Bowerchalke

Buddhist Meditation

Handbook:

Introduction with *Commentary*

October 2015

Buddhist Meditation

at

Bowerchalke Village Hall

Postcode: SP5 5BB

OS: SU 01862 23091

10 – 11 am each Wednesday

6 – 7 pm each Tuesday

Tuition and support for
a regular practice of
calming the mind and
attending to the world

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(*Commentary in italics*)

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1. Introduction

This text is an auto-commentary: containing some further explanation, some clarification, and some critique of the words, ideas and assumptions that appear in the introduction section of the Bowerchalke Buddhist Meditation Handbook.

What is meditation?

'Mental development (*bhāvanā*), 'Meditation' and 'Mindfulness' all refer to the same sort of activity: ways of paying closer-than-usual attention to what is actually happening to consciousness.

*[**Doing attention, not doing intention**]*

Although meditation looks inactive, because bodily movement is stilled, the process of consciousness carries on as usual, reacting to stimuli in the on-going generation of information about the world. And there is always subsidiary activity going on, in the form of doing and not-doing intentions. At the very least, there must be the intention to pay closer-than-usual attention to what is happening, for even the seemingly passive act of paying attention requires some degree of applied concentration. Yet attention loosens the hold that all other intentions normally exert over consciousness, diminishing attitudes of wanting or not wanting and de-motivating actions aimed at fulfilling those desires. Without deliberately intending to do so, in meditation there is 'ceasing to do evil, beginning to do good'.

Mental Development refers to the practice of cultivating consciousness (citta-bhāvanā). Like the agricultural source of this metaphor, the target is an expectation that meditation will eventually be productive in everyday life by preparing the mind for beneficial changes to attitude and behaviour. Otherwise, there would be little point in continuing.

Meditation is an English translation for jhāna (Pāḷi) or dhyāna (Sanskrit). Meditation has a slightly wider meaning in English, representing a reflective mode of thought in addition to the more passive, Buddhist mode of paying close attention to consciousness. Such extension of meaning can be confusing, but the term remains fruitful, for it also carries subliminal associations from its Latin derivation in representation and mediation. To practise any activity is to re-present it; hence meditation is a signifier: a representation of ordinary consciousness to itself, revealing consciousness to be extraordinary. Also, to meditate is to

locate oneself medially, at the centre of one's world, at the centre of what it is like to be human, in the middle of what is to be one amongst many, self with other, simultaneously psychological and physical, imaginary and real.

Mindfulness is just one English translation of sati (Pāḷi). As a metaphor, it indicates the most significant attitude to be cultivated during meditation: from one moment to the next, the mind should be occupied by (be 'full' of) attention to what is happening, rather than preoccupied by intentional reactions towards what has already happened, or intentional attitudes towards what just might happen. Depending on its precise usage in canonical Pāḷi texts, sati has also been translated as 'concentrated attention', 'presence', 'memory' or 'recollection'. The first two alternatives do seem synonymous with 'mindfulness'. The last two suggest that meditation involves more than just 'bare' attention, as if attention was being deliberately redirected towards the recall of wholesome or ethical objectives. Loving-kindness meditation (mettā-bhāvanā) is a prime example.

What happens can only consist of the so-called 'internal' mental features of feeling, emotion, intention, imagination and rational thought, plus the so-called 'external' sensory features of contact with embodiment in a world. These days, the traditional Buddhist list of six senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind (awareness of internal mental features) can be extended to include the sense of proprioception (awareness of bodily condition and orientation).

[***Neutral observation of sensory and imaginative information over time***]

There is no mention, here, of the third part of St. Augustine's view: that in addition to (1) assimilating sensory impressions and (2) relating to them through memory and imagination, the mind is also capable of (3) direct communication with the Divine. Buddhists would have to revise their benign neglect of this third possibility, if and when it ever happened.

The external/internal division between mind and world is not as absolute as the metaphor of outside/inside containment suggests: this is a peculiarly European view of mental events. Actually, the so-called 'external' and 'internal' features break through notional containment to radically interact with each other: we make our world and the world makes us. Buddhism tends not to imagine mental events as if they were metaphysically, or spatially, separate parts of a 'thing'; instead observing them to be nothing more than a succession of neutral point-instants becoming known and evaluated as appearances in (or as) consciousness.

There is no particular reason to doubt that there is an external world, yet much of the confirming information that seems to come from the senses is actually mentally-sourced: we mostly fabricate our images of the world out of a recollection of past history, so making the world's presentation, in consciousness, liable to psychological conditioning and confusion.

Early Buddhists seem to have been aware of this fallible relationship between mind and world, for they divided the eighteen elements (dhātu) that constitute the world (Sabba) into six objects of sense, with six corresponding sense-faculties and six corresponding sorts of consciousness, without bothering to demarcate any point of separation into external (world) and internal (mind). The tripartite eighteen-element arrangement does not bother to determine whether the world is a figment of mind (idealism) or whether the mind is an emergent feature of a physical world (realism).

Given this indifference to what's inside and what's outside, and what's real or ideal, it is not so surprising that some mental events, including feelings, perceptions, intentions, awareness of space and enlightenment (nibbāna) were each thought to require a separate mental sense-faculty. More to the point, we now know what St. Augustine and the Buddha could not have known: that all the modalities that combine to form consciousness actually require an embodied brain. Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas were equally unaware, but they came closer to the mark with the notion of a sensus communis, which combines all kinds of sensory information into images of the world.

For example, the reason why proprioception is missing from the traditional Buddhist list of senses is because it relies on the combination of a variety of information from the inner ear and neuro-receptors in the muscles, joints, skin and other organs, rather than depending on just one obvious organ of sense, such as the eye or the nose. Edward Conze glosses over this omission with the remark that:

> *'(touch)... includes not only the objects of touch proper, but also the objects of the temperature sense, the kinaesthetic sense, the sense of balance, and the somatic sense by which we perceive the inward condition of our body... (1988: 113)*

The truth is, no explanation of anything is a complete fit, and that is especially so for explanations of embodied mental events. Any explanation may include useful features and glaring omissions, yet all sorts of explanations, be they cultural, psychological, biological or

physical, can be combined to form a working model of the way things really are. Buddhist explanations remain useful for the current model of the world, because they indicate that the mind is not a thing but a continuing process of becoming conscious within space and time. Processes undergo change in ways that things do not.

The paragraph from the Meditation Handbook, here commented upon, could also mention time, for consciousness not only takes place in a three-dimensionally embodied being, but takes up time. It is not often noticed that time is indescribable without the aid of metaphors derived from spatial activity: an indication that time is easy to measure but difficult to comprehend. Roughly speaking, 'secular' activity mostly deals with issues of location, while 'religious' activity deals with more difficult issues of duration.

A Bowerchalke meditation session takes up about 45 minutes, but is made out of a succession of moments that are never precisely momentary because they occupy brief periods of time during which the brain processes information and delivers it as consciousness. Maintaining a coherent meditation practice is one way of rescuing a coherent life out of a vertiginously brief succession of moments.

Close attention can be concentrated on one mental feature or another, to the partial exclusion of the rest, or one can sit in awareness of them all, if and when they happen. The Handbook describes some of these methods of attention.

Traditionally, Buddhism divides the purpose of meditation into 'calming' (*samatha*) and 'insight' (*vipassanā*). The first is an attempt to stop mental agitation by anchoring attention on a mental object such as breathing: a form of awareness that is easy to return to again and again, precisely because it advertises itself through periodic change. The second is an attempt to develop intuitive understanding of 'the way things really are' when the mind is undisturbed by 'greed, hatred and delusion'.

As an indirect way to calm the mind, meditation usually begins with observation of the body, of the process of breathing and of subliminal feelings. By this direction of attention, the mind's continual stream of imaginative scenarios tends to diminish. Roughly speaking, that's *samatha*.

*[**Calming meditation**]*

It is possible that calming (samatha) meditation (jhāna) pre-dated Buddhism, or began as a separate technique within early Buddhism. Calming was traditionally divided into eight

categories: four kinds of 'form meditations' (rūpa jhānas) followed by four 'formless meditations' (arūpa jhānas). The form meditations were expected to include continuing awareness of the 'forms' of mind, body, and world. On the other hand, it was anticipated that awareness of mind, body and world would gradually fall away during formless meditation, until the unlikely condition of complete cessation of consciousness was achieved (Griffiths 1986: 17-19). At some indeterminate time, perhaps because they were directed towards such an unachievable outcome, the formless meditations (on infinite space, on infinite consciousness, on infinite nothingness and on neither perception nor non-perception) were neglected in favour of a transition from calming 'form' meditation into the Buddhist innovation of insight (vipassanā) meditation.

The four form meditations are described in the Bahuvedanīya Sutta:

1. '...secluded from sensual pleasures...[and] unwholesome states...accompanied by applied and sustained thought...with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion.'

2. '...self-confidence and singleness of mind without applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration.'

3. '...with the fading away of rapture...abid[ing] in equanimity, mindful and fully aware, and still feeling pleasure with the body.'

4. '...with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of joy and grief...and [with] purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.' (Nāṇamoli 1995: 503-504)

Although the sutta mentions 'entering and abiding' in each of these meditations, it might be better not to think of them as if they were separate locations, in case that degree of separation makes them sound like mental states that are unattainable or impossible to maintain over prolonged periods of time. Remember that all explanations are inherently static, incapable of fully representing the fleeting variety of experience. It is a reasonable hunch that over the course of most meditation sessions, most people fleetingly 'enter' into feelings that fit these descriptions. Amongst other things, meditation practice is about developing and extending (abiding in) these brief feelings of awareness, concentration, self-confidence, pleasure, joy, rapture, equanimity, and purity of mind.

Most meditation sessions involve seclusion from excessive sensory information and some attempt to avoid unwholesome mental states of greed, hatred and confusion. Thought processes do not stop, but they are pulled away from disorder by means of observation. And there is pleasure to be found in just sitting quietly by oneself. There may be increasing self-confidence as single-minded concentration improves, and an occasional sense of equanimity, even if that feeling only arrives with the ending bell, after a long struggle with agitation of mind.

So, it is possible, even normal, to have brief intimations of at least the first three jhānas; the difficulty lies in 'abiding' or 'dwelling' within these states for any length of time. Calm abiding takes dedication and long-term practice, but the outcome can be blissful. The Samaññaphala Sutta offers metaphorical descriptions of what these meditations are like: the first jhāna is like a bath-ball, pervaded with perfume; the second is like cool water welling up within a lake; the third is like lotuses entirely permeated by their lake-water; the fourth jhāna is like being enclosed in a white cloth, completely enveloped in 'pure, bright awareness' (Thanissaro 1997).

Many people take up meditation as an antidote to distressing feelings and hyperactive mental states. It is utterly normal and not at all unusual, that these states and feelings should turn out to be hard to control. Maybe it is better to come at them another way: to let them fade away in the face of a body at rest, in a secluded place, in the company of other people at peace. In the endeavour to let that happen, it should be reassuring, and motivating, to realise that there is more to calming meditation than might be first imagined.

Any reduction in the activity of consciousness allows room for greater awareness of the way the mind is working, and for closer observation of appearances within the field of consciousness, such as 'external', sensory feedback about embodiment in a physical world. Roughly speaking, that's *vipassanā*.

*[**Insight Meditation]***

For those who practise meditation without the aid of Buddhist explanations, vipassanā is still possible, for insight comes from the experience, rather than the explanation, of what it is like to observe the flow of mental events. However, to the extent that Buddhist explanations are true, they are helpful; firstly, because they point the way from simply abiding in equanimity (samatha), towards an intuitive understanding of the working of the mind; secondly, because

they provide a framework for communicating that understanding to others. The experiences of meditational insight are individual, introspective and private, therefore hard to dispute. Although Buddhist explanations spring from the long history of such experiences, they remain open to critique because their knowledge-status remains unverifiable.

The Buddha was the first to explain the experience of insight. According to the Mahāsaccaka Sutta, after abiding for some time in the four jhānas he directed his attention towards recollection of past lives. For anyone who has had no confirming insight into rebirth, it is reasonable to do without this explanation for as long as, for lack of evidence, it fails the crucial test of conformation with 'the way things really are' (yathā-bhūtam). The alternative strategies: provisional acceptance and agnosticism, might be honest metaphysical positions, but, from a Sartrean existentialist viewpoint, might also be a bit of a fudge: for having been 'thrown' into the world, a paradoxical sense of obligation to make up one's mind comes with the freedom to choose what to believe.

The Buddha's second insight is said to have been into the way in which sentient beings '...pass on in accordance with their actions' (Ñāṇamoli 1995: 341). This is a concise reference to the doctrine of karma, which suggests that we reap what we sow as our unethical actions rebound in harmful consequences. It is reasonable to do without those parts of the karma-explanation that imply an undetectable metaphysical mechanism enmeshed with the concept of rebirth: what Flanagan (2011) calls 'wild' karma. But that still leaves 'tame' karma: useful step-by-step explanations pointing to habitual intentions that invariably cause harm. In this context it is worth bearing in mind that our actions are motivated by thoughts and feelings, and that all our thoughts and feelings are actions in themselves.

The Buddha's third insight was into the mental 'pollutants', 'cankers' or 'taints' (āsavas) that make life unsatisfactory. The basic āsava-list consists of sense-desire, desire for eternal existence and ignorance. Although 'wrong views' are sometimes included, they are implied by the concept of ignorance. Of the remaining trio, meditation already offers a preliminary antidote to the first two, for part of the practice is replacement of intentional actions of desire by attentional actions of concentrated observation. But the domain of ignorance (avijā) is where Buddhist explanation is most helpful, by providing a framework for coming to understand desire, its effects and its antidote. Buddhism opposes ignorance with the explanation that 1) existence is unsatisfactory (dukkha) and 2) that dissatisfaction originates from a cause (samudaya), which is craving (taṇhā). The logical corollary is 3) that anything

originating from a cause can be terminated by another, with the concluding assertion 4) that the Buddhist eight-fold path is a causal route to the elimination of dissatisfaction.

There is an element of public relations marketing in the labelling of this four-fold explanation as 'Noble Truths'. Of course, they need testing, to find out if rumination around them proves helpful in meditation practice. And since they are public propositions, their truth-value always remains open to critique (Batchelor 2012).

Insight does not mean meditating on the precise wording of statements, but on the experiences that may or may not be indicated by statements. If first-hand experience matters more than second-hand explanation, it makes sense for the practitioners of meditation to minimise reliance on Buddhist explanations, so as not to be overwhelmed by second-hand generalisations. 'Dependant arising', the 'four noble truths' and the 'three marks of existence' provide quite enough general Buddhist theory to last a lifetime. But these key ideas remain worthy of thoughtful critique, not least because, over the last two and a half thousand years, they lead on to all the developments, interpretations and misinterpretations that count as Buddhist explanation (Dharma). Discussion of the four truths and the three marks is reserved for a later text:

Dependant Arising (idappaccayatā, paṭiccasamuppāda)

When this exists, that comes to be;
with the arising of this, that arises;
when this does not exist, that does not come to be;
with the cessation of this, that ceases (Ñāṇamoli 1995: 927).

This simple statement encapsulates the Buddhist view that everything that happens does not depend upon itself, but upon other conditioning factors. This seems similar to Hume's view that 'causes' and 'effects' are ideas whose 'constant conjunction' can be observed, but not the 'necessary connection' of their causal relations. However, Peacocke goes beyond Hume by suggesting that, unlike the western theory of causation, the idappaccayatā formula ignores time: it does not mention any sequential separation between the appearance of 'this' and the conditioned arising of 'that' (2006: 1-5).

So, in the East as in the West, causal theories remain mysterious. In most cases, so many conditioning factors are in play that the identification of a single cause is a gross over-simplification for the purpose of clear explanation. Furthermore, Hume argues that, on the inductive basis of observing their 'constant conjunction' in experience, we can never be sure that certain causes will invariably produce certain effects (Hume 1951: 89-90). In a similar manner, might it be reasonable to question the temporal precedence of conditioning causes ('this being') over their resulting effects ('that arises')?

We have only recently become accustomed to Einstein's discovery, verified both mathematically and by empirical observation, that time and space are variable in relation to speed and gravitational force. Without the benefit of that sort of persuasive evidence at the scale of our own lives, for most purposes we are likely to stick with the 'folk' theory of causation: that causes invariably precede their effects.

But perhaps time loses its salience during meditation, diminishing the before-and-after connection between causes and effects. After all, causation remains an underlying theory for the purposes of explanations that are in themselves purposeful, and humans put causal theory to use in the service of their intentions and desires. But meditation is not about fulfilling intentions, satisfying desires, or putting the world to service; it is about letting go of motivations in favour of disinterested observational attention. Thus, there is no particular requirement to identify causes and effects during meditation. When events are just allowed to happen, rather than being influenced in the way they happen, then time may not stand still, but it becomes psychologically attenuated, losing metronomic rigidity and seeming to slow right down. So perhaps the Peacocke's interpretation of the idappaccayatā points to a different way of experiencing the world, relatively free from causal ascription, from intentionality, and from time.

And yet, in the absence of any verification in experience, it is hard to accept that such psychological plasticity could ever amount to a complete absence of time. To say: 'existence free from time' is not the same as experiencing existence in the absence of time. Try to imagine existence without time: nothing happens.

After some experience of meditation, it becomes apparent that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are simultaneous and mutually reinforcing. The act of closely observing any mental event tends to exert a calming effect; one can always return to a calming technique whenever it becomes

apparent that the mind has slipped back into thinking, imagining or worrying.

Why bother?

When done regularly, meditation becomes a habitual *practice*: a form of ritual activity designed to short-circuit the tendency for consciousness to drift along in the activity of the internal mental faculties, thereby losing contact with the passage of time and awareness of the physicality of embodied being in an external world.

*[**Meditation as a practice**]*

'Practice' is a bit of a buzz-word for Buddhists, so it must indicate something significant, but what? Practice means undertaking an activity on a regular basis. Why do that? Perhaps the undertaking is expected to be beneficial, or the ritual repetition of the activity is beneficial, or the content of the activity is beneficial.

To undertake to do something is to make a commitment, a sort of vow to oneself. When that undertaking includes the commitment to perform an action regularly and repeatedly, that is likely to be beneficial in itself by overcoming the traditional Buddhist hindrances to action: desire, ill will, sloth, restlessness and doubt. By making a commitment to practice, a person forgoes the immediate gratification of free will in favour of a future outcome that may turn out to be more beneficial.

In what sense is repeated meditation practice a ritual activity?

> *[Ritual is] ...a culturally-constructed system of symbolic communication ... constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts...whose context and arrangement are characterised by ... formality ... stereotypy ...condensation ... and redundancy. (Tambiah 1981: 153)*

Is this definition of ritual applicable to meditation? Meditation is a product of the cultural upheaval that pertained in India at a time of agricultural settlement, iron-age technology and the coalescence of city-states into monarchies during the last five hundred years B.C. It may not be obvious that meditation is a form of symbolic communication, but to sit quietly on a regular basis is to express something meaningful about one's personality, both to oneself and to others. Meditation is a patterned sequence of words and activities, even though the words are few and both words and actions are internalised. Meditation is formal, because it is a

customary behaviour. Meditation is stereotypical, in the sociological sense that it has special significance for the group of people who coalesce around this practice. Meditation is a condensation of experience, by diminishing the variety of events that spring from everyday intentional activity. And meditation has redundancy, in the sense that it is regularly repeated in precisely the same form.

Meditation can be equated with other forms of ritual activity:

> *Buddhist ritual forms are traditionally divided into acts of body, speech and mind... First, there are bodily activities (posture, walking, bowing, and prostration); second, speech acts (sound, the chanting of texts and mantras); and third, there is mental activity (meditation). This traditional location of mental activity solely in meditation is one source for the distinction between meditation and other forms of ritual, but the distinction is illogical: every form of ritual performance is inevitably initiated and accompanied by mental activity; it could not be otherwise for the psycho-physical person. The accompanying bodily activity of quiet sitting creates the impression that mental activity during meditation is qualitatively different from mental activity during expressive forms of ritual, but that is not necessarily so. In theory and in practice, the distinction between different forms of ritual is not a matter of physical or mental activity, but of ...subjective observation and observance of mental representations, and subjective observance and observation of social representations. What is distinct about meditation is the object of observation: mental movements of the mind are ritually observed by the mind, whereas in more outwardly expressive rituals it is the physical movements of the ritual that are ritually observed by the mind. But although the objects of observation are different the manner of ritual observation is in both cases the same, and in Buddhism that manner is mindfulness: non-discriminative mental attention. (Kennedy 2004: 150)*

So, on a regular basis, the meditation practitioner undertakes the ritual observance of being mindful of the all the representations that appear to consciousness: sensations of embodiment, feelings, information from the senses, awareness of mental formations (saṅkhāra: intentional thoughts) and awareness of awareness itself. Effective meditation is the ritual practice of not 'drifting along in the activity of the internal mental faculties', of not

becoming lost in the imaginative thoughtscape of the saṅkhāra, and not losing contact with human embodiment in time and space.

The problem with our random internal mental chatter is that, by virtue of our chequered evolutionary history, the task-free mind tends to fall into disordered rumination, overpowering awareness rather than aiding effective conscious activity.

*[**Meditation as a 'bottom-up' pacification of mental activity**]*

When not engaged in purposive, task-based thinking, sequential mental events ('minds') can be so disorderly as to prompt the question: why? How are minds meant to behave, and what are they actually for? Since Darwin, the most reasonable hypothesis is that natural selection, and nothing else, has pushed minds towards the initiation of behaviours that contribute to the survival of the organism. Minds, therefore, are not meant for anything or meant to do anything, for they were not created by any external agency to fulfil any pre-ordained role.

So we can do what we like with our minds, for good or ill. But before we do, it is worth asking how minds operate in the way that they do. They work that way because they are just the activity of the brain, developed over millennia out of on-going relations between beings and their environment.

Firstly, think of the brain as a handle on top of a stick: the thalamus on top of the brainstem; then imagine a cap on top of that handle: the 'limbic' system that envelops the thalamus; thirdly, imagine another hat on top of that cap to represent the twin cerebral hemispheres. According to Maclean, this tripartite structural arrangement of the brain is an archaic trace of the course of evolutionary development. The first structures, representative of the reptilian brain, evolved to manage movement (motor control) and to initiate routine reactive behaviour. The second, capping structures, which he calls paleo-mammalian, include most of the limbic system, which is responsible for a primitive sense of self, for food-seeking, parental instinct, a wide range of reflex responses, and the expression of emotions. The third, neo-mammalian, hat-on-top-of-cap cerebral cortices are responsible for sensory imaging and complex cognitive activities such as empathy, creativity, imaginative prediction and language (Maclean 1989, 35, 62, 161-2, 167, 189, 247, 257).

From a neuro-anatomical point of view, Maclean's tripartite view of the brain is simplistic, for it glosses over the boggling connectivity of all the neurons across all the various parts.

But that is beside the main point, which is that although minds can reason, rational thought is continually warped by endurance of physical pain and enslavement to emotional reactions, which arise from the self-same systems that evolved for the particular purposes of our mammalian, neo-mammalian and even reptilian ancestors. No wonder, then, that the whole kit-and-caboodle of the mind is so hard to control.

From a top-down perspective, we ought to be able to use rational thought to determine what to do, and to exercise sufficient willpower to carry through to the fulfilment of our intentions. We decide not to lust after, or to loath, some person or some thing, and that self-control ought to happen. But the mind/brain does not work like that. Some of our reactions are so habitual, so genetically pre-determined, that it makes more sense to think of mental events from a bottom-up perspective. From that point of view, effective control by will-power alone is a fond myth. In reality we have to get ahead of the game: to trick our minds into orderly behaviour.

Normally that is achieved by regularising life-circumstances: by making relationships, establishing histories of acceptable activity and by avoiding risk, all with the aim of reducing the prevalence of circumstances that are liable to produce uncontrollable reflex reactions. Still, there can be no certainty about what might happen next and how we might react. That is precisely why one of the main tasks of the (pre-frontal) cerebral cortex is the imaginative prediction of complex future scenarios, in order to speed up reaction times in the interest of survival (Llinás 2001: 21-29). Within those scenarios we locate an imaginary version of ourselves in order to act out a future in which our intentions reach fulfilment.

All this scenario-making is not a problem when put to work in establishing social relations, doing jobs and ensuring survival, but there is no off-button: scenario-making just runs on in the random form of rumination, getting in the way of relaxation, occupying the foreground of consciousness and pushing other forms of awareness out of mind. When will-power alone fails to turn off random mental chatter, it is time for meditation: a bottom-up method of pacifying the mind by placing the body at rest while consciousness remains alert.

Some consequences flow from resorting to evolutionary neuroscience to explain how mental events work:

Firstly, to the extent that animal and human brains are similar, animals are likely to have similar forms of consciousness. Any being in possession of a limbic system (structures around the thalamus, within the cingulate gyrus) is likely to experience and recall pain and emotion over the short term. Any being in possession of mammalian cerebral cortices is likely to experience something like consciousness. These similarities carry ethical implications for the welfare of animals (Crook 1983: 11-14).

Secondly, meditation is unlikely to be effective as a short-term practice. Although the mind/brain is remarkably plastic (susceptible to change), it is unlikely that deeply ingrained habits can be overcome over the short term, and it is probably inadvisable (or impossible) to use meditation to overcome strong emotional reactions that are hard-wired into the architecture of the brain.

Thirdly, there is a need to re-think the concepts of 'enlightenment' or 'awakening' (nibbāna/nirvāṇa) and of Buddhahood. To the extent that minds cannot be changed, these concepts are reducible to ideals of perfect experience and perfect behaviour, rather than achievable realities. McMahan has suggested that this sort of re-examination of Buddhism, in the light of scientific understanding, indicates that Buddhism is being '...subsumed...beneath the...authority of the scientist' (2008: 115). But the relative authority of one mode of explanation over another is a second-order issue; what matters more is the imperative to approximate to awakening and to truth, in what is done and what is said.

Buddhist meditation is not aimed at altogether eliminating random mental activity, for it is not a top-down attempt to exert absolute control over consciousness by consciousness itself, as if by a supreme act of willpower. Since meditation is a bottom-up practice designed to circumvent willpower's tendency towards self-obsession, the preferred attitude is better described as just doing, or effortless effort, or trying without deliberately trying.

We normally think of the will, free will and willpower as sterling qualities that motivate individuals to stay the course over long time-scales in pursuit of pre-determined objectives. But the trouble is that original intentions can be misguided and circumstances can change over time, whereupon determination to fulfil intentions against all odds can become suicidal rather than heroic.

There seems to be no precise Pāḷi analogues for the concepts of 'the will', 'free will' or 'willpower'. Just because western culture imagines that individuals have free will does not make it so, especially if it turns out (as I think it does) that most decisions happen in advance of conscious awareness of the decision-making process. Yet traditional Buddhism is very concerned with goal-oriented intentions (cetanā), on the basis that they tend to generate unforeseen ethical consequences (kamma/karma), whereas the most basic intentional attitude: that of turning attention towards an object as it appears in consciousness (manasikāra), is kamma-neutral. 'The will' could be comparable to a resolve (adhimutti) or intention to achieve some goal (cetanā), and 'willpower' to effort (vāyāma), but there is no absolute 'free will', for freedom of choice is constrained by 'tame' kamma: by the habits ingrained by our previous actions. Personal responsibility still remains, for individuals are liable to be punished or rewarded for their actions, either externally by society or internally by the way their minds are affected for good or ill.

The upshot of the view that desires, cravings and decisions originate as unconscious processes (Hulse et al: 2004), is that minds have to learn how to play tricks on themselves in order to influence the moment when desires, cravings and decisions unconsciously arise. That is the purpose of meditation practice: to exert 'bottom-up', unconscious influence upon mental habits that are proving difficult to change by 'top-down' conscious choice.

As conceived of in the East Asian 'Pure Land' tradition, the trick is not to rely on one's own willpower (Jp. jiriki), but on the 'other-power' of the world (Jp. tiriki), with the world considered to be anything that happens, even including the imagination of a compassionate intervention by the Buddha Amitābha. The task of meditation is to attend to this world of all appearances to consciousness (including imaginative appearances), in which case it is the entire world that is changing the mind.

Therefore, after the initial decision to undertake meditation, there is nothing to be done but pay appropriate attention (yoniso-manasikāra) to the world. The appropriate attitude is not the exertion of willpower, but 'effortless effort' (Ch. wu wei): 'not-doing', not grasping after, and not becoming attached to, anything whatsoever.

Having understood the method and the object of any particular meditation technique, as much as possible the mind should be left to its own devices, just being non-judgmentally returned to the job-in-hand whenever it strays. The job-in-hand is the concentration of

awareness on the object of meditation, even though concentration without trying to concentrate sounds paradoxical. The more careful the attention, the more it seems that, whether the object of meditation includes many things (is consciousness as a whole) or excludes most things (is consciousness of one type of mental faculty), attention can only be directed towards one happening at a time. Even attention on that happening (one-pointed attention) is elusive: it tends to be brief. But does experience really feel like that? When walking mindfully, does the mind only notice the lifting, pushing and placing of one foot or the other, or is there simultaneous awareness of both feet, of the rest of the body, of a certain feeling-tone, of contact with the ground, of other people, and of surrounding space? Without pre-judging the issue, it may turn out that even when attention is primarily directed towards only one 'thing' at a time, there is subliminal awareness of many other events, things or processes.

*[**Working with what it is like to have consciousness**]*

Consciousness is a funny thing: intimately related to having a body, representative of 'what it is like' to be a person, yet not a 'self' as such. Consciousness is continuous yet momentary in operation, often present (in waking) yet often absent (in sleep). There is no particular evidence that we have a 'mind' or 'soul', in the sense of a portion of personality that is immune to change over time, but humans do have consciousness: the ability to turn attention to information from one and all sensory faculties, whether immediately or by retrieval from memory, whether by manipulation of the imagination or by language and abstract thought.

What is it for consciousness to be 'what it is like' to be a person? Firstly, information from relevant and available senses is integrated to create an image of the world. Secondly, consciousness is either <u>of</u> the world or imaginative recall <u>about</u> the world. Persons may be aware that consciousness is happening, but tend not to be aware of consciousness in itself, because consciousness is always of, or about, something else. In other words, it is unlikely that there is a 'pure' form of consciousness without any object of attention. Thirdly, consciousness is always in arrears of what happens. Fourthly, consciousness is more often than not accompanied by unconscious intentional attitudes: by some sort of uncertainty, aversion or desire.

Roughly speaking, the quality of consciousness is the same as the quality of attention, and both are limited by time. If an event detectable by the senses happens even faster than the

synchronous firing of neurons, then information about it may not be widely disseminated throughout the 'global workspace' of the brain (Dehearne and Naccache 2001: 20-29), via the well-connected structure known as the claustrum (Crick and Koch 2005), sufficiently to achieve consciousness until after the event has taken place (Crook 1980: 28-29). The upshot is that consciousness is never precisely about 'now', even though consciousness is momentary and the continuity of consciousness is an illusion: it takes time for the brain to complete one image of the world, then more time to complete the next. And so on for a lifetime. Between each synchronous sweeping of attention towards whatever it is that world, body and brain have to offer, there is always change: on the world-side in the form of physical events and on the brain-side in the form of intentional attitudes. By virtue of the seemingly quick yet deceptively-slow pace of consciousness, humankind is forever in arrears in its rush to be aware of events that happen over time. It was well-put by Dōgen: we are time-beings.

Meditation is just being aware of what consciousness is like, by means of the practice of attention over an allotted space of time. Six of the methods described in the Handbook (meditation on the body, on breathing, feeling-tone, walking, loving-kindness, and ambient sound) all rely on the sort of commitment over time that is known as 'one-pointed attention' (ekaggatā). Two of the methods (silent illumination and the hwadu: 'what is this?') require a more diffuse or open attitude towards the contents of consciousness. In silent illumination, anything that happens becomes the object of attention. With the hwadu, the cosy tendency to take consciousness and the objects of consciousness for granted is deliberately undermined. But the distinction between one-pointed and diffuse attention is more of a time-difference than a qualitative difference of consciousness.

Consciousness is not quick enough to be clearly aware of more than one thing at a time, therefore momentary attention is one-pointed, whereas attention over duration tends to become diffuse. Each event that makes it into consciousness represents an unconscious judgment of significance amongst the subliminal multitude of sensed and imagined happenings. Anything left at the threshold is probably less feared, less desired, less confusing, or just less accessible to the senses. But the unconscious assessment of significance is continually changing, pushing new sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings and images into consciousness. Conscious attention, it turns out, is always one-pointed yet continually diffused over time by unconscious assessments of relevance.

What has meditation got to do with this subordination of conscious attention to unconscious intention? In all honesty, one can't be sure, but meditation probably influences the unconscious process by which the brain/mind decides what consciousness should be of and about. To sit with attention directed towards a pre-determined object does not slow down the movement of information across the threshold from unconsciousness into consciousness, but it might reduce the scattergun intentional urgency of the process. To sit without directing attention towards any pre-determined object might have a similar effect. To sit attentively, while continually questioning the object of consciousness, may be just as disruptive. The outcome of these three techniques (one-pointed attention, diffuse attention, and the hwadu) is not going to be 'pure' consciousness, it is going to be what it is like to be conscious of the world for no other purpose than for the sake of consciousness of the world.

However wide or narrow the focus of attention, and however much effort of willpower, the claim being made here is that the establishment of habitual meditation practice, in which consciousness is observed but largely left to its own devices, is conducive to more orderly, less discontented states of mind. Having learnt some meditation techniques it is, of course, a personal decision as to whether to continue, depending on whether or not any initial changes of mind feel beneficial. Either way, a new skill has been learnt, like swimming or riding a bike, which is capable of recall whenever the need arises.

*[**Claims about meditation**]*

Ideally, it would be better to make no claim at all: to leave others to discover for themselves whether or not meditation is beneficial. That approach is more respectful of the strict knowledge-conditions that surround human consciousness: the virtually complete inaccessibility, privacy and autonomy of every mind. To put the matter in reverse: any suggestion that the mind and life of any person (for example: the Buddha, the Dalai Lama or any other Buddhist) has been improved by meditation, can only have the uncertain status of a claim, for two reasons: firstly, because the minds of others cannot be observed; secondly, because however minds may seem to have changed for the better up to date, any person might relapse back, at any moment, into previous bad habits and disorderly modes of operation.

Perhaps meditation is not necessary for those who are happy, healthy and well-socialised; those lucky people whose lives are entirely fulfilled and harmonious. But in practice, for the

benefit of those whose lives aren't quite like that from day to day, for those who feel that an unexamined life is not worth living, and for those who encounter the sorrowful realisation that everything is impermanent, it is worth making the claim that Buddhist meditation can be beneficial. After all, meditation is such an obscure, 'off the wall' addition to the frenetic activity of the western, eurocentric, British way of life, that an even smaller percentage of the population would be motivated to give it a try, if there were no indication whatsoever that it might prove worthwhile.

Claims about meditation are quite varied. For two and a half thousand years, it has been thought of as a way to gain supernormal powers, or a more fortunate rebirth, or a more-than-human state of enlightenment. Yet, in the early texts and over the same time period, Buddhist claims have also been expressed in this-life, human-centred, psychological terms, as a way to eliminate the mental disturbances of greed, hatred and confusion, to eliminate sorrow in the face of the impermanence of everything, and to eliminate habitual forms of unethical behaviour.

The only claim made in the Bowerchalke Meditation Handbook is that meditation is conducive to more orderly, less discontented states of mind. It is up to others to decide if that is sufficient inducement to make the attempt, and whether or not this practice is worthy of perseverance. For meditation is not an easy ride. It is tempting to discontinue the practice when faced with the physical discomfort of sitting still for long periods, the mental discomfort of failure to eliminate incessant, random mental chatter, and the social discomfort of performing a practice that doesn't fit in with western cultural expectations.

To have tried meditation, even briefly, is better than to altogether discount it on the basis of prejudice about what it is for and what it is like, for meditation skills can be stored at the back of the mind, to be retrieved if and when they become useful or necessary. Most Buddhist centres teach meditation to far more people than those who go on to attend regularly, by a rough factor of ten to one. That's not necessarily a sorry state of affairs. People have different priorities and, of course, ought to make up their own minds about what's worth including in their lives. But there is no harm in acquiring a different way of working skilfully with troubling aspects of the mind.

For modern westerners, meditation can seem like a form of psychotherapy, and with the development of Jon Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress-reduction programme, it has

become just that. But Buddhist meditation has a wider *insight* perspective: to be fully alive to the world, just as we are and just as it turns out to be, and by doing so, to recollect existence here and now, as a means of reflection on the 'great matter of birth and death'. Perhaps the difference between these two attitudes towards meditation, as a therapy and as a way of living, is no more than a matter of scope.

*[**Meditation, psychology and the decline of explanation**]*

Philip Mellor was the first to argue that it was difficult to identify or analyse Buddhism in western contexts, for Buddhism tends to be 'translated' into ways of speaking that are psychological (1989) and ways of behaving that are reminiscent of Protestantism (1989, 1991). While the second assertion is questionable, the first is undeniable. Clearly, there is an affinity between Buddhism and psychology, since both deal with changes to consciousness.

Buddhism and western psychology don't always adopt the same approach. Buddhist meditation focuses on the arising of habitual intentions from one moment to the next, paying scant attention to the manipulation of substantial or thing-like ideas of 'mind' or 'self' that seem to persist over time. And Buddhist explanations rarely deploy the ubiquitous inside/outside metaphor of the mind as a container for psychological contents.

Buddhism and psychology do endure the same knowledge-constraints (the same epistemology): that there can be no direct insight into other minds, therefore no sure way of knowing whether a particular practice or therapy is proving beneficial for any particular person. Knowledge of benefit can only rely on the unreliable grounds of testimony, or unreliable statistics on depression or self-harm. There is no sure way of measuring individual well-being, let alone gross national happiness.

Buddhism and psychology both tend to generalise in the production of theories, yet particularise in practice. This distinction is the same as the division between explanation and experience. The difference is a problem for the flourishing of Buddhism as a religion, for these days people are less interested in the abstract generalities of explanation than they are in the concrete particulars of experience. To quote Arthur Waley (out of time and slightly out of context):

> *The English upper class... brought up at the universities in a tradition largely inspired by Plato, has reconciled itself to abstractions and even to the belief that*

> *the general is, in some mysterious way, truer and nobler than the particular. But ordinary people in England have very little use for abstractions... (1918: 7)*

One outcome of the twentieth-century turn away from abstraction, theory and explanation is that western interest in Buddhist teachings has stalled, while western interest in the keynote Buddhist practice of meditation/mindfulness is on the rise. So an inevitable disconnect has arisen between teaching and practice. That's just an assertion, but I suspect it to be accurate, even in the absence of much in the way of evidence.

It used to be said that Buddhism was growing exponentially in the West, but the two recent British censuses cannot be taken to indicate such a lively trend. Buddhism has been active in Britain for over a hundred years, yet by 2001 only 0.3% of the population self-identified as Buddhist, increasing to 0.4% in 2011. That is not necessarily a significant increase, since it includes immigration, and probably includes some of those who were denied the 2001 option of writing-in their own religious affiliation (many frivolously self-identified as 'Jedi Knights'). British interest in traditional forms of Buddhism has stalled; it would be wishful thinking to anticipate a reversal of that trend in the near future.

It would be silly to blame static or declining interest in Buddhism on the emergence of mindfulness as a form of psychotherapy, for the causes are more fundamental. Firstly, the affinities between Buddhist teaching and psychology, Buddhist practice and psychotherapy, make some overlap inevitable. Secondly, the real problem lies in contemporary suspicion of elite forms of explanation, such as the Buddhist dharma, which rely on abstraction, theorisation, and generalisation.

Of course, Buddhist explanations should attempt to avoid elitism of expression and seek to make common sense in the light of scientific knowledge and everyday reality. But even if they remain unpopular, traditional Buddhist explanations remain a useful resource for critique, for they don't pander to contemporary attitudes. Abstracting general theories from particular cases remains a worthwhile enterprise, so long as the conclusions are indicative of unnoticed or neglected features of reality. To the extent that either contemporary attitudes or Buddhist attitudes are psychologically self-serving, and therefore out-of-step with the way of the world, they should be analysed and criticised.

Over many centuries there has been anxiety about (Jp.) mappo: a dharma-ending age of Buddhist decline. But Buddhism can always resort to its default position as an alternative, ethical way of living on the margins of society.

As psychotherapy, mindfulness is primarily a short-term intervention for those who are having difficulty coping with life, usually after some form of traumatic circumstance. Buddhist meditation is a more open-ended practice that is, in theory, suitable for anyone on the basis that anyone can benefit from some reduction in mental disorder, whether they lead a charmed life or whether they have been buffeted by misfortune, and whatever their underlying religious or secular beliefs. One does not have to be Buddhist to meditate, for ritual forms similar to meditation are also found in Christianity, Hinduism, Sufi Islam and most other religious social systems.

What to do?

In order to meditate effectively it is necessary to adopt a comfortable physical position.

*[**How to sit**]*

Meditation is a literal following of the Buddha's example of sitting down to attempt a more enlightened understanding, whatever that might be. Metaphorically speaking, Buddhist meditation is a 'middle way' between the extremes of hedonism and asceticism. It is not done out of a desire for pleasure: that can be got from red wine, a hot bath, exercise endorphins, listening to music, etc. It is not done out of a desire for misery: that can be got from a swift recall of all the suffering in the world. Meditation is not about physical or mental satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Meditation is about not doing: 'time out' from intentional activity; a period set aside for the careful observation of whatever it is that happens to appear to consciousness.

As such, meditation is unlikely to be effective when undertaken on the basis of a physical position that is out-of-kilter in the beginning, uncomfortable in the middle, and downright agonising by the end. For those who are young, undamaged and flexible, the practical effort required to make the lotus position a personal accomplishment should prove worthwhile. For those who have a disability, whether initially or on account of age, injury, illness, rheumatism or arthritis, other positions are available: the kneeling seiza position, sitting on a chair, or even lying down.

What matters is not what the chosen position looks like, for Buddhist meditation is not a lifestyle consumer choice, like a beauty therapy. What matters is that it should be fit-for-purpose: capable of sustaining alert consciousness for about 45 minutes without lapse into either drowsiness or discomfort.

Ideally, the back should be as upright as possible, as if it were an axis passing through the centre of the earth, for the meditator is indeed located at the centre of their world. In Chan/Zen, just to sit in this position is enlightenment; although the work of realisation has to follow. The lotus and seiza positions are naturally good for posture, but when sitting on a chair, some adjustments may need to be made. It is useful to find a seat at the right height, so that the feet are flat on the floor, and to sit forward in order to reduce any temptation to slump against the chair-back. Find a way to make the hands comfortable. Normally, hands rest on the lap with the fingers of one on top of the other, with the tips of the thumbs barely touching. If the lap feels too low for the hands, try adding a foam block or a roll of cloth for additional support. If lying down is the only comfortable position, so be it, although it may be more difficult to avoid drowsiness. Commonsense steps, like choosing a time before meals and keeping cool, should be helpful in all positions.

There are two solutions to physical discomfort. The first is to turn awareness upon the discomfort, name it, accept it, and let it fade under the searchlight of observation. When that doesn't happen, the second is to wriggle, to adjust position, to stretch or even to get up and move around, rather than to bear increasing discomfort out of a misguided sense of social obligation. To other people in the room, any noise made is just the next happening. It is unlikely to be as unpleasantly distracting as anything in the machine-register of sound.

Mental and physical conditions interact: really, they are not two separate states of affairs. Since the mind is just the embodied brain's relation to the world, physical discomfort will affect the mind and mental disturbance will affect bodily awareness. Meditation is not a panacea for all ills: if mental or physical disturbance is too extreme for effective resolution it may be better to wait for a later opportunity.

When calming the mind before meditation, it is worth recalling that the troubles of the world are a collective responsibility. Although collective responsibility may, in theory, be divisible into individual responsibility, responsibility is only partially about what has already happened: it is also a matter of what should be done and what will be done. As an aid to

loosening the grip of the past on the mind, there is a simple formula for asking for forgiveness, in the section of the Handbook on 'Loving Kindness':

> *'If I have done wrong, may all forgive me*
> *I freely forgive anyone who may have injured me.*
> *I freely forgive myself.'*

After that recitation, it may be easier to sit with awareness of whatever kind of mental disturbance arises, to accept it and let it fade away under the influence of a settled, comfortable physical position. After the 'time out' that is meditation, there will be more opportunity to cease to do evil, and begin to do good.

The most stable posture is the lotus or half-lotus position, seated on a cushion with the legs crossed and feet facing or resting upon the opposite thighs. But for many people, this position proves excessively uncomfortable. The most common alternative is a modified form of the (Jp.) *seiza* position, kneeling with the support of a round cushion (Jp. *zafu*) or a meditation stool. After all, meditation is about the alleviation, not the application, of suffering, so if aches and pains make even this position uncomfortable it is reasonable to meditate sitting upright on a chair. In order to achieve the most erect and comfortable position, try placing a cushion or foam block under the feet, on the chair, at the back, or on the lap as support for the hands.

Whatever the sitting position adopted, the upper body should be erect, as if supported by a string attached to the top of the head, yet with the back muscles slightly relaxed. The eyes should be directed towards the ground one or two metres away. It is a matter of preference whether the eyes are open, half-open or closed, but if closed, care should be taken to remain awake and alert. The palms of both hands should face upwards with the fingers of one hand resting on the fingers of the other. The tips of the thumbs should gently touch each other. When sitting for extended time in cold weather, try wrapping the lower half of the body in a blanket.

During meditation, some temporary suspension of judgement is helpful in order to more fully attend to the world, because judgements and beliefs may be mis-guided by our habitual intentional attitudes. The preferred attitude towards what happens (the intentional stance) should just be a background state of care for oneself, for others and for the world.

*[**Appropriate attitude**]*

There is a tendency to judge everything that appears to consciousness. Is this thing pleasant or unpleasant, a threat or an opportunity, mine or not-mine, beautiful or ugly, useful or useless? And so forth. All these judgements are self-centred, so we alone are responsible for the consequences, yet the judgmental process is normally too automatic, too habitual and too rapid to fall under conscious control.

In meditation, the aim is to temporarily suspend this juridical process, or at least to notice whenever quick-fire judgments are being made. Deliberately resolving (making a vow) to suspend judgement might prove helpful, in the hope that conscious resolve will exert some effect on the unconscious juridical process. But it is never easy to consciously control the unconscious.

The usual meditational approach is to sit without any preconceived attitude whatsoever: to simply attend to what happens. But shifting from living with intentional attitudes, to dwelling in the absence of intentional attitudes, is such a radical change that it is probably more effective to begin by replacing the judgemental attitude with a less self-centred alternative.

In Buddhism, the less self-centred alternative is compassion (karuṇā), but that state of mind is expected to arise in tandem with wisdom (adhipaññā). There is a problem here, for the concept of wisdom carries the very implication of judgment that we are trying to avoid, and in any case, wisdom is unlikely to arise until further along the Buddhist path of practice.

It might be better, therefore, to work towards compassion by means of an initial attitude of care for oneself, for others and for the world as a whole. Care remains intentional but is more even-handed than holding an attitude of self-concern in isolation from concern for others and the rest of the world. Heidegger identified care (German: Sorge) as a necessary 'fore-structure' for any Being-in-the-world (Dasein) (Philipse 1998: 28, 148, 176). Put simply, it is a willingness to be and do as a full participant in the world: the absolute opposite of indifference.

Indifference to what happens might be appropriate in a person who is trying to escape from the world, either temporarily during meditation or permanently by reaching Buddhahood 'without remainder' and so escaping the unceasing round of rebirth. But indifference to the

world is an inappropriate attitude for a person who finds no grounds for belief in rebirth and who thinks of Buddhahood as an ideal of human perfection.

For the person who wants to engage with themselves, with others and with the world, the most appropriate meditative attitude is care. Care is the pre-existing intentional fore-structure of everything that we do, including the simplest of all actions: observing what comes to us in consciousness.

With this sort of ethical yet fairly indeterminate attitude, not being bothered about 'what's it all about' and 'what's in it for me', it is easier to pay closer attention to what is actually happening, when it actually happens, both 'in' consciousness and apparently 'out there' in the world.

At Bowerchalke, a bell is rung three times at the beginning and end of meditation. It is also rung once at ten minute intervals, as a reminder to return attention to the meditation technique, or to turn attention to another technique. Occasionally, the facilitator may quietly utter a reminder of how to proceed. However, although our minds are open to suggestion from outside, they are our only arena of complete freedom: it is up to you what happens therein, including whether to follow the advice on offer.

The style of meditation practice and the attitude towards Buddhist ideas at Bowerchalke is thoroughly liberal: what feels useful is promoted, while what appears to be superfluous or superstitious is neglected. Even so, the practices described in th[e] Handbook are not modern innovations; they are derived from the earliest Buddhist texts (the Pāḷi *suttas*) or from the East-Asian Chan/Zen/Sŏn tradition.

*[**Western/new/secular/humanist/liberal Buddhism**]*

'Liberal' has roughly the same meaning here as other terms used in similar contexts by several other Buddhist thinkers: 'western' (Sangarakshita), 'secular' (Stephen Batchelor) 'humanist' (John Crook) and 'new' (Brazier, Loy). A vague explanation for these similar terms does surface in this passage: with regard to ideas and practice, to promote what's useful while neglecting what's superfluous or superstitious. But to be at all useful, that explanation must be clarified.

To be liberal, I think, is to subscribe to Kant's 'maxims of common human understanding:' 1) 'to think for oneself'; 2) 'to put ourselves in thought in the place of everyone else'; and 3)

'always to think consistently'. Kant suggests that not to think for oneself is to be prejudiced and that superstition is a pernicious form of prejudice:

> *For the blindness in which superstition places us, which it even imposes on us as an obligation, makes the need of being guided by others, and the consequent passive state of our Reason, peculiarly noticeable (Kant 1931: 171-172).*

The proper practice of these maxims opens the way to freedom from the darkness of superstition: enlightenment in the 17th to 18th century western use of that metaphor to describe the turn from ancient to modern modes of thought. So, 'liberal', 'new', 'western, 'secular', or 'humanist' versions of Buddhism are all likely to be combinations of eastern and western forms of enlightenment. But can these two be combined?

Yes they can, for Kant rightly mentions <u>common</u> human understanding: in the East as in the West, the world is only knowable by sensory contact and only comprehensible by activity of mind. Notwithstanding cultural differences, minds/brains are unlikely to have altered enough over historical time, or to differ enough on either side of the globe, for there not to be commonality of human understanding: this impartiality over time and space entails that both enlightenments ought to be compatible. Yet clear explanations of compatibility are not easy, not only because of disagreements about the meaning of words, but also because the mind/brain uses multiple and overlapping ways of knowing and understanding: ways that tend to be divided, roughly, into reasoning and intuition.

Reasoning is a largely conscious, deliberate, cognitive, front-of-brain, analytical (step-by-step) manipulation of propositions (meaningful, grammatical statements in a language) according to underlying logical rules, affording more-or-less justified understanding of the world. Intuition is a largely unconscious, accidental, whole-brain process, leading to a seemingly-sudden understanding that may be difficult to explain, yet tends to be accompanied by a sense of certainty.

It is easy to assume that western enlightenment relies entirely on reason. Yet, to think for oneself, without guidance by others, implies placing no reliance upon any pre-existing logical system; to '...put ourselves in thought in place of everyone else' cannot be done without intuition about what it is like to be someone else; and to 'think consistently' requires ethical intuition: an ability to detect the subtle trimming of attitudes and opinions to suit different

social circumstances. Therefore, Kant's maxims can be interpreted as commending both reason and intuition.

It is easy to assume that Buddhist enlightenment relies exclusively on intuitive wisdom (Sanskrit: prajña). One might think so, given the frequent warnings in Buddhist texts against 'views' (diṭṭhi), given the argument in the Kālāma Sutta against reason and in favour of intuitive 'knowing in yourselves'; and given the overcoming of reason by the apophatic negations found in the Chan/Zen tradition, which are derived from the Prajñāpāramitā literature. Against these examples can be set the argument, in the Vīmaṁsaka Sutta and in the Mahāparinibbana Sutta, that followers should not accept the Buddha's teaching without first subjecting it to their own investigation. It seems that early and later Buddhists always understood the basic logical exclusion between 1) A, and 2) not-A, even when entertaining the alternative possibilities of 3) both A and not-A, and 4) neither A nor not-A, all of which constitute the four-limbed Indian scheme of catuṣkoṭi logic (Seyfort-Ruegg 1977). Without some basic logic, all arguments would be inconclusive in all Buddhist texts. The fact that most texts do arrive at a conclusion (a view) by means of an argument, is ample evidence that reasoning and 'thinking for oneself' does take place in Buddhism, even in texts where the ordinary 'folk' logic of A excluding not-A is apparently being undermined.

Although western enlightenment emphasises reasoning and eastern enlightenment emphasises intuition, these are not entirely separate mind/brain processes. From within the frameworks of neuro-anatomy and cognitive science, much more could be said about how these processes interact, but for the purposes of this argument, suffice it that it is useful to be aware, through careful attention to the way one's own mind works, of the interdependency between the largely-conscious process of reasoning and the largely-unconscious processes of intuition. Otherwise, humanity is liable to fall into prejudice, inconsistency, inhumanity and superstition, as a result of habitual, unexamined, misunderstood and uncontrolled mental reactions.

One caveat

For some people, very rarely, meditation may generate overwhelming feelings or sensory disturbances. It is better to seek advice than to suffer such disturbances without help. If empathetic listening, (available from the facilitator, fellow meditators, or friends) proves insufficient, it would be sensible to consult a qualified psychotherapist. Persons on

psychoactive medication, or with existing concerns about their mental health, ought to consult their G.P. and inform the group facilitator before undertaking meditation.

*[**Another caveat**]*

These days, it is well known that abusive behaviour: physical, sexual, psychological, and financial, can develop within social organisations that lack appropriate external safeguards. In the regrettable absence of any national system to protect members of Buddhist organisations, Bowerchalke Meditation Group has given power of oversight to a reputable external person, whose contact details will be passed on to anyone who has concerns of any kind.

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