

**108TH CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION  
BUDDHIST APPLICATIONS TO PSYCHOTHERAPY  
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Healing for the Millennium: Buddhist Applications to Psychotherapy” was the theme of two sessions held at this year’s American Psychological Association’s (APA) 108th annual conference. Due to the popularity of the topic, this is the third year in a row that it has been included in APA’s program; given the standing room only crowds, interest continues to grow.

Buddhism and psychology both aim to enable individuals to cope effectively with suffering and stress by fostering self-awareness and providing insight into the mysterious workings of the mind. Panelists at these forums presented case studies and introduced Buddhist principles and practices that, coupled with psychotherapy, provide powerful tools to promote emotional transformation and healing.

The panel on Saturday afternoon focused on the complementary nature of Buddhism and psychology. C. Peter Bankart of Wabash College began with the topic of Buddhist wisdom. He proposed that the wisdom an individual gains through the practice of Buddhism can contribute significantly to progress in therapy. Wisdom comes from the insight gained into the causal nature of phenomena, which underlies the concept of karma, an understanding of which allows people to establish a greater sense of personal responsibility. By learning about the function of a bodhisattva and a Buddha, clients can develop a deeper sense of self-worth and respect for others, providing a foundation for improving one’s character and gaining an optimistic view of life.

Following that, Douglas Pryor, of Behavioral Management Consultants, spoke about the role Buddhism can play in dealing with anger. He explained the Buddhist concept of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds—a systematization of the various life states that individuals have the potential to manifest at any given moment—which range from the state of Hell, a life of profound suffering and destruction, to that of Buddhahood, a life characterized by the qualities of boundless wisdom, tremendous fortune, infinite compassion and unlimited freedom. Anger is one of the lowest worlds. If an individual can grasp the notion that all Ten Worlds exist simultaneously in each world, then he or she can realize the infinite potential for change and the possibility to reveal higher states of life, including Buddhahood, which all living beings possess.

Next, Rita Dudley-Grant, with the Virgin Islands Behavioral Services, shared her views on the positive impact Buddhism can have on the recovery from addiction. Pointing out that Alcoholics Anonymous has proven that spirituality is an important ingredient in recovery, Dudley-Grant explained that Buddhism offers a spiritual alternative for individuals who do not believe in God. By practicing Buddhism, individuals are able to purify their senses and thereby elevate and redirect their desires to noble causes, such as caring for others. Greed, hatred and ignorance are replaced with compassion and wisdom.

Tara Brach, psychologist and senior teacher at the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, spoke on “Transforming Shame and Fear with Buddhist Mindfulness and Heart Meditations.” She described how Buddhism and Western psychology overlap in their understanding that suffering is alleviated when buried or hidden facets of the psyche are brought into the light of conscious awareness.

The session on Monday morning focused on how to apply Buddhist principles to solve social problems such as nuclear and biological warfare, environmental degradation and global warming, genocide, poverty and racial and ethnic conflicts. Describing the psychological consequences of these threats, Anthony Marsella from the University of Hawaii in Manoa warned that social, cultural, political and environmental problems around the globe are imposing intense and complex demands on individual and collective psyches, challenging our ideas about identity, control and well-being.

Yoichi Kawada, director of the Institute for Oriental Philosophy in Tokyo, sent a paper entitled “Buddhist Psychology: Principles of Interdependence and Compassion.” Kawada explained that from a Buddhist perspective the solution to all the social ills in the world lies with the individuals who inhabit the earth. This is because both the natural and the social environments are reflections of the collective condition of the planet’s population. As individuals are awakened to the truth or wisdom of the dharma essence through Buddhist practice, they come to realize that all life is interconnected throughout the cosmos and that everything is equal and worthy of respect. With that awakening practitioners embark on the role of planting seeds of compassion as a means to overcome hatred and violence.

Belinda Khong from MacQuarie University in Sydney, Australia, emphasized the growing numbers of socially engaged Buddhists who actively contribute to the betterment of their communities. Such activism is natural as individuals gain compassion through their Buddhist practice. Underlying the Buddha’s teachings is the notion that the microcosm and the macrocosm are irrevocably intertwined. As individuals awaken to this, they develop a strong sense of responsibility to address social problems.

The last issue to be addressed was Buddhism and the environment. Shyuichi Yamamoto of Soka University in Tokyo shared his views on what Buddhism offers to solve the critical environmental problems confronting the planet. Buddhism offers an ethical and philosophical basis for a system of universal values, including respect for the dignity of all life, the theory of the nine consciousnesses—the ninth being the deepest level of consciousness where everything in the universe is interrelated—and dependent origination, which describes the interdependence of humanity, the natural world and the cosmos.

Because the relationship of Buddhism and psychology has for so long held such great appeal for the APA conference participants, organizers hope to hold longer sessions next year in San Francisco so that there will be more time for dialogue.