

A Psychoanalytic View of the Sangha: Group Functioning in Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism

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ABSTRACT - *The goal of Buddhism is to gain enlightenment through the realization of the psychological basis of human suffering. Like other religions Buddhists undertake this goal together in a community known as the Sangha, which, includes lay practitioners, clergy, and various symbolic figures. While, the ostensible goal of the Sangha is to help Buddhists reach a state of religious epiphany, it also functions in a psychological fashion to moderate the regressive effects of group membership. This moderation allows the Sangha to facilitate individuation for its members while they maintain their group membership. In this way the Sangha provides a practical method for applying spiritual principals to relationships with others in the group and later, to the world at large. This paper will review classical and object relations views of group psychology and then apply these perspectives to the understanding of the Sangha.*

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Buddhism, Object Relations, Sangha, Group Psychology

1. INTRODUCTION

The Buddhist Sangha has been variously described as a community of enlightened beings, Bodhisattvas, monks and nuns, and lay practitioners of Buddhism. However, the Sangha is constituted, it exists is to further the tenets of Buddhism, with the ultimate goal of helping all people (in and out of the community) to gain enlightenment. The journey of the Sangha is primarily a psychological one in which community members help each other to recognize the Buddhist conception of the ‘true’ or ‘original’ nature of mind, while simultaneously becoming cognizant of the mental roots of human suffering. Once this recognition commences the Sangha provides a ‘training ground’ for applying this spiritual awareness to relationships with others. Later, these Buddhist principles will be extended beyond the group to the world at large.

While the Buddhist Sangha as a group of individuals displays many of Freud and his followers’ principles regarding groups, its unique ideology, based in a psychological conception of reality, meditational technique, and its emphasis on the ideology of compassion, provides some interesting variations to the psychoanalytic perspective.

2. FREUDIAN GROUP PSYCHOLOGY

Freud wrote extensively about groups of people in his work on *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). He specifically wrote about two examples of groups that had a leader – the Catholic Church and the army. In both of these groups, the leader is presumed to love all group members equally and according to Freud both of these groups would dissolve if the illusion of this equal love was lost. A libidinal bond to the group leader and other members of the group binds each individual in these groups. Freud postulated that this dual tie of the group member to the leader and other group members is cause for the alteration and limitation of the group member’s personality. The group member, therefore, gives up personal freedom in order to remain a group member.

Freud was one of the first writers to note the importance of the leader to the life of a group. He said that the loss of the leader or even doubt about him could lead to panic among the group members and dissolution of the libidinal ties they have for each other. In religious groups, Freud supposed that the result of the dissolution of these libidinal ties was not panic or dread but the release of hostility towards other. Even when the group is intact and the libidinal ties to the leader and among the group members are in place, this necessitates a withdrawal of libidinal ties to those outside the group. This leads to the conclusion that religious groups –even those based on love - must by necessity be hard and ruthless to people outside of group membership. According to Freud people have ambivalent feelings toward one another in general – love exists along with aversion and antipathy in human relationships. The formation of a group is the antidote to this. Once a group is formed, and while it exists, its members feel as equals and tolerate one another better – the byproduct of the libidinal ties of the group members and a limitation of their narcissism. As Freud (1921) says “Love for oneself knows only one barrier – love for others, love for objects” (p. 56).

Libidinal ties between the group members and group leader take the form of identification and object choice – i.e. the group members want to become the leader and at the same time they want to love and be loved by the leader. The

difference Freud tells us is whether or not the cathexis is to the ‘subject’ or ‘object’ of the ego. Object choice can regress back into identification. Freud gives the example of Dora having the symptoms of her father’s cough – she cannot ‘have’ her father, so she takes on his characteristic¹. This example shows us that this identification can be partial and is akin to the introjection of the object. Freud calls this the “Identification of an object that is lost or renounced as a substitute for it” (p.67). This kind of identification readily occurs among group members and is also related to the bond with the group leader. Another aspect of this identification that Freud alludes to but does not explain is that it can lead to empathy. As he says “ A path leads from identification by way of imitation to empathy, that is, to the comprehension of the mechanism by means of which we are enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life” (p.70 ff). This identification pathway postulated by Freud will become important when we look at Buddhist groups.

Another important mechanism for explaining the ties of group followers to their leader is how the love of the leader leads to his idealization. This occurs when the sexual feelings for the leader become repressed and the followers’ egos become more modest and unassuming as their narcissistic libido overflows to the leader. For the followers the leader becomes more sublime and precious until it consumes all of the followers’ self-love for their own egos – the object consuming the ego. This causes the ego ideal to cease functioning altogether with the leader taking the place of the ego ideal, i.e. that part of the superego responsible for rules of behavior and the standards that the ego needs to measure up to.

Freud gives us an example of the group functioning in certain the forms of the hero myth found in fairy tales. The hero in these stories is usually a youngest son who is seen as not too bright is given a task by the father (a surrogate for the group leader) which he can only do with the help of small, somewhat mindless animals such as bees and ants. Freud likens these animals to the primal horde of brothers – all identified with each other. In these myths, the hero represents the individual emerging from the group into something like individuation.

3. OBJECT RELATIONS AND GROUP PSYCHOLOGY

Object relations theory gives us another psychoanalytic way of examining group dynamics. An object is something (a person or thing) outside of the subject. In psychoanalysis, the term interpersonal relationship is used to indicate the relationship between a subject and an object, while object relations theory is used to describe the relationship between internal representations of objects and the self, within the subject. In other words, object relations theory describes an internal mental representation of an interpersonal relationship. Accordingly, object relations theory indicates that the mind includes elements taken in from the outside through a process of internalization and that there is an internal relationship between one’s self representations and the representation of internalized objects (K. Volkan, 1994).

This theory is derived from the older psychoanalytic model where drive energy (libido) seeks *objects* in order to neutralize anxiety. Freud (1920) held this as the constancy principle where the basic aim of the psychic apparatus is to maintain stimulation as close as possible to zero. From an object relations point of view the infant’s uncomfortable tension is relieved when he or she comes into contact with an ‘object’ (i.e. a significant caretaker). This object reduces tension through satisfying the infant’s drive needs and this is experienced as pleasure (Symington, 1986). When the drive is satisfied, or tension reduced, there is an opportunity for the creation of a mental representation of the object. Repeated situations of satisfaction create an internal mental representation of an object – subject relationship. This is also true for negative experiences. As Kernberg (2001) puts it,

...intensely pleasurable experiences of the infant in the relationship with the mother generate primary, “all good” units of self and object representations, while peak experiences of pain and fear generate “all bad” ones. (p. 608).

These ideas were pioneered by Freud (1917) who described the mechanisms in the process of mourning (V. Volkan, 1981). He theorized that when an external object is lost (for instance when a person dies), the shadow (i.e., the mental representation of this person) falls upon the ego of the mourner. When this happens the already existing mental representation of the lost object is re-catheted. This leads to an internal interaction between the representation of the lost object and the representation of the self.

A general view of object relations theory holds that we can understand existing interpersonal relations in terms of past ones, i.e. how past interpersonal relationships from early childhood are internalized and become psychic structures. These internalized object relations are seen as determining, to a great extent, current interactions between a person, his or her significant others, and the world at large.

A more specific view of object relations theory examines the building up of dyadic intrapsychic representations of self and objects. Such representations reflect the original relationship between the infant and its primary object. The first and primary object is usually the mother (or significant caretaker), or a part of the mother (e.g. the breast). This

¹ Freud also gives the example of an adolescent who is attached to his mother – i.e. in love with her. He is not able to successfully transfer this attachment to the suitable object of a girl his own age, therefore he regresses and becomes identified with his mother, transforms himself into her, and then looks for objects similar to his ego that he can love the way his mother loved him (p.67).

relationship to the primary object becomes the prototype of all relationships for the rest of the infant's life. Consequently, disturbances in this relationship have profound and far-reaching effects upon the infant's mental health. The relationship to the primary object is later elaborated into triadic and multiple internal and external interpersonal relationships. (Kernberg, 1967, 1975, 1976, 1980a). These relationships unfold from birth to around three years of age, though the time period can vary significantly. Affective development is also related to this time period and it is not surprising to find that individuals with object relations pathology often have severe emotional problems. As Kernberg (2001) says,

...the relationships with different objects in the context of hatred or love are integrated as fantastic primitive object representations relating to representations of the self. The affects themselves are condensed, converging into two key series of emotional experience: erotic desire, on the one hand, and murderous hatred, on the other. (p. 609-610).

The normal resolution of this developmental sequence is healthy psychic structures; ego, superego and id (Kernberg, 1980a). In classical psychoanalysis Oedipal level conflict is described as occurring between unconscious wishes and superego responses. Later on, this type of conflict came to be explained as being related to anxiety. This anxiety is created when expressions of libidinal and aggressive drives come into conflict with both internal and external prohibitions. From an object relations viewpoint the infant needs to gain the ability to integrate opposing self and object representations and their drive derivatives. This attempt at integration causes anxiety and conflict. This type of *preoedipal*, object relations conflict dominates until the child develops a cohesive sense of self and integrated object representations. Once this is achieved, oedipal or structural (id/ego/superego) conflicts become dominant.

Obviously, object relations can have a significant impact on group dynamics. Kernberg (2004) characterizes primary object representations as loving and aggressive, and outlines their significance for group psychology. The loving object representation

... contributes to the longing for fusion, intimacy and security within a group that shares our language, behavior, appreciation for esthetics and ethical values, that behaves commensurately with our own patterns and acknowledges our own acquired knowledge. Commonality of food and music and the nature of the home, celebrations and rituals ... provide narcissistic gratification as well as the safety of belonging to a loving and beloved in-group. Meanwhile, aggressive strivings toward members of that same beloved group arouse intolerable guilt feelings that are dealt with by projection. They find a place for such projection in those who are different, 'not like us', those who express an alien cultural atmosphere made up of alien systems of ethics, values, esthetics or culturally sanctioned interactional behavior patterns and areas of accepted knowledge or truth. (p. 172).

In other words the task of group membership is to maintain 'good' object attributes while simultaneously projecting the 'bad' object attributes outside of the group. Even among healthy people group membership tends to lead to regression and the use of primitive defense mechanisms such as projective identification and splitting. This primitive regression typically becomes worse as the group becomes larger. Being a group member does not typically encourage integration of good and bad object representations and in times of stress or turmoil leaders with pathologies accompanied by primitive defenses (i.e. narcissistic and/or borderline pathologies) may arise (Kernberg, 1980b; Turquet, 1994).

Bion (1961) outlined three basic 'assumptions' or types of groups; dependency, fight/flight, or pairing which, can be understood as being derived from object relations of the group members.

Dependency group members see themselves as inadequate and weak. Their immature good object representations are at risk from being overwhelmed by bad object representations. This type of group demands an omnipotent, infallible, narcissistic leader who binds the followers through their neediness. However, if the leader fails to live up to the group's demands, he or she is devalued and eventually replaced by someone who can fulfill the omnipotent projections of the group members.

Fight/Flight group members are bound together by an *esprit-de-corps* in which they stick together in the face of and outside enemy. In this type of group, the aggressive qualities of the bad object representations of the group members are projected outward. In order to accomplish this projection, group members must bind together through a common ideology. Group leadership is characterized as paranoid. This manifests as excessive control as any deviation from the orthodoxy could allow the aggressive feelings to become projected within the group. This type of fight or flight organization often leads to faulty decision-making in the form of 'groupthink' (Janis, 2007). When the leader is unable maintain control, group members begin to project the aggressive and negative qualities of the bad object on to each other. This leads to the splintering of the main group into warring subgroups.

The pairing group is based on the projections of the good object representations of the group onto a sexual couple that take on the role of group leadership. The sexual union of the couple, which can be understood as a fusion with the good object, protects the group members from aggressive impulses from within and without. This kind of group can become eroticized so that the task of the group becomes secondary to participation in the group dynamics. The group members are dependent on the union of the group leaders and if this relationship becomes troubled, its problems will become reflected among the group members.

4. SANGHA

Let us now turn to the idea of a community or group among Buddhists. The original meaning of the word Sangha in the Pali language is ‘association’ or ‘group’. Initially, this meant a grouping of monks (and later nuns) who were the most devoted followers of the Buddha. Even though the Buddha had many lay followers right from the beginning, these were considered more as supporters of the Sangha than members (Snelling, 1991).

Another original meaning of the word Sangha refers to a group of enlightened or semi-enlightened (Bodhisattvas) beings. This definition is important in the context of the Buddhist *refuge*, which consists of the historical Buddha, the Dharma (or Buddhist law or tenets), and the Sangha. The idea of an enlightened Sangha is that this is a group one can go to for protection, help, etc. In such a case, a Sangha of people, (even if they are monks), who have all the same problems of human existence as ourselves, would not be too helpful. However, we can share the single-minded attainment of liberation together with others, which can be helpful. Therefore this human Sangha can be said to be a group of people who listen to or experience the teachings of the Buddha, and live their lives in accordance with these teachings. This lifestyle would include some form of regular meditation practice with a commitment to helping all beings gain enlightenment².

The Tibetan word for Sangha is ‘Gedun’ which means to strive after virtue. The Sangha therefore can be thought of as a group of people who “are lovers of virtue who undertake and uphold positive actions, who try to transform their bad habits, purify their negativity and increase their virtuous acts – mentally, verbally, and physically – in order to benefit others...and to engage in that path one-pointedly until we reach the shared goal of enlightenment” (Rinpoche, Chagdud Tulku, 2005). The Buddhist Sangha can be thought of as a group that participates in human relationships in an extraordinary way. This participation includes a dedication to refraining from harm and serving as a role model for others. This in turn leads to the practice of compassion amongst themselves which is then extended to everyone else outside the group. Psychologically, Sangha members use other group members as a safe way to work out negative mental projections on one another, while reinforcing positive and idealized mental projections, and then extend this beyond the group.

Seen in this way the Buddhist Sangha becomes an intermediate step between worldly life (samsara) and enlightenment. It is in essence the proving ground of Buddhist ideals as they pertain to human relationships.

5. SANGHA LEADERSHIP

In this sense the elements of the Buddhist refuge can be seen as the leaders of the Sangha. The Buddhist refuge is those elements of the Buddhist faith that hold the ideals of Buddhism. These elements typically include the Buddha, the Dharma (written teachings), and the Sangha, though Tibetan Buddhists add three more elements, which will be discussed below.

Obviously the historical Buddha was the actual leader of the Sangha during his lifetime. However, since his death more than 2500 years ago, the representation of the Buddha has continued in this leadership role. This is similar to the leadership role that Jesus has maintained in Christian communities and that Freud (1921) wrote about in relationship to the Catholic Church. It is also usual for living Buddhist masters to be seen as the representation of the historical Buddha³. This is one of the reasons why lineage is so important among Buddhists. A teacher’s direct lineage to the Buddha establishes their right to be held in the leadership role for the group.

The other elements of the Buddhist refuge – the Dharma, and the Sangha (in the strict sense as the Bodhisattva Sangha) also contain leadership qualities. In Tibetan Buddhism there is the addition of a primordial Buddha⁴ (which varies depending on sect of Tibetan Buddhism), Yidams (or meditational deities), and Dharma Protectors and Guardians (these are wrathful deities which have been converted to Buddhism). The Buddha is presented in peaceful form, the Dharma as texts, and the Sangha as peaceful deities. The primordial Buddha, Yidams, and protectors and guardians are represented as peaceful, semi-wrathful, and wrathful figures respectively.

All refuge elements have characteristics of which remind of objects in the Freudian sense. The Buddha and primordial Buddha can be seen as a ‘whole’ object, playing a parental role – father or mother representing the sum of all the other (part) objects⁵. The Sangha are usually peaceful deities that can be seen as part objects. The Yidams also can be

² We are speaking of the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism in which practitioners take the Bodhisattva vow to help all beings to enlightenment before gaining enlightenment as an individual. The Hinayana or Theravada tradition of Buddhism more or less holds individual enlightenment as the primary goal. Nevertheless, helping others to gain enlightenment is strongly implied in this tradition.

³ Or identified with a primordial Buddha

⁴ Also referred to as the root Guru (teacher)

⁵ If fact in many cases these primordial Buddhas are depicted in sexual union with a consort – i.e. as both father and mother.

seen as part objects which are usually semi-wrathful or having a combination of peaceful and wrathful characteristics to be projected or internalized. The protectors and guardians are wrathful figures.

In the view of classical Freudian psychology we can see Eros and Thanatos in these figures, while from an object relations perspective we can understand these figures as good and bad object representations. Tibetan Buddhism has a similar characterization of the good and bad characteristics of these objects as ‘peaceful’ and ‘wrathful’. Traditionally in Tibetan Buddhism, the peaceful objects represent the emotional aspects of the personality while the wrathful objects represent the rational or cognitive components.

6. SANGHA AND FREUDIAN GROUP PSYCHOLOGY - IDENTIFICATION AND OBJECT CHOICE

The Buddhist Sangha has much in common with Freud’s ideas regarding groups. As mentioned previously, the Buddhist Sangha has a central historical/mythological figure – the Buddha – in the leadership role, much like Jesus is the leader of Christians in general, and the Catholic Church specifically. Also like the Catholic Church there are various manifestations of this leader (i.e. the refuge objects) that also take on or represent characteristics of the leader.

One interesting difference is that Catholics want to choose Jesus as an object. In other words they give Jesus their love and ask Jesus for his love in return. Identification with Jesus is not seen as quite as important.

However for Buddhists this is not the same. While Buddhists might start with loving the Buddha, and asking for his love in return, the ultimate goal is to become Buddha. This is ultimately a task for the individual in Buddhism. As in psychotherapy, no one can do the work for you. This task can be seen as something akin to individuation.

Followers begin by loving the Buddha – asking for his blessing and for him to love us via giving us refuge. In this way all the refuge elements (objects) represent different aspects of the Buddha’s love. This is a necessary step to becoming a Buddha and is why the refuge practice is so important as a preliminary practice in many forms of Buddhism. The next step in Buddhism is to become Buddha. How is this accomplished? Different schools have come up with different philosophies and techniques for accomplishing this. Most Tibetan and Mahayana schools of Buddhism hold the view derived from *Madhyamika* philosophy, that we are already enlightened – i.e. we are already the Buddha, or we already have the mind of the Buddha. The only difference between the Buddha and us is that we have a layer of obscuration that prevents us from recognizing our Buddha-nature. The Tibetan Buddhists often use the metaphor of clouds obscuring the sun.

Just as the clouds can be shifted by a strong gust of wind to reveal the shining sun and wide-open sky, so, under special circumstances, some inspiration may uncover for us glimpses of this nature of mind...In Tibetan we call it Rigpa, a primordial, pure, pristine awareness that is at once intelligent, cognizant, radiant, and always awake. (Rinpoche, Sogyal, 2009)

Even when the clouds are present, the sun is still shines, however, we don’t perceive this. Therefore, we have complete identification with the Buddha; we just don’t yet realize it due to our mental obscurations. The process of meditation, therefore, is to remove these obscurations. Realizing the state of Rigpa is the same as becoming Buddha.

But there is a great problem with becoming the Buddha, with complete identification of oneself with Buddha-nature. This problem is the narcissism that arises from both loving an object and then becoming the object you love. For Buddhists the solution to this problem is to disseminate the love. Disseminating it within could also lead to a building up of narcissism from the group members; so therefore, it would be preferable to disseminate it outside the group. This is exactly what occurs in Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism in the form of the *Bodhisattva Vow*, which is the vow to help all beings gain enlightenment before oneself. Hence the Bodhisattva Vow in Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism serves to eliminate the possibility of people becoming narcissistic Buddhas. In this way one of the main reasons for having a Sangha is to limit group members’ narcissism as they both simultaneously love and identify with the Buddha.

7. OBJECT RELATIONS AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM

The techniques of establishing identification with the Buddha differ among different types of Buddhists. Tibetan Buddhist practices are very interesting in this regard, giving a sense of how object relations play a part in the identification process. Many Tibetan Buddhist rituals use ‘deities’ which play the role of good and bad objects. These Tibetan Buddhist ‘objects’ all represent some aspects of Buddha nature – i.e. the Buddha, and so can function in the same sense as the Buddha as leader as described above. A typical Tibetan Buddhist meditation ritual includes what is referred to as the *Creation* stage and *Dissolution* stages. This usually involves the visualization of some personified characteristic of the Buddha in the form of a deity. Most of these deities are iconographically-derived from earlier Hindu deities, though the symbolic and spiritual meanings have changed to fit Buddhist ideals. One of the psychological methods used

in Tibetan Buddhism is to encourage followers to become these objects; i.e. to identify with them, to take on their characteristics, and to internalize them.

As mentioned in context of the Buddhist refuge above, these Tibetan Buddhist deities have much in common with objects in the Freudian sense. They come in both peaceful (good) and wrathful (bad) forms. A close look at these objects reveals some degree of ambivalence and integration – some of the peaceful objects hold swords or other weapons, and the wrathful deities all hold a great degree of loving compassion in addition to their ferocity. These deity objects are often presented in the ‘yab-yum’ (father-mother) posture – i.e. engaged in sexual intercourse, which in Tibetan Buddhism symbolically represents the unification of wisdom (female) and compassion (male) of the enlightened mind, or as the ‘cognizing mind’ recognizing the ‘true nature of mind’. In the Freudian sense, this symbolizes the part object becoming whole and the integration of good and bad objects.

The Creation stage usually begins by visualizing the deities as separate from oneself. The visualization can be fairly elaborate, with all aspects of the deity including clothes and ornaments having symbolic meaning. This visualization is often accompanied by the recitation of a mantra – a specific series of sounds designed to invoke the energy relevant to that specific deity in the practitioner. One way of conceptualizing this process is to think of it as a sort of positive projective identification (Klein, 1946). As Ogden (Ogden, 1977) states, projective identification is “the way in which one person makes use of another person to experience and contain an aspect of himself (p. 1). In this part of creation stage the visualizations are developed to the point where the deities can be experienced as another person. This other entity contains the part of oneself that represents the individual’s Buddha nature in pure form.

After visualizing the separate deity, and usually after the recitation of the mantra is completed, the deity is then visualized as oneself. The practitioner is now internalizing and identifying with, the deity, their Buddha nature in purified form. This process is necessary to proceed to the Dissolution stage, where the deity, oneself, is dissolved into the non-conceptual nature of the mind. Reality in this state is experienced in its stark naked primal condition. The realization of the inherent nature of both the deity-object and non-conceptual mind as representing both the relative and absolute manifestations of reality is the goal. This is a difficult concept to translate to Freudian thought, but can perhaps be thought of as the mysticism of “fullness and emptiness” to use Eigen’s (1998) terms.

8. THE RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS IN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND BUDDHISM

One way to think about the relative and absolute reality is through a view of the unconscious. The relative unconscious is relatively easy – this is the personal unconscious of Freud with its repressed memories and sublimated energies. The absolute is more difficult to imagine in the framework of Freud. It is tempting at this point to invoke Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1972). Indeed, the Buddhist *Yogachara* school of philosophy has a similar idea of a ‘foundation consciousness (called *Alayavijnana* in Sanskrit). This foundation consciousness has much in common with Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious. Both are constituted as a continuum that has carried forward from the human past. Both form the basis for the transmission of mental imprints that represent our phylogenetic inheritance. Both influence or even to some degree make up the core identity of a person. However, there are some important differences. The Buddhist foundation consciousness is accessible to consciousness while Jung’s collective unconscious is not. The foundation consciousness is more like another form of consciousness than a type of unconscious. So while there is a strong temptation is to equate the two there is also good reason to rethink this enterprise. Even one of the foremost Buddhist thinker of our day, the 14th Dalai Lama, has stated that he refutes this Buddhist idea of a foundation unconscious altogether, seeing it as a rhetorical tool to help explain the carrying forward of self-consciousness from one life to the next (Molino, 1998).

Another metaphorically satisfying idea, but still without precision is Freud’s idea of the ‘unknowable’ in the human mind. As psychoanalyst McDougal says:

When the patient is trying to understand and reconstruct, through dreams, associations, and memories, it is like unwinding a skein of wool. You can undo so much of it, but in the middle is a knot you will never be able to see into, that keeps the whole skein of wool together. This he called the unknowable and felt it was indefinable. (Molino, 1998)

Eigen (1998) reports that Bion links that ‘void and formless infinite’ with the concept of psychoanalytic openness. As Eigen says of Bion, “He characterizes the psychoanalytic attitude as being without memory, expectation, desire or understanding” (p. 16). Freud tantalizingly alludes to something similar near the end of his life: “Mysticism is the obscure self-perception of the realm outside the ego, of the id” (Eigen, 1998; Freud, 1938). One way to look at a combination of the meanings of these statements is to say that psychoanalytic openness is a possible path to perception of the realm beyond ego. In this way we can talk of a ‘transpersonal’ Freudian psychology (Kernberg, 2000).

But how do we achieve this ability to perceive beyond the ego and what prevents us from doing this? What is it which sets up a barrier to this experience – i.e. resistance? Strachey (Strachey, 1934) places this resistance within the ego

itself and states that perhaps it is more important to remove the resistance than to explore the unconscious (p.130). In this line of thinking removal of resistance could lead to a transpersonal ego, free of grasping and neurotic attachment. Strachey says one way to remove resistance is to work with the ego utilizing intelligence and rationality. However, he states the more sophisticated approach is to use transference. The Tibetan Buddhist work with deities is reminiscent of the transference seen in psychoanalysis and dynamic psychotherapy, or generated in groups with a leader. If libido is removed from the ego and projected to the leader, and transference established with the group leader, strength is removed from the ego's resistance. This is one way to understand the way Buddhist Sangha members move towards individuation.

9. CONCLUSION

The above ideas play key roles in understanding the group psychology of the Buddhist Sangha. Freud's brilliant insight that group members' egos are diminished when libido is attached to the group leader can be extended in the case of the Buddhist Sangha. We can imagine a process whereby group members start to lessen the grasp of their egos by identification with the group leader. This is accompanied by the introjection of the refuge objects, which help to strengthen and stabilize the personality in the face of a diminishing ego. The diminishing of the ego is continued by spreading the libido to other group members. Then finally, libido is sent out to all beings outside the group exhausting the grasp of the ego entirely.

We might say that this process serves to make the ego more flexible rather than weak. This diminished ego can be seen as an ego that lessens its grasp onto external objects, turning inward towards the unconscious. In fact, Freud, in response to his friend Romain Rolland's criticism of *Future of an Illusion*, (Freud, 1927; Vermorel, 1993) became genuinely interested in the relation of the ego to mystical experience (Epstein, 1996; Schneider & Berke, 2008) For Freud, in order for the unconscious to be made conscious, the ego must turn inward to where it can be experienced as a small part of the continuum of the unconscious mind. As Epstein states:

On the basis of a limited knowledge of the meditation traditions of the East, therefore, Freud came to a conception of the individual ego as extending infinitely in both internal and external directions. Each individual, he hypothesized, contains the entire universe, because each ego extends infinitely to encompass both the inner unconscious and the external world. (Epstein, 1996)

Without being aware of it, Freud is echoing the Buddhist view of samsara and nirvana. As one Buddhist master puts it:

Samsara is the mind projected outwardly, lost in its projection. Nirvana is the mind turned inwardly, recognizing its true nature. (Rinpoche, Sogyal, 2009)

Only when the ego's grasp on the external world is exhausted, can we fully experience the internal world of the unconscious, our own true nature – the sky un-obscured by the clouds. Indeed it is within this true nature of the mind, our vast unconscious, which we see the similarity in suffering that we all share as well as the fleeting nature of our joys. However, paradoxically, it is the awareness of the universality of our suffering that allows the Buddhist Sangha to experience the bliss of a non-ego-centered state of being.

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