ORIGINAL PAPER

Buddhist Antecedents to the Body Scan Meditation

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Abstract:

This article explores the historical background to the body scan practiced in MBSR by tracing it back via *vipassanā* meditation taught in Myanmar to a particular interpretation of the third step in the canonical instructions on mindfulness of breathing. Although the body scan as such would presumably have been unknown in early Buddhism, its practice does appear to have developed from an aspect of perhaps the most popular meditation practice in ancient and modern Buddhist traditions: mindfulness of breathing.

Key words:

Body scan; S.N. Goenka; Ledi Sayādaw; Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction; mindfulness of breathing; proprioception; U Ba Khin; *vipassanā*

Introduction

The standard curriculum in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) begins with a body scan. As noted by Dreeben et al. (2013, p. 395),

> The body scan, in effect, provides the pedagogical basis of all the practices introduced later within both the MBSR and MBCT programs … it provides a thorough introduction to mindfulness in practice.

Given that the body scan serves to introduce patients to mindfulness, it would seem of interest to explore its historical background, in the sense of trying to ascertain its probable precedents and how it might have developed into its present form.

The MBSR Body Scan

The MBSR body scan meditation involves systematically 'sweeping' through the body, starting with the toes of the left foot and moving up to the leg and hip, then shifting to the other foot and the corresponding leg and hip, followed by covering the torso. From the shoulders, attention shifts to the tips of both hands and then moves up both arms simultaneously and proceeds to the neck and finally to the head. Throughout, the emphasis is on being aware without reactivity. Regarding the origins of this approach, Kabat-Zinn (1990/2013, p. 91) reported that

> One of the people who influenced my developing the MBSR version of the body scan had been an aerospace engineer before he became a meditation teacher.

As pointed out by Stuart (2017, see note 26), this meditation teacher was Robert Hover (1920–2008), who taught in the tradition of U Ba Khin (1899–1971). According to Gilpin (2008, p. 238), Jon Kabat-Zinn's "initial training" under Robert Hover took place in the year of 1973. The U Ba Khin meditation practice formed the starting point for Jon Kabat-Zinn's eventual development of MBSR (email communication 24 August 2019):

> We were taking vows not to make any voluntary movements for several hours at a time, and for me, that was really stretching my envelope of experience, and put me face to face with levels of pain intensity I had never experienced before, and an experience of spaciousness and no suffering in moments within all the screaming intensity of sensation in the body. Part of what I realized on that retreat was that people whose pain would not go away just by getting up and stopping meditating might

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> benefit from such a discovery, and the realization that one could actually turn toward and "befriend" intensive and unwanted sensation.

The actual envisioning of how this could be put into practice occurred in the setting of another *vipassanā* meditation retreat. Kabat-Zinn (2011, p. 287) reported that

> On a two-week *vipassanā* retreat at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts, in the Spring of 1979, while sitting in my room one afternoon about Day 10 of the retreat, I had a 'vision' that lasted maybe 10 seconds … I saw in a flash not only a model that could be put in place, but also the long-term implications of what might happen if the basic idea was sound and could be implemented … it was so compelling that I decided to take it on wholeheartedly as best I could … a flood of thoughts following the extended moment filled in the picture. Why not try to make meditation so commonsensical that anyone would be drawn to it? … and, why not do it in the hospital of the medical centre where I happened to be working at that time? After all, hospitals do function as 'dukkha magnets' in our society.

As part of the practice of MBSR that stemmed from this vision, the body scan is usually practiced in the prone posture, whereas traditionally *vipassanā* meditation mostly involves the sitting and walking postures. In an attempt to reach out to those who are in pain and make the potential benefit of mindfulness practice accessible to them, adopting the prone posture is a skillful means. This holds particularly in the Western setting, where a chief challenge of communicating mindfulness meditation to those unfamiliar with it lies in facilitating a shift from doing a chore to learning to just be. Hence, the degree of relaxation that comes naturally when adopting the prone posture must have been a substantial asset to the successful spread of MBSR.

This does not mean, however, that the body scan is merely about relaxation. Physiological changes during the practice of the body scan meditation differ from mere relaxation (Ditto et al. 2006). Preferences regarding posture can vary; in a research conducted by Ussher et al. (2014, p. 131) a substantial majority of participants in a body scan meditation "chose to sit, rather than lay down."

Insight Meditation Taught by U Ba Khin

According to Solé-Leris (1986/1992, p. 137), "U Ba Khin started *vipassanā* meditation in 1937" under the guidance of the lay teacher Saya Thet Gyi (1873–1945), who practiced and taught mindfulness of breathing. Saya Thet Gyi had been a follower of the famous scholar monk Ledi Sayādaw (1846–1923).

Ledi Sayādaw had a central role in the spread of insight meditation among laity (Braun 2013). This spread appears to have taken its initial momentum from the wish to strengthen lay Buddhists in Myanmar against the destabilizing influences of the British colonial regime and Christian missionary activity. According to a prediction found in later Theravāda texts, the disappearance of Buddhism will be heralded by the disappearance of the Abhidharma teachings (Endo 2004). These scholastically-oriented teachings, which gradually developed during the first few centuries after the time of the Buddha, are found in a body of texts considered by Theravāda tradition to be canonical.

Given such a prediction, an attempt to ensure the longevity of Buddhism naturally focused on protecting this particular collection of teachings. For this purpose, Ledi Sayādaw taught Abhidharma widely to lay Buddhists, mainly based on a post-canonical compendium reflecting a later stage in Abhidharma thought, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (Bodhi 1993). As part of such teaching activity, he also encouraged meditation practices aimed at making these Abhidharma teachings a matter of personal realization.

Two central notions of Abhidharma thought, in the way it had developed by that time, were particularly influential for such meditation practice. One of these is the affirmation of momentariness, in the sense that everything, without exception, passes away as soon as it has arisen. The other is the belief that matter is made up of subatomic particles, referred to by the term *kalāpa*. Both notions are later developments, attested only in the post-canonical period (Karunadasa 1967/1989 and von Rospatt 1995). The relevance of these two notions can be seen in the following explanation given by U Ba Khin (1991/1998, p. 32 and 35) of the type of *vipassanā* meditation he taught:

> Everything that exists at the material level is composed of *kalāpas. Kalāpas* are material units very much smaller than atoms, which die out almost immediately after they come into being … in Vipassana the object of meditation is *anicca* [impermanence], and therefore in the case of those used to focusing their attention on bodily feelings, they can feel *anicca* directly. In experiencing *anicca* in relation to the body, it should first be in the area where one can easily get his attention engrossed, changing the area of attention from place to place, from head to feet and from feet to head, at times probing into the interior. At this stage it must clearly be understood that no attention is to be paid to the anatomy of the body, but to the formations of matter—the *kalāpas*—and the nature of their constant change.

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Practiced in this way, the body scan serves to corroborate the Abhidharma map of reality, confirming through personal meditative experience that the body is made up of subatomic particles that arise and pass away with great rapidity.

This way of employing the body scan seems to have evolved at some juncture in the trajectory from Ledi Sayādaw via Saya Thet Gyi to U Ba Khin. Kornfield (1977/1993, p. 236) commented that "U Ba Khin's teachings are based primarily on his own experience." This leaves open the possibility that the employment of the body scan was a contribution by U Ba Khin. However, this is not the position taken by the perhaps most well-known student of U Ba Khin, S. N. Goenka (1924–2013). According to Goenka (1991/1998c, p. 118 and 1991/1998a, p. 151f),

> this wonderful technique was kept in its pristine purity from generation to generation through a chain of Teachers culminating in Sayagyi U Ba Khin … [it is this] entire chain of teachers from [the] Buddha, the Enlightened One, to Sayagyi U Ba Khin, who maintained this wonderful technique in its original form.

Braun (2013, p. 159) commented that "so far as I know, Ledi never made such a claim, nor did Thetgyi or U Ba Khin put so much stress on a perfectly preserved technique." In fact, as already pointed out by van Oosterwijk (2012, p. 67), in the early discourses it is not possible to "trace sweeping through the body" in the way taught by U Ba Khin and his students. Perhaps the position taken by S. N. Goenka regarding the "technique" passed down since the time of the Buddha should be read as referring to contemplation of impermanence in general. Such contemplation is indeed found recurrently in the early discourses as a meditation practice with a remarkable liberating potential.

The body scan taught by U Ba Khin can also offer relief from pain. In the case of S. N. Goenka, such potential had drawn him to the practice of *vipassanā* in the first place. This led to him being cured completely of the debilitating pains of migraine, which convinced him of the efficacy of the meditation practice. Goenka (1991/1998b, p. 141) reported:

> A severe physical disease—migraine headaches—provided the impetus for me to go to Sayagyi U Ba Khin and to undertake a ten-day course of Vipassana meditation … after learning Dhamma from Sayagyi, I realized that the migraine had been a blessing in disguise. Certainly, the disease was now cured; but this benefit was only a very minor, trivial aspect of the help my teacher gave me. Immeasurably more valuable is the jewel of Dhamma received from him which has changed my life.

Although the potential of freedom from pain served as an initial motivation, S. N. Goenka clearly placed emphasis on the mental transformation through insight into impermanence and its resultant impact on his life.

The Body Scan and the Breath

The harnessing of the body scan to the cultivation of *vipassanā*, in the form taught by U Ba Khin and his students, is not the only instance of such a form of meditation. A somewhat similar practice has been taught by the Thai monk and meditation teacher Ajahn Lee Dhammadharo.

The relevant instructions in Dhammadharo (1979/2010, p. 17f) related the body scan to being aware of the process of breathing:

> As soon as you find that your breathing feels comfortable, let this comfortable breath sensation spread to the different parts of the body. To begin with, inhale the breath sensation at the base of the skull and let it flow all the way down the spine. Then, if you are male, let it spread down your right leg to the sole of your foot, to the ends of your toes, and out into the air. Inhale the breath sensation at the base of the skull again and let it spread down your spine, down your left leg to the ends of your toes, and out into the air. (If you are female, begin with the left side first, because the male and female nervous systems are different). Then let the breath from the base of the skull spread down over both shoulders, past your elbows and wrists, to the tips of your fingers, and out into the air. Let the breath at the base of the throat spread down the central nerve at the front of the body, past the lungs and liver, all the way down to the bladder and colon. Inhale the breath right at the middle of the chest and let it go all the way down to your intestines. Let all these breath sensations spread so that they connect and flow together.

This way of undertaking the body scan comes closely intertwined with paying attention to the breath. Notably, such a connection, although in a less prominent form, can also be seen in instructions given by Kabat-Zinn (2018a, p. 80):

> The body scan can be undertaken and practiced with great precision and detail … that might include sensing how the breath is moving in and through each region (which of course it does, because the breath energy

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> reaches and bathes each and every region through the vehicle of the oxygenated blood) … inhabit each region and cultivate a deep intimacy with it as it is in that moment through your breath and through the direct, moment-to-moment attending to the raw sensations emanating from it.

Although the U Ba Khin method does not direct attention to the breath during the actual body scan, it builds on the same practice. In the course of a standard retreat, a practitioner will first cultivate mindfulness of breathing. Based on the degree of mental collectedness achieved in this way, a practitioner then turns to the body scan. Some employments of the body scan in current Mindfulness-Based Interventions similarly start off by directing mindfulness to the breath (Cropley et al. 2007 and Ussher et al. 2009).

Another meditative approach that also combines the breath with awareness of the body has been taught by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. This takes the following form (Nhat Hanh 1988, p. 46):

> you begin by breathing out and you observe, ‘I am breathing out and am aware of the hair on my head.’ ‘I am breathing in and am aware of the contents of my skull.’ You can continue like this until you reach the tips of your toes.

All of these various meditative approaches point to some relationship between the body scan and mindfulness of breathing.

Contemplation of the Body and of Feeling Tones

In principle, an antecedent for the body scan could reasonably be expected to be found in mindfulness practices that are in some way related to the whole body. Yet, none of the meditation practices listed under the heading of "contemplation of the body" in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels resembles a body scan (Anālayo 2013).

The most obvious place to look for a precedent to the body scan is the listing of bodily parts for contemplation of the body's anatomy. This is because the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels introduce the different bodily parts with a phrase that does come close to suggesting a body scan. The phrase is as follows:

> One examines this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair.
> (MN 10: *imameva kāyaṃ uddhaṃ pādatalā adho kesamatthakā … paccavekkhati*).
>
> [One contemplates] this body, according to its position and according to what is attractive and what is repulsive, from head to feet.
> (MĀ 98: 此身隨住, 隨其好惡, 從頭至足).
>
> One contemplates this body according to its nature and functions, from head to feet and from feet to head.
> (EĀ 12.1: 觀此身隨其性行, 從頭至足, 從足至).

However, the actual listing of anatomical parts proceeds from the hair (both the hair found on the head and that on the rest of the body), to the nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones and then various internal organs. This listing does not progress in a way that would be amenable to a continuous scanning through the body either from the head down or from the feet up.

Hence, it seems probable that the reference to contemplating the body from heat to feet would not have been meant literally, in the sense of requiring that one actually starts off with the head and then gradually moves toward the feet (or else starts from the feet and moves toward the head) when surveying the anatomical constitution of the body. Instead, this part of the instruction appears to express just the sense of a comprehensive coverage of the whole body when contemplating its anatomical constitution, making it clear that anything found between the top of the head and the soles of the feet should be contemplated in the same manner.

Another potential candidate for a precedent to the body scan would be contemplation of bodily postures. Kabat-Zinn (2018b, p. 87) explained that "when we practice the body scan, our awareness includes that very sense of proprioception." Such proprioception seems to be indeed relevant to mindfully knowing the posture of the body as being either walking, or standing, or sitting, or lying down. At the same time, however, the instructions for this exercise are about being aware of the posture as a whole, not about scanning the body upwards or downwards.

Another possible meditation practice of relevance would be contemplation of feeling tones (*vedanānupassanā*), the second of the four establishments of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*). Drummond (2006, p. 68) argued that "it is reasonable to assume that the field of the body scan is the second category of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, *vedanānupassana*,

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and not, as might possibly be assumed, the mindful observation of the body."

Yet, in the early discourses the compass of feeling tone, *vedanā*, is not confined to bodily sensations. This is particularly evident in the Discourse on the Dart, which distinguishes between the bodily feeling tones of pain and the mental feeling tones of reacting to that pain (SN 36.6 and SĀ 470; Anālayo 2016). Much of the success of MBSR lies precisely in tapping the potential of mindful observation to decouple the bodily dimension of pain from the mental feeling tones caused by reactivity to that bodily pain. This involves monitoring the type of feeling tones that result from mentally reacting to physical sensations.

Moreover, the emphasis in the canonical instructions on contemplation of feeling tones is on the clear distinction between pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral affective tones. Based on such recognition, these can be further distinguished into worldly and unworldly occurrences (Anālayo 2019a). The instructions for such practice have no evident relation to experiencing the constant change of subatomic particles.

In sum, contemplation of the body's anatomy, of its postures, and of feeling tones does not seem to offer an obvious precedent for the body scan.

An Ancient Chinese Meditation Manual

A precedent to the meditative approach taught by U Ba Khin and his students can be found in a meditation manual extant in Chinese (Anālayo 2006). This manual (T 614) had been compiled by a Kuchean named Kumārajīva (344–413), who became famous for translating a range of Mahāyāna texts into polished Chinese. According to Yamabe and Sueki (2009, p. xiii), this meditation manual was "compiled by Kumārajīva based largely on Indian sources." Deleanu (1992, p. 45) explained, regarding this manual and other closely similar works, that

> much of the meditation practices and doctrines, especially those associated with Conservative Buddhism, can be traced back to the Kashmirian Yogācāra school … the practice and theory of the Sarvāstivāda Yogācārins of the first four centuries of our era.

The relevant part in the meditation manual occurs in the context of an exposition of the third of the sixteen steps of mindfulness of breathing. These instructions are indeed an instance of a meditation practice "associated with Conservative Buddhism", an expression Florin Deleanu would have used to denote pre-Mahāyāna thought and practice. The explanation of the third step of mindfulness of breathing in Kumārajīva's meditation manual takes the following form:

> One is mindful of the breaths pervading the body, being as well mindful of breathing out and in. Completely contemplating the out-breaths and the in-breaths within the body, awareness pervades and reaches inside the body up to the toes and the fingers and pervades all the pores, just like water entering sand.
> (T XV 275b: 念諸息遍身, 亦念息出入. 悉觀身中諸出息入息, 覺知遍至身中乃至足指, 遍諸毛孔, 如水入沙).

This passage can be related to an explanation of the third step of mindfulness of breathing given by Goenka (1999, p. 29 and 31) in this manner:

> You learn to reach the important station of feeling sensations in the whole body in one breath: from top to bottom as you breathe out, from bottom to top as you breathe in … with the help of the breath the whole body is felt inside.

The approach depicted in Kumārajīva's meditation manual concords with the explanation offered by S. N. Goenka that sensations are felt throughout the whole body with each breath. Such an idea also resonates with the meditative approaches presented by Ajahn Lee Dhammadharo and Thich Nhat Hanh. Kumārajīva's meditation manual in particular reflects the notion that mindfulness of breathing involves experiencing the breath throughout or alongside the whole body, up to the toes.

In relation to such description it is of interest that, as noted by Kerr et al. (2013, p. 10), "during the body-scan and breath-focused awareness … mindfulness-trained subjects frequently report perceptual feedback from the fingers, toes, abdomen, etc." This suggests that it is perhaps natural for the subjective experience of mindfulness of breathing to be related to the perceptual experience of body parts like the toes, even though at first sight one might not associate these with meditation on the breath.

Formulations of the Third Step of Mindfulness of Breathing

The formulation employed in Kumārajīva's meditation manual for the third step speaks of "pervading the body" (遍身). The same expression can be found in expositions of this third step in three different texts on monastic discipline, the Mahāsāṅghika *Vinaya* (T 1425), the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*

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(T 1435), and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (T 1448). The relevant instructions take the following form:

> At the time of breathing in pervading the body, one knows one is breathing in pervading the body; at the time of breathing out pervading the body, one knows one is breathing out pervading the body.
> (T XXII 254c: 息入遍身時, 知息入遍身, 出息遍身時, 知出息遍身).

> When breathing in pervading the body, one should know single-mindedly that one is

> breathing in from the whole of the body; when breathing out pervading the body, one should know single-mindedly that one is breathing out from the whole of the body.
> (T XXIII 8a: 若息入遍身, 當一心知從一切身入; 若息出遍身, 當一心知從一切身出).

> Pervading the body when breathing out, one understands it completely; pervading the body when breathing in, one also understands it completely.
> (T XXIV 32c: 遍身所有出息, 皆悉了知; 遍身所有入息, 亦悉了知).

Such "pervading the body" (遍身), mentioned in each of these versions, is not the sense carried by the relevant instruction in the Pāli discourse, which proceeds in this way:

> One trains: 'I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body'; one trains: 'I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body.'
> (SN 54.1: *sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī ti sikkhati; sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī ti sikkhati*).

Here the question is one of "experiencing" the body, rather than of pervading it. The same sense also finds reflection in a translation of this third step in the *Saṃyukta-āgama*:

> Experiencing the whole body when breathing in, one trains well [to experience] the whole body when breathing in; experiencing the whole body when breathing out, one trains well [to experience] the whole body when breathing out.
> (SĀ 803: 覺知一切身入息, 於一切身入息善學; 覺知一切身出息, 於一切身出息善學).

The first part of the instruction for breathing in and breathing out clearly speaks of "experiencing." However, this term is lacking in the ensuing parts. A comparable case emerges in a *Madhyama-āgama* discourse:

> Experiencing the whole body when breathing in, experiencing the whole body when breathing out.
> (MĀ 98: 覺一切身息入, 覺一切身息. The first occurrence of 覺 is based on adopting a variant; the original reads 學).

This last instance depends on adopting a variant reading; the original speaks of "training" in regard to the inhalation. Moreover, another occurrence of the same instruction in a different discourse in this collection (MĀ 81), speaks of "training" in regard to both inhalations and exhalations. Kuan (2008, p. 213 note 9) observes that "it is likely that the original had both" of these terms. Due to the relative similarity of the two corresponding Chinese characters, one of them might have gone "missing at some point during the process of transcribing the text." The same appears to be the case for the *Saṃyukta-āgama* passage. On this reasonable assumption, the above Chinese *Āgama* parallels would convey the same sense of experiencing the body as reflected in the Pāli version. According to these instructions, executing the third step of mindfulness of breathing requires being aware of the whole body alongside noticing the movement of the breath going in and out.

The Body Scan and the Third Step of Mindfulness of Breathing

In a detailed study of the body scan, Dreeben et al. (2013, p. 398) reported:

> One of the most consistent findings in the MBSR literature is a preference for the body scan, as measured by practice time, compared to other core practices.

Compared to mindfulness of breathing and *mettā* (often translated as "loving kindness," although a better rendering would be "benevolence"), the body scan appears to be more

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effective in improving life satisfaction (Kropp and Sedlmeier 2019). Schultchen et al. (2019) reported that the practice of the body scan led to a reduction of biological markers of chronic stress. Significant improvements in participants' level of depression can occur due to body scan meditation (Corbett et al. 2019). Moreover, Dambrun (2016) and Dambrun et al. (2019) found a distinct tendency of the body scan meditation to elicit the experience of happiness in practitioners and to bring about a lessening of anxiety.

These results acquire additional significance when correlated to the subsequent steps of mindfulness of breathing (SN 54.1and SĀ 803; Anālayo 2019b). Following the third step of experiencing the whole body, the fourth step requires "calming bodily activity" (*passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ*/一切身行息). This points to an experience of relaxation at the bodily level that would indeed counter anxiety. The next two steps are about "experiencing joy" (*pītipaṭisaṃvedī*/覺知喜) and "experiencing happiness" (*sukhapaṭisaṃvedī*/覺知樂). Such experience fits with the eliciting of happiness noted above.

These similarities give the impression that perhaps comparable mechanisms might be at work in the body scan meditation and in the progression of meditation practice that sets in with the third step of mindfulness of breathing.

Significance of the Third Step of Mindfulness of Breathing

Theravāda exegesis understands the instruction for the third step of mindfulness of breathing to refer to paying attention just to the breath in its entirety. This understanding is based on interpreting the reference to the "whole body" in the instructions to intend the "entire body of the breath":

> One trains: 'I shall breathe in' and 'I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body': [This means that] one trains: I shall breathe in making known, making evident the beginning, middle, and end of the entire body of the inbreath; one trains: I shall breathe out making known, making evident the beginning, middle, and end of the entire body of the outbreath. (Vism 273: *sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmi, passasissāmī ti sikkhatī ti, sakalassa assāsakāyassa ādimajjhapariyosānaṃ viditaṃ karonto, pākaṭaṃ karonto assassisāmī ti sikkhati, sakalassa passāsakāyassa ādimajjhapariyosānaṃ viditaṃ karonto, pākaṭaṃ karonto passassisāmī ti sikkhati*).

This interpretation has as its point of departure an indication provided in the Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing, given in the context of correlating the sixteen steps with the four establishments of mindfulness. The relevant passage reports the Buddha making the following statement:

> I say that this is a certain body among bodies, namely, breathing in and breathing out. (MN 118: *kāyesu kāyaññatarāhaṃ etaṃ vadāmi yadidaṃ assāsapassāsaṃ*).

From a practical perspective, however, to apply this statement to the third step of mindfulness of breathing and then take it to imply a focus on only the breath remains unconvincing. The preceding two steps require ascertaining whether the breaths are short or long. Without making known their beginning, middle, and end, this would not be possible. Given that the sixteen steps of mindfulness of breathing introduce a new theme with each step, it seems considerably more probable that the instruction in the third step to experience the whole body refers to the physical body rather than the whole length of the breath.

At the same time, however, the instruction for this third step also does not appear to imply a pervading of the body with the breath (Anālayo 2019c). This becomes evident once ensuing steps in the scheme on mindfulness of breathing are taken into account. The relevant steps require experiencing joy (5), experiencing happiness (6), experiencing mental activity (7), and experiencing the mind (9). On adopting the interpretation that experiencing the whole body (3) means to experience the breath in the whole body, the meditative practices described in these other steps would have to be interpreted similarly, given that they employ the same formulation. This would result in the idea that one should experience how the breath pervades joy and happiness, or else how it pervades mental activity or the mind. From a practical perspective, such an interpretation fails to make sense.

In fact, the instructions for these steps are not about experiencing the breath in a special way, be it as pervading the whole body or in any other way. Instead, they require that the practitioner experiences joy, happiness, mental activity, and the mind alongside remaining mindful of the process of breathing in and breathing out. Similarly, the instruction to experience the whole body is not about experiencing the breath in the whole body. Instead, it requires being aware of the whole body alongside remaining mindful of the process of breathing in and breathing out.

Another point of relevance is that the instruction for being mindful of the process of breathing refers to the inhalations and exhalations; it is not about experiencing the processes that distribute oxygen throughout the whole body. Inhalations and exhalations are only one specific manifestation of the wind

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element, which stands for motion in general. A relevant canonical passage provides the following list of occurrences of the wind element inside of the human body:

> Up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, inhalations and exhalations.

(MN 28: *uddhaṅgamā vātā, adhogamā vātā, kucchisayā vātā, koṭṭhasayā vātā, aṅgamaṅgānusārino vātā, assāso passāso*).

Up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the bowels, circulating winds, pulling and contracting winds, stabbing winds, pushing winds, irregular winds, winds circulating in the limbs, exhalations and inhalations.
(MĀ 30: 謂上風, 下風, 腹風, 行風, 掣縮風, 刀風, 躋風, 非道風, 節節行風, 息出風, 息入風).

This description reflects a considerable degree of similarity between breathing and other bodily motions and processes, as they all come under the heading of the wind element. At the same time, however, inhalations and exhalations are seen as distinct from up-going and down-going winds, which one might consider responsible for the distribution of oxygen in the body, otherwise they would not have been listed separately.

In sum, the idea that the third step of mindfulness of breathing entails experiencing the breath throughout the whole body appears to be a later development. This idea, which from a practical perspective is certainly meaningful, appears to have furnished a starting point for the body scan. Needless to say, establishing such a historical perspective should not be taken as implying some kind of devaluation. Throughout its history, Buddhism has been in continuous development in response to various causes and conditions. Hence, it is only natural that the same is also evident in relation to meditation practices.

The thread of development studied here appears to begin with a shift in understanding of the third step of mindfulness of breathing from a more static "experiencing" of the whole body to a more dynamic "pervading" of the same body. This would have fostered the idea of moving attention through the body in a more or less systematic manner, an interpretation which eventually spread from India to China. In the course of this trajectory, the somatic experience of the body seems to have become a more prominent object of meditation.

In colonial Myanmar such body scanning or sweeping through the body came to serve as a tool to enable a direct experience of the teachings of the Abhidharma. By this time, the body scan had become an independent practice in its own right and mindfulness of breathing came to serve as a preliminary to such practice. Moreover, the attention directed to the body in this way had become more detailed, as the purpose of the body scan was to lead to an apperception of subtle sensations as a corroboration of the continuous arising and passing away of the subatomic particles in the body (and by implication in any other manifestation of matter).

More recently, the body scan has come to serve as an entry point to secular mindfulness practices aimed at reducing the stressful dimensions of pain and disease. At this stage, mindfulness of breathing has receded further into the background, no longer required as a preliminary and only serving as an optional exploration. In this way, the body has become still more prominent. Moreover, the potential of the body scan meditation to alleviate pain, or at least to diminish mental reactivity to pain, has also become considerably more prominent.

Viewed in this way, a fascinating trajectory emerges, whose different stages appear to take their initial inspiration from an aspect of what, according to the early discourses, was the Buddha's own favorite meditation practice: mindfulness of breathing (Anālayo 2017).

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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

Conflict of Interest: The author declares to have no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

MĀ, *Madhyama-āgama*; MN, *Majjhima-nikāya*; SĀ, *Saṃyukta-āgama*; SN, *Saṃyutta-nikāya*; T, Taishō edition; Vism, *Visuddhimagga*.

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