

## **East or West, the Goal Is the Same: Buddhist Psychology and Its Potential Contributions to Invitational Education**

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*After describing the basic tenets of Invitational Education and Buddhist psychology, this article explores four commonalities and their implications: The individual is in control; knowing is not doing; others can help; and we can facilitate others' efforts to use effective strategies to reach happiness. The paper concludes by contrasting Invitational Education and Buddhist views on self, perception, and appropriate action. Invitational appropriate wisdom (pradjna paramita) and is totally under the control of the individual.*

The United States has a multi-billion dollar weight loss industry. There are pills, books, DVD's, CD's, diets, food diaries, special foods, support groups, personal trainers, television programs, game shows, point systems, weigh-ins, an army of machines, and even special rubber suits...you name it, we sell it to those who want to lose weight. And why do we want to lose weight? Appropriate weight management is related to good health, longevity, a more active life, and, perhaps, also to one's attractiveness. In the west, good health, long life, active living, and caring friends are all associated with the ultimate goal of happiness. Given the keys to weight loss we are concomitantly given the keys to one route to happiness.

If this is true, wouldn't those keys be coveted, embraced, and used to guide our daily living?

Fortunately the keys to healthy weight management are well known. There are few things in science known as well as we know the two irrefutable strategies for healthy weight management: exercise more and eat less. This is a guarantee. It does work. So why do so many have such difficulty with the concept? Paradoxically many of us do not want to give up pleasure to get happiness. We desire an easier way and do not like relying on the energy of our volition but prefer some substitute for self discipline. This propensity (but not necessity) for externalization presents us with a continual

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array of new problems, each in turn relying on yet another externalized solution.

The premise behind describing this gloomy outlook is that even if we had unquestioned strategies that would lead us to happiness, as individuals we would still confront substantial personal difficulties in accepting and implementing them. For example, just as in weight loss, one significant roadblock to getting to a state of happiness would be the pleasure we must forgo to get happiness. In short, happiness requires substantial personal effort, perhaps too much effort. Rather than internal self discipline, our tendency is to avoid fundamental changes in our thinking and action in lieu of finding an environment that requires considerably less effort and self-discipline. In weight loss, we look for the right gym, the right diet, the right gear, the right personal trainer, the right supplements, and the right prepackaged meals. And yet, for many of us, the goal of weight loss and the benefits weight management provides remains elusive. We do, however, have two vehicles that can help us, one from the west and one from the east.

### **East and West Meet On Uncommon Ground**

Invitational education is representative of western viewpoints and is designed to be a vehicle where one person can be of benefit to others, usually through an invitation to participation provided by way of the people, places, procedures, processes, and policies (Purkey & Novak, 1996) that make up a learning environment. By manipulating these variables the likelihood that others experience success and happiness is greatly

enhanced. However, it is always the purview of the individual to accept or reject the invitation.

From the east, Buddhist psychology claims we all want to be happy. Further, all the causes and conditions needed to be happy are already in us. (Gnanarama, 2000; Hagen, 1997) Happiness is unlocked by the recognition that suffering exists as a natural state of being; this suffering is caused by desire; desire can be extinguished; and happiness obtained. In response to these propositions the western view counterpunches with some problematic issues: not everyone has the strength to accomplish this journey; someone must teach the ways to happiness; life can present fostering situations but also stultifying challenges; and self discipline alone cannot bring about pleasant events or meet personal needs.

The perspective of Buddhist psychology, we can conclude that both eastern and western views demonstrate that we cannot unlock happiness for others. We cannot ensure the success of others. Both east and west have identified many barriers to happiness and have provided a number of poignant solutions. When considering ways to help others be happy, two very substantial situations are confronted: (1) We confuse knowledge with action, and (2) We cannot control others; we can only control ourselves. Both invitational theory and Buddhist psychology clearly establish these parameters in that both recognize that the necessary first step in being helpful to others is to be helpful to oneself first. Fortunately both perspectives offer direction, often

complimentary, for overcoming these barriers.

### **The Individual Is In Charge**

Knowing what, knowing how, and choosing to do are three distinct phases of education: They correspond to content acquisition, skill development, and motivation-into-action. A unifying and defining commonality between Buddhist psychology and Invitational Learning is that both recognize others may invite, but only the individual can accept: The individual is in charge. We may influence, encourage, discourage, facilitate, and interfere, but the individual is always the determiner of personal effort. Invitational theory calls this process “honoring the net.” Both Invitational Learning and Buddhism consider opportunity to learn and practice to be critical to happiness. In invitational theory the invitation sincerely sent by caring educators initiates the needed ameliorative emotional and cognitive processes. In Buddhist psychology the dharma (or “the way to wisdom”) is made available through written teachings and through the guidance of the sangha, a dedicated group of scholar practitioners that readily assist those who desire it. However, both invitational theory and Buddhist psychology recognize that coercion is no answer. While we may provide sufficient sanctions to suppress behavior in a certain forum, the decision to act or not to act beneficially in a way that leads to true happiness is still the province of the individual.

However, there is a glaring difference between Buddhist psychology and Invitational Learning. While each view

accepts that the individual is in control of the individual life given, Invitational Learning believes that improving the personal environment and providing experiences that are personally rewarding will foster a resulting improvement in attitude, behavior, self concept, and happiness. Buddhist psychology, however, maintains that a person’s mental well being is totally *independent* of one’s surroundings and the environment has little to do with the attainment of happiness. In the Buddhist view, whatever the environment may supply to create pleasure is impermanent and will surely pass. Happiness, encapsulated in a Buddhist view, is living in mindfulness: That is, living in full awareness of the here and now, without imposition of any judgment of what “should” or “ought” to be. Any happiness that is dependent on things being “just right” is condemned to create sorrow and suffering. If favorable circumstances are needed for happiness, happiness will never last since all things are impermanent and will change, including the favorable circumstances on which one may base personal happiness. It is in this difference Buddhism may contribute most to invitational thinking.

### **Shared Basic Principles**

Psychological principles concerning success and happiness exist in both perspectives in ways similar to the weight loss industry’s basic truths, but not quite as definite. Like our weight loss truths, these basic principles are easily overlooked because of the demands they make upon us.

Invitational Education provides a progressive logic in building success and happiness (Purkey & Novak, 1996):

- Within every individual there is unlocked potential.
- That potential often needs an invitation to actualize.
- If we treat people with trust, respect, optimism, and intentionality, that potential is more likely to emerge.
- The resulting engagement of potential results in success and happiness.

Buddhism has its Four Noble Truths (Rahula, 1959; Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998):

- Not everything in life will be to our liking.
- The more we attach ourselves to a single way we believe things should be, the more dislikes we will have.
- We don't have to suffer disappointment and hurt as much as we do.
- If we act in certain ways, suffering is lessened and enjoyment is increased regardless of our surroundings.

### **The Perspective of Invitational Education**

The basic tenets of Invitational Education are straightforward and are presented graphically in Figure 1. The fundamental premise of invitational theory is that within each individual that exists untapped potential that needs just a gentle nudge to actualize, there are strategies describing how that can be done (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey &

Strahan, 1995; Stanley & Purkey, 1994). In getting individuals to recognize their potential, the educator needs to provide opportunities for engagement or “invitations” to participate. Managing these invitations so that they are systematic and systemic to the environment requires attention to context or in invitational parlance, “the five P’s” (people, places, policies, procedures, and processes.) Rather than an incidental or haphazard management of these entities, the invitational stance is one of deliberate action based on trust, respect, and optimism.

One of the most direct linkages between invitational theory and the Buddhist perspective of the mind is that each of us needs to be helpful to others. In short, one must attend to establishing and maintaining one’s own health before helping others. Thus in invitational theory being professionally and personally inviting to oneself is a co-requisite to being professionally and personally inviting to others.

Invitational theory owes much to the groundwork laid out in self concept theory where ideas held about oneself have a profound influence on the ideas and conclusions one has about the world and how it should be engaged (Novak, 1981; Purkey & Novak, 1996). Ideas about self are thought to relate perceptually to ideas about the world surrounding the individual. In Invitational Education, it is argued that the perceptions of the individual create the reality he or she will assume is true and real and will act in accordance with those beliefs. Denying the perceptual reality of another isn’t likely to bring benefits.

Invitational learning places great emphasis in ameliorating the environment to create positive conditions for learning and happiness. Both inviting theory and Buddhist psychology place great emphasis

on adding to the goodness of the world and avoiding any harm. However, there is a significant difference: In the Buddhist perspective, living an ethical and helpful life is not likely to affect the happiness of others.

Figure 1.

<p><b>Four Noble Truths</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suffering exists</li> <li>2. Suffering is caused by attachment</li> <li>3. Suffering ceases when attachment ceases</li> <li>4. Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path</li> </ol>	<p><b>Eightfold Path</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Right View</li> <li>Right Thought</li> <li>Right Speech</li> <li>Right Action</li> <li>Right Livelihood</li> <li>Right Effort</li> <li>Right Mindfulness</li> <li>Right Concentration</li> </ul>	<p><b>Three Qualities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wisdom (panna)</li> <li>Morality (sila)</li> <li>Meditation (samadhi)</li> </ul>										
<p><b>Three Characteristics of Existence</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Impermanence (anicca)</li> <li>2. Sorrow (dukkha)</li> <li>3. Selflessness (anatta)</li> </ol>	<p><b>Things that hinder and restrict freedom</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-delusion</li> <li>2. Doubt</li> <li>3. Clinging to ritual</li> <li>4. Sensuous lust</li> <li>5. Ill will</li> <li>6. Greed for material existence</li> <li>7. Greed for immaterial existence</li> <li>8. Conceit</li> <li>9. Restlessness</li> <li>10. Ignorance</li> </ol>											
<p><b>Friends to Freedom</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loving kindness</li> <li>2. Compassion</li> <li>3. Sympathetic joy</li> <li>4. Equanimity</li> </ol>	<p><b>The Five Precepts</b></p> <p>I undertake the training of precept of refraining from...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. harming living beings by practicing loving kindness</li> <li>2. taking the non-given by practicing generosity</li> <li>3. committing sexual misconduct by practicing contentment</li> <li>4. false speech by practicing truthfulness</li> <li>5. intoxicants by practicing mindfulness</li> </ol>											
<p><b>The Ten Perfections</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>1. Generosity (dana)</td> <td>6. Patience (khanti)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2. Morality (sila)</td> <td>7. Truthfulness (sacca)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3. Renunciation (nekkhamma)</td> <td>8. Resolution (adhitthana)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4. Wisdom (panna)</td> <td>9. Loving kindness (metta)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5. Energy (viriyā)</td> <td>10. Equanimity (upekkha)</td> </tr> </table> <p><b>Apparent Truths</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Everyone must die...</li> <li>2. The remainder of our life span is decreasing continually.</li> <li>3. Death will come regardless of whether or not we have made time to practice the dharma.</li> <li>4. Human life expectancy is uncertain</li> <li>5. There are many causes of death.</li> <li>6. The human body is very fragile.</li> <li>7. Our wealth cannot help us.</li> <li>8. Our loved ones cannot help.</li> <li>9. Our body cannot help.</li> </ol>			1. Generosity (dana)	6. Patience (khanti)	2. Morality (sila)	7. Truthfulness (sacca)	3. Renunciation (nekkhamma)	8. Resolution (adhitthana)	4. Wisdom (panna)	9. Loving kindness (metta)	5. Energy (viriyā)	10. Equanimity (upekkha)
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Each person's happiness is self-determined. The following Buddhist teaching illustrates

*In some way, invitational theory wants to cover the world with leather. That is, the world should be made a better place for each and every one of us. Buddhist psychology tends to be more specific and pragmatic on this point: Deal with the here-and-now of one's own feet. Once that is done, help others do the same.*

In Invitational Education all individuals have value and are valuable. One individual is not put on earth to serve another. Instead, all are considered equal in their pursuit of the happy and satisfying life. The centrality of the value of the individual also is reflected in Buddhist psychology where each individual contains "Buddha nature" or the potential for consummate kindness and wisdom. The unlimited potential of each individual for goodness is an inviolable principle.

Invitational Education places great importance on the development of skills that assist the individual in understanding self and developing appropriate strategies, actions, and understandings of the world. This perspective is a product of the western viewpoint owing much to the ideas of William James (consciousness), George Herbert Mead (social nature of perception), Art Combs and Donald Snygg (perceptual psychology), Carl Rogers' (becoming), and Albert Bandura (social cognitive theory) and should be familiar. (Purkey & Siegel, 2003) If reading from the western point of view,

invitational theory is a natural progression of viewing self as an individual, complete, enduring, and sufficient in its own right. Invitational theory extends the individuality of self to include consideration of the perceptions and interpretations of self as being a form of reality, at least to the individual holding them. In contrast, Buddhists do not doubt the apparent nature of an individual self, but counter that this self exists only in relative reality and is a delusion blocking our understanding of ultimate reality; a reality where there is no permanent unchanging self. The basics of Buddhist conceptualizations of the mind differ from most of the west on this point. The view of "no self" is usually unfamiliar in the west and frequently is viewed as paradoxical and difficult to understand. It is sufficient for our present purpose; however, to point out that the western view of an independent self can be logically and rationally challenged.

### **The Perspective from Buddhist Psychology**

Most readers will be familiar with Buddhism as a religion and may find the current view of Buddhism as a psychology to be confusing. Various scholars, both east and west, study Buddhism from various perspectives including religion, ethics, logic, and psychology. (Mon, 1995; Thera, 1976; Tsering, 2006) There are a number of reasons for viewing Buddhism from various perspectives although each method has limitations. For example, viewing Buddhism as a religion is difficult in that Buddhism has

no god, no cosmology, and discourages faith while demanding active use of reason. The Buddhist dependence on reason, practice, observation, and outcomes more closely matches western psychology than religion. Reason is central to Buddhist thought but only has value if it is used to direct practice. In establishing day-to-day practice, all things in Buddhist thought are subject to question and, indeed, if not questioned, then perpetual happiness and the accompanying enlightenment cannot be obtained.

The distrust of faith and the dependence on reason is illustrated best by the Kalama Sutra, a teaching by the Buddha encouraging questioning and doubt. He admonishes his students not to believe in anything simply because it has been said. He cautioned not to believe in traditions, the teaching of elders, or the authority of teachers without subjecting them to intense questioning and thought. Only when these lessons agree with reason and after observation and analysis are found to be conducive to the good and the benefit of all is a teaching to be accepted and practiced.

Knowledge is important but only insofar as it remains practical and guides practice. Any benefit in following a Buddhist path comes from the practice of being a caring and kind person. The Buddha historically rejected speculation about such matters as God, the nature of the universe, and the afterlife (Hagen, 1997; Rahula, 1959; Trainor, 2001) where the nature of the problem limits the utility of knowledge and reason. Buddha instead urged his followers to focus on the Four Noble Truths (see Table 1) by which they can free themselves from suffering.

As psychology, Buddhism employs reason applied to the study of apparent reality, that is, that which is around and inside us, which in turn leads us to understand the more subtle ultimate or true reality. The first conclusion of reason applied to reality is undisputed observation that no matter whom one is, what one has, where one lives...everyone is subject to suffering. Everyone get sick, gets old, and eventually dies. This “unsatisfactoriness” of life (*dukkha*) is first of three basic facts of existence. The second is impermanence (*annica*) of all material things. The third is the complex concept of “no self” previously mentioned. This is the fact of egolessness (*anatta*), or the lack of an eternal, unchanging, and independent self. *Anatta* is a challenging concept, particularly from the west. In brief, “no self” means the self is ever-changing and dependent upon the conditions of the moment. An unchanging, permanent, and fixed self does not exist. *Anatta* is controversial yet its unique perspective has a potential contribution to invitational learning discussed later in this paper.

In Buddhist psychology the primary purpose of life is to be happy and end suffering. Although the pain of existence may be external, suffering, however, is internal; suffering exists only in the mind. The Buddha taught that humans suffer because we continually strive after things that do not give lasting happiness. We desperately try to hold on to things...friends, health, material things...that do not last, and cannot last. All things change and are impermanent. Attaching oneself to a specific view of how things “ought to be” is the cause of sorrow.

To try to provide the apparent self with the things and activities it desires for pleasure is condemned at the outset as an approach to

happiness. This process only creates the desire for “more” and obtaining “more” only

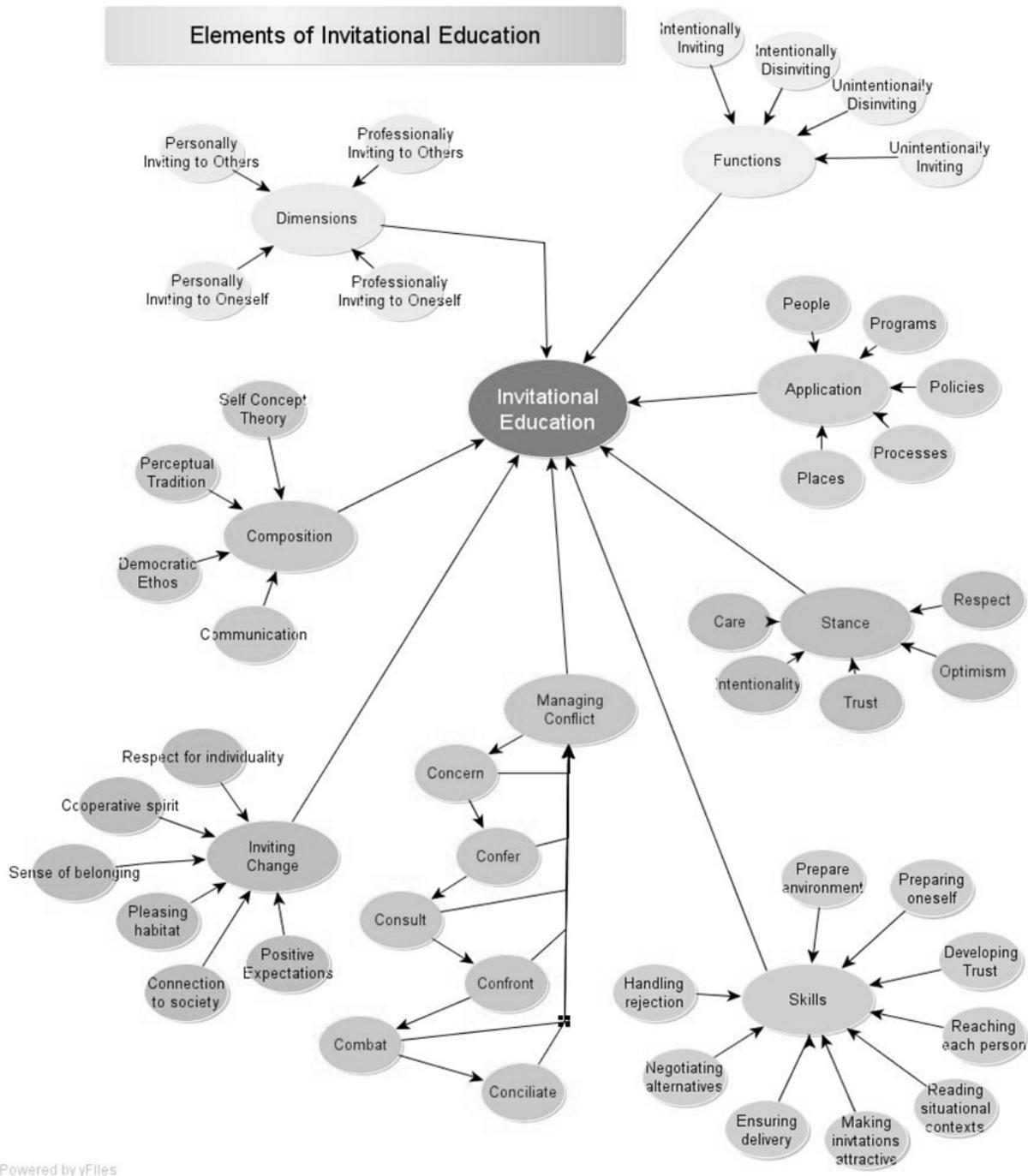


Figure 1. Elements of Invitational Education.

results in more suffering when these things pass. Freeing oneself from attachment to specific views, desires, or things is the avenue to the highest happiness. This is perhaps the premiere psychological challenge: Detaching from things, both material and ideas, lessens suffering.

### **The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path**

The psychological outlook of Buddhism is formed by four progressive premises described above and collectively are known as The Four Noble Truths:

1. All of life is marked by suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by desire and attachment.
3. Suffering can be stopped.
4. There is a way to end suffering.

According to the Fourth Noble Truth, one can permanently escape suffering by following eight basic ethical principles known as The Eightfold Path. Basic Buddhist principles are not typically well understood in the west and therefore a brief introduction is provided here to ground the comparison to invitational learning. The following is a compilation from Bhikku (1997; Gnanarama (2000), Hagen (1997), Rahula (1959), Thera (1976), and Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) and reference to any one of these sources will provide a comprehensive and comprehensible introduction. The Eightfold Path is rich in teachings, theory, practice, and pragmatic strategies that offer a rich source of thought for invitational theory.

1. Right Understanding refers to the study and understanding of the existence, creation, and cessation of suffering.
2. Right Determination requires the individual to give up what is wrong and evil; to undertake what is good; and to abandon thoughts that have to do with bringing suffering to any conscious being. In general one's duty is to cultivate thoughts and acts of loving kindness by attending to others' suffering and sharing a sympathetic joy in the happiness of others.
3. Right Speech outlines appropriate ways of communicating with others. It includes abstaining from deceiving others; avoiding talk that brings harm, embarrassment, or hurt to others; and abstaining from harsh, rude, impolite, malicious or abusive language.
4. Right Action requires abstinence from taking life, theft, and misappropriation. Right action is peaceful, honorable conduct; abstaining from dishonest dealings; and fostering what is good. In short, doing things that alleviate suffering while avoiding things that create suffering.
5. Right Livelihood encourages work that does not cause harm to people, animals, or the environment.
6. Right Effort is preventing "the arising of unwholesome thoughts that have not yet risen, to abandon unwholesome thoughts that have already risen; to develop wholesome thoughts that have not yet arisen; and to maintain wholesome thoughts that have already arisen." (Gnanarama, 2000, p. 87).

7. Right Mindfulness consists of being in the “here-and-now,” not “adding” interpretations to the experiences, and avoiding judgments (that is, place on the experience attachments to what “should” or “ought” to be.) Mindfulness, however, is somewhat complex to encapsulate in a summary, yet may have the greatest contribution to invitational practice. My personal example of experiencing mindfulness is the experience of reclining on a grassy lawn on a spring day feeling the sun on my skin, smelling the crispness of the air tinged with the smells of spring; hearing the sounds of wind and bird. I do not think, “the sun is hot; the birds are singing; the air is sweet” or “it is three o’clock and 74 degrees; the bird songs are from mating magpies, and the air quality index is ‘moderate’.” Rather I just experience it without processing it in any way. In fact, I don’t even think, “This is pleasant; I like this.” Rather I just experience the moment.
8. Right Concentration is the state of thought where the mind is disciplined and focused only on the intended object. While mindfulness includes awareness of all experiences, right concentration excludes attention except to the thing intended. The most familiar form of right concentration combined with mindfulness is *anapanasati* meditation where the meditator sits cross-legged in a lotus position and concentrates on the process of breathing in and breathing out. There are many other types of meditations, some done while walking, or sitting, or doing work. A general

understanding of right concentration would be the state of mind where the other seven of the eightfold path are practiced, in invitational terms, with intentionality.

### **Invitations, Self Concept, and Anatta**

William Purkey, one of the founders of inviting theory, demonstrates self-concept as a spiral. In the very center is the “I” which is the very essence of who we are. Along the spiral at various distances from the “I” are circles which represent circles of existence. These he calls “Me’s”. There are many “Me’s” such as scholar, father, friend, basketball player, and so on. Not all of these “Me’s” are as important to the “I” as others. These “Me’s” are a relational existence; that is, these “Me’s” are dependent upon the situations, the context, and others involved. Yet, it is evident that the “Me” isn’t the “I”.

Both invitational theory and Buddhist psychology have elements of dependent selves and both generally agree that these “Me’s” are more of an illusion of reality rather than representative of one’s total being. At question is the nature of the total being. In Buddhist psychology the central “I” is not an individual; rather, once one understands the central “I” is understood it fades as awareness of the unity of all things becomes apparent.

This is a wide deviation from invitational theory. We are familiar with the Decartian proof of existence commonly translated, somewhat inaccurately, as “I think therefore I am.” From the Buddhist psychological perspective, the saying would be “I think therefore I am deluded.” As introduced

earlier, the primary delusion is that of the “I” or independent self. While the substance of the “I” differs greatly from invitational theory and Buddhist psychology, the substance of the “Me’s” are quite similar. The key to the use of the “Me’s” is to help self and other’s realize the transitory and relational nature of existence.

As an exercise, try imagining yourself from the beginning of your existence to the present moment as existing in a space that contains nothing; no light, heat, matter, sound, thing, bird, fish, or fowl...absolutely nothing. If you are like most, such an existence is not conceivable; we exist in a world where other things exist therefore our concept of existence (feeling, smelling, touching, communicating, etc.) is in *relationship* with other people and other things. Your existence is conceived in relationship to the other; existence of the “I” is *dependent* on something else, “the other.”

Whether or not the final “I” is relational and changing as are the “Me’s” is a matter for each individual to determine. What both invitational theory and Buddhist psychology have to offer us, however, is that they demonstrate that we tend to identify ourselves only in relationships to external things. We are tall or short only in relationship to a comparison to other people. We are hot only in relationship to our experiences of being cooler. Everything we *think* is in relationship to something else. Our existence is composed totally as one relationship or another. But this need not be the case. We do not need to be trapped by our environment.

*Anatta* is obviously in conflict with self-concept theory and is very difficult for those reared in a culture of individualism to understand and accept. However, the comparison between inviting theory’s “I” and *anatta* is worth the effort regardless of one’s conclusion as to the validity of either position. By examining these commonalities and differences, we can gain a great deal of insight into the relationship of “self” to “other” and possibly to a number of hypotheses that potentially can advance invitational theory.

One of the more instructive hypotheses that can be constructed by unifying the two views addresses the role of invitations in developing self concept, the type of communication that would compose the most effective invitation, and how students can be taught to be inviting to themselves as opposed to being dependent upon an environment structured by others.

According to invitational theory, self is primarily conceived in terms of messages received from others and the environment. “Blue” or positive messages and experiences enhance the value of self while “orange” or negative messages and experiences detract from self. In invitational theory, the caregiver or helping professional is to provide an environment with an ever increasing number of blue cards (positive experiences). In the Buddhist perspective, the provision of inviting theory to provide more messages to counter negative ones and attempting to flood the students’ environment with only the positive would be right action and right effort. However, at best, these efforts are only temporary,

ephemeral, and will not have an enduring presence in the long term.

Buddhist psychology would suggest a more substantive way by providing instruction in “seeing things as they are” and recognizing that the momentary perceptions are only comparative. In short, they are just thoughts and as such, can be set aside with mental discipline. In short, blue cards as well as orange cards are only thoughts. We can learn to set them aside. This “setting aside” of thoughts and seeing things as they are paves the way to self understanding as opposed to relying on encouragement of others.

Providing a plethora of blue cards to students who are experiencing hardship, we only encourage more and more *attachment* to blue cards and *aversion* to orange cards and run the risk of communicating that happiness is a collection of joyous moments, strung together by interactions with a cooperative and nurturing environment.

Buddhist psychology would suggest that heaping ever increasing amounts of pleasurable sensation on a self that can never be satisfied is futile. The self will only want more, crave more, and demand more pleasure for the future. This process, ironically, results in suffering since ultimately, the very nature of life cannot provide pleasure endlessly. Also, since all things are impermanent, the blue cards must come to an end sometime. Hence, ultimately the sending of blue cards results in *samara*, or the process of suffering: wanting more and more, never being satisfied, and at the same time growing older, getting sick, and eventually passing from this earth.

The Buddhist psychological solution can be instructive: Messages, be they blue or orange, are just messages. Messages are nothing more and nothing less than thoughts. Thoughts are mental formations and as such can be controlled by us. A negative message is negative because, using invitation theory’s language, our *perception and interpretation* gives them their orange cast. If we can see messages as they truly are (for example, an attempt to demean an accomplishment as a result of unproductive envy), accept them for what they are (the unhappiness of another), then we will be saved suffering.

An example of “seeing things as they are” is found in Haim Ginott’s (Ginott & Goddard, 2003) *Parent and Child* when he discusses communication strategies parents use with children. When the child comes home and complains, “The teacher hates me; she thinks I’m stupid,” Ginott would have us see the comment for what it is. The congruent response is, “You’re upset because the teacher said things you didn’t like.” The teacher said something. The child did not like it. The child is upset. While the comment does not remove the teacher’s words and acts nor the hurt they cause, it does convey to the child that someone understands and cares. It also clearly states “what is” without misleading interpretations.

Ginott argues that the child will find solace and will be better able to deal with his or her feelings of the actual event if given support to see the experience for what it is, not for what emotion can make of it. Attempting to tell the child the teacher isn’t mean is confrontational to the child and adds to suffering. To counter with an assertion, “I

think you are smart” only perpetuates the child’s dependence of the perceptions of others. Trying to analyze the event while the child is angry or hurt will not work because the child’s emotional state is not conducive to rational analysis. Giving the child compliments to “override” the teacher’s comments only contributes to the child’s need for external validation or, in Buddhist’s words, more craving. “Seeing things for what they are” is a skill of infinite utility and should be considered as an alternative to “sending blue.” “Seeing things as they are” is known as mindfulness and is of critical importance in maturity, and assists each of us in forming a view of self based not on the views of others, but on our own thoughts and actions. “Seeing things for what they are, ” or mindfulness also has contributions to other areas of inviting theory such as the employment of the perceptual tradition.

### **The Perceptual Tradition and Mindfulness**

Another conceptual modification that might advance invitational theory comes from comparing invitational learning’s perceptual tradition and the Buddhist psychology’s mindfulness training. The perceptual tradition plays a large role in invitational theory. Purkey and Siegel (2003) write:

*The perceptual tradition is a way of understanding human behavior that includes all the ways we as humans are viewed as we normally view ourselves. The term perceptual refers not only to the senses but also to meanings--the personal significance of an event for the person experiences it. These meanings*

*extend far beyond sensory receptors to include such personal experiences as feelings, desires, aspirations, hopes, as well as opinions about ourselves, others, and the world (p.27).*

Inviting theory argues that “we are conscious agents in the process of our own development.” (Purkey & Siegel, 2003, p. 27) In this view of the perceptual process, perception includes all that we experience, interpret, construct, decide, and act. This is in contrast to Buddhist psychology where perception is but only one of several processes involved in interacting with the other. For example, prior to perception there is consciousness, that is, a state where information can be received. Then there is awareness, a state where the information is experienced and is actually incorporated. Awareness does not interpret, it is simply the function of mind that prepares us to receive information. It is, at least in part, a precognitive function. Note that without consciousness and awareness any event in the environment is a “non-event” to the individual in that without consciousness and awareness, no perception could occur.

Third in the string would be perception where the mind writes a transcript of the attributes of the event that the mind can engage. In Buddhist psychology, perception, like awareness, does not interpret; rather it is like a recording of the external event converted to a vehicle the mind can encounter. Interpretations, such as overlaying concepts or labels, establishing meaning, relating this to that, and so on, are to be avoided at this stage. Avoiding

“overlaying” meaning is a practice of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a critical element in Buddhist psychology in that it is our interpretations that distort reality and overlay attributes that are not there when we are mindful. These interpretations and judgments of how we feel things *ought to be* give rise to suffering: In our quest to understand, to attach to those sensations, we apply meanings and interpretations that ultimately are not the thing itself and leads to delusion which, in turn, leads to unsatisfactoriness. We have attached meanings to things that do not have that meaning and we cling to those meanings as if they are real. This misinterpretation of things gives rise to confusion, disappointment, inappropriate expectations, and a whole host of states that bring on disquiet and suffering.

Invitational theory is in stark contrast at this point with Buddhist psychology. In invitational theory “Behavior is understood as a product of the way we see ourselves and the situations in which we find ourselves.” (Purkey & Siegel, 2003) Perception includes the interpretations, generalizations, and reference to the image of self. Buddhist psychology would not contest that individuals perform in this manner. The Buddhist view would simply counter that making life’s decisions in such a manner gives rise to suffering. Attaching meaning to past events and hanging on to those interpretations of events to relate to future ones simply compounds the attachment. We begin to interpret events and ideas as we believe things *ought to be* instead of the way things are. The key element to keep in mind

is to avoid unneeded judgments and endeavor to practice mindfulness in order to try to see things as they.

An example might help here: Consider the event presented earlier of the child coming home from school angry at the teacher. We need to seriously consider if the anger is caused by the actions of the teacher or is the anger caused by the interpretation of the child? Invitational theory proponents would more frequently view the teacher as the culprit for sending the negative message. Those employing the perspectives of Buddhist psychology would say the suffering is caused by the student. The cause, however, would not be in the poor study habits per se, it is because the student has added so many interpretations and expectations to the event. The Buddhist view would find both the teacher’s talk and the student’s unsuccessful study habits regrettable, and teacher and student should consider the consequences and alternatives. However, the student’s anguish and suffering is caused by the student because of a lack of mindfulness.

In mindfulness, we experience the thing but we do not add or take away by interpretation. Typical of this type of event, the unmindful child would think, “The teacher was mean to me. She said I wasn’t smart enough to do the work without studying. And I studied, I did...a whole hour. I know it was an hour because I watched a Star Trek episode. She says I can’t do it, I’m dumb.” The child’s thinking is consistent with the perceptual tradition in that the meanings and interpretation have a life of their own. If we, as helpers, choose to

focus on the acts of the teacher it does not ease the child's suffering. Perhaps action on our part may prevent such acts in the future; perhaps not. Perhaps the teacher was too blunt and to the point, but if she was accurate, what then?

If we focus primarily on changing the environment to foster changes in student activity, we would probably work in two areas: changing the speech patterns of the teacher and changing the study habits of the child. These are, of course, both reasonable strategies and fit the Eightfold Path well. However, neither will ease the student's current suffering. However, if we add mindfulness to the equation, we would work on helping the child see things without addition. The child's thoughts might be different: "The work I did was not acceptable to the teacher. She feels I do not make adequate effort. I think I made adequate effort but I did share my study time with television watching. I did not like today's class because my work was rejected by the teacher." This type of mindful thinking can prove very helpful to each of us. By not adding interpretations, not including an image of how I see myself, not imposing a moral judgment of "right or wrong" on the situation, we can see things more clearly and as a result, the course of action to less suffering is much easier to discern. In fact, by not clinging to the notions about the self ("I'm smart enough to do my homework and watch TV at the same time") and of others ("You cannot say things to me that I do not like") much suffering is averted.

There is nothing in invitational theory that would contradict the veracity of mindfulness and making students aware of distorted messages. However, if mindfulness were a major tenet of invitational theory, there would be much less focus on altering the environment, sending invitations, and otherwise attempting to make the external environment "satisfactory" to each individual. Much of this effort would be on providing teachings assisting the individual to be mindful or "to see things as they are." However, this formula is analogous to our earlier reference to the rules of weight loss. Just because it will help does not mean they are willing to employ it. Do we enjoy our misery too much?

One of the difficult parts of perception is the experience of the pain of hurt feelings, disappointment, anxiety, and other emotional states that cause suffering. "The first step to destroy such suffering is to accept the reality of it, not as blind faith but as a fact of existence that one realizes through careful examination and investigation" (Abeysekera, 2002, p. 147). Buddhists do not attempt to gloss over this hurt. Instead, it is to be examined and studied. Even so, continued work on mindfulness and experiencing things as they are continues: "...everything within the Buddhist canon is meant to help us relieve suffering and achieve happiness, and that only happens through the mind. Medicine can cure the body, but that in itself cannot make us happy." (Tsering, 2006, p. 1).

### **Conclusion**

While a belief in continual examination of our values is a natural conclusion reached by

reason from the tenets espoused by each viewpoint, it is actually rare in society. At large, great effort is exerted for individuals to conform in all types of social organizations...from family units, to schools, to the workplace, and even nations to have the “right” view where “right” is provided prepackaged and not subject to inquiry. Both invitational education and Buddhism reject this imposed believing outright. The individual is sacrosanct.

*Rather than relying on one program, one policy, or one process, Invitational Education addresses the total zeitgeist, the spirit within a school. It has a wider focus of application than traditional efforts to make schools safe. It is concerned with more than grades, attendance, academic achievement, discipline, test scores, and even student self-esteem. It is concerned with the skills of becoming a decent and productive citizen in a democratic society (Purkey, 2009)*

*An invitation is not a sugar-coated demand. It is a cordial summons to consider something beneficial for acceptance or rejection. True commitment cannot be forced, only volunteered...Ends do not justify the means. (Purkey & Siegel, 2003, p. 11)*

One important similarity between Invitational Education and Buddhism is the respect given to the independence of thought of each individual. No coercion or enforcement may be used in the teaching of Buddhist views of mind and thought. In sending invitations we must use the right action and right effort. Inviting theory calls this being inviting to oneself. Indeed, although each of us is filled with shortcomings, each perspective wishes us to be gentle to others, but also to be gentle to ourselves. “Knowing that the only person one can change is oneself, should we not then be spending more time where we can have some effect? We know now where we must concentrate. We must eradicate greed, hate, and delusion.” (Abeysekera, 2002, p. 159).

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