

The Structures of Suffering

James Low

Published in **The Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, science and our day-to-day lives**, edited by Guy Watson, Stephen Batchelor and Guy Claxton (Rider, 1999) ISBN 0-7126-7043-2

Contents

The Nyingma view	3
The Cognitive-analytic view.....	8
The Cessation of Suffering: the Nyingma View	11
The Cessation of suffering: the CAT view	14
The Role of the teacher / therapist	17
Conclusion	18

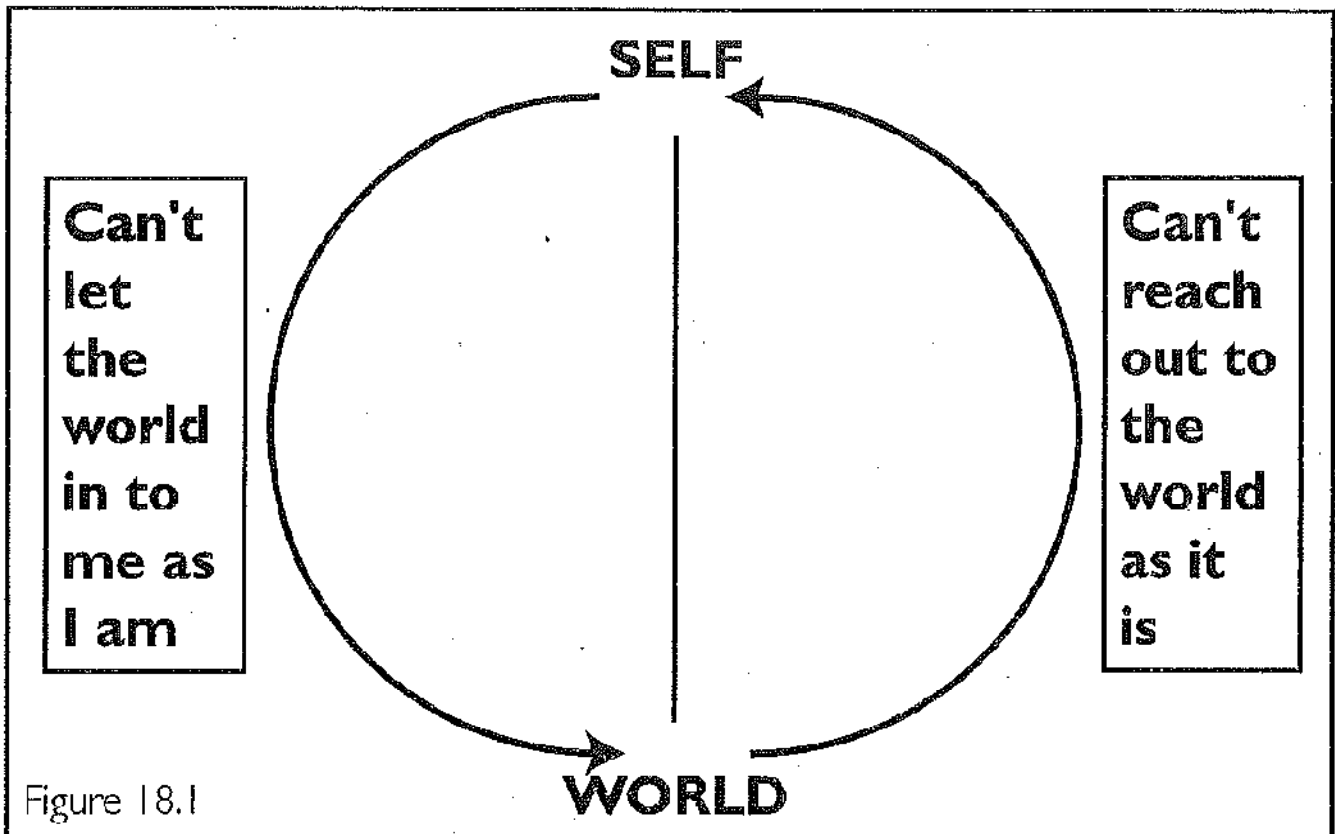
Suffering is something that concerns us all. We are marked by our own past sufferings, and the bruises we carry around in our hearts often keep us wary of what the world might bring. We are also marked by the sufferings of others and may rate our own and others' value as human beings in terms of our sensibility to, and efforts to alleviate, the sufferings of others.

On a more problematic level, psychotherapy has helped to highlight how much we wish to suffer, how deep our self-hatred can be and how committed we often are, both consciously and unconsciously, to maintaining the patterns of belief, cognition, affect and activity which bring us grief.

There are many similarities between Buddhist and psychotherapeutic descriptions of the processes which lead to suffering. The main differences seem to be around the identification of initiatory causes. I am going to set out the basic structures of suffering according to two particular versions of Buddhism and psychotherapy: those of the Khordong lineage of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and the cognitive-analytic (CAT) model of psychotherapy. These structures, though of precise provenance, do, I feel, have general relevance for the ongoing discussion of what Buddhism and psychotherapy might contribute to, and learn from, each other.

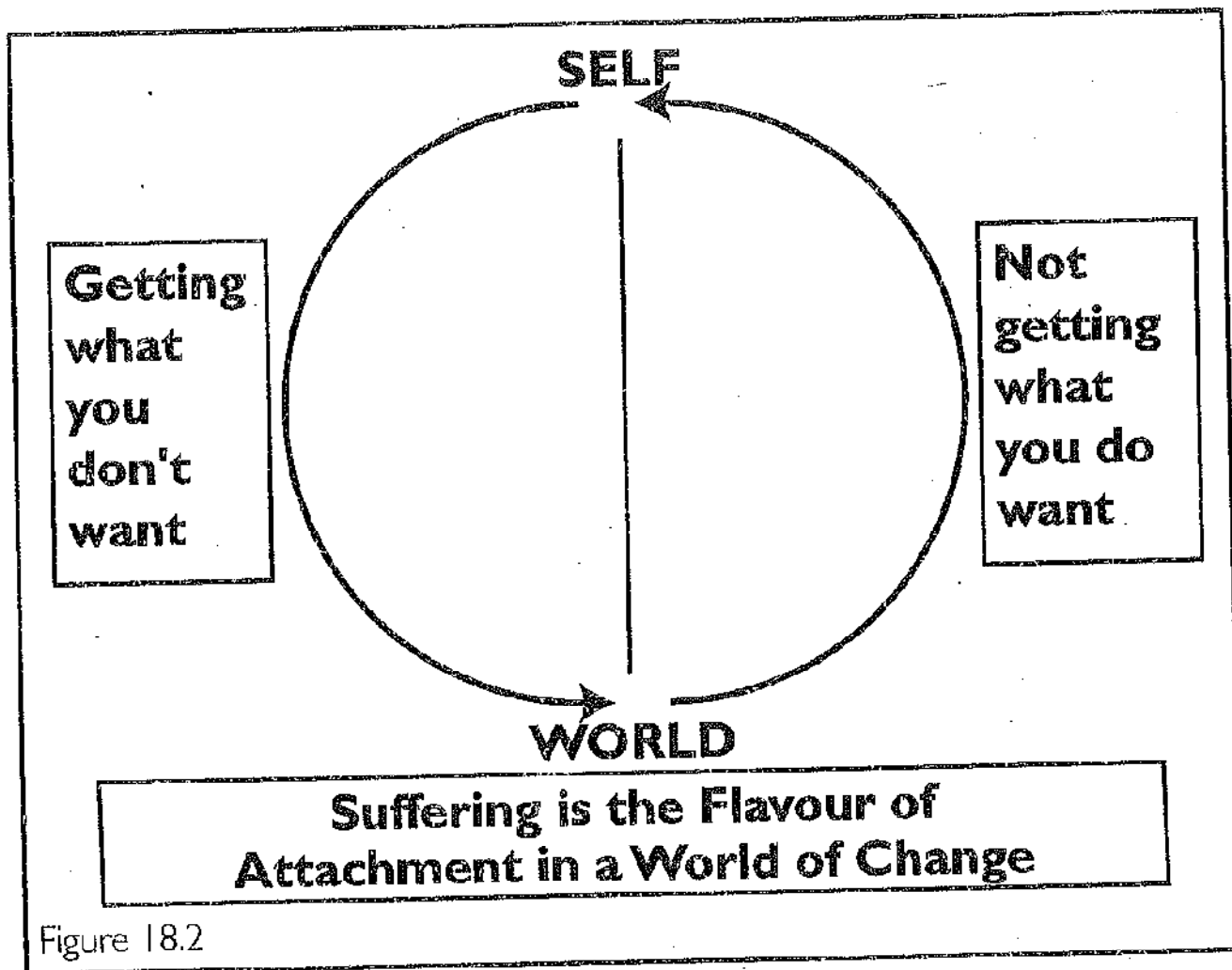
In both Buddhism and psychotherapy great emphasis is put on the process of the individual, the dynamic unfolding of experience - and clearly this is important. However an overview of the structures, particularly those which indicate cause and effect relations, whether linear and definitive, or contextually supportive (as in dependent co-origination), is also very important. When clarity about structure is established it provides a self-supervision support in the midst of process, a space for reflection, a means of reorientation, and particularly in the Buddhist context, an encouragement to enter fully into the disorientation from samsara that leads to awakening.

Although people come to psychotherapy for all sorts of reasons and with many different kinds of stories, problems and concerns, two basic blockages often seem to operate. (Figure 18.1)



The individual, being absorbed in their own view of themselves, finds no gap in the world to enter, no way of speaking and connecting. And the world, other people, seem to present nothing but demands, criticism, shaming perceptions and so forth and so has to be resisted. The Buddha also spoke of how fixed positions and interpretations generate suffering, showing how attachment gives rise to pain because it involves a denial of the changing nature of our experience.

We seek to predict the responses of others and then set about engaging with the environment to bring us what we want. But what we want is rarely enduring and even when our own desire is stable the environment in which we seek its gratification is undoubtedly changing and so frustration is never far away. (Figure 18.2) Prolonged frustration undermines our necessary sense of self-efficacy, and through that our sense of self-esteem



Leading to a to a pervasive low-level depression and self-dislike, for, especially under the legacy of a Protestant work ethic, we feel if only we had worked harder things would be better and we could have got what we wanted.

The Nyingma view

Luckily the Buddha, in his compassion, has pointed out that this view is just another punitive fantasy of ego omnipotence and that the roots of suffering go much deeper than this. The Buddha taught that attachment arises from ignorance, from not seeing things as they really are. In the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism ignorance is described as having three stages. (Figure 18.3)

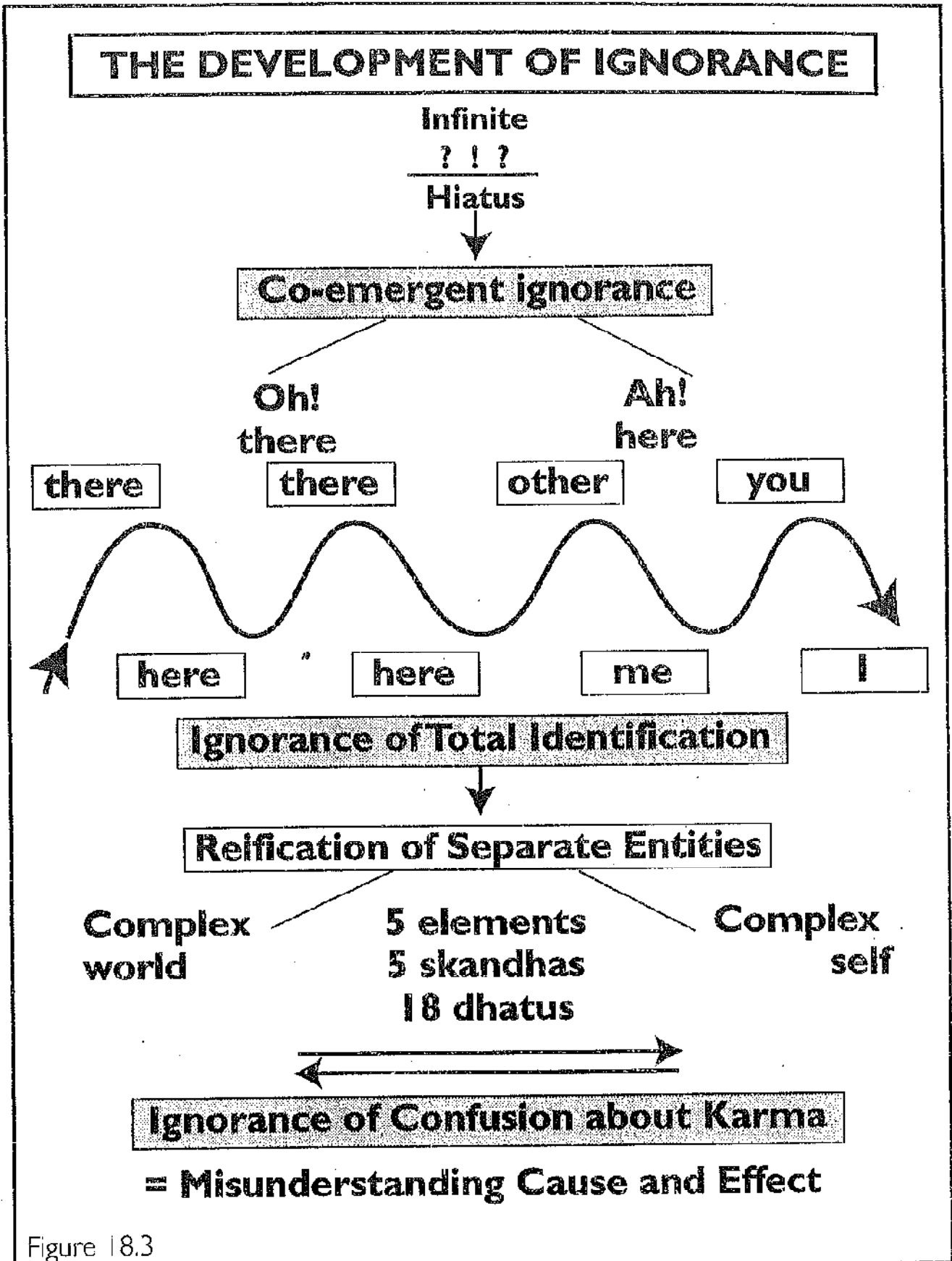


Figure 18.3

Before ignorance there is primordial Buddha nature. Buddha nature continues during ignorance and after enlightenment: it is unassailable. To forget it, to not be aware of it, is ignorance. To remember it, to be aware of it, is enlightenment. It is neither destroyed by ignorance nor created by enlightenment. However an interruption does occur in this open awareness free of the constraints of time and space, which is described as being like a shock, like a drunk man falling down a flight of stairs: *'Oh! Ah! What! That! Me!'* Consciousness seeks to make sense of experience rather than letting it pass as just another moment in the infinity of awareness. Open awareness becomes fixed as a questioning, involved consciousness. This is called *'co-emergent ignorance'* since openness and its closure are arising together.

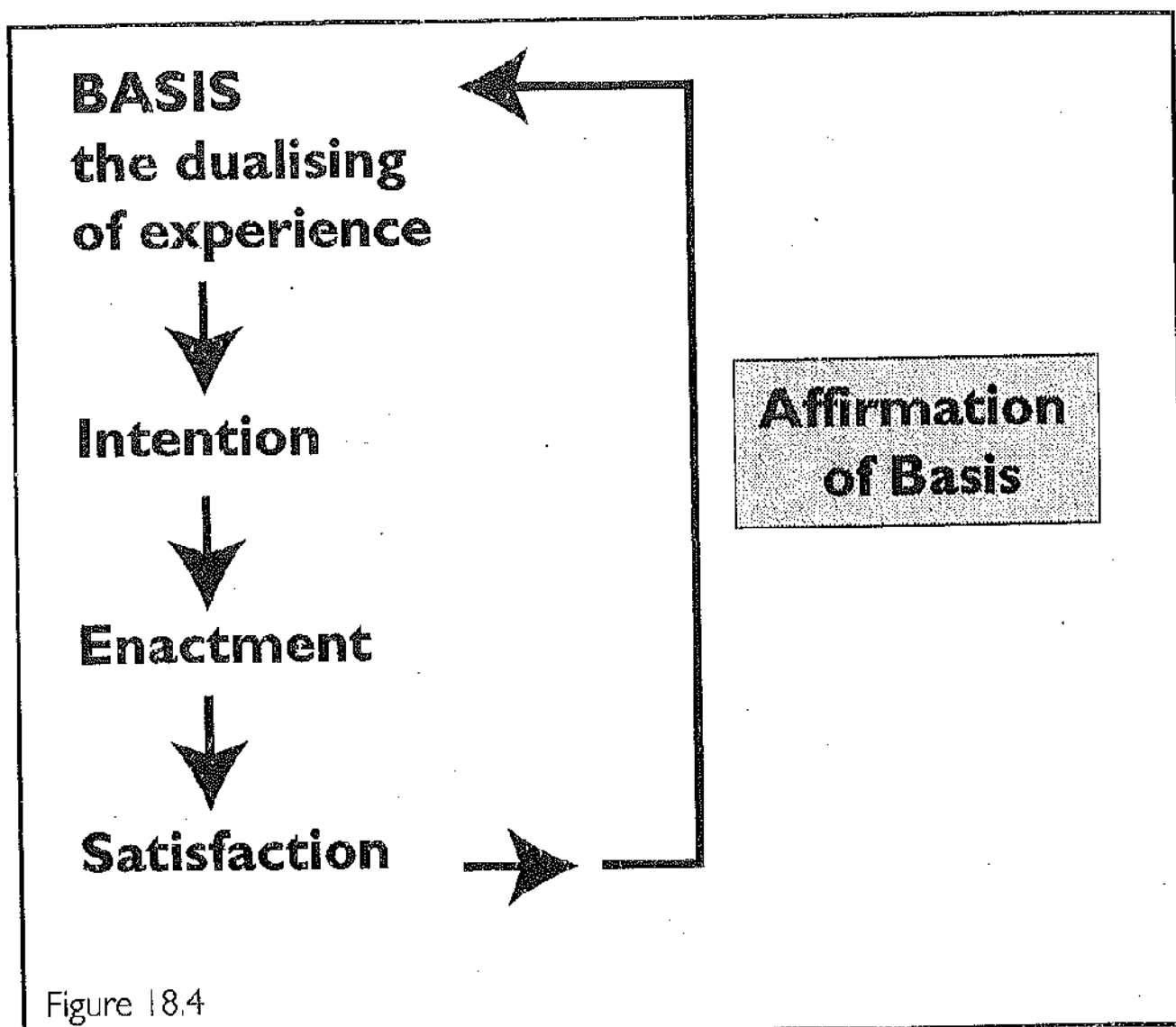
As consciousness tries to strengthen itself by working out what is going on, a process of naming and recognition commences giving rise to a sense of a complete world full of diverse, discrete entities being experienced sensorily by a complex individual. This is the operation of the ignorance of total identification where nothing, including self, escapes definition and the ascription of essential being, true self-existence. This is like a pinball machine, in which the subject shoots about like a ball, setting off lights and bells, ricocheting yet somehow believing it is in control, desperately trying to score lots of points before momentary oblivion and then the start of a new game.

Due to all this busyness we find ourselves born again and again, each time entering a new environment which offers us a new set of values and teleological explanations. A lot is going on and we learn a lot of reasons why it's going on, but these reasons tend to be limited only to the particularities of precise interactions, as for example in the notion currently dominant in Western psychoanalytic psychotherapy that the environment surrounding the infant has a powerful influence on the child's development. That is to say the true existence of the child and its environment is taken for granted. This is a mode of the ignorance of confusion regarding karma and it is this misreading of cause and effect that creates the impulses that bring us into further painful situations in the future.

These three stages of ignorance represent the movement from infinite presence to a sense of particular, finite being operating within the constraints of a linear sequence of past, present and future and the dichotomising of me and not me. Of course they could also be used to reflect on psychological development in one life and have some interesting parallels with the work of Daniel Stern especially in terms of an originatory curiosity or intentionality, an urge to order, leading to the arising of structures of differentiation and the evolution of sustainable patterns of self-affirming activity.

The word *'karma'* is often used in a very general way to mean the impact of past actions on the present and this weak usage gives it the feel of being not much different from luck. But karma also has a technical usage which is more illuminating.

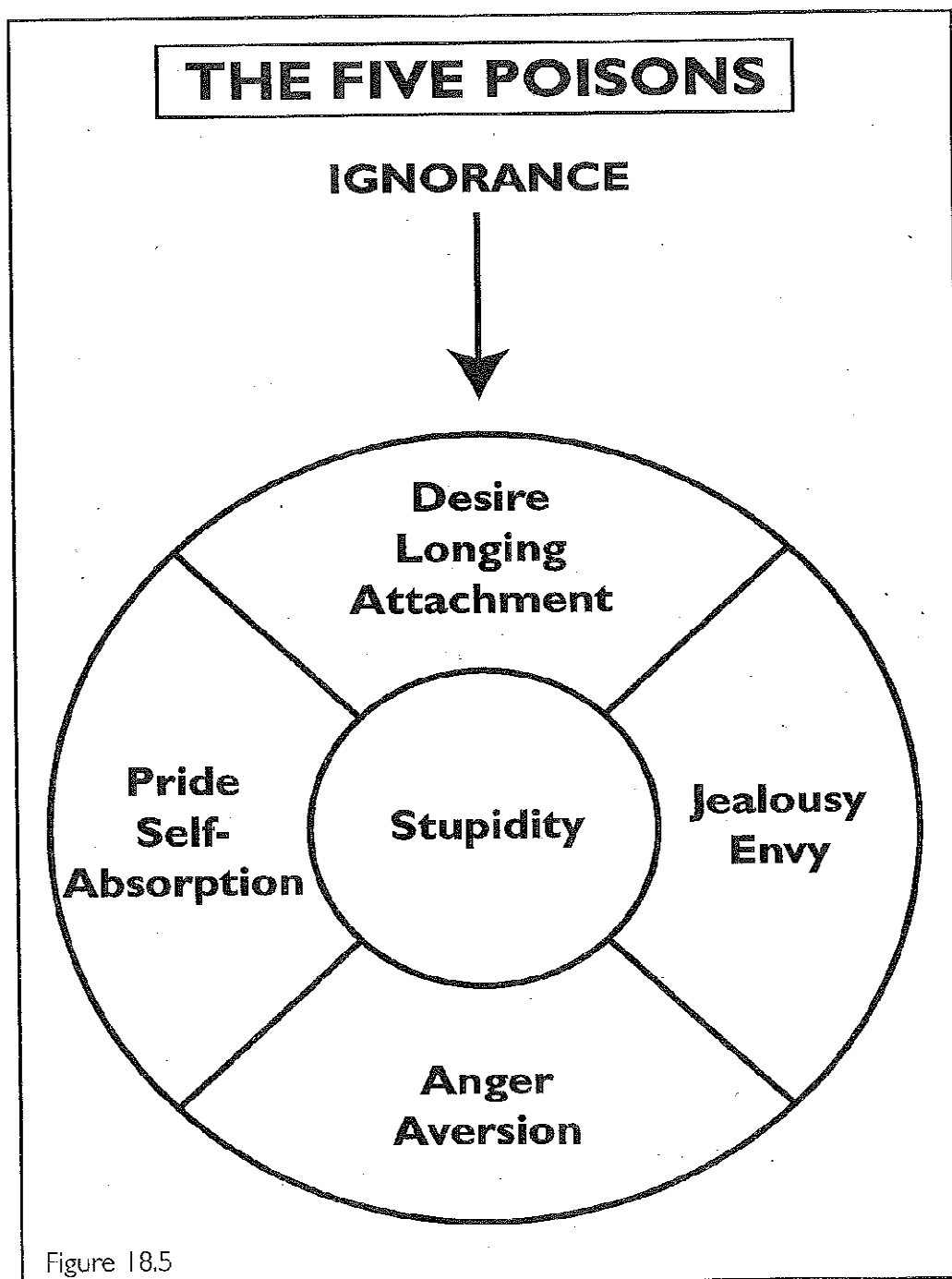
The basis arises from the three stages of ignorance and is the sense of being a subject separate from an environment of objects. (Figure 18.4)



Although I may be aware of others as having a subjectivity similar to my own, the usual impulse is to interact with the environment in terms of the primacy of my own needs, desires, wants. That is, I experience intentions towards another in terms of needs that I have, especially my desire to avoid getting what I don't want and to not get what I do want. This leads to an enactment in which subject comes more fully into contact with object, as their connection is manifest in the world. Then follows satisfaction or finalisation in which the subject reviews what has happened with/to the object, and is pleased or displeased. This leads to an affirmation of the basis, the view of subject and object as inherently real and separate. When all four steps are unimpeded in intensity this creates a powerful *'charge'*, an impulse to affirm and act on that concretised view of experience. This then leaves the subject open to great distress when things change and the world acts on the subject as if it were an object. As a brief example, I see you put your purse in your bag (basis). I think it would be easy to steal it and I indulge that thought until it becomes an intention. I then wait for the opportunity and then act. Later I open your purse and am pleasantly surprised at how wealthy I now am. Having felt no qualms during or remorse after the incident, I become even more fully committed to exploiting you and getting away with it.

This sequence of cognition, perception, intention, action, review, and affirmation of cognitive structure is self-perpetuating and tends to be so until interrupted by the pain of latterly manifesting consequences. The affective force that powerfully drives these sequences is conceptualised as the five poisons. (See Figure 18.5 below)

In giving rise to the sense of a separate self, ignorance establishes a *'self-referencing function'* to use Maturana's term, a function which can ascribe any content to itself as it moves like a demented cuckoo from nest to evanescent nest with a sense of full proprietorial rights in each and every one. This activity of protecting a territory which is always changing causes a diminution of phenomenological attention since so much has to be ignored in order to maintain the continuity and centrality of self. This is known as stupidity and a great deal of intelligence can be utilised in its continuity, for what stupidity is dull or stupid about is precisely the mind's own structurally embedded limitation on awareness. Within that attitude, great intelligence can be displayed in expansion or empowerment, but it does not transcend the *'basic fault'*, to use Balint's helpful term.



The fragile security of this *'self-existing'* self engenders all kinds of boundary issues which are grouped in four segments. (Figure 18.5) Desire wants more, reaching out to heal the rupture installed by ignorance. But because it starts from a reified self position to appropriate the other, its satisfaction is grounded in the other's loss of freedom.

Any pleasure thus derived is therefore short-lived and perilous and likely to lead to fear and frustration. Anger seeks to drive away, crush and punish any threats to the autonomy of this contingent illusory self. However the self is arising in dependent origination with the other and so to drive the other away is to deplete and threaten the self. This in turn promotes a shift to desire in order to bring about replenishment. Pride brings both a sense of entitlement over others and a feeling of isolation from their needs. But it also needs a mirror and so is dependent on the other who has to be seduced or bullied into aiding the inflationary task. Jealousy and envy are similar in their core fear that what one has is not adequate and is vulnerable. The *'secure base'* of self, the self referencing that adds itself to the apparitional forms as if they were reliable; is revealed as a conceit as a deceit.

In these ways wave after wave of energetic involvement in the environment is unleashed evoking wave after wave of response from equally reified positions. Like the surface of a pond on the first impact of rain, each individual arises to rock and be rocked by the arising of the others. Within this complex interaction the struggle to remain in control is the prime cause of suffering.

The Cognitive-analytic view

Many of the elements of this Buddhist model are to be found in modern psychotherapy, particularly in some of the more recent models which seek to integrate historically developed pathological templates from psychoanalysis with the sequential procedural descriptions of the activation and impact of cognitive, and more recently affective, schemas conceptualised in cognitive behavioural psychotherapy. Aaron Beck's model of depression, though problematic for several reasons, is an interesting early example of cognitive modelling. According to this view, early experience of the environment leads to the development of dysfunctional attitudes, assumptions, or *'schemata'* in vulnerable individuals. These remain hidden until activated by resonant environment events. This activation leads to the locking on of negative cognitions which cut the individual off from effective interaction with the environment, resulting in depression. Thus a child whose parents have little time for it may develop the schema *'I am unlovable; the world does not want me.'* However through going to school there is enough interaction to keep the child feeling okay. But then later in life a series of abandonments occurs, through redundancy, marital breakdown and so forth, and the underlying schema is powerfully activated in a way that discounts the potentially ameliorating effect of all other life events. This constellates the negative triad shown in Figure 18.6, and so the individual sinks into depression.

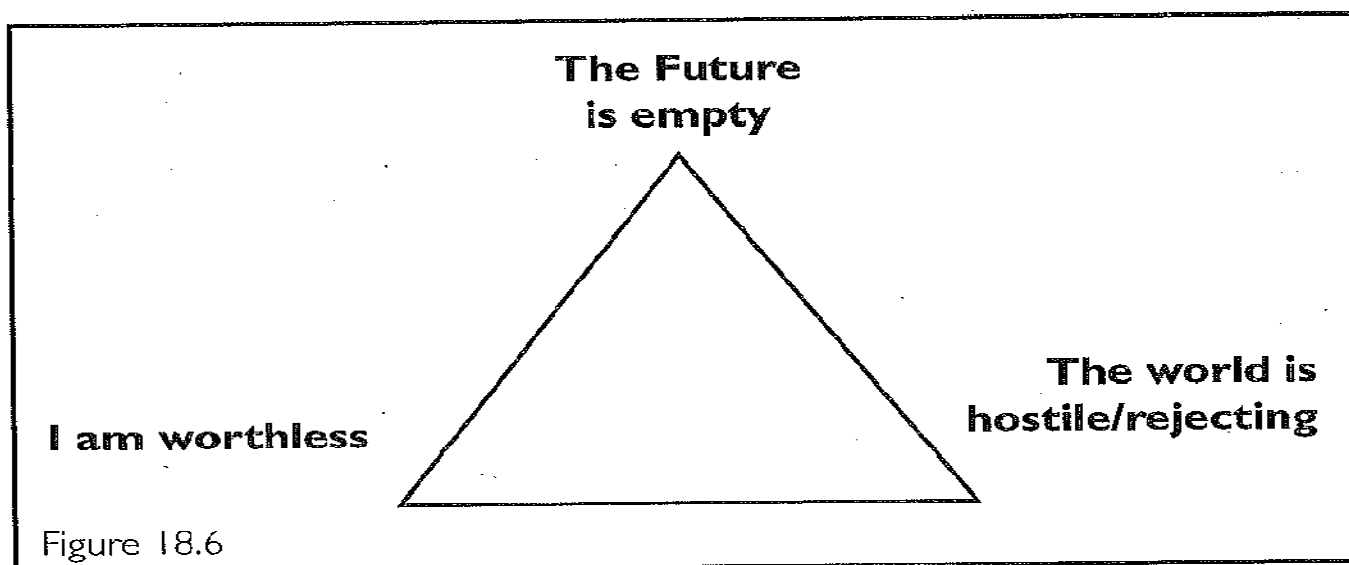
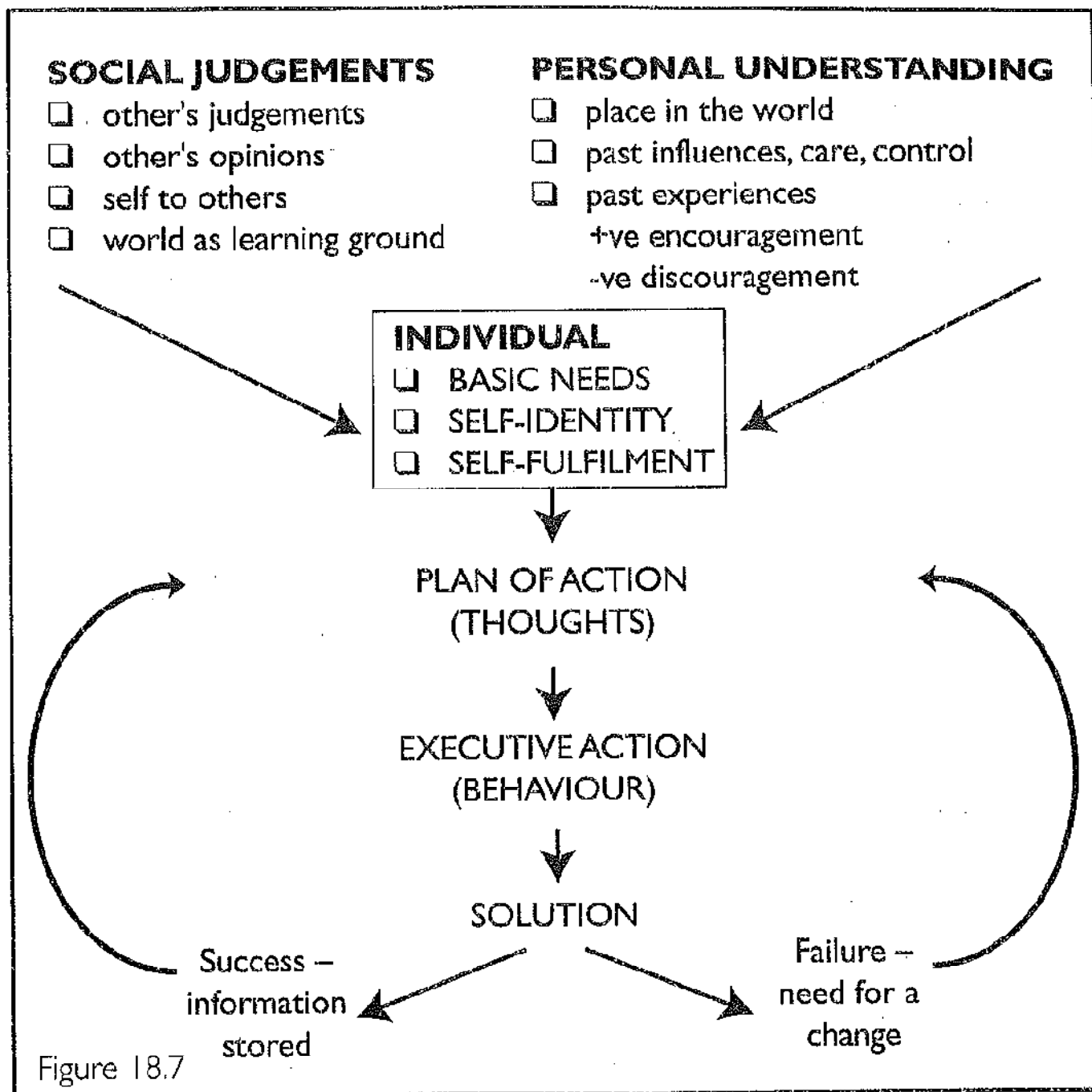


Figure 18.6

The schema is thus in some ways analogous to a karmic potential, for both are activated by precise circumstances. However in Western psychotherapy the originatory cause is generally attributed to the environment rather than to the individual's own attentional, and then latterly ethical, failure, as it is in the Buddhist system.

CAT develops a view of individual identity as arising as the interface between the environment's demands for adaptation and the individual's desire for belonging and meaning. (Figure 18.7)



In this framework, the individual is seen as an interactive sequence, a process of ongoing engagement with the environment, acting and reacting via a ceaseless processing of experience. The great complexity of the multi-dimensional interactive nature of this process is simplified into a **Procedural sequence Model** (Figure 18.8): a reaffirming cycle which can operate with greater or lesser degrees of conscious intentionality.

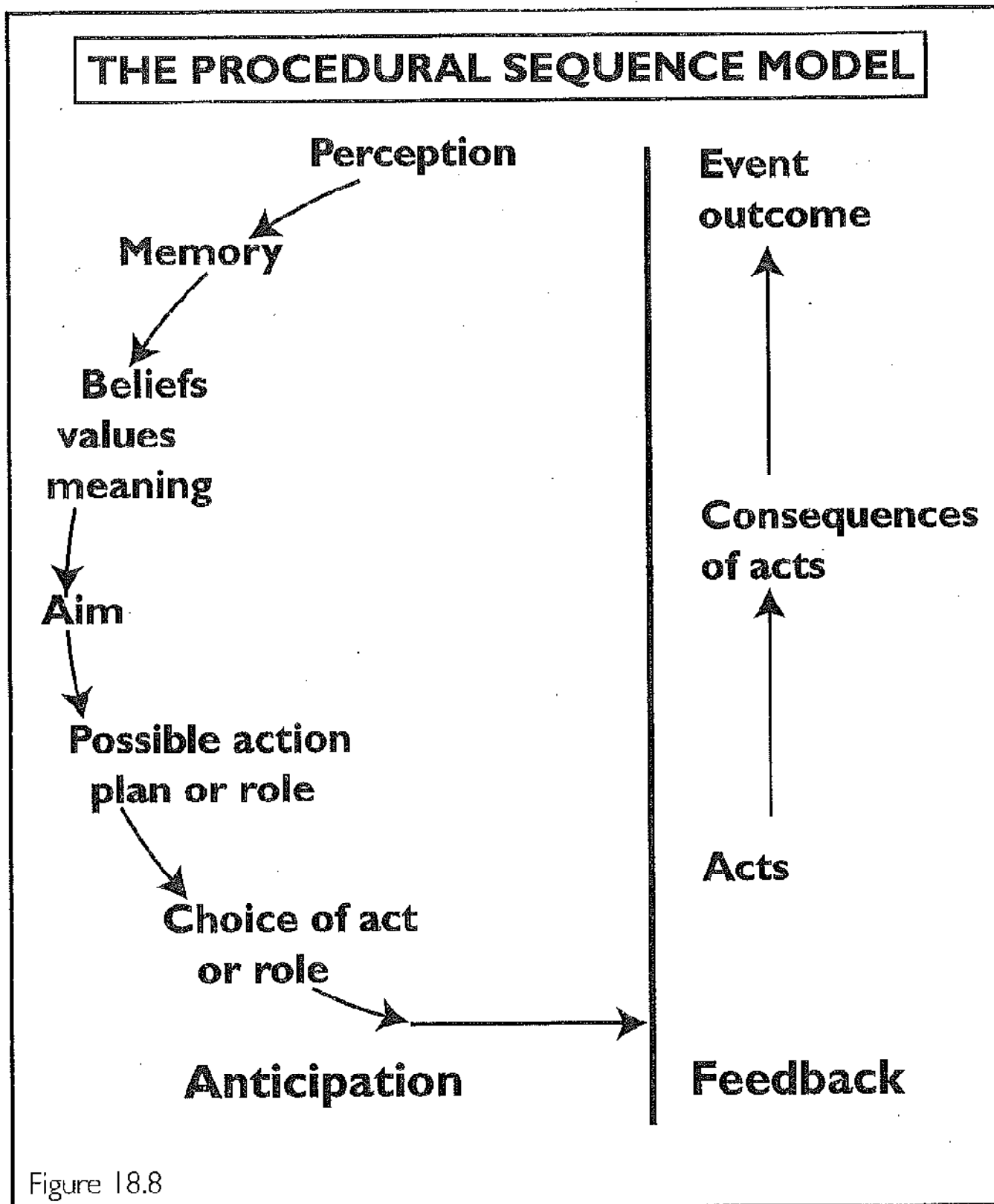


Figure 18.8

This dynamic sequencing generates its own energy and seems to operate like a perpetual motion machine maintaining the psychosocial life of the individual. There is clearly scope here for drawing analogies with the twelve links of dependent co-origination, especially in the circular representation familiar from the Wheel of Existence.

Each new infant is born ready and willing to engage with the interactive field it encounters. Key figures in the environment establish the patterns of response, which have a binary, complementary structure such as criticising / criticised; abandoning / abandoned; abusing / abused. The more extreme the quality of the environment, the more intense, narrow and fixed the quality of these '*reciprocal roles*' becomes, leading to the formation of self states which may have little direct contact with each other. The infant introjects the pole held originally by a person in the environment so that these reciprocal roles become basic organising sites for both self-to-self and self-to-environment experience. Thus self is constructed dialogically as a stream of gestures, a flow of conversation in which self and other cannot be separated as independent monads. Self is a pole of dualistic movement, a pole which is created by that movement and which reveals itself in the interactional responsiveness depicted in the **Procedural Sequence Model**.

This view would have to regard the autonomous self as a chimera and thus has deep similarities with the Buddhist view described above. Moreover neurotic suffering is generated when the reciprocal role positions resist adaption to the inevitable environmental changes. Thus having grown up in a family where criticising was a primary mode of communication, the adult maintains a criticising-criticised dialogic intention in environments which may be rather more tolerant. This leads to inevitable conflicts which are then processed in terms of criticising-criticised and so the rejected adult can retreat in to an angry self-despair by focusing the criticizing pole on either others or self. Suffering for self and other is generated out of entrapment in the rhythm of historical interactive situations which have become condensed as fixed dialogic positions seeking to seduce or coerce the environment into compliance. Thus the open freshness of the potential of the here and now moment is obscured by the imposition of the legacy of past experience.

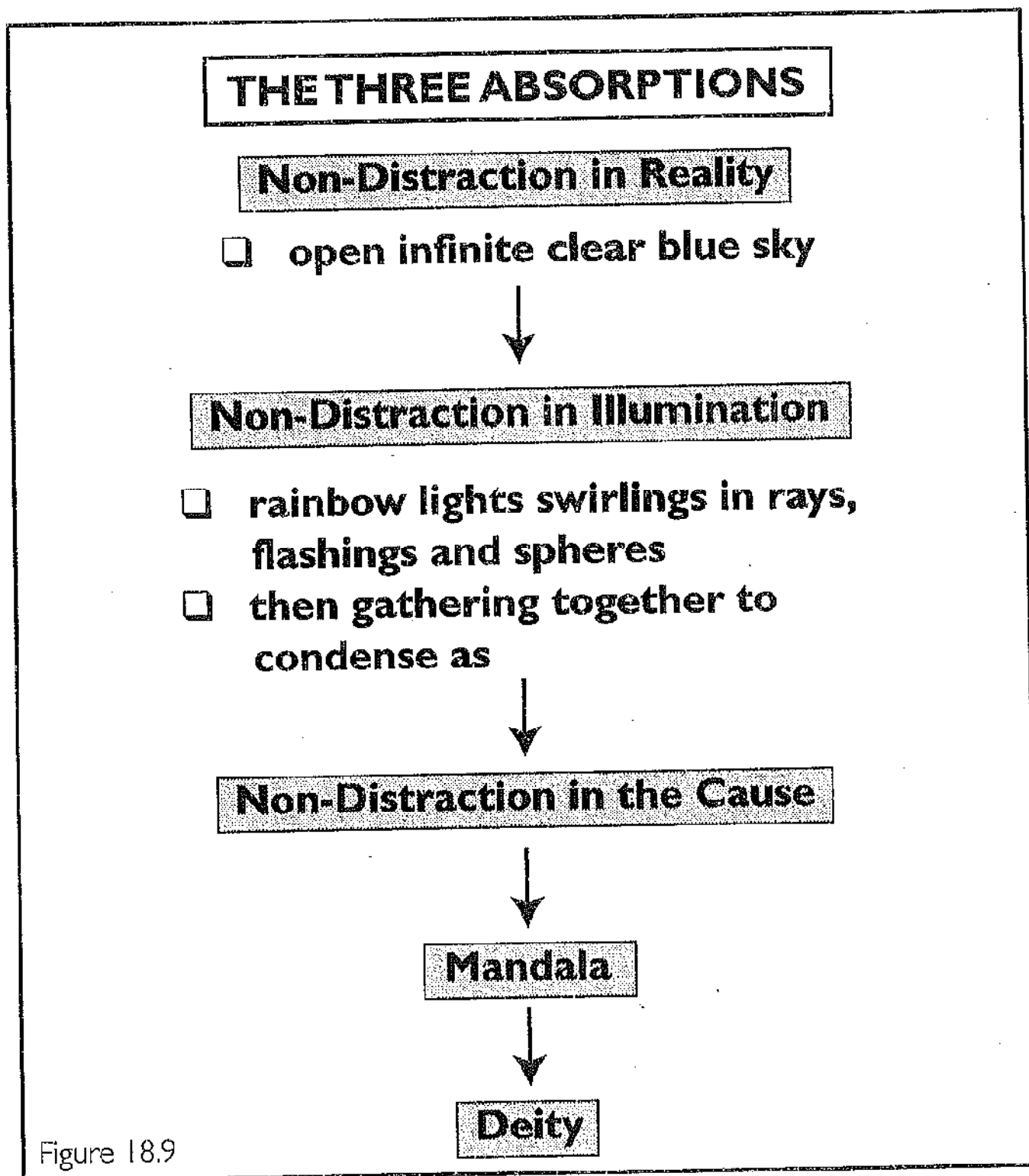
Clearly in both views reification, fixation, the desire to control other and defend what has been gained become instrumental in the generation of suffering. As the Buddha explained, all sentient beings seek happiness, yet they act continuously in ways which bring about its opposite.

The Cessation of Suffering: the Nyingma View

Our focus now shifts on to exits, the methods that have been developed to help us extricate ourselves from these pervasive structures of pain. The Buddha Shakyamuni is said to have taught 84,000 dharmas, both explanations and methods, because sentient beings vary so much. This is an excellent example of the principle that the treatment should be adapted to fit the patient rather than the reverse (though sadly the Procrustean bed of ideological foreclosure finds its way into most dharma centres and psychotherapy institutes.)

In the space available we can only touch on some of the Buddhist principles guiding the removal of the causes of suffering. Perhaps three key approaches can be identified: avoidance, regeneration, and disruption. The approach of avoidance seeks to calm the mind by focusing attention on a neutral and reassuring object so that the flow of experience can be experienced as distracting rather than as fascinating. If the object chosen for this focusing is the unborn nature of the mind itself, then by recognising it and abiding within it, the very root of samsara and all suffering is cut so that all that arises is the ceaseless display of the mind in a state free of reification.

Regeneration occurs when, through meditation one goes back to the ground of all, visualised as a clear blue sky, and with one-pointed attention moves through the three modes of absorption which parallel and deconstruct the three modes of ignorance described above. (Figure 18.9)



Through this process one generates the aesthetically vibrant experience of oneself as a deity in a mandala and the intensity and richness of this experience is used to transform one's daily world at the end of the meditation by enjoying the flavour of the open empty clarity of the mandala in and as all the moments of one's ordinary interactive experience.

This experience of being a deity at the centre of a mandala is the purification and transformation of the five poisons (see Figure 18.5) into the five wisdoms, with the deity manifesting as the integration of the five principles of enlightened and enlightening being-in-the-world. With the awareness of the inalienable openness of being—not being something-as-such, but simply being—the presence of this unborn awareness has no limits and so this infinity is unimpeded no matter what is going on. This is the purification of stupidity, for, rather than experiencing oneself as a self set against the world, self and world arise together as the manifestation of the energy of openness. With this awareness the facticity of impermanence is no longer a threat to identity, an acid inexorably eating away all that we might cling to. Impermanence is the fresh crest of the wave of becoming, on which awareness surfs without ever toppling into the turbulence of the reified splitting of self and other. This is known as the *'wisdom of infinite spaciousness'* and it is rich in the confidence of ceaseless generosity, for nothing has been appropriated.

With this at the centre desire and attachment arise as fascination with everything; when nothing is special everything is wonderful, full of the wonder of freshness. As awareness opens to the ceaseless display of becoming, the radiant present frees attention from the determination of linear past-present-future so that surprise is present in each moment. This protects awareness from being shocked out of itself and so ignorance slips by as an unsprung trap. This is called the *'wisdom which is open to everything'*, an experience rich in discrimination yet free of prejudice and judgement.

Anger and aversion arise only as heightened illumination of the moment, since now the separation from (and retaliation towards) the environment is dissolved in the dislocation of identity. Not being fixed to this body as one's only refuge, awareness becomes a mirror in which self and other carry on their unborn dance of inter-being. With nothing to protect, there is nothing to reject, and so the brilliance of the moment can be enjoyed without threat, even when self is threatened with extinction. This is called the *'mirror-like wisdom'*, for it reveals appearances to be illusory, essence-less manifestation of nothing at all.

Pride arises only as pride in the infinity of becoming, pride in everything, a pride that deconstructs the isolation of narcissism and self-absorption. *'Where does the world come from? What is the root of me? Of you? Of everything? Why, it is my mind! How wonderful! What is my mind? Where is my mind? Nothing and nowhere - amazing!'* The observer self can never observe itself and find something. The motherless mother of all takes pride in all her unborn babies. This is called the *'wisdom of equality'*, the enjoyment of everything which transcends the petty pleasures of superiority.

Jealousy arises only as a powerful mobilisation free of the paralysis and rage of wondering what others are up to. As awareness welcomes all, nothing can be given or taken away and yet all is connected and so, without shame or anxious excitement, activity moves freely to accomplish whatever is necessary for the benefit of self and others. This is the *'wisdom of accomplishment'*, of ceaseless unimpeded activity free of the reification of actor, object and connecting activity.

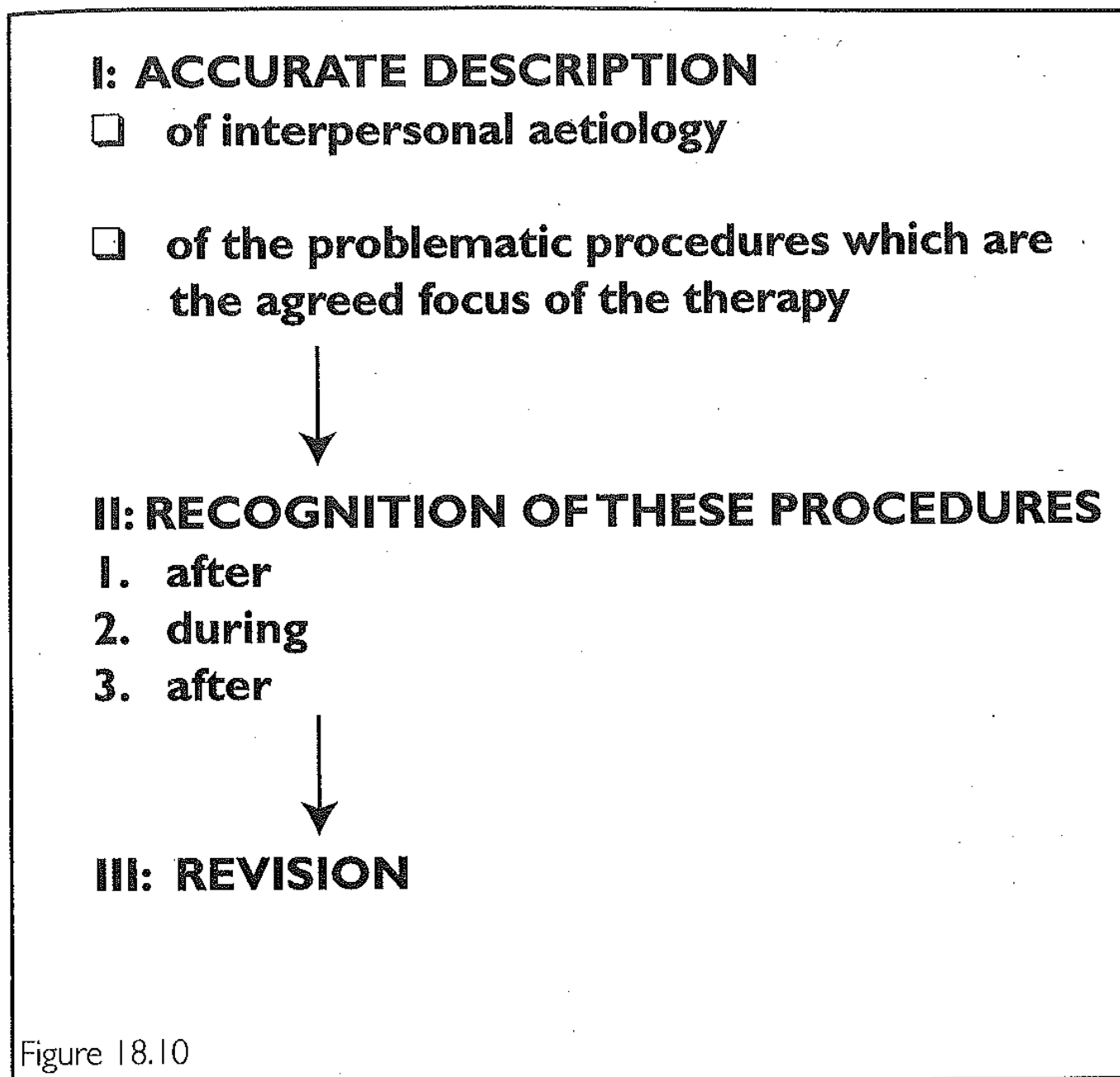
This description of the five wisdoms is necessarily allusive, symbolic and metaphysical since it gestures towards experience on the cusp of language, to a mode of being which cannot be trapped within definitions of this or that. Thus the description invites us into the aesthetic moment of becoming, a moment imbuing language with vibrancy, and yet forever beyond its encapsulation. In this way language itself becomes a means to freedom. This way finds its purest expression in the use of mantra, of *'pure'* sound, of sound freshly formed in open awareness, the sound which evokes and sustains the deity and the world of universal liberation through the flow of light, sound and movement.

The third method of liberation, disruption, occurs when one acts on the first level of ignorance by shocking oneself through the use of various techniques, especially the sudden sounding of the syllable Phat! One attempts to disrupt the flow of one's thoughts in order to gain a moment's experience of the open state before confusion; and then through that window of opportunity to see the arising of thoughts in quite a different light.

In these various methods the richness of embodied experience, our capacity for thought, feeling, sound, movement, is mobilised in the service of subverting the structure of suffering by settling the dichotomising urge within the simplicity of one-pointed attention.

The Cessation of suffering: the CAT view

The task of alleviating suffering is construed rather differently in CAT where a three-stage approach is employed. (Figure 18.10)



The 'accurate description' is distilled by the therapist from the first three sessions. Then, in the fourth session of the therapy, the therapist reads out a letter to the patient in which the patient's presenting problem is refined into a

target problem and a historical account is given of the evolution of this target problem via a description of the reciprocal roles and procedures which sustain it. These are then discussed and agreed and become the focus for the therapy i.e. a specific, defined procedural sequence is established as the object of change.

Working with the patient in a collaborative manner the therapist structures the key elements of the description into a diagram, a sequential diagrammatic reformulation. Figure 18.11 illustrates how a reciprocal role structure initiates and is sustained by an interpersonal procedure.

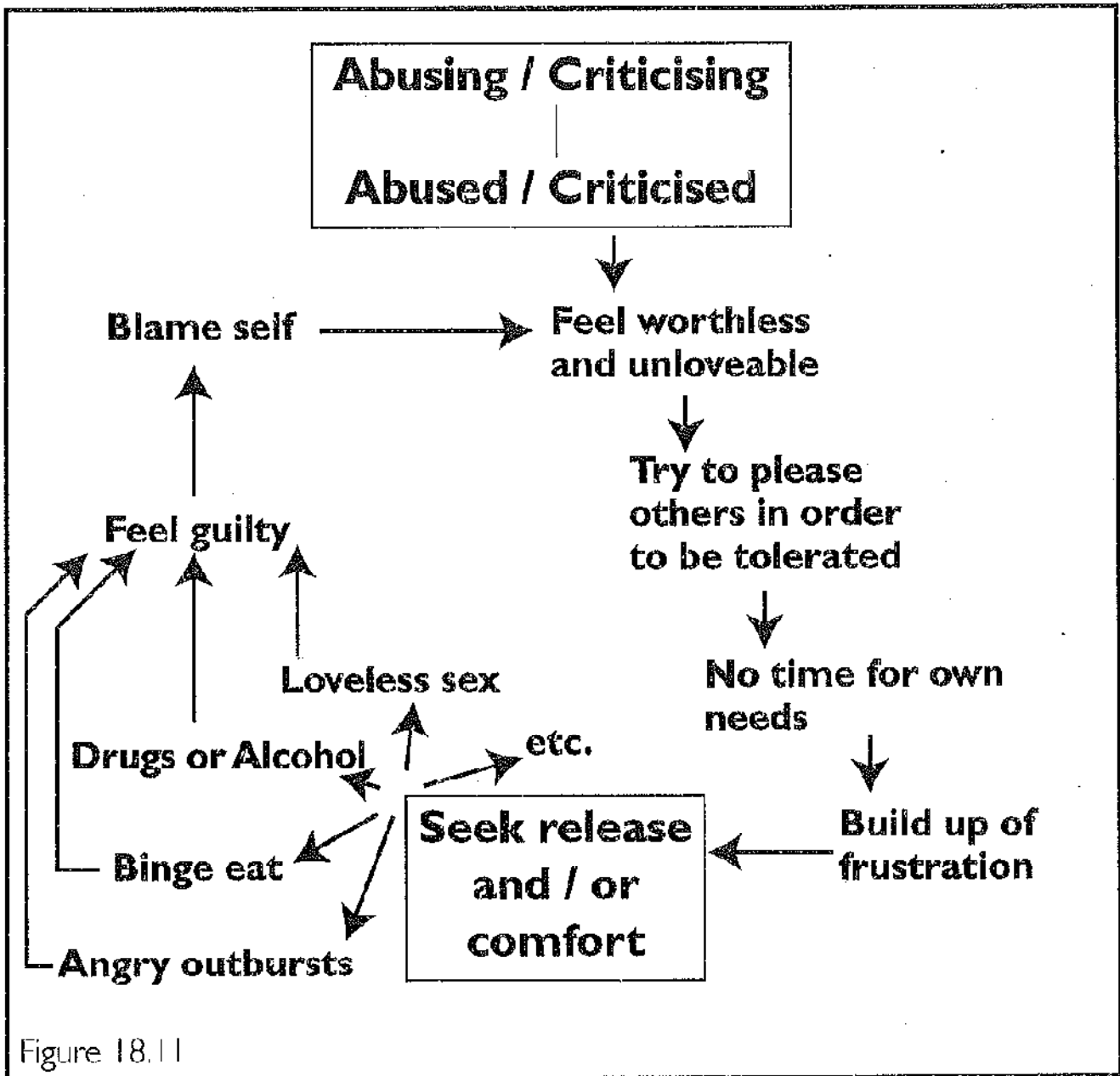


Figure 18.11

The second stage involves the recognition of these procedures as they operate inside and outside the consulting room. At first they are often only recognised after they have occurred, then one learns to be aware of them as they are going on, and finally one begins to see the conditions in oneself and in the environment which activate the procedures. This of course is very similar to the development of mindfulness in the first style of meditation mentioned above. Once the process of entrapment in the sequence of habitual limiting responses is clearly established in consciousness, the third stage, revision, can occur. There are many ways to do this but a central focus

is always the strengthening of the observing self, especially where the patient's experience of self and other is fragmented.

The **Procedural Sequence Model** can be used as a basis for discussing specific items of revision. (Figure 18.12)

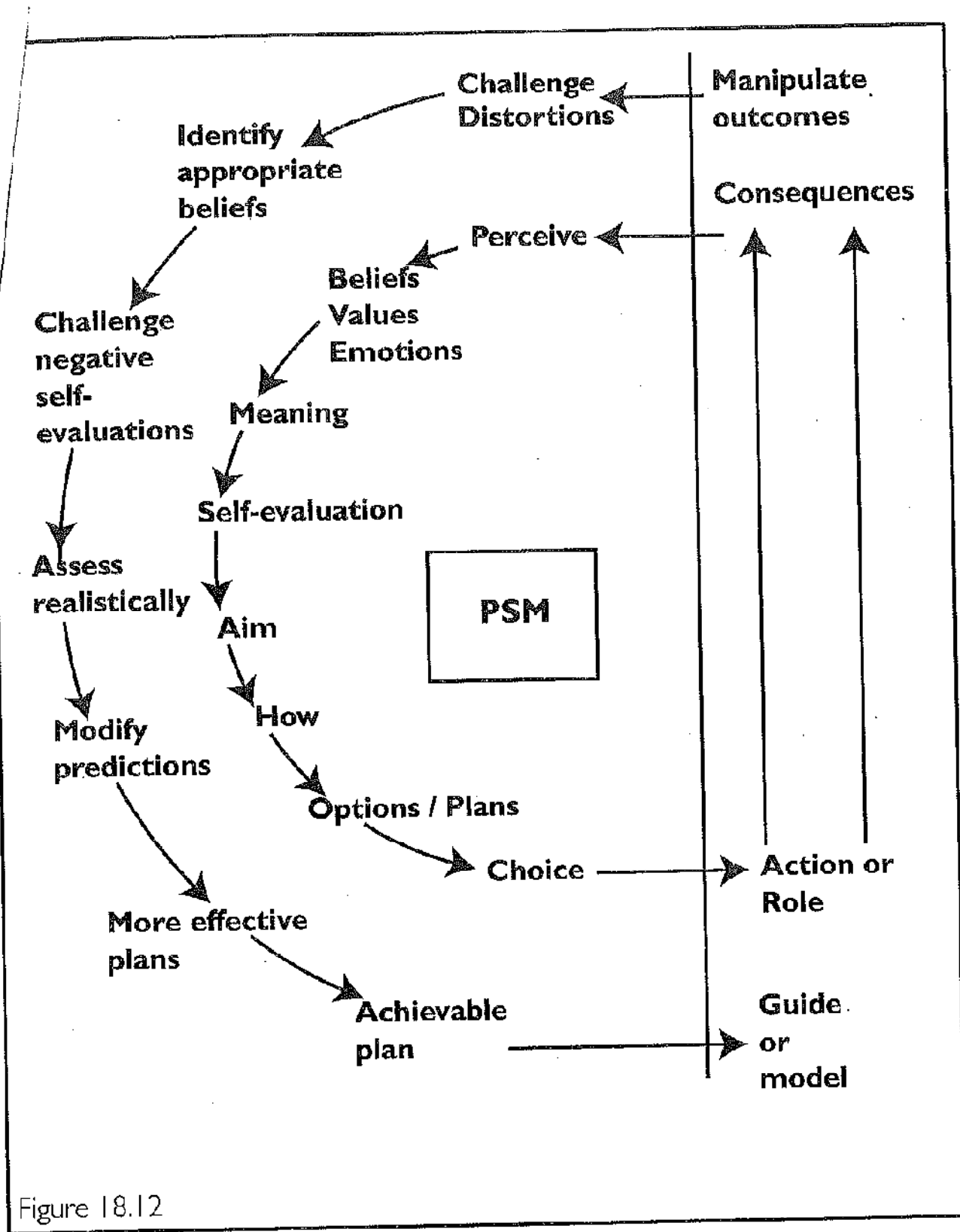


Figure 18.12

Clarity and specificity are vital for increasing a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy and there is an emphasis on

homework tasks and evaluation of progress through rating sheets. This again is similar to the Buddhist focus on stages of development and signs of achievement. Precision of evaluation through rating sheets, etc. strengthens the observing self, increasing the space for reflection while also turning the patient's attention away from absorption in habitual thoughts and feelings and towards a more fresh and realistic phenomenological experience.

One question which is very alive in CAT is whether the core reciprocal role positions are an inherent mode of psychological functioning, or whether they can be relaxed until they become *'flavours'* or *'moods'* of interaction rather than determinants of it. Clinically the description of fixed positions in family structure is very helpful in providing a focus for recognition. However the tendency to reify descriptions and to hypothesise the existence of entities is difficult to resist. From the Buddhist viewpoint outlined above, the danger would be that the revision could promote a further concretisation of self and other. In freeing oneself from the encapsulation of a specific reciprocal role determinism, self is established as having a quasi autonomy. This then has to be maintained by attempting to influence the patterns of dualistic interaction through making the best possible choices to achieve the self's goals.

A recent development in CAT has been the use of [Bakhtin's](#) notion of the dialogic structure underpinning all human communication. All speech acts and bodily gestures are taken to be expressions of an intention towards another, a specific other who is the necessary addressee, necessary because without them speech would be a schizoid scream.

Work by Mikael Leiman from Finland, has focused on seeing reciprocal roles as dialogic positions with the suggestion that we develop a necessary core repertoire which then becomes influential if not determinant in our interaction with the environment. In this formulation we again see the reductive move to prediction and stabilisation which, while offering clarification, moves inexorably towards foreclosure. However we can also highlight the potential openness of the field of the dialogic where each position reflects and connects, driving and distorting the energy of interpersonal being. Intentionality is then but a flicker in a hall of mirrors. This is to see the total dialogic field as being like [Indra's net](#), an infinite web of mirror-like crystals which dazzlingly display each other in themselves, until self and other are impossible to separate. This motif has of course already been made use of by R.D. Laing in a similar critique of fixed positions in family structures.

The dialogic view allows us to describe dualistic experience in a much more dynamic interactive way, revealing the living inseparability of subject and object, of self and other. This Western view decentres the subject from the splendid isolation of pseudo autonomy and invites the emergence of a responsive awareness moving like a shuttle through the warp and woof of subject-object inter-being. In this way the relative truth experience of entities is reconceptualised allowing a flexibility which gestures towards the openness of absolute truth. Extending the terms of the *Heart Sutra* we can say that the dialogic is emptiness, emptiness is the dialogic.

The Role of the teacher / therapist

So far we have looked at a range of methods for influencing or even uprooting these structures of suffering without considering how they are imparted. In the Nyingma tradition the teacher or guru is very important for the authenticity of the transmission comes through him—the guru is usually male. The teacher gives instructions on different kinds of meditation, how to do them and how to deal with any difficulties that arise. But he also directly transmits through the quality of his being an experience which gives a living bond with the authenticity of the practice and of oneself. That is to say that the teacher is the gateway to oneself, acting to disrupt the patterns of karma, and their object relations concomitants, which support the false notion of self that then mediates experience. The path to enlightenment is not the journey of a lonely hero or heroine but is a movement between the wisdom that is revealed to us by another and the compassion that we develop in turn for others. The task of meditation cannot be separated from relationship. (Figure 18.13)

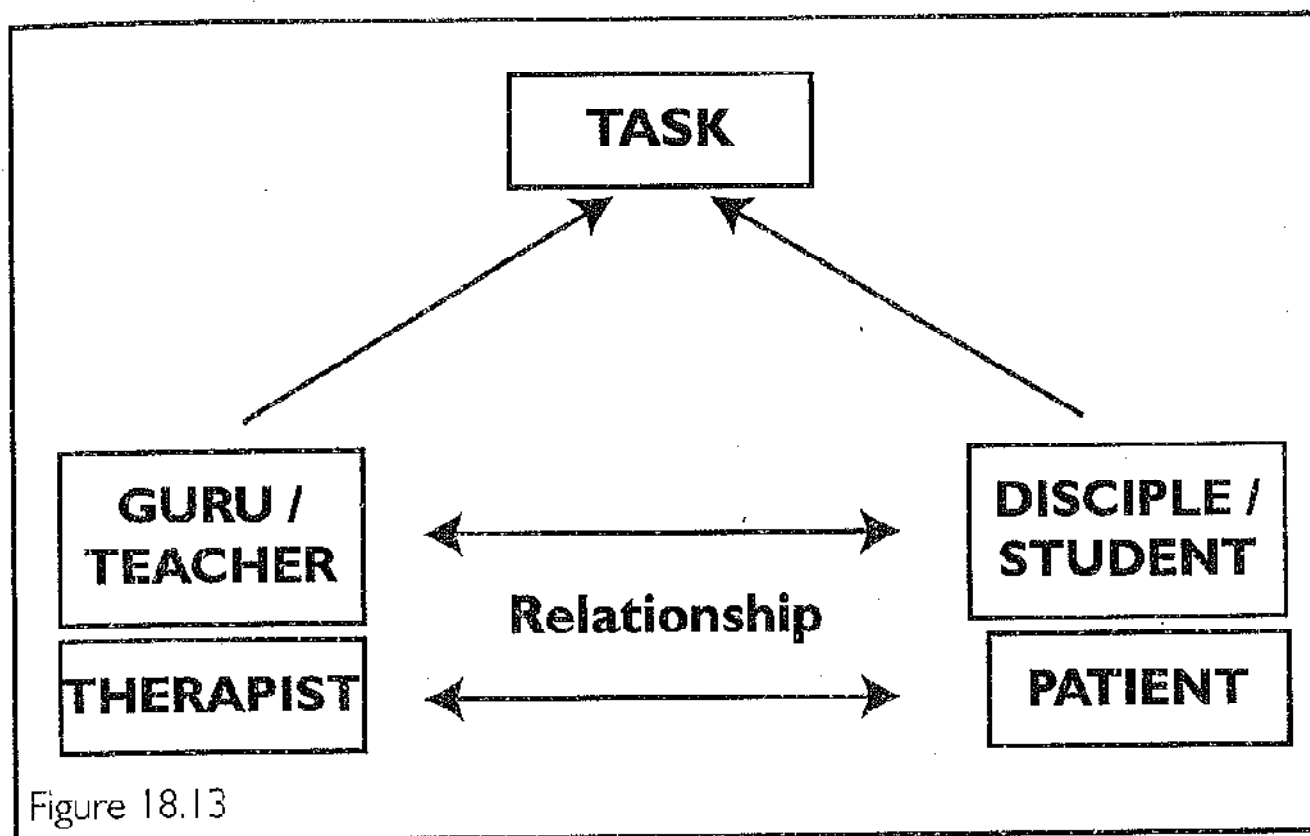


Figure 18.13

In CAT the therapist is both an educator, showing the patient how to attend to the process of her life, and also a potential point of awakening, through non-compliance with the habitual positions that the patient tries to install in the therapeutic relationship. Too much 'task' and the work can be rather cold and formal, lacking the warmth of welcome and conviviality. Too much focus on relationship and the pull of complex connections can ensnare both parties so that the space to think is usurped by a melange of feelings both intoxicating and deadening. If both parties can keep the task in mind, then when the force of the reciprocal roles arises powerfully, causing a rupture in the therapeutic alliance, the experience can be considered via the distilled shared analysis represented in Figures 18.10 and 18.11.

Conclusion

Psychotherapy does not seek to facilitate enlightenment in the Buddhist sense and there have been frequent debates about its goals: for example whether social adaptation is a necessary aim of *'treatment'*, or whether *'seeking oneself'* is often an other-attacking self-indulgence. The Western approaches neither identify nor seek to extirpate the root of suffering as it is set out in the Nyingma view. But perhaps an awareness of the Buddhist vision of infinite freedom of being, and in particular of its commitment to openness and compassion, has a lot to offer psychotherapy. Therapists need an *'inner space'* in which to reflect on the process they are involved in, and mindfulness of the open nature of being may be the best inner supervisor for clinical practice. The Buddha suggested that just as a boat is useful for crossing a river but becomes a burden if we carry it with us on our journey, so concepts can be helpful for part of the way but may become heavy and restrictive when the context no longer requires them. Many creative helpful concepts and techniques have been developed in psychotherapy but they can become restrictive, acting as the basis for sectarian identity rather than as useful boats for part of the way. **'Boatism'** occurs when we can't move on, when we think we've found a resting-place for this life. **Buddhism**, with its insistence that whatever is constructed will come apart, provides many methods for deconstruction so that we can stay attuned to the changing rhythm of the world, and through this attain the enlightenment that does not rest anywhere.

But psychotherapy also has much to offer those who practice Buddhism in the West. The Buddhist analysis of experience breaks it down into a wide range of building blocks, skandhas, dhatus, samskaras and so on which can be very alien to current Western thinking. These building blocks are used both for the analysis of experience and, especially in therapy, as points of symbolic transformation. My suggestion would be that the kind of description of the 'components' of interpersonal being developed in CAT provides the basis for a more easily accessible vocabulary to aid analysis and transformation. After all, within the realm of relative truth, our usual mode of experience, what we call truth is always contingent. The important thing is to gain the direct experience of the open nature of awareness and any changes in analytical concepts which aid this process for people at this time is surely to be welcomed. The interplay of Buddhist non-dual openness and Bakhtinian dialogic responsiveness has rich potential to develop a vision that sees through the structures of suffering.