The elusive self – Buddhism and psychodynamic theory

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Introduction

There is a Buddhist story about a man who has been mortally wounded with a poisoned arrow. As family and attendants gather round to remove the arrow and tend the wound, the man stops them. He wishes to know, before the arrow is removed, from what wood it is made and from what bird the feathers came. Further he wishes to know the name of the man who shot the arrow, from what tribe he came and what poison anointed the tip of the arrow. By the time all the questions could be answered, the man was dead.

A more contemporary story (Beck, 1993) tells us of the aeroplane pilot caught in a hurricane, subject to terrifying stress and danger to himself and his aeroplane. In an attempt to protect himself, the pilot tries to find the eye of the hurricane where all is still, at least temporarily.

A glider pilot, on the other hand, lacking the power and control provided by an engine, is free to enjoy, if he allows himself to do so, the exhilaration and excitement of the storm.

The mind of the first pilot is focused entirely on himself, tense with the effort of survival, of trying to control the situation, attempting to protect himself from almost certain death. The glider pilot can go beyond the limited sense of himself to experience the wind and the rain, the lightening and the once-in-a-lifetime roller coaster ride.

Both men will die. One will end his life in fear, carrying with him to the end the illusion that he has some control – that life can be what he wants it to be rather than what it is. But one, freed from the need to protect himself and control his life, may have the chance truly to experience living before he dies. Most people are so busy trying to protect themselves from life's vicissitudes that they never really live. Unable to experience life directly, we erect defences, perfect our systems of protection and live in isolation. We try to find the eye of the hurricane, and if we find it for an hour, a week, a year, we try to hold on to it. But the hurricane doesn't stay still – it moves on. Then we look for someone to blame when all is not as we would wish. And we die without really having lived, isolated by and trying to protect our fragile sense of ourselves. Until we are prepared to face everything, without picking and choosing what we like and what we don't like, accepting change as reality, we cannot really live.

Like the man in the first story, we think we want to know the answers. We fail to see that the answers lie within ourselves. We seek the answers from the psychotherapist, viewing the psychotherapist as an expert. (Phillips, 1995) As long as we separate the expert from ourselves, we are like the wounded man and the aeroplane pilot, desperately trying to protect ourselves with answers, controlling every situation.

Death is the only thing that is certain for every one of us. Knowing this, we should be able to live life to the full. But instead, we live it fearfully, hardly daring to engage with it, hiding our selves behind a bewildering array of defences, illnesses, neuroses designed to protect the (according to Buddhist thought) deluded sense of self.

Buddhism is about that making whole, connecting or re-linking, which is the ultimate aim of all religious practices (Schloegel, 1977). However, it does not do this through adherence to doctrines or beliefs – quite the opposite in fact. Rather, it encourages each person to test reality for him or herself, offering a number of practical methods intended to cure a wide variety of spiritual and psychic ills. Psychotherapy is also about caring for the soul – a latter day religion. (Fromm, 1993 and others) It too is concerned with

restoring or making whole all the separate pieces of human existence. One of the ways it does this by looking at the past, and how that past influences the present. However, while an effective diagnostic tool, it may fail to provide the right medicine to promote spiritual and psychic health and may encourage people to concentrate on the past. Since psychotherapy is also concerned with the self, these two approaches would appear to complement one another. Let us see how Buddhism and psychotherapy together can offer a powerful tool for healing and transformation.

But first, it is important to consider how I have arrived at this place where I now sit at my computer, struggling to find the right words . . .

Background

The mind of the past is ungraspable
the mind of the future is ungraspable
the mind of the present is ungraspable

Diamond Sutra

I was brought up in a household – and indeed in a country – where there was no state-imposed religious or spiritual practice. I grappled with the existence of God from quite a young age and agonised over my inability to believe in the white bearded character who resided in a place where streets were paved with gold and heavenly hosts serenaded him on their harps.

My father's expectations of me were embodied in my name (that of the hero in Dickens' Great Expectations) and included his desire for me to realise his unfulfilled dreams. There was considerable pressure on me to perform well academically in my father's chosen field – history, as it happens. This kind of parental narcissism – the desire to see oneself repeated or recreated in one's children is insidious, suggesting an excess of self in the parent and often resulting in the suppression of a necessary degree of self in children.

I was, therefore, always different from my friends. I was not allowed to do many of the things they did, but instead had to learn to play the piano, speak 'properly', not stay out late, wear correct clothes and generally behave like a child of several generations past.

When I was 15 my father moved our family from America to England where I was sent to a very traditional Church of England Girls Boarding School. I remember feeling like a young plant that had been uprooted and transplanted into an unwelcoming, hostile soil. I grieved for the loss of my friends, my school, my grandmother, my culture and way of life. In response to this rude transplanting, even my body refused to grow, and the outward sign of fertility and womanhood, my periods, ceased for six months.

Americans were not popular at this school (or in England generally) and the expectation there was that I would be stupid and brash. The reality, being rather different, aroused widely differing feelings ranging from resentment, through tolerance to surprise and finally a form of acceptance. My accent was derided and very quickly I learned to speak 'properly' – lest I starve! Shy and generally compliant, I bowed my head and gave myself to the prevailing culture and let it mould me rather than feel so different.

My first experience of formal Christianity was unfortunate – I became known as 'The Heathen' for my failure to have been confirmed. The school Chaplain regarded me with contempt for my ability to 'pull the wool over the eyes' of the A Level Religious Knowledge examiners and convince them that I knew something about the Bible. Christianity seemed hypocritical and murderous in the extreme. I knew that a spiritual aspect was essential for me, but it was too early, and my experience was too limited to know what form that might take.

My interests in and experiences of Buddhism and psychotherapy have leap-frogged one another. At university I learned Transcendental Meditation in an attempt to deal with the extreme states of anxiety which had been provoked by O level and A level examinations. The promised state of calm and equanimity held great appeal and the practice was to a large extent successful in seeing me through finals. It was kept up erratically after that. A slightly timid fascination with psychology was perhaps the result of or a rebellion against my father's stern insistence that I should have nothing to do with any 'ologies', but my interest remained covert, a guilty secret, not encouraged by my new husband who bore my father's banner in this respect.

A two year sojourn in Sri Lanka provided a formal introduction to Buddhism. There I studied basic Theravadan tenets and learned to meditate on the breath. The need for equanimity was great in the midst of tumultuous marital storms and the demands of two young children in a foreign country. Looking back, my husband and I, barely more than children ourselves, were individually engaged in the search for some kind of self and meaning, and unable to help each other. The sense of isolation and separateness was reinforced by misunderstandings and individual but apparently incompatible needs. Buddhism seemed to offer what I had been searching for. Life was suffering. The only way out of suffering was through it. There was a way, the Noble Eightfold Path, which had been trod by the Buddha and millions after him. Buddhists were calm and peaceful. Buddhists didn't engage in war and didn't kill. (My vegetarian tendencies and disgust at hunting and killing of any kind were vindicated.) They tried to do no harm and they didn't judge. They brought peace and light with them. Buddhists

live in the here and now while at the same time acknowledging the influence of the past on the present. They even, sometimes, became enlightened.

On returning to England, I found a meditation teacher and took up the practice more seriously. The London Buddhist Society provided a structure within which it was possible to study and practice. However, as my marriage broke apart, the difficulties in meditating and practising in the absence of a nearby teacher proved too much for me. Gradually the practice dwindled, with the children providing an excuse for not going to London. A valid and practical but also expedient excuse – I had not progressed sufficiently along the Buddha's way to be able to face the painful feelings brought up during meditation.

Over the next ten years there were infrequent visits to the Buddhist Society and short periods of regular meditation. Therapy had become a regular occurrence after the end of my first marriage and a second brief but unsuccessful union. I was desperately searching for some ultimate truth while trying to find some sense of myself and keep the ever deepening depression at bay. While sympathetic to my Buddhist interests, the therapist could never quite grapple with my need to discover something greater than my subjective experience, and continued to point out to me the relative truth of this experience. I couldn't seem to transcend the feelings of guilt, depression, anger, low self-esteem, loneliness, fear and the repetition of earlier failed relationships which were features of that time. There felt to be no substantial change, no way of getting at the real problem which always seemed to elude us. The search for peace and truth continued. For a time I attended Quaker meetings which seemed to provide the closest Western equivalent to Buddhism – the stillness and silence of Sunday meetings provided a brief respite from the world. But I had not yet learned to look deeply . . .

Several devastating work experiences, in the form of redundancies, abuses, oppression and abrupt endings had left me extremely depleted, frighteningly depressed and with almost no self-esteem. I sought for some way of earning a living which also had some meaning and might benefit other people. Although far from sorted out, to my satisfaction at least, there was some recognition that I might have something to offer others in their search for meaning.

I took an introductory course in group analysis in an attempt to uncover the root of my apparent difficulties in functioning well with others. I then enrolled on the UCS counselling course. As a nascent counsellor, my responses were continually coloured by hazy recollections of how Buddhism might approach this or that problem. The connections were tenuous, largely because of my relatively slight grasp of both bodies of knowledge. The older psychology seemed to have covered everything and to have dealt with the age-old problems of the human condition by insisting that people face themselves in an attempt to realise that this very self they face is nothing more than a collection of features, a series of memory traces – nothing of substance – an illusion. Sitting alone, looking deeply into the nature of the problem, can be a terrifying and lonely experience. The Buddhist emphasis on community as a safe place in which to undergo this kind of self-examination recognises the need to share joys and sorrows while at the same time bearing a collective responsibility for the happiness of each member. Clearly the therapeutic space is a suitable place for this kind of work to be undertaken. Such an approach enables us to realise that we are not separate but rather interdependent. However, our own society's emphasis on individuality can often exclude the benefits and responsibilities of community and the recognition that 'no man is an island'.

Two lectures organised by the UCS course strengthened the connections and rekindled my smouldering interest in Buddhism. The old books took on new meaning. New publications lent added interest in a more accessible way than had been possible ten years before. I read avidly. Visits to the Buddhist Society became more regular as did meditation and mindfulness practice in daily life. New friends lent strength to the practice. Now there was felt to be an urgent need to amalgamate the ancient Eastern way of dealing with the fact of suffering with the newer Western method of healing mental and emotional afflictions. Everything I read or heard about psychotherapy seemed to connect now with the other, older system of thought.

Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (TNH, 1995) notes that Western approaches to medicine condone the removal or killing off of any part of the body or mind which is causing a problem. Surgery and antibiotics are the main weapons in this war against the unacceptable bits of ourselves. However, he adopts a different approach, which he likens to psychotherapy: to embrace those parts of oneself which are less than appealing, and by that very holding, begin to heal them and make whole that which has been fractured and split. The therapist can help the client in this process, by encouraging him or her to recognise the unpleasant feelings and uncovering the values and beliefs which have led to them so that they may be dealt with. Clearly, despite the therapist's help, the efforts of the client are crucial: just as 'a teacher must give birth to the teacher within his students, so a psychotherapist has to give birth to the therapist within his patient. Only then can the patient's internal psychotherapist work full time in a very effective way.' In order to achieve this, the therapist must herself be free from delusion, mindful and present in this very moment. . .

Some theory

A special transmission outside the scriptures
not relying on words or letters
but directly pointing to the human heart
so that we might awaken to reality.

Bodhidharma

These words may give some clue as to why this part of the dissertation feels so difficult to begin. For weeks it has been going round in my head but sitting down to the computer has seemed impossible. It was only after reciting this verse to a friend who suggested that they form the first words in this theory section that it became possible to make a start.

Words have been my livelihood – until very recently. A sudden end to a difficult but in many ways rewarding job has perhaps contributed to my reluctance to set myself up to be judged, yet again, by the words I write. I am tired of hearing words which mean nothing other than to confuse or mislead. The editor in me rejects and changes every sentence before it even reaches the page. The Buddhist in me attempts to see through this bit of ego asserting itself, and I am reminded by a small sign over my desk to return to the present moment and give myself into the task at hand.

How does this help with the theory? Perhaps it is simply a reminder that however much learning and information we acquire, what is important is our relationship firstly with ourselves and only then other people. This is difficult, if not impossible, to describe or define in words and I am reminded of the Buddhist view that knowledge often gets in the way of understanding. The eighteenth century Zen Master Torei Enji offered this warning:

Written words can be a source of entanglement as well as of liberation; unless the right person takes it at the right time, the elixir turns to poison. Please be careful.

The Discourse on the Inexhaustible Lamp (trans. Okuda)

Legend has it that the Buddha, in what has become known as the first 'Transmission' of his teachings, held up a lotus flower before a large crowd of people. Saying nothing, he looked around at the faces of his followers. Eventually his eyes lit on Mahakasyapa who looked back and smiled. At that instant it was apparent to both of them that a deep understanding had passed between them although no words had been spoken.

This emphasis on what happens without words seems crucial to me. So much of what happens in our relationships occurs at an unconscious level. So much of what happens in the therapeutic space is unspoken. So many people experience intolerable pain before the acquisition of language, and so without the ability to put into words the perceptions and experiences as they arise. The unclarified feelings swirl around in a kind of mental chaos, only to assert themselves many years later, in the form of depression, anxiety and nameless fears. For many of us, difficulties in expressing our feelings – and consequent frustrations – probably date back to this pre-verbal time. The importance of 'inner speech' in shaping present and future conversations and interactions – and the difficulties which may arise from the lack of language has been studied and noted by the Russian psychologist L S Vygotsky and the American, Jerome Brunner (in Sacks, 1990).

Our conscious mind, being but the tip of the iceberg, gives little clue to the reality of the unconscious, or to the true self . . . We are shaped by the past as well as the future, allowing them to exert their power over the present. The transferences and projections which inform our present relationships are like time bombs from the past, hidden and unknown, but waiting to wreak havoc in the present. We view reality only through our constructs, habits and filters which actually prevent us from directly experiencing the present moment (Packer, 1995).

Beginning to notice the feelings, seeing when they arise, what inflames them, what causes them to change or die away, may be a beginning of the recognition that this self is not permanent in its nature – that we are both greater and less than our emotions. This simple awareness, which can be developed through meditation, may be the first step towards an integration which may be facilitated by therapy. It may then be possible to move on to discover that we are not separate, however isolated we feel. I cannot exist without you who will read this paper. This insight into the interconnectedness of all things is reminiscent of Winnicott's insistence that 'there is no such thing as a baby'. It must follow that there is no such thing as a mother; it is only the nursing pair forming the complete entity. In other words, the close physical and emotional ties between the mother and the baby are crucial to both of them. Of course it is possible for each to exist separately. If one dies, the other can survive. But 'living' in a full sense is another matter. The survivor may or may not ever learn to do that. The physical and emotional responses of each are inextricably tied up with the those of the other; for a period before and after birth, each is seen as – and feels – a part of the other. And they in turn cannot fully exist without the father, the grandparents and many others . . . Indeed, if we could only but see it, this interconnectedness is not limited to the time around birth, but continues throughout life. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh has established the Order of Interbeing to reflect both the emptiness (in the sense of being empty of a separate self) and the completeness of the self and the universe. The Buddhist insistence on non-duality means that you can never have completeness without emptiness – for how can something be full unless it

was first empty? In the paradoxical words of The Heart Sutra, 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form'.

Buddhist psychology

All composed things are like a dream,

a phantom, a drop of dew, a flash of lightening.

That is how to meditate on them,

that is how to observe them.

The Diamond Sutra

Around 2500 years ago, after years of asceticism, meditation and introspection in an attempt to find the answer to human suffering, the man who was to become known as the Buddha awakened to the reality of life with the recognition that it is the illusion of self which is the cause of all suffering. This, combined with greed and hatred, separates us from each other and from life itself. It is this delusion which clouds our view of existence with desires and fears. It is this which prevents us from seeing clearly and directly experiencing ourselves and our existence.

Buddhism places faith in the mind as the basis for everything – it is the projections of our minds which create our version of reality. At the same time our perceptions of reality form the contents of the mind. Our mind is not therefore separate from the rest of our existence. (Brazier, 1994) According to Buddhist psychology also, the self generates karma (the consequences of intentional action or the law of cause and effect) and karma is the self. When we stop creating karma, the sense of self weakens – this of course is the ideal in Buddhist practice and appears to be the opposite of the aim of most Western therapies, which is regarded as the strengthening of the self.

Early Buddhists mapped out a sophisticated and deep psychology of human existence in the diagram which has come to be known as the 'Wheel of Life'. We move from one state of unsatisfactoriness to another, from one minute to the next, day after day and year after year. One moment we are in the realm of the gods, delighted and delightful, giving to others and rejoicing in our good fortune. However, the prospect of losing our heart's desire transports us to the realms of the jealous demi-gods, fighting to retain that which we believe to be rightfully ours. With this, we descend to the animal realms, driven by base desires. Indulging our passions drives us still further downwards to the hell realms where we are tortured by hatred, anger, fear, anxiety. Passion spent, we may arrive in the realm of the hungry ghosts, filled with an inexplicable desire for something, we know not what. The human realm is where we reside when we are attempting to find some answers, questioning our identity and our place in the universe.

We whirl through the different realms many times in a day – we are reborn each minute and the state in which we are reborn is dependent on our behaviour in the previous state. Only when the 'self' has been extinguished is it possible to step off the wheel into freedom or Nirvana. Thus, briefly, can the Buddhist concepts of karma (cause and effect) and rebirth be explained. What is important is to note that it is not the realms themselves which cause us to suffer, but our perceptions of them. It is traditionally said that 'Nirvana is Samsara' or 'Heaven and Hell are only a hair's breadth apart'. It is necessary to reconcile the various neurotic states represented by the realms in order to become liberated.

We can see the relationship between the states briefly described above and the more familiar psychoanalytic descriptions which have done much to illuminate our understanding of the various realms.

Animal realm	*Freudian exposure of animal nature of the passions*
Hell realm	*paranoia, aggression, anxiety*
Hungry Ghosts	*insatiable longing (of oral craving), alienation*
Gods realm	*peak experiences (as defined by humanistic psychology)*
Demi-gods realm	*competition and envy (cultivated by ego psychology, behaviourism and cognitive therapy)*
Human realm	*Narcissistic preoccupation, questions of identity*

(Epstein, 1995)

Buddhism suggests that it is our estrangement from all these states as well as from what is called the Buddha-nature or true self (our own enlightened mind) which is the cause of our suffering. All six states must be reclaimed and integrated before we can become whole and truly human. The material of each realm is not the cause of suffering but rather the means to end suffering. It is our own reactions to the material which cause suffering and only by greeting the reactions, embracing and transforming them is there a possibility of wholeness.

If aspects of the person remain undigested – cut off, denied, projected, rejected, indulged, or otherwise unassimilated – they become the points around which the core forces of greed, hatred, and delusion attach themselves. They are black holes that absorb fear and create the defensive posture of the isolated self, unable to make satisfying contact with others or with the world . . . . the personality is built on these points of self-estrangement; the

> *paradox is that what we take to be so real, our selves, is constructed out of a reaction against just what we do not wish to acknowledge. We tense up around that which we are denying, and we experience ourselves through our tensions.*
>
> (Epstein, 1995)

Narcissism

> *To study Buddhism is to study the self,*
>
> *To study the self is to forget the self,*
>
> *To forget the self is to be one with others.*
>
> Zen Master Dogen

Since all suffering is seen to arise from the deluded self, it seems appropriate to concentrate here on psychodynamic theories relating to Narcissism. Indeed, the central question in Buddhism, and perhaps in psychotherapy as well is: Who am I?

Freud (1914) regarded Narcissism as a normal part of development. It involves the construction of the self by the infant seeking to fulfil its instinct for self-preservation. Pleasant and unpleasant experiences are responded to during this 'auto-erotic' phase without any sense of identity. In other words, the libido is directed towards the newly forming self which means that, as the baby realises that not all desires are immediately gratified, it begins to map the world into self and other (objects). So everything other than self may be perceived as having the potential to gratify or frustrate its desires.

The consequences of Narcissism, as outlined by Freud, range from megalomania, through hypochondria and repression, and then, on the healthier side of the spectrum, to object love and sublimation. Freud considered that the need for love – both given and received – was essential for health. But sublimation is the way to a higher cultural and spiritual purpose (Brazier, 1992).

Klein (1952) considered that the ego was actually present from birth. The baby had then to cope with differing impulses arising in its own body and so risked being overwhelmed by either love or hate. In order to cope with this seemingly impossible choice, the baby 'splits': either everything good becomes part of itself, including the good aspects of the mother, while the bad, frustrating and painful, including the withholding aspects of mother, are projected outside, or it may happen the other way round. The baby can't hold both 'good' and 'bad' together so it splits them, projecting out one or the other.

This is known as the 'schizoid position' and forms the beginning of the dualistic approach to life which is so typical of Western culture. These mechanisms – splitting, projection, introjection and identification are all thought of as the Narcissistic states. When the baby begins to realise that the source of good and bad feelings are one and the same, and is able to contain both good and bad feelings inside itself, although it may experience guilt and sadness about the feelings of hatred towards the source of goodness, it has achieved what Klein called the 'depressive position' (Klein 1952). Many of us spend the rest of our lives fluctuating between the depressive and the schizoid positions (and some remain in the latter).

Nothing is all good or all bad. Indeed, something can only be 'good' if there is also the concept of 'bad'. If we can come to a deep realisation of this fact, there may be some chance for integration and freedom from isolation. All too often however, hatred, prejudice, racism, war and persecution of all kinds are the result of the schizoid position re-asserting itself in later life. Relationships are born and die as a result of such projections – the result of an inability to hold on to the good and the bad within ourselves, causing us to project the unacceptable onto other people. Buddhism attempts to reconcile the differences and difficulties brought about by these dualistic states of mind.

Heinz Kohut reformulated Freud's theory of Narcissism. He assumed that the baby experiences 'perfection' in the pre-Oedipal phase of its life (Kohut, 1971) The baby naturally tries to preserve this perfection by one of two means: the development of an idealised 'grandiose self' around the age of 2-4 years; and the idealisation of the parents which occurs a little later. The development of a 'bi-polar' self is the result of these two idealisations. Healthy development allows a gradual disintegration of the idealised parents, enabling the child to replace it little by little with his or her own inner resources. In the case of sudden loss of an idealised object or trauma, it may not be possible for the internalisation to take place and the 'bad' objects may end up by overwhelming the 'good'. This may result in a life lacking in authenticity since the ego has not had a chance to develop its own values. There may be a constant seeking for guidance in an attempt to recover the lost ideal object.

Thus it is the Narcissistic urges which enable us to make something of ourselves – or not (Brazier, 1992). Clearly there are many similarities between, especially, Freud's view of Narcissism and the Buddhist doctrine of suffering based on selfish desire.

Many people in the West suffer from feelings of self-pity or self-blame. There is much envy and the desire to be envied. Most people seek some form of liberation from suffering. But we often interpret freedom as being able to do whatever one wishes. Might we do better to apply the Eastern approach to freedom as being release from the need to do whatever one wishes: in other words, freedom from wanting things we like and not wanting those things we dislike or find uncomfortable?

Sharon Salzberg explains another possible way of looking at the self and of seeing how it is the sense of separateness which causes so much pain:

> *There is so much in all of us that is unexplored. And it is so deep, so dark. The fear of not-being, for example, the fear of evil, of destructiveness and violence. And there is such a longing for something beyond all these, something beyond the triteness of the everyday, beyond the endless difficulties of relationship. And it seems, as if, since time immemorial, enclosures have been especially conducive to what assuages these – to projection, propitiation, worship, magic, ceremony. We tend to build enclosures, such as cathedrals or caves and celebrate these, rather as we do with the self. In fact, the mind is not a small, bounded thing, it is endless, if only we could remove the enclosures. Until we begin to question 'what is this self?' it is not clear that it is an enclosure, that it separates us from others, from nature. We see and touch and contact the world through our past experiences which colour everything, determine our whole approach.*

[This can be see especially clearly through the transference – the mechanism by which we transfer the feelings about key figures, key experiences, key constructs from the past onto people and situations in the present.]

> *'Without enclosures or fences, there is space, no inside and outside. We contain the past, are the present and point towards the future – the self is nothing other than a process, a stream of thoughts over time, rather like the imprint of a seal on sealing wax leaving an impression but nothing of itself.'*
>
> (Sharon Salzberg, in Friedman, 1987)

Loss and change

> *If a person holds on to the idea that a self, a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva.*
>
> The Diamond Sutra

The concept of a separate self leads rapidly to desire – longing for those things we want but don't have and wishing to be free of the things we dislike or find uncomfortable. Most of us love one person, don't love another, want one thing, don't want another. Underneath is always loving and wanting. Until we can free ourselves from grasping, until we can remove the object of our emotions, we are locked into duality and separateness. Only when we have become free of the enclosures and the greed can love be simply love or compassion. Then there is no choosing of what is worthy of our love or attention – we are love and attention. Acceptance – of ourselves and others – is then inevitable.

Our resistance to change leads us to hold on to the past – in the case of loved ones dying, we are often unable to let go of them and are dragged back into the past, our anger feeding our disbelief that we have been so abandoned. Attempts to look forward into the future may cause a feeling of guilt at our seeming betrayal of the dead person (Parkes, 1972) and so we remain in the past in order to escape the guilt. Earlier internalised 'bad objects' become reinforced by later losses and changes, in rather the same way that screen memories are an amalgamation of lots of similar events being remembered as one. In the trauma of loss it is the other way round: the current loss becomes confused with earlier losses for which we had no defences and no language with which to describe them.

It is perhaps necessary for the therapist to help clients recognise and find expression for early difficulties through acknowledging their anger, rage, sadness – in order to gain release from the power of earlier losses. The task is to help the client see that the time for meeting early needs is past and that the therapist cannot meet those needs. At this recognition, reality may enter the situation and anger at emotions which have been locked up may be released or transformed. In meditation, you assume and acknowledge the anger without being taken over by it, seeing that the self is in fact more than the anger. Having first of all recognised and accepted the anger, only then is it possible to begin the work of transformation (Hanh, 1995).

Only when there is a recognition that the loss which has been sustained is not a total one, that the painful feelings may be mitigated by a recognition that it is possible to live life without the loved one, is it possible to move on.

Buddhism offers the opportunity to regard the self as unbounded, and recognises that the dead live on, both physically and emotionally, in the bodies and memories of their descendants and friends. With this realisation the wanting and not-wanting begin to fall away and it becomes possible to accept things the way they really are.

Since Heraclitus's pronouncement that 'Life is flux' many wise people have recognised that life cannot continue without change. If things were to stay the same, none of us would ever grow up or learn anything. There would be no seasons, nobody would ever die and no child would ever be born. Food would never grow and there would be no ocean tides. It is actually inconceivable to imagine a life without change. And yet we resist it – we try, like the aeroplane pilot, to control our lives so that only those changes which we find acceptable can happen. And yet, the most basic part of our humanity is to be born, to grow old and often ill, and then to die.

With all this theory in mind, let us see how it might be possible to approach clinical work in a different frame of mind.

Clinical work

> *When a bodhisattva practices generosity, he does not rely on any object – that is to say he does not rely on any form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object, or dharma – to practice generosity.*
>
> The Diamond Sutra

The concept of the boddhisattva in Buddhism is an important one for therapists as well as many who tread a Buddhist path. Boddhisattvas seek their own enlightenment through the enlightenment of others. They attempt to reduce or transcend the self through acts of selflessness, not discriminating between self and others. This is both the way to enlightenment and enlightenment itself. It is by partly performing unselfish acts of compassion that we may gradually begin to diminish the sense of self and realise our connections with each other and with the world.

Despite the multitude of methods of communication available, especially in the western world today, there is a deplorable lack of communication between friends, family members and society. Certainly it has been my experience that those closest to me are the very people with whom it is hardest to communicate about the things that really matter. People feel isolated and misunderstood and many become ill. They purchase or seek the services of counsellors and therapists. However, therapists themselves also suffer and may in turn not be able to communicate with those closest to them.

It is important for therapists to be able to listen deeply and speak mindfully. It is as well to remember that it is the relationship between therapist and client which enables the client to begin to learn how to heal him or herself. This means that the therapist must be able to provide a unblemished mirror in which the client may see him or herself reflected. This unblemished mirror is also necessary in order to work with the transference.

The first of the twin verses traditionally (from the sixth century AD) held to embody the spirit and paradox of Zen, reminds us of this, while at the same time reminding us that the body and the mind are not separate, that the health of one relies on and determines the health of the other.

> *The body is like the bodhi tree*
>
> *The heart is like a mirror bright*
>
> *If we polish the mirror every day*
>
> *Where can dust alight?*

In order to present a clean mirror for the client, therapists must be able to forget themselves. Stillness and mindfulness help the therapist to become aware of and resonate with the client.. It is possible to develop this attitude through meditation and/or through therapy. A combination of the two methods may be the most effective way of getting rid of the illusions, the projections, the wrong perceptions, and returning to our true selves

The mirror analogy is also a useful one for thinking about working with transference. Most of us carry with us the images of and feelings attached to key figures in our lives. Instead of greeting new people through fresh eyes, and seeing their reality, we superimpose the images from the past onto the person in the present – rather like a photographic double image, or the kind of distorted image one sees in a tarnished or blemished mirror. If the mirror, in the shape of the therapist is clean, it will be easier for her to recognise transferred feelings from the past. Equally, with the clear eyes of no-self, it is possible to see more clearly the reality of each individual who comes to us, without the haze of counter-transference.

Avaloketeshvara, the Boddhisattva who hears the cries of the world, and Manjushri, the Boddhisattva of great understanding, provide the inspiration for aspiring Buddhas and perhaps for therapists as well:

- to listen in order to understand
- to practice listening with all our attention and open-heartedness
- sit still and look deeply into the heart of things and into the hearts of people
- to sit, look and listen without judging or prejudice
- to sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what has been left unsaid
- to recognise that just by listening deeply we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person.
- •look so deeply that we will be able to see and understand the roots of ill-being, the impermanent and selfless nature of all that is.

These guidelines remind us of how much of our work can be done without words. When someone else really listens to our anguish, pain and despair, we feel understood and we suffer less. This approach is not dissimilar to Rogers' concept of 'unconditional positive regard' but it requires mindful awareness and deep listening if we are to be able to resonate with the client and recognise his or her reality. The space we create both makes possible and arises from a deep understanding of the client. 'When the therapist has space within him (or her) self he or she can be one with anybody.' (Brazier) I know that in my own therapy, it was when the therapist stopped questioning, analysing, interpreting

and simply let me sit with the pain, with her there, that the most profound work was done.

We need to encourage our clients to examine and question and be there with them while they do this. We cannot take the pain away from them. The existence of suffering is the first of the Buddhist signs of being. There is no judgement attached to this statement – it is simply true – as it is true that impermanence is the nature of all conditioned things.

Clients

> *'Both therapist and client are on the same sort of path. We are both afflicted by suffering caused by our conditioned state of mind. There naturally arises, therefore, a sense of fellow feeling.'*
>
> Zen Therapy

In trying to start writing this section I am aware that any understanding of the clients I saw a year or more ago will have altered through the lens of time, new knowledge and understanding. I would see them differently now and I am grateful for the changes in me which make this possible.

While on a Buddhist retreat recently, one of the images which often popped into my mind, especially when I was taking a shower, was that of Siobhan, a young Irish woman who came to the University Counselling Service suffering from low self-esteem, grief from various losses and anxiety which resulted in a range of worrying physical symptoms. She found it very difficult to love or care for herself and one day exclaimed with tears in her eyes, 'I don't even use talcum powder when I've had a shower.' This seemed to epitomise for her – and now for me – the kind of care which one needs to accord oneself and which, presumably, she never received from her mother . . . It seemed significant that she was so often in my mind at a time when I was also trying to look after myself . . .

Finding oneself in order to lose oneself

Siobhan came to the UCS suffering from panic attacks and headaches since a trip to Australia six months or so ago. Her sense of herself had been quite eroded by a number of factors: a domineering mother and abusive father, betrayals by men, loss resulting from two abortions. She was quite hypochondriacal (my word), fearing that every pain in her chest was a heart attack and every headache was a brain haemorrhage. She was lonely and depressed and very much wanted a man to love and care for her – only the weekend before coming to counselling she had been let down by someone she considered to be a friend, leaving her feeling very betrayed.

An aunt had died of a brain tumour in the summer – this had quite shocked her and presumably raised the fear of brain haemorrhage. Her two abortions had never been mourned or discussed with anyone.

She told me that her father often referred to her as 'arrogant and stupid' – an opinion apparently shared by the extended family – and she said 'my mother has had too much influence on my life'.

Her next brother was born when she was 18 months old. Siobhan remembers sitting in the back seat of the car on the way home from hospital, furious with her mum and demanding that father sit in the back seat with her. The youngest brother is between 3 and 4 years younger. He was a sickly child who needed lots of attention and was close to father.

She played a lot with other boys during childhood, especially some cousins who lived nearby. One of them was 'always trying to kill her', leaving huge nails lying about, trying to trip her down stairs and other antics. She never told anyone, just went along with it and tried to be one of the lads.

She remembers drawing horrible pictures of her father and putting them under his pillow. Although he has mellowed now, her feelings about herself as being no good have clearly been very influenced by him. He hit her often. Yet he tells her he loves her. He used to have baths with her – until she was about 7. We discussed how confusing these mixed messages would be for a small child and how she seems to be replicating this pattern in her relationships with men – that she only feels loved when men are actually treating her as though she has no value.

When she was naughty, Mother used to lock her in her room. There she would take off all her clothes and stand in the window until one of the neighbours rang her mum to inform her. She says she must have been a brat.

Her first abortion was when she was 17. She later went off to university and had another abortion as a result of a reasonably long-standing but unsatisfactory relationship. She has recently been on a trip to Australia which she enjoyed as it gave her an opportunity to be independent, have some adventure, make decisions, gain confidence and come to know herself. She is worried now that she seems to be losing this confidence.

During the first session Siobhan talked about her loneliness and her desire to share her life with a 'nice man'. She spoke about not feeling at home in England and of other people's reactions to her: as someone capable and strong, even intimidating – 'one of the lads' in some ways. She fears that her friends find her boring (I certainly never did) and that her failed relationships with men are her fault.

She mentioned several times not wanting to go on like this, wanting to become softer and more human. I suggested that the task might be a bit like peeling away the layers of an onion -- that when there has

been a lot of pain which has not been dealt with, it seems to build up in layers around the heart making it difficult to find one's softness and humanity. It felt as though she was in quite a deep spiritual malaise and she spoke of being in 'self-destruct' mode, asking me if I knew what she meant. I knew only too well!

She had spoken earlier of wanting a man to come and sweep her off her feet. This seemed like rather wishful thinking, so I tentatively suggested that another way of feeling better about herself would be by finding her way into herself by herself; in other words we talked about the need to love herself before other people could love her. This seemed a completely alien concept to her and she questioned it several times, what I meant by it, how she could do it. So we talked about it in terms of acceptance, of not blaming herself, of finding her own way rather than trying to follow other people's (like her mother's) directions for her. It felt very important that she should know I trusted her to do this difficult thing but that she had the space to do it for herself. My own ability to set myself aside and feel myself into her skin would be important here – perhaps if she felt loved and accepted by me it would be easier for her to accept herself.

She seemed very sad and soft at the end and didn't want to finish. She reassured herself that I would be there next week. I felt that she was projecting a great deal on to me – especially those 'good' aspects which she could not acknowledge in herself – and was concerned not to acknowledge and own her projections. Looking back, it seems that there was a considerable amount of projection and projective identification happening in both directions – and perhaps she was in some way putting herself into my skin. I'm sure that part of my identification with her was to do with us both being 'aliens'.

Siobhan was feeling better by the second session, and told me of several ways in which she felt more able to cope, less at the mercy of other people's perceptions of her, though still worried that she might be a 'flirt' (because she had overheard someone describing her in that way). She was also concerned at her propensity to get into relationships with 'horrible' men who are not nice to her. Her boyfriend at the time of the second abortion, a man called Tom, was not at all loving or supportive and she says of that time 'I always wanted more of him'. She spoke of having 'unconsenting sex' with him but she regarded this as her fault, linking it with all the names the family had called her: 'slut', 'slag', 'whore', 'stupid', 'dizzy girl'. Such labels seem to have shaped and defined her life and her view of her self.

She was also concerned about a tendency to dominate in sexual relationships as she had heard that this was connected with early sexual abuse and worried that she couldn't trust men. We explored some of the possible reasons for this and she announced that she couldn't really trust herself. This was apparently because she had once gone out with a man while officially seeing someone else. It felt as though it would be difficult for her to trust anyone else if she couldn't trust herself first. I wondered whether perhaps she felt that she couldn't trust me, but I believe she may have been talking about not trusting herself – perhaps because there was so little sense of herself to trust. On later reflection it seems likely that she cannot trust me or anyone because of her own internalised bad objects. No one has ever been able to make her better and of course it is a vain hope that anyone could. Only she can learn to accept and validate herself. But the therapist can help her to acknowledge both the frustration and the rage which is locked up around her bad objects.

Despite a series of mildly violent and abusive relationships, she finds 'nice' men boring – they are not exhilarating and entertaining. She wants a man 'to be proud of her', to 'tell other people how wonderful I am' – this would make a change from her father telling her and other people that she is stupid and arrogant while also telling her he loves her. When asked to describe what love felt like, immediately she said 'Like being swamped'. This seemed to reflect her mother's kind of love of which she feels very sure but is at the same time very controlling, leaving her little space in which to grow.

During the first few sessions Siobhan often asked me what I thought about things, refusing to see that she had many of the answers within herself. If I made an observation about anything, she questioned it with 'Do you think so?' I felt uncomfortable being regarded as the expert, especially since so many of her issues were the same as my own. I realised that we were not so different or indeed so separate. I spoke a bit about not being able to avoid the pain and needing to work through it and that I would be happy to accompany her on this journey. It was reassuring when she began asking those questions less often and offering her own ideas more frequently. I felt very fond of her and quite protective of this young woman whose parents seem either to have smothered or abused her. I was also struck early on by the way in which she seemed to echo my own issues. Whether her struggle was really partly with existential and spiritual issues or whether that was my counter transference, I am not sure, but there was a feeling that she was working very hard on these kinds of things.

I feel that part of this was, perhaps, to please me – this would fit in with her childhood need to please her parents and be for them the person they wanted her to be (in very much the same way as I had tried – and failed – to be the person my father wanted me to be). Sadly though, she had always failed with them, whereas she was rather successful with me, in that I did feel very maternal and protective towards her

while, I hope, at the same time, able to let her be herself whatever that might be. I was (and continue to be) reminded of how we all hold the shape of past experiences in the present moment and of how confusion can arise as to whose past and whose present is being dealt with.

By the fourth session, Siobhan seemed in good spirits and announced how much she was getting from counselling. She had talked at length with a girl friend who was having problems with men and found herself saying 'You have to learn how to love yourself before you can expect anyone else to love you!' I asked her if she believed it as she said it to which she replied 'Oh yes' and proceeded to mention some of the ways in which she is trying to love herself. She also said she thought maybe this ideal relationship which she has been seeking doesn't really exist and that men seem to be so tied up with themselves, not interested in or affected by relationships in the way that women are. She said she was feeling 'good' and 'positive'.

However, later in this session, she spoke of a deep sense of shame, related to the abortions, and of her fear of letting people down. She may have felt that she was letting me down. We thought about what that really meant and she mentioned being true to herself. This is a problem, of course, if you have spent all your life being true to other people's ideas of what you should be. She realises that it is important to sort out who she is and what she wants, rather than always being flexible and adaptable and trying to please other people. It felt as though it was not yet quite possible for her to hold on to the good feelings about herself – and perhaps I am still necessary to do this for her. I reminded her of Shakespeare's words: 'To thine own self be true and it must follow, as the night the day, thou can'st not then be false to any man.' (Hamlet, Act I, Scene iii)

During the next few sessions, we revisited the same themes, particularly the ones of lack of trust and the difficulty of loving oneself. She was very keen to grow and to change, and didn't fight shy of the pain or the work. Over the Christmas holidays she was pleased to be able to speak to her mother and was much helped by her mother's support when father became verbally abusive. She was also able to stand up to him. I was delighted that she had found the strength and the ability to hold on to the good aspects of herself.

During this holiday as well, she met a 'nice' man who has continued to phone since her return to England. She recognised that her valuing of herself in some way affected other people and enabled them to value her also. What she liked about this man was that 'he didn't lay a finger on me'. She has begun using talcum powder and has decorated her room so that it is a pleasanter place to be – all outward signs of having recognised her own worth. She felt that she would now be able to cope well without counselling.

Siobhan commented that she had never really talked about the things she thought she had come to talk about, i.e. the abortions, but we agreed that perhaps by sorting out some of the underlying problems which may have led to the abortions, they in themselves became less significant. She remarked that she felt a different person from the one who had the abortions. The analogy of a river, always different and yet always the same, containing the past within the present and the future, changing only ever so slowly seemed to be helpful here, but that it was necessary to keep on flowing through life and not get too stuck in the difficult bits. I felt that we now had a very much more equal relationship than we had at the beginning, that she was ready to end and consolidate the work that had been done already. Although the abortions were not dealt with, I think we made a good ending and we discussed the importance of possible future work on this issue.

In ten sessions, Siobhan had discovered a great deal about herself by not shying away from the suffering in her life and by her willingness to look at the past. At first I felt that the transference was about good mothers, and the projections were all 'good' ones caused by her inability to hold on to the good objects. While I am aware that my own counter-transference was also about being a good mother, I was less ready to accept her projections. By staying and working with the pain, she has discovered much about her own ability to cope with painful situations. By not being able to project the 'good' aspects on to me, she was able to see and accept them in herself.

She has become more compassionate towards others, citing an example of a young man friend who collapsed in tears telling her that he had been raped. Saying that there was a time when something like that would only have thrown her back into her own difficulties with her own rape, she was now able to offer love and compassion to others. Although we never spoke at length about the issues which were initially 'presenting', by working in a safe place and looking deeply at some of the underlying factors, it became possible for Siobhan to look at her shadow, and become stronger. Having reinforced her initially rather fragile sense of herself, she was then able to lay it aside feeling that she had the strength to cope with difficulties and changes in the future. For Siobhan, it was necessary first to 'lose' herself in order for a new, stronger self to grow.

Fear and isolation

Anna was a 40 year-old woman who came for counselling suffering from lethargy, feelings of low self-esteem and depression. These feelings had, I think, been with her for many years, but the current crisis was precipitated by the very strong emotional attachment she had formed towards a lecturer on the

PGCE course she had just finished. She berated herself for her 'stupidity' and 'silliness' for the strength of her feelings for this man, who had a wife and family and knew nothing of her love for him. She was very anxious and uncomfortable, both about what she perceived as her abnormal feelings and about coming to counselling. I suggested that our time together might be an opportunity for her simply to explore some of the painful and difficult feelings which she had never been able to look at before, but that I certainly couldn't provide the answers. I attempted to respond to her concerns about confidentiality (she was sure that her husband would be 'shocked' should he discover that she was having counselling) by reassuring her that this was a safe place in which to talk or weep or be silent or relive memories which were likely to be affecting her present life.

By the end of the session I felt very sad – she had wept quite a lot and there was a keen sense of futility, despair and nothingness, summed up perhaps, in her heartfelt confession that all she does at home is 'sit and watch the weeds grow'. It felt very much as though the garden of her soul had been under-watered and under-nourished for far too long – my fear was that perhaps she had withered too much to be revived, with or without help. Perhaps I somehow communicated this fear to her . . . or perhaps it was her subconscious letting me know of her own fear.

Subsequent sessions revealed that her father had died when she was 16, just at a time when a young woman most needs the approval of a man to grow into a healthy woman. I was reminded that at that age my own father sent me to boarding school, so in some ways we had both been abandoned at this transitional stage in our lives. The convent school where she had been educated was very strict (as was my own) – the girls were not allowed to look in mirrors. So not only did she lack the reflection of her father's love, but she was not able even to look at her own reflection. She had never mourned her father's death. Her marriage was rather arid – she described the two of them as 'trains on parallel tracks, never meeting'. It was no wonder that her sense of herself was so badly eroded, almost to the point of non-existence . . .

Anna saw herself as a shy person, 'like a mouse in a corner'. Her husband, when she met him at university twenty years ago, was (in her view) capable, out-going, charismatic, vivacious and confident. It seemed to me that there was massive projection going on, as this was exactly the way in which she described both the lecturer of whom she had recently grown so fond, and another man with whom she had had a brief affair seven years previously. The men to whom she is attracted seem to receive her projections all the confident and outgoing aspects of herself, leaving her as the mouse in the corner, too frightened to look at the possibility of change. It also felt that her lack of a 'proper' youth was causing her to act out some of the things which traditionally happen during the late teens and early twenties. This seemed to be confirmed in some ways by the great pleasure she had experienced being with a group of young people on her course – she badly missed this contact now that the course was finished.

I found myself wanting to reassure her that she was not silly and stupid – I wondered who had been telling her these things about herself. I also felt that I was receiving projections about competence and skill and knowledge and wisdom . . . little did she know of my own lack of confidence and how closely I identified with her own issues.

Appearance was very important to Anna. She described how she chose her clothes each day according to her mood – flamboyant, bright clothes if she is feeling good and wants to be noticed, but sombre, dark clothes on the days she feels low and mouselike. We weren't sure whether the feelings influenced the choice of clothes or vice versa, but it felt very much as though she was relying on outward appearances to reinforce or shape the inner ones. There was a sense of her being a chamaeleon – altering her appearance to fit her mood and vice versa, with no real sense of her self.

Anna came for five sessions. The same themes of appearance, lost hopes and feelings of failure, lack of esteem were partially worked through. She feels that she is always 'the assistant', at work, in her marriage, even in friendships where she always lets other people take the lead. She continued to feel anxious about coming to see me, partly because of other people's expectations of her to sort out her own problems. It seemed very hard for her to accept that she might not always have to conform to what other people wanted of her. I often felt frustrated and needed to guard against what I believe was her need for reassurance – it was very tempting to tell her that she was far from stupid, or silly, or selfish, or lacking in any other way. She wouldn't have heard it anyway . . . I felt that the only thing I could do was to create a safe space for her to talk and be heard and I encouraged her to take the time for herself in the midst of all the responsibilities and expectations. At times I wondered whether this was what I was wanting someone to say to me . . .

Anna's sadness, lost youth, feelings of failure and isolation were very poignant and I always felt sad, helpless and rather hopeless at the ends of her sessions though she often said she felt better by then, less hopeless and less mouse-like with me. At least temporarily she could leave some of her bad feelings with me. However, when I tried to bring her into the session, asking her how she felt now, or tried to illuminate what might be going on between us, there was considerable resistance. We were very similar in

age, with many similar experiences and almost identical responses. Although in recent years I had addressed many of these issues, it felt dangerous to explore them with Anna, as though it would be very easy for me to be dragged back . . .

She stopped coming the week before I was due to be away on holiday, and never returned. Perhaps she couldn't bear another abandonment – nor was she ready to look deeply inside to see what was there. She seemed determined to remain isolated, her separate sense of self impeding any progress towards change, communion or liberation.

I worried for awhile that she had felt that I was unable to cope with the depth of her sadness. It seemed that the picture that Anna had built up of herself had actually become too precious to let go of. The defences were so strong, the projections so forceful and the feelings so painful that it was not possible to work through them in the short time we had together. Transformation is a slow and painful process and I think Anna hoped that I would magically be able to remove her suffering while at the same time she believed that nobody could possibly do that. I think of Anna sometimes, and am reminded that the only way out of suffering is through it – avoidance is not the answer. Anna was not yet ready to face her ambivalence and her pain, preferring to sink back into the relative comfort of the picture of herself she had created. And I think I had not yet reached the stage at which I felt ready or able to help her feel safe enough to do this work.

Conclusion

> *Pure awareness is the essence of what we truly are. We are not the different states and feelings, moods and tempers succeeding one another. All of it comes and goes lightly, cloudlike, without leaving a trace, when thought doesn't identify with any of it.*
>
> (Packer, 1995)

The Buddhist terms 'no-self' and 'emptiness' mean 'empty of a separate self'. This is simply a recognition that nothing can exist by itself alone. All my clients have become a part of me as I have also become a part of them. By breaking down the barriers and defences we create in order to protect our fragile and, according to Buddhist doctrine, deluded, sense of self, there is the possibility of recognising our interconnectedness with everyone and everything. And so it seems to me that the two approaches, Buddhism and psychotherapy, build on and reinforce one another and it is now inconceivable to me to think of them as separate.

Looking deeply and listening thoughtfully, recognising when the past is shaping the present, integrating the split-off parts of ourselves, enables us gently to lead others to a truer and more complete sense of themselves, without the need for projections and deflections, barriers and defences. This in turn offers the possibility of experiencing life more fully, with all its richness and variety, and without fear, like the glider pilot at the beginning of this paper.

Psychodynamic theory has given me new knowledge, a new way of thinking about myself and others – a new way of shaping the world. But there is more.

> *When you say "I see it but I can't get out of it," what is the quality of that seeing? Here is where you really need to look and examine carefully. Is it thinking about your habit-patterns – how long they have persisted, how this is never going to end, wanting to know how to fix it? This is not seeing. This is thinking.*
>
> (Packer, 1995)

Buddhism has given me new eyes. It has enabled me to see into the depths of my own psyche and to touch both the pain and the joy there. It has helped me, at times, to see things that other people can't see, to understand very deeply – and to arrive more often in the present moment. It has given me an experience of a spaciousness, solidity and freedom which I never dreamed possible.

I have learned much from my clients. I hope they have also learned something from me. They have taught me about hope and trust and the determination to change and improve their lives, as well as about the fear of changing. I have tried to listen deeply, to feel myself in their skins, to suffer with them and share their joys. Together we have struggled, sharing the painful issues of self and no-self, of ignorance and anger, of suffering and change. Some transformations have been achieved by clients in the context of our work together. We have encouraged each other to realise love, caring and generosity and to live in the here and now rather than to simply exist. Together on this path, it begins to be possible to facilitate small differences in the lives of ourselves and of others. What more can we do?

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