

Buddhism as Psychotherapy

(Part 2)

by Ven. Bhante Punjabi

(Adapted from the transcription of a Dhamma talk)

[In part 1 (in the last issue of "Wisdom"), the author compares the Buddha's teaching of avoiding the extremes of indulgence in pleasure and "self denial" with Freud's Structural Hypothesis. The Ego, guided by the reality principle, should find that the state of calmness from meditation practice brings inner peace and is also good, thus satisfying both the Id and the Super Ego. He also explains that anxiety caused by our personalization of experiences that are beyond our control can be removed by depersonalizing these experiences.]

The question seems to be a matter of self-boundary or ego boundary from a Freudian standpoint. This is the extent to which a person identifies the things in the world as belonging to himself or as a part of himself. The abnormal person's self-boundary is greater in circumference than that of the normal one. The normal person's self-boundary is greater in circumference than that of the supernormal one. The supernormal person's self-boundary is greater in circumference than that of the sublime one. Buddha therefore recognizes two levels of being above the normal level, the supernormal (*uttari manussa*) and the sublime (*ariya*).

The personalization process is dependent on what is called *tanha*, which



- (一) 師父，真糟糕呢。我剛才坐禪時，腿痛背又痛，精神不集中，我煩惱極了，怎麼辦？
 (二) 不要執著。
 再坐一堂後...
 (三) 師父！師父！您說得真好。我剛才坐禪坐的真好，身體輕鬆，心平如鏡，我很開心啊！
 (四) 不要執著。

in literal translation is thirst, which is similar to the Freudian urge. This thirst, or *tanha*, is three-fold: the thirst for pleasure, the thirst for existence and the thirst for non-existence. It is interesting to note that the Freudian concept of drives which included the sexual and the self-preservative drives at first, and later proposed as the life and death drives,

seems to coincide with the Buddhist concept of *tanha*. It seems that psychologists are rediscovering what the Buddha discovered 2500 years ago. Yet the aim of Buddhism goes beyond the aim of modern psychology in that a complete disappearance of *tanha* is aimed at. According to Buddhism,

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perfect mental health is not achieved until this thirst has been completely rooted out. Although modern psychology seems to rest satisfied by making an abnormal person normal, Buddhism aims at removing even normal mental discomfort and unhappiness by bringing about perfection of health. It is interesting to note that the Buddha recognizes nine levels of mental health above the normal stage. This is discussed in detail in a *sutta* in the *Anguttara Nikaya* (A IV 44). Of the nine supernormal (*uttari manussa*) levels of mental health, the ninth one which is called the sublime level (*ariya bhumi*) is further analyzed into four levels of personality: 1) that Stream entrant (*sotapanna*); 2) the Once returner (*sakadagami*); 3) the Non-returner (*anagami*); and 4) the Worthy One (*arahant*). Modern psychology, of course, does not seem to think that it is possible to remove this thirst or urge altogether. Yet Eric Fromm points out that Freud's ultimate aim was to remove the Id entirely and he quotes Freud as saying, "in place of the Id there shall be the Ego." This seems to support the Buddhist position.

The first sermon of the Buddha that we are discussing goes on to explain further the technique by which this thirst is remove. This technique is called the Sublime Eight-Fold Way which we discussed earlier as the medial mode of living that avoids the two extremes: the pursuit of sensual pleasures, and self exhaustion through "self denial". This Eight-Fold Way begins with what is called *samma ditti*, which is awareness of reality by understanding three important facts of life: 1) instability (*anicca*), 2) discomfort or anxiety (*dukkha*) and 3) impersonality (*anatta*). *Anicca*, or instability, is the transitory nature of all experienced phenomena to which we become attached and which we personalize, thinking "this is mine", "this is me or myself". *Dukkha* or anxiety is what is experienced due to the experiencing of what has been personalized. This anxiety is the result of a clash between the wish for permanence and the reality of instability. Here we begin to distinguish between the wish for permanence and the fact that we do not wield any power over anything because we cannot make permanent what is impermanent. It is the recognition of the fact that we do not have power not only over external objects but also over what is within the body which is identified as self. In other words, if ownership is seen as lordship or wielding of power over what is owned, we own nothing in the world, not even what we call ourselves. Therefore, there is no basis for the concept "mine" or "myself". In other words, the "self concept" is also seen as made up of our wishes or impulses. This is, in Freudian terms, reality testing or distinguishing between reality and a wish. This way we acquire the healthy sense of reality which removes all anxiety. This understanding results in an emotional state of calmness, happiness and kindness. Such an emotional state leads to good external behavior, verbal and physical, which is regarded as good socially. A life based on this perspective and this emotional state and behavior is a harmonious life. And this harmonious life has to be

maintained and perfected by means of the harmonious practice.

In discussing the harmonious practice we come to another aspect of Buddhist therapy which is in line with a different kind of psychological technique from what we have just discussed. The modern psychological technique that falls in line with this practice comes under what is called the Behaviour Therapies. This practice could be described by using terms like desensitization, operant conditioning, and also the learning theory. Buddha regards even mental processes as habits of thought which have been learned and which could be unlearned by consciously stopping their repetition, and constantly practicing wholesome thoughts. What are regarded as wholesome thoughts are those thoughts that are calming. Those that excite the mind and produce tension are regarded as unwholesome.

Buddhism also recognizes that affective mental processes or emotional excitements are rooted in cognitive mental processes, such as the formation of concepts or interpretation of experiences. According to how you interpret the situation, you become emotionally excited or become calm and relaxed. These interpretations that produce excitement are always associated with a "self-concept" or "self-image". If we carry bad self-images habitually, we become habitually unhappy individuals. By practicing good thoughts we begin to eliminate these bad self-images and cultivate images of calm. The calm mind is able to observe the subjective experience objectively and this brings us to the next step which is the harmonious awareness. In the harmonious awareness, one becomes aware of the subjective experience objectively and by the constant practice of this awareness, one begins to depersonalize the subjective experience. This way the personality perspective (*sakkaya ditti*) is gradually removed followed by further gradual removal of all thoughts of "I" and "mine". This gradual depersonalizing process calms the mind further and leads to the experiencing of progressively deeper levels of tranquillity and happiness, leading to the perfection of mental health with the complete eradication of the experience of self within and the rooting out of thirst, and the disappearance of all anxiety for good. This ultimate state of mental health is rarely attained in modern Buddhist practice, but this is the final goal of the Buddhist as taught 2500 years ago.

These principles of Buddhist psychology could be used in the modern world and could be constructively used by modern psychotherapists. Space limitation does not allow me to discuss in detail, in the present essay, the various cases where the Buddha has used these principles in his time. For the same reason, I am unable to discuss here some of the cases in my own experience where I have used these principles. The most important of all is the use of these principles on oneself. I would like to state, in passing, that I have tested in my own experience the validity of these principles.

(cont'd on next page)

In discussing the First Sermon of the Buddha called the Revolution of the Wheel of Experience in this way, as the process of transformation of an individual's personality from an unhealthy one to one of health, I might appear to have strayed away from the Orthodox Theravada, Mahayana or any other Buddhist tradition. But as I pointed out earlier, I am not discussing any form of modern Buddhist standpoint or practice. I am discussing the Original Teaching and Practice of the Buddha as found in the earliest sources recognized by all scholars which do not belong to any modern school of thought. I hope this effort will kindle your interest in exploring further the early teachings of the Buddha. I believe that if modern psychologists make a serious study of these early teachings of the Buddha, it would become a significant turning point and breakthrough in modern psychotherapeutic thought and practice.

May all beings be happy!

Ven. Madawela Punnaji Mahathera

(This concludes the essay "Buddhism as Psychotherapy")

The author, the scholar monk Mahathera Punnaji has played a significant role in the dissemination of Buddhism in the West and is well known to Buddhists in Canada and abroad. Recently, Ven. Punnaji completed a one-year tenure at the Fo Kuang Shan University as Professor of Buddhism and returned to the West End Buddhist Centre in February (1998). Sought by many as a resourceful spiritual guide, Ven. Punnaji shares this time between the West End Buddhist centre and other locations in Canada, the U.S. and England

(We would like to thank the West End Buddhist Centre for granting us permission to reprint this article.)

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保健法

梁啟妙

現代人對醫學知識比較留意，社會上一般人都會小心飲食，注意保持身體健康，從醫學理論來說：是保持好的體質；或以醫前身體不夠健康的，他們會刻意去改變體質，通常是服用些保健藥物，例如一般維他命丸與多運動去改變體質，當然對人體生理上有多少幫助。但最重要要改變體質的方法：是心理，亦是佛家所說的「自淨其意」。意念清淨對修學佛法固然重要，對身體健康方面亦不可忽略。

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一個性情急躁剛強的人，容易發怒，心不
安定，或在因細小的事而起煩惱，甚至於
身體的細胞會因此而死亡。貪看妄妄，不
能安靜，佛等妄想說一
的，故此要修定、持咒、妄所說一
，真能盡量放下，一切隨緣，更有
，真能盡量放下，一切隨緣，更有
，真能盡量放下，一切隨緣，更有

修學佛法：明白經教的道理，心能安靜，
知道一切法從心想生，故此要修定、持咒、妄所說一
的，真能盡量放下，一切隨緣，更有
，真能盡量放下，一切隨緣，更有
，真能盡量放下，一切隨緣，更有

我們經過一天的疲勞工作或學習，晚上能
放下一切煩惱，靜坐半小時，身心自然保
持健康愉快。

Buddhism Awareness Week

February 1 to 4, Sidney Smith Hall
and International Student Centre, University of Toronto

by Kwai Li

Those passing through the lobby of Sidney Smith Hall on St. George Street on February 2, 3 and 4, were greeted with a transformed lobby: Buddhist flags and lotus flower lanterns

on Buddhism, and some stopped at the table of the U of T Buddhist Community and Buddhist Student Association and signed up, and still more stopped and talked to the two monks who volunteered to answer questions at the Buddhism Awareness Week.



One of our guests, Samdan from Source Books

Born and raised in Jamaica, Ven. Bhante Kovida is a Buddhist monk, ordained in the Theravada tradition of Sri Lanka. He has travelled widely and taught Buddhism in Asia and North America. For the past two years, he has also led the U of T Buddhist groups weekly meditation workshop at the International Student Centre. Ven. Ariyavansa, born and raised in Canada, is also a monk in the Sri Lanka Theravada tradition. Ven. Ariyavansa who has contemplated the Dhamma for many years felt ready to receive ordination in 1998. Currently he lives with his senior teachers in the Westend Buddhist Centre in Mississauga, Ontario.

hung from the ceiling, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on pictures smiled serenely from displays on tables, with rainbow-hued paper lotus flowers floating beside books on Buddhism. At one end of the lobby, a television showed a group of nuns at their morning service in a Korean Buddhist temple.

Throughout the days, Buddhist language could be heard in the lobby. At the Second Cup kiosk: "I would like a Shaolin Temple coffee, something with a kick." Two students leaving a lecture room: "This was a most enlightening lecture." And, "You should have seen the sales in the stores, Nirvana!"

Overheard during Buddhism Awareness Week
In a lecture, the professor:
"In fact, (this problem) is so difficult that people who work on it will often run off to join a Buddhist monastery."

Many stopped and browsed at the displays: the story of Sakyamuni Buddha, the life of novice monks in a Korean monastery, and Buddhism and the environment, to name a few. Most picked up flyers and books

In the evening, the Buddhism Awareness shifted to the International Student Centre: monks from Korean Zen and Theravada traditions led mediation workshops, or lectures on Buddhism and the environment. The week ended with a lecture at Sidney Smith on Volunteering at Mother Theresa's Home of the Dying and Destitute in Calcutta.

The Sutra of Forty-two Chapters 四十二章經

優婆塞盧榮章譯白話文於多倫多

In 68 A.D., two monks from Central India, Kasyapa Matanga and Gobharana, jointly translated the Sutra of Forty-two Chapters in the White Horse Temple (bai ma si) in Luo-yang, China. It was the first Buddhist sutra written in Chinese. They translated the key teachings from many sutras of both Mahayana and Hinayana origins, using simple and direct language. Earlier this year in Toronto, Upasaka Lo Wing Cheung has completed an elaborated rendering of this sutra into modern Chinese. "Wisdom" would like to share with you in the next few issues selected chapters from Upasaka Lo's translation. Its English version is translated by Shan Tong Wu.

第二章 斷欲絕證

佛說：已經捨離眷屬的修行人，斷除了各種貪欲後，進一步是認識自己本來面目，同時需要明白佛覺悟的宇宙緣起道理，了解有為和無為法的差別，內心沒有執著和希求，心地超越一切因果的繫縛，亦很清楚世間和出世間的因果。身心仍然繼續活動，可是再沒有執著的想法，慈悲心連綿不絕，這樣不黏著、同時又沒有離棄修道的人，才是真正的修道人。

Chapter 2: Cutting off Lust and Ending Attachment to the Path

According to the Buddha, one who has gone forth from home to homelessness, who has cut off all kinds of desires to come to understand the original nature of the mind, must also see the Dependent Arising of the universe realized by the Buddha and the difference between dharmas that are dependent on causes and conditions and dharmas that are not. No longer desiring and grasping, the mind is beyond the bondage of cause and effect and is clear about the law of karma for this world and beyond. The body and mind are active but the thought of grasping does not exist. The mind is full of kindness and compassion continuously. In this way, the practitioner who adheres to the path without attachment is a true practitioner.

第三章 頭陀聖行

佛說：剃去鬚髮的修行人，不只是側重外表的形態，而且要接受身心嚴格的訓練，他們不再擁有世間的金錢去維持生活，度的是沿門托鉢乞食的生涯，和世間貧苦的乞人一樣，而且只限於中午以前乞食，晚上在樹下靜坐。除了頭陀行的十二項生活法則，不能再有增減。要知道人類的愚昧無知，處處被事物蒙蔽，都是由貪愛和嗜欲太多的原故。

Chapter 3: The Noble Dhuta Practice

According to the Buddha, the shaven practitioner must not be concerned merely with appearance, but must discipline the body and mind. Not possessing worldly wealth for the sake of living, much like the poor beggars of the world, he/she begs for food by people's doors. Eating before noon, meditating under a tree at night, the practitioner of dhuta training must neither augment nor reduce the 12 training rules. For the foolishness and ignorance of people and their being deceived by the appearances of phenomena find roots in their lust and indulgence in pleasures.

第五章 轉重令輕

佛說：那一個人沒有過失？可是他們沒有悔過的念頭，仍然堅持自己的觀點，只會寬恕自己；不知道由不善運作所產生的力量，獨如滴水雖少，積聚成大海汪洋，使他們永遠漂流在苦海中，沒有出離的一日。如果有人雖然做錯了事，但是能夠省覺到效果嚴重，因此立刻時常提高警覺；不但不再犯錯。同時努力為社會供獻自己的力量，一點都沒有吝惜。這樣繼續下去，他過去做錯的事、過失的效果，亦會力量淡薄，有如一個人患了熱病，身體如果發表很多汗水，熱病亦會漸漸痊愈的。

Chapter 5: A Heavy Load Made Lighter

According to the Buddha, people are not without faults. But if they do not have the thoughts of repentance, maintain their viewpoints and know only of forgiving themselves, they are ignorant of the power of their unvirtuous actions - as the accumulation of tiny water-drops will become a vast ocean. They will forever be lost in the sea of suffering, without hopes of ever reaching the shore. If people see that they have done wrong and understand the severity of the consequences, they will not only be alert to avoid ever repeating their wrongdoings, but will also work for the benefit of society without hesitation or reservation. If they sustain their efforts in this way, the power of the consequences of their past wrongdoings will gradually diminish - as one's fever will subside after much perspiration.

Aspiration of a Buddhist

If I have strayed from the true path,
may I never do so again.
If I have carelessly hurt someone today,
by word or deed,
may I be more mindful the next time.
O Buddha, the Enlightened One, help me
to set my heart right.
May my actions reflect
Your love and compassion.

I shall strive to cleanse my heart
from hate and envy,
and live in harmony with all people.
I shall be close to the Dhamma,
in good as well as in difficult times.
I know that should the moment
come for me to leave the world,
I shall do so without fear or regret
because I leave the world a better person
than when I came into it.

Whatever wrong someone may do to me,
may I be compassionate and forgive and
bear no hatred in my heart.
I shall bear in mind to be grateful
for the acts of love and consideration
shown to me,
no matter how small they appear to be.
For those I love and those who love me,
may this life be a blessing and
a source of happiness to all beings.

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Buddhism Awareness Week at U of T (see page 4)

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