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Buddhism and Healing

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In his discourses with those he encountered throughout his life, Buddha declared that he was “awake”! But awake from what? The Buddha was obviously not referring to awakening from literal sleep. He was pointing to a psychological state. Having “awakened,” the phenomenal world had not changed. What had altered was a subjective state. The Buddha was pointing to a radical shift in the perception of the subjective world. If the Buddha lived today, he might adopt the term *aware* to better convey what he intended to describe. What the Buddha was describing may be contrasted with the opposite of being awake or aware: darkness, ignorance, unconsciousness, or nonclarity. But exactly what was the Buddha aware of or awake from? The Buddha was referring to a discernment that dissolved the distortions of perception and cognition that obscure or veil our ability to perceive ourselves, others, and our experiences as veridically as possible.¹

The Buddha was describing a clarity of perception and cognition that can distinguish the distorting aspects of ordinary consciousness that is the foundation of emotional suffering and illness. This clarity of perception can be termed *wisdom*. And the distortion is the outcome of the conditioned, even traumatized, inherited biases, delusions, and obscurations that prevent us from authentically encountering our perceptual world. The Buddha is describing a profound perceptual–cognitive shift that reveals the psychological basis of our emotional suffering. He clearly saw the specific ways our mind can, without the clarity that comes with discernment and wisdom, lead to modes of perception and cognition (and hence feeling and action) that produce the endless cycle of human suffering and anguish (*samsara*).²

This leads to an important insight about the nature of **Buddhism** that will be expanded further in this chapter. The mind and its functions are central to how we see ourselves, our world, and others. The mind maintains our suffering. The mind releases us from suffering.³

Historical Context

The Buddha was born approximately 2.5 millennia ago (approximately 550 BC; although others have suggested closer to 350 BC) in what is southern Nepal today as Siddhartha Gautama.⁴ He was of privileged descent as his father, Suddhodana, was king of the Shakya clan. Tragically, Siddhartha's mother, Mahamaya, died days after his birth, and he was subsequently raised by his aunt and other attendants. Nevertheless, blessed as he was by virtue of his privileged birth, Siddhartha lacked nothing and had free access to every pleasure and opportunity. He had been prophesized to become either a political leader or a great sage. His father, preferring the former, ensured that Siddhartha became proficient in all of the customs and laws of his culture so that he would one day succeed him. His father kept him occupied with all manner of material goods, pleasures, and entertainments.⁵ Siddhartha eventually became bored with this sensually pleasing but existentially unsatisfying existence and became curious to explore the world outside his privileged environment. So he ventured out, deliberately rebelling against his father and his upbringing. In his sojourns, Siddhartha met a very different reality. He encountered old age, disease, and death and learned that he (and everyone else, including his loved ones) would be subject to these forces. Unable to return to his previous life cloistered within the confines of his kingdom, Siddhartha made a radical, life-altering decision: to find real happiness and well-being and not the facsimile his father had offered; he had to leave the world his father had prepared for him. Biographies of the Buddha describe Siddhartha's exploits over the several ensuing years during which he encountered and was taught by Hindu mystics and yogis, all of whom were also united in their search for true, enduring happiness and health. Siddhartha, through extreme asceticism, austerities, and bodily privations, mastered the most advanced states of consciousness, meditative bliss, and absorption. Perception and sensation were blamed for suffering and our ability to transcend. If one could separate, ignore, or set aside our somatic, carnal nature from the soul, the spirit, or consciousness itself, then we could be free. Understandably, if the path of sensory indulgence, of bodily satisfaction through pleasure, had not yielded an authentic, real, stable happiness, then possibly the opposite approach might. This inherent dualism revealed the tendency of the mind to seek for the solutions outside of itself. Years of such ascetic and meditative practices, however, did not satisfy Siddhartha. They did not solve the problem of mental suffering and illness nor produce lasting healing. Thus, Siddhartha had no choice but to reject asceticism as he had done so with indulgence years before.⁶

With one-pointed determination, he sat under the pipal tree, closed his eyes, and resolved to allow his mind to become still and observed his inner world.⁷ After 6 months, the limited, conditioned, societally civilized Siddhartha personality disappeared or dissolved, and the insights he had made months before were now stabilized and integrated into a coherent state of being.

He had awakened from the dream of suffering, of birth and death. He was now “the Buddha”—awakened, aware, and enlightened. An apt translation of Buddha could also be the “healed one” in the sense that the outcome of such a journey was to attain an authentic wholeness and well-being. The path to truth and wellness could be achieved only by oneself and only with dedicated effort and persistence. For several decades, the Buddha taught ceaselessly throughout the Indian continent, attracting devotees and disciples until his passing at the age of 80.⁸

Buddhism Worldview

In the centuries after the Buddha passed away, efforts were made to preserve his teachings, orally at first, but eventually written (i.e., the Pali Canon sutras). This collection of sayings of the Buddha, preserved by the Theravādins, one of the last sects that emerged following the Buddha’s death, are considered the most complete set of the Buddha’s spoken word. It is sometimes referred to as Southern Buddhism as it is predominant in modern-day Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand.⁹ The main teachings include what are considered to be the core teachings of Buddhism such as the Three Marks of Existence, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, dependent origination, nature of self, and nirvana. The emphasis is on personal liberation (the *arhat*), renunciation (or more accurately, discipline), mindfulness, and ethical living.¹⁰

By the 1st century BC, additional teachings appeared; they were believed to have been inspired or revealed by the historical Buddha (e.g., Diamond Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Heart Sutra) but hidden and preserved (e.g., in a cave, heaven, encased at the bottom of the ocean and protected by a dragon) only to be released at a later time when the need of humankind demanded it. In these writings, the Buddha is portrayed more as a transcendent, idealized superbeing, with less significance placed on the appearance of the historical Buddha (the physical manifestation of the archetypal Buddha) of the Pali Canon scriptures. Omnipresent and omniscient, the Buddha could reveal himself to anyone at any time or place. This development of the Buddhadharma is commonly labeled as the Mahayana (Great Path) or Northern Buddhism (China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam) and includes Shin Buddhism, Soto Zen and Rinzai Zen Buddhism, and Nichiren Buddhism. The main teachings include the idea of the bodhisattva, who, motivated by supreme compassion, resists final nirvana for the sake of sentient beings (in contrast to the emphasis on solitary attainment of final nirvana of the *arhat* of the Theravada). The Lotus Sutra, for example, mentions 23 celestial bodhisattvas, such as Maitreya, Manjushri, and Samantabhadra. In addition to the bodhisattvas, a vast pantheon of divine, archetypal, celestial Buddhas are described, infinite in number and teaching Dharma in any number of infinite universes to those who dwell in their own heavens and to whom worship, propitiation, and

eneration could be directed. Some of these celestial Buddhas included Vairocana (in the pure land of Akanistha) or Amitābha (in the pure land of Sukhavati). Mahayana places equal emphasis on compassion and wisdom.¹¹ Mahayana teachings expand the Theravada nonself (*anatta*) doctrine in the form of emptiness (*shunyata*), which is the noninherent existence of all phenomena, as well as the positing of Buddha nature, which is the intrinsic potential of all beings to become a Buddha (*tathagatagarbha*). It also teaches the doctrine of the three bodies (*trikaya*) of the Buddhas, which consist of manifestation (*nirmanakaya*); the archetypal, subtle, cosmic form (*sambhogakaya*); and the ultimate, unconditioned, empty nature (*dharmakaya*).¹²

The final significant contribution to the Buddhadharma occurs in the form of Tantra, a tradition found in Buddhism and Hinduism. Commonly known as Vajrayana (the Diamond Path), Tantric Buddhism emerged around AD 750 and relied on the tantras, teachings written by the Buddha or other Buddhist deities that were hidden and revealed to (select) humans at appropriate times and places. Tantric Buddhism includes a number of what may be termed magical and supernatural practices including the recitation of mantras (magical formulae to evoke a deity, protect from demonic forces, and nurture spiritual advancement), mudras (ritual hand gestures), mandalas (visions of totality of the mind and the universe depicted in magic circles), and the introduction of a vast number of new deities including spirits, demons, protectors, and other spiritual beings whom one could invoke, propitiate through liturgy, and visualize union. Five Buddhas (or *Tathagatas*) were especially considered central to Buddhist tantric cosmology: Vairocana, Ashksobhya, Rantnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi. Vajrayana can be found primarily in Tibet, Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal, China, and Japan. Unique among the Buddhist traditions is the pivotal role of the guru, or realized teacher who mediates the attainment of enlightenment.¹³

Over the long history of Buddhism there have been, and still exist, many schools, sects, and traditions that emerged, flourished, disappeared, and emphasized different aspects of the historical Buddha's teachings; interpreted or reinterpreted what he taught; and addressed aspects of the teachings that were overlooked or neglected by other interpretations and vary in their interpretation of texts, soteriological practices, and traditions. Nevertheless, the basic teachings found within the Pali Canon, especially the Four Noble Truths, are found within every tradition and will be described briefly in this chapter.¹⁴

Conceptualizing Illness and Healing: Buddhist Perspectives

As the description of the Buddha's life and the traditions that developed since his passing clearly demonstrate, suffering and illness (or more precisely mental illness) is closely tied to the functioning of our mind. Suffering is the

result of perceptual and cognitive distortions that yield a number of harmful emotional states and the associated actions. Without insight into the cause of our suffering and the role that we play in our mental health and wellness, then we are doomed to repeat the conditions that can only lead to suffering for ourselves and others. The insight that authentic health can be attained only by a disciplined reorientation of our mental life (rather than focusing solely on the outside world as a solution to our mental suffering) can begin the process of healing the wounds we acquire through life and foster our responsibility for our own health and well-being. It is not surprising that the Buddha's final advice to his followers was to work diligently on realizing the nature of the mind (empty and impermanent).

The Development of Buddhism and Healing in the Modern World

The core teachings of the Buddha can be considered his instruction advice on attaining true health, healing the emotional suffering and dissatisfaction that each of us is sure to experience and for which no solution can ever be found "out there." Indeed, the teachings of the Buddha present a radical psychology that situates the deepest states of bliss and happiness and wholeness "in here," in the workings of our mind.

The Four Noble Truths

The **Four Noble Truths** (or insights or realizations) summarize the first major teaching of the Buddha following his enlightenment and, if properly understood, can be considered to contain his entire psychology, psychotherapy, and soteriology. In some presentations of the Four Noble Truths, an explicit medical model is adopted with the Four Noble Truths corresponding to the diagnosis, etiology, prognosis, and cure of suffering, respectively. As such, the model of the Four Noble Truths represents an analysis of the human condition and its causes (the first two truths), its profound healing through the prescriptions summarized in the fourth Noble Truth culminating in enlightenment, or, more accurately, authentic health, the third Noble Truth.¹⁵

Noble Truth 1: There is Suffering

The Ubiquity of Suffering

The essential teaching of the first Noble Truth is that suffering or sorrow is an inescapable fact of life. This does not mean that everything is just suffering or that there is only suffering, a common misunderstanding of the first Noble Truth and Buddhism in general. Within the broad compass of the term

commonly translated as suffering, *dukkha*, is a focus on what today we might consider primarily to be psychological or emotional suffering: anguish, stress, agony, disappointment, unfulfilled, etc.¹⁶ These aspects of suffering are unavoidable as long as one clings to specific perceptual and cognitive distortions (or illusions). This is the human condition. Our body can be the source of endless and excruciating suffering (hence, the dedication of vast amounts of financial, intellectual, and human resources toward the amelioration of suffering in our society). Suffering can also accompany all of our remaining senses, including mental suffering. In other words, we have the potential to suffer at any moment in a myriad of ways. Pain may be inescapable (e.g., disease, accident, violence), but suffering—the way we interpret, react, work with the pain—is within our power. It is this type of suffering that is the primary focus of the Buddha's teaching.¹⁷

The Illusion of Permanence

All phenomena, mental and physical, are finite from the most majestic mountain ranges to the subtlety of a flame, from thoughts and perceptions to the universe itself. The intrinsic quality of all phenomena is change, transformation, movement, process, and flow. Impermanence is often concealed by apparent continuity—many things seem to be the same day after day—or change very slowly (e.g., a table). The constant arising and subsiding of every moment of cognition whether it is a thought, emotion, sensation, perception, or action, can be easily perceived. Aging, from the moment we are born to our final dissolution, is the most emotionally powerful example of impermanence.¹⁸

The Delusion of Essence

While suffering and impermanence may become obvious to any intuitive observer, the Buddha's core insight, which underpins both suffering and impermanence, is a cognitive one and much more subtle. The Buddha came to understand that suffering and impermanence were based on the utter conditionality (or causal interdependence) of all phenomena. All appearance is conditioned and composite, created or caused by the coming together of specific elements and components and that disappears when those components dissolve. There is only appearance and no ultimate reality behind what we perceive, including the human being. The truth of nonself suggests that there is not essence, substance, or inherent existence to any phenomenal experience.¹⁹ While objects appear as if they really do exist, they would cease to if the conditions that brought them into appearance change. To present this doctrine in a more positive way, the existence of phenomena is conditional, dependent, contextual, including the self. In a sense, the Buddha advocated a contextual realism. Everything exists in the sense that they are real and have real effects in the world, but they lack essence or substance. There is no thing in itself "behind" the appearance. Our subjective reality is the outcome of an

interconnected interaction between the external world, as detected by our senses, and the interpretive processes of our mind.²⁰

Noble Truth 2: The Cause of Suffering Is Craving

The Buddha told us that the condition or cause for mental and emotional suffering lies in the activity of the mind. He adopted the term *craving* and compared it to thirst (*tanha*) to describe it. However, craving is not the same as simple desire (*kama*). But what exactly is craving, and why is it the basis of suffering? Craving is bidirectional as it includes both a compulsive desire *for* something as well as a compulsive aversion against something. It can be understood as a very strong, intensive, obsessive, or compulsive projection of our needs upon the world. When in the state of lustful craving, desirable properties are viewed as inherent in the object of our craving. The craved object is considered a real source of happiness, pleasure, or well-being. When in the state of aversive craving, undesirable properties are viewed as inherent in the object of our craving and the avoidance of the object is considered a real source of happiness, pleasure, and well-being. The Buddha described three types of craving:

- *Sense experience (kama tanha; e.g., pleasure, hedonism)* refers to the compulsive desire for pleasurable sensory experience (or the removal of unpleasant ones). Craving for sensation expresses the belief that happiness is inherent in pleasure and the objects that give pleasure. As a result, we fixate, seek, and cling to objects that we are convinced will give us pleasure or eliminate pain. Any of the senses may be the focus of our sensory craving.
- *Being or existence (bhava tanha)* refers to the strong belief, desire, or obsession to become greater than we are, to become “somebody,” to achieve, overcome, attain, accomplish, etc. This craving is often motivated by a desire to satisfy others and cultural expectations. It is important to distinguish normative efforts to achieve success in life versus craving. This distinction lies in the attribution or projection onto the goal or target of our efforts an excessive or exaggerated function or significance (without consideration of the costs that must be borne to achieve this goal or target) and that we fervently believe is needed to achieve happiness.
- *Nonbeing or nonexistence (vibhava tanha)* refers to the strong desire, obsession, or compulsion to escape from experience, existence, being, to become “nothing,” to reduce stimulation, to die (e.g., absorb, merge, unite, be one, sleep, avoid, numb out, escape, “veg,” dissociate, be reckless, be suicidal, do drugs). *Vibhava tanha* encompasses all the activities that diminish or attenuate consciousness. As with other cravings, there is a normal or healthy form of *vibhava*. This occurs when we wish to sleep, rest, reduce stimulation, relax, or withdraw from the world

temporarily. When we crave nonbeing, our goal is to eliminate sensation, perception, cognition, and any other form of subjective experience even if doing so may harm ourselves or others.²¹

The second Noble Truth situates genuine healing within our mind. Healing the suffering we endure can be achieved only through a recognition that health and wellness arises from our own subjectivity. Only by correcting the delusional beliefs that the Buddha identified as underlying suffering can the authentic health be attained.²²

Noble Truth 3: Cessation of Suffering

The first two Noble Truths or insights describe the human condition under the sway of ignorance (or lack of awareness). If the Buddha had stopped at describing the first two insights, then he could be accused of presenting a very pessimistic view of human nature. The last two Noble Truths or insights describe the human condition under the sway of wisdom (or awareness). The third Noble Truth or insight induces hope without which there would be no escape from the inevitability of suffering. Within the medical or psychological model of the Four Noble Truths, the third Noble Truth or insight is the positive prognosis for the elimination of mental suffering and illness. There is a way of realizing genuine health and happiness. The third Noble Truth is often expressed as nirvana or enlightenment. When one has understood nirvana, one is able to remain free of the perceptual, cognitive, and affective distortions that create continuous suffering, ill-health, and misery. We are able to encounter our world with wisdom and discernment. Nirvana is genuine health.²³

Noble Truth 4: The Path to the Cessation of Suffering

Having discussed the human condition and the potential for liberation, the Buddha described a method (i.e., the cure or treatment) for realizing nirvana that places the responsibility for true health squarely upon ourselves. The Buddha delineated the **Eightfold Path**, a systematic approach to transforming the personality, beginning with perception and culminating with our place in the world. The Eightfold Path is neither prescriptive nor moralistic, but it is ethical and intersubjective. How we relate to others is central to the fourth Noble Truth and is critical to lasting health.²⁴

Skillful View

Skillful view retrains our perceptions. It encompasses the realization of the suffering, impermanence, and nonself that characterize all phenomena; the law of cause and effect; and the Four Noble Truths. The full realization of the wisdom of skillful view acknowledges that the roots of our suffering are to be found in the most basic way that we encounter the world. The

realization of the insights of skillful view on its own might culminate in a depressive realism, or nihilism, unless these insights are allowed to mature within the insights of the remaining aspects of the Eightfold Path.²⁵

Skillful Thought

Skillful thought focuses on the relationship we develop with the world around us but in particular with others.²⁶ This path strongly emphasizes intention, which reflects the goal of our action and the quality of the mind that engages in that action. The Buddha described three types of skillful thought or intention to cultivate: (1) our relationship toward sensation or perception should avoid craving; (2) an attitude of goodwill (*metta*), benevolence, and kindness toward ourselves as well as to those whom we know and like (e.g., family), those to whom we may be indifferent (i.e., strangers), and those to whom we dislike (e.g., “enemies”); and (3) an attitude of nonharming and compassion toward others and wishing to relieve their suffering (*karuna*). We are encouraged to be empathically mindful of our behavior, speech, attitudes toward others that might cause them harm. *Metta* advocates a genuine desire for others to be happy and successful. Both *metta* and *karuna* require that we realize our mutual interconnectedness. Without authentic relationships with others, durable health is not possible.²⁷

Skillful Speech

Unskillful speech (e.g., lying; gossip; divisive, deceitful, denigrating, humiliating, critical, abusive, insulting, sarcastic, demeaning language) is a contributor to almost all interpersonal conflict. Language can generate destructive emotions within oneself and in others. Speech reflects and shapes our views of others and ourselves.²⁸ Authentic happiness must guard against destructive speech patterns. Such speech directed at oneself can produce feelings of anger, rage, anxiety, or depression and may culminate in acts of self-destruction (e.g., addiction, suicide, self-mutilation). When such speech is directed toward others, we can generate similar emotions in others and intensify emotions that may lead to enactments (e.g., violence).²⁹

Skillful Action

The Buddha encourages us to avoid the following activities if we are to attain the kind of genuine health that requires harmonious, benevolent, compassionate relationship with others.³⁰ Skillful action is directly related to skillful thought and skillful speech:

- Killing is the intentional harming of other beings and is prohibited. Unintentional harm may still occur (e.g., we may hurt or kill someone inadvertently) but is less harmful to our well-being than the type the Buddha is describing.

- Lying refers to intentional deception that violates trust and can harm others.
- Stealing includes activities beyond the act of taking something that does not belong to oneself but also includes other forms of stealing such as fraud, plagiarism, or other efforts to deceive, manipulate, or extort others in order to obtain what they possess.
- Sexual misconduct refers to sex with sentient beings who cannot consent, who are emotionally attached to others, or who may be hurt or deceived.
- Intoxication disinhibits mental processes that can readily lead to other harmful activities; it is to be avoided.³¹

Skillful Livelihood

Most of our waking lives are eventually spent in a form of work. The Buddha cautions that the need to earn a living should not include the harming of others. This can be difficult to discern at times and will always need a judgment on the part of the individual, especially when the harms may not be directly obvious. While some forms of livelihood (e.g., working in a gun factory or abattoir, running computer scams, dealing drugs) are clearly unskillful, in other cases it may be difficult to discern (e.g., certain types of scientific research, sex trade, farming).³²

Skillful Effort

Skillful effort is concerned with mental training and the effort required to master harmful emotional states. Harmful mental states are those that disturb calm, insight, equanimity, and tranquility. They interfere with the development of authentic self-understanding and impact our relationships with others. Since action is closely tied to feeling, we are advised to skillfully address negative emotions by preventing their occurrence and by terminating them when they should arise. The Buddha identified five specific classes of harmful emotions that may impede emotional health: (1) craving attachment, (2) ill will, (3) depression, (4) anxiety, and (5) confusion.³³

Skillful Mindfulness

In order to undermine the tendency to identify with interpretive narratives (*vicara*), the Buddha encouraged the cultivation of present-moment awareness.³⁴ This interpretive process elaborates, embellishes, and otherwise distorts perceptual events (*vitarka*) and fosters an inner commentary that can strongly influence our emotional states. Once *vicara* is active, it is difficult to remain aware of the original perceptions that form the bases of our interpretations. If the narrative is dysfunctional, intense emotional suffering can result (e.g., depression, anger, anxiety). Through the interruption of such narratives

by grounding attention by recollecting present-moment awareness, such emotional states can be attenuated.³⁵

Skillful Concentration

Concentration encourages in maintaining one-pointedness attention on an object. It unifies the mind. Through sustained concentration on a meditative object (such as the breath), deep states of relaxation and absorption can be attained (e.g., *samadhi*). Skillful concentration nurtures unbroken attentiveness and induces tranquility and is a natural antidote to emotional suffering.³⁶

The Nature of the Self

In describing nonself, it is important to clarify that the Buddha did not say that the **self**, or our sense of who we are, does not exist. The Buddhist teaching is that our self (our sense of unique subjective reality) is, like all other phenomena, also compounded, composite, and conditional, devoid of any unique ontological status or essence. The self is a process, not an essence or substance. The notion of nonself is central to Buddhist psychology. The Buddhist teaching of self is described in the teaching of the five psychophysical elements (*skandhas*) that comprise the self.³⁷

- Form (*rūpa*) includes our physical body and all of its functions, including the five sense organs and their objects. The form aspect our self is in constant transformation from the moment we are conceived in the womb until our death.
- Feeling (*vedanā*) is composed of three hedonic qualities that the Buddha said accompanies every moment of subjectivity: (1) pleasure, (2) aversion, and (3) neutrality. Since there are six senses, there are 18 feeling states.
- Perception–cognition (*samjñā*) refers to discernment, analysis, recognition, judgment, and thinking arising from contact with objects. This aspect of our self is intimately connected with memory and can be affected by expectations, our current emotional state, habits or karma, experience, and conditioning.
- Conditioning (*samskara*) is our embodied conditioning. It includes what is normally called the personality (e.g., mental activities, volition, action, will, reflexes, dispositions, habits).
- Consciousness (*vijñāna*) consists of six types, five sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness. This *skandha* allows us to be aware and conscious. Without consciousness, we would have no awareness of anything else although one could imagine having a physical self without consciousness (e.g., asleep, coma, deep intoxication).

Conclusion

The Buddha's description of the human condition summarized in the Four Noble Truths can be summarized in the following way: The pervasive dissatisfaction, lack of fulfillment, and mental suffering and illness that is part of life (first Noble Truth) is caused by the strong tendency to look for happiness, satisfaction, and reality in the phenomenal world that, by definition, cannot provide such dissatisfaction (second Noble Truth). The Buddha demonstrated that phenomenal experience, due to its transience and conditionality, can never provide us with genuine health and happiness but only conditional states of mind. As a result, we repeatedly encounter mental suffering. However, through discipline and discernment (fourth Noble Truth), one can develop a new *experiential* understanding of oneself, our social relationships, and the "world" based on uncontrived acceptance and equanimity rather than obsessive clinging and fear (third Noble Truth). The discipline described in the Eightfold Path outlines a reconditioning of our life through a healthier attitude toward others, effective regulation of emotions, cognition and behavior, and insight into the perceptual patterns of our minds, all to be applied with effort, mindfulness, and one-pointed concentration. The outcome of this process is a durable, intuitive, direct, authentic understanding into the nature of our own subjectivity that it is open, unbound, aware, flexible, and skillfully responsive. This describes the traditional Buddhist notion of health and happiness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What challenges might arise in the comprehension of the core Buddhist notion of non-self (or emptiness) outside of the Buddhist context? How might nonself be misunderstood? Are there potential dangers in this concept (e.g., nihilism, lack of meaning)?
2. Although considered a religion, the nontheistic emphasis of Buddhism places the emphasis of self-development squarely on the individual. Might there be limitations to the value the Buddhist perspective in cultures that are strongly founded on theistic religions? Does the focus on self-determination ignore historical, social, and cultural oppression?
3. As Buddhism grows outside of its original Asian cultural context, what are potential challenges to its preservation in very different multicultural environments? Does the growth of Buddhism in the West and its emphasis on science challenge the notion of the nature of Buddhism?
4. Buddhism makes bold claims about the ability to end suffering through disciplining of the mind. Does the psychological emphasis of Buddhism ignore or minimize other variables that influence suffering (e.g., systemic racism, homophobia)? Does the psychological perspective reflect an incomplete analysis of the nature of emotional suffering?

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37. Gowans, *Philosophy of the Buddha*; Mishra, *An end to suffering*; Olendzki, Buddhist psychology.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Gowans, C. W. (2003). *Philosophy of the Buddha*. London, England: Routledge.

This is an excellent overview of the Buddha's core teachings and the underlying philosophical assumptions. An especially noteworthy feature of this book is an in-depth and articulate description of the notion of nonself, an aspect of the Buddha's teaching that can be challenging to fully comprehend

Laumakis, S. J. (2008). *An introduction to Buddhist philosophy*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

This book surveys the breadth of Buddhist traditions and teachings with chapters on later developments of the Dharma. A useful aspect of this book is the description of the cultural conditions that led to the emergence of Buddhism.

Lopez, D. S. (2002). *The story of Buddhism: A concise guide to its history and teachings*. New York, NY: HarperOne.

In addition to an overview of the core teachings of Buddhism, this book also explores the structure of the Buddhist universe and the emergence of the Mahayana. In addition, a detailed exposition of the monastic life and the practices of the laity is excellent.

Schumann, H. W. (1989). *The historical Buddha*. London, England: Arkana.

The teachings of the Buddha are closely associated with the life of the Buddha. This excellent text surveys in detail the Buddha's life and his teachings and the social, religious, and political conditions that led to the development of Buddhism in the centuries following his death and the establishment of the ordained *sangha*.