

Buddhist view on the qualities that should be cultivated by a good psychological counsellor

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Psychology, psychotherapy and counselling, do not appear to be extraneous to Buddhism. The core teachings of Buddhism mainly deal with mental problems. The goal of Buddhism is the restoration of mental health rather than physical. According to the Buddhist tradition the Buddha is often referred as the incomparable surgeon (*amuttaro sallakatto*) and also the Buddha was an exemplary counsellor. In the *Khuddaka nikāya*, the verses of Arahants' mention how the Buddha's teaching helped them to overcome their mental sufferings.

Buddhist philosophy especially pays attention to explain the real nature of life and personal spiritual liberation by means of practical way. When we consider present day society, although there is a profusion of resources, brought about by rapid economic growth and technological advances, there is dire lack of spirituality. When the body and mind are stressful and harmed by various pressures from the external environment, the inability to adjust or adapt to them, usually mental disorders such as anxiety and depression can be the result. Buddhist Psychology identifies the source of all suffering. It shows the meaning of life and guides all sentient beings to search the deeper powers of mind through the

elimination of greed, anger, and ignorance from within. Its practice, if pursued freely and diligently, prevents any occurrence or recurrence of psychological illness. It aids people in creating both physical and mental health so that they can lead both joyful and fulfilling lives. Since, overall Buddhist practices can be considered psychotherapy and counselling.

However, at present, counselling has been developing as a profession with scientific basis in the West as well as the East. It involves talking with a person to facilitate him to resolve problems such as personal, social, emotional or psychological, in such a way that it will cause the person to understand and improve his behaviour, character, values or life circumstances. Counselling can also help at any time in the course of one's life psychological stress. Western counselling and psychotherapy theories have begun to develop since the beginning of the 20th century, but it is believed that the roots of this subject can be traced back to a much longer past. Both Counsellors and Psychotherapists hold different opinions with regard to the perimeter of each field. According to *Thorne*, counselling is for less disturbed people, dealing with conscious problems and requiring a single issue focus, while psychotherapy is for more disturbed who exhibit less apparent constellations of problems.¹

The meaning and the role of counselling is ever evolving to meet the challenges of modern social pressures and demand which we often attempt to deal with at cost to our inner world. The role of counselling has been defined by its aim and values. Aims are included providing environment that enables the client to work towards living in a more resourceful and personally fulfilling way. Integrity respect and impartiality are

basic values which are demonstrated through the counselling process.

Most of the time, people who seek counsel are not always in natural mental conditions. They could be dealing with severe problems such as: sexual abuses, serious physical illnesses, alcohol habits, divorce cases, low self-esteem and stresses or depressions. The counsellor should be wise enough to find out the client's problems. Another important requirement is the relationship between counsellor and client. In order that the client feels comfortable in expressing himself in an uninhibited way, the relationship between the client and the counsellor needs to be built on reciprocal trust. It is the counsellor's responsibility to provide a safe, confidential environment, and to offer empathy, understanding and respect.

The 1940's and 1950's marked an important expansion in the field of counselling. The US psychologist Carl Rogers established the person centred approach, which is at the heart of most current practice. He says that the therapist should give independence to the client to achieve their goal without being dependent on the therapist. They need to try their insights on their own, in real life beyond the therapist's office. An authoritarian approach to therapy may seem to work marvellously at first, but ultimately it only creates a dependent person. He asks, why do we want air and water and food? Why do we seek safety, love, and a sense of competence? Why, indeed, do we seek to discover new medicines, invent new power sources, or create new works of art? Because, he answers, it is in our nature as living things to do the very best we can.

Rogers said that a therapist, in order to be effective, must have three very special qualities:

1. Congruence - genuineness, honesty with the client.
2. Empathy - the ability to feel what the client feels.
3. Respect- acceptance, unconditional positive regard towards the client.

He says these qualities are "necessary and sufficient:" If the therapist shows these three qualities, the client will improve, even if no other special "techniques" are used. If the therapist does not show these three qualities, the client's improvement will be minimal, no matter how many "techniques" are used.²

Aileen Milne who is the author of famous counselling treatise called '**teach yourself**' says that "we enter into a counselling relationship when we engage the help of a counsellor in mutual agreement. No one can be forced into a counselling client relationship; a person chooses to have counselling, otherwise it is not counselling at all."³ According to him, the activity of counselling can be defined in many ways. The following are some of the ways in which the people who resolve problems or help people to live in a more insightful fulfilling way.

- To clarify what is important to them in their lives,
- To get in touch with their inner resources,
- In the exploration of feeling, thoughts and meaning particular to them,
- By offering support at times of crisis,
- By offering support during developmental and transitional periods,



- To work through stuck issues that may involve integrating childhood experiences and
- To reach a resolution of problems.⁴

To complete above statements, the counsellor should acquire knowledge of skill, theory and practical experience, regarding counselling. According to the new approach of counselling, the counsellor should train for a long period of time to be a good counsellor. Otherwise he could not make a healthy relationship with the client. So, Buddhism as well as Western Counselling Psychology has paid keen attention in regard to good qualities that should be cultivated by a counsellor.

The following qualities that should be acquired by a counsellor are presented by Aileen Milne in his book. Those are, integrity, ability to look at oneself, knowledge of theory, humanity, empathy, a liking of others, an interest in people, kindness, non-judgmental attitude, respect for others, a good memory for detail, being a good listener, patience, sensitivity, in control of own emotions, professionalism, ethical behaviour and so forth.⁵

Gerald Corey outlines a list of essential qualities of therapeutic persons who are willing to be effective in counselling.

- Effective counsellors have an identity,
- They respect and appreciate themselves,
- They are able to recognize and accept their own power,
- They are open to change,
- They are making choices that shape their lives,

- They feel alive and their choices are life-oriented,
- They are authentic, sincere and honest,
- They have a sense of humour and
- They have a sincere interest in the welfare of others.⁶

All the qualities and techniques which are being used by present psychotherapists and counsellors could be traits of the Buddha himself and had been skilfully applied by him two thousand five hundred and fifty years ago. The Buddha advised his disciples to cultivate these qualities and techniques those who were willing to counsel.

It is considered important for counsellors to have personal therapy or counselling in order that they may be able to explore their own prejudices and unresolved emotional issues, which might otherwise, get in the way of constructive work with a client. In Buddhist *Jātaka* stories, where the *Bodhisatta* himself is represented in various situations in previous lives, all the weaknesses of human beings could be seen in the *Bodhisatta's* life too. In this sense, all human beings have various weaknesses. A good understanding of human nature is important to someone who wants to relate to other people as a counsellor. To help another, one must have gone through that experience of self-explanation considerably a long time. Without self-understanding one cannot help another, because, everyone goes through stressful situations one time or another through his lifetime, those who really experience such stressful situations can understand other persons very well. Buddhism instructs to have analytical awareness of self through insight meditation like *satipathāna*. In this discourse a person is encouraged to look reflectively at one's own experiences.

So Buddhism pays attention with regard to self development of counsellors. The Buddha says if one wants to counsel others firstly, one should cultivate morality within oneself. The *dhammapada* says “let one establish oneself first; then let one advise others”.⁷ For instance; the Buddha did not allow to his first group of disciples to go counselling until they became fully insight. When they became *Arahants*, the advices were given to them to walk on tour for the welfare and happiness of the people.⁸ Buddhism considers, he who is free from lust, hatred and delusion is the most suitable one for counselling.

Since, self-analysis or self-examination is one of the prominent themes discussed in Buddhist Psychology. It is an effective tool for counsellors as well. In the *Sabbāsava Sutta* the Buddha explains “destruction of cankers is possible for the person who knows and sees; not for the person who does not know and does not see”.⁹ In order to eliminate negative emotions of mind, it is very important to recognize them; the *vattūpama sutta* has listed no less than seventeen emotions that defile the mind.

Covetousness (*abhijjā*), unrighteous greed (*visamaloba*), ill will (*vyāpāda*), anger (*koda*), contempt (*makkha*), attitude (*palāsa*), envy (*issā*), avarice (*maccariya*), deceit (*māyā*), fraud (*sātheyya*), obstinacy (*thambha*), presumption (*sārambha*), conceit (*māya*), arrogance (*atimāna*), Vanity (*mada*), negligence (*pamāda*).¹⁰

In the *Sutta*, The Buddha emphasizes the importance of knowing the harmful defiling nature of these emotions and getting rid of them by self-analysis.

On another occasion the Buddha says how to understand others' mind.

“O; monks, a monk who is not skilled knowing the way of others' mind should resolve ‘I must become skilled in knowing the way of my own mind; thus you should train yourselves first... for monks, self examination is very helpful for the growth of wholesome qualities. Am I often covetous or not? Do I have ill will in my heart or am I often free from it? Am I often immersed in sloth and torpor or free of it? Am I often excited or free of excitement? Am I often in doubt or free of doubt? Am I often angry or free of anger?... and so on.

...examining himself, if that monk finds that he is more often without covetousness and ill will, he will be free from sloth and torpor, free from excitement and doubt, anger¹¹ so on.

Another occasion, the Buddha advices venerable Rāhula, that discourse is also very useful regarding self-development. Here the Buddha counsels addressing ven: Rāhula in regard to the radical elimination of harmful emotions by resorting to different meditative techniques.

“Rāhula, develop meditation that is like the earth (*paṭhavi*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*), air (*vāyo*) and space (*ākāsa*) by which arisen agreeable and disagreeable contacts will not invade his mind and remain.

Rāhula, develop the meditation of loving kindness (*mettā*) for when you develop the meditation of loving kindness, any ill will be abandoned.

Rāhula, develop meditation on compassion (*karuṇā*) for when you develop meditation of compassion, any cruelty will be abandoned.

Rāhula, develop meditation on sympathetic joy (*muditā*) for when you develop meditation on sympathetic joy, any discontent will be abandoned.

Rāhula, develop meditation of equanimity (*upekkhā*) for when you develop meditation on equanimity, any aversion will be abandoned.

Rāhula, develop meditation on foulness (*asubha*) for when you develop meditation on foulness, any lust will be abandoned.

Rāhula, develop on the perception of impermanence (*anicca*) for when you develop on the perception of impermanence, the 'I am' (*asmi māna*), and conceit will be abandoned.

Rāhula, develop concentration of mindfulness on in-and-out breathing (*ānāpānasati*), for when the concentration of mindfulness on in-and-out breathing is developed and cultivated it is of great fruit and great benefit".¹²

According to Buddhism, the counsellor must be sound morality. Moral integrity or stability is counted as an essential quality to be an excellent counsellor. Many places in the canon have stated some primary skill of a prospective counsellor. The *Anguttaranikāya* explains thus:

*"He does not get emotionally disturbed and distracted by intense passion for what is attractive. He is not irritated by what tempts the average folk to get irritated. He is steady firm and not deluded in the presence of bewildering impressions. He never falls into a fit of anger. He does not get discomposed in what is enchanting"*¹³

Once the Buddha stated five qualities of a counsellor addressing ven: Ananda

1. A counsellor follows the gradual method in his counselling session.
2. He keeps the causal genesis in his references.
3. He handles the case with kindness.
4. He does not aim at worldly gains.
5. He does not attend to the case in way that it hurts his own interest or others.¹⁴

The *Metta sutta* clearly classifies fifteen qualities to be possessed by a skilful one who prepares the ground to flourish unconditional love towards all beings. These qualities are quite necessary to cultivate to be an effective counsellor; a counsellor should be;

Able (*sakko*), upright (*uju*), perfectly upright (*sūjū*), modest (*suvaco*), humble (*anatimanī*), contented (*santussko*), easily supportable (*subharo*), with few commitments (*appakicca*), plain living (*sallahukavutti*), restrained in senses (*santindriyo*), discreet (*nipako*), not impudent (*appagabbho*), free from familial bonds (*kulesu ananugiddho*), abstained even from a slightest wrong that the wise would censure (*na ca khuddam samācare kinci yena viññu pare upavadeyyum*)

Kindness and compassion play a major role in Buddhist approach in counselling. In order to strengthen interpersonal relationship for the sake of the well being of individual and society, the Buddha prescribed several procedures to be followed. Out of them, two important teachings called Sublime Abodes: (*brahmavihāra*) and Four Grounds of Benevolent Actions (*sangahavattu*) can be cited. They address

specially to the mentality of clients suffering from worry, depression and poor interpersonal relationship. And they can be used effectively to counsel psychotic and neurotic clients. Clients who cherish negative thoughts and emotions become the victims of their own unwholesome thoughts.

Four Sublime Abodes:

1. Loving kindness (*mettā*)
2. Compassion (*karuṇā*)
3. Sympathetic joy (*muditā*)
4. Equanimity (*upekkhā*)

A counsellor can prescribe one of these four to his clients for afore mentioned psychological problems.

Boundless loving kindness towards all living beings is discussed in *Metta sutta*. One has to start firstly pervading thoughts of loving kindness to oneself and then proceed further step by step to engulf all living beings. It is mentioned that one who cannot be kind to oneself cannot bestow kindness on others. Benevolence to oneself is part of the healing process in counselling. In the *Mettānisamsa sutta* mentions that eleven benefits are given by cultivating loving kindness. Those are comfortable sleep, waking up comfortably, freedom from dreadful dreams, becoming affectionate to human beings, becoming affectionate to non-human beings, protection by gods, not being subjected to fire, poison or weapons, mind becomes composed, facial complexion becomes bright, able to face death with dignity, and birth in *brahma* world after death if *Arahantaship* not attained.¹⁵

Buddhism points out that according to the client's problems, any one factor out of the four can be used to devise practical strategies to bring about an attitudinal change in the client's perspective. The exegeses of the four are thus in the *Visuddhimagga*;

Loving kindness is characterized here as promoting the aspect of welfare. Its function is to prefer welfare. It is manifested as the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing lovingness in beings. It succeeds when it makes ill will subside and it fails when it produces selfish affection

Compassion is characterized as promoting the aspect of allaying suffering. Its function resides in not bearing others' suffering. It is manifested as non-cruelty. Its proximate cause is seeing helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It succeeds when it makes cruelty subside and it fails when it produces sorrow.

Sympathetic joy is characterized as gladdening. Its function resides in being unenvious. It is manifested as the elimination of aversion. Its proximate cause is seeing beings' success. It succeeds when it makes aversion subside and it fails in when it produces merriment.

Equanimity is characterized as promoting the aspect of neutrality towards beings. Its function is to see equanimity in beings. It is manifested as quieting of resentment and approval. Its proximate cause is seeing ownership of deeds thus: beings are owners of their deeds. Whose is the choice by which they will become happy, or will not fall away from the success they have reached? It succeeds when it makes resentment and approval subside and it fails when it produces the equanimity of unknowing based on the household life.¹⁶

Four grounds of benevolent actions are:

1. Practicing generosity (*dāna*). Having a generous and liberal attitude of giving, caring and sharing with others.
2. When communicating with others use of pleasant, endearing words, which warble and worth recording. (*peyyavacca*)
3. Engaging in welfare work (*atthacariyā*). Helping those who are in need and the concern for the well being of people of all walks of life.
4. Fellow-feeling (*samānattatā*). Treating others with fairness and equality without any discrimination.¹⁷

A non-judgmental stance encourages openness and understanding to develop. A person accepting the client means that the counsellor can help the client to get in touch with their innermost feeling, facilitating the gradual trust in their own inner resources. No therapist can ever take away painful experiences which have happened in a person's life but they can help another to acknowledge and understand what they have gone through, helping them to work through complex feelings they have experienced in the past or are presently experiencing, so that helping in time, client can move forward. By their warm accepting attitude toward the clients, counsellors are conveying "I accept you; what has happened to you is understandable. You should feel the way you do or that you have behaved". This is not a token blanket approval of everything a client has felt or done, but rather an empathic response, as if having walked in their shoes and felt what they have felt.¹⁸

The Communication skill and judgment of character

Buddhism pays much attention regarding the communication skill of counsellor and the ways of understanding in the client's character. According to Buddhism, the major task of counselling is listening to the client. As the Buddha illustrates, it is the first step to be adhered to in a counselling session. There are references in the canon where the Buddha listens to first and then analyses the problem in detail. Patience and attentive listening satisfy the client with a major part of counselling as a therapy. When a client feels safe and knows that his therapist is non judgmental and attentive, he will be able to cooperate with his therapist on his issues and to let go with his emotional baggage. So, when we observe the above statements, the following Buddhist teachings are more important.

- He should be a listener (*sota*)
- He should be a drawer of client's attention to listen (*saveta*)
- He should be a learner (*uggaheta*)
- He should be one who causes the listener to remember (*dhāreta*)
- He should be a person who knows the facts and figures (*viññāta*)
- He should be an expounder
- He should be skilled in what is compatible and incompatible (*kusalo sahitasahitassa*)
- He should not be given to quarrelling (*na ca kalahakāri*)¹⁹

Another important point is that the counsellor should be understood the client's character. If he is unable to judge the client's character clearly, it will be difficult to counsel successfully. So the Buddha has mentioned the way of knowing one's character. In the *Samyuttanikāya* the Buddha was addressing the King Pasenadi Kosala and remarked:

1. It is by dealing with a person that his virtuousness should be known
2. It is by association that a person's integrity should be known
3. It is in times of trouble that a person's fortitude should be known
4. It is by conversing with him that a person's wisdom is to be known²⁰

Some personality types are lack in awareness. The counsellor should consider that why they are lack of awareness. The canon has recognized such characters. There are threefold personality types:

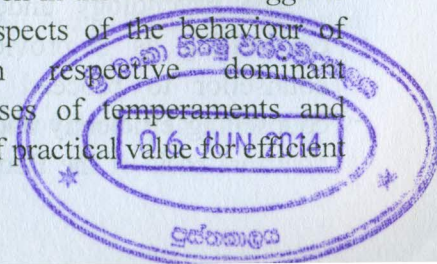
1. Person is topsy-turvy brained (*avakuññapaññā*). Just as a pot turned upside down, water poured thereon runs off and does not stay in the pot, even so this kind of person does not listen and is incapable of grasping what is being taught.
2. Person who is scattered-brained (*uccangapaññā*). His understanding is confined only to that particular moment just as a person who collects things on his lap scatter them on the ground when he stands up, even so this type of person gets up from his seat and goes away and does not remember anything he has heard.

3. Person who is of wide understanding (*putupaññā*). He is a person of wide understanding. As a pot kept upright can hold water poured into it, even he gets up from his seat and goes away, he continuous to hold in mind what he has heard.²¹

Another occasion personality types have classified according to their mental capacity:

1. A person who is quick in acquiring (*uggahitaññu*). He understands quickly by taking hints only.
2. A person who learns by full detail (*vipacitaññu*).
3. A person who has to be led by constant instruction (*neyya*).
4. A person who is just word-perfect, at most knowing only the text without understanding (*padaparama*).

Venerable Buddhaghosa has discussed in the *Visuddhimagga* certain character types in detail. Since its fundamental objective is meditation, the description has been given while commenting on the phrase one that suits his temperament in practice of meditation, the subject of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*) is selected to suit the temperament of the trainee and then the method of practicing it is taught. Since it is not possible to make an instant assessment, the teacher has to carefully observe the behaviour of the trainee at the outset by way of associating with him and thereafter selecting one out of forty subjects of meditation that suits his temperament. The description given in the *Visuddhimagga* is exhaustive and touches many aspects of the behaviour of individuals possessing each respective dominant temperament. Hence the analyses of temperaments and behaviour as illustrated here are of practical value for efficient



and effective counselling as well. It is evident that venerable Buddhaghosa's description is based on the Buddha's fundamental thesis that the world is composed of many people and diverse temperaments. Mainly six character types are distinguished according to the dominant temperament or the mode of behaviour particular to that character:

1. The lust of passionate or greedy (*loba*)
2. The hateful or irritable (*dosa*)
3. The deluded (*moha*)
4. The faithful (*saddhā*)
5. The intelligent (*buddhi*)
6. The speculative or discursive (*vitakka*)²²

So, the counsellor wants to acquire a knowledge about clients that what character they belong to. Otherwise, he could not help the client properly.

Conclusion

The forgoing evidences clearly show that what qualities are expected from the counsellor by Buddhism. The important things which Buddhism mainly expected from counsellors are the purification of insight, sound morality, empathy, compassion and so on. The Buddha always emphasizes that it is impossible for one who is stuck in the mud to pull out someone else who is stuck in the mud.

The psychology underlying the Buddha's system of counselling as it provides premises for a perspective counsellor to proceed with the practice of Buddhist counselling efficiently and effectively. The fundamentals of doctrinal basis of the Buddha's practice in counselling have

been elucidated with the purpose of making the subject more comprehensive. However, the Buddhist aim of counselling was to make a client aware of the present situation and to show them the way to get out of it.

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