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**BUDDHISM AND PSYCHOTHERAPY:
DEVELOPING A NON-JUDGING MIND**

**Presentation to the Nashville chapter of the Indo-American Psychiatric Association
January 24, 2013**

- I. My journey to becoming a Buddhist psychotherapist.
- II. The benefits of Eastern meditation practice.
- III. Tara Brach, Ph.D.: The "trance of unworthiness."
- IV. Sharon Salzberg: What we really want are certain mind states.
- V. Pema Chodron: Dropping "the story lines."
- VI. Some thoughts on obsessive-compulsive disorder.
- VII. Eckhart Tolle: Dissolving the emotional pain-body.
- VIII. Mark Epstein, M.D.: Buddhism and psychotherapy
- IX. Bibliography

WellSpring Health Services

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION, YOGA, & INNER PROCESS

A therapy group using meditation and yoga practice to enhance progress in psychotherapy

"Therapies break the hold of past conditioning on present behavior. Meditation tries to alter the process of conditioning per se." As a result, the meditator realizes his or her role as writer-director of these inner dramas and discovers the element of choice in the cutting and editing of perceptions of reality. This responsibility for choices becomes clear . . . The meditator is able to identify and abort the circular, conditioned mind habits that before had tended to linger and reverberate as ruminations and purposeless obsessions. ("Meditation and Psychotherapy: A Rationale for the Integration of Dynamic Psychotherapy, the Relaxation Response, and Mindfulness Meditation," by Illan Kutz, M.D., Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., and Herbert Benson, M.D., *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 142:1, January, 1985, pp. 5-6, emphasis ours.)

There is a growing awareness within the Western psychotherapeutic community of the substantial benefits of Eastern meditation practice. For many, the mind is continually busy: thinking and planning and worrying; calculating and talking; analyzing and criticizing; worrying and dreading; and imagining and preparing for the worst. Concern with past and future take up an inordinate amount of time and energy. Pain and other emotions are often focused on past events while fear, anxiety and worry target the (imagined) future. The present moment is often lost in all of this activity. The value of mindfulness meditation is thus to bring one directly into the present. The discipline of returning again and again to the present moment from the distractions of future and past is the focus of this group.

Most of us enter psychotherapy in part to deal with an inner sense of "something's wrong with me." And what keeps this inner feeling of shame in place is our own inner voice of judgment and criticism — our "inner critic." Mindfulness meditation provides a method for dislodging and uprooting the inner critic. Through regular practice, the mind develops a kind of non-judging muscle. "We discover a remarkable truth: much of spiritual life is self-acceptance, maybe all of it." (A Path with Heart, p.47)

Not only is non-judgment central to the moment-to-moment practice of meditation, but there are also practices within this tradition for developing positive mind states such as lovingkindness, compassion, equanimity, and sympathetic joy. In this way, we move beyond the psychotherapeutic goals of ridding ourselves of neurosis and into the territory of actually building an inner sense of tranquility and well-being.

This therapy group will be appropriate for those who have developed or who intend to develop a mindfulness meditation practice as an adjunct to psychotherapy or for those who wish to explore mindfulness meditation and yoga in a group experience. We will combine mindfulness meditation, yoga and process time to talk about our experience. Yoga is meditation in movement, and in the yoga practice we will focus on gentle stretching and opening to encourage us to more fully inhabit our bodies in the present moment.

TIME: Thursday 12 noon - 1:15 p.m., Sept.24 - Dec. 17 (12 weeks)

FEE: \$395 if paid in advance (18% discount) or \$40 per session

LEADERS: Sandi Anders, M.Div., therapist and yoga teacher

Philip Chanin, Ed.D., ABPP, licensed clinical psychologist

PLACE: Center for the Family, 2323 21st Ave. S, Suite 401, Nashville, TN 37212

REGISTRATION: *Contact Sandi at 297-7027 or Dr. Chanin at 386-3333. Limited to 12 participants.

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“As a friend of mine put it, ‘Feeling that something is wrong with me is the invisible and toxic gas I am always breathing.’ When we experience our lives through this lens of personal insufficiency, we are imprisoned in what I call the trance of unworthiness. Trapped in this trance, we are unable to perceive the truth of who we really are.

A meditation student at a retreat I was teaching told me about an experience that brought home to her the tragedy of living in trance. Marilyn had spent many hours sitting at the bedside of her dying mother—reading to her, meditating next to her late at night, holding her hand and telling her over and over that she loved her. Most of the time Marilyn’s mother remained unconscious, her breath labored and erratic. One morning before dawn, she suddenly opened her eyes and looked clearly and intently at her daughter. ‘You know,’ she whispered softly, ‘all my life I thought something was wrong with me.’ Shaking her head slightly, as if to say, ‘What a waste,’ she closed her eyes and drifted back into a coma. Several hours later she passed away.

We don’t have to wait until we are on our deathbed to realize what a waste of our precious lives it is to carry the belief that something is wrong with us. Yet because our habits of feeling insufficient are so strong, awakening from the trance involves not only inner resolve, but also an active training of the heart and mind.”

(Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha by Tara Brach, Ph.D., p. 3)

“Can you imagine a mind state in which there is no bitter, condemning judgment of oneself or of others. This mind does not see the world in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, good and evil; it sees only ‘suffering and the end of suffering.’ What would happen if we looked at ourselves and all of the different things what we see and did not judge any of it? We would see that some things bring pain and others bring happiness, but there would be no denunciation, no guilt, no shame, no fear.”

(Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness, by Sharon Salzberg, p. 108)

“Comparing ourselves to others is a very powerful mental affliction. In Buddhist psychology it is called ‘conceit.’ When we are enmeshed in conceit, we are pulled outside ourselves, trying to know who we are and what our experience is by comparing ourselves to others. ‘Who am I in reference to that? Am I good enough in comparison to that?’ Whether we conclude that we are better than, worse than, or equal to another, when we measure ourselves against others, it causes us harm. As we constantly try to decide, through comparison with others, who we are, what is important about us, whether or not we are happy, that churning of the mind in itself undermines our happiness.

Comparison or conceit is a gnawing, painful restlessness. It can never bring us to peace, because there is no end to the possibilities for comparison.” (p. 122)

We may think that we want a lot of money in order to be happy, but it's not that we want a lot of pieces of paper with pictures of presidents on them piled everywhere, or even a lot of objects that they could purchase. What we really want is what having a lot of money implies to us. It may imply security or power. It may imply an ability to make choices, or it may imply having time to play.

If we look very carefully, we realize that after our basic needs have been met, what we really want are certain mind states. (p. 54)

Slogan: "Practice the three difficulties"

The three difficulties are acknowledging neurosis as neurosis, doing something different, and aspiring to continue practicing this way.

Acknowledging that we are all churned up is the first and most difficult step. Without recognition that we're stuck, it's impossible to liberate ourselves from confusion. "Doing something different" is anything that interrupts our strong tendency to spin out. We can let the story line go and connect with the underlying energy, do on-the-spot tonglen, remember a slogan, or burst into song—anything that doesn't reinforce our crippling habits. The third difficult practice is to then remember that we need to keep doing the first two. Interrupting our destructive habits and awakening our heart is the work of a lifetime.

In essence the practice is always the same: instead of falling prey to a chain reaction of revenge or self-hatred, we gradually learn to catch the emotional reaction and

drop the story lines. Then we feel the bodily sensation completely. One way of doing this is to breathe it into our heart. By acknowledging the emotion, dropping whatever story we are telling ourselves about it, and feeling the energy of the moment, we cultivate maitri and compassion for ourselves. Then we could recognize that there are millions who are feeling the way we do and breathe in the emotion for all of us with the wish that we all be free of confusion and limiting habitual reactions. When we can recognize our own confusion with compassion, we can extend that compassion to others who are equally confused. In this step of widening the circle of compassion lies the magic of bodhichitta training.

*From: Compendium with
Uncertainty by
Pema Chödrön*

Some Thoughts on Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

“It has been my repeated impression that obsessive-compulsive individuals are very wound up and tense. They appear to be almost continually in a state of high stress—hurried or ‘speeded up’ to the point that they can’t relax and slow down. Accompanying this state of high tension is a tendency to be very out of touch with their bodies and their feelings. Sufferers from this disorder are frequently very intelligent and tend to spend a lot of time ruminating in their heads, at the expense of being centered and relaxed in their bodies and able to experience their feelings...Unfortunately, there are relatively few ways to avoid something that causes you anxiety when it’s strictly in your own head...”

I believe that a more lasting solution to this problem may be found in dealing with the tension that I mentioned before; that is, trying to undo the condition of being ‘speeded up’ and out of touch with your body and feelings. It requires lifestyle changes and a fundamental change of attitude. If you’re willing to incorporate some of the changes suggested below on an ongoing basis, you may be surprised to find that your problem with obsessions tends to diminish.

1. **Attempt to slow down and pace yourself.** Back off from always keeping busy and give yourself more time for rest, relaxation, and recreation. Recreation should consist of activities that you find genuinely enjoyable. Take more vacations and ‘mental health days’ off if you need them. The point is to stop driving and pushing yourself—to take life more slowly and live more in the present. Often this will require fairly basic changes in your priorities and your attitudes.

2. **Engage in activities that help you to be more in touch with your physical body.** A regular exercise program...will be helpful. Other physical disciplines such as yoga, martial arts, dancing, or working in the garden, practiced on a regular basis, can be helpful too. Some of you may choose to experience body therapies...or other forms of massage. All of these activities will help you to feel more ‘grounded’ and in your body. And this, in turn, will reduce your tendency to become (preoccupied with)...your inner thoughts and impulses.

3. **Be willing to experience your feelings...** You can learn to be more aware of your feelings, first, by slowing down enough so that you can live more in the present moment instead of in your thoughts...Then you can begin to bring out your feelings by writing them down or sharing them on a regular basis with someone you trust.

4. **Overcome isolation.** Social isolation tends to aggravate obsessions and compulsions, whereas connecting with, and feeling close to, other people will tend to reduce the problem because it brings you more into the present—more in contact with your whole self and your feelings. If you’re dealing with obsessive-compulsive disorder and find that you spend a lot of time alone, work on increasing your support system and make time to be with people. If you are

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already with someone a lot of the time, then work on upgrading your level of intimacy and communication with that person. You'll find, as a rule, that you tend to let go of obsessions when you're having a good time being with someone."

(The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook, Appendix 5)

Past Pain: Dissolving the Emotional Pain Body

“Every emotional pain that you experience leaves behind a residue of pain that lives on in you. It merges with the pain from the past, which was already there, and becomes lodged in your mind and body...

This accumulated pain is a negative energy field that occupies your body and mind. If you look on it as an invisible entity in its own right, you are getting quite close to the truth. It's the emotional pain-body...Anything can trigger it, particularly if it resonates with a pain pattern from your past...

Watch out for any sign of unhappiness in yourself, in whatever form—it may be the awakening pain-body. This can take the form of irritation, impatience, a somber mood, a desire to hurt, anger, rage, depression, a need to have some drama in your relationship, and so on. Catch it the moment it awakens from its dormant state.

The pain-body wants to survive, just like every other entity in existence, and it can only survive if it gets you to unconsciously identify with it. It can then rise up, take you over, ‘become you,’ and live through you. It needs to get its ‘food’ through you. It will feed on any experience that resonates with its own kind of energy, anything that creates further pain in whatever form...

So the pain-body, when it has taken you over, will create a situation in your life that reflects back its own energy frequency for it to feed on. Pain can only feed on pain...Once the pain-body has taken you over, you want more pain. You become a victim or a perpetrator. You want to inflict pain, or you want to suffer pain, or both...

The pain-body...is actually afraid of the light of your consciousness. It is afraid of being found out. Its survival depends on your unconscious identification with it, as well as your unconscious fear of facing the pain that lives in you. But if you don't face it, if you don't bring the light of your consciousness into the pain, you will be forced to relive it again and again...

So the pain-body doesn't want you to observe it directly and see it for what it is. The moment you observe it, feel its energy field within you, and take your attention into it, the identification is broken...You are now the witness or the watcher of the pain-body. This means that it cannot use you anymore by pretending to be you, and it can no longer replenish itself through you.”

(The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment, by Eckhart Tolle, pp. 29-31)

PSYCHOBITS

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January/February 1996

FROM THE CHAIR

By Philip Chanin, Ed.D., ABPP

BUDDHISM AND PSYCHOTHERAPY: DEVELOPING A NON-JUDGING MIND

Freud unquestionably brought incredible light to the psychology of the unconscious, yet searching for relief through the methods of psychotherapy alone is the equivalent of Nasruddin searching in the wrong place for his key. In striving to rid the mind of neurosis, one could dig forever . . . Meditation . . . offers not only the key for us to engage directly with life itself but also the method of developing the mental faculties so that the kind of working-through that Freud envisioned could actually occur.

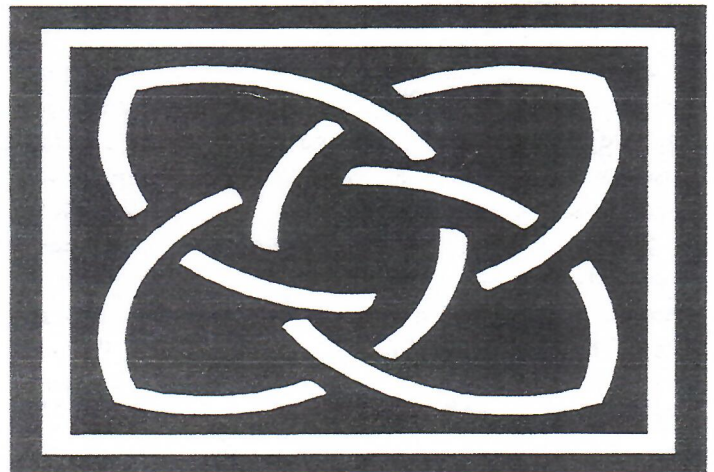
(Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective by Mark Epstein, M.D., p. 160).

It was the spring of 1975. I had just finished my doctoral dissertation. The previous fall, for the first time, I had begun personal psychotherapy. In recent months I had also tried transcendental meditation, but it seemed like a pop version of something with a much deeper foundation. One spring day, sitting in my men's group, Kent said to me, "Phil, you need to go to Naropa, in Boulder, Colorado, and learn Vipassana meditation."

I took Kent's advice, and enrolled in an intensive five-week Buddhist meditation course at Naropa, taught by Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, and Sharon Salzberg. We meditated four hours-a-day, all day on Sundays, and received instruction from these teachers. Perhaps the single most memorable teaching of that summer was the repeated admonition that we bring "non-judging awareness" to every

sensation, every thought, every emotion. For someone such as myself, raised as a Southern Baptist, with a judgmental, perfectionist father, this was indeed a radical proposition!!

As Epstein, a Harvard-trained psychiatrist, in his new book on Buddhist psychotherapy, suggests,



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Buddhism and Psychotherapy - from page 1

When we refuse to acknowledge the presence of unwanted feelings, we are as bound to them as when we give ourselves over to them . . . Religion has traditionally counseled believers to withdraw from aggressive, erotic, or egotistical states of mind, replacing them with the 'purer' states of devotion, humility, or piety. Psychoanalysis has encouraged its adherents to be less fearful of these emotions, to understand their roots and recover the energy that has been lost through the failure to accept primitive urges or longings. Buddhism, alone among the world's religions, has taken a characteristically middle path, recognizing the need to be free from destructive emotions while at the same time seeing that such freedom comes through *nonjudgmental awareness of just those emotions from which we seek freedom*. (p. 24, emphasis mine)

If I were to choose one idea that I hope to teach to my psychotherapy patients, it is this practice of developing a non-judging mind. Over the years, I have turned to various methods in my efforts to teach this approach. I have introduced the various "dysfunctional thoughts" which have been identified by Aaron Beck, David Burns, and the field of cognitive therapy. Ten years ago, working at a substance abuse hospital, I developed a lecture on "The Inner Critic", based in part on the book *Self-Esteem* by Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning. I still give some patients, who have a particularly virulent critical superego, a copy of that lecture. Where in years past I might have talked about "low self-esteem," I am now more likely to focus on shame, that inner sense that most of my patients have that "something is wrong with me."

Over the course of a long psychotherapy, I usually observe that my patients do become kinder and less harsh toward themselves, mostly, I believe, out of experiencing being treated nonjudgmentally in the therapy. However, I have yet to find, within the field of Western psychology, an actual *method* which a patient can utilize to make finally peace with, and put to rest, the extraordinarily tenacious and shaming superego developed in her or his childhood. For that, I must turn to Buddhism and the tenets of Buddhist meditation practice.

To his great credit, Freud discovered the importance of the therapist's learning to attend, non-judgmentally, to whatever came into the patient's mind. "There is no evidence," according to Epstein, "that Freud was influenced directly to Buddhist practices, but the resemblance of his attentional recommendations to those of the Buddha cannot be denied . . . Freud's writings on the subject reveal the first essential quality of bare attention--its impartiality. (Freud) repeatedly admonish(ed) psychoanalysts to 'suspend . . . judgment and give . . . impartial attention to everything there is to observe.'" (p. 114)

What Freud was not able to do was outline an attentional method whereby the patient would be able to "stay with" whatever came up. Epstein articulately outlines the substantial benefits of an approach which combines psychotherapy and meditation. "Much of my work as a therapist with a meditative perspective," Epstein writes, "involves teaching people, in the context of therapy, *how* to pay attention to what they are repeating in a manner that is both meditative and therapeutic (p. 193). He elaborates as follows:

The Buddha taught a method of *holding* thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the balance of meditative equipoise so that they can be seen in a clear light. Stripping away the identifications and reactions that usually adhere to the emotions like moss to a stone, the Buddha's method allows the understanding of emptiness to emerge. This is an understanding that has vast implications for the field of psychotherapy because it promises great relief from even ordinary suffering (p. 102).

Twenty years ago, I was introduced to this method by my Buddhist teachers at Naropa. Sitting with patients in my office, I am frequently daunted by the task of assisting them in learning to approach their painful memories, shaming thought processes, and chaotic affects with the attentional awareness of a non-judging mind. I am comforted by knowing that there is a method, if I can adequately model and teach it. Epstein quotes Suzuki Roshi, from what is still my favorite book on meditation practice, *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*.

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So even though you have some difficulty in your practice, even though you have some waves while you are sitting, those waves themselves will help you. So you should be grateful for the weeds, because eventually they will enrich your practice. If you have some experience of how the weeds in your mind change into mental nourishment, your practice will make remarkable progress. You will feel the progress. You will feel how they change into self-nourishment . . . This is how we practice Zen (p. 127).

Commenting on Suzuki Roshi's words, Epstein concludes:

This is the promise of bare attention and the great discovery of the Buddha. The relevance of this discovery to psychotherapy cannot be overstated, since, as every veteran of psychotherapy can attest, analysis can easily give understanding without relief. Meditation offers a method of recycling psychic pain, bringing about the very relief that is otherwise so elusive. This is the reason for its extraordinary appeal to those conversant with psychotherapy. Meditation offers a method of working with emotional material that may be implied in the best psychotherapy but is rarely made explicit. The Buddha was a master at making the method explicit (p. 127-128).

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