

Look at the Cypress Tree

<u>Contents</u>		
		<i>page</i>
	1. Preamble	2
	2. Present Moment	2
	3. Kant and the Cosmos	2
	4. Buddhist Philosophy and Shadow Matters	3
	4.1 Lochs, reflections, and distortions	3
	4.2 Jung, condemnation; and compassion	4
	4.3 In the other's shoes; towards softening our hearts [after Chödrön]	5
	5. Disturbed couple dynamics and projection [based on Hanh; Craig; Panksepp]	7
	5.1 Neuro-physiological preamble	7
	5.2 Upsetting Relationships	7
	○ Figure 1: Negative Mental States and Inner Suffering	8
	5.3 Softening; Mindfulness; and Autogenic Training	9
	6. More Mindful Dynamics	10
	○ Figure 2: Compassion and softening the heart transformations	10
	7. Epilogue: Looking – and Being Present	11
	Appendix: Transactional Analysis and Life Positions	13
	Linked themes in this Autogenic Dynamics Section	14
	References and Sources	14

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1. Preamble:

Long ago, a student asked a Zen Master Chao-Chou why the Indian monk Bodhidharma had brought the Buddha's ideas and teachings to China. The Zen Master replied: "Look at the cypress tree in the courtyard". [Hanh 1973 p 49-51; Keown 2003 p 37; 54]. What can we make of such an extra-ordinary reply; what are the implications for us in the modern world?

There are many factors that can act as hindrances to our "seeing the cypress tree"; we will be looking at some of these, as well as reflecting on factors that may facilitate us in understanding at a deep level Chao-Chou's statement.

2. Present Moment:

Thich Nhat Hanh has written extensively on Buddhist matters and eastern psychology during the last several decades. Two of his shorter books are essentially about the experiential aspects of Buddhist approaches from a Zen perspective – these are: "Present Moment, Wonderful Moment"; and "Our Appointment with Life" [Hanh 1993; 1990]. Zen teachings emphasise the importance of living in the present moment and thus experiential life matters – rather than concepts, ideas and ritual which can hinder our moment-by-moment direct experience of life and Being. If we are negatively ruminating about the past, or "getting lost in the future", then we will not be being in the present moment [Hanh 1990].

During the first session of a recent Autogenic Training group, a perceptive student commented that one of her hopes and expectations on the course was to "better manage my emotions and perceptions". This is a profound comment on the human condition; if our emotions are disturbed, so will be our perceptions.

As students of any discipline, we tend to focus on left brain analytical type learning, which is to do with ideas, concepts, and "truth" in a scientific sense. In doing this, we may become expert, yet miss the point – that is, an underlying truth. "In the Beginner's Mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's, few"; our task through life is to keep, and remain in touch, with our "Beginner's Mind" [Suzuki 1970 p 21]. Children, before they are "educated" have a very strong SEEKING system¹ [Panksepp 1998], and their sense of wonder is ever-present; such wonder is close to awe [see A9 in this series, which contrasts the emotion shame with that of awe²].

Chao-Chou's comment to the student can be seen as a reminder to all of us of the dangers of getting bogged down in concepts, dogma, teachings – and not notice the bee that has just landed on a flower. The bee, the flower, and the cypress tree inter-are. "What doth it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet does not see the lilies in the field, or the butterfly on the flower?" Present Moment, Wonderful Moment.

The cypress tree, the butterfly, and grasses blowing in the wind can each become a way to the existential realisation of Inter-Being [Hanh 2012 pp 55-58].

3. Kant and the cosmos

A life of reflection and philosophy does not necessarily mean that we are limited to analytical and left brain matters. A balanced life can of course embrace the whole. In a "Critique of Pure Reason", Kant writes:

¹ The SEEKING system is one of the seven Emotional Operating Neural Circuits / Systems (EONS) that we humans share with mammals.

² Specifically in relation to Well-Being and our immune system; the experience of Awe is potentially life enhancing; while that of persistent unresolved shame can potentially have serious effects on our health – see related article A9.

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*. I do not seek or conjecture either of them as if they were veiled obscurities or extravagances beyond the horizon of my vision; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence. The first starts at the place that I occupy in the external world of the senses, and extends the connection in which I stand into the limitless magnitude of worlds upon worlds, systems upon systems, as well as into the boundless times of their periodic motion, their beginning and continuation. The second begins with my invisible self, my personality, and displays to me a world that has true infinity, but which can only be detected through the understanding, and with which ... I know myself to be in not, as in the first case, merely contingent, but universal and necessary connection. The first perspective of a countless multitude of worlds as it were annihilates my importance as an *animal creature*, which must give the matter out of which it has grown back to the planet (a mere speck in the cosmos) after it has been (one knows not how) furnished with life-force for a short time. The second, on the contrary, infinitely elevates my worth, as an *intelligence*, through my personality, in which the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the entire world of the senses, at least so far as may be judged from the purposive determination of my existence through this law, which is not limited to the conditions and boundaries of this life but reaches into the infinite.

Kant: *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:161-2)
Circa 1788

In Kant's time, awe and wonder were common human experiences. During the last century or so, they may have been eclipsed partly by the move of peoples from rural to urban environments; and partly by the left hemisphere's "usurpation" of the right hemisphere [McGilchrist 2009].

Consciousness; life itself; is a mystery beyond singing about. "Look at the Cypress Tree".

4. Buddhist Philosophy and Shadow Matters [with reference to Jung and Chödrön]

4.1 Lochs, reflections, and distortions

One of the ever-present dangers for humans, in Jung's psychology / metaphysics, is to not acknowledge our shadow – that is, the dark side within us of which we are generally not aware, and which we tend to project (unconsciously) onto other people. This is especially likely to occur if our emotions are disturbed – this then distorts our thinking and perceptions. If we are sitting by a lovely highland loch on a calm sunny day, mountains and rowan trees may be reflected beautifully, and we can be there in each wonderful moment. If we are there on a stormy day, the loch is no longer able to truly reflect the wonderful trees and mountains, and they become distorted / dissociated. So it is with our mind if it is emotionally disturbed: the emotional disturbance reflects the fact that our body is itself disturbed. In such situations, our perceptions are axiomatically distorted. Our (psychological) projections distort our perceptions.

Bernie, my wife, recently gave me a wonderful example (from the internet) of such a distortion:

A young couple move into a housing estate. One summer morning a few weeks later, an elderly woman (her neighbour) comments to her husband how dirty the washing of the young couple seems to be each time it is put out. Her husband says nothing. A week or two later, the woman exclaims to her husband: "That young woman must have learnt a thing or two; or has got some much better washing powder; the washing is now sparkingly clean."

Her husband quietly comments: "Yes, I was up early this morning washing *our* windows."

In-depth Analytical Psychology is one of the paths that help us to recognise our own shadow [Jung 1957; 1959]. I have also found that the Transactional Analysis model of Life Positions³ to be very helpful [Stewart & Joines 1987 pp 117-124]. Whenever we find ourselves with a feeling of "I'm OK, You're not OK" [I+; U-], it is well to be aware that this may actually be a reflection of the fact that our own shadow / negative side is being projected onto the other person. The well-known expression of the pot calling the kettle black is a good metaphor for this [see Wikipedia 2015].

4.2 Jung, condemnation; and compassion

Jung had grown up seeped in the Judaeo-Christian milieu of central Europe; yet he also had an in-depth understanding of eastern philosophies [see e.g. Rosen 1996]. In an essay entitled "Psychotherapists or the Clergy", he comments on the attitude a well-integrated doctor-psychiatrist must adopt if she or he is to help distressed suffering human beings; if the therapist judges patients (consciously or unconsciously), healing and transformation are unlikely to come about.

We cannot change anything unless we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses. I am the oppressor of the person I condemn, not his friend and fellow sufferer. I do not in the least mean to say that we must never pass judgement when we desire to help and improve. But if the doctor wishes to help a human being he must be able to accept him as he is. And he can do this in reality only when he has already seen and accepted himself as he is.

Para 519
p 339

.....yet the patient does not feel himself accepted unless the very worst in him is accepted too. No one can bring this about by mere words; it comes only through reflection and through the doctor's attitude toward himself and his own dark side. If the doctor wants to guide another, or even accompany him a step of the way, he must *feel* with that person's psyche. He never feels it when he passes judgement. Whether he puts his judgement into words, or keeps them to himself, makes not the slightest difference.....

Para 519
p 338

Jung 1933: Psychotherapists or the clergy

IN CW 11

Also in Modern Man in Search of a Soul – paperback p 270-271

Although Jung's comments may seem obvious today, at the time of writing (1933) it was a major departure from the psycho-analytical approach of Freud when the medical profession was often deemed to be the expert.

If as human beings / therapists we are to help each other's troubled souls, we can do this only when we allow our inner being at a gut level to resonate with that of the other [e.g. Bromberg 2011 pp 81-88]; in this situation, the ANS afferents of both beings will be in the same or similar

³ Transactional Analysis Life Positions: see appendix on pages 13 & 14 for a brief description.

modality / wavelength – and so there emerges a non-cognitive sharing, just as when a mother cuddles her distressed child [Sunderland 2007]. This may only be possible if the therapist / healer has themselves looked deep within and begun to integrate the shadowy matters within: “And he can do this in reality only when he has already seen and accepted himself as he is.” This means accepting what is within, and having compassion for ourselves and the whole human condition. We all have within us seeds of violence and destruction on the one hand, and seeds of compassion and caring [CARE circuits] on the other. Jung goes on to say: “.....what if I should discover that the most impudent of all offenders, yea the very fiend himself – that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of alms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved – what then?” [Jung 1933 op cit; para 520; p 338].

In this situation, we become the ruffled surface of the lochan: all is distorted and chaotic. Yet calmer conditions may be on their way in our recognition of what is within. Only by becoming aware of our shadow and “the enemy within” can we embark on a journey of psychic integration and wholeness.

It may sometimes be felt that Buddhist approaches do not address in-depth psychological matters such as the Shadow that Jung spent a life time in re-searching; while this may be partly true, it is also to misunderstand a fundamental aspect of Buddhist philosophy / metaphysics.

4.3 In the other’s shoes; towards softening our hearts [after Chödrön]

If we are to become whole, we need to accept ourselves and the other as we / they are. Family disputes and wars start when we become convinced that our position, our society, our nation is right – and the other is wrong. As already indicated, in Transactional Analysis terms this is associated with the Life Position of “I+, U-”. Yet once we adopt such a perspective, our hearts harden in our own increasingly self-righteous position. Rigid hearts lead to battles and wars.

War begins when we harden our hearts, and we harden them easily – in minor ways and then in quite serious, major ways, such as hatred and prejudice – whenever we feel uncomfortable. It is so sad, really, because our motivation in hardening our hearts is to find some kind of ease, some kind of freedom from the distress that we are feeling.

Someone once gave me a poem with a line in it that offers a good definition of peace: “Softening what is rigid in our hearts.” We can talk about ending war, we can do everything in our power, but war is never going to end as long as our hearts are hardened against each other.

Chödrön 2006 pp 16-17

If our hearts “are hardened against each other”, we are bodily in the Life Position of “I+, U-”: self-righteousness. Neuro-physiologically this may be reflected in increased SNS afferent activity, and the disturbed loch surface that prevents us from getting an un-distorted view of reality / the world. Chödrön goes on to reflect on an ancient Buddhist text:

Recently, I was teaching from a Buddhist text called *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, which offers guidance to those who wish to dedicate their lives to alleviating suffering and to bringing benefit to all sentient beings. This was composed in the eighth century in India by a Buddhist master name Shantideva. In it he has an interesting point to make about peace. He says something along the lines of, "If these long-lived, and ancient, aggressive patterns of mine that are the wellspring only of unceasing woe, that lead me to my own suffering as well as the suffering of others, if these patterns still find their lodging safe within my heart, how can joy and peace in the world ever be found?"

Shantideva is saying that as long as we justify our own hard-heartedness and our own self-righteousness, joy and peace will always elude us. We point our fingers at the wrongdoers, but we ourselves are mirror images; everyone is outraged at everyone else's wrongness.

Chödrön 2006 pp 26-27

In terms of affective neuro-science and our primary process emotions, Shantideva's comments about these "long-lived, and ancient, aggressive patterns of mine" reflect on the establishment in childhood of dysfunctional Separation Distress [PANIC], FEAR and RAGE circuits; and if we do no sort them out in our own life times, they can reappear epigenetically in future generations, just as the conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Middle East reflect epigenetic programming going back generations. In this mental state, the cypress tree will elude us.

Thich Nhat Hanh indicates that with the development of mindfulness we can begin to overcome trans-generational negative transmissions, as the following shows.

Two siblings from Switzerland, a boy and a girl, regularly attended Plumb Village (the community founded by Thich Nhat Hanh in France). The boy, aged twelve, *"had a problem with his father: he was very angry with his father because his father did not speak kindly to him. Whenever the boy fell down or hurt himself, instead of helping and comforting him, his father got angry with him. He would say: 'You're stupid! Why did you do such a thing?' "*

The boy is determined that should he become a father when he grows up he will never shout at his children in the way his own father shouts at him.

One day, his sister and another girl are playing in a hammock, which is gently rocking in the wind; suddenly, they both fall out and his sister cuts her head. The boy is about to shout at her: "Why did you do that, you stupid idiot!"

"But because he knew how to practice, he caught himself, and went back to his breathing. Seeing that his sister was all right and was being taken care of by others, he decided to do walking meditation."

During his walking meditation, he had a sort of awakening. *"He saw he was exactly like his father. He had the same kind of energy that pushed him to say unkind words. When your loved ones are suffering, you should be loving, tender, and helpful, and not shout at them out of anger."* He realised that he had been about to behave in just the way his father would have, and that he was unconsciously acquiring his father's habits. This was his first insight.

"Continuing to walk mindfully, he discovered that he could not transform his anger without practice, and that if he did not practice, he would transmit the same energy of anger to his children." This was his second insight.

"Later he decided that when he returned home he would discuss his discoveries with his father" and suggest that they practice ^(mindfulness / meditation) together. He had become aware that his father was also a victim, and had perhaps been shouted at when he too was a child.

Hanh 2001; quotes in italics direct from book pp 41-42; the rest paraphrased and based on Hanh 2001

The above is taken from the book: “A Pebble for Your Pocket – *Mindful Stories for Children and Grown-ups*.” Hanh’s experience and wisdom suggest that the teaching of mindfulness can help to prevent the transmission of negative complexes down generations – especially if we are introduced to such teachings at a relatively young age⁴.

Softening our heart and imagining walking in the other’s shoes makes for a good start in Mindfulness. In doing this, we are axiomatically moving towards an authentic Life Position of “I+, U+”. We recognise the hardness and stubbornness within ourselves (Jung’s “enemy within”); and from this, compassion and activation of our own wholesome CARE and PLAY circuits can develop.

In the next section, we will look at some of these dynamics in the context of inter-personal relationships – such as within families / couples.

5. Disturbed couple dynamics and projection

5.1 Neuro-physiological preamble:

Human beings have an amazing ability to nurture and CARE; and SEEK meaning. We share our seven distinct Primary Process Emotions (PPE) with mammals⁵. When we are disturbed, FEAR and RAGE neuro-circuits can easily become activated – for they were the very Emotional Operating Neuro Circuits that allowed our ancestors to survive, going back to the cave (wo)man and before. Such neuro-circuits are not compatible with mindful thinking, for FEAR and RAGE disconnect us from logical thinking and compassionate / mindful being responses.

5.2 Upsetting Relationships

We can easily become upset in relationships if we are not mindful. It may be that our partner / spouse / child / parent / close friend says something hurtful – and as a result we suffer and may get angry. We do not feel good inside; our body is telling us that all is not well. This is exactly what is already going on within our beloved: she or he does not feel good inside; her body is telling her all is not well inside. Human beings tend to only say cruel things when they themselves are suffering. “The person we love doesn’t know a way out of his suffering” [Hanh 2012 p 188] and so the hateful / unkind words come in our direction. It may reflect part of his / her shadow⁶:

This is why our beloved pours out all his hatred and violence on us. Our responsibility is to produce the energy of compassion that calms down our own heart and allows us to help the other person. If we punish the other person, he will just suffer more. Responding to violence with violence can only bring more violence. This wisdom is in every one of us. When we breathe deeply, we can touch this seed of wisdom in us.

Hanh 2012 pp 188-189

⁴ This resonates with the work of Siegel and others: “The best predictor of a child’s security of attachment is not what happened to his / her parents as children, but rather how his parents *made sense* of those childhood experiences.” Siegel 2010 p 171. At the same time, it suggests that some aspects of Procedural Learned Tendencies [Ogden 2009] may be overcome by Mindfulness approaches – see later in article.

⁵ These seven are: FEAR; RAGE; SEEKING; and CARE; PLAY; GRIEF / PANIC (Separation Distress); and LUST (Sexual Circuits) [See Panksepp 1998; Panksepp & Biven 2012; and B3 Part 1 and Part II on this website]. Panksepp’s notation in discussing these Primary Process Emotions is to use capitals to signify that we are talking about these specific Emotional Operating Neuro Circuits / Systems.

⁶ Just as when we say unkind things this may well reflect part of our own unacknowledged shadow.

Hanh's example here is when our beloved says something upsetting / hurtful to us; of course, we also need to be aware when it is ourselves that are saying the unkind words / actions. We can so easily project our own shadow onto the other. Hatred and jealousy⁷ reflect a disturbed and unhappy mind, and are associated with increased Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) activity that inter-are with RAGE and FEAR circuits [Panksepp 1998]; in this situation, we are, in each moment, getting messages back from the body that "all is not well"; and this axiomatically increases our disturbed state [Craig 2005]. Increased efferent SNS activity inter-is with increased afferent SNS activity; this is not compatible with "the energy for compassion" or with *seeing* the Cypress Tree, and is reflected schematically in Figure1:

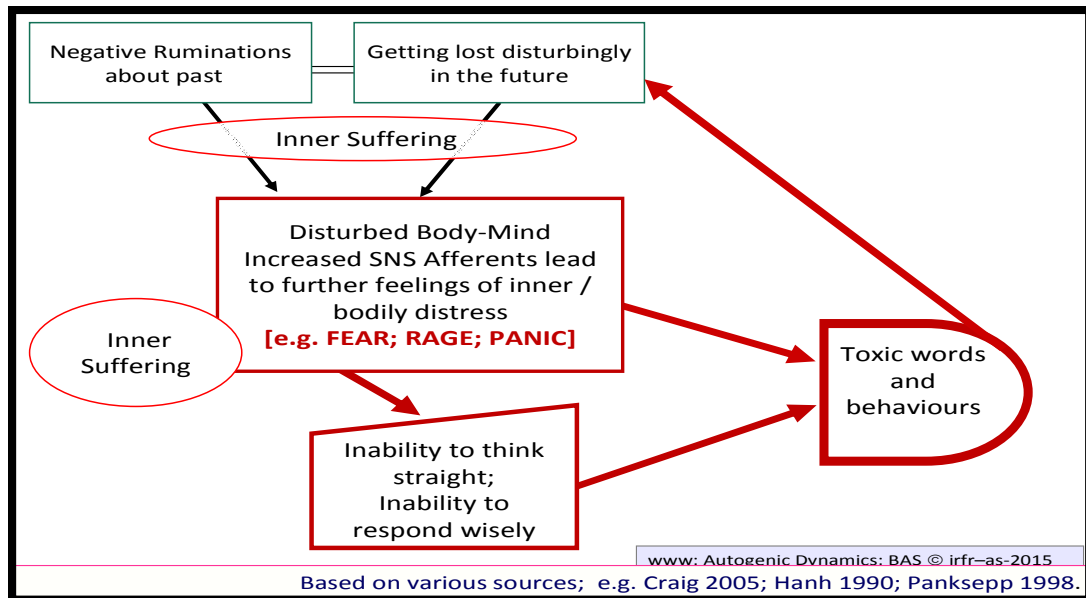


Figure 1

Negative Mental States and Inner Suffering

(Thanks to Annie Sturgeon for her useful comments and help with this figure)

Comment on Figure 1

- Our present negative mental state is represented in this figure in terms of negative ruminations about the past and getting lost in negative thoughts about the /our future. These distressing mental states both reflect inner suffering.
- As a result of our distressed mental state, our body becomes distressed; and indeed the distressed mental state reflects a disturbed bodily state in which "everything in the periphery is not-calm". Such states may activate FEAR, RAGE and PANIC Circuits. In these situations, we will be getting disturbing feedback from the body in terms of SNS (Sympathetic Nervous System) afferents [Craig 2004; 2005; 2008; see also thematically related web-page C12]. These distressing bodily sensations will increase our inner distress and suffering.
- Activation of such Primary Process Emotions is not conducive to clear thinking; we are in fact being taken over by the more primitive parts of the brain which evolved to protect us (flight and fight modalities).
- As a result,
 - i. we will tend to respond with angry / hurtful / toxic words and behaviours;
 - ii. we will not be able to think straight or respond wisely – which itself may result in toxic words and behaviours;
 - iii. we will tend to develop a rigid heart and a closed mind.
- This all fuels our suffering, and may lead to further negative ruminations;
-and in this state we cannot be mindful of the present moment – the cypress tree is lost.

⁷ Emotions such as hatred and jealousy are not Primary Process Emotions (PPE). PPE have their neuro-circuits sub-cortically; in other words, deep within the brain and well below the neo-cortex. We can view hatred and jealousy as neo-cortically elaborated emotions that can carry such non-mindful thoughts as: "I will get my own back on him / her."

When we are taken over by these neural circuits [e.g. FEAR; RAGE; LUST⁸], it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to remain mindful⁹ and open minded. This can also be the case when we become convinced that “our” cause is *the* right cause; as a result, feelings of self-righteousness creep in, and our heart can easily become rigid. Family upsets and wars start when we develop rigid hearts, associated with a closed mind that is convinced it is right.

5.3 Softening; Mindfulness; and Autogenic Training

We can construct and use a Personal and Motivational formula to soften any rigidity in our heart / within ourselves. For example, after the Heart Beat Calm and Regular (Steady), we can add a phrase such as one of the following:

Heart Softens

Mind Opens and Softens

My heart is softening

Heart Softens, Mind Opens

These are of course simply suggestions, and the essence of Personal & Motivational Formula is that we construct / develop our own formula in such a way that they resonate within us.

Our tendency to have a rigid heart may well go back to childhood. As a result, in certain situations we may respond in a fixed / automatic way – sometimes called a Procedural Learned Tendency [Ogden 2009; and B17 in this series]. Chödrön makes an interesting comment on the origins of anger and our essential humanity. She suggests that underlying anger [RAGE circuits] there is often FEAR; yet if we go deeper still, we find that beneath the fear there is something wonderful that we can tap in to.

There is a teaching that says that behind all hardening and tightening and rigidity of the heart¹⁰, there’s always fear. But if you touch fear, behind fear there is a soft spot. And if you touch that soft spot, you find the vast blue sky. You find that which is ineffable, ungraspable, and unbiased, that which can support and awaken us at any time.¹¹

Chödrön 2006 p 33

This is very similar to the Chinese concept of Jen, or Inner Human Heartedness [Watts 2005 p 25].

⁸ When our LUST circuits become dissociated from CARE and nurturing, then the outcome can of course be terrible [see Panksepp 1998 pp 225-245]. On the other hand, when our LUST circuits are in synchrony with CARE and PLAY, and we allow our monogamy switch to be cascaded with oxytocin, then the sexual intimacy can become a wonderful and spiritual experience [see Porges 2011 pp 183-185].

⁹ Note that the Chinese symbol for mindfulness (念) (in Sanskrit “smriti”) has two parts: the upper part means ‘now,’ and the lower part means ‘mind’ or ‘heart’. So our western translation of *smriti* gives it a misleading cognitive and left hemisphere bias: mindfulness that is not heartfelt is not mindfulness. The term would perhaps be better rendered as “Mind-Heart-Fullness” – or left un-translated [see also Hanh 1998 p 64-65].

¹⁰ Which is often associated with frustration / anger when we feel that our ideas / wishes are being threatened / belittled; and so we move into an I+, U- (or I-, U+) Life Position.

¹¹ In other words, the Cypress Tree!

The central question for conscious human beings is how can we tap in to the inner healing wisdom of our bodies that includes, for example, wholesome CARE, SEEKING and PLAY circuits and the “blue sky”?

6. More Mindful Dynamics

A rigid heart reflects a state of being in which “all in the periphery is not calm” [to reframe Wallnöfer 2000] as it tends to be caught up in toxic self-righteousness, with an inability / unwillingness to address our own shadowy matters; this is a recurring problem of the human condition.

If we can find means to soften our hearts, then we can become mindful [Chödrön 2006]. We tend to develop rigid attitudes and hearts when we do not understand other people and /or if we do not like what they are doing. If we begin to imagine ourselves in their shoes, then our hearts begin to soften [Chödrön op cit]; and as they soften, the feedback from our body begins to change from feedback dominated by SNS afferents to feedback dominated by PSNS afferents [see C12 in this series]. Love without understanding is not true love [Hanh 1998 pp 66-67; 169-175]; wars start due to not understanding. Figure 2 reflects some of the dynamics associated with softening our hearts.

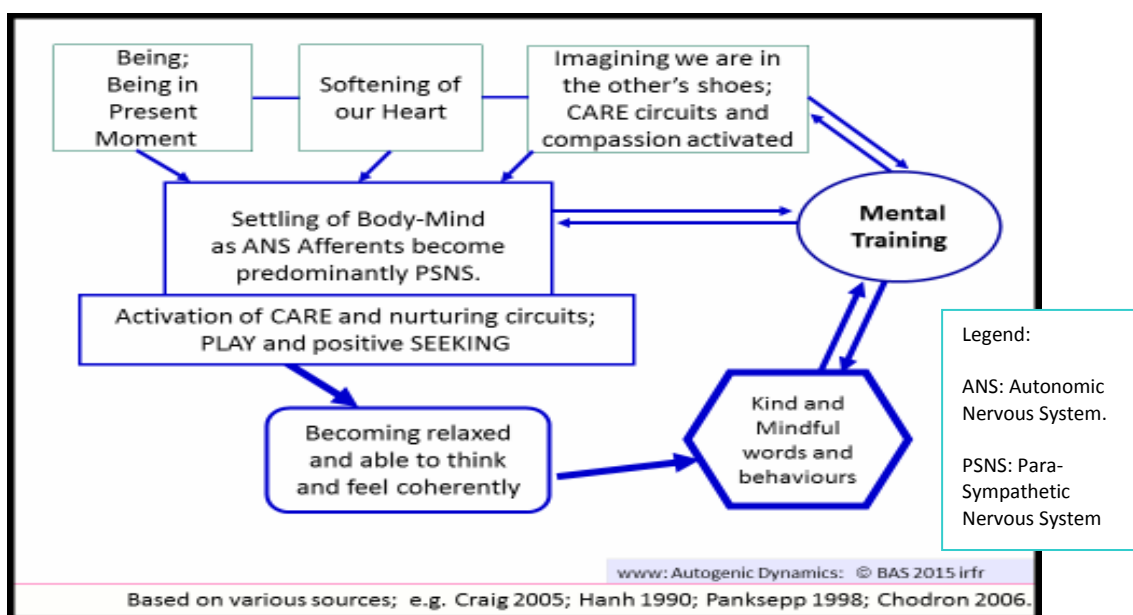


Figure 2
Compassion and softening the heart transformations

Comments on Figure 2

- Mental Training such a Mindfulness Meditation and Autogenic Training is associated with increased Heart Rate Variability – which is an indirect measure of PSNS activity. In other words, as we settle into a meditation there will be a gradual shift in our being and physiology, resulting in increased PSNS afferent activity; and this will allow our being to become settled [after Craig 2005].
- So the troubled waters of our minds become settled, to use the lochan analogy.
- With this, our perceptions and thinking become clearer and more accurate; we are able to imagine ourselves in the shoes of the other.....
-and so our hearts can soften....
-and these modalities inter-are with our nurturing / CARE circuits becoming engaged; and this will facilitate positive SEEKING for solutions to difficult problems / dilemmas.
- In due course, this can lead to Mindful thoughts, words, and actions;
-which are reinforced by the daily discipline¹² of Mental Training.

¹² The word “discipline” can have various connotations; here it is used in the sense of developing a Mindful Practice to facilitate well-being of ourselves and others. “In Tibetan, the term for discipline is *tsul trim*. *Tsul*

If we are caught up in negative mental states such as “pursuing the past”; pursuing past grievances; or “getting lost in the future”, our very neuro-physiology will be in a state that makes it very difficult for us to be at one with our-selves – and to see the cypress tree. It is suggested that Chao-Chou’s student was caught up with these negative mental states just like us, and for that reason was not perhaps ready to understand the words “Look at the cypress tree in the courtyard.”

Mental Training such as Meditation, Positive Mental Training, and Autogenic Training can allow for the disturbed surface lochan within our mind to become calm; and so reflect reality as it is.

In a Standard Autogenic Training sequence, our body calms; our breathing calms; and so our body calms even more with each gentle outbreath¹³. As our body settles, there is an increase in the afferent Parasympathic Nervous system activity from the body to the brain, and this in turn calms the mind and body even more [Craig 2005; Porges 2005; 2006; 2009; 2011; and see Website A7; A8]; and is the physiological basis of Wallnöfer’s:

Everything in the periphery is quiet

Wallnöfer 2000;
Cited in Ross 2010 p 24

It is this calming of Body-Mind that gives us the energy of compassion; and so we begin to see the inter-relatedness of all things.

7. Epilogue: Looking – and Being Present

“Look at the cypress tree in the courtyard.” Look out of the window; look at the clouds while waiting for a bus; look at the branches of the trees blowing in the park; look at the “*the starry heavens above me*”. If we are being in the present moment, all of these can activate in us a sense of wonder and awe; all of these present moment activities are possible for us each moment of the day; yet we can so easily be “pursuing the past” or “getting lost in the future” [Hanh 1990; e.g. pp 5-8]. Neo-cortically elaborated emotions such as jealousy, envy, dismissing the other and hatred take us away from the present moment and away from being mindful.

If we look deeply into any object, any creature, any person, we will see that they have no separate, permanent self; all matter, all life, is in constant flux, constant movement, constant change. All is impermanent. No one thing in the cosmos has a permanent, separate self. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, if we look at a tree, we can see the sun in the tree – for without the sun, there can be no tree. If we look at the tree, we can see the clouds in the tree – for without clouds there would be no rain – and so no tree. In the same way, we can see the air and the soil in the tree – and actually the entire cosmos. Everything is inter-related, and cannot exist in isolation. The blackbird on the bush outside similarly inter-is¹⁴ with the sun, clouds, air and soil – and with all the blackbird’s ancestors; without any one of these, the blackbird would not be; so it is with us.

means ‘appropriate or just,’ and *trim* means ‘rule’ or ‘way.’ So discipline is to do with what is appropriate or just; that is, in an excessively complicated age, to simplify our lives” [Rinpoche 1992 p 22]. If we do not, we may not see the cypress tree or the snow-drops.

¹³ Technically, this is related to Heart Rate Variability [HRV], an indirect measure of increased Vagal Myelinated Efferent activity to the heart [Porges 2011; see also A7 & A8].

¹⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh has coined the term “Inter-Being”. “Inter-Being” is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix “inter” with the verb “to be”, we have a new verb “inter-be”. If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow....” [Hanh 2012 p 55].

It is the very impermanence of all things and beings that allows them to change and grow; without impermanence, our children could not grow up, fall in love, and have their own children.

The realisation that we each inter-are with everything else is a good anti-dote to Ego¹⁵ and hubris. The ancient teachings of Sakyamuni can be seen to be supportive of, and sympathetic to, recent research in affective neuro-science and the work of, for example, Jung, Panksepp, Porges, Damasio and Craig [see also Ross 2005 pp 30-34].

Zen Master Chao-Chou's comment to his student reflects Sakyamuni's dharma talk (or non-talk) in which he held up a lotus flower in front of the gathered children, women and men [Hanh 1991 pp 336-339]: "The Buddha's Dharma talk that day was most special. He waited for the children to be seated quietly, and then he slowly stood up. He picked up one of the lotus flowers and held it up before the community. He did not say anything"

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Appendix: TA and Life Positions /

¹⁵ In the ego-centric, I+, U- sense.

Appendix
Transactional Analysis and Life Positions - A brief overview
(I+, U+ dynamics)

There are many different and useful models that are used in counselling / psychotherapy. One such model, called Transactional Analysis (TA), was developed some forty years ago and has been adopted world-wide. In this article, we have from time to time referred to the Life Positions described in TA, and below is a brief description.

At any one moment in time in any transaction with another person, we will have an internal mental image / feeling of how we are perceiving ourselves at that moment, and how we are perceiving the other person. These can be summarised thus:

Possible Life positions of the individual at any one moment	Abbreviated notation
I'm feeling OK with myself [I'm OK]	I+
I'm not feeling OK with myself [I'm not OK]	I-
I'm feeling OK with you [You're OK]	U+
I'm not feeling OK with you [You're not OK ¹⁶].	U-

If we are feeling good and OK in ourselves, and with the other person, then our Life Position will be:

- I+, U+.

There are actually four possible Life Position, we may be in at any one moment:

- I+, U+;
- I+, U-;
- I-, U+;
- I-, U-.

The other person will have a similar (reciprocal) internal image of us (e.g. our partner; our mother; or son; our doctor). As the footnote indicates, the Life Position has nothing to do with how the other person is actually feeling, as it is purely our own internal mental construct.

In any one day, we may each experience one or all of these Positions, and at the end of a day it can be helpful to reflect on which one has dominated. One of our tasks in life if we see it as "spiritual journey" is to move more and more into the I+, U+ position. The only wholesome (Authentic) Position is that of I+, U+. That is to say, all other positions are not wholesome in that they are coming from a place of fear, distress, or ego-inflation, as summarised below:

Life position of the individual at any one moment	Comment / possible internal feeling associated with positions
I+, U+	This is the wholesome / Authentic Position; we are feeling OK with ourselves and with the other person. We may not agree with them, but we respect them as a person. From this Life Position we are able to see the inter-relatedness of all things.
I+, U-	While this may appear OK in terms of the I+, it is not actually a wholesome position as we are discounting the other person. Bullies, Persecutors, and Dictators are often operating from this Life Position. It can also be the position of the "Rescuer" whose inner perspective is from ego rather than compassion.
I-, U+	This is a sad situation in which we may have low self esteem and / or feelings of shame. It may have its origins in our childhood. We may feel that the other person is always "right"; and that our own feelings / views are of no importance. This is also the classic position of the "Victim".
I-, U-	This is a sad / desperate perspective in which we perceive ourselves and the other as useless. It may indicate unresolved and unrecognised anger within us. Again, this Life Position may have its origins in childhood. The position I-; U+ is healthier in that it can imply a recognitions on our part that we feel the other person can help us.

¹⁶ This is a subjective perception, and has nothing to do with whether the other person is or is not "OK".

To summarise:

- I+, U+: This is the Life Position of mutual respect with the other person; it embraces Mindfulness. It is a wholesome perspective.
- All the other positions [I+, U-; I-, U+; I-, U-] are unhealthy¹⁷ in that they do not represent our True / Authentic Self; and they discount ourselves, others, or both.

Linked themes in this Autogenic Dynamics Section:

A1	The Stress Response, the Relaxation Response, and the Tend-and-Befriend Response
A7	Porges and the Polyvagal Theory – <i>reflections on clinical and therapeutic significance</i>
A8	The Polyvagal Theory <i>and a more sympathetic awareness of the ANS</i>
A9	Emotions, Well-Being and Immune Function: Awe and Shame as modulators of Being – <i>for good or ill</i>
B3	Part I: The Origins of Affect and Affective Neuroscience – <i>and the misplacing of Affect in the Neo-cortex</i>
B3	Part II: Emotional Operating Neuro Circuits – <i>a brief introduction to Panksepp's model</i>
B17	Windows of Affect Tolerance: <i>Reflections on Childhood Distress, Procedural Learned Tendencies, and the Therapeutic Dyad [based on Ogden]</i>
B18	The Space to Choose – <i>reflections on the gap between the stimulus and the response</i>
C12	Presence in Mind – Autonomic Afferents and Well-Being [based on the work of A.D. Craig]

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¹⁷ Thanks to Brian Heaton Ross for pointing this out.

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