

An Eastern Approach to Psychotherapy: Taopsychotherapy with Ramana Maharshi's Self-Enquiry

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Abstract

The ultimate goal of a human being's life is attaining *Mokṣa* [liberation], which is being as the Self, however *Samskāra* [mental impression] acts as an obstacle when attempting to achieve this goal. The root of *Samskāra* is *nuclear feeling*, a major feeling which influences one's entire life, even though it was formed in the past. To eliminate this nuclear feeling, it is essential to practice *taopsychotherapy*, which was founded in the Eastern Tao (Confucianism, Buddhism, Laotzu and Chuangtzu) and merged with Western psychotherapy. Taopsychotherapy also helps one to successfully practice Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry, which is the direct path to remain in the Self. In this paper, it presents the theoretical and the practical aspects of taopsychotherapy. The aim of this paper is to show that only when one's nuclear feeling is removed through taopsychotherapy, one can effectively practice Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry that will eventually lead one to realize the Self.

Keywords: Tao, Taopsychotherapy, Nuclear feeling, West and East

1. Introduction

All human beings consciously and unconsciously have a deep desire to be happy and eliminate their suffering. As a result, the interest towards Yoga, meditation, the spiritual field, etc., has immensely increased with the hopes of eliminating this suffering. Furthermore, the significance of Indian traditional meditation practices is getting noticeable attention worldwide.

The final goal of meditation is to achieve *Mokṣa* [liberation] and one effective meditation practice is Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry, a powerful practice to be as the Self with a firm realization "I am already That." The real nature of a human being is already "that" in the here and now, but the ego has a constant tendency to go back to the past and to unconsciously repeat certain pattern that habitually causes them to suffer.

This tendency is because of their *Samskāra* which is the Sanskrit term, and although it has various meanings according to the context in Indian philosophy, it is generally defined as "mental impression, recollection" (Monier-Williams, 1899, p.1120) and "disposition" (Khand, 2016, p.500). A human being is born with his *Samskāra* (Sivananda, 1998, p.56), and every action, thought and experience of each being will leave a *Samskāra* (Najemy, 2005, p.139), which remains in his subconscious or unconscious mind (Doner, 2016, p.37). The process of a formation of *Samskāra*, according to Sivananda, is that as soon as one experiences something new, one gets the knowledge of this experience, and the *Samskāra* of this experience is immediately formed in the mind. *Samskāra* then generates a memory of a particular experience (1998, p.54). *Samskāra* surfaces in the future when it is stimulated by a certain circumstance, and further creates "emotional and mental trigger buttons," which propels one to repeat the same pattern again and again until one is released from this *Samskāra* (Doner, 2016, p.38). It will continue to influence one's entire life, nature, and state of mind (Kapoor, 2002, p.7813).

According to Kim, these aspects of *Samskāra* are similar to a *nuclear feeling* because it is the root of *Samskāra*. A nuclear feeling is the core feeling that is formed in the there and then, which unconsciously influences one's entire life (Kim, 2006, p.220). Moreover, this feeling blocks one to be as the Self because if the practitioner's nuclear feeling is not burnt, he constantly gets distracted to be here and now or generates somatization by his nuclear feeling, and further he is unable to deeply concentrate on the state of the Self (Kim, personal communication, April 27, 2017). However, when his nuclear feeling is sufficiently dealt with, he becomes aware of the repeated past patterns of his *Samskāra* and stops being in the past by returning back to the present (Rhee, 2004, p.27; Rhee, 2009, p.45). It means that he is able to efficaciously practice Ramana's Self-enquiry because the outcome of this practice is dependent on his ego strength, and as a result, this ego strength becomes stronger when the strength of his nuclear feeling becomes weaker.

Sivananda (1998) mentioned that the purpose of *sadhaka* [a spiritual practitioner] is to burn all the *Samskāras* because when the practitioner completely burns his *Samskāra*, it leads him to *Mokṣa* (p.56). It shows that he must eliminate his nuclear feeling first to achieve this goal. Obliteration of the nuclear feeling can be done by *taopsychotherapy*, a unique Korean psychotherapy practice which is based on the Eastern Tao and fused with Western psychotherapy, founded by a respected psychiatrist Dr. Rhee Dongshick and developed by a prominent psychotherapist Prof. Kim Kyeungmin.

According to Rhee (2004), the core essence of taopsychotherapy is to "bring spring to the patient who is

shivering in a frozen land" (p.19). It means that the practitioner who is struggling in his life due to his nuclear feeling can be released by taops psychotherapy. Otherwise, he will suffer due to his inability to freely express his feelings or continue to not be aware of his feelings while living his life according to this nuclear feeling (Rhee, 2009, pp.44-45). Hence, the purpose of this paper is to prove that when one's nuclear feeling, or the root of *Samskāra*, is eliminated with the help of taops psychotherapy, one can practice Ramana's Self-enquiry more effortlessly, allowing one to finally abide as the Self in the here and now. For that, the author would like to introduce taops psychotherapy and its specific practical process.

2. The Theoretical Aspect of Taops psychotherapy

Rhee Dongshick, a Korean psychiatrist who was in the United States for undertaking his psychiatric residency studying psychoanalysis from 1954 to 1958, was influenced by prominent Western psychoanalysts, existential, and phenomenological philosophers. But, in the 1960's, he also started studying his own religious and cultural traditions including Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc. Since he founded taops psychotherapy in 1974, he has actively developed and shared this therapy for those who are in need of it (Craig, 2007, pp.120-121). Taops psychotherapy has been remarkably effective in the Korean psychotherapy field.

Furthermore, Kim Kyeungmin, an influential psychotherapist and a Professor at Self counseling graduate school in Korea, has systematized the taops psychotherapy program into a comprehensive and practical method that merges with Ramana's Self-enquiry. It now has been around for over 30 years and his work continues to contribute to the development of taops psychotherapy.

2.1 Meaning and Definition of Nuclear Feeling

Rhee used the word nuclear feeling for the first time in his research paper "*한국인 정신치료에 관한 연구* [Research on the Psychotherapy for Koreans]" in 1970 (2009, p.21), and it has been officially known as taops psychotherapy since 2002.

Rhee (2004) illustrated the historical background of taops psychotherapy as follows:

In 1960 one of my patient, 31 years old business tycoon (chebol) told me that he found his nucleus even when he drank a glass of water and a few years later when I saw a film of interview of Miss Mun by Carl Rogers, I observed Miss Mun was reproducing her Nuclear Feelings on the spot. When I was reading 'Letters' of Tahui who is the great Sun master of Song dynasty in China 12th century, I came across the words "When you remove 'something stuck in your chest(碍膈之物),' you are enlightened." (p.20)

Here, "something stuck in your chest (碍膈之物)" is the same as nuclear feeling, and Rhee explicitly defined it as "a highly charged affective complex originating in childhood as a primary motivational influence throughout one's life" (Craig, 2007, p.124).

Rhee mentioned that in Western psychoanalysis and psychotherapies, there are similar terms of nuclear feeling, namely, complex (Jung), central conflict, central issues, nuclear dynamics, central nuclear dynamics, major motivation, nuclear emotional constellation and core emotion. However, these are just "objective descriptions" unlike the term nuclear feeling which is a "subjectively felt emotion," because nuclear feeling is not something that can be transmitted by words, but it is something that can only be felt by the empathy of one's heart (2004, p.20).

This feeling is usually formed when one's desire of getting love or of being recognized are not met by one's "major subject" (e.g. one's parent) who has influenced one's childhood for the first time. Due to the deep emotional connection with the mother, one's major subject usually becomes the mother (East & West Psychotherapy Center [EWPC], 2013, pp.24-25, 138; Rhee, 2009, p.65). Kim noted that one's nuclear feeling is usually formed at the time of one's prenatal life because one's emotional relationship and emotional pattern with one's mother begins from this period of time. When one interacts with others by one's nuclear feeling, one recreates the relationship pattern between oneself and others. Eventually, one's nuclear feeling unconsciously and continuously influences one's entire life (EWPC, 2013, pp.25-26), which includes one's action, namely, one's speech, behavior, thought, emotions, etc., arising in every single moment.

There is a proverb "What is learned in the cradle is carried to the grave." It means early association and learning of the child strongly influence the personality of the adult (Rubinstein, 2014, p.68), and a habit that was formed in childhood may be hard to change in adulthood. There is a thread of connections between this proverb and nuclear feeling because both indicate an importance of the experience in early childhood and it is a decisive factor of one's character formation (EWPC, 2013, pp.24-25).

When a pregnant woman is dominated by a depressive emotion because of having trouble with her husband, her unborn child could feel her depressive emotion while residing in the womb. Then, there is an increased possibility that her baby will develop a nuclear feeling such as sadness that will affect her child's entire life (EWPC, 2013, pp.26-27). This can be taken as an example of how nuclear feeling is formed.

Nuclear feeling is something that is unsolved since one's childhood that makes one unnatural and

uncomfortable. This feeling may seem real in one's experience due to its strong influence but this feeling is actually illusory and non-existent. When this feeling is formed in one's past, it is a desperate struggle to survive in that moment, but it is not the same situation in the present so there is no need to hold onto one's nuclear feeling. However, one unintentionally repeats the same behavioral patterns when faced with similar situations that parallel experiences of when the nuclear feeling was built (EWPC, 2013, pp.27, 138-139).

One aspect of nuclear feeling is that it acts as two sides of a coin giving the practitioner the opportunity to experience the pain, while also using that same pain to grow, develop, and transform oneself, utilizing the energy in healthy ways that benefit the subject. The nuclear feeling becomes evident, coming up in various forms within past experiences and even though he may not be aware of it, it somehow still plays a valuable role in improving his life. The other aspect of nuclear feeling is that it blocks him from living according to his nature in the here and now, and as a result it becomes difficult to live with the burden of his past emotions. Thus, it is a matter of how he is going to use his nuclear feeling. Consequently, it is required to observe the nuclear feeling with a holistic view, and he should undoubtedly be capable of recognizing that this gives him the power in sustaining his life is a positive way (EWPC, 2013, pp.139, 221-222).

2.2 Meaning and Definition of Taopsychotherapy

According to Rhee (2004), taopsychotherapy is "the fusion of Tao with Western psychoanalysis and psychotherapies (Daseinsanalysis, Existential analysis, Client-centered therapy, Transpersonal psychotherapy and Spiritual theological psychotherapy). These Western psychotherapies are the results of the influence of the Tao and they are heading towards Tao" (p.19).

Tao, as stated by Rhee, can be described as "the reality, no projection, no transference, mature personality, no theory (concept), no technique, nondoing, emptiness, compassion, Jen, God's grace, empathy and self-control" (2004, p.19).

Rhee (2004) insisted that "the essence of the East Asian tradition is the Tao (Confucianism, Buddhism, Laotzu and Chuangtzu), in other words, purification of mind, removing complexes, pacifying the mind by accepting reality as it is, correcting cognitive distortion by removing projection" (p.21). These three kinds of Tao will be described in detail later in this paper.

The aim of taopsychotherapy is to attain empathy by eliminating one's nuclear feeling. Here, the empathy can be understood as benevolence (仁) of Confucianism, emptying mind (*śūnyatā*) of Buddhism and non-doing (*wu-wei* 無為) of Tao (Laotzu or Chuangtzu). The empathy in one will be heightened when one understands and removes one's nuclear feeling; this state is known as purification of mind (淨心) or catharsis (Rhee, 2004, p.19).

The uniqueness of taopsychotherapy is that it is mainly dealing with the instinctive, intuitive subjective feeling and the past that is alive in the present. Unlike other practices, taopsychotherapy directly works with the root of the unconscious and burning this root. It is crucial to understand how one's nuclear feeling functions in one's life as well as to accept one's past experiences as they are and embrace them. It will result in a purification of one's "negative" feelings, so one should also focus on the "positive" sides of one's nuclear feeling that firmly keeps one in the moment. Through this, the practitioner becomes free from past experiences and allows him to stay in the present, and finally, it enables him to love himself in a much "healthier" way (Kim, 2003; EWPC, 2013, p.43).

Furthermore, it is essential to practice meditation along with taopsychotherapy. Rhee agreed Georg Picht's opinion that "one cannot reach truth by theory, one needs meditation" (2004, p.20; 2009, p.30). That is why Kim's taopsychotherapy practice is significant, because he includes the meditation in this part of the practice. For this reason, Kim's five stages of taopsychotherapy practice would be helpful.

Kim viewed that the crucial point of taopsychotherapy is that this practice starts from the notion "One is already That," which is one's real nature according to Ramana's Self-enquiry. But, one repeatedly forgets one's true nature due to one's nuclear feeling, which is the root of *Samskāra*. When one removes one's nuclear feeling by practicing taopsychotherapy, one can go back to one's original nature, which is the Self (personal communication, April 27, 2017).

Rhee suggests to study Western psychotherapy to have a better understanding of the Tao and to achieve empathy. Likewise, practicing the Tao is helpful to develop one's psychotherapy practice. The crucial point here, as claimed by him, is that for removing nuclear feeling, one sees one's mind clearly with the help of one's master, but Tao practice ultimately should be done by oneself because the core teaching of Eastern philosophy is that everything starts from within. Similarly, when one practices taopsychotherapy independently, one becomes mature and automatically becomes a healer of oneself through the purification of the mind, and in this state, one will attain compassion by gaining the ability to empathize. The reason is that one can see and accept oneself as is without any distortion (projection). Therefore, the best approach for attaining empathy would be to meet a "genuine" master to comprehend one's nuclear feeling and then to merge psychotherapy into Tao practice; this holistic approach is taopsychotherapy (Kang, 2002, p.19; Kim, personal communication, April 27, 2017; Rhee, 2004, pp.21-23).

2.3 Comparison between the Western Psychotherapy and the Eastern Tao

At this point, it is necessary to show a comparison between Western psychotherapy and the Eastern Tao. It will be useful to understand the similarities and differences between the West and East, and further, to understand how Western psychotherapy merged into taopsychotherapy, which is based on Eastern Tao.

Rhee introduced some Western psychotherapists named F. Alexander, L. J. Saul, C. Rogers, and P. A. Dewald., who have similar concepts to nuclear feeling, the essence of taopsychotherapy.

Alexander's corrective emotional experience in 1946 is also helpful in understanding the concept of nuclear feeling. It means that the therapist stimulates the client to have transference towards the therapist to re-experience the client's past. The therapist should provide a warm and friendly environment to expose the client to a new, positive emotional experience that the client has never experienced before. This experience helps to redirect the client's previous traumatic experience, and further, to make the client realize that this tough emotion is because of the past emotional experience, and it is no longer appropriate for the present moment (EWPC, 2013, pp.37-38).

Rhee (2009) indicated that Saul, a psychotherapist, has the most similar concept to nuclear feeling called childhood emotional pattern (p.246). This pattern is the emotional transaction pattern with the closest person in one's childhood (0-6 years) such as the client's parent. Through this interaction, his unique emotional pattern is built up at the age of 6-7 years, and this nucleus remains in one's entire life as the same pattern. Depending on how this pattern is formed, one can be either a mature or an immature adult (Jeon, n.d.). The aim of understanding this pattern, as claimed by Saul (1980), is to recondition the client from any wrong teachings provided to him by his parents (p.335).

Rogers developed person-centered therapy, one of the humanistic approaches in the 1940s to 1950s, that promote the client's growth with the help of a careful listening technique (client centered listening) in a honest and an empathic atmosphere (Hyun *et al.*, 2008, p.577), furthermore, it aids the client to realize how his attitudes and behaviors are being affected in his life (Boy and Pine, 1963, p.16). Rhee (2004) pointed out that Rogers's therapy is similar to taopsychotherapy because it puts importance on working with the client's mind rather than just theory or technique (p.19).

Dewald, who is specialized in the field of psychoanalysis, described that the transferred core emotion is very realistic and appropriate when the client is involved with the people around him in the past, but he should not stick to the emotion that was formed in the past (Lee and Park, 2013, p.164). Dewald, also, defined that a "healthy person" is a person who is able to see reality as it is without reality distortion or illusion (Rhee, 2009, p.70). He, in addition, strongly insisted that "the patient is always right." In other words, even if the patient's symptom or subjective appeal is irrational and inappropriate from the perspective of an observer, it is an appropriate response from the patient's perspective due to his unconscious internal conflicts, which he has been experiencing and repressing in the past (Dewald, 1974/2010, pp.32-33).

These four psychotherapy theories eventually pointed out that one should realize that one's core emotion is formed in the past, and is no longer existing in the present, thus, one should break away from this delusory past emotion.

Now, it is required to comprehend the essential teachings of the three kinds of Tao (Confucianism, Buddhism and Tao). They are as follows:

In Confucianism, *The Analects of Confucius* is a collection of teachings and ideas of a Chinese philosopher Confucius (Kong Fuzi) and his contemporaries. In Analects, Confucius explained how to attain benevolence (仁) which is his central philosophy. Benevolence means one subdues one's self by controlling one's desire and returns to propriety, and one finally gets back to his "good-nature." For that, one should not do anything which is contrary to propriety (Legge, n.d., pp.155-156) and one should look for this within one's self rather than attempting to seek it outside (Rhee, 2004, p.27).

Rhee (2004) claimed that when one removes one's nuclear feeling, one becomes the sage (聖人) who "is versed in the great way, with change finds no obstacle, who can empathize with every being in the universe," and it is known as the "perfect empathy" according to Confucianism (p.22).

In Buddhism, "something stuck in your chest (碍膈之物)" is the same as nuclear feeling, which can also be understood as attachment in Buddhism. Eliminating attachment is the same as eliminating nuclear feeling, and it is the kernel of Buddha's teaching (Rhee, 2009, p.21). For that, it is essential to understand stop and seeing (止觀), which means one should not engage in the "outside appearance" but instead should illumine one's own mind (不取外相 自心返照) (Rhee, 2004, p.26). In other words, it indicates that the practitioner must correct his cognitive distortion with the help of the purification of mind (Rhee, 2004, p.26). This purification of mind (淨心) comes when his nuclear feeling is removed leading to an "emptying mind" (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*; Pali: *suññatā*), which is the state where everything is empty of intrinsic nature (Shonin, Van Gordon, Singh, and Griffiths, 2015, p.159). Then, he eventually becomes a Buddha (佛) who has no projection, no unconsciousness, no thought, and is always aware of his mind. Thus, it is possible to see things as they are without any distortion and is the

ultimate goal of Tao practice (Rhee, 2004, pp.26-27).

One, according to Laotzu's text that is a representative Chinese text *Tao Te Ching* [The Classic of the Way's Virtues], can "reach" the Tao by practicing "non-doing (*wu-wei* 無為)" and "is thus-of-himself (*ziran* 自然)" (Major, Queen, Meyer, and Roth, trans. 2010, p.210). The definition for the term *wu-wei* is beyond name and form. The reality is that there is no subject or object and not doing or having (Kang, 2002, p.19). The meaning of the term *wu-wei ziran* (無為 自然) is that when one gets rid of pretense and artificiality, one regains one's original nature through purification of oneself. When one reaches to this state, one becomes "perfect or a true man (真人)" (Moo A, 2007; Rhee, 2004, p.22). Tao is the way of "well-being," and Chuangtzu developed Laotzu's teaching further.

Rhee (2004), to explain the central teaching of Tao, quoted Laotzu's saying that "The student learns by daily increment. The Tao is gained by daily loss. Loss upon loss until it comes to *wu-wei* (doing nothing)" (p.26). In other words, it means that when one studies theory or "conceptual knowledge," one's knowledge increases day by day. But, in the Tao, theory and concepts are just "means to point at reality." When one practices Tao, one loses one's "neurotic motivation" until it is completely lost, and this is known as *wu-wei*, non-doing (Rhee, 2004, p.26).

Rhee (2004) explains the reason why the West and the East lean toward different directions. Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* stated that "Knowledge is an illusion. You have to die to reach the truth" (p.20), and further Socrates said that "Death is the separating of soul from body" (Rhee, 2004, p.26). Socrates observed the limitation of the intellectual achievement in the West, and found the only way to achieve the reality was the death of a physical body because he believed that the body is the same as sensation and emotion, which are the fetters of the body that generate illusion. Only after death, one's soul could be separated from one's body to reach the ultimate truth (wisdom, reality) (2004, p.26).

Rhee (2004) further illustrates after the death of Socrates the following:

But after his death, in the Western tradition since Plato, they tried to purify the mind (catharsis) by intellectual pursuit (theory building), whereas in the East they practiced the Tao. *Nirvana* (complete liberation) is liberation from bodily shackles (which creates Illusion) while alive. Socrates believed you have to die in order to be liberated. This is the crucial difference between East and West tradition. (p.26)

From this point, Western psychotherapy was obsessed with theory and the conceptual knowledge, while the Eastern Tao was more focused on the practice and the experience.

Rhee (2004) pointed out that Western psychiatry and psychotherapy still remain imprisoned by theory and concepts that act as limitations. For instance, they are restricted by certain processes of "description, explanation, interpretation, understanding (objective observation) to empathy (subject-object congruence) but still bound to theory" (p.19). Taopsychotherapy, on the other hand, directly deals with the client's mind by the therapist's empathy without theory or technique. That is why taopsychotherapy is the "cure for addiction to theory and technique of Western psychotherapy" (Rhee, 2004, p.19). It proves that the main stream of Western psychotherapy should eventually work toward the Eastern Tao.

Similarly, Western cultures have become addicted to coming up with new words, new theories and new techniques to be recognized rather maintaining what they already have. But, in Eastern culture, they are trying to preserve and convey their traditional culture to the next generation. That is why Rhee puts an emphasis on the Eastern way (Tao), and fuses the strength of both aspects, West and East, to build the foundation of taopsychotherapy (Rhee, 2004, pp.26-28).

As mentioned above, Georg Picht emphasized on the significance of meditation. Rhee (2004) further described on Picht's comment the following:

The theory is the product of Platonic metaphysics. Theory is based on logic which is dogma. Western culture and science are the derivatives of Platonic metaphysics. Western culture and science destroy nature, society and mankind because they are based on theory which is a dogma. (p.20)

This shows the value of "direct experience" in Buddhism and according to Buddhism, "truth can be experienced not by conceptual knowledge but by Tao practice" (Rhee, 2004, p.20). So it is essential to do Tao practice and Taopsychotherapy to have a direct experience of meditation.

2.4 Human Understanding Model

To comprehend taopsychotherapy, the human understanding model must be explained. This model is designed by Kim, and it is collected from various theories of psychotherapy including taopsychotherapy and Eastern thoughts. He explained the reason why and how all sorts of conflicts, problem behaviors or symptoms from interpersonal relationship appear, and suggests the solutions to them (EWPC, 2013, pp.31-32). This process can be described by Figure 1 given below:

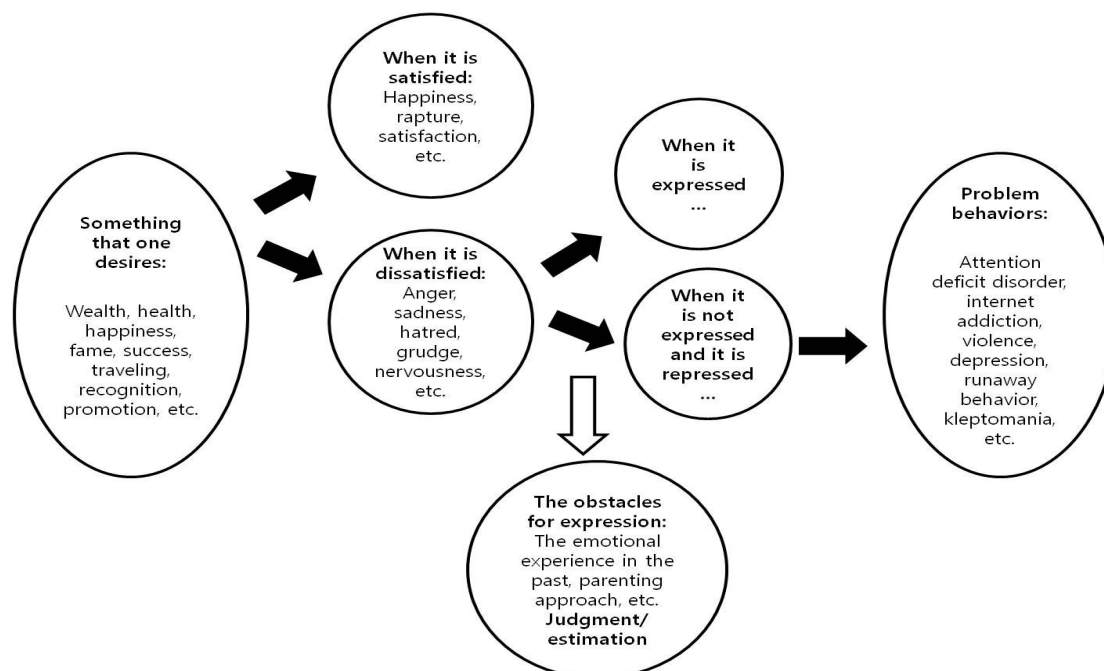


Figure 1. Human understanding model. Reprinted from *대물림되는 핵심감정* [Nuclear Feeling that is Transmitted to one's Descendants], by East & West Psychotherapy Center, April 30 2013, Copyright 2013 by East & West Psychotherapy Center.

Everyone has something different that they desire in their life. The emotional reactions can vary according to whether these desires are fulfilled or not. For instance, when one's want is fulfilled there will be happiness and satisfaction. If, on the other hand, it is not fulfilled, there will be various "negative" emotions. However, here, Kim explained that the word "negative emotion" can be misunderstood because every feeling is a human's natural reaction from the stimuli that arises from the relationship with others. However, when a negative emotion is not released, this emotion causes problems to humans. But, these emotions are natural responses and it is better to express them for one's "positive mental health" (EWPC, 2013, pp.32-33).

However, there are more cases of repressing his emotions rather than expressing his emotions. The reason is that he regards these kinds of emotions as "negative" things. The degree of expressing emotions are intimately associated with the degree of how many times he has been accepted by his major subject like his parent when he was expressing his emotions in the past. The reason is that when there is enough times he experiences being accepted by his major subject in the past, he can easily express his emotions to others in the present. If, on the other hand, he had a repeated experience of having his emotions being rejected, ignored or blamed by a major subject, he will not easily express his emotions even with other "alternative" subjects in the present (EWPC, 2013, pp.33-34).

When these unexpressed and repressed emotions are saturated, these will eventually appear as problem behaviors or symptoms. These are signals of one's desperate struggle for others to understand him, give him attention and affection to him (EWPC, 2013, pp.33-34).

To deal with these symptoms, he should have enough emotional outlets of expression, and accept his emotions as they are, without any judgment. For that, the most important quality is empathy which means that he understands and accepts himself as he is. When this happens, he who is able to now express his suppressed emotions will experience that his feeling is wholly accepted and further, he is able to sufficiently express his repressed feelings. He, eventually, will be released of the feelings that were painful, and his problematic behaviors or symptoms will automatically dissipate (EWPC, 2013, p.34).

3. The Practical Aspect of Taopsychotherapy

Taopsychotherapy practice is mainly propagated by Prof. Kim Kyeongmin. He has done a number of taopsychotherapy sessions for more than thirty years. He has been focusing on the practical aspect of taopsychotherapy and developed this practice into five stages. They are: (a) love the body and the mind, and self-love (b) discovery of nuclear feeling, (c) the burning of nuclear feeling, (d) being here and now, and (e) Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry.

3.1 Love the Body and the Mind, and Self-Love

The aim of the first stage of taopsychotherapy is to accept oneself as they are without any judgment. First of all,

loving one's body needs to be discussed. Since everyone has a body, it is the easiest way to access this practice, but at the same time one easily neglects the body. The state of the body directly influences the state of mind, and thus it is significant to have a concrete foundation and understanding of the body through careful observation (Kim, 2005).

During this stage, it is necessary to develop awareness on the five sense organs and to have a conversation with one's body. This practice aids in increasing an interest in one's body (Kim, 2005).

These processes are carried out to ultimately accept one's body as it is and to transcend one's body. A human being's body keeps changing and is impermanent. Thus, one should realize that one's body is not identical as the Self, one's true nature (Kim, 2005).

Furthermore, it is essential to be aware of and to love one's mind as well as pay attention to the state of one's mind and feelings to develop a keen awareness of oneself. Also, one should observe these arising mind states and feelings as they are without identifying with them (Kim, 2005). When one is able to do this, one can be in the here and now, which is the purpose of this stage.

Kim introduced the concept of self-love as an important point in this stage. This is directly related to emotional expression and can be divided into six steps as below:

The first step of self-love is paying attention to one's emotion, which is a signal from the inner self informing the status of one's state of mind. The second step is self-understanding, meaning one intellectually understands one's emotion and sees what is happening in one's mind in the present. The third step is self-acceptance, which means to accept one's emotions without suppression, truly feeling it from one's heart that is beyond any kind of intellectual understanding. The fourth step self-expression is to feel and to express the emotion that arises within one's inner self. The fifth step is self-empathy, which means accepting oneself without any judgment and embracing one's emotional reactions. The sixth step, which is self-love, then becomes possible. In this step, it requires one to be aware of, to take care of, to accept and to respect oneself. Self-love practices are the same as the process of embracing oneself who has been hurt in one's childhood, which will be discussed in the third stage of taopsychotherapy (EWPC, 2013, pp.35-39).

3.2 Discovery of Nuclear Feeling

The second stage of taopsychotherapy is the discovery of nuclear feeling, where the practitioner understands his nuclear feeling and how it is dominating in his present life. For that, he has to look back upon his whole life. It is significant to specifically take a closer look in what kind of relationship he had with his major subject and how this feeling was formed, with the understanding of what kind of foundation this feeling was built upon (EWPC, 2013, p.41).

First of all, he must focus on a certain sensation or the feeling to discover his nuclear feeling. It should be naturally linked from a past experience, which is repeated in the present. After focusing on the feeling that arises in the present moment, one should work on the feeling that is frequently repeated, the feeling that makes him struggle, or the feeling that rises when he is not recognized or does not receive love by his closest person (EWPC, 2013, pp.166-167). Kim suggested several approaches that would make the discovery of the nuclear feeling much easier, and they are as follows:

The first way is through the first memory and the initial memory. The first memory is the oldest memory that one remembers about a specific incident with a particular person from one's childhood. This memory is meaningful because one still remembers it after many years of its occurrence. It is necessary to carefully specify the situation or the related person in the memory, because this memory could be directly linked to one's nuclear feeling (EWPC, 2013, p.147).

The second approach to find a nuclear feeling is from the dream that has been repeated since his childhood. Dreams reflect any repressed thoughts and emotions from a situation, which one has faced in the past, and it is a symbolic image of one's major emotion. He unconsciously expresses his repressed emotions and thoughts that were formed when his desire was unfulfilled and unexpressed in his reality through his dreams (EWPC, 2013, pp.148-149).

The third point is the favorite song. Another way to express his emotion is singing a song. In general, he unconsciously chooses a favorite song that contains his unexpressed story or feeling, which reveals his suppressed emotion. Thus, the favorite song can be a good tool in finding his nuclear feeling (EWPC, 2013, pp.149-150).

The last approach for knowing one's nuclear feeling is through one's hobby or job. When one chooses a hobby or job, one is influenced by one's nuclear feeling. Also, it is highly possible that the major emotion that arises in one's hobby or job is usually related with one's nuclear feeling (EWPC, 2013, p.151).

After these kinds of practices, if one is able to identify one's nuclear feeling in a single word of emotion when looking back at one's entire life until now, that is one's nuclear feeling (EWPC, 2013, pp.166-167).

3.3 The Burning of Nuclear Feeling

In the previous stage, the practitioner discovers one's nuclear feeling and carefully investigates how this nuclear feeling is formed under different circumstances. Following which, it is crucial to burn this nuclear feeling and be released from past experiences. The burning of nuclear feeling is the process of pacifying and embracing one's *traumatic past self* that has been developed in early childhood. When one starts looking for support and love from one's major subject during early childhood (e.g. one's parent), but instead gets hurt because one's desires were not fulfilled, the nuclear feeling strengthens. Especially, since one was too young and weak during one's childhood (Kim, 2006, p.228).

It is important that the practitioner begins to have a conversation with his traumatic past self, and for that, he must empathize with the traumatic past self's feeling, which arose in the past. It is also important to loudly express it with the use of speech, thought or feeling that he could not reveal to his major subject before when he was in the environment which stimulated the formation of his nuclear feeling (EWPC, 2013, p.191).

In the present, he does not need to live as the past self anymore, but due to nuclear feeling, he keeps going back to the past and attempts to receive that love and recognition that was once left unfulfilled from that major subject. To not repeat the same patterns, he should re-experience his traumatic past and the emotional relationship with the past subject who is still alive in his mind. For that, he must take care of his traumatic past self on his own because that care cannot be given by any other person (EWPC, 2013, pp.192-193).

A practitioner, further, writes a letter to his own traumatic past self, because expressing through writing makes it easier to burn the nuclear feeling. When he writes, he should refer to his traumatic past self and should particularly express what he wanted to say or what he thought at that time. This work can be done alone because he is the only one capable of fully understanding his traumatic past self. For that, he should deeply focus upon his traumatic past self, because he can be liberated from his nuclear feeling only when this past self's hard feeling is properly burnt (EWPC, 2013, pp.194-195).

Thus, he must understand, recognize and accept his traumatic past self who could not express anything to anyone and who could not be understood by anyone. For that, it is significant to have self-empathy towards his traumatic past self and to empathize with all past aspects of his life, while also accepting his whole existence as it is. Eventually, it becomes possible for him to stand by himself as a whole and to truly love himself. When he observes how this feeling is functioning every moment with full awareness, it will slowly fade away, and finally, his nuclear feeling will be eliminated (EWPC, 2013, pp.189-191, 202-206).

Through this process, he is finally able to love himself, and when he sufficiently loves himself, then the light of his true nature Self, will be revealed. The Self is the root of life and its existence itself is natural, comfortable and peaceful. As a result, the stage of burning nuclear feeling should be accompanied with the illumination of the Self, along with happiness and healthy energy (EWPC, 2013, p.189).

3.4 *Being Here and Now*

The core point of this stage being here and now is to understand how nuclear feeling is alive in the present and influencing one's life, so one can return back from one's nuclear feeling to reside in the Self in the here and now. Even if one lives for 70 to 80 years, this lifetime is formed by a collection of moments that occur every day, so it is important that one lives in the present. However, one's nuclear feeling prevents one from living in the here and now and observing the present as it is. Even though one is physically present, one's nuclear feeling influences one's mind, thought, and behavior to selectively see the present situation through the lens of the past, which leads to one's suffering. To escape from this situation, one must observe every single thought, feeling and sensation etc., which are experienced by one in the present moment. When one becomes a seer, then one can be here and now, and this state is known as "positive mental health" (EWPC, 2013, pp.126-127, 139).

Also, the practitioner should stop judging and selectively choosing what he likes and does not like about himself but should instead meet himself as he is. He, further, must not be attached with his past self, because it is not his true self, for the past is merely an experience that he had undergone during his life. The past is already gone and it is not of existence anymore in the present (EWPC, 2013, pp.128-129). After these practices, he will be able to live here and now and be free from his past.

3.5 *Ramana Maharshi's Self-Enquiry*

The last stage of taopsychotherapy practice by Kim is Ramana's Self-enquiry. This stage is in the extension of the previous stage, being here and now. When the strength of a practitioner's nuclear feeling becomes weaker and his self-awareness becomes stronger, with the help of the earlier four stages of taopsychotherapy, he must practice Ramana's Self-enquiry to abide as the Self. The reason is that it aids him to discriminate between the "real Self" and "non-self" like his ego, body, etc. (Mlecko, 1975, p.148), and as a result, he will be less influenced by his nuclear feeling. Then, it finally aids him to cultivate more strength in remaining as the Self. That is why it is essential to practice taopsychotherapy and Ramana's Self-enquiry together.

Ramana is the traditional Indian master who used to keep inner silence as his teaching. Ramana's Self-enquiry is one of the ancient meditation practices in India, and it is a direct, powerful path to the Self (Mc Martin,

2005, p.159).

First, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the Self. Ramana stated that the best definition of Self is "I am that I am" (Mc Martin, 2005, p.57). It can also be called the "Supreme Being," "pure consciousness," "immortality," "the only reality," etc. (Mc Martin, 2005). The crucial point here according to Ramana is that Self is not something to realize anew because he is already "that" (Venkataramiah, 2006, p.422).

The process of Ramana's Self-enquiry is briefly described as follows. When he asks the query "Who am I?," he emphasizes that the ego will begin to sink. In this practice, it is required to concentrate on the "I"-thought, the origin of all activities of his body and mind. When any sort of thought rises, he must observe the rising thought as it is without any discrimination. After that, he should immediately enquire "From whom did it rise?" and the answer would be raised as "From me." Further, he again asks "Who am I?," and then, the thought that arose will disappear. When he constantly practices this enquiry, his ego will return to his source and all other thoughts will automatically vanish. This question will ultimately destroy itself because it is just used as a device to discriminate the Self from non-self. Finally, his ego will merge to his true nature and the Self will be the only one that remains (Godman, 1992, pp.54-56; Kim, B., and Kim, K., 1999, p.126).

4. Conclusion

The foundation of taopsychotherapy is the Tao (Confucianism, Buddhism, Laotzu and Chuangtzu) an Eastern approach that merged with Western psychotherapy, so this practice contains the essence of both Eastern and Western components.

Due to the nuclear feeling, one's awareness of the Self becomes weaker and it prevents one from being in here and now. Although one is already that, one forgets the Self due to one's *Samskāra* and identifies oneself as the ego. However, one consciously or unconsciously tries to escape persistently from one's *Samskāra* and tries to seek one's true nature during one's life time.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to introduce taopsychotherapy, which aids one to be free from one's *Samskāra* after the removal of one's nuclear feeling and to effectively practice Ramana's Self-enquiry that finally leads one towards realizing the Self.

First, in this paper, meanings of nuclear feeling and taopsychotherapy have been introduced. Nuclear feeling is the core feeling which was formed in the past when one's desire to get love was unfulfilled by one's major subject like one's parent. It is crucial to remember that nuclear feeling can make one's life painful, but, at the same time, it can be the catalyst that makes one mature and stronger. When one realizes it, then one is finally able to meet and love one's true Self (EWPC, 2013, p.231).

According to taopsychotherapy, the state of elimination of one's nuclear feeling is known as the purification of mind. In this state, compassion (empathy) arises internally, and this enables one to see everything as it is without any distortion.

Further, there was a comparison between Western psychotherapy and Eastern Tao which are related to taopsychotherapy. Rhee stressed that Western psychotherapy pays too much attention to the theory and the technique, while Eastern Tao is more focused on the experience and the practice. Eventually, the essential aim of West and East are similar, where they work towards being free from past experiences and being present here and now. Thus, it is crucial to practice taopsychotherapy.

Furthermore, Kim's human understanding model was illustrated, and it showed the importance of expressing one's emotions. Moreover, the five stages of taopsychotherapy practice that was developed by Kim are described. He emphasized that when taopsychotherapy and Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry are practiced together, the most effective results can be achieved for *Mokṣa*, which is being free from the suffering and being happy.

The author, through this paper, has attempted to present the significance of practicing taopsychotherapy with Ramana's Self-enquiry. The crucial point here is to make sure that the practitioner understands taopsychotherapy as well as find it within himself to continuously practice taopsychotherapy.

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