



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO ITS DEVELOPMENT

A FOREWORD

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has come a long way for the short period of its existence since John Mayor and Peter Salovey laid its theoretical foundation just ten years ago. The extreme interest it generated among the people should not only be attributed to the Journalistic and Marketing skills of Daniel Goleman; that interest can also be explained by the possibility that EI was something that people knew existed, but no one had bothered to explain it to them in an orderly and scientific fashion, as Goleman did. The author of this paper believes that EI is in fact not a discovery but a re-discovery. What is known today as EI, is what **Siddhartha Gouthama (the Buddha)**, urged his disciples to develop in them, and the doctrine he preached was in essence a well defined path to developing EI to its practical extreme. The aim of this paper is to introduce the reader to Buddhism as a path to developing Emotional Intelligence. However it begins with a summary of existing theoretical knowledge on the subject for the benefit of the uninitiated reader. For the reader who is current on the theory of EI, the matters of interest would be in the second half of the paper.

I. History of the Concept of Emotional Intelligence

American psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer are credited with having the first comprehensive theory and definition of Emotional Intelligence, which they first published in 1990. Salovey and Mayor were trying to develop a way of scientifically measuring the difference between people's ability in the area of the emotions. They found that some people were better than others at things like identifying their own feelings, identifying the feelings of others, and solving problems involving emotional issues. Since 1990 their efforts have been directed at accurately identifying the unique ability possessed by these people, which Salovey and Mayor have chosen to call Emotional Intelligence, and to find a way of measuring individual variations in this ability possessed by different people. Their latest contribution in this area of work is the "Mayor, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test – MSCEIT." (Mayer et.al.,2001:232-242)

The person largely responsible for giving the concept of EI its present popularity is psychologist / journalist Daniel Goleman, whose 1995 book "Emotional Intelligence" made it to the cover of Time magazine, and remained in the New York Times best – seller list for almost a year. The overwhelming response received by the book from the business world, "mostly came from the realization on the part of jobholders at all levels that both success and effectiveness has more to do with what Goleman described as EI, than with intelligence as traditionally depicted Intelligence Quotient (IQ), technical expertise, or even experience." (Luthans, 2002:305). What, the evidence available to them suggested could be summarised into the phrase "IQ gets you hired, but EQ gets you promoted." As recent surveys have shown, "... the *stars* (italics mine) used EI dimensions such as social skills to build a network of relationships and friends that they could call on and would get right back to them to help solve a problem or handle a crisis. Also, the well known centre for creative leadership found that derailed executives (rising stars who flamed out) failed because of emotional intelligence types of problems (poor working relations, too authoritarian, too ambitious, conflict with upper management) rather than a lack of technical ability." (Luthans, 2002:306)

A study of Emotional Intelligence, should, for obvious reasons, begin with a study of **emotions**.

II. Emotions

The world **emotion** is generally thought to mean how a person feels about something. Emotional feelings are also known to stand in contrast with rational thinking. As it is often said, emotions come from the heart, where as rational thinking comes from the head. What is most



serious is the observation that emotions often win over rational thinking in what people decide and do in their lives.

Emotions result from the various experiences that we are subjected to in life, and with time can turn into **moods**. Relationship between emotions and moods is clearly explained in the following quotation. "Emotions are reactions to an object, not a trait. They are object specific. You show your emotions when you are happy about something, angry at someone, afraid of something. Moods, on the other hand, are not directed at an object, Emotions can turn into moods, when you loose focus on the contextual object." (Robbins, 2001:104)

Emotions are often categorized as positive or negative, based on the reactions they can generate and the nature of moods they can lead to. Some emotions are identified as primary emotions, as some others are seen as combinations of these **primary emotions**. These primary emotions are sometimes conceptualized along a continuum from positive to negative. The closer any two primary emotions are placed to each other along the continuum, the more difficult it is for others to distinguish between them when expressed.

What roles do emotions play, and what are the purposes they serve, in our lives. Firstly, they are our **primary aid to survival**. They are a delicate internal guidance system that alert us when our natural human needs are not being met. For example, when our need for safety is unmet, we feel afraid. When our need for connection with other people is unmet, we feel lonely. Secondly our emotions help us **make decisions**; as studies have shown, when a person's emotional connections in the brain are severed he cannot make even simple decisions because he doesn't know how he will feel about his choices. Thirdly emotions trigger spontaneous reactions in us, for example facial expressions, which **help us to communicate** to others how we feel about a situation we experience. Sometimes this role of communication is used purposely to deliver a message to others, as in the case of **Emotional Labour** (Which refers to service personnel who are expected to express false positive emotions, for example by smiling). Emotions are creations of the mind that we all are familiar with, through personal experience. But the ability to identify them as they arise, and the ability to understand their meaning and their cause of origin, are rare competencies, the study of which is one of the primary objectives of this paper.

III. Intelligence

What is traditionally called Intelligence, is a set of abilities which were expected to be measured by a test created by Alfred Binet about hundred years ago, to measure the Intelligence Quotient of grade school children in Paris. IQ was traditionally considered to be fixed at birth and was treated until recently as an accurate predictor of success in education, work and life. Traditional IQ tests measure a person's ability in mathematical / logical and verbal / linguistic dimensions. However a new approach to defining Intelligence, proposed by Howard Gardner, through his 1983 book "Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences", identifies a total of seven Intelligences. They include, logical / mathematical and verbal / linguistic Intelligences evaluated by Binet's tests, as well as five others, namely, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Visual / Spacial, Musical and Bodily / Kineasthetic. Multiple Intelligences (MI) are equal in importance and most people are strong in three or four and, because they are not fixed, there is always room for improvement in others.

To be considered an Intelligence under Gardner's approach, the following three criteria had to be met; (1) measurable (2) valued by the person's culture, and (3) a strength that the person defaulted to when challenged to be creative or solve a problem. (Luthans, 2002:302). The expanded view of intelligence provided by Gardner has led to the addition of other Intelligences to his list, like Naturalist, Existential, Spiritual and Emotional, Intelligences.



Emotions and Intelligence are important psychological dimensions, and what is studied here under Emotional Intelligence is the synergy created by combining the two.

IV. Definition of Emotional Intelligence

Peter Salovey and John Mayer have defined Emotional Intelligence as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Luthans, 2002:304). Daniel Goleman has proposed another definition which in essence means the same but has a more practical orientation. As he defines, EI is, “The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.” (Goleman 1998:317).

These and other definitions found in literature, of Emotional Intelligence, generally agree on the view that EI consists of multiple competencies. They include the ability to identify and understand one’s own emotions, ability to identify and understand the emotions of others through available indications, ability to use the knowledge of one’s own and others’ emotions to consciously manage one’s own emotions and thought processes, and the ability to use that knowledge to manage relationships with other individuals and groups. These abilities can be further subdivided into more specific competencies and even measured, as believed by the pioneers of the concept. “... the domain of EI was sizable in that we could come up with 12 fairly diverse tasks to measure it, everything from recognising emotion in faces to understanding how emotions might combine to form other emotional experiences ... we found that performance on those 12 diverse tasks was correlated positively across samples. A factor analysis of those tasks indicated that they could be defined by one general factor, and that they also fell into three or four sub-groups of skills roughly corresponding to our model of Emotional Intelligence. (Mayer, et.al., 2001:232).

V. Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman’s model of EI describes five dimensions. **Self-Awareness** : understanding of one’s own emotions at the present moment, **Self Management**: controlling one’s own emotions to facilitate rather than hinder the work at hand, **Self Motivation**: to avoid and overcome demotivating negative emotions and using one’s positive emotions to persist with the efforts to achieve a desired goal, **Empathy**: being sensitive to the feelings of others, or being able to "get into the other person’s shoes", and **Social Skills**: being able to "read" social situations by sensing the emotions of others and being able to control or guide the emotions of others to create a favorable social situation, make up the list of five dimensions. (Luthans, 2002:304).

The model of EI proposed by Salovey and Mayer contains four "branches". As they explain, “our own analysis of emotion related abilities led us to divide EI into four areas of skills. We call these areas, branches, in reference to the diagrams in which they were first introduced, The four branch model which we now use divides EI into four areas : accuracy at (a) perceiving emotions, (b) using emotions to facilitate thought, (c) understanding emotions, and (d) managing emotions in a way that enhances personal growth and social relations. We view a distinction between the second branch (using emotions) and the other three. Where as branches 1, 3 and 4 involve reasoning about emotions, branch 2 uniquely involves using emotions to enhance reasoning. Finally we view the four branches as forming a hierarchy, with emotional perception at the bottom and management at the top.” (Mayer, et.al., 2001:232-242)

VI. Leadership and EI

The strong relationship between Emotional Intelligence and effectiveness of Leadership, has been established beyond any doubt. The following quotations summarise that relationship. It can be said that, “A high level of self – awareness, combined with the ability to manage one’s



own emotions, enables a leader to display self – confidence and earn the respect and trust of followers. In addition, the ability to manage or temporarily restrain one’s emotions can enable a leader to objectively consider the needs of others over his or her own immediate feelings. Giving in to strong feelings of anger or depression, for example, may intensify a self centered focus on one’s own needs and limit the ability of the leader to understand the needs of others or see things from other perspectives”.

“The emotional state of the leader impacts the entire group, department or organization. Leaders who are able to maintain balance and keep themselves motivated are positive role models to help motivate and inspire those around them. The energy level of the entire organization increases when leaders are optimistic and hopeful. The ability to empathize with others and to manage interpersonal relationships also contributes to motivation and inspiration because, it helps leaders create feelings of unity and team spirit. “(Draft, 2002:183).

The followers led by emotionally intelligent leaders can grow, learn and develop with the leader’s help. Such leaders can make their followers feel safe, and thus can obtain their fullest contribution towards achieving the group’s goals. Under such leaders, unity and team spirit improves, as the strength of his relationships with individual followers, has a contagious effect on the relationships among others in the group. Mutual trust, respect and interdependence can only lead to one thing, **synergy**.

VII. Developing Emotional Intelligence

One of the fundamental differences between the concept of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of Alfred Binet and the concept of Multiple Intelligences, developed by Howard Gardner, is the idea that intelligence was not entirely genetic and fixed at birth, but instead it could be nurtured and grown. The experts on Emotional Intelligence almost unanimously agree on this view about Emotional Intelligence as well. As the pioneer, Daniel Goleman himself writes, "Unlike IQ, which changes little after our teen years, Emotional Intelligence seems to be largely learned, and it continues to develop as we go through life and learn from our experiences - our competence in it can keep growing ... There is an old fashioned word for this growth in Emotional Intelligence: maturity." (Goleman, 1998:7)

How can Emotional Intelligence be developed through a conscious, organized effort, among individuals and groups. “At the individual level, elements of Emotional Intelligence can be identified, assessed, and upgraded. At the group level, it means fine tuning the interpersonal dynamics that make groups smarter. At the organisational level, it means revising the value hierarchy to make Emotional Intelligence a priority in the concrete terms of hiring, training and development, performance evaluation and promotions.” (Goleman, 1998:315)

In recent times, schools specialising on training and developing people on EI competencies, have come up, like Paul Wieand Centre for Advanced Emotional Intelligence. Big corporations in the US, are known to be developing their own in house EI strategies. Some firms are conducting EI training for their employees to better cope with and effectively resolve emotional issues and complaints, and to deal with change and emotionally charged work situations.

Perhaps an area that has got largely neglected is the contribution that **Religion** can make, in developing Emotional Intelligence in individuals. Some of the basic teachings of **the Buddha**, can throw some light on certain grey areas in the theory of Emotional Intelligence, as it stands today, and also make a significant contribution by showing the path to an effective and time proven approach to developing Emotional Intelligence of individuals. In fact the very essence of Buddhism is a path to developing Emotional Intelligence to its practical extreme, as it will be explained in the next section of this paper.



VIII. Buddhism and Emotional Intelligence

1. Buddhist Definition of Emotions

Modern psychology still seems to be in the early stages in its efforts to accurately define **emotions**. This limitation has seriously affected the development of the theory of EI as well. What modern psychology knows about emotions is that they are an internal guidance system that is meant to be an aid to survival, and that they help us make decisions and to communicate with others, through non verbal means.

The Buddhist definition of emotions is based on the Buddhist definition of "self", the "individual" or "being". Buddha defined the **being** as an aggregate of five factors.

Rupa - **The body**, the tangible part of the being, which physically exists and which includes the sense organs.

Vedana - The **Experiences** gathered through the five sense organs and perhaps through other senses that we have not yet identified (Telepathy ???)

Sanna - **Perceptions**, resulting from experiences, which is the form in which data is stored in the memory.

Sankhara - Complexes of volition, or **Emotions**, which drive the body to react to the experiences that it goes through.

Vinnana - **The Mental State**, which is the combination of emotions and perceptions in an individual or being at any particular time.

In other words, the phenomenon we call being is only a body behaving in a reasonably predictable manner, and the behaviour is its reactions to the experiences that it is going through at that moment (Buddhism rejects the idea of a "Soul" living inside the body, although some Hindu concepts like Rebirth and Transmigration, that have crept into Buddhist literature in later times, have led to such a belief among many Buddhists.)

The phenomenon we call **being** did not suddenly come into existence, at the time of its birth. Its growth into its present form was a gradual process, which has continued for a long period of time, starting at the time when the being was conceived in the womb of its mother. Some of the perceptions stored in his memory were received from his parents, in the form of molecular structural patterns in the DNA (Deoxy Ribonucleic Acid) molecule, in his early cellular state of existence. From that time onwards, he was subjected to scores of experiences every minute, through various senses. All these experiences led to the formation of perceptions, which too got stored in his memory. New experiences created new perceptions and changed or strengthened older ones. Most importantly, older perceptions stored in the memory always affected the formation of new perceptions.

An emotion is an **urge** exerted by the body on itself to act in a certain manner, based on a perception arising from an experience. Emotions are in fact complexes of **volition** (willful thoughts) according to Buddhists doctrine, a remarkable parallel to the modern psychologists' identification of primary and secondary emotions. An analysis of some primary emotions can make things clearer.

Anger - The body has identified (or misidentified) the experience as representing a threat to its survival or its ability to reproduce (ie. the survival of its species), and it is urging itself to act violently in response.

Fear - The body has identified (or misidentified the experience as representing a threat to its survival or its ability to reproduce (ie. the survival of its species), and it is urging itself to run away or avoid the experience.



Sadness - The body has identified (or misidentified) the experience as representing a threat to its survival or its ability to reproduce (ie. the survival of its species), and it is urging itself to “Cry for Help”.

Now consider a relatively more complex emotion like **love**. In essence, love is an urge to protect the object concerned. The object of love is one that is identified by the phenomenon **being**, as something helpful to its survival or to the survival of its form/species (example - one's offspring, or a member of the opposite sex identified as a potential partner for reproduction).

It is interesting to note here that even **physical pain** can be categorised as an emotion. Physical pain is an urge exerted by the body on itself to focus its attention towards an injury or ailment in a certain part of the body (which it has recognised as representing a threat to its survival) and to “do something about it”. If one tries to ignore the pain or concentrate elsewhere, the pain becomes more and more intense, as it has failed to serve its purpose earlier at low intensity. If the person concentrates at the point of origin of the pain, he will actually feel the pain fading away, as it has now served its purpose of directing the attention towards the injury/ ailment.

2. Buddhist Approach to Mastery Over Emotions

The fundamental theories of Buddhism can be summarised into the following three sentences taken from the 277th, 278th and 279th stanzas of the Buddhist classic “Dhammapada”.

Sabbe Sankhara Anichcha – All emotions are impermanent. They arise and when their purpose is served they fade away.

Sabbe Sankhara Dukkha – All emotions, whether positive or negative, disturb the naturally tranquil nature of the mind.

Sabbe Dhamma Anatta – All phenomena, or more specifically **beings**, are devoid of a soul. This represents the understanding of oneself as a phenomenon formed by the aggregate of five factors discussed earlier, and thus the understanding of the purpose and the meaning of emotions.

A Buddhist's mastery over emotions is based on his understanding, of himself as a phenomenon, and of the nature of emotions. When he identifies the arising of an emotion in himself, he understands it as an urge exerted by the body on itself to act. He also realises that the emotion is impermanent and shall fade away. He understands that the emotion is (whether positive or negative), disturbs the tranquil nature of his mind. He does not have to do anything to suppress or control the emotion; the very understanding of its **nature** and **meaning** leads to its fading away. Emotions can pressurise us only as long as we fail to notice them and fail to decode their meaning. The moment they are found and their secret meaning decoded, they lose their purpose of existence and they just fade away.

It is obvious that to achieve mastery over one's emotions, one should maintain a high level of self-awareness, to identify and analyse the emotions as they arise. This is achieved through “Vipassana” style of meditation.

Buddhist meditation falls into two categories, “Samatha” and “Vipassana”. The practitioner is first introduced to Samatha meditation, which is a form of mental exercises, intended to train him to concentrate fully on one objective. Having achieved this he will be guided through Vipassana meditation, to complete awareness of the functioning of his body and mind, which will enable him to identify even the weakest or least significant of his emotions, as they arise. Continuous identification and analysis of these emotions lead to their dissolution, resulting in absolute and permanent peace in mind, that Buddhists call “Nirvana”.



Is it possible for a person to maintain this high level of self awareness while going about the day to day activities in life? With practice, yes. The Buddha himself and thousands of his followers over the last two and a half thousand years, have proven that possibility with their own lives.

The Buddhist who understands himself can easily extend that understanding to others around him. The true Buddhist understands that two different people, who have received two different sets of perceptions from their parents at the time of conception, and who have gone through different experiences in life, will have completely different states of mind. Hence he knows that they are bound to perceive even similar experiences differently. Different perceptions lead to different emotions, which in turn will lead to different behaviours. Good, bad, wise or foolish acts of any person, are in reality the reactions of that phenomenon we call **being**, to different experiences and emotions resulting from them. The formation of these perceptions and emotions was controlled by older perceptions that were stored in his memory. These older perceptions were either inherited by him, or were formed out of his control by the experiences he went through in life. Having understood this, the true Buddhist would not label any act of any being, good, bad, wise or foolish, nor will he hold any being responsible for his actions or behaviour. This is how the true Buddhist can develop empathy to its practical extreme.

The self-awareness and empathy so achieved will be clearly reflected in the way the person handles his interpersonal relations, and how it helps in managing emotions and displaying social skills is too obvious to need further explanation.

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