

**PSYCHOLOGISTS EXAMINE BUDDHISM IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**  
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For the fourth consecutive year, “Buddhism and Psychotherapy,” an extremely popular topic among psychotherapists, drew a standing room-only gathering at the 109th annual convention of the American Psychological Association held in San Francisco, Aug. 28.

Chaired by SGI-USA Culture Department member and licensed clinical psychologist Dr. G. Rita Dudley-Grant, this two-hour symposium titled, “Healing the Person, Family, and Planet: Buddhism and Psychotherapy” informed therapists and others about methods of incorporating Buddhist philosophy and practices in traditional and nontraditional therapy sessions.

“Releasing the Demons: Teaching Men to Meditate” was the first presentation, by Dr. C. Peter Bankart, a licensed psychologist, professor, director of the Student Counseling Service at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Ind., and expert in Buddhist psychotherapy East and West. Prefacing his talk, Dr. Bankart issued a serious challenge to Western psychology by asserting that the deep ecological truths of Buddhism (e.g., dependent origination) are more powerful than virtually everything encountered in Western psychology and almost cannot co-exist with Western individualistic paradigms. Dr. Bankart suggested “that the pursuit of self-awareness and self-control that are at the heart of the wisdom traditions requires a strength of character and an intensity of personal commitment that relatively few individualistically oriented young European American men have acquired.”

Taming these demons was the focus of the next presentation, “The Buddha’s Influence in the Therapy Room,” by Dr. Belinda Siew Luan Khong, licensed clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW, Australia. Dr. Khong discussed the psychological use of Buddhist mindfulness practice and meditation and its impact on both therapist and client. “Through the use of concentration and mindfulness, clients can learn to acknowledge, accept and make space for their emotions and psychological concerns.” She discussed the Buddhist concept of “letting go” (relinquishing attachments), including the ability to listen quietly and remain open, and the ability to give even attention and bracket one’s biases.

The use of Buddhist principles to better understand family dynamics and change was presented by SGI-USA member Dr. Maria Guajardo Lucero, licensed clinical psychologist and director of Assets for Colorado Youth, in “Healing the Heart and the Family.” Addressing the parent’s role in healing, Dr. Lucero stated: “Parents might view their family role as a navigator, navigating the waters of human potential. The core of family life is respect for human dignity. Realizing this is at the core of creating peace in the family.” She called for the use of open dialogue to resolve conflict among family members and a deep appreciation that “children and parents chose each other in a previous life to spend this lifetime together in a parent-child relationship. This Buddhist belief speaks to the interdependence and interconnectedness that exists in the parent-child relationship, as both provide the other with opportunities to polish their lives, overcome obstacles and practice engaged compassion with each other.”

In “Substance Abuse in the Caribbean: A Buddhist Approach to Recovery,” Dr. Dudley-Grant of the Virgin Islands Behavioral Services in Christiansted, Saint Croix, considered the larger picture of Buddhism and psychology on a community scale. Using the Caribbean as an exemplar, Dr. Grant addressed how Buddhist psychology can be used in

the treatment of substance abuse and as a force to promote the development of positive community values. “Buddhist doctrine addresses cravings and attachments, indicating that an appreciation for the impermanence of all things can inform our understanding of the causation and mechanics of addictions.” Analyzing the breakdown in the fabric of Caribbean society, Dr. Grant pointed to a “particularly pernicious value found in Western culture, that of rugged individualism. This individualistic approach to living is antithetical to the communal family structure and Afrocentric social fabric that stemmed from our African heritage.” Based on the Buddhist principle of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things, Dr. Grant called for the widespread acceptance of social responsibility for both the problem and solution. “This will help to overcome the self-centeredness of Western individualism and to effect major change in our island nations individually and collectively.”

Two overarching lessons were drawn from the presentations by symposium discussant Dr. Kathleen H. Dockett, licensed psychologist and acting chairperson of the Department of Psychology and Counseling at the University of the District of Columbia: 1) The Buddhist ecological principle of dependent origination is central to understanding and intervening in the behavior of individuals, families and communities; and 2) It is imperative that humanity develop compassionate acceptance of responsibility for the plight of others at the individual, micro- and macro-systems levels of intervention if society is to survive. “Both compassion and responsibility arise from understanding that we are all interconnected and interdependent,” Dr. Dockett noted.

The profundity of the principle of dependent origination is reflected in the following statement by SGI President Ikeda: “Buddhism teaches that the mind and body of each human being, human society and the natural ecology are all interdependent. On their respective planes, they exist in a mutually supportive relationship; each is grounded in universal life and participates in the process of creative evolution in a profound harmony with the entirety of being...

“In modern society, the unity and harmony of mind and body has been broken. This has caused both spiritual problems—including various types of mental breakdowns, loss of ethical values and increasing violence—as well as physical problems—such as stress related illnesses, psychosomatic disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, etc...

“Buddhism takes as its essential starting point the need to deploy the inherent human capacities for compassion, trust and wisdom in order to heal the severances stemming from the inner disruptions of human life. The positive impact of this inner transformation to healing and harmony can transform the dynamics of families, of societies, and even of humanity itself” (Sept. 29, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 10).

Thus, the deeply ecological concept of dependent origination serves as a foundation for healing at multiple levels of society. Strictly speaking, dependent origination teaches us that because everything in the universe is mutually related, one cannot separate collective karma from individual karma. We are all responsible collectively for our collective karma. Therefore, in order to change a suffering society, such as that reflected in the tragic terrorism of September 11, both an inner transformation and a widespread compassionate social responsibility will be essential.

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