

Changing Karma and Enlightenment

Introduction

I have spoken a great deal on the terms and concepts of Buddhism from Shakyamuni to Nichiren and beyond through my own study and insights for modern practice to connect directly with the pure teachings. In doing so I have created my own terminologies to illuminate the modern mind and its uses of language. In this document I will be adding a transcript from a scientific study of neurology and the “mind” of reality as experienced by the human system of thought and epistemology.

Terms such as “**Engine of Life**”, **Karma**, “**Meeting the Buddha**”, **GoHonzon**, **Samsara** and **Resolve**, will be discussed in juxtaposition to Buddhist teaching. I will ask you, the reader, the Buddhist practitioner, to consider these neurological ideas in the light of certain words, terms, as these to locate the nexus of our felt life experience in relation to our active and constant feedback loop from established karma to altering that experience in willful practice to attain enlightenment or purification. My hope is that by doing so, we will develop deeper insight and understanding of our interactions with Karma, the Engine of Life, and our actualizing of Buddha, a state of moment-to-moment awareness.

The precision of Buddhist teachers from Shakyamuni to Nichiren and beyond attest to the clarity of the enlightened mind. However, this precision is obfuscated by the vast experiential observers of an ever growing population of sentient individuals. As we will read in the transcript provided, “reality” is by its nature a deeply subjective experience. It is this experience that Buddhist practice and teachings confront head-on and utterly. Perhaps the deepest insight of Buddhism is that “reality” is an ongoing process of sentient identification, categorization, and recording via innumerable personal filters of epistemology, resulting in the subjective permanence of something only slightly resembling or related to the actual “reality” of the cosmos and the Engine of Life.

As I have oft repeated, Buddhism is about the Mind, and Shakyamuni’s constant use of stories was his device of choice for illustrating the workings of the mind in our life experience, either in Samsaric delusion, or guided by enlightened clarity. Nichiren was adamant about the practice of a strong mind of Resolve in the pursuit of “Meeting the Buddha”, in his teaching of opening the GoHonzon mind to experience enlightenment or Buddha as a purified clarity of mind. For all Buddhist teachers, the sentient mind becomes the nexus of the moment-to-moment expression of energies of the cosmos, and the experience and identified traces held in collective memory by the sentient human observer.

This nexus is our point of entry. We can, with compassionate effort, retrain our epistemological basis for “reality” toward an unobstructed experience of the cosmos as a manifest component part of the massive process of space/time, within the moment-to-moment expression of potential. This is in sharp contrast with life lived as observers of an “outside” reality unattainable to us, distinct from us, happening around and to us. To be enlightened is to experience life as we make it, as we manifest it, rather than something we are thrust into.

(I will interject into the following transcript parenthetical notes to remind the reader of Buddhist terms and concepts to correlate.)

The Transcript

Your nervous system is not broken. It is working exactly as designed. It is producing the same results, the same emotional weather, the same ceiling on what feels possible with extraordinary precision because it was built to do exactly that. The problem is not that you have the wrong thoughts. The problem is that you have been trying to renovate a building by repainting the walls while the foundation is running a completely different blueprint underneath. Carl Fristen, one of the most cited neuroscientists on Earth right now, has spent 20 years proving that your brain doesn't receive reality. It generates reality through a prediction engine that was calibrated mostly before you were 10 years old and has been running on autopilot since. The world you experience is not reality. It is your nervous system's best current guess about reality, filtered through every expectation it has ever been trained to hold. *(Epistemology)* Change the prediction engine and the experienced world changes with it. Not metaphorically, neurologically. And there is a specific documented mechanism for how that change happens. That's what this is about.

To understand why the standard approach fails, you need to understand what the standard approach is actually targeting. When someone tells you to think positive, to affirm your desires, to visualize what you want, they are addressing the conscious mind. The part of you that reads books, watches videos, understands ideas, and agrees with things intellectually.

The conscious mind processes roughly 50 bits of information per second *(think Samsara)*. That sounds like a lot until you find out what it's competing with. Your nervous system as a whole processes approximately 11 million bits per second. The conscious mind is not in charge. It never was. It is a narrator sitting in the passenger seat describing the journey while something else entirely controls the wheel. That something else is what Fristen calls the predictive processing system *(think Karma)*. And understanding how it actually works is the difference between spinning in circles for years and making a change that actually sticks. Your brain is not a camera. It does not take in the world and then form a picture of it. It works in reverse. It generates a model of what it expects the world to look like. It Projects that

model outward and then checks incoming sensory data only to see if anything contradicts the prediction. When nothing contradicts it, the prediction gets confirmed and reinforced. When something does contradict it, the brain updates the model slightly and moves on. What you experience as reality is at every moment, primarily your own forecast. The world you see is the world your nervous system expected to find. This is not a fringe theory. The architecture of the brain supports it structurally. The visual cortex receives significantly more input from higher cortical regions feeding predictions downward than it does from the eyes feeding raw data upward. Seeing is more construction than reception.

Your brain is filling in most of what you think you're perceiving with what it already decided would be there. The implications of this are strange and they are important. If two people stand in the same room receiving identical sensory inputs, they are not having the same experience. They are each living inside the version of that room their nervous system predicted. One person walks into a networking event and their system predicts rejection and so their filter selects for evidence of rejection. Cold glances register. Ignored overtures land hard. Warm signals get filtered as irrelevant. The other person walks into the same room. Their system predicts connection and they notice the open faces, the available conversations, the opportunities to engage. Neither person is seeing reality. Both are seeing their prediction confirmed. This is the mechanism behind what people loosely call the law of attraction. Stripped of the metaphysics and put on a neurological foundation. You do not attract what you want. You perceive what you predict. And what you predict is determined almost entirely by what your nervous system has been trained to expect through years of repeated experience.

Now, here is the piece that makes the standard advice not just ineffective, but structurally incapable of working. Your nervous systems prediction model was built during a period when you had no conscious input into its construction. The core templates were laid down in early childhood before the prefrontal cortex was developed enough to evaluate or question them. Before you had language sophisticated enough to argue with them, (*think Nidana*) before you had any awareness that they were being installed at all. A child who grows up in an environment of unpredictability learns that safety is temporary and threat is the baseline. That is not a belief they chose. It is a calibration that happened to them, written into the nervous system as a survival strategy. In adulthood, that calibration continues running because it was never updated. The prefrontal cortex can understand intellectually that the threat is gone. But the system running the predictions is not listening to the prefrontal cortex. It is older than that. It is faster than that. And it has 20 or 30 years of corroborating evidence that its predictions are accurate. Every time the prediction came true, the model got reinforced. Every relationship that confirmed the pattern, every professional situation that replayed the dynamic, every emotional response that matched the forecast added another layer of certainty to a system that was already certain. (*Shakyamuni called this 'habit energy'*) By adulthood, the prediction engine is not running a hypothesis. It is running a conclusion. (*think immutable Karma*). This is why insight does not produce change. You can spend years in therapy developing a precise intellectual understanding of exactly why you are the way you are, exactly where the patterns

came from, exactly what they cost you, and still find yourself reproducing them in new situations with new people as if none of that understanding existed.

(This is precisely why Nichiren created the mandala of the epistemological gateway to our Buddha clarity).

Because the understanding lives in the conscious mind and the patterns live somewhere the conscious mind cannot reach through thinking alone. Benjamin Libet made this concrete in his experiments in the 1980s. He monitored brain activity in subjects making simple voluntary movements and found that the brain's readiness potential, the neural signature of an action being prepared, appeared approximately 550 milliseconds before subjects reported any conscious intention to move. The decision was already made before consciousness arrived to claim authorship of it. What this means is that your sense of consciously choosing your responses to life is largely retrospective. The system already initiated the action.

Consciousness showed up afterward and wrote a story about having decided. Which means that if you want to change your actions, your emotional responses, your habitual interpretations of events, the place to work is not where you think. It is not in the story consciousness tells. It is in the system that moves before the story begins. So where is that system and how does it actually update?

(Changing Karma)

The answer requires understanding two things. The reticular activating system and the mechanism of memory reconsolidation. The reticular activating system is a small cluster of neurons at the base of the brain stem. Its function is to decide from the 11 million bits of information hitting your senses every second which 50 bits reach conscious awareness. It is the gatekeeper of your perceived reality and the criteria it uses to make that selection are not random. It prioritizes whatever your nervous systems prediction model has flagged as relevant. This means that two people living in objectively identical circumstances are not accessing the same information from those circumstances. The person whose system predicts scarcity has a particular filter that selects for evidence of scarcity. The person whose system predicts abundance has a filter that selects for evidence of abundance. Same world, different 50 bits, genuinely different experienced reality. Changing what you perceive requires changing what the reticular activating system is told to select for and changing that requires updating the prediction model. Which brings us to the mechanism. The prediction model updates through a process called memory reconsolidation.

Every time a memory is recalled, it enters a temporarily unstable state. For a brief neurochemical window, the memory is malleable. *(This is where/when our trained GoHonzon-mind can intercede with Buddha clarity, especially while we chant)* It can be modified before it is stored again. If during that window something happens that violates the emotional prediction attached to the memory, the memory gets rewritten, not erased. The event is still there. But the emotional signature, the somatic marker, the prediction that memory carries about what the world is like gets updated. This is the neurological basis for certain therapies that actually produce lasting change rather than just insight. EMDR works through this

mechanism. Certain forms of somatic experiencing work through it. The memory is brought up, held in awareness, and the expected emotional response is not allowed to complete. The mismatch between what the system predicted it would feel and what it actually feels during the session is what rewrites the stored record. You can apply this deliberately without a therapist, though working with one is often faster. *(Insert your Buddhist practice of study, chanting/Gongyo, and Resolve for this work. This is also why I have repeatedly commented on practices that focus on material gains is an aberration that fully destroys the Buddhist teachings and goals).* The practice is not positive thinking. It is closer to what Neville Goddard was describing when he talked about revision, the deliberate reconstruction of past events in imagination with a different emotional outcome. He didn't have the neuroscience to explain why it worked, but the mechanism he was intuiting is exactly this. Recall the memory, hold it in an elevated emotional state that contradicts the original prediction, and the system updates the stored record.

This is also why embodied visualization done correctly produces different results than standard visualization. Standard visualization is a cognitive exercise. You picture something. You think about it. You try to feel something about it. The system recognizes it as imagination and files it accordingly. Embodied visualization is different. When you generate an internal experience that is sufficiently vivid, sufficiently emotionally complete, sufficiently felt in the body rather than just pictured in the mind, the nervous system does not cleanly separate it from a physical event. The neural architecture activated by a vividly imagined experience and the architecture activated by a lived experience overlap substantially. The system cannot fully distinguish them. Brain imaging research consistently supports this. Imagined movements activate the motor cortex.

Imagined social rejection activates the anterior cingulate cortex, the same region activated by physical pain. Imagined future scenarios activate the hippocampus in patterns nearly identical to remembered past experiences. At the level of neural firing, a sufficiently real internal state is real. What this means practically is that when you can generate the felt experience of a different life, not just picture it, but actually feel it in your body as present and already true, you are feeding the prediction engine new data. You are not tricking it. You are updating it. You are creating what neuroscience calls long-term **potentiation**, the strengthening of neural pathways through repeated co-activation for experiences that have not yet occurred in the physical world. And when those pathways strengthen, the prediction engine's model begins to shift. The reticular filter begins selecting for different signal. Different evidence starts becoming visible in the same environment. Different opportunities register as real rather than irrelevant.

The world has not changed. The 50 bits being selected from it have. *(This is relatable to the idea of attitude and intent in our minds awareness overcoming our Samsaric delusions. Old sutras discuss this in terms of purification of all the senses and more.)*

Now there is a layer underneath all of this that most nervous system content never reaches. And it is the layer that connects the neuroscience to something much

larger. *(In these layers one can correlate the concept of 9 consciousnesses in Buddhist teaching to refer again to the workings of the sentient mind.)*

In 2019, a team of physicists at Harriet Watt University ran an experiment based on a thought experiment proposed by Eugene Wigner in 1961 called Wigner's Friend. The setup involves two observers measuring the same quantum event simultaneously from inside and outside an isolated system. Wigner's original question was whether both observers would agree on what happened. The 2019 experiment gave an answer that the physics community has been quietly arguing about ever since. The observers did not agree. Both used correct measurement procedure. Both arrived at objective facts and those facts were mutually exclusive. The results were published in Science Advances. The researchers outlined three possible interpretations.

1. First, that measurements made by one observer can influence those made by another across the system, implying a non-local connection between perspectives.
2. Second, that absolute objective facts about measurement results simply do not exist independently of the observer making the measurement.
3. Third, that the standard framework of quantum mechanics breaks down at some scale we have not yet identified.

All three interpretations are deeply uncomfortable. All three point toward the same conclusion. The observer is not separate from what is being observed. Reality does not have a definite state prior to interaction with a measuring system. What becomes real at the quantum level is not independent of who is looking. Now hold that next to what predictive processing tells us about the nervous system. Your brain does not passively receive a fixed external world. It actively constructs an experienced world through prediction, selecting which information becomes real to you based on what the prediction engine expects to find. The boundary between your internal model and your external experience is not a clean line. It is a continuous loop of prediction and confirmation. If reality at the quantum level is not observer independent and if your nervous system is constructing your experienced reality rather than receiving it, then the question of where your mind ends and the world begins does not have the clean answer we were taught. The separation is not as absolute as it appears. This does not mean you can think anything into existence. The physical world has constraints that operate regardless of belief. Gravity does not negotiate. Other people have their own nervous systems and their own interactions with reality that do not bend to your predictions. There are boundaries, but within those boundaries, and the boundaries are wider than the standard materialist picture allows, the prediction engine is doing something that is more than just interpretation. It is participating in the ongoing construction of what becomes available to you. The slice of reality you can access, perceive, and act within is being actively shaped by a system running below your conscious awareness every second without your knowledge or permission unless you make it conscious and unless you learn to work with the specific mechanisms through which it updates.

The most important thing to understand about nervous system re-calibration is that it does not happen through force. The prediction engine does not respond to pressure. Telling yourself you should feel different, should think differently, should want different things produces resistance, not change. The system interprets the pressure itself as a signal that the current state is threatened, which activates the very defenses you are trying to work around. The update happens through what Fristen calls precision weighted prediction error. When an experience violates a prediction and when that violation carries enough emotional weight that the system cannot dismiss it as an anomaly, the model gets revised.

The key variable is not effort. It is **salience** (*attitude and intent*). The unexpected experience has to matter enough to the system that filing it as irrelevant is not an option. This is why peak experiences, whether they occur in **meditation**, in nature, in profound connection with another person, or in moments of sudden clarity, tend to produce lasting change in ways that years of effortful practice do not. The system encountered something it did not predict, and the emotional charge of the encounter was high enough that the model had to update. One high salience mismatch outweighs a thousand low salience affirmations. It is also why somatic approaches consistently outperform purely cognitive ones for deep change. The prediction engine is not a cognitive system. It is a body-based system. It stores information somatically, intention patterns, breath patterns, postural defaults, autonomic baselines. It speaks in sensation, not language. Approaching it with language is like trying to update software by talking to the screen. It is the body-based practices that actually move the needle. Whether you call them somatic experiencing, breath work, extended meditation, certain movement practices, or the specific kind of embodied visualization described earlier work because they engage the system in its own language. They create felt experiences, not thoughts about experiences. And felt experiences are the input the prediction engine is designed to process. There is one more mechanism worth understanding because it operates continuously and almost entirely without awareness.

It is called autonomic co-regulation and it explains why the people around you have more influence over your nervous system baseline than almost any deliberate practice you could adopt. Your autonomic nervous system is not operating in isolation. It is constantly reading the nervous systems of the people in your environment through micro expressions you never consciously register through vocal tone and rhythm through subtle postural signals through the heart rate variability patterns of people in close physical proximity and it is using that information to calibrate its own baseline state. This is not metaphorical. It is a documented neurobiological function. Polyvagal theory developed by Steven Porges describes the vagus nerve's role in this continuous social scanning. Mirror neuron research demonstrates the automatic activation of your motor and emotional systems in response to observing others. Studies on heart rate variability synchronization show measurable alignment between the autonomic states of people in close contact. What this means practically is that your nervous system is being co-regulated by the people around you at all times. (*Think chanting with others...*) Sustained exposure to people whose systems are running from a baseline of fear, scarcity, or chronic stress pulls your own baseline in that direction. Sustained

exposure to people whose systems are running from a baseline of safety, confidence, and possibility pulls it the other way.

This is not a soft social observation about the importance of good influences. It is a neurobiological statement about the continuous inputs your prediction engine is receiving. Environment is not context. Environment is data. The people you spend time with are feeding the system that constructs your experienced reality directly, continuously, and beneath the threshold of your conscious awareness. Changing your environment is therefore not a lifestyle choice. It is a nervous system intervention and in many cases it is the highest leverage intervention available because it changes the input rather than trying to fight the output.

So what does this mean as a practical framework? The work is not about positive thinking. It is not about affirmations or vision boards or trying harder to believe something your system has been confirming for years. Those approaches target the conscious mind which processes 50 bits per second and arrives after the decision has already been made. They are working at the wrong level. The work is about identifying the prediction engine's current model, specifically its baseline predictions about what is safe, what is available, and who you are in relation to the world. Not the conscious beliefs you would articulate if asked, but the operational predictions revealed by your habitual emotional responses, your chronic physical tension patterns, your automatic interpretations of ambiguous situations. The gap between what you consciously intend and what you repeatedly produce is the most direct readout of what the prediction engine is actually running. If you consistently intend connection and produce isolation, the engine is predicting isolation. If you consistently intend abundance and produce scarcity, the engine is predicting scarcity. The output is not failure. It is accuracy. The system is working exactly as designed. It is just designed around an outdated model. Once you can see the model, you can begin working with the reconsolidation mechanism. You find the somatic signature of the prediction, the body sensation, the emotional texture, the felt sense of the thing the system is running and you introduce a high salience mismatch, not a logical argument. A felt experience that violates the prediction while the prediction is active. That combination activation plus mismatch plus emotional weight is what the system is designed to update in response to you. Reinforce the update through embodied repetition, not repetition of thoughts, repetition of felt states. The more consistently you can generate the somatic experience of a different prediction being true, the more the long-term potentiation builds in that direction. The more the reticular filter shifts, the more the experienced world changes to match the new model. And you support the process by attending deliberately to co-regulation by placing yourself in environments and relationships where nervous systems running the baseline you are moving toward are present and available to en-train with not as a motivational strategy as a direct neurobiological input to a system that is reading those signals whether you intend it to or not. Go back to the Wigner's friend result one final time. two observers, same quantum event, irreconcilable objective facts. The conclusion that physics cannot avoid is that reality at its most fundamental level is not a fixed thing waiting to be passively discovered. It is something that becomes determinate through interaction with an observer. **The observer is not outside the system looking in. The observer is**

part of the process by which the system has definite states at all. Your nervous system constructs your experienced reality through prediction rather than receiving it. Your prediction engine runs below conscious awareness, responds to somatic input rather than cognitive argument, and updates through high salience mismatch rather than through effort or intention. The boundary between your internal model and the world you experience is a loop, not a wall. You are not a passive receiver of a fixed reality waiting to be discovered. You are an active participant in the ongoing process by which your reality becomes what it is. The mechanism of that participation is documented. The conditions under which the system updates are known. The inputs it responds to are accessible. The only question is whether you engage with the system at the level where it actually operates or whether you keep addressing the part of it that shows up after the decisions are already made. That is not a rhetorical question. It is the most practical question available to you right now because the prediction engine is running either way. It is constructing your experienced reality either way.

It is selecting your 50 bits either way.

The difference is whether you are doing it deliberately or whether it is doing it to you.