

CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES BETWEEN MORITA THERAPY AND CHAN (ZEN) BUDDHISM

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Morita Therapy (psychotherapy) was created by Dr. Shoma Morita (1874-1938), a psychiatrist and Department Chair of Jikei University School of Medicine in Tokyo, around 1920. He formulated it as a program of treatment for neurotic weaknesses among the Japanese. Morita Therapy has been proven to be very effective for common mental weaknesses, neurotic tendencies and depression, etc. While the original method of Morita therapy applies self-healing without using medicine and is considered more constructive in daily life, the present form of it is more frequently combined with the use of medicine. Since Morita was influenced by the Chan (Zen) school of Buddhism, his therapy has many elements derived from it. Chan (Zen) school of Buddhism emphasizes attention paid to the present moment at every point of one's daily life. Both Chan (Zen) Buddhism and Morita Therapy advocate that a healthy mind and a healthy body are parts of self-realization and self-healing. It is a positive, strong and healthy training which builds up self-resistance to overcome negative emotions and mental diseases. After overcoming psychological problems in this manner, one may be able to lead a happier life both mentally and physically. According to the Chan master Yixuan in the Tang dynasty, one of the paths to liberation is detachment of the mind: being devoid of wanting, depending, or special tasks, which is similar to the first step of treatments on Suzuki Tomonori (1909-2007), one of the neurasthenia patients of Dr. Morita who did not engage himself in any significant activities. Master Yixuan explains those three concepts as follows: (1) being devoid of wanting means no desire: Suzuki did not request for anything during his treatments; (2) being devoid of depending: he recovered only through self-healing, without depending on medication; and (3) being devoid of special tasks: he was not given any special task. Suzuki Tomonori believed that "complete recovery" was achieved due to Morita Therapy and the "spiritual awakening" of Chan (Zen) Buddhism, which are of similar mental stages. However, Dr. Morita considered that the state of spiritual awakening of Chan (Zen) Buddhism is different from the state of complete recovery from neurosis. Accordingly, this research has, as its objective, an examination of the convergences and divergences between Morita Therapy and Chan (Zen) Buddhism related to the concepts of self-healing, self-realization, and spiritual awakening. It depends mainly on Buddhist scriptures and the texts of Dr. Shoma Morita and relevant sources.

Keywords: Morita Therapy, Chan (Zen) Buddhism, Self-Realization