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Article

Is mindfulness Buddhist? (and why it matters)

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Abstract
Modern exponents of mindfulness meditation promote the therapeutic effects of "bare attention"—a sort of non-judgmental, non-discursive attending to the moment-to-moment flow of consciousness. This approach to Buddhist meditation can be traced to Burmese Buddhist reform movements of the first half of the 20th century, and is arguably at odds with more traditional Theravāda Buddhist doctrine and meditative practices. But the cultivation of present-centered awareness is not without precedent in Buddhist history; similar innovations arose in medieval Chinese Zen (Chan) and Tibetan Dzogchen. These movements have several things in common. In each case the reforms were, in part, attempts to render Buddhist practice and insight accessible to laypersons unfamiliar with Buddhist philosophy and/or unwilling to adopt a renunciatory lifestyle. In addition, these movements all promised astonishingly quick results. And finally, the innovations in practice were met with suspicion and criticism from traditional Buddhist quarters. Those interested in the therapeutic effects of mindfulness and bare attention are often not aware of the existence, much less the content, of the controversies surrounding these practices in Asian Buddhist history.

Keywords
bare attention, Buddhist meditation, history, mindfulness

Introduction

In a chapter in an edited volume on the role of culture in depression, Gananath Obeyesekere begins by quoting from Brown and Harris's influential 1978 study on the social origins of depression in women:

> The immediate response to loss of an important source of positive value is likely to be a sense of hopelessness, accompanied by a gamut of feelings, ranging from distress,

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> depression, and shame to anger. Feelings of hopelessness will not always be restricted to the provoking incident—large or small. It may lead to thoughts about the hopelessness of one's life in general. It is such *generalization* of hopelessness that we believe forms the central core of depressive disorder. (Brown & Harris, 1978, p. 235)

To this Obeyesekere responds:

> This statement sounds strange to me, a Buddhist, for if it was placed in the context of Sri Lanka, I would say that we are not dealing with a depressive but a good Buddhist. The Buddhist would take one further step in generalization: it is not simply the general hopelessness of one's own lot; that hopelessness lies in the nature of the world, and salvation lies in understanding and overcoming that hopelessness. (Obeyesekere, 1985, p. 134)

One might want to quibble with Obeyesekere; one might demand more evidence—both psychological and ethnographic—for the similarities he sees between good Sri Lankan Buddhists and American depressives. Do Sri Lankan Buddhists really aspire to a state that we would associate with depression? Or is the very idea of depression so culturally and historically constructed as to mitigate its cross-cultural utility? However one parses these issues, on purely *doctrinal* grounds Obeyesekere has a point: early Buddhist sutras in general, and Theravāda teachings in particular, hold that (1) to live is to suffer, (2) the only genuine remedy to suffering is escape from *samsara* (the phenomenal world) altogether, and (3) escape requires, among other things, abandoning hope that happiness in this world is possible.

If one has any doubts, consider the advanced stages of insight described in the *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), an authoritative Pali compendium composed by the 5th-century monk Buddhaghosa in Sri Lanka. After an exhaustive account of the various practices and meditative states discussed in the scriptures, Buddhaghosa turns to the ascending "stages of insight" that immediately precede the attainment of liberation. The eight stages of insight include "knowledge of dissolution," "knowledge of appearance as terror," and "knowledge of danger," and Buddhaghosa resorts to vivid similes to capture the affective tone that accompanies these rarefied states. One of the most harrowing is found in the description of "knowledge of appearance as terror":

> A woman's three sons had offended against the king, it seems. The king ordered their heads to be cut off. She went with her sons to the place of their execution. When they had cut off the eldest one's head, they set about cutting off the middle one's head. Seeing the eldest one's head already cut off and the middle one's head being cut off, she gave up hope for the youngest, thinking, "He too will fare like them." Now, the meditator's seeing the cessation of past formations is like the woman's seeing the eldest son's head cut off. His seeing the cessation of those present is like her seeing the middle one's head being cut off. His seeing the cessation of those in the future,

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> thinking, "Formations to be generated in the future will cease too," is like her giving up hope for the youngest son, thinking, "He too will fare like them." When he sees in this way, knowledge of appearance as terror arises in him at that stage. (Buddhaghosa, 1956/1976, Vol. 2, p. 753)

In other words, the emotional valence of this advanced stage of insight is likened to that of a mother being forced to witness the execution of all three of her sons. Could one imagine a more disturbing image of human anguish? Yet, according to Theravāda teachings, it is necessary to experience such despair—to confront the unmitigated horror of sentient existence—so as to acquire the resolve necessary to abandon the last vestiges of attachment to things of this world. Obeyesekere would seem to have a point: states akin to what we identify as "depression" would seem to be valorized, if only for the insight they engender, on the Buddhist path.

Yet today Buddhist insight is touted as the very antithesis of depression. Rather than cultivating a desire to abandon the world, Buddhism is seen as a science of happiness—a way of easing the pain of existence.[1] Buddhist practice is reduced to meditation, and meditation, in turn, is reduced to mindfulness, which is touted as a therapeutic practice that leads to an emotionally fulfilling and rewarding life. Mindfulness is promoted as a cure-all for anxiety and affective disorders including post-traumatic stress, for alcoholism and drug dependency, for attention-deficit disorder, for anti-social and criminal behavior, and for the commonplace debilitating stresses of modern urban life.

Buddhist modernism and the rhetoric of bare attention

The notion that Buddhism is a rational, empirical, and therapeutically oriented tradition compatible with modern science is one of the characteristic features of "Buddhist modernism" (sometimes known as "Protestant Buddhism"), an approach to Buddhism that evolved out of a complex intellectual exchange between Asia and the West that took place over the last 150 years or so. As there is now a robust literature on this subject, there is little need to rehearse it here.[2] My focus is on the particular practice most characteristic of Buddhist modernism, namely, "mindfulness" (Pali: *sati*, Sanskrit: *smṛti*), and more specifically, the interpretation of mindfulness as "bare attention" or "present-centered awareness," by which is meant a sort of non-judgmental, non-discursive attending to the here-and-now.

Scholars have argued that the widespread understanding of mindfulness as bare attention has its roots in the Theravāda meditation revival of the 20th century, a movement that drew its authority, if not its content, from the two recensions of the *Scripture on Establishing Mindfulness* (*Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*),[3] as well as Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), and a few other Pali sources. The specific techniques that came to dominate the *Satipaṭṭhāna* or *Vipassanā* ("insight") movement, as it came to be known, were developed by a handful of Burmese teachers in the lineages of Ledi Sayādaw (U Nyanadaza, 1846/7–1923) and Mingun Sayādaw (U Nārada, 1870–1955).[4] Mingun's disciple, Mahāsī

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Sayādaw (1904–1982), developed the technique that is best known today, in which the practitioner is trained to focus on whatever sensory object arises in the moment-to-moment flow of consciousness. Mahāsī designed this method with laypersons in mind, including those with little or no prior exposure to Buddhist doctrine or liturgical practice.[5] Perhaps most radical was Mahāsī's claim that the cultivation of liberating insight did not require advanced skill in concentration (*samatha*) or the experience of absorption (*jhāna*). Instead, Mahāsī placed emphasis on the notion of *sati*, understood as the moment-to-moment, lucid, non-reactive, non-judgmental awareness of whatever appears to consciousness. One of Mahāsī's most influential students, the German born monk Nyanaponika Thera (Siegmund Feniger, 1901–1994), coined the term "bare attention" for this mental faculty, and this rubric took hold through his popular 1954 book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*.[6]

Western Buddhist enthusiasts may have a hard time appreciating just how radical Mahāsī's method was in its day. Designed to be accessible to laypersons, it did not require familiarity with Buddhist philosophy or literature, most notably with the scholastic literature known as *abhidhamma*. (Traditional forms of Theravāda meditation required proficiency in the categories and methods of *abhidhamma* analysis.) It also did not require renunciation of lay life, and it could be taught in a relatively short period of time in a retreat format. All this made it easy to export, and it has been influential not only in the Southeast Asian Theravāda world, but also among modern Tibetan, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese religious reformers. By the end of the 20th century, Mahāsī's approach to mindfulness, understood as "bare attention" and "living in the here and now," had emerged as one of the foundations of Buddhist modernism—an approach to Buddhism that cut across geographical, cultural, sectarian, and social boundaries.[7]

The meaning of the term "mindfulness" is presumed by many to be self-evident, and thus modern exponents of mindfulness meditation may see little need to explore the intellectual history of the concept in Buddhism.[8] "Mindfulness" is a translation of the Sanskrit *smṛti* (Pali: *sati*), a term that originally meant "to remember," "to recollect," "to bear in mind." Its religious significance is sometimes traced to the Vedic emphasis on setting to memory the authoritative teachings of the tradition. The Pali term *sati* retains this sense of "remembering" in the Nikāyas (the scriptures attributed to the Buddha in the Theravāda school): "And what, *bhikkhus*, is the faculty of *sati*? Here, *bhikkhus*, the noble disciple has *sati*, he is endowed with perfect *sati* and intellect, he is one who remembers, who recollects what was done and said long before."[9] Moreover, the faculties of recollection and reflection were unarguably central to a variety of classical practices associated with *smṛti*, including *buddhānusmṛti* or "recollection of the Buddha," which typically involves some combination of recalling the characteristics of the Buddha, visualizing him, and chanting his name.

Even in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, the term *sati* retains a sense of "recollecting" or "bearing in mind." Specifically, *sati* involves bearing in mind the virtuous dharmas so as to properly apprehend, from moment to moment, the true nature

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of phenomena. At least this is the explanation found in early Pali exegetical works such as the *Milindapañha*[10] and the commentaries of Buddhaghosa.[11] Rupert Gethin (1992), who has undertaken a careful analysis of such passages, notes that *sati* cannot refer to "remembering" in any simple sense, since memories are, as Buddhists are quick to acknowledge, subject to distortion. Rather, *sati*

> should be understood as what allows awareness of the full range and extent of *dhammas*; *sati* is an awareness of things in relation to things, and hence an awareness of their relative value. Applied to the *satipaṭṭhānas*, presumably what this means is that *sati* is what causes the practitioner of yoga to "remember" that any feeling he may experience exists in relation to a whole variety or world of feelings that may be skillful or unskillful, with faults or faultless, relatively inferior or refined, dark or pure. (Gethin, 1992, p. 39)

In short, there is little "bare" about the faculty of *sati*, since it entails, among other things, the proper discrimination of the moral valence of phenomena as they arise.[12]

Critiques of mindfulness as bare attention

There are, in addition, philosophical objections to construing *sati* as bare attention. The popular understanding of bare attention presumes that it is possible to disaggregate pre-reflective sensations (what contemporary philosophers sometimes refer to as "raw feels" or *qualia*) from perceptual experience writ large. In other words, there is an assumption that our recognition of and response to an object is logically and/or temporally preceded by an unconstructed or "pure" impression of said object that can be rendered, at least with mental training, available to conscious experience. Mindfulness practice is then a means to quiet the ongoing chatter of the mind and to keep to the "bare registering of the facts observed."

Superficially, this notion of mindfulness as bare attention would seem tied to a view of the mind as a sort of *tabula rasa* or clear mirror that passively registers raw sensations prior to any recognition, judgment, or response. The notion of a conscious state devoid of conceptualization or discrimination is not unknown to Buddhist exegetes; indeed, later Buddhist philosophers associated with *pramāṇa* (logic) and *yogācāra* (mental construction) systems posit a "non-conceptual cognition" (*nirvikalpajñāna*) that operates by means of "direct perception" (*pratyakṣajñāna*), and these authors use the imagery of the mirror to illustrate the relationship between pure mind and defiled object. This state is sometimes understood as preceding (or undergirding) the arising of conceptualization, or as an advanced stage of attainment tantamount to awakening.[13] But while the notion of non-conceptual cognition became important in some *yogācāra* systems (not to mention Tibetan Dzogchen), it remained at odds with the Theravāda analysis of mind and perception. In Theravāda abhidharma, consciousness and the object of consciousness emerge codependently and are

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hence phenomenologically inextricable. That is to say, the objects of experience appear not upon a preexistent *tabula rasa*, but rather within a cognitive matrix that includes affective and discursive dispositions occasioned by one's past activity (*karma*).[14] The elimination of these attendant dispositions does not yield "non-conceptual awareness" so much as the cessation of consciousness itself.[15] Arguing along similar lines, Paul Griffiths suggests that the closest thing to a state of unconstructed or pure experience in classical Indian Buddhist literature is *nirodhasamāpatti*—a condition in which both objects *and* conscious experience cease altogether (Griffiths, 1986, 1990; Sharf, 2014a). In such a framework, it seems misleading to construe *any* mode of attention or perception as "bare." The psychological model behind Nyanaponika's understanding of *sati* as bare attention may owe more to internalist and empiricist epistemologies than it owes to early Buddhist or traditional Theravāda formulations (Sharf, 1998).

Given the ambiguities surrounding *sati*, it is not surprising that the Mahāsī method quickly came under fire from a number of quarters, including both Theravāda traditionalists in Southeast Asia and practitioners and scholars in the West. Critics object to (1) Mahāsī's devaluation of concentration techniques leading to absorption (Pali: *jhāna*); (2) claims that practitioners of the Mahāsī method are able to attain advanced stages of the path, including the four stages of enlightenment (Pali: *ariya-magga*), in remarkably short periods of time; and (3) the ethics of rendering *sati* as bare attention, which would seem to devalue or neglect the importance of ethical judgment.[16]

In my own work on the roots of the Zen (Chinese: Chan) tradition in 8th-century China, I found that certain early Zen teachers seem to have turned away from traditional forms of meditation—repentance practices, meditations on corpses and the impurity of the body, and so on—in favor of instructing their disciples to simply set aside all distinctions and conceptualizations, and allow the mind to come to rest in the flow of the here-and-now (Sharf, 2014b). It may not be a coincidence that the teachers who advocated this new style of practice were also those who had garnered a sizable lay audience, an audience that presumably had little interest in monastic renunciation and little background in Buddhist doctrine. So these early Zen techniques, which went under the rubrics of "viewing mind" (*kanxin*), "discerning mind" (*guanxin*), "reflecting without an object" (*wu suo nian*), and so on, were, like "bare attention," seen as direct approaches that circumvented the need for traditional *dhyāna* attainments, for mastery of scripture and doctrine, and for proficiency in monastic ritual. In brief, the early Zen technique (or techniques—it is difficult to determine whether these terms were referring to one and the same practice) revolved around a seemingly simple figure–ground shift, wherein attention is directed away from objects of any kind toward the abiding "luminosity" or "transparency" of mind or awareness itself. The early Zen reformers, like the Burmese reformers in the 20th century, were popularizers: they touted a method that was simple, promised quick results, and could be cultivated by anyone in a short period of time. Indeed, one early Zen text, attributed to the

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fourth patriarch Daoxin (580–651), actually traces the technique back to Layman Fu.[17]

Early Zen was not the only pre-modern Buddhist tradition to develop something akin to "bare attention"; one finds it in Tibetan Dzogchen as well, which is not surprising as there is evidence, albeit controversial, that Dzogchen was itself influenced by Zen.[18] I do not want to engage the thorny issue of whether these traditions were referencing a common meditative experience or state of consciousness.[19] Rather, I would draw attention to certain institutional and sociological parallels—to the fact that the early Zen patriarchs and Dzogchen masters, like their modern Burmese counterparts, were interested in developing a method simple enough to be accessible to those who were unschooled in Buddhist doctrine and scripture, who were not necessarily wedded to classical Indian cosmology, who may not have had the time or inclination for extended monastic practice, and who were interested in immediate results as opposed to incremental advancement over countless lifetimes. It is thus not surprising that the early Zen and Dzogchen teachers found themselves in the same position as Mahāsī: castigated for dumbing down the tradition, for devaluing ethical training, for misconstruing or devaluing the role of wisdom, and for their crassly "instrumental" approach to practice.

Those interested in the scientific, empirical study of mindfulness today would do well to pay attention to some of these criticisms. The Tang master Mazu Daoyi (709–788), for example—a celebrated representative of the Hongzhou Zen lineage—was noted for his rejection of the more scholastic interests of the monks in his day, and he is particularly associated with the idea of a sudden, almost spontaneous, realization of one's buddha nature or "true mind." But Guifeng Zongmi (780–841), another celebrated master and chronicler of early Zen, had deep misgivings. He believed that the Hongzhou method, which he characterizes as "simply giving free rein to the mind" (*dan renxin*), failed to distinguish between right and wrong.[20] Indeed, a not uncommon criticism was that the excessive focus in meditation on achieving "inner stillness" (*ningji*), especially when unbalanced by an engagement with the scriptures, leads to a state described as "falling into emptiness" (*duokong*), which is, in turn, associated with "meditation sickness" (*chanbing*).[21] The term meditation sickness was used by various Buddhist masters as a critique of practices they deemed detrimental to the path, notably techniques that emphasized inner stillness—they seem to have been targeting practices that cultivated a sort of non-critical or non-analytical presentness. Today we might translate "meditation sickness" as "zoning out," by which I do not mean being lost in thought or daydreaming. Rather, I suspect that when medieval meditation masters used terms such as "falling into emptiness" and "meditation sickness," they were targeting techniques that resulted in an intense immersion in the moment, in the now, such that the practitioner loses touch with the socially, culturally, and historically constructed world in which he or she lives. The practitioner becomes estranged from the web of social relations that are the touchstone of our humanity as well as our sanity. The key to avoiding this is to learn to see both sides at once. Zongmi says: "While awakening from delusion is sudden, the transformation of an

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unenlightened person into an enlightened person is gradual." From a more traditional Buddhist perspective, what is missing in the modern mindfulness movement is precisely this gradual transformation, which involves active engagement with Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist "forms of life" (*Lebensform*).[22]

The modern mindfulness movement

This engagement with Buddhist scripture, doctrine, ritual, and institutions is often rejected by modern advocates of mindfulness, who believe they can garner the rewards of Buddhist practice without having to adopt a Buddhist form of life or world view. Indeed, some insist that Buddhist practice does not entail a worldview at all; rather than a process of reconditioning, they claim that Buddhist meditation, properly understood, is a process of deconditioning—of setting aside our culturally constructed notions of reality so as to see things "as they really are." The object, they believe, is to put an end to the ceaseless inner chatter of the mind—to stop thinking. The epistemological and metaphysical commitments behind this are vividly illustrated in Jill Bolte Taylor's popular book (2008) and TED Video,[23] both of which are titled "My Stroke of Insight." Taylor, a brain scientist, experienced what she believes is a taste of Buddhist *nirvāṇa* as the result of a debilitating stroke that compromised areas of her left hemisphere. She writes:

> As the language centers in my left hemisphere grew increasingly silent and I became detached from the memories of my life, I was comforted by an expanding sense of grace. In this void of higher cognition and details pertaining to my normal life, my consciousness soared into an all-knowingness, a "being at *one*" with the universe. (Taylor, 2008, p. 41)

Taylor holds that if we can just quiet the inner voice in our left brain, we will spontaneously experience the *nirvāṇa* that is always present in our right brain (Taylor, 2008, p. 116).

In short, the rhetoric of "bare attention" is predicated on an often unacknowledged commitment to what scholars of religious mysticism call "perennialism"—the notion that there is a singular, transcultural, trans-historical, and spiritual experience that is common to mystics around the globe.[24] The perennial experience is, in itself, unconstructed: it is free of local cultural, linguistic, or social inflections, although such inflections invariably color any and all descriptions or analyses of such a state. More specifically, the popular understanding of mindfulness seems to be associated with an understanding of perennialism that is sometimes called the "filter theory." The filter theory, vividly illustrated in Taylor's narrative, holds that our normal sensory and discursive processes, rather than opening us to reality, actually serve to filter it out. The Indian master Kamalaśīla (fl. 740–795), in his critique of the Chinese Zen master Heshang Moheyan (d.u.) in a famous 8th-century Tibetan debate, pointed out that there is a particular place for yogis who erroneously believe that the goal of meditation is

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to put an end to thinking: it is the realm of the "beings without minds," who, after death, will spend five hundred eons as mindless zombies (Sharf, 2014a).

Just as there is a set of metaphysical commitments that undergird the modern mindfulness movement, there are also ethical and political commitments. The problem is that, in America at least, these commitments so resemble those of mainstream consumer culture that they go largely unnoticed. Note that, in the early period at least, the Buddhist institution—known as the *saṃgha*—comprised a renunciate community that embodied, quite literally, a critique of mainstream social values and cultural norms. For the *saṃgha*, liberation required "letting go," and letting go did not mean to merely adopt a particular attitude or psychological frame, however important such a frame may be. Rather, it necessitated a radical change in the way one lived; one was required to opt out of family ties and worldly pursuits, and opt into an alternative, communal, celibate, and highly regulated lifestyle. Modern teachers of mindfulness rarely make such demands of their students; the liberating, or if you will therapeutic, benefits apparently do not require dramatic changes in the way one lives. Rather than enjoining practitioners to renounce carnal and sensual pleasure, mindfulness is touted as a way to more fulfilling sensual experiences. Rather than enjoining practitioners to renounce mainstream American culture, mindfulness is seen as a way to better cope with it. There may be no better exemplar of this ethically dubious and politically reactionary stance than *Tricycle Magazine*, with its advertisements for expensive meditation gear, for dharmic dating services, dharmic dentists and accountants, and its implicit authorization of the entrepreneurial and commercial activities of countless dharma centers and self-styled Buddhist masters. The packaging of mindfulness in programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is arguably a variant on the same theme.

Could it be that this socially conservative ideology is tied to the particular ideological strand in modern Buddhism that I have identified as perennialism? Arguments to similar effect have been made by, among others, Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Lévinas (Sharf, 1995b, pp. 50–51), but perhaps most relevant is the so-called "Critical Buddhism" (*hihan bukkyō*) movement that emerged out of Japanese Sōtō Zen in the 1990s. The leaders (and possibly sole members) of this movement, Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō, claimed that the ethical failings of Japanese Buddhist schools—notably their complicity in the militarist and nationalist fever that led up to the Pacific War—could be traced, in part, to buddha-nature theory (Hubbard & Swanson, 1997). (The doctrine of inherent buddha-nature holds, in brief, that we are all naturally endowed with the awakened state of the buddhas but fail to recognize it.) Their argument, in short, is that the East Asian Buddhist tradition largely abandoned the more analytical and critical dimensions of Indian Mahāyāna, aligning itself instead with buddha-nature doctrine, and that this led to a kind of ethical, social, and political passivity. This is not the place to weigh in on this issue, except to note that this critique too emerges not from without, but from within the Buddhist tradition itself.[25]

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Conclusion

To conclude, it is my impression that many of the psychologists, cognitive scientists, and sociologists doing research on Burmese style mindfulness practices seem to assume that the psychological benefits of such practice are born out by centuries of Buddhist experience. Such is not the case. To the extent that the modern approach to mindfulness can be found in premodern Asia, it was a minority position that was met with considerable criticism from traditional quarters. The nature of the criticism warrants our attention, as it parallels criticism directed against Mahāsī's technique in modern Southeast Asia. Thus we hear the charge that such practices emphasize momentary states rather than long-term transformation, that they do not yield the benefits that are claimed on their behalf, that they are more Hindu than Buddhist, and that the overriding emphasis on inner stillness, in the absence of critical intellectual engagement with the teachings, can lead to a paralyzing state of self-absorption—what East Asian Buddhists have long identified as "meditation sickness" (Ahn, 2007).

To be clear, I am not claiming that mindfulness has no therapeutic value. I am aware of the claims, based on a substantial body of empirical (if contested) data, that suggests it does. But my own experience among long-term meditators in Asian monastic settings as well as in American practice centers leads me to be somewhat skeptical, and I sometimes wonder if researchers in this area are asking the right questions of the right people. It is not just that advanced meditation practitioners in more traditional Asian settings may not exhibit the kinds of behavior that we associate with mental health. It is that, as Obeyesekere noted, it is not clear that they aspire to our model of mental health in the first place. And this, I submit, is the real challenge for those interested in the causal relationship between traditional forms of Buddhist meditation and the psychological and behavioral outcomes that such meditation is assumed to produce.

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Notes

1. For a history of the construal of Buddhism as a "science of happiness" see especially Lopez (2008, 2012).
2. The literature on Buddhist modernism is large and growing; see, for example, the collection of papers in Lopez (1995), as well as Gombrich & Obeyesekere (1988), McMahan (2008), and Sharf (1995a).
3. The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (*Majjhima-nikāya* 10) and *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta* (*Dīgha-nikāya* 22); cf. the Chinese *Nian chu jing* (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, No. 26, Vol. 1, pp. 582b–84c).
4. On Ledi Sayādaw, see especially Braun (2013); on Mingun Sayādaw, see Houtman (1997, p. 311).
5. On Mahāsī's pivotal role in the Burmese lay meditation movement, in addition to Braun (2013), see Jordt (2007). Braun believes that the lay orientation can be traced back to Ledi who was influenced by, among others, his mentor Hpo Hlaing (1830–1885), a layperson working in the Burmese court environment. Hpo Hlaing wrote two popular books on meditation, *Taste of Liberation* (*Vimuttirasa*, 1871) and the *Meditation on the Body* (*Kāyanupassanā*, 1874), both of which "reveal a concern for a lay readership and an effort to show meditation's relevance to knowledge about the modern world that presage and likely informed Ledi's presentation of meditation" (Braun, 2013, p. 31). Ledi came to believe that laypersons are capable of advanced stages on the path and that awakening is possible in this very lifetime (Braun, 2013, p. 119), both of which are integral to the ideology of Buddhist modernism. Mahāsī's teacher Mingun is sometimes given credit for establishing the first meditation center in Burma open to laypersons as well as monastics (Houtman, 1997, p. 311).
6. Nyanaponika (1973, p. 40) describes it as follows: "Bare Attention is concerned only with the *present*. It teaches what so many have forgotten: to live with full awareness in the Here and Now. It teaches us to face the present without trying to escape into thoughts about the past or the future. Past and future are, for average consciousness, not objects of observation, but of reflection. And, in ordinary life, the past and the future are taken but rarely as objects of truly wise reflection, but are mostly just objects of day-dreaming and vain imaginings which are the main foes of Right Mindfulness, Right Understanding and Right Action as well. Bare Attention, keeping faithfully to its post of observation, watches calmly and without attachment the unceasing march of time; it waits quietly for the things of the future to appear before its eyes, thus to turn into present objects and to vanish again into the past."
7. The secondary literature on the "Mahāsī method" is vast. On the complex doctrinal issues surrounding Mahāsī's method, see especially Cousins (1996); on the influence of the Mahāsī method in contemporary Thai monastic and lay practice, see Cook (2010); for its influence in Nepal, see LeVine and Gellner (2005).
8. As much has been written of late about the term *sati/smṛti* I will only touch upon it here. In my discussion I am drawing largely on Gethin (1992, pp. 36–44), but see also Gyatso (1992), Kuan (2008), Nyanaponika (1976, pp. 68–72), Shulman (2010), and the special 2011 issue of *Contemporary Buddhism* on the topic "Mindfulness: diverse perspectives on its meaning, origins, and multiple applications at the intersection of science and dharma" (Vol. 12, No. 1).
9. *Saṃyutta-nikāya* Vol. 5, pp. 197–198; trans. Gethin (1992, p. 36).

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10. "Just as, Your Majesty, the treasurer of a king who is a *cakka-vattin* causes the *cakka-vattin* king to remember his glory evening and morning [saying], 'So many, lord, are your elephants, so many your horses, so many your chariots, so many your foot soldiers, so much your gold, so much your wealth, so much your property; may my lord remember.' Thus he calls to mind the king's property. Even so, your Majesty, *sati,* when it arises, calls to mind *dhammas* that are skillful and unskillful, with faults and faultless, inferior and refined, dark and pure, together with their counterparts: these are the four establishings of mindfulness, these are the four right endeavors, these are the four bases of success, these are the five faculties, these are the five powers, these are the seven awakening-factors, this is the noble eight-factored path, this is calm, this is insight, this is knowledge, this is freedom." *Milindapañha* 37; trans. Gethin (1992, p. 37).
11. "By means of it they [i.e., other *dhammas*] remember, or it itself remembers, or it is simply just remembering, thus it is *sati*. Its characteristic is not floating; its property is not losing; its manifestation is guarding or the state of being face to face with an object; its basis is strong noting or the *satipaṭṭhānas* of the body and so on. It should be seen as like a post due to its state of being firmly set in the object, and as like a gatekeeper because it guards the gate of the eye and so on." *Visuddhimagga* XIV, 141; trans. Gethin (1992, p. 40).
12. On the relationship between *smṛti* and memory and *smṛti* as mindfulness, see especially Cox (1992).
13. See, for example, the analysis in Deleanu (n.d.) and Klein and Wangyal (2006). The notion of a non-conceptual state of consciousness was the subject of considerable discussion if not controversy, as it was not easy to square with earlier systems of Buddhist thought. One problem was how to disambiguate states of "non-conceptualization" from states in which there is simply no cognition whatsoever, such as *nirodha-samāpatti* (and, perhaps, *nirvāṇa*); see Sharf (2014a).
14. Interestingly, some recent findings in cognitive neuroscience resonate with classical Buddhist "intentional" models; see Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991).
15. The only candidate in early Buddhist psychology for a "raw feel" might be *sparśa* or "contact" (Pali: *phassa*), but properly speaking *sparśa* per se is not a conscious event so much as an essential but subliminal constituent involved in the arising of cognition.
16. For traditionalist critiques see the overview and bibliography in Sharf (1995a, pp. 262–265). The appropriateness of "bare attention" as a way to understand *sati* is the subject of a dialogue between Alan Wallace and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Wallace & Bodhi, 2006), and is explored at length in several of the contributions to the 2011 issue of *Contemporary Buddhism* (see note 8 above).
17. On Layman Fu, or Fu Xi (a.k.a. Fu Dashi, 497–569) see Hsiao (1995, pp. 50–224), Yanagida (1971, p. 236), and Zhang (2000). A text attributed to him, the *Shanhui Daishi lu* (*Zokuzōkyō* 69, no. 1335) contains little with regard to actual meditation technique.
18. The Dzogchen analogue to bare awareness is known variously as "awareness" (*rig pa*, sometimes translated "open awareness"), "gnosis" (*ye shes*), "the mind of awakening" (*byang chub kyi sems*), "luminosity" (*'od gsal*, sometimes translated "clear light"), and so on; see Karmay (2007), Klein and Wangyal (2006), and van Schaik (2003).
19. Elsewhere I have argued that to do so would be to misconstrue the logic of the rhetoric of "subjective experience" (Sharf, 1998).
20. For Zongmi's critique of Mazu and the Hongzhou school see Broughton (2009, pp. 84–86 and passim).

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21. This language of inner stillness and falling into emptiness is found, among other places, in the records of another Hongzhou school critic Fayan Wenyi (885–958) and his dharma brother Xiufu (d. 951?). Wenyi's Fayan lineage stressed the study of doctrine and texts as a corrective; see his biography in fascicle 24 of the *Jingde chuangdeng lu* (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* no. 2076, vol. 51, p. 400b1–3), and the discussion in Welter (2008, pp. 32–33), and Brose (2013, p. 116). Guishan Lingyou (771–853), a third-generation teacher in the Hongzhou line, was another critic of a perceived tendency toward moral turpitude in the growing Zen movement; see Kirchner (2006) and Poceski (2006). On meditation illness see Ahn (2007).
22. Gregory (1987, p. 286). Similar critiques can be found in the writings of many major medieval Zen figures, from Heze Shenhui (670–762?), who played a role in the composition of the *Platform Scripture*, to Yongming Yanshou (904–975), a prolific and influential master of the 10th century.
23. See http://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight.html
24. The literature on perennialism is vast; for overviews, see especially Katz (1978, 1983, 1992), Forman (1990), Proudfoot (1985), and Sharf (1998).
25. On Critical Buddhism, see especially the collection of papers in Hubbard and Swanson (1997).

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