

Inner Peace and Happiness: A Study of *Paṭācārātherī Apadāna*

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- **Article History:** Submitted 21 February, 2025; Reviewed 27 March, 2025; Revised 10 April, 2025 • **Corresponding Author:** Ven. Dhammissara
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Abstract

Inner peace and happiness are fundamental objectives in Theravāda Buddhism, achieved through ethical conduct, mindfulness, and meditation. According to Buddhism, mind is able to come into being in the cycle of birth and death. In the same way such the mind also is able to liberate from the cycle of rebirth. Especially, Buddhism trains the mind in order to achieve the ultimate liberation. This study explores Buddhist counselling psychology from the Theravāda perspective, focusing on the Paṭācārātherī apadāna (p.236) as mentioned in Ekūposathikavagga of Apadāna Pāli - II in Khuddaka nikāya. With the development of material things, in modern today, mental problems also increase. The challenges faced by the modern world often stem from various mental health issues, such as disorder, stress, anxiety, anger, and depression. It is a central problem to solve. Therefore, the study highlights how Theravāda principles address mental and spiritual well-being. The findings emphasize personal liberation from suffering (nirvāṇa) as the ultimate source of peace and happiness, with practical applications for contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Inner Peace, Happiness, Mental Illness, Buddhist Counselling, Meditation

Introduction

Why is meditation needed to practice? The answer is simple. It is because meditation is a method to make mind calm and peaceful. If mind is peaceful and calm, it will be happy. The experience of a peaceful calm mind is happy feeling. When the mind is peaceful calm, there becomes happy feeling naturally. So, in order to achieve

inner peace and happiness the meditation needs practicing. Inner peace and happiness are universal aspirations that transcend cultures and philosophies and religions. In *Theravāda* Buddhism, they are intertwined with the cessation of suffering, as elucidated in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path (Gethin 79-82). If everyone has a wealthy life and is able to live in comfort and luxury, they feel peaceful and happy. And it is believed that the feeling is what they really want. In fact, that is wrong. It is because the feeling peaceful and happy is impermanent. What they really want is what cannot be destroyed by anything. When what they feel on their wealth is destroyed, their mind cannot be peaceful and calm. This points out that the real inner peace and happiness do not depend on the material things due to the impermanence of them. The importance of Paṭācārā's story in Buddhist counseling is that it serves as a powerful teaching tool to help individuals process grief and overcome suffering. That is why this study focus on her story.

The Significance of Paṭācārā's Story in Buddhist Counseling

Paṭācārā's story is profoundly significant in Buddhist counseling, particularly in guiding individuals through grief, trauma, and emotional distress. Her life journey marked by unimaginable suffering and ultimate liberation demonstrates the transformative power of wisdom, mindfulness, and spiritual refuge.

Her tragic losses reflect the unavoidable nature of suffering and the impermanence of life. In Buddhist counseling, her story serves as a powerful reminder that all conditioned phenomena are subject to change, helping individuals accept loss without excessive attachment.

Overwhelmed by sorrow, she initially lost her mental stability. However, after encountering the Buddha, she received compassionate guidance that led her to realize that grief arises from clinging and attachment. This insight allowed her to transform suffering into wisdom, which is a key approach in Buddhist counseling helping individuals move beyond their emotional pain through right understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*).

Her path to enlightenment demonstrates the healing potential of mindfulness and letting go of attachment. In counseling, her experience is used to encourage individuals to cultivate equanimity (*upekkhā*) and acceptance, helping them cope with loss in a healthier way.

Statement of the Problem

All living beings are born into a state of suffering, with the first sign of life often being the cry at birth. As individuals progress through life, the nature and intensity of their suffering typically escalate. In today's modern society, characterized by rapid material development, mental health issues have become more pronounced. Disorders such as stress, anxiety, anger, depression, and other psychological challenges have emerged as significant concerns. Effectively addressing these issues is vital for promoting mental well-being and improving the quality of life in the face of growing psychological challenges.

Objective of the Study

It is the purpose of the present article to explore the application of Buddhist counselling psychology in understanding the psychological transformation of Paṭācārātherī, focusing on how her experience aligns with key Buddhist psychological principles. And also, it aims to examine the impact of mindfulness, impermanence, and non-self on emotional healing.

Research Method and Source

This study will adopt a qualitative and analytical research design. Paṭācārātherī's journey will be treated as a case study. The main source of data will be the Paṭācārātherī *apadāna* as mentioned in *Ekūposathikavagga* of *Apadāna Pāḷi* - II in *Khuddaka nikāya*.

Overview of Buddhist Counseling Principles

The fundamental principles of Buddhist counselling are rooted in the teachings of the Buddha and provide a holistic framework for addressing emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. The methods for treating mental illness in Buddhist psychotherapy include a variety of approaches. These principles include: (1) Mindfulness (*sati*) developing present-moment awareness and acceptance; observing thoughts and emotions without attachment or aversion; cultivating self-awareness to understand the nature of the mind, (2) Compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*) offering unconditional kindness and compassion to oneself and others; developing empathy and understanding for those who suffer, (3) Letting go (*vimutti*)_ releasing attachment to negative emotions, desire, and fixed identities; practicing acceptance and equanimity in challenging situations.

Cultivating mindfulness

First of all, *sati* (mindfulness) has to be cultivated as a healing. It is the first step towards healing. In Buddhist counseling, mindfulness (*sati*) plays a central role as a transformative tool that helps individuals develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and insight into their thoughts and behaviors. Rooted in Buddhist teachings, mindfulness-based counseling encourages clients to cultivate present-moment awareness, equanimity, and compassion, which are essential for addressing psychological distress and promoting well-being.

Practicing mindfulness is for developing present-moment awareness and acceptance; for observing thoughts and emotions without attachment or aversion; and also, for cultivating self-awareness to understand the nature of the mind. The universal truths can be understood by developing the mindfulness practice. Inner peace and happiness cannot be achieved without understanding clearly that all phenomena, including emotions and mental states, arise due to interdependent causes and conditions. Suffering arises due to craving and ignorance, and by addressing these causes, emotional suffering can be reduced.

Venerable *Bhante Gunaratana* makes explanations on *Sati: Mindfulness* is non-judgmental observation. Mindfulness is an impartial watchfulness. Mindfulness is nonconceptual awareness. Mindfulness is present-moment awareness. Mindfulness is nonegotistic alertness. Mindfulness is awareness of change. Mindfulness is participatory observation. Mindfulness is not an intellectual awareness. It is just awareness (Gunarata 133-35). Moreover, he explains continuously, “Mindfulness is not trying to achieve anything. It is just looking. Therefore, desire and aversion are not involved. Competition and struggle for achievement have no place in the process. Mindfulness does not aim at anything. It just sees whatever is already there” (147). It is clear to understand what *Bhante* means. Because desire and aversion are not involved, mindfulness causes inner peace to individuals who cultivates mindfulness practice.

***Samādhi* (Concentration)**

Moreover, it is the practice of focused concentration to develop mental clarity and stability. Buddhism specially teaches the importance of *samādhi*. The Buddha said the following about this point:

“Monks, cultivate concentration. A monk who develops concentration gains a clear understanding of reality as it truly is. What does he understand in this way? He perceives the arising and cessation of form, and cessation of feeling, the arising and cessation of perception, the arising and cessation of mental formations, and the

arising and cessation of consciousness. (*samādhisutta of Khandhavagga samyutta in Samyuttanikāya 12*)” Through this focused awareness, he sees the true nature of these phenomena: - how they come into being and how they pass away.

***Sammā Diṭṭhi* (Right View)**

Understanding reality and the nature of suffering is, thirdly, a vital tool for reducing mental suffering. *Sammā diṭṭhi* (Right view) is vitally important in Buddhist counselling because it provides the foundational understanding necessary for personal transformation and emotional healing. It shapes how individuals perceive their lives, suffering, and the world around them. In Buddhist counselling, Right view helps clients cultivate awareness, reduce confusion, and guide their actions in ways that lead to greater mental and emotional well-being.

The universal truths can be clearly seen by Right View, through the developing from the angle of Three Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*). The concept of the Three Characteristics serves as the fundamental basis for understanding the Buddha’s path to liberation (*vimokkha*). These three universal qualities of all phenomena in the world are: *Anicca* (impermanence or transience), *Dukkha* (suffering, dissatisfaction, or unsatisfactoriness), and *Anatta* (non-self, the absence of a permanent self, or insubstantiality). Reflecting on these three characteristics—whether in relation to all conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhāra*) or all existences (*dhamma*)—leads to profound insight (*vipassanā*) and ultimately to enlightenment (*bodhi, ñāṇa*). Thus, realizing these fundamental truths is considered the key to attaining the highest level of spiritual perfection in the Buddha’s teachings.

Understanding the nature of suffering (*dukkha*)

In *Mahāvagga Pāli* of *Khuddakanikāya* it mentions that birth itself is suffering – “*Jāti pi dukkhā*” (14). It must be truly understood that suffering is an inherent part of life. And it has to be accepted. Loss is a natural part of life. Right view enables a person to deeply understand the nature of suffering, its causes, and its cessation. This understanding is essential in Buddhist counselling because it provides a grieving person with a clear framework for addressing their mental and emotional distress. By realizing the suffering of life, mental suffering can be reduced, as well as inner peace and happiness can be cultivated.

Awareness of impermanence (*anicca*)

Right view emphasizes the concept of impermanence (*anicca*), which teaches that all things, including emotions and life situations, are temporary. By accepting impermanence, a grieving person can detach from unhealthy attachments and reduce emotional suffering.

In Buddhist counselling, the concept of *anicca* (impermanence) is applied to help individuals gain a deeper understanding of the transient nature of all experiences. By recognizing that all phenomena, including thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, are impermanent and in constant flux, individuals can reduce attachment to fixed identities and diminish suffering caused by clinging. Through mindfulness and insight practices, individuals are encouraged to observe their experiences without attachment, which allows them to cope with challenges more effectively and build resilience. Understanding *anicca* helps shift perspectives, leading to greater emotional balance, reduced reactivity, and a deeper acceptance of life's uncertainties, ultimately fostering mental well-being and supporting spiritual development.

1. Understanding of non-self (*anatta*)

In Buddhist counselling, the concept of *anatta* (non-self) is applied to help individuals understand the impermanent and illusory nature of the self. By recognizing that the self is not a permanent entity but a collection of changing processes, individuals can reduce attachment to fixed identities and diminish suffering. The practice emphasizes the dissolution of ego-centric views and encourages a deeper understanding of impermanence, fostering emotional balance and clarity. This approach contributes to mental well-being by promoting insight into the transient nature of selfhood and the alleviation of self-centred attachments.

The Story Backgrounds

In *Theravāda* tradition, there is a story that is known as a woman being pointed out to remember her situation every time that many different kinds of suffering are to become faced. It is Paṭācārātherī (*Trans. by Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs, p.228-231*).

The story begins with a past life in which the woman encounters a Buddha, *Padumuttara*, who praises a modest and disciplined Buddhist nun. inspired by this, she vows to follow a similar path, and the Buddha predicts that in a future life, she will be a follower of another Buddha, Gotama. In that life, she is born as the daughter of a

king and, after listening to the teachings of the Buddha Kassapa, she chooses to seek ordination but is delayed by her father's refusal. She and her sisters practice celibacy and devotion for thousands of years.

In another life, she is born into a wealthy family in sāvatthi, living in comfort and luxury. However, her life takes a tragic turn. One day, her husband embarks on a journey, leaving her alone. While he is away, she experiences intense labor pains, and the moment she goes into childbirth, a heavy rainstorm arises. During this tumultuous time, her husband, who had gone in search of grass, is bitten and killed by a snake. Alone and in severe pain, she struggles to give birth to her first son. Soon after, she sets out to visit her parents, but her journey is fraught with hardship.

While crossing a river to reach her relatives, she carries her newborn son in her arms, but tragedy strikes again. an osprey swoops down and carries away her child, and the current of the river sweeps away her other son, both of whom she loses in an instant. Overcome with grief and helplessness, she continues her journey to sāvatthi, only to hear that her entire family, her parents and siblings have perished in a fire, their bodies burned on a single pyre. Devastated by the losses, she is consumed by sorrow and despair, unable to bear the weight of her suffering. in this state of profound grief, she encounters the Buddha Gotama, who, seeing her distress, advises her not to cling to the impermanence of life. He teaches her that all things such family, possessions, even life itself are transient and subject to death, and that it is futile to torment herself over what is lost. His words bring her a sense of clarity and peace, and she begins to understand the nature of suffering and impermanence.

Upon reflecting deeply on the Buddha's teachings, she reaches the first stage of enlightenment, overcoming her grief and attachment to the fleeting world around her. This marks the beginning of her transformative spiritual journey, leading her towards the ultimate goal of liberation.

She continues her spiritual journey, eventually becoming an arahant through diligent practice and the teachings of the Buddha. She masters supernatural powers and the 'Three Knowledges,' including the ability to recall past lives and see into the minds of others. The Buddha praises her for her purity, discipline, and wisdom, declaring her foremost among those who follow the discipline of the monastic life.

In the end, she reflects on the fulfillment of her spiritual journey, having severed all ties to worldly existence and defilements. She is free from all attachments and has achieved the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice: the destruction of all fetters and the attainment of complete liberation.

Reviews on the Story

The narrative of Paṭācārātherī life from tragedy to spiritual enlightenment is not just an exemplary story of Buddhist practice but also a profound case study of

how Buddhist counselling psychology can be applied to deeply rooted psychological suffering. Her journey reflects the universal human struggle with loss, attachment, and emotional turmoil, and how Buddhism, particularly through the framework of counselling psychology, offers tools to transcend these afflictions. The Buddhist counselling approach provides a unique model for transforming unwholesome mental states into positive, skilful thoughts that lead to greater peace and happiness. Her story, from the perspective of Buddhist counselling psychology highlights significant insights into transforming grief and emotional suffering through mindfulness, cognitive reconditioning, and the cultivation of compassion and wisdom.

Analysis of the Story

The story begins with profound emotional trauma. Her attachment to her family and her sense of self are shattered by the loss of her children and family. From a psychological perspective, this is a classic case of attachment-related trauma. Her grief and confusion reflect the deep cognitive distortion that attachment can cause. In Buddhist terms, attachment generates mental states rooted in desire (*taṇhā*) and identification with transient phenomena, leading to profound suffering.

Her encounter with the Buddha represents a shift in cognitive perspective. The Buddha's teachings on impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*), offer her a cognitive framework that challenges her previous attachment-based thinking. The Buddha teaches her that her grief is not a personal failing, but a natural consequence of attachment to things that are impermanent. This teaching introduces the Buddhist counselling approach of using mindfulness and insight to recognize the transient nature of life's experiences, encouraging acceptance rather than resistance to what arises.

Then the Teacher said this to me:
“Do not grieve, child; breathe easily.
You should search after your own self;
why uselessly torment yourself?
There are no sons to give shelter,
not fathers nor even kinsmen.
There is no shelter with kinsmen
when one's seized by the end-maker.”

(*Apadānapāli-II*, 500-501; trans. by Jonathan S. Walters: <https://suttacentral.net/thi-ap20/en/walters?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>)

“Do not grieve, child; breathe easily.”

The Buddha’s first instruction is to encourage her to release grief and calm the mind. This is aligned with the practice of mindfulness and equanimity in Buddhist teachings. Grief often arises from attachment and ignorance of the impermanent nature of all things. By asking her to breathe easily, the Buddha encourages a sense of inner peace and present moment awareness, which helps to detach from the overwhelming emotional response to loss.

“You should search after your own self; why uselessly torment yourself?”

According to the passage, the Buddha advises her to look inward and search for the true self. The question “why torment yourself?” is a reflection on the destructive nature of attachment and clinging. In Buddhist counselling, individuals are guided to recognize how their suffering is often a result of identifying with a fixed sense of self and clinging to impermanent things. Letting go of these attachments leads to freedom from self-inflicted suffering. Subjected to the torment of death and having departed to the afterlife, among those beings, neither mother nor father can protect or save their children from the peril of death, nor can relatives rescue their kin from the same fate. There are two arrows, one is physical pain, the other is mental pain. The mental pain comes from the way you relate to the physical pain (*Salla sutta* of *Suttanipāṭapāḷi* 371). Here, the Buddha suggests that mental suffering is often self-inflicted through attachment and resistance.

“There are no sons to give shelter, not fathers nor even kinsmen.”

This statement shows that the Buddha points out that external sources of support such as family and loved ones are impermanent and unable to provide true security in the face of life’s ultimate reality: death. This echoes the Buddhist understanding of impermanence: nothing in the material world can offer lasting shelter or protection. This teaching encourages letting go of attachments to worldly relationships, understanding that while these are valuable, they cannot prevent suffering or death. In counselling, this could help individuals shift their focus from external dependency to developing inner strength through spiritual practice and mindfulness. In *the Dhammapada* (62, *Bāla vagga*), the Buddha says:

“I have sons, I have wealth” – with such thoughts the fool is troubled.

Indeed, he himself is not his own, how much less sons and wealth?

The wise man should not take refuge in a home or a family, for in the end, death will come to take them. When one correctly understands the nature of impermanence, the suffering that arises from clinging to things that are misperceived as permanent ceases to occur.

“There is no shelter with kinsmen when one’s seized by the end-maker.”

In this context, the “end-maker” refers to death, which is inevitable for all beings. The Buddha reminds *Paṭācārā* that, ultimately, no one can escape death, and even the closest family members cannot protect you from this universal truth. “*Natthi jātassa amaranam*, which means there is no death for one who is born,” it is mentioned in *Mahāgovinda sutta* in *Mahāvagga Pāḷi* (DN 197). This teaching helps individuals confront their fear of death and realize the importance of spiritual practice over clinging to the idea that family, wealth, or status can offer eternal protection.

According to *Ekanipātapāḷi*, the Buddha exhorts monks to do contemplating death over and over again. By doing thus there would make such many benefits as being free from attachment, realizing the truth of the nature, and attaining liberation, *nibbāna* (AN 32). Reflecting on death, or *Maraṇānussati*, is a core practice in Buddhist counselling (*Analayo* 97-116). This perspective leads to a more balanced view of life, where individuals can focus on cultivating wisdom, compassion, and mental clarity to face suffering with resilience. In the *Sabbāsava sutta* (MN 2), the Buddha explains: “The householder who is attached to the five senses is heading toward death, just as a flower wilts.”

In this passage the Buddha’s advice highlights key Buddhist concepts: impermanence, non-self, and letting go of attachments. These teachings from the foundation of Buddhist counselling, where individuals are encouraged to:

1. Release attachment to grief and emotions through mindfulness and equanimity.
2. Seek inner peace by recognizing that attachment to the self leads to suffering.
3. Understand the impermanence of life, including the inability of external relationships to offer permanent refuge.
4. Cultivate wisdom to confront death and suffering with peace and acceptance.

Through these teachings, individuals can develop resilience, find inner peace,

and ultimately liberate themselves from the cycle of suffering.

Contemplation of death serves as a catalyst for deeper understanding and detachment. New findings in contemporary Buddhist counselling align with Paṭācārā's story, particularly in the areas of cognitive restructuring, emotional resilience, and the cultivation of equanimity, compassion and mindfulness. These elements are central to Buddhist psychological practices and offer valuable therapeutic tools for modern counselling approaches.

Conclusion

The analysis of Paṭācārā's journey provides deeper insights into how Buddhist counselling psychology addresses the roots of suffering, particularly through the transformation of thoughts and emotions. Her story serves as a model for Buddhist counselling in practice, showing how impermanence and non-attachment lead to the cessation of suffering, as well as it serves as a reminder that true healing comes from recognizing the nature of suffering and transforming our attachment to it. The Buddha contextualized her grief by asking, "How many in this world have lost children?" _ revealing the universality of loss (*dukkha*). He redirected her focus from past trauma to the present moment, anchoring her in sati (mindfulness). The Buddha's guidance is an example of how mindfulness and insight can be applied in counselling to help individuals overcome grief, attachment, and emotional suffering. Her eventual peace and liberation highlight the therapeutic potential of Buddhist principles in healing emotional pain, rooted in the teachings of impermanence and non-self.

In the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, the Buddha, until His final moments before passing away (*parinibbāna*), consistently instructed living beings to maintain Whether or not there are physical and mental problems as well as social problems and so on, cultivating the mindfulness is very important. In addressing various problems, it is more effective to cultivate mindfulness before any issues arise, rather than being mindful only when confronted with difficulties. It is better to eliminate the root causes of problems rather than merely dealing with their consequences. Therefore, the Buddha earnestly and emphatically instructed His followers to maintain constant mindfulness. It would not be inaccurate to state that the therapeutic techniques in Buddhism are fundamentally grounded in mindfulness.

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