

Thoughts about the book

SKILL AND TRUST - The Tovil Healing Ritual of Sri Lanka as Culture-Specific Psychotherapy by Beatrice Vogt, Ph.D.

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The Author, formerly a professor of psychology at the Zurich University, is now a director of a Psychotherapy Institute in Basel, Switzerland. She was living in Sri Lanka for three years and studied Dhamma and, especially the Abhidhamma, with the Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera in Kandy. She conducted research on the Buddhist ways to overcome suffering -- as they are really practised by the Sinhalese people. From reading her book we understand that she is an Abhidhamma scholar, who knows not only the pali texts, but also the practice of various methods described in them. Her book is a scientific treatise of three aspects of the Buddhist daily life: the procedures to purify the mind, to heal the mind, and to cultivate the mind.

As an introduction the fairy-tale about "Tovil in a Pumpkin" is being related. In an easy manner, that can be understood by anybody, the author proceeds to give us answers to the following two questions:

- 1) What is **the process of healing the mind** through the Buddhist methods?
- 2) What are, in Sri Lanka, **the criteria for mental health and happiness**?

The answers are given by what the bhikkhus, the traditional healers, and the common villagers say and do. Their answers are then ordered in relation to the paradigms of Abhidhamma and interpreted by the methods of modern science. Thus every chapter contains both easily readable information and references to the most sublime Buddhist and scientific doctrines. For this the author has prepared the scientific background in her article on "Silabbata -- Virtuous Performance" published in the Sri Lanka Journal of Buddhist Studies (Vol. III, 1991, page 71-104).

Some common misunderstandings are being done away with. The author gives quotations from the Tipitaka which describe the behaviour of a madman or of Mahasohona Yaka (note 92 on page 313) and explains in what way is the Tovil an accessory to the Buddha Dhamma. The pathology of the beings called bhutas is connected to the explanations found in Samyutta-Nikaya. The procedure of Buddhist psychotherapy is explained on the basis of Abhidhamma texts of Vibhanga, Nettippakaranam, etc. Nevertheless the most distinctive feature of the traditional Buddhist psychotherapy is the inclusion of the ethics. The ethical training sila-sikkha is the must, as the author shows in the last chapter, for everybody who wants to keep his mind healthy and be happy in everyday life.

Ven. Bhikkhu Kusalananda
Sambodhi Vihara, Colombo 7