

Preface

Mindfulness was taught and practiced by the historical Buddha some 2500 years ago and is a fundamental aspect of Buddhist practice. Teachers from diverse Buddhist traditions consistently convey the message that mindfulness is essential for cultivating meditative awareness and lasting psycho-spiritual wellbeing. In this sense, mindfulness can be viewed as a prerequisite for entering the advanced stages of spiritual practice and for perceiving the ultimate mode in which phenomena exist. The Buddha taught that when mindfulness is used as a basis for apprehending this ultimate aspect of reality, all forms of suffering and ignorance are transmuted.

Although there are different interpretations of mindfulness in Buddhism, there are a number of constants that unite these interpretations and point towards certain inborn characteristics of mindfulness. For example, a more exoteric Buddhist interpretation might describe mindfulness as the practice of being fully aware of the present moment, while a more esoteric Buddhist interpretation might describe it, in the words of Dudjom Rinpoche, as the *simple recollection of the recognition of your own nature*. Although these delineations allude to different perceptual referents that should be adopted as the object of mindful awareness, they both imply that mindfulness entails being fully aware of what is unfolding in the here and now. Depending upon an individual's meditative experience and the particular spiritual path that they are following, this awareness could relate to simply acknowledging the existence and/or gross properties of the various bodily, affective, and cognitive processes that are present in any given moment, or it could relate to directly perceiving the underlying and ultimate nature of these same phenomena.

Thus, despite the different ways in which Buddhist traditions describe mindfulness, there appears to be a degree of consensus in Buddhism that mindfulness involves being fully aware of the gross and/or ultimate properties of phenomena at the moment they enter into the attentional sphere. There is also consensus in Buddhism that mindfulness should be cultivated at all stages of an individual's meditative journey. In this respect, the Buddhist delineation of mindfulness is of a simple yet spiritually profound practice that is good at the beginning, good in the middle, and good at the end.

In recent decades, there has been growing scientific and public interest in the health benefits of mindfulness as well as its applications in various applied settings.

For example, initiatives are underway and/or research has been conducted that supports the use of mindfulness as a tool for: (i) treating psychological and somatic illness, (ii) reducing reoffending and regulating anger in forensic populations, (iii) improving work-related wellbeing, job satisfaction, and job performance in occupational and commercial settings, (iv) improving academic performance, knowledge acquisition, cognitive functioning, and quality of learning environment in schools and other education establishments, and (v) helping athletes and sports professionals enhance situational awareness, task focus, and competitive performance more generally.

Understandably and in many cases, mindfulness has been introduced to the non-Buddhist Westerner in a manner that filters out many of the contextual factors that connect it with its Buddhist origins. To a large extent, this has been a successful strategy and has meant that individuals who might otherwise be deterred from practicing mindfulness (i.e., due to it being an explicitly Buddhist practice) have been willing to explore its potential merits. Indeed, it is our personal belief that had mindfulness not been operationalized in this manner, it would not have experienced the same popularity or been assigned the same level of scientific value that it currently enjoys.

However, it is for this exact same reason—the apparent watering-down of mindfulness—that there have been growing concerns amongst academicians, clinicians, and Buddhist teachers that secular mindfulness has become estranged from the traditional Buddhist model to such an extent that it can no longer be accurately described as “mindfulness.” We have previously explicated the implications of these concerns as follows:

1. If it is the case that secular mindfulness approaches are incongruent with the Buddhist model, then it is ethically inappropriate and potentially misleading (e.g., to participants and service-users) to describe them as being grounded in Buddhist principles.
2. Since secular mindfulness approaches have been shown to be efficacious for various clinical and nonclinical population groups, research is warranted to investigate whether there are additional benefits associated with utilizing an approach that more closely accords with the traditional Buddhist construction of mindfulness.
3. There may be risks associated with teaching mindfulness in isolation of the principles and practices that are traditionally assumed to underlie the effective development of mindful awareness (e.g., ethical awareness, compassionate outlook, insight into nonself, etc.). This remains an important future direction for mindfulness research because empirical enquiry specifically assessing whether secular mindfulness can induce nonsalutatory health outcomes is currently underdeveloped.

One valid argument in response to these concerns is that if secular mindfulness approaches can be shown to be efficacious for a given application, then it is of little relevance whether they embody a traditional Buddhist construction. A further

counter-argument is that the abovementioned concerns appear to be based on the assumption that compared to secular mindfulness modalities, present-day Buddhist teachers and traditions necessarily embody a more ethically wholesome and spiritually potent approach. Although it is comparatively easier for mainstream Buddhist teachers and traditions to claim a spiritual connection (i.e., lineage) to the historical Buddha's teachings on mindfulness, this does not, by default, mean that they are any more or less "superficial" than secular mindfulness approaches.

Irrespective of an individual's perspective on the above debate, what is certain is that the more they understand the Buddhist theory and principles that underlie the practice of mindfulness, the better positioned they will be to study, practice, and/or teach mindfulness effectively. This, in short, reflects the provenance for the current volume on the *Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness*. This book provides a comprehensive overview of the Buddhist fundamentals of mindfulness, and discusses the relationship of mindfulness to core Buddhist practices and teachings. It is intended to be an essential guide for academics, clinicians, Buddhist scholars, mindfulness and Buddhist teachers, university students, and Buddhist and mindfulness practitioners wishing to consolidate and expand their understanding of mindfulness.

As discussed further in the introductory chapter, the current volume includes contributions from some of the world's leading scholars, Buddhist teachers, clinicians, and scientists in the field of mindfulness practice and research. In addition to ensuring a complete coverage of relevant topics, the contributors were selected in order to introduce diversity in respect of professional background, meditation experience, and scholarly interpretation of the Buddhist teachings. In Part One of the book, mindfulness is discussed in the context of core Buddhist teachings such as the *Four Noble Truths*, ethics, *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* meditation, and emptiness. Part One also includes separate chapters on the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*—two key Buddhist teachings of mindfulness. The dialogue progresses in Part Two with an examination of how to effectively integrate and utilize the core Buddhist principles relating to mindfulness in research and applied settings. In Part Three, mindfulness is then discussed in relation to a broader selection of Buddhist themes and modes of practice.

Chapters follow a logical sequence such that earlier chapters provide the necessary foundations to understand and analyze the additional layers of Buddhist theory and teachings that are presented in subsequent chapters. However, although earlier chapters focus on core Buddhist teachings, they invariably do so in a way that introduces original ideas and/or clarifies areas of confusion in relation to Buddhist thought. Consequently, all chapters make an important contribution to improving understanding regarding the Buddhist principles that underlie effective mindfulness practice and they can be read in sequential order or as standalone entities.

We hope that this volume on the *Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness* will help to establish robust foundations for the ongoing integration of mindfulness into Western clinical and scientific settings. We also hope the volume will make a valuable contribution to the mainstream Buddhist literature on mindfulness and on Buddhist

practice more generally. Finally, we hope that the volume will inspire readers of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist backgrounds to seek guidance from an authentic teacher and take up a personal practice of mindfulness so that they can encounter the mindfulness teachings directly for themselves.

Edo Shonin
William Van Gordon
Nirbhay N. Singh

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Shonin, E.; Van Gordon, W.; Singh, N.N. (Eds.)

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