

Mindfulness & Psychotherapy ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 When Buddhism went from India into China, it encountered the indigenous culture of China

00:00:17 and the indigenous philosophies of China through the cross-fertilization of Indic Mahayana

00:00:27 Buddhism and the Taoist-Confucianist culture of China was born a new direction in Buddhism

00:00:41 called Chan or Zen.

00:00:44 There's historically precedent for Buddhism coming into a culture and interacting with

00:00:52 what already exists there to produce interesting new results.

00:00:58 Now we have Buddhism coming into the Western world, all three vehicles of Buddhism, mindfulness

00:01:08 practice which is representative of the small vehicle, Zen which is representative of the

00:01:16 large vehicle, and the tantric practices which are representative of the diamond vehicle.

00:01:24 It's all coming here and we would expect that it would interact with Western culture, many

00:01:32 facets of Western culture.

00:01:34 One of them is neuroscience and another one is physics.

00:01:43 Those are areas of particular interest.

00:01:46 There's also the religious interactions, specifically with Christianity, primarily Catholicism,

00:01:56 and with Judaism now.

00:01:59 Then there's the interaction that it is having with psychotherapy.

00:02:05 A hundred years ago, William James predicted that within a hundred years, Westerners would

00:02:15 be learning their psychotherapy from Buddhists, an amazing prophetic statement.

00:02:25 Because at this point in history, I would say that the dialogue between mindfulness

00:02:33 practice and Western therapy is central to therapy.

00:02:41 It's not just some marginal thing that's being done by a few people with special interest.

00:02:48 It's the hot topic, which is utterly amazing, because I can remember reading books when

00:02:56 I was a kid in the 50s, books by psychiatrists and so forth, who basically

pathologized Buddhist

00:03:05 meditation, considered it to be a form of mental illness.

00:03:10 And now, within 50 years, we're talking about major influence from Buddhism into therapy,

00:03:24 especially from mindfulness into therapy, particularly into the more hard-nosed forms

00:03:32 of therapy, like cognitive behavioral therapy.

00:03:35 This is just amazing that this is occurring.

00:03:39 So it's a natural question.

00:03:42 What is the relationship between these two modalities?

00:03:49 It's the question, the central question, that is now being investigated.

00:03:54 We don't have the answers yet.

00:03:56 But I can make some conjectures.

00:03:59 If I had to summarize the difference, with an oversimplification, I would say that in

00:04:09 some sense, Western therapy and mindfulness practice seem to be rather similar.

00:04:19 At least if you look at the key concepts and the buzzwords, they're both in favor of being

00:04:26 aware as opposed to being unconscious.

00:04:29 They both want you to be aware of the influences from the depths that may be influencing the

00:04:38 surface now.

00:04:39 They both ask you not to hold on inappropriately to things from the past, but to move forward

00:04:49 into the present without holding complexes from the past.

00:04:54 They both ask you to not be conflicted, not fight with yourself.

00:05:02 They both talk about having aha experiences, insight experiences, and so forth.

00:05:09 So from a certain perspective, they seem to hold rather similar ideas.

00:05:18 Where I would say the primary difference, if I were allowed to oversimplify things,

00:05:26 is that although the ideas are the same, or roughly similar, let's put it this way, mindfulness

00:05:34 practice implements those ideas at a much finer time-space scale and at a much more

00:05:44 intense level.

00:05:47 So that mindfulness practice has a quantitative difference, and that quantitative difference

00:06:01 is so great that it leads to a qualitative difference.

00:06:07 So similar type things, but done at a very fine time scale, second by second.

00:06:17 The holdings that you let go of in mindfulness practice are second by second inappropriate

00:06:25 holdings, as opposed to the holdings that you let go of in psychological practice, which

00:06:31 is from last year or last decade or your early childhood or so forth.

00:06:38 Those are sort of macro holdings.

00:06:41 Mindfulness asks for letting go of micro holdings.

00:06:45 The clarity that you're asked to develop in mindfulness is a moment-by-moment ability

00:06:52 to resolve experiences into feel-image-talk and to resolve the feel into a spectrum of

00:07:00 flavors and resolve the flavors into individual location arisings.

00:07:06 It's a whole other level of being aware of what you're experiencing or, quote, knowing

00:07:17 what you're feeling in that moment.

00:07:19 It's like a totally different level of resolution and detail.

00:07:26 And the way of reaching the unconscious differs.

00:07:30 Typically in psychotherapy, I call it the dredge-up.

00:07:33 You just approach.

00:07:35 You sort of reach down and you dredge up one or two important pivotal things to look at,

00:07:44 whereas in mindfulness practice, it's a trickle-down.

00:07:49 The awareness trickles down through all of consciousness and the subconscious rewires

00:07:55 itself without the surface even needing to know, and that's global.

00:08:00 That's throughout the entirety of consciousness.

00:08:04 So I would say, roughly speaking, that the basic ideals are the same, but because mindfulness

00:08:14 implements them at a more, a finer scale and with much greater intensity, this is a quantitative

00:08:24 difference that leads to a qualitative difference.

00:08:27 However, the differences are complementary.

00:08:32 One needs to know the brick and mortar structure of the building in addition to knowing the

00:08:37 atomic structure.

00:08:39 If you just know the atomic structure, you don't have the whole picture.

00:08:43 You need to know gross anatomy as well as cellular histology.

00:08:50 So the two pictures complement.

00:08:54 For the large structure of personality and behavior, that's the specialty of psychotherapy.

00:09:01 For the transcendence of limited existence and suffering, for insight into the nature

00:09:09 of all selves as opposed to insight into the nature of a particular self, for understanding

00:09:18 the nature of all self, mindfulness is the specialized vehicle.

00:09:26 So it's good.

00:09:28 They complement each other.

00:09:30 They give different scale picture of the same phenomenon.

00:09:37 So you get the big picture, the gross anatomy, so to speak, clarified, and the behaviors

00:09:44 dealt with with the therapy.

00:09:47 And then you get the microstructure, the spiritual essence, dealt with through the mindfulness,

00:09:53 and you have a perfect complementarity.