Psychotherapy with a Buddhist perspective

Posted on

(Part II)



The Buddha guides Patāchārā towards inner peace through the wisdom of the Dharma.

Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behavior in both animals and humans. In certain instances, psychologists have used animals in experiments, particularly in behavioral psychology. It delves into various facets of human thought, emotion, motivation, and action. By understanding psychology, we gain valuable insights into why individuals behave the way they do and how they interact with others. If we investigate this further, it is essential to consider the roots of psychology. According to William James, “Psychology is a scientific discipline that studies mental states and processes and behavior in humans and other animals.” He did not propose just one theory; rather, he developed several foundational theories across psychology and philosophy that shaped how we understand the mind, emotion, and truth.

“Psychology is the scientific study of the mind and behavior. Its subject matter includes the behavior of humans and nonhumans, both conscious and unconscious phenomena, and mental processes such as thoughts, feelings, and motives. Psychology is an academic discipline of broad scope, crossing the boundaries between the natural and social sciences.” (Wikipedia.) In psychology, some argue that understanding human nature requires integrating biology, cognitive schemas, personal history, and sociocultural context, rather than relying on a single data source or a grand, reductionist theory. Anyhow, it is important to understand the origin of psychology.

The etymology of psychology, according to Greek origin, comes from psyche, meaning soul, breath, or mind, and logos, meaning study, reason, or discourse, translating to “study of the soul or mind.” Mentally, it involves internal, unobservable experiences such as thoughts, feelings, memories, dreams, and sensations. Behavior means any outward, observable, and recordable action or reaction by humans or animals. In the scientific method in psychology, psychologists use empirical research, experiments, and observation rather than pure speculation to test theories about why people act and feel the way they do. To understand psychology, we must examine the main branches.

There are six psychological theories:
1. Psychoanalysis.

2. Behaviorism.

3. Gestalt Psychology.

4. Cognitive Psychology.

5. Social learning theory.

6. Humanistic and Existential theory.

According to these theories, the main purpose is to examine the human mind, understand mental or social questions, and solve problems. Before psychology developed, philosophy addressed many problems of the mind, and eventually evolved into psychology. As unsolvable problems arose in the human mind within that society, a new trend emerged in modern psychology: ‘psychotherapy.’ History said that the reason for this was the increase in wars in the world; losing their properties, lives, and beloved ones created anger, social or mental phobia, hatred, and bereavement, etc., in the minds. On the other hand, some mental states are common to all human beings, which lead to mental issues and even mental illnesses, like stress, anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia.

According to Dharma, there are three causes of all these issues: Greed (Lobha), Hatred (Dvesha), and Ignorance (Mōha). If you lose something, you will become frustrated. If you lose someone, you will experience bereavement. There was a story about obtaining relief from these problems, called Patāchārā, which occurred during the Buddha’s period.

Patāchārā was described as a beautiful daughter of a wealthy merchant of Sāwatthi, in the Kōsala Kingdom. Her previous name was Rūpāwati. Her parents arranged her marriage with Prince Revant, a handsome young man from a neighboring Kingdom. Meanwhile, Rūpāwati discovered that she was pregnant with Amarsh, her early boyfriend. As planned, Amarsh and Rūpāwati secretly eloped from the palace with some money and ornaments and reached a small village far away from the palace to lead a simple and happy life. They settled down in a farmer’s hut, leading a struggling life to earn a living without any luxuries. Her parents got furious after they found out that their daughter had a relationship with a servant and that both had eloped.

During her pregnancy, Rūpāwati begged to be taken to her parents’ house to give birth there, as was the tradition. Rūpāwati’s husband refused, stating that her parents would surely torture him. But she justified it by saying that parents always love their children, no matter what had happened. Upon realizing that he would not accompany her, Rūpāwati decided to go alone. Finally, he agreed to accompany

her. Before they could reach Sāwatthi, she delivered the baby. Since there was no longer any reason to go to Sāwatthi, they turned back and resumed their life in the village. After a few years, Patāchārā became pregnant with her second child. She asked her husband to take her to her parents, but when he refused again, she set out with her son. But her husband followed her. She began labor and asked her husband to find a shelter. After they found shelter, a heavy storm hit the area where they were sheltering. So, to keep his wife warm, he went to search for wood, where he was bitten by a poisonous snake and died instantly.

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Meanwhile, at this dangerous juncture, Patāchārā gave birth to her second baby. Because he did not come, she left the place the next morning to find her husband. She was distraught and blamed herself when she found that her husband had died. Aroused by the sorrow of losing her husband, Patāchārā made her way to Sāwatthi, but when she reached the river Aciravati, she saw it overflowing due to heavy rain. Unable to cross the river with both children, she left the elder son on the riverbank and carried the baby to the other shore. When crossing the river back after placing the new baby on the riverbank, a vulture swooped down and flew off with the baby. Hearing his mother’s screaming, the elder son, who was on the other bank of the river, believed that his mother was calling him and entered the water. Suddenly, a strong current swept him away.

After losing her husband and both children, she was devastated. Despite her challenges, she pressed on towards the city, hoping to reunite with her parents. But on the way, she was informed that her parents and brother had been killed after their house collapsed during a storm. Utterly depressed, Patāchārā became insane and crazily started to scream without any clothes and began to run. People who hadn’t recognized her previous life began to throw stones at her, calling her a crazy woman. Even though she had nowhere to run, she was running as people were shouting at her. Thus, she was named ‘Patāchārā’, and people used to hurl abuse at her, and she ended up being completely ostracized from the village. Ultimately, she encountered the Lord Buddha at Sāvatthi and, upon hearing his explanation of the nature of human life, she understood the impermanence of all things and the Dharma. Do you think this is limited to Patāchārā? There is a new saying that “Tens of thousands of tents flooded after heavy rains. “We no longer know how to protect

our children. “My children ask me where we will sleep tonight, and I have no answer.” Because this is the “Dukkha” in this word, do not hesitate to realize it. So, if you face deep frustration, remind yourself of “Patāchārā, as a psychotherapy.



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