

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE SELF: HOW EASTERN THOUGHT HAS
INFLUENCED WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

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“Of what use are giants if we refuse to stand on their shoulders?” –Unknown

CHAPTER I

Introduction

A little over a century ago, in 1909, a group photograph was taken in front of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Seated in the front row from left to right were Sigmund Freud, G. Stanley Hall, and Carl Gustav Jung. One would be hard pressed to find an exploration on the history of psychology that does not mention the significant event captured in this black and white image, which propelled Sigmund Freud and his theory of psychoanalysis into the consciousness of the United States (Evans & Koelsch, 1985).

The five lectures that Freud gave during those two weeks, which he later published under the title *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, were the only ones he ever delivered in the Western Hemisphere, yet they would have a profound effect on the history of Western psychology (Evans & Koelsch, 1985). Although many of Freud's ideas have been called into question over the years, nonetheless, he is recognized for his development of such concepts as defense mechanisms, the unconscious mind, dream analysis, transference, free association, as well as psychoanalysis.

G. Stanley Hall was the first president of Clark University and was responsible for inviting Freud and Jung to the conference in 1909 (Evans & Koelsch, 1985). He was also the first president of the American Psychological Association and was responsible for starting the first psychological laboratory in America. Hall is known as a major contributor to the development of Educational Psychology and for his work with adolescents (Evans & Koelsch, 1985).

Carl Jung was only 34 years old when he arrived at Clark University and is the youngest person to have received an honorary degree from that institution (Evans & Koelsch, 1985). Jung is known as the developer of Analytical Psychology and was the first to propose such psychological concepts as the Collective Unconscious, Archetypes, synchronicity, and the Complex. Of particular importance to this paper, Carl Jung was known for his psychological explorations of religion and the relation of, and differences between, Eastern and Western Philosophies (Evans & Koelsch, 1985).

The history of psychology, as we know it today, was greatly influenced by the lectures given at Clark University in 1909, but it has been equally influenced by Western empirical inquiry and the scientific method. Over the past century, psychology has moved from a largely philosophically driven exploration of human behavior to a discipline that places its primary emphasis upon the experimental verification of hypotheses (Robinson, 1976). Recent decades have experienced an influx of Eastern traditional ideas, largely derived from Buddhism, into the realm of Western Psychology in both the fields of research and the therapeutic traditions intended to alleviate human

suffering (Michalon, 2001). In addition to the influences of Freud and the scientific method, a significant portion of the historic explorations in the field of psychology have been dedicated to enlarging an understanding of the Self.

The Western concept of the Self is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition of an entity or inner substance that is separate from the gross body. This ghost in the machine or homunculus, which existed within the individual, was viewed as having volitional control over a person's thoughts or actions (Mosig, 2006). So, when "I" am thinking a thought or performing an action, this "I" that is being referred to was considered to be in charge of directing the body into acting. Western religion and philosophy, within the Cartesean framework, have historically regarded the Self, the mind, the ego and the soul as the same kind of inner substance. In Western psychology, this idea of the Self is directly connected with the ego, and most therapeutic interventions work to strengthen the ego as low self-esteem is corrected (Michalon, 2001). The recent incorporation of Eastern thought into the lexicon of Western psychology has resulted in expanded notions of what it means to be a Self and how these notions have come to play a role in our suffering (Cantor, 2008).

Eastern ideas regarding the Self, particularly those informed by Buddhist traditions, are quite different. From the Buddhist perspective, there is no permanent separate self that exists within the gross body that exercises volitional control over one's thoughts and actions (Kornfield, 2008). Rather, Buddhism proposes that nothing in the universe can exist separate of an interconnected net of causal conditions that make existence

possible. In other words, all things, including humans, are composites that have no real existence other than as an impermanent collection, or *gestalt*, of component parts. This concept will be explored in greater detail later, but it is necessary to point out this fundamental difference in the way that the Self is conceptualized in Eastern and Western thought. This difference has played a key role in how Westerners have come to understand Buddhism and how Western Psychologists have approached integrating Eastern thought into their conceptualizations of human psychology and the alleviation of human suffering from psychological disturbances (Kumar, 2002). Before discussing how some of the notable figures in Western psychology incorporated Eastern thinking into their philosophies, practices, and conceptualizations of the Self, we should strive to better understand the origins of Buddhism and Buddhist Psychology.

CHAPTER II

The Story of the Birth of Buddhism

Although it is difficult to separate which elements of this story are myths and which are historical facts, the following tale contains the essential elements understood to be the underlying narrative of most of the forms of Buddhism found throughout the world today. This narrative can be found with some amount of variation in numerous historical accounts and literary works. The man we have come to know as the Buddha was born in what is now Nepal around 563 B.C.E. and was named Siddhartha Gautama. Born into the family of a feudal lord, his life was luxurious and as a young prince, he never wanted for anything. The story goes that Siddhartha had it all. He was married at age sixteen to a beautiful princess called Yasodhara and they later had a son named Rahula. When Siddhartha was born, his father summoned fortunetellers to provide him with a glimpse of his son's future. He was told that his son would walk on one of two possible paths. If Siddhartha remained in his role as a prince, he would unify India and become her greatest ruler. If he chose to forsake his role as a conqueror, he would become a great spiritual leader, perhaps even a world redeemer.

Siddhartha's father was determined to guide his son toward the role of conqueror and took great pains to keep the young prince fettered to the world of material possessions and courtly pleasures. None of the brutal realities of the world that existed outside of their castle was to fall upon the eyes of Siddhartha. He was not to see or

come into contact with sickness, decrepitude, or death upon any of his travels outside of his castle and, each time he went out, runners were sent ahead of him to clear the roads of any of these disturbing sights. One day, however, an old man was missed and Siddhartha saw for the first time what it meant to be decrepit. When he asked his driver what was wrong with the gray-haired, shaking, and broken-toothed man, the driver told him that the man was simply old and that everyone gets old. On Siddhartha's next trip out of the castle he saw a person who was suffering with a disease lying by the road. Once again, his driver explained to him that the person was ill and that everyone gets ill at some time in his or her life. On a third trip, he saw a corpse and his driver told him that all people die eventually. None of these disturbing thoughts about life had ever entered the mind of Siddhartha, and he was profoundly affected by this. On a final trip outside of the castle he saw a shaven headed monk dressed in an ochre robe with a begging bowl in his hand. His driver explained to him that the monk was someone who had withdrawn from the world of materialism and conquest in order to live the ascetic life while seeking spiritual enlightenment.

The stark reality that every person will inevitably experience old age, illness, and eventually death led Siddhartha to realize that he had been living a life filled with distractions and that he could no longer walk that path. He decided to seek truth. One night, at the age of twenty-nine, Siddhartha silently said goodbye to his wife, his son, and his life as a prince so that he could seek the path to enlightenment. The young prince shaved the topknot off of his head, which was an indication of his upper class status, and walked into the forest. For six years, Siddhartha concentrated his efforts on

finding enlightenment. He first studied *raja yoga* and Hindu philosophy with the help of two *yogis*, but soon realized that he had learned all that they could teach him. Next, he joined a band of ascetics and attempted to find enlightenment by way of the mortification of the body. It has been said that at one point he ate as little as six grains of rice per day and, as a result, grew so weak that if a maiden called Sujata had not fed him warm rice porridge, he might have died. Having lived both the life of a prince who had all of the indulgences of the privileged upper class at his disposal and the life of the extreme ascetic, Siddhartha realized that these polarized approaches did not provide him with the truth he was seeking. This realization laid the foundation for what would be called the Middle Way, a life in which the body is given what it needs to survive in health, and nothing more. The final phase of his quest for enlightenment is one of the great stories within human history.

The story goes that one evening Siddhartha sat down to meditate under a pipal tree (now known as a Bodhi tree) and vowed not to rise until he achieved enlightenment. This place, located in northeast India near the city of Patna, has come to be known as the Immovable Spot. *Mara*, or The Evil One, came to the spot in order to prevent the young prince from achieving his goal by disrupting his concentration. *Mara* made his first attack in the form of the God of Desire, by parading his three beautiful daughters in front of Siddhartha, but he did not succumb to the temptations of desire. Next, Mara assumed the form of The Lord of Death and sent his demon armies to attack with torrents of rain, hurricanes and showers of flaming rocks. Siddhartha's meditative state held, and the weapons hurled at him turned into flower petals as they

entered his field of concentration. Mara, in a final desperate attempt to prevent Siddhartha's potential enlightenment, demanded to know who would bear witness to Siddhartha's right to do what he was doing. Siddhartha touched the earth with his right fingertip and the earth roared "I bear you witness", and Mara's armies fled in defeat. As the morning star rose in the East, the prince who had been known as Siddhartha achieved enlightenment as the Bodhi tree rained down red blossoms. From that day forward, he would be known as the Buddha, or the Awakened One.

It is not the purpose of this exploration of how Buddhism affects Western psychology to speculate about the factual nature of the story of how Siddhartha Gautama achieved enlightenment. If we examine this process as one that occurred on a purely psychological level, the lessons are equally valid. According to Buddhism, in many respects, we are our own worst enemies and create much of our suffering. The idea that a life lived in either excess or asceticism causes us to suffer is easy to see. The idea that our fears and desires exercise great influence on how we make our decisions is also easy to see. In addition, our efforts to use the experiences of others to solve our problems is limited and, at best, anecdotal. Our path is ours alone, and if we are going to discover a sense of peace and purpose in our life, we are going to have to find our own way. Perhaps the greatest realization that the Buddha achieved through his contemplation under the Bodhi tree was that enlightenment is not something that we achieve or some distant unearthly place we strive to get to, we are already living in *nirvana* as enlightened beings; we just do not realize it. Our flawed view of ourselves as separate beings operating against the world is what keeps us from realizing this truth

(Kornfield, 2008). As the Tibetan Lama Za Rinpoche (2010) said, “Enlightenment is like when we realize, after searching for our glasses all over the house, that they were on our head the whole time and we say to ourselves, ‘duh!’”.

After his realization at the age of thirty-five, the Buddha would spend the rest of his life teaching until his death at the age of eighty, but before he began his life as a teacher, Mara had one final challenge for him. Mara asked, who could be expected to understand a truth as profound as the one you have grasped? How can a person show what can only be found and teach what can only be learned? Why not just slip away into nirvana and be done with this physical body? It was a compelling argument, but the Buddha thought long and responded, “There will be some who will understand” (Smith, 1991, p. 87) and with that, Mara was driven from the life of the Buddha forever. The Buddha had slain what mythologist Joseph Campbell called the dragon “thou shalt” (Osbon, 1991, p. 21). The teachings of the Buddha are extensive and far beyond the scope of this paper. There are, however, some key Buddhist concepts that appear to be part of the human existential condition and worthy of discussion as they relate to how Westerners view psychological health and psychopathology.

CHAPTER III

Key Buddhist Concepts

The Buddha taught about Three Marks of Existence: *anicca*, or impermanence; *anatta*, or no self and *dukkha*, or suffering. Buddhist scholars refer to these as The Three Dharma Seals. There is some debate about the inclusion of *dukkha* in The Three Dharma Seals; with some scholars making the case that the Buddha taught *nirvana* as part of the Dharma Seals and not *dukkha* (Hanh, 1998). I will choose to leave such a debate to those who are far more qualified to explore such things. For the purposes of this paper, the inclusion of *dukkha*, as part of The Four Noble Truths, is logical for exploring how Buddhism relates to Western Psychology, but we will return to *dukkha* in a moment. We will first explore the Buddhist conception of impermanence.

Key Buddhist Concepts: Impermanence

Anicca, or impermanence, is a concept that can become rather paradoxical when we explore it. On one hand, we seem capable of understanding the transitory nature of our existence. We see birth and death play out in our own lives and in the world around us. We can see how a beautiful flower may grow from the final resting place of a decaying life form. We use composted waste products in order to help our garden vegetables grow better by taking advantage of the natural processes of decay to create our own natural fertilizer. Medical knowledge has taught us that the cells in our body

are in a continual process of being replaced as they die off. Our bodies are in constant change. The process of erosion by wind and water here on earth are evident in the field of geology, even if it is hard for our minds to grasp the vast stretches of time often involved in these processes. The earth is in constant change. We are learning more about the forces of evolution and change in our universe through the lens of cosmogony. Stars and galaxies are born and die. The universe is in constant change. Back on a more human scale, here in the temperate regions of North America, we see the change of the seasons right before our eyes as our world is transformed from one of lush green foliage in summer; to the initial colorful splendor of decay in the autumn; and then from the stark monochromatic shades of winter to the first shoots of green plant life emerging again in the spring. We live in a cycle of constant change and nothing that exists within this field of natural phenomenon appears to be permanent (Kumar, 2002).

On the other hand, we frequently strive very hard to establish some sense of permanence in our world. We construct languages, governments, philosophies, and religions to help us provide some stability and consistent meaning in our world. We build temples and establish sacred grounds in order to mark significant events and places. We construct cities of concrete and steel that reach toward the sky and stretch as far as the eye can see. We probe the microscopic and macroscopic universes with scientific empiricism in order to establish models of determining factors that explain how our entire existence works, or at least one small part of our existence. We frequently use our scientific conclusions to draw inferences that can help predict future events and behaviors so that we may feel some sense of certainty about what may occur tomorrow.

When it is all said and done and we die, many of us choose to have small (and some very large) stone monuments erected that effectively say to the universe, “I was here!!!” Can a tombstone be anything but a last desperate attempt to make what was transitory into a permanent reality? We shall have to leave that question for another day.

The Buddha addressed the transitory nature of existence and identified it as one of the key ideas that must be accepted as reality in order to live a life free from unnecessary suffering. Impermanence is essential to understanding Buddhist thinking. Without this understanding, Western applications of Buddhist Psychology are misguided. Another area of Buddhist thought, one that gives many people a great deal of trouble, is directly related to this concept of impermanence; it is called *anatta*, or no self.

Key Buddhist Concepts: No Self

For a person raised in a Judeo-Christian tradition, the self is intrinsically tied together with the soul. There is the physical body, and there is an entity that exists separate from, but within, the body which is referred to as the soul. In Buddhism, the word *anatta* means no self (Cantor, 2008). There is no permanent entity that exists outside of the causes and conditions that gave rise to our gross body. Within a Buddhist psychological framework, there is no spirit matter that will exit our body upon death and enter Heaven, Hell, or linger in a purgatorial waiting room. The mistaken idea of some separate thing that exists independent of everything else in the universe is considered one of the root causes of suffering in Buddhism and Buddhist psychology.

For a table to exist, we need wood, a carpenter, time, skillfulness, and many other causes. And each of these causes needs other causes to be. The wood needs the forest, the sunshine, the rain, and so on. The carpenter needs his parents, breakfast, fresh air, and so on. And each of those things, in turn, has to be brought about by other conditions. If we continue to look in this way, we'll see that nothing has been left out. Everything in the cosmos has come together to bring us this table" (Hanh, 1998, p. 222).

This idea of no self is directly related to the concept of impermanence, for if there is nothing that endures this must include the self. The many Buddhist traditions that have come about over these past 2,500 years go into tremendous detail about these concepts of *anicca* and *anatta*. Volumes have been written about them, so in the interest of keeping our focus on how these concepts tie in with Western Psychology we will have to move on. Our final introductory concept that is essential to understanding Buddhism is called *dukkha*.

Key Buddhist Concepts: Suffering and The Four Noble Truths

The Buddha's first instruction after reaching enlightenment is called The Four Noble Truths. It was from this lesson that all the subsequent teachings of the Buddha would proceed. The First Noble Truth says that life is *dukkha*. The most common Western interpretation of the word *dukkha* is suffering, but perhaps a better interpretation would be pervasive unsatisfactoriness (Epstein, 1995). This sense that

life is suffering stems from the fact that at some point we will all experience mental distress and physical illness. In addition, the things that we like or dislike contribute to our suffering. To be associated with what we do not like or to not be associated with what we do like causes a sense of dissatisfaction within us. Fear of our inevitable death is another cause of this feeling of *dukkha* (Kornfield, 2008).

Closely related to this pervasive sense that life is unsatisfactory in nature is The Second Noble Truth, or *tanha*. *Tanha* has been interpreted to mean desire, but like the interpretation of *dukkha* there is more to it than one simple equivalent word. A better interpretation might be “the desire for private fulfillment” (Smith, 1991, p. 102). It is this desire, or craving, for private fulfillment that is the primary cause of our suffering. Our desire for sense pleasures, for existence, and for some, even nonexistence, gives rise to this pervasive sense of deficiency in our lives (Nakasone, 1993).

We can already begin to see how the first two teachings of the Buddha are related to psychology. However, these interpretations, although essentially accurate, have led many to view Buddhism as being pessimistic toward existence. Hanh (1998) explains,

To say, ‘Life is suffering,’ is too general. To say that craving is the cause of all our suffering is too simplistic. We need to say, ‘The basis for this suffering is such and such an affliction,’ and then call it by its true name. If we have a stomachache, we need to call it a stomachache. If it is a

headache, we need to call it a headache. How else will we find the cause of our suffering and the way to heal ourselves? (p. 23)

The Buddha was not instructing us to deny joy in our life; he was attempting to help us see the reasons why we suffer and offer a way to fulfill our potential for happiness (Ross, 1966).

The Third Noble Truth reinforces this more positive outlook by stating the cessation, or *nirodha*, of suffering by refraining from doing the things that make us suffer (Smith, 1991). In our Western culture, we say that the definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over then expecting a different result. Although this may appear to trivialize the seriousness of psychological suffering, it does relate to the Buddha's teaching of the Third Noble Truth. If we continue to do the things that cause us to suffer, how can we possibly expect to end our suffering? Getting the desired result without having to do the hard work of modifying the way we do things may be one possible explanation for why medications for the treatment of mental illness have risen exponentially over the past 25 years (Whitaker, 2005). The Buddha has now taught us that it is possible to end one's suffering. His next teaching was an exploration on how to go about affecting this change (Ross, 1966).

The Fourth Noble Truth is *marga*, or the path that can help lead us to refrain from doing the things that cause us to suffer unnecessarily. The Buddha called this the Noble Eightfold path, or as the Chinese translate it, "the Path of Eight Right Practices" (Hanh, 1998, p. 11). The Noble Eightfold Path consists of Right View, Right Thinking,

Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. It is important to note here that the word “Right” is translated from the *pali* word *samma*, which is an adverb meaning “in the right way”, “straight”, or “upright,” not bent or crooked (Hanh, 1998, p. 11). It is not intended as a moral judgment of right or wrong, but as a description of what is beneficial to the practice of ending our suffering. In addition, each element of the Noble Eightfold Path is directly connected to all the others. Each element is contained within all of the other elements, which is a common theme one finds running throughout Buddhist thought. It should be mentioned here that I have made the choice to utilize Hanh’s (1998) particular interpretations of each of the elements of the Noble Eightfold Path in this paper. Although Hanh’s (1998) treatment of these tenets is not necessarily universal, it does represent the fundamental attributes of each step in the path and his particular method for illuminating these concepts is approachable for both experienced practitioners of Buddhism and those who have had little or no experience with it at all.

The Noble Eightfold Path

Right View strives for accurate perceptions not distorted by prejudice or prior conceptualizations, such as negative self-concept or false assumptions about other people. The Buddha taught that many of our perceptions are false (Hanh, 1998). A common example cited in Buddhist thought is to imagine oneself walking in muddy water where we cannot see the bottom. If we were to step upon a rope, we may

perceive that the rope is a snake and experience tremendous fear and apprehension. But the rope is not a snake; it is our conditioned thinking that has caused us to falsely assume we are in danger. Right view reminds us not to assume that our first perception of something is correct. It leaves us open to other possibilities.

Right Thinking, sometimes referred to as Right Intention, is based on our acceptance of what really is, rather than wishing for something better (perhaps desiring to reach unrealistic goals) or believing that things are worse than they really are (perhaps avoiding exaggerated or inaccurate danger). Right Thinking encourages us to ask ourselves questions like, “Are you sure?” so that we can discern between accurate and false perceptions. We may also ask ourselves, “What am I doing right now?” Am I preoccupied with past or future-based thinking, or am I operating in the present moment? Right Thinking also asks us, “Is what I am doing right now a force of habit, or did I choose this action?” Much of what we do, we do out of habit, never noticing that we are caught up in a cycle of repetitive behavior that may be unhealthy, or counterproductive. Finally, we should ask ourselves “Is what I am thinking kind and in the spirit of bringing forth happiness for myself and others?” (Hanh, 1998, p. 61). In this, we are asking ourselves about what our intention is when we are thinking about something.

Right Speech simply means being mindful of making statements which are truthful, respectful, and direct. The words that we choose to share with others can have a profound effect for fostering good, or for causing harm and suffering, in others (Hanh,

1998). One kind or encouraging word could change another person's life in a positive way from that moment forward. Unfortunately, one cruel or hateful word could also change a person's life forever in a very negative way, perhaps even prodding them into suicide. Right Speech also requires the ability to listen. How often have you found yourself in a conversation with someone, but not listening to them? Rather, we too often are thinking about other commitments or activities we have to tend to. We speak and then close our ears and, consequently, often close our minds.

Right Action means practicing non-violence toward ourselves and toward others. It also involves generosity and living with the intention of doing no harm. Right Action involves how we treat our own bodies and how we treat other life forms as well (Hanh, 1998). We are encouraged to have a reverence for life. This reverence is not only to be shown toward other humans, but also toward animals, plants, and even minerals. Our happiness is directly linked to the happiness of our environment. We may think that we are treating our environment with reverence, but we may be killing every day just by the ways in which we mindlessly eat, drink, and use land, water, and the air (Hanh, 1998). We are encouraged to be generous to others with our time, energy and our material resources. We should not steal and we must respect the property of others. We have a responsibility to prevent others from profiting from human and non-human suffering, so when we are promoting an idea such as social justice, we are promoting Right Action (Hanh, 1998).

Right Livelihood is performing work that is meaningful and consistent with your ethical and spiritual principles. Hanh says, “The way you support yourself can be an expression of your deepest self, or it can be a source of suffering for you and others” (Hanh, 1998, p. 113). Buddhist scriptures have specific prohibitions on how one can earn a living without violating Right Livelihood. These include not dealing in arms or weapons of any kind, the slave trade, the meat trade, the sale of alcohol, drugs, or poisons, and not making prophecies or telling fortunes. Imagine the ramifications for global financial markets if they had to adhere to these standards! The idea behind all of this is to try to understand how our livelihood can affect our well-being, as well as the well-being of our neighbors. If we mindlessly go about “just doing our jobs” we may be causing great harm. The harms that we can bring on others is easy to see when we look back at that list of prohibitions, but it is sometimes harder to see the damage we do to ourselves when we do our work.

Joseph Campbell is rather well known for coining the phrase “follow your bliss” (Campbell, 1988, p. 229). Although I could spend many pages discussing how this has been misinterpreted over the years, Campbell’s directive was very much to the point of Right Livelihood when he said,

There’s something inside you that knows when you’re in the center, that knows when you’re on the beam or off the beam. And if you get off the beam to earn money, you’ve lost your life. And if you stay in the center

and don't get any money, you still have your bliss (Campbell, 1988, p. 229).

We all have certain skills that we are better at than others or seem to come more naturally to us than they do to others. I may be able to grasp easily how to play a particular chord or scale on a guitar, but struggle with the proper solving of an algebraic math problem. If we are able to recognize these abilities and forge a career path that will help us feel a sense of satisfaction at the end of a long and tedious work day, we are less likely to feel that our work was in vain, or was only done in order to "earn a paycheck". If we have a passion for what we do and we do it for the right reasons, we are more likely to be aware of how what we do may affect ourselves and others both positively and negatively.

Right Effort, sometimes referred to as Right Diligence, involves being disciplined but not overly critical of oneself (Hanh, 1998). It involves walking down the middle path in life. The Buddha had learned through his efforts to reach Nirvana that liberation did not exist in the extremes of existence. The Buddha experienced this first hand as he struggled with his previous life filled with excesses and his ascetic life of total self denial. In addition, we are encouraged to approach our life with joy and humorous equanimity. A metaphor used by the Buddha in his teachings illustrates Right Effort as the Middle Way.

When he asked a monk named Sona, who was a musician, "What happens if the string of your instrument is too loose?" Sona replied,

“When you pluck it, there will be no sound”. Then Buddha asked, “What happens when the string is too taut?” “It will break.” The Buddha replied, “The practice of the Way is the same. Maintain your health. Be joyful. Do not force yourself to do things you cannot do (Hanh, 1998, pp. 100-101).

Right Effort ultimately means finding a path that does not cause us undue physical or psychological suffering and learning to recognize our limits.

Right Concentration means being fully involved in each moment by “maintaining evenness” (Hanh, 1998, p. 105); in other words, we are not allowing our concentration to slip into states that are too excited or too dull. It also involves training the mind to focus attention on one particular object. In the Buddhist tradition, there are two types of concentration, active and selective. In active concentration, we are dwelling in the awareness of the present moment as it unfolds before us. We acknowledge objects of our awareness as they enter our consciousness without concern for how they may have come into it or where these objects have gone after leaving our perception. A frequent metaphor for this type of concentration is to imagine a calm lake. A bird flies over and is reflected in the water. We are aware of the bird entering our field of perception. As the bird’s reflection exits our awareness, the image of the clouds and the sky above remain in our vision. We do not concern our thinking with where the bird came from or where it may have gone. With active concentration, the reflection of the sky that existed before and remains after the object of our perception has passed is a clear mind that rests in evenness.

When practicing selective attention, we are actively choosing an object on which to focus our full attention. Meditation is one way of developing this skill. We may choose to meditate on one object such as a mandala, or other work of art. We may meditate on a word such as “peace” or “love”. There is also walking meditation, where the practice involves focusing on the sensations and perceptions that come into our awareness as we walk, like how the grass feels on the soles of our feet. Even a mundane activity such as washing the dishes can become an object of our selective attention as long as we are focusing our thoughts on the job of washing the dishes well and nothing else. The purpose of Right Concentration is to foster our ability to become deeply present in this moment and to help us develop insight (Hanh, 1998).

Right Mindfulness is often described as the heart of the Buddha’s teachings. Hanh (1998) says,

When Right Mindfulness is present, the Four Noble Truths and the seven other elements of the Eightfold Path are also present. When we are mindful, our thinking is Right Thinking, our speech is Right Speech, and so on. Right Mindfulness is the energy that brings us back to the present moment (p. 64).

As our exploration of the ways in which Buddhist thought has come to influence the practices and philosophy behind some of today’s Western psychology, mindfulness will occupy the central position in the investigation. We will spend a great deal of time defining and exploring what mindfulness is and how it is applied in today’s therapeutic

interventions. Before we do that, we shall have to leave ancient India behind, moving over 2,400 years forward in time to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When we think of the early pioneers in Western psychology, we cannot help but think of the tremendous influence European, and particularly German and Austrian, psychologists had on how the future of the discipline would unfold in the 20th century. In terms of understanding the potential that Eastern thought had in aiding our understanding of human psychology, it is an American named William James who is often credited with setting the stage for concepts such as mindfulness to be integrated into our lexicon therapeutic approaches in the West.

CHAPTER IV

Buddhism and William James

William James is frequently called the “father of American psychology”. In 1890, he wrote *Principles of Psychology*, a 1,200 page, two-volume exploration of human psychological functioning that put forth the idea that the human mind is inherently purposive and selective. James was also a philosopher and key author in the school of philosophy called American Pragmatism. He was also interested in religious thought and published an important book on the topic called *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902 (Scott, 2000). In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James explored ideas grounded in Buddhism and cites several books on these ideas including *Die Religionen des Buddha* (1857) by Carl Koeppen, *Buddha* (1882) by Hermann Oldenberg, and *Buddhism in Translation* (1898) by Henry Warren (Scott, 2000).

A frequently cited anecdote illustrates how James felt about what he had learned about Buddhist concepts and the “psychological sophistication” (Michalon, 2001, p. 202) that Buddhist thought exemplifies. The noted Buddhist teacher Dharmapala was visiting the United States from 1902-1904 and attended one of James’ lectures at Harvard. When James saw Dharmapala in the audience, he is reported to have said, “Take my chair. You are better equipped to lecture on psychology than I” (Scott, 2000, p.335). After Dharmapala had concluded his remarks, James said, “This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty five years from now” (Scott, 2000, p.335). James

was a little too optimistic in the timeline of his forecast, but as we will later see, by the late 1970's and early 1980's, his prediction was beginning to be realized in more mainstream psychological traditions. An entire thesis could be developed that explores the depth of how James' ideas about pragmatism and metaphysics share common ground with Buddhism, but such an exploration is well beyond the scope of this inquiry. Although James may have earned the moniker "father of American Psychology", it was an Austrian who would have the greatest impact on the field of psychology in the early 20th century in the West.

CHAPTER V

Sigmund Freud and Eastern Thought

The arrival of Sigmund Freud and his theories at Clark University in 1903 would shape the development of Western psychology (Evans & Koelsch, 1985). Whether one accepts or rejects Freud's ideas, there is little doubt that his work has had the single greatest influence on how we have viewed human psychological functioning. His work was endorsed by those who strictly followed his psychodynamic theories; modified by the many Neo-Freudians who built upon and refined his work; and was refuted by those who found his theories to be unverifiable, unnecessarily complex, patriarchal, and ethnocentric. In addition to his contributions in psychology, for better or worse, Freud is also credited with having an integral role in how we have come to study and understand religion today (Ross, 2001). As a self-professed atheist, Freud had little good to say about religion, stating that it was nothing but psychology projected into the external world (Freud, 1901).

Freud's disdain for religious thought has not inhibited his work being compared to many Buddhist concepts as the years have passed. For example, during a therapy session the therapist needs to be able to maintain a balance between listening to and understanding the client's speech and understanding how they themselves are reacting to these statements, which Freud called *evenly suspended attention* (Rubin, 2009). Although the exact technique for how a therapist is supposed to cultivate this state of

evenly suspended attention remained largely undefined throughout the history of psychoanalytic therapy, modern day mindfulness-based therapeutic interventions make the cultivation of attention on the part of both the client and the therapist inseparable from the treatment process.

Contemporary psychoanalytic thinking is quite different from the rigidly defined theories and techniques that were originally developed by Freud. Recent decades have seen a wider embrace of eclectic approaches to the treatment of human suffering within psychoanalytic traditions (Corey, 2009). This wider acceptance of diverse viewpoints, something that Freud was notorious for rejecting, has provided fertile ground for the development of integrative approaches to psychotherapy and Buddhist thought has been no exception.

CHAPTER VI

Buddhism and Post-Freudian Psychoanalysis

As we will soon see, several post-Freudian psychotherapists found Eastern spiritual concepts to be effective tools for treating persons who are suffering. Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and Karen Horney all came directly out of the psychoanalytic school of thought (Cloninger, 2008) and went on to develop their own ideas about how to approach psychological distress, including integrating certain Buddhist principles. Today, the person most closely associated with integrating Freudian theories and Buddhism is Mark Epstein. Epstein is a practicing Buddhist and psychiatrist who has authored several influential books including *Thoughts Without A Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective* (1995) and *Psychotherapy Without The Self: A Buddhist Perspective* (2008). In speaking about the integration of Buddhist thought with the goals of psychoanalysis, Epstein (1995) says,

As psychotherapy has grown in scope and sophistication over the years, its parallels with Buddhist thought have become ever more apparent. As the emphasis in therapy has moved from conflicts over sexual and aggressive strivings, for instance, to a focus on how patients are uncomfortable with themselves because, in some fundamental way, they do not know who they are, the question of the *self* has emerged as the common focus of Buddhism and psychoanalysis (pp. 5-6).

Epstein goes on to draw many parallels between Buddhism and psychoanalytic therapy in his books, and his work has had a great influence in how those working in various therapeutic schools of thought have come to understand Buddhism and its potential role in their respective disciplines. One need not totally agree with psychoanalytic theory to learn from the works of Mark Epstein; one need only wish to learn about how Buddhism relates to therapeutic approaches.

One particularly interesting development in the evolution of psychoanalytic approaches has been a move away from the biological determinism to which Freud was known to stringently adhere. Contemporary psychoanalysts are embracing wider perspectives on the nature of psychological suffering and directing criticism toward purely deterministic approaches. One recent author wrote, "Instead of recognizing the power of subjective distress (our moods, attitudes, and emotional habits), the American anti-suffering campaign addresses people in terms of drugs, neurotransmitters, organ transplants, genetic engineering, and biological determinism" (Young-Eisendrath, 2008). Much of the criticism coming from the psychoanalytic community stems from a movement away from lengthy psychotherapy treatments toward brief therapies, psychotropic medications, and cognitive-behavioral approaches, which have gained favor in the insurance industry (Whitaker, 2005). The combination of slick marketing campaigns, limitations to alternative therapies by insurance companies and an embrace of these models by most family doctors, have resulted in a nationwide attitude that quick solutions are the best solutions to mental suffering (Young-Eisendrath, 2008).

Psychotherapy from a psychoanalytic perspective takes time. Working through the many possible factors that could play a role in our suffering is a process and not something that is easily fixed by doing a homework assignment between therapy sessions. The early work of Freud attempted to address the complexity of these factors and his work spawned a whole tradition of post-Freudian thought.

Carl Jung and Eastern Thought

Of all the pioneers in the Western psychological tradition, it is unlikely that anyone dedicated more effort in exploring Buddhism, and religion in general, than Carl Gustav Jung. Jung's first exposure to Eastern views came as a child when his mother read him stories from the Hindu pantheon, and this fascination continued right up until his death where it has been found in his correspondences that he was reading the Buddha's middle discourses in the *Pali Canon* (Daniel, 2007). Whereas Freud had a largely negative view of religion and spirituality, Jung spent a significant amount of his career examining these areas in depth and felt that they had value for those who sought to expand their individual consciousness. Throughout the writings of his *Collected Works* and many seminars, Jung referred over 60 times to Buddhism alone and wrote commentary on translations of the *I Ching* by Richard Wilhelm and *The Tibetan Book of Great Liberation* by D.T. Suzuki (Daniel, 2007). Jung also devoted a considerable amount of his writing to cautioning Westerners about embracing Eastern Philosophies and religions and vice-versa. In *Psychology and religion: West and East* Jung says,

But I cannot help raising the question of whether it is possible, or indeed advisable, for either to imitate the other's standpoint. The difference between them is so vast that one can see no reasonable possibility of this, much less its advisability. You cannot mix fire and water. The Eastern attitude stultifies the Western, and vice versa. You cannot be a good Christian and redeem yourself, nor can you be a Buddha and worship God (CW 11, para. 772).

We have already seen that much of our individual identity in the West is intimately tied to our notion of a strong sense of self, or ego. Jung saw this as being one of the most fundamental problems of attempting to integrate Eastern and Western spiritual and religious concepts. He was unable to imagine a person growing up in Western society being able to successfully eliminate clinging to a strong sense of self and maintaining psychological health (Jung, CW 11, para. 774). It is important to remember that Jung lived during a time in which Western European ideas about the East were highly romanticized and often held an emotional and intellectual appeal for someone seeking to transcend the limitations of a rigid and dogmatic Western religious system (Daniel, 2007). Had Jung lived to see the rapid inflow of many new cultural perspectives that have come about since the advent of postmodern thought, it is likely that he would have been justifiably cautious, but perhaps a bit more optimistic about the potential benefits of using meditative techniques and ideas that arose in predominantly Eastern cultures.

On a more positive note, Jung certainly embraced and integrated many of the Buddha's teachings on a personal level and found areas that he thought would be of particular value to a Westerner trying to gain a greater insight into their psychic suffering. When Jung used the word "consciousness" when writing or speaking about the teachings of the Buddha, he was referring to what the *Pali Canon* calls mindfulness (Daniel, 2007). As we move forward in time a little later on in our current exploration, we will see that mindfulness has become a cornerstone of the modern psychological embrace of Eastern Buddhist concepts in various therapeutic techniques. Jung (1988) could certainly be described as someone who was able to recognize the potential for mindfulness-based therapeutic techniques when he wrote,

He [the Buddha] says that whatever you do, do it consciously, know that you do it, and he even goes so far as to say that when you eat and when you drink, know it and when you satisfy your physical needs, all the functions of your body, know it. That is realization—not for one moment to be without realization. You must always know what you do. (p. 1344).

Jung seemed to be able to foresee the potential that mindfulness represented, but was cautious about maintaining a distinct line between East and West when it came to the integration of what appeared to be quite disparate ideas. Buddhist concepts continued to play a subtle role in the theories and philosophies developed by the people working within the Neo-Freudian tradition of psychology. We will see that the degree of influence would grow from subtle or veiled references of Eastern thought toward

psychologists openly embracing the integration of all manner of culturally diverse types of thinking, including Buddhism.

Neo-Freudians and Buddhism: Alfred Adler

Without making any explicit references to Buddhism, one of the Neo-Freudians whose work has impacted today's Eastern-influenced therapeutic approaches on a significant level, and whose work would later be credited for helping create modern cognitive behavioral approaches, was Alfred Adler. Although Sigmund Freud embraced a deterministic and biological perspective toward human psychology, Alfred Adler was the first to explore social-psychological factors and a teleological view of human nature within psychology (Corey, 2009). Adler's holistic approach, which he called Individual Psychology, has found common ground with Buddhism in recent years by sharing the goal of helping an individual transcend their ego-centered lifestyle with increased social interests that aid in overcoming suffering and unhappiness (Sakin-Wolf, 2003). Although we often see the image of the Buddha as seated alone in a meditative position, much of the strength of Buddhism exists in the *sangha*, or community. The *sangha* represents a Buddhist's support network of fellow practitioners who are there to help each individual during their difficult times and to be helped in return when their own practice becomes a struggle. Hanh (1998) describes the *sangha* as an essential part of any Buddhist meditative practice because it can be difficult to continue without the support of one's friends. For Adler, to go beyond one's private logic (egocentric

viewpoint) is to become more compassionate toward oneself and others with the ultimate goal of feeling a sense of oneness with the universe. He wrote,

Social interest remains throughout life. It becomes differentiated, limited or expanded and, in favorable cases, extends not only to family members, but to the larger group, to the nation, to all mankind. It can even go further, extending itself to animals, plants, and inanimate objects and finally even to the cosmos (Adler, 1927/1992, p. 46).

Considering the all-too-frequent ethnocentric views of many of Adler's contemporaries, the last sentence of his quote is one that truly illustrates his willingness to expand ideas of what constitutes knowledge to systems well outside of the narrow paradigms of Western thinking, which may explain why there have been effective techniques developed that combine Adlerian and American Indian concepts to help children deal with a feeling of disconnectedness (Hunter & Sawyer, 2006). When we explore the more recent cognitive behavioral therapeutic techniques, we will see the innovators of those theories pay homage to Adler as an individual who had the foresight to embrace wider cultural perspectives and an increased allowance of social factors as contributing to the issues of mental suffering. Several well-known pioneers in psychology have traditionally been labeled as Neo-Freudians, but a good case can be made that they would be better called Neo-Adlerians (Corey, 2009). Among them were Karen Horney and Erich Fromm.

Neo-Freudians and Buddhism: Karen Horney

Karen Horney was a psychoanalyst known for her work in the theory of personality that emphasized cultural and relational aspects in the development of the self, as opposed to the Freudian libidinal drive system of personality development (Cloninger, 2008). Horney's first reference to Buddhism, specifically Zen Buddhism, appeared in her book *Our Inner Conflicts* (1945), but her real exploration of these concepts began in the winter of 1950 when she was introduced to D.T. Suzuki when the two formed a friendship that lasted until her death from cancer in December of 1952 (Westkott, 1998). Horney had moved away from therapeutic techniques that were based in the traditional analytic concern about a patient's past events toward dealing with the existence of present moment struggles, which was a reflection of her clear rejection of both psychoanalytic and Christian dogmas (Horney, 1939). As the recent explorations in various mindfulness-based therapies have demonstrated, much of the power of mindfulness exists in its application for therapists as well as patients (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Karen Horney (1987) seemed to recognize the potential for bringing full attention to the moment, what she called *wholehearted attention*, with a patient when she wrote,

That attention should be wholehearted may seem banal, trite, and self-evident. Yet in the sense that I mean wholehearted attention, I think it rather difficult to attain. I am referring to a power of concentration...This is a faculty for which the Orientals have a much deeper feeling than we

do...Wholeheartedness of attention means being there altogether in the service of the patient, yet with a kind of self-forgetfulness...self forget, but be there with all your feelings...The best advice that I can give is that [let] everything come up, emerge, and at the proper time, be observed (pp. 19-21).

Unfortunately, Horney died before she had an opportunity to more fully develop an integrative approach to Western Psychoanalysis and Buddhism, but it is clear that in her final class lectures she was encouraging her students to find a way of using the meditative attitude of mindfulness within the therapeutic setting (Westkott, 1998). Erich Fromm, a close friend of Horney's and a writer in humanistic philosophy, went on to explore the ways in which Eastern thought could be integrated into a wider Western consciousness.

Neo-Freudians and Buddhism: Erich Fromm

Sigmund Freud appeared to avoid addressing Buddhism in any way. He was adamantly dismissive of religion, so this is not a surprise. Carl Jung, on the other hand, spent a great deal of his time trying to understand religious belief and was in many ways responsible for helping many Westerners understand Buddhism, at least in psychological terms. Jung, as we have seen, was concerned about the problems associated with Westerners attempting to integrate Eastern Buddhist ideas into the spiritual dimension of their life. Erich Fromm was willing to draw upon Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism, as a legitimate and non-theistic method of achieving

individual maturity and freedom, which he believed were the ultimate goals of both psychoanalysis and spirituality (Cantor, 2008). Like Karen Horney, Fromm was influenced by the writings of Zen master D.T. Suzuki. In 1960, Fromm co-authored a book with Suzuki and Richard De Martino called *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, which focused on the individual's existential struggles and longing for meaning in his or her life (Epstein, 2007). The book utilized both psychoanalytic and Buddhist psychological ideas to address feelings of isolation, hollowness, fear and anxiety in the human experience. For Fromm, the healthy individual will be socially responsible, an idea that we saw expressed earlier in the work of Alfred Adler. In *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, Fromm (1960) writes,

To live in Zen 'means to treat yourself and the world in the most appreciative and reverential frame of mind', an attitude which is the basis of 'secret virtue', a very characteristic feature of Zen discipline. It means not to waste natural resources; it means to make full use, economic and moral, of everything that comes your way (p. 121).

Psychoanalytic thought was the first major influence on how the field of psychology would progress throughout the 20th century. Neo-Freudians like Erich Fromm had begun to tie together theories that had been previously thought to be incommensurable by the early 1960's. Another influence on how psychology was going to develop began largely as a reaction against mentalistic and psychodynamic interpretations of human

thinking. Human behavior, it was thought, could be reduced to observable reactions to stimuli.

CHAPTER VII

The Emergence of Behaviorism

We have seen, so far, the effect Buddhist ideas had on some of the major figures in the Western psychoanalytic tradition of psychology that had emerged from the initial works of Sigmund Freud. Much of what we have explored passed largely unnoticed in mainstream society. It was another branch of psychology, perhaps ironically, that sowed the seeds that would ultimately bring these Eastern ideas into the contemporary realm of psychotherapeutic interventions. That branch of psychology is behaviorism. The irony exists in the fact that the behaviorist's traditional view (Robinson, 1976) of human behavior initially went to great lengths to avoid addressing ideas like thinking, consciousness, and other inner subjective states, which we would be hard pressed to imagine any Buddhist perspective avoiding!

The early behaviorist pioneer, John Watson, was relentless and clear about what constituted good science when he said that science must concern itself with the prediction of natural events, and that mental states and private experiences do not exist in a publicly verifiable world (Robinson, 1976). For Watson, only observable behavior was worthy of being an object of scientific inquiry. The behaviorist tradition came about largely as a reaction against the Freudian model of human psychology. We will briefly touch upon the origins of the behaviorist views and then explore how the more evolved

tradition of cognitive behaviorism has come to embrace, albeit cautiously, Buddhist concepts for the alleviation of suffering, particularly for the treatment of depression.

When studying the history of psychology, it is easy to think that behaviorism suddenly sprang up in 1913 when John Watson famously wrote, “Psychology as the behaviorist views it is a purely experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior” (Watson, 1913, p. 175). But much of the thought in America about psychology was already strongly influenced by ideas about the classical laws of association as described by philosophers such as Aristotle, John Locke, David Hume, C. S. Peirce, and Jeremy Bentham, as well as the theories of evolution and natural selection proposed by Charles Darwin (Robinson, 1976).

It was also the work of E. L. Thorndike, whose research on memory in cats laid a solid foundation for the use of a rigidly defined experimental method in order to observe behavior. Thorndike’s Law of Effect said that, all things being equal, an event that is followed by satisfaction will increase the likelihood of the event recurring, and an event that is followed by discomfort will likely result in less likelihood of the event recurring (Robinson, 1976). Essentially, Thorndike posited that behavior is determined by its consequences. Although Watson gladly embraced Thorndike’s scientific methodology, he was critical of the use of psychological terms such as “discomfort” when trying to describe behavior. Watson’s fervent rejection of anything mentalistic, or introspective, eventually led to him making the ludicrous assertion that he could make dentists by simply using Pavlovian conditioning, which led to a reduction in his credibility within the

larger psychological community (Robinson, 1976). It is fortunate, therefore, that behaviorism would be championed in the coming decades by a man who was somewhat more grounded in his approach to the science of behavior than was Watson.

The Behaviorism of B.F. Skinner

B. F. Skinner may have avoided such a grandiose claim as Watson's dental folly, though one may argue that his book *Walden Two* (1948) comes close, but his brand of behaviorism is still called *radical behaviorism* (Moore, 2010). Skinner defined his brand of behavioral research as something whose subject matter is restricted to the observable behavior of organisms; whose aim is the prediction and control of behavior; whose legitimacy does not depend on complementing or validating the other biological sciences, nor does the validity of behaviorism rest upon the findings of neurophysiology or biology; and whose concern lies not with theoretical systematization, but with the behavior that operates on the environment and affects the survival of an organism (Robinson, 1976).

Once again, we see the realm of consciousness and mental activities avoided completely and intentionally. In fact, a case can be made that the efforts of behaviorists such as Watson and Skinner made it possible for the discipline of psychology to find its rightful place in the pantheon of science by focusing exclusively on the descriptive aspects of behavior that permits the prediction and control of the actions of organisms,

leaving the mental world as a problem to be addressed by philosophers (Robinson, 1976).

Behavior modification has been embraced by social institutions like prisons and schools, as well as the animal laboratories, with the applicability of the techniques extending to any living organism, whether that organism is a rat, a prisoner, a student, or a person suffering from mental distress (Corey, 2009). Without diving into the details of what is entailed in this extensive school of thought, the point must be stressed that behaviorism has come to have a tremendous impact on the field of psychology and the various techniques that have been applied in both the research lab and in the day to day practices of the counselors who help individuals that are coping with distress and issues related to psychopathology. Although the work happening within the research labs is important, it is in the realm of counseling and therapy that the techniques for alleviating human suffering explored within Buddhism have been most fully developed.

Cognitive Behaviorism

Up until the 1960's, behaviorism had been defined largely by the work of Watson and Skinner. Their disdain for anything "mental" had created a division between the psychoanalytic community and those who stood with the behaviorist's rigidly defined theories. It was during the 1960's that Albert Bandura developed his social learning theory, which included aspects of both classical and operant conditioning and combined them with observational learning to finally allow for cognitive processes to become a legitimate focus of investigation in behavior therapy (Corey, 2009). Since that time,

behavior therapy has been described as occurring in “waves”, which have been reflective of transitions from a strictly external behavior model toward one in which thoughts and emotions are increasingly included in the framework of the various therapeutic techniques.

The “first wave” occurred during the 1970’s, when a major shift was seen in the acceptance of behavior therapies within the psychological community, education systems, businesses, and in social work. The “second wave” occurred during the 1980’s and the 1990’s when the behaviorist-centered community shifted its focus to cognitive behavior therapy, reflecting a continued integration of cognitive and behavioral therapeutic techniques (Corey, 2009). The “third wave” of cognitive behavioral therapy, which surged in the 2000’s and includes techniques such as dialectical behavior therapy (Linehan, 1993), mindfulness-based stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002), is the place where we find Buddhism having an increasingly significant place within the theoretical and practical applications of behavior therapy. In order to understand how these two ideas became integrated into their current forms, we will have to turn back to the clock to the late 1970’s when a man began fusing his experience with meditation with an effort to help people cope with what seemed to be insurmountable medical problems.

CHAPTER VIII

The Emergence of Mindfulness-based Therapy

In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn developed a therapeutic technique to help patients deal with the emotional and stress-related issues that were associated with the various medical conditions from which they were suffering. This method of therapy is called mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR, Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). MBSR offers a variety of both formal and informal programs that involve intensive training techniques in sitting meditation, body scan, walking meditation, gentle yoga, and other informal daily mindfulness practices. The program was highly successful, which led Kabat-Zinn (2003) to want to better understand exactly what was happening with these patients and to the development of research trials in order to study the results in greater depth. A little under two decades later, another group of researchers was trying to gain a better understanding of depression and why so many people who suffer from it relapse after receiving various kinds of treatment. It was largely through their initial efforts and the early work by Kabat-Zinn that the treatments involving mindfulness have evolved into their current incarnations.

Fusing Mindfulness with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

In the late 1990's, John Teasdale, Mark Williams, and Zindel Segal, experts in the field of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, were investigating why people who recovered

from a major depressive episode were likely to have more depressive episodes in the future. There had already been some success at incorporating mindfulness-based techniques into therapy at that time. Marsha Linehan (1993) had developed a technique called dialectical behavior therapy, which was based on the concept of *decentering*, to treat persons suffering from borderline personality disorder, and she was having positive results with it (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). Decentering is the capacity to take a detached or objective stance toward one's own thoughts and emotions, which helps a person to foster viewing their negative thought patterns simply as mental events, rather than valid reflections of a permanent reality (Fresco et al, 2007). In addition, Kabat-Zinn had been conducting extensive research trials with his MBSR and was documenting good success with his mindfulness-based technique (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002).

Mindfulness and decentering are related in that they both seek to detach the individual from their thoughts in order to take a more neutral stance toward how our emotions develop and affect how we think. With the growing interest and extensive research supporting the efficacy of MBSR, and with the help of Kabat-Zinn, Segal and his colleagues integrated Cognitive Behavior Therapy with MBSR and developed a formal, manualized (something that can be taught to others) therapy called Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). The process of developing treatment techniques based on the word mindfulness would require that the people investigating and delivering such treatments were fully capable of understanding what it is that they were attempting to do.

Defining Mindfulness in Psychology

In order to integrate and manualize mindfulness into cognitive-based therapy techniques, it was necessary that the parties using mindfulness agree on a definition of what mindfulness is. In the various Buddhist meditative traditions, mindfulness is a central component and refers to a careful awareness of one's own thoughts and feelings. Mindfulness is an English translation of the Pali word *sati*, meaning awareness, attention, and remembering (Germer, 2005). Because Kabat-Zinn was interested in conducting scientific research trials on the efficacy of his MBSR therapy, he took the Buddhist concepts and developed a definition that would allow not only his own research, but the research conducted by others to explore what this largely experiential term meant.

In order for it to be properly integrated into the Western psychological research paradigm, mindfulness has been defined as the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This definition places the emphasis on attention, and therefore helps to de-emphasize any particularly Buddhist spiritual component that may undermine its receptiveness in the scientific community, which is largely skeptical of spiritual concepts regardless of their cultural origin.

Because mindfulness is defined as being about attention, it is thought to be universal and so there is nothing particularly Buddhist about it. It becomes an inherent

human quality that claims that we are all mindful in varying degrees from moment to moment. By consciously bringing awareness and acceptance to our experiences in the present moment, we are better able to use a more adaptive range of skills in coping or attending to the task at hand (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006). Since the integration of the research by Kabat Zinn and the Cognitive Behavior Therapy traditions and their subsequent research, mindfulness-based therapy has been nothing short of a revolution in psychology and counseling (Greeson, 2009).

Mindfulness: The Research

A 2008 meta-analysis of the research on mindfulness found that the cultivation of a more mindful way of being was associated with more positive states of mind, less emotional distress, and a better quality of life (Greeson, 2009). Research into the physiological benefits of mindfulness-based meditative techniques also found positive influences on the brain, stress hormones, the autonomic nervous system, and the immune system (Greeson, 2009). The evidence, it would appear, points to both psychological and physiological benefits from cultivating mindfulness. It seems that the Buddha was on the right track in his explorations of what it is that leads to our suffering and the continuation of that process if we do not consciously seek to intervene. The recent research, however, has not been without a fair amount of debate as to exactly how to determine what is going on when someone is or is not being mindful. Some are asking if mindfulness is a state of being, or whether it is a trait that some of us are better adapted to utilizing as a method for coping with life's stressors. In other words,

researchers are beginning to ask the question, *how do mindfulness-based interventions actually work?* (Shapiro, Carlson, et al., 2006).

In their paper's attempt to address this question, Shapiro, Carlson, et al. (2006) posited that mindfulness could be explored by way of an axiomatic approach that divides the key aspects, or axioms, of mindfulness into three parts: intention, attention, and attitude. The reason behind choosing these three aspects was based on breaking down Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness into its components. As stated above, he defined mindfulness as the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Intention, then, is the part of the definition related to having a specific purpose in mind. Attention is obviously paying attention and attitude is reflected in the idea of withholding judgment of our experiences by making an effort to identify them rather than make a value judgment about them. The authors justify their approach by saying that axioms represent the fundamental building blocks out of which other things emerge (Shapiro, Carlson, et al., 2006).

Although a philosophical exploration as to whether or not their statement about the fundamental nature of the universe, as is understood by an axiomatic approach, would be something that I would relish at this point, that discussion will have to be put aside for another time and another venue. The effort of the authors in this paper is certainly not without merit, at least from the perspective of someone interested in attempting a reductionist approach toward understanding something. Interestingly,

though, they are also quick to say that intention, attention and attitude are not separate processes as they are related to mindfulness, but rather that they “are interwoven aspects of a single cyclic *process* and occur simultaneously. Mindfulness *is* this moment-to-moment process” (Shapiro, Carlson, et al., 2006; p. 375). In an effort to explore the one of the proposed axioms (attention) by Shapiro, Carson, et al. (2006), I conducted a research study involving how a brief instruction to pay attention to a video representation of a virtual environment may mediate a person’s aesthetic experience and their sense of psychological presence (see Appendix). It appears to be a bit paradoxical to attempt to reduce constituent parts of a concept and then claim that these aspects do not individually define the concept, but rather play a cyclical role in its inception. Kabat-Zinn (2003) anticipates the coming of such difficulties and says,

It becomes critically important that those persons coming to the field with professional interest and enthusiasm recognize the unique qualities and characteristics of mindfulness as a meditative practice, with all that implies, so that mindfulness is not simply seized upon as the next promising cognitive behavioral technique or exercise, decontextualized, and “plugged” into a behaviorist paradigm with the aim of driving desirable change, or of fixing what is broken (p. 145).

It is important to remember that mindfulness has come out of a spiritual tradition that uses meditation as one of its core components. The fact that a therapeutic technique called mindfulness should have come out of the recent manifestations of

behaviorism has been the focus of much discussion in recent years. Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2002) noted the irony that mindfulness, which is an inherently subjective, introspective and personal Buddhist concept, has been brought into the vocabulary of mainstream Western psychology by therapists from the cognitive-behavioral tradition. Perhaps the assertion by Segal, Williams and Teasdale is a bit overly generous in their appropriation of this Buddhist concept.

As the examples provided earlier in this paper have shown, rather than the contemporary offshoots of the behaviorism traditions being the forerunners of integrating Eastern thought into the Western psychological traditions, it was the early pioneers in Psychology such as William James and Carl Jung, to name just two, who waded into these concepts and laid the groundwork for the techniques being explored today. Grossman (2010, p. 88) writes that mindfulness “is at the same time embedded in a range of not only cognitive, but also emotional, social, and ethical dimensions, which extend far beyond the usual compartmentalization of conditioning, attention, and awareness of academic psychology.” The initial concerns expressed by Kabat-Zinn (2003) continue to be of concern today as the embrace of mindfulness-based therapeutic techniques gain wider acceptance and are being formatted to fit into the current paradigm of managed-care treatment methods.

CHAPTER IX

Mindfulness and Buddhist Psychology: Ethical Considerations

Grossman (2010) included ethical dimensions as an integral part of what mindfulness is when viewed from its origins with Buddhism. Historically, Buddhism has been a difficult concept for most Westerners to grasp effectively. Much of the reason for this is that Buddhism straddles the line between being a religion and a philosophy. For those in the Cognitive-Behavioral traditions, the religious aspects are troublesome and represent shades of gray not conducive to sound scientific research methods, which has led to an embrace of Buddhism's philosophical aspects (Kumar, 2002). Nevertheless, the philosophical dimension presents its own set of problems for those who work within the contemporary scientific paradigm.

Philosophy and ethics are deeply connected. Indeed, Grayling (2010) says "philosophical reflection on ethical matters is probably as old as human consciousness itself", so to address or compartmentalize philosophical notions will inevitably lead toward questions of ethics and their proper place within science. Yet, the scientific community has largely attempted to disassociate itself from ethical questions, or at least draw a distinction between pure and applied science by arguing that science at the pure level is *value-neutral*. The Indigenous scholar and philosopher Laurelyn Whitt (2009) writes,

One of the most firmly entrenched commitments of western science is to value-neutrality. Value-neutrality is a familiar, widely acknowledged thesis about the practice and ideology of western science, especially in its positivist and neopositivist formations. At its simplest, it is the claim (or assumption) that science is value free, unburdened by “external” ethical and political values (p. 59).

Buddhist philosophy and psychology are deeply committed to ethical concerns, which present problems for any scientific paradigm that attempts to remove ethically derived values from within it. Grossman (2010, p.89) illustrates the importance of ethical concerns with Buddhist thought when he says that within Buddhist psychology “ethical behavior is considered to be essential for the development of mindfulness because it frees the individual from the agitation that unethical behavior produces.” Buddhism concerns itself with the cultivation of kindness, tolerance, empathy, and openness, to name just a few examples of its positive ethical dimensions. It is also concerned with defining unethical behaviors, which include physical harm, slandering, sexual misconduct, lying, and stealing. Within the Buddhist psychological and philosophical realm, “ethical behavior reinforces mindfulness, but mindfulness is seen to reinforce ethical behavior as well” (Grossman, 2010, p. 89). This illustrates the difficulty that academic psychology has experienced in attempting to divorce mindfulness from its roots in Buddhism, which has always placed a strong emphasis on the interconnected nature of existence. Separating one thing from another runs contrary to a philosophy that sees every aspect of the universe as an interconnected nexus.

CHAPTER X

Conclusion

Mindfulness has truly become a word that has found its way into the lexicon of contemporary psychology. Shapiro and Carlson (2009) found in their analysis of mindfulness-based interventions over 300 different articles published that address the various theoretical and empirical perspectives on this growing phenomenon. A Google search today yields over 700,000 hits for the term “mindfulness-based”. Although many of these hits are likely to be peripheral to the term mindfulness, the number is impressive. We have seen that the early pioneers in psychology investigated Eastern philosophies and Buddhism from a very early stage in the evolution of psychology. Many of those early pioneers were steeped in an educational system that still embraced a philosophical approach as a fundamental technique for exploring the nature of human behavior and thinking.

As the embrace of a more scientifically informed paradigm found its way into Western psychology, the “big thinkers” as I like to call them, were pushed aside in favor of a methodology that embraced the scientific method wholeheartedly. All of our behaviors were seen as something that could be reduced to smaller and smaller constituent parts, which would perhaps someday lead to a grand theory that could explain all human behavior, just as contemporary physics has sought to explain the totality of the universe at the quantum level. The field of psychology chose to align

itself with the scientific method in order to find a legitimate place within the academy of “hard sciences” like chemistry, biology, and geology. This association is easily understandable when framed against the apparent lack of verifiability that is found in the earlier psychodynamic traditions of Freud, Jung, Adler and others.

Contemporary practitioners of psychotherapy and other kinds of therapeutic interventions often rely on a guidebook called the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR)* in order to make diagnostic assessments of individual clients (Corey, 2009). The *DSM-IV-TR* utilizes a categorical and medical approach to identify an underlying pathology that present as psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, or excessive compulsions. The goal in the development of the *DSM-IV-TR* was to move away from the Freudian psychoanalytic influences on early psychological thinking about mental suffering and move toward observable behavior as the primary criterion for diagnosis (Corey, 2009). The goal in the development of this book and the manualized techniques of the cognitive-behavioral traditions that have come about in recent decades is to *fix a problem*. This focus on fixing something that is broken in the way people think may represent the most fundamental difference between contemporary Western psychological conceptions of mindfulness and its Buddhist roots. Grossman (2010) writes,

Buddhist psychology makes no distinctions between depressives, anxiety neurotics and “normal” individuals but suggests that the process of development of awareness is universally available and generally follows a

common, if temporarily varying, path. In effect, insight, itself, is the goal, rather than fixing a problem or attainment of personal happiness, as the phrase is typically understood (p. 97).

Our happiness or insight, then, is not something that is removed from feelings of sadness or anxiety but is an integral part of being with these feelings and understanding that they are only temporary, impermanent thoughts that will not endure as a permanent part of this “I” that we so strongly identify with as a static and enduring being.

It is possible that the current embrace of mindfulness with all of its nuances and connections to Eastern philosophy and Buddhism represents an oncoming cyclical shift in thinking within psychology. Perhaps there will be a movement away from a reductionist scientific model for explaining the complexities of human behavior and motivation toward a more subtle and philosophical understanding; one that sees the work of those who built the foundation for how we understand ourselves and each other over the course of the past century as having contributed something vital and significant about where we have come from, who we are, and what we are capable of becoming as human beings.

Many of the great thinkers in psychology were giants. They delved into the uncharted waters of human consciousness and into its shadow counterpart, the subconscious. They reached outward and upward into the cosmos to seek what it means to be alive as a part of a miraculous and sometimes befuddling universe and also what it means to want to deny this miraculous existence, or even extinguish it. We

have the opportunity to stand on the shoulders of these giants to gain a different perspective on our world and perhaps discover solutions to the human problems that have plagued us since we first asked ourselves the question, *who am I?*

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Appendix

Exploring the relationship between attention, emotional variability, and presence in a virtual environment.

My primary research objective was to explore the relationship between attention and psychological presence, as well as aesthetic experience for subjects experiencing an Artistic Virtual Environment. Recent research has demonstrated that level of attention is highly linked to increased psychological presence in a computer-mediated environment (Sacau, Laarni, & Hartmann, 2008). In addition, previous research has found a direct relationship between the strength and quality of an individual's psychological presence and their aesthetic experience while experiencing virtual environments (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Psychological presence has been defined as “a complex, multi-dimensional perception, formed through the interplay of raw (multi-) sensory data and various cognitive processes” (Riva et al., 2006; p. 45). The aesthetic experience is characterized by object focus, freedom, and active discovery and interest (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Increasing the level of an individual's attention to the virtual environment throughout viewing/experience of a

virtual environment may have an effect to improve the level of telepresence experienced and, thus, improve the aesthetic experience for the individual.

Method

In the study, subjects viewed a series of images from an Artistic Virtual Environment. In the Experimental group, the subjects were probed regarding their level of attention after viewing the images on a 5 point likert scale. Two sets of directions were given to two groups. The two groups/direction sets were as follows:

Attention Set: We are going to show you some video of an Artistic Virtual Environment. Please watch the following video carefully. If you find that your mind is wandering or your attention is drifting away from the video, try to re-focus your attention on the video. You will be asked to answer some questions about the video at the conclusion of the experiment.

Non-attention Set: We are going to show you some video of an Artistic Virtual Environment. You will be asked to answer some questions about the video at the conclusion of the experiment.

Participant Selection

Participants ($n=92$) were recruited from Kent State University at Stark. The students were enrolled in General Psychology and, as stated on the syllabus in the General Psychology classes in which recruitment occurred, students are required to either participate in a psychological experiment or to write a short research report. Students

were not penalized if they chose to write the research report rather than participate in the study. Ten class points were awarded for participation in the study. For students who chose not to participate in the study, they were given the choice to compose a two-page, double-spaced paper on a current "Psychology Today" topic for ten points upon completion of the paper. The participants were then divided into either the experimental "attention" group ($n=46$) or the control group ($n=46$).

Assessments and Measures

Subjects completed a PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Scale; Watson & Clark, 1994), the STAI-S (State-Trait Anxiety Scale-State only; Spielberger & Sarason, 1985), and the MAAS (Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale; Brown & Ryan, 2003) prior to viewing the images. Subjects in the Attention set completed a likert scale probe for attention at the conclusion of the video. Upon completion of viewing the images, subjects completed the PANAS and STAI-S scales, along with a questionnaire consisting of the following issues:

1. The aesthetic experience. These questions are based upon a study by Hirschman (1983).
2. Sense of Presence. One paper of the questionnaire will consist of the Independent Television Commission- Sense of Presence Inventory (Lessiter, Freeman, Keogh et al., 2000).

3. Absorption. This will be measured by Tellegen's Absorption Scale (Tellegen, 1982).

Results

The results of the study are currently being analyzed and will be presented at the Undergraduate Student Conference at Kent State University at Stark in April 2011. Preliminary statistical evaluation indicates attention was positively correlated ($p < .001$) with measures of spatial presence ($r = .472$) and the reported aesthetic experience ($r = .394$). In addition, significance was indicated between groups for the attention group [$t(90) = 3.31$, $p < .001$] and an increase in aesthetic experience [$t(90) = 2.42$, $p < .01$], spatial presence [$t(90) = 2.51$, $p < .01$], and psychological engagement [$t(90) = 1.94$, $p < .05$].

Limitations of the Present Study

The groups were made up of University Students from a predominantly Caucasian, middle-class Midwestern university in Ohio and are not representative of cultural or regional diversity. In addition, the participants were gender skewed, with 67 females and 25 males participating. The age of the participants was also skewed, with 65 participants aged 18-20. An additional limitation included the use of self-report measures to gather assessment data. Finally, it is possible that being asked to "pay attention" may represent a demand characteristic, having a direct effect on the participant response about their level of attention to the video.