

Karma Assessment for Healthy Living: A Buddhist Contribution

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ABSTRACT:

WHO's definition of health reads "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease"... "Mental health refers to a broad array of activities... related to the mental well-being component... the promotion of well-being, the prevention of mental disorders, and the treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by mental disorders." Karma Assessment aims healthy living for all. Classifying and listing labels as in the *International Classification of Diseases* (WHO) is useful and serves HEALTH2020 goals. However, it is not an ongoing diagnoses and assessment of the causes and conditions of body/speech/mind states; neither is it revealing the sense and meaning of suffering nor designing a tailored treatment plan. All of these activities are culturally

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bound. In Buddhist Psychotherapy (2012 UNDV), Karma plays a pivotal role in transforming stress toward mental health. Karma Assessment is a snapshot of a client's suffering status which varies from unsatisfactoriness to pathology. Manifesting in dependent origination of the Skandhas, Karma is reformulated as BASIC-I, a psychological concept and acronym for Behaviour-Affect-Sensation-Imagery-Cognition-Interaction, an adjustment to cater to Western audiences. Framed in divided consciousness (*vijnana*) these modalities are diagnosed by interview and result in a *structural analysis* of BASIC-I/skandhas in the context of the client's relationships. Completion of the *Karma Life History Questionnaire* forms a backdrop against which sense and meaning of suffering become clear (www.taosinstitute.net/psychotherapy-kwee).

Defined as *intentional* (Cognition/Imagery) *action* (Behaviour/Interaction), Karma might lead to *sukha* or *dukkha* (Affect/Sensation). Focusing on *dukkha*, *functional analysis* refers to processes depicting BASIC-I as integrated vicious cycles of assessed causes and conditions. External conditions do not make us feel sad, bad, mad or glad, intentional choices and behavioural actions do. Professional skills enable identifying karmic variables and reveal effect as cause and cause as effect. From a Buddhist perspective, disorder is centred in the poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance (on how the mind works and the emptiness of self). Greed encompasses sadness/grief (of lost) and anxiety/fear (of losing); hatred encompasses anger/aggression (blaming others) and depression (blaming self). Pinpointing dependent origination of depression, anxiety, anger, sadness, joy, love and silence/nirvana is the heart of Karma Assessment. The structural and functional analyses of modalities and emotion parallel the candle flame and domino pieces metaphors of Karma.

Personality, I-me-mine as BASIC-I, is contemplated as a provisional concept that is ultimately an empty illusion of self. Impermanent body/speech/mind specifiable in observable mutating modalities operates in a flux of sensing-feeling (*vedana*), thinking-emoting (*samjna*) and intending-behaving (*samskara*). Emotional problems are relational scenarios comprising modality processes of embodied karmic suffering. We are perceiver and conceiver of interlinked and partly overlapping BASIC-I as they concurrently arise, peak, subside and cease in cycles of dependent

origination. Karma Assessment and *emotional restructuring* yield a logical treatment plan which is a scaffold for *cognitive restructuring*. Disrupting vicious cycles by detoxifying poisons secures healthy living. Diagnosing requires psychological knowledge, clinical acumen, proficient skills and unique artistry.

INTRODUCTION

Compared to solving psychological problems, the UN Millennium Developmental Goals aims at fulfilling humanity's basic needs (eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases). Progress has been made (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015.shtml): "Global poverty continues to decline, more children than ever are attending primary school, child deaths have dropped dramatically, access to safe drinking water has been greatly expanded, and targeted investments in fighting malaria, AIDS and TBC have saved millions." Progress can be expanded in most countries by the target date of 2015. Hereafter, efforts to achieve a world of prosperity, equity, freedom, dignity and peace will continue unabated. UN Member States took steps towards advancing the development agenda beyond 2015. Civil society organizations have also begun to engage in this process, while academia and other think tanks are particularly active (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/beyond2015.shtml). The *Institute for Relational Buddhism* belongs to the latter category and submits that in a world of prosperity or non-prosperity, one needs to attend the inner world. In this framework, the world's karma can always be improved: how can happiness rule the world?

The remainder of this text refers to the adage: change the world start with self and Karma. There is no other word in Buddhism which is more central, more complex and more controversial than Karma (*Mahakammavibhanga Sutta*). Its working is one of the "unthinkables", impossible to conjecture about (*Acintita Sutta*). Karma's importance is illustrated by the Buddha's self-designation as a *kammavadin* (guru of karmic causes); other related epithets are *hetuvadin* (guru of karmic motivation), *kiriyaadin* (guru of

karmic effects) and *vibhajjavadin* (guru of karma analysis) (*Subha Sutta*). As a social construction Karma does not exist in a cultural vacuum and is only intelligible in relational context. While mostly Karma is inferred as retribution,¹ the Buddhist meaning pertains intention (*sankappa*) – synonyms: conation and volition – which is closely related to motivation (*Hetu Sutta*). The literal meaning of Karma is act, action, conduct, deed, performance or behaviour and can be anything that one does (body), says (speech) or thinks (mind) which was pre-meditated, planned or intended. Karmic intention appears as antecedents of action/conduct through body/speech/mind. On its turn karmic action leads to karmic consequents experienced as delight or regret. Regret asks for transformation of body/speech/mind (*Kiriya Sutta*). Action, intention and regret operate in relational context; they arise from and impact relationship. This view offers nine Karma manifestations (Table 1).

Table 1: Nine Variations of Karma Manifestation

Karma	Body	Speech	Mind
Karmic Antecedents (intention)	4	5	6
Karmic Action (conduct)	1	2	3
Karmic Consequents (regret)	7	8	9

Dependent origination (*Paticcasamuppada-vibhanga Sutta*), the *nec plus ultra* of the Buddha's awakening, refers to Karma's causality comprising its birth and rebirth, coming about, arising, peaking, disappearing and ceasing. If rebirth alludes to a state of greed, hatred and ignorance (the 3-Poisons), it refers to recurring emotional intoxication. Conditioned by circular causality, multiple causes and feedback mechanisms are involved in the rebirth of poisoned Karma. Rebirth is then a function of feedback and suggests a temporal link between rebirths ranging from correlation to causation (*patthana*; cf. *Abhidhamma*).

1. In Brahmanism, but also in some Buddhist quarters, the term Karma carries a religious meaning where it is believed to be a spiritual law of retributive justice that works like a bank account stretching across reincarnated lifetimes wherein meritorious deeds are rewarded, unmeritorious deeds punished. In the Christianity dominated West, Karma tends to be interpreted as the consequences of sin.

Feedback is a dynamic process in which information of karmic actions and its consequents influence karmic action and its future antecedents through a chain of cause and effect leading to the next rebirth.

It is not the outward show-off action of Karma, but the quality of intention (*sankappa*) that counts which is critical for regret or delight and mind's healthy living as a result. The Buddha reasoned according to "logical fate" when stating that wholesome or healthy action will accrue healthy mental results. Wholesomeness refers to an inner state of serenity, not some external goal like affluence (*Sannoga Sutta*). A term inflated by erroneous meanings is merit (*punna*) which, influenced by pre-Buddhist thought and sky-god religions, has become a concept pointing at the hope that good deeds produce credit transferred to a next organic life. As present Karma is entangled to past Karma and hopes for the future metaphysics is an enticing proposition despite the Buddha's admonition to stay away from it.

People seek counsel when in trouble and stuck in regret (*vipaka-phala*). Hence, client and coach or therapist analyze the situation by going back to the karmic act itself and eventually to what motivated the act causing the result (*vipaka-hetu*). It is thereby important to responsibly own Karma instead of blaming others or circumstances. Karma is "inherited", thus inescapable once the conditions are in place (*Upajjhatthana Sutta*). Because Buddhism leaves room for choice, one can always decide to improve Karma. This starts with "balancing views", the first step of the 8-Fold Balancing Practice (*Nibbedhika Sutta*). Like in detective plots, Karma Assessment is about searching motives to understand why one acted as one did with suffering as a result and how to change it. Vasubandhu (4th century), an epistemologist and psychologist *avant la letter* of the Mahayana/Yogacara school and the last of the great innovators of Buddhism, pointed at motivational causes/*hetu* and conditions/*pratyaya*. Causes and conditions accrue fruit according to a cyclical spiral like the yearly seasons, whereby Karma is cause and effect as well as effect and cause. A cause for instance follows the trajectory from seed to sprout to tree. A condition is for instance favourable weather (Anacker, 2005). Karma is ripening non-stop; we are always in some body/speech/mind activity toward some future state. Therefore it is possible to exercise free

will or a “free won’t” to curb unhealthy mental life and shape healthy Karma (Kwee, 2012; 2013a).

Intentional activity was recently discovered in the literature of happiness, seemingly without being aware of the Buddhist definition of Karma (Lyubomirsky, 2008). In Buddhism happiness (*sukha*) is an aim considered to be a fluid experience amid adversity and an epiphenomenon while practicing Dharma (Kwee, 2013b). Research (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005) suggests that happiness is determined by a genetic set-point (50%), circumstantial factors (10%) and intentional activity (40%). This finding opens a window of opportunity for happiness. Human beings are equipped by an idiosyncratic genetic set-point for happiness comparable with a set-point for weight or length which is hardly modifiable. High set-point people find it easier to be happy, while those with low set-points have to work harder to be happy under similar conditions. Circumstances like age, health, education, money, country, religion or marital status only determine a small percentage of happiness. They do not impact long-lasting happiness. Happy people do not just sit around being happy. They make things happen and this activity spins off a by-product which is happiness over and above the genetic set range and life circumstances.

The manifestation of the Karma of *dukkha* was extolled by the Buddha as: “Birth is *dukkha*, aging is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are *dukkha*; association with the unbeloved is *dukkha*; separation from the loved is *dukkha*; not getting what is wanted is *dukkha*. In short, the *khandhas* are *dukkha*” (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*). As it is incomprehensible and goes beyond the limits of the conceivable how Karma comes to fruition, it is senseless to speculate about it. It will not lead to the end of suffering (*Acinteyya Sutta*). The present psychological view might disillusion Buddhists who prefer supernatural interpretations of Karma, but opens new vistas for Karma Assessment. The rationale is to find out people’s own responsibility as in the Chan adage: “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny”.

Karma, *Skandhas* and BASIC-I Modalities

Although Karma is adopted in vernacular English, this appropriation did not help to grasp its psychology. Allocating Karma a central place, the Buddha attributed a non-metaphysical meaning to Karma involving choice, intention and action. Thus, the concept refers to an event-specific causal *intentional action* and its episode-related *effects* in dependent origination. The Buddha's causality view lies in a "this/that conditionality": (1) when this is, that is; (2) from the arising of this comes the arising of that; (3) when this isn't, that isn't; and (4) from the cessation of this comes the cessation of that. This causality view comprises the interplay of a linear and a non-linear principle depicting a synchronic pattern. The linear principle takes 2 and 4 and the non-linear is 1 and 3. When the two principles combine, a given event is determined by an input from the past and by an input from the present. Add this interplay to intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, and the sum is a complex analysis of multiple causes and effects of Karma (*Mahakammavibhanga Sutta*). Thus, Karma is not a mystifying "what goes around comes around" formula, neither does it allude to fate or destiny arranged by reincarnation, but to an *choice of action according to corresponding intentional thoughts and feelings, often a habit, and grounded in relational meaning*.

Table 2: Buddhologists’ Interpretations of the Skandhas

AUTHOR	RUPA	VEDANA	SAMJNA	SAMSKARA	VIJNANA
Bernard-Thierry	Corporeality	<i>Sensation</i>	<i>Representation</i>	Formation	Knowledge
Edgerton	physical form	Feeling <i>Sensation</i>	<i>notion / idea conception</i>	Predispositions	Practical Knowledge
Guenther	expressive form	Feeling	Sensation	<i>Motivation</i>	Discrimination psych process mentalism
Inagaki	matter / form	<i>perception</i>	<i>Conception</i>	<i>Volition</i>	Cs
Kalupahana	material form	Feeling	Perception	Dispositions	Cs
Monier-Williams	bodily forms	Sensation	Perception	aggregate of formations	Cs / thought Faculty
Nyanatiloka	Corporeality	Feeling	Perception	Mental formations	Cs
Rahula	Matter	<i>Sensation</i>	Perception	Mental Formations	conscience knowledge
C. Rhys-Davids	<i>seen-thing / body</i>	Feeling	Perception	<i>activities planning</i>	mind / survivor
Soothill	form, sensuous quality	Reception feeling <i>sensation</i>	<i>thought / Cs / perception</i>	Action mental activity	Cognition
D.T. Suzuki	material existence	<i>perception sensation</i>	Mental perception <i>Ideas</i>	<i>Volition & related activities</i>	Cs of mind
Gethin	Form	Feeling	Recognition	volitional forces/formations	self-Cs
Takakusu	Form	<i>perception</i>	<i>ideas conception</i>	<i>Volition</i>	Cs/Mind

Karmic trouble arises when ignorance on “not-self” leads to grasping greed and clinging hatred. It is therefore relevant to elucidate self’s emptiness and analyse the relational meaning of obnoxious greed and hatred. Grasping and clinging are behaviours of interaction often happening automatically like habits. Bad habits form the bulk of regrettable Karma which is usually the starting point for reflection, contemplation, meditation and therapy. Habits come about in the

framework of body/speech/mind specifiable in the 5-Skandhas of clinging, referred to here by the acronym BASIC-I, discernible but inseparable psychological modalities: *i.e.* Behaviour (action, doing), Affect (emoting, feeling), Sensation (perceiving, feeling), Imagery (visualizing, thinking), Cognition (conceiving, thinking), Interpersonal relations (interacting, doing) (Kwee & Lazarus, 1986). BASIC-I is a function of divided consciousness and biological drives: the origin of basic motivation like the need for water, food, sex, clothing and shelter. The self exists only as a mind construction that artificially freezes the flux of BASIC-I processes. Karma comprises the *skandhas*: body (*rupa*) and mind (*nama*), *i.e.*, perceiving (*vedana*), conceiving (*samjna*), intending (*samskara*), and dualistic consciousness (*vijnana*). The meaning of the *skandhas* is reflected in the BASIC-I modalities which are sequential factors of an emotional episode. Various Buddhist scholars – none of them a psychologist – have offered different, often contradictory, translations, inferences and meanings for the *skandhas* as depicted in Table 2 (*e.g.* Gethin, 1998). (The italicized terms correspond with a multimodal view.)

BASIC-I reflects the structure of a provisional state, called self (or personality) which at bottom is an intersection of BASIC-I. Taking place in relative awareness and depending on wilfully paid consecutive concentration, daily experience is often framed by habits. Habitual responses happen automatically due to ingrained learning conform to the psychological principles of classical (Pavlov), operant (Skinner) and vicarious (Bandura) learning. Learning principles are metaphors constituting a coherent narrative for BASIC-I change.

KARMA: THE CANDLE FLAME METAPHOR

Assessment takes place in collaborative conversation, a practice characterized by scepticism (people are entitled to their own truth), particularism (nobody/no-event is the same), interactionism (intelligibility emerges through co-action) and connectivism (we are interlinked in dependent origination). Habit as a mentally healthy reaction to a *stimulus* situation requires an alternative healthy *response* to be figured out by the

organism. Whether what was emitted is healthy or not is an evaluation on the cognitive/affective-emotional level. Affect or emotion inheres in relational meaning and can be any inner short-lived or long-term feeling varying from moods, preferences, stances, attitudes, dispositions to strong emotive experiences with a positive, negative or neutral quality. A mentally unhealthy *response* is connected to emotionally distorted and unhappy feeling – candle flames in the Buddhist lore – and is often the start of voluntary attention and awareness of the modalities for the sake of change. These might be experienced as a SICAB-I firing order Sensation-Imagery-Cognition-Affect-Behaviour-Interpersonal, a sequence corresponding with Karma's vicissitudes in dependent origination (*Dhammapada* 1-20 and *Madhupindika Sutta*). Karma Assessment sees parallels between the *skandhas* and the BASIC-I:

(1) Mind-body *skandha* (*nama-rupa*): A momentary *stimulus* configuration contacts (*sparsa*) and impinges on the *organism*, *i.e.* the somatic radar screen of the sense organs which detects and attends in streaming awareness a momentary stimulus configuration of external and/or internal *dharma*s: the smallest mind objects and units of experience.

(2) Perceiving *skandha* (*vedana*): Sensation – After wilfully attending, there is perception and apperception, a post-perceptual but pre-conceptual tiny moment of *dharma* perception, impacted by memory and recognition weighing in on Affect; the *organism* experiences a sensory-affective feeling immediately rated as relatively positive, negative or neutral.

(3) Conceiving *skandha* (*samjna*): Imagery/Cognition – The *stimulus*, *i.e.* the *dharma*, becomes a representation through visualization and conceptualization, dualistically classified as black/white, good/bad, right/wrong, etc., against the backdrop of memory fits/misfits, subsequently fabricated and proliferated as beliefs, attitudes, judgments and values by the *organism*.

(4) Intending *skandha* (*samskara*): Affect/Behaviour – Having appraised, the *organism* emits an emotive *response* that motivates a volitional act of Karma, a karmic *response* which is fresh and new, automatic and habitual or planned and prepared through self-talk and more often than not expressed by speech in the context of Interpersonal

relationship.

(5) Divided consciousness *skandha* (*vijnana*): One can be aware of *dharma*s in the space of dualistic consciousness, a SICAB-I sequence, wherein the formation of I-me-mine/self-illusions occurs place and ultimate emptiness/not-self could be experienced by meditation enabling bypassing provisional self (assessment takes place in the dualistic realm of provisional self).

The SICAB firing order concurs with Cannon-Bard's sequence: I perceive a bear (S), appraise danger (I/C), feel fear (A), tremble and run (B). The James-Lange sequence (SICBA) reads: I perceive a bear (S), appraise danger (I/C), tremble and run (B), and feel fear (A). Darwin-Plutchik points at a SBAC/I sequence: I perceive a bear (S), tremble and run (B), feel fear (A), and appraise danger (C/I) (Kwee, 2010). Numerous BASIC-I mutations are possible. The present one corresponds with the Buddha's expression "if this arises that arises, if this ceases, that ceases" (*Sammaditthi Sutta* and *Mahahatthipadopama Sutta*). The SICAB-I firing order parallels the Buddha's Karma sequence (Table 3).

Table 3: The SICAB-I firing order of Experience in Parallel with the Buddha's Karma Sequence of *dharma*

The Buddha's Karma Sequence	BASIC-I Multimodal & Trimodal Assessment
6 Senses, felt: + / 0 / – (<i>vedana</i> /perceiving)	Sensation (<i>feeling</i>)
Ignorance: Illusion (self)/Delusion (god) (<i>samjna</i> : conceiving; intentions)	Imagery (<i>thinking</i>) Cognition (<i>thinking</i>)
Craving: Greed-Grasping, Hate-Clinging (<i>samskara</i> : conating, motivation, action)	Affect (<i>feeling</i>) Behaviour (<i>doing</i>)
Body/speech/mind: to be mindfully aware (<i>vijnana</i> /dualistic consciousness)	Interactions (<i>doing</i>) Biological Drives (D)

Karma Assessment is a clinical art and cannot be exact; it is about

opening possibilities of transformational action and requires self-assessment. One can learn to become aware of the birth and rebirth – *i.e.* the origination-arising-peaking-subsiding-ceasing – of emotional episodes, *e.g.* joy, sadness, fear or anger and discover that craving leads to grasping and clinging onto illusory certainties. These illusions can be unveiled by mindfulness through the sense-perception of *dharms* which can be designated as reality constructions. Notably: “*perceivables*” – *i.e.* *visibles, hearables, smellables, tasteables* and *touchables* – and “*thinkables*”, *i.e.* images, concepts as well as memories, dreams and delusions. Wisdom and transformation are a means to un-learn or de-condition and extinguish the karmic flame of agony. Extinction of emotional arousal is called: nirvana. This is not being out-of-orbit or some place to go to. Nirvana is rather serenity and silence after being freed from ignorant/irrational views and ceasing emotionality. It is attained for instance if anxiety or depression are extinguished and could be a temporary state or a lasting trait of not-self and emptiness. Since the “cognitive revolution” (Newell & Simon, 1956) in scientific psychology, the study of processes in the “black box” was reinstated along with the method of introspection, observing what is perceived internally. Introspection bears resemblance to mindfulness as an inside viewing tool. It is a start for *cognitive restructuring* like for instance by Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (Kwee & Ellis, 1998).

The Karma sequence begins with “contact”, the pure perception through one of the six “sense doors”. These are sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and awareness of mind objects: *dharms* arising by attention. These smallest units of experience are the brain’s internal perceptions comprising images, conceptions, memories, dreams, illusions, delusions, all of which are social constructions of “the mind’s eye”. They are subsequently registered as positive, neutral or negative. The hedonic qualifications refer to the input level of Sensation (sense felt) which pierces into a deeper level of Affect (emotionally felt). On an intermediate level, ignorant Imagery/Cognitive processing against the backdrop of a vast pool of stored data in memory results in detrimental Karma. Processing involves questioning like: Is it recognizable and

does it fit in available information? Can it be labelled? What's the plan? Thus, the experience is classified-categorized, stored in memory and becomes a building block to an intelligible world. Unwholesome Karma is due to irrational intention which motivates craving Behaviour of greed-grasping and hatred-clinging.

All of this takes place as a mindful experience in attention and awareness emanating from body/speech/mind consciousness in interpersonal context. However, one is not always aware of intention which can be instinctive, intuitive and subconscious or unconscious but always hungry and on the lookout for satisfaction. It could lead to approach, avoidance or indifference. Discriminative awareness plays the role of figuring out whether long-term goals – to end emotional suffering (*dukkha*) – will be attained. This is a skilful/insightful reflective scrutinizing to be done in a sane, sound and sensible way with reason and savvy (*yoniso-manisakara*), thus developing wisdom (*panna*) and wholesomeness (*kusala*). Sequential emotional episodes are part of a chain preceded and followed by other episodes and may form cycles that are either vicious (*samsara*) or virtuous (*nirvana*). The nirvana and samsara suffering cycle is consequential to the status of daily Karma.

Various passages in the Buddhist scriptures corroborate the SICAB-I firing order. The *Dhammapada* (the Buddha's sayings in 423 verses; Byrom, 2001) states in its opening verses (*italics added*):

We are what we *think*. All that we are arises with our *thoughts*. With our *thoughts* we make the world. *Speak* or *act* with an impure mind, and trouble will follow you as the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart. We are what we *think*. All that we are, arises with our *thoughts*. With our *thoughts* we make the world. *Speak* or *act* with a pure mind, and happiness will follow you as your shadow, unshakable... "Look how he abused me and hurt me, how he threw me down and robbed me." Live with such *thoughts* and you live in *hate*. "Look how he abused me and hurt me, how he threw me down and robbed me." Abandon such *thoughts* and live in *love*. In this world *hate* never yet dispelled *hate*, only *love* dispels *hate*. This is the law, ancient and inexhaustible...

However many holy words you read, however many you *speak*, what good will they do you, if you do not *act* upon them?

The italicized words show the relevance of thinking, doing and feeling. Another illustration of the Buddha's corresponding stance was found in the following (also from the *Dhammapada*): "By oneself unwholesomeness is done, by oneself one suffers, by oneself evil is left undone, by oneself one is purified, purity and impurity depend on oneself, no one can purify another" (Humphreys, 1987, p.93). In the spirit of these stanzas thinking makes up experience from contentment to distress and agony. Cognitive intention/motivation and behavioural action/Karma play a central role in the practice of Karma Assessment and Transformation.

KARMA: THE DOMINO PIECES METAPHOR

The domino metaphor of Karma delineates dependent origination (*pratityasamutpada*) by explicating the interplay of 12 interlinked elements (Conze, 1980). The graphical representation of aging, death and (re)birth lead credulous Buddhists to believe that this exposition is metaphysical; *i.e.* it is about reincarnation, the soul and Transcendental Truth, rather than about a here-now/this-worldly scrutiny of dependent origination observable from mind-moment-to-mind-moment during meditation (Fig. 1; www.hgposthuma.nl).

The Buddha's Karma sequelae analyse 12 factors (*nidanas*) of dependent origination which refer to the daily events of suffering due to emotional poisoning. The figure is a traditional display linking these factors. In *the centre of the circle* the Wheel depicts the cycle of suffering (*samsara*) and liberation (*nirvana*) with at the hub the 3-Poisons: a rooster (greed), snake (hatred) and pig (ignorance) biting in each other's tail. Turning around it is a circle designating six variations of existence and "rebirth", *i.e.* in the higher nirvanic realms (feeling *humane*/achievement-frustration, *heavenly*/pride-downfall and *titanic*/envy-conflict, the upper part) and in the lower *samsaric* realms (feeling *hungry*/greed-kindness, *hellish*/hatred-compassion and *animal-like*/ignorance-wisdom, the lower part). Rebirth in a realm is an effect of karmic causes and conditions. *The outer circle* consists of 12 factors which refer to dependent origination of

the poisoning.

The experience of mental suffering is represented in the interplay of

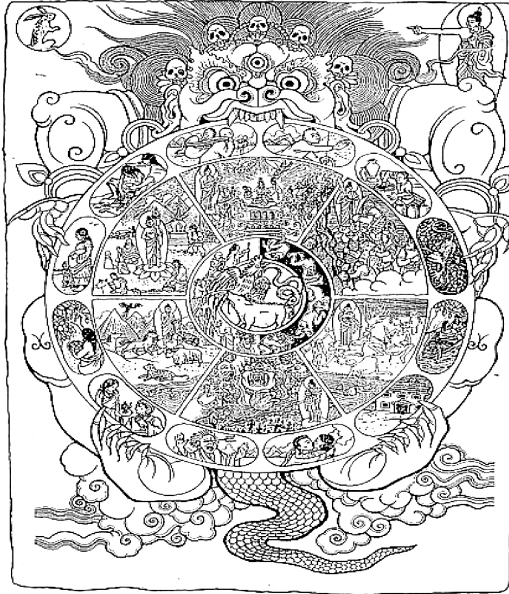


Fig. 1: Traditional display of the 12-Factor
Dependent Origination of Karma

these factors (*Culakammavibhanga Sutta*). These are: ignorance (*avidya*) (1) leading to the birth of Karma due to previous impressions (*jati*) (2), which one can be aware of (*viññana*) (3), due to mind-speech/body consciousness (*nama-vak/rupa*) (4), which appear through the six senses (*sadayatana*) (5), and starts with contact (*phassa*) (6) and sense experience (*vedana*) (7), directing to craving (*tanha*) (8) and grasping/clinging (*upadana*) (9), igniting, fuelling and perpetuating the flames of becoming (*bhava*) (10), resulting in the (re)birth (*jati*) (11), which is subject to aging, decay and death/cessation of the karmic cycle (*jara-marana*). A circle between the poisons and the realms which is half white and half black represents the ever present possibility to rise toward happiness by wholesome Karma and to fall toward unhappiness by unwholesome Karma. Outward the circle is the mythological Yama holding the Wheel; it metaphorizes the ever presence of death: the end of samsaric cycling.

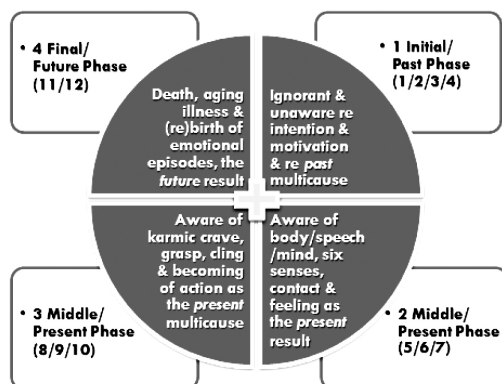


Fig. 2: A Psychological Summary of the 12-Factor Dependent Origination of Karma in 3 Segments

The traditional display of Karma's dependent origination can be reduced to three segments: an initial, middle and final segment (Figure 2). Poisoning is self-inflicted: how did we get here, sitting on self-created emotional debris? Analysis begins in the right upper quadrant with distress and agony due to ignorance on how the mind works. This is when the damage was done and we are left in sufferance. The quadrants below show our here-now mindfulness and explains the causes and conditions of Karma formation. Once emotional arousal is extinguished nirvana is attained as a combined result of Karma transformation by meditation and/or therapy. The upper left quadrant predicts future karmic cycles which can be *nirvanic* (contentment) or *samsaric* (suffering) depending on insight, understanding and fortunate dealing with the 3-Poisons.

THE HEART OF KARMA: AFFECT AND EMOTION

As in the "Gospel According to Pogo" (a long-running American daily comic strip), "we have met the enemy and he is us." In the pristine Buddhist and other East-Asian languages, there are no terms for psychology and Affect/emotion. For instance in Mandarin, the term for psychology is Xin Li Xue, meaning the science of the heart which is a metaphoric denotation for guiding a balanced way of life. This concurs with the Buddhist view of the mind as "located" in the heart and in-between hearts rather captured in the head.

Karma Assessment unravels “who, what, where, when and how” to counter ignorance and suffering. By doing so in the area of greed, hatred and underlying affect, it works at *emotional restructuring*. Greed and hatred inhere in basic emotions which are at the heart of Karma Assessment. Greed is featured by demanding “musts/shoulds” (e.g. “I must/should have it”) which masks *anxiety/fear* of future loss and *sadness/grief* of past loss. Hatred is featured by demanding some “must not”/“should not” (e.g. “S/he, they, or I must/should not have done it”) which masks *anger* which might lead to aggression (other hate) and eventually to *depression* (self-hate). A working definition of basic emotions reads: *the socio-cultural scenarios of human experience discernible as depression, anxiety, anger, sadness, joy, love, silence/serenity/tranquility and nirvana*. These states - not absolutely discrete – can be visualized as an onion that one can peel. From the outer to the inner, the layers entail: depression, anxiety, anger, sadness, joy, love, silence/nirvana (Figure 3).

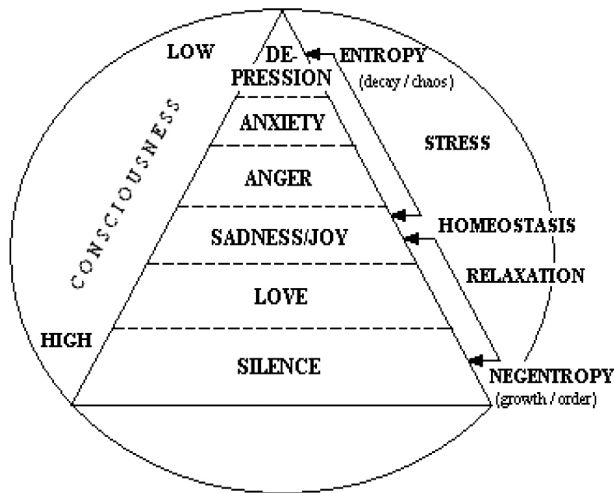


Fig. 3: Graphic Depiction of Basic Emotions Between Order and Chaos

The first four are karmic unhealthy, to be decreased; the rest is karmic healthy, to be increased. While these emotions exist in various intensities, there is a dynamic homeostasis in-between the stressful-chaotic (entropy) experiences of low awareness and the relaxed-orderly (negentropy) experiences of high awareness. These emotions can be illustrated by

cognitive styles of self-speech/self-talk: Depression: “No hope, no future; I’m a loser and hate myself...” Anxiety: “What if I fail or laughed at? I am totally lost...” Anger/aggression: “He shouldn’t be like that, damned it, I’ll beat him...” Sadness/grief: “I’ll never get over her dead and stay unhappy...” Joy/contentment: “Life is good, hahahaha, my prospect with her is joyful...” Love: “Smiling within, I love the present moment with me...” Silence/nirvana: “Not-self/Emptiness (0)...” Between the state of emotions gone awry and non-emotion all possible variations of emotional experience from suffering (*dukkha*) to happiness (*sukha*) have a place in the spectrum.

Emotions do not stand alone. Embedded in relationship, the complex pattern of emotion, are “relational performatives”: appropriated expressions in socio-cultural context. This is a postmodern relational view which is a perspective implying a paradigm shift that abandons “atomistic” views. Modernism conceives emotions as discrete indexes of the mind with a cortical substrate and essential properties. A relational perspective reconstructs the individualized conception and offers a view of emotion as relational scenarios of embodied action. Viewing emotion entwined in relation is in accordance to dependent origination. Thus, Karma Assessment entails inquiring about the inextricable relational meaning of emotion: I am depressed (because my family died), I fear to be fired (by the boss), I am angry (at my kid), I feel sad (about her rejection), I feel joy (meeting him), I love (her), I was silently thinking (of my mother), etc.

From a Buddhist stance depression is not merely a negative experience. The Buddha awakened while in despair. Depression is positive, if viewed as an obstacle to be turned into a path that may mark the beginning of a learning experience toward self-reflection and awakening to emptiness and interconnectedness. Conducive to becoming sadder but wiser, depression is enriching. Depressive clients erroneously attribute failures to themselves and successes to external factors. Their sombreness is fed by a negative view of themselves, others and the future (Beck, 1976). Sometimes the urge to commit suicide prevails. Such death wishes differentiate depression from love. Heralded as the most important in life, *magna res est amor*, love is the most sought after experience in all

cultures designating the *raison d'être* of life (Sternberg & Barnes, 1988). There are two variations of love: infatuation (passionate) and compassion (dispassionate). Compassion figures prominently in the Buddhist value system next to kindness and joy. Enlightened compassion is endorsed which is a down-to-earth practice of empathizing with the suffering of others and is to be applied sensibly, like in what I call the oxygen mask principle. In case of emergency in the air, use the mask yourself first before applying it to your kids to secure the best survival for all.

The taxonomy can be understood by scrutinizing the functional relationships of emotions, intention and action *vis à vis* motivation (*hetu*) toward a goal. Karma becomes transparent in terms of intended goals of action by peeling each emotion, layer by layer, until nirvana is unveiled. In depression no goals are worthwhile to pursue: one feels intensely dejected, down, disordered, confused, demoralised and hopeless. Nonetheless, depression harbours a reassessment potential. In anxiety the attainment of a goal is threatened; fear can be functional or dysfunctional. In the latter case it might take the form of a disorder. For example, claustrophobia might be the result of locked-up anger. In anger a goal is blocked. It usually goes along with lowered levels of awareness and a loss of control. Chronically repressed, stress-related ills could be the result. The relieving expression of anger depends on culture. Preferably, anger is transformed by assertiveness as throwing garbage without compassion leads to escalation. In sadness there is a loss of a goal; crying is cleansing. Sadness and joy are two sides of a coin, both are melting experiences. Joy conveys a relevant progression to a goal. In love a merging goal is met. It usually requires total acceptance and surrender. In silence there is minimal intention, no goal. Silence is fulfilling and profound because it energizes and opens the door to nirvana

SECONDARY EMOTIONS AND DEFENCES

Occurring as from the cradle in interaction with parents, basic emotions are reserved to denote elementary experience, a compass in collaborative practice. There is no consensus on the number of basic emotions due to a

lack of criteria for “basic” (Scherer, 2005). My onion model is founded on clinical experience, *i.e.* on interviews with more than 2000 clients. Next to basic or *primary emotions*, Affect also includes *secondary emotion* which is mixed with Imagery, Cognition, Sensation, Behaviour, and always appears in Interaction. Karma Assessment endorses a lexicon of secondary emotions, the rating of feelings as painful, pleasurable or neutral, and backs people’s hedonic striving for happiness, which includes healthy living. However, happiness is a multifaceted state featuring not being a goal in itself but an epiphenomenon of people’s working at creating a meaningful life, nor is it an absolute condition but a state amid life’s inescapable adversities.

A dictionary of Affect reveal 4000 English words (Plutchik, 1994) expressing various nuances of secondary emotions from weak (*e.g.* worry) to strong (*e.g.* panic). A lexical guideline is devised to become aware of the variations of affective semantics (Table 4).

Table 4: Guideline of Semantics Denoting Variations of Affect: a Lexicon Sample

The list of affective compositions is like a sample of melodies created by combining basic musical notes. Another metaphor points at the rainbow that appears if white light (silence) is bent by a prism resulting in six basic colours: red (love), orange (fear), yellow (joy), green (anger), blue (sadness), and violet (depression) with innumerable hues in-between. An affective lexicon serves the purpose of awareness about emotional variations. It is not meant to be complete but to facilitate deliberation when assessing karmic problems.²

There are fourteen lists of basic emotions creating a Babylonian confusion. Four relevant lists are presented by Plutchik (1994), Izard (1972), Frijda (1987) and Ekman (1992) (Davidson, Scherer & Goldsmith, 2003). Plutchik lists anger, joy, fear, sadness, *surprise*, *disgust*, *anticipation* and *acceptance*; Izard lists anger, joy, fear, *surprise*, *disgust*, *contempt*, *distress*, *shame*, *guilt* and *interest*; Frijda lists anger, joy, fear, *surprise*, *contempt*, *distress*, *shame*,

2. Enigmatically, naming the particular Affect might evaporate the “magic spell” and cease an emotional hijack like in the fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin. If the name is guessed the problem vanishes.

aversion, *desire* and *pride*; and Ekman lists anger, enjoyment, fear, sadness, *surprise*, *disgust* and *contempt* (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1992). The italicized emotions are considered secondary: *surprise* may vary from Cognition about an unanticipated event to an activation of a neural reflex (Lazarus, 1991). *Disgust* impresses as a Sensory experience. *Anticipation* comprises Imagery and Cognition which are beliefs not emotions. *Acceptance* is an attitude with predominantly Cognitive, Behavioural and Interpersonal features. *Contempt* inheres in Cognition of anger and defensive fear. *Distress* terms the Sensation of tense. *Shame* is a variant of fear with Imagery, Cognitive, Interpersonal and Sensory aspects. *Guilt* consists of Cognitions, Interpersonal values and social fear. *Interest* is motivational rather than emotional, thus foremost Cognitive (intentional) as well as Sensory (perceptual/attentional). *Aversion* (Latin: *aversio*, turning away) has a Behavioural emphasis due to a Sensory dislike, *desire* refers to the future and consequently contains Images/Cognitions of wanting/intending. *Pride* connotes standing on an Interpersonal pedestal (I/C). The rationale of assessing primary and secondary emotions is to find appropriate interventions.

Improvement might be hampered by “defence mechanisms” uncovered by Freud. Defences operate in unawareness and are cognitive distortions avoiding “sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair” (to use a Buddhist phrase). Avoiding what is going on in thought, feeling or conduct is called “repression” and is detectable in for instance selective perception or slips of

[illegible]

the tongue. Curiously, the Buddha already described some of these defences. Humorously comparing the shaky behaviour of recalcitrant horses, he called them the *bhikshu*'s "abreactions" against frustration as if beaten. They manifest if faulty conduct is fed back (*Khalunka Sutta*). Afraid of making mistakes, one discharges discontentment, defends and creates *duhkha-duhkha* which is suffering on top of the original suffering mitigated by the self-beguiling defence. The practitioner needs to be mindful of these intra-personal self-distortions. The Buddha's awareness-truncating variations of obstinate conduct countering the coach (in parallel with Freud's mechanisms) are: (1) Making an excuse for not remembering having breaking a rule (unaware due to "repression"), (2) Criticizing criticism as foolish (attributing to another due to "projection"), (3) Accusing others or something else (diverting attention by "displacement"), (4) Dodging by evading issues and acting aggrieved (the issue does not exist due to "undoing"), (5) Delivering an impressive speech (compensating with a strength: "sublimation"), (6) Ignoring everybody and walking around as an offender (withdrawing by "isolation"), (7) Refuting the offense and by being stubbornly silent (blind because of "denial") and (8) Quitting the Dhamma (reverting to immaturity: "regression").

STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF BASIC-I

Here is a Karmic BASIC-I Proclivity Scale which scans BASIC-I structure and personality by rating seven questions from 6 (high) to 0 (low). B: How much of a doer am I? A: How deeply emotional am I? S: How far tuned am I into my senses? I: How vivid do I visualise/think/intend in pictures? C: How much of a thinker (analyst/planner/intender) am I? I: How much engaged in social activities am I? How unhealthy do I feel? The results, plotted on a histogram, gives an idea on whether someone is a "thinker" (*vedana*-type: I/C), "feeler" (*sanna*-type: S/A), or "doer" (*sankhara*-type: B/I). The seventh dimension refers to diagnosing the person's health (biological causes of psychological malfunctioning need to be excluded).

Figure 4 depicts a person's karmic BASIC-I proclivities reflecting a *sankhara*-type. Thus, the therapist/coach gets a lead on matching the working alliance, attuning meditations and personalizing interventions. It seems that Buddhism presented the first personality typology ever. Personality is defined as someone's habitual proclivities which can be stable "traits" or abiding "states". In the *Visuddhimagga* Buddhagosa (5th century) elaborates the 3-Poisons. He discerned six types grouped in three pairs of unwholesome (pathological) and wholesome (non-pathological) types: (1) Greed/Non-Greed (e.g. generosity), (2) Hate/Non-Hate (e.g. kindness) and (3) Ignorance/Non-Ignorance (e.g. wisdom). The present revitalization outlines the remedy for ignorance and unveils karmic greed and hatred. Rationale is eradicating inner foes: daily rebirths of suffering, distress and agony. After structural analysis, BASIC-I change targets are listed. Table 6 illustrates a case of fear:

Table 6: Karmic BASIC-I Structural Analysis in Case of Fear

B: Conduct of flight and avoidance; looking for escape/help while hiding fear...

A: Heightened arousal; hyperventilation leading to fear of fear and to panic...

S: Chilling sensations of suffocating/sweating; tachycardia; nerveless/dizzy...

I: Imagery of being caught and lost; visualizing loss of control, embarrassment...

C: Catastrophizing thoughts about hopelessness/helplessness and inferiority...

I: Attitude of dependency/inassertiveness/manipulating; disturbed family life...

Structure is incomplete without understanding function. BASIC-I functional analysis comprises five hypothetical cycles of Karma.³ Feelings (S/A) are functional to thought (I/C) and action (B/I) (Kwee & Lazarus, 1987; Kwee & Ellis, 1997). Karma's definition as intentional action opens the possibility for a cyclical representation reflecting the functional relationship between cause (intention and action) and effect (feeling),

3. The Abhidhamma (last book of the Theravada third canonical tome) distinguishes 24 patthanas: possibilities of functional/activating links between dhammas which is formulated here in five karmic cycles. The functional relationships between dhammas in dependent origination ranges from loosely connected correlation to hard-wired connections.

whereby effect can be cause and cause can be effect. Functional analysis is a scheme of input-output sequences of five Karma cycles. It describes how habits of feeling (S/A), thinking (I/C) and doing (B/I) are perpetuated via spiraling cycles circling emotion. The hypothetical construction of the functional interrelations between modalities within cycles reflects gyrations perpetuating the vicious processes of grief, anger, fear or depression. They occur between the input of S/I/C and the output of A/B in Interpersonal context. A *nirvanic* reconstruction is feasible by working toward affective order (joy, love, silence/nirvana).

A simile about the man shot by a poison arrow elucidates the circularity of effect and cause (*Sallatha Sutta*). Hit by greed, hatred and ignorance, the untrained mind feels bodily and mental pain as if hit by two arrows. But a skilful mind struck by a poison arrow is not distraught and will only feel bodily pain as if hit by just one arrow. The second arrow of mental pain is the self-caused emotional suffering, which aggravates through vicious cycling, a psychological process turning effect into cause which might be curbed. The five cycles expand the vicissitudes of the man hit by a poison arrow. We are daily hit by poison arrows and feel it whenever feeling bad, mad or sad and tumble into a morbid spiralling process. BASIC-I functional analysis highlights vicious cycling processes which adhere to the Buddha's "this-that conditionality". This conditionality refers to a linear function

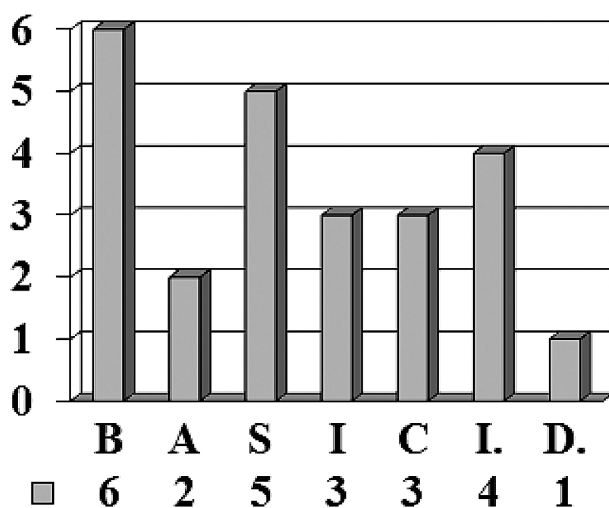


Fig. 4: Graph of a Person's Scores

(“when this is/isn”t, that is/isn”t”) and a synchronous function (“from the arising/ceasing of this, comes the arising/ceasing of that”), implying that past and present influences interact in complex patterns (*Mahakammavibhanga Sutta*). The following describes each cycle:

The 1st cycle (SICAB-I) starts with a *stimulus* (an arrow penetrates a Sense organ); subsequently the *organism* responds (I/doom-gloom and C/despair-catastrophe), evoking a *response* (A/fear-panic, anger-rage or sadness-depression), e.g. fearful avoiding (B) and complaining (I); feedback activates similar events causing more Affective misery. This *cycle* might be tackled by Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy.

The 2nd cycle (BSDA) reflects a spiral of *long-term intrinsic loss*: as a result of avoidance (B), the person harbours chronic tension (S), a negative consequence eventually leading to chronic pain or causing illness necessitating *Drugs/medication* mutating biology and consciousness, and aggravating the Affective disturbance. The *2nd cycle* by relaxation/samatha or medication.

The 3rd cycle (BISA) reflects a spiral of *long-term extrinsic loss*: as a result of avoidance (B), the person evokes adverse social reactions (I), a negative consequence leading to social isolation and – having lost contact with work and family – debouching in a state of sensory deprivation (S) which aggravates the Affective disturbance. The *3rd cycle* by interpersonal training.

The 4th cycle (BSICA) represents *short-term intrinsic gain* (tension relief): initially, avoidance (B) leads to tension reduction (S), but in the long run the short-term relief does not solve anything; thoughts of doom-gloom (I) and of guilt-remorse (C) accumulate, increasing the Affective disturbance. The *4th cycle* by meditation/vipassana.

The 5th cycle (BISA) represents *short-term extrinsic gain* (reward): initially, avoidance (B) is advantageous, but eventually it turns out in Interpersonal disaster (I); one may gain social attention by manipulative ploys or be excused from responsibilities through face-saving tactics, but these reactions backfire and generalize into more stress (S) escalating the Affective disturbance. The *5th cycle* by group or family therapy.

The man hit by a poison arrow who asks “who did it, I’ll kill him...?” will evoke hatred and aggression which will lead to remorse, isolation and more stress in the long run. The end result is an aggravation of the man’s vicious karmic by his own choice. If another way is preferred, the scheme provides a roadmap with strategic clues where and when to curb, find and break up the spiralling and inflexion points resulting in virtuous transformation.

There is a freely downloadable *Karma Life History Questionnaire* which completion is part of a Karma Assessment intake procedure and provides the personal data for functional analysis (www.taosinstitute.net/psychotherapy-kwee). In order to intervene meaningfully, one needs to know the client’s psychological profile by collecting data of the present state by an intake procedure and by scrutinizing the client’s emotional/interpersonal life history. This includes the client’s emotional development in the context of family, education and work. While these strategies suggest a general approach for disrupting vicious cycles and curbing them toward virtuousness, there are specific interventions proven useful for targeting specific psychological problems. Interventions are preferably evidence-based.

IN CONCLUSION

The assessment of Karma requires psychological knowledge, clinical acumen, proficient skill and unique artistry (Kwee, 2013c). The subject of assessment is Karma’s dependent origination whose numerous variations can be described in psychological terms. According to the Buddha: “whoever sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma and whoever sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination” (*Upanisa Sutta*) and ““He who sees the Dhamma, sees me; he who sees me, sees the Dhamma” (*Vakkali Sutta*). These quotes corroborate the utmost importance of dependent origination and thus of Karma Assessment. Insight and understanding of emptiness and not-self depend on analyses of dependent origination in order to cease *dukkha*. Conform to the prime noble aim of the Buddha, ceasing *dukkha* is the *raison d’être* of Buddhism.

Karma Assessment, even if only for a second opinion, requires people’s courage to confront and not to flee from life’s *dukkha*. Carrying

the Buddha's metaphor of *dukkha* as inescapable *dis-ease* a step further, the analogy of *dukkha* as a self-inflicted "auto-immune" disease comes to the fore: emotional agony is inflicted by oneself. If *dukkha* is inferred as suffering from the unsatisfactoriness of life, *dukkha* equals "existential neurosis". A wish to come to terms with "inner enemies" and to become an *arahant* or a *bodhisattva* (buddha-to-be) might stimulate motivation. There is however no need whatsoever to be or become a Buddhist to be diagnosed by Karma Assessment and embrace a wholesome *modus vivendi*. The Dharma advocates not-self/emptiness when emotional stress makes things in life do not roll smoothly by dis-solving, dis-owning, un-clinging, un-grasping, un-craving and de-constructing I-me-mine/self. Diagnosing by Karma Assessment is just the very beginning of ceasing *dukkha*.

Dukkha is a term defying translation. No doubt, *dukkha* is inextricably entwined in life's impermanence and imperfection. Life's flow is getting troubled like the wheels of a chariot running stuck due to the stress of life. *Dukkha* starts right after birth and becomes manifest in our dealings with decay, disease and death. First used by Selye in the 1930s, the term stress might correspond with *dukkha* if conceptualized as the burden bearing on an individual. The weight, caused by situational conditions and emotional changes, likely evoke karmic unhealthy reactions in body/speech/mind. Enduring states of distress endanger healthy living when *dis-ease* transforms in disease due to long-term defilement by stress-hormones (adrenaline and cortisol). *Dukkha* has the potential to exacerbate psychological disorders like depression, aggression, panic or phobia, as well as psychosomatic illnesses like high blood pressure, psychogenic pain, skin irritation or what have you. Although the Dharma is not meant to cure chemical imbalances, the stress definition of *dukkha* opens the door to probing whether mindfulness reduces stress and heals these types of disorders; psoriasis is a case in point: mindfulness expedites improvement (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Karma Assessment requires commitment and hard work, the reason why it is not suitable for the faint-hearted who will benefit more from the metaphysics of heaven and hell, and the "do's and don'ts" of ethics (*Sigalovada Sutta*). However, for sufferers who wish to decide for

themselves, use their capacity to think, pick and choose rather than follow commandments, Karma Assessment and *emotional restructuring* are a sensible start for healthy living. How can happiness rule the world: By self-knowledge?

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