

On Buddhist-Lite And Pristine Mindfulness Meditation: A Social Construction Perspective – Maurits G.T. Kwee,^{1 2}

Abstract

This article is a critical appraisal of the “mindfulness-based” approaches which are regarded here as a fragmented application of a family of a dozen Buddhist meditations. The blossoming of interest has led to the adoption of mindfulness meditation as a fashionable tool in the armamentarium of health-care workers and corporate coaches. Although not depreciated, such Buddhism disconnected application raises the worry of a mindfulness de-contextualized from its wholistic context. By neglecting the *Dharma*’s “heart-core”, pristine mindfulness is chopped off from its very essence: the *4-Ennobling Realities*. Redressing this issue, it is recommended to also teach those who are genuinely interested in mindfulness the quintessential Buddhist awareness of *karma*, *dependent origination*, and *not-self* in the context of an *8-Fold Balancing Practice*. This requires insight in the smallest units of experience regarding thoughts/things (*dhammas*) which can be viewed as “neither empty, nor not-empty” (the Buddha), as “empty of emptiness” (Nagarjuna), as “non-dual binaries” (Vasubandhu), and currently as “social constructions” (K.J. Gergen) – a landmark revision in seventeen centuries. In effect this renders a psychology of *Relational Buddhism* centered round “relational inter-being” which – comparable to “team spirit” – locates the mind in people’s interactions rather than inside the skull, thus emphasizing mindfulness of speech, synergy, and harmony.

Introduction

For the last few decades Buddhist meditations, particularly mindfulness, has enjoyed growing interest in the scientific community. Its research was boosted since Kabat-Zinn (e.g., 1996) introduced “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction” (MBSR) in the medical community. Additionally, it is a hot topic among psychologists, health-care workers, and corporate coaches who work with evidence-based interventions. In this article pristine Buddhist mindfulness meditation is viewed as an overarching process constituting the *general factor* for clearing the mind. It is a scaffold to practice a family of *12-Meditations* in the framework of the *4-Ennobling Realities* (suffering, its causes, a way out, and an *8-Fold Balancing Practice*, see below) which the Buddha offered humanity as a gift of compassion.

Used for the first time by Rhys Davids (1881), the term “mindfulness” is in fact something of a misnomer as the term “mind” does not exist in the Asian languages through which the Buddhist way (*Dharma*) was taught. The meaning of the meditation is rather to be “mind-empty” and “full-of-heart” while remembering to be constantly watchful regarding whatever appears in the stream of consciousness in awareness from now-to-now. Although the original Pali word *sati* or its Sanskrit equivalent *smriti* is preferred, the term mindfulness will be maintained because of its vested usage and connotations of being attentive and aware. The below is based on psychological insights of mindfulness from a combined Theravada and Mahayana (Chan/Zen) perspective.

Mindfulness: the G-factor

The “Great Discourse on the Four Frames of Reference of Mindfulness” (*Mahasatipatthana Sutta*) and the smaller “Discourse on the Four Frames of Reference of Mindfulness”

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(*Satipatthana Sutta*) refer to the following: (1) the body, (2) the body's "actions" (i.e., feelings: sensations and emotions), (3) the mind, and (4) the mind's "actions" (i.e., thoughts: visualizations and conceptions). Thus, the first six of the meditations refer to mindfulness of the body and bodily feelings, while the next six refer to mindfulness of the mind and "brainy" thoughts. Formal meditation is mostly practiced in a sitting position with the back held upright, not slouched forward. Research findings suggest that holding the back and head straight strengthens confidence in the emitted thoughts whether negative or positive (Brinol, Petty, & Wagner, 2009) and that this posture boosts positive mood, while a doubtful posture invites or worsens a dejected mood (Haruki, Homma, Umezawa, & Masaoka, 2001).

Inseparably belonging to the Buddha's soteriological system to cease emotional misery due to the existential ramifications of birth, aging, illness, and death (*duhkha*) in aggregate compassion, the Buddhist adept is concerned about the following (www.metta.lk):

- (1) Mindfulness of abdominal *breathing* and air passing the nostrils as an anchor for concentration and absorption in a way which heightens clarity and contentment.
- (2) *Behaviours*: mindfulness of sitting, walking, standing, and lying (the 4 dignities) and all other variants of conduct (e.g. drinking, eating, relating, emoting).
- (3) *Repulsiveness*: mindfulness of the body as a bag of food/liquids enveloped by the skin, and consisting of 32 parts (like hair, nails, teeth, flesh, nerves, bones, etc.).
- (4) Mindfulness of the body dissected into *elements* (earth/water/fire/wind), awareness of which is conducive to dis-identifying the body from "I-me-mine/self".
- (5) *Decomposing*: mindfulness of a body dead 1-3 days, blue, swollen, festering, eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, worms and reduced to bones and dust.
- (6) *Feelings*: mindfulness of feelings and their origination; are they only sensed skin-deep or are they heartfelt feelings, additionally: are they pleasant, painful, or neither?
- (7) *Hindrances*: mindfulness of distracting sensual pleasures, ill-will, sloth-torpor, agitation, doubt, and worry, and learning from each obstacle and its impermanence.
- (8) *Modalities of self (skandhas)*: mindfulness of Body/Speech/Mind, i.e. sensing, imaging/reasoning, emoting/acting in awareness: is there any self-identification?
- (9) *Sense-bases*: mindfulness of contact between the sense organs and corresponding internal objects (thoughts) and external objects (sight, sound, odour, taste, touch).
- (10) *Awakening factors*: mindfulness of cultivating analysis, persistence, enthusiasm, serenity, focus, equanimity, and awareness to cease craving, grasping, and clinging.
- (11) *4-Ennobling Realities* (not "Transcendental Truths", but experiences, data, facts, or postulates): mindfulness of *duhkha*, its causes, the way out, and "walking the talk".
- (12) *8-Fold Balancing Practice*: mindfulness of views-intention-speech-action-living-effort-awareness-attention in order to maintain dynamic balance going forward.

Since the Buddha proposed these meditations many more exercises were developed which can be done in principle with respect to all precious experiences in daily life, e.g. mirth/laughing, joy/smiling, delight/singing, thirst/drinking, appetite/eating. Well-known are the contemplations of loving-kindness, empathic compassion, and shared joy/happiness. Applied as meditation-in-action these practices will accrue the best results after an "emptiness of mind" is first attained.

Mindfulness: a Way of Life

Because the *Dharma* is a *modus vivendi*, our daily lives are preferably spent in a meditative way. Embedded in an *8-Fold Balancing Practice*, mindfulness is a scaffold for a way of life which comprises the investment of balanced *effort* to augment *attention*-concentration and *awareness*-introspection with the prospect toward balanced *views*, *intentions*, *speech*, *actions*,

and *living* according to the Buddha's "Middle Way" which renounces extreme proclivities. Mindfulness and all other Buddhist meditations are not solitary exercises but applied within the framework of these eight interconnected and interlinked practices.

If mindfulness is considered as an isolated training, it could be applied for goals which were never meant by the *Buddhadharma*, i.e. as a method to cease *dukkha*. For instance, Zen's connection with the Samurai (aimed at killing and not to be killed) is an anomaly that continued until WWII (Victoria, 2006): "If you march, march; if you shoot, shoot; the only thing, don't wobble". Such slogans were used when Zennists were blackmailed into collaboration with the war-mongering rulers and the imperialistic aspirations. On a smaller scale, try to steal from a shop while not wanting to be caught... mindful eyes will grow in the back of the skull. Note how different this is from, for instance, the kung-fu martial arts of mindful personal defence which is closely connected to Buddhist values. Indeed, mindfulness is "just" a human capacity (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009), but why mindfulness needs to be isolated from the *4-Ennobling Realities* and be framed by the "Hippocratic Oath" instead (Kabat-Zinn, 2009a), while microbiologists and psychologists are not MDs, is mind boggling. It seems that the *Dharma* is viewed as mumbo jumbo so that mindfulness and its research should be de-contextualized from its Buddhist roots and to be re-contextualized into western paradigms (e.g., Grossman, 2010). Such would be a move of expropriation which is not free of danger as patients or clients would be able to desecrate mindfulness by turning MBSR into for instance "Mindfulness-Based Sniping and Raping", to say it ironically. In order to ensure that mindfulness is not misused, a plea is made here to cultivate mindfulness in its original framework: the *8-Fold Balancing Practice*.

Pristine mindfulness comprises the balancing of attention-concentration (to discipline a wandering mind) and awareness-introspection (to understand *karma* and "not-self"). Mindfulness operates in the sensory modality and can be a process (the practice) as well as an outcome of the practice. The latter involves inward (and also outward) concentration of attention (changeable foreground presence) and awareness (changeable background presence) which illuminates consciousness (unchangeable backdrop presence) and enables an alert monitoring (introspection) in "luminous comprehension" of the smallest units of experience (*dharmas*) as they come to be in "dependent origination" (*pratityasamutpada*).

The first step toward mindfulness is to tame the restless mind through the practice of *Jhana/Dhyana* using breathing as an anchor to sharpen concentration. This is a process of four initial stages: 1st *Jhana* (one-pointedness-pleasure/joy), 2nd *Jhana* (one-pointedness-joy/happiness), 3rd *Jhana* (one-pointedness-contentment), and 4th *Jhana* (one-pointedness-even-mindedness/stillness). One-pointed concentration is a run-up to access mindfulness and to awaken emptiness (*bodhi*).

The Mindfulness Quadrant

Table 1 depicts a quadrant of pristine mindfulness, encompassing: *Samatha*/tranquilizing meditation leading to *Samadhi* (firming)³ and *Vipassana*/insight meditation leading to *Sunyata* (not-self/emptiness) (Kwee, 2010a). Mindfulness starts with cultivating *Samatha* which is a state of composure characterized by self-control, calm, serenity, balance, undisturbed

³ Csikszentmihalyi's "flow" (1990) seems to be a rediscovery of *Samadhi* because descriptions of their essential features overlap. Both are considered to be an optimal experience while performing a skilled task (or while meditating) characterized by intense concentration, energized focus, complete absorption, total involvement, no sense of time or self, enjoyable and gratifying for its own sake, and no distracting thoughts entering the mind due to a single-minded immersion. Zennists refer to the *Samadhi* state as "going with the flow while nothing remains undone" which is typified by non-dual experiencing of wholistic oneness described as neither-perception-nor-non-perception and neither-thinking-nor-non-thinking, an effortless-effort and non-controlling control due to a merging of action and awareness often accompanied by spontaneous rapture (Kwee, 2010a & 2010b).

tranquillity, and impartiality of Body/Mind-Speech anchored in a bottom-up practice of relaxed concentration and bare attention by neutrally observing external and internal perceptual stimuli in the ongoing stream of experience.

Table 1: Mindfulness Meditation Quadrant©

MINDFULNESS <i>remember</i> to awaken in the context of the <i>4-Ennobling Realities & 8-Fold Balancing Practice</i>	Bare attention: perception of <i>dharmas</i> via the senses (knowledge by description); <i>sati, attentiveness</i>	Impartial awareness: apperception of <i>dharmas</i> (wisdom by acquaintance); <i>sampajanna, comprehension</i>
Relaxed/gentle/focused concentration on object, i.e. process (<i>by jhana/dhyana</i>)	1.SAMATHA (Body/Mind) Calm/composure/quiescence/equanimity: <i>Tranquility</i>	2.SAMADHI (Body/Mind) Flow/receptive-absorption/firm-stabilization: <i>Nirvana</i>
Vigilant/alert monitoring of un/wholesome <i>karma</i> (<i>by appamada/watchfulness</i>)	3.VIPASSANA (Mind/Body) Insight in causality of becoming in <i>Dependent Origination</i>	4.SUNYATA (Mind/Body) Liberating blank mind/ <i>not-self/emptiness/reset-point: (0)</i>

Practice gradually shifts this state of quiescence into *Samadhi*, a receptive and non-suppressing stability or flowing absorption resting in an advanced gentle concentration upon occurring *dharmas* with clear comprehension and in the full present of the “here-and-now” or rather “from-now-to-now”. This results in the extinction (of the flames) of emotional arousal (*Nirvana*), a passing state which may become an enduring trait by training. Having thus extinguished afflicted/defiled affect, one evolves into *Vipassana*, a Mind-Speech/Body top-down practice of “cleansing the doors of perception”. This practice enables the meditator to perceive in a special way, i.e. to see “things as they *become*”: in “dependent origination”. This insight comes about while monitoring *dharmas* by remembering to be attentive and vigilantly watchful regarding the un/wholesomeness of appearing *karma* (intentional choices to think and act). While alert in “unclouded luminosity”, clearly discerning/comprehending (*sampajanna*) and constantly heedful (*appamada*), one wisely introspects karmic (un)wholesomeness and gradually (or suddenly) shifts into the awakening insight of an *empty not-self*, also called “luminous suchness” or “vast zeroness” (*Sunyata*). Thus telescoping inner galaxies and encountering *dharmas* in inner spaces, insight dawns in the laboratory of Body/Speech/Mind that *dharmas* are pervasively empty on the ultimate level, even though they can be full of affect on the provisional level of interpersonal life. Inner speech, self-dialogue, and thought-fabrication – to be mindful of – arise during the entire process in the four boxes up to the point of emptiness in the fourth box. The process from box 1 to 4 is a track of *social de-construction* which is accompanied by ascending AHA experiences of insight. An empty mind at point zero is not a goal in itself but a reset point which functions as a “solid”, sound, and sane platform for igniting the collaborative practice of *social re-construction*, accompanied by descending HAHA experiences of delight, by embodying in mindful equanimity the sublime pro-social skills of loving-kindness, compassion, and joy toward what we already are: “relational inter-being” (Kwee, 2010c).⁴

⁴ The processes of ascending and descending are a relevant theme in Mahayana teachings as depicted on more than 1460 bas reliefs (2x1m each) and by 504 Buddha statues in circumambulatory corridors with a length of more than 5km at an immense *stupa* structure, the Borobudur – a UNESCO protected world wonder stemming from circa the year 800 – on the island of Java. The adept who ascends the 10-floor dome-like construction learns to meditate toward liberation, symbolized by an empty tower, via the pictorial narratives and instructions on the panels which depict five books carved in stone. Once liberated, the *bodhisattva* starts the descending journey back to the mundane world to fulfil the vow to practice, in mindful equanimity, the social meditations of loving-kindness, compassion, and joy. Particularly, the compassion meditation of offering (*kasih*) and receiving (*terima*), known in Tibet as *tonglen*, is a legacy of Javanese Buddhism, this author’s intellectual mainstay.

Despite the fact that a quadrant suggests strict categories, there is overlap. The cultivation of *Samatha* and *Vipassana* and the experience of *Samadhi* and *Sunyata* are not mutually exclusive phenomena but may occur (partly) simultaneously. During the initial stages, *Samatha* and *Samadhi* work like a *metonym*: “there is no way to mindfulness, mindfulness is the way”. This is realizing that we are not going anywhere for we are “already there” and therefore nothing needs to be done: “the grass will grow by itself”. Containing means and goals, mindfulness implies an “effortless effort” of a “beginner’s mind” (Zen’s *shoshinsha*) to perceive sensory experience with no aim, gain, or agenda (Zen’s *mushotoku*). To indulge in a Zen metaphor (*mizu no kokoro*), the trainee develops a mind like water which is a state of mind that flows, reflects, and adapts. Flowing to the lowest point like water, the mind’s natural state is never to get clogged or stuck by any thought or feeling. Water does not react but responds: appropriately, adequately, and effectively. A centred mind is just like a pond that returns to a state of a reflecting mirror after a pebble is tossed in. In total readiness and never losing control the mind’s natural proclivity is to return to inner calm and flexibility after disturbance. Like water, mind’s nature is not to be rigid; water always takes the shape of its container. Rigorous training is required to keep a total awakening (Zen’s *shonen shozoku*). Notwithstanding this, *Vipassana* and *Sunyata* are in the advanced stages basically purposeful as they aim to further “wise reflection” on *karma*’s vicissitudes (*yoniso manasikara*). In the “discourse on taints” (*Sabbasava Sutta*) it is advised to implement mindfulness “correctly” (methodically/skillfully, i.e. in a balanced way) by heedfully introspecting the un/wholesomeness of *karma* with “illuminating insight”. Furthermore, impartial or “choiceless” awareness implies that there is no prejudice, sympathy, or antipathy for what appears in the spaces of Body/Speech/Mind while apperceiving *dharmas*. Apperception is a pre-conceptual perception which excludes pre-conceived ideas, which are by definition conceptual and judgmental.

It should be noted that mindfulness as defined in the MB approaches, i.e. as awareness arising by paying nonjudgmental attention on purpose and in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a), is limited to the first two boxes of the quadrant and is therefore not the pristine mindfulness as meant in the Pali *suttas*. By excluding “dependent origination” (3rd box) and not-self/emptiness (4th box) and by marginalizing Buddhist Psychology, MB approaches lack the quintessential experience which is indispensable for a clear understanding of the *Dharma*.

The Smallest Units of Experience (*dharmas*)

An in-depth understanding of *dharma* (to be discerned from *Dharma* with upper case) is crucial in the practice of pristine mindfulness meditation. For ages numerous scholastic discussions have been written on this technical index of experience (e.g., Karunadasa, 2010). Referred to here as “perceivables” and “thinkables”, these are anything sensed or thought and their counterparts like images, conceptions, memories, dreams, illusions, and delusions.

In Buddhist scholastic history three views are discerned. For the Buddha (6th century BCE) things and experience neither exist, nor do not exist, while some of the early heirs (*Sravakayas*) were inclined to view both as real. Nagarjuna (2nd century), called the second Buddha, viewed experience and things as unreal, while Vasubandhu (4th century), also known as the third Buddha, viewed experience as real and things as unreal. From the present perspective which is the first renewal in seventeen centuries and a fifth view, based on K. J. Gergen’s social psychology (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_J._Gergen), experience and things are social constructions. They do not exist unless there is communal agreement on their existence. A social constructivist revision does not discard the previous views but is a postmodern complementary view in the ongoing discourse on *dharmas*.

The Buddha started with “neither this, nor that” reasoning as to *dharmas* which later slipped into “somethingness”. As in the *Mahasunnata Sutta*, to the question on what

emptiness is, the Buddha replied, “there is no self, nor anything pertaining to self which is solid in this world, [therefore] the self and the world are empty”. After the Buddha’s death his discourses were abstracted as “deeper reflections”, collected in the *Abhidhamma* (4th century), and commented by Buddhagosa (5th century), a Theravada (early Buddhist) scholar. From 100 BCE on Mahayana (great vehicle) schools, which functioned alongside “Early Buddhism” schools, began to appear. Grouped around newly written sutras produced anonymous devotees, the Buddha enact new talks (also up until the 4th century). These discourses, allegedly held by the Buddha descended from heaven and kept secret/buried under the sea until the time was ripe to reveal them, can be subsumed under the “Perfection of Wisdom” sutras, commented on by Nagarjuna’s *Madhyamaka* (middle) school and the “Buddha Womb” sutras, commented on by Vasubandhu’s *Yogacara* (meditation) school. Vasubandhu who expounded a psychological-epistemological (*vijnavada*), “mind-only”, i.e. “non-dual”, teaching of *dharma*s, criticized Nagarjuna’s “emptiness only” as a nihilistic philosophy and made a plea to experience *dharma*s’ emptiness rather than to muse on them. The Theravada differentiated 173 *dharma*s, while Vasubandhu discerned 100 *dharma*s including *dharma*s of sense awareness, un/conditioned *dharma*s, unwholesome *dharma*s (e.g., greed, hatred, ignorance), and wholesome *dharma*s (e.g., trust, equanimity, non-harming). These numbers do not seem to be exact and need therefore to be taken with a grain of salt (www.cttbusa.org).

The history continues. As from the 7th century a Chinese school based on the *Avatamsaka* (flower garland or *hua-yen*) *Sutra*, championed by Fa-tsang, expounded that there is a universe of countless *dharma*s from atom to galaxy. The externally perceived can only be known and experienced through their internal mirrored representations. All *dharma*s are positioned like in “Indra’s Net”, a jewelled matrix originating itself. Due to their interdependency, phenomena arise, peak, subside, and cease in co-action. This net has at each crossing a gem, reflecting and self-reflecting all gems like mirrors placed opposite each other, thus showing an infinite unobstructed mutual penetration and repeated images, causing one’s light to be part of all others’ and accepting their light as part of one’s own. As each person is interconnected with all other persons in social context, one person’s change will affect the whole group. Mind-made distinctions between provisional/individual selves and the ultimate non-self thus collapse into emptiness like waves in the sea. We cannot live without the other as in the dramatic metaphor of the too long spoon preventing feeding oneself. Because we have to feed each other, we are “inter-being” as called for in the *Lotus Sutra* and echoed by Thich Nhat Hanh (1998). This *hua-yen* (Japanese, *kegon*) reality experience is a cultural story that concurs with the social constructional view that a person is not an isolated independent being, but a manifestation of relationships. Gergen (2009a) submits the idea “relational being” which implies that there is no solitary self. Focusing on interactions the “you-me” binary collapses and crumbles in emptiness. Thus “relational being”, which is congruent to “inter-being”, is procreated. Both are neither in body, nor in mind, but in people’s encounters, dialogues, and collaborative practices. As individuals are empty of the pure private, a “non-foundational morality of collaborative practice” is espoused which merges into a Buddhist stance.

Private or personal *dharma*s cannot be solipsistic as they ensue from a history of language and relations. Although we are laughing or crying alone the interpersonal dimension is ubiquitous. Building on Vasubandhu’s subject-object non-duality, a move forward is made here to reconceptualise *dharma*s as integers of relational processes. As the personal emerges out of the interpersonal, *dharma*s exist because of the interpersonal. The binary personal-interpersonal is dealt with by recasting the artificial qualifications of the individual as a separate agency independent from relational processes. Attributing meaning to *dharma*s is a communal agreement. *Dharma*s are not akin to a subjective mirror-in-here reflecting an

objective reality-out-there. Mind is not confined within the individual's subjective experience but is an impermanent process between individuals' interacting from which *dharmas* derive meaning. Atomistic *dharmas* are relational integers which meaning is gained through interpersonal processes. *Dharmas* are a variety of interaction which is in form not unlike other conduct, i.e. they can be indexed but do not stand on their own. This relational view is grounded in dialogical engagement and contends the Buddhist view of "relational mind" arising in "dependent origination". Due to this redefinition of *dharmas*, the psychology of social construction plays a prominent role in enriching pristine mindfulness.

The "Mindfulness-Based" Frenzy

MBSR, which covers the first two boxes of the mindfulness quadrant, is an 8-week outpatient intensive course comprising body-scan visualization, Hatha Yoga, sitting, walking, CD-guided homework, and self-monitored practice (Kabat-Zinn, 2003b). MB practices have sparked frenzy amongst adherents who have developed "MB Cognitive Therapy", "MB Relapse Prevention", and "MB Eating Awareness Training", to mention a few programs. The programs are clinical interventions truncated from Buddhist context and devoid of relational meaning.

There have been over 100 controlled trials employing MB interventions for a host of medical disorders and psychological anomalies. Almost half of them have been published in the past two years. Since this clinical mindfulness is surmised to be a common factor in psychotherapy, studies on what might be its mechanisms of action have mushroomed (Williams & Zylowska, 2009; <http://marc.ucla.edu>). Shown to be more effective than waiting-list or "treatment as usual" control groups in heterogeneous samples, MBSR meets the American Psychological Association's "probably efficacious" designation (Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Shigaki, Glass, & Schopp, 2006) and gained the U.K.'s National Institute for Clinical Excellence approval for its use in the National Health Service. Despite promising results, suggesting the intervention is beneficial for psychological and physical symptoms, the jury is still out. In a review of 15 controlled studies, Toneatto and Nguyen (2007) found that MBSR does not have a reliable effect on clinical symptoms of anxiety and depression. It seems that the state of the art is statistically "efficacious" rather than clinically effective. "MB Cognitive Therapy" accrued better results as it proved to be effective in preventing relapse into depression for up to 60 weeks for those who have suffered three or more depressive episodes (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Ma & Teasdale, 2004; Kenny & Williams, 2007) and could reduce the use of anti-depressant maintenance medication (Kuyken, Byford, Taylor, Watkins, Holden, et al., 2008).

Even though its definition is the subject of continuous debate, MBSR is embraced as an important clinical treatment. Kabat-Zinn's (2003b, p.145) working definition is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience, moment to moment." A more detailed definition includes: (1) non-striving; (2) acceptance; (3) patience; (4) trust; (5) openness; and (6) letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In another instance (Kabat-Zinn, 2003b), mindful attention includes a stance of (7) compassion, (8) interest, (9) friendliness, and (10) open-heartedness toward the experience observed regardless of its quality. Later on (11) being non-reactive and (12) intentional training were added (Kabat-Zinn (2005). Others point at gentleness, generosity, empathy, gratitude, loving-kindness (Shapiro, Schwartz & Bonner, 1998), exposure, values clarification, self-regulation, and cognitive-emotional-behavioural flexibility (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006). Shapiro et al. define mindfulness also as an intentional, open, and non-judgmental attending, whereby intentional is meant as on purpose, a personal motivation to practice (e.g., to reduce hypertension). They believe that "re-perceiving" is the meta-mechanism of change. It is safe to conclude that there is no consensus about what

exactly constitutes mindfulness in the MB approaches and that its interpersonal meaning is a conspicuously absent subject.

A consensus panel proposed a two-component definition: “the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment”... and “adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, et al., 2004, p.232). According to Siegel, Germer, and Olendzki (2008), non-judgment, compassion, and acceptance are clinical expansions of the original meaning of *sati*: attention, awareness, and remembering. The consensus emphasizes acceptance as one needs to be aware of the problem first in order to be able to change it. A re-examination of existing questionnaires (Baer, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, Smith, & Toney, 2006) revealed the psychometric potential for assessing five factors of the MB approaches: (1) non-reactivity to experience, (2) observing inner experience, (3) acting with awareness, (4) describing with words, and (5) being non-judgmental about experience. Whether this consensual mindfulness is a state or trait, process or outcome, cure or care remains a subject of study.

While acknowledging “intention” as the investigative effort to observe thoughts and feelings, the term does not reflect the Buddhist meaning of intention as karmic willful activity of un/wholesomeness in the context of “inter-being”. Skittishness to embrace Buddhist values by MB researchers due to the erroneous perception of the *Dharma* as a religion, so-called “universal values” are privileged (e.g., Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). It is doubtful whether the empirically found mindfulness factors are useful for a better understanding of pristine mindfulness.

Mindfulness and Buddhist Psychology

In light of this review, we submit that mindfulness as conceived and dispensed in health-care is floating adrift not only from the pristine method from which it has been wrest, but also from its avowed purpose as it is sadly missing its Buddhist fundamentals. Mindfulness as a component in the MB and kindred treatment packages like Dialectical Behavior Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy explicitly exclude Buddhism. Can mindfulness be invoked without subscribing to the *Dharma*? Traditionally, mindfulness resides in an inextricable function in the Buddha’s project to liberate humanity from *duhkha*. This is a much larger aim than alleviating patients’ suffering or promoting clients’ labor satisfaction.

Although in MBSR it is emphasized that mindfulness is not a quick fix, Buddhist psychological underpinnings are conspicuously absent. This leaves the practitioner with a procedure de-contextualized from Buddhist practical guidelines. The tactics behind the stripping of mindfulness from its roots is to not burden clients with Buddhism and to not repel mainstream professionals and their vested interests (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; pers. comm., Bari, Italy). Thus, the mindful professional is not obliged to study Buddhist Psychology (e.g., Grepmaier, Mitterlehner, & Nickel, 2008). Furthermore, Kabat-Zinn (2003b, p.149) is categorical in stating that:

[Dharma] is at its core truly universal, not exclusively Buddhist... a coherent phenomenological description of the nature of mind, emotion, and suffering and its potential release... mindfulness... being about attention, is also of necessity universal. There is nothing particularly Buddhist about it (p.145)... It is an inherent human capacity... received its most explicit and systematic articulation and development within the Buddhist tradition... although its essence lies at the heart of other ancient and contemporary... teachings as well (p.146)... [MBSR] needed to be free of the Buddhist origins... the objective was not to teach Buddhism... but to... experiment

with... novel... methods... At the same time, the program needed to remain faithful... to the universal dharma dimension alluded to, which... lies at the very core of... mindfulness. The task... is to translate the meditative challenges and context into... the lives of the participants, yet without denaturing the dharma dimension... This requires... understanding of that dimension... through... personal engagement... meditation retreats at Buddhist centers or... professional training programs in MBSR.

We are left with a bewildering impression that the Dharma is diluted to some “universal lawfulness”. Buddhist Psychology is given credit through a half-hearted gesture. In fact, in a following article Davidson and Kabat-Zinn (2004, pp.150-152) totally dismissed Buddhist Psychology by stating that mindfulness, defined as moment to moment non-judgmental awareness, “does not include Buddhist psychology”; it is an isomorphic translation “for greater awareness, self-knowledge, equanimity, and self-compassion”... practiced “across all activities of daily living” aimed at “the cultivation of insight and understanding of self and self-in-relationship”... “the cultivation of openhearted presence (has) nothing particularly Buddhist.” Revisiting these issues once more, Kabat-Zinn (2009b, pp.xxviii-xxix) recently obfuscates his above statements by contriving that his use of the mindfulness concept is also:

[A]n umbrella term that subsumes... the Eightfold Noble Path, and... the dharma itself... We never limit our use of mindfulness to its most narrow technical sense... I offered an *operational* definition... [which] leaves the full dimensionality and impact of mindfulness... implicit and available for ongoing inquiry... [T]he word *mindfulness* does double-duty as a comprehensive but tacit umbrella term that included other essential aspects of dharma, [the choice] was made as a potential skilful means to facilitate introducing what Nyanaponika Thera referred to as *the heart of Buddhist meditation* into the mainstream of medicine... and the wider society in a wholly universal rather than Buddhist formulation and vocabulary... [His] inclusive and non-dual formulation offered both validation and permission to trust and act on my own direct experience of the meditation practice and the dharma... even if... it was glossing over... Buddhist psychology... that I felt could be differentiated and clarified later...

To give this justification the benefit of the doubt, one needs to believe that Kabat-Zinn never dismissed Buddhist Psychology. If this *post hoc* rationalization is acceptable, psychologists with a Buddhist background (e.g., at the 2nd Asian Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy Conference, Bangkok, 2008) who felt at odds with and expressed their worry about the *chutzpah* of “Buddhist Lite” approaches (Kwee, 2010d), may feel somewhat relieved. Nonetheless, the inherent deficiency as elucidated by means of the quadrant remains unaffected.

Buddhist Psychology as a Framework

The Buddha’s pivotal insight is that the human predicament of suffering is relational and rooted in these “Three Poisons”: greed, hatred, and ignorance (regarding the illusion of self or soul and the delusion of the existence of god[s]). This social vision is as valid today as it was 2600 years ago, since it is undeniable that greed is the root cause of global financial crises and hatred is the root cause of worldwide terrorism. The end result is *duhkha* (fear, anger, sadness, depression, and premature death) unless we know how to modify these interactive relational performances with savvy and wisdom. Arising from relationships, *karma*’s intentional action concurs with “meaningful-thought-and-relational-performance” whose malfeasance is transformable by collaborative practice. During his time the Buddha called himself a *karmavadin*, someone who deals with *karma* and its transformation through discourse and dialogue. Dealing with meaningful scenarios by detecting and changing its cognitive,

behavioural, volitional, and motivational causes in co-action, “Buddhist appreciative inquiry” mobilizes people to eradicate unwholesome anti-social affect by exercising wholesomeness through embodying pro-social *sukha* (bliss) in impartiality via the social meditations of loving-kindness, compassion, and joy. A postmodern collaborative practice of “Karma Transformation” systematically integrates the *Dharma*, the co-arrangement of evidence-based interventions, and the meta-psychology of social construction from a new Buddhist Psychology perspective (Kwee, Gergen, & Koshikawa, 2006).

The Buddha summoned those who travel in his footsteps not to follow him blindly, but to be “a light onto oneself”. Pristine mindfulness constitutes the groundwork for “awakening” which is viewed here as a process of de-construction toward “not-self”. To reiterate, a non-foundational “empty-self” is not a goal in itself but a reset point to re-construct toward “relational inter-being”. MB interventions cleverly foster attention, awareness, and concentration, but conspicuously disregard the cultivation of judgmental insights in the karmic interpersonal virtues and relational consequences within the framework of the *4-Ennobling Realities*. These are social realities which inhere in the Buddha’s causality hypothesis of “dependent origination” whose heartfelt understanding might lead to liberating emptiness. Entwined in the *8-Fold Balancing Practice*, mindfulness is more than bare attention to what arises in the here-now, clarity, and focus. It also requires an insightful monitoring and introspection of *karma*’s relational impact and an interactional balancing whilst expanding the social meditations. Advocating a pristine mindfulness, Asian Buddhist psychologists in a recent volume (Kwee, 2010d) do not belittle the MB outcome research but rebut the *Dharma*-alienated, reductionist, and fragmented “Buddhist-Lite” approaches as they feel like a kind of colonial or arrogant expropriation. Notwithstanding, as Padmasiri de Silva (2008; pers. comm., Bangkok), a doyen of Buddhist Psychology, observed: “Converting mindfulness to the status of a pill to get rid of a headache is harmless, but building a psychological system around Buddhist practice is a serious mission.”

In Closing

Recently, Kwee and others (2010d) highlight Buddhist scriptures relevant for psychology by using concepts grounded in the rudimentary philosophical psychology of the *Abhidharma* (the third Buddhist canonical book). They accommodate a comprehensive roadmap to deal with the existential suffering of everyday life by a relational *modus vivendi* of loving-kindness, compassion, and joy amidst adversity, in line with what the Buddha had taught, in a postmodern rendition called *Relational Buddhism*. Upholding the *Dharma* as a pro-social way of life and endorsing a pan-Buddhist Psychology characterized by a secular and demythologized content, they refute pious adherents’ craving projections of the Buddha as an omniscient saviour who performed magic miracles and promised *Nirvana* as a palpable paradise in a space to transmigrate to after death. This article reflects some of their critical appraisals and new finds of current trends in Buddhist Psychology and recent developments in mindfulness.

Contemporary psychology provides an academic vocabulary to convey age-old conceptualizations of Buddhist practices and is not proposed as an alternative framework to replace the *Dharma*. Thus, a “Psychology of Relational Buddhism” renders a present era translation of the *Dharma* and all its practices, particularly mindfulness meditation. Conveyed as an integrated “social-clinical-neuro-psychology” of Body/Speech/Mind, it is 21st century *bodhisattva* guideline which embraces the psychology of social construction as a meta-theory of action that discards “Transcendental Truths”. “The truth” as a non-foundational concept is empty. Using language, to tell *the* truth about reality, the Buddha or Buddhism will thus remain utopia. Language cannot tell whether the world of things and experiencing are “real” either as it is merely a provisional map, not an ultimate reality mirror. Thus, there are no final

reality constructions. Words make us participate in relationship. Through the pragmatic medium of speech we act and do things with each other. This leads to the hypothesis that the site of mind and experience is not under the skin in-between the ears behind the eyeballs but in-between us through “linguaging”. Once we agree on this, *reality is polyvocal*.

The principle of “skillful means and methods” (*upaya*) through which Buddhism could adapt to various cultures and survive the ravages of time is now again helpful in the present major move of the *Dharma* away from metaphysics and religion toward an ongoing paradigm shift involving social psychology to become a disseminating vehicle for Buddhist action appropriate for today. In effect, what matters for the Buddhist practitioner is to cease *duhkha*, the *raison d’être* of Buddhism, by mindfully deconstructing the taken for granted socially constructed *dharma*s into emptiness. Few people are prepared for such a wrenching dislocation, but for the poetic activist the horizons are exciting (Gergen, 2009b). In closing: “If you call this a stick, you affirm, if you call it not a stick, you negate: beyond affirmation and negation what would you call it?” (Ta-hui, 12thc). Even when one abides in a state of mindfulness all alone grappling with this *koan*, “I” do not experience in solipsism because any experience that can be labelled by words is imbued by interpersonal meaning. And if we concur on the watershed that it is relationship that engenders the private, loving-kindness might make headway to congeal societies.

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