

## Book Reviews

***Buddhist Thought and Applied Psychological Research: Transcending the Boundaries*, by DK Nauriyal, Michael S Drummond and YB Lal, Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism, (2006) pp. 520+xxxv, price \$265.**

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It is a welcome addition to the current literature, ably demonstrating how Buddhist principles can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the human condition and help rebuild a balanced and fulfilling life. The spiritualist's version of the need for the current study is emphasized by his holiness the Dalai Lama in drawing the distinction between the 'understanding of the external world' and the 'understanding of the internal experiences'. As he opines, in his foreword, while material development is necessary for the happy life; a focus only on the material at the neglect of the inner development can be dangerous. In order to avert such a danger the enterprise of bringing together scientists and psychotherapists to critically analyze the process of meditative praxis and its impact on human wellbeing is what gets featured in the volume under review.

The book therefore examines the origins and expressions of Buddhist thought and how it is now being utilized by psychologists and social scientists, and also discusses the basic tenets of Buddhism and contemporary Buddhist-based empirical research in the psychological sciences. Further emphasis is placed on current trends in the areas of clinical and cognitive psychology, and on the Mahayana Buddhist understanding of consciousness with reference to certain developments in consciousness studies and physics.

The present work can be situated within Buddhist inroads into the epistemological bedrock of western philosophical tradition in the wake of postmodernist openings. It looks into the influence Buddhist studies and mindfulness practices have had on applied psychological practices especially therapy. Underlying theme in the project which culminated in this work is therefore the effort to bring the classical vipassana meditation practice texts of Pali into the various modes of meditation praxis induced psychotherapies and the contemporary research surrounding the same.

The book is divided into two parts: the first, an understanding of consciousness from traditional Buddhist perspectives, and the second, on mental afflictions, their arising and deconstruction. The first part provides the background necessary for especially the non practitioners, to understand the research findings presented in the first and second section of the second part. The chapters in their respective three sections interweave the three perspectives: Buddhist philosophical, Buddhist psychological and applied psychological. The developments in consciousness studies as they are impacted by the Buddhist philosophical and psychological studies on one hand and the applied psychological perspectives on the other provide the book its dynamism.

The nine chapters of the first part are all of them philosophical in orientation and begin with the historical overview by John Pickering of the interdisciplinary focus of the volume. The methodological pluralism having receptivity in the postmodernist context show Buddhist studies, consciousness studies and applied psychology as capable to examine and intervene into each others fields of endeavour.

The second chapter by William Ames takes up the central text of the most prominent among Mahayana Madhyamaka school, Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika*. The central issue therein of the emptiness-experience as the measuring yardstick of enlightenment or awakening into nirvana is taken up for discussion. In this sense it offers the foundational explanation of Mahayana philosophical tradition and prepares the reader for what is to come by way of detailed study of 'storehouse consciousness' or *alaya vijnana* of the Yogacara and of Tibetan Dzogchen. The third chapter by David Germano and William Waldron, specialists respectively in Adbhidarma Yogacara Buddhism and Dzogchen philosophy of Longchenpa a fourteenth century master of Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, provide the historical background as well as evolution of the concept of *Alaya vijnana* followed by its historicization and rewriting as in a genuine living religious tradition by Tibetan Buddhists. The contemporary revival of Dzogchen meditation adds to the chapters' relevance in the volume.

Along the same line of discourse, the fourth chapter by Michael Sheehy carries forward a seminal analysis of the nature of awareness exclusively from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective by exploring the translated excerpts of a Tibetan psychological text by the Third karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339) entitled 'Ordinary awareness and Pristine Awareness, Treatise on the Distinction.' It deals with the semantic, psychological and contemplative differentiation possible between the minds of a Buddha vis-à-vis non-Buddha. The nuances of Buddhist contemplative literature gets unveiled for throwing new light upon different modalities of ordinary awareness and pristine awareness. The fifth chapter is by Guy Claxton and is the first interdisciplinary one exposing the functioning of the brain from scientific as well as philosophical perspectives. It is a scientific explanation of the process of enlightenment or awakening in the neural response language of the scientist philosopher. The sixth chapter once again is an interdisciplinary one taking up the Dzogchen approach to *alaya vijnana* and explores the link between consciousness studies in Buddhism and space studies in

physics. The seventh chapter by Michel Bitbol makes a comparison between Immanuel Kant and Madhyamaka approach to reason and rational processes by way of analyzing the respective merits of both epistemologies and shows how both could benefit from each other though while one uses reason to construct science knowledge and morality the other uses rational process to deconstruct both.

The eighth chapter entitled 'the Bodhisattva's brain: neuroscience and happiness' by Owen Flanagan does a comparative search into the notion of virtue and happiness in folk understanding and Buddhist tenets and compares them scientifically with western presuppositions as to open way for further research into positive emotions as described in Buddhist happiness. The ninth chapter is once again by William Waldron and compares the scientific psychological with Buddhist Indian notion of consciousness as the receptacle out of which arises the consciousness whether termed as 'cognitive unconscious' or as in '*alaya vijnana*' in the arising of the self, object, world and society into consciousness. The last chapter of the first part by Victor Mansfield takes up the issue revolving around the misconceptions Jung had on the Tibetan Buddhism as he built around the Tibetan book of the dead, *Bardo Thodol* and equally delves into the theme of synchronicity in Jung and Tibetan Buddhism.

The second part is again divided into two sections in which the first deals with articles related to Buddhist studies revolving around the practices of vipassana meditation and the second addresses how applied psychology especially by acknowledging the effectiveness of mindfulness based psychotherapies make new attempts to understand mental afflictions and cure them.

The first section has three chapters that establish the textual basis of the efficacy of mindfulness meditation beginning with chapter eleven by Ven Analayo drawing from Pali canon. He shows how it broadens the mind as to create the connections to the 'boundless'. The second by Andrew Olendzki deal with the Pali texts exposition of '*anatta*' (non self) a companion teaching of the Buddha to his central teaching of mindfulness. This study keeps as foreground the western assumptions of selfhood and identity in unveiling the traditional wisdom of Buddha in deconstructing the content-object related process of 'self-building'. The third is by James Apple who investigates Tsong-kha-pa, the fifteenth century founder of Gelukpa school (of Dalai Lama) and his solutions for overcoming mental afflictions especially anger. It is based on the celebrated text *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* and establishes the possibility of arriving at the mind's natural, pure and luminous state.

Following the above chapters focusing on classical studies are two others by Michael S Drummond and Mu Soeng (chapters fifteen and sixteen) analyzing the vipassana meditation teaching of SN Goenka, based on observation of body feelings, comparing it with Eugene Gandlin's experiential psychotherapy both aimed at deconstructing the mental afflictions. Similarly Mu Soeng discovered Zen Koan practice as a means for mental health relying on the psychotherapy work done by John Suler to show

that the permanence of self presumed in personality development is deconstructed through Koan practice thus opening up vistas for further studies. This section closes with Christopher Tori's attempt to summarize and interpret the entry of Buddhist teachings and practices into a predominantly Christian Protestant American society of US. In his assessment of the cultural factors that facilitated the entry he portends that the transference of Asian Methods of meditations to an occidental setting will continue to be dominated by mindfulness meditation within the American Buddhist clientele.

As a whole, therefore, the chapters of section I of part two offer 'the foundation from which the mindfulness based interventions in therapy have sprung, concerning both principles and practices of Buddhist mindfulness meditation as seen in ancient texts and as practiced contemporarily' (p.xxix) This exposition of its application in psychotherapy is what constitutes the chapters of section II. It should be noted that the meeting of these two traditions took place firstly among the researchers and practitioners themselves through their own exposures to its practice and literature besides their own training in psychology. The second reason for this happy meeting point was the serious absence in Western medical tradition of giving due attention to the mind-body continuum in understanding psychophysiology. Therefore the interest in holistic approach triggered this entry into meditation practices as being helpful in treating illness. The third reason for scientific investigation of mindfulness and other meditation practices arose from the practitioners' experience that it 'provided a path of personal development not fully understood within existing principles of cognitive and behavioral psychology' on the one hand but understandable equally well within or by integrating Buddhist perspectives.

In this section chapter seventeen by David Goleman offers an overview of mind-life conference held in March 2000 with Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India. In it he especially touches upon the negative emotions as to how they arise and can be deconstructed and how positive emotions can be developed and children educated to identify and positively work with negative emotions taking into consideration the role of meditation. The three following chapters offer three different specialist interventions of working with mindfulness based techniques: Kristeller and Jones on Mindfulness Based Eating Awareness Training (MBEAT), Bowen et al on Mindfulness based Relapse Prevention Programme in treating addictive behaviours and Teasdale on treating depression with Mindfulness based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme developed by Jon Kabat Zin a molecular biologist cum seasoned vipassana meditation practitioner.

Chapters 21 and 22 by Hayes et al and Ciarocchi deal with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). The first establishes that mindfulness practice can be theoretically and scientifically defined as 'the voluntary moment-by-moment interaction with cognitive and emotional events' (xxxi) by holding a non evaluative contact with the present moment; and the second adds the dimension of effective emotional orientation as to 'continue the pursuit of one's ambitions despite difficult

emotional experiences' (xxxi) wherein Mindfulness helps to look at emotional problems as challenges than threats. Taking a slightly different turn, Jeremy Safran's description in Chapter 23 is about how the 'therapist's own mindfulness meditation practice is critical in monitoring her or his therapeutic relation with the client' termed as 'metacommunication'. The final chapter by Levine is an assessment of the types of therapies that have been in vogue, be it insight therapy or cognitive therapy wherein individuals learn to 'restructure negative mental habits'. These methods which have parallels in the Buddhist traditional textual as well as praxis tradition attempt 'systematic desensitization' of irrational fears and provide 'assertiveness training' through 'equanimity and right speech' as alternatives to 'anger and fear'. It opens up scope for new hybrid therapeutic techniques.

The epilogue is an assessment of the efforts to engage Buddhist textual studies and practices with scientific analytic framework. While appreciating the road travelled it hints at the possible directions for the journey ahead. The relevance of the work under review arises primarily from its compelling presentation of the applicability of perennial wisdom tradition, the mindfulness meditation of Buddhism, as having continued contemporary vitality in addressing issues of psychotherapy, healing personality disorders. However, the work misses out, as result of the chosen focus, on situating the discourse also within the mystical contemplative theological traditions of other religions. The implications of the mindfulness practices whether in Buddhism or Psychotherapy seen through the prism of other religious traditions and their theologies would add new perspectives for further research.