

## The Body and the Emotions: Anger, Disgust and Contempt

**Abstract** Carroll Izard, a pioneer in emotion studies, considered anger, disgust and contempt as the ‘hostility triad’ and this chapter has a focus on the physiological, psychological, moral and metaphysical facets of disgust, as well as an entry into the contemplative meditative discernment in Buddhist practice. There is also a short entry into ‘disenchantment’ in the life of Prince Siddhārtha, and concluding reflections on self-disgust and beyond to wholeness in the Sri Lankan novel, *Dispersion (Virāgaya)*. The chapter examines the thematic strands of the concept of disgust.

Carroll Izard, a pioneer in emotion studies who presented the hostility triad, anger, disgust and contempt, says:

Disgust combined with anger can be very dangerous, since anger can motivate ‘attack’ and disgust the desire ‘to get rid of’. Disgust, like anger can be directed towards the self, and self-disgust can lower self-esteem and cause self-rejection.... research with normal people and hospitalized patients has shown that inner-directed anger and disgust are usually characteristic of depression. (Izard 1977, 377)<sup>1</sup>

The Buddhist approach to deal with such negative emotions as anger, lust and conceit, manifested in *cittānupassanā* (mindfulness of thoughts), does not involve active measures to oppose unwholesome states, but lets the task of mindfulness be receptively aware, recognizing the state of mind underlying a particular thought pattern—and does not oppose,

ignore, repress or find methods of self-deception. It is non-reactive awareness. Below, I shall cite the different forms of anger examined in the *suttas*.

## BODY–MIND RELATIONS

While this study will have a focus on feelings, emotions and thought patterns, I am especially concerned with *body–mind relations* in both wholesome and unwholesome emotions. In fact, somatic intelligence refers to embodied emotions and disgust, both in meditation and in non-meditation settings that have a strong focus on the body. An important reason for this concern is that the meditation of disgust is centred on the repulsiveness of the body. We need to look at both the impact of subliminal anger (*paṭighbānusaya*) on the attitude to the body, and also a point of contrast, an alternative form of meditation, where the physical bliss of body contemplation is the focus. Thus, there is a need for balance, integrating the unattractive aspect of the body without overdoing the feeling of repugnance and loathsomeness. Furthermore, there is also the possibility of positive insight described in Pāli as *nibbidā*, often translated as ‘disgust’. The alternative route is presented in the *Kāyagatāsati sutta*, which takes the physical basis of absorption attainment as a goal. In this context, the contemplation of the body is not necessarily linked to any repulsiveness. The sense of balance in contemplative emotions directed towards the body is important. In fact, this sense of balance comes out in a graphic simile which compares contemplation on the anatomical parts of the body to examining a bag full of grains and beans. Thus, it has no affective overload of repulsiveness.

The sense of balance pervades many other contexts in the *suttas*, as when the Buddha advises Venerable Soṇa, who was a musician before he became a monk. He tells him that when playing a lute the strings should neither be too tight or too loose: over-aroused persistence leads to restlessness, overly slack persistence leads to lassitude (de Silva 2010, 657–672).<sup>2</sup> Regarding the relationship between body and mind, the Buddha, as an analytical philosopher (*vibhajjavādi*), perceived the working of *kāyānupassanā* (meditation focussed on the body (*rūpa*)) and the working of *cittānupassanā* meditation focussed on the mind (*nāma*), as well as feelings, as separate regions. On the other hand, however, he saw an integral connection between body and mind and recognized embodied emotions, seeing the mind as embodied, thus *shifting gears in different*

*contexts.* At another level, more deeply, when a meditator has achieved the culminating body-based experience in *kāyasaṅkhāra-passambhayaṃ* (stilling of the bodily dispositions), the meditator has to be extra-diligent to notice any messages verging on *nāma* (mind). Furthermore, sharpening the body–mind distinction is achieved in the first stage of insight meditation: *nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*.

The Buddha’s focus was on the shifting contours of concentrated meditation practice rather than on any metaphysical debates, as sharpening meditation skills helps one to discern new distinctions. The Buddha discouraged his followers from getting entangled in finding an ultimate solution to the to the body–mind relationship and described it as an indeterminate issue. A dominant contextualism and pragmatism pervades his philosophy and the practice of ethics and meditation. The Buddha accepted a form of body–mind interaction and did not try to reduce the body in terms of the mind or the mind in terms of the body. Speculative involvement in their ultimate status leads to unprofitable metaphysical wrangling.

## ANGER

Anger as described in the *suttas* (sermons of the Buddha) is one of the roots of unwholesome behaviour (*dosa*). It is one of the hindrances (*vyāpada*) and is included among bodily fretting (*pariḷāha*), malice (*upanāha*) and subliminal anger (*paṭighānusaya*). As a disguised visitor (*vañcaka-dhamma*), it feeds the craving for self-destruction (*vibhava-taṇhā*), which may take a negative form of repulsion/disgust in the misguided contemplation of the body. Anger also makes inroads into other emotions, converting simple greed to envy and covetousness (*abhiḷlāḥā*) and malice. In addition, it is a silent presence in boredom and depression, and generates a whole dynamism of reactivity. In this chapter, we are looking at anger as an inroad to negative forms of disgust and more briefly contempt. We are also looking at techniques of meditation and therapy to deal with negative forms of disgust. In particular, we are looking at the very concept of emotions at different levels—at the feelings/affects level, the cognitive/thinking level, and also the neurological, physiological and motivational levels. In Buddhist psychology, an emotion may be described as an interactive complex emerging within a causal framework. It is an interaction of perception (*saññā*), feeling (*vedanā*), intention/directed dispositions (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness and neurophysiology (*rūpa*). The causal series

is described in Buddhist sermons as follows: when the eye that is internal interacts with material shapes, there is sensory impingement: feelings arise because of sensory impingement, feelings, conditions, desires/craving and thought patterns which give way to clinging, dispositional, intentional activity and so on.

The first three facets of the *Satipatthāna* present a progressive pattern. Contemplation of the body progresses from the experience of bodily postures and activities to the anatomy. This refined sensitivity is followed by the contemplation of feelings. This contemplation of feelings ranges from its hedonic/affective quality into pleasant, unpleasant and neutral, and proceeds to consideration of their nature as wholesome and unwholesome, bringing an ethical dimension, which is foreign to Western psychologies. Then follow the contemplation of the mind and thought patterns, especially focussed on lust, anger, delusion and distraction.

### THEMATIC STRANDS OF DISGUST

These are described by William Miller thus:

Here we have the most embodied and visceral of emotions, and yet even when it is operating in and around the body its orifices and excreta a world of meaning explodes, coloring, vivifying, and contaminating political, social and moral orderings. Disgust for all its visceralness turns out to be one of our most aggressive culture-creating passions. (Miller 1997, xii)<sup>3</sup>

Disgust differs from other emotions by having a unique aversive style. The idiom of disgust invokes the *sensory* experience of what it feels like to be put in danger by the disgusting, of what it feels like to be close to it, to have to smell it, see it, or touch it... disgust is more visceral than other emotions. (Miller 1997, 9)<sup>4</sup>

The facial expression for disgust is described as having a raised upper lip, wrinkling of the nose and having raised cheeks.

In the early studies of disgust in the West, disgust was described in terms of things which are inedible, that have deteriorated, are spoilt, unclean, infectious and associated with a bad smell. Paul Rozin was an expert on the potential for oral incorporation of offensive objects. He discussed the risk of contamination by urine, mucus, and blood, and commented on the ensuing symptoms such as vomiting and nausea.

Rachel Herz's book, *The Scent of Desire*, a collection of literature on disgust, is a fascinating study which I picked up from a roadside bookshop:

The connection between smell and emotion is not only metaphorical but is also founded on the evolution of the brain. A primitive olfactory cortex was the fabric of our brain and from the neural tissue grew the *amygdala*, where the emotion is produced, and parts of the brain that are responsible for memory and motivation – the collective structure of the limbic system, in other words the ability to express and experience emotion grew out of the ability of our brain to process smell. (Herz 2007, 4)<sup>5</sup>

Disgust is inherent in the satisfaction of sensual desires to excess and can be very aggressive. The Buddha has described the inherent disarray and emptiness in the *kāmasukhallikānuyoga* lifestyle of 'pure hedonism'. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, describes in a graphic way the collapse of the 'pleasure lover' into tiresome monotony and boredom. Thus, there is disgust felt by the outsider as well as the self-disgust felt by the pleasure lover himself. Kolnai's insightful work, *On Disgust*, refers to the tiresome monotony of the sensualist (Kolnai 2004, 63).<sup>6</sup> The collapse of the lifestyle of the sensualist is also a kind of somatic intelligence with a valuational strand, a perspective of unwholesome clinging to the sensualist tempo of the body.

Soren Kierkegaard's masterly analysis of the collapse of the pleasure lover is graphically presented in his novel, *Either/Or* (Kierkegaard 1937, 43–44; see de Silva 2007, 84–109).<sup>7</sup> It is a remarkably insightful expression of somatic intelligence, the predicament of a sensualist attached to the body. But these pleasures contain within them the potentiality to decay. With the onset of loss and decay, delight turns into melancholy. Substitute forms of pleasure can be found, and a variety of diversions are within one's reach as the pleasure drive is always fed with new fuel. So, the endless process continues (de Silva 2007, 85)<sup>8</sup>:

Though the aesthete may get engrossed in commonplace and ordinary pleasures, it is the enigmatic, the surprising and the secretive kind of pleasure that can keep him fully absorbed. The aesthete has to drown the dullness and boredom that overtakes him in the search for pleasure. This sense of dullness has to be kept away by the category of the 'interesting' but yet does not make any commitment. That is why he renounces the bond of marriage. Searching for immediacy, variety, and novelty, he avoids any kind of stability or resting place. (de Silva 2007, 87)<sup>9</sup>

As presented in the sketch of Nero, however, though the pleasures seemingly focus on despair and melancholy, they cannot find a metamorphosis:

Nero sought pleasures to drown his melancholy. He has gone through every conceivable pleasure. His life depraved as it may be, has matured his soul; at least he experiences melancholy. But a metamorphosis is not possible, as a higher level of existence is necessary for that. However, if that is to come about, ‘an instant will arrive when the splendour of the throne, his might and power, will pale, and for this he has not the courage’. (de Silva 2007, 92)<sup>10</sup>

William Miller’s classic study, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (1997),<sup>11</sup> has been described as a book where moral psychology is at its best. It is a work that is directly relevant to the call of moral intelligence in Howard Gardner’s work, *The Theory of Multiple Intelligence*. Miller’s work is able to absorb Kierkegaard’s graphic study of the collapse of the pleasure lover towards self-disgust. His concept of *tedium vitae* refers to a kind of disgust with life—despair, boredom, depression, melancholia and *ennui*.

There is a danger, however, of describing genuine sadness and melancholy as depression, as I have shown elsewhere (de Silva 2012).<sup>12</sup> In fact, the Buddha made a point of emphasizing that periods of anxiety and melancholy are a necessary part of life and to use Freud’s thinking, in his brilliant paper, ‘*Melancholia*’, we need to replace neurotic unhappiness with normal unhappiness.

## ETHICAL CATEGORIES

Apart from the psychological perspectives, I shall now move on to ethical categories. Jonathan Haidt, who has a record of interesting research in moral psychology, says:

Our idea was that moral disgust is felt whenever we see or hear about people whose behaviour shows them to be low on this vertical line. People feel degraded when they think about such things just as they feel elevated by hearing about virtuous actions. A man who robs a bank does a bad thing, and we want to see him punished. But a man who betrays his own parents or enslaves children for the sex trade seems monstrous – lacking in some basic human sentiment. Such actions revolt us and seem to trigger some of the same of the physiology of disgust as would seeing rats scampering out of a trash can. (Haidt 2012, London)<sup>13</sup>

Haidt also refers to obsessive rituals for cleansing sin/wrongs and calls it the ‘Macbeth effect of washing hands’. In fact, the Buddha refers to a kind of ritual cleansing or converting ethics into a ritual as *śīlabhata-parāmāsa*. Appiah says that the category of perceptions of purity and pollution is one of the psychological modules of moral experience (Appiah 2008).<sup>14</sup> Aaron Ben-Zeev also observes that disgust plays an important moral role in presenting intense resistance to immoral deeds and violation of norms (Ben-Zeev 242, 402).<sup>15</sup> But, it can take an excessive turn by getting converted into moral contempt, with anger hiding one’s own conceit of one’s morals. Moral anger, as we shall see later (Chap. 11), is a complicated emotion.

### CONVERTING ‘DISGUST’ INTO A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

At the contemplative level, the mortality, dissolution and decay to which the human body succumbs is a subject for contemplation in Buddhist practice. The term *nibbidā* may be translated as disgust, revulsion or even disenchantment, but it is better to render it as disenchantment, as disgust has many meanings:

In insight meditation there is a revulsion which emerges in relation to formations (*saṅkhāra*) of the phenomenon of five aggregates. When the true nature of formations is realised through insight knowledge, the delight that the worldly mind takes in formations subsides and revulsion then emerges. (Venerable Gnanarama 1997, 50)<sup>16</sup>

Thus, we see that in this context, *nibbidā* is a positive experience and is described as revulsion or disgust. Disgust felt towards residual attachments of the body and defilements adds a sense of urgency for final liberation. Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathero says that such disgust is a sign of the practitioner’s detachment. It is also said that the contemplation of dispassion (*virāgānupassanā*) and the contemplation on revulsion (*nibbidānupassanā*) go together and closely related.

### NEGATIVE VERSIONS OF ASUBHA BHĀVANĀ

The Venerable Dhammajiva Mahathero says:

An overemphasis of repulsiveness could lead to loathing which could manifest as an expression of frustrated desire. The discourses recollect an

example of excessive contemplation of the anatomical parts of the body. After the Buddha had instructed a group of monks on this practice and retired to solitude, the monks contemplated the anatomical parts of the body and their repulsiveness with such fervour that they became disgusted by it, resulting in a number of them committing suicide.<sup>17</sup>

On the positive practice of *nibbidā*, Venerable Nyanaponika says:

The snake feels disgust towards its old skin when the sloughing is not yet complete and parts of the old skin still adhere to the body. Similarly the disgust felt towards the residual attachments and defilements will give to the discipline an additional urgency in the struggle for final liberation. Such disgust is a symptom of growing detachment. (1983, 9)<sup>18</sup>

Positive responses are not fed by aversion (*paṭigha*) and hatred (*dosa*). The purpose of contemplating the nature of the body is to bring its unattractive aspects, previously emphasized, into a more balanced context. The aim is a balanced and detached attitude towards the body (Anālayo 2003, 122).<sup>19</sup>

A good contrast is the *Kāyagatāsati sutta* which takes the physical basis of the attainment of absorption as an object of contemplation. Thus, the contemplation of the body is not necessarily linked to any loathing/repulsiveness. ‘The fact that a firm grounding of awareness in the body provides an important basis for the development of both calm and insight may be the reason, why, of the four *satīpaṭṭhānas*, body contemplation has received the most extensive and detailed treatment in the discourses and commentaries’ (Anālayo 2003, 124).<sup>20</sup>

In fact, in the *Theravāda* school of *vipassanā*, contemplation of the body takes a central place. In the practice of higher meditative absorptions, there is a crowning experience of the stilling of the bodily dispositions, described in *Pāli* as *passambhayaṃ kāyasankhāraṃ*. These experiences are non-sensory and the development of consciousness occurs at a primordial level (*indriya-paṭibaddha-viññāna*): this highlights the deep value of the contemplation on the breath.

## INTEROCEPTION

The sixth sense in neurology or non-sensory intuition (*anindriya-paṭibaddha-viññāna*) is described by the term ‘interoception’:

Our sixth sector of the rim includes sensations in our limbs, our body's motion, the tension or relaxation in our muscles, the state of our internal milieu, including our organs as lungs, hearts and intestines. These bodily aspects of potential awareness serve as a deep source of intuition and shape our emotional state. (Siegel 2007, 122)<sup>21</sup>

Siegel also says that, the hormonal state of our body, the tensions of the muscles and limbs, torso, and face, have an impact on our feelings. The notion that physiological changes in the body have linkages not merely to fear and anger but also to positive meditative experience is a crucial insight for the Buddhist contemplative tradition. Physiology is one aspect of emotional experience: its role in emotions will be taken up in the chapter on Darwin and James. It has of course been observed that, 'In meditation and relaxation the calming effects are achieved by means of feedback from the body. The rhythmic breathing and the relaxed state of the muscles are interpreted by the brain as a calm state of the mind' (Evans 2001, 104).<sup>22</sup>

The argument referred to is also presented by Jesse Prinz in describing four basic strands of the Jamesian analysis, where for the present, I shall quote only one of them:

James also supports his theory by appeal to parsimony. We know that the mind can register bodily changes. If emotions are constituted by such mental states, we do not need to postulate some further faculty to explain affective phenomena. He also says, that voluntary change of bodily states can impact our emotions. (Prinz 2004a, 56)<sup>23</sup>

James's theory of emotions has sometimes been considered as a form of 'reductionism' but as Dylan Evans very skilfully argues, James assumes a two-way relationship between body and mind: 'There is a feedback mechanism by which the body can affect the mind just as much as the mind affects the body. As with any feedback loop, this allows for amplification. James described the body as the mind's 'sounding board', allowing the emotional signals to resonate much as the soundbox of a guitar amplifies the sound of the strings' (Evans 2001, 105).<sup>24</sup> Evans also says, 'Conversely as the body technologies of emotion makes clear, the feedback mechanisms also allow us to exercise some measure of control over our emotions by deliberately suppressing some automatic bodily changes and consciously making others' (Evans 2001, 106).<sup>25</sup>

In clinical psychology, according to Yana Suchy, the value of interoceptive awareness is receiving a great deal of attention from psychologists concerned with mental health (Suchy 2011).<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is important that in the higher reaches of the mind, in insight meditation, the tranquilization of the breath leads to joy (*pīti*) and tranquillity (*passaddhi*) concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

## DISGUST AND CONTEMPT

While anger does belong to the emotional initiative of ‘attack’, contempt is focussed towards the ‘exclusion’ of another person or group. As the main focus of this chapter is the study of the emotion of disgust, I shall be brief about the nature of contempt. Contempt involves a judgement that because of some moral or impersonal standard, the person who makes the judgement considers the object as worthless. It involves a comparison of one’s superior standing with someone else, and that the other person is inferior. Though there is an outward expression of indifference in the person displaying his contempt to others, the indifference is manipulated to cover a hot emotion with a cold jacket. Contempt against a group may have bad consequences in generating intergroup tension. Contempt has even been described as a corrosive emotion of social exclusion. But, contempt towards those in power may be felt by an angry person whose rights have been violated and who then calls for redress. Ekman and Frierson, in their pan-cultural study of facial expressions and emotions, found that contempt is found across all cultures. Contempt is seen as a moral emotion related to the transgression of a code of ethics. In general, contempt is not associated with extreme behaviour but that of silent ignoring of another person, and coldness.

## FROM DISENCHANTMENT TO DISSONANCE

The renunciation of Prince Siddhārtha is a paradigmatic example of the experience of disenchantment (*samvega*): the emotional cluster of oppressive shock of dismay and alienation, realizing the futility and meaninglessness of life as it is normally lived, with an anxious sense of urgency in trying to find a way out of the *samsāric* circle (Thanissaro 1999, 4).<sup>27</sup> There is a clear distinction between the *samvega* of Prince Siddhārtha and the self-disgust, tedium and boredom cited by Miller.

Although my initial stimulation to look at disenchantment, dissonance and disgust came about partly to make a more complete response to Miller, another line of stimulation emerged unexpectedly after reading a much celebrated Sri Lankan novel, *Virāgaya* ('Dispassion') by Martin Wickramasinghe<sup>28</sup>: a novel written in Sinhalese, but translated into English and several other languages. The literary controversy in translating the Pāli term *nibbidā* was the initial point of stimulus for me, an issue I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere (de Silva 2013, 17–22).<sup>29</sup> I shall present a very short summary of the thematic thrust of the novel.

The novel depicts Aravinda, who experiences the dissonance and melancholy of a person torn between the conflicting attractions of a simple rustic life, the wilderness and the monastery, and the subliminal passions aroused due to an inability to commit to Sarojini, a potential partner, for life. The passions he experienced were not crude sensual passions but the expression of love with some depth. The tension was not resolved, but the elegance with which Wickramasinghe generates the luminosity of self-analysis within the wavering mind of Aravinda is one of the significant strengths of the novel. Aravinda's awareness of the contradictions within himself was a kind of wisdom in a dark corner, a point of luminosity, and my mind was enthralled by these Zen Buddhist strands of wisdom. In Buddhist mindfulness practice, apparent defilements are converted into realization—they are seen as evolving states of the mind—*dharmatā*:

My love for Sarojini brought me to the great cross-roads of life. I hadn't the strength of mind to choose my path and step out boldly. When Sarojini married Siridasa I hadn't the courage to take the path left to me either: it takes courage and resolution to go alone into the wilderness or enter a monastery, or to rid oneself of desire and I lacked both these qualities. (Virāgaya, 131)<sup>30</sup>

Although some readers of the novel feel that Aravinda was a 'lonely' person, in spite of his lack of decisiveness to make a full commitment to Sarojini, he was also a lover of 'solitude' and part of his personality was drawn to a kind of disenchantment with the world. As Krishnamurti expresses it: "alone" has a different meaning: alone has beauty. When a man frees himself from the social structures of greed, envy, ambition, arrogance, achievement, status—when he frees himself from these, then he is completely alone' (de Silva 2007, 56).<sup>31</sup>

Aravinda was completely free of any egoistic pursuits of power, accumulation of wealth, arrogance and ambition and though his personality fell apart and broke into pieces, during the last phase of his life, he moved into wholeness. In the words of Mark Epstein in *Going to Pieces without Falling Apart*, he was ‘converting the cracks and asymmetry in his life to a thing of beauty’. The compassionate nursing he received during the last stages of his life made him realize that compassion and love are more complex in terms of maturity and are more lasting than subliminal passion. ‘I no longer feel despair, for I find myself in a place where kindness, charity, love are still valid’ (*Virāgaya*, 246).<sup>32</sup> The cracks, and fissures, and emptiness is the real heart of dharma—to be with the feeling of emptiness without rushing to change them:

This is the task that faces nearly all of us. We must learn to be with our feeling of emptiness without rushing to change them. Only then can we have access to the still, silent center of our awareness. (Epstein 1995, 26)<sup>33</sup>

I have already referred to the use of the term *nibbidā* above as a refined meditative state. The author of the novel uses the same term in relation to Aravinda. This caused some literary controversy, which was partly instrumental in my reading the novel afresh after many years. As Maddegama quite clearly states in a review of the novel: ‘the concepts of “virāgo” or “vītarāga” are used in Buddhist writing as states devoid of lust attained by those who have conquered the defilements of the mind, as exemplified in the Buddha or the *arahants*, but we do not discover in the novel *Virāgaya* anyone who displaced these qualities’ (Maddegama 1997, 9).<sup>34</sup>

Although I fully agree with Maddegama’s analysis, Aravinda’s profile has many positive features, and I have used this novel in a clinical context as a therapist to deal with issues of self-disgust. Of note is that Aravinda rejuvenates himself through insight towards the close of his life: a resurgence of deep human sentiments of compassion and love. It is obscured by tensions in the earlier part of his life. As Carl Jung observed, the subliminal and the repressed contains not merely repressed passions but positive human sentiments in revolt, which emerge as a person moves towards wholeness. *Virāgaya* is a narrative therapy of optimism for managing people drowned in apparent self-disgust and depression—the thematic strand in *Virāgaya* is the rejuvenation of Aravinda towards the latter part of his life.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE BODY: SOME APPARENT PARADOXES

My recent work on pain management is focussed on what is described as embodied mindfulness and somatic intelligence (Chap. 4). In this context, we consider the body as a veritable treasure house. Somatic learning can be used as a skilful means to transform pain, trauma and some of the effects of ageing and make people more empathetic and compassionate. Recent neuroscience has shown that developing embodied mindfulness practice enhances neural networks of positive states.

In fact, the development of contemplative meditation generates a *spiritual turning point* on the way to ultimate liberation from the cycle of suffering. But, studies indicate that in such a progress there is a qualitative positive change in the neural network, as was evident from the ground breaking work of Richard Davidson on neuroplasticity. This was followed by the research of Siegel (2007, 346–362).<sup>35</sup> This work gives a great deal of credence to the claim that the higher stages of the Buddhist path produce profound psychological changes as the experience of *nibbidā* (revulsion), along with those of *virāgo* (dispassion) and *vimutti* (liberation), is a spiritual turning point,

At another level, mindfulness practice that is highly developed builds what some scientists are calling our resonance circuitry for enhanced compassion and empathy and also assists in developing prefrontal self-regulation for affect regulation. The practice of compassion as *mettā* meditation brings about great changes at both the secular and the spiritual levels. Aravinda was transformed by the compassion and empathy he received. It helped him to triumph over loss, depression and social exclusion. As we move to the next chapter, the positive transformation of embodied emotions is discussed and illustrated at great length.

According to Yana Suchi, even among non-religious practitioners, the practice of insight meditation and developing our skills of ‘interoception’ has been recognized in the area of mental health. It has been found that there is a correlation between interoception (awareness of our internal body states), empathy, heightened immune function and a sense of well-being. One way of reconciling these different levels of spiritual development and mental health, which sometimes generate apparent paradoxes, is to contextualize the different approaches to the body: as we have already done in reconciling the meditative perspectives on revulsion as positive and excessive disgust and hate directed to the body. Also, the

physical bliss and rapture captured in the *kāyaḡatāsati sutta* adds a sense of balance. Above all, the Buddha used the techniques of contextualism in running through apparent theoretical muddles.

## INTEROCEPTION AND THE EMOTIONS

One of the most important concepts that we take from this chapter to the next and beyond, is the Buddhist perspective on interoception or what was described as the ‘sixth sense’. In her book, *Clinical Psychology of Emotion*, Yana Suchy defines the concept as follows: *Interoceptive awareness* refers to our ability to detect the physiological responses that take place within our bodies. In other words, it refers to the ability to detect changes in our own heartbeat, breathing patterns, and peristaltic motion, as well as perspiration, temperature and piloerection on our skin.<sup>36</sup>

Suchy says that this concept is very important for understanding our emotions. It was William James who first suggested that the feelings (emotions) we experience are our interpretations of physiological changes in the body. In a special chapter on the pioneers of emotions, William James and Charles Darwin, we shall explore all the ramifications of William James’s standpoint on emotions, interoception and the body.

## NOTES

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