

## How does the present interpretation of mindfulness (Sati) in modern psychology differ from its original function in ancient teachings?

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### Abstract

Mindfulness, Sati, awareness of the reality at the moment and accept it as it is. The origins of practicing Mindfulness as a part of a whole package named: Eight Fold Noble Path go back to Buddhist meditations which aimed to train the mind to be able to realize the ultimate truth. In this article the practical applications of Mindfulness is discussed. The main goal of this research was to review the differences between clinical and ancient (ethical) mindfulness. Findings indicate that ethical leadership is more strongly related to follower extra effort and helping at higher levels of follower moral emotions and higher levels of follower mindfulness. Secularization seems the main reason of removing cultural and religious specifics in original Mindfulness practice. The lack of morality in clinical mindfulness does not imply that morality plays no part; because gradually participants develop their own sense of morality through the practice. Although psychology and ancient mindfulness meditation are different knowledge systems and pursue totally dissimilar final aims. Nevertheless, they converge on a keen interest in understanding the workings of the mind unnecessary suffering and awareness of the role of morality in mindfulness practice is important for counselors, who are willing to assist their clients with considering the suffusing role of morality and Mindfulness through practice with their own worldviews and ethical frameworks.

**Keywords:** Mindfulness, Sati, Morality, Meditation.

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### Introduction

In recent years, mindfulness programs have experienced

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a surge in popularity in psychological interventions (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). As part of such mindfulness-based interventions, or so-called “third-wave psychotherapies”, mindfulness practicing such as meditation have been taught systematically in order to experience different levels of mental health. Four widely used interventions include acceptance and commitment

therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Krageloh, 2016).

Mindfulness based interventions literatures up to October 2017 were 3666. Meta-analysis of across all randomized control trials significant positive effects of mindfulness base interventions was found relative to controls, for the outcome categories of mindfulness executive functioning, attention, expression, anxiety/stress and negative behaviors, with small effect sizes. However, when considering only those randomized control trials with active control groups, significant benefits of clinical mindfulness were restricted to the outcomes of Mindfulness, Depression and Anxiety/Stress only (Dunning, 2018).

Mindful attention involves cultivating a compassionate, nonjudgmental, and accepting

response to one's observation of events in the present moment. Clients are encouraged to observe internal and external experiences with an openness and curiosity, to use a "beginner's mind" to see things as they are, rather than as one believes them to be (Hanh, 1992).

We discuss here, whether the present mindfulness wave which is characterized by psychotherapist compatible with the ancient teachings in this respect? What is the role of morality in clinical mindfulness?

### **Definitions of Mindfulness**

The English term mindfulness appears to have had its origins in the translation work of Rhys Davids during the late 19th century (Gethin, 2011). Western mindfulness is hampered by semantic obscurity surrounding the term "mindfulness". Clinical usage of mindfulness has also inherited a lack of certitude concerning the meaning of mindfulness. Enthusiasm for mindfulness in Western psychology and other science has resulted in proliferation of definitions, operationalizations and self-report inventories that purport to measure mindful awareness as a trait (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). Acceptance-based approaches emphasize a particular quality of attention or observation that has been described most explicitly in definitions of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Linehan, 1993; Segal et al., 2002). It has been mentioned by several psychologist that the meaning of mindfulness is subtle and elusive and it is difficult to give definition in precise terms (Baer, 2011). Mindfulness within Western psychology is generally assumed to reflect the ancient construct. However, definitions of the term vary greatly from that of a simple therapeutic or experiential technique (Hayes & Plumb, 2007).

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu wrote: 'Western psychology mandates that constructs must be explicated and operationalized to be accurately assessed. However, most ancient traditions dictate that mindfulness cannot be easily extracted and analyzed in isolation from inherently interrelated concepts' (Christopher and Gilbert, 2007). According to the ancient traditions the word Sati, mindfulness, included two different meanings: the ability to remember what has been done or said long ago and the four establishments of mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna). However the first definition describes a quality of mindfulness, the second outlines its actual application (anayo, 2018-a). Therefore, the word sati usually translated as mindfulness in English is constrained in meaning by its etymological heritage, which is the Vedic word smṛti meaning memory or remembrance. The only definition of Sati in the canon attributable to the Buddha is in terms of memory with wisdom. The problem here is that in

English usage, words like memory and remembrance tend to have prominent connotations of events in the past. Such is not invariably the case for Sati and its ancient Indian antecedents. The basic meaning of smṛti in Vedic literature as well as in ancient literature is to become conscious of something past or present by either outer or inner stimuli, either intentionally or unintentionally. The four establishments of mindfulness are concerned with what happens in the present moment and also combine mindfulness with "clear knowing" or "clear comprehension" (sampajañña). This quality matches a frequent injunction in actual instructions for the four mindfulness establishment that one should "know" (pajānāti). Such knowing is distinguished from mindfulness itself (sati). This quality of knowing appears to be responsible for discriminating and eventually engendering meditative wisdom, although in later exegesis such functions are attributed to mindfulness itself (Anayo, 2018-a). These practices consist of non-judgmental observation and recognition. The mind is simply aware of an object objectively without evaluating the object, the subject (i.e. the observer or the mind) or the interaction between the two. Mindfulness is often understood or employed in this sense by psychologists. For example, Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally." Following this definition, Teasdale (2004) says, "The non-judgmental characteristic of mindfulness means that pleasant and unpleasant experiences are treated simply as that, as experiences" (Kuan mf) (Anayo, 2018-b).

### **Importance of Morality**

As result of secularization and adaption of western mindfulness practices from traditional origin, elements specific to culture and religion have been removed, now criticism that mindfulness training has lost its original ethical characteristics (Payne, 2015). The traditional approach in the Pali Canon can be described as a form of constructivism, in which certain cognitions and qualities must be developed and faulty ones, such as the faulty belief in a permanent ego, must be eliminated.

Morality is an integral aspect of any mindfulness practice, even when it is not formally emphasized, as is often the case in clinical mindfulness programs. In the absence of formal coverage of ethics and morality, mindfulness practitioners will draw on their own personal sense of morality as opposed to a formalized and common set of religious precepts and rules. Here, counselors may regard their role as reinforcing or even guiding their clients' process of contextualizing mindfulness within their personal ethical and

personal belief systems, because an increasing amount of research evidence has indicated that such an integration is linked to long-lasting positive health benefits (Krägeloh, 2018). In the best-known and most sophisticated text on ethics of the Mahāyāna tradition—Śāntideva's Bodhicāryāvātāra—mindfulness is taken up as the very foundation of all of moral practice and development (Garfield, 2012).

For those who present mindfulness as a medicalized technology, claiming a moral dimension requires a discursive sleight of hand. For those who see mindfulness as spiritual practice, ethical instruction would seem to be a necessary part of mindfulness. The preconceptions regarding the identity of religion and morality are not, however, rooted in the ancient tradition itself but rather a cultural heritage of the Reformation and Enlightenment. Rather than simply accepting this cultural presumption uncritically, it should be recognized as merely an artifact from a particular historical era, one that arose as part of a discourse compartmentalizing religion as a limited affiliation and private commitment within the public sphere of the secular. The lack of formal coverage of morality in clinical mindfulness does not imply that morality plays no part, and that participants independently contextualize their mindfulness practice by drawing on their own sense of morality. Therefore, awareness of the role of morality in mindfulness practice is important for counselors, who can assist their clients with integrating their mindfulness practice with, who can assist their clients with integrating their mindfulness practice with their own worldviews and ethical frameworks (Payne, 2015). Mindfulness practitioners vary in terms of their sensitivity toward and processing of moral information, as conveyed by ethical leaders, and that these individual differences determine the strength of the link between ethical leadership and follower discretionary work behaviors. Studies demonstrated that ethical leadership is more strongly related to follower extra effort and helping at higher levels of follower moral emotions and higher levels of follower mindfulness (Eisenbeiss and van Knippenberg, 2014; Toor & Oforo, 2009). Also studies indicated a positive relationship between ethical leadership and follower helping (Kalshoven et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 2010).

### Conclusion

Mindfulness approaches being applied in West could be criticized for not incorporating more explicitly traditional associations of mindfulness with wisdom and memory. Psychologist need to embrace new approaches for studying mindfulness, and merely linear, additive models

that sum putative markers related to mindfulness will not suffice. Just like the current clinical employment of mindfulness, each of the ancient traditions has evolved out of its own specific historical and social setting and, for this very reason, developed its particular approach to, and understanding of, mindfulness. The point is only to place these different constructs of mindfulness within a historical context in order to enable a better understanding of each. Particular applications of clinical mindfulness could be compared to related approaches or doctrinal teachings in ancient traditions. By adding historical depth to clinical mindfulness, researchers in psychology will in turn be able to draw upon a broader body of knowledge. This can serve as a catalyst for exploring in more detail the relationship between a particular definition adopted and the actual intervention. It can also foster the motivation to evaluate how the results of any particular research impact our overall knowledge of mindfulness (Analayo, 2018-b). Psychology and Buddhist meditation are different knowledge systems with distinct epistemologies and dissimilar final aims. Nevertheless, they converge on a keen interest in understanding the workings of the mind with a view to alleviate unnecessary suffering. More attention to details will help to put research on clinical mindfulness on a robust standing and provide it with a historical background that reaches back far beyond the late seventies of the twentieth century (Analayo, 2018-a). Also awareness of the role of morality in mindfulness practice is important for counselors, who can assist their clients with integrating their mindfulness practice with their own worldviews and ethical frameworks.

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