



Noble Journey

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A publication of the Buddhist Recovery Network (BRN), supporting the use of Buddhist teachings, traditions and practices to help people recover from the suffering caused by addictive behaviors.

Don't miss the Buddhist Recovery Network Inaugural Conference

Los Angeles, October 8–12.

Book online at:
http://www.buddhistrecovery.com/inaugural_conference.htm

This Conference provides an unprecedented opportunity to explore the use of Buddhist teachings and practices in recovery.

The Conference provides a broad platform for a diverse range of perspectives to be heard, including presentations from experts in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, Buddhism and neuroscience. At the time of writing, the following speakers, facilitators and panel members have been engaged.

Buddhist Recovery Network's First Newsletter

We are pleased to present the first issue of the Buddhist Recovery Network's quarterly newsletter, Noble Journey. As promised, this newsletter is distributed to all BRN members so that we may stay informed and connected as a community.

We welcome your input, feedback, and ideas for future newsletters. Feel free to contact us: you'll find our contact information at the bottom left hand corner of the newsletter.

The Intersection of Buddhism and Recovery: Perspectives from BRN Members

BRN members were recently invited to participate in an e-mail interview, to provide an opportunity for sharing and learning various perspectives on the relationship between Buddhism and recovery. The interview focuses on vital aspects of Buddhism and traditional 12-step programs and what each has to offer the recovering alcoholic or addict.

Among those responding to the interview questions were Noah Levine, BRN board member and founder of Against the Stream Meditation Society, and three BRN advisory council members: Bill Alexander, author of *Cool Water, Alcoholism, Mindfulness and Ordinary Recovery*; Lisa Dale Miller, a mindfulness-based psychotherapist; and Lisa S., author of *Twelve Steps on Buddha's Path*. The thoughtful and evocative responses provided by these and other BRN members are offered here.

What aspects of Buddhism are most helpful to the recovering alcoholic or addict?

Noah Levine: Mindfulness is key: it builds the understanding of impermanence that leads to a great ability to tolerate

Trudy Goodman. Practicing psychotherapist, ordained lay Zen Buddhist, vipassana teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Insight Meditation Society, and the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. Goodman will be a keynote speaker at the conference, and will hold a workshop on depression, stress, and anxiety in recovery.

Kevin Griffin. Author of *One Breath at a Time: Buddhism and the Twelve Steps* (Rodale Press, 2004) and the forthcoming *A Burning Desire: Dharma God and the Path of Recovery* (Hay House, 2009). Griffin will be a keynote speaker at the conference, speaking on "What is Buddhist Recovery?" He will also participate in a cross-tradition panel on facilitating Buddhist recovery groups, and will participate with Noah Levine in a discussion panel on the role of theism in recovery.

Dr. G. Alan Marlatt. Professor of Psychology and Director of the Addictive Behaviors Research Center at the University of Washington. Dr. Marlatt is a Buddhist who practices in the Shambhala tradition, and in addition to over 200 journal articles and book chapters, he has published several books in the addiction field. At the conference, Dr. Marlatt will be a keynote speaker on Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention, and will facilitate a session on addiction and the neuroscience of mindfulness.

Noah Levine. Buddhist teacher and founder of Against the Stream Buddhist Meditation Society. Levine holds a master's degree in counseling psychology, and is author of *Dharma Punx* and

craving without acting on it. Also, Compassion, Forgiveness and Equanimity are core values necessary for recovery.

Bill Alexander: In my case, what was most useful early on about my Buddhist practice was the possibility of finding a power greater than myself in a way that was contrary to the *de jure* reality of the 12 step programs, which was largely dualistic and hierarchical. "The power of things as it is", from which I am not separate, has served me well for some time now.

Lisa Dale Miller: Awareness of "tanha" or craving and aversion is the root cause of suffering and the insight of the Second Noble Truth. Vipassana or insight meditation cultivates the ability to directly observe the arising of tanha at its source. Direct perception of craving and aversion allows for a spaciousness of mind from which we can make skillful choices rather than find ourselves mindlessly ruled by reactivity to desire. Mindfulness practice and the application of skillful means decreases the negative impact of tanha while increasing mind states of equanimity and contentment, a necessary element of long-lasting recovery.

Laura S.: The emphasis on living in the now.

Artie Cable: What is Buddhism? Not sure that Buddhism can be helpful to someone who is newly sober (although I am aware there is some tradition of achieving sobriety in Japanese Zen monks, boot camp style). What is needed in this circumstance is one drunk or addict helping another. Personally I was led to a Buddhist practice through a gradual and free-thinking examination of the 11th (and other) step/s, long after I achieved physical sobriety and struggled with what truth is.

Paul Lanier: Mindfulness (meditation and full participation in the moment) resolves all addictive behaviors. Understanding suffering as the result of craving and grasping establishes paths of abstinence and recovery. Realization of emptiness (all things are conditioned) means understanding that all descriptions, including "addict" and "alcoholic," are impermanent forms rather than intrinsic identities. Most basic, Buddhism's nontheistic approach eliminates unhelpful speculation and grounds thinking in practical solutions.

Patrick Smith: The most helpful aspect of Buddhism to my recovery is the concept of impermanence and not-self. The statement of the Buddha, "What arises, ceases" is very much in accord with the A.A. slogan and Christian statement of "This too shall pass." On a very practical level, it allows me to better deal with my obsession with and for alcohol, which obsession is a huge obstacle to overcome and/or deal with for most recovering alcoholics, especially in early recovery.

Rick Zubres: Mindfulness practice has proven the most helpful aspect of Buddhism for my recovery. Through it I experience the impermanent and impersonal nature of my

Against the Stream. He has recently initiated a recovery program that focuses on the Buddha's teachings and does not rely on the 12 steps. Levine will host the conference at his Against the Stream Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles. At the conference, Levine will facilitate a breakout session on a Buddhist approach to recovery, and will participate with Kevin Griffin in a discussion panel on the role of theism in recovery.

Tich Dao Quang

("Thay"). Abbot of the Tam Bao Vietnamese Temple in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Thay holds a degree in Psychology and a Masters in Community Counseling, and works with mental health professionals on the use of meditation in mental health disorders. Thay will give the keynote presentation.

Santikaro. Translator and Buddhist meditation teacher at Liberation Park, Norwalk, Wisconsin. Santikaro meets annually with alcoholics and addiction counselors in Siam, and is assisting with a new culturally appropriate translation of the Big Book into Thai. At the conference, Santikaro will speak on addiction to self and will facilitate a panel discussion on addictive culture.

Jeff Bell. Author of forthcoming book *When in Doubt, Make Belief: Life Lessons from OCD*. Bell is a radio news anchor in San Francisco. Bell will speak at the conference on the topic of uncertainty and mindfulness.

Dr. Ann Bolger. Clinical Psychologist with a private psychotherapy practice in west San

mind. This is more powerful and directly affects my "heart-mind" more than intellectual understanding of cliches, true though they are, such as "This too shall pass."

What, if any, important components of traditional 12-step programs are missing from Buddhism?

Noah Levine: I have always thought that Buddhism could use an explicit Amends process like the 9th step.

Bill Alexander: (A) The tradition of sponsorship. I could have used a steady companion to speak with in the beginning of my practice. (B) Meetings. In Sesshin, we sit silently, with our backs to each other. But I've often wondered what it would be like if for just one day, we sat facing each other, without rakusus and robes and with no "authority" perched on a Zafu, and shared our joys, our hopes and our fears.

Lisa Dale Miller: My response to these questions about Buddhist teachings and 12-step programs is one of curiosity. I don't see that Buddhist teachings have a relationship with 12-step approaches or need to be fit into a 12-step framework in order to be useful or relevant to people who suffer with chemical abuse and dependence issues or those in recovery. Human beings are human beings, no matter what form of suffering they may be experiencing. The Four Noble Truths and all the suttas in the Theravada tradition, along with the vast, profound teachings of Mahayana teachings that have been revealed and handed down in Northern India, Tibet, China, and Japan, comprise a profound system of knowledge and practice for total liberation of the human mind and heart. The 12-step approach is very successful philosophical and practical system that provides communal support for sober lifestyles, but I do not see it as a path to complete cessation of suffering. It is every human being's right to hear the dharma and have the blessed opportunity to develop the heart of a bodhisattva and the mind of a Buddha.

Laura S.: A creator god is missing, which causes some people in AA problems but has never been a problem for me.

Artie Cable: The steps are missing. Some are similar to Buddhist principles, but it doesn't seem propitious to deconstruct and admix the two. The steps appear to have sprung up as being helpful in achieving comfortable sobriety. For example, there is no inventory practice in Buddhism (4th step). Although the sangha is one of the three jewels, in practice it is not emphasized as fellowship is in A.A. - I have experienced my Buddhist practice as self-centered, like a study, and sitting is not a group experience. So, there are two - fellowship and self-examination. To a great degree Buddhism is an accumulation of wisdom; A.A. is not that. In

Jose and Santa Cruz, California, specializing in the treatment of substance abuse and other addictions. Dr. Bolger trained extensively as a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction teacher with Drs. Jon Kabat-Zinn and Bob Stahl, and she is currently teaching Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention to people recovering from alcoholism and drug addiction. Dr. Bolger will facilitate an MBRP workshop at the conference.

Other confirmed speakers in the workshop include: Ann Buck, Laura Burges, Pablo Das, Damon Gay, Rev. Alex Holt, Dr. Kathy Lustyk, Rev. Elizabeth Munoz, Mary Stancavage, and Diana Winston.

We warmly invite you to become part of the inaugural Conference, and look forward to seeing you in October.



A.A., I have experienced the joy and relief to learn that I am not alone in my experience. What little wisdom or merit I have is mine alone, or so it perhaps falsely appears.

Patrick Smith: I believe that what is very beneficial to 12 step programs is the 3rd step in which one turns oneself and one's will over to a higher power. While I do not believe in a Creator God, or any derivation thereof, I do think that Buddhas and deities, such as Avalokiteshvara and the Medicine Buddha (Bhaisajyaguru), can play a very important role in the recovery of a Buddhist practitioner if more emphasis was made in how to incorporate these Buddhas more actively into the recovery of the addict, either through prayer, liturgy etc.... Finally, the message of hope conveyed by A.A., I do not believe is adequately conveyed in Buddhism, and that by practicing the Dharma, hope for recovery and a 'better' life comes to all addicts who seek it.

Rick Zubres: Service opportunities *appear* to be lacking in Buddhism. Of course, Buddhism stresses virtuous actions in daily living such as generosity, but meetings provide opportunities for newcomers to be of service with simple commitments like greeter. And classic Twelve Step recovery encourages working with others as soon as possible as the fruition of the twelve step process. The book *Against the Stream* seems to indicate it takes several years to be a teacher in Buddhism. I'll repeat: it appears this way to me, and my perception may be based in ignorance.

What, if any, important components of a Buddhist approach to recovery are missing from traditional 12-step programs?

Noah Levine: Clear and direct meditation instructions. Insistence on non-violence. The truth of total personal responsibility (karma).

Bill Alexander: This doesn't answer the question but I need to point out subtle difference between program and practice. I have never found in practice a tendency toward a kind of fearful communal exclusivity. I have yet to hear an "Us Buddhists and them Earth People" division.

Laura S.: The concept of not-self.

Artie Cable: Not sure what is meant by "Buddhist approach to recovery." What is that? The noble truths and eightfold path are not part of 12-step recovery, obviously -- and these are the heart of Buddhist wisdom. Sitting, to me, is at the heart of Buddhist practice. It is the swinging door to the steps - through the 11th, either direction. I suppose metta practice can be equivalent to the 12th step. This question calls for an exhaustive discussion ...

The BRN doesn't seek to spread a dogma or system of recovery, but rather to act as a hub from which a mandala of skilful means, community support, research, and treatment might grow, bringing new visions of healing to the recovery community and a deeper understanding of ancient Buddhist wisdom to us all.



Contact Us

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For story ideas and contributions, contact Ellen Berryman

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Patrick Smith: Impermanence and not-self are crucial to overcoming the despair and hopelessness for the addict in the beginning of recovery. Getting those first 30, 60 or 90 days of sobriety seem impossible without it. As well, the truth that one's true nature is that of a Buddha may help to propel the addict out a cycle of self-loathing and perceived worthlessness and into a belief of self value and as a benefit to their fellow sentient beings. Finally, the concept of the Bodhisattva better crystalizes the purpose of step 12.

Rick Zubres: My answer to what is lacking in Twelve Step is the same as my answer to the first question: mindfulness practice. Twelve Step fellowships appear to stress prayer more than meditation, and the meditation that is stressed is either analytic or "listening". My brief experience with mindfulness and study of Buddhist concepts has given me what I find a more practical framework and tool for dealing with my delusions and the brain that the Big Book says I was given to use. However I cannot say whether I would have made effective use of these tools as a newcomer to recovery.



Many thanks to all who participated in this interview.



"The view that is presented in the Buddhist teachings is not one of becoming a better person, or finally getting it right, but is a view based on trusting what we already have, of starting and staying where we already are.

So with letting go of addiction, the instruction is the same, it is instruction to get in touch with our basic nature, to get in touch with the basic energy of the moment in which we are all caught up . . .

What allows us to stop is maïtre, which in this case means a basic feeling that we do not have to be afraid of what we are feeling right now, that we do not have to look for alternatives, that we aren't ashamed of what we are feeling in this moment . . . instead, we can just let our warmth toward the wound, or the warmth toward that instant of time just be there as a working basis." - **Pema Chodron**