

## **Buddhist Psychotherapy**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is focused on psychotherapy in the teaching of the Buddha found in Buddhist Literature with evidences. Psychotherapy in Buddhism can cure not only mental illness but also other diseases occurring in physical process. This paper is an attempt to solve the problem how can it effect to solve their mental problems and what is the relation between the treatment and their illness. And it emphasizes to give the solution that the hypothesis is given that the Buddha cured with psychotherapy to mental illness and physical diseases which is formed by mind. As a research background, four real events, happened in India during the Buddha period will be presented. This paper is formed with three categories: mental problems which are occurring in our daily life, curing mental illness by Buddha-dhamma, Buddhist Psychotherapy which has still valid since about 2600 years ago. In writing this paper, Analytical Research Method is mainly used. The solution will be evaluated in the light of the principle of Tipitaka Texts. This research paper will be hoped successfully solve the mental and physical problems of mankind by Buddhist Psychotherapy, to be able to effectively used teaching of the Buddha in social sustainable job.

Key words: psychotherapy, treatment, mental and physical problems

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, the progress of material improvement of human beings is very fast because science and technology have brought enormous benefits to society. For example, they can help many people in any field such as information, technology, transportation, education, food and reproduction. Modern technology creates the things that even they couldn't dream before. They can pass over all difficulties. Their powers can influent not only over ground they live but also over ocean and universe. In contrast, war, becoming terrible attitudes and diseases show their own decreasing level to human beings. Especially, increasing diseases is one of the great problems that they are facing up to. The major causes of these diseases may be human's greed, side-effect of science and the damage of ozone layer. People are now solving these problems in various ways as it is really important to save the world.

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## What is Disease?

A disease is an unhealthy condition of body, mind, plant, or some part thereof.<sup>3</sup> In Pāli, there are many different names with the meaning of disease; Roga, Vyādhi, Ābādha, Ātaṅka, Gelāṅṅā<sup>4</sup>, Vyathana, Āmaya, Aru, Gada, Vana, Ruja, Rujā and Gaṇḍa<sup>5</sup>. By depending on different causes, different diseases come to appear in the world. That can be divided into two main types; physical diseases and mental diseases. The samples of numerous physical diseases are sickness, influenza (Sūlatṭhi), fever (Jara), coughing (Kāsa), heart disease (Hadayabyādi), Alzheimer, pain, cancers (Yamabbuda), headache (Siro sūla), AIDS and poliomyelitis (Peṣīsaṅkucana). And the samples of mental diseases are depression (Visādī), phobia (Uttāsa), anxiety (Vyākulatā), eating disorder (Bhojanātaccha), personality disorders (Byattittātaccha), obsessive-compulsive disorder (Ekārammaṇalubbhana), bipolar and suicidal feeling.

According to the condition of different diseases, medical treatments differ in variously. These are surgery, taking drugs, blood transfusion, gene therapy, herbal medicine, acupuncture, message, exercises, psychotherapy, psychotherapy with drug and something like that.

## Psychotherapy

In this paper, among these medical treatments, Buddhist psychotherapy will be emphasized. Before presentation about Buddhist psychotherapy, first of all, psychotherapy will be presented generally. There are some questions about psychotherapy: "What is psychotherapy? What does it help to cope with? What are the different names and common types of psychotherapy?" Psychotherapy is a treatment of mental disorder by psychological means<sup>6</sup>. It means a treatment of mental illness by talking to someone and by discussing his or her problems rather than giving him or her drugs. Psychotherapy can help to cope with mental health problems, physical health problems and relationship difficulties<sup>7</sup>. There are many different names of psychotherapy; talking treatment, talking therapy, therapy, psychological therapy and counseling<sup>8</sup>. The common types of psychotherapy are cognitive behavioral therapy, Interpersonal therapy, psychodynamic therapy and psychoanalysis<sup>9</sup>.

## Buddhist Psychotherapy

Buddhist psychotherapy is just a mental treatment in Buddhist way. Unlike other medical treatments, Buddhist psychotherapy has the ability to cure without any harm. It can be admitted that other medical treatments can remove the diseases. But symptoms of diseases may remain

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<sup>3</sup> COD. 274.

<sup>4</sup> PTS EPD. 146.

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<sup>6</sup> COD. 831.

<sup>7</sup> What is problem solving therapy.pdf

<sup>8</sup> understanding mental health problem, 2016.pdf

<sup>9</sup> psychotherapy.pdf

more or less. Buddhist psychotherapy can totally remove the diseases together with their symptoms. Moreover, Buddhist psychotherapy is secured not to get any side-effect. These are significant properties of Buddhist psychotherapy. In majority, the mental treatment known as Buddhist psychotherapy is just the teachings of the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha normally give people confidence, brave, satisfaction, calmness, contentment, etc. Therefore, it can be regarded that the teachings of the Buddha can maintain mental states of human beings to be fine. That is why these are called Buddhist psychotherapy.

Generally, many people think that teaching of the Buddha is a way to be free from worldly sufferings and it concerns with only supramundane benefits. The reverse is true. Buddhist teaching is valid for both mundane and supramundane. For example, the Buddha used mental treatment to cure any illness.

In this world, although there were many effective medicine and physicians, the Buddha sometimes used his own religious way when he felt ill. So why did the Buddha use mental treatment and how does it work? To answer these questions, we need to present by dividing into two main parts; mental problems and physical problems.

Nearly all Buddhist believe that Buddhist treatment can successfully cure mental problems. Because mental problems such as depression, loneliness, feeling small, fear, etc. which are mainly produced by greed, delusion, hatred and some other attitudes of human beings. The Buddha knew basically about that and He could see the fundamental source of these diseases. In the Purisa Sutta, the Buddha said "Lobha (Greed), Dosa (Hatred) and Moha (Delusion) of someone are not to have benefits, to suffer and not to live happily."<sup>10</sup> In the Book of Dhammapada, "from craving, grief and fear are sprung."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it can be seen that teachings of the Buddha can cure these mental states successfully and remove them completely. So there is a question; "What are the treatments in Buddhism?" These are meditation, listening to Dhamma-talk, reciting Dhamma and cultivating any six kinds of mindfulness (Buddhānussati, Dhammānussati, Saṃghānussati, Sīlānussati, Cāgānussati, Devatānussati). By doing so, Buddhist medical treatment can help to cope with human's problems.

In the teaching of the Buddha, there are many famous mental treatments to prove that the Buddhist psychotherapy is an effective treatment. It is as follow-

"Akkodhena jine kodhaṃ, asādhūṃ sādhunā jine;

Jine kadariyaṃ danena, saccenālikavādināṃ."

"Conquer anger by love.

Conquer evil by good.

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<sup>10</sup> S-I. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Dh. 45.

Conquer the stingy by giving.

Conquer the liar by truth."<sup>12</sup>

This stanza may be thought as a way to conquer someone other. Actually, that is a way to conquer oneself. Otherwise, it is a guidance to cultivate a good mental state by oneself. If one has something bad mental state, one should change to be good. To dominate anger, its opposite, love must be chosen. So also, to dominate evil, stingy and liar, their corresponding opposites must be chosen. The Buddha knew very well about these terrible mental states and can salute the problems. Therefore, it may be concluded that Buddhist psychotherapy is an effective mental treatment for human beings.

### **The Influence of Mind**

To express how to treat the physical illness, the influence of mind will be presented with speech of the Buddha. The mental treatment known as Buddhist psychotherapy is a progress to solve the problems by mind power. Because mind is overwhelm to anything. In Pāli canon, some teachings of the Buddha express the influence of mind. In the book of the Dhammapada, it can be seen thus-

"Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manosetthā manomayā.

Manasā ce paduṭṭhena, bhāsati vā karoti vā.

Tato naṃ dukkhamanveti, cakkamva vahato padaṃ."

"Mental perception is the lead in mind that causes everything to happen.

It is founded on our thoughts.

Our life is the creation of our mind which is supreme.

If one speaks or acts or plans with wicked mind, suffering and pain will follow as the wheel of a cart that follows the hoof of the ox."<sup>13</sup>

Also in the Ummagga Sutta, it is stated thus; "the world is led by mind. The world is drawn by mind. Under the sway of mind that has arisen, the world goes through."<sup>14</sup> In the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the influence of mind show obviously. Body of a being greatly depends on four great causes; reflection of one's deed, mind, climate and nutrition.<sup>15</sup> But two powerful causes to form the body are reflection of one's deed and mind.<sup>16</sup> These statements significantly show dominance of mind. It is obvious that mind has a great power to create matter. Angry

<sup>12</sup> Dh. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>14</sup> A-II. 497.

<sup>15</sup> Saṅgaha. 102-103.

<sup>16</sup> ရောဂါကုစားစိတ်စွမ်းအား၊ ၂၅။

makes angry manner, mind lead us to do something. From these statements, it can be known that mind power is used as a mental treatment to cure not only mental illness but also physical illness. Therefore, in Pāli Canon, it can be seen that the Buddha sometimes used His own religious treatment without any help of medicines and physicians.

### **Buddhist Psychotherapy and Our Society**

In Myanmar, many Buddhist people usually used Buddha's teachings as a medical treatment. According to regional survey, the list of famous teachings for patients are found thus- Bojjhaṅga Paritta, three-fold refuges, nine praises of the Buddha, Sambuddhe verse and Buddhānussati (Mindfulness in praise of the Buddha). Overall, the famous teachings to cure illness are the ones which are daily recited by Myanmar Buddhists. But they all admitted that Bojjhaṅga Paritta is a special treatment of the Buddha for all illnesses. It derives from Pathama, Dutiya, Tatiya Gilāna Suttas in the Samyutta Nikāya.<sup>17</sup> People usually recite these Buddha teachings when they or their family members feel ill. They believe that these teachings can help to cope with the diseases they suffer. Besides recitation, other medical treatments; meditation, listening to Dhamma-talk and cultivating any six kinds of mindfulness are usually used in Buddhist society.

### **The Evidences of Using Buddhist Psychotherapy**

Using the Buddha's teaching as a medical treatment is a great custom in Myanmar Buddhist society. In Pāli Canons, there are many evidences to show that it has valid since the Buddha time. In order to attack physical and mental illness, the Buddha and his disciples used it as a mental treatment. Among them, six distinct topics will be expressed and discussed in this presentation. They are divided into two main divisions; curing physical illness by three topics, curing mental illness by another three topics.

Firstly, the three topics about curing physical illness will be presented. The first topic is about the Gilāna Suttas. In fact, it is a combination of three stories. In the first story, the Buddha cured the disease of Venerable Mahāmogallāna. In the second story, the Buddha cured the disease of Venerable Mahākassapa. And in the third story, Venerable Cunda cured the disease of the Buddha. Although the patients and instructors are different, the same medical treatment was used. That is seven Bojjhaṅga (7 factors of enlightenment). And the only result was they all free from diseases completely.<sup>18</sup>

In this topic, there is something to ask; what is the seven Bojjhaṅga? And how does it work? To answer these questions, we have to discuss about seven Bojjhaṅga. Seven Bojjhaṅga means seven factors of Wisdom. These are Sati (mindfulness), Dhammavicaya (investigation of the Law), Vīriya (effort), Pīti (rapture), Passaddhi (tranquility), Samādhi (concentration)

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<sup>17</sup> S, III. 71-73.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 71-73.

and Upakkhā (equanimity). Bojjhaṅga means constituents of Enlightenment.<sup>19</sup> Actually it is a mental practice in practical life. But developing that practice simply may be a treatment to bodily illness depending on mind. By cultivating that practice, mind of patient would purify. And then also his body would purify.<sup>20</sup> As a result of that, the diseases, finally, would disappear. Therefore, these three Suttas have a reputation for the quality of seven factors of Wisdom. Today, Buddhist people usually know these three as the only teaching, Bojjhaṅga Paritta.

The second topic is about Girimānanda Thera. When the Thera Girimānanda felt terrible ill, the Buddha gave the teaching to Venerable Ānanda to preach that patient monk. The teaching given by the Buddha was about Ten Saññā (Ten Perceptions). As a result of that, the disease appeared in that monk could be removed completely by that teaching.<sup>21</sup>

To discuss about that topic, formerly, the expression of ten perceptions should be described. These are- Aniccasaññā (a perception of inconstancy), Anattasaññā (a perception of non-self), Asubhasaññā (a perception of unattractiveness), Ādīnavasaññā (a perception of drawbacks), Pahānasaññā (a perception of abandoning), Virāgasaññā (a perception of dispassion), Nirodhasaññā (a perception of cessation), Sabbaloke anabhiratisaññā (a perception of distaste for every world), Sabbasaṅkhāresu anicchasaññā (a perception of the undesirability of all fabrications), Ānāpānassati (a mindfulness of breathing-in and breathing-out). And then it is needed to analyze how to treat with these perceptions. Developing Aniccasaññā, Anattasaññā may be assigned as a foundation of treatment. Developing Asubhasaññā, Ādīnavasaññā, Pahānasaññā can be regarded as curing the disease directly or a consciousness on illness. Developing Virāgasaññā, Nirodhasaññā may be defined as a perception of happiness to overcome the illness. Developing Sabbaloke anabhiratisaññā, Sabbasaṅkhāresu anicchasaññā may be attempting not to desire on one's body. It can support to train mind not to be unpleasant because of illness and to release the suffering of illness. Ānāpānassati is a kind of psychotherapy called meditating. It may be called as a kind of psychotherapy because it can make patients to realize the nature of body and illness. By realizing these things, diseases can be reduced.

The third topic is about the devotee, Nakulapitu. When Nakulapitu had got a serious illness, he received a treatment with Buddhist psychotherapy. His wife, Nakulamātu may be regarded as a psychiatrist because without any drug, she had easily cured his disease by words. These are telling not to be worry and about religious state she had attained. By these words, the disease could remove at once.<sup>22</sup>

Telling not to worry is a kind of encouraging words. That encouraging words creates him rapture. Like the Gilāna Suttas, rapture is a Bojjhaṅga factor used in curing diseases. Because

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<sup>19</sup> Buddhist Dict. 75-77.

<sup>20</sup> SA-III, 185-186.

<sup>21</sup> A-III, 342-345.

<sup>22</sup> A-II, 261-264.

for a well-practiced person, rapture creates tranquility, then that tranquility creates concentration and equanimity step by step. It can be assumed that the devotee, Nakulapitu became fine by this encourage words. This way of curing diseases can be somehow called psychotherapy.

The fourth topic is a story of Paṭācārā Therī which is a well-known story in Myanmar society. A young woman Paṭācārā, lost her husband, her children, her parents and her only brother under tragic circumstances. Then she became a mad because of her grief. When she met the Buddha, the Buddha addressed her with His Loving-kindness. At that time, she could concentrate her mind. After that the Buddha comforted her with a teaching on Anamatagga. On hearing that, all her grief was removed at all. Finally, she entered the Order and attained Arahantship.<sup>23</sup>

The topic said that once Paṭācārā heard to the Buddha's voice and teaching, the insanity came to disappear in her and out of grief. So these may be treatments for mental illness. There were two stages of treatment; treatment for madness and treatment for grief. In the first stage, by loving-kindness, the Buddha let her to devote in Him. As a result of that, her mind was clear by faithfulness and foolish mental state disappeared.<sup>24</sup> In the second state, the Buddha gave a teaching called Anamatagga-pariyāya;

“Catūsu samuddesu jalaṃ parittakaṃ,  
Tato bahūṃ assujalaṃ anappakaṃ;  
Dukkheṇa phuṭṭhassa narassa socanā,  
Kiṃ kāraṇā amma tuvaṃ pamajjasi.”

"The water in the four great oceans is just of little amount. Compare with it, tears due to grief of a person stricken with suffering are not little amount, but plentiful. Dear daughter, why do you forget that phenomenon?"<sup>25</sup>

In medical term, it is also known as Client Centered Treatment. It is also called client centered therapy or person-centered therapy or person-centered counseling or Rogerian psychotherapy.<sup>26</sup> Client Centered Treatment is demonstrating empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness to create a warm and accepting therapeutic atmosphere.<sup>27</sup> In this therapy, one core condition, empty is an ability to understand what the client is feeling. While

<sup>23</sup> Ap-II, 236-239. Dhp A-I, 437-442.

<sup>24</sup> Dhp A-I, 441.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> psychotherapy.net. Wikipedia. Client-centered-therapy.html.

<sup>27</sup> Psychology.

this refers to the therapist's ability, the Buddhist made the client to imagine and understand oneself in other's positions. The result was that she had no grief about her past.

The fifth topic is based on a story of Kisāgotamī Therī. Like the previous story, this story is a well-known story among Buddhists. Before Kisāgotamī entered the Buddhist Order, she had a sorrowful story. A young mother named Kisagotamī, lost her only child. As she had never come across an instance of death she carried the corpse believing the child to be ill and searching for a remedy. A wise man directed her to the Buddha who advised her to collect some mustard seeds from a household where none had died. She got mustard seeds but found no household where none had died. The Truth dawned upon her. Then she could return without any grief and lamentation and listen to the Dhamma peacefully that the Buddha preached.<sup>28</sup>

Mental illness experienced by Kisāgotamī is similar to Paṭācārā's experience. Keeping her to collect some mustard seeds from a household where none had died by the Buddha can be assigned making understanding that a sorrow she had suffered was the same experience of others had got. That was the Buddha used psychotherapy known as Client Centered Therapy. This treatment is to be able to imagine and understand oneself in other's positions. Therefore, the reason why she got free from grief is Client Centered Therapy in Buddhist way.

Moreover, there is another evidence to express how to treat mental problem of fear. In the Dajagga Sutta<sup>29</sup> of Pāli Canon, the Buddha preached the Dhamma to monks. In this Sutta, if the monks get fear, tremble and nervousness while meditating, they should make recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṃgha. By doing so, they can safely meditate in seclusion without fear, tremble and anxiety. According to that doctrine, recollection of the Buddha is thus; "Itipi so bhagavā Arahamaṃ, Sammā sambuddho, Vijjācraṇa sampanno, Sugato, Lokavidū, Anuttaro purisa dammasārathi, Sathhādevamanussānaṃ, Buddho, Bhagavā." (Thus indeed, is that Blessed One is an Arahant, a fully-enlightened Buddha, endowed with wisdom and conduct, the Well-Farer, Knower of the worlds, incomparable Trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of gods and humans, enlightened and blessed.)

And recollection of the Dhamma is thus; "Svākkhāto bhagavatā Dhammo, Sandiṭṭhiko, Akāliko, Ehipassiko, Opaneyyiko, Paccataṃ veditabbo Viññūhi." (The Dhamma of the Blessed One is Well-proclaimed by the Lord is the Dhamma, visible here and now, timeless, inviting inspection, leading onward, to be comprehended by the wise each one for himself.)

The last one, recollection of the Saṃgha is thus; "Suppaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaṣaṃgho, Ujuppaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaṣaṃgho, Ñāyappaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaṣaṃgho, Sānicippaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaṣaṃgho, Yadiḍaṃ cattāri purisayugāni aṭṭhapurisaṃpuggalā, Esa bhagavato sāvakaṣaṃgho, Āhuneyyo, Pāhuneyyo, dakkhiṇeyyo,

<sup>28</sup> Ap-II, 224. Dhpa-I, 443-446.

<sup>29</sup> S-I, 220-222.



Añjalīkaraṇīyyo, Anuttaram puññakkhettaṃ lokassā." (The Saṃgha of the Buddha's disciples has well-directed, upright conduct, the right path, the perfect path, is worthy of offerings, is worthy of hospitality, is worthy of gifts, is worthy of veneration and an unsurpassed field of merit in the world.)

The way to solve the problem of man's fear is recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṃgha. In this topic, we have something to know "what is the connection between removing fear and recollection of the Buddha, etc?" In fact, recollection of the Buddha is cultivating Buddhānussati. In the other words, it is mindfulness of the qualities of the Buddha. One of the qualities of the Buddha is no fear, since the Buddha had abandoned all mental defilements; greed, hatred and delusion. Just like a person who wants to have courage, must think about great heroes in his home country. Also a person, who wants to remove fear, must recollect the qualities of the Buddha. In the same way, the qualities of Dhamma are the means to free from fear and the qualities of Saṃgha is having ability to attempt to abandon mental defilements. Therefore, recollecting these Three Refuges may be defined as a good treatment to extinct the mental problem of fear and anxiety.

## Conclusion

To conclude, Buddhist Psychotherapy plays an important role in human society. The target of this paper is to know clearly that the psychotherapy in Buddhist teaching is a good treatment for human beings. In the Dhammapada, the Buddha said "Ārojaparamā labhā"<sup>30</sup> (Health is the greatest gift)". From that teaching, the value of Healthy could be known and the Buddha really cared about benefits of human beings such as health. Each discussion of the stories supported to confirm that the Buddhist psychotherapy has valid since the Buddha time. Its effect is good for physical and mental conditions of human beings. Therefore, the Buddha is usually called as a Physician (Bhisakka or Vajja).<sup>31</sup> Overall, it is remarkable that mind is a great foundation of a body to be fine or also to get ill. As the saying goes "Dhammo Loke samuppanno sukhāya sabbapāṇinaṃ"<sup>32</sup> (Dhamma has arisen for the sake of all beings to get happiness)", the psychotherapy in Buddha's teachings is able to be effectively used in our health programs.

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<sup>30</sup> Dhp, 43.

<sup>31</sup> SA-III, 101.

<sup>32</sup> SnA-II, 293.

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အနုရုဒ္ဓ၊ အရင်၊ အဘိဓမ္မတ္ထသင်္ဂဟပါဠိ၊ သစ္စာမဏ္ဍိုင်စာပေ၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၂၀၀၆၊ ပဉ္စမအကြိမ်။

နန္ဒမာလာဘိဝံသ၊ ဒေါက်တာ၊ ရောဂါကုစားစိတ်စွမ်းအား၊ အောင်ဇေယျပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ၂၀၀၉။

ဟုတ်စိန်၊ ဦး၊ အများသုံး မြန်မာ-အင်္ဂလိပ်-ပါဠိ အဘိဓာန်၊ ဒေးလီးဂေဇက်စာပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့၊ ၁၉၈၁။