

## **Abstract**

As a response to Dr. Patrizia Collard and James Walsh's Article „Sensory Awareness Mindfulness Training in Coaching: Accepting life's Challenges" in the JRECBT Vol. 26, Nr. 1, I correct some glaring misunderstandings about REBT and make some general comments regarding the abandonment of science in psychotherapy and ask the question of the future of REBT when we continue to accept and promote piffle.

## **Key Words**

REBT, Third wave, Mindfulness, Buddhism.

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In the new Journal of Rational Emotive & Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dr. Patrizia Collard, or how she refers to herself in the article: PC, and her colleague James Walsh, I presume he would go for JW, presented an article concerning a "new set of skills" that help clients to "in a nutshell" develop "a new lifestyle" and "way of being" (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 30). I was intrigued then disappointed, then pissed. PC and JW began by sharing their new found inspiration after have read Goleman's (2003) monograph, *Destructive emotions and how we can overcome them: A dialogue with the Dalai Lama*. The book encouraged them to challenge themselves (ourselves) to "approach therapy in new ways" (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 30). With all respect to his Holiness, the Dalai Lama and to PC and JW, what does this have to do with Psychotherapy? Indeed, PC and JW anticipated some skepticism in writing that "some people may have misgivings about bringing in largely spiritual practices into the cognitive arena of treatment" (2008, p. 31). Of course we have misgivings, because we have been educated, trained and we now practice within a verified and structured framework: psychotherapy. Velten so aptly criticized this in *Under the Influence*, by stating that there is a "departure from empiricism" in the so called Third Wave psychotherapy movements (2007, p. 215). PC and JW then posed the question: "can the scientific insights of CBT and REBT and of recent neuroscience be combined with the wisdom of the Buddha" (p. 31)? Probably not.

From my position the more proper question, especially in JRECBT would be, can Buddhists learn from the scientific insights of REBT? Very probably. "Mere speculation devoid of an empirical basis, when such is possible, will not do" (Dalai Lama, 2000, p. 61). His Holiness continues: "Basically a Buddhist attitude on any subject must be one that accords with the facts. If upon investigation, you find that there is reason and proof for a point, then you should accept it" (Dalai Lama, 1993, p. 61). Hmm, I guess that means that the Dalai Lama is more or less in our camp – the scientific and psychological camp. So why not stick with what works and is evidence based before racing off to discover something "new"; respectively, re-warming and clouding the old tried and true. Case in point, In the article PC briefly compares two existing types of mindfulness "therapies" and then describes her own beta-version, because, I suppose, it better suited her needs: "SAMT [Sensory Awareness Mindfulness Training] was developed by Patrizia Collard [PC] in 2003 as an offshoot of her own experiences and insights gained in Yoga, Meditation and mindfulness training" (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 32). "The motto was: we are all unique; your trainer cannot necessarily feel what feels right for you right now. We do not attempt to become like somebody else, but may however be able to connect fully to ourself" (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 32). I'm thinking that a good REBT course would have taught PC and JC how they could find a similar motto without sounding so cheesy.

Obviously, the motto isn't new, USA & UOA have long been REBT concepts and since 1955 Ellis has propagated the idea of living healthy, e.g., thinking rationally promotes goal attainment. (1962, 2007). Yes, but how you are wondering. If only Ellis had been more specific. Fortunately we have PC and JC to help us in discovering these mysteries:

#### Basic Attitude for Emotional Health

The following beliefs and behaviours are the concepts that will help a coachee of Mindfulness to improve her practice. They are frequently shared by the trainer while taking the participants through the exercises.

1. Non-judging attitude and acceptance: Mindfulness is cultivated by being an impartial witness to your own experience, for example, if you're watching your breath you may find your mind saying, "This is boring or I don't like this." When this happens just observe and accept it, there is no need to change anything.

2. Patience: It is a form of wisdom; it's an acceptance of the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. To be patient is to be completely open to each moment.
3. Trust: Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings. Trust your intuition rather than always looking for external guidance.
4. Non-striving/letting go: Almost everything we ever learned to do was for a purpose. Mindfulness has no goal other than for you to be yourself and be present.
5. Enlightened self-interest: We promote interaction where everyone has rights and everybody counts in order to create a world where we can, at times, live comfortably and happily (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 33).

Of course these concepts are again not new and are for all REBTers familiar, i.e., USA, UOA, HFT. I refer readers to Ellis's article: "Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and The Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Training of Jon Kabat-Zinn" (2006), for a more detailed commentary on these points. Parenthetically, I find it annoying that Ellis, among others were not accredited nor referenced to, especially in a JREBT, for their contributions on emotional health in psychotherapy; however, neither was Kabat-Zinn and they are his points! Because, Ellis himself committed on this neglect in "Reasons why Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy is Relatively Neglected in the Professional and Scientific Literature" (Ellis, 2003) and in the chapter "Future 'borrowings' from REBT that may be used without giving proper credit" (Velten, 2007), I'll stop here with this argument.

As we move ever forward toward living the JC and PW-rational life, ah I mean, healthy life, what is it that they do that REBT doesn't. "Whilst REBT, for example, helps the client to identify and change irrational patterns of thought and thus stop maladaptive behavior, mindfulness practice offers a different path into change, namely: learning to accept painful experiences can lead to transformation in itself" (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 33). Once again, not quite:

Irrational Idea No. 4: The *idea that it is awful and catastrophic when things are not the way one would very much like them to be* It is simply amazing how many millions of people on this earth are terribly upset and miserable when things are not the way they would like them to be, or when the world is the way the world is. That these people should be distinctly frustrated when they are not getting what they strongly want to get is of course normal.

1. There is no reason, why things should be different from the way they are, no matter how unfortunate or unfair their present state of existence is. And there are many reasons, especially the facts of reality

themselves, why unpleasant situations and events *are* the way they are. *Disliking* nasty people or conditions is perfectly reasonable; but *becoming seriously disturbed* because reality is reality is patently absurd. It would often *be nice* if things were different from the way they are, or if we got what we wanted out of life instead of what we actually get. But the fact that it would be nice if this were so hardly makes it so nor gives us sensible reason to cry when it is *not so*.

2. Getting enduringly or extremely upset over a given set of circumstances will rarely help us to change them for the better. On the contrary, the more upset we make ourselves over the unpleasant facts of life, the more we shall tend to become disorganized and ineffective in our efforts to improve existing conditions.

3. When things are not the way we would like them to be, we should certainly strive, and often mightily strive, to change them. But when it is impossible (for the nonce or forever) to change them as, alas, it often is the only sane thing to do is to become philosophically resigned to our fate and accept things the way they are. The fact that children, who have little ability to think philosophically, usually are unable to tolerate any amount of inevitable frustration hardly proves that adults cannot calmly do so. They can if they will work half as hard at accepting grim reality as they usually work at convincing themselves that they cannot accept it. (Ellis, 1962, p.69).

There is no mention of maladaptive behavior in there, yet a whole lot of acceptance! However, maybe PC and JW have special weapons that make such acceptance easier or more accessible than does REBT: "Mindfulness is about being fully awake, about being in the here and now, about being connected to the flow of everyday experience and enjoying a sense of oneness between mind and body" (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 33). Hmm, how does that work? PC and JW used the following methods in their experimental group: sound meditation, power of breathing and body scan mediation (Collard & Walsh, 2008, p. 34). I'm speechless... almost.

"My experience is that it [mental peace] is obtained mainly through reasoning. Mediation doesn't help much" (Dalia Lama, 1993, p. 93). Maybe he hasn't tried using sound in his meditation exercises. Sound meditation, power of breathing and body scan mediation may all be well and good for even most people; however, how are these exercises going to help patients see a problem, emotional or otherwise, and aid them to deal with it? Indeed, "If you meditate like that [watching your mind] during the meditation period you may find mental peace, or some kind of realization, but that may simply be a diversion from the real problem. The problem is still there. The approach by way of reasoning is not a diversion" (Dalia Lama, 1993, p. 93). Exactly. I can

understand that these methods may be used as a periphery tool to therapy as would be progressive muscle relaxation from Jacobson (PMR), which may exclude many from within the targeted clinical population, i.e. borderline personality disorders. Yet, the question remains, how are these “new set of skills” that help clients to “in a nutshell” develop “a new lifestyle” and “way of being” (Collard and Walsh, 2008, p. 30) going to help patients change and manage their ways that make themselves disturbed in difficult situations, which our patients are often in, due to their psychological disorders.

Again Ellis states, “Biological tendencies, environmental conditions, and social conditions all contribute to the reasons why people become upset or disturbed”, “REBT focuses primarily on the cognitive elements of disturbance because changing a core belief can subsequently cause profound improvements emotionally and behaviorally” (2005, p. 47). Ellis further rightfully states that when clients come to psychotherapy they want to relieve presenting symptoms (2005, p. 38). “Clients, when they reduce the symptoms that bother them most, can be helped to minimize related or not-so-related thoughts feelings and behaviors” (2005, p. 39). Therefore, REBT strives to help patients find ways of coping and managing their problems with regard to the biological constraint, among other factors. Of course, acceptance through a high frustration tolerance and non catastrophizign are quintessential to the process.

The strength of REBT lies again in this all encompassing scientific paradigm with the goal of helping patients to develop a new life philosophy in order to deal with all of life’s obnoxious and threatening events. Clearly, these new set of skills, which are not all that new, that promote a new lifestyle as reported by PC and JW cannot begin to contend with REBT; indeed, it isn’t even the same freaking species. PC and JW offer an exercise(s) not a holistic system of psychotherapy! I am sure that some of the nice neurotics of this world will enjoy learning these exercises for stress reduction and indeed, they may even work for most of these participants; however, because of my education and clinical experience, I highly doubt that sound meditation, power of breathing and body scan mediation among other exercises will profoundly change or even help patients or even nice neurotics to develop a new life style, e.g. new life philosophy. Indeed, and this is good: “Introspection and reasoning is more efficient for this purpose [inner awareness] than mediation and prayer” (Dalia Lama, 1995, p. 95.). Ellis could not have said it better.

## Conclusion

Dr. Patrizia Collard and James Walsh presented an article to the JRECBT boasting of new found skills and insight to be used in psychotherapy. PC and JW also made some erroneous comments about REBT along the way. And they basically tested my high frustration level in having the audacity to compare esoteric exercises such as sound meditation, power of breathing and body scan mediation, with psychotherapy, especially REBT in the REBT journal. As was stated in the above article, surely these methods work for a lot of people a lot of the time and cashing in on the Buddhist wave of tranquility is really neat. However, must such piffle be promoted in the JREBCT. Why not let Cosmo or Psychology Today earn some bucks with these new and profound skills, instead of throwing away our reputation, what is left of it!

Since Ellis has died, maybe even before, REBT seems to have lost its public defender. Emmett Velten did an excellent job in *Under the Influence*, which is highly recommended reading, especially for those of us feeling a void after Al's death and the ongoing onslaught of the so called third wave. Not having a public defender is dramatic, because obviously we are not in a position to keep up with the research undertakings of other schools of psychotherapy. Indeed it appears that we are not even in the position to keep up with the "publish-or-perish" approach of the postmodernists (Velten, 2007, p.216). Over the years we could count on Ellis to analyze and counter any attacks on REBT and to set the record straight; although mostly unacknowledged as PC and JW have well demonstrated. Many have criticized Ellis in his way of handling these issues, but as I see it, it was the only way to survive without having data in our scientific world. If we cannot find a vigorous public defender(s), we had probably, at the very least, stop pushing piffle. Otherwise, we are prematurely sealing our own grave, and that would be too bad. "If we lose our mental balance, we will not be able to work for our own benefit, let alone work for others" (Dalai Lama, 1993, p.97). Again, Al couldn't have said it better.

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