Reviews

Books


Hayao Kawai, the first Jungian analyst to practice in Japan, in his fourth book in English describes his method of psychotherapy and examines the meaning of “I” psychologically as it relates to Buddhism. He chooses to speak of his personal experience rather than from the perspective of Buddhist doctrine or psychoanalytic theory. Kawai notes that many Japanese, even as he was, are unaware Buddhists with little reason to be aware of being a Buddhist unless there is a funeral for a family member. Kawai’s personal reminiscences of his early life are poignant and quite individual. After Japan’s defeat in World War II, he was profoundly drawn to the West and had a strong prejudice against Japanese mythology. He writes, “I liked virtually everything Western, while Japanese things seemed irrational to me.” For Kawai, his connection with Buddhism did not begin until he came to the United States. The same was true for Jungian psychology, which he came to “seemingly by chance.” It was only through personal analysis that he discovered, much to his dismay, that Japanese mythology had great meaning for him. He was further shocked by his encounter with the Western ego, which he sees as developed as if utterly distinct from all that is not “I” (i.e., everything else). For him the Japanese ego is a container and has bearing strength but does not cut like the Western ego. When he returned to Japan he refrained from publicly teaching about Jungian psychology for over ten years.

Practicing analysis in Japan, Kawai has been impressed by the dominant power of the mother archetype in the Japanese psyche. There is a much greater expectation that the analyst will be a Great Mother who can hold anything, accept everything, endlessly. Western therapeutic neutrality would be ineffective and destructive. With Japanese clients the accustomed thinking of the technological West is: if it’s broken, fix it; it simply doesn’t work. He emphasizes the centrality of just sitting together. Cure, should it come, is a byproduct of the relationship. Certainly this would be anathema to those large companies who provide “managed health care.”

The second chapter is something of a problem for me. It involves a comparison between a traditional Japanese series of pictures illustrating developments in Zen practice called “Ten Oxherding Pictures” and the Rosarium
pictures from Western alchemy. This seems forced and unconvincing. The Oxherding pictures were consciously drawn to illustrate Zen development while the Rosarium reveals an unconscious psychic process underlying what was thought to be alchemical experimentation. Interestingly, Kawai acknowledges that there is no feminine figure in the Japanese pictures. Kawai struggles with his conviction that the anima, the soul image for a man, is a woman and at the same time acknowledges the absence of such a figure in Japanese literature. The image of the "swan maiden" disappeared from Japan with the influence of Buddhism. Though his evidence is incomplete and anecdotal, he is convinced that there is a fresh movement in modern Japan toward an increased feminine consciousness (p.87).

His third chapter critiques the Western concept of the ego and presents a contrasting view developed from the Eastern perspective. While doing psychotherapy the question of "What is I?" becomes relevant when Kawai feels himself to be a stone, an animal, a patient, or a Samurai turned priest. If he is so easily so many things, one wonders who is "I"? Kawai following Hua-yen understands that "I" is basically empty and my true self does not exist in itself. Buddhism, as against natural science, which refines ordinary consciousness, is concerned to move toward negating the use of conscious discrimination. Jung was virtually alone in the West in showing that the lowering of consciousness, if pathological, has a creative and constructive role. In contrast to individuality, the Western ideal, Zen Buddhism insists people exist only in relationship and if taken out of relationship lose their "self nature," and thus cease to exist.

In the final chapter, Kawai describes his style of psychotherapy, comparing his work to the two Zen schools in Japan. Both schools focus on meditation but Soto stresses "just sitting," while Rinzai favors interviews and koans. Sometimes his approach is "just sitting" not caught in "treatment" or "solution." Other times he treats a client's symptoms like koans. Like a koan, the symptoms cannot be resolved by rational thinking and the answer must be found in one's depths. A client who has been given a koan (symptom), but with the help of the therapist turns back in another direction, abandons it in the middle, actually has a rare opportunity taken away and fails to reach the depths of the psyche. His model is not therapist facing client, thrusting interpretations, but rather the two sitting together, uttering some words, but mostly simply being there in the sorrowful center.

The overpowering feeling one gets from reading this book is that it is written by a profoundly compassionate and humble human being. His attitude of non-manipulation in therapy and "not knowing" is essentially religious. The mystery and silence in his therapeutic work stand in sharp contrast to my colleagues who make me so uneasy by their always seeming to know exactly what the problem is and how to fix it. While as a Western Christian I cannot go the whole way to the East for my sense of mystery and otherness, I can