

Chapter 1

Mindfulness and Buddhist Practice

Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon and Nirbhay N. Singh

1.1 Introduction

According to historical sources, Shakyamuni Buddha, who lived and expounded spiritual teachings in India, is understood to have been born approximately 2500 years ago (Gombrich 2009). Historical sources also suggest that as part of growing into an adult, he played with other children, received an education, explored feelings of a sexual nature, and developed various interests and skills. At some point in early adult life, it appears that he experienced a yearning to embrace spirituality. At the point this desire first arose in the Buddha, he probably did not fully understand it. Although it is likely that the Buddha had been exposed to religion during his upbringing, we suspect the longing he experienced went far beyond the type of interest expressed by most religious/spiritual teachers and scholars. Consistent with the accounts of other reportedly enlightened spiritual practitioners (e.g. Milarepa 1999), it is likely that the Buddha's wish to permanently transmute suffering arose from deep within and was the result of a long-standing connection with the spiritual teachings.

The Buddha chose not to ignore the urge to spiritually awaken, and he made spiritual development his primary life objective. Consistent with the experiences of other Buddhist and non-Buddhist spiritual adepts, in the course of living and pursuing this objective, the Buddha encountered numerous adversities. However, because the Buddha's intentions were "right" (Pāli: *sammā sankappa*, Sanskrit:

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samyak-saṃkalpa), rather than deter him these challenges only cemented his spiritual competencies and convictions (Shonin and Van Gordon 2015). At some point in his life, the Buddha's commitment and efforts began to yield results. He encountered—within himself—an unremitting wealth of wisdom, spiritual energy, and love for all beings, and he eventually realised his enlightened nature.

Although the Buddha was an enlightened being, whilst he remained alive, he was also a human being. He ate, slept, walked, talked, bathed, defecated, laughed, and cried. Although not bound by his feelings, he felt happy when others were kind to each other and felt sad when he observed people behaving in a hurtful manner. He was approachable to individuals from all remits of society, and it is almost certain that he was neither aloof, clinical, nor overly solemn in the way he interacted with others.

Whilst attempting to guide individuals towards embracing the truth (Pāli: *Dhamma*, Sanskrit: *Dharma*), and whilst recollecting the condition of his own mind prior to realising its (inherent) enlightened nature, it seems that the Buddha recognised that the human mind has a propensity to be eternally distracted. Consistent with empirical research findings and contemporary clinical opinion, thought rumination and a distracted mind are not conducive for the cultivation of psychological wellbeing and invariably play a role in the onset and maintenance of mental illness (Davey 2008). Consequently, the Buddha required a method—that was easily digestible for individuals from a broad range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds—which he could teach in order to help individuals regulate maladaptive thinking patterns and introduce spiritual awareness, calm, and focus into their minds.

Based on the importance assigned to it in the canonical record of the Buddha's teachings, it appears that he deemed mindfulness (Pāli: *sati*, Sanskrit: *smṛti*) to be such a method. Mindfulness was taught by the Buddha as a core aspect of the path to awakening and as a competency to be developed and practised throughout the lifespan of the spiritual journey. The Buddha described mindfulness as the spiritual process of being fully aware of *that which is*, as opposed to *that which was* or *that which might be* (Shonin et al. 2014). The Buddha taught that when suitably developed, the concentration-regulating faculty of mindfulness: (i) gives rise to a pervasive and enduring feeling of calm and spiritual wellness, and (ii) brings the mind into a state of meditative focus that is conducive for examining and gaining insight into the nonself or empty nature of self and reality (Van Gordon et al. 2015).

This book provides a comprehensive and scholarly examination of the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness, and how they can be used to traverse the various stages and obstacles of the Buddhist spiritual path. The dialogue extends outward from an examination of the Buddhist foundational principles of mindfulness in Part One, to the application of these principles in applied and research settings in Part Two, and then in Part Three to a discussion of mindfulness in relation to a broader collection of Buddhist themes and practice traditions.

1.2 Part One

Part One of the book focusses on the relationship of mindfulness to core Buddhist teachings and principles. In the first chapter of this section (Chap. 2), William Van Gordon, Edo Shonin, Mark Griffiths, and Nirbhay Singh explore the relationship between mindfulness and the *Four Noble Truths*. The *Four Noble Truths* are recorded as being the first teaching given by the Buddha after he attained enlightenment, and they represent the foundations for the entire collection of teachings that the Buddha subsequently expounded. Chapter 2 employs logical deductive analysis in order to examine the validity and logical soundness of the *Four Noble Truths* and then discusses the relationship of mindfulness to the Four Noble Truths as a collective, and to each truth individually.

Following the dialogue on mindfulness and the *Four Noble Truths* in Chap. 2, the obvious direction for Chap. 3 is to discuss how mindfulness fits into the framework of the *Noble Eightfold Path* (which is the spiritual path referred to in the fourth of the *Four Noble Truths*). This task is undertaken by Malcolm Huxter who analyses mindfulness in relation to each aspect of the *Noble Eightfold Path*, and then discusses in-depth the meaning of *right mindfulness* (Pāli: *sammā-sati*, Sanskrit: *samyak-smṛti*) which appears as the seventh aspect of the *Noble Eightfold Path*.

The next two chapters (Chaps. 4 and 5) are written by Anālayo who examines the instructions recorded in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*—two core Buddhist teachings on mindfulness. These chapters compare the version of the *suttas* as recorded in the Pāli canon with parallel versions preserved in Chinese translation. The chapters demonstrate that by comparing and drawing on multiple historical records of these teachings, a collective and reliable wisdom emerges in terms of how to cultivate mindfulness effectively and use it as a means for traversing the path to awakening.

In Chap. 6, Steven Stanley explores the relationship between mindfulness and Buddhist ethics. He examines the ethical psychology of early Buddhism and discusses how this understanding can help inform the development of ethically sensitive mindfulness-based approaches in modern-day society. The chapter also includes a discussion of *wrong mindfulness* (Pāli: *micchā sati*, Sanskrit: *mithyā smṛti*) and shows how an understanding of the “wrong” way to practise can help prevent the development of misconceptions relating to mindfulness.

Peter Harvey undertakes the task in Chap. 7 of examining the role of mindfulness in calm (Pāli: *samatha*, Sanskrit: *śamatha*) and insight (Pāli: *vipassanā*, Sanskrit: *vipaśyanā*) meditation. The theme of Chap. 7 is particularly timely given the confusion that exists in the academic literature regarding the meaning of these different forms of Buddhist meditation. The chapter emphasises the importance and benefits of utilizing both *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation, and explicates the various functions that mindfulness performs as part of the effective practice of these different meditative modes.

The *six perfections*, which assume a central role in Mahayana Buddhist practice, are the subject of Chap. 8. Here, Karma Lekshe Tsomo examines the role of mind-

fulness in the cultivation of the *six perfections*, and she explicates how mindful practice of the *six perfections* facilitates an individual's progression through the various stages of the path to enlightenment.

Part One concludes with a contribution by Edo Shonin, William Van Gordon, Nirbhay Singh, and Mark Griffiths that examines the relationship between mindfulness and emptiness (Pāli: *suññatā*, Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*), and how these two fundamental aspects of Buddhist practice interact in order to foster spiritual awakening. In addition to elucidating the practice of *mindfulness of emptiness*, Chap. 9 introduces the idea that mindfulness is empty of intrinsic existence, and that there are risks associated with developing attachments to the practice and construct of mindfulness.

1.3 Part Two

The chapters in Part Two of the book examine how to utilise the core Buddhist principles discussed in Part One and effectively integrate them into research and applied settings. In the first chapter of Part Two (Chap. 10), Lynette Monteiro makes use of key teachings from the *Ānāpānasati* and *Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas*, as well as meditation principles underlying a number of Buddhist practice modalities, and demonstrates how these Buddhist teachings and principles can inform and enrich the content and development of secular mindfulness-based approaches.

The next chapter is written by Kaisa Puhakka who explores whether the potency of Buddhist mindfulness practice diminishes when it is adapted into forms suitable for psychological research and evidence-supported clinical practice. Chapter 11 also examines the limitations inherent within contemporary research designs and assumptions, and it discusses how these limitations often result in the various subtleties and profound aspects of Buddhist practice being overlooked.

1.4 Part Three

Part Three of the book discusses mindfulness in relation to a wider selection of Buddhist themes and modes of practice. The first chapter in Part Three (Chap. 12) examines the role of mindfulness and vigilance in Tsong-kha-pa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of Path to Enlightenment*. Tsong-kha-pa (1357–1419) was a highly acclaimed Tibetan Buddhist saint and founding figure of what became the Gelukpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. In this chapter, James Apple comments on Tsong-kha-pa's treatise and explicates how mindfulness and vigilance help to regulate mental excitement and laxity—two primary hindrances in the development of meditative serenity.

In Chap. 13, Tse-fu Kuan examines how the Buddha provided instructions on mindfulness through the use of similes. Similes were frequently employed by the

Buddha as a didactic strategy, and the chapter focuses on four different types of similes: (i) prevention, (ii) healing, (iii) binding, and (iv) altruism. The discussion focusses on the early Buddhist literature, including the *suttas* in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and the *Āgamas* extant in Chinese translation. The challenges associated with reading some of the early Buddhist texts are also appraised.

In Chap. 14, Tim Lomas and Jnanavaca identify three different types of mindfulness that emphasise elements of recollection, ethical care, and spiritual development, respectively. The chapter then discusses the relationship of this threefold model of mindfulness to the law of conditionality and Sangharakshita's five-stage model of the Buddhist spiritual path.

The following chapter is written by Spencer McWilliams who examines mindfulness from the Zen Buddhist perspective—with a particular focus on Hubert Benoit's Zen writings and Charlotte Jōko Beck's Ordinary Mind School of Zen. Chapter 15 discusses how applying these teachings and practising mindful awareness of self-centred thoughts and feelings can lead to an awakened and transformed experience of life.

Part Three concludes with a chapter by Maurits Kwee that outlines a mode of practice that he devised called Pristine Mindfulness. Pristine Mindfulness is an eight-step process that draws upon teachings from numerous traditional and contemporary Buddhist movements. Chapter 16 examines the differences between Pristine Mindfulness and established secular mindfulness-based interventions.

The scholarly interpretations featured in this volume bring the reader into contact with teachings that have been practiced for thousands of years and that represent a diverse selection of Buddhist practice traditions. The volume is intended to help advance both theoretical understanding and mindfulness practice competency. However, although the current volume focusses on the Buddhist principles that underlie effective mindfulness practice, we hope that readers will derive benefit and knowledge from the broad selection of Buddhist practices, themes, and teachings that are traversed throughout the book.

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