

BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY TO NAVIGATE THE MODERN WORLD

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ABSTRACT

There are a lot of ideas in Buddhism that deal with the human mind and suffering. Buddhism addresses questions like why do we suffer? Why do we feel anxiety? Why do we get overwhelmed by sadness? Why do people act unkindly? How to cope with hurtful behaviour, setbacks or failures? Though these are some of the questions formulated centuries earlier but not only do they speak to the modern world but form a common core of the different forms of Buddhism across regions. Through this paper, I seek to explore the solutions offered by Buddhism, particularly meditation, to change the way mind works in order to cope with stress, strife and unhappiness, the three ailments of modern humans.

The foundation of the paper comprise the meditation techniques formulated in Buddhism with special emphasis on mindfulness meditation and how it has the potential for inner peace at individual level and a harmonious system at social level. The second step is to investigate the results of mindfulness meditation at some Buddhist retreats and in clinical psychotherapy. The case is made for integrating Buddhist philosophy with meditation practice to make it more efficacious and its positive outcomes more durable. A holistic approach is proposed through the paper.

The Buddhist ideas like illusory thinking, mind changing

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the reality for us are subjected to scientific evaluation as done in modern psychology examining through the twin principles of natural selection and evolution. William James, the great American psychologist said that the animating essence of religion is the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves to it. Buddhism too postulates the existence of an unseen order that we should adjust ourselves to which is not a reference to some mystic cosmic plan. The unseen order is the truth about the way things work. The truth comprises of the structure of reality, of the truth about human beings, or the truth about self. According to Buddhism, these truths often go unseen because the human mind contains certain built-in distortions. We don't see the world clearly and our vision and understanding is marred by illusions. Buddhism explains that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves to this normally hidden truth and lays a path for the harmonious adjustment.

This paper largely investigates whether the Buddhist diagnosis of the human predicament and suffering is valid and whether the prescription is powerful and effective.

There are a lot of ideas in Buddhism that deal with the human mind and suffering. Buddhism addresses questions like why do we suffer? Why do we feel anxiety? Why do we get overwhelmed by sadness? Why do people act unkindly? How to cope with hurtful behaviour, setbacks or failures? Though these are some of the questions formulated centuries earlier but not only do they speak to the modern world but form a common core of the different forms of Buddhism across regions. It is worthwhile to explore the solutions offered by Buddhism, particularly meditation, to change the way mind works in order to cope with stress, strife and unhappiness, the three ailments of modern humans and to test the logic behind Buddhist diagnosis and prescription to establish its validity for the modern world.

The foundation of the paper comprise the foundational teachings of Buddhism, four noble truths and no-self that form the core of Buddhist psychological formulations of human predicament and its solution which are also examined through the prism of evolutionary psychology. The meditation techniques formulated in Buddhism

with special emphasis on mindfulness meditation are examined in view of their potential for inner peace at individual level and a harmonious system at social level. The efficacy of meditation is established through psychological studies on modular theory of mind and default mind function. The case is made for integrating Buddhist philosophy with meditation practice to make it more efficacious and its positive outcomes more durable. A holistic approach by integrating researches of modern psychology forms the core of the paper.

The Buddhist ideas like illusory thinking, mind changing the reality for us are subjected to scientific evaluation as done in modern psychology examining through the twin principles of natural selection and evolution. According to Buddhism the human mind contains certain built-in distortions. Our vision and understanding of the world is flawed by false impressions. Buddhism seeks to enable a harmonious adjustment to the actual truth. The study postulates that Buddhist meditation practices are said to be conducive to a heightened awareness and a clearer vision of reality but we need to examine if such a concept is supported by modern science. Thus, the paper largely investigates whether the Buddhist diagnosis of the human predicament and suffering is valid and whether the prescription is powerful and effective in view of modern day challenges.

BUDDHIST DIAGNOSIS OF DUKKHA / MODERN SCIENCE OF STRESS-REDUCTION

The starting point of Buddhist teachings is suffering. It begins by acknowledging and accepting mankind's predicament and attempts to lessen the influence of self-imposed sources of distress such as harmful behavioural habits (*karma*), unrealistic cognitive tendencies (*samskara*), and affective emotional reactions (*klesha*). The conscious disarming of these habits extinguishes the fire of suffering. In the same way, modern research has revealed that the causal sequence-negative appraisal, adverse emotions and sympathetic activation can be intentionally intervened, regulated, and reversed. (Apply and Trumbull 1967; Goldberger and Breznitz 1982; Loizzo 2000) Buddhist psychology shifts the blame as

well as the responsibility of the human predicament away from environmental influences that presuppose external agents towards internal dynamics that require reflective analysis, self-regulation and self-correction which is supported by modern psychotherapy too. (De Silva 2000; Loizzo 2006)

The core of Buddhist doctrine of suffering is contained in a four-fold framework – the disease, the cure, the cause, the medicine. The first truth exposes the pervasiveness of *dukkha*. Rich in meaning and nuance, the word *Dukkha* in literal sense may mean physical pain or mental anguish but it alludes to a general feeling of unsatisfactory, a nagging unease with the state of things. This corresponds to the state of eerie disenchantment and unexplained discomfort that modern life is also marred with. On one hand, the world is scaling new heights of development; on the other hand the people are facing acute stress. The researchers are exploring new frontiers of scientific investigation and medicinal breakthroughs, yet, there is a sharp increase in number of deadly diseases, mental illnesses and suicide rates. Carl Jung captured the dilemma of modern times in his phrase, ‘modern man in search of a soul’. Young men and women are clamouring to get high paying jobs and soon reaching a saturation point and feeling disenchanting fall into depression and anxiety. Alarming, the suicide rates amongst young population have reached epidemic proportion in Europe and are on the rise in most Asian countries. Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, encouraged his patients to have a spiritual aspect to their lives. Buddhist outlook can be one of the ways to deal effectively with onslaughts of problems arising in modern lives. Charles Byrne, an Irish psychiatrist writes, “As I read more about Buddhism, I came to understand that it represents a profound understanding of humanity and human psyche.” (Value Creation, 2008) Buddhist psychology creates an understanding about the nature of suffering without which it is not possible to overcome it.

In *Majjhima Nikaya* (i.140), Buddha states that he has always made known just two things, namely suffering and the cessation of suffering. This is an expression of the basic orientation of Buddhism for all times and all places. *Dukkha* can be analysed in Buddhist thought in three ways or as three kinds: Suffering as pain,

as change, as conditions. (*Visuddhimagga* xvi. 34-35; *Digha Nikaya* iii. 216; *Samyutta Nikaya* iv. 259, v. 56; *Nettipakarana* 12) The bodily pain or psychological anguish can be easily discerned, but a pleasurable condition is also bound to end in due course and will ultimately bring suffering through change. All reality is subject to change and therefore, our condition of existence itself is flawed with changefulness and inherently prone to suffering. The psychological unease is an inevitable state but only if we understand the reality, we can make progress to resolve it.

“Buddhism regards itself as presenting a system of training in conduct, meditation and understanding that constitutes a path leading to cessation of suffering. Everything is to be subordinated to that goal.” (Gethin 1998: 65) This suggests the fundamental goal of Buddhist theory and practice. It urges us to see the reality in a new light. Our preconceived and conditioned ideas about the ultimate nature of the world and our place in it need to be redefined not because it will make us a Buddhist but because the erroneous beliefs hinder our progress on the path of happiness. The premise that pleasure is short-lived yet we revel in it needs to be first comprehended more deeply. The question arises as to why it is that pleasure always evaporates in time and yet we have so much trouble reckoning with that. The modern psychologists also inquire that although the brain is built in such a way that pleasure is fleeting. Even then it focuses more on the pleasure than the fleetingness of it. The source of *dukkha*, suffering and unsatisfactoriness lies in our attempt to hang onto impermanent things that include pleasure. So, the cause of suffering is the clinging to the erroneous belief that the gratification is going to last forever. This is called craving, cause of suffering, as described in the second noble truth.

Modern science agrees to the pleasure-seeking tendency of brain and that the feeling of gratification lessens or vanishes with time. It looks at parts of the brain that are relevant to the failure of gratification to last forever. One experiment was conducted through the neurotransmitter dopamine. It has become pretty much common knowledge that dopamine is a pleasure chemical, the reward chemical. It is interesting to look at data from a study in which the neurons in monkeys that are involved in the release

of dopamine were precisely monitored. (Yoshimi et al. 2015) In this experiment, they gave a little fruit juice to a monkey and measured his dopamine levels. The dopamine spike lasted about a third of a second. So assuming that, in this monkey, dopamine is correlated with pleasure, that's pretty brief pleasure. The monkey condition is very much like the human condition where pleasures are impermanent

BUDDHISM: AGAINST CRAVING/ NATURAL SELECTION: FOR CRAVING

The word craving has been used by the translators to convey the meaning of the Pali term '*tanha*'. (*The Book of Kindred Sayings*, V, p. 357; *The Book of Discipline*, IV, p. 16). In the Buddhist sense it stands for thirst which is given in the doctrine of four noble truths as the cause (*samudaya*) of suffering. (*Samyutta Nikaya* V, p. 421; *Vinaya Pitaka* I, p. 10) For this reason, The Buddhist goal of Nirvana is referred to as the extinction of suffering (*tanhakkhaya*). *Dhammapada* states that craving begets grief – *tanhaya jayati sokho* (v. 216) and that eradication or extinction of craving makes one triumph over all grief – *tanhakkhaya sabbam dukkham jinati*. (v. 354) This makes it very clear that the resultant pleasure derived from fulfilling a craving evaporates very quickly.

Therefore, the question arises as why is not inbuilt in our natural instincts in everyday lives that the pleasure is going to rapidly dissipate. Why did natural selection design our brains in a way that we veer towards short term gratifications? Cosmides and Tooby elucidate "Natural Selection does not work "for the good of the species", as many people think ...it is a process in which a phenotypic design feature *causes its own spread through a population* (which can happen even in cases where this leads to the extinction of the species). (1997: 5-6) Not just biological but social status is also related to the design of natural selection. With humans and nonhuman primates, things like elevating their social status helps them to spread their genes, because it seems to be the case that in primates and some other parts of the animal kingdom, social status is correlated with getting genes into the next generation. Therefore, first function of natural selection (a part of which is our blindness to

fleeting nature of pleasures) is to perpetuate the species but it also reflects the evolutionary adaptations of a species. Simply put, the reason we have one set of brain circuits rather than another is that they are better at solving problems that our ancestors faced during our species' evolutionary history, (Cosmides and Tooby 1997: 6) The only kind of problems that natural selection can design for solving are adaptive problems – how an organism makes its living, what it eats, what eats it, who it mates with, who it socializes with, how it communicates and so on. Therefore, natural selection creates craving to foster the species.

Buddha said pleasure doesn't last, leaves us unsatisfied, evolution seems to explain why. Buddha says we focus on pleasure and not on the fleetingness of pleasure, evolution seems to explain why. It is not the agenda of natural selection whether we see the world clearly nor is it the goal of natural selection that we are happy. From natural selection's point of view, happiness is just a tool. On the other hand, Buddhism wants us to see the world clearly all the time, and aspires to end our suffering. Buddhism has a specific strategy for realizing these goals of ending suffering, and helping us to see the world clearly. The third and fourth noble truths comprise of Buddhist prescription for the human predicament. The third noble truth tells us what the cure is. It is the abandonment of craving and of clinging. The fourth noble truth spells out the path you have to follow if you're going to attain full liberation. And it turns out that it is an Eightfold Path. There are eight things that you have to master if you want to be liberated. So it starts with right view, which is to say getting a proper understanding of the Buddhist teaching.

ANCIENT BUDDHISM: TIMELESS PHILOSOPHY/ MODERN SKULLS: STONE AGE MIND

Natural selection, the process that designed our brain, takes a long time to design a circuit of any complexity. The time it takes to build circuits that are suited to a given environment is so slow it is hard to even imagine -- it's like a stone being sculpted by wind-blown sand. Even relatively simple changes can take tens of thousands of years. The environment that humans -- and, therefore, human *minds* -- evolved in was very different from our modern environment. Our

ancestors spent well over 99% of our species' evolutionary history living in hunter-gatherer societies. Generation after generation, for 10 million years, natural selection slowly sculpted the human brain, favoring circuitry that was good at solving the day-to-day problems of our hunter-gatherer ancestors -- problems like finding mates, hunting animals, gathering plant foods, negotiating with friends, defending ourselves against aggression, raising children, choosing a good habitat, and so on. Those whose circuits were better designed for solving these problems left more children, and we are descended from them.

Our species lived as hunter-gatherers 1000 times longer than as anything else. The world that seems so familiar, a world with roads, schools, grocery stores, factories, farms, and nation-states, has lasted for only an eye-blink of time when compared to our entire evolutionary history. The computer age is only a little older than the typical college student, and the industrial revolution is a mere 200 years old. Agriculture first appeared on earth only 10,000 years ago, and it wasn't until about 5,000 years ago that as many as half of the human population engaged in farming rather than hunting and gathering. Natural selection is a slow process, and there just haven't been enough generations for it to design circuits that are well-adapted to our post-industrial life. In other words, "our modern skulls house a stone-age mind". (Cosmides and Tooby, p. 11-12).

The key to understanding how the modern mind works is to realize that its circuits were not designed to solve the day-to-day problems of a modern world -- they were designed to solve the day-to-day problems of our hunter-gatherer ancestors. In saying that our modern skulls house a stone age mind, we do not mean to imply that our minds are unsophisticated. Quite the contrary: they are very sophisticated computers, whose circuits are elegantly designed to solve the kinds of problems our ancestors routinely faced. Cognitive mechanisms that exist because they solved problems efficiently in the past will not necessarily generate adaptive behavior in the present. (See Symonds 1990; Tooby J. and Cosmides L. 1990).

Buddhism, on the other hand, deals first with cognitive aspect leading to adaptive aspect. It seeks to provide us tools to navigate the reality, be it the reality of hunter-gatherer society or modern day

challenges. The aim is to undo unsatisfactoriness, acknowledging the impermanence of reality, by developing awareness beyond evolutionary ingrained interests. Buddhist teachings have some sort of timeless value as psychological pay-offs. Donald T. Campbell, in an address to American Psychological Association, spoke, “the possible sources of validity in recipes for living that have been evolved, tested, winnowed through hundreds of generations of human history. On purely scientific grounds, these recipes for living might be regarded as better tested than the best of psychology’s and psychiatry’s speculation on how lives should be lived.” (Wright 1994: 366).

The Buddhist wisdom urges digging up the “root of thirst”, which is not necessarily abstinence but cultivation of a general austere attitude towards material things. *Dhammapada* guides, “Cut down the whole forests of desires, not a tree only!” (v. 283) Herein, lies the greater wisdom regarding both the addictiveness and ephemerality of pleasure. There are scattered clues in ancient philosophy that human striving after pleasure is yoked to self-deception. In this day and age of self-centeredness, egotism and individualism, words of Buddha seem to hit the nail on its head, “The fault of others is easily perceived, but that of one’s self is difficult to perceive.” (*Dhammapada* 252) “We do not realize that “normal” behavior needs to be explained at all. This “instinct blindness” makes the study of psychology difficult. To get past this problem, William James (1890) suggested that we try to make the “natural seem strange.” (Cosmides, Leda and Tooby John *Evolutionary Psychology: A Primer*, p. 1) Buddhist critique of the notion of ‘self’ is fundamental to its explanation about individual experience of the world, of consciousness and its workings that challenges the established, accepted presumptions.

BUDDHA’S NEGATION OF NOTION OF SELF/ EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY AND DECEPTION OF SELF

Buddha’s critique of the notion of self is rooted in a specific historical context and initially directed towards particular understandings. In negating existence of ‘self’ in the complex flow of physical and mental phenomena of an individual, Buddha points

to lack of certain attributes. These attributes, therefore, describe the self that Buddha says does not exist. If there is a self, it should be (i) constant – an unchanging phenomenon, (ii) inner controller – having ultimate control. This notion of self was common to the Brahmanical theories regarding the ultimate nature of individual and his destiny in the fifth century BCE around the time of origin and rise of Buddhism. (Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 133) This unchanging self was assumed to be the immortal element on which individual identity rests. Buddha negates the existence of an unchanging element in an individual. He takes us to this conclusion through logical deductions about a person's existence and its constituent elements, which are shown to have no fixed or permanent nature. He proceeds very systematically to refute the notion of self.

In the *Anattalakkhanasutta* Buddha explains that all individuals are made of physical and mental formations. These are further listed in the form of five aggregates – form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. Then he asked the monks, who were listening to the sermons, if any of these elements had permanent nature. He pointed to each aggregate and posed questions like whether our physical form remained constant or our feelings never changed and so on. The monks agreed with him that none of these five aggregates were permanent and therefore cannot be the self.

Then Buddha deals with the power of control assumed to be vested in the self. The first argument is that these five aggregates cannot be subjected to control. Instead of dealing first with their controlling power, he analyses them as rather 'out of control'. For example, we cannot will our form to be a certain, specific kind or the body will age, it will bear sickness, however hard we may will otherwise.

So, any of the aggregates, which are the sum of our existence, cannot collectively or individually be called self as they are impermanent and over them we have no control.

The first argument that everything is in a flux can be applied even today. Our physical forms, emotions, understandings, views are evolving and changing. Sometimes we behave differently in a formal setting and change within minutes when with friends or

family. We play different roles in the same slice of time and definitely evolve and change over longer durations. Comprehension of the impermanent nature of existence, can help to develop equanimity, detachment. The evolutionary psychologists hit at the 'reality' of 'self' and do a Buddhist stance without that agenda.

The playing field of the principle of natural selection displays the victory of genetic interest over truth where organisms practice deception widely for self-promotion. For example, some female fireflies in the genus *Photuris* mimic the mating flash of the genus *Photinus* and then, having attracted *Photinus* male, eat him. (Taken from a study by James E. Lloyd, Department of Entomology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York) Some harmless snakes develop the colouration of poisonous snake to garner undeserved awe and fear. Evolutionary psychology tells us that people are no different.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, a 1956 sociology book by Erving Goffman, the author uses the imagery of the theatre in order to portray the importance of human social interaction; this would become known as Goffman's dramaturgical analysis approach. He stressed that when an individual comes in contact with other people, that individual will attempt to control or guide the impression that others might make of him by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner. "In social interaction, as in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the performers (individuals) are on stage in front of the audiences. This is where the positive aspect of the idea of self and desired impressions are highlighted. There is also a back region, where individuals can prepare for or set aside their role." (Ritzman 2008: 372) But there is a difference between people and other members of the animal kingdom. Human beings can be fully taken in by their own act. Goffman marveled that a person could be "sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality." (Ritzman 2008:17-18) Robert Wright confirms that accurate depiction of reality is not high on natural selection's list. "The new paradigm helps us map the terrain of human deception and self-deception, if at a low level of resolution." (1194: 265).

An ingenious experiment has shown how deeply the truth about ourselves can be buried. In seeking to demonstrate the

paradoxical character of self-deception, Gur and Sackeim (1979) adapted a voice-recognition task that had been developed about a half-century earlier. In this task, after making recordings of samples of their own voice, subjects were asked to judge whether each of a series of played-back samples was or was not their own voice. The critical evidence comes from examining the relationship between occurrences of galvanic skin response (GSR) and overt verbal identification responses to the voice stimuli. The GSR is assumed to indicate unconscious own-voice recognition, whereas verbal identification indicates conscious recognition. Self-deception is judged to occur when the GSR occurs on an own-voice trial, yet the subject fails to identify the voice as self. Surprisingly, the subjects on hearing their own voice show high GSR but 'fail' to identify it as their own voice more often after self-esteem is lowered. When self-esteem is higher they recognize their own voice with the same tally of GSR. Somewhere the information was recognized within as manifested by the high GSR. Robert Trivers writes of this experiment that "it is as if we expand ourselves ... when succeeding, and shrink our presentation of self when failing, yet we are largely unconscious of this process." (1985: 417) The range of egocentric bias is from minor to epic making one prone to inflate the virtues and shroud the vices. Buddha specifically recognizes that much delusion grows out of the human penchant for one-upmanship. In warning his followers against dogmatic squabbling, he said, "The senses evidence, and works, inspire such scorn for others, and such smug conviction *he* is right, that all his rivals ranks as "sorry", brainless fools." (*Suttanipata*, v. 887).

This grasp of our naturally skewed perspective is bound up with the path to correct the distortion. The Eightfold path leads to right mindfulness and right concentration; which point us to meditation. Meditation helps us to correct the biases built into us by natural selection. Without emphasize this distinction between the therapeutic and the spiritual nature of the path, the agenda is to curb the selfishness and move towards "an all embracing love for the entire universe ... unmarred by hate within, not rousing enmity." (*Suttanipata, Mettasutta*) The *Mettasutta* (Poem on Loving Kindness) concludes;

“Standing, walking, sitting or reclining, as long as he is awake, let him develop this mindfulness. This, they say, is ‘Noble Living’ here.

Not falling into wrong views — being virtuous, endowed with insight, lust in the senses discarded — verily never again will he return to conceive in a womb.” (Suttanipata, I. 8).

BUDDHIST VIEW OF MIND/MODULAR VIEW OF MIND

Meditation is primarily progressive stages of mental culture culminating in the attainment of the emancipation of mind from all unwholesome emotions that defile it and produce unending misery for the individual. Liberating knowledge is considered in Buddhist traditions as consisting of understanding mind or mind and matter in accordance with the principles governing dependent arising and existence. The crucial factors that condition delusion and craving are mental. Liberation occurs through insight and riddance of unwholesome emotions – *punnavimutti* and *cetovimutti*. IN the Pali scriptures three terms are frequently used to refer to mind – *citta*, *mano*, *vinnana*. *Citto* and *Mano* are considered as psychological constitution of personality that can be developed and cultivated. *Vinnana* denotes the psychological remnants that have continued from past in the present realm. “From the Buddhist point of view, the observable physiological activity is preceded by mental processes ... Thus, in dealing with the nature of the body-mind relationship, Buddhism adopted a principle of dependent arising, according to which both mental and physical existences are viewed as being mutually dependent.” (Malasekara 2003:5) It is maintained that there is nothing else in the world that conduces to the greater well-being of a person than a well-cultivated mind.

Evidence for the modularity of mind hypothesis comes from studies of patients with brain damage. If the human mind were a general all-purpose problem-solver we would expect damage to the brain to affect all cognitive capacities more or less equally. But this is not what we find. On the contrary, brain damage often impairs some cognitive capacities but leaves other untouched. This view argues that the human mind contains a number of subsystems or modules – each of which is designed to perform a very limited number of tasks and cannot do anything else. Some of the most

compelling evidence for the modularity of mind hypothesis comes from studies of patients with brain damage. If the human mind were a general all-purpose problem-solver we would expect damage to the brain to affect all cognitive capacities more or less equally. But this is not what we find. On the contrary, brain damage often impairs some cognitive capacities but leaves other untouched. It means no single thing, is doing the job. Rather, there are a number of these things called modules, and they kind of take turns exerting decisive influence on our thought, our feelings, our behavior. And there's no conscious self kind of picking the module that gets to be in charge at a given moment.

There is no conscious self directing our behavior and thoughts but the modules are taking control as a self-organizing system. These modules express themselves to us through feelings like jealousy, fear, depression, elation etc. The modular view of the mind has some illuminating links with Buddhist meditation. It can help explain the role of modules in vying for attention when people meditate. When one understands these feelings as just a bunch of modules and not core consciousness, it becomes easier to escape their grip. Thus, mind is freed from the affective shackles as desired by Buddhism.

BUDDHIST MEDITATION/MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

“Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.

Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow.” (Dhammapada v. 1-2).

Buddhist philosophy and the Buddhist meditation are so enmeshed together that the understanding of one is not possible without the other. The classical interpretation of Buddhist meditation does not entail merely plucking the references towards it from the canonical and other scriptural texts. It has to be contextualized within the larger corpus of Buddhist teachings. Embedding the practice of meditation within the larger ethical

framework of Buddhism is what constitutes its complete and correct understanding. The application of meditation in clinical regimen does not necessarily require faith in Buddhism as a religion yet knowledge of the seminal beliefs from which it originates is desirable. Although the goal of Buddhism is liberation from the cycle of birth and death, but even if one just reduces stress, the world can be seen a little more clearly and emerge happier. There are many forms of Buddhist meditation but they can be studied under the main forms of concentration and mindfulness.

Concentration meditation involves focusing on something very intently. It could be a mantra, breathing, a visual image on which the practitioner focuses single-mindedly, get completely absorbed and reach a blissful state. Mindfulness meditation is a method of giving 'close attention' or 'bare attention' to experience mental purity. The Pali word for mindfulness, *satipaṭṭhana*, literally translates as "keeping awareness of the present". Mindfulness is a meditation technique in Buddhist psychology in which attention is systematically expanded to encompass any physical or mental activity from moment-to-moment with an attitude of detachment and acceptance. Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation describes four applications of contemplating – the body, feelings, mind and phenomena. (*Satipaṭṭhanasutta, Majjhima Nikaya*) Contemplation of the body proceeds from mindfulness of breathing, of postures, various activities, its anatomical parts to a corpse in decay as final destination. Mindfulness of breathing is the foundation of mental calm and inward attention towards a process we take for granted. The contemplation on death and decay bring about the impermanence of being as an antidote to conceit and avarice. The second contemplation is concerned with feelings. Awareness about feelings is enhanced by training oneself to distinguish between their pleasant (*sukkha*), unpleasant (*dukkha*), and neutral (*adukkamsukkha*) affective qualities. They are to be further distinguished between worldly (*samisa*) feelings arising out of carnal experiences and unworldly (*niramisa*) feelings arising out of a deeper spiritual experience. Contemplation of mind is aimed at recognizing the various states of the mind – the lustful, angry, deluded, and the distracted. These states are

the underlying motivation of a particular train of thought. By recognizing them, the practitioner can understand the mechanism of the rise of unwholesome states of mind and move towards higher states of tranquility. The practice leads to the removal of hindrances (*nivaraṇa*) that obstruct the proper functioning of the mind. The culmination of mindfulness practice is reached with the contemplation of the four noble truths which can be undertaken “by either contemplating *dukkha* and its arising, or by directing mindfulness to the cessation of *dukkha* and the path leading thereto” (*Dvayatānupassanasutta, Suttanipata*) According to Bhiku Bodhi, ordinarily the faculty of attention is used as an instrument for serving our purposes, our biological and psychological needs. But mindfulness is a kind of attention which operates independently of all ulterior aims and purposes. It is attention that aspires towards a pure objectivity, an awareness which reflects the nature of objects exactly as they are, without adding to them, without elaborating upon them, without interpreting through the screens of subjective evaluation and commentary.

The part of the brain called the default mode network gets active when a person is not engaged in any other mental activity. Brain scans have shown that when people meditate, the default mode network gets quieter, less active. (Brewer, Worhunsky et al) Ultimately, it is in the nature of an individual’s experience of the world, in mind and its perceptions, nature of mind itself that description of Buddhist analysis of *Dukkha* can be understood. Evolutionary psychology helps to discover and understand the design of human mind. The Buddhist ideas like illusory thinking, mind changing the reality for us are subjected to scientific evaluation in modern psychology through the twin principles of *natural selection* and *evolution*. According to *Evolutionary Psychology Primer* “The brain circuits are designed to generate behavior that is appropriate to your environmental circumstances.... the conscious experience is just the tip of the iceberg.” Modern science concedes that most of what goes on in your mind is hidden from you. Many studies have shown the preference for mates with biologically better parameters for fertility without the subjects being aware of any such conscious bias. They think they are in the hallowed act of falling in love.

Therefore, the notion that feelings of pain and pleasure are true reality is debunked by modern science which is exactly the basic premise of Buddhist meditation. It is a quest to create awareness about actual reality.

CONCLUSION

The sense of dissatisfaction is regarded as an essential prerequisite for progress on the Buddhist path. Pain remains painful unless something is done to alleviate it, while pleasure will naturally turn into pain. The most subtle form of suffering of all is one to which the unenlightened are said to be oblivious: that our minds and bodies are so conditioned that we are always subject to suffering in the next moment.

Buddhism presented a radical challenge to the way we see the world. That the path that we think will lead us to happiness leads instead to sorrow. That what we believe is true is instead false. That what we imagine to be real is unreal. Robert Wright says, "As we said, you view your feelings with less attachment and they may not get the same kind of traction with you. They may not have the same kind of power to drag your mind in a particular direction." Buddhist assertion is that if you see the world clearly, you respond appropriately to it. You do align yourself with moral truth by embracing universal love over material and sensory gains. Meditation is the most helpful tool to aid the mental cultivation conducive to a happier, altruistic self in harmony with the environment.

Natural selection tends to create various distortions in perception, in cognition and certainly, in moral judgment with a strong intent of self promotion. Richard Alexander has stressed the evolutionary importance of moral self advertisement. (*The Biology of Moral Systems*) Campbell suggested some ideas parasitize brain and appeal to myopic cravings. We all have regrets of some such succumbing to temptation. One study proves that there is no willful control of brain as we imagine. In reality, brain works to justify our actions even when not aware of its purpose, Buddhism starts from this premise that the feelings and ensuing reality are delusional which is supported by modern science. Meditation definitely has self help benefits at individual level but its moral validity is not that

easy to establish. Natural selection focuses on self promotion even when it portrays oneself altruistic whereas Buddhism addresses basic human delusion of moral bias towards self. Buddhism is the path to correct moral biases built into us by natural selection and modern science also shows that natural selection is not perennially beneficial therefore moral validity of Buddhist meditation is at least partially supported by modern science. Therefore, Buddhism has great potential for self help and harmonious living. Buddhism says that we discover and harmoniously align ourselves with the hidden reality of the world, then we will in some sense realize our supreme good. And if we do not see ourselves attaining that loft goal, we shall definitely find and spread happiness.

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Note: All the Pali sources refer to the Pali Text Society editions.