

Cycle 5 Project – A Map for Navigating Treacherous Waters
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Intention

For this Cycle, we decided to look into the exploration of internal states without conceptualization taking place. How would sensations, including emotions, appear without being categorized, interpreted, named, or otherwise conceptualized? We Setians are a Psyche-centric lot. Too often, however, we do not experience our everyday minds in pleasurable and harmonious ways. Rather, we get stuck in all sorts of unhelpful, oppressive thoughts, leading to even worse emotional and physiological states. Or it may even happen in the reverse fashion; we feel something, choose to interpret that feeling, and then unleash a maelstrom of thoughts and other projections.

Truly dreadful seas for any Psyche-centric voyagers! Is there no way out? Indeed! To show a way out of the choppy waters of stuck internal stimuli, I've explored relevant topics and practices to share with others. There are three primary sections that form this map into smoother sailing. First, there is a theoretical discussion. I've started with basic Buddhist psychology and then moved onto more Esoteric Buddhist theory, to set up a basic framework for thoughts and emotions. Then I transition into grounding this framework within the embodied experience, in both Buddhist and Trauma-Centered applications, to make it practical. Second, I will share the practices I either found or created, based on this framework. Lastly, I will discuss some of my experiences of these practices.

We will start with a brief examination of basic Buddhist psychology. This will help create the beginning of the framework for understanding how internal states arise. By the end of the theoretical discussion, my hope is to point out a way where we can artfully experience internal events, without needing to interpret or elaborate upon them. The goal of this is to see to what degree we can experience reality without needing to dilute it or expand upon it.

Buddhist Psychology: The Foundation of Buddhist Thought

To begin, mind seems to have a different meaning in Buddhist psychology than in Western psychology. In the West, we tend to say that we "have a mind". In Buddhist thought, we would say that we "have minds", in the plural. Here, a mind is a subjective event that occurs when a subject interacts with an object. A mind manifests due to a constant, active interpretation of one's environment and the stimuli therein, though this actually includes an internal world with internal stimuli too. In contrast to this, there is Rigpa, the clear light of self-arising awareness that is the fundamental ground of all other cognitive events. In less Esoteric terms, we could say that minds manifest as projections superimposed on an already-present subjective awareness. To help differentiate these two ideas, I'll use "minds" for subjective events and "Mind" for Rigpa.

To further differentiate the minds and Rigpa, we can introduce a sense of dualism into this discussion. This seems allowable to me, since the Buddhist texts point to a subtle duality of

mind and matter, so my use of dualism here seems appropriate. At a surface level of cognitive experience, we have these dynamic, causally-dependent minds that are all tied together. In a way, they seem to be semiotic chains, with one mind leading to another leading to another, all based on previous cognitive events and appearing stimuli. Beyond the surface of this choppy ocean, there is this vast abyss of Rigpa. Where the waves are numerous, the darker depths are singular. Where the waves come and go, the depths abide in their own state.

This oceanic metaphor seems to hold accurate to the Dzogchen literature about Rigpa, with minds arising out of Rigpa. Rigpa is connected to the body through the subtle body, with Rigpa being the determinant for there being a body in the first place. Rigpa, or primordial awareness, is the matrix for both physiological and psychological events to occur within. To understand how this works from the psychological side, we have to go back up to the waves of the ocean.

There are many minds in Buddhist psychology, though there are 6 main minds that govern the rest. We have 5 perceptual main minds that are tied to sensory consciousnesses, which is to say that each sense organ produces a subjective cognitive event when the sensory faculty collects raw sense data. When this occurs, the raw sensory data is then collected within a perceptual-consciousness main mind, or that is to say that the information is cognitively processed into something usable. From this point, there is then a conceptual-consciousness main mind generated that interprets the now-processed sensory data, and those interpretations become mental factors.

We can use a tree as an example of this process, some of the technical language omitted. The main mind of visual consciousness detects a tree through the eye and then sends the visual data to the perceptual consciousness. At this point, you would see a tree subjectively. However, we then interpret that sight through conceptualization, perhaps thinking “this tree is stupid, I hate trees” or “did a dog just pee on this tree?”. Then who knows, maybe at this point you start thinking about fireplaces, your neighbor’s dog peeing on your lawn, people hugging trees, the Vietnam War, and then maybe what you’ll have for lunch.

Keeping with that tree example, we can briefly detour into what might be called Buddhist semiotics. What are we seeing when we see this stupid, dog piss ridden tree? In this text, it is explained that according to Buddhist thought, we are not truly interacting with reality as it ultimately is. We’re not really interacting with the tree itself. Due to the nature of our minds, we are constantly projecting symbolic representations of sensory events onto whatever we observe, and then we interact with that symbolic representation more than the real thing itself. Put alternatively, people create mental schema about the things in the world and then view all those things in the world through the lens of the individual’s mental schema. Buddhist schools seem to disagree as to whether or not there is a self-existing Objective Universe that produces these external things, or if all the things we observe are all pure mental projection. Regardless of that, we can see that in this thinking, we’re always at least one step removed from reality; we are stuck interacting with our interpretations of reality rather than reality itself. From these interpretations spring a host of neutral and negative emotional and mental events.

What are these events? These are the aforementioned mental factors, which can be understood as thoughts and emotions that arise in connection with any of the main minds we generate through our interactions with the worlds around us. I say “worlds” because we must treat the Subjective Universe as a Universe that can be perceived just as much as anything Objective, meaning that we can perceive and conceptualize internal stimuli just as much (if not more) than any tree we come across.

What is fascinating to me is that there are both wholesome and unwholesome mental factors, but they have entirely different origins. All unwholesome mental factors arise from a fundamental ignorance of Emptiness, both of self and other. This can briefly be put as the total misunderstanding of the ecological nature of existence, wherein all things are conceived as atomic, static forms that are entirely isolated from all other things. Additionally, unwholesome mental factors arise due to mental conditioning and can be sudden in their manifest; this condition is the karmic element of consciousness. Conversely, all wholesome mental factors arise from core Goodness or core Wise-Mind, which we possess innately. Wholesome mental factors, including wisdom and virtue, arise from our inherent mental qualities, but they take time to ripen. How are they ripened? Through rational thinking, virtuous deeds, and mental stability.

These mental factors are key to understanding how emotions, sensations, and thoughts emerge in Buddhist psychology. Negative and neutral internal events emerge due to karmic causes and conditions. We interpret because we perceive, with one perception leading to another, and with one interpretation leading to another, without end. We react to internal and external environments, ceaselessly, as if chained to the Wheel of Fortune. This means that when we feel something internally, it is due to a cause, so we need to stop and pay attention to it if we are not to react to it mindlessly. And if we want to experience positive emotions and thoughts that are not tied to external environmental factors, we need to cultivate the Wise-Mind within.

Let's cut to the chase here!

We are subjective beings. We have this self-luminous Mind that grants awareness and the capacity for subjective interpretation of the life around us. Since we have this Gift, we can work with it to catch ourselves when we get lost in the conceptualizations we project onto life. When we are lost in conceptualization, we become stuck in mental conditioning and spiritual enslavement. When we can break out of conceptualization, we can deconstruct that conditioning and gain spiritual freedom, our birth-right. The question comes down to a choice.

Ultimately, we get to choose if we are to suffer or to thrive. Shocking! Unheard of! Cruel! Some will think so. However, consider this as a dose of Reality Therapy, if you will. Or instead of taking a Glasser approach, we can paraphrase Jung, who said that we are responsible for healing ourselves even if we aren't responsible for our wounds. Regardless! We possess, or at the core-level exist as, this free, clear light of Mind that is without suffering. Every day, we can choose to be dominated by mental impulses, emotional reactions, and environmental conditioning, and thereby acquiesce to suffering. Or we can choose the path of mind training. We can choose to turn the minds onto themselves and experience the inherent luminosity of Mind.

We can choose to develop the core qualities within ourselves of joy, happiness, compassion, and Right Acting.

When you recognize yourself as being without a master, what will you choose?

The Vajra Essence

Now that we've gotten our toes wet on the shores of Buddhist psychology, we can jump in the shark tank of Esoteric Buddhist metaphysics. The reason will become apparent as you read on. We'll start on the basic premises that we ended with above:

1. There is a reality outside of our interpretations of reality, even if we can't agree upon its exact nature (mind, matter, or something else).
2. We have the innate potential for the Wise-Mind, if we are willing to develop it and evolve towards it.
3. This innate potential is only found internally within consciousness itself.

If we can accept these premises, we can begin our descent into the abyss of Mind from the waves of mind. If we want to gaze upon the nude Beauty of Ultimate Reality, we have to be able to get beyond intellectual understandings and conceptualizations of Reality. The way to do this is to rationally understand the various forms of our minds, as well as the consciousnesses that give rise to them. While this text uses language and models of psychology different from the first, I'm going to make the language consistent and alter the models for sake of utility.

There are 8 types of consciousnesses, which include the previous 6 types mentioned before. These 6 are the five external sense faculties and the additional mental perceptual faculty. There is then the 7th consciousness, volition, and the 8th is labeled as "repository" or "alayavijnana" consciousness. This 8th consciousness is the basis for the rest and it is the thing that is reborn continuously throughout our infinite lives. It is also the basis for embodied existence. The mind is the sovereign of the body and acts as its preceding necessary causal condition. We can again see a subtle body\mind dualism in Buddhist thinking here, though at a higher level of analysis, Buddhist metaphysics hold that the body, speech, and mind are all actually manifestations of divinity alike.

With that in mind (but which one?), we turn our view to Reality itself. There are three ways we can experience reality:

1. Ordinary, impure karmic reactions to external and internal stimuli.
2. Through ethically neutral repository consciousness.
3. Through the primordial consciousness of the Wise-Mind.

The first text largely discussed the first option here. We can choose to be tossed about in the waves of Samsāric existence by choosing to indulge our reactionary internal stimuli and then act wrongly as a result. This is straightforward enough.

The second option is a bit harder to conceptualize. The repository consciousness is more or less analogous to the psychoanalytical view of a personal and collective unconsciousness (personal and collective seem hard to delineate without an essential personality). If we experience this unconscious element of mind, we can get lulled into it and confuse it for Reality. This can be experienced as a neutral trance or a dreamless sleep, though I suspect it also manifests through subconscious events like cognitive free-association and Shamanic states of consciousness. This is the “down direction”, so to speak, of spiritual experience. From my own experience, a meditator experiences this unconscious mind when one spaces out or blanks out in a trance-like state, where sensory perception largely stops and there is a feeling of a nothingness-like stream of mind.

The third option is impossible to conceptualize accurately. It cannot be accurately described, though it can be experienced. The Wise-Mind, Bodhichitta, is the primordially pure ground of absolute Being itself. This can get confused with the unconsciousness because the repository consciousness is the primordial consciousness, but the former is the obscured version of the latter. The sharp knife of mind training cuts through one to reveal the other, so it’s important to understand the difference between un-consciousness and supra-consciousness. The easiest way to do so seems to be that the unconscious mind is neutral and the supra-conscious mind is The Good; it is the difference between standing at the exit of Plato’s Cave versus basking in the light of the Sun outside of it. I can’t tell if I have actually ever achieved this state or not, so speaking too much about it may not be helpful. What I can say is that one can get a taste of it, a peak at the Sun through a hole in the clouds, and that experience alone is worth any sacrifice or expenditure of time and effort. It defies all effort to define, other than a sense of completeness and wholeness that embraces everything perfectly. And you’ll know it when you Awaken to it.

This differentiation between the three approaches is important to consider. From this Esoteric perspective, everything we’re encountering is our own subjective experience, regardless of the origin of sensory data. The subjective experience and everything in it are displays of mind suspended in the medium of cognitive space. Put alternatively, all phenomena, internal or external, are apparitions occurring in the space of repository consciousness and it is the repository consciousness itself that generates those apparitions.

This is a fairly radical perspective to take, though it builds on the more basic Buddhist psychology already discussed. We have a primordial consciousness that is obscured by negative subjective conditioning. This conditioning manifests as and colors all subjective experiences. So, when we’re feeling various sensations and emotions, and are experiencing thoughts and conceptualizations, we are interacting with our own conditioning. What is underneath the conditioning itself?

In this Esoteric Buddhist perspective, there is this Wise-Mind that is often described in terms of luminosity. A way to understand the experiencing of this luminosity is to think of light and a prism. Our state of Being is the prism and the light is the nature of the Mind. When the prism is pristine and clean, white light will disperse into its full, visible wavelengths. If you chuck that prism into a pit filled with gore, blood, cum, piss, and shit, that prism may not be able

to refract light as it can when clean. Thankfully, the prism can be cleaned, hence the practices of Tantric Buddhism. Through mind-training, we can begin to see those vibrant colors of dispersed light, and those rainbow lights are the Five Buddha Families.

The Five Buddha Families are the manifestations of primordial consciousness. The primordial consciousness could be thought of as light itself, with visible wavelengths of light being its manifestations. These Five Buddha Families are five types of Wisdom that can be experienced as physiological, emotional, or cognitive states, which are always there in the background even if we don't experience them directly. These internal experiences become the unwholesome mental factors we do experience directly in everyday life. This means we can actually experience primordial consciousness, in its various forms, if we are mindful about our internal states.

I've collected a series of symbolic associations on each of the Buddha Families. I've also added a brief commentary based on my current Understanding. This is a rough sketch but it's enough to make them practical. It's worth noting that the Buddhas' characteristics may change depending on the text, since different traditions often focus on a single Buddha of the Families and will imbue that Buddha with the qualities of another. But that doesn't really matter here. A basic table of correspondences are as follows:

- Vairocana is the Principle of Primordial Consciousness of the Absolute Space, which is the Inherent Wisdom of Identitylessness. Vairocana is the Sapphire Buddha of the Crown Chakra, who manifests as delusion and confusion when obscured by ignorance.
 - Vairocana is often Diamond or White instead of Blue or Sapphire, to represent the potentiality of all other colors. Vairocana is the Axis Mundi Buddha who represents Sunnatta. Sunnatta can be thought of as form, since appearance and emptiness are the same thing. We can think of this as "freedom of form" for now. Also associated with the Nirmanakaya, which I'll discuss shortly.
- Amitabha is the Principle of Discerning Primordial Consciousness, which is the Inherent Wisdom of Emptiness. Amitabha is the Ruby Buddha of the Throat Chakra, who manifests as infatuation and attachment when obscured by ignorance.
 - Typically, Akshobhya would be next in this ordering. I've put Amitabha here so each Buddha is vertically aligned with their Chakras. Amitabha is the Buddha of passion, which is healthy and joyful by itself, but turns into attachment and desperation-driven desire when we fall into forgetfulness. Also associated with the Sambhogakaya, which will also be referenced later.
- Akshobhya is the Principle of Mirror-like Primordial Consciousness, which is the Inherent Wisdom of Non-Dualism. Akshobhya is the Diamond Buddha of the Heart Chakra, who manifests as hatred and aggression when obscured by ignorance.
 - Akshobhya is often associated with Sapphire and the color Blue as the Buddha of the Heart. Akshobhya is the "unshakable" Buddha associated with raw power and Vajrapani, the Herakles of Buddhism. He is also associated with the Medicine

Buddha. His clear-headed Wisdom turns into hatred when we forget ourselves because we turn our discernment into rage through ignorant, delusional thinking. Generally this is associated with Dharmakaya.

- Ratnasambhava is the Principle of Primordial Consciousness of Equality, which is the Inherent Wisdom of Equality. Ratnasambhava is the Golden Buddha of the Navel Chakra, who manifests as pride when obscured by ignorance.
 - Ratnasambhava is associated with wealth and therefore the Earth; the Coins of the Tarot are appropriate to think of here. Pride here is referring to a sense of being better than others due to material success or social status, or even being “more spiritual” than others. We forget our shared nature as sentient beings.
- Amoghasiddhi is the Principle of Primordial Consciousness of Accomplishment, which is the Inherent Wisdom of Unmanifestness. Amoghasiddhi is the Emerald Buddha of the Secret Chakra, who manifests as envy when obscured by ignorance.
 - This is a very interesting Buddha. Amoghasiddhi is the Buddha associated with the Anti-God Realm (think of Greek Titans) and pure dynamism. He is also associated with Hayagriva, the Buddhist version of Rudra. Being associated with the sexual organs, he is wrathful and violent in the name of compassion and bliss, protecting against illness and the serpent-entities called Nagas. Envy here is the neurotic form of accomplishment, a state of never being happy with one’s deeds and being driven by one’s environment to do things without any deeper grounding or purpose.

We can also understand all of these ideas in terms of the Trikaya, or Three Bodies or Three Dimensions of Being. They can be thought of as:

- At a fundamental level of Being, we are Wise-Mind or primordial consciousness. This can be experienced but not described accurately, though it is also termed the Dharmakaya, the body of Wisdom. But at our fundamental level of Being, this Goodness is there within us.
- Through mind-training, we can actually begin to perceive this Goodness in the forms of Buddhas and other divine entities. We also then begin to actualize this Goodness and take on our divine identity, which survives physical death. This primordial Wisdom can be actualized and expressed, and its expression or articulation is Sambhogakaya, the body of Enjoyment.
- This expression can take any form and can be experienced in this very lifetime, without needing to wait for some magical afterlife. We can see other sentient beings as possessing divinity and our perception of the world itself becomes the display of the Wise-Mind. These compassionate expressions of the Wise-Mind is the Nirmanakaya, the physical manifestation of these three bodies.

This has been quite a bit of theory! But it is worth it in my mind because it bridges the gap between the psychological theory of mind and how we can see that theory at play in our bodies. We as human beings are composite creatures. We possess negative conditioning and positive potential. If we do the Work, we can undo and dissolve the negative conditioning, and we can experience that positive potential. When we are blinded by negative conditioning, we ultimately forget our own innate divinity and are stuck grasping at our own cognitive projections. We have allowed ourselves to sleep in illusion and delusion. However, when we decide to Remember our Original Faces, we can tap into that latent Wisdom and discover a new range of possible experience.

Nejang: Tibetan Self-Healing Yoga

This short text serves as a guide to the Tibetan physical yoga of Nejang. The beginning of the text has quite a bit of information on Tibetan medical theory, which I found to be directly connected to the Buddhist theory of mind already elaborated upon. This text naturally bridges theory and practice, though it isn't a yoga primarily focusing on emotions and sensations per se. I'm largely covering it because the Tibetan medical theory points to how the Five Buddhas manifest in physical ways and how we can work with them physically rather than only in ritual.

To start where we left off in the Vajra Essence, we are beings with a subtle body\mind duality, at least in terms of everyday life. But unlike in popular Western thought, body does not precede mind; mind is the prerequisite for body in this way of thinking. If we want to think about the mind as the driver and master of the body, then this is the reason why: the mind is the cause of the body. This mind takes on the form of a subtle body that then forms into a physical body. We typically only consciously interact with this physical body, but within it, there is both a subtle body and the Mind that generates them.

This Nejang text provides the how of this works. When one takes on physical embodiment, the repository consciousness seeks out a form resonant with its karmic state. We can say that the Mind slumbers as its minds create a subtle body within the beginnings of physical body and that this physical body is a microcosmic representation of its macrocosmic realm (and there are many different realms to choose from). But this subtle body is multiple rather than singular, in that it contains an Immortal Form (Vajra Body), Immortal Energy (Vajra Energy), and Immortal Mind (Vajra Mind). It might help to think of the subtle body as the ever-changing manifestation of that core Mind, a plastic expression that changes upon causal factors. As an aside, this makes consideration of Self interesting. What we think of as Selfhood may be understood here as something like a Russian nesting doll rather than a singular "thing" or a homunculus, so we can't point to any one of these Immortal aspects as a Self. For ease, I'll label these three Immortal forces as the Vajra Complex, rather than a Self Complex.

Within the Vajra Complex, there are channels, winds, and nuclei that keep the physical body manifested. All of this is possible because of the Five Buddha Families, or the Five Primordial Wisdoms that are part of our primordial consciousness. These Wisdoms act as the preconditions or Causes for metaphysical elements to manifest, which in turn are the preconditions for physical elements. From the Space element (Vairocana), there is a medium for

further elements to manifest within and out of. We then have Water (Akshobhya), Fire (Amitabha), Earth (Ratnasambhava), and Wind (Amoghasiddhi). These metaphysical elements are more dynamic than what we typically think of when we think of “elements”, so they could be called forces or energies too. These metaphysical forces or elements manifest as the subtle body, which has the anatomy of the channels, winds, and nuclei. These elements also create three humors, roughly analogous to the Medieval European idea of humors, and these humors have either a feminine or masculine polarity. The humors have more of a medical value than not, so I won’t be discussing them much here.

The channels, or *Tsa*, are a series of pathways that branch out throughout the body to keep it alive. There are thousands of subchannels and three main channels. There is a Solar Channel associated with the feminine polarity, bile, fire, emotion, and the color red. There is a Lunar Channel associated with the masculine polarity, phlegm, water and earth, thought, and the color white. There is then the neutral Central Channel, situated between the two other channels, which is associated with wind and the color blue. This Central Channel is of great importance in Tantric thought and I can’t cover it adequately here, so I won’t. However, what is important to note is that the Five Chakras manifest in the Central Channel, so accessing the Wisdom of the Chakras requires familiarity with this channel. This is particularly so for those who practice the higher yogas of Inner Fire and the conscious expulsion of the Mind from the body at the time of death.

Within those channels, we have circulating winds or *Loong*. It is translated as a “wind” because it is a moving force, but it can be called energy if preferable. The *Loong* is connected with the experience of the minds and they are interconnected. If our *Loong* is disrupted, we experience disruption in our emotions, thoughts, and body. *Loong* can be subdivided into Karmic Winds or Gnostic Winds (in Dr. Nida’s words). The Karmic Winds are conditioned karmic energies that are tied to our minds, whereas the Gnostic Winds are the forces of the primordial consciousness. So again, we’re seeing that there is an undercurrent of pure Wisdom in us, if we can clear away inner obscurations that block our perception of that Wisdom.

The last component of the subtle body anatomy is the *Thigle* or nuclei. This portion of the anatomy is not something I fully grasp compared to the others. It would seem to be a condensed “drop” or nucleus of Essential nature. I wonder if we can’t conceive of it as a condensed sphere of Psychic force. It is connected to thoughts, emotions, and sensations, but only a very subtle level. The text says that it is connected to the Gnostic Winds, and I know from other texts that the *Thigle* is connected with the life force itself, with sexual fluids being a physical manifestation of *Thigle*. Perhaps future readings will clarify this topic for me.

Returning now to the “doing” part of all this, we essentially have to return to how we’re using our physical bodies. The physical body is required for *Tsa*. The *Tsa* are required for *Loong*. *Loong* is required for *Thigle*. It would seem to be implied that *Thigle* is an emanation or manifestation of the repository consciousness and therefore one’s Wise-Mind. So, there is a subtle body-mind distinction, but we can see that Mind is the Cause of everything physical we experience. Working with this framework, we can see that our daily doings including posture, attention, breathing, and inner experiences are all interwoven.

Put alternatively, the physical body is hardwired for Gnosis. We don't need to shun the body or its senses. I am reminded of what Dr. Nida teaches about Anuttarayoga Tantra (the highest class of Tantric yoga); there is nothing to reject or cling to here. Everything about the body can teach us something, if we want to listen. We just need to key into our Awareness. We need to turn our gaze inward. We need to examine our breathing, our posture, our bodily motions, and our health overall, if we want to understand what gives rise to sensations, emotions, and thoughts.

The Tibetan Book of Health: Sowa Rigpa, the Science of Healing

This text, by the same author as the previous one, contains more detailed information on the three humors and the five elemental forces. As a medical text, it has less of the focus that I was originally after, but it did give further information on how consciousness relates to the physical body. Since this text covers much of the same material as the previous one, I'll omit any repetitive notes and focus on the additional details of interest.

While the Wise-Mind is the precondition for the body, this text really illuminates for me that as an Initiate, our Work really is grounded in the physical body. It all starts with the body. An Initiate has to Work with the body, if only to some degree, to consistently experience these deeper core processes of Mind in a willed fashion. I can't help but think that the older forms of Buddhism used a purely analytical method ("top down") to break through cognitive conditioning to see the True Mind or Original Face, whereas Tantric Buddhism uses a more wholistic approach "from the bottom up".

With this "bottom up" approach, the Five Wisdoms become the five metaphysical elemental forces and this text states that those elemental forces form the basis of Thigle. The Wisdoms of the Buddhas form the basis of Thigle, which in turn is the lynchpin for the entire subtle body network. We then have Loong, the twofold mind-winds that course through our channels.

This text reminds us that the Loong is wholly dynamic, with one portion being environmentally conditioned and one portion being primordially wise consciousness, but these exist concurrently as two sides of the same coin. This text clarifies that the primordially Wise portion, the Gnostic Wind, travels in the Central Channel, with the Karmic Winds traveling in the two other channels. These Karmic Winds, being conditioned in nature, move so fast and erratically they obscure the Gnostic Wind, resulting in tidal emotionality and a reactive, defensive state. The Chakras of the Central Channel are then nexus-points of the Tsa, responsible for various physiological, emotional, and cognitive processes.

This text, along with the Nejang text, would seem to point out how to use the physical body to interact with the Five Wisdoms. Whereas the first two texts give an analytical approach, these two give a physical approach. We can use the analytical approach to meditate and gain insight into these processes. We can use a physical yoga approach to work with the channels, winds, and nuclei. What both approaches share is posture, stabilization of breathing, and attentional training. We can use both approaches and methods to tap into the Gnostic Winds, taking us out of the wheel of cause and effect emotional reactivity. When we stabilize these Gnostic Winds, we can see Reality as it Ultimately Is.

We can take away from this that Wisdom is fundamental to the human being. We don't need to create or attain spiritual freedom, Virtue, and Wisdom. We already possess them. We only need to train ourselves to see the Jewel (or Flame) that we already hold ready in-hand.

Polyvagal Exercises

Polyvagal is a modern theory of trauma that focuses on the autonomic nervous system and its effect on the rest of the body, including emotions and thoughts. It was created by Dr. Stephen Porges from his research on the autonomic nervous system. Polyvagal Theory is the basis for Dr. Porges' evidence-based practice of the Safe and Sound Protocol, a bottom up rather than top down modality. Safe and Sound Protocol can be part of other psychotherapeutic modalities, but is not the focus of what I'm looking for, so I'm not looking into it at this time. Could be useful for comparisons with mantra practice though.

The basic premise of this theory is that the vagus neural pathway regulates the autonomic nervous system and the autonomic nervous system greatly determines our internal states. The brain organ-system can be thought of as working in a hierarchy, with newer brain organs regulating the older ones and inhibiting them in terms of behavioral responses. When that hierarchy collages, the organ-systems collapse in an order of dissolution towards the limbic system. Likewise, the autonomic nervous system is also hierarchical, with the ventral vagal system regulating the other systems under it, which gives it an order of dissolution too.

From my reading, it struck me that there are three main ideas at work here. They are:

1. There is no solid boundary between mind and body, where each one is separate and isolated from the other. Changes in one aspect of the person creates changes in the other. Dr. Porges' theory suggests that a body\mind duality is outdated and no longer scientifically valid, based on modern imaging studies of how the brain works with the body.
 - a. The vagus neural pathway starts in the brainstem and goes throughout the body. This neutral pathway connects nervous system, brain, and body, with changes in any one system leading to changes in the others.
2. Our nervous system is always working at a level below conscious perception. It is always working with perception to scan for threats and other environmental cues ("Neuroception"). Before conscious behavior can arise, the state of the nervous system greatly influences that behavior and what internal states arise.
 - a. This alters the usual cognitive-behavioral understanding of states and behaviors. Instead of the model of Thought → State → Behavior, we get something more like this: Neuroception → State → Thought → Behavior.
3. There is an evolutionarily-derived hierarchy of the autonomic nervous system, consisting of the dorsal vagal system, sympathetic system, and ventral vagal system. The dorsal vagal and ventral vagal systems evolved through the parasympathetic nervous system, in contrast to the sympathetic nervous system. Each system is nested within the other, with the newer systems embracing the older ones.
 - a. Dorsal Vagal - Freeze\Immobilization response (turtle response).

- b. Sympathetic - Flight\Fight response (fish response).
- c. Ventral Vagal - Safety through social connection (human response).

In short, as mammals we co-regulate or regulation emotions and physiological responses through social connections with others. This begins before we're born and becomes stabilized through early development. If this doesn't develop in a healthy way, the person often becomes stuck in survival modes of behavior, and this also happens when a person is struck in their trauma due to some event that occurred. These polyvagal exercises are meant to help the person move away from protection to connection; protective states correspond to either\or survival options and connective states correspond to and\with thriving options.

In practice, this turns into syncing up present-moment awareness with conscious sensory perception and neuroception. The person learns to develop improved self-regulation through awareness of the cues of the three vagal systems. This improved self-regulation increases resilience, whereas dysregulation is correlated with psychological and physiological illness. Through identifying internal cues, and their relationship to breath and heart rates, the person learns to pump the brake pedal of the vagus neural pathway. The heart rate seems especially important, as the sinoatrial node of the heart is directly connected to the vagus neural pathway, so bringing the heart rate and breath rate out of survival modes is crucial for well-being.

Practices

Based on the topic of the Cycle, I opted for a twofold method. These two methods can then be subdivided further based on the actual techniques themselves. The first two are practices I created from reading up on Buddhist psycho-metaphysical theories.

1. Self-Liberation in Dharmakaya
 - a. Based on the framework outlined in the Vajra Essence text, emotions and other internal experiences are manifestations of the qualities of one's own primordial consciousness. As long as one doesn't grasp onto or push those internal experiences away, in theory those experiences should express themselves and dissolve back into Dharmakaya.
 - i. When any internal experience occurs and I want to practice this exercise, I'll attempt to shift into non-thought.
 - ii. After establishing non-thought, I'll stabilize a non-dual awareness.
 - iii. After stabilizing non-duality, I'll then just experience the internal event without conceptualizing it, until it self-liberates.
2. Quintessence-Mandala of the Primordial Consciousness
 - a. The Vajra Essence text describes a mandala of the Five Buddha Families (p. 119). While a visualization of a symbol can be a form of mentation, I'm curious to know what will happen if a visualization is done during a strong internal experience. This might be a more directive practice compared to others but I think it is minimal, and the resulting experience might be worth the experiment.
 - i. When a strong internal experience arises, such as an emotion or sensation, I will stop and do a closed eye visualization.

- ii. I will call up to visualization a mandala of the Five Buddha Families, though I may change the position of the Buddhas depending on preference in the moment.
- iii. Without calling up any associations between colors, Buddhas, or anything else, I will observe what happens internally when the visualization is sustained.

The second two are practices I found in the referenced texts. These have either been practiced according to the texts or have been modified to fit the goal of the Cycle.

1. Nejang.

- a. The Nejang text has a series of exercises to be done in a single session with accompanying breath control.
 - i. I will dedicate time to practicing the Nejang exercises and breath control. I will then focus my attention entirely on the sensations before the practice, during it, and then after it.

2. Polyvagal Exercises.

- a. Modified version of “The Autonomic Request for Connection” exercise (p. 85). Practice cueing into the nervous system expressions of others. Pay attention to eye movement, tone of voice, facial expression, and body language. Observe your response to those expressions. Unlike the full exercise in the book, this practice ends without interpretation of those cues, signals, and response. The goal of this modification is to experience the cues, hold attention, and experience one’s response without naming it or making an internal narrative about it.
- b. Modified version of “Finding Glimmers” exercise (p. 108). Author appears to define glimmers as brief moments of self-regulation through building a buffer against negativity bias. Intentionally looking for quick moments of enjoyment and positivity, as far as I can tell. The modification is to not keep track of them formally, not to share them with others, and not to intentionally create a certain number of them. The goal of the modification is to get one to stop, notice, and appreciate a sensation, without defining the sensation and without engineering its arising.
- c. Modified version of “Follow your Breath” exercise (p. 128). This appears to be a basic counting of one’s exhalations during a state of emotional dysregulation. One also combines the practice with mantras, affirmations, noticing where the breathing is happening in the body, changing postures, placing the arms on parts of the body, and moving the arms. The modification here is to count the exhales, notice where the breath is felt in the body, and experiment with posture as desired, but not to use any verbal or narrative additions onto the feeling. The goal is not to use the mind to modify the sensation or feeling, but to bring greater awareness to it through direct experience.

- d. Modified version of exercises “Recognize” (p. 149) and “Reflect” (p. 151). The two exercises have been altered to keep more in line with the goal of the Cycle, and then combined into a single practice. The first exercise is geared towards bringing awareness to your current autonomic state and naming it with the appropriate autonomic system. The second exercise is nonjudgmentally experiencing the state, figure out what the autonomic system is telling you, and then get the message without forming a narrative upon it. The modification is to not name the origin of the sensation nor associate it with the nervous system, but I want to keep the part about there being a message. As such, this is a more directed practice compared to the others; it is the closest to getting towards interpretation compared to the others.

They’re different methods based on different inspirations but I think they hold true to the original topic of the Cycle. The first technique is the least directive and then they become increasingly directive, though I’ve only chosen techniques that explore sensation rather than shove sensation into conceptual schema. There is an interaction with sensation but these techniques do not use internal narrative or elaboration, so I think they hold true to the goal.

Experiences

As one can imagine, taking detailed notes about experiences of non-conceptuality is something not easily done in the moment. Accordingly, I can only give general impressions from the doing the various exercises and some thoughts about how I think all this works from the practitioner side. Really, with these exercises, the only way to really get a taste of them is to take a bite for yourself.

1. Self-Liberation in Dharmakaya
 - a. Of all the exercises, I found this one to be my preferred method. By simply sitting with whatever arose in me, without conceptualizing it, I found that it had no power over me and it went away on its own quickly. By not attempting to categorize or even interpret it, it liberates itself rather fast. By the end of the Cycle, I understood that previously used categorizations such as “positive” or “negative” states are ultimately meaningless. There is no “this” or “that” in terms of states. There is the experience alone and anything else added is just that, a layer put up on top of the experience that takes the person one step away from it.
2. Quintessence-Mandala of the Primordial Consciousness
 - a. I did not find this method to be as useful as the previous one. I felt that I was attempting to fit an emotion into a symbolic representation of the emotion, as if interpreting the emotion through an image rather than a word. I think this exercise still has value and could be a way to work with an emotion in a symbolic way, particularly in the reframing of a potentially “negative” emotion into a “positive” divine form. However, for the purposes of this Cycle, it seemed to take me one step away from directly experiencing the raw emotion\sensation, which goes against the whole idea of the Cycle to begin with.

3. Nejang

- a. I found this practice to be quite enjoyable. When I fully focused on my breath work and the sensations happening internally, I was entirely present in the moment. It was only when my mind wandered a bit that the otherwise enjoyable states actually turned into states deemed uncomfortable or displeasing. That is say, the more I strayed away from the focus on my internal sensations, the more those sensations transformed into aversive states. That was an interesting lesson.

4. Polyvagal Exercises.

- a. These exercises were something of a grab-bag. The “Glimmer” exercise was reminiscent of a form of a Self-Remembering and so was the “Follow your Breath” exercise, though that also had a Zhine flavor to it too. The combination of “Recognize” and “Reflect” seemed quite similar to the Self-Liberation practice previously described. The “Autonomic Request for Connection” exercise was one that did not bear much fruit, potentially because many of the people I was interacting with were wearing masks. However, I did use it in situations where that was not the case, and I did feel more connected to the other person.

From the practitioner side of all this, I felt it necessary to come up with metaphors for how I understand these experiences and how they work. The first metaphor was that of a ship on an ocean and the second was a spectrum of light. These metaphors are not hard and fast absolutes for anything, so much as a visual representation of my ever-developing thoughts. What both of them have in common is that they’re an attempt to frame these experiences in terms of “scales” or what I have described in other EOB literature as “scalability”.

If we think of a ship on an ocean, we can think experience as dependent upon state. From the level of the surface of the water, the ship’s captain sees either calm or rushing water. From the ocean’s floor, the observer wouldn’t necessarily see calm or rushing water, and instead would see water as a medium for other things to exist within. That same observer, this time flying in the sky, would likely see the ocean surface in a less detailed way and instead would be seeing more of the sky. We can think about scales in terms of “up” and “down” in this case. What is true in the “up” direction may not hold true in the “down” direction. One can hardly see the sky from the depths of the ocean’s floor and one cannot fully appreciate the beauty of a coral reef from a plane. However, all directions themselves are contained within the larger whole. From the larger whole, the place of Awareness itself, we can learn to see both individual scales and the big picture all at once.

This may seem overly poetic or foolish, so perhaps some key for the reader is warranted. We can understand phenomenological experiences, like those in Operative Workings and meditation, through three primary states of mind. There is the everyday waking mode of consciousness, where we typically understand experiences through reason and emotion. This would correspond to the surface of the water. The depths of the ocean correspond to the unconsciousness, including the subconsciousness. These terms merely refer to parts of consciousness that typically below “the radar” of everyday consciousness and may relate to the more animal elements of consciousness. We can access these “down” states through dreams, guided meditation or “path working”, Active Imagination, and Shadow Work. The “up” states

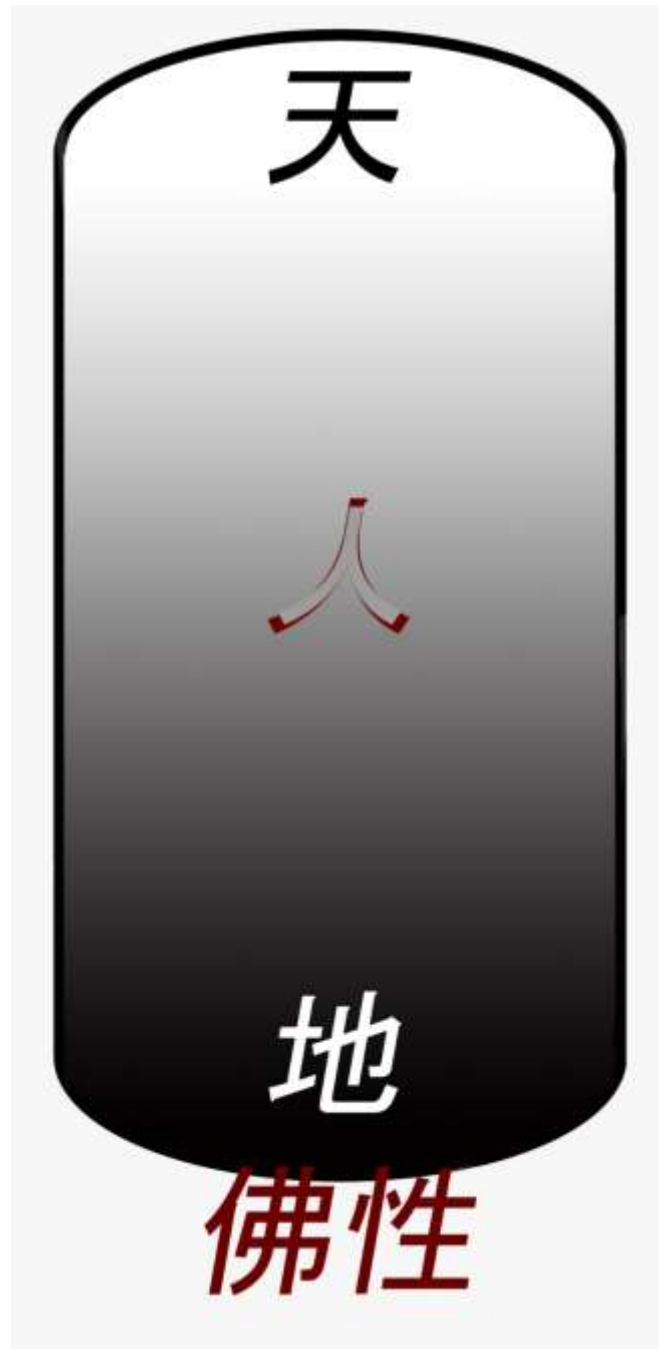
are those transpersonal states frequently encountered in Workings and meditation, such as Jhanas and Workings that put us in contact with higher life-forms. One could probably even place the experiences of the Higher Emotional and Higher Intellectual Centers here too.



The Dragon surrounding the entire image is the Essential nature that allows us to experience any of this in the first place. All the directions are embedded in Mind itself. Our own Awareness is the direct doorway to all experiences, regardless of the words we use to characterize them. It is of pivotal importance, in my mind, that we point out that we only ever encounter experience through our own direct Awareness. It is from that vantage point of Awareness that we can begin to label, distinguish, categorize, and conceptualize experience. In this way of understanding experience, we would say that all experience of phenomena occur within the Mind, not outside of it; all experience is Subjective rather than Objective.

This is not to deny that anything Objective exists. Rather, it is the explicit understanding that everything we experience is our own perceptions and interpretations of those perceptions. This grants us tremendous freedom in how to respond to those things, even if only in our ability to interpret those things that otherwise seem absolute in their nature.

The second metaphor is a simple greyscale spectrum. Initially I wanted this to be more of a sphere with a cross-section cut out but I figured this tubular shape was sufficient. On one end there is a side of a light and on the other there is a side of darkness. In the middle is a solid grey area. The light side, the “up” direction, is the side of Heaven. Conversely, the dark side, the “down” direction, is the side of Earth. Stuck in the middle is Man. However, all directions are embraced by a greater whole, the Buddha-Nature. This is the Essence that allows all directions to come into being in the first place. The container of the greyscale is itself this Essence and it can be accessed through the middle position.



I will again offer the same basic key to this visual metaphor. The darkness below, Earth, can be understood as the unconsciousness. The light above, Heaven, can be understood as transpersonal consciousness. The middle area, Man, can be understood as the composite of both states of consciousness. Man has a foot in both directions simultaneously. We often live our lives through our emotions and thoughts, which are often colored by unconscious cognitive processes. We can also activate and access higher states of consciousness through certain practices. However, the goal of Initiation is not necessarily to stay in any one state perpetually, nor chase after experiences pertaining to any one state. Those experiences will arise on their own anyway. It is only through the present moment that we can actually have the experience of gazing upon our own True Nature. Our Original Face. The Self or No-Self that is beyond the conditioning of society, morals, trauma, thoughts, emotions, sensations, karma and or anything else. Like the Dragon in the seafaring image (yarr, here be Leviathan!), it is through our True Nature alone that we can see the entirety of our consciousness for what it is. And that experience of looking upon one's own Original Face is utterly beyond any description.

Last Thoughts

This is all rather wordy for something meant to be an exploration of non-conceptuality and non-discursiveness! Alas, 'dems the breaks sometimes. If there is one take away from all this, here it is. Human consciousness is an incredible Gift that has granted us many advantages on this planet. But I would challenge the reader to really think about what that Gift consists of. If we limit the Gift of Set to just conceptual thinking or rationality, I think we're missing out. I challenge the reader to instead consider the Black Flame as the entire package all together.

Within the Gift of Set, there a number of different experiences to enjoy and bask within. Emotions, thoughts, subconscious archetypes, transpersonal gazing upon the Forms, the ordinary enjoyment of a game or a cup of coffee; they're all experienced directly through our faculty of Awareness. There are no states to push away, no states to desperately chase after. There's no good or bad to any of them. They're all Good, if we allow them to be. With that in mind, I ask the reader to consider this question.

In a life of total freedom, what you choose to allow yourself to experience?

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