

## The Role of the Buddha as a Psychological Counsellor

Ven. Kirama Wimalatissa

Whatever religion, nation or cast we belong to, the feelings, sensations or sufferings we feel may be not far different. Today, we are living in a world where people have to work very hard, both physically and mentally. Without hard work, there is no place for people in modern society. Keen competition is going on everywhere. One person is trying to beat another in every sphere of life with the result that man has no rest at all. Mind is the nucleus of life. When there is no real peace or rest in the mind, life collapses. People naturally try to overcome their miseries through pleasing sensations; they drink, gamble, sing dance and so forth; all the time having the illusion that they are enjoying the real happiness of life. Sense stimulation is not the true way to relax. The more we try to please the senses through the sensual pleasures; the more we become slaves to the senses themselves. There is no end to this craving for satisfaction. The real way to relax is to calm the senses by controlling the mind. If we control the mind, we will control everything else as well. When the mind is fully tranquil, it is free from all those mental disorders and disturbances. When the mind is free from them, it sees many things. Those who cannot make their mind tranquil also cannot see those things. Those who achieve mental tranquility, however, will be able to attain their salvation and happiness.

The goal of Buddhism is to attain everlasting happiness by removing all cankers of mind. The path was discovered by the Buddha through experimentation over a long period of time. Later, He motivated others to take that path, too. In the terms of modern psychology, we may compare the Buddha's mission to that of a 'counselor'. A counselor is a person who paves the way for the resolution of certain psychological problems by giving the right kind of advice. All of the qualities needed by a counsellor can clearly be seen in the Buddha's character as well. Many techniques used by the modern counselors were practiced by the Buddha about two thousand five hundred and fifty years ago. The Buddha had an inborn ability to comprehend the mental and emotional state of those who needed help. The counselling techniques used by famous psychologists and psychotherapists such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers and others are mostly similar to those used by the Buddha.

The Buddha gave due credit for mankind's achievements to human intelligence and effort rather than to supernatural beings. Buddhists do not regard man either as a sinner or as a rebel against god. Conversely, the human being is regarded as a person of great worth who has a vast store of good as well as bad within himself. The good in a person is always waiting for a suitable opportunity to flourish and ripen. The Buddha says that everyone is responsible for his own good and bad deeds, and that each individual can shape his own destiny. The Buddha emphasized the need to rely on one's own efforts. The whole responsibility for a person's present and future life rests completely with that person alone. Each must seek salvation for himself. The Buddha says "oneself, indeed, is one's own savior,

for what other savior could there be? With one's own self well controlled, the problem of looking for an external savior is resolved"<sup>1</sup>

### **Perspective of the Buddha's counselling**

The word counseling is derived from the Latin *counsilium* and means consultation or advice. The Oxford Dictionary gives a much more comprehensive definition, describing it as the giving of professional help and advice to someone to resolve personal, social or psychological problems.

The contributions made by modern psychologists to the development of psychotherapy are vast and it is now considered as a specialized discipline dealing with many facets of day-to-day life. It covers different areas such as the family, marriage, sex, education, employment, alcoholism, frustration, stress, depression and emotional problems. It also covers physical problems, such as aches and pains and their management. Significantly, modern psychotherapists tend to assume that all individuals have the capacity to make decisions and put them into practice effectively by themselves. Carl Rogers says that every individual has the ability to steer his life and also the right to hold his own view as to how he should manage his life.

The Buddha's approach to fulfilling all of the above requirements and descriptions of counseling can be verified conveniently in the life and entire teaching of the Buddha found in the *pāli* canonical scriptures, which are both psychological and psychoanalytical and aim at achieving what we could

describe in our modern terminology as psychotherapy through counseling. The Buddha commenced his mission of counseling with the historic address to five fellow ascetics and continued it until the last moment of his mortal existence. Certainly, the first discourse delivered by the Buddha can be considered as a successful attempt at rectifying the maladjusted mindset of five ascetics who had resorted to asceticism with the firm conviction of realizing the goal of liberation by means of self-mortification.

The main concern of the Buddha's mission was the emotional, psychological and physical suffering of sentient being and how to overcome them. A monk called *Mālunkya putta* wanted to know the answers to metaphysical questions from the Buddha. The Buddha explained to him what he had declared.

*"This is suffering, this is the origin of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, and this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering, why I have declared that? Because it is beneficial to the holy life; it leads to the disenchantment to dispassion, to cessation to peace, to direct knowledge, and to the Enlightenment of Nibbāna. That is why I have declared it"*.<sup>2</sup>

The objective of the evaluation of body, mind, feeling, mind objects including emotions has been introduced as a technique of the mental culture of Buddhism. At the beginning of the discourse on the four bases of mindfulness, it is stated that this is the sure path. It is for the:

1. Purification of beings (*Sattānam Visuddhiya*)
2. Overcoming of sorrow
3. Overcoming of lamentation (*soka pariddhavānam samatikkamāya*)
4. Eradication of physical suffering
5. Eradication of mental suffering (*dukkhadomanassānam atthangamāya*)
6. Reaching the right realization (*ñāyassa adhigamāya*)
7. Attainment of Nibbāna (*nibbhānassa saccikiriyāya*)

Of the seven benefits outlined here, few are related to our daily life. In Buddhism, both psychotherapy and counseling encourage the person to observe the objects of the mind objectively and evaluate them.<sup>3</sup>

The Buddha described all worldlings as mad (*ummattaka viyahi sabbe putujjanā dissanti*). Many, though physically well were mentally ill. The Buddha recognized those blemishes in the human mind quite clearly, diagnosed their cause quite effectively and administered fitting therapies. That explains why He told the Brahmin called *Sela*.

*“O Brahmin, I am the supremely enlightened one and I am the greatest surgeon” (Soham brahmana sambuddho sallakkatto anuttaro)*

The Buddha’s surgery is to pull out the stakes and spikes that are there in the minds of individuals. On another occasion, He addressed the Bhikkus in this way;

“O monks! There are no medicines as effective as the medicine of *Dhamma*. Please drink that”

“O monks! Doctors administer laxatives to cure illness that have arisen due to the bile, due to the phlegm, and due to wind. O monks! I too administer noble medicine. Due to that medicine, beings that are given to being born; become free of birth. Beings who are given to decay and old age become free of decay and old age. They become free of death. Those beings that prone to sorrowing, weeping, wailing, privation and unhappiness become free of these”<sup>4</sup>

There is a very positive aspect of Buddhist counseling. Buddhist counseling is not merely for treating sick people. It is counseling to make healthy people healthier. The Buddha used such terms as *Nibbāna* to harmonize mental health as an entirety. The Buddhist mental culture is concerned not only with the negative aspect, with eliminating unwholesome states of mind, but also with cultivating the wholesome state of mind that enhances human wellbeing and happiness. “*Akusalānam dhammānam pahānāya kusalānam dhammānam bhāvanāya*,” those positive qualities that should be cultivated for mental sanctity, are represented in terms of:

- Four foundation of mindfulness (*cattarosatiṭṭhāna*)
- Four right exertions (*cattaro sammappadhāna*)
- Four roads to power (*cattaro iddhipāda*)
- The five organs (*pañca indriya*)
- The five powers (*pañca bala*)
- The seven factors of enlightenment (*sattabojjhangō*)
- The noble eightfold path (*ariyo atthangiko maggo*)

### The Buddha's awareness of human mind

The Buddha formulated theories of psychological causality, perception, imagination, thought and behavior; the processes of consciousness and unconsciousness, motivation, emotion, and different personality types; an albeit rudimentary framework for understanding psychosomatic disorders; the ways and means for changing conscious processes; and many more psychological issues besides.

Once the Buddha was addressing the monks and said that there are two kinds of diseases, diseases of the body and diseases of the mind.<sup>5</sup> The Buddha was concerned about the health of his followers. This is summed up in the *Bhesajjha kkhanda* of *Mahāvagga*. Referring to mental health, the Buddha remarked;

“There are to be seen beings who can admit freedom from suffering from bodily disease for one year, for two years, for three years, for five years, for ten, twenty, thirty, forty and fifty years. But monks, those beings are hard to find in the world who can admit freedom from mental disease even for one moment save only those in whom the defilements have been destroyed”<sup>6</sup>

What is the fundamental factor underlying this mass of suffering? It is craving (*tanhā*). The term craving is significant both psychologically and philosophically for the understanding of the Buddhist analysis of the human mind and its spiritual goal. As described in the discourse, craving has the inherent characteristic of leading one to re-becoming, having the pleasure of attachment and delighting in this and that, now here, now there.<sup>7</sup> Craving colored by the prolific tendency of the mind is instrumental in causing the conflicts and confrontations found in the world over.<sup>8</sup>

Basically desire is threefold. There is Desire for sensual pleasure (*kāmatanhā*), desire for becoming (*bhava tanhā*), and desire for annihilations (*vibhavatanhā*). According to Buddhist analysis, man is a psychophysical unit, constituted of mental factors and physical form (*nāma-rūpa*). Again these two factors are analyzed into five, physical form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formation (*samkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*). Thus, the personality is a package of these five factors having no abiding substantiality whatsoever. Particularly, the three terms ‘perception’ ‘mental formation’ and ‘consciousness’ occurring in this analysis are significant both for our

understanding of the Buddhist view of psychodynamics and for effective counselling.

Perception plays a major role in our behavior. The way we perceive the world around us at any given moment conditions our thoughts, to our disadvantage or to our benefit. Emotion is the interpretation and expression that we give to our mental states aroused by perception.

With reference to how perception affects our judgment, Buddhism has a clear psychoanalytical answer. As explained in the *Madhupindika sutta* of *Majjhima nikāya*, “visual consciousness, brethren, arises because of the eye and material forms; the meeting of the three is sensory impingement and because of sensory impingement arises feeling, what one feels one perceives; what one perceives, one reasons about (*vitakketi*); what one reasons about, one proliferates (*papñceti*); what one proliferates due to that '*papañca, saññā, sankhā*' assailing one in regard to material shapes is cognizable to the eye belonging to the past, future and present.”<sup>9</sup>

In the same way, perceptual processes of other sense faculties are explained. The process of perception as illustrated in this discourse is of immense importance to understanding the Buddhist approach to positive and negative emotions.

There are five causal factors of mental obsessions that are usually translated as hindrances or impediments (*nīvarana*). This is a fairly comprehensive treatment of the negative emotions

that keep one's vision obscured. They hamper one's powers of discernment and judgment. Namely they are:

1. Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*)
2. Ill will (*vyāpāda*)
3. Sloth and torpor (*thinamiddha*)
4. Restless and remorse or scruples (*uddhacca kukkucca*)
5. Skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*)

### The Buddha's counseling for stress management

Stress is considered a common phenomenon in today's society. Numerous environmental factors that condition the lifestyle of contemporary man make him stressed. The Buddha says that the causes of mental stress are the unwholesome emotions that derive from the sense perceptions. The Buddha says that by being aware of unwholesomeness through mindful observation, one can extricate oneself from stress. One technique known by the Buddha was the establishment of mindfulness. The conditions under which stress arises and passes away have to be clearly understood. How one feels when one is under their influence and how one feels when the mind is rid of them needs to be carefully observed. Mindfulness functions like a watchman, who knows the rules and protects our mental life from further damage.

The *Sabbāsava sutta* of *Majjhima nikāya* introduces a number of very practical ways of dealing with unwholesome emotions. A considerable part of what is described as psycho

logical cankers (*āsava*) in the sutta, are the unwholesome emotions that create suffering for us. Robert H. Thouless, a Cambridge psychologist, has shown that the *Pāli* word *āsava* is rich in psychological content and that it covers a wide range of stress-related mental disorders such as depression, aversion and perversion. He further points out that best English rendering for the *āsava* found in early Buddhism is mental stress.

The plural term has been rendered into English in many ways, including 'defilements' 'cankers' 'taints' 'corruptions' 'influxes' 'influences' and 'mental stress' or just 'stress'. As one would expect from this, the term may be taken to convey diverse shades of meaning. The test that defines the word states that it is destructive and consuming (*vighāta parilāhā*). The *suttas* usually mention four kind of *āsavas*; the stress of sensual pleasures (*kāmāsava*), stress of becoming (*bhavāsava*), stress of dogmatic clinging (*ditthāsava*) and stress of ignorance (*avijjāsava*).<sup>10</sup>

Certainly the causes of stress may be varied but, when they are analyzed deeply, most of them can be traced to one of the above four. Although somewhat overlapping, the impact of stress is recognized on four levels; the emotional, behavioral, psychological and cognitive. A client overwhelmed by depression, sadness, irritation, aversion and frustration exhibits stress on the emotional level. Poor interpersonal relationships, forgetfulness, lack of attention, carelessness and low productivity are behavioral. On the psychological level, he may display tension, headache, backache, stomachache, ulcers, constipation and high blood pressure. Cognitively, he seeks self-respect and self-

confidence, avoids responsibility and may even go to the extent of committing suicide.<sup>11</sup>

The *Sabbāsava sutta* proposes seven ways to manage with *āsava*.

1. The first way of eliminating taints is by having proper vision into life (*āsavā dassanā pahātabbā*).
2. The second way of eliminating cankers is by means of restraint (*āsavā saṃvarā pahātabbā*).
3. The third method proposed by the Buddha, deals with taints that can be abandoned by using (*āsavā patisevanā pahātabbā*). This means being satisfied with one's basic needs.
4. Fourthly, the Buddha speaks of *āsava* that can be eliminated by means of enduring (*āsavā adhivāsnā pahātabbā*).
5. Fifthly, the Buddha considers taints that can be abandoned by avoiding (*āsavā parivajjnā pahātabbā*). This is one way to keep the mind without being stressed.
6. The sixth method of eliminating taints proposed by the Buddha is removing them (*āsavā vinodanā pahātabbā*).
7. Eventually, the Buddha advises on eliminating taints by developing (*āsavā bhāvanā pahātabbā*).<sup>12</sup>

In the *Vitakkasanṭhāna sutta* of *Majjhimanikāya*, the Buddha presents another four ways to deal with the same unwholesome emotions as in the *Sabbāsava sutta*.

The Buddha is a counsellor in the true sense of the word. Every quality that should be cultivated by a counsellor can be seen within him. Having seen, his incomparable physical beauty and personality, many persons thought that he may be an extraordinary person such as a god and so on. Unerringly kind and wise and so positive was an encounter with him, that it would change people's lives. Actually the Buddha was a human being, not a 'mere human being' as is sometimes said, but a special class of human being called a complete person (*mhā purisa*). Such complete persons are born no different from others and indeed physically they always remain quite ordinary.

The Buddha had a pleasant voice, good looks and poise combined with the appeal of what he said, he was able to enthral his audience. This was more helpful to counsel others.

*"When he is teaching Dhamma to an assembly in a park he does not exalt them or disparage them but rather he delights, uplifts, inspires and gladdens them with talk on Dhamma. The sound that comes from his mouth has eight characteristics: It is distinct and intelligible, sweet and audible, fluent and clear, deep and resonant. Therefore, when he instructs an assembly, his voice does not go beyond that assembly. After being delighted, uplifted, inspired and gladdened, that assembly, rising from their seats, depart reluctantly, keeping their eyes upon him."*<sup>13</sup>

Another remarkable thing is the unshakable quality of the Buddha. Whether it is praise or criticism, his response became calm and peaceful. And he urged his disciples to be the same. Sometimes he made correct misunderstanding that gave rise to the criticism. The Buddha counsels his disciples thus:

*"If anyone should criticise me, the Dhamma or the Sangha, you should not on that account be angry, resentful or upset. For if you were, that would hinder you, and you would be unable to know whether they said right or wrong, would you? No, Lord. "So, if others criticise me, the Dharma or the Sangha, then simply explain what is incorrect, saying: that is incorrect, that is not right, that is not our way, and we do not do that."*<sup>14</sup>

The Buddha's daily routine was a very special one. He devoted his time and energy for the sake of others' welfare. According to the commentaries his day was divided into five parts:

- I. The forenoon session
- II. The afternoon session
- IV. The first watch of the night
- IV. The middle watch
- V. The last watch<sup>15</sup>

He would sleep at night for only one hour, wake up and enter into absorption in Great Compassion (*mahākaruṇā samāpatti*) spreading his thoughts of compassion towards all beings searching whom would be helped on that particular day. Just before noon, he would take his robe and bowl and go into the nearest city, town or village to beg for alms. After he had become famous, he would often be invited to people's homes for a meal and, being an honoured guest, he would be given sumptuous food, something other ascetics criticised him for. On such occasions he would eat, wash his own hands and bowl after the meal and then give a short Dharma talk. Straight after his meal he would usually lie down to rest or sometimes to have a short sleep. In the afternoon he would talk to people who had come to see him, give instruction to monks or, where appropriate, go to visit people in order to talk to them about the Dharma. Late at night when everyone was asleep, the Buddha would sit in silence and sometimes *devas* would appear and ask him questions.

The Buddha was the first religious teacher who meant his message to be proclaimed to all humankind and who made a concrete effort to do this. He told his first disciples to spread the Dhamma far and wide.

*“Go forth for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the good and the happiness of gods and men. Let no two of you go in the same direction. Teach the Dhamma which is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle*

*and beautiful at the end. Proclaim both the letter and the spirit of the holy life completely fulfilled and perfectly pure.”*<sup>16</sup>

He also hoped that after his passing away the teachings would continue to spread and he instructed his disciples, both ordained and lay, accordingly.

*“I shall not die until the monks, the nuns, the laymen and the laywomen have become deeply learned, wise and well-trained, remembering the teachings, proficient in the lesser and greater doctrines and virtuous; until, having learned the teachings themselves, they are able to tell it to others, teach it, make it known, establish it, open it up, explain it and make it clear; until they are able to refute false doctrines taught by others and are able to spread the convincing and liberating truth abroad. I shall not die until the holy life has become successful, prosperous, undespised and popular; until it has become well proclaimed among both gods and men.”*<sup>17</sup>

The Buddha would approach people to counsel according to their needs and dispositions. Generally, many people who sought counsel came to see the Buddha, and sometimes he would go out to meet people who were misguided or helpless. The Buddha followed various methods when he was counselling others. It depends on the person who is to be counselled. The most popular technique used was ‘gradual instruction’ (*ānupubbī-kathā*). It was considered necessary to prepare the listener's



mind, by teaching about generosity, moral conduct, heaven, about the dangers of sensual desires and the advantages of giving them up.<sup>18</sup> This allowed the Buddha to know the listeners' level of intelligence and receptivity. If the response was good, he would then, teach that *Dhamma* which is called the advanced teaching of The Four Noble Truths; suffering, its cause, its overcoming and the way leading to its overcoming.<sup>19</sup>

*Dīghanikāya* commentary reports another method that the Buddha used to teach *dharmas* in accordance with the client's mentality.

- I. On his own willingness (*aṭṭajjhāsaya*)
- II. Knowing the purpose of others (*parajjhāsaya*)
- III. As an answer to a question (*pucchāvasika*)
- IV. According to the condition (*aṭṭhuppattika*)<sup>20</sup>

Often the Buddha talked to groups or individuals giving a sermon or engaging in dialogue, asking and answering questions. The people he talked with always found him welcoming, speaking kindly, courteous, genial, clear and ready to speak. When he met people strongly attached to their views and whom he knew he could not change, he would suggest discussing points of agreement so as to avoid fruitless arguments. At such times he would say: About these things there is no agreement, therefore, let us put them aside. About the things on which we agree let us take up and talk about.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes rather than talk about his own *Dhamma* he would invite his opponents to explain their teachings first. At a time when there was great competition and jealousy among different religions, the

Buddha's fairness often caused surprise. Once a group of ascetics met the Buddha and their leader asked him to explain his views. The Buddha said: Better still, tell me about your teachings. The ascetics were astonished and said to each other: It is wonderful, truly marvellous, how great is the recluse Gotama in that he will hold back his own views and invite others to explain theirs.<sup>22</sup> When people asked a particularly appropriate or relevant question he would praise them, thereby encouraging discussion, questioning and inquiry. When Bhadda asked such a question, the Buddha replied, well said! Bhadda.<sup>23</sup>

Another characteristic of the Buddha's method of counselling was his use of similes and metaphors. Drawing upon his wide interest in and knowledge of the world in which he lived, he used a rich variety of similes and metaphors to clarify his way of counselling and make them more memorable. For instance, he compared a person who fails to practise the teachings he proclaimed to a beautiful flower without fragrance.<sup>24</sup> We should replace negative thoughts, the Buddha said, with positive ones, just as a carpenter knocks a peg out of a hole with a second peg.<sup>25</sup> He was also skilled at using whatever was at hand to make a point or dramatize or make clear his meaning. Prince Abhaya once asked the Buddha if he had ever said anything that made people feel unhappy. At the time the prince was holding his baby son on his knee. The Buddha looked at the child and said: If your son put a stone in his mouth, what would you do? Prince Abhaya replied: I would get it out straight away even if I had to hurt the child. And why? Because it could be a danger to the child and I have compassion for him. Then the Buddha explained that sometimes he would say things that

people needed to be told but did not like to hear, but that his motive was always compassion for that person.<sup>26</sup>

In some religions, it is only necessary to believe in order to be saved, while in Buddhism, *Nibbāna* can only be attained through understanding. As such, those who came to hear the Buddha teach and who became his disciples tended to be the better educated lay men and women, and the intellectuals of the time. The Dharma, the Buddha said, had to be understood by the wise each by oneself (*paccattaṃveditabbo viññuhi*). But this did not mean that the Buddha had nothing to say to the unsophisticated. On the contrary, with his skill and creativity, he was able to make his message intelligible to people of all levels of understanding, even to children, and as a result people of all types became his disciples. So successful was he in fact, that some of the other teachers of his time accused him of using magic to lure their disciples away.<sup>27</sup>

Because the Buddha's motive in teaching the *Dhamma* was compassion and because his compassion was infinite, he never became tired in his efforts to proclaim it or explain it to others. Only a few months before his passing away, he said: There are some who say that as long as a man is young, he possesses lucidity of wisdom, but as he ages that wisdom begins to fade. But this is not so. I am now worn, old, aged: I have lived my life and am now towards the end of my life, being about eighty. Now if I had four disciples who were to live for a hundred years and if, during that time, they were to ask me questions about the four foundations of mindfulness, except when they were eating, drinking, answering the call of nature or sleeping, I would still not finish explaining *Dhamma*. Even if you have to carry me about on a stretcher there will be no

change in the lucidity of wisdom. If anyone were to speak rightly of me they could say: A being not liable to delusion has arisen in the world, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good and the happiness of gods and men. And he was true to his words in this respect. As he lies dying, a man approached him to ask a question. Ananda and the other disciples held him back saying that the Buddha was tired and ill, but when the Buddha saw this, he beckoned the man forward and answered his questions.<sup>28</sup> The Buddha's great gift to humankind was the truth and his compassion motivated him to give it to all who were willing to receive it.

### Well - Known Cases of Effective Counselling Techniques Applied by the Buddha

As explained above, each and every step of the Buddha until his passing away was sacrificed for the welfare of not only human beings but non-human beings as well. A close consideration shows that the majority of *Suttas* in the *Pāli* canon deal with psychology of counselling. People from all walks of life came to meet the Buddha to get their problems that tortured their minds resolved. Whatever his ulterior purpose, whoever came to meet the Buddha, his kindly and compassionate acceptance and attentive listening was same. Before the commencement of counselling, both mental and physical conditions of the listener and the nature of the problems were taken into consideration by the Buddha. Therefore, every method and technique that used to counsel to others was different. Modern psychologists and counsellors also have understood that these

different types of techniques are more useful in effective counselling. The following few episodes will provide sufficient evidence to recognize the Buddha's counselling ability.

### Dissatisfied with life Yasa

At that time in Benares, there was a merchant's son, named Yasa. He was the only son of family, was provided with all the pleasures of the five senses. But he could not be satisfied with the household life. He left home one early morning, saying "Oh what trouble indeed! Oh what affliction indeed!" when he was walking on the road near Isipatana, at the time, the Buddha, having risen from the night, early at dawn, was walking up and down in the open. The Buddha saw, Yasa, coming in the distance. When he was near the Buddha, saying: "Oh, what trouble indeed! Oh, what affliction indeed!" Then the Buddha said this to Yasa:

*"Here, Yasa, there is no trouble; here there is no affliction. Come, Yasa, sit down: I will teach you the nature of life. (Dhamma)"*

Having heard the Buddha's word, he was delighted and sat down to hear furthermore what he was saying. The Buddha made conversation with him and understood his psychological condition and then counselled him based on his method called 'gradual instruction' (*ānupubbīkathā*). When the Buddha knew that Yasa, was ready, his mind malleable, free of hindrances, uplifted, and clear, then he explained the highest teaching common to all the Buddhas (*sāmukkamsika desanā*). Just as a

clean cloth free of any black spots easily takes a dye, even so, just as he sat right there, the stainless, spotless Dhamma-eye arose in him.<sup>29</sup>

### A Self-realizing course for Kisā Gotmī

Kisā Gotamī was a young woman in Savatthi. She married a rich man and a son was born to them. When the child was just a toddler, he died. In her grief, she refused to believe that the child died and having carried the dead child went to all her neighbours, asking them for medicine, and the people said: 'She has lost her senses. The boy is dead. At length Kisā Gotamī met a man who replied to her request: 'I cannot give medicine for your child, but I know a physician who can.' The girl said: 'Pray tell me, sir; who is it? And the man replied: "Go to the Buddha, he would know a cure for your son'.

Kisā Gotamī went to the Buddha and pleaded: "Lord, give me the medicine that will cure my son." The Buddha answered: "yes, probably, but I want a handful of mustard-seed to prepare the medicine." And there is one thing, the Buddha added: "The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, or parent." Poor Kisā Gotamī now went from house to house, and the people pitied her and said: "Here is mustard-seed; take it!" But when she asked did a son or daughter, a father or mother, die in your family?" They answered her: "oh the living is few, but the dead are many. And there was no house where some beloved one had not died in it.

At last the darkness of the night reigned everywhere, and she became aware of reality. She thought to herself; how selfish am I in my grief! I am not the only person who has experienced the agony of losing someone to death and that is a natural phenomenon, and it is common to all. Putting away the selfishness of her affection for her child, Kisā Gotamī left the dead body in the forest and returned to the Buddha. The Buddha asked her: "sister, have you brought a pinch of mustard seeds?" "No lord! She said; there are many the dead than those who are living." The Buddha said: "The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain. For there is not any means by which those that have been born can avoid dying; after reaching old age there is death; of such a nature are living beings. As ripe fruits are early in danger of falling, so mortals when born are always in danger of death. As all earthen vessels made by the potter end in being broken, so is the life of mortals. Both young and adult, both those who are fools and those who are wise all fall into the power of death; all are subject to death. Finally, she took refuge in him and found comfort in the Dharma.<sup>30</sup>

This is one instance to understand the Buddha's par excellent usage of counselling techniques. The Buddha could have counselled her stressing the impermanent nature of life, but the Buddha realized that it would have been an ineffective attempt as she was not prepared to accept the child was dead due to so much affection. She was allowed to realize the true nature of life. Normally, counselling helps a person to see and choose which way to go in their life, whether with regard to relationships, decisions, illness or any other pressing issue. A skilled

counsellor will never make a person's decision for them, nor tell them what to do, but will help them to unravel and see what is hidden within. Often a person finds one's own natural level of intuition and decisiveness greatly enhanced by this process, as one comes to understand oneself to a greater depth.

### A Self-awakening practice for Cūlapanthaka

Mahāpanthaka and Cūlapanthaka were brothers who lived in Rajagaha. Mahāpanthaka, being the elder, used to accompany his grandfather to listen to the Buddha's discourses. Later, Mahāpanthaka joined the Buddhist community and in the course of time became an Arahant. Cūlapanthaka also followed his brother and entered the order. But, he was a very slow learner. He could not even memorize one verse in four months. Mahāpanthaka was very disappointed with his younger brother and even told him that he was not worthy of the Order.

About that time, Jīvaka came to the monastery to invite the Buddha and the resident *bhikkhus* to his house for a meal. Mahāpanthaka, who was then in charge of assigning the *bhikkhus* to meal invitation left out Cūlapanthaka from the list. When Cūlapanthaka learnt about this he felt very much frustrated and decided that he would return to the life of a householder. Knowing his intention, the Buddha came to the front of his way and took him along and made him sit in front of the Buddha's chamber. He then gave a white clean piece of cloth to Cūlapanthaka and told him to sit there facing the east and rub the piece of cloth. At the same time he was to repeat the word "*Rajoharanam*", which means "taking on impurity." The Buddha then went to the residence of Jivaka, accompanied by the *bhikkhus*.

Meanwhile, Cūlapanthaka went on rubbing the piece of white cloth, all the time muttering the word "*Rajoharaṇam*". Very soon, the cloth became soiled. Seeing this change in the condition of the cloth, Cūlapanthaka came to realize the impermanent nature of all conditioned things. On a later occasion, when the subject of Cūlapanthaka cropped up among the *Bhikkhus*, the Buddha said that one who was diligent and steadfast in his striving would certainly attain *arahatship*.<sup>31</sup>

Once Cūlapanthaka was abandoned as a duller, but his hidden potential was manifested by the Buddha in terms of his skilful counselling. Finally, not only did he become an *Arahant* but the Buddha declared him as the foremost among monks skilled in creating forms by mind-power and mental resolution.

### Depressed Paṭācārā

Paṭācārā was born in Savatthi to a rich family. She grew up to become a very beautiful daughter, closely guarded by her caring parents. Nevertheless, unknown to anyone she fell in love with her servant. Later, the lovers eloped to a distant village where they settled down as husband and wife. She soon became pregnant and asked her husband to bring her back to her parents' home for childbirth. The husband was scared of her parents because of their unsanctioned elopement. Anyway, she went by herself in her husband's absence. The husband later gave chase and found her by the wayside where she had given birth. With no purpose of proceeding further, they returned to their farmhouse. She became pregnant again and when it was due birth time she again wanted to return to her parents' home.

Again the husband postponed to return to her parents home, she left alone with her small son. Again the husband followed and found them on the road, but she readied to deliver the baby on the way. It was heavy rainy season, and she told her husband to find them shelter. He ran off to do this but in doing so, was bitten by a poisonous snake and died instantly.

There was no sign of her husband returning. Unable to wait any longer, she took her two sons and went in search of their father. Eventually she found the husband's dead body and tearfully she went away towards her home in Savatthi. On the way she had to cross a river which became a raging torrent because of the previous night's rain. She told the small boy to wait for her while she crossed the raging river with the new born baby and placed him on a leaf at the other bank. She then came back for the small boy but half-way in the river a big hungry bird swooped down and carried off the new-born baby. The mother Paṭācārā frantically waved her arms to drive the bird away but to no avail. Meanwhile the small boy mistook the arms of his mother to be a signal for him to go to her. Unable to reach her in mid-stream he fell into the raging river and was drowned. In great anguish she wandered miserably on to Savatthi, hoping for consolation and solace from her parents.

On the city, she enquired about her family and was told that they were dead. Their home was destroyed by lightning during the thunderstorm the night before. She was told to look at the pall of smoke rising from the totally burnt building which was her parents' home. She was completely overcome by grief. Mad with grief and distraught with all the tragedies, Paṭācārā

wandered naked, raving and wailing around the streets of Savatthi. No one helped or comforted her. Some even mocked and taunted her, calling her names.

Eventually she wandered into Jetavana Monastery where the Buddha was preaching *Dhamma*. When the people tried to stop her from entering, taking her to be a mad woman, the Buddha prevented them and called her to Him, and said: "sister, be mindful," consoling her with gentle words and restoring back her senses. Becoming aware of her nakedness, she felt ashamed and crouched down on the ground. She was thrown a cloth to cover herself. She got up, came close to the Buddha, worshipped Him and told the tragic loss of her whole family and property. Then the Buddha counselled her showing the real nature of life and finally, she entered the order of nuns.<sup>32</sup>

### **A Murderer who became saint - Angulimāla**

Angulimāla was born in the kingdom of Kosala where his father was the royal astrologer and chaplain to King Pasenadi, and mother was Mantāni. When he was born all the weapons brightened in the palace. According to astrology it was indicated the baby would be a bandit certainly in due course of time. However the baby Angulimāla was known as Ahimsaka - meaning the "Harmless One" in his boyhood. When he came of age he was sent to Takkasila for an education befitting the young student from a respectable family. He soon became an excellent pupil, loved and trusted by his teacher but was greatly envied by his fellow students who consistently poisoned his

teacher's mind against him. Eventually they succeeded and thereupon the teacher demanded an honorarium of a thousand right index fingers. This was his obligation as a student. He was very reluctant but was coerced by his teacher who told him that upon completing his mission. Ahimsaka did not realize that his involvement with this tempting scheme would eventually lead him to the evil path.

Thus the gentle Ahimsaka became the heartless bandit, merciless and relentless on killing. He was determined to complete his mission as soon as possible. He spared no one that happened to cross his path, whether it was men, women, or the aged, eventheinfants were brutally killed and their right fore-fingers cut off. Soon he became the cruel notorious murderer Angulimāla who wore the "garland of fingers" of his victims.

For years Angulimāla terrorized the countryside and in the forest Jalini where he stayed. The people were so frightened and angry that they went yelling at the King's palace, demanding for the notorious bandit Angulimāla to be captured and killed in order to protect the people. So the King at last led an army of soldiers to capture Angulimāla dead or alive.

For the great love of her son, mother Mantani started out for the great Jalini forest to find Angulimāla. When Angulimāla saw her, he was blindly excited and rushed after her to cut off her finger and to complete his mission of the thousandth finger. At this juncture the Buddha who was of great compassion came to the rescue and appeared walking leisurely in front of Angulimāla. Immediately Angulimāla rushed after him

instead of fulfilling his mission but was baffled because even by running furiously fast, he could not catch up with the gently walking Buddha. Exhausted and frustrated he stopped running.

Thereupon he shouted for the Buddha to stop but the Buddha replied that He had stopped, only Angulimāla was still running. Still more baffled he shouted to the Buddha that he was lying because he was still walking. Then the Buddha turned around and told him that he, the Buddha, had stopped doing evil, gave up running after pleasures, stopped unwholesome thoughts. Saying so he expounded to Angulimāla the *Dhamma*. After hearing the sermon, Angulimāla realized the reality and immediately changed for the better, joined the monkhood and followed the Buddha back to the monastery. The Buddha knew and saw his plight, advised him to be patient and practice diligently. He followed the Buddha's advice and before long attained Arahantship. Gradually all came to love and respect him in the end.<sup>33</sup>

### **Kālāmas' Dilemma**

The Buddha and several of his monks travelled through the Kosala country and entered a town of the Kālāmas' called Kesaputta. The Kālāmas' told the Buddha that many monks and Brahmins had come to Kesaputta before him. Each of these religious men had expounded their own doctrines and reviled the doctrines of others. "Venerable sir," they asked the Buddha, "Which of these reverend monks and Brahmins spoke the truth and which falsehood?"

"Of you are uncertain, Kālāmas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kālāmas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are unskilful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to harm and to suffering', then you should abandon them."

By the same token, "When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skilful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare and to happiness', then you should enter and remain in them."

By gently asking them questions, the Buddha guided the Kālāmas to understand that teachings based in greed, hate and delusion are unskilful. Teachings free of greed, hate and delusion are skilful. By applying these criteria, we can understand truth from falsehood.<sup>34</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

As we know, the entire world is talking more than ever about mental health. Mental health has become an overall measure of the development of a nation. To develop a culture of mental health, professional level counseling and well trained counselors are required. How can we fulfill both requirements? One way to respond to these challenges is to take guidance from Buddhism.

No counselor could have a more exemplary character than the Buddha.

The Buddha was a counselor par-excellence. All of the qualities that need to be acquired as a counselor can be observed in the Buddha's character. He had boundless kindness towards all beings. He counseled people from all walks of life around the clock. He had the ability to understand different people's characters. Clients who sought help from the Buddha never went away without hope. Not only did He counsel them on day-to-day problems, He had solutions regarding the cycle of rebirth also. Many counseling techniques that modern counselors follow were used by the Buddha two thousand five hundred and fifty years ago.

### End notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dhammapada, 166.
- <sup>2</sup> Majjhimanikāya, I, PTS. p 431.
- <sup>3</sup> Mahāsatipattāna suttha M, ii, PTS. pp, 290-318.
- <sup>4</sup> Anguttaranikāya, v, PTS. p 158.
- <sup>5</sup> *Deveme bhikkhave rogā, katame dve, kayiko rogo cetasiko rogo*, A, ii, PTS. p 142-43.
- <sup>6</sup> Anguttaranikāya, ii, PTS. p 143.
- <sup>7</sup> *Yāyam tanhā ponobhavikā nandorāgasahagatā tatta tattābhinandanī*, S, iv, PTS. p 421.

---

<sup>8</sup> Dighanikāya, II, PTS. p 276.

<sup>9</sup> Majjhimanikāya, I, PTS. p 111.

<sup>10</sup> Saṃyuttanikāya, v, PTS. pp 236-340, A, PTS. p 237.

<sup>11</sup> Jenny quek, **The Buddha's Technique and Practice of Counselling as depicted in the Pāli Canon**, Singapore: Kepmedia International Pte Ltd, 2007, p 109.

<sup>12</sup> Majjhimanikāya, I, PTS. p 56.

<sup>13</sup> M. II, PTS. p.140.

<sup>14</sup> *Brahmajāla Sutta*, D. I, (tr.) Bhikku Bodhi. p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> DA. I, PTS. pp. 45-47.

<sup>16</sup> Vin. IV, PTS. p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* D, II, PTS. p. 113.

<sup>18</sup> *Aṃbaṭṭha sutta*, D. I, PTS. p.110.

<sup>19</sup> *Ambaṭṭha Sutta*, D 3; *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, D 14; *Upāli Sutta*, M. 56.

<sup>20</sup> DA. I, PTS. pp. 50-51.

<sup>21</sup> *Sakkapañha Sutta*, D, II, PTS. p. 274.

<sup>22</sup> *Pāṭika Sutta*, D, III, PTS. p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> S. V, (tr.) Bhikkhu Bodhi. p. 1523.

<sup>24</sup> Dhammapada, 51.

<sup>25</sup> *Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta*. M. I, PTS. p.119.



- 
- <sup>26</sup> *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta*. M. II, PTS. p. 392.
- <sup>27</sup> *Upāli Sutta*. M. II, PTS. p. 371.
- <sup>28</sup> *Mahāparinibbān Sutta*. D.II, PTS. p.149.
- <sup>29</sup> Vin. I, PTS. pp 15-16.
- <sup>30</sup> DhA. I, PTS. p. 270 ff.
- <sup>31</sup> DhA. I, pp. PTS. p. 239 ff.
- <sup>32</sup> DhA. II, PTS. p. 260 ff.
- <sup>33</sup> *Angulimāla Sutta*. M. II, PTS. p. 97.
- <sup>34</sup> *Kālāma Sutta*. A. I, PTS, p.170.