

# **A Path Towards Wholeness**

## **Identifying the Experiences of Clinicians Who Practice Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism**

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**2017**

A dissertation submitted to Auckland University of Technology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Psychotherapy

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which, to a substantial extent, has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



Seiko Shirai

30 May 2017

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation is like my impossible dream. I have discovered that even an impossible dream can be realised with the support of others. Words can never fully express my true feelings, but I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the following people.

My family, my research participants, Beth Cohen, Kim Laurence, Vikki Baird, Emma Ellis, Wiremu Woodard, Noboru Komiya, Outi Malcolm, Momoyo Tsuchiya, Lucy Bennett, the members of the Victorious March Band, and SGI friends.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, my father and Daisaku Ikeda.

## **Abstract**

This research studies the experiences of clinicians who practice Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism. Five people were selected from four countries, New Zealand, England, America and Japan. The study seeks to understand some aspects of where both practices overlap and what they say about transforming human suffering. The study utilised the hermeneutic phenomenology. This methodology is underpinned by philosophies which are the most suitable for exploring and interpreting the clinicians' lived experiences. The study has revealed three central themes: Compassion for oneself – being true to oneself, a determined effort to help others, and a wholehearted commitment to life. These themes describe an inner transformation of the self as the starting point of transformation in the environment. The study discusses the participants' process of engaging with inner conflict and cultivating compassion. The participants' experiences suggest that our vulnerabilities are not seen as an obstacle against compassion, but rather as a catalyst that makes the emergence of compassion possible. The study explores how our individual inner transformation can make a positive impact on our immediate environment and society.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. How I came to this project?

“A fish is the last to know water” is a well-known proverb. Sometimes the thing that is most natural to us is the thing least known. We can only understand our implicit assumptions and world views when presented with something different. My journey as a newcomer to Aotearoa New Zealand and my interaction with different cultures and languages has been both painful and liberating. Since moving to New Zealand and facing the cultural differences between Japanese and Maori, and Japanese and Western cultures, I have experienced my Japanese identity in new ways. And my personal journey alongside the psychotherapy training has let me discover my sense of identity as a Buddhist.

During my training in psychotherapy, I became interested in the intersection between Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy. I was born into a Buddhist family. My mother was practicing Nichiren Buddhism prior to my birth. I grew up with Nichiren Buddhism alongside my mother and other people in the lay organisation, Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Nichiren Buddhism emerged in 13<sup>th</sup> century Japan at a time of great social upheaval and natural disasters. During my own time of upheaval and emotional difficulties in New Zealand, both psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism helped me.

It is interesting to me that Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy have some commonality, and yet are quite different in other areas. I have experienced times when my Buddhist practice has felt uniquely powerful. It has enabled me to tap into strong and pure life energy in times of difficulty. I have also experienced times when psychotherapy has felt more effective and healing for me. Psychotherapy has particularly helped me to understand and articulate my emotional truths that were previously unspoken. What is most fascinating for me is that my inner transformation towards happy and fulfilled life has progressed significantly because of both practices. Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy have set me free from the suffering that had bound me down for a long time.

My experience as an immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand confounded my sense of self. I came to New Zealand alone 15 years ago. When I dreamed of living overseas I had no idea it would entail such painful challenges. My sense of self-worth and confidence were shattered. Cultural differences and language barriers felt insurmountable. I developed an inferiority complex because of my limited communication skills. I was in constant pain from bearing my reduced sense of self, and struggled with an acute sense of being different and not belonging. I despised my difference. My personal life was also challenging. My partner already had children from his previous marriage, and I felt there was no room for me in his family as his children and ex-wife seemed more important than I was. My sense of being left out and uncared for was so painful. My resentment towards my partner was exhausting.

I felt bewildered not knowing how I could resolve these things. These experiences forced me to delve into what it really meant “to be me.”

Although I have practiced Nichiren Buddhism since a young age, psychotherapy has allowed me to go inward on a whole new level. For me psychotherapy has taught me that I can only savour the fullness of who I am when I can be fully and compassionately with my emotional truths. I had to dig through so many layers of fear, insecurities, anger and sadness before I could reach my innermost truths. It was a profound revelation that I was actually so afraid to be myself. However I was able to slowly reveal myself with the unconditional presence of others such as my psychotherapy lecturers, my peers and my Buddhist mentor and friends. The Buddhist practice of chanting was a private space of non-judgement where I could get in touch with a tender place within me. I now know that recurring emotional pain comes up in order to heal not to suffer. Being true to myself – this is what I was the most afraid of, yet my deepest desire at the same time. It is compassion that has liberated me.

I am eternally grateful that both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy have helped me to arrive where I am today. It is beyond my words to fully explain how both practices have liberated me from emotional wounds that I did not even know I had. I feel my life has been fundamentally transformed from “this is not the life I wanted” into “I am so grateful for my life and so happy to be ‘me.’” I believe that both practices have something vital to offer to work through inner difficulties and enjoy living wholeheartedly.

A research question has naturally developed alongside my personal journey through practicing Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy over time. How can we achieve emotional freedom? What really matters for living a joyful life? How can we stop hiding from our innermost truths and begin to savour being ourselves? My effort to combine both practices has provoked my passion to investigate how Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy can help free people from suffering. This study does not aim to provide answers to these questions, but is an invitation to the personal journey and a process of thought.

My own experience and this curiosity are the basis of writing this dissertation and have informed my overall research question:

*What are the experiences of clinicians who practice both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy?*

The interviews with five clinicians are the main data source for this study. “Clinicians” here mean practitioners who offer psychotherapy to clients. Although the difference among clinicians such as psychotherapist, psychologist and so on is very distinctive in New Zealand, this is not a concern in this research. Psychotherapy in the study refers to a broad

range of psychotherapy. It is not limited to personal psychotherapy sessions. A full outline of research approach to this study will be described in the methodology chapter.

## **1.2. A movement towards wholeness in psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism**

The notion of wholeness is complex and hard to define. A part of the history of Western psychotherapy reflects a movement towards wholeness. Broadly speaking psychotherapy aims to investigate how we can relate empathically to unspoken emotions that are suppressed, ignored or denied, and explore implicit relational knowing (Grebow, 2014; Schore, 2009). Psychotherapy has taught me that the effort to search for the truth in our innermost feelings has an essential healing value. By being attuned, empathic and responsive to the most fundamental and immediate force behind the words, psychotherapy seeks to unpack and heal causes of emotional and interpersonal difficulties that are hidden in the unconscious (Stern, 2010).

Self-psychology and object relations have particularly influenced my thinking and practice. These help me understand the development of the self and the life-long effects of early relational experience. These theories clarify what kind of needs human must have to be satisfied and the kinds of environments that must be provided to realise human potential. Research and observation of children in development inform what may happen when necessary needs are chronically unmet or when a desirable environment is not provided.

There is a parallel in the development of psychotherapy and Buddhism in general. Both practices seek inner truths. From Nichiren Buddhist perspective, early Buddhist teachings were directed towards a particular audience and problems. Shakyamuni, the original historical Buddha, believed “This enlightenment could not be explained or described. Why? Because I knew that living beings are not alike in their natures and desires,” and because of that “I preached the Law in various different ways” (*The Lotus Sutra: Its opening and closing sutras*, 2009, p. 15). Early Buddhist teachings were thus taught in accordance with people’s capacities. It can be seen as being similar to how psychotherapy is based on people’s different problems. A variety of theories and practices in both psychotherapy and Buddhism is the result of compassionate efforts to help people seek their inner truths where they are in the particular time, place and individual capacity.

One fundamental difference between Western psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism can be found in their respective orientations. Psychotherapy is disease orientation (Bohart & Tallman, 1999; Stricker & Gold, 2003). Western psychology offers a theory that emotional difficulties arise from past emotional hurts. They often originate in chronic mis-attunement of caregivers to a child’s self-expression in our early life. Nichiren Buddhism proceeds from the assumption that we all have innate Buddha nature. Nichiren Buddhist practitioners use their faith in the potential of Buddha nature as a cause for inner transformation.

While psychotherapy that I have learned seeks to bring about healing through uncovering emotional truths, Nichiren Buddhism takes a different approach. It sees that in the depth of our lives there is a fundamental life energy that exists in both our lives and the universe. This deepest level of life has the power to influence the other more superficial and easier to access layers of consciousnesses. The goal of Nichiren Buddhism is thus to tap into this enlightened or Buddha nature, which has an impact on all other emotional states, both positive and negative. Nichiren Buddhism views that we can utilise all our experiences to awaken our Buddha nature, our innermost truth. I see a commonality with the psychotherapy – both practices seek inner truths.

What does it really mean to be “enlightened” in the context of psychotherapy? How can psychotherapy use Buddhist sensibilities and approaches to successfully help people progress toward uncovering healing truths? My hope is that this study will investigate how the practices of both psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism contribute to transforming human suffering and bring joy to life. I hope also that through this study we can gain a better understanding of theoretical and practical approaches that can be shared by both practices.

### **1.3. A brief explanation of Buddhism**

In the West, the collective name we give to all Buddhist practices is “meditation.” There are different practices that in their own particular ways use the repetition of a mantra and reciting Buddha’s teachings (Bankart, Dockett, & Dudley-Grant, 2003). There are also different types of Buddhism: Theravada Buddhism, Vipassana or Insight Meditation, Tibetan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and many others including Nichiren Buddhism. Nichiren Buddhism understands that the Buddha’s teachings prior to his final teaching, the Lotus Sutra, served as “preparatory” teachings in order to raise people’s awareness of spirituality. Buddhist practices vary in goals, philosophy and practice.

Nichiren is the name of the founder who established the practice of chanting “Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.” Through the study of the Buddhist sutras, Nichiren realised that it was the teachings found in the Lotus Sutra that had the potential to liberate common people from suffering. Nichiren names innate Buddha nature, the deepest level of life, “myoho-enge-kyo” (Ikeda, 2006c). “Myoho-enge-kyo” is also the title of the Lotus Sutra. It is considered encapsulating the essence of Buddha nature. By chanting “nam” (devotion) “myoho-enge-kyo” (Buddha nature) we can call forth our innate Buddha nature and receive the benefits of reciting the entire Buddhist teachings. This could be compared to the idea that by stating two words “New Zealand” one conjures up the entire multitude of meanings, ideas and imagery of a country of over four million people.

The major distinction between Nichiren Buddhism and the other Buddhist schools is the emphasis on “faith.” Nichiren writes “one can gain entrance (to enlightenment) through faith

alone” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume I*, 1999, p. 832) What practitioners have faith in is that everyone has Buddha nature which pervades in both their lives and the universe. The deepest level of life can be accessed by choosing to believe in it.

#### **1.4. Motivating factors for this research**

The mindfulness practice has been widely applied in Western psychotherapy (Dimeff & Linehan, 2001; Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2013; Hayes, Pistorello, & Levin, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2001). It appears that Western psychotherapy has incorporated what is missing in the West in order to enhance psychotherapy practice (Rubin, 2003). I wonder if this selective adoption of Buddhism misses out the point when it comes to what Buddhism can offer.

On the other hand, Rubin notes that Westerners adopt Eastern contemplative practices and spirituality, while neglecting what psychotherapy can offer Buddhism. To date most of the research in the context of psychotherapy has focused on the efficacy and mechanism of mindfulness practice. There is little research into how psychotherapy can enhance Buddhism. The existing research has mainly focused on the experiences of clients in terms of the use of meditation. Hardly any of the research is on clinicians who practice both Buddhism and psychotherapy.

Another motivating factor for the study is that Nichiren Buddhism is under-researched in the field of Western psychology. Western mindfulness practice is derived largely from Zen (Kabat-Zinn, 2011) and Vipassana, Insight Meditation (Brach, 2003). These Buddhist traditions have been extensively researched, while there is a lack of research into Nichiren Buddhism. To date the research of Nichiren Buddhism has been limited to religious study and sociology (Machacek & Wilson, 2000; Metraux, 2010) and peace study (Urbain, 2014). Very little research has been conducted from the standpoint of psychotherapy.

I believe Nichiren Buddhism is worthwhile studying because it is practiced by approximately 12 million members of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) in 192 countries around the world (Soka Gakkai International, 2015). For my dissertation my research participants were from New Zealand, America, England and Japan. I thought it was important that the study, even on a small scale, reflected a diversity of membership.

#### **1.5. Definition of Nichiren Buddhist terms**

I will provide a definition of key terms that are used throughout the dissertation.

**Life:** Practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism often use the word “life” when describing their whole self. It contains everything about oneself: mind, body, psyche, cognition, affect, emotion, spirit, soul, personality, karma (past life causes) and so on. Our life is considered inseparable with the environment. Thus a sense of self often includes its environment. Life

is also seen as eternal. Our present life is carried from one's past lives. Our fundamental life energy will carry on to the next life time. A view of life is holistic and encompasses both time and space. There seems to be no word or term to capture this broad concept of self in Western psychotherapeutic literature and research.

**Fundamental enlightenment:** This is our innate divine nature. This term is interchangeably used with Buddhahood or Buddha nature. It is often described as a state of absolute freedom, life force, wisdom and compassion. Fundamental enlightenment is considered much stronger than any external conditions or inner negative energies. Nichiren states that this Buddhahood is our original nature. People in this state can freely draw out innate positive qualities from their lives whenever necessary. Nichiren often describes qualities of Buddhahood as “unmade,” “originally endowed,” or “eternally dwelling” (Yatomi, 2006, p. 30). Buddhahood is also the strength of faith (Ikeda, Saito, Endo & Suda, 2000a). Fundamental enlightenment is contrasted with fundamental darkness.

**Fundamental darkness:** What prevents us from tapping into our Buddhahood is identified as “fundamental darkness” within ourselves. It means “ignorance” of the existence of Buddhahood (Ikeda, 2005). Fundamental darkness can be seen as an inability to recognise the true nature of our life. Fundamental darkness is thought to “cause[s] people to be lost and deluded, and ruled by negative impulses; it is the root source of all unhappiness and suffering” (Ikeda, 2005, pp. 5-6). Fundamental darkness obscures our enlightened nature. In the context of psychotherapy, fundamental darkness can mean our vulnerability, distressed states and negative impulses including the workings of the unconscious such as repression.

**Oneness of fundamental darkness and fundamental enlightenment:** A concept of “oneness” of opposing things is everywhere in Nichiren Buddhism. Fundamental darkness and fundamental enlightenment are essentially inseparable. From the perspective of a dualistic view, it may be perceived that Buddhahood is “good” and fundamental darkness is “bad.” It follows that a bad or negative aspect of us needs to be eliminated. However, this is not the case in Nichiren Buddhism. Our fundamental darkness guides us to a place where we can bring out our Buddhahood.

## **1.6. Overview of chapters**

The following chapter provides additional context for this literature review on the nature of life and key elements of psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative methodology and method used in this research. In chapter 4, I will describe the process of this research and how I arrived at the findings. Chapter 5, 6 and 7 provide a discussion of each theme of the research. Chapter 8 provides a further discussion of the findings, the strengths and limitations of the study, and the implications for the field of psychotherapy.

## **1.7. Chapter summary**

My personal experience of practicing Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy has sparked my interest in exploring the intersection between both practices. Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy concern the alleviation of suffering in people's lives. They are overlapped in some ways. A fundamental difference is that Buddhism is based on a faith in our innate Buddha nature, while most of the psychotherapy is disease orientation. My main motivating factor for the study is that there has been little study into how psychotherapy can contribute to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, and vice-versa. I am passionate about both practices and want to contribute even in a small way to the benefits of people.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter outlines literature review from both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy. The core concepts that inform experiences of both practices are introduced: The concept of personality, the understanding of the sense of self, the key perspectives from Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy with regards to “inner transformation”, self-awareness and self-acceptance based on mindfulness practice, and a critique of mindfulness practice.

### 2.1. Concept of personality

#### 2.1.1. The nature of life

Our view of life affects every aspect of our actions. Connell (2007) writes “Since the ground is different, the form of theorising is often different too” (p. xii). Our theorising is dependent on how we see the nature of life.

In the interview I was struck by the sense of “hopefulness” expressed in each participant’s narrative. When I mention “hopefulness” in the dissertation, it refers to a sense of being “heartening,” “optimistic,” “encouraging,” “empowering,” and “confident.” Through using a hermeneutic circle of reflection, it appears that their hopefulness is part of their strong faith in that everyone has Buddhahood, the potential of life. In a process of spiritual struggle, the participants courageously orient themselves in a direction of possibilities. Their faith-based view of life felt hopeful to me.

In traditional psychoanalytic theory, there is no unified concept of personality. It draws from disparate theoretical approaches (Curtis & Hirsch, 2003). However some psychotherapists in the past have recognised a human being’s inherent nature towards realising potential and growth. Their view of the nature of life resonates with that of Nichiren Buddhism.

Rogers (1959) conceptualises “actualizing tendency.” It is “the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the organism” (p. 196). This tendency includes not only meeting deficiency needs, but also growth motivations. Horney (1942) also notes a similar tendency:

The ultimate driving force is the person’s unrelenting will to come to grips with himself, a wish to grow and leave nothing untouched that prevents growth. It is a spirit of ruthless honesty toward himself, and he can succeed in finding himself only to the extent that it prevails. (p. 175)

The innate tendency to strive for higher growth echoes the concept of “holism” coined by Smuts<sup>1</sup> (1936). This is a fundamental operative tendency to strive towards greater wholeness. He considers both biology and the human spirit as being in the domain of wholeness. There are self-generating functions of equilibrium that both life and the universe inherently possess. When life experiences a disturbance, a readjustment of the equilibrium will take place with immediacy. A new equilibrium is reached through the tension between positive and negative forces.

A similar idea of equilibrium is illustrated by Nichiren Buddhism. The true nature of life is embodied by a dynamic interaction between “fundamental enlightenment” and “fundamental darkness” within our lives (Ikeda, Saito, Endo, & Suda, 2002). A dialectic interaction between positive and negative forces is always at work inside and outside our lives. In Nichiren Buddhism the concept of the oneness of good and evil suggests that there is positive potential inherent in all negative aspects of our lives: “Good exists in response to evil. There is no good in isolation from evil” (Ikeda, Saito, Endo, & Suda, 2001, p. 79). Good and bad are not in themselves fixed or absolute, but they are relative. The tension between the opposing forces implies the birthplace of greater wholeness.

In the study the participants’ spiritual struggle to engage with their inner tension is one of the recurring themes. Their faith co-exists with the fundamental darkness and negativity in their environment. Fundamental darkness in their lives often serves as a catalyst to seek their Buddhahood.

### **2.1.2. Deepest impulse to strive for the good**

Smuts (1936) posits the innate impulse to actualise holism as a “living fountain from the very depths of the universe” (p. 342). Smuts describes a “living fountain” as the deepest impulse to strive for the good as follows:

The groaning and travailing of the universe is never aimless or resultless. Its profound labours mean new creation, the slow, painful birth of wholes, of new and higher wholes, and the slow but steady realisation of the Good which all the wholes of the universe in their various grades dimly yearn and strive for. It is the nature of the universe to strive for and slowly, but in ever-increasing measure, to attain wholeness, fullness, blessedness. (pp. 341-342)

This view of life and the universe resonates with the Nichiren Buddhist perspective. This “living fountain” could parallel the “aspiration for the Buddha nature or Buddhahood” (Ikeda, 1976, p. 218). Nichiren Buddhism recognises that all living beings are “turned towards the

<sup>1</sup> Smuts was not a psychotherapist but a philosopher who made a pioneering contribution to the idea of holism.

Buddha nature” on the deepest level of life (Ikeda, 1976, p. 218). Ikeda (1976) writes that this impulse exists at a deeper level even than the desire for existence.

## **2.2. Nichiren Buddhism**

### **2.2.1. The understanding of self – The nine consciousnesses**

How we see ourselves greatly influences how we think, feel and behave. Buddhism offers a theory of consciousness called “nine consciousnesses” (Ikeda, 1988). The concept of nine consciousnesses explains the different levels of consciousness beginning with the five senses which are the most superficial, through to innate fundamental life energy at the deepest level. Nichiren Buddhist practitioners often draw on this concept to describe their understanding of self and the experience of chanting.

The first of the five consciousnesses are the five senses. The sixth consciousness is mind and perception about the external world. The seventh consciousness is ego, a sense of self. The eighth consciousness exists where what Western psychology calls the unconscious. It contains unconscious fear and core beliefs about the self and the world. This realm also includes karma. Karma in Sanskrit means action: habitual patterns of thought, speech and behaviour. While Western psychology limits the effect of karma in this present lifetime, Buddhism includes all experiences from past lifetimes as well as the present one. Karma is considered as a life energy produced by all our actions, both past and present. This is similar to the principle of the “conservation of energy” in Western science.

Carl Jung came up with a concept of the “collective unconscious” (Young-Eisendrath & Hall, 1991). He stated that collective unconscious mind is derived from ancestral memories and experiences and is common to all humankind. This can also be seen as the eighth consciousness. Buddhism recognises similar workings; the eighth consciousness transcends the boundaries of the individual and interacts with the karmic energy of others. Ikeda and colleagues (2002) state “this latent karmic energy merges with the latent energy of one’s family, one’s ethnic group, and humankind, and also with that of animals and plants” (pp. 262-263). The eighth consciousness is also described as a “rushing stream” of karmic energy (p. 262). This realm, although it is unconscious, powerfully affects our every action.

The Buddhist understanding of consciousness goes even deeper than the unconscious. There exists a ninth consciousness. This is equivalent to Buddhahood. This consciousness is more powerful than any negativity or other more superficial layers of consciousnesses in our lives. Through accessing the ninth consciousness, we can utilise our negative experience as a catalyst to draw out inherent positive qualities from within whenever necessary. Buddhism perceives that this consciousness represents our true, eternal self.

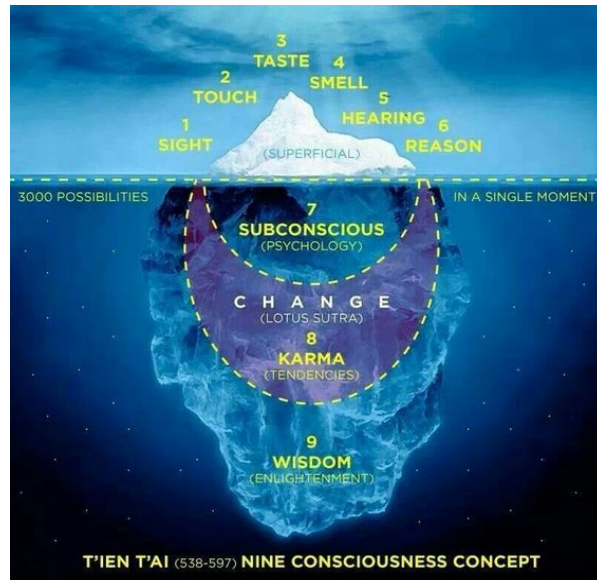


Figure 1: Nine consciousness  
 From <https://nz.pinterest.com/pin/497155246347180507/>

### 2.2.2. Great cosmic life energy in the depth of life

From a Nichiren Buddhist perspective, the ninth consciousness “both resides within us and transcends us” (Ikeda, 2006b, p. 4). What this means is that we are capable of tapping into the power that is greater than us and yet it exists within us. On the deepest level of life the great cosmic life energy permeates through us and the universe. Our life is viewed as the manifestation of the cosmic life force. Our individual life can be likened to waves and the universe to the ocean.

Nichiren Buddhism views that the essence of the universe is compassion. The universe operates in a compassionate rhythm that “enables all living things to grow and advance” (Ikeda et al., 2001, p. 38). It is interesting to me that Smuts (1936) also notes the compassionate workings of the universe: “Its (the universe’s) deepest tendencies are helpful to what is best in us” (p. 340). Both Buddhism and Smuts recognise intrinsic compassionate working to bring the best possibility.

This compassionate working of the universe, the ninth consciousness that resides inside us, has the power to unify things and bring harmony to life. In contrast, “fundamental darkness” functions to “disintegrate and divide” (Ikeda et al., 2001, p. 58). In our lives, there exists an inner conflict between a force that turns us towards Buddhahood, or higher growth, and an opposing force that separates us from Buddhahood and alienates us from other people. From a Nichiren Buddhist perspective, the compassionate workings of the universe are always at work on the deepest level of life. This means that when we face a challenge in life and our “equilibrium” is upset, then the compassionate workings of the universe within us seek to generate greater harmony in response to a feeling of being

challenged. Great cosmic life energy inside and outside ourselves facilitates this dialectic process of engaging with tension which gives birth to more balanced life.

### **2.2.3. Faith as cause for healing and transformation**

Faith is a constant theme in the participants' experiences. What they have faith in is the ninth consciousness, Buddhahood. One way of tapping into Buddhahood is chanting "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" for Nichiren Buddhist practitioners. A process of chanting "activates the energy engine" within us (Baird, 2012, p. 65). The purpose of chanting is to call forth our inherent Buddhahood. The participants describe the practice of chanting as integral to both their clinical and personal experiences.

Nichiren Buddhism assumes the existence of Buddhahood in all living beings. This assumption is faith-based, and offers a hopeful view of life that we can activate innate Buddhahood and in those of others at anytime and anywhere. Practitioners seek to develop faith in that they already possess the power for transforming any problems.

For Nichiren Buddhist practitioners, faith in the potential is considered conducive to healing and inner transformation. Their experiences are characterised with their efforts to seek faith in the face of both inner and outer negative forces. The participants' faith is intertwined with their practice of chanting. As the participants relate how their chanting helped them get through difficult times, a "real" sense of faith emerges through their felt sense of being invigorated based on chanting. Faith is no longer a wishy-washy thought. The participants are able to find a feeling place of faith within them where their desire is already or almost fulfilled.

### **2.2.4. Our own life as the object of fundamental respect**

Nichiren clarifies that our own life is "the object of fundamental respect" (Ikeda, 2007, p. 1). He writes "When you chant *myoho* and recite *rengé*, you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-rengé-kyo is your life" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume I*, 1999, p. 3). What this means to us is that our respect for our own life is at the heart of the Nichiren Buddhist practice. Our life deserves "our highest respect and reverence" (Ikeda, 2007, p. 2). In a practical way, "fundamental respect" can be expressed as unconditional acceptance of ourselves.

## **2.3. Psychotherapy**

### **2.3.1. The understanding of the development of sense of self**

How we treat ourselves stems largely from how we were treated by our caregivers. Our relationships with significant others are fundamental elements of our inner world. Our early relational experiences with them are woven into our beings. Developmental theory in Western psychology unravels how children adapt to their caregivers, and how their sense

of self are formed as a result. This is a valuable theory in that it gives psychotherapists a much deeper understanding of the root of emotional difficulties. The deeper theoretical understanding not only helps clinicians see their clients in a holistic way, but also cultivates deeper empathy towards them.

If the parent is emotionally attuned and responsive to their child's self-expression, a child will learn that it is OK to feel whatever arises from within. Parental empathic mirroring and responsiveness nurtures a solid sense of self in the child (Kohut, 1971). In this way a secure attachment is developed in earliest life through experiences of being seen, heard and understood. This will become the foundation of basic trust in self and others (Herman, 1992). The capacity for secure attachment serves as a "foundation for both intimacy and autonomy" (Holmes, 1996, p. 19).

By contrast, when the child reaches out to his caregiver for comfort and feels ignored, annoyed or punished in return, he will become afraid to express himself spontaneously (Johnson, 1994). The child will interpret his need as "bad." The child will result in renouncing his needs in order to be attuned to others' needs and behaviour. For the child losing parental attention and care means a death. He is dependent on his parents and he emotionally needs them. As a result the child develops a "compromised false self" (Johnson, 1994, p. 37).

In this way a child learns to assimilate the introjected values into himself, rather than valuing how he actually feels. Rogers (1959) calls this "conditions of worth" (p. 224); our self-worth becomes conditioned in early life. Our early relational experiences of feeling "unmet" lead to a sense of unworthiness in later life (Neff, 2011). Even though we do not remember our early experiences, they are ingrained inside us as implicit memories and have far-reaching effects on our subsequent self-other experiences. Early implicit relational knowing shapes pathogenic belief (Weiss, 1997). This is an unconscious belief of who we are and what we expect from others. These core beliefs are hard to alter because of their unconscious operation (Flores, 2004).

### **2.3.2. The art of psychotherapy – Empathy opens the gateway for healing**

Psychotherapy is the art of being with unresolved emotions that were previously unfelt and unspoken. In psychotherapy, therapist and client uncover the client's emotional truths in an "atmosphere of acceptance, respect, and compassionate efforts to understand" provided by the therapist (McWilliams, 2011, p. 250).

The "faith" that we have in psychotherapy is that discovering and being with our innermost feelings will lead to an essential healing value. Emotional truths are often difficult to find because they are hidden behind "emotional armours." We all develop unconscious strategies of self-management. An empathic understanding of psychotherapy perceives

such emotional armours as our “best effort” to protect ourselves from emotions that are too painful to feel (McWilliams, 2011). Psychotherapy aims to cultivate acceptance of oneself first through the therapist’s empathic presence. The client will gradually be able to viscerally understand and accept their emotional truths. Brach (2003) writes “The boundary to what we can accept is the boundary to our freedom” (p. 44). The effort to find emotional truths leads to emotional freedom.

## **2.4. Mindfulness practice**

### **2.4.1. Self-awareness and self-acceptance**

In psychotherapy, mindfulness practice is derived largely from Zen (Kabat-Zinn, 2011) and Insight Meditation (Brach, 2003). Mindfulness practice has given us a tool to break free of the chains of reactivity by “noting” and “labelling” what is true for us in this present moment (Brach, 2003; Germer, 2009). In our lives, when we are upset, we often get caught up with reacting and rehearsing what is happening externally in our head. We become possessed and consumed by feelings that cause us to suffer. We become vulnerable and feel easily hurt when our feelings are dependent on other people’s behaviours. This reactivity clouds our ability to attend to what is happening internally. Reactivity therefore keeps us stuck. Mindfulness practice can cultivate a self-awareness of our present experience so as to “respond” to our circumstances rather than being “reactive.”

The definition of mindfulness practice by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) may be the most well-known: “Paying attention to a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally” (p. 4). Brach (2003) describes the essence of mindfulness practice as follows: “A pause is a suspension of activity...by disrupting our habitual behaviours, we open to the possibility of new and creative ways of responding to our wants and fears” (pp. 51-52). An increased self-awareness through mindful attention to our present experience allows us to recognise that which spontaneously arises within us. The process of “observing” our minds separates ourselves from troubling thoughts and feelings. As a result, an inner space is created and we can become less identified with them.

An expanded inner space allows us to hold difficult feelings with gentleness rather than aversion. It enhances a non-judgemental awareness and an empathic attention to our vulnerability. Being attuned, responsive and consistent to inner experiences cultivates self-acceptance and openness to what really is. Research suggests that mindfulness practice helps develop a more gentle and accepting relationship with unpleasant thoughts and feelings (Hayes, Follette, & Linehan, 2011). Increased self-acceptance provides a platform to undo our emotional armours such as resistance and defences.

Nichiren Buddhist practice is considered as a form of mindfulness. However there is lack of research into Nichiren Buddhism to examine the effect of its practice. Baird (2012) identifies

three benefits of chanting from her research: (1) tapping into Buddhahood, (2) activating the energy engine, and (3) realising a wonderful interconnectedness (with others).

#### **2.4.2. Critique of mindfulness practice**

Mindfulness practice shifts the outward-directed consciousness into the inward-directed consciousness. Once our consciousness is focused inward, we are able to tap into memories and emotions that have been hidden in our minds. Our focused attention can induce implicit memory (Waterfield, 2003). It has been reported that people can become very anxious while practicing meditation; meditation can potentially cause adverse effects for those who “have maintained rigid control over their thoughts and feelings to defend against a disruptive childhood and chronic insecurity” (Bankart, 2003). Others have also advised caution as meditation can trigger panic, depression, mania, anxiety and psychosis (Crawford, 2015; Foster, 2016). Bankart (2003) suggests that mindfulness practice for some people may be “too powerful an encounter with the self” (p. 65). It is important to note that for some people it may be unsafe to practice meditation without a solid emotional holding by trained staff or supporting others.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Segal et al., 2001) emphasises “decentering.” It is a practice which takes one’s mind away from recurring unpleasant feelings by attending to present sensations such as bodily senses. This approach was developed with the intention of helping people who are stuck in negative ruminative thinking. Decentering from negative thoughts and feelings is conducive to improving their mood. However it can be counter-productive if people apply this to every thought and feeling. By decentering, it can potentially move us away from the very experience of suffering (Sikh, 2012). From the perspective of psychotherapy, contacting emotional truths of our experience is integral to healing. It is necessary to put into perspective mindfulness practice or Buddhist practice based on each person’s inner state and their unique tendencies.

Thinking about my practice of Nichiren Buddhism, I have observed that it can sometimes hinder my emotional process. As an example, when feeling down, I used to deal with my feelings by telling myself “What I do ‘from now on’ is most important!” I would tend to shortcut my feelings of vulnerability with my “go to” positive inner resolve and start chanting with a determination. Nichiren Buddhist practitioners seek to develop the mindset that the future depends on attaining a positive attitude in the “now.” Although I see the value in being forward-looking, I think it is necessary to be with our emotional pain so that all of our experiences are recognised and respected. The suppression of an emotional response to painful experience can lead to mental illness and psychological difficulties (Dalenberg, 2001). My challenge is to be open to my emotional truths and work through an inner dilemma when my emotional truths contradict what is taught in Nichiren Buddhism.

## **2.5. Chapter summary**

This chapter provided an overview of a literature review of Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy on the following topics: the concept of personality, the understanding of the sense of self, the key perspectives from Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy with regards to inner transformation, self-awareness and self-acceptance based on mindfulness practice, and a critique of mindfulness practice. Smuts, a philosopher who developed the concept of holism, and some psychotherapists believe that life possesses an innate tendency to strive for greater wholeness in the process of achieving equilibrium. In Nichiren Buddhism, I see this as similar to the aspiration to turn towards Buddha nature where there is a dynamic interaction between fundamental darkness and Buddha nature. The concept of the nine consciousnesses offers the understanding of the self in Buddhism. Nichiren Buddhist practitioners use their faith in Buddhahood for inner transformation, while psychotherapy uses empathy. Psychotherapy offers a developmental theory, which cultivates deeper empathic understanding of human suffering. Mindfulness practice is useful for developing self-awareness and self-acceptance. However, negative effects have also been reported.

## Chapter 3. Methodology and Method

I have sought a methodology underpinned by philosophies which are most suitable for exploring the participants' lived experiences of Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy. Hermeneutic phenomenology mirrors my topic as it aims to capture a fullness and uniqueness of individual experiences. I have used interpretive analysis as the method to my research because I myself am a practicing psychotherapist and Buddhist, and this method allows me to work inter-subjectively in the research. Here then, both methodology and method are named – and all theory for both is in the rest of the body of this chapter.

I initially considered thematic analysis, however there was a risk to hamper my spontaneous thinking by coding process. In hermeneutic phenomenological research, it is important to ensure a “free acting of ‘seeing’ meaning” (van Manen, 1997, p. 79). There was another risk that potentially important parts of texts could be lost in the coding process. Van Manen warns that mechanical application of coding texts may hinder a process of deepening and widening understanding in the hermeneutic circle. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to let fresh understanding “come,” whereas thematic analysis aims to “distill” findings. I concluded that a thematic analysis was not feasible with hermeneutic phenomenological methodology.

### 3.1. Hermeneutic phenomenology

The research question for this study is “*what are the experiences of clinicians who practice both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy?*” The goal of the study is to explore meanings of their experiences and interpret what lies behind what is being said (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Hermeneutic phenomenology blends philosophies of both hermeneutics and phenomenology (van Manen, 1997). The main focus of this methodology is on exploring the experience as it is lived and seeking to uncover a deeper understanding of a phenomenon of investigation (Kafle, 2011). This fits well with the goal of this research.

In hermeneutic phenomenological research, results of research are considered not as truth but fresh understandings or insights. It can be seen as “something that matters significantly, something that we wish to point the reader towards” (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, 2008, p. 1392). Themes will emerge in a thinking process where thoughts are free to play out. The researcher’s “interpretation of coming to understand” leads to findings (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1391). Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a “journey of thinking.”

On a personal level, I see hermeneutic phenomenology a good fit because it provides me with an opportunity for personal growth. Through practicing Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy I have discovered a fear of letting myself be seen. However, “being myself”

is the very thing that hermeneutic phenomenology requires. Phenomenology is a way of “staying true to what must be thought” (Harman, 2007, p. 155). This methodology challenges me to fully bring myself forward in the thinking process, and use *my* spontaneous response as signpost for exploration. Given that this dissertation is the final work towards a Master of Psychotherapy, it is a meaningful challenge for me to express myself without the fear of “being wrong,” and to stay true to my thinking process.

### **3.2. Interpretation and historicity**

How things are interpreted is often coloured by our pre-assumptions and world-views (Smythe & Spence, 2012). We bring our individual and collective histories, culture, and our past understanding when interpreting something. From a hermeneutic perspective, we can never truly stand outside of the phenomena of investigation. Gadamer (1982/2013) introduced the importance of a “historically effected consciousness” (p. 288). This is the ability to recognise our own history and appreciate how it influences our interpretations (Smythe & Spence, 2012). In terms of this study my experience of practicing both Buddhism and psychotherapy prior to the research served as the starting point of my thinking journey. A phenomenological approach requires my constant enquiring how my history affects my thinking.

Meanings made by human beings are unique, “depending on their context and personal frames of reference as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 614). The phenomenon of investigation using hermeneutic phenomenology includes these implicit arenas. For these reasons, I am drawn into the interpretive methodology as most suitable for this research. The study deals with complexities of internal phenomena around one’s vulnerabilities. It also touches on the research participants’ awareness about how our cultures play a part of shaping our inner struggles. Hermeneutic phenomenology allows me to explore the depth of phenomenon.

In order to identify our historicity and projection, Heidegger’s (as cited in Smythe & Spence, 2012) idea of “fore’s” to reviewing texts is helpful: Fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. Fore-having acknowledges that we already have values and understanding that are ingrained in us. Fore-sight is our ability to see ahead, which can guide the process. Fore-conception directs the research in a certain way because of the researcher’s fore-having and fore-sight. Heidegger’s idea of fore-projection gives me ideas “how” my history can influence the research process. It helped me be mindful of what I was doing and why.

The researcher’s reflexivity and self-awareness of their projections is important to ensure rigorous research. It also helps clarify the horizon of the researcher’s understanding.

### **3.3. Subjectivity of researcher**

Hermeneutic phenomenology accepts the researcher's bias and prior knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Its assumption is that it is impossible to negate one's subjectivity related to the phenomenon of investigation. The researcher's subjectivity serves as a signpost in the process of understanding (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a "philosophic *method for questioning*, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions. But in this questioning there exist the possibilities and potentialities for experiencing openings, understandings and insights" (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). The researcher needs to be attuned and attentive to their own response to text. "Hearing the call to thinking" is central to the analysis to data (Smythe, 2005, p. 224).

In hindsight, much of my process was intuitive and spontaneous. Heidegger (1993) writes "We truly incline towards something only when it in turn inclines towards us" (p. 369). I followed my thoughts and intuition towards the texts and ideas that drew me in. With awareness of the thinking that emerged, I would search and read materials. I took notes and kept a record of text that inspired my thinking, and that held my thoughts and provoked me to wonder. I kept a detailed journal to write down my thoughts and made comments in the margins of books and papers that I read. My incessant thinking and enquiring led to more wondering and thinking.

In terms of my Buddhist practice, my challenge lies in my ability to recognise prior knowledge and how it affects my thinking as Buddhism is deeply embedded in my way of life. To solve this problem, I did a brief literature review of Nichiren Buddhism using the excerpts of teachings that I have retained for many years. This gave me a broad sense of my prior knowledge. I will describe the process and outcomes in the next chapter.

Given that hermeneutic phenomenological research locates the researcher within the phenomenon of investigation, the research itself is a lived experience. My inner transformation has taken place alongside the research process, which is inseparable with the emergence of the themes. I will discuss this in the discussion chapter.

### **3.4. Fusion of horizons – Dialogic approach to text**

An evolving process of understanding occurs through dialogue with another. The researcher's receptivity to how text speaks to them moves the process of understanding forward. Gadamer (1982/2013) views the process of understanding as a "fusion of horizons" (p. 311). It means that different interpretations of the phenomenon are brought together through dialogue, and new thinking and understanding is created. Higgs, Paterson and Kinsella (2012) write:

Through a fusion of horizons whether this be the historical horizon of the past and the current horizon of the present, or the different perspectives and experiences of

a clinician and a client, or a researcher and a research participant, there is a bridging of the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar. (para. 6)

Dialogue with others highlights the “gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar.” A dialogic approach is the heart of this research. It creates an inner space where all thoughts and ideas are held together free from judgement. This open space allows the researcher to take them in as fully as possible and develop relatedness between them. Dialogic exploration can expand one’s previous understanding and shift assumptions. In this way a deeper understanding comes through dialogue with others.

### **3.5. Openness to what is**

The nature of dialogue implies that no one knows what will come out. Therefore the key for hermeneutic exploration lies in an “openness to what is” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1392). Openness to what is allows us to experience the authentic meaning of “*being*.” The hermeneutic attempt to delve into the essence of phenomena is underpinned by the philosophical idea that the nature of *being* is unique and contextual. Heidegger argues that we can only understand the nature of an authentic existence by identifying the different layers associated with a thing (Sikh, 2012). The authentic character of *being* can be understood through examining the *being* in relation to the world in which it is grounded. The idea of interconnectedness is at the heart of Buddhism and psychotherapy. Another notion of *being* is that it is constantly in flux (Smythe et al., 2008). This view corresponds to a Buddhist view of *being* that everything is ever-changing.

A researcher who proceeds with openness may be compared to a psychotherapist who attends to whatever arises from their interaction with the client. My responsiveness and receptiveness as a therapist helps me be attentive to my response to the text. By articulating one’s spontaneous thinking in a way that is unhindered by pre-organised plans, hermeneutic research seeks to grasp the meaning of *being*.

### **3.6. “Play” as a way of engaging with research**

This open space for exploration may be likened to a “potential space” in psychotherapy described by Winnicott (1971). This mental space refers to an “intermediate area” of experience located between fantasy and reality and inner and outer worlds (Ogden, 1993, p. 203). The functions of potential space include playing with ideas and possibilities free from the restrictions of objective reality. In this space, opposites and differences can meet and be held together. This is where creative possibilities can emerge. Similarly, hermeneutic enquiry values a sufficient “leeway” to play (Smythe et al., 2008). Having room to play in a conversation creates a reflective space where fresh insight or thinking can emerge.

In hermeneutic phenomenological research, the researcher uses an openness to listen to emerging thinking (Smythe et al., 2008). The attitude of openness to what is requires openness to ambiguities as well. The researcher is always “wrestling with the restlessness of possibilities” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1391). In order to be in the “interplay of seeking and waiting” for themes to emerge, it is important to have the ability to bear a sense of restlessness (Smythe & Space, 2012, p. 20). The ability to sit with this unrest and not seek clarity prematurely can be compared to the psychotherapist’s ability to stay open to the unfolding therapeutic process.

### **3.7. Hermeneutic circle of understanding**

The “hermeneutic circle” is a process of understanding texts by moving dialectically between the parts and the whole (Crotty, 1998). Myers (2013) suggests that the hermeneutic circle can be viewed as a spiral to indicate how ongoing engagement with text lead to more integrated understanding. The researcher’s relatedness to the text enables them to see the potential insights that lie within. Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism value this holistic approach. Both practices seek to understand the totality of being through analysing the parts in relation to the whole, and evaluating the wholeness by synthesising the parts. The hermeneutic way of “knowing” matches that of psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism.

Van Manen (1997) asserts that “writing exercises the ability to see” (p. 129). He explains that “writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know” (p. 127). By externalising what is internal, a reflective space can be created. Writing my thoughts down on paper served to clarify my current horizon of understanding. And over a period of months what I wrote down kept expanding when new thoughts were fused with the horizons of others and my prior understanding.

Hermeneutic phenomenological exploration involves going back and forth in order to develop relatedness within the hermeneutic circle of exploration. Van Manen (1997) suggests reviewing texts from three different layers:

- (1) “Wholistic or sententious” approach: which phrases capture the main significance of the text as a whole?
- (2) “Selective or highlighting” approach: which phrases are revealing about the phenomenon?
- (3) “Detailed or line-by-line” approach: what does this sentence reveal about the phenomenon? (pp. 92-93)

It requires a lot of backwards and forwards between my evolving knowledge and the text from the above layers. Once I had transcribed an interview, I would read it several times to gain an overall understanding and feeling of the text. I would underline and make

comments on the parts that captured my attention. As the process proceeded, I noted that my responses sometimes highlighted different aspects depending on whether I reviewed texts as a psychotherapist or as a Buddhist. Therefore, I mindfully read transcripts as a psychotherapist and identified the aspects that seemed to “speak to me.” I would repeat the same process from a Buddhist perspective. Once I had transcribed all interviews, I engaged in a process of going back and forth between each one. As I immersed myself in the texts, I explored how the things were interrelated. I sometimes used a mind-map to organise and synthesise my thoughts. I will discuss my research process in detail later.

### **3.8. Letting come fresh insights**

The hermeneutic approach aims to let new insights come rather than distilling findings (Dunne, 1997). This method requires a committed engagement in staying open to the thinking process (van Manen, 1997). The research process is mysterious and I was always grappling with unsettling feelings of ambiguity. The words of Rilke (1986) encouraged me to embrace uncertainty and be open to the experience. He encourages to “live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer” (p.21). I trusted that themes would come to me.

### **3.9. Critique of hermeneutic phenomenology**

The main purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to “invite readers to make their own journey, to be exposed to the thinking of the author” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1393). This requires the author’s skill of describing their process of how they have arrived at their themes. It can be problematic if the author unthinkingly manipulates the process and directs the research in a certain way because of a lack of reflexivity (Smythe & Spence, 2012). Research using this methodology presents more difficulty in measuring rigor and validity unlike scientific research.

Hermeneutic research is sometimes criticised because the reader’s interpretation can be influenced by the author’s interpretation (Crotty, 1998). Since the research findings are a product of the researcher’s “thinking journey,” it is inevitable that the reader is influenced by the author’s perspective. This could limit the reader’s freedom of interpretation.

Eco and colleagues (1992), on the other hand, critiques that because hermeneutics invites readers to take their own journey of thinking, overemphasising the reader’s role of interpretation may lead to over-interpretation. While welcoming different interpretations of text, they raise a concern that the reader’s freedom of interpretation may reduce the “certain unity and coherence” of the text (Crotty, 1998, p. 106); thus the author’s intent must be first identified and taken into consideration.

### **3.10. My thoughts on critique**

Hermeneutic phenomenological research promotes an interactive approach with readers. I would like to note that the “reader-centred approach” has emerged in response to the need of the times. In the history of conceptualisation of reading, there has been a gradual shift from the “privileged author” transmitting their ideas towards an active dialogue between author and reader to co-create the meaning in response to text (Crotty, 1998). I believe that hermeneutic phenomenology has developed in response to this desire for people to connect to each other through expressing and respecting what is true for them.

I personally value the relational approach because I feel that a better understanding of each other through sharing our honest intent is an important and desirable outcome. I believe that there is an urgent need for this type of communication today especially in view of recent world events characterised by hostility and dislike towards different people. My hope is that this study will help in some small way to develop a greater understanding between people through respecting each other’s inner truths.

### **3.11. Chapter summary**

I have outlined the methodology and method for my research in detail. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand lived experience and interpret what is behind what is being said. The methodological stance is that human beings bring their history, culture and past experiences when interpreting something. Therefore researcher’s reflexivity is important. Openness to what is is an essential quality in research. A researcher with openness is able to stay attuned with how text speaks to them. Openness also enables the researcher to develop relatedness within the hermeneutic circle of reading, writing, thinking and understanding. Themes will emerge through the freedom of such exploration.

In the next chapter I will cover my research process in detail.

## **Chapter 4. Research Process**

The practical aspect of my research method, the research process, is outlined in this chapter. I used interpretive analysis as my research method to explore and organise the phenomenon of clinicians' experience of practicing Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy. The main data source for my study was obtained from the transcripts of the interviews with five clinicians, three females and two males. Nationalities included one each from New Zealand, America, England, and two from Japan. The Japanese participants are a married couple. This chapter will cover ethical considerations, the collection of data, the evolution of the research question, my approach in the interviews, my process of working with the data, and the rigor and validity that I applied to my research.

### **4.1. Ethical considerations**

One important consideration was the possibility that research participants could be identified because of using a small sample. I communicated this possible concern with each participant. I also encouraged them to share any other concerns that they may have had. I specially included this point on the consent form so as to ensure that each participant was aware of possible identification. Despite this possibility, all participants agreed to sign the form. Participants were also advised of their right to withdraw at any point during the research process. In addition they were also informed that they would receive a transcription of the interview and could edit or delete their comments as they wished.

### **4.2. Collection of data 1 – Recruitment of participants**

Following approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, I sent explanatory emails to six clinicians. I identified them through their own publications, through SGI's publication (SGI quarterly magazine), and my personal connections within SGI. I used an internet search engine to obtain the overseas participants' email addresses. Five people agreed to participate in the study. My choice of participants from different countries, and from both the West and East, was deliberate. Given that a distinctive feature of Nichiren Buddhism is diversity and social inclusiveness (Chappell, 2000), I felt it important that the study would reflect diversity even on a small scale. My criteria for the selection of the participants was that they had been practicing Nichiren Buddhism for more than 10 years within SGI and practicing psychotherapy as clinicians for a minimum of three years. In fact, the majority of my participants have had decades of experience in both practices.

### **4.3. Collection of data 2 – Researcher's understanding**

Effective hermeneutic phenomenological research requires the researcher's reflexivity. It is a self-awareness of one's own horizon of understanding and how one's history and culture influences one's interpretation (Gadamer, 1982/2013). It involves mindful attention to what I

am doing and why, and analysing my assumptions. The researcher's reflexivity is dependent on openness to one's fore-projections.

Nichiren Buddhism is deeply ingrained in me. I thought about how I could recognise my prior knowledge related to Nichiren Buddhism. I came up with the idea of doing a brief literature review of Buddhist teachings. I used the excerpts of Nichiren Buddhist guidance that I have retained in digital storage for more than 10 years. I selected key phrases that have had a profound influence in my life. I then categorised those phrases into 12 groups based on themes. I was satisfied with the summary of what I had learned from my lifetime of practising Nichiren Buddhism, and how my life had been shaped by it. The following photo shows a summary of literature review of Nichiren Buddhism on a notice board. It is in Japanese, so I have included a translation.



Figure 2: Literature review of Nichiren Buddhism

The following themes emerged:

- Developing your life energy that is stronger than problems.
- Growth from lesser self towards greater self.
- Facing fundamental darkness in order to strengthen faith.
- Hardship makes you stronger.
- Having faith in the law of the universe, the compassionate rhythm of the universe.
- Laughing off obstacles that get in the way.
- Everything is determined by your innermost intent.
- Believing that you are a Buddha.
- Having a spirit of always moving forward.
- Accumulating treasures of the heart and good fortune that move your life forward.

- Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental life force that moves the universe. It is also contained within you.
- Oneness of self and others. Joy for oneself and others. Buddhahood is strengthened by helping others.
- Making a great vow. A vow is the power to orient you in the best possible direction.
- Seeking mentors.

This board was placed in my office so that I could constantly see where the horizon of my understanding started in the study.

My relationship with psychotherapy is obviously new compared to my life-long relationship with Nichiren Buddhism. In order to refresh my previous work and experience in my mind, I reread the journal that I kept during my psychotherapy training. My journal helped me see how much I have grown through the training. The single most significant thing that I have learned from psychotherapy was that finding my emotional truths led to emotional freedom. An empathic enquiry to my emotional pain allowed me to open the gateway to a tender place within me. It was a place that was difficult to go to. "Being seen" was the very thing that I was most afraid of. At the same time, it was the deepest desire that I had.

#### **4.4. The evolution of the research question**

As I alluded to in the introduction chapter, my interest in my research question began when I started my psychotherapy training in 2011. I was initially interested in exploring the unique benefits and challenges that psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism present. In my experience of combining both practices, I noted that there were similarities in some areas, and differences in others. With this curiosity piqued, my initial research question was "how do clinicians who practice both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy understand the benefits and challenges of each practice?"

I realised however that I was on the wrong track. When I started to think about possible questions for the interviews, I was bogged down in the questions and became confused. I realised that rather than having my participants relate their stories in an open manner, my well-thought questions could narrow down their narratives. My mind-set of "conducting" interviews would "freeze the phenomenological spirit" (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1392).

One phrase from a Japanese book that I was reading at the time struck me. It said that everything has consciousness; if you let go of your ego or your attachment to what you want to happen, things will unfold in the best possible way (Hew Len, 2008). I saw that I was unconsciously trying to "control" the research process by making interview questions as "specific" as possible. I attempted to list questions because I was anxious to capture the information I needed.

After reflection and discussion with my supervisor, I decided to expand the focus of the research by including a wider range of experience of Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy. I felt that focusing solely on the benefits and challenges could limit the research. I decided to allow the study to go in the direction it would take me. I believed that this was a hermeneutic phenomenological approach

With this in mind, the research question was amended to “What are the experiences of clinicians who practice both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy?” My Buddhist practice helped me bear my sense of restlessness for possibilities of the direction and expectations. Acceptance of unrest feelings created an inner space to be open to “what is.” It was like the “act of handing over self to await the coming of a thought” (Smythe & Spence, 2012, p. 19). I was fortunate to have recognised my anxiety at the beginning of research process. This allowed me to remain open to the unfolding process of my experience.

#### **4.5. My approach in the interviews**

I communicated with the participants an amendment to the research question prior to conducting the interviews. I encouraged them to share things that were important to them. Participants were either interviewed using Skype or in their home for between 90 and 120 minutes. I had planned that the interviews would last 60 to 90 minutes, but the participants were enthusiastic to share their stories. I felt they were engaged in the process. I was mindful to “let the interviewee find their own way” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1392) just as a psychotherapist allows her client to take the lead in a conversation. I then recorded and transcribed interviews. The transcription was emailed to each participant to read.

#### **4.6. A process of working with data**

##### **4.6.1. Reviewing through different lenses**

A sense of “hopefulness” stemming from each participant impressed me. In the dissertation, “hopefulness” refers to a sense of being “inspiring,” “empowering,” “optimistic,” and “confident.” I felt it informed something significant as a whole. A sense of “hopefulness” made me think about where it was coming from. With this sense of curiosity, I read the transcripts several times over so as to immerse myself into the content. I wrote down any thoughts that came to my mind and seemed important on the margin of the transcribed dialogue. I reviewed the texts both as a psychotherapist and as a Buddhist separately. I purposely wanted to interpret the content through different lenses. I also reviewed the texts as a researcher to explore interrelationships in the transcribed texts.

##### **4.6.2. Putting words into the unutterable**

The writing process was a constant challenge of putting words into the unutterable (Smythe, 2005). I found the writing process very demanding and frustrating. I often felt that

I had a revelation, but when I tried to write about the excitement I was feeling, the result was completely disappointing and far from what was developing inside me. I rewrote passages again and again trying to put my thoughts into words. I would become frustrated with my writing process. I shared my struggle with a close friend of mine. She is an accomplished musician and conductor from New York. She encouraged me to look at manuscripts of Beethoven for inspiration.



Figure 3: Beethoven's manuscript  
From [http://drownedinsound.com/in\\_depth/4143376-the-classical-1-roll-over-beethoven](http://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/4143376-the-classical-1-roll-over-beethoven)

When I saw this, I was taken aback. Beethoven also struggled to articulate music that was resonating within him. He was single-mindedly seeking the notes that express the music he was hearing inside him. This experience definitely inspired me to stay focused and keep going.

I was even having dreams about how to express myself. Often thoughts that clarified what I was thinking about would spontaneously enter my mind. As Smythe and colleagues (2008) say, "To think phenomenologically... is to let what 'captures thinking' stay in thought and speak to understanding" (p. 1394). Although I did not see it at the time, each passage I wrote helped me move forward in my thinking journey.

#### **4.6.3. Emerging horizon that permeates everything**

Several themes began to emerge such as compassion for oneself, speaking one's truths, taking action for social change, and deeply "living" Buddhist core concepts.

I wrote in my journal: "I am feeling 'stuck' even though I see raw themes. I feel as if I know how they are related to each other because I see those aspects within me as well, but I cannot get to the bottom of what underlies these. What makes it possible for the participants to have such a positive outlook in the face of their challenges? How are these

aspects related to my sense of hopefulness?” My daily life activities were completely taken over during this period of exploration and contemplation. During this time I was reading the last 10 years of the annual Peace Proposals published by Daisaku Ikeda, President of SGI, and lectures on Buddhism that he gave at the universities around the world. His words significantly helped me to understand the interrelation between individuals and the world, and between Buddhist concepts and global challenges.

His words from the 2011 Peace Proposal made a big impression on me:

People of courage with the spirit of ceaseless striving know no limits. The essence of Buddhist humanism lies in the insistence that human beings exercise their spiritual capacities to the limit, or more accurately, without limit, coupled with an unshakable belief in their ability to do this. In this way, faith in humanity is absolutely central to Buddhism. (Ikeda, 2011, p. 5)

“Faith in humanity” – it was an “aha” moment for me. I realised this was what held together every aspect of the participants’ experiences. I returned to the interview texts once again and reviewed them based on “faith in humanity” or “faith in the potential of life.” I highlighted everything in the text that not only “expressed” participants’ faith but also seemed “related” to it. The selection process was intuitive and did not delve into “how” things were interrelated. The following photo shows the categories that emerged from this hermeneutic exploration.

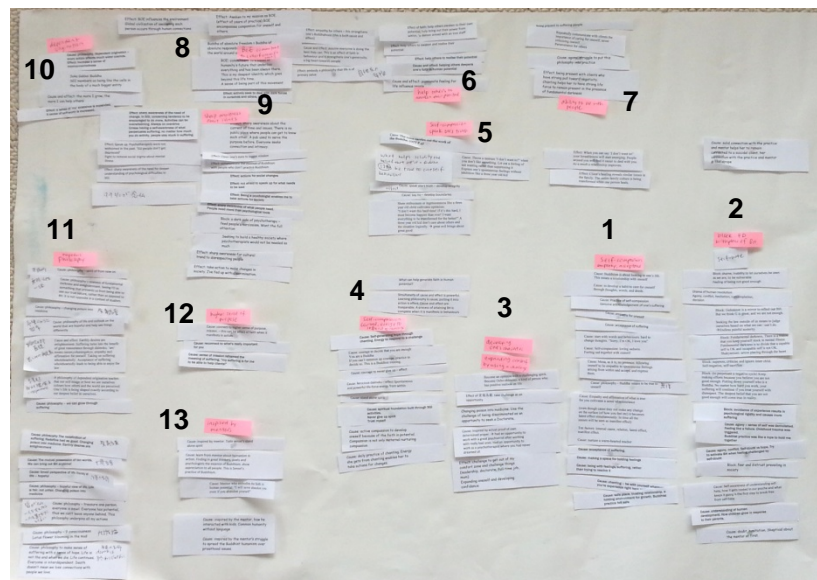


Figure 4: The exploration around “faith in human potential”

Bullet points in pink post-it notes show the categories as they emerged below:

1. Self-compassion: Empathy and acceptance for oneself

2. Obstacles to Buddhahood/faith: fundamental darkness, but also a birthplace of Buddhahood/faith
3. Developing one's character and expanding one's capacity through challenging oneself
4. Self-compassion: Courage and energy to respond to challenge
5. Self-compassion: Speaking one's truths
6. Helping others awaken and realise their potential
7. Ability to be present with people
8. Commitment to the lives of both oneself and others
9. Sharp awareness about socio-cultural phenomena that underlie individual problems
10. Dependent origination, interconnectedness between self and others/environment
11. Buddhist philosophy of life that is hopeful and optimistic
12. Higher sense of purpose
13. Inspiration from mentors

I explored the relatedness between each category, its relationship with each other, its relationship with the whole, and faith in human potential. I also examined them in relation to my fore-understandings and my socio-cultural background. I attempted to study the transcriptions from the participants' socio-cultural perspective. In addition to examining the transcribed text, I also read literature to help my reflection and thinking. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the interrelationship of the texts, I reflected many times on the text and the literature that I had reviewed.

One thing that posed a problem for me at the time was that faith co-existed with fundamental darkness such as doubt and hesitation. My revelation was that participants' faith underpinned their experiences. However faith alone could not be responsible for the phenomenon I was seeing. I was seeking to articulate something that would "encapsulate" the phenomenon of co-existence. I noted that the participants' "spiritual struggle" was always present in their experiences. I came to see that a spiritual struggle was where faith and fundamental darkness met. In my previous hermeneutic exploration, I was seeing fundamental darkness as an "obstacles to Buddhahood/faith" *and* a "birthplace of Buddhahood/faith" at the same time.

The photo below shows the backbone for the research findings that emerged through hermeneutic exploration of the above 13 categories.

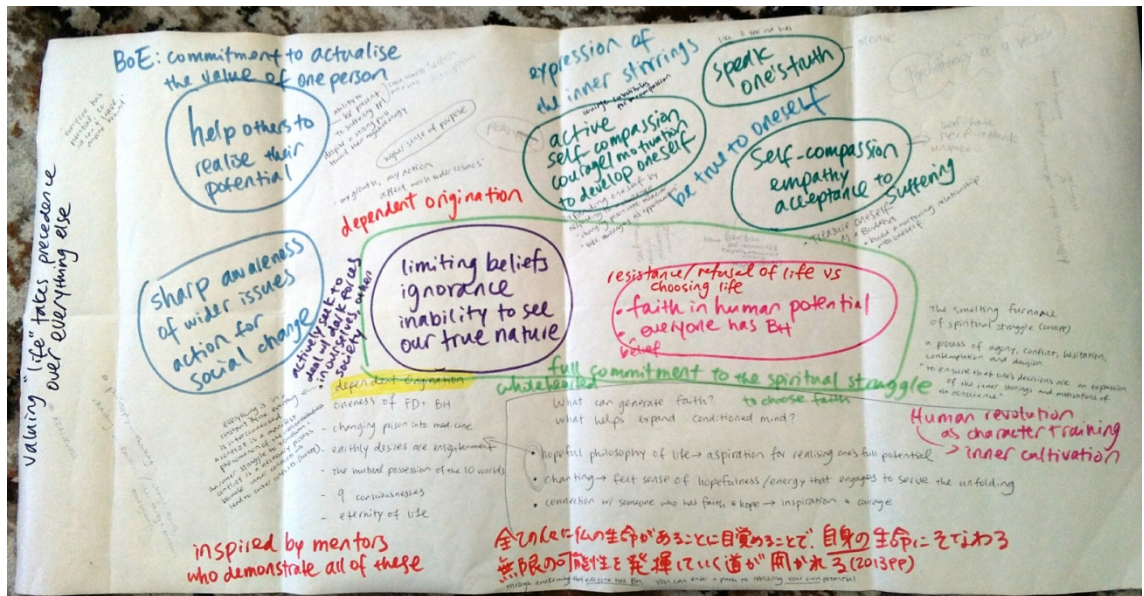


Figure 5: The backbone for the research themes

Three basic themes emerged: Having self-compassion / being true to oneself, helping others to realise their potential / sharp awareness of wider issues, action for social change, and a full/wholehearted commitment to spiritual struggle. While first two themes, self-compassion and helping others were straightforward, I felt that the third theme, a “full/wholehearted commitment to spiritual struggle” fell somewhat short in terms of articulating the phenomenon.

#### 4.6.4. My process towards the emergence of the final theme

I began reviewing the texts once again to explore how the idea of caring for oneself is related to one’s engagement with others, and how each theme and sub-theme is related to each other. Most importantly I wanted to see the interrelationship between the participants’ faith in human potential and everything else. Although I had the realisation that a “faith in humanity” or a “faith in the potential of life” underpinned every aspect of the participants’ experiences, it took me a long time to articulate the final theme. I lapsed into a period of thinking.

The final theme gradually emerged while writing the chapters about my first two findings. During that period, I reflected on how difficult it was to be compassionate with oneself and others. The participants’ experiences highlighted that negative thoughts and feelings persistently appeared when they tried to find compassion and faith. Participants’ “tenacity” in their spiritual struggles and associated inner conflicts impressed me. I began reviewing each sub-theme of the participants’ experiences from the lenses of “tenacity.” I came to see that tenacity was one of the expressions of their faith. It was impossible to be tenacious in a spiritual struggle without faith. Tenacity was like a path through their fundamental darkness leading to faith-based action.

The whole research process had been the quest for “hopefulness” based on my initial felt sense of hopefulness from each of the interviews. I wanted to make sense of something that encompassed hopefulness, spiritual struggle and faith. I began wondering what a spiritual struggle had to do with hopefulness or optimism when both appeared to be in conflict with each other. Over the many months of my thinking process, I came to understand that what I felt hopeful for stemmed from the participants’ attitude towards life: a “wholehearted commitment to life.” This is an expression of their faith on multi-dimensional levels: cognitive, emotional, behavioural and spiritual levels. Hopefulness was felt as a spark of faith in the midst of engaging with spiritual struggle.

#### **4.7. Rigor and validity**

The risks of hermeneutic phenomenological research include the accountability for research. While scientific research aims for validity through objectivity and precision in the method (Badger, 2000), hermeneutic phenomenological research seeks to invite readers to a journey of thinking by uncovering the researcher’s own thinking (Smythe, 2005). Therefore rigor is dependent on the researcher’s reflexivity and openness to one’s prior knowledge and experiences that have influenced one’s understanding. I have previously described how I demonstrated my reflexivity, and tried to articulate how the horizon of my understanding developed in a dialogue with others.

#### **4.8. Chapter summary**

I have described the process I went through in the research. I have also described how my process unfolded through a hermeneutic circle of exploration, and how the central themes emerged. I have articulated the base horizon of my understandings in both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy.

In the following three chapters, I offer a discussion of each theme in more detail.

## **Chapter 5. Finding 1: Compassion for Oneself – Being True to Oneself**

A sense of hopefulness was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Where does this come from? Pondering this question moved my thinking forward. It has become clear to me that a sense of hopefulness comes from the participants' faith in their potential of Buddhahood. It is expressed in various ways throughout the interviews. This chapter covers my first theme: Compassion for oneself. Three aspects will be discussed: Building a nurturing relationship with oneself, speaking one's truths and active self-compassion – courage to develop oneself. I will also explore what it means to be true to oneself in relation to these three aspects.

A note: Pseudonyms are used for the names of the research participants and any client work.

### **5.1. Building a nurturing relationship with oneself**

All participants spoke of actively building a nurturing relationship with themselves. Their emphasis was on the practice of compassion for oneself and also helping their clients to do the same. In psychotherapy the therapist's attunement and empathic understanding is one of the important elements for healing (Kohut, 1971; Rogers, 1961/2004). By empathy here I mean all expressions of self-experience are respected without judgement. This unconditional presence with all of our experiences opens the gateway to our emotional truths. The client will learn to be empathic with themselves through experiencing empathy from the therapist. The participants actively practiced developing empathy for themselves. In the following sections, I discuss how they achieve this.

#### **5.1.1. Creating an inner space to hold one's feelings with empathy**

The participants describe the first step towards building a nurturing relationship with themselves as creating an inner space to hold their feelings with empathy. Vanessa articulates that it is like "being with" her feelings. She uses chanting as a kind of "emotional holding":

*We are encouraged to chant just as we are with whatever feeling we have in front of the Gohonzon (the object of worship). I think that's almost like when we chant in front of the Gohonzon that way, I kind of see that very similar to see a really good psychotherapist. It's consistent, the Gohonzon is always there, always open. That's very powerful.*

For Vanessa daily chanting helps her create an inner space to hold her feelings gently and non-judgementally. A sense of safety is nurtured through her unconditional acceptance of her vulnerabilities as if "see[ing] a good psychotherapist." The creation of an inner space of non-judgement makes her feel safe. A sense of safety and reassurance is the first step

towards dealing with painful emotions (Herman, 1992; Levine, 2005). She creates an inner space where she can be true to herself through her relationship with the Gohonzon.

"It's consistent, the Gohonzon is always there, always open" is suggestive of characteristics of a secure attachment. Vanessa's relationship with the Gohonzon can be seen as a surrogate secure attachment. For Vanessa, the Gohonzon is seen as an unconditional presence that she can always turn to and rely on as if she is securely attached. Although the Gohonzon is not a person, it helps provide a secure base to hold our emotions so that nurturance can be developed.

Nichiren writes "What is called faith is nothing unusual. Faith means putting one's trust in the Lotus Sutra [i.e., the Gohonzon] ... as parents refuse to abandon their children, or as a child refuses to leave its mother" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume I*, 1999, p. 1036). In this quote faith is described more like a visceral desire. "As a child refuses to leave its mother," Nichiren urges his practitioners to chant with the love that we feel for the most cherished person in our lives. Creating an inner empathic space for our feelings is the basis of building a nurturing relationship with ourselves.

### **5.1.2. Self-awareness of the sensible "adult" and innocent "child" within us**

This inner space cultivates a self-reflective capacity to explore our emotions more fully. However, it is difficult to recognise all of our emotional truths when they are conflicting. Kaz and Mia help their clients in Japan raise their awareness of the inner battles between their conflicting parts: the "adult self" and the "child self." This is the second step of building a nurturing relationship with oneself. This is the language that the participants used, and is not based on Transactional Analysis. The use of one's "adult" and "child" parts is relevant particularly to Japanese culture. In group-oriented Japanese culture, superficial politeness or the culturally-valued behaviour sometimes has to be communicated contrary to one's true feelings. Maintaining harmony with others is a very strong cultural value in Japanese culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Similarly, a sensible "adult self," who is preoccupied with what people think of them and is concerned with moral issues and social values, tends to suppress the innocent "child" within them. Mia likens an "adult self" to a judgemental "cold-hearted teacher." She describes how the "adult self" suppresses the "inner child" as follows:

*If you are struggling, it is only normal that you feel vulnerable. For example, when someone slaps you, you feel pain. You don't need to process your feeling, for example, "I am supposed to feel pain right now because I've been slapped." A feeling of pain spontaneously arises as you are slapped... Everyone feels this way. This is what it means to be true to yourself. Our inner child is always true to ourselves. As an adult, however, when we are slapped, our reaction is not to show our emotions. The adult self within us will go "You must suck it up," "You are not hurting!" As a result, the adult self suppresses the inner child. Inner child Seiko-*

*chan*<sup>2</sup> will feel intimidated and anxious. Seiko-chan will feel not understood and lonely. This state of insecurity has continued for a long time within the patients...

Mia describes contrasting reactions to pain between adult and child selves within us. The inner child is spontaneous and straightforward whereas the adult self is judgemental and harsh. When Mia speaks of “be[ing] true to yourself,” she means being true to what spontaneously arises from within.

The above quote suggests that we tend to be identified with only one part of an internal conflict (Stevens, 1971/2007). We often listen to the judgemental voice of the adult self, and try not to attend to the voice of the inner child who is hurting and needs to be reassured. Self-awareness of the internal battle helps us recognise both parts.

When we have this inner battle, there is incongruence between what we feel and what we allow ourselves to express. As Mia describes, we are conditioned to try to hold our spontaneous feelings back. Consequently we move away from the very experience that hurts us. This is what Rogers (1959) describes as a state of incongruence between self and experience. He regards incongruence as the threat of the self.

Self-judgement by our adult self creates a division within us; we can accept parts of us who are capable and strong, but we despise other parts of us who are incapable and weak. In Nichiren Buddhism this impulse of dividing good and bad parts of the self is identified as “fundamental darkness” (Ikeda et al., 2001). A self-awareness of the adult and child parts within us creates a reflective space (Holmes, 2001). This non-judgemental awareness with our present experience leads to self-acceptance.

### **5.1.3. The recognition of one’s suffering and the creation of a new caring voice**

Self-awareness of a part of us that is hurting is a prerequisite for empathy. Leon talks of a process of creating a caring voice by recognising his suffering. He shares the following quote, which led him to search for a practice of self-compassion:

If I could have compassion (loving myself)  
for hating myself  
(!),  
I would no longer be hating myself,  
I’d be loving myself  
and nothing about me  
would need to change. (Huber, 2001, p. 115)

<sup>2</sup> In Japanese, “chan” is used when an adult addresses a child. It has a sweet feeling.

This quote initially made no sense to Leon. He struggled with his sense of self-hate, but the author did not tell him how to achieve self-compassion. Leon began chanting to gain a deeper wisdom and compassion for himself. One day he came across a practice of self-compassion introduced by Neff (2011). She has developed a simple practice of cultivating compassion for oneself. This practice helped him “break the whole cycle of self-hate.”

Leon’s practice of self-compassion starts with recognising our suffering in the present moment. He states “In order to have compassion for another person you have to be able to recognise their suffering. Likewise, you can’t have compassion for yourself if you don’t recognise your own suffering.” Leon describes the process of cultivating self-compassion as follows:

*When you feel discouraged, you say to yourself “I’m suffering,” “I’m suffering,” or “this is the moment of my suffering.” And what’s interesting about this process is that inner critic in your head is going to say “Nonsense!” “You deserve this,” “You’ve brought this on yourself,” “You’re not suffering!” You have to keep telling yourself over and over again “I’m suffering,” “I’m really hurting right now” until it clicks. You always know when it happens. You will just feel the shift when you finally recognise it... the second step is to say to yourself “I’m not alone” and the third thing you say to yourself is “I’m here for you, how can I help you to get through this moment of suffering?” You can even use the words like “sweetheart” or “darling” or “honey” just like you say to your child... my experience is that most of the time I realised what I need was help... [This practice of self-compassion] breaks the whole cycle of self-hate. You are creating this new voice of real compassion, not just criticism.*

When Leon tries to contact his suffering, it evokes his inner critic, his feeling of being undeserving. His internal battle is similar to the interaction between “adult self” and “inner child” described by Mia. There is a tension between his self-judgemental voice and the new caring voice. The familiar overpowering inner critic obstructs him from being empathic with himself. The awareness of the inner critic without being reactive to it leads to breaking the cycle of negative self-talk (Segal et al., 2001).

“You *always* know when it happens” and “you will *just* feel the shift” illustrates that the moment of truly recognising suffering is visceral; it is deeply felt inside. McWilliams (2004) writes “To change, we need to appreciate our condition in a way that feels visceral as opposed to cerebral” (p. 38). The true recognition of suffering involves emotional processing as well as the cognitive one.

The last step entails actively comforting ourselves as we would respond to a child who needs loving attention. Leon uses words such as “sweetheart” or “darling” to respond to his inner child. It is interesting to me that both Leon and Mia treat their vulnerable parts as a child. During the interview Mia often referred to me “Seiko-chan.” When she called me “Seiko-chan,” I felt warm and tender as if my inner child was reassured. While Leon uses an empathic enquiry to himself, Mia verbalises empathic understanding and the expression of love for oneself:

*So when you feel hurt, you say to yourself “Seiko-chan, I understand you are really hurting, you are really sad. I’m sorry that I didn’t notice it until now. You have been bearing this hurt by yourself. Don’t worry, it’s OK now. I’m here for you. I will protect you. You are OK as you are. There is nothing wrong with you. Seiko-chan, I love you dearly.”*

Both Leon and Mia are very consciously and actively comforting their vulnerable child parts. The practice of self-compassion is an intentional act to create a mental space like a “maternal reverie.” Bion (1962) describes that it is the role of the caregiver to contain her child’s discomfort and to transform it into more bearable feeling state. A mother’s attunement and responsiveness to a child’s distress is essential to the development of their basic trust, which will become a foundation of their sense of worthiness in later life (Neff, 2011). Nichiren also emphasises cultivating “the warmth of the mother” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume II*, 2006, p. 1030).

#### **5.1.4. Tenacious effort to practice self-compassion in the face of negativity**

As Leon describes his effort to create a new caring voice, the practice of compassion for ourselves requires tenacity. The tension between negative feelings and compassion for ourselves is a constant theme from my participants. When we try to create a new caring voice (the act of choosing compassion), it activates an internal critical voice (fundamental darkness) at the same time. An internal critical voice can also be a catalyst to choose a caring voice. Through an intentional practice fundamental darkness in turn serves to strengthen our compassion.

Mia also emphasises the importance of repeated practice of self-compassion:

*Thoughts or beliefs [about the self] are the most difficult to alter, so we begin with altering “words” to ourselves. As words change, thoughts start changing. What’s really important in this practice is that when you say kind words, you still say it even though you don’t mean it. This is a very important point. You actually build a habit to say kind things to yourself when you don’t feel good about yourself. The power of words is immense.*

In this quote, Mia communicates that we can start the practice of self-compassion where we are. When she says “build[ing] a habit to say kind things to yourself when you don’t feel good about yourself,” she articulates that compassion for ourselves still grows deeper through a repeated practice. An emerging caring voice may initially be a “still small voice” inside us (Symington, 2001, p. 112). However, even a small voice is in fact awakening our innate compassion. The accumulation of this small voice leads to breakthrough.

While the participants promote saying kind words sincerely, they are reassuringly communicating that we do not need to worry even if those phrases seem artificial or contrived. What matters most is our intention to be compassionate with ourselves. Intention comes first and then feelings will follow (Brach, 2013; Germer, 2009).

### 5.1.5. Our innermost self-experience deserves all our love

Rilke (1986) writes “What is happening in your innermost self is worthy of your entire love” (p. 30). This quote struck me that it summarised the heart of the practice of compassion for ourselves – bringing our empathic presence with our emotional truths, irrespective of the contents of them. Kaz and Mia relate that most trauma can be healed when people are able to empathise with the feelings of the inner child that has been suppressed, denied, ignored or abused. Empathy has a curative power in itself (Strozier, 2001).

Kaz and Mia relate that the qualities of inner child such as spontaneity and authenticity are similar to those of Buddha. Nichiren describes a Buddha’s life as being “unmade” (Yatomi, 2006, p. 30); it is something that “was not worked for, that was not improved upon, but that exists just as it always has” (*The record of the orally transmitted teachings*, 2004, p. 141). Simply put, we are originally endowed with Buddhahood and we do not need to improve ourselves for attaining enlightenment. Kaz and Mia say that our inner child in fact signifies a Buddha within us.

Is my inner child a Buddha? Really?

Their revelation opened my eyes. The following quote from Jung (1954) also caused me to think further:

In every adult there lurks a child – an eternal child, something that is becoming, is never completed, and calls for unceasing care, attention and education. That is the part of the human personality which wants to develop and become whole. (pp. 169-170)

I began to understand that the inner child represents a part of us that has always been pure and authentic; it also represents our true self that needs to be nurtured. I came to realise that the inner child was our truest self, the most precious part within us. It suddenly made sense to me that building a nurturing relationship with our inner child is in itself nurturing our Buddhahood, our innate worthiness.

In Nichiren Buddhism our lives are regarded as an object of “fundamental respect.” I have come to a deeper understanding of what this means; every part of us, regardless of what they are, deserves the unconditional respect. There is a tendency to see our bad parts, fundamental darkness, as opposed to our goodness, Buddhahood. We tend to eliminate our bad parts. It has dawned on me that bringing an empathic presence with our vulnerability is an act of utmost respect for ourselves. Holding our deepest fears and insecurities with compassion is equivalent to treasuring ourselves as a Buddha. What it really means to attain enlightenment is to be all of who we are. Our vulnerability is not an obstacle against compassion. Rather it can be the birthplace of compassion for ourselves. This was a light bulb moment to me.

## 5.2. Speaking one's truths

In order to be all of who we are, we need to be true to our emotional truths. In order to stay true to ourselves in relationship with others, we need to be able to speak our truths. This is the second aspect of compassion for ourselves. In this section, I discuss a process of finding our voice and how our sense of self emerges through the act of speaking our truths.

### 5.2.1. "Throwing a tantrum" – Finding your voice

Kaz and Mia speak of the importance of finding our voice. Mia again uses the image of the "inner child." She refers to a "toddler at age three," who expresses a full range of emotions without hesitation. Using this image, Mia helps her clients develop their "unbound" expressiveness – "throwing a tantrum."

Mia describes what it means to "throw a tantrum":

*We have a "cold-hearted teacher" inside us. There are also people who function as a "cold-hearted teacher" outside us. They are people who try to impose their demands, ridicule and bully you... It is important to discern such external functions that suppress you... Those who suffer from mental illness have a tendency to blame themselves when they are treated badly. When you turn against yourself it disempowers you... The next step after bringing empathy to yourself is to throw a tantrum. (Seiko asking Mia, "Tantrum? What do you mean by that?") (Mia demonstrating a "tantrum" by thrashing her arms and legs and saying out loud) "Noooooooooooo!" "No! I don't like this! It's OK to say no!" You validate a feeling of dislike and aversion to someone, and then express your feeling of dislike. You find your voice. This is not actually saying something to those bad people but about finding your voice. It's self-expressive. This is very important.*

Mia highlights the importance of recognising workings of a "cold-hearted teacher" outside ourselves, and expressing our feeling of dislike as if we "throw a tantrum." This uninhibited self-expressiveness like a three-year-old toddler empowers ourselves. Our voice is no longer suppressed. We give ourselves permission to have a feeling of dislike towards a hurtful aspect of the person, who plays a cold-hearted teacher. "Throwing a tantrum" is analogous to finding our voice.

Fonagy (2001) explains that maltreatment in childhood can result in impairing a child's capacity to respect his subjective experience. When a child's spontaneous reactions are met with abuse, mis-attunement or lack of responsiveness, they begin to experience their spontaneous expression as "bad," which impacts on their development of self-trust (Johnson, 1994). When Mia says "you turn against yourself," she means that a child learns to blame themselves for their feelings because self-blame is less terrifying than feeling unloved.

The suppression of self-expression takes deep roots in "pathological accommodation" (Brandchaft, 1993). This is a compulsive tendency to conform to values projected by others. We sometimes compromise our needs for being liked. However when we become

accustomed to complying with environmental demands, we can lose ourselves. Winnicott (1965) describes this as a “false self.” When Mia says “when you turn against yourself it disempowers you,” she is explaining that a “false self” leads to reducing a sense of self. When we struggle to feel a sense of being ourselves, we will lose aliveness.

Pathological accommodation is difficult to transform because it often stems from an urge to preserve the bond with our caregivers (Brandchaft, 1993). Ogden (1982) writes that if a child fails to comply, he would “cease to exist for the mother” (p. 16). This existential threat to the child is enormous. The need to maintain attachment bonds causes the child to behave in a way that is congruent with their caregiver’s values and behaviours. The bond with our caregivers is the most fundamental need for survival as a human being (Bowlby, 2005; Orange, 2011a).

### **5.2.2. Dignity awakening through speaking one’s truths**

A process of finding our voice cultivates a real sense of self. Mia talks of how the act of speaking our truths develops a sense of self and aliveness:

*President Toda<sup>3</sup> was furious at the military government, which caused his mentor, Makiguchi’s death. He said “I will smite the evil!” ...The attitude of “smiting evil” is correct psychotherapeutically. When people suppress their true feelings and blame themselves for their experience of unjust treatment, it is the same as supporting negative workings in those people... When we can find our voice, for example, “I will not forgive this!” “This is unreasonable!” “I really don’t like these people!” our dignity will begin to awaken for the first time... If we can do this, a fundamental life energy or aliveness begins to emerge from within.*

Mia explains that the anger we feel towards someone who hurts us is “correct psychotherapeutically.” By allowing ourselves to express our true feelings, a real sense of self begins to emerge. When she says “This is unreasonable!” “I really don’t like these people!” she is communicating that this kind of “unbound” self-expressiveness of anger is the source of aliveness and cultivates our dignity to stand our own ground.

At the same time by speaking our truths, we stand up to the negative inner workings of others which can be hurtful. Nichiren writes “Anger can be either a good or a bad thing” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume II*, 2006, p. 931). When anger is directed at “the abuse of human dignity and unjustified pain, it is a force for good; contributing to the happiness of the self and others” (Díez-Hochleitner & Ikeda, 2008, p. 111).

Mia describes that when we speak our truths, we feel real and alive. Kalsched (2013) draws on Symington’s idea that the “inner divine soul-child” is life-giving and it “only comes into being when we choose it” (p. 198). This caught my attention because these authors

<sup>3</sup> Toda (1900–1958) was the second President of Soka Gakkai. He and Makiguchi (1871–1944) opposed the military government during World War II, which caused them to be imprisoned in 1943. Makiguchi died of malnutrition in prison, while Toda was released alive in 1945.

also saw a “divine” quality in the characteristics of the inner child. Each action of letting out the voice of our inner child awakens our dignity. This conscious choice of contacting our inner child is a part of the transformation process.

This shift towards choosing to speak our truths accompanies “the tenacity of the resistance to change” (Brandchaft, 2001, p. 284). Therefore Orange (2011b) writes that a choice of speaking our truths requires “courage.” This is the courage to be true to our self-experience. It is also the “courage to fight free from the dictates of Antiquity” (Orange, 2011b, p. 224). Courage here can be seen as compassion for ourselves. This resonates with the Nichiren Buddhist view of compassion: “We can substitute courage for compassion. The courage to speak the truth is equivalent to compassion” (Ikeda, 2013).

The act of choosing courage over fear is actually planting a seed of dignity in the face of oppression. This is a process similar to creating a new caring voice in tension with inner critical voice. Trusting the voice of the true self, we choose to live our own lives instead of a life that continues an unhealthy adaptation to the oppressing environment by remaining silent. A caring voice is also the voice of the true self, dignity and justice.

With the courage to let our voice out, we are then able to nurture self-trust and a real sense of self. Trust is the foundation of our capacity to travel our own path. With the ability to remain true to ourselves in relationship, it is possible to form an intimate relationship with others “without placing ourselves at risk of surrendering the determination of who he is to that other” (Brandchaft, 1993, p. 226). The practice of speaking our truths encourages “unbound” self-expressiveness and helps us stand our ground of worthiness.

### **5.3. Active self-compassion – Courage to develop oneself**

Two aspects of compassion for oneself have been explored so far: “Building a nurturing relationship with oneself” and “speaking one’s truths.” In this section, another aspect of compassion for oneself, the courage to develop oneself, will be discussed. Jane calls this “*active self-compassion*”:

*In terms of self-compassion, I think that what some people don't recognise is that compassion has two faces. Compassion is often taught by people who very much like the idea of “mother compassion”... be kind to yourself... self-compassion has somehow become associated with the passive side, not action. But there is also active side... active compassion for oneself, actively thinking to develop oneself, to develop one's full potential.*

Jane differentiates active self-compassion from maternal self-compassion. I was interested in the idea of “*active*” self-compassion. The idea of developing oneself was familiar to me, but it never occurred to me that it could be a compassionate act. I wondered how Jane associated “developing herself” with compassion for herself. I came to understand that when Jane first started practicing Nichiren Buddhism, she was suffering from depression.

She reports that she was emotionally so “depleted” that she did not have the energy to cope with the responsibilities in life. For Jane developing the ability to take responsibility for her life and the world around her is inseparable with compassion for herself.

Active self-compassion can be seen as the act of being true to our *innate potential*. By contrast the first two aspects of self-compassion are about being true to our *emotional truths*. Developing ourselves can be thought of as a compassionate act because it is based on self-trust in our untapped potential. The participants bring both aspects of compassion to light. I believe this stems from their view of life; they see themselves as a person who possesses innate potential. Active self-compassion is associated with the courage to realise our full potential.

### **5.3.1. Daring – Courage to challenge oneself to the limit**

Jane and Vanessa speak of their experiences of building their characters based on their Buddhist practice. In the following paragraph, Jane talks about a big challenge for her:

*I was doing that [a leadership role in SGI for the first time] and studying for my Doctorate and I was working pretty much full-time. It was a formative experience... It was a tremendous thing. It has given me the confidence to go out and challenge things which would not have even occurred to me [to try] before. There has been this sort of training that comes from membership in the organisation and facing the challenges to the self that membership of the SGI organisation presents.*

This section articulates Jane’s increased sense of self-confidence to challenge herself to her limits. Confidence develops through having the courage to do things that she previously did not think she could do.

Vanessa also relates that she managed to complete the demanding psychology course because of her previous training in SGI:

*I have so much gratitude for the foundation that I had been able to build [through the training] within SGI. When I felt like things were falling apart, ... all my [Buddhist] training, all my experience in SGI really helped me through that time... the reason why I didn't give up was because I have learned not to give up in SGI... I have always had self-doubt but with SGI and practicing Buddhism, I have learned to trust myself.*

Vanessa’s increased self-trust led to her self-confidence in managing the challenge she faced. Dockett (2003) writes “The perception that one has control of his or her life is associated with successful adjustment, while the perception that external forces are in control is associated with negative outlooks and outcomes” (p. 178). Vanessa’s sense of self-mastery through the Buddhist training induces a sense of hopefulness. It enables her to dare to press forward in times of challenge.

I believe that the participants’ faith in their potential grows deeper through the experiences of challenging themselves. Faith means the “courage to keep believing in the power of your

own life” (Ikeda, 2016). Their faith manifests as being courageous to challenge themselves to the limit.

### **5.3.2. Tenacity – Courage to keep moving forward despite obstacles**

Tenacity is a theme that keeps appearing in the participants’ experiences. The practice of compassion for oneself is possible with tenacity. As discussed earlier, the effort to seek compassion and courage activates their negative impulses such as their inner critic, anxiety and resistance to change. The practice of self-compassion involves a spiritual struggle to engage with inner tension.

In Nichiren Buddhism perseverance is seen as one of the qualities of Buddhahood (Ikeda, Saito, Endo, & Suda, 2000b). Tenacity is an expression of courage to keep moving forward despite obstacles. I think tenacity is a proof of faith. Faith gives people courage to stay committed and true to their highest potential. I will discuss tenacity in detail in chapter seven.

### **5.3.3. Decision – Courage to assume one’s innate worthiness**

The participants communicate a strong sense of courage to assume their innate worthiness. This courage feels like a decision when we are not confident of ourselves.

Kaz talks of the importance of “deciding” that we are always already worthy.

*President Ikeda often quotes Shakyamuni’s words “Our lives unfold according to what we believe about our lives.” What this means is that if you think you need to work hard because you assume you are not worthy enough as you are, no matter how much effort you make to improve yourself, you will end up struggling even more, for you are trying to resolve a sense of inadequacy with more effort... Your life still unfolds according to your deepest belief that you are not worthy as you are... Having faith means you change your fundamental assumption from that you are not worthy to that you are always already worthy... Simply put, you decide you are worthy as you are. This decision requires courage... Faith means to decide.*

Our deepest belief about how we see ourselves and what we expect from others is called “pathogenic belief” in psychology (Weiss, 1997). All too often we tend to misinterpret situations because of our assumptions and beliefs. When Kaz says “our lives unfold according to what we believe about our lives” he is communicating that our minds unconsciously try to gather evidence to support our deepest beliefs and therefore what unfolds in life only justifies our beliefs.

What he means by “you will end up struggling even more” is that no matter how hard we work to become happy, if our motive arises from a place of unworthiness, we only reinforce the pain of our unworthiness. We remain trapped in our deepest belief that we are never worthy *unless* we work hard. Our deep-seated sense of falling short drives us to endless painful efforts of self-improvement.

When Kaz states “you decide you are always already worthy as you are,” he is saying that this bold decision creates the opening into cultivating our sense of innate worthiness. Korb (2015) writes that decision-making has the power to orient ourselves towards where we want to go rather than being pulled towards our negative impulses. My feeling is that by deciding that we are worthy, we deliberately orient ourselves towards our innate worthiness. In the context of Nichiren Buddhism, “deciding” often expresses our wholehearted commitment, which parallels putting faith into action. I believe that our courage to assume our innate worthiness means moving away from an identification of a small and anxious self to an identification with a courageous self.

#### **5.4. Chapter summary**

This chapter has covered the three facets of compassion for oneself: Building a nurturing relationship with oneself, speaking one’s truths and active self-compassion. Building a nurturing relationship with ourselves means cultivating our empathy and acceptance to our vulnerabilities. Being true to our innermost emotional truths is an act of utmost respect for ourselves. By speaking our truths, our real sense of self begins to emerge. This is the source of aliveness. Compassion has an active side as well. Courage to develop ourselves based on faith in ourselves is identified as active self-compassion. The participants’ experiences of self-compassion involve both empathy and courage.

The practice of self-compassion accompanies a spiritual struggle between compassion and fear. According to my participants, the emergence of compassion is dependent on bringing the most vulnerable aspects into our awareness. Our deepest fears and insecurities can be the birthplace of compassion for ourselves. Compassion comes into being and grows stronger with practice. What makes the emergence of compassion possible is faith, that is, a wholehearted commitment to all of who we are including our potential.

## Chapter 6. Finding 2: A Determined Effort to Help Others

This chapter discusses the second theme, a “determined effort to help others.” The participants’ faith in their potential is not only the foundation of the practice of self-compassion, but also a strong desire to help others realise their potential. Compassion for oneself and compassion for others are inseparable. The participants also demonstrate their awareness of the relationship between the socio-cultural values and beliefs and people’s emotional struggles.

### 6.1. Compassion for others

#### 6.1.1. Compassion for oneself as the foundation of compassion for others

The participants’ practice of compassion for oneself goes hand in hand with their compassion for others. They spoke of the importance of their personal growth in order to help others. As an example, “my growth affects my clients’ growth” and “you cannot really help other people unless you actively engage in your own human revolution (inner transformation).” These comments express a common theme; compassion for oneself is a foundation of compassion for others. Kaz talks of the inseparability in compassion for oneself and others.

*Compassion (for oneself) means to envelope ourselves with a big heart when we are most disheartened and miserable... when we cherish our worst parts with compassion, our soul becomes whole. Those who can embrace their worst parts will be able to be with someone in despair as if his pain is their pain. When you are down and see yourself with contempt, you will also denigrate other people who are down. The way we see ourselves is the way we see others. Therefore, those who can accept themselves are able to respect others.*

Kaz emphasises that “the way we see ourselves is the way we see others.” He explains that our compassion for the vulnerable parts of us determines the degree of compassion for others. When we can accept those parts, we can see the struggling of others in the same empathic way; on the other hand, if we see our vulnerability “with contempt,” we will see others’ vulnerability in the same way. Jung (1989) writes “Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves” (p. 247). Our feelings of judgement towards others often mirror aspects of ourselves that we dislike.

One way of understanding this phenomenon is projection (Ogden, 1979). This is an unconscious process of projecting unacceptable parts of the self onto others. It is a form of defence to “create a sense of psychological distance from unwanted (often frightening) aspects of the self” (p. 362). Disowned parts of the self are often the cause of suffering, for when we reject parts of ourselves it creates psychological resistance against ourselves (Brach, 2013).

When Kaz says “those who can accept themselves are able to respect others,” he explains that we can accept others to the exact degree that we accept ourselves. We can only help others as much as we are able to help ourselves. Komiya (2007) states that how much a therapist can be with and contain client’s intense emotions is dependent on the therapist’s capacity to feel her own emotions without being afraid or overwhelmed; if the therapist is overwhelmed by her emotions and sees her clients expressing intense feelings, the therapist may unconsciously try to hinder their feelings from being expressed. The participants’ ability to feel their vulnerability serves to increase their empathy for others. Compassion for ourselves is the foundation of compassion for others.

The participants’ compassion for others is expressed as their “readiness” to engage with others’ feelings that are difficult to be felt and contained. In next sections, I discuss how their compassion for others is expressed in their effort to help others.

### **6.1.2. Seeking to engage with “dark forces” in others**

Vanessa relates that for her to be a Buddhist means to engage with “dark forces<sup>4</sup>” in her life and in society. What she refers to “dark forces” is fundamental darkness in the Buddhist context which prevents us from recognising our inherent positive qualities, Buddhahood. In my opinion, it can be expressed as negative impulses, vulnerability, habitual patterns of beliefs, speech, and behaviour, or repressed feelings.

*I think the mindfulness movement is very much about being in the present moment and connecting with our present experiences. I think we do have that aspect in our practice of Nichiren Buddhism but because Nichiren Buddhism has tradition of social change... Nichiren Buddhism also says that there is a lot of suffering in the world... we can't just sit back and do nothing about that. We need to actively engage with dark forces in ourselves and the society, we need to actively work to overcome those tendencies... Nichiren Buddhism is active practice.*

When Vanessa says “dark forces in society” she is communicating socio-cultural tendencies that cause people to suffer. As an example, in the interview she relates her experience of speaking up about the issues at her work place. A determined effort to help others as exemplified by Vanessa is a common theme that appears in the participants’ experiences. Their committed engagement with others is accompanied by their spiritual struggle to engage with inner and outer negative tendencies.

### **6.1.3. Spiritual struggle between faith and fundamental darkness**

Jane speaks of her spiritual struggle as a result of seeking to help others. She notes an inner conflict between her faith in her clients’ potential and the challenging reality:

<sup>4</sup> Both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy intrapsychically locates “dark forces.” How Nichiren Buddhism and traditional psychotherapy conceptualise the etiology of psychological distress is different. While Nichiren Buddhism sees it in ignorance of the existence of Buddhahood (Ikeda, 2005), traditional psychotherapy understands it in a relational way – how the psyche is impacted by the environment (Johnson, 1994).

*I can connect with the vision [of Buddhist humanism] ... of a world in which a basic assumption of society is that life is infinitely worthy of respect, that human beings have the ultimate potential and because of that we can't afford to leave anyone behind when we make change... that's huge... I have to believe that my clients have the capacity for change. Sometimes it's very difficult to believe that when they've spent many years sitting in their bedroom playing computer games or just staring at the wall, for example. You have to have a fundamental faith in the fact that there is something there, basically it is their Buddhahood.*

Jane's faith in the potential of her clients leads to challenging her to "leave anyone behind" no matter how difficult it is to help them. She also acknowledges that there are people whose life energy is at a low ebb. When she says "sometimes it's very difficult to believe..." this describes Jane's questioning whether she can really help her clients. I see this as her fundamental darkness doubting her clients' potential.

The practice of compassion for others challenges us to face our own disbelief. When Jane says "have to believe" and "have to have a fundamental faith," she is communicating her conscious effort to believe in her clients' potential despite how they may present themselves at that moment. Making a conscious effort to seek faith is a part of a spiritual struggle demonstrated by the participants.

There is a tendency to treat fundamental darkness and Buddhahood or faith as being opposite and separate to each other. From the Nichiren Buddhist perspective, however, they are not viewed as being opposite but complementary (Ikeda et al., 2001). Jane's experience suggests that both fundamental darkness (e.g. hesitation or doubt here) and Buddhahood (faith) manifest in relation to each other. For example, Jane's sense of doubt emerges in response to her effort, based on her faith to unleash a person's potential. Her doubt in turn allows her to seek faith more actively. Her fundamental darkness is in fact what makes the emergence of her Buddhahood possible.

In Nichiren Buddhism it is said that "strong faith in the Lotus Sutra [i.e. Buddhahood] is called the world of Buddhahood" (Ikeda, Saito, Endo, & Suda, 2000a, p. 180). This translates to the concept that Buddhahood or awareness of innate potential is derived from the act of faith in the potential of life. For us, this can mean that when we are doubting someone's potential, we are actually denying our own capacity to trust the existence of Buddhahood within us and others. When we fail to make that leap for others, we stop ourselves short as well.

The idea that we all inherently possess Buddhahood or a higher potential is easy to grasp. What is difficult is putting it into action. When it comes to particular people in our lives, we may find ourselves thinking "I can believe in this person's Buddhahood, but it is hard to believe in that person's Buddhahood." The ultimate challenge is, without faltering, to believe in the highest potential of all people, at all times.

There is a similar process of engaging with tension in relation to others. Psychological phenomena between two people are co-created (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996). When engaging with someone who is depressed or someone who is experiencing intense emotions, Jane notes a “very strong pull” towards the client’s emotional state. The interaction between two people can be seen as an “energetic transaction” between each other.

Jane talks of some very challenging work with her client, Tim, who lost his son to suicide. He was very angry and was self-harming. Tim believed that suicide was the only solution to end his suffering. However he was so attached to his wife and daughter that he could not leave them behind. His logical solution was to take them with him. The psychiatrist referred him to the Crisis Unit, but he did not go. He did agreed to have a conversation with Jane:

*I had no advance idea how to respond to my client, I just connected with my wise place and we spoke. In two years we have moved from him wanting to kill himself and his wife and daughter to a situation where... he has now allowed himself the possibility that staying alive is something he can do... I believe that it is only possible for me to face that and to work in that way because of my decades of Buddhist practice... I suppose I'm not afraid [of talking about death], I will explore that [ideas of death and afterlife] with him... and we can go together on an adventure to find what his belief really is. Buddhism is the rope which attaches me to the mountains we traverse. It can be a very precarious piece of rock, and my connection with him is secure because of my connection with my mentor and my practice... I'm not sure he would have been alive, two years on, if we hadn't been having that honest conversation... Because I have a passionate feeling for life, I believe I influence people. That passion comes from my faith.*

When Jane says “I had no advance idea” and “I just connected with my wise place,” it gives a sense that she could rely only on her intuitive wisdom based on her Buddhist practice. Jane describes her work with Tim as “a very precarious piece of rock.” This implies his unstable and insecure emotional state, which has an effect on her. However the “safety rope” or support of Buddhism gives Jane a sense of strength and security.

I surmise that Jane has developed perseverance through her “decades of Buddhist practice.” This allows her to engage with stress and tension of working with Tim. When she says a “passionate feeling for life...comes from my faith,” she describes this as a source of energy for her to proceed. Buechler (1995) suggests that a therapist’s life orientation, or whole relationship to life, can inspire hope in clients. Jane relates that her “passionate feeling for life” coming from her faith makes a positive influence on Tim. Faith in the potential of life is what moves Jane towards positive outcomes.

#### **6.1.4. Unleashing the innate positive qualities that are inherent in others**

This is another example of the interaction between one of my participants and his client. Leon talks about his experience with his Medical School student client, David, who performed badly in a practice exam. He was in a state of panic. Leon shared with David that he had also failed the psychology practice exam and how much he hated himself for it

at that time. This reassured him. David was a Mormon, but Leon said that he wanted to share something from Buddhism. David was seeking anything that could help him.

*In the Buddhist teachings, there is a saying, “a sword is useless in the hands of a coward” ...and I said “To overcome this problem, you must be strong. It is ‘a demon armed with an iron staff.’”... he brightened up! He really liked that. I said “This is going to be your attitude towards this exam. You are going to be a demon armed with an iron staff. Don’t be intimidated. Go in there courageously and fight against this exam.”*

Leon’s comment “This is going to be your attitude towards this exam” expresses his firm intention to inspire David’s courage that is inherent in him but clouded by his fear of failure. With Leon’s encouragement, David cheered up. Leon’s intervention was possible because he had faith that David could meet the challenge. Leon’s confidence served as a cause to activate David’s courage.

McWilliams (2004) writes about the role of the therapist’s faith in psychotherapy. She describes it as a “gut-level confidence in a process” (p. 42). McWilliams sees the importance of faith in client’s growth because a therapeutic process is sometimes beyond their comprehension. Therefore “to move into areas that are emotionally new, a client must proceed on a kind of borrowed faith” (p. 43). David was able to have faith in himself through faith that Leon had in him.

The law of cause and effect is central to Buddhism; everything arises as a result of cause. This is an ordinary concept of cause and effect, which we are familiar with. A Nichiren Buddhist perspective of causality emphasises the importance of “context.” The same cause can give rise to different effects “depending on the context of the relations that are formed” (Ikeda, 2017, para. 18). For example when David failed the exam (cause), he was disheartened (effect). Then he felt empowered (alternative effect) thanks to Leon’s encouragement (relation). Therefore the context (relation) is important as it “can powerfully shape the interplay between cause and effect” (para. 18).

Buddhahood that is inherent in us has the potential to manifest in each moment. Jane’s passionate feeling for life towards Tim and Leon’s faith in David served as a cause for spiritual resonance, unleashing the innate positive qualities in another person. Anderson (2000) offers an analogy for this. He reflects that when a cello string is played on one side of the room, the same string of a cello on the opposite side of the room will begin to generate a sound in resonance with the original string. “The resonance communicates and connects directly and immediately without intermediaries” (Anderson, 2000, p. 33). In the same way, a “gut-level confidence” demonstrated by Jane and Leon facilitated greater confidence and growth in their clients (Symington, 2001).

## **6.2. Awareness of socio-cultural phenomena underlying individual problems**

Bordo (1997) states that psychopathology is the crystallisation of culture. My participants see people's intrapsychic phenomena as revealing of wider phenomena in society. The participants' determined effort to help others is expressed as their awareness of how a socio-cultural system plays a part in shaping individuals' inner struggles.

### **6.2.1. Cultural constraints on being true to oneself**

Kaz describes a particular social phenomenon in Japan that he recognised; some people work hard, have a strong sense of responsibility and compassion for others, and yet somehow struggle with life. On the other hand, those who seem to be self-involved succeed in life. Kaz realised what was underneath this phenomenon:

*Some people strive to help others and make positive social changes. But when they do "good" things, if they sacrifice themselves or suppress their true feelings to achieve it, they are in essence denigrating themselves. They will not feel any joy or personal growth out of their good deed... Some people think "Where there is unseen virtue, there will be a visible reward. My effort will be rewarded if I put up with this hassle and I continue doing these good things for others." In reality things continue to get worse... This kind of effort cannot be seen as "unseen virtue" because you are suppressing your true self, who is actually a Buddha. In contrast, if you do the same thing out of joy, this will become a source of greater happiness. You will feel vitality because you treasure yourself. It is important what sort of action you take, but the intent behind your action is more important. Is it from joy or self-sacrifice?*

Kaz explains that if our action is congruent with our intent, the action brings joy; on the other hand, if we suppress our true feelings for doing good, the action leads to stress. Kaz points out incongruence between our intent and action. Incongruence causes emotional conflict and anxiety (Rogers, 1959).

One of the factors that hinders Japanese people from being true to themselves could be cultural constraints; their true intent is sometimes in conflict with their consideration for others. A social phenomenon that Kaz realised is that people struggle with life when they suppress their true feelings even though they do good things for others, and that it is because suppressing themselves is the same as disrespecting themselves. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the act of being true to our emotional truths is the act of utmost respect for ourselves. What Kaz means by doing things "out of joy" is taking actions that are congruent with our emotional truths.

In Japanese culture people are interdependent and a person's sense of self is inseparable from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Doing what brings harmony to everyone is an important behavioural code. Japanese people tend to adjust themselves in order to meet others' needs and expectations. Consequently they often lose themselves for others. I surmise that it is difficult for Japanese people to value what is important for them first.

When Kaz says that some people may think “my effort will be rewarded if I put up with this hassle and I continue doing good things for others,” he is addressing Japanese people’s tendency to suppress or devalue their voice so as to please others. Winnicott (1965) states that “compliance with environmental demands creates a false self” (p. 147). A suppression of our voice leads to a “false self.” A false self does not have a sense of being real or being oneself. When our action is incongruent with our emotional truths, we suffer. A challenge is that it is difficult to speak our truths if they go against our cultural values.

### **6.2.2. The culture of “needing to do more” and inability to set boundaries**

Vanessa talks of a conflict between a culture of “needing to do more” in SGI and the tendency of young women who become overwhelmed by taking on too much because they struggle to say “no.”

*I think as a SGI leader now I’m very aware of this tendency. I’m really saying to my young women, “It’s OK to say no.” I’m really encouraging them to think about their own life, where they want to, or where they need to put their energy in their lives... sometimes this is a thing about faith and practice like “Oh just take on more, we have unlimited potential.” Yes I do believe we have unlimited potential, but I sometimes feel [too much emphasis on] unlimited potential can be dangerous.*

This part highlights the interplay between the emphasis on “doing more” and young women’s difficulty in setting boundaries. I think Vanessa’s concern is that the emphasis on doing more can be counterproductive for those who need to learn to set boundaries. I wonder if those young women hesitate to say “no” because they not only struggle to say not but also think “doing more” is a good thing. The need to do more can be seen as functioning of harsh demanding superego that disguises as spiritual aspiration to be a “good” person, or desire to be liked by others.

The ability to set boundaries is considered important in psychotherapy, for our sense of self is developed by “strengthening and ensuring the boundaries of the self” (St. Clair, 2000, p. 143). This clear sense of self leads to “a positive liking for himself” (Rogers, 1961/2004, p. 67). Setting boundaries requires the ability to know our inner truths. As I discussed in the previous chapter, to know what is true and important for us in the present moment is the starting point of the practice of self-compassion. Through my both personal and clinical experiences, I think that we can stay true to ourselves in a relationship only when we are able to speak our truths and make our boundaries. Unless we develop this ability, we can always be under threat of being pushed or losing ourselves for others.

### **6.2.3. The culture of “never enough”**

Leon speaks of the other side of the culture of “needing to do more” – the culture of “never enough.” He relates his experience at a local Buddhist meeting, where he shared a concept called “living BIG” from a book. Leon explains that “B” stands for boundaries, “I” stands for the integrity to speak one’s truths and “G” stands for the generosity to “have a big heart to

assume that everybody is doing the best they can.” One of the leaders in the meeting responded as follows:

*He had a puzzled look on his face and he said “You know for so many years I always assumed that people were not doing their best they could. I always thought people could really be doing more, and that’s how I treated them, why aren’t you doing more?” I thought, wow this is one of the problems in SGI, you know, the feelings that we are not doing enough and other people should be doing more... When we assume everybody is doing the best they can, then that’s President Ikeda’s spirit. He is so appreciative.*

Leon highlights a culture of “never enough.” Although in this case it is one particular person and I cannot generalise, I do think people can judge others based on how much they do, and there is always pressure to do more.

Both Vanessa and Leon’s examples seem to reflect a “collective sense of unworthiness” in our current cultures. In the study a pervasive tendency of self-criticism and self-aversion is identified in both the West and East. Brown (2012) identifies that “the feeling of scarcity does thrive in shame-prone cultures that are deeply steeped in comparison and fractured by disengagement” (p. 27).

The culture of “unworthiness” arising from the feeling of scarcity drives us to do more so as to feel validated by others. This way of maintaining our sense of self-worth reinforces the endless cycle of pain of unworthiness (Brach, 2003). Nichiren writes “unless one perceives the nature of one’s life (Buddhahood), one’s practice will become an endless, painful austerity” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume I, 1999, p. 3*). What Nichiren means is that when we seek worthiness outside ourselves by achievement and approval from others, we condition our worth; seeking innate worthiness frees ourselves from an “endless, painful austerity.”

Brown (2012) asserts that the counter approach to dealing with scarcity is not about “abundance,” as “getting more” and “scarcity” are two sides of the same coin. Getting more only reinforces a sense of scarcity contrary to the original aim to avoid the pain of inadequacy. A sense of unworthiness drives us to misinterpret every situation as evidence of our unworthiness and it leads to “misguided action designed to rid you of fear and satisfy your need for more, a bottomless hole that can never be filled” (Tolle, 2006, p. 12). What Brown and Tolle highlight here is that no matter how much we try to resolve a sense of inadequacy from a place of unworthiness, we will never feel enough.

The participants’ experiences reflect that it is difficult to discern how our culture influences our sense of self and how we interpret things. Our “collective unworthiness” lies within each one of us *and* it constitutes the greater part of history and culture (Brown, 2012). Brown recognises that there are so many people who are struggling with a sense of unworthiness and inadequacy that is creating a “shame-prone culture” (p. 27).

My sense is that although Nichiren's focus is on liberating people from suffering, the way his followers practice Buddhism seems to be driven by a fear of "never enough." This can be considered as revealing of cultural phenomena in the wider environment.

The participants' compassion for others develops their awareness of the relationship between the individual inner struggles and the socio-cultural contributing factors. I believe that in order to help ourselves and others, it is necessary to look into our cultures in which we live.

### **6.3. Chapter summary**

This chapter has discussed the second theme, "determined effort to help others." With compassion for oneself as the foundation for compassion for others, my participants seek to engage with spiritual struggles arising from dealing with people's emotional difficulties. Their "gut-level confidence" in others inspires the innate goodness in them. Spiritual struggles are characterised by a dynamic interplay between Buddhahood (e.g. faith and innate positive qualities) and fundamental darkness (e.g. doubt and self-criticism). There is a tendency to treat them as opposites, however they are rather complementary. Fundamental darkness can be seen as a catalyst to bring out our Buddhahood.

The participants' compassion for others develops their awareness of socio-cultural phenomena underlying people's sense of unworthiness. The participants' experiences suggest that it is difficult to recognise how our cultures affect our sense of self and behaviours. The practice of compassion for others involves dealing with the social climate of scarcity and unworthiness.

## **Chapter 7. Finding 3: A Wholehearted Commitment to Life**

In the previous chapters I have discussed different aspects of the participants' experiences in relation to compassion for oneself and a determined effort to help others. What holds together the participants' experiences? I was interested in this question throughout the research process. After the first two themes became clearer, I spent many hours chanting, thinking, reading, writing, talking to friends, and linking literature to the participants' narrative. The final theme emerged through this reflective process: "a wholehearted commitment to life."

So far I have explored different expressions of the participants' faith in terms of practicing compassion for oneself and others. I was inspired by their tenacity to engage in a spiritual struggle. It has become clear to me that the participants' commitment to their spiritual struggle is at the root of hopefulness. How though can hopefulness relate to a spiritual struggle when the two appear as opposing ideas? Hopefulness implies moving forward while a spiritual struggle suggests being stuck or at best moving with obstruction. According to my participants the solution to this paradox is their faith. This chapter explores what constitutes faith, a wholehearted commitment to life, in the process of a spiritual struggle.

The spiritual struggle between faith and fundamental darkness and the value created out of that struggle is a central theme. Since the word "faith" is rooted in religion, I am aware of the possibility that it may make some readers uncomfortable. In the previous chapters, I have attempted to articulate the phenomena around what can be described as faith. The word faith is more "visceral" and "determining" compared to the word "belief," which is cognitive. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

### **7.1. A dialectic process of spiritual equilibrium**

A spiritual struggle is characterised by inner tension between Buddhahood and fundamental darkness. By "spiritual equilibrium" I mean our capacity to engage with inner tension and strive towards greater growth out of the spiritual struggle. I see this capacity as an innate capacity just as life possesses the inherent function to achieve equilibrium (Levine, 2010; Smuts, 1936).

The participants' spiritual struggle brings to mind the story of Shakyamuni's intense struggle for attaining enlightenment (Ikeda, 1996). Shakyamuni devoted himself to the practices of meditation and austerity, but he could not attain the enlightenment he was seeking. Shakyamuni vowed to attain enlightenment with a determination that he would continue meditating until he achieved his goal. Demons tempted him to stop trying by using hunger and exhaustion. They also tormented him with doubt and the fear of death. Shakyamuni discerned demons as the inner workings of fundamental darkness. He

summoned up a powerful resolve and swept away the disruptive thoughts that plagued him. In his heart he cried out: “Demons! You may defeat a coward, but the brave will triumph. I will fight” (Ikeda, 1996, p. 148). Shakyamuni’s enlightenment is a result of overcoming his spiritual struggle.

Shakyamuni’s spiritual struggle describes a dialectical process of spiritual equilibrium. As Smuts (1936) says, a process of equilibrium is “somewhat unstable” (p. 173). This is where a person goes through a process of agony, conflict, hesitation, contemplation in order to “ensure that one’s decisions are an expression of the inner stirrings” (Ikeda, 2010a, p. 5). Shakyamuni found his inner strength and attained enlightenment through fully experiencing his vulnerability. He engaged with the dialectical tension between his fundamental darkness and his determination. As discussed in the previous chapter, Nichiren Buddhism views that fundamental darkness and Buddhahood are complementary, not oppositional (Ikeda et al., 2001). In terms of Shakyamuni’s spiritual struggle, his fundamental darkness (e.g. hunger, doubt, and fear of death) emerged in response to his desire to attain enlightenment. The persistent fundamental darkness inside him in turn evoked a stronger resolve and made his enlightenment possible.

In the following sections, I will explore a dialectic process of spiritual equilibrium and how a sense of hope is born in that process.

### **7.1.1. Buddhist practice as a “safety rope” in an “unsafe” journey**

Vanessa speaks of her struggle in her training to become a psychologist. She relates “It demolished my sense of self.” Despite her hope to be “fostered” by “warm and understanding” lecturers she could trust, her experience was rather traumatic:

*The training was almost like we had to prove our capability and prove our trust all over again... It was difficult because those lecturers whom I looked up to were now a kind of gateway towards becoming a psychologist or not... I had grown up witnessing a lot of domestic violence... and being in quite an unsafe environment in my whole life. The training triggered a lot of childhood stuff for me. Buddhist practice was like a rope I was holding on to... When everything else felt unsafe, my Buddhist practice felt safe.*

This quote describes that Vanessa is barely managing to hold herself together using a “safety rope,” her Buddhist practice. The rope enables her to bear a sense of insecurity and emotional pain. In order to engage in a spiritual struggle, the participants’ experiences suggest that the first thing that needs to be ensured is a sense of safety. Herman (1992) asserts that the first important task for dealing with trauma and overwhelming emotions is the establishment of safety. A safe environment allows us to explore our experience more fully. Vanessa’s Buddhist practice helped generate a sense of safety. As discussed earlier, the creation of an inner space to hold our vulnerability with empathy cultivates a sense of safety and care.

### 7.1.2. Finding the opposite to overwhelming feelings

With the presence of a safety rope, Vanessa is able to explore the tension between her self-doubt and self-trust:

*I realised that I have different parts of myself. I have part of me, self-doubt, but also have part of me, Buddhahood... I recognised my self-doubt in the eighth level of consciousness, but I recognised my Buddhahood came from the ninth level. That's what we know the ninth level of consciousness which makes a change possible, you know, I had those two realities and sometimes I was very much in self-doubt, but each time I go back to the Gohonzon (the object of worship), I could activate the other part of myself... because training was so challenging, I just had to keep fighting to activate the other stuff.*

Vanessa recognises her self-doubt and self-trust as different parts of herself. The recognition of different parts within her creates a reflective capacity (Holmes, 2001). It opens her to the potential of Buddhahood although it is tarnished by self-doubt. With her awareness of different parts of herself, Vanessa seeks to “activate the other part of myself (Buddhahood).” This corresponds to that self-awareness of “adult” and “child” parts within ourselves leads to creating a reflective space, where a new caring voice can be born, as discussed earlier.

In this part Vanessa refers to the concept of nine consciousnesses. As explained in the literature review, the ninth consciousness means Buddhahood, which exists in the deepest level of our lives. The life energy stemming from the ninth consciousness has the power to permeate through emotional blocks and negative habitual patterns of thoughts, speech and behaviours that cause us to suffer (Ikeda, 1988). In the interview Vanessa describes that this view of life is encouraging. The comment “I had to keep fighting to activate the other stuff [Buddhahood]” indicates Vanessa’s conscious effort to mobilise her “opposite” feelings to self-doubt so as to counterbalance it.

Leon introduces one way of seeing fundamental darkness to his student clients who are very critical of themselves.

*What I say to them is in Buddhism there is a concept called fundamental darkness and Buddhahood... in Western thinking these would be opposite, right? Buddhahood is all the good things like love, compassion, wisdom, courage, patience, all positive attributes. So if this was a Western concept, the opposite of that would be all the bad things like hate and greed and so on. This is not actually the case in Buddhism. Fundamental darkness is whatever prevents you from being able to see your true nature... The real problem is not battling against yourself but you can't see who you really are... I say to them “Your true nature is to be kind, generous, compassionate, and loving... so let's talk about your fundamental darkness that prevents you from being able to recognise your true nature.”*

In this way, Leon tries to bring both fundamental darkness and Buddhahood into awareness. His student clients’ self-criticism can be seen as fundamental darkness that prevents them from being able to see their true nature. Leon sees students “battling against” themselves to improve their bad parts. He relates that this is not the real problem;

the deeper problem is their inability to see their true nature, that is, being “kind, generous, compassionate, and loving.” Leon opens a way to finding the opposite to their self-criticism by introducing an alternative way of seeing both positive and negative parts inseparable. Rogers (1961/2004) writes “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change” (p. 39). It is necessary to see the opposites as elements that consist of our whole self.

Levine (2010) identifies a “surprisingly effective strategy” in dealing with overwhelming feelings, which is “finding an ‘opposite’ sensation” (p. 79). He calls positive feelings an “island of safety” in the midst of overwhelming emotions. Levine asserts that “when enough of these little islands are found and felt, they can be linked into a growing land mass, capable of withstanding the raging storms of trauma” (p. 79). This brings to mind the process of creating a new caring voice to counter our internal critical voice. As the accumulation of small caring voice leads to breakthrough, discovering a way to contact positive feelings is an important healing element. It anchors us in the face of overwhelming feelings. Cultivating inner positive qualities is conducive to psychological breakthrough.

The equilibrium of life is characterised by a dynamic transaction between positive and negative forces (Smuts, 1936). This corresponds to a Nichiren Buddhist view of a dynamic interplay between Buddha nature and fundamental darkness. As discussed earlier, the practice of compassion involves a spiritual struggle between faith and doubt, and compassion and self-judgement. Our innate positive qualities come into our being through the act of choice for “our own spiritual centre of being” (Kalsched, 2013, p. 199). In the context of the participants’ experiences, this act of choice is seen as the act of choosing Buddhahood such as compassion and courage based on faith. Faith is in essence Buddhahood (Ikeda et al., 2000a).

### **7.1.3. Outer expressions of Buddhahood as a bridge to inner Buddhahood**

It is a difficult and delicate process when we move through our vulnerability towards faith and compassion. For painful emotions to be worked through, additional resources such as a sense of safety, care and courage need to be present (Brach, 2013). However, it is sometimes difficult to find inner resources by ourselves. Jane found her confidence through her Buddhist practice and her relationships with other Buddhist colleagues. Vanessa learned to be empathic with herself through her psychotherapist’s caring presence. Those external positive resources can be thought of as outer expressions of our Buddhahood (Brach, 2013). They serve as a bridge to find our own resources that are contained within our lives.

Leon also talked of his difficult journey in his career. It took him seven years to get his first job as a clinician after he finished his psychology training at Graduate School in the 1970’s. After many job applications he became very frustrated and disappointed. Leon was under

pressure to find employment so he could support his young family. Finally after an interview which went well he was confident in being successful. He relates the following:

*I was actually in my house when I got the phone call [to say I was unsuccessful]. I remember I walked outside, and it was a cold day in October. I didn't even put a jacket on. I was standing in the cold, the wind was blowing and the sky was really grey and depressing...*

This quote describes Leon's disappointment after he received the bad news. He began thinking about the second President of Soka Gakkai, Mr. Toda's struggle to re-establish the Buddhist organisation after World War II. Toda found a few old Buddhist colleagues, but they were not interested in Buddhism and people's happiness any more. He realised that he was alone in this struggle. Although Toda initially had no support, he managed to develop the organisation. Leon identified himself with Toda. He continues the story:

*Standing there, I felt the same way... I have to stand alone! I can't be defeated. So I went back inside the house and sat down in front of the Gohonzon and I chanted the most intense daimoku (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo), you know, "I'm not going to be defeated! I'm going to overcome this problem and find a job!" When I finished, I got up and went to the phone. I called a social worker who worked at an Outpatient Psychiatric Programme run by the biggest Psychiatric Hospital in Pittsburgh. I just called her because I didn't know anyone else to call... And she said to me "Oh it's great that you are calling me right now because my hospital is hiring a clinician."*

After seven years of trying, Leon finally got a job as a clinician at a well-known Psychiatric Hospital where he had "never dreamed" that he could work.

Leon's story illustrates how Toda's example gave him the courage to "stand alone." Toda's self-reliant spirit serves as an outer expression of Buddhahood. Leon's self-talk "I have to stand alone!" "I can't be defeated" describes that he is gathering courage and trying to move towards faith in the possibility that he can get a job. A sense of courage is emerging from his feelings of defeat. Toda's example is like a bridge for Leon to find the courage within. Fromm (1968) writes: hope is "a psychic commitment to life and growth" (p. 13). Leon may not have felt particularly "hopeful" in the moment of chanting intensely, but a sense of hope can be found in his uncompromising attitude towards his challenge. Courage substitutes for faith.

I interpret this mental space of an inner tension as being the same as a "potential space" in psychology (Winnicott, 1971). The ability to generate a "potential space" is considered as one of the desirable goals for psychotherapy (Ogden, 1993). In a potential space, we suspend our judgement and begin to open up to the possibilities free from restrictions. Leon's experience suggests that grappling with inner tension leads to the emergence of his courage. In the following section, I explore how inner tension leads to inner transformation.

#### **7.1.4. Inner tension brings about greater wholeness**

Engaging with our inner tension produces a profound spiritual struggle. Yet it “has the potential to take us to the depths of ourselves” (O'Hara, 2011, p. 325). The participants relate that being vulnerable to self-doubt and despair, for example, leads them to meditative chanting and seeking their Buddhahood. Their spiritual struggle opens a gateway to Buddhahood.

The process of the spiritual struggle is both difficult and delicate. It seems uncertain and even frightening. Haule (2011) reflects that being in a state of conflict is unsettling and we tend to try and resolve it too quickly. This can, however, lead to limiting possible outcomes. According to Haule the role of conflict is “to allow ourselves to feel pulled this way and that, while resisting the temptation to end the conflict with an arbitrary decision that would accomplish little more than to relieve the tension in the short run” (p. 14). The dialectic process of engaging with inner tension is where possibilities reside, and where we are capable of influencing which possibility comes into being through the act of choice (Schwartz & Begley, 2002). Our inner tension opens a realm of possibilities.

The ability to engage with tension is inseparable with the ability to be with a “restlessness of possibilities” (Smythe et al., 2008, p. 1391). A feeling of uncertainty is so uncomfortable that it drives us to “control” things. When we accept all of our experiences including discomfort, only then can we be open to the possibilities. In order to find the best possible outcome from many possibilities, we have to be open to “what is” in an unfolding process. Haule (2011) points out that it is this unstable state of consciousness that induces a transformative state towards a greater wholeness. Bram and Gabbard (2001) write “A state of ‘coming into being,’ a sense of ‘aliveness’ emerges through our inner space where we engage with tension” (p. 687).

Ikeda (2010a) highlights the significance of engaging with inner tension: “The ability to hesitate in this way may be compared to the strength required to pull back a bowstring to its fullest extent: The arrow that is released from it is certain to overcome all difficulties to strike the target of the good” (p. 5). “Hesitation” can be described as the ability to “hold oneself patiently.” I have come to a new understanding of the significance of holding ourselves in a state of inner tension. An experience of inner tension makes us feel stuck. But it is in that unstable state where a process of spiritual equilibrium takes place and a greater whole that encompasses our inner tension is being generated.

#### **7.1.5. Radical faith – Intrinsic hope in the depth of one’s life**

The ability to “hold oneself patiently” demonstrated by the participants can be seen as their tenacity to engage with a spiritual struggle. I believe that what makes it possible for them to be tenacious is their faith in the potential of life. In this section I explore the nature of faith. Vanessa describes a moment of outgrowing her self-doubt with her faith.

*I think there is hopefulness in our practice of Buddhism... Even when it is so dark, you can't see a way out, I always had that hope when I started chanting in front of the Gohonzon. It was like "Damn it! I can do this! You can make the impossible possible!" So hope kept me going. I felt hope from chanting, from the belief that we all have Buddhahood. Buddhahood exists in each moment of life so that we can pull and activate that Buddhahood in ourselves and in our environment.*

This quote illustrates Vanessa's sense of hopefulness emerging through her chanting and belief in Buddhahood. I sensed a marked shift in the energy of her words, "Damn it! I can do this! You know making the impossible possible!" It feels as if her faith to trust her potential is emerging as courage and inner strength. Baird (2012) reports that the process of chanting activates an "energy engine" from within (p. 65). I surmise that what feels like "hope" for Vanessa is an emerging fresh sense of energy together with her belief in her Buddhahood in the midst of her struggle. When her self-doubt is contained in an enlarged feeling state of faith, a sense of hope begins to emerge from within. Jung (1992) states that the essence of growth and healing is "not [to] solve the problem but outgrow it" (p. 87).

I wonder if the participants' examples suggest that we inherently possess faith in the depth of our lives, a kind of faith that we can say "yes" to life no matter what happens. I want to differentiate "faith" from "belief." Faith is "visceral" and resides in the deepest part of us. Belief resides in a more cognitive and superficial realm. Henick's (2013) view of hope really touched me. He was in despair and felt that committing suicide was the only thing that allowed a sense of agency in his life. However, he relates that there is hope deep inside us even after all hope is lost. I believe that a sense of hopefulness demonstrated by the participants originates from this hope in the deepest level of our lives.

I would like to call this deepest hope "radical faith." It is intrinsic. It is uncompromising. Hope is the spark of this faith. Participants' experiences suggest that when we lean into our vulnerability and feel our emotional truths, our vulnerability becomes the opening into our innermost truth, Buddhahood. By digging through the layers of vulnerabilities that cover up Buddhahood, only then can we reach Buddhahood or radical faith.

Nichiren Buddhism says that "the fire of life force" always burns in the depth of our lives (Ikeda, 1976, p. 23). Smuts (1936) writes that life's deepest impulse is to strive for good and there is a "living fountain" from the depth of our lives and the universe (p. 342). Mcgilchrist (2009) writes that our inner force that attempts to integrate tension is stronger than the opposing force that attempts to cause splitting. I see my participants' tenacity to engage with their inner tension as an expression of their deepest desire to move towards greater wholeness, higher growth and healing.

I believe that radical faith is the deepest hope that is inherent in all lives (Ikeda, 1976). Radical faith can also be seen as a compassion that wants us to respect every part of ourselves and achieve our full potential. All that is required is a wholehearted commitment to ourselves.

## **7.2. Chapter summary**

This chapter discusses the participants' wholehearted commitment to life. Finding our positive emotions while recognising uncomfortable ones helps us outgrow our spiritual struggle. Although the spiritual struggle is uncomfortable, it actually allows us to go deeper, and opens an inner space for choice and possibility. This requires openness to "what is" and the ability to bear restless feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability. A wholehearted commitment to life therefore involves accepting and savouring all parts of ourselves. The inner tension then brings about greater wholeness. "Radical faith" is defined as the deepest hope that we can generate. This is an intrinsic desire to move towards hope in the depth of our lives. A wholehearted commitment to life takes us to the place of radical faith.

## Chapter 8. Discussion: Emerging Buddha

In this chapter I will discuss my thoughts on this study further. The research question was “what are the experiences of clinicians who practice both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy?” The study revealed common ground between their Buddhist practice and psychotherapy, with three main themes emerging. This included having compassion for oneself (or being true to oneself), making a determined effort to help others and a wholehearted commitment to life.

This chapter discusses the practice of compassion in relation to the self, others and the world, and how each relates to each other. This chapter also includes my own journey of inner transformation that I went on during my research process. Finally this chapter discusses the limitations of this study and makes recommendations for further research.

### 8.1. “Live true to your own life!”

The above quote is one of my favourite quotes from Nichiren Buddhism (Ikeda, 2010b, p. 43). During this study, I have reached a deeper understanding of the above quote: To live true to our *own* lives means to experience all parts of ourselves including unpleasant aspects. I have long believed that I needed to “win over” my fundamental darkness (my vulnerability) or “fix” my bad parts so as to find my Buddhahood. In Nichiren Buddhist practice, the words such as “fighting against” or “defeating” fundamental darkness are used but often misunderstood. It has occurred to me that I too have misinterpreted the approach to fundamental darkness. I felt as if I needed to “unroot” or “eliminate” my vulnerability because I believed they were things that made me suffer. My dislike of the “bad” parts of me has led me to conceal or deny them.

To my surprise the study has shown me that vulnerability can be the gateway to our confidence and inner strength. In the past my lack of belief in my self-worth led to endless excessive efforts so that I would feel worthy enough to be happy. I now understand that these efforts took me further away from my emotional truths which were that I felt unworthy. The study has taught me that in order to break this cycle vulnerability is not something that we need to push away or eradicate, but rather to “infuse [them] with compassion and wisdom” (Ikeda, Saito, Endo, & Suda, 2000b, p. 131). The courage to be vulnerable substitutes for compassion. I believe we can bring compassion into our lives through our deepest fears and insecurities. Finding compassion, it will shine a light into the darkest recesses of our being.

When we open ourselves to our vulnerability, it is often accompanied by restless feelings (Smythe et al., 2008). We tend to seek self-confidence by negating our weakness, or try to seek clarity prematurely so as to resolve uncomfortable feelings. Our spiritual struggle

between negative and positive, fundamental darkness and Buddhahood, leads to an inner tension. There is a tendency to see these forces within us as opposites.

The participants' experiences of inner tension show that opposite forces in our lives can meet and they are actually complementary (Ikeda et al., 2001). Both Buddhahood and fundamental darkness manifest in relation to each other. For example, a participant's sense of self-doubt manifests in response to her effort to trust herself. Her self-doubt in turn allows her to seek faith more actively and that leads her to connecting more with her inner strength. When we try to numb our vulnerability, we move away from the source of our hidden strength and compassion all together. Our vulnerable and painful parts are in fact what makes the emergence of Buddhahood possible.

It is a paradox in life that opposites result in wholeness. The inner tension is our path to personal growth and healing. Alexander (2012) writes "Evil was necessary because without it free will was impossible, and without free will there could be no growth" (p. 48). In fact, fundamental darkness, our vulnerability, serves as a catalyst to choose to activate our Buddhahood, our compassion. Things that we regard as unacceptable and frightening are actually the opening into what we are yearning for.

During my research, I often referred to a quote by Donna Orange (2011b): "Every reduction – by systematizing, classifying, pointing, even describing – is, for Levinas, a violence, a violation, a form of murder" (p. 47). Levinas was a student of Heidegger and a Lithuanian survivor of a Nazi labour camp. Orange's message struck me. An act of diminishing ourselves was actually an act of violence.

The above quote brought to mind my process of self-compassion through practicing both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy. I remembered the pain at the felt loss of my identity when I experienced a reduced sense of self after arriving in New Zealand. I also remembered the healing process when I came to terms with my innermost emotional truths which strengthened my sense of being myself. The process of self-compassion for me was finding the way home to who I really was. "Every reduction is... a form of murder" is not an exaggeration. I now understand that by suppressing how I really felt, I was losing myself. I abandoned myself. Through this study I have come to the realisation that every and each part of ourselves deserves our highest respect. As Rilke (1986) says our innermost truths deserve all our love.

Through the lens of the "wholeness" of life, the study has taught me that our lives become the "clusters of blessings" when we accept and live all parts of ourselves (Ikeda et al., 2000b). In other words, when we hold our vulnerability with compassion, every difficult experience will become a blessing in disguise. Ikeda (2010a) says "Dig beneath your feet, there you will find a spring" (p. 4). I now understand what this means; when we dig into the inner reaches of our own beings we will discover a place inside us which is pure, authentic,

compassionate and undefeated. I believe this is the place of radical faith; my research participants' optimism for life stems from this place inside them. Their faith in the potential of life unlocks it. In the journey of being true to our own lives, we are awakened to what we are capable of. From the perspective of Nichiren Buddhism we are an emerging Buddha. To use an analogy we are a lotus flower emerging from the muddy water and blossoming in the warm sun.

## **8.2. Broadening the circle of compassion in the interconnected world**

Brach (2003) states "Feeling unworthy goes hand in hand with feeling separate from others, separate from life. If we are defective, how can we possibly belong?... The more deficient we feel, the more separate and vulnerable we feel" (p. 6). This is exactly how I felt when I struggled with my sense of inadequacy. I could not fully open myself to connect with people as I was afraid of what they would think of me. Brown (2010) suggests that in order to cultivate connections, we need to talk about the "things that get in the way – especially shame, fear, and vulnerability" (p. 36).

The practice of being true to ourselves can help us not only nurture our self-worth and self-acceptance. Our empathy with our own vulnerability will also become the empathy to "viscerally" feel the pain of others. Our increased capacity to be vulnerable allows us to engage with others (Brown, 2012). The more compassion we bring into our own lives, the more compassion we can share with others. Our inner change, galvanised by our self-compassion, can then extend the circle of care around us. Our care for others can in turn help us to hold ourselves with greater compassion. Our action to help others cannot be separate from our action to help ourselves as well (Ikeda et al., 2002).

The Nichiren Buddhist concept of a "practice for oneself and for others" explains that the two are not separate but completely intertwined. There have been many times in my life that I felt empowered when I helped others. My action for others has deepened my compassion and inner strength. My increased self-compassion allowed me to better empathise with others in need. In the interconnected web of the world, we grow and heal through mutual experiences of understanding and being understood, helping and being helped.

## **8.3. My deepest fear, revelation and breakthrough**

My personal journey has paralleled my research process. The emergence of the central themes is inseparable with my inner transformation. Through psychotherapy training, I discovered my fear of "being seen." As a Japanese woman, I felt more comfortable conforming to my surroundings rather than revealing myself. I was fearful that I would be seen as incompetent. I was hiding behind my fear and showing just enough of myself to get through my training. I was quietly hoping that I could sneak through with no drama. But I

soon discovered that there was no such luck in psychotherapy training! Whether I liked it or not, I had to face my painful inadequacies. This was a particularly difficult time for me but in hindsight, it was also a very cathartic process.

My dream has come true, I am beginning my career as a psychotherapist. I have more dreams that I want to be realised. Looking back at the beginning of my research process in 2016, I felt a strange hesitation to think about the business aspects of my psychotherapy practice. Part of me was motivated, however another part of me was holding back. One afternoon I sat with my feelings trying to understand where my hesitation was coming from. Through my empathic enquiry, I came to a deeper emotional truth; my success in having a career that I had dreamed about made me feel as if I was “betraying” my mother. I felt guilt for achieving my goal. Guilt? How so? I did not understand why I felt like this.

I began to reflect on my mother. She is a caring and strong person, very hard-working, and raised three children. I remember as a child feeling sad that she had to work such long hours to support us. I saw her physical and emotional distress. It dawned on me that my pain was the pain of my inner child who felt guilty because I could not help, protect and care for my mother. If I had my dream job, earned money and was happy, it would feel like denying my mother’s life that was filled with so much pain and suffering. I saw the workings of pathological accommodation inside me. A deep part of me wanted to hold on to the grief for my mother. I did not want to leave her behind and seek my own happiness.

As my research proceeded, I felt inspired by the findings. “Being myself” has become my mantra. The study has taught me that I can truly experience the joy of life by being true to myself. I have also learned that being true to my emotional truths is the utmost expression of compassion for myself. I discussed a concept of pathological accommodation in chapter five, and I have learned that it is the “courage” to speak my truths that liberates me. Throughout the research process I was constantly asking myself what was it exactly that I feared.

It was a revelation to me that my deepest fear was in fact my own potential. At the very core of me was my fear of allowing myself to realise my full potential. To be myself meant to express myself, but doing so would I mean I had no protection, and nowhere to hide. To be myself, I would have to face down my inferiority complex and reveal myself fully. My feeling of being “not good enough” was so difficult to bear because it made me feel like I had let my mother down. I felt worthless.

My thinking continued to cycle. It gradually became clear to me that my sense of guilt and grief for my mother as a child was intertwined with my hunger for love. As a child I learned to suppress my feelings and needs. I did not want to burden my mother. This was all I could do for her. Looking back, though, I was desperately longing for my mother’s love. This part of me for decades later was still hurting and wanting to be loved. My hunger for love placed

me in the position of always “struggling” and “being incompetent” so that I could receive love. My fear was that if I became confident and competent, I could lose opportunities to get my needs met. By remaining “struggling,” I could also hold on to my feelings of guilt for becoming happy. In this way I was respecting my mother’s grief and my pain from not being able to help my mother.

Komiya (2007) writes “To become truly happy means to let go of hope that one day you will be loved unconditionally by your parents. When you cannot let it go, you will refuse to become happy even without knowing” (p. 27 translated by the author). Through this process, I realised that I was holding onto my unmet need to be loved as a child. Things began to make sense. My yearning to be loved was holding back my potential for growth and happiness.

As the research process unfolded, the inner conflict between my fear of demonstrating my potential and my desire to be myself came to a head. One morning, I was chanting and reflecting on my feelings for my mother and what she had endured. I was also acknowledging my fear of being true to myself. An image appeared in my mind; I was soaring like a bird in the sky and when I looked down I saw my mother and she was watching me. A sadness overwhelmed me and my tears flowed down my cheeks. Leaving my mother was so sad, but through my tears and love for her, I whispered “Mum, I will be more happy than you.” Those words affected me deeply. I thought to myself, “I must now demonstrate my full potential in my life.” When I said this, I felt a sense of spiritual freedom flow through me. I had found the courage to be myself. When I decided to stand my own ground and to commit to being true to myself, I felt a sense of dignity ran through my life. I believed that this was the best way to repay my gratitude to my mother.

The research using hermeneutic phenomenology has challenged me to stay open to my journey of thought and experience. In hindsight I was learning a wholehearted commitment to life through the study. I now understand that when I fully open myself to the unfolding process, the best result out of many possibilities reveals by itself. A wholehearted commitment to life involves a process of leaning into fear with faith. Half-heartedness means that we are still in fear. Our anxiety would unconsciously try to manipulate the process. We must let the potential of life unfold with openness to what is. In the study this state of openness is seen as faith, the act of choice for the potential of life (Kalsched, 2013). It is faith that allows the unfolding of our lives to proceed at its unhurried pace.

#### **8.4. Implications – Responding to contemporary crises through individual transformation**

The study addresses interconnectedness between the self and others, and the self and cultures. I have been constantly reflecting on the interrelationship between the self, others, and the world. I have come to see the special significance of the practice of compassion in

the context of contemporary crises in the world. There is a growing concern about the increasing atmosphere of hostility, self-centredness and indifference to the pain of others in the world (Yanagida, 2005). It seems that the “absence of empathic capacity” for others is at the root of the phenomenon of contemporary society (Ikeda, 2006a, p. 3). The global rise of xenophobia in recent times is a prime example of this phenomenon.

Bringing this collective apathy to an individual dimension, I wonder if the root of this issue lies in that the individuals’ ability to recognise and be with one’s own pain has been diminished. One way of understanding this phenomenon is socio-cultural influences. This could be revealing of societies that promote the idea of eliminating pain as quickly as possible. They also encourage having more rather than being more. The concrete accomplishments of getting a better job or house, improving personal skills, and achieving more successes replace a more abstract sense of self.

Bordo (1997) says psychopathology is the crystallisation of our culture; our culture plays a big part of forming the individual psyche, and just as importantly, the individual psyche collectively shapes our cultures. As Brown (2012) states, the “feelings of scarcity” that many individuals have are actually forming “shame-prone cultures” (p. 27). I believe that the absence of an empathic capacity for others seen in collective apathy is perhaps the manifestation of the lack of compassion for ourselves. How can we recognise others’ suffering if we fail to recognise our own suffering? It appears that the level of compassion is gradually reducing in our societies.

I have come to the conclusion that an individual’s reduced capacity to feel their own pain stems from their inability to accept their vulnerable parts. Jung (2014) writes that the “unrecognised evil” within us will project onto others. Unrecognised evil can be understood as the unwanted or disowned parts within us. When we have parts of us that we think are “unacceptable,” we see them in others so as to keep a psychological distance from those aspects of ourselves (Ogden, 1979).

I ponder how our tendency to be unaccepting of the parts of us leads to a dislike or prejudice against people who are different from us. When we are unable to hold our inner conflict, we will see what we push away as being “out there” (Mehrtens, 2009). In this way our inner discrimination can be expressed in outer discrimination. Our ability to engage with our inner tension is thus of great importance in the context of contemporary crises.

Shakyamuni said “I perceived a single, invisible arrow piercing the hearts of the people” (Ikeda, 1993). I see this arrow representing our inner division or inner discrimination: a judgemental tendency to divide good and bad parts within us. The practice of self-compassion shared by the participants suggests how to remove this arrow of inner discrimination – by choosing to infuse vulnerability with compassion. Rilke (1986) writes:

We have no reason to harbor any mistrust against our world, for it is not against *us*. If it has terrors, they are *our* terrors; if it has abysses, these abysses belong to us; if there are dangers, we must try to love them. And if only we arrange our life in accordance with the principle which tells us that we must always trust in the difficult, then what now appears to us as the most alien will become our most intimate and trusted experience. How could we forget those ancient myths that stand at the beginning of all races, the myths about dragons that at the last moment are transformed into princesses? Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love. (p. 43)

Our unwanted parts are not to be eliminated but to be loved. As we come to terms with and bring together the different parts within us, I believe this is a starting point to cultivating a culture of compassion that embraces differences. By creating the individual threads of compassion we are collectively contributing to building a compassionate society. Building heartfelt connections with others begins with building heartfelt connections with ourselves. In other words, we begin with cultivating an intimate connection with our vulnerability through holding our inner tender place with compassion.

I have come to believe in the potential of the practice of compassion for transforming our world. Our collective efforts to help ourselves and others to embrace our vulnerability will lead to creating a new social culture of compassion. The study has deepened my belief that we do not exist in isolation; we can truly live in the web of interconnectedness.

### **8.5. Limitations and recommendation for further research**

There are limitations in this study. Firstly, the sample size of participants in the study was small. As a result, the findings may not be transferable outside of this particular study. Secondly, there was limited time to explore the depth of phenomena. This project has explored a wide range of topics: the intersection of Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy, the interplay between the practice of compassion and cultures, and so on. I do hope some of the thinking and ideas presented in this study could serve as a catalyst for further research.

Another recommendation for further research is how Japanese culture has influenced the manner in which people interpret and practice Nichiren Buddhism. Given that Nichiren Buddhism emerged in Japan, its philosophy and practice is inseparable from Japanese culture (Gadamer, 1982). It would be interesting to study how the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Buddhism reflects Japanese socio-cultural values.

## **8.6. Concluding remarks**

The practice of compassion is a journey of delving into what it really means to be “me” and “you.” Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy are both practices that seek our inner truths. I believe that both fields of Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy could assist with a wider social dialogue about the importance of being true to ourselves. My hope is that even in a small way, this research will benefit psychological practitioners and their clients. I would like that they take an interest in the importance of being true to themselves.

The aim of my research is to explore the experiences of clinicians who practice both Nichiren Buddhism and psychotherapy. Given that Buddhism is considered a religion while psychotherapy is not, I am aware that some people may be dubious about my study. I felt some anxiety about this. However after careful thought I felt it was very important to me to proceed with research that I felt truly passionate about. The study has inspired me to show up just as I am, in a way that is most true for me, even though it might be uncomfortable. I believe that through being true to myself I can stand my own ground of worthiness and therefore am able to open my heart and connect with others.

This study has taught me that the starting point of positive transformation is courageously and compassionately bringing our vulnerability into our lives. When vulnerability is held by compassion it will no longer be the cause of suffering. With compassion, vulnerability will turn into the courage to be oneself. It will become empathy with others who struggle. When we dare to be all of who we are, positive and negative, confident and unsure, joyful and in pain, we are healed. The emerging Buddha, our most clear and aware selves, arises from within and creates a world of compassion around us. A path towards wholeness is the journey to becoming oneself. This path is open to each and every one of us.

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## Appendix A. Participant Consent Form



Project title: Exploring clinicians' experiences of benefits and challenges of Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism in inner transformation process

Project Supervisor: Wiremu Woodard

Researcher: Seiko Shirai

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_ (dd/mm/yy).
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I agree to the possibility to be identified.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings.

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate): .....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 2 May 2016

AUTEC Reference number **16/151**

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

## Appendix B. Participant Consent Form (Japanese)

### 同意書



研究タイトル：内面変革におけるサイコセラピーと日蓮仏法の効用と挑戦：サイコセラピストの経験の考察

研究スーパーバイザー：ウィレム・ウッドワード (Wiremu Woodard)

研究者：白井聖子 (しらいせいこ)

- 私は4月20日付の参加者情報シートに記載されている研究内容を読み、理解しました。
- 私は質問する機会が与えられ、質問に答えてもらいました。
- インタビュー中は、研究者はメモをとり、インタビューが録音され書き起こされることを承知しています。
- 私は提供した情報を、インタビューを書き起こしたものを確認する時と、また研究結果と考察の章のドラフトを確認する時に、自由に変更したり削除したりできることを承知しています。またいつでも研究から辞退することが可能なことを了解しています。
- もし辞退した場合は、録音されたオーディオや書き起こしたものなどすべての情報が処分されることを理解します。
- 私はこの研究に参加することに同意します。
- 研究対象者が限られているため、参加者が自分であると識別される可能性があることを承知します。
- 研究結果の要約を受け取りたいです。

研究参加者サイン: .....

研究参加者氏名: .....

連絡先: .....

日付:

2016年5月2日にオークランド工科大学倫理委員会によって承認されています。(承認番号: 16/151)

注意: 参加者はこの同意書のコピーを保持すること。

## **Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet**



Date Information Sheet Produced:

20 April 2016

### **Project Title**

Exploring clinicians' experiences of benefits and challenges of Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism in the inner transformation process

### **An Invitation**

My name is Seiko Shirai. I am researching how Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism contribute to improving one's quality of life. I have a particular interest in how psychotherapists experience the benefits and challenges of the both practices. This research seeks to develop a more integrative approach to the art of living through finding a way to enrich both practices. You are invited, as a member of Soka Gakkai International, to participate in a study of the experiences of Nichiren Buddhists who are also psychotherapists. This is an opportunity for you to share your experiences of a practicing Nichiren Buddhist who is also working with individuals as a psychotherapist. This research is part of my Master's of Psychotherapy degree. It is your right to discontinue the interview process if you so wish. Your participation is completely voluntary.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the benefits and challenges in both Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism in the inner transformation process. As mentioned, this research is part of my study for my Master's qualification. Participants will receive a summary of findings of this research. As Nichiren Buddhism has not been widely researched, the researcher's aim is to add to the body of knowledge about how both Nichiren Buddhism and Psychotherapy can help transform human suffering. The research may also lead to greater dialogue between psychotherapy communities and Buddhist communities with the aim of mutual enrichment. My aim is to publish my findings both in New Zealand and internationally through publishing in journals and presentation at conferences.

### **How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You are invited because you have identified yourself as practising psychotherapy and a member of Soka Gakkai International. I have obtained your contact details through my personal organisational network or your website. I am hoping that you have a story to tell about your experiences of how you see the benefits and challenges of both Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism.

### **What will happen in this research?**

The research will involve participating in an initial interview with myself for a period of 30 minutes followed by a 90 minute face-to-face interview. The audio will be recorded in the interviews. I will ask you questions about your experiences as a psychotherapist and a practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism. You will receive main questions prior to the interview. You will be encouraged to make any additional comments as you see fit. After transcription of the recordings, I will subsequently give you a copy of your dialogue and ask you to verify my interpretation of your experiences. This process may take 30 to 45 minutes. At this stage you will have the opportunity to amend or remove any information from your interview transcript. A draft of findings and discussion chapters will be also sent to you later. You will have the opportunity again to amend or remove any information from your interview transcript. You will be welcome to give me feedback on those chapters.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

You have my reassurance that there will be no downsides to you in the interview process. However the interviews will include personal stories of your experiences, which may evoke memories and emotions for you. You will be reminded that you do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

The style of the interview will be relaxed and informal and you will be under no pressure to respond to my questions. I will endeavour to ensure that the environment is conducive to you feeling relaxed. If you do not wish to respond to a question or wish to withdraw entirely from the study, you may do so at any time. If you should experience any discomfort, you will be encouraged to seek help in your professional supervision.

### **What are the benefits?**

Research findings show that the interview process can help people gain new insights into their experiences. During the interview process you will be encouraged to articulate things you may not have previously spoken about. With this in mind, you may experience the benefit of an increased understanding of your own experiences.

For me as researcher, this research will be a vital part of the completion of my Master's degree. I envisage that your personal story will assist me, other psychotherapists and Buddhist practitioners, to gain a better understanding of how we can enrich our therapeutic practice and quality of life. I hope to disseminate the findings through publishing this research in journals or conference presentations.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

Neither your name nor any contact information will be used in the findings. Details that may identify you will be omitted. When you receive a transcript of the interviews, you may request any information you consider confidential to be deleted. I will also send a draft of findings and discussion chapters, which will give another opportunity to check details and you have the right to request omission of information. Given the small pool of possible participants, limited confidentiality only can be offered. If you participate in this research, you are agreeing to the possibility of being identified.

All research data will be kept in locked storage area, and kept separate from personal details.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

This research should not be at any financial cost to you. It is anticipated that a total of approximately 3 hours would be needed, 90-120 minutes for the interview and 30-45 minutes to review the transcribed material, with an added 30-45 minutes extra to review the interpretation of your experiences.

### **What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

If you are interested in joining this project, or have further questions, please contact me or my project supervisor at the phone numbers or email addresses below. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate you will be asked to sign the attached consent form. You will have two weeks to consider this request. It is your right to withdraw at any time from the project.

### **How do I agree to participate in this research?**

A Consent Form is provided for you to sign and return a scanned form with your signature to me.

### **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

The research findings will be summarised and emailed to you close to the research completion date (late 2016).

### **What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the project supervisor, Wiremu Woodard. His contact details are as below.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz*, +64 9 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

*Researcher Contact Details: Seiko Shirai, seikotherapie@gmail.com, mobile: +64 21 718 255*

*Project Supervisor Contact Details: Wiremu Woodard, wiremu.woodard@aut.ac.nz, +64 212512829*

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 2 May 2016, AUTEK Reference number 16/151.**

## Appendix D. Participant Information Sheet (Japanese)



### プロジェクトタイトル

内面変革におけるサイコセラピーと日蓮仏法の効用と挑戦：サイコセラピストの経験の考察

### 招待

私は白井聖子と申します。現在、サイコセラピーと日蓮仏法がどのように人生の質の向上に貢献するかを研究しています。創価学会メンバーでありサイコセラピストである方に、それぞれの実践の長所と難しい点をどのように経験されているかをインタビューを通して探求したいと思っています。この研究によって、西洋のサイコセラピーと東洋の教えと実践が、「自分らしく生きる」ことに対し、より統合されたアプローチを展開できればと考えています。あなたは、創価学会のメンバーで且つサイコセラピストですので招待させていただきました。これは、あなたが日蓮仏法を実践するサイコセラピストとしての経験をシェアする素晴らしい機会だと思います。この研究は、私の修士課程の一環です。あなたの参加は、完全に任意ですので、もし思うように話せなかったり、継続が困難な場合は、あなたはいつでもインタビューを中断できる権利があります。

### この研究の目的

この研究の目的は、内面変革におけるサイコセラピーと日蓮仏法の効用と挑戦を探りながら、より統合された人生へのアプローチを築くことです。前述の通り、これは私の修士課程の一環です。また研究の参加者へ研究結果をお伝えすることも大事な目的のひとつです。サイコセラピーの分野では、日蓮仏法はまだ未研究の分野です。この研究を通し、日蓮仏法とサイコセラピーが、人間の苦しみを転換するためにどう役に立つのか、既存の知識体系に新たな有益な情報を貢献したいのです。また研究がサイコセラピーと仏教全般の分野で、どのようにお互いの実践から学びあい、お互いの実践をより豊かなものにするための対話が、更に促進することにつながるようにと願っています。私は、研究結果を学術誌やカンファレンスで発表したいと考えています。

### どのように研究参加者として認定されたか

あなたは、ご自身が創価学会メンバーで、且つサイコセラピストであることを明言していたことから、この研究参加者の対象として招待されています。あなたの連絡先は、私の個人的なネットワークやあなたのウェブサイトから得ました。それか私がサイコセラピーの団体に発信したニュースレターを通して、あなたからすでにご連絡を頂きました。私は、

あなたがサイコセラピーと日蓮仏法の長所と挑戦を、日々どのように感じていらっしゃるか、様々な経験をお持ちだと思っています。

### **この研究で何をするか**

研究への参加には、最初に 30 分ほど研究に関する話と、約 90 分のインタビューが含まれています。インタビューは実際お会いして行うか、もしくはスカイプ等でやることも可能です。インタビューは録音されます。インタビューでは、私があなたにサイコセラピストとして、また日蓮仏法の実践者としての経験を質問させていただきます。大まかな質問は事前にお知らせいたします。あなたが必要と思われることなら、それ以外のこともぜひ自由に語ってください。録音したインタビューは文字に書き起こし、そのコピーと私の解釈をあなたに送りますので、あなたのお話した内容と私の解釈が正確かどうか確認していただけます。この段階で、あなたはインタビューの内容を自由に変更したり削除することができます。のちほど、私が研究結果と考察の章のドラフトを書き次第お送りしますので、その時にもインタビューの内容を自由に変更したり削除することができます。またドラフトに関してフィードバックがあれば、ぜひお知らせください。内容確認の作業に 30 分から 45 分ほど必要だと思われます。

### **インタビューによる不快感やリスク**

このインタビューで、不快感やリスクが生じることはないと思われます。インタビューでは、ご自身の個人的なことをシェアされるので、様々な感情や記憶を呼び起こされることもあるかもしれません。もしインタビュー中に不快な思いや何か違和感を感じた際には、教えてください。インタビューは任意ですので、答えるのが難しいと思う質問には答えなくてもかまいません。

### **不快感やリスクを感じた場合の対処**

インタビューのプロセスは、リラックスしたものですので、あなたの経験を応えなければならぬというようなプレッシャーはありません。インタビューの環境が、あなたにとって和やかで落ち着いたものになるよう心がけますので、ご安心ください。もし質問に答えたくなかったり、この研究への参加自体を取りやめたい場合は、あなたにそれをする権利があります。もし不快感やリスクを感じ、サポートが必要な場合は、あなたの心理療法のスーパービジョンをご利用されることをお勧めします。

### **研究のメリット**

リサーチでは、インタビュープロセスはインタビューを受ける人の洞察を深める効果があることを示しています。インタビューでは、あなたが今まで話したことがないようなこと

も、語っていただきたいと思っています。ですから、インタビューを通して、ご自身の経験への理解が深まるかもしれません。

私にとっては、この研究は修士課程の最後の大事な課題です。あなたのストーリーは、人生を生き抜き向上するための実践を、どのようにさらに良いものにできるか、私ばかりでなく、他のサイコセラピストや仏法実践者が理解を深めることの大きな手助けとなります。研究結果は、ジャーナルやカンファレンスで発表したいと考えています。

### **プライバシーの保護**

あなたの名前や連絡先が研究で使われることはありません。あなただと分かるような詳細は省かれます。インタビューの書き起こしたものを受け取り、ご自身が秘密にしたいと思われる内容があれば、それを削除するように要請することができます。ただし、この研究の対象グループの規模がとても小さいため、上記のようにプライバシーの保護をしても、あなただと分かることがあるかもしれません。この研究への参加を希望される場合は、その点も考慮の上、お願いいたします。

研究のデータは鍵のかかった場所に保管され、あなたの個人情報や同意書とは別に保管されます。

### **研究に必要なコスト**

この研究に費用がかかることはありません。時間面では計3時間（90分から120分ほどのインタビューと、30分から45分ほどインタビューを書き起こした内容の確認）を要します。

### **研究への参加に関して**

このプロジェクトへの参加に興味がありましたら、もしくは何か質問がございましたら、下記のメールか携帯番号にご連絡ください。私か私のスーパーバイザーどちらでもかまいません。あなたの参加はあくまでも任意です。参加する場合には、添付した同意書への署名が必要です。2週間以内にご連絡をいただけましたら幸いです。参加が決定した後でも、あなたが参加を取りやめたい場合は、いつでもそれを行うことができます。

### **参加同意のプロセスについて**

添付の同意書に署名し、私にスキャンした同意書をメールで送ってください。それにより参加に同意したものとみなします。

### **研究結果の受け取り**

要約された研究結果をメールにてお送りいたします。今年の終わりごろになると思います。

### 研究に関する懸念

この研究の性質や内容に関して何か懸念がありましたら、私のプロジェクトスーパーバイザーのウィレム・ウッダードにご連絡ください。彼の連絡先は下記の通りです。

また研究のやり方について懸念がありましたら、**AUTEC**（オークランド工科大学倫理委員会）の秘書であるケイト・オコーナーにご連絡ください。

**Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, +64 9 921 9999 内線 6038**

### 研究に関する連絡先

この参加者情報シートと同意書のコピーを大切に保管してください。何かありましたら、私と私のスーパーバイザーのウィレムにいつでもご連絡ください。

研究者連絡先：白井聖子（しらいせいこ） smileseiko@gmail.com 携帯 +64 21 718 255

プロジェクトスーパーバイザー連絡先：ウィレム・ウッダード（Wiremu Woodard）  
wiremu.woodard@aut.ac.nz, 携帯：+64 21 2512 829

この参加者情報シートは、2016年5月2日にオークランド工科大学倫理委員会によって承認されています。（承認番号：16/151）

## **Appendix E. An Amendment to My Research Question**



My original research question was “How do clinicians who practice Nichiren Buddhism understand the benefits and challenges of Psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism in the inner transformation process.” After further reflection on my research and consultation with my dissertation supervisor, I have decided to expand the focus of my study by including a wider range of experiences of Nichiren Buddhism and Psychotherapy. I felt that focusing solely on the benefits and challenges would limit my research. I would rather allow the findings to determine the direction of this study.

With this in mind, my interview questions now revolved around one main topic.

**Please tell me about your experience of being a Nichiren Buddhist practitioner and a practitioner of Psychotherapy.**

You may like to talk about how one practice influences the other and vice versa. Do these practices come together and if so how? Or if they are separate, how? You may like to talk about your clinical experiences, or personal experiences in SGI, or your inner transformation. If, for example, the benefits and challenges of either or both practices is of particular interest to you, please feel free to talk about them. I have attached “areas of interest” for your reference. Again, this is just reference for your reflection. Please feel free to talk about whatever feels the most important for you.

I look forward to hearing any insights into my study topic.

## Appendix F. An Amendment to My Research Question (Japanese)



### 研究テーマの修正

当初の研究の焦点は、「日蓮仏法を実践するサイコセラピストが、内面変革における、日蓮仏法とサイコセラピーの効果と挑戦をどのように理解しているか」でした。この研究について熟慮し、またスーパーバイザーとも話し合った結果、研究のフォーカスを広げて、日蓮仏法とサイコセラピーの実践に関するさまざまな経験を対象にしようと決めました。研究内容を内面変革における効果と難しい点だけにしぼるのは、リサーチを逆に制限してしまうのではないかと感じたのです。そうではなく、研究そのものが進むべき方向に展開できるように、出てくるデータはプロセスに任せようと決めました。

ということで、いろいろ考えた結果、インタビューの質問はシンプルな質問となりました。

**日蓮仏法の実践者として、またサイコセラピストの実践者としての経験をお話ください。**

語ってくださる内容は自由です。例えば、お互いの実践が、それぞれどのように影響し合っているのか、仏法と心理療法がどのように統合されているか、また折り合わないこともあるのか、などを語ってくださってもかまいません。臨床経験について語りたいかもしれませんし、学会の中での個人的な経験や人間革命について語ることも自由です。もし、仏法とサイコセラピーの実践の効果と挑戦に関して興味がおありであれば、それについて語ってくださってもかまいません。

日蓮仏法とサイコセラピーに関する経験から得た洞察を、どのような内容でもかまいませんので、お伺いできることを楽しみにしております。

## Appendix G. AUTEC Approval Amendment Letter



1 June 2016

Wiremu Woodard

Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Wiremu

Re Ethics Application: **16/151 Exploring clinicians' experiences of benefits and challenges of psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism in inner transformation process.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 31 May 2019.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 31 May 2019;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 31 May 2019 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

All the very best with your research,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor'.

Kate O'Connor

Executive Secretary

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Seiko Shirai [smileseiko@gmail.com](mailto:smileseiko@gmail.com)

## Appendix H. AUTECH Approval Letter



6 May 2016

Wiremu Woodard

Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Wiremu

**Ethics Application: 16/151 Exploring clinicians' experiences of benefits and challenges of psychotherapy and Nichiren Buddhism in inner transformation process.**

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. I am pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 2 May 2016, subject to the following conditions:

1. Provision of the authorizing signature for section O.3 of the application;
2. Amendment of the Information Sheet as follows:
  - a. Checking of both the language and spelling;
  - b. Details of the presentation mentioned in E.6.2 of the application;
  - c. Advice that given the small pool of possible participants, limited confidentiality only can be offered.

Please provide me with a response to the points raised in these conditions, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTECH also requires copies of any altered documents, such as Information Sheets, surveys etc. You are not required to resubmit the application form again. Any changes to responses in the form required by the committee in their conditions may be included in a supporting memorandum.

Please note that the Committee is always willing to discuss with applicants the points that have been made. There may be information that has not been made available to the Committee, or aspects of the research may not have been fully understood.

Once your response is received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. Full approval is not effective until all the conditions have been met. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. If these conditions are not met within six months, your application may be closed and a new application will be required if you wish to continue with this research.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor', written in a cursive style.

Kate O'Connor

Executive Secretary

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Seiko Shirai [smileseiko@gmail.com](mailto:smileseiko@gmail.com)