



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY AND BUDDHISM

Pyin Nyar Bala
Acharya Nagarjuna University.

▪ ABSTRACT:

Buddhism is viewed as one of the main religions of the entire planet. The journey of Buddhism had begun more than Two Thousands Five Hundred years when Gautama Buddha started to give his preaching to the common people and philosophize the whole universe. Today more than Five Hundred millions people do follow Buddhism as their religion. Buddhist Religion is firmly related with the substance of human mental health and the state of wellbeing. There is an extended area where the philosophical doctrines of Buddhism and his Dhamma meet and overlap with the fundamental ethos of contemporary schools of western psychology. Western psychology, like Buddhism, has its historical roots in ancient philosophies. One of the core distinction between these two traditions that Western psychology is an explicitly scientific tradition as it endures its validity from scientific disciplines while Buddhism on the other hand is, has been philosophical and religious tradition. Essential Buddhism, the fundamental teachings of the historical Buddha and the core of all major branches of Buddhism, is psychology, not religion or philosophy. This paper is going to give a brief outlook of a Western psychological interpretation of the fundamentals of Buddhist thought, and an integration of the concepts with some Western psychological constructs and disciplines.



KEYWORD: *Buddhism and Psychology, Western Psychotherapies and Buddhism, Mindfulness Psychology, Behavioral Modification and Buddhism.*

▪ INTRODUCTION:

Gautama Buddha started his preaching more than 2500 years ago to address mainly the cause of human suffering which had its constituent foundation at the understanding of psychological nature. Like clinical psychology in the West, Buddhist approaches to human cognition also were born out of concern with human suffering and the desire to lessen it. Human being in terms of Buddhist perspective, is a psycho-physical combination of mind and matter (nāma and rūpa) which constitutes of aggregates (pañcakkhandha). Four of the five aggregates, sensation (vedanā), perception (saññā), mental formations (sañ khārā) and consciousness (viññāṇa) form the mind (nāma) while rūpa made of the four great elements (cattāri mahābhūtāni) form the body of a man. In other words, the four non-physical factors of the aggregates collectively known as nāma in Pāli form the immaterial conditions of man while the physical factors collectively regarded as rūpa in Pāli form his corporeal conditions. The Sangīti Sutta (DN) explains nāma as the psychological basis and rūpa as the physiological basis of the human being. Thus, four terms are used to indicate the psychological basis while only one term is used for a physiological basis.

▪ THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASES IN BUDDHISM:

The onset of Essential Buddhism can well be sighted as the mechanism of psychology, for it deals with topics such as sensation, perception, emotion, motivation, cognition, mind, mindfulness and consciousness. The Buddha said his primary work was to reduce suffering, and the Dalai Lama continually stresses that his approach to Buddhism is about increasing human happiness throughout positive cognitive faculties and compassion. In regard of the behavioral and spiritual development, the mind is the most prominent and pivotal factor both in the wholesome and the unwholesome in Buddha's reality principles. It is clearly elaborated in the first two stanzas of the Twin Verses (Yamakavagga) of the Dhammapada- "Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states. The mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox /Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states Mind is chief and mind-made are they or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves." This shows that Buddhism highly concerns the psychological aspect of the human being. The fundamental objective of Buddhist teachings was to disclose the true nature of the phenomenal existence, individual personality and mind in order to get rid of the human predicament. The goal, according to Buddhism, is essentially attainable through one's own effort depending on one's own wholesome behavioral and psychological potentials. (De Silva, Lily, 1991) Therefore, a great deal of psychological content, explicit psychological theorizing and many of the others present psychological assumptions and much material of psychological relevance can be found in Buddhism. For instance, the Abhidhamma contains a highly systematized psychological exposition of human behavior and mind. The translation of the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, one of the Abhidhamma texts, was given the title "A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics" by its translator, Caroline Rhys Davids when it was first published (1900). In the Sangīti Sutta nāma is explained as the psychological basis and rūpa as the physiological basis of the human being. Thus, four terms are used to indicate the psychological basis while only one term is used for a physiological basis. This shows that Buddhism highly concerns the psychological aspect of the human being. In Buddhism, the personality of man is conditioned and sustained by the activity of citta and consequently, the character of a man is also determined by citta. The mind is defined in Buddhism as a non-physical phenomenon which perceives, thinks, recognizes, experiences and reacts to the environment. The mind has two main aspects: clarity and knowing; this means that the mind is clear, formless and allows for objects to arise in it and that the mind has awareness, a consciousness which can engage with objects. The mind is also defined in Buddhism as a series of elements of thoughts, occurring only one at a time. The mind is not something permanent but changes every moment. viz., the mind is an ever-changing, constant, quick-moving process. One element of thought has two major components, citta or consciousness, and cetasika, the associated mental factors. Psychological aspects of Buddhism with its universally adoptable stance can be exposed in the Dhammapada, Sutta Piṭaka and especially in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

▪ COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND BUDDHISM :

In United States' academic psychology, the dominant and usually exclusive cognitive science is the information-processing computer-simulation model. In this theory humans are information processors, the brain is the major or only vehicle for this processing, and computers are models for how the brain functions. Thus, for example, the learning and memory literature is filled with computer processing concepts such as coding, storage, and retrieval. Behaviors of the mind is an alternative cognitive science with the strength of obvious implications for therapy, personal/spiritual growth, education, sports, and art.

Buddhism in general has much to offer Western cognitive science including a very comprehensive cognitive science in the Abhidhamma . Abhidhamma is one of the three books in the Pali Canon. It is the further philosophical and psychological development of essential Buddhism. The Abhidhamma ("ultimate teaching") is a critically-analyzed, detailed map of the mind, broken down into sequences of conscious and mental factors. This involves dissecting experience into "Dhammas," elementary essences of conscious reality. A Dhamma is a irreducible atom of expression, such as a

single characteristic or quality. For example, a triad of Dhammas is related to feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Dhammas include momentary forces, defined in terms of function, that create conventional reality. One classification of Dhammas is by the five aggregates or 'heaps' (Pali: *khandha*), currently best known in the West by the Sanskrit term 'skandha'. The skandhas are collections of Dhammas that comprise entities such as a person. The five skandas are form (elements of matter, the five physical senses and their objects), feeling, perception (discernment of an object, beginning of concept formation), mental formations (mental contents other than feeling and perception), and consciousness.

The Abhidhamma includes many different systems of categorizing and grouping dhammas and other basic components of the mind and consciousness. One is the 52 mental factors (*cetasikas*), components associated with consciousness. Seven of the factors are "universals" since they are found in all consciousness and are needed for basic cognition of an object: 1) Contact, consciousness mentally touches object; 2) Feeling, experience of affect, 3) Attention, making object present to conscious, 4) One-pointedness, concentration, 5) Perception, recognition of object via its features, 6) Volition, willing, actualization of goal, 7) Mental life faculty, vital making and maintaining associated with mental states (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1993).

The Abhidhamma also includes lists of unhealthy factors and healthy factors in regard of psychological attributes. These factors impair or help meditation, and can be the basis for personality and mental health. Therapy consists of cultivating healthy factors that offset unhealthy factors. For example, cultivating the healthy factors of insight and mindfulness reduce the unhealthy factor of delusion, which could be causing paranoia. The unhealthy factors include delusion, perplexity, shamelessness, remorselessness, egoism, agitation, worry, greed, avarice, envy, contraction, and torpor. The healthy factors include insight, mindfulness, modesty, discretion, rectitude, confidence, non-attachment, non-aversion, impartiality, and composure in the realm of cognitive domain map of our living

▪ **The Essence of Mindfulness, Behavior Modification and Buddhist Thoughts**

Buddhist psychology is largely focused on analyzing and understanding the nature of the self, and many positive effects of meditative practice based on Buddhist psychology have been documented by researchers interested in self-processes. **Mindfulness originates from Buddhist philosophy and acts as the central tenet for many of its meditative traditions, such as Zen, Shambhala, and Vipassana and has been defined as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003)**

Translated from the Pali word *sati*, mindfulness encompasses an array of meanings, but the most important relate to "clear awareness" and "memory". In Buddhism, the origins of suffering (*dukkha*) are thought to be caused by our ignorance of the impermanent nature of the universe (*anitya*), and our patterns of attachment and resistance towards pleasant or unpleasant experiences. Through formal meditative practice, which entails sitting or lying still and placing awareness on a particular aspect of experience, such as the rhythm of breathing, physical sensations, or a chosen mantra, or participating in mindfulness-based movement activities such as yoga, tai-chi, and qigong, the individual is able to practice becoming aware of, and disidentifying from, their habitual unconscious cognitions and develop a sense of familiarity with the feeling of clarity and calmness that arises. The cultivation of this state of awareness allows the individual to adopt a much more accepting, non-judgemental attitude; a kind of 'go with the flow' mentality, towards both internal and external stimuli, which can cause drastic improvements in general well-being (Shapiro *et al.* 2008).

In western concept of Psychological study, the coin "behavior modification" is used in the broadest sense to include behavior therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, and applied behavior analysis. The first major paper interrelating Buddhism and behavior modification was a comparison of Zen meditation meditation and behavior self-control (Shapiro & Zifferblatt, 1976). Similarities between essential Buddhism and behavior modification can endure the core common facts that ascertain both

asstress perceiving reality as it is with a minimum of distortion and interpretation, avoiding theoretical and metaphysical constructs that are difficult to measure or have questionable usefulness. Both are primarily ahistorical with a focus on living more fully in the here and now, historical information is primarily useful in understanding current conditions. Both encourage increased awareness of body, mind, and emotions, and the importance of learning related self-control skills. According to Dr. Padmal de Silva in a full article (1984, pp. 666 – 667), the Buddha helped king Kosala who had trouble because of overeating. A prince was instructed to watch the king eat and when the king was down to one handful of rice, he would stop the king with a verse from the Buddha about moderation in eating. The next day the meal was only as large as what was eaten the previous day. Later the king added that he would give away a thousand pieces of money if he had to be reminded by the prince. The king learned to eat in moderation and became lean and energetic. Since the beginning of the field of behavior modification, counterconditioning has been a basic approach to reduce respondent-based behavior, particularly unwanted emotions such as stress and anxiety.

CONCLUSION:

The foundation of Buddha's thoughts and preaching had its bases in human mind and the universal exposition of such mechanism what dealt with behaviors and functioning. Thus we have witnessed the vision of 'Buddhist Psychology' and its propelling. Buddhist psychology has much to offer Western psychology, including new conceptualizations, theories, and practices. In the process Western psychologists have a chance to reconsider and refine basic constructs and dynamics and move into new domains. An integration of Buddhist and Western psychologies should yield a much more comprehensive psychology with more powerful and more applicable therapies.

REFERENCES:

- Andresen, J. (2000). Meditation meets behavioral medicine. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*
- Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2012) *The numerical discourses of the buddha, a translation of the aṅguttara nikāya*, Wisdom Publications: Boston.
- Caroline, Rhys Davids (1900). *A buddhist manual of psychological ethics*, London.
- Davids, Mrs., Rhys, (1900), *Buddhist psychological ethics, (dhammasaṅgani)*, London.
- De Silva, Lily, (1991), *Radical therapy, buddhist precepts and the modern world*, Bodhi Leaves No.123, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- De Silva, Padmal. (1973). *Buddhist and Freudian psychology*. Colombo: Lake House Publishers.
- De Silva, Padmal. (1989). *Buddhist psychology: a review of theory and practice*. Institute of Psychiatry, University of London
- **KABAT-ZINN, J. (2003). MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN CONTEXT: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE. CLIN. PSYCHOL. 10, 144–156.**
- Nyanaponika, (1983), *The heart of buddhist meditation – a handbook of mental training based on the buddha's way of mindfulness*, Rider & Company, New South Wales, Edition, London.
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu (1991). *The path of discrimination (paṭisambhidāmagga)*, The Pali Text Society: London.
- Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha taught*. (sec. ed.) New York: Grove Press.
- Robins, C. J. (2002). Zen principles and mindfulness practices in Dialectical Behavior Therapy. *Cognitive and Behavior Practice*, 9, 50-57.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). On becoming a person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Mikulas, W. L. (1995). Conjunctive psychology: Issues of Integration. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 5(4), 331-348. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0101258> .
- **SHAPIRO, S. L., CARLSON, L. E., ASTIN, J. A., AND FREEDMAN, B. (2006). MECHANISMS OF MINDFULNESS. J. CLIN. PSYCHOL. 62, 373–386.**
- Walshe, Maurice (trs.). (2012). *The long discourses of the buddha, a translation of the dīgha nikāya*, Wisdom Publications: Boston.