

The Buddha In Psychotherapy

Buddha said that the cause of all suffering is attachment. Attachment means craving for the pleasure and aversion for pain. For example, we know that the craving for money, sex, power, and material possessions allows us instant gratification, and yet makes us restless and unhappy, over and over again. In theory, it is clear to most of us that we need to find something higher in order to touch lasting happiness. What is not clear is summarized in following two questions. Should attachment (i.e. craving and aversion) towards family, friends, and partners needs to be avoided as well? If non-attachment means no desire, then what is the fun in life?

These questions are even more relevant now because we are just getting used to the post holiday routine again, still feeling the loss of a pleasant vacation or the disappointment from holiday dynamics with the family. Valentine day is coming up, brimming with anticipation and excitement but also putting romantic pressure on some. What would compassionate Buddha offer us as answers to these questions? The following points offer some clarification.

- 1) Attachments are not the same as desires and goals. “Non-attachment” does not imply that one cannot aim at and should not enjoy the pleasure from material. Attachment implies the clingy craving for the final outcome alone that deprives us from enjoying the process of working hard towards the goal and makes us suffer when our desires are not fulfilled.
- 2) Desiring intimacy, family, and relationships is not “bad” in itself. The caveat is the following. Attachments for people can be tricky because the craving for the once experienced “great times” can make people act in sometimes shameful ways, hoping to re-experience the pleasure. When you do not get along, the aversion to the painful experience makes us run to the “comfort zone” of either quick fix or running away. The self-discovery relationships can offer could get lost in this game of craving and aversion.
- 3) In the context of your relationships, in your psychotherapy session, you may be discussing the “addiction”, “codependency” or “need for approval”. Examine the issues in terms of what the craving and aversion is for, why it is there and how it is destroying your happiness. The work then involves how is to reduce the craving.
- 4) The misery from human relationships, often times, may be from attachment to the pride. This means the craving for grandiosity of the self and aversion from anyone slashing that feeling. Consider if your relationships are suffering from this. Understanding the grandiosity can offer a sense of relief!

Go ahead and enjoy the romance and friendships on the valentine day. Simply beware of the craving and aversion underlying the miseries you may be experiencing!

