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*From Helpless to Selfless:
The Disruptive Nature of 'Mine'
and 'I' in Papañca:
Buddhist Insight for Cognitive
Therapy*



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Abstract

*'From Helpless to Selfless:
The Disruptive Nature of 'Mine' and 'I' in Papañca:
Buddhist Insight for Cognitive Therapy'*

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We have embarked on this study to search for Buddhist insights into Cognitive Therapy. At the very beginning we were struck by the similarities between papañca in Early Buddhism and Automatic Thoughts in Cognitive Therapy. We proceeded to delve further into these apparent similarities.

They share in common the tenet that egocentric thoughts interfere with our sense perception and invariably result in a departure from reality. Though they have other aspects in common, in the main central to both is the 'I' and 'Mine' as the pivotal springboard to subjective and chaotic orientation to reality. This results in inappropriate emotional reactions to one's experience of the world, hence, the study concentrated on the notions of 'Self' and 'well-being'.

The study commences with presentation of: 1. Paradigm of Buddhist Psychology, 2. Papañca, 3. Main features: craving, conceit and views, 4. Impact of papañca on anguish and conflict. Similar lines of enquiry were applied to Cognitive Therapy: 1. Paradigm of Cognitive Therapy, 2. Automatic Thoughts, 3. Impact of Automatic Thoughts on depression and anger and hatred.

We were encouraged that our initial inclination that papañca and Automatic Thoughts share a great deal in common. We compared the two along the lines of three major attributes: cognition, egocentricity and helplessness. It was found that the cognition deployed both in papañca and Automatic Thoughts is similar; it is inaccurate cognition underpinned by egocentricity leading to helplessness.

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The Buddhist notions of Right View and Stream-Enterer were addressed, because it is here that the paradigm shift and the personality change commence. These are the entry points for more accurate cognition in line with reality. Cognition that approximates reality is cognition that is an attribute of 'well-being. This cognition has to depart from our inclination to believe, feel and attend to the notion of 'Self'. This the Buddha asserts could only lead to affliction and anguish and impede our well-being.

We concluded that the Buddha has gone further than Beck in his dealing with our afflictions. The Buddha by his negation of the 'Self' has negated a major obstacle to accurate and proper reactions to reality and consequently improving and enhancing our well-being. This is the Buddhist insight into Cognitive Therapy