

Chasing Elephants: Healing Psychologically with Buddhist Wisdom

Diane Shainberg

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“Chasing elephants is a phrase that means looking for things outside of ourselves.” Shainberg, a psychotherapist and Buddhist priest, explores inner healing through the integration of western psychology and Buddhist teachings. She proposes a learning curve that starts with the psychological and continues harmoniously to the spiritual awareness of true nature.

A lot of the author’s words in these eight chapters are reiterated (and for good reason, this is an elusive subject to write about) in the message: Be Here Now. The psychology integration is simply her practice of allowing patients/clients to share their woes in a clinical setting where she, as the therapist, compassionately mirrors their problems. This validates the client and allows the successful introduction of meditation, visualization, and inner listening. Through her case studies, Shainberg’s wisdom and experience shines and emphasizes the clarity of Buddhist practice.

Bringing together these two worlds of healing methods is a daunting task. The book portrays western psychology as a comfortable starting place, however, as the author states, “in spiritual therapy we are encouraged to be aware of exactly where we are in the present, which is the opposite of trying to fix our experience or to change it or to imagine we can control it.” For example, being present and aware with anger allows the seeker to flow with the emotion as it peaks like a wave, but then dissolves into the larger realm of our true nature; where that person is complete and full potential is available. Giving the respect of awareness to mind and body allows negativity or unwanted emotions to subside and will always bring spontaneous healing.

Shainberg says the poem, “Natural Great Perfection,” inspired her to write Chasing Elephants. Here is an excerpt that neatly summarizes her creative work:

Happiness cannot be found

Through great effort and willpower, but is

Already present, in relaxation

And letting go.

Anyone stuck in the endless psychological cycle of inner searching, whether for themselves or therapy clients, should study this book.

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