Sitting Together:
A Conceptual and Clinical Integration of Psychoanalysis & Zen

by Barry Magid, MD

When we speak of integrating the practice of Zen Buddhism into our analytic work, we do not mean adding a new technique to our clinical toolkit. Rather, it involves coming to terms with another longstanding tradition that has, like psychoanalysis, endeavored to grapple with the problem of human suffering, and which has evolved its own metapsychology, its own theory of the self, and its own ways of engaging and transforming human experience. Meditation can produce profound experiences of self-acceptance, and help develop capacities for empathy, compassion and affect regulation that may parallel or even go beyond what psychoanalysis has traditionally been able to offer.

Yet, the two traditions formulate the problem and offer their respective solutions from fundamentally different perspectives. In order to highlight that basic difference, we could begin by saying that we all face two challenges in accepting who we truly are. The first is to accept our vulnerabilities and all those parts of our self about which we have grown up feeling shameful, guilty or in denial. The second challenge is in grasping our intrinsic wholeness or perfection. While each has found ways of engaging with both perspectives, Western psychotherapy has traditionally been more focused on the first, Buddhist practice on the second. Western psychodynamic psychotherapy analyzes those aspects of the personality that are obstacles to happiness such as difficulties in attachment, lack of self-esteem, inhibition of one's desires or sense of agency, unlinked or

conflicting selfstates, a sense of badness and failures in recognition. All of these have been formulated as obstacles to development or growth. Buddhism, on the other hand, has fore-grounded the realization of perfection, accessing a self state of deep acceptance of life as it is, an acceptance not contingent on the vicissitudes of loss or gain in any ordinary sense.

In order for there to be a fruitful dialogue between these two very different perspectives, we will need to untangle some basic assumptions about how analysis and meditation each goes about their job, and how we can understand what is happening within each practice in the language of the other practice. For to truly integrate the two systems of thought, it is not enough to give a psychoanalytic account of what is going on in meditation practice, one must also be open to understanding from a Buddhist perspective what is happening in analysis. From each perspective, there is a temptation to say that we understand what is *really* going on in the other, to privilege one system of explanation as more fundamental, more foundational, more all encompassing than the other. It is helpful to be reminded that we are Other to the Other, that the object of our study and judgment is simultaneously studying and judging us.

The historicist philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1988) has examined how competing world views come to interact and mutually influence one another, as was the case when the classical perspective of Aristotle was integrated into Christian thought by Thomas Aquinas. That collision of two entirely different modes of thought, which in the West ultimately gave rise to the Renaissance, might serve a model for the encounter between Buddhism and psychoanalysis. Here is how MacIntryre characterizes the typical phases of such interactions:

"When two rival large-scale intellectual traditions confront one another…there is no neutral way of characterizing either the subject matter of which they give rival accounts or the standards by which their claims are to be evaluated…Each standpoint has its own account of truth and knowledge…How then can genuine controversy proceed? It characteristically does so in two stages.

The first is that in which each characterizes…its rival in its own terms, making explicit the grounds for rejecting what is incompatible with its own central theses, although sometimes allowing…its rival has something to teach it on marginal and subordinate questions. A second stage is reached if and when the protagonists of each tradition..found it difficult to develop..beyond a certain point, or in some areas produced insoluble antinomies, ask whether the alternative and rival tradition may not be able to provide resources to explain the failings and defects of their own tradition more adequately they [themselves] have been able to do." (MacIntyre 1988 p166-167)

Buddhism in America faced the kind of impasse that MacIntyre describes when the problem of teacher sexual misconduct became too widespread to ignore. How could supposedly enlightened masters behave in such seemingly unethical, self-centered ways? The biography of Zen Teacher Denis Jun Po Kelly (Martin-Smith 2012) describes an encounter he had with the Dalai Lama in which he and other teachers raised this issue of teacher misconduct. The Dali Lama maintained that any teacher who engaged in that sort of behavior simply hadn't had a deep enough realization. "When the insight of your true nature is deep enough," he explained, "it transforms all parts of us, so that Basic Goodness and compassion naturally arise. This

prevents the kind of deluded behavior we see" in such cases. "Bullshit," said Kelly, citing one offending teacher's decades of training, including ten years with the Dalai Lama himself. How could anyone maintain the teacher hadn't had deep enough insight? "That is because your insight isn't deep enough," replied the Dalai Lama. (p276)

I'm inclined to say they both had a point. The Dalai Lama's statement is, on one level obviously true; anyone acting from self-centered motives in sexually exploiting his students has not had a deep enough realization into the interconnectedness of all beings. But the diagnosis is a tautology; by definition that behavior can't co-exist with complete realization. The problem is, as Kelly pointed out, there is no reliable correlation between what looks like years of practice and attainment by every other available criteria (eg completion of koan study, authorization to teach etc) and the transformation of character that would guarantee such misconduct would not occur. If a teacher with decades of practice and teaching experience, who has had what are, by all accounts – including his own teacher's – genuine experiences of enlightenment, has not had a "deep enough" realization for his students to feel safe, what does it say about the efficacy of the method of training or the nature of enlightenment experience? It also begs the question as to whether ethical behavior shouldn't be reliably grounded in something more generally available than complete enlightenment.

Buddhism lacked a psychological theory that enabled it to deal with transference, dissociation and the bypassing of split off aspects of the self that remained untouched by otherwise seemingly deep spiritual insights. The recognition of this lacuna in Buddhist thinking was a major impetus to Buddhist teachers becoming increasing open to Western psychological theories and the integration of meditation and different kinds of therapy

practice. (It's not as if psychoanalysis has been untouched by misconduct; however it was never short of explanations and unhampered by an ideal of perfect enlightenment).

Is there an equivalent lacuna in current psychoanalytic thinking that Zen can address? Certainly the field is not facing the sort of crisis brought on teacher misconduct among the Buddhists. As analysts, however we are facing a quieter, slower building crisis in which the relevance of our field is being questioned from many quarters. In a world of neuroscience and genetics, psychoanalytic explanations no longer appear as foundational as they once did. In a world of mindfulness, yoga, health conscious exercise, diet and ecological awareness, psychoanalysis no longer appears as relevant to the definition and pursuit of a good and healthy life. Political and social liberation no longer seem as tied to personal liberation as they did for the generation of analysts who grew up reading R.D. Laing and Norman O. Brown. Buddhism, not psychoanalysis, appears to many in a new generation to offer the deeper, more all-encompassing practice for achieving a meaningful, fulfilling and compassionate life.

Practice

At the most basic level, both psychoanalysis and meditation are disciplines that teach us to sit still. This is the case more literally in Zen meditation, where one of the basic instructions is to literally sit physically still, not to scratch an itch or move an aching leg. But it is true for both at a deeper metaphorical level as well, at which we are asked to stay still and experience thoughts and feelings we would normally move away from, by avoidance, denial or dissociation. In Zen meditation, the capacity to sit still in the midst of physical pain or restlessness becomes a bodily correlate for

the capacity to sit still in the midst of emotional pain and profound existential doubt. The upright, still body of the meditator at the most basic, physical level, is the prototype for a stable psychic container of self-regulation.

In analysis, we allow ourselves to be drawn both deeper into an inner world of fantasy and unconscious desire and relationally into a intersubjective matrix of attachment, longing and complex, often conflicting expectations. The capacity to stay still, to hold in our minds and in our bodies, an often frightening or confusing array of thoughts and feelings, is developed in the course of both practices, though it usually appears that self-regulation is foregrounded in meditation, while mutual regulation is the hallmark of relational analysis. It is nonetheless the case, that meditation is rarely a truly solitary practice and the relational context that includes the teacher, the fellow members of the sangha, and indeed the whole history and tradition of Buddhism serve as a mutually regulating matrix.

The experience of sitting still with our thoughts and feelings also teaches us in Philip Bromberg's (2001) words, to "stand in the spaces;" to contain our disparate self states, and to hold a observer's perspective on how we switch from one self state to another under different relational circumstances. When we sit in meditation, we not only sit still with a particular feeling, we must sit, from one period to the next, with an ever-changing flow of experience. In Zen, we see this as developing a tolerance for the impermanence, or fluidity, of any given self state; we watch how one flows into another or how sometimes we abruptly find ourselves occupying a whole "other" self from the one we think of ourselves as always being. From a psychoanalytic perspective, we can see this developing a capacity for awareness of otherwise dissociated self states.

There are many parallels between psychoanalysis and meditation in the ways this capacity is developed, though psychoanalysis offers a detailed developmental model for understanding the failure of that development, in ways that Buddhism typically does not concern itself. However, like analysis, meditation practice is built around a long-term relationship with a figure who serves regulating selfobject functions as well as becoming the object of transferential longing and expectation. Like analysis, meditation practice creates an ongoing, reliable setting for eliciting and working through fantasies and intense affects. Like analysis, meditation practice creates a relational setting in to stay with, tolerate and explore thoughts and feelings normally felt to be too painful or frightening to endure. Like analysis, meditation creates a relational frame for experiencing hitherto split-off or dissociated self states felt to be "not-me." All of these aspects of meditation practice may be called "structure building," where "structure" refers to the psychic capacities for affect regulation and for increasing holding in mind previously discordant self states.

In accord with a number of psychoanalytic thinkers occupied with development (BCPSG (2010), Schore (1994)), Daniel Siegel (1999) has outlined a framework for understanding emotional self-regulation that integrates neurological, physiological, and relational dimensions of experience. Emotional reactions are triggered according to our different thresholds of arousal, our differing appraisals of the nature of the stimuli, our relative sensitivity to that type of stimuli and lead to different responses varying in both intensity and specificity of response. The sum of these factors determine the "window of tolerance in which various degrees of emotional arousal can be processed without disrupting the functioning of the system." (p253) While Siegel emphasizes that our emotional processing and

reactivity normally occur outside of consciousness, it is also the case that the relational context and consciousness processing can effect the course of an emotional reaction, changing the intensity and duration of the feeling as well as of any reactive behaviors, by changing the meaning of what has occurred.

This very same function is being described by Zen teacher Charlotte Joko Beck (1989) when she says, "What grows is the amount of life I can hold without it upsetting me, dominating me." (p51) Traditional Zen practice made physical endurance the vehicle for developing an ever wider "window of tolerance." Joko Beck was unique in emphasizing that, not only must a meditator be able to sit with – that is continue to non-reactively function (what we call self-regulate) - through a good deal of physical pain, sleeplessness, and other intense physical triggers – she must be able to hold within what she called "a bigger container" all the emotional triggers and responses of anxiety, anger, vulnerability, longing , shame etc. that are stirred up by the transference relationship and practice setting. (p50).

When we think of how meditation most closely intersects with psychological practice, it is in merging these two dimensions, the physical and the emotional. Meditation teaches us to literally sit with and through all of these states and thereby build up our capacity to tolerate, regulate and organize our affective experience. It is perhaps a caricature of meditation that as we sit we become calm, peaceful or even blissful. Though those states may occur, and may be what beginning students have in mind when they say they had a "good' period of meditation, the real work of meditation takes place when we stay with all the disruptive thoughts and feelings, that we probably came to meditation to get rid of in the first place. Within the Zen tradition, this kind of goalless attention, an overall receptivity to experience regardless of its content, and a willingness to acknowledge and

deconstruct the curative fantasies surrounding the notion of ‘enlightenment” that may have brought us to practice, are summed up in the phrase “no gain.” It is vividly illustrated in the story of an encounter of an anxious young monk who asked his powerful charismatic teacher, Kodo Sawaki Roshi, if it would ever be possible for him, if he dedicated his life to Zen meditation, to become as clear and confident as his teacher. “No!” the teacher shouted. “ I am not like this because of my practice of zazen. I was like this before I began to practice. Zazen doesn’t change a person. Zazen is USELESS!” (Uchiyama 2000; p123)

Compare this uselessness to Stephen Mitchell’s (2003) description of analytic “irresponsibility”:

"It is the analysand's job in some very important ways, to be irresponsible. That is we ask analysands to surrender to their experience, to show up and discover what they find themselves feeling and thinking. We ask analysands to renounce all other conscious intents. As we all know this is not easy to do…Analysands start out trying to accomplish all sorts of other goals: getting "better" quickly, avoiding trouble, taking care of the analyst, and so on. So, we work with them articulately their conscious intentions, and discovering what would make it safe enough not to pursue them. We are trying to create a context in which the absence of conscious intentions will allow feelings to emerge...." (p133)

We are describing a way of being in the world in which nothing is merely a means to an end, nothing is merely a step on the path to somewhere else. Everything we encounter, every moment is fully and completely itself. While with free association, psychoanalysis could offer a taste of this experience, it is the predominant flavor of Zen.

Going Beyond Dualism

At a more metaphysical level, Zen Buddhism has focused on the resolution of dualistic thinking, the reduction of our experience to black-or-white, either –or alternatives. These dualisms can range from clinging vs aversion, contrasting immaterial mind with the physical body, of the Absolute with the relative or even the very state of enlightenment itself with delusion.

This delineation of the dangers of dualism and finding a way beyond reductive either –ors finds a parallel in Benjamin's (1988, 2004) idea of complementarity, in which each partner in the intersubjective relation embodies one side of the duality, such as doer and done-to, powerful and powerless, have and have not. Zen practice deliberately brings these complementarities to the surface with their attendant painful feelings of an underlying sense of lack, inner emptiness or inadequacy in the presence of a teacher or master with whom the student feels, "He has it and I don't."

But what does the master have that I do not? When one of my own students asked me how was my mind different than his, I replied, "You believe there is a difference." The teacher, of course, may become equally locked into a split complementarily if he projects onto the student all his own disowned vulnerability and emotional needs. This is where Zen could learn from a relational analytic perspective. Paraphrasing Stephen Mitchell (1997), we can say that only when the teacher or the analyst becomes aware of being part of the problem can she also become part of the solution. Relational analysis has allowed us to accept that participating in the intersubjective reality of the other will inevitably entail enacting the very complementarities that the analyst and patient (or student and teacher) have

been attempting to explore and disentangle. It is through the very struggle with enactment, or live re-creation of the patient's trauma, that dissociation can be lifted.

The mutual entanglement and re-enactment of analysis finds its parallel in the Zen use of koans .At one level, Zen uses koans, (literally "public cases") that recount the dialogues between old masters and students the way psychoanalysis uses its own clinical case studies to convey from one generation to the next the essence of its teaching. Typically they pose a question that appears to take the form of a riddle. But the actual work with koans that goes in private between teacher and student entails a personal re-immersion and re-enactment of the core dilemma presented by the case. The student must in some very real and emotional sense become what is being talked about, must in their own being discover both the essential dualism that gives rise to their suffering, and in the very moment of presenting the dilemma to the teacher burst forth with a non-dualistic "answer" to the question it poses.

Here is an old Zen case study, one traditionally considered the most difficult and essential for a student to pass, that demands that we enter into the heart of a painfully ingrained duality, a duality between who we aspire to be and who we are afraid we really are.

" A monk asked Chao-chou, "Does a dog have the Buddha-nature or not?" Chao-chou answered, "Mu." (Aitken 1991).

Although, "Mu" means "no" in Chinese, the word is usually left untranslated. A student, then as now, will be asked by the teacher, "What is Mu?" The first problem is why does Chao-chou answer "Mu," when every

novice Buddhist knows that the answer should be “yes,” that every sentient being has Buddha nature?

How does one practice with Mu? Here is what the old Chinese Zen master Wu-men (1183-1260), who included the story in the first compilation of koans, has to say:

“So then, make your whole body a mass of doubt, and with your thr\ee hundred and sixty bones and joints and its eighty-four thousand hair follicles concentrate on this one word ‘Mu.’ Day and night, keep digging into it. . Don’t consider it to be nothingness. Don’t think in terms of 'has' or 'has not.' It is like swallowing a red-hot iron ball .You try to vomit it out, but you can’t.” (p8-9)

The paradox of Chao-chou’s answer arises out of a conflict between what the monk knows intellectually to be the right answer and his own deeply ingrained feeling that there is an unbridgeable gap between the rarified, spiritual world of “Buddha nature,” which seems to exist millions of miles away from the real world of dogs and miserable, ordinary monks like himself. The gap, seemingly so real, is nonetheless a creation of his own thoughts, his own preoccupation with “have and have not.” Wu-men offers us the technique of concentrating on this one word, “Mu,” as a way of breaking down these barriers. By becoming completely absorbed in Mu, the student, then as now, will first bump up against his own split off feelings of unworthiness, and filling his whole consciousness with Mu, his whole world with Mu, all the barriers, along with everything else, will disappear into this one word. Mu is not a mantra we repeat in order to become calm or peaceful; instead it becomes a focal point of inner pain and tension, which eventually will break wide open into an experience of total acceptance.

Today, we are more prepared to see the complex emotional dynamics of our barriers. As psychoanalysts, we might see as them as primitive representations of the good and bad me. Wu-men's "red hot iron ball" that we can neither swallow or spit up is a picture of how it feels to come to grip with that painful sense of inner conflict, shameful badness or a fundamental basic fault (Balint 1968). While we sit in meditation, we practice by focusing on our own inner barriers, one by one, especially the emotional barriers of fear, pain, emptiness and anger that manifest as hard knots of bodily tension. These are truly red-hot iron balls. These are feelings we've tried to stay separate from, and to keep them at bay we have erected dissociative barriers between ourselves and life. Moment after moment in the practice of zazen, these barriers appear to us in the form of "This isn't it." This moment is not what I want, not what I'm trying to achieve or become, not what I can even tolerate. The gap between dog and Buddha feels unbridgeable. The teacher has the answer and you do not.

The modern Zen teacher who asks, "What is Mu?" is creating a relational space into which flow all the transferential enactments and dissociated self states associated with that gap. The teacher is simultaneously a stabilizing selfobject who enables you to stay with and endure physical and emotional pain; she must also carry the repetitive transferential dimension of the critical, withholding or punitive parent. Latent states of inadequacy, impotence, or hopelessness will emerge. Idealizations of the teacher may alternate with frustration and even rage at their refusal to "help" you through the barrier of Mu.

The fundamental dualism we face on the cushion with Mu is not some metaphysical abstraction, it is the dualism of a person divided against herself in the form of self-hate and dissociation. "Great doubt" is Wu-men's name

for the process of engaging and working through our inner divides. Mu – and our failure to "answer" it – progressively elicits and deconstructs our habitual organizing principles. Paradoxically, it is in the midst of doubt and not knowing that our habitual ways of thinking and feeling lose their grip. We can truly become Mu only when we have finally ceased to try to understand it, when we totally surrender ourselves to it in "not knowing." In such a moment, all distinctions between dogs and Buddhas and ordinary people disappear. Everywhere you look, inside or outside, we are able to say "This is me." This experience is the literal embodiment a level of radical self-acceptance and acceptance of life as it is that is rarely encountered in psychoanalytic work.

"Mu" is typically just the first many hundreds of cases a student will confront in traditional Zen training. Although the "answers' to Zen koans are not supposed to be discussed outside the confines of formal training, some require the student to mime, rather than speak, the answer. One is asked to literally embody and enact what is at issue. Sometimes there is an amusing intersection of the abstractly metaphysical with the psychological. Picture a young Japanese male monk being asked as a koan, "Is that girl over there the younger or older sister?" At one level, the koan asks a deep question about separation, about difference and about self and other. But in order to demonstrate one's understanding, the young man must get up and mime being a young girl – something that requires allowing all sorts of disowned feminine and vulnerable aspects of self to be engaged by a man in a traditionally macho cultural environment.

Accessing Pre-verbal Experience

Beyond the discipline of sitting still in the midst of the ordinary flux of cognitive, emotional and physical experience, Zen has also traditionally sought to move the meditator into a deeper state it has called "beyond words and concepts," which, as psychoanalysts, we might see as prior to or underlying conceptualization. That is, Zen functions to bring us into contact with the sort of pre-verbal experience (which Wu-men characterized as "Great Doubt,") that analysis associates with deeply regressive, traumatized transference states. Being able to immerse one's self into what is literally unspeakable is the necessary precursor of full realization. Among the major hallmarks of trauma are the subjective sense that it is an intrinsically private, unshareable, literally unspeakable experience that has separated a person off from the rest of normal life. Furthermore, the person feels left in a state defined by what has been done to them; rather than being defined by their own agency, they are the *object* of trauma. Enactments within the analytic container allow the re-experiencing of the trauma to occur in a relational context where the unspeakable becomes speakable. Koans can likewise give voice to aspects of our self that have lost their voice, and the fully embodied response the teacher demands that we give to the koan restores the possibility of agency, impact, acknowledgement and repair instead of mute passivity, in a way that parallels the analytic Third's restoration of a meaningful and lawful relational world (Benjamin 2004).

Like the background radiation that pervades every direction that scientists claim is residue of the Big Bang, so too we might say that our subjective experience of the *affective tone* of the world is the remnant of our pre-verbal infantile experience. By affective tone, I mean how we might instinctively react to silence – is it frightening and empty, or serene and calming? Do we experience the open spaces of nature as a lonely

unpopulated expanses or are they enveloping and deeply enriching landscapes? Do we find crowded city streets lively and stimulating or overwhelming, cacophonous and looming? Do we approach each day with a sense of possibility, crowded with options, or as an empty expanse of time to be filled and gotten through?

I will leave it to others to explicate the correlations between any of these alternative experiences and the quality or absence of particular early mother -baby interactions. But there is something about such reports, sometimes deeply embedded in a person's unspoken intuitive sense of "that's just how the world is" that provides the color, tone or, if you will, background theme music to a person's life. Whether they stem from some basic physiological temperamental pre-disposition or reflect the emotional residue of early attachment patterns, as clinicians we try to be aware of this implicit background of experience. Staying attuned to this underlying background affective tone is one way that contemporary Zen brings into the scope of spiritual practice the residue of the early childhood experiences that has hitherto been the provenance of psychoanalysis. It is in the sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatic transformation of this underlying affective tone that we can see the deepest effects of meditation practice. The neurologist and Zen practitioner James Austin (1999) has ventured to specify specific changes in brain activity that he claims can be correlated with enlightenment experiences. These experiences can be sudden, dramatic, sometimes even ecstatic transformative moments. They may also may manifest slowly and subtly, almost outside of our conscious awareness. One metaphor traditionally given for the latter type is of taking a long walk on a misty foggy day. When we set out we may hardly notice any dampness in the air at all; but when we arrive home hours later, we find that our clothes have been

soaked through and through.

I have suggested that enlightenment experiences can be thought of as the mirror image of a traumatic event; that is, a single moment's experience can create a long lasting re-setting of our most basic systems' arousal and reactivity. In the case of trauma, the post-traumatic syndrome of hyper-arousal, flashbacks, panic and anger, becomes a new baseline of response to all subsequent stimuli. In the case of enlightenment experiences, the inverse can occur: a dramatic decrease in the tendency to frustration, perceived threat or narcissistic injury, a capacious sense of acceptance rather than hyper-vigilance and defensiveness, and a spontaneous increase in empathic responsiveness and compassion. Such experiences are not necessarily accompanied by anything that psychoanalysis is used to calling insight. Zen "insights" are not conceptual (in the sense of narratively re-framing, organizing or giving meaning to experience) and really have no cognitive "content" at all --- rather they in some sense "re-set" our most basic relation to the world at an implicit physiological level. Here is a description of such a moment by Australian potter Milton Moon (2006), who had been meditating on the word "One," (used like Mu) under the direction of a Japanese Zen teacher:

"At a time of great tension and for no particular reason, a sequence of words came into my head. I recall they began with the word "when." … Suddenly the first word became the last. WHEN? It was delivered at projectile speed. Loudly! WHEN was answered with the word NOW. Not a quiet whispered Now but a shouted NOW! NOW! A revelatory NOW!"

Moon describes the result of this moment as " a total change in the way everything was perceived. The world was the same world but it was different....Everything looked different, magically soft and luminous, an

experience beyond words….a feeling of wonderment." (p151-152).

Attachment & Detachment

The study of mother-infant attunement and the vicissitudes of attachment, with its ongoing cycles of disruption and repair, is playing an ever more central and paradigmatic role in the development of relational psychoanalysis. As psychoanalysts we are increasingly focusing on tracking the permutations of attachment and its disruptions within the transference relationship. "Attachment," in the context of infant research and as the paradigm of the secure container of the analytic relationship, has an unquestionably vital role in the development and maintenance of our relational world. However, as our patients, or we ourselves, increasingly come in contact with Eastern spiritual practices, we find that "attachment" in those contexts is a word with very different connotations. In the language of Buddhist practice, "detachment" (which means non-clinging in the face of change or loss, including the loss of personal relationships) rather than "attachment" seems to be prized and we may initially (and actually for quite a long time) be unclear to the extent to which these words mean something the same or different in the two contexts. Is a truly different set of values being proposed and a truly different paradigm of human flourishing being described? – or are the words attachment and detachment being used in such radically different ways within the two systems, that the contradiction is more apparent than real? I would suggest that this is a case where the perspective of each practice illuminates areas potentially neglected by the other.

This is revealed when working clinically with meditators we see that spiritual practices, even when they embody a genuinely different set of values and ideals, may nonetheless be unconsciously enlisted in the service of defensive or dissociative processes – in other words, the legitimately spiritual experience of detachment may be, so to speak, highjacked by a person's unconscious avoidance of emotional conflict. Then, a resolution of conflicts arising in early traumatic failures of attachment (in our usual psychoanalytic sense) may be pursued through a spiritual practice of "detachment," a resolution that, in effect, attempts to bypass the old trauma by denying the centrality of emotional attachment in the spiritual life. Some variety of universal love, God's love or "it was meant to be" may all be put forward as "detached" alternatives to the vulnerabilities associated with the vicissitudes of personal love and emotional attachment. Yet, genuine compassion, far from being an expression of "detachment" or "selflessness" may require a grounding in secure attachment, lest it inadvertently become a mode of avoidance rather than true connection with the other. Obviously, we will do our patients a disservice if we avoid exploring the unconscious dynamics latent in their spiritual practices out of an overly scrupulous respect for religious difference.

Perhaps one of the most surprising ways in which spiritual traditions differ from psychoanalytic narratives is how they talk about the effects of early losses on subsequent development. Psychoanalytic narratives invariably focus on these events in terms of loss, rupture, trauma and early damage. But when Buddhists tell the story of the Zen master Dogen, who as a young child, sat by his mother's body, watching the smoke of the funeral incense dissolve into the air, the language is quite different. Rather than suggesting that the future master has been damaged by this early loss, they

imply that it has given him an unusual and intense glimpse into the reality of impermanence and that early losses are part of what fuels a spiritual quest latter in life. The lives of Buddhist masters, including the Buddha himself, very often seem to include the early death of a mother or of being orphaned as a child. In the spiritual narrative, loss brings with it a sense of urgency and an unblinking need to come to terms with the reality of life and death. If the psychoanalytic model serves to illuminate the untold trauma within these stories, perhaps it does so at the risk of neglecting the way that trauma may be a necessary element in opening us to the reality of suffering and the role of spirituality in coming to terms with suffering and impermanence.

Compassion

Although koans like Mu engage our metaphysical doubts in the guise of riddles, the core of Buddhist thought and practice is the inseparability of the philosophical from the ethical. We do not strive to dissolve the boundaries between self and other or self and the world in order to bask in our own private glow of beatific Oneness. Just as from the perspective of relational analysis, our well-being can never be ours alone and the end of our personal suffering can only be achieved in tandem with resolving our conflicts with others. To be ethically meaningful as well as therapeutic, both Buddhism and psychoanalysis must extend their reach beyond the confines of the analytic couch and the meditation cushion. Buddhists ideas of compassion, interconnection and interdependency are increasingly part of our, and our patients, moral Third; that is, they contribute to our overarching sense of life's meaning and values in the face of suffering and injustice. The Buddhist ideal of compassion is the Bodhisattva, a being who is so devoted to the

salvation of all beings that she vows not to enter Nirvana herself until all other beings have already done so. How are we to understand this ideal of selflessness?

An ideal of compassion can go awry when the spiritual practicioner's own legitimate emotional and physical needs are disavowed in the name of service, charity or an ethical obligation to others. The corollary of an unhealthy *submission* to others may be an unhealthy *devotion* to others – a parody of compassion I have called vowing to save all beings *minus one.* They may enlist their ideals in the service of a curative fantasy of eliminating their own neediness and vulnerability or in the unconscious wish to repair a damaged caregiver. Unable to face need in themselves, they project it out into the world, attributing it to all those others who are in need of their love, service and compassion, all the while denying that we ourselves might be in exactly the same condition. Love and care-giving become one-directional. They forego expecting anything in return (that would be self-centered!) and end up of seeing the world as bottomless pit of need, an image that more honestly applies to our own neglected and repudiated inner state. Is it any wonder that such compassionate care-givers (whether Buddhists or therapists) so often end up depressed and burnt out?

The Bodhisattva's Vow composed by the Japanese master Torei Enji (1721-1792) provides an alternative view of compassion based on the realization of interconnection, one reflected in the root of the word "compassion" as suffering together. Here is a crucial portion of that verse which includes a vivid exhortation to move "beyond doer and done to":

If by any chance they should turn against us,
become a sworn enemy and abuse and persecute us,

we should sincerely bow down with humble language,
in the reverent understanding that they are the merciful messengers
of the awakened one, who use devices to emancipate us
from blind tendencies, produced and accumulated upon ourselves,
by our own egoistic delusion and attachment,
through countless cycles of space and time.

It is perhaps necessary to unpack some of the language and imagery of this old text, to see through to it's underlying theme, which is the dissolving of the dualistic opposition of self and other. For it is precisely in situations of "abuse and persecution" that we are most reflexively inclined to devolve into complementarity, to see the world in the black and white opposition of self and Other. In the imagery of the Bodhisattva's Vow, the Awakened One, the Buddha, is trying to awaken all beings to the reality of non-separation, of our intrinsic inter-connectedness. He sees that we are sometimes capable of beginning to understand this truth under benign, non-threatening circumstances. We may feel harmony and oneness within our own community or in relation to nature. But this nascent understanding has its boundaries, and these are typically marked out by and reinforced in the face of suffering. Something is required to push us past our inertial limits, and so the old master suggests Buddha "uses devices" to further awaken us. Although this language was perhaps taken literally at the level of religious folklore, in the same way in the Judeo-Christian tradition one might speak of God's plan extending down into the particulars of our everyday life, there is a deeper, non-theistic, non-literal sense to these words as well. At the purely psychological level, we are told that we can use the experience of being mis-

treated to remind ourselves of the artificial boundaries we set up in the creation of an Other. Suffering may be the precipitant, but also the reminder to attend to out reflexive tendency to split off as not-me that aspect of our common humanity which is now fragmenting into doer and done to.

If ethics may be said to consist, in very large part, learning to behave well when we are treated badly, both Buddhism and relational psychoanalysis offer perspectives on how to move beyond doer and done to, beyond the endless the perpetuation of the cycle of injury, retaliation and re-injury that characterizes so many of conflicts at both the personal and international level. *Breaking out of reactive cycles and restoring a vision of our common humanity may be a better way of understanding compassion than a picture of endless one-directional giving.*

A Lifetime of Practice

Zen, like any religious practice, or like yoga and many forms of healthful exercise, is a lifelong practice. Disciplines of self awareness and self regulation, to be effective, need to be practiced religiously. And to practice something religiously, it naturally helps to ground it within a religion. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is still looking for ways to understand and justify some equivalent version of lifelong self-inquiry. Arising within the context of a medical model, therapy has traditionally been conceived of as part of a time limited sequence of illness, treatment and termination. While we may speak of chronic illnesses that require a lifetime of treatment or maintenance therapy, within the mental health community, an unending psychotherapy is usually spoken of in a way that is either

perjorative (ie the analyst fostering dependency for his own narcissistic needs) or pathologizing (eg the patient being so regressed or dysfunctional as to not be able to stand on their own two feet). Within psychoanalysis, the metaphors of growth, development and separation hold sway in way that dovetails with the medical model's goal of cure and termination. The baby starts out totally dependent on the mother, but her care leads to the child's increasing capacity for independence and ultimate separation. What alternative metaphors are possible?

Perhaps, within the developmental model, we can shift away from the picture of the infant separating and individuating or the adolescent becoming an adult and leaving home and consider the relationship of adult children to their parents which is lifelong. Are there other metaphors like this that would respect rather than pathologize lifelong attachment and an open-ended analytic relationship? We don't speak of a need to mature and separate from our Zen teacher or rabbi, though maybe here, psychoanalysis can help us sort out pathological dependency from devotion. Can bringing together these two disciplines help us re-think whether they have to have the trajectory we have always assumed?

For many of us, as clinicians, as teachers, as patients, and as practitioners, the boundaries between disciplines of self-care, the therapeutic, and the spiritual are both ambiguous and porous. In classical Western culture, the role of the philosopher, paradigmatically exemplified by Socrates, was to lead his interlocutors into a dialogue about the nature of the good life. In the generations following Socrates, schools of Stoics, Skeptics and Epicurians, each in their own way, evolved what Martha Nussbaum (1994) called "therapies of desire," a term that would seem to fit aspects of

Buddhism as well as psychoanalysis. But the public role of the philosopher himself has dropped out of the picture, and his function has bifurcated into two separate paths, the therapeutic and the spiritual. Yet much of what now goes on within the ostensibly therapeutic disciplines of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy involves confronting existential issues of identity, meaning and mortality, as analysts such as Hoffman (2001) and Eigen (1998) remind us. Within Zen and other so-called spiritual practices, teachers are confronted with students hoping for relief from anxiety, depression, and addictive behaviors.

The integration of these two paths is thus not so much as matter of integrating techniques from different disciplines, as it is a matter of acknowledging how goals and functions that we are used to thinking about separately are becoming increasingly mixed together, in ways that raises the expectations placed on each, often resulting in confusion and disappointment. I am not convinced that this confusion can be resolved by a restoration of clearer boundaries between the disciplines. Rather we must acknowledge that the traditional boundaries of each practice are under pressure and are adapting to the needs of their practitioners in ways that may require us to re-think our own limits.

The Case of Ken

Ken was a 50 year old HIV positive gay man who sought me out because of his interest in combining meditation with therapy. His case provides a vantage point from which to examine the relationship of spiritual to clinical practice and of the pursuit of a version of spiritual detachment as a way of coping with a history of insecure personal attachment.

As psychoanalysts, we may be called upon to help our patients untangle the experiences that arise in the context of their spiritual practice, which may give rise to their own set of transferential issues and entanglements. These practices may engage our patients in ways that collude with their curative fantasies and dissociative processes in the name of spirituality. The unacknowledged and often unconscious use of meditation in the service of defensive strategies I (2008) have called a "secret practice." For example, a seemingly compassionate preoccupation with service to others may mask an underlying avoidance of one's own needs and vulnerabilities.

Ken had been sitting within another Zen group for some years before coming to see me but felt he never developed a personal relationship with the woman teacher there. He had been in and out of therapy of one kind or another for most of his adult life. He was a chronically depressed and lonely man who had for years pursued a compulsively promiscuous sexual life that centered on his seeking out partners on whom he would perform fellatio. His primary satisfaction came, not from his own orgasm, since the sex act was often one way only, but from the gratification of being important to another man, if only for a few minutes. His sense of self worth was dependent on being able to hold the other man's interest, arouse and gratify him. Because of his age and being HIV positive he felt that he was "damaged goods" within the gay community and constantly needed reassurance of his worth and desirability. Incidents of rejection, provoking profound narcissistic injury, repeatedly led to suicidal fantasies.

He called suicide his "blankie' – a word that carried the double meaning of the soothing comfort of a baby blanket and the ending of emotional pain through oblivion. When he felt overwhelmed by self hate and depression,

holding the thought of his blankie was actually stabilizing at a symbolic level – he held onto to the thought that all pain could have an end, oblivion was possible and he didn't have to endure any more hurt than he could stand. In part we were able to track the progress of his work both in therapy and in meditation in his relation to his "blankie" as his fall-back option of self-regulation and release. Like a literal blanket kept by a toddler as a transitional object, Ken's blankie was never taken or interpreted away. Rather, he gradually began to use both meditation and our relationship as an alternate sources of self regulation. Using meditation was, for a long time, like the blankie. It felt under his control, and did not involve reliance on another person, which from the perspective of those disrupted selfstates, was always the source of the problem, never the potential solution.

We gradually established a connection between this form of desire and gratification and his relationship with his father. Ken grew up in a small Southern town where his father was a school teacher. His mother was an uneducated small town girl and his parents married when she became pregnant with his sister. However, shortly after the marriage it became evident that his father was engaging in compulsive homosexual behavior, picking up men in truck stops and public bathrooms. Ken was never sure whether the marriage represented his father's attempt to deny this side of himself or to provide a cover for it. His father also was molesting his students and was arrested after one such incident. He was given the choice of prison or entering a psychiatric hospital, where he stayed for over a year and received electro-shock therapy.

On his return from the hospital, Ken's sister told him his father was the most normal she ever saw him and the most connected to her and his mother. It was shortly after this return from the hospital that Ken was conceived.

This interlude of normality did not last long however, and his father gradually returned to his compulsive behavior. Because of his record, he was unable to find another teaching job and spent most of Ken's childhood at home and unemployed. Ken remembers him lying in bed, crying for hours on end, completely enveloped in his own sorrow, oblivious to his wife and children's presence. Ken's mother regularly had to take two or even three low paying jobs to support the family and was therefore unavailable to him as well. Ken recalls one incident when he was about ten or eleven when he became aware that his father was paying particular attention to him and realized that it was a sexual attention – that he was now at the age of the boys his father was attracted to. He says he felt the temptation to seduce his father, or allow himself to be seduced, as a way to finally get his father's attention, but abruptly turned away. His own sense of being a gay man was for many years contaminated by his sense growing up that what his father did, molesting children – was what it meant to be gay, though he himself has never engaged in that behavior and denies that it ever has even played any part of his fantasy life. Rather he has been preoccupied by the need to arouse and hold the attention of father substitutes.

When he began treatment with me, Ken was in the midst of a relationship with a man in his forties that had lasted for a number of years. However, he was extremely hesitant to put any trust in that relationship or his partner, always fearful that his partner would grow tired of him and leave him for a younger man.

Even after he had been seeing me for over a year, had experienced a dramatic improvement in his mood and had made a significant commitment to the zendo and the sangha, he would always speak about how "practice" was changing his life, and how important Zen was to him. He was extremely

reluctant to say anything about what I, as a person, an analyst or teacher meant to him. He wanted to rely on the impersonal "practice" and not feel too dependent on an actual human being or another man.

The shape of Ken's desire, we might say, enacted a parody of compassion. He routinely sacrificed his own satisfaction for the satisfaction of others. He was never exclusive in his desire but was happy to gratify anyone who sought gratification. But it was not so much the renunciation of his own desire in favor of gratifying others that characterized Ken's behavior. It was the renunciation of placing his desire and trust in a single unique individual – borne of his despair at ever holding his father's attention – in favor of making the objects of his desire as anonymous and multiple as possible. We might say he fled the particular in favor of the universal. I have often found this enacted in a variety of ways, not just in the realm of desire, in student meditators' pursuit of what they call the spiritual. Typically a disappointment in the particulars of everyday life leads them to aspire to a realm where they are not subject to such disappointment, where they can transcend dependency and contingency. As Ken grew more confident and trusting in his relationship with me, he allowed himself feel more and more committed to his partner as well. However, many small incidents of disappointment or what he took be signs of disinterest from either one of us repeatedly threatened to rupture the stability of our relationship and had to be meticulously examined and worked through to repair our bond and his sense of trust. Over the course of three years of treatment and meditation practice his interest in anonymous sex gradually diminished and he became more focused on his own satisfaction in the role of a "top" with his partner. Trusting his partner, he was more able to trust his own desire and act more

"selfishly," no longer abdicating his right to pleasure in the sexual service of others.

Buddhist practice initially gave Ken a mode of self –regulation but it was not until he entered analytic treatment that he was able to engage his avoidance of mutual regulation and begin to deconstruct the nature of his desire. Ken eventually was able to own his own desire, not as something selfish or self-centered as his Buddhist practice might have allowed him to continue thinking, but through a letting go of a defensive, masochistic self-effacement. Defending ourselves against the vulnerability associated with having desires may engender a far more rigid set of attachments than the original desire itself.

Attachment and detachment each come with their own attendant curative fantasies. On the one hand, attachment promises security and constancy; on the other detachment promises autonomy and freedom from vulnerability to change. We indeed need the secure base of attachment in our lives in order to flourish. We also need a capacity accommodate ourselves to the reality of change and loss. For Ken, experiences of early parental loss and insecure attachment led him to pursue a form of spiritual practice that promised a transcendence of that early pain. But he had to find a path back from a fantasy of transcendence and a solution of dissociation, detachment and self-denial, back down to earth and the realm of the personal, back to the realm of conflict and desire.

Conclusion

Buddhist thought and practice is being integrated into our lives and thought at many levels. Many psychoanalysts are themselves drawn to meditation practice as a mode of ongoing self-exploration, self-regulation and self-care. Furthermore, as clinicians, we are encountering more and

more patients who are engaged in spiritual practices, and for whom Buddhist ideas of interconnectedness and compassion form an important part of their moral Third in coping with the suffering and injustice of the world. Their spiritual practices are inevitably becoming entangled in transferential and dissociative processes that relational analysis is better equipped to address that traditional Buddhist psychology. Buddhist practice, in the meanwhile, is offering us access to powerful resources of affect regulation and depths of radical self-acceptance that psychoanalysis is only beginning to appreciate. The process of building conceptual and experiential bridges between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis, however, has lagged behind the connections already being forged between mindfulness based meditation techniques and cognitive behavioral therapy.

This paper has attempted to engage each practice on its own terms and find a common language in which to fruitfully encounter both the wisdom and the limitations of their different perspectives. Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis are each complex disciplines of awareness, personal encounter, and transformation. Their dialogue has just begun and we are only beginning to imagine what will emerge from the encounter.

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