



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2022; 8(5): 224-227

© 2022 IJSR

www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 14-07-2022

Accepted: 16-08-2022

Dr. Renuka KC

Assistant Professor,

Department of Sanskrit Nyaya,

Sree Sankaracharya University

of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala,

India

Relation between Buddhism and psychotherapy

Dr. Renuka KC

Abstract

There is a growing interest in spirituality at the moment. There is a growing movement within the mental health professions to include spiritual issues within the scope of treatment and even to base psychological approaches upon "spiritual" ideas, despite a rift between psychology and religion that at least goes back to Sigmund Freud's influential book on religion. The practice of psychotherapy as guided by Buddhism is the specific branch of spiritual inclusion within psychotherapy that this essay focuses on. The wider stream of ideas' overall movement is crucial to comprehending the context in which Buddhist-informed psychotherapy operates, even though psychotherapy informed by Buddhism is unique from general spiritually oriented psychologies as a distinctive current of thinking.

Keyword: Spirituality, religion and spirituality, psychotherapy, Buddhism and psychotherapy

Introduction

The Latin term "spiritus," which connotes the concepts of breath and wind, is where the word "spirituality" first appeared. (Mish, 1985) ^[1]. This idea implies a shared link to life's fundamental nature. It was believed that the wind that blows across the waters and the land is the same wind that enters and exits our lungs with each breath and exhalation. The concept of life was viewed as being inextricably linked to this flow of movement through all living things and across the Earth itself. This understanding of spirit was direct and sensate, without in any requirement for mediation. The word still conveys a fundamental sense of vitality and sanctity, even though modern definitions of spirituality have altered slightly.

Bond of Religion and Spirituality

Although the terms "spirituality" and "religion" are sometimes used synonymously, this usage is uncommon and ignores the subtleties of both words. In a 1997 study, Zinnbauer *et al.* discovered that although there was a notable link between peoples' self-descriptions of religion and spirituality, there were also important discrepancies.

As predicted, religiousness was found to be associated with higher levels of authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, intrinsic religiousness, parental religious attendance, self-righteousness, and church attendance. In line with predictions, spirituality was associated with a different set of variables: mystical experience, New Age beliefs and practices, higher income, and the experience of being hurt by clergy (Zinnbauer, 1997, p. 561) ^[2].

Most frequently, the term "spirituality" was used to describe anything personal or experiential, such as a relationship with or belief in a higher force. Definitions of religiosity included both individual convictions, such as faith in God or a higher power, and institutional or group convictions and behaviours, such as participation in organized religion.

Relation between Psychotherapy and Spirituality

Training in spirituality-related topics would seem to be necessary for any practitioners who seek to handle spiritual difficulties, let alone those who choose to conduct spiritually informed psychotherapy, given the complexity of potential pitfalls. All people, including Counselling Psychologists and other psychotherapists, are situated along various aspects of a spiritual continuum, according to the definitional view of spirituality. Untrained psychotherapists cannot be conscious of their own spiritual foundations, which could have a negative effect on therapy.

It has also been discovered that the theoretical orientations of psychotherapists and their views on spirituality are related.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Renuka KC

Assistant Professor,

Department of Sanskrit Nyaya,

Sree Sankaracharya University

of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala,

India

There is no doubt that a psychotherapist's spirituality has an impact on the work they do with clients. Greater self-awareness on the part of the psychotherapist in this area might give the psychotherapist more flexibility and expertise when talking with clients about these and other concerns.

Buddhist Foundations

There is a widespread consensus that Buddhism is one of the world's major religions. However, its classification as a religion has been up for discussion for quite some time. One of the most renowned authors in the field of comparative religion, Houston Smith, claims that the Buddha's (or "Buddha," from the Sanskrit for "the enlightened one") teachings on Buddhism violate the major criteria usually deemed required to religions (Smith, 1994) [3]. There is no place for authority, ritual, tradition, or the supernatural in the canonical Buddhist texts. These principles offer an alternative paradigm that is empirical, scientific, pragmatic, therapeutic, psychological, egalitarian, and focused on the needs of specific people (Smith). But after his death, Buddhism adopted many of the religious trappings that the Buddha had rejected during his lifetime. Buddhism may be well-known as a religion, but it differs significantly from other faiths in important ways. Since this is the case, some have argued that Buddhism is better understood as an atheistic philosophy (Herbrechtsmeier, 1993) [4].

Most people define spirituality as the direct experience of one's own oneness with the ground of being. This is a perfect way to describe Buddhism. In Buddhism, "non-dual" refers to the ultimate interconnectedness and unity of all aspects of reality (Herbrechtsmeier, 1993) [4]. There is still a recognition of differences between people, or duality, but this is paradoxically balanced by the understanding that each person is "empty" of their own existence, or non-duality (NhatHanh, 1998) [5]. In this framework, the concept of "self" makes sense. "When we approach these matters seriously, we discover the interconnectedness and mutual permeation of all things" (NhatHanh, p. 136) [5]. An orange can be used to symbolize the hollowness of individual existence. While each orange is its own unique entity, that entity would not be possible without the presence of the sun, water, and soil. You become one with the sun, the soil, the clouds, and the tree that produced the orange when you eat it. This web of interdependence is, in fact, ever-present and active in every facet of existence. We believe that there are things that are not the self and we become entangled in the word "self. But when we examine ourselves closely, we discover there is no such thing as an autonomous, individual self, and we are liberated from the symbol of the self. It is clear that to safeguard our own safety, we must also ensure the security of everything outside of ourselves (NhatHanh, p. 141) [5].

While Buddhism doesn't completely overturn self from Western psychology, it does add to those foundational ideas. From this vantage point, the goals of psychotherapy inspired by Buddhism include going beyond the self, directly experiencing the ground of being, and then returning to the work of the self. Huang Po, a Buddhist poet, wrote several centuries ago that "Men are afraid to forget their minds, fearful to fall through the Void with nothing to stay their fall. Those people are unaware that the real Dharma (Cosmic Law) resides in the Void, which they mistake for nothing." (Huang Po as cited in Epstein, 1998, p. vii) This view of the Self is just one of many ways in which Buddhist-inspired psychotherapy diverges from the dominant strands of Western psychology.

It's worth noting at this juncture that much Buddhist-informed psychological writing on the self emphasizes the importance of a "healthy" ego before transcending a narrow sense of self. According to the work of psychologist Jack Engler (1984) [7], "it is developmentally necessary to acquire a cohesive and integrated self-first, one that is differentiated from others and has a degree of autonomy" (Engler, 1984, p. 43) [7]. Not having done so much work on one's ego before trying to transcend it is likely to backfire in a big way.

By emphasizing non-duality as the ultimate reality, Buddhism avoids theological debates and defines itself as a framework for enlightenment.

The Quadruple Pious Truths

A brief introduction to some core concepts is provided to grasp the potential psychological applications of these teachings. The "four Noble Truths" are the cornerstone of Buddhist doctrine (Daya, 2000; NhatHanh, 1998) [8, 5]. That life has "dukkha," a Pali word that means "instability" or "imbalance," as in a wheel that isn't in proper alignment, is the first Noble Truth. This idea is usually translated as "life is suffering," but this alters the original meaning slightly. This condition is sometimes called a "dis-ease" (Daya, 2000, p. 258) [8]. Life's inevitable hardships include aging, illness, and death. Discomfort may also be exacerbated by factors such as one's own tastes. It's possible that feeling dissatisfied is rooted in a combination of not getting what you want, getting what you don't want, and getting what you want but fearing losing it.

The Doctrine of Dependent Origination explains the second Noble Truth, that "the beginnings, sources, characteristics, genesis, or the advent of pain. We must then delve deeply into our pain in order to discover its origins after having come into physical contact with it. What we've eaten, both spiritually and materially, may be to blame for our current state of misery, so it's important to pinpoint the specific foods" (NhatHanh, 1998, p. 9) [5]. A lot of people feel unhappy because they try to cling to ideas, things, and people that they know won't last forever while simultaneously believing that their own permanent, unchanging self is the cause of their distress. The outlook expressed here "causes serious problems when it occurs in ways that are not expected or desired. A person's definition of who they are compels them to seek out, cling to, and defend that definition at all costs" (Daya, 2000, p. 260) [8].

As such, the third Noble Truth is that relief from the ills of dukkha (imbalance) is not only possible but can be attained in this very life. Some people have compared this to the end of their pain. According to Kawamura (1990), this release results from confronting reality head-on, which involves breaking down the artificial barriers between people, places, and ideas.

The eighth noble truth is the eightfold path, a style of life that promotes wholeness in view, wholeness in thought, wholeness in speech, wholeness in action, wholeness in livelihood, wholeness in diligence, wholeness in mindfulness, and wholeness in concentration (Daya, 2000; NhatHanh, 1998) [8, 5]. Although the English translation of the Pali word "samma" commonly renders it as "correct" rather than "wholesome," this is not the original meaning. Although the word "Samma" can be translated literally as "unbent," the word "wholesome" more accurately captures the all-encompassing knowledge of interconnectedness that is at the centre of this teaching.

Buddhism and Psychotherapy

Buddhism takes a comprehensive approach to minimizing suffering and re-establishing equilibrium. Buddhist-informed psychotherapy seeks to recognize wholeness rather than only alleviate the suffering caused by psychological symptoms. This contrasts with traditional Western psychology's emphasis on severe psychopathology. The educated Buddhist perspective, on the other hand, tends to concur with Abraham Maslow that "what we call 'normal' in psychology is essentially a psychopathology of the average, so undramatic and so broadly disseminated that we don't even recognize it" (Maslow as cited in Walsh, 1988, p. 552) [9]. Buddhism-informed psychotherapy can be viewed as a wellness approach that aims to maximize one's capacity for life happiness and functioning (de Silva, 1986) [10]. This method "aims at something other than conflict resolution or emotional reparation: it gives both the key for us to interact directly with life itself and the way of improving the mental capabilities so that the kind of working-through that Freud envisioned may actually occur" (Epstein, 1995, p. 160) [6].

The majority of professional psychotherapists "identify themselves as eclectic" or "integrative," rather than with just one theoretical field of psychology. Such practitioners strive to draw from the diverse currents of psychological thought rather than limiting themselves to a single stream of theory. With the help of this psychological integration, psychotherapists can address the complex fabric of the human experience from a variety of angles. Buddhist psychotherapy theory is viewed as a framework for a comprehensive East-West psychotherapeutic integration by some practitioners.

However, some in the psychotherapy community passionately disagree with the wisdom of even attempting to combine Buddhist ideas with psychoanalysis. It may not be possible or even desirable to fully integrate Buddhism with psychotherapy, but these attempts are regrettably frequently founded on incorrect interpretations and uses of Buddhist ideas. Buddhism is perceived to advocate self-mortification, complete surrender to spiritual authority, and radical isolation from daily life, all of which are clearly at odds with Buddhist tradition. However, the debate over the combination of Buddhism and psychotherapy remains between supporters and detractors. It may be helpful to consider both sides of this debate in order to comprehend contemporary Buddhist-related psychotherapy.

Buddhist terminology can be more precise when referring to some psychological ideas than English language might be. Clarity of goal is significantly more important than language choice, which is undoubtedly more tied to the therapist's preferences. It would seem helpful for both clients and psychotherapists to have an understanding of the basic course and procedures of counselling therapy since such clarity is part of what defines informed consent. In the worst-case scenario, not disclosing this information could make some clients feel betrayed. It would seem that there is some obligation toward this kind of disclosure the more intentionally Buddhism is incorporated into client conceptualization and assistance. This is especially significant because, regardless of the non-theological components of these psychological/philosophical notions, the incorporation of Buddhist perspectives in psychotherapy entails the integration of concepts directly tied to a historical and modern world religion.

Buddhism places a lot of emphasis on the idea of mindfulness, which is also one of the ideas that are perhaps easiest to understand psychologically. Simply put,

mindfulness is awareness. A consciousness that is both broad in breadth and intensely focused is known as mindfulness. In the past, Buddhist thought has emphasized the use of mindfulness as a tool for introspective change. This is done by paying close attention to one's thoughts and other phenomena while keeping in mind three ideas: non-self, the emptiness of independent existence, as previously mentioned, impermanence, the transitory nature of all phenomena, and release from suffering, which is understanding the interpenetrating and interconnected nature of all things. The "Three Dharma Seals" are the three ideas that have served as the foundation of Buddhist philosophy ever since the first written accounts of Gautama Buddha's teachings were produced. They might be thought of as an alternative interpretation of the "Four Noble Truths." This method's fundamental tenet is to achieve change by bearing in mind a wider view on reality—the Dharma Seals—in relation to our self-defeating thought and action patterns. In this regard, becoming conscious of our self-defeating habits can help us find relief from our pain. "We see that there is nothing we need to reject or dismiss when we change our forgetfulness into mindfulness" (NhatHanh, 2001, p. 167) [12].

The relationship as the common element plays a special role in the relationship between Buddhism and psychotherapy. It seems that these various uses might be brought together by the connection as it is expressed via compassionate presence. Since Buddhism places, such a strong emphasis on the causes of suffering and ways to be freed from it, compassion, which literally means "to suffer with," is especially pertinent to this religion. In spite of the fact that compassion is helpful and humane for psychotherapists regardless of therapeutic approach, the self-awareness of the psychotherapist who has a Buddhist background may draw on this comprehension of oneself and relationship in a qualitatively distinctive way. Although there are currently no ready ways to systematize or manualize compassionate presence as an intervention, the degree to which it is emphasized in the work of the research participants suggests the following recommendation: try to think about the potential contribution that your own compassionate presence might make during the therapy session and use your compassion as a resource for your helping relationship.

Conclusion

Buddhism places a strong philosophical emphasis on helping others by interfering when necessary. It's not new for psychotherapists to draw inspiration from Buddhism. The expanding presence of Buddhism's influence on psychotherapy and its increasingly specialized forms as a psychotherapy influence is new. Such a coalition of viewpoints cannot be pursued along a single road. Buddha himself urged those who were curious about his philosophy to visit, explore, and find out firsthand whether they might find what he said to be helpful for them:

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.'... when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them. ("Kalama Sutta," 1994, 15) [13].

References

1. Mish F. (Ed.). Webster's ninth new collegiate dictionary. Springfield: Merriam Webster; c1985.
2. Zinnbauer B, Pargament K, Cole B, Rye M, Butter E, Belavich T, *et al.* Religion and spirituality: Unfuzzifying the fuzzy. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* 1997;36(4):549-564.
3. Smith H. The illustrated world's religions: A guide to our wisdom traditions. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco; c1994.
4. Herbrechtsmeier W. Buddhism and the definition of religion: One more time. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.* 1993;32(1):1-18.
5. NhatHanh T. The heart of Buddha's teaching: Transforming suffering into peace joy and liberation: The four noble truths, the noble eightfold path, and other basic Buddhist teaching. Berkeley: Parallax Press; c1998.
6. Epstein M. Going to pieces without falling apart: A Buddhist perspective on wholeness. New York: Broadway Books; c1998.
7. Engler J. Therapeutic aims in psychotherapy and meditation: Developmental stages in the representation of self. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology.* 1984;16(1):25-61.
8. Daya R. Buddhist psychology, a theory of change processes: Implications for counsellors. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling.* 2000;22:257-271.
9. Walsh R. Two Asian psychologies and their implications for Western psychotherapists. *American Journal of Psychotherapy.* 1988;42(4):543-560.
10. De Silva P. Buddhism and behavior change: Implications for therapy. In *Beyond Therapy: The impact of Eastern religions on psychological theory and practice.* Dorset: Prism Press; c1986.
11. Epstein M. Thoughts without a thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist perspective. New York: Basic Books; c1995.
12. NhatHanh T. Transformation at the Base: Fifty verses on the nature of consciousness. Berkeley: Parallax Press; c2001.
13. Kalama sutta. DharmaNet Dharma Book Transcription Project; c1994. Retrieved March 28, 2008, from <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html>