

Buddhist Psychotherapy for mental issues (Part II)

Posted on



“If there is no mud, there are no Lotuses.”

In last month’s magazine, we explored several theories related to Buddhist psychotherapy; as we said, we expect to put forward some practical mental therapy in this issue.

Buddhist psychotherapy traces its roots to the time of the Lord Buddha, who used it to address various social and mental issues. The Buddha used various theories,

along with examples and metaphors, to clarify relevant problems in light of the client's understanding.

Mainly, the Lord Buddha has used 'Stories of the Buddha's Former Births,' called 'The Jāthaka Stories', which consist of more than 500 stories. According to 'Pansiya Panas Jātakaya' (compiled by Professor W. S. Karunathilaka, published by Buddhist Publication Society, Dehiwala, 2000, p. vi, p. vi), there are exactly 547 Jāthaka stories.

According to the character of the Buddha, He has used these Jāthaka stories to provide solutions to the problems of relevant individuals, while also using some Dhamma tips specifically for learned people, including monks, nuns, Upāsaka, and Upāsika (men and women). First, I'll share some therapy tips based on a Jāthaka story called "Anabhirati Jāthakaya."

A young Brahmin in Sāwatthi had mastered the Three Vedas and taught sacred verses to many young Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Eventually, he married and settled down in a house. His thoughts are now busy with wealth, ornaments, servants, lands, possessions, cattle, and family, which subjects him to passion, error, and folly. His confusion clouded his thoughts, causing him to forget the proper sequence of his formulas. Occasionally, the charms would slip his mind entirely. One day, he gathered an assortment of flowers and scents and took them to the Master (The Lord Buddha) in Jētavana Park.

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After his greeting to the Lord Buddha, he sat down on one side. The Master talked pleasantly to him. "Well, young Sir, you are a teacher of the sacred verses. Do you know them all by heart?" "Well, Sir, I used to know them all right, but since I married, my mind has been darkened, and I don't know them any longer." "Ah, young sir," the Master said, "the same thing happened before. (In your previous births.) Before you married in this life, your mind was clear, and you knew all your verses perfectly. However, when your mind became clouded by passions and desires, you could no longer see them clearly."



Today's Brahmins depict the ancient Brahmins.

At his request, the Master (the Buddha) then recounted the following story. Now the Buddha tells the story of the former birth to the young Brahmin. "Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was the king of Benares, the Bodhisattva was born in the family of a brahmin magnifico. When he grew up, he studied under a far-famed teacher of Takkasila, where he learned all magic charms. After returning to Benares, he taught these charms to a large number of Brahmin and kshatriya youths.

Amongst these young people was a young Brahmin who had learned the Tree Vedas by heart. He became skilled in rituals and could recite the entire sacred texts flawlessly. Eventually, he married and settled down. However, the responsibilities of household life weighed on his mind, and he could no longer recite the sacred

verses. One day, his teacher paid him a visit, “Well, young Sir,” he enquired, “do you know all your verses by heart?” He replied. “Since I have become the head of a household, my mind has been too clouded, so that I can no longer recite them.” Said his teacher, “When the mind is clouded, no matter how perfectly the scriptures have been learned, they will not stand out clearly. But when the mind is serene, there is no forgetting them.” And thereupon he repeated the following two verses.

“Thick, muddy water will not show.
Fish, shell, sand, or gravel that may lie below; So with a clouded wit:
Nor your nor others’ good is seen in it.” “Clear, quiet waters ever show.
All, be it fish or shell, that lies below;
So with unclouded wit:
Both your and others’ good shows clearly in it.”

This Jāthaka story illustrates that when a person’s consciousness is overwhelmed, they cannot discern right from wrong. It means, referring to psychotherapy, that if a person needs to recover from their mental illness or any other issues, what they need first is consciousness. Even today, in a psychotherapy session, like me, we first encourage the client to get a clear picture of their incident or problem. They are then directed to delve into the problem and find a solution. But before that, they are trained in how to make the mind clear and calm, because otherwise, one cannot understand anything in a frustrated mind, like trying to see through murky water. Most psychotherapists never use this method, and that is why some clients are unable to reach an exact solution.

In psychotherapy, in my experience, the easiest and most efficient method is mindfulness meditation training. Most Western psychiatrists incorporate mindfulness meditation into Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) because American scientist and professor emeritus of medicine Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn created these approaches for Western people in 1979.

He has written many books on psychotherapy, with mindfulness meditation, named “Full Catastrophe Living, Wherever You Go, There You Are, Coming to Our Senses, Mindfulness for Beginners.” I mean, anyone can relieve their mental problems if they practice how to keep their mind calm and see the problems as they are. So, you don’t need to worry about your problems, because everyone has problems. Is your mind filled with frustration, agitation, anger, and hatred like muddy water? At this juncture, I remember a dialogue in a Resilience English lesson: “Don’t worry

about that, man. That happens.” Remember, lotuses grow in muddy water, not in swimming pools. In other words, if there is no mud, there are no Lotuses. In the next article, we will also discuss some mental therapy techniques.



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