

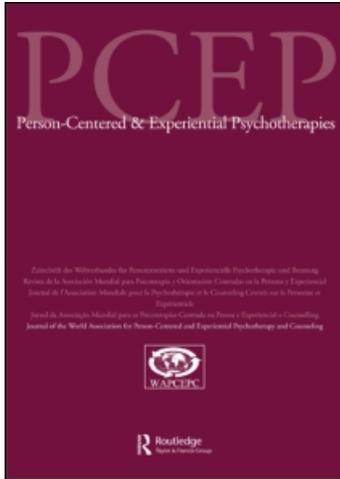
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The Buddha as a fully functioning person: toward a person-centered perspective on mindfulness

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The Buddha as a fully functioning person: toward a person-centered perspective on mindfulness

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The paper explores links between the person-centered approach (PCA) and meditation. It is divided into two parts. The first part begins with a description of the author's own experience of meditation. It is followed by a brief discussion of other approaches which similarly attempt the integration of meditation and psychotherapy: mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, transpersonal and psychodynamic models, and by what might constitute an alternative paradigm, one based on phenomenological principles which are central to the PCA. The second part outlines interviews and findings of a small-scale heuristic and phenomenological research (originally part of a dissertation) conducted among person-centered therapists who regularly practice meditation. Meditation is tentatively realized as a way of increasing organismic and phenomenological awareness, of cultivating and refining a way of being, of fostering a re-sacralization of the everyday and a greater appreciation of the existential dilemma of being human.

Keywords: meditation; person-centered therapy; the everyday; mindfulness; self; organism; Zen

Der Buddha als eine Fully Functioning Person: eine Personzentrierte Perspektive zu Achtsamkeit

Dieser Artikel untersucht Verbindungen zwischen dem Personzentrierten Ansatz und Meditation. Er ist zweiteilig. Der erste Teil beginnt mit einer Beschreibung von eigenen Erfahrungen des Autors mit Meditation, gefolgt von einer kurzen Diskussion anderer Ansätze, die ebenso die Integration von Meditation und Psychotherapie versuchen: Achtsamkeitsbasierte Kognitive Therapie, transpersonale und psychodynamische Modelle und, was ein alternatives Paradigma begründen könnte, eines, das auf phänomenologischen Prinzipien beruht, die zentral für den PCA sind. Der zweite Teil skizziert Interviews und Befunde einer kleinen heuristischen und phänomenologischen Untersuchung (ursprünglich Teil einer Dissertation), die unter personzentrierten Therapeuten durchgeführt wurde, die regelmässig meditieren. Meditation wird versuchsweise als ein Weg gesehen, wie man organismische und phänomenologische Bewusstheit verbessern und eine Art zu sein kultivieren und verfeinern kann; auch wie man eine Re-Sakralisierung des Alltags fördern und ein grösseres Verständnis für das existenzielle Dilemma Mensch zu sein schaffen kann.

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Buda como una Persona de Funcionamiento Pleno: Hacia una Perspectiva Centrada en la Persona de la Conciencia Plena

Este escrito explora las conexiones entre el enfoque centrado en la persona y la meditación. Se divide en dos partes. La primera comienza con una descripción de la experiencia de meditación del autor. Le sigue una breve discusión acerca de otros enfoques que tratan de integrar la meditación con la psicoterapia en forma similar: terapia cognitiva basada en la conciencia plena, modelos transpersonales y psico dinámicos, y por lo que puede ser un paradigma alternativo, uno basado en principios fenomenológicos centrales en el ECP. La segunda parte describe entrevistas y hallazgos de una investigación heurística y fenomenológica (originalmente parte de una disertación), llevada a cabo en pequeña escala por terapeutas centrados en la persona que practican meditación habitualmente. Concebimos la meditación como una forma de incrementar la conciencia orgánica y fenomenológica, también de cultivar y refinar una manera de ser, de propiciar la re sacralización de lo cotidiano y una mayor apreciación del dilema existencial de ser humanos.

Le Bouddha en tant que Personne Fonctionnant Pleinement: Ters une Perspective Centrée sur la Personne du “Mindfulness” (la Pleine Conscience)

Cet article explore les liens entre l'Approche Centrée sur la Personne et la méditation. Il est divisé en deux parties. La première partie débute avec une description de l'expérience personnelle de l'auteur de la méditation. S'ensuit une discussion brève provenant d'autre approches qui tentent d'y intégrer également la méditation et la psychothérapie: la Thérapie Cognitive fondée sur le Mindfulness, les modèles Transpersonnel et Psychodynamique et puis ce qui pourrait s'avérer être un paradigme alternatif, c'est à dire fondé sur des principes phénoménologiques, qui sont au cœur de l'Approche ACP. La deuxième partie de l'article dresse les grandes lignes des entretiens et les résultats d'une recherche heuristique et phénoménologique à petite échelle (originellement faisant partie d'un mémoire), conduite auprès de thérapeutes centrés sur la personne qui pratiquent régulièrement la méditation. La méditation est proposée comme une manière d'augmenter la conscience organique et phénoménologique, de cultiver et affiner une manière d'être et de favoriser la ré-sacralisation du quotidien et une plus grande appréciation du dilemme existentiel d'être humain.

Buda como uma Pessoa Plenamente Funcionante: Com Vista a uma Perspectiva de Consciência Plena Centrada na Pessoa

Este artigo explora as ligações entre a abordagem centrada na pessoa e a meditação. Encontra-se dividido em duas partes. A primeira parte começa com uma descrição da experiência de meditação do próprio autor. Segue-se uma breve discussão de outras abordagens que, de forma semelhante, procuram integrar a meditação na psicoterapia. A Terapia Cognitiva Baseada na Consciência Plena, os modelos Transpessoal e Psicodinâmico, e um outro que pode constituir um paradigma alternativo, baseado nos princípios fenomenológicos centrais à ACP. A segunda parte destaca entrevistas e achados de uma investigação heurística e fenomenológica de pequena escala (originalmente parte de uma dissertação), levada a cabo entre psicoterapeutas centrados na pessoa que praticam regularmente a meditação. A meditação é vista como sendo, em princípio, uma forma de aumentar a consciência orgânica e fenomenológica, de cultivar e refinar um jeito de ser, de fomentar uma re-sacralização do cotidiano e um maior apreço pelo dilema existencial do ser humano.

十分に機能する人間としての仏陀：マインドフルネスをPCAの視点からとらえ直す

本論文では、パーソンセンタードアプローチと瞑想の関連について探索する。まず、論文の第一部では筆者自身の瞑想の体験を描写する。次に、マインドフルネスに基づいた認知療法(MBCT)、トランスパーソナルアプローチ、心理力動的モデルなど、マインドフルネスと心理療法の統合を目指したアプローチについて概観し、さらに、PCAの中核でもある現象学的原則に基づいたアプローチについて検討する。論文の第二部では瞑想を日常的に実践しているパーソンセンタードセラピストを対象として行った、小規模の発見的／現象学的なインタビュー研究とその結果について報告する。瞑想とは有機的／現象学的な気づきを高め、自分のあり方を育み明確にし、日常生活を聖なるものにするのを助け、人間であることの実存的な葛藤をしっかりと味わうことを可能にするものである。

Part I: Meditation

A phenomenological description

Cool air coming in through my nostrils, warmer air going out. Focusing on the breath, on what is so intimately connected with being alive. Attentive and curious, I stay with a simple yet wondrous act, one that I am oblivious of because taken for granted. Eyes half-closed, keeping a soft gaze, I listen to my breath, without changing its rhythm, focusing on the out breath, letting the in breath happen on its own accord.

I get distracted; why is it difficult to stay with the breath? Why is it hard to attend to the simplicity of being? Coming back to the breath over and over, I renew my intention to stay present, to attend to the body posture. It is a remembering: of the task at hand, of the facticity of living. Now feeling somewhat more grounded, I start to *notice* more: I notice my thoughts and recognize them as such, instead of getting carried away by them; I notice various physical sensations; I notice feelings and emotions. I am *aware* of thoughts, sensations, feeling and emotions – at times I can even see them coming. . . . Spaciousness is created, and with it a sense of freedom.

I now become aware of sounds. I try not to label, interpret, or build conjectures around them: I just listen. I notice that sounds arise, stay for awhile, and fade. By listening to sounds in the room, in the street, in the sky above, I now perceive myself as embedded in this vast phenomenal world, as part of this very moment as it unfolds: a multifaceted, rich and complex totality; even to call it “the present moment” seems inadequate. I feel perplexed, and unable to come up with any satisfactory explanation of it. I decide to introduce a question that reflects and highlights my perplexity. The question is simple: “What is this?” *This*: not the single phenomenon. Not the car engine in the street, the birdsong, or this rumble high above (a thunder? a plane?) or the passing thought that I mustn’t forget to phone a friend later *This* addresses the totality of the experience as it unfolds. Being alive right now is as puzzling, as astonishing, and as *unlikely* as any mystery ever contemplated by the human mind. An experience I habitually take for granted, discard, look at with boredom and all too often fail to appreciate. I ask the question wholeheartedly, and I wait in the silence that follows. “Answers” of all sorts do come

up, but they are all unsatisfactory. Instead of appeasing my perplexity, the question deepens it; for an instant I perceive the unfathomable nature of *this*.

A meditation session normally lasts between 30 and 45 minutes. I usually sit at home on a cushion on the floor, cross-legged, sometimes on a chair, both feet on the ground, sometimes on my own, other times with friends. I meditate on a train on my way to work: no external sound is a real disturbance, for this experience of meditation is rooted in phenomenological observation.

Meditation as awareness of the organism

Meditation is an integral part of my life and it influences the way I am with clients. I have practiced meditation since 1978 and in January 2004 I received ordination in the Soto and Rinzai schools of Zen. I used to think meditation meant: (a) stopping the mind by interrupting the flow of thoughts; (b) experiencing “altered states of consciousness” (Bazzano, 2010b, p. 33). With hindsight, those notions now seem somewhat green, even counterproductive, although at the time they made sense. Instead of attempting to stop the thoughts (I seriously doubt if anyone ever managed to do that), meditation has now come to mean *being with* whatever comes up, be it emotions, feelings, or thoughts, and developing awareness of the phenomenological field. Instead of chasing after “altered states,” instead of hunting for a glimpse of an imaginary spiritual state outside and beyond the everyday, meditation has gradually come to mean appreciating ordinariness more fully. As my meditation practice developed, it became less special and more ordinary: “awareness of the posture as well as of thoughts, feeling and emotions” (Bazzano, 2010b, p. 33). It became awareness of the wider field, of what Rogers calls *organismic experiencing* (Rogers, 1961, p. 111).

A particular strength in Zen Buddhism is appreciation of the everyday (Aitken, 1994; Batchelor, 1997; Bazzano, 2006; Maezumi, 2001; Suzuki, 1970), a disinclination to resort to the supernatural and the transcendent, as well as a rejection of what Rorty, an American pragmatist thinker in the tradition of William James and John Dewey, calls “foundationalism” (1989, p. 120), i.e., an attempt to explain, interpret and substantiate contingent reality. The spirit of Zen covers similar ground, and is brilliantly encompassed by one of its key exponents, Dogen (Waddell & Abe, 2002), who, in the text known as *Genjokoan* (Manifesting Suchness), writes:

To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one’s self. To learn one’s self is to forget one’s self. To forget one’s self is to be confirmed by all dharmas. To be confirmed by all dharmas is to cast off one’s body and mind and the bodies and minds of others as well. (Waddell & Abe, 2002, p. 41)

Dogen wrote this in the thirteenth century, yet those few verses deeply question some of the mainstream ideas that have shaped the modern world: the belief in the isolated Cartesian ego; the Newtonian, mechanistic view of nature, as well as “the disenchantment and the de-sacralization of the world” (McMahan, 2008, p. 162). Personally, I have found Dogen’s stance useful in articulating the self as process as well as the refusal of a mechanistic view of life. I continue to find that Zen practice and the PCA, two equally motivating sources of inspiration in my life, complement and inform each other.

My own perspective on Buddhism is underpinned by a secular and existential angle. I do not regard the Buddha as a transcendent figure who had a revelation

from above, but as someone able to embrace becoming and impermanence. To be a Buddha is for me akin to functioning freely, to be “open to experience without feeling threatened... display[ing] a trust and confidence in [one’s] organismic valuing process” (Mearns & Thorne, 1988, p. 11).

Meditation and person-centered therapy: A new field of research

What started as curiosity gained momentum, becoming a series of deeply personal questions. In my opinion – and in the light of my own experience of different modes of therapy – the person-centered approach is the most challenging for the practitioner, requiring the cultivation of a way of being rather than the acquisition of expertise. Such complex therapeutic practice requires that I be truthfully human, which in turns requires a congruent and conscious use of self in order to offer fully the core conditions. I began to ask myself: “Does meditation help me become a more effective person-centered therapist? Does it help me embody its principles?”

I went back to the source and revisited the six conditions (Rogers, 1957). For two people to be in contact (the first condition), I need to be present in the room, to attend to the client (who is vulnerable, anxious or in a state of incongruence – the second condition). I need to be congruent in the relationship (the third condition), fully aware of the wider sphere of organismic experiencing. I need to do so *beyond the cognitive level*, i.e., at the level of *embodiment* (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Such congruent attending is the milieu that makes unconditional positive regard possible (fourth condition). My early belief was that a genuine desire to “do good” alone would bring about unconditional positive regard. I had not taken fully into account its organismic connotation and its indissoluble link to the fifth condition which states that the therapist “is *experiencing an empathic understanding of the client’s internal frame of reference*” (Rogers, 1961, p. 22). Only then my congruent communication would make the sixth condition possible, i.e., “*perceives*, at least to a minimal degree, conditions 4 and 5, the *unconditional positive regard* of the therapist for him, and the *empathic understanding of the therapist*” (Rogers, 1961, p. 22). These reflections had the positive effect of re-grounding me in the fundamental principles of the PCA.

It seemed clear that regular meditation practice did help me in offering congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard, but was it the same for colleagues who meditated regularly? Before attempting to answer this question it was important to widen my literature research, double-check on my understanding, and clarify what other approaches had to offer.

Having looked at most contemporary journals, books and magazines, I have not been able to find anything in the more specific field of meditation and contemporary person-centered psychotherapy, the one very significant exception being the seminal work of Brazier (1995), a writer and practitioner who has, however, moved away from meditation advocating a “Pure Land” approach to Buddhism, which focuses on love and active social engagement, and discarding meditation altogether (Brazier, 2008).

My own contributions to the field (Bazzano, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) register shifts in my ongoing process of practice and study. Looking back, I can now see that I made some of the same mistakes I have subsequently attributed to other writers in the field, the most obvious being that of an arbitrary division, i.e., allocating to therapy the domain of the everyday and to meditation the

“transcendental” domain, as well as not taking fully into account the experiential, experimental and existential nature of both endeavors.

Outline of other approaches

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy

The most popular attempt of integrating meditation and psychotherapy is mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) (Nauriyal, Drummond, & Lal, 2006; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), a blend of mindfulness techniques and CBT, inspired by Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness program (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2005). Prior to my person-centered training, I taught and co-facilitated Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programs. I found them fascinating and welcomed the effort to translate key Buddhist principles into a quantitative language. I also became aware that Buddhist meditation was being presented as a didactic tool instead of an empirical expedient – as a technique aimed at the reprogramming of thought and behavior instead of the cultivation of a nonjudgmental stance and appreciation of human imperfections. Meditation within MBCT is used prescriptively in order to reduce stress, control anxiety, manage physical pain, treat depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. I sympathize with the desire to alleviate suffering, yet MBCT highlights “negative thinking” (Segal et al., 2002, pp. 252–253) and computes “dysfunctional attitudes” (Segal et al., 2002, p. 5); it uses “Dysfunctional Attitude Scale questionnaires” (p. 5), thus repackaging the paradoxical teachings of the Buddha into a formula aimed at sending the client back to a normally alienated life.

The Buddhist element in MBCT has a strong *Theravada* flavor: for this early school of Indian Buddhism the world is illusory and the human experience has to be rectified, made wholesome and disentangled from its clutches. A methodology inspired by this philosophy will naturally attempt to re-educate the client and will be prescriptive rather than experiential.

Transpersonal psychotherapy

Transpersonal psychology has also used meditation and Buddhist principles and ideas in order to corroborate a belief in the spiritual dimension. Contributions to this approach come from Wilber (2000) and Rowan (2001), among others. The approach is vast and multifaceted, and it permeates sections of person-centered therapy. Rather than deconstructing the self and seeing directly into its fluid and “process-like” nature, this approach sees meditation as a way to foster a developmental stage beyond the self and expand into “cosmic consciousness”.

Psychodynamic therapy and meditation

Authors integrating psychodynamic psychotherapy and Buddhism (Burns, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Fromm, Suzuki, & De Martino, 1960; Safran, 2003; Welwood, 1983, 2000) produced pioneering works whilst accepting as givens key psychoanalytic notions – free association, belief in the unconscious, the notion of psyche as a separate apparatus made up of parts. As a result, meditation is seen as an introspective exercise – missing the wider phenomenological reality, thus perpetrating Cartesian/Freudian misconceptions.

Meditation, PCA and phenomenology

Meditation – as I experience it and understand it – is a form of phenomenological and existential inquiry; it is becoming aware of the wider organismic field, actively and creatively adapting to the fluid, nonsubstantial nature of the self. It deals with – and helps one appreciate more fully – the everyday (Mahezumi, 2001), the life of the organism beyond the confinements of ego and of the self-concept (Rogers, 1957).

The Zen stance is more in tune with phenomenology (which is one of the foundations of the PCA) in the attempt to appreciate more fully the imperfect world of phenomena, something that can be seen in the late writings of Husserl, and especially in Merleau-Ponty's emphasis to bring essences back into existence (Matthews, 2002).

Part II: Research Summary

Bringing in the experiences of others

I started my small-scale research by formulating a question: “How does the regular practice of meditation inform the work of person-centered therapists?” (Bazzano, 2010b, p. 34). Over a period of five months I recorded interviews and conversations with person-centered therapists who practice meditation regularly. The challenge of qualitative research, and heuristic research in particular is, of course, the weight of responsibility resting on the researcher, for, as Polanyi reminds us, “there are no rules to guide verification that can be relied on in the last resort; the scientist must make the ultimate judgment” (cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 33). What Moustakas describes as “getting inside the question, become one with it” (1990, p. 15) echoes my experiences with *Koan* study in Zen where one meditates on an insoluble existential dilemma (i.e., the aforementioned *what is this?*), which may open the practitioner to a different perception. After the conversations, I listened repeatedly to the recordings, looking for emergent themes that would deepen my understanding. For several months I remained with the general question which is central to my exploration. I kept the question alive on a daily basis before and after having the conversations with my colleagues: a key note that kept on ringing as I went through my daily activities. I found four colleagues, person-centered practitioners and meditators, willing to have recorded conversations with me of about an hour's duration (Bazzano, 2010b).

Preparing the interviews

Before conducting my interviews, in order to stay focused whilst maintaining flexible guidelines for myself, I prepared four sub-questions:

- (1) What is your experience of meditation?
- (2) How does it influence your work as a person-centered therapist?
- (3) How does your experience and understanding of the person-centered approach inform your meditation?
- (4) How is meditation helpful or unhelpful to your work as a person-centered therapist?

The fourth question challenged “my own assumption that meditation is *always* beneficial to the practice of [person-centered] therapy (Bazzano, 2010b, p. 34).

Ethical issues

Having checked codes of conduct consonant with widely accepted research prerequisites and methodologies (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], 2010; Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002; Social Research Association [SRA], 2003), I conducted the conversations in the spirit of respect and empathy and clarified with participants their rights to: (a) withdraw from the inquiry at any time; (b) request to see the completed dissertation and have particular contents taken out. Issues of confidentiality and data protection were further clarified prior to our interviews: identity of participants withheld and confidential; all names are fictitious, and personal details coded; notes and tapes locked in a filing cabinet; computer data password protected with only non-identifiable details in notes or computer files; all tapes to be transcribed by myself without resorting to a third party. Finally, I received informed consent from participants for the publication of the findings.

Findings

Conversation 1

Mark (all names given in this paper are pseudonyms), a person-centered therapist, started practicing meditation regularly three years ago and experienced what he calls an internal “breakthrough,” the perception of

[A] wider space inside, a place of connectedness with the world, as well as an acceptance of my basic humanness, both the “good bits” and the “less good bits”.

He found that this was reflected in his work. Prior to practicing meditation, he would often feel

prompted to intervene and challenge the client, trying, even indirectly, to rectify what I perceived as “wrong” behavior”.

Now he found that – in a way that reflected his own internal process – he was “more prepared to allow the client more space to explore, verbalize and find out for herself”. He remarked how silences during the sessions felt “deeper and more meaningful”.

When I first listened to the above interview, I felt smugly reassured: it seemed to confirm my own assumptions. By the third listening, Mark’s tone of voice when he spoke of “good bits” and “less good bits” hit me. I could somehow hear that what he really *meant* was that he was truly willing to engage with difficult process as well as with positive configurations (Mearns & Thorne, 2000, p. 102). I went back to the beginning of the tape, where he talks of his first experiences with meditation. It had been “a breakthrough . . . a place of connectedness with the world”. His was in many ways the enthusiasm of the beginner, a highly desirable quality known in Zen as “beginner’s mind” (Suzuki, 1970). This “discovery” both excited me and saddened me. It excited me because it confirmed what I had always known. It saddened me because it made me wonder whether I still possessed that same freshness after 32 years of practicing meditation.

Conversation 2

Gill practiced meditation long before training as a person-centered therapist. Then therapy “replaced meditation practice” and became the focus of her life, whilst meditation took backstage. Listening to her, I felt the truth of what she was saying, trusted the validity of her statement: her person-centered work had become the natural outlet of her meditation practice. I noticed my own biases only afterwards, the first time I listened to that passage on tape, for it did not match my own experience. On a second listening, however, it did make sense, and this time I could also hear what she had said in the very next sentence:

Going from meditation to person-centered therapy felt like a natural progression. For me, meditation is sitting, focusing on mindful awareness, observing thoughts, observing the experience; being with my own experience. At times this can be painful, psychologically or physically, to be sitting a long time – to be with my experience and to know that it’s temporary and that it will pass. And the same goes for sitting with a client.

For her, the crucial element in person-centered practice is an attitude of openness and *unconditionality* to one’s own experience and the client’s:

It has to do with being able to be with moment-to-moment experience, not judging, not directing it. I find helpful the “*unconditionality*” – not good or bad.

Conversation 3

For Johanna, a person-centered therapist and meditator of many years,

Meditation is being fully present with whatever I’m doing and whomever I’m with . . . a kind of essential underpinning to my person-centered practice. I use the breath as coming back to the present moment . . . the rhythm of breathing, feet on the ground . . . Reminding myself – remembering that I’m here, I’m alive, this other person is with me, this activity takes place here and now. Ideally, this is my experience of meditation. And it carries on in your work with a client, particularly with person-centered practice which I see as a form of meditation in itself, being in the presence of a human being.

Johanna’s experience perfectly matched my own: how exhilarating! And yet it made me think: “Am I having conversations with like-minded people? Are we validating each other?”

Conversation 4

For Steve, meditation can aid therapy because it is

[A] conscious response and a willingness to stay with discomfort and be open to the possibility of change.

The regular practice of meditation makes it less compelling for him to “jump in” when working with a client, to want to rescue and direct:

If a client expresses difficult feelings – well, I can stay there without easing the pain or do relaxation or distract . . . Staying with it will not destroy me or the client, and it can

allow for a sense of freedom and inner strength, the same things that I do to myself when I meditate.

He pointed out that a meditative awareness of “what happens” and “what arises” is invaluable to the practice of person-centered therapy:

Meditation helps clean the screen and be more in touch with the here and now, with what is happening, not just mentally . . . with a wider sphere, not just with my self-concept, who I think I am, or I should be.

Steve also stressed the relational aspect of meditation:

Meditation is brought into the relationship. I become the *instrument* of the work. Person-centered practice allows me to value meditation more because of the effect it has on me, on my way of being.

After the first listening I thought, “This makes sense. I agree. Nothing shattering, nothing new . . . sounds good”. After the third listening I noticed his stress “I become the *instrument* of the work” and something changed in my perception. I don’t quite know how to express it. It might have something to do with the fact that “instrument” evokes music, tuning up my guitar before I play for friends or an audience so that the sound is crisp and the notes crystal clear. It might have something to do with how Steve said it. Something about him, the way he is as a person . . . the way he was with me, for instance, during our conversation: clear, open, attentive.

Emerging themes

Upon repeated listening, the conversations seemed to converge on some points summarized below. The regular practice of meditation, according to these recurring themes, help foster the following:

- Unconditional, nonjudgmental openness
- Embodied presence and wider awareness of the organism
- Staying with – being present to both pleasurable and difficult experiences
- Curiosity – the ability to stay with a question
- Compassion – the self-nurturing provided by meditation overflowing into natural empathy and unconditional positive regard
- Quality of the relationship – meditation may alter positively the way a therapist relates to the client
- Awareness of the interdependent nature fostered by meditative practice. (As Gill said, meditation might begin as “something private that I do on my own” but soon the very self is “seen in context, as part of an intersubjective and interdependent set of relations.”)
- Awareness of the self-concept and of the “configurations of self” (Mearns & Thorne, 2000, p. 102): awareness of fluidity, of self as process.

Could meditation be *unhelpful* for person-centered therapy? Two interviewees suggested that meditation can be an escape, a passive response to life’s challenges,

and that, if practiced solely in order to corroborate beliefs derived from Buddhism, it can lead to passivity.

The general consensus during the four conversations previously highlighted suggested that meditation helps a therapist become aware of the field, of the wider organismic reality, which is central in person-centered therapy, for Rogers saw psychotherapy as “a process whereby man becomes his organism – without self-deception, without distortion” (1961, p. 111).

It emerged that focusing on the breath is focusing on a simple activity shared by all living things. As Steve said: “Through awareness of the breath I become more aware of the wider sphere encircling the self”.

Awareness of the field means also awareness of what is normally deemed as “obvious”. What emerged is that we easily avert our gaze from everyday life in search of something else, thus missing the ordinary miracle, one that can only be apprehended through the body, the senses, through the ordinary yet wondrous experience of being-in-the-world.

Meditation, according to what two of the participants said, might provide the rudiments for “a training that helps us be in touch with everyday phenomenological reality, in order to better remember and recollect” (quoted in Bazzano, 2010b, p. 36), cultivating a sense of wonder and attending to ourselves and our clients more fully. Such training would help the practitioner cultivate what Rogers calls *a way of being* (Rogers, 1980; Bazzano, 2010b, p. 36).

There was a general consensus among participants on two points:

- (1) Meditation relates to the PCA because meditative awareness *is* in itself awareness of organismic experience and helps to fine-tune the organismic valuing process.
- (2) In meditative awareness, the self is at times perceived as non-existing or rather existing only in a *relational*, interdependent mode. More importantly, the self in meditation is perceived as *fluid*, not as a solid construct but as *process*, something that resonates with Rogers’ (1961) elucidation of the seven stages of process.

Conclusion

Working toward a perspective able to combine person-centered principles and meditation is a long due and necessary task; my hope is that this small contribution – limited in scope and in its findings as it might be – will spark further discussion and research.

Some of my previous insights were confirmed: for example, that meditation is effective in cultivating a way of being. I could not help wonder at times whether I have been conversing with like-minded people who amplified and resonated in their own ways some of my own assumptions. This thought helps me be more realistic about my inquiry, and it makes me curious: for instance, what about person-centered practitioners who do *not* meditate? How do they cultivate a way of being and foster the genuine offering of the core conditions?

The research made me aware of the need to do more in the field of meditation and the PCA. This current research may have been with a small sample but the findings encourage further inquiry, for they alerted me to the need of developing

further links between Eastern contemplative practices and person-centered and experiential therapies.

Meditation helps us be grounded in the organism and in the phenomenal world – a position at variance with the mechanistic view proposed by mindfulness-based CBT. Meditation fosters the exploration and the re-enchantment of the everyday, thus avoiding the escapist route and the spiritual bypass of much transpersonal psychotherapy.

Meditation helps us experiencing the self as process, thus deconstructing the psychodynamic view of the psyche as a separate apparatus.

Finally, meditation helps us appreciate life's imperfections as gifts. This could mean that this life is already the life of the Buddha, already the life of a fully functioning person.

The stance emerging here is phenomenological, experiential and existential: as such is not subservient to a system of beliefs.

My sincere hope is this might provoke discussion and encourage fellow researchers and practitioners to take the inquiry forward. May we inspire each other in this new and exciting field.

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