

Early Buddhist Mindfulness and Memory, the Body, and Pain

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Abstract In this article I survey selected aspects of the early Buddhist conception of mindfulness. I begin by distinguishing different types of mindfulness and draw out the implications of such distinctions. Next, I explore the relationship between mindfulness and memory in order to determine how far a conceptualization of mindfulness as a quality of the mind related to the present moment is indeed central to the understanding of its functions and significance in early Buddhist texts and in what way this relates to the ability to remember. Another dimension of the present exploration is the relation of mindfulness to being anchored in the body and how this can serve to maintain continuity of awareness in a daily life situation. The final topic I take up is the use of mindfulness to face pain and disease in the way this is already reflected in the early Buddhist discourses. These texts clearly document that the potential of mindfulness in this respect is not a modern innovation but has roots in the Buddhist tradition that reach back over more than two millennia.

Keywords Contemplation of the body · Memory · Mindfulness · Pain reduction · *Satipaṭṭhāna*

Introduction

Early Buddhist thought provides a range of perspectives on the uses, significance, and practice of mindfulness (*sati/smṛti*). In the present paper, I explore three perspectives in particular.

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One of these is the relationship between mindfulness and memory. Another concerns the use of awareness of the body as a tool to maintain continuity of mindfulness. Yet another topic is the potential of mindfulness in helping the sick to face pain and disease.

By way of laying a foundation for these explorations, I first of all take up different qualifications of mindfulness made in the early discourses. One of these contrasts “right” (*sammā*/正) and “wrong” (*micchā*/邪) types of mindfulness. The other differentiates between mindfulness that is “established” (*upaṭṭhita*/立) and mindfulness that is “lost” (*mutṭha*/失).

Right and Wrong Mindfulness

The Pāli term *sammā* or its Sanskrit equivalent *samyak*, often translated as “right,” more literally expresses the idea of “being towards one point” or “connected in one,” in the sense of “togetherness” (Anālayo 2003, p. 74). This qualification reflects the relationship of mindfulness to the noble eightfold path of practice. The noble eightfold path combines the cultivation of mental qualities like mindfulness and concentration with a foundation in virtuous conduct, all kept together by the overarching directive of “right view” (*sammā diṭṭhi*/正見) as the first factor of the noble eightfold path. Right view in turn stands for understanding the four noble truths, a central doctrine in early Buddhist thought that appears to mirror an ancient Indian scheme of medical diagnosis (Anālayo 2015b, p. 33). The resultant correlation can be visualized as follows:

Disease: *dukkha*

Pathogen: craving = arising of *dukkha*

Health: Nirvāṇa = cessation of *dukkha*

Cure: noble eightfold path

According to this diagnostic scheme of the four noble truths, a condition of decisive influence in regard to one's present experience of pain or frustration is one's own craving. In order to avoid being impacted by such influence, the noble eightfold path falls into place as the practical means to train oneself so as to emerge from craving and its various ills.

In this way, mindfulness can be classified as "right" when it operates from within the perspective of the four noble truths, in other words, when it is part of a mode of behavior or form of practice that leads to diminishing the cause of pain and frustration in oneself and others. In contrast, mindfulness that comes in conjunction with unwholesome actions and intentions can be qualified as "wrong," in so far as it lacks a relationship to the fundamental insight that we build our own affliction and that continuing to do so is bound to lead to an increase of pain and frustration for ourselves and others.

The distinction drawn in this way in early Buddhist literature, preserved in the Pāli discourses of the Theravāda tradition and their parallels transmitted by other early Buddhist schools and extant in discourse collections in Chinese, Sanskrit fragments, and Tibetan translation, is significant in so far as later Buddhist traditions do not necessarily take the same position. The commentarial exegesis of the Theravāda tradition, for example, holds that mindfulness is always wholesome (Anālayo 2013b, p. 179).

The resultant contrast between Theravāda canonical and commentarial conceptualizations of mindfulness alerts one to the need to be clear about what mindfulness one is talking about. This is not so much a question of deciding which definition is the only correct one. Instead, the task is to recognize that there have been (and still are) different valid definitions of mindfulness (Anālayo 2013a). This holds even within the Theravāda tradition, where the canonical perspective, shared with the same type of texts from other Buddhist schools, differs from the commentarial viewpoint. The same is all the more the case in modern times, where not only definitions from within the Buddhist traditions but also understandings of mindfulness informed by its clinical usage stand side by side. This plurality of mindfulness-es needs to be clearly recognized in order to avoid conflating different ideas and thereby missing out on the required conceptual clarity for proper understanding and research and also in order to avoid positing one particular definition as the correct understanding in contrast to other understandings of mindfulness perceived as incorrect.

Mindfulness Established and Lost

The other distinction drawn in the early discourses, the type of texts that are in time closest to the delivery of the original teachings by the historical Buddha that they purport to record, concerns the difference between being with or without mindfulness. From a practical perspective, this is more than obvious. Having had even a brief exposure to meditation practice, one will have come to appreciate that there are moments when one has been mindful and others when such mindfulness has been lost and one has been carried away by some fantasy or other distraction. In line with such practical experience, from an early Buddhist perspective mindfulness should be considered a quality that is not a naturally given of any experience, but rather something one has to bring into being, something that needs to be established (Anālayo 2013b, p. 31).

This in turn is significant in so far as it implies that mindfulness cannot be identified with a mental quality that is continuously present during the normal waking life of a human being. It could not be, for example, equivalent to consciousness (*viññāṇa*/識). Consciousness is one of the five aggregates (*khandha*/陰) recognized in early Buddhist thought as the main aspects of experience with which one tends to identify. These can be understood as pointing to the body as the material location "where" I am, feeling as providing the hedonic tone of "how" I am (in terms of being either pleasant, or unpleasant, or neutral), perception as supplying the conceptual appraisal of "what" I am experiencing, formations as responsible for "why" I react in the way I do, and finally consciousness as that "whereby" I experience. Presented in summary form, the analysis into five aggregates could be visualized in this manner:

Bodily form = the physical body as the material location: "where"

Feeling = the hedonic tone of experience: "how"

Perception = the matching of sense data with concepts: "what"

Volitional formations = reactions to experience: "why"

Consciousness = the ability to be conscious: "whereby"

Consciousness is of course not permanent but rather a flow of moments of being conscious. Nevertheless, it does stand for something that is experienced as being continuously present during the waking life of an individual. Consciousness is not something intentionally brought into being at one moment of one's meditation session, to stay with the earlier example, and then lost at the next moment. Instead, whether one is mindful of the present moment or caught up in day-dreaming, both experiences involve consciousness. The same applies in the case of other mental aggregates, including perception (*saññā*/想). Here, too, whether one is aware of the

object of one's meditation practice or lost in some distraction, some form of perception is present.

That mindfulness cannot simply be equated with perception is significant for the next topic to be taken up in this paper, namely the relationship of mindfulness to memory. Perception in the early Buddhist analysis of experience stands for matching information derived through the senses (including the mind as a sixth sense) with mental concepts. This of course relies on having earlier learned those concepts. My ability at this moment of writing to express thought in English and the ability of the reader to comprehend these thoughts at the time of reading rely on both of us having learned English at some point in our lives. It is not necessary for us to remember right now when and how we learned it and from whom, but the skill we acquired at some time in the past informs our present ability to express and understand English words and sentences. This type of semantic memory is according to early Buddhist thought performed by perception, the third of the five aggregates. As explained by Ñāṇaponika (1949/1985, p. 69), “we can assume that ancient Buddhist psychology ascribed the main share in the process of recollecting to perception (*saññā*).”

This puts into perspective a position sometimes taken regarding the relationship between mindfulness and memory. To provide one example, Ṭhānissaro (2012, p. 21) proposes that “mindfulness—whether right or wrong—is a factor present in any experience where memories from the past are brought to bear on what is happening within that experience.” Ṭhānissaro (2012, p. 76) continues that, according to his understanding, “establishing of mindfulness is clearly a process of bringing memory to bear on the present moment.” This suggestion seems to involve a basic misunderstanding. This misunderstanding arises from a conflation of the functions of perception and mindfulness. This conflation then leads Ṭhānissaro (2012, p. 150) to the conclusion that “mindfulness is an act of memory.” At least as far as early Buddhist thought is concerned, this conclusion is not tenable and does not provide a foundation for understanding or practising early Buddhist mindfulness. Such a misunderstanding is not entirely unexpected, however, since the early discourses do refer to a relationship between mindfulness and memory. To the significance of this relationship I turn next.

Mindfulness and Memory

The standard definition of mindfulness describes someone who is mindful and able to recollect and remember what has been done or said long ago (e.g., AN IV 111 and its parallel T I 423a). This clearly establishes a relationship between mindfulness and memory, although at the same time it does not just equate the two. At least for the type of memory that brings

knowledge from the past to bear on present experience, this would in fact not work, as already mentioned above.

The standard definition of mindfulness does not seem to be so much concerned with the ability to recognize things as such, but more with what we would nowadays call episodic memory. In support of a link between mindfulness and episodic memory, one could point to a supernormal ability recognized in Buddhist thought as possible for those who have trained themselves in mindfulness and concentration, referred to as recollection of past lives (*pubbenivāsanussati*/憶宿命). According to the standard description of this ability, someone who is exercising this type of recollection will be able to remember various details from one's own past lives, such as one's former name and appearance, the food one ate, and the pleasure and pain one experienced, etc. (e.g., MN I 22 and its parallel T II 666b). Although the term used to express such recollection is *anussati*/憶, in as much as recollection of past lives requires the previously developed ability of attaining the fourth absorption, it does rely on having acquired a high level of proficiency in mindfulness as well as concentration.

Intentional recollection of one's own past lives is only one form of episodic memory, however, and another much less intentional form of recollection can involve past events of one's present life that intrude at a time when one had rather decided to focus on another matter at hand. This type of unintentionally arising episodic memory from the past is taken up for criticism in a set of verses that recommend not running after the past, instead of which one should rather remain in the present moment (MN III 190 and its parallel T I 700a). Another passage more specifically refers to the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, indicating that for one who has gone forth to live the life of a monastic, these four establishments of mindfulness can fulfil the purpose of overcoming memories and intentions related to one's former lay life in the household (MN III 136 and its parallel T I 758b).

These passages tie in with the observation made above regarding even a short exposure to meditation practice, where the practitioner soon enough finds out the difference between being mindful of whatever is the object of one's meditation practice and being carried away by some fantasy or distraction. Often such fantasies or distractions can be triggered by a memory of something that happened in the past. For the mind to be engaged in such episodic memory of the past is the exact opposite of what a meditator is intending to do, namely remaining mindful of the present moment. As explained by Harvey (2015, p. 128), “mindfulness slips ... the mind becomes distracted ... if one then becomes involved in a long wandering thought, there may be concentration on *this*, but no mindfulness.”

In sum, although the standard definition of mindfulness suggests some relationship to episodic memory, the two cannot simply be identified with each other. The reason is that some types of episodic memory can take the form of

unintentionally dwelling on memories of the past and related fantasies, which would be the very opposite of being mindful.

Another possible approach to explaining the memory dimension of mindfulness could be to suggest that the connection rather lies in remembering to stay in the present moment. In relation to mindfulness of breathing, for example, Gethin (2011, p. 270) explains that “one has to remember that what it is one should be doing is remembering the breath.” From a practical viewpoint, this is indeed what one needs to do in order to remain mindful. Yet, this would not help explain the standard definition of mindfulness mentioned above, since the passage in question clearly speaks of remembering what was done or said “long ago,” *ciram/久*. This description is not concerned with the mental ability to continue doing what one had just now decided to do, involving the type of “remembering” that is related to working memory, but rather refers to remembering something that has happened a long time ago.

Besides, in relation to working memory the same problem would arise as with episodic memory (and also semantic memory). Each of these types of memory cannot be equated with mindfulness, as each can take place when mindfulness is lost. A distraction during meditation practice, although clearly a case of loss of mindfulness, can involve working memory just as much as it can involve episodic memory or semantic memory.

In sum, the idea of conceptualizing the relationship between mindfulness and memory in terms of ensuring a continuity of practice by “remembering” to stay in the present, although certainly meaningful from a practical perspective, does not yet provide a solution for appreciating the significance of the standard definition of mindfulness.

Cox (1992/1993, p. 67) argued convincingly for an “underlying unity and interaction between models of memory and religious praxis ... [where] the contexts for the operation of *smṛti* suggested by the term *mindfulness* actually encompass the psychological functions of memory as they were understood within Indian Buddhism.”

In line with this suggestion and in view of the problems with the other interpretations discussed so far, it seems to me that the best way of interpreting the relationship between mindfulness and memory in early Buddhist discourses would be in the sense that mindfulness enhances memory, in that the presence of mindfulness makes it easier to remember (Anālayo 2003, p. 47f and 2013b, pp. 30–38). This avoids proposing in some way an identity between mindfulness and memory, which as mentioned above is problematic, but at the same time allows for the two to be closely interrelated. That being mindful will make one remember better is in fact quite intuitive, and this would apply for working, semantic, as well as episodic types of memory. Being receptively mindful in the present moment, more data related to that moment can be taken in by the mind,

thereby furnishing a good foundation for later recalling that moment and its various related details. In contrast, if one is absent-minded, it can safely be expected that little, if anything, will be stored in memory. Doing a particular daily chore in autopilot mode, one can become so absent-minded that later one is not certain of having actually done it. In contrast, if one does such a chore with mindfulness, there will not be any need later to go and check if one has really done it, as one will remember.

Research in cognitive psychology has been able to confirm that mindfulness training does indeed enhance working memory (van Vugt 2015, pp. 197–199). The same also holds for episodic memory (Brown et al. 2016); in fact, mindfulness training even facilitates recalling associations experienced in the past in relation to a perceptual event (Rosenstreich 2016). The impact of mindfulness on episodic memory in particular concords with the canonical description above, according to which one who is mindful will be able to recall things even if they happened or were said long ago. The findings of cognitive psychology thereby support an interpretation of this definition as intending that mindfulness enhances the ability to remember.

The same quality of mindfulness would also be helpful at the moment of remembering itself, in line with the importance of attention employment in memory retrieval (Dudukovic et al. 2009). Due to the open and receptive attitude that can be cultivated with the help of mindfulness, it will naturally become easier to access data stored in one's memory. This is particularly relevant at times when attempting to recover a specific piece of information by concentrating on it remains unsuccessful. Instead of trying to push one's way through to the mental record of what happened, simply remaining with an open and mindful attitude can often be the best way to allow the required details to come to mind naturally.

In this way, mindfulness can be understood to be helpful both when receiving information for storage in one's personal memory bank, as well as when accessing such information on a later occasion. This explains the relationship between mindfulness and memory, a recurrent topic in the early discourses, so much so that at times, the word *sati* (Sanskrit *smṛti*) can stand in place of remembering. From the viewpoint of the explanation proposed here, this is simply a way of speaking about remembering by referring to the appropriate mental condition for recollection.

The suggested solution to the conundrum of the relationship between mindfulness and memory not only explains such usage, it also preserves the all-important emphasis on being in the present moment that is so crucial for properly undertaken *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation.

In fact, the instructions for meditation practice in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels keep emphasizing

precisely this aspect. When a certain feeling manifests, one should know what type of feeling one experiences at the present moment: “I feel a pleasant feeling,” or “I feel a painful feeling” (Anālayo 2013b, p. 117). If a particular state of mind arises, one should know what is happening in one’s mind right now, not what has happened earlier. In the case of a hindrance, one should know “sensual desire is present within me,” for example, or “anger is present within me” (Anālayo 2013b, p. 177). The task is to recognize what is happening right now in the present moment at the level of feelings, mental states, etc.

In this way, mindful recognition of the situation in the present moment is indubitably a crucial aspect of successful *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. This aspect can easily be lost out of sight if the relationship between mindfulness and memory is taken to imply an exact equivalence of the two and the practice of mindfulness is conceptualized as a form of remembering. Of course, the ability to know what “pleasant” and “painful” mean, or what “sensual desire” or “anger” are, is based on memory, on having earlier learned what these terms refer to. But this type of memory, by way of matching experience with particular concepts, is performed by perception. Again, the ability to recognize what type of feelings happen or what mental states arise requires continuity of mindfulness, in that one needs to remember to stay mindful. But such continuity of mindfulness is not a form of remembering what has happened long ago. Instead, it is a form of open and receptive awareness that is very much concerned with the present moment, with what happens right here and now, and which takes its continuity precisely from staying with the present instead of turning to the past.

Mindfulness and the Body

From a practical viewpoint, the suggestion that mindfulness stands for an open and receptive type of mental attitude that makes it easy to remember naturally leads over to the question of how to cultivate such mindfulness. A helpful directive in this respect can be gathered from a discourse that describes a practitioner who is able to handle sense experience without immediately reacting with likes and dislikes. Needless to say, this is another important dimension of mindfulness, and this is precisely what *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is trying to inculcate. Recognizing with mindfulness that “I feel a pleasant feeling” or “I feel a painful feeling” is exactly about learning to be with the feeling itself without immediately reacting to it with desire or aversion.

The Pāli version of the discourse which describes a practitioner able to avoid such reaction to sense experience has the title “Great Discourse on the Destruction of Craving,” *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya-sutta*, making it clear that its subject matter is about how to get out of craving, the chief culprit for all affliction, frustration, and mental bondage in the early

Buddhist analysis of existence. The *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya-sutta* and its Chinese parallel agree in describing that the practitioner who does not react to anything experienced at the six sense doors with desire or aversion dwells with “a boundless mind,” *appamānacetasā*/無量心. In addition, and from a practical perspective this is perhaps an even more important indication, one who has such a boundless mind and is free from reacting with wanting and rejecting has established mindfulness of the body, *upaṭṭhitakāyaṣati*/立身念 (MN I 270 and its parallel T I 769c).

This suggests that the way to establish mindfulness envisaged in this passage somehow stands in relation to the human body. The same relationship also comes up in another discourse, described with the help of a simile that illustrates mindfulness of the body (SN V 170 and its parallel T II 174b; see also Analayo 2013b, p. 56). The simile depicts the dilemma of a person who has to carry a bowl brimful with oil. Since in ancient as well as modern India things are often carried on the head, it seems fair to visualize this person as carrying the bowl on the head. Now, a crowd has assembled because the belle of the countryside is singing and dancing. Again, visualizing this in an Indian setting, one might picture people coming really close to each other—Indians do not seem to have such a strongly felt need to be physically distant from each other as is the case in Western culture—and perhaps even moving rhythmically along with the tune of the singing and at the same time trying to get as close as possible to be able to see the dancing and singing of the girl.

The person carrying the bowl has the task to get through between the crowd and the girl without spilling even a single drop of the oil from the brimful bowl, carried presumably on the head. The challenge of this already difficult task is further heightened by the fact that the carrier of the oil is followed by an executioner with drawn sword who will cut off the head of the carrier as soon as any oil is spilled. In such a situation, it can safely be assumed that the carrier of the oil will not forget about the task at hand or the executioner behind and start glancing around, looking at the girl and her performance, or at other things. Instead, the carrier will be completely dedicated to be mindful of every step, every move of the body, making sure that bodily equilibrium is maintained and nothing happens at the bodily level that could in any way tip over the bowl.

The rather dramatic image conveyed by this simile serves to highlight how to practise mindfulness even in such a demanding type of situation. The predicament of the carrier of the oil is far removed from a quiet sitting on one’s cushion during a meditation retreat. By dint of being far removed from formal meditation, the simile serves to show in what way mindfulness cultivated during quiet sitting and retreat can be brought to bear on everyday situations. Even if such daily life experiences are far less dramatic, they involve basically the same challenges. All kinds of sensory input are happening;

one might be quite literally crowded in by people and tasks of various types, and in all that there is certainly a danger that one loses one's head.

The way to avoid this, according to the purport of the simile, is by being mindful of the body. This does not mean to concentrate on the body at the exclusion of everything else. In fact, the carrier of the oil would not be able to complete the task successfully through such an exclusive focus. Excessive focus on one's body could prevent the carrier from noticing any obstacle in the path, such as spectators moving to and fro, as a result of which bodily balance will be lost, the oil spilled, and the head lost.

Instead, so as to get safely through between the crowd and the dancing girl, the carrier of the oil has to stay aware of the whole situation. But in order to avoid such a wide-angle lens perspective becoming distractedness, mindfulness can be rooted in the body. This can take place by being aware of the body as a whole, by using awareness of the whole body as a basis, a somatic anchor, container, reference point, perhaps even a resting point for a type of receptive and open mindfulness of the situation as a whole.

Applied to the description in the *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya-sutta* and its Chinese parallel, this implies that by way of resting in embodied mindfulness one becomes able to maintain a widely open, even boundless mental attitude that remains aloof from reacting with desire and aversion to whatever is experienced via the six senses. Needless to say, the fact that such descriptions refer to the six senses does not mean that the reference to the body, *kāya*, should be construed to have a meaning that differs from the physical body. Such has been assumed by Kuan (2008, p. 100), who suggested that in descriptions of six sense door experience the term *kāya* in *kāyasati* refers to “an individual who experiences through the six senses.” In a subsequent publication, Kuan (2015, p. 271) then warns that “*kāyagata sati* should not be construed as mindfulness directed to the physical body, because *kāya* here refers not to the physical body alone, but to ‘an individual that is able to perceive through his senses’.”

Of course, such passages are about an individual who experiences through the six senses and not just about a physical body bereft of such ability to experience. But the point of being mindful of the body in the *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya-sutta* and its Chinese parallel or in similar passages concerns rooting mindfulness in the physical body in order to be able to handle properly experience through any of the six sense doors. This can be seen particularly well in yet another simile that compares mindfulness of the body to a strong post to which six animals are bound (SN IV 200 and its parallel T II 313a; see also Anālayo 2013b, p. 55). However much the six animals struggle to escape in this or that direction, eventually they have to just lie down beside the post to which they are strongly bound.

The strong post in this simile must stand for the physical body as the type of anchor for embodied mindfulness that enables handling well whatever happens at any sense door. The simile of carrying oil similarly illustrates the need for being anchored in the physical body. Without such anchoring, the carrier might bump into a spectator or in some other way incur a loss of balance of the physical body, with the fatal result of spilling the oil.

The role of such embodied mindfulness as a foundational practice also emerges from the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and its Chinese parallel (念身經), both of which indicate in their title that the subject matter of their exposition is “mindfulness of the body.” Comparing the two discourses brings to light some variations regarding the type of exercises they describe. As a basic methodological approach in general, what is shared by two or more parallel versions is likely to reflect early material (Anālayo 2012). In the present case, some of the contemplations found only in the Chinese versions do not seem to have any clear relationship to the body and thus can safely be assumed to be later additions (Anālayo 2013b, p. 42; *pace* Kuan 2008, p. 96).

One exercise found in the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and its Chinese parallel is mindfulness of the four postures. This requires being aware of the position of one's body, such as when one is standing, one knows to be standing, and when sitting, one knows to be sitting (MN III 89 and its parallel T I 555a). The instructions for this practice confirm a point made above, in that mindfulness here is clearly a matter of attending to the present moment. It would not do if, on having just sat down, one remembers that just before sitting down one has been standing. Instead, as soon as one sits down, one should know that one is sitting.

The same exercise also illustrates the type of proprioceptive awareness that can be employed to cultivate a form of mindfulness that is anchored in the body and at the same time open and receptive to various facets of the situation at hand. Proprioception stands for the ability to sense the positioning of one's own body and its movements without even needing to open one's eyes. It is a felt physical presence that is often hardly noticed. Even in the present situation of reading these words, such proprioceptive awareness is there, and if there should be a sudden earthquake or even only the seat should collapse or be tipped over for some reason, this felt sense for one's bodily position would very quickly come to the forefront of one's attention.

Cultivation of an embodied form of mindfulness requires simply to allow this felt sense of the body's presence to be a more intentionally noticed part of present moment's experience, to accompany it in the form of an anchor or resting point of awareness. Properly undertaken, this results in the felt sense of bodily presence being no longer ignored, as is usual, nor being made the object of an all-out focus at the expense of everything else, such as when one suddenly loses balance.

Instead, such embodied form of mindfulness can coexist with other tasks to be done or meditation practices to be cultivated. In fact, it not only coexists with them, but it even offers substantial support to them by way of enabling the establishing of a somatic anchor in the here and now that counters the tendency to distraction, a dimension of embodied mindfulness practice that has been confirmed in recent research (Kerr et al. 2013).

The *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and its Chinese parallel follow their descriptions of mindfulness cultivated in relation to the four postures with another exercise concerned with various bodily activities, such as going out and coming in, wearing one's clothing or carrying a bowl, speaking, or going to sleep. When considered in the light of the approach described above, this next exercise can be understood to exemplify how embodied mindfulness of the type cultivated through being aware of one's postures can carry over into any type of activity. In fact, even though the bowl mentioned in the instruction in the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and its Chinese parallel refers to the begging bowl a Buddhist monastic carries when out on the road to collect food, the same would also work for the bowl of oil to be carried in the simile described earlier. It is just such postural awareness applied to various bodily activities that enables the carrier of the bowl to get safely through between the watching crowd and the dancing girl.

Other exercises in the *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and its Chinese parallel explore in various ways the nature of the body by providing instructions on how to contemplate its anatomical constitution, the physical elements out of which the body is composed, and its nature to succumb to death and fall apart. These exercises reflect a complementary perspective in the practice of mindfulness of the body, in the sense that being mindful of the body leads to developing an understanding of it. From the viewpoint of the need to remain free from reactions under the influence of desire and aversion in relation to the body, these three contemplations can make a substantial contribution to emerging from attachment to it.

Regarding this contribution, it is noteworthy that the formulations used to describe the distinct character of each of these three contemplations do not involve the term mindfulness at all. In relation to the anatomical parts and the elements found in one's body, one should "examine" them or "contemplate" them, *paccavekkhati*/觀. In the case of the cemetery contemplations, one "compares," *upasaṃharati*/比, one's own body to that of a corpse. These activities are not in themselves a form of mindfulness but rather mental activities that lead up to being established in mindfulness.

The case of contemplating the anatomical parts requires some degree of evaluation and also some degree of recollection of the different parts of the body listed in the exercise. Such evaluation and recollection is not in itself designated as a form of mindfulness. The point

behind this seems to be that through cultivating a proper understanding of the true nature of the body, mindfulness can become ever better established. Examining or contemplating one's own body, and subsequently also the bodies of others, as made up of various anatomical parts that are not in themselves particularly beautiful or appetizing, undermines the ingrained tendency of the mind to evaluate bodies, be this one's own or those of others, in terms of their possession or lack of sexual attractiveness. This in turn makes it easier just to be mindful of bodies, without immediately reacting with evaluations and the type of desire and aversion that usually follow suit.

The case of contemplation of the anatomical parts is significant in so far as it shows that, even though mindfulness itself is a predominantly receptive type of awareness that is closely related to remaining aloof from reacting with desire or aversion, such mindfulness can nevertheless have its foundation in and coexist with purposeful evaluation if, and only if, such evaluation has the purpose of leading to non-attachment.

The *Kāyagatāsati-sutta* and its Chinese parallel also describe the effect on the body of the experience of deeper states of concentration, namely of the four absorptions. Already with the first of these four absorptions, one's entire being will be suffused with joy and happiness in a way comparable to soap powder mixed with water (Anālayo 2014). This goes to show that the practice of embodied mindfulness can extend all the way from ordinary activities like walking to the experience of profound concentrative attainments.

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels, contemplation of the body leads over to contemplating feelings, mental states, and *dharmas* (Anālayo 2015c). The same can also be seen in the Chinese version of the simile of the oil carrier, which continues by showing that a foundation in mindfulness of the body can lead over to cultivating all four *satipaṭṭhānas*. Clearly, mindfulness of the body has a broad range of possible applications and commends itself as a mode of practice that will enable establishing mindfulness in a way that facilitates various meditative practices and of course will also make it easier to recall what has been done or said long ago.

Mindfulness and Pain

Another significant dimension of the early Buddhist conception of mindfulness emerges in relation to pain. This dimension is based on a basic analysis of pain into its bodily and mental dimensions. According to a succinct instruction given by the Buddha to an ailing elderly lay disciple, one should train oneself in such a way that, even though the body is sick, the mind does not also become sick (SN III 1 and its parallel T II 33a; see also Anālayo 2016b).

Another discourse provides a simile to illustrate this basic difference. According to this simile, if when being afflicted by bodily pain one were to react to this by becoming mentally upset and perhaps even express this by wailing or becoming irritated, then this would be comparable to being shot at by two arrows (SN IV 208 and its parallel T II 120a; see also Anālayo 2016b). In contrast, one who has trained in mindfulness can learn to be aware of the experience of physical pain without the pain afflicting the mind. Such is comparable to being shot at by only one arrow.

This basic indication concords with the modern-day clinical employment of mindfulness to reduce the stress of pain and disease. Kabat-Zinn (1990/2013, p. 374) explained that

Several classic laboratory experiments with acute pain showed that *tuning in* to sensations is a more effective way of reducing the level of pain experienced when the pain is intense and prolonged than is distracting yourself ... the sensory, the emotional, and the cognitive/conceptual dimensions of the pain experience can be *uncoupled* from one another, meaning that they can be held in awareness as independent aspects of experience ... this phenomenon of uncoupling can give us new degrees of freedom in resting in awareness and holding whatever arises in any or all of these three domains in an entirely different way, and dramatically reduce the suffering experienced.

The same potential of mindfulness in relation to healing was clearly recognized in the Buddhist tradition over two thousand years ago (Anālayo 2015a). An example in case is the description of a lay disciple who faces the pain of a serious illness through being established in the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. The Pāli discourse in question and its Chinese parallel agree not only in presenting this lay disciple as someone with high proficiency in mindfulness practice in this respect but also in proclaiming that he was a non-returner, one who had reached the third of the four levels of awakening recognized in early Buddhism (SN V 178 and its parallel T II 271a).

This puts into perspective a recurring assumption by some scholars. According to this assumption, during the ancient period of Buddhist practice the formal cultivation of mindfulness was a prerogative of monastics only (see e.g., Wilson 2014, p. 21). This is not correct. The discourses repeatedly document the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* by lay disciples (Anālayo 2003, 275f). Moreover, the recurrent referent to “monks” as the audience of an instruction does not imply that the teaching was invariably meant to be restricted to male monastics only (see Collett and Anālayo 2014). Instead, the formal address “monks” can function as an umbrella term that includes all those who are present, in addition to the male monastics. These are being addressed simply because in the

ancient Indian hierarchical setting it was a custom to direct any form of address of a whole congregation to those who were considered to be the most highly regarded members of the audience.

The discourses even report that an accomplished lay disciple by the name of Citta gave teachings to monks. In one such instance, a group of monks had been in discussion, expressing different opinions regarding the nature of the mental fetters. The householder Citta clarified the situation for them with the example of two oxen bound together by a yoke. Neither oxen is the fetter of the other. Instead, it is the yoke between them that is the fetter (SNN IV 282 and T II 152a; see also Anālayo 2016b). Similarly, Citta explains, the six senses are not fetters nor are the objects of these senses what fetters. Instead, the fetter is to be found in the mind. It is the mental reaction that yokes these two together by way of craving and attachment.

This reminds one of the description in the *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaṇḍika-sutta* and its Chinese parallel, according to which one who is established in mindfulness of the body will be able to handle experience through the six senses without giving rise to desire and aversion. It also shows that Citta, living the lay life in a household setting, must have had considerable practical experience of how to carry the bowl of oil through the vicissitudes of daily life. This was the case to such an extent that he was able to clarify this crucial distinction to monks who, due to their more withdrawn lifestyle, perhaps had been carrying their bowls of oil in places where no watching crowds or dancing girls were present.

This is of course not to say that monks and nuns were not also practising mindfulness. In fact, the same potential of mindfulness to enable bearing even intense pain is reported for a monk by the name of Anuruddha. When visited by other monks who had come to inquire about his affliction, Anuruddha was able to inform them that by just remaining established in mindfulness, he was capable of bearing the intense pain of his disease (SN V 302 and its parallel T II 140c; see also Anālayo 2016b).

This description is particularly noteworthy since Anuruddha was an adept in deep concentration, able to enter an experience known under the name of “the cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññāvedayitanirodha*/滅盡定). Such experience is described in the discourses as resulting in the ability to shut off mentally to such a degree that one no longer experiences any feeling. In relation to the present episode, this in turn suggests that Anuruddha, instead of availing himself of this possibility to shut off pain completely, rather opted for facing it with mindfulness.

The same can be seen in relation to another episode that involves the Buddha himself. His foot had been hurt, causing the arising of strong pain. In this situation, the Buddha is described as just facing the pain with mindfulness (SN I 27 and its parallel T II 355a; see also Anālayo

2016b). Onlookers express their praise of his ability to endure the pain with mindfulness; one of them explicitly refers to the Buddha's concentrated mental condition. This makes it clear that the description of his sore affliction is not meant to imply that the Buddha was so overwhelmed by pain that he was not able to enter concentration. Instead, the passage is best read in conjunction with the description of Anuruddha as implying that both of them decided not to employ their concentrative abilities to enter the attainment of cessation, even though they presumably could have done so, but rather faced their pain with mindfulness.

In addition to furnishing the appropriate means for facing pain, mindfulness can also bring about actual healing. This comes to the fore in a discourse that describes how a recitation of the awakening factors helped the Buddha to recover from a disease (SN V 81 and its parallel T II 195c; see also Anālayo 2016a). The recitation of the awakening factors would have served as a form of guided meditative recollection, with the result that the body reportedly recovered.

The first of the awakening factors is mindfulness, which provides the foundation for the arising of the others. Mindfulness is also the one out of the set of altogether seven such mental qualities that is required at all times. Three of the other six awakening factors are commendable when the mind is slightly sluggish, the other three when the mind is slightly excited. Mindfulness, however, is required throughout (Anālayo 2013b, p. 204).

Besides throwing into relief the all-out importance of mindfulness, the passage describing the healing effect of the awakening factors also points to the overall aim of mindfulness practice in early Buddhist thought. The capability of leading to awakening must be what endows a recitation or recollection of the awakening factors with its healing potential. With all due recognition given to the potential of mindfulness to help one to face pain and even bring about a healing at the bodily level, the true aim of mindfulness practice in its early Buddhist setting is awakening. The notion of awakening in early Buddhist thought is based on a conception of mental health that goes far beyond what in a clinical context would be considered as a reasonably healthy mental condition. It envisages a condition of total freedom from all greed, aversion, and delusion, liberation from any type of craving, and thus the coming to an end of all unwholesome mental influxes (*āsava*/漏) in one's own mind.

Those who constantly
Undertake mindfulness of the body well
Who do not follow what should not be done
And who always do what should be done
Being mindful and clearly comprehending
Their influxes come to an end. (Dhp 293)

AN, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*; DhP, *Dhammapada*; MN, *Majjhima-nikāya*; SN, *Saṃyutta-nikāya*; T, Taishō edition; (Translations are by the author)

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