

A STUDY OF THE EMERGING BUDDHIST COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

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Introduction

Buddhist Counseling Psychology (BCP), a field emerging within Buddhism, has generated excitement and confusions for the interested. What is BCP? What sort of comparison could be made between BCP and CP developed by western psychologists familiar with scientific methodology, where does BCP stand in reference to Buddhist Psychology, or Buddhism in general? Is it a supplement, a missing ingredient, or a gap-bridging element that could potentially merge the world of Buddhist religion with modern scientific psychology? This article sets out not to unriddle all the puzzles; it simply can't, but purports to lay the concepts of each subject on the table for the interested to see and compare themselves, and hopefully to arrive at a closer understanding of what BCP is by identifying clearly what it is and what it is not. In addition, a discussion is attempted at the end to survey the unique potential of Sri Lanka as the breeding ground for developing and shaping the subject of BCP, and a few challenges it must overcome to turn such potential to actuality.

Discussion

In answering question if BCP bears a kinship with western psychology, this paper first discusses the origin and historical development of western psychology, and its modern day definition as a scientific domain. In addition, the attributes of "science" are added to the

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discussion establishing a referential framework within which the science-or-not nature of BCP can be analyzed. Then the paper touches upon the western Counseling Psychology, including the description of the subject and objective it assumes in general, for further understanding of BCP through comparative study. When placed side by side, both subjects, BCP and CP, demonstrate commonalities at different levels; however, their differences are more distinguishable. The last discussion involves the limitation of BCP at present stage, and a few hurdles, in order to develop BCP in Sri Lanka, must be focused on.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the present development of BCP at its infancy stage, author suggests that it is still early to conclude what BCP is, how it will evolve or what it will evolve towards. However, it is reasonable to state that BCP bears little kinship to science of western psychology, for the very attribute underlying the definition of science of *unbiased observation* is dismissed by the Buddha; man perceives what's been filtered by his mind, hence all perceived reality is inherently *biased*. In comparative review of BCP and CP, a few commonalities they both share and distinctions that set them apart are discussed. Fundamentally, the goal of CP is to help correct the malfunctioning or set right the maladjustments towards a standard within consensus reality. Consensus reality denotes a norm, a subtle agreement consented and accepted by societal members regarding what and how a normally functioning mind and mental wellbeing is and should be. As society evolves, so shifts the measuring bar. BCP, however, works against a permanent and absolute background, the Ultimate Reality, which Buddha realized himself experientially. The direction is clear and unwavering, and success measurement fixed. In parallel with a goal of alleviating pain and suffering now and here, and bringing individual, group or a relationship back on track underlies yet another profound motive, which is to budge the individual one step closer to the very truth of his being, the ultimate nature of his existence, to see, beyond illusion, what is.

Sri Lanka prides in her ancient history and profound knowledge of the doctrine, and the large number of well-learned monastic members who are able and eager to apply the Buddhist counseling techniques for the benefits of their fellow community members. The challenge, however, remains in the absence of a well-structured and result-validated system that trains and develops qualified Buddhist counselors. A serious commitment to standardization of the facility where Buddhist counseling sessions take place, and the establishment of an authority to maintain reasonable standards of the practice are also to be required. Moreover, few researches have been conducted to evaluate the efficacy of Buddhist Counseling sessions, despite its regular widespread practice across the island, consequently preventing experiential understanding of which aspects of the practice are effectively working and which are not.

Keywords: Buddhist, counseling, psychology

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