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"Adding Legs to a Snake": A Reanalysis of Motivation and the Pursuit of Happiness From a Zen Buddhist Perspective

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Current theories of motivation provide insightful discussions of why people behave as they do. In addition, the research studies surrounding these theories provide insights that can help people move toward the goals of greater competence, autonomy, and relatedness. However, these theories cannot lead to realization of what is widely considered the most fundamental goal of humanity: underlying contentment. In this article, a Zen Buddhist perspective is presented that illuminates some problematic aspects of current theories of motivation. The article also presents the way in which Zen Buddhism avoids these problems and points toward contentment (whether linked to Buddhist doctrine or not). The article closes with educational implications of a Zen Buddhist perspective.

Arguably the most central issue in understanding humanity is an understanding of motivation. Physical and mental capabilities, conceptual and strategic knowledge, and the ability to flexibly and creatively integrate and apply these resources afford the potential for action, but it is motivation that provides direction for that potential and sets it in motion. A major emphasis of current research and theory in the area of motivation is that humans are motivated to achieve goals (e.g., Ames, 1992; Graham & Weiner, 1996; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Stipek, 1996). Although different researchers structure the study of motivation differently, one useful means of organizing human goals is into the goals of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci, 1995; Ryan & Powelson, 1991). Achievement of these goals is considered to be important because the degree to which we perceive that these goals are met at any particular point in time is presumed to be directly related to our realization of "the actual end state that is desired for all behavior . . . the affective experience associated with motive satisfaction" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 232). Stated differently, the degree to which we feel that we have met our goals is directly related to our happiness or contentment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argued that the pursuit of happiness has been, and remains, the most central motivator of human thought and action:

> Twenty-three hundred years ago Aristotle concluded that, more than anything else, men and women seek happiness. While happiness itself is sought for its own sake, every other goal—health, beauty, money, or power—is valued only because we expect that it will make us happy. Much has changed since Aristotle's time. . . . And yet on this most important issue very little has changed in the intervening centuries. (p. 1)

The problem is that although current theories of motivation can help support people's development of greater levels of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, they cannot lead to the underlying contentment that people truly seek. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) stated, "People who learn to control inner experiences will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy" (p. 2). This suggests that we can become happier, but true happiness that reflects underlying contentment and a sense of harmony, even in the face of adversity and pain, is essentially beyond our reach. True happiness requires the dissipation of deeply rooted restlessness and anxiety that results from discrepancy between one's experiences and one's understandings, values, and expectations. This restlessness and anxiety is rooted in uncertainty about who we are and how we fit into the larger context (e.g., Abe, 1985; Kasulis, 1981). Thus, true happiness is not a temporary positive affective state, but a lack of conflict with what is.

Current motivation theory rarely focuses on such topics as underlying contentment and what philosophers recognize as "ontological anxiety." However, such topics are important to a thorough understanding of human motivation across the course of the human life span. Although these topics are not discussed very often in contemporary motivation literature, there is a perspective that addresses these concerns at length and approaches the topics of motivation and contentment from a completely different vantage point in general. This approach is Zen Buddhism.

In this article, I will compare and contrast current theories of motivation with Zen Buddhism as it relates to motivation and the realization of contentment. In doing so, I will clarify why Zen Buddhism would suggest that current theories of motivation are problematic and cannot lead to contentment at the deepest level. In closing, I will discuss some educational implications of a Zen Buddhist perspective on motivation and contentment.

In presenting a perspective that is often recognized as a religion (even though most Zen Buddhists would not call Zen Buddhism a religion), I understand that some people may be wary of my intentions. However, I am not trying to convert anyone to Zen Buddhism, nor do I seek to transform school classrooms into Zen monasteries. I present a Zen

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Buddhist perspective because I do not believe there is a perspective that can more thoroughly or powerfully illuminate problematic aspects of current theories of motivation while presenting a viable path out of these problems (whether linked to Buddhist doctrine or not).

Current Research and Theories of Motivation

As was mentioned earlier, one prominent means of organizing the primary goals that motivate human thought and action is to cluster the goals into the pursuit of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. A related emphasis in current research and theory in the area of motivation is the centrality of the concept of self to motivation (e.g., Graham & Weiner, 1996). In this section, I will provide a brief overview of contemporary motivation literature related to competence, autonomy, relatedness, and self.

Competence

The goal of making meaning of the world and developing the ability to function efficiently and effectively within it has long been considered essential to humans' survival and quality of life. It is also widely assumed to be fundamental to human motivation (see Deci & Ryan, 1985; Graham & Weiner, 1996; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Stipek, 1996). This goal is in essence the goal of competence. Competence involves having the physical and mental capabilities as well as the conceptual, strategic, and metacognitive knowledge to flexibly and creatively address the demands of any particular situation. However, inasmuch as there is no naturally occurring, fixed standard of competence that will ensure our survival or happiness, humans (both individually and collectively) create their own means of determining competence. As a result, the pursuit of competence becomes the pursuit of a satisfactory self-evaluation of our own competence on the basis of personal or group-determined standards, or both. Stated differently, in the absence of an objective standard of competence, the goal of competence becomes the goal of self-efficacy.

The centrality of self-evaluation in the pursuit of competence has significant implications. It suggests that people's actual levels of ability are not as important to their success and contentment as their perception of the adequacy of their present levels of ability. Indeed, research in such areas as self-efficacy, goal orientation, personal attribution, helplessness, and self-worth provide a wealth of data to support this hypothesis (Bandura, 1993; Covington, 1992; Deci, 1995; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Graham & Weiner, 1996; Nicholls, 1984; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Even when we consider ourselves to be competent, the satisfaction that we derive from this level of competence does not last. As a consequence, we raise our standards for competence and we seek to improve our capabilities further by conquering optimal challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, realization of our current conceptualization of competence is almost perpetually just beyond our reach.

Autonomy

Although competence is extremely important to discussions of motivation, the freedom to determine how one's physical and mental skills (competence) will be implemented is also widely considered to be a fundamental human goal. Many researchers have suggested that humans appear to have a need to be free of external controls and able to determine their own courses of action and effect change on the environment (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; deCharms, 1976; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Weiner, 1992). Research supports the notion that the perception of being autonomous is generally associated with higher levels of achievement than the perception of being controlled (see Deci, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Although the central aspect of autonomy is control, researchers clarify that motivation and happiness are not contingent on dictating what transpires in a particular situation or on any absolute level of self-determination. Instead, motivation and happiness are contingent on the perception of choice and the absence of being controlled by either external forces or internal demons (see Deci, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, as with competence, an important aspect of the goal of autonomy is that it is met to one's own, self-determined level of satisfaction.

Relatedness

It is widely acknowledged that humans are social creatures and that social relationships are important to us in many different ways. For example, our systems for conceptualizing the world are presumed to be shaped by the cultures in which we are raised, as are the very ways in which we think (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978). But, a number of people have hypothesized that social relationships serve another fundamental purpose. Social relationships provide a means for validating that we are valuable individuals who are competent and capable of exerting some control over the environment and enacting some change on that environment (see Banaji & Prentice, 1994). In addition, through such validation and the building of social bonds, we feel that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and are not alone in the world (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Juvonen, 1996; Ryan & Powelson, 1991; Wentzel, 1996).

Many researchers support the notion that social relationships significantly influence our perceptions of ourselves. For example, researchers have suggested that the evaluations of valued others such as teachers, parents, and peers can affect our self-esteem (e.g., Berndt & Keefe, 1996; Harter, 1996; Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougall, 1996; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1996; Stipek, 1996). Social relationships also can affect our self-perceptions in a different way. Through combining our skills with those of others in a cooperative fashion, we can extend our individual capacity for competence and our ability to control or bring about change in the environment (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Slavin, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978); thus, group identification can enhance one's self-worth (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Self

> [M]ost of what psychologists currently know about human nature is based on one particular view—the so-called Western view of the individual as an independent self-contained, autonomous entity. (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224)

Consistent with this assertion, one of the most fundamental assumptions reflected across current motivation literature (either explicitly or implicitly) is that every individual is directed by an independent essence recognized as a self (e.g., McCombs, 1989; Whisler, 1991). As Covington (1991) stated, self is widely considered to be "the progenitor of all psychological processes and of every behavior . . . all hypothesized inhabitants of the mind—cognitions, feeling states, and metacognitions—are best thought of as subsystems under the central control of the self as agency" (p. 83). Thus, self is considered to be the central factor in determining our motivation and contentment. Whisler (1991) reinforced this idea when she stated, "[o]ur sense of self . . . is the foundation for the quality of all of our experiences in life and for who and what we become" (p. 16). Consequently, motivation and contentment are presumed to be enhanced by strengthening one's concept of self. Thus, most current researchers would agree with Deci and Ryan (1985) when they suggest,

> [S]elf-determined functioning . . . is theorized to be based in a strong sense of self, and thus to be associated with a high level of self-esteem. . . . [Therefore] ego-development, self-actualization, and self-esteem are all positive and highly valued characteristics. (p. 165)

The underlying assumption of the centrality of self to motivation has resulted in an increased focus on the study of self-related concepts. As Graham and Weiner (1996) point out, current research and theory in motivation reflect an emphasis on such topics as self-worth (e.g., Covington, 1992), self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1993; Schunk, 1994), self-regulation (e.g., Meece, 1994; Zimmerman, 1994), self-determination (e.g., Deci, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985), self-concept (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991), possible selves (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1986), self-focus (e.g., Duval & Wecklund, 1972), self-handicapping (e.g., Jones & Berglas, 1978; Midgley & Urdan, 1995), and self-monitoring (e.g., Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). This body of literature has led Graham and Weiner (1996) to suggest that the study of self is "probably the main new direction in the field of motivation . . . and . . . on the verge of dominating the field of motivation" (p. 77).

A Zen Buddhist Perspective on Motivation and Contentment

Although Zen Buddhism shares some similarities with current theories of motivation, there are fundamental differences between these two understandings of human experience. In what follows, the basic tenets of Zen Buddhism will be presented. This will be followed by a comparison of current views of motivation and Zen Buddhism as it relates to motivation and contentment.

The Human Experience

Zen Buddhism holds that the original nature of human beings is pure and harmonious, free from anxiety and perplexity. However, humans are characterized by a fundamental restlessness or anxiety and fail to existentially realize their original nature. Thus, they are discontented at the deepest level. This state of restlessness and anxiety is represented in the First Noble Truth of Buddhism, "Life is dukkha." In this statement, the word *dukkha* conveys not only its typical meaning of *suffering,* but also "deeper ideas such as 'imperfection,' 'impermanence,' 'emptiness,' 'insubstantiality' " (Rahula, 1974, p. 17). Thus, the First Noble Truth states that, prior to enlightenment, no matter how desperately or diligently happiness is sought, at the deepest level, we will be discontented.

The cause for dukkha is craving, striving, or thirst. This is the Second Noble Truth, and it is intended to account for all manifestations of craving—from craving for sensory pleasures to "the will to be, to exist, to re-exist, to become more and more, to grow more and more, to accumulate more and more" (Rahula, 1974, p. 31). Craving can be traced to one's belief in a permanent essence or self (Abe, 1985; Chang, 1969; Kasulis, 1981; Rahula, 1974; Watts, 1957; Wu, 1996). Indeed, for the Buddhist, belief in an independent self is at the core of delusion and strikes to the heart of human unhappiness:

> According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of "me" and "mine," selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world. (Rahula, 1974, p. 51)

Buddhism holds that there is no independent thinker behind the thought, no mover behind the movement. The Buddha taught that what we recognize as a self or permanent essence is actually an ever-changing configuration of physical and mental energies or processes that is only meaningful because of surrounding conditions (particular contexts). This configuration includes the capacity for memory, evaluation, and reflection, but no matter how systematic one's thoughts or actions may be as a result of this capacity, this should not be mistaken for a permanent essence.

As was mentioned earlier, for the Buddhist, belief in self is at the core of human suffering. Once we are committed to the existence of self, we cannot escape the fundamental anxiety that plagues us and we cannot find peace. Self becomes the central concept in our systematic endeavor to gain some foothold on experience. We do so by attempting to make meaning of the flood of raw data that presents itself in experience so that we might not only survive, but flourish. In other words, we seek to have a better understanding of how the world works and how we might act in subsequent situations so as to ensure survival and contentment. In order to facilitate the making of meaning, we break experience into manageable parts that seem to us to have some consistency from one experience to the next. Stated differ-

ently, the creation of meaning, including the creation of self, is a quest for permanence.

However, there are no fixed means of measuring or assigning meaning to things (objects, ideas, or events) in the world, so humans created means of defining things. For this purpose, we create qualities or characteristics such as long–short, hot–cold, beautiful–ugly, strong–weak, useful–useless, meaningful–meaningless, and good–bad. Then, we attribute these qualities to things so that we can understand how to interact with these things.

As part of this process, we come to value certain ideas, objects, or events more highly than others because, on the basis of our personal systems for making meaning of the world, they seem to be more closely related to our survival, success, and happiness. Thus, we desire the acquisition of certain objects, wish for certain outcomes, believe that things should happen in a certain way, and develop attachment to certain ideas and actions as the right way to proceed. All of these are manifestations of craving.

The problem is that such craving cannot deliver happiness. First, we may not be able to acquire what we want or obtain the outcomes we desire, so we are frustrated. Even when we acquire prized objects and accomplish desired objectives, our contentment with this occurrence fades and we want more or something else. Likewise, things will not always go the way we think they should, which will be frustrating. They may for a time, but experience bears out that, ultimately, humans cannot take control of the environment around them, and even if everyone in a group agrees on what is good or best, it still may not happen. Happiness simply cannot be objectified and grasped. It is not something static that can be captured.

An important related issue concerns making meaning of ourselves. In the process of making meaning of the world, we also have to give meaning to ourselves. So long as each of us considers him or herself a fixed entity, we must ask, Who am I? What qualities define me? Why am I here? How is my individual meaning meaningful in the big picture? These are questions of great consequence to an individual, and we crave validation that we are indeed the autonomous entities we believe ourselves to be, and that we are important and meaningful in the broader context. However, because at the root, all meaning is based on certain assumptions that cannot be verified, these questions cannot be answered in any definitive way. Thus, the quest to validate our permanence is a source of underlying anxiety and unhappiness.

Contentment

Zen Buddhism suggests that liberation from suffering and the realization of contentment come not from adding to what is (the present prereflective experience, just as it is), but by removing all additions to what is. This involves emptying ourselves of conceptualizations, including self, which involves the removal of all filters and partitions we have created between ourselves and aspects of our experience. When this happens, we are free to experience the present moment, just as it is. We are no longer separate from the world, but an integrated part of it. In addition, we are no longer separate from ourselves, asking, Who am I?—which suggests two selves, that which is asking and that about which is being asked.

The nature of this liberation was beautifully presented by Ch'ing-yuan Wei-hsin when he said

> Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, "Mountains are mountains, waters are waters."
>
> After I got an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, I said, "Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters."
>
> But now, having attained the abode of final rest (that is, Awakening), I say, "Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters."
>
> And then he asks, "Do you think these three understandings are the same or different?" (Abe, 1985, p. 4)

In the first stage (the stage at which virtually all people function), Wei-hsin distinguishes mountains, waters, and self as three distinct entities. Therefore, he says, "mountains are mountains," distinct from other things. He experiences mountains and waters by way of the concepts he has attributed to them. Thus, when he interacts with these mountains and waters, he is separated from them by the filters of conceptualization and his understanding of them is structured by, and therefore limited by, this conceptualization. In the second stage, Wei-hsin realizes that there are no grounds for discrimination and that self and all other things are without an individual, permanent essence. Thus, there is no basis for identifying a mountain as distinct from other things, and so he says, "mountains are not mountains."

Although the second stage represents a significant breakthrough, it is still incomplete and problematic. Wei-hsin is almost entirely free from the entanglement of conceptualization in this stage, but not quite completely. Commitment to discrimination is replaced by commitment to no discrimination. The permanent ego–self viewing itself and all other things as distinct has crumbled and been replaced by an ungraspable no self that sees itself and all other things as impermanent and indistinguishable. Self is still something empty and unattainable, so there is still a trace of objectification. No self (of the second stage) is distinguished from ego–self (of the first stage) and discrimination is distinguished from no discrimination. Thus, a further leap is necessary.

The realization that demarcates the second from the third stage is the shift from the understanding that "I am empty" to the understanding that "Emptiness am I." This is a shift from an understanding that we have no ground for grasping reality (because all is impermanent) to an understanding that this impermanence is the fundamental nature of everything. Thus, the conceptualized and conceptualizing self is once and for all removed as the source of all thought and action. Because emptiness is the root of all things, through emptiness we are interfused with all things. Thus, that which we formerly conceptualized as *self* and *mountain* are inextricably intertwined.

Concurrently, at any given moment, self and mountains can be perceived as somewhat separate configurations of potentiality within the interwoven tapestry that is the current experience. However, self and mountains are recognized as

undetermined, constantly changing configurations of potentiality with no permanent essence. They assume a particular meaning in a particular context, but as soon as the context changes, their potentiality will be manifested in a different way and their meaning, significance, and use will be different. Because their meaning is not fixed or limited by conceptualization, in stage three, Wei-hsin affirms that mountains are really mountains. In other words, they are finally seen for what they truly are, raw, undetermined potentiality, free of the limitations and entanglements of conceptualization.

Thus, stage three should not be construed as a return to stage one. It is rather the transcendence of the duality between differentiation and no differentiation. The affirmation of stage three is not an affirmation from the relative standpoint of self that is based on conceptualization. It is an affirmation of that aspect of the prereflective present experience in all of its fluctuating particularity at this instance. (This discussion of the mountains–waters passage has drawn heavily on the insightful discussion of this passage in Abe, 1985.)

In accordance with this view, the enlightened Wei-hsin simply flows with the situation, which is natural, as he is an integral part of the context, just as it is at this moment. Note that this is somewhat different from the way in which an unenlightened person approaches a situation (e.g., Kasulis, 1981). The unenlightened person typically acts **on** the situation as a result of conscious reflection based on evaluation, preferences, and expectations. These evaluations, preferences, and expectations become fairly well established with repeated experiences, and inasmuch as these conceptualizations shape thought and action, consistent patterns of thought and action can be mistaken for a permanent essence. As has been discussed, the problem is that these evaluations, preferences, and expectations filter experience and determine our thoughts and actions and thus we lose direct contact with reality. This is problematic because when free-flowing harmony with "what is" is blocked, we experience fundamental restlessness, anxiety, or discontent (Abe, 1985).

Conceptualization is so perilous to contentment that Zen Buddhism suggests that even if the philosophy of Zen Buddhism becomes a static conceptualization, it will lead one astray. This point is illustrated in the following passage:

> Coming to a ford in a river, two Zen monks met a beautiful maiden who asked assistance in getting across because of the depth and strength of the current. The first monk hesitated, starting to make apologies—the rules of the religious order forbade physical contact with women. The second monk, on the other hand, without a moment's hesitation picked her up and carried her across. With a parting gesture of thanks, the young woman continued on her way, the two monks going off in the other direction. After some time, the first monk said to the second, "You shouldn't have picked her up like that—the rules forbid it." The second monk replied in surprise, "You must be very tired indeed! As soon as we had crossed the river I put her down. But you! You have been carrying her all this time!" (Kasulis, 1981, p. 46)

The first monk was so wrapped up in compliance with his philosophy that he could not act freely. In strictly applying the rules of conduct associated with his religious order, he was not free to provide the woman with the efficient and effective solution enacted by the second monk. The second monk knew the philosophy just as well, but he recognized that the rules of conduct were intended to lead one away from attachments and toward freedom, so he did not get entangled by the rules and view them as **being** freedom. Thus, he was able to flow with the situations and do what needed to be done. That is why Yamaoka Tesshu stated, "Zen is like soap. First you wash with it, and then you wash off the soap" (as cited in Aitken, 1990, p. 58).

To be sure, the enlightened person has been conditioned by his or her culture and other learning experiences to have a certain set of possibilities for action that have been accumulated to that point in time; however, this accumulated information does not determine his or her actions (Kasulis, 1981). Because the enlightened person's belief in and reliance upon conceptualizations has been shattered, he or she is unattached to objects, thoughts, or actions and thus has no preferences or expectations that direct his or her functioning. Techniques for functioning are learned and ready for potential use and information about possibilities related to the presence of certain potentialities is retained, but none of this is imposed on the situation. Instead, it is set in motion in a particular way, given the specific configuration of the present moment.

The next logical question is, "How do we know what actions are appropriate for a particular situation?" When the great master Chao-Chou was an unenlightened student, he asked his master Nan-ch'uan basically the same question and received the following response:

> "By intending to accord [with "what is" by having a particular guideline for action] you immediately deviate."
>
> "But without intention, how can one know the Tao [the Way]?"
>
> "The Tao," said the master, "belongs neither to knowing nor to not knowing. Knowing is false understanding; not knowing is blind ignorance. If you really understand the Tao beyond doubt, it's like the empty sky. Why drag in right and wrong?" (Watts, 1975, p. 38)

For the Zen Buddhist, there is no goal to be striven for, no unchanging "Good" that is to be reflected in our actions. Such mental wrangling only adds to what is and impedes our experience of immediacy with what is. Indeed, the belief that we need to add to what is is at the heart of craving and unhappiness. That is why Yao-shan responded to the question addressed above by pointing to a cloud in the sky and water in a jug (Watts, 1957, p. 153). Clouds and water take a particular form based on the context or conditions that exist at this moment. There is no conscious effort to control their form or deliberate about the issue. Thus, Yun-men advised, "In walking, just walk. In sitting, just sit. Above all, don't wobble" (Watts, 1957, p. 139).

This should not be construed as an absolute rejection of thought and the promotion of animal-like instinct. Indeed, spontaneous action based on interfusion with the present experience is considered the enlightened path, whereas evaluation and reflective analysis based on conceptualization are considered impediments to free-flowing immediacy.

However, as Kasulis (1981) explained, thought serves an important function:

> When immediacy is blocked by some new phenomenon or by some previously unnoticed presupposition, one may think in order to eliminate the obstruction, but one does so only until one can again abandon reflective conceptualization and return to immediacy. (p. 60)

Thus, what is rejected is not all forms of thought, but thought that obstructs immediacy.

In a similar fashion, conceptualization and language are not to be entirely abandoned. If they get in the way of immediacy, they are problematic. However, if one can recognize their limitations and fundamental emptiness, they may be useful in particular circumstances. Kasulis's (1981) words are again helpful in this instance:

> If one finds it necessary to describe or analyze phenomena, one will be cognizant of which aspects of the primordial experience are being highlighted and which hidden by the distinctions. By recognizing the limitations of language and conceptualization, one can use them without being misled by them. (p. 61)

So, as was the case with thought, Zen Buddhism does not reject conceptualization and language, just conceptualization and language that block immediacy.

After reading all of this, one might suggest that the enlightened person is not free at all, but determined by the situation. However, this is not so. To be directed by the situation, we would have to be separate from the situation and we are not. Because the enlightened "person" (configuration of potentiality at a given moment) has been liberated from the channeling effect of conceptualizations, rather than being determined by the situation, he or she acts without hindrance and in this way is completely free.

Finally, it is important to consider Wei-hsin's closing question, "Do you think these three understandings are the same or different?" The answer is that they are the same and different. As has been discussed, in a sense, at any given moment, we can identify particular configurations of potentiality, so you could argue that we can distinguish things. However, each thing is truly empty of permanence, so in another sense you cannot distinguish things. This is the understanding of particularity and interfusion that is the core of enlightenment and the ground of contentment for Zen Buddhists. (It is important to note, however, that this must be understood existentially rather than intellectually to be enlightenment.)

Wei-hsin's question is also relevant to the discussion of motivation and contentment in another way. The Zen master Dogen clarified that sentient beings do not **have** the capacity for enlightenment, but **are** enlightened (Abe, 1985; Kasulis, 1981). In other words, sentient beings are not separate from enlightenment, with enlightenment being out there to be grasped. Instead, the original nature of sentient beings **is** enlightened, although it may be obscured by conceptualization. In the same way, although there is a difference in Wei-hsin's understanding across these three stages, there is no difference in the original nature of Wei-hsin across these three understandings. In the context of the present discussion, we can relate this to the fact that it is a mistake to see happiness as separate from self and thus something to be striven for. Our original nature is contentment or happiness and we simply need to realize this thoroughly and existentially.

A Comparison of Current Theories of Motivation and Zen Buddhism as They Relate to Motivation and Contentment

There are some important similarities between current theories of motivation and Zen Buddhism as they relate to motivation and contentment. Both suggest that humans are fundamentally motivated to realize contentment. Both would also agree that most humans seek contentment by striving to attain goals that they value, such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness. However, Zen Buddhism differs significantly from current theories of motivation regarding the realization of contentment.

The core of this difference is the issue of self. The concept of a distinct and autonomous self is a central focus of current theories of motivation, and motivation and contentment are considered to be contingent on a strong sense of self. However, from a Zen Buddhist perspective, the belief in a permanent essence or self is the cornerstone of delusion and the source of human suffering. Belief in the concept of self is like "adding legs to a snake," as the Zen expression goes. It is a concept that doesn't belong. It is an addition to what is. Zen Buddhism suggests that validating the concept of self does not lead toward contentment, but completely undermines any hope of realizing contentment. To the Zen Buddhist, contentment is realized by eliminating the concept of self and, in so doing, all other concepts. That is also why Chao-Chou responded as he did in the following exchange:

> A monk said to Chao-Chou, "I have just entered this monastery. Please teach me."
> Chao-Chou said, "Have you eaten your rice gruel?"
> The monk said, "Yes I have."
> Chao-Chou said, "Wash your bowl." (Aitken, 1990, p. 54)

The key to contentment is "washing" oneself clean of self (and all other concepts) and returning to a prereflective experiencing of life, just as it is at this moment. Thus, Shibayama explained, "The secret of Zen lies in this really throwing oneself away" (Kasulis, 1981, p. 42).

When the veil of self is lifted, it is possible to perceive the three goals considered to be central to motivation and contentment a bit differently. Instead of self seeking contentment through competence, autonomy, and relatedness, what is truly sought (before enlightenment; after enlightenment we do not "seek" anything) is the ability to act in complete accordance with the situation just as it is, freedom (from that which binds us—conceptualization and discrimination) and interfusion with all things. Zen Buddhism suggests that these things cannot be attained through conscious striving and are only realized when the concept of self is removed as the center of functioning and emptiness assumes the central position. Thus, Zen Buddhism presents a distinctly different understanding of motivation and contentment than do current theories of motivation.

Independent, Interdependent, and Zen Buddhist Perspectives on the Concept of Self

The distinction between current theories of motivation and Zen Buddhism regarding the concept of self is similar in many ways to the distinction raised by Markus and Kitayama (1991) between independent and interdependent construals of self. As Markus and Kitayama suggested, current theories of motivation reflect an independent view of self, in which "the essential aspect of this view involves a conception of the self as an autonomous, independent person" (p. 226). Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, reflects something similar to the interdependent view of self, in which individuals assume meaning in relation to the context or the whole rather than as autonomous entities.

However, although the Zen Buddhist perspective of self is similar to the interdependent view of self in a general sense, it is not identical to the interdependent view of self. In short, the Zen Buddhist view is one of interfusion rather than interdependence. Instead of every person being a fairly well-defined piece of a larger puzzle (the interdependent view), every "thing" forms an undifferentiated, everchanging unity (the Zen Buddhist view). As Markus and Kitayama (1991) clarified:

> An interdependent view of self does not result in a merging of self and other, nor does it imply that . . . people do not have a sense of themselves as agents who are the origins of their own actions. On the contrary, it takes a high degree of self-control and agency to effectively adjust oneself to various interpersonal contingencies. (p. 228)

In other words, the interdependent view of self still involves an independent self with individual opinions, needs, and desires, but this self is socialized to keep those individual opinions, needs, and desires subordinate to the needs of the whole or group. Thus, there is a self–other distinction and tension in the interdependent view, just as there is in the independent view of self. To be sure, this tension appears and is addressed in different ways in each of these orientations, but the tension is present in both views.

In contrast, as has been illustrated, in a Zen Buddhist view, the tension between self and other is dissolved through interfusion of self and other. Thus, the Zen Buddhist perspective of self is distinct from the interdependent view of self, and the discussion in this article is not a reiteration of the differentiation between independent and interdependent views of self articulated so lucidly by Markus and Kitayama (1991).

Educational Implications of the Zen Buddhist Perspective

As has been argued in this article, a Zen Buddhist perspective represents a different understanding of motivation than is currently espoused in psychological literature. As a result, the Zen Buddhist approach suggests different educational implications than are suggested by current theories of motivation. Given that the educational implications of a Zen Buddhist approach have not been explored in psychological or educational literature, it is important to consider them. However, as a detailed discussion of the theory and practice of Zen Buddhist teaching as it relates to western education is beyond the scope of this article, I will focus on the most central implications of Zen Buddhism for education. The core of a Zen Buddhist approach to education involves helping students realize (a) the limited (and ultimately empty) nature of conceptualizations (including the concept of self), (b) the interfusion of all things, and (c) the realization that every moment is fresh, unique, and brimming with possibilities and should be the complete focus of our attention.

The Limited Nature of Conceptualization

It is important that students realize that their understandings of objects, concepts, and events are conceptualizations that fail to capture the dynamic quality of these things. As O'Loughlin (1992) suggested, knowledge is partial and positional. Any conceptualization represents one limited view of things from a particular perspective, and the degree to which we are locked into rigid conceptualizations of things is the degree to which we are limited in our understanding of these things, as many psychologists would affirm (e.g., Barell, 1995; Kitchener & Brenner, 1990; Kramer, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Meacham, 1990; Perkins, 1990; Sternberg, 1996). As an example of the limiting nature of conceptualization, consider the concept of a chair. If we simply consider a chair to be an object upon which to sit, we may miss that it also could be a shield, a stepladder, a drum, a weapon, a table, a wedge, (possibly) a source of combustible material, or a myriad of other things. That which we recognize as a chair is much more than any definition of it. It is not fixed, but a particular configuration of potentiality with an almost unlimited range of possibilities. What it "is" depends on the context.

Thus, it is important to avoid attachment to conceptualizations that result in approaching situations with set assumptions and expectations—an idea that current literature on wisdom, intelligence, and creativity affirms as well (e.g., Perkins, 1990; Sternberg, 1988, 1990, 1996; Weisberg, 1993). Reality overflows our attempts to partition it into compartments and affix permanent meaning to it. Attempting to do so will only lead to limitations and frustration. Therefore, it is important that we avoid reinforcing limited conceptualizations of things and help students remain open to multiple perspectives and possibilities in any instance.

There are many ways to help students develop an understanding of the partial and positional nature of knowledge and the potential limitations of conceptualizations. For example, students can investigate historical incidents from various perspectives and discuss why societies historically promoted one particular version of history at any given point in time. Students might also consider the consequences of a narrowed perspective. Similarly, students can explore current events from multiple perspectives and consider why various parties (including different branches of the media) explain those events as they do. Again, students can also consider the results of rigid stances on such issues.

In addition, students can investigate different cultures and

the perspectives of underrepresented populations. Through such activities, students can not only develop an appreciation of different beliefs, values, customs, and viewpoints, but they can develop an understanding that different cultures are simply different systems for making meaning of the world and that each of us can benefit from being open to the multiple perspectives and insights that these cultures and perspectives afford us. Students also can investigate (and study investigations of) a range of scientific phenomena when starting with various premises. In doing so, students can experience how the questions underlying the investigations, the data collection techniques, and the interpretation of data will all depend on the perspective from which the investigator begins.

There are also many activities that can help students recognize the utility of remaining open to various perspectives and possibilities. For example, students can be provided with real world and hypothetical problems in which they need to use conventional items in unconventional ways and integrate them in unusual combinations in order to arrive at solutions. Discussion of historical examples of such problem solving (e.g., the Apollo 13 mission) and personal examples from the teacher's experience would be useful too. As a final example, students can read and listen to stories from various cultures that (a) highlight the limitations of a single, rigidly held perspective and (b) demonstrate the utility of openness and flexibility as they relate to creativity and problem solving.

To this point, these educational implications are not drastically different from ideas suggested by current psychologists studying intelligence, creativity, and wisdom (e.g., Barell, 1995; Perkins, 1990; Sternberg, 1996), nor are they significantly different from educational implications that follow from the work of existential psychologists (e.g., Frankl, 1962; May, 1969). However, Zen Buddhism takes the assault on conceptualization further than any of these psychologists by also considering the limitations of the concept of self. Instead of an individual and autonomous self seeing the limitations of all concepts except self, Zen Buddhism moves toward a thorough understanding that all concepts are ultimately empty of permanence and stability, including (and most importantly) self.

Like the chair discussed earlier, Buddhism teaches that a person does not have a fixed identity or essence at one's core. We may identify ourselves through roles (e.g., teacher, father, leader, philanthropist), beliefs (e.g., pacifist, constructivist), or qualities (e.g., smart, flexible, persistent, benevolent) that we consider to be rather consistently exhibited by us (or we hope are), but these are constructed identities and do not reflect a stable essence or self (e.g., Watts, 1957). Instead, Buddhism suggests that we are dynamic, robust, and ever-changing configurations of potentiality. What a person "is" depends on the context, because we are inextricably intertwined with all that is rather than separate from it. Our actions affect the whole, just as the whole affects our actions. They are two sides of the same coin. We may believe that we are autonomous, but we cannot act (or *exist) outside of a context*—we are part of it.

Interfusion

The fluctuating and nonautonomous nature of the concept of self leads to the second core concept mentioned at the outset of this section: the interfusion of all things. From the Zen Buddhist perspective, everything shares a common ground of emptiness or nonbeing and is thus intertwined. This realization of interfusion is important because it is the ground of deepest compassion. When any aspect of existence is injured, we are injured too. Thus, realization of interfusion corresponds with reverence for all that is. In addition, interfusion represents a fundamental shift in our focus from the self to the whole. Emptiness (undetermined, dynamic potentiality) is now the ground of functioning rather than self, and compassion and selflessness are central issues rather than self-determination and self-concept.

To be sure, current motivation theories do not exclude some notion of interconnection, nor do they ignore compassion and selflessness. As Deci (1995) suggested,

> We are not ends in ourselves but part of a larger system, and because the true self has the dual tendencies toward autonomy and relatedness, the person who acts from a well-developed self will accept others and will respect the environment, as well as proactively influence both. (p. 206)

However, it is important to note that compassion for others and the environment are contingent on a well-developed self. This suggests that although competence, autonomy, and relatedness are all important, the needs of the self appear to take priority and concern for others assumes a precarious and secondary position.

Thus, although current self-oriented motivation theories and Zen Buddhism both speak of some type of interrelationship between self and other, as well as the need for compassion for others, the two theories are significantly different in how they address these issues. In short, in self-oriented theories, self and other are related but distinct. Self is the central concept, with others being an important but somewhat secondary consideration. In Zen Buddhism, there is no distinction between self and other (interfusion), and this unity results in compassion and selflessness being central (as opposed to important, but secondary) concepts.

The differences between current theories of motivation and Zen Buddhism as they relate to self and interfusion result in Zen Buddhism suggesting some educational implications that are quite distinct from the educational implications of current motivation theories. Certainly, teacher modeling of compassion and respect for every aspect of the universe, humility, patience, and appreciation of and full attention to current circumstances are an important part of a Zen Buddhist approach to education. However, activities that provide students with an opportunity to directly experience these qualities are even more essential. For example, one of the central components of education in a Zen training facility is work that benefits the community (e.g., Collcutt, 1981; Nishimura, 1973; Sato, 1972; Suzuki, 1934). Activities such as maintaining the grounds, growing and harvesting crops, and cooking are as integral to Zen training as meditation and words from the Zen master. These activities are important for many reasons, not the least of which is that

they provide an opportunity for students to apply what they are learning in real world practice, where true insights must stand or fall (e.g., Sato, 1972; Suzuki, 1961). In a similar fashion, in schools, students could maintain a garden, be responsible for certain aspects of general grounds maintenance, take part in community service and global outreach projects, and take actions to help mentor and encourage students in younger grades. These activities need not be isolated from the curriculum. They could be integrated into the curriculum, providing a source for discussion of problem solving, creativity, flexibility, and focus on the moment.

Teachers could also diminish the focus on self and emphasize the whole in other ways. For example, similar to chanting in Zen training (e.g., Myokyo-ni, 1995; Nishimura, 1973; Suzuki, 1934), teachers could begin the day with group reading of statements that reinforce the utility of such qualities as compassion, respect, humility, appreciation, and emptiness (openmindedness–flexibility). This would not only keep these qualities fresh in students' minds, but would provide a unity of purpose among the group and commitment to one another, moving the focus away from self. Similar to mealtime recitations in Zen training (e.g., Nishimura, 1973; Sato, 1972; Suzuki, 1934), before each meal, students could recognize all of the laborers and raw materials that contributed to bringing this meal to their tables, while also acknowledging the potential ways in which they could use the nourishment to help others. This would serve to reinforce that we are truly intertwined with all other things and that we have much for which to be thankful.

There are even more ways that teachers can downplay self, emphasize the whole, and reinforce the themes of compassion and interfusion. For example, teachers can present students with physical challenges that can be met only by teamwork and group problem solving. Because individual effort will not lead to success, such experiences help soften the "I," and, again, build respect and commitment among the group.

Teachers can demonstrate the interfused nature of existence through examples from physical and social sciences. Certainly, the life cycle, food chain, water cycle, and global warming are clear examples of topics that could be rich sources of discussion and inquiry, while also reinforcing how any particular aspect of a situation is affected by the other aspects of the situation. Economic interdependence, supply and demand, and the particular mix of circumstances that comprise any historical event are fruitful topics for the reinforcement of interfusion too.

It would also be useful for teachers to engage their students in discussions of the implications of the interfusion of all things for their actions. For example, an important idea in Zen Buddhism is not to be wasteful, but instead "to make the best possible use of things as they are given to us" (Suzuki, 1961, p. 323). Students could read accounts of the careful use of every element of raw materials, including parts that may seem insignificant. Then, students could practice this principle in their own actions. In a similar fashion, teachers could discuss other central tenets of Zen Buddhist action that follow from interfusion, such as nonviolence and respect for all.

Literature can play an important part in teacher activities too. Reading and discussing stories about characters who demonstrate selflessness and compassion, function from an orientation of emptiness (openness to undetermined, dynamic potentiality), and recognize their interfusion with all that is would also be beneficial. The Jataka tales are one particularly rich source of such tales (e.g., DeRoin, 1975; Inayat, 1939; Martin, 1990), but stories such as these from any tradition would be helpful.

As teachers develop activities that promote flexibility and creativity, it also would be useful to downplay the issue of personal choice. To be sure, students should have ample opportunities to address interesting, real-life challenges as they feel is most fitting; however, the focus should be on addressing the needs of the situation rather than expressing individuality, exercising personal choice, and displaying control over the situation. The teacher could reinforce that the core of decision making should be emptiness (or no set position) rather than self, as self's judgment is clouded by desires, expectations, and assumptions. In the end, activities that follow the suggestions in this paragraph may look quite similar in many ways to those found in inquiry-based approaches (e.g., Levstik & Barton, 1997; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). However, the focus or orientation from which these activities are approached and viewed will be changed from self to emptiness, and that is significant.

There are still more ways in which teachers can reflect the Zen Buddhist understandings of compassion and interfusion in how they interact with their students. For example, teachers can avoid validating the concept of self through their comments. For example, comments stating that students "are" smart, clever, or impulsive (or that they "possess" certain attributes, in general) serve to reify the concept of self through the implication that people have a permanent essence. Even praising students as being unselfish, serves to feed the ego and reinforce self, and is thus counterproductive. Instead, teachers should focus on the behaviors that they see that demonstrate that students are flowing from emptiness and thus reflecting openness and flexibility.

Teachers can also downplay self, and emphasize the whole, through the way in which they help students resolve conflicts and deal with adversity. When students feel angry, stressed, disappointed, embarrassed, or frustrated, teachers can have them consider why they feel as they do. Teachers can help students recognize—through discussion as well as stories that challenge the concept of self—that these emotions stem from a focus on self and the assumptions, expectations, and wants that self brings to a situation. Furthermore, teachers can help students recognize that if they could empty those assumptions, expectations, and wants (and the concept of self, in general), there would be no grounds for these anxious states. Of course, freedom from anxiety will not occur without great effort and practice, but such discussions could help plant seeds for future encounters.

Focus on the Moment

A final point that is truly intertwined with the first two is the recognition that every moment is unique and robust with

possibilities and should be the focus of our complete attention. It is easy to get preoccupied with past events or driven forward by hopes regarding the future, but lasting contentment comes from focusing on the present context and realizing a state of harmony with what is at this moment. No matter how similar two situations might be, they are not alike. There are new variables or essentially the same variables manifesting themselves in different ways in every situation. Thus, it is ill-advised to try and make the present situation conform with assumptions based on previous events or expectations based on desired outcomes in the future.

Instead, it is useful to approach all situations from a state of emptiness (openness to undetermined, dynamic potentiality). Without the limitation of conceptualizations and preoccupation with self, we are no longer focused on, or restricted by, what we want to happen or what we think should happen. We are completely free to attend to the unique configuration of potentiality that comprises this moment and do what needs to be done. Approaching each moment from the orientation of emptiness (rather than self) is the ground of true freedom and creativity. As Sternberg and his colleagues suggested, creativity involves nonentrenchment (e.g., Sternberg, 1988, 1990). However, Zen Buddhism goes beyond Sternberg's advice by also recognizing and addressing the danger of attachment to the concept of self. By doing so, Zen Buddhism provides a means for realizing even greater flexibility.

In order to help cultivate the emptiness that provides the opportunity for such freedom and creativity, something akin to meditation, or focused sitting, might be added to the activities suggested to this point. Clearly, some teachers may deem this activity too religiously oriented, but various forms of meditation are used widely outside of religious contexts and thus meditation need not be considered a religious practice. Simple focused sitting based on counting breaths could help students learn to quiet their minds full of racing concepts (assumptions, expectations, and desires) that keep them from fully attending to the current moment. With time and practice, students could begin to experience something of the unclouded state of emptiness too. Learning how to meditate can provide a means of returning to a state of harmony and openness when stress begins to build. It also begins to help students carry over and develop that state of harmony and openness even when they are not meditating.

Zen Buddhism and Research

Given that Zen Buddhists suggest that words and concepts are incapable of capturing dynamic qualities and that there are ultimately no grounds for establishing the validity of any idea, the question might arise as to the place of research and scholarship in a Zen Buddhist approach to education. Certainly, scholarship can never provide insight into truth, as many in psychology and education would agree (e.g., Eisner, 1991; Johnston, 1989). Scholarship must be recognized as presenting partial and positional perspectives, and, no matter how overwhelming the evidence or how compelling the argument supporting an interpretation, there are simply no means of establishing the validity of any perspective or summarily dismissing the utility of every aspect of a contrary perspective. Thus, no viewpoint should be promoted or accepted as the right perspective across situations, thereby blinding us to the potential utility of other perspectives.

Despite all of this, Zen Buddhists would not suggest the cessation of all research and writing. Instead, consistent with virtually all psychologists, Zen Buddhists would suggest that readers carefully attend to every aspect of how a piece of research or theoretical treatise was constructed so that the assumptions underlying the piece and the limitations of the study can be recognized. After these issues have been considered, the work may serve to highlight possibilities that can be integrated into our bundles of potentiality and drawn upon when they fit the circumstance.

Summary

Current theories of motivation present a useful explanation of why most humans behave as they do. In addition, they can help students move toward the goals of greater competence, autonomy, and relatedness. However, there is some question as to whether these theories can lead to true contentment at the deepest level. Stated as succinctly as possible, Zen Buddhists suggest that contentment does not come through strengthening one's concept of self (as is suggested in current theories of motivation) but by eliminating it. Consequently, Zen Buddhism does not suggest creating instructional contexts that promote self-regulation through supporting self-efficacy and self-determination. Instead, Zen Buddhism suggests helping students realize (a) the limits of all conceptualizations, (b) the interfusion of all things, and (c) how to fully attend to the current moment and recognize the unique and robust configuration of potentiality that exists at this moment.

To be sure, it is not realistic to think that many (if any) students will fully realize the limitations of all conceptualizations, including self, or that they will fully grasp the interfusion of all things during their educational experiences. However, if teachers can develop classroom contexts that loosen the grip of conceptualization and open students to the interfusion of all things, they will have weakened the structure of impediments that must be removed for students to realize true freedom and function with wisdom, compassion, and contentment throughout their lives—and that would be quite a worthy accomplishment.

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