

**UNCOVERING THE SELF: AN INTROSPECTIVE APPROACH
THROUGH ETHICAL LIVING, MINDFULNESS, AND
EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that pervasive existential malaise can be dealt with fundamentally through uncovering the nature of conventional egoistic self and its associated symptoms. This argument is based on the Buddhist psychology that centralizes the importance of the practice of introspective, attentive observations combined with ethical living. Their combinations yield tranquility and insight born of experiential wisdom. In the Buddhist field, this practice is known as *bhavana*.

Moreover, the in-depth exploration of *bhavana* in this thesis has a future educational application purpose in mind, namely, looking into the possibility of administering *bhavana* as a complementary practice besides the standard pharmacological treatment, to the mentally afflicted and personality disordered.

In Chapter One, I argue that the skills of introspective, attentive observations can be developed so that we can observe the nature of the conventional egoistic self and its undercurrents. In Chapter Two, I discuss our tendency to misapprehend reality and how the latter impacts and moulds our notion of self, leading to pervasive existential malaise or discontent. In Chapter Three, I explore how we keep reinforcing antecedent mental dynamics through the activities that keep us enthralled to the 'Wheel of Life'. Chapter Four provides the theoretical foundations and the know-how of the practice of *bhavana*. Chapter Five examines how the experience of 'Uncovering the Self' could help personality disordered and mentally afflicted individuals.

Sabbe Sathā Bhavanthu Sukitatha
MAY ALL BEINGS BE WELL, HAPPY & PEACEFUL
Dedicated
To
ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

*Mano pubbangamā dhammā;
Mano setta manomayā.
Manasā ce passannena;
Bhāsathi vā karothi vā,
Thatho nam sukha man ce thi,
Cāyāva anapāini.*

Dhammapada – Y V 2.

Mind is the forerunner of all its objects,
Mind-governed and mind-made are they.
If one speaks or acts with a peaceful mind
Happiness follows one,
Like one's shadow that never separates.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND PALI TRANSLATIONS

<i>AN</i>	Anguttara Nikaya
<i>DN</i>	Deegha Nikaya
<i>DSM IV</i>	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV, American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC
<i>FPH</i>	Forensic Psychiatric Hospital
<i>MN</i>	Majjhima Nikaya – Sutta Pitaka
<i>n.d.</i>	No date
<i>OCD</i>	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
<i>PRN</i>	As and when needed (medical abbreviation)
<i>PTS</i>	Pali Text Society, London, UK
<i>SN</i>	Samyutta Nikaya – Sutta Pitaka
<i>VMC</i>	Vipassana Meditation Centre

<i>Abhidhamma</i>	deep dhamma
<i>Adhi</i>	higher
<i>Adhivācana</i>	concepts
<i>Ajiva</i>	livelihood
<i>Akalika</i>	independent of time
<i>Akāsa</i>	sky
<i>Anatta</i>	selfless, egoless
<i>Anicca</i>	impermanence
<i>Anuloma</i>	ascending
<i>Anusāya</i>	dormant
<i>Asati</i>	is not
<i>Asubha</i>	foul
<i>Atiparitta</i>	very slight
<i>Atta kilamatanu yoga</i>	extreme of self-mortification
<i>Avijja</i>	misapprehension, ignorance
<i>Bhagiya</i>	a share
<i>Bhanga</i>	dissolution
<i>Bhava</i>	being or becoming
<i>Bhāvana</i>	meditation (approximation), cultivation of mind

<i>Bhavanga</i>	body of personality
<i>Cakkhu</i>	eye
<i>Cetanā</i>	volition, intention
<i>Chinta</i>	through reflections
<i>Chula Sihanada</i>	small lions roar
<i>Citta</i>	emotional mind
<i>Dhamma</i>	law of nature
<i>Dāna</i>	generosity
<i>Dhyāna</i>	concentration
<i>Dosa</i>	aversion
<i>Dukkha</i>	unsatisfactoriness, agony, misery, difficult to endure
<i>Ekaggata</i>	one-pointedness (focus)
<i>Gāmini</i>	way
<i>Hoti</i>	is
<i>Idam</i>	that
<i>Immasa</i>	when
<i>Jara</i>	decay
<i>Jati</i>	birth
<i>Javana</i>	appreciation
<i>Kalāpa</i>	field
<i>Khanti</i>	forgiveness
<i>Kamacchanda</i>	carnal desires
<i>Kamma</i>	karma or activity
<i>Kammantha</i>	industry or action
<i>Kammatthana</i>	base of action
<i>Kāma sukalikānu yoga</i>	extreme indulgence of sensual desire
<i>Karuna</i>	compassion
<i>Kilesa</i>	fetters, impure tendencies, impediments
<i>Kukkucca</i>	worry
<i>Lakkhana</i>	traits or characteristics
<i>Lekha</i>	Inscriptions
<i>Loba</i>	greed
<i>Mano</i>	reflective mind
<i>Magga</i>	path
<i>Marana</i>	death
<i>Metta</i>	amity
<i>Middha</i>	drowsiness
<i>Min</i>	this
<i>Moha</i>	delusion born of greed and aversion
<i>Mudita</i>	selfless joy

<i>Nahoti</i>	is not
<i>Nāma-rūpa</i>	mind – body (mental and physical aggregates)
<i>Nirujanthi</i>	ceases
<i>Nirodha</i>	ceasing
<i>Nivarana</i>	obscurants
<i>Pabhassara</i>	luminous
<i>Paccayā</i>	due to
<i>Panchadwaraviññāna</i>	five sense-door-consciousness
<i>Pañña</i>	wisdom
<i>Paramitā</i>	determinations
<i>Paritta</i>	slight
<i>Paticca</i>	dependent
<i>Patigha</i>	resistance
<i>Patiloma</i>	descending
<i>Patipada</i>	principle
<i>Patisandhi</i>	re-linking
<i>Phassa</i>	contact
<i>Pena</i>	bubbles
<i>Prakertiparisuddha</i> (snskrt)	purest
<i>Rūpa</i>	physical body or matter
<i>Sacca</i>	truth
<i>Sakkāyaditti</i>	belief in personality
<i>Samādhī</i>	concentration
<i>Samma</i>	harmonious, right, noble
<i>Sammappadhana</i>	noble efforts
<i>Sammāditti</i>	harmonious perspective
<i>Sampassa</i>	contact
<i>Sampaticchana</i>	receiving
<i>Samudaya</i>	arising
<i>Samuppāda</i>	co-arising
<i>Samatha</i>	tranquility
<i>Sandhittika</i>	visible in this life
<i>Sankhāra</i>	reactions or mental formations (thoughts, emotions and volitional activities and conditioned unconscious)
<i>Saññā</i>	recognition
<i>Santirana</i>	investigating
<i>Sati</i>	mindfulness
<i>Satipattana</i>	foundations of mindfulness
<i>Sikkhā</i>	training

<i>Sila</i>	ethical conduct
<i>Sutta</i>	discourse
<i>Tadalambana</i>	registering
<i>Tanhā</i>	attraction, repulsion and disinterest (craving and rejection)
<i>Thina</i>	lethargy
<i>Titi</i>	sustenance
<i>Unmāda</i>	psychosis
<i>Upādāna</i>	clinging
<i>Uppajathi</i>	arise
<i>Uppadam</i>	arising
<i>Vaccā</i>	speech
<i>Vagga</i>	group
<i>Vāyama</i>	effort
<i>Vedanā</i>	sensations
<i>Vibhanga</i>	dissolution
<i>Vibhava</i>	non-existence
<i>Vicikiccā</i>	vacillation
<i>Vijja</i>	appear
<i>Vina</i>	violin
<i>Viññana</i>	cognition or consciousness
<i>Viparinama</i>	change
<i>Vipassana</i>	seeing one's own reality
<i>Vīrya</i>	vigour
<i>Visuddhi</i>	purification
<i>Vottapana</i>	determining
<i>Vyāpāda</i>	aversion
<i>Uddacca</i>	anxiety
<i>Unmāda</i>	psychosis
<i>Uppāda</i>	arise
<i>Uppekkhā</i>	equanimity

PROLOGUE

Uncovering the Self is a thesis that explores the self. This is done through an introspective approach, which seeks understanding of the nature of self and its concomitants with a view towards developing an adjunctive therapy to help individuals resolve their mental afflictions and disturbed personalities. By adopting ethical living, developing mindfulness and applying experiential knowledge gained through this practice to every day life, one will be able to find balance in life with peace of mind.

I work with mentally afflicted individuals on a daily basis. These people suffer from various mental disorders some more severe than others. Among these mentally afflicted, we also have individuals with personality disorders and addiction problems. The patient population is a mix of all possible permutations of the known realm of mental illnesses. With few exceptions, all of these patients are placed on pharmacological therapy. This is the accepted world community norm in dealing with mental illness and to some degree with personality disorders. However, there are people with diagnosed mental afflictions who have adopted therapies that are not well known in the West and recovered noticeably from pervasive unsatisfactoriness or mental afflictions in life and returned to mainstream living. This is not uncommon in Buddhist cultures. For this reason, I thought to undertake this exploration into Uncovering the Self that is at the center of mental afflictions, from an empirical perspective as depicted in Buddhist psychology of the Theravada Tradition.

If we take a close look at mental afflictions or the personality disorders from a psychological/psychiatric point of view, which I discuss later in this thesis, it becomes evident that the conditions are centred on the self of the person. For example, in schizophrenia, the individual suffers because it is “difficult to endure” the overwhelming emotional problems, chronic insecurities characterized by delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech with negative effects and dysfunctional life with a dysfunctional mind. For such an individual, we offer psychotherapy, motivational, occupational or vocational therapy and importantly, pharmacological therapy. We also assist in rehabilitating mood-disordered individuals whose behaviour is characterized by disturbed thought process, difficulty in dealing with reality and experiencing low self worth/self-esteem. When compared to schizophrenia, mood disorders have different expressions of the dysfunctional mind in which it may be manifested as major depression, manic, or bipolar disorders (Rawlins et al. 1993). In both disorders delusions, whether paranoid, erotomantic, grandiose, jealous, somatic or persecutory, play a major role in the display of individual behavior.

Generally, the therapy provided for people with delusional disorders, according to Saxton et al. (1996) is pharmacological with individual psychotherapy providing some relief. However, these authors state that, “paranoid clients are the most challenging to reach because none of the present therapies appear to be helpful in breaking down the delusional system” (p. 200). For example, an individual with paranoid delusions may display problems related to anxiety, misinterpretation of environmental stimuli, innate loneliness, and lack of self-esteem, misperception of internal stimuli and tendency to

violence. Misperception of internal stimuli such as bodily and mental sensations lead to distorted view of reality. They get entrapped in such realities. If we look very closely, we will see an individual who has alienated him/herself whether in terms of thoughts, emotions, affect, general appearance or the self from the apparent reality. This is a person who is totally confused in terms of what happens within his mind-body framework. Lack of insight and the inability to find clarification lead such a person to take the path of alienating the self, as everything in his/her reality appears miserable or lustful or grandiose. This becomes a firm, fixed false belief that has no base in reality and we call it a delusion. The individual's self is conditioned to believe in what appears to be his/her reality. It is a deeper problem with that person's self than he/she wants to acknowledge. For such a person the apparent reality becomes a deception. This is created by his internal mental and physical dynamics that have become stained by already existing perceptions. In essence, one who is delusional does not challenge his own reality by way of the necessary observations and pertinent questions required to discern the nature of the occurrence as experienced through the senses.

In this particular area, the difference between those of us who are considered mentally healthy and those who are mentally ill may be a matter of the degree to which we perceive and interpret experience. This phenomenon of perception of experience will be discussed later in detail. The vast majority of 'mentally healthy' also accept everything that they see, hear, taste, touch, smell and feel without question. When any information contacts our sense receptors, we instantly make decisions based on prior mental conditioning or disposition, a condition that determines the individuation of a person. Almost everything

including physical phenomena come under this most forceful cause of evolution of the human personality (Kalupahana, 1987). Kalupahana (1987) writes further:

[E]pistemologically, the dispositions are an extremely valuable means by which human beings can deal with the world experience. In the absence of any capacity to know everything presented to the senses, dispositional tendencies function in the form of interest, in selecting material from the “big blooming buzzing” confusion in order to formulate one’s understanding of the world (p. 19 - 20).

In recognizing the world or our reality, what if the information processing centres of the brain misinterprets our experience?

Wade and Tavis (1996) write that seeing can be misleading which in essence means appearance is deceiving. Since we know that information received will be coded and decoded in our nerve network, how can we be certain that our senses do not deceive us? After all, the self is the notion that embodies all deceiving and realistic information from both internal and external sources. In this respect the general agreement is that we believe our body to be a firm solid entity and our mind to be an unchanging entity, making the body, “I”, “me” and perceived possessions “mine”. Kalupahana (1987) quotes William James’ view on mind and matter where, for James, mind is “contact with concepts” (*adhivācana sampassa*) and matter is “contact with resistance” (*patigha sampassa*). This knowledge about the self in terms of body and mind raises more questions than answers. In order to answer these questions, we need a technique that can provide objective or attentive inquiry in the quest to explore and expose the nature of self.

Since all mental afflictions arise through the dynamics of mind, body and mental dispositions, it is imperative that we have a sophisticated technique to explore the interactions of all three components in an empirically verifiable manner. In the absence of such a technique, we will not be able to successfully address the problem of pervasive unsatisfactoriness that centres on the self. As described by Epstein (1995) in his “Thoughts without a Thinker”, the current methods we use in psychotherapy/psychoanalysis or in any known therapies such as behavioural, cognitive or humanistic can only envision reaching and exposing the most difficult attribute of the mind and body, namely the self, a conditioned state of the mind, for what it is. The nature of self must be understood through introspection. If we understand the nature of the self, then we will be able to comprehend its dynamics that contribute to human malady whether mentally afflicted or having problems with the personality. This comprehension takes the self on a path of discovery.

Psychologists and students of psychology recognize that the self plays a cardinal role in daily mental afflictions and general unsatisfactoriness in life. Yet, in western thought, the self has never been considered as the main factor in these afflictions and therefore, people usually looked for a remedy or solution from outside the self. Contrary to this position, Buddhists assert that the self is at the core of this problem. This assertion stands on the ability to observe self objectively or with detached attention. These observations on human malady are made through an empirically verifiable technique known as *bhāvana* or meditation. It is this technique that allows the recognition of how the self becomes overwhelmed in dealing with reality, leading to confusion, frustration, neurosis, delusions and, in the extreme, psychosis.

It follows, then, that in order to become free from mental afflictions and vicissitudes in life, we must uncover and explore the self and its dynamics. It is this understanding that enables us to reconfigure our habitual reactions and respond to life situations in ways in which we are least affected by such unsatisfactoriness. Therefore, in this thesis, I argue that uncovering the self can be brought about through an introspective approach to expose the nature of self and its associated concomitants through a practice that is based on ethical living, developing mindfulness and concentration leading to tranquility and insight born of experiential wisdom.

In addition to the current western therapies to access and rehabilitate the self, there are key eastern approaches to explore the self through introspection. One such approach with a high therapeutic potential is *vipassana* (observing of one's own reality), a type of *bhāvana* (means cultivation of mind) discovered by Sidhartha Gautama and used by recluses and laymen alike to achieve mindfulness, mental serenity/concentration, and enlightenment. It is a technique based on a strict discipline of the mind and a way of life that has been largely foreign to the West until the twentieth century. Here the discipline and the way of life are mutually beneficial to each other. Some aspects of this unique technique are being used in the West for relaxation purposes. Often, it is known as "breathing meditation". The ancient technique of *bhāvana* has the potential for more than mere relaxation. It is and has been one of the most effective tools in the transformation of personality whether for the mentally afflicted or healthy.

There are many stories about transformation of individuals using this technique of *bhāvana*. One of the well-quoted examples of such transformation

of personality is the story of *Angulimāla*. *Angulimāla* was a bright student who won the heart of his teacher. The fellow students became jealous of this situation. They made up a story and told the teacher that *Angulimāla* has a romance with his wife. The teacher became angry and thought to get his beloved student killed. In setting up a plan to get him killed, the teacher used the gift giving tradition. Since the studies were soon to be completed, the teacher told *Angulimāla*, that the best gift that could be given to the teacher would be a necklace of thousand fingers. This gift plan turned *Angulimāla* into a serial killer and an outcast of the law. However, in the end, *Angulimāla* got hold of the technique of *bhāvanā* and turned his life around to become an enlightened being.

This technique is not only effective for people with personality disorders but also for those with other mental afflictions. For example, the story of *Patāchāra* tells us how this technique was helpful in assisting a psychotic woman to recover fully from the psychosis (*unmāda*) that she suffered after losing her husband from a snake bite, losing her only child to falcons, and losing parents to a house fire, this sequence of events having taken place within a brief period of time. In another story, *Kissā-Gothamie*, a naked delusional women, who became psychotic (*unmāda*), embracing her infant son's corpse and crying for help to restore her son's life came to Gauthama, The Buddha. After receiving the technique of *bhāvana*, she became enlightened leaving all misery behind.

Even today this technique seems to be working for those who have mental afflictions. Michael Leven (2002) of Baltimore County in Maryland, an individual with diagnosed severe obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) writes in his article "From Madness to Mindfulness", that by adopting the practice of

bhāvana as his way of life, he has been able to recover from his illness and become fully functional. He became aware of the technique in 1997. In the year 2001, Leven adopted this technique as his way of life. He writes,

I am still subjected to the constant flow of harrowing imagery from the malfunctioning brain, but instead of being a slave to the fear, and spending my life in institutions, I practice mindfulness throughout the day and watch the mind and the fear sensations, instead of responding to them unskillfully as I had done in the past, which exacerbated the illness. The longer I can maintain this, the more the fear loses its potency and control over me. After exerting much effort and maintaining objective awareness for a long time, I sometimes experience brief periods (seconds only) where I seem to break through the fear and experience moments of clarity and profound calm and I see that the frightening imagery and thoughts are not real, and that nothing bad is going to happen if I don't do the rituals. It is difficult to always maintain mindfulness, and I slip a lot if I'm not alert, or getting too distracted by the activities around me. Some months the illness is more powerful, and some months it is more manageable. But the fear is always a reminder that I'm not being mindful enough and I had better start using what I've been taught very quickly. For if I become too unmindful, I can easily be overwhelmed by the fear and again become an automaton to the rituals. If I am too mentally distraught, I just focus my attention on the body and try to relax it. I can do this anytime: while walking, eating, waiting in lines, etc. All are perfect times to just watch and relax. Later, I will then be able to watch the mind more easily throughout the day (p.6).

The analysis of all such stories points to one direction. Whether it was *Angulimāla* or *Patāchāra* or *Kissā-Gothamie* or the modern day *Michael Levens*, the problem was their inability to uncover self and its reality for what it was. Their inability to understand the nature of self brought them past the threshold of neurosis into psychosis (*unmāda*). Likewise there are many such stories in the *Suttas* from the Buddha era indicating that this technique had been employed to help people heal from their mental afflictions by removing the conditions.

There are not many approaches in the medical management of mentally afflicted or personality disordered individuals. I am convinced through my own practice that the technique of *bhāvana* would provide an adjunct therapy to help

those individuals overcome their mental afflictions and find lasting relief. By making the technique of *bhāvana* available, I believe that many of the mentally infirm could reach a level of functioning that would enable them to return and live in mainstream society. Since this technique has already been implemented with success in many correctional facilities around the world including United States of America (Meijer, 1999; Engardio, 2000 & 2001) we can learn from their experience as to how it can be implemented in a secure hospital environment. At the present, the technique of *bhāvana* is being conducted for prison inmates as a ten-day course at North Rehabilitation Facility in Washington, San Fransisco City Jails and in Bessemer, Alabama in the United States. However, this kind of intensive mind cultivation has not to date been employed as an adjunctive treatment program in a psychiatric hospital environment. I believe that if adapted to suit the needs of the personality disordered patients, and those who are in remission from mental afflictions such as depression, paranoia, psychosis, anxiety disorders and addictions to name a few, many would benefit from this technique.

It is for this reason that I chose to address this theme of “Uncovering the Self” and present it as a project of exploration within the framework of education. It is my intention to provide sufficient detail to allow therapists to understand its foundations and the potential it carries in reconfiguring the way we conceptualize self; the self that is at the core of all malady we experience. I have attempted to provide detailed discussions from my own experience and the experience documented for over two and one half millennia in Buddhist literature to explore and clarify this important technique and its theoretical foundations. This exploration of the theoretical foundations is important not

only to understand it in context but also to develop it into a therapeutic tool with which we will be able to help those who seek help for their mental afflictions and behavioural problems. Further more, the technique of “Uncovering the Self” described in this thesis provides a non-reductionist, non-dogmatic, attentive empirical approach that is based on ethical living, mindfulness and application of experiential knowledge in daily life to overcome difficult to endure situations including mental afflictions. It can lead to mental tranquility and insight born of direct experience of body-mind phenomena without engaging in any form of metaphysical dialogue. This technique takes the individual from the position of the observer to the position of being observed in the process of “Uncovering the Self”.

CHAPTER ONE

POWER & PROMISE OF INTROSPECTIVE, ATTENTIVE OBSERVATION

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I argue, based on my own life and research experience that the cultivation of attentive observation is crucial for arriving at a judicious, more “objective” picture of reality, which can help us to handle and overcome mental afflictions. Within the framework of this thesis, objective observation is referred to as observations without allowing mental distortions to stain what we observe through questioning and examining the object. In other words, it is an observation characterized by an interested, caring detachment (Macdonald, 1996). Observation is a function that gives us not only the ability to survive but also the ability to liberate us from our mental afflictions. Generally, our observations tend to be both objective and subjective. In a general context, objective means to “deal with the matter at hand without thoughts about it” and subjective means “derived from the mind or a person’s feelings” (Webster, 1990). We take what we see as what is out there. Even though seeing can be misleading (Wade & Tavris, 1996), we rarely challenge or question what we see, let alone examine it.

Our observations get clouded depending on our mental state and insight on a particular subject or an experience. We discriminate what we see. Ordinarily what we see is our own projection shaped by our cultural, social and

personal beliefs. What we observe is an already preconceived object whether physical or mental. It is a product of conditioning. In this regard, Macdonald (1996) writes, “awareness was being modulated by brain generated information, and the products of that modulation process were mental artefacts: mind content, *qualia*” (p. 5). Unconsciously, we project what we think we see. This type of conditioning can be a barrier that operates and impacts consciously or unconsciously all our observations. By not being able to observe attentively or objectively the conditioned nature of what we observe, we are unable to distinguish what we see from what is out there.

For example, the following story will illustrate our inability to distinguish experience and how our observations get tainted. Once, I was fast asleep and vaguely heard knocking on my door. It was around 1 a.m. at night. Since I did not anticipate any visits around that time, I became a little suspicious. I walked quietly to the upstairs window to get a glimpse of who was knocking on my door. I did not see anyone in the dark, but I saw a small car with the engine running, waiting in front of my house. Simultaneously, my telephone rang twice. I purposely did not respond to it. After the phone call, I noted the car slowly rolling toward the street. I thought to myself that whoever they were I was fortunate to be unharmed. After about five minutes, my phone rang again and I did not respond. I was certain that someone was testing whether I was at home or not. Shortly afterwards, I fell a sleep and woke up only the next morning. After getting ready to go to work as usual, I went downstairs to the garage to get into the car only to discover that the front door of my house had been unlocked!

It was then that I realized what might have transpired the previous night as I began to recall the events one by one. After preparing dinner, I had opened the main door to allow some fresh air in to the house. However, I forgot to shut the door, left it ajar and went to bed. My neighbours must have seen it and had knocked on my door to let me know. When I heard the knocking, my perception was that burglars were waiting to rob my house with a car waiting to take off. If I had been observing attentively what I saw without prejudgements, I would have recognized that my neighbours were trying to tell me something. But I was too quick to interpret my observation even though I did not observe the whole event completely. By the time I got the first frames of observation (knocking sounds, telephone ringing, waiting car outside the house) my mind started filling in the blanks of the mental picture I started to paint for myself. I constructed my own reality instead of observing what was happening at the moment. This is the result when we transfer feelings from past experience or relationships in our lives to present situations, thereby distorting our perception of present reality (Born, 2000). If we analyze this story carefully, it is not very difficult to observe its conditionality. When we are unable to see things as they are and understand their dynamic relationships, we make decisions that are not in agreement with what is out there. This causes a lot of internal and external conflicts and we get dragged into the quagmire of mental chaos. This occurs due to our inability to observe experience objectively.

Without the ability to cut through our preconceived ideas about what we see and feel about physical and mental objects, it will be difficult for us to resolve the human discontent or anguish. Human discontent (*dukkha*) is referred within the framework of this thesis interchangeably as misery, pervasive unsatisfactoriness, human malady, mental afflictions and

unhappiness. This becomes apparent when I work with mentally afflicted individuals. If we can develop the skill to observe experience objectively without allowing it to be dominated by our distorting views and emotions, perhaps we will be able to maintain a balance (Nottingham, 2001). Like a coin having two sides, misery also has two sides: misery on the one side and the seeds of relief on the other. However, it becomes visible to our mental eye only if we look at such experience mindfully with objectivity at the core to understand the dynamics of mind and body.

In the following section, using the comparison of plant physiology and psychiatry, the two fields in which I have worked and researched, I will illustrate the power of judicious observation for being in the “right” contact with reality and also the obstacles that block this power.

POWER OF ATTENTIVE INTROSPECTIVE OBSERVATION

About ten years ago, I made a decision to change my career from plant physiology and agriculture to the study of psychiatric nursing and psychology, a decision that puzzled many people. Most of them saw no connection whatsoever between these two fields. I went back to school. At school a friend of mine casually asked me what made me interested in psychology and psychiatric nursing after having engaged in plant physiology research for over 15 years. The thought never occurred to me until then that these were distinctly different areas. Perhaps I was used to observing these things attentively through questioning and examining the object. Due to the fact that specific phenomena in both subject areas can be explained in terms of common metaphors related to caring or growth, it did not occur to me that these two are

two distinctly different fields. However, during that period I was able to improve my observation and analytical skills because they are necessary in caring for plants.

It is due to this experience that I began to understand many parallels and common ground between these subject areas where caring stands at the core, whether for plants or human beings. In working with these two groups, caring becomes an essential component in helping to meet needs and provide guidance through difficult periods in order to enable full functionality. Without proper care a child will not reach its full potential in much the same way that a tender seedling will not produce a good harvest if it does not receive harmonious growing conditions. In order to provide necessary care, we need to recognize the problem through objective observations and analytical insight. Thus, observations and analytical insight play a major role in the provision of care.

For my friend, it appeared to be incomprehensible to find a way to link plant physiology with psychology and psychiatric nursing. I am not surprised to hear such comments in a world in which tradition allows us to look at all beings and things as separate entities. Conditioned by this premise, people consider objects, events, views, opinions and all phenomena as separate entities and the world as a whole in a firmly structured manner as if some kind of boundary exists wherein the interdependencies among them are least considered (Zukav, 1979). Furthermore, we are conditioned to believe that the real world is outside. Thus, I am not surprised by the way in which we allow ourselves to be dominated by such concepts about the world and its contents. Instead of observing our experience attentively for what it is within the scope of our direct

experience, we attempt to understand experience in terms of rigidly defined concepts based on preconceived notions while disregarding its interdependencies. In this way we see what we want to see.

Though it appears that plant physiology and psychiatry are, by their generally accepted conventional definitions, worlds apart, for me, they appear to have considerably more similarities than differences. In essence, the distinction is in the way in which we view these things based on our previously mentioned, preconceived conditioned worldview. In working with plants one needs to understand their needs and problems. Plants, like animals are living organisms that have the ability to express both conditions of suffering and of well being, dependent on environmental conditions. Understanding the responses of both species through objective observations and analysis is the key to helping them reach their potential.

For example, if plants have to grow in a too damp growing medium, the leaves will turn yellow and will be shed. If branches are broken, they will show recovery by developing a suberine (cork) layer or with various secretions such as gums to cover the wounds until healed. If they have to survive on soils poor in nutrients, the leaves will display a spectrum of colours or even necrosis dependent on which nutrient or their combinations are being deprived. If they were to grow on soils with a high degree of salinity, they would wilt and die a slow death dependent on various other environmental conditions that prevail. In principle they begin to express their concerns in terms of behavioural symptoms. These are analogous to our non-verbal behaviour. For example, according to Wengraf (2001, p. 128) about 93% of human behaviour is manifested in non-verbal body language despite the ability to verbalize both

pleasant and unpleasant experience. However, the nonverbal body language allows us universal access to the 99.9% of the unconscious that is not typically available to verbal communication. In other words we need to also observe non-verbal behaviour in order to understand the problem completely.

Though the plants respond to their misery or adverse conditions at a different dimension, their expressions of misery can be understood only through attentive observation and the analysis of data so observed. Through observations and objective analysis similar to the methods used by psychiatrists and psychotherapists to treat their patients, I was able to understand problems with plants and treat them to overcome their difficulties.

Viewed with an open mind, without preconceived notions of what should or should not be there, these observations concerning plants gave me the impression that it should be possible to recognize the causes and the real nature of malady, a common phenomenon in the realm of living organisms, whether animals or plants. When it comes to plant behaviours, most of us can observe them objectively and pay attention to detail without personalizing or getting affected by such observations. For example, we would not feel anxious or jump to help immediately when a plant in our garden shows a few yellow leaves or a broken branch. However, if we observe a human being with some bruising on the body or a broken limb, we get affected emotionally and feel quite uncomfortable. We want to help immediately. This means, when we make observations on fellow humans we tend to lose objectivity and lean more toward subjectivity. We jump to unqualified conclusions based on perceptions rather than the observed data would allow us to. This is more so if we happened to observe our own self.

When humans suffer or face adverse conditions in life, it is reflected in behavioural changes. Such behavioural changes are quite analogous to that of the plant responses. Though we have the ability to express and mobility to seek help, it is often noted that it is not easy to delineate the causes for human malady due to our inability to observe it objectively. However, our ability to observe objectively remains obscured by our endemic weakness of adhering to preconceived notions and concepts. This deludes and deceives our experience. For example, when we feel some discomfort, we tend to develop an unpleasant feeling even without knowing the source of the cause. We go to the physician for an examination and wait anxiously to know the diagnosis. We are already fearful of the diagnostic outcome. If the diagnosis is grim, then there begins a whole new reaction at the conscious and subconscious levels of our thoughts giving rise to various mental disturbances. We feel confused, frustrated, irritable, and above all we feel depressed and go into denial. Instead of observing and taking the right steps, we react blindly, giving rise to mental states that impact our behavior. With time some behaviours become habituated and reach pathological levels. At this stage, when a person shows a significant level of mental disturbance, we need to assess the behavioural responses, including verbal and non-verbal manifestations, through objective observations in order to understand the causes. Since these behavioural responses are complex in nature, objective observations become a valuable tool in these assessments within an empirical framework.

The importance of attentive or objective observation as a tool has become clear to me since I started work at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada with mentally ill offenders. For assessment and treatment, the Law Courts of British Columbia and some

provincial authorities refer patients to our hospital. Subsequent to the assessments and the judicial reviews, patients who require treatments will be detained at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital to improve their mental well being and rehabilitation. An important criterion in the psychiatric assessment is the mental status examination. Within the framework of mental status assessment, we observe among other factors, whether the patient's verbal responses are congruent with his/her non-verbal expressions or manifestations. Often, such observations are keys to identifying apparent causes related to troublesome behaviour and mental afflictions.

For example, it is known in psychiatry that some individuals are prone to paranoid / psychotic behaviour if they use mind altering drugs such as heroine, cocaine or marijuana and so on. One morning, I noted that a patient who was in remission from a recent episode of paranoia had become somewhat euphoric. I interviewed the patient and observed that his mood had elevated to a high level of "happiness". When I confronted him on the issue of smoking marijuana that morning while outside the unit, he denied it. However, I noted his bloodshot and glassy eyes, unusually happy mood and an inability to maintain direct eye contact while answering my questions as some of the displayed non- verbal reactions congruent with symptoms related to substance abuse. I could smell around him the substance he abused. The patient denied his action and my observations of his non-verbal behaviours were incongruent with his denial and his conscious attempts to mask the typical changes in behaviour.

It appears to me that plant behaviour to adverse conditions and diseases provides a perfect analogy to the mental health problems of human beings.

When plants are in distress, the responses and reactions displayed and observed have taken me to another level of thought. As indicated earlier, it is our framed belief that plants cannot think. In this thesis, it is not my intention to make an argument on whether plants can think or not. Though I use plants and human beings to illustrate the importance of objective observation through my own experience, it is not my intention to reduce human beings to the level of plants. However, it becomes obvious that the plant's display of responses is conditional and "impersonal". In this thesis "impersonal" means a reaction or a response (phenomenon) that occurs naturally due to conditions that precede the reaction and leads to other reactions due to prevalent conditions. For example, the display in plants is an impersonal response to physico-chemical reactions that occur as passive process within the plant tissue. These are natural phenomena that occur as and when conditions change; there are no doers. Even though these reactions are quite analogous to similar chemical reactions in our physical body, we feel offended if we call such reactions impersonal phenomena. We feel offended because of our conditioned perception of what impersonal means. Our perception misleads us from seeing such reactions as impersonal phenomena. Therefore, it becomes clear that if we want to observe phenomena for what they are, we need to develop our powerful attentive observation skills that can cut through our conditioned perceptions.

When we observe our own anguish, we tend to lean often toward narrowed ego focused subjectivity that is tainted by mental tendencies of greed (*lobha*), ill will (*dosa*) and cognitive distortions (*moha*) (Nissanka, 2002). Such distortions obscure our ability to observe conditions that cause our misery. We see what we believe is happening. It becomes our chosen reality. Instead of responding to such situations through attentive observation, we make decisions

within the chosen reality in an attempt to find relief. Therefore, it is not surprising that we often end up finding something outside to blame such as a disease, a condition, an event or another individual for our anguish.

From the experience of objective observations on plants, I came to believe that many of the same principles could be applied to observe human behavior objectively. For example, when the growing substratum is too damp, the roots will lack oxygen and start to decay. So the plant begins to suffer in terms of water and mineral intake, ability to hold on to soil, and translocation of its produce. Compounding the problem, the leaves will not only transpire a lot of water through their stomata but also produce significant amounts of soluble sugars, creating an adverse gradient of concentration within individual cells increasing the of loss of water. Under these complications, a plant would reach the wilting point and come close the point of death. For this reason, the plant would discard the leaves in order to regulate transpiration. But with certainty, it can be said that there are many known and unknown conditions involved in this process of plant wilting that appears as a less complex outcome. By observing this phenomenon objectively, we may begin to think how the objective data collected through observations relate to each other. Analytically, we begin to understand that there must be other factors that are involved in the process.

If we are able to observe phenomena involved in human malady attentively, we will be able to recognize their manifestations in terms of co-dependent and intricately connected conditioning factors both at macro and micro realms. For us to understand them through direct experience, such phenomena have to be observable. In fact, they are observable phenomena

(Kalupahana, 1987, Narada, 1987, Epstein, 1995, Batchelor, 1997 and Glickman, 2002). However, observation of these intricate and subtle mind body phenomena becomes possible only through attentive observation skills that are free from our own preconceived notions (Kalupahana, 1987, Narada, 1987 and Epstein, 1995). For this reason, I argue that if we develop our latent skills of objective observation for the purpose of addressing the problem of human unhappiness, we will be able to understand its co-dependent intricate factors and their subtle connections within the framework of body mind dynamics.

PROMISE OF INTROSPECTIVE ATTENTIVE OBSERVATION

Plants let go of their leaves when faced with misery such as in the example discussed previously. For some, such behavior may seem to be an adaptation. But, I would see it differently. I would see it as finding relief from their malady. If we could learn how to let go of factors that condition discontentment, perhaps, we would feel at ease. For instance, when we accumulate items in the household, it will lead to unnecessary complex problems of compactness, disorganization, confusion, arguments within the household, increased house keeping work, limited or no time at all for leisure activities leading to frustration and anger. However, if we let go of unnecessary possessions, the result will be more space and clarity, fewer things to clean and more time to relax and be engaged in meaningful work leading to some form of harmony. Similarly, human unsatisfactoriness has its conditions that are co-dependent on other factors similar to the complex nature of plants in distress. If shedding the leaves by the wilting plant is considered relief and promotes recovery, then I would argue that the same principle could be applied to

improve mental well being by letting go of the factors that condition human malady.

Letting go is a practice that allows one to transcend attachment to things or thoughts with insight and moving on without suppressing them. Though plants mitigate their misery by letting go of leaves, we take quite a different approach in resolving it. In our approach, we acquire things instead of letting go to mitigate our miserable predicament. The acquisition process is based on the notion of strengthening the notion of self. It is believed that a stronger self is the answer to our misery. Therefore, unlike the plants, we personalize experience. For example, we get attached to things, people, opinions, ideas and so on. When we are attached, we cling to them mentally. We do not let go of them. We acquire them. Then, we hold steadfastly to our possessions. We believe we have secured our acquisitions. We fear losing this security. This process is called 'personalization' within the framework of this thesis.

Generally, we are taught to take control of self and what belongs to it. For example, whether its self-control, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-realization, self-expression, self-awareness or self-development, attempts are made to strengthen self through belief in control. It is believed that if we can take control of these concepts we are at ease. In this approach experience has to be solidified around the core of the notion of self. This self is also identified as "me, "mine" or "I". Even though this practice has been in place for decades, human suffering has not been resolved through this approach of strengthening the self (Epstein, 1995).

The process of personalization does not stop here, but proceeds to personalize the external world of sensory objects. The vast majority of us firmly believe that by taking control of the self and the world, we would ensure our happiness while getting rid of pervasive discontentment. For this reason, we are encouraged to personalize experience including the world. However impersonal these objects may be, we personalize them in the belief that they are “mine”. When we buy a house, it becomes “mine”. When my wife gives birth to a new child, the child becomes “mine” despite the fact that the child is a separate and a unique being. If something pleasant or unpleasant happens to these objects that have been personalized, it becomes an overwhelming experience that makes our body and mind feel tense. Tension leads to discomfort and misery. Then, I believe, the attempt to control our apparent reality through personalization of experience contributes to our pervasive discontentment.

All such measures to control the *self* and the *world* through personalization do not allow us to observe the underlying causes as they are. The personalization becomes a force that obscures and distorts our experience (*Lankavatara Sutta, n.d.*). However, observation of underlying causes and their recognition is the most important step toward resolving human suffering full of mental afflictions. If we are to heal ourselves from this unsatisfactoriness, we need to know its causes. The measures to personalize and strengthen self-experience only allow us to bury the moments of misery provisionally as we do not address the causes of this phenomenon. In doing so we lose awareness of the objective experience of unpleasantness and lean more toward a level of comfort that is governed by emotions. This occurs at an impersonal level. However, the pervasive unsatisfactoriness strikes back when the conditions are sufficient for it to manifest, just as the glow under ashes will ignite a fire when

there is fuel. If we are able to observe the conditions causing misery through objective observations, we will be able to know how the causes evolve and give rise to misery. When we know its dynamics, we are empowered to take action to alleviate it.

As described earlier, we segregate emotions and sensory experience into separate entities as if there are no interdependencies among them in our attempt to find relief from human suffering. Too often, verbalization, mental imagery, emotions and sensations are like tight compartments and the lack of communication between the mental functions is one of the reasons of inner suffering (Vigne, 1997). Thus, any therapeutic attempts to resolve these problems without giving due consideration to the interdependencies that exist between mind and body would likely be unproductive. Like verbal expressions that are reflections of our conscious thoughts, non-verbal body language reflects our unconscious fears and worries revealing the conflicts between our rejections/desires and associations/resistance in the unconscious and the apparent reality. For example, a depressed person receives an antidepressant as a measure to ease his depression, - “an abnormal mental state characterized by exaggerated feelings of sadness, apathy, dejection, worthlessness, emptiness and hopelessness that are inappropriate and out of proportion to reality” (Mosby’s, 1994). In the extreme, the person may become paranoid or psychotic, expressing a wide range of affective, cognitive, and behavioural manifestations. It is said that these varied behaviours represent complex actions, reactions and interactions of the depressed person to stimuli that may be external or internal. He reacts to an apparent reality that is only known to him.

By administering antidepressant medications and through the support to strengthen his/her concept of *self*, we expect the person not only to take control of his/her feelings of sadness, apathy, dejection, worthlessness, emptiness and hopelessness that are inappropriate and out of proportion to reality, but also to convert him/herself into a person who lives up to the expectations of the generally perceived reality. Yet, the person is able to overcome depression only for a short period and he/she falls back to the depressed mood over and over again. In order to manage depression, the person has to be on medication for the longer term (Montgomery, 1994). Now the person is also dependent on antidepressants and it causes additional side effects causing more discontentments. It is an indication that mind and body are conditioned phenomena and discontentment is the result of the dynamics between some conditions that are dependently co-arising.

It is common knowledge that despite treatments the patient's depressed mood returns over time (Anonymous, 2004) and this situation is common to many other conditioned mental disturbances. Since the mental afflictions or disturbances are conditioned phenomena (that is, they arise momentarily due to many other fleeting phenomena), perhaps, the therapeutic strategies should include techniques that allow individuals to learn to observe mental afflictions that arise in their conscious and unconscious realm of the mind. All traditionally known methods are geared toward managing and alleviating mental afflictions. Since mental phenomena that are described in terms of mind-body dynamics are observable, a different type of introspective observation skill characterized by objectivity would be worth considering.

The Buddhist technique of *Vipassana Bhāvana* has been a technique known to take on this task of objective observation of mental concomitants that condition human malady. Though it was an exclusive technique for the recluse, ordinary people have practiced it over the centuries with success. With this in mind, I wish to explore *bhāvana* as a therapeutic technique that could be used as an adjunctive therapy to observe pervasive unsatisfactoriness through introspection of all coarse and subtle body-mind dynamics. Whether it is happiness or sorrow, pleasure or pain, in this way of thinking, they are considered as psychological experiences and hence the therapy is mind focused (Claxton, 1986). The technique of *bhāvana* will be discussed in detail later in chapter four. According to Epstein (1995), this technique can take the individual towards a level of mental clarity that psychotherapy so far has only envisioned.

Even though it is known that psychoanalytic psychotherapy provides some degree of introspective approach to problems related to mental afflictions, it does not offer “a direct route to appreciating the temporal nature of self” (Epstein, 1995, p.147) an important concomitant related to human condition. Though the contemporary psychologists consider that self plays a role in misery, they do not envision self itself as a problem (Blatner, 2001 and Weiss et al. 1995). Yet, the problems arising out of self-concept are dealt with in different cultures in many different ways. For example, in the Western culture it is believed that inner peace and harmony can be achieved when a person strengthens his/her sense of self and becomes acquisitive to reach self-actualization (Norwood, 2003).

However, in the Buddhist culture, it is believed that the strong sense of *self* is the cause of all mental disturbances and acquisitive tendency in the mind leading to the continuation of pervasive unsatisfactoriness (Batchelor, 1997, Epstein, 1995, and Kalupahana, 1987). These beliefs have evolved from empirical observations made by the ascetic Sidhartha Gauthama two and one half millennia ago (Batchelor, 1997). As a person born and raised in a Buddhist culture, I look at mental disturbances as temporal and causal phenomena that occur in daily life whether mentally afflicted or mentally 'healthy'. Whether it is pain, anxiety, frustration or anger, happiness and suffering are common experience to all of us irrespective of designated mental status. All mental states are transient and conditioned (*Dhammapada. n.d.*).

During my childhood, when people suffered with death, illness or any other loss, I heard the village elders saying, "impermanence brings suffering". Though I didn't understand what it meant at the time, it apparently brought relief to those who understood it. However, it resonated in my thoughts as a childhood experience. Later in life, after having experienced deaths in my immediate family, I thought to investigate the saying of the village elders in order to come to terms with my own grief, sorrow and misery. Later my investigations revealed what they really meant. I found it fascinating - this simplified statement has a solid psycho-physiological foundation that could be quite helpful to those who need to overcome misery.

According to Epstein (1995) *vipassana bhāvana* is an introspective approach that surpasses the therapeutic potential of psychotherapy. This technique of *bhāvana* involves no metaphysics or dogma. I am not surprised if some may view this method as a reductionist approach. However, I must

emphasise that “reductionism is an approach to building descriptions of systems out of the descriptions of the subsystems that a system is composed of, and ignoring the relationships between them” (Yaneer, 2000, p.1). *Bhāvāna* follows a judicious path in observing not only our reactionary emotional nature of (subjective) experience but also interested, attentive and detached experience (objective) in the world. This method has no place for speculations or blind acceptance without examining the experience within the co-dependent framework of mind and body. William James (1912) writes:

[E]xperience in its immediacy seems perfectly fluent. The active sense of living, which we all enjoy, before reflection shatters our instinctive world for us, is self-luminous and suggests no paradoxes. Its difficulties are disappointments and uncertainties. They are not intellectual contradictions. When the reflective intellect gets at work, however, it discovers incomprehensibilities in the flowing process. Distinguishing its elements and parts, it gives them separate names, and what it thus disjoins it cannot easily put together (p.92).

The experience points to the fact that *bhāvāna* is an empirical process that enables us to develop our latent ability to observe disjointed experience and experience how they are interdependently arising to condition pervasive discontentment. It is a mental discipline that empowers an individual to explore own mind body experience in an objective manner without rejecting the conventional world (Gunaratana, 1991). Through *bhāvāna*, an individual becomes mindful of the fact that all conditioned states are fleeting and it is common to all experience. When we become mindful of the fleeting nature of our experience, we become mindful of change. With this frame of mind, change cannot overwhelm us. This understanding comes through direct experience through own mind-body dynamics and as such it is not limited to

intellectual logic. A serious undertaker of this therapeutic method may experience that in the process the observer of misery becomes the observed.

Therefore, I believe that this unique approach suggested within the framework of my master thesis could be useful in developing an adjunctive therapy to uplift the mental well being of both mentally healthy and mentally afflicted. Since this is an objective approach to resolve mental afflictions through own observations of direct experience, learning and practice play a vital role if one aims to pursue this path. It requires a high level of determination and practice while abiding by a code of ethical living. Thus, in the next chapter, I wish to discuss in detail how we perceptually discriminate our own experience due to misapprehension, how misery manifests and the different psychological perspectives of this universal phenomenon.

CHAPTER TWO

Dukkha Sacca – The Unsatisfactoriness

MISAPPREHENSION (*avijja*) OF REALITY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE NOTION OF SELF

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the discussion was focused on how our perceptions prevent us from seeing the reality in which we live objectively. Due to our automated reaction of believing in what we see without challenging or examining the object so observed, we make decisions that are not necessarily rational or clarifying. Particularly, such decisions become even less rational in an environment where all things change from moment-to-moment even though we do not take notice of such change. Despite our inability to avoid this situation completely, we are capable of safeguarding our selves through attentive observations of change. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to examine and question reflectively in an effort to understand one's experience in a more judicious manner, freed from distorting biases. In the absence of attentive observation, we run into the danger of transference, a process by which we transfer feelings and past experience, both qualitative and quantitative, into our observations in the present (Born, 2000). This colours our present reality and we see what we want to see and not what is really out there.

This impacts the way we observe reality and understand it. Hence, in this chapter, I will argue how our observations get stained, causing us to believe in

an experience that is coloured by many factors, as mentioned in the previous chapter. All these contribute to misapprehension that I will be discussing later in this chapter. By default, we do not become aware of our misconception of experience. Due to the fact that we believe in our experience as real, we anticipate things to happen in certain ways. In essence, our anticipations are built on assumptions of reality that we believe in and not on what is really out there. In the end we do not get what we anticipated but often get something that we do not want. This brings a lot of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*¹)

Depending on the nature of experience, unsatisfactoriness manifests in many different ways. In this chapter, I will also illustrate the various manifestations of *dukkha* and our inability to recognize it. Further, as described in the previous chapter, *dukkha* is immediately connected to our concept of self. The relationship that exists between *dukkha* and the self has become the subject of two different approaches taken by Easterners and Westerners in coming to terms with unsatisfactoriness. These different psychological perspectives from both East and West will also be briefly discussed in this chapter.

According to Buddhist psychology, *dukkha* is an inevitable unsatisfactory state of existence that can be resolved only through self-help or introspection. If we are determined to achieve some level of healing from *dukkha*, we need to learn the skill of attentive observation characterized by an interested, caring detachment. *Bhāvana*, a therapy for the mind, offers us an alternative practice to learn observation skills as stated above. It is a practice that is built on the

¹ *Dukkha*: In the ancient language of *Pali* it means misery, anguish, difficult to endure, suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and discontentment, a mental state that results from attachment to the notion of self and its consequent inability to accept the impermanence of phenomena.

foundation of three factors, namely: ethical living (*sila*), mindfulness and concentration (*samādhi*), and experiential knowledge (*pañña*). Through this practice, we gain the training necessary to observe the nature of mind body experience attentively with detached caring that in turn enables us to observe the momentary nature of the self. From a Buddhist psychological perspective, the objective observation is imperative in understanding how the wholesome and unwholesome tendencies of the mind (discussed in the next chapter), centres on the notion of self, contributing to unsatisfactoriness in life. Though *dukkha* is universal in making us feel miserable in daily experience, we fail to recognize the need for its resolution as a top priority in our lives.

LEARNING FROM CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

I see, meet and work with people with mental afflictions on a daily basis. The Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, where I work, detains patients who have a criminal history and an Axis I – V diagnoses per DSM IV for treatment and rehabilitation. This experience at the hospital has given me an adequate opportunity to study unsatisfactoriness of life closely and its many manifestations. At work I meet also staff and visitors who, for purposes of delivering health care services, are in relationships with each other at therapeutic or at personal levels. During this process we make every effort to help ease the misery of our clients whether through medical management or psychosocial rehabilitation. Our goal is to help patients to reach a reasonable level of mental wellness that would enable them to find reintegration into mainstream society living (FPH, 2004). Once discharged after rehabilitation, many patients return to the hospital in a cyclical fashion for recurrent mental health problems whether manifested as depression or as sensory perceptual

disturbances with paranoia or psychosis. For example, currently our readmission rate is at fifty percent (Livingston et. al., 2003) and this is not very uncommon. Some are readmitted because they become suicidal, as they find no relief from their misery. Others may return due to breach of conditions, such as substance abuse for the purpose of coping with their discontentment or to satisfy insatiable desires. Upon their return, it is apparent that their suffering has multiplied or they have fallen victim to their own actions. Pervasive unsatisfactoriness as evidenced in these patients manifests in many different ways.

The nursing station at my workplace is built as a secured capsule and is separated from the patient area by a series of windows enabling us to monitor them. When I observe patients and listen to their stories, it becomes apparent that unsatisfactoriness is both outside and inside the capsule. A mentally afflicted patient who requests a dose of Ativan to deal with restlessness, agitation or a patient who requests a PRN medication to offset side effects of regular anti-psychotic medication or a staff member who complains about migraine headaches or insomnia are, for me, indicators of the level of misery that are experienced. When I talk to these patients, to encourage alternative approaches for relaxation, they often prefer to take their PRN medication. Most of them firmly believe medications can relieve them from misery. However, there are others who would prefer adjunctive therapies to medication but they lack the knowledge of an adjunctive therapy for their predicament.

Though one in every five people in North America suffers from some form of mental afflictions (Picard, 2003), the very word “suffering” is automatically linked in the western mind to physical pain or to serious mental

affliction. The fact that we all suffer mentally tends to be ignored and often underestimated by western culture. Therefore, I will use many words given in the footnotes for *dukkha* interchangeably to depict the state of pervasive or existential unsatisfactoriness. In other words, the stress of living results in daily mental impairments such as anxiety outbursts, emotional turmoil, anger, substance abuse problems and include chronic suffering from known and unknown physical and mental conditions that are beyond our control. Though this is a daily experience, we think, “life is chronically disappointing or life is off kilter,...sounds so dismal, so un-American and un-empowering” (Glickman, 2002, p. 22). This is the way we often look at discontentment in life rather than observing and reflecting what it is or how it occurs. Without systematic observation of how *dukkha* evolves or what concomitants it involves, it is difficult for us to comprehend how we become deluded and misled (deceived) by the many manifestations of this malady.

The crux of the deception is that we assume what we see, hear, taste, touch, smell or think are how things are out there. In other words, without questioning we accept what our senses appear to tell us. According to current scientific knowledge the information we receive via sense organs get processed in our central and peripheral nervous systems. Until a sensation turns into a reaction it goes through encoding and decoding systems that result in what we believe we see, taste, smell, touch or hear. Though the mind too acts as a sense organ that receives information similar to other sense organs, it has not been recognized as such until recently (Evans, 1970). While these encoding and decoding systems transform information that we receive through sense receptors, our perceptions of the received information are further coloured by

social, cultural and personal values. For example, it is similar to a story that goes from person to person, gets distorted and when it comes to the last person, is already unrecognizably altered. Then, in a similar manner the ultimate object that we think we see, hear, smell or touch may not be necessarily what is out there. In essence there exists a discrepancy between how we experience sensory input tainted by mental tendencies of greed, ill will and cognitive distortions and experience these without. By failing to recognize this flaw as a problem, we do not challenge or inquire these activities fully and objectively (H. Bai, personal communication, June 15, 2004).

This endemic and systemic inability to observe natural phenomena for what they are, places us in a predicament in which we tend to react to incoming information without knowing what it is that we are reacting to. In essence, we react to an assumed cause. This occurs not by choice but by default. In other words, we do not have clarity on what we react to or the knowledge of the origins of what we react to. Neither do we have the knowledge for bringing it to an end and taking the path or a course, which will lead to freedom from such undesirable reactions. This is known in the Buddhist literature as misapprehension (*avijja*). I believe it is for this reason that our rational perceptual conclusions often come into conflict with what is out there in their natural state, whether it involves people or objects. These conflicts with apparent reality make us feel frustrated, exhausted and miserable. All this occurs in the matrix of misapprehension by default.

Due to this misapprehension as described above and in the absence of knowledge of the dynamics of pervasive unsatisfactoriness, we react blindly. Even if we hear the truth about this predicament, we find it too pessimistic or

too unrealistic, because reflecting and confronting misery would bring discomfort. We push it aside or misinterpret its causes and ascribe it to someone or something other than our own self (Batchelor, 1997, Narada, 1967). If we want to find relief from this predicament, we need to develop mental skills to penetrate the veil of misapprehension about human malady that envelops our mind.

MANIFESTATION OF PERVASIVE UNSATISFACTORINESS (*dukkha*)

Dukkha in *Pali* can be translated as “difficult to endure”. Most of life's events are difficult to endure. We do not get what we want, but we get what we do not want. It is difficult to endure. We accept all these “difficult to endure” experiences without much investigation. Whether it is physical or mental we do not question or examine them. This is also applicable to our patients. The misery becomes apparent in their moods, actions and reactions. A careful observer would note that some patients react to voices they hear within their reality. Others become depressed and suicidal due to hopelessness and misery. In such an environment, even the most professional of staff working with these patients feel the resulting exhaustion and stress. The consequential disturbed sleep patterns, resulting in impatience with loved ones or with co-workers, impaired relationships and related physical problems such as stomach pains, migraines, insomnia or cardiac arrhythmias are unconscious expressions of their *dukkha*. However, for many, the concept of misery is limited to some thing like an inherent condition that disrupts “normal” functioning of an individual or a serious illness or a state of extreme pain. Within the scope of limited understanding of human malady its manifestations can be difficult to recognize.

Here is an illustration that may clarify the above observation. A friend of mine told me recently that he would be so happy if his wife would change a little. On another occasion his wife mentioned to me that everything in their household would become so pleasant and smooth, if only her husband would change. Their only son thinks that if his parents were to make a few changes, everything in his life would be smooth. All three members of the family expect to resolve their individual discontentment by forcing the others to change. It is always the other who has to change in order to resolve someone else's unsatisfactoriness. This kind of externalization of human condition is an innate tendency that evolves due to misapprehension. This form of unsatisfactoriness that arises due to physical and mental impairments in daily life is referred to in the ancient text as *dukkha-dukkhata* (Sayadaw, 1999 and Silva 1969). If my friend had observed his problem and attempted to find its causes, my friend's approach would have been different. However, my friend's reaction is a typical example that can be generalized. Generally, we fail to observe attentively what takes place in our own body and mind when we receive information about something on which our mind and body disagree. Instead of looking inward and observing attentively the change that is taking place and responding, we react and attempt to fix the problem in the outside world. This is similar to a situation where wild deer destroy the crops in the field and the farmer punishes the deer hide resting on the floor in his home.

Pervasive unsatisfactoriness manifests also as fears. We fear decay, aging, sickness and death. Death is a great malady to those who live. Once born, these natural processes that are inevitable begin. We suffer considerably at the face of change. We do not like aging. We want to live a long life despite all the ills of

aging. We go through plastic surgery to remove wrinkles and look younger. We take hormones and pills to revitalize the lost youth and satisfy our senses despite its accompanying dangers. For example, the hormone therapy, which is prescribed to restore vitality, increases the probability of cancer bringing as a consequence more misery than anticipated. Aging means loss of vitality and increased vulnerability. It brings insecurity to our mind. We want to feel secure both in the eyes of the others and ourselves. Therefore, we attempt to organize our apparent reality in ways in which we feel some form of security to fight pervasive unsatisfactoriness. Batchelor (1997) writes, “no matter how convincing an image of well-being we project, we still find ourselves involved with what we hate and torn apart from what we love. We still don’t get what we want and still get what we don’t want” (p. 23).

Though we experience unsatisfactoriness, our mental habits propel us to deny it. We resist and attempt to take control of the situation. This too is a way we externalize the problem. Instead of looking into our own body and mind for conditions as to why it arises and what can we do about it, we attempt to get things under control by repressing it. Assuming that we have everything under control, we return to the alluring world of sensual desires. This is a habit into which we condition ourselves to avoid unpleasant affective mental states in an effort to maintain pleasant mental states. If we observe attentively, we certainly would recognize the fact that when an unpleasant sensation occurs, our mental state switches to rejection mode developing subtle ill will toward what is undesirable. Instead of taking a moment to observe what happens to this undesirable sensation, we react to it instantly based on our old conditioned perceptions that prevent us from becoming attentive as they resist to changes

to status quo of existence. In essence, these old conditioned mental habits prevent us from observing the experience in the present moment, obstructing attentiveness of the observation leading to a misconception of the experience. This is deception by default and it is due to our inability to recognize such deception that we tend to react to something in the apparent reality, similar to chasing a mirage in the desert assuming that its water. It is due to this misapprehension that we imprison ourselves in the cycle of *dukkha*.

As I mentioned earlier, *dukkha* has many facades. Death is one such facade of pervasive unsatisfactoriness that many people don't like to talk about. Recently an ex-staff member passed away at a young age. We were informed about this untimely death and most of her co-workers attended the funeral. A co-worker who had been a very close friend of the deceased told me that she would not attend the funeral, as her death was unfathomable to her. From the conversation I became aware that she was in denial of her friend's death. She was not even ready to talk about this death. Since she felt agonizingly miserable, she took a couple of days off from work to cope with her miserable predicament. This form of suffering, known in the Buddhist literature as *viparinama-dukkhata*, arises due to the impermanent nature of things (Sayadaw, 1999; and Silva 1969). In other words, being torn apart from loved ones and losing desirable relationships or objects bring misery.

Beyond hesitation, I can say that grieving and lamentation about death is human. But, how many of us have simply accepted that if we are born we are destined to die similar to any other composite structure that will undergo decomposition. When we are gripped by misery, we attempt to shake it off like

something that is foreign to us. This exhausts us. According to Batchelor (1997),

[R]eflections may prepare us to encounter the actual performance we tacitly seek to sustain. Yet, we are skilled in disguising such reactions with expressions and conventions that contain death within a manageable social frame. To meditate on the certainty of death and the uncertainty of its time helps transform the experience of another's death from an awkward discomfiture into an awareness and tragic conclusion to the transience that lie at the heart of all life (p.33).

Perhaps my co-worker would have been at ease if she were able to reflect on death objectively recognizing its inevitable nature and transforming this fear into awareness about transient nature of life. By not being able to reflect on death in an objective manner, the confusion and fear of death maintain not only their power but also multiply and paralyse us. This is similar to a pathogen that is in our body leading to disease. In the absence of understanding of the behaviour of the pathogen we cannot remove it from the system. It thrives and leads to our demise as long as we do not take remedial action. Without this kind of objective reflection on death, our understanding of it remains clouded. We are afraid to go beyond the confines of this mental cloudiness due to confusion, anxiety and fears about death even though in the Buddhist view death is a change from one state to another similar to other changes that we experience in the continuum of life (Rahula, 1959). It is the fear of uncertainty that arises due to change, which is difficult to endure and keeps us away from gaining clarity. Generally, our habit is to consider that death is fearful and threatening. If we reflect on it, we would gain some understanding. According to Batchelor (1997), "it is like if we try to avoid a powerful wave looming above us on the beach; it will drive us crashing into the sand and surf. But, if we face it head-on and dive right into it, we discover only water" (p.7). Instead of searching

answers for these gaps in our understanding, we tend to ignore and dismiss death or misery from our conscious thought. We do this due to misapprehension as discussed earlier.

Despite these gaps in our understanding, we like to live with optimism. It is apparently based on false beliefs, false hopes and assumptions. And beneath it all sit a lot of repressed fears and anxieties. Such a person is not prepared for the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' (Satipanya, 2004). In the Buddhist view when life is considered unsatisfactory, it is a way to see life as it really is and not to shy away from its inbuilt suffering. This suffering can also be caused by inbuilt cumulative factors such as past kamma, genetical disorders and birth defects and so on that are beyond our command. This form of unsatisfactoriness is known as *sankhāra dukkhata* (Sayadaw, 1999; Silva, 1969). In this situation, those individuals whose mental faculties remain functional may benefit by engaging in *bhāvana*, a cultivation of the mind that will be discussed in detail later.

Recently, at a conference, I listened to a woman who has been burdened by continuous misery. At a very young age she had been sexually abused, and as a teenager she had experienced gang rape. She continued to live her life by repressing the agony. However, after many years she became a professional, helping others to recover from their agonies. Unfortunately, but each time when she helped someone with a history similar to her's, she found herself in turmoil. Though, she did not display her turmoil overtly, she could not find inner peace and with time became severely depressed. She became suicidal and needed professional help. This situation led to the break down of her marriage. According to her narrative, she lived only for her children. Without medication

she could not attend even to her daily needs. The trauma experienced as a child and as a teenager has been explained as the cause for her strong sense of blemish, fragility and turmoil. These experiences may have made her vulnerable to unfathomable levels of anxiety that survives as a sense of futility or as feeling of unreality. According to Epstein (1995), when one is caught between such conditions of fear, one becomes even more uncertain about one's reality. All these contribute to the general malady that one feels about oneself and is manifested in multiple ways as depicted in the above story. The true conditions for her malady remain hidden beyond her awareness.

The above discussion illustrates that the cardinal cause(s) for our inability to recognize pervasive unsatisfactoriness in its dynamic and complex components is not only due to its many manifestations but also due to misapprehension. The way in which we analyze experience is conditioned by traditions, social values, attitudes and perceptions forming personal mental habits in observing daily experience. By all these factors and inbuilt systemic phenomena as described earlier, we get a stained view of what we observe. Our conditioned old mental habits that are tuned in to accept what we see, hear, taste, touch, smell and think without questioning or challenging as means to protect desires and to reject what is undesirable to the notion of egoistic self are not conducive to acknowledging the fact that we look at experience through a veil of misapprehension. Yet, East and West view this human malady in distinctly different ways. Thus, the next part of this chapter discusses the psychological perspective of misery from both Eastern and Western perspectives.

WESTERN MODERNIST PERSPECTIVE ON PERVASIVE UNSATISFACTORINESS

Commonly in the modern west, pervasive unsatisfactoriness is understood at different levels. According to American Heritage Dictionary (2003), at a physical level, the human misery is understood as a state of suffering resulting from physical circumstances or extreme poverty. Psychologically, pervasive unsatisfactoriness is understood as mental or emotional unhappiness or distress. Our discontentment or contentment depends also on our dispositions and not on our circumstances. Glickman (2002) writes that in the west even the words such as greed, hatred or delusion are harsh words and people understand them in a very negative way. Informally, misery is limited to a physical ache or ailment. Though misery is universal, there are many different approaches to resolving this human condition based on various sectarian models. This becomes obvious if we take a close look at the current therapeutic models of western origin practiced worldwide. I do not intend to discuss these models in detail. But, I think it is important to explain some of these widely practiced models in brief.

Contemporary practices in psychoanalysis/psychotherapy are focused to provide relief from misery by reconstructing the self through enactment of the historic experience of early and more formative emotional relationships in life. As Epstein (1995) explains, it essentially deals with past experience in reconstructing a new self. The personality evolves as a result of interactions between biological factors and vicissitudes of experience. The interactions of the therapy are focused on the three components of the mind, the *ego*, the *id* and the *superego* making it possible to demonstrate to the patient what parts of

thought and behaviour are determined by inner wishes, conflicts and fantasies and what parts represent a mature response to objective reality (Corsini and Wedding, 2001). The cognitive-behavioural strategies are designed to help people to recognize the relationships among thoughts, feelings, and experience and change behaviour and attitudes by identifying how they unnecessarily prolong their unhappiness, loneliness, conflicts, and other problems (Ellis and Dryden, 1987). In cognitive therapy, patients are often asked to write down their negative thoughts and read them as if it is someone else's problem. Wade and Tavis (1996), state that this technique is useful because many patients have unrealistic notions of what they must do or should do in their lives. Often, they react without examining the validity of such notions. Being unable to accept their human limitations, people set impossible standards and experience catastrophe. According to Corey (1994), behavioural therapy is intended to teach individuals "self-management, skills they can use to control their lives, deal effectively with present and future problems and function well without continued therapy" (p. 345). Among cognitive behavioural therapies we observe some differences in their approach. For example, in Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy, the person is encouraged to substitute illogical thoughts with rational ones. Even after substitution of logical thoughts the individual still experiences suffering, misery or discontentment in life experience. The continuous discontentment in life situations remains unresolved.

As opposed to cognitive behavioural therapies, "humanistic approach rejects the deterministic view of human nature as supported by psychoanalysis and radical behaviourism" (Corey, 1994, p. 236). The humanistic approach focuses on four ultimate concerns that are rooted in human existence; death,

freedom, isolation and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980). The goal of the therapy is to challenge the individual to discover alternatives and choose among them to resolve his/her misery by not being a passive victim of circumstances but consciously becoming the author of life. The Person Centred Therapy, another humanistic approach to ease the human condition, is primarily a way of being toward wholeness and self-actualization. If lived, there is a “natural formative tendency or a central source of energy that seeks fulfilment and actualization involving both maintaining and enhancing the organism” (Corey, 1977, p. 263). All these therapies are geared to enhance the preservation of egoistic self.

Most western therapists with psychotherapy and psychoanalytical background believe that the factors contributing to human malady lie in the unconscious (Mosak, 2000; Arlow, 2000) and it is very difficult to access the unconscious with known traditional methods (Epstein, 1995). The therapists believe that the unconscious is well guarded by defense mechanisms that prevent them from understanding their client’s misery. However, due to many complications such as transference and large-scale forgetfulness, it is very difficult to recognize impenetrable defences that guard the conditioned causes of suffering. For this reason, the therapist explores the unconscious dynamics of personality such as defenses and conflicts. Through probing the past, therapist expects the client to gain awareness of factors that cause anguish. Through these approaches, the therapist attempts to reconstruct the self of the individual. With reference to early days of psychotherapy, Erich Fromm (1992) states,

Freud’s aim was to help the patient understand the complexity of the mind, and his therapy was based on the concept that by understanding one’s self, one can free one’s self from the bondage to irrational forces, which cause unhappiness and mental illness (p.3).

However, in contemporary therapeutic approaches, we notice a trend that is more consistent with strengthening the self instead of freeing our “self” from bondage. For example, in modern Western psychology, harmony is promoted through acquisitiveness and the assertion of self-development, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-expression, self-awareness and self-control within the individual (Valéry, 1996; Epstein, 1995). This is more or less congruent with reconstructions of self by providing the necessary re-enforcements toward integration of self as a whole. Moreover, it is believed that by promoting the self together with its corollary concepts, the self will be able to take control in resolving its conflicts (Wade and Tavris, 1996).

According to Blatner (2000) one way to understand what happens with another person’s self at a deeper level is to assess various attributes that might be supporting or detracting from the sense of self. Thus, it is assumed that it may be possible to more consciously repair deficiencies or reduce trauma, or to otherwise participate in a more holistic approach to healing. He suggests twenty-one aspects to assess self in the process namely body tone, activity, competence, self-control, appearance, recognition, preferences, differentiation, philosophy, boundary-making, possessions, identifications, social status, being useful, fantasy, integration, creativity, character roles, vocation, imagination, self-expression, and depth.

In order to strengthen the self, cognitive-behavioural strategies encourage people to recognize the relationships among thoughts, feelings, and experience. They believe that activities based on illogical thoughts lead people to miserable predicaments. For this reason the therapist teaches the individual how to substitute adaptive thoughts for negative ones. In this approach the use

of coping strategies such as distraction, re-labelling of sensations, and imagery to alleviate suffering are common. According to Wade and Tavris (1996) all these techniques are supposed to increase feeling of control and reduce feelings of inadequacy.

Thus, it can be said that the western therapies depicted here are more or less focused on addressing specific psychological aspects of the human mind and resultant attitudes and behaviours. One common aspect that becomes obvious is that all these therapy designs have the notion of self at their centre and inquiry remains at the surface level of the mind. Whether it is self actualization or replacing illogical with logical thoughts or even facilitating the *ego* to feel balanced through acquisition of material wealth or hoarding other self related concepts of self-esteem or self-confidence and so on, all of them have one common goal, that is, strengthening the self as the way to get rid of discontentment that arise through vicissitudes in life. Every step of therapeutic action is geared toward strengthening the self as a way to cope with a particular issue. In the *dhamma* this kind of believing in the notion of self is described as the belief in personality (*sakkayaditti*), a belief that has no firm hold in mind and body. As Goenka (1991) explains, perhaps currently known techniques in psychology cannot take the therapist or the patient into the depths of the mind the immediate site where all our conditioned, emotional reactions arise.

BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON *DUKKHA*

In contrast to the way the western psychology attempts to reconstruct the notion of self, some (Epstein, 1995, Batchelor, 1997 and Glickman 2002) believe that moving away from this kind of approach and learning the skill of

letting go of burdensome feelings could help individuals achieve relief from vicissitudes in life. In this regard Glickman (2002) states that thought associated with feelings of pleasure and pain, and emotions tell us what to keep and what to avoid. Due to the fact that we can feel without thoughts and we cannot think without feelings (LeDoux, 1998), it can be argued that we should be able to feel and observe pain, pleasure and emotions without being affected by them. This in other words, is our ability to observe things objectively. However, this mental ability remains latent or dormant beneath our awareness and with the technique of *bhāvana*, we will be able to rekindle this skill.

Mark Epstein (1999) in his book, *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart*, contends that in the Buddhist approach to relief from discontentment is attained through letting go of acquisitiveness and that augmenting the impenetrable, separate and individual self is more of the problem than the solution. The self that we experience can be pleasant or unpleasant or neutral. When our experience becomes unpleasant, it evokes tension in mind and body. When we experience pleasantness, it too triggers tension. This tension that is perpetually changing from moment-to-moment gives us the sensation of some permanent, solid entity. It is a reaction that takes place instantly when desirable or undesirable objects come in contact with our sense receptors. Instantly the experience is personalized. This phenomenon of personalization will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. It takes place both from within and without. Personalization gives rise to tension in both mind and body. It is this tension that further gives rise to the notion of *I* or *me* or *not me* within the framework of body and mind and vice versa. This tension is a natural phenomenon that occurs whether we like it or not. It is impersonal and operates beneath our awareness. According to Kashyapa (1969),

[T]he contents of the deep mind are not dormant-like dead repositories in the go-down. Rather each bit of it is highly active and alive like the under currents and cross currents surging deep below the ocean dominating and determining even the uppermost wave on the surface. This zone of the mind constitutes the *bhavāṅga* (body of the personality) (p 126).

Freud called this phenomenon the *id*. Kashyapa (1969) quotes how Freud explained *id*.

To the oldest of the mental provinces we give the name of *id*. It contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth that is fixed in the constitution – above all, therefore the instincts, which originate in the somatic organization and which find their first mental expression in the *id* in forms unknown to us (p. 126).

Thus, I view *id* as an ‘impersonal’ experience that surfaces as sensations, for example the non-verbal sensation of hunger. The conceptual mind that has the notion of “I” notes the sensations and personalization takes place as we feel the tension, that is, the tension of feeling “I am hungry”. We associate our “self” with this sensation and conceptualize this reaction as “I am hungry”. Here, the “I” comes into existence. According to the Buddhist understanding, this is a continuous process that gives rise to the concept of an unchanging self (*ego*). As long as information continue to contact our sense bases, it leaves the impression of an unchanging identify of “self”. This is similar to a flame that leaves the impression that it is a continuous entity, which in reality is a continuous stream of particles where one particle burns out and another new particle takes its place producing the illusion of an unchanging flame. Though the self (*ego*) evolves from moment-to-moment similar to a flame, we believe in a permanent unchanging self in much the same way we believe in the flame as a continuous entity due to misapprehension.

With regards to sensations that arise in the body Glickman (2002) writes that, though our unconscious is carried in the soma, or body, “most of us, however, still think of it as residing somewhere in our brain, inseparable from our thought” (p. 52). He suggests that our unconscious process is significantly sensation and body based, though not disjointed from our thoughts due to the legacy of our evolution as a species. For example, according to Glickman (2002) when an ant’s eyes and feelers contact the information about cupcake crumbs nearby, sensations run through its body triggering the motion of chemical and physical mechanisms that take the ant to the cupcake crumb. The ant eats and drags it to its nest. Without personalizing it, the ant cannot eat or take it to its nest. Whether its evolutionary or not, an observer would note objectively that it is attracted to the cupcake crumb. Likewise, Glickman postulates that relevant details for survival must be processed through sensations and instinctive reactions. That takes place in the unconscious. For example, when our conscious mind is shut down for the night, our ability to shift positions or respond to noises or recognize cold or hot are indications that we process sensations even when we are asleep. We are reacting. This means we process sensations unconsciously and consciously contributing to the sensation of self.

In the Buddhist view, the self or *ego* is not an entity that is firm and permanent but an activity that evolves on a moment-to-moment basis and differentiates itself and manifests through body-mind dynamics while affected by sensory input received from without. The moment-to-moment evolution of an illusory self is the change we experience. This is an unpleasant truth about our selves. Our unconscious defense systems do not admit our lack of substance to our selves. Instead we attempt to project an image of wholeness

and perfection. This requires some form of structure for the self to hold on to. In its search for a firm hold, the self moves between the extremes of sensual desires (*kāma sukallikānu yoga*) and self-mortification (*atta-kilamatānu yoga*) (Narada, 1987). When the self is unable to find a firm hold due to the inevitable moment-to-moment change, the self feels insecure, uncertain and becomes confused. This leads to unsatisfactoriness. In Freudian terms this unsatisfactoriness can be viewed as the struggle of *ego* to find and preserve the illusion of security between the extremes of *id* and *superego* with the hope of finding a secure refuge (Epstein, 1995).

We attempt to resolve misery in many different ways. Another way we take to resolve misery is by attempting to fit the world to our agenda, in which we expect only perfection. Everything has to change to suite our liking. Due to this kind of expectations, Batchelor (1997) writes,

[W]e find the stubbornness of matter, the fickleness of mood, the ambiguity of perception, the wilfulness of thought and habits are at odds with us. In order to control these, we split reality into two parts in which one part is *mine* and the other part that is *not mine*. [For this reason, we] do not experience matter, mood, perception and impulses as such but as unique chaotic moments configured in unprecedented and unrepeatable ways (p. 69).

This is common to all our experience. For example, Glickman (2002) explains how distorted our vision can be. He writes,

[T]wenty percent of what we see comes from unadorned data that the retina has absorbed; the rest comes from information added by other parts of the brain. [...] typically, eighty percent of what we see is a projection influenced by our feelings and thoughts (p. 62).

In effect, these mental processes operate impersonally within body and mind and our conceptualizing minds prevent us from seeing things as they appear.

ILLUSION OF CONTROL

One of the most prominent ways in which we try to resolve pervasive unsatisfactoriness is by attempting to take control of events, self and other phenomena (Epstein, 1998). Generally, we assume that if we take control of an object or a situation, we would be able to resolve the conflict that brings discontentment, with anticipation that such control would give us the feeling of security leading to harmony. However, attempting to take control of self or a situation or an object is a conditioned habit pattern in the conscious and unconscious human mind. Delmonte (1995) thinks that templates for such human behaviour lie in our unconscious mental processes. We all know how difficult it is for an unskilful mind to control simple conscious desires and aversions in our daily experience. Our attempt to control is a reaction to a pleasant or an unpleasant event or an object either to avert unpleasantness or to consolidate pleasantness. If we do not accept experience as it is and want to force things to go our way, ironically, we are not only trying to control it but also thwart what is desirable from it (Glickman, 2002). We tend to forget limitations of our projected mind based influence to change reality.

In the Buddhist view, this is a form of narcissistic tendency that arises due to clinging to extremes of indulgence and self-mortification that leads to frustration (Epstein, 1995). In the process we feel that we have hardly any control over self, others or phenomena. All attempts to take control by arranging apparent reality to fit our desires lead to frustration as the reality of the moment changes faster than we can comprehend. Thus, whether conscious or unconscious, taking control of any process whether mental or corporeality is an impossible task. However, these phenomena if allowed unimpeded will turn

our body and mind into a slave of desire. For example, a person wants to feel good and he decides to take a drink (longing) at the pub. He consumes a drink. He begins to feel good and takes a second drink. He feels better and then thinks, I am in control and I can have a third drink. Due to his insatiable desire, and in order to maintain his condition of “feeling better,” evermore, he decides to have a third drink and craves for more; it is an impersonal trap of insatiable craving; now the drink takes the man.

If unimpeded, insatiable desires have the potential to pull us into pervasive discontentment as illustrated in the above example. However, if the man had the skills to observe his desire objectively and allowed the thought of feeling good to take its natural course, he may not have become a slave to the drink. If relief from life vicissitudes is our goal, then, instead of trying to take control of our sensations, feelings, thoughts and reactions consciously or to prevent our unconscious efforts for the same, we should allow our mind to observe these processes attentively. It is such attentive observations that allow us to relate to such phenomena in a detached caring manner and leaving them to run their natural course. By doing so we would be feeling way more relaxed from within.

Pervasive unsatisfactoriness is closely linked to our feelings. Epstein (1998) states that most of us have not learned how to be with our feelings without rushing to analyze them or to change them. He further writes that we must recover the capacity to feel because avoiding emotions will only prevent us from being our true selves. In effect, if we do not integrate our feelings we lose our wholeness. Instead of feeling feelings for what they are, we attempt to analyze them based on our assumed perceptions. We rationalize and give new

meanings to feelings. We misinterpret our feelings as they arise. This is similar to our encoding and decoding system, in which our rational efforts distort our experience of feelings instead of recognizing them for what they are. We need to examine even the most unpleasant feeling mentally and try to understand its course. Perhaps such understanding allows us to let go of burdensome feelings. According to Epstein (1998), putting down our burdens in this way does not mean forsaking the conventional world, but it means being in the world with the consciousness of one who is not deceived by appearance. Though it is a difficult path to follow, it is possible through mind cultivation.

Constructing a strong self with acquisitive tendency as suggested and practiced by Western therapies has not yet succeeded in providing relief from pervasive unsatisfactoriness in life. However, the Buddhist psychological perspective on this human discontentment that arises due to mental undercurrents involved in the notion of self, sets a strong foundation for an adjunctive therapy of the mind that empowers the observer through an empirical, non-dogmatic, non-reductionist and non-sectarian method to observe the illusory notion of self and how to deconstruct it systematically in finding relief. This kind of deconstruction is not dissolution of the self, rather getting to know this unwavering notion for what it is. It is accomplished through an observation technique known as *bhāvana*. This method of *bhāvana* as suggested in this thesis has been tested and successfully practiced for over two and one half millennia. This approach does not forsake the conventional world in which we live but we learn to live mindfully with the experience as it is, without misapprehension. If we learn the true nature of self-experience for its moment-to-moment existence, it certainly takes away many uncertainties that

envelop the belief in self as a solid, unchanging entity. This knowledge gives the observer a feeling of contentment in which the observer becomes mindful of the perpetual change that is inevitable and is better prepared not to be shaken by it. As long as we live in misapprehension our mind is in a state of cloudiness. Therefore, the next chapter is focused on the discussion, from a Buddhist perspective, of how *dukkha* evolves and impacts our daily experience while giving due consideration to the core issue of *self*-phenomenon and its dynamics in the arising of *dukkha*.

CHAPTER THREE

Dukkha Samudaya Sacca – Arising of Unsatisfactoriness
&
Nirodha Sacca – Path to Freedom

COMPREHENSION OF MENTAL DYNAMICS

INTRODUCTION

In the discussion so far, I have attempted to point out how we view apparent reality through our discriminatory perceptual definitions. Our perception throws its projection towards the object and shapes it into something that we want reality to be, which prevents us from seeing things the way they are. As a result we believe in what we see or feel without questioning or examining the object so seen or felt, as described in the previous chapter. In the absence of attentive observational skills and analytical/experiential knowledge, we interpret experience blindly.

The notion of self evolves and grows through our experience. Due to our inability to cut through perceptual distortions and observe experience for what it is, and due to misapprehension of phenomena, we personalize impersonal experience, as described in Chapter One, adding strength to the notion of “self”, “I” or “me”. The notion of self is a firmly anchored concept within our experience in which we seek refuge (Epstein, 1995). Though the western approach to healing is based on strengthening the self -concept, the Buddhist approach stands on a foundation that helps us understand the nature

of self as a conditioned state, which arises in the mind. As stated in the *Dhammapada*,

[M]ind is the forerunner of all its objects, mind-governed and mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a peaceful mind, happiness follows one, like one's shadow that never separates" (YV2). If one speaks or acts with an unwholesome mind, misery follows one, like the wheel that follows the foot of the wagon bearer (*Dhammapada – YV1*).

Even though the debate on the human condition and its healing is continuing, the Buddhist position has been clear as reflected in the above quote. The Buddhist approach to uncovering the self is thus based on objective observation of the self, an experience that is empirically verifiable by the observer through the technique of *vipassana bhāvanā* in order to expose and uncover the conditionality of our notion of self. Through this process, the observer gets empowered to observe how he/she reacts to sensations and what concomitants are operational as undercurrents² in the outcome of our notion of self (Glickman, 2002).

In this chapter, I will present the theory that unsatisfactoriness in life is a condition that arises due to the inability to perceive our body and mind as a conditioned state, in terms of physical and mental aggregates and how mental undercurrents such as thirst for (*tanhā*), clinging or attachment (*upādāna*) and becoming (*bhava*) contribute to the evolution of the notion of self. These three terms, "thirst for", "clinging" and "becoming" will be illustrated explicitly, later in this chapter. The translation of the *Pali* term *tanhā* as "thirst for" is only an approximation of its meaning. It is much more complex than simple, "thirst for". This tendency of *tanhā* will be discussed in all its aspects later in this chapter. For this reason, I am inclined to use the term *tanhā* instead of using its

² Undercurrents: mental tendencies that operates with or without intentional involvement and remain impersonal.

approximation. *Tanhā*, clinging, and becoming are three states among a total of twelve antecedent states that make up the wheel of life. Even though each cause and its effect are vital for the turning of the wheel and deserve explanation, within the framework of this thesis, my discussion will be limited to *tanhā*, clinging (*upādāna*) and becoming (*bhava*) including a brief discussion about the wheel itself.

BLIND REACTION

Our mind tends to be habituated or conditioned to see only what it wants to see and not how things come to be through their conditionality. It is this habit that prevents us from knowing the reality of pervasive unsatisfactoriness that we experience in life (Kalupahana, 1987). Through social, cultural, spiritual and personal experience, we are conditioned to believe that whatever the experience in our encounter with the world, we take the characteristics of the experience to be the properties in it. In this relationship, the body and mind encounters a barrage of information from both inside and outside. Since it is an impersonal reaction in which neurotransmitters and other physico-chemical processes give rise to sensations in our body and mind, it will be difficult to recognize which chemical or which process resulted in a given sensation. At any given time information is received by all six sense organs in our body. Some are processed quicker than the others. For instance, in the example that I quoted in the earlier chapter about leaving my house door opened over night, I was not sure which information in my observation triggered my fear. It could be anything; that is, the knocking sounds on the door after midnight, or the car with a running engine, or the phone ringing, or my pre-existing biased perceptions, or even the darkness and drowsiness of the

moment. As explained in the above example, we tend to react to things and events without knowing even what we are reacting to and why. It is an inbuilt conditioned mental habit.

This happens due to the fact that mental conditioning modifies our ability to experience the stimulus as it is. In brief, we react to a conjured cause. When we react to a conjured cause, our reaction becomes blind. For example, you are driving on highway and another driver happens to cut you off and pass you. Instantly you become angry with the other driver. Now you are upset and feeling miserable. Let us take a close look at this scenario. When the other driver cut you off, it was something that you observed. What you observed did not fit into the perfect world that you wish to live in. Simultaneously, it gave rise to a sensation. Impacted by mental biases, the sensation in this case turned to be unpleasant. Unpleasant sensation is something that we do not want to accept. It causes discomfort. Therefore, the tendency of thirst for rejection arises. This tendency makes us react by rejecting the discomfort and it will be manifested as ill will. It is expressed in various manifestations such as anger, hostility or hatred that in the extreme leads to violence. You did not even become aware of the unpleasant sensation that arose in your body and mind. It is your body and mind that goes through this violent change, experiencing a high level of anxiety, fast heart beat, increased respirations, inability to think rationally and the like. In brief you become dysfunctional momentarily. Yet, you do not take care of it, and instead react angrily towards the other driver. Instead of taking care of the conditions of the moment, which is, in this case, the unpleasant sensations that give rise to ill will causing anxiety within yourself, you react to something else. According to Punjabi (1990) this is a blind reaction to a conjured cause.

Whether sensations are caused internally by changes in thoughts, emotions and body-mind dynamics, or externally as was the case with the driver on the highway, we react to them habitually. This leads to faulty reactions and discontentment. Then, it can be said that misery evolves not by random chance but through causes within our mind and body. We react to these causes blindly without being mindful of them, due to the veil of misapprehension. When we become unmindful of our habits and permit reactions that are blind, we create mental chaos spiralling into confusion.

THE FIVE AGGREGATES (*Nāma-Rūpa*)

According to *Satipattana Sutta* (MN), phenomenologically a ‘human being’ is comprised of five aggregates in which one is a physical and the other four are mental aggregates. The body is the physical corporeality (*rūpa*) and the mind (*nama*) is comprised of four mental components, namely, cognition (*viññāna*), recognition (*saññā*), sensations (*vedanā*) and reactions or mental formations (*sankhāra*). Each of these antecedent aggregates arises (*uppada*) rapidly, completes its function (*tiṭṭi*) and dissipates (*bhanga*) rapidly in a continuum.

Narada (1991) explains the workings of these aggregates within the “being” using the conscious thought process, which consists of seventeen thought moments from becoming aware up to producing a reaction.

The *bhavanga*³ consciousness which one always experiences as long as it is uninterrupted by stimuli, vibrates for two thought moments and passes away. Then the consciousness of the kind that apprehends sensation arises and ceases. At this stage the natural flow is checked and turned toward the object.

³ *Bhavanga*: when a person is in a state of profound sleep his mind is said to be vacant or, in the state of *bhavanga*. We experience such a state of consciousness when our minds do not respond to external objects.

Immediately after which there arises and ceases visual consciousness. The sense vibration (*panchadwaraviññāna*) is followed by a moment of the reception of the object so seen (*sampaticchana*). Next comes the investigating faculty (*santirana*) or a momentary examination of the object so seen. After this comes the stage of representative cognition termed determining consciousness (*vottapana*) on which depends the subsequent psychologically important stage - appreciation or *javana*. This *javana* stage usually lasts for seven thought moments or at times of death five. The whole process, which happens in an infinitesimal part of time ends with the registering consciousness (*tadalambana*) lasting for two thought moments, thus completing one thought process (p.100).

It is at this appreciation stage, one begins to react to pleasantness or unpleasantness by developing volition (*cetanā*). This is explained in the following historical simile of the mango tree.

A man lost in deep sleep is lying at the foot of a mango tree, with his head covered. A wind now stirs the branches and a fruit falls besides the sleeping man. He is in consequence aroused from dreamless slumbers. He removes his head covering in order to ascertain what has awakened him. He sees the newly fallen fruit., picks it up and examines it. Apprehending it to be a fruit with certain constituent attributes observed in the previous stage of investigation, he eats it and then replacing his head cover, once more resigns himself to sleep (Narada 1991, p. 101).

In the unconscious process, Narada (1987) writes,

[A]n object with a slight (*paritta*) intensity, being not vivid, cannot survive even till the genesis of the seven appreciative moments. In this case the stream of consciousness flows only up to the determining stage and then subsides into *bhavanga* [body of the personality]. An object with a “very slight” (*atiparitta*) intensity enters the sense avenue and causes only a vibration of the life continuum (p. 101).

The individual remains unaware of such slight or very slight sensations and the resultant energy slips into *bhavanga citta*³ (Kashyapa, 1969, Rahula, 1991) and gets buried beneath the awareness. Therefore, the mental aggregates whether conscious or unconscious are in a constant flux of arising and passing away from moment to moment, with some contributing to antecedent volition

³ *Bhavanga citta*. Constitutes the body of the personality and it keeps the continuity in a lifespan, so that what we call a 'being' goes on to live from moment to moment. That is the function of the bhavanga-citta (Kashyapa, 1969).

resulting in reactions of which one remains aware or unaware. Within this rapidly changing reality, one seeks his/her identity of “I”, “me” and its security.

THE QUANTUM AGGREGATE (*Rupa*)

The physical body, that is tangible and has form, is comprised of different systems such as skeletal, muscular, digestive, cardiovascular, urinary-genital, respiratory and defense at the macro level. Despite all these differences, solid, fluid and gaseous states of our body are made up of particles (Zukav, 1979). Thus, our body is an association of particles glued together according to the laws of nature (*Dhamma*). In the macro world we believe that we have control over our body, though we know that we have no control even over the homeostasis that supports the vital internal organs. We have only some knowledge about reactions visible to our eye and of those biochemical reactions within the cells that can be made known through indirect methods. However, at the most fundamental level, the reality of our body looks very different. Though, we see and feel our body as a firm and a solid entity, it is a mass of oscillating formless particles (indivisible infinitesimal *kalapas*) that exist as energies (Karunadasa, 1989). These quantum aggregates that make up our body are evolving and dissolving endlessly in an antecedent succession for reconfiguration. This means our body is not a permanent solid entity, as it appears to be.

The twentieth century physics provides further evidence to the above status of our body. As Zukav (1979) writes, at the fundamental level the body is a mass of dancing electro magnetic vibrations, which is constantly reconfiguring (Glickman, 2002) and reappearing dependent on prevalent conditions. Also at the macro level, our body is constantly changing. For example, whether it is

decay or regeneration our skin changes every 2 months, bones change every 3 months, blood cells every 21 days and the stomach epithelial lining every 5 days. These are evidence to the effect of our impermanence (Glickman, 2002). Every cell in our body decays and new cells are being formed. There remains nothing permanent even at the macro level. Though the body also changes from moment to moment at both levels, we believe firmly that our body is a permanent entity and react as such.

Irrespective of our belief in our body as “I” or “me” or “myself”, it is an undisputable transient phenomenon that is constantly changing without leaving any permanent identity anywhere. Here the science and Buddhist psychology appear to come to the same understanding that the body, though it looks solid and tangible, is constantly evolving and passing away at the micro level and thus our body is a conditioned state. Everything is changing without discrimination. This is the experiential knowledge of impermanent reality of our body, described by the Buddha (Narada, 1987) over 2500 years ago and then recognized and confirmed by the scientists of the twentieth century (Zukav, 1979). We transcend this knowledge of change and take refuge in a permanent self by identifying the body as “I” or “me” or “myself”. That is the reality.

MENTAL AGGREGATES (*Mind*)

According to *Satipattana Sutta* (MN), mental activities of cognition, recognition and sensation are processes that take place naturally within the sensory perceptual structure, if it remains functional. There is no 'doer' for these mental activities (*Anatta-Lakkhana Sutta*- SN), and for this reason, I would describe this antecedent natural activity within the framework of this thesis as an “impersonal” process that duly takes place. However, mental formations

such as thoughts, emotions and voluntary activities that are also part of this successive logical antecedence at the conscious level are described as intentional activities (*sankhāra*). According to Buddhist interpretation all mental aggregates also exist in the form of vibrations or wavelets as reconfiguring mental energies, similar to vibrations that make up our body, which arise momentarily and pass away when their functions are completed (Narada, 1991). This means that even the mental aggregates are transient and that there is no permanency in any of these aggregates whatsoever. In essence the mental processes, similar to the physical corporeality, also do not have anything permanent to identify as “I”, “me” or “myself” because it too is a process that evolves from moment to moment.

MIND PROCESS (*Nāma*)

Even though all phenomena are transient and conditioned, when we experience life events, we feel a strong sense of “self”. This feeling that evolves in the mind process is very strong in its reaction. This reaction leads us to believe that there is “I” “me” or “myself”. It is an unwavering sensation that would render all the knowledge that we gain from reading, intellectualization and logic about the fleeting nature of our mind-body dynamics, invalid emotionally.

According to *Lankavathara Sutta*, at birth the mind is said to be pure and luminous by nature (*praktiparisuddha*) unstained by fetters of desire, ill will, and delusion. As we live the life, our experience makes the mind turbid with these fetters and reactions. A stained mind is compared to a pond of murky water, which prevents us from seeing its depth. Therefore, we need to focus our inquiry into how the mind gets “turbid” in the mental process, disallowing us to

experience things as they are and how this experience evolves into a notion of “self” and affects us in the process.

SENSATIONS (*Vedanā*)

When an object is recognized with raw information, sensation (*vedanā*) arises due to contact (*Dutiya Dwaya Sutta – SN*). For example, when an object of form and eye come into contact (*phassa*), there arises the “eye-cognition” (*cakkhu-viññāna*) as explained earlier in the section of five aggregates. Sensations (*vedanā*) are vibrations resulting through the contact of incoming raw information with sense receptors in the body, giving rise to cognition (*viññāna*). In this context, cognition is referred to as the awareness or consciousness. The term *vedanā* includes all kinds of sensations, both physical and mental. Depending on prevalent conditions, they may be coarse or subtle. Sensations are part of the mental process that runs in the body. Now, McGinn (1991) asserts in a consciousness study that there is no duality in mind and matter and it is not possible to understand the process by which mind-body transition occurs from one to the other due to our limited intellectual capacity. As opposed to this assertion, the Buddhist view emphasises the fact that sensations (*vedanā*) are the crossroads where mind and body meet and *vedanā* is an empirically verifiable phenomenon through *vipassana bhāvana* (Goenka, 2004). However, a sensation is an indication that something is changing at the fundamental level; it is an activity that duly takes place.

In terms of modern science, sensations are linked to chemical - physical reactions that take place when such phenomena occur. For example, when an emotion arises, a rapid chemical recording in neuro-peptides takes place, resulting in a change at the molecular level. These neuro-peptides are held in

cells until they are discharged or changed. They record the effects of our emotional reactions or stress in the form of “impersonal” chemical reactions. The more intense the emotion or the stress gets, the more intense the recording becomes. The vehicles, which carry these chemical signatures, are stored in body parts and circulate throughout the whole body. (Pert, 1999). Since the whole body and mind are vibrations at the fundamental level, when such chemical change occurs, there arise a variety of vibrations that give rise to various sensations similar to a beam of light producing various colours depending on various wavelengths when refracted through a prism. Then, it can be postulated that permutations of such vibrations (wavelets) with varying frequencies give rise to diverse sensations with different characteristics such as burning, itching, pinching, heat or cold and so on. These are sensations that are observable.

In the *Pena Sutta* (SN) sensations are compared to the bubbles that form when rain hits the surface of water. Quickly they arise and in an instant they disappear, some lasting longer than others. This sensation remains neutral until labels or rational interpretations give a particular conceptual form. Once we conceptualize and add meaning to the incoming raw information, the sensation becomes pleasant or unpleasant. For example, if the object so recognized were a friend, the desire arises and we react with a smile and give him a hug or shake hands. We feel safe, calm and content. If he were an enemy, the same sensation turns into one that is unpleasant. We reject and react to unpleasantness by avoiding meeting with him or developing ill will or aversion. These reactions lead to the action part of the process of “fight or flight”, that is, the intentional actions such as getting into an argument, confrontation or walking away. It is

our habit to strive for and prolong the pleasant or desirable sensations. If it is unpleasant, we get rid of it quickly by pushing it away.

In this way, we develop our reaction around the nature of the sensation that is unpleasant, pleasant or indifferent. They arise due to the mental tendency of *tanhā*. *Tanhā* can be translated as craving, attachment and “thirst for”. *Tanhā* gives rise to the qualities of greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). When we feel a sensation as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, then attraction, ill will or indifference develops instantly and impersonally. If our minds are adequately disciplined and remain mindful, the arising of these qualities can be observed objectively. For this reason, objective, detached observation of sensations becomes one among the four foundations of mindfulness in the practice of *bhāvana* (Gunaratana, 1991). The dilemma is that when we feel a sensation as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, then respectively, attraction, ill will or indifference will develop uncontrollably, instantly and impersonally.

DEPENDENT CO-ARISING – THE WHEEL OF LIFE

As explained in the *Dhamma*, all mental aggregates are involved, to varying degrees, in vicissitudes in life because of their antecedent nature. However, the first three aggregates namely cognition, recognition and sensation in the process are passive, and it is the affective or the reactive aggregate that contributes to the building of *sankhāra*. According to *Satipattana Sutta*, our mental reaction or *sankhāra* namely thoughts, emotions and voluntary intentional activities with habit forming tendencies in both conscious (*mano*) and unconscious (*bhavānga citta*) is part of a cycle of cause and effect known in

the laws of nature (*dhamma*) as “*Paticca Samuppāda*” or translated as “Dependent Co-Arising”.

Dependent-Co-Arising, also known as the Wheel of Life, is a cycle that runs through the past, the present and the future. The wheel of life has twelve factors that give rise to both causes and effects. The causes and effects can be both conditioned and conditioning. That means, a cause for the next state to arise becomes the effect of previous state that ceased after serving its function. Among them there are eight observable states within the present. They are re-linking consciousness (*patisandhi viññāna*), mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*), six sense bases (*salāyatana*), contact (*phassa*), sensation (*vedanā*), thirst for (*tanhā*), clinging (*upādāna*), and becoming (*bhava*). In particular, sensations (*vedanā*), thirst for (*tanhā*), clinging (*upādāna*) and becoming (*bhava*) are important observable causes and effects through the practice of *bhāvana* that is discussed within the framework of this thesis. When sensations arise, *tanhā* arises, when *tanhā* arises, clinging arises, when cling arises, there arises becoming; becoming “me”, “myself” or “I”. However, I will include a brief discussion of the entire wheel and its causes later.

GREED, AVERSION AND DELUSION (*Tanhā*)

In *Sabbāsava Sutta (MN, I)*, *tanhā* is explained as the root cause of mental defilement or cankers. This means it is connected to all ills in life. Where there is *tanhā* there is *dukkha*. Where there is *dukkha* there is *tanhā*. Therefore, a discussion about *tanhā*, an important concept in the making of fleeting happiness and misery, becomes essential. Sidhartha Gauthama discovered through his own mind-body experience that *tanhā* is the basic condition of all unsatisfactoriness (*Maha-Satipattana Sutta, MN*). In the

Sammaditti Sutta (MN), *Arahant* Sariputra talks about the importance of understanding *tanhā* in the following manner. The *tanhā* needs to be

[U]nderstood in its origin, cessation, and the way leading to its cessation. There are these six classes of [*tanhā*]: [*tanhā*] for forms, [*tanhā*] for sounds, [*tanhā*] for odours, [*tanhā*] for flavours, [*tanhā*] for tangibles and [*tanhā*] for mind-objects. With the arising of sensation there is the arising of [*tanhā*]. With the cessation of sensation there is the cessation of [*tanhā*]. When a noble disciple has thus understood [*tanhā*], the origin of *tanhā*, the cessation of [*tanhā*], and the way leading to the cessation of [*tanhā*]... he here and now makes an end of suffering... (p.1).

According to *Abhidhamma*, *tanhā* arises in three manifestations namely thirst for sensual pleasures (*kāma tanhā*), thirst for existence (*bhava tanhā*) and thirst for non-existence (*vibhava tanhā*) (Rahula, 1959). In Freudian terms *Kāma tanhā* is comparable to the sex-libido, *bhava tanhā* to life instinct or self-preservation and *vibhava tanhā* to death instinct (Kashyapa, 1969 and Punnaaji, 1991). They are the causes of our reactions. These mental tendencies, as stated in the *Satipattana Sutta*, (MN) form conditioned mental habits. All three types of *tanhā* are characterized by greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) leading to pervasive unsatisfactoriness. Thus, our reactions are often based on habits shaped by greed, aversion and delusion. It is these reactions that generate misery within our daily experience.

People do not always realize how *tanhā* contributes to unsatisfactoriness or anguish through these three undercurrents. They may recognize unwholesomeness when it is coarse, but not when it is subtle. For example, they may know that the mind (*citta*) is unwholesome when it is blemished with greed (*lobha*) for sensual pleasure, which manifests as coarse greed or lust, but it will be difficult to recognize greed when it is subtle, such as attachment to beautiful things or to beloved ones. One may think: "what is wrong if we have

attachments to our relatives and friends or beautiful things?" There is nothing wrong with this as a convention. But, the fact is that we are bound to get obsessively attracted due to greed (*lobha*) and this attachment based on greed is not the same as pure selfless love (*metta*). It is a quality that centres on the notion of self. It is an urge underwritten and reinforced by selfishness (Glickman, 2002). As long as we remain mindful of these undercurrents, no harm will come to us.

If we analyze it very carefully, we recognize that this attachment serves to satisfy our own desires and needs rather than the needs of the other. Then, it can be described as selfish love, a manifestation of greed that makes the self "feel" secure, strong, grandiose and in control. We are afraid of losing this feeling of self-centeredness. Punjabi (2001) states that this self-centredness is biological and is built-in to our system. In modern psychology, this tendency is described as narcissistic. This is an inevitable tendency that manifests in many diverse ways. If we do not get what we want we develop unpleasantness. It develops into rejection or ill will. In this regard, Epstein (1995) writes

[A]ccording to Buddhist psychology, narcissism is endemic to the human condition; it is an inevitable, if illusory, outgrowth of the maturational process. Buddhist psychologists see narcissism as essentially self-generated...It is the tendency of the developing mind to impose a false coherence on itself to become infatuated with the image of self, to grasp for an identity by identifying with something or with nothing, to make the self into something other than what it actually is. It is this thirst for certainty, this misapprehension of self that so confuses the mind... In the attempt to preserve this illusion of security the ego races back and forth between the two extremes of fullness and emptiness hoping that one or the other will provide the necessary refuge (p. 69 – 70).

This is an indication as to how virulent and entrenched these three factors namely, greed, ill will and delusion are in the personality of each individual. The

tendency of *tanhā* shifts between the two extremes of sensual desire and non-existence. This type of narcissistic greed (*loba*) and ill will (*dosa*) manifest either in terms of our craving for something and longing for more and more or reject what we dislike and hate it, wishing its disappearance. A moment's introspection will show us how deep-rooted greed can be; even in the most trivial instances, for example - even though you're full, you may eat a bite more or may take one spoonful more. Of course, it can manifest itself more compulsively and more destructively - wanting bigger and better all the time; wanting someone else's possessions, partner, land and so on. It can manifest itself in international disputes over territory and resources, resulting in conflict and warfare (Gunaratana, 1991). Similarly, we can have feelings of ill will because someone irritates us for whatever reason; but ill-will can transform itself into hatred of people, races, nations and their annihilation. Delusion (*moha*), perhaps the basis for the other two, is a state of not knowing and not seeing the reality of the moment as it is. *Tanhā* imposes upon itself a false coherence through the process of personalization to become identified as the self. If we could be attentive and see clearly, we would know that greed and hatred are harmful both to others and ourselves. What brings harm to others and us is unwholesome and leads to suffering sooner or later. Of the three characteristics of *tanhā*, greed and hatred are the most easily identifiable. We can see them both in ourselves as individuals and in society. Both are destructive and on a psychological and emotional level they prevent us from seeing things from a balanced perspective. Because of them, our sense of reality is always skewed. These reactions are quite subtle and add layer by layer as *sankhāra* beneath our awareness and into the body of personality creating identities that are identified as the self.

If we observe bare sensations, we begin to understand how the dynamics of *tanhā* gives rise to mental confusion within the notion of self. As Epstein (1995) describes, whether the notion of self is [“grandiose or empty], we have to bring these attachments into awareness to generate opportunities for release” (p. 66). The more we develop *tanhā* toward any object whether physical or mental and pleasant or unpleasant, the greater the tendency of attachment to the extremes of sensual fulfilment and hopelessness due to misapprehension. In either way, we get disappointed because we are unable to secure certainty around the notion of self, because of the fleeting nature of all phenomena. If we are to find a way of life without leaning to the extremes, we need to be mindful and continuously vigilant of *tanhā* to note how these tendencies can arise in one's daily life unbidden, and to deal with such impulses before they can take effect.

CLINGING (*upādāna*)

Clinging (*upādāna*) to the notion of self arises when there is *tanhā*. Clinging or grasping is a habit driven, conditioned mental tendency that is latent in us but arouses, subsequent to *tanhā* and becomes strong, dependent on the degree of concupiscence or abomination of the object; i.e. if we cling to the attraction, presumably we feel happy. If we cling to an abominable object, we feel unhappy. Therefore, when *tanhā* arises, mind grasps the object. This means no acquisition can take place in the absence of grasping. As stated in *Sammaditti Sutta* (MN), there are four types of clinging, namely clinging to sensual pleasures, to views, to vows and rules, and to the self. However, the discussion on clinging to sensual desires and the self shall give adequate understanding of

the workings of the concept of clinging. Thus, the discussion in this chapter is limited to the clinging to sensual desires and to the notion of self.

Culasihanada Sutta (MN, XI) explains that clinging has a source, origin and a produce. All four kinds of clinging have *tanhā* as their source, *tanhā* as their origin; they are born and produced from *tanhā*. We obsessively cling to sensual desires. For example, it is normal that we seek sensual gratification (*kāma tanhā*). As soon as we satisfy one desire, the next one arises. Often, we cling to sensual gratification as the only means to find happiness. Epstein (1995) writes,

[T]he feeling that every need could be immediately satisfied, every sense pleasure immediately obtained, every un-pleasurable sensation immediately avoided is the foundation of narcissistic craving and the thirst for sense pleasure (p.60).

If unimpeded, *kāma tanhā* becomes an insatiable mental habit that we long for. It becomes a strong force. The degree of clinging depends on how forceful the under currents of *kāma tanhā* are. Some people sacrifice everything including their life to sensual satisfaction. For example, it is quite comparable to an individual who is addicted to drugs needing ever increasing dosage to achieve satisfaction while going through anguish. Epstein (1995) writes,

[T]he Buddhist view is not pleasure denying; it does not counsel rejection of pleasurable experience, but only of the attachment to them as sources of ultimate satisfaction (p.61).

Since this is an impersonal process and occurs when there is *tanhā*, inevitably, we get affected. Since it is also a natural mental tendency that arises, sustains for a period and passes away, it becomes an observable phenomenon. Thus, it can be said that through the practice of *vipassana bhāvana*, this mental tendency can

be observed objectively by becoming mindful. This mindfulness, keeps *tanhā* at bay without allowing it to dominate and cause life's discontentment.

NOTION OF SELF (*Atta & Anatta*)

The term, *self or ego* can be conceptualized at least in three distinctly different ways. Firstly, “ego or self” refers to the deep conviction that we exist as continuous, independent beings; a view that holds no ground in Buddhist thought. Secondly, “ego or self” refers to that separate, continuously existing part of ourselves that we believe makes us the same person today as we were yesterday, which the Buddhist thought considers a mistaken belief. Thirdly, essentially a Buddhist concept, “ego or self” refers to the collection of habitual patterns of recognizing, feeling, thinking and behaving that culminates in and continually reproduces conviction in the separate existence of subjects and objects. In this context, the “ego” is the process whereby experience comes to be interpreted dualistically, as arising from a self that is separate from the world (D. Vokey, personal communication, June 15, 2004). It is this third concept of “self” that will be examined in depth within the framework of this thesis.

We react strongly if we need to defend our image of our “self” i.e. the concept of “I” or “me” or “mine” because we identify with this concept of “I”, “me” or “mine” strongly. We see our self (mind and body) as a firm and solid entity and take refuge in it, despite the fact that the notion of self requires many conditions to evolve, as described earlier. If we observe this phenomenon objectively, our findings may not be far from the following explanation given in the *Vina Sutta* – (SN XXXV.205)

[S]uppose there were a king or king's minister who had never heard the sound of a lute before. He might hear the sound of a lute and say, 'What, my

good men, is that sound -- so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling?' They would say, 'That, sir, is called a lute, whose sound is so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling.' Then he would say, 'Go & fetch me that lute.' They would fetch the lute and say, 'Here, sir, is the lute whose sound is so delightful, so tantalizing, so intoxicating, so ravishing, so enthralling.' He would say, 'enough of your lute. Fetch me just the sound.' Then they would say, 'this lute, sir, is made of numerous components, a great many components. It's through the activity of numerous components that it sounds: that is, in dependence on the body, the skin, the neck, the frame, the strings, the bridge, and the appropriate human effort. Thus it is that this lute -- made of numerous components, a great many components -- sounds through the activity of numerous components.'

Then the king would split the lute into ten pieces, a hundred pieces. Having split the lute into ten pieces, a hundred pieces, he would shave it to splinters. Having shaved it to splinters, he would burn it in a fire. Having burned it in a fire, he would reduce it to ashes. Having reduced it to ashes, he would winnow it before a high wind or let it be washed away by a swift-flowing stream. He would then say, 'A sorry thing, this lute -- whatever a lute may be -- by which people have been so thoroughly tricked & deceived.'

In the same way, ...[if one investigates] feeling... perception... fabrications... consciousness, however far consciousness may go, any thoughts of 'me' or 'mine' or 'I am' do not occur to him.

According to the above *Sutta*, there is nothing substantial that we can call "self" or "I" or "mine". Yet, we feel something that constitutes the notion of self. This happens through the cognitive process (intentional part of the mind process) that can be distinguished into cognitive and affective processes commencing subsequent to arising of sensation. The cognitive process is just being aware of the world whereas the affective part beginning with the reaction of *tanhā*. *Tanhā* gives rise to clinging and we cling to the reaction whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. In other words, we become attached to the pleasant and averse the unpleasant. This means through clinging, we personalize relationships between the *self* and the *world*.

For example, a man sees a woman. A pleasant sensation occurs in the man. He falls in love with the woman (*tanhā*). He feels tensed. He is unable to

eat, sleep or even to focus on his daily work as he thinks about this woman. In a few days time he notices another man is talking to the woman. He feels jealous and miserable despite the fact that he has not even spoken to the woman he is attracted to. He already thinks that this woman is “mine” (*clinging*). He has acquired the woman mentally. He thinks: No one has the right to hold what is mine. He becomes defensive and jealously guards what is his. Jealousy is an ill will.

The moment we become attracted to something we cling to it and call it mine. We are not doing it, but it is happening to us. We identify with the object as “I”, “me” or “mine” in much the same way as we did personalize “I am hungry” in the example given earlier. It happens through emotional reactions. The object has become “mine” because of the emotion. This can be described as personalization of experience (Punnaji, 2001).

We cling to everything – to our traditions, opinions, rules and vows, thoughts, feelings, activities and also objects outside of our physical body that are pleasurable as well as disagreeable. We cling to the desirable and reject the undesirable, making the “I” or “me” quite an extensive ‘entity’. When the mind clings to an object or a view (physical or mental) we find a new identity of “I”, “me”, “mine” or “not me”. During the time of Sidhartha Gauthama, a householder by the name Citta, raised the question of - how does self-identity view come into being? Venerable Isidatta, answered it in the following manner,

... householder, [if one who is] not well-versed or disciplined in their *Dhamma* -- assumes form (the body) to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. He assumes feeling to be the self, or the self as possessing feeling, or feeling as in the self, or the self as in feeling. He assumes perception to be the self, or the self as possessing perception, or perception as in the self, or the self as in perception. He assumes (mental) fabrications to be the self, or the self as possessing

fabrications, or fabrications as in the self, or the self as in fabrications. He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identity view comes into being (*Isidatta Sutta, SN*).

When the arisen identity fades away into the body of the personality (*bhavānga citta*) adding layers to already confused identity, the new identity emerges similar to the new particles emerging to burn out in the flame, leaving the impression of a non-changing continuous entity. The self finds nothing secure to hold on to and uncertainty becomes the driving factor. It gives rise to mental chaos. This moment-to-moment change in identity that arises due to clinging (*upādāna*) makes us frustrated, as we have no control to stop change or to adhere only to pleasant experience. In this way we keep on extending “me” or “I” to many things inside and outside of our physical self while taking refuge in them for assumed security. The more we extend our “I” or “me” notion, the more prominent the “self” becomes and the more anguish and unsatisfactoriness, the “self” experiences.

BECOMING (*Bhava*)

As discovered by Gauthama the Buddha, when there is clinging there is *becoming*. Though the term *bhava* is translated as “*becoming*” by many commentators (Rhys Davids, 1923; Horner, 1954 and Thannisaro, 2001) others define it as “*being*” (Punnaji, 2002 and Ñanamoli, 1993a). Due to *tanhā* and clinging, we react and our reaction results in wholesome and unwholesome deeds mentally, verbally and physically in our daily experience. Since all our conscious actions and reactions, both physical and mental, are extensions of the antecedent mental aggregates of cognizing, recognizing and sensations, any reaction that results in the process becomes necessarily intentional. An

intentional activity means we create new *sankhāra*. Thus, numerous reactions that occur throughout a day in our lives give rise to numerous *sankhāra* whether our reactions are conscious or unconscious. This build up of *sankhāra* coats the old *sankhāra* pressing them into the depth of the mind (unconscious and memory). Thus, according to *Dhamma*, our unconscious (body of the personality) is full of past *sankhāra*. With present reactions and past *sankhāra*, the self is in a continuous becoming from moment-to-moment.

Sankhāra is a word that is difficult to translate. However, Horner translates the word “*sankhāra*” in the widest sense the “world of phenomena” as all things, which have been made up by pre-existing causes (*Pali Text Society, n.d.*). In other words all conditioned mind-body phenomena contribute to the build up of *sankhāra*. It includes all our actions and reactions whether good or bad, happy or unhappy and conscious or unconscious. In the *Lekha Sutta* (*AN, III.130*) *sankhāra* is said to be like 1) an inscription in water that immediately disappears and doesn't last long or 2) like an inscription in soil that is quickly effaced by wind or water and lasts only a short time or 3) like an inscription in stone that is not quickly effaced by wind or water and lasts a very long time. According to Punnaaji and Horner (Olds, 2003), it can be postulated that *sankhāra* is analogous to the mental constructs, habit-forming tendencies and identities that are created by our own actions and reactions through body, mind and speech. Then, it can be argued that the notion of self is a conditioned state of mind that is constantly evolving and becoming. A new self emerges as the preceding self fades away into the body of personality. Since this is also a conditioned phenomenon, we will be able to observe it objectively, if we become mindful. Through mindfulness, we will be able to expose our notion of self for its moment-to-moment evolution into a new existence and accept it the

way it is. Once we accept its reality of impermanence (*anicca*), we would not be seeking any refuge in a permanent secure self but rather allow it to unfold and take its natural course without resisting its change. When we become capable of observing attentively the arising of *tanhā* at the inception of sensation, we are able to arrest desire and aversion from developing into their extreme forms of obsessional desires and ill will. This is the crossroad where we become capable of making a choice whether to take the path of indulgence or to stay in the middle path without allowing our sense desires or ill will to overwhelm us. In the absence of extreme desires and when there is neither obsession nor ill will, the mental process reaches a state of balance leading to peacefulness in the mind.

CAUSALITY OF PERVASIVE UNSATISFACTORINESS

The three factors we discussed above constitute antecedent causes and effects of a cycle known as the Wheel of Life (*Paticca Samuppada*). The Wheel of Life or the Web of Life constitutes a causal formula in which each of the factors is conditioned as well as conditioning. They arise in a logical antecedence. Often, we are accustomed to assuming that life is a line stretching from a finite past to an infinite future. However, according to this formula of *dependent co-arising*, life is a circle and reflected as such, it is repetitive and in an endless continuum. As described in *Paticca Samuppada Sutta (SN)*, the causal formula in its most abstract form holds the following law of nature:

When this is, - that is; this arising - that arises; When this is not, - that is not; this ceasing, - that ceases (Rahula, 1959. p. 53).

Considered in modern logical terms it is explained as,

When A is present, B is present; with A arising, B arises; When A is not present, B is not present; With A ceasing, B ceases (Rahula, 1959, p.53).

According to *Suttas*, cause and effect can be separated by any length of time (Brahmavamso, 2002). Often commentators agree that there can be a substantial time interval between a cause and its effect. It could be moments, seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years until an effect comes to fruition. Narada (1987):

When there is misapprehension there arise reactions; When reactions arise there arise consciousness; When consciousness arises there arises mind-body; When mind-body arises, there arise sense faculties: visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, gustatory and mental; When sense faculties arise, there arises contact; When there is contact there arises sensation; When sensation arises there arises attraction, repulsion and indifference (*tanhā*); When *tanhā* arises there arises clinging; When clinging arises, there arises becoming/ being; When there is becoming/being there arises birth; When there is birth, there arise anxiety, lamentation, mental disharmony, tribulations, despair, aging, torment and death (p.178).

Since the Web of Life is a logical antecedence, it provides us also the way to eradicate its causes. According to the teaching, turning the wheel in the reverse order (*patiloma paticca samuppada* -) means the causes will be extinguished also in a logical antecedence (*Paticca Samuppada Sutta, Vibhanga Sutta (SN XII, I)*). This is the third noble truth known as *nirodha sacca* or the way to extinguish pervasive unsatisfactoriness. The reverse order of the wheel is as quoted by Narada (1987),

With cessation of misapprehension, (blind) reaction ceases; With cessation of reaction (blind) consciousness ceases; With cessation of consciousness, mind-body ceases; With cessation of mind-body, sense faculties ceases; With cessation of sense faculties, contact ceases; With cessation of contact, sensation ceases; With cessation of sensation, *tanhā* ceases; With cessation of *tanhā*, clinging ceases; With cessation of clinging, becoming/being ceases; With cessation of becoming/being, birth ceases; With cessation of birth, cease anxiety, lamentation, despair, mental disharmony, misery, tribulations, aging, torment and death (p.178).

Cessation in this context means: when A is not present, B is not present; with A ceasing, B ceases. This cessation is also a logical antecedence. Some believe that by severing the link between *vedanā* and *tanhā* the forward order of *dependent co-arising* can be brought to an end through the development of mindfulness on *vedanā* to prevent *tanhā* from arising (Goenka, 1991). When we become mindful of *vedanā*, we become vigilant of our old mental habits. At this stage with determination, one is able to divert mental energy to counter the obsessive tendencies and cultivate their antidote as described earlier. In this way, one cultivates new mental habits in place of the old and gradually the old mental tendencies of *tanhā* and *upādāna* (clinging) fade away.

According to the *Suttas*, it is explained that dependent co-arising involves three lives, namely past, present and future. They include factors co-arising and contributory to birth, post-natal and post-life realms. In terms of the past, birth can be seen in this life, not one's own but as a daily occurrence. Similarly, one may not be able to see one's own death, but we know death from seeing that it is happening to others. The twelve factors of *paticca samuppada* become visible in this life along with their causal relationships as and when they manifest themselves, irrespective of time.

The Buddhist approach to healing from within is grounded on the dynamics of body and mind (Nissanka, 20021) with a practice that empowers the individual to comprehend the intricate relationships and the dynamics in the Web of Life. Observing these intricate relationships such as sensation and its effects objectively may look as if it is a reductionist approach to resolve human malady. The discussion in this thesis has pointed out in many situations that the objective observation with caring detachment is not a reductionist but a

pragmatic approach that empowers the observer to observe subtle relationships among the mental concomitants noticing the impermanent nature of arising, sustaining and passing away of all phenomena including the notion of self. However, this is a method that has been practiced successfully in order to understand the human unsatisfactoriness through own direct experience. This practice brings more of the experiential knowledge rather than the intellectual aspect. If our objective is to alley misery, we need to make it insightfully visible in this life. This visibility makes us understand how our own body-mind dynamics trap us in the Web of Life.

THE PATH TO RECOVERY (*Dukkha Nirodha Gāmini*)

In order to achieve visibility, the mind needs to acquire objective observational skills. Through continuous practice to observe mind-body activities within the framework of ethical living and determination, the mind can be rehabilitated to become mindful and stay focused. When mindfulness and mental quietness returns to the mind with focus, according to *Pabbassara Sutta (AN)* the mind becomes luminous and reflective like a mirror.

“Mindfulness is mirror-thought. It reflects only what is presently happening and in exactly the way it is happening. There are no biases” (Gunaratana,1991a, p.2).

Then, the mind is able to cut through the veil of misapprehension and perceptual distortions created by conditioned mind body reactions. In this regard writes Epstein (1995), we believe in a,

[S]elf that is fiction, a mirage, a shadow, or a dream....In today's psychodynamic language we would call it fantasy...The essential task of [*bhāvana*] is to uncover the unconscious wishful conception of self, the fundamental craving and to expose them as fantasy , thereby dispelling [misapprehension] and revealing the imagined nature of self (p.88).

In order to achieve the level of exposure required to uncover the imaginary nature of self, *vipassana bhāvana* offers a profoundly effective technique. This technique can be taught as either an individual or a group practice. It consists of a generally accepted universal code of ethical living (*sīla*), development of mindfulness and concentration (*samādhi*), and achieving experiential knowledge through direct experience (*pañña*) by objective observation. The serious practice of ethical living (*sīla*), mindfulness and concentration (*samādhi*) and experiential knowledge (*pañña*) have been shown to bring healing to those who are suffering from sickness and pain in both mind and body. *Girimananda Sutta (AN)* provides evidence to this effect. There was once a recluse by the name of Girimananda who had fallen severely ill. He had been given instructions to contemplate aspects related to mind and body while in his sick bed. The object of *bhāvanā* assigned to him had given him the opportunity to comprehend clearly about the conditioned nature of his body and mind. By following instructions mindfully and ardently, Girimananda was able to extinguish five obscurants (*nivāraṇa*) that interfere with self and find peace. According to the *Sutta*, through continued practice, Girimananda became healthy. These obscurants will be discussed briefly in the next chapter. There are many more documented stories from ancient India, that provide convincing evidence to the fact that *bhāvanā* has been helpful in healing obsessions, paranoia and psychosis (Narada, 1987). Thus, it can be stated that this practice, if followed ardently and persistently has the possibility to help not only individuals who seek spiritual life but also those who have mental afflictions and personality disorders.

CHAPTER FOUR

Magga sacca & Bhavana – The Path & The Practice

FINDING RELIEF BY UNCOVERING THE SELF

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I have argued that human unsatisfactoriness is a condition that arises through habituated conditioned reactions to conjured impersonal phenomena, the inability to observe the conditioned nature of mind and body, and the mental undercurrents that impact our actions and reactions. I have pointed out that the relief from this predicament is possible only when we develop the mental skills to observe and understand them experientially for what they are. In order to gain this kind of experiential understanding, western therapies have developed and employed many treatment methods, particularly in psychoanalysis and psychodynamics. Though these therapies have envisioned an introspective approach to expose the nature of self, they have been far from achieving it according to Epstein (1995). He writes,

[P]sychotherapy has had trouble providing a satisfactory answer for the problem of self (p. 152). Positioning our need for a solid self squarely in the centre of human suffering, Buddhism promises a kind of relief that is beyond the reach of the psychotherapeutic method, brought about through techniques of self-examination and mental training unknown to the West. (p. 45).

Whether conscious or unconscious the phenomenon of self and its associations within the mind-body framework are conditioned states that are hardly observable in the absence of strict mental discipline. However, if we

develop mental discipline with the skill of attentive detached observation and concentration, all phenomena that originate in the mind become observable (Batchelor, 1997).

To facilitate such levels of observation, our mind has to be trained to reach and sustain a high degree of mental clarity similar to a pond of clear water that enables us to see its depth. Usually our unskilful mind is compared to a pond of murky water with a high level of mental turbidity. Therefore, therapy should be focused to develop observational skills that allow us to watch the mind content and function with clarity. In this regards, Macdonald (1996) suggests that the observational skill be a “combination of detachment, wide attentional focus, keen interest, alertness and the ability to detect fast-changing subtlety” (p.3). The suggested practice in this thesis is a less directed type of mind observation compared to what has been practiced by introspectionists around the turn-of-the-century. This type of observation is not focused on one specific object, but without expectation, simply waiting to see what happens next. In the process the observer observes what arises and related causal patterns thereof. Macdonald (1996) asserts further that this combination of attitudes and skills can be developed through practice. With practice, the ability develops to see what is happening in the mind with relative clarity and precision.

The Buddhist practice of *vipassana bhāvana* offers precisely what Macdonald (1996) has suggested as a mind observing technique. In this technique we develop attentional steadiness by spending time to watch the sensations arising through breathing. Breathing is a natural impersonal process that occurs without being stained by impure mental tendencies of greed, ill will and delusion. Once we have developed the skill to observe breath sensations

mindfully, we are encouraged to widen the focus of attention to the rest of the body and mind to include all sensations, thoughts, emotions, and finally whatever happens in the mind (Ariyadhamma, 1994).

If our goal is to resolve human anguish with a view to understand the self by enabling the mind to watch its own mind process and its undercurrents through the disciplined path of mental culture, one needs to be determined and ready to make a serious effort toward achieving progress. This is a long-term process. Then, such a practice becomes a way of life that enables an individual to develop mental calmness and the ability to focus and gain clarity on mental phenomena through direct experience. With this in mind, I would argue in this chapter that this kind of mental culture could be achieved through the practice of ethical living, developing mindfulness and concentration, and gaining experiential knowledge by way of direct sensory experience that sharpens our mind to cut through the veil of misapprehension and understand mind-body dynamics for what they are.

ETHICAL LIVING – (*Sila*)

According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, nature gives us only our faculties and it is not nature that makes us good or bad but our values, beliefs and actions (Thirakoul, 2000 ; Burnyeat, 1980). I, too, subscribe to this view. What it means is that we make our own rules, values, beliefs and actions that define what is good and bad or right and wrong in a social and an ethical context. We manage our actions and interpretations within these definitions. This is the foundation for our moral, ethical and social behaviours that often limit our understanding of the psychology of the vicissitudes of life explained in this thesis. We are, however, reluctant to challenge these traditional definitions

partly due to our ambiguity and partly due to socio- economic and cultural pressures. Yet, it is through these narrow views and sectarian frameworks that we attempt to find solutions to a universal problem requiring knowledge and practice far beyond sectarian boundaries.

The goal of ethics is to become a person who does good things freely from the ground of a well-tempered character, supported by a mature, resolute, and reasonable knowledge of what one is doing. “The path of Buddhism does not dissolve character [disposition or the features that distinguishes one person]. It awakens and illuminates moral character and establishes a "noble" selfhood in the wide, deep, expressive freedom of creative forms of life and its perfections” (Whitehill, 1994, p. 5).

Buddhist cultivation of ethics tends to encompass not only the formation of good intentions in the heart and mind but also practices that include physical postures and breath-speech techniques. The centre of Buddhist tradition affirms that ethical practice through ethical determinations (*paramitā*) must be conjoined with *bhāvana* and transformative practices to be ultimately effective for us and for others (Whitehill, 1994). The virtuous practices that characterize a good person were often defined as at least the six *paramitās* of generosity or gift-giving (*dāna*), morality or the five precepts (*sīla*), patience and forgiveness (*khānti*), courage and vigour (*virya*), concentration (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*pañña*). While espousing the general tenets and principles of universal ethics, Buddhist ethics tends, in practice, to define and effectuate *paramitā*-cultivation at the mind-and-heart level.

Ethical living is part of the “Noble Eightfold Path”. Ethics is a mode of mind and volition (*cetanā*) manifested in speech and bodily action. It is the

foundation of the whole Buddhist practice, and therewith the first of the three kinds of training (*sikkhā*) that form the 3-fold division of the 8-fold path (*maggā*), namely ethical living (*sīla*), mindfulness and tranquility (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*pañña*). These ethics are not grounded on the notion of obedience, but on that of harmony. In fact the commentaries explain the word *sīla* (ethics) by another word, *samādhāna*, meaning “harmony” or “coordination” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1984).

In Buddhist ethics, there are a few dispositions that are universally accepted irrespective of the differences in sectarian doctrines. They guide us to wholesome activities in terms of mental and physical harmony. These ethics (*sīla*) are based on such irrefutable moral and ethical values that are amenable and admissible universally (Barua, 2003).

The first of the universally accepted moral and ethical code is to abstain from actions that are harmful to self and others. The second is the abstinence from taking that, which is not given. Abstaining from speech that is untruthful, backbiting and slanderous, harsh, carries malice, detrimental idle gossip and meaningless babble is the third. The fourth is the abstinence from sexual misconduct and the fifth is the abstinence from intoxicants. Activities that are contrary to these dispositions are unwholesome involvements that constitute a breach in the expected ethics leading to strengthening bondage and delusion (Thurman, 1976). In other words breaching the above five precepts consciously or unconsciously shrink the potential for mental serenity through increased anxiety and worry. Thus, in order to achieve mental calmness, ethics play a vital role.

Observation of the above stated five precepts forms the very minimal ethical base that is required not only to embark on the Eightfold Noble Path to purify the mind of defilements - greed, ill will and delusion, but also they enhance wholesome social behaviour. Moreover, the ethics, if practiced sincerely, ground us in the noble path preventing the reinforcement of the very mental habits that we want to unlearn; to crave the pleasant, reject the unpleasant and to react blindly. Without a strong base of ethics, the practice of *bhāvana* would become ineffective similar to an attempt to see sunshine through a sky full of thick clouds.

The observation of five precepts is closely linked to the rest of the factors in the “Eightfold Noble Path” and contributory to the way of life required to heal the self from its predicament. In this context, Buddhist ethics lead the way to strengthen the foundation of *bhāvana* through harmonious speech (*Sammā Vācā*), harmonious action (*Sammā Kammantha*) and harmonious livelihood (*Sammā Ajiva*) (Punnaji, 2001). Harmonious speech is

[F]ourfold, i.e., abstaining from: lying, slandering, harsh speech and frivolous talk. When one comes face to face with the situation to commit one of the above four false speeches, and one abstains from saying it, then one acquires harmonious speech at the instant of abstinences (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1984, p 46 - 47).

Harmonious speech is directly linked to harmonious action. Though we are unmindful of it, thoughts are translated into speech and speech into action. Generally, we are not very mindful of our unwholesome thoughts or how they lead to unwholesome speech and unwholesome actions (Rahula, 1959). It is a logical antecedence that takes its natural course if allowed unimpeded. Due to our un-mindfulness of these innate reactions we get engaged in unwholesome activities. Harmonious action involves avoiding killing, stealing and unlawful

sexual misconduct. By maintaining these ethics, our livelihood too becomes harmonious. Harmonious livelihood in the Buddhist context means living a noble life or engaging in occupations that fall within the framework of the earlier described five precepts forming the moral and ethical base for the practice of *bhāvana*.

Living an ethical life based on the factors described above means, we essentially abstain from harming ourselves. Moreover, by avoiding harmful actions toward others, our minds remain relatively free of anxiety and aversion. A mind that is less anxious and less worried has less greed, less aversion and can think harmoniously. Such a mind is emotionally calm. Only a calm mind has the ability and agility to observe and distinguish subtle sensations that arise in the process of natural uncontrolled breath and make a harmonious effort (*Sammā vāyama*) toward the development of mindfulness. In order to achieve progress on *vipassana bhāvana*, our mind should be given this opportunity to develop its observation skills in an environment that is free from greed, aversion and delusion. Ethical living leads to all these qualities required as prerequisites for *bhāvana*, whether *samatha* or *vipassana*. *Samatha bhāvana* will be explained in the next segment. Without ethical living the foundation to develop mindfulness and concentration in mind become weak. Therefore, an ethical way of life becomes an essential requirement to gain insight into our objective reality (Punnaji, 2001).

MINDFULNESS (*Sati*)

Once we have established the ethical foundation, mind becomes relatively settled and less agitated. It should be noted that mere physical restraint from unwholesome activities does not give desired results unless the

mind is prevented from getting entangled in unwholesome mental habits as discussed earlier. When unwholesome mental habits are consciously impeded, our physical and mental behaviour become ethical. An individual with good ethical behaviour is in a commanding position to develop mindfulness and concentration. Amarasiri (1995) states that mindfulness facilitates the achievement of both serenity and insight. It leads to either deep concentration or wisdom depending on the mode, which is applied.

Generally, people do not live in the present moment or in their present actions. In this regard writes Rahula (1959),

[T]hey live either in the past or in the future. Though they seem to be doing something now, here they live somewhere else in their thoughts, in their imaginary problems and worries, usually in the memories of the past or in desires and speculations about the future. Therefore, they do not live in, nor do they enjoy, what they do at the moment with the work at hand, and naturally they cannot give themselves fully to what they appear to be doing (p. 71).

The development of mindfulness can be achieved through observing the breath. The *bhāvana* to achieve mindfulness in this way is known as *sati bhāvana*. Developing mindfulness on breathing is not a physical breathing exercise but it is a mental exercise to observe as and when it occurs without controlling it.

Becoming mindful is the art of becoming deeply aware of the present moment.

Mindfulness means fully experiencing what happens in the here and now.

Rahula (1959) writes,

“[B]eing mindful does not mean that we should be thinking and be conscious ‘I am doing this or I am doing that’. The moment we think ‘I am’, we become self-conscious and then we do not live in the action, but we live in the idea” (p 72).

Being mindful is the art of being aware in our mind of what happens in and around us at this very moment. The key is not so much what we focus on but

how we do it. What is more important is the quality of the awareness we bring to each moment. In this process we become a silent witness, accepting and maintaining equanimity. It, however, does not imply resignation to abuse or injustice. It teaches acknowledgment of the moment-to-moment reality and prepares those who use the technique to respond to that reality without reacting impulsively and emotionally. When mindfulness is developed, it helps us to keep the mind less agitated or from becoming restless. It is a more calm, clear, and non-reactive state of mind. Though pre-existing concepts of guilt, anger, doubts, and uncertainties surface in our moment-to-moment reality, a mindful mind is better able to observe them instead of reacting. In this way mind becomes tranquil.

Once we have developed the habit of staying mindful of breathing, we become able to focus on different sensations that arise when incoming or outgoing air touches the inside walls of the nostrils. These subtle vibrations arising from the contact between nasal walls and air particles become recognizable. Once the skill to observe natural breathing is developed, breathing becomes even subtler. At this level of mindfulness, one is able to observe sensations that arise in the body of personality (unconscious) as described earlier (*anusāya*). This is possible only at the progressive states of mindfulness.

Through *bhāvana*, we will also be able to understand what disturbs the peacefulness of the mind. Punnañi (2001) states that there are five hindrances that interfere with mind to disturb calmness. They are carnal desires (*kāmacchanda*), aversion (*vyāpāda*), lethargy and drowsiness (*thina middha*), anxiety and worry (*uddhacca kukkucca*) and vacillation (*vicikicchā*). These forces or tendencies take effect with every mental reaction unless we learn to observe

them mindfully with equanimity. At one time or another when we would experience these obscurants (*nivāraṇa*) in different manifestations in our practice of *bhāvana*, we must take notice of them mentally and observe them rather than reacting. If we react, they get entangled in our mind. But if we observe them in a non-reactive manner, they will take their natural course of arising, sustaining and passing away. In this way we make our mind clear of these defilements.

Maintaining a steady posture without tension in the body is also an important aspect of developing mindfulness, concentration and wisdom through *bhāvana*. The relaxed stable posture enables one to stay longer in the mode of *bhāvana*. If we are able to stay non-reactive both mentally and physically, we can make the above stated obscurants the object of our *bhāvana*. By doing so, we will be able to observe how tendencies of mental defilements arise and manifest, sustained and get fully blown into greed, ill will and delusions and fade away upon emergence of the next tendency implicated by sensations. Gunaratana (1991) and Amarasiri, (1995) state that the confident mindful practitioner becomes capable of overcoming arisen unwholesome thoughts, preventing unwholesome thoughts from arising, sustaining arisen wholesome thoughts and developing un-arisen wholesome thoughts.

CONCENTRATION (*Samādhi*)

The suggested practice of objective observation is focused on the development of insight, i.e. *vipassana bhāvana*. Some of the *Pali* terms used in this thesis need to be clarified with respect to their application. Gunaratana (1991) writes that the word *jhāna* in Buddhist *bhāvana* is closely linked to the word, *samādhi* that generally renders the meaning ‘concentration’. He and other

commentators (*Visuddhi Magga- XIV, Section III*) explain further that the word *samādhi* is derived from the prefixed verbal root *sam-a-dha*, meaning to collect or to bring together, thus suggesting *samādhi* is the concentration or integration of the mind achieved through centring of consciousness and placing consciousness-concomitants evenly and rightly on a single object. So *samādhi* should be understood as the state in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly on a single object un-distracted and un-scattered. The concentration so developed is four fold, namely, concentration that leads to a pleasant abiding in the here and now; leads to the attainment of knowledge and vision; leads to mindfulness and alertness, and leads to the ending of the effluents. Effluents here means the stream that flows from the five aggregates of clinging consciousness (*viññāna*), perception (*sañña*), sensation (*vedanā*) and volitional activities (*saṅkhāra*) (*Samādhi Sutta, AN*). When the mind is undisturbed and remains un-scattered, it is a fully focused mind at absolute peace (*citta ekaggata*). It is a state in which mind has come to a complete stillness without any thoughts or thinking. At this state, the mind is awake and without drowsiness or lethargy. All noises in the mind have become quiet. The focus remains on an object without labelling.

According to Gunaratana (1988) '*samatha*' can be translated as 'concentration' or 'tranquility'. The word *samādhi* is almost interchangeable with the word *samatha*, or serenity, though the latter comes from a different root, *sam*, which means, "to be calm". It is a state in which the mind is brought to rest, focused only on one item and not allowed to wander. When this is done, a deep calm pervades body and mind, a state of tranquility, which must be understood through experience. The same author further states that most systems of meditation emphasize *samatha* component. The meditator focuses

his mind upon some items, such as a prayer, a certain type of box, a chant, a candle flame, a religious image or whatever, and excludes all other thoughts and perceptions from his consciousness. The result is a state of rapture, which lasts until the meditator ends the session of sitting. It is beautiful, delightful meaningful and alluring, but only temporary. It is not focused to gain insight.

In other words *samādhi* is the maintenance of focus on an object that is free from attachment, ill will and illusion (*Samādhi Sutta – SN*). Breathing is a phenomenon that does not lead to attachment, aversion or illusion. It just occurs in the present moment. For the mind, the natural breathing is thus the most appropriate object to establish unattached mindfulness free of aversion and illusion. With increasing mindfulness and focus, the mind begins to feel relaxed, content and energized (U Ba Khin, 1961). When a person develops *samādhi*, the mind reaches a level of stillness that no other therapy can help achieve. Therefore, this technique of developing *samādhi* has the potential as a therapeutic technique to help those who have mental afflictions whether they are mood, thought or personality related if they have the ability to remain mentally stable for a reasonable period of time. Vigne (1997) writes “concentration of the mind is a basis for beginners and patients as well. It gives some knowledge and capacity to master the mind, even if it does not solve every problem” (p.7). With concentration, tranquility develops gradually and progressively through practice. A quiet mind achieved through *bhāvana* would enable the person not only to experience a significant level of relaxation but also an accompanying healing of mind and body.

On the other hand, with gradually increasing *samādhi*, the mind reaching tranquility, it can become a tool to observe phenomena that make up our

apparent reality as they occur. As Goenka (1993) explains, *samādhi* works best at the conscious level of the mind. Using this technique, for example, we can divert attention effectively to deal with greed and aversion at the surface level. It is a form of suppression that can be brought back to observation under favourable mental conditions. It does not eliminate the conditions lying in the depth of our minds where they remain latent and manifest when opportunity arises (*Pahana Sutta*, SN). As long as conditioning occurs in the depth of the mind, the dormant unwholesome tendencies (*anusāya kilesa*) of greed, ill will and delusion about the moment-to-moment reality seem to continue (*Datthabba Sutta* - SN). When one attains the state of harmonious mental repose (*Sammā samādhi*) (Punnaji, 2001), it is an indication that one has made real progress toward gaining insight. The removal of the earlier discussed unwholesome undercurrents at the depth of the mind requires a technique that has the capability to penetrate those depths in order to arrest the conditions and conditioning at their origin. In the Buddhist tradition this method is known as developing *pañña* or training of wisdom.

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE THROUGH VIPASSANA (*Pañña*)

In the *Vijja-Bhagiya Sutta* (AN IV. 30), it is explained that tranquillity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassana*) are two qualities that have a share in clear knowing.

When tranquillity is developed, the mind is developed. A developed mind in this way abandons passion. When insight is developed, discernment is developed. When discernment is developed, misapprehension is abandoned. Defiled by passion, the mind is not released. Defiled by ignorance, discernment does not develop. Thus, from the fading of passion is there awareness-release. From the fading of ignorance is there discernment-release (*AN. IV. 30*).

Once the mind has achieved a high level of *samādhi*, the mind becomes tranquil. It is ready to undertake *vipassana*, a practice to develop insight and a technique that leads to the purification of mind by eradicating mental defilements.

Vipassana can be translated as insight, a clear awareness of exactly what is happening as it happens (Gunaratana, 1991). In other words, *vipassana* means, “seeing or observing of one’s own reality. Here, one develops experiential knowledge through one’s own experience of reality as it happens from moment-to-moment. It is this direct experience that transforms the old mental habits, changing the very nature of one’s behaviour.

Just like the dairy farmer who knows all about milk but, having never tasted it, would not know its taste, the intellectual understanding of phenomena involved in human unsatisfactoriness alone does not help one to gain the freedom from greed, aversion and delusion. The insight about these undercurrents can be gained through direct experience according to *Satipattana Sutta (SN)*.

When aversion and craving are appeased and restlessness and worries are calmed down by mindfulness on breathing, such a mind is calm at the conscious level. Such a mind is *vipassana* ready. Without this readiness, it would be impossible to see how we set the Wheel of Life in motion. In brief *vipassana bhāvana* enables us to observe and experience the Wheel of Life (*paticca samuppāda*). It is a journey into the depths of the mind that begins at the surface of our physical body.

Vipassana begins with systematic attentive observation of bodily sensations as and when they occur while attempting to stay mindful and

focused. It may be asked, if we want to examine the mind, why do we observe sensations? According to *Satipattana Sutta (MN)* sensations (*vedana*) are a direct experience within the framework of our body and mind, and thus it lies within the realm of mundane observations. It is sensations that make us be aware of the world. Moreover, sensations are part and parcel of the mind process, which is a logical antecedence, and as such are intricately and immediately connected to the conscious and unconscious dynamics. As described in chapter three, sensations are the cross roads where mind and body come together (Zukav, 1979 and Goenka, 2004). Thus, it can be said that if we observe physical or mental sensations, we are realistically and practically observing the mind.

When the mind is sharp and alert, we move attention systematically throughout the body from top to bottom observing sensations. No particular sensation is paid attention to or searched for. It is just an observation of whatever vibrations arise at the moment, without reacting to them in any way. This is to observe, for example, itchiness as itchiness without analysis or taking ownership; cold as cold, pain as pain and so on (*Datthabba Sutta – SN*). The effort is to observe sensations objectively for what they are. We should not look for conditions. The focus lies in the present. Initially we experience sensations only in some parts of the body. Moreover, they are very much limited to gross sensations such as pain, itchiness, numbness, pinching, hot or cold among others. We may experience some blind spots. This does not mean that those spots do not produce sensations but rather that our mind is not adequately sharp to recognize such subtlety.

When we experience, for example, pain due to sitting posture, we objectively observe pain as pain at the moment. We may be able to recognize

for example, heaviness, denseness, solidity, hotness, pressure, and burning among other sensations. We observe all of them for what they are and move on to the adjacent body part. We do not judge this experience for its intensity or location or level of discomfort or reasons. Simply we observe it as an impersonal phenomenon that occurs interdependently. Through this observation, we will be able to recognize how these concomitants arise, sustain for a moment and pass away at the emergence of another sensation.

Sensations are experienced as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral (*Gelañña Sutta, SN*). Neutral sensations do not remain neutral for long as they are impacted and transformed into either pleasant or unpleasant sensations. Each sensation is an indication of change that takes place within the body and mind that are made up of particles (*kalapas*) (Karunadasa, 1989). These particles arise instantly and pass away soon after they arise in a continuum of reconfiguration. Then, the physical sensations are also ephemeral in nature, similar to their mental counterparts that, after serving, their function pass away to give rise to another successive aggregate. Moreover, these changes in wavelets (*kalapas*) are also impacted by environmental stimuli (external wavelets). As change occurs, sensations arise to pass away in a momentary succession like winds blowing across the skies from every direction (*Akāsa Sutta – SN*). When there are sensations, then there are feelings. When sensations cease, feelings cease.

Through the practice of *vipassana bhāvana*, most importantly, we begin to realize the intensity of sensations that we experience from moment to moment. It is a continuous process without an end. Sensation means that something is changing somewhere in our body and mind. Sensation is only the indicator of change. Endless sensations are an indication of an endless change. This rapid

process of change impacts our mental process and the way we react both physically and mentally. Our body and mind are in a continuous flux. Therefore, change is the reality of mind and body. This direct experiential understanding empowers us to gain insight into impermanence (*anicca*) of what we believe as permanent body (*Anicca Sutta, SN*). With this experiential knowledge, one becomes able to observe oneself freed from all *tanhā*, ill will and delusion. A person who has gained the knowledge of impermanence, *dukkha* and selflessness of mind-body phenomena through direct experience, will not suffer by accepting the change.

A focused sharp mind is able to penetrate the depths of our own mind-body framework and experience rapidly changing interdependent phenomena that produce the illusory notion of “I”, “me” or “mine”; our apparent reality (*Anicca Sutta – SN*). Through the practice of *bhāvana*, we come to the realization that every particle of the body and mind are transient, and as a result there remains nothing other than a single moment of experience in the present. Then, we also come to the realization that these constantly changing impersonal phenomena are beyond the scope of our control (Thannisaro, 2001). With this experience, we begin to recognize that the identity as “I” or “me” is only an illusion that is conditioned and exists within the sphere of six senses (*Anatta Lakkhana Sutta, SN*). When Citta the householder asked Venerable Isidatta, “how does self-identity view not coming into being?”, - Venerable Isidatta answered him based on the experiential knowledge of the transient, selfless self

... householder, [if one who] is well-versed and disciplined in their dhamma -
- does not assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form. He does not assume feeling to be the self... He does not assume perception to be the self... He does not assume

fabrications to be the self... He does not assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identity view does not come into being (*Isidatta Sutta, SN*).

Both historical and present experience indicate that only the experiential knowledge empowers us to shatter the veil of misapprehension allowing us to experience and understand the nature of our egolessness (*anatta*). This level of understanding of phenomena enables the observer to experience how form, perception, sensation and own mental fabrications make one believe in the conditioned illusion of “I” or “me” as described in the *Isidatta Sutta, (SN)*. This is the key to relief from all pervasive unsatisfactoriness.

The practice of *vipassana bhāvana* can be supported by six *paramitās* namely: generosity (*dāna*), ethical living (*sila*), forgiveness (*khānti*), courage and determination (*virya*), concentration (*dhyāna*) and experiential wisdom (*pañña*) that I presented earlier to be practiced, if we are serious about resolving the unsatisfactoriness in life. The determination of *dāna* develops into the quality of letting-go that is a skill vital to eradicate the undercurrent of *tanhā*. The ethics implicates our way of life transforming it into one of peace and harmony. Ethical way of living paves the way to develop a high degree of patience in us and we become forgiving to others (*khānti*). All these qualities contribute to the courage and vigour (*virya*) to achieve *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is the stage that enables the development of penetrative knowledge. It is a direct experience gained through renewed ability to observe the mental faculties that are associated with the notion of “self” or “I” or “me” equanimously. While maintaining concentration, we reach mental serenity and suppleness to observe the mind process. By being detached mindfully and with suppleness to observe, we

become alerted to recognize fast-changing subtlety of our body mind dynamics. Now, the observer has become the observed.

This understanding makes us aware of the way in which we imprison our “self” in the continuum of the Web of Life. Therefore, it can be said that by choosing to live an ethical life, by learning the skills to be mindful of our moment-to-moment reality and achieving a higher level of concentration and peacefulness of the mind, we gain the insight into the impermanent, ego-less nature of our existence. The recognition and being mindful about the self, for its conditioned nature, does not become a terrifying uncertainty or an unpleasant experience to the observer any longer. For such an individual, with equanimity and the strength of *paramitās*, there will be no surprises when facing vicissitudes in life. In this way, we help our “self” and this is convalescence from within. A person who recovers from within through *vipassana* is a transformed personality.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROLEGOMENON TO CLINICAL APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

I have discussed and argued the way we conceptualize self and how it leads to the human malady. I also have discussed that by developing our latent skill of objective observation through the continued practice of *bhāvana*, one is able to develop a peaceful mind unaffected by the vicissitudes of life; a healthy mental state. Learning about the 'self in a flux' does not mean that we have to shed the notion of self or dissolve it totally. This exploration of self is not about finding proof as to whether the self exists or not, rather, this knowledge is important to acknowledge the change that the self goes through and be aware of it. Once we are aware of its changing nature we will not get caught up in an identity crisis, tension or be surprised by the change. We can be prepared to recognize the inevitable change. In this way, we become less reactive to change. In the absence of reactions, change takes its natural course. As an observer, we remain least affected. This is the understanding we need to resolve pervasive unsatisfactoriness or mental afflictions. And through *bhāvana*, we have a method to work toward the goal of gaining this experiential understanding. This understanding facilitates transformation of personality. The method of *bhāvana* does not require the participant to have a higher level of education as a prerequisite. One needs functional mental and physical faculties, a strong determination and the ability to maintain the basis of ethical living. By

considering the discussion that I have facilitated up to this point, I am of the opinion that *bhāvana* can be reasonably adapted as a self-help tool or a therapy, which could be used to assist personality disordered and mentally afflicted individuals to enhance their status of mental well being and behavioral change. Therefore, in this final chapter, I would like to explore and discuss the therapeutic effects of *bhāvana* with a view to help the personality disordered and the mentally afflicted to improve their mental status and behavior.

In chapter one, I discussed the fact that entities that appear as different are not necessarily very different. The distinction between these forms or appearances that we call “different” is made in our own minds as our perceptions distort our observations. In subsequent chapters I addressed the problem of misapprehension, various manifestations of pervasive unsatisfactoriness, the Eastern and Western perspective on those, therapeutic approaches to relieve this universal human existential unsatisfactoriness, conditioned nature of misery and how we get trapped in the Web of Life along the continuum of discontentment.

As discussed earlier from a Buddhist perspective, human anguish is considered a problem that is closely linked to the way one perceives and deals with the notion of self and its implications in setting the Wheel of Life in motion (Narada, 1991, Epstein, 1995). The practice of *vipassana* allows one not only to observe one’s “self” very closely in terms of how one’s self evolves from moment-to-moment but also how one’s urges and impulses make one react blindly leading to more problems than answers in life situations. Through *bhāvana*, one gains insight into this futile attempt and how it leads to anguish. It is through this direct experience one realizes that if one observes change

without reacting, one remains unaffected by it. This understanding that is gained through one's own direct experience paves the way for one's transformation.

Using the experience of *vipassana bhāvana* of incarcerated individuals in US jails, I wish to illustrate that this therapy of *bhāvana* should not be underestimated in its potential to help individuals with personality disordered and mentally afflicted (Engardio, 2000 & 2001; Meijer, 1999; Karuna Films, 1994). However, *bhāvana* is not a substitute for any psychiatric therapy based on pharmacology. Rather, it is a way of life that an individual must practice with all seriousness and determination in order to allow the self to focus attentively on own mind and body and to experience mental serenity and relief accompanied by transformation of behaviour. Thus, this technique can be considered as an adjunctive therapy similar to psychotherapy.

In order to find relief from human malady, one embarks on the path of *bhāvana* as discussed in this thesis. In this introspective journey, one requires a raft to cross the ocean of misery. In Buddhist literature *dhamma* or the natural law is equated to a raft that can be used to cross the ocean of misery and reach the shores of lasting peace. If we need to cross a river or an ocean, we do not need to own the raft but if a raft is available we may borrow it. In a similar manner, individuals across all cultures can also borrow the Buddhist *dhamma* through the practice of *bhāvana* to reach a level of healing characterized by less anxiety and peacefulness in life. Though *bhāvana* is a complex technique used for cultivating the mind, a technique that can be correctly learned only through practice, I have attempted throughout the thesis, to present this practice in a simplified manner.

For incarcerated individuals, today's jails and prisons do not have a conducive environment for rehabilitation. Many inmates say that they come out "better criminals" than they went in, that they learn the tricks of the trade from other prisoners (Nolo – Law for All, 2004). This appears to be the general trend in prisons. According to Schwartz (2001),

[T]he prison system has become a revolving door for drug offenders. Upon serving their sentence, they are released back into the same environment from which they came, without any skills or education to change their situation. Often the knowledge they have gained in prison is better ways to commit more crimes (p.1).

For a similar reason the technique of *vipassana bhāvana* was applied in a maximum-security correctional facility in Thiar, India in 1975 as an attempt to help rehabilitate its inmates who were notoriously known for antisocial behaviour, drug abuse and criminality including murder (Karuna Films, 1994). In North American and European prisons, the inmate populations are comprised of significant numbers of personality-disordered individuals, inmates with criminal behaviours and of those who are suffering from co-morbid mental disorders. Co-morbidity is a condition in which a patient is diagnosed with more than one mental affliction either with personality disorder or with other mental affliction. In one survey of randomly selected sample (one in six prisons) in England and Wales showed that the prevalence of personality disorders was 78% for male remand, 64% for male sentenced and 50% for the female prisoners (Singleton et. al. 1998). Due to the success of the Indian experiment on *vipassana bhāvana* to rehabilitate inmates with personality disorders, addictions, and similar problems, England, New Zealand, Taiwan, Thailand and United States (US) have also implemented the

therapy of *bhāvana* to rehabilitate inmates in some of their prisons (VMC, 2003). In the US, *vipassana bhāvana* has so far been implemented in North Rehabilitation Facility in Seattle, (WA), San Francisco Jail and W. E. Donaldson Correctional (Maximum Security) Facility in Bessemer, Alabama with appreciable results (VMC, 2003; Engardio, 2001; Meijer, 1999). Since the US Jail experiment on *vipassana* said to have helped personality disordered individuals with problems of drug abuse and with co-morbid mental disorders transform themselves, I intend to illustrate the US experience with a view to a possible application of this technique in a psychiatric hospital or in a community setting.

VIPASSANA IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

Practicing *Vipassana* in prison environments has become not only successful but also popular among inmates in San Francisco Jail (Engardio, 2000 & 2001). The administrator at the North Rehabilitation Facility of the King County Jail in Seattle, Lucia Meijer (1999), writes that as of January 1999, fifty inmates had completed four ten-day vipassana courses at the King County Jail, in Seattle. In order to gain maximum benefits from this therapy, inmates had to adopt a way of life based on ethical living; the jail administration and the system had also to support and facilitate participating inmates to adhere to this kind of ethical living. They had to accommodate a facilitative security protocol to make it happen. According to Meijer (1999), a major issue after the cost and security considerations has been the credibility of the practice. For her, there are six persuasive factors to introduce this course at the jail. In her view, it is a discipline and not an escape (characterized as “mental detox”), an ethical

practice (simple and integrated moral code of conduct), pragmatic (focuses on direct cause and effect), the course that can be taught in ten days (suitable in a place with high turnover), is free of charge (taught free of charge and minimal cost relative to benefits), and has immediate benefits/ tangible results (short term- easy management of inmates) (p. 13).

The courses were conducted in groups of 5 - 20 inmates and the groups were isolated from the general inmate population for the duration of the course. During the course, the inmates shared small rooms or dorms with other inmate participants. The courses were taught by experienced *vipassana* teachers and assisted by experienced mature students. The teachers and their assistants stayed with students during the course. According to Engardio (2000), the inmates participated with great enthusiasm with very few dropouts. After a 10-day course in San Bruno's Medium Security County Jail No. 7, an inmate (named JC) awaiting trial on domestic violence and harassment charges stated,

[I]t was by far the hardest 10 days of my life. All these thoughts flooded my mind and I relived a lot of the misery I have caused people. I know if I wasn't doing drugs or cheating my wife, I would not be in this position. And if I had known Vipassana, I would not be here. Now I can see how it can help me change my thinking and purify my mind (Engardio, 2001, p3).

Another important consideration for practice in a prison environment is that the inmates must have some degree of personal freedom within the practice setting, under the supervision of sheriffs and prison officials. According to Goenka (1993) this program cannot be taught when one is shackled and hand cuffed. The course has a demanding regimen that expects a student to be actively involved in the practice of *bhāvana* from 04:30 hrs till 21:00 hrs. The food has to be totally vegetarian. Initially when the course was

introduced, there had been some hesitation and concerns whether it would conflict with jail security and routine, as outsiders were to stay with inmates during this period. However, jail administrators made necessary adjustments to their protocols to accommodate the course. In the US jail experience of *vipassana*, the participant inmates, upon course completion, showed noticeable changes in their behavior in terms of other program participation, better relationships with each other and with prison staff, following the rules, exhibiting less resistance and aggression, and better relationship with their families (Engardio, 2000). Following these positive outcomes in personality change, prisons in California, Massachusetts and Vermont as well as the Federal Prison System in the United States are currently considering this technique (VMC, 2003). From the experience of *vipassana* courses held in US and in other jail environments, it can be said that this therapy establishes an individual on the foundation of ethical living. This foundation of ethical living enables an individual who has apparent personality disorders and/or with co-morbid disorders to take the opportunity to observe their own self and its faulty reactions at both cognitive and affective levels leading them to gain insight. It is this insight that transforms their behaviour.

OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSFORMATION: PERSONALITY DISORDERS

Generally, people believe that individuals with personality disorders never change. Personality disorders are characterized by habitual patterns of behaviour. Habitual attitudes and reaction patterns in our relationships develop early in life and impact the structure of our personality and the behavioural outcome (Moran, 2002). According to Moran and Hagell (2001), personality is

something that people have, not something that they do, although personality dispositions are inferred from behaviour. Prins (1991) writes that personality disorders are reflected in an individual's cognitive processing, affect regulation, interpersonal functioning and impulse control. Hill and Rutter (1994) explain that the personality disorders are pervasive and persistent abnormalities of overall personality functioning that cause social impairment and/or emotional distress, and are not due to episodic disorders of mental state, nor the result of qualitatively disordered thought process.

Disturbed personality is an indication of the selection and utilization of specific defense mechanisms that are used so often by the individual. These defenses form a life long pattern of action that, although not normal, is neither neurotic nor psychotic (Mosby, 1994). Under stress, these abnormal behaviours may manifest depicting the uniqueness of the individual. Whether the inability to postpone gratification or random acting out of aggressive egocentric impulses of antisocial personality or overblown self importance, strong need for attention and admiration and ambivalence in relationships of the narcissistic personality or emotional instability and hyper-excitability, extroverted and manipulative attention seeking behaviour of the histrionic personality, psychodynamics of all such personality disorders are closely related to the concept of self and its maladjustments. All behaviour is a form of adjustment, and this is equally applicable to behaviour that is socially acceptable or unacceptable. It is an active response of a living organism to some stimulus or some situation, which acts upon it. The ways in which certain persons deviate from the generally perceived behaviour can be viewed as individual ways of

meeting and adjusting to situations. Such deviations in the extreme can become problematic.

When we examine norm deviations of personality through the Buddhist psychological perspective, the way in which we define the problem is of utmost importance. According to *dhamma*, all modes of consciousness are seen as responses to sensory stimuli and are conditioned by the predetermining factors from past volition. In the process leading to such responses, the human consciousness moves selectively, clinging to this or rejecting that, according to personal preferences of habit and prior self-conditioning. Self-conditioning brings the mind to a state in which it construes things and personalities in our apparent reality (Story, 1961).

Though somewhat different to the Buddhist approach, Freudian psychoanalysis works on the assumption that when the origin of a personality disorder is known, its influence on unconscious motivation will automatically disappear. Freud endeavoured to trace all psychic traumas to experiences in infancy or early childhood, and made the *libido* the basis of his therapeutic system (Arlow, 2000). However, in psychodynamic and psychotherapy, when the original cause of the trauma is brought to the surface, the conflicts engendered by unconscious motivation do not always cease. For this and other reasons Story (1961) believes that “psychotherapy has not been able to produce the benefits as desired. In many cases it can help the patient only to recognize the problem and 'live with the condition” (p. 6).

In contrast to these practices of Western psychotherapy and psychiatry, the Buddhist *bhāvana* aims at total integration of the personality. Since *tanhā* is

the primary cause of anguish, it is necessary to weaken the force of *tanhā* gradually and ultimately to eradicate it. But *tanhā* is also the main source of volition. Then, it becomes imperative that at the initial stage, motivation caused by obsessively lustful desires (*libido* - the psychic and emotional energy associated with instinctual biological drives - American Heritage Dictionary, 2003) and ill will with their many facades must be substituted by more reasonable and ethically appropriate objectives. The best practice is to cultivate the mental antidotes of desire and ill will. According to the practice, the desires driven by urges (*libido*-activated) need to be replaced by consciously directed higher order motives (*Adhi-citta*) such as amity (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) or equanimity (*uppekḥā*).

Story (1961) writes that the discarding of many conventional moral attitudes and ethical ways of living has left psychotherapists without ethical determinants in important areas of psychotherapy. While psychotherapy accepts the standards of contemporary life as the norm, it does not have any universal basis on which what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' to establish standards for human conduct. The defect has been a serious handicap in the treatment of anti-social and delinquent behaviour. When the therapist is confronted with deviations and unacceptable behaviour, the therapist has difficulties in setting up a 'norm' or a standard that is not stained by the social environment and convenience. It is here that Buddhist psychology introduces a point of reference which Western psychotherapy has not been able to fit comfortably into its theories, the "ethics of living".

In this regard, Story (1961) writes,

Buddhist ethico-psychology cuts through the problem by asserting boldly that the measure of immoral behaviour is simply the degree to which it is dominated by craving and the delusion of selfhood. This at once gives an absolute standard and an unchanging point of reference. It is when the ego-assertive instinct overrides conventional inhibitions that behaviour becomes immoral and therefore unacceptable; it is when the over-sensitive ego fears contact with reality that it retreats into a fantasy of its own devising. The neurotic creates his own private world of myth with its core in his own ego, and around this his delusions of grandeur, of persecution or of anxiety revolve. Neurosis then passes imperceptibly into psychosis. The ordinary man also, impelled by ego-assertiveness and the desire for self-gratification, is continually in danger of slipping across the undefined border between normal and abnormal behaviour. He is held in check only by the inhibitions imposed by training. The attainment of complete mental health requires the gradual shedding of the delusions centred in the ego, and it begins with the analytical understanding that the ego itself is a delusion. Therefore, the first of the fetters to be cast away is *Sakkayaditthi*, or the illusion of an enduring self-concept (p.5).

In order to bring about this change, Buddhist therapy recommends introspective examination of the states of the mind in order to realise the illusory nature of the notion of self. This introspection leads also to the understanding of the impermanent nature of self, discontentment as being the product of *tanhā* and a re-orientation of mind characterized by detachment, emotional stability and wholesome awareness within the understanding of the selfless self (Chavan, 1994). However, it must be emphasized that this is not something that can be achieved by external means. It is the result of effort and determination sustained by the exercise of will. In order to succeed, one must have the desire to put an end to one's misery, and that desire must be properly channelled into the Four Great Efforts (*Sammappadhana*) namely the effort to abolish existing unwholesome states of mind, to prevent the arising of new unwholesome mental states, maintain the arisen wholesome mental states and to develop new un-arisen wholesome mental states.

The technique of insight meditation (*bhāvana*) is designed for specific ends, according to the personality of the aspirant and the traits that are necessary to be eliminated. The *bhāvana* teacher prescribes them just as a psychiatrist gives the treatment; the mode of treatment is selected with the individual requirements of the patient in view. There are forty subjects of *bhāvana* known as bases of action (*kammatthana*) that cover every type of psychological need and its possible permutations. Their salutary action is cumulative and progressive from the first stages to the ultimate achievement. From the beginning, the Buddhist system of self-exploration makes a radical readjustment within the mental process. This readjustment is based on the acceptance of crucial concepts that differ from those ordinarily held in the West. For instance, the past mental habits with their emphasis on the cultivation of desires, is seen to be false and a source of unhappiness. But this realisation does not result in a mental vacuum. As the past, unwholesome thoughts are uprooted, seeds of wholesome invigorating thoughts such as amity (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) are being planted, while the unwholesome motivations give way to consciously directed wholesome states manifesting in pleasant and peaceful behaviour (Gunaratana, 2000). So an individual who goes through this process of *bhāvana* by adhering to a strict ethical living develops concentration and mental quietness and becomes empowered to observe own cognitive and affective reactionary behaviours objectively. The insight gained through such observations permits the individual to adopt new wholesome behaviour based on the sublime qualities of amity, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. The possibility for such an individual to return to previous mental habits remains remote.

BHĀVANA FOR THE MENTALLY AFFLICTED

Similar to the application of *bhāvana* to the personality-disordered individuals, it can also be meaningfully employed to help the so called mentally afflicted. There are mentally afflicted individuals who may or may not have a co-morbid personality disorder. Singleton et al. (1998) write that personality disorders are frequently diagnosed in populations of psychiatric patients either as the main psychiatric condition or as an ancillary illness where it confluences the symptom presentation and treatment of the mental illness. In general, the prevalence of personality disorders among psychiatric patients is high, with many studies reporting prevalence greater than 50% (Moran, 2003). The same author states that the patients meeting criteria for one category of personality disorder also meet criteria for other personality disorders. With regards to co-morbidity between personality disorders and other mental disorders, the most heavily studied patterns are between personality and addiction disorders, anxiety and affective disorders. From a Buddhist perspective (Rahula, 1967; Narada, 1987), all these problems, whether it is personality disorder, addiction, anxiety or affective disorder, are part and parcel of pervasive discontentment and are related to tendencies such as *tanhā* and clinging that are closely linked to the notion of self and its conditionality as explained throughout this thesis.

Mental afflictions or illnesses, asserts Buddhist psychology, are conditions that arise due to mental impediments (*kilesa*) (Nissanka, 2002, Goenka, 1991, Story, 1961 and Rahula, 1959). These impediments or defiling passions are tendencies that arise in the mind process enveloping it with limitations, fetters, and bonds that tie a being to the wheel of suffering. The relief from misery means the cleansing of the mind of all defilements that mar

its purity. In other words we need to remove or impede defilements (*kilesa*) in order to gain the lost mental clarity and restore its purity as expounded in the *Pabbassara Sutta* (AN). These defilements or obscuring factors are five fold (Nissanka, 2002 ; Rahula, 1959). They are sensual desire (*kamacchanda*), ill will (*vyāpāda*), sloth and torpor (*thina-middha*), restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*). They are called ‘hindrances’ because they hinder and envelop the mind, obstructing its development (*bhāvana*) in mindfulness, concentration, serenity and insight (Nissanka, 2002). The defiling tendencies cause widespread harmful insinuations and therefore, it is necessary to impede their power by constant effort. One should not believe that it is sufficient to turn one's attention to the hindrances only at the moment when one sits down for *bhāvana*. Such short-term efforts in suppressing hindrances will rarely be successful unless it has been made to an ongoing practice in ordinary life.

In this effort, one who has chosen the conquest of the five hindrances should also examine which of the five hindrances are strongest in one's mind. Then one should carefully observe how, when and in which situation they usually surface. Within this approach, one should also know the positive forces or the antidotes within one's own mind by which each of these hindrances can best be countered and, finally, conquered.

Once emotional mind (*citta*) is overwhelmed by unrestrained covetousness, a person tends to do what should not be done while neglecting what should be done. And through such action one's good name and happiness will be ruined. One whose *citta* is overwhelmed by ill will... by sloth and torpor... by restlessness and remorse... by sceptical doubt tends to do what should not be done and neglect what should be done. And through such action good name and happiness will be ruined (*Endowed with Wisdom Sutta, AN. IV. 61*).

In this regard Nyanaponika (1993) gives an analogy from the Pali Cannon.

There are five impurities of gold impaired by which it is not pliant and wieldy, lacks radiance, is brittle and cannot be wrought well. What are these five impurities? Iron, copper, tin, lead and silver. But if the gold has been freed from these five impurities, then it will be pliant and wieldy, radiant and firm, and can be wrought well. Whatever ornaments one wishes to make from it, be it a diadem, earrings, a necklace or a golden chain, it will serve that purpose.

Similarly, there are five impurities of the mind impaired by which the mind is not pliant and wieldy, lacks radiant lucidity and firmness, and cannot concentrate well upon the eradication of the taints (*asāva*). What are these five impurities? They are: sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and sceptical doubt. But if the mind is freed of these five impurities, it will be pliant and wieldy, will have radiant lucidity and firmness, and will concentrate well upon the eradication of the taints. Whatever state realizable by the higher mental faculties one may direct the mind to, one will in each case acquire the capacity of realization, if the (other) conditions are fulfilled (Nyanaponika, 1994, *AN. 5. 23*).

Quoting *AN*, Nyanaponika (1994) writes that as long as these five hindrances are not forsaken in us, we consider ourselves as indebted, as ailing, as imprisoned, as enslaved, as traveling in a wilderness. Same author states further that

[U]n-forsaken hindrance of sensual desire is like being in debt; and the other hindrances are like being ill, and so on. Similarly when these five hindrances are abandoned, one considers oneself as free from burden, rid of anguish, emancipated from the bondage of greed, ill will and delusion and as a free man, one arrives at a place of safety (*AN.V.XXII*).

And when one sees oneself free of these five hindrances, joy arises; in him who is joyful, rapture arises; in him, whose mind is enraptured, the body is stilled; the body being stilled, he feels happiness; and a happy mind finds concentration.

Thus, there is a possibility that some of these mentally afflicted individuals whose information processing attributes (mental faculties) are intact and functional could be helped in finding relief for their condition. If *bhāvana* is

to be employed as a therapy to help the mentally afflicted, there are a few aspects that need consideration. Though some argue that *vipassana bhāvana* is not indicated to acutely mentally ill individuals, individuals with mental illness can be helped through this practice once they are in remission for a reasonable period of time. According to Sirimangalo (2004), mentally ill patients can benefit from this therapy of *bhāvana* if they qualify for practice. In order to qualify for the practice of *bhāvana*, the patients must be reasonably stable in their mental status through pharmacological therapy. Once stable and qualified for practice, the patient afflicted with mental illness is absolutely required to inform the teacher of their diagnosis. Persons on medication or with prior drug addiction issues are also required to inform the teacher of their condition. Consumption of intoxicants including smoking is forbidden for the duration of the course. The patient must follow directions given by the teacher. Moreover, such an individual must be ready to live an ethical life for the duration of this training. If a patient does not have the determination to abide by the code of ethical living and to attempt this technique seriously, such an individual may not be able to achieve the desired results. Thus, this technique is not indicated for patients who are acutely ill, lacking determination, unable to abide by the code of ethical living and unwilling to stay and complete the training.

Then, I would suggest that *bhāvana*, if adapted and structured to suite the needs of the forensic psychiatric patients, would be beneficial to a great number of them in gaining the necessary insight to elicit transformation. If our objective is to rehabilitate and reintegrate these patients into mainstream living, we need to give them an opportunity to learn about their own self and its reactionary nature as discussed in this thesis. By practicing *bhāvana*, they will

learn to observe attentively, to concentrate and experience relative mental tranquility and learn about own self. Perhaps then, as Vigne (1997) states, the patients may find a way out of the psychopathological labelling and enter the main stream of society through the practice of *bhāvana*.

Though there are many clinical studies, publications about the application of Buddhist meditation in treating mental afflictions such as Depression (Ma and Teasdale, 2004), chronic illness such as fibromyalgia, hypertension, cancer and anxiety (Bonadonna, 2003) and even developing psychometric properties of the dispositional Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown and Ryan, 2003), *bhāvana*, the cultivation of the mind based on ethical living and mindfulness toward the development of insight as described within the framework of this thesis has not been employed as a routine adjunctive therapy in any known psychiatric hospital.

This course of *bhāvana* (*samatha/vipassana*) that extends to sixteen hours a day for eleven days can pose a tremendous challenge to a mentally ill patient. In this context Vigne (1997) writes that *bhāvana*, “is not indicated for pathological patients because it intensifies everything good or bad and put a strain on the weak points of an individual’s personality” (p.6). Persons with prior mental illness must necessarily have their practice adjusted accordingly, due to the intensive nature of the course. However, for such individuals, it is suggested that a simple practice may be beneficial if performed for a short duration in several sessions a day. As Vigne (1997) asserts, what happens during these sessions should be freely discussed with a therapist who has some experience in *bhāvana* making it into a habit of “mental hygiene” enhancing the chances for further improvement.

From the two types of *bhāvana*, namely *samatha* and *vipassana*, it is believed that *samatha* - i.e. concentration *bhāvana* would be the choice basis for patients as it provides some skills to master the mind even if it does not resolve all their problems. It would help them to achieve some level of quietness in the mind. However, with improved ability to concentrate, the energy flow within the body and mind balances, giving the individual a better feeling of general welfare. For those patients who have a strong tendency toward scattering, observation of the mind in a mindful manner may pose considerable difficulties. However, with some guidance from the therapist and by using shorter sessions such individuals may have a chance to learn the skills and move progressively on the way to uncovering the self through reorientation of mind, which is characterized by detachment and emotional stability with ethical alertness. Nissanka (2002) writes that in his practice of “Buddhist Psychotherapy”, patients have to follow daily instructions apart from weekly sessions in order to be successful and recommends that the therapist adapts and structures *samatha* and *vipassana* forms of *bhavana* to suit patient needs. It is suggested that observation of sensations may be an effective way for mentally ill patients to develop concentration and serenity. Usually *bhāvana* on the body is a beneficial technique as it keeps patients away from having to deal with a wandering mind and draws attention on observing changing sensations. This type of *vipassana* is not indicated for hypochondriac patients who have the tendency to be focused on the smallest sensation and interpret it as the beginning of a serious disease (Vigne, 1997).

Based on the US experience and efforts in other countries in the introduction of *vipassana* practice to rehabilitate incarcerated individuals, it

becomes clear that it is an effective method that triggers positive transformation in individuals with habituated behavioural problems and mental afflictions. If given the opportunity to cultivate the necessary mental skills, perhaps, many patients who are stable enough to pursue this therapy and its adaptations, may find a way out of the psychopathological labelling in their own relative capacity and enter the main stream social living through the practice of *bhāvana*. The key is to stay balanced in the middle path of life without leaning to extremes of sensual desires and self -mortification. Whether mentally afflicted or healthy, each one of us should avoid all unwholesome states of mind and cultivate universal benevolence in a systematic manner while enduring to accept the impermanent nature of all phenomena and its allied pervasive unsatisfactoriness, accompanied by a selfless self, in our efforts to come to terms with vicissitudes of life. By observing these three inevitable phenomena in the quietness of our mind unrestricted peace and harmony will be brought into our mind and body indicating that everything, including our self, is mind made and mind governed. There lies the relief from all *dukkha*.

EPILOGUE

In this thesis, I have presented the argument that uncovering the nature of self and its concomitants through the practice of an introspective, attentive observation, based on ethical living, mindfulness/concentration and experiential knowledge would lead to improved mental well being by alleviating the anguish of living. This practice toward an improved mental well being is known as *bhāvana*. It is a practiced Buddhist concept and a method that clearly promotes mental well-being not only through intellectual logic but also most importantly through experiential knowledge. Though the path of *bhāvana* is clearly demarcated, it is not an easy path to tread. If we are determined to follow the path, it should be noted that there are no short cuts whatsoever. We have to follow the path vigorously by adhering to a life that is both ethical and mindful.

In the late twentieth century, a few attempts have been made to utilize this practice as a tool (Michalon, 2001; Epstein, 1995 and Dwivedi, 1994) in treating the mentally afflicted. Dwivedi (2000) writes that the western mental health professionals have used mindfulness as a tool for the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of individuals with mental disorders. However, in order to achieve desirable results, *bhāvana* must be practiced within the framework of the three components, ethical living, mindfulness and experiential knowledge as stated through out the thesis. If the individual is not ready to practice ethical living, which is its basic foundation, *bhāvana* cannot be

forced upon a person in the same manner as we administer psychiatric medications. Therefore, a person must be in a state of readiness to recognize his or her state of unsatisfactoriness and be self-motivated to learn, practice and grasp this technique. By engaging an individual who does not have the determination to overcome own difficulties and find peace from within in *bhāvana*, he or she may not be able to achieve the benefits of this technique.

The concern that this technique is based on spirituality rather than on science is unfounded. *Bhāvana* is a technique that has a well-established scientific foundation. Chavan (1994) writes that it is a science, a methodology practised and perfected centuries ago by the scientists of mind and matter. If science is about objective observation, analysis of data, and their application while seeking to know the truth, then, even by modern criteria, *vipassana bhāvana* is a perfect science. This practice trains our skill of objective observation. Once observed, we analyze the experience and apply its results and conclusions in life situations. When observations become objective, we learn to observe experience equanimously in its wholeness, without reacting to it. In the process of observation, we experience how experiences arise, sustain and pass away from one moment to the other. Observing these phenomena objectively becomes a living science and a way of life. Objective observation is a skill that is latent in us but without vigorous mental culture, it cannot be liberated from its conditioned reactionary and opinionated nature. Once developed, this skill enables the mind to observe apparent reality in a detached, caring and attentive manner while reflecting, analyzing and understanding the transient nature of phenomena that we identify with and take so personally. In essence, we are “Uncovering our Self” in a profoundly scientific manner.

The concept of self is not a phenomenon easy to understand. Within a frame of mind that allows the senses to govern its activities, it would be a daunting task to challenge the belief in the straight-jacketed egoistic self, as it would defend itself vigorously. These defences and their many manifestations identify with our body and mind by decree rather than through mindfulness of our mental activities. Even though everything that falls within our sensory world is mind made and governed, we have the conditioned mental habit of ignoring the mind process altogether. As a consequence, we experience a whole spectrum of mental afflictions without recognizing their conditioned nature. Despite the fact that the self is mind made and conditioned in its becoming, we believe self to be an absolute entity that has power to control the mind. This makes our perception of the “self” stronger. As I have explained in this thesis, the past mental habits that are deeply rooted in our minds do not allow us to cut through such perceptions. Therefore, understanding this concept, as presented in this thesis, is challenging and would be impossible to comprehend in the absence of open-mindedness.

There is a possibility that the suggestion to “Uncover the Self” may be interpreted or misconstrued as a denial of “Self”. The exploration of the notion of "self", rather than the denial of the concept, would help us understand what “self” is about. A careful reader and a practitioner of this technique may gain the experience that the mental process does give rise to the notion of self; but it is gained as a moment-to-moment evolving phenomenon, similar to a flame that burns continuously as long as fuel is available, depicting the appearance of continuity and stability. Like the flame that has no control over the source of fuel, the notion of self has no hold on either body or mind. It keeps evolving as

conditions change. When we understand the notion of self for its conditioned and moment-to-moment becoming, we begin to realize that holding on to a phenomenon that is rapidly changing brings only existential discontentment and anguish. This realization brings us to the understanding that if we learn to observe this process equanimously, we do not become affected by discontentment and anguish as we did before. This is the contentment and peacefulness that this technique brings to the mind.

The efficacy of this technique depends on the degree to which the individual is ready to undertake the technique. The practice provides historical evidence (Narada, 1987) to the effect that this technique has been helpful for those who were psychotic, as I have mentioned in the prologue. The cases like Michael Leven (2002), with serious and acute mental afflictions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, points to the fact that this practice is not only therapeutic and beneficial but also allows the patient to find a way out of the psychopathological labelling and enter the main stream of society. In spite of the many therapeutic effects such as release of tension, availability of affect, openness, receptivity, sensitivity, better management of pain, performance and learning and reduction of psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety, hostility and independence from alcohol and drugs (Walsh, 1979), there are a lot of challenges to be met in order to achieve a high degree of efficacy through this technique. The major challenge, in my opinion, is to prepare the individual for the technique, particularly in terms of the required ethical living.

Cultivation of mind through ethical living changes the way we deal with reality. Ethical living as explained in chapter four allows us to safeguard the mind from getting overtly agitated, worried or restless. In essence, it keeps

psychological obstacles to a minimum. An agitated mind is incapable of observing experience objectively. Moreover, emotional intensity affects our analytical skills, paving the way for erratic decisions. In this way we multiply anguish. Thus, ethical living, as suggested in Chapter Four, would enable us to maintain a relatively calm mind conducive to *bhāvana*. Particularly, this kind of living leads to the development of compassion, forgiveness, patience and understanding of others. These functions are mind calming. When the mind is less agitated and rested, it is reflected in our behaviour.

Form the perspective of the Buddhist psychology, most of the problems we experience in life are mainly due to our inability to be mindful of the present. Often, we live in our ideas rather than in our actions as I have explained before. These ideas that are fantasies in the language of psychotherapy, or delusions in terms of Buddhist psychology, do distract us from living in the present moment. If we have the ability to live in the present moment, we live in the action. This means that we act mindfully; we do not allow ourselves to react blindly as discussed in Chapter Two. However, developing mindfulness and concentration is the most difficult approach to improve mental well-being. If we are mindful, we begin to live in the present moment with the realization that every thing including our “self” is a moment-to-moment reality. The realization that produces this experiential knowledge is fundamental in changing our mental habits and behaviour. When we develop this ethical way of life, mind begins to regain its lost mindfulness and concentration leading to mental tranquility and analytical wisdom. A person with this capability is a transformed individual.

If we are interested in successfully achieving improved mental well being for all human beings whether mentally afflicted or not, the path of *bhāvana* must be followed rigorously and vigorously without concessions. It requires a strong commitment, and most importantly, the initial step of ethical living and cultivation of mindfulness. The practice makes us understand the conditioned nature of unsatisfactoriness. In this way, we will be able to endure it until it passes away. This salutary understanding can also be applied beneficially to those who have developed personality disorders, childhood traumas, or any other mental afflictions of which we are able to track down the cause. Due to the experiential understanding that comes through practice, this technique becomes a promising therapy, according to Epstein (1995). He states that introspective approach as known to western psychotherapy easily provides the necessary understanding of a given problem but offers no relief. However, *bhāvana* offers a method of “recycling psychic pain bringing about the very relief that is otherwise so elusive” (p. 127). Further, the emotional material that may be implied but rarely made explicit in psychotherapy will be made explicit in *bhāvana*.

It is for these reasons that I have made this thesis as deeply exploratory as possible so that I may be setting up the theoretical stage for a therapeutic framework that would be helpful in the provision of relief to those who are afflicted, and to those with personality and addiction problems. Moreover, if we are to set up this kind of training for the mentally afflicted, we could draw also from the experience gathered at many US Federal and State Correctional facilities. With adaptation to our attitude toward mental illness, necessary adjustments to accommodate the suggested practice, and finding qualified

teachers to conduct these courses, we will be able to develop a specific program to suite the patient population with mental afflictions. Such is my hope of contribution. I believe that, at least on a trial basis, it would be a worthwhile approach because of its known efficacy in improving mental well-being. Moreover, this technique, although there may be some costs in the organization of the event, does not incur high cost in terms of its delivery. The amount of time required for each individual may vary according to needs and circumstances. Among the many therapies that are available to the mentally afflicted, *bhāvana* is the most difficult practice to endure. However, for those who are determined to learn the technique and practice it ardently, persistently and with diligence, it is highly likely that most of the serious aspirants will find relief as it enables them to uncover the nature of self that is mind made and mind governed.

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