Internationally renowned psychoanalyst, Neville Symington, passed away peacefully following a brief illness and hospitalisation on 3rd December 2019, in the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital, in Sydney. The Australian Association of Buddhist Counsellors and Psychotherapists (AABCAP) has lost a major supporter of our organisation from its early beginnings.

Neville was a highly respected international figure in the world of psychoanalysis. He revitalised the Australian Psychoanalytic Society from the time he moved from the Tavistock Clinic in London to Sydney in 1986. He contributed generously to Australia’s wider psychotherapeutic community, making presentations to AABCAP, Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Program (PPP), Australian Association of Group Psychotherapists (AAGP) Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Association of Australasia (PPAA), New South Wales Institute of Psychoanalytic Psychotherapists (NSWIPP), Catholic Psychotherapy Association of Australia (CPAA), etc. Neville was the recipient of the 2013 Sigourney Award. The award is given for outstanding contributions to psychoanalytic thought worldwide. Many of us benefitted from his books, journal articles, conference presentations and seminar series.

In one of his earlier books, *Emotion and Spirit* (1994), Neville expressed his strong sentiment that psychoanalysis needs religion to provide the core spiritual values that give life meaning. In the chapter on "Religious Wisdom from the East” he considered Buddhism as a practical philosophy of the mind. He asked the question by what sort of
action does a man or woman find release from suffering? He pointed out that the Buddha is clear that a person does not find nirvana through knowledge but through moral action, and Neville added that the individual has to grasp what this is, in a free act of understanding. In this book he concluded that psychoanalysis is a spirituality in the world, or a more mature religion and therefore inseparable from acts of virtue. For him, Buddhism is a mature religious philosophy similar in its value system to that of psychoanalysis.

AABCAP invited Neville as a keynote speaker on two occasions. In our 2nd Annual Conference (2008) “PATHWAYS TO LIBERATION” Neville presented a paper on “The Personal Mystery of Being.” In his summary he said: “So the psychotherapist needs to become the possession of Being, Absolute Being. As Being penetrates all the variety of everything so also his own self is interpenetrated by Being. Absolute Being. That is the first essential....The second principle is that I perceive the world according to the way my own being is constituted. I shall then see this individual that I am talking to in the light of Being which also penetrates his unique individuality as he is..... So the act of seeing has a power. It is like the laser beam, which not only lights up the door but opens it. If I can be myself, then the other can be totally herself. For me to be myself and for you to be yourselves - this is the aim of psychotherapy.”

In AABCAP’s last Conference, our 9th, held in 2018, themed “TRANSFORMING NARCISSISM: BUDDHIST and PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PERSPECTIVES,” Neville presented his keynote address “Transforming Narcissism by the Act of Understanding.” He highlighted the plight of the narcissist as someone whose source of pain and suffering comes from being utterly alone and alienated from any shared experience. Neville shared the story of a patient who was suffering from being in this isolated state and how an engagement with her opened a doorway to a new and shared experience. Often this is the transformation required in the therapy of narcissistic disorders. Neville’s perspective, akin to the Buddhist view, was that a shared experience does not cancel out suffering but enables it to be embraced as part of the human condition, a process that is inherent in both spiritual and psychotherapeutic healing traditions.

In his 2016 memoir, “A Different Path-An Emotional Autobiography,” Neville revealed that he was born into a large, close-knit, Portuguese Catholic family, of mainly British descent. In his youth he moved to England to study philosophy and theology and became a Catholic priest in East London, within a socially deprived community which he grew to love. He undertook his psychoanalytic training at the Institute of Psychoanalysis, London and qualified in Clinical Psychology. He worked in the Tavistock Clinic from 1977 until 1986 just prior to coming to Sydney.

The Buddhist psychotherapeutic sangha remembers Neville for his skilful speaking, his breadth of knowledge and experience gained from philosophy, theology, psychology and psychoanalysis. He encouraged us to exercise our freedom of thinking instead of following what was imposed on us. He gave us his time, wisdom and compassion and encouraged us to be true to ourselves. We miss his voice of awakening.

Eng-Kong Tan
Founder President, AABCAP

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