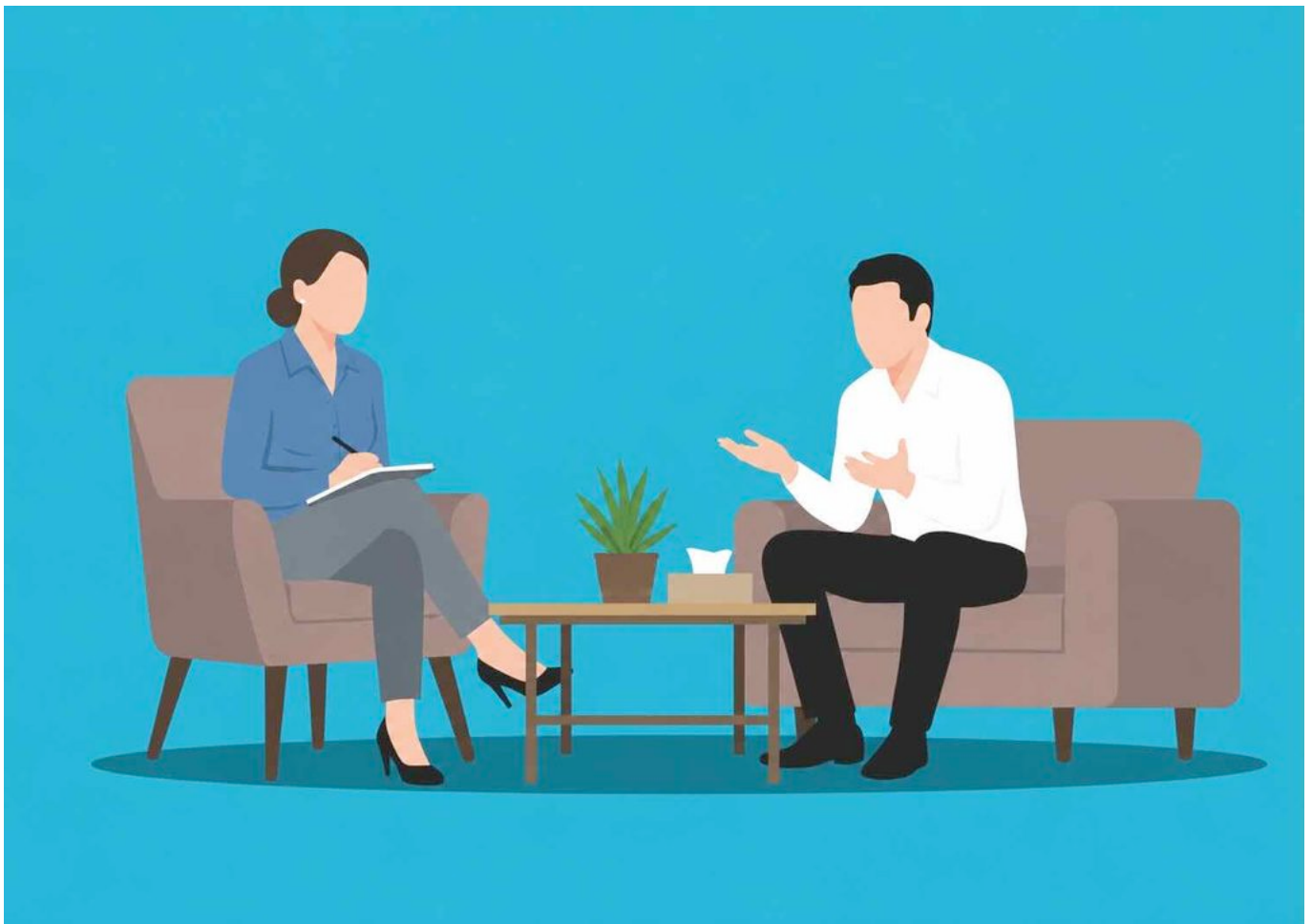


Buddhist Psychotherapy for mental issues (Part I)

Posted on



Psychotherapy.

Buddhist psychotherapy is a contemporary modern therapy described by psychotherapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and Buddhist teachers for mental health and mental problems. Buddhist psychotherapy is based on the Buddhist understanding of mental suffering, which arises from attachment to the world, the

belief in permanence, and clinging to the self. In Buddhist psychotherapy, a variety of practices are utilized to alleviate mental suffering. These include mindfulness meditation, compassion, and loving-kindness meditation.

Psychiatrists suggest that Buddhist psychotherapy has significant power in helping clients become aware of the processes that lead to mental suffering. Individuals seeking psychological counseling often find themselves caught between two unsustainable or unsatisfactory choices. For example, being fully engaged or doing nothing at all. If they lived in this mood for a long period of time, they would develop chronic illnesses. According to the Australian and New Zealand Journals of Family Therapy, to address these mental issues, counselors have introduced the 'Buddhist Middle Path' as a therapy approach. Mark O'Donoghue, a Counsellor, Buddhist practitioner, and meditator, explains in an article who seeks counseling.

"For many years, I have been practicing Buddhist meditation in my personal life. In this article, I present one way in which Buddhism has influenced my work. People who seek counseling often swing between two unsustainable or unsatisfactory alternatives. Buddhism proposes the middle way as a path out of these extremes. I present ways to deconstruct dichotomies, allowing people to find more effective alternatives. I show how to actualize a 'middle way' approach that is appropriate to Western therapy." (Dichotomy is a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different). According to him, 'therapy is something that helps people live their day-to-day lives more effectively and perhaps with less pain.'

Meanwhile, Dr. Jack Kornfield has mentioned in a speech that "many meditation practitioners and teachers have been left with serious problems such as alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, or misuse of power and money." But before starting a meditation program, individuals in Eastern countries observe five precepts (Pañca-sīla), which include the three mentioned above. They are. "The Five Rules: No killing: Do not hurt or kill any living being. No stealing: Do not take things that are not given to you. No sexual misconduct: Do not misuse the senses or commit harmful sexual acts. No false speech: Do not tell lies, cheat, or gossip. No intoxicants: Do not use alcohol or drugs that make you lose your clear mind." (AI Overview in Google.)



As a cute young girl, can she cope with such a disaster on her own?

Having an idea of Buddhist psychotherapy is an inner technology, he has summarized it as: "I found a middle-way approach most useful when people swing between unsatisfactory and unsustainable extremes. This is a widespread reason for people coming to therapy." By this expression, Dr. Kornfield sometimes

suggested that Buddhism serves more than as a therapeutic process, than merely a belief system. He has used some dichotomies in his counseling to trap clients. Some of them are:

1. Trust vs Distrust
2. Optimism vs Pessimism
3. Positivity vs Negativity
4. Idealized happy self vs Depression
5. Over-indulgence vs Self-hatred
6. Perfection vs Imperfection
7. Total control vs No control
8. Possession of very good friends vs. Friendlessness

He believed that in these situations, a brief reference to the extreme was sufficient to understand the change within the middle path.

After the Lord Buddha's period, in the second century, the Buddhist writers Nāgarjuna and Candrakīrti (seventh century) introduced the Mādhyamika theory of Dichotomies.

According to Google's explanation, dichotomy means: "a split or difference between two completely opposite things or ideas. It means dividing one whole group into two separate parts that do not overlap and cannot be true at the same time, like a sharp line drawn between two opposing choices." For this, there are a few rules:

1. Two parts only: The group is cut into two distinct sides.
2. Mutually exclusive: Nothing can belong to both sides at once.
3. Jointly exhaustive: Everything must fit into one side or line the other." (AI Overview.)

To clarify the dichotomy, they have provided some examples. "1. Good and evil:

Morality split into absolute right and wrong. 2. Theory and practice: What you plan versus what you actually do. 3. Public and private: Life shared with the world versus kept at home.” (AI Overview.)

They introduced the analytical meditation to achieve a state of liberation or unconditional freedom. According to their philosophy, the analytic meditation takes many forms, and one of them is to collapse two polarities into each other, dissolving the polarity.



Ven Diypattugama Revatha Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Siriwardhanaramaya Temple, Kollupitiya.

They point out that there are five developmental steps within the Middle Path regarding the dichotomy. Fenner, (1995) says, “Middle path meditators aim for a state where all conceptuality, necessarily bipolar, is restructured, leaving a non-conceptual state that ends anguish, since anguish is a concept. When one pole is unsustainable or unsatisfactory, people tend to shift to the other pole. This leaves them no room to display any other behavior, feeling, or thought. The role of the counselor is to locate this trap and help people out of it.”

We can see some therapeutic techniques the Buddha used in the stories of Patâchârâ, Kisagothamî, and Angulimâla. In the 2004 tsunami disaster, the story of Patâchârâ was a main therapeutic technique, and until then it had been just a story for films.

Accordingly, we can understand that not only Buddha’s sermons but also Jâthaka stories and stories from Lord Buddha’s period contribute to psychotherapy. Not only

that, but most Western psychotherapists also draw on Buddhist insight in their practice.

According to a program explaining Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Marsha M. Linehan, an American psychologist and professor, developed Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) by integrating Cognitive Behavior Therapy with certain Buddhist principles. Along with Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Western Psychologists, Psychotherapists, and Psychology Counselors also employed techniques such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Additionally, the Lord Buddha has illustrated several instances in which he employed cognitive methods to assist those in need. In the next article, we will discuss practical mental therapy techniques. Also, be sure to check out next month's Explore Sri Lanka magazine.

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