
REFLECTIONS ON BUDDHISM AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

JAMES LOW

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Generally, within a buddhist understanding, we could say that all of us are blown hither and thither like autumn leaves by the winds of our own karma. We live in the fantasy, the illusion, that we are in charge of our lives, that we are in control and that we know what we are doing. However, suddenly something happens, life tilts, and we run this way and that.

The causes of suffering that the Buddha set out in his very first teachings are ignorance and attachment. Ignorance is to ignore what is simply the case. This is not abstract or theoretical; it is very simple and direct. Attachment then arises to that which is created by the act of ignoring what is there. There appear to be real things with real qualities experienced by a real subject. We then react towards this stuff as if it is reliable and stable. On the basis of taking things to be stable and reliable we build up sets of assumptions. Then, while moving within these realms of assumption, everything seems happily reassuring, at least for a while. We maintain our assumptions by means of selective attention, editing, and by privileging our map over the actual lived territory. This is normal and pervasive. That is to say, we suffer because we want to stabilise our existence – but our desire is for an impossibility. We want things to be OK: ‘If only I could find a stable object then I would be OK.’ However, stable objects don’t exist and stable subjects don’t exist.

We have an endless capacity to wrap ourselves in dreams, fantasies, projects, hopes and fears. However, each of these is contingent and ephemeral. As we get older we can look back on our life and remember the things that we put our heart into: getting a new bicycle, falling in love for the first time, getting a job; all the various things which seemed so very important. All these have now gone. One of the things about our blinkered existence is that we have a short range of focus and we tend to take an immediate situation as being the final solution: ‘If only this happens then I will be OK.’

Impermanence is the heart of the Buddha’s teaching: every arising thing will pass away. That is to say, everything that we see, everything we hear, everything we touch, all the experiences of our senses, all the phenomena which are revealed to us, including those which appear external and those which appear to be internal, are like holograms. They have no substance to them. Rather, they arise due to the meeting together of many temporary causal phenomena. For example, it is like a theatre. Theatres exist because of the coming together of many diverse intentions and motivations. We have a history of drama, we have drama schools, playwrights, and so on. However, these are not sufficient conditions because if you don’t have an audience the theatre will quickly close. This is the same with our existence. We think everything is in

place but the one factor we didn't see, what lies in the shadows, suddenly manifests and the situation changes. Our lives are manifestations of causes we never see, and the focus on daily events and our feelings about them blinds us to our ephemeral status.

Who is the one who experiences all arising things? Clearly, each of us can say: 'I do.' Yet who am I? What is this self constructed out of? Many different events, concepts and experiences are taken to be 'self'. I can say, 'I am tired,' or 'I am a man.' Both of these exist as sites of self-identification. However, of course, I am not *always* tired. I can say, 'I am hungry' and then have lunch and then I am not hungry. So how could I, as a permanent entity, be hungry and then not be hungry? We ourselves fill ourselves all the time with things from the world. That is to say, momentary identifications are taken and given full validity by the strength by which we take them. How can this be possible? How can *one* thing have so many different significations? For example, if we take this object I am holding, my watch, we can see it has two little wings, the straps, and so it is also a very nice bird flying about. We could hold it straight out and it is a gun. We are too old for these happy games, though children are not yet trapped in the understanding that there is more to life than the imagination. All the important, 'real' phenomena of our lives are just a constipated imagination; the illusion of stability created by our habit of reification.

Reflecting on this, each of us might see that what we experience as 'my mind' is itself the host of everything, including the concept and, indeed, the experience of 'my mind'. My mind invites 'you' and it invites 'me'. While I am always 'just me', I am also a never ending stream of identifications as I momentarily become this and then that, tired, and then hungry, and then happy...on and on. Emptiness and awareness are inseparable. This is the ground in which all experience occurs. This is the understanding of non-duality which is developed in the later mahayana understanding and provides the basis for all tantric practice.

To see our transience and lack of central control over our existence is the beginning of understanding emptiness through recognising dependant co-origination. We can also experience emptiness directly through meditation. That is to say, by calming the mind, we can experience directly how the revelation of manifestation, the arising of particular thoughts, feelings and sensations, does not last for long. Then, taking this understanding into the world, we start to see that the phenomena we encounter always have a missing element, ourselves; an object only comes into lived experience through the participative presence of a subject. Subject and object, self and other, are inseparable and empty of inherent self-nature.

You can take an ordinary object, like a watch and use it to explore experience. The watch comes into existence for you when you look at it. Before you look at it, it is not a major part of your world experience. It is in the background, taken for granted. The watch exists as a moment of experience. When the attention is removed from the watch, where is the watch? A traditional question in Indian philosophy is, 'If a tree falls in a forest and there is no one to hear it fall, does it make a sound?' If we give this watch to a three year old child it is very likely that they will start to hit it on something. They have eyes, ears, they can eat but they don't know the value of the watch. Therefore, we have to tell them the value of the watch: 'Don't touch that. That is your father's and when he comes home there will be trouble.' This shows us directly that the child has not yet learnt to put the value in object. While we, as adults, have learned about the function and cost of watches, and in a manner very similar to the psychoanalytical notion of repression, we have forgotten that we have put the value into the object and so have come to automatically see the value as inherent in the object.

For example, if I hold up this watch and ask you what it is, you will say that it is a watch; you will believe it is a watch. However, if you were from a tribe in the jungle you may put it in your ear. That is to say, we take what we see to be what it appears to be for us, forgetting that it is we ourselves who co-create the existence of the phenomena with our habitual and largely automatic interpretations. This is the living meaning of emptiness; there is no inherent 'watchness' in the watch. Without the concept of the watch in our mind, without the habit of

using this object in this way it would not exist in the way that it appears to. Something would be there, but this is not a 'thing'. Natural radiance is always present as the potential out of which all appearance manifest with the movement of the mind. In the dharma it is said that mind is the maker of all things, mind is the chief.

Reification and its consequent mistaking of appearances is not something natural but is, in buddhist understanding, seen as an artificial construction. The word samsara refers to our endless revolving through realms and experiences generated by our imagination when it is in the service of maintaining a separation of self and other, subject and object. How samsara arose has been described by Padmasambhava. As in all the buddhist traditions he points to its root in ignorance.

The word for ignorance in both Tibetan and Sanskrit is a negative form of the word meaning awareness. Padmasambhava describes three stages to its development. The first of these is called co-emergent ignorance and this is compared to a drunken man falling down a flight of stairs. In that situation there is a movement of energy, a momentary shifting in the field of awareness, some experiences arise but without clarity. There is a hazy indeterminability. However, instead of the drunken man relaxing back into his carefree state, something happens. The moment doesn't just pass; it causes a disjunction in the quality and focus of experience which is then stabilised by thinking, 'What has happened to me?' At this point subject and object become strongly divided. The energy of awareness is not recognised for what it is. It is taken to be something else. The rapid interplay of the emerging polarities of this energy is the field of subject and object. Neither has any essence or ground of its own yet they soon are taken to be real and separate entities. It is as if you were out walking in the mountains and you came to a crossroads and you took the wrong way. Instead of the road taking you down through the valley and back home you find yourself walking further and further into places that you don't know. Now, at this point if you were just to stop and think, 'Ooh, I am lost,' you might be able to turn around and go back home. However, the mind never stops; thoughts, feelings and sensations continue to arise and you start to make sense of this place where you find yourself. It becomes, as you focus on it, your only world, your sole domain of experience and identity. There is no longer any recollection of one's true home.

This constructive elaboration is the function of the second level of ignorance, the ignorance which names or organises everything. Now you are living in this new valley and you say, 'Aah, I know this place, it's OK, I can build a house here.' The creativity of your own mind makes what is completely unfamiliar and ungraspably transient into something that seems familiar and increasingly reliable. The more you identify particularities in the field of objects the more you have nouns, adjectives and adverbs describing not just things but qualities. In this way your own subjectivity becomes more and more complex as you hold more and more different ideas which respond to the increasingly variegated field. And now that you have been in this complexity for such a long time, though actually it is just in an instant, you settle into taking it for granted, as if it has always been like this.

Then comes the third level of ignorance which is called the ignorance of the stupidity or dullness of not understanding karma. Now we are living in the world with our familiar phenomena and we take it for granted; we take it as given that things just are the way they are. That is to say, there are 'real objects' present in a 'real world' and I am a 'real subject' experiencing these objects. Towards these different objects, I have different kinds of reactions which identify them as being good or bad, and then I feel happy or sad. Feeling that it is my job to improve myself I keep trying to make events happen the way I want them to be. This is what occurs when we do not understand karma.

Karma is traditionally described in terms of four stages. The first of these is the ground or the base. The base of karma is ignorance, not being awake to how things are, being lost within the illusory realm of the duality of subject and object. The second stage is intention developed by

an autonomous subject. For example, you might come to this buddhist centre and see these Tibetan thangka paintings. You might think they look nice and that you need to get one so that it can increase your faith. You go into the shop, see one you like, feel you must have it and pay the money. You now have the thangka. This leads to the third stage which is the getting of, or union, with the other. Subject and object have now joined together: 'I now have what I want.' You then take it home and feel: 'Ooh this is really good.' This is the fourth stage called completion which means that my intention been fulfilled and I remain fully aligned with that intention. If these four factors are fully aligned all the way through, you have the full impact of the karma. That is to say, an energetic charge is set up which will later manifest as a good experience if there was a virtuous action and as a negative experience later if it was an un-virtuous action. Thus, moment-by-moment in life we are weaving strands in a tapestry we don't see; we are creating the causes and conditions of future events. An action which, in this particular moment, seems to free us, may well have the consequence of binding us into something else later.

CONSIDERING THE PRACTICE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY IN RELATION TO WISDOM AND COMPASSION

Before considering the practice of psychotherapy in relation to the view unfolded above, it is important to be aware that psychotherapy and buddhism differ in that psychotherapy, generally, is grounded in the humanistic tradition. This is to say, it is a view which is human centred, which sees human beings as a kind of ultimate form and that our task is to realise our potential as human beings. However, in traditional buddhism, being a human being is just one particular mode of illusion. The essence or the central quality that is the basis of our ripening and fulfilment is not our humanity but our buddha nature. Psychotherapies also tend to be concerned with one life; not saying anything about where we came from before birth or where we might go afterwards. This is quite a small perspective. The metaphysical view of buddhism is vast, infinite. We have all been born millions of times and we can all be born millions of times more. How we are now is just the fruit of the arising of certain causes which are both limited in the duration of the result and also easily displaced by the arising of the results of other causes. No matter how we act in trying to stabilise the patterns of phenomena, they change in ways we don't want. And our own thoughts and feelings seem to have a life of their own.

Everywhere there are hospitals; people get sick. Perhaps today we are not sick but sooner or later we will become so. Cemeteries are everywhere and they are not just for other people. We also will find a little hole in the ground somewhere. Thus, who we are and what we are is not so special. What happens to others will also happen to us. Yet we live in a time of supreme narcissism. If you watch football on television you will see grown men put a little leather ball into a goal and then hug each other and punch the air as if something truly marvellous had happened. Without shame they waste their precious human life. From a buddhist view this behaviour results from a seductive yet terrible confusion in which entertainment is privileged and the possibility of deeper reflection is forgotten. If all the wonderful skills of a good footballer such as grace, balance, collaboration, and timing were applied to the task of awakening how wonderful that would be. The paths in which we can go into meaningless meaningfulness are everywhere available.

However, according to the buddhist framework we now have a precious human birth, we have met the dharma, and perhaps start to understand something. Yet death can come at anytime. There are many horrible places to be reborn and our power to control our situation is very small. In the mahayana tradition we focus on two key principles: wisdom and compassion. As we began to explore above, wisdom is to understand the essential emptiness of all phenomena. Compassion is the intention and activity to help beings realise that they construct the world of illusion and suffering for themselves. I would like to offer some reflections on the practice of psychotherapy from the view of wisdom and compassion.

I realise I did not introduce myself so maybe I should say something. I studied buddhism in India for about twelve years and worked mainly with a Nyingmapa lama translating many buddhist texts. I was lucky enough at that time in the 1970's to meet many different teachers. When I came back to live in England in 1983 I had to earn some money, unfortunately. However, one day I was walking down the street and I saw in the window of the unemployment office an advertisement for a job in a drama therapy project. In this project I learnt as an apprentice, finding my way through participation and feedback. I then went onto train formally as an art therapist.

In the Nyingmapa tradition we talk of nine yanas, nine different vehicles or styles of practice, and so I thought I should apply this principle to therapy training as well. Therefore, for the next twelve years I trained in gestalt, psychoanalytic therapy, family therapy and did many, many trainings. I found this very interesting, for each model illuminates a bit while claiming to see all. Just because we search for truth and justice does not mean we can escape power politics, hierarchy, and the myriad games of samsara. Stepping out of our box, out of the reassuring assumptions and mutual validation of our group, lets us see how relative our beliefs and practices are. The truth does not lie in any of these particular forms but each of the forms is a useful method for making contact and doing work with particular kinds of people. As in the well known example from the Buddha, if you come to a river and you need to get across, it is useful to use a boat. However, you don't need to carry the boat with you after you reach the other side. This is particularly true when your journey might require you to ride a bicycle for a while and then use skis.

Whatever we study the question of identity is always central even if not immediately apparent. We can practice staying open and using everything we learn as a method for connecting with different kinds of people. Or we can turn it knowledge into a kind of house that we live in. If we choose this latter path, then the more we learn, the more we build up a secure territory, a fixed position, from which we carry out transactions with others. However, that has a kind of sclerotic quality and gradually we find that what gave us freedom starts to imprison us, and of course, it also limits or imprisons all those we interact with. As Patrul Rinpoche says in his commentary on the key dzogchen teaching of Garab Dorje, the yogi develops his meditation by destroying it. This means that we don't make something which *seems* like a success, which *seems* like something secure, a place in which to hide. Rather, if we keep opening each moment up we will find that our freshness and the freshness of the world move together very beautifully.

In therapy, in the early stages, the patient is often caught up in a neurosis, in a particular kind of anxiety or depression, and they take their experience to be very strongly real as something that is a given in their existence. The therapist endeavours to remain open to the patient without being seduced by the story while at the same time taking their experience seriously as just that, their experience. Heinz Kohut used this intentionally, in privileging empathic attunement in the first stage of the analysis in order to gather information in order to prepare the interpretation which, like a stiletto, would then be inserted at the right point. Love and death go together. As our poor wounded hearts know, to love someone is to let them know where to stab us. This is transformed from the usual self-centred activity of securing one's own benefit into a higher activity in the practice of therapy. For change to occur sooner or later there has to be blood on the carpet; something has to die. And the more we ourselves realise the parts of ourselves which have to die or be untied, or cut free, the more easily we can help the good physician accomplish this. It is vital that trainee therapists are willing to open to the razor of insight so that they experience its benefits and also, having felt its pain, learn to use it wisely.

Similarly, in meditation retreats there is always a little air of danger. Being near a lama who is a meditator should not be a relaxing experience. The English psychoanalyst, Wilfred Bion said that unless there are two anxious people in the room there is no point in them meeting; something must be at stake for both. Time is short, distractions are many and so it is vital to be clear about the task and the methods. To really understand emptiness and to embody the

function of compassion requires us not to stray from our own state of awareness. This is no easy pursuit, and there is an added complication when we try to integrate this with the practice of psychotherapy.

It is common for parents to say to their children: 'Sweet heart, just do the best you can, nobody can ask more, just do the best you can.' However, from the point of view of dharma this is not true. This is because only awakening will protect you from the dreams of samsara. Almost awake... and then suddenly another big wave comes—gone. And day-by-day, month-by-month life goes by. The practice we didn't do yesterday we won't do today because today we have today's practice to do. I think the practice of dharma brings to the task of psychotherapy a heightened awareness that this person in front of me is suffering and they are suffering inside a story and that story is an illusion. What is an ethical pitch or grade of response to make to this unique person? How can I bring a useful edge to help the person have a deeper fear, one that ripens the growing edge of their capacity to live with things as they are? Freud said that the goal of analysis was to help people move from neurotic suffering to ordinary unhappiness. However, I would suggest that a dharma-informed therapy should be to help the patient move from neurotic unhappiness to existential terror – that the world is not what we think it is – and through that to a state of relaxed openness.

With neurosis, narrative comes to replace the direct experience of vivid actuality. Therefore, as therapists, as meditators, it is important to listen to everyone, including ourselves, very lightly, without any particular bias or agenda. We need to resist the seductive pull of the patients' narrative, for we are all suckers for a good story. I personally think many therapists listen too sweetly to the patient. We have two ears: one ear should be like a loving mother and the other should be like a policeman. The police don't believe very much of what anyone says. We don't understand ourselves very well and therefore we need to be suspicious of our belief that we tell the truth. When we really see how we are, we can apply the same compassionate scepticism to the speech and actions of others. If compassion is to help people awaken, the first thing we have to do is to become a little bit awake ourselves. Of course that requires meditation but also it requires a very precise and accurate understanding of how it is that we become asleep or deluded. In order to do that we have to really trust that the dharma view is more important than our own ordinary experience.

When patients come into therapy they are often encouraged to talk about their childhood. However, at first they might be surprised at our interest in that area of their lives. They are being inducted into a narrative that says: 'How you are now is dependent on what happened to you as a child.' This can be explored in terms of an active/passive split: that the child is like clay and the environment moulds them. Or, we can see it as more a dynamic interaction: that the small baby, already when in the womb, is in relation to the environmental field and that mutual influencing is the force-field within which the baby starts to individuate. However, the view in terms of karma would be that the baby has come into a world determined by its own karmic structure. Both the baby and the baby's world are the baby's karma.

According to the tradition, having left a previous existence, if you are going to take on a human form you find yourself, at a certain point, after many different experiences, running in a tunnel. Ahead of you, you see a couple having sex and your intention or gaze is fixed particularly on their genitals. If you feel excitation for the penis and an aversion for the vagina this determines you to have a female birth; if you feel excitation at the vagina and aversion for the penis this prefigures you to have a male birth. That is to say, the way of being born as a human being is a mixture of desire and aversion. We are constantly making selections from the rich potential which is all around us and within us. The choices that we make are determined by our conditioning; the impact of past experience.

Thus, our karma is not something inside us; our karma is the entirety of our subject/object interaction. From the point of view of meditation, everything we experience is ceaselessly

unfolding and there is no stability in anything. This sphere of our experience is always unique and particular for each one of us. For example, we are here in this room and not so much is going on, and yet each of us will be having our own specific experience that will differ from that of the people sitting next to us. When the words come out of my mouth and go into your ears, they meet the complex patternings of possibility which are your existence. This is the nature of our karma; we always get our own share. Nobody can get someone else's share. Therefore, there is a fundamental otherness on the level of manifestation. However, on the level of the ground of emptiness, everything is entirely the same. At the moment when we rest in awareness and experience phenomena arising, they all have one taste. They are equal however differentiated they are in form: equal in being the flowers of emptiness.

Therefore, if you are sitting in the room with someone who has come to see you for counselling or therapy, you could think of this as a kind of theatre. The stage is always empty, and with each play that arises, new props are set up within the space of the stage. At the end of each production they have to be put away to make room for the new props. It is the very emptiness of the stage that allows the play to be performed; an emptiness which is unaffected by the changing usage of the stage. Accordingly, when our patient or our client comes to see us, we must have an empty stage and some silence—the patient then tells us the story lines out of which we will jointly create today's play. Last time it may have been something very dramatic and intense and today it may be something subtle and understated. Is remembering what happened in the previous session helpful or not? Perhaps, we should neither remember nor not remember but just simply be relaxed and ready. This requires us to maintain the stillness and silence in the midst of responding and speaking. The deepest stillness comes from awakening to the emptiness of oneself and all phenomena. Then we see that everything is like a dream, and this brings a freedom of response.

As Heidegger has suggested, it is important to have many things to hand. Like a good chef you have a kitchen with many spices, many kinds of knives and so on. Everything can be available around you: all the experiences of your own life, all that you have studied and then—what shall I cook today? Perhaps today they want to have a cheese soufflé. Fine, but we might want to ensure that they have some salad too. We have to learn many, many kinds of cooking to fit our many patients and their many moods. You may be familiar with the image of the bodhisattva of compassion, Chenrezig, who has many heads and many, many hands; this is the sign of a good therapist.

However, you might think that your oven is not very good and maybe the soufflé won't rise. Why is everything not possible for us? What is the limit inside ourselves that says: 'I cannot provide this person with what they seem to need.' Sometimes it is because we have an anxiety about making mistakes and we want to wait until we are surer, more certain. However, in that moment of waiting, the moment of action has gone.

When you act you take; you take yourself into engagement with the other, you take them up in a particular way. Maybe it is a miss-take. In the English language to mistake is just to take the wrong way. You can always let go; miss-takes are never final because nothing is final. Impermanence means that good things don't last forever and it also means that bad things go too. Therefore, the courage of the therapist is to be present and if something is a bit off or a bit wrong don't go with that, don't beat yourself up, but just come back to yourself and the actual situation and then proceed again. All that the *patient* takes up as real and all that *you* are invited to take up as a means to understanding them are structurally miss-takes; inside the realm of ignorance everything is off. Therefore, it is about listening with a sense of illusion; that one is hearing everything in the person's life as if it were a dream.

For example, the patient may say, 'My mother never loved me and because of that I have always been depressed. I don't trust that anyone will ever love me. Therefore, when I meet someone who might love me, I test them so very hard that they run away.' How, then, to hear this? *Who*

is the one who has not been loved? Is it the ego or is it something else? The buddha nature, the undying, perfect, open dimension of being, has never been loved or not loved because the person who was their mother did not have that ability. If you want to buy spinach don't go to the butcher. Only the unconditioned can provide unconditional acceptance. Trying to do it will not help, for it is not a quality of the ego and is beyond the scope of the will. Moreover, we need to remember Freud's notion of transference love and resist the pull of that longing and idealisation. Analysis should at least free us from the projection that the analyst is more than an ordinary human being. Then our familiar sense of what constitutes a human being can be deconstructed. This is why dharma practice is vital. From the point of view of the dharma the love of a mother is both very beautiful and very dangerous. It is beautiful because the warmth, tenderness, and careful attention help the child to thrive and develop confidence and the capacity to relate. It is dangerous because the mother wants the best for their child within the frame of reference of the assumptions of her own world. She wants to protect the child from the horrible fruits of ignorance by feeding them the delicious fruits of ignorance. 'You know I will always love you—you are the best one.' This is beautiful, this is a heart which is full of love but has no emptiness. So if a patient says, 'I have not been loved,' if we hear that in terms of a deficit and tilt too much to provide some kind of reparation we potentially miss the possibility of staying with the openness: 'What is this love that you have missed?' 'Who is the one who has missed it?' 'We sit together and I see you breathing in and out. You are alive. You have life. You came from your mama. Perhaps, that is enough? She was the source of your physical existence but what is the source and ground of who you actually are now? What do you want to do with your life? Who are you?' Going back to that question again and again from various points of view, we can help to untie the fantasy that there is a 'lack in me' which requires a perfect object to fill it. Neurotic lack is like the photographic negative of emptiness. All things from the very beginning have been empty and are ungraspable. Therefore, fulfilment, satisfaction, gratification or ease will not arise from attachment to an object.

Perhaps, then, very subtly and with great kindness, we can help people to realise that the fantasy that they have longed for cannot do the business and that, in fact, the suffering they have is perhaps a blessing—if they have courage. The Buddha began his first teaching by pointing out the prevalence of suffering. Suffering lets us see that the world which can seem such a sweet dream is actually a nightmare. Just as the communists have critiqued psychoanalysis for being a way of dispelling the outrage we feel at the pitiless structure of inequality-based society and for being against an external revolution, so from a buddhist point of view psychotherapy can also be seen as a bit of a cover up. Psychotherapy could be taken as saying, 'Oh, I will make your dream better. Let me take some of the stones out of your shoes so you can travel easily as a sleep walker.'

Patients tend to slip into places inside themselves. If we think about an infant developing, we see that they encounter many different experiences, some they can cope with and some they can't. Babies are overwhelmed very easily and require the presence of another, usually the mother, to help them come back into themselves. If this happens frequently they learn to self-soothe. However, if the environment is particularly invasive or abandoning then the capacity to self-soothe will not develop. As the child grows into adulthood their rapid arousal and slowness to return to a calm state makes them vulnerable to the actions of others. When a person cannot settle themselves easily after a disturbing event, the prolonged period of arousal often feels overwhelming and this can easily lead to the adopting of intense strategies to shift mood and lower arousal. These include self-medicating with alcohol and so called recreational drugs, cutting, starving, bingeing, use of pornography and impulsive sexual contacts. These behaviours arise from and further intensify negative thoughts about oneself and others which create a sense of how things are which is at odds with the actual state of affairs. This leads to interpersonal conflict which further intensifies the affective disequilibrium and the sense that one is wrong or bad and that others are dangerous or indifferent.

For example, if somebody has experienced a lot of abandonment—when as a small child they have gone out towards the environment with a natural hope and expectation of being met in some way and that has been collapsed—then there is a turning in, a despondency, which is often represented in the body by a downward gaze. This experience then develops as a kind of site or place in the evolving sense of self, one of hopelessness or sinking or confusion. At the same time, when the child is feeling this abandoned by the environment, they will feel a natural anger and irritation. However, of course, if you are being abandoned you cannot show it because the very showing of it often intensifies the abandonment you are receiving from the environment. This creates, in turn, a little island of anger, rage and confusion. All of us have particular, intense nodes or pockets of rather cut off aspects of ourselves which, when we are encapsulated within them, isolate us from both the environment and from other aspects of ourselves. This means that when you experience a provocation from the environment, instead of being able to calm yourself and then think in a balanced way about what is happening in the outer field and in yourself, there is a collapse into a limited state which is deprived of the resources, both outer and inner, required for attuned responsiveness. Then, when one acts from such a limited state, it tends to be with impulsivity—with no checks being applied from the other aspects of oneself—and such impulsivity tends to be habitual and addictive. It is as if all the pain and suffering you have had in the past has filled a big freezer with intense emotions, and when a new provocation comes from the environment you take a little packet from the freezer, pop it in the microwave and deliver to the world a ready prepared very hot meal. You don't have to think about how to do it, and more importantly you are not thinking what the other person can eat. You are just feeding them stuff from your own history, your own pain.

A central task in working with people who are incoherent, who have never really experienced themselves as an integrated reflective self, is to bring about increased communication between their self-aspects and through that, with the world at large. Whenever we have a particularly intense moment in the therapy, where the working alliance is under pressure and may rupture, it is important to revisit it later when the temperature cools and try to make sense of what happened. One of the methods I use for this is to work with the patient to map what has occurred on a piece of paper. In collaborating to do this, we build up a picture or a description that helps us both to see what we were getting caught up in. With this the patient can come to see what their tendencies are, and what the likely provocations are that might illicit them. With this overview they can see then see how they could prepare themselves, in advance, to not succumb to the situational elicitation, and to not be pulled into it. That is to say, we want to install a capacity for intentionality within a wider reflective turn as the antidote to slipping into the intensity of fusion with the arising of the limited and limiting impulse.

We can now look at how the view and practice of Tibetan buddhism can support us as therapists in the task of staying open to those in distress, especially when they are in states of fragmentation. The buddhist teachings describes five poisons or limiting afflictions: stupidity, aversion, attachment/desire, pride and jealousy. It is out of these five tendencies that all the different kinds of emotional and interpersonal disturbance are said to arise. In the practice of tantra these five poisons are transformed into the five buddhas in the development of the mandala structure which includes and transforms all experience. Stupidity is usually in the centre and is transformed into the wisdom or the awakening to all-encompassing space. That is to say, one moves from being trapped inside preoccupation with oneself as an autonomous monad, as somebody self-existing in a world of one's own—always with a threshold in front of one and a choice whether to move towards the world or not—to recognising that we are *always already* in the world, and that awareness itself is the ground or field of both self and the world.

On an ordinary level we came out of the world, we came out of our mother's belly as part of the world and all the way through our lives, in all situations, we have been part of the world. It is not that we have a sort of customs station at our ears, eyes and nose and so on, checking out if some presenting situation has a visa or not. Everything comes and we are always already in it.

Even if you take a lot of drugs to get out of it you are just in it in another way. We are en-worlded. Therefore, our choice is not *whether* we enter the world or not but *how* we move in this experiential field which is indeed ourselves. This is the basis of what is called the *dharmadhatu*. *Dhatu* means space or dimension and *dharma*, in this context, means natural, that which has never been created or fabricated. It is in this space that everything is already moving. We are the space *and* the movement. However, with the arising of ignorance we have forgotten our spaciousness, we have lost contact with our own ground and become over involved in movement. Therefore, the main task of integrating, from the buddhist point of view, is to find space; to relax into the space and to realise how everything, from the very beginning, has space as its sole mother.

This may seem rather abstract and lacking the feeling tone that would bring it alive. In the tradition the quality of emptiness, openness or spaciousness, is seen as a goddess, Prajnaparamita or transcendent wisdom. She is called the mother of all the Buddhas. When *we* were born we came out of our mother's flesh and blood womb but when we are born as Buddhas we are born from, and into, and within emptiness. We enter into a non-dual integration in emptiness and then we wake up to realise how we are, which is how we have always been.

With this view as a background, when we reflect on patients who have been very hurt, patients often classified as having borderline personality disorder, we see that they manifest or are constituted from a range of self-aspects each invested with great emotional intensity and marked by poor communication with other states. The task is to integrate these states, to bring about better communication between them. The more this happens they function less as separate states and more as nodes in an interweaving system.

In the psyche there is no enemy. Rather, these aspects of ourselves which can seem very terrifying in their intensity are just trapped energy. For example, if you have a kettle and you put it on the fire it will boil and if you keep the heat going the kettle will start to shake. This is exactly what happens in these states of intensity. What Freud would call libido is very similar to what in yoga we call *prana* or in Japanese and Chinese systems *Ki* or *Qi*. In the system of tantric yoga we understand that we have many different channels in the body. These channels direct all our activity and they meet together in the central empty channel which runs down the middle of our body. However, knots can occur in these channels. This is rather like cholesterol thickening the arteries and making it difficult for the blood supply to pass through. Something similar occurs within the structure of personality disorders: communication starts to break down and the self-aspects lose touch with each other. This is like life in a big city where alienated autonomy becomes normal. People walk down the streets without looking at each other, they bump into each other and don't have any sense of rhythm. Their eyes go dull and there is a kind of falling inwards; people become like zombies. This is pervasive and this is a quality of the intensification of ignorance, as each part sees itself as apart, forgetful of its actual participation.

That is to say, the more subject and object become separated and the more objects seem real and controlling and coming towards us, the more we want to vanish. If you travel in the city as a commuter during the rush-hour everybody is 'gone'—if you stayed in your skin you would scream. We are invited to become machines. Karl Marx had a very clear analysis of this phenomenon which he describes in terms of alienation, false consciousness and mystification. By mystification he indicated the way the worker in a factory—who is toiling all day long and very tired and sweaty at the end of it—cannot understand how the owner of the factory is driving by in a Ferrari in a beautiful suit with his hair nicely quiffed. We just think, 'Oh, some people are rich and some people are poor. Life is like that.' In that attitude there is no understanding of cause and effect, and so we tend to reconcile ourselves to the seeming givenness of the situation.

As an antidote to this tendency what we want to develop is a sense of emptiness in order to recognise the open spaciousness of our own mind; that our mind is big enough to encompass any of the impermanent phenomena, internal and external, that we encounter. If you trust impermanence you won't have to do so much work, as you can catch the patients' moment of change and engage with it. In the teachings of dzogchen, one of the most important aspects of the view is awareness of the automatic self-liberation of all that occurs. This is the direct experience that everything goes free by itself: good things will go and bad things will go. Even though you try desperately to hold onto good things they still go. Even though you try desperately to keep bad things away from you they still come and then go. Relaxing and being open one can experience that whatever comes, comes and whatever goes, goes.

This is not a macho position; it is not about steeling oneself against situations. Rather, it is about trusting the indestructible quality of spaciousness and letting go of the need to neurotically control circumstances so that we can creatively work with them. Of course, in the Tibetan tradition there are many wrathful gods which indicates that you do not have to simply become passive and adaptive in every situation. Rather, if a situation becomes knotted, if life becomes blocked, then sometimes you need to hit it very hard. If you have wisdom you know exactly where to hit it. If you have compassion you hit it just hard enough.

In our life we are pulsating between being ordinary and invisible and being visible and unique. Somebody knows our name, we have a coffee with them, we feel seen and valued, we part and then we are just invisible again, just a face in the crowd. That is a great freedom, moving from emptiness into manifestation, pulsating all the time. The capacity to relax and become invisible, to become no-one, is attacked by all the mental dysfunctions: depression, anxiety, personality disorders, psychosis and so-on. That is to say, these are all states of arousal: 'I am depressed', 'I find myself always worrying.' They are states in which the subject and what is arising have become fused together and so one can't just relax out of them. For example, in the garden here there are many beautiful birds flying around. However, somebody who is very depressed will be in their depression and not really be touched or moved by the birds. In that way they are pre-occupied; they are always already filled with their neurotic structure. To be released from neurosis is the beginning of the way back into the openness or emptiness of availability.

The buddhist notion of attachment, as something intrinsic to dualistic experience, helps us to see that even those who suffer from something which they hate are implicated in being stuck with it. The object by itself never determines a situation. For example, in one of the hospitals I used to work in, they had a large surgical unit where many amputations took place. The hospital had a very long corridor running through it and patients used the corridor to help them get used to using a wheelchair after having one or both legs cut off. Every day, when I would be walking along to my clinic, there would be people coming at me in their wheel chairs. Some people would cry and stop and bang the wall and be very angry. Some people would go very slowly as if all the energy had drained out of them. And every now and then two people would have a race. I would often wonder what I would be like if I lost my legs. This thought would make me agitated because I like moving around. I would think, 'Oh, if it happened to me then I would be...' and it would seem like something very fixed. However, what was very helpful for me was to see the wide range of how people responded to this challenging situation. For there is always freedom to take up a new position to any situation. Who we were yesterday is already gone. Who we will be tomorrow we don't know. Nonetheless, we project our fantasies of the continuity of our current situation. This is a kind of auto-intoxification, a kind of dream we live in, and the deeper the dream we are in, the more cruelly the world hits us when things change. Therefore, part of our work in preparation to be a therapist is, I think, to observe the impermanence of our own existence and to start to observe very precisely that we are not the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. We are not who we think we are but we are, momentarily, who we are revealed to be in the moment-to-moment interactions with others.

For example, in the course of a day I see many patients and in my private practice I sit in the same chair all day long. However, I am not the same person sitting in the same chair all day. With each patient who comes I become different. This, of course, is happening outside the consulting room as well. On the level of movement or manifestation our identity is always co-created with others. That is to say, our identity is not something we have or we keep safe inside us like gold bars in a Swiss bank. Rather, our identity is something which exists as a potentiality which is revealed according to the circumstance. In fact, it is only because we are empty and open that we can become all the many things we become. Every time you look at the emptiness of your own nature, when you look at the nature of your own mind, its openness is the same. And it is the same because you cannot find it—the mind is not a thing. It is not a substance built up layer-by-layer like a lasagne. It is not built up as a composite from all our life's experiences.

Rather, all the experiences of our lives are like birds flying in the sky. Maybe you go walking through the lovely trees here and suddenly a memory of being a child, walking with your grandmother, comes into your mind. This is a beautiful bird; it has flown into your mind and then it flies out. However, birds can shit on your head. If you get caught up in a thought it can start to grind...and then something else is happening. This little beautiful hummingbird was followed by a vulture...and then that also flies away. Everything flies away. Therefore, you can be a hunter, or a bird, or you can be like the sky. When you are like the sky everything will come to you and everything will go—you can enjoy the birds as they fly. Or you can be a hunter, always trying to catch or kill the birds. This creates a constant arousal in the mind as we are always on the lookout, always ready to pounce, and this grasping attitude blinds us to the beauty and freedom of the situation. However, if you become a bird you will find that the hunter will come and get you and then you will sing away in the little box of your life. This doesn't mean that we should run away to some other country. Even inside the cage, no matter if the cage of your life is very small, there is still some space. It is by integrating with the space that you have the full freedom of your life even though you are very constrained. But this is very hard to do when you start from a sense of being trapped.

That is why in practice we aim to integrate with space as quickly and easily as we can. It is through resting as space that we see that the bird and the hunter have the same nature; they are both thoughts, identifications devoid of inherent self-nature. For example, my consulting room for my private work is in a basement and I see maybe twelve patients a day. In the summer time they come in and tell me how beautiful the day is. However, I am in the basement. The question arises: who has the freedom? Are you more free in the basement if you are at home in yourself or if you are out in the world running around in your head.

Ordinarily, our interactions with the world are mediated through the sense organs and their associated consciousnesses which are organised by our mental consciousness and influenced by the consciousness which holds our biases and by the fundamental consciousness which holds all our memories, karmic traces and links to all memory and traces everywhere. That would indicate that there is an awful lot of information to be reviewed and thought about, in fact too much for us to cope with. This is one of the reasons why, no matter how hard it tries, the ego cannot think its way out of samsara.

However, the actual ground of all these consciousness and their objects is emptiness. There is no need to conceptualise the unconscious as a container in order to explain what intrudes in our daily life. Every concept we have is empty, all our constructs are just a series of patterns or movements of energy. They have no inherent self-nature, no personal essence.

When the stage in a theatre is not empty but has the remnants of the previous play, the pieces of furniture can act as a hook to make the actor forget what play they are in. In the same way, all of these accumulations which we have around us and in us, our external and internal furniture, which come as impulses and in our dreams and so on, can distract us and hook us into endless reflections, interpretations and thoughts. However, they are there because of causes and

conditions and the causes are impermanent and the conditions are impermanent. There is no true self which is an object of mind. That is to say, everything you know about yourself is both true and false. Therefore, you might think, 'I am hungry.' However, as we looked earlier, after lunch you will not be hungry. You might think, 'I am a woman.' However, in this life you are a woman; in another life you do not know. Due to causes and conditions everything arises. Some people here may be very wealthy and some people very poor. Some people are happy in love and some people are unhappy in love. Therefore, what is the basis of my sense of who I am? If all the building blocks on which I build my house are made of water then it is only the freezing power of attachment that makes the house look real. When the heart warms and the sun of wisdom arises all the bricks melt. You then find an open space in which movement is occurring and sometimes it looks like yourself and sometimes it looks like another but everything is both ungraspable and completely present. The heart of mindfulness is to attend to the present moment alone.

The most important thing is to be content with your life. Enjoyment is a central theme in tantra. In tantra you will often see depictions of these gods held together in sexual union. When the male and the female come together this is the union of wisdom and compassion. And just as sexual union brings happiness so, when we are fully alive and fully present, every experience with the object, whatever kind it is, brings full satisfaction grounded in spacious contentment.

The resolution to so many psychological problems is to awaken into a state of presence. This is true for both therapist and patient. Presence is not 'my presence', it is not a possession but the ground or basis of my coming into the world as this or that, good or bad, happy or sad. The forms of neurosis, everything you can find in the big diagnostic manuals, all of these conditions, are signs of the absence of wisdom and compassion. In this way the view and meditation of buddhism can open a new dimension to therapeutic practice.

JAMES LOW

<http://www.simplybeing.co.uk>

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http://www.iltk.it/en/L3_S3_1_conferences.htm