

Buddhism as deep psychology

Most people seem to agree that the Buddha had a very good understanding of human psychology. On the other hand many people now seem to doubt the mystical or religious side of Buddhism. I believe that this latter part can, however, if we choose, also be understood as psychology. I think we can understand the entirety of the Buddha's teaching as a method to free the mind from suffering – as solely concerning the mind and its relationship to the world.

In this way we can discover an extended psychology that, as an ex-psychologist, I consider completely valid. This is not to reduce the magic of the spiritual side of Buddhism either but instead to discover new understanding and new potential within the mind and heart.

With such an understanding, the modern man could, I hope, feel free to take from the Buddha's teaching what he finds acceptable and useful and keep an open mind toward the religious side (then also, perhaps, the religious institutions, that have kept the teachings alive for centuries and of which I am now a part, will likewise be respected and continue to win support in the modern world).

Let us conclude by trying to briefly re-frame some of the contentious issues: All mystical beings can, if we wish, be thought of as in the mind – as aspects of the mind with their own independent existence or dynamic. The teaching on rebirth can be initially thought of as concerning morality and the relationship between the body and the mind throughout life. Such areas are often the ones people openly find difficult to accept but more important, perhaps, is the phenomenon of samādhi. We have at least an awareness of moral issues in modern culture but the modern psychological understanding of samādhi is very poor. This often leads to this phenomenon being either ignored or misunderstood. What a shame. Samādhi, although hard to win, is both a profoundly pleasant and highly significant part of the Buddhist path. The patient cultivation of samādhi has few potential dangers and many benefits. Thankfully neuroscience is beginning to provide objective evidence of such benefits and help to overcome the sceptics.

I offer this for your reflection.

Ajahn Kalyāno

<http://www.openthesky.co.uk>