Special Edition: Buddhist Critical Thinking Skills

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Edited by Dr. Dion Peoples
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Editor’s Comment:

This special edition of the Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities is on a specialized theme of Buddhist critical thinking skills, or perhaps more easily consumed as Buddhist analytical thinking. This journal was created because there was some trouble over the proper title of this work. An academic-colleague reported to me, that someone errantly translated the terminology into the Thai-language, as: “Buddhist Aggressive Thinking” – casting a large and dark shadow over this endeavor. Time and again, I had to battle with university administrators over the true intention of the work. The international community seemed to have little trouble over the material. Buddhism should be emerging from its dark cloud. This journal is one small step out from the shade of normal methods. We hope, as the International Association of Buddhist Universities, that people will appreciate this small step. Here is what I see directly in front of me in the office if I look up and across the room:

As the Manager of the IABU, I literally ‘face’ these challenges every day, even to the point of losing my job as a lecturer in the International Masters of Arts Program for teaching Buddhist Critical Thinking Skills, in the Selected Topics in Buddhist Scriptures course. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University is only one of nearly one-hundred member universities, but still is plagued with conservatism, despite being the headquarters, as the host for the IABU Secretariat. Conservative-minded students and program officials were not ready for progressive Buddhist teachings, all of which are found in the Tipitaka and other important works. We hope, one day, Buddhism will return to the prominent position it once held, being world-renown as a system of wisdom; today it is only known or celebrated as a tradition of loving-kindness and compassion.

The IABU is proud to offer this special edition of the Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities, Vol. IV, as an on-line edition. There were about thirty submissions for the journal, and only these ten were selected for publication. Please read, study and enjoy the offerings, and if there is any questions over some content by any author, please feel free to contact me, and I will forward your questions.

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Learning and Interdependence: Towards a Buddhism-inspired Theory of Learning

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Introduction

Do theories of learning have universal import such that they should be applicable in all cultural contexts? The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, theories of learning originally conceived in one culture can be adopted by others. This is a common occurrence. On the other hand, this does not mean that there is one universally valid theory, since any theory is adopted only because they are responding to the needs and goals that vary according to circumstances. The paper suggests a proposal based on the teachings of Buddhism as to why this is the case.

Globalization has spread its effects and impacts to almost all corners of the globe; this also includes how teaching and learning are conducted. As countries and cultures are interacting with one another intensively, they become aware of what others are doing and this can have profound effects on how each country or cultural region undertakes its ways of doing things and its practices. This interaction leads to countries feeling that they need to compete with one another: once certain practices arise in one culture, which are found to be advantageous by others, then it is quite certain that the other cultures will adopt them. These practices also include how education, especially the practice of students are being taught and how they learn, is conducted. Globalization has led to many countries around the world sharing its ways of how teaching and learning are performed.

However, this sharing of practices has its own set of problems. The logic of globalization seems to indicate, ideally: everywhere in the world should be homogeneous, having the same texture and the same features; but, that does not seem to be the case in practice. There have been apparent conflicts when certain educational practices from one place are adopted for use in another. It is often mentioned that the learning style of Asian countries is not suitable for producing critical minded students who dare to question authorities, or students who are creative and innovative. Rote learning has been blamed for this apparent lack in critical and creative thinking. On the other hand, we find US President Barack Obama extolling the virtues of the Asian style of learning, which led to their rapid economic growth (Nussbaum 2010). It is interesting to see how these different viewpoints on the Asian way of learning arise in the first place.

The contention of this paper is that culture is essentially involved in how teaching and learning are performed. Perhaps this is not surprising at all, but often discussions about theories of teaching and learning overlook cultural issues all together, proceeding as if students can be taught the same way no matter if they are in Singapore, Jordan or Bolivia. As culture is the total sum of beliefs and practices that inform a group of people in a society or a community such that the group becomes distinctive, there is no escaping the fact that culture is essentially involved in everything we do. What is at issue, then, is whether there is a universally true learning theory, such as it is applicable everywhere, or must learning theories forever be adapted to each particular community wherein they are going to be used in real classrooms.

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The answer to these questions is both yes and no. On the one hand, teaching and learning theories do retain some universal characteristics. This is the reason why we can study these theories across cultures and national boundaries, and why we scholars can communicate with one another in the numerous international conferences taking place all over the globe. However, on the other hand there seems to be obvious cases where there are problems of using a theory that has been developed in one culture in another one. A middle approach will be offered which neither falls into the trap of relativism (the view that each particular locality has its own valid ways of thinking and doing simply because they are being practiced in one place), or absolutism (the view that there is only one set of beliefs and practices that is valid across the globe regardless of cultural differences).

More specifically, the questions for the paper are: Does a theory of how teaching and learning should be done have a universal import, such that it is applicable anywhere in the world? Does it have only local applicability, and needs to be radically adapted if it is to be of use in a new cultural context from the one where it is first conceived? These are very complex questions, which do not admit themselves of easy answers. Nonetheless, I intend to provide some tentative answers to these questions in this paper. I will argue that insights obtained from Buddhism could illuminate this question such that a way out of the impasse between relativism and absolutism can be found. The impasse occurs when a dilemma arises between the need for cultures in the globalized world to interact and to get along with one another on the one hand, and the need for these cultures to maintain their own identities and sensitivities to local contexts on the other. In the context of teaching and learning, this plays itself out in terms of conflicts between what is believed to be universal learning theories and particular ones based on local traditions and cultures. An example might be that a learning theory adopted from the West, such as one emphasizing free exploration of ideas and content rather than strict transmission of received knowledge, could face problems arising from cultural conflict when it is adapted in Asia, where transmission of knowledge and information handed down through textbooks and the earlier generations appear to be the norm. This does not have to mean that the West is all about free exploration and the East is all about transmission, but the stereotype at least helps us see our problematic more clearly, which is how theories in education are always bound to local cultures and local contexts.

The dilemma is, then, only an apparent one created by a presupposition that cultures are static entities that exist in their own right. Viewed in this way, cultures become much like a substantive thing with clear boundaries and an ‘essence’ that defines it as what it is in contrast to other cultures. Once it is perceived in this way, it becomes difficult to see how cultures could interact with one another, giving and taking ideas, goods, beliefs, and practices from one another, something which cultures have actually been doing since time immemorial. The felt need to maintain cultural identity thus stems from the belief that there is something substantial or essential about a culture such that the substance or the essence here should remain in the midst of the exchanges that cultures are undergoing. It is, nonetheless, very difficult to state precisely what that essence of a culture is. More plausible is it to say that cultures are fluid and the boundaries between them much more porous.

The force of globalization of cultures has strongly highlighted this problem. A reason why many fear the threat of globalization is that it appears to threaten cultures. However, those who fear the threat of globalization have a point. They do not only fear globalization per se, but what they worry about is that the world itself could become homogeneous in such a way that cultural differences cease to matter altogether. For them the whole world would be much more impoverished. It seems that we cherish cultural differences and cultural identities, but we also enjoy the fruits of globalization too.
The proposal offered in this paper aims firstly at deconstructing the boundaries between cultures. This does not mean that cultures cease to matter, but it means that cultural identities and cultural differences are themselves cultural constructs and do not exist objectively on their own. Then, I will look at the very identity of a culture through a more pragmatic outlook. That is, instead of viewing cultures as static, one should look at cultures as serving purposes at hand. For example, when the matter concerns interaction and sharing among a smaller group of people who live together and are already sharing a lot of background information with one another, the culture that emerges can be an intimate one. Here one could say that the identity of this particular culture depends on the level of interaction and sharing among the participants. However, when the interaction is extended, as is the case when people from faraway places do meet and communicate with one another, there emerges another kind of culture which does not require much background information. This is known as the ‘thick’ and the ‘thin’ versions of culture respectively (Hongladarom 1999). Furthermore, when the interaction of these levels take place on a very intensive scale, such as what is now happening on the Internet today, the very distinction between the thick and the thin appears to be collapsing (Hongladarom 2008).

All this merging of boundaries and so on illustrates the Buddhist viewpoint of the interdependence of all things. The basic idea is that a thing is not what it is essentially, but is a result of some interplay and interaction among various factors. This is also the case for cultures and anything else. The implication for a theory of learning, and of leadership, is that one should recognize that learning always takes place within a context. Thus one needs to factor in contextual information as needed for the objectives of the learning at a particular moment and locality into consideration. This does not imply that there can be no universal theory of learning. What has been thought up systematically in one place can always be relevant in another. It only needs to be adapted as actual needs arise.

**Two Cultures:**

According to some viewpoints, many of the differences between the East and the West that we see today are in fact expressions of the differences between tradition and modernity. To those who subscribe to this view, the West embodies what is modern; and what is distinctive about Asian or other non-western cultures are characteristics of pre-modern or traditional cultures, such that when Asian cultures become modernized, they will eventually be like Western ones. What is distinctive about the West in the discussions on cross-cultural practices is in fact what is distinctive about modernity, and when the East has become thoroughly modern, then they will become indistinguishable from the West in beliefs and practices.

This view, however, has been under attack on various fronts. There are actually many traits that distinguish Western culture from modern culture, even though the former is thoroughly modern. Many have shown that Asian or other non-western cultures can maintain their identities even when they have become ultramodern. Japan has become perhaps the very epitome of modernity, but no one can deny that Japan has largely maintained its own distinctive culture which separates it from other cultures in Europe and North America. Furthermore, when one looks more deeply at the West itself, one also finds many differences between, say, Europe and the US in many ways. To illustrate some of the cultural differences between Japan and the West, one finds that in Japan people are more reluctant to accept that patients who are totally brain dead are really dead physiologically. For many Japanese, the notion of a patient whose body is still warm and breathing (even with the help of a ventilator) who is really dead is very hard to accept. On the contrary, the notion is rather widely accepted in the West so much as that it has
become a norm (LaFleur 2002; Nudeshima 1991; Picken 1977). Moreover, it appears to be easier for a typical Japanese to accept the development of human-like robots who are able to speak and play with us than a typical Westerner. This is perhaps due to the fact that Westerners are brought up in the Christian culture which gives a special prominence to human beings as images of God (Kaplan 2004; Bartneck, Suzuki, Kanda, and Nomura 2006). Furthermore, there are many marked differences between the cultures of the US and Europe. Dan Burk (2007), for example, has pointed out that the primary ethical theoretical framework in the US is utilitarianism and consequentialism, whereas in Europe the deontology theory emphasizing absolute rights seem to be preferred.

All these show that modernity and the West are not synonymous. The upshot is that the East can become modern without being identical to the West; thus one can devise a theory on learning and teaching which is modern and non-western, retaining distinctive characteristics of one’s own cultural tradition. It also shows that concepts such as modernity, Eastern and Western cultures, and so on are only constructs (Hongladarom 2001). They do not exist in objectivity; instead, they appear to exist as a result of our conceptual apparatus that defines them. That these concepts cannot be defined precisely is due to the fact that our conceptual apparatus has not given precise definitions to them. As a result we can recognize these concepts in paradigmatic cases, but when we focus on gray areas then it becomes difficult to say whether these instances belong to which concept.

In an article on “Asian Learning Culture,” Benjamin Vogler (2006) presents a useful comparison of learning cultures in the East and West. While he presents what many in the educational circle have already understood to be stereotypical conception of the two learning styles, his presentation clearly captures and highlights the differences between the two. The following table sums up these differences in the two cultures of learning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWO MODELS OF EDUCATION: East and West (Vogler, 2006)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Germany (Western countries)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Techniques of independent learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>Combination of theory and practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discourse/controversy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion (polarization)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of objects, texts</td>
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<td>Making comparisons (differences)</td>
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<td>Experimenting</td>
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<td>Detecting problems</td>
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<td>Work-sharing</td>
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<td>Criticizing</td>
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<td>Transformation</td>
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<td>Learning is thinking</td>
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<td>Active/Expertise</td>
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The dichotomy between the two cultures is clearly presented. The East, according to this picture, emphasizes rote learning or “techniques of memorization,” which means that one learns by heart the received text with the expectation that one understands its meaning later on (the usual conception of rote learning as mere parroting is actually a misunderstanding); the West, on the other hand, emphasizes “techniques of independent learning,” meaning that one does the study on one’s own through one’s interaction with the text and with the teacher’s commentary. Here the understanding is supposed to occur at about the same time as the reception of the text. Another popular perception of the differences between two styles concerns the relation between the teacher and the student. It is well known, stereotypically, students in the East are much deferential toward the teacher and questioning the authority of the teacher is almost non-existent. In the West, on the contrary, students are more expected to challenge the teacher in order to engage in lively discussions of ideas.

The two stereotypical models presented here have been both praised and attacked alike. While many are familiar with the criticism of the Asian style of not being able to produce students capable of thinking creatively and independently, we have found some thinkers in the West arguing that it is in fact due to this so-called Asian style that is responsible for Asia’s surge as the world’s leading economic and technological power. US President Barack Obama, for example, has extolled the virtue of Singaporean education was on record saying that “[Singaporeans] are spending less time teaching things that don’t matter, and more time teaching things that do. They are preparing their students not only for high school or college, but also for a career. We are not” (Obama 2009). Philosopher Martha Nussbaum wrote that Obama was clearly in approval of the way education is being done in countries such as China and Singapore (Nussbaum 2010). In her article Nussbaum chastises the educational systems in China and Singapore, saying that they still stifle creative and critical freedom that is needed for a genuine democracy. According to her, the success of Chinese and Singaporean economy could be explained by how students in these countries are taught, but what is more important to her is “civic education,” which is sorely lacking in both countries. She sees Chinese and Singaporean students being taught to become cogs in the giant economic machines without much emphasis on how they become thinking citizens capable of deliberating on public issues that are essential to a democracy. Warning US leaders not to get caught up with “rose-colored glasses,” Nussbaum urges US policy leaders to remain firm in their own traditional models of fostering creative imagination and critical thinking (Nussbaum 2010).

What is shared by Vogler and Nussbaum here is their entrenched view that there are irreconcilable differences in the education styles and theories in the East and the West. However, there are research works showing that this dichotomy between the learning cultures of the West and the East are more products of exigent time and circumstance rather than their fixed characteristic. In my previous paper (Hongladarom 2006a), I show that traits usually considered as belonging to the West, such as critical thinking and the use of logical argumentation, did exist and prosper in the East centuries ago. Both ancient India and China did have sophisticated systems of logical argumentation that rivaled the Aristotelian system that was in use in the West. For example, in medieval India, debates between rival groups of religious adherents were abundant. Buddhist monks and Hindu holy men usually debated each other on theological and philosophical topics, and out of the need to codify these arguments and debates arose treatises on epistemology and logic, which were at least as developed as anything the Western world has to offer even today. Buddhist scholar-monks such as Dignaga and Dharmakirti were well recognized, both by Buddhists and Hindus, as very good exponents of logical thinking, and both did advance the knowledge in Indian philosophy.
on logic and epistemology a great deal. In fact that logical acumen of Buddhist philosophy does not limit itself to the Mahayana tradition, Dion Peoples has shown that logical argumentation and critical thinking has already been in Buddhist philosophy since the time of the Buddha himself (Peoples 2013). Furthermore, the Nyaya system in Hindu philosophy also did much work in logic. The existence of debates and codification and systematization of argumentation showed that the use of reasons and arguments was very well established in India. This extensive use of reason and arguments also existed in China too. Although Chinese philosophy is not as well-known as Indian philosophy as one emphasizing the use of logic, there is a school of Chinese philosophy, the Mohists, that developed much of the knowledge and use of logic which became part of Chinese philosophy (Hongladarom 2006a). All this evidence shows that it is not true that Indian and Chinese philosophical traditions did not have any logic, and thus the belief that logic and argumentation belonged to the West only is totally unfounded.

If this is the case, then the reason why there is the widespread perception that the Asian learning style does not emphasize logic and reasoning as much as rote learning is due to exigencies of the time. Even in the West, when Industrial Revolution was first developed and there was the urgent need to produce skilled personnel to work in factories, education for the mass took shape that did not pay much attention to the development of critical or creative thinking abilities. Instead the education focused almost exclusively on development of useful skills which can be used in the factories in shortest time (Cf. Lawton and Gordon 2002: 115 – 132). The education that fostered critical and creative thinking was an exclusive reserve for the ruling elites for a long time. Universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, for example, specialized in educating a small number of elites who would later become professionals and members of the ruling class in England. It was in this atmosphere that critical thinking was developed since the aim of the education was to foster leadership skills. However, this was not available to the toiling masses who were destined to become the labor force in the emerging factories in rapidly industrializing Britain. It is only after World War II that opportunities for university education began to open up to the masses in full force (McConnell, Berdahl, and Fay 1973). The situation in other western countries is not too different. The mainstream education in Germany had been vocational for a long time, a system whose purpose was to produce the working class for the industry. Even though there were no liberal arts colleges like Cambridge or Oxford in Germany, the country did develop the first Ph.D. Program in the world, as there was the need to produce researchers who were capable of producing new knowledge for the modern world (Mclelland 2008; 1981). The kind of education whose primary aim was to foster critical and creative thinking abilities was not given much attention in Germany for a long time. The vocational education system saw no need for them, and the Ph.D. programs usually bypassed these for the more specialized areas of research advanced fields of study. In the US, which adopted both the British liberal arts system and the German Ph.D., there seemed to be the atmosphere of anti-intellectualism which prevented students from actually realizing the ideals of liberal arts education for the majority of its population. Only a small fraction of the population was able to reap full benefits of critical and creative thinking in the liberal arts colleges. Much of the education in these countries, in short, focused more on rapid transmission of industrial skills rather than developing critical and independent thinking.

This situation is not much different at all from the Asian countries, which are also fast industrializing; the only difference is that the industrialization process took off later than in the West. The perception that Asian countries pay more attention to rote learning rather than development of critical thinking stems from the need of these countries to produce personnel for the emerging industries, and when they find that the other kind of education will be better suited to changing circumstances, then they feel no qualm in
switching their education system so as to produce students who are better trained with critical and independent thinking. How students in a culture are educated is not part of a fixed identity of a culture, but is a reflection of how that culture regards as important at a particular time.

An upshot of this is that the idea that rote learning belongs exclusively to Asian culture is untenable, so is the view that critical thinking belongs exclusively to Western culture. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, a point missed by Vogler and many scholars. A clear advantage of rote learning, the style of learning that emphasizes transmission of information and skills in a rapid manner, is that it is necessary for producing personnel who are skilled at a particular task in a short time. In fact, this is also commonplace even in the West when the emphasis is on training personnel for particular jobs in the workplace. In an industrializing country facing the problem of shortage of manpower, the rote learning system is clearly required. On the other hand, when the emphasis is not so much on producing personnel for specific tasks, but for personnel who are more flexible and more able to think independently, then rote learning is inappropriate, and the kind of learning usually perceived as belonging to the Western culture, the kind that emphasizes critical and independent thinking, will be more suitable.

Other traits can also be regarded in the same way. Vogler is representative of the received opinion that in the East students are more deferential toward their teachers and rarely question the teachers’ authority. However, this is not the exclusive concern of the East. In medieval times, the authority of the teachers was unquestioned, since it was based on the authority of the Church and the received knowledge handed down from antiquity. To question the teachers was tantamount to questioning the Church itself, and the penalty for doing so can be severe. Since most education during this time was in the hand of the Church, whose primary interest was to perpetuate its own organization through recruitment and training of later generalizations of priests, rote learning became the method of choice. Beating of students was also the norm throughout the Middle Ages and continued to almost the present time. However, this does not mean that logical debate had no place at all in medieval education. On the contrary, the study of logic was part of the curriculum of all churchmen, and they became skilled in debates and logic, much like their Buddhist and Hindu counterparts in India. The study of logic and the use of debate were limited only to the received doctrine of the Church. A churchman can debate with his counterpart, but he cannot transgress these limits on pain of being branded a heretic. This is clearly not the same as the spirit of questioning authority that is implied by most studies on the Western style of education in the contemporary world. In the same vein, Buddhist monks debating among themselves could enjoy a range of freedom of thought and expression, but when it came to challenging the accepted doctrine of the Buddha, they ran the risk of being branded a “non-Buddhist” and hence unworthy of being a monk in a Buddhist monastery.

Hence, it is clear that rote learning and unquestioned acceptance of authority was not the sole prerogative of the East. In fact it is a function of society; when society needs one kind of personnel to fulfill its tasks, then it adopts an educational system accordingly. One might object that the system that existed in the medieval or in fact pre-twentieth-century West belonged to the past and does not represent what is happening there today; they might object that when the West became modern these educational systems were abolished together with the old regime. However, we have seen that to become modern does not have to mean to become Western; one always has to keep in mind that these two concepts are distinct.
A Theory of Learning

We have seen that the educational systems and learning theories that are usually regarded as “Eastern” or “Western” are in fact not necessarily so. One can find the systems that are typically associated with one in the other, and vice versa. Hence, the problem that we raised at the beginning of the paper, of whether learning theories can be universal can be answered in the affirmative. A theory of learning can indeed become universal if enough cultures in which it is adopted see a need for it. If all cultures of the world see the value of a particular learning theory and adopt it, then it does become universal in this regard. However, this is not exactly the sense that proponents of the universal theory intends. For them a theory should be universal due to its internal content; even if the actual situation is such that not every culture adopts a purportedly universal theory then all cultures should adopt it anyway because this is the right thing to do. Here one finds a similar situation in the case of ethical theory. A long standing debate among ethicists concerns whether there can be any universal ethical theory such that each culture should adopt it so as to become genuinely ethical. That each culture has not actually adopted it is beside the point, and is not relevant to the status of the theory as a universal one. However, since any theory of learning has been designed and adopted as a response to the needs of a society that vary according to time, place and socio-cultural environment, then it is difficult to conceive such a universal theory in this sense. One cannot say that the theory usually regarded as belonging to the West, one that emphasizes critical and independent thinking, is universal so that all other cultures should adopt it. The theory can be useful in some situation, but not in all, as we have seen. Thus it can become incongruent if one insists in adopting this theory in any circumstances. However, a theory can indeed become universal in the weaker sense alluded to above, when all or most cultures see its value for a particular circumstance and environment and adopt it together.

This interplay between the particular and the universal in the context of cultural practice such as teaching and learning reflects what I have written earlier on the “thick” and “thin” conceptions of culture in the globalizing world. Reflecting upon the impact on local cultures of the rapid advance in global network of information and communication technologies, I wrote that local cultures do have a means of maintaining their identities amidst the onslaught of the globalizing force associated with the Internet (Hongladarom 1999). There was a concern then that the Internet could become an agent of globalization which could swallow up local cultures, obliterating any differences among them. What I found in the paper, on the contrary, was that local cultures could maintain identities even if they participated fully in globalization through the global network. What they did was that they separated between the “thick” culture of local and historical traditions which were unique to them, and the “thin” culture that they take up as a front when they participate through the global network with members of other cultures (Hongladarom 1999; 2000). The distinction between the thick and the thin culture was adopted from Michael Walzer, who used the term to refer to the particularities of local traditions and the common feelings one has when one sees common concepts such as truth or justice being used and claimed in other cultures (Walzer 1994). Instead of believing in the absolute dichotomy with the local and the universal, one has another conceptual tool which I believe to be more attuned to reality where what is supposed to be universal is in fact the thin veneer of common feelings and what is shared among people of various cultures when they meet and interact, and what is supposedly particular is none other than the thick local lore and stories that only members of that culture share among themselves. Furthermore, the situation nowadays is such that even the distinction between the thick and the thin itself is disappearing, as cultures appear to merge together while retaining their own identities at an increasing rate (Hongladarom 2008).
To translate this into the discussion on whether there are universal learning theories, one finds that there is the thick learning theory based upon local traditions, and the supposedly universal thin theory that one shares with other cultures. Thus when one talks about how a learning theory is justified on the basis of local traditions then this takes place at the level of the thick culture, but when one talks about how a learning theory can be shared among various cultures, then it is at the thin level.

This deconstruction of fixed boundaries among cultures also accords with key Buddhist teachings. One of the main tenets of Buddhism is that all things are interdependent. This means that all things do not possess inherent characteristics such that these characteristics can identify a thing to be what it is without relation to any other things. A table, for example, is a table not only in virtue of its internal properties (such as hardness, having a flat top and four legs, and so on), but also necessarily in virtue of its external relations to other things, such as the wood that was carved into the table, the work of the carpenter in making it, its use as a piece of furniture in a household, and so on. The fact that one usually thinks of the internal properties of a table as being sufficient in identifying it is due to our ingrained belief, stemming from the use of concept ‘table,’ that the concept has essential meaning such that it uniquely identifies what is a table and nothing else. The belief in uniqueness of conceptual meaning, then, depends ultimately on our common sense notion that language refers to things accurately just as a mirror reflects an image. This notion, however, is not tenable since language can never capture reality in full. Hence, all things are interdependent according to the Buddhists because our conceptual apparatus is only approximate and can never exactly represents reality (Nagarjuna 1995: 304 – 308). What this means in our case is that when we try to define a boundary separating one culture from another, we can only do so with prior assumption that cultures have fixed, essential properties, but since they do not, any attempt to fix boundaries for cultures can be only piecemeal, something done for the purpose of responding to exigencies and temporary circumstances only.

This Buddhist deconstruction of fixed boundaries between concepts then belies Vogler’s contention that Asian learning style is due to Asian religious traditions such as Confucianism or Buddhism (Vogler 2006). Confucianism, with its emphasis on relations among individuals, can also be regarded as providing a basis for deconstructing the boundaries between cultures in quite the same way as Buddhism too. In the attempt to search for learning theories that are suitable for particular cultures, one should indeed look at the historical and religious roots of that culture themselves. I have argued elsewhere that this attempt will not generate “alienation” that is actually felt by many non-western cultures when they are more or less forced to accept practices belonging to another (mostly western) culture (Hongladarom 2004; 2006b). Such alienation occurred when, for example, Thai culture felt that it needed to adopt the scientific material culture coming from the West in order to catch up with them and avoid being colonized. This acceptance led to epistemic clashes between what has already been believed as integral part of that culture’s identity and way of life and the scientific culture that comes from outside. Hence, a way out of this dilemma is for the local culture to find a source that would endorse the scientific and technological culture from its own indigenous sources, and I argue that this can lessen the alienation that can occur (Hongladarom 2004; 2006b). Consequently, in the case of adopting a theory of learning, one has to find its source from one’s own indigenous, homegrown source. The culture has to identify the problem that it needs to solve, and design a learning theory that can best educate its own students accordingly.
Conclusion

Teaching and learning theory, then, does not by itself have universal import; it is just a way society responds to challenges facing them at a particular place and time. This, however, does leave open the possibility that all cultures in the world might come to agree on some narrow set of teaching and learning styles, narrow enough to be regarded as similar in all cultures. Then these styles might be collectively regarded as universal. On the other hand, the idea that theories of teaching and learning are always local and cannot be expanded across cultures is rather untenable too. Cultures always look across their shoulders to see what others are doing, and they are keen to borrow ideas and practices from others if they see them to be beneficial to their own situation. The aims of education do not have to be everywhere the same, for education needs to serve the goals and values of society in which it finds itself (Hongladarom 2005).

So, what does a theory of learning should look like in concrete terms? It depends on circumstances, of course, but as the circumstance in the world today clearly calls for students who are capable of thinking for themselves and engaging in critical judgment and evaluation, these skills are necessary if students are to become successful in this early part of the twenty-first century. This does not mean that the older style, for example one emphasizing rote learning, is immediately out of fashion, for there can arise a need for such a style even in today’s highly globalized world (such as when there is a need to train new skills rapidly). Cultures and learning theories do interact with each other in an interesting way, and one cannot consistently pair up one culture with one learning theory in such a way that the culture is forever tied up with that theory.
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Structuralization of the formation of Critical Thinking Skills for Learning, Practice, and Development: Case of Buddhism

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“There can be no place for thinkers in Universities, no knowledge from researchers, no skills, knowledge, values, and professional qualifications without thinking. Status quo cannot survive from the realities from ecological questions.”

-Odora Catherine Hoppers and Howard Richards, University of South Africa.

Introduction

Critical thinking has vast derivatives from different schools of thought. The Buddhist perspective provides a more structured and guided form of critique, shaped by ethical and moral values that are channeled through the practice and structure of insight meditation. It provides consistent path of thinking and discipline towards attainment of knowledge facets. This comes with some resources such as time, good feeding, and initiative. The positive outcomes outdo the negative, and reinforce the initiative. This makes it most scientifically compliant form of thinking relevant to living fulfilling lives in relation to other philosophical approaches. This significantly prepares practitioners of the discipline for happier times ahead, henceforth; should be encouraged.

My first impression of the term critical thinking, came from what my experience as a child when my guardian challenged me to act every time I got subjected to a problem-solving task; and from the school of psychology where I was taught cognitive processes.

Most of the tasks presented to me were to face an institutional system and bend to serve my needs within the shortest time possible, when the needs’ utilization was highest. Every time I failed to bend and fasten the institutional system’s slow processing of requests, my intellect was questioned. I often got asked, ‘Why don’t you think? Think! Think! Think!’ he said. I then got prompted to ask questions such as what, why, how, when, who, and which. My guardian used to call them the ‘six best friends.’ These, according to him, had to be my best friends if I equally had to deal with inevitable complex situations.

Indeed those helped me with time, and I remember to continue consulting them within myself or during my interaction with colleagues. At the school of psychology, I remember: the environment stimuli, sensory system, sensory, brain, motor nerves, and actions towards, and additional environment stimuli. It was a human mental functioning system required of me as a student to understand normal functioning processes and defects, and how they can be corrected.

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Introduction to psychology provided some forms of learning subject to all beings, of which the most contemporary ones being learning by insight. It is a model most applicable to the so-called superior animals, the primates, including man. It is however supported by other forms of learning that provoke the thinking system, including operant conditioning, when dharma message is used to support the critical thinking process; modeling, involving practical demonstration of critical thinking enhancement processes, when a person practices and experiences critical thinking-enhancement processes.

**Issues Surrounding Critical Thinking Skills in Buddhism**

For the last 2600 years, Buddhism has been at the forefront of finding answers about questions regarding the unknown, through the concept and practice of vipassana, involving awareness of the inner-self, immediate, and far states of the environment. Vipassana is insight meditation. Insight meditation is Buddhist meditation. It is used to develop the mind (Nyunt, 2013). Parts of such developments are: thinking processes and their management and how they are coordinated to reach a certain goal; and the goal of attaining knowledge and wisdom.

Thinking is highly varied dependent on the ever changing emotions levels, either negatively or positively, as provoked by both external and internal stimuli. Much of the emotions involving the instinctual need for flight or fight trigger electric emotions and thoughts, leading into actions. They leave no time to think deeply and determine nature of emotion-triggered thoughts and action, most rationally. Development of critical thinking skills provides conscious and unconscious solutions to irrational, destructive, and conflict-ridden actions. Achievement of right thoughts and actions is a direct consequence of attained ability to master emotions and thoughts, respectively; and guided by rational values. There are values for any nature of emotions, thoughts, and actions, whether rational or irrational; positive or negative; constructive or destructive. This paper caters for the form of thought processes constructed around Buddhist values.

Vipassana or mindfulness provides structure for attainment of critical thinking skills. Incidentally, mindfulness is central in the Buddhist tradition. During the process, the practitioner explores the visible and invisible aspects of the natural world, from which an understanding of the current phenomenon were reached, solutions were identified, shared, and humanity continued to thrive. It has 7 sessions each day. It is 2 hourly 4pm to 6pm concluded by 30 minutes of Dharma Talk.

It involves first by breathing through the nose, taking refuge there, gaining experience of the sensory activities or events, and sustaining concentration on that for 2 days. These sensations are not reacted to but got wind of their existence. It is preceded by experiencing sensations on the moustache area for 2 days. From there, and exploration work begins, involving attaining awareness of the mid area of the scalp, shoulders (beginning with right one), arms (right), wrist (Right), and fingers (on right hand), the same case happens for the left shoulder and hand, legs (thigh to toes, beginning with the right one, ½ a day x 2); chest, abdomen, and back; general experiencing of head to toe sensor activity (back and forth for ½ a day), review unexperienced areas one at a time, review by sweeping the whole body from head to toe x 2, again experience unsensed one a time, pick out one sensory activity one at time when the previously unsensed become gross. In total, this takes days. The finish line (3 last days, per day for at least 2 minutes each): ‘brushing up-down and forth, experience sensory activity one at a time, pick sensory activity one at a time from the gross experience, single (uniform brushing), pick single sensory activity from the uniformly brushed areas, pick out on the blind areas, and lastly; test the mind to find out if it recalls the blind areas.’

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2 Vipassana Training Course in Jinja, Uganda, 2010
That predisposes the mind to work more and be a basis of decision making rather than the emotions. Reaction tendencies implied troubles (consequential of poor virtues and mindlessness), and disruptions of life that have to consistently and systematically be eliminated and be replaced better ones that better emotions, thoughts and actions. Critical thinking is as old as mankind; it is an extension of our natural drives, such as the drives to eat, to socialize, to fight in defense or to flight in fear. It provides objective views of those drives before dictating an action to any of them. In other beings, it is electronic.

In the bid to establish existence of critical thinking in Buddhism, the writer explored aspects the mind’s critical thinking architecture and model – vipassana. The author specifically handled the following aspects in that regard: understanding critical thinking, characteristics of critical thinking, development process of critical thinking in Buddhism, impact of attainment of critical thinking skills, and critical thinking in relation to other philosophies.

Paper Design and Development
This paper is constructed from experiences within and outside Buddhist environments, and interfaces surrounding the concept of critical thinking skills that involved peer discussions (5 thinkers), analysis of dharma talks (recorded) by S.N. Goenka, and review of secondary literature regarding Buddhist critical thinking skills. The information was generated under each objective or theme stated above, and subsequently generated it as findings hereunder:

Understanding of Critical Thinking
Critical thinking is the deliberate process of systematically, objectively, and consistently applying the thinking system (learned from the school of psychology) to create awareness of the unknown (problem), understand it compositional elements, find their relationship (cause-effect), and source of solutions to questions about those elements. Self-imagery is a mental process of critical thinking, involving formation of mental images to derive meaning.

The behavioral patterns predisposed get consistent with the desired mental images, influenced my dharma lessons, social norms or traditions. The ultimate to thinking is learning, which is done by developing the inner mind, especially, the thought. When the concentration is right, the right thought follows (Akaraputipun, 2013).

While looking around for any deviations from my existing views about critical thinking, I critically thought that breaking down the term critical thinking into parts, critical and thinking could be a great starting point so that I develop information around singly.

The word critical and then thinking are interesting combination to consider and subject them to critical thinking process as well, to understand and derive meaning. From here, it becomes comprehensible that thinking is a vital part of living and wellbeing through conscious application of sustained mental effort to objectively concentrate on a given phenomenon over manageable period of time to achieve an overall sense of mental control over situations, by one’s ability to solve complicated cases. The Buddhist morality awareness is the path of gaining concentration and wisdom, which include: refrain from killing, refrain from taking what is not given, to refrain from misconduct in sensual pleasures, to refrain from false speech, not being covetous, free from ill-will and hatred, and right view (Gervasi, 2013).

From the World Wide Web, the following words were gathered in respect of the word ‘critical’: attention to errors and flaws, a point at which a phenomenon suffers abrupt change after application of an object to sustain change, and careful evaluation and
judgment. Additionally, for the term ‘thinking’, the following was attributed: the high value process of using the mind to consider something carefully.\(^3\)

**Critical Thinking in Buddhism**

Different aspects of meditation point to thinking about a target issue of concern in order to solve a given problem; contemplation in order to find a way forward; and worrisome thinking provoked by negative emotions. All they share is the tendency to find solutions to given problems. However, some meditation class participants fail because they are not guided in standardized procedures to produce desired results, of understood phenomena and solutions to them. The Buddhist method of solving problems is by contemplating on thinking, breathing in long at the nostril down to the navel, breathing out long gradually, then wisdom rises to solve problems (Samut, 2013).

Like meditation which is an essential natural way of living, characterizing human beings, critical thinking is concentrated activity over a given situation, broken down into pieces of tasks requiring same amount of time, creating associations between the mind and stimuli, and causing deeper understanding and meaning of issues that seem complex. It involves giving up hindrances and freeing oneself from attachment of the body, and achievement of solitude where thought is sustained (Peiris, 2013).

Insight meditation is superior mode of meditation; so how one meditates matters a lot to define person or group’s goal. One clear indication of meditations as a prevailing form of exercising thinking or critical thinking is the discovery of similar way of expression among the Uganda society. The word like *okufumitiriza* exists among the two largest tribes in Uganda. It is used to mean in-depth application of the mind to understand a situation, or taking time to think.

Peoples (2013:7) in his paper, ‘The Sangiti Sutta as a Meditation Manual,’ in respect to attainment of deliverance, noted: “…applying the mind to the Dharma and thinking and pondering over what is being mentioned and then concentrating attentively to the Dharma principle.” This associative nature of thinking is learning by insight in Buddhist teaching. After a while, the action taker will be in position to solve problems or make very shrewd decisions, a way out of puzzles of life.

It easily identifies gaps in living and fills them up. Indeed meditation is critical thinking but critical thinking is not necessarily meditation; meditation manages thinking. It goes a long way to concretely predispose the mind and body towards certain behaviors and discipline as taught by Buddha, about the realities of life, including the 4 Noble Paths.

A concept hereby presented within the context of critical thinking, includes making deliberate steps to invoke and provoke experiencing of stimuli, arousing of emotions, triggering of survival instincts of fight or flight, higher thinking (critical thinking) for higher sense of security, deeper attention, awareness, enlightenment, necessary to cause a transformative action on both the individual and his environment as appropriately and sustainably desired by the individual. Critical thinking is made possible by relaxation, attained through deep, and all of which are featuring elements during the process of meditation.

This paper, though, caters for critical thinking, combined, in a Buddhist perspective, in pursuit of the following objectives: find out an understanding of critical thinking in the Buddhist perspective, its origin, identify its patterns, its role in beings, and compare it (in Buddhist perspective) with other religious and philosophical perspectives. It gives the context within which critical thinking processes are held raises questions and thematic answers regarding it, as used in Buddhism.

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\(^3\) Word Web Computer Dictionary Application, used on 23 March 2013
Insight meditation also equals mindfulness. It happens in line with events and aspects in the environment. Though it one is able understand and differentiate them. Mindfulness develops insight, and subsequently he or she becomes familiar with realities of life (Gyi, 2013). Indeed insight meditation is as complete as learning by insight, thought, going far to incorporate other forms of learning such as observational learning and consistent learning.

For humans, to act outside the sieving roles of critical thinking phases in mental and behavioral processing, issues are reasoned out before being acted out. Bypassing that phase lead to dysfunction tendencies: compromised rationality. If a person has been doing mindfulness exercises, his or her action patterns will depict existing critical thoughts and from bases of religious and cultural values.

Critical thinkers thrived so much in the past, when people dedicated their entire time and lives on it to understand phenomena, predict outcomes and form conclusions to share with the rest of man-kind. It is based on values enshrined within the four noble paths. Much of what we base on to make instant problem-solving decisions and nurture new generations. There has been a greater tendency of reproducing more ancient thoughts than new ones, or rather ancient knowledge is dominant.

**Characteristics of Critical Thinking in Buddhism**

Critical thinking is an integral part of the Buddhist practice of Vipassana, and it has the following characteristics:

The daily disruptions, which may be hunger, phone calls, radio, television, and members of the opposite sex, among others, are controlled to facilitate critical thinking process. Food and drinks are made available during breaks; phones are shutdown to avoid any distractive calls, the same is the case with radios and televisions; and members of the opposite sex are asked to sit separated so as to enhance concentration. The mind is relentless guided to focus on existing pattern of events in and outside the person’s sensory environment, including the natural environment. It is a levels analysis of events, penetrating the puzzles of life; both the desirables and undesirables. There are 2 to 3 hourly breaks shows the changes so far felt in as far as perception of the world, understanding it, intelligently relating to it, and succeeding in life alongside it. Pursuance of morally upright thoughts and behavior patterns, vertical and horizontal communication paths to the divinity and other beings, respect to spiritual leadership hierarchies, much dignifying of holy places, and scriptures as bases of Buddhist thinking and understanding (Wikipedia, 2010).

Critical thinking is not purposeless; it aims at solving problems that arise from accumulation of internal and external pressures and vice-versa, which cause mental and physical dysfunction. It exhibits on-going activities and events, their properties, from where the practitioner is able to align cases, tell their relationship, and predict favorable outcomes to best consider as solutions to emerging problems. The act of critical thinking must thus have a purpose. Even when one possible solution to a given problem fails or is not good enough, he or she is still surrounded by numerous alternatives, from which to select most applicable answer. The ability to do this evolves from successful practice of mindfulness, which is a Buddhist philosophy and practice of paying careful attention to the present moment. Elements in the present moment include breathing, heartbeat, and thoughts (Star, 2013).

It is a conditioned process or activity; the conditions include freeing oneself from the daily routines of work, receiving calls, watching television, listening to music, attractions from the opposite sex, and guilt arousing and mind-compromising habits like

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4 Vipassana Training Course in Jinja, Uganda, 2010
aggression towards animals and alcohol. Instead the person is enabled to focus on internal and external environment events in a more controlled and systematic way.

There are breaks in-between the critical thinking phases, to enhance mental coping and physical coping with the new experiences. At this time practitioner makes sense of the puzzles. Balanced diets accompanied by safe drinking water and other fluids are specially provided to support body after undergoing shocks and reactions to new experiences. There is mindful of what is eaten to avoid concerns associated with unhealthy eating habits.

It is practical not story-told to have critical thinking abilities. While debates about a subject such as critical thinking are common and easily engulfed into, it is rather common for anyone to make comments or make a speech over that matter, without prior experience of it. However, the Buddhist perspective of critical thinking gives room to experience and have a reason to speak about it.

It is inexpensive for beginners. The context within which critical thinking is exercised in Buddhism, known as vipassana, it is free course for beginners. After learning the basics, they are able to practice on their own and at their own time discretion; so the only incurrence turns out to be any time despite one’s busy routine.

It goes beyond the natural way of living, very essential for one realizes reason for living. People who attempt to forego this valuable etiquette can be termed as being simplistic, as opposed to complex animals; the kind human beings are expected to exhibit. Simplistic beings are the category of worms and ants.

**Critical Thinking Development Processes in Buddhism**

Heong (2011:V2-282) wrote:

All students are capable to think, but most of them need to be encouraged taught and assisted to the higher order thinking processes. These higher order thinking skills are teachable and learnable. All students have the right to learn and apply thinking skills, just like other disciplines of knowledge. Higher order thinking is defined as the expanded use of the mind to meet new challenges [p.1]. It requires someone to apply new information or prior knowledge and manipulate the information to reach possible answer in new situation [p.2].

Similarly, in Buddhism, the process is taught and practiced guided by values, enriched by dharma message. This builds great experience of harmony and calmness, which are vital for healthy thinking exercises.
Figure 1: Vipassana’s Critical Thinking Development Process Structure

Critical Thinking Conditions:
- Separation of sexes
- Physical detachment from usual routines
- Physical separation from commonly used gadgets
- 4 Noble Paths and 8 fold Truths
- 5 to 8 precepts
- Insight meditation
  - Individual or group
  - Self-imagery
  - Self-talk (Direction of positive energies to work for you)
- Breaks after ever sessions (1-2½ hours)
- Good diet, including refreshing water or juice

Events (Sensory and Environment) ➔ Emotions, Feelings, and Motivations ➔ Imagination and Thoughts

Mental Awareness and Understanding:
- Pattern —set thinking
- Time-bound thinking
- Thinking set to one event at a time
- Presenting and silent stimuli/event
- Haphazard thinking towards gross events
- One-at-a-time thinking towards gross events
- Collective-form / sweeping thinking towards all events (up-down, and forth)
- Test memory on awareness of silent areas

Values:
- Experience of and reflections to the 8 precepts, 4-fold Noble Paths, 8-fold Noble Paths

Impact:
- Knowledge, Wisdom, and Memory Banking
- Development (Success, Happiness, and Peace)
  - Adverse Impacts

It is a systematic (following specific values and practices) and consistent mental concentration on a given phenomenon one at a time as their activities occur, without being judgmental, and without having prior goal as motivation to exercising it. The critical thinking exercises penetration of puzzles in the life and non-life systems back-to-back and either sides of objects reactions and events in the environment to gain deeper understanding of their tendencies without bias or subjectivity.

Besides, subjectivity is broken through equal time of observations, disappearances of mental contact, and muscular and general physical relaxation, regardless of what is happening in the environment. This continues to be the case in one’s day-today routines. The properties of the varied observations from which obvious, hidden, and the unknown answers (mysteries of nature) are encountered and found, get indiscriminatively known in unison, in depth and breadth.

During the mental interaction, unison if formed and end up being part of the existence of the practitioner, and making it easier to discern the good and bad based on universal values and principles enshrined in the Four Noble Truths. If the values are bad,
they will be strengthened in the mental faculty and behavioral patterns of the individual, and so will be the cases of values are good.

From here, the unknown becomes known, and the individual is able to respond to appropriately and effectively to different complex questions that seem puzzling to many or everyone. The focus of attention is temporary; it soon vanishes and ceases to be an issue of concern. The mental solutions provide physical solutions. The mental action of concentration on particular elements and their dynamic nature, without going astray, is structured to facilitate physical concentration, high-levels of creativity, and productivity in their endeavors in line with the current needs.

The process is directed from the narrowest of the scope to the widest, to free style, and to mental recollection of previous events. It is a total and in depth mental analysis of the visible and invisible events. The answers to emerging problems are found through consultation of the mass of information acquired during the critical attention on events happening in vipassana course.

The information generated is inferential or referential. That is, it is used to understand future events and earlier ones. The practices and values that support critical thinking are the Eight Precepts, the Four Noble Truths, and the expanded Eightfold Noble paths so that the likelihood of adherence to those values is positively strengthened and perfected overtime, and thus; yielding success. The developments of critical thinking skills is shaped by Buddhist values, and are (critical thinking skills) further reinforced them: the Buddhist values

Impact of Critical Thinking within Vipassana-Critical Thinking Structure

The observation of the events impact individuals differently, depending on the efficacy of implementation of the idea; some take shorter times to feel the mental and physical changes, new abilities and competences in response to and managing them as well as occurring and incoming events about the social and natural worlds. From the variety of events observed, the individual is able to make a cost-benefit analysis whilst in the more practical world. The mentally-tasked cost-benefit analysis includes matching of events against existing values before making rational actions.

A practitioner is able to cope with the mental, physical, and social distractions as well as those in the so natural environment such critically thought and planned activities are the ones that prompt behavior. Attain to details is developed and sustained through processes of problem-solving. It is easier to see through puzzles when others are struggling, about to give up, or have given up. It provides high quality decisions and actions. The practitioner is clear-headed (thinks healthily), makes quick resolutions from both knowledge gained during mindfulness, and walks the talk, without any inconsistencies. He or she assumes the role-model stature; becomes an admiration of the community and easily assumes leadership, all because of the consistently good ethical and moral conduct.

It builds a sense of psychological and physical security being able to walk around puzzles and the seemingly complex problems to solve for one’s and other’s wellbeing. Wellbeing is enhanced by way of eliminating fears, anxieties, and maladaptation that are common among people with stagnated problems in their minds. The person achieves a level of comfort, harmony, and peace with himself and the rest of the world, with which he or she shares the benefits. The elimination of insecurities in one’s life sets ground for healthy choices and decisions, calmness, confidence, courage, humanitarian, sociable, well-balanced mind and behavior, focused and goal oriented nature, productivity, and success. This has been supported by several writers, including recently, Star (2013), who said:
When practiced regularly, mindfulness can bring about a deeper sense of clarity and personal understanding. Insight gained through mindfulness can be a starting point that influences a change in behaviors. For example, through mindfulness, a person with panic disorder may begin to recognize how his/her self-talk affects deep emotions. The person may then decide to change this negative self-talk by working on new behaviors throughout the day, such as trying affirmations, stress management techniques, or gratitude journal writing.

It prompts positive response towards peace-building efforts, through forgiveness, restoration, healing, and transforming people from viewing it as a way of achieving personal-level success to community-level wellbeing (Rodrigues, 2010).

The attribute of patience is nurtured through the condition of persistence and enduring during the tense episodes to muscular actions, and mental boredom and exhaustion. These are rather looked at a representation of misery characteristic of usual afflictions of man and woman, which are only given equal observation time like all other events happening in the course of critical thinking. Critical thinking may undo defensive and protective roles of instincts, which require no thinking. However, earlier critical thinking exercises could provide immediate (instinctual) answers to problems that require instant solutions.

These whilst guided by Buddhist moral and ethical values generates the cessation of the sense of guilt, generating a positive sense of self and enduring harmony with others as errors and conflicts are minimized as much as possible through right thinking and actions. Also individuals are helped to avoid possessiveness that caused unnecessarily fearfulness, anxieties, and suspiciousness to avoid jealousy which increased mental pain; help to build individual diligence through application of energy and alertness of right intensities to achieve success; right intentions (or a life without stealing, taking other man’s wife) to avoid embarrassments, shame, guilt and loss of respect; to build individual confidence, social harmony with self and fellow men; and to avoid generating anger, among others, through verbal and behavioral provocations (Knight, 1999).

Anandarajah and Hight (2001) note that spiritual distresses and spiritual crises occurs when a person is unable to find sources of meaning, hope, love, peace, comfort, strength, connection in life, and when conflict occurs between the belief systems and life events. Buddhism is thus a way of life and understanding of all that surrounds beings, be it living or non-living things. Practitioners are made aware of the effects of the would be actions and effects and, subsequently; they are able to make right decisions.

Adverse Impact of Vipassana-structured Critical Thinking Skills

The adverse impact of the practice Buddhist practice of critical thinking falls under what is incurred to achieve positive outcomes, including the undesirable muscle reaction characterized by pain, tingling and tightening; the missed fantasies during mindfulness, and the time taken which someone would to do something else. In a very violent environment, critical thinking geared towards peace may be over showed by ones predisposition towards violence unless guided by peace-enhancing values. Still, the benefit outmatches the costs while at the same time the ill-feelings during the critical thinking exercise are short-lived and leave behind only positive benefits. It is necessary to receive guarantees about continued benefit from critical thinking exercise, which is achieved through the regular practice; but research has indicated that spiritually inclined practices easily accelerate individual to becoming mentally ill.²

² Spiritual people are prone to mental illness, Sunday Monitor, February 3, 2013 p.vi
Critical Thinking in Buddhism in Relation to other Philosophies

Critical thinking in Buddhism is independent of the ego while other religious philosophies make it egocentric, which prompt them to act on behalf of their mental states in the name of religion. Their subjective nature spreads to assume that everyone must be like them, where that fails conflicts ensue.

In Buddhism, it is a personal project set aside every day or according to a person’s discretion; in other religious philosophies, it is replaced by spiritual assumptions that the almighty God thinks on their behalf; and gives them solutions. It emphasizes more self-practice to obtain wonderful outcomes from right thought and structured processes than merely believing or being made to do so. It is rather a committed fight, a personal battle, and a way to liberation, a universal path acceptable to people of all shades (Goenka, 2007).

In Buddhism spirituality and the practitioner are partners and interact and form unison identity, from where understanding of the unknown (spirit or non-physical) is attained. In other religions spirituality dictates through written scriptures and known representative of a religious sect. The tendencies of vulnerability have been experienced in Buddhism in their response to terror attacks from other sections of religious thinkers. Moral guidance to thinking and practice exists among other religions, too. Hygiene and removal of shoes in worship places to express orientation to purity across the spiritual, mental, and physical segments of the being are used to generate senses of uprightness and union with the spiritual truth to guide thinking and practice (Seyyed, 1987).

In both Buddhism and other religious philosophies, critical thinking is crucial for the survival of the followers, from violence and through peaceful means. Critical thinking skills are a science which must be encouraged. Pope Benedict XVI cautioned about extreme attitudes towards science; he reveal that it holds answers to life problems (St. Andrea Parish Catholic Church, 2010).

In Buddhism, there is a considerable time and commitment to critical thinking, exercised through mental observation of particular events by equal amount of space and time. In other religious philosophies, it is the scriptures and leaders that provoke thinking.

In Buddhism subjects in which critical thinking is done, are diverse and ever-emerging, whereas in other religions subjects are unchanged. The thinking process is controlled, supported by human effort, egos and resources.

In Buddhism, critical thinking is respected and nurtured, in other religious philosophies, it is undoing the almighty position of God, who is overall master of all being, and thus is discouraged.

Similarities:

Buddhism and other religious philosophies have values and doctrines that guide their thoughts, regardless of the commitment placed to critical thinking process and the length of time given to it alone. They both provoke critical thinking in line with them. Until now, however, the benefits of critical thinking are outwardly still eluding all. Irreconcilable fanaticism has turned out to be the leading cause of trouble in recent years, leading into acts of terror on either side. Over the years Asia and the Middle East have been grounded in largely religious antagonism. Interreligious dialogue, through which to channel religious concerns across the religious thought-spectrum, suggests that sharing and discussing with other idealists was, however, the biggest way to go (Kung, 1992).

Buddhism and other religious philosophies have a shared spiritual space, with which they interact to cause changes in lives of subjects, attained through affirmation exercises during vipassana and mindful prayers or worship. Dharma is a universal phase for all people and elements.
While mindfulness has earliest origins in Buddhist philosophy, it permeably spread into other diverse areas. Star (2013) wrote: ‘The practice of mindfulness has origins in Buddhist philosophy, but is now widely practiced by people of a variety of religious backgrounds or spiritual beliefs.’

**Conclusion**

Critical thinking is an essential process of generating information to solve human problems and changes lives. It is equally vital for survival and sustainability of life and systems that support it. Because of the pressures of life, man and woman hardly take time to conduct critical thinking exercises, instead, they react and drown in misery. Buddhism approach provides critical conditions for critical thinking enshrined in vipassana practice, where proper thinking occurs, disruptions are controlled and given limited attention, to enhance critical thinking and learning. It is guided by moral and ethical values to project thinkers from making hazardous choices. Critical thinking is conjoined by traditional practices such vipassana. By divorcing it, it provides alternative model label for the traditions, alongside labels like mindfulness, insight meditation, and meditation. The duplication of the traditional could cause confusion among new generations of practitioners, and could give hard time knowing which is which. It is therefore safer to say that critical thinking = vipassana = insight meditation. More research is needed to show if there is any differences. Interestingly, the thinking patterns are most localized, from the inner environment to the far external world, which ensures that all solutions developed are most appropriate to one’s immediate world. Therefore, to contribute to the wellbeing of world through objective or purposed critical thinking and planning, one must critically focus his or her thinking about the self; understand the self, the immediate environment and the far worlds, apart. From here, one is able to make right and constructive decision for personal good and the benefit of others, now and in future.
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Psychotherapy: Meditation and Change

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The purpose of this paper is to propose that the practice of meditation can be useful in the treatment of depression and other mental disorders in conjunction with psychodynamic and other kinds of psychotherapy. Meditation brings a behavioral and “practice” component to a process of change that relies heavily on cognitive awareness and insight. In traditional psychoanalysis as well as in psychodynamic psychotherapy, patients explore the meanings, both conscious and unconscious, of their feelings, thoughts and behaviors and consider possibilities that they have not typically utilized. The process entails the activity of an “observing ego” that can notice and comment on one’s own behavior. Patients (or clients) try and learn about motivations driving their behavior with the generally unstated expectation that insight leads to change.

Similarly, cognitive therapies rely heavily on thought as well. As Nancy Schimelpfening writes: “Cognitive therapy makes the assumption that thoughts precede moods and that false self-beliefs lead to negative emotions. Cognitive therapy aims to help the patient recognize and reassess his patterns of negative thoughts and replace them with positive thoughts that more closely reflect reality.” Both psychodynamic and cognitive approaches in mental health have shown levels of efficacy equal or greater than the effects for medication, however, for many clinicians in their private practice offices, both insight-oriented psychotherapy and cognitive therapy have proved disappointing in their ability to generate real change.

In Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy for Depression, for example, the authors present the view that relapse in depression is, at least in part, caused by “the reactivation…of patterns of negative thinking similar to the thought patterns that were active during people’s previous episodes of depression.” They go on to state that “The patterns themselves also seem automatic, in the sense that the mind runs around some very well-worn mental grooves, or ruts, as old mental habits switch in and run off”. They understand these patterns of behavior as expressions of deeper states of mind that are the distillation of beliefs about the body, feelings and mind. These beliefs form a core, deeply held view that they believe drives depression. Segal et al review research indicating that relapse rates for depression can be anywhere from 33% to in excess of 80% across populations.

In a presentation at the American Psychological Association (Jan. 2009), Lowder, Hansell and McWilliams make a strong case for the “enduring” significance of psychoanalytic theory. They present a range of sources, including empirical research, supporting the importance of psychoanalytic theory as a general theory of mind, as a theory of psychopathology, as a theory of social and group phenomena and as the basis for psychotherapeutic treatments. In particular, they cite research supporting the clinical

4 ibid.
5 ibid, p. 14.
use of psychoanalytic theory in the treatment of panic disorder, depressive disorders, eating disorders, borderline personality disorders and others.

Even some psychoanalysts, however, make a case for a more active approach to healing patients with psychiatric disorders. In his book, Practical Psychoanalysis for Patients and Therapists, Owen Renik describes the impracticality that has become the image of psychoanalysis today, and his approach that he labels “practical”. “Practical clinical psychoanalysis”, he writes, “is a treatment that aims to help the patient feel less distress and more satisfaction in daily life through improved understanding of how his or her mind works.” He adds that “Psychoanalysis is a scientific study of the mind, and clinical psychoanalysis an application of psychoanalytic science to therapy.”

Meditation (and here we are talking about vipassana meditation in particular), approaches these same issues from a different vantage point – one that emphasizes habit, long-term over short-term satisfaction, and developing new skills. While it recognizes that understanding thought patterns and/or meanings can be a helpful, even essential aspect of change, the role of meditation is to provide an arena (sitting on the cushion initially) to “do something” different – that “doing” often consisting of “not reacting” in the face of automatic reactions. It is a kind of training that involves wisdom and insight, but repeatedly comes back to the present, the here-and-now, the way we behave in the moment.

For instance, Germer, et. al., view anxiety as a potentially adaptive approach that become maladaptive when it is in response to danger that is not real. They suggest that while the underlying cause may be genetic, environmental or other, anxious individuals all share an inability to tolerate the experience of anxiety. “What they have in common is intolerance for the experience of anxiety. Effective treatments address, directly or indirectly, the patient’s adversarial relationship to anxiety symptoms.”

**Issues in Psychotherapy and Behavior Change**

One of the difficulties of producing change through insight is the heavy reliance on understanding and the resultant hazard of the process becoming an intellectual one. As Freud, in “The Dynamics of Transference” (1912a), wrote: “When all is said and done, it is impossible to destroy anyone in absentia or effigy”. What this means in effect is that the process of change entails experiencing as well as understanding one’s own patterns of behavior. Unfortunately, unless one is able to talk about the transference, i.e. the living, breathing relationship with the therapist and all that arouses in the patient, many psychotherapy experiences do become highly intellectual and therefore not particularly effective in bringing about true behavior change. As sometimes is said, the results of psychotherapy may in fact appear to be a lot like “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic”; because meditation engages that part of us that is used to reacting, and encourages us to refrain from behaving in familiar patterns. It brings the process of change to behavior as well as to how we think about ourselves and our world. It dares us not to continue those patterns of behavior we have relied upon for so long. If nothing else, the mantra of meditation may be summarized in the phrase “Just don’t do it!”

For many patients, then, insight has often not been sufficient to bring about behavior change and both cognitive-behavioral and insight-oriented treatment often leaves patient and therapist alike frustrated and less than satisfied with the actual results of treatment. Many clinicians eventually find themselves exploring other avenues for

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8 ibid.
10 ibid, p. 153.
change to help patients suffering from depression, anxiety and other disorders of the mind.

**Meditation as an Adjunct to Insight-Oriented Psychotherapy**

Recent advances in neuroscience have opened doors to the impact of both meditation and psychotherapy on the human brain. Peter Fonagy writes: “Recent reviews of neuroscientific work confirm that many of Freud’s original observations, not least the pervasive influence of non-conscious process and the organizing function of the emotions for thinking, have found confirmation in laboratory studies.”

While a full review of current research and findings is beyond the scope of this paper, there is extensive documentation for the growing body of evidence connecting psychoanalytic constructs with neuroscience findings.

However, while the field of neuroscience is a very significant arena that appears to support the overlap of meditation and psychotherapy, especially around potential changes in the brain, it is not the only one. Treatment programs such as DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy), ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) and MBSR (Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction) all grew out of meditation and its various manifestations and are experiencing success in a variety of treatment populations. DBT, for example, is believed to relieve clients’ suffering because it gives them concrete, practical ways to address and change their behaviors.

In a similar vein, Dewane writes: “Psychodynamic approaches that emphasize insight imply that a change in attitude will most likely result in a change in behavior. In contrast, pure behavioral approaches suggest that altering behavior does not demand a change in attitude. However, changing a behavior may eventually result in a change in attitude or emotion. Focusing on changing behavior regardless of accompanying emotion is the emphasis...[of ACT].”

This paper will explore three of the ways in which meditation provides “training” that supports change by engaging that part of us that moves towards reactivity - this is in the arenas of:

- Affect tolerance
- Reality testing
- Loosening of defenses

In each of these arenas, the training that meditation supplies can increase the possibility of change in each moment, so that insight can actually be translated into new ways of responding to the world. The paper will conclude with a discussion of how meditation contributes to the development of a mentally “healthy” individual.

**Affect Tolerance**

Meditation, and particularly vipassana meditation, has a peculiar (to Western psychologists, anyway) view of feelings. In fact, what we in the West call feelings are labeled mental states, or mental formations, and always involve a desire for action as well as a positive, negative or neutral tone. In fact, in Buddhist psychology, the word “feeling” is only used to delineate the “tone”, i.e. positive, negative or neutral. “I like this”, “I don’t like this”, or “I don’t have strong feelings one way or another about this”, are the only expressions of feeling in Buddhist conceptualization. “I feel happy” or “I hate this” are

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expressions of mental states that tend to be powerful organizers of behavior. Anger is a mental formation that many individuals struggle to control and contain.

One of the primary practices of vipassana meditation is to notice mental states, as well as feelings, which arise and pass away while sitting on the cushion. It is understood that at least for the period in sitting meditation, no action will result from these mental states. They are continually experienced, observed, tolerated and accepted without the need for changing them, judging them or behaving in any particular way because of them. Mental states simply are and our task is to try and see them clearly.

For many of us, just observing mental states without the almost immediate translation into action (or an action plan) is radical. One can then observe, for instance, a mind obsessed with anger and can try to see that anger as a mind state rather than as a call to action. Love can be observed impartially and without concern for outcome. Impatience can be seen as a particular constellation of physical sensations that can be endured rather than changed. At best, the process results in an ability to tolerate mindstates in a new way – without the automatic segue into action that is so familiar to us. Eventually, we may still decide to act, however, that action has a better chance of being a “response” rather than a “reaction” because one has had time to reflect and consider before acting.

In psychotherapy, this practice may result in the capacity to tolerate and observe a wider range of mental states and the ability to experience these mental states in a setting in which they can be understood. It has generally been accepted that psychotherapy benefits from the capacity to understand, rather than “act out” what we are experiencing and meditation practices such as sitting still and observing mindstates can increase the development of that capacity. While that generally does occur in the setting of the therapist’s office, meditation provides the opportunity for individuals to “practice” that skill between sessions and on their own time.

**Reality testing**

One of the goals of vipassana meditation is the possibility of increasing one’s ability to see things “as they really are”. In Buddhist psychology, we are all born with tendencies towards living out the “Three Poisons”: greed, hatred and delusion. Delusion, in the sense it is meant here, indicates our difficulty in seeing the world as it is. We have the tendency to create “stories” about what is going on, especially when what is going on is not to our liking. In psychoanalytic terms, we are referring to projection, or transference or the myriad ways we distort reality as we view it through the lens of our own experience. We make assumptions, develop theories and categorize the behavior of others as a way of attempting to make their behaviors more palatable. Sometimes we perceive the world through the lens of our upbringing, the philosophies we were raised by or the politics of our families. In vipassana meditation, however, we practice stripping away the layers of delusion that automatically color how we see the world, and try to see things in their bare essence. As the behaviors of others are observed without interference, we are often left having to admit that there is much we do not know in terms of the other’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations. There is a greater sense of uncertainty because we are not falling back on our usual prejudices to make meaning of the world.

**Loosening of Defensive Structure**

It is generally believed that defenses develop out of the need to deny unpleasant thoughts and/or feelings. From the psychoanalytic perspective, we defend ourselves “against” a thought, feeling or perception because we don’t want to see it, don’t want to accept it. Every defense is a distortion of reality, so that in the most “primitive” defenses such as denial, there is an unwillingness to “see” outright something which has occurred, i.e. the death of a dear one or a terminal diagnosis. In less primitive defenses, there will
be a less obvious distortion: I didn’t study for my test because my dog was sick, rather than because it makes me anxious to study for the test.

If vipassana meditation makes it more possible to “sit” with and have awareness of unpleasant thoughts, feelings and perceptions, then a further result of meditation may be less need for defenses. If I can embrace without shame the idea that I said a foolish thing to my best friend, then I don’t need to rationalize it (i.e. he “deserved” it), intellectualize it (i.e. I meant it as a compliment only he didn’t get it), or turn it into self-criticism (i.e. what an idiot I am!). I can accept that as a human being I am subject to making mistakes. I can apologize for bad behavior and make an effort not to repeat the mistake. I can also turn to self-analysis if I want to try and understand if there was a deeper, unconscious meaning to my remarks.

**Enlightenment or Mental Health?**

Perhaps the primary difference in viewpoint between western psychology and Buddhist view on personality has to do with the relationship one has with one’s own thoughts, feelings, perceptions and moods. While there is no enduring “self” in Buddhist psychology, as there is in western psychology, there is a “bundle” of functions (called skandhas) that include one’s perceptions, ideas, feelings, moods, and awareness. Thinking, feeling, perceiving, and paying attention (i.e. awareness) are all considered ongoing important functions of human beings that influence how we interact with the world. They also influence how we relate to our experiences internally. In Theravada Buddhism, the goal of meditation (ultimately enlightenment) is to reach a level where one is free of attachment to any of these factors – in other words, one is no longer reacting to the world in terms of thoughts, feelings, perceptions, mental states or awareness. For example, someone may say something that hurts my feelings. If I am able, I do not respond out of that hurt, but rather understand: all of us are subject to having our feelings hurt and that lashing out or responding in kind in some way only contributes more to the suffering of the world. It also doesn’t change the fact that MY feelings were hurt. Nothing will change that which has already occurred.

**The “Healthy” Personality**

Rebecca Clay, in *Monitor on Psychology*, writes that, “For many humanist psychologists, the recent positive psychology movement is simply humanist psychology repackaged.” While Freud most famously enumerated the factors of a healthy personality as the ability to work and love, there have been numerous attempts since his time to define the healthy personality in broader terms, beginning with the humanist psychology movement in the 1950’s. In 1958, Jahoda enumerated six aspects of the healthy personality:

1. The degree of personal integration achieved by the individual.
2. The degree of autonomy achieved by the individual.
3. The adequacy of the individual’s perception of reality.
4. The degree of environmental mastery achieved by the individual.
5. The attitudes shown by a person towards his or her own self, and
6. The style and degree of the individual’s self-actualization.

Like many other attempts at defining the factors of the healthy personality, this one tends towards descriptions that are difficult to operationalize.

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Other conceptions of the healthy personality were offered by Gordon Allport, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Fritz Perls. A brief review of these theorists’ conceptions of the healthy personality highlight some of the commonalities and differences that exist between them. Allport, for example, saw the qualities of self-acceptance, frustration tolerance and emotional control as important factors in the healthy personality.\textsuperscript{15} He further defined frustration tolerance as the ability to tolerate “the thwarting of wants and desires”.\textsuperscript{16} He also included the ability to regard the world objectively – in other words, not to distort reality in order to make it more compatible with the wants and fears of individuals.

Carl Rogers emphasized present perceptions as well as openness to experience. He believed that openness to experience was the opposite of defensiveness, and allowed the individual greater personality flexibility and present-moment awareness.

Abraham Maslow, in his description of the healthy personality agreed with other humanists in crediting the importance of the ability to perceive reality without distortion, a general acceptance of self and others and being present and fresh in momentary experience. Taking this concept to an extreme was Fritz Perls who saw present moment experience as the only reality. He believed that, “The here and now is all we have and we must take responsibility for experiencing every moment.”\textsuperscript{17} He placed a high level of value on awareness and acceptance of self as ingredients of the healthy personality.

Case Examples

Mrs. R.

Mrs. R is a fifty-four year old married Caucasian woman who was referred to me by her physician for psychotherapy in conjunction with medical treatment for irritable bowel syndrome. Mrs. R. had experienced gastrointestinal difficulties since she was a child, however in recent years and following a surgical intervention removing her gall bladder, Mrs. R. had experienced more severe symptoms and chronic anxiety. Her anxiety propelled her to search for a doctor who could “cure” her of her symptoms and return her to a physical state in which she experienced no distress at all. She had tried many, many doctors, all of whom she met with high expectations and who gradually she discarded as they failed to cure her totally of her symptoms. Finally, her most recent physician had referred her to me, recognizing that the search for a cure had roots in psychological issues and that Mrs. R. needed help coming to terms with what would probably continue to be an ongoing, chronic condition requiring medical management on the part of Mrs. R.

As she had in the past, Mrs. R. came to me with the expectation that I would cure her. When, in fact, she continued to experience symptoms of IBS, Mrs. R. became discouraged and depressed. At the same time, her highly intelligent mind understood that she was overreacting to an unpleasant but not necessarily debilitating physical condition. I taught Mrs. R. to meditate and she began regular mediation for about 30 minutes at a time. I gave Mrs. R. the standard instructions concerning focusing on the breath and returning to that focus whenever she became distracted. In sessions, Mrs. R. and I talked about her fear of illness and her difficulty accepting that she might have a chronic condition that could not be cured. Repeatedly, she returned to ruminations about how her life used to be and her wishes to return to the past. Ms. R. had very little memory of her childhood; however it did appear that when she was ill as a child she did not receive much parental reassurance. Apparently, she was raised by anxious parents who were

\textsuperscript{15} N. Eddington and R. Shuman. The Healthy Personality, Continuing Psychology Education, Springfield, Ill. 2006 p. 3.
\textsuperscript{16} ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} ibid, p. 13
unable to soothe Mrs. R. or demonstrate how she might soothe herself. The only possibilities for Mrs. R. were to be sick and incapacitated, or, be completely well. She had never considered the gray area in which one might have an illness that needs to be managed but does not ever go away completely.

Throughout the therapy, Mrs. R. continued to mourn the inability of doctors to cure her. She never completely let go of that hope and therefore remained somewhat dissatisfied with her life. At the same time however she began to return to some of the activities that she had given up. She started taking horse-back riding lessons and was able to return to walking as a form of exercise. She became more philosophical about her situation and was able to consider the possibility that her situation was not completely debilitating. More and more, Mrs. R. was able to live in the present moment and worry less about what would happen were she to travel to her daughter’s home for a visit, or have a meal in a restaurant. Her level of anxiety dropped considerably. She began to appreciate the ever-changing nature of her body and its condition and therefore was able to “ride the waves” of her feelings more easily, i.e. “I may feel lousy today but I will probably feel better tomorrow. Things change.”

Mr. M.

Mr. M. came to see me with his wife to work on their marital relationship. Many of their arguments stemmed from difficulties with their demanding 11 year old son who dawdled and misbehaved, causing stress to Mr. and Mrs. M. In particular, Mr. M. acknowledged his own temper and that he often yelled at his son – a parenting intervention that did not appear to help the situation but which had been habitual for many years. Mrs. M. would then attempt to protect this son from his father’s rage and the two parents would end up angry with each other. Both parents agreed that they played a role in this scenario – Mr. M. by allowing his temper to dominate and organize his behavior, and Mrs. M. by joining with her son and treating Mr. M. like he was the “enemy”. Both parents were willing to try and change this pattern of behavior.

Mr. M. and I talked about his anger. There were many conditions that had led to this behavior – identification with an angry father, frustration from his work environment, a tendency towards attention deficit disorder and perfectionism in his personality. At the same time, he was taught to meditate, starting with 5 minutes a day, practicing in particular noticing his feelings and watching them come and go. He was encouraged to “sit” with angry thoughts even if he felt like ending the meditation. He was instructed to view his angry behavior as a pattern of behavior that had been learned and that could be unlearned. We discussed returning to focusing on the breath when he started to feel that he would be overwhelmed by angry thoughts.

Fairly quickly, Mr. M. was able to notice his anger as it was arising. He and his wife were helped to recognize the approaching storm and divert it through a variety of interventions. For one thing, Mr. M. began to be able to recognize his anger without having to express it. He could focus on the breath, or even leave the room if necessary. Mrs. M did not meditate, but she accepted responsibility for “siding” with her son. When she understood that her husband was trying to deal with his anger in another way, she was able to support his efforts. She understood that if he left the room it was in order not to yell. She refrained from criticizing him when he did get angry. In addition, I referred the couple to a child therapy specialist to get help for their son. As they fought less about him, they were able to renew their relationship, enjoying each other’s company.

Teaching Meditation in Psychotherapy

Most individuals who come into the office for help are not seeking training in meditation. People have problems of living and want help to solve those problems. In an
Teaching meditation in psychotherapy often requires a skillful and especially light touch. Sometimes I don’t call this meditation at all, but rather suggest that a breathing exercise I know might be useful in this situation. While certainly considered less than ideal in the meditation world, I suggest that individuals only practice this exercise for 5 minutes a day. I compare it to brushing your teeth and tell people not to expect immediate results, but that if they practice it regularly, at least 4 or 5 times a week, they will notice a difference in a few weeks.

Many people have the notion that meditation means to have a blank mind. They have already decided that this is something they could never do. I spend some time explaining that there are different kinds of meditation, and indeed some kinds do involve trying to have a blank mind, but that the kind of meditation I teach is different. It is not about stopping thought; it is about having thoughts and letting them go.

In the current social climate, meditation is not relegated as much to the realm of flakey or weird, as it used to be. Many individuals have tried acupuncture or yoga and have found these practices helpful as well. I have found it important, however, to keep the expectations low—a few minutes a day. This is in part because meditation, while simple, is actually quite difficult to do, and also to make a very small demand on people’s time. At the present time, I am working with a police officer, a salesman, a teacher, and a mental health professional, all of whom are meditating.

The instructions are to sit comfortably but erect and to bring the attention to the breath. I advise the patient that he or she will very quickly begin to be distracted with thought, or with sounds. I tell them to acknowledge the thought or sound (or feeling) but then to try and let it go and return to the breath. I tell them that this is what they will do, over and over again until the time is up. I advise people that there are meditation timers available for downloading on their cell phones and that they can use these timers as a way to end their session. I ask them to try and avoid grading themselves on how they do, that meditation is a skill, a way of training the mind, and that we all have difficulty doing it. We are teaching the mind to stay where we put it, rather than wherever it wants to go.

I usually spend only a few minutes on the meditation portion of the session, keeping in mind that individuals have the expectation that talking about their problems is the most helpful way of solving their problems. After the session in which I teach them the technique of meditation (often the second session), I follow-up with them in later sessions, inquiring on how they are doing. Most people report that they meditated only once or twice during the week. I let them know that this is common, that most folks have a hard time in the beginning remembering to practice or finding the time. I continue to encourage them and refrain from any criticism regarding the practice. Most people assume that psychotherapy only occurs in the office and they are not usually prepared to “practice” anything in between sessions. Over time, however, I find that people become attracted to the practice, initially for the feeling of peace it brings, and eventually for the changes it allows them to make in their lives.

**Conclusion**

I have tried to show in this paper that vipassana meditation can be used in conjunction with standard psychotherapy practices to help patients change their behavior. Most therapists find that while a great deal of insight often emerges in the therapy session, it can be slow to translate into noticeable behavioral changes. Yet, most patients are most eager for “real” change, however it may occur.

Meditation can, in the lingo of psychoanalytic theory, assist individuals in tolerating difficult affect, in seeing reality more clearly and become less dependent on or
rigid, defensive psychological maneuvers. It also treats much of human behavior as “habit” and therefore works to diminish repeated patterns of unsuccessful behavior. These additions to psychotherapy can make the treatment process less intellectual and more behaviorally satisfying to patient and therapist alike.
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According to the Avatāṃsaka Śūtra twenty-seven days after his Enlightenment, the Buddha ascended higher and more rarefied stages of mindfulness before entering sāgaramudrā-samādhi (Chinese: haiyin sanmei; Jpn: hōkai) or “dharma-realm” wherein all dharmas are mutually dependent and interrelated. This multi-centered psycho-cosmic vision provided the canonical justification and inspiration on which the Chinese Huayan masters would construct the doctrine of fajieyuanquanshu (Jpn: Hokkai engi setsu) dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda or “universal-dependent-co-arising” that amplified Siddhārtha Gautama’s original insight of “living, dying, and rebirth” experience by all dharmic-existences. In addition to opening new vistas for spiritual, ethical, aesthetic, and intellectual explorations that are still unfolding, the experience of sāgaramudrā-samādhi is also a blueprint for Buddhist knowing, thinking, and doing. The Chinese Huayan patriarch Fazang (643-712) crystallized this blueprint in a series of conceptual grids, the shixuan yuanqi wui famen (Jpn: Jūgen engi muge hōmon) or "Ten Subtle and Unimpeded Dharma-gates of Pratītyasamutpāda," hereafter simply the Ten Dharma-gates. In brief, the Ten Dharma-gates (Sanskrit: dharma-paryāya, “pathway to Dharma [truth]”) is a conceptual overlay on the dynamic interplay between and among dharmas of the dharmadhātu that includes the insight into and participation in the interplay of dharmas.

As a bridge between abstraction and reality, the Ten Dharma-gates is a series of propositions constructed on earlier doctrinal developments, made comprehensible by metaphors, examples, and rational argument, to articulate the reality that Tathāgata Śākyamuni intuited and experienced. The Ten Dharma-gates justifies the identity and interfusion between and among dharmas, and categorizes their concomitant spatial, relational, and temporal interplay; it also maps the landscape of dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda. As a map, the Ten Dharma-gates highlight the most salient landmarks of the dharmadhātu; and the Huayan manner of apprehending and thinking about the world.

This article explores the paradigms that frame and direct the Huayan Buddhist knowing and thinking as a basis for critical thinking. It begins with an overview of the dharma-gates that establish the rationale for Huayan knowing and thinking. Subsequently, it considers the ninth and tenth dharma-gates that bring to light different aspects of knowing and thinking. It concludes with some reflections on nurturing critical thinking.

Huayan Posture

Fazang states his reliance on the experience of sāgaramudrā-samādhi in the opening lines of the Huayan wujiao zhang (Jpn: Kegon gokyōshō). “I expound the ten categories of the sāgaramudrā-samādhi the Tathāgata Śākyamuni [ascended, and which is

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1 The Ten Dharma-gates of Pratītyasamutpāda systematized by Fazang is a reworking of the Ten Subtle Pathways of Ekāyana formulated by Zhiyan (602-668), his mentor. Some scholars trace the origins of the Ten Dharma-gates to Fashun (558-640), the first Huayan patriarch who composed Fachieh kanmen (Jpn Hōkkai kanmon, Pathways of the Meditation of the Dharmadhātu) – it builds on these early enumerations.
the basis for] the teaching and doctrine of Ekayāna” (Wujiao zhang, Taishō 45:477a). The treatise concludes with a discussion of the Ten-dharma-gates. Fazang returns to the Ten Dharma-gates in the Huayan danzuanji, his commentary on the Avatamsaka Sūtra. The listing and articulation of the dharma-gates differ, indicating a shift in Fazang’s thinking from an emphasis on the relationship between absolute and particular to the relationship among particulars. The earlier is referred to as the Old Ten Dharma-gates, and the latter as the New Ten Subtle Dharma-gates. I will consider the New Ten Dharma-gates; it represents Fazang’s matured views and the distinctive Huayan attention to dharmas (beings, things, and events). It is important to note that Fazang’s speculations presuppose the capacity of the human mind to ascend and enter into sāgaramudrā-samādhi and intuit the dharmadhātu.

The first dharma-gate, the “simultaneous and complete accommodation [of dharmas]” is a descriptive restatement of fajieyuanqi or dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda, “universal-dependent co-arising.” The dharma-gates two through six detail the rationale for mutual-interfusion, mutual-identity, and mutual-inclusion between and among all dharmas. Mutual-identity refers to the ontological identity of dharmas; and the existential identity between appearance and reality. Mutual-interfusion refers to the efficacy (function: influence, energy) a dharma projects that penetrates other dharmas; and includes the capacity of each and every dharma to absorb the projected energy and/or influence. Mutuality provides support and meaning to each and every dharma. These five dharma-gates draw from prior doctrinal developments and establish the basis for the next four dharma-gates.

The final four dharma-gates are the epistemological paradigms that map the noetic experience of sāgaramudrā-samādhi and map the pathways of Huayan thinking. They constitute a set of cognitive mediators through which Huayan Buddhists perceive and interpret the world. Each dharma-gate calls attention to different cognitive paradigms; they are not mutually exclusive. The seventh dharma-gate, “Indra’s Net” plots the functional or dynamic interplay between and among dharmas. The eighth dharma-gate charts the identity between appearance and reality. The ninth dharma-gate, “interfusion of time” maps the interchange among the past, present, and future. The tenth dharma-gate, “shifting centers (perspectives)” plots the fluid spatial and relational associations among dharmas. These four dharma-gates describe paradigms along which Buddhist thinking proceeds; they also highlight the ambiguity that is inherent in these epistemological paradigms. I begin with the tenth dharma-gate, shifting centers.

**Shifting centers**

Drawing attention to the spatial and relational structure of dharmas, the tenth dharma-gate tenth, “the complete accommodation of principal and secondary [dharmas],” or what I have renamed “shifting centers” re-imagines the truth of dharmadhātu-pratītyasamutpāda, a universe of multiple and shifting centers. Fazang explains:

> [In the event] a single dharma is designated to be the principal [dharma], all [of the remaining dharmas] are relegated to a secondary [status]. ...Consequently, [as the occasion requires] a single dharma can play either the principal or secondary role. [These dual roles] are inexhaustibly repeated (Huanyuankuan, T. 45: 640bc).

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2 For a detailed discussion, see Yusugi Ryōe, Kegon taikei (Tokyo: Kokusho hangyokai, 1918) 481-497.
3 For a discussion on the Huayan notion of mind, see my “Spiritual Cartography: Mapping the Huayen Mind.” In Humanity and Religion in the Age of Science. Committee in Charge of Publishing Collected Papers Commemorating the Retirement of Professor Takeda Ryūsei. Kyoto: Hōzōkan.
The above passage presumes constant change, a prime Buddhist presupposition, and organic totality of the dharmadhātu. Simply, the tenth dharma-gate states that in such a universe, when a dharma is arbitrarily singled out for special consideration that particular dharma becomes the principal dharma and the remaining dharmas assume secondary roles. Yet at the next instant, when another dharma assumes the central role, the once principal dharma will be relegated to a supporting role. This is true for every other dharma. Every dharma therefore has the potential of alternately assuming the principal or secondary role.

Shifting-centers characterizes our collective impressions of the world and events; and affirms the validity of varying viewpoints and allows for openness to new discoveries. The most obvious value of varying viewpoints is evident in scientific investigations of physical phenomenon. To cite one example, the chemist and the physicist who observe a helium atom are interested in and see different aspects the same element. To the chemist the helium is a molecule because it behaves as a gas; to the physicist, on the other hand, it is not a molecule, because it does not display a molecular spectrum (Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions 1962: 50-51.) The atomic scientist, on the other hand, sees the element as a byproduct when hydrogen atoms fuse and releases energy. Each specialist, by his or her training and professional methodology understands the same phenomenon from a specific perspective. The chemist’s view does not discount the physicist’s understanding; both contribute to our knowledge of this simple atom. A specific discipline illuminates one facet of reality, never its totality. It is unlikely that we will never have a complete understanding of a single phenomenon. Our knowledge remains incomplete and ambiguous.

“Shifting centers” highlights the spatial and relational structure of knowing and thinking that emerges from even a slight shift in space or perspective. While “shifting centers” may seem quite commonplace, useful, and even innocuous, it is a serious challenge to persons and ideologies that adhere to a single perspective or absolute center. The most recent example of such narrowness surfaced when Rev. Rob Morris, who lost a member of his congregation, delivered the benediction at an interfaith prayer service in Newtown, Connecticut a few days after Adam Lanza fatally shot twenty children and six adult staff members at Sandy Hook Elementary School. It was a high profile event. President Barak Obama together with families who lost children and relatives, clergy from different faith traditions, including Muslim and Baha’i clerics attended the 16 December 2012 service.

Rev. Morris drew the ire of his denomination, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and was asked to apologize. The denomination forbids its clergy from participating in multi-faith services, lest it will “give the impression that other faiths are equally valid” (The New York Times, National Edition, February 8, 2013, A19). The Sandy Hook incident recalled the rebuke Bishop David Benke received for sharing the podium at Yankee Stadium with representatives of other faith traditions who had gathered to memorialize the victims of 9/11. In an interview on Frontline: Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero, Bishop Benke recalled that on 23 September 2001, the day after the service, he began receiving calls reminding him that “the doctrine of the church does not allow a Christian to stand at the same podium with someone of another faith or everybody is going to get the same idea that all religions are equal, and we have made absolute claims, exclusive claims about our faith.”

4 Bishop Benke’s participation in this event was met with extreme opposition by many in his denomination, who claimed that his participation constituted syncretism and unionism. On 6 July 2002 the Bishop was suspended from his responsibilities. However on 10 April 2003 he was reinstated. The charges against Benke were eventually withdrawn because internal investigation determined that the president of the Synod, Gerald B. Kieschnick, his ecclesiastical supervisor sanctioned his participation in the event.
One of the most notorious examples of an absolute center is the Roman Catholic Church’s condemnation of Galileo (1564-1642). The Church accused the scientist for willfully disobeying the Church’s order not “to hold or defend” Copernican contention that the Earth and other planets orbit the sun. In 1633 the Congregation of the Holy Office that administered the Inquisition concluded that Galileo’s confirmation of Copernicus’ observations were inconsistent with scripture; Church doctrine stated the planets revolved around the earth. The Church’s single vision did not allow Galileo to imagine the possibility of an alternative reality. In 1992 after 359 years Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) declared that Galileo suffered at the hands of some individuals and church institutions. The Church officially apologized to Galileo in 2000.

The above incidents expose the limits of absolute centers, namely a reluctance to admit the possibility of other visions of reality that would invite ethical and moral relativism. Such concerns prompted in 2000, before his guise as Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the head of the Roman Catholic office for the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (formerly, Congregation of the Holy Office) to proclaim in Dominus Jesus, “The Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism” (Ratzinger 2000, para. 4). Continuing the document disparages the validity of other faith traditions when it states, “If it is true that followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation” (Ratzinger 2000, para. 22).

A faith tradition is free to declare itself to be absolute and perfect, but such claims become problematic when it has the means to forcibly impose its beliefs beyond its ideological boundaries. Ideological centers are not limited to faith traditions. Thich Nhat Hanh and others caught up in war, experienced firsthand the rigidity of “isms” and its proponents, during the American misadventure in Southeast Asia. In response, they developed the fourteen precepts (guidelines) of the Tiep Hein Order that re-imagined the traditional Precepts and revived the spirit of the Buddhadharma in the “crucible of war and devastation.” The first Precept is most pertinent to our discussion; it states:

Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth. Even meritorious teachings become a burden if one does not know when to discard them (Nhat Hanh 1987:27).

This statement challenges the “True Way” or “One Way” attitude of ideological centers and the inertia of tradition that clings to the “truths” of the past. For the Tiep Hein Order the Vietnam (American) War was an ideological conflict. The Americans and their allies claimed to be fighting for freedom and democracy. The National Liberation Front and their allies believed that they were battling against colonialism and for national self-determination. Thich Nhat Hanh seems to have taken to heart Buddha’s advice to the Kālāmas clansmen and women. When asked whose teaching they should believe and follow, Buddha underscored that his Dharma or teaching is only a guide, and that he too was a guide, not an absolute authority. Saṅghabhadrā recounts the Buddha’s advice to the Kalāmas.

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5 On a less universal scale, nationalism requires a degree of homogeneity. To cite an extreme case, leaders of the post-French Revolution wanted the citizens to read the same books and identify with the same history. Similarly the Japanese national building project required Okinawans and other people on the fringes of its cultural and political sphere to become Japanese.
If anyone wants to have knowledge about the words of a rule of conduct, or the original text of a rule, or if he has any difficulty in answering the question on the same, he must know the fourfold aspects of the Vinaya, which the great elders with miraculous powers have found out and have explained to people. At the time when the congregation had assembled, there was a question: What are the fourfold aspects? (1) First, the original text of the Vinaya; (2) second, what is in consonance with the original text; (3) third, the words of teachers; and (4) one’s own opinion (Saṅghabhadra, 1970: 172).

This passage outlines the four levels of authority that should be appealed to determine whether a specific activity constitutes proper conduct. Saṅghabhadra reminds us that while the words of the Buddha may be the final authority, he lists three other levels of authority. The second level of authority is what might be properly referred to as the implicit spirit of the Buddha’s teaching, namely, “What is in consonance with the original text.” The third level of authority is to be obtained from “the words of the teachers,” which I understand to mean the interpretations of learned persons. The fourth level of authority is “one’s own opinion.” In response to the question, “What is meant by one’s own opinion?” The Buddha responded:

Leaving aside the original text, leaving aside what is in consonance with the original text and leaving aside what is the word of Teachers, to infer with one’s own mind, or with the help of other means such as the detailed explanatory commentaries…, or with what is said by Teachers - this is called one’s own opinion” (Saṅghabhadra, 1970:172).

Thich Nhat Hanh took Buddha’s caution against over-reliance on dogma and doctrine to heart. I am not certain if he appealed to the four sets of authorities outlined above, certainly refashioning the traditional Precepts for the crucible of war time realities conforms to the spirit of “one’s opinion.” The Buddha stressed that he was a guide, not an authority, and that all propositions must be tested, including his own (Conze 1982:12). “Shifting-centers” offers a road map for traversing the complex spatial and relational perspectives that must be considered in accessing and making decisions.

Interfusion of the ten time-periods

The ninth dharma-gate, “free interplay of the ten time-periods,” or simply the “interfusion of time” is an exposition of time from the standpoint of the Enlightenment. Existentially, the ninth dharma-gate describes the reality and experience of transcend-timelessness that is realized in transient-time. The rarefied experience that suspends all time into a single existential moment contrasts with our conventional understanding of time represented by the clock. Mechanical or clock-time is orderly, and evenly sequenced; it divides time into past, present, and future. Such notions of time are unidirectionally; namely time moves either from the past to the future or from the future to the past. Regularity is crucial for managing credit card payments, scientific experiments, flight schedules, and generally establishing order in our daily lives. Mechanical time is observed; one stands outside of time and change. Time is also experiential and embodied in experience and memory; and is freely manipulated. The imaginative mind can re-create and retrieve the past and bring it to present time and into being; the imagination can also “remember the future” and transport it into the present and into being. These creative

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6 Each time period—past, present, and future—possess its respective three time periods, for a total of nine time periods. Entering into the sāgaramudrā-samādhi, these nine time periods collapse into the tenth, a time of timelessness-time.

7 “Memories of the future” or “remembering the future” is simply to imagine future possibilities, including working towards that end. The expression is inspired by Sarvāstivāda notion of time. Normally we think time moves from past to present and proceeds to the future, but the tradition maintained that time originates in the future, appears in the present,
Manipulations are common in the elderly with dementia and persons with cognitive impairments, who frequently move in and out of time by tapping their memory store or by juxtaposing non-sequential events. In Ingmar Bergman’s (1918-2007) Wild Strawberries, Professor Isak Borg moves between the past and present by reminiscing, nightmares, and day dreaming. Moving through and between past and present is a theme in the recent Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past lives (Lung Bunni Raluek Chat) produced and directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. In both films past memories and the making of present memories are set against memories of the future (anticipated) death. The mind traverses, collapses, transcends, denies, and even reverses time.

The expression "じゅうせい” or “porously-laminated nature” coined by Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō captures the existential and ontological complexity that evolves with the interplay of past, present, and future memories. Watsuji (1889-1960) maintained that the Japanese are informed by a variety of traditions and cultures - Shintōism, Confucianism, Daoism, Chinese and Indian Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, Christianity, and a variety of Western thought and attitudes. Folk beliefs, emotional, social, historical and current events, personal proclivities and experiences, and recent advances in biotechnology and the culture that it has spawned can also be added to these layers. Additionally these layers are porous; the Japanese may have assimilated the above traditions in their comings and goings, but they may respond to an event from a single, or any combination of these layers. “じゅうせい” highlights the embodiment of different layers of personal and community experience and memory that inform and nurture individuals and communities.

The co-mingling of ancient with more recent memories is evident in the multiple definitions of death in the 1997 Japanese Organ Transplant Law. A clear legal and medical definition of brain-death is essential for harvesting and transplanting organs. After more than thirty years of debate and reflection, the Law admits the traditional cardio-pulmonary definition of death or the more recent brain-death criteria. While an individual and/or family may rationally accept the notion of brain-death and the medical logic of organ transplants, they are still informed by the traditional cardiopulmonary definition of death, especially while the heart is still beating and the body is warm. It is perhaps for this reason that the Law has a “family consent” provision, which is in essence a third definition: “social death.” This provision allows the family to negotiate the definition of death that would allow for the harvesting of organs. These multiple definitions of death played out during Japan’s very public first experience with brain-death and heart transplant.

In 1968, Dr. Wada Jurō removed and placed the heart of Yamaguchi Yoshimasa in eighteen year old Miyazaki Nobuo. On 11 August 1968, four days after the transplant, the Asahi Shimbun reported that both families met and appeared together at a news

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The Japanese criteria for whole-brain death are: a) deep coma; 2) cessation of spontaneous breathing; c) fixed and enlarged pupils; d) absence of brain-stem reflexes; e) flat brain waves; f) the above four conditions must continue for at least six hours. Children under six are not subject to the criteria. Two physicians with no vested interest in the harvesting of the individual’s organs, in addition to the attending physician are required to make the diagnosis. The law makes a distinction between a clinical diagnosis and a legal determination of brain-death. In cases where an individual has agreed to the legal definition of whole-brain-death, that person can request that his or her heart and other organs be removed for transplantation. However, should the occasion arise and before the organs can be harvested, a transplant coordinator must consult with the family to ascertain that they will agree with the legal diagnosis of brain-death and approve the removal of the organs.

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conference. The article noted that though Yamaguchi’s parents were initially hesitant in donating their son’s organs, they were now pleased that their son was able to make a contribution to society. Miyazaki’s father responded that he had no words to express his gratitude, and that he would like, if the Yamaguchi’s were amenable, for both families to continue their relationship as relatives. Yamaguchi’s teenage daughter initially opposed gifting her brother’s heart. While she now agrees with the decision, she tearfully wished that her brother’s body could have been left alone. Her remarks hinted of the intensity of the family discussion. These brief remarks suggest some of the different spiritual layers that may have informed members of the family. I offer a few observations.

Ms Yamaguchi lament that she wished her brother’s body not be violated can be attributed in part to the Buddhist view that associates life with sentience in its broadest sense. Though the brain may have ceased to function, the individual with a beating heart is still alive and thus would be pained by being cut and having his or her organs removed; or she may have been informed by the Confucian and/or Shintō objection to any calculated violation of the body. The deliberate removal of vital organs is a most unfilial act. ⁹ Additionally popular Shintō belief maintains that a person should be buried with all of his or her body intact; lest its angers the spirit (reikon) of the deceased who may become vengeful and wreak havoc on the living. Moreover, the lack of a completely intact body complicates the individual’s transformation into a kami or ancestral spirit (sosen). Daoist beliefs maintain that the body is a microcosm of the harmonious universe and such vital organs as the heart are inhabited by spirits (Ch: shen) that coordinate its vital functions. A replacement heart would destabilize the inner harmony of the body. Another concern is the dwelling place of the spirit that once resided in the heart. Without a permanent abode, the spirit is apt to become distressed and cause misfortune on the family.

These views may seem archaic, but they still inform Japanese attitudes toward personal and family identity, life, death, and the afterlife. Miyazaki’s father expressed long held beliefs in the nature of personhood, when he proposed that he would like their families to continue their relationship as relatives. Such an attitude can be attributed to Confucian notions of filiality that defines the responsibilities and obligations between and among individuals: parent and child, husband and wife, siblings, friends, and the community. An essential part of Japanese identity is his or her place within the family lineage that emerges from the distance past and extends into future generations. That his son received and is living with someone else’s organ raises significant conceptual questions concerning the notion of family and personhood. Though deceased, the donor’s heart is alive and beating in another person. To which family lineage does the person Yoshimasa belong to? Assuming that the Yamaguchi family belonged to a temple and their son was buried with and continues to be memorialized with Buddhist rites, what ritual adjustments, if any, did the priest or priests make? How did the Miyazaki’s memorialize Nobuo, who passed away 83 days later? As far as I am aware, Buddhist mortuary and memorial rituals have not been modified to account for donors and recipients of large organs.

As an epistemological paradigm, the “interfusion of time” cautions that there is always more than meets the eye. The Japanese’s first experience with organ transplant challenged them to re-image death and long held attitudes of family and personal identity. The need for a precise definition of death requires a subjective shift that unveils other ways of thinking and being. Like “shifting centers,” the “interfusion of time” is a

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⁹ The opening lines of the Hsiao-ching (Classic on Filiality) states, “Filial piety is the basis of virtue and the source of our teachings. We receive our body, our hair, and skin from our parents, and we dare not destroy them” (Hsiao-ching 1997: 4).
reminder that the slightest subjective shift opens new possibilities for knowing and thinking.

Reflections

Dwelling in the a-temporal and non-spatial mindfulness of sāgaramudrā-samādhi the Tathāgata Sākyamuni apprehended the reality of the dharmadhātu immediately and directly. From this vantage, he apprehended all dharmas: beings, things, and events - to be part of a continually changing organic whole, rising and falling as a single body. The Ten Dharma-gates is a map through which we can visualize this luminous psycho-cosmic landscape and to imagine the contours of Enlightened knowing that apprehends “the rich sensual world of everyday experience” in a single swoop that is of increasing interest to scientists who wish to understand complex organisms and systems in their entirety. Scientific inquiry is moving away from a physical-mechanical-mathematic model of the world toward a cognitive texture that is closer to an individual’s direct perception of reality (Nakayama and Sivin 1973: xxix). Multiple and “shifting centers” and the “interfusion of time” support the effort to understand every being, thing, and event in its entirety.

In a world of conflicting demands and responsibilities dharma-gates ten and nine are useful guidelines for observing and assessing events, passing judgment, and taking action. Such prudence is evident in the geriatric team that coordinates the respective expertise of medical professionals, social service providers, clergy, family, and volunteers in partnership with the elder and his or her family to best ensure the elder’s well-being. Even these efforts are never exhaustive, and our knowledge of a particular phenomenon or care for a person always is indeterminate and changing. An issue may be irresolvable and may remain forever ambiguous. Yet living and working in ambiguity may be the most productive way of ethical deliberation and action. Such a posture initiates humility in deliberation, decision-making, and action, knowingly that others have different values and may not approve or follow our example. Living and working with uncertainty is invaluable in public discourse; indeterminacy demands that we consider all concerns in advancing the public good or determining end-of-life care.

The moral ends of Buddhist knowing, thinking, and doing, and their institutionalization at Nālandā Mahāviharā may be useful models for fostering critical thinking. Students at Nālandā explored and measured the Buddhadharma by studying the different branches of Brāhmaṇic philosophy. In addition the more than forty scholar-monks from China, Korea, Tibet, Central and Southeast Asia who studied were in residence no doubt introduced non-Indian visions of reality, healing, and problem solving (Joshi 1967:140). The secular disciplines, especially medicine and pharmacology, nurtured the practical aspects of compassion (Demiéville 1985:50-53). If this experience is any guide, the exposure to competing ideologies the students at Nālandā received instilled an appreciation for “relative values.” This “liberal education” prepared the students to engage their ideological competitors and more importantly to face

10 After three centuries Nālandā universal educational vision gave way to a focus on “Buddhist Tantra, an amalgamation of mysticism, and magic that radically departed from classical Buddhist teachings of śūnyatā and other fundamental ideas. Tantra incorporated mystical and magical elements into Buddhist ritual and practice, including sexual components. Tantra’s emphasis on the necessity of a guru to guide the devotee limited the glories of the Dharma to a select few. This intellectual narrowing limited the exposure to alternative visions of reality and thus solutions to human questions. Scholars speculate that this intellectual stunting was a major reason Nālandā was unable to adequately respond to the Brahmanic and Muslim challenges. While Brahmanism was able to recover from the destruction of its temples and the slaughter of its ascetics, the Buddhism of Nālandā was unable to (Dutt 1962:344. Joshi 1977:304-327). Passing the secrets of the Dharma from teacher to disciple also suggests the decline of Buddhism as a living faith; the laity was not included in the fruits of the academy, distancing the Dharma from the wider society. The scholar-monks did not involve themselves with the lives of the laity and their rituals for birth, marriage, and death. These mundane tasks were relegated to the Brahmanic clergy (Joshi 1967:323).
unprecedented moral, ethical, spiritual, and intellectual challenges. At its height, the rectors - Dharmapāla, Śīlabhadra, and Santideva were scholar-monks of liberal learning and wide philosophical outlook (Joshi 1977:345). Edward Conze attributes the spread of Buddhism to monks, who “Having the advantage of a liberal education, …react to the unproven with a benevolent skepticism and so …have been able to accommodate themselves to every kind of popular belief not only in India, but in all countries they moved into” (Conze 1982: 12).

“The Buddha always stressed that he was a guide, not an authority, and that all propositions must be tested, including his own” (Conze 1982:12). To that end, he continually retooled the conventions (language) and his pedagogy, cognizant that what may work today or in one context may not be appropriate tomorrow or in a different context. A lesson that was not lost to Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363-1443), the nō actor and aesthetician who observed the ambiguities of his art. For his part, Zeami applied Buddha’s pedagogy to “hana” or “flower,” an expression that refers to the consummate skill of a performer who is able to consistently transport the audience into the imagined world created by the theater. What may be successful for one theatrical venue may not be effective in another for any number or reasons, not the least, a different audience at every performance. He buttressed this opinion with a reference to Dōgen (c. 1200-1253), Zeami writes:

The non-believer (turtika) quires the Buddha. “Yesterday, what kind of Dharma did you preach?”
“Yesterday I preached the unambiguous Dharma.”
“What kind of Dharma will you preach today?”
“I will preach the ambiguous Dharma.”
“Why do you preach the ambiguous Dharma today?”
“Yesterday’s unambiguous Dharma is today’s ambiguous Dharma (Zeami 1970: 305-306).”

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Humanity is facing a global crisis because these years are decisive for whether our civilization will irreversibly continue to produce social and ecological death or whether we find a way out towards a life-enhancing new culture. This constitutes a challenge but also a kairos, a necessity to take a position, for people of all religions, spiritualities and faith communities because the crisis is global. A decision requires critical thinking in order to make a right judgment, connected with right practice. One crucial element of critical thinking is to look at a phenomenon from different perspectives, compare them and draw adequate conclusions. This is why Buddhist critical thinking can be sharpened by exposing itself to critical thinking in other philosophies, spiritualities and faith communities.

My own perspective is originally based on the Jewish-Christian tradition; but I have studied other traditions as well and come to the conclusion that the main world religions were shaped in similar historic contexts, particularly shaped by new developments in the economy which, however, had also immense impact on human minds and hearts. Therefore, to compare them and put them into dialog has an objective base in history. In addition, as these contexts also constitute the foundation of our present global civilization in crisis there is a double reason to develop critical thinking in the form of interreligious dialog. Let us look at this hypothesis in detail starting with an analysis of the historic contexts of the so-called Axial Age and Modernity.

I. Suffering caused by economic injustice in the Axial Age and in the capitalist civilization of modernity

We do not need to spend much time on describing the sufferings caused by economic injustice today. They cry to high heaven every day. Jean Ziegler, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, speaks of more than 60 million people dying of hunger and its consequences every year, especially children, although there is more than enough to feed them. This is an annual World War II against the poor. He continues to say: “A child that dies of hunger is murdered.” He calls this a daily crime against humanity. Others call it structural genocide. All these victims are human beings with a human face, which according to biblical tradition: humans are created in the image of God; so, in Jewish-Christian language terms, we are talking about murdering living images of God – tantamount to blasphemy.

Also, the blue planet earth’s suffering is growing dramatically. The extinction of species is accelerating, desertification is expanding, the poisoning of water and soil is

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increasing, climate change is producing irreversible effects like lifting the sea level, devouring islands in the Pacific and growing parts of Bangladesh, creating weather disasters everywhere and possibly ten degrees higher temperature in parts of Africa. We all know this, but so far we have not been able to make the necessary changes neither in global economics and politics nor in thinking, attitude and action of the majority of people.

What is often forgotten are the psychological and spiritual sufferings and diseases of a growing number of people. In India about 54 farmers, driven into debt beyond their means, commit suicide on a daily average out of despair. Workers suffer increasing stress and anxiety, middle class people fall into depression, in 2020 presumably the second largest illness according the WHO. So what are the roots of all of this?

My thesis is that what we are experiencing now started nearly 3000 years ago within what is called the Axial Age, beginning in the 8th century BCE in the whole of Eurasia from Greece to China. At that time a new economy started to appear in daily life, built on money and private property. It had tremendous social as well as psychological and spiritual effects. To analyze what happened then helps to understand what is happening today. Looking at the responses to this development by the different faiths and philosophies in Israel/Judah, India, China and Greece may also help us to better understand the tasks and possibilities of engaged Buddhists and others in our age.

It was the philosopher Karl Jaspers who coined the term Axial Age. According to him the experience of violent crises between 800 and 200 BCE might have prompted the parallel efforts of the prophets, the Buddha, Confucius, Daoism and Greek philosophy to find new foundations for living together. He characterized the new approach as intellectual and spiritual (geistig), looking only marginally at the economic and political context. Recently Karen Armstrong and, based on her findings, Jeremy Rifkin took up this theory, looking particularly at war and violence as causes for the responses within the different cultures. Also, José María Vigil has just published a chapter in his book on Theology of Axiality and Axial Theology. As far as the socio-historic context of the Axial Age is concerned my thesis comes nearest to what David Graeber has worked out in his book Debt. The First 5,000 Years, although he is not very interested in the religious responses. Combining his insights with my own research let me summarize how the new economy affects the ancient societies.

Money as unit of account was used in the palaces and temples of Mesopotamia as early as around 3000 BCE, but the ordinary economy of people in daily life did not function via money but a system of mutual credit. This changed when soldiers and mercenaries became professionals and war-making was raised to previously unknown levels. They had to be paid. The most important wage were the spoils. As precious metal could easily be transported it started circulating in little pieces as a kind of money. Around 600 BCE authorities in Lydia, India and China started at nearly the same time to coin the metal. One primary purpose was to pay the mercenaries and soldiers, i.e. large numbers of people with standardized quantities. Other areas where this standardized

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payments came into use where taxes and fines. With these practical currencies also local markets developed for daily transactions of the normal people and with them the impersonal relationships in selling, buying and exchange. This means that cash and unified markets are the children of war.

At the same time slaves, usually prisoners of war, now increasingly also debt slaves, were turned into a negotiable commodity. This is why Graeber calls this new system the “military-coinage-slavery-complex”. There was a kind of circle: new professional armies loot precious metals from temple or palace treasuries, jewelry of women etc. and slaves. The slaves have to work in the mines to produce more metal for the coinage. The coins are paid to the soldiers and stimulate the local markets and so on. The whole system only functions as long as it expands through further conquest. So it is no surprise that this system is easily wedded to imperialism. Increasingly the empires also request tribute payment in the form of money. This development finds its first climax in the Hellenistic-Roman empires.

On this basis the logic of calculated exchange in markets emerged. Goods for daily needs were exchanged with money as unit of account. Money became the “one” in the variety of commodities – however, not as a “thing”, detached from the social process, in which people recognize its value, as the Buddhist economist Karl-Heinz Brodbeck points out. This means that the daily use of money also changed the soul and the thinking of people. Besides communicating by speech, i.e. using words (logos), they communicate by calculating in money (ratio). In so doing, the individual ego gains precedence over relations in community.

This is furthered by the fact that, in the process of exchange in the market, the money owner has more power than the producer of goods. Money as such offers access to the market while the product has first to be in demand. Coping with this risk is only possible by having as much money as possible. One of the “Sages of Antiquity”, Pittakos of Mytilene, underlined this, saying: “Profit is insatiable”. He does not say: “The one who makes profit is insatiably greedy”. An economy in which money is made a commodity is inherently greedy. This is why in our new book Franz Hinkelammert and I speak of “greedy money”. There is an ‘objective’ base for greed to accumulate money without limits.

The other implication of this is that money gives the right to private property beyond personal use. Money gives access to the market, cushions the risks, measures the exchange value and gives access to property rights. Combined with the development of hierarchies and classes in larger societies, money and private property start to determine the economic, social and political power of people within societies.

In any case, the new economy led to greed and the desire to accumulate limitless money. The institutionalization of this greed was interest. A debtor had to pay back more than he had borrowed, for example to purchase seed. He also had to put up his own land as security. If he could not pay back his debt plus interest, he lost his land and his family had to work as debt slaves for the creditor. Thus private property and money came into existence at the same time and led to debt slavery and loss of land. On the other hand, the creditors could collect more and more land, money, and debt slaves. This is what scholars have called the emergence of a class society in antiquity.

Private property and money also reinforced the male domination of patriarchy

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12 Cf. footnote 1.
since only men could own property, which was a way of giving them political power, too. The house father (in Greek: despotes, in Latin: dominus) was seen as the owner of the land, women, children, slaves and cattle. In Roman law private property even got the status of an absolute. The men were legally allowed to use, misuse or destroy it.

So the result of introducing money as commodity and private property as an absolute, combined with imperial conquest was increased division in societies between masters and slaves, men and women, a more and more precarious situation of small farmers and in general a dire impoverishment and suffering for the majority of people. This was not just a structural problem because money also changed people’s souls. Besides communicating through speech and cooperation they start calculating, including calculating each other’s performance in competition. So the problem was not just structural, but took on a psychological and spiritual dimension.

Before looking at the religions and philosophies resisting these developments in the Axial Age let us briefly analyze how the modern capitalist civilization has built on the early money-private property-economy, giving it a new dynamics. In early capitalism from the 13th/14th century CE the market set out to conquer one sphere of life after the other. The basic step was the privatization of land as commons through enclosures subjecting agriculture to the mercantile coordination of labor. Another new element was the introduction of compound interest. However, the most decisive new element was the invention of the double-entry book-keeping in the upper Italian trade and banking cities. Here everything was calculated according to debit and credit, costs and return, input and output – with the one goal to gain maximum profit. This was not just a social technique but the decisive characteristic of a new worldview. The world became looked at as a functional mechanism to produce profit for one-self. The calculation of utility followed the means-end rationality, which is the typical way of thinking in European modernity, which meanwhile dominates the whole world. As the economy serves the one purpose of maximizing profits normal people judge everything according to a single yardstick: “What’s in it for me?”

So structural, cultural and personal greed starts to be seen as something positive. Finally Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith define greed and egoism as a virtue and the decisive motor of the economy. The mechanism of continuous re-investing the profit in new projects in order to gain higher profits created an obsessive accumulation machine. Money which is constantly re-invested for accumulation purposes is called capital. Capital is not simply money but money or assets in monetary terms invested for getting more money. It can also be frozen to capital in the form of machines serving accumulation. So greedy money is the exact description of the nature of capital, of profit, thirsty for more profit. This is why capitalism is the precise term for the economic system and the form of society of western modernity. Market economy is a euphemism in order to avoid touching the taboo. If you want to use this term in a capitalist context you need to say “capitalist market economy” because in the past there were and in the future there will be other kinds of market economies. There can be exchange markets without money but also markets with money, however not with money in the form of a commodity geared at accumulation. We shall come back to this.

Industrial capitalism deepened the division of labor and increased the split between the classes. The key new feature of it is the increased through-put of energy and resources for profit’s sake, aggravated by the fact that consumerism has to be stimulated for the sake of maximum capital accumulation. The result of this shift is only visible now as we face the energy and ecological crises. Karl Marx was prophetic when he stated: “Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth –
the soil and the laborer.”

He also analyzed the obsession for accumulation by the commodity-money mechanisms as fetishism driving people and societies even against reason. This is exactly what we experience today as growth fetishism destroying the earth.

Today this fetishism has taken the form of financial capitalism after it turned out that infinite growth is not possible in a finite world. Within the financial sector the growth obsession has turned to speculation with ballooning financial assets in all kinds of forms. But it is not without a link to the real economy. When the balloons burst as we experienced in the years following 2007 the neoliberal governments take real money from the working taxpayers and throw it into the voracious jaws of the money owners and their agents, the banks. As this increases the debt of the public budgets, big capital is blackmailing the governments to even pay higher interest rates and curb social benefits (austerity politics which nowadays is the official policy in the European Union). It seems certain that the whole system will one day collapse, thereby increasing the suffering of people even more. Financial capitalism is the ultimate climax of a development starting in the Axial Age.

For me the conclusion is that we are not dealing with this or that crisis, but that this whole civilization is death-bound, not just the economy. It is only because the majority of the people and to some extent all of us are imprisoned in the same kind of logic, spirit and practice that the system is still able to operate. Are there possibilities of structural and personal transformation to find a new culture of life?

II. The response of the Axial Age faiths and philosophies and of today’s liberation theologies and spiritualities

My key thesis is that all religions and philosophies of the Axial Age can and must be understood as a response to the emergence of that kind of civilization – including its political economy, psychology and spirituality – which now, at its climax, are leading humanity and earth not only into increasing suffering but also into death. This means that it is of crucial importance to unleash the original power of these faiths and spiritualities in order to inspire and lead us towards a new all-embracing culture that allows life to flourish on this wonderful planet. This includes the critique of religion that has deviated from its original source in order to assimilate to the dominating civilization. My proposition is that engaged Buddhism and liberation theologies in the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are already doing this but they can be strengthened and united by realizing their common origin in the Axial Age. Let us look at some details.

Historically it seems that the prophet Amos in the second part of the 8th century BCE was the first to react to the upcoming money-private property economy. His central theme was the threat to the small farmers. They were losing their possessions through seizures, being sold into slavery for excessive debts; women were abused as debt slaves etc. Listen e.g. to chapter 2:6-8:

“Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl,

so that my holy name is profaned;
they lay themselves down beside every altar
on garments taken in pledge;
and in the house of their God
they drink wine bought with fines they imposed.”

Against the destruction of human and social relations through the mechanisms of money and private property Amos puts justice into the center, correcting all power asymmetries (5:24):

“Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

The other prophets of Israel and Judah follow the same line: Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah. The latter identifies the knowledge of God with doing justice to the poor when he critically addresses King Jehoiakim, son of King Josiah (22:16):

“Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well.
Is not this to know me? says the Lord.
But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain,
for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.”

The prophets and their followers were a minority in Israel and Judah. It was only King Josiah who made a difference in the second part of the 7th century BCE. It was under his rule that the message of the prophets started to be implemented in the form of legal reforms, that eventually led to the Torah. Central to this process is the Book of Deuteronomy, literally translated meaning “The Second Law”. Here you find the Decalogue, presenting God as the liberator from slavery and therefore demanding and protecting just human relations because only in this way can freedom be secured (5:6-21). It is not by accident that the last of the Ten Commandments is about greed and accumulation:

“Neither shall you covet your neighbor’s wife.
Neither shall you desire your neighbor’s house,
or field; or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey,
or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Deuteronomy presupposes an economy using money for exchange (Deuteronomy 14:24-26). At the same time, all its concrete laws aim at correcting, if not avoiding, the destructive forms and consequences of money and private property. A preventive measure is the prohibition of charging interest and pawning as well as the abolition of tribute to be paid for the court and the temple. Tithing now only serves the purpose of staging an annual people’s festival and social benefits for those members of the community who have no land for their subsistence (widows, orphans and Levites, 14:22-29). Moreover, the harvesters have to leave grain on the fields for the poor to collect (24:19). When somebody falls into debt anyway, the debts have to be forgiven after seven years, in the Sabbath Year. Also, the debt slaves have to be released after such period – receiving a certain sum of money, equivalent to the seven years’ wages of a day laborer, for a new start in freedom. If the people follow God’s life-sustaining instructions there will be no
poor among them (Deuteronomy 15:4). Taken together, these amount to the first known social laws in world history.\(^\text{15}\) The prophet Jeremiah, living at the same period, is hoping for a time when God’s spirit will write these laws, protecting freedom and creating justice, in the hearts of the people (Jeremiah 31:31ff.).

The Holiness Code later adds the theological foundation of these laws (Leviticus 25:23). The earth belongs to God and, therefore, humans must not claim absolute ownership of the land by turning it into a commodity but they should use it as guests on earth. In economic terms, this means that property is only legitimate in its use value, not in its exchange value for accumulation. This is the basis for an economy, in which all may have enough for life, summarized in the story of the bread, called Manna, given from heaven for the people traveling through the desert after liberation from slavery in Egypt. Those who gathered much did not have too much and those who gathered little had not too little but each of them had as much as they needed (cf. Exodus 16).

When the political economy of greed and conquest becomes totalitarian in the Hellenistic empires the Jewish faithful (chassidim) react with apocalyptic underground literature characterized by resistance and hope for God’s intervention. The classical text for this is the Book of Daniel. In chapter 3 we find the narrative of three Jewish men defying the emperor’s demand that everybody should fall down and worship the golden statue. Chapter 7 tells about a vision of Daniel: The empires in the shape of greedy predatory animals are overcome by God’s new order coming down from heaven in the shape of a human being. The message is: the human, image of God, will have the victory over the beast-like, destructive imperial order. That is the hope feeding persistent resistance.

So Ancient Israel and Judah, according the Hebrew Bible, react to the Axial Age context, characterized by growing economic injustices and suffering, with (1) prophetic critique of the economic mechanisms and encouragement of inner conversion, (2) theo-political legal reforms and (3) persistent resistance in the perspective of a new order of humanization.

This is the tradition on which Jesus, his movement and the early church are building new messianic communities in the context of the Roman Empire. This I understand as a second wave of the Axial Age faiths and philosophies. (In parenthesis: I regard Islam as the third wave, building on the biblical traditions, in the context of the Arab merchant society). Jesus proclaims that God’s new domination-free order with a human face, announced by Daniel, is beginning in his presence. It is the suffering, the poor, the outcast who become the first subjects of this new order that turns the imperial hierarchy upside down. The first will be the last and the last will be the first. He creates a spirituality of trust in God’s care overcoming the external and internal rule of Mammon, the idol of collecting treasures in the form of the accumulation of money and property. “Strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s justice, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

It is important to realize that Jesus does not only liberate the poor to change their own lives and build communities of solidarity but he also acts politically in relation to the existing institutions. He does not join the Jewish freedom fighters against Roman occupation, while he does not reject them. He simply looks for a more effective strategy in order to break the cycle of violence and exploitation. One of his key actions in this regard is the confrontation with the Jewish collaborators of the Romans, the priestly elites in the temple (Mark 11:15-19). The temple during that time was the economic center of Judea. It was not only a kind of central bank but also the center of trade and market

transactions, built on a whole system of sacrifice, exploiting the people. Here the central question is: Which god rules? Is it the gods legitimating exploitation and impoverishment; or is the biblical God protecting and liberating the poor, asking for justice, not for sacrifices? First of all Jesus confronts those who harm the poor by the monetary system, the money changers; secondly, those who profit from the market system, trading with pigeons, the sacrificial animals for the poor; finally he stops the whole liturgy of sacrifice.

The key text of God and Jesus’ identification with the people impoverished by and suffering from economic injustice is found in Matthew 25:31ff. Here the victims, the hungry, the thirsty etc. are portrayed as the yardstick for all people and peoples to be accepted in the final judgment. The judge is the Human One of Daniel 7. This text is crucial for interfaith relations and interfaith solidarity for justice. Because those judged are not being judged by the criteria of belonging to this or that religion but by providing for the basic needs of the least ones with whom Jesus identifies.

The early Christian communities followed Jesus on this path. The classical text is Acts 4:32-35. The community voluntarily shares property, especially those having landed property and houses. This balancing of the relations within the community is portrayed as fulfillment of the Deuteronomy Torah by quoting: “There was not a needy person among them” (cf. Deuteronomy 15:4).

The Apostle Paul adds two important insights to the Jesus tradition. The first is that reason can be co-opted by greed. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, he shows that reason is folly, when it orientates itself to a wisdom in the service of the strong, the rich and the mighty. (Today we know this very well when e.g. scientists work in the service of TNCs to smokescreen the ecological dangers of a product which destroys ecosystems). So wisdom is only true wisdom when it orients itself to the criteria of the weak, vulnerable, despised in order to be truly inclusive. Secondly Paul shows in the letter to the Romans that also the law, meant to serve life in community, can be co-opted by greed (Romans 6 and 7). In that case it kills. (Today we can see this in the case of debt mechanisms: When the law that debt has to be repaid is made an absolute, it can kill by producing hunger and even death through Structural Adjustment Programs). Therefore, the overarching criterion for law must be love, solidarity. This is the most developed form of critical thinking in the Bible.

Summarizing the core of the Hebrew Bible and the messianic Second Testament in relation to human beings suffering from economic injustice: it is the identification of the God of Israel and Jesus with the impoverished people. Therefore, justice in the hearts of people and justice in community relations and institutions is the key contribution of the biblical traditions towards interfaith solidarity for overcoming suffering.

It seems to me that the Buddha presented his teaching in a similar context. In her book The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism in India the Indian historian Uma Chakravarti concludes that the prince Siddhartha Gautama experienced his conversion and enlightenment to become the Buddha in the following context: between the 8th and 6th century BCE a new economy penetrated North India building on private property and money supported by the monarchic power. Consequently, society split into impoverished people and those who enriched themselves on the basis of the new economic mechanisms. It was the pressures of this context – together with his strong inspiration to liberate human beings from suffering – that motivated prince Siddhartha to abandon his privileges in order to find a way for overcoming such suffering in society. He came to understand that the poverty and suffering was caused by greed grounded in the illusion of an ego to be protected by aggressiveness. His solution was to overcome the three poisons – greed,

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hatred and illusion – through meditation on the inter-relatedness of all beings and to let go all superfluous things.

It is my conclusion that given the similar context in Israel/Judah and in India during the Axial age, the prophets, the Torah (and later Jesus) and the Buddha’s present teachings and actions, lead us in the same direction: to overcome the suffering, aggravated by the injustice of the money-private property economy and its effects on the human soul and thinking. However, both have a different focus. While also dealing with overcoming the personal greed and ego-centrism the biblical traditions at the same time put a strong emphasis on developing legal and institutional provisions against structural, systemic greed to protect the poor and suffering people. Jesus also tries to develop new messianic communities of solidarity to renew Israel to be a light to the world, while Paul widens those communities to include people of all nations in order to subversively spread out these alternatives throughout the Roman empire with the motto: “No Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female” (Paul’s letter to the Galatians 3:28). This can be seen as a global cultural revolution.

The Buddha, it seems to me, with his Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path, has his main focus in liberating each human being from the fetters of greed, hatred and illusion, stimulated by the Axial Age imperial money-private property economy. His institutional contribution to a counter-culture is the formation of the Sangha, including all castes and eventually also women. He also confronted the despotic kings of his time by propagating the image of the ideal Dharma-king. He gave them the responsibility to make sure that all people can satisfy their basic needs. He also taught them to govern without violence. This was to be achieved by constantly teaching him – a similar concept as we also find in the Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 17).

Because of lack of space I cannot look at the responses of Confucius and Laozi in China and the post-Socratic philosophers to the Axial Age developments in political economy, psychology and spirituality. They, too, would have specific contributions to make for an interfaith perspective. But let us briefly look at Islam as the third wave of the Axial Age.

As far as money and private property is concerned, Islam has basically taken over the approach of the biblical traditions. The special context in which Muhammad (ca. 560-632 CE) received his first revelations is characterized by conflicts with the rich class of traders in his home town Mecca.17 Mecca was situated at the trading route between the Yemen in the South and Great Syria in the North. In this situation, people had begun striving for individual wealth and the traditional forms of behavior and tribal virtues (loyalty, hospitality) had started to erode. People were starting to expect immortality from hoarding money, as Aristotle had put it in his analysis of the money economy.

Especially the revelations during Muhammad’s first time in Mecca deal intensively with the issues of money, interest and wealth. The key question concerns the accumulation of riches beyond what is necessary for life – exactly like what can be seen in biblical and Buddhist traditions.18 This wealth produces the illusion of eternal life without God. In Sura 104.1ff. We read:

“Woe to every backbiting slanderer
Who gathers his wealth and counts it
Thinking with his wealth he will never die”.

Interest (riba) is denounced as the main instrument for the hoarding of superfluous

18 Ibid. 172ff.
wealth:

“They who devour interest do not rise except as rises one whom Satan has smitten with insanity. That is because they say: ‘Trade also is like interest;’ whereas Allah has made trade lawful and made interest unlawful. ...Allah will abolish interest and will cause charity to increase” (2.275-276).

In this passage several aspects deserve our attention. Trade is clearly permitted while making money from money through charging interest is condemned. This mirrors Aristotle’s distinction between “natural” barter economy (also with the medium of money) and the money-accumulation economy via exchange and interest (chremastikē). The former is allowed while the later has to be prohibited (by and within the polis). Secondly the sura refers to the meaning of wealth according to God’s purpose. It is to serve a social balancing in order to provide the poor with what is necessary for life. Theologically the argument is the same as in Lev. 25:

“To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth” (2.284).

This boils everything down to the key question: Is the world a gift or a commodity?

What does all this mean for our situation? I think that engaged Buddhism, Christian and Muslim liberation theology have a tremendous task here. If it is true that the imperial money- and property-led civilization, beginning in the Axial Age, is finished, and has to come to an end because it threatens the very survival of humanity and the earth, the spiritual power of all faiths emerging in opposition to this very civilization have to be renewed together. This starts with the critique of the present reality of these faith communities. After all, large parts of them have assimilated themselves to the money culture – be it by individualizing the faith or be it by participating in capitalist practices. Engaged Buddhism, Christian Muslim liberation theology direct a kairotic request to our communities to make a clear choice between God and Mammon. This has a solid base in our Scriptures, if we read them contextually in order to see the economic and social implications of the texts. On this basis we can come to a clear rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of the capitalist civilization by our communities. It would bring hope to the suffering world.

Positively liberation theologies and engaged Buddhists can contribute to building up alternative human communities and join the struggles of people’s movements to develop a new political economy that is geared to satisfying the basic needs of people. If it is true that the creation of suffering in the new Axial Age economy happened through a false use of money and private property then the crucial task here is to implement the existing designs of a new property order, based on the use value, and a new money order, where money is transformed from a commodity into a public instrument serving the real economy of and for the people. While cooperating in the purification of the economy from greed at the same time a mental change has to happen – away from personal greed and ego-centric illusion and violence. The inter-linkage of both is crucial, because otherwise greedy thinking will allow the greed-economy to continue and, vice versa, the greed-economy will stimulate personal greed.

Combining the strengths of engaged Buddhism as well as Christian and Muslim liberation theologies to help building up a new trans-modern civilization of just relations between human beings as well as the humans and the other living beings of the earth
would not only reduce the suffering, created by the present economic injustice, but would also open a new era towards joyful and mindful life of all.
References:


Critical Thinking: Establishing the Foundation for Buddhist Practice

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Introduction:

I am writing this in hope to encourage the reader to apply critical thinking to Buddhism and to demonstrate that the core of Buddhist teachings lies in its practice and that Buddhism shouldn’t be referred to as a religion but it is rather a set of teachings, which can be logically analyzed, scrutinized and found to have quite a rational foundation. Ideally this work will motivate people to start meditating instead of wasting time arguing about insignificant points in Buddhism which may even have been mere mistranslations or something of the sort.

It may seems as if there is a significant problem with applying critical thinking to Buddhism as a practitioner - it is an inevitable requirement to accept at least some dogmatism such as Buddha’s enlightenment, meditation as a way of achieving Enlightenment, the necessity of sila (moral or monastic regulations) and so on. If one was to undertake a Buddhist path while totally avoiding any dogmatism in any form and purely from a rational and critical point of view, it appears as if he would be unable to do so, since there are concepts in Buddhism that point to non-tangible non-verifiable (at least until enough insight has been developed) matters. We see more people turning to material science to answer the big question: “What is it all about?” instead of searching within oneself, as the Buddha taught. It is perhaps because most concepts in modern science refer to certain objects that are either calculable or tangible/visible or at least partly verifiable, which sound more satisfying to a layman, unlike the hypothetical bliss of jhanas or Nibbana, which may seem too distant or even out of reach. We do, however, encounter a lot of instances of critical thinking expressed by the followers of Buddhism that suggest that Buddhism has very little to do with blind faith and we could also use our own critical thinking in order to avoid dogmatic pitfalls or just see if the Buddha’s teachings make any sense at all:

“The Buddha said that those who simply believe others are not truly wise. A wise person practices until he is one with the Dhamma, until he can have confidence in himself, independent of others. On one occasion, while Venerable Sariputta was sitting, listening respectfully at the feet of the Buddha expounded the Dhamma, the Buddha turned to him and asked: “Sariputta, do you believe this teaching?” Venerable Sariputta replied, “No, I don’t yet believe it.”

Now this is a good illustration. Venerable Sariputta listened, and he took note. When he said he didn’t yet believe he wasn’t being careless, he was speaking the truth. He simply took note of that teaching, because he had not yet developed his own understanding of it, so he told the Buddha that he didn’t yet believe - because he really didn’t believe. These words almost sound as if Venerable Sariputta was being rude, but actually, he wasn’t. He spoke the truth, and the Buddha praised him for it.

“Good, good, Sariputta. A wise person doesn’t readily believe, he should consider first before believing.”

1 Ajahn Chah, http://www.dhammatalks.net/Books/Ajahn_Chah_Samma_Samadhi.htm - accessed on 20 June 2013
Needless to say that the word consider here points to the ability to analyze and come to a somewhat a logical conclusion. By looking at the examples like this in Buddhism, we can clearly see that it does not promote dogmatism and blind faith in any way but it rather does the opposite.

Another problem for a layman could be that there is some risk involved in undertaking the Buddhist path to awakening - it is the time and effort that one has to dedicate to practice, which may or may not be wasted. Obviously, so-called ultimate release, or the joy and happiness brought on by meditation is worth the effort, but as long as it is only hypothetical, to an individual it may seem like a very long shot. What Buddhism lacks perhaps, is tangibility, especially at the beginning of the path, where a student has to rely purely on faith, authority or suttas or at least it appears so. It is said that once a person experiences the first fruits of his jhanas (meditative absorptions), in form of bliss, his faith is undoubtedly going to transform into something more reliable and independent, thus providing zeal and in turn boost his practice.

If there is a blissful state such as jhāna and it is potentially achievable and verifiable, then perhaps it is very wise to try and see or find out for oneself, just as we try something new being motivated by someone’s advice, be it a delicious dish, a good movie or a good place to visit for vacation. There is certainly a risk of spending money, disappointment or regret, but yet people still do it, so why not follow the same logic and apply it in Buddhism, try and see so to speak. In the end, it may be very well worth the effort, while also proving that Buddhism is not so much of a religion as it is a set of teachings that train an individual for a particular goal, which is the cessation of suffering.

Simply studying suttas and thinking about them may provide some ideas, inspirations and food for thought but it will only remain hypothetical and may turn into an intellectual mess unless it is applied in practice through meditation. There are plenty of scholars and professors who spend their entire lives studying Buddhism, suttas and writing commentaries about their understanding without ever having sat on a meditation cushion. Zen Buddhism refers to that kind of people as ‘killers of Buddhism’ and there is an interesting saying in Zen tradition that the person who writes another book on Buddhism will be reborn as a donkey for seven lifetimes, obviously it is purely metaphorical, yet it is very easy to trace the subtle message this statement is trying to convey. I think it is a suitable place to quote Johann Wolfgang von Goethe here: “Knowing is not enough; you must apply. Willing is not enough; you must do.”

I believe this is the exact point where Buddhism differs from a lot of other traditions by being ultimately a practical approach. For instance, in contrast with Christianity, there is certainly a huge advantage in Buddhism, which seems to provide tangible results in this very life, rather than just feeding people with promises based on blind faith of hoping to see Jesus or His Father in a heaven after death. So if one had to make a rational choice whether to believe in Christ and live purely in hope and thus risk having lived all life in wishful thinking, or choose a very well detailed path of Buddhism, which provides results in this lifetime - it would probably be better to follow Buddhist Zen master Dogen’s way of thinking who was motivated to find the truth at all costs by believing that if there was heaven, it was possible to find it on earth and that it could be achieved here and now without having to believe in anything supernatural or wait till death to go to heaven.

It seems there are two main paths of modern Buddhist practice, which are said to lead one to the actual understanding of Buddhism rather than conceptualizing. The two are vipassana (insight meditation) and samatha (jhāna meditation). They are said to be essential in developing wisdom and insight, which are necessary for the attainment of the ultimate release and the experience of the Four Noble Truths, thus going beyond the necessity of faith and into the territory of confidence. Therefore, obviously the strongest
point of Buddhism is its clearly defined goal.

I would like to suggest that scientific evidence related to Buddhism could be of great benefit for a certain type of individuals - those who are highly intellectual and skeptical so that they could see for themselves the value of Buddha’s teachings and begin the purification path for which faith in the teachings is arguably necessary. I believe there is a great number of people who converted to Buddhism through studying comparative religion and other mystic traditions and by seeing a lot of similarities (i.e. samadhi, enlightenment, moksha, kensho, satori, dhyana, samadhi, and so on) and this conclusion is brought upon by thinking critically, scrutinizing and actually seeing those points being tightly connected, rather than relying on someone’s authority.

For a highly skeptical person it would be against his critical ability to deny the results of studies conducted on subjects in jhanas. We can clearly say that jhanas are something tangible, verifiable and attainable, thus dropping the need for faith or dogmatism as far as jhanas are concerned. A practitioner can be sure that jhanas are not something he needs to believe in, but that they are actually something scientific - achievable through samatha meditation practice. Perhaps this is where initial inspiration can be strongly established. There are plenty of disagreements whether one needs to pursue samatha first or one can start right from the practice of vipassana. To make things a bit clearer let me quote a portion of a page from one of the most respected Theravada Tradition’s Monk Ajarn Maha Boowa²:

“Samâdhi does not bring about an end to all suffering; but samâdhi does constitute an ideal platform from which to launch an all-out assault on the kilesas that cause all suffering. The profound calm and concentration generated by samâdhi form an excellent basis for the development of wisdom.

Samâdhi’s main function on the path of practice is to support and sustain the development of wisdom. It is well suited to this task because a mind that is calm and concentrated is fully satisfied, and does not seek external distractions. Thoughts about sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile sensations no longer impinge upon an awareness that is firmly fixed in samâdhi. Calm and concentration are the mind’s natural sustenance. Once it becomes satiated with its favorite nourishment, it does not wander off where it strays into idle thinking. It is now fully prepared to undertake the kind of purposeful thinking, investigation and reflection that constitute the practice of wisdom. If the mind has yet to settle down—if it still hankers after sense impressions, if it still wants to chase after thoughts and emotions—its investigations will never lead to true wisdom. They will lead only to discursive thought, guesswork and speculation—unfounded interpretations of reality based simply on what has been learned and remembered. Instead of leading to wisdom, and the cessation of suffering, such directionless thinking becomes samudaya—the primary cause of suffering.

Since its sharp, inward focus complements the investigative and contemplative work of wisdom so well, the Lord Buddha taught us to first develop samâdhi. A mind that remains undistracted by peripheral thoughts and emotions is able to focus exclusively on whatever arises in its field of awareness and to investigate such phenomena in light of the truth without the interference of guesswork or speculation. This is an important principle. The investigation proceeds smoothly,

with fluency and skill. This is the nature of genuine wisdom: investigating, contemplating and understanding, but never being distracted or misled by conjecture.”

From the paragraph above, we can clearly see what purpose jhāna meditation serves; and, it is up to a person to decide whether to begin the path from vipassana or samatha meditation. It is also obvious that investigating and contemplating becomes a lot easier once the mind is in a state of samadhi as the biases are minimized and the ability to think critically and scrutinize experiences to their core is enhanced.

Another important point in Buddhism is self-analysis or self-scrutiny along the path, especially when a practitioner does not have constant contact with an Ajahn who knows. Of course self-scrutiny is nothing other than critical thinking applied through vipassana, which gradually develops through Buddhist practice until it transforms into prajna or wisdom.

Finally I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dion Peoples as impressions gained from his publications are incredibly positive. His work is clearly promoting healthy skepticism and teaches us how to apply our thinking ability to gain clarity in effort to understand Buddha’s teachings. Through developing our ability to think critically and applying it to the analysis of Buddha’s teachings we can perceive the depth of the teachings as well as absorb the essentials and consequently avoid unnecessary arguments and maximize the results. Thus we can see the utmost importance of critical thinking which is intrinsic part of Buddhist path; and without it, our efforts to perceive the core of Buddhist teachings may prove futile.
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Are Buddhists Critical Thinkers?

Saw Yee Mon
Myanmar

I believe how we think shapes us more than what we think. Here, the word ‘How’ constitutes the different functions of mind such as reflection, investigation, questioning, analyzing, reasoning, processing, etc. and the outcome of such thinking entails some quality results rather than that of random thoughts. We can produce better results or rational outcomes if we engage in such skillful thinking process as we call ‘Critical Thinking’. So I ask myself, as a Buddhist, am I a critical thinker; or in a broader sense: are Buddhists critical thinkers? This is a question that also has been asked quite a few times to me by some individuals, both Buddhist and non-Buddhists. When I try to answer, it is more than a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Yet, being follower of the Enlightened One, the Buddha, who is the ultimate critical thinker, Buddhists can also regard themselves as critical thinkers if they really do follow Dhamma and apply it in their daily life.

The Ultimate Critical Thinker

I am sure that there would be no objection for regarding Buddha as an ultimate critical thinker. I have full confidence over this because among a number of definitions on Critical Thinking produced by a number of great thinkers and scholars, I find one particular characteristic, that is: to be able to change the existing conventional belief into more reliable and trust-worthy one. To be able to do this, one needs strong power to take the challenge and excellent skill to convince others or oneself about the new outcome. Before the time of Buddha, people believed in the idea of permanence (nīcca). However, Buddha obliterated the widely accepted belief of permanence and introduced the idea of impermanence (anīcca). We can imagine how difficult it was to challenge and reject the long-standing idea of permanence that had dominated, and still dominates, belief systems of mankind. For many people of that time, the truth was already out there for them. Without any endeavor to analyze this truth - the idea of permanence, they took it for granted and accepted it, which then influenced and reflected their way of thinking as well as behavior and actions. For Buddha, he was against all odds. He discovered what had not yet been readily known to humanity before him: the impermanent nature of world and the Four-fold Ultimate Reality\(^1\) - which can be attained only by the highest level of higher-order thinking and the insight knowledge.

According to Buddhist texts, there are three kinds of insight-knowledge\(^2\): the knowledge acquired by learning (sutamaya-ñāna); the knowledge acquired by individualized reasoning (cintāmaya-ñāna); and the knowledge acquired by contemplation (bhāvanāmaya-ñāna). The second type of knowledge, cintāmaya-ñāna\(^3\) is of two kinds:

- prior knowledge: we make rationalizations or reasoning based on our self-knowledge and experience
- unattainable by beings other than the would-be Buddha\(^4\), attained solely by reasoning without any prior taught-knowledge which in this case is impossible for any one of us.

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1. Mind, Mental concomitant, Matter, Nibbāna
4. In a Dhamma speech given by Ashin Chekinda, he referred to only a sub-commentary of Visuddhimagga, and asserted that this second aspect is only of the Buddha and the Bodhisatta - before being fully enlightened and during the stage of yet to become a Buddha. However, many scholars interpret that lay people can also attain this second aspect of wisdom. After attaining sutamaya-wisdom (first level), one can analyze and contemplate - and it is referred to as the second aspect of wisdom.
The Buddha had gone through processes, in which I am certain, involves all the characteristics of a critical thinking process. He reached beyond the inherently flawed nature of human-thinking and thus the Buddha is the greatest and the ultimate critical thinker.

Skepticism on Dhamma

From the earliest philosophers as far as history can trace back to the most recent contemporary philosophers, there has always been the need for modification of the original philosophy or the accepted conventional truth the former discovered – ideas should fit or be applicable to changing situations and circumstances. This is also the essence of critical thinking. Again people challenge and question existing ideas and beliefs with doubt which is commonly known as skepticism. This involves questioning, doubting and sometimes suspending judgment. When it comes to Dhamma, critical thinking or skepticism can be practiced, to scrutinize it through: reflecting, examining, questioning, doubting and analyzing. However, since Dhamma is the truth which also explains the nature and the ultimate truth, skeptical thinking on Dhamma is like questioning whether it is true that the sun rises in East. Dhamma deals with reality, so there is no need to modify Dhamma – we may have to modify our own thoughts or previous beliefs. Nothing should be extracted nor added to Dhamma. What makes more sense to me is that we should use the teachings as a tool in practicing critical thinking, a tool that serves as a basis for producing more rational outcomes that really benefit ourselves and society as a whole without any harm. The Teachings of Buddha are virtuous and righteous in the beginning, middle, and in the end - unshakable by skepticism. Once Dhamma is fully understood, there shall be the automatic removal of doubt; and, skepticism will be in vain. The only thing that matters is that followers should possess confidence and trust in Dhamma, learn it well, and apply it appropriately.

Buddhist Order and Critical Thinking

It is quite a common assertion that there is lack of critical-thinking skills in Buddhist monks or the monastic order in their pursuit of Buddhist teachings, especially in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition - as they all apparently suggest that all they do is learn the canon by-heart. In my opinion, this claim is originally flawed. Preserving the Teachings of Buddha by learning by-heart and handing over to the next generations of followers is a unique tradition of Buddhism and this also has allowed Pāli language to be a most unique and sustainable ancient language for mankind. In fact, the existing mode of studying Buddhist Teachings in Theravāda Buddhist tradition is said to be a parallel approach because it comprises both learning and practicing at the same time. It is also relevant for modern-day learning-facilities, such as: libraries, laboratories and in field excursions. To make the analogy more vivid, we have three main sections or ‘baskets’ of canonical material in the Tipitaka - as a highly resourceful library. We have the most efficient laboratory - facilitated with different meditation methods to examine and analyze: mind and matter, and the physical body (khāndā) to take an excursion to explore the impermanence nature. In this sense, all that needed is a balanced good faith (saddhā) and wisdom (pānā).

Buddhists as Critical Thinkers

Do Buddhists practice critical thinking? The issue over who practices critical thinking and who does not has no direct link to being a Buddhist or not. Obviously, some cultures encourage people to develop their critical thinking while some cultures do not. Also, the degree and skill for one to think critically, to reach the most rational conclusion,
is influenced partially by the culture of which the person belongs to. Moreover, some people, especially in the case of developed countries, are trained to question and to think critically; but in other nations: questioning and thinking critically is very much discouraged, not because of culture but because of political issues. However, this does not imply that Buddhists cannot think critically if they are born, brought up and living in a society where critical thinking is not encouraged. They are critical thinkers if they follow the teachings of Buddha and apply what they are taught into the circumstances of everyday life - in such a way that they get rid of undisciplined and irrational thoughts, cultivating the rational, disciplined and responsible ways of thinking. The least of this practice can be seen in the everyday life of a devout Buddhist who differentiates between good deeds (kusala) from bad deeds (akusala) as his mind works critically analyzes his own thoughts, speech and action.

So, indeed, Buddhists endeavor through forms of self-reflection as critical thinking. As the saying goes, ‘An unexamined life is not worth living’\(^5\) – Buddhists examine life through the lens of Dhamma until they reach the final goal of Nibbāna - and they are proud to maintain themselves as critical thinkers.

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http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Socrates


Ven. Dr. Chekinda: A Dhamma Talk (audio Records)

Ven. Dr. Nāndamālābhivarīṇa: A Dhamma Talk (audio records)
The Curious Case of the Formless Attainments

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The Buddha has been depicted most often seated in the bhūmisparśa or the dhammacakkappavattana mudrā, in an image that brings to mind words such as serenity, peaceful repose, relaxed awareness, presence, grace, compassion, and wisdom. These qualities are the mark of his nibbāna, the outcome of a tortuous process he undertook to achieve what is described as freedom from the rounds of birth and death. All of the Buddha’s teachings, in his forty-five years of ministry, emanate from that experience under the Bodhi tree. That these teachings were vast and subtle is borne out by the numerous schools in Buddhism and their canons maintained in Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan languages. As Buddhism disseminated across Asia for well over a thousand years after his passing it also gave rise to a rich commentarial tradition as well as remarkable efforts at translations. Despite the voluminous pedagogical materials, though, there was no doubt that the Buddha’s method was one of practice. Meditation was central to his teaching and the textual materials preserve the skillful devices he used to communicate the complexity of the mind, the deep-rooted nature of delusion and the way to overcome the fundamental cognitive error in our understanding of the nature of reality.

Buddhist meditation is commonly described as a two-stage process, comprising a calming of the mind (samatha) and an analytical component (vipassanā). The former leads to concentration (samādhi) while the latter results in liberating insight (paññā) his Visuddhimagga treatise is so encyclopedic in scope that it is regarded as a general commentary on the Tipiṭaka; Nāṇamoli (2010: xxvii) calls it “the principal non-canonical authority of the Theravāda”. Buddhaghosa rendered invaluable service with this work that finally breaks the fetters that bind a meditator to samsāra. The Theravāda tradition, for instance, respects and highly reveres Ācariya Buddhaghosa for his immense contribution in systematizing commentarial literature. In the particular case of meditation practice, for one main reason: although the path that the meditator traverses en route to nibbāna is described in numerous places in the Suttas, as Gethin (2004) observes: there is precious little that is available as practical instruction. Buddhaghosa refers to the Suttas, Abhidhamma and the commentarial literature that had been developed in Sinhala to compose a comprehensive guide. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Visuddhimagga is popular and in use even today.

Even so, textual material on meditation does present a challenge, especially when it is for academic study, by a non-meditator. He is immediately at a disadvantage, as he has only texts to rely on, in what is essentially a lived experience. The modern scholar’s method of linguistic and textual criticism, while delivering admirable insights into historical and developmental aspects of the teachings, cannot fully plumb the depths of the instructions meant for practice, because in the Indian context there was always reliance on a teacher. Each individual’s experience in meditation practice being unique and subject to his particular conditioning, meditation always was, and still is, practiced under the guidance of a teacher. Strictly speaking, therefore, there really cannot be a general purpose “meditation manual”; there can only be broad, guiding principles. The role of the teacher was invaluable and irreplaceable, because of the numerous perspectives he brought to bear on textual materials by virtue of his own experience. Recognizing this, some modern scholars do study with and cite the interpretations and
instructions of practitioners in order to come to a better-informed conclusion. Largely speaking however, there is an intellectual divide between the scientific approach of the modern scholar and the implicit faith of the practitioner in the texts.

It might be useful for academic study, though, to consider meditation as a living tradition, and complement the analyses of textual criticism with recourse to the experience of practitioners. The Theravāda tradition has three internationally-known meditation traditions: the Mahasi tradition, the method of S. N. Goenka, following his teacher U Ba Khin, and the third being that of Pa-Auk Sayadaw and their approach to practice has been studied by Anālayo (2010). Of these three, only the method followed by Pa-Auk Sayadaw has recourse to the systematic cultivation of the jhāna-states. While the Pāli word jhāna is connected to the Sanskrit dhyāna, it refers to specific states of meditative attainments in Buddhist literature and is often translated as “absorption”. Jhānas comprise two distinct sets, rūpa jhānas and arūpajjhānas, each with four sequential stages. This paper examines the descriptions of the arūpajjhānas, as mentioned in the Visuddhimagga for what, on the face of it, seems like an inconsistency in formulation.

As Nānāmoli (2010: xxxii) notes, very little is known about Buddhaghosa, despite his rich legacy of commentarial literature and much of what we do know can be construed to be based on legend.1 Theravāda tradition maintains that while the commentaries themselves were drawn on ancient materials, his work on the Visuddhimagga itself was the result of a “test” administered to him by Mahāvihāra monks, to gauge his capability for the task that they had in mind for him. As such, it is considered to reflect his deep grasp of the Dhamma and his sound knowledge of canonical works. The discovery of the Chinese translation of the Vimuttimagga cast doubt on this tradition which was reinforced by a statement Dhammapāla makes in his commentary, the Visuddhimagga Mahāṭīkā.2

The text itself is arranged around the three trainings of sīla, samādhi and paññā and uses the Abhidhamma method of analysis in its composition. The two processes of samatha and vipassanā are described in great detail. The former leads to samādhi, a state in which the mind dwells calmly and evenly on a given object. The latter is considered to be the quintessential “Buddhist” component of meditation, giving rise to liberating insight and wisdom that leads to nibbāna.

The schema of Theravāda meditation has been critically studied by many scholars, as the texts show some inconsistencies. There has been much discussion, for instance, on what seem to be twin soteriological goals mentioned as the culmination of the two processes of samatha and vipassanā, which are irreconcilable in their definition. Early concerns were raised by Louis de la Vallee Poussin (1936-37)3 and have been dwelt on subsequently by other scholars such as Griffiths (1981) and Gombrich (2006). Within the broad scheme for the path, there have also been questions raised about the discrepancy in the description of the first rūpa jhāna as recorded in Sutta literature and Abhidhamma treatises, notably by Griffiths (1983), Stuart-Fox (1989), and Bucknell (1993).

As mentioned earlier, samatha is a practice of developing concentration as a result of which the mind dwells with single-pointed focus on a given object; vipassanā leads to insight that results in experiential knowledge of things as they are (yathābūtā añā dassanām). In the cultivation of samatha, the Visuddhimagga gives a detailed explanation of forty meditation objects, their suitability for persons of different types and the method of using them to cultivate practice.4 He develops the meditation with the earth kasiṇa to

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1 See Nānāmoli (2010:xxiii-xliv) for a survey of biographical material on Buddhaghosa.
2 Ehara, N.R.M., Soma Thera, Kheminda Thera (trans), The Path of Freedom by the Arahant Upatissa. Ceylon: Roland Weerasuria, 1961, p. xxxvi. See also Anālayo (2010), n. 21
4 Nānāmoli (2010) Chapters III-X.
elaborate on cultivation of samādhi, the pinnacle of which is reflected in the attainments known as jhānas and the four formless attainments. Beyond these, there is also an attainment known as nirodha samāpatti, which is described as the enjoyment of nibbāna here and now, but only attainable by an arhat and an anāgāmin.5

The jhānas are mentioned in a fairly standard manner in Sutta literature and Buddhaghosa follows the same pattern:

1. “Quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unprofitable things, he enters upon and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with happiness and bliss born of seclusion.”6
2. “With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, he enters upon and dwells in the second jhāna, which has internal confidence and singleness of mind without applied thought, without sustained thought with happiness and bliss born of concentration.”7
3. “With the fading away as well of happiness as well he dwells in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, he feels bliss with his body; he enters upon and dwells in the third jhāna, on account of which the Noble Ones announce: ‘He dwells in bliss who has equanimity and is mindful.”8
4. “With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief he enters upon and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.”9

Rūpa jhānas are so called because of the dependency of the attainment on an object with material form and a meditator who attains to these jhānas is reborn in the form realm.

Buddhaghosa states that the meaning of “quite secluded from sense desires, secluded from unprofitable things...” in the attainment of the first jhāna refers to the suppression of five hindrances of desire for objects of the five senses (kāmacchanda), and that of ill-will (byāpāda), sloth and torpor (thīnamiddhā), restlessness and worry (uddhacca-kukkucca), and doubt (vicikicchā) respectively. These hindrances must be abandoned as they obstruct or are incompatible with the five jhāna factors, namely applied thought (vitakka), sustained thought (vicāra), happiness (pīti), bliss (sukha)10 and unification of mind (cittassa’ekāgga). He quotes from the Peṭakopadesa to show the correlation between the hindrances and the five jhāna factors as follows: “Concentration is incompatible with lust, happiness with ill-will, applied thought with stiffness and torpor, bliss with agitation and worry, and sustained thought with uncertainty.”11

Notably, however, it is not just the hindrances which are overcome. As the meditator progresses with cultivating samādhi, he also stills or surmounts the grosser of

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6 Ṣāṇamoḷī (2010, IV:79).
7 Ibid. IV:140.
8 Ibid. IV: 153
9 Ibid. IV: 183
10 In modern translation pīti is generally translated as zest and sukha as happiness. However, as Ṣāṇamoḷī translates pīti as happiness and sukha as bliss, that is the version used here.
11 Ṣāṇamoḷī (2010, IV:86)
the jhāna factors as he seeks to develop more refined mental states. In the attainment of the second jhāna, therefore, vitakka and vicāra are abandoned and the state is defined by happiness, bliss, and singleness of mind. The Visuddhimagga also mentions that with the abandoning of vitakka and vicāra, the meditator’s mind is suffused with internal confidence (sampasādanam), a more tranquil version of faith. The reason it is called internal confidence is to distinguish it from the preliminary level of faith present in the first jhāna, which is disturbed by the mental activity of vitakka and vicāra. To attain the third jhāna, he abandons pīti and we find there is a mention of three mental concomitants that do not comprise the jhāna factors. These are equanimity (upekkhā), mindfulness (sati) and full awareness or clear comprehension (sampajaṇāṇa). The fourth jhāna is marked by equanimity and a feeling of neither pain-nor-pleasure.

Beyond these form-sphere jhānas lie the ārūpas, as they are referred to in the Suttas. Unlike the rūpa jhānas which are numerically designated, these attainments are described by the names of their objective spheres (āyatanāni). There are four: the sphere of infinite space (ākāśanaṃcāyatana), the sphere of infinite consciousness (viññāṇaṃcāyatana), the sphere of nothingness (ākīcaṇṇāyatana) and the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception (nevasaṅghānaṃcāyatana). They possess the same factors as the fourth rūpa jhāna, i.e. equanimity and the feeling of neither pain-nor-pleasure. However, they are arūpa because the meditator now wishes to abandon the material sphere: “...one who wants firstly to develop the base consisting of boundless space sees in gross physical matter danger through the wielding of sticks etc., because of the words: ‘It is in virtue of matter that wielding of sticks, wielding of knives, quarrels, brawls and disputes take place; but that does not happen at all in the immaterial state,’...”

We know from the Āriyapariyesana Sutta that the Buddha attained the third and fourth formless attainments when he trained with two masters, Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, before striking off on his own. However, he had rejected these attainments as they did not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to stilling, to direct knowledge, to Awakening, nor to Unbinding. Instead, they led to reappearance in the dimension of nothingness and the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception.

Just as in the case of the rūpa jhānas the formless attainments are also recorded in more or less standard terms, which Buddhaghosa follows (given below) but there is a marked difference in the manner in which the meditator progresses through this series, as we will see.

- “With the complete surmounting (samatikkama) of perceptions of matter, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, with non-attention to perceptions of variety, [aware of] ‘unbounded space,’ he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of boundless space”.
- “By completely surmounting (samatikkama) the base consisting of boundless space, [aware of] ‘unbounded consciousness,’ he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of boundless consciousness.”
- “By completely surmounting the base consisting of boundless consciousness, [aware that] ‘There is nothing,’ he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of nothingness”.

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12 Ibid. X:1.
13 M 160
14 Ibid. nāyam dhammo nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya sañvattati, yāvadeva ākīcaṇṇāyatatanupappati; and further: ... yāvadeva nevasaṅghānaṃcāyatānūpapatti
15 Ānāmoli (2010, IX:12)
16 Ibid. IX:27
• “By completely surmounting the base consisting of nothingness he enters upon and dwells in the base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception”\textsuperscript{18}.

The distinction between the rūpa jhānas and the formless attainments is made in the following aspects:

• The nature of the object: in the rūpa jhānas the object remains the same through all four. In the case of the formless attainments, however, the meditator progressively moves from a gross object to a more and more refined one.

• The meditator abandons the gross jhāna factors as he progresses through the rūpa jhāna. However, the formless attainments have the same factors present as the fourth jhāna.\textsuperscript{19}

• The verbs used to describe the attainments are markedly different: enter into (upasampajjati) and dwell or abide (viharati) are used for both, form-sphere and formless attainments; however, in the case of the formless attainments we find, additionally, the term “surmounts” (samatikkama) used in the context of going beyond, overcoming.

• The nature of the attainment: the rūpa jhānas are marked by the attenuation of the hindrances, purification of mindfulness and development of equanimity. The formless attainments are concerned with more subtle activity of perception and consciousness itself and the Sallekha Sutta mentions them as peaceful abidings.\textsuperscript{20}

In the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa describes the manner in which the formless attainments are to be cultivated as follows:

• Ākāsāna cāyatana: “He adverts again and again to the sign of space left by the removal of the kasīṇa as “space, space,” and strikes at it with thought and applied thought. As he strikes adverts to it again and again and strikes at it with thought and applied thought, the hindrances are suppressed, mindfulness is established and his mind becomes concentrated in access.”\textsuperscript{21}

• Viññāna cāyatana: “He should give it attention, review it and strike at it with applied and sustained thought.”\textsuperscript{22}

• Ākiñcaññāyatana: “Without giving [further] attention to that consciousness, he should [now] advert again and again in this way, “there is not, there is not,” or “void, void,” or “secluded, secluded,” and give his attention to it, review it, and strike at it with thought and applied thought.”\textsuperscript{23}

• Nevasaṅña-saṅña-atāna: “He should advert again and again to that attachment of the base consisting of nothingness that has occurred making non-existence its object,

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. IX:36
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. IX:36
\textsuperscript{19} Gunaratana (2002: 93) explains that “The factors in each higher attainment are subtler than those in its predecessors, more peaceful and more sublime, but they do not differ in number or in their essential nature.”
\textsuperscript{20} M i 40.

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adverting to it as “peaceful, peaceful.” And he should give his attention to it, review it and strike at it with thought and applied thought.”

The point to be noted in these explanations is that they mention the meditator strikes at the object with thought (takka) and applied thought (vitakka). This appears strange because it is inconsistent with the descriptions we have seen earlier, of the cultivation of rūpa jhānas. For one, the faculties of applied thought (vitakka) and sustained thought (vicāra) are very clearly abandoned in the cultivation of the second rūpa jhāna. Here we find the mention of takka and vitakka, but to the extent that they refer to the mental activity of thought, it is still a point to be noted. Secondly, we have seen that the attainments, both in the form sphere and the formless sphere, are sequentially cultivated. We also know that the fourth rūpa jhāna is identical to the formless attainments in terms of mental factors present. It is therefore not clear how takka and vitakka are available to the meditator, that too in all four of the formless attainments.

The term vitakka is etymologically linked to takka and the editors of the PED observe that in earlier works, vitakka and vicāra were used to denote emphatic thinking; that they were distinguished as two separate terms as the study of terminology advanced in the Sangha. Generally, vitakka is mentioned in a pair, with vicāra, as it is in the description of the attainment of the second rūpa jhāna. Both these are classified as cetasika in the Abhidhamma, in the occasional (pakkīṇṇaka) category of the ethically variable factors (aññasamānacetasika). This means that by themselves, these two factors are neither wholesome (kusala) nor unwholesome (akusala); their moral quality is determined by the presence of other cetasikas in that moment of citta, particularly the presence (or absence) of the three roots of greed (lobha), hatred (dosa) and delusion (moha).

In the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa describes these two factors at length. Using the Abhidhamma method of delineating the characteristic (lakkhaṇa), function (rasa), manifestation (paccupatthāna) and proximate cause (padaṭṭhāna), he explains them as follows, in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Manifestation</th>
<th>Proximate Cause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vitakka</strong></td>
<td>Directing the mind to the object (ārammane citassa abhinirpana)</td>
<td>Strike and thresh at (āhana, connected with āhanana’pariyāhanana)</td>
<td>Leading the mind onto the object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vicāra</strong></td>
<td>Continued pressure on (occupation with) the object (āramman’ ānumajjana)</td>
<td>To keep conscious mental states occupied with the object</td>
<td>Keeping consciousness anchored on the object.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 Ibid. X:40. The Pāli (as above, p. reads:...manasikaritvā “sāva abhāvaṃ ārammanaṃ katvā pavattitā ākāśaṃ bhūtattvasamāpatti santā santā” ti puṇappunār āvajjitaṃ, manasikātabbā, paccavekkhitabbā, takkhatā vitakkhātā kātabbā.  
25 PED (1924) Vol. 7, p. 620 
26 Āṇāmoḷi (2010, IV:88-92)
The difference between these two mental factors is explained using numerous similes, in Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Vitakka</strong></th>
<th><strong>Vicāra</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Striking a bell</td>
<td>Ringing a bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bee diving towards a lotus</td>
<td>Bee hovering over the lotus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird flapping its wings as it is about to fly</td>
<td>Bird gliding through the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand that grips a dish</td>
<td>Hand that rubs it with powder, oil and woollen pad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting hand of potter after he spins the wheel with a stroke of his stick</td>
<td>The hand that moves back and forth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin that stays fixed in the centre while drawing a circle</td>
<td>Pin that revolves around it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These similes make it clear that vitakka is an initial response to the object, an “interference of consciousness” while vicāra is a “more quiet, being near non-interference of consciousness”.

In the attainment of the second rūpa jhāna, we find there is emphasis (see underlined text below) on the fact that it is free from both vitakka and vicāra:

- “With the stilling of applied and sustained thought, he enters upon and dwells in the second jhāna, which has internal confidence and singleness of mind without applied thought, without sustained thought with happiness and bliss born of concentration...”

Buddhaghosa explains that the presence of applied and sustained thought in the first jhāna hinders full development of internal confidence (ajjhattām sampasādanaṁ), like “water which is ruffled by ripples and wavelets.” He then goes on to explain the repetition of terms (underlined above) with regard to applied thought and sustained thought as follows:

- The first phrase refers to the fact that after the first jhāna, the subsequent ones are attained by surmounting gross factors.
- It also clarifies that internal confidence and singleness of mind come about with the stilling of applied and sustained thought and not just their absence.
- The second phrase explains that the second jhāna is without these two factors.

In the context of such detailed and precise explanation of terminologies, it is difficult to explain why the formless attainments have the factors of thought and applied thought available to the meditator.

The Visuddhimagga Mahāṭīkā (Paramatthamaṇṭīkā) makes no comment on this aspect. When takka and vitakka are mentioned, they appear in the Pathavīkṣaṇaṁdesavaṇṇanā and not in the Āruppaniddesavaṇṇanā, as would have been expected. As such, it does not help in resolving this riddle. Gunaratana’s study of the jhānas is exhaustive in its scope and although the aspect under consideration in this paper is recorded for the spheres of infinite space and of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, he does not offer any explanatory comment. This is also the case with a more recent

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27Ibid. IV:89.  
28 Vitakka-vicārānaṁ vūpasamāṁ ajjhattāṁ sampasādanaṁ cetasos evaṁ avitakkaṁ avicāraṁ, samādhijaṁ pīti-sukhaṁ dutiyaṁ jhānaṁ upasampajjanaṁ viharati.  
29 Nanamoli (2010, IV:144)  
30 Vsm-mh, p. 147. Takkahātaṁ vitakkaṁ takko, savisesaṁ takkanato ca, “takko, vitakko”ti ca evaṁ laddhanāmenā bhāvanācattasampayuttena sammāsakappena āhananapariyāhananakiccaṁ aparāpārāṁ vattamānaṁ kaṁmatthānaṁ āhataṁ, pariyāhataṁ kātabbariṁ, balappattavītakko manasikāro bhūhālaṁ pavattetabboti attho.  
study by Shaw (2006:177) who mentions this aspect of adverting to the object in the description of the attainment of the sphere of infinite space.

In order to look for a possible explanation, we would need access to the sources Buddhaghosa used for his compilation. It has been mentioned earlier that there is reason to believe Buddhaghosa was familiar with the Vimuttimagga, based on a comment Dhammapala makes in his Visuddhimagga Mahāṭīkā. The Vimuttimagga does not contain any reference to takka or vitakka in the cultivation of the formless attainments and hence could not have been his source for this particular formulation of the practice. Another possible explanation could be that the formless attainments were quite a different series altogether, as suggested by Norman (1990), although in the context of another issue. If that possibility is extended to the issue under consideration in this paper, it implies that the method of instruction by the Buddha’s teachers, Āḷāra Kāḷāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta did not envisage a graduated development from the rūpa jhāna through to the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; that this was a later development as the formless attainments were absorbed into the Buddhist path. It would also imply that the method was preserved in the old commentaries, which comprised the corpus of materials Buddhaghosa worked on. Needless to say, this can only remain a hypothesis, as the materials Buddhaghosa used are not available to us for investigating this further.

At this point, it would also be useful to study the experience of meditation practitioners, in an attempt to find correlation between theory and practice. Since the method taught by Pa-Auk Sayadaw is the only tradition that systematically teaches attainment of jhānas and the formless attainments, a reference to his writing would be useful. In a collection of lectures which have been published, the Sayadaw describes the formless attainments largely as a process of observing the inherent dangers of the earlier meditative attainment because of its proximity to the next earlier one; he also reflects on the more peaceful abiding that characterizes the attainment sought to be cultivated. He makes no mention of striking at the object with thought and applied thought in the process of cultivating the formless attainments. Two senior disciples of the Sayadaw were interviewed and they gave somewhat different answers to the query.

One was emphatic in stating that it is not possible for vitakka or vicāra to be present in the formless states, as these states are highly subtle and the factors too coarse. In his opinion, should either of the factors indeed arise in the higher jhānas, the meditator would experience them as physical pain. In response to the query as to what brings the mind to the object and retains it there once the two factors have been abandoned, he said it was cetanā and manasikāra, two cetasikas which are classified as universals as they are present in all cittas. The second respondent stated vitakka was present in the cultivation of the formless attainments, but it was qualitatively different from the one that marks the attainment of the first jhāna and is stilled in the attainment of the second.

In the Suttas, we find vitakka is also mentioned in contexts other than the attainment of factor. For instance, in the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta the Buddha describes how, in his practice leading to enlightenment, he divided his thoughts into the two categories unwholesome (akusala) and wholesome (kusala). The former were marked by

32 See note 2 above.
33 In this case, Norman refers to the record of the Buddha recalling his boyhood experience of the first jhāna, which then leads him to stop the severe austerities he was practicing and to adopt a more peaceful method, during the process of which he cultivates the four rūpa jhānas. However, we also know that before embarking on the period of austerities, he had trained with two masters, Āḷāra Kāḷāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, with whom he had cultivated the spheres of nothingness and of neither-perception-nor-non-perception respectively. Given that in all textual sources, the formless attainments are preceded by the rūpa jhānas, the boyhood story seems strange.
34 Knowing and Seeing, revised edition.
35 Mi 114.
the feelings of sense gratification, ill-will and for causing harm. These he suppressed and dispelled, as pondering over them makes the pattern habitual in a man. He then explains the virtues of kusala vitakka, marked by renunciation, absence of ill-will and without any desire to cause harm. It is by reflecting and nurturing these thoughts, when he found mindfulness was established and his body was calm. In this description, the term vitakka is used in the context of thought, as we understand it. By nurturing wholesome thoughts, he had attained to the preliminary requisites for cultivating jhāna.

In the Čulavedalla Sutta, Bikkhuni Dhammadinnā describes both vitakka and vicāra as “vācisaṁkhāra” i.e. activities of speech. She then goes on to explain that having first directed one’s thought, and made an evaluation, one breaks out into speech. In the Rahogata Sutta the Buddha states that speech ceases in the first jhāna. From these two particular accounts we can conclude that vitakka and vicāra refer to the thought process and ideation that precedes speech and that in the attainment of the first jhāna, there is some attenuation of these factors, making them more quiescent, in what must be a result of the concentration developed. At this stage, they perform the function particular to this jhāna, of keeping the mind fixed on the object, in an awareness that is devoid of “thought” as we understand it in the modern context. This is why some translators prefer to use initial and sustained application for these two factors.

As we can see from the two examples above, there is a subtle shift in the meaning of vitakka as it has been used. An even more remarkable shift is mentioned in the Mahā Cattārisaka Sutta where the Buddha explains components of the Noble Eightfold Path in terms of sāsava and anāsava. The term āsava is defined as that which flows (out or on to) and in terms of psychology, to certain kinds of ideas that intoxicate the mind. By extension, sāsava is connected with āsavas and anāsava connotes freedom from them, which is the case of an arhat. Thus, the sāsava expression of each component leads to accumulation of merit (puññabhāgiya) but also lead to acquisitions of “becoming” (upadhivepakka). This is the mundane (lokiya) path the practitioner embarks on, concerned with the five aggregates of clinging. In contrast, the anāsava expression is a factor of the supramundane path (lokuttaramagga). In this Sutta, we find takka and vitakka used as synonyms of right intention (sammāsankappa) on the supramundane Path.

Cousins (1992), in his study of vitakka and vicāra, notes that the complete mnemonic register for vitakka in the Dhammasaṅgani is found in the Mahā Cattārisaka Sutta. He discusses the possibility therefore, that this sutta is the source of this register. In the process, however, he fails to note a few points. Firstly, the register in the Dhammasaṅgani has sammā sankappa as its seventh item, which leads him to examine a development from gross to more refined as the list progresses from takka to sammā sankappa. In the case of the sutta, however, the seventh item is vacīsaṁkhāra, which takes us to Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā’s explanation mentioned above, where vitakka and vicāra have a decidedly gross nature. Secondly, the Dhammasaṅgani list is for vitakka whereas in the sutta, the list defines sammā sankappa. Most importantly, however, he fails to note that in the sutta, the list pertains to factors of the supramundane path and it is this aspect that has considerable implications for what vitakka might mean in this context.

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36 M i 292
37 vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācaṃ bhindati.
38 S iv 216
39 pathamam jhānena samāpannassa vāca niruddhā hoti
40 M iii 71
41 PED, p.115.
42 Katamo ca bhikkhave, sammásaṅkappo ariyo anāsavo lokuttaro maggaṅgo: yo kho bhikkhave, ariyacittassa anāsavo vacīsaṁkhāra ariyamaggam bhāvayato takko vitakko sankappo appaṅṇa vyappaṅṇa cetaso abhinīropanaṁ vacīsaṁkhāro. Ayaṁ bhikkhave, sammásaṅkappo ariyo anāsavo lokuttaro maggaṅgo.
To examine the Sutta further, it is useful to bear in mind the two kinds of wisdom that arise as a result of the two paths. When a practitioner interested in developing serenity embarks on spiritual practice, he strives to establish mindfulness and cultivate the components of the eightfold path, using one from among the various meditation objects. As he overcomes the hindrances and attains to higher levels of concentration, his progress is marked by continuous unification of mind as it withdraws from its discursive tendency. Using this concentration, he embarks upon insight meditation. A practitioner who chooses to cultivate insight, without developing serenity first, goes straight on to analysis of the aggregates. As a result of this exercise, insight wisdom arises, enabling him to see that the aggregates are marked by impermanence, suffering and non-self. This is knowledge of the mundane world (lokiya) and while it rids him of the notion of individuality, it does not result in the eradication of defilements, which is truly his end goal. For that to occur, his practice has to mature fully and stabilize, culminating in what is described as the development of the supramundane (lokuttara) path, where he now has nibbāna as his object. This path is no longer concerned with the five aggregates and refers only to nibbāna and the four paths and fruits of stream-entry, once-returner, non-returner and arhat. It is the final stretch of the journey undertaken and the wisdom that arises on this path leads to nibbāna, removing defilements from the root. The supramundane path transformative at the level of perception and experience; any factors operating on this path would have to be extremely subtle and refined versions, if at all, of the factors that operate on the mundane path.

In the light of the above discussion, we have two possible explanations for the curious use Buddhaghosa makes of the terms takka and vitakka in formless attainments. The guiding principle behind them is inspired by Schmithausen (1981):

“...I presuppose that the texts I make use of are to be taken seriously, in the sense that one has to accept that they mean what they say, and that what they mean is generally reasonable within its own terms. I do not think it justified to make the general assumption that a text or an idea must be inexact or vague merely because it is a religious and not a philosophical one... when there are instances of incoherence, they will have to be explained (e.g. by reference to textual history...).”

First, the Mahā Cattārisaka Sutta usage of vitakka in the lokuttara context implies a meaning that must be quite different from the ones commonly encountered through the Suttas, where it used either as thought or as a factor of jhāna. The reference must be to a manifestation that is more quiescent, definitely far removed from speech and ideation. While the formless attainments certainly do not constitute the supramundane path, they do refer to states of extreme withdrawal from sense perceptions. It is possible that there is a subtle version of factor we understand as vitakka that is operative at this stage of samādhi as well. If it is so, then it would also tie up with the two different responses that were received from the practitioners of the Pa-Auk Sayadaw method.

The second possibility is, however, more likely. Bearing in mind that the Buddha cultivated the formless attainments at the very beginning of his spiritual journey, the record of their development would, therefore, comprise very early materials in the canon. This suggests two plausible explanations for the issue at hand. First, as tradition maintains that the Buddha rejected these attainments as they did not lead to dispassion and release, it is likely that these records did not receive the same kind of reverential attention for their preservation as his teachings did. The inconsistency we find in Buddhaghosa’s work may

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43 Ñañamoli (2010) Chapter XXIII.2
reflect inaccuracy or corruption in the materials he worked with. Secondly, we can extend the reasoning Rhys-Davids and Stede used in the PED to explain the virtual synonymity of vitakka and vicāra in early materials to this instance as well. The materials Buddhaghosa had at his disposal on this particular matter may reflect a time when the Sangha had not yet begun the delineation of various categories of experience into well-defined matrices that make up the Abhidhamma. At that time, terminology was probably more fluid and lacking in the precision which we find in later work. In addition, with the formless attainments being part of an early “non-Buddhist” experience, they may have inherited descriptive terminologies that they did not wish to alter, leading Buddhaghosa to describe the method of adverting to the object with “thought and applied thought”.
Abbreviations used:

Pāli texts refer to are the editions of the Pāli Text Society, by volume number and page.

M: Majjhima Nikāya
S: Samyutta Nikāya
Vsm-mhṭ: Visuddhimagga Mahāṭīkā

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The story of Mittavinda (also known as Maitrakanyaka as mentioned in later versions) is one of the famous Jātaka tales. The story presents a good blend of desirable and undesirable fates one has to experience based on his actions. The story highlights the theory of kamma (karma) and kamma-vipāka (karma-vipāka) - the core of Buddhist philosophy.

Buddha proclaimed the ‘Four Noble Truths’. He emphasized tanhā or trṣṇā as being the main cause of suffering. Tanhā (trṣṇā), translated variously as: desire, greed, lust, cravings - is the cause which instigates a man to perform any action. Action decides the fate of the man. It’s a relation of cause & effect. The cause lays in the kamma i.e. action or rather ‘the volition’ which produces similar results - as you sow, so shall you reap: “yadisam vapate bijam tadisam harate phalam.”

Thus the law of kamma governs over every action and its result. The kusala kamma or akusala kamma performed in this life or earlier fetches good or bad results consequently; hence there are Buddhist teachings that emphasize sammā sankappa (right intention/thought), sammā kammānta (right conduct) and sammā vāyāma (right efforts). Texts like the Vimānavatthu and the Petavatthu discuss in detail the various actions and the results they produce.

The story of Maitrakanyaka utilized in different texts beautifully exhibits the theory of kamma-vipāka. The story is available in Jātakas as well as in Avadāna literature. Both the types are similar in nature as they describe the previous births of Lord Buddha. They do not intend to teach the highly philosophical doctrines of Buddhism but aim at preaching the basic ideals. The edifying stories serve best as means for popularizing Buddhist ideals. The principal difference between the two is that every Jātaka necessarily deals with the role of the Bodhisattva and his high virtues, whereas it is not mandatory in the Avadāna literature. In Jātakas the Bodhisattva is Lord Buddha himself, whereas Avadānas depict glorious acts of any saintly hero or disciple. Yet, a large number of Avadānas present the heroic deeds of the Bodhisattva and are hence called: Bodhisattvāvadānāni. It should be noted that in case of the story of Mittavinda or Maitrakanyaka, Avadānas are the one which identify the character of Maitrakanyaka with that of Bodhisattva; whereas in Jātakas, the Bodhisattva is a separate character occurring only at the end of the story. The purpose of the paper is to analyze and compare the same story through various sources as they present some peculiarities of style and language.

Sources of the Story:
The story is initially found in the Jātakāṭṭhakathā. It is narrated in parts, in different Jātakas:
• Losaka Jātaka, no. 41
• Mittavinda Jātaka, no. 82, 104 & 369
• Catudvāra Jātaka, no. 439

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Similar stories discussed in the Avadānaśataka, Divyāvadāna and Avadānakalpalatā of Kūemendra are also referred to in this paper.

**The Jātaka Tales:**

Although Jātaka 82, 104 & 369 are named as Mittavinda Jātaka, they are just fragmentary versions of an original, longer story. They present just a short outline of the whole account. The complete story is found in Catudvāra Jātaka (no. 439) and in the Losaka Jātaka (no. 41), but are presented for different purposes. Interestingly, in all these Jātaka tales, Mittavinda is nowhere equated with the Bodhisattva, rather Bodhisattva has a separate identity. In a later stage, texts like Avadānaśataka, Divyāvadāna, Avadānakalpalatā have identified Mittavinda with the Bodhisattva. This shows the assimilation of the ideas.

**Summary of the Catudvāra Jātaka:**

- Parents of Mittavinda had entered into the 1st Path but he was unbeliever (no details about his birth).
- After the death of his father his mother tries to instruct him on the path of devotion & righteousness. Once she forces her son to listen to the laws for one night for the sake of 1000 pieces of money. Mother hopes that this will bring a change in his attitude; but, unfortunately the son agrees to it only for the sake of money and doesn’t even listen to the laws at the monastery. These details are important in order to stress upon the unfaithful nature of Mittavindaka and are not found in Avadānaśataka, Divyāvadāna or Avadānakalpalatā.
- Son behaves rudely with the mother and takes 1000 pieces of money with which he starts a business. Earning enough he decides to start a sea voyage. Mother tries to dissuade him but he strikes her down and starts the journey. Here there is no hint about the business of Mittavindaka’s father or the different professions which Mittavinda adopted; it is added in later versions.
- The ship becomes immovable, the lots are cast and Mittavindaka is cast adrift upon the deep. He reaches an island where he visits four palaces respectively of crystal, silver, jewels and gold. In each of these palaces he stays with female spirits (damsels), the number of which increases in successive order of 4, 8, 16, 32.
- Finally he enters a city with four gates. There he sees a man holding razor-sharp wheel over his head, but for Mittavindaka it looks like a lotus bloom. Being keen to possess it he asks for the wheel to the man (conforming to his unjust nature). The man understands that Mittavindaka has performed a similar sin of disobeying his mother. Then the wheel moves on the head of Mittavindaka. As he suffers from the unbearable pains he understands his fault. Bodhisattva who was on a visit of Ussada Hell3 at that time explains to him that this is the result of Mittavinda’s greed and wicked nature. Here Bodhisattva is playing the role of a ruler of Ussada Hell and Mittavindaka suffers till his death as a punishment.

**Summary of the Losaka Jātaka:**

- This tale is about a monk, whose mind has not freed from jealousy and greed. These defilements lead him to distress and his peace of mind is lost. The story further tells that the act of the monk of throwing ‘alms food’ on the burning coals caused him to be reborn in a hell where he suffered for hundreds of thousands of years. Later he was

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reborn as a demon 500 times, then again as a starving stray dog 500 times and finally as a human being named Mittavinda in a poorest of poor family. The story is narrated in great detail explaining how his past actions and his disobedience brought misfortune to him.

- Similar to earlier Jātaka he enjoys pleasure in four palaces and finally experiences the pains and misery of a wheel of blades. With that spinning wheel he again came to an island inhabited by powerful she-devil. At the end of the story, Mittavindaka being a monk in initial life meets his teacher who welcomes him with open arms as a student.
- This is the only story where sufferings of Mittavindaka come to an end on behalf of his past good deeds and he is fortunate enough to get an eye-opening advice from a teacher.

**Avadāna Tales:**

The central theme of whole Avadāna literature is to teach people the doctrine of kamma (karma). In order to highlight the fruition of kamma many interesting tales were woven around the virtuous deeds, from either the Bodhisattva or a saintly hero or a disciple of Buddha. The moral they convey is always noted as:

\[
\text{iti hi bhikśava ekāntakṛṣāṇāṁ karmanāmekāntakṛṣno vipākāḥ}
\text{ekāntaśuklānāmekātaśuklo vyatimiśrāṇāṁ vyatimiśståśmāttarhi bhikśava ekāntakṛṣāṇi karmānyapāśya…}^4
\]

Thus it is hammered on the heart of the masses that wrong actions produce undesirable results and good actions bring good results. Hence a person should always strive to perform righteous deeds following the path of 6 pāramitās. Thus all Avadānas have happy endings to emphasize that virtuous acts are always rewarded. Story of Maitrakanyaka as seen in the Avadāna literature also depicts the same theme by equating him with the Bodhisattva.

**Avadānaśataka:**

Avadānaśataka was probably composed in the beginning of the 2nd century CE and is considered as the oldest collection in the Avadāna literature. It consists of 10 vargas dealing with certain subject. Some stories can be categorized as Jātakas whereas some come under ‘vyākaraṇa’ where a story is explained about future accounts in contrast to the usual style. The story of Maitrakanyaka falls in the 4th varga (no. 36) which represents the style of Jātaka.

- It presents great details related to the same story. The story is in Sanskrit (while it presents some features of Hybrid Sanskrit). Story begins by paying salutations to parents.
- A rich merchant named ‘Mitra’ is worried as no child of his survives. Interestingly he is not emphasizing on begetting a son but expresses his sorrow with the expression, ‘though my house is furnished with all sorts of wealth, I am deprived of a son as well as a daughter’\(^5\). He prays to number of gods to have progeny. He is advised that if a son is born he should be named after a girl for his survival; there is a prophecy as well that he is likely to have a son. Later the son is named as Maitrakanyaka (as he is a son of Mitra named as a daughter) and is brought up by several nurses. This story incorporates many unnecessary events and detailed descriptions of the birth of

\(^4\) CF. Avadānaśataka, 8th varga, story 71
\(^5\) ‘anekadhanasamuditaṁ me grhaṁ na me putro na duhutā’

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Maitrakanyaka. The details show less conservative approach while describing the worship of different gods for the sake of progeny (some being Brahmanical deities).

- In the meantime, his father passes away while on the sea voyage. When Maitrakanyaka inquired about his father’s profession, his mother hesitantly hides the truth and directs him to different professions. The co-merchants being jealous of his progress tell him the truth and he plans for a sea voyage.

- As is the case with earlier stories, mother pleads to him for not to undertake this profession; but disregarding her emotions, he starts with the group of 500 merchants. This story depicts a different shade of the character of his mother. She being kind to heart prays for his son that he should not face the bitter results of this karma.

- Following the story line of Jātakas, Maitrakanyaka visits four islands namely Ramaṇaka, Sadāmatta, Nandana & Brahmottara. Despite being advised at each step by the nymphs not to go towards south, he curiously follows the south path and at the end receives the sharp iron wheel over his head. It is interesting to note that in the Brahmanical mythology south is considered as the ‘path of pitr’ - the abode of Yama is also located at this direction.

- Here Maitrakanyaka is identified as the Bodhisattva for the first time. It should also be noted that the Avadānasataka is the oldest among Avadāna Literature. His is full of compassion and declares that he is ready to bear miserable pain forever, so that no one else suffers from similar misery. With the effect of these words the wheel disappears and Bodhisattva Maitrakanyaka is raised to Tuṣita heaven.

- The story also informs to us: the enjoyments he experienced at the four islands were the result of his good deed of handing over all his earnings to his mother (thus every act is justified).

**Divyāvadāna:**

The text has a later date than the Avadānasataka probably from the beginning of the 3rd century. It follows the same story-line as discussed earlier; but only on a note: the moral of the story is introduced in the beginning, as: ‘mātary apakāriṇāḥ prāṇina ihaiva vyaśanapurapātātapātāvalambino bhadvantāti’. The story is narrated here in elaborate manner by adding many verses in between decorating the original account. In view of scholars this story doesn’t originally belong to Divyāvadāna but was added to it at a certain stage of manuscript transmission. Prof. Hahn opines that the narration as seen in Divyāvadāna was borrowed from Gopadatta’s Jātanakālī.

**Avadānakalpalatā:**

Avadānakalpalatā composed by Kṣemendra dates around 1052 CE. Text is composed in pure Sanskrit and is a piece of ornate poetry. Few details described here should be noted:

- The story begins by glorifying motherhood. The names of the parents are mentioned as Maitra & Vasundhara. The earlier versions refer to the name of the father as Mitra which seems more appropriate as Mitra’s son will be named as Maitra.

- Here again, whatever earnings he makes out of his business he hands it over to his mother (As a result of this he enjoys pleasures in four islands). Maitrakanyaka finally decides to start a sea voyage and disrespects his mother’s request. In this narrative

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7 Kudo Noriyuki, The Karmavibhaṅga, The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, Tokyo, 2004, P. 252
there is no mention of the jealous neighbors and co-merchants which forms part of the narration in the Avadānaśataka.

- The story proceeds in the same manner as in Avadānaśataka; but is briefly referring only to major incidences. Bodhisattva Maitrakanyaka shows great compassion towards others and hence receives an abode in the Tuṣita heaven.

**Language and style:**

This paper focuses on the various versions of the story of Maitrakanyaka from Jātakas and Avadānas. As mentioned above, both maintain a similar pattern of narrating a story. The narrative constitutes mainly five sections:

- a framework of the story stating when, where & why the story is related,
- the story of the present,
- the story related to past events,
- the characters of the story of the past are identified with those of the present story,
- moral of the story.

The Jātaka stories discussed in this paper adhere to their usual form; whereas Avadāna stories present many variations and language peculiarities. Avadānaśataka and Divyāvadāna are texts of Sarvāstivādins. Avadānaśataka presents many features of hybrid Sanskrit. Forms like pascādaham pi⁹ (rule of sandhi neglected), aukvarikāpaṇo¹⁰ (purely hybrid noun), prakṛtaḥ¹¹ (instead of prakṛtibhiḥ), yanmātpitṛsu kārānkarisyāmo¹² (unusual usage for upakārān) are few examples to note. In order to make the story more fascinating it adds many interesting descriptions in between. It follows a simple style of narration and includes gāthās only at the beginning and at the end of the story. In contrast to this, the Divyāvadāna presents figurative & flowery language using long compounds for the descriptions.¹³ The prose is interspersed with many verses; however, some of them are penned beautifully and can be cited as an example of good counsel:

\[
\text{anarthaṛāgagrahāmūḍhabuddhayo narā hi paśyanti na kevalāṃ hitam|}
\text{satāṃ hitādhānavidhānacetasāṃ giro pi śṛṇvanti na bhūtavādinām||}¹⁴
\]

Maitrakanyaka while suffering from the miserable pains of the razor-sharp wheel repents for his excessive desire and exclaims:

\[
\text{karśati prāṇinas tatra phalāṃ yatra prayacchati ||}¹⁵
\]

Avadānakalpalatā of comparatively late origin is composed in a style of classical Sanskrit poetry; and though the story is not dealt at length yet, is delightful - it depicts ornate language and few apt expressions add to the beauty of it:

\[
\text{mātuḥ pituśca na samoṣti gurūṣṭṛtyāḥ¹⁶|}
\text{mohaḥ śāpa ivābhavat ||}¹⁷
\]

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⁹ Avś. p. 198
¹⁰ Ibid
¹¹ Ibid, p.199
¹² Ibid, p. 204
¹³ tato´sau samapavanagamanajanajitavāsasagatibhiḥ salilplavair itastathaḥ samākspyamāno nirāhāratayā ca parimālāyamānayanavadananakamolai cānyair bahubhīr......āsasāda| Div. p. 596
¹⁴ Ibid, p. 594, People whose thoughts are captured by the ill feeling, not only ignore their welfare but also do not listen to the advice of the righteous, who are their well-wishers speaking the truth.
¹⁵ Ibid, p. 607
¹⁶ Avk. 92.6
Concluding Remarks:

The study of Jātakas and Avadānas is significant as the earlier portion forms part of Pāli Tipiṭaka (Tripiṭaka), whereas the latter includes various pieces of literature influenced by different schools of Buddhism. Thus it also reflects the development of ideas, foundations of new concepts and assimilation of thoughts. Scholars believe that works like Avadānaśataka, or Divyāvadāna ascribed to Sarvāstivāda school do not present a conservative approach but at many places exhibit the influence of Mahāyānist ideas (though they may not have adopted the whole concept). Hence it is considered that such texts were composed during the transition period from Śrāvakayāna (i.e. early Buddhism / Theravāda) to Mahāyāna. Dr. N. Dutt considers Avadānas along with Jātakas under the heading ‘semi-Mahāyāna’.20 Winternitz also notes, “The Avadāna texts also stand, so to speak, with one foot in the [Theravada] literature and the other in that of the Mahāyāna”.21

The story of Maitrakanyaka also supports this view in some regards. The Bodhisattva of Jātakas has a separate role to play where he declares the verdict of punishment at the end of the story. Here Maitrakanyaka has to suffer through the pains till his death. On the contrary Avadānas identified Maitrakanyaka with the Bodhisattva and changed the whole focus of the story. Here the story is fashioned in such a way that at the end of the story great compassion of the Bodhisattva towards all beings is highlighted and he attains an abode in the Tuṣita heaven.

Elaborate descriptions presented in Avadānaśataka and Divyāvadāna are useful in order to examine some social, religious and economic aspects. Apart from Catudvāra Jātaka the story as narrated in the Avadānaśataka provides great details which vary in many respects with the Jātaka versions. It has been mentioned earlier that Jātakas are silent about the business pursued by Mittavinda. On the other hand Avadānaśataka and Divyāvadāna inform us about three different occupations adopted by Maitrakanyaka viz. aukvarika (Avadānaśataka) or aukarika (Divyāvadāna) (It is not much clear which business is referred to by this name22), gāndhikāpanika i.e. merchant of scents, and hairanyika i.e. goldsmith. Seafaring merchants also seem to have been popular at the time as a group of 500 merchants joins Maitrakanyaka on his ship. Such reference is also seen in many different stories and probably shows an influence of foreign fairy tales where the descriptions of seafarers and their adventures are found in abundance. Story of Maitrakanyaka is, on one hand a fairy tale with fascinating adventures and on the other hand falls in the line of a typical karma story.

Narration from Avadānaśataka also throws light on the custom of worshipping various deities for the desire of offspring. Interestingly no story has emphasized on the importance of son than a daughter. Many Brahmanical divinities viz. Śiva, Varuṇa, Kubera, Śakra, Brahmā are also referred to along with some peculiar names like ārāmadevatā (deity of grove), vanadevatā (deity of woods), catvaredevatā (gods at

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17 Ibid 92.22
18 Ibid, 92. 50
19 Ibid, 92.58
20 As quoted in Sharma Sharmistha, Buddhist Avadānas (Socio-political, Economic and Cultural Study), Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi, 1985, p. 21
22 For details refer to Edegerton F., Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar & Dictionary, Vol. II, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, reprint 1993

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crossroads), śṛṅgāṭakadevatā (gods of crossway) and balipratigrāhikā devatā (gods receiving bali offerings). These correspond more to the local gods and folk beliefs.

Starting with the Jātakas and Avadānas following the same path, the whole account of Maitrakanyaka strongly emphasizes the theory of karma–vipāka. Whether described in brief or with great details, the moral of the story does not change, yathā yathā yaṁ puriso kammaṁ karoti tathā tathā taṁ paṭisanyedissati – “in whichever way this man does a deed, in the same way he will experience it (in its effect)”\(^{23}\). Though Mittavinda of Jātakas or Maitrakanyaka of Avadānas initially finds himself in bliss later he has to face the consequences of his unrighteous behavior towards his mother. The story underlines the respect for Motherhood and at the same time points out the consequences of excessive greed conforming to the teachings of Buddha - ‘taṅhā’ is the main cause of sufferings. Avadāna stories have highlighted this theme more effectively. In case of Jātakas Mittavinda enjoys pleasure at each island only for 7 days, whereas according to Avadānas his enjoyments last for many years at each island. In the Losaka Jātaka the jealous monk has to suffer for his misdeed through many different rebirths. Thus sooner or later the acts bear their fruits.

\[na praṇaśyanti karmāṇi api kalpaśatairapi |\]
\[sāmagrīṁ prāpya kālam ca phalanti khalu dehinām||\(^{24}\)

Thus the story serves as a means for critical analysis to understand the socio-cultural aspects reflected in the narrations.

\(^{24}\) Div. XI, p. 141
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Dictionaries:


As the manager of the IABU, I have certain responsibilities, which fall under our vision, mission and goals:

**IABU Vision:**
- Motivate future generations to gain and apply profound understanding of the Buddhadhamma in every aspect of life
- Raise the quality of scholarly work within Buddhist Studies and across other academic endeavors
- Contribute to meeting the challenges that face human society world-wide

**IABU Mission:**
- Support and collaborate with members to ensure humanity can benefit from the richness and variety of the multi-dimensional Buddhist traditions
- Provide a framework towards better understanding diverse policies and activities
- Collaborate in administration, teaching, research and outreach
- Recognize each other’s qualifications

**IABU Goals:**
- Propagate the Buddhadhamma through collaborative academic channels
- Eliminate Buddhist sectarian, national, and institutional barriers
- Raise the academic standards throughout the Buddhist world
- Maximize academic potentials and abilities.

When I review articles as the general editor for our conference publications or journal articles, I must continually reflect upon our aims, in the sense of the vision, mission and goals of the association, and must strive to work for Buddhism to the highest of my abilities. I have been, primarily, in this position since 2007 – editing perhaps almost 500 different articles over this time, for acceptance in the Buddhist world. Many of our conference publications and journals are available on the United Nations Day of Vesak conference website.¹

Recently, I was teaching a course on Selected Topics in Buddhist Texts, and the topic I selected to lecture on was Buddhist critical or analytical thinking skills, as developed in the Nettippakaranam, since I have had many students throughout the years who seem to avoid using them when writing their major assignments; and as I operate under the vision, mission and goals of IABU, it was a necessary opportunity. A student can sure criticize a teacher they dislike or find boring, but they seldom scrutinize the value of the Dhamma to any intellectual degree. I would think that the value of the information is more important than the delivery of the information – in the sense that this is a university and not a theater-performance. Imagine my dismay and reaction, when in the final of eight lectures, a graduate-school student challenged me: “Why do we have to know this?” I wanted to leave the lecture room silently in shock – but my computer was still plugged in, and it would take several minutes to shut it down and pack it up into my backpack. Instead, his ignorant outburst triggered a rise in my stress-level, and I was baffled by the dearth in his comprehension-level, and the need to shoot the messenger. Clearly I was wasting my time with this student, who was starving for attention. Let me

‘screen-capture’ the first paragraph of the translator’s introduction to the Nettippakaranam:

**TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION**

1. **THE GUIDE**

The book here translated—as it stands, it was perhaps composed more than two thousand years ago—sets forth a method intended for the guidance of those who already know intellectually the Buddha’s teaching and want to explain his utterances. It is not a commentary but a guide for commentators: it deals with scaffolding, not with architecture. Its name, *Nettipakaranam*, means ‘guide-treatise’, but the translation has been called, more simply, the *Guide*.

If a student doesn’t already know the Buddha’s teachings before trying to earn a master-degree in Buddhist studies, then he/she may be unqualified to be a student in the classroom. This is not the time to learn new things. If a student is not learning these ideas in his/her undergraduate training, then the school-system might be failing. It is my perception that this text would be the perfect book for a graduate student of Buddhist studies to read and examine - if they were a graduate-school student of Buddhist Studies. Is this a correct presumption? Apparently, I am an idiot for thinking that the text should be read and is appropriate for graduate-level students, attempting to earn a master’s-degree in Buddhist studies.

I was trying to guide students in learning how to further interpret the Buddha’s terminology, through an assignment using the sixteen haras defined in the text through a different randomly selected vocabulary word – a different one for each student to prevent plagiarism. A certain monastic paying for courses in the Graduate School’s program, obviously never did the reading of the text – never got beyond the first sentence of the first paragraph of the first page of the prime text that I was using for the course, and through a few of his peers thought it would be easier to protest against me and the assignment for doing something innovative, rather than trying to engage into a meaningful analysis. Therefore, the miserable lesson learned from teaching MCU Graduate School monks, is that they were ungrateful for innovative Dhamma-lessons. Critical thinking also urges our association to make faculties and departments more aware of what we are trying to accomplish as an association, so that their exposed weaknesses can be healed. We need to be more proactive with our functioning objectives – education is the key to improvements. If departments are not online with our aims, the situation will only remain the same.

When I set out to create this special edition of the 4th Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities (JIABU), on the theme of Buddhist critical or analytical thinking skills, I envisioned that the scholars participating would have read the volume of work that I attached with the call for papers. I produced a research document on the theme of Buddhist critical thinking skills that drew out the material from the Tipitaka pertaining to analytical thinking, which was a reaction from a journal edited by Dr. Soraj Hongladorom of Chulalongkorn University. It was the very same text that I taught to the ungrateful class, as mentioned above. It was my vision to have Buddhist scholars react in such a way as to contribute new innovations to the field of critical thinking, not to protest and remain doing the time-wasting tiresome endeavors. Dr. Soraj

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is an academic composing scholarly endeavors, and my work builds upon his work, and he himself returns to contribute something to this volume. In a sense, this is a useful collaboration – but I wanted more, in the sense of intellectual depth, from others in the Buddhist academic world. I wanted to be taught something new by superior scholars.

One scholar in this journal referenced that work, and it is my gut-instinct that despite 1853 downloads or reviews of my text, most of everyone in this volume never utilized any of my proper research in a way in which I thought they would have or should have. Does this mean that almost everyone found nothing of value in it, nothing in it was important to build upon – or does it mean that no one was capable of using anything in the text? To some extent, I became disappointed over the dearth of scholars approaching the material that I spent a few years documenting into a funded research project. Was it a failed endeavor or did people neglect to grasp the material? The few students who turned in the final assignment neglected to turn in a proper assignment. This is my enduring inquiry. Regardless of the opinions, the evidence is contained within the reference section of these individual articles.

Review of “Buddhist Critical Thinking Skills”:

There are two assertions that need to be made: the first is that the Buddha called himself an analyst (vibhajjavadan), and the second assertion is that he suggested that people become masters of the courses of thoughts (vasī-vitakkapariyāyapathesu). This is a seldom-discussed issue in Buddhism, and it may be apparent that people choose to become meditation masters rather than becoming dhamma-masters. I’ll briefly summarize the major parts of my text mentioned above, where the following items are discussed (and, please see the complete-project to witness how these issues are presented), represented here in brevity:

- A portion of the Vibhanga’s Patisambhidhavibhanga illustrates the criteria of analytical insights: into the consequence, origin philology and knowledge of whatever is being investigated for the purpose of inquiry. This is important to show, because there are layers of information built onto what we may see, and we have to scrutinize the various components of what it is that we are examining, from a variety of perspectives. As said, the sixteen haras also serve this function in great depth.

- I designed a chart illustrating what Marx and Engels presented in terms of how religious and secular institutions use each other or are against each other, for social-control of the masses. This is present to illustrate what might be operating against Buddhism, in terms of critical thinking: it is important to know what the antagonist might be pondering, and why?

- I try to discuss how Habermas is useful, in his discussions pertaining to communicative action – where reasoning and argumentation are discussed to bring elements of validity into some discussion.

- I discuss the importance of the Nettippakaranam, which should be a fundamental Buddhist textbook in our modern Buddhist universities, where even in the introduction to the text, it details why the text is important and even further: one can ascertain why a student in a Buddhist graduate-school program should learn the contents of the text and be able to work with the contents. There are sixteen modes of conveying an element of discussion, allowing a student to engage into hermeneutical endeavors or drawing out special elements of the idea under examination. If any student aspires to become a teacher, this text should be mandatory to read and consider.

3 Available here: [http://www.academia.edu/2344610/Buddhist_Critical_Thinking_Skills_-_revised_17_January_2013 - accessed on 10 March 2014, receiving 1853 views or downloads to this date.](http://www.academia.edu/2344610/Buddhist_Critical_Thinking_Skills_-_revised_17_January_2013 - accessed on 10 March 2014, receiving 1853 views or downloads to this date.)
I move deeper into the introduction, discussing various aspects of Dhamma and covering the Yodhajiva Sutta, the Kesaputta Sutta, and other details towards illustrating hermeneutical tools for Buddhists to implement into their studies.

In the second chapter of the text, I cover discourses that relate to morality, yet useful, for illustrating episodes of critical thinking, when in the presence of another person.

In the third chapter of the text, I cover discourses that relate to higher forms of exercising mentality, beginning from an Upanishad, and evolving the dialogue into proto-abhidhammic material that is found in the early Buddhist discourses.

In the fourth chapter of the text, I cover discourses that relate to training in higher wisdom. Higher wisdom is not critical thinking, but higher wisdom can stimulate critical thinking.

The conclusion to the text summarizes each chapter and brings in some other material to support some claims or suggestions made within, such as the importance of self-scrutiny; and examining the concept of progress through the sixteen modes of conveying – since every discourse within the text seems to suggest that some sort of progress is needed to advance from a lower worldly stage into a better or higher realm; then I provide a final conclusion and suggest that the path in critical or analytical thinking should lead someone towards greater progress.

Previewing, “Advanced Analytical Assessment of Buddhist Critical Thinking Skills and Additional Philosophical Concerns or Perspectives for the Field of Critical Thinking”:

I am engaged into a second volume – a completely new version and perspective of another funded research project that advances over the above mentioned research. Although it remains incomplete, the following material is what is discussed thusfar in that project. Prior to my involvement in Buddhist studies, I was a intelligence analyst in the United States Air Force – for many years I tried to leave my past behind and forget about the years as a sort of a spy and decided to merge my experience as a communications-analyst and academic philosophy-doctor. In this advancement upon my earlier funded effort, I begin by taking a look at what exactly is: intelligence, an analyst, and analysis – using material complied from thirty-seven full texts available on the CIA’s website.

I equate a lot of what Buddhists do towards what an intelligence analyst or a “spy” must do. A Buddhist is responsible for contemplating matters that are occurring internally in the mind and body, as well as what is occurring externally as a sort of stimuli which may have some influence over the individual’s response-pattern. A greater comprehension of neurosciences and psychoanalysis would benefit the Buddhist, so one would know that is really occurring within the brain or being. Both the Buddhist and the Analyst are collecting information: intelligence data, and are analyzing this data for a purpose, formulating knowledge towards the development of experienced-wisdom. When the Buddhist or the analyst, or for simplicity: when analysis is performed by either, then it is likely that they can comprehend occurrences in the minds of others. The use of one’s abhinna performs a similar function: when subjected to similar circumstances, given a certain type of variables afflicting the person subjected to the scrutiny or the one scrutinizing the phenomena, a certain calculated reaction is expected, and responses can

4 I believe that I may be the first professor to have students examine something, such as a selected verse from the Dhammapada or a key-vocabulary word and have that idea scrutinized through each of the sixteen modes of conveying, as suggested in the Nettippakaranam. I have my undergraduates perform this exercise and I have my graduate-students perform the exercise. Many have trouble adequately performing the sixteen interpretations.

5 For instance, a review of some occasional papers can be found here: https://www.cia.gov/library/kent-center-occasional-papers or here: https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence - last accessed on 26 June 2013
be predicted to a high degree of accuracy. When the analyst (either person: the Buddhist or the ‘spy’) is engaged into data-collection or inquiry, they are gaining access to the intelligence data (thoughts or capabilities of others) that will need to be subjected to data-processing procedures – in Buddhism this is also done through such popular training-systems like vipassana-mediation.

There is also the burden of cognitive dissonance. Any thought is cognition. If you think that this article or a lecture by me is boring, you have cognized or made a determination that the article is boring and you may even formulate a dislike for this information, and discontinue reading it. If you have the knowledge that this ink on this paper is black, this is the cognition of black ink on white paper. Someone may like this article, and cognitive irrelevance could form. For cognitive irrelevance to be shown: there is no relation between liking or disliking this article and that the ink is black – the two thoughts are irrelevant to each other. Cognitive dissonance is best illustrated in: some person thinks this article is boring, and another person thinks that the article is interesting. There are two distinct perceptions or the same object. Since there is an obvious polarity in the opinions: dissonance increases as the degree of discrepancy among cognitions increase. Further, to better cognize dissonance, there are four points that should be illustrated:

- Dissonance increases as the degree of discrepancy among cognition increases
- Dissonance increases as the number of discrepant cognitions increases
- Dissonance is inversely proportional to the number of consonant cognitions held by an individual
- The relative weight of the consonance or dissonance may be adjusted by their importance in the individual’s mindset.

We are all not going to have the same opinion from the same given set of materials to examine. Mindsets are molded as new information presents itself or is discovered. As an analyst is confronted with additional information or new circumstances, the reaction or response could vary, and as someone becomes more experienced, each experience builds upon past experiences, new information or the development of keener insights or wisdom can be produced – mindsets are transformed. An analyst also proceeds in a more higher-level, scientific manner rather than using personal feelings or emotions to guide their responses – however difficult that this endeavor becomes. Analysts, and certainly Buddhist monks, should have active self-awareness and make proper active analytical assessments of the development of the phenomena or the object of scrutiny. This analysis deciphers between the basic questions that even children are aware of: who, what, when, where, why, how, and so forth, according to the scenario that someone is facing. One problem may be that students of Buddhism are less equipped with learning how to apply their data or Dhamma-sets to real world situations, therefore they rely on a master for a number of years until enlightenment is attained. Buddhist and analysts need to know how to apply the proper method to the scenario, weigh all the variables involved in the processes and be able to adequately synthesize and communicate the results. This intelligence data comes from, as far as a Buddhist is concern, the functions associated with the mind – the organ that faces difficulties when forced to engage into complex issues: perceptions, memory, information processing, and consciousness. Towards improving our minds, under the rubric of critical or analytical thinking, we may go beyond just acquiring knowledge or the types of thoughts one is taught or trained to have, and move beyond the actual functioning of the

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*For example, see the discussion here: [http://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/stephens/cdback.html](http://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/stephens/cdback.html) – accessed on 26 June 2013, where these four points and the discussion on cognitive dissonance are presented.*

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mind – we may need some moments, real quality and peaceful time (this is meditation and
meditation), to assess the intelligence data against sophisticated and even deceptive ideas.

Although the research-project remains incomplete, I aspire to research and
discover ways in which our intelligence-information or knowledge gathered can be used
more effectively and through our analytical-processes, perhaps towards generating better
wisdom.

Review and Analysis of the Articles in this Volume:
The current journal begins with the leading article by Dr. Soraj Hongladarom,
who contributed the article: Learning and Interdependence: Towards a Buddhism-
inspired Theory of Learning – dealing with deconstructing cultural boundaries, while
comparing the merits of critical thinking in Eastern and Western constructed cultures.
Several years ago, Soraj edited an influential journal on critical thinking skills, which
directly influenced my own work, and the construction of this present journal on the
theme of Buddhist critical thinking skills. It is known that there are many philosophical
systems of thought that entertain critical inquiry or analysis, but within my efforts, the
focus is on Buddhist methods and logic systems, the assumed inherent tradition of the
people around South, Southeast and East Asia, and as my own previous work asserts:
these are all found inside of the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Professor Soraj looks at
the research shown by several scholars that shows how each system has some respectful
role in a proper context. One culture, which has a history of growth and adaptation within
itself, cannot be continually tied up with a single set learning theory or system; the key to
a strong culture would be to possess multiple methodologies and use the proper method
for the proper circumstance, as they do when facing some threat. Students must,
absolutely, learn to think for themselves. There is ample evidence that some culture can
be a modern culture and not succumb to Westernization or Globalization.

My instincts suggest that he is not looking at some singular issue, and he is being
proper to look at larger perspectives when taking a theoretical look at how people are
learning, and in ways that people acquire their information through institutionalized
learning facilities. Dr. Soraj discusses that procedures are needed or certain learning
theories should be emphasized, but these not mentioned. There is no mentioning of
specific processes and how they work or could be measured, in this theoretical output that
aims to deconstruct cultural boundaries. Systemized learning is mentioned when
discussing ancient historical periods, and the implication is that there is no modern school
educating younger generations in these methods, means or manners. I tried, but a
student-protest prohibited any attempt. Additionally, the responsible department-head
acquiesced to the whims of the students. The point here is not the disrespect that the
department or students directed towards the teacher, rather the point is that the attempt
was made to regenerate age-old Buddhist wisdom – too many people seem to have
difficulties when faced with change and revolt against this improved methods for change.

Jacob Buganga’s contribution supports and defines the role that general critical
thinking plays as an instrumental process that creates benefits for the well-
being of people. When difficult tasks are faced, people must be aware of cognitive processes.
Since our youth, we have all been taught basic question words: who, which, what, when,

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7 For instance, take the criticism of Noam Chomsky towards Slavoj Zizek, here:
http://www.openculture.com/2013/06/noam_chomsky_slams_zizek_and_lacan_empty_posturing.html - where he is not
interested in theory and claims Slavoj Zizek is only posturing, the phone call is also here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWRqPbwvYS0 – both accessed on 30 June 2013, the point of illustrating this is
not to criticize my elder scholarly colleague, rather the point is to show that some people don’t merely believe in
philosophy and theory, but believe in praxis or practical applications – the transference of some idea into a real world
situation.
where, why and how - we should bring these basic ideas into our lives and meditation endeavors by attaining to higher knowledge and wisdom. Our thinking often varies and fluctuates depending on our moods. When we meditate, we are finally given the time to ascertain and tend to our troubled consciousness – bringing about the development of clarity, enabling us to better assess our afflictions. Vipassana provides decision-making framework for such self-scrutiny and it is available during our every breath. Through analytical scrutiny or critical thinking, minute characteristics can be examined, yet such methods are not even limited to Buddhism. Taking the time to think about issues is also inherent to many tribes, evidence to support this is inherently found in the language of tribes in Uganda. Buganga’s discussion illuminates the role and value of critical thinking in Buddhism and within other traditions. It’s evident that vipassana-meditation is: a form of mindfulness, which in itself implies a tradition of scrutinizing the occurrences within the mind and body; a form of critical analysis of the momentarily existing conventional-self during the instance of pondering. Critical thinking is also beneficial towards predicting outcomes – and in a tradition like Buddhism, abhiññas are considered important tools to develop. Buganga additionally asserts that critical thinking skills are an integral part of Buddhist values and coping mechanisms towards constructed social-realms and the natural environment. He concludes his endeavor by urging contemplatives to ponder if critical-thinking really is vipassana meditation or insight meditation.

The article by Helen Rosen challenges us to consider not just psychotherapy, but how meditation actually creates changes in our personalities: treating depression and other disorders. Dr. Rosen is not just speaking from reading articles about the subject and preaching the standard themes, she is actually prescribing meditation for her patients and measuring results, inasmuch as the later effects can be measured or ascertained. Vipassana meditation, as we all know, is designed for people to determine the truer stage of their mental states by taking notice of the arising, presence and dissipation of such temporary states. She turns to the necessity to explore or engage into self-criticism when undertaking vipassana meditation. Her case studies demonstrate that some changes occur over longer periods of time if patients neglect the daily meditations. Most of these changes involve taking time out for breathing exercises – she stresses behavioral modification and not taking on some intellectualized theory.

Ronald Nakasone discusses the idea of dharma-gates, which are a conceptual overlay that provides insight and the opportunity to participate in the contemplation of the reality of dhammas. This system of knowing and thinking establishes criteria for critical or analytical thinking. There are a list of ten criteria within the dharma-gate system. He discusses shifting our center of awareness, allowing us to see the perspective of others and timeless alternate impressions – opinions and positions that are not our own, but valid within other mindsets, or from recognized authority. We should know that there may be special and relational structures or alternatives in ideas that we have not adequately assessed. We should additionally consider that the Buddha was only a guide for someone to become Enlightened, and imparted the Dhamma as authority, following his passing; and Prof. Nakasone concludes with suggesting what was known yesterday, can be confusing even today.

Prof. Ulrich Duchrow begins by saying there is a global decisive point challenging everyone and that the solutions might not be Buddhist. We can agree to disagree but what if the existing policy-makers are so removed from Buddhism that a partially influenced decision through Buddhism may never become a possibility? They think critically, but their methods and aims have little to do with any input from Buddhist ideology. He emphasizes that interreligious dialogue is very important for comprehending how ideas are traded between cultures. Further, if there is any unifying trend from discussions pertaining to the Axial Age (economic and technological responses to the
ancient advancing localized developments) - this was a common stage in many civilizations around the same time, perhaps owing to the greater mobility of humans. Soldiers and mercenaries had to be paid, and around this time: slave-mining for precious metals became an industrious endeavor – class exploitation has ancient roots. The idea of private property was another innovation, which lead to heightened structural greed and the accumulation of commodities. While Prof. Ulrich Duchrow is illustrating elements of Western European societies, we may also reflect upon parallel developments in Asian nations – embracing a common connection between cultures. Different nations adapted to the new conditions differently, and the great spiritual or philosophical traditions emerged as deviant reaction to these changing circumstances – away from the older social-beliefs now seemingly obsolete. Professor Duchrow suggests that the laws found in Deuteronomy are the first known social laws; however this seems to ignore the ancient Sumerian codes (Code of Urukagina or Ur-Nammu) and those developed in ancient Egypt (Ma’at) and India (Manusmrti). Ancient societies around the world had developed legal codes and further, forms of economic discipline - it is certainly not a unique invention. The various global traditions do have a lot in common: the outright opposition to this devastating capitalistic civilization that is engulfing the planet. All of the liberational theologies or ideologies oppose the development of capitalism, as their traditions are built upon satisfying the needs or eliminating the suffering of individuals for a collective moral civilization.

Gregory Ryhor Haurylau’s learned position is one in support of critical thinking skills and their application as a device needed to assist in better meditations – however he takes this approach from his life experience and extensive meditation efforts. He asserts that merely examining suttas will lead to an intellectual-disaster unless the gained insights can be applied during meditation: some professors of Buddhism or Buddhist studies may be full of words, but do little in terms of meditation – and this is a big problem. Analytical thinking is a critical portion of Buddhist meditations, and more effort should go into bringing awareness into this aspect of the Buddhadhamma.

Saw Yee Mon contributes very thoughtful words through expressing ‘how’ we go about scrutinizing our various or random thoughts, and the ability to transform our conventions into something ultimately more reliable. She does not assert that the practice of analysis is necessarily Buddhist, as thinking is a valuable aspect within human-cultures; rather: it’s the fostering of, within some cultures, to actually place emphasis on scrutinizing stimuli. Again, one does not need to be a Buddhist to analyze things, although Buddhist meditation and mental-endeavors do suggest to exercise the mind in such a way – and it is the way for Buddhists to achieve final liberation: Nibbana.

Supriya Rai works through some problematic scholarship that illustrates difficulties in some meditation procedures and distinguish between aspects of transitioning from one state to another. After suggesting that there are two primary systems of mediation: the calming of the mind and the analytical processes that occur or are utilized in vipassana meditation. She points out instances in the problematic meditation scholarship: manual-writing authors are disconnected from gurus, and seldom penetrate into the deeper realms of expert contemplatives – they turn to texts like the Visuddhimagga for their valued commentary. Many people know that the Visuddhimagga, as a great and revered text, is still filled with some inconsistencies. She raises the question over the controversy in determining exactly what criteria determines the first jhāna, and some controversy over the arupa-jhanas; she raises the dilemma over looking at a meditator striking at an object with thought versus an applied thought, and how these thoughts may be determined in formless or supramundane attainments. She further suggests that the problems may lie in the original sources no longer available to modern scholars, since the time of Buddhaghosa – modern scholars still perpetuate these
lines, while the meditative-traditions assert their alternative and perhaps more accurate assessment of the scrutinized-idea.

There might be some sensitivities involved with discussing Buddhist Jatakas, as they are said to be collections of the Buddha’s past life stories. There is no available modern scientific understanding towards determining the truth of these old-world tales. Bhagyashree Bavare scrutinizes several jataka stories that she determines are actually one story, but because they have been examined from different aspects, certain elements have changed within the stories. She discusses favorable and undesirable faith in respect to kamma. She asserts that Buddhist doctrine states: desire, greed, lust, and cravings are the causes of why humans perform the actions or volitions that they engage into, which is responsible for their subsequent fate. She asserts that there is a cause and a resultant effect. The therefore goes into a literary analysis of two stories: one appears in the Jātakas and another in the Avadānas. She assembles a few of the 547 Jatakas to make a singular coherent, full story – the particular story about Mittavinda as the Bodhisattva, who happens to be either some world-renown teacher, a celestial-spirit, or fantastically: the King of the Gods, in these stories.

She neglects to fully utilize the other related Jataka stories (#381, as ā Migālopa; and # 427, as Supatta) about the same unruly-bhikkhu, who in other jatakas, existed previously as a high flying vulture that was killed in a high black-winded storm – flying so high he was ‘blown into atoms’. This mentioning of the vultures does little to add to the story of Mittavindaka, but deepens the characterization of one Losaka Tissa. In the utilized stories, Mittavindaka’s stories are very inconsistent. First, he is identified as being an elder-bhikkhu Losaka Tissa, and has a headstrong or domineering attitude. The Buddha tells the story of this monk in Kosala and in Jetavana. The Buddha tells the story in different ways, perhaps forgetting certain details: in one version of the story he seeks to be hired on an ocean-going ship, so that he can earn some money; and in another version of the story he actually owns the ship and aspires to do business utilizing the vessel. When the ship is out deep into the ocean, seven days into the voyage, it comes to a halt owing to some problem. The crew of the ship decide to pick-lots, to determine who must be tossed overboard. One story says lots where picked three times, and in another story lots were picked seven times – it may be of no significant matter, but Mittavindaka is the loser, multiple times – it must be his kammic-fate to be let off the boat. The boats must have been of some large size, because Mittavindaka is given a raft, so as to not be a victim of drowning – but after days alone in the sea, he begins to have delusions, or illusions of sea-nymphs of various descriptions, according to the various stories, and obviously dies – but the stories suggest that he experienced divine bliss. The various stories eventually have Mittavindaka reemerged into Ussada Hell, a beautiful city of torment. The Bodhisatta was on a religious-mission in the miserable-realm and happened upon Mittavindaka, who inquired to the future-Buddha, in some words as to why he is suffering in hell. Mittavindaka was forced to wear razor-wheel headgear which would slowly crush his skull. Meanwhile the Buddha answers his questions, and after the episode, the Buddha reappears into his unspecified Deva-realm, as the King of the Gods.

Bhagyashree has the troubled-bhikkhu, or as named in the story: Maitrakanyaka, as being identified as ‘the Bodhisattva’ – but perhaps he is not “The Bodhisattva”, which could be assumed to be the Buddha Gotama. She duly notes that the stories have been elaborated upon, since the transmission of the stories have continued along to the point that our modern scholars have collected and presented.

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8 E.B. Cowell (ed.): The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, translated from the Pāli by various hands (Oxford: Pāli Text Society, 2005)
The inconsistencies in the presentation of the Jatakas themselves, highlight that there was adaptations made, likely to fit the different audiences present at the story. The Buddha himself, gave the story in different locations, and forgot minor elements or changed them, as he determined.

**Conclusion:**

After setting the framework for the perspective of the author through the vision, mission and goals of the IABU, and how his own research supports the general structure of those emerging to become better scholars within the IABU – the endeavor emphasizes a Buddhist text that also fulfills our aims to create better scholars and teachers. The Nettippakaranam is such a text, that all of our scholars and students within our association of Buddhist universities should read. Taking the attitude that questions the necessity of the text, illustrates that one may not be intellectually ready to become a teacher of Buddhism, and thus, perhaps not ready or able to be a suitable graduate-student. Then, the determination was made to issue summarizations of the material brought out that pertained towards Buddhist critical thinking or analytical skills – from two projects that the author is involved in. This was presented prior to the article-reviews in this journal collection, hoping that some of the author’s training in the topic of Buddhist critical thinking skills could be put to use, productively, for the sake of our IABU audience.

Of course we know Asians can be critical thinkers, so there is no reason to debate the topic – even people trained in the most rigid systems are known to be skillful, so there is really nothing to debate here. The question really is: does the political system or religious system allow for free and analytical thinking? The answer might be to the contrary, nevertheless, for some people, remaining silent in such a system is an exercise in critical thinking: “What can I say, so that I don’t get in trouble?” – might be the beginning of such a long line of inquiry. Cultural boundaries are one of the inhibiting factors towards a liberated culture. We can push towards exploring more boundaries. We have a few papers present that assert that critical thinking is a major factor of vipassana meditation, and other papers that claim that critical thinking or analytical/intellectual endeavors are counterproductive in the case of psychotherapy or behavioral modification – rectifying the dilemma over these two opinions may take more work in a future article, and it would be well worth the academic-pursuit for someone to complete that project. We also know that there are many items set up as conceptual framework for us to operate from when pursuing something through the perspective of Dhamma, for our societies. Through the Dhamma-gate system we can shift our perspectives which can give us keen insights into the nature of phenomena. Some philosophical systems have been set up with devious aims, as shown in my work: the chart based on Marx’s thought pertains to the aims of religions and governments – each seeking to control the other. Humans, since ancient times, have set out to dominate societies - even deifying leading figures that were determined to have some measurable amount of success. Important canonical texts and other great works, despite their errors or speculations, are indeed valuable to determine how critical thinking is involved in the literary-characters presented or in the compilation of the texts produced for us to study. When we use critical thinking, we reflect upon these texts and the reality that we are conscious of, at that moment, to make sense of this during our attempts to exercise and gain Buddhist wisdom.