



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF METTĀ

by Ven Dr. Madawela Punnaji

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The Psychology of Mettā

by

Ven Dr Madawela Punnaji

Buddhism is often misunderstood as an atheistic philosophy, because it is not a religion that worships supernatural gods or an all-powerful Creator. However, Buddhism is a humanistic religion, pragmatic philosophy, and an evolutionary psychology. Religion, as understood in Buddhism, is the human effort to solve the **problem of existence**. The problem of existence is the **insecurity of life** due to the **ever-threatening**

fate of an impending, unpredictable, certainty of death.

Are not all religions attempting to solve this same problem of existence? Isn't it the main effort of every religion whether they recognize it or not? Some attempt to solve it through a well-believed **hope** of eternal life in heaven after death. This belief helps the faithful to endure the suffering until death intervenes to dispel all doubts.

Modern existential philosophers have drawn attention to this problem when they point out that "out of all animals, it is the human being that is aware of his own existence and also aware of his ever threatening impending death."

It was Charles Darwin in the modern age that saw life as a “struggle for existence.” His cultural prejudice prevented him from seeing reality in full perspective. Therefore he believed in the “survival of the fittest.” He forgot that every plant and animal that is born into this world had to undoubtedly end his or her life in death. It was the Buddha who noticed twenty-five centuries earlier that every plant, animal, human being or even celestial beings could never escape death, whether fit or unfit. It was also the Buddha who drew attention to the problem of existence fully by speaking about birth, aging, sickness, death, meeting pain, parting from pleasure, not getting **what** we want, **when** we want and the **way** we want.

Pleasures and pains constantly come and go. By wanting to hold on to pleasure, and to permanently avoid pain, we only **suffer**. Our desires can never be fulfilled to our full satisfaction. This is the **problem of existence**.

Another part of religion is to deal with the terrible problem faced by animals, plants and even human beings without exception. **Every animal, plant and human being is self-centered**. They are not only selfish, they are competitive and attempt to live at the expense of others. They even kill one another in the process. This destructive behavior is not only observed in animals but even civilized human

beings are not free from it. It is not only through murder that they hurt one another. There are so many other ways of hurting and harming others - direct hurting, stealing, robbing, sexual misconduct, dishonesty, use of unpleasant language and even harming themselves as well as others by the use of harmful drugs.

All religions attempt to deal with this problem too. Some blame the helpless creatures for disobedience, when they are totally ignorant of why their emotions dominate their lives, even to the extent that they destroy their own loved ones and kinsman. Sometimes religious authorities are guilty of harmful behaviour; even they

are not totally free of hurting others
or waging wars.

It was the Buddha who pointed
out that the problem lies in the nature
of the human flesh. The human
being is an animal by nature, as the
Sanskrit sloka points out:

Āhāra nidrā bhaya maitunan ca
Feeding, sleeping, fear and sex

Sāmānya mē tad pasubih samānāh
Common are these to man and beast

Dharmohi tēsāmadiko visēsō
Especially to man is thought complex

Dharmēna heenāh pasubih samānāh
Thought when low, man is a beast

An American Physician Paul D. MacLean proposed and formulated a hypothesis of the evolution of the human brain. His **Triune Brain** model that comprises 3 complexes, explained below, has since proven to be technically inaccurate. However its simplicity in broadly explaining brain activity makes it one of the reference points in psychiatry. It also remains as one of very few approximations on the truth we have about the workings of our brain. The earliest part, according to the Triune Brain model, is called the **Brain Stem** that deals with seeking food, and reproduction. The second part is the **Limbic System** that deals with emotions. The third part is the

Cerebral Cortex or **Neocortex** that does the thinking in the human being.

This means there is no separate thing called the mind, apart from the body. What is called the mind is only an activity of the body, which is the activity of the nervous system. The Buddha in the *Mahā Tanha Sankhaya Sutta* in the Majjhima Nikaya has already pointed out this fact. While research in Neuroscience has brought this fact to light recently, The Buddha had used three words that refer to the mind, which are really activities of the nervous system of the body. They are: (1) the affective or emotional (*citta*), which is the activity of the Limbic system, (2) the cognitive or thinking (*mano*), which is the

activity of the Neocortex or Prefrontal cortex, and (3) perceptive activity (*viññāna*) of the Brain Stem. These three activities are what we refer to as the mind, according to the Buddha.

The important message of the Buddha to the world is that the human being **can solve the problem of existence** only by understanding the problem and knowing its solution, given in the form of the **Fourfold Supernormal Reality**, which is: Insecurity of life (*dukkha*), Origin of this insecurity (*samudaya*), the Resolution of this insecurity (*nirodha*), and the method of resolving this insecurity (*magga*). This **solution** has to be realized through an **evolution of the human**

consciousness. However, this is not a biological evolution. Rather, this is a **psychological evolution with the improved understanding of the workings of the human brain.**

We must understand that we are animals born with a body having five senses: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, plus a body that feels the touch. The activity of the senses is to perceive (*viññāna*) and feel (*vedanā*) pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings. All that is perceived and felt is carried to the brain (*mano*) where thinking and comprehension (*mano viññāna*) takes place, which is called cognition. According to what has been cognized, an emotional reaction to the cognition (*cittāvēga*) takes place. This

emotional reaction is seen as a disturbance of the mood or temperament (*citta*). This affective mood (*citta*) can remain either calm or agitated. Agitation is an emotional reaction (*cittāvēga*).

In the lower animals, such as the mammals, where the thinking cerebral cortex is not fully developed, the messages go from the senses straight to the limbic system, where emotions are aroused. In the human being, however, two messages are sent from the senses: (1) to the limbic system, and (2) to the cerebral cortex. This helps the human being to act rationally instead of acting emotionally in a given situation by

making a decision (*cetanā*). This ability is often called **will power**.

It is important to understand that although the human being has the ability to act rationally he does not act rationally always. When he is not acting rationally he is unconscious – unconscious according to the concept of unconscious mind popularized by Sigmund Freud. Emotions act unconsciously. Because the human being is mostly guided by the unconscious mind, he is also mostly emotional. The emotions seem to dominate and force him to act emotionally. The emotional or affective mood (*citta*) cannot think. It can only get excited (*cittāvēga*) or remain calm (*samāhita citta*). The

thinking is done only by the cognitive (*mano*). This is why the Buddha pointed out that we can learn to gain control over emotions by right thinking (*pasanna manasikāra*). Meditation is the way to learn emotional control. Meditation is not concentration, or hypnosis, but learning to remain conscious and thoughtful all the time, and thus begin to act rationally instead of emotionally.

In the first sermon of the Buddha, called the *Dhamma Cakkha-Pavattana Sutta*, the Buddha teaches how to avoid acting emotionally without suppressing, or repressing emotions. He shows that the medial

path results in relaxation of the body, calmness, peace, and happiness.

The aim of the Buddha was to point out to human beings how to transcend the animalistic emotional nature and learn to act rationally by developing the cognitive awareness of reality. The reality, according to the Buddha, is that every occurrence of nature is based on the presence of the necessary conditions (*hetun paticca sambhutan hetu bhanga nirujjati*). Nothing happens in nature due to the power of supernatural beings. Today this natural law is called determinism. The Buddha called it *paticcasamuppada* (Consequence of Antecedents). When this law of nature is understood:

- (1) What is dependent on conditions is unstable (*anicca*)
- (2) What is unstable is unpleasant (*dukkha*)
- (3) What is unpleasant is not as I want.
- (4) What is not as I want is not under my power (*netan mama*)
- (5) What is not under my power does not belong to me.
- (6) What does not belong to me is not me (*neso hamasmi*)
- (7) What is not “me” cannot be my “self.” (*neso me attati*)

This means: this body or mind is neither mine nor me. In other words, this self that I am thinking of is only an illusion or a delusion. An **“illusion”** is a perceptual fallacy, and a **“delusion”** is an intellectual fallacy. We are commonly blinded by a fallacy both perceptual and intellectual.

This means **we do not really exist**. If we do not really exist, **can we die?** This **existential problem of mortality** is based on the notion of existence, which is the common existential belief, which is a misnomer or delusion. The **solution**, therefore, is **awakening from this dream of existence**. It is a **dream** because it is a belief that goes on unconsciously.

Although we **can intellectually comprehend** that this is true, we find it difficult to base our life on it. Why? We are **blinded by emotions**. It is only by learning to **meditate** that we can **be free from emotions**.

There are ten fetters that bind us to emotions, which need to be broken. They are:

1. *Sakkāya ditthi*
(personalization of body)
2. *Vicikiccā* (cognitive dissonance)
3. *Silabbata parāmāsa*
(heteronomous morality)
4. *Kāma rāga* (lust for pleasure)

5. *Patigha* (intolerance of pain)
6. *Rūpa rāga* (lust for mental images)
7. *Arūpa rāga* (lust for absence of images)
8. *Māna* (egoism)
9. *Uddhacca* (agitation)
10. *Avijjā* (absence of full comprehension)

It was to help overcome these fetters that the Buddha went beating the drum of immortality:

Apārutā tēsan amatassa dvārā

Open is the door to immortality

Yē sōtavantō pamuccantu saddan

Those with ears listen and be free

Now comes the question: How is Mettā related to this evolution of the mind?

It is important to remember that Metta is not mere kindness or love, though it is often called loving-kindness.

We should remember that we are born as self-centered animals struggling to exist in a hostile environment antagonistic to existence. It is as an appropriate adaptation to this opposing environment that the evolutionary process is going on. It is necessary to realize that evolution is a competitive struggle between two natural but unconscious forces. The **stratagem** adapted to survive in this

harsh environment is what we call **evolution**. We are here because of this evolutionary adaptation.

This unconscious struggle to survive is a mistake and a failure. It is only **suffering** that continues during this struggle to survive. **No individual really survives** during or after the struggle. **We do not really exist**, though we struggle hard. Who then is struggling really? This struggling is only happening unconsciously due to the presence of the necessary conditions. No **ego** is really doing it. The continuation of this struggle is simply an **unconscious continuation** of suffering, due to the presence of the necessary conditions. We assume we exist and continue to suffer, just

as an electrically driven toy that accidentally falls and gets crushed.

Just think about this **blind process of suffering**. Stop assuming you exist. If you cannot forget your “self,” think of your “suffering” and think: “May I be free from suffering.” Then think of all beings that are “suffering.” All innocent beings are suffering, not only yourself. Make the wish: “May all beings be free from suffering.” You can do this by beginning to wish for yourself, and gradually extend the same wish towards all beings.

The meditative process

First of all go into an empty room, or solitary place alone and begin to make good wishes towards your own self: “May I be well, comfortable, peaceful and happy; free from worries, free from fears, free from every kind of discomfort and unhappiness.” Keep on repeating these good wishes towards yourself as long as possible.

Next begin to think: “May all beings in this room or ground be well comfortable peaceful and happy. Just as I should be well and happy, may all beings in this place be well comfortable peaceful and happy.” Keep repeating this thought as long as you can.

Next you should begin to spread your interest further out to all beings in your neighborhood, repeating the same kind of good wishes as long as possible.

Next you extend your good thoughts further to the whole city.

Then from there you spread to the whole country.

Then from there you spread your thoughts to the whole continent.

From there you extend to the whole earth.

Then you extend to the solar system.

From there you extend to the entire universe.

From there you extend to all other worlds known and unknown.

From there you send your wishes to everywhere, to all beings without exception, whether known or unknown. Keep sending out good wishes to every one without exception. Keep doing this as long as you can in the stages described above.

This is the cultivation of *Metta*. We call it **Universal Benevolence**.

This when fully developed turns into *Karunā*. *Karunā* is when you do not make a distinction between oneself and others. Just as a mother thinks of her own children, we spread good will towards all beings without exception. All beings are regarded as important

as one-self. Then we **lose ourselves** in the **interest in all beings**. Just as a river, when it falls into the ocean, loses its identity, we lose ourselves in the interest in all beings. This is practicing *karunā*.

This **loss of self** brings about **freedom from all grief and suffering**. This results in the **happiness of selflessness (*muditā*)**. This happiness of selflessness is not an emotional excitement. It is a perfect tranquility of mind (**equanimity**). This perfect tranquility is **turned inwards**. It does not seek happiness outside. The mind at this stage is not disturbed by the changing vicissitudes of life: gain and loss, fame and ill fame, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

The mind thus centered within begins to be focused on the experience within **apperception** (*upekkhā*). When the mind is focused within, the attention becomes focused on the process of perception rather than the object perceived. When this occurs one becomes aware of the process of perception in detail. This way one becomes able to analyze the process of perception and becomes aware of the constituents of the process of perception (*pancakkhandā*). When one is aware of the analytical parts as they appear and disappear, one begins to see that the “world” we are aware of and the “self” we are aware of are only like a cinematographic movie. What is perceived is seen as a series of fast moving pictures. This results

in making a distinction between reality and appearance, thus losing the attraction to the objects perceived. The **reality** of the **subjective process of seeing** (identified as the “self”) as well as the **reality** of the **cinematographic “object” seen** (identified as a real object) begins to **appear as unreal** resulting in the **breaking of all emotional bonds** to the object seen as well as the subject that sees. This way one **awakens** from the **dream of existence**.

Then no more is **existence** and then no more is **death**. Thus ends the **problem of existence**. When **existence** is no more, the **problem** is no more. The problem is ultimately **solved**, by **understanding** the process

of perception, and **how** it creates the **delusion**. Thus **terminates** the **process of evolution**, and this **eradicates** all **suffering**.

Thus runs the **Buddhist psychotherapy** for normal people, which makes them **Supernormal** through the development of **METTA**.

THE 124 YEAR OLD BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA, BRICKFIELDS

The Buddhist Maha Vihara was founded in 1894 by the Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society (SAWS), the oldest registered Buddhist Society in the Klang Valley.

From its very inception, the Vihara has been managed by the Sinhala Buddhist community but always financially supported by the Chinese and Indian communities. The first structure of the Vihara was the Main Shrine room, completed in early 20th Century. The donors for the Shrine Room, as recorded in the Selangor Government Gazette 1896, pg. 408 are clearly Chinese and Indian communities and among the main donors were:

Kapitan Yeap Quang Seng, Towkay Loke Yew, K. Tambusamy Pillay, R. Doraisamy Pillay, Loke Chow Kit, San Peng and Son, Lim Tua Taw, etc...

The Vihara was always the focal point to mobilize the Buddhist community. The large gathering to protest and stop the screening of the then controversial film "Light of Asia" in 1927 in Malaysia was also held at the Vihara, and so was the mass gathering and signature campaign in the 1950s to lobby the government to declare Wesak as a national holiday.

During the Emergency period of 1948-1960, monks from the Vihara made a massive impact reaching out to calm and educate the psychologically disoriented Chinese New Villagers who were evicted from their traditional lands and placed in new settlements by the Government which was fighting a communist insurgency.

Since the 1940s, the Vihara commenced a free Dhamma publications program as a Dhammadutta outreach to the masses which by the year 2012 was made available in 28 languages, with millions of copies of books and CDs

produced. The Vihara's Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS), founded in 1929, is the oldest Sunday School in the country with an enrolment of more than 1200 students and continues to produce systematic books on Buddhist studies for children.

The Wesak procession organized by the Vihara since the 1890s is the oldest and largest religious procession in the country. The 3-day Wesak celebrations at the Vihara attracts about 100,000 people.

Many students or devotees who have studied and benefited from the BISDS, the Vihara's Free Publications, Dhamma programs, classes, talks, etc have gone on to set up new Buddhist societies and centers which help to spread Buddhism in the country far and wide.

The SAWS is also one of the founding members of the Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) formed in 1983, a Council which constructively engages the Government on matters affecting non-Muslims in the country. The MCCBCHST Administrative office is based at the Vihara.

In 2004, the Vihara was a major focal point in the country to collect relief aid to assist the South Asian Tsunami that killed almost 280,000 people. Several forty foot container equivalents of relief aid were dispatched by the Vihara to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India, Myanmar and Thailand by air, sea and land.

Buddhists remain the country's largest organ donors, thanks to Cornea and Organ Donation Campaign carried out by the Vihara.

The Vihara continues to operate to deliver its obligation to the Buddhist community till this day and is governed and directed by its Vision, 4 Missions, 6 Strategic Objectives

and 4 Ennoblers in tribute and gratitude to all our past and current Sangha, volunteers, donors, friends, etc. We would be failing in our duty if we fail to mention the name of the foremost amongst them, our late Venerable Chief, ie. Ven Dr Kirinde Sri Dhammananda.

Vision

To be a leading international center for the Learning, Practice and Dissemination of the Buddha Dhamma

Mission

To provide a conducive environment to:

- promote scholarship and study of the Buddha Dhamma
- propagate the Buddha Dhamma
- be the focus of Buddhist activities for the larger community
- foster Theravada Buddhist cultural and traditional practices

Six Strategic Objectives

To be the Buddhist center of choice for:

1. Learning, Practising and the Realization of the Dhamma
2. Spreading the Dhamma
3. Buddhist Civilization
4. Synergy groupings to sustain the Buddha Sasana
5. Compassion in Action
6. Financial Accountability while delivering Cultural Obligations

Four Ennoblers:

1. Loving Kindness
2. Compassion
3. Altruistic Joy
4. Equanimity

Motto

Go forth, for the good, happiness and welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world.

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- Dana for Monks (at Vihara or Home) and Bana (Sermons)
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Monday to Sunday	6.30am - 7.30am	Morning Buddha Puja
	11.30pm - 12.00 noon	Noon Buddha Puja
	7.30pm - 8.30pm	Evening Buddha Puja

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

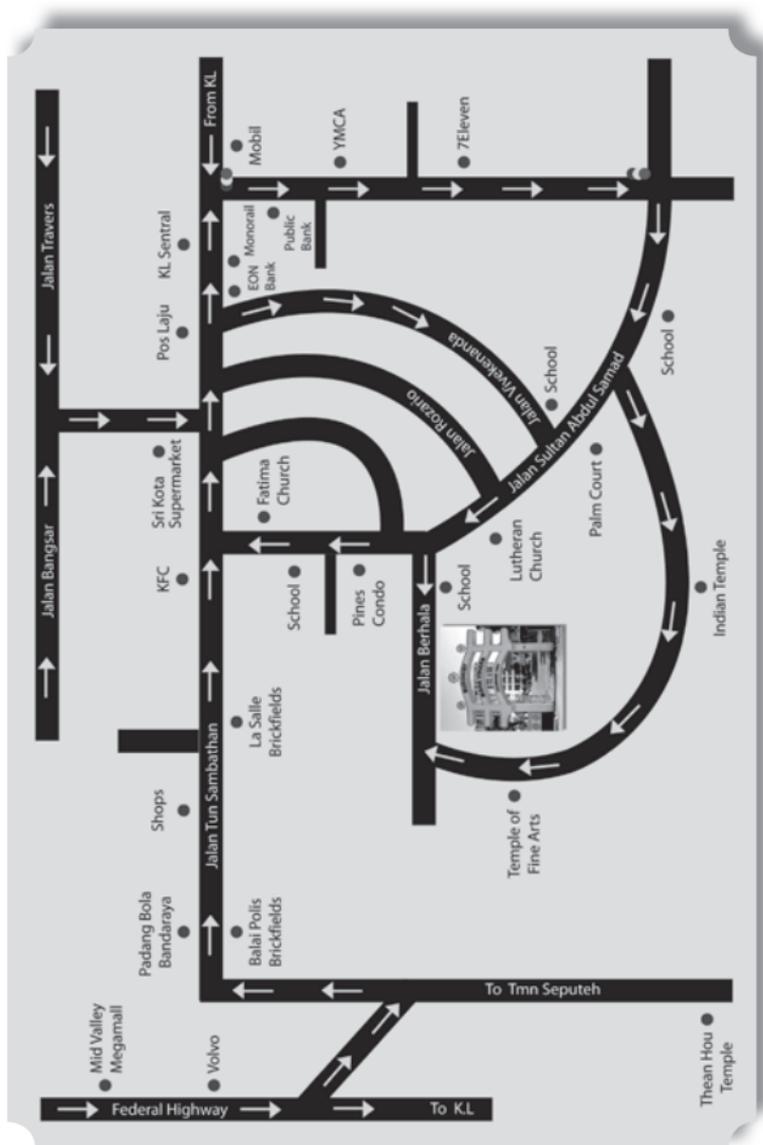
Mon, Wed, Thurs	8.00pm - 10.00pm	Meditation Class
Tuesday	8.30pm - 10.00pm	BMV Choir Practise
Thursday	7.30pm - 9.00pm	Senior Club Yoga Practise
Friday	1.00pm - 2.00pm	Afternoon Puja & Talk
	8.00pm - 9.30pm	Dhamma Talk
Saturday	7.30pm - 8.30pm	Bojjhanga Puja
	9.30am - 11.30am	Sanskrit Class
Sunday	8.30am - 9.30am	Morning Puja
	9.30am - 11.00am	Abhidhamma Class
	9.30am - 12.00 noon	Sunday School Session
	10.00am - 11.30am	Dhamma Talk
	10.00am - 2.00pm	Traditional Chinese Medicine <i>(1st and 3rd Sun of the month. Please note there will be no clinic if a Public Holiday falls on the allocated Sunday)</i>
	11.00am - 12.30pm	Sinhala Language Classes
	1.30pm - 5.00pm	Sinhala Cultural Dance Classes
	2.00pm - 3.00pm	Dhamma for the Deaf <i>(fortnightly)</i>
	2.00pm - 7.00pm	Diploma & Degree in Buddhism Classes
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- Monks' Dana - Offering Monk Requisites of Food, Medicine, Lodging, Robes, etc
- Welfare Fund
- Special Religious Events - Wesak
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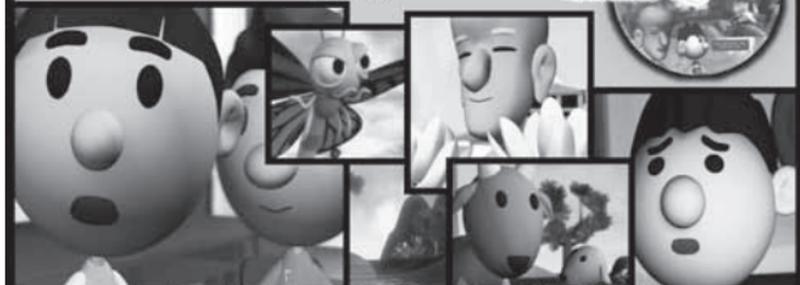
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*We also wish to share the merits with
our departed relatives, friends
and sentient beings.*

*May they all attain the
Bliss of Nibbana*

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!



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