Abstract
Mindfulness is a complex, multifaceted quality (feeling, attitude, posture). It integrates many different aspects of human feelings and viewpoints. All together they comprise what we call mindfulness: presence, respect, welcoming what comes, being in the here and now, noticing what is just there, acceptance, loving care (for oneself and others), empathy, and congruence (being what I am). In this chapter, I will show that all these aspects of mindfulness are inherent and constituting values of the person-centered approach. Citing some Asian colleagues who also practice Buddhist meditation, I conclude that Eastern philosophy and Rogers’ therapy approach have central aspects in common.

Keywords (separated by '-')
Person-centered approach - Mindfulness - Acceptance - Core conditions - Presence - Third wave of behavior therapy - Meditation - Buddhism - Taoism - Wu Wei
The Awakened Heart: Mindfulness as a Bridge Between the Person-Centered Approach and Eastern Philosophies

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1 Introduction

Carl Rogers (1902–1987) initiated person-centered psychotherapy in the 1940s. Many therapists and counselors worldwide consider this approach one of the most important representatives of humanistic psychotherapies. In 1982 and again in 2009, Rogers was rated the most influential psychotherapist (Cook et al. 2009).

The basis of the person-centered approach (PCA) is a view of human beings, which emphasizes the capacity for self-development as well as the freedom of decision and self-responsibility, and it puts the relationship between the therapist and the client at the center. It considers certain fundamental attitudes and ways of behaving with which the therapist meets, or rather encounters, the client, to be a healing force, which generates change.

In this chapter, I aim to trace the footprints of Carl Rogers under a perspective of mindfulness in order to find out what the PCA has to offer to the new stream in psychotherapy, counseling and everyday life which evolved from “the great mindfulness debate,” especially held in the field of the behavior therapists. This stream, which is known as “third wave of behavior therapy,” emphasizes Buddhist and Zen meditation practice, acceptance, and mindfulness. Examples of therapeutic approaches from this direction are acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) (Hayes and Smith 2005), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn 2005), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) (Linehan 1993), and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) (Segal et al. 2002). Some relationships of the PCA with this “third wave” will be addressed later in this chapter.

Various authors (Kuno 2001; Moore 2001, 2003; Schillings 2004) think that Carl Rogers’ theory builds a bridge between the Eastern and the Western world. This position is shared from the perspective of Buddhist psychotherapy which
acknowledges that the PCA offers “some clear ground for fruitful interaction
between Buddhist and Western psychological approaches to mind” [Padma (2011)
Internet source without page information]. The aim of my chapter is to elucidate
some of these bridges.

2 What Does Mindfulness Mean?

It is undisputed that in the Western linguistic, therapeutic, and philosophical
sphere the term “mindfulness”—meaning taking care, being careful, paying close
attention, being alert—has an important function as well as its own value and
tradition. It holds the meaning of awareness, attentiveness, consciousness,
regardfulness, sensibility, thoughtfulness, cautiousness, and “watchfulness.” It
also implies the connotation of accepting what is, just in the here and now. It is
obvious that “mindfulness” and “acceptance” in person-centered psychotherapy
are of crucial importance. We can even consider them as fundamental.

In a workshop, I asked the participants: “When do you think you are mindful?”
One of them answered: “When I am carrying something very precious and fragile,
then I am mindful.” And this—to me—is really the core of mindfulness in the
PCA: encountering somebody very precious and fragile—the client sitting in front
of me. In the PCA, the basic principles, which are unconditional positive regard,
acceptance, respectful non-judgmental listening, gentle care and non-intrusiveness,
form the basis for constructive change. Person-centered encounter always takes
place “in the situation,” in the “here and now.”

Similar descriptions come from Kabat-Zinn (2003), a microbiologist special-
ized in integrating the concept of mindfulness in a modern form of stress-coping
therapy. He writes that “mindfulness” is connected with special features like
mindfulness and consciousness, which can be cultivated and developed by means
of meditation. According to him, “mindfulness” means that consciousness is
focused on the evolution of experiencing on a moment-to-moment basis. The basis
for this is the fact that attention is paid intentionally and without judgment to
present moment experiences.

Being mindful reminds us of the inherent actualizing tendency of a person:
Mindfulness in its most general sense is about waking up, becoming alert, and
being sensitive to our everyday experiences and the direction of personal growth.

3 Carl Rogers: A Mindful Man

People are just as wonderful as sunsets if I can let them be… When I look at a sunset, I
don’t find myself saying: Soften the orange a bit on the right hand corner… I don’t try to
control a sunset, I watch with awe as it unfolds… Carl Rogers.
Carl Rogers was known as an attentive, friendly, unassuming, moderate, and humble man, very authentic, yet radical in his thinking. The way he saw himself was as “walking softly” through life, like Native Americans often “walked softly” through the forest; nobody knew of their whereabouts until they had reached their destination. Carl Rogers, “the quiet revolutionary” (Rogers and Russell 2002) lived in a similar way. Perhaps, it is due to these qualities that he was able to develop a psychotherapy and counseling approach accepted worldwide, describing the fundamental basis of therapeutic change.

Rogers was an example of his own vision of lifelong learning, changing, and growing. When he died the influence of his theory and therapy was widespread and profound. But he worried about the legacy of his theory. He did not want his theory becoming a dogma of truth, but a stimulus for further creative thinking. This was—in his mind—the real goal of a theory. And he did not want to imprison others with his thinking (Demorest 2005). In his view, people should always be open to their own experience and trust in them.

Eastern thinkers “walk softly” as well. They also caused something like a “quiet revolution.” They are “warriors” in a special sense. The key to this kind of “warrior ship” is not being afraid of who you are and not being afraid of yourself. We can be heroic and kind at the same time. The essence of being a warrior, or the essence of human bravery, is refusing to give up on anyone or anything. Trungpa (1984) states: “Real fearlessness is the product of tenderness” (p. 47). I believe Rogers embodied this attitude very well.

4 The Core Conditions Under an Eastern Perspective

I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Lao Tzu.

4.1 Offering Mindful Relationships: Being Genuinely There with an Open Heart

In a lecture, delivered in 1954 on the Nellie Heldt Lecture Fund about “Some Hypotheses Regarding the Facilitation of Personal Growth” Carl Rogers said:

In my early professional years, I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth? I recognize that change appears to come about through experience in a relationship. I can state the over-all hypothesis in one sentence: If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur (p. 1).
We learned that there is a very special way of listening to a person, which fosters personality growth and change. This way of listening has to meet three crucial attitudes, which we call the core conditions: empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness also known as congruence. And even more: They build—if they happen to come into the presence of the living moment of the relationship in the here and now—a special “sacred space” in which healing and growing can take place.

In Rogers’ opinion, the most important attitude is “congruence” because without this quality the other two conditions are not trustworthy and reliable: “I have found that the more I can be genuine in the relationship, the more helpful it will be. It is only in this way that the relationship can have reality and reality seems deeply important as a first condition. It is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can seek for the reality which is in him” (Rogers 1954, p. 2).

Congruence means to open to one’s experiences: “If a person could be fully open to experience, however, every stimulus,—whether originating within the organism or in the environment,—would be freely relayed through the nervous system without being distorted by any defensive mechanism” (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 188). Hendricks-Gendlin (2003) suggests the expression “pausing” in order to sense and listen to what is felt right now as a mean of authenticity and self-exploration. To pause an ongoing situation, to become aware of one’s immediate inner felt sensing creates a space for new possibilities to unfold.

Genuineness and exact sensing what is felt in the present moment meet mindfulness at this point: Solé-Leris (cited by Rose and Wallach 2009, p. 28) defines mindfulness this way: “Mindfulness is the attentive, unbiased looking at all phenomenon, in order to perceive and experience them as they really are, without deforming them emotionally or intellectually” (translated by KBM).

If we follow the perception of Manu Bazzanu, who is an ordained Taoist monk and person-centered counselor, genuineness and congruence find an equivalent in Buddhist terms like “being there with an open heart” or “being there like a host.” At the PCE Conference 2008 in Norwich in a workshop, he compared Eastern philosophy and Rogerian theory. In Taoist tradition, a wise individual is called a “true person,” a person of integrity, dignity, a person who is whole. If a true person opens up to another person in an encounter, he or she becomes open and vulnerable and he or she has to be aware about the risk of meeting another person on an existential level. Bazzanu also cited Levinas: “We are a host of the other.” This hospitality is crucial for the PCA (see chapter by Schmid in this book) as well as for Buddhism. It is due to the awareness: I am a guest in my own dwelling, in the world. I am passing through. And thus I am guest and host at the same time.

On this basis—genuineness, deep openess of the heart and my own vulnerability—contact, real encounter is possible. When I am meeting the other person with an attitude of not knowing, with openness, wonderment, and curiosity (Buddhists call this attitude a “beginner’s mind”), then I am ready to really listen to another person.
Rogers puts this into these words: “I risk myself… I let myself go into the immediacy of the relationship… in these moments there is a timeless living in the experience which is between the client and me. It is at the opposite pole from seeing the client, or myself, as an object” (Rogers 1955, p. 268f). Rogers emphasizes that in these moments helping is mostly a by-product; according to him, what is the most important is that “I want to understand you. What person are you… behind all these masks that you are wearing in real life? Who are you? In this there is the ‘desire to meet as a person’, not the wish to help” (Rogers and Buber 1994, p. 30). Genuineness and openness causes openness in the other person. Encounter is touching and being touched. This position we share with Buddhist thinking.

4.2 Unconditional Positive Regard: Accepting What Is

What you know is not as important as how you are as a person Carl Rogers.

Rogers characterizes the importance of unconditional positive regard as follows: “I find that the more acceptance and liking I feel toward this individual, the more I will be creating a relationship which he can use. By acceptance I mean a warm regard of him as a person of unconditional self-worth—of value no matter what his condition, his behavior, or his feelings are” (Rogers 1954, p. 3). The concept of unconditional positive regard can also be found in Eastern schools of thought. Shared terms like loving kindness, compassion, tenderness, respect, joy, beauty, patience, gratitude, gracefulfulness, or unconditional love characterize the bridge between PCA and Eastern thinking.

The fact that the attitude of unconditional positive regard is close to and related to the attitude of mindfulness which Eastern tradition displays is underlined by the estimation of Japanese person-centered psychotherapists of Buddhist orientation. In the Japanese school of person-centered psychotherapy, a special focus is put on the quality of unconditional positive regard. Kuno (2001) recognizes in this quality the core of Buddhism. For him, “unconditional” means that a person is accepted exactly the way he or she is, independent from whether he or she expresses “bad,” painful, anxious or abnormal feelings or a “good,” positive, adult and trusting way of experiencing. To approach another person in an unconditional way of being also means that the therapist him- or herself must learn to accept his or her own negative feelings in the same way as he or she accepts his or her positive feelings.

Buddha’s teachings show that everyone can reach this state of mind, if he or she can fully understand the “Four Noble Truths,” which are The Truth that there is sadness and distress, the Truth that there is a reason for sadness and distress, the Truth that there is an end to suffering, the Truth that there is a way to end suffering. In order to obtain a better understanding of the third truth, Kuno quotes Brazier’s (1995) interpretation of the second Truth which is based on the following logic: If one does not suppress or unnecessarily enhance the emotions which come with
suffering, these emotions will gradually disappear without leaving a trace. However, normally we endeavor to escape our suffering, the final result of which is that we aggravate it. Rogers came to realize the same insight which is expressed in the paradox of change: “…the curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I change. I believe that I have learned this from my clients as well as within my own experience—that we cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly accept what we are. Then change seems to come about almost unnoticed” (Rogers 1961/1955, p. 17).

Apart from “unconditionality,” Kuno also describes, as a second element, the core variable of “positive regard” from a Buddhist perspective: According to Kuno, Rogers’ notion of positive regard corresponds with the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism in that sense that priority should be given to saving others before saving one’s own soul. In person-centered therapy, the feelings and the experiencing of the client have priority over the feelings and experiences of the therapist. From Buddhist perspective, the therapist encounters the client with a behavior that corresponds with the “Four Means of Embracement,” which are “to give,” “mild words,” “philanthropic deeds,” and “connection with others” (Kuno 2001).

Also in the Western sphere, some authors point at the parallels between the variable “unconditional positive regard” and Buddhist practice. For example, Moore (2001) emphasizes the deep need for acceptance of the truth and truthfulness of inner experiencing. According to her, this is of existential significance for human growth. Moore describes this attitude of unconditional positive regard as an exceptional letting go, an inner melting, a way of forgetting or losing the self—the aim of Buddhist practice.

Furthermore, unconditional positive regard can be seen as a joy about the truthfulness of the other person. The joy of experiencing beauty only implies seeing the object—a kind of joy which is not possessive or controlling. Joy about beauty is without an agenda. It does not want to possess, to own, to consume, or to control. We are happy observing the object, looking at it. This attitude resonates in Carl Rogers’ work and in the work of many others, when they describe the attitude of a person who offers unconditional positive regard to another person. Santorelli (1999, quoted by Iberg 2001, p. 124) adds another specific aspect: “When we stay closely and non-judgmentally with someone exploring pain, we find beauty in the midst of the ‘ruins’.” It is touching to be present, when a person confronts him or herself with their problems in a truthful and genuine way. It is truthfulness which “opens the heart” and which evokes feelings of appreciation and respect.

4.3 Empathy: Mindful Listening

It is as though he listened and such listening as his enfolds us in silence, in which at last we begin to hear what we are meant to be. Lao Tzu.
“It is only as I understand the feelings and thoughts which seem so horrible to you, or so weak, or so sentimental, or so bizarre—it is only as I see them as you see them, and accept them and you, that you can feel really free to explore all the hidden nooks and frightening crannies of your inner and often buried experience. This freedom is an important condition of the relationship” (Rogers 1954, p. 2).

Empathy implies mindfulness, care, and acceptance. In order to be able to enter the world of another person in a healing way, the therapist needs to adopt an attitude of friendly, appreciative, and respectful mindfulness, of “being with” the client: “It means temporarily living in the other’s life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments; it means sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover totally unconscious feelings of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening. It includes communicating your sensing of the person’s world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which he or she is fearful” (Rogers 1980b, p. 142).

Such mindful listening can have a healing power which is very well exemplified by a quote of Hanh (1998): “If the power of mindfulness and of empathic listening is in you, your presence can have a healing and calming effect on other people. You only have to sit there and to listen to the person who trusts you…” (p. 64, translation by Elisabeth Zinschitz). Rud (2003) calls this capacity of empathic listening a contemplative state which leads to transformation. Another important and complimentary aspect of transformation is what happens inside the client. Eugene Gendlin [who was a student and colleague of Carl Rogers at the University of Chicago and influenced him a lot, especially his concept of experiencing (1962) and the way of being with the client (1970, 1984)] explored the question what clients have to do to improve their own therapy outcome (Klein et al. 1969). He found out that it is crucial to develop an attitude of mindful attention toward oneself. When I am able to listen precisely and from moment to moment to myself in a gentle, friendly and curious, nonjudgmental manner, especially to what is bodily felt, change will occur, naturally. As this chapter deals mainly with the impact of Carl Rogers, I will mention the work of Eugene Gendlin only briefly (More about relationships between Gendlin, Focusing and mindfulness can be found in Bundschuh-Müller 2004, 2006, 2007).

4.4 Presence: Wu Wei—A Way of Being With

When nothing is done, nothing is left undone—The way to do is to be—By letting go it all gets done Lao Tzu.

When he was already at the end of his life, Rogers proposed a hypothesis about a further significant variable which he called “presence.” This additional feature is one that exists in the area of mysticism and spirituality (Rogers 1979, 1980b, 1986). He describes in “A Way of Being” (1980b) what happens in a helping relationship, when he is very close to his “inner intuitive self”: 
When I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when I am perhaps in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my presence is releasing and helpful to the other. There is nothing I can do to force this experience, but when I can relax and be close to the transcendental core of me, … it seems that my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger. Profound growth and healing and energy are present (Rogers 1980b, p. 129).

Rogers did not elaborate on an understanding of presence. But today there are several authors who have reflected about this topic. Schmid (2003) assumes that Rogers’ “presence” is the existential foundation of the basic attitudes. It comprehensively describes them in an existential way and on a deeper, dialogical–personal level. Thorne (1985), independently, uses the word “tenderness” in this context. Thorne’s experience is that tenderness emerges when a relationship is characterized by acceptance, empathy and congruence and a deep trust in the client’s ability to move forward. Thorne describes this as being caught up in a stream of love. Effortless understanding, profound growth, energy and healing accompany this. This quality can only arise in a climate of faith and a transcending of fear. O’Hara (2000) calls presence “moments of eternity,” which for her is a synonym for unconditional love.

Gendlin described this special attitude of “being with” like this: “If there is something bad, sick, or unsound, let it inwardly be and breathe. That is the only way it can evolve and change into the form it needs” (Gendlin 1986, p. 178).

This attitude meets perfectly the principle of Wu Wei which originates from Taoism. Wu Wei means “non-doing” or more precisely not to act against the Tao or the “flow of the universe”: “Taoism states that all life forces tend to move toward harmony and balance because it is in their nature to do so. From the Taoist viewpoint, we, as humans, have the choice of consciously aligning ourselves with the way, or remaining in ignorance and resisting the natural order of the Tao. To choose the latter means to remain disconnected from our own personal processes, our own Tao, as well as life’s grand flow. Taoist teachings are intended to be utilized as a guide to daily living. Their greatest value lies in their ability to direct us toward our own process of self-exploration, growth, and transformation which connects us deeply to ourselves and to the world around us” (Kardash nd, p. 2). The “going with the flow” of the Wu Wei principle, the “non-doing” can be seen as being/staying with what is just there in the present moment.

Presence is the authentic attitude to be, to fully live in the presence: unconditionally accepting the other, empathically becoming involved in his or her presence, without any prior intention that is with openness and a wonder toward experience and thus meeting the quality of Wu Wei.

To sum up, it seems to me that the core conditions put into practice meditative attitudes (see also the chapter by Flender). In Buddhist terms, these are the qualities of being there with an open heart (genuineness), loving kindness (unconditional positive regard), mindful listening (empathy), and the principle of Wu Wei (which meets the quality of presence).
5 Selected Concepts of the PCA: Reflected by Eastern Wisdom

5.1 Actualizing Tendency

From the viewpoint of the PCA in each person, there is the deep need and desire of “becoming oneself,” a longing to become whole, a craving for further development in a direction of growing and becoming what one is meant to be. “It seems to me that at bottom each person is asking, who am I really? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all my surface behavior? How can I become myself?” (Rogers 1980a, p. 357) and the reply could be: “At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want” (Lao Tzu, internet source). Rogers names this inner quest the “actualization tendency.” I dare to assume that the “Tao” is of similar quality: the inner spirit which flows through us, a life force that goes for inner development in a direction of living in harmony, genuineness, and balance. Chuang Tzu refers to this type of being in the world as flowing, or more poetically (and provocatively), as “purposeless wandering.” By allowing the Tao to work through us, we render our actions truly spontaneous, natural, and effortless. We thus flow with all experiences and feelings as they come and go (Kardash 1998, 2012 Internet source without page information).

5.2 Openness to Experience

One main basic assumption of PCA is that of the fully functioning person. This (ideal) person is totally free of defense, it is not identified with a special view of itself and flexible to adapt in any situation. “The self and the personality emerge from experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit a preconceived self-structure. It means that one becomes a participant in and an observer of the ongoing process of organismic experience, rather than being in control of it” (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 189). Or, “The good life is a process, not a state of being, it is a direction, not a destination” (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 186). We can understand the attitude of the fully functioning person as mindfulness toward one’s own ongoing experiencing in the sense of an attitude of attentive and accepting being with what is going on inside right now without presumption and prejudice. One can also name this “openness to experience”: “In general then, it appears to be true that when a client is open to his experience, he comes to find his organism more trustworthy. He feels less fear of the emotional reactions he has. There is a gradual growth of trust, and even affection for the complex, rich, varied assortment of feelings and tendencies, which exist in him at the organismic level. Consciousness, instead of being the watchman over a dangerous and unpredictable lot of impulses, of which few can be permitted to see the light of day, becomes the
comfortable inhabitant of a society of impulses and feelings and thoughts, which are discovered to be very satisfactory self-governing when not fully guarded” (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 119).

Gendlin (1962) emphasizes the attitude as one of unconditional positive regard, mindful attention, and curiosity toward oneself and toward what is bodily felt in the present moment. It is a focusing on one’s own inner sensing. It carries in it the mood of “beginner’s mind” or the position of witness. One uses the core conditions to establish a helpful and friendly relationship toward oneself in order to further personal development.

Quite similarly, Lao Tzu writes that we must be quiet and watchful, learning to listen to both our own inner voices and the voices of our environment in a non-interfering, receptive manner. In this way, we also learn to rely on more than just our intellect and logical mind to gather and assess information. We develop and trust our intuition as our direct connection to the Tao. We heed the intelligence of our whole body, not only our brain. And we learn through our own experience. This means trusting our own bodies, our thoughts and emotions (Kardash 1998, Internet source without page information).

5.3 The Positive View of Human Nature

Within the PCA, a positive view of human nature is held: “One of the most revolutionary concepts to grow out of our clinical experience is the growing recognition that the innermost core of a man’s nature, the deepest layers of his personality, the base of his ‘animal nature’ is positive in nature—is basically socialized, forward-moving, rational and realistic” (Rogers 1961/1995, p. 91).

Eastern philosophies also assume a basic goodness of human nature. Chögyam Trungpa (1998) writes:

If we are willing to take an unbiased look, we will find out that, in spite of all our problems and confusion, all our emotional and psychological ups and downs, there is something basically good about our existence as human beings. Unless we can discover that ground of goodness in our own lives, we cannot hope to improve the lives of others. Every human being has a basic nature of goodness, which is undiluted and unconfused. That goodness contains tremendous gentleness and appreciation. If they have never developed sympathy or gentleness toward themselves, people cannot experience harmony or peace within themselves, and therefore, what they project to others is also inharmonious and confused. Developing tenderness toward yourself allows you to see both your problems and your potential accurately. That kind of gentleness toward yourself is very necessary. It provides the ground for helping yourself and others. Basic goodness is very closely connected to the idea of bodhicitta in the Buddhist tradition. Bodhi means “awake” or “wakeful” and citta means “heart”, so bodhicitta is “awakened heart”. Such awakened heart comes from being willing to face your state of mind. That may seem like a great demand, but it is necessary (p. 11).
Both Eastern Philosophies and the PCA refer to humans as part of a social system, as having a social responsibility, meant to be part of a relationship from the very beginning. Social responsibility, “social self,” being part of something bigger, being a relational person is central for both:

By listening carefully within, as well as to our surroundings, by remembering that we are part of an interconnected whole, by remaining still until action is called forth, we can perform valuable, necessary, and long-lasting service in the world while cultivating our ability to be at one with the Tao. Such is the power of wu-wei, allowing ourselves to be guided by the Tao (Kardash 1998, para. 11).

One can say the background parallels between the PCA and Eastern approaches involve similar aims, recognition of the essential trustworthiness of human nature, the importance of an internal locus of evaluation, the “process” view of the self, and the therapeutic process which involves a reduction in “incongruence” or “delusion” (Purton 1996).

6 Shambhala: Different Routes—One Destination

In Tibet, there are stories about a legendary kingdom. According to the legends, this was a place of peace and prosperity, governed by wise and compassionate rulers. The citizens were equally kind and learned, so that in general, the kingdom was a model society. This place was called Shambhala. Their people follow the Buddhist path of loving kindness and concern for all beings. Among the Tibetan people, there is a popular belief that the kingdom of Shambhala can still be found, hidden in a remote valley somewhere in the Himalayas. Many scholars, however, believe that the stories of Shambhala are pure fiction; it is also possible to see in these legends the expression of deeply rooted and very real human desire for a good and fulfilling life. Shambhala can be regarded as the ground or root of awakening and sanity that exists as a potential within every human being. Shambhala teachings are found on the premise that there is basic human wisdom that can help to solve the world’s problems. This wisdom does not belong to any one culture or religion. Nor does it come either from the East or from the West. Rather it is a tradition of humanistic warrior ship that has existed in many cultures and many times throughout history (Trungpa 1984).

Like the hidden land of Shambhala, the PCA and its findings and richness nowadays have moved into the background for many modern psychotherapies. As mentioned before, today many therapists prefer Eastern concepts and techniques and integrate them into their work rather than use “old-fashioned” therapies and concepts of Carl Rogers, Gene Gendlin, and other representatives of the humanistic therapies. If I compare these different streams carefully, I don’t understand this effort, because there are a lot of similarities between them.

Take, for example, Marsha Linehan, the founder of the DBT, who originally learned a lot from Carl Rogers during her university time. When I attended a
with her and Benedictine monk and Zen Master Willigis Jäger about mindfulness and DBT in 2006, she was asked about this noticeable influence of Rogers, and at this retreat she confirmed Rogers’ influence on her. One of the participants a behavior therapist asked her about how real change is to come about. He asked: “How can I change, when I accept what is?” Linehan looked at him irritated for a moment, then she smiled and replied: “But acceptance is change!”—In other words, she offered to the whole auditorium the Rogerian paradox of change without mentioning him, and perhaps without even realizing it.

Many therapists, especially from the behavioral therapy direction, are just exploring the—for them—radically new findings of the impact of mindfulness and acceptance, without realizing that there is a lot to learn from proven body of experience of the PCA.

Mindfulness meditation is a central element of the “third wave” of behavior therapy (see above). While in these therapies training of mindfulness is generally offered as a pure exercise, in PCA mindfulness is offered in a relationship. In person-centered and experiential therapy we (usually) don’t sit on a cushion or bench, we carry mindfulness in the real relationship of the present moment, or in the real relationship with oneself. Here, the dialog is affected and colored by mindfulness; there is a flowing of mindfulness between the two people. In this way, the client is able to learn to be mindful with him- or herself.

But undoubtedly meditation practice is extremely useful (and also Western contemplation practice, see the chapter by Flender in this book). There are an increasing number of person-centered counselors and psychotherapists who practice Buddhist or Zen Meditation. Geller (2003) explains the meaning of mindfulness and meditation:

Simply being with internal states and accepting what is there—thus enabling the client to be with and accept what is there—is what lies at the heart of working with the core conditions. There is something important in all of this about being with in a deeper, more fully “mindful” way that might require a different, perhaps a more precise quality of attention to what is going on—such as in both self and client—at the level of thoughts, feelings, body language and the felt sense (Cited by Moore 2002). She and her colleague Greenberg (2002) also offer a very profound and comprehensive research study about the impact of mindfulness practice on person centered and experiential psychotherapists. Additionally, Bazzanu’s (Bazzanu 2009) result of a small research project was that “the regular practice of meditation would assist a process of focusing and centering that can make a therapist a better instrument, more finely tune to empathic awareness and congruence, on that can better assist a person in distress, or a person exploring issues in his or her life” (p. 11).

The PCA goes far beyond mindfulness trainings. It aims deeper than pure mindfulness practice. Sometimes very special moments of deep connectedness, like “sacred spaces,” arise in the relationship. This is when the quality of presence unfolds. In presence, there is a qualitative jump, which in contrast to meditation practice we cannot make, cannot control with our will. We can direct mindfulness to something, yet presence simply is; it is effortless (yet needs a lot of concentration). It can come when bodily sensation, feeling, and mental activity, such as thinking, are synchronized to a great extent. Rogers (1980b) described an opening
in the direction of presence in the sense of this spontaneous state of effortless clarity, precision, lightness and earthed expansion of perception or consciousness. And so, we are entitled to say: The PCA offers much more than a mere technique!

7 Conclusion

Coming to a conclusion, the quality of being “mindful,” being fully and accurately aware of what is going on, both in self and in self-in-relation-to-other is of high value in different schools of thought. Person-centered therapists have known about this for a long time (see “The Essence of the Person-Centered Approach”). I want to state that the PCA is the first and oldest mindfulness-based therapeutic approach of the western hemisphere carrying old and everlasting wisdom from Eastern and Western traditions. Realizing this we are entitled to say: Mindfulness, peacefulness, and “a listening mind” are the crucial characteristics of the PCA. They constitute the spirit of the PCA. They are “the mood” of it. And I want to bring to mind again the quality of humanistic warrior ship.

Members of the person-centered community are the keepers of a deep wisdom and competence, which is inherent in the PCA. In the spirit of a warrior, who never gives up, with the sense of bravery and trust, we will wait for a change of the zeitgeist. In the spirit of Lao Tzu, we can say: “I see my path, but I don’t know where it leads. Not knowing where I’m going is what inspires me to travel it.” And so: We will walk softly and: The path unfolds while walking….

References


Bundschuh-Müller, K. (2004). „Es ist was es ist, sagt die Liebe…. [It is what it is, love says...] In T. Heidenreich & J. Michalak (Eds.), Achtsamkeit und Akzeptanz in der Psychotherapie (pp. 405–456). Tübingen: DGVT. (English translation by Elisabeth Zinschitz at http://focusingzentrum-frankfurt.de).


The Awakened Heart: Mindfulness as a Bridge


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