INTRODUCTION

In its Buddhist context, mindfulness meditation has three overarching purposes: knowing the mind; training the mind; and freeing the mind. While mindfulness can be practiced quite well without Buddhism, Buddhism cannot be practiced without mindfulness. It is easy to spend an hour, a day, or even a lifetime so caught up with thoughts, concerns, and activities as to preclude understanding deeply what makes us operate the way we do. People can easily stay clueless as to what motivates them, the nature of their reactions and feelings, and even, at times, what they are thinking about. The first step in mindfulness practice is to notice and take stock of who we are. What is going on in the body, in the mind, in our emotional life? What underlying dispositions are operating?

This part of mindfulness practice is a simple process of discovery; it is not judging something as good or bad. Meditative discovery is supported by stillness. Whatever our degree of stillness, it acts as a backdrop to highlight what is going on. It doesn’t take much stillness to notice a racing, agitated mind. Discovery means becoming familiar with what a racing mind is like instead of being critical of it. What is the mind itself like, and what is its effect on the body? What emotions are present? What thoughts and beliefs?

ABSTRACT

Buddhism, like most of the great religions of the world, is divided into a number of different traditions. However, most traditions share a common set of fundamental beliefs. One central belief of Buddhism is often referred to as reincarnation, the concept that people are reborn after dying. In fact, most individuals go through many cycles of birth, living, death and rebirth. A practicing Buddhist differentiates between the concepts of rebirth and reincarnation. In reincarnation, the individual may recur repeatedly. In rebirth, a person does not necessarily return to Earth as the same entity ever again. He compares it to a leaf growing on a tree. When the withering leaf falls off, a new leaf will eventually replace it. It is similar to the old leaf, but it is not identical to the original leaf.

Buddhism is a philosophy of life expounded by Gautama Buddha who lived and taught in northern India in the 6th century B.C. The Buddha was not a god and the philosophy of Buddhism does not entail any theistic world view. The teachings of the Buddha are aimed solely at liberating sentient beings from suffering. The Basic Teachings of Buddha which are core to Buddhism are: The Three Universal Truths, The Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path.

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The law of Karma teaches that the responsibility for unskillful actions is borne by the person who commits them. After his enlightenment, the Buddha went to the Deer Park near the holy city of Benares and shared his new understanding with five holy men. They understood immediately and became his disciples. This marked the beginning of the Buddhist community. For the next forty-five years, the Buddha and his disciples went from place to place in India spreading the Dharma, his teachings. Their compassion knew no bounds; they helped everyone along the way, beggars, kings and slave girls. At night, they would sleep where they were; when hungry they would ask for a little food. Wherever the Buddha went, he won the hearts of the people because he dealt with their true feelings. He advised them not to accept his words on blind faith, but to decide for themselves whether his teachings are right or wrong, then follow them. He encouraged everyone to have compassion for each other and develop their own virtue: "You should do your own work, for I can teach only the way." Once, the Buddha and his disciple Ananda visited a monastery where a monk was suffering from a contagious disease. The poor man lay in a mess with no one looking after him. The Buddha himself washed the sick monk and placed him on a new bed. Afterwards, he admonished the other monks: "Monks, you have neither mother nor father to look after you. If you do not look after each other, who will look..."
after you? Whoever serves the sick and suffering, serves me.” After many such cycles, if a person releases their attachment to desire and the self, they can attain Nirvana. This is a state of liberation and freedom from suffering.

The knowing aspect of mindfulness is deliberate and conscious. When you know something this way, not only do you know it, but also a presence of mind grows in which you clearly know that you know. It is like being one of two calm people in an unruly crowd. Neither of you gets caught up in the crowd’s agitation, and a spark of recognition, maybe even a smile, passes between you as you share knowing that both of you are not caught. When the focus is on knowing, we make no attempt to try to change anything. For people who are always trying to make something happen, just observing the mind can be a radical change and a relief.

The mind is not static. It is a process or, more accurately, a series of interacting processes. As such, the mind is malleable and pliable: it can be trained and shaped in new ways. An important part of Buddhist practice is taking responsibility for the dispositions and activities of our own mind so that it can operate in ways that are beneficial. When we don’t take responsibility for our own mind, external forces will do the shaping: media, advertisements, companions, and other parts of society.

The three universal truths teach us about mindfulness. Nothing is lost in the universe, Everything Changes and the law of cause and effect In Buddhism, the law of karma, says “for every event that occurs, there will follow another event whose existence was caused by the first, and this second event will be pleasant or unpleasant according as its cause was skillful or unskillful.” These three consist of Sila, Virtue, good conduct, morality. This is based on two fundamental principles: The principle of equality: that all living entities are equal. The principle of reciprocity: This is the “Golden Rule” in Christianity - to do unto others as you would wish them to do unto you. It is found in all major religions. Samadhi: Concentration, meditation, mental development. Developing one's mind is the path to wisdom which, in turn, leads to personal freedom. Mental development also strengthens and controls our mind; this helps us maintain a good conduct. Prajna: Discernment, insight, wisdom, enlightenment. This is the real heart of Buddhism. Wisdom will emerge if your mind is pure and calm. The first two paths listed in the Eightfold Path, described below, refer to discernment; the last three belong to concentration; the middle three are related to virtue. A good starting point is to train the mind in kindness and compassion. Even a little mindfulness will sometimes prove the cliche, “Self-knowledge is seldom good news.” Mindfulness may reveal mental conflict with ourselves, others, or the inconstant nature of life. Such conflict can take the form of aversion, confusion, anger, despair, ambition, or discouragement. Meeting conflict with further conflict will only add to our suffering. Instead, we can begin exploring how to be kinder, more forgiving and spacious with ourselves.

Sometimes how one makes effort in meditation can be unproductive. Striving too hard, trying to escape something, clinging to views and ideals, meditating as penance or obligation, and measuring every little bit of progress are some of the things that interfere with meditation. An antidote to this struggle is training the mind to be more at ease with how things are. Rather than trying to organize the conditions of the world, we can cultivate an ability to be relaxed with whatever is happening. Once the mind experiences some ease in meditation, it is easier to train it in other ways. We can develop concentration or mental stability. We can foster the growth of generosity, ethical virtue, courage, discernment, and the capacity to release clinging. Often a Buddhist practitioner will choose one particular quality to cultivate for a period of time.

The Buddha's Four Noble Truths explore human suffering. They may be described as ‘Dukkha’: Suffering exists: Life is suffering. Suffering is real and almost universal. Suffering has many causes: loss, sickness, pain, failure, and the impermanence of pleasure. ‘Samudaya’: There is a cause of suffering. Suffering is due to attachment. It is the desire to have and control things. It can take many forms: craving of sensual pleasures; the desire for fame; the desire to avoid unpleasant sensations, like fear, anger or jealousy. ‘Nirodha’: There is an end to suffering. Attachment can be overcome. Suffering ceases with the final liberation of Nirvana (Nibbana). The mind experiences complete freedom, liberation and non-attachment. It lets go of any desire or craving. ‘Magga’: In order to end suffering, you must follow the Eightfold Path. There is a path for accomplishing this. The five precepts These are rules to live by. They are somewhat analogous to the second half of the Ten Commandments in Judaism and Christianity -- that part of the Decalogue which describes behaviors to avoid. However, they are recommendations, not commandments.

Central to Buddhist practice is training the capacity to let go of clinging. Sooner or later, the first aspect of Buddhist meditation, knowing the mind, will reveal how and where clinging is present. Some of the more painful forms of grasping are clinging to such things as pleasure, desire, self-image and judgments, opinions and ideals, people, and possessions. All clinging limits the mind’s freedom and peace. The good news of Buddhism is that we can release clinging. We can free the mind. Or, if you prefer, you can call it “freeing the heart.” The ultimate aim of Buddhist practice is to liberate the heart so there are no barriers, shackles, or constrictions to our heart’s freedom. Usually freeing the heart begins in small steps, each bringing a corresponding peace. Freed completely, the heart is completely at peace. Complete freedom is not easily attained. It requires knowledge and training.

Knowing, training, and freeing the mind develop together. The more we know ourselves, the easier it is both to train ourselves and to know what needs to be released. The more our minds are trained, the easier it is to know ourselves and the more strength and wisdom we have to let go. And the more we let go, the fewer the obstructions to understanding ourselves and the easier it will be to train the mind. Few people care for their own minds as they do their own bodies, their clothes, or their possessions. Care of the body is a daily task. The mind too needs regular care, exercise, and training. With freedom from suffering as the goal, knowing, training, and freeing are the three Buddhist ways of caring for the mind.

Believers are expected to use their own intelligence in deciding exactly how to apply these rules. Do not kill. This is sometimes translated as "not harming" or an absence of
violence. Do not steal. This is generally interpreted as including the avoidance of fraud and economic exploitation. Do not lie. This is sometimes interpreted as including name-calling, gossip, etc. Do not misuse sex. For monks and nuns, this means any departure from complete celibacy. For the laity, adultery is forbidden, along with any sexual harassment or exploitation, including that within marriage. The Buddha did not discuss consensual premarital sex within a committed relationship, thus, Buddhist traditions differ on this. Most Buddhists, probably influenced by their local cultures, condemn same-sex sexual activity regardless of the nature of the relationship between the people involved. Do not consume alcohol or other drugs. The main concern here is that intoxicants cloud the mind. Some have included as a drug other methods of divorcing ourselves from reality — e.g. movies, television, and the Internet. Those preparing for monastic life or who are not within a family are expected to avoid an additional five activities. Use of garlands, perfumes and personal adornment. Use of high seats and accepting gold or silver.

Buddhism represents a vast and rich intellectual tradition which, until recently, received very little influence from Western philosophy. This tradition contains a variety of teachings about how to live and what to do in various situations. Buddhism tells us to purify our own minds and to develop lovingkindness and compassion for all beings. The various forms of Buddhism offer systematic frameworks for understanding the traits of character and types of actions that cause problems for ourselves and others, as well as those qualities and actions that help to heal the suffering of the world. When starting a Buddhist path, one agrees to follow rules of moral discipline that forbid various destructive actions; but once the mind has reached a very high degree of spiritual development, the rules are transcended and one acts spontaneously for the benefit of others.

Right Concentration: Meditate to achieve a higher state of consciousness. Right Concentration is meditating in such a way as to progressively realize a true understanding of imperfection, impermanence, and non-separateness. There are, however, many sects of Buddhism and there are different kinds of Buddhist monks all over the world. The life and customs of Buddhist monks are not only different and unique but consist of a spiritual meaning. Their daily life follows a strict schedule that revolves around meditation, study of scriptures, and taking part in ceremonies. There are Buddhist shrines, Buddhist monasteries, where monks live, Gompas and Buddhist Stupas all over the world. Though it originated in northern India, the Emperor Ashoka helped to spread Buddhism into South East Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand and Indo-China, from where it moved on to influence people in the Himalayan kingdoms of Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, Central Asia as well as China, Korea, Viet Nam and Japan. Around 95 per cent of the population in Thailand is Buddhist, the highest concentration in the world, with Cambodia, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Viet Nam, Japan, Macao (China) and Taiwan Province of China following close behind. Devotees reaffirm their faith in the five principles called Panchsheel. Do not to take life, Do not to steal, Do not to commit adultery, Do not lie and Do not to consume liquor or other intoxicants.

Buddhism upholds lofty and demanding ethical values, but recognizes the need to adapt those values to the conditions of the real world. From a Buddhist point of view, animal life is precious, and human life is even more so. Ideally we should refrain from killing animals, adopt a vegetarian diet, renounce all forms of violence and live in harmony with nature. Yet there are some difficult cases in which violence and killing seem almost unavoidable. Some Buddhist writers have offered guidance on how to act appropriately and realistically in such situations, without abandoning the compassion and lovingkindness that form the basis of the Buddhist approach to ethics.

References
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