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TITLE: Can East and West Meet in Psychoanalysis?

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TEXT:

SIR: We read with great interest the article "**Meditation** and Psychotherapy: A Rationale for the Integration of Dynamic Psychotherapy, the Relaxation Response, and Mindfulness **Meditation**" by Ilan Kutz, M.D., et al. (January 1985 issue). It skillfully highlighted the pertinence of Eastern thought to psychological growth and healing, and it was insightful in explaining the inabilities, as well as the resistances, of traditional psychoanalytic thinking to understanding and accepting Eastern ideas. Also, an interesting suggestion, blending Eastern and Western approaches, was put forth -- that of borrowing the technique of **meditation** and adapting it to psychotherapy. However, we believe that a fundamental difference between Eastern and Western metapsychology was overlooked -- the concept of self -- and, because of this, the appropriateness and limitations of combining **meditation** and psychotherapy could not be fully explored. Western metapsychologies have emphasized the need for a coherent self or ego for healthy psychological functioning and have postulated that neurosis or even psychosis can result from a disordered or inadequate self or ego. Elaborate and intricate treatment methods have been devised by proponents of these concepts (i.e. Kohut, Kernberg). Eastern traditions, on the other hand, go beyond the notion of an adequate self or ego by stressing that, ultimately, there is no separate self or ego, that the illusion of their existence is the source of human suffering, and that full human existence can only be attained by realizing this fact [n1]. Many Eastern techniques such as the "mindfulness **meditation**" described by Dr. Kutz and associates have been devised to help the practitioners observe or attend to mental processes in order to be freed from such illusions as a sense of separate self or ego [n2]. These techniques, as stated in the article, are often incorporated in a complex belief or religious system. However, many prominent Eastern thinkers have clearly pointed out that any system is simply a barrier to choiceless attention to "what is," and substitutes one illusion for another: the personal illusion for the common cultural illusion of a path of liberation (i.e. psychotherapy) [n3]. Liberation from suffering, therefore, would not be accomplished by any particular technique or system but by the help of a faculty of attention to life and to oneself that does not involve logical analysis, knowledge, or effort [n4].

Thus, the attempt to combine **meditation** and psychotherapy would be self-defeating: first, because the goal of **meditation** (the realization that the self or ego is illusory) is irreconcilable with the stated goals of psychotherapy, particularly of the analytical type, and, second, because the incorporation of the technique of **meditation** into the system of psychotherapy strengthens the illusion that a thorough understanding of life and liberation from misery can be achieved through any system. **Meditation**, used in analytical treatment, might well be a substitute for hypnosis, but would it really narrow the gap between East and West and put into perspective the limitations of Western metapsychology?

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[n4.] Watts A: The Art of Contemplation. New York, Pantheon Books, 1972