Strong Case for a Strange Merger


Reviewed by Curt Gentry

A NY psychologist, even twenty years ago, would have been greatly surprised—or shocked—to find his colleagues interested in a 'mythical' religious system such as Zen Buddhism. He would have been even more surprised to find that most of them were not just 'interested' but deeply concerned.

Thus Erich Fromm introduces the fascinating, and in many ways ironic, meeting of psychoanalysis and Zen. Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis is composed of a series of talks given at a psychoanalytic workshop in Mexico in 1957. Dr. Suzuki presents a strong case for consideration of Zen as a modern mode of enlightenment; Dr. Fromm considers what Zen can mean to psychoanalysis; and Richard De Martino, with experience in both fields, discusses the benefits and problems, both theoretical and operational, of this merger.

Though perhaps the most common word in this book, the joint findings indicate an auspicious beginning. Zen and Psychoanalysis have common goals, the authors find; their points of agreement are stronger than those of difference; and in the words of Dr. Fromm, it seems possible that "Zen thought will deepen and widen the horizon of the psychoanalyst and help arrive at a radical concept of the grasp of reality which is the ultimate aim of full, conscious awareness."
Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism, common ethical orientation, 123-24; common insistence on independence from authority, 124-26; common method in, 126; common need for a guide, 124-26; differences of, 77. Psychoanalyst, role of, 111-13. Puritan ethics, aims of, 81. 

In relating Zen Buddhism to psychoanalysis, one discusses two systems, both dealing with a theory concerned with the nature of man and with a practice leading to his well-being. Each is a characteristic expression of Eastern and Western thought, respectively. Zen Buddhism is a blending of Indian rationality and abstraction with Chinese concreteness and realism.