

General Introduction: Toward A New Buddhist Psychology

This work finds its most immediate origins in the 5th International Congress of Cognitive Psychotherapy held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in June, 2005. Its scientific program was organized by Dr. Astrid Palm Beskow, president, and Prof. Jan Beskow, secretary. The event took place in confluence with the 9th World Congress on Constructivism, headed by Prof. Michael J. Mahoney. Informally the convention also hosted the 9th conference of the Transcultural Society for Clinical Meditation (founded by Prof. Yutaka Haruki). It was a historical event in many respects. According to history, in 1904 the Sri Lankan monk Dharmapala gave a lecture at Harvard on not-self after which William James, founder of American psychology, allegedly said to the audience: "This is the psychology everybody will be studying 25 years from now." Now, 101 years later, we have witnessed a full welcoming of Buddhist teachings and practices by an entire congress of professional psychologists.

This vital collaboration was most dramatically symbolized at the very opening of the meetings. Over two thousand participants were treated to a public dialogue between the 14th Dalai Lama (Dr. Tenzin Gyatso) and Prof. A.T. Beck, founding father of Cognitive Therapy. Their exchange of views on commonalities and differences in psychological orientations is featured as the first chapter of this work. The remainder of the volume is composed primarily of chapters growing from presentations at the Gothenburg meetings. For further depth we have also included additional chapters commissioned after the meetings. This volume reflects a genuine East-West collaboration; contributors converge from twelve different nations. All are concerned with the integration of Buddhist teachings and scientific psychology by exploring the possibilities of merging practices of therapy, research methods and theory. Our chief hope in this volume is that this communion may enrich practices for the positive transformation of individuals and societies.

Toward a New Buddhist Psychology

"Buddhism" is a modernist term inherited from the 18th century European era of Enlightenment. Meant as a translation of the Buddha's Dharma (a systematic way to teach a practice on a certain understanding of life through meditation in action), Buddhism is a container that has been variously filled with almost everything related to the Buddhist teachings for more than 2500 years. Historically, it came to mean, among other things, a philosophy, a metaphysics, and a religion, or some amalgam of these combined with atavisms derived from regional cultures

like Bon (Tibetan Buddhism) or Taoism (Chan/Zen Buddhism). The existence of a large body of Buddhist scriptures — estimated to be 60 times larger than the bible — in Pali (Theravada/Hinayana), Sanskrit (Mahayana), Tibetan (Vajrayana/Tantrayana), and in Chinese, has made it impossible for one person to read and fathom them all in a lifetime. In the course of history many denominations and sects have come into being, selecting and adapting various materials and practices to serve various local needs and values. Unsurprisingly, many of these communities started to claim their own proprietary truth around a certain sutra. These competitions eventually lead to rivalry and fragmentation down the ages, some of which we will take up in the pages of this book. Unfortunately, however, this has meant both a distancing of groups that might otherwise stand to enrich each other, and in some cases a degeneration and disappearance of Buddhist teachings and practices

Our effort in the present work is to regenerate and rejuvenate these Buddhist teachings as a transcultural and unifying psychology. Although there are important differences in emphasis and content in the jungle of schools, denominations, and sects resulting from 2500 years of *Buddhisms*, we emphasize here what we take to be various themes intrinsic to all. The hope for a unifying Dharma is not new (see, for example, Goldstein, 2002). However, our specific hope in this work is not only to locate unifying themes, but to inject a vitality that enables them to flourish in a globalized world. In our view, this first means finding means of linking East and West, and second of traversing the historical planes of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern. In effect, we press toward a Buddhist teaching that is apt for the 21st century.

The possibility of bridging eastern and western traditions is already in active motion. As will be evidenced in later chapters, western scientists and practitioners have become increasingly drawn to the potentials inherent in the Buddhist traditions. We view developments in psychology, and particularly within the domain of therapy, as a particularly fertile field for unification. This is so because at the heart of both the Dharma and the therapeutic mission is practice, that is, action in the world for the alleviation of suffering and the realization of positive human relationships. We generally avoid the term Buddhism — reserving its use to denote the traditions of the past — and consequently speak about Buddhist Psychology. More specifically we propose a New Buddhist Psychology (NBP) to delineate a movement in Buddhist teachings that, by including western psychology, go beyond the major traditions of Theravada and Mahayana.

The advantages of a New Buddhist Psychology are many. Western psychology brings to the table the broadly employed discourses of science. It invites one to view Buddhist practices, then, in both biological and social contexts. It opens the possibility carrying out systematic, empirical research on the efficacy of practice. And it invites open and reflexive dialogue on such practices, their potentials and implications. It is just such dialogue that can also bring about creative amalgamations, and new practices that speak to the unfolding predicaments of cultures

in motion. At the same time, western psychology is challenged not only to expand its repertoire of practices, but as well its theoretical vocabulary, and its traditional presumptions. In particular, presumptions of mental illness, cause and effect, and mental mechanics are opened for further deliberation. In effect, we strive for an orientation that dialectically connects social, clinical, and neuropsychology to the Dharma in order to generate effective practices for all people. We hope for a Dharma that invites and guides professional practice, and in which research is meant to improve the practice of action, and theory serves the enrichment of dialogue.

Bridging History: The Constructionist Connection

It is one thing to press toward a vision of the Dharma that brings together East and West, thus moving toward pan-cultural inclusion. However, another way of viewing the adequacy of NBP for the challenge of 21st century globalization, is in terms of history. Cultural variations invariably earmark differences in historical developments. In this sense, Buddhist teachings largely bear the marks of what may be viewed as Traditional or Pre-modern history. They grew into form and presence prior to the rise of science, secularist materialism, democracy, and a belief in infinite progress through technology — all marks of what is often viewed as Modernism. In this sense, psychological science is a child of modernist history, as evidenced in its firm commitments to the observable world, scientific research, and continuous strides in the understanding and treatment of human suffering. Yet, as many see it, the global flows of information, peoples, technology, goods, and entertainment, bring forth a new *Zeitgeist*. In what is commonly viewed as an emerging period of Postmodernism, we are increasingly sensitized to the existence of multiple truths, rationalities, and values. Western science is based on a particular array of assumptions and values lodged within a particular time in history. This does not render its truths invalid so much as revealing them to be of a particular and delimited kind, one among many as opposed to an unquestioned ultimate.

Within the postmodern sphere this heightened sensitivity to the social basis of beliefs about the real, the rational and the good is generally viewed as *social constructionist*. Social construction places the primacy in reality construction not within individual minds but within relationships. Meaning is not a solipsistic matter, but it resides in social negotiation, collaboration, and agreement. In this sense individuals owe their private meanings to their existence in a history of relationship. This includes the meaning of the self. Such revolutionary and radical stance toward permanence is deeply resonant with the Buddhist viewpoint that we should not mistake our conventions of understanding for transcendental truth. As humans we construct the world and the self but these constructions are often the root of suffering. We may live by our constructions, but we also die by them. Whether we call it “no mind” or “deconstruction,” the potential for liberation is essential for human well-being.

We shall have more to say about the relationship between Buddhist and social constructionist thought as the volume proceeds. Most important for now, this affinity in orientations provides us with a means of bridging history. That is, in their postmodern stance, they do not eliminate the beliefs of any period of history. No person, profession or culture is transcendently wrong in its constructions of existence; all contain validity for those who live within their frame. Thus, all are invited to participate in the dialogues from which the future is molded. In effect, we may hope for a New Buddhist Psychology that not only entwines the Dharma with modern psychological inquiry, but will be enriched by all those who wish to enter the conversation.

Organization of the Book

Informed by the preceding, we have organized the present volume in the following way: We begin with what may be regarded as a historical landmark, the dialogue between the 14th Dalai Lama (Dr. Tenzin Gyatso) and Prof. Aaron Beck, a major figure in the development of cognitive therapy. The account not only includes their thoughts on similarities and differences in approach, but the relationship of Buddhism to science, imagery and visualization, and educating the public. Appended to the account of this engaging exchange are Beck's later reflections on the dialogue.

The remainder of the volume is divided into four sections. In Part I we feature a variety of cutting edge contributions to the use of Buddhist practices and their therapeutic modifications for purposes of human change. Eight practitioners describe in illuminating detail the practices they employ in eliminating anger, increasing compassion, treating excessive grief, developing social skills, reducing anger, controlling obesity, treating post-traumatic stress disorder, augmenting positive emotions, and bringing about an enhanced sense of well-being. It is important to note that this placement of practices toward the beginning of this volume first represents the Dharma's emphasis on practice as opposed to theoretical musing. Both Buddhist teachings and social construction caution against relying on theory as a picture or map of what is the case, and emphasize placing human action in the forefront of concern.

Part II features chapters that illuminate the landscape of contemporary research in Buddhist psychology. The majority of these studies are essentially concerned with the outcome of Buddhist practices, or variants thereof, on problems typically challenging the psychotherapist. Ten different studies are featured in this section, and they variously demonstrate the efficacy of Shikanho, a cognitive-behavioral method for alleviating feelings of negativity; the effects of a mindfulness training program on reducing stress; the effects of a mindfulness-based stress reduction program in treating emotional disorders; the efficacy of Zen meditation in reducing depression; the utility of a sensory awareness seminar on professional functioning; and the efficacy of combining Tai Chi and Zen meditation in reducing

anxiety. In effect, while the chapters in Part I offer a broad range of practice possibilities, the contributions in Part II build substantial confidence in the efficacy of such practices for human change.

In Part III, we include theoretical reflections on Buddhist traditions and practices and their various relationships with western psychology. These chapters first of all explicate more fully the relationship between social constructionist thought and central ideas in the Buddhist tradition. However, the stronger emphasis of this section as a whole is on the ways in which Buddhist ideas and practices either parallel, augment, or are in tension with central movements in western psychotherapy. In opening this relationship to both constructive and critical analysis, we create avenues to new departures in practice. These contributions also set the stage for the more fully elaborated theoretical offering in Part IV.

In Part IV, a single, comprehensive essay is featured. This essay, by Maurits Kwee and Marja Taams, is an attempt to collect the major strands of thought in the Buddhist tradition and to integrate them more fully with central tenets in western psychology. In doing so the authors also draw together much of the work included in this book. This integrative attempt is most useful, as well, in furnishing a rich historical background that enables the reader to appreciate the many variations in Buddhist beliefs and practices, and where they both resonate with and differ from the western psychological orientation.

Does this volume succeed in bringing about an integration across cultures and time? By blending social construction with a New Buddhist Psychology we certainly hope we can make a contribution to fitting the Dharma for the 21st century. At the same time, if reading evokes more questions than answers, we might say the book has done a good enough job of serving the Buddhist teaching. If reading this book is like throwing a million little bits and pieces into the air and letting them fall into a curious and provocative mosaic, we have proceeded at least minimally toward our goal. More hopefully the present effort will serve as a catalyst to creating a vision of an East/West/North/South communion that is not only diagnostic, therapeutic and prophylactic, but above all provides new ways of being-in-the-world that are salubrious, sublime, and sane.