RELATIONAL DHARMA: A MODERN PARADIGM OF TRANSFORMATION—A LIBERATING MODEL OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Jeannine A. Davies, Ph.D.
Vancouver, B.C.

ABSTRACT: Presented are the theoretical and experiential foundations of the author’s interdisciplinary model of intersubjectivity, inspired by a contemporary, trans-sectarian and creative re-envisioning of the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising (paticca samuppada). Relational Dharma seeks to illuminate the nature of co-genesis through engaging awareness within a progression of insight within intersubjective experience in human relationship. The purpose of this model is to support refinement of our understanding of relatedness as a means toward liberation from self and self-other generated suffering and capacitate greater influence upon one’s own and other’s higher freedom. The doctrine of dependent co-arising, from classical Buddhist perspectives, and a theoretical overview of its mechanics as a living architecture of interdependence that can be directly experienced across myriad phenomena, is explored. Clinical implications are discussed as they apply to resolving trauma, posttraumatic growth, and growth through adversity, along with a framework determining and guiding expressions of higher human relatedness.

KEYWORDS: interdisciplinary, intersubjectivity, dependent co-arising, paticca samuppada, Relational Dharma, insight meditation, Buddhism, Theravada, psychotherapy, mindfulness, trauma, posttraumatic growth, non-violence, Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma.

In this age of wonders no one will say that a thing or idea is worthless because it is new. To say it is impossible because it is difficult is again not in consonance with the spirit of this age. Things undreamt of are daily being seen, the impossible is ever becoming possible. We are constantly astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence.

—Mahatma Gandhi (as cited in Gandhian Institute, 2006, para. 119)

Violence and human conflict exist in a myriad of expressions and forms. As a result, there is suffering. Inherent within the fabric of human suffering, whether experienced within our personal lives or expressed by another, is inevitable reciprocity. Our very existence is woven in and through our profoundly connected natures. As the Buddhist poet and activist Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) said, “We need the vision of interbeing, we belong to each other; we cannot cut reality into pieces. The well-being of ‘this’ is the well-being of ‘that,’ so we have to do things together. Every side is ‘our side’; there is no ‘evil side’” (p. 86). Because people suffer together, and indeed often because of one another, so, too, do they share in the capacity to develop the consciousness that is necessary to transcend the conditions that propel this mutually arising fabric of human experience.
For the previous 100 years, Western personality and developmental theories have been dominated by the notion that to become a healthy human being, one must have a solid and distinct sense of self that emerges through autonomy and progressive degrees of separation from others. In contrast, the notion of intersubjectivity, which emerged as an explicit theme of intellectual exploration in the early 20th century, identified a relational or reciprocal dimension of development in which an individual’s internal mental and emotional states could be co-experienced, or shared with another. Disciplines such as early child development, relational psychology, intersubjective psychoanalysis, and interpersonal neurobiology subscribe to intersubjectivity as a formative process in the development of self.

Within Relational Dharma, intersubjectivity can be seen to pervade through the entire spectrum and lifespan of human existence, patterning itself through the window and mirror of our relational interactions and contextual perceptions, and in turn contouring the conditions of self and self–other experience. The elaboration of this subtle and enduring, shared atmosphere is made visible through experiential insight into the mechanics that organize self and self-other development within human relationship, and emerges as the means through which the mind can detangle and liberate itself from the causes of self and self-other generated suffering. Thus, relative to insight into the causes that function to link and give rise to the generation of self and self and other experience, a detangling from their conditions occur, and a progressive acclimating within higher freedom becomes possible.

The result of the consciousness gained through experiential insight into human interrelatedness, fosters a new level of intelligence that reveals how we can engage a more active role in envisioning (or intending) determination. It is for this reason that intersubjectivity within Relational Dharma, as a means to demonstrate subtle degrees of indivisibility, can capacitate valuable insights into the intricate and reciprocally co-arising (causal) nature of human suffering. The study of intersubjectivity may lay a foundation for envisioning new patterns of determination within human nature and thereby provide a means to transform suffering and self-other imposed limitations.

**INTERSUBJECTIVITY: A RELATIONAL MATRIX OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

It is obvious that all of living and all of development takes place only in relationships.

—Jean Baker Miller, Ph.D. (1987)

The term intersubjectivity is conventionally used within philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychology, and phenomenology as a means to illustrate structural or developmental factors “accessible or established for two or more subjects” and the causal interrelations “involving or occurring between separate conscious minds” (Intersubjective, n.d.). The recognition of intersubjectivity as a formative determiner in factors of human growth through reciprocal influence can be recognized across disciplines and psychological models such as bio-genetics.
(Watson, 2001), relational psychology (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 1997), clinical psychology and early child development (Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Bowlby, 1958), humanistic, existential, and transpersonal psychology (Grof, 1975; James, 1902/1999; Maslow, 1968; May, 1967; Schneider, Pierson, & Bugental, 2001; Wilber, 2000), psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 1990; Kohut, 1984; Mitchell, 1988; Stolorow, Atwood, & Brandchaft, 1994), interpersonal neurobiology (Lipton, 2006; Siegel, 1999), and phenomenology (Frie, 1997; Husserl, 2009). This illustrates that diverse areas of contemporary theory are re-envisioning the organization of human development and its patterns of change in the genesis of self, as inseparable to human relationship, as opposed to discrete or autonomous change. To this end, the role of intersubjectivity, as critical in illuminating both influence and organization of the subtle patterns involved in contextual determination, is becoming increasingly relevant.

The notion of a separate self, attained through increasing degrees of autonomy from others equating healthiness as a human being, has influenced the last 100 years within Western personality and developmental theories. As Jordan (1997) stated, “Emphasis on innate instinctual forces, increasing internal structure, separation and individuation have characterized most Western psychological theory” (pp. 85–86). Psychological development in the context of relational interactions—for example, within Freudian theory—was seen as “secondary to or deriving from the satisfaction of primary drives (such as hunger or sex)” (Jordan, 1997, p. 89). Intersubjective theorists and psychoanalysts, Stolorow et al. (1994), along with various feminist theorists (Chodorow, 1999; Gilligan, 1982 Jordan, 1997; Miller, 1987), proposed an alternative theory of development that emphasized intersubjectivity and relational factors in the emerging development of personality. In this view of development, mutuality, or reciprocity within human connection, is paramount to the healthy formation of personality and psychological development throughout the lifespan.

Relational psychology proposed a developmental theory of the self that was interconnected and emphasized the “contextual, approximate, responsive and process factors in experience” (Jordan, 1997, p. 15). This model stresses the intersubjective “relationally emergent nature of human experience” versus “a primary perspective based on the formed and contained self” (Jordan, 1997, p. 15). From a relational psychology perspective, “a personality can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which the person lives and has his being” (Jordan, 1997, p. 11).

The potency of intersubjectivity in early human development begins within the parent-infant relationship, and plays a vital role in human development, directly impacting the formation and maturation of the social brain, self-regulation, and emotional resonance, symbol use, and empathy (Beebe & Lachmann, 1988; Bowlby, 1958; Bremmer & Fogal, 2004; Feldman, 2007; Gianino & Tronick, 1988; Klaus & Kennell, 1976; Nichols, Gergely, & Fonagy, 2001; Sameroff, Lewis, & Miller, 2000; Schore, 1994; Stern, 2000; Trevarthen, 1993).
Psychoanalysts Stolorow et al. (1994) also emphasized the “intersubjective context,” where “unconscious ordering principles, crystallized within the matrix of the child-giver system, form the essential building blocks of personality development” (p. 5). As Emde added, the personality structure itself, in part, emerges from the internalization of “infant-caregiver relationship patterns” (as cited in Stolorow, et al., 1994, p. 5). This patterning of experience through an internalization of relational interaction is not isolated to a fixed period of time in human development. Rather, it can be seen to affect personality and the formation of self across the life span. As Emde stated, the “affective core of the self” derives from the person’s history of intersubjective transactions—a history that is being construed all of the time (as cited in Stolorow, et al., 1994, p. 5).

The term intersubjectivity theory was introduced in psychoanalysis by Stolorow et al. (1994) and is defined as “a field theory or systems theory in that it seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting worlds of experience” (p. x). In this framework, “intrapsychic determinism gives way to an unremitting intersubjective contextualism” and the focus shifts from the isolated individual mind to “the larger system created by the mutual interplay between the subjective worlds of patient and analyst, or of child and caregiver” (p. x).

For Donald Woods Winnicott (1971), the experience of the intersubjective extended beyond an objective interpersonal sharing of separate minds, or of recognizing each other. Winnicott (1971) saw the intersubjective encounter as “life in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation and in the area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals” (p. 64).

Intersubjectivity, as experienced between the therapist and client, is also linked with being facilitative of new understandings and potential for change within psychotherapy. In a study conducted by Natterson (1993), case illustrations were used to demonstrate the “intersubjectivity transaction” defined as a “process of reciprocal influence in which each person in the therapeutic dyad influences and is influenced by the other,” as critical in marking “turning points” whereby the patient’s “behavior, attitudes, or feelings” shift (p. 45). In this sense, it is not simply the client in therapy in which the therapist must seek to foster an atmosphere of transformation. Rather, it is also the therapist’s ability to enter a state of mutuality and openness to influence, which in turn helps foster communion within the intersubjective atmosphere where transformation becomes possible.

Pickering (2005) added to this perspective in her study of intersubjectivity with couples. She stated that the intersubjective field is “revealed by the communications of the individuals, but controlled by neither” (p. 44). In this way, the intersubjective field can be seen as an additional dimension of space, where consciousness, previously attributed as separate and self-contained, becomes permeable, and shared within the between. As Pickering (2005)
expressed “there are the two partners, the complex network and dynamics of relations between them, and the relationship itself which creates a fluid, interpenetrating and interactive field…” (p. 44).

The interpretation of intersubjectivity, as encounter, arises from the work of Buber (1996) who defined the “I-you encounter of becoming” as

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one’s whole being. The concentration and fusion into whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter. (p. 62)

Thus, the intersubjective context becomes the means to enter a dynamic atmosphere infused with potentials, capacitating the individual to release his or her self toward a direct encounter with evolutional creativity.

**INTERSUBJECTIVITY WITHIN BUDDHISM**

The theme of intersubjectivity in Buddhism is inseparable to the nature of existence itself, thus underscores the terrain of all Buddhist paths. Intersubjectivity can be seen in and through the oceanic fabric of interdependence, whose composition is made visible through the confluence of nature, as permeated by change or impermanence (*anicca*) and indivisibility or non-self (*anatta*). The tides of this atmosphere give rise to the patterns that orchestrate all conditioned phenomena, and the dance of influence in the arising and passing of all forms, including mind.

The architecture of intersubjectivity in its breadth and depth can be mapped through the teachings of *paticca samuppada*, a Buddhist Pali expression that translates as “dependent origination,” or “dependent co-arising” (Pali derives from the vernacular languages of northern India at the time of the Buddha; Bodhi, 1980, p. 6). *Paticca samuppada* is the doctrine of causality that the Buddha proclaimed to be the fundamental view of reality. This view of reality and causality asserts that no phenomenon exists (or comes about) without depending on other phenomena or conditions around it. So critical was *paticca samuppada* to the scope of the Buddha’s teaching that, “an insight into dependent co-arising is held to be sufficient to yield an understanding of the entire teaching” (Bodhi, 1980, p. 6). As the Buddha stated, “He who sees dependent co-arising sees the *dharma*, he who sees the *dharma*, sees dependent co-arising” (Bodhi, 1980, p. 6).

Individual existence too, in Buddhism, can be considered at its core, inherently intersubjective. The formation of individual identity, in this way, is a fundamentally contextual occurrence based upon a “matrix of dependently related events,” all of which function in a “state of flux” (Wallace, 2001, p. 1). The experiential realization how an individual’s sense of self is brought into existence is recognized through insight into the power of *conceptual attribution*. Conceptual attribution occurs either through the identification with the body.
(e.g., I am warm) or through a mental process (e.g., I am happy) and through the confirmation of these conceptual ideations from others. This is the nature of intersubjectivity and dependent origination.

Relational Dharma (Davies, 2006, 2009, 2010), as developed by the author, involves the realization of indivisibility or non-self (anatta in Pali), change or impermanence (anicca), and dependent origination (paticca samuppada), as it is experienced through the manifold of intersubjective consciousness. This realization is illuminated through the experiential and intuitive interface experienced between self and other. Through mind-to-mind contact in the dharma, or higher truth, and subsequent coordination upon the intersubjective terrain, a stability and momentum form (Davies, 2006, 2009, 2010). In this encounter, the mechanics that underlie and form as the genesis within intersubjectivity between self and other can be brought into visibility.

This movement leads to an ignition that propels experience to migrate through cumulative stages or levels as they pertain to liberation. Liberation in this definition refers to a progressive and increasing degree of acclimatization within freedom — the release from the gravitational pull of unconscious or conscious experience of bondage with the self-generated forces within mind that produce suffering and restriction. Concurrent with the dematerialization of conditions that form the tension of habitual psychophysical binding, mind and experience begin their ascension toward the unobstructed knowledge and recognition of freedom within inseparable nature. As a result of this insight into our deeply intertwined nature, higher stages of human development that go beyond the ego and belief in a separate self, becomes possible.

THE BUDDHA’S ENLIGHTENMENT

It was 2,500 years ago that Gotama sat under the bodhi tree, on the eve of his enlightenment, and began to probe his own mind in an effort to understand the root causes of human suffering. After years of searching and intense yogic training, he still had not found any satisfying answers. According to the Buddhist scriptures, Gotama began by naming all the factors that formed the constituents of his own experience, such as ignorance, volitional formations, cognition, name and physical form, sensation, feeling, and craving. He then examined how the specific factors related to each other. He repeatedly asked, “For this factor to arise, what else must happen, for it to cease, what else must stop” (Macy, 1991b, p. 56). Through this form of unrelenting questioning he “re-discovered” that suffering itself had no first cause, no external source, no “prime mover” (Macy, 1991b, p. 56).

It is said that dependent co-arising is re-discovered because it is an “abiding truth about reality” (Macy, 1991a, p. 27). It is then that “Buddhas, as they appear in the world, re-discover and make [paticca samuppada] manifest” (Macy, 1991a, p. 27). As Gotama continued his examination, insight dawned into the nature of mutual causality (i.e., dependent co-arising). He saw that the factors that formed the constituents of his own experience “were sustained by
their own interdependence” and that the source of suffering was orchestrated by “patterns or circuits of contingency” (Macy, 1991b, p. 56). It was through the collective orchestra of these perceptions that the vision of paticca samuppada descended upon him.

Coming to be! Coming to be!… Ceasing! Ceasing! At the thought there arose in me, brethren, in things not taught before vision, there arose in me knowledge, insight arose, wisdom arose, light arose. (Samyutta Nikaya, 1922/1979, p. 7)

After many years of arduous searching, Gotama perceived paticca samuppada—the insight into dependent co-arising, awakened—and became the Buddha. The Buddha’s account of awakening reveals that liberation opens up a deep and profound appreciation of the inherent interconnectedness of life. Within this transforming appreciation, there is an illumination of the actual factors that arise and which bring a knowing and feeling quality to this deep mutual interconnectedness. Intersubjectivity, in this way, can be recognized as the relative realization of the universal interdependence of all phenomena.

Dharma and Reality

Just as in the great ocean there is but one taste, the taste of salt, so in this Doctrine and Discipline (dhammavinaya) there is but one taste, the taste of freedom.

—(the Buddha as cited in Bodhi, 1976, p. 1)

The late, renowned Burmese meditation and dharma teacher, the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, stated in regard to dependent co-arising,

Paticca samuppada is hard to understand because it concerns the correlations between causes and effects. There is no ego entity that exists independently of the law of causation. It was hard to accept this fact before the Buddha proclaimed the dhamma. (Mahasi, n.d., section 6, para. 3)

Dharma is an ancient Buddhist Sanskrit word (or dhamma in Buddhist Pali) and has a broad and far-reaching meaning in Buddhism. It points to the “truth about existence,” to the specific elements of and the natural laws that govern experience (U Pandita, 2006, p. 153). The meaning of dharma then can be understood as the characteristics and laws that govern the framework of individual and co-existence (interrelatedness) and that manifest through the expression of being in experience of totality. Implicit in this, is the inner development of the good or goodness. For example, the expression of the Paramis, (or ten perfections) the foundation being dana or generosity. The Buddha’s teaching, in this way can be understood as the study of the human condition and the examination of the processes of perception, cognition, attention etc. The dharma can be seen as a path for how to engage suffering for the purpose of overcoming suffering (for example, the fourth Noble Truth) and how to engage the truthful and the good (i.e., the development of the Paramis).
One aspect has to do with the overcoming of suffering, and the other is enhancement.

To practice *dharma* is to discern the distinction between conventional and ultimate realities through direct experience (Davies, 2006, 2009, 2010). A simple example of the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality is the difference between the concept of water and the physical sensation of water. Its salient characteristics are of wetness and of a cool, warm, or hot temperature. As awareness discriminates between the concept of water and water’s physical sensations, an insightful penetration into the nature of conceptual ideation occurs. Concepts are then seen as abstractions within consciousness, mental overlays born through prior conditioning.

This awareness is fostered through an intimate examination of “name” and “form,” or “mind-body processes” (U Pandita, 2006, p. 97). Name (*nama*) refers to mental phenomena and to the mental components of feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Form (or *rupa*) refers to the body, physical phenomena, and sensations and becomes attributed through the “six sense doors” (the six sense doors refer to seeing, hearing, feeling tasting, touching, and cognition through the mind; U Pandita, 2006, p. 70). Parallel to the progression of insight into these two realities, a transpersonal and trans-conceptual awareness is cultivated. As this awareness becomes progressively embodied, it leads to a lessening of fixation in perceiving or interpreting self-identity and reality as experienced through the six sense doors. Through cultivation of this method of introspective observation, mind becomes pliable, transparent, and open. This process, in turn, leads to factors of awakening whose symmetry serve to nurture an advancement toward freedom — the relaxation and eventual extinction of the mental impurities (e.g., greed, aversion, and delusion) that function to restrict and cloud the mind from its deeper nature.

Embedded within the conceptual architectures that incline the mind toward entry into the dharma is the immediacy of their results. Within this view of experience, we recognize the unique symmetry between path and goal: the path leads to the goal, and the goal, in turn, fulfills the path. The seeing, the seer, and that which is seen coalesce as inseparable aspects of each other, and which arise interdependently. In this way, *dharma* is not bound by linear time. Yet, paradoxically, its visibility emerges through time. An emergence made possible through myriad causes and conditions. This progressive ripening, in turn gives rise to an alignment of attention and observation within the direct experience of discernible qualities of “name” and “form” (U Pandita, 2006, p. 97).

Through the continuity of attention on mind-body (*nama-rupa*) processes, a new intelligence is born. This intelligence illuminates the simultaneity of mutual dimensions holistically co-emerging through all appearances. Like looking into a stream that has sediment clouding the surface, at first all one sees is sediment. And then, as the sediment clears, that which is in the stream, and the stream itself, become visible. This progression can be likened to how
dharma, and what is seen and known through dharma, ascends into awareness. As awareness within the intersubjective is enhanced, it dissolves the mind-to-mind gap, promoting a kind of elasticity as the proximity between self and other merges into Relational Dharma (Davies, 2006, 2009, 2010).

**Satipatthana Bhavana: Perceiving the Three Characteristics of Existence: Anicca, Anatta, and Dukkha**

The Satipatthanasutta, which extols meditation (mental development or bhavana) techniques, is the most revered of all discourses in the Theravada Buddhist tradition (Feer, 1960). As the renowned Burmese meditation and dharma teacher, the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita (1995) explains, “satipatthana is derived from sati, meaning mindfulness or awareness, upatthana is establishment or foundation, meaning that mindfulness approaches its object and stays there” (p. 25). Patthana signifies adherence, firmness, or anchoring upon a continuous occurrence, and bhavana is mental development (U Pandita, 1995, p. 25). As mindfulness or awareness is centered upon the physical sensations of the body, a gradual aligning occurs that in turn forms a resonating accordance with the immediacy of bare experience. As awareness rubs against or lays itself on the contours and features of the phenomena that arise and pass within an individual’s most immediate experience, a deep and blanketing immersiveness occurs.

The mind is able to stay composed and focused on the objects that arise in the present moment as this practice is engaged. Stability and familiarity increase through this process, causing forms of mental friction, whether emotional, physical, or psychological, to dissipate. The mind experiences a kind of current of quiet peace. From a Buddhist point of view and understanding, when this kind of focus is sustained, it inevitably leads to the development of wisdom and freedom—the penetration that reveals direct insight into the characteristics of anicca, or impermanence, anatta, emptiness or no self, and dukkha, suffering (U Pandita, 1995, 2006).

Sayadaw U Pandita’s teacher, the Burmese meditation master, Mahasi Sayadaw, in relation to the practice of satipatthana bhavana, said the following:

> It is said ... that nama-rupas [name and forms] are in a constant flux and that we should watch their arising and passing away. But for the beginner this is easier said than done. The beginner has to exert strenuous effort to overcome hindrances (nivarana). Even freedom from nivarana helps him only to distinguish between nama [name] and rupa [form]. It does not ensure insight into their arising and passing away. This insight is attained only after concentration has been developed and perception has become keen with the practice of mindfulness. Constant mindfulness of arising and vanishing leads to insight into anicca, dukkha, and anatta of all phenomena... Hence the description of the dhamma is something that is beyond logic and speculation. (Mahasi, n.d., section 4, para. 3)
In the summer of 2000, during a three-week intensive meditation retreat, I had the opportunity to ask one of my teachers, the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita, to describe the single most important factor in realizing the highest form of dharma freedom. “The highest form of dharma freedom” Sayadaw U Pandita began, “is the freedom from the bondage of kilesas (mental impurities) such as greed, hatred, and delusion and then the total extinction of the karma and aggregates” (personal communication, August 11, 2000). It was the practice of satipatthana bhavana that he then went on to affirm. As he explained, the practice of satipatthana bhavana functions as a two-fold physics. Concurrent with the spiritual momentum derived through this approach, afflicting mind states within consciousness such as ignorance, self-centeredness, and aggression are quieted. These qualities both protect and develop the mind. Sayadaw U Pandita (personal communication, August 11, 2000) expressed this as follows:

When these modes are strengthened, there will be meditative mind, meaning a developed mind. This leads to path consciousness, and the defilements or impurities within consciousness are eradicated. With the practice of satipatthana, all states of loss will be overcome, which brings higher path consciousness, until you eventually overcome the kilesas (mental struggles) so fully there is no return. And then there is the realization of the fruit of release, by knowledge.

Direct insight into anicca, or impermanence, and anatta, emptiness or no self, punctures the notion of the self as a separate or unchanging, independent entity. As Macy (1991a) stated, “Although masked by the appearance of continuity, impermanence is real and pervasive” (p. 34). Satipatthana enhances transparency upon that which is arising in an individual’s direct experience. Through this transparency on the immediacy of this direct experience, reality, the phenomenal world is recognized as a flux of movement or change, with no ultimate core. Intuitive insight into physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disappear reveals this knowing in a startlingly clear, new way. From within the framework of Buddhism, the nature of suffering is understood as arising from a mistaken belief in a “self” that is both continuous and separate. It is in this way that the practice of satipatthana bhavana allows for the origin of suffering to be seen, its dissolution, as well as the way leading to its dissolution.

The experiential discovery that there is a conditioned nature to the factors that generate suffering is in and of itself profoundly empowering. It is by virtue of their conditionality that they can be “unbound” or undone (Access to Insight, 2009). Nibbana (Pali) or nirvana (Sanskrit) translates as enlightenment or liberation (Liberation in the Buddhist definition refers to the literal “unbinding” of the mind from mental defilement and the round of rebirth; Access to Insight, 2009). “Unbinding” also symbolizes the extinguishing of a fire because it carries the implication of stilling, cooling, and peace. “According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, a burning fire seizes or adheres to its fuel; when extinguished, it is unbound” (Access to Insight, 2009, section 1, para. 8).
Insight into anicca (impermanence), anatta (emptiness), and dukkha (suffering) engenders a softness, openness, dexterity, and malleability of mind. Within Relational Dharma, this, in turn, conditions and germinates the way for the emerging intersubjective view of dependent co-arising; the fabric of interdependence across all scales of phenomena and minds intersubjective lens of liberation.

**RELATIONAL DHARMA**

Considering the body carefully,  
Everything will be clearly seen:  
Knowing all the elements are unreal,  
One will not create mental fabrications.

…by the power of perceiver and perceived  
All kinds of things are born;  
They soon pass away, not staying,  
Dying out instant to instant.  
—Avatamsaka Sutra (Cleary, 1993, pp. 300–301)

In contrast to attuning to the dharma through purely introspective observation, Relational Dharma focuses on heightening and refinement of awareness via the interactive interplay of experience in human relationship (Davies 2006, 2009, 2010). The intersubjective field connecting minds becomes the means in which to inspire spiritual momentum. Through the progression of insight as unveiled through gross, subtle and refined filters, a further revealing of the mind’s deeper substratum and organizing mechanics becomes visible.

The realizations that emerge through Relational Dharma are in accord with the Satipatthana Sutta (as previously discussed). The insights that unfold through understanding its spectrum are considered fundamental to what Wallace (2001) referred to as “the cultivation of a multi-perspectival view of oneself, others, and the intersubjective relations between oneself and all other sentient beings” (p. 2). Through the practice of satipatthana within shared awareness in relationship, an anchoring upon the actual experience of self in relation with other is adhered to and sustained. The continuity of this anchoring emerges as a transparency that brings direct clarity to experience by seeing into the actual nature of other.

The liberating insights into the nature of mind and reality that gradually unveil emptiness or no-self (anatta) and impermanence (anicca), and the nature of how suffering (dukkha) arises in relation to the fixed belief in a self that is permanent or unchanging, (also referred to as the three characteristics of existence), and subsequent vision into dependent arising (paticca samuppada), emerge through the intersubjective view, enabling a transpersonal exploration of the mutuality and development of spiritual insight.
Although Engaged Buddhism, which seeks to apply insights gained from meditation and dharma teachings to social, political, environmental, and economic suffering and injustice (see Halifax, 2009; Hanh, 1992; Macy, 1991a) has been developing since the 1950s, along with a recent emergence of perspectives exploring relational and collaborative considerations within Buddhist theory and practice (Kramer, 2007; Kwee, 2010), the practice of meditation within Theravada Buddhism has primarily focused on solitary, introspective methods (Satipatthanasutta, vipassana, or insight meditation; or samatha meditation), where stages of insight unfold within a climate of extreme mental seclusion and interpersonal isolation.

All forms of development within the human experience occur within the context of relationality. And, it is our experience of ourselves within our relationships that we return too, after retreat, at the end of meditation. If the dharma has not been recognized through insight that has unfolded through and thus vivified the subtle nuances of human interrelatedness, how are individuals to then live from that understanding within their relationships? Furthermore, how can individuals cultivate the relational wisdom necessary to lead toward more compassionate, wise and tolerant ways of being? The need for forms and practices that achieve this aim is evident in the state of suffering that is procured within human relationships. Outside of an ongoing experience of Relational Dharma, where awareness into the fundamental and interdependent nature of our existence is recognized and cultivated between people, it represents a very complex challenge. We need a dharma that helps us in the world, and that engages directly where all suffering and development occur, the interface of our most intimate and precious folds of interdependence, the human relationship.

**The Practice of Relational Dharma**

In traditional satipatthana practice, an individual uses the physical sensation of the breath or the abdomen as object of meditation, or attention. In contrast, the practice of Relational Dharma utilizes the full breadth of experience, as it arises in relation with another. In this way, the alignment within the “four foundations of mindfulness” (U Pandita, 2006, p. 70) which include contemplation of the body, feelings, states of mind, and mind objects) as experienced intersubjectively, becomes the ongoing object of meditation (Davies, 2006, 2009, 2010). The practice of Relational Dharma attunes to an individual’s experience of mental and physical occurrences as they intersect in relationship and are not conditional on the body being in any defined posture or locality. As such, it is an attitudinal posture, not confined or contingent upon any form other than the employment of awareness on relations. As Sayadaw U Pandita was fond of expressing in regard to opening the mind to liberation, “It is awareness that liberates the mind, not a form or a doctrine… wisdom is beyond all ideas and forms” (Clements, 2002, pp. 144–145).

As continuity in this intersubjective atmosphere gains further momentum, awareness begins to coordinate with the immediacy of what is occurring as
present experience. As deeper transconceptual natures of self and self-in-relation-with-other are progressively seen-through or un-layered through \textit{Relational Dharma}, the mind and heart soften and open. Transconceptual, in this sense, refers to the felt realization that emerges through the development of insight (cultivating discernment between conceptual understanding and felt realization). As previously mentioned, there is the concept of water versus the actual characteristic of it (i.e., wetness). Meaning, for example, one does not satiate thirst through reading words on drinking. Transconceptual understanding in this way is the felt realization of the actual characteristics of self and self-in-relation-with-other. This malleability gives way to a further synchronizing in the \textit{dharma}, and the experience of self and other as either objective or subjective, or separate and outside of oneself, transforms. Through shared \textit{dharma} resonance, an increasing sense of spaciousness and simultaneous connectedness occurs. The resonance permeates and occupies the intersubjective mind-to-mind atmosphere, and this permeation causes the nature of “other,” as existing outside of self, to progressively dissolve. By knowing this permeation, the arbitrary and illusory nature of the parameters that form divisions in the mind and that function to restrict and or divide the mind’s capacity to encounter an unobstructed flow of experience are recognized.

Whether through individual, couple, or group practice, as awareness coordinates directly with the nature and experience of other, perception of other moves through progressive filters. These filters reveal gradients through which mind, sustaining mindful awareness in relationship, sees its own nature while involved in the process of purification from that which obscures it from its own innate luminosity. In the cleansing of the relational lenses of perception, filters become radiant windows through which nature, as immaculate, reveals itself. \textit{Phottahbba} describes the essence of touching and being touched. To touch, or experience \textit{photthabba}, is to know through direct non-conceptual experience, the primary elements: earth, fire, air, and water. When coordinated with experience, these elements are perceived by the body as solidity and hardness, heat and maturing, and distension and motion (U Pandita, 2006). The water element, which is cognized by the mind, brings a feeling of cohesion and liquidity to these bodily-sensed features (U Pandita, 2006). As awareness moves into accord with the nature of how other is directly experienced, we have allowed ourselves to be touched in this way.

In this relaxation of solidity, or opaqueness, the transition of experience from gross to subtle filtering begins. Mind becomes able to lean into or against the mind of another, feeling the vibrational texture that forms the contour of the perceived ending of self and beginning of other. In addition, as experience moves from gross to subtle filters, the capacity to tolerate increasing degrees of uncertainty is gained, which helps nurture a shift from habituated associations that rely upon identification with self, to immersion in a transconceptual intersubjective atmosphere. Through this sensed vibrational touching, mind-to-mind contact deepens and the progression of relationship in \textit{dharma} continues through gross, subtle, and refined levels. At the refined level, mind interpenetrates mind and “mingles into oneness” (Kunsang & Schmidt, 2005, p. 46).
Gross, subtle, and refined filters represent three discernable structures of experiential transition through purification within *Relational Dharma* and the terrain of intersubjectivity. Though experiential, they can be conceptualized as follows.

**Gross Filter**

At the initial gross level of intersubjective filtering, the primary feature is a structure of self-defined by separateness and autonomy. The matrix of self is referenced as local, contained, and relatively constant, while other is experienced as outside and separate from this containment. As bare attention (a mental posture of non-activity that is characterized by receptivity, focus, and wakefulness) is brought forward, and progressively aligned with mental and physical processes experienced in relation with other, a discerning clarity and familiarity arises. The distinctions between an individual’s feelings and thoughts (mental) and sensations of the body (physical), as he or she intersects with mental projections of the other, become intuitively more clear and punctuated.

As this intimacy within the awareness of relationship continues, momentary concentration (khaṇīka-samādhi) is achieved, further supporting a partial absorption in the objects of attention, and awareness is able to “close in upon and fix on whatever object is being noticed and the act of noticing will proceed without break” (Mahasi, 2009, section 2, para. 3). Mental absorption, (*jhana*), or right concentration (*samma samadhi*), in this sense is defined as a “meditative state of profound stillness and concentration in which the mind becomes fully immersed and absorbed in the chosen object of meditation.” Development of *jhana* or absorption arises from the temporary suspension of the five hindrances (sensual desire, ill will, sloth and drowsiness, restless and anxiety, and uncertainty) and through the development of the following five mental factors: directed thought (*vitakka*), evaluation (*vicara*), rapture (*piti*), pleasure (*sukkha*) and singleness of preoccupation (*ekaggatarammana*; Mahasi, 2009).

This partially interpenetrating and forward-leading attitudinal posture flexes the experiential envelope past the perimeters that previously had limited its extension. Like having one foot move into a door while the other foot extends out the door, the subjective and intersubjective dimensions are now encompassed in parallel. While self is still experienced as predominately separate from other, a co-joining dimension of awareness arises where self-other form is less fixed and more mutual.

**Subtle Filter**

At the subtle level of filtering, the quality of bare attention that rests on mental and physical processes becomes significantly more acute and strong as they intersect with other. This agility facilitates a close proximity and timing in the
meeting of mind-body experience as it arises in tandem with the objects in awareness that formulate the composite of other. Within this immediate lucidity and strength of awareness, experience joins and anchors upon the features of other, illuminating the interactive dynamics to pervade holistically across mind in an effortless way. This ease leads to tranquility, as awareness, so filtered, is able to attend to and directly align with any of the arising objects for any desired length of time. As proficiency is further developed, insight is able to penetrate the objects, and experience illuminates the arising and dissolving formations of mind-body (nama-rupa) cognition (U Pandita, 2006).

As awareness of how this arising and dissolving (pairing) of material processes (seen as object) and mental processes (the action of knowing it) occurs, this helps to illuminate how self and other are fabricated. There is a realization that when visual consciousness arises, both the sense door of the eye and the visual object of the other are co-present. This is true of each of the six sense doors (seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, touching, and cognition). In noticing or reflecting upon an object that is a formation of the composite of other, consciousness becomes engaged in noticing, thinking, reasoning, or understanding.

Mahasi notes “consciousness arises in accordance with each object that becomes evident. If there is an object, there arises consciousness; if there is no object, no consciousness arises,” leading to “knowledge by comprehension through direct experience” that objects noticed are impermanent and impersonal (Mahasi, 2009, section 4, para. 5). As the dynamics of impermanency are directly experienced, a co-arising association within intersubjectivity is enhanced.

From the vantage point of the intersubjective, the surfaces of self and other are penetrated, and form is seen as impermanent and without an inherent or solid existence. The undivided field of Relational Dharma is experienced and inhabited as these moving patterns of change and impermanence are realized. Self-other form appears as translucent emanation co-occupying the unbound nature of intersubjective awareness: that which remains in and through the arising and passing of all formation.

**Refined Filter**

At the level of refined filtering, observance on mind and body (nama-rupa) processes remains continuous, along with increasing equanimity in relation to the arising and passing of formations. This experience reveals a deeper transparency—objects disappear or extinguish immediately at their moment of initial emergence (Mahasi, 2009). Here, the awareness of change, or the arising of mind-body processes, is no longer visible and the appearance of form emerges as one that is already vanishing or disappearing. Perceiving the dissolution of appearances gives way to a pleasure and freedom that reinforces the continuity of observance (Mahasi, 2009).

In the awareness of the action of perceiving, two factors are always present: an objective factor and a subjective one (i.e., the object noticed, and the mental state...
of knowing it). According to Mahasi (2009), these vanish or dissolve by pairs, one pair after the other. Within any given moment of the arising there is a multiplicity processes. In this detailed observance, it can be seen that within the very arising of form its dissolving is already occurring. The dissolving is part of the motion of arising: in the moment-by-moment appearance of the other, in the movement of its body and form, in its sound as it meets the ear, and in the direct experience entwining within the relational motion of formation. Like a semi-translucent mirage being pervaded by the sun’s light, its opacity giving way to a fading transparency, emptiness and form are seen as one.

Concurrent with the filter’s refinement and the release from the circuitry that propels self and separation, spiritual ignition (samvega) grows. This momentum, over time, supports the progression through each level of filter upon a terrain of gradual departure from the binding with self-correlates. This terrain is felt to occur in five interwoven stages, and traveling between them is a release parallel to the progression of the filters. The stages unfold naturally and occur in proportion to the progress of insight achieved through the refinement of the filters.

Sayadaw U Pandita described the stages as follows:

1. Part-time liberation;
2. Liberation by distancing the impurities;
3. Total eradication of the impurities (path consciousness);
4. Quieting down the impurities;
5. Total liberation. (U Pandita, personal communication, August 11, 2000)

Although the last of the five stages represents knowledge leading to complete release from the psychophysical bonds of constriction, neither it nor the preceding four stages should be regarded as hierarchical, linear, or mutually exclusive.

As the release of psychophysical constrictions occurs, insight into their conditioned nature becomes enhanced—the emerging view of dependent origination. The flowering of the mind through the gross, subtle, and refined filters and parallel “stages of liberation,” reveals a deeper topography of filters (U Pandita, personal communication, August 11, 2000). These link and inform the pattern of mind itself, and its causal motion in the architecture of self and other.

**Paticca Samuppada: The 12 Links of Dependent Origination**

Dependent co-arising (paticca samuppada), considered a central doctrine within Buddhism (Mahasi, 2009), illuminates a map of the way the five aggregates or mental components interact with ignorance and craving and result in human suffering. These five consist of material form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness. In addition, Bodhi (1980) expressed,
As the frame behind the four noble truths, the key to the perspective of the middle way, and the conduit to the realization of selflessness, it is the unifying theme running through the teaching's multifarious expressions, binding them together as diversified formulations of a single coherent vision. (p. 4)

So important is \textit{paticca samuppada} to Buddhism that it is considered to be the essence of Buddha dharma. The Buddha proclaimed that failure to understand dependent co-arising was the cause of suffering. Therefore, through its comprehension, all suffering ceases (Buddhaghosa, 1975).

The meaning of \textit{paticca samuppada} has several translations, including dependent co-arising, conditioned co-production, causal conditioning, causal genesis, and conditioned genesis (Macy, 1991a). Macy describes the breakdown of the meaning of \textit{paticca samuppada} as follows: “Uppada is the substantive form of the verb uppajjati, which means ‘arising.’ Sam-uppada, means ‘arising together.’ Paticca, as the gerund of pacceti (inati + i, means to ‘come back to’ or ‘fall back on’) and is used to denote ‘grounded on’ or ‘on account of’” (p. 34). Therefore the compound means “on account of arising together” or “the being on account of arising together” (p. 34).

According to the Pali texts, dependent co-arising is presented as both an abstract statement of a universal law as well as a means to resolve suffering through the direct experiential application of the law. In the abstract description, dependent co-arising is “equivalent to the law of the conditioned genesis of phenomena … it expresses the invariable concomitance between the arising and ceasing of any given phenomenon and the functional efficacy of its originative conditions” (Bodhi, 1980, p. 6). Buddhaghosa defines \textit{paticca samuppada} as “that according to which co-ordinate phenomena are produced together” (Macy, 1991a, p. 34).

As an applied to the problem of suffering, dependent co-arising is taught through a 12-term or 12-link formula. Each of the links represents the causal factors that the Buddha examined on the eve of his enlightenment as he began to reflect on the origin of old age and death. As Bodhi (1980) expressed, the 12 links seek to describe the “causal nexus responsible for the origination of suffering” (p. 7).

Although ignorance marks the beginning of the classical 12-link chain, which then conditions the arising of ethically determinate volitions (and in turn conditions the arising of consciousness), it is not considered a “causeless root cause of the world” (Bodhi, 1980, p. 7). Rather, it is co-emergent, “with the arising of cankers there is the arising of ignorance” (Access to Insight, 2013). Ignorance is made to serve as a starting point in an exposition of the round of becoming.

The Buddhist definition of ignorance has a different level of meaning than the Western interpretation. For example, the Western definition of ignorance might be described as a lack of knowledge or education, or it might represent
an unawareness of something that is considered important (e.g., racism, nationalism, or sexism). Within the context of Buddhism, ignorance is defined in two ways. The first is ignorance of the four Noble Truths, meaning the truth about suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way to its cessation. The second definition, as the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw discusses, is framed in “the positive sense,” meaning it “implies misconception or illusion” (Mahasi, n.d.). As Mahasi Sayadaw stated, “It [ignorance] makes us mistake what is false and illusory for truth and reality” (Mahasi, n.d., section 7, para. 1) and “makes us blind to reality because we are unmindful” (section 7, para. 7). As an example of being unmindful, he said the following:

[It] gives rise to the illusion of man, woman, hand, leg, etc., in the conventional sense of the terms. We do not know that seeing, for instance, is merely the name and form \textit{nama-rupa} or psychophysical process, that the phenomenon arises and vanishes, that it is impermanent, unsatisfactory and unsubstantial. (Mahasi, n.d., section 7, para. 7)

The 12 links were organized into a particular series because it created ease as a “mnemonic device in the oral tradition” (Macy, 1991b, p. 58). The Buddha’s method of teaching dependent co-arising in relation to the 12-link formula was expressed in four different ways (fourfold): “(a) from the beginning (starting with ignorance), or (b) from the middle up to the end (starts with feeling), and (c) from the end (begin with birth), or (d) from the middle down to the beginning (begins with craving)” (Buddhaghosa, 1975, p. 532). The series provided a way to bring direct illumination to the specific factors inherent within experience, and created a kind of scale and composition to recognize, and eventually penetrate, the nature of interdependent causal movement. In this way, the potency of the formula is discovered in two ways: through interpenetrating the pattern (which composes the 12 links as a whole), and through the direct realization of the “interdependent dynamic between” the links (which conditions and links the co-arising factors; Macy, 1991b, p. 58).

The 12 links comprise the factors of existence and are therefore considered to give rise to the wheel of existence or the round of becoming (Samyutta Nikaya, 1922/1979). Each of the psychophysical factors of existence provides the conditions for the subsequent factors, thus indicating the wheel or cyclical nature of life as it arises within interdependent conditions. When certain conditions are present, they give rise to subsequent conditions, which, in turn, give rise to other conditions, and the cyclical nature of life in \textit{samsara}, meaning “the round of rebirth,” can be seen. The wheel of existence indicated through the 12 links is a graphical illustration of these conditions. The classical or predominant ordering of the twelvelfold links that became standard and their account of the arising of the wheel of existence and life are as follows (Samyutta Nikaya, 1922/1979):

- From ignorance (avijja), volitional, or karmic, mental formations (sankhara) arise;
- From volitional, or karmic, mental formations (sankhara), consciousness or cognition (vinnana) arises;
From consciousness or cognition (vinnana), name-and-form, or mental and physical phenomena, the psychophysical entity (nama-rupa) or mind and matter arises;

From name-and-form the psychophysical entity (nama-rupa), the six sense base (salayatana) arises;

From the six sense base (salayatana) contact (phassa) arises;

From contact (phassa), feeling (vedana) arises;

From feeling (vedana), craving (tanha) arises;

From craving (tanha), attachment or clinging (upadana) arises;

From attachment or clinging (upadana), becoming/volitional actions (bhava) arises;

From becoming/volitional actions (bhava), birth (jati) arises;

From birth (jati) old age and death (jaramarana), sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; arise attachment to views as the cause of rebirth, thus does the whole mass of suffering arise.

The cessation of the wheel of existence and life reverses its order as follows:

- Through the cessation of ignorance, volitional formations cease;
- Through the cessation of volitional formations, consciousness ceases;
- Through the cessation of consciousness, psychophysical phenomena cease;
- Through the cessation of psychophysical phenomena, the six sense base ceases;
- Through the cessation of the six sense base, contact ceases;
- Through the cessation of contact, feeling ceases;
- Through the cessation of feeling, craving ceases;
- Through the cessation of craving, attachment/clinging ceases;
- Through the cessation of attachment/clinging, becoming/volitional actions cease;
- Through the cessation of becoming/volitional actions, birth ceases;
- Through the cessation of birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair cease; thus does the whole mass of suffering cease.

(Samyutta Nikaya, 1922/1979)

After Gotama’s reflection upon dependent co-arising in both its positive, or forward (anuloma), and negative, or reverse (patiloma) aspects, he proceeded to contemplate the nature of the “aggregates of grasping” (feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness and sense media; Mahasi, n.d., section 3, para. 3). It was then, as Mahasi Sayadaw stated, “he attained the successive insights and fruitions on the Ariyan holy path and finally became the all-Enlightened Buddha” (Mahasi, n.d., section 3, para. 3).

**Perceiving Interrelationships**

According to the Pali texts, the teachings of dependent co-arising were first spread through the formulation of the following four-part statement that, “This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises; this not being,
that becomes not; from the ceasing of this, that ceases” (Samyutta Nikaya, 1922/1982, p. 23).

In this way, the teachings describe how phenomena materialize and dematerialize through an intertwining reciprocity. As Macy (1991b) discusses, “Things do not produce each other or make each other happen, as in linear causality,” rather, “they help each other happen by providing occasion or locus or context” (p. 58). As things are “helped” to happen within a “context,” a mutual motion occurs, and “in so doing, they in turn are affected” (p. 58). This relational, wave-like reciprocity sinews itself through all phenomena, informing the arising and passing.

Within this framework, the nature of dependent co-arising encompasses a shared motion that functions to inform the ongoing linkage between what give rise to nama-rupa (name and form, mind and matter, mentality-physicality). Through the co-arising union of mental phenomena (nama) and physical phenomena (rupa), there is the arising or materialization of the five aggregates (feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness, and sense media). It was through the direct experiential investigation of what gives rise through the interplay of mind and matter with consciousness that the Buddha perceived dependent co-arising. The Buddha realized that there was a circuitry that both conditioned and held the stencil of interrelated causes, and that the circuitry itself, in turn, composed the conditions of the physical and psychological genetics of formation.

Insight into dependent co-arising undoes the conditions within consciousness that lead to self-generated suffering. The Samyutta Nikaya (1922/1979) distinguishes three types of suffering, or dukkha (in Buddhist Pali). The first is dukkha-dukkha, meaning the pain of pain for example body or mental pain, illness, old age, death, and grief. The second is viparinama-dukkha; meaning suffering that is caused by change for example violated expectations or the failure of happy moments to last. And lastly, sankhara-dukkha, meaning the pain of formation, a subtle form of suffering that is inherent in the nature of conditioned things and which include formations and the factors that constitute the human mind.

When practitioners perceive the pattern, or architecture, of dependent co-arising, they, in turn, experience a relaxation of mental rigidity (often not even previously noticed), and with this relaxation there is a natural release of attachment and cravings. In this way, by entering the formulaic motion, conditions can be undone. Within the motion of undoing, there is the embodying and enhancing of the qualities of consciousness that nurture beauty and the pure freedom and inquisitiveness to explore that which stretches beyond the confines of habitual and superficial perception.

In its purest sense, dependent co-arising is a holistic system of accordance, an operating software that is transdisciplinary in nature. Through directly perceiving the unbroken pattern of change found within the matrix of cause and effect relationships, there is the realization of a fabric that stretches to
encompass our deepest felt sense of interconnectedness. As Macy (1991a) suggested,

No immutable essence is posited from which paticca samuppada, as a regulative principle, emanates. Rather it is the pattern of change itself. As such, it represents a dual assertion—of change and order, or order within change. In the linear view of causality, order requires permanence, a static basis impermeable to change. But here order and impermanence go hand in hand. (p. 35)

This process, or pattern of change, is across all scales of phenomena, inclusive of both micro and macro. Like a living vine, this regulative principle construed itself as a pattern within perception as it perceives. Not recognizable through linear thinking, the view encompasses a bilateral directionality, holding its tension between a simultaneous backward and forward reciprocal entwine- ment. Unity, or order, is perceived in the process of change.

Although paticca samuppada reflects an interdependent probability structure, it does not suggest a reality defined through certainty. To the contrary, it is through the view of dependent co-arising itself that then reveals a potential for choice and the resulting freedom to emerge. When the awareness of dependent co-arising is recognized as an “accordance structure,” it can be utilized as a kind of geometrical conceptual experiential tool (Davies, 2009, p. 131). When discovered in this way, it offers both a deeply intimate and holistically inclusive map for encountering new forms of freedom.

By recognizing and entering into the in-between of everything that arises and passes, we interject awareness in the middle of the habitual circuitry and activate the potentiality of liberation. The in-between, or gap, that is inherent within the ongoing interplay of name and form, mind and matter, formation itself, gives rise to a dimension of what is conventionally untapped human potential. When entered, there is the recognition of how the relations themselves are constructing the cause of formation. This seeing activates a higher, more detached, transdisciplinary form of witnessing. The relational interplay itself is seen as the sewer of perceptual formation. In this way, the intuited view of dependent origination becomes a mechanism in and of itself to evolve and compose novelty in consciousness. By function of the scope and depth that this kind of seeing incurs, the human mind encounters new manifolds of awareness. As reference with these manifolds stabilizes, it becomes progressively easier to climb out of the circuitry of conditioned and habitual responses and awaken into another sphere of identification and directly influence an individual’s own freedom.

**Perceiving Wholeness**

The holistic view of paticca samuppada and the Relational Dharma, by which we may encounter it, involves an overarching awareness that stretches to encompass a metasymmetry of deep, multilayered causality. To touch and be
touched by its architecture is to step away from linear reasoning, intellectual judgment, conventional modes of thought, and our usual ways of filtering information. As Macy (1991a) stated, “It is not a dissecting or categorizing exercise of the intellect” (p. 63). Buddhist scholar Herbert Guenther (1989) described this movement away from a “mechanistic linguistics,” as a requisite for encountering the immediacy involved in this kind of experiential knowing (p. 9). Guenther (1989) described, there is a “shift in attention and interest away from the surface of sensuous and mental objects and toward the dynamic background and source of all that is” (p. 9).

In the teaching of paticca samuppada, a phrase was utilized to assist in the conveyance of the kind of thinking involved in the perception of mutual causality. The term is “yoniso manasikara” (Macy, 1991a, p. 63). Manasikara is a noun and translates as “to attend to, to consider, to reflect on” (B. Bodhi, personal communication, 2012, personal communication). The other half of the phrase, Yoniso or (yoni) literally translates as “womb,” and by extension came to mean “origin,” “way of being born,” and “matrix” (Macy, 1991a, p. 63). In this way, as Macy (1991a) discussed, womb “connotes generation, the arising of phenomena,” and matrix suggests the “interdependence in which these phenomena participate” (p. 63).

As awareness expands to encompass this matrix, or wholeness, there is an illumination of a kind of nonlinear mathematics that elucidates the otherwise invisible dynamics that are contributory to being. It is, as Macy (1991a) stated, “synthetic rather than analytic;” there is both a deep penetrative immersion and a simultaneous inclusion of all that can be mutually held in the field of awareness (p. 63). This holistic pattern is felt as an unending mosaic, a music composed through a fluid symmetry. It is the embodiment of process as synthesis, a dimension of felt motion. As Macy (1991a) stated, “It involves an awareness of wholeness—a wide and intent openness or attentiveness wherein all factors can be included, their interrelationships beheld” (p. 63).

Seen from this vantage point, the map of dependent co-arising reveals a holistic experiential transparency on the structures and substructures that compose the germinating genesis of mind and matter, interdependence and consequential formation. An analogy can be drawn with classical Tibetan Buddhist art. Beneath the colorful rendering of deities in classical Tibetan Buddhist art, there lies a specific geometrical grid, or tigse, that is associated with each deity (Nova, n.d.). The architectural grid provides the structure for the image and sets the guidelines for the image formed. This sacred structure underscores all Buddhist forms, and though conventionally invisible in the final visual creation, if the eye is attuned to this sacred geometry, it can be recognized. In a similar way, as awareness becomes tuned, the geometry of dependent co-arising emerges, rendering an interpenetrating transparency on color and form. When we see into reality with this recognition of its layers and dimensions, existence itself becomes like a magical array of multi-tiered lattices, transparently interrelating tapestries of dimensional movement. We are no longer limited by a superficial perception.
As an approach that seeks to transform collectively imposed and socially/relationally constructed forms of suffering that lead to self-other limitations, Relational Dharma’s (RD) clinical implications are broad and significant. As insight into the nature of RD is generated, a new level of intelligence is fostered that reveals the reciprocally co-arising (causal) nature of human suffering. From this awareness, a view into how we can engage a more active role in envisioning new patterns of determination becomes realized, making higher stages of human development possible. In this way, as a clinical approach, RD encompasses two parallel stages or processes: (a) recognizing and disentangling from the causes and conditions that give rise to suffering (b) subsequent alignment in intersubjective structures of “higher human relatedness” that function to evolve higher freedom.

“Higher human relatedness” (HHR) is a phrase the author conceived to both illustrate and provide a structure for making visible and bringing into form the mutually liberating, relational expressions that can emerge, as we experience insight into human nature as inseparable and interdependent, within the context of Relational Dharma (Davies, 2010).

The underlying structure of HHR is formulated through seven criteria, inspired by an ancient Buddhist methodology called the fourfold defining device. This device was originally used to formally define dhammas (or dharmas), meaning “things, which bear their own intrinsic nature” (Bodhi, 1993, p. 14). In addition, it was used to categorize the Buddhist pāramīs, perfections or noble qualities that a Bodhisattva vows to develop, in which states of mind are defined according to their characteristics, functions, manifestations, and proximate causes. This fourfold defining device is found within the commentaries on the Abhidhamma Pitaka. The source of this device is suggested by modern critical scholars to have originated and derived from two old exegetical texts, the Petakopadesa (“Instruction to the Tipiṭaka”) and the Nettipakarana (Book of Guidance), (Bodhi, 1995). The Abhidhamma Pitaka is the last of the three Pitākas (“baskets”), the preceding being the Vinaya Pitaka and the Sutta Pitaka, which constitute the Pāli Canon (and make up the scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism).

Each intersubjective expression of higher human relatedness (HHR) is characterized by seven criteria and coordinates with the fourfold defining device as follows: The first and second criteria form “characteristics” of intersubjective themes or structures of HHR, in that (a) it is a state of mind and being that can be mutually or reciprocally experienced (not necessarily at the same time or in the same physical location), (b) it can be a single theme or composed by a pattern of interacting qualities (the third and fourth criteria relate with the “proximate causes” of the intersubjective themes of HHR), (c) it arises through and/or reflects insight into inseparable nature, and (d) it is rooted in compassion. The fifth and sixth criteria relate to the “function,” in that (e) it nurtures the well-being of self and other, and (f) it reinforces other
expressions (principles, perspectives, or practices) of HHR. Finally, the seventh criterion is the “manifestation,” as (g) it fosters liberation (Davies, 2010).

These criteria form the underlying architecture for determining liberating expressions of HHR within Relational Dharma. In addition, the formula provides a guide for the recognition of the nature of HHR within our relationships, so that these intersubjective structures can be evoked as a means to transcend habitual patterns of self-other harm and co-evolve our higher freedom. As these mutually liberating potentials are fostered, higher stages of human development are actualized that go beyond ego and beyond the separate self. Thus, they provide a framework for elevating a new level of conscious interaction.

The effects of insight resulting in expressions of HHR within RD have been made visible through the author’s research into the key leaders of the democracy movement in Burma, one of the most awe-inspiring, nonviolent expressions of “spiritual revolution” in modern times. This research applied the criteria of HHR, as a means of identifying the essential intersubjective themes (inclusive of principles, perspectives and practices), underlying Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi’s non-violent approach (along and her two colleagues U Tin U and the late U Kyi Maung) toward achieving democratic freedom over military rule within Burma, 25 themes of HHR were identified (see Davies, 2010). The intersubjective structures, which underlie and inform transformational inner-outer dynamics (self and self with other), illuminate key processes involved in an individual’s ability to engage in non-violent (self and other), personal, relational/social, spiritual, and political, transformational change. In addition, they provide an intersubjective approach that functions to encounter, override, and/or transmute negative mind states and/or traumatic responses and reflect an internal purification from actions born of self-preservation (at the cost of another’s suffering) and illuminate intentions rooted in selflessness, compassion, wisdom, and love.

Of particular relevance in this regard are the contexts in which these themes of HHR were illuminated. Aung San Suu Kyi spent over 15 years under house arrest, in addition to being incarcerated in Insein prison on three separate occasions. As prisoners of conscience, U Tin Oo and U Kyi Maung both spent years in Insein prison, many of which were in solitary confinement. Insein prison is considered one of the world’s most brutal, in terms of its inhumane conditions, abusive techniques, and use of mental and physical torture.

An example of HHR is expressed in the following theme, “Obstacles as Vehicle: Transforming Negativity into Wisdom, Clarity, and Freedom” (Davies, 2010). Any obstacle, whether perceived as inner (such as fear) or outer (for example, the perception that another’s judgment is restricting oneself), can be approached as the vehicle toward higher human development and freedom. When met in this way, obstacles (or perceived negativity) become creative opportunities to develop spiritual strength while evolving freedom through the action of wise interrelatedness. As one engages with and
transmutes suffering, spiritual power emerges. All struggles, in this sense, can be seen as a means to purify the mind; thus, they are vehicles in disguise pointing the way to higher freedom. As Aung San Suu Kyi said, “The opposition is your greatest benefactor” (as cited in Davies, 2010, p. 163; see also Clements, 2008).

An expression of using an obstacle as a vehicle can be seen in the following illustration: U Tin Oo had been sentenced by the military tribunal to serve two separate terms in Burma’s notoriously inhumane Insein prison for being a leader in the democracy movement. While enduring years upon years of torturous conditions and solitary confinement, he turned the barbed wires that encircled his hut into a symbol to reflect on the preciousness of freedom (Davies, 2010; see also Clements, 2008). In addition, to safeguard any feelings that could arise where he would perceive his captors as enemies, he made it a habit to offer them dana, sharing the small precious eatable gifts that his wife brought him when she was allowed to visit. U Tin Oo reflected that by giving dana to his captors while in solitary confinement, he was participating in overcoming his “feelings of seeing them as ‘enemy.’” In this way, he made sharing some of his food with them his dana, his practice. “They, too, had a hard life in prison,” he reflected. “This eased my own emotional and psychological pain…” (as cited in Davies, 2010, p. 152; see also Clements, 2008). Another illustration can be seen in the following expression: U Kyi Maung, also twice imprisoned for a total of 11 years for his involvement in Burma’s democracy movement, on his third day in prison exhibited the power that is possible when we understand the nature of our minds and how to exert influence on it. U Kyi Maung instructed his mind to “renounce thinking.” In so doing, he later reported that he was able to free his mind from the arising of anger, frustration, and suffering (Davies, 2010; Clements, 2008).

**Clinical Application Example: Trauma**

As a clinical approach toward expressions of human suffering, such as “’trauma,’” RD (Relational Dharma) has been applied in the prevention and resolution of traumatic stress (Davies & Pitchford, 2010; Krippner, Pitchford, & Davies, 2012) as well as in providing an approach that builds upon a science of human strengths toward generating resilience, posttraumatic growth and growth through adversity (Davies, 2010). While posttraumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999) emphasizes the psychological growth gained from working through trauma, growth through adversity also values the nature of adversity in and of itself, and recognizes it as a valuable part of life (Joseph & Linley, 2006).

Trauma’s impact is often immediate, propelling a disruption of a person’s balance causing a “shattering” that can lead to the destruction of one’s self-regulation capacities or even to a break in the flow of life experience, such as with dissociation. As an approach to the resolution of trauma, RD supports a holistic reintegration of the traumatized individual’s experience, as it is
encountered within the *intersubjective* field between the client and psychotherapist (or other RD-trained healthcare provider; Krippner, et al., 2012). The intersubjective space, in this way, gives rise to a higher awareness that makes visible the patterns that emerge between self and other and provides the context for a reciprocal formation to develop between the RD practitioner and the trauma survivor. Utilizing the immediacy of the encounter between the RD practitioner and the trauma survivor, the RD approach mediates and attunes within an environment of empathic union, nourishing an atmosphere that assuages anxiety and facilitates the generation of trust and safety to flow in the in-between. This process allows for the possibility of transforming negative or life-diminishing “filters” into associations that widen and deepen identity. In this experience, the appearance of something “foreign,” “not part of,” or “too much,” is relaxed, so that one’s sense of what constitutes a “whole person” naturally broadens and evolves, and a deeper understanding of oneself and the relationship between oneself and others emerges. In this way, in order for RD to be effective in working with trauma, foundational, relational factors must be present for the trauma survivor (e.g., safety, connection); thus, noting that the level of experiencing for the trauma survivor dictates the pace for how RD unfolds.

As deeper insight into oneself and within relationship evolves, an opportunity for a new understanding and vision of oneself begins to emerge. From this understanding, higher forms of relatedness are both discovered and fostered promoting greater forms of freedom, both for oneself and in relationship with others. Examples of these forms of freedom expressed through HHR include the inner liberty to feel another’s suffering as inseparable to one’s own and the compassion to seek to alleviate it, thus respecting the freedom of others as inseparable to one’s own freedom. Another expression of HHR is the freedom to forgive others for their transgressions. In order to forgive, the ability to “step back” and recognize the conditions that gave rise to his or her actions versus reacting from a place of personalizing these actions, must be developed. As awareness into the causal relationships that led this individual to be wounded and act in a harmful ways becomes recognized, relational objectivity emerges and compassion becomes possible.

In this way, RD becomes a means toward a simultaneous release from the trauma that evoked the experience of suffering and the identification with earlier negatively conditioned behaviors and experiences.

From this new orientation, expressions of higher human relatedness naturally emerge, which in turn promote greater freedom to oneself and in relationship to others. In the case of the trauma survivor, he or she may find the freedom to release from the isolation and imprisonment of living imprisonment by his or her wounds (such as feeling hatred toward their oppressor). Instead, in recognition of the deep interdependence of human life, he or she may choose to become a “voice for the voiceless,” someone who seeks to bring peace to all victims, the oppressor and oppressed alike (Krippner et al., 2012).
CONCLUSION

Profound and tranquil, free from complexity,
Uncompounded luminous clarity,
beyond the mind of conceptual ideas
In this there is not a thing to be removed,
nor anything that needs to be added. It is merely the immaculate looking naturally at itself.
—Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche (Sogyal, 1994, p. 50)

Specific processes (i.e. gross, subtle, and refined filters) within Relational Dharma are illuminated as a means to parameterize and illustrate a phenomenology for degrees of insight, liberating mind from the forces of ignorance and self-other generated suffering. As mind moves into greater proximity with liberation, a deeper substratum of causality becomes visible. These dependently co-arising relationships can be seen to link and inform the patterns that give rise to the nature and formation of mind itself, and its causal motion in the architecting of self and other.

Through this recognition, experience can release from the gravitational pull of conditioning and become propelled toward the potentiality of full liberation. With liberation, filters cease to obscure experience from direct knowing. In this relational accordance, filters become translucent and pliable canvases upon which emerge the colors of luminosity, compassion, and wisdom in an ongoing alchemy toward the nature and expression of higher human freedom.

The ethical implications for humanity that these perspectives offer are undoubtedly the most relevant. In a world that is still addicted to violence and non-sustainable action, insight into the conscious engagement of interrelatedness may be one of the most important in terms of its spiritual, social, and political implications. It is only when we see with greater clarity the intimate causation of how “we,” citizens of the Whole, affect totality that we find the inspiration to take personal responsibility for our presence and fine tune our physiological, emotional, and physical resonance within the Whole.

REFERENCES

The Author

Jeannine Davies, Ph.D., is a licensed psychotherapist in private practice in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and faculty at Saybrook University within the School of Clinical Psychology in San Francisco, California, where she co-developed and co-leads the Complex Trauma and Healing Processes Certificate. She is co-author of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and is the founder of Relational Dharma, an intersubjective and integral model of consciousness, which is being applied toward resolving individual and collective experiences of human suffering, while evolving higher human potentials and freedom.