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Mindfulness and Motivation in Self-Transformation: Thich Nhat Hanh's Teachings on the Interbeing

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the relationship of mindfulness and motivation in self-transformation based on the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh. It discusses mind and meditation, the application and impact of mindfulness on body and mind, the Buddhist's roots of motivation in meditation, the dynamics of motivation in mindfulness practice and Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on interbeing. He argues that it is not necessary to hold the original Buddhist intention with the goal to attain enlightenment when practicing mindfulness because mindfulness is not only a means but also an end in itself. My discussion will highlight this interconnectedness of mindfulness and motivation where one's motivation can affect mindfulness and mindfulness practice can further shape one's motivation. The continuous practice of mindfulness has the ability to develop one's motivation to change one's mental state and life perspective, as the transformation will occur when the mind becomes more aware and more insightful.

Keywords

mind – mindfulness – meditation – motivation – psychology – Buddhism – self-transformation – interbeing – Thich Nhat Hanh

1 An Overview of Mind and Meditation

The concept of both mind and meditation can be understood in many ways by different beliefs, culture and science.

Consciousness is sometimes used synonymously to signify "mind" or "life" in the Buddhist canonical literature as translated by Bodhi (2000, 914–918) and defined by Waldron (2003, 14). Ledi (2006, 119) explained that this is "knowing" and "awareness", and this consciousness includes "awareness of cognition through sense and cognition through work of mind." In the early Buddhist texts, mind or consciousness is termed as *vinnaṇa*, *manas* or *citt*a, but over time they have developed to have their own meaning.

Mindfulness as the way to the mind's liberation is the foundation of Buddhist "meditation" or "mind training". All the methods taught by the Buddha converge into the way of mindfulness, and mindfulness is considered as the key and foundation of all Buddhist practice (Kabat-Zinn 2003; Nyanaponika 1962). Thich (1999, 64; 2005, 25–26) also emphasized that right mindfulness (*samyak smriti* in *Sanskrit*,[1] *samma satti* in *Pali*), where one is encouraged to be mindful in every moment in all aspects of daily life, is the core of the Buddha's teachings.

Meditation, as a participatory and experiential observation, has its roots in ancient Buddhism, where the purpose of meditation is self-transformation, to purify the mind of psychic irritants like greed, hatred and delusion, and develop the mind to a state of concentration and insight. This purpose is the motivation for meditation in Buddha's exposition, and it has a role to play in the path. Understanding this constitutes the right view, which will lead to right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, interconnecting each element in the Noble Eightfold Path in the Four Noble Truths.

The English term *meditation* comes from the Latin word *meditatio,* which basically means contemplation. It does not represent the true meaning or essence of the original *Pali* and *Sanskrit* term *bhavana* which means spiritual cultivation or development in Buddhist *patipatti* (practice). Buddhists believe that as one continues to learn and contemplate in daily life, one can gain further insights into things and life. Similarly, in the context of *bhavana*, one aims to achieve the development of a certain mental faculty, and with continuous practice over time, to gain insights. Nyanatiloka (1980) defined *samatha-bhavana* as the development of tranquility, and *vipassana-bhavana* as the development of insight.

1 In the discussion of texts and in references to names, I have decided to freely use both Indo-Aryan languages *Sanskrit* and *Pali* (e.g. either *sutra* or *sutta*) depending on what is appropriate in the context, except when an English word is available or quoted from an authoritative text. A *Pali* or *Sanskrit* word may have more than one rendition in English and vary with context, and my usage is without regard for its linguistic contexts, as my criteria of usage is clarity and effectiveness of communication. Most *Pali* and *Sanskrit* words are italicized. In addition, I have sacrificed elegance for simplicity, hence, all foreign words in *Pali*, *Sanskrit*, Chinese and Vietnamese, are deliberately written without diacritics.

In fact, there are as many definitions of meditation as there are writers, scholars and practitioners in the field. In this paper, I use the term "meditation" to refer to mental culture or mental cultivation as taught by the Buddha, and I use "mindfulness" to refer to awareness of the present moment in meditation, which is a universal practice.

In the 1970s, there were only a few scientific research articles on meditation. However, in 2017, there were almost 7,000 such articles; and in 2015 and 2016, there were more than 1,000 publications in the English-language scientific literature based on research by Goleman and Davidson (2017). Since the 1970s, new academic disciplines and research developments on meditation and the nature of mind, such as neuroscience and cognitive science, have emerged. Many studies and experiments from different fields done on the domain of the mind have been based on the understanding that mind lies in the brain, and the brain is viewed by researchers, scientists and doctors as the source of our consciousness, our mental states, thoughts and sensations. Hence, for them, the nature of mind is the physical functions of the brain. And as such, neuroscience has provided evidence such as neuroimaging to explain the functioning of our brain and its technical development. For instance, in his research on consciousness and the brain, neuroscientist Zoran Josipovic (2011) has shown how the states of consciousness cultivated through contemplative practice can tell us about the nature of consciousness and its relation to authentic subjectivity.

An epigenetic study in the life sciences by biologist Lipton (2005) concluded that the environmental (nature) factors which influence one's beliefs can control the mind. This uncovers new complexities in the nature of diseases, including mental illness. And philosopher Baggini (2015) asserted that this conclusion challenges the assumption of most scientific research in the past, which has developed further into a belief that genes "control" biology, thus linking numerous genes to many different diseases and traits. I do believe there is a correlation, but it is not the main controlling causation. The discovery of the environmental role in influencing gene activity is remarkable in the sense that it proves the traits and diseases of a human, as a living organism, are not solely controlled by genes. Further, recent research by Swiss and French researchers Collins (2014) and Warmflash (2015) has posited that under certain conditions, mental states can turn on and off to regulate the genes.

Many studies and experiments have been done to understand the mind, but these have mainly focused on one's brain as the western common assumption is that mind lies in one's brain (Benson, Thurman, Gardner, Holman et al. 1991; DeCharms 1998). What is perplexing is that experiments using brain waves to investigate one's thoughts reduce thought and sensation to something

physical. In such cases where the human mind has been perceived as a brain, the mechanical metaphor used for the mind is a "computer" as in Benson et al. (1991, 57).

Still the researcher's and scientist's concept of mind is not wholly shared among cultures as different cultures might offer different mental constructs and different interpretations. Anthropologist Shore (1996) argued that through the development of experiences, culture affects cognition as the mind can make meaning from everyday thinking and feeling. Prinz (2012) further drew on revolutionary research in anthropology, psychology and neuroscience to prove that experience and culture can influence the mind, making everyone unique. The early Greeks viewed the mind as the organ concerned with pure ideas, whereas for the Chinese, the mind lies in the heart, the word 'mind' being the same as the word for 'heart' (心) – the organ of thoughts and feelings. These are the different attributes that make up the mind according to different beliefs, implying that mind may exist in more than one location, which is commonly assumed to be in the brain.

According to the Statistic Brain Research Institute (2016), the brain makes up about 2% of the body's weight but due to thinking, worrying and planning, consumes about 20% of the body's energy. Similarly, in Buddhist psychology or the classical mind science of Buddhism called *Abhidharma*, the belief is that the brain is born from consciousness. Based on the concept of *Abhidharma*, the brain acts as a physiological base for consciousness, and hence, the mind is not the brain. This belief is opposed to the common western belief that the mind is in the brain. This basic consciousness from which mental formations arise is recognized in all schools of Buddhism. Thich (2007, 17) described the mind as "non-local" or "not in one set location"; that is, mind and object of mind are inseparable; object and subject manifest together as they are interdependent. Similar to the Buddhist understanding that mind is not only attached to the brain, Goldhill (2016) and Taylor (2017) cited evidence showing that though the mind can be in the brain with its important functions and characteristics, the mind is not even confined to the body.

Significantly, Buddhists believe that the mind does not die when the physical organ dies. Although the body dies, because the mind or stream of consciousness is not local, it will continue to be reborn within the cyclic existence (*samara*) as interpreted by Bodhi (2000, 533–539) in *Sutta SN 12*. The Buddhist concept of rebirth contradicts the assumptions of most scientific research that the mind is attached to the brain. In Buddhism, a human being is made up of both a physical body and formless mind where it can be divided into five aggregates, namely form, feeling or sensation, perception, mental formation

(thought process) and consciousness. All five aggregates are interdependent, ever-changing and arise dependent on causes and conditions. This supports the Buddhist teaching of impermanence and non-self, where the experiences of a human being arise from both internal mechanisms and external causes and conditions. Consciousness arises from material sense bases and it can either condition or conditioned by the mind and body, as interpreted by Walshe (1995, 223) in *Sutta DN 2.15*. This important relationship in the interaction and integration of the physical and consciousness, which has the nature of mere experiences, possibly points to the mysterious concept of what is called *mind*.

From this alternate perspective, Buddhists aim to discover the nature of the mind – its characteristics, functions and habits – in order to harness its full potential in self-transformation through meditation. And specifically, mindfulness is in the core teachings of the Buddha with the goal of self-transformation. Following the interpretation of Benson et al. (1991, 4); Bodhi (1998) and Wallace (2009, 2), self-transformation as the motivation for meditation mentioned throughout this paper refers to the mental well-being acquired through mind training practice when one abandons the unwholesome and cultivates wholesome qualities in order to purify the mind.

2 The Application and Impact of Mindfulness on Body and Mind

Since the 1950s, many scientific studies have been conducted to assess the impact of meditation on body and mind, and many neuroimaging studies have explored the effects of meditation on brain structure and function (Aspy and Proeve 2017; Austin 1998; Baggini 2015; Castillo 1990; Congleton, Holzel, and Lazar 2015; Germer 2005; Goleman and Davidson 2017; Josipovic 2011; Kabat-Zinn 2003; Mascaro, Rilling, Tenzin Negi, and Raison 2013).

The insight gained from these studies has opened up the possibility that meditation can benefit one's wellbeing. In the 2000s, even more contemplative research in neuroscience has investigated how meditation can physically change our biology and emotional life, and how it can help us live a healthier and happier life. According to Goleman and Davidson (2017, 16–17) and Davidson (2008), more than a hundred scientists gathered together to further an in-depth study of meditation that has resulted in several hundreds of publications showing how meditation trains the mind and our experience reshapes the brain. Findings from the brain labs of the University of Wisconsin, and the medical schools of Stanford and Emory, Harvard University and Yale University conclude that even a few minutes of meditation per day can have amazing benefits, with the mind feeling calmer and body more relaxed. The facts generated suggest that the more one meditates, the more benefits one reaps.

After a decade, more studies and research continue to prove the positive effects and benefits of mind training or meditation practice. Congleton et al. (2015) contributed to research on the cognitive processes of a group of participants who completed an eight-week mindfulness program, and subsequently, other neuroscientists have shown ways in which meditation can change our brain and improve our health. The process of meditation is currently a popular area in neurological research as it points to the possibility of the brain being changed and optimized in a way that was never realized before. Modern scientific methods and instruments to measure brain wave activity like functional magnetic resonance imaging or functional MRI (fMRI) and electroencephalogram (EEG) are being used to study meditation effects (Tang and Posner 2013). Large amounts of data are being collected under many such studies to further examine the neural effects of meditation practice.

Subsequently, many institutes are being set up, for instance, at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to study medicine related to body and mind, and to improve understanding of certain illnesses like autism and Alzheimer's. Though the results of these studies are in general inconclusive due to very limited sampling (Feldman, Greeson, and Senville 2010; Keng, Smoski, Moria and Robins 2011; Stetka 2014), it is common now for doctors to recommend meditation to their patients. Here the focus is on mindfulness-based treatment for long term healing and prevention of diseases as it is an inexpensive and non-invasive therapy. The recent research done by King's College London (2017) and Mason, Peters, Williams, and Kumari (2017) have demonstrated how Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) changes the way one thinks and reacts to thoughts and experiences. Seagall (2003, 165–178) and Taylor (2017) observed that with research results showing strong connections in the key regions of the brain of those with psychosis, more psychiatrists and psychotherapists are officially turning to non-medical therapies like CBT and mindfulness practices. Shonin, Gordon, and Griffiths (2014) also commented that these Buddhist-derived interventions based on Buddhist practices, like mindfulness, have since set a new trend in the health industry.

In the Buddhist context, mindfulness practice is important in all types of meditation. It is awareness of the present moment and the prerequisite for concentration which focuses on one object. Though mindfulness and concentration are normally seen as two functions and two qualities of mind, both are inseparable practices in Buddhist meditation. The mind can be described as consciousness, whereas mindfulness can be understood as observing the ongoing flow of moments or events without being caught up in thoughts or having emotional reactions to situations. And meditation is the gradual process of training the mind; it can lead to the goal of self-transformation where

one gains insight into the nature of reality. The practice of meditation has also enjoyed a tremendous surge in popularity among various social applications based on societal development. Business-minded people have commercialized meditation into business and technology. Many multi-media businesses on meditation have appeared on social media and streaming platforms such as mindfulness apps and TED talks, promising to help users combat insomnia, anxiety, and more. Hundreds of meditation apps form social networking communities, driving accessibility of meditation and de-stigmatization of mental health issues. As mindfulness has continued to gain acceptance and popularity in recent years, many organizations and schools have customized and marketed mindfulness in the form of mental health and brain enhancement products, and have implemented mental wellness programs as an essential part of overall healthcare. Some organizations even include mindfulness training as part of their corporate training and executive development programs. There are also many seminars and conferences conducted on meditation.

Meditation as a mind training practice, is now viewed as a kind of mental fitness tool to improve athletic performance and mind-body connection. With most yoga businesses struggling to survive in recent years, many yoga studios have integrated meditation as a main part of their offerings. Meditation has even been made technological. Tech companies create new mobile applications on meditation, like Headspace, which provides guided meditation sessions. And there is hype around meditation technology relying on software applications to aid meditation. For instance, the Blue Brain Project tries to find shortcuts to help meditation practitioners achieve mastery and experience in the Buddhist concept of enlightenment, which is liberation from suffering and cyclic existence.

Indeed, meditation has grown recently from an old-fashioned religious idea or supernatural belief to a spiritual concept of phenomenological experience and one of the fastest-growing wellness activities, sometimes with misrepresentations and questionable claims or even scandals. Different people practice meditation for different reasons, maybe for better physical and mental health, or for better focus and creativity. As meditation has evolved over the years beyond the boundaries of nationality and faith, many myths have emerged in the deep-rooted cultural history of meditation. Common notions about meditation include imagination and emptying the mind or self-hypnosis. Some consider it as a ritualistic ceremony encoded with specific meaning and symbolism; some think that it is just a setup with a series of actions and certain steps to follow.

Similar to the word sports, which refers to a wide range of athletic activities, meditation is a broad-based word for all varieties of contemplative practices.

At the deepest level with the goal of self-transformation, it means the pure form of an ancient practice from Asia that forms part of the spiritual lifestyle of the monastic and yogi. Among the intensive practices are the lineage of Theravada Buddhism and Tibetan yogis. At the broad level with secular motivations, spiritual traditions are often being removed and customized into various forms suitable for a contemporary lifestyle and the masses as described above. These accessible forms of meditation are mindfulness in daily life or mindfulness applications for the benefits of personal health or for the increase of company profits. An instance of such innovations and adaptations is the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program by Kabat-Zinn (2003; 2011; 2013), which is taught in many organizations, clinics and medical centers around the world.

Over the decades, research has been focused on studying the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions such as the MBSR program. Clinical and behavioral outcomes evaluating the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions are positive and encouraging, pointing to the effectiveness of treating both psychological and physical symptoms. So far mindfulness has been proven scientifically to effect change and transformation in mental well-being, with investigations to examine the possible important mechanisms for cultivating mindfulness. However, I believe another equally important direction for future scientific research into the process of mindfulness is to explore the original motivational aspect of mindfulness in Buddhist meditation on affecting ultimate self-transformation and deriving maximum benefits. Accordingly, ultimate self-transformation in Buddhism leads to complete liberation from the cyclic existence of birth and death. This ultimate happiness or cessation of suffering (*nirvana* in *Sanskrit*, *nibbana* in *Pali*) is considered as enlightenment or full awakening.

The section below explores the Buddhist's goal of meditation and the Buddhist's roots of motivation (or the seeds of *karma*). I would like to emphasize that this is a humble attempt to understand the complex process of mindfulness in search of common ground on which to build an understanding of one of the primary compositions involved in mindfulness practice.

3 The Buddhist Theory of Motivation

Kabat-Zinn (2013, 32–46) asserted that one's intention sets the conditions for personal growth and the possibility of change. The motivation (or intention) here is defined as energy or force, incentive or drive, stimulus or influence, to practice mindfulness with the desire or aim for self-transformation.

Self-transformation is frequently defined as changing one's way of seeing and transforming one's habits and perception through recognizing one's mental defilements, which are unwholesome mental states like greed, anger, delusion, fear and depression. Since mindfulness has its roots in the ancient Buddhist tradition, a complete self-transformation according to Buddhist belief will lead one to full awakening or liberation or enlightenment, and it happens when one practices deeply for a long period of time. Buddhists believe that if one can identify and cultivate the wholesome roots of motivation, then one can utilize one's full potential to achieve best performance in transforming oneself and becoming more wholesome in bodily action, verbal speech and mental state. And the motivation to achieve self-transformation at the deepest level depends on mindfulness that is supported by moral understanding and action. For instance, the main motivating roots of skillful actions are non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, which could lead to renunciation of worldly pleasures, growth in loving kindness and compassion, and a clear and insightful mind. Continuous cultivation of such positive mental states will result in complete self-transformation.

According to a study by Shapiro (1992) quoted in Carlson, Austin, and Friedman (2006) on the motivation of meditation practitioners, the motivation to practice "shift[s] along a continuum from self-regulation to self-exploration, and finally to self-liberation" as the meditators continue to practice. The findings suggest the significance of having motivation in the mindfulness model as it sets the platform for what is possible and is a reminder of the reason for practice. The study shows that the efficacy or outcome of meditation is correlated with one's motivation. That means, those who practice mindfulness to reduce stress achieved the goal of relaxation, and those who intend to liberate themselves moved towards this goal. These findings prove that motivation is an important fact in mindfulness meditation.

Motivation itself is dynamic and evolving. Motivation affects one's mindfulness, and mindfulness affects one's motivation. Both are interconnected and interrelated. For instance, if one starts mindfulness practice with the goal to reduce stress, he will manage his stress with the practice. As he continues to practice mindfulness, his original motivation may change and move towards more compassionate and equanimous mental states. In other words, motivation is important for meditation as it sets the foundation and direction for the practice, so that ultimate goals and maximum benefits can be achieved.

So far scientific research has provided an excellent analysis of the process of mindfulness, but in studying this process, the original motivational aspect of mindfulness practice is often extracted out and its roots in Buddhism omitted. The researchers have also overlooked the operational definition of mindfulness

to include motivation as a factor. This observation has been made by a group of clinical psychologists (Shapiro et al. 2006) studying the efficacy of mindfulness practice. Here I open a dialogue to build an understanding of the Buddhist theory of motivation.

In Buddhism, the theory of motivation rests on three basic roots of human nature: greed, hatred and delusion; and an action can be motivated by these three unwholesome forms in different combinations. Examples of wholesome actions are non-attachment, loving-kindness and right understanding, and the cultivation of these positive qualities is an antidote to negativity. In understanding this interrelationship, Thich (1999, 11) advised one to be mindful of what causes suffering and what creates happiness. Both wholesome and unwholesome actions contribute to the creation and accumulation of *karma* (*kamma*). The seed of *karma* is the intention or motivation of one's acts through body, speech and mind. When motivation changes, karma changes, and transformation happens. That is, only when the wholesome roots of motivation are uncovered and cultivated can positive transformations happen. As motivation is the seed of *karma*, more elaboration on *karma* is necessary here.

In terms of actions, there are three types of *karma* in Buddhism: good, neutral and bad. Good *karma* is often equated with merit, and bad *karma* with demerit. Merit is not a reward from God but the result of good *karma* manifested in material form, and the merit field is dependent on the intention of the act. Together with wisdom, it can provide the right conditions for further spiritual cultivation towards enlightenment. Merits can be increased or reduced, similar to amassing or spending money. Thus, the act of accumulating merits for happiness or for a better rebirth is encouraged in the Buddhist's spiritual path of cultivation.

An analogy would be a seed. It must be planted first in the right conditions; supporting factors like nutrients from the soil, water and sunlight are the necessary food for it to grow, mature, and ripen into a fruit. The seed from a banyan fruit when planted can evolve to its full potential in the presence of the necessary conditions or supporting factors like soil, sunlight and water. Once germination has taken place, the seed will release its function for the supporting conditions of soil, sunlight and water to take over in growing the tree. Though the seed is not needed at this stage, the potential inherent in the genes of the seed will determine the species, size and characteristics of the tree. And this inherent potential can only be fulfilled with the supporting conditions of soil, sunlight and water.

In the above analogy, the seed is like *karma* and the tree is like one's body. According to Buddhism, there is a need to identify the right supporting conditions for self-transformation, and to allow the good seeds in oneself to be watered so that they can grow and realize the final goal of liberation. Thich

(2015, 51) often used "watered" as a metaphoric expression to illustrate continuous "feeding" and "growing" to encourage the manifestation of mental formation at the level of mind consciousness. With this understanding, I believe that if we study the mind in human nature and the motivational roots, we are able to tap into the potential and possibilities of a human being to the fullest; and in a similar vein, learning and cultivating positive habits through mindfulness practice can increase one's free will and transform oneself for peace and happiness.

At this juncture, it is necessary to highlight a point in the Buddhist canon which states that not everything that happens to a person is due to *karma*, as interpreted by Bodhi (2000, 1279) in SN Sutta 36.21, and Nanamoli and Bodhi (2009, 827–838) in MN Sutta 101. There are as many causes as there are conditions. If one feels unwell, the cause could be the external environment like seasonal changes in the weather or problems with internal body conditions, and it may not be due to the fruition of *karma*. For instance, if cancer is a cause of death, this does not imply that all deaths are caused by cancer. This simple logic implies that if all volitional actions have karmic results, this does not mean that whatever happens is the result of past karma. However, it is not due to pure chance either. According to Buddhist belief, so-called destiny is not fixed and can be changed through one's deeds based on one's motivation.

The above discussion illustrates that although human behavior and action are a manifestation of the mind, and the form of practice is an outward expression of one's inner motivation, one's continuous practice in cultivating positive habits and mental states can also influence a person's motivation. In other words, right mindfulness will in turn influence right motivation. The motivation to achieve ultimate self-transformation or true liberation might determine how far one will practice and how deeply one can transform; however, continuous right mindfulness practice can also affect one's motivation along the path of practice. This interdependent characteristic of motivation and mindfulness mirrors the Buddhist concept of interbeing as insight into the process of self-transformation, which I will discuss further based on the view of Thich Nhat Hanh – one of the contemporary Buddhist leaders in teaching mindfulness.

4 The Dynamics of Motivation and Mindfulness

The interdependence of motivation and mindfulness has demonstrated that the different approaches, either broad or deep, do not matter in self-transformation. If we focus on the broad approach in meditation with secular motivations like focusing on the bottom-line and worldly benefits of mindfulness,

instead of the original spiritual goal of self-transformation (liberation or enlightenment), we might encourage more people to practice mindfulness. Eventually, as one continues to practice mindfulness meditation, one's motivation will evolve towards a deeper practice.

Thich Nhat Hanh (Confino 2014) has asserted that since the means and the end in mindfulness are the same, the original motivation is not important in mindfulness and it is not possible for people, like businessmen, with secular or worldly motivation to corrupt mindfulness practice. He believes that the basis of every action rests in right mindfulness, and he follows the Buddhist teachings on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, MN Sutta 10 as interpreted by Nanamoli and Bodhi (2009, 145–155) and Thich (1999, 80, 94–98; 2012, 103–215). He believes that the practice of mindfulness has the power to make one more compassionate, and the insight of interbeing is itself a form of self-transformation. With this insight into the nature of interbeing, whether a deep approach to meditation with a spiritual motivation for self-transformation or a broad approach to meditation with secular motivations, is not important in the mindfulness process as the continuous practice of mindfulness will shape one's motivation along the path of practice. Thus, Thich Nhat Hanh has argued that the original intention of mindfulness practice does not matter.

According to Thich (1999, 225; 2012, 428), the essential nature of interbeing is the understanding of "this is, because that is". In his words:

> In early Buddhism, we speak of Interdependent Co-arising. In latter Buddhism, we use the words interbeing and interpenetration. The terminology is different, but the meaning is the same
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> THICH 1999, 225.

Lim (2019) mentions that it is necessary to explain "interbeing" as a new terminology coined by Thich (1999, 225–226), which has the same meaning as Interdependent Co-arising, to explain all the teachings of the Buddha. Interdependent Co-arising (*paticca-samuppada*) is also called Dependent Co-arising or Dependent Origination or Twelve-Links, where all *dharmas* are interdependent and mutually conditioned on each other. It is the most popular system used to explain the Buddhist principle of causation. Thich (1991, 95–96; 1996b, 61; 1999, 80; 2005, 41) invented "inter-be" by combining "inter" and "to be" to describe a concept which has the characteristics of impermanence, non-self, *nirvana* and emptiness. Interbeing carries the message of interdependence and inseparability (unity) of all things, and the "all in one, one in all" (*advaya*) concept in the Mahayana *sutra*. The nature of interbeing

is where all psychological and physical phenomena (*dharmas*) are interpenetrated, interconnected, interdependent and mutually conditioned in reality and in the world. This relationship is clearly shown in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* in which "everything contains everything else" and "everything penetrates everything else".

To him, *interbeing* is an expression of the true reality:

> Nothing can exist by itself alone. It has to depend on every other thing. That is called *inter-being*. To be means to *inter-be*. The paper *inter-is* with the sunshine and with the forest. The flower cannot exist by itself alone; it has to *inter-be* with soil, rain, weeds and insects. There is no being; there is only inter-being."
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> THICH 2002, 47.

Thich (2005, 105–106; 2006, 11; 2012, 117) considers mindfulness as a universal and non-sectarian practice; and to meditate is to observe and breathe deeply in order to "bring your mind home to your body" as "to be mindful means to be yourself," thus such practice does not rely on the original intention that one has. He even boldly suggests that one can be a Christian and practice meditation because it is a practice like yoga. In other words, he believes that one can still keep their religious roots and practice meditation because it is a secular practice to train the mind like mental fitness. He explains mindfulness as the awareness and the practice of looking deeply on the nature of things; he says that a deep understanding of "the nature of our mind" will make one's practice easy. "The nature of mind" in the context of Mahayana Buddhism refers to the true interconnectedness of our consciousness and the emptiness of nature where there are characteristics, roles and habits. "Emptiness" refers to a thing or self that is empty of inherently independent existence. "Empty" is to be without a fixed unchanging permanent identity. It has the true nature of impermanence, non-self and *nirvana*, and he sometimes uses these terms interchangeably.

In fact, the term "religion" is ambiguous and problematic. When Buddha discovered the truth, he called it *Dhamma-Vinaya* (Keown and Prebish 2007). Since Buddhism is not his invention, it is simply not possible to reduce *Dhamma-Vinaya* to a theoretical collection of literature or a philosophical system of thought. In the history of Buddhism, it is told that the Buddha expounded at Sarnath the first discourse on the Middle Path of avoiding the two extremes. This is the Noble Eightfold Path which can be analyzed in terms of Morality, Concentration and Wisdom. The attainment of wisdom is through contemplation and insight into constantly changing phenomena. Meditation

encompasses different techniques and practices to achieve mindfulness, concentration and insight, which balance and support each other's growths to eradicate the roots of mental impurities or psychic irritants at the deepest level in the mind. And the cultivation of mindfulness and concentration in *vipassana* meditation will give rise to deeper insights and finally lead one to liberation.

Thich (1999, 64–83) teaches that everyone can live mindfully in everyday life, and he has a spiritual goal of offering a living and engaged Buddhism for as many people as possible regardless of their original motivation. He emphasizes that since the purpose of Buddhism is to benefit oneself and others, the teachings should be made more relevant and accessible for practice. Hence, spiritual practice based on mindfulness is of central importance to his system of doctrinal renewal and reform, which he believes can eventually lead one to self-transformation. So how do we know that these people with secular or worldly motivation have transformed through practice? Thich Nhat Hanh sees the understanding and realization of Dharma as a form of self-transformation. He asserts that mindfulness is a necessary process to gain insight into the nature of interbeing, with this insight, self-transformation happens.

Mindfulness practice in daily life, as Thich (2006, 39–41, 163) has taught, is the way to understand the nature of interbeing and to realize the inter-are nature of the whole cosmos. His insight into the nature of interbeing is understanding the moment to moment arising and passing away of phenomena. He has shared that as one becomes more aware of the mental formations and practices deep looking into the nature of things, one is able to transform oneself by changing our way of seeing things. Similarly, in research done by Goleman and Davidson (2017, 290–292), there is evidence of the possibility of using mindfulness to acquire learnable positive qualities like kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity, and as one continues to cultivate these positive traits, one could transform oneself and the world.

Further, Thich (1996a, 37; 1999, 22, 226) believes that to understand all the Buddhist teachings, including the Three Marks of Existence or Three Dharma Seals – impermanence, non-self and *nirvana* – one needs to see them in the light of interbeing, where all teachings are based on Interdependent Co-Arising, and if any teaching is not in accordance with Interdependent Co-Arising, then it cannot be the Buddha's teachings. It is necessary to point out that Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings here are based on the northern transmission (Mahayana) of Buddhism, instead of the southern transmission (Theravada) of Buddhism where impermanence, non-self and suffering are the three marks or seals as mentioned in Dhammananda's (1992, 502–504) *Dhammapada verses 277, 278 and 279*.

In Buddhism, everything is interrelated as interdependence is the nature of existence; similarly, motivation and mindfulness are interrelated and interdependent – the interbeing nature. To support this argument, Thich (2006, 82–83) describes the interconnectedness of the universe using metaphors like a flower to illustrate the principle of interbeing, interdependence or interpenetration; that is, a flower is made up of non-flower elements such as the clouds, soil and sunshine, and without these non-flower elements, the flower cannot exist. And since we breathe in oxygen from the trees and mountains, when we look deeply at our lungs, we can see the cosmos, where the interdependent nature of everything is reflected; in "our body is the body of the cosmos, and… the cosmos is our own body". He supports his view with Bohm's (2002) ontological concepts for Quantum Theory – implicate order and explicate order – where the presence of all other particles can be identified in one particle. The nature of a particle shows the ultimate dimension where "everything is inside of everything" and the conventional dimension where "everything exists outside of everything". Since living things are made up of non-living elements, it is then logical that non-living things can contain life. The implication of this understanding of interbeing in daily life and in our society can be examined further in the inter-are relationship of our present life and the contemporary ecological and environmental concerns as proposed by Lim (2019).

To sum up, Thich argues that it is more important to understand Interdependent Co-arising in the process of mindfulness than having the original spiritual goal of self-transformation. The core Buddhist teaching of Interdependent Co-arising, "This is because that is; this is not, because that is not" (Thich 1999, 221), is necessary for one who practices mindfulness to see the existence of infinite layers of causes and conditions and put this into practice. To him, insight into "inter-be" (Thich 1999,135), where everything is related to everything else, is a sign of progress in self-transformation. He believes that the practice of mindfulness to become more aware of the mental formations and the practice of looking deeply to see things more insightfully, can transform us by changing the way we habitually see things. That means, a clear understanding of one's mind is an important link to mindfulness practice so that maximum benefit and full potential can be achieved in self-transformation, including the insight into the nature of interbeing.

5 Conclusions

Mindfulness is a necessary process for gaining insight into the nature of interbeing; with this insight that "everything is related to everything else,"

the process of self-transformation happens. And mindfulness can help us to become more aware of the mental formations and see things more clearly, thus enabling us to transform ourself by changing how we see things. With constant daily practice, one can eventually transform, becoming more understanding and compassionate. Buddhists believe that with the right mindfulness practice, one will naturally be transformed in the process.

As we have discussed, the two approaches to mindfulness practice have their own merits. The broad approach with secular motivations is a good effort to benefit the masses by making meditation more accessible and relevant to the world, especially in its cross-cultural journey to the west. This emerging culture of mindfulness has created transcultural practices connecting the ancient eastern tradition and the modern western world, whereas the deep approach with the motivation to achieve self-transformation offers a lifelong pursuit and a natural progression for those who have more time and interest in pursuing the practice. As research findings show, motivation and mindfulness influence each other. They are of the nature of interconnectedness or interbeing; thus, with the continuous practice of mindfulness, the original motivation for right mindfulness practice can be influenced and shaped.

In fact, the positively altered traits acquired through meditation can be learned and nurtured. Eventually, it is assumed that these positive qualities will lead to self-transformation and enhance the potential to transform our society and our world for the better. Further, it may provide a clue to the fundamental problems of modern psychology as mentioned by Benson et al. (1991, 4), namely: the nature of mind, the limits of growth in human potential, the possibilities for mental health through meditation, and the way to personal transformation.

Based on the above understanding, even though some people do not transform along the way, as long as one practices right mindfulness, the practice will change one's perspective on life through the nature of interbeing, and eventually make one more understanding and compassionate. Thus, mindfulness will become not only a means but also an end in itself.

Lastly, for the purpose of understanding the mind, the inclusion of original motivation in mindfulness practice may have some theoretical value and practical significance in the path of self-transformation. This researcher hopes that more studies can be done on the roots of motivation so as to deepen our understanding of the nature of our mind and meditation. To enhance our understanding of the role of motivation, future study could research the efficacy of motivation in transforming oneself. Perhaps an investigation on how the ancient Buddhist tradition links its understanding of the nature of mind in terms of its characteristics, functions and roles, to the meditation process, and

in this way shine light on how one could derive maximum benefits in body and mind from meditation.

Abbreviations

CBT	*Cognitive Behavior Therapy*
DN	*Digha Nikaya*
EEG	*electroencephalogram*
fMRI	*functional MRI*
MBSR	*Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*
MN	*Majjhima Nikaya*
SN	*Samyutta Nikaya*

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