



JOURNAL OF RESILIENT ECONOMIES

PLATINUM OPEN ACCESS 

Journal homepage: <https://journals.jcu.edu.au/jre/index>



Happiness and Self as Social Constructs- an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Buddhist Practitioners Transcendence: Key Lessons in Resilience

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Abstract

The paper explores the role of Buddhist Practices like meditation and chanting in causing personal transcendence and, through the journey of personal transformation, analyses the development of key resilient competencies and spiritual intelligence in individuals. The study's theoretical framework is Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy because it helps provide a comprehensive and multicultural viewpoint. The study is qualitative. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, and the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed to understand the participants' experiences. Using an inductive approach, three themes were generated, leading to discussion and conclusion. The study is significant because the findings can contribute to building a theory of individual resilience.

Keywords: Buddhism, REBT, Phenomenological Analysis, Transcendence, Resilience, Spiritual Intelligence

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1. Introduction

Experts have pointed to rising mental health issues post the pandemic. These issues are predicted to be sticky beyond the pandemic (Kathirvel, 2020). This study explores how Buddhist practices help deal with mental and emotional issues and enhance spiritual intelligence by helping people transcend their idea of the Self. Transcendence is a key concept explored in the paper. Value transcendence is already taking place across generations, causing a shift in choices people make across generations (Kapoor et al., 2022).

Transcending the concept of Self from a socially constructed phenomenon to the Self within is an aspect of spiritual intelligence. Instrumental in this transcendence is a resilient mindset (Kapoor, 2021). This study explores how resilient mechanisms are set in motion when the constructs of happiness and the "Self" are explored critically.

Very few studies have captured the existential angst of people who make a conscious effort towards transcendence. This study is significant because it attempts to study this phenomenon by directly reporting the participants' experiences and bringing to the surface the techniques that can effectively build resilience and spiritual intelligence. By framing spiritual practices with popular cognitive behaviour therapy, the study also highlights the role of the mind and the spirit. It brings a comprehensive view of the subject to the table, which will further research resilience competencies.

One of the most popular cognitive behaviour therapies used by psychotherapists worldwide is Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy which is different from other such therapies because of its philosophical grounding and hence most adequate to frame this study. The paper uses the theoretical construct of REBT to understand the convergence and then arrive at the point of divergence between the two. The study is qualitative and uses the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA hereafter), and the research design is based on the recommendations of (Smith et al., 2009).

The paper begins with a review of existing literature on various Buddhist practices and their impact on mental, physical and emotional well-being. The literature review also elaborates how IPA is useful in conducting studies dealing with complex human emotions.

The next section of the paper elaborates on why the Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory provides the right theoretical framework for the study. The core of the study is the segment on the method used, which has sub-segments that elaborate on the study participants, and the procedure used to collect, record and analyse the data. The next sub-segment is on the findings of the study, which elaborate on the three themes which resulted from the two-stage or double hermeneutic processes. The final sections are devoted to the discussion, which synthesises the findings with the theoretical construct. The paper concludes with the larger implications of the study for building theories for resilience.

2. Review of Literature

Buddhism started a revolution in the 6th Century BC by questioning the orthodox practices prevalent in religion. His teachings (for lack of a better word) were simple and direct and spoke about the nature of reality, which transcended concepts of good and evil, right and wrong (Goodman, 2009). Buddha had experienced the ultimate reality and is believed to have been said to be too powerful yet subtle, pure, luminous and not conditioned, which could not be conveyed with words and

thought it would be impossible to teach (Klaus-Dieter Mathes, 2017).

Mental health issues are rising worldwide because of climate change, pandemics, and economic imbalances (Burns, 2015; Hayes et al., 2018). Advances in a scientific study focusing on human well-being are essential considering these pressing social issues. Experiences of joy and happiness are essential building blocks in establishing pleasant emotions and feelings that, in turn, lead to a person's physical and emotional well-being (James, 2003).

Research has demonstrated that engaging in Buddhist practices can benefit psychological and physical health (Laurent, 2021). More recently, it has been discovered that embracing Buddhist ideals such as self-regulation, compassion, and kindness may result in a more positive outlook (Aich, 2013). The therapy of mood disorders, substance use disorders, and mental disease are three effective treatments for a wide range of psychopathologies (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014). The results of one study showed that Zen trainees in Japanese monasteries who practised regular, severe meditation had high scores on measures of quality of life as well as good levels of general mental health (Shaku et al., 2014). In addition, Buddhist concepts have been successfully incorporated into mind-body interventions, with studies demonstrating significant reductions in depressive symptoms (Chan, 2011).

Previous Buddhist studies have largely taken a positivist approach, allowing for identifying correlations (e.g., between Buddhist practises and improved mental health), but not their interpretation. Few phenomenological qualitative studies have examined Western users' experiences of Buddhist practices (Laurent et al., 2021). Happiness has a social construct as with other concepts like beauty and fairness, and an individual assessment of his happiness depends on the shared notions of the same and his or her own appraisal (Veenhoven, 2014). Existing definitions of happiness, subjective well-being, and quality of life suggest a conceptual overlap between these constructs (Medvedev & Landhuis, 2018). Some concepts of happiness could be more beneficial than others (Bojanowska & Zalewska, 2015).

The original goal of Buddhism was enlightenment; however, it has been associated with resilience, which is a modern interpretation. Various researchers have studied varied but common themes like temporality, affect, power, ethics and selfhood (Gajaweera & DeAngelo, n.d). It is one thing to understand the concept of impermanence and quite another to know by experience (Valdivia, 2020).

Both Buddhism and REBT make people think critically and pursue truth in their own ways. They use a very similar method (Christopher, 2003). REBT combines philosophy and psychotherapy to create a stronger, more integrative approach. The therapy is based on Stoicism, Humanism, and Epistemology and is influenced by the work of philosophers like Popper and Bartley (DiGiuseppe, 2013). Popper and Bartley worked on learning, emotional disturbance and ideas of rationality (Dryden & Still, n.d). Integrating their work, Ellis developed his version of human transformation and crafted it in therapy, which caused a revolution in the field in the 1950s. His unique ways led people to think about thinking and challenge one's own assumptions. The pursuit of truth in terms of REBT means one's own truth by making people understand the irrationality of their beliefs.

The idea of the Self is primarily within the social and cultural context (Zahavi, 2009). This Self is the intervening factor that comes in between other phenomenological factors, i.e. other people, roles and external objects (Gergen, 2011). One constructs the Self in the various social processes. This has far-reaching implications in organisational dynamics wherein human experience and action can be well understood rather than explaining and controlling human beings through organisational dynamics (Jun, 2005).

This study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach in order to understand and make meaning of the complexities and nuances involved in human thought and behaviour. IPA provides an appropriate methodology because it's a philosophical approach that allows for interpreting the human experience in full subjectivity. It is based on how humans make sense of their own subjective experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This method is particularly suitable for exploring topics that are complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden (Smith & Osborne, 2008).

IPA has two primary aims: to look in detail at how people make sense of a lived experience and give a detailed interpretation of these experiences to explore emerging patterns of the unanticipated (Tuffour, 2017). The suitability of the approach lies in its participant orientation and legitimises the participant, researcher bonding and shared values (Alase, 2017). Hermeneutics refers to the interpretation of experience from language and texts (Smith et al., 2009). In this methodology, the researcher is considered a part of co-creating participants' meaning-making (Smith & Osborne, 2008). The method favours a small homogenous sample of people who have had similar experiences, and the interview method is considered the most favoured method of collecting data (Smith & Osborne, 2008).

3. Theoretical Framework

REBT comes under the umbrella of therapies under CBT or Cognitive Behaviour Theories. There is an overarching theme in all: people's emotions and behaviour result from their deep-seated beliefs about themselves and, consequently, the world around them. To change behaviour, the underlying beliefs have to be chiselled, modified or replaced (Turner, 2019). However, REBT differs from the others because it's grounded in philosophy and is founded on totally accepting the Self or self-love. Lastly, it attacks the root cause of distress or anxiety, which is a secondary disturbance, which in short, implies worrying about worrying or being anxious about being anxious, which is a major factor in endogenous factor in lifelong/ chronic depression (Dryden, 2021).

REBT provides one of the richest theoretical frameworks for the study as the epistemological views of the researchers, the methodology and the purpose of the study merge to create a rich synthesis of ideas. REBT is different from other cognitive behaviour theories in its philosophical approach. As illustrated in Figure 2, The central theme of REBT is that it is not events that cause people's emotions rather, it is the belief that people hold that causes people to experience emotions that could cause repeated and entrenched negative emotions like anger, stress, and anxiety and depression (Turner, 2016). Interestingly, REBT is the only major kind of psychotherapy apart from Zen Buddhism that holds that the individual does not need any trait, characteristic, achievement, purpose or social approval to accept himself (Kwee & Ellis, n.d.). Ellis was also deeply influenced by ancient philosophies of Stoicism and modern philosophers like Immanuel Kant and John Dewey (Robertson, 2019). Hence the philosophy and the

methodology involved in REBT make for comprehensive therapy with a Humanist Approach and cause people to transcend irrational beliefs and concepts of Self.

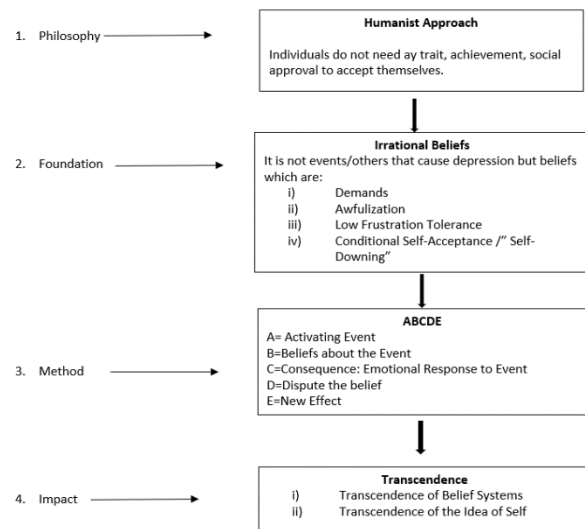


Figure 1- REBT & Transcendence, Adapted From : Christopher, M. S. (2003). *Albert Ellis and the Buddha: Rational soul mates? A comparison of rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) and Zen Buddhism*

4. Methods

The study is based on three IPA foundations: phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Idiography. The study follows Smith et al. (2009) guidelines for a systematic enquiry. The method entails enlisting a small group of participants with a shared experience. Data is collected with the help of semi-structured interviews. The analysis is done using Thematic Analysis, where each case is dealt with individually, and emergent themes are noted before moving to the next case. Subsequently, overarching themes are developed for all the individual cases, and finally, the interpretation is taken to a deeper level with a wider context.

Participants

The researchers recruited participants who had been practising the Buddhist practices of either Vipassana Meditation or Chanting as prescribed in Nichiren Buddhism under Soka Gokkai International. It was important to get participants to use two different techniques because although both techniques cause practitioners to step aside from their own mental habits creating the distance between their thoughts and themselves, enabling a more expansive and pliable mind. However, taking up chanting or meditation is a personal choice.

These two practices were specifically pertinent to the study because the researchers wished to understand the different impacts the practice has on participants' behaviour and attitudes. Four participants were recruited via networks of two researchers who initially identified eight. The final selection was based on the participants' willingness to open up, share

personal details and be enthusiastically willing to participate in the research. Two women and two men candidates were selected. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of the participants.

In all further discussions, the participants will be referred by given ID number as per Table 1 to protect their identity further.

Table 1- Participants' Details

ID Number	Age	Profession	Practising Since
Participant 1	42	IT Consultant	6 years
Participant 2	50	Psychologist	5 years
Participant 3	39	Professor	7 years
Participant 4	45	Media Professional	4 years

The sample size is in line with the recommendations of IPA (Smith and Osborne, 2008), favouring a small group of people with a common shared experience to conduct an in-depth analysis.

Procedure

A group called the Soka Gakkai, or Value-Creation Society started spreading Nichiren Buddhism outside Japan in the last half of the twentieth century. They were led by Daisaku Ikeda, who also wanted to spread Nichiren Buddhism outside of Japan. Its main goal is to spread Buddhist humanism around the world in the tradition of socially-engaged Buddhism and help people all over the world live in peace (Seager, 2006).

Vipassana meditation is a technique that directs attention to mental and physical phenomena as they occur over time. This practice leads to a methodical process of observation of sensory inputs from all of the existing phenomena, as well as the knowledge that they are fleeting and impermanent in nature. This insight form of the practice assists us in understanding the useless attachment to 'I' and liberates us from suffering by supporting long-term intra-psychic development. This is the practice of maintaining a clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception (Feldman & Hayes, 2005). This choice-less observation opens the door to observing and attending to all stimuli equally, without any preference.

The first author had experience with both Nichiren Buddhism and mediation, which was helpful as there was an understanding of Buddhist terms and philosophy which helped in insightful analysis and prevented misinterpretation of data. It was an asset to have an insider view. However, to ensure the validity of the analysis, both the authors maintained individual journals and had access to all the recordings.

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and allowed each participant to respond to each question in a freestyle, allowing for the emergence of a rich narrative. The interview questions were prepared based on the guidelines given for IPA (Smith et al., 2009). A semi-structured interview was designed having three categories of questions:

- Introductory
- Main
- Exit

The questions were simple at the beginning allowed for went on to become complex later. The questions were also designed in order to capture the ongoing journey of the individual participants allowing them to reflect on the nature of their personal struggles, trials, tribulations and triumphs. The participants were thanked upon completing the interview, and the research purpose was reiterated. Two interviews were online, using zoom and two were conducted in person. All the interviews were recorded, and the researchers also took notes of the same. Table 2 shows examples of the questions posed to the participants.

Table 2- Sample Questions

Introductory

1. How did you get introduced to Buddhism /Buddhist Practices?
2. Since how many years have you been practicing Buddhism?

Main

3. Which Buddhist Practice Do You Follow? (Chanting/Meditation/)
4. What change have you notice in your behavior because of your practice?
5. What's happiness according to you ?
6. What change did you notice in your emotional health?
7. What helped you deal with the stress/anxiety?
8. How have these Practices helped you in understanding yourself better?

Exit

9. Do you wish to share your personal journey of transformation?
10. What are your personal views on mental resilience?

IPA is a qualitative thematic approach rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography philosophies. The method was developed by predominantly Smith (1996), who used it in the field of Medical Psychology, but over the years, it has been used widely in social sciences (Turner, 2021). Phenomenology, over the years, has gained immense popularity in research and has captured the paradigm shift of inductive research over deductive research (Tuffour, 2017).

The idiographic approach suggests a detailed analysis of each case /participant is reported and analysed before moving towards cross analysis for thematic interpretation (Alase, 2017). The transcripts were analysed using the steps per Smith et al. (2009) recommendations. The interviews were both recorded and manually transcribed too. Each transcript was read and re-read multiple times. After gaining familiarity with the transcript, the researcher's comments were added. Attention was also given to linguistic elements and the use of metaphors.

Each participant's experience was analysed, and concept-level themes were identified. After that, idiographic themes were clustered for each participant, and through rigorous interpretation, key themes were developed that emerged from each participant's lived experiences. Yardley's (2000) criterion was used to assess the validity of the study.

5. Findings

IPA is based on double hermeneutics or, simply put, follows a two-stage interpretative process. The method is committed to a detailed analysis of cases rather than jumping into generalisations, thus taking an idiographic mode of inquiry instead of a nomothetic study. Hence the first stage was a detailed micro-level reading of each participant's account with a strong empathetic engagement of the researchers. This is

followed by the researchers' interpretation of these experiences at a more macro level.

The analysis revealed three themes that captured the participant's experience/journey with Buddhist practice and insights for further elaboration. These themes have captured the participants' complete narrative and elaborated on their lived experiences as a person and a practitioner of Buddhist Practices. Figure 1 illustrates the thematic map of the study, which begins with the trigger, then the process of transformation of the participants and finally, their transcendence.

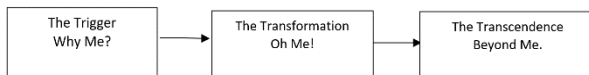


Figure 2- The emergent themes

Theme One: The Trigger: "Why Me?"

All the participants turned to Buddhism when they experienced existential angst and searched for answers. Looking at the age profile of the participants, all of them are in the age group of the early forties and fifties, implying they were searching for answers and were no longer indulging in the blame game by attributing others or a circumstance for their condition but were willing to introspect. Participant 1 had been facing anger issues since his early days. He had quickly changed jobs and was expecting a better profile or leadership position. His personal relations with his wife were strained too.

I remember I had changed my job recently and all was going well. I felt hopeful that I would be up the corporate ladder soon. Until ...one day again, I reacted sharply and rudely to a colleague because I was angry with her low commitment and unprofessional approach. I had gone a little far and was rude. It was the beginning of the same cycle, again. That day, I realised that it's not the world that needs to change. It was me. Participant 1. (15/03/2022). Personal Communication [Personal Interview]

Participant 1, then contacted an old college friend who had taken up Vipassana meditation and had told him about his personal transformation. He made preliminary inquiries and booked himself at the Vipassana Meditation, taking the earliest dates that were available.

Participant 2 is a practising Psychologist and has a thriving practice. Whilst she felt that she was adept at listening and providing solutions for her clients, there were parts within herself that she had not come to terms with. She had not come to terms with her own shadows and darkness.

I had had a busy day; the last session had gone well. I had counselled a woman who had married recently and was facing issues with her husband's controlling and aggressive behaviour.... The client had gone. I went home, not happy but with a feeling of anxiety. Sitting by myself, I was about to distract myself with some soap opera when I decided that it was time to confront my anxiety issues. I no longer wanted to feel like a hoax. Participant 2.

(18/03/2022). Personal Communication [Personal Interview].

Participant 3 worked as a professor in a private college in Pune. For the last few months, there have been issues with salary. It began with a delay; first, there was a delay of a week, the next month the delay was fifteen days, last month there was no salary, and on enquiring, she was given vague answers by the Human Resource Department, it was just an assurance that things would be back on track soon.

The bank will deduct the EMI in the next two days, and the mummy has to be taken to the neurosurgeon without fail. Why are things so unfair? Why did I quit my stable job to take up this one? How can people be so insensitive that they don't care about other people's financial commitments? Why is life always difficult for me? Participant 3. (09/02/2022). Personal Communication [Personal Interview]

Participant 3 said she initially just wanted to change her circumstances. She was desperate to find a new job and started looking for something that would help.

Participant 4 revealed that he was very successful in his career. He was the blue-eyed one. The boss's favourite one, popular with all his colleagues. He thought all was going well with his life, professionally as well as personally. He had a charming wife and an adorable five-year-old daughter until his world came crashing down one day.

We had all had dinner, and Tia had gone to sleep. I was checking my messages on the phone when my wife shook my shoulder and told me that she wanted to speak to me. I looked at her, and she told me that she wanted to tell me that she had started seeing someone else. I just remember feeling numb by disbelief. Participant 4 (18/03/2022). Personal Communication [Personal Interview]

It was found that there was a compelling need to find solutions to problems in the case of all the participants, and the will to find a solution was very intense. This will be what drove them to seek unconventional answers.

Theme Two: The Transformation: "Oh Me"

The participants reported a gradual transformation and detailed their individual experiences, narrating how their chosen practices brought about a profound change in their attitude and behaviour. Participant 1, went through the 10-day meditation retreat. Initially, he found it very tough and also futile.

I was very excited to go to the Vipassana Centre; however, things were not what I expected. We were told about the daily routine. No cell phones were allowed, speaking was also not allowed, meal times were fixed, we were expected to wake up by 4.30 in the morning. I was expecting a lot of fanfare and feel-good motivational conversations. We were told to sit with folded legs, lotus position if possible and just watch what happens inside us ...just watch the breath, watch your sensations. Participant

1(15/03/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview]

Participant 1 recalled that he thought of packing up and leaving the retreat in two days. He felt angry and betrayed again. But he remembered his friend's glowing face and peaceful demeanour and decided to try for one more day, and ultimately, for reasons unknown to him, he completed the course day by day. He said he started feeling a sense of calm and peace he had never felt before towards the end of the course. He told the researchers that he felt empowered when he perceived the distance between himself and his thoughts. When he returned to his office, he gradually got the ability to respond and not react. He felt an inner transformation had started. His relationships began improving.

Participant 2's journey was different from that of Participant 1. She took to meditation like fish takes to water. She was used to listening deeply and intently, she was also used to observing other people's reactions non-judgementally. The only difference was that she had never turned the gaze to herself.

I felt at home with the practice.... Watching, and observing came easily to me. I realised that the only way to confront our fears is through them, ourselves. Participant 2 .(18/03/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview]

Participant 2 realised that many beliefs people live with may come from the subconscious mind, childhood memories or unresolved trauma. In order to resolve these feelings which generate thoughts or beliefs, it was necessary to have a technique that helps people bring them up and confront them. It is then that a person will find closure and be able to accept oneself and others.

Participant 3's experience was radically different from others.

I was desperate to find a new job and felt miserable. I decided to confide in an old friend, and she told me about her experience with chanting and the benefits that it brought to her. It's only a few minutes every day; try it out. Participant 3 .(09/02/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview]

Participant 3 told the researchers that she thought that she would give it a try, and ultimately, there would be no harm. She told us how her friend took her to her first meeting. A kind old woman told her to chant "Nam Meyo Ho Renge Kyo" for a few minutes every day and test the process herself. Participant 3, a Hindu, lives in a joint family. In the evening, she chose a quiet corner in her room and started whispering the chant to herself. She did not want the others in the house to think she is doing something "weird". One week into the practice, Participant 3 developed a liking for chanting and would look forward to the daily practice. In a few months, the new job arrived, and Participant 3 also felt new energy around herself.

Meanwhile, Participant 3 had started reading the texts more and attending meetings of a support group in her circle. All three elements of the practice: chanting, reading & contemplation and being a part of the support group helped in Participant 3's transformation. Hearing about the pain/suffering/problems others were facing made her realise that

by thinking of herself as a victim, she had undermined herself hood. Later, she too got the courage to talk about her problems, and once that was done, it proved to be a cathartic turning point.

Participant 4 recounted sheer disbelief and horror when his wife confided in him. His ego was hurt, so he went into his own shell for days. He started staying in denial. He could not figure out why and how could this episode happen to him. He also could not summon the courage to confront his wife because that would mean acknowledging his own failure. His personal problems started taking a toll on his professional life, and things started to go downhill.

I felt everything around me collapse like a house of cards. My self-confidence shattered; I felt broken and depressed and took recourse to alcohol. Things got even worse. My mother discovered my condition and asked me to take a break and head home. It was the best decision I took. Participant 4 .(18/03/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview]

Participant 4 told the researchers that he remembers just crying for one full day, but this catharsis helped him heal. He felt strong again and looked up more study material online on meditation and Buddhism. One thing led to the other, and he discovered a class on meditation with regular practice; participant 4 was able to transform himself by now listening to both his heart and mind, and he was able to forgive himself and his wife. All four participants gradually reached a level of acceptance of the Self and hence of situations and other expectations. These profound changes inspired them to keep working on the practice and explore more.

Theme Three - The Transcendence: "Beyond Me"

All four participants have continued with their practice and have deepened their understanding of themselves and the world around them. Their hearts, minds, soul and body are in harmony and their personal and professional lives more harmonious. They have been able to make the shift from themselves to others and have realised the interconnectedness that people and events have on each other. They function not from a limited sense of their individual selves but from an expansive self. Meditation, chanting and other contemplative practices have also brought about a change in the notion of happiness which is now grounded in fulfilment and purpose.

Participant 1 holds a leadership position in a Consulting organisation and lives a balanced lifestyle. His personal lifestyle is more balanced, he focuses on health by taking care of his sleep, right breathing and digestion. He deals with people more compassionately and does not view them as ends to his means but as people with their own aspirations. He is calmer and leads by example. He nurtures his hobbies like gardening and cooking.

I feel calmer now and do not feel angry if things do not go my way. I like being with my own Self and like going with the flow. By the following vipassana, I now know the true nature of things: impermanence. I feel blessed and feel gratitude for all situations and people in my life. Participant 1

.(15/03/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview]

Participant 2 has also narrated that she continues her daily practice of mediation and has reported feeling more authentic and genuine. She can connect better with her clients. She can stay in the present moment and no longer feels anxious.

I can stay in a meditative state now, focussing on the present moment. I do not sway from one extreme to the other. I feel calm, composed and able to connect better with my clients. I now combine psychotherapy with meditation and mindfulness, and my clients are leading healthier and happier lives. Participant 2. (18/03/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview]

Participant 3, has evolved from considering herself to be a victim to somebody who accepts full ownership of her life. From helping herself, she now leads a support group herself and gives life lessons to the younger generation at her centre, where she is extremely popular. She continues her exploration by diving deep into the texts provided by Soka Gakkai International, which is a global community of individuals spread in 192 countries who practice Nichiren Buddhism

I now feel empowered and understand the cause and effect of a relationship or karma. I no longer feel scared about my decision to stay single and do not search for a partner in fear, but I know that when the time is right, the right person will come into my life. Participant 3. (09/02/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview.]

Participant 3 acknowledges that "Faith is a daily challenge", but because of the community, the experience and learnings, she will strive to move on.

Participant 4 greatly benefitted from meditation. He told the researchers that he realised that the desire to constantly succeed was due to his feelings of inadequacy and his innermost desire to prove himself and seek validation. He said, "his wife wanted a companion, not a super achiever provider." Participant 4 told the researchers that by practising heartfulness meditation, he realised that he had long ignored his heart, and had been operating from the mind only. He realised that relationships are based on mutual feelings and that he was required to be sensitive to the emotional needs of others and himself.

I finally acknowledged my own fear and hurt ego and was able to confront my wife about our broken relationship. I did not have the desire to hold on or cling to the relationship and also did not feel inadequate. I respected my wife's decision, and we parted our ways amicably; our daughter, too, has understood the new arrangements. Participant 4. (18/03/2022).Personal Communication[Personal Interview]

He told the researchers that he feels a sense of freedom. His professional life is back on track, and he feels much in control. All the participants have reached the level of transcendence whereby their idea of the Self has expanded to accommodate others, and the notion of happiness is no longer limited to power, achievement, control etc. Happiness is more about finding harmony, balance, purpose and compassion.

6. Discussion

The study used the method of Phenomenological Analysis to understand because it's a philosophical approach to the study of experience. Its goal is to fully explore a lived experience. There are two approaches to Phenomenological Analysis, descriptive and/or interpretative. This paper takes the interpretative approach where participants have narrated their lived experiences, and the researchers have interpreted the embedded meaning in the lived experience.

Through interpreting the lived experience of practitioners with Buddhist practice, the paper attempts to find connections between Buddhist Practices and one of the most popular and widely used cognitive behaviour therapy: Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy. This was created by Ellis (1995) and has been the dominant approach to psychological treatment since then. Originally, Ellis trained in person-centred therapy and psychoanalysis but realised the approach's limited effectiveness and developed a more comprehensive therapy based on a more wholesome and humanist. The overarching aim of the analysis is to unlock the resilient mindset and spiritual intelligence.

Throughout the interviews, we found that each participant was triggered to search for Buddhist practices on encountering mental upheaval, confusion, angst, or witnessing repeated patterns. As narrated, Participant 1 had always blamed others for not succeeding in his professional and personal relations until he had a flash of insight. It dawned on him that something inside of him needed to be changed. It was this realisation that drove him to the path. In Participant 2's case, she was doing well with her career. Still, in the backdrop of her being, there were always the shadows of anxiety which she could not understand and would always push out by distracting herself with entertainment, till one day, it welled up and could not be pushed more and made a resolve to confront her inner demons and search for answers within. For Participant 3, her search for a Buddhist Practice was triggered not so much by a compelling need to search within but by hoping to find a better job. As she followed the practice of chanting and contemplation, she discovered her sense of victimhood and gradually felt empowered. She continued the practice as she found people with whom she could relate and forge meaningful relations. In Participant 4's case, it was shock therapy. His mind was numbed by his first-ever, unanticipated rejection and his sense of being heartbroken for his daughter. He had no reasons and hence slipped into semi-depression until he found answers. Spiritual Intelligence is the search for answers regarding the greater purpose of human endeavour and life. Existential angst is often the origin or the fertile ground on which it flourishes (Kapoor, 2021).

The second theme sheds light on the journey of transformation, the essence of which lies in the total acceptance of the situation, developing resilience to go through challenges and ultimately expanding the notion /concept of the Self and hence being able to reassess the meanings happiness. Participant 1 no longer reacted to situations or people with anger but started responding as the situation desired. Participant 2, too, by her regular meditation practice, emerged in her own light and acquired the finesse to deal with her clients. Vipassana in Pali means "special seeing" implying that one gets the ability

to see through one's own beliefs, concepts, ideas and notions, which sheds light on things as they really are. Hence, the practice allows people to respond to situations based on reality instead of through worries or preconceived notions.

When it comes to meditation, we can go to the Buddhist tradition for practices that help us build a positive outlook on life, calm our minds, and stabilise our focus. The rituals' intended outcome was enlightenment in their religious setting. Understanding the interdependence of all living things; non-harm toward oneself and others; non-harm toward one's own needs; an emphasis on empathic and compassionate behaviour that sustains the community; the need for continuous practise of this way of being are some of the characteristics of these traditions (Grepmaier et al., 2007; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). In other words, contemplative practises prescribing what we now know to be the components of a physically and mentally fit person immersed in a flourishing community. Reflective practices can be seen as an important behavioural adaptation for individuals and communities in their efforts to become more resilient. All levels of resilience are influenced by various interrelated circumstances (Tache & Selye, 1985).

For Participant 3, the chanting quietened her mind, giving her the ability to get intuitive insights and the community or group meetings that Soka Gakkai offered meant that she saw so many other people suffer, also made her realise that her concerns were nothing in comparison to what others were going through. By going through books, and articles provided by Soka Gakkai, she could also replace her belief patterns with newer thoughts.

For Participant 4, mediation made him listen to the heart, and his transformation occurred because he learned to listen to the heart's silent wisdom as opposed to the incessant noisy chattering of the mind. He learnt to balance the heart with the head and surge ahead with more power.

There seems to be a contradiction between the reality we expect and experience on a daily basis and the reality described by the Buddha. This is because the way things appear to us is not the way things truly are. Whereas we see a limited world, confining and solid, the reality is constantly in motion, in flux and non-permanent (Thomas, 2007). To help people understand /see this point of view in Buddhist philosophy, the phenomenon is all banal realities and all the emotions we experience, grief, sadness, joy, anxiety, suffering etc. In stark contrast to this is essence or reality as it is. Essence means seeing/understanding the world through the lens of the Universe, which is vast, empty, and remote (John, 2008).

"Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water." This is a very famous Zen koan that captures the third theme enigmatically from the Buddhist perspective. All four participants did the same things they did before but reported more contentment, peace and well-being. It can be said that they transcended what was limiting them and emerged much stronger. By working on their existential angst, the participants could transform and transcend the notions of the Self and redefined happiness to a broader dimension: finding purpose, being authentic, and finding fulfilment.

Participant 1 became a compassionate leader, Participant 2 felt authentic, Participant 3 felt empowered, and Participant 4 more heartfelt and balanced. All four reached this

stage because they accepted the situation as it was, leading them to accept themselves. Also, the concept of transcendence can be interpreted to mean that the participants transcended their personal goals and started living with a larger and expansive self to serve their communities in their personal and professional capacities.

REBT focuses on understanding irrational beliefs and replacing them with more rational ones. Irrational beliefs are of four types: Demands which have musts, should and absolute at their core. The second type is categorised as Awfulizing, implying when a person believes that a bad, unfortunate or inconvenient situation is worse than the worst (Ellis & Ellis, 2019). The third is categorised as Low Frustration Tolerance implying absolute inability /unwillingness to undergo the slightest discomfort or deviance from a set notion. The last and fourth irrational belief is Conditional Self-Acceptance, also known as Self Dooming, when people have enormously high expectations of themselves and feel a sense of self-worth based on high achievement or social approval, etc.

The method involved in REBT comprises of 5 steps which have the acronym ABCDE
A=Activating Event
B=Beliefs about the Event
C=Consequence: Emotional Response to the Belief
D=Dispute the Belief
E=New Effect

The start of need for some therapy always begins with an Activating Event which is the cause of the state of being shaken and stirred. Further examination of the trigger with the help of the therapist, the client begins to see that it was not the event but a certain belief behind it that led to the distress. In Participant 1 case: He believed that others had more of a role to play in his life. They were in control, not him. In Participant 2's case, she believed that she was adept at finding all solutions for all worries. Participant 3 believed that life was always unfair to her, and finally, Participant 4 believed that he was perfection personified and that anyway could never reject him. He believed himself to be the winner. In the therapy, clients are made to realise that C is a result of B.

But what's different between REBT and Buddhist Practices is that, in REBT, someone helps people understand, see, or realise; hence, there is an external agency. Whereas in Buddhist practices, the tool is provided, but the person himself or herself arrives at an answer. In REBT, clients are shown their thoughts /beliefs, which are bracketed as irrational. It's a rational process. However, in Buddhist Practices, space is naturally created between the thinker and his thoughts, which occurs as a result of mediation and as the space increases, people begin to see the true nature of things or phenomena and gradually see that the cause of their "suffering" is couched in "desire". If we interpret the four cases from the Buddhist worldview, Participant 1's suffering was due to the desire to control outcomes always, hence the anger; Participant 2's desire to be perfect and Participant 3's desire to evade personal responsibility, and Participant 4's desire for approval was the actual cause of their suffering.

The Buddha gave the Four Noble Truths the foundation of Buddhist thought and philosophy. These being: There is Suffering. There is the origination of suffering. There is a cessation of suffering. There is a path to the cessation of

suffering. However, certain entrenched mental modes stop people from seeing the truth: desire, aversion, and ignorance.

Table 3- Difference Between Buddhist and REBT Toolkit

Buddhist Practices Focus Area	REBT Focus Area
Ignorance	Irrational Beliefs
The impermanence of Material Phenomenon	Role of Individual in Finding Meaning
Dissolution of Notion of Self	Finding Higher Version of Self
Enlightenment	Transcendence

Table 3 summarises the difference between the two approaches. The ultimate aim of REBT is self-love /acceptance of the Self by doing away with demands, awfulisation, low frustration tolerance and conditional self-acceptance. It's a gradual process of accepting external circumstances and making peace with oneself (Turner,2016). However, the core idea of Buddhist Philosophy is the idea of No Self. However, the ultimate aim of Buddhist teachings is to extinguish the sense of Self, achieving what is known as the nonself state. Buddhism believes that personal identity is delusional (Giles, 1993).

The tools provided by Buddhism are meditation and the role of community. REBT uses the process of rationalisation to see /perceive /understand/realise irrational beliefs, which are replaced by the person's will and dedication. However, Buddhist practices begin with acknowledging the nature and limits of the mind, hence using other techniques like meditation, chanting, reflective practices, kaons/riddles to bring about an inner change /newer experiences.

So comparing the two, REBT is bracketed by rationality and Buddhism with reality or the real nature of things, the nature of the world around an individual and the deep/ entrenched mental modes/states of desire, aversion or Self. Both take individuals towards transcendence; REBT stops at transcendence which can be seen as finding a richer meaning in life through meaningful relationships with the Self and others. However, in Buddhist philosophy, transcendence can be interpreted as the complete dissolution of the ego and the Self with the ultimate aim to get enlightenment which is freedom from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

7. Conclusion

The study deeply dived into the lived experiences of four participants regarding their Buddhist Practices to analyse resilience that develops in people during the practice. The broader aim is to build a theory/ for the Resilient Competency Framework. By using the theoretical framework of REBT, the study gets a multicultural and broader framework for finding implications for the study.

The finding suggests that the key competency in building resilience is challenging existing beliefs /mental models of two main ideas that shape the nature of interactions people have with others and the way people navigate through challenges in both personal and professional lives. The first is the idea of happiness and what that entails, and the second is the idea of the Self and its building blocks.

The study finds that the experience of anxiety, lack, and depression emanates from unfulfilled desires or unmet expectations dictated by the concept of Self, which is largely validated by social experiences and the individual concept of happiness. However, the challenge is the way to replace existing belief structures. Both REBT and Buddhist practices aim to do that.

It can be concluded that the key lesson in resilience is transcendence, and the competencies that drive it are critical thinking, which helps in deconstructing existing knowledge systems, the second being cross-cultural sensitivity, which leads to expansion in perspectives and third spiritual intelligence, which is the intelligence to navigate the existential angst from transformation to transcendence. The study recommends more research on the three competencies on a larger scale to build the Resilient Competency Framework.

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