



Psychotherapy:  
**Cure of  
the Soul**

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## Buddhism, Healing and Pastoral Care

Christopher F. J. Ross and Robert Doering

### Introduction

The worldwide wisdom tradition of Buddhism offers pastoral care providers a rich storehouse of ritual and ethical resources across the three classical psycho-spiritual domains recognized in the psychology of religion: cognitive beliefs, affective motivation, and religious behavior.

Cognitively, Buddhist beliefs can potentially expand the perspective that practitioners bring to those for whom they care. In terms of affective motivation, Mahayana Buddhist teachings of *bodhicitta* (spirit for awakening) address issues of burnout (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Wiedis, 2013) and compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995) common to helping vocations such as pastoral care. Behaviorally, meditation practices such as the Tibetan Buddhist practice of regarding all beings as our mothers, deepen our capacity to care for others, while Theravada Buddhist mindfulness practice can facilitate deep rest for those offering and receiving care, as well as hasten recovery or increase the comfort of those facing disability, loss or death. Buddhist wisdom traditions possess the potential to be effective across the spectrum of pastoral care.

### Softening the paradox of Buddhist approaches to curing a soul that ultimately may not exist

At first glance, drawing on Buddhism as a resource for the “cure of souls” may seem anomalous since Buddhism does not believe in the “soul” per se, at least not according to the three main streams of Buddhism we know today (*Theravada*, prominent in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos; *Mahayana* in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam; and *Vajrayana* in Tibet). The soul is often regarded in the humanistic and religious traditions of the West as connoting the individual ego or self in an expanded context. Two intricacies of Buddhist thought are relevant here. First, the self in Buddhism is seen as no less real than anything else. Buddhism simply argues that, as with all objects of awareness, the self does not exist as a separate essence; it is only experienced in relation to a perceiving mind. Tibetan Buddhism, or Vajrayana (a related, but distinct form of Mahayana Buddhism) offers a particularly clear critique of essentialism; the soul or self is

no less essential than anything else this side of Great Enlightenment (Aronson 2004; Kelsang Gyatso, 2004). A firm distinction is drawn between absolute and conventional truth. On the level of conventional truth, the self does exist. At the level of absolute truth, however, the self or soul do not exist; like everything else they are empty of substantial existence.

Second, the supremely idealized state in Mahayana Buddhism is the Great Enlightenment, in which all beings are free from suffering. This state can only be reached on the wings of both wisdom *and* compassion. However, compassion requires “others” as an object for expression; that is; it requires something or someone to receive it. Thus the “wing” of great compassion causes the existence of suffering to become noticeable to sentient beings; in turn, their compassionate response to suffering is an absolute requirement for progress along the Buddhist path toward full awakening,

(Full awakening to our own true nature, or vast open consciousness, is the essential meaning of the term Great Enlightenment.)

These two considerations mitigate any theoretical barriers that may have been associated with Buddhism as being appropriate to pastoral care and the cure of souls. Indeed, Buddhist teachings regarding emptiness, whereby all phenomena are connected, affirm its spiritual value in the pastoral context: the carer and cared-for require each other in the shared aspiration to realize their own true nature – *dharmakya*, or the union of bliss and emptiness.

Another encouragement to pastoral care from Buddhist traditions is to normalize, without minimizing, the values around the “cure of souls” in the sense of caring for that more inclusive sense of self. Such inclusive care or cure has traditionally been understood to take one of four main forms: healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1964). The intent of this chapter is to show how Buddhist wisdom traditions may contribute to these aspects of pastoral care; first cognitively, by offering a lens through which to recognize ourselves anew as providers and in so doing *re-cognise* those for whom we provide. Excerpts from arguments in Tibetan Buddhist teachings as summarized in *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (or *Lamrim*) will be presented along with an example of guided meditation. Together, these aid the process of analytical meditation in which reason is used to reach insight, an approach that can have favorable impact within the pastoral situation.

In the second half, Basic Mindfulness (a particular model of placement meditation pioneered by Shinzen Young) will be presented together with a case study. The Basic Mindfulness approach was selected because of its accessibility to both Western care providers and recipients, and for the variety of methods it offers in responding to diverse problems, individuals and settings. We will illustrate how intellectual or conceptual insights move into a more holistic knowing that includes both bodily and emotional awareness.

### Buddhist view, analytical meditation and pastoral care

Mahayana teachings can be a corrective to excessive over-specialization in pastoral care. Within traditional healing, sustaining, guiding or reconciling ministries, as well as the twentieth-century innovation of pastoral counselling (with its ties to mental health treatment), there has been a tendency to approach pastoral care as a specialist activity undertaken by conspicuously and professionally religious providers toward the distressed. The starting point of Buddhism in the Four Noble Truths, especially the First Noble Truth, offers an antidote to this attitude.

The First Noble Truth assumes that suffering is universal, affecting all beings, and advocates the spiritual value of contemplating this truth. Fifth-century BCE recipients of the historical Buddha's teachings were first enjoined to "know suffering"; that is, to become familiar with suffering as an unchangeable reality for any conscious and sentient being. Thus all human beings, whether immediately in a state of suffering or not, are encouraged to know and accept its existence. Suffering is not merely "normal"; when raised to the level of *conscious* experience, it can serve as an existentially valuable prod on the journey toward Enlightenment, where peace and happiness are available regardless of our situation. In more traditional Buddhist terminology, Enlightenment is happiness that is not dependent upon conditions.

The First Noble Truth that suffering is universal to humanity can help prevent the professional isolation that sometimes deprives pastoral care-givers of the support systems they need in order to sustain their own well-being over long periods of exposure to the sufferings of others. Whether it stems from the perfect competence of the provider, or the subdued condition of the receiver, the condition of isolating "specialness" finds a useful antidote through an understanding of the Buddha's First Noble Truth as a ground of human connectedness.

A pithy and cogent expression of the First Noble Truth known as Equalizing Self and Others is contained in Tibetan Buddhism's *Lamrim* (Stages of the Path to Enlightenment), a compact twenty-one lesson summary of Buddha's teachings. According to this Buddhist perspective, we are all in the same boat; we want to be happy and to experience ongoing happiness, but we suffer. The reasoning proceeds as follows:

*Just as I wish to be free from suffering and experience only happiness, so do all other beings. In this respect I am no different from any other being; we are all equal. I am only one, whereas others are countless, so how can I cherish myself alone while I neglect to cherish others?* (Kelsang Gyatso, 1990, p. 73)

Equalizing Self and Others forms part of the Great Scope, the largest section of the *Lamrim*. This section is designed to build *bodhichitta* – from *bodhi* (full awakening) and *chitta* (spirit). *Bodhichitta* is the wish to move past all narcissistic obstacles in order to become a *buddha*, for the simple, over-riding reason that becoming a *buddha* is the best way to "do one's bit" in freeing *all* beings from suffering. *Bodhichitta*, fuelled by universal or Great



Compassion, functions as the spiritual motor propelling seekers toward Enlightenment (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 1990, p. 85).

The *Lamrim* makes distinctions among spiritual healing qualities that can be of great benefit to pastoral care providers (Khandro 2005). For example, love and compassion are not presented as identical in Tibetan Buddhism. Being able to approach them individually may assist pastoral care providers in clarifying the welter of feelings they experience in their work and thereby reduce the risk of burnout (Wiedis, 2013) or compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995).

The most accomplished realization of love toward someone from a Buddhist background is to wish that person happiness, while compassion is wishing that person to be free from suffering. Both love and compassion go hand-in-hand as each is the flip-side of the other. Buddhism, however, skillfully maintains a distinction between them in order to maximize the development of both sensitivities within the individual; this can be achieved through separate analytical meditations. Furthermore, love and compassion *feel* different at a phenomenological level, so each is taught as a separate spiritual virtue with a view to incrementally building *bodhicitta*, the impelling force leading one's consciousness toward Great Enlightenment.

Tibetan Buddhism distinguishes three kinds of love: affectionate love, cherishing love and wishing love, the last being regarded as the more accomplished and spiritually powerful form of love, because it provides the foundation for universal compassion. Affectionate love is defined as a "warm and friendly attitude toward other beings" (Kelsang Gyatso, 2003: p.68), which is remarkably similar to the unconditional positive regard originated by Carl Rogers in his *Client Centred Therapy* (1951). Renamed as Respect or Non-possessive Warmth (Truax and Carkuff, 1967; Bergin & Garfield, 1994), unconditional positive regard was later established as one of three core conditions of effective psychotherapy. Warm affection is easily evoked when thinking fondly of friends and family. Drawing on this association, the pedagogically adroit Tibetan lamas devised a spectacular analytic meditation called the Jewel Tree, received in oral transmission by senior author Christopher Ross at Hart House, University of Toronto, in November 2005 (see also Thurman, 2006):

*Imagine that you are lying under the deep blue sky upon the light earth-brown shores of Lake Manasarovar, at the foot of the most sacred mountain in Tibet's high plateau roof-world, Mount Kailash. Fifty yards out on a slight flat island, there is a tall tree with wide handsome bowers extending on either side. Surprisingly, you see sitting in the branches on the left of the tree all the people you have ever loved or respected, including family members and beloved teachers or admired figures made known to you through books or other media. They are smiling at you, happy that you are here enjoying the warmth of the sun on this roof-world and its beautiful scenery. Time drifts by as you bathe in their warm affection and your own. They are indistinguishable. A sound emanating from the right side of the wide-bowered tree draws your attention and then you see that upon the branches on the right side of the tree sit people with whom you have had conflict; opponents, rivals, even enemies, and you experience a different set of feelings -- anger, annoyance, even hatred. These feelings persist for as long as your eyes fasten upon them, until your eyes*

*wander to the upper boughs of the tree which is full of people whom you have never seen before this moment. They are indeed strangers, and again your feelings shift. You feel perhaps an absence of feeling, indifference, perhaps even "blab." While still absorbed in getting used to this reality, you hear a rustling. It is not the wind. You then look in the direction of the island tree, and lo! The people in the top of the tree are clambering down to the left side and filling the branches hitherto occupied by your love ones (of course people you love were once unknown to you!), even while those in the loved position have now traversed to the enemy-rival position in the tree upon the right-hand branches -- which is only possible because the former enemies have now become forgotten, transformed into strangers and evacuated to the top of the tree.*

The moral of this visual argument, and the object of analytic meditation, is that our minds are unstable because we are continually engaged in existential triage with our relationships. While we aren't sitting by Lake Manosarovar, it happens daily as we perhaps enter a café for lunch and survey the tables, asking ourselves "Who is here?" The teaching from our Tibetan lamas (Kelsang Gyatso, 1990; Kyabgon, 2007) favors "equanimity," or a state of equal-mindedness:

*There is no certainty. Moreover, in the past we have been close to those we now regard as strangers, and there will come a time when we shall become estranged from those to whom we feel close. Therefore there is no sense in our being attached to some and feeling aversion or indifference towards others. By thinking in this way we can give up these unbalanced attitudes of attachment, aversion and indifference, and cultivate instead a feeling of warmth towards all living beings. (Kelsang Gyatso, 1990 p. 62)*

In short, why not express the warm affection we experience with friends toward *all* beings? This quality of deep availability is what the world notices in such exemplary present-day figures as the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that this attitude of radical openness can be attained by any of us through simple familiarity, by training our minds in a sustained manner; first through analytic meditation and then by methods more widely known as mindfulness meditation (discussed in more detail in the following section).

The next kind of love in the *Lamrim* is cherishing love (Kelsang Gyatso, 1990) and the teaching goes as follows: it is natural to come to cherish someone as special when we accumulate a relational history with that individual upon the basis of greeting them with an attitude of warm affection. Sooner or later, frequent recipients of our warmth will come to *feel* special and lovable to us.

Cherishing love in turn lays the foundation for wishing love: when we feel someone to be special and precious to us, then we naturally want that person to be happy. Wishing love is the felt sense of wishing someone to be happy and, as noted earlier, compassion is its companion virtue, the reverse side of the same spiritual coin. Since compassion is wishing someone to be free from suffering, universal or Great Compassion is the wish that all beings be free from suffering. It is this compassionate wish that generates *bodhicitta*, the wish to become a *buddha* for the sake of all living beings. Just as only those able to swim can capably rescue drowning people, so only as *buddhas*, or fully awakened beings, can we be most effective in reducing others' suffering. The fully awakened being is able to sense

what others need and help to create conditions for supplying those needs; this is accomplished through the *clairvoyance*, or natural intuitive sensitivity, that accompanies buddhahood. Clairvoyance steadily increases along the spiritual path of a *bodhisattva*, defined as anyone “who spontaneously wishes to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings” (Kelsang Gyatso, 2012, p.80).

These specific teachings from the *Lamrim* and their associated guided meditations make accessible the vast view afforded by Mahayana Buddhism which, like other Asian wisdom traditions, is grounded in an epistemological distinction among different levels of truth, in particular absolute truth versus relative truth. This can offer a refreshing alternative approach to pastoral caregivers schooled in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, where creator/creature distinctions are more frequently emphasized – including, perhaps, the possible unconscious transference to the provider/receiver roles of caregiver and client.

Additionally, the guided *Lamrim* meditations themselves draw on sensory specificity, a power relatively neglected within Christian spirituality (notably excepting the *Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola). This resource is only now being re-discovered within Christian traditions through the portal of imaginative prayer (O’Brien, 2012).

Experiencing even a slight taste of the vast Mahayana Buddhist perspective can be encouraging to care providers, especially in dealing with frustration or exhaustion as a result of intensively caring for others. When rooted in the imaginative Great Heart of *bodhicitta*, this epistemological strand of Buddhist teachings pays great dividends, setting in motion the release of resentment at feeling drained by the needs of others. At the level of absolute truth, self and others are ultimately the same, since from the Mahayana Buddhist perspective we share the “emptiness” that connects all phenomena. By absorbing this teaching through various forms of meditation, the self and others are eventually experienced as being so thinly separated that “other” is no longer *really* other; thus giving to the other can never be “a bridge too far.” Over time, the giving effort lessens into no effort! This aspiration is captured in the Buddhist prayer, “May the emotional confusion of myself and others be removed” (Hearn, 1993). In fact, when dwelling inside this Buddhist view it is hard *not* to give; the energy flows as spontaneously as the response of parents to the cries of their newborn child.

That sense of profound connection is also inherent in other wisdom traditions. In Vajrayana Buddhism, however, this approach is so robustly and variously presented (through intellectual reasonings and methods such as Equalizing Self and Others) that the intuition of profound connection can be appreciated and absorbed quite early in one’s adult life. Thus ease-of-giving may be more accessible through Buddhist beliefs and practices, rather than aspired to as some rare mystical gift that ripens only in a care provider’s mature years!

### Placement meditation and pastoral care: the contribution of Basic Mindfulness

Learning Buddhist beliefs and internalizing them conceptually through analytical meditation increases and expands the cognitive perspectives one can bring to pastoral care. In turn, placement meditation methods equip the care provider for integrating these techniques into heart and body, thus making them part of the relational encounter that defines the pastoral situation. Placement meditation is a term used in Tibetan Buddhism to describe the attentional practices used to bring “head” or conceptual insight into a more broadly based awareness. Placement meditation overlaps with “mindfulness,” a term gaining prominence among mental health and self-care practitioners with the recent publication of evidence that it is effective in the treatment of depression (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002).

Mindfulness meditation is often identified with sustained, non-evaluative attention to the breath. Many people try this approach, including providers of pastoral care, but for most it does not capture their imagination, nor engage their critical intelligence. They stop and decide “It’s not for me,” or conclude, “It’s too boring for the people I serve.” Meditating on the breath, however, is just one among numerous methods that Tibetan Buddhists know as placement meditation.

Basic Mindfulness, as formulated by Shinzen Young, is a contemporary adaptation of placement meditation. It was selected for presentation here because it makes a variety of meditation methods available and accessible to Western professional care providers, not only for the intrinsic benefits already documented, but also as a way to experientially access the Buddhist beliefs and perspectives outlined in the previous section.

In *Five Ways to Know Yourself*, Shinzen Young presents the fundamentals of what he calls Basic Mindfulness (Young, 2011). Steeped in both Theravada and Mahayana traditions and their languages, as well as in mathematics, Western science and academic studies of religion, Young accounts for the remarkable array of psycho-physical and psycho-spiritual benefits documented (Davis & Hayes, 2012) in regard to mindfulness meditation by analyzing its components according to three core skills: (1) Concentrative Power; the ability to focus on what you want, when you want; (2) Sensory Clarity – the ability to untangle the elements of sensory events, including the detection of subtle sensory events that were previously subconscious; and (3) Equanimity – the ability to let experience come and/or go, without push (aversion) or pull (clinging).

Intention lies at the core of Concentrative Power: it is the ability to focus, and remain focused on what the individual holds to be relevant. Sensory Clarity is the ability to trace, track and monitor what is being experienced in the moment, and refer it back to the individual’s avowed intention. The core of Equanimity and of *remaining* in that state, lies in staying present in the flow of experience as it changes; impermanence or *anicca* is one of the hallmarks of existence.

In Basic Mindfulness, a person’s level of awareness is understood as the result of these three attentional skills working together. By systematically practicing them, one begins to

notice the full richness of sensory experience through letting go of the internal struggle for control. With better concentration, one can navigate the attention more easily *within* and *between* experiences. Since thoughts and emotions are part of our sensory world, one's ability to work insightfully with them improves; inner struggles are calmed and the individual becomes more tranquil.

Another contribution of the Basic Mindfulness model is its differentiation of three basic training strategies: (1) Noting – tracking sensory events over time, with or without mental labels (the only method described in detail in this chapter); (2) Doing nothing – relinquishing the need or purpose to control attention, sometimes called “choiceless awareness” (Krishnamurti, 1948) or “open presence” (Nyoshul Khenpo & Surya Das, 1995); and (3) Nurturing the positive – intentionally holding positive mental images, mental talk and/or pleasant emotional body sensations. (*Metta* meditation, or sending love and compassion to other beings, is the most common form of this method in Western convert Buddhist groups.)

The practice of Noting involves untangling the elements of sensory events, allowing them to be experienced in a deeply satisfying way, often described as having a “fullness” or “richness” of experience. Noting initially creates temporary or fleeting states of mindful awareness, but with consistent practice these states gradually become enduring mindfulness traits. In the process, one's capacity to sustain these attentional skills is increased, resulting in blissful presence experienced over longer periods of time; this presence becomes less and less often deflected by changing external and internal conditions.

With regular practice, concentration becomes more intentional, perception more vivid and alive, and the self more equanimous. These three attentional qualities allow the care provider to bring greater presence and resources to the pastoral situation. In fact, they bear a striking resemblance to the core therapeutic conditions of empathy, warmth and genuineness, regardless of the specific mode of intervention (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967; Bergin & Garfield, 1994; Richards & Bergin, 1997).

Young uses a three-fold classification to map out the different arenas – hearing, seeing and body sense (Fig. 1) – in which these skills can be developed; for each sensory mode there is an internal and external focus.

Three *modalities* of sensory experience are explored in Basic Mindfulness:

- Visual – both ordinary vision (seeing) and internal vision (images, non-verbal thinking).
- Auditory – both external sensory processing (hearing) and internal mental talk (auditory thinking).

- Somatic – both ordinary somatic (physiological) experience of body sensations, and emotion as experienced by detecting body sensations. Smells and tastes fall into the category of somatic body sensations.

The Basic Mindfulness model also identifies four different forms for each of the above sensory modalities.

- (a) Focus In – in which internally arising subjective experiences are the chosen focus. These include thoughts (mental images in the visual modality and mental talk in the auditory mode), and emotionally based body sensations.
- (b) Focus Out – in which ordinary physical aspects of seemingly “objective” sensory experiences in nature (e.g., sights, sounds, and physical body sensations) are the focus of exploration.
- (c) Focus on Rest – where the restful aspect of each of the three sensory modalities is explored: in the body (as relaxation); in auditory experience (as quietness); in visual experience (as the “blank screen” of closed eyes, or “soft focus” of gazing outward with no visual fixation).
- (d) Focus of Flow – when, with increased sensory clarity, practitioners generally become more aware of subtle fluctuations within sensory experiences so that they seem ever-changing, and dynamic (*anicca*).

Meditating through this approach requires the individual to choose one or more of these ways to focus, deliberately noting what arises within the particular mode(s) of awareness. For the sake of increasing sensory clarity, Young (building upon Mahasi Sayadaw’s innovation of mental labeling), suggests using standard two-word verbal labels (See Fig. 1) for what comes into awareness during the sensory event on which one is focusing. This labeling can be a private mental construct, or spoken aloud for those wishing to create an even clearer feedback loop.

The particular focus may vary from meditation to meditation, or even within a single meditation session, depending on what the individual personally deems relevant at a given time. Thus within the auditory mode, one may focus on external sounds (label: “hear out”) or their absence (“hear rest”), or else may focus on internal sound (i.e. thoughts, inner speech, “hear in”), or their absence (also “hear rest”). In the visual mode one may focus externally, like the Soto Zen monk looking at a blank wall, and note what is seen (“see out”), or visit the absence of visual content with a soft focus approach (“see rest”), or else go to the blank screen of closed eyes and note mental images or their absence (“see in” and/or “see rest”). When meditating by means of body awareness, Basic Mindfulness encourages one to note purely physical bodily sensations (including awareness of the breath) as “feel out” and their absence as “feel rest,” while emotion-related bodily sensations are noted as “feel in.”

The Grid for Noting Sensory Experiences (Fig. 1) is a training tool to help improve one’s ability to track sensory events over time. The three rows show the three sensory modalities

(visual, auditory, somatic), while the four columns show different aspects of these experiences. The twelve categories of the grid (and their various combinations) can be used to explore the rich details and elements of sensory experiences that are ordinarily entangled. This entanglement is often subconscious, but we may become quite conscious of a felt sense of relief and refreshment as the entanglement is reduced or goes away entirely.

.....	<b>In</b> (Subjective Experience)	<b>Out</b> (Objective Experience)	<b>Rest</b> (Restful Experience)	<b>Flow</b> (Sensory Fluctuation)
Visual experience Label: <b>SEE</b>	Mental images  Label: <b>"See in"</b>	Physical sights  Label: <b>"See out"</b>	Visual rest (blank screen or soft focus)  Label: <b>"See rest"</b>	Fluctuating visual experiences  Label: <b>"See flow"</b>
Auditory experience Label: <b>HEAR</b>	Mental talk "hearing yourself think"  Label: <b>"Hear in"</b>	Physical sounds  Label: <b>"Hear out"</b>	Auditory rest (mental quiet or no audible sounds)  Label: <b>"Hear rest"</b>	Fluctuating auditory experiences  Label: <b>"Hear flow"</b>
Somatic experience Label: <b>FEEL</b>	Emotional body sensations  Label: <b>"Feel in"</b>	Physical body sensations.  Label: <b>"Feel out"</b>	Somatic rest (relaxation or tranquility)  Label: <b>"Feel rest"</b>	Fluctuating somatic experiences  Label: <b>"Feel flow"</b>

Figure 1. Grid for Noting Sensory Experiences<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> © Shinzen Young. In this grid, each cell describes a category of sensory experience (e.g., "mental image"). The two-word phrases in quotes are the labels spoken silently as an optional aid to the more basic of "noting" experiences that are relevant to the chosen focus category (e.g., "See in").

The power of mindfulness practices such as these is remarkable, and lies in the synergistic interaction of the three attentional skills that Young illustrated. To enlarge our previous discussion, intention lies at the core of concentrative power, or the ability to focus and remain focused on what is relevant. Sensory clarity is then the ability to trace, track and monitor *what* is being experienced in the moment and refer it back to the individual's avowed intention, while equanimity is the ability to remain at ease with whatever is presented to our sensory awareness, permitting sensory experiences to come and go, to flow as they do. This third attentional skill of equanimity contrasts with the first two, as it is concerned with maintaining attentional flow, whereas the former two involve a "gathered holding." Phenomenologically speaking, concentrative power has to do with gently holding an intention; sensory clarity is about monitoring what happens during that intention by discriminating among the phenomena that appear to our awareness and referring the mind back to its intended focus.

The effect of the three skills working together is to create *presence* – the key intervening variable that mediates the wide-ranging impact of mindfulness as documented in current scientific literature. Young identifies himself as a sensory phenomenologist and phenomenology is one of several traditions that intersects with methodologies he used in formulating his Basic Mindfulness Model. The language and metaphors for *Being* used by Martin Heidegger, the German existentialist philosopher in that same tradition, help in conveying the power of presence that accumulates when meditation is going well. Presence is like "the house of Being" that Heidegger famously ascribed to language (Heidegger, 1977). Presence is where we meet others and mindfulness meditation is a powerful means for constructing that house of presence. Related areas of research that should be pursued in the applied psychology of religion include: (1) the use of sacred moments as resources, as found in Ken Pargament's *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy* (2011); and (2) the re-appraisal of placebo effects by Alan Wallace (2012) in which the scientific model that has dogged many in pastoral care is challenged.

Basic Mindfulness does not require an orientation toward Buddhism or indeed any type of faith tradition. By integrating teachings and practices from all Buddhist traditions, mindfulness practice draws from the deeper well of universal contemplative endeavor. At the heart of Basic Mindfulness is the question: "What is mindful awareness, and how can it be cultivated?" In addressing this question, one begins to find convergence with all forms of contemplative spiritual practice – Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam and even practices that define themselves as secular and non-religious in orientation. Whether religious or secular, efforts to improve mindful awareness may ultimately lead to empowering spiritual experiences.

#### **Embedding Basic Mindfulness within pastoral care:**

In the early stages of mindfulness practice, people generally report positive but subtle benefits. These can be highly significant and should not be dismissed, as the practices included within Basic Mindfulness can have more notable and powerful effects over time, which in turn may trigger profound spiritual transformations. Reaching a level of



“industrial strength” mindfulness, however, usually requires the consistent, determined, and intelligent application of its techniques both in formal practice and daily life.

Many counsellors and therapists are attracted to Basic Mindfulness because the work they do upon themselves increases their inner resources for helping others. By personally testing out the full range of approaches it offers, they learn through direct experience which techniques are most helpful in particular circumstances. They discover that being open about their own difficult emotions and confusing mental states puts them in a much stronger position to help others. Through mindfulness practice, they are better able to convert the leaden difficulties of life into insight and transformation; better able to discern that some troubled people who seek help may be experiencing unrecognized states of spiritual transformation that have been “thrust upon them” by life events.

The ability of counsellors to detect these nuances is important, as the people with whom they work will often be unaware of their own potential for psycho-spiritual growth. Instead of deriving benefits from what is happening (i.e. making lemonade from lemons, or seeing a glass half-full), they may feel terrified and falsely conclude that they are defective, or somehow to blame. But a counsellor who has directly experienced his or her own spiritual turmoil can help such a person move from feeling traumatized to empowered.

#### **Nancy’s plight yields to the “Focus In” technique**

Consider Nancy, engulfed in a struggle with intense anger and an equally intense self-reproach for harboring such negative feelings. Her children grown and gone, Nancy was an “empty nester” who instead of enjoying the freedom of less responsibility found herself seething with resentment, most of it directed at her husband. Reduced energy had sapped her confidence in re-launching her original career. And while she still loved her husband, she could not feel or show much affection for him; affectionate feelings had given way to irritability. She thought constantly about his imperfections and repeatedly recalled many grievances she had accumulated over the years. Nancy did not want the marriage to end, but was growing desperate to end her turmoil. She had already tried individual and couples therapy, with little lasting benefit. She was frequently seized by anger toward her husband, yet inwardly felt guilty, sad and discouraged.

Nevertheless, she chose to try again with a pastoral counsellor called Samantha after hearing that she offered some different approaches, such as individual sessions alongside an introductory class in Basic Mindfulness. Feeling desperate and having heard some positive things about mindfulness therapy, Nancy agreed to both. In the class she was introduced to the methods of Basic Mindfulness and learned to use some of the techniques described earlier in this chapter.

Nancy’s counsellor Samantha practiced mindfulness twice daily and had become skilled in working with her own thoughts and emotions. She also drew on the experience gained from sustained meditation in retreat settings, which helped her to attune to Nancy’s struggle. After hearing Nancy’s re-telling of how she berated her “angry self” and of her

vain struggle to push it aside, Samantha suggested several alternative approaches that might aid in dismantling this psychic siege. However, she allowed Nancy herself to set the goals and select the approaches she preferred.

Nancy decided on the “Focus In” technique. After an orientation to the use of labels for noting thoughts and emotions, she embarked on the process. Initially she was instructed to speak her labels aloud, so that Samantha could hear the pace of the exercise and the tone of voice Nancy employed. First, Nancy explored her emotional body sensations. She then changed the focus to her mental talk and subsequently to her mental images. Through this gradual “divide and conquer” approach, the pastoral counsellor helped Nancy face her swirling emotions. Over time, she began to feel less internally oppressed and experienced more happy moments. With her outlook on life more sanguine and calm, she developed the motivation to be more selective and intentional in her remarks to her husband. The outcome was an improved relationship for both partners.

### Summary and conclusions

1. The originating viewpoint of Buddhism – found in the spiritual value of realizing the universality of suffering as a first step on the path to Enlightenment – provides the pastoral caregiver with an alternative to the implicit hierarchy of pastoral care in which one person provides healing, spiritual sustenance, guidance, or the means of reconciliation, while another receives it. This situation is typical of caring services that survive in post-1970s capitalism, often without a human face, as they have undergone intensified pressure toward clinical specialization. The Tibetan Buddhist *Lamrim* teaching of Equalizing Self and Others offers a particularly effective counterpoint to this trend; its succinct reasonings constitute a powerful reminder of the essential shared context of a pastoral encounter.
2. With its emphasis on the connectedness of all beings, the Mahayana Buddhist teaching on emptiness mitigates the isolation that impersonal professionalization can bring to care giving practitioners. When the connectedness of all beings through shared consciousness is felt as a lived reality, this understanding can reduce the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue.
3. Similarly, the teachings and meditations for attaining *bodhicitta* – progress toward the “full awakening” of becoming a *buddha* in order to reduce suffering for all beings – can also serve to ward off burnout and compassion fatigue, as it builds a feeling in the heart and within the subtle body of really wanting to help. As *bodhicitta* grows, it mitigates the energy crises that arise when giving (whether of a religious or secular nature) is based on obligation and guilt.
4. The analytic meditation, moral reasonings and guided imagery of *Lamrim*, the twenty-one concise teachings of Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, help to crystallize the foregoing viewpoints. With focus and active development, one can engage profoundly with the related but distinct spiritual qualities of affectionate love, cherishing love and wishing love, finally embracing universal Great

Compassion. Becoming familiar with how each may be developed can bring renewal to tired care providers, and offer a teaching resource that gives their clients/recipients hopeful new methods for self-renewal or soul cure.

5. Through the power of strengthened presence, placement meditation can bring about beneficial cognitive discriminations such as: equalizing the self and others; sharing our connective nature; and equanimous warm affection, from the head, into the body, and into heart-felt emotions. These resources combine to sustain a strong healing presence in the pastoral encounter.
6. We have found the Basic Mindfulness model of Shinzen Young to be an accessible, flexible and promising form of placement meditation to use in self-renewal for the pastoral care provider. It holds equal promise for equipping the recipients of pastoral care with techniques to move past the distressing “stuckness” in their minds and lives. These methods can become skills ably used long after the initial pastoral contact, as suggested in the Basic Mindfulness meditation classes that counsellor Samantha offered alongside her individual sessions. Nancy’s case illustrates how effectively that combination broke open the components of her anger problem.

For readers from all walks of life who provide spiritual care in a professional or volunteer capacity, *Psychotherapy: Cure of the Soul* is a much-needed companion on their own journeys of learning, discovery and healing. Its pages offer an accessible, vivid and often passionate gathering of reflections and current research intended to both challenge and inspire.

For the 23 contributing authors who brought many lifetimes of care-giving research and experience to the chapters between its covers, *Psychotherapy: Cure of the Soul* is where their diverse journeys meet; a rich culmination of current and future-oriented thinking for the Canadian psychotherapeutic community and beyond.

The many explorations of soul-work within these pages reveal an astonishing variety and depth that dissolves traditional assumptions and limitations about the nature of secular and religious helping vocations. Through a unique intermingling of faiths, cultures, disciplines and personalities, each of the distinct voices on this journey of caring for, curing, and even healing the soul offers a renewed understanding about the immeasurable essence within every human being.

It's no small accomplishment to gather leading minds and hearts to create a resource whose longevity and relevance will be measured not in months, but in years or decades. In an age when knowledge and information are often misconstrued as identical, written words seem to evaporate with each new social trend; reading for the soul has become a casualty of fragmented time. On this journey, however, the soul is front and centre, the simultaneous destination and beginning for all who seek to unravel its mysteries.



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