

# What is the Value of Mindfulness Meditation in Buddhist Psychotherapy



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## ABSTRACT

It seems necessary before to go further to understand what is really mindfulness and its origins. Nowadays, mindfulness is really fashion everywhere through the world; we can see a lot of newspapers, magazine dedicated to mindfulness and numerous centers where it is possible to practice mindfulness. However, it's seems always hard when we read these newspapers or magazine to get a right view of what is mindfulness and sometimes it could be really misleading. So what is mindfulness and which impact mindfulness has with the buddhist psychotherapy?

What is to be mindful? Actually is to pay attention in a particular way. The key word here is the 'way' because some write from the standpoint of buddhism and other from the standpoint of psychology. However, there is common sense to say that there is an emphasis on awareness being alive to what is immediately presented to it. In some definition, mindful awareness is apparently directed and focused by deliberate effort and according this definition it should not have a particular object.<sup>1</sup> In addition, we can notice that mindfulness has a particular qualities which are acceptance and non-judgment. In a way, being mindful is to be alert to what is

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<sup>1</sup>Mace, C. (2008). Mindfulness and mental health, Routledge. p.5.

happening now to the exclusion of the past or the future. This kind of definition are used by some authors like John Kabat-Zinn who note that: “mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way on purpose in the present moment and nonjudgmentally” or Gunaratana said that: “mindfulness reminds us of what are supposed to be doing, it see things as they really are and it sees the true nature of all phenomena”<sup>2</sup>.

*Keywords:* Mindfulness, way, psychological health

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 4.

## Mindfulness and its buddhist context

However, to understand more fully mindfulness and its value with buddhist psychotherapy, one has to focus about its basic understood and what is expected to achieve in the buddhist context. So, the meaning of mindfulness was introduced a century ago by the translator Rhys David who was working on Pali texts for the buddhist text society. He used it to translate the Pali term *sati* for which common alternative translations are awareness or bare attention. Why mindfulness is connected with buddhist psychotherapy? Actually, because we find his roots in the buddhist theory which elaborate a kind of psychology rather than a theology or cosmology like in western. In fact, the goals are to provide support, but it means a practical support through teaching through sutras. What is the essence of the buddhist teaching? The four noble truth. Life bring suffering, there is causes of this suffering, suffering can end and there is a path by which it may be ended<sup>3</sup>. It's in the last truth that mindfulness comes to the fore. The method of liberation is set out in eight linked stages within the Noble Eightfold Path. Here, one can see the link between mindfulness and his buddhist roots. Among the eight, the three factors that make for concentration are right effort, right awareness and right concentration. Mindfulness is an essential ingredient of right awareness often translated as right mindfulness and as such, the foundation of the mental discipline necessary to achieve concentration and subsequently, the right understanding and right thought that make up wisdom.<sup>4</sup> Beside, the practical importance of mindfulness is understood as we said above through sutra like very popular sutra Mahasatipathana which is exceptionally popular because it covers contemplation of the body, feelings, mind and mind objects. For instance, it is mentioned in these passages the practice of mindfulness of breathing which contain clear instructions for maintaining attention on the passage of the breath. This is a pivotal text.<sup>5</sup> Buddha teaches that one should use one's breath in order to achieve concentration for instance the sutra of mindfulness says: when walking, the practitioner must be conscious that he is walking. When sitting, the practitioner must be conscious that he is sitting. When lying down, the practitioner must be conscious of that position. Practising thus, the practitioner

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<sup>3</sup>Mace, C. op.cit. p.8.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p.9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. p. 16.

lives in direct and constant mindfulness of the body'.<sup>6</sup> Actually, the contemporary definitions of mindfulness recognise an immediate and receptive awareness, shorn of reactions and judgement. In this way, early buddhist literature identifies a form of awareness prior to the elaboration of experience through habitual reactions which is known as bare attention as well as mindfulness. In fact, mindfulness differs from the highly conditioned states of everyday awareness but can be cultivated through practices that aim to recover its unconditioned quality.<sup>7</sup> Here we can see how the practice is connected with his buddhist roots. Traditionally, the practice involves disciplined attention to the body, including breathing, felt reactions, patterns of the mind and apprehension of the basic nature of the reality in all experience. So if one experience mindfulness with his deep buddhist understanding pattern, one can expected to be free from suffering. The development of mindfulness in that way is a precondition of liberation, although other factors are required to complete the mental purification that permits this direct immediate and irreversible knowledge of reality that in buddhism is the only alternative to suffering.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the characteristic of mindfulness is nonsuperficiality, it means that mindfulness is penetrative and profound. For instance if we throw a cork into a stream, it simply bobs up and down on the surface, floating downstream with the current. If we throw a stone instead, it will immediately sink to the very bed of the stream. In this way, mindfulness ensures that the mind will sink deeply into the object and not slip superficially past it.<sup>9</sup> The function of mindfulness are nonsuperficiality and nondisappearance means to keep the object always in view, neither forgetting it nor allowing it to disappear<sup>10</sup>. What are the benefits if one can keep these two functions of mindfulness? Probably, one will become more mindful in daily life and will avoid defilements that bring psychological trouble and suffering.

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<sup>6</sup>Thich Nhat Hanh. (2008) *The miracle of mindfulness*. Rider. P.7.

<sup>7</sup>Mace, C. op.cit. p.23.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p.23

<sup>9</sup>Sayadaw U Pandita.(1992). *In this very life*. Wisdom Publication. p.94.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.94.

## Mindfulness and psychological health

How mindfulness can be useful for anyone in health as a psychotherapy? We have seen above that if one wishes to understand deeply what is mindfulness, one has to look after his buddhist roots. Actually, one will understand how mindfulness could be useful in daily life if one understand really the five aggregates and the four noble truth. We have seen that the cause of suffering is disorder and especially what we call the mental disorder. They are labelled as a negative emotions or kilesa which it means defilements. Because of these defilements, one suffers. The term kilesa could also be understood through the noxious trio which is lobha, dosa, and moha. Actually, moha means desire, hate means dosa and moha means delusion. When one has to fight with the defilements, he or she will never get peace, and instead of peace one will be blind and ignorant. In this way, mindfulness can lead people to knowledge and peace. Because one is not mindful and fetter with the noxious trio, the suffering appear. For instance, the things of this world are impermanent but because we don't understand that, we cling about the things. When the things vanish we are suffering and our reaction lead to hate. This is why it's really important to connect the mindfulness and his buddhist root, because if we realize the impermanence of the things through a deep understanding of the five aggregates and the four Noble truth, we could avoid the suffering. However to reach this stage, we have to develop mindfulness. The mind is always distorted because we are looking for pleasure, the mind is always obsessed about that and this situation is reinforcing by our contemporary society because today, our society emphasize the pleasure and encourage beings to looking for that. The result is suffering, because one is always hunting to catch pleasure and most of the time he is not mindful. When we cannot get the object of our desire, we suffer, we feel sad and this lead to psychological disturbance. Why we are in this situation? Because we are confused, it means we are searching outside instead of inside. If we turn outside we cannot learn the science of concentration. Hence, when one know there is no suffering but when one doesn't know there is suffering. The psychological disorder appears because our attention is not stable. In this way, if we are mindful we could remove defilements which bring us to pain. How we know if we are mindful or not? We know we are mindful because our attention remain stable; our attention doesn't shake or distract. In fact, we could say that an unstable mind is a non-fulfill mind which project always his desire and frustration. Because there is no mindfulness, we don't have awareness and we develop fear, depression which is ignorance. So, mindfulness is the cause of liberation because when we understand body and mind we understand all. The body connect with the mind will bring peace. Does mindfulness

can be labelled as the guard of the mind? It seems that it's like the boat which is follow the radar, mind follow mindfulness which is like a guard. In the Dhammapada there is an interesting quote which says: 'the job of the wise man is to guard the mind, the job of the foolish is to be distracted'. In fact, the wise learn to be always mindful and the foolish has a distracted mind which is a natural state for the foolish. The foolish has no any intention to protect the mind from shaking because shaking became an habits. Shaking mind lead to suffering and psychological disturbance. Mindfulness lead beings to understand the reality of the things, it lead to liberation. In fact, we understand the all by understanding the parts of the all which are the aggregates which each aggregates are inseparable of the all. It means that one understand the dependent origination and anicca, the impermanence of the things. One understands the true reality because when one understands the five aggregates, one understands non self and one can be relaxed. We could notice that the practice of mindfulness is changing the habit to attune to the ultimate reality. Unfortunately, our monkey mind has nature to running after the object of our desire which can impact the mind with pleasure, with sensation. We cling pleasant and unpleasant and when there is no we suffer, we are bore, we smoke or drink. In fact this is mindfulness which can turn to the mind. Because we are not aware about these excitements, we are disturbed and we don't have healthy mind.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

We have seen that mindfulness means to pay attention in a particular way in the present moment without judgement. In this way, mindfulness is really valuable regarding psychotherapy, because it could make one free of suffering. However, it seems that if one expects a great impact of the practice of mindfulness in the field of psychotherapy, one should also get a deep understanding about his buddhist root. Because practice mindfulness without understand and cut mindfulness from his buddhist root, how one could understand about the impermanence of the things and the dependent origination through the five aggregates and the four noble truth? So, it is really important to have a good knowledge of that because mindfulness with his buddhist root can remove the defilement by this understanding, and put away the noxious trio of moha, lobha and dosa. Mindfulness brings a

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<sup>11</sup> Venerable Dhammadipa, Shamata retreat, 6-15 septembre 2017, International buddhist academy, Kathmandu.

stable mind which can cure the pain which come from the defilements. Finally mindfulness could be really valuable in the field of psychotherapy because it will bring liberation to beings. Mindfulness will remove ignorance which has been developed because of moha, lobha and dosa and will bring clarity. Because of the clarity, beings could be cure and remove pain with mindfulness.

## **References**

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