Deintegrate, disintegrate, unintegrate: A Buddhist perspective in heart-centered therapies

Citation metadata

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Date: Autumn 2003
From: Journal of Heart Centered Therapies (Vol. 6, Issue 2)
Publisher: Wellness Institute
Document Type: Article
Length: 21,615 words

Main content

Abstract: Our intention in Heart-Centered therapies is to bring to conscious awareness the habitual choices we make by default, habitual patterns based on old outdated beliefs, providing the opportunity to break through the automated pattern and open that moment to new and spontaneous choices. Then we are, in a real and conscious way, constructing our sense of self anew from moment to moment. We will investigate the intersection between Heart-Centered therapies and Buddhist psychology on three levels of depth and expansion: ego, existential and transpersonal. The personality traits contributing to openness operate on the first level through the ego's navigation of (1) a realignment of the twin ideals of ego ideal (yearning for perfection) and ideal ego (inflated sense of self); and (2) successive deintegrations (Fordham) to accommodate newly consolidated growth. From a Buddhist viewpoint, we may all be said to be suffering from narcissism, i.e., identification with the fantasy ideal ego of a permanent and immortal self. De-constructing the ego occurs in the context of delicately balancing the ideal ego and the ego ideal to avoid either ego inflation or deflation. Openness to experience or ego permissiveness connotes a reduction of ego control in the interests of self expression and growth. For some, however, the experience of letting go feels too undefended, unstructured, unbounded, too open, and is equated with annihilation: ego-chill, angst, or in Zen Buddhism the "Great Death."

The experience of openness expands into the existential level of ego transcendence with non-defensiveness to the "existential vacuum": fear of life and fear of death (Rank), and acceptance of living in a world of miracles. The transitional space between existential healing and transpersonal healing is that of operating right at the edge of system disintegration, balancing the challenges of deintegration and the sublime peacefulness of unintegration (Winnicott). The personality dips into formlessness for rest, taking time off from self, in a state of unboundaried radical connectedness between minds and also between mind and matter.

Finally openness expands into the transpersonal level, ultimately to non-defensiveness toward the transpersonal anxiety of "spiritual exile" on earth, and receptivity to unintegration, the vast openness of unstructured being. The experience begins to approach, we might say, the three facets &Buddha-mind: sila, an open-hearted response to the gift of life; samadhi, infinite flexibility, magical and energetic; and prajna, effortless wisdom, the insight that comes from recognizing that nothing can be possessed and thus from letting go.

We will investigate the intersection between Heart-Centered therapies and Buddhist psychology on three levels of depth: ego, existential and transpersonal. It would be a mistake of oversimplification to view these three levels as sequential; rather work on each level is interrelated and mutually supportive. There are elements of resonance between HeartCentered therapies and Buddhist psychology on all three levels. We see the levels as progressively deeper and more expansive; however, we do not impute a value on a given individual's personal choice regarding how deep or how far he/she wants to stretch in personal growth and development.

Outline of...

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