



# The Myth of McMindfulness

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## Abstract

This article examines to what extent the teaching of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) can accurately be referred to by the term “McMindfulness.” The application of this term appears to rest on the expectation that teachers of MBSR and similar mindfulness programs, in order to be true to their Buddhist heritage, should inculcate political awareness in their patients, motivating them to resist the neoliberal capitalist system. Moreover, another assumption seems to be that present-moment awareness, viewed as another departure from ancient Indian Buddhism, prevents critical thinking and thereby supports obedient submission to exploitative conditions. Closer examination shows that expecting mindfulness teachers to stimulate political activism is not in keeping with relevant Buddhist antecedents. The relevant sources even testify to the employment of mindfulness for mere health benefits already in ancient India. Besides, the same textual sources show that mindfulness of the present moment is not a later innovation. The belief that such mindful presence disables critical thinking appears to mistake the goal of the cultivation of mindfulness for the mere absence of thoughts. At least as far as MBSR and related programs in healthcare are concerned, the term “McMindfulness” is not justified and its recent indiscriminate application to any contemporary mindfulness practice appears to have turned it into a myth. Rather than being merely a tool to ensure subservience to the neoliberal capitalist system, in view of the impending climate catastrophe, mindfulness can offer an important resource to face the ravages caused by unbridled exploitation of the environment.

**Keywords** Capitalism · MBSR · McMindfulness · Mindful eating · Neoliberalism · Present moment · Rumination · *Satipatthāna* · Time

The development of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) has been the starting point for a global spread of mindfulness-related practices into various areas of modern society (Wilson 2014). This has resulted in a mindfulness-hype (Van Dam et al. 2018), with often disconcerting consequences. Mindfulness has become a commercialized product and as such has been taught, for example, to improve the combat skills of soldiers, a development that is rather problematic from a Buddhist ethical perspective.

The various employments of mindfulness in contemporary society span a very broad and diverse spectrum. The fact that they have MBSR as their common starting point does of course not imply that those involved with MBSR are directly responsible for all of these varied applications. For this reason,

legitimate criticism of particular employments of mindfulness does not apply wholesale to all mindfulness-based programs.

This raises the question of whether MBSR and similar mindfulness programs in the field of healthcare indeed deserve the application of the catchy phrase “McMindfulness,” a term employed by Purser and Loy (2013) to highlight entrepreneurial strategies similar to those of the fast-food chain McDonald’s with the result of “decontextualizing mindfulness from its original liberative and transformative purpose,” evident in its employment in ancient Indian Buddhism. According to a recent and detailed articulation of this criticism by Purser (2019, p. 21), such decontextualization leads to the following query:

Should we celebrate the fact that this perversion is helping people to “auto-exploit” themselves? This is the core of the problem. The internalization of focus for mindfulness practice also leads to other things being internalized, from corporate requirements to structures of dominance in society ... while paying no attention to civic responsibility.

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## The Final Goal of Buddhism and Dependent Arising

Regarding the original purpose of Buddhist mindfulness, Purser (2019, p. 249) argued that

In his final words, the Buddha is said to have urged his disciples: “Strive to attain the goal by diligence.” However, the goal includes seeing all things as being connected: the insight of interdependence known as *pratitya-samutpada*. So while some of our delusion is in our heads, tuning out of the conditions that cause us to suffer is also delusional from a political point of view.

The idea appears to be that the goal of diligent practice, as conceived by the historical Buddha, should include a political awareness of societal conditions that cause suffering. Such an awareness was presumably lost in the transition from early Buddhist mindfulness to its employment in MBSR and related practices.

Regarding the actual quote, the phrase “to attain the goal” is a supplementation by the translator unsupported by the original. The Pāli text that forms the source of the quote simply reads *appamādena sampādettha*, “strive with diligence” (SN 6.15). Although the Pāli commentary relates this injunction to mindfulness, thereby confirming its relevance to a discussion of mindfulness practices, it also does not have any explicit reference to an attaining of the goal (Spk I 223).

More importantly, perhaps, is that the goal set by the historical Buddha for mindfulness practice, as testified by the “early discourses,” the source material to which we nowadays still have access to reconstruct early Buddhism (Anālayo 2012), is not insight into interdependence. The goal is rather to bring to cessation the specific conditions delineated in the teaching on dependent arising (Pāli *paṭicca-samuppāda*, Sanskrit *pratītya-samutpāda*, Chinese 因緣, Tibetan *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*). The notion of a general interconnectedness of phenomena appears to become prominent only with *Buddhavatamsaka*/Huayan Buddhism (Schmithausen 1997), many centuries after the time when the Buddha lived.

Although the idea of such interconnectedness has become popular in contemporary Buddhist circles in the West, the teachings of the historical Buddha are rather concerned with progress to individual awakening. The early discourses often expound dependent arising by way of a chain of twelve conditions, none of which refers explicitly to political or societal causes of suffering. Instead, the emphasis is on the individual who can attain liberation by removing from his or her own mind the root cause of ignorance and its outgrowths in the form of craving and clinging. Although such removal has repercussions beyond the individual, the focus for achieving

such removal is on working with the conditions found within one’s own mind.

## The Buddha’s Attitude to Politics

The idea that it is delusional not to pay attention to political conditions that contribute to suffering does not appear to be reflected in the early discourses. Instead, according to these texts, the Buddha eschewed the possibility of becoming a world ruler, whereby he could have ensured peace and safety over the whole world (as known to ancient Indian cosmology). By going forth, he instead opted to follow the alternative career open to someone possessing a particular set of auspicious bodily features, namely becoming a Buddha (Anālayo 2017, p. 44). This recurrent trope shows that the very career of becoming a Buddha is based on the decision to refrain from taking an active part in politics; it unmistakably places spiritual above political concerns.

Another relevant passage involves a depiction of bad rulership, which results in poverty among the populace. Poverty leads to theft, whose prosecution stimulates those engaged in robbery to commit murder so as to cover up their deeds (DN 26, DĀ 6, MĀ 70; Anālayo 2019d). Commenting on this depiction of moral decline, Gombrich (1988, p. 84) reasoned that

this text states that stealing and violence originate in poverty and that poverty is the king’s responsibility; punishment becomes necessary only because of the king’s earlier failure to prevent poverty. This humane theory, which ascribes the origin of crime to economic conditions ... is not typical of Indian thinking on such matters ... this idea is so bold and original that it is probably the Buddha’s.

In spite of such political acumen, according to this discourse the Buddha delivered this depiction of moral decline to encourage his disciples to become self-reliant, rather than take political action. The advice given by the Buddha to his listeners was that they should take refuge in themselves and the Dharma. Such taking refuge can be achieved by cultivating the four establishments of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*, *smṛtyupasthāna*, 念處, *dran pa nye bar gzhaḡ pa*). Given this excellent opportunity to encourage political and social activism, according to this discourse, the Buddha rather chose to commend mindful self-reliance.

The general attitude informing the practice and final goal advocated by the historical Buddha, according to the textual witnesses we have, was decidedly not concerned with politics. If contemporary mindfulness-based practices do not explicitly direct attention to political causes of suffering, then, in that

respect, they are simply following the precedent set by the Buddha.

## A Buddhist Precedent for Mindfulness in Health Care

A significant precedent for mindfulness-based practices in health care can be found among the early discourses, according to which the Buddha taught mindfulness explicitly aimed at mere health benefits. The episode in question involves a local king by the name of Pasenadi who was in the habit of overeating. The Buddha gave him a brief instruction on the cultivation of mindfulness in order to know measure with food (SN 3.13, SĀ 1150, SĀ<sup>2</sup> 73; Anālayo 2018a, b). The king asked a young man, present on that occasion, to memorize the instruction and recite it every time he took his meal, promising a payment for such service. Being regularly reminded of the need to be mindful, the king no longer overate and, as a result, lost weight. The discourse concludes with the king expressing his gratitude for the benefit he had derived from the Buddha's instruction.

A perusal of other discourses involving this king gives the impression that this episode might be the only recorded instance of him receiving meditation instructions (Anālayo 2020). The overall impression conveyed by relevant textual sources is that Pasenadi was also not a paragon of Buddhist lay virtue, as he appears to have pursued the activities typical of a petty king in ancient India, including sensual indulgence and engaging in warfare. The last involves intentional killing and thereby runs counter to the first of five precepts to be observed by a Buddhist disciple. The early discourses are in fact quite outspoken on the dire repercussions a soldier can expect from engaging in battle (Anālayo 2009), leaving little scope to support a just-war ideology or in some way excuse killing if it is done at the command of others.

The mindfulness practice taught by the Buddha to Pasenadi was specifically aimed at noting one's measure with food; it was not presented as part of a meditative program aimed at progress to awakening. Moreover, it was taught to someone who does not appear to have had the kind of firm ethical foundation required of disciples who dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to progress on the path to liberation. Finally, the actual implementation of this mindfulness practice involved a paid mindfulness instructor.

An evaluation of MBSR or other mindfulness practices in contemporary health care against mindfulness employments in early Indian Buddhism would need to take into account the precedents set by this episode.

It clearly shows that, already at the time of the Buddha, the employment of mindfulness was not confined to a cultivation of all four establishments as an implementation of "right mindfulness" in the context of progress to awakening. Since

the instructions given by the Buddha do not, of course, fall into the opposite category of "wrong mindfulness," it becomes clear that since the beginnings of Buddhism there has been a scope for employments of mindfulness that are not explicitly aimed at progress to awakening.

## Mindfulness of the Present Moment

A concern with remaining anchored in the present moment through mindfulness is another element that has precedents in early Buddhism. Of course, the question here is not just whether the phrase "present moment" has an exact equivalent in the ancient texts, but rather if the corresponding idea is found.

A closer inspection of the instructions given in the Discourse on the Establishments of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*) and its parallels for the systematic cultivation of mindfulness brings to light that these are predominantly concerned with what happens in the present moment (Anālayo 2019b). The same holds for instructions in the Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpānasati-sutta*) and its parallels (Anālayo 2019c). Clearly, an emphasis on the present moment in mindfulness practices is not a later innovation.

The memory connotation of mindfulness does not stand in contrast to such concerns. As already clarified in contributions to the ground breaking collection of essays on *Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism* (Gyatso 1992), the term we nowadays translate as "mindfulness" was from the outset of its Buddhist usage not confined to recall of the past. This much even holds for its pre-Buddhist antecedents, as already in the most ancient of Indian sacred scriptures, the *R̥gveda*, a verbal form related to the same term conveys a meaning related to paying attention to what happens in the present moment (Klaus 1993).

Purser (2019, p. 23) argued that "the true meaning of mindfulness is an act of re-membering, not only in terms of recalling and being attentively present to our situation, but also of putting our lives back together, collectively." This is not an accurate reflection of the significance of mindfulness in the teachings of the historical Buddha and his personal disciples. In such usage, the term was not confined to an act of remembering and the notion of a collective putting together of our lives is not found at all.

## The Temporal Breadth of the Present Moment

Purser (2015, p. 683) also argued that

the instruction to pay attention to the present moment, and a conception of mindfulness that aims for the subject to "be in the present," can in actuality lead to a freezing

effect by an attempt to shut down experiential time and the passage of ordinary time. The direction of attention to one momentary object ... does not lead to any fundamental or significant change in the way the temporal order is viewed and experienced.

Purser (2015, p. 682) concluded that “a mindfulness practice that aims to attend to the ‘present moment’ is problematic, if not experientially impossible.”

The reference to paying “attention to one momentary object” suggests that the reasoning could be based on a conception of momentariness. According to this theory, which arose during a later phase of Buddhist history, all phenomena without exception disappear as soon as they have arisen. On adopting this widespread perspective, it would make sense to assume that attending to a single momentary object involves a shutting down of experiential time. From the viewpoint of the fully developed doctrine of momentariness, to direct mindfulness to the present moment can indeed seem to be “problematic, if not experientially impossible.” As explained by von Rospatt (1995, p. 80) in a detailed study of the early phases of this doctrine,

by reducing the duration of momentary entities to such an extreme that it entails the denial of any duration, including the time taken for coming into being and vanishing, the[ir] entire existence may be effaced. In other words, the reduction of the moment to a point-instant may be carried so far that the point itself becomes erased.

In contrast, early Buddhist thought recognizes that some phenomena can last for quite some time as changing processes, between the time of their arising and the occasion of their eventual passing away (AN 3.47 and EĀ 22.5; Anālayo 2013). From this viewpoint, the present moment can have considerable breadth, comprising in its purview both the recent past and the impending future.

Such breadth is evident in the canonical instructions for mindfulness of breathing, for example, which “relates to the three periods of time (past, present, and future) in a way that allows them to be connected to the experience of the breath in the present moment” (Anālayo 2019e, p. 44). The same temporal breadth is also evident in instructions on the establishments of mindfulness (Anālayo 2019b). For example, mindful contemplation of the hindrances or the awakening factors requires a clear recognition of their presence and absence in the present moment. Building on that, the task of mindfulness also comprises exploring conditions that have led to their arising (in the past) and that will lead to their overcoming or strengthening (in the future).

Inasmuch as early Buddhist thought does not subscribe to the doctrine of momentariness, it presents a precedent for a conception of the present moment that does not shut down experiential time and is certainly experientially possible, indeed advisable. This goes to show that mindfulness of the present moment as such need not be considered problematic at all.

By way of further clarification, from an early Buddhist perspective the notion of “time” can be considered as simply a conceptualization of the fact of change (Anālayo 2019f). This fact can be distinguished into three dimensions in the continuum of the flow of impermanent phenomena: what has changed (past), what is changing now (present), and what will change (future). The three periods of time that emerge in this way are entirely compatible with the notion of mindfully attending to what is changing now, in the present moment. Such an emphasis on the here and now can come in conjunction with an openness to past and future, which is also reflected in recent research on the temporal dimensions of mindfulness-based practices (e.g., Rönnlund et al. 2019; Samani and Busseri 2019).

## Mindfulness and Thinking

The tendency to problematize the present moment apparently led Purser (2019, p. 111) to the conclusion that “mindfully fixating on the present moment means tuning out of thoughts about the past and the future. Thinking is considered a distraction, detrimental to ‘being’ in the here-and-now.” Purser (2019, p. 40) summed up his impression by stating that “critical thinking is pathologized in mindfulness. It is seen as a diversion from the practice.”

In order to explore the perspective of MBSR on this matter, an explanation by its founder Jon Kabat-Zinn on the relationship of mindfulness to thinking can be consulted (Kabat-Zinn 1990/2013, p. 66), which proceeds as follows:

It’s important to reiterate that letting go of our thoughts does not mean suppressing them. Many people hear it this way and make the mistake of thinking that meditation requires them to shut off their thinking or their feelings. They somehow hear the instructions as meaning that if they are thinking, that is “bad,” and that a “good meditation” is one in which there is little or no thinking ... mindfulness does not involve pushing thoughts away or walling yourself off from them to quiet your mind. We are not trying to stop our thoughts.

The above quote shows that mindfulness cultivated in MBSR does not involve considering thoughts to be detrimental as such, which appears to be rather a reflection of popular

notions about what meditation in general implies. The clarification offered by Jon Kabat-Zinn implies that a cultivation of mindfulness of the present moment is not invariably meant to prevent critical thinking. The point is only that, during early stages in mindfulness training, there is a need to learn to remain in the present moment by making an effort not to be carried away by the habitual proliferation of thoughts. Once that has been achieved at least to some degree, however, mindfulness of the present moment can coexist with thinking activity.

In other words, the main concern of directing mindfulness to the present moment is neither to discourage nor to encourage critical thinking but to train in continuity of mindfulness. Such continuity in turn enables the freedom to decide whether or not to engage in reflection, rather than just being overwhelmed by thinking. The monitoring function of mindfulness can steer critical reflection, thereby enhancing its potential, just as it can alert when the mind is getting carried away by irrelevant thoughts. To fulfil this purpose, however, mindfulness needs to be anchored in the present moment and remain a quality of uninvolved observation.

Such remaining uninvolved relates to another important dimension of learning to attend mindfully to the present moment, which finds an expression in the qualification “non-judgmental.” Kabat-Zinn (2011, p. 291), explained:

Non-judgmental does not mean to imply to the novice practitioner that there is some ideal state in which judgments no longer arise. Rather, it points out that ... we do not have to judge or evaluate or react to any of what arises ... this can lead naturally to the directly experienced discovery that the liberative choice in any moment either to cling and self-identify or not is always available, always an option.

What emerges from this explanation can be related to a key element in early Buddhist descriptions of the formal cultivation of mindfulness (Anālayo 2019a), according to which each of the four establishments involves staying free of greedy desires and discontent (*abhijjhā-domanassa*, *abhidhya-daurmanasya*, 貪憂, *brnab sems dang yid mi bde ba*). This would indeed require avoiding judgmental reactivity to what ever arises.

In sum, the premises of the “McMindfulness” critique taken up for examination in this article appear to reflect a lack of acquaintance with relevant ancient Buddhist antecedents. Judging from the textual sources, already at the time of the Buddha mindfulness was intentionally employed for health benefits and its cultivation in general came with a clear-cut emphasis on the present moment but without any evident concern for political conditions. In that respect the term “McMindfulness” fails to offer a convincing assessment of

MBSR and similar mindfulness-based practices in healthcare and therefore can be considered to have by now become a “myth.”

## Compulsive Thinking

Additional information on the problematization of mindfulness and thinking can be garnered from the report by Purser (2019, p. 104) of his own participation in an MBSR course, during which he reacted to the arising of a memory in the following manner: “disregarding the instructions to be in the present moment, I decide to indulge the memory, at least a little,” followed by noting that “being a bad MBSR student, I began ruminating further” (p. 105). “That was a little too much thinking; I brought myself back to the present moment” (p. 105). “I tried to stay in the present moment—really, I did—but this ‘mind-wandering’ seemed to be leading somewhere, connecting dots, yielding ‘ah-ha’ moments” (p. 107).

Needless to say, Ronald Purser is of course entirely free to indulge his memories, ruminate, and mentally connect dots after dots while in an MBSR class. But the decision to indulge his memories and disregard the instructions has consequences, as it can prevent learning what an MBSR course is trying to foster: mindful presence.

Regarding his experience during the same MBSR course (p. 114), he also reported that at a certain point “I realized that I had drifted off into a pleasant nap. But nobody around me was judgmental, or seemed to care.” This almost gives the impression that the alternative to indulging in memories and ruminations was for him to fall asleep. That would indeed be contrary to the development of critical thinking.

Of interest here is also a report of his participation in a mindfulness workshop. During a talk by the teacher, the following happened: “I decided to accompany his homily on mindless addiction to devices by checking my iPhone. I got a few dirty looks from the people across from me” (p. 153). Such a defiant attitude makes it simply more difficult to benefit from a workshop on mindfulness.

Apparently based on his personal experiences, Purser (2019, p. 8) then asserted that, in the way taught currently, “mindfulness is nothing more than basic concentration training.” Moreover, “the general emphasis is on awareness of the present moment, which means tuning out of feelings and thoughts” (p. 190). This gives the impression that his apparently defiant attitude and seeming unwillingness to follow the instructions has indeed prevented him from appreciating key aspects in the cultivation of mindfulness.

The MBSR curriculum also comprises the exercise of mindfully eating a raisin, a skillful means employed to help patients realize the potential of being fully present during the act of actually and fully tasting something they have eaten many times before. Purser (2019, p. 103) noted that this was

“an exercise I was honestly not looking forward to doing,” followed by reporting that “the ritual of eating slowly was not new, but it’s hard to be sure I was eating *mindfully*.” His final assessment takes the following form (p. 220): “never mind how the raisin looks, feels, smells and tastes,” instead of which one should rather reflect on

the farm where the raisin was grown by Hispanic immigrants doing back-breaking work ... earning a cent for every two-hundred grapes harvested. Reflection on the raisin could call to mind units from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement rounding up workers like cattle and deporting them ... what about the grocery store staff that unloaded, unpacked and stocked raisins on the shelf?

The suggestion to reflect in this way is directed at someone else, in this case the US congressman and mindfulness practitioner Tim Ryan, as a more appropriate way of going about the exercise of mindfully eating a raisin. This seems to exemplify a general pattern in Ronald Purser’s criticism, which appears to be based on turning his personal decision to ruminate into a normative stance, in the sense of demanding that others should follow his example. The recommendation appears to be that practitioners of MBSR and similar mindfulness-based practices stop their attempts to be mindful of the present moment and instead engage in reflections and associations, especially of the political type. In this way, they would be able to avoid what Purser (2019, p. 23) considers succumbing to “social amnesia that leads to mindful servants of neoliberalism.”

Yet, the function of the raisin exercise is to facilitate a different way of experiencing, distinct from the habitual tendency of the mind to run an auto-commentary on anything that happens. Such a commentary can at times provide rather interesting perspectives, no doubt, but it is necessary to learn to step out of it at will. Without developing this ability, one might remain at the mercy of unending mental chatter and an endless proliferation of thoughts that keep confirming and reinforcing personal biases and prejudices.

Worthy of note are also comments made by Purser (2019, p. 10) on Jon Kabat-Zinn, relating his presumed political philosophy to the “compassionate conservatism” of George Bush, his supposed subservience to “the requirements of neoliberalism” to Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (p. 27), and his alleged invitation for others to abandon ethical discernment to Donald Trump’s “flinging morality to the winds” (p. 241). Drawing relationships in this way goes beyond the bounds of reasonable criticism and shades into personal attack.

Needless to say, criticism as such is highly welcome. Critical feedback by peers, critical thinking, and self-criticism are indispensable for scientific progress in our

understanding of mindfulness. But criticism that lacks balance can undermine the credibility of whatever reasonable critique there may have been.

There is indeed a need to beware of the current hype around mindfulness and of its commercialization, and even more so of its employment in ways that run counter to basic Buddhist ethics. However, drawing attention to such issues would be more effective if it could embody the quality that it wishes to foster: mindful presence. This requires paying attention to the complexity of the processes involved, rather than opting for a simplistic black-and-white view and consequent othering of all those who do not subscribe to one’s personal agenda. It will hardly do justice to the cultivation of mindfulness if the world is divided dualistically into the good ones, who oppose the destructive forces of neoliberalism, and the bad ones, a category arrived at by lumping together everyone else, from those who do not actively resist these forces to the main protagonists of capitalist exploitation.

## Neoliberal Capitalism

Critical reflection, supported by mindfulness of what is happening at present, rather than just remembering what seemed right in the past, might even pose the challenging question of whether neoliberal capitalism is indeed the most pressing issue we face nowadays. Pursuing this question could draw attention to the degree to which capitalism has grown a “cancer” over the past decades, with a gradually increasing likelihood that this cancer will turn out to be terminal. The name of that cancer is global warming.

According to Wallace-Wells (2019, p. 164), the future impact of global warming “assaults the economies of the world with extreme weather and natural disaster at an entirely unprecedented rate and—just in the diminishing downtime between hurricanes and floods and heat waves and droughts—also threatens to devastate agricultural yields and cripple worker productivity.” He further reasoned that (p. 166),

if what you meant by “capitalism” is not just the operation of market forces but the religion of free trade as a just and even perfect political system, you have to expect, at the very least, that a major reformation is coming. The predictions of economic hardship, remember, are enormous—\$551 trillion in damages at just 3.7 degrees of warming, 23 percent of potential global income lost, under business-as-usual conditions, by 2100. That is an impact much more severe than the Great Depression; it would be ten times as deep as the more recent Great Recession, which still so rattles us. And it would not be temporary. It is hard to imagine any system

surviving that kind of decline intact, no matter how “big.”

From the perspective of the looming climate catastrophe, environmental activism might even have a stronger claim to public attention than other political agendas. At the very least, it is certainly not tenable to assume that one particular political opinion, however significant or pressing it may appear subjectively, should be adopted by everyone else in the same manner.

In addition to the potential of facilitating receptivity to the complexity of the present situation, mindfulness can also offer a substantial contribution to facing squarely the catastrophic repercussions of global warming. By now, the time to prevent the dire consequences of climate change is already past. But there is a pressing need to take swift action immediately to mitigate its repercussions. Here, mindfulness can turn out to be a major asset, by countering denial just as much as resignation and thereby help facilitate that the urgency of the current predicament is realized on a large scale (Anālayo 2019g).

Another potential for mindfulness lies in providing resilience in the face of the actual unfolding of the imminent climatic catastrophe. Kaza (2014, p. 87) reasoned that

mindfulness practice has become very popular and well known in the west, with active movements to bring mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) techniques to schools, hospices, prisons, and business places. Through deliberate attention to body, breath, and mind, the mindfulness practitioner becomes more fully engaged in the present moment. This sort of grounded presence is what you would want for emergency workers if they are dealing with a climate crisis in your town.

Kaza (2018, p. 433) concluded that, “to date, these trainings have been minimally applied to environmental contexts, but they may prove effective in future environmental disasters.” Relevant examples would be the possible benefits of mindfulness for professional firefighters (Smith et al. 2019) or for children who have survived a hurricane (Cutright et al. 2019). In this way, mindfulness might turn out to be a crucially important resource in facing the ravages caused by neoliberal capitalism.

Whatever might seem subjectively to be the most pressing challenge to be addressed in contemporary society, however, be it environmental disaster, racism, other forms of discrimination, or capitalist oppression, mindful presence can serve as a key quality to enable appropriate action from a position of inner balance. As formulated by the Vietnamese scholar monk and meditation teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (2008, p. 77), renowned for his political and ecological activism, “truly

engaged Buddhism is first of all practicing mindfulness in all that we do.”

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** This article does not contain any studies performed by the author with human participants or animals.

**Abbreviations** AN, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*; DĀ, *Dīrgha-āgama* (T 1); DN, *Dīgha-nikāya*; EĀ, *Ekottarika-āgama* (T 125); MĀ, *Madhyama-āgama* (T 26); SĀ, *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99); SĀ<sup>2</sup>, *Samyukta-āgama* (T 100); SN, *Samyutta-nikāya*; Spk, *Sāratthappakāsinī*; T, Taishō edition

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