



# CONFLICT RESOLUTION WITHIN A BUDDHIST CONTEXT

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## **Abstract**

More than ever before, adequate conflict resolution skills belong to the indispensable competencies of anyone who deals with intra-personal and inter-personal conflicts, not only on a personal level, but also in professional, organizational, and corporate areas. In recent literature a fair number of conflict resolution tools have been described within a pragmatic context of skill development (Liu & Opotow, 2014; Coleman & Prywes, 2014). These skills are presented without discussing fundamental, personal variables, such as the mediator's mindset fundamental to conflict reconciliation. In that way, these skills become mere techniques – not competencies. In order to become true competencies, the tools must not only emanate in a transparent way from the mediator's inner attitude and correspond with his/her mindset. In order to fully 'own' these tools, and to be able to use them sensitively, the mediator must also be aware of their roots and of their deeper origins. On closer look it appears, that many of these tools have an ancient basis and are rooted in Non-Western, Buddhist teaching.

The aim of this paper is:

1. To show how Buddhist teaching may offer a solid foundation for the understanding of conflict and conflict resolution in mediation. Here, the Buddhist concept of self-versus non-self will be highlighted, as well as the Buddhist teaching on suffering and 'unwholesome states'. Complementary to and in line with these Buddhist concepts, some neurophysiological aspects of conflict will be presented.
2. To develop a theme relevant framework for training of mediators and for the practice of mediation, Buddhist virtues of non-violence, compassion, wisdom, benevolence and empathy are described as important prerequisites to help the mediator in her professional practice.
3. To present essential Buddhist self-management techniques such as self-regulation and meditation-in-action.
4. To outline some strategies for effective mediation based on the above.

The paper is concluded with a summary of the essence of the argument along with the implications for the target audience.

## **Keywords**

Conflict resolution, Buddhist context



## 1. BUDDHIST FOUNDATIONS OF CONFLICT

### 1.1. *Self and non-self*

In Hinduist thought, the self (Sanskrit. *atman*) is a reality. The historical Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama, c.485-405 BCE) revolted against this notion: the central Buddhist teaching revolves around *anatman*, no-self. 'It is important to note, that *anatman* is not solely a philosophical but also a psychological concept, because it touches on the fundamentals of suffering: the affirmation of a self implies the distinction between "I" and "other"' (Tophoff, 2013, 44). Psychologically, the 'I' is close, the 'other' distant, the 'I' is familiar, the 'other' foreign. The more the person identifies with herself in a complete attachment, the more distant, sometimes even hostile the other(s) become. Here, the basis for suffering is built.

The notion of a permanent self lies at the base of interpersonal conflict, since it opens the gap between self-versus other, between 'us' versus 'them'. It is only when this distinction is transcended that true conflict resolution<sup>1</sup> can take place. According to Buddhist thinking, transcending this distinction, transcending the self, eventually leads to nirvana, ultimate bliss. Nirvana, literally, means extinction, in this case: the extinction of the self. When there is no self and no other, suffering will cease.

The *Four Noble Truths*<sup>2</sup> are the core Buddhist teaching. The first of these Truths points to the reality of suffering. The cause of suffering, according to the second of the Noble Truths, is craving and ignorance.<sup>3</sup> Craving always is directed to all that is external to one's own experienced self, to what the self-desires. Here, the experiencing of one's own self is taken as the basis of the seeming existence of the self, with characteristics such as stability, permanence and separateness. Buddhist teaching, in contrast, denies the existence of a permanent self. Clinging to the idea of a separate self, which includes clinging to one's body, leads to suffering of oneself and of other beings (Tophoff, 2013). In conflict situations, vis-à-vis one's personal self, a separate other is dialectically and implicitly constructed. In making a distinction between oneself and the other, a Pandora's box may be opened.

The Third Noble Truth, which refers to the end of suffering, implies the letting go of craving and of desires. As long as the idea of a separate self is cherished, this letting go of the self's desires is not possible. Pandora's Box then will manifest not only craving, but also desires as well as the urge to gratify these desires, be it at the cost of others. The others, at their turn, will react defensively or aggressively, and again, a spiral of suffering and conflict results. The suffering enhanced by clinging to this distinction is poignantly described by Seng-ts'an (d.606 CE), (Austin, 1998, 700):

'The Great way is not difficult for those who have no preferences. When love and hate are both absent, everything becomes clear and undisguised. Make the smallest distinction, however, and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart. If there is even a trace of this and that, of right and wrong, the Mind-essence<sup>4</sup> will be lost in confusion'



## 1.2. *The Buddhist Noble Truth of suffering*

Conflicts and suffering seem to be inherent in the behaviours of the human being, as in all other mammals. Where most animals usually experience conflicts in a one-to-one situation, however, man is confronted with intra-psychic conflicts, with person-to-person conflicts, with intra-group and intergroup conflicts, even with conflicts between countries and continents. Technological progress in our century makes us perceive the world as 'smaller' than ever before, and connects people to close and almost tangible units. Unfortunately, contact through closeness and connectedness does not necessarily make for more interpersonal harmony, or even for peace. The reality of suffering, the first Noble Truth of Buddhism, is experienced by anyone of us.

Craving, is one cause of suffering. Craving, or attachment, is experienced as clinging to desired states, to persons or to objects, to health or to material possessions. On a wider scale, attachment to one's territory or country leads to a world divided between mine versus yours: 'I am right and you are not'. Attachment can manifest itself in holding on to one's convictions, persuasions, or religion.

Craving easily breeds negative emotions such as anger, greed and hatred that play a crucial role in generating and escalating every kind of suffering and conflict. As to emotions *per se*, Buddhist teaching holds a teleological viewpoint: the function of emotion depends on its outcome: does the emotion lead to a state of happiness or to harming someone? If the emotion results in harming someone, and thus in suffering, it is, in Buddhist terminology, an *unwholesome state*, and as such it is a barrier on the path of conflict resolution.

And again, echoing the above words of Seng-Ts'an, the existence of preferences is the causal factor in negative emotional states. A person wants what he desires and may become attached to it once he has acquired it. He refuses what he does not want, which may result in aversion or hatred.

Suffering often entails other unwholesome states like fear, anxiety and anger. Fear, for instance in the sense of a phobia, is usually directed towards a well-defined object or a certain behavior. It might be the fear of losing what we cherish and what we think we possess, be it a partner, a child, material goods, our health. Anxiety has a more general, free-floating and less circumscribed character. Anxiety may result when struggling with existential questions, with premonitions about one's own death, with televised crises of war and atrocities. Anger frequently has destructive connotations. Here, destruction may be expressed or interjected, on the one hand, as retaliation for acts of aggression, on the other as self-destruction and depression.

These negative emotions will generate new conflict related actions in the other party, either in an individual or in a group. (1) Fear and anxiety may become linked to indignation and anger in an explosive mixture leading to verbal or physical abuse and attacks. (2) Anger can also be interjected by the individual. In that case, and in combination with fear, flight and depression result. (3) Extreme fear can be expressed in a stupor like, frozen shock.

Unwholesome states tend to exacerbate conflicts, which in turn can spiral into new and usually higher levels of negative emotions. Anger breeds anger. Emotional arousal, however, neurophysiological



blocks quiet thinking and hinders sensitive listening to the other(s). In conflict resolution, it is of paramount importance to keep levels of emotional arousal as low as possible. This pertains especially to these situations where discord is expressed honestly and fully. Expressing of discord by one party necessitates the willingness of the other to truly listen. To realize this, a climate of trust and the readiness to hear one another has first to be established between parties.

In his illuminating study of self-regulation in the service of conflict reconciliation, Mischel focuses “on the ability to inhibit impulsive, automatic, ‘hot’ emotional responses” (Mischel et.al. 2014, 310). The process of emotional inhibition, however, is precisely is most difficult in those peaks of conflict that are in themselves characterized by high negative emotional arousal. In section 4 of this paper I will discuss Buddhist based methods of training in self-regulation as a process of cognition, contemplation and introspection. Let us first turn briefly to some neurophysiological aspects of conflict that are in line with the Buddhist concepts presented earlier.

### 1.3. *Neurophysiological aspects*

Unwholesome states are characterized by high emotional arousal, such as in stress producing situations of conflict. Here, the brain – hypothalamus and pituitary gland – activates the adrenal cortex to produce cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline. Consequently, there is a rise in blood pressure, cardiac stimulation and oxygen increase. In other words, the body becomes alert and is ready to deal with a conflict (Austin, 1998; 2006; 2009). If, however, in situations of protracted conflict, the stress becomes chronic, the stress hormone cortisol continues to be produced so that blood sugar levels increase – the body stays in a continued, chronic state of alarm.

High levels of arousal are also instrumental in the activation of another neurophysiological structure, the amygdala, part of the limbic system. The amygdala scans one’s surroundings as to potential threats and reacts to unwholesome states as anger and anxiety. When the person is threatened, the amygdala almost instantly sends out signals of alarm to the body (Mischel et.al., 2014, 315)– in other words it prepares the person to either fight, flight or freeze – behaviours that are incompatible with constructive conflict reconciliation. Inhibition of ‘hot’ emotional impulses during that state becomes almost impossible. Self- regulation, so fundamental in conflict reconciliation, cannot occur.

## 2. IMPORTANT PREREQUISITES FOR MEDIATION: THE BUDDHIST VIRTUES

### 2.1. *Practicing Buddhist virtues in mediation*

A deeper insight into and an understanding of Buddhist teachings may help the mediator to build a mindset which is conducive to conflict reconciliation. This is why, before focusing on the mediator’s training of self-management and of conflict reconciliation strategies, a number of virtues that are important prerequisites for these conflict resolution strategies will first be presented. These virtues include the practice of non-violence, compassion, wisdom, empathy and benevolence. Deeply understanding these virtues so that they become part of the mediator’s mindset, allows her to pass them



on to the clients, by example and by pointing out their relevance for the process of reconciliation of their conflict. Practicing these Buddhist virtues will not only help to cool down high levels of negative, and potentially destructive emotions. Cultivating these virtues is instrumental for the development of feelings of friendliness, agreeableness and loving kindness – and these are essential ingredients when we wish to build a solid and stable basis for effective conflict reconciliation.

### 2.1.1 *Non-violence*

The fundamental ethical principle of non-violence (Skt. *ahimsa*), not harming other sentient beings, was described prior to the Buddhist era by Mahavira (599-527 BCE), the founder of *Jainism*. It is a basic prerequisite for constructive conflict resolution. Here, violence is defined in general terms. It entails all conscious actions to the effect that they may hinder, damage or threaten someone. Ahimsa is integrated in the Buddhist canon through the *Eightfold Path*, the fourth of the *Noble Truths*, which is called Right Action, implying the avoidance of violence in any form<sup>5</sup>. Right action is concerned with the development of compassion with all sentient beings. Non-violence by thought, word or action includes (1) the resolve not to harm others, (2) the avoidance of lying (which can also do harm), (3) the avoiding of violent action. By injuring someone else, one injures oneself (Faure, 2009): ‘don’t do unto others what you don’t want them to do unto you’.

### 2.1.2 *Compassion*

Deeply related to the concept of non-violence is the virtue of compassion with living beings (Skt. *karuna*). Where ahimsa formulates personal behaviour in more negative terms, compassion is described as a fundamental and positive attitude essential for conflict resolution, because it entails empathy, respect and appreciative acknowledgement of the other party. Compassion is one of the core Buddhist virtues, to be integrated as a basic foundation or mindset. An essential prerequisite in conflict resolution strategies, compassion is one of the core Buddhist virtues which are called ‘*The Four Brahmavihara’s*’ (tr. *Divine States of Being*). They are: Compassion, Loving Kindness, Sympathetic Joy, Equanimity. Compassion with her clients should be part of the mediator’s mindset. Ideally, the mediator may, by example and through her interventions, contribute to a more compassionate attitude between clients.

### 2.1.3 *Wisdom*

Murti (1974) emphasizes the close connection between compassion and wisdom. Wisdom (Skt. *Prajna*) in Buddhist terms refers to the insight into the Four Noble Truths, the insight in the reality of suffering. Compassion and Wisdom go hand in hand: ‘Karuna is the actualized state (of Wisdom)’ (Faure, 2009, 264). Wisdom is realized through practicing of compassion. It is ‘inseparable from practice’ (Watson, 1998, 84). Very much down-to-earth, Buddhist teaching here refers to practice: how do I, in fact, communicate compassion to my clients? In this case, the important concept of ‘*Skillful Means*’ (Skt. *Upaya*) is highly relevant. Compassion must be communicated ‘skillfully’ to the clients, which means that



the communication, guided by empathy, must be tailored specifically to the needs of the other party. Compassion implies a responsibility to act. Austin (1999, 651) has this to say: (On the basis of empathy) 'we reach out selflessly to respond in the most sensitive, appropriate way...non-intrusively...In this way, compassion should be skilfully applied'.

The intricate relationship between compassion and action is further clarified by the Chinese Ming philosopher Wang Yangming (1472-1529).<sup>6</sup> Wang focuses on intuitive or innate knowledge (Tophoff, 2007), which includes compassion. For Wang, intuitive knowledge and action are inseparable. In fact, "contacting one's innate knowledge already implies (right) action...it is practiced by the one who deeply 'sees' the human condition of suffering and focuses on its elimination through the letting go of 'selfish desires'" (Tophoff, 2007, 186). In this way, insight into the nature of these virtues only becomes tangible if these virtues are indeed manifested in overt behaviour, in real actions.

The most venerated Buddhist symbol for compassion is the Bodhisattva<sup>7</sup> Avalokitesvara (Chin. *Guanyin*). In Indian and Chinese Buddhist art she is often depicted as a female with many arms. These symbolize her compassionate determination to save all beings. In fact, she is 'the veritable incarnation of all the Buddha's compassion...she even descends into hell in order to save the suffering hell-beings' (Williams, 2009, 221-222).

#### 2.1.4 Benevolence and empathy

In conjunction with non-violence and compassion, the virtue of benevolence or kindness (Skt. *metta*) is another basic prerequisite for conflict resolution. Buddhist monks in South East Asia recite daily the *Metta Sutra*, the sutra on Kindness: "... the man who is wise ...let him be strenuous, upright and truly straight, without conceit of self ...let his senses be controlled ...let none by anger or ill-will wish harm to another..." (Schuhmacher, 1989, 225). Like non-violence and compassion, kindness is neither a technique nor a strategy. What matters is not what someone does, it is what someone is. In other words, these virtues have to become conscious parts of one's mindset, which then forms the starting point for effective action in conflict reconciliation. Empathy is related to benevolence and compassion. It is one of the virtues most needed by the mediator. Practicing empathy, the mediator tries to be in the shoes of her client, without, however, identifying with him. The essential part is the mediator's capacity to fully and actively communicate this -to the client, so that the client not only hears the words, but feels the connection.

Buddhism teaches that these virtues are inborn, as part of one's innate 'Buddha- nature'. Recent neurophysiological and cognitive-behavioural research seems to offer scientific support to this view (Siegel, 2007; de Waal, 2009). Notwithstanding that these virtues are, so to say, neurologically preprogrammed, they have to be developed and trained in order to become true competencies of conflict resolution.



### 3 BUDDHIST SELF-MANAGEMENT FOR THE MEDIATOR

#### 3.1 *Impulse-regulation and meditation-in-action*

Conflict resolution tools for the mediator can be trained academically as part of a wider ‘personal skills’ curriculum. For those tools to become both meaningful and effective, training has to take place on a more person-centered level, too, since the functioning of the whole person is concerned. Here the focus is twofold.

First, the Buddhist virtues have to be developed as prerequisites for mediation. These virtues need to be focused on during mediation training. Here, gaining theoretical insight into their function within conflict reconciliation is important. However, as Wang Yangming reminds us, insight should go hand in hand with action. This makes role playing of these virtues in mediation practice an excellent training tool. It allows the students to grasp their effectiveness when they learn to manifest them in their practice.

Second, equally important, self-management mechanisms have to be learned as well. To fully evolve as a person, in the professional sense, management of self has to precede management of others (Tophoff, 2007; 2013; 2014). Before being able to manage conflicts in the outside world, the mediator has to first listen to her/his ‘inner’ world. It is from this personal vantage point that she proceeds when constructive reconciliation is needed.

Adequate self-management requires the capacity of the mediator of impulse regulation. Assisting in the process of reconciliation, intense emotions may be provoked in the mediator. Likewise, emotions of the other parties may easily ‘infect’ her. So it is fundamental for the mediator to be able to control high levels of emotional arousal and to ‘cool down’ to a state of a clear, non-judgmental, attentive awareness of what is occurring in the moment. This state is mindfulness. Without it, conflict resolution fails.

Mindfulness might be imparted in several ways (Siegel, 2007; Tophoff, 2003). One of the most important of these is practicing meditation and learning to concentrate on breathing. Mindful breathing is an anathema to emotional arousal. As the mediator focuses her attention on her breathing, breathing will by itself get deeper and slower. Mindful breathing does not take more than two minutes to realize. By employing mindful breathing, the level of emotional arousal will be brought down. As such it is the basic ingredient for deactivating highly emotionally loaded states of arousal. In order to practice mindful breathing in order to achieve this attitude of stillness and self-reflection, the mediator might want to devote twenty-minute- periods daily to meditation. Meditation entails a quiet, non-judgmental observation of what is happening within and around the person without any attachment to these stimuli. Meditation thus helps the mediator to contact her ‘inner theater’ and to train her introspection and self-reflection, allowing the mediator to focus more consciously and clearly on the style and content of her interventions.

Gradually, the mediator will be more and more capable of manifesting the virtues within her profession, and to help her clients to reconcile and to grow. Once self- regulation techniques are mastered by the mediator, she may then start to teach them to her clients. Learning by example is the easiest way, for the mediator’s clients too. Mindful breathing, as a powerful antidote against ‘hot’ emotional responses



from clients, is easily taught to them. The transmission of the virtues, likewise, advances best by setting an example. If the mediator is capable to share these attitudes and techniques within her work, the atmosphere between clients will change accordingly.

In the Chinese Buddhist traditions, meditation is 'extended' and generalized into whatever action: *meditation-in-action*, or 'meditation-in-the-marketplace' (Tophoff, 2003, *passim*). In early Buddhism, meditation was the domain of monks and nuns. It was directed towards transcendence of worldly matters in the process of reaching *nirvana*. Buddhism arrived on mainland China around 550 CE. In China, however, the function of meditation changed fundamentally. Here, meditation was no more an activity confined to monks and nuns, but to be practiced by anyone. Indeed, meditation became integrated in day to day living, as an inner attitude, emphasizing an attentive focus on whatever activity without judgment. Meditation became: *meditation-in-action*, or: *meditation-on-the-, marketplace* (Tophoff, 2003). *Meditation-in-action* is mindful action<sup>8</sup>. Since, as we have seen, Buddhism warns against the making of distinctions, each action is of equal importance, and each action merits the same degree of mindfulness. So meditation becomes an essential tool 'on the marketplace': "For penetrating the depths of one's own true self-nature and for attaining a vitality valid on all occasions, nothing can surpass meditation in the midst of activity", says Hakuin (1686-1769), a famous Chan Buddhist teacher (Tophoff, 2003, 105).

As one becomes able to connect to a state of mindfulness, overt and sometimes violent expression of negative emotions, such as anger – counter-productive in conflict resolution - is no longer needed. Anger, however, might also be dealt with Introspectively. In this case, the emotion is mindfully acknowledged without judgment. Emotion is, so to say, 'permitted' to be present in awareness. Integrated with mindful breathing, the intensity of the emotion will then fade, so that conflict resolution can proceed from inner quiet and from a receptive mindset.

## 4 BUDDHIST BASED STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE MEDIATION

### 4.1 *Transcending the self*

The foremost important and certainly the most time consuming task for the mediator in every kind of conflict resolution process is building a twofold respectful connection: 1. with the stakeholders and 2. between the persons. In both instances, this requires a transcending of the 'I' versus the 'You'. To do this, the emphasis is no longer on differences. Instead, it is important to make explicit the commonalities that transcend the purely individual targets of each person separately. In order to bring this about, several consecutive actions are necessary. After *assessment of the conflict situation*, and after introspectively having become *aware of her one's inner emotional state* the mediator has to *neutralize the level of arousal* before meeting his clients. Here, and at any further period with high levels of emotion, the mediator's focus is on impulse regulation and on establishing an inner atmosphere of mindful quiet. Only in this way she can manifest an open and receptive stance. It is from this inner quiet, that the mediator can take the first step to build a meaningful connection with the persons. This connection is achieved by *Active listening*. Active listening implies true understanding of another's position, explicitly communicated

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in such a way that the client does indeed feel understood and acknowledged. Subsequently, the mediator will respectfully *communicate empathy, compassion and benevolence* (5), so that her client feels esteemed and acknowledged.

During this process, through the mediator's interventions, a positive climate of growth may be facilitated between the conflicting parties. Existing differences are not diminished or denied, but non-judgmentally acknowledged. As both parties feel more and more accepted in this way, there will more space to consider potential common ground.

Establishing a connection in this way is the foremost priority in the process of conflict resolution. Once the connection is: (1) fully established and acknowledged by both parties, and (2) impulse-regulation is maximized, the factual problematic issues - the so-called causes of the conflict, (which in fact they are not!) - can then be dealt with in a non-threatening atmosphere of trust, respect and security. In dealing with these disputes, it is essential to differentiate between person and problem. This means that the problem has to be externalized. The other party is not the problem; the problem is the problem. By objectifying the problem both parties can look at it together in order to reach a solution which is satisfying and rewarding to both of them.

#### 4.2 *Welcoming the enemy*

Sometimes, however, the mediator has to deal with direct forms of aggression. Then 'welcoming of the adversary seems to be the best of strategies' (Tophoff, 2013, 29). This strategy originally stems from Eastern martial arts, such as aikido and judo. Judo signifies *the friendly way*, whereas aikido may be translated as *the way of harmonizing the energy*. Note that already in the names of these martial arts the contrary of aggression is expressed.

In the welcoming the adversary strategy, the aggressor is no longer an opponent one has to be fight, or from which one must run away, or in whose presence one freezes in anguish and stupor. In successful conflict resolution, this party is reframed and treated as a 'welcome guest'. Our guest brings a gift: his attack (Tophoff, 2013). This gift is appreciated by the mediator, who flows and moves with the energy of the attack – instead of fighting it. The attack, in this way, misses its goal, and the energy of it fades. Now the mediator can start to build a positive connection.

Here, of course, lies a critical challenge for the mediator: to respond emotionally with a response that is not intended or perceived as a counter attack. In implementing this strategy, he need for an adequate self-regulation becomes ever more obvious. This is phrased beautifully in an ancient Buddhist text:

'An enemy should be looked on as a beneficial treasure, for he gives one a good opportunity for practicing patience, and should be venerated accordingly' (*Bodhi- caryavatara VI*, in Harvey, 2000, 245). Paradoxically and in Buddhist terms<sup>9</sup>, the other party – the 'adversary'- becomes a true Bodhisattva. In his turn he will show benevolence and compassion, and he will let these very same virtues shine in the mediator.



## 5. SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to show how Buddhist teaching may offer a solid foundation for understanding and managing conflict and conflict reconciliation in mediation.

At the base of interpersonal conflict lies the notion of a permanent self. The affirmation of self implies the distinction between self and other, between us versus them. Buddhism teaches the importance of transcending this distinction. Only then conflict resolution can take place. Clinging to the idea of a separate self leads to suffering. One of the main causes of suffering is craving. Craving breeds negative emotions. Neurophysiological and psychologically these lead to high emotional arousal. Conflict resolution, however, is negatively correlated with high emotional arousal. Essential Buddhist based prerequisites for mediation such as virtues as non-violence, compassion, wisdom, empathy and benevolence, facilitate impulse regulation as they become part of the mediator's mindset.

The implication of the above for the mediator – and for her training – are manifold. Self-management of the mediator (and eventually of his clients) has to precede management of conflicts of others. Self-management includes impulse regulation. Buddhist based techniques such as meditation and mindful breathing are helpful towards this end. They have to be trained and practiced by the mediator. Consequently, these techniques may then be taught to the mediator's clients. Likewise, a mindset characterized by Buddhist virtues, may first be learned in person-centered courses, and then be practiced in the mediation process itself.

In this way, the mediator learns to build a respectful connection with the clients, and, by example, can influence the climate between them. Gradually, the mediator develops high states of mindfulness. But, even more important, she assists her clients in their own process of reconciliation and growth.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In true conflict resolution winners nor losers exist. True conflict resolution leads to a mutual and respectful communality, where the 'we' transcends the 'me' and the 'you'.

<sup>2</sup> The Four Noble Truths are: 1. The reality of suffering. 2. Suffering is caused by craving. 3. Suffering can end. 4. *The Eightfold Path* to end suffering.

<sup>3</sup> Ignorance, here, refers to not being able to grasp the Four Noble Truths. 'It is that state of mind that does not correspond to reality ... and brings forth suffering (Schumacher, 1989, p.26)

<sup>4</sup> In Siegel's (2007, 5) Buddhist inspired definition of mind, the emphasis is on transience and change: "Mind is a process that regulates the flow of energy and information". Buddhists maintain that mind is essentially empty (Fung Yu-Lan, 1983). This refers to the awareness of and the insight into the illusion of permanence and fixed stabilities. In that sense, even the concept of emptiness is an illusion. Even 'a trace of this and that' already suggest difference and concept. <sup>5</sup> This is the reason why devout Buddhists are vegetarians.

<sup>6</sup> Though Wang Yangmin is frequently considered a Neo-Confucian philosopher ((Chan, 1962; Henke,



1964; Tu Wei-ming, 1976), Tophoff (2007) presents him as a Chan Buddhist.

<sup>7</sup> A Bodhisattva is an enlightened being ‘who renounces complete entry to nirvana until all beings are saved. The determining factor for his action is compassion, supported by highest insight and wisdom’ (Schuhmacher e.a. 1986, 39).

<sup>8</sup> It is also a fundamental factor in the prevention of stress-related disorders and recurrent depression (Teasdale et al., 2000; Davidson, 200).

<sup>9</sup> *A note of caution.* Orientalistic Asia lovers often equalize Buddhism with peace and serene harmony. Also in Buddhism, however, theory and practice sometimes don’t connect at all. Zen Buddhist monks during World War II ‘often justified some of the worst forms of brutality in the name of “ruthless compassion”’ (Faure, 2009, 125).

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