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Eva Gold and Stephen Zahm. *Buddhist Psychology and Gestalt Therapy Integrated: Psychotherapy for the 21st Century*. Portland, OR: Metta Press, 2018.

Endorsed by Peter Cole, Bob Edelstein, and Elinor Greenberg, all well-known and distinguished players in current Gestalt therapy milieu, Eva Gold and Stephen Zahm have accomplished the (usually) arduous task of writing a beautifully organized and produced book. Their time and patience have paid off. Kudos to both. Erving Polster has contributed an outstanding Foreword in which, among other things, he stresses the joint appeal of both Buddhist psychology and Gestalt therapy in illuminating self-experience. This grounding is entirely trustworthy and clarifying; it is exactly "right."

The book itself is in four parts: (1) "Buddhist Psychology and Meditation Practices"; (2) "Gestalt Therapy Theory and Practice"; (3) "Convergences and Clinical Implications"; and (4) "New Directions: Psychotherapy for the 21st Century." This book is the real deal: it contains Resources, References, and an Index! It beautifully illustrates the importance of thinking through the minutia of careful planning with regard to production. (My pet peeve is the lack of an index, something that is not at all difficult to include in any book worth reading.)

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Part I (“Buddhist Psychology and Meditation Practices”) illustrates how Buddhist psychology and Gestalt therapy are both complete, dynamic, and interrelated systems for growth and transformation. Theravada (not Zen) Buddhism is the subject of this book. Theravada Buddhism is practiced throughout Southeast Asia. Importantly, the authors indicate that mindfulness—so prominent in so many types of therapy today—is an essential (but not the only) element of Buddhism. The authors refer to basic concepts and practices that are included in the aim of Buddhist psychology: the radical transformation in the direction of more wisdom, compassion, and—ultimately—freedom from suffering. Suffering is seen as distinct from the immediate response to events that are in and of themselves seismic, life-changing, injurious, and painful. A crucial distinction is made between pain and suffering, suffering being mind-created and subject to change. Buddhism is described as nontheistic, offering views and practices that are part of a path of inquiry where experiential understanding is key. Basic to understanding is that human existence includes inevitable pain.

Buddhist psychology views are clearly described and support what follows in the blend. They are in themselves thought-provoking and extremely supportive of deep, unflinching awareness of life and experience. Referring to Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005, 45), the authors note that the Buddha taught and demonstrated a path leading to ultimate freedom and also to “the various types of wholesome, mundane happiness to which humans aspire.” Building blocks in this perspective—leading the way out of suffering and convergent with Gestalt therapy’s understanding of self as process, and with its field phenomenological view—are five aggregates: form, sense impression, perception, categorization, and consciousness. Most significantly, these aggregates are basic to how we establish and maintain selfhood. It is within this flow of aggregates that we can and often do mistake this flow with fixity, allowing us to create and identify with an apparently stable self and a seemingly stable external reality.

Insight meditation practices are described. Results can include increased awareness, clarity, wisdom, compassion, and even freedom from suffering. Perhaps of more importance is the development of increased “goodness and peace.” Buddhism teaches that caring only for ourselves leads to suffering, and that the wellbeing of the world comes

from wishing for happiness of others. As generally taught, “loving kindness” includes both ourselves and our intentions toward others. Factors of both “awakening” and “hindrances” are included and clearly explained.

Convergences of Gestalt therapy and Buddhism are developed in Part II (“Gestalt Therapy Theory and Practice”). In a clear and never jarring manner, Gold and Zahm seamlessly describe the historical origins and building blocks of Gestalt therapy. These landmarks are presented in a logical and integrated way that is comforting and that makes sense of Gestalt therapy’s methods and their underlying theoretical bases. Even if not involved in doing therapy that consciously includes tenets and principles of Buddhism, a heightened understanding of the development of Gestalt therapy as we know it today is both grounding and validating. The small yet so vital inclusion of these historical developmental steps may become a factor in decisions to retain this book in many of our personal libraries.

Part III (“Convergences and Clinical Implications”) includes factors in the common ground of Buddhist psychology and Gestalt therapy as a continuous process of discovery. What is seen as more common ground is developed in detail. The authors explore clinical convergences, with an emphasis on mindfulness. They emphasize convergences in areas of human nature (emphasizing wholeness, potential for growth, and connectedness), and awareness. Highlighted is the importance of awareness as essential to working with obstacles, as well as a more fully realized human potential.

The authors present considerations of convergence in areas such as view of human nature, relationship and interconnectedness, view of self, view of suffering, and view of what is curative (the common denominator here is the emphasis on being with things and ourselves as they are). Four specific areas of intersection are included: phenomenology, attention to the present, being with what is, and embodiment. Especially helpful is attention to that of therapist presence. Emphasis on meditation practices and Buddhist psychology is supported by the contention that our own self-awareness and personal development impact our work. This contention is, of course, inarguable.

Part IV (“New Directions: Psychotherapy for the 21st Century”) takes the reader into future possibilities for development and improvement of practice and anticipated better outcomes for our clients. There is an emphasis on meditation practices as a critical part of training for therapists. A model for training future psychotherapists is included as an

“experiment” that continues to evolve. The model has considerable merit and is worthy of serious consideration.

Case vignettes, both in number and in placement, are appreciated. They are not space fillers. They are always “straight on,” well edited, and always apt. They are especially useful for their clear illustrations of gentle, focusing, empathic, dialogic, and polite (noninterruptive) ways in which experience can be transformed into more immediate, complex, growthful, and meaningful self-development. As case material consistently refers to individual work with adults, the question arises about potential applicability for children, family systems, couples, those with disabilities, and so on. Also “incomplete” is my longing for more ways in which Buddhism amplifies the effectiveness of Gestalt therapy. Attention to mindfulness, its implications, and its impact on change-producing therapy, may be what is appropriate and quite “enough,” yet perhaps we could become more effective as therapists if we were to embrace other characteristics of Buddhism as well—without, of course, creating jarring interruptions in our work.

There is yet another remaining question: Why Theravada? While not Zen? As Theravada is essential to the purpose and content of this book, it is next to impossible not to be intrigued by implications and fall-out of not having a reason or basis for Theravada, and not Zen or other aspects of Buddhism.

For me, reading the excerpts from therapy sessions conducted by Gold and Zahm was a source of satisfaction and comfort. I tend toward recognizing therapeutic approaches that are supportive and safe, those that are in actual practice accepting, empathic, and genuinely underscored by clear intentions of therapists to affirm and strengthen aspects of self. Having endured and survived damaging events occurring during the course of my personal psychoanalysis, I am sensitized to triggers that identify danger in therapy sessions.

And so, it was a privilege to be able to write a review of this book.

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