Edukacija u 21. stoljeću: sreća i altruizam

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Education in the 21st century:

Happiness and altruism

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Abstract

Discussing happiness, which has been at the forefront of human endeavour since time immemorial, is often deemed laughable and absurd or, at least, non-important. However, since it actually determines the quality of every single moment of our lives, it might be worthy of investigation.

Here I present the view of happiness not as a certain feeling to be attained and maintained but as a skill that can be precisely defined and practiced. Specifically, I attempt to show the ways in which our existing notions about happiness are misguided and provide an answer as to what happiness really is and how it can be achieved. Through this investigation, we discover that happiness does not depend on particular circumstances, whether inner or outer, but on the quality of our relationship to circumstances in general. We also discover that the reason we have an unhealthy relationship to circumstances is ignorance of our mind's true nature and potential, which generates a plethora of attachments and aversions which lead us to endless suffering. In order to end this ignorance, an expanded type of education and investigation are needed, specifically, the type which take into account the inner, mental dimension of life. It is, then, only through dedicated mind training that happiness can be attained. One example of such mind training is given in the form of Buddhist philosophy and spiritual practice, according to which happiness is only achievable through the diligent application of wisdom and compassion in our concrete, everyday life.

Key words: happiness, altruism, education, Buddhism, mind, Hīnayāna, spiritual practice

Sažetak

Rasprave o sreći, koja je već od davnina glavni cilj svog ljudskog djelovanja, često se ismijava i smatra apsurdnima ili barem nebitnima. Međutim, budući da ona zapravo određuje kvalitetu svakog pojedinog trenutka našeg života, mogla bi biti vrijedna istraživanja.

Ovdje predstavljam viđenje sreće ne kao određenog osjećaja kojeg se postiže i održava, već kao vještine koja se može precizno definirati i uvježbavati. Naime, ovdje ću pokušati pokazati načine na koje su naša postojeća viđenja sreće pogrešna i pružiti odgovor o tome što je sreća zapravo te kako se može postići. Kroz takvu istragu otkrivamo da sreća ne ovisi o nekim posebnim okolnostima, bilo unutarnjim ili vanjskim, već o kvaliteti našeg odnosa prema okolnostima općenito. Također, otkrivamo i to da je razlog zbog kojeg imamo nezdravi odnos s okolnostima neznanje o istinskoj prirodi i potencijalu našeg uma, koje onda neprekidno stvara razna prianjanja i odbojnosti koji nas pak drže u beskrajnoj patnji. Da bi se to neznanje okončalo, potrebne su proširene vrste obrazovanja i istraživanja, konkretno, one vrste koje uzimaju u obzir unutarnju, mentalnu dimenziju života. Sreća se, stoga, može postići samo kroz ustrajno treniranje uma. Jedan primjer takvog treninga uma ovdje se daje u obliku budističke filozofije i duhovne prakse prema kojoj je sreća ostvariva jedino kroz marljivu primjenu mudrosti i suosjećanja u našem konkretnom, svakodnevnom životu.

Ključne riječi: sreća, altruizam, edukacija, Budizam, um, Hīnayāna, duhovna praksa

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1 Introduction[1]

We do not have to be happy. We want to be happy. Is that not the truth of our lives? Irrespective of how we define happiness, we want to achieve it. Unless we do, we are, at the very least, restless and dissatisfied. There are those, of course, who look down on happiness as if it were a naïve, sentimental concern which has no place in an intelligent person's life. For these people, discussions about happiness may seem laughable and absurd, yet they, too, are living based on what they deem to be the best for them. Their behaviour simply betrays them, showing that they are no more or less human than the rest of us. While this may be true, still, why would we discuss happiness? Is it not some vague, private matter to be left to the individual to address? If it were so, indeed, it would not be of great importance, but the reality is rather different. Happiness is not just some circumstantial, temporary feeling; it is "a way of being that defines the quality of every moment of our lives".[2] Rather than being vague, it is a skill that can be precisely defined and practiced; one that oversteps the boundaries of our private lives and affects everyone with whom we come into contact.

The aim of this dissertation, therefore, is to show the ways in which our existing notions about happiness are misguided; to provide an answer as to what happiness really is and how it can be achieved; and attempt to illustrate the investigative and educational process that may allow us to realise it.

In chapter two, after this introduction, I will present our usual idea of happiness and the ways in which we attempt to achieve it. After concluding that such approaches cannot be successful, I will argue for an alternative informed by Buddhist philosophy, one that also redefines the concept of happiness and places education in the unique position of the primary

[1] This dissertation is dedicated to my good friend and teacher Mihajlo Pažanin without whom it would have been impossible to write it. Heartfelt thanks also go to my mentors and teachers of philosophy at the Faculty of humanities and social sciences in Rijeka, Croatia as well as to my good friend Ivan Zubović for his valuable comments and proofreading.
[2] Ricard (2007, pp. 18).

facilitator of happiness. In the third chapter, I will argue that education can indeed fulfil this promise; albeit only in a different form than the one contemporary formal education seems to display. This different form of education includes contemplative practices and requires dedicated research in order to better inform it. This research, however, needs to be done not only in an objective, scientific way but also in a systematic, introspective manner. Since such kind of inquiry is a novelty in the domain of contemporary science, I will suggest that we investigate those contemplative traditions that have already done it extensively. In chapter four, I will introduce and explore the basic philosophy of one of these traditions, namely, Buddhism; which will be followed by a short exploration of its practice in a concluding subchapter.

2 The search for happiness

In this chapter I shall discuss our most common attempts to attain happiness and avoid suffering, assess their (un)successfulness and argue for an alternative approach based on Buddhist philosophy. This alternative approach to happiness redefines what it means to suffer and to be happy as well as reveals learning and education to be the only ways to achieve true, lasting happiness.

I will begin by defining happiness, according to the prevalent notion of it, as a kind of circumstance which, when acquired, is supposed to bring satisfaction. This will be followed by a systematic investigation of whether circumstances can indeed be a stable basis upon which to establish happiness. After examining and dismissing this possibility, I will show that an alternative is possible. This alternative approach redefines happiness as a specific type of relationship towards circumstances rather than some type of circumstance itself. In order to elaborate this idea, I will appeal to Buddhist philosophy which shares the basic premises on which this idea is based. According to Buddhism, happiness is not the opposite of suffering but the absence thereof and since suffering is caused by ignorance, happiness is the absence of ignorance. Based on these insights, I will conclude the chapter by stating that learning and education are the only way to attain true, lasting happiness.

2.1 Suffering and the quest for happiness

We all want to be happy and not to suffer. That is the fundamental motivation behind everything we do. Whether it is something as simple as looking inside the fridge or as complex as building a successful career, all we ever do, essentially, is seek satisfaction. And yet, despite everything we have done so far, our lives are still very much marked by suffering. Indeed, it is perhaps the one thing that we all most intimately share. Pain and dissatisfaction occur everywhere; they do not discriminate between rich or poor, young or old, famous or

unknown; they affect us regardless of gender, skin colour, nationality, creed or sexual orientation. There is no one who has not experienced suffering and no one who does not wish to be happy. That is why the question of happiness may well be the most important question of our lives. As Epicurus said, "one must practice the things which produce happiness, since if that is present we have everything and if it is absent we do everything in order to have it."[3] However, in order to be happy, we must first understand what happiness is and where it comes from. Let us investigate then if our preconceptions about happiness and its sources are correct.

2.2 How we chased a feeling

When people say that they want to be happy, they often mean many different things. Some of them will talk about happiness in terms of bodily pleasure such as eating delicious food, getting a massage or engaging in sexual intercourse. Others might associate it with obtaining wealth, glory and power or with accomplishments such as passing an exam, winning a tournament or learning a skill. Other still might talk about a sense of deep peace that they have experienced while immersed in nature or a sense of warmth and intimacy with friends, family or a loved one.[4] Whatever it may be, all of them seem to be talking about a subjective feeling, about a "sense of either immediate pleasure or long-term contentment with the way [one's] life is going."[5] According to this definition of happiness, in order to assess whether someone is happy or not we need only ask them how they feel. By performing a systematic inquiry then we might be able to discover how happiness is achieved.

The implicit notion here is that happiness depends on something such as a thing, person or situation. Therefore, we can approach the analysis more systematically by dividing it based on the circumstances that lead to happiness. These circumstances can be either outer

[3] Ricard (2007) and Classics.mit.edu. (2018).
[4] Ricard (2015).
[5] Harari (2014, pp. 322). See also Diener (2009, pp. 68-9) and Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 97).

or inner. Let us begin by exploring the outer ones. The following subchapters (2.2.1 – 2.2.5) were inspired by and adapted from Harari (2014, ch. 19).

2.2.1 Outer circumstances – material and social conditions

One often-accepted view in our society is that happiness depends on the material and social conditions in one's life. According to this view, a person will be happy if they like their conditions and unhappy if they do not. Of course, not all people have the same preferences, but there are some basic things that can be considered generally desirable. For example, happiness is believed to come from things like being in good health, having a nice house, a lot of money, a successful career, enough free time, doing the things one enjoys and having a loving family and supportive community. In short, happiness seems to come from liking the state of one's body, environment and community, which can be translated as a regard for health, money[6] and relationships. Various studies and questionnaires have attempted to discover the correlations between these factors and happiness. What follows is a summary of their findings.

First, health, or rather illness, has a weak to stronger correlation with happiness, depending on the type of illness.[7] It will decrease the overall happiness of the person but only short term until they get used to the new situation. Long term drops in happiness are to be expected only in cases where the person's health keeps declining or if there is continuing and incapacitating pain, especially one that interferes with the activities of everyday life.[8] Otherwise, if other things remain equal, after the adjustment period, the ill person will return to their baseline level of happiness, which is determined by their genes but which can also change through life via experience.[9]

[6] One's environment usually depends greatly on one's financial status.
[7] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 208-9).
[8] Harari (2014, pp. 323).
[9] See Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 494-6).

Second, money affects people's happiness in a slightly more complex way than illness. Historically, even though societies have become wealthier, they have not necessarily become happier. One example on a smaller times scale concerns the happiness of US citizens studied from 1972 up until the early 2000s. The findings show that even though income per capita through this period has nearly doubled, people's satisfaction with their financial situation has actually declined.[10] Nevertheless, this is not enough to conclude that there is no correlation between happiness and money. Past studies may not have taken into consideration various contextual factors that could affect their results. Today, updated studies show a statistically significant correlation between a nation's wealth and its reported happiness.[11] What is more, there are some positive correlations between money and happiness on an individual level as well. For example, there is a fairly precise pattern showing the change in happiness as one rises through income levels. First, when due to higher earnings one is lifted out of poverty, there is a significant long-term surge in happiness. Afterwards, as one continues earning more, the effect on it is much weaker. At some point, which is around or below an average yearly income, money ceases to have a significant effect on someone's perceived well-being.[12] However, it still affects the person. "The richest of individuals is, on average, substantially higher in life satisfaction than the poorest individual, even in wealthy nations."[13]

Finally, our ties to family and community have a strong correlation with happiness.[14] What is especially significant is the quality of the relationships rather than the quantity.[15] Even though one may be socialising with a large number of people, unless the relationships get more open and intimate, a feeling of loneliness may still arise. It may not be surprising

[10] Layard (2006, pp. 31, 42).
[11] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 499-503).
[12] Diener (2009, pp. 241) and Eid and Larsen (2008, ch. 15). See also Layard (2006, pp. 32) and Harari (2014, pp. 323).
[13] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 499).
[14] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 200).
[15] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 204).

then that one of the most important factors contributing to happiness in this domain is marriage. A good marriage, where a high-quality relationship is established, is linked with high levels of perceived well-being, while bad marriages correlate with low levels of subjective well-being.[16] Additionally, it seems that relationships have a greater impact on our happiness than economic and even physical circumstances, as long as these are not too severe.[17] An invalid, even though poor, if surrounded by a loving family and supportive community can be much happier than an alienated billionaire irrespective of the enormous wealth difference between them.[18]

To sum up, it seems then that money and health are important for our happiness but only insofar as we have enough of them so that they do not represent an obstacle to everyday life, after which point they become less important. Relationships, on the other hand, seem to have a greater impact on our perceived wellbeing so that even in situations when there is a significant lack of both money and health one can feel happy.

2.2.2 Inner circumstances – expectations

However, it might sound surprising, but happiness may not depend on material and social factors at all. A subsequent finding seems to overthrow the idea of happiness being dependent on outer circumstances and instead identifies another source – expectations.[19] According to this view, happiness has nothing to do with money, health or even relationships but is a result of inner circumstances or, to be more precise, of fulfilling our expectations. The more our expectations match our outer circumstances or vice versa, the more we will experience happiness. If I want a new computer and I get it, I will feel happy. If, however, I get a new computer but it is not the model that I wished for, there will be unhappiness. This is

[16] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 266-7).
[17] Harari (2014, pp. 323).
[18] Harari (2014, pp. 324).
[19] Harari (2014, pp. 324).

why we can be dissatisfied even after receiving a lot of money or finding love – due to high expectations – and why we can feel quite alright even after getting a chronic disease – as our expectations drop.

A more extreme example found in Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman (1978) is perhaps a better illustration of this view. The study compares the reported happiness of lottery victors and accident victims who have been left quadriplegic. Their levels of perceived well-being are evaluated before their lucky win or accident and 2 years after the event. According to the study, both the lottery winners and the quadriplegic victims will have nearly returned to their prior happiness levels within this period. In case these prior levels were the same, it would follow that a win at lottery and a severe accident have the same long-term effect on one's happiness. Such a view, however, seems too extreme. It is true that adaptation can cancel and to a surprisingly high degree the effects of both pleasant and unpleasant life events but such processes are not all-powerful. Similarly, even though people return to a specific happiness baseline determined by one's genes and certain life experiences, the fact that this baseline changes partly due to experience and that in itself it allows for a certain spectrum of happiness levels, suggests that happiness may, after all, be in part determined by outer circumstances.[20]

Nevertheless, as useful as this correction to an outdated study may be, it does not disprove the power of expectations. The fact that adaptation is not entirely successful at cancelling out positive and negative states of mind says nothing about expectations. In fact, the reason people still feel somewhat better or worse than others may be due to a remaining mismatch in expectations even after the adaptation period. Even the genetic-biochemical account of a happiness baseline allows for changes in happiness levels to occur due to life experiences but it does not follow that the quality of the experiences will be due to outer

[20] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 494-6).

circumstances. It may be, again, that their quality is determined by whether or not one's expectation has been fulfilled. After all, it would be strange to say that we are unhappy despite having completely fulfilled our expectations, in other words, been granted everything that we wanted. It would be just as strange to say that we are happy even though we still yearn for something but do not have it or if we have what we do not want. In the end, it seems that outer circumstances may not be relevant at all, since all that matters is if our expectations are met.

2.2.3 Inner circumstances – biochemistry

The biologist might not entirely agree. It may be true that happiness does not depend on external circumstances but it does not depend on expectations either. Since the reason we feel satisfied when our expectations are fulfilled is entirely biochemical in nature, it follows that it is our biochemistry that makes us happy or miserable. Biologists who follow this line of thought hold that we are never made happy by getting a lot of money, that dream job or true love we have been looking for, but by electrical signals in our nervous system and accompanying biochemicals such as dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin.[21] Whatever we do throughout our day, whether it is to scratch our head, call a friend, listen to music or work hard on a project, it is all done so that we can feel a bit of pleasure. According to this view, happiness is a matter of pleasant sensations in our bodies[22] and, if it is indeed so, we can create our happiness through interventions such as genetic engineering, surgery, implants and drugs. In retrospective then, most of history has done nothing to increase our contentment. We have battled countless wars, changed many ideologies and governments, reformed the

[21] Harari (2014, pp. 327).
[22] Harari (2014, pp. 327).

economy and education, but only one of our achievements is truly valuable - the ability to manipulate our bodies and their biochemistry.[23]

Of course, this ability is far from perfected, but we can reasonably expect that it will be more and more so in the future. For now, each of our bodies has their own happiness baseline determined by genetics, one's specific medical condition but also life experiences. As mentioned before, this baseline may change throughout the span of an individual's life due to certain experiences, such as losing a spouse or becoming unemployed.[24] Because of these reasons, many biologists agree that experience still has a role to play in determining our happiness levels.

However, these problems are not theoretical but practical. The question we are attempting to answer is not whether we can actually manage to intoxicate ourselves to bliss but whether we should aspire to do that or not. In principle, if happiness is a bodily sensation and we want to be happy, it follows that we should, because that is how happiness is ultimately achieved.

2.2.4 Inner circumstances – meaning

Nevertheless, there is something disconcerting about wishing for such a world. Everybody would be feeling ecstatic yet there is something wrong about that. After reading Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World", we can see that the characters therein are feeling overjoyed thanks to *soma* – the happiness drug with no side-effects that they take every day - but I suspect we would also be reluctant to call such a state of affairs *happiness*.[25] In fact, Huxley's work is widely known as a dystopian novel depicting a world we would all be happy *to avoid*. It seems therefore that there is something more to happiness than just pleasurable bodily sensations. Interested in finding more about this topic, the psychologist Daniel

[23] Harari (2014, pp. 330).
[24] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 496).
[25] Huxley (2006).

Kahneman conducted a study in which he asked people to recount and evaluate the episodes of a typical day in their lives.[26] He discovered that even in cases where most episodes in their day were unpleasant, people would still rate their day as a whole as a joyful experience. This was particularly evident in the case of raising children. Kahneman surveyed one thousand North American women using something called the Day Reconstruction Method or DRM.[27] The method basically asks people to analyse a day in their lives by segmenting it into its component activities and then to relive those experiences and rate them in terms of certain criteria. In this instance, the women had to rate their activities according to pleasantness. The surprising finding was that mothers rated child care as the third most unpleasant activity in their day which "was slightly less enjoyable than doing housework".[28] Nevertheless, if you were to ask these mothers what brings them the most joy in life, they would probably answer that it is their children. But how can this be? Are people simply ignorant of what is really good for them or is there perhaps another plausible answer?

Aware of such problems, some researchers pointed out that happiness or subjective well-being actually has two components – the cognitive and the affective.[29] The cognitive component is sometimes also called life satisfaction and is "based on evaluative beliefs about one's life".[30] In contrast, the positive and negative aspects of the affective component correspond to the experiences of pleasure and displeasure, respectively. The above finding, then, can be thought of as a mismatch between these two components. The mothers obviously had an unpleasant day in terms of the affective component of happiness but if they had considered their activities as meaningful and worthwhile, they would rate themselves as happy in terms of the cognitive component. In other words, happiness seems to be based on more than just bodily pleasure and has to do as much or even more with seeing one's life as

[26] Kahneman (2011, pp. 332).
[27] Kahneman (2011, pp. 331).
[28] Kahneman (2011, pp. 332).
[29] Diener (1984) and Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 97).
[30] Eid and Larsen (2008, pp. 97).

meaningful and worthwhile. According to this view, how we see our day in the context of our lives makes all the difference. If we see no point in parenting, for example, the very same activities will seem much harder and agonizing than if we see our efforts as a worthwhile contribution to the development of a new human being. In the same way, countless people have devoted their lives to arduous tasks that, even though unpleasant, are seen as meaningful. Many of our deepest stories and legends, for instance, tell of the hardships of various people and how they fulfilled their mission in life. These stories when lived out would certainly not be pleasurable yet oftentimes we wish to be their protagonists. Humans, it seems, cannot bear a meaningless life any more than a pleasureless one.

2.2.5 The happiness that we do not want

Throughout this analysis of both outer and inner life circumstances we have seen that happiness has two components. One of these is the bodily sensation of pleasure and the other the attribution of meaning to our activities and lives. The first one is achieved, ultimately, by manipulating our bodies and their biochemistry, while the second by being successful at interpreting our lives in accord with the meaning we ascribe to it.

At first glance these conclusions may seem fine, but there is something disturbing about them. As already discussed, being constantly blissed out may seem desirable but there is also something deeply unsettling about it, especially if it depends on whether or not we manipulate our bodies to feel so. However, if we attempt to find happiness in meaning, the situation is as dystopian as the one concerning bodily pleasure. If we think about it, at least in scientific terms, life and its activities have no meaning – they just are. The attribution of meaning is, therefore, nothing but a delusion. Whether comforting or not, the stories we superimpose upon our lives are, after all, just useful fabrications. They may motivate us to do this or that but to what end? Ultimately, happiness seems to be found either in engineered

bliss or successful self-delusion or both and none of these options seems like something we would want.

2.2.6 The addiction hidden in plain sight

There are people, of course, who would embrace engineered bliss and/or certain stories as their way to happiness but, sadly, they would find out soon enough that such an approach can never really work. This is because our view of happiness sets before us an impossible task. Happiness, as we have been discussing it so far, is a subjective feeling. It is, in other words, a certain inner circumstance, one that we have been chasing since time immemorial. Whenever this particular type of circumstance is not present, we do everything we can to get it back and protect it. Although this seems logical, it is, unfortunately, also short-sighted. Circumstances, whether inner or outer, are subject to constant change and are, therefore, an unstable basis for achieving happiness. Of course, we may get a taste of satisfaction from time to time, but lasting happiness, which is our real goal, will keep on eluding us. This is true not only because we have failed to acknowledge how the world works, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because we have failed to acknowledge how the mind works. Consider the following.

We suffer when we have what we do not want. We also suffer when we do not have what we want. When we finally get what we wanted, we may feel satisfied for a while, but we will probably find out that the new situation is not as wonderful as our expectations made it appear. In fact, since no situation exists on its own, we will find out that situations, no matter how nice they may be, always come as package deals with certain responsibilities and problems. But even after this disillusionment, we will still try to hold on to the new situation, fearing that it may end. In many cases, we will not enjoy even the short period of satisfaction that it provides because we will already be trying to intensify and safeguard the feeling that

we have got. Even in cases where the situation lasts for longer, there will be no long-term satisfaction as we get used to the situation, bored and wish for something else. Finally, whether we want it or not, our circumstances will change. Our fear of losing what we have will always and inevitably come painfully true. And as one cycle ends, another will begin.

As we can see, we have been chasing not just outer circumstances but inner ones as well. If we reflect upon this, we will see that lasting happiness can never be found in circumstances, whether inner or outer, because they are both impermanent. Engineered bliss and the stories we believe are no exception.

The problem, however, is that circumstances seem to work up to a point and, thus, give us the illusion that they might actually work for good. We call this illusion hope but we might as well call it addiction. In other words, since we feel happy only when circumstances are just right, we conclude that controlling circumstances is the way to happiness and disregard other approaches. However, this is more or less the same as saying that injecting oneself with heroin is the way to happiness. If the heroin addicts were to report that they only feel happy when they use the drug, would we conclude that heroin is the key to happiness?[31] Of course we would not. Rather, we would feel compassion for them as they attempt to become happy via precisely those means which will only make their situation worse. We would, in brief, conclude that they are ignorant of how happiness is truly achieved.

This is, unfortunately, not only the case with heroin addicts but is our reality as well. We are addicted to control. Believing that it will make us happy, we exercise it repeatedly over our lives only to find out, time and again, that it will fail. Still, this would be an endless source of wisdom if it were not for the misguided conclusion that we make every time our attempts fail. Since we are not well-informed about these matters, we conclude that the reason we failed was a lack of control. We decide, therefore, that next time we will control

[31] Harari (2014, pp. 333).

circumstances even better than we already did and it is thus that our ignorance keeps us trapped in a cycle of anguish.

2.2.7 Conclusion

To sum up, we have started our search for happiness by defining it as a subjective feeling consisting of affective and/or cognitive pleasure. Such a view postulates that happiness is a certain type of (inner) circumstances. However, after exploring all the possibilities of attaining lasting happiness within the bounds of such a view, we have concluded that it is not possible. The main reason why lasting happiness cannot be achieved within circumstances, whether inner or outer, is that they are both impermanent by nature. In fact, as we have discovered, our very attempts to attain happiness in such a way can only bring us an endless amount of suffering. If we want happiness, then, we must look for another way to achieve it.

2.3 Know thyself

2.3.1 An alternative

If lasting happiness cannot be found in circumstances, does that mean that it is simply impossible to attain? Not necessarily. There is an alternative. We may not be able to attain any lasting happiness via circumstances themselves but we might be able to achieve our goal by developing a different relationship towards them. To clarify, let us imagine the following situation.[32] We are walking barefooted through a desert. The sand is blazing hot and the stones are razor sharp. Wherever we go, it hurts our feet. Suddenly, however, we get the brilliant idea to cover everywhere we go with leather. By doing so, we believe, we will stop our feet from getting hurt. For a moment that sounded like a wonderful idea, but we soon

[32] Shantideva (1995, 5:13-14). See also a short video from the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies (2008).

discover that, in practice, it is impossible to do. Trying to do so, in fact, would bring endless frustration. On the other hand, if we would simply wrap the leather around our feet, that is, wear shoes, we would be able to walk freely through all kinds of terrain without suffering. This analogy may not be perfect but it illustrates the point we are discussing. Instead of trying to attain this or that specific circumstance, whether outer, such as a nice house or beautiful partner, or inner, such as a feeling of security or joy, we can simply work with our mind and how it relates to circumstances in general.[33] In this way, no matter which circumstances arise, we will always be content. Nevertheless, this is easier said than done. Furthermore, since we do not have an experience of this kind of relationship with life, this line of though may be easily misunderstood as well as prove too abstract to grapple with at first. Therefore, we would need a systematic and gradual approach to deal with these problems.

2.3.2 Buddhadharma

Fortunately, the insights discussed here are neither new nor unknown. Throughout history, many an approach to happiness has been attempted but few have, perhaps, been so meticulous in its pursuit as Buddhadharma or, as it is usually known, Buddhism.[34] For more than 2,500 years, the followers of the Buddha have been painstakingly exploring the causes of both suffering and happiness via unrelenting logic and systematic introspection, which is why there is ever more interest for their philosophy and meditative practices in the scientific community and why we are discussing them right now.[35] Buddhists would agree with the present examination which has found that happiness depends neither on outer nor on inner circumstances as they would agree that the only way to attain happiness is by developing a different, healthier relationship with circumstances in general.

[33] In a sense we have come back to working with expectations, but also more than that. This time the goal is not to achieve pleasure but to get rid of ignorance and suffering.
[34] McMahon (2007). Apart from Buddhism, there are other approaches to happiness with perhaps the same conclusions as ours which may also be considered.
[35] See Harari (2014, pp. 333).

The current relationship we have with them, they say, is based on the belief that happiness depends on a particular arrangement of circumstances.[36] Because of this belief, we exert a lot of energy into getting and maintaining pleasant feelings and the situations which provide them, while at the same time avoiding any unpleasant feelings and situations which may give rise to them. Unfortunately, however, such an approach to life keeps failing us because the belief it is based on is simply false. Happiness does not depend on circumstances, primarily because they are ephemeral, fleeting and in constant change. To believe otherwise is ignorance and because of this ignorance we are constantly generating attachment and aversion to particular feelings and situations as well as a whole plethora of behaviours, all of which, at the end of the day, result only in problems, pain, conflict, anxiety and dissatisfaction. In other words, the current relationship we have with circumstances is a deeply unhealthy one. According to Buddhism then, suffering is not this or that situation nor feelings of pain or meaninglessness but rather this "never-ending and pointless pursuit of ephemeral [circumstances]."[37] Happiness, as a result, is none other than the cessation of this pursuit.

If true, this line of thinking constitutes a Copernican shift in our understanding of the mind. While we have been thinking of happiness as something we do not have that has to be acquired, for Buddhists it is something already present waiting to be discovered.[38] It is the very attempt to establish it somewhere else, they say, that prevents us from experiencing it. Happiness, according to them, is the natural state of the mind or, to be more precise, the already present potential of the mind that, however, cannot be fully realised until it is obscured by ignorance and its accompanying reactions of attachment and aversion to particular circumstances. In short then, happiness is not the opposite of suffering, but the absence thereof, the absence of ignorance.

[36] See Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (2007).
[37] Harari (2014, pp. 333).
[38] See Arya Maitreya and Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (2007).

2.3.3 A deeper ignorance

However, the Buddhist account of ignorance goes much deeper than the mere misapprehension of where true happiness lies. To expound it completely will require a more detailed description but, for now, it will be enough to present some of its aspects even though very concisely.

The reason why we are ignorant about where true happiness lies, explain Buddhists, is that we are ignorant of both how the world exists and of who or what we are.[39] According to them, in principle, neither the world nor who we are can be reduced to our ideas about that, which is what we attempt to do when we conceptualise ourselves, other beings, things and situations and attempt to control them. We believe that phenomena can be clearly defined and, therefore, also successfully managed according to our desires but it is not so. Phenomena exist only in interdependence so that any attempt at defining them as independently existing entities with a nature of their own is doomed to fail. In fact, if they were independent, it would be absurd to speak of change as things and events would be fixed in a state of their own. In short, since phenomena change and exist in interdependence, they are not reducible to concepts, least of all to the concept of permanence.

In everyday life, however, we innocently believe our concepts to be more than just concepts and, as a result, we reify phenomena. Because of this habit of perception, we misidentify what we and other things are. In particular, we misidentify ourselves with our feelings, which is why we start paying so much attention to them. If we exist independently and we are our feelings then we must protect ourselves from harm and improve our situation, that is, seek only pleasant feelings and avoid any unpleasant ones. This endeavour, as we have seen, is precisely what leads us to suffering. If we could recognise the interdependent, impermanent nature of phenomena, we would realise we are not our feelings and could stop

[39] See Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (2007).

obsessing about them, we would finally vanquish our ignorance and achieve a profound and lasting happiness, one much greater and deeper than any experienced beforehand. To recognise this, however, is not easy at all. Ignorance, according to Buddhists, is primarily a matter of perception, which then translates into emotions and thoughts. If it is to be tackled, one has to address all of these layers. The only way we can do this, as far as we know for now, is through proper education and diligent mind training.

2.3.4 Conclusion

In summary, Buddhists agree that happiness does not depend neither on outer nor on inner circumstances and that it stems only from a healthy relationship to circumstances in general. At the moment, they say, our relationship with circumstances is a deeply problematic one because it is based in ignorance about how the world is and who or what we are. Specifically, we are ignorant about the interdependent and impermanent nature of circumstances which leads us to mistakenly identify ourselves with them and, consequently, to chase some of them and avoid others. This relentless pursuit leaves us not only empty-handed but also in pain, restless and perpetually dissatisfied. To eradicate our ignorance then would be to re-establish a healthy relationship with circumstances as well as to cease all those activities which inevitably lead to suffering. The resulting happiness is said to be unshakeable as well as so great and profound that it is impossible to comprehend by anyone who has not realised it. However, to discover this happiness within ourselves, we would need to work with more than just thoughts and emotions but go all the way down to the most basic aspects of perception. If this is so, that is, if happiness is a skill to be cultivated rather than a circumstance to be felt, then the quest for happiness rests solely in the hands of a proper type of education that would enable us to actualise this so far hidden potential.

3 Expanding education and science

In this chapter, I will argue that education can indeed lead us to true, lasting happiness but only if it includes mind training. I will also discuss that this educational process needs to be complemented with dedicated research, which needs to be done not only in an objective, scientific way but also in a systematic, introspective manner. As a suggestion, I will add that we need not start from scratch but can learn by studying and testing out existing contemplative traditions such as Buddhism.

I will begin by exploring the definition of education in general, especially its variants according to formality, and comparing this with the description of contemporary formal education. The ensuing conclusion will be that while the latter does not in itself show promise of leading us to happiness, it might do so if supplemented by proper mind training. In the second part of this chapter, I will argue that we still do not know enough about the essence and causes of happiness and that, consequently, we need to conduct dedicated research which would be able to inform our novel type of education. This research, however, would need to consider both the mental and material aspects of life and would thus need to be not only objective and scientific but also introspective, communicative and interpretative. As a final suggestion, I will comment that we do not need to start our investigation from the very beginning, but that we can learn by investigating and testing out existing contemplative traditions such as Buddhism.

3.1 Education revisited

If education is the only way to happiness, then it is fair to ask whether it can actually provide what we are asking for. Can education really bring us the deep transformation required to achieve true happiness? By the looks of our modern education system we might be tempted to say no, however, there might be more to education than the contemporary view of

formal schooling would make us believe. We should, therefore, explore the extent to which education can impact our individual lives.

3.1.1 A definition

Let us begin by defining it. The origins of the English word *education* can be traced back to two Latin roots – *educere*, which means to lead out and *educare* which means to train or to mould.[40] Although they differ in meaning, both words denote a form to be developed. The form in question is none other than the human being itself, not so much his outer, physical form as much as his inner form or mind.[41] In very basic terms then, education has to do with the shaping of the mind or, in other words, with the shaping of perception, thoughts, emotional and behavioural patterns. However, it does not have to do with just any shaping of the mind but with learning, which is the shaping of the mind that tends towards both pleasure and truth.[42] Learning often happens with the learner's awareness and/or intention but consider the following: a person engaged in an informal conversation may subconsciously learn about certain preferred patterns of speech and behaviour even though they did not enter the conversation with the intent to acquire this knowledge. In such an example, one learns even without being directly aware of it or intending to do so. Nevertheless, even though we could describe this as *learning*, we would struggle to call it *education*. On the other hand, if the same person had been put in this situation by someone so that they can learn, that is, if the learning had been facilitated at least from the side of someone else, we would label it *education*. It seems, therefore, that we can define education as the act or process of facilitating

[40] Bass and Good (2004).
[41] That is because doing push-ups, for example, is neither learning, nor education, even though physical education includes push-ups.
[42] There is always an element of truth in learning; however, it is primarily done so that one can function in the world and society. The motivation of truth is, therefore, only secondary to the motivation of attaining pleasure and avoiding suffering. For example, notice that the aim of science is, in most cases, to solve problems and better existing conditions. If, however, learning is done solely because of curiosity it is done for pleasure alone, although, as mentioned, an element of truth is present there as well.
For a dictionary definition see Merriam-webster.com. (2018).

learning.[43] It usually happens under some educator's supervision and guidance, but learners can also educate themselves.

To make this definition more informative, we can distinguish education according to formality. It can be informal, non-formal and formal.[44] The first, informal education, is that which is not purposefully organised even though there is awareness and intention to learn. It does not happen, therefore, within an institution nor is it recognised with a formal certification. It is the facilitation of learning realised in everyday situations and interactions related to work, family and leisure, especially within socialisation.[45] Such education happens all the time but has been especially salient in pre-industrial times when the role of family and community in an individual's life was much stronger than it is today.[46] The second, non-formal education, is purposefully organised and structured, it usually happens within an institution on a regular or intermittent basis but like the previous type it does not provide a formal certification that would attest to one's gained knowledge and skills. The most prevalent forms of non-formal education are workshops, courses and seminars. Finally, formal education, which is provided by the state's educational institutions[47], is highly organised, it awards learners with a certification recognised by the state at the completion of the curriculum and, in contrast with the other two types, it is organised as a full-time and long-term program with a clear structure and distinct stages.

[43] The result of such an act or process can also be called *education* but we will not discuss this aspect of education at present.
[44] See Unevoc.unesco.org. (2018).
[45] Unevoc.unesco.org. (2018).
[46] See Harari (2014, pp. 301-9).
[47] These can beeither public ones or private institutions recognised and accredited by the state. Some of these can teach alternative types of education such as Waldorf or Montessori.

3.1.2 Contemporary formal education

However, to get a clearer understanding of what formal education means today we need to explore its historical development.[48] If we think of education as the preparation of the individual to become a functional member of society, the conclusion is that education will have to change along with society so as to live up to its needs. As societies become more complex and accumulate knowledge, the amount and complexity of information to be passed on to the next generation increases. At a certain point, existing educational structures need to be reinvented so as to become more efficient. It was thus that the institutionalised, formal system of education arose. Complex societies, especially today in the developed West, require a majority of their members to be educated up to a certain degree in order to merely function, let alone thrive. They require a system to educate entire populations and do so as fast as possible. Because of this need to transfer a great amount of information in a short amount of time, today's formal education is not just highly segmented and specialised but is also ever more distant from the practical context of everyday work. In other words, modes of learning such as physical engagement, observation and imitation are increasingly abandoned.[49] Furthermore, due to the same pressures, the focus of the educational process is being moved away from the learner and placed solely on the information to be acquired. This means that the development of the learner's character traits and soft skills such as introspection and emotional awareness, communication and teamwork, creativity and critical thinking is being ignored in favour of acquiring mainstream values and hard skills that will be directly relevant to the learner's future job.[50]

[48] See Encyclopedia Britannica. (2018b).
[49] Encyclopedia Britannica. (2018b).
[50] See Bass and Good (2004) and The Balance Careers (2018).

3.1.3 The potential of education

Now that we have seen both how education can be defined and how it is commonly perceived in today's developed world, we can compare the two views and conclude whether education is a possible way of achieving happiness or not. One thing that can be immediately noticed is that education in general is frequently defined through its formal variant, for example, as a "discipline that is concerned with methods of teaching and learning in schools or school-like environments as opposed to various non-formal and informal means of socialization."[51] This line of thinking is understandable and it has its practical reasons but it limits the perceived scope of what education can be. In its essence, education is the art of the transformation of the mind. If developed fully, it has the potential to transform not just behavioural patterns and thoughts, which, as we have seen, is what today's formal education is mostly concerned with, but also emotional patterns and perception itself.[52] Such education usually takes the form of a rigorous and life-long mind training that, even though difficult, can bring incredible results. There is a danger, of course, for such an approach to be performed systematically since if done improperly or with a malicious intent the consequences can be disastrous. However, if done properly and with a kind motivation, the results could be astounding. This type of education may be hard to comprehend since we lack the training that would give us a first-hand experience of its transformational power, but we can look at the rare examples of people who have undergone such training, for instance, Matthieu Ricard and H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama.[53] Their examples are interesting because they clearly illustrate the effects of proper education, and especially mind training, on one's life and subjective well-being. When it comes to the Dalai Lama, a more detailed appraisal can be found in Ricard (2011) where it is argued that the Dalai Lama possesses an enduring happiness in the form of

[51] Encyclopedia Britannica. (2018b).
[52] For neuroscientific studies see Lutz et al. (2004) and Ricard, M. (2015, pp. 56–64). For more information on basic mind training and an expanded argumentation in favour of the present thesis see Ricard (2007).
[53] See Matthieuricard.org. (2018). and The 14th Dalai Lama. (2018) for more information.

lasting and circumstance-independent inner peace and compassion. However, besides anecdotal evidence there have also been neuroscientific studies on Mr. Ricard himself as well as on other long-term Buddhist practitioners.[54] Throughout these studies happiness is seen as a skill that can be developed. In terms of the body, this means that due to neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to evolve in response to experience, certain areas of the brain associated with positive emotions can be developed to a high degree through a specific kind of training, in these cases, through Buddhist meditative practices. Research shows that these practices, whose principal aspect is often compassion, result in the development of the left prefrontal lobe, an area of the brain associated with emotions such as love, joy and enthusiasm, as well as of the "parts of the brain involved in planning movement and in feeling maternal love".[55] These findings conclusively show the effects of mind training on one's general disposition via lasting changes in one's brain. Interesting enough, since Mr. Ricard's brain shows the highest development of the mentioned brain regions in any case recorded so far, he has been dubbed by the media as the "happiest man in the world".[56]

3.1.4 Conclusion

To summarise, we have started with the question whether education can indeed impact our life enough to bring about a sense of deep and lasting subjective well-being. We knew that, in theory, it should be able to do this but, seeing the state of contemporary formal education, we would have been forgiven to doubt it. Fortunately, however, there are examples of a different type of education which includes mind training that can impact our lives to the necessary degree and that can supplement our modern style of education. Specifically, these are examples of Buddhist teachings and meditative practices which have been shown to significantly alter one's brain as well as one's perception and disposition in a way that is

[54] Matthieuricard.org. (2011) and Ricard, M. (2015, pp. 56–64).
[55] Matthieuricard.org. (2011).
[56] Ted.com (2004).

consistent with our definition of happiness. Therefore, it can be argued, that, to the degree to which proper education and training can change one's perception and affective patterns, they can be a perfectly viable path towards happiness.

3.2 A "science" of the mind

Now that we have found, at least in principle, both what happiness is and how it can be achieved, we need to complement these findings with a more detailed analysis. What are the aim, contents, form and methods of an education that is able to change one's perception and lead us to happiness?

3.2.1 We do not know

We have already seen some examples and there has been ongoing research in happiness for some years, but, at least for now, it is too early to say.[57] Perhaps it would be best to start by admitting that we do not really know. In the past, the willingness to admit our ignorance of how the outer world works sparked one of the most important revolutions in recent human history – the scientific revolution.[58] In the present, the possibility that we may be ignorant of how the inner world works may perhaps bring us the next great revolution. Therefore, in order to inform this happiness oriented education, we ought to perform the necessary research, primarily in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, cognitive and neuroscience and pedagogy.

[57] Reasearch into happiness has been ongoing for at least 26 years, for instance, as part of the Mind and Life Institute's efforts to bridge Buddhist contemplative practices with science. For more information see Mind & Life Institute. (2018). Also, the field of positive psychology itself represents an enterprise, albeit extremely young, into the essence and causes of subjective well-being. It is characterised as young since interest for positive psychology started in the 1950s but was cemented only 20 years ago, in 1998, when one of its major proponents – the psychologist Martin Seligman – became president of the American psychological organisation.
[58] See Harari (2014), ch. 14.

3.2.2 Looking inside

However, there might be a problem. When it comes to happiness and the mental realm in general, we cannot and should not limit ourselves to objective, scientific research alone. As this thesis may sound controversial, let me elaborate it further.

Wilber (2000, pp.63-75) talks about differentiating the world through four categories – the inside, outside, individual and collective. If we were to represent this graphically it would yield four quadrants – the interior-individual or *I* quadrant, the exterior-individual or *it* quadrant, the interior-collective or *we* quadrant and the exterior-collective or *its* quadrant.[59] Each of these quadrants, as mentioned, represents an aspect of the world. Here, however, we are interested only in the distinction between inside and outside. To clarify what this distinction means in the present context, let us look at a comparison of the *I* and *it* quadrants on the example of an individual human being. The following image is taken from Wilber (2000, pp.68):

prehension	atoms
irritability	cells (genetic)
rudimentary sensation	metabolic organisms (e.g., plants)
sensation	protoneuronal organisms (e.g., coelenterata)
perception	neuronal organisms (e.g., annelids)
perception/impulse	neural cord (fish/amphibians)
impulse/emotion	brain stem (reptiles)
emotion/image	limbic system (paleomammals)
symbols	neocortex (primates)
concepts	complex neocortex (humans)
UPPER LEFT	UPPER RIGHT

FIGURE 5-3. *The interior and the exterior of the individual.*

Comparing the two columns, we see that on the left side there is a list of mental states, while on the right side a list of material structures corresponding to those mental states. The left side represents the interior-individual or *I* quadrant, while the right side the exterior-individual or

[59] Wilber (2000, pp. 67).

it quadrant. If we look at the right-hand list we will notice a familiar hierarchy often found in a standard biology textbook. It is a hierarchy of material structures, ranging from simple to more complex, pertaining, in this case, to a human being or, to be more precise, to their body.[60] All these items, however, are exterior descriptions of what a human being is. A scientist can easily talk about the limbic system, for example, and describe it at great length and in great detail. She will explain that it is the home of some basic emotions such as desire and aversion and will even be able to tell you interesting details of how these emotions are processed through electric and biochemical reactions, but she will be unable to tell you much about the emotions themselves. The inner experience of these emotions, the what-it-is-like to be in such a mental state will elude all explorations of the limbic system, or of the brain for that matter. The reason for that is quite simple – the inner dimension of a human being is just not accessible in an objective, scientific way and as a result science has no interest for it. The inside and the outside, while obviously interrelated seem irreconcilably distinct. The reason why there is a chasm between the inner, experiential world and its outer, material correlates is a question for metaphysics and needs not be discussed at present.[61] What is important is that there is indeed a rift between the inner and outer dimensions of sentient beings and this fact necessitates us to explore the world not only in an objective, empirical manner but also in an introspective, communicative manner. That is the only way in which we can achieve a more complete picture of what the world is and how it works.

To belittle or deny this inner dimension by relativizing it, because it cannot be researched in the same way in which material structures can be, would not only be ignorant, but a disaster. Unfortunately, this is more or less what we have been doing as a society in the past two hundred years. To elucidate this point I will paraphrase and comment alongside

[60] Whether the hierarchy is precise enough or not is irrelevant to the current discussion.

[61] Even if physicalism, the thesis that everything is physical i.e. material, is true, we would still require introspection, interpretation and communication to research the inner dimension of ourselves. For more information see Tye (2018, ch.5) and Stoljar (2017).

Wilber (2000, pp.241-254). The reason for the denial of the inner world, he explains, was a double-fold success in the exterior domain, namely, the many realisations of modern science and the immense accomplishments of industrialisation. In themselves, these may not seem like special developments since people have been doing science, using and improving tools long before the 18th century when these revolutions took place. What was different this time was the sheer transformative power that these developments had over the techno-economic base of society. Since the base sets various constraints and possibilities within which culture can unfold, it was almost by necessity that the culture set in a scientific-industrial base developed into a corresponding rational-material culture. It was thus that, suddenly, after centuries of almost exclusive devotion to the inner domain, primarily because of Christianity and the dominance of the Catholic Church, Europe shifted towards the opposite extreme; and due to its influence, the rest of the developed world soon followed suit. From that time onward, the inside was valued less and less until, at some point, we started to feel as if it is irrelevant or altogether non-existent. Consequently, today, it seems like the only thing that is real is the exterior, that is, the physical or material. This can be seen in all three spheres of life, namely, in the environment, the body and the mind. First, philosophy and science dictate what is true about the environment and their dominant view is physicalism or the thesis that everything is physical. Second, emerging out of the former, medicine and healthcare reveal a view of the body which most often neglects the psychological and cultural dimensions so that, when patients are treated, what is treated is their body as if it existed in complete isolation from its inner experience. This is perhaps best seen in the example of psychiatry. Lastly, when it comes to the mind, the most prominent question is that of morality. How can we know what should or should not be done based solely on knowing about the material basis of life? Frequent debates about what constitutes morality, especially in today's highly technological context, and concerns about a crisis of values are an indication of disconnect with the inner

sphere of life. Additionally, to come full circle, the mind is considered to be none other than the brain, which, as we have already argued, cannot be the case. Even if physicalism were true, it should be clear by now that the mind, while part of nature, is not part of the brain. The most important difference between them is that, unlike the brain, the mind does not appear to have a location in space and time, at least not in the same way that a brain does. To research the mind, therefore, by looking solely at the brain would be akin to researching a beast by looking solely at its footprints – the essence would be lost in the surface. That is why the aforementioned neuroscientific research about the effects of Buddhist meditation on the brain can only be an indicator of whether these practices are successful but can never be proof that they are. Matthieu Ricard seems to be the happiest person to have been analysed so far but to know whether he really is and what led him to this accomplishment we would have to look into his mind, which, by default, we cannot do. We only know that he is happy because we asked him. In other words, we only know that certain states of the brain correlate with certain mental states because we asked people what they experience. Matter can be seen, but mind has to be introspected, communicated and interpreted. As Michel Foucault would say, people are not merely "objects of information" but are at least as much "subjects in communication".[62] Our failure to see that, according to Wilber (2000, p. 242), has been the source of many serious problems such as:

> "a mechanistic worldview; the destruction of an organic culture; the cause of an analytic and fragmented world; the displacement of social cohesion; the cause of ecological catastrophe and the ruin of religious sensibilities."

These are grave problems indeed but none is perhaps more so than the loss of depth, that is, of our essence, our intimacy and humanity. This is precisely because our society worships the object while it disregards the subject. What needs to be done, therefore, is to regain a healthy

[62] For more information see Foucault (1995, p.195-228).

balance.[63] In this spirit, I think, it would be decidedly unfair to criticise the rational-material worldview without also mentioning its many extraordinary accomplishments. To quote Wilber (2000, p. 63):

> "we might mention: the rise of democracy; the banishing of slavery; the emergence of liberal feminism; the widespread emergence of empirical sciences, including the systems sciences and ecological sciences; an increase in average life span of almost three decades; the introduction of relativity and perspectivism in art and morals and science; the move from ethnocentric to world-centric morality; and in general the undoing of dominator social hierarchies in numerous significant ways."

Since we discussed them, we might also give specific praise to the view of physicalism which, starting in its methodological variant, helped liberate philosophy and science from the authority of the Church; to modern medicine and healthcare which significantly improved our livelihoods, not to mention our lifespans; and to modern technology which brought so much more comfort than even the pre-industrial aristocracy could have imagined. All of these wonderful benefits of the rational-material worldview were gained because we recognised the limitations of and managed to transcend the previous paradigm in which science was still supressed in favour of a divine, otherworldly realm. Therefore, the problem of modernity is not that it transcended this inner realm but that it failed to include it in an overarching view. There are just as many if not more benefits to be gained, however, if we manage to recognise the limitations inherent in the rational-material paradigm and transcend it. This does not

[63] Notice that the frequent criticism aimed at modern science is that it is too mechanistic and atomistic. These critics call for a holistic approach as a solution to this problem. However, while they are partly right insofar that we require a holistic view as well, they are wrong if they think that this is the crux of the modernist problem. Whether atomistic or holistic, the view of modern science is still only materialistic. The solution is, therefore, to integrate not just the body but also the mind into our dominant paradigm.

mean, however, that we would have to abandon it. Quite the contrary, we would need to transcend but also include it.[64]

For our research into happiness and its education, this means that it should, of course, be based in common sense, in an objective, scientific manner of investigation but also in an introspective, communicative and interpretative manner. As mentioned above, it should include logic and philosophy, especially epistemology; pedagogy; cognitive and neuroscience; anthropology but also psychology in a wider sense.[65] With the latter I mean a psychology not only informed by the contemporary Western tradition but also by the various ancient and modern traditions around the world, whether they are part of a religious context or not, so long as they uphold the highest rational standards.[66] The main point here, however, is that, like many of these traditions, we too would need to explore the mind in a systematic experiential way in as scientific a spirit as this kind of approach allows. Concretely, this means we should map the mental realm as if we were some sort of *intronauts*, as opposed to astronauts, using tools such as meditation, visualisation, contemplation and others. We need to literally look for answers inside ourselves by strengthening and then using our ability of mindfulness. Examples of questions we might look to answer are: Can mental abilities like concentration and compassion be trained? What are the immediate and long-term effects of being in a state of concentration or compassion on the rest of the mental landscape? Can thoughts or emotions be controlled? What is the relationship between them? Do they have an inner structure with regard to perception? Is our perception clear or is it filtered through concepts? Are there ingrained mechanisms of perception? How are mental habits stored in the mind? What experiential circumstances activate them? How are mental habits changed? And

[64] According to Wilber, the development in each of the four quadrants follows the pattern of transcend and include. Each level brings certain benefits and each has its own limitations, except perhaps the highest level which is said to transcend and include everything.
[65] For a perspective on the relationship between science and Buddhism see Thompson (2017).
[66] Notice that there can be rational reasons not to be rational, especially in the domain of emotions and perception. For more information see Nagatomo (2000).

so on. In short, we need not only expand our view of what education can do, but also of what science and similar pursuits can investigate and how.

3.2.3 Learning from older traditions

Still, we do not need to start from scratch. We can, as mentioned, inform our research and education by studying about and practically evaluating existent contemplative traditions. Some of these are standalone such as Stoicism and Neoplatonism, but most are embedded in the great world religions.[67] There is much that can be learned if we manage to approach these traditions with a spirit of genuine curiosity without, of course, losing our scepticism and intellectual thoroughness.

On the one hand, contemplative streams in the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are perhaps closer to the Western mind than those found in the Indian religions of the East. Examples include Kabbalah, Hasidism and the Musar movement in Judaism; the rich mystic tradition of Christianity; and Sufism, the Isma'ili tradition and the schools of Shiraz, Isfahan and Mulla Sadra in Islam.[68] Of course, apart from these traditions of mysticism, one can draw also from the standard teachings of these religions. On the other hand, we also find rich contemplative traditions in the Indian religions of the East. The many traditions and schools of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism all aim at liberation through contemplative practices.[69] Among these, Hinduism is, perhaps, the closest to the Western mind-set since it can include worshiping a higher power. Buddhism and Jainism, on the other hand, offer a non-theistic approach to life, whereby contemplative practices form an integral part of the mainstream religion itself.

[67] See Baltzly (2018) for Stoicism and Wildberg (2016) for Neoplatonism.
[68] See Encyclopedia Britannica. (2018c) for Judaism; Encyclopedia Britannica. (2018a) for Christianity and Aminrazavi (2016) for Islam.
[69] See Ranganathan (2018) for Hinduism; Velez (2018) for Buddhism and Webb (2018) for Jainism.

All of these traditions, as well as others that we may not have mentioned here, have valuable insights to contribute. In this dissertation, however, we will explore only one of them, namely, Buddhism, since it stands out in the context of our discussion. The reasons for that are the following. First, Buddha's view of happiness is consistent with our findings. Second, contemporary neuroscientific research seems to confirm the successfulness of Buddhist contemplative practices. And third, which is also important, Buddhism has become increasingly popular in contemporary global culture. For this reason it should be inspected for errors, especially if it turns out to be problematic, and inspected for its valuable insights, especially if it turns out to be successful. In light of these considerations, therefore, we can proceed to acquaint ourselves with Buddhism's view of life and with its practices and, if possible, do so from its own perspective. In this way we will be in a good position to properly inform our research and education with this particular tradition and thus, perhaps, be a step closer to our goal of lasting happiness.[70]

An education based on this specific approach could be characterised as follows. Firstly, the aim of such an education is the eradication of ignorance and suffering as defined by Buddhism. Secondly, its contents are the teachings of the Buddhadharma along with the appropriate additions from other sources, especially from pedagogy, anthropology and various contemporary scientific fields. And lastly, the forms and methods of such an education would be varied but would primarily include information, observation, contemplation and meditation through lectures, training and other, less conventional methods.

[70] See Thompson (2017) for a discussion about empiricism and Buddhist "science".

3.2.4 Conclusion

In summary, we have started with the question about the particular characteristics of a lasting-happiness-oriented education. We have found that, although we have some insight, our understanding of these matters is still decisively lacking and that a call for research is in order. However, as we have argued, this research cannot and should not omit the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of life because a purely objective, scientific approach is incomplete. The call is then to supplement modern science and education with not just dedicated philosophy but also with systematic and "well-refined contemplative practices and introspective methods [… to] be used as equal instruments of investigation — instruments that would not only make science itself more humane but also ensure its conclusions were far-reaching."[71] Nevertheless, this does not mean we need to start from scratch. There are various traditions of contemplative research that can aid us in our investigation. In this dissertation, we explore one of them, namely, Buddhism since its view seems to be consistent with our findings about happiness and its teachings and practices seem to produce the relevant results. One possible type of happiness education then can already be formulated based on Buddhist teachings and methodology.

[71] Mind & Life Institute. (2018).

4 The basics of Buddhist philosophy

In this chapter I will attempt to present the basic teachings of Buddhadharma from the intellectual perspective of a scholar of Buddhism. This contrasts with the perspective of a Buddhist practitioner which, for the sake of brevity, will not be given in this dissertation.

Guiding me will be Pažanin (2009) whom I will paraphrase from at length throughout this entire chapter and who provides a clear overview of Buddhadharma from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism across all three of Buddhism's main traditions – Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna.[72]

I will begin this chapter with a few preliminary remarks about one's attitude when approaching Buddhism. This will be followed by an introduction to Buddha and his teaching, with a special focus on Buddha's pedagogical ability or skilful means. After this point is clarified, I will move on to explain several teachings which constitute the basics of the Buddhist worldview. It should be noted that my explanations will be primarily from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism and will include mostly Hīnayāna teachings. The teachings that will be presented will be: the Four seals of existence, the three yānas or traditions of Buddhism, the Four noble truths, karma, rebirth, samsāra and renunciation.

Before we continue, however, it should be noted that since one can only approach a certain discussion to the best of one's current abilities, my interpretation of Buddhism provided here may or may not reflect Buddhism's authentic teachings. With this in mind, we can proceed to explain the basics of Buddhism and its philosophy.

[72] The reason why I will draw so much from Pažanin (2009) is that many scholars, even renowned ones, frequently make mistakes regarding the particulars about Buddha's teaching and it would be therefore much better to rely on a work written by a life-long practitioner of these teachings, one who knows them intimately rather than just intellectually.

4.1 Preliminary remarks

When it comes to approaching Buddhism, one can only do so much by reading books, watching or listening to teachings or even meditating. By themselves, these activities are simply not enough. People spend years and years attempting to penetrate the teachings of the Buddha by studying and practicing on their own but even after all that time the true meaning of the Buddhadharma remains hidden from them. The interest and passion that one began with thus slowly turn into disappointment. And it is rightfully so, because the only way to actually understand the teachings is under the guidance of an authentic teacher. Only after we have encountered someone who has already walked the path can we start to develop a sense of direction. Under the guidance of such teachers one starts to see that the teachings are not mysterious at all, but deal with some very intimate and practical matters – they are about us; about the nature and potential of our own minds; they are, at the end of the day, nothing but the cure for the concrete problems in our life.[73]

4.2 The Buddha and his teaching

Buddhism or, more precisely, Buddhadharma is a set of spiritual-religious teachings originating in India some 2,500 years ago. They are supposed to have been revealed[74] by a man called Siddhartha Gautama or, as he is usually known, the Buddha.[75]According to scholars, the Buddha was born in Lumbini, in what is today southern Nepal, and lived for 80 years, primarily in the 5th century B.C.E.[76] There are many different accounts of his life varying according to interpretation and detail. Here I will present a very concise, generic

[73] Pažanin (2009, pp. 16).
[74] Buddhadharma is said to be an eternal truth that is not founded but rather revealed by an enlightened being. Even so, the form that these teachings take may vary radically as long as it retains the very same meaning.
[75] See Velez (2018) for more information.
[76] Velez (2018).

account covering only some of the main points about Buddha Śākyamuni's life.[77] The following is adapted from Velez (2018).

The Buddha was born into the royal family of the Śākya clan. He was the son of Queen Māyā and King Śuddhodana. One week after she gave birth to him, however, his mother suddenly died. Suffering, the Buddha would later recall, had already been there at the beginning of his life. He spent his first twenty-nine years in the capital city of Kapilavastu, enjoying all the luxuries and pleasures that a royal palace can offer. As time went by, however, he became increasingly unsatisfied with his life. He experienced a profound crisis when he suddenly realised that everyone's life, including his own, was subject to old age, sickness and death. After seeing a serene monk by the side of the road, he decided to renounce his throne, his family and all his wealth in order to go and seek a way out of suffering. He became a wanderer and for six years he practiced various spiritual paths trying to reach liberation (skt. nirvāṇa).[78] First, he practiced meditation under the supervision of Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. However, after mastering these practices and seeing that they do not lead to liberation, he decided to take another path. So, he started to practice extreme asceticism. After he almost died from starvation, he realised that this path would not do either. He thus resumed to eat solid food and began to practice a moderate path that would neither indulge nor deprive the senses. Shortly after that, he sat under a Bodhi-tree and experienced awakening or enlightenment. Finally, he was free. At first, he was not willing to teach what he had discovered but at the supplication of the god Brahmā and out of his compassion, the Buddha started a successful teaching career that would last until the end of his life.

While the Buddha's life may be fascinating, what usually captivates us most is the mystery of the Buddha's enlightenment. What he experience under that Bodhi-tree changed

[77] As leader of the Śākya clan, the Buddha is also known as Buddha Śākyamuni.
[78] Some terms, such as this one, will be provided also in their Sanskrit variant for the sake of clarity and precision.

him profoundly. So, what did he experience? The following paragraph is adapted from Pažanin (2009, pp. 33-5).

> "All traditional sources agree that what the Buddha attained was insight into the true nature of reality, into a truth that is beyond concepts, words, space, time or any known dimension of being."[79]

Therefore, any attempt we may make now at rationally understanding even a part of the Buddha's experience is sure to fail. That is because our mind works in a dualistic fashion. We understand things only by comparison. For example, our idea of *up* only has meaning in contrast to something which is *down*, *good* only in contrast to *evil*, *mind* only in contrast to *body*, *me* only in contrast to *others*. How are we then to grasp an experience which is altogether outside the scope of conceptuality? Because of this impediment, the Buddha is said to have almost abandoned his intention to teach, fearing that his insight would be impossible to arrive at using only dualistic instructions. Fortunately, however, he devised a skilful approach that would work. He understood that it would take a long time, absolute dedication and arduous practice, but he knew that those with the necessary requirements and who possess a sincere wish to rid themselves of ignorance would be able to gradually progress and experience awakening just as he had done. Therefore, he presented his insight using skilful means (skt. upāya). In other words, everything the Buddha ever said was a sort-of half-truth which is primarily an expression of the Buddha's pedagogical skill and which leads the practitioner more and more towards the ultimate truth of enlightenment. The Buddhist teachings, therefore, only show the right way to go, but in themselves do not hold the ultimate answers which can only be arrived at with direct experience, rather than intellectual comprehension. They are, as it is often said, only a finger pointing at the moon.

[79] Pažanin (2009, pp. 33).

4.3 The fundamentals

Even though we are limited by the dualistic, conceptual framework of our minds, the Buddha was quick to point out that without a proper intellectual understanding of the nature of reality and of ourselves we would not be able to practice properly and reach enlightenment. That is why *right view* (skt. samyak-dṛṣṭi) stands as one of the most important points of the Buddha's teaching (skt. dharma).[80] With this in mind, we can continue to the main part of this chapter – the exposition of some of the fundamental teachings of Buddhadharma.

4.3.1 The four seals of existence

The four seals of existence are called so because they represent four undeniable characteristics of reality.[81] Any philosophy which contains them and any person which believes them are considered to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha. The four seals are:

1) All compounded things are impermanent.

2) All emotions bring suffering.

3) There is no thing which exists on its own.

4) Nirvāṇa is beyond concepts.

4.3.1.1 **Impermanence**

The first seal states that all compounded things are impermanent. It is a profound statement with many theoretical and practical aspects to explore.

To begin with, we can notice that all things which exist within the sphere of space and time are actually compounded (skt. saṃskāra), that is, made out of other elements. In Buddhist terms, every single thing is the result of a great number of causes and conditions.

[80] See Velez (2018, ch. 3b) and Pažanin (2009, pp. 66).
[81] For an in-depth elaboration of the Four seals of existence see Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (2007).

Take a chair, for example.[82] We tend to think of it as a single object but in reality there is no chair, there is only a temporary arrangement of various causes and conditions. A chair, for example, is "an arrangement of an idea in the craftsman's mind with the wood, nails, glue and the needed tools and conditions for such work to be done."[83] If any of these elements were missing, there would be no chair.

However, the Buddha would be quick to point out that these elements themselves are also compounded, also a result of many other causes and conditions so that there is no final, independently existing element to be found. This hints directly to the third seal which states that there is no thing which exists on its own. Such a perspective sees the world as a great interdependent flow of phenomena, each of which is the result of an immense number of causes and conditions and each of which represents a formative cause and condition for other phenomena. In this fashion, all "things change, are destroyed and created; whether they are the contents of our mind, the smallest physical particles or planets, stars and [galaxies]."[84]

Things, however, are not only compounded, they are also impermanent (skt. anitya). The Buddha's choice of wording here is not without reason. He could have easily said that compounded things *change* but instead chose the word *impermanent*. The reason is that this statement stands in direct opposition to our deeply ingrained habit of perception which tends to see things as permanent and independently existent. There is something in us, the Buddha would say, that makes us conceive of ourselves and all other things as being permanent, as if things possessed a name, form and various characteristics which permanently define them; even though this is not the case at all.[85] Whether we like it or not, everything and everyone we love, but also hate or do not care about are equally subject to impermanence and decay. The

[82] The example is taken from Pažanin (2009, pp. 38).
[83] Pažanin (2009, pp. 38)
[84] Pažanin (2009, pp. 39)
[85] Pažanin (2009, pp. 39)

older we get and the more we look around, we see this more and more. The inevitable fate of our very body, too, is old age, sickness and death.

However, instead of being pessimistic, impermanence is a relief. Because of it, we know that the hard times will also pass and that we will always have a chance to do things differently. With it, we need not worry. If we know impermanence, not just intellectually but in our bones, we become fully able to accept the experience of loss. Finally, by contemplating impermanence, we start to increasingly appreciate the remaining time in our lives. We would do well not to waste it.

4.3.1.2 All emotions bring suffering

The second seal states that all emotions bring suffering or, more precisely, that attachment or aversion to any emotion brings suffering. This is a radical claim. We all understand the way in which anger, greed, jealousy and pride bring suffering, but how can love, generosity, joy and humility bring suffering? Are they not purely pleasant emotions?

To understand what the Buddha is saying here we need to go back to the first seal and remember that all things exist in interdependence and are impermanent. That is to say that they have no independent existence neither in space, nor in time, respectively. They are, in other words, completely empty of a permanent self-existence so that, consequently, all characteristics that we ascribe to them are also ephemeral and dependent on a great many causes and conditions.

Nevertheless, there is something in us that prevents us from seeing this truth and this something is ignorance (skt. avidyā). But how does this ignorance come about? Buddhist psychology says that we have not five but six primary senses – sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch and the ability to perceive mental formations such as thoughts and emotions. The input from all of these senses is gathered in the mental consciousness (skt. manovijñāna) and forms

an ever changing mind stream (skt. citta-santāna). Of course, there is no fixed identity in any part or moment of the mind stream or in the mind stream taken as a whole, however, that is precisely the conclusion that ignorance forces us to make. As soon as there is perception of the mind stream as an independently existing and permanent phenomenon, there is also the identification with it as *my mind stream*. That is the basis for the false idea of an independently existing and permanent *me* or ego. Soon enough, this *me* also identifies with and thus *acquires* a body and a name. Even though this process of identification is an innocent mistake, Buddhists caution that it is the source of all the suffering (skt. duḥkha) in the world.[86]

Because of these identifications, there is also the identification with feelings. We start to have attachment to pleasant feelings and aversion to unpleasant ones. As already discussed in chapter two, this leads to an endless and frustrating pursuit of this feeling over that one. We become obsessed about performing an impossible task, about attaining and maintaining a certain ephemeral part of the mind stream. We become, in other words, addicted to control. And not just of feelings, but control of situations as well. Since we do not realise that situations are entirely empty of a fixed nature, that is, entirely neutral, we identify them with our feelings and react to them with attachment and aversion as well. We let situations and how other people behave towards us shape our identity. It is no wonder then that we have so much hope and fear regarding situations; that we fight so much; that we are so anxious to solve our problems by changing circumstances… From the perspective of an enlightened being, we must all look rather crazy. It is no wonder then that we are unhappy.

So, what can we do? What would true happiness look like? According to Buddhists, happiness is the spontaneous expression of a mind free of attachments to *me* and *mine*.[87] This accomplishment is said to be the result of the insight into emptiness.

[86] This entire paragraph is adapted from Pažanin (2009, pp. 43).
[87] Pažanin (2009, pp. 43)

4.3.1.3 Emptiness

The third seal states that there is no thing which exists on its own or, in other words, that all things are empty (skt. śūnya) of self-existence. That is why in Buddhism the ultimate nature of reality is often said to be emptiness (skt. śūnyatā). It is the central tenet of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the one seal upon which all other three are based. Its most famous presentation can be found in Arya Nāgārjuna's "Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way".[88] There are also several logical arguments that support the teaching of emptiness as well as countless commentaries by both Buddhist masters and various scholars, but they will not be discussed here.[89]

According to Pažanin (2009, pp. 44), when the teaching first came to the West it was wrongly understood by Buddhist *experts*. They had translated the Sanskrit term *śūnyatā* into *nothingness* and falsely concluded that the aim of Buddhism was "the extinguishing of all moral and religious values and the merging with nothingness."[90] As he comments,

> "if it were really so, we would be entirely justified to conclude that Buddhism encourages people to have a nihilistic view of the world in which there is no room for an affirmative and engaged way of life."

Fortunately, however, it is not so.

The teaching of emptiness simply states that things are not as they appear. They are not independently existent; they do not have an individual essence that would hold contingent characteristics in place. And yet, "phenomena appear to us as if they existed separately from each other, as if they had a nature of their own and specific characteristics that permanently define them."[91] That is why we define people as family, friends, enemies, as pretty or ugly,

[88] See Nāgārjuna (2014).
[89] For the arguments themselves see Mipham Rinpoche (2005). For an academic discussion by Western scholars see Garfield (1994) complemented by Chinn (2001). Additionally, a good academic overview of both the philosophical and epistemological views on emptiness has been given by Nagatomo (2017).
[90] Pažanin (2009, pp. 44).
[91] Pažanin (2009, pp. 45).

rich or poor, good or bad... just as we define ourselves through our sex, nationality, religious affiliation, job, age or as weak, strong, stupid, clever, liberal, conservative, a good kisser, a bad manager and so on. All of these things, people and characteristics are compounded and impermanent and they do not exist on their own. To believe otherwise is to have fixed views in an ever changing world, which, naturally, leads to suffering.

Another important point, especially for practitioners, is the following. Emptiness can also be understood as an inverted way to say that things are interdependent. These two teachings are, in fact, two different dualistic expressions of one and the same non-dual reality.[92] The reason why the Buddha put focus on the negative expression, that is, on emptiness is because people have a tendency to look for solid ground under their feet. In other words, Buddha's intention with this teaching was to undermine our ego's attempts to obtain a fixed view of reality. That is why it only states how things are *not* rather than how they *are*. Because he feared we might take the teaching of emptiness as our new fixed view of things, he pointed out that emptiness itself was also empty. Just as all other ideas, the idea of *empty*, too, he would caution, can only be understood in relation with something that is *full*. If there was no idea of *full*, we would not need to talk about *empty*. In the same way, if our perception was not deluded into believing that things have an independent existence, it would make no sense to talk about emptiness. Therefore, it should be understood that this teaching was given solely as a pedagogical means, as an antidote for our ignorance because of which we keep seeing phenomena, ourselves included, as independently and permanently existing. Ultimately then, it is not a metaphysical claim but a friendly admonition against any psychological attempt to conceptually arrive at some ultimate nature of things. In the end, when the teaching has done its job in helping our practice, it should be abandoned just as we abandon the clothes that we have outgrown.

[92] The Mahayana tradition is primarily focused on emptiness, while the Vajrayana tradition on interdependence or, more precisely, on Buddha-nature. For the latter see Arya Maitreya and Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (2007).

4.3.1.4 Nirvāṇa is beyond concepts

The fourth seal states that liberation or nirvāṇa is beyond the reach of concepts. It can also be stated as nirvāṇa is beyond extremes. But what is nirvāṇa?

Traditionally, this term is used to denote the *state* of mind of an enlightened being, that is, of one who has *achieved* liberation through the practice of Dharma or the Buddha's teaching. However, we should be careful not to misunderstand this *achievement*. The practice of Buddhadharma has nothing to do with gaining anything. It is actually all about losing, in more ways than can now be described. Primarily, however, it is about losing ignorance, greed and hatred. In Adyashanti's words:

> "Enlightenment is a destructive process. It has nothing to do with becoming better or being happier. Enlightenment is the crumbling away of untruth. It's seeing through the facade of pretense. It's the complete eradication of everything we imagined to be true."[93]

To put it more simply, enlightenment is the complete realisation of emptiness. That is why it is beyond all conceptualisation and all extremes. It is not exactly the achievement of anything, although one does indeed arrive at deep and unconditional peace, happiness and love. This arrival, however, is only the uncovering of what was here all along. That is also why enlightenment is not some particular state of mind but rather a wise and healthy relationship with any and all states of mind. As the late Jesuit priest Anthony de Mello once described it: "Enlightenment is absolute cooperation with the inevitable."[94]

By understanding these points more and more, the task of the fourth seal slowly becomes clear. It is to remind us that every time we get attached to ideas of an actually

[93] Adyashanti (2010, pp. 136).
[94] Quoted in Adyashanti (2010, pp. 169).

existing spiritual path, enlightenment, meditation or bliss, we have simply got lost in our own projections all over again.[95]

For now, however, for all of us who are still in need of dualistic ideas of a problem, solution and result, the idea of nirvāṇa rightfully shines as a beacon of hope; a wise goal that we would all do well to work towards.

4.3.2 The three yānas

While the Four seals of existence represent the defining teachings of Buddhism, the three vehicles (skt. yāna) represent the various expressions that these teachings can take. They are the three traditions of Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna or the Small, Great and Diamond Vehicle of the Buddha's teachings, respectively. The following two paragraphs on the three yānas are adapted from Pažanin (2009, pp. 50-1).

The three traditions of Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna differ according to the methods used to train the mind, which is primarily the consequence of different people having different abilities and inclinations. However, because the three traditions can differ so much that they can sometimes seem as if they are in opposition to each other, Westerners sometimes believe that there is no connection between them but that, as time went by, there developed many separate Buddhisms. In this vein, for example, the Theravāda school of Buddhism or the *school of the elders*, has become known as the *original or southern Buddhism*; the Mahāyāna school as the *northern Buddhism*; and the Vajrayāna school, which existed mainly in Tibet, as *lamaism*.[96] Such views, however, are misguided and rather unfair towards Buddhism. To this day, unfortunately, there are many orientalist scholars who believe that

[95] Pažanin (2009, pp. 49-50).

[96] People sometimes conflate the terms Theravāda and Hīnayāna, however, this is a mistake. The former is a proper school of Buddhism, one of the 18 schools that practice the Hīnayāna, while the later is a term denoting a practice tradition within Buddhism whose goal is personal liberation. Similarly, one should distinguish between the Buddhist traditions of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, which primarily denote two practice traditions with two different goals, from the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools which embody each of these traditions, respectively.

lamaism is but "a degenerate form of Buddhism which has no connection to the Indian original."[97]

This could not be further from the truth. In reality, Tibetan Buddhists pride themselves with having preserved the authentic teachings of their Indian teachers in a clear, undiluted form for more than a thousand years. These teachings must be transmitted personally from master to disciple so that if there is only one generation in which a direct transmission did not happen, the whole lineage would be considered forever lost. What is more, Tibetan Buddhism incorporates all three traditions of Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, so that Tibetans have always understood that these are not three separate traditions but actually three sequential methodologies that train the practitioner through ever subtler methods and thus provide insight into ever subtler aspects of the mind. Because of this, one cannot just skip Hīnayāna and start with Mahāyāna or skip Mahāyāna and go straight to Vajrayāna. In attempting to do so, one will completely miss the point of Dharma teachings and be unable to advance on the spiritual path. Therefore, the movement from Hīnayāna to Mahāyāna to Vajrayāna should be understood as a logical and natural progression in Dharma practice. In this spirit then, let us comment shortly and in sequence on each of the three yānas.

Hīnayāna or, as it is known in Tibet, the foundational vehicle of Buddhism is an expression of Dharma best suited for beginning practitioners. It is a practice tradition whose final goal is personal liberation. It is often conflated with Theravāda or the *school of the elders* although to do so is a mistake. Hīnayāna is a practice tradition, whereas Theravāda is a proper school within this practice tradition. To be precise, it is only one of the minor schools among the 18 ones that pertain to the Hīnayāna tradition.[98] Within Tibetan Buddhism, the principal aim of one practicing the Hīnayāna teachings is to achieve and stabilise renunciation (skt. naiṣkramya or nirveda) which is the inner abandonment of worldly concerns and a

[97] Pažanin (2009, pp. 51).
[98] Pažanin (2009, pp. 55).

spontaneous wish to get enlightened for one's personal gain. The principal motivation behind this being fear of suffering or dukkha. Once this is done, one is finally ready to fully engage with the very same teachings in a subtler form, this time in the Mahāyāna fashion.

Mahāyāna or the Great Vehicle of Buddhism is an expression of Dharma best suited for middling and advanced practitioners. It is a practice tradition whose final goal is to liberate not just oneself but also all other sentient beings. In this regard, since it shares the same goal, the Vajrayāna tradition is considered a part of Mahāyāna. However, at least within Tibetan Buddhism, they differ with regard to their principal aim of practice and with regard to motivation. The principal aim of one practicing the Mahāyāna teachings is to achieve and stabilise bodhicitta or the *mind of enlightenment.* Bodhicitta is difficult to define but may be understood as a natural development of renunciation. The more one sees what brings them suffering and gradually stops with all those actions that lead to it, the more it becomes evident that others are suffering in the same way. Since one of those actions that lead to suffering is aversion, it slowly gives way to its opposite, that is, to love and compassion. Having achieved love and compassion for oneself thus naturally leads to developing love and compassion for others. However, this is still not bodhicitta. Only when such love and compassion are based in the insight of emptiness can bodhicitta arise. In short then, bodhicitta is a spontaneous wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, however one that is based in the insight of emptiness. Logically then, the main motivation behind Mahāyāna practice is the fear of others' suffering. Someone with such a strong wish, however, would surely appreciate the possibility of accelerating the whole process of practice so that they can help others promptly. For practitioners with this level of motivation, the Buddha has taught the third and most advanced expression of Dharma – the Vajrayāna.

Vajrayāna or the Diamond Vehicle of Buddhism is an expression of Dharma best suited for advanced practitioners. Just like Mahāyāna, the final goal of this practice tradition

is to liberate all sentient beings. However, unlike in Mahāyāna, a practitioner of Vajrayāna ventures deeper into the mind to those levels that we in the West would call the subconscious. In order to allow communication with such deep aspects of one's psyche, which the intellect cannot penetrate, the Vajrayāna uses additional techniques such as visualisations, chanting, various postures and movements and tools such as "archetypal symbols, colours, feelings, breathing techniques, sounds, energy vibrations"[99] and so on. The principal aim of one practicing the Vajrayāna teachings is to achieve and stabilise pure perception of reality. Even harder to describe than bodhicitta, pure perception might be defined as one's perception cleared of all ignorance, attachment and aversion. It is said that one who has actualised pure perception sees everything as utterly pure and perfect. In practice, it represents a natural progression from bodhicitta whereby its aim can only be achieved if one also achieves pure perception because only when one is not deluded by the mind's projections are they fully able to help sentient beings. Logically, the motivation behind Vajrayāna practice then is fear of being deluded. In addition to this, a crucial point for understanding Vajrayāna is that, unlike Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, the Vajrayāna is not a causal vehicle but a resultant vehicle of Buddhism. The meaning behind this is the following. A causal vehicle operates on the principle of generating specific causes to attain specific results. A resultant vehicle such as the Vajrayāna, however, operates on the principle that things are already as the final result would testify. That is why all Vajrayāna practices already imply that reality is, has always been and will always be pure and perfect. The realisation stemming from Vajrayāna practice is thus similar to the realisation of a film character who, after finally realising that it is all just a film, sees that there was never anything to worry about; things have actually been completely alright from the very start. In order for this insight to help us, however, we need to practice.

[99] Pažanin (2009, pp. 189).

In this spirit, let us proceed then to the teachings of the foundational vehicle of Buddhism, the Hīnayāna tradition.

4.3.3 The four noble truths

The four noble truths are one of the Buddha's most famous upāyas or skilful means. They are a logical teaching about suffering and how to end it and, although they are an essential teaching of the Hīnayāna, they form a basis for all Buddhist practice. The four noble truths can be shortly described as follows:

1) There is suffering.

2) Suffering has a cause.

3) If the cause of suffering is removed, there will be no more suffering.

4) There is a path that can end suffering.

Although Buddhists talk a lot about suffering, it should be understood that this is not because they are pessimists but because they are simply positing a diagnosis for an illness that has been plaguing us since time immemorial. The reason why they talk so much about it then is that they understand that the only way to end suffering is to first accept that it is here and then slowly work to unravel it. As Pažanin (2009, pp. 59) says, we have to be realistic if we are to solve any problem that we are facing. With this in mind, we can proceed.

The names of the following sub-chapters will be given in the Pāli language and will correspond to each of the noble truths, respectively.

4.3.3.1 Dukkha

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering (skt. duḥkha). The meaning of this term, however, includes not only the common forms of physical and mental suffering but also our lasting experience of insecurity and dissatisfaction.

The traditional account introduces suffering as follows: birth is suffering; sickness is suffering; old age is suffering; death is suffering; having what we do not want and not having what we want is suffering; being with whom we do not want to be and not being with whom we want to be is suffering. Aside from the obvious reasons, birth is suffering because it is the basis of all consequent suffering in life; sickness and old age are suffering because they transform the experience of life into great frustration and death is suffering because it represents the loss of all that we value, especially control, and is an encounter with the utter unknown.[100] Additionally, as Buddha says and as we have already discussed throughout this thesis, attachment and aversion to things, situations and people are suffering. In short, ignorance and any action of body, speech or mind stemming from ignorance are suffering.

The traditional account of suffering also classifies it in three categories: 1) suffering based on suffering; 2) suffering of change and 3) all-pervasive suffering. The following explanation is adapted from Pažanin (2009, pp. 62-3).

The first, suffering based on suffering, refers to all the common forms of physical and mental pain as well as to birth, old age, sickness and death. According to Buddhists, even rebirth falls within this category since it is the basis for all future sufferings.

The second, suffering of change, refers to the suffering experienced once circumstances change from pleasant to unpleasant, whether these circumstances are internal states of mind or outer situations.

The third, all-pervasive suffering, refers to an aspect of suffering that we may not be conscious of but that is still there throughout every moment of our lives. It is our ignorance as well as the attachment and aversion that stem from it. Together they form and continually reinforce a mode of perception that results in frustration in the present and negative consequences in the future.

[100] Pažanin (2009, pp. 59-60).

All in all, the first noble truth may seem deeply discouraging, however, it is not. In reality, it is extremely motivating. We are terribly afraid of suffering and what the first noble truth reveals is that we are neck-deep in it. This should lead to us to prompt and decisive action for if we deny the problem, it will not stop it from hurting us all the same. In fact, it will only make it worse. This is why we should work tirelessly to discover what the cause of this problem is.

4.3.3.2 Samudaya

The second noble truth is the truth of the origin (skt. samudaya) of suffering. In short, the cause or origin of suffering is desire (skt. tṛṣṇā) based in ignorance.

When it comes from ignorance, desire manifests as attachment and aversion to both inner and outer circumstances. Specifically, it manifests as the belief that things *should* be different than how they are. This is how we start our battle with the inevitable facts of life; a battle that results solely in suffering.

In order to end suffering then, we should eliminate this desire. However, although this point is rather straightforward, it has been frequently misunderstood to mean that one should desire not to desire or, simply, that one should cease all desire. If it were so, it would be an insoluble contradiction. Moreover, how would we act without any motivation? The solution lies in the understanding that only desires based in ignorance result in suffering and thus only those are to be eliminated. In contrast, genuine desires to help others or to become enlightened are strongly encouraged by Buddhist teachers as some of the most beneficial motivations that one can have.[101]

The problem, therefore, does not lie in desire itself, which is only a neutral instrument in the hands of our perception, but in the ignorance which obscures our perception. The

[101] See Pažanin (2009, pp. 64).

primary cause of suffering then is ignorance of our true nature because of which we develop the belief of an independent and permanent *me* along with a plethora of identifications with what is *mine*. It is this attachment to *me* and *mine* which actually causes suffering. Notice, however, that the problem is *attachment* to *me* and *mine* and not the ideas of *me* and *mine* themselves. People who misunderstand this point often believe that to end suffering they should eliminate the *me* or ego. However, only people with the belief of an independent and permanent ego would desire to destroy it. Buddhism, on the other hand, teaches that the ideas (and feelings) of *me* and *mine* are completely fine as long as we see them for what they really are – just ideas in our minds. It is when we reify these ideas that problems arise. After all, according to Buddhism, it is not that the ego does not exist but only that it does not exist as an independent and permanent entity.

So long as we experience ourselves as independent and permanent, we will experience the rest of the world in this way as well. However, since both we and the world are compounded and impermanent, everything we do with such a perception will result in suffering.[102]

4.3.3.3 Nirodha

The third noble truth is the truth of the cessation (skt. nirodha) of suffering. It is a common-sense statement that if the cause of suffering is eliminated, there will be no more suffering. In other words, the third noble truth says that nirvāṇa is possible.

Traditionally, the term nirvāṇa is used to refer to the complete extinguishing or eradication of the three poisons (skt. kleśa) of ignorance, greed and hate. As Pažanin (2009, pp. 65) comments, "nirvāṇa is best to be understood as a state of complete freedom from any form of suffering whatsoever whose quality transcends the ability of words to describe it."

[102] See Pažanin (2009, pp. 64).

4.3.3.4 Magga

The fourth noble truth is the truth of the path (skt. marga) that leads to liberation from suffering. In other words, there is a method which one can use to attain nirvāṇa. This method, which implies rigorous mind training, is called the Noble Eightfold Path. It consists of eight mutually supporting elements: right view, right motivation, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

These elements are split in the three categories of morality (skt. śīla), meditation (skt. samādhi) and wisdom (skt. prajñā). The category of morality consists of right speech, right action, right livelihood and right effort. Practicing these helps our practice of meditation, which consists of right mindfulness and right concentration. Practicing meditation then helps our practice of wisdom since it leads to various insights that establish right view and right motivation. These, in turn, help our practice of morality and of meditation. Therefore, only by practicing all three of these categories will our practice be able to yield results.[103] The following is a short elaboration of each of the eight elements of the path adapted from Pažanin (2009, pp 65-8):

Right view

In no particular order, we can start with right view.[104] It refers to both the intellectual and the internalised view of how things really are. It short, it aims at an intimate realisation of the Four seals of existence[105], the Four noble truths, as well as the teachings on karma, rebirth and other Buddhist teachings.

Right motivation

[103] See Pažanin (2009, pp. 65-6).
[104] See chapter 4.3.0 The fundamentals.
[105] The Hīnayāna teachings actually contain only three seals – impermanence, non-self and nirvāṇa. However, since I am presenting them from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism, whose primary view is Mahayana, I have opted to include all four seals even here.

Out of a right view of things stems right motivation. It primarily refers to a motivation which does not arise from ignorance, greed or hate but it can also refer to certain aspects of such a motivation, for example, to a genuine renunciation from worldly concerns.

Right speech

One who has right motivation will also have right speech. It is speech which does not stem from the three poisons of ignorance, greed and hate. However, even though we may not yet have a right view or right motivation, we should nonetheless cultivate a truthful, necessary and kind speech.

Right action

Connected to this is right action. According to Buddhism, since all suffering is a result of actions of body, speech or mind stemming from ignorance, the first thing to do is to start modifying our behaviour in accord with the teachings. We should, therefore, avoid negative actions such as killing, stealing, adultery, lying, harsh speech, divisive speech, idle talk, jealousy, hate and wrong views, because they lead to suffering.[106] What is suggested instead is to cultivate their opposites.

Right livelihood

Right action in general also refers to one's job and other major aspects of one's life. In this context, it can be called right livelihood. Buddhists who intend to practice the Dharma, therefore, avoid doing jobs which, directly or indirectly, lead to either one's own or other people's suffering. This includes jobs like a butcher, seller of alcohol or other intoxicants, military jobs and so on.[107] It is thus preferable for practitioners to have jobs which promote people's physical and mental wellbeing.

Right effort

[106] Pažanin (2009, pp. 67).
[107] Pažanin (2009, pp. 67).

In order to practice properly, one has to be able to overcome the power of old, harmful habits. That is the point of the teaching of right effort. Traditionally, there are four types of right effort: 1) effort to abandon the negative states of mind that we already have; 2) effort to avoid developing negative states of mind that are not active yet; 3) effort to develop the positive states of mind that we do not yet have and 4) effort to further develop those positive state of mind that we already possess.[108]

Right mindfulness

In order to practice one also has to be able to notice things. Because of that, the practitioner needs to develop right mindfulness, that is, the ability of the mind to notice one's surroundings, one's body and its behaviour as well as one's mind and its behaviour. The most salient, however is the latter. In this regard, right mindfulness primarily refers to the ability to notice one's states of mind and reactive patterns. In this way, one gradually disrupts the automatism of one's reactions to inner and outer stimuli and begins to have more control over one's life.

Right concentration

However, the ability of the mind to notice things can only go so far without the development of right concentration. The practice involves choosing an object of meditation and then keeping attention concentrated on that object for prolonged, uninterrupted periods of time. Since this is the opposite of how our attention ordinarily functions, namely, since it continually jumps from object to object, right concentration is difficult but not impossible to develop. Once one has this ability, one is able to penetrate much deeper into the nature of things and of the mind, thus gaining valuable insights which are beyond the reach of an untrained mind.

[108] Pažanin (2009, pp. 67).

4.3.4 Karma

Another teaching of the Hīnayāna, one that is as important for complete beginners as it is for practitioners of the highest Buddhist teachings such as Mahamudra and Dzogchen, is karma. Without understanding karma it is impossible to develop right view. That is why it is an essential teaching without which one cannot advance on the spiritual path.

In recent decades, the teaching of karma has become so widespread that it has entered popular culture, albeit in a completely distorted form. Sometimes people even joke about it as the popular notion of it is that one will receive some punishment from life because one has done something immoral, the most probable punishment being that one will experience the same negative deed one has performed on another. This notion, however, is completely wrong and has nothing to do with karma.

The real meaning of karma is not something to joke about. In fact, of all the Hīnayāna teachings, this is the scariest of them all. While the first and second noble truths talk about suffering and its causes, karma elaborates the details of how and why we will suffer. One who understands it and starts to see it in action will gradually develop more and more awareness of all actions of body, speech and mind as well as an acute awareness of their inevitable effects. As time goes on, one will become increasingly afraid of and disgusted with all those actions that lead to suffering and will start abandoning them. This shift in one's motivation, especially with regard to worldly concerns, is called renunciation and represents the primary aim of Hīnayāna teachings.[109] At this point in practice one will spontaneously look for refuge in the Dharma and will no longer see karma as an enemy but as an invaluable ally that can help one advance on the path of virtue. To understand why, however, we need to elaborate what karma means.

[109] In this context it means the primary aim from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism.

In essence, karma is about causality. We have all heard of the law of cause and effect. It is a fundamental principle that we use in science but also in everyday life in order to understand how the world works. Basically, it states that once certain causes have been created, certain effects will necessarily be produced. We could pray and beg for this not to happen, but it would happen nonetheless. Therefore, if there are certain effects in our life that we would want to avoid, the only way to do so is to find out and eliminate their causes. However, if we are not aware of the various causal patterns that govern our life, we will be left at the mercy of the elements, which are much harsher than our comfort zones would make us believe. This is where the teaching of karma comes to our aid. The following paragraphs about karma are either adapted or cited from Pažanin (2009, pp. 69-74).

As a word, *karma* means action or deed. It has nothing to do with notions of deserving or not deserving, punishment or praise. It is simply a teaching about the causes and effects of the actions that we perform. Specifically, all our actions of body, speech and mind are seen as causes and all our experiences as their effects. In this sense, karma is an exploration of the ethical consequences of the universal law of cause and effect. It teaches about the beneficial consequences of virtuous actions and, in contrast, about the devastating consequences of non-virtuous actions. It is clear then why everyone's karma is completely unique. Depending on how we acted in the past, we will experience consequences in the present.

These can manifest as both outer and inner circumstances. When it comes to outer ones, karma can manifest as favourable or unfavourable life situations, we may be born into a stable family or into an unhappy one, we may be rich or poor, in good health or not. Nevertheless, a much more important aspect of karma is the inner one. In this regard, karma is our character, a "particular psychological profile which shapes our perception of the world"[110]. Since it shapes how we see the world it also represents a tendency for how we will

[110] Pažanin (2009, pp. 69).

react to both inner and outer circumstances as they arise. And it is precisely these reactions or, more precisely, the quality of the motivation (skt. saṃkalpa) behind them that is the primary meaning of karma. This motivation can be positive, negative or neutral. Positive motivation, which leads to positive effects, can be characterised as a genuine "wish to do something which lessens suffering"[111]. Negative motivation, which leads to negative effects, are intentions characterised by selfishness, attachment and aversion. Neutral motivation, which leads to neutral effects, are states of mind such as indifference and dullness.

In this inner context, karma can refer to either one of its three components. It may mean an "action, its consequences or the karmic seeds which actions plant in our minds from the moment when these actions have been done until the moment when their consequences have ripened"[112]. The first two are pretty straightforward concepts but the latter needs some elucidation. First of all, it should be pointed out that as long as our perception is obscured by fundamental ignorance, we will react to circumstances with attachment and aversion and, as a result, we will generate karmic seeds (skt. karma bija) with every single action that we perform. These seeds are then stored in what Buddhists call the storehouse consciousness (skt. ālāyavijñāna). Each of them carries with it the information or *vibration* of how we reacted in connection with some circumstance. This *vibration* is primarily shaped by the quality of our motivation behind this reaction, which can be any type and intensity of attachment and/or aversion.[113] Once we encounter circumstances that have a similar *vibration* to that of our karmic seeds, these until then dormant seeds activate and we inevitably experience the results which are *in resonance* with the characteristics of the previously performed action. If we

[111] Pažanin (2009, pp. 71).
[112] Pažanin (2009, pp. 70).
[113] A way to describe this whole process without using the concepts of karmic seeds and of the storehouse consciousness is to fully utilise metaphors of vibration. Imagine that the mind itself has a form and that this form is a complex vibration. It is present in its entirety in every moment although only one of its aspects is active in every moment. This complex vibration changes shape through time. Its shape in the present was determined by how we (re)acted to circumstances from forever up until now. Every moment, therefore, as we (re)act to circumstances, we slightly change this complex vibration depending on how we (re)act. Primarily, this refers to the quality of motivation with which we (re)act. The complex vibration is also our character, our perception and the tendency we have for (re)acting in the future. It is the basis for our relationship with circumstances.

somehow manage not to react with attachment or aversion to this newly arisen situation, we become free of the future consequences of this particular karma. However, if we react in the same old way, the same karma is generated or, if we react in a worse way than before, a worse karma is generated.

For now, our reactions are firmly based on an innocent but destructive ignorance, which leads to reacting with attachment and aversion, jealousy, pride and so on. In this way, since there is no escaping the law of cause and effect, we condemn ourselves to, sooner or later, encounter the same kind of hurtful experiences all over again. This is because we do not realise that with every single action of body, speech and mind that we perform we are actually shaping our character and thus also our perception and reactive tendencies. To be more precise, our character is none other than the collection of our habits or reactive patterns. When these are performed, they strengthen the perception from which they arose. Our perception, in turn, shapes how we see things and, therefore, how we will react in the future. This is the meaning behind the definition of karma as our character and our perception.

People with different karmas will see the same situation in different ways. Pažanin (2009, pp. 71) offers the example of a road accident. The families of the directly involved in the accident will see the event as a tragedy; journalists will see the same event as a good opportunity for writing a news article and the police and doctors will see it as a situation to be professionally handled. Another, more everyday example might be the experience of a sunny day. A joyful person will enjoy the beautiful occasion, while an angry person will see it as an additional cause to be angry, because they are not able to enjoy it in the first place. Whatever it may be, how we perceive and, therefore, how we react to circumstances, we will shape how we feel and what situations we will encounter in the future.

We should also understand that every circumstance which we identify with will become something that we are either going to be attached to or will want to avoid. In this

sense, depending on what we identify with, we can distinguish individual but also group karma. Examples of the latter are belonging to a certain family, nationality, sports club, subculture, sexual minority and so on. As long as we identify with a certain group we will also share in the effects of that group's karma, whether it is positive or negative.

It is, in fact, impossible to experience different circumstances until we change our perception and our habits. As our mind is, so our life will be. This is because "every set of conditions attracts, like a magnet, another set of similar conditions".[114] We may get angry at circumstances, but we should realise that the real enemy is our own deluded mind because of which we continue to end up in these hurtful situations. It is hard to accept the idea that we are, after all, completely responsible for every single experience that we ever have, but it is so nevertheless. All people and situations that we encounter are, in a sense, only the messengers of our own karmic debts. If we want change, we should not resent people and situations that are mere messengers but should work on developing a healthier way of interacting with life.

To sum up then, karma means that the hedonic nature of our experience is the inevitable and sole result of our actions, primarily of the quality of their motivation. It is a subset of the universal law of cause and effect observed in its ethical dimension. The law of karma states that all actions of body, speech or mind represent the sole causes and all experiences or rather, their hedonic nature, represent their inevitable effects. Every person's karma is thus unique and, depending on what one is identified with, it can be distinguished as individual or group karma. The quality of the effects of karma depends directly on the quality of the motivation behind our actions. In this regard, they can be positive, negative or neutral. Karma is generated as long as our minds are obscured by fundamental ignorance and thus

[114] Pažanin (2009, pp. 72). There are arguments for this, of course. Basically, since mind and body are, ultimately, both part of the same interdependent world, they necessarily harmonise, that is, are always consistent with each other. By changing the mind, therefore, we also necessarily change the circumstances in which it can find itself. The more the mind's experiences depend on circumstances, the stronger this effect will be. Through Dharma practice, however, this dependency becomes lesser. At higher levels of practice, it becomes increasingly subtle until, at enlightenment, a person becomes free from having to experience specific circumstances.

react to circumstances with attachment and aversion. Every time we (re)act we *shape* our mind in accord with that reaction as we strengthen such habits and the perceptive framework from which they arose. This, in turn, shapes the way we see life and represents a tendency for how we will react in the future. Karma is thus the reason why the same situation can be perceived differently by different people as well as the reason why we will end up in specific circumstances. The *shape* of our mind is what *remembers* how we reacted to circumstances from forever up until the present. Since the mind and the world are actually part of one and the same interdependent reality, their causal patterns harmonise meaning that a certain karma and certain situations will attract each other like magnets. This is how positive motivations, which lead to pleasant feelings, will also lead to pleasant circumstances and how negative motivations, which lead to unpleasant feelings, will also lead to unpleasant circumstances. While positive motivations here are characterised by a wish to alleviate suffering, negative ones are defined as intentions arising from ignorance, attachment and aversion. However, although generating positive karma is much better than generating negative karma, in the end, positive karma, too, has to be abandoned since it promotes attachment to pleasant circumstances and, therefore, leads to suffering. To become fully free from karma, then, one needs to become enlightened. In other words, as long as there is karma there will be suffering. Therefore, as long as there is karma there should be responsibility. It may be hard to accept that we are ultimately responsible for every single experience that we have but that is the prerequisite of working towards real freedom. This is because, whether we like it or not, as our mind is, so our life will be too.

In conclusion, Pažanin (2009, pp.73) writes about the four main characteristics of the law of karma:

1) All actions performed bring equivalent effects

Just as an orange cannot grow from the seed of an apple, so a positive effect cannot result from a negative deed and vice versa. If the action was *coloured* with a negative motivation, the effect will likewise be negative.

2) The effects of actions come back increased

We may not be aware of it but even our smallest actions have great effects, which is especially visible over longer periods of time. This is akin to a single spark which can burn down an entire forest or a single world that can save a life. The karmic effects of our actions, therefore, will hold within them all the energy of their positive or negative consequences.

3) If an action was not performed, its effects cannot appear

This explains why certain people survive catastrophes, wars, accidents and why other people do not or why certain people win at lottery while others do not.

4) Every action, sooner or later, inevitably produces its effect

Karmic seeds may stay dormant for thousands or millions of years but as soon as circumstances are right, they will inevitably produce their effects. There is simply no escaping karma, even though we may not feel its effects in the present lifetime.

4.3.5 Rebirth

Apart from karma, Buddhists think that rebirth (skt. punar bhāva) or, as it is more popularly known, reincarnation is another essential feature of life without which one cannot understand and practice Dharma properly.

The thesis of rebirth simply states that mind streams adopt other bodies after they have finished with the present one. In other words, that just as it already happened that we suddenly

woke up once when we were born, it can happen again that we suddenly wake up when we are reborn.

This may sound very controversial in our materialistic worldviews since it seems we cannot prove this scientifically. However, there are ways to argument for it. One of these is the following.

According to what Buddhists say about rebirth, it seems that the statement which needs to be defended is that mind neither begins at birth nor ceases at death. Under the materialistic worldview, the mind is an end result of complex configurations of matter, namely of an embodied brain and nervous system. However, if we think about it, as a human being develops from being food in the mother's mouth to being a fetus and later a newborn baby, at what point exactly did mind arise? It seems that there was a point in which there was only matter, for example, food in the mother's stomach, and some other point at which this matter gave rise to mind. The same process can be observed in evolution of life at large. At what point did interstellar dust and gas give birth to mind? No matter how complex the configuration of physical substances, they are still only physical. Therefore, whichever point we choose and say is the one at which mind arose represents a radical jump from materiality to mentality and nature does not make such jumps.[115] It seems clear then that a fully materialistic model cannot explain our experience of life.

This is because the mind is simply not material.[116] Any human being can ascertain to this by virtue of being a mind possessor. Like any other thing in this universe the mind can only change form but cannot be created or destroyed. To say that mind arose from matter would be akin to saying that something can arise out of nothing. Therefore, mind was not

[115] See Strawson (2016).

[116] If we were to say that mind is material we would have to say that matter has awareness as its intrinsic nature which would be the same as saying that matter is mental or, in other words, the same as admitting ontological idealism. Note, however, that the most comprehensive Buddhist philosophy – the Vajrayana - does not hold an ontological position of dualism or of simple idealism but a more complex view which, however, for the sake of simplicity has been avoided in this dissertation. This complex view still supports rebirth and avoids the problems of various dualisms as well as those of simple monisms.

created at birth or some similar occasion. Likewise, to say that mind disappears at death is akin to saying that something can turn into nothing. On the basis of this, we can then say that mind does not cease to exist at death. In short then, mind neither begins at birth nor ceases at death.

As Pažanin (2009, pp. 75) says:

> "Buddhists reject the view which holds that mind, that is, consciousness is a mere consequence of interacting neurons in the brain. For them, the mind is a *material basis* needed for the functioning of consciousness on the human or animal level, but not its *source*."

According to Buddhist psychology, therefore, the mind is made of a stream of individual moments of consciousness (skt. citta). Each of these moments of consciousness is shaped by the previous moment and, in turn, shapes the next one. This causal chain explains how information is transferred from the past to the present. The shape of the mind stream in terms of karma is what determines which circumstances this mind stream will engage in. Part of these circumstances is the body that the mind stream uses. At death, when the body dissolves, the mind stream continues. If it is not enlightened, because of attachment and aversion, it has residual energies (unspent karma) which need to be spent and so it requires a rebirth to do that. According to this mind stream's karma, a body and family with a compatible karmic potential are found and a new rebirth takes place. This is why, in Buddhism, it is said that children choose their parents and not the other way round.

Certain commentators have argued that the teaching of rebirth clashes with the teaching of emptiness, according to which, ultimately, there are no independently existing entities. However, this is a misunderstanding. Buddhist psychology does not assert the mind stream or any of its moments to be ultimately independent phenomena. On the other hand, their independence is asserted on the relative level, rather than the ultimate. This is the same

kind of independence that a waterfall has in contrast to another waterfall, even though both are ultimately compounded and empty of self-existence. In other words, there is no *soul* migrating from body to body but only a stream of mental moments, which is characterised by its individual karma but which has no permanent, unchangeable essence. As Pažanin (2009, pp. 76) says: "While there are people who remember past lives, in reality the *person* from that past life, who experienced those memories, is gone."

4.3.6 Samsāra

When discussing rebirth, Buddhists always associate this teaching with that of samsāra or *the wheel of life and death*. The teaching of samsāra illustrates what existence is like for sentient beings caught in the clutches of delusion and suffering and refers to *cyclic existence propelled by karma* or, in other words, propelled by the poisons[117] of ignorance, attachment and aversion. It is a description of how sentient beings incarnate again and again, spending life after life caught up in their delusions, never realising the truth and endlessly suffering because of that. This is the reason why the point of Dharma teachings, at least in Hīnayāna, is to liberate oneself from karma; because it is the only way to free oneself from the horror of samsāra. However, before we can truly wish to be free from it, we first need to familiarise ourselves with it.

Buddhism describes samsāra in great detail and classifies it in various ways. The most famous type of classification is known as the *six realms*. These represent the six major types of situations in which sentient beings can take rebirth depending on their karma. They are the hell realms and the realms of the hungry spirits, animals, human beings, demigods and gods. These six are also classified according to (un)pleasantness as the lower and higher realms of

[117] Buddhist teachings about the mental poisons can be short, of medium length or longer. The short version speaks of the three poisons of ignorance, attachment and aversion; the medium version expands this with jealousy and pride; while the longer version speaks about these five and many other derivative and subtler mental poisons.

samsāra. The first three mentioned here are the lower, while the latter three are the higher realms. Aside from these, Tibetan Buddhism also describes the intermediate state of *bardo* where mind streams linger after death until their next birth.

While these descriptions may be fascinating, they may sound very strange to the modern reader. This is why it should be noted that these six realms are first and foremost descriptions of the six major types of mind states that sentient beings can get caught up in. Additionally, the bardo after death is also primarily a description of one's state of mind after the loss of a gross physical body, which is said to be similar to that in the state of dreaming.

However, even if the six realms refer primarily to states of mind, we should remember that suffering and happiness depend upon them and nothing else. In this respect, we should never forget that the law of karma is always at work. In fact, the whole of samsāra and every minute aspect of it are a product of karma. In this context, the consequences of karma can be classified into three categories: 1) throwing or projecting karma; 2) the consequence identical to the cause; and 3) the consequence of one's place of residence. Their descriptions are adapted from Pažanin (2009, pp. 77-88):

1) Throwing or projecting karma

As we live and react to circumstances we slowly shape ourselves into a certain character with a certain perception and reactive tendencies. In Buddhist terms, we slowly shape our karma. By the time of death, our karmic tendencies have become quite strong in certain aspects and weaker in others. The dominant karma at the time of death, which throws or projects us into the bardo and then into a new life, is called the throwing or projecting karma. It is its strong inertia which decides whether we are going into a pleasant or a rather unpleasant type of situation.[118] That is why it is very important to have a good death.

[118] The term situation primarily refers to mind states since one who is desperate and anxious will be so even in the nicest of material situations and, vice versa, one who is happy will remain so even in tough material conditions. This is not to say, however, that one's mind states do not determine the material situation in which one can be born, but just that they do not define it as linearly as we would assume at first.

However, there is no trick for or shortcut to a good death; one simply needs to practice Dharma as much and as best as one can while one is still alive.

2) The consequence identical to the cause

This consequence of karma can be distinguished, on the one hand, as reactive tendencies identical to the cause and, on the other, as experiences identical to the cause.

When it comes to reactive tendencies identical to the cause, this means that our habits in this life will be shaped by the karma from previous lives, especially the one right before the present life. Pažanin (2009, pp. 85) explains it in the following way. Someone who has a tendency to kill, even though she might have already suffered all the consequences of the karma generated from killing in the previous life, she will still retain a habit of violence even in this life. In contrast, someone who has behaved compassionately will have this kind of tendency even now although they might have already experienced all the beneficial consequences of these acts in the previous life. This explains why some even very young children have a strong urge to hurt animals and other children, while some others will start crying for the lice that their mother is removing from their hair. It also explains why some very young children are incredibly talented, for instance, for playing the piano, speaking a certain language and so on.

The second consequence identical to the cause are experiences identical to the cause. This means that depending on the quality of our actions in the past, we will experience karmically equivalent consequences in the present. Pažanin (2009, pp. 86) lists many examples, some of which are the following. The consequences of killing are a short life, violent death or bad health in this life. The consequences of stealing are poverty or, if we are rich, vulnerability to theft. Those of lying are that people will tend not to trust us, even when we speak the truth; of divisive speech that we will have a hard time truly connecting with

others; of greed that we will find it hard to fulfil our desires; of ill will that we will be in fear and panic; and of wrong views that we will find it hard to develop wisdom.

3) The consequence of one's place of residence

Karma not only shapes our future states of mind but also attracts those circumstances in which these states of mind can be realised. Therefore, even the place where one is born and resides is seen as a direct consequence of the quality of our previous actions and motivations.

Depending on the throwing or projecting karma and on other karmic seeds we may be reborn in various places. If we confine our examples to planet Earth and life as we know it, we can end up in the following way. If the dominant karma is negative, we may be born in a war zone in Syria or as a slave in Niger. If our karma is much more positive, we may be born in California as the child of rich parents in a stable, happy family. However, if our karma is really excellent, we may be born close to authentic Dharma masters and have the opportunity to encounter the teachings and start spiritual practice from a very young age.

Further examples are given by Pažanin (2009, pp.86-7). Some of them are the following. Sentient beings that have a tendency to kill are born in dangerous and materially poor environments; those that have a tendency to steal in deserts or other places where there is such a need; those that lie in places where no one can be trusted; those with ill will in zones of war, sickness and conflict; those with wrong views in places bereft of any precious things whether of material things or cultural and spiritual values.

From these and other examples it is clear that any being wishing to improve one's situation will have to work on their habits. Specifically, in order to improve one's situation within samsāra, one needs to accumulate *merit* (skt. punya). The concept of merit is quite important in Tibetan Buddhism and represents a crucial practice up until the very moment of enlightenment. This is because merit is the only way to fulfil one's aspirations, whether worldly or spiritual. It is the consequence of positive actions, primarily those done with a

positive motivation, and manifests as intelligence, good health and other circumstances conducive to a happy life and to the practice of Dharma.[119]

Even though this project is selfish, Buddhists think of it as wise selfishness that will help the individual and, sooner or later, other beings as well. A wise selfish person, therefore, will do their utmost to avoid negative actions and generate positive actions, which is how she will be able to enjoy and avoid suffering, not only in this life but in future lives as well.

4.3.7 Renunciation from samsāra

However, while Buddhists accept our basic motivation of wanting happiness and seeking to avoid suffering, they point out that, no matter how nice the circumstances in samsāra, so long as one is in it, one will still be doomed to suffer. This is because circumstances are not permanent. Even if we reach the mind states and pleasant situations of the godly realms, sooner or later these will vanish as we are thrown again to suffer in the lower realms. Therefore, it is only by escaping the cycle of samsāra altogether that we can become truly happy.

As Pažanin (2009, pp. 90) explains: this is why Buddhist teachings point out that our ultimate goal must be liberation (skt. moksha), rather than true happiness (skt. sukha), because it is only via liberation that we can gain happiness. As a consequence, anyone wishing to attain liberation will have to develop a strong, genuine wish to be free not only of the unpleasant ones but of all six realms of samsāra. In other words, one has to develop a genuine wish to abandon all worldly concerns as well as all hopes of being reborn in the higher realms, dominated by states of pleasure and joy.

This kind of wish would be contradictory and forced if our belief were still that lasting happiness can be found in samsāra. Therefore, we should be wise about how to approach this

[119] Pažanin (2009, pp. 88).

task. In short, we should start to explore the true nature of samsāra, that is, explore the first and second noble truths. As our exploration deepens, we will become more and more afraid of and disgusted by all actions that lead to suffering. Proper spiritual practice, therefore, will make us feel awful; which is a natural reaction to discovering that the premises on which our life has been built so far are wrong and make us suffer. However, as this process unfolds, a new hope will begin to dawn as well. We will start to see more and more clearly that there is only one type of activity that is worth taking refuge in – the practice of Dharma. At that point, just like a sick person who thinks only of regaining her health, we will think only of how we can truly liberate ourselves from attachment, aversion and ignorance. It is this intention that Buddhists call renunciation from samsāra. When it has finally awoken in us, we will have truly entered the spiritual path and made the first step towards liberation.

4.4 Concluding suggestions for practice

Now that the theoretical foundations have been established, the following subchapter will discuss certain guidelines regarding our approach to the practice of Buddhism, especially of Hīnayāna. They are written, first and foremost, for beginners. While these guidelines do not cover the wide range of topics that pertain to this discussion, they might at least be of use by providing a sense of direction.

1) The need for proper intellectual understanding

As we have seen throughout this chapter, Buddhist teachings, although based in reasoning, can be quite counterintuitive. That is the reason why anyone approaching Buddhism, or any spiritual path, should know what they are doing. In one aspect, this means that we need to have a clear intellectual understanding of the teaching we are starting to be interested in. We should have an attitude of genuine curiosity that allows us to entertain new

ideas, while at the same time an attitude of scepticism and intellectual thoroughness which aims to discover the truth no matter what it may be or who might be proclaiming it. In this regard, the Buddha himself is known to have said that people should not just believe him, but should lead an investigation of their own to check whether or not his teachings make sense and deliver results.

2) The importance of practice

This investigation, therefore, should be intellectual but also practical. It must be intellectual because one has to make the teachings one's own. They are here to be applied intimately in one's life and the first step in this process is for them to make sense. This is why intellectual laziness is discouraged and why tough logical analysis is much preferable. The benefit of having proper intellectual understanding will be its ability to constructively inform our practice. Apart from being intellectual then, our investigation should also be practical. It should not remain an abstract philosophy that we enjoy to think about. This means that one has to test the teachings in the midst of one's own everyday life. By observing the effects then, one will get further intellectual but also intimate understanding of what the teachings are about. This is the way in which intellectual and practical investigations reinforce one another.

3) Devotion to truth

This whole process, in reality, requires the guidance of an authentic teacher because it is literally impossible to disarm all the tricks of our own ego on our own. In fact, believing that we can succeed on our own is none other than ego itself. However, in this whole process, even if we have teachers we are zealously devoted to, we must never forget that we are not children anymore and that a certain amount of responsibility and authority remains with us. In other words, our first and foremost devotion should be to truth itself. Afterwards, when one

has done a certain amount of investigation, a secondary devotion will arise, which is devotion towards the authentic teachings that lead to the discovery of truth. Additionally, after one has become more spiritually mature, a tertiary devotion can be developed, which is devotion to the authentic embodiment of the teachings, in other words, devotion to one's spiritual teachers. The numbering here is not without reason and it underscores the importance of sustained sincere practice.

4) Arrogance as an obstacle to practice

However, since this practice process is rather slow, boring and requires effort, we may start to get side-tracked from the path by our attachments. One of these is the wish to speed up the spiritual development process. Most intellectually inclined people will thus tend to approach the teachings as if they were riddles to be solved. While this is fine to a certain degree, it is not ultimately the optimal approach to spiritual teachings. The reason is that, with such a kind of approach, we will often seek to understand and practice the highest teachings at the exclusion of all others, especially the basic ones. This is a grave mistake that can cost one an incredible amount of frustration and time. Fortunately, since this mistake is caused by arrogance, its antidote is simple sincerity. If we are honest, we will see clearly that we are not as advanced as we think we are and that, at the first sign of trouble, we will still react egoistically. We should know the difference when certain teachings sound abstract to us and when they are firmly rooted in our life experience. In short, we would do well to trust the guidance of our teachers who are doing everything they can to help us. If they say that the best thing for us is to practice the most basic teachings then perhaps there is a reason why they say so. Perhaps that is indeed the fastest path to concrete spiritual results. We may investigate and get surprised by the transformative power of the most basic practices.

5) Angry at the world

Additionally, we may want to keep our practice secret since it will be more effective that way. There is no need to proclaim that we are Buddhists. Similarly, it is not advisable to try to convert others to our ideas. While the first is still a form of arrogance, the second is actually arrogance combined with anger. It is only when we see others and the world as broken and needing fixing that we act in such a way as requiring them to change in order for them to be acceptable in our eyes. This kind of perception is the perception of anger. We may want to observe and consciously avoid such practices if and when they happen as they will lead only to suffering, irrespective of what we think we will achieve. In fact, since we can only give others what we have, it would be best to practice first. Then, when compassion or enthusiasm arises, we will be in a better position to help.

6) Starting where we are

This kind of sincerity about ourselves will bring us ever closer to discovering what our real motivations are. When we are engaging in a spiritual practice we should know clearly why we are doing that. This has multiple benefits. First, we start to get intimate with the practice itself. By finding out what the practice really means to us we start to make it personal. Second, by discovering our motivations we are actually advancing in our very practice. That is because we are finally starting to discover the truth behind our actions. This truth may be ugly. We may discover that we are, after all, nothing special; that we are actually relentless egoistic bastards. However, as much as we would prefer not to see the truth, Buddhism teaches that we should learn to live to our shame. It is only via accepting our egoism that we can start to transform it. As H.H. the Dalai Lama says, wise selfishness is how we start our practice.

7) Formal everyday practice

In order for our practice to be effective, however, it should be done every day. We should devote a certain amount of time, for example, an hour or two every day to do our formal practice in a suitable environment where we will not be disturbed. In the beginning, a great practice to cultivate is simple mindfulness meditation which focuses on the breath. It is much more important than we may think. Practicing compassion and loving-kindness meditation can be an effective addition. Contemplating the Buddhist teachings but doing so in a personal way that will be rooted in our own life and will address our own concrete problems is also great. Finally, dedicating all merit generated by our practice for the wellbeing and enlightenment of all beings is a wonderful way to end our practice session. Of course, once we find a teacher we should follow his or her instructions so that our practice may be different. Whichever practices we have, however, they should always motivate us to turn our mind away from circumstances and onto our confusion itself. This is because true solutions to problems are never found in circumstances but only in our mind. Practicing is thus most important when life is hardest. If we can continue practicing though the storms of life, our practice will become so much stronger. But again, this can only be done if we have developed a strong habit of practicing every day.

8) Discovering the mechanisms of perception

Developing habits by sheer force of will is one aspect of our practice. Another aspect is wise navigation through life and through our own psychology. Changing emotional patterns, for example, cannot be done by suppressing or by simply acting out emotions. The principle of practice is rather different – it is to be authentically ourselves and to observe. In other words, we have to be sincere and audacious about our egoistic wishes and fulfil them to some degree in a clever way that will not hurt ourselves or others; and we have to observe the

motivation and effects of what we do. Through this observation process alone, our perceptive and emotional patterns will change themselves. This is because, after gaining a certain insight, we will no longer be deluded into seeking happiness where it cannot be found. This is how we will eventually develop renunciation from samsāra.

9) Altruism

Finally, as we reflect on the meaning of these teachings, we may begin to realise that all this time, while we may believe we have been talking about wisdom alone, we have actually been talking about altruism as well. Since the elimination of ignorance is none other than the dismantling of egoism and the purification of karma is none other than the practice of virtue, wisdom is revealed to be inseparable from love and compassion. It is only these two together that can bring about final awakening. In this context it can be said that the practice of Buddhism is none other than the practice of love and compassion. First, we practice them towards ourselves as we develop renunciation from samsāra. Afterwards, when we have achieved them for ourselves, we can begin to genuinely practice them towards others. That is because, finally, at that point, we will have something to offer. At last, since we will not be judging ourselves anymore, we will not be judging others either. By practicing love and compassion towards others, slowly but surely our self-obsessions will diminish, our ego attachments and aversions will wane and in the end, by saving others we will have saved ourselves.

5 Conclusion[120]

In this dissertation I have presented the view of happiness not as a certain feeling to be attained and maintained but as a skill that can be precisely defined and practiced. First, I have attempted to show the ways in which our existing notions about happiness are misguided and, afterwards, I tried to provide an answer as to what happiness really is and how it can be achieved. Specifically, through this investigation, we have discovered that happiness does not depend on a set of particular circumstances, whether inner or outer, but on the quality of our relationship to circumstances in general. We have also discovered that the reason we have an unhealthy relationship to circumstances is ignorance of our mind's true nature and potential, which generates a plethora of attachments and aversions which keep us in an endless cycle of suffering. In order to end this ignorance, an expanded type of education and investigation have been argued for, specifically, the type which take into account the inner, mental dimension of life. This is because happiness was shown to be attainable only through dedicated mind training. One example of such mind training was given in the form of Buddhist philosophy and spiritual practice, according to which happiness is only achievable through the diligent application of wisdom and compassion in our concrete, everyday life.

[120] If there is anything worthy in this dissertation it is only because of the kindness of my many teachers. May any benefit gained from writing this paper be for the wellbeing and enlightenment of all beings. Sarva mangalam!

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