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Walking With Buddha: Are We There Yet?

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The growing interest in mindfulness and meditation practices have generated a corresponding interest in the Buddha's teachings (Dhamma). The approach adopted in this article is informed by the poem of Rumi, a 13th-century Sufi poet—*Two Kinds of Intelligence*—which recommends getting in touch with our intuitive (as opposed to learned) intelligence. In this article, I discuss the understanding and applications of mindfulness and meditation in Buddhist traditions and classical texts and their articulation in contemporary contexts and literature. I also discuss the importance of practicing *dana* (generosity), *sila* (ethical conduct), and wisdom (*panna*) holistically with meditation and mindfulness (*bhavana*). I address some contemporary issues—the "debate" about acknowledging the connections with the Dhamma in current teachings and applications of mindfulness more unequivocally; the direction and limitations of some mindfulness research and mindfulness-based therapies; and the appraisal of the adverse effects uncovered in mindfulness research. I share anecdotes and clinical vignettes to illustrate the themes discussed in the article. Finally, I discuss my vision and hope for how the Dhamma can contribute further to contemporary society. In unpacking some of the misconceptions about the Buddha's teachings, especially in relation to mindfulness, and explicating a more nuanced and "right" understanding of the Dhamma, I hope that this paper can make further contributions to the understanding and applications of mindfulness, mindfulness research, and the place of mindfulness in psychology and psychotherapy.

Keywords: Rumi, Eightfold path and The Three Pillars, right mindfulness and the Dhamma, research, mindfulness-based therapies and adverse effects of meditation and mindfulness

This article speaks to various aspects of my life—personal, spiritual, professional, and daily living—over many years. The profound impact of what walking with the Buddha has been on these aspects will be fleshed out in the article. I organize the article around four major themes—(a) the approach adopted in this article; (b) mindfulness and meditation in the context of the Buddha's teachings (Dhamma [Pali]; Dharma [Sanskrit]); (c) my concerns and responses to contemporary approaches and applications of the Dhamma, especially mindfulness and meditation; and (d) revisioning mindfulness—my hope and vision for the future.

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The Buddhist terms used in this article are derived from the Pali language, and italicized, with the exception of the word Dhamma due to its frequent usage.

Reviewing the width and breath of the Dhamma and writing on mindfulness is beyond the scope of this article. For example, a recent Internet search (November 3, 2020) on Google for the term "mindfulness" uncovered 251,000,000 items. This search result included websites, programs, training courses, research, publications and blogs.[1] I believe that what might be more helpful is to discuss some of the Buddha's important teachings that can assist in deepening our understanding of, and application of, mindfulness. To illustrate the themes discussed, I share some anecdotes and clinical vignettes to help readers to appreciate that the Buddha "taught an attitude, not an affiliation" (Khong, 2003a).

Savoring the Dhamma: Approach Adopted in the Article

I have been involved with the Buddha's teachings and Buddhist practices for most of my life. Growing up in Malaysia, where many of my family are followers of Buddhism, I would have described myself growing up, as a "Sunday-School Buddhist," someone who accompanied my parents to Buddhist temples and undertook meritorious acts for the monks and the Buddha on auspicious occasions. Although it felt good, I did not understand much of the rationale for what I did. I merely carried out what my parents encouraged me to do. Then about 25 years ago, when I was researching Buddhist psychology, Heidegger's philosophy, and Daseinsanalysis for my doctoral dissertation, I learned more about the Dhamma, especially seen alongside Heideggerian and Daseinsanalytic ideas and concepts.

In that same period, I used many of the Buddhist, Heideggerian and Daseinsanalytic ideas and concepts in my psychotherapy practice with clients (Khong, 2013), in training workshops, teaching and supervising research in mindfulness, while undertaking further professional training in mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT). Concurrently, I was helping out in the Buddhist communities—building meditation centers, running retreats, and deepening my personal practice. Gradually, the theory and knowledge which I had acquired was transformed into the experiential lived worlds of myself and others.

I had the mistaken belief that having straddled the worlds of academia, psychotherapy, traditional and contemporary training, and practices in the Dhamma and mindfulness, writing an article about Buddhist and contemporary perspectives on mindfulness would some what be easier. I was wrong. These pathways, as the Buddha explained about his teaching, "[are] merely a vehicle to describe the truth. . . . A finger pointing to the moon is not the moon. The finger is needed to know where to look for the moon, but if you mistake the finger for the moon itself, you will never know the real moon" (cited in Nhat Hanh, 1991). In short, the Buddha is advising us not to confuse the methods and means with the end, and conflating one for the other.

My savoring of the Dhamma over the years informed my choice of the title for this article. The catalyst for the first part of my title "Walking with Buddha" is shaped by the succinct explanation of Sumedho (2014) of walking meditation: "One step at a time—notice how peaceful walking meditation is when *all* you have to do is to be with one step (p. 30). The second part of my title, "Are we there yet?" is my humorous (tongue-in-cheek) attempt at acknowledging the caution given by the Buddha about not mistaking the finger for the moon. When I teach meditation and mindfulness, I am often asked "Am I there yet?" I usually reply,

[1] Readers interested in mindfulness publications and resources can access selected bibliography on mindfulness and therapy (Johansson, 2009), and the American Mindfulness Research Association (2019).

"There is no 'there.' Meditation, like the rest of life, is a process, a journey, the 'there' being where you are now." Or as Kabat–Zinn (2018), the developer of MBSR titled one of his books, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*.

One of the things I learned was—the more knowledge one acquires, the greater the desire to share, and therefore, the more complicated one's writing can become—the dilemma foreshadowed by the renowned 13th Century Sufi poet, Rumi (2004) in his poem—*Two Kinds of Intelligence* (p. 178).

> There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,
>
> as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts
>
> from books and from what the teacher says,
>
> collecting information from the traditional sciences
>
> as well as from the new sciences.
>
> With such intelligence you rise in the world.
>
> You get ranked ahead or behind others
>
> in regard to your competence in retaining
>
> information. You stroll with this intelligence
>
> in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more
>
> marks on your preserving tablets.
>
> There is another kind of tablet, one
>
> already completed and preserved inside you.
>
> A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness
>
> in the center of the chest. This other intelligence
>
> does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid,
>
> and it doesn't move from outside to inside
>
> through conduits of plumbing-learning.
>
> This second knowing is a fountainhead
>
> from within you, moving out.

So my dilemma became what to do about this dilemma—how do I ensure that I am not writing about the finger, rather than the moon, and how to get in touch with Rumi's second knowing, this fountainhead coming from within us, and moving out. The solution for me came about in two ways. I was fortunate to come across an insightful commentary (Batalden & Gaufberg, 2012) on Rumi's poem as it applies to the medical profession. According to Batalden and Gaufberg (2012, pp. 1157–1158):

> In academic medicine, we are rich with facts and concepts and sincere in our quest for information from what Rumi calls "the traditional and the new science." We are busy with assessments of competencies and occupied with rankings. But what about this second kind of intelligence? . . . How do we find it? . . . Rumi's "second knowing" [one already completed

> and preserved inside you] often speaks in the first person. . . . The narratives are epiphanies, confessions, expressions of gratitude. . . . They are emotionally evocative, Most are born of experience. . . . The narrator wants us to know that he or she is changed . . . has learned something, or remembered something true. (p. 1157)

The commentary by Batalden and Gaufberg (2012) applies equally to the field of mindfulness. In its current and contemporary articulation and delivery, meditation (and mindfulness) have been promoted principally in scientific terms, for example, "The Science of Meditation—New Age Mumbo Jumbo?" (*Time*, 2003), or *12 Science-Based Benefits of Meditation* (Thorpe & Link, 2020). A *science* of meditation? These writers are in fact talking about a practice and a way of life that is more than 2600 years old, taught and promoted by teachers, sages, and adepts all over the world for many centuries and benefiting many—but of course not in the mold of a Western scientific container. In my view, the scientific descriptors used to describe meditation reflect the first kind of intelligence that Rumi warned us against.

Is there another kind of intelligence or knowing that we could employ in working with, or writing about meditation and mindfulness? This brings me to the proposal which I sent to invited contributors (Sangha—members of the monastic communities, teachers, researchers, academics, and politicians all well versed in the practice of mindfulness and the Dhamma). Below are parts of this proposal (B. Khong, personal communication, January 23, 2019).

> I envisage that the special issue will be conceptual and philosophical, meaning that it does not focus on, but may appraise some studies and research. Many of these research and studies have already been published. I believe that the Buddha's teachings provide an important platform for the praxis of Humanistic-Existential values, and that mindfulness practice is only one (albeit) important aspect of being a mindful human being. The idea that I have for the issue is based on the practice of mindfulness as an integrated, mindful way of living and attitude.

I hope that through the various contributions, readers will come to appreciate that it is a special issue because somewhere, someone had the vision, compassion and courage to use mindfulness in a way to benefit many others, and carried out that vision. I hope that the special issue will inspire others who have their own visions to carve out their unique way of giving back to the community. Finally I hope that when it is published, the issue will serve as an important companion piece, for people who are familiar with, or may be new to mindfulness. It is interesting that many of the individuals who agreed to contribute said to me, "I have waiting to write a piece like this." I realized that the approach I should take is to write from the heart, so that this article does not become another finger pointing to the moon!

Understanding Mindfulness in the Context of the Dhamma

I have written extensively about mindfulness not being a stand-alone technique, but something that has to be understood in the context of the bigger picture of the Buddha's teachings (Khong, 2003b, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009). Many of the authors in this special issue have also recommended cultivating this deeper understanding. In this section, I discuss some of the Buddha's core teachings.

Meaning of Dhamma

The term "Dhamma" is usually used to refer to the Buddha's teachings. But Dhamma is more than a description for the Buddha's teachings or Buddhist doctrines. Sumedho (2014) explained that Dhamma "means the way it is, 'the natural laws.' When we observe and practice

the Dhamma, we open our mind to the way things are" (p. 9). According to O'Brien (2018), "Dharma is nearly indefinable. But to the extent that it can be defined, we can say that dharma is both the essential nature of reality, and also the teachings and practices that enable the realization of that essential nature."

So the Dhamma can be understood broadly as the principles which seek to explicate the cosmic or universal laws underlying the world. In this sense, the Dhamma precedes the historical Buddha who is credited with the founding of Buddhism approximately 2,600 years ago (Ling, 1981). However, the Buddha is universally accepted as articulating these universal laws in his teachings and making them accessible to people who wish to understand, and lessen their existential and everyday suffering (*dukkha*). In this article, I use the term "Dhamma" to refer principally to the Buddha's teachings, unless otherwise indicated.

Within the constraints of the article, I focus on aspects of the Dhamma which help to deepen our understanding and appreciation of mindfulness. These teachings comprise of the Four Noble Truths, especially the Eightfold Path (Fourth Noble Truth); the three pillars and meritorious deeds; and wisdom and compassion. To understand the substrates of the Dhamma, I find the concept of the "ontological difference" as articulated by the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1998, p. 93) helpful.

The Ontological Difference

According to Heidegger (1998) the ontological difference points to the two principal characteristics of Being—the "ontological" and the "ontic" (p. 93). The ontological refers to the fundamental nature of beings, things, and phenomena, whereas the ontic points to those characteristics of Being that are manifested in the ordinary everyday world of beings. However, the ontological and the ontic are indivisible, as the former provides the conditions for the possibility of the latter. In other words, they are like the "flip sides of the coin." Many of the Buddha's teachings, such as impermanence, dependent origination (interdependence), and existential suffering incorporate this unified ontological-ontic dimension (Khong, 2009). Take the example of the concept of impermanence. The Buddha taught that at the ontological level everything including human existence is subject to change (*anicca*), and at the ontic (individual) level, the mind and body is in a constant state of flux. In other words, the Buddha employed ontological concepts to explicate ontic experiences, and the latter to explain how the ontological "operates" at the human level. Throughout this article, the ontological-ontic framework is used to explore the relationship of mindfulness to the Dhamma, and to show how mindfulness is a practical, ontic, skillful application of the Dhamma.

The Four Noble Truths

In the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha taught the universality of suffering (*dukkha*; First Noble Truth), the arising of suffering (Second Noble Truth), the cessation of suffering (Third Noble Truth) and the way to transcend or overcome suffering (Fourth Noble Truth; Sumedho, 2014). The Four Noble Truths occupy a central place in the Buddha's teachings, and are regarded as pivotal to understanding the Buddhist psychology of mind (Epstein, 1995). These Four Noble Truths are best summed up in the Buddha's words at his first lecture to his earliest disciples at the deer park at Isipatana, Varanasi (Dhamma, 1997).

> One thing only do I teach,
>
> the cause of suffering [*dukkha*] and
>
> the way to cessation of suffering [*dukkha*]

(Dhammananda, 1994, p. 39, Majjhima Nikaya: 180)

The Eightfold Path

In the Fourth Noble Truth, also known as the "Noble Eightfold Path," the Buddha enunciated a set of practices that the individual can adopt to overcome suffering. Batchelor (1997) noted that the Eightfold Path is neither particularly religious nor spiritual as it encompasses everything we do and signifies "an authentic way of being in the world" (p. 10). As Rahula (n.d.) explained,

> Practically the whole teaching of the Buddha, to which he devoted himself during 45 years, deals in some way or other with this path. He explained it in different ways and in different words to different people, according to the stage of their development and their capacity to understand and follow him. But the essence of those many thousand discourses scattered in the Buddhist scriptures is found in the noble Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path comprises the following (Dhammananda, 1987, p. 90; Dhamma, 1997) as set out in Table 1.

The word "right" (*samma*—meaning right, good, correct) which qualifies each element of the path—for example, right mindfulness (*samma sati*), right understanding or right view (*samma ditthi*), and so forth is important. The term "right" does not imply moral judgments concerning sin and guilt, or arbitrary standards imposed externally (Khong, 2003a). The Eightfold Path is neither hierarchical nor prescriptive and the Buddha does not dictate what is right or wrong. Instead he spoke of skillful (wholesome) or unskillful (unwholesome) actions, and explained that the path merely serves as a guideline or a "raft" for helping people to take personal responsibility (Majjhima Nikaya, 1.260, Dhammananda, 1994, p. 69). According to Nhat Hanh (1998), the word "right" for example, as in right view means "clear vision, seeing things as they are." "Touching reality deeply—knowing what is going on inside and outside ourselves" (p. 51). From this perspective, it can be said that the Eightfold Path grounds our mental attitude.

Meditation and Mindfulness: Theory and Practices—an Overview

Tranquility and Insight Meditation

Although meditation is commonly associated with Buddhist practices and ideas, meditation per se is not unique to Buddhism. Other religious traditions including Christianity, Islam and Hinduism have their own unique meditation practices for centering the mind and body. However the Buddhist practice offers a systematic and rigorous way for understanding the workings of the mind and body (Khong, 2009).

"Mental culture" refers to that aspect of the Eightfold Path that deals with the mental discipline normally associated with the formal practice of meditation (Epstein, 1995). In classical

Table 1
The Eightfold Path

Wisdom (*panna*)	Ethical conduct (*sila*)	Mental discipline (*bhavana*)
1. Right understanding (Right view)	3. Right speech	6. Right effort
2. Right thought	4. Right action	7. Right concentration
	5. Right livelihood	8. Right mindfulness

Buddhist texts, the word "meditation" is not used. The actual term used is "*bhavana*" meaning "mental culture" or "mental development" (Rahula, 1978, p. 67). The absence of the term meditation is not accidental, for what is important in Buddhist practice is not meditation *per se*, but the cultivation of certain wholesome qualities of the mind including acceptance and letting go (Khong, 2003a).

In the Eightfold Path, two kinds of meditation are recommended, namely, tranquility (*samatha*) meditation, and insight (*vipassana*) meditation. The latter is now more commonly understood in terms of mindfulness practice. Both types of meditation require right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness.

Tranquility (S*amatha*) Meditation

Right concentration is explained as sustaining attention on one object to the exclusion of other stimuli, allowing the mind to settle down. As Sumedho (2014) explained, with tranquility practice "you are not trying to create any image, but just to concentrate on the ordinary feeling of your body as it is right now: to sustain and hold your attention on your breathing. When you do that, the breath becomes more and more refined and you calm down" (p. 8).

Insight (Vipassana) Meditation

Vipassana means "to clarify" or "to see clearly" (Young, 1994, p. 57). Although the Buddha promoted tranquility meditation as a way of calming down the mind, he emphasized insight meditation, as he believed that this is the practice that can help people to overcome suffering (Rahula, 1978).

What Is Mindfulness?

The growing popularity of mindfulness has engendered a variety of definitions of mindfulness. Various explanations have been given to unpack the meaning of mindfulness, and what is involved in being mindful. These explanations have evolved—over time, in different settings, in classical texts and contemporary literature.

Mindfulness as Bare Attention, Present-Centered, Nonjudgmental Awareness. The following definitions are some examples of the understanding of mindfulness in contemporary literature. According to Bishop et al. (2006):

> Broadly conceptualized, mindfulness has been described as a kind of nonelaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as it is. . . . The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. (p. 232)

Then we have the often cited definition from Kabat-Zinn (2017)—"The operational definition I offer . . . mindfulness is *the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally*" (emphasis in original text, p. 1127). Kabat-Zinn added that he uses mindfulness as a synonym for "awareness" or "pure awareness" (p. 1127). Gunaratana (1991) explained that mindfulness is "nonjudgemental observation. It is the ability of the mind to observe without criticism. . . . One does not decide and does not judge. One just observes. . . . Mindfulness is nonconceptual awareness . . . bare attention. . . . present-time awareness" (pp. 141–142). According to Nyanaponika (1998):

> Bare Attention is the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens *to* us and *in* us, at the successive moments of perception. It is called "bare", because it attends just to the bare facts of a perception as presented either through the five physical senses or through the mind, which, for Buddhist thought, constitutes the sixth sense. (p. 32)

From the abovementioned explanations, it appears that there are a number of key components to the contemporary definitions of mindfulness—i.e, that it involves bare attention, present-centeredness, attentional regulation, and nonjudgemental awareness. Dreyfus (2013)[2] noted that although the view of "mindfulness as bare attention has by now gained wide acceptance among contemporary Buddhists" (p. 44), it does not correspond to the classical definitions of mindfulness; and that although bare attention is not alien to the Buddhist [Theravada] tradition, "it does not occupy the central place that many modern mindfulness practitioners assume" (p. 44). Dreyfus (n.d.) also explained that Nyanaponika's (1998) description of mindfulness as bare attention "is to clarify an important aspect of its practice," rather than providing a "complete definition of mindfulness" (para. 8). The point that Dreyfus made about Nyanaponika's account is worth keeping in mind. Although contemporary Buddhist writers and scholars often seek to offer working or practical definitions of mindfulness, most traditional Buddhist scholars do not. Dreyfus (2013) queried, "What can we learn from the classical sources about mindfulness . . .?" This is a pertinent question. In my view, the understanding of how contemporary definitions and explanations differ from the classical texts is crucial for a more nuanced understanding of, and the practice of mindfulness.

Mindfulness as Remembering, Recollection, Retention, Reflection, and Clear Comprehension. In the classical texts, the word for mindfulness is s*ati* (Pali) or *smrti* (Sanskrit) (Anālayo, 2004; Dreyfus, 2013; Gunaratana, 1991). *Sati* comes from "the Sanskrit root, *smr* which means to remember and keep in mind" (Dreyfus, 2013, p. 46). The renowned Buddhist scholar, Buddhaghosa explains *sati* as follow:

> By means of it, they [i.e., other mental processes] remember *(saranti),* or it itself remembers, or it is simply just remembering *(sarana).*Thus it is *mindfulness (sati)*. Its characteristic is not wobbling; its function is not to forget. It is manifested as guarding or the state of being face to face with an object. (cited in Dreyfus, 2013, p. 45)

According to Gunaratana (1991), remembering in the context of mindfulness is not just remembering things from the past [that is not memory], but a "clear, direct, wordless knowing of what is, and what is not, of what is correct, and what is incorrect, of what we are doing, and how we should go about it" (p. 148). Anālayo (2004) explains that *sati* involves not only remembering the present moment, but "also to bring this moment back at a later time (p. 62). To "recollect," Anālayo (2004) added, is a state of mind "characterized by 'collectedness' and the absence of distraction" (p. 62).

The above explanations of the various functions of mindfulness appear to accord with the Buddha's advice to practitioners to stay focused and to practice wholesome or skillful, states of minds and actions, and to set aside unwholesome or unskillful states ones. The descriptions of mindfulness as remembering, reflecting, retaining, and recollecting what the Buddha taught, and bringing the Dhamma to bear upon a current experience or situation is crucial. From a Buddhist perspective, it is one of the important reasons for practicing mindfulness and being mindful. As Dreyfus (2013) pointed out, the ability to differentiate wholesome

[2] Readers may be interested in reading further Dreyfus's (2013) erudite account of the differences between contemporary and classical explanations of mindfulness.

from unwholesome mental states must necessarily means that mindfulness is "explicitly cognitive and evaluative," and why the idea of mindfulness is not just bringing "bare attention," "present centered" and "nonjudgmental awareness to whatever arises within the stream of consciousness" (p. 45).

In my view, the classical explanations of mindfulness appear to be consistent with the Buddha's teachings of "right understanding" or "right view" (ethical discernment) and "right mindfulness," rather than just mindfulness. In addition, the calm, concentrative and evaluative states of mind help the practitioner to develop clear comprehension (*sampajanna*) and insight into the true nature of reality and phenomena as impermanent (constantly evolving-*anicca*), unsatisfactory (causing suffering-*dukkha*) and not-self (self as a process, rather than a permanent entity-*anatta; Ubeysekara*, 2019).

How do we make sense of these significant differences in our understanding of mindfulness? Dreyfus (2013) offered a sound explanation. According to him "the problem with such presentations of mindfulness stems from the failure to distinguish between practical instructions and adequate theoretical descriptions" (p. 52). Dreyfus explained that bare attention is helpful in the initial stages of practice, as these instructions can assist the meditator in disengaging from habitual patterns of reactivity. However, a deeper understanding of the theoretical foundations of the Buddhist practice is needed to bring about profound transformation. In later sections, I elaborate on *why* and *how* understanding mindfulness in a more nuanced way is important for the practice of mindfulness.

Practicing Mindfulness in the Context of the Dhamma

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Apart from understanding the definitions of mindfulness, it is also important to examine the Buddha's recommendations on how to practice, the most notable instructions being set out in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana Sutta*; Dhammananda, 1994; Anālayo, 2004). Practicing the four foundations involves developing and maintaining continuous awareness of the (a) body (e.g., posture, breath), (b) feelings (whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral), (c) mind (thoughts, emotions, intentions, volitions and so forth), and (d) mental contents (mental phenomena relevant to awakening, such as the seven factors of enlightenment and the five hindrances to meditation; Goleman, 1984; Nyanaponika, 1998).

According to the Buddha, if we are mindful of each phenomenon as it arises, we learn to differentiate between the injured arm and its damaged condition (body), the unpleasant nature of the associated pain (feelings), the anger and annoyance at the perpetrator (mind), the way pain affects our ability to achieve meditative concentration (mental objects), and to understand the circuitous nature of the mind (Nyanaponika, 1998). Sharf (2014) noted that "even in the *Satipatthana* [*S*]*utta,* the term *sati* retains a sense of 'recollecting' or 'bearing in mind.' Specifically, *sati* involves bearing in mind the virtuous dharmas so as to properly apprehend, from moment to moment, the true nature of phenomena" (p. 942).

Mindfulness: First Among Equals?

There is a Latin phrase "first among equals" (*primus inter pares*) which carries the connotation of a "person or thing having the highest status in a group" ("First Among Equals," n. d.). Given the prominence and stature accorded to mindfulness in contemporary writing and research relating to mental health, well-being, and human flourishing, one could easily be forgiven in thinking that mindfulness is the "first among equals" in the Buddha's teachings. It is

not. Mindfulness is grounded upon and embedded within an array of teachings and practices, all intended to afford the individual a way to live a life of nonharming, love, kindness and tolerance, to take the personal responsibility for reducing one's suffering, and the social responsibility to alleviate the suffering of others. It is but one of the eight constituents of the Eightfold Path. This is not to deny that mindfulness is important. However, mindfulness has to be cultivated and developed alongside morality, ethics and wisdom, and the virtues spelled out in the Eightfold Path and expanded throughout the Buddha's lifetime of teachings, for example in the "three pillars" and "meritorious deeds." All the contributors to this special issue, who are sangha (members of the monastic order; see Anālayo, 2004; Dhammaratana, personal communication, July 25, 2018; Pemaratana &Tejadhammo, 2021) have stressed the importance of people cultivating all these virtues and skillful actions.

The Three Pillars and Meritorious Deeds

The three pillars comprise the practice of (a) *dana* (generosity, compassion), (b) *sila* (morality and ethics), and (c) *bhavana* (mental discipline and concentration). In his teachings of the "three pillars," and the practices or systematic trainings of "meritorious deeds (*punnas*), the Buddha encouraged the practice of the triad of s*ila* (morality and ethics), s*amadhi* (mental concentration) and *panna* (wisdom, discernment, insight; Dhammananda 2013; Sayadaw & Wheeler, 2019). According to Sayadaw and Wheeler (2019), *dana* involves acts of giving "without expectation of return—and without attachment to what is given. This frees us from greedy self-interest." Furthermore, when the giving is coupled with "loving kindness, dana frees the mind from anger. When dana is also imbued with compassion, it counteracts cruelty." In the Eightfold Path, wisdom points to "right understanding" and "right thought; while ethical conduct promotes "right speech," "right action" and "right livelihood" (Dhammananda, 1987, p. 90; Dhamma, 1997).

The three pillars, the meritorious deeds and the Eightfold Path are interconnected and inseparably linked, as each practice supports and is in turn informed by the cultivation of each of the eight factors. For example, in developing the stillness and clarity of mind through mental discipline (*bhavana*), one develops the wisdom to practice ethical conduct, generosity and compassion which involves nonharming, love, kindness and tolerance. Concurrently, the practice of s*ila* and *dana* promotes the clarity of mind leading to clear comprehension about doing "the right thing." The three pillars are not hierarchical or linear. As my colleague, a senior Zen teacher explains, "meditation, generosity and ethics are all of a whole. From a Zen perspective, meditation is the earth out of which these flowers grow when it is watered with right intention" (G. Dawson, personal communication, November 23, 2020).

In my discussions with Reverend Dhammaratana (personal communication, July 25, 2018), the Chief Abbot of the Theravada Order in Malaysia, he explained that mindfulness as currently practiced (especially in the West) tends to focus primarily on *bhavana*, rather than complemented with *dana* and s*ila.* And as Tejadhammo pointed out (Tejadhammo, 2021), "this ethical domain, although one of the most fundamental and primary purposes of the exercise of mindfulness within formal practice and with recollection in our day to day living, is rarely taught or promoted in contemporary teachings of mindfulness."

The focus on making mindfulness "the first among equals," at the expense of cultivating other aspects of the Eightfold Path, *dana,* s*ila* and *bhavana,* is a disconcerting and worrisome trend. I believe that such a focus has given rise to many of the concerns and disquiet concerning the understanding and practice of mindfulness in contemporary settings. I address some of these issues in later sections.

The practice of the three pillars and meritorious deeds needs to be encouraged and promoted in all aspects of life. For example, before my clients finish counseling, I usually wrap up the

therapeutic relationship with an exercise—in which I ask the client to put together a list of charitable organizations and activities. I encourage them to select two or more charities which they wish to work with. The list compiled by my clients have included—working with the homeless, in aged-care homes, aboriginal organizations, animals, handicapped children and so forth, and in recent times, just checking in on their elderly neighbors. The rationale I shared with my clients, is that if they practice *dana* and *sila* (generosity and ethical conduct), they are less likely be self-focused—personalizing their problems as "My pain, my depression, my anxiety, my suffering," and instead transforming them to what the Buddha counseled, "There is suffering."

Some may argue that many people do charity work without needing to appreciate the Dhamma. However, I believe that giving my clients, the Buddha's rationale for self-transformation has played an important role in their healing and is one of the reasons why many of my clients do not experience relapse—they have reduced their sense of grievance and entitlement through their insight that they can make a difference to others by lowering their sense of self and ego—an essential aspect of the Dhamma and the Eightfold Path.

Looking for Right Mindfulness?—Some Concerns and Disquiet

Over the decades of my involvement in the Dhamma, meditation, and mindfulness in various settings, I have experienced a number of concerns and a sense of disquiet. To name a few—the "debate" about acknowledging the connections with the Dhamma in current teachings and applications of mindfulness more unequivocally; understanding the direction and limitations of some mindfulness research and mindfulness-based therapies; appraising the adverse effects uncovered in mindfulness studies; the commercialization of mindfulness; and the quality and training of mindfulness teachers. Several of these issues have been addressed by other contributors. Because of the constraints of space, I examine the following:

The Place of the Dhamma in Mindfulness Today

How do we contextualize the Dhamma in the teachings of mindfulness? How should the influence of the Dhamma in this context be brought to the forefront? Kabat-Zinn (2017) shared that he has been asked a similar question approximately 30 years ago, and recently—"are mindfulness-based interventions watered-down dharma?" (p. 1128). His response is insightful. Kabat-Zinn explained that when he developed MBSR, "few people in the mainstream culture understood the word 'mindfulness'" (p. 1128), and it would be difficult for mindfulness to take root, if it was associated with "an ancient meditative discipline and tradition" (p. 1128). Kabat-Zinn's concerns were understandable, 30 years ago. He acknowledged that times have changed, and that the more pertinent question is "What is called for now?" (p. 1129). Kabat-Zinn pointed out that clear comprehension (*sampajanna),* "the Four Noble Truths and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness" are "the bedrock of MBSR, even though they are *never mentioned*" (p. 1133, italics added). Although I can empathize with the reticence of some mindfulness teachers (especially in Western societies) to reference the dhamma directly, 30 years ago, I am less certain about this ambivalence now.

As I discussed earlier, the concept of the "ontological difference" demonstrates that the ever-changing nature of human feelings, thoughts, emotions, and experiences is grounded on the ontological foundation of impermanence (*anicca*) and not self (*anatta*). The explanations, teachings, and practices, which help people to understand and experience the nature of reality and existence are integral, and I would suggest, unique to the Buddha's teachings. I believe that in helping people to reduce their suffering (whether physical, medical, mental or

emotional), if the Dhamma provides a clear rationale and basis for what we are doing, it would be helpful to make the source of our own teachings and work clear. As I pointed out earlier, the Buddha "taught an attitude, not an affiliation" (Khong, 2003a).

I have known Kabat–Zinn for a long time. Having trained in MBSR, I agree with Kabat-Zinn (2017) that MBSR is one "of an infinite number of possible skillful means" (p. 1130). Kabat-Zinn's influence and impact has been profound and wide-reaching. His work in MBSR has benefited many, generating much interest, research and supplementary programs in a range of settings including the U.K. parliament ("Mindful Nation Report," 2015). In these challenging times, when the world needs a healthy dose of generosity, ethics, respect, wisdom and compassion, values promoted by the Buddha all his life, I hope that leaders like Kabat-Zinn and others in the mindfulness community, depending on their individual level of comfort, will reference the Dhamma more explicitly in their work.

Would the Buddha Recognize His Own Teachings in Contemporary Mindfulness Research and Therapy?

The increasing popularity of meditation and mindfulness practices have led to attempts by researchers to operationalize, and measure the benefits of these practices. Some of the methods used include controlled trials, breath-counting, neuroimaging, and self-report inventories. Within the scope of this article, I examine some of the recent research and studies.

Breath-Counting Method for Measuring Mindfulness. In 2014, a group of researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison undertook a study to validate breath counting as a behavioral measure of mindfulness. The researchers (Levinson et al., 2014) concluded that "skill in breath counting is associated with more metaawareness, less mind wandering, better mood, and greater nonattachment," and that four weeks of breath counting training "improved mindfulness and decreased mind wandering" (p. 1). This reminds me of an interesting anecdote. Many years ago, when my father passed away in Malaysia, he was buried in a cemetery called Nirvana (meaning a state of enlightenment). There were signposts throughout the cemetery showing "To Nirvana." The Buddhist monk who conducted my father's service remarked, "If only it was that simple!"

In the present discussion, I focus on the researchers' method of "breath-counting." Levinson et al. (2014) chose as their working definition of mindfulness "present moment awareness" (p. 1). To measure their level of mindfulness, participants were instructed to count their breaths from 1 to 9 repeatedly. In 2019; I decided to try this exercise for myself. Some of the online instructions ("Breath Demo Instructions," n.d.) included the following: With the first breath, you'll press the ↓ key, and on breath 9 you'll press the → key; feeling the breath move at its own natural rhythm, once it moves in and out, silently say "one" and press the ↓ key; continue this way up to 9. When you get to 9, press the → key (instead of the ↓ key). During my exercise, I tapped on the keyboard as instructed while counting my breaths. I received various comments on my tapping (not my mindfulness)—"You didn't press the ↓ key on all breaths except the 9th breath; Press the ↓ key to try again; You took an unusual amount of time to complete the practice run."

It is worthwhile to compare the method used by Levinson et al. (2014) with the use of the breath as a meditation object in the Buddhist practice. In the Buddhist tradition, apart from centering the mind, focusing on the breath enables the meditator to directly experience the Buddha's teachings in a profound and nonintellectualizing way—letting go and letting be—"We cannot breathe past breath, so what we cannot change, let it go." "We cannot breathe future breath, so what we cannot control, let it be." Mindfulness enables the meditator to directly experience, clearly comprehend, and reflect on the continual presence of change. When we experience within ourselves how everything is constantly changing, and

how no phenomenon, whether mental or physical stays the same for two moments, we gain deep insight into impermanence and the understanding that clinging to anything that possesses such a characteristic will inevitably lead to suffering (*dukkha*; Khong, 2004).

There are several shortcomings in the research, of which I will highlight a few. The first limitation is that in practicing mindfulness (as opposed to tranquility meditation), one does not focus on any specific object that enters the mind. According to Gunaratana (1991, p. 154):

> Mindfulness has no fixed object of focus. It observes change. Distractions and interruptions are noticed with the same amount of attention as the formal objects of meditation. In a state of pure mindfulness your attention flows along with whatever changes are taking place in the mind.

It appears that the researchers are in fact not addressing mindfulness as understood from a Buddhist perspective. Could they be trying to measure the participant's ability to calm down and focus as promoted in concentration meditation? The methodology used by Levinson et al. (2014) did not suggest this to be the case either. In the Buddhist context, the breath is often used as a meditation object because breathing is a nonconceptual process. It is content-free and can be experienced without the need for intellectualizing. However, from my experience with the online breath-counting training, I was constantly aware of my internal dialogue—for example, "I just missed the counts," "When do I press the keyboard," "This is so confusing and frustrating." I have been teaching my two grandsons, Matthew Jun (10 years old) and Nicholas Kai (7 years old) meditation and mindfulness for several years. My grandsons often say to me, "Nai Nai (Chinese for grandmother), that is being MINDFULL, with two LLs. We need to be MINDFUL, with one L." My experience with the experiment is indeed causing me to be mindfull with two LLs!

Another shortcoming of the research is that by supplementing breath counting with a cognitive task of tapping the keyboard in a specific way, the researchers have in fact increased thinking about the breath, rather than just being aware of it. As one of my clients, Nareen[3] explained, "When I am meditating, I found that I was thinking ABOUT (emphasis in the original text) the breath, but not aware of it all. I am beginning to understand the difference". It appears that the researchers have failed to appreciate this important but subtle difference.

It is helpful for the breath to serve as an anchor for the wandering mind. My concern is with the way the researchers have adapted breath counting to research. How could this kind of convoluted breath counting have anything to do meditation or mindfulness? At best, we could say that the method is a behavioral measure of the participant's ability at multitasking, an activity that is contradictory to the Buddhist approach to mindfulness. The methodology used clearly demonstrates a significant "watered-down" understanding and approach to mindfulness. This wrong understanding is understandable, given that Levinson explained that he "came up with the idea through [playing] video games" (Levinson, 2014). Contrast Levinson's training with the Buddha who spent at least six years exploring different kinds of spiritual practices, mental training, self-exploration, and reflection before he even began to teach (Rahula, 1978; "Seven Wonders of the Buddhist World," 2017).

Mindfulness Research Using Neuroimaging. In recent years, neuroimaging has become one of the popular methods for conducting research on mindfulness (Hölzel et al., 2011). This is due to the growing interest in neuroplasticity—the understanding that "the adult nervous system has the capacity for plasticity and the structure of the brain can change in response to training" (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 8).

[3] Although my clients whose stories appeared in this article have kindly consented to share their experiences, their names and personal details have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

In their study, Hölzel et al. (2011) wanted to understand the "neural mechanisms" associated with using "mindfulness-based interventions" (p. 1). The researchers undertook a longitudinal study using MRI imaging to scan pre- and postchanges in the "brain gray matter" of healthy participants of MBSR programs. The researchers found "increases in gray matter concentration within the left hippocampus. The results suggest that participants demonstrated changes in the brain areas involved in learning memory processes, emotional regulation, self-referential processing and perspective taking" (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 1).

What do the findings tell us about the specific contribution of mindfulness training? Would other activities that involve concentration such as playing sports, music or chess, show analogous changes in the same brain areas? Hölzel et al. (2011) highlighted the use of mindfulness exercises, body scan, and mindful yoga in the MBSR program. They concluded that participation in the program resulted in changes in the brain. This reminds me of another interesting anecdote. A few years ago, I attended a Mind-Life conference, where a neuroscientist was showing his Holiness, the Dalai Lama, fMRI images of what the brain looks like when a person was experiencing anger. Upon seeing this image, the Dalai Lama in his inimitable manner, bowed to the presenter, and asked, "Why did the person get angry in the first place?" The awe and silence in the audience was palpable. With one short, simple question, the Dalai Lama was able to pinpoint a significant limitation in the neuroscience research on mindfulness—that is, that although researchers might be able to show with neuroimaging what happened in the brain at a point in time; the research does not tell us how the changes came about, or what is happening in the mind. There is a significant difference between the workings of the brain and the mind—the former appears to be the focus of neuroscientists, while the latter is the primary concern of the Buddha.

Research findings on the workings of our brains are interesting. However, scanned images do not tell us the whole story or enable us to get a holistic understanding of the person. Contrast the technical explanations given by the researchers with the simple, first-person account from my client, Nareen. Nareen had been seeing me for counseling to manage her depression and for lessons in meditation and mindfulness practices. I encouraged her to keep a journal. Below is her description of her feelings of anger and frustration when she was unable to find suitable clothes to wear to work when she was 8 months pregnant. Nareen (Personal communication, February 1, 2009) wrote,

> There seems to be 2 parts to my internal existence. There is the "me" that thinks feels and reacts. Then there is the "awareness" behind all that. When there is anger, anxiety, happiness, the awareness is neutral. Practicing mindfulness is developing my ability to reside in the neutral awareness regardless of the experiences of "me." I was aware that the emotion was temporary and would pass in time. Previous to my exposure to mindfulness, my internal reactions would have been very different. I would have started ruminating and made several globalizing judgements about myself at being a failure as a human being because I couldn't even control my emotions. This would started a "depression spiral" of which I could not think my way out.
>
> The practice of mindfulness has introduced a self-compassion that I do not believe I have ever experienced before. In hindsight, I may have been emotional as a result of late pregnancy hormonal changes. But in that moment, with no explanation, there was compassion in that awareness. There was no judgment. Residing in awareness was full of compassion, free of stress, and ultimately peaceful.

Measuring Mindfulness: Self-Report Inventories. According to Grossman and Van Dam (2011), the current trend in Western psychology is "to define and operationalize mindfulness as a relatively stable trait in a manner that takes little account of the developmental

and contextual aspects inherent in the Buddhist formulation" (p. 221). The need to use evidence–based methods has given rise to a range of assessment tools and self-report inventories of which the more popular ones are the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) and the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006). Grossman and Van Dam's (2011)[4] main criticism is that most of the inventories appear to measure "mindlessness" (p. 227) rather than mindfulness. Grossman (2011) noted that in the MAAS, participants are asked to rate themselves on a variety of questions, such as "I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time," "I drive places on 'automatic pilot,'" and "I snack without being aware that I'm eating" (p. 1034). As many experienced practitioners would appreciate, as one's mindfulness increases, moments of mindlessness are experienced contemporaneously with their arising. With their greater sense of awareness, participants in MBSR programs may have rated their mindlessness higher on the inventories than untrained participants. This subtle distinction cannot be captured in blunt instruments such as assessment tools and questionnaires.

In addition, the changes that arise from an individual's mindfulness practice is an ongoing process and cannot be measured by instruments that capture a linear trajectory at a point in time. As Heidegger (1927/1962) might have put it, many of the researchers undertaking studies on mindfulness appeared to be "levelling down (p. 121) the profundity of this phenomenon. As mindfulness teachers, most instructors would encourage the participants to get in touch with their experiences subjectively. Yet as mindfulness researchers, they might say to the same participant, we need to measure your experiences objectively, as your subjective experience may not be reliable. Clearly, there exists a wide chasm between being a mindfulness teacher and a mindfulness researcher. We need to embody mindfulness in all contexts, and not only when we are teaching.

Grossman (2011) recommends the use of qualitative methodologies for developing a greater understanding about the experience of mindfulness. There is a place for both quantitative and qualitative research if they are undertaken by researchers skilled in such methodologies. Good mindfulness research has been carried out using qualitative methods (Mason & Hargreaves, 2001; Mackenzie et al., 2007; Monshat et al., 2013). The beauty of qualitative methodology is that the individual voice is not leveled down to an "average mean" or "statistical significance," and we get an insightful account of the practitioner's experience. I doubt that any quantitative study, self-report inventory or fMRI imaging could have captured the insights and riches shown in Nareen's phenomenological account of her experiences with mindfulness, or the way she embraced, and embodied these practices.

Concerns With the Application of the Buddha's Teachings in Mindfulness-Based Therapies

For a number of years, mindfulness practices have been incorporated into a range of therapies dealing with mental and physical health, and general well-being. This include MBCT (Segal et al., 2002); acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes & Smith, 2002), dialectical behavior therapy (Dimeff & Linehan, 2011), and mindfulness-based EAT (Kristeller & Hallett, 1999). There is no question that the incorporation of mindfulness practices has been beneficial in helping individuals deal with a range of mental and physical health concerns. However, I have concerns with some of the approaches taken in these mindfulness-based therapies.

[4] For a more extensive discussion on these self-report inventories for measuring mindfulness, see Grossman and Van Dam (2011) and Grossman (2011).

Although Buddhism and psychotherapy have a common aim in alleviating suffering, the Buddha's teachings are focused on freedom from suffering, whereas the more contemporary application of mindfulness is focused on "the relief … from symptoms and attitudes that result in distress" (Monteiro et al., 2015, p. 11). The difference in their primary aim has resulted, I believe, in some basic misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings as applied to psychology. This misunderstanding is clearly illustrated in the use of the term "mindfulness-based-interventions" or "MBIs" by many psychologists working in this area (see Cullen, 2011, p. 186; Hölzel, 2011). Although some other psychologists have used the term, "mindfulness-based approaches" (MBA; e.g., Burke, 2010) to describe their work, for the most part, the term MBI either alone or in combination with MBA, is used predominantly.

Is the difference between the terms, MBI and MBA, simply a matter of semantics? The short answer is, "No." Some of the synonyms for the word "intervention" are "intrude," "interfere," and "intercede," all involving elements of one person acting upon or stepping in for the other. On the other hand, some of the synonyms for the word "approach" are "path," "way," or "passage," all involving elements of making way for, or facilitating. The word intervention is incongruent with the Buddha's teachings or his approach to meditation and mindfulness which promote nonstriving, nondoing, and letting go. Arguably, the proponents of MBI programs could point out that in reality, they do not intervene, but merely facilitate. In the Eightfold Path, the Buddha emphasized the importance of right understanding or right view, right action, and right speech. I would say that this would include using right terminologies.

Appraising Adverse Effects Uncovered in Mindfulness and Meditation Studies

The growing use of mindfulness and meditation in "meditation-based therapies (Farias et al., 2020) has highlighted another area of concern—the adverse effects of these practices and their potential for harm. Farias et al. (2020) analyzed 83 studies from 1975 to 2019 involving an "assessment of adverse events [AEs] in association with meditation practices" (p. 14). The researchers found 65% of the participants (1,102 participants in 55 studies) reported at least one type of meditation adverse event (MAE), with the most common AEs being anxiety, depression, cognitive anomalies, and the less frequent being gastrointestinal problems, and suicidal behaviors. The researchers also found that AEs can occur during or after meditation practices, and even in individuals with no mental health history.

Farias et al. (2020) cautioned that the results showing the prevalence of MAES were inconsistent and required further scrutiny, and that the higher prevalence of AEs may be reflective of the contexts—for example, many of the participants in the observational studies were "individuals practicing without face-to-face interaction, using books or phone apps" (p. 14), or attendees at retreats (42% of the sample). The researchers also suggested that plausible explanations for the prevalence included "the intensity of meditation practice, the competence of the teacher and participant vulnerabilities" (p. 15). Many of my colleagues in the mindfulness community, and I share the concerns raised by Faris et al. Several authors in this special issue have raised concerns about the inadequate training of the teachers and facilitators who teaches meditation and mindfulness after receiving little or inadequate training themselves.

I use mindfulness and meditation in my clinical practice with clients experiencing a range of mental health issues including depression, anxiety, obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Khong, 2003b, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011). With my clients who have significant psychopathology such as schizophrenia or paranoia, I would never permit them to use concentration techniques, as it may be difficult for them to differentiate the mental states generated by meditation from their own psychopathologies. Instead, I encourage such clients to practice simple daily mindful activities—for example, cooking,

watering the plants, swimming, walking, or arranging flowers, and using loving kindness (as opposed to the breath) as their meditation object. The rationale, I explained to them, is to help them to calm down, rather than prioritizing self-transformation. I also actively discourage my clients from learning meditation and mindfulness from books, apps, or attending long retreats until they have gained significant proficiency in their personal practices. I encourage them to learn these practices under the guidance of a skillful meditation teacher, and to attend regular group meditation sessions. I check on my clients' progress constantly and process with them any effects that they might be experiencing.

I believe that an instructor (whether as therapist, teacher, or facilitator) with inadequate skills, training and experience could likely be one factor for the AEs found in the studies by Farias et al. (2020). Mindfulness and meditation practices when used appropriately and skillfully with individuals benefit many. In my view, AEs and MAEs could be significantly reduced if instructors exercise wisdom and compassion in being aware of their own limitations—help when they can, and to restrain when they cannot. Skillful teachers would certainly help the practitioners to manage adverse effects, and themselves seek advice from other senior teachers. In addition, a skillful teacher can reassure a practitioner that an unpleasant experience may not necessarily be an "adverse event," but part of the meditative process, and could provide invaluable opportunities for self-understanding and reflections. This is true, whether such experiences occur in a contemporary or traditional meditation context. In short, instructors have to be mindful teachers, rather than teachers of mindfulness.

Conclusion: My Vision and Hope for the Future

Would the Buddha recognize his own teachings today? How would the Buddha feel about the way his teachings are being applied? I believe that he would probably have significant concerns with:

- Using the mastery of keyboard tapping as a measurement of mindfulness.
- Scanning the meditators' *brains* rather allowing them to understand the nature and workings of their *minds* experientially. The Buddha would probably have said, "Why scan their brains? Why not just ask the meditators about their experiences?"
- Attempts to operationalize and measure mindfulness by relying on assessment instruments. The Buddha's most important message to people is "Know for yourself." Objective pencil-paper assessments is inconsistent with this message.
- Using the term "intervention" in relation with his teachings, when he promoted "letting be," and "letting go."

I am not suggesting that individuals should not continue to apply meditation and mindfulness practices in whatever field of work they are currently involved. However, it is important that such individuals (whether as a teacher, instructor, researcher, academic, etc.) unpack their own misconceptions of, and cultivate a right understanding of the Buddha's teachings. Without the right understanding, we should not try to repackage old wine into new bottles as the new bottle could end up "corrupting" the old wine, instead of enhancing it. Sometimes, a rose by any other name *just* cannot smell as sweet if the essence of what makes it a rose is lost!

I conclude with excerpts from Whitney Houston's (1985) beautiful song, *Greatest Love of All*:

> I believe the children are our future
>
> Teach them well and let them lead the way

Show them all the beauty they possess inside

Give them a sense of pride

To make it easier

Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be.

The beauty inside my two grandsons—Matthew Jun and Nicholas Kai, and their simple and heart-warming practice of the Dhamma—gives me hope that children are indeed our future, if we cultivate a similar "beginner's mind." On my meditation teacher's birthday, Matthew donated his entire savings of two $1.00 coins as a present. Nicholas was sad, explaining that "I do not have a present to give to Bhante. I used my savings to buy my brother a birthday present last month." Matthew responded, "It is ok, Nicholas, you can share my present. I will give Bhante a $1 coin on your behalf." Bhante was touched and the boys were happy. Matthew's and Nicholas's simple acts of generosity to Bhante and compassion for each other is evocative of Rumi's second kind of intelligence—one that is not acquired, but "already completed and preserved inside you . . . a freshness in the center of the chest . . ." (Rumi, 2004, p. 178). My grandsons have practiced a simple, unadulterated version of the Buddha's teachings on *dana, sila* and *bhavana*. If we walk with Buddha, like children do, there is no question of "Are we there yet?" "We are here. We are not the fingers pointing at the moon. We are the moon."

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