Other-Centered Approaches: Psychotherapy and a Buddhist Paradigm

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Modern psychotherapy has, to a large extent, developed within the context of Western culture and values, and has itself supported and affected the development of Western culture over the last half century (Furedi 2004[2]). Buddhist psychology is grounded in an Eastern religious and ethical paradigm (Harvey 2000[3]) and, whilst incorporating a diversity of theory on specific issues, is broadly distinct from Western perspectives in a number of significant respects, particularly in relation to the view of the self, of the human condition and of the nature of therapeutic growth. As such it offers a vantage point from which to elaborate and sometimes critique some of the assumptions of Western therapeutic models.

Buddhist psychology (Brazier C 2003[4]) has spawned a number of therapeutic models, which differ from one another in various respects. Some draw more on Buddhist practice such as meditation or mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn J 1991[5]), whilst others draw to a greater extent on the Buddhist theoretical understanding of mental process (Brazier D 1995[6]). In either case the use of Buddhist ideas does not necessarily guarantee that the therapy will support a Buddhist paradigm. Buddhist ideas and methods may influence the, often unconscious, assumptions which underpin the therapeutic process or may be used to serve a more Western value system.

Among the models derived from Buddhist psychology are approaches which rely upon the Buddhist understanding of the individual identity as the product of a set of conditions, reliant upon, and existing in relation, to others. In particular such approaches view the self as dependently originated (Jones 2011[7]), constructed on the basis of object-related perception (Brazier D 1995[8]). These approaches can be termed other-centered[9] and include approaches such as Naikan and Morita (Krech 2001[10]), both developed through Japanese Buddhist traditions, and the Other-Centered model (Brazier C 2009[11]) developed at the Amida center in the UK.

This presentation will explore the importance of the Other-Centered paradigm in offering an alternative perspective to the prevailing value system found in psychotherapies in the West, which often tends towards individualistic viewpoints. It will include a summary of the basic principles of different Other-Centered Approaches and their relationship to Buddhist psychology.

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[2] Furedi, F, 2004 *Therapy Culture* Routledge

[3] Harvey P 2000 *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* Cambridge University Press

[4] Brazier C 2003 *Buddhist Psychology* Constable Robinson

[5] Kabat-Zinn, J, 1991 *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* Delta

[6] Brazier D 1995 *Zen Therapy* Constable Robinson

[7] Jones D 2011 *This Being that Becomes; The Buddha's Teaching on Conditionality* Windhorse Publications

[8] Brazier D 1995 *Zen Therapy* Constable Robinson

[9] Brazier C 2003 *Buddhist Psychology* Constable Robinson pp236-253

[10] Krech G, 2001 *Naikan: gratitude, grace, and the Japanese art of self-reflection* Stonebridge Press

[11] Brazier C, 2009 *Other Centered Therapy: Buddhist Psychology in Action* O-Books

Buddhism on a Postcard

The other-centered therapeutic approach, as taught on the Amida psychotherapy training program, is grounded in the core teachings of Buddhism. Since several of these teachings are open to differences of interpretation, I will set out here the model as we interpret it in this context. Whilst there is not space in this paper to argue all the points of controversy, I will indicate sources to which the reader may refer for further clarification.

The Buddha reputedly gave 84,000 teachings but, in fact, his presentation of the Dharma can be understood as a whole, that is as one integrated model. It is a system of thought which offers an analysis of human process and which explains how mental problems arise. The Buddha's teaching is summarized by the oft quoted assertion that he taught suffering and the end of suffering (Sutta Nipata[12]), or, more accurately, the (*nirodha*) containment of that which arises from suffering[13]. The Buddha's core message is also summarized as consisting of insight into Dependent Origination and the conditioned nature of existence (Jones D 2011[14]). These two teachings are in fact the two faces of the one central message of Buddhism.

In brief then, the Buddha taught that affliction was an unavoidable truth (Brazier D 1997[15]). He taught that in response to affliction, we cling to things. Our energies are aroused by grief or anger (ibid[16]) and we experience craving which we satisfy through our attachments, and it is on these that the sense of self and of the world depends. In other words, in our attempt to dissipate the discomfort of affliction, we are drawn into compulsive clinging and from it construct all that we think we know.

Attachment and the process of self-creation

The teaching of the second Noble Truth, *samudaya,* describes this process. Clinging begins with sense attachment (*kama*) then progresses to 'becoming' (*bhava*), or the creation of the self. Finally, if the sense of self fails to offer sufficient comfort and security, the person falls into non-becoming (*vibhava*) or self-destructiveness (Samyutta Nikaya[17]). We can see this process in the example of the drinker, who starts by dissipating anxieties through the sense activity of enjoying a glass of wine. Gradually this person starts to identify with favorite drinks and progresses through identities of social drinker, wine buff to alcoholic, each with its associated 'objects' of particular alcoholic drinks, settings and companions. Eventually when life becomes overwhelming he starts to drink himself into oblivion. In most cases the progression is more complex and we all build our identities on idiosyncratic combinations of objects. Basically, however, Buddhist psychology can be seen as a psychology of addiction; addiction to the supports of identity.

This is the unenlightened process whereby humans become psychologically enmeshed in a self-world. Identity formation is a protection from the experiencing of affliction and impermanence. It is also a barrier to enlightened perception.

The self-world is mediated through our senses. The senses, known as the uncontrollables (*shadyatana*) because we do not really choose where they fix their attention, are each seen to possess a conditioned mentality (*vijnana*). They lock onto objects[18] according to their conditioned modes of perception, or habitual preferences. The

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[12] Sutta nipata
[13] See Brazier D 1997 *The Feeling Buddha* Constable Robinson pp89-96
[14] Jones D 2011 *This Being that Becomes; The Buddha's Teaching on Conditionality* Windhorse Publications pp16-17
[15] Brazier D 1997 *The Feeling Buddha* Constable Robinson
[16] Ibid pp63-66
[17] Samyutta Nikaya 61.11.6
[18] This is a powerful 'locking on' as for example suggested by the image of the axe and block used in the *Ant Hill Sutta*; Majjhima Nikaya 23

person thus repeatedly uses the same patterns of clinging, dividing experience into 'mine' and 'not mine' through attractive or aversive responses, and from them builds an illusion of permanence. This is identified as the self. This understanding of the self-building process is elaborated in other core Buddhist teachings, namely those which describe the conditioned nature of the ordinary person, the Skandhas and the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination (Brazier C 2003[19]).

Dukkha as the source of growth

Whilst Buddhism is sometimes portrayed as a negative philosophy grounded in a view that life is afflictive and the only escape is through an ending of existence, this view is not borne out by the sutras. Far from offering a negative perspective, the Buddha appears to have seen affliction, *dukkha*, as a Noble Truth[20] and as the root of the spiritual life.

In the *Sutta on Fear and Dread*[21], the Buddha describes how, immediately prior to his enlightenment, he deliberately went into the forest to experience those places which frightened him, the shrines of demons and harmful spirits. He practiced in these places by developing steadfastness, and not allowing himself to be diverted from the experience of discomfort arising in him, but rather holding himself still as the feelings arose and waiting for them to dissipate. In other words, he did not retreat into the psychological diversions of sense attachment and self-building, nor did he walk away from the situation. He faced the arising emotions directly. This process led to his enlightenment experience which is described in the sutta immediately after his description of facing out the fear.

As discussed in my recent book, *Acorns Among the Grass* (Brazier C 2011[22]), the Sutta on Fear and Dread can be understood to support the view that the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, which was among the first teachings which the Buddha gave, is basically a description of how the practitioner can employ the energy which arises from life's difficulties as fuel for the spiritual path (Brazier D 1997[23]). This interpretation is rather more positive than the traditional interpretation which sees the teaching as concerning the elimination of *dukkha,* which in any case, the Buddha evidently did not do[24]. One can see the Buddha's spiritual journey as centered on this discovery. It was initiated by an unwelcome encounter with affliction in his meeting with the four sights, and was resolved by his discovery that by facing fear and dread one can attain the ultimate spiritual breakthrough. This understanding was then formulated as the Four Noble Truths.

Thus Buddhist psychology encourages fortitude in the face of difficulties and an attitude to life which seeks out the truth of situations rather than avoiding them. It emphasizes the importance of engaging with reality, however uncomfortable, rather than getting drawn into pleasantries or distractions.

Object related Identity

The Buddhist model of human process defines the self as an illusory, defensive structure, which is itself a source of affliction[25]. Unless our psychological state

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[19] Brazier C 2003 *Buddhist Psychology* Constable Robinson

[20] Or a 'truths for noble ones' to take Peter Harvey's suggestion in Harvey P, 2009 *The Four Ariya-saccas as 'True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled'- the Painful, its Origin, its Cessation, and the Way Going to This – Rather than 'Noble Truths' Concerning These.* in Buddhist Studies Review, Vol 26, No 2 (2009)

[21] *Sutta on Fear and Dread*: Majjhima Nikaya 4

[22] Brazier C 2011 *Acorns Among the Grass: Adventures in Ecotherapy* O-Books

[23] Brazier D 1997 *The Feeling Buddha* Constable Robinson

[24] As David Brazier points out, the Buddha got sick, was betrayed by those he loved and eventually died after his enlightenment.

[25] The skandhas are listed among the elements giving rise to dukkha in Samyutta Nikaya 6.11.5

deteriorates further into the nihilism of *vibhava*, the self gives us a semblance of order in a disordered world and acts like a protective bubble.

The senses distort our relationship with the world, creating a personal world-view through their conditioned attraction to particular perceptual objects and their rejection of others. They reinforce our prejudices and confirm us in our sense of self. In this way the identity mirrors the object world which we choose to inhabit. We seek out places and people who in turn support our self-view. Because they are driven by our latent fears and need for security, the senses are powerful as they seek out sense objects and the Buddhist texts are full of images which confirm the dangers which they pose[26].

The self is thus object related. It depends upon the maintenance of a distorted perception (*rupa*[27]) of objects and seeks out confirmation of itself through its attraction to the familiar. The mind depends upon the object of attention and the self upon the object world which it inhabits. This relationship between the self and the world view is mutually conditioning.

The Constructed Self

The teachings of the Skandhas and of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination explain the mechanism by which the self is created and maintained. They can be interpreted as descriptions of the same basic cyclical process (Brazier C 2003 p183[28]). Indeed these two key teachings share the four elements of *vedana*, *samskara*, *vijnana* and (*nama*) *rupa.* These four elements, if taken as a cycle, appear in the same relationship to one another.

These common elements in the two teachings, then, are key points in a cycle which describes how conditioned perception (*rupa*) leads to attractive or aversive responses (*vedana*). These bring about the creation of new action traces (*samskaras*). This in turn reinforces the mentality (*vijnana*) which continues to seek out confirmation in new perceptual objects (*rupas*). Other elements of the two teachings elaborate different aspects of the cycle. In the teaching of the Twelve Links, for example, we see that as we name the phenomenal object (*nama-rupa*) we make contact with it (*sparsha*) and then the senses grasp the object, leading to the *vedana*. Both the Skandhas and the Twelve Links are, however, basically descriptions of the same self-building process.

In the Ant Hill Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya 23) the skandhas are represented by the tortoise. This description suggests the self as a hard impenetrable shell with which we protect ourselves from those things in life which threaten us[29]. The image of the tortoise fits well with the idea of a cycle which perpetuates itself and defends us against uncertainty.

The processes of self-creation described in these core teachings offer an understanding of human process which can be applied at the collective as well as the individual level. Groups build identity based of shared objects of attention and world views in just the same ways as individuals. This process orientated interpretation gives additional support to our understanding of the ephemeral nature of the self. The self only exists in dependence upon the sense objects which give birth to it.

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[26] The axe and block in the Ant Hill Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya 23) and the Fire Sermon (Aditta-pariyaya-sutta) give images of the power and passion of the senses.

[27] Rupa, the first of the skandhas, describes the perceptual object. Although sometimes translated as form, the word has a primary meaning of coloration or phenomenal presence.

[28] Brazier C 2003 *Buddhist Psychology* Constable Robinson p 183

[29] This interpretation seems to me more plausible than that offered in the commentaries which suggest that the tortoise represents the skandhas on the basis of having four limbs and a head. Were the commentaries right, one would have to ask if tortoises of the time were without a tail.

Other-Centered Approaches

The Buddhist understanding of conditioned nature of the ordinary mind provides a model of human process which is complex and subtle. Because all the Buddhist teachings can basically be linked to this same model, details which are found in different teachings can be used to elaborate and clarify aspects of it. In fact the core teachings are themselves presented in slight variations in different sutras, which seems to confirm their relationship to one another.

This Buddhist understanding of mind can be used in practical ways to create interventions which will facilitate psychological change in therapeutic and other contexts. The teachings of the Skandhas and Dependent Origination suggest a number of different possibilities for intervention at different stages in the process (Brazier C 2003[30]). Other-centered approaches tend to focus on interventions at the *rupa/vedana* points. In developing a therapeutic model for the Amida Psychotherapy Training Program[31], we have found that those parts of human process which relate to the world view are more amenable to intervention than those parts with which the person identifies (Brazier C 2001c[32]). People are more willing to question their perception of others than their sense of self.

Whilst people identify with their habitual behaviors and with the self-story which emerges from them, they are less identified with their world view, despite the fact that it is distorted by the escapist and self-building agenda. It continues to be regarded as an accurate understanding of 'how things are' and is not generally identified as part of the self. People may feel possessive of objects and can be defensive of them, but they are not generally aware of the extent to which their perception of them is clouded by self-interest.

Other-centered models therefore rely upon examination of the conditioned nature of perception and on investigating our relatedness to others. This indirectly reveals the self-structures and invites the client to question and change them. Changing the perceptual conditions changes the self which rests upon them. By focusing on the objects which are significant to the self-process, and implicitly or explicitly questioning the perception thereof, the reactive and associative responses are modified and the hold of the self-structure is loosened.

In this process two aspects are assumed. Firstly, that the object is perceived in a conditioned way (*rupa*) and, secondly, that the object has a real existence (*dharma*), even if this cannot be directly perceived by the unenlightened mind. In addition to this understanding of perception, other-centered approaches also suggest that, since the object has a reality, it can be assumed that it will, of itself, exert some influence on the interaction, independently of the perceiver. The 'other' will itself become an enabling factor in the process of change.

Other-centered work thus becomes an enquiry into relatedness. The mode of operation is one in which the therapist listens to the client and notices the significant objects upon which the self-world is built (Brazier C 2009b[33]). Initially she invites the client to talk more fully about these objects, which are often, but not always, people, and to see them in a more sense-based way. Their *rupa* quality is amplified, intensifying the whole cycle so that it can be better understood. Thus the process of the Skandhas or Dependent Origination becomes more apparent in the therapy room, and the origins and dynamics of the conditioned view can be investigated and deconstructed.

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[30] Brazier C 2003 *Buddhist Psychology* Constable Robinson ; Chapters 9-16
[31] www.buddhistpsychology.info
[32] The following therapeutic model is elaborated in Brazier C, 2009 *Other Centered Therapy: Buddhist Psychology in Action* O-Books
[33] Brazier C 2009b *Listening to the Other* O-Books

With this investigation, the client becomes less identified with the self-process. Understanding and recognition are common roots to dis-identification in Buddhist practice. In many forms of meditation, the invitation to observe the arising and dispersion of mental factors is used to interrupt the self-creation process. Reflexive observation creates distance and renders the process itself a mind-object, and therefore an object of perception and a conditioning factor to self rather than an aspect of self. The observed self-element thus ceases to be part of the identity. The person comes to realize *this is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself*[34].

More importantly, though, in other-centered work the client is then encouraged to enquire into the reality of the other. By bringing into question the immediate perceptual responses, the person develops curiosity and is invited to engage in a search for new perceptions. This other-centered enquiry is, of course, unlikely to release the person from conditioned existence within the therapy room, but it does create the possibility for a more fluid, multi-faceted world view to emerge, in which the habitual preconceptions are not taken as absolute. Space is created in which the other can be heard. As this happens, the identity is also naturally changed. Attachment to a fixed sense of self becomes less pressing.

Pureland Buddhism and Buddhist therapies

All Buddhists schools are grounded in the same understanding of the nature of conditioned existence which was realized by Siddharta Gotama, the Buddha, founder of our shared traditions. Different schools of Buddhism differ in finer details of doctrine, but more significantly in the practices which they have adopted in response to this human predicament. Practices and approaches have been categorized in various ways, but a significant division, which grew out of the Indian philosophy of Nagarjuna[35] and became particularly significant in Japanese Buddhism, is that between what are known as *self-power* and *other-power*[36]. All Buddhist schools have some elements from each approach but in most one or other predominates. Whilst *self-power* schools emphasize effort and the capacity of the individual to achieve enlightenment, *other-power* schools emphasize faith and the need for reliance upon what is beyond the self. *Other-power* schools might be seen as primarily concerned with refuge.

Pureland Buddhism[37] is an *other-power* approach. In this it places the locus of salvation outside the self, specifically in the beneficence of Amida Buddha, literally the immeasurable Buddha[38]. It is a tradition which places its emphasis on faith. The practice of Pureland is *nembutsu*, calling the Buddha's name. At its core is the recognition of our unenlightened nature, referred to as *bombu*[39] nature, and of our dependence on others for our existence.

Whilst its understanding of the conditioned nature of mind and the processes of self-building are in line with those already outlined in this paper, Pureland Buddhism offers two important additional qualities to the therapist. Firstly its emphasis on the locus

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[34] This phrase recurs in many of the sutras as the Buddha's instruction to relinquish self-attachment.

[35] Pureland Buddhism recognizes Nagarjuna as its first patriarch based on his identification of two paths to enlightenment, the Igyodo, the Easy Way, and Nangyodo, the Difficult Path, (Japanese terminology) in book five chapter 9 of his work

[36] Tariki is the Japanese word for other-power. This term is contradistinguished from Jiriki or self-power. The two terms are often applied to Pureland and Zen schools respectively.

[37] Pureland Buddhism is widely influential across Eastern Asia, but is particularly established as separate schools in Japan. These schools draw on the three Pure Land Sutras, The Greater and Smaller Pure Land Sutras and the Contemplation Sutra, for their doctrinal base.

[38] Amida is an amalgamation of Amitabha and Amitayus, and thus is Buddha of infinite light and life

[39] Bombu or bompu means literally 'foolish being' and is a term used widely in Pureland; see the Jodoshu web site: http://www.jsri.jp/English/Main.html

of salvation being external to the self supports an other-centered approach in which healing is seen to come from the relationship with others. To accept this support requires faith. Secondly it emphasizes that salvation is not dependent upon our deeds[40] and that we are infinitely karmically compromised[41]. This position offers a radically non-judgmental value base.

Faith in the therapy process

The path of faith can be understood in terms of the model already presented. The self is a constructed defense system, which is normally impervious to change due to its self-perpetuating cycle of conditioned perception and self-reinforcing reactions. An illusory phenomenon, the perceived world is separated from the reality which it masks by our clinging nature and the expectations which it generates. At the same time, there is acknowledged in the Buddhist texts, the unconditioned[42] which exists beyond the conditioned experience of the ordinary person. This is the real world which we only intuit beyond our conditioned view. Beyond the world of conditioned existence, the self that is created on the sand of delusion, there is an immeasurable reality. It is in this that we place trust.

Faith (*shradha*) is significant in all Buddhism, and is generally understood to signify faith in the Dharma. Faith should be distinguished from belief. The term 'faith' here refers to something more akin to trust or confidence. Faith allows us to live with impermanence and uncertainty, so is in some respects opposite to belief. It is trust in the teachings, the Dharma, which promise to help us do this.

In Pureland, faith is expressed in our spiritual confidence in Amida Buddha's unconditioned omnipresence. In the more general sense, faith is placed in an unconditioned reality beyond the clouding of *avidya* (ignorance; unenlightened view). Thus in Pureland the emphasis is not on deconstructing the self-world, but on looking to the unconditioned that lies beyond it (Brazier C 2007[43]).

Pureland accords particularly with the other-centered model in that it supports the premise that psychological health is a product of our openness to the presence of others rather than something which we construct. This can be seen as a manifestation of faith at the mundane level.

Mental health is a product of faith. Without faith the person experiences more fear and becomes more rigid. Self-building accelerates. Therapeutic process requires a foundation of faith, and it is the therapist's confidence in the possibility of healing which often inspires the client to change. This observation is reflected in the theory proposed by Japanese psychologist and Pureland priest, Gisho Saiko, who saw the therapist's awareness of this external Dharmic foundation of support, represented by Amida's presence, as instrumental in the efficacy of the therapy process (Saiko G 2001[44]). Although the client arrived in a state of faithlessness, through the therapeutic encounter and through being held by the therapist's faith, his own faith became restored.

Gratitude and Dependence

Pureland Buddhism emphasizes our reliance upon others. Our existence is conditional upon many factors, all of which are ultimately beyond our control. Both

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[40] Shinran was radical in his emphasis of our powerlessness to affect our own salvation. For example Tannisho 3 he is famously quoted say saying 'Even a good person can be born in the Pure Land, how much more so an evil person.'
[41] ibid
[42] The Udana specifically refers to the unconditioned
[43] Brazier C 2009 *The Other Buddhism* O-Books chapter 4
[44] Saiko, G 2001 *Dharma-based Person-Centered Approach in Japan* paper presented 8th International PCA Forum in Japan.

Honen[45] and Shinran[46], the twelfth century founders of the Pureland schools in Japan, agreed that if we simply relied upon our own efforts and received what was due to us on account of our Karma, we would be destined for the hell realms[47].

Some therapies which have grown out of the Pureland tradition therefore place their emphasis on recognizing our dependent nature and on the cultivation of humility, contrition and gratitude. Naikan therapy involves reflection upon the balance between what has been received and what has been given to others (Reynolds 1983[48]; Krech 2001[49]). This approach is radically different from the Western paradigm in reducing the sense of personal entitlement and increasing feelings of appreciation and understanding for others. Taking place traditionally in a retreat format, more recently it has developed a number of guises including regular weekly sessions[50] and on line programs[51].

Guilt and non-judgmentalism

Whilst western therapies often espouse non-judgmental philosophies[52], in practice they are often embedded in a paradigm which values change, self-actualization[53], and the meeting of personal needs[54]. Whilst the client may be reassured of his worth and potential, there is sometimes an implicit avoidance of those areas of the client's life and behavior which contradict this positive image. Without even realizing it the therapist steeped in the Western paradigm tends to reinforce values which are prevalent in Western culture[55]. Success is reinforced and difficulties or unpleasantness explained away.

Other-centered work is grounded on the premise that people are inevitably fallible. The understanding of *bombu* nature releases client and therapist from the myth of perfectibility (Brazier C 2007[56]) and guilt becomes an ordinary matter (Brazier C 2009b[57]) to be recognized and not hidden. The therapeutic relationship becomes one of equality, or *fellow feeling*, in which the therapist is implicitly aware of her own *bombu* nature.

Freed from the need to hide personal failings, the client loses one layer of defense. There is no longer a danger of punishment, so there is less need to protect the self. The client naturally begins to open to the therapist in ways that habitually would not have been possible, freed from layers of subtle dissimulation.

Other-Centered Values and the Psychotherapy Profession

This paper has outlined the basic structure of ideas in Buddhist psychology. It has explored a number of ramifications of these principles for the therapist, and in particular has introduced the other-centered model as one example of a psychotherapy grounded in the Buddhist paradigm. In doing so it has introduced a number of concepts particular to Pureland Buddhism and shown how they relate to the broader context of Buddhist ideas.

Collectively, the other-centered approach offers a methodology and theoretical underpinning which is radically different from many other approaches available in the

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[45] Honen *Gyojo-ezu* chapter 32

[46] For example Tannisho chapter 2

[47] ibid

[48] Reynolds D 1983 *Naikan Psychotherapy: meditation for self-development* University of Chicago Press

[49] Krech G, 2001 *Naikan: gratitude, grace, and the Japanese art of self-reflection* Stonebridge Press

[50] As offered at the Nara Naikan Centre, Japan http://www4.ocn.ne.jp/~naikan/eng-05.html

[51] http://www.todoinstitute.org/

[52] For example Rogers C.R. 1951 *Client-Centered Therapy*. Constable, London

[53] Rogers C.R. 1961 *On Becoming a Person*. Constable, London

[54] Maslow, A 1954 *Motivation and Personality* Harper & Brothers New York

[55] For an example of this see the discussion of 'Brian's vacuum' in Brazier D 1995 *Zen Therapy* Constable Robinson pp 25-27

[56] Brazier C 2007 The Other Buddhism O-Books chapter 3

[57] Brazier C 2009a *Guilt: an Exploration* O-Books

West. Whilst it would be naive to suggest that Western therapies all share the same value base, the other-centered model offers a critique of many ideas which are prevalent today and is sufficiently different to offer a counterpoint to some of the accepted norms of the psychotherapy profession. In particular, we can see differences in the following areas:

Western therapies tend to emphasize strengthening the self, and the sense of self entitlement. Whilst extreme caution should be exercised in comparing systems which may have radically different notions of what the self is, on this matter, other-centered methods, which focus the enquiry on others in the client's life rather than on the client himself, are stylistically innovative. Other-centered understanding tends to be less centered on the individual. In the last fifty years, the West has seen society become increasingly individualized and divided by inequalities (Wilkinson & Picket 2009 [58]) with accompanying rises in consumerism, mental illness and addictions. As I have discussed at length in the first chapter of my book, *Other-Centered Therapy* (Brazier C 2009c[59]), therapy culture (Furedi F 2004[60]) has been highly influential in shaping society in this period so it is vital that we question the value base from which therapists are working. The Buddhist paradigm addresses many of these trends and in particular other-centered principles embrace the importance of the collective as much as individual progress, reversing the common trend. In broad such approaches can be seen to address issues of greed, one of the manifestations of self-building attachment at the social as well as personal level.

Buddhism is concerned with the question of suffering. As we have seen, however, it is possible to argue that far from being something to be avoided, *dukkha* is in fact a source of strength. This positive view of adversity does not lead to a loss of compassion, but it does bring an attitude of realism as, for example, we see in the Buddha's own response to Kissagotami and Patacara[61], both of whom were experiencing extreme grief at the time when they arrived in his community[62]. In modern society there is an increasing trend towards establishing controls and safeguards in the attempt to legislate against afflictions of many kinds. The common out-cry that 'it must never happen again' leads to restrictions and regulations which themselves lead to difficulties, yet humans are not omnipotent and disasters continue to happen. As we have seen, it can be argued that Buddhist teaching views the transformation of our reaction to affliction as the basis for spiritual growth. This teaching offers not only comfort, but also encouragement to face and transform painful circumstances. It takes us to the core of our human position and encourages us to live authentically.

In modern times, however, the teachings which are of greatest import are probably those which counter our tendencies to discriminate and judge. The radical non-judgmentalism of Pureland is so different from the predominating culture that it can seem shocking at first. Our culture is founded on assumptions that rights, justice and punishment are the basis of a healthy society. Western therapies do not necessarily fit their caricature of blaming parents and partners for all that is uncomfortable in the client's world, but they do often promote, at least indirectly, attitudes of self-justification, seeking out culpable causes for current unhappiness in past experiences and the behavior of others. Clients are still encouraged to see themselves as damaged, survivors of traumas and victims of social and family pressures. In this context, an approach such as that of Naikan which puts it emphasis on looking at the positive benefits which we have received

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[58] Wilkinson R and Pickett, K 2009 *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* Allen Lane
[59] Brazier C 2009c *Other-Centered Therapy* O-Books, Chapter 1
[60] Furedi, F, 2004 *Therapy Culture* Routledge
[61] Both described in the Therigata; see Murcott, S 1991 *The First Buddhist Women*, Parallax Press
[62]. See Brazier C 2007 *The Other Buddhism* O-Books chapter 9

from others and on our own past failings can seem strikingly different. Accepting responsibility and recognizing our shortcomings is the foundation of psychological maturity. They are also essential to a world in social strife and environmental crisis. The Pureland view of *bombu* nature, as well as other Buddhist teachings on the human condition, offers methods to work with hate and aversion, the self-building attachments which grow from our collective lack of faith as we face our endangered situation.

In the appendix of his book *Naikan: grace, gratitude and the Japanese art of self-reflection*, Gregg Krech offers his own comparison between the traditional Western approach to therapy and that of Naikan. When I read this list, I felt a strong affinity between this approach and that which we teach at Amida Trust. I would therefore like to finish this paper by quoting his section headings from this appendix for mental health professionals.

1. **Traditional:** *Focus on Feelings*
   Naikan: *Focus on Facts*
2. **Traditional:** *Revisit how you have been hurt and mistreated in the past*
   Naikan: *Revisit how you have been cared for and supported in the past*
3. **Traditional:** *The therapist validates the Client's experiences*
   Naikan: *The therapist helps the client understand the experience of others*
4. **Traditional:** *Blame others for your problems*
   Naikan: *Take responsibility for your own conduct and the problems you cause others*
5. **Traditional:** *The therapist provides analysis and interpretation of the client's experience*
   Naikan: *The therapist provides a structured framework for the client's self-reflection*
6. **Traditional:** *Therapy helps clients increase self-esteem*
   Naikan: *Therapy helps clients increase appreciation of life (Krech[63]2001, pp197-205)*

Namo Amida Bu

Pali Suttas

- Aditta-pariyaya-sutta The Fire Sermon
- Majjhima Nikaya 23 *Ant Hill Sutta*;
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[63] Summarized from Krech G, 2001 *Naikan: gratitude, grace, and the Japanese art of self-reflection* Stonebridge Press pp197-205

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