

## BUDDHIST APPROACHES TO MENTAL HEALTH

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**Abstract:** To Buddhists, the supreme purpose of life is to become a Buddha; their ideal is to “deliver all beings.” They advocate dispelling all private desires and distracting thoughts, doing good deeds, and being altruistic. There is no specific theory on health building in the Buddhist classics. Working, sitting in meditation, eating vegetarian food, and rejecting sexual desire are Buddhism's philosophy on health building. Ideologically, Buddhism holds that if people sit still with a peaceful mind, concentrate, and perseveres; they can achieve a delightful, bright, clear, refreshed state of body and mind. Achieving this state is the purpose of sitting in meditation. From a medical point of view, constant anxiety and worry negatively affect the physiological functioning of the human body and cause pathological changes. The goal of meditation is to free the mind to achieve a natural state of peace. Buddhists combine chanting with sitting in meditation. Many Buddhists, including lay Buddhists who practice Buddhism at home, live a long life. One reason is because they concentrate on chanting Buddhist scriptures and so have few distracting thoughts running through their minds. They are totally indifferent to personal honor, disgrace, gain, or loss in the physical world

**Keyword:** Meditation, Body and Mind, Spirituality, Psychotherapy etc

### INTRODUCTION:

Buddhism is a spiritual and religious tradition dating back to the Buddha who lived in the fifth century BCE. Buddhism has a rich variety of teaching relating to our mental states, and on working with mental process. These teachings have been developed through a number of schools which have each found their particular areas of emphasis and interest. Buddhism arrived in the West at a time when interest in psychology and mental process was growing. As a result of these factors, In the West, Buddhist ideas have become influential in the development of a number of distinctively different forms of therapy. These differences reflect influence from different Buddhist schools, and differences which come from the integration of Buddhist ideas or method with the methods and theory of different therapeutic schools in the West. The picture is complex but the table below offers an, albeit simplified, model of some of the main approaches currently available, with examples of some of the textual roots of the ideas they incorporate. Our habits and senses are drawn to particular things because these

are significant in our patterns of sense distraction and self-building. We live in a world of objects. People, places and things are significant in our lives. They affect our moods, our thoughts and our expectations. When we see a rose flowering, we probably feel happy. When we hear a baby crying, we may feel upset or irritated. When we see a sunset we may feel inspired. When we see a good friend we may feel love. In Buddhist Psychology we say that the mind is conditioned by the object of attention. What we see conditions our emotional response. We like it or don't like it. We identify with it or reject it. We have Particular associations with it.

Some Basic Questions: Can we counsel in ways that are not spiritual?

What do we mean by spirituality? Is our spirituality something we can separate from the rest of our being? What is the difference between: Psychotherapy, Spiritual counseling and Pastoral care? What is the common ground and what is distinct?

Some areas of experience have obvious possibilities for revealing spiritual meaning: Inspiring encounters, relationships and ideas, Natural environment, Grief, loss and fear, Shame and remorse Response to world events / others' experience Ideas from a spiritual tradition can be introduced into the therapeutic process at a number of levels:

### OVERVIEWS OF BUDDHIST APPROACHES TO PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Basic orientation Changing relationship with:  
Predominant Buddhist school / style

Examples of Key Buddhist Teachings

### **The Four Noble Truths**

One of the key teachings of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truths. This teaching was given by the Buddha soon after his enlightenment and is seen as fundamental to the Buddhist understanding of mind.

#### **FIRST NOBLE TRUTH**

DUKKHA: The reality of affliction and impermanence

#### **SECOND NOBLE TRUTH**

SAMSKARA: Arising (reaction) & Attachment (distraction)  
Sensory Attachment  
Becoming (self formation)  
Non-Becoming (self-destruction)

#### **THIRD NOBLE TRUTH**

NIRODHA: Containment, stopping, unhooking

#### **FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH**

MARGA: Path

From this we derive a theory which suggests that The self is a defensive construct

Mental problems are the result of delusion which arises in response to affliction, so grief or fear of impermanence is a common root. There is a progression from sensory distraction to self building and ultimately destructiveness and the seeking of oblivion. That this is an energetic process and that if the energy of the (grief) reaction is harnessed this will lead to a more grounded, spiritually healthy, life. That human psychology is basically a psychology of addiction and compulsion

In therapy this leads us to. Have a provisional attitude to self-view and focus more on a person's engagement with their life-experience, Not focus on building self-image or self-esteem, See the experience of grief and disappointment as something

with the potential to transform if it is honestly faced  
Look at ways in which the person is living outside the constraints of their self-image

### **Dependent Origination**

All things are dependent upon causes and conditions Mental states depend upon the object of attention Conditions create a likelihood of something happening, but they are not deterministic The Object World Our habits and senses are drawn to particular things because these are significant in our patterns of sense distraction and self-building. We live in a world of objects. People, places and things are significant in our lives. They affect our moods, our thoughts and our expectations. When we see a rose flowering, we probably feel happy. When we hear a baby

crying, we may feel upset or irritated. When we see a sunset we may feel inspired. When we see a good friend we may feel love. In Buddhist Psychology we say that the mind is conditioned by the object of attention. What we see conditions our emotional response. We like it or don't like it. We identify with it or reject it. We have particular associations with it.

### **Skandha Theory**

A third teaching on which we draw extensively is that of the Skandhas.

This shows how the creation of self-structures becomes a self-perpetuating cycle in which world view is conditioned by previous experience and consequent mental formations. skandha theory suggests that our perception of the world is "coloured"

by our conditioned view. This is seen as "rupa" In other words, they are coloured by our self-building activity.

### **Object-Related Therapy**

One of the key methods in the Other-Centred Buddhist approach which we teach derives from this theory of conditioned mind. It involves identifying significant objects as the client talks and keeping the person's attention focused on them. By doing this, we can observe the client's reaction (vedana) response. This might allow The client themselves to become more aware of their patterns of reactivity and the way these are conditioned. This involves investigating the "rupanness" of the object. The client to change their view of the object and thus change

their mental state. This might mean reducing the "rupanness" of the object, or might mean changing a negative view to a positive one. Gratitude, Appreciation and non-Judgment. The understanding of our dependently originated nature is particularly

developed in the thinking of Pureland Schools of Buddhism. Here the emphasis is on our ordinary or "bambu" nature. Each person is seen as having infinite capacity to accumulate bad karma and yet as being surrounded by love and support in the form of the conditions which give rise to life. Investigating our dependent nature is given form in the practice of Naikan, a Japanese therapy in which the participant works with three questions:

What have others done for me?  
What have I done I return?  
What trouble has my existence caused?

Naikan therapy tends to encourage A deep appreciation of life and others. Regret at past events and ways in which one has not seen others Taking place in a paradigm in which judgment is absent, however, it tends to lead to realism rather than guilt, catharsis and action rather than stagnation and self-justification.

### **CONCLUSION**

Traditional: Focus on Feelings Naikan: Focus on Facts Traditional: Revisit how you have been hurt and mistreated in the Past Naikan: Revisit how you have been cared for and supported in the past Traditional: The therapist

validates the Client's experiences Naikan: The therapist helps the client understand the experience of others Traditional: Blame others for your problems Naikan: Take responsibility for your own conduct and the problems you cause others. Traditional: The therapist provides analysis and interpretation of the client's experience Naikan: The therapist provides a structured framework for the client's self-reflection Traditional: Therapy helps clients increase self-esteem Naikan: Therapy helps clients increase appreciation of life .This pack has given a very brief introduction to a complex topic. If you want to read further, you might like to look at some of the following resources:

#### **NOTES AND REFERENCES**

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