In Response

A Response to Diller and Lattal's "Radical Behaviorism and Buddhism"

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In a recent article published in *The Behavior Analyst*, Diller and Lattal (2008) draw comparisons between radical behaviorism and Buddhism. The authors compare these two philosophies and conclude that showing commonalities may enhance an understanding of both philosophical systems. The purpose of this paper is to provide a clearer understanding of what Buddhists refer to as enlightenment and then discuss how including a central concept of Buddhism (i.e., nondoership; nonvolitional living) may well support the argument that the systems of thought have several common themes.

In their article, Diller and Lattal (2008) state that the goal of Buddhism is for the individual to "achieve enlightenment and escape from the suffering inherent in the world" (p. 167). They also state that when the rules of the Eightfold Path are followed, "it is possible to identify the impermanent and interdependent nature of all things" (p. 167). Furthermore, they cite Mitchell (2002) and state, "Once an individual becomes enlightened, attachment to the world ceases, and craving and suffering also end" (p. 167). A closer inspection of the concept of enlightenment will yield an understanding that enlightenment is an impersonal event defined by the dissolution of the ego (the

individual; the one who is seeking). Therefore, there can be no sense of "achievement or identification with the impermanent of interdependent nature of things." The saying "there are no enlightened individuals" is applicable here (Balsekar, 2000; Liqourman, 2004).

Buddhists promote the concepts of nondoership or nonvolitional living and point out that there is "no self in the chariot" and there is no permanent individual self in humans (Balsekar, 2000). Radical behaviorists echo these statements when they state that there is not a "little person" existing within the individual who controls actions (Skinner, 1974). Furthermore, in the Buddhist literature there are common phrases such as, "thoughts without a thinker, feelings without a feeler, and actions without an actor" (Balsekar; Epstein, 1995). Balsekar summarizes the words of the Buddha to illustrate nonvolitional living: "Paradoxical though it may seem: there is a path to walk on, there is walking being done, but there is no traveler. There are deeds being done, but there is no doer" (p. 42).

Buddhists cite *mara* (illusion) as a psychological force that obstructs the apprehension of nonvolitional living. However, after the removal of *mara* and the addition of clear knowledge (*vijja*), there is the deep intuitive understanding that individuals merely respond to environmental stimuli (Balsekar, 2000), according to learning histories, environmental condi-

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tioning, and genetic tendencies (Skinner, 1974). Thus, there are no internal states that cause our behavior, there is no free will, and as Skinner (n.d.) stated, “and eventually I think we need to attribute nothing to it [free will].”

The purpose of this response is to provide supplemental material to Diller and Lattal’s (2008) original paper so the reader can gain an understanding of commonalities between Buddhism and radical behaviorism. Obviously, in a limited space, an in-depth discussion cannot be provided; however, the intention of this response is to provide the reader with a beginning understanding of these concepts.

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