**Recalibration of Mindfulness for Education**

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**PREAMBLE**

Compartmentalization and disconnection have been pervasive phenomena that have characterized and affected all spheres of human endeavour in modern times, including--and notably for the context of this chapter--education. Modern schooling has increasingly focused on teaching many different subjects, as students move up in grades and qualify for higher education. Although educators have advocated for care and human development as the primary goals of schooling, the reality is that such aims are most often subsumed under student academic performance. In other words, the primary focus of modern schooling has been knowledge and skills acquisition. Human flourishing and personhood development tend to play a secondary or instrumental role. In response to modernist educational aims, strong attempts have been made by educational leaders, philosophers, and practitioners in recent decades to steer education more towards development of whole human beings and whole communities, not just primarily as students and classroom dwellers, who learn and master subjects and acquire skills. Holistic education movements, and more recently, contemplative education movements (Bai, Cohen, Culham, Park, Rabi, Scott & Tait, 2014; Barbezat & Bush, 2014), which can be seen as part of holistic and contemplative educational reform, are at the vanguard of such educational reform or at least enhancement.

Unfortunately, contemplative methodology itself has been subject to the same pressure of compartmentalization and disconnect. For example, consider what Yoga has generally become in North America: a billion dollar industry that proffers a homogenized version of the original intent of the practice, and idealized and extreme images that consists of young and sexy bodies. Mindfulness has not escaped similar commodification and appeal to short-term benefits. In education, mindfulness has been turned into a technique for "self-regulation" that is brought into schools to manage students who are, in this age of distraction and dis-regulation, increasingly less able to perform academically.

Mindfulness in the context of education at times appears to be undertaken as a skill-based, cognitive-behavioural approach where its utility seems to be isolated to supporting individual cognitive processes. Such reductionist interpretations of mindfulness have resulted in it having lost connection to its original meaning in Western psychological theory and practice, and has led to the misconception that ethics and the discernment of the wholesome from the unwholesome are not part of mindfulness, when in fact they are central.

This chapter by the four authors critically examines how mindfulness has been taken up in education, and attempts to re-calibrate its use and offering in education so as to suggest better use of what mindfulness practice is truly capable of: liberating humanity from the narrow and limiting confines of a reified ego consciousness and its perpetual condition of schism and conflict, internal and external.

**THE CURRENT MINDFULNESS UPTAKE SCENE IN EDUCATION**

The growing popularity of mindfulness programs in schools can be traced in part to neuroscientific studies on the effects of contemplative practice on the brain. Beginning in the late eighties, scientists began to investigate the physiological correlates of meditative states as well as the effects of contemplative practice on neural circuitry. Ancient forms of Buddhist meditation, whereby the practitioner engages in full and present awareness, have been known to produce mental states, characterized by clarity, and in some cases, ecstatic joy and warm compassion. Such meditative techniques have traditionally fallen under the purview of monastics contemplatives, who have renounced worldly life in pursuit of spiritual illumination. With the spread of Buddhism in the west, and interest in eastern philosophies gathering momentum, Buddhist adepts who have devoted much of their lives to meditation became the subjects of study, and the states of consciousness arising from meditative practice began to attract scientific attention.

The neuroscientific study of meditation coincided with the neuroscientific revolution, also known as the decade of the brain (Jones & Mendell, 1999). The advent of imaging and diagnostic technologies such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), and positron emissions tomography (PET) allowed scientists to peer into the operational and structural intricacies of the brain. Using a variety of monitoring methods, scientists are able to correlate mental states with activity in different regions of the brain, and thus construct a physiological map of neurological functions that correspond to subjective mental states. Moreover, researchers have been able to detect changes in cortical structure as a result of repeated practice of certain activities, including spatial navigation, and memory (Maguire et al., 2006). These advances in neuroscience have produced the empirical evidence of physiological changes as a result of periods of intense meditative practice (Lazar et al., 2005).

Neuroscientific investigation into the effects of meditation effectively imports an ancient practice into a scientific paradigm. Experimental design attempts to isolate a variable in an effort to determine and measure the *effects* of meditation. Whereas ancient Buddhist traditions utilize meditation as merely one among a suite of practices that aim to develop and transform consciousness, neuroscience only measures the observable effects of meditative practice. The articulation of neuroscientific findings can sometimes convey observable *effects* as *outcomes*; changes in the brain are presented as the result of exposure to a given variable (i.e. meditation). In this figuration, significant results are often read by the wider public as recommendations for meditative practice. If meditators demonstrate emotional stability in the face of stress, and emotional regulation is thought a desirable feature of mental well-being, then the merits of meditative practice becomes apparent. However, this scientific apprehension tends to examine meditation outside of its traditional context, omit its original purpose, and neglect the suite of practices of which it is meant to be part. Thus, *effects* are mistaken for *aims*, and outcomes for methods. In Buddhism, emotional stability is correlated with deep and lucid non-dual awareness, consciousness that manifests when the ordinary consciousness’ of subject-object dichotomy dissolves, giving way to subject-object unity or integration. In common language this is often described as a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Western observers, however, are likely to adopt meditation as a means to achieving what is only the secondary effect of a more fundamental transformation in the quality of consciousness and in the emergence of increasingly kind, compassionate, and peaceful society.

As neuroscientific knowledge garnered attention, coupled with empirical science’ current repute as epistemology *par excellence*, educators began to incorporate neuroscientific findings into discussions of pedagogical methods. Bolstered by scientific evidence, educators have turned to mindfulness practices in an effort to cultivate emotional stability, resilience, empathy and positive affect among students. The MindUP program (Hawn Foundation, 2011) is one example of a comprehensive mindfulness curriculum, designed to introduce students to the basic awareness and self-regulatory practices along with the rudiments of brain science. With lessons and activities for students from K-10, MindUP aims to “foster social and emotional awareness, enhance psychological well-being, and promote academic success” (Hawn Foundation, 2011, p. 6). Each lesson includes a segment on the brain and the physiological effects of recommended practices. MindUp sees wide implementation by teachers, and some academics have now presented its salutary effects (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

In addition to mindfulness-based interventions for children, programs have also been developed for educators. Mindfulness can be brought to the classroom directly through programs for children, indirectly through programs for teachers, or through a combination of both approaches. Two interventions offered to teachers in Canada are Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE) and the Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART) in Education program. Both programs draw upon MBSR and include teachings on mindfulness, and practices such as guided sitting meditation, body-scan meditation, and yoga.

A third program from the United States and just recently being brought into Canada is Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE). Founded on mindfulness-based practices and the Prosocial Classroom model CARE emphasizes how teachers’ themselves must possess social-emotional competence and attend to their own well-being in order to develop and maintain teacher-student relationships, classroom management, and effective Social and Emotional Education (SEE) implementation.

A mindfulness-based program that combines both direct and indirect approaches is the Inner Resilience Program (IRP), which is grounded in research in SEE and contemporary mindfulness-based interventions. In 2009, the IRP became a two-year pilot project within ten New York City public schools (Lantieri, Kyse, Harnett, & Malkmus, 2011). It was hypothesized that there would be greater positive effects if administrators, teachers, parents, and children from each school all participated in various components of the program. The activities primarily focused on administrators and teachers, and were intended to reduce teacher stress, and increase their concentration, attention, and job satisfaction. It was theorized that such changes in teachers would have a positive impact on their classroom environments that in turn would affect students’ well-being relative to their attention, frustration levels, stress, and acting out behaviors. In addition, students’ well-being would further be improved by activities provided in the Building Resilience from the Inside Out curriculum (Lantieri et al., 2011).

The IRP brings together direct and indirect approaches to SEE, and suggests further consideration be given to balancing our efforts in SEE; we must not only consider the child, but the people comprising the context in which children live and learn. As the field of mindfulness and contemplative practices grows, what remains in the context of education is a bridging between teachers and students, where we attend to the psychological well-being of the individual students and teachers, as well as the student-teacher relationship itself.

**BEYOND SELF-REGULATION AND MANAGEMENT**

The mindfulness programs widely adapted for schools attend closely to the prevalent discourse on self-regulation. Such programs enlist data from neuroscientific research to present a physiological picture of the brain in distress, and proceeds to offer methods for alleviating anxiety and tension. This presentation construes the brain as the seat of negative and distressing experiences – the solution to which lies in mindfulness practice. The amygdala is often associated with “fight, flight or freeze,” whose stress induced, reactionary impulses is moderated by the prefrontal cortex (MindUP, 2011, p. 27). Such simplistic presentation of the brain is misleading in three ways: first, the reduction of cortical structures to a short list of functions tends to misrepresent the complexity of the brain and the vastly integrated circuitry across the entire cortex, while essentializing the role of each cortical region (Varela et al., 2001); secondly, the simplification of regional function tends to establish a hierarchy of brain functions, i.e. the executive role of the prefrontal cortex is privileged over the supposedly reactionary impulses of the amygdala; third, the association between amygdular activation and negative affect implies the need to subdue the amygdala. Such depictions of the brain misrepresents the vital functions served by the amygdala, which includes pro-social behaviours and empathetic attunement (Adolphs, 2010).

Increasingly in education we see such terms as “self-control”, “self-management” or “self-regulation.” The concern about the use of this language is similar to the oversimplification of mindfulness as it is often equated with simply being, “aware.” When taken up as a means of self-regulation, mindfulness risks being perceived as a means to eliminating or preventing particular emotions, thoughts, and/or actions. The self-regulation model of mindfulness may lead educators to see negative feelings as something to be avoided or suppressed. Furthermore, what may be lost is the value of the emotion, positive or negative, as important indicators of what the child may need.

Epstein (2013) outlines some common misperceptions about being with emotion, such as believing they must be managed or suppressed. When emotions are viewed as something to be controlled, the author describes, “[i]n this view, the emotions are personified as wild animals lurking in the jungles of the unconscious--animals that must be guarded against or tamed to the greatest extent possible” (p. 96). This misconception of emotion results in emotions being identified as “real entities” over which we have little control, and that rather than working with the emotion we see our task as being to subjugate or to control our emotion in order to avoid calamity. When we view emotion as beasts to be tamed, we lose the opportunity to learn about the nature of the mind and emotion; how to be with the emotion, and to see the emotions natural passing away. In addition, the more we cut off the emotion, the more we continue to identify with them. If our efforts are to control or inadvertently eliminate, we may be reinforcing the very emotion of which we are attempting to rid ourselves. What tends to happen commonly is confusion between feeling and off-loading feelings in the service of relieving the pressure of feeling. Feeling means only that: feeling. To repeat (as it is a significant insight): what is usually identified as feeling is more often than not an effort to get rid of a feeling and involves an action. Mindfulness practice provides a way of being with feeling. Inner work with the egoic selves provides the opportunity to know the self that has the feeling and that was wounded repeatedly until the wound itself became reified and buried in such a way that an egoic structure developed that powerfully suppressed feeling and being that was natural to a person (Schellenbaum, 1998/1990).

To reiterate, the practice of mindfulness meditation is not about stopping emotion, but rather, being with and understanding what we feel. It is learning how to be with our emotion, and recognizing whether they are wholesome or unwholesome, healthful or harmful, that enables change and/or transformation. When we use the language of self-control or self-regulation we are focused on an end point without understanding the means to such ends, and in this case the value of being with emotion. Moreover, when we come up against or try and control what we feel, and fail to do so, this potentially creates a greater sense of failure and self-loathing, further perpetuating established harmful thinking patterns.

The proliferation of mindfulness-based programs intimate a turning point in the career of an ancient contemplative practice; the transplantation of meditation from a religious to a secular context is accompanied by significant changes to its supposed purposes and aims. Western adaptation of meditative practice, and its numerous variants, inevitably shifts the supposed goals and use of meditation in the direction of western values. Let us here note that the use to which something is put tends to define what this something is. For example, if in one’s household one were to use a book of Shakespeare’s collected works only as a doorstop for the front door, never bothering to open it and read it, that book in that household will be known as the doorstop. While it’s wonderful that a book can be used as a doorstop on occasion, if it’s not opened and read, its possibility to open one’s eyes and move one’s heart and to transform one’s life is lost and wasted. Our sense is that mindfulness practice currently so ardently pursued in schools, military, corporate environments is being similarly used.

This section of the chapter exposed the doorstop use of mindfulness in contemporary school, and in the subsequent sections, we shall explore possibilities of reclaiming, to continue with the analogy, its Shakespearean-like use.

**RE-MINDING MINDFULNESS**

To further build on the analogy of Shakespearean doorstop, the particular use to which we put something tells us a lot about the user’s mindset. In our imagined household where a heavy tome of Shakespeare is used only as a doorstop, possibly the householder is illiterate, or, even if she can read, she doesn’t imagine any worth and merit in the contents of the book. Similarly, ignorance or lack of understanding regarding the purpose and use of mindfulness seems to be behind the current scene of mindfulness in education.

The best purpose or use for which mindfulness is intended is enlightenment or awakening. Just as ordinary waking up signals a transition from a sleep state to an awake state, enlightenment signifies a transition of human consciousness from that of being limited and bound to ego identity to its liberation. What do we mean by these words? What is ego or ego identity? What is it to be liberated from the ego or ego identity?

While there are different meanings and different nuances for the word ‘ego,’ in the context of enlightenment discourse, such as Buddhist psychology, ego signifies the self seeing itself separate from the rest of life and universe: “I am not you; I am not this tree; I’m not that woman; I’m just this me, this person whose physical boundary lies at my skin surface and whose mental and emotional boundary lies in my beliefs, my religion, my nationality, my gender, my money, my interest, my words, my taste, and so on.” In setting up the clear and categorical separation between what is me and mine and what is not, and insisting on what’s ‘mine’ and what’s not ‘mine,’ the reified ego consciousness is rigid and defensive. It is alert all the time, which causes stress, in looking out for foreign encroachment and invasion and, when the latter is detected, it’s swift in reacting to the invasion either by withdrawing and running away, or by fighting and attempting to eliminate the foreign other. It's fair to say that within these parameters a person does not 'have an ego': the ego has the person. An awakened person will have an ego, not be had by it, and it will in subtle and not so subtle ways never be the same in its manifestation twice. This kind of ego is fluid, flexible, and responsive to the entire context within which it arises, and is a vehicle for optimal expression of life energy. We invite our reader to look around and look within to see if what we are describing as ego consciousness is at work and whether it is so pervasively. Good news is that where ego consciousness is discovered, we can welcome them as sites for inner work (Cohen, 2015) that is transformational.

From world political scenes to interpersonal dynamics, such as in public and private organizations (to which the institution of schooling belongs), family, spousal relationships, the ego consciousness presently prevails. Conflict, domination, defamation, intimidation, war, marginalization and slaughter all take place in the field of ego consciousness. The message that egos communicate to each other, implicitly or explicitly is this: “I am not you, and you are not me, and we don’t like and want each other. One of us has to go.” The reader's response might be: “Oh, come on! It’s not that bad, is it? People cooperate, get along, make love, make peace, make a family, do business... ego consciousness works O.K., right?” Yes, we try and try hard: we teach people to be tolerant, respectful, control their impulse to lash out; we teach people to be kind, etc. Of course, these are not useless injunctions. However, we only succeed in this effort to the degree we manage to soften our ego consciousness and expand its boundary. If we have not been fully liberated from the confines of ego consciousness, our progress is unstable, episodic, therefore limited. The battle of ego consciousness will continue: anger, hatred, greed, grief, and vengeance seeking will persist. This has been the story writ-large of humanity for the past few millennia.

Teachings and practices of mindfulness squarely aim at transforming the ego consciousness. In its aim and execution, mindfulness as taught in the Buddhist tradition is accompanied by the Eightfold Path: *right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration*. Two main points we wish to draw out of our reference to Buddhist teachings here are: 1) mindfulness aims to transform consciousness; and 2) it doesn’t and can’t accomplish the goal alone, as it needs to be supported by and to support other effort-making compliments (e.g., Eightfold Path). Thus, for example, to apply mindfulness to exploitative profitmaking (as in business), killing (as in military), or competition (as in school) is completely misguided, destructive, and certainly shows ignorance of what mindfulness is about.

We the authors of this chapter do not object that mindfulness is used at school to alleviate test anxiety and help children become less reactive and self- and other-destructive; that is, more regulated. We do not deny that mindfulness can assuage stress, reduce anxiety, boost immunity, or even raise test scores. What we want to emphasize and highlight here, however, is that mindfulness is for a vastly more important and critical purpose than these incidental uses, however beneficial they are. Mindfulness can, in conjunction with other practices, transform the egoic consciousness into one of greater consanguinity and connection. If we want the matrix of our civilization to change, if we want to enter a new axial period of human development (Bai, 2013) that will usher in a different civilization from one we currently know, then we will need to facilitate the return of mindfulness practice to a holistic and integrative paradigm. (Please note that we are not saying or implying that this paradigm has to be Buddhist.) This paradigm will encompass a comprehensive, wide-angle understanding of shifts in consciousness and accompanying practices that promote such transformations. In the following section, we will discuss this returning of mindfulness to a holistic paradigm in education.

**PUTTING BACK WHAT IS LEFT OUT OF MINDFULNESS**

We are glad that there is enthusiastic reception to mindfulness in education and we hope that future mindfulness programs will be strengthened, made more comprehensive, integrated, and moving towards becoming a vehicle for human liberation. The depth and fullness of mindfulness practice was laid out by the historical Buddha in his discourse on mindfulness (*satipathana sutta*). In this discourse, the Buddha set up mindfulness cultivation in the four fields of our being: body, mind or consciousness, feelings or sensations, and mental or conceptual categories. Now, the reason for our mentioning this seminal text on mindfulness is not to impart something about Buddhism but to illustrate the comprehensive and holistic nature of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is the calm but energetic, alert but relaxed awareness that attends comprehensively to present experience. This acute and lucid awareness is an integral part of human consciousness, a fundamental and inalienable quality of awareness that underlies all forms of mentation and cognition.

We can cultivate mindful awareness in all domains of our being so that, as a whole, in all our intentions and actions, we are established in mindfulness. This prospect of mindfulness cultivation then goes far, far beyond the current interest and application of mindfulness that is primarily focused on calming and soothing a “deregulated” nervous system. As well, the purpose of the latter, namely reducing students’ test anxiety and “problem behavior” in school from a behavioural management point of view, is fragmentary and short-sighted, and perpetrating of social inequity and injustice. Behaviourally (and neurobiologically) adjusting students whose life history bears psychological (and even physical) wounds so that they won’t be “problem students” is not a liberatory pedagogy.

Pedagogically, mindfulness can do a lot more than just calm deregulated nerves. For example, when we apply mindfulness cultivation to our feelings and sensations, we can work on not only deregulated, reactive emotions but also we can cultivate wholesome emotions that have moral/ethical power. That is, we can cultivate moral emotions such as kindness, compassion, empathic joy, and inner freedom and peace. Call it “affective meditation” or “heart meditation.” In the Buddhist literature and practice, these are known as The Four Immeasurables. Their utmost importance to human collective and individual wellbeing, and simultaneously the recognition that they have been sidestepped and overshadowed by mindfulness uptake in the West, are being noted and made in recent works (Feldman, 2015). Cultivation of The Four Immeasurables through mindfulness application to one’s consciousness would be the most radical moral activism in today’s world seething with greed, discontent, and hatred.

Meditation is not limited to the popularized depiction: for example, sitting cross-legged, eyes-closed, and manifesting a mudra. While formal meditation practices are important, our efforts are not limited to our time on the cushion (or chair). Beyond the cushion, mindfulness becomes a moment-by-moment meditation as we go about our day. “Whatever you do mindfully is meditation,” says Thich Nhat Hahn (2004, p. 15). In particular, Thich Nhat Hahn speaks of loving (being kind, being compassionate, being empathically joyful) as a true meditation. In “real meditation,” says Thich Nhat Hahn, “all at once there is love, compassion, joy, and freedom . . .” (p. 18).

**WHAT DO “MINDFUL” SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS LOOK AND FEEL LIKE?**

In this last section, we the four authors present a short interview/dialogue on the topic of implementing the deepened and expanded understanding of mindfulness in various educational settings. We talk to each other about the kinds of effort we have been making within our own educational settings and teaching environments, as well as share our future dreams and hopes.

***Heesoon Bai (HB):*** *Colleagues, I would like us to take this opportunity to talk about the work we have been doing in practicing, teaching, mentoring, and researching in mindfulness. I would like to hear how you have been bringing in mindfulness for liberation and enlightenment, as we talked about in this chapter, for your professional and personal environments. Michelle, would you like to go first? I know that you have been very active in your community, for example, offering mindfulness workshops to parents. You also use it in your counseling and psychotherapy work, right? On top that, you are writing your doctoral dissertation on the topic, yes?*

***Michelle Beatch (MB):*** *Yes! I have spent the last decade studying and practicing Vipassana. I personally came to mindfulness meditation as many do, as a means to care for chronic health issues. I was so taken by the effect of meditation on my body, mind and relationships that it sparked a lasting passion for studying and practicing the trainings offered by the Buddha. I quickly realized how important it was to hear the teachings of the Buddha, and that his wisdom as a whole (e.g., the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, Four Noble Truths, Four Immeasurables, Ten Perfections, etc.) was profoundly transformative. As I began to study and embody what I was learning, I could not help but bring it to my work as a psychotherapist. With many of my clients being cautiously curious about meditation, as they were concerned of its religious overtones, I worked very hard to describe the Buddha’s teachings in an accessible language as possible. At times, this meant not referencing the traditional languages of Pali or Sanskrit, as well as not referring to it as a spiritual practice (if that was not suitable for the client). This secularization came easily as I saw the Buddha’s teachings as simply pointing to the way things are and that the teachings could hold there meaning in the absence of the above references. Working primarily with adults, when I saw the benefits my clients were gaining from the Buddhist understanding of suffering and the means to address it, I became interested in examining how these teachings were and could be shared with children. So, I returned to school do to my PhD and when I started I was first looking at the* *mindfulness-based programs being offered to K-12 students. It did not take long to see that mindfulness was being extracted from its historical roots, with no recognition of the Buddha or his depth of insight. This was understandable given the view of Buddhism as a religion. The timing felt right though to move beyond just mindfulness and I felt that the decades of work that had come to pass paved the way for us to share more; to honour the very practical wisdom of the Buddha. While examining mindfulness-based programs, I was also concerned about what little support there was for teachers to practice meditation themselves and anyone else for that matter in and around those children participating in such programs as MindUP. The above concerns led me to develop an introductory mindfulness meditation program for parents, grandparents, caregivers, teachers, community members, school counsellors, really anyone who would listen! My intention was to introduce people to meditation; acknowledge the Buddha; share how Buddhist teachings such as the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path are integral, and how the Buddha offered a way of life or a Social and Emotional Education program in and of itself. When I started offering these classes in my community, I knew that I would also need to create something to support participants to continue on in their practice, so I also run a weekly sitting group, where we sit together for 40 minutes, and then I share a Buddhist reading, and we have time to reflect on our practice or study of Buddhist teachings. Currently, my PhD thesis aims to, (1) provide a critical examination of Social and Emotional Education and the challenges of integrating mindfulness-based practices within a neo-liberal context, (2) highlight the need for more community based resources and support for teachers, parents, school counsellors, etc., and, (3) make additional Buddhist teachings more accessible in order to add greater depth and meaning to Social and Emotional Education, and provide a greater balance between individual and relational processes in schools.*

*With my thesis nearly done, I am closely reflecting upon, “What have I learned?” and “What’s next?” I have come to see that mindful schools do not come to be simply through teachers taking up a packaged curriculum via one day training. It seems most viable when teachers and administrators embody “mindfulness” in all its richness – where staff champion contemplative practices. In terms of supporting children to develop mindfulness-based skills at school – I have learned of the complexity of the conditions necessary for children to thrive, to be mindful. We need to include in our care consideration of whether children have access to safe living conditions, are in a home that is able to provide economic security, has access to healthy foods, are safe at school and feel supported and cared for by their teachers, to name a few. As many have argued, mindfulness is not a panacea and we need to see the big picture and all that effects children’s social and emotional development. Looking ahead, I will continue to try and make the Buddha’s teachings accessible; to share the Buddha’s teachings in my private practice, and offer the Dhamma… to anyone who will listen. I believe if we are going to foster mindful children, we need mindful adults in their lives. In order to support these children and adults, I envision them having free access to more community based resources (hence my vision of a Contemplative Community Centre).*

***HB:*** *precisely! Meditation is a community-supported endeavor. By the same token, meditating together creates a wonderful community. This has me curious about your interest in living like a hermit, David. You are planning on pursuing six-month solitary off-grid living as part of your doctoral research, right? Is your solitary living an extensive Zen retreat? Will this be an all-out enlightenment pursuit for you? Once I saw a cartoon whose caption says, “Nirvana or bust”! I also know that you wrote your master’s thesis that researched neuroscience behind mindfulness meditation.*

***David Chang (DC):*** *I suppose my doctoral work extends from my attempt to reconcile my personal practice with what I have seen in the proliferation of mindfulness programs in recent years. For my Master’s thesis, I examined the intersection between meditation and neuroscience. My thesis coincided with the popularization of mindfulness programs; as a secondary teacher at the time, I was one of many teachers who incorporated mindfulness-based practices in classrooms. In the ensuing years, however, I have developed a more critical view of mindfulness in classrooms as a result of further scholarship and Zen practice.*

*From my own study of Zen, I came to appreciate meditation as a formal discipline that helps me attend to my present condition. Meditation is demanding work because the rawness of emotional states, and the tempestuous fluctuations of mental life, not only imparts unpleasant valances, but also trigger conditioned reactions that furnish the habits of inner experience. The disciplined practice of remaining with inner storms and witnessing conditioned impulses is challenging, and not congruent with the popular notion of meditation as a blissful trip through poise and equanimity. I gradually came to see suffering as a pattern of my own mind, a recurring confusion and a set of ongoing insecurities. These insights make way for a more capacious way of being, a more open attitude toward one’s own inner world. I don’t think meditation has made me happier; rather, pain is more acute ⎯ but by the same token, joy is more exuberant. So I think meditation broadens and deepens the scope of human experience ⎯ I feel everything more vividly.*

*Further, commitment to this practice reveals one’s deepest inclinations. I became more sensitive to the things that produced more anxiety, confusion and chaos; at the same time, I gravitated toward perspectives and philosophies that led to a healthier condition of mind. It’s this evolution of my own habits and values that led me to give up a full-time salary (and the financial security and status afforded by employment) to pursue doctoral studies. This drastic change is part of an ongoing evolution of self. In Buddhism, we tend to hear a lot about “letting go.” In my experience, relinquishment is not about “letting go” (prying one’s fingers off of some indispensable treasure) so much as “falling away.” The things that used to stick simply falls away, and you find yourself unfettered. Only after many years of practice have I come to see the cumulative outcomes of Buddhist practice, which is not about feeling good per se, but honest engagement, moment after moment. In doing this, I become a different person. The things that used to hold sway have lost their charm.*

*The proposed study of solitude in the woods is a way to immerse myself in conditions that fully support Zen practice, and to test the kinds of comforts (social and material) that I’ve taken for granted as parcel to a good life. I expect to live on only the essentials, and I’m sure it will be difficult. I don’t think I would’ve been ready for this even five years ago, but somehow I’ve changed. Austerity and asceticism does not frighten me anymore, because I see it as a form of simplicity. I would not have come to this project if not for the continuous attention to my own inner experience through meditation. Perhaps this is why I’m a little weary of the tendency to associate meditation with tranquility and happiness. Don’t meditate if you’re not prepared to see your life turned upside down!*

***HB:*** *I am deeply moved and inspired by what I heard from you here. I clearly see how the fruit of mindfulness practice is ethics: how one’s life stands in relationship to the world and life. Thank you, David. I now turn to you, Avraham. I know you to have been a long-time meditator in many different traditions: Sufi, Daoist, Buddhist, Qi Gong, and so on. But perhaps the most important influence on your mindfulness practice is your psychotherapy practice and teaching. You and I have talked a lot (for 12 years!) about our work in the intersection of psychotherapy and meditation. What would you say is the most important contribution that psychotherapy has made to mindfulness/meditation? And how have been you been extending the insight you gleaned here to your teaching? What has been your path that brought you to the present interest in integrating mindfulness into psychotherapy as well as teaching?*

*Avraham Cohen (AC): Firstly, let me comment on the narratives of my colleagues, Michelle and David. Michelle, I am most appreciative of the depth and breadth of your personal work and your efforts to integrate the whole of the Buddha's teachings into your own life, your practice, and in the service of transforming mindfulness within educational contexts. David, I am totally struck by your courage to leave a secure livelihood and to throw yourself into doctoral studies in the service of personal transformation and service to the larger community. Your research that will have you off the grid for six months and that is in the service of deepening your knowledge of self, other, relationship, and the world, I see as immensely bold and courageous and having great potential to bring something back that will have deep and enduring ripples.*

*Well, regarding myself, please allow me to**start at the beginning, which was many decades ago. I discovered that I was trying to become a member of a club that barely existed and that eventually I realized I did not want to be a member of. As a teenager and young adult I thought there was something wrong with me as I did not seem to be able to discover the way into the groups that seemed to exemplify the good life. Eventually, it became evident to me that my 'strangeness' was in fact my uniqueness and my unconscious rebellion against mainstream ways of being and striving that I now see as anti-human and even dehumanizing. Now with my new vocabulary, I would call these, the ways of egoic consciousness. From there it was and has been a long path of self-discovery, other-discovery, self-other discovery, relational discovery, meaning searching, searching for the Way and myself simultaneously, increasing discovery that my inner world in all its formation and dis/formation was and is a crucial element in my path finding and that seeking and finding were increasingly aligned. I discovered and continue to discover inner work, which integrates mindfulness practice with process-oriented psychotherapy approaches. I have the view that education primarily is education about life and that this is intrinsic to a vibrant educational experience. I see self-discovery as a profoundly educational experience and that integration of such inner work with curriculum learning in educational environments is crucial to learning in all realms and is supportive of optimizing human possibilities. Such optimization is, in my view, essential to the survival of the human species and the planet as a life-viable environment. This latter, of course, assumes that this is a core value for humanity.*

*So, to answer your question, Heesoon, about what I have been doing with psychotherapy in relation to meditation, I offer the following brief synopsis. As is outlined above, I see a close and essential relationship between meditation and psychotherapeutic ways. This relationship can be facilitated by someone who is practiced in both dimensions. (I am not implying that one has to be a psychotherapist to do this work. Having some psychotherapeutic knowledge and familiarity is helpful. The difference I’m implying here is the difference between, for instance being a trained chef and being a good cook for everyday life.) As well, a person can learn to do inner work on their own, using meditation and psychotherapeutic knowledge. In fact, meditation helps a person to learn to develop the focus that such inner work requires. The paradigm in brief is to sit in meditation and notice what happens. This is awareness training. Expanded awareness is liberating experience.*

*However, as a person works in this way, there is the likelihood that something will arise that will 'oppress' the expression of life energy. This arising experience is to be noticed and over time appreciated as a gift. The gift is the light that is shed on reified egoic structures that are oppressive to life energy. These egoic structures were originally and unconsciously developed in the service of survival and the obtaining of whatever scraps of love and attention that were available. Inner work with these structures is in the service of transforming the experience of being 'had' by the egoic structure to one of having it. This 'having' means that the egoic structure is now at the service of the person's nature/life energy rather than the opposite, where life energy/nature are compromised.*

***HB:*** *Your insights here are profound, and I am intrigued by how you do this inner work. I wonder if we can explore what you are saying about how to work with the egoic identity structure and mindfulness practice. Perhaps you can illustrate the work through a dialogue with me? For example, suppose that I* sit in meditation and at some point realize that I have *been lost in thought and unconscious about this for a number of minutes.*

***AC:*** *Okay. The key to this kind of work is finding or identifying the egoic, personality structure that has been built, and best guide to finding this is paying attention to feelings that arise. Going into your example, the first signal is the noticing of the 'lost' time period. The traditional teaching is to go back to the meditation method and to let any associated feelings, the feeling self (Feeling Self=FS) pass. A more useful approach in my view is to identify and articulate the egoic self that was 'lost' (Lost Self=LS) and assume the identity of this self temporarily in the service of understanding it and its intent, and also do the same with the egoic self that is providing this blanket of unconsciousness to protect (Protective Self=PS) the lost self. We then put the three selves into a dialogue:*

LS: I am very sleepy. I am not aware of much. I don't really feel anything.

PS: I don't want LS to feel any pain or discomfort. I will isolate and block the FS.

FS: I am all alone. It is very dark where I am. I have an idea that there are others but I'm not sure. I don't know how to find them if they do exist.

LS: I am very tired. I would like to feel better.

PS: I am doing my best to help you to feel better.

LS: It's not working. I am just getting increasingly tired as time goes by. Couldn't you please stop protecting me so much. I am living a life that repeats over and over and over.

PS: I don't know how to do anything different.

FS: let LS know me, and let me know him!

PS: That will hurt. I can't stand the thought of you, dear LS, feeling any discomfort.

FS: I don't really know much but I have an idea that if he can know me he can learn to have discomfort and that really will help him to grow (up) and feel more alive.

PS: I don't know if I can stop doing what I am doing. It is the only thing that I really know how to do, and I don’t know if I can tolerate seeing LS in pain.

FS: Please, please let me and him connect a little. If it's too much we can always go back to the old ways.

LS: Yes, yes, please let me know FS. And, PS, I think you have been alone for a long time. You can join in with us to be an inner community. I think that protecting against feeling is a trap, and we are all in the trap separately. We are all lonely. And this is a perfect reflection of our early years when we were not connected very well at all to our parents, and now is a reflection of our current significant relationships that are not really connected.

PS: I will need a lot of support as I am used to protecting against you, LS, and you, FS, connecting. I don’t know what will happen, and I do not feel at all comfortable about 'not knowing.'

***HB****: Wow, that’s wild! Dialogue amongst different sub-selves of the inner community! I can now see what psychotherapeutically informed mindfulness practice can be like. I would say that what took place amongst the three selves really was a ‘mindful dialogue’! Such dialogue could be fostered, encouraged, to go on over an extended period of days, weeks, month, and even years, until better integration of consciousness, therefore harmony and peace within, takes place. I can see how the process is healing the inner wounds, opening up the inner relationships, and re-initiating processes of growth and development that came to a halt many years ago and over a period of time.*

***AC:*** *Yes,**mindful dialogue is powerfully transformative. I have my clients and counselling students practice it.**And of course, I do it, too****.*** *And finally,**Heesoon,**we would like to**hear from you what you have been doing in bringing mindfulness and enlightenment to your own teaching and other areas of professional practice.*

***HB:*** *Thank you for asking. Like many people, I went into mindfulness practice when I was in the depth of my own personal suffering. I was gripped by and “eaten alive” from inside by my anger and grief. I knew then that I had to change my perceptions of the world and my self. This is when studying Buddhist philosophy in my earlier years came to the rescue, for, the idea I remembered was that mindfulness could help one to grow the eye of compassion, the “Buddha Eye,” through which I would see the world without hatred, with equanimity, and with kindness and forgiveness. Through research--I wrote my doctoral thesis about nondual perception and compassion—and contemplative practices, I confirmed the theory of enlightenment (I have had moments of enlightenment but I have a long way to go for becoming more stably established in nondual consciousness), and I have been making various attempts at bringing the enlightenment discourse/studies and contemplative practice into my own teaching. I published my first chapter article on mindfulness in 2001 (Bai, 2001), and since then there have been numerous chapters and journal articles on the subject that I authored and co-authored with colleagues and students.*

*I am most particularly pleased with my effort at bringing enlightenment discourse and contemplative practice into higher education, and this took a variety of forms. For example, with a large undergraduate lecture course in Philosophy of Education that I taught more than a decade ago, I introduced 5-minute silent contemplation at the beginning of each class. That was the beginning of my “subtle activism” (Nicol, 2015). Subsequently, I did this silent sitting in just about all courses I taught over the years. More recently, two years ago, my colleagues and I at Simon Fraser University founded a Masters in Education program that approaches education as a contemplative inquiry. We would explain to people who ask about this program, that contemplative ways of inquiry and practice are infused throughout the two-year program of studies in different education subjects. In all this my emphasis has always been on the integration of such practice into everyday life activities. Like Michelle, I would tell to whomever I was introducing mindfulness that having a regular and formal practice, like sitting meditation, is very helpful and recommended. I would also emphasize that integration of mindfulness into every day life takes the form of doing it--whatever one is doing-- mindfully.*

*Most recently, in working with a doctoral student who is a Buddhist meditation teacher and social and eco-activist, Derek Rasmussen, I have been focusing on the cultivation of the Four Immeasurables. The latter was already a central topic in my doctoral dissertation; however, now, I am going into it with greater depth of understanding and breadth of application. I work with the Four Immeasurables with the Masters of Education students in the Contemplative Inquiry program, and I am working with it with my psychotherapy clients. They are very powerful in dissolving suffering through overcoming the dualistic, ego-bound consciousness and transforming the latter into nondual, post-egoic consciousness. I admit that this academic vocabulary, although good in being technically precise, is too arcane to be useful to many. Instead, I am now using the language of the Immeasurable and speak of its everyday practice! Genuine compassion, love, kindness, joy-sharing . . . and feeling oneness with all: these are the attributes of post-egoic, nondual consciousness, of being enlightened. And it is truly a lifelong process of education. I personally find the learning for enlightenment very challenging. Everyday I struggle to stay “awake” from delusions of egocentric thinking and seeing; I am challenged to face the personal limitations in compassion, kindness, and forgiveness, and I despair from the torments of past grief and loss, not just of my own but also of my ancestors. Yet, the touch and feel of “enlightenment” is never too far away, even as I stumble through my days, learning to welcome them as messengers from reality.*

## *Colleagues, it has been an immense joy to closely collaborate with you in crafting this chapter on mindfulness. Thank you. In closing, I would like to share the following words from Thich Nhat Hahn’s True love (1997, pp. 6-7):”The most precious gift you can give to the one you love is your true presence.”*

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