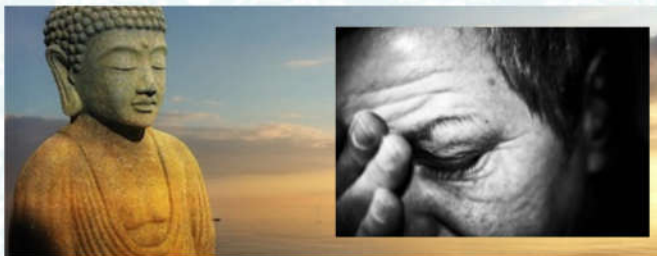


Mahayana Buddhism and Trauma



by David J. Lewis PhD, Deborah Rozelle PsyD
Symposium on Trauma & Contemplative Practice
May 1-2, 2015 – Harvard Divinity School

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Trauma ♥ or ☹ Meditation?

- **Attraction**
 - Contemplative practice as trauma treatment
 - MBIs for trauma – but late to the celebration
- **Aversion**
 - Trauma contraindication for meditation
- **Confusion**
 - *Dukkha nanas* (dark night) vs traumatic reaction
 - Dissociative states vs enlightenment

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As a relative newcomer to the study of trauma, I've noticed a good deal of ambiguity over the connection between trauma and meditation. If they were to proclaim their relationship on facebook, they would probably say "it's complicated – deep but complicated". Taking a cue from Buddhism, there seem to be attraction, aversion and confusion.

This symposium is clearly about the attraction – ways that contemplative practices, even though drawn from spiritual contexts where they are aimed at transcendent goals, can help alleviate the very worldly suffering of trauma. And as we see yesterday and today, there are lots of great ways for that to happen.

But there are also notes of complexity. For one, trauma seems rather late to the mindfulness celebration. Despite considerable theoretical speculation and a handful of small but positive studies on treating PTSD with MBIs – mindfulness-based interventions such as MBSR and MBCT – trauma has been conspicuously absent from the many lists of disorders that MBIs can successfully address. It looks like Tony King and a few others may finally be changing that, but it's taken quite a while, and probably quite a few failed trials that we will probably never hear about.

On the aversion side, to complicate things even more, unmetabolized personal trauma, whether explicit PTSD or not, is generally considered a contraindication for meditation, or at least a problem to address off the cushion, with a psychotherapist. The literature is replete with stories of people crashing out of retreats and entire meditation careers with what appear to be severe traumatic reactions.

But now we are into confusion territory, because sometimes these episodes are not due to personal trauma history, but are experiences that advanced meditators are *supposed* to have, to one extent or another, and supposed to work their way through *on* the cushion. In the Theravada these are the so-called *dukkha nanas*, or states of fear, terror and other unpleasant states that are the necessary precursor to certain significant meditational achievements. Sometimes even beginning meditators without a trauma history encounter these unpleasant states. And the Tibetans don't wait for it to happen to them. Early in their path they deliberately throw themselves into states of extreme fear by meditating intensely on hellacious realms of suffering far worse than experienced by any humans.

And to top off the confusion, there are extremely *positive* states on the Buddhist path, such as witness consciousness, that seem to be mimicked by the dysfunctional traumatic conditions forms of dissociation known as depersonalization or derealization, which Shinzen Young calls "enlightenment's evil twin".

What we propose is a new way to look at the relationship between trauma and Buddhism that throws light on some of these complexities. While we won't solve these conundrums today, this model does point the way to solutions.

Our model is based on Mahayana Buddhism in the Tibetan tradition, hence the title of the talk. But since Tibetan Buddhism includes Theravada as a theoretical subset, even though the two have different maps of practice, much will still be familiar to Theravada and modern-day mindfulness practitioners.

Let's start at a somewhat philosophical level.

	Samsara	PTSD
Misapprehension	Self & things are inherently existent, permanent	The trauma is still present, permanent
Misidentification	Body/mind reified	Body/mind at time of trauma
Mistaken Self	Everyday self – suffering-saturated	Second self – trauma-saturated
Ultimate Reality	Empty self – no suffering	Everyday self – untraumatized
Conventional Reality	Self & things exist in web of dependence	The trauma exists in web of memory

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When I say Mahayana, you probably think of compassion and the bodhisattva ideal.
But there's a lot more to the Mahayana
And the part I am going to discuss day is mostly the wisdom side

There are important relationships between the compassion side of Mahayana Buddhism and trauma
But we won't be talking about that today

Xx And also, if you are more familiar with Theravada, Vipassana or mindfulness movements today

Xx You will see a lot of ideas in common.

Xx because Mahayana Buddhism draws from the same roots

Xx And,

particularly on the Wisdom side, the Mahayana sees itself **not** as a new doctrine,
But as recasting and clarifying the ideas of the early Buddhism.

To get started, we use the Buddhist notion, common with all Buddhism,
that the world we live in is a realm of suffering (or dukkha), called samsara

Click -- samsara

Samsara is not a place, of course, but a state of mind, Our everyday state of mind
Characterized by suffering, gross and subtle
Not only birth, sickness old age and death
But the hidden suffering underlying even pleasant and neutral experience
Because we cling to things that are by nature transient
Which are bound to end, leaving us wanting

By the way, this correlation between cosmology – a realm -- and psychology – a state of mind
-- is a common theme in Buddhism and other religions
More to say about that later

But **why** is our everyday life a realm of suffering, overt and hidden?
The Mahayana way of putting that root of suffering
Is what's called our **misapprehension of inherent existence**

That our self and things in the world
Are independent, self-standing things, or as we say, reified
When in fact they exist only in a web of interdependence

And that misapprehension of reified reality
leads us to identify with the body and mind that we carry around with us everywhere

Thinking I **am** that body/mind
And since the body suffers – injury, sickness, old age, death
And the mind suffers – it resists, it clings, it denies, gets angry, obsessive
WE suffer by identification with them

And taking that one step further
We have a self

A reified, inherently existent self
That is saturated with suffering

What's the relief?

Some Mahayana language for that is Ultimate Reality
The celebrated emptiness
Or more completely – emptiness of inherent existence

The cure for samsara is to see through our misapprehension of inherent existence
and gain trans-conceptual insight into ultimate reality – emptiness
And if we can live there, it ends our misidentification and hence our suffering

Inherent existence and emptiness
basically wrap up in one concept
the notions of self, impermanence, selflessness and interdependence

But there is one key feature of emptiness that is often obscured by the term selflessness or no-self

And that is that there IS a self, just not an inherently existent self (and likewise for phenomena)

For how can we deny there is a self that perceives, thinks and acts? That would be nihilism!

There is a self -- We just mistake its true nature

The notion called Conventional reality expresses that distinction

That self and things DO exist

Not inherently, but in a web of utter interdependence

So Conventional and Ultimate reality are two sides of the coin

As are interdependence and emptiness

And the highest achievement,

Is to simultaneously realize and live in ultimate and conventional reality

To see at once

both the emptiness of self and things

And their interdependent functioning in the world

So that's a little crash course in Mahayana wisdom ideas
But what does it have to do with PTSD/

Click [ptsd](#)

The crucial observation is that the phenomenological root of PTSD is re-experiencing
The involuntary reliving of the trauma
As if it is still happening, here-and-now
Which leads in turn to the range of emotional, cognitive and somatic symptoms of PTSD

So we can say that the PTSD sufferer is actually experiencing a profound misapprehension
in the psychological realm

And they cannot integrate the traumatic event into their experience and other memories
So it has a kind of hard shell, we could say, a mistaken psychological inherent existence

And we can also characterize PTSD as
identifying with their body and mind at the time of the trauma
Rather than their actually present body/mind

We can call that the PTSD sufferer's second self
That "The trauma becomes the new me"

So there is a sense here of functional correlation
Between the Mahayana account of samsara
And what we understand about PTSD?

We are not saying they are equivalent – far from it
But we propose there is a parallel structure

What is healing from PTSD?
It is getting back to the everyday, untraumatized self
Gaining insight that the traumatic misapprehension is just that, a misapprehension
That the trauma is in not still present, dangerous and fearful

We can't really call it ultimate reality, of course
But to the PTSD sufferer who may have lost hope, it is pretty significant
So it's a relative ultimate reality, if you'll pardon the oxymoron

And the PTSD correlate of conventional reality is especially interesting

Despite the dysfunctional nature of the traumatic memory in PTSD
It is still an actual memory.
Not to be expunged, but instead integrated into the web of personal experience

And accomplishing that, the former PTSD sufferer lives comfortably with both realities at once

The trauma did happen – their conventional reality
But it's in the past, no longer threatening –their healed, "ultimate" reality

There is much more to this functional relationship between PTSD and samsara
And in the remainder of the talk
I'll present a couple more pieces of evidence
That there is something significant going on here between Buddhism and trauma psychology
Something not really recognized before, at least this explicitly



But first, a few words about the whole idea of analogy

Protective headgear must be worn

Ohhh... kay

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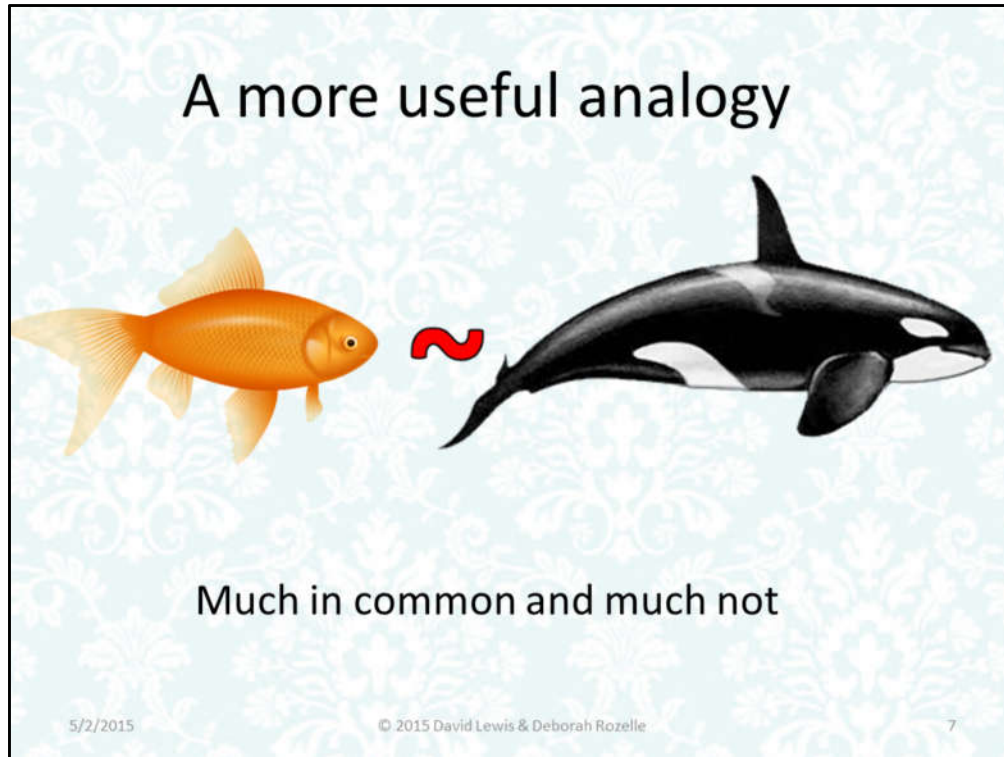
How about this headgear?
Appropriate for the theme



Analogies are easy
But to be meaningful, useful
To add something to our understanding
They need a fair amount of correlation between the two sides

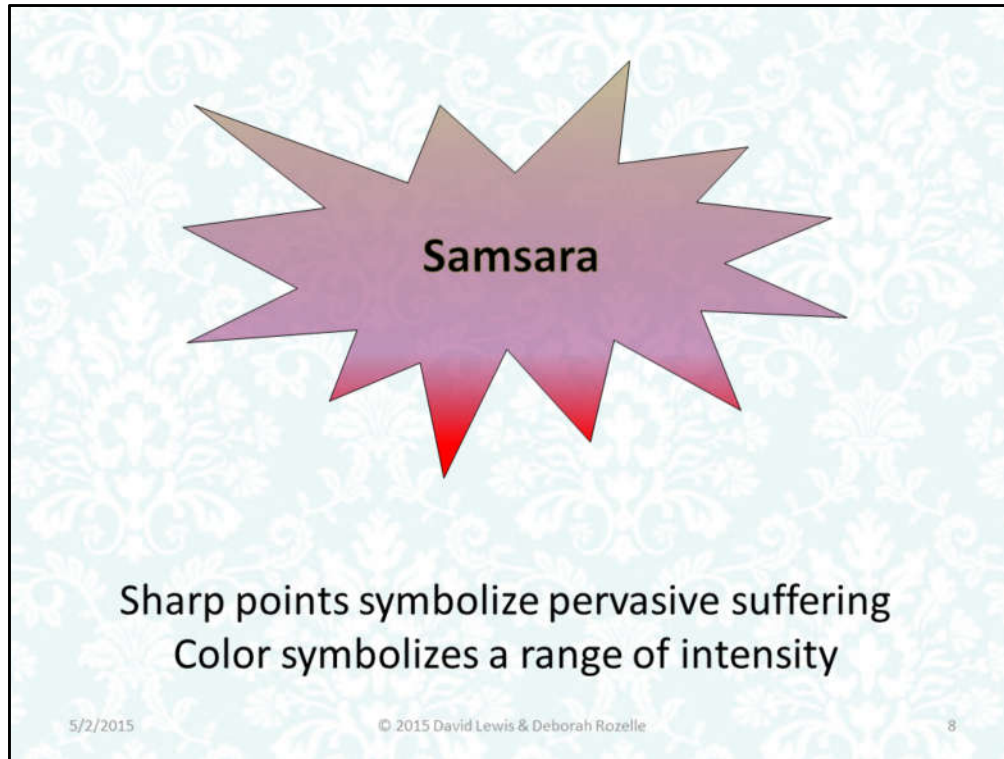
This isn't a very good one

We'll use the red twiddle symbol for analogy



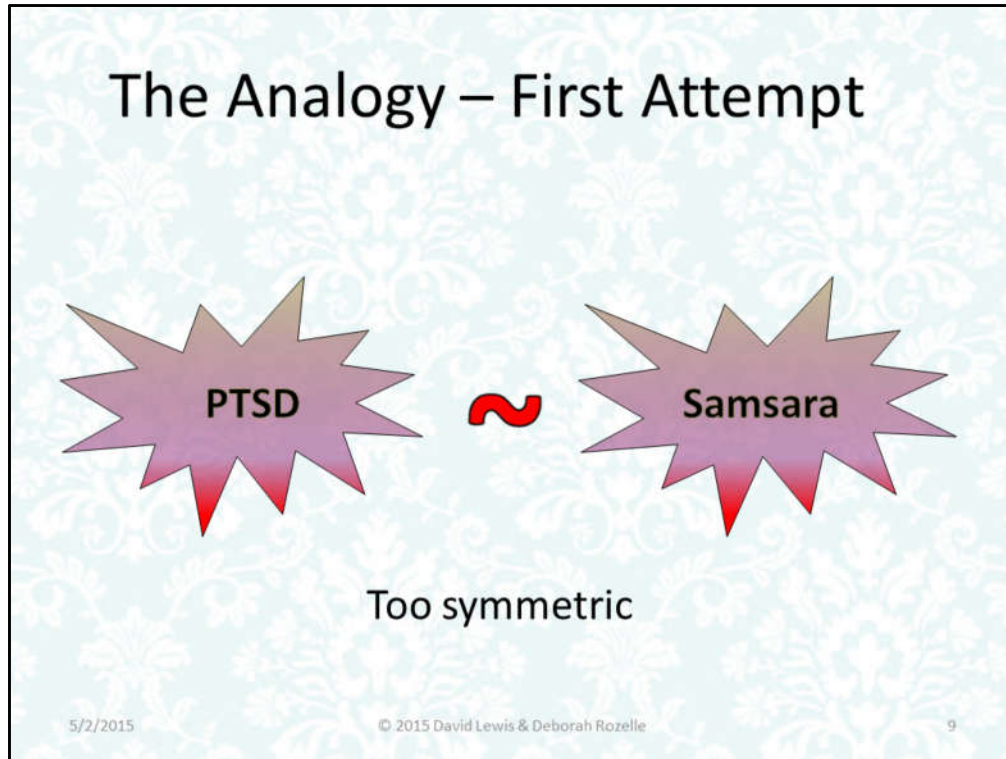
Now we're getting somewhere

But this talk isn't about fish and mammals who swim like fish



It's about suffering – samsara
This will be our symbol for that

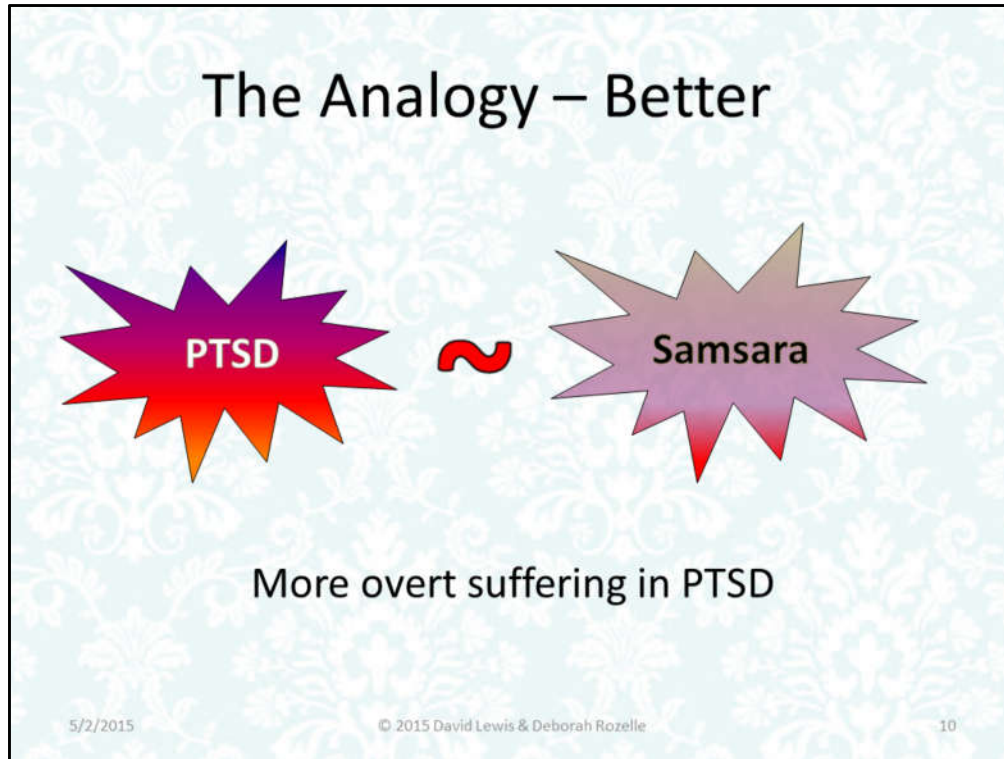
The sharp points mean it's a realm of pervasive suffering
The red shading is the overt suffering – sickness, injury, loss
The lighter shades are the more subtle, hidden forms of suffering
Of the pleasant and neutral



As a first pass –
As we have seen
PTSD and samsara are **functionally** analogous at a theoretical level

But on many grounds they are far from equivalent

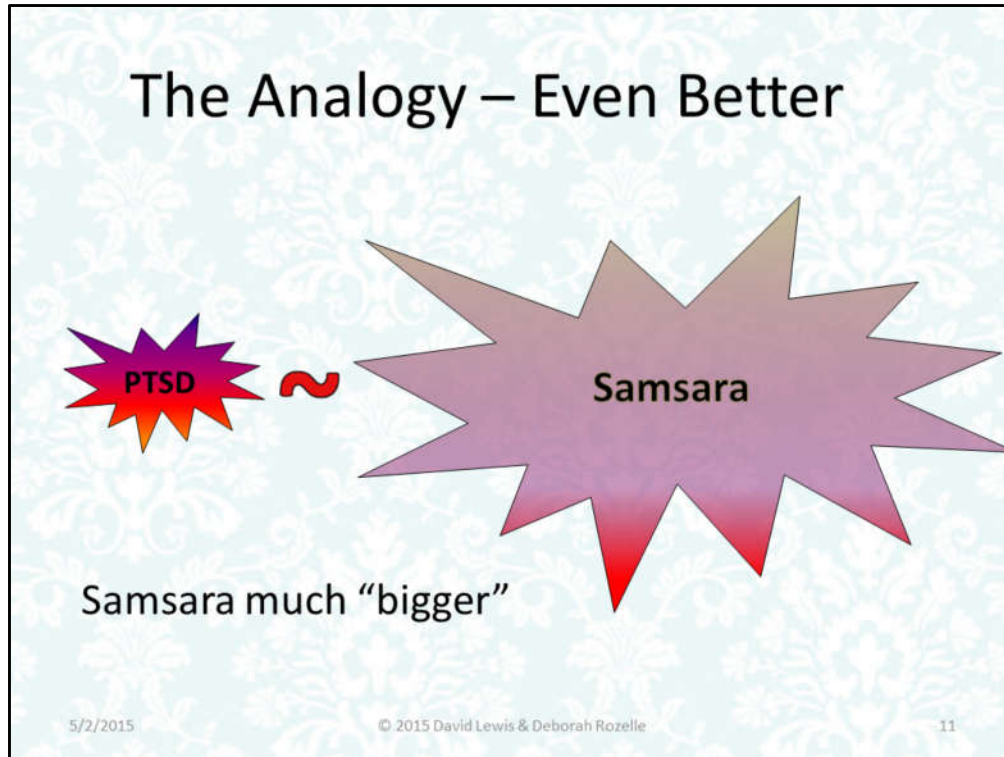
The diagram should not be anywhere near this symmetric



For one, the suffering of PTSD is far more overt than that of samsara
Not at all subtle
That's why it's so unpleasant

This is an important asymmetry in the analogy

Let's use coloring to show that
More red for suffering more overt

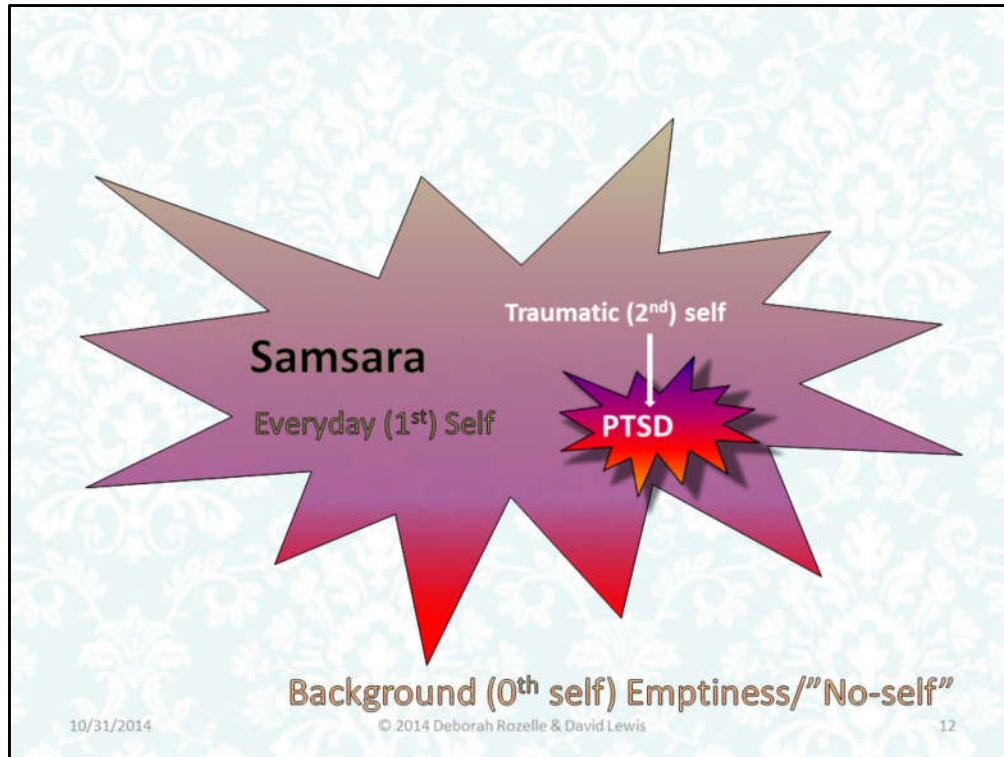


And samsara is also much “bigger” than PTSD
More sentient beings “have” it – in fact almost all of them
It’s a transcendental concept

So we need to change the sizes in the diagram, another asymmetry

There are a number of other asymmetries
only some of which we’ll get to today

And there’s one more crucial feature of this analogical model...



click

PTSD is part of samsara – a subset

click

So we have what mathematicians call
A self-similar structure, a fractal
The whole is similar to a part
And that gets tricky
But very interesting
And is mathematically related to cyclicity

And we can also now see the layers of self

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So the first self, the everyday self, is the “background” for the traumatic second self

click

Just as no-self, or more precisely in Mahayana language, emptiness

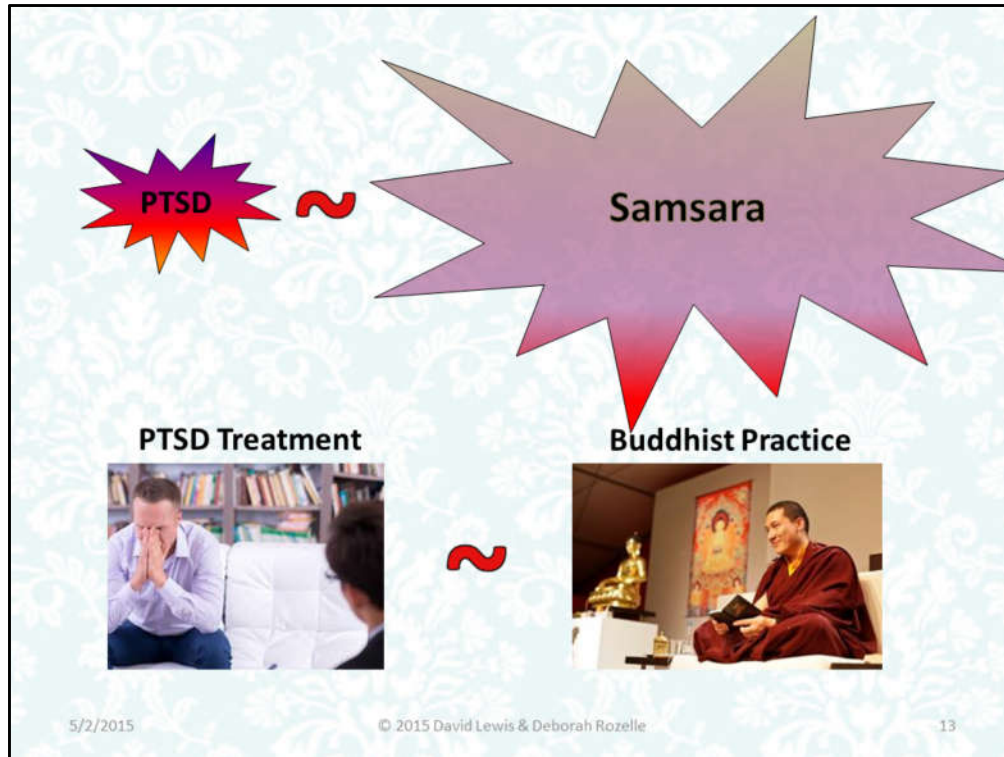
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Is the background for everyday, inherently existent self

And this is another, perhaps the crucial asymmetry

There is a big difference between layering a second self over the first one

And layering the first self over emptiness



The next piece of evidence for the analogical model
Is treatment, the path to relief
For PTSD, that's psychotherapy
For samsaric suffering, Buddhist practice – meditation and other elements of the path

We'll be comparing these at a relatively high level
Again with a Mahayana flavor
but also elements common with other Buddhisms

PTSD Treatment – Exposure

- *Therapeutic Exposure* to traumatic material
 - Intentionally recall trauma memories & triggers
- *Some* exposure required to resolve PTSD
 - Need *not* be prolonged, intensive
- **Conundrum**
 - Traumatic reactions can disrupt therapy

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First for **PTSD therapy** is the notion of **therapeutic exposure**

Click

Voluntary, intentional recall, **in therapy**, of **trauma memories and triggers**
Just **exposure** for short

Exposure is generally accepted as necessary **in some form** to resolve PTSD
But it need **not** be **sustained, intensive and painful**
As in **prolonged exposure therapy**

(pause)

But **exposure** of **any sort** in therapy raises a **conundrum**
Traumatic reactions will not only **disrupt therapy**
They may also **retraumatize** the sufferer

Click next slide

Phase 1 – Safety & Stability

- Safety
 - Physical safety
 - Reduced traumatic fear
- Stability
 - Better control of hyper- and hypo-arousal
 - Ability to attend to trauma material
- Manage & somewhat reduce symptoms
- Gain confidence in the therapy

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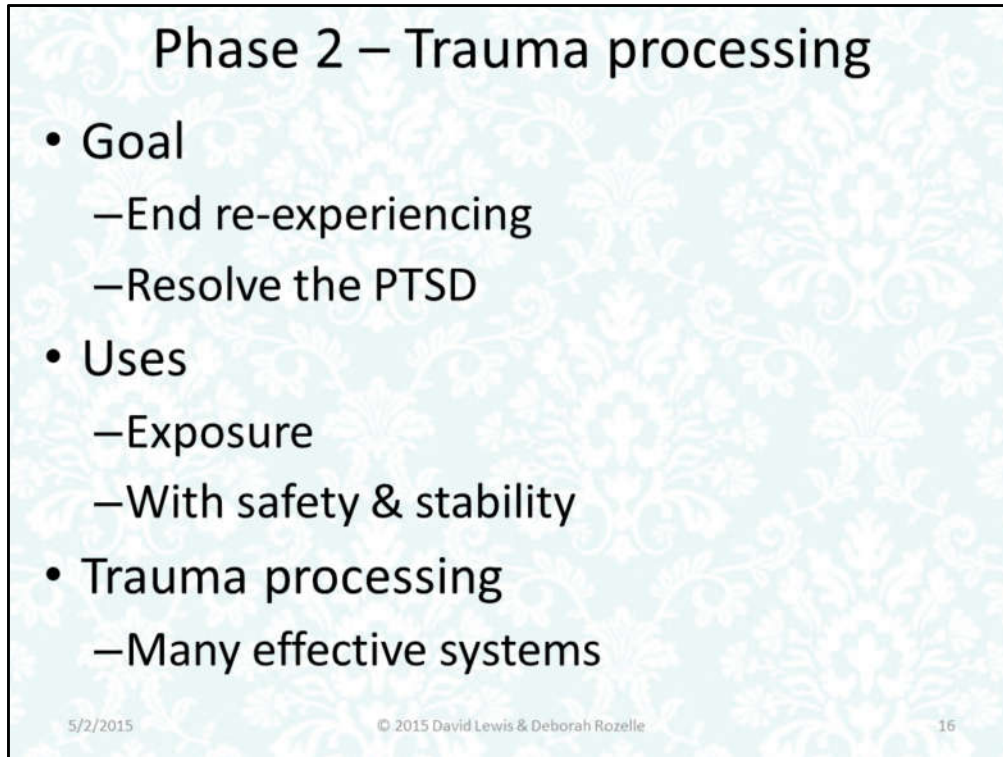
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The solution to the conundrum is a **phase** oriented approach to trauma therapy
Before doing **exposure**, you **prepare** for it

You establish **physical safety** – a prerequisite – the traumatic events won't happen again
And enough **emotional safety** -- reduced fear of the trauma
And enough **attentional stability** – better control of both hyper- and hypo-arousal
to be able to attend to traumatic material in therapy, that is, do the necessary exposure
work
Again, not necessarily prolonged exposure

That's called **Phase 1**

Phase 1 also means managing symptoms somewhat
Despite still having PTSD
And thereby also gain enough confidence in the therapist and therapy
that you can proceed with the difficult processing work



Phase 2 – Trauma processing

- Goal
 - End re-experiencing
 - Resolve the PTSD
- Uses
 - Exposure
 - With safety & stability
- Trauma processing
 - Many effective systems

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Phase 2 aims at **remission** of PTSD.

It uses **exposure** to **elicit** traumatic material
With safety and stability from Phase 1 to keep things on track
And some system of trauma **processing**

There are many such systems – three of them coming up in the afternoon panel
In fact, the development of such systems of trauma treatment
Is, in my personal opinion, one of the greatest accomplishments
Of modern clinical psychotherapy

By the way, phases 1 and 2 are always somewhat **interwoven** in practice

Click next slide

Mahayana / Vajrayana Refuge

- **Not** unexamined faith or devotion
- Profound practice to develop experiential:
 - Inspiration
 - Trust in the path
 - Sense of protection from suffering
 - Confidence in own ability
- Support for all practice – gateway to path
- Related to Theravada stream entry

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Lets compare the notion of Phase 1 **SAFETY** in trauma therapy

To that of REFUGE in Buddhism

Refuge is a **profound** practice in the **Mahayana and Vajrayana**

Essential to gaining both wisdom and compassion

It downplayed or even omitted from modernized Buddhism

Why? Probably thinking of it as unexamined faith or devotion

That formula you repeat at the start of every prayer, teaching, practice

But in the Tibetan Mahayana, it's much more than that

a practice and set of profound realizations

Motivated by intensive meditative reflection on the fears of samsara

(including the hellaceous realms I mentioned earlier)

And the nature of the Buddhist path

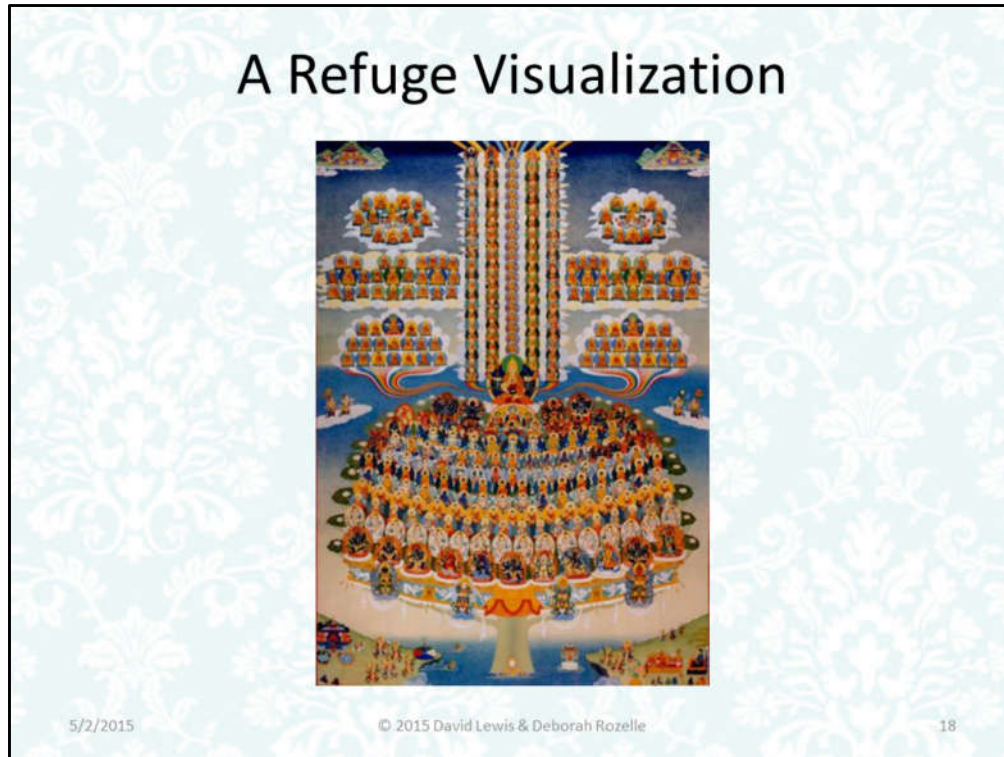
To develop inspiration, experiential trust, confidence

In the capacity of the dharma to protect from and relieve suffering

And your own ability to accomplish the goal

It serves as the support for all meditative practices and a gateway to the path

And, I believe, refuge is related to the important state in the Theravada path' called stream entry



For a taste of the profundity of refuge in the Tibetan tradition
Here's what Tibetan Gelugpa monks learn to visualize in meditation
As intimate part of developing their refuge realizations

Gelugpa founder Tsongkhapa in the center
Your own teacher in the lower right
And numerous other meditational figures

Monks invoke this visualization and the thoughts that go with it
before and in the background of every practice
To elicit reasoned inspiration and experiential trust

Phase 1 Safety ~ Buddhist Refuge

- Both
 - Protection from fear
 - Confidence in the path
 - Gateway / prerequisite to path
- Asymmetry – fear palpable vs hidden
- Objects of refuge
 - Therapist ~ Buddha – teacher
 - Trauma therapy ~ Dharma – teachings
 - Positive relationships ~ Sangha – helpers

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So comparing Phase 1 safety and Buddhist refuge realization
It should be pretty clear that they correlate functionally

Both provide protection from fear and confidence in their respective realms and paths
And are a gateway

But a big asymmetry
Is that the fear of reexperiencing the trauma is all too palpable
While the fears of samsara range from overt to hidden
But on both sides we do avoid confronting the fears

Here is a correlation of Buddhist objects of refuge
With the psychotherapy process



Here's a map of this territory.

Phase 1 Safety takes you from the **paralyzing traumatic fear** to a state in therapy enough like everyday safety to be able to do trauma processing

Buddhist **refuge** practice

Takes you from **everyday safety**, with its hidden fears to an **extraordinary** positive state of protection & confidence

Click next slide

Aspects of Buddhist Meditation

- Calm abiding (shamatha)
 - Heightened stable attention
 - Clear seeing
 - Joyful, unified, light mind
- Insight (vipashyana)
 - Seeing true nature of self & phenomena
 - Uses calm abiding

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OK for Phase 1 safety. Now lets address **stability**,

First a quick refresher on the **traditional** Buddhist meditation schema
Which is conceptualized somewhat **differently** than the **modern mindfulness** paradigm

There are **two basic aspects of meditation**

Calm Abiding

Also called **shamatha, concentration**, and other terms.
cultivates **sustained, clear attention**
And promotes a light, joyful mind

The second aspect is **insight** practice
Which **uses** calm abiding to do the **ultimate** job of Buddhist meditation
To penetrate the misapprehension of inherent existence and get to
The fundamental nature of reality, ultimately emptiness

Impaired Attention in PTSD & Samsara

- Samsara
(Discovered in meditation)
 - Distraction
 - Excitement
 - Laxity
- Addressed w/ calm abiding

- PTSD
 - Re-experiencing
 - Hyperarousal
 - Hypoarousal
- Addressed w/ Phase 1 stability

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So there's another two-phase structure
IS IT functionally analogous to the two-phase structure of PTSD therapy?

Plausibly yes, because we can say that
Both sides of the analogy are characterized by **impaired attention**

Of course, we don't usually think of ordinary attention as impaired
Until we try to meditate
And discover – distraction, excitement and laxity
That prevent us from concentrating on our chosen object of meditation
and attaining insight into its reality

Calm abiding meditation addresses that

On the PTSD side, we can think of re-experiencing, hyper- and hypo-arousal
As attention problems that prevent the sufferer from focusing on their traumatic
misapprehension
And experientially seeing through the re-experiencing misapprehension

And phase 1 stability addresses that

And the specific attention problems listed here **do correspond** respectively
But we will not go into detail today

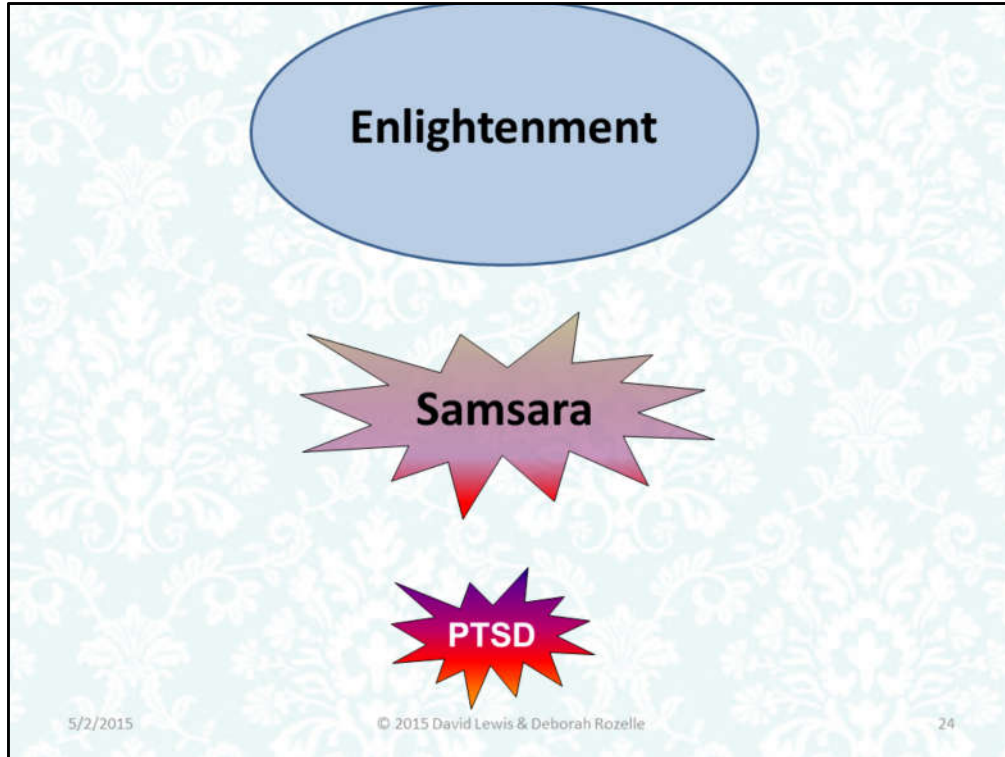


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A map of the attentional territory

Both sides **enhance attention**
But **starting from different bases**
And **aiming at different levels**

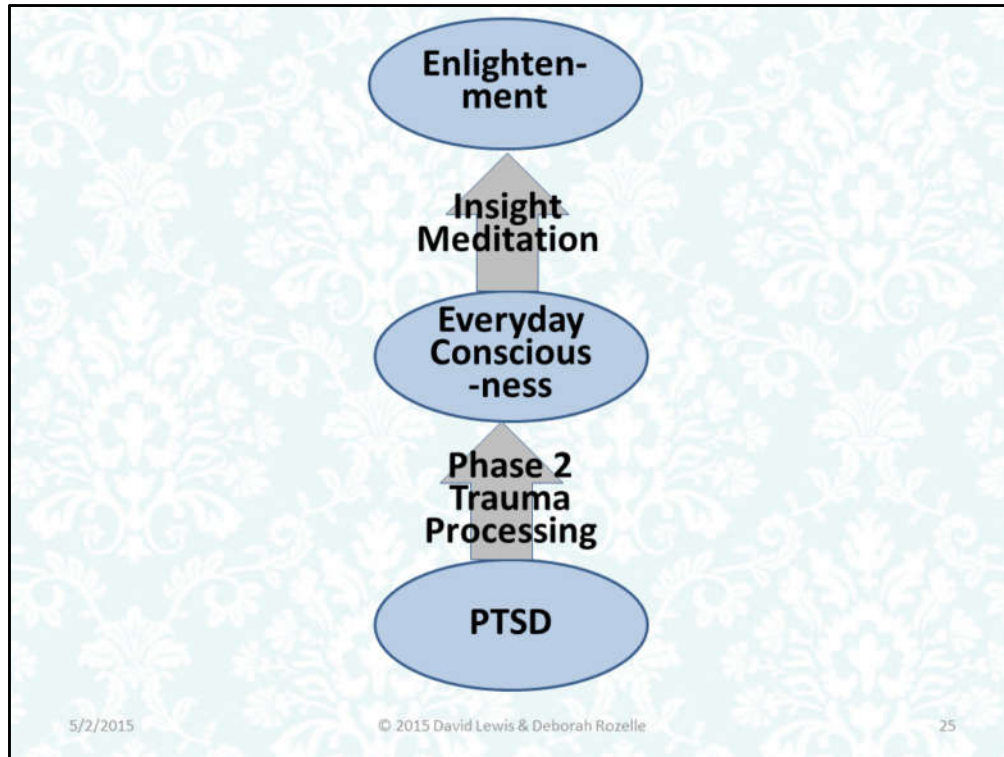
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Let's now summarize this all graphically

Here are the three major **realms or states** of consciousness we've been discussing
Of course, it doesn't show the **true differences** in size and scope
Enlightenment would be off the chart

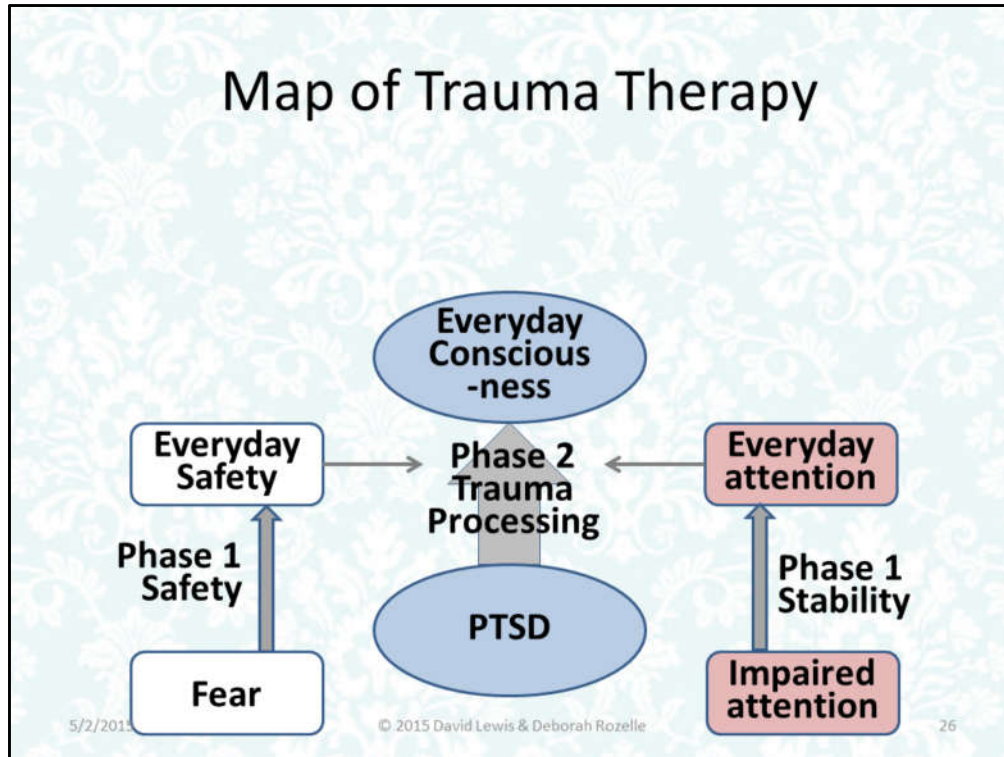
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For graphical clarity, let's make them all the same size and rename samsara "**everyday consciousness**" which it is

Click

And here are the two processes that take you from one to the other.
Phase TWO trauma processing and insight meditation
Which are therefore functionally analogous
At different levels



Let's put the supporting practices onto the map
Here's the **PTSD** part

PTSD is characterized by **fear and impaired attention**

Click

Phase 1 gives us the **two supporting factors**

Safety in the present

And **enough attentional stability** to stay with the trauma material in **exposure**

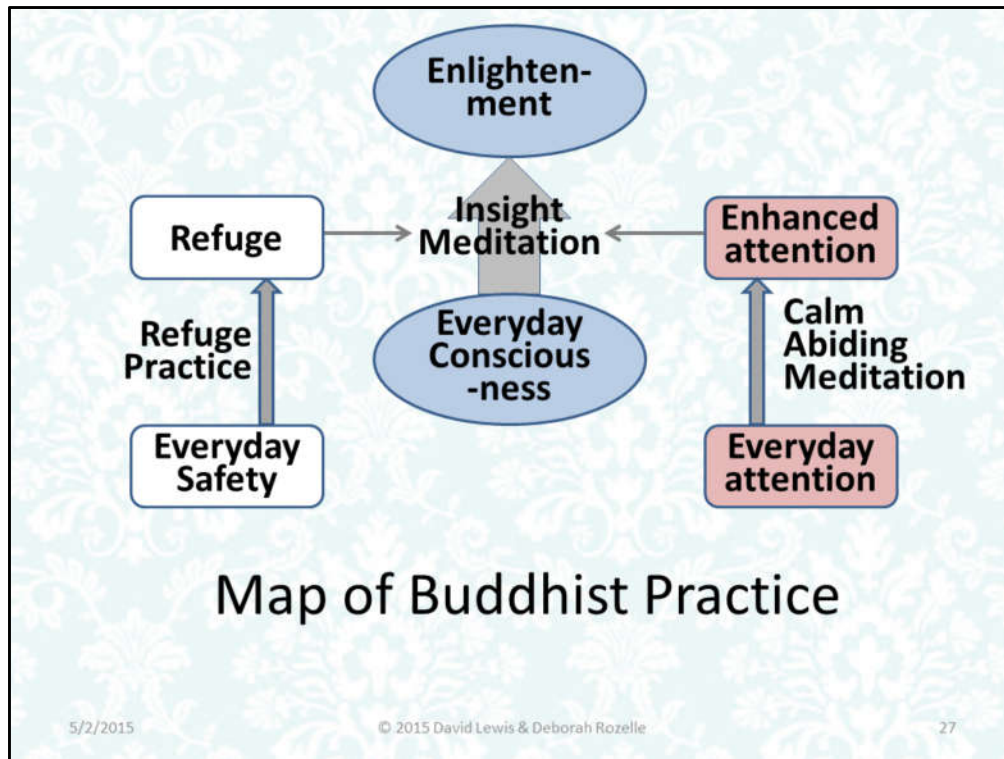
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These make **actual trauma processing possible**

Click

Leading to healing of the trauma through **insight**

Click next slide



Here's the **analogous** process for **Buddhist practice**

We **start** with **everyday consciousness, safety and attention**

Click

Refuge and Calm Abiding give us the **supporting factors**

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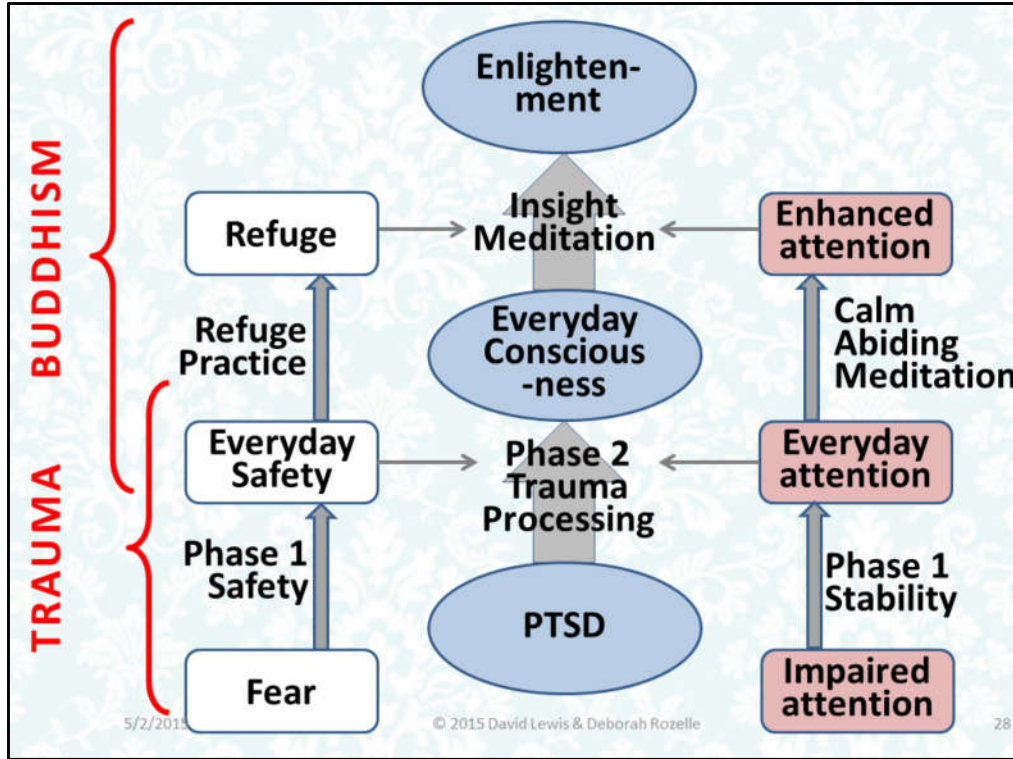
For **insight meditation** to do its **job**

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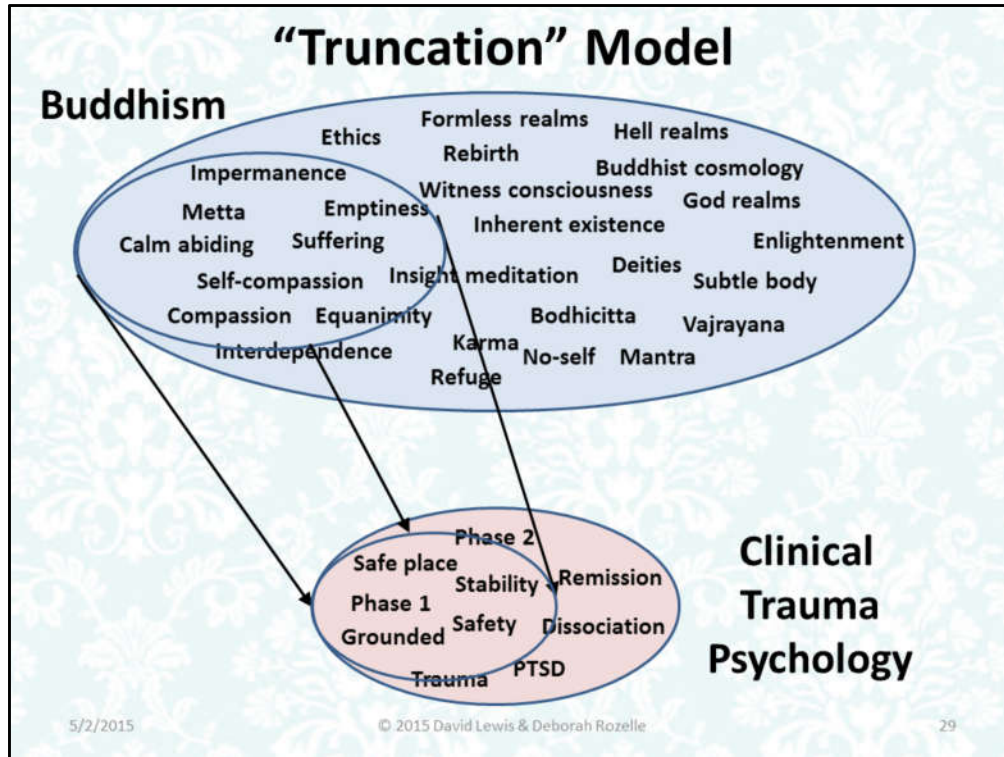
And get us to **enlightenment**

We don't mean to **trivialize** this profound path
And likewise for healing from trauma

Click next slide



And finally
Put it all together into **one map**



Let's step back for some methodological. reflection

Here's Buddhism...

It's vast. With many ideas, beliefs, practices that don't fit well with the modern scientific/materialistic zeitgeist

And, of course, there isn't even **one** Buddhism – there are many, ancient, modern and in between.

And many of the modern versions have already omitted the un-modern elements or transmuted them into other terms – that's part of what scholars call Buddhist modernization

But we need not worry about what Buddhism per se, is or is not, because we have a different task before us ...

Click

Namely relieving the very worldly suffering of PTSD and related disorders.

But there are still issues about how Buddhism **does** relate to trauma (or any psychological domain)

and what elements of Buddhism, if any, might help.

At the risk of oversimplification, let's say there are two basic approaches.

First, the explicitly contemplative approach –

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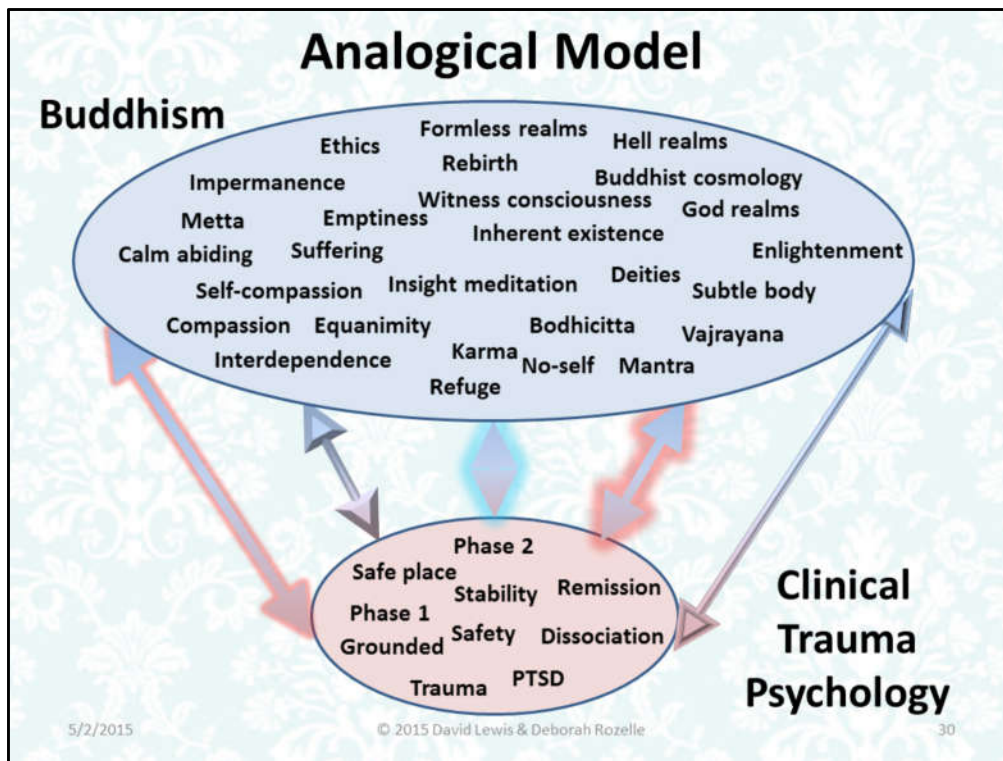
Take a small subset of Buddhism and map it more or less intact into psychology, with some mixing, matching and modern language

This is what MBIs do for stress, chronic pain and other problems

And it's been wonderfully successful

Though it hasn't yet been able to address the hard nub of trauma – re-experiencing.

Not meaning to be derogatory,
we can call this the **truncation** model
For obvious reasons



The analogical model
Takes a much wider swath of Buddhism and maps it
Functionally rather than literally
into a psychological domain
with nuanced attention to the differences, the asymmetries, and what they mean.

The diagram is an exaggeration, of course – we still aren't mapping anywhere near all of
Buddhism, or even one tradition.
But it is a lot more

Some Methodological Issues

- Analogy vs Truncation
- Respect both sides
 - No reduction, dismissal, colonization
- Study differences as well as similarities
 - Explain differences by wider principles
- Relate cosmology and psychology
 - Already done within Buddhism
- Use specific “traditions” on both sides
 - To focus analysis

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Some methodological issues

We just discussed analogy vs truncation

As for respecting both sides, that can be hard for us children of scientism.

But perhaps we should heed Thubten Jinpa, the Dalai Lama’s principal English translator
Respected on both sides of the divide,
Who supports MBIs,
but warns against claiming you have extracted the essence of Buddhist practice,
and what’s left out is just mumbo-jumbo.

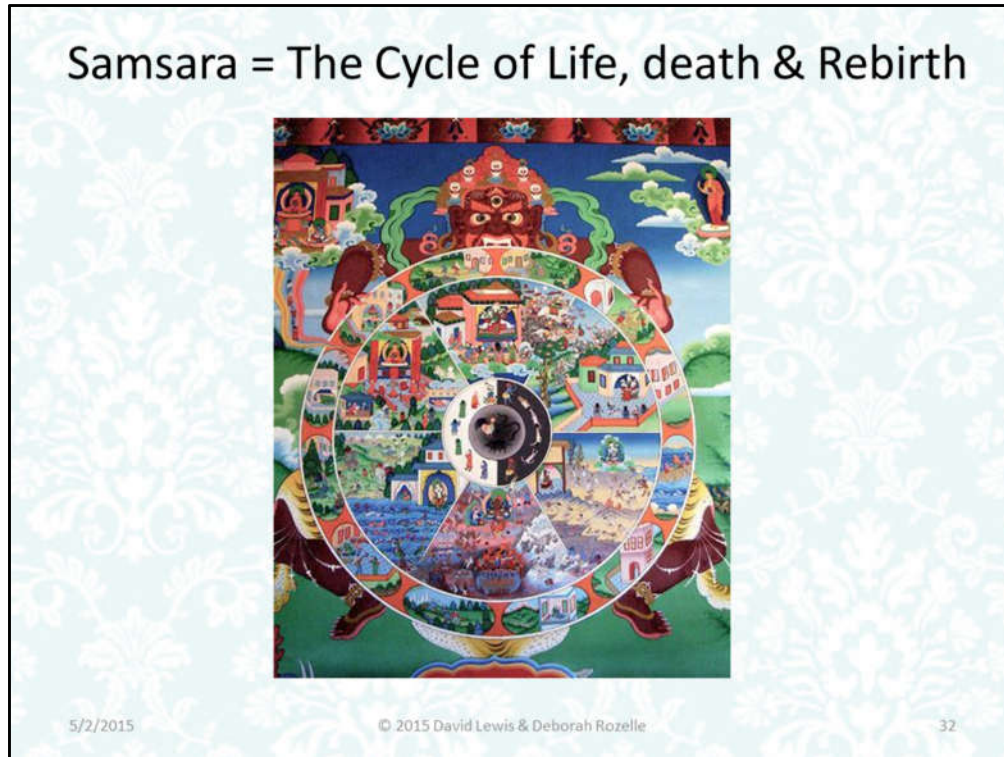
The analogical approach does find psychological meaning
In those often deprecated aspects of Buddhism
through the asymmetric functional analogy
without reinterpreting Buddhism or reducing it to modern psychology

In studying differences between the two sides, we look for a wider principles that explain them,
For example the idea that the suffering of PTSD shifts samsara to the overt end of the scale
Underlies many of the differences

As for relating cosmology and psychology, the idea of samsara itself is a prime example.

Another is for anyone who has practiced metta, compassion, joy and equanimity under the name Brahmaviharas
For that means “abode of Brahmin” in Sanskrit, a place in Buddhist cosmology
Eminent Buddhist scholar Rupert Gethin has written a wonderful series of papers on this notion
And even put it in his beginning text on Buddhism

For specificity about traditions,
Instead of using an impossibly heterogeneous domain like just Buddhism
our use of the Tibetan Mahayana focuses the analysis
But even that is often too big
And we dig deeper,
We often focus even further on specific Tibetan traditions



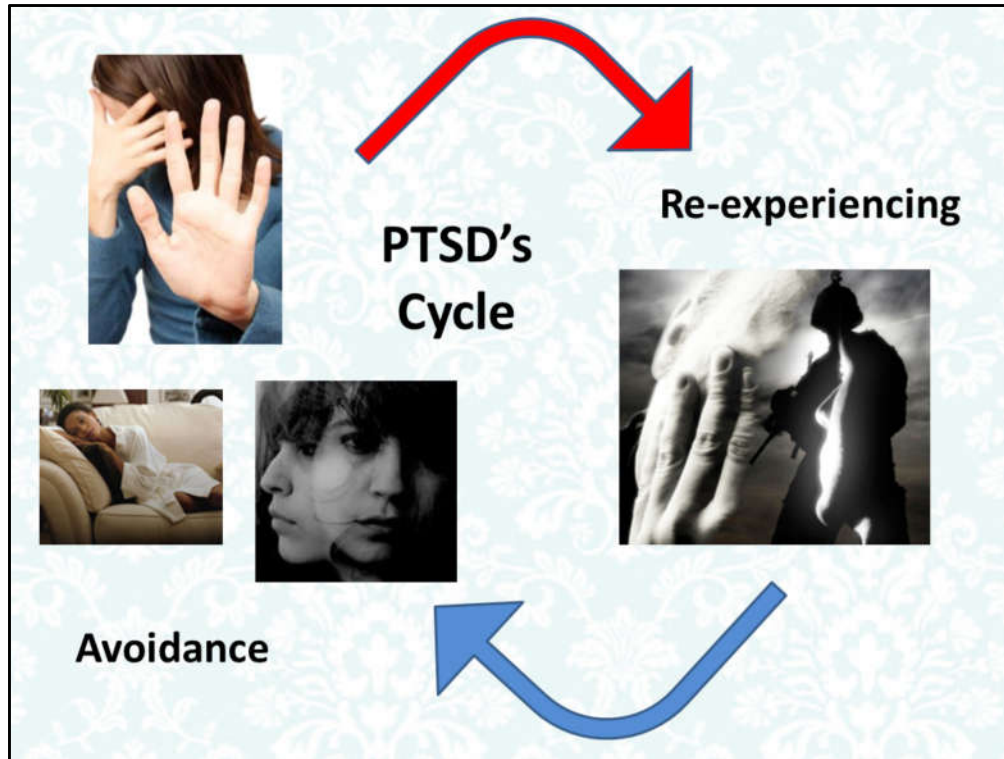
So, lets use some of these principles a bit farther

I've been avoiding something

That samsara is the cycle of life, death and rebirth – that very unmodern concept
And that unenlightened beings – most of us – wander from life to life in that realm
until we figure things out

That's pictured here by the Tibetan Thangka depicting samsara in the jaws of the lord of death

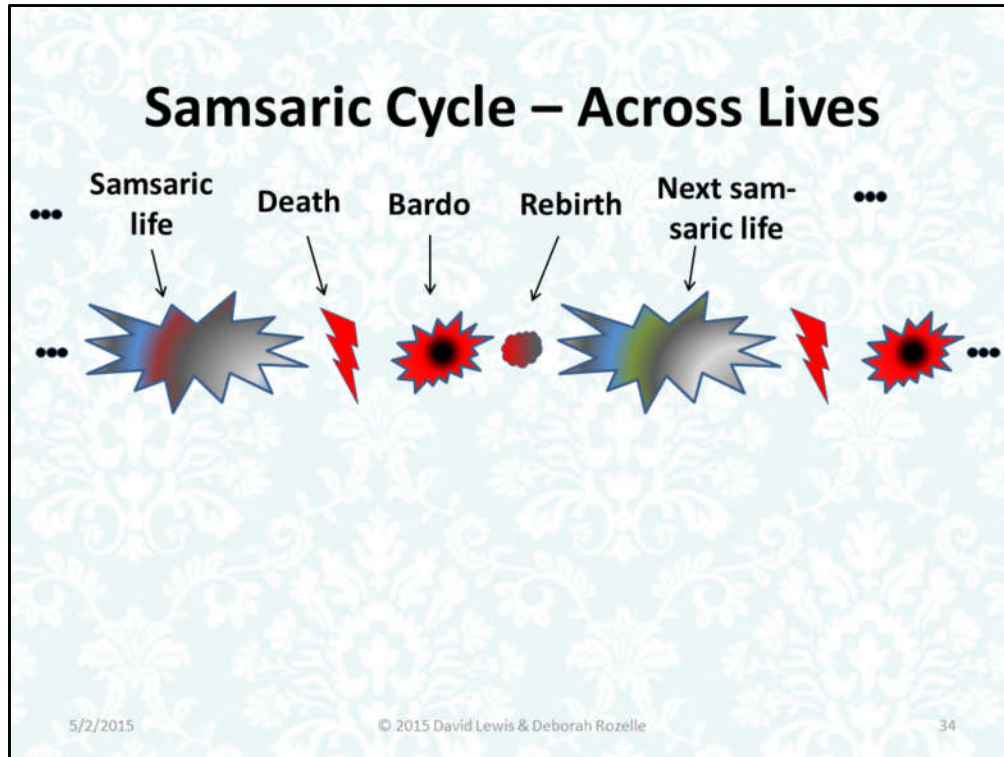
But now that we've agreed not to reduce or dismiss this kind of stuff – at least tentatively
And to relate cosmology and psychology
Let's see what we can make of it



Is there a cycle in PTSD
Yes there is!

The PTSD sufferer alternates between re-experiencing and avoidance
That's all there is for them

When avoidance fails, they are plunged into re-experiencing of one intensity or another
And when they come out of it, they are back to avoidance



So let compare those two cycles

First, the **Buddhist cycle of samsara**, according to **Mahayana** and **Vajrayana** ideas

Click

You're in an ordinary samsaric life

Click

Death arrives

The body and mind **dissolve**

And **with it**, your **misidentification**

Sounds like a **welcome** idea

Except you **clung** to your body and mind **in life**

And may be **unwilling** to let them go.

Or **even** if you **dealt with that**, you next...

Click

Are plunged into the fearful **bardo**, the state between lives

With our body gone, and only a very subtle mind left

Where you come **face to face with emptiness**
Which also seems like a good idea – isn't that what we are seeking?
Except that it appears to the **untrained mind** as utter annihilation

So instead of **enlightened**, you are **terrified**
And the fear **reinforces rather than dissolves** the sense of **separateness**
And you **black out**
(that's the black hole inside the bardo icon)

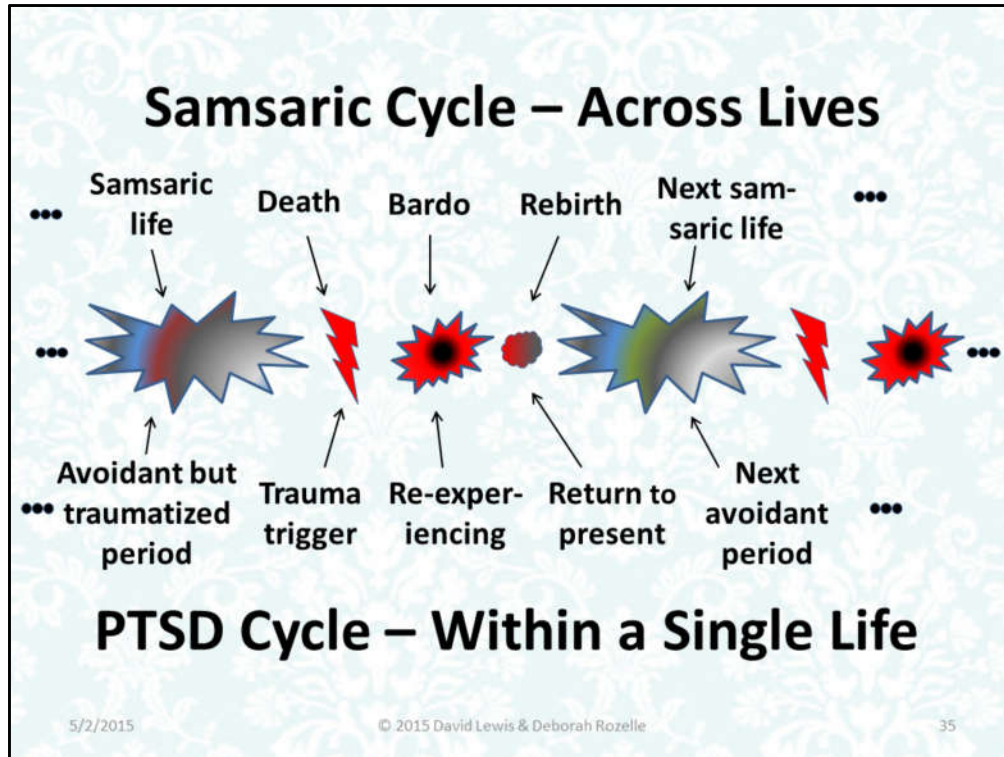
And when the bardo is over
You are **reborn** into a new samsaric body and life

Click

Without having recognized emptiness as enlightenment
Still subtly **conditioned by the fears**
Misidentifying with the new body/mind
To **continue** samsara

Click

And so on into the future and beginningless past



Now the PTSD side – which we propose is analogous
But within a single lifetime – in the modern zeitgeist

Click

Start with the traumatized person in a period of **ordinary life**
Successfully **avoiding triggers**
(just as in samsaric life – avoiding **thoughts of death**)

It's still a period of **traumatic suffering**, however
But with the trauma in the **background**

Click

Then, along comes a **trauma trigger**
Which **dissolves** their avoidant period
(just like **death** dissolves a samsaric life)

Click

And **plunges** them into a re-experiencing episode,
marked by **fear and traumatic reactions**
(just like the bardo)

Is there a blackout in trauma and re-experiencing?

Yes there is.

There is **cognitive or emotional shutdown**

Related to the final mammalian **primitive defense after fight and flee – collapse in the face of death**

Often with amnesia or dissociation

Leaving the **raw, unprocessed fear unintegrated** with the **rest of the psyche**
(just as fear from the bardo is forgotten in the new life)

Click

Eventually the **re-experiencing ends**

You return to the **present**

(like samsaric rebirth)

And resume the **avoidance**

But still **trauma-saturated**

Click

And so on – you are stuck in this cycle

Each re-experiencing effectively regenerating the PTSD syndrome

Click

One big asymmetry, of course,

Is that, unlike samsara, PTSD has a beginning

(pause)

So a conclusion

Trauma is driven by an unexpected encounter death that doesn't result in actual death

If the body does die, you are next in a new samsaric cycle of rebirth

But if you survive

the mind still thought it was about to die

blacks out

And wakes up in the same body within the old samsaric life

But now traumatized and driven into a worse cycle

That fractally resembles the larger samsaric cycle

If you at all buy this – and there is lots more evidence that I haven't time for

Including some great ideas from Trungpa

On both sides of the analogy

It's saying that Samsara is transcendental trauma
and trauma is mundane samsara