

The Concept of Path in Original Buddhism and the Concept of Psychotherapeutic Improvement

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Abstract : The landmark movement of Western clinical psychology in the 20th century was the development of psychotherapy. The landmark movement of clinical psychology in the 21st century will be the absorption of meditation practices from Buddhist psychology. While millions of people explore meditation and related philosophy, very few people are exposed to the materials of original Buddhism on this topic, especially to the Theravada Abhidharma. The Abhidharma is an intricate system of lists and matrixes that were used to understand and remember Buddha's teaching. The Abhidharma delineates the first psychological system of Buddhism, how the mind works in the universe of reality and why meditation training strengthens and purifies the experience of life. Its lists outline the psychology of mental constructions, perception, emotion and cosmological causation. While the Abhidharma is technical, elaborate and complex, its essential purpose relates to the central purpose of clinical psychology: to relieve human suffering. Like Western depth psychology, the methodology rests on understanding underlying processes of consciousness and perception. What clinical psychologists might describe as therapeutic improvement, the Abhidharma delineates as a specific pathway of purified actions of consciousness. This paper discusses the concept of 'path' as presented in aspects of the Theravada Abhidharma and relates this to current clinical psychological views of therapy outcomes and gains. The core path in Buddhism is the Eight-Fold Path, which is the fourth noble truth and the launching of activity toward liberation. The path is not composed of eight ordinal steps; it's eight-fold and is described as opening the way, not funneling choices. The specific path in the Abhidharma is described in many steps of development of consciousness activities. The path is not something a human moves on, but something that moments of consciousness develop within. 'Cittas' are extensively described in the Abhidharma as the atomic-level unit of a raw action of consciousness touching upon an object in a field, and there are 121 types of cittas categorized. The cittas are embedded in the mental factors, which could be described as the psychological packaging elements of our experiences of consciousness. Based on these constellations of infinitesimal, linked occurrences of consciousness, citta are categorized by dimensions of purification. A path is a chain of citta developing through causes and conditions. There are no selves, no pronouns in the Abhidharma. Instead of me walking a path, this is about a person working with conditions to cultivate a stream of consciousness that is pure, immediate, direct and generous. The same effort, in very different terms, informs the work of most psychotherapies. Depth psychology seeks to release the bound, unconscious elements of mental process into the clarity of realization. Cognitive and behavioral psychologies work on breaking down automatic thought valuations and actions, changing schemas and interpersonal dynamics. Understanding how the original Buddhist concept of positive human development relates to the clinical psychological concept of therapy weaves together two brilliant systems of thought on the development of human well being.

Keywords : Abhidharma, Buddhist path, clinical psychology, psychotherapeutic outcome

Conference Title : ICBWMCS 2017 : International Conference on Buddhism, Wellbeing, Medicine and Contemporary Society

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : September 15-16, 2017