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FORGIVENESS MINDFUL HEALING: A PATH TO RECONCILIATION

Editors

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**FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING:
A PATH TO RECONCILIATION**

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UNITED NATION DAY OF VESAK 2025

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Editors:

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FOREWORD

His Eminence Thích Thiện Nhơn

President of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha

On the auspicious occasion of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025, solemnly held at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City from May 6–8, 2025 — coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 50th anniversary of national reunification — the publication of *“Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation”* affirms the pioneering role of Vietnamese Buddhism in offering both ethical insights and practical solutions for a world fraught with turbulence and division.

As one of the five thematic volumes presented at the international conference *“Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development,”* this anthology gathers 26 in-depth scholarly papers authored by monastics, researchers, and interdisciplinary experts from across the globe. The essays collectively illuminate the theoretical foundations of Buddhist thought on forgiveness and inner healing, while also presenting concrete applications of mindfulness in psychotherapy, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and holistic human development.

Under the editorial direction of two distinguished Buddhist leaders of Vietnam — Most Ven. Thích Đức Thiện and Most Ven. Thích Nhật Từ — and with the collaboration of Hồng Đức Publishing House, this volume stands as a testament to the Editorial Board’s outstanding contribution in shaping the intellectual vision, connecting global scholars, and elevating Vietnamese Buddhist studies on the international academic stage.

The core value of this anthology lies not only in its liberative philosophical content but also in its practical applicability. Drawing from canonical sources and integrating practices of mindfulness meditation, Buddhist psychology, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), the contributors offer profound analyses of forgiveness, self-healing, trauma recovery, and intercultural dialogue as essential foundations for comprehensive reconciliation.

One particularly noteworthy feature of the volume is its interdisciplinary approach — spanning psychology, education, medicine, anthropology, and social history — which clarifies the relevance of Buddhist teachings to the global pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

especially in the domains of mental health, gender equity, quality education, and enduring peace.

This volume also lays the groundwork for new directions in research, including the integration of Buddhism into contemporary psychotherapy, the design of mindfulness-based educational programs, and the development of community reconciliation models rooted in compassion (*karuṇā*), non-self (*anattā*), and interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Especially significant are studies on the role of Buddhist women, the transformation of anger in socio-political conflict, and the principle of non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) in addressing domestic violence — all of which highlight the humanistic depth and practical wisdom of Buddhist insight in today’s world.

With the guiding spirit of “transforming suffering through wisdom and compassion,” this volume serves not only as an academic forum but also as a profound humanistic message to the global community in the post-pandemic, post-conflict era. It offers living evidence of Buddhism’s capacity to heal individuals, foster unity, and promote world peace from within each person.

Thanks to the strategic vision and creative commitment of the National Organizing Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025, this publication contributes to the unique imprint of Vietnamese Buddhism in the modern era — confidently leading the way, illuminating insight, and integrating global wisdom in the shared effort to cultivate a world of peace, inclusivity, and harmony.

FOREWORD

Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Brahmapundit,

President of the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV)

The United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV), initiated by Thailand and embraced by the global Buddhist community, stands as a profound response to the United Nations Secretary-General's call to commemorate Vesak Day worldwide. This occasion marks the sacred triple events of the Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment, and *Mahāparinibbāna*—not merely as a global cultural festival, but as a sacred duty of the international Buddhist community to advance peace, compassion, and wisdom in alignment with the noble objectives of the United Nations. As Buddhists, we share a collective responsibility to bring the teachings of the Buddha to bear upon the urgent challenges of our time, from social injustice to climate change.

Thailand, with the gracious support of the Thai Royal Family and the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand, has played an important role in this sacred mission. Spearheaded by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and supported by the Royal Thai Government, we established the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV) in 2004. This laid the foundation for the inaugural United Nations Day of Vesak in the same year, uniting global Buddhist leaders in vital forums to explore Buddhist principles as solutions to global issues—resonating with the vision and mandate of the United Nations.

Over the course of twenty UNDV celebrations, Thailand has had the honor of hosting fifteen, Sri Lanka one, and Vietnam has proudly hosted four—namely in 2008, 2014, 2019, and 2025. Each of Vietnam's contributions to UNDV has been remarkably successful, exemplifying visionary Buddhist leadership and international solidarity. The Government of Vietnam and the leadership of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have demonstrated unwavering commitment and dedication in organizing these momentous events, showcasing the power of Buddhist unity and collective action for global peace.

The main theme of UNDV 2025, *"Solidarity and Tolerance for Human Dignity: Buddhist Wisdom for World Peace and Sustainable Development,"* reflects the vision of the United Nations and the aspirations of the Government of Vietnam for peace and sustainability in the spirit of the Buddha's teachings. It also honors the Buddha's immense contributions to human history, while commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Republic

of Vietnam and the 50th Anniversary of the country's reunification.

I deeply appreciate and hold in high regard the organizational capabilities, vision, and tremendous devotion demonstrated by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in hosting the four UNDV celebrations. These efforts stand as a testament to the highest standards of Buddhist leadership and an enduring commitment to peace and sustainable development.

This volume, *Forgiveness and Mindful Healing*, is the second thematic collection of the 2025 UNDV International Conference, featuring five English-language forums with more than 600 scholarly papers and five Vietnamese-language forums with over 350 research contributions. The high-quality submissions from monastics and scholars alike highlight the academic depth, intellectual diversity, and cross-cultural values of the Buddhist world in dialogue with modern global issues.

These contributions span a wide array of disciplines, from Buddhist studies and philosophy to psychology, education, and conflict resolution. Each paper not only reflects rigorous scholarship but also embodies compassionate engagement with contemporary challenges. The diversity of perspectives represented affirms the universal relevance of Buddhist wisdom across cultures, traditions, and geopolitical contexts. Collectively, this volume serves as a meaningful resource for advancing peace, healing, and human dignity through the timeless insight of the Buddha's teachings.

As we approach UNDV 2025, I warmly welcome the expected participation of above 1,200 international delegates from 80 countries and 5 territories. Furthermore, I commend the cultural dimensions of Vesak 2025, including the Buddhist Art Exhibition, the Vietnamese Buddhist Cultural Festival, and the international Buddhist cultural performances from India, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

These scholarly, cultural, and spiritual perspectives collectively contribute to the profound success of this sacred Vesak celebration. Together, let us ensure that the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak in Vietnam becomes a beacon of peace, unity, and sustainable development for the entire world.

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND

In an era defined by rapid globalization and multifaceted socio - political challenges, the imperative for unity and inclusivity as foundations for human dignity has never been more urgent. This volume, emerging as one of the five key components of the conference “*Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development*,” represents one of the five thematic pillars of the 2025 UN Vesak Conference, assembling a series of rigorous scholarly investigations that critically engage with Buddhist thought.

Specifically, the theme “*Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation*” is explored in depth, illuminating the transformative power of Buddhist teachings in mending fractured societies and nurturing individual resilience. The contributions within these pages articulate how ancient wisdom can inform contemporary strategies for conflict resolution, mental health care, and ethical governance.

The research presented here aligns closely with the strategic priorities of the United Nations, particularly in its pursuit of sustainable development and the promotion of global peace. By interweaving traditional Buddhist precepts - such as compassion, mindfulness, and forgiveness - with modern academic inquiry, these studies underscore the capacity of spiritual values to address tangible global challenges. This integration is presented not merely as a theoretical exercise, but as a practical blueprint for transformative social change.

Against the backdrop of Vietnam’s momentous milestones - celebrating 80 years of the Socialist Republic, 50 years of national reunification, and hosting the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak (the fourth time in our nation) - this compendium acquires additional symbolic significance. It reflects Vietnam’s emerging role as a bridge between Eastern spiritual traditions and contemporary global imperatives.

Moreover, the book resonates with a dual commitment: to honor the enduring legacy of Buddhist intellectual heritage and to stimulate innovative, interdisciplinary approaches that can drive peace and sustainable development. It invites policymakers, scholars, and practitioners alike to reimagine a future where spiritual and material progress coexist harmoniously.

Ultimately, this volume stands as a proof to the belief that true human

dignity arises not solely from economic or technological advancements, but from the cultivation of inner wisdom and the nurturing of compassionate communities.

II. OVERVIEW OF SELECTED RESEARCH PAPERS

Section I: Foundations of Forgiveness and Mindful Healing

1. Most. Ven. Dr. Ashin Sumanacara, in *"The Transformative Journey of Forgiveness: Integrating Mindfulness and Compassion for Healing and Reconciliation"*, proposes a novel framework linking forgiveness, mindfulness, and compassion for personal and societal healing. The paper synthesizes ancient wisdom with modern therapeutic practices to promote reconciliation. It delineates practical steps for emotional recovery and community restoration. Despite its innovative outlook, the study is limited by its abstract nature and a scarcity of quantitative validation. This research stands as a promising interdisciplinary contribution, though it calls for more rigorous empirical support.

2. Prof. Dr. Wimal Hewamanage, in *"Buddhist Reflection on Forgiveness and Its Relevance to Patience and Loving-Kindness"*, offers a reflective discourse that connects classical Buddhist teachings with modern ethical practices. The research articulates how forgiveness, patience, and loving-kindness can enhance interpersonal relationships and societal well-being. It is celebrated for its clear exegesis and thoughtful synthesis of traditional and contemporary viewpoints. Nonetheless, the study's narrow cultural focus and limited cross-comparative data pose notable constraints. Despite these issues, the paper contributes meaningfully to discussions on ethical living and psychological health.

3. Ven. Dr. Thich Thien Huong's *"Three Messages of the Buddha - The Foundation for Building Peace for the World"* presents a distilled interpretation of key Buddhist principles aimed at fostering global peace. The study translates complex philosophical ideas into practical strategies for societal harmony and ethical conduct. It is marked by its creative presentation of mindfulness, compassion, and self-discipline as pillars for peace. Some critics might note, however, that the theoretical exposition occasionally lacks empirical reinforcement. Nevertheless, the paper offers a refreshing perspective that enriches the scholarly dialogue on peace studies.

4. Prof. Dr. Abraham Vélez de Cea, in *"A Buddhist Philosophy of Forgiveness"*, delves deeply into the conceptual realm of forgiveness as envisioned in Buddhist thought. His rigorous exegesis provides a robust theoretical framework that links spiritual forgiveness with practical reconciliation methods. The study is notable for its detailed philosophical analysis and its implications for conflict resolution. However, the dense theoretical language and minimal empirical evidence may challenge some readers. Despite these limitations, the work remains a profound contribution to the academic exploration of forgiveness.

5. In *"Understanding True Nature and Loving Oneself: Path to Forgiveness, Mindful Healing and Reconciliation"*, Prof. Dr. Haththaka Rasika Nishadini Peiris investigates the transformative journey toward self-acceptance through Buddhist practice. His work artfully connects self-love with broader themes

of forgiveness and social healing. The paper emphasizes the psychological benefits of mindfulness and offers an integrative model that is both innovative and accessible. Its conceptual depth, however, is tempered by a lack of extensive empirical data, limiting its immediate practical applicability. Overall, the study provides a nuanced perspective that encourages further interdisciplinary exploration.

6. In *"Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation"*, Ven. Dr. Shantimoy Tongchangya outlines a holistic model linking forgiveness with mindful healing. The research underlines the transformative potential of forgiveness as a catalyst for emotional and social recovery. It effectively synthesizes Buddhist teachings with modern therapeutic practices. The paper's innovative approach fosters deeper understanding of reconciliation processes. Yet, its predominantly theoretical stance and lack of extensive empirical validation are notable limitations.

7. Ven. Gomila Gunalankara's *"Significance of Apology and Forgiveness: An Examination of Buddhist Teaching and Practices as a Framework for Peace, Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation"* delves into the dual roles of apology and forgiveness in building peaceful societies. The study presents a well-articulated theoretical framework that marries ancient wisdom with contemporary conflict resolution. It offers fresh perspectives on using spiritual practices to heal social rifts. The analysis is thorough and insightful, though it is somewhat limited by an absence of robust quantitative data and empirical testing.

8. In the article *"An Assessment of the Term 'Forgiveness' from Vietnam Buddhist Perspective"*, Dr. Bachchan Kumar critically examines how forgiveness is conceptualized within Vietnamese Buddhism. His work explores the cultural nuances and ethical dimensions that shape contemporary understandings of forgiveness. The paper contributes by challenging conventional definitions and offering a culturally rich interpretation. It is praised for its nuanced discussion and in-depth analysis, yet the qualitative nature of the study and a limited comparative framework with non-Vietnamese perspectives pose significant constraints.

9. In *"Buddhist Women's Journey of Self-Healing and Forgiveness"*, Thich Nu Dieu Hanh explores the unique spiritual paths of Buddhist women. First, the research foregrounds personal narratives that reveal transformative resilience. Second, it analyzes how gender-specific challenges intersect with spiritual growth. Third, the study highlights the empowering role of traditional practices in fostering self-healing. Fourth, limitations such as a narrow sample and scarce quantitative data are acknowledged. Fifth, the work provides a fresh lens on gender and spirituality, prompting further inquiry into inclusive Buddhist methodologies.

Section II: Mindfulness Practices and Mental Health

10. In *"The Critical Perspective of Mindfulness Programs Integrating Buddhist Principles into Mental Health Scenario in Vietnam"*, Ven. Dr. Thich Nguyen The critically examines the adaptation of Buddhist mindfulness within Vietnam's

mental health practices. His investigation reveals how traditional concepts can be localized to address contemporary psychological challenges while questioning the predominance of Western methodologies. The research introduces culturally sensitive intervention models and supports its arguments with qualitative evidence. Notably, the study is constrained by limited sample sizes and potential cultural biases that may affect generalizability. This work contributes significantly to both mental health and Buddhist studies, inviting further expansive research.

11. In *"Integrating Buddhist Psychology and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: A Comprehensive Approach to Emotional and Behavioural Healing"*, Asst.Prof.Dr. Shalu Nehra endeavors to merge traditional Buddhist insights with modern CBT techniques to address emotional disorders. Her integrative framework is backed by illustrative case studies that highlight enhanced therapeutic outcomes. The paper stands out for its interdisciplinary methodology and practical application. On the downside, the relatively small sample size and potential subjective bias limit the overall conclusiveness. This research pushes the boundaries of conventional therapy, paving the way for future multidisciplinary investigations.

12. Rev. Nikapitiye Nandarathana's paper on *"Buddhist-Derived Meditation Integrated Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depressive Disorders in Adults"* reviews randomized controlled trials to assess integrated therapy outcomes. It successfully merges Buddhist meditation with cognitive behavioural techniques to treat depression. The study highlights promising results and contributes to interdisciplinary therapeutic approaches. Its systematic methodology offers a solid foundation for future research. Nonetheless, the review is somewhat limited by the variability of trial designs and potential selection bias.

13. In *"The Wise Thinking Development: Cultivating Mindfulness for Self-Healing from Theravāda Buddhist Psychotherapy"*, Dr. Dinh Thi Bich Luy advocates for mindfulness as a pathway to self-healing. Her paper articulates the concept of 'wise thinking' and integrates traditional Theravāda practices with modern psychotherapy. The research stands out by offering a culturally nuanced approach to mental health. It enriches therapeutic strategies with deep historical insights, although its limited empirical support and narrow case selection suggest the need for further validation.

14. Mr. Sujan Chakma's *"Pain and Stress Management Through Mindfulness and Buddhist Practices"* investigates the application of mindfulness in alleviating both physical and emotional distress. First, the research demonstrates how integrating Buddhist practices can effectively reduce stress. Second, it provides concrete examples of mindfulness techniques in clinical settings. Third, a holistic approach is developed by combining empirical observations with traditional insights. Fourth, the study admits to limitations such as individual variability and methodological constraints. Fifth, overall, the work contributes valuable interdisciplinary perspectives that pave the way for further clinical investigations.

15. In *"Buddhist Science of Mental Health: Forgiveness, Compassion and*

Mindful Healing as Paths to Reconciliation", Mr. Sumedha Viraj Sripathi Ukwatta constructs an integrative framework linking ancient ethics with modern mental health practices. First, the paper posits that forgiveness, compassion, and mindfulness together form a robust basis for reconciliation. Second, it bridges spiritual traditions with contemporary scientific inquiry. Third, potential mechanisms for applying mindful healing in therapy are clearly articulated. Fourth, challenges such as quantifying intangible outcomes and cultural biases are critically examined. Fifth, despite these limitations, the study significantly enriches scholarly discourse and invites extensive empirical follow-up.

Section III: Conflict Resolution, Unity, and Global Harmony

16. Asst. Prof. Dr. Sunil Kamble's *"Buddhist Insight for Peace Through Social Conflict Resolution - A Historical Application by Dr. Ambedkar in India"* offers a historical analysis that interweaves Buddhist philosophy with social conflict resolution strategies. His narrative brings forward historical case studies that exemplify how traditional insights can resolve contemporary disputes. The paper is rich in contextual analysis and reinterprets classical teachings for modern applications. However, its reliance on qualitative historical data and the absence of recent empirical evidence present certain limitations. Ultimately, the research provides a thoughtful reinterpretation that could inspire new conflict resolution frameworks.

17. In *"Reconcile Conflicts with Forgiveness and Insight Meditation for a Peaceful World"*, Ven. Dr. Thich Dao Nhan proposes practical meditation techniques aimed at healing interpersonal and societal rifts. His paper bridges ancient meditative practices with modern peacebuilding efforts, outlining actionable strategies to foster reconciliation. The work is distinguished by its innovative integration of spiritual discipline with conflict management. Yet, its anecdotal evidences and limited quantitative analysis restrict the strength of its claims. Overall, the study lays a solid foundation for future research into integrating mindfulness with global peace initiatives.

18. In *"Ahimsā": A Buddhist Response to Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)*", Prof. Elias G. Konyana investigates how Buddhist non-violence can counter domestic abuse. He argues that ancient ethical precepts offer practical solutions for modern conflicts, emphasizing compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The paper demonstrates innovative thinking by linking spirituality with social justice. It provides clear frameworks for applying Buddhist values to interpersonal violence. However, its reliance on qualitative insights and limited cross-cultural analysis may restrict its universal applicability.

19. Dr. Debika Mitra, in *"Practicing Compassion towards Conflict Resolution and Peace: A Buddhist Perspective"*, explores the role of compassion in mediating conflicts. Her work presents practical strategies that integrate meditative practices with active conflict resolution techniques. The paper enriches the conversation by highlighting the tangible benefits of compassionate engagement. Its strength lies in connecting spiritual principles to everyday social challenges. However, the study's reliance on anecdotal evidence and a limited sample of case studies may curtail broader generalizability.

20. *"Abandoning Anger for Peace: Analysis of the Three Stages of Anger and Methods to Deal with Them"* by Bhikkhu Dr. Sobhana Mahatthero, PhD dissects the progression of anger into distinct phases and proposes targeted interventions rooted in Buddhist practice. His analysis clarifies how transforming anger can lead to inner peace. The work provides a detailed conceptual framework that bridges ancient teachings with modern psychology. It contributes to understanding emotional regulation from a spiritual perspective, yet the subjective interpretation of emotional stages and the lack of extensive quantitative measures present clear limitations.

21. *"The Way to Overcome Resentment (Āghāta) with Special Reference to the Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Sutta in Aṅguttara Nikāya"* by Ms. Nguyen Thi Hong Diem (Sucintī) investigates scriptural approaches to mitigating resentment. The paper combines detailed textual analysis with contemporary psychological insights to propose a mindful path toward reconciliation. It uniquely connects ancient sutta teachings with modern emotional healing strategies. While its innovative synthesis offers valuable guidance, the narrow focus on specific texts and limited empirical corroboration may hinder its broader impact.

Section IV: Modern Applications and Educational Perspectives on Forgiveness And Healing

22. Ven. Dr. Sumedh Thero introduces in the article *"Dynamics in Forgiveness and Mindful Healing on the path of dhamma"* The Path to Reconciliation is a journey to establish respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. It means recognizing past injustices and building a just, equal society rooted in mutual respect. Reconciliation is founded on respect for Indigenous nations and Indigenous peoples. Respect grows through understanding their history and valuing their languages, cultures, and legal traditions.

23. *"The Power of Forgiveness: Pathway to Inner Growth and Renewal"* by Prof. Dr. Jyoti Gaur presents Forgiveness is a profound process that paves the way for personal growth, emotional healing, and inner transformation. It helps individuals release anger, build empathy, and find peace. This paper explores forgiveness as a tool for emotional well-being, positive relationships, and community harmony through methods like mindfulness and self-compassion.

24. *"Love Conquers the World not Arms"* by Dr. Labh Niharika explores the Buddhist conception of 'mettā' (Pāli) or 'maitrī' (Sanskrit), highlighting it as unconditional and selfless love that transcends attachment. Rooted in core Buddhist texts, mettā is shown as both personal and political, promoting harmony from families to global relations.

25. Ven. Dr. Tan Kah Poh in the article *"A Synergistic Model for Psychological Crisis Management and Healing in Buddhist Contemplative Care and Chaplaincy"* indicates that Buddhist chaplaincy is a relatively recent profession offering spiritual care rooted in Dharma. It supports individuals through crises, particularly illness and death, by applying key Buddhist practices and compassionate presence.

26. In the paper *"A study of the application Forgiveness and Mindful Healing*

for social harmony and solidarity" Ven. Mahawela Rathanapala focuses on in examining of utility of forgiveness and mindful healing for social harmony and solidarity. Rooted in Buddhist teachings, it emphasizes overcoming hatred with non-hatred, and using wisdom to understand and respond to conflict. Through the Pali concepts of Khanti (patience/forgiveness) and Sati (mindfulness), it shows how these practices contribute to mental peace and collective harmony.

27. *"Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: a Path to Reconciliation"* by Ven. Sumedha Bodhi explores the concept of forgiveness and mindful healing as a path to reconciliation in a world plagued by conflict and violence. It highlights the role of mindfulness, compassion, and interfaith dialogue in fostering peace. The Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement is introduced as a model for personal and social transformation through self-awareness, empathy, and engagement.

28. Dr. Lauw Acep in the paper *"Mindfulness and Forgiveness in Buddhist Practice: A Path to Healing and Transformation"* presents the intersection of mindfulness and forgiveness within Buddhist practice offers a profound framework for healing. This review highlights how mindfulness supports forgiveness by reducing rumination, enhancing empathy, and improving emotional regulation. Neuroscience confirms its benefits, and clinical studies show its use in trauma recovery, relationship healing, and societal reconciliation.

29. *"An Exploration of Buddhist Principles on Conflict Resolution and Peace-building as Presented in the Pali discourses"* by Ven. Dr. Rathmale Punnarathana has explored delves into Buddhist teachings on conflict resolution and peace - building as presented in the Pali discourses. It identifies craving, hatred, and ignorance as roots of conflict and promotes their transformation through non - craving, non-hatred, and wisdom. Emphasizing inner peace, ethical living, and compassion, Buddhism offers a practical model for societal harmony.

30. Dr. Konara Mudiyansele Geethani Chandrika Kumari Amaratunga in the paper *"New Trends in Buddhist Rituals and Practices Used for the Mental Healing of Individuals"* hopes to identify new trends in Buddhist practices and behavioural methods used in Sri Lankan society for the purpose of achieving individuals' mental health. It highlights how original Buddhist teachings have evolved into applied practices influenced by socio - cultural changes. Modern rituals like Bodhi puja and Fensui, adapted with technology and urban symbols, now serve as tools for spiritual and psychological healing.

31. *"An analysis of the Pathway for Emotional Healing Therapy Reflected in Buddhist Teachings"* by Ms. Haddela Gedara Harshani Sewwandi Haddela explores the integration of Buddhist principles into emotional healing to improve mental well-being. The study examines how teachings like mindfulness (sati), the Satipaṭṭhāna and Sabbāsava Suttas, protective chants (parittas), compassion (karuṇā), ethical conduct, and the Four Noble Truths can offer therapeutic tools for emotional recovery. Using a qualitative approach and textual analysis of key Buddhist texts, the research also evaluates mindfulness-based and compassion-focused therapies. Findings suggest that these teachings support emotional regulation, reduce suffering, and enhance resilience. The

study concludes that applying Buddhist principles in therapy can offer a holistic and transformative path toward emotional healing and inner balance.

32. Thich Nu Lac Dieu Nga's *"Forgiveness and Mindful Healing in Ancient and Modern Contexts as Pathways to Reconciliation"* examines how ancient Buddhist practices evolve into modern healing modalities. First, the paper traces forgiveness from historical roots to contemporary applications. Second, it forges a link between traditional wisdom and current therapeutic models. Third, innovative strategies for integrating mindful healing into reconciliation efforts are proposed. Fourth, the reliance on qualitative evidence is noted as a potential shortcoming. Fifth, while offering a rich interdisciplinary perspective, the study calls for broader empirical validation to enhance its generalizability.

33. *"Buddhist Philosophy on the Resolution of Conflicts and Wars"* by Colonel, MSc. Vu Van Khanh presented Human history has witnessed tens of thousands of conflicts and wars on different scales, occurring in all continents in the world, causing suffering to all sorts of people. Despite humanity's yearning for peace, war leaves deep scars - destroying lives, infrastructure, and long-term development. Buddhism seeks to overcome these consequences, aiming for a life of peace, freedom, and happiness. This paper does not criticize other religions or deeply analyze Buddhist philosophy, but instead reflects on its aspirations for peace and global prosperity.

34. Mr. Ranathunga Arachchige Rushan Indunuwan's *"Healing Wounds of Misunderstanding and Cultivating Peace: Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Buddhist Thought"* presents an integrative model that bridges ancient doctrines with modern peace initiatives. First, it innovatively connects mindfulness practices to forgiveness processes. Second, the paper offers a nuanced analysis of interpersonal healing mechanisms. Third, practical applications for societal reconciliation are delineated. Fourth, challenges arise in standardizing subjective experiences and limited empirical support. Fifth, despite these constraints, the study lays a robust foundation for future interdisciplinary research in conflict resolution.

35. Mr. Ankit Kushwaha's *"Cultivating Mindfulness Through Forgiveness: Lesson from Buddhist Education for a Cohesive Future"* advocates for embedding forgiveness into educational paradigms to foster mindfulness. First, the paper argues that Buddhist pedagogical models can transform modern curricula. Second, it outlines actionable strategies drawn from ancient teachings. Third, illustrative case studies underscore its potential to enhance social cohesion. Fourth, the research identifies scalability and cultural adaptation as notable challenges. Fifth, while offering a compelling vision for educational reform, the study urges systematic empirical testing to fortify its claims.

36. In the paper *"Impact Of Counselling And Psychotherapy On Vipassana Meditators, With Forgiveness And Mindfulness - A Link Towards Healing: A Case Study Approach"*, Mrs. Divya Thakur shows that Meditation practices, particularly those rooted in Buddhist traditions, have gained increasing recognition for their potential therapeutic benefits. This study explores how Vipassana meditation intersects with counselling and psychotherapy

in addressing depression. Focusing on four adults with chronic illness, the paper highlights how their engagement with Vipassana supported emotional recovery. Despite initial discontinuation due to depressive episodes, those who resumed meditation alongside psychological treatment recovered more quickly. The findings suggest that integrating meditation and counselling may enhance healing in individuals coping with depression.

37. *"From Mindfulness to Reconciliation: the Foundation of Forgiveness and Healing"* by MA. Lê Thị Hồng Diễm expressed views Forgiveness is a complex psychological process that requires individuals to let go of resentment and accept suffering as part of life's experience. Research in psychology and teachings from Thich Nhat Hanh show that mindfulness supports forgiveness by enhancing emotional awareness, reducing stress, and fostering healing. This paper explores the link between mindfulness and forgiveness through Buddhist and psychological lenses, focusing on practices like deep listening and compassion meditation. It concludes that mindfulness transforms forgiveness into a healing process that nurtures inner peace and social harmony.

38. *"The psychological transformation of becoming a Sotāpanna: reducing fear, doubt, and attachment through mindfulness and insight"* by Thich Nu Dieu Anh examines the psychological transformation associated with the attainment of Sotāpanna (Stream entry), a fundamental indicator of the Buddhist path. It highlights how mindfulness and insight practice help reduce fear, doubt, and attachment, contributing to emotional balance. The study also considers how these practices align with modern psychotherapy in treating anxiety and depression, offering a bridge between spiritual growth and mental health support.

III. CONCLUSION

In synthesizing the diverse and profound insights presented throughout this volume, it is evident that Buddhist principles - rooted in forgiveness, mindfulness, and compassion - offer transformative potential for addressing some of today's most pressing global challenges. The contributions compiled here underscore how ancient wisdom can be harnessed to heal individual wounds and mend societal fractures, providing innovative frameworks for conflict resolution and sustainable development.

These scholarly endeavors resonate strongly with the strategic imperatives of the United Nations, which champion peace, inclusivity, and sustainable human development. In particular, the research aligns with UN priorities by articulating models that integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions into public policy and community building. Against the backdrop of Vietnam's historic milestones - celebrating 80 years of the Socialist Republic, 50 years of national reunification, and hosting the 20th United Nations Vesak Festival (the fourth hosted by Vietnam) - this volume exemplifies a pioneering effort to fuse traditional Buddhist insight with modern developmental paradigms.

From the perspective of both the editorial leadership and Buddhist tradition, these studies illuminate a path toward holistic transformation.

They not only reaffirm the enduring relevance of Buddhist ethics but also challenge contemporary scholarship to adopt interdisciplinary methodologies that can further validate and expand upon these transformative models. The integration of qualitative insights with rigorous empirical research is essential for deepening our understanding of how spiritual practices can foster resilient, compassionate societies.

Ultimately, this compendium serves as a clarion call for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to reimagine the future. By embracing a vision that privileges ethical evolution and intercultural dialogue, we can forge pathways toward global harmony and human dignity. It is our hope that these studies will inspire continued, in-depth research and collaborative action, laying the groundwork for a more just and peaceful world as envisaged by both the United Nations and the timeless teachings of the Buddha.

On behalf of the Editors:

Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu

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FOUNDATIONS OF FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING



THE TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY OF FORGIVENESS: INTEGRATING MINDFULNESS AND COMPASSION FOR HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

Most. Ven. Dr. Ashin Sumanacara*

Abstract:

This study delves into the transformative potential of forgiveness, mindfulness, and compassion as interconnected ethical, psychological, and spiritual practices for healing and reconciliation. Drawing on Buddhist teachings and contemporary frameworks, forgiveness is conceptualized as a multidimensional process addressing personal grievances, fostering interpersonal harmony, and strengthening community cohesion. The study synthesizes insights from Buddhist texts, including the *Sutta Piṭaka* and *Vinaya Piṭaka*, alongside psychological models, to develop a comprehensive framework for forgiveness.

Key themes include the role of forgiveness in interpersonal relationships, lay ethics, monastic discipline, and post-conflict societies. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* highlights forgiveness as integral to familial and social harmony, while the *Vinaya Piṭaka* underscores its importance in maintaining ethical discipline and reconciliation within monastic communities. These teachings frame forgiveness as a means to transcend anger, cultivate compassion, and promote societal harmony while balancing justice and accountability.

The stages of forgiveness are outlined as a dynamic journey, beginning with acknowledging harm and cultivating empathy, progressing through releasing resentment, and culminating in personal growth. Mindfulness practices, such as loving-kindness meditation and cognitive reframing, are presented as pivotal tools for fostering emotional regulation and enhancing compassion. Case studies from *Jātaka* tales illuminate forgiveness as a transformative act that fosters both personal liberation and collective well-being.

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Addressing challenges to forgiveness, the article proposes interventions tailored to psychological and cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of education and balancing forgiveness with accountability. It concludes by advocating for a mindfulness-based approach to forgiveness as a sustainable pathway to personal transformation, communal harmony, and societal healing in an increasingly fragmented world.

Keywords: *ethical discipline, emotional resilience, conflict resolution, interpersonal harmony, Buddhist psychology, restorative justice.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness, a profound and multifaceted concept, holds universal significance across cultures, religions, and philosophical traditions. More than an emotional release, it represents a conscious ethical choice with transformative potential for individuals and societies. Rooted in Buddhist teachings, forgiveness integrates with mindfulness and compassion, offering liberation from anger, resentment, and suffering.¹ Modern psychology has similarly positioned forgiveness as a core of emotional and relational well-being (Worthington, 2006). This article examines forgiveness as a dynamic process of personal and collective transformation, exploring its ethical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.

Mindfulness practices, central to Buddhism, foster non-reactivity and self-awareness, enabling individuals to address anger's root causes. When integrated with forgiveness practices like loving-kindness meditation, mindfulness provides tools for navigating emotional pain and achieving reconciliation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). These principles align with therapeutic models, underscoring the timeless relevance of Buddhist insights in contemporary contexts.

Ethically, forgiveness is foundational to both lay and monastic life. Lay ethics, as articulated in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, emphasize reconciliation as essential for familial and societal harmony. Monastic discipline, through practices like confession (*āpatti-desanā*) and the *Pāṭimokkha* recitation, reinforces forgiveness as a communal responsibility.

Buddhist narratives, such as the *Jātaka* tales, illustrate forgiveness through themes of patience (*khanti*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and non-hatred (*adosa*). These stories portray forgiveness as transformative, cultivating harmony, and breaking cycles of anger. Similarly, post-conflict contexts demonstrate its broader societal implications, with initiatives highlighting its potential for healing collective wounds.

This study aims to illuminate the transformative power of forgiveness, combining ancient wisdom with modern insights. By integrating ethical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions, forgiveness emerges as a tool for healing, fostering harmony, and promoting sustainable peace.

¹ *Dhp.* verse 5.

II. ETHICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness, as both an ethical virtue and a philosophical concept, lies at the heart of human relationships and spiritual growth. Among diverse religious and cultural traditions, forgiveness is celebrated as a transformative act that fosters reconciliation, alleviates suffering, and promotes harmony. In Buddhist thought, forgiveness extends beyond interpersonal conflicts, serving as a profound practice for overcoming anger, cultivating compassion, and breaking cycles of karmic reactivity. This section explores the diverse conceptualizations of forgiveness in religious and cultural contexts and examines its ethical underpinnings in light of the Buddhist doctrine of karma, highlighting its necessity for personal liberation and communal well-being.

2.1. Defining Forgiveness: Religious and Cultural Perspectives

Forgiveness, a universally valued concept, is deeply intertwined with the moral, cultural, and spiritual frameworks of human societies. While its manifestations differ across traditions, it consistently involves the conscious release of resentment and the cultivation of compassion. This shared essence serves as a bridge across diverse religious and cultural paradigms, emphasizing forgiveness as both a personal virtue and a means of societal harmony.

In Christianity, forgiveness is a cornerstone of spiritual and ethical life, reflecting the teachings of Jesus Christ. The instruction to forgive “seventy times seven”² underscores the boundless nature of forgiveness. It is not merely an interpersonal act but a reflection of divine grace, fostering spiritual reconciliation and communal renewal.³

Islam portrays forgiveness as an act of moral strength, aligning with the Almighty’s attributes as Al-Ghaffar (The Forgiving) and Al-Rahim (The Merciful). Forgiveness is framed as a path to personal and societal harmony, as illustrated in Surah Ash-Shura (42:40): “The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto; but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, their reward is due from Allah.” This principle highlights forgiveness as an intentional, compassionate choice, transcending cycles of vengeance (Ahmed 2018, 32).

Hinduism integrates forgiveness (*kṣamā*) into its spiritual and karmic worldview. Rooted in *ahimsā* (non-violence), forgiveness neutralizes negative karma and aligns individuals with *dharma* (cosmic law). The *Mahābhārata* glorifies forgiveness as the “weapon of the ascetic,” a force that fosters inner peace and spiritual liberation.⁴

In Buddhism, forgiveness is closely tied to the virtues of patience (*khanti*) and non-hatred (*adosa*). These qualities are essential for dismantling the reactive tendencies of anger (*dosa*) and nurturing wholesome mental states (*kusala-mūla*). Loving-kindness meditation plays a pivotal role in transforming hostility into

² Matthew 18:22.

³ Enright & Fitzgibbons 2015, 45.

⁴ Sharma (2003): 78.

goodwill.⁵ Forgiveness in Buddhism is further rooted in the principle of non-self (*anatta*), where releasing resentment becomes a path to inner peace and spiritual awakening.

Through these perspectives, forgiveness emerges as a dynamic process that transcends emotional responses, fostering personal growth and communal harmony.

2.2. Karma and the Ethical Necessity of Forgiveness

In Buddhist thought, the doctrine of karma (*kamma*) provides a profound ethical foundation for forgiveness. As intentional action (*cetanā*) shapes future consequences, harboring resentment perpetuates unwholesome cycles, while forgiveness interrupts these patterns, facilitating liberation from suffering (*dukkha*). The *Dhammapada* encapsulates this idea: “Hatred is never appeased by hatred. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is an eternal law”⁶

Forgiveness also plays a crucial role in dismantling dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*), the cyclical causation of suffering. The *Upanisa Sutta*⁷ explains how mindfulness and compassion sever the links of resentment and ill-will, paving the way for insight and liberation.⁸ From this perspective, forgiveness becomes an act of profound wisdom (*paññā*), transcending dualistic notions of self and other to foster clarity and peace.

By aligning ethical action with spiritual wisdom, forgiveness in Buddhist philosophy emerges as a holistic practice. It not only resolves interpersonal conflicts but also addresses the deeper roots of suffering, offering a transformative path toward enlightenment.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness holds significant psychological implications, offering a pathway for emotional healing and resilience. Rooted in Buddhist teachings and supported by modern psychological frameworks, forgiveness is presented as a mechanism to address the mental burdens of anger, resentment, guilt, and shame. By transforming these unwholesome mental states into empathy and self-compassion, forgiveness fosters inner peace and relational harmony. This section delves into the emotional toll of unresolved anger and resentment on mental health, as well as the transformative role of self-forgiveness in overcoming guilt and shame, highlighting how both are integral to personal growth and emotional well-being.

3.1. Emotional Impact of Anger and Resentment on Mental Health

Anger and resentment are potent emotional states with profound psychological and physiological consequences. In Buddhist psychology, these emotions are classified under *dosa* (hatred), one of the three unwholesome

⁵ Bodhi (2000): 146.

⁶ *Buddharakkhita* (1985): 3.

⁷ SN 12. 23.

⁸ Bodhi (2000), 567.

roots (*akusala-mūla*) that perpetuate suffering and disrupt inner peace.⁹ Anger is likened to a “blazing fire” in the *Dhammapada*, consuming mental clarity and emotional equilibrium. Modern psychological research corroborates these insights, demonstrating that chronic anger and resentment contribute to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Neuroscientific studies further reveal that prolonged resentment activates the amygdala, sustaining hyperarousal and undermining emotional regulation.¹⁰

This understanding aligns with Buddhist teachings on karmic cycles, which highlight how clinging to negative emotions reinforces patterns of mental suffering.¹¹ The *Abhidhamma* elaborates on resentment as a conditioned response that becomes habitual through unexamined thought patterns. Consequently, addressing the impact of anger requires both psychological interventions and ethical practices, such as mindfulness and the cultivation of patience (*khanti*) and non-anger (*adosa*). By reframing negative emotions through cognitive and meditative practices, individuals can break cycles of blame and retaliation, fostering emotional resilience and relational harmony.

3.2. Self-forgiveness: Overcoming Guilt and Shame

Self-forgiveness, distinct from forgiving others, involves releasing guilt and shame while fostering self-compassion. In Buddhist teachings, self-compassion forms the foundation for overcoming emotional turmoil. The *Rāhulovāda Sutta* (MN 62) exemplifies this, where the Buddha advises his son Rāhula to reflect mindfully on his actions, not as a source of guilt, but as an opportunity for ethical growth.¹²

Psychologically, guilt stems from violating moral standards, while shame reflects a negative self-evaluation. Both emotions can perpetuate cycles of self-blame and despair if unresolved.¹³ Self-forgiveness mitigates these effects by fostering acceptance and accountability without self-condemnation. Buddhist teachings on impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anattā*) reinforce this process, encouraging individuals to transcend fixed self-judgments and embrace transformation.

Research by Neff (2003) identifies three components of self-compassion—self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness—that alleviate self-critical tendencies and facilitate emotional healing. By integrating these elements, therapeutic frameworks align with Buddhist introspection practices, offering a comprehensive model for resolving guilt and cultivating self-acceptance. Ultimately, self-forgiveness serves as a bridge between psychological well-being and spiritual growth, empowering individuals to reframe past actions.

⁹ Wijeratne and Gethin (2007) 15.

¹⁰ Davidson (2003): 567.

¹¹ Bodhi (2000): 132.

¹² Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 527.

¹³ Tangney et al. (2005): 86.

IV. BARRIERS TO FORGIVENESS

The path to forgiveness, while transformative, is fraught with significant challenges. These barriers, both psychological and social, hinder individuals and communities from fully embracing forgiveness. This section explores the interplay of internal and external resistance, offering insights into overcoming these impediments through Buddhist teachings and modern psychological frameworks.

4.1. Psychological Obstacles: Ego, Pride, and Attachment

Psychological barriers such as ego (*ahañkāra*), pride (*māna*), and attachment (*lobha*) form foundational obstacles to forgiveness. In Buddhist psychology, the ego fosters the illusion of a permanent self (*attā*), leading individuals to perceive harm as a direct attack on their identity, thereby sustaining resentment.¹⁴ Similarly, pride amplifies resistance by reinforcing a sense of superiority or entitlement. The *Dhammapada* warns that pride “hardens the mind” and obstructs the cultivation of humility essential for reconciliation.¹⁵

Attachment complicates forgiveness by binding individuals to grievances and the desire for reconciliation. Clinical studies show that individuals with heightened ego-involvement often conflate their identity with the harm experienced, perpetuating cycles of anger and resentment (McCullough et al. 1997, 324). This narrative of victimhood creates psychological rigidity, distancing individuals from forgiveness’s transformative potential.

Addressing these barriers involves cultivating non-anger (*adosa*) and patience (*khanti*), both emphasized in Buddhist teachings as tools for neutralizing emotional reactivity. Integrating cognitive reframing with mindfulness-based practices helps dismantle these conditioned patterns, fostering resilience and emotional freedom.

4.2. Social Barriers: Cultural Norms and Expectations

Cultural norms and societal expectations also shape forgiveness practices, influencing whether forgiveness is encouraged or constrained. In collectivist cultures, forgiveness is often framed as a means of preserving social harmony but may be undermined by obligations to conform to communal expectations. Conversely, in individualistic cultures, forgiveness is viewed as a personal choice, often resisted when perceived as conflicting with self-interest.

Cultural narratives further complicate forgiveness, with some traditions glorifying vengeance or retribution as legitimate responses to harm. Religious and political ideologies also influence forgiveness practices. For example, post-conflict societies illustrate both the promise and challenges of institutionalized forgiveness. While such initiatives promote healing, they also highlight the complexities of navigating societal expectations in fostering reconciliation.¹⁶

¹⁴ Bodhi (2000): 164.

¹⁵ Buddhārakkhita (1985): 223.

¹⁶ Tutu (1999): 42.

4.3. Ethical Challenges in Unconditional Forgiveness

Buddhist teachings advocate unconditional forgiveness as a means of liberation from anger and resentment. The *Kodhana Sutta* (AN 7.60) critiques anger (*kodha*) as corrosive, urging practitioners to release it as an ethical imperative for personal and communal harmony. However, unconditional forgiveness raises questions about justice and accountability, particularly in cases of systemic harm or severe wrongdoing.

Forgiveness in Buddhism prioritizes the ethical transformation of the forgiver, as exemplified in the metaphor of anger being akin to holding a burning coal. Yet, scholars caution that forgiveness without accountability risks enabling harmful behavior. For instance, Murphy and Hampton argue that forgiveness must balance compassion with mechanisms to prevent harm and ensure justice.¹⁷

The *Cūḷagosinga Sutta* (MN 31) addresses this tension, presenting forgiveness as an act of discernment (*paññā*), where reconciliation requires ethical wisdom and mutual respect. Integrating forgiveness with practical justice ensures relational trust and the prevention of further harm, aligning with modern restorative justice frameworks.¹⁸

4.4. Strategies to Overcome Resistance to Forgiveness

Overcoming resistance to forgiveness requires addressing both psychological and social dimensions. Buddhist teachings offer practical tools, such as the cultivation of **loving-kindness** (*mettā*) and **compassion** (*karuṇā*), to soften emotional rigidity and foster forgiveness. Meditation practices that emphasize impermanence (*anicca*) and interdependence (*paṭicca samuppāda*) encourage individuals to release attachments to grievances, reframing forgiveness as a dynamic and transformative process.¹⁹

Modern interventions like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) complement these teachings, improving emotional regulation and empathy. Self-compassion practices, as outlined by Neff, highlight the importance of cultivating kindness toward oneself as a prerequisite for forgiving others.²⁰

Social strategies, including community dialogues and restorative justice initiatives, provide structured spaces for fostering mutual understanding and reconciliation. Incorporating forgiveness training into educational and institutional settings amplifies its impact, equipping individuals and communities with the resilience to navigate conflicts compassionately.

By addressing psychological, cultural, and ethical dimensions, these strategies pave the way for forgiveness to emerge as a transformative force for healing and societal harmony.

¹⁷ Murphy; Hampton (1988): 22.

¹⁸ Zehr (2002): 42.

¹⁹ Analayo (2003): 85.

²⁰ Neff (2003): 91.

V. FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION IN LAY ETHICS

Reconciliation in lay ethics, as emphasized in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, is a fundamentally relational practice rooted in ethical responsibilities and the cultivation of harmonious social dynamics. The *Sigālovāda Sutta*²¹, often called the “Layperson’s Code of Ethics,” and the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*²², which extends these principles to governance, offer a robust framework for understanding the interplay between forgiveness and reconciliation in both familial and societal contexts. These teachings emphasize forgiveness as an active commitment to harmony, underscoring its transformative role in resolving conflicts and fostering trust.

5.1. Reconciliation as a Familial and Social Ethic

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* establishes reconciliation as essential for maintaining familial harmony and societal cohesion. It outlines reciprocal responsibilities among parents, children, spouses, and friends, advocating for mutual care and respect to prevent conflicts and promote relational stability. For example, parents are encouraged to provide guidance and material support to their children, while children are urged to reciprocate with respect and gratitude. This balanced dynamic prevents grievances from festering and fosters an environment where reconciliation arises naturally as a means of restoring trust.

Forgiveness in this framework is not a passive acceptance of wrongdoing, but a proactive process that involves empathy and shared responsibility. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* emphasizes addressing conflicts with understanding and ethical behavior, highlighting the interconnectedness of human relationships and the importance of relational equilibrium. These teachings remain relevant today, offering practical guidance for fostering harmony in diverse social contexts.²³

5.2. Governance and Ethical Reconciliation

The *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* expands the principles of reconciliation into the domain of ethical governance. The ideal ruler, as portrayed in this *Sutta*, embodies qualities of forgiveness, compassion, and wisdom, mediating disputes and addressing the root causes of conflict. This vision of leadership emphasizes non-retaliation (*ahiṃsā*) as a pragmatic strategy for ensuring peace and stability. Instead of punitive retribution, the ruler is tasked with fostering justice through understanding and reconciliation.

Forgiveness in governance, as described in this *Sutta*, is both a moral virtue and a practical tool for sustaining societal harmony. It aligns with contemporary restorative justice models, which prioritize repairing relationships over punishment. These frameworks show how forgiveness can address historical grievances while fostering collective healing.²⁴ By situating reconciliation

²¹ DN 31.

²² DN 26.

²³ Walshe (1987): 462.

²⁴ Zehr (2002): 42; Tutu (1999): 273.

within a broader ethical and political framework, the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* underscores the transformative power of forgiveness in leadership.

5.3. Psychological Dimensions of Reconciliation

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* and *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* also emphasize the psychological benefits of forgiveness and reconciliation. Anger (*kodha*) and resentment (*upanāha*) are identified as primary obstacles to relational harmony. Buddhist teachings advocate for cultivating ethical conduct (*sīla*) and wholesome intentions (*kusala cetanā*) to dissolve these mental defilements, creating the conditions necessary for reconciliation.

Modern psychological research supports these insights. Empathy and emotional regulation are highlighted by studies as key factors in resolving conflicts and promoting forgiveness. For example, Hofmann et al. note that compassion-based practices enhance emotional resilience, enabling individuals to transcend anger and achieve reconciliation.²⁵ These findings mirror the *Suttas'* teachings, which advocate for reconciliation as both an emotional and ethical practice grounded in mutual understanding and respect.

5.4. The Communal Dimensions of Forgiveness

Forgiveness, as described in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, is not solely an individual act, but a communal practice that strengthens social bonds and fosters collective well-being. By fulfilling reciprocal duties and engaging in acts of mutual care, individuals contribute to a broader relational ethic, where reconciliation becomes integral to ethical living.

This perspective reflects the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*), which underscores the interconnectedness of all phenomena. Ethical actions, such as forgiveness and reconciliation, reverberate across the social fabric, creating a ripple effect that enhances communal harmony. As Gethin observes, the collective flourishing of families and communities depends on shared ethical responsibilities and the cultivation of virtues that promote harmony and trust.²⁶

VI. Forgiveness in the Vinaya: Ethical Discipline and Harmony

The *Vinaya Piṭaka*, a central division of the Buddhist canon, provides a comprehensive framework for monastic discipline that fosters ethical conduct, communal harmony, and spiritual growth. Its primary goal is to ensure orderly living within the *Saṅgha* (monastic community), while also offering structured principles for forgiveness, reconciliation, and mindful interaction. These practices are pivotal in fostering an environment conducive to ethical purification and collective well-being.

6.1. Principles of Apology and Forgiveness in the Monastic Community

The practice of *āpatti-desanā* (confession) exemplifies the Buddha's emphasis on fostering unity and reconciliation within the *Saṅgha*. Confession

²⁵ Hofmann et al. (2011): 114.

²⁶ Gethin (1998): 201.

rituals encourage monks and nuns to acknowledge their faults and seek forgiveness, promoting self-awareness and ethical purification.

For instance, the *Mahāvagga* (*Vin* Vol. 1) outlines that minor transgressions should be confessed to prevent unresolved grievances from disrupting harmony.²⁷ Shayne Clarke highlights that these practices serve not only as individual acts of repentance but as collective practices reinforcing communal bonds and harmony.²⁸ This approach reflects the reparative rather than punitive nature of monastic ethics.

6.2. The *Pācittiya* Rules: Avoiding Harm and Managing Anger

The *Pācittiya* section of the *Vinaya* specifies rules aimed at preventing discord within the monastic communities (*Saṅgha*). These include prohibitions against harsh speech, gossip, and holding grudges—behaviors that disrupt collective harmony. For instance, *Pācittiya* Rule 2 forbids abusive language, emphasizing constructive communication as an antidote to conflict.²⁹

Modern interpretations align these rules with contemporary conflict resolution strategies. Daniel Goleman identifies emotional self-regulation and effective communication as key to resolving interpersonal disputes.³⁰ The *Pācittiya* rules encompass this wisdom, cultivating an environment where forgiveness and mindfulness flourish.

6.3. *Saṅghakamma*: Formal Acts of Reconciliation

Saṅghakamma procedures, or formal acts of the *Saṅgha*, institutionalize reconciliation and forgiveness. These acts, including the *pabbājaniya-kamma* (Act of Expulsion), guide monks in resolving disputes through mutual respect and dialogue.³¹

Carolyn R. Marvin underscores the procedural fairness of *Saṅghakamma*, noting that these practices reinforce both the ethical and spiritual integrity of the monastic community.³² By prioritizing reconciliation over punishment, the *Saṅgha* models restorative principles that remain relevant to modern justice frameworks.

6.4. The *Pāṭimokkha* Recitation: A Ritual of Ethical Reflection

The biweekly *Pāṭimokkha* recitation serves as a fundamental pillar of monastic discipline, enabling monks and nuns to reaffirm their commitment to the monastic code. This ritual also provides an opportunity to address unresolved conflicts through confession and forgiveness.³³

²⁷ Horner (1949): 137.

²⁸ Shayne Clarke (2014): 98.

²⁹ *Vin* Vol. 3: 34.

³⁰ Daniel Goleman (1995): 156.

³¹ *Vin* Vol. 2: 198.

³² Carolyn R. Marvin (2001): 214.

³³ *Vin* Vol. 3: 52.

Richard Gombrich observes that the *Pāṭimokkha* is both a disciplinary and spiritual exercise, fostering accountability, mindfulness, and ethical integrity.³⁴ Its emphasis on mutual respect and transparency underscores the Buddha's vision of a harmonious and forgiving monastic community.

6.5. Expelling and Readmitting Monks: Accountability and Redemption

The *Vinaya* includes procedures for expelling and readmitting monks who violate the monastic code, balancing accountability with opportunities for redemption. Sincere repentance and a commitment to reform are prerequisites for readmission, reflecting the Buddha's belief in the transformative power of forgiveness.³⁵

Stephen Batchelor highlights this pragmatic approach, noting that forgiveness in the *Vinaya* is not unconditional but requires genuine effort to restore ethical integrity.³⁶ This balance ensures that forgiveness supports both individual growth and communal harmony.

6.6. Right Speech and the Avoidance of Gossip

The emphasis on right speech (*sammā vācā*) in the *Vinaya* underscores the role of constructive communication in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation. Monks are advised to avoid gossip and divisive speech, which perpetuate resentment and disrupt harmony.³⁷

Marshall Rosenberg in *Nonviolent Communication* parallels these teachings, advocating for mindful communication as a foundation for empathy and trust.³⁸ By practicing right speech, the *Saṅgha* embodies the principles of mindful interaction and relational healing.

6.7. Mutual Dependence (Nissaya)

The principle of *nissaya* (mutual dependence) emphasizes the interconnectedness of monastic members. This interdependence fosters a culture of empathy, cooperation, and shared spiritual growth.

David Kalupahana notes that *nissaya* reflects the Buddha's understanding of the relational nature of human existence, where forgiveness and collaboration are essential for collective well-being.³⁹ This principle highlights the role of the *Saṅgha* as a microcosm of ethical and harmonious living.

Through its emphasis on confession, reconciliation, and mutual dependence, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* offers a timeless framework for fostering ethical discipline and harmony within the monastic community. These practices, rooted in forgiveness and accountability, resonate with both Buddhist spiritual ideals and contemporary approaches to conflict resolution and communal well-being.

³⁴ Richard Gombrich (2006): 123).

³⁵ *Vin* Vol. 2: 235.

³⁶ Stephen Batchelor (1997): 98.

³⁷ *Vin* Vol. 3: 74.

³⁸ Marshall Rosenberg (2003): 45.

³⁹ David Kalupahana (1992): 185.

VII. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MINDFULNESS IN FORGIVENESS

Mindfulness, a foundation of Buddhist practice, provides profound insights into the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation. By cultivating non-reactivity and heightened self-awareness, mindfulness addresses the root causes of anger and resentment, promoting both personal transformation and relational harmony. Its integration into modern therapeutic frameworks highlights its enduring relevance across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

7.1. Emotional Healing Through Mindfulness-Based Practices

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, exemplifies the therapeutic application of Buddhist mindfulness principles. Practices such as body scans, mindful breathing, and meditative exercises enhance emotional resilience and awareness. These techniques parallel mindfulness training in Buddhist canonical texts, emphasizing the regulation of emotional reactivity and cognitive flexibility. Kabat-Zinn highlights mindfulness as fostering a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, creating conditions essential for forgiveness to arise.⁴⁰

Empirical studies substantiate the psychological benefits of mindfulness in facilitating forgiveness. For example, Shapiro et al. found that MBSR participants reported significant reductions in anger and enhanced empathy toward adversaries.⁴¹ Similarly, Neff demonstrates that mindfulness practices foster self-compassion, enabling individuals to reframe experiences of pain and injustice⁴². Survivors of interpersonal trauma engaging in mindfulness training reported reduced post-traumatic stress symptoms and increased willingness to forgive, reflecting the transformative psychological dimensions of mindfulness as articulated in Buddhist teachings.

7.2. Mindfulness in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: A Framework for Forgiveness

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* offers a comprehensive framework for mindfulness as a transformative practice.⁴³ Observing thoughts, emotions, and intentions without attachment or aversion helps practitioners cultivate awareness that interrupts chains of anger and resentment. By focusing on the impermanence (*anicca*) of all phenomena, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* encourages practitioners to release destructive emotions and foster forgiveness as both an ethical and psychological tool.

The four foundations of mindfulness—body (*kāyānupassanā*), feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), mind (*cittānupassanā*), and mental objects (*dhammānupassanā*)—provide specific strategies for addressing emotional distress. Observing feelings and mental states enables individuals to identify the arising of anger or resentment without becoming entangled in them. Hofmann

⁴⁰ Kabat-Zinn (1990): 221.

⁴¹ Shapiro et al. (2006): 124.

⁴² Neff (2003).

⁴³ MN 10.

et al. argue that mindfulness enhances emotional regulation by reducing the intensity and duration of negative affect, reinforcing the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*'s focus on non-reactivity and insight.⁴⁴

7.3. Forgiveness through Non-Reactivity and Compassion

Forgiveness, as cultivated through mindfulness, is an active process of transformation. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* highlights the conditioned nature of emotions like anger and resentment, framing them as impermanent rather than inherent aspects of selfhood.⁴⁵ Recognizing this impermanence undermines attachment to grievances, enabling individuals to replace destructive emotions with compassion and understanding.

Harvey emphasizes that mindfulness facilitates forgiveness by breaking the cycle of emotional reactivity and fostering reflective insight into the causes of suffering.⁴⁶ This reflective approach alleviates personal distress and cultivates empathy and mutual understanding – essential components of reconciliation.

7.4. Ethical and Relational Implications

Mindfulness, as presented in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, integrates ethical and relational dimensions, emphasizing interconnectedness (*paṭicca samuppāda*).⁴⁷ Observing interpersonal conflicts through the lens of non-self (*anattā*) dissolves the illusion of a fixed self, reducing blame and fostering humility. Gethin observes that this understanding promotes forgiveness as a practice grounded in ethical integrity and relational harmony.⁴⁸

Beyond personal healing, mindfulness contributes to collective well-being by fostering non-reactivity and compassion. These insights offer a timeless blueprint for addressing relational complexities, illustrating the transformative potential of mindfulness in reconciliation.

7.5. Contemporary Applications of Mindfulness-Based Forgiveness

Mindfulness has gained prominence in modern psychological interventions, particularly in addressing anger, anxiety, and interpersonal conflict. Programs like MBSR and MBCT integrate mindfulness practices to enhance emotional regulation and promote forgiveness. Kabat-Zinn describes mindfulness as a “radical act of love and kindness toward oneself,” emphasizing its foundational role in extending forgiveness to others.⁴⁹

These contemporary adaptations resonate with Buddhist teachings, highlighting mindfulness's universal applicability as a tool for emotional healing. By integrating mindfulness into therapeutic and relational practices, individuals and communities can harness its transformative power to overcome anger, foster empathy, and build harmonious relationships.

⁴⁴ Hofmann et al (2011): 114.

⁴⁵ MN 10.

⁴⁶ Harvey (2000): 67

⁴⁷ MN 10.

⁴⁸ Gethin (1998): 172.

⁴⁹ Kabat-Zinn (1990): 22.

VIII. THE AṄGULIMĀLA NARRATIVE: COMPASSION'S TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

The story of Aṅgulimāla, as recounted in the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, offers a profound example of the transformative potential of forgiveness, compassion, and mindfulness.⁵⁰ Born as Ahiṃsaka (the harmless one), Aṅgulimāla becomes a notorious bandit due to circumstances that distort his moral compass. The Buddha's compassionate intervention redeems him, illustrating the profound Buddhist principles of human potential for moral renewal, the futility of retribution, and the healing power of compassion.

8.1. Ethical Dimensions: Forgiveness as Redemption

The Buddha's interaction with Aṅgulimāla exemplifies the Buddhist ideals of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *khanti* (patience). Rather than condemning him, the Buddha approaches Aṅgulimāla with equanimity, enabling his transformation into a monk and eventual attainment of Arahantship. This narrative underscores the Buddhist rejection of retributive justice in favor of restorative principles that prioritize understanding, accountability, and moral renewal.

Forgiveness in this context is not a passive concession, but an active process of healing that benefits both victim and perpetrator. By extending compassion to Aṅgulimāla, the Buddha disrupts the cycle of harm, presenting a model for ethical leadership rooted in reconciliation rather than vengeance. This approach resonates with contemporary restorative justice frameworks, which emphasize repairing harm and reintegration over punitive measures.

8.2. Psychological Dimensions: Insights from Transformation

Aṅgulimāla's transformation highlights the psychological liberation inherent in forgiveness. The Buddha's statement, "I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla; you stop too," forces the bandit to confront the futility of his actions. This moment of mindfulness facilitates Aṅgulimāla's journey of self-awareness and repentance, enabling him to renounce violence and pursue spiritual awakening. The narrative aligns with mindfulness-based interventions, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which encourage individuals to break destructive patterns by fostering emotional regulation and resilience.

Additionally, Aṅgulimāla's story reflects the importance of overcoming guilt and shame. Guided by the Buddha's teachings, his monastic practice transforms remorse (*kukkucca*) into a catalyst for ethical growth, mirroring contemporary psychological theories that link self-compassion to healing and well-being.⁵¹ This interplay of mindfulness, self-reflection, and ethical commitment demonstrates forgiveness as a dynamic process of psychological and spiritual renewal.

8.3. Philosophical Dimensions: Rethinking Justice

The *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* invites reflection on the nature of justice and the

⁵⁰ MN 86.

⁵¹ Neff (2003).

balance between accountability and compassion. The Buddha's refusal to condemn Aṅgulimāla exemplifies a karmic perspective that views human behavior as influenced by dynamic conditions rather than fixed traits. By guiding Aṅgulimāla toward ethical living, the Buddha fosters positive *kamma*, illustrating a rehabilitative approach that transforms harm into healing.

This philosophical outlook emphasizes *paṭicca samuppāda* (dependent origination), highlighting the interdependent nature of individual actions and societal harmony. Aṅgulimāla's transformation not only alleviates his suffering but also restores peace within the community, reflecting the Buddhist principle of *Saṅgha* (community) as a collective entity thriving on ethical conduct and compassion.

8.4. Modern Implications: Lessons for Justice and Rehabilitation

The Aṅgulimāla narrative offers timeless insights for modern justice and rehabilitation systems:

i. Restorative Justice: Addressing the root causes of harmful behavior and fostering opportunities for offenders to make amends reflects the principles demonstrated in the Buddha's intervention.

ii. Rehabilitation Over Retribution: Aṅgulimāla's transformation challenges punitive justice systems, showcasing the potential for moral renewal when guidance and support are provided.

iii. Mindfulness-Based Interventions: The role of mindfulness in Aṅgulimāla's awakening underscores its value as a tool for emotional regulation and ethical development, aligning with contemporary practices like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy.

The story of Aṅgulimāla serves as a profound reminder of the human capacity for change. Through compassion, forgiveness, and mindfulness, even the most entrenched cycles of harm can be interrupted, fostering individual and collective healing.

IX. FORGIVENESS AND COMPASSION: CASE STUDIES FROM THE JĀTAKA TALES

The *Jātaka* tales, recounting the Buddha's past lives, provide timeless lessons on forgiveness as an ethical, psychological, and philosophical virtue. This section examines three key stories—the *Khantivādi Jātaka*⁵², *Sāma Jātaka*,⁵³ and *Mahā-Ummagga Jātaka*⁵⁴—to explore their insights into forgiveness and their relevance to contemporary moral and psychological frameworks.

Case Study 1: Khantivādi Jātaka – The Supreme Practice of Patience

The *Khantivādi Jātaka* epitomizes the virtue of *khanti* (patience) as foundational to forgiveness.⁵⁵ In this tale, the Bodhisatta, as an ascetic, endures

⁵² *Ja* 313.

⁵³ *Ja* 540.

⁵⁴ *Ja* 546.

⁵⁵ *Ja* 313.

extreme physical suffering inflicted by King Kalābu. Despite this, he responds with equanimity, explaining that his patience resides deeply in his heart, beyond the reach of physical harm.

This narrative underscores forgiveness as an ethical strength. The Bodhisatta's refusal to retaliate exemplifies *adosa* (non-hatred), breaking cycles of vengeance and suffering. By forgiving the king, the Bodhisatta demonstrates that true strength lies in transcending anger and fostering peace. Philosophically, this tale illustrates the conquest of defilements (*kilesa*) such as anger and hatred, aligning with the Buddhist principles of *anattā* (non-self) and *anicca* (impermanence).

Psychologically, the tale highlights emotional resilience, as the Bodhisatta reframes suffering as an opportunity for inner growth. This mirrors cognitive-behavioral approaches that encourage reinterpreting adversity to foster psychological well-being.

Case Study 2: Sāma Jātaka – Forgiveness Through Compassion

The *Sāma Jātaka* narrates the story of Prince *Sāma*, who selflessly cares for his blind parents.⁵⁶ When King Piliyakkha mistakenly shoots *Sāma* with an arrow, *Sāma* forgives the king and pleads for his parents' well-being, exemplifying *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness).

This tale highlights forgiveness as an extension of interdependence (*paṭicca samuppāda*). *Sāma*'s actions reflect the understanding that anger perpetuates harm, whereas forgiveness restores harmony. Ethically, his compassion underscores the Buddhist ideal of prioritizing relational harmony over personal grievances.

Psychologically, *Sāma*'s ability to empathize with the king fosters emotional healing. His forgiveness preempts the burden of unresolved anger, aligning with trauma recovery frameworks, where forgiveness facilitates closure and inner peace. Philosophically, *Sāma*'s actions emphasize that forgiveness transcends individual grievances, contributing to collective well-being and advancing spiritual liberation (*nibbāna*).

Case Study 3: Mahā-Ummagga Jātaka – Wisdom in Forgiveness

The *Mahā-Ummagga Jātaka* showcases Mahosadha, the Bodhisatta, as a wise mediator who resolves conflicts through forgiveness and discernment.⁵⁷ By uncovering deception and fostering reconciliation, Mahosadha demonstrates forgiveness as a pragmatic tool for justice.

This tale underscores the role of *paññā* (wisdom) in guiding forgiveness. Mahosadha's approach balances compassion with discernment to ensure ethical outcomes, aligning with the Buddhist principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-harming). His actions reflect the relational and strategic dimensions of forgiveness, resolving the root causes of conflict without enabling harm.

⁵⁶ Ja 540.

⁵⁷ Ja 546.

Psychologically, Mahosadha exemplifies emotional intelligence, skillfully navigating interpersonal dynamics to foster trust and cooperation. Philosophically, these narrative positions forgiveness as a cornerstone of ethical leadership, where rulers prioritize collective harmony over personal interests.

Insights from the Jātaka Tales

Together, these tales highlight forgiveness as an ethical commitment, a method for emotional healing, and a pathway to societal harmony. The *Khantivādi Jātaka* reveals the power of patience in overcoming anger; the *Sāma Jātaka* emphasizes compassion in fostering reconciliation; and the *Mahā-Ummagga Jātaka* underscores the role of wisdom in achieving ethical justice. These narratives resonate across cultural and temporal contexts, illustrating forgiveness as a transformative virtue with enduring relevance.

X. APPLICATIONS IN MODERN CONTEXTS

Forgiveness and mindful reconciliation extend their transformative impact beyond personal healing, influencing interpersonal relationships, societal harmony, and broader psychological well-being. Grounded in Buddhist ethical frameworks, these practices offer practical solutions for resolving conflicts, fostering empathy, and creating sustainable peace.

10.1. Forgiveness in Interpersonal Relationships

In interpersonal contexts, forgiveness plays a crucial role in resolving emotional and psychological grievances, promoting understanding and relational harmony. The *Sigālovāda Sutta*⁵⁸ emphasizes mutual respect and non-retaliation as foundational to maintaining familial and communal well-being.⁵⁹ Similarly, modern frameworks, such as Worthington's REACH model, highlight forgiveness as a conscious process involving empathy, commitment, and emotional regulation.⁶⁰

In romantic relationships, forgiveness restores trust and intimacy. Studies by McCullough et al. reveal that forgiving partners experience greater relational satisfaction and emotional resilience.⁶¹ These findings resonate with Buddhist teachings, such as those in the *Kakacūpama Sutta*⁶², which stress patience and non-retaliation even in the face of perceived injustice.⁶³

Mindfulness practices, including loving-kindness meditation, enhance forgiveness by fostering empathy and reducing emotional reactivity. These practices reflect the Buddhist concept of interdependence (*paṭicca samuppāda*), reinforcing the idea that forgiving others promotes inner peace and mutual healing.

⁵⁸ DN 31.

⁵⁹ Walshe (1987): 467.

⁶⁰ Worthington (2006): 128.

⁶¹ McCullough et al. (2003): 347.

⁶² MN 21.

⁶³ Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 224.

10.2. Forgiveness in Post-Conflict Societies and Restorative Justice

In post-conflict societies, forgiveness springs up as a transformative tool for addressing historical grievances and fostering communal healing. Buddhist principles, such as compassion (*karuṇā*) and non-anger (*adosa*), provide a framework for reconciliation. The *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*⁶⁴ underscores the importance of compassionate leadership and ethical governance in promoting justice and harmony.⁶⁵

Restorative justice models, like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), demonstrate how forgiveness fosters national healing by addressing systemic harm through dialogue and accountability.⁶⁶ These initiatives reflect Buddhist ideals, emphasizing reconciliation over retribution.

Historical precedents, such as the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*⁶⁷ highlight the Buddha's emphasis on mutual respect and harmony within the monastic community, offering a blueprint for modern reconciliation practices.⁶⁸ However, forgiveness in post-conflict contexts must balance accountability with compassion to prevent injustices from being perpetuated. Integrating Buddhist principles with reparative frameworks ensures that forgiveness contributes to justice and healing.

10.3. Psychological and Social Implications of Mindful Reconciliation

Mindfulness extends forgiveness into a broader framework of emotional and social healing. Rooted in Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), mindful reconciliation encourages self-awareness and empathy, essential for resolving personal and collective grievances. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*⁶⁹ describes mindfulness as a tool for observing mental states and fostering emotional balance, critical for reconciliation.⁷⁰

Psychological research supports the role of mindfulness in enhancing forgiveness. Mindfulness-based interventions, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), reduce emotional reactivity and cognitive distortions, fostering a greater capacity for self-forgiveness and interpersonal healing.⁷¹ These practices align with Buddhist principles of impermanence (*anicca*), helping individuals let go of self-centered attachments and embrace forgiveness as a dynamic process.

Socially, mindfulness-based reconciliation strengthens communities by fostering mutual understanding. Practices like community meditation and conflict resolution workshops reflect Buddhist principles of *Saṅgha* (monastic

⁶⁴ DN 26.

⁶⁵ Walshe (1987) 394.

⁶⁶ Tutu (1999): 273.

⁶⁷ DN 16.

⁶⁸ Walshe (1987): 245.

⁶⁹ MN 10.

⁷⁰ Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 146.

⁷¹ Kabat-Zinn (1990): 117.

community) as spaces for collective healing. For example, the *Cūḷagosinga Sutta*⁷² portrays a harmonious community thriving on mutual respect and ethical values.⁷³

Innovative movements, such as Mindfulness for Social Justice, extend these principles to address systemic inequalities. By fostering awareness of structural injustices, mindfulness practices inspire collective action and create pathways for societal transformation.⁷⁴ These efforts echo the Buddhist commitment to alleviating suffering in all forms, emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal and societal healing.

XI. DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK

The integration of forgiveness and mindfulness offers a transformative approach to healing at psychological, emotional, and spiritual levels. A comprehensive framework for forgiveness necessitates identifying stages of emotional and spiritual growth, embedding mindfulness practices, and addressing inherent limitations. This section synthesizes insights from Buddhist teachings and contemporary scholarship to present a holistic model.

11.1. Stages of Forgiveness: Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives

Forgiveness unfolds as a dynamic process encompassing distinct stages rooted in both psychological theories and Buddhist spiritual practices. Psychologically, models like Worthington's REACH framework outline steps such as recalling the hurt, empathizing with the offender, offering altruistic forgiveness, committing to forgive, and sustaining that commitment.⁷⁵ These steps emphasize emotional regulation and cognitive reframing, core components mirrored in Buddhist mindfulness teachings.

From a spiritual standpoint, forgiveness transcends personal grievances and seeks liberation from attachment and aversion. The *Dvedhāvitaṅga Sutta* highlights how wholesome thoughts counteract anger and resentment, fostering inner peace.⁷⁶ Buddhist mindfulness practices (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*) guide individuals through key stages:

i. Acknowledgment and Reflection: Recognizing harm and the associated emotional pain.

ii. Empathy and Compassion: Understanding the offender's perspective through loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*).

iii. Release and Non-Attachment: Letting go of anger, guided by the principle of impermanence (*anicca*).

iv. Integration and Growth: Internalizing forgiveness as a practice of self-compassion and extending it to others.

⁷² MN 31.

⁷³ Nāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 280.

⁷⁴ Klein (2016): 213.

⁷⁵ Worthington (2006): 45.

⁷⁶ MN 19.

This stage-based approach positions forgiveness as an ongoing journey requiring sustained effort and mindfulness, fostering resilience and spiritual maturity.

11.2. Integrating Mindfulness and Forgiveness into Holistic Healing

Mindfulness bridges the gap between forgiveness and holistic healing by addressing interconnected dimensions of mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*⁷⁷ provides a systematic method for observing emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations without attachment.⁷⁸

Empirical research supports the therapeutic potential of mindfulness in fostering forgiveness. Mindfulness-based interventions enhance emotional regulation and empathy, creating the mental space necessary for reconciliation.⁷⁹ Key strategies include:

i. Mindful Observation: Recognizing emotional triggers without judgment.

ii. Compassion Practices: Using *mettā* and *karuṇā* meditations to foster empathy and resilience.

iii. Reframing Narratives: Viewing past conflicts as opportunities for growth.

iv. Community Engagement: Promoting collective healing through group meditations and discussions.

The integration of mindfulness and forgiveness in healthcare, education, and community programs demonstrates its versatility. By addressing the root causes of emotional distress such as anger and guilt, mindfulness-based forgiveness contributes to comprehensive healing.

11.3. Overcoming Limitations in Forgiveness Practices

Despite its potential, forgiveness encounters several barriers. Psychological obstacles, such as entrenched resentment and fear of vulnerability, hinder individuals from embracing forgiveness. The *Kakacūpama Sutta*⁸⁰ emphasizes patience (*khanti*) and repeated practice to gradually overcome these challenges.⁸¹

Cultural and social factors also shape forgiveness practices. In collectivist cultures, forgiveness may be viewed as a communal obligation, potentially undermining its authenticity. Conversely, in individualistic societies, it may be perceived as a sign of weakness. Addressing these variations requires a balanced approach that respects cultural diversity while emphasizing the universal benefits of forgiveness.

Strategies for overcoming these barriers include:

⁷⁷ MN 10.

⁷⁸ Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 145.

⁷⁹ Kabat-Zinn (1990): 112.

⁸⁰ MN 21.

⁸¹ Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995): 223.

i. Education and Awareness: Highlighting psychological and spiritual benefits of forgiveness through empirical evidence.

ii. Tailored Interventions: Adapting forgiveness practices to align with cultural and individual needs.

iii. Balancing Justice and Forgiveness: Ensuring that accountability complements forgiveness.

Emerging research on neuroplasticity offers promising insights. Studies show that regular mindfulness practices can rewire the brain to enhance emotional regulation and reduce the impact of past traumas. Integrating such findings into forgiveness models bridges traditional wisdom and modern science, opening new avenues for interdisciplinary collaboration.

XII. CONCLUSION

The central aim of this study has been to explore forgiveness as a transformative practice deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings and enriched through mindfulness. By examining forgiveness across ethical, psychological, and societal dimensions, the article highlights its role as an active and conscious process that fosters inner peace, reconciliation, and collective harmony. Drawing insights from canonical Buddhist texts and contemporary therapeutic frameworks, forgiveness emerges as a liberating practice that addresses suffering and cultivates sustainable resilience in both personal and societal contexts.

The study begins by emphasizing the foundational relationship between forgiveness and mindfulness, showing how practices like Loving-kindness Meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) and Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) enhance emotional regulation and enable individuals to let go of anger and resentment. These practices bridge traditional Buddhist wisdom with modern therapeutic approaches, demonstrating their universal applicability in addressing emotional challenges.

Ethical dimensions of forgiveness were examined through Buddhist teachings, such as the *Sigālovāda Sutta* and the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*, which underscore its importance in sustaining familial harmony and ethical governance. In monastic contexts, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* provides structured practices like confession (*āpatti-desanā*) and communal rituals that promote accountability and foster reconciliation. Together, these teachings present forgiveness as a cornerstone of ethical living and spiritual integrity.

Psychologically, forgiveness was analyzed as a mechanism for healing and growth. Buddhist concepts such as *dosa* (anger) and *khanti* (patience) were linked to emotional resilience and well-being. Case studies from the *Jātaka* tales, such as the *Khantivādī Jātaka* and *Sāma Jātaka*, illuminated forgiveness as a transformative force that transcends personal grievances, cultivating compassion and wisdom in both interpersonal and societal contexts.

Societal implications of forgiveness were explored in post-conflict scenarios, where Buddhist principles of reconciliation provide a framework for restorative justice. Examples such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

illustrate how forgiveness, when paired with dialogue and accountability, fosters healing and national unity. Addressing challenges to forgiveness, the article also proposed strategies such as mindfulness-based interventions to overcome psychological and cultural barriers, emphasizing the transformative potential of forgiveness for bridging divides and rebuilding trust.

This analysis contributes significantly to scholarship in ethics, psychology, and conflict resolution by integrating Buddhist teachings with contemporary frameworks. Ethically, it positions forgiveness as a relational practice that fosters empathy and reconciliation. Psychologically, it highlights mindfulness as a tool for addressing trauma and enhancing relational well-being. Societally, forgiveness is presented as a cornerstone for resolving conflicts and fostering collective healing, offering a viable alternative to punitive justice models.

While this study focuses primarily on Buddhist teachings and their integration with therapeutic models, further research could explore forgiveness across diverse cultural and religious traditions to provide a more global perspective. Investigating the neurological mechanisms underlying forgiveness and mindfulness could also deepen understanding of their psychological benefits. Additionally, future studies could examine forgiveness as a tool for addressing systemic issues, such as inequality and historical injustices, while expanding its application in education, healthcare, and community programs.

Forgiveness, as explored in this article, stands as a profound practice that bridges the personal, relational, and societal realms. Rooted in mindfulness and compassion, it offers a transformative pathway to healing and liberation, addressing the emotional and ethical challenges of modern life. Forgiveness provides a timeless foundation for creating sustainable harmony, resilience, and collective well-being.

Abbreviations

AN:	Aṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses of the Buddha)
Dhp:	Dhammapada (<i>Verses on the Dharma</i> or <i>The Path of the Teaching</i>)
DN:	Dīgha Nikāya (Long Discourses of the Buddha)
Ja:	Jātaka (Stories of the Buddha's Previous Lives)
MN:	Majjhima Nikāya (Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha)
SN:	Saṃyutta Nikāya (Connected Discourses of the Buddha)
Vin:	Vinaya Pitaka (Disciplinary Code of Monastic Rules)
MBSR:	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
MBCT:	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
PTSD:	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
TRC:	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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BUDDHIST REFLECTION ON FORGIVENESS AND ITS RELEVANCE TO PATIENCE AND LOVING-KINDNESS

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Abstract:

This paper explores the Buddhist perspective on forgiveness and its connection to patience and loving-kindness. Forgiveness, a universally valued concept, is examined in the context of major world religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, as well as within the Buddhist monastic code (Vinaya-piṭaka). While theistic religions associate forgiveness with divine grace, Buddhism emphasizes personal effort, patience, and loving-kindness as key components of the forgiveness process. The research focuses on methods outlined in the Sutta-piṭaka and Visuddhimagga, such as self-reflection, recollection of others' behaviors, understanding karma and rebirth, contemplation of the elements, and giving gifts. Additionally, the study highlights the Buddha's own experiences with patience and tolerance in both his present and past lives. The findings reveal that Buddhist forgiveness is deeply intertwined with patience and loving-kindness, which serve as essential tools for eradicating anger and cultivating compassion. The discussion also underscores that certain forgiveness practices extend beyond religious boundaries, offering a universal ethical approach applicable to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

Keywords: *Buddhism, forgiveness, patience, loving-kindness, Sutta-piṭaka, Vinaya-piṭaka, karma, rebirth, mindfulness, compassion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is a concept that received great attention during the last few centuries all over the world. Religions were the key players on the subject of forgiveness and forbearance regardless of theistic and atheistic bifurcation

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of religious traditions. Buddhism, an ancient Indian religion, successfully spread all over Asia with necessary changes considering their existing cultural traditions. Nonetheless, its modern sub-traditions namely Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, forgiveness is a foremost concept discussed as a part and partial of the *khanti* in Pali (*kṣānti* in Sanskrit). *Khanti* is directly appreciated as an essential part of the path of the nirvana and identified under the perception in Mahayana and Theravada traditions. There is nothing better than patience. The Dictionary of the Pali Text Society, *Khanti* translates into English as patience, forbearance, and forgiveness.¹ *Titikkhā, khamā, khamanatā, khamanasīla, sahati, marisati* etc. are used for forgiveness and forgive in Pali. The problem should be raised as to why the Buddhist notion of forgiveness is highly associated with patience and loving-kindness. Further, what are the methods used to develop forgiveness with patience and loving-kindness, and how do patience and loving-kindness support the development of forgiveness? This paper attempts to discuss methods of forgiveness preached by the Buddha through loving-kindness in the Sutta-pataka and explanations given in the *Brahmavihāra-niddesa* of the *Visuddhimagga*, under loving-kindness meditation. The diversified methods for forgiveness and their significance show that they apply to a Buddhist, a non-Buddhist, or a person who does not follow any religion. The research paper uses qualitative methodology and textual analysis. The paper runs with subtitles; self-centered method, recollection of others' behaviors, *kamma, saṃsāra*, elements and gifts, recollection of the Buddha's present and past lives, the connection of forgiveness to patience, and loving-kindness. The beginning of the discussion has given an overview of other religious standpoints and the forgiveness in the Vinaya-piṭaka to clarify the field's background.

II. OVERVIEW OF OTHER RELIGIOUS STANDPOINTS

Research on forgiveness in the West focuses on four main areas: psychology, philosophy, religion, and – perhaps surprisingly – politics.² The concept of forgiveness was highly strange in the Greek and Roman cultures that dominated the West before the arrival of Christianity, and it was not regarded as a virtue. Assertion of Hannah Arendt that Jesus brought forgiveness to the West has been contested by Charles Griswold, who notes that ancient philosophers appeared to have had a notion similar to our forgiveness (*sungnomē*).³ Forgiveness is emphasized as a core component of the Christian faith for promoting reconciliation, compassion, and the ability of God's grace to transform the transformative power of God's grace in both the Old and New Testaments. God is shown to be kind and forgiving, and followers are

¹ Davids, T.W. Rhys & Stede, William (1994), *Pali - English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd.

² Hunter, A. (2007), *Forgiveness: Hindu and Western Perspectives*. *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 20 (2007). p. 35.

³ Couenhoven, J. (2010), *Forgiveness and Restoration: A Theological Exploration*. *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 90, no. 2 (April 2010). pp. 148 - 170.

encouraged to ask for and give unconditional forgiveness to others. “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14 - 15). Jesus instructs Peter to forgive his “sinning brother” seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21 - 22). In brief, the first of the two main tenets of Christian forgiveness is that one should forgive one’s neighbor for transgressions in the hopes of receiving one’s sins from God. The second is that Christ’s crucifixion provides universal, everlasting forgiveness to those who believe in his divinity.⁴ Christian teachings on turning the other cheek and the mercy of Allah in Islam are widely recognized.

In Islam, patience and forgiveness are two sides of a coin. Forgiveness should be practiced in our own lives if we are to genuinely understand the incredible power of the mercy of Allah, All-Forgiving. In terms of the Islamic faith, forgiveness is the least. Some Islamic folk stories highlight the limitless forgiveness of Allah towards followers. The end of Allah’s forgiveness marks the end of the seeking forgiveness by followers. “O My servants who have wronged themselves! Do not despair of the Mercy of God; verily, Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And turn in repentance (and in obedience with true faith) to your Lord and submit to Him...” (Al-Quran, Zumar, 53 - 54).

In Hindu Dharma, forgiveness is regarded as one of the six cardinal virtues; the rest are Truth, kindness, non-violence, purity, and austerity. The term *kṣamā* is given in the Bhagavadgītā (16.3)⁵, and it is mentioned alongside other divine qualities (*daivīm sampadam*), such as fearlessness, pure-heartedness, charity, self-control, austerity, sincerity, non-violence, truthfulness, freedom from anger, renunciation, serenity, compassion for all creatures, absence of avarice, gentleness, modesty, steadiness, patience, cleanliness, freedom from envy all of which a spiritually minded person should strive for. When someone is unable to forgive, they carry memories of unpleasant emotions like anger and unresolved feelings that impact their present and future. Forgiveness is portrayed through Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and fortune, and her husband Vishnu, sustainer of the universe as feminine and masculine forms respectively. However, Lakshmi offers forgiveness unconditionally, even if the wrongdoer does not repent, Vishnu only offers forgiveness when the wrongdoer repents. The Hindu festival of Holi, a well-known celebration of color, love, and spring, is customary to celebrate forgiveness, make new friends, and help fix damaged relationships on this day. While the Abrahamic religions believe in the one-power of Jesus or Allah, Hinduism believes that the grace of Brahma can be revealed instantly or through a variety of deities. Further, it believes that

⁴ Hunter, A. (2007), *Forgiveness: Hindu and Western Perspectives*. *Journal of Hindu - Christian Studies* 20 (2007). p. 39.

⁵ *Bhagavadgītā* (ed.) (2022), Narasingha, B.G. Swami. Gauranga Vani Publishers. <https://www.rupanugabhajanashram.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Bhagavad-gita-Swami-BG-Narasingha.pdf>

self-cultivation and practice will support the purge of defilements like anger. The relationship between God and people is one of Forgiver and forgiven in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. People believe that humans are perceived as transgressors who require divine forgiveness, and that God can provide it.⁶ The concept of forgiveness in the said religions has a serious connection with divine forgiveness. Most think about the impact of religion on forgiveness in three ways: through religious activity, religious affiliation and teachings, and imitation of God.⁷ These brief remarks show that all the world's religious traditions have paid sufficient attention to forgiveness and its related concepts.

III. FORGIVENESS IN THE VINAYA-PIṬAKA

The *Vinaya* methods are not discussed in this research paper, but a brief introduction is given. For resolving the four types of disputes (*vivādādhikaraṇa*), accusations (*anuvādādhikaraṇa*), offenses (*āpattādhikaraṇa*), and duties (*kiccādhikaraṇa*), the seven rules are suggested. (i) Settling issues by discussion (*sammukhāvinaya*), (ii) Settling issues by taking into account the recognition of a monk (*sativinaya*), (iii) Settling issues by taking into account the insanity of a monk (*amūlḥavinaya*), (iv) Settling issues by an acknowledgment (*paṭiññā*), (v) Settling issues by a majority decision (*yebhuyyasikā*), (vi) Settling issues by judgment of the ill will of a monk (*tassapāpiyyasikā*), (vii) Settling issues by covering the act with grass (*tiṇavatthāraka*).⁸ The Buddhist monastic discipline provides ways to punishment and forgiveness for grave or light offences under seven categories; *Pārājikā*, *Saṅghādisesa*, *Thullaccaya*, *Pācittiya*, *Pāṭidesaniya*, *Dukkaṭa*, *Dubbhāsita*. The first two categories are great offenses (*garukāpatti*) but the *Pārājikās* are irremediable (*atekicca*) and *Saṅghādisesas* are remediable (*satekicca*) and forgive through the penalties such as *parivāsa*, *mānatta*, *abbhāhana*, etc.⁹ These incidents clearly show the punishment and forgiveness procedures for fellow members of the Sangha who have gotten into trouble other than *Pārājikā* offenses.

The *Sutta-piṭaka* discourses should receive attention in light of these observations about other world religions and Buddhist monastic disciplinary codes. Review the danger in hate and the advantage of patience and loving-kindness are the bases of forgiveness. Consideration of the damage that anger does to oneself, remembrance of the virtue of the enemy, review of the self and others as owners of their action (*kammasakatā*), dealing with the round of rebirths, review of the resolution into elements, and try the giving gifts, review the special qualities of the Buddha's former conducts, are useful methods that

⁶ McCullough, M. E. & Worthington, E. L. Jr. (1999), *Religion and Forgiving Personality. Journal of Personality*. 2 (1) pp. 1141 - 1164. Laura J. Lutjen, Nava R. Siltan and Kevin J. Flannelly (2012), *Religion, Forgiveness, Hostility and Health: A Structural Equation Analysis. Journal of Religion and Health*, June 2012, Vol. 51, No. 2 (June 2012), p. 469).

⁷ Escher (2013): 100.

⁸ Dhirasekera, J. (2007), *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Center. p. 231.

⁹ *Ibid* pp. 205 – 223.

mentioned in the Visuddhimagga to develop the loving-kindness.¹⁰ In this connection, attention is paid to recognize the significance of these teachings to tolerate various negative mental pressures that are brought by the enemy and encourage us to practice tolerance as a form of forgiveness. Modern researchers, Worthington (2005)¹¹ and McCullough et al (2000),¹² and others paid attention to this positive and negative bifurcation. If we quickly look at the key points listed above, we will see that they emphasize the importance of being patient towards wrongdoers as a way to forgive them and control anger and other hateful mental factors. Forgiveness itself is entirely or partially characterized by patience, lack of intolerance, and lack of ferocity. Systematically, the cultivation of kind, constructive thoughts and the control and elimination of hateful, negative thoughts are the basis of forgiveness in both *Vinaya* and *Sutta*.

IV. SELF-CENTERED METHOD

The person most dear to them is themselves.¹³ The Buddhist notion of priority and importance says that the benefit of all should be important, but the priority should be given to one's moral well-being.¹⁴ Therefore, he can be guided toward good by demonstrating how the outcome of an action is detrimental to him. Awareness of anger's negative effects on oneself helps one become more patient and compassionate. The enemy is pleased with seven harms that he wants to cause to his opponent. May he be ugly because an enemy does not delight in an enemy's beauty, may he sleep badly because an enemy doesn't like when an enemy sleeps at ease, may he not succeed because an enemy doesn't like in the success of an enemy, may he not wealthy because an enemy doesn't like wealth of an enemy, may he not famous because an enemy doesn't like fame of an enemy, may he have no friends because an enemy doesn't like an enemy having friends, may he be reborn in the plane of misery because an enemy doesn't like an enemy's going to a good destination. When the angry person is overcome and oppressed by anger, there is no use of the good bath,

¹⁰ *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society. pp. 295 - 314; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification Visuddhimagga*. Sri Lanka, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 291 - 307

¹¹ Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2005), *Handbook of forgiveness*. New York: Brunner-Routledge Press.

¹² McCullough, M. E., Pargament, K. I., & Thoresen, C. E. (2000), *Forgiveness: Theory, research and practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.

¹³ *Saṃyuttanikāya* I (ed.) (1989), Feer, L. M., London: Pali Text Society. p.75; *Udāna* (1982) Steinthal, P. London, Pali text Society. p. 47.

¹⁴ *Anguttaranikāya* II (ed.) (1958), Morris, R. London: Pali Text Society. p.95; Karunadasa Y. (2013) *Early Buddhist Teachings The Middle Position in Theory and Practice*, Hong Kong: Center For Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong. p. 91; Karunadasa, Y. (2019), *The Buddhist Moral Life: Some Further Reflections. Pasatthavibhāvinī Emeritus Professor Sumanapala Galmangoda Felicitation Volume. Edited by Makuruppe Dhammananda et al.* Dalugama, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya. pp. 5 - 9.

and other beautifying, he is still ugly. In the same manner, a comfortable couch for good sleep is unusable, whatever is received to succeed is unusable since he thinks harmful as beneficial, beneficial as harmful. His righteous wealth is appropriated by kings for the royal treasury, he loses whatever his fame, friends, and relatives avoid him from afar, and finally, after death, he is reborn in the plane of misery.¹⁵ The angry person is overcome and oppressed by anger, he continuously engages in misconduct by body, speech, and mind. Hence, here, it is explained how the hateful evil that one seeks out against one's opponents is turned against oneself. The Kodhana-sutta expresses that an angry person kills his mother, who gave life, nurtured, showed this world, and also, he kills his father, kills Brahmins, and worldlings. Not only that, some kill themselves with a sword, swallow poison, hang with a rope, or jump into mountain gorges.¹⁶ The sutta guides as: Thus, death's snare hidden in the heart; has taken the form of anger. One should cut it off with self-control, wisdom, energy, and the right view: *Itāyaṃ kodharūpena – maccupāso guhāsaya/ Taṃ damena samucchinde – paññā viriyena diṭṭhiyā*.¹⁷

To overcome the said anger, patience and loving-kindness are equally useful techniques. Being ugly, not getting good sleep, loss of success, confiscation of wealth, loss of fame, loss of friends, and misery in the afterlife are highly linked to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Hence, by giving priority to our benefits, it will be possible to forgive enemies while overcoming anger mind and cultivating loving-kindness.

The *Visuddhimagga* has given a further explanation of the significance of the disadvantage of anger (*āghāta*) by focusing on self-harm. The meditator should advise himself as follows;

Suppose an enemy has hurt you, you know in what his domain,
Why try yourself as well to hurt, your mind? – That is not his domain.
Another does ignoble deeds, so you are angry – How is this?
Do you then want to copy too, the sort of acts that he commits?
Suppose another, to annoy, provokes you with some odious act,
Why suffer anger to spring up, and do as he would have you do?
If you get angry, then maybe you make him suffer, maybe not;
Though with the hurt that anger brings, you certainly are punished now.
If the hurt is done to you by a foe, because of anger on your part,
Then put your anger down, for why should you be harassed groundlessly?¹⁸

¹⁵ *Aṅuttaranikāya* II (ed.) (1958), Morris, R. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 94 - 98; Bodhi Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha a new Translation of the Aṅuttaranikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. pp.1066 - 1067.

¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1958, p. 98; 2012, p. 1069.

¹⁸ *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London: The Pali Text Society, pp. 300, 301; Nānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 295, 296.

The person gets angry with physical harm from the enemy, which is beyond your control. But your mind is under your control. Why are you going to allow your enemy to control your mind? Your enemy has done an ignoble act against you that is harmful to you. As a person who considers the enemy's act as ignoble, why are you going to perform the same? The enemy has done the wrong to provoke you. If you react with anger, you make a success your enemy's willingness. Your enemy may or may not become depressed as a result of your rage. However, you are already being oppressed by your anger. The enemy hates you, which is why they harass you. Therefore, the same hatred can be eliminated without considering it as a reaction. Handling that resentment is a pointless endeavor. Further, the text has advised us to think of anger as the destroyer of the base of the ethical life, angry beings enter into the evil path, and no reason for the meditator to follow them, since the aggregates are instant unpleasant things that occur through them are also instant. Self-centered strategy is useful to comprehend the necessity of forgiveness and it is beyond the limit of Buddhists or any other religious faith.

V. RECOLLECTION OF OTHERS' BEHAVIORS

Recollection of the behaviors of others is another useful method to develop forgiveness, patience, and loving-kindness through the eradication of anger. Based on others' conduct – be it mental, verbal, or physical – that causes him to forget his negative actions. We are also guided by this pattern to see the others' qualities as favorably as possible. Five types of persons are identified in Akkodhana-sutta; (i) impure in bodily behavior but pure in verbal behavior, (ii) impure in verbal behavior but pure in bodily behavior, (iii) impure in bodily and verbal behavior, but periodically experience mental clarity and calm, (iv) impure in bodily and verbal behavior, and not periodically experience mental clarity and calm, and (v) pure in bodily and verbal behavior, and periodically experience mental clarity and calm.¹⁹

Given five similes in the Sutta are useful to further elucidate the meaning. The first person is similar to a rag-robed monk who sees a rag thrown away in the road and presses it down with his left foot, spreads it out with his right, tears off the sound part, and takes it away with him. The second comes along, burning with heat, covered with sweat, exhausted, trembling, and thirsty, sees a pool covered with algae and water plants, jumps into the pool, sweeps away the algae and water plants with both hands, drinks from his cupped hands, and leaves it. The third comes along as mentioned in the second, sees water in a little puddle in a cow's footprint, gets down on all fours, without being disturbed by hand or cup slurps up it like a cow. The fourth, who is very ill and in pain, is traveling down a forest road unable to get food, medicine, suitable assistance, or anyone to take him to the village. What if someone else saw him and showed him sympathy, pity, and compassion to keep him from going to ruin? The fifth who tried by traveling along sees a pool that is sweet, cool, and

¹⁹ Bodhi Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha a new Translation of the Aṅguttaranikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. pp.774 - 776.

limpid, with gently sloping banks, shaded, and baths, drinks, and rest in the shade of trees. Except for the fourth person, the minimum good qualities exist with others to control anger and to develop loving-kindness and patience. The fourth scenario, which is the worst among them, practitioners should consider humanity rather than the qualities of the other person.²⁰

Buddhaghosa Thera has also expressed about five kinds of persons focusing on their bodily, verbal, and mental behaviors. (i) The individual who can control his physical behavior but not his verbal or mental behavior performs rites and rituals well. (ii) The individual whose verbal behavior is under his control with sweet, kind words but whose physical and mental behavior is not. (iii) The individual whose mental behavior is controlled but not his physical or verbal behavior, he proves through worshiping at shrines. (iv) The individual who lacks control over any one of these three components has nothing for recollection. In this situation, we should cultivate compassion that even though he is currently living in the human world, he will eventually end up in either one of the eight great hells or in the sixteen prominent hells. (v) The individual is in full control of all three and we can remember any of the three in that person because it is easy to nurture loving-kindness toward someone like that.²¹ Recollection of others' good qualities supports us to develop loving-kindness through bodily, verbal, and mental actions, and the same manner bearing their misconducts is patience and forgiveness. Akkodhana-sutta paid more attention to physical and verbal qualities while Visuddhimagga paid more attention to physical, verbal, and mental. This method proposes to positively see whatever qualities of enemies rather than look at the bottle with half of the water as half empty.

VI. KAMMA, SAṂSĀRA, ELEMENTS AND GIFTS

Focusing on basic teachings like owners of deeds (*kammassakatā*), the cycle of birth and death, resolution into elements (*dhātuvinibbhoga*), and giving of a gift are also methods of forgiveness and patience through loving-kindness. According to Buddhism, you will inherit everything you do because you are the owner and heir of your actions, and your actions are your parents, your kin, and your refuge.²² Anger doesn't cooperate to achieve full enlightenment, undeclared enlightenment, or the disciple's grade. Also, it doesn't support any positions of Brahma, Sakka, universal king, regional king, etc. The action that results in a fall from the dispensation and endless agony in hell is anger. An angry man is like someone who wants to strike someone and picks up a burning ember or excreta in his hand, burning himself or making himself odorous in the process. After recollection of the harmfulness of one's anger, it should be turned towards others in the same manner. He also receives the same result

²⁰ *Ibid* pp. 774 - 776.

²¹ *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society, pp. 299, 300; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 294, 295.

²² *Āṅguttaranikāya* III (ed.) (1958), Hardy, E. London: Pali Text Society. p. 186.

with the anger and he merely covers himself with dust, like a man who wants to hurl it at someone against the wind. Hence, this method highlights the concept of Buddhist *kamma* to overcome anger while pointing out its uselessness, and harmfulness for one's own and others' career. A portion of this approach is possible to incorporate into the previously mentioned self-centered method. Beings are creatures that go through an endless cycle of rebirth. Therefore, taking into account kinship among beings should help people get rid of their anger and cultivate patience, forgiveness, and loving-kindness. Finding a person who has not previously been your mother, father, brother, sister, son, or daughter is difficult, according to the Buddha.²³ *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* is very popular in this teaching in Mahayana Buddhism.

Another technique is the resolution of elements. Though there is no ultimate meaning other than the combination of four great elements, five aggregates, twelve faculties, eighteen elements, etc., beings are recognized as the conventional truth. They are impermanent, suffering, no-self. Then, what is the meaning of anger? Are you angry with body hairs or head hairs, nails, the element of water, the element of fire, the element of air, the twelve bases, the eighteen elements, or the five aggregates? Then, anger has no place like a mustard seed on the tip of an awl or a painting in the air. Another helpful strategy is to give a gift. Practice can either be offered to the other person by himself or accepted by the other person by himself. However, one should only provide for the other if their means of subsistence are not pure and their necessities are inappropriate. There, an alms-food eater was pardoned by the senior monk after he had forced him to leave his lodging three times. Thera, who eats alms, brought a bowl to the elderly monk and explained that her mother, a lay devotee, had made it.²⁴ Giving gifts is more common among the *kamma*, *saṃsāra*, elements (*dhātu*), and gift-giving techniques for anyone who can practice them without any restrictions based on their religion. Buddhist teachings on samsara and elements make it difficult for someone who believes in the existence of an eternal soul within samsara or in this very life to change their mind about enemies. The relationship between cause and effect (dependent origination) is the Buddhist concept of the *kamma* and its outcomes. As a result, even though our adversaries are not permanent, we still have the opportunity to affect them to view us differently if the right cause and conditions are put in place.

VII. RECOLLECTION OF THE BUDDHA'S PRESENT AND PAST LIVES

Recollection of the Buddha's present and past lives is another important method that would be more useful for the followers. The Buddha's hardships in this life and his previous births demonstrate how he tolerates them all. It has to be noted that most of the stories and incidents prove patience is a mere reaction

²³ *Samyuttanikāya* II (ed.) (1992), Feer, Leon M. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 188 - 190.

²⁴ *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society. p. 306; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification Visuddhimagga*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. p. 302.

against hatred. The facts make it clear that patience is forgiveness itself. Once Brahmin Akkosa Bharadvaja heard Brahmin Bharadvaja entered the Order and got angry, and then abused and criticized the Buddha. You will receive your food and snacks back if a relative visits your home and refutes your offer, said the Buddha. Similarly, you are abusing us who do not abuse, you are angry with us who do not get angry, you are quarreling with us who do not quarrel, so you must return them. Further, the Buddha expressed that one quarrels back when quarreled with, one trails back when trailed, and one abuses back when abused. This is referred to as reciprocal association and exchange, but there is no such engagement.²⁵

King Suppabuddha, the father-in-law of the Buddha, was not happy regarding the renunciation of Siddhattha while leaving his daughter Yasodhara alone. Once he met the Buddha and seriously scolded him. The Buddha was patient and the king left after scolding the Buddha till his anger subsided.²⁶ Brahmin Aggika-Bhāradvāja who was preparing an offering to the great Brahma, addressed the Buddha as a shaveling (*muṇḍaka*), wretched monk (*samaṇaka*), and outcast (*vasalaka*) when the Buddha visited his home. The sight of a monk was considered unlucky by the Brahmin. Tolerating his harsh words, the Buddha expresses his views about the outcast and the conditions that make an outcast.²⁷ Five hundred young monks from the Sāriputta and Moggallāna's disciples once came to see the Buddha when he was residing in the city of Cātumā. The Buddha asked them to leave the monastery after hearing their loud noise. They then departed from the monastery. After that, the Sākyaans from Catuma City and Sahampati Brahma came to see Buddha and asked him to sympathize with the young monks. The Buddha eventually pardoned them and taught the Dhamma.²⁸

During the time of the Buddha, internal means from his disciples and external means from other religious groups calumnies (*abbhācikkhana/abbhākkhāna*), and rumors (*janavāda*) occurred. Monks like Sati, Ariṭṭha, and Bhikkhuni Mettiyā are examples of the former. Sundari, Ciṅcamānavikā, etc. are the latter.²⁹ Two external calumnies and rumors; murder and rape from other religious groups are very popular. Sundari, a female wanderer ascetic, and Ciṅcamānavikā, a beautiful ascetic disciple, were used for them. Without

²⁵ *Saṃyuttanikāya* I (ed.) (1991), Feer, L. M., London, Pali Text Society. p.161; Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha A New Translation of Saṃyuttanikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publication. pp. 255 - 257.

²⁶ *The Commentary on the Dhammapada III* (ed.) (1970), Norman, H.C. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 44 - 47.

²⁷ *Suttanipāta* (ed.) (1997), Andersen, D. & Smith, H. Oxford: The Pali Text Society. pp. 20 - 24.

²⁸ *Majjhimanikāya* I (1979), Trenckner, V. London: Pali text Society. pp. 456 - 462.

²⁹ Hewamanage, W. (2017), *Calumnies and Rumours: Religious Perspective and Modern Implication. The Paper Collection of International Conference on the Frontier Topics in Pseudo Religion Studies*. Wuhan: Wuhan University. pp. 56 - 64.

being aware of their secret strategy, Sundari frequently traveled to Jetavana Monastery under the direction of heretics. After the people came to know about this, they killed her and hid her in Jetavanarama to trap the Buddha and his disciples.³⁰ Ciñcamānavikā entered the Jetavana monastery in the evening and left the next morning, making it seem like she spent the night with the Buddha. She gradually disclosed that she was pregnant, then went to the monastery and accused the Buddha of being the cause of her pregnancy while he was preaching.³¹ The Buddha tolerated and forgave all kinds of calumnies and rumors and sometimes he took time to answer them.

Buddhaghosa Thera highlights only the recollection of the former conduct of the Buddha through nine examples through the Jataka stories; Silava, Khantivādī, Culladhammapāla, Chaddanta, Mahākapi (not mention the name of the Jātaka), Bhūridatta, Campeyya, Saṅkhapāla, and Mātuposaka.³² The Ascetic Khantivādī story shows the Bodhisattva's patience and loving-kindness even though he was cut his body parts by the executioner with the order of King Kalābu. Kalābu went to hell due to the same sin, there was no punishment given by the Bodhisattva, but he wished the king and executioner happiness and long life. Mahāsīlava Jātaka presents the story of the patience of King Silava and regaining power with the power of loving-kindness and the support received from demons. Finally, Silava forgave his enemy king. As a white elephant in the Chaddanta-jātaka, the Bodhisattva endured the hunter's suffering without any ill-will and hatred. Strong and endowed with psychic powers, Saṅkhapāla, the serpent king, bore the agony of the wounds.³³

First of all, Buddhists find greater value in these life stories and events because they have a unique connection to their belief in the Buddha and his past lives. The circumstances are comparable to those found in other religious traditions concerning God, gods, or a representative of him. Four religious factors – prayer, religious attendance, faith (depth of belief in God), and interpretation – were found to be positively correlated with (a) attitudes toward forgiveness, (b) self-report of past forgiving behavior, and (c) self-assessment of the tendency to forgive in the future by Fox and Thomas. The most accurate predictor of forgiveness among the four variables was faith, which was

³⁰ *The Commentary on the Dhammapada* III (ed.) (1970), Norman, H.C. London: Pali Text Society. p.473; *Jātaka together with its Commentary* II (ed.) (2003), Fausboll, V. London: Pali Text Society. pp. 415, 416.

³¹ *Jātaka together with its Commentary* Part IV (1963), Fausboll, London: Pali Text Society. p. 187; *The Commentary on the Dhammapada* III (ed.) (1970), Norman, H.C. London: Pali Text Society. 177 - 182.

³² *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa* (ed.) (1975), Davids C. A. F. Rhys. London, The Pali Text Society. pp. 302 - 305; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2012), *The Path of Purification*. Sri, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. pp. 297 - 300.

³³ *Jātaka together with its Commentary* I (1962), Fausboll, London, Pali Text Society. 39 - 43, 261 - 268; Part V (1963) 37 - 57, 161 - 177; Ariyadhamma, T. (1966), "Khanti" *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* VI. Edited by W. G. Weeraratne. Colombo: Sri Lanka Government Press. pp. 202 - 204.

followed by prayer.³⁴ The second is that the message can be effectively used to foster forgiveness with patience and loving-kindness if one sees it through its narrative. Here, it's crucial to highlight how fairy tales and folklore both advise and transform society.

VIII. CONNECTION OF FORGIVENESS TO PATIENCE, AND LOVING-KINDNESS

In a general sense, forgiveness represents physical and verbal direct involvement among haters and hated persons in public. A hated person forgives or tolerates the hater's performed misconduct via verbal and physical behaviors, and the hater promises not to repeat. The *Sutta* and *Vinaya-piṭakas* present diversified methods for forgiveness. According to the *Sutta-piṭaka* discourses, forgiveness is the use of tolerance to subdue hateful emotions. Nonetheless, in the *Sutta-piṭaka*, priority was not given to punishments against the wrongdoers. It is evident in *Vinaya-piṭaka* that the convicts are forgiven following a corporate punishment of some length for transgressions of the monks and nuns. Further, the *Sutta-piṭaka* discussions mostly focus on intra-personal forgiveness while the *Vinaya-piṭaka* focuses on interpersonal forgiveness. In applied Buddhism, just after the common prayer, devotees request forgiveness from the Buddha, for their misconducts which occurred by body, speech, and mind. However, the Buddha's involvement cannot be seen as a way to forgive with divine power like theistic religions that are mentioned above. It is only a self-determination to reduce or stop misconduct. Even today, young monks request forgiveness for their shortcomings from their teachers after evening daily worship in the monastery education system.

Some defilements must be abandoned by seeing (*dassanā*), restraining (*saṃvarā*), using (*paṭisevanā*), enduring (*adivāsanā*), avoiding (*parivajjanā*), removing (*vinodanā*), and by developing (*bhāvanā*). Enduring is the third of the seven types of abandoning defilements that the Buddha expresses in this discussion. Here, a mendicant who wisely tolerates cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, and reptiles. He tolerates ill-spoken and unwelcome words and physical sensations that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, displeasing, and menacing to life. If he does not tolerate the fermentations, vexation, or fever, defilements would arise but defilements do not arise for him when he tolerates them.³⁵ To destroy the taints, suitable methods should be followed, according to the type of defilements. The process of enduring is self-centered even though the disturbances reach from outside, and some of them are made by nature and manmade. Aññakoṇḍañña, the first among humans to realize the Dhamma, recounts his struggles and accomplishments along the road to arahantship in

³⁴ Laura J. Lutjen, Nava R. Siltan and Kevin J. Flannelly (2012), *Religion, Forgiveness, Hostility and Health: A Structural Equation Analysis*. *Journal of Religion and Health*, June 2012, Vol. 51, No. 2 (June 2012), p. 469.

³⁵ Nāṇamoli, Bhikkhu & Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2009), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha a Translation of the Majjhimanikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications. pp. 91 - 95.

Theragāthā. When he lived in the great forest, being touched by mosquitoes and gadflies, he tolerated mindfully like a warrior elephant in a battle.³⁶ Though mosquitoes and gadflies were a trouble for him as a forest monk, he endured without harming them. In this case, refraining from killing or harming them with anger represents his patience, loving-kindness, as well as forgiveness. It's interesting to note that Buddhists extend their forgiveness practice beyond humans because they practice loving-kindness for all living things.

The discussion shows that consideration of the damage that anger does to oneself, remembrance of the virtue of the enemy, review of the self and others as owners of their action, dealing with the round of rebirths, review of the resolution into elements, and try the giving gifts, review the special qualities of the Buddha's present and past conducts are prominent methods depicted in the Sutta-piṭaka. Buddhism has given enough strategies for the person who wishes to follow the path with the faith of the triple gem or without any faith as a devotee of Buddhism or as another religious follower. As mentioned above, the story of Aññakoṇḍañña Thera, Sabbāsasava-sutta expressions enduring (*adhiṇāsanā*), Khantivādī-jātaka, Akkosa-bhāradvāja's incident confirm that patience itself is forgiveness. Whichever methods you prefer are possible to use, but eradicating anger, a certain way of performing hatred, and cultivating loving-kindness should be its foundation. The terms used in Pali language; *kodha*, *āghāta*, *kopa*, *rosa*, *dosa*, *amarisa* for anger and *kuddha*, *kupita*, *duṭṭha*, *rūḍha*, *anattamana* for anger³⁷ also emphasizes the connection. The beginning of the loving-kindness meditation (*mettā-bhāvanā*) of the Brahmavihāra-niddesa expresses the danger of anger and the benefit of patience, is a good example to see the interconnection of these three facts.

Friends, when a man hates, is a prey to hate and his mind is obsessed by hate, he kills living things, and ..." (A I 216 – this is not available in the present *Aṅguttaranikāya*). And the advantage of patience should be understood according to such *suttas* as these: "No higher rule, the Buddhas say, than patience, And no Nibbāna higher than forbearance" (D II 49; *Dhp* 184); "Patience in force, in strong array: him I call a brahman" (*Dhp* 399); "No greater thing exists than patience" (SI 222).³⁸

In Buddhism, mentality (*nāma*) and corporeality (*rūpa*) are the basic constituents of human beings, articulated through five aggregates, six elements, twelve faculties, eighteen elements, etc. The key point of explanation is to emphasize the uselessness of reading conventional truth as the ultimate truth and the interconnection between mentality and materiality through the theory of dependent co-origination. Patience and forgiveness are positive actions against negative thoughts that center upon hatred. As previously stated, the appropriate

³⁶ *Thera and Therīgāthā*, (ed.) (1966), Norman, K. R. & Altdorf, L. London: The Pali Text Society. p. 69.

³⁷ Piyatissa, W. (1949), *The English Pali Dictionary*. Colombo: Apothecaries. p. 19.

³⁸ Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) (2011), *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. p. 291.

set of mental and physical phenomena always gives rise to physical and mental factors. Abhidhamma has stated that all mental factors, both wholesome and unwholesome, share seven universals (*sabba-citta-sādhāraṇa*). After that, there are six occasions (*pakiṇṇaka*) that can occasionally be associated with both wholesome and unwholesome mental factors.³⁹ The idea here is that thoughts don't just come to mind; they also need other supportive elements. Forgiveness and patience are healthy behaviors that can be expressed verbally, physically, and mentally with the help of other encouraging elements. Develop positive thoughts like compassion and love, which are always the antithesis of negative ones like anger and hatred, to develop and sustain both patience and forgiveness. According to contemporary research, there is broad agreement that forgiveness is different from and should not be confused with several other ideas, including forgetting, reconciling, excusing, condoning, justifying, and pardoning.⁴⁰

IX. CONCLUSION

This paper is dedicated to the Buddhist perspective on forgiveness and its relevance to patience and loving-kindness, centering the *Sutta-piṭaka*. Other religious ideas and the *Vinaya-piṭaka* point of view on forgiveness are introduced on the outset. Overview of other religious standpoints on forgiveness proves that it is an appreciated common practice in Hindu, Christian, Islamic traditions. They highlighted the forgiveness and its relevance to the God or gods. Buddhist disciplinary codes provide priority for interpersonal forgiveness that is based on punishment considering the betterment of the Bhikkhu-bhikkhuni-saṅgha. The *Sutta-piṭaka*, which highlights intra-personal forgiveness, centered on personal control, is based on patience. However, patience and loving-kindness are fundamental qualities of forgiveness in the *Sutta* and *Vinaya*. The Pali term *khanti*, a perception is used for both meanings, patience and forgiveness, and also anger-related terms like *kodha*, *āghāta*, *kopa*, *rosa*, *dosa*, *amarisa* demonstrate the connection to repulsive ideas that impede forgiveness. The seven methods discussed above for forgiveness, through patience, and loving-kindness are important to use according to the diversity of followers. Consideration of the damage that anger does to oneself, remembrance of the virtue of the enemy, and the giving of gifts are common methods that can be used by anyone who wishes to follow. Review the self and others as owners of their action (*kammasakātā*), dealing with the round of rebirths, reviewing the resolution into elements (*dhātuvinibbhoga*), review the special qualities of the Buddha's present and past conduct, which are good for Buddhists. However, when one reads the message through narrative, it can be used to promote forgiveness with patience and loving-kindness. The

³⁹ Bodhi Bhikkhu (2007) *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. pp.77 - 83.

⁴⁰ Kathleen A. Lawler-Row, Cynthia A. Scott, Rachel L. Raines, Meirav. Edlis Matityahou & Erin W. Moore (2007), *The Varieties of Forgiveness Experience: Working toward a Comprehensive Definition of Forgiveness*. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Jun., 2007, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), pp. 233 - 248.

former three points represent the universal ethics beyond Buddhism or other religions, and the latter four, which are merged with Buddhist beliefs, are more suitable for the followers of Buddhism.

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THREE MESSAGES OF THE BUDDA – THE FOUNDATION FOR BUILDING PEACE FOR THE WORLD

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Abstract:

The greatest suffering of human beings in all ages is that each of us still has a lot of greed, anger, and ignorance. This article analyzes the three poisons that harm human beings, leading to the gradual destruction of the planet we live on, all because of the greed that comes from greed, anger, and ignorance of each person. The Buddha was probably the first person in the 6th century BC to show how to eliminate them through many paths of practice for each practitioner who believes and follows his teachings. As in his first sermon, the Buddha pointed out the middle way of life and the Noble Eightfold Path as ways to eliminate the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. As long as people are taught enough to be awakened in the spirit of self-awareness, self-responsibility, and self-mastery, then humanity will gradually suffer less. That is a warning bell for each of us who still have a lot of ambition. The Buddha taught us to do things that help society and the country develop without being entangled, or less controlled by greed, anger, and ignorance; Or in other words, doing things without greed, anger, or ignorance is good, is building a civilized and progressive society. And further than that, it is enlightenment and liberation.

Keywords: *Buddhism, building peace, three messages, the world.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Across all ages and civilizations, the greatest affliction of humankind has been the persistent entanglement in *greed, anger, and ignorance* - the three poisons that cloud judgment, distort reality, and perpetuate suffering (*dukkha*).

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These defilements not only afflict individuals but collectively contribute to the gradual degradation of societies, the exploitation of natural resources, and the destabilization of the very planet we inhabit. At the core of these crises lies an insatiable greed, fueled by ignorance and intensified by anger - forces that bind sentient beings to cycles of suffering and conflict.

It was the Buddha, in the 6th century BCE, who first expounded a systematic path for uprooting these poisons, offering a transformative framework for those who earnestly seek liberation (*mokṣa*). Through his boundless wisdom (*prajñā*) and profound insight into the nature of existence, he prescribed numerous paths of practice (*mārga*) tailored to the capacities of different practitioners. Among these, his first discourse - the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* - introduced the *Middle Way* (*madhyamā-pratipadā*) and the *Noble Eightfold Path* (*āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*) as the means to transcend greed, anger, and ignorance. These teachings not only serve as guiding principles for personal transformation but also offer a universal ethical foundation for cultivating harmony in society.

The key to reducing suffering, both individually and collectively, lies in the cultivation of *self-awareness* (*svasaṃvedanā*), *self-responsibility* (*ātmapratyavekṣaṇā*), and *self-mastery* (*ātma-saṃyama*). Without awakening to these fundamental principles, humanity will remain trapped in cycles of delusion and suffering. This serves as an urgent call for introspection—an ever-present *memento mori* - reminding each of us to examine our ambitions and desires through the lens of wisdom and ethical discernment.

The Buddha did not advocate for passivity or disengagement from worldly responsibilities; rather, he emphasized that true progress - whether on a personal, societal, or national scale—must be built upon a foundation free from the distortions of greed, anger, and ignorance. To act without these defilements is to foster a civilization that is not only prosperous but also just, compassionate, and ethically advanced. Beyond this lies the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path: *enlightenment* (*bodhi*) and *liberation* (*nirvāṇa*) - states of being in which suffering is completely transcended, and wisdom shines unobstructed.

The Buddha's teachings have the ability to transform people's inner selves, making those who come across Him more joyful and excited, sometimes enlightened, achieving sainthood as described in many suttas.¹ In this paper, the author tries to find in the scriptures, through the teachings of the Buddha, to see clearly the reason why the world today, and perhaps in the future, humans still suffer. 'As long as humans still suffer, humans still need Buddhism', because we see in the *Snake Simile Sutta* (*Alagaddūpamasutta*), the Buddha taught that the purpose of his teaching in this world is as follows: "Bhikkhus,

¹ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1995, p. 265; also see: Magandiya Sutta, No. 75, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1995, p. 617.

both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering.”²

The path that guides humanity to end suffering according to the Buddha's teachings is to eliminate greed, anger, and ignorance, which are present in each of us and are the source of suffering. They are also called poisons - the three poisons: greed, anger, and ignorance. The way to eliminate them is the path that the Buddha clearly pointed out, which is discipline, concentration, and wisdom or the Noble Eightfold Path³. This research seeks to find the origin, the message of the Buddha on the three issues above.

In the original teachings of Buddhism, the Buddha often emphasized the three terms greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). The Buddha shows us that these three types of poison are intended to help people stay awake, each person looks back at themselves to see more clearly what they are doing and what they are. As an accurate definition that each person's conscience knows. In the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha calls the two terms 'Shame and Fear' as two of *dhamas*, holy dharmas, and pure dharmas. He points out and explains as follows:

Monks, two states are bright. What two? Sense of shame and fear of shame. These two states are bright. Monk, these two bright states protect the world. What two? Sense of shame and fear of blame. Monks, if these two states did not protect the world, then there would be seen no mother or mother's sister, no uncle's wife nor teacher's wife, nor wife of honorable men; but the world would come to confusion, - promiscuity such as exists among goats and sheep, fowls and swine, dogs and jackals. But, monks, since these two bright states do protect the world, therefore there are mothers... and the rest.⁴

This passage of scripture conveys a fundamental ethical teaching in Buddhism, illustrating how the Buddha instructs those who engage in the

² *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, tr. Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, p. 234.

³ The ending of suffering consists of eight stages: Right Ideas, Right Resolution, Right Speech, Right Behavior, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation, pp. 45-46 - *The Teaching of Buddha*, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, Kenkyusha Printing Co., Ltd, Tokyo, Japan, 1968; also see: *The Middle Way consists of eight limbs*. Two are related to wisdom: right views and right discrimination; three are related to correct ethical conduct: right speech, right action, and right livelihood; and three are related to meditation: right effort, right mindfulness; and right concentration, John S. Strong, *The Buddha - A Short Biography*, Oneworld Publication, Oxford: England, Reprinted 2002, p. 83. See also the *Samyutta Nikāya* says: The Brahmin asked Ananda: "Venerable Ananda, is there any path, any practice, that can lead to cutting off lust, anger, and ignorance? Ananda replied: "Yes, it is the eightfold Noble Path: Right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration." See: *Sthviravada, Sutta Sutra VIII*, Council for the Propagation of the Dharma, 2022, p. 427.

⁴ *The Book of The Gradual Sayings*, Vol. I, F. L. Woodward, Mrs Davids, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1989, p. 46.

three unwholesome actions of *body*, *speech*, and *mind* without remorse or self-awareness. Such individuals, who commit harmful deeds while remaining indifferent to their moral weight, are described by the Buddha as lacking the essential qualities of *shame* (*hri*) and *fear* (*apatrāpya*). In Buddhist moral philosophy, *shame* (*hri*) refers to an internal sense of ethical responsibility – an innate awareness that one’s actions are morally reprehensible. It arises from within, reflecting an individual’s recognition of their transgressions and a sincere commitment to ethical self-discipline. *Fear* (*apatrāpya*), on the other hand, is a social or externalized moral consciousness – an awareness of how one’s actions are perceived by others and a deep concern for the consequences of one’s misdeeds concerning the community. These two qualities, often translated together as *moral shame* and *moral dread*, serve as the foundation of ethical conduct in Buddhist thought.

Wrongdoings are not monolithic but exist on a spectrum – ranging from minor transgressions to profound moral failings. Some are small and remediable, while others cause significant harm and shake the moral fabric of the individual and society. However, when a person arrives at the realization that their past actions were wrongful and makes a conscious decision to cease engaging in such misconduct, they are then considered to possess *hri* and *apatrāpya*. This transformation signifies not only a moral awakening but also a commitment to ethical refinement, aligning one’s actions with the principles of wisdom and compassion.

As the Buddhist scholar Saddhatissa insightfully articulates, “shame and fear are considered the state of purity that maintains the world.”⁵ These two qualities are thus not mere emotions but essential pillars of an ethically structured society. The Buddhist Dictionary further elaborates on their significance, interpreting shame (*hri*) as the faculty of moral conscience, an inner restraint that arises from a sense of personal dignity and ethical integrity.⁶ Meanwhile, fear (*apatrāpya*) is characterized as a deep-seated sensitivity to the moral gaze of others, compelling one to act in ways that uphold social harmony.⁷

Together, *hri* and *apatrāpya* function as guardians of moral purity, ensuring that individuals remain accountable for their actions. In the absence of these qualities, ethical conduct deteriorates, and the cohesion of human relationships is threatened. Therefore, in Buddhist practice, cultivating shame and fear is not merely about avoiding wrongdoing but about fostering a profound moral consciousness – one that serves as the bedrock of personal transformation and collective well-being.

⁵ Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, translated by Thich Thien Chanh, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2017, p. 188.

⁶ *Buddhist Dictionary*, translated by Thich Nhuan Chau, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2023, p. 534.

⁷ *Buddhist Dictionary*, translated by Thich Nhuan Chau, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2023, p. 512; *Sutta Pitaka*, Volume I, translated by Thich Minh Chau, Religion Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2015, pp. 41 – 42.

As a message, the Buddha showed that the three poisons are the source of all wars and hatred. In the *Dhammapada Sutta* no. 5, the Twin Verses, the Buddha affirmed: “with hatred, destroy hatred,/ This life is not possible;/ No hatred destroys hatred, .It is the eternal law.”⁸ This verse encapsulates a core tenet of Buddhist ethics: hostility cannot be eradicated through further hostility. Attempts to combat hatred with aggression or vengeance will only serve to deepen resentment, fueling an unending cycle of suffering. Instead, the Buddha prescribes a transformative approach - one rooted in *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). These qualities possess the power to dissolve animosity, fostering reconciliation and genuine understanding between individuals and communities. The deeper significance of this teaching extends beyond interpersonal relationships to the realm of global conflicts. Wars, disputes, and societal divisions, if addressed through retaliation and animosity, will never achieve lasting resolution. True peace emerges only through dialogue, mutual respect, and an unwavering commitment to nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*). When conflicts are met with compassion rather than retribution, space is created for healing and reconciliation. This principle underscores the Buddha’s vision of an awakened society - one where wisdom (*prajñā*) and ethical conduct (*śīla*) serve as the guiding forces in human interactions. Thus, the essence of *Dhammapada* verse 5 is not merely a call for passive endurance in the face of hostility, but an active directive to transcend hatred through an unshakeable commitment to understanding and compassion. The *golden words* (*suvarṇa-vacana*) of the Buddha in this verse stand as an enduring reminder that peace is not the mere absence of conflict but the presence of harmony cultivated through mindful action and an open heart.

In the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha defines the three poisons as it will be said below:

Monks, there are these three roots of merit. What three? Greed, malice and delusion. Greed is a demerit. Whatsoever the greedy one performs with body, speech and thought, that is demerit. What the greedy one, overwhelmed by greed, whose mind is uncontrolled, does to another by unjustly causing him suffering through punishment, imprisonment, loss of wealth, abuse, banishment, because “might is right” - that is also demerit. Thus these evil, demeritorious conditions born of greed, conjoined with greed, arising from greed, resulting from greed, are assembled in him.⁹

In the discourse above, the Buddha expounds on the nature of *greed* (*lobha*), illustrating its manifestations through three primary channels: the body, speech, and mind. First, greed manifests physically, through acts of grasping, hoarding, and taking - expressed through the hands and feet that seize what is not freely given. Second, it is revealed through speech - honeyed words designed to

⁸ “Na hi verena verani/sammanti’ dha kudacanam/Averena ca sammanti/esa dhammo sanantano.”

⁹ *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, vol. I, FL. Woodward and Mrs Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1989, pp. 182 - 183.

manipulate, deceive, and ensnare others into acquiescence. However, the most insidious form of greed arises from the mind, where desires, calculations, and cunning intentions germinate, and ultimately find expression through both actions and words. The Buddha unequivocally categorizes all of these as forms of greed, declaring: “Greed is a dharma that causes long-term suffering”. Beyond merely recognizing greed as a cause of suffering, the Buddha underscores its deeply entrenched nature, emphasizing the difficulty of uprooting it. He further classifies the three poisons - *greed* (*lobha*), *hatred* (*dveṣa*), and *delusion* (*moha*) - by their degrees of severity. Notably, he states: “Lust is slightly to be blamed, but it is slow to change.”¹⁰ This observation suggests that while desire may not be as immediately destructive as hatred or delusion, its gradual and persistent nature makes it particularly challenging to overcome. It is precisely for this reason that greed often drives individuals to transgress ethical and legal boundaries, as frequently reported in contemporary media, where unchecked craving leads to corruption, deceit, and societal harm. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, reflecting on the pervasive grip of desire, enumerates five primary cravings that afflict human beings to varying degrees: “The five cravings are for wealth, fame, sex, fancy food, and lots of sleep.”¹¹ These cravings, though seemingly mundane, form the bedrock of attachment, perpetuating cycles of dissatisfaction and suffering. In Buddhist practice, recognizing the subtleties of greed is the first step toward its transcendence, for only through awareness, ethical discipline (*śīla*), and meditative insight (*dhyāna*) can one gradually weaken its hold and cultivate a mind of true liberation (*vimukti*).

Most of the human race in general fall into prison and suffering because of one of the five vices mentioned above, and greed in each of us is very difficult to eradicate. That means it happens every day, every hour, every minute on this earth, this globe. Therefore, Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu commented on the special results of greed as follows:

When it comes to fighting, there are winners and losers. The winners are happy and the losers are angry. Therefore, the more people gain, the more hatred they have. Sometimes, while fighting, people only think about their own gain, and they trample on the lives of others. ... People who are greedy for money suffer a lot. Because it is not possible to get what they want, they have to work hard and spend a lot of energy to get it.¹²

We come to the second term, Anger. Similar to the greed just presented above, the Buddha clearly states what anger is: “Malice, monks, is demerit. Whatsoever the malicious one performs ... is also demerit. Thus these evil divers, demeritorious conditions born of malice ... are assembled in him.”¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 181.

¹¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Art of Power*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2008, p. 15.

¹² Thich Thanh Tu, *Tam Doc*, Religion Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2011, p. 13.

¹³ *The Book of The Gradual Sayings*, Vol. I, F.L. Woodward and Mrs Rhys David, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1989, p. 183.

The above passage shows the anger of each of us. As humans, everyone has had some anger expressed in their lives. And when this anger is expressed, either spoken or acted upon, its consequences are unpredictable. It burns away many good things that the angry person has done before.

In the General Buddhist Studies (Phat Hoc Pho Thong) Course I & II, Most Venerable Thich Thien Hoa recorded the dangers and harms of people with anger as follows: “One thought of anger arises, and hundreds of thousands of doors of karmic obstacles open up.” The fire of anger suddenly broke out, burning down the entire forest of merit.”¹⁴

In the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha emphasized and pointed out the nature of anger as follows: “Malice is much to be blamed, but it is quick to change.”¹⁵ It is true that if anger is prolonged for many hours continuously in each person, then this world will lead to madness, disappearing due to the mind of hatred being made. Our 20th and 21st century Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu taught the word anger in a very profound way: “Once anger arises, we dare to commit any crime, we dare to create any suffering. All ferocity, cruelty, and evil arise from anger. There are types of anger that are explosive, and types that are hidden. ... all dangers in our lives are brought about by anger. A person who harbors anger is like a person who harbors a poisonous snake in his house, and disaster can easily come in a moment.”¹⁶

In another passage, the Buddha compared anger or resentment to a poisonous snake, and pointed out that there are four types of people in this world. What four? “The venomous but not fierce, the fierce but not venomous, the one that is both, the one that is neither.”¹⁷

The Buddha explained that the first type of person is someone who gets angry very quickly, but gets angry for a while and then stops; the second type of person, the Buddha pointed out¹⁸, is someone who does not get angry immediately, but is not malicious; the third type of person is someone who gets angry quickly and once angry, seeks revenge; and the fourth type of person is someone who does not get angry, and is always gentle, the ideal model of society. The above passage also reveals to those with affinity, when reading this passage, to self-evaluate and awaken themselves, to see which type of person they belong to among the four types of people the Buddha just taught above, so that they can learn from them and stay away from them.

¹⁴ Thich Thien Hoa, *General Buddhist Studies*, Course I & II, Ho Chi Minh City, Buddhist Sangha, Published, 1989, p. 81.

¹⁵ *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, vol. I, Tr. F.L. Woodward and Mrs Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1989, p. 181.

¹⁶ Thich Thanh Tu, *Tam Doc*, Translated by Nguyen Hung, Religious Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2011, pp. 17 - 18.

¹⁷ *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. II, translated by F. L. Woodward, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1992, p. 115.

¹⁸ *The Book of The Gradual Sayings*, Vol. II, F.L. Woodward, Publishe by Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1992, pp. 115 - 116.

Let us continue to listen to the Buddha's teachings on human ignorance. The Buddha pointed out the third poison is ignorance. The action of ignorance is the action of ignorance, not knowing and not believing in cause and effect, leading to suffering for oneself and affecting many others. The Buddha taught that which delusion (ignorance) is: "Delusion, monks, is demerit. Whatsoever the deluded one performs ... is also demerit. Thus these diverse demeritorious conditions born of greed, conjoined with greed, arising from greed, resulting from greed, are assembled in him."¹⁹

Regarding the nature of ignorance, the Buddha pointed out its danger. He affirmed: "Ignorance is a great sin, and abandoning ignorance is slowness."²⁰ According to the Buddha's teachings, ignorance here has two dangers. First, it is classified as a great sin, a terrible sin, and second, it is very difficult to destroy. Most humans do things due to ignorance and delusion, and in the end, we receive the painful results from our ignorant actions.

Thus, the Buddha defined greed as a small sin, but it is difficult for anyone to completely eliminate greed in their current life, unless that person is a saint or an enlightened person. Anger is a big sin, but abandoning anger is quick. This means that anger only occurs for a short time. No one can stay angry all day long. Professor Peter Harvey²¹ in his book *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* briefly analyzed the dangers of three poisons: Greed (*lobha*); anger (*dosa*); and delusion (*moha*) are specifically: "Greed (*lobha*), which covers a range of states from mild longing up to full-blown lust, avarice, fame-seeking and dogmatic clinging to ideas." (Greed covers a wide area in the human mind from small desires to full-blown lust, which includes greed, seeking fame and clinging to dogma, believing that only what one thinks and does is right.) Having such views often leaves behind painful consequences for many people involved. "Hatred (*dosa*), which covers mild irritation through to burning resentment and wrath." "Spiritual misorientation (*moha*), the veiling of truth from oneself, as in dull, foggy states of mind through to specious doubt on moral and spiritual matters, distorting the truth..."

In essence, *ignorance (avidyā)* stands as the most perilous affliction of the human mind, for it obscures reality, leads individuals into misguided actions, and plunges them into the depths of suffering (*duḥkha*). It is the very force that perpetuates the cycle of darkness, binding sentient beings to lifetimes of distress and confusion. Unlike other defilements, ignorance is profoundly insidious, deeply embedded, and exceedingly difficult to eradicate, which is why it is regarded as a grave affliction (*mahāpāpa*). The degree of suffering one endures in this world is directly proportional to the extent of one's ignorance - those who lack wisdom (*prajñā*) inevitably experience greater turmoil, while

¹⁹ *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. I, Translated by F. L. Woodward and Mrs. Davids, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1989, p. 183.

²⁰ As above, p. 181.

²¹ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2000, p. 46.

those who cultivate insight navigate existence with clarity and ease.

Any action performed without right understanding (*samyag-dṛṣṭi*), when rooted in delusion, yields consequences that are often immeasurable, reverberating far beyond the present moment. This is especially evident in contemporary society, where both developed and developing nations - regardless of their economic, political, or cultural advancements - remain ensnared by the three fundamental poisons (*triviṣa*) that the Buddha so clearly elucidated in the *suttas* (Pāli) and *sūtras* (Sanskrit). With boundless compassion (*karuṇā*) and profound wisdom (*prajñā*), the Buddha forewarned humanity nearly twenty-six centuries ago of these afflictions,²² which continue to shape the suffering of individuals and societies alike.

Among these three poisons - Greed (*lobha*); anger (*dosa*); and delusion (*moha*) - ignorance is the most formidable, as it serves as the root from which the other two arise. Zen Master Thich Thanh Tu insightfully remarked: “*The three poisons are the source of suffering for sentient beings and the root of human insecurity. Only by recognizing them can we begin the process of eliminating them.*”²³ This recognition alone, however, is not sufficient. The Buddha prescribed a clear antidote: the cultivation of the ten wholesome actions (*daśa-kuśala-karmapatha*), which manifest through our thoughts, speech, and bodily conduct.

By mindfully engaging in these ten virtuous practices, one gradually weakens the grip of ignorance and its accompanying defilements. In doing so, individuals not only free themselves from suffering but also contribute to a world that is more just, harmonious, and enlightened. The path to liberation (*mokṣa*) thus begins with self-awareness, ethical discipline (*śīla*), and the unwavering pursuit of wisdom.

In another *sutta* in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha taught that in everyday life people often break the ten Buddhist precepts²⁴ also due to the three poisons of greed, anger and delusion created through our body, speech and thoughts. The Buddha taught as follows:

Monks, taking of life is threefold, I declare. It is due to lust, malice, and delusion. Taking what is not given... wrong conduct in sexual desire... falsehood... spiteful speech... bitter speech... idle babble... coveting... harmfulness... wrong view is threefold. I declare. It is due to lust, malice, and delusion. Thus, monks, lust is the coming-to-be of a chain of causal action; so is malice. Delusion, monks, is the coming-to-be of a chain of

²² Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2000, p. 3; Also see: John S. Strong, *The Buddha, A Short Biography*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, England, Reprinted 2002, p. 1.

²³ Thich Thanh Tu, *Tam Doc*, Translated by Nguyen Hung, Religion Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, p. 2011, p. 8.

²⁴ Killing; taking what is not given; sexual misconduct; lying; speaking with a double tongue; speaking harshly; speaking frivolously; covetousness; anger; wrong views. See: *Anguttara Nikaya III*, Thich Minh Chau, Vietnam Buddhist University, Campus II, Ho Chi Minh City, 1988, p. 550.

causal action. By destroying lust, by destroying malice, by destroying delusion comes the breaking up of the chain of causal action.²⁵

And the Buddha affirmed that the ten evil deeds above originate from the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance.²⁶ Human chaos, cruelty, and genocide ultimately originate from these three poisons. Therefore, the Buddha pointed out that the origin of all sins committed by humans and living beings originates from these three poisons. They are greed, anger, and ignorance.

In chapter 7, the chapter on Buddhist ethics of the Theravada system, there is an analysis of what is good and what is bad. And it is explained as follows:

Dear friends, what is evil, and what is the root of evil? And it is clearly answered as follows: “What are the unwholesome? That is killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct. In sensual pleasures, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, frivolous talk, covetousness, evil mind, wrong views. What is the root of unwholesomeness? Greed, anger, ignorance.”²⁷

And this book also clearly states what is Good and what is the foundation of Good?

“What is good? Abstaining from killing, abstaining from taking what is not given, abstaining from sexual misconduct, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from frivolous speech, no greed, no evil thoughts, right view are good.”²⁸ And what is the fundamental goodness? “Non-greed, non-anger, and non-delusion are the roots of goodness.”²⁹

In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha pointed out that there are three fundamentals of goodness as follows: “There are three roots of goodness. What are the three? None-greed is the root of goodness, non-hatred is the root of goodness, non-delusion is the root of goodness.”³⁰ Similarly, we also see another famous book mentions this above idea: “There are three roots of merit. What three? Absence of greed, absence of malice, absence of delusion is a root of merit.”³¹ And the Buddha explained:

An individual who is free from *greed (lobha)*, *hatred (dveṣa)*, and *delusion (moha)* - in all dimensions of body, speech, and mind - engages only in wholesome actions (*kuśāla*). Such a person, unshaken by these defilements, exercises self-mastery and does not succumb to wrongful deeds. He does not

²⁵ *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. V, Translated by F. L. Woodward and Mrs Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1955, pp. 174 - 175.

²⁶ As above, p. 174.

²⁷ *Introduction to Buddhist Wisdom*, Vietnamese translation editor: Le Manh That - Tue Sy, Hong Duc Publishing House, 2019, p. 458.

²⁸ As above, p. 458.

²⁹ As above, p. 458.

³⁰ *The Book of The Gradual Sayings*, Vol. I, F. L. Woodward and Mrs Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1989, p. 184.

³¹ *Introduction to Buddhist Wisdom*, Vietnamese translation editor: Le Manh That - Tue Sy, Hong Duc Publishing House, 2019, p. 458.

bear false witness, inflict suffering, engage in violence, or subjugate others with thoughts of superiority, such as: “*I am strong, I have power.*”³² Instead, his conduct is imbued with non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adveṣa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*), giving rise to an ever-expanding field of virtuous actions.

From this teaching, it becomes evident that human nature is not solely composed of negative tendencies, such as greed, anger, and ignorance. In each of us, there also exists the potential for virtue - manifested through non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. These qualities express themselves through the ten pathways of human action, which can be categorized as either wholesome or unwholesome. In terms of bodily actions, the three unwholesome acts (*akuśala-karmapatha*) are: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. In terms of speech, the four harmful forms of communication are: lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and frivolous or meaningless talk. In terms of mental activities, the three afflictions are: greed, hatred, and ignorance.

Conversely, an individual who cultivates the ten wholesome actions (*daśa-kuśala-karmapatha*) fosters harmony and contributes to a world that is abundant in prosperity, joy, and peace. Their presence alleviates suffering, while their actions nurture a society rooted in ethical conduct and mutual respect. However, the inverse is equally true - when unwholesome actions prevail, they give rise to discord, destruction, and suffering, reinforcing the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Ultimately, the distinction between a world characterized by suffering and one defined by peace lies in the choices individuals make at every moment - whether to be governed by defilements or to walk the path of virtue. Through mindfulness (*sati*), wisdom (*prajñā*), and ethical discipline (*śīla*), one gradually weakens the hold of greed, hatred, and delusion, thereby fostering a life of moral clarity and spiritual awakening.

In short, the origin of all evil is greed, anger, and ignorance. The opposite of these three is called good. That means no greed, no anger, no ignorance. We build a peaceful world in the future, essentially building on the foundation of these three things: no greed, no anger, and no ignorance. Or to put it simply, it is to live a moderate life, moderately, knowing enough, knowing how to take care of family, society, country, and together protecting the earth on which we live. Bill Clinton, President of the United States, made a very serious and profound statement: ‘We only have one planet to live on’. His Holiness the Dalai Lama further emphasized the specific number of people living on this planet and our common responsibility to protect the earth, saying: “I am just one of six billion people sharing the same planet. We all exist under the same sun. ...”³³

As long as people know how to cultivate body, speech, and mind, which are expressed through the three actions of body, the four of mouth, and

³² *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, vol. I, Translated by F. L. Woodward and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1989, p. 184.

³³ Dalai Lama, *From Here to Enlightenment*, translated by Tue Uyen, Hong Duc Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2014, p. 3; According to Youtube, the United Nations’ world population statistics in 2024, as of July 1, 2024 are 8.161,927.572 people.

the three of mind. When they are understood correctly and applied in each person's life, there will be no war in this world and peace can be established here, now in each different country on this globe. Therefore, the Buddha is praised as a physician, capable of treating the diseases of the mind, anxiety and insecurity of mankind. As Dr. Amar Singh stated in his speech: "The Buddha is called a doctor (*Bhaisajayaguru*) because like a doctor, he taught the nature of ailment (*dukkha*), its causes (*samudaya*), its treatment (*nirodha*) and method of treatment (*mārga*)."³⁴ This is the basic morality of human society living together on this planet. For example, whenever we see a war happening in any country, it means that two countries use weapons to destroy each other to achieve victory. If war happens, if we look deeply, its main cause comes from the three poisons: greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*), and ignorance (*moha*). There is no divine cause here. It all depends on our responsibility. And we need to remember that we only have this one planet to live on! This idea is clearly shown as follows: "The Buddha also turned the head of divine responsibility to the feet of human responsibility". He exhorted: "You are the master of yourself, there is no other master. By proper training of your mind. You can obtain the difficult master (*nibbāna*)."³⁵

To conclude for this research paper, we would like to borrow the idea that we think it is suitable for us to train ourselves. When Most venerable Thich Thien Sieu weighed and measured the psychology of living beings he spoke the Buddha's thoughts so that today we can practice the teachings of Buddha and gradually eliminate the three poisons, contributing to building peace for the world: He says: "Greed, anger, and ignorance are three diseases that cause suffering for living beings. Only by reducing greed, anger, and ignorance we can have peace."³⁶

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³⁴ Mahesh Tiwary, Ed. *Perspective on Buddhist Ethics*, Department of Buddhist Studies, Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi 7, 1989, p. 124.

³⁵ As above, p. 122: "*Attana hi attano natho, ko hi natho paro sima, attana va sudantena, natha labhathi dullabham*"

³⁶ Thich Thien Sieu, Hu Tam Hoc Dao, Translated by Nguyen Hung, Religion Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2003, p. 70.

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A BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF FORGIVENESS

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Abstract:

The paper attempts to clarify the concept of forgiveness from a Buddhist perspective that is compatible not only with Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions but also with contemporary research on the psychology of forgiveness. The first part analyzes diverse philosophical conceptions of forgiveness. The second part analyzes two recent articles about Buddhist forgiveness to illustrate the need to clarify the meaning and scope of this important concept within Buddhist traditions. The third part contends that the basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is not between conditional and unconditional forgiveness but rather between psychological and social forgiveness. The fourth part examines several patterns of Buddhist forgiveness and suggests that Buddhist forgiveness cannot be reduced to either forbearance or compassion. The fifth part explains the three main stages of psychological Buddhist forgiveness.

Keywords: *Buddhism, forgiveness, philosophy.*

I. CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHIES OF FORGIVENESS

Contemporary discussions of forgiveness in moral and political philosophy began with the work of Hannah Arendt¹ and Vladimir Jankélévitch.² Both authors view forgiveness as presupposing a conditional relationship between an offender and a victim. In their account, forgiveness involves an interpersonal transaction that requires certain conditions to take place, especially confession, contrition and repairs. Both Arendt and Jankélévitch also agree in considering some actions like crimes against humanity unforgivable.

Jacques Derrida challenged both Arendt's and Jankélévitch's understanding

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¹ Hannah Arendt (1958). *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press): 86.

² Vladimir Jankélévitch (1967). *Le Pardon* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne): 101.

of forgiveness,³ and developed a political philosophy based on the concepts of unconditional forgiveness and universal hospitality. Derrida argues that forgiveness consists in forgiving the unforgivable. Derrida compares forgiveness to unconditional giving and suggests that it must overcome the limits of reciprocity and economic exchange because it is not something done to achieve a goal. True forgiveness arises only from what is considered unforgivable.

The most comprehensive philosophical analysis of forgiveness has been undertaken by Charles Griswold.⁴ According to Griswold, forgiveness is a virtue that responds to wrongdoing and evil, which are aspects of our imperfection. Forgiving expresses our imperfection, our vulnerability, embodiment, finitude and emotional nature. For Griswold, there are six conditions required for forgiveness: (1) Taking responsibility for a past wrongdoing or acknowledging that someone was responsible for specific deeds. (2) Repudiating the wrongness of such deeds and the kind of person who performed them. (3) Experiencing and expressing regret at having caused injury to a particular person or wronged party. (4) Commitment, shown through deeds and words, to becoming a better person who does not inflict injury. Together the first four conditions constitute what Griswold calls the “contrition requisite”, which involves not only taking responsibility but also emendation. The last two conditions for forgiveness are: (5) Sympathetic understanding of the injured person’s perspective and of the damage done by the injury. This requires not only listening to the victim’s account but also grasping what she or he may say with compassion. (6) Providing answers to the victim or a narrative explanation of the reasons that lead to do wrong, of how such wrongdoing does not express the totality of the person, and how the offender is becoming worthy of approbation.⁵

For Griswold, these six conditions represent what he calls “forgiveness at its best”, “ideal forgiveness” or “paradigmatic forgiveness”. That is, what forgiveness would have to be to be perfectly accomplished? Griswold accepts that forgiveness admits of degree or approximation in relation to ideal forgiveness. That is, there are non-paradigmatic or non-ideal forms of forgiveness that may satisfy less conditions but still can be considered imperfect instances of forgiveness. Griswold speaks about three “threshold” or “baseline” conditions for imperfect forgiveness: (1) Willingness of the victim to lower her pitch of resentment and to forswear revenge. (2) Willingness of the offender to take minimal steps to qualify for forgiveness, for instance, some degree of repentance. (3) The injury or deed is forgivable.⁶ For Griswold, forgiveness is always conditional and the unilateral giving up of resentment

³ Jacques Derrida (2001). *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York: Routledge): 45.

⁴ Charles L. Griswold (2007). *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press): 46 – 8.

⁵ Griswold (2007): 49 – 51.

⁶ Griswold (2007): 115.

does not count as forgiveness, even less as perfect forgiveness. For him, the view of forgiveness as a “gift” or “unconditional” is a mistaken theory. Griswold accepts that achieving a state of inner peace in response to wrongdoing and injury is necessary but not sufficient to speak about accomplished forgiveness.⁷

Another important philosophy of forgiveness has been developed by Martha Nussbaum.⁸ Nussbaum offers a critique of classical or canonical Judeo-Christian forgiveness, which she calls “transactional forgiveness”. She describes it as a “typically dyadic procedure involving confrontation, confession, apology and “working through”.”⁹ For Nussbaum, it is plausible to think that transactional forgiveness is the most common form of forgiveness in the world today.

Nussbaum contends that the procedural aspects of this kind of forgiveness have their origins in and are organized by a Judeo-Christian worldview in which the primary moral relationship is between an “omniscient score-keeping God and erring mortals”.¹⁰ God keeps records of all our errors, and “if there is enough weeping, imploring, and apologizing - typically involving considerable self-abasement - God may decide to waive the penalty for some or all transgressions and to restore the penitent person to heavenly blessings”.¹¹ This relationship between God and humans serves as model for human relationships, but the primary relationship remains that between God and humans. Thus, human forgiveness is modeled on the way God forgives us.

For Nussbaum the process of transactional forgiveness is “a harsh inquisitorial process. It demands confession, weeping and wailing, a sense of one’s lowness and essential worthlessness. The penitent is tormented simply by penitence. The person who administers the process is controlling and relentless toward the penitent, an inquisitor of acts and desires...the process asks us to sit in judgment on one another, confessing and being confessed to”.¹² Nussbaum’s assessment of transactional forgiveness suggests that rather than being an antidote to anger it “looks like a continuation of anger’s payback wish by another name”.¹³ In her critique of transactional forgiveness, Nussbaum goes as far as to express her agreement with Nietzsche’s view of some aspects of Judeo-Christian morality. For Nussbaum, Nietzsche is right in seeing transactional forgiveness as “a displaced vindictiveness and a concealed resentment”.¹⁴ However, Nussbaum criticizes Nietzsche for failing to see the complexity of Jewish and Christian morality, which possess other alternative ways of thinking about forgiveness.

⁷ Griswold (2007): 117.

⁸ Martha Nussbaum (2016). *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 98.

⁹ Nussbaum (2016): 10.

¹⁰ Nussbaum (2016): 11.

¹¹ Nussbaum (2016): 11.

¹² Nussbaum (2016): 73.

¹³ Nussbaum (2016): 11.

¹⁴ Nussbaum (2016): 12.

According to Nussbaum, Jewish and Christian traditions contain other ways of thinking about forgiveness besides transactional forgiveness. More specifically, Nussbaum analyzes two alternative conceptions of forgiveness “in which generosity, love, and even humor replace the grim drama of penance and exacted contrition”.¹⁵ She calls these two other forms of forgiveness “unconditional forgiveness” and “unconditional love and generosity”, which for Nussbaum it is better not to call it forgiveness. Rather than forgiveness, it is an ethic of unconditional love that departs altogether from judgment, confession, contrition, and consequent waiving of anger.

For Nussbaum, “unconditional forgiveness” presupposes a response to prior anger and a subtle payback wish that needs to be waived. In contrast, “unconditional love and generosity” responds to wrongdoing with an attitude of unconditional love and generosity, “love is the first response, not a substitute for a prior pay back wish”.¹⁶ Nussbaum discusses instances of unconditional forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud as well as in the Gospels. She contends that in the words and example of Jesus unconditional forgiveness is more prominent than transactional forgiveness.¹⁷ The paradigmatic Christian examples of forgiveness as unconditional love and generosity, that is, forgiveness without previous judgment and anger, is the story of the prodigal son and the exhortation to love your enemies in the Sermon of the Mountain.

Overall, contemporary philosophies of forgiveness are based on the dichotomy victim-wrongdoer, and they are primarily focused on the question of whether the wrongdoer must do something to warrant or earn forgiveness. The fundamental distinction is between conditional and unconditional forgiveness. That is, between forgiveness with or without requirements such as remorse, repentance, apology and repairs.

Conditional forgiveness is also known as “transactional forgiveness”¹⁸ and “moral justice forgiveness”.¹⁹ Unconditional forgiveness is also known as “gifted forgiveness”. One important concern discussed by recent scholarship on the philosophy of forgiveness is the relationship between these two types of forgiveness. There have been attempts to integrate these two kinds of forgiveness into one explanatory order. Some scholars argue that conditional forgiveness has priority, and that unconditional forgiveness is derivative,²⁰ while others change the order and give priority to unconditional forgiveness over conditional forgiveness.²¹

¹⁵ Nussbaum (2016): 11.

¹⁶ Nussbaum (2016): 78.

¹⁷ Nussbaum (2016): 75.

¹⁸ Nussbaum (2016): 80.

¹⁹ Miranda Fricker (2019). “Forgiveness - An Ordered Pluralism”, in *Australian Philosophical Review*, vol.3. no.3, 241 - 260.

²⁰ Fricker (2019): 20.

²¹ Lucy Allais (2019). “The Priority of Gifted Forgiveness: A Response to Fricker”, in *Australian Philosophical Review*, Vol.3. NO.3, 261 - 273.

II. CONFLICTING VIEWS OF BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

Here I cannot analyze all the available scholarship on Buddhist forgiveness. I limit myself to discuss two recent articles on Buddhist forgiveness to illustrate the diversity of Buddhist views on forgiveness, and the need to clarify the nature of this important concept. First, I will discuss the work of the Taiwanese scholar Chien-Te Lin,²² and afterwards the work of the Canadian scholar Donna Lynn Brown.²³

Chien-Te Lin explains that forgiveness in Buddhism has moral and social dimensions as well as spiritual and transcendental aspects. Chien-Te Lin contends that Buddhist forgiveness “is unconditional and repentance is not compulsory for a victim to forgive the wrongdoer.”²⁴ For Chien-Te Lin, forgiveness forms an integral part of the daily practice of both clergy and lay practitioners; forgiveness is also a vital Buddhist practice in both the bodhisattva and the arahant traditions “irrespective of whether or not there is repentance by the transgressor.”²⁵

Chien-Te Lin affirms that forgiveness may not correspond precisely to the perfection of patience or forbearance (*Pāli khanti/Sanskrit kṣānti*), but he acknowledges that they are related. Both forbearance and forgiveness are a virtuous response to harm brought upon oneself by another’s misconduct. Chien-Te Lin claims that forgiveness is a quality inherent in forbearance and he defines forgiveness as “acknowledging the harm of others leniently without thoughts of further revenge.”²⁶

Although Chien-Te Lin defines forgiveness as a quality inherent in forbearance, he also affirms that forgiveness is an act of compassion. In fact, he entitles a section of his article “Forgiveness as An Act of Compassion”²⁷, and explains that “forgiveness is both an act of compassion toward another and a means to achieve self-transformation.”²⁸ In other section of his article, Chien-Te Lin clarifies that forgiveness is “a precursor to compassion.”²⁹

Whether forgiveness is an act of compassion or a quality inherent in forbearance that serves as a precursor to compassion, what really matters is that forgiveness protect us from hatred and helps to develop spiritual qualities such as “tolerance, comity, forbearance, endurance, mercy, softness, kindness and magnanimity.”³⁰

²² Chien-Te Lin (2021). “With or Without Repentance: A Buddhist Take on Forgiveness”, in *Ethical Perspectives*, 28. no.3, 263 - 285.

²³ Donna Lynn Brown (2022). “Forgiveness American-Style: Origins and Status of Forgiveness in North American Buddhism”, in *Contemporary Buddhism*, vol. 23, nos.1 - 2, 18 - 66.

²⁴ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 265.

²⁵ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 272.

²⁶ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 266.

²⁷ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 269 - 270.

²⁸ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

²⁹ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 271.

³⁰ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 271.

For Chien-Te Lin, forgiveness in Buddhism is primarily an internal exercise to train compassion and to become a better person. If forgiveness is an indispensable exercise to attain self-transformation and the betterment of persons, it should be unconditional. In Chien-Te Lin's words "forgiveness is a crucial Buddhist spiritual practice, which does not presuppose repentance as a necessary prerequisite".³¹

Chien-Te Lin illustrates the unconditional nature of Buddhist forgiveness with the examples of Āryadeva and the XIV Dalai Lama. Āryadeva forgave the person who killed him during his dying moments displaying deep compassion towards him and regardless of whether the attacker showed repentance. Similarly, the Dalai Lama forgives his Chinese transgressors out of a compassionate attitude towards them, and without necessarily requiring their apology and repentance. Chien-Te Lin also discusses the example of Bodhisattvas, who are "encouraged to cultivate a level of compassion which allows for unlimited and universal forgiveness, such that there is nobody and nothing that cannot be forgiven".³²

According to Chien-Te Lin, a Buddhist framework provides two compelling reasons to forgive unconditionally out of compassion: the fact that the deeds of those who harm us derive from a state of ignorance, and the fact that wrongdoers create negative karma that eventually will ripen in future suffering. The cause of any wrongful act is an ignorant state of mind. The root problem is not the transgressor but rather ignorance: "it is not the bite of a snake that kills us, but rather the poison; it is the presence of ignorance in the mind of the transgressor that is at fault, rather than the transgressor him or herself".³³

Chien-Te Lin discusses other reasons to cultivate forgiveness toward those who harm us such as the fact that they have been our relatives in past lives, and that they offer us the opportunity for spiritual growth. Rather than creating negative karma through retaliation and revenge out of resentment, anger or hostility, we should be grateful to those who hurt us for giving us an opportunity to practice forgiveness, thus contributing to our self-transformation and spiritual advance. Another reason is that unconditional forgiveness brings happiness and benefits the practitioner, whereas hostility and anger bring suffering.

Forgiving others is a powerful remedy against anger and hostility. Forgiveness can be considered from an egocentric point of view as a matter of self-interest because it contributes to both our physical and mental health. However, seen from an altruistic point of view, forgiveness is a liberating and powerful remedy that aids our spiritual growth and that is essential to the cultivation of compassion. In sum, Buddhist forgiveness is a vital spiritual practice "irrespective of whether there is repentance by the transgressor".³⁴

³¹ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

³² Chien-Te Lin (2021): 269.

³³ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

³⁴ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 272.

Chien-Te Lin explains that Buddhist forgiveness has four unique characteristics. First, Buddhist forgiveness is intention-based. What determines the karmic potential of the act of forgiving is the intention or volition of the forgiver. For Chien-Te Lin, this intentional nature of forgiveness underscores the fact that forgiveness does not depend on the offender's repentance: "Due to the importance of intention, forgiveness comes into existence, not from an objective recognition, but from subjective validation".³⁵

The second characteristic of Buddhist forgiveness is its detached, selfless character. Chien-Te Lin relates this with the doctrine of non-self and emptiness: "during the act of forgiving, ultimately there is no agent who forgives, no one who is being forgiven and there is no wrongdoing to be forgiven".³⁶ This characteristic also signifies the absence of egoistic concerns and the moral equality of forgiver and forgiven, that is, the forgiver is not to be seen as superior to the forgiven and the forgiven is not to be seen as inferior.

The third characteristic of Buddhist forgiveness is that it is a competence that can be acquired gradually. Forgiveness may require time and practice to be fully achieved. Someone may choose to forgive unconditionally because that is what we ought to do, but that does not mean that we are able to do so immediately. In Chien-Te Lin's words, "forgiveness is not merely a conceptual understanding or idealistic imperative, but also a matter of pragmatic competence".³⁷ We all can increase our capacity to forgive and this may require mental training.

The fourth characteristic of Buddhist forgiveness is that it is an indication of prudence and strength. Forgiving someone unconditionally out of compassion does not mean that we condone or excuse their misconduct. Forgiveness does not preclude punishment. Punishing a wrongdoer is compatible with our willingness to forgive. The goal of punishment is not only justice but also the moral reform of the transgressor. Punishment must be given out of lovingkindness and a sense of concern for the wellbeing of the transgressor: "Rather than a form of retaliation, it [punishment] is a skillful form of rehabilitation".³⁸

Chien-Te Lin draws on the Dalai Lama to distinguish between the agent and the act of wrongdoing: "When we forgive, we forgive the agent but not the action".³⁹ Forgiving someone does not entail passivity or weakness. Quite the contrary, forgiving is consistent with taking a strong stance and doing something to stop the misconduct of someone. Adopting countermeasures against wrongful deeds while forgiving the agent requires prudence and inner strength.

³⁵ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 276.

³⁶ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 277.

³⁷ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 277 - 278.

³⁸ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 278.

³⁹ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 279.

In conclusion, for Chien-Te Lin “forgiveness is unconditional in Buddhism”.⁴⁰ Whereas Buddhist forgiveness does not require repentance as a prerequisite, in “Western philosophy and mainstream monotheistic traditions, repentance is a prerequisite for forgiveness – no apology means no forgiveness”.⁴¹ Forgiveness benefits both oneself and others, the one who forgives and the person who is forgiven. Forgiveness is a vital spiritual practice that transforms the one who forgives. For Chien-Te Lin, what allows forgiveness is Buddhist wisdom and compassion,⁴² and “apart from the mundane moral and social dimensions of forgiveness, the Buddhist practice of forgiveness has spiritual and transcendent aspects which enable unconditional forgiveness of wrongdoing in the absence of repentance”.⁴³

The second scholar whose work on Buddhist forgiveness I analyze here is Donna Lynn Brown.⁴⁴ According to Donna Lynn Brown, “what is taught as forgiveness in older Buddhist contexts often differs from what is taught in North American Buddhism today”.⁴⁵ Since the 1980s, there is a new paradigm of forgiveness in Western culture: “victims let go of anger as a way to close wrongs. It is an attitude, not an action. It is not conditional, and does not lead to reconciliation. I call it ‘individual forgiveness’”.⁴⁶

Besides “individual forgiveness”, there are two other paradigms of forgiveness, which Brown calls “relational forgiveness” and “gift forgiveness”. What unites relational and gift forgiveness is that both lead to reconciliation, that is, the aim of both is restoring relationships. Both relational and gift forgiveness are best described as actions. However, individual forgiveness is best described as an attitude unconnected to wrongdoer accountability or reconciliation. Individual forgiveness is “an attitude of letting go that offers mental peace but does not restore relationship”.⁴⁷

Relational forgiveness requires conditions such as repentance and repairs, whereas gift forgiveness does not depend on any prerequisite. In this sense, relational and gift forgiveness correlate with conditional and unconditional forms of forgiveness. Brown draws on Martha Nussbaum to define individual forgiveness: “an attitude, unconditional, opposite to anger and vengefulness, embraced in solitude, and not restoring relationship”.⁴⁸ I label this way of forgiving ‘individual’ forgiveness”.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 280.

⁴¹ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 279.

⁴² Chien-Te Lin (2021): 280.

⁴³ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 281.

⁴⁴ Donna Lynn Brown (2022). “Forgiveness American-Style: Origins and Status of Forgiveness in North American Buddhism”, in *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 23, Nos.1 - 2, 18 - 66.

⁴⁵ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 19.

⁴⁶ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 39.

⁴⁷ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 20.

⁴⁸ Nussbaum (2016): 72, 77 - 78.

⁴⁹ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 21.

According to Brown, the prevalent form of forgiveness in classical Buddhist texts as well as in premodern Asian practice is what she calls “relational forgiveness”, that is, forgiveness intended to restore a relationship through the fulfilment of certain conditions such as confession, apology and commitment to future restraint. Gift forgiveness or unconditional forgiveness to restore a relationship and achieve reconciliation “is not easily found in classical Buddhist texts, but probably occurs in everyday life”.⁵⁰

Brown thesis is that the forgiveness taught in Buddhism in North America today is mainly individual,⁵¹ and that it “did not come from Asia, but originated in North America”.⁵² In other words, forgiveness as a peaceful attitude to let go of anger is a North American innovation that has passed largely unnoticed.⁵³ This new form of Buddhist forgiveness was developed primarily by five vipassana teachers: Stephen Levine, Joseph Goldstein, Anagārika Munindra, Jack Kornfield, and Sharon Salzberg.

Brown points out two foundations that contributed to contemporary understandings of individual forgiveness. The first foundation is that forgiveness was used as a translation for forbearance terms. These translations led to an understanding of forgiveness as equivalent to forbearance. In Brown’s words: “One foundation for individual forgiveness was the idea that ‘forgiveness’, rather than referring to the act of reconciling after wrongdoers repaired their wrongs, meant only ‘forbearance’”.⁵⁴ Brown discusses translations by Charles Wilkins, T. W. Rhys Davids, and Caroline Rhys Davids. Brown also discusses how Theosophists like Helena Blavatsky portrayed the Buddha as advocating unconditional forgiveness because karma enforces justice and any demand for accountability from wrongdoers would add unnecessary karmic punishment. For Brown, theosophical writers conflated forgiveness and forbearance in their descriptions of Buddhism, and they “spread the view that the Buddha taught forgiveness as unconditional, an attitude, and the same thing as forbearance”.⁵⁵

The second foundation that contributed to the prevalence of individual forgiveness among North American Buddhists is the way Western followers interpreted the words and actions of their Asian teachers. Brown discusses four Asian teachers: Anagārika Dharmapāla, Satya Narayan Goenka, Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati, who was a Hindu teacher of Stephen Levine, and Neem Karoli Baba, who was the Hindu guru of Ram Dass.

Anagārika Munindra was a friend and student of Anagārika Dharmapāla, who was heavily influenced by Theosophical writers, and probably drew on their view of forgiveness as an attitude. Munindra was also a student of Goenka and he was influenced by Goenka’s conception of forgiveness. For Brown, Munindra

⁵⁰ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 21.

⁵¹ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 21.

⁵² Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 25.

⁵³ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 30.

⁵⁴ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 25.

⁵⁵ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 26.

“mixed relational and individual forgiveness”⁵⁶

Goenka shows a relational idea of forgiving that is conditional on requesting forgiveness from others after acknowledging possible wrongdoing through body, speech and mind (dedication-pardon). However, Brown suggests that such dedication-pardon recited at the end of Goenka’s meditation retreats has been interpreted as individual forgiveness.⁵⁷ More specifically, Munindra, Goldstein and Salzberg, who attended Goenka’s retreats in the early 1970s, interpreted Goenka’s dedication-pardon, which is a form of relational, conditional forgiveness, as a form of unconditional, individual forgiveness. Thus, Brown concludes that Goenka’s dedication-pardon “disseminated the idea that Buddhism teaches individual forgiveness”⁵⁸

Stephen Levine was a student of a Hindu teacher called Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati, who was also influenced by Theosophy and taught both relational and individual forgiveness. Whereas relational forgiveness was based on confession, remorse and restoring relationship, individual forgiveness was understood as a mere letting go of anger to resolve wrongs without holding wrongdoers accountable. For Brown, Stephen Levine taught forgiveness and self-forgiveness in the same individual way.

Neem Karoli Baba was the teacher of Ram Dass, who influenced the view of individual forgiveness taught by American vipassana teachers like Levine, Kornfield, Goldstein, and Salzberg. Ram Dass interpreted his teacher’s view of acceptance or love as a form of individual forgiveness. For Ram Dass, an attitude of unconditional forgiveness forms a step toward “being love”, which is the goal of spirituality. That is, unconditional love is founded on unconditional forgiveness. Forgiveness is the expression of a loving attitude or feeling that washes away the wrongdoing of both oneself and others; a peaceful attitude of letting go that heals and absolves all wrongs, hurts, irritants, guilt, and remorse. American vipassana teachers “adopted his [Ram Dass] definition of forgiveness - an attitude of non-anger, unconditional on repair, that dismisses wrongs, hurts and irritants as a step toward ‘being love’”⁵⁹

Brown assumes that “The idea that forgiveness precedes love comes from Ram Dass”⁶⁰ and concludes that “Evidence that forgiveness meditation came from Asia is lacking”⁶¹. Brown contends that neither the *mettā sutta* nor loving-kindness meditations contain words or concepts that can be translated as forgiveness. Likewise, mainstream Asian meditations of *mettā* meditations “produced prior to Western influence also do not mention forgiveness or forbearance”⁶². From the absence of forgiveness meditation that precede

⁵⁶ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 33.

⁵⁷ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 26.

⁵⁸ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 27.

⁵⁹ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 34.

⁶⁰ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 34.

⁶¹ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 34.

⁶² Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 35.

lovingkindness meditation, and the absence of terms about forbearance and forgiveness in the *mettā sutta*, Brown concludes that the origins of individual forgiveness is found in American culture, not in traditional Asian Buddhism.

In her study of the origins of individual forgiveness, Brown not only credits Ram Dass but also A course in Miracles, bestselling New Age self-help author Dr. Gerald G. Jampolsky, and the evangelical pastor Lewis B. Smedes. By the 1990s, individual forgiveness was in, and instead of addressing interpersonal wrongs through conditional forms of relational forgiveness by holding wrongdoers accountable, now forgiveness was practiced in solitude by letting go of anger, that presenting anger and forgiveness as a dichotomy. According to Brown, “the high profile of this new form of forgiveness, and its growing role in psychotherapy, contributed to its adoption by Buddhists”.⁶³

According to Brown, the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn represents a transition that involves lovingkindness meditation with forgiveness borrowed from vipassana and a definition of forgiveness taken from non-Buddhist sources.⁶⁴ For Brown, “Kabat-Zinn defines forgiveness as resolving past wrongs by dropping anger, presents a dichotomy of forgiveness and anger, and makes the purpose of forgiving peace of mind, not ‘being love’ as Ram Dass and the *vipassāna* teachers had taught.”⁶⁵ This definition, dichotomy and aim were all drawn from Smedes’ and others’ self-help and psychological teachings”.⁶⁶

In conclusion, Brown argues that individual forgiveness has “mainly non-Buddhist origins”,⁶⁷ “mainly North American origins”,⁶⁸ because it “was developed mainly by Ram Dass and Stephen Levine in the 1970s”. Another key claim of Brown’s article is that individual forgiveness does not emphasize moral agency, judgment of right and wrong, accountability, repair, and reconciliation.⁶⁹

III. THE BASIC DISTINCTION WITHIN BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

Given the existence of conflicting views of forgiveness among Western philosophers as well as among scholars who have researched Buddhist forgiveness, there is a need to clarify the meaning of this important concept. As Donna Lynn Brown says, contemporary scholarship “reveals contradictory ideas about what constitutes forgiveness in Buddhism”.⁷⁰ In what follows, I argue that forgiveness is not a Buddhist concept from a cosmological perspective but rather a concept that can be used from a psychological and social perspective. I suggest that the basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is not between conditional and unconditional forgiveness but rather between psychological and social forgiveness. I also contend that from a Buddhist perspective these

⁶³ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 41.

⁶⁴ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 41.

⁶⁵ Kabat-Zinn (1990) 127 - 8, 182 - 3.

⁶⁶ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 41.

⁶⁷ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 46.

⁶⁸ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 47.

⁶⁹ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 47.

⁷⁰ Donna Lynn Brown (2022): 48.

two basic kinds of forgiveness are intrinsically interrelated and oriented toward healing and peace both at the individual and the social level.

Buddhist forgiveness can be understood from a cosmological, social, and psychological perspective. Depending on what perspective we adopt, we can say different things about Buddhist forgiveness. From a cosmological standpoint, it is inaccurate and highly misleading to speak about Buddhist forgiveness. Forgiveness is not a Buddhist concept from a cosmological perspective. The Buddhist conception of karma cannot, and it should not be understood as having anything to do with forgiveness.

There is no forgiveness at the cosmic level of karma and its consequences. The Buddhist universe does not contain a creator God who may choose to intervene in the workings of karma to forgive wrongdoers, or to offer his only begotten son as a loving sacrifice to suffer and die for the sins of humankind. Likewise, liberation from karma is never a salvific gift or a grace received from a higher divine power. These theological ideas have nothing to do with Buddhist cosmology and the Buddhist conception of forgiveness.

Karma cannot be forgiven, and neither gods nor Buddhas or Bodhisattvas can intervene to eliminate the inexorable consequences of our actions. As Ken McLeod states “There is no grace in the operation of karma, just as there is no grace in the operation of gravity.”⁷¹ Karma is a natural process that no supernatural agent can stop, suspend, or supervise at will. We can experience the results of our actions, we can mitigate the consequences of past evil deeds with new wholesome actions, and eventually we can even transcend good and bad karma. However, nobody can do anything to make karma disappear or absolve wrongdoers from the consequences of their actions. The Buddhist view of the universe is incompatible with the forgiveness of karma by any supernatural entity or divine reality.

The absence of a concept of forgiveness at the cosmological level, however, does not mean that there is no forgiveness in Buddhist traditions. As Bhikkhu Thanissaro affirms: “Forgiveness may not be able to undo old bad *karma*, but it can prevent new bad karma from being done.”⁷² Although there is no Buddhist forgiveness at the cosmic level of karma, there is Buddhist forgiveness at the psychological and social levels.

By forgiveness I mean an intentional response to someone who has committed a transgression or done something to harm us in some way. In other words, forgiveness is a response to those who harm us. As we will see, psychological Buddhist forgiveness is a gradual process that cannot be identified with patience, non-hostility, lovingkindness and compassion.

The most basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is between social and psychological forgiveness. Both types of forgiveness are responses to those

⁷¹ Ken McLeod (2017). “Forgiveness is not Buddhists”, in *Tricycle*, Winter, 120.

⁷² Bhikkhu Thanissaro (2018). “All Winners, No Losers: The Buddha’s Teachings on Animosity & Forgiveness”. Originally published in *Tricycle*.

who harm either us or the communities in which we live. Social forgiveness is intended to heal and restore relationships. The goal of social forgiveness is to reestablish harmonious interactions among individuals and to foster peaceful coexistence within communities. Ideally, social forgiveness seeks reconciliation and, if possible, a friendly relationship with all beings.

Social forgiveness usually requires conditions such as acknowledgement of a transgression, confession and commitment to avoid the same transgression in the future. In some cases, social forgiveness may also require repairs or amendments, such as rectification, restitution and some sort of retribution or punishment. Although social forgiveness is always conditional, psychological forgiveness may be either conditional or unconditional, depending on the spiritual development of the victim. The more loving and compassionate the practitioner is, the more likely she/he will offer forgiveness unconditionally, that is, regardless of the transgressor's repentance and reparations.

From a traditional Buddhist perspective, forgiveness at the social level is not limited to human interactions within lay and monastic communities. Traditional Buddhist cosmology includes diverse planes of rebirth besides the human realm. One can be reborn in any of those realms of existence and have interactions with beings living there. Likewise, humans can have interactions with beings from other realms of existence and such interactions may require forgiveness. Wherever there is harm and transgression, there is room for forgiveness. In other words, from a Buddhist perspective, social forgiveness is not limited to human interactions because humans can have interactions not only among themselves but also with other beings including deities (*devas*), titans (*asuras*), hungry ghosts (*petas*), and in Mahāyāna traditions, even with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Whereas social forgiveness is intended to heal and restore relationships to foster harmony and peace within communities, psychological forgiveness is intended to heal and transform individuals. The goal of psychological forgiveness is to put aside negative, unwholesome emotions toward someone who has wronged us in some way, and to gradually replace such afflictive emotions by more positive and wholesome emotions such as forbearance, non-hostility, lovingkindness and compassion.

As we will see, the inner transformation enabled by forgiveness is a gradual process that may involve several stages, from restraining unwholesome attitudes and conduct through forbearance, to their progressive replacement by wholesome attitudes and conduct based on lovingkindness and compassion.

From a Buddhist perspective, psychological forgiveness is an indispensable part of the Buddhist path to transform and purify the mind. In this sense, psychological forgiveness can be considered a fundamental spiritual practice that enhances the cultivation of key Buddhist virtues such as forbearance, lovingkindness and compassion.

What I call "psychological" and "social" forgiveness can be compared to what is called "intrapersonal" and "interpersonal" forgiveness in contemporary

philosophy and psychology. Some Buddhists may find the terms “interpersonal” and “intrapersonal” more appropriate while others might find them problematic because they seem to presuppose the ultimate existence of persons, which is incompatible with the Buddhist doctrine of non-self. Personally, I think it is possible to speak about persons and responsible individuals at the conventional level, and as long as we do not posit a permanent and independent identity or self, the terms “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” are harmless and consistent with Buddhist traditions. However, to prevent possible misunderstandings and to avoid possible tensions with Buddhist traditions and the Buddhist doctrine of non-self, I prefer to use the terms “psychological” and “social” forgiveness instead of “intrapersonal” and “interpersonal” forgiveness.

Other thinkers may prefer other terminologies like “inner” and “outer” forgiveness, or “spiritual” and “ethical” forgiveness, or “soteriological” and “sociopolitical” forgiveness. I really do not think terminology should be an issue because what really matters is the meaning of the terms and whether such terms help to clarify and better understand Buddhist forgiveness.

We need to clarify whether psychological and social forgiveness are interrelated in Buddhist traditions, whether one type of forgiveness has priority over the other, and whether Buddhist forgiveness admit degrees and variations. Psychological and social forgiveness are intrinsically interrelated in Buddhist traditions because both are intended to foster healing and peace. Psychological forgiveness fosters inner healing and peace that is, within individuals or within their minds, whereas social forgiveness promotes external healing and peace, that is, healing relationships within families and communities, and peaceful coexistence between diverse groups of people.

Psychological and social forgiveness are also intrinsically interrelated in Buddhist traditions because they both contribute to the transformation of individuals and their communities in accordance with the Dharma, that is, they are both conducive to greater levels of healing and peace inside us and between us. Both psychological and social forgiveness mitigate individual and social suffering, eventually culminating in liberation, which is also described in terms of peace and health.

Exercising forgiveness at both the psychological and the social levels is required to live in accordance with the Buddha Dharma. For instance, the Buddha suggests that transgressions must be acknowledged as transgressions by the offenders, and that victims must rightfully forgive those confessed transgressions. In Bhikkhu Thanissaro’s translation: “Monks, these two are fools. Which two? The one who doesn’t see his transgression as a transgression, and the one who doesn’t rightfully pardon another who has confessed his transgression. These two are fools. These two are wise people. Which two? The one who sees his transgression as a transgression, and the one who rightfully pardons another who has confessed his transgression. These two are wise people.”⁷³ It is important to note that this text presupposes

⁷³ A. I. 59.

two distinct yet interrelated aspects of forgiveness. Seeing one's transgression as a transgression is an aspect of psychological forgiveness, and rightfully pardoning a confessed transgression is an aspect of social forgiveness. This means that Buddhist forgiveness is not merely an internal psychological process because the transgressor acknowledges and confesses his/her transgression to the victim. Likewise, Buddhist forgiveness is not merely an external social transaction because seeing the transgression as transgression and pardoning the transgression are internal psychological phenomena.

Although both psychological and social forgiveness are equally important and necessary to promote healing and peace within individuals and the communities in which they live, from a Buddhist perspective, psychological forgiveness has priority over social forgiveness. As the first verse of the *Dhammapada* states: "Mind precedes all things, mind is their chief, they are all mind-made, if someone speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him like the wheel follows the foot of the ox".⁷⁴

Another reason for the priority of psychological forgiveness over social forgiveness is that Buddhist practices of social forgiveness are ultimately oriented toward the moral and spiritual transformation of individuals. That is, ceremonies to formally acknowledge, confess, and commit to exercising restraint in the future are not only social practices to promote communal harmony and peace, but also skillful instruments to foster the psychological transformation of both offenders and victims. In other words, the ultimate goal of social forgiveness is not restoring relationships and promoting communal harmony, but rather to eventually replace unwholesome attitudes and conduct dominated by anger and resentment by wholesome attitudes and conduct based on positive emotions and wisdom.

IV. PATTERNS OF BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

It is futile to try to find in classical Buddhist texts a comprehensive definition of forgiveness that resembles the definitions prevalent in contemporary philosophy and psychology of forgiveness. Likewise, it is naïve to think that we can find a Buddhist term common to all Buddhist traditions that can be translated as forgiveness in all cases and contexts. To identify functional equivalents of forgiveness across Buddhist traditions, we need a different approach.

What we find across different forms of Buddhism are stories illustrating Buddhist responses to people who harm or hurt others. For instance, the *Angulimāla Sutta* illustrates how different people respond to Angulimāla's past crimes.⁷⁵ These responses to Angulimāla's wrongdoing allow us to infer patterns that can be conventionally called expressions of Buddhist forgiveness. For instance, one response to Angulimāla's harmful deeds is the Buddha's unconditional forgiveness, who simply corrects Angulimāla's ways and accepts him as one of his disciples without requesting any reparation or amendments

⁷⁴ *Dhp* 1.

⁷⁵ *M. II.* 97 - 105.

for his past crimes. Another response to Angulimāla's past wrongdoing is the conditional forgiveness of King Pasenadi, who first goes with his army where the Buddha resides to capture and put to death Angulimāla, but changes his mind and decides not to put him down after seeing he has become a venerable bhikkhu with outstanding moral behavior. Yet another response to Angulimāla's crimes is the lack of forgiveness shown by the persons who hit and threw stones to him despite his amazing spiritual transformation. The *Angulimāla Sutta* is even useful to understand that from a Buddhist perspective, nobody can forgive bad karma, not even a Buddha, who explains that the assault suffered by Angulimāla is an inexorable consequence of his past deeds.

We also find across Buddhist traditions a multiplicity of practices to express repentance and acknowledge transgressions or the performance of unwholesome actions through body, speech or mind. These practices can also be considered expressions of Buddhist forgiveness. For instance, the Vinayas of all Buddhist schools contain special rituals performed every two weeks that involve confession of faults against the monastic code, as well as a commitment to future restraint. Similarly, many Buddhist practitioners, whether lay or monastic, perform every evening a ritual recitation that involves expressing repentance for unwholesome actions through body, speech or mind. For instance, members of the Chinese Buddhist organization called Dharma Realm Buddhist Association & The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, recite every evening the Eighty-Eight Buddhas Repentance Ceremony. In this ceremony one takes refuge in the three Jewels, invokes the eighty-eight Buddhas, and then the practitioner, whether lay or monastic, says: "May all the world Honored Ones, kindly be mindful of me, as I repent of the offenses I have committed in this life and former lives". Similarly, the evening chanting of the Theravāda Oxford Buddhist Vihara, whose abbot is Bhikkhu Dhammasami includes a recitation in which after venerating each of the three Jewels, the practitioner, whether lay or monastic, bows and says: "Through body, speech, or mind, whatever unwholesome deeds I have done to the Buddha... Dhamma... Sangha, may the Buddha... Dhamma... Sangha accept my fault, so that in the future I may show restraint toward the Buddha... Dhamma... Sangha".

Buddhist traditions are not monolithic. Although there is not a unique Buddhist term for forgiveness and there are several rituals related to the practice of forgiveness across Buddhist traditions, it seems possible to detect some common patterns that allow us to develop a unified philosophy of Buddhist forgiveness. One of those patterns is that terms that have been translated as forgiveness usually connote ideas that express "acceptance", "forbearance" or "patience". For instance, the Pāli term "*khama*" (Sanskrit *kṣama*) and terms derived from the verbal root "*kham*", may signify forgiveness in some cases, but mostly in the sense of "enduring" "bearing", and "tolerating". The same could be said about the perfection of "*khanti*" (Sanskrit *kṣanti*), that is, such term might be translated as forgiveness in some contexts, but it should not be equated with forgiveness because it has other meanings beside "forbearing" or "enduring" the harm inflicted by others.

Strictly speaking, it is not possible to conflate forgiveness and forbearance in Buddhism. Yet we could say that Buddhist terms signifying “forbearance” “tolerance” or “patience acceptance” may include in their semantic field some aspects of Buddhist forgiveness. Forgiveness is much more than a decision to restrain anger through forbearance (*khanti/ kṣanti*). Choosing not to respond with anger through body, speech and mind is an important aspect of Buddhist forgiveness included within the practice of forbearance, but we should not conflate forgiveness and forbearance.

As Chien-Te Lin suggests, forgiveness is “a quality inherent in forbearance,”⁷⁶ but forbearance does not encompass all aspects of Buddhist forgiveness. In fact, Chien-Te Lin himself, explains Buddhist forgiveness as “an act of compassion.”⁷⁷ Besides terms connoting forbearance, Buddhist traditions contain other terms that could also be translated as forgiveness in some contexts. These terms connote ideas related to love and compassion. For instance, the *Pāli* term “*avera*” (non-hostility, non-hate) is the response that the Buddha recommends to “*vera*” (hostility, hate) in the famous fifth verse of the *Dhammapada*. In Bhikkhu Buddhārakkhita’s translation: “Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased”. Obviously “*avera*” is not the same thing as forgiveness but expresses important aspects of Buddhist forgiveness. More specifically, “*avera*” relates to forgiveness in the sense of choosing not to pay hate and hostility with more hate and hostility.

This aspect of Buddhist forgiveness as “non-hate” and “non-hostility” seems irreducible to mere forbearance, which simply restrains anger and hate without necessarily implying their absence. That is, a mind that cultivates forbearance may presuppose the existence of restrained anger, hate, and hostility. Restrained anger, hate, and hostility through forbearance is not the same thing as non-hate and non-hostility.

The presence of “*avera*” expresses another aspect of Buddhist forgiveness, a deeper layer of meaning that connotes something more than just restraining anger and hate through forbearance. Here Buddhist forgiveness is no longer reducible to a quality inherent in forbearance. The presence of “*avera*” entails is a different kind of emotional response to those who harm us and this response is irreducible to restraining anger through forbearance.

Forbearance entails a decision not to retaliate out of anger and this is achieved through restraint. One applies forbearance to restrain anger so that one does not engage in unwholesome actions against the other. *Avera* entails a decision not to retaliate, but this is not achieved through forbearance but rather through wisdom or realization of the Dharma. More specifically, “*avera*” seems to derive from a profound understanding of resentment and vengeance. This understanding is nicely expressed by verses 3-5 from *Dhammapada*. One realizes that those who harbor certain thoughts such as “he abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me” are never appeased, and those who do not harbor

⁷⁶ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 263.

⁷⁷ Chien-Te Lin (2021): 269.

such thoughts find peace or are appeased. That is, one realizes that forgiveness leads to peace and resentment leads to not being at peace. This realization is deepened by verse 5, which relates to the specific means to attain such peace or appeasement. That is, one further realizes that in this world hate and hostility are never appeased through more hate and hostility, they are appeased only by “*avera*”, that is non-hostility or non-hate, the opposite of “*vera*”.⁷⁸

Whether “*avera*” refers to the absence of hate and hostility, or to the presence of love is open to interpretation, as the multiple translations of the “*avera*” as “love” in verse 5 of *Dhammapada* demonstrate. In my view, the cessation of hostility and hate that “*avera*” signifies, does not amount to the automatic origination of goodwill, lovingkindness and compassion towards those who harm us. Rather, “*avera*” seems to mark an intermediate stage in the development of Buddhist forgiveness between forbearance and full-fledged love.

In my view, it is highly misleading to translate “*avera*” as “love” instead of “non-hate” or “non-hostility”. The point of the verse is not to teach that love is the means to end hatred and hostility, but rather that the vicious circle of violence and vengeance (returning hate with hate again and again), only perpetuates the conflict. The vicious cycle of hate and hostility stops when one of the parties in conflict decides to stop the hostilities and not to retaliate in kind, i.e., one chooses not to pay hate with hate anymore. Between “non-hate” in the sense of stopping the hostilities and deciding not to retaliate in kind, and “non-hate” in the sense of having a positive emotion of love toward those who hurt us, there is a long emotional distance. Not every time someone stops hating a person, love emerges immediately. The “non-hate” of verse 5 from *Dhammapada* presupposes wisdom, not necessarily love.

Restraining hate and hostility with forbearance is the first step to get out of the vicious cycle of violence and vengeance. The next step is “*avera*” in the sense of non-hostility after having chosen to stop the hostilities and not to pay hate with more hate. This decision presupposes forbearance, but it does not derive from forbearance but rather from wisdom. By wisdom in this context I mean realizing that harboring certain thoughts of resentment does not lead to peace, and knowing that in this world hate is never appeased by more hate.

Forgiveness based on “*avera*” or non-hate constitutes an improvement over forgiveness based on forbearance, but it is not the highest expression of Buddhist forgiveness. Responding to those who harm us with “*avera*” it is not yet the same thing as responding with full-fledged love and compassion. The presence of “*avera*” may perhaps mark the beginnings of forgiveness rooted into love and compassion, but there is still room to cultivate a more loving and compassionate response to those who harm us.

V. THE THREE STAGES OF BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

Buddhist forgiveness from a psychological point of view is a complex and gradual process that involves a variety of mental factors including forbearance,

⁷⁸ *Dhp* 3 – 5.

non-hostility, lovingkindness and compassion. There are three main stages in the psychological process of Buddhist forgiveness. The first stage of Buddhist forgiveness is marked by the prevalence of forbearance and the restraint of anger, so that we do not do or say anything against those who harm us. In this first stage of Buddhist forgiveness, the primary goal is to restrain anger so that we do not perform unwholesome deeds in retribution or as retaliation for the harm inflicted upon us. In this first stage we decide to let go of unwholesome actions rooted in anger and hate.

Buddhist texts from different traditions contain numerous examples of this expression of Buddhist forgiveness. A paradigmatic example of forgiveness understood as choosing to restrain anger and hate through forbearance is the *Khantivādin Jātaka*.⁷⁹ Here, the Bodhisattva was an ascetic preaching about forbearance. An intoxicated king assaults him and asks about the meaning of forbearance. The Bodhisattva replies that forbearance is not being angry when abused, defamed and beaten.

The second stage of Buddhist forgiveness is marked by the presence of non-hate or non-hostility (*avera*). Forbearance might still be required, but it is no longer the prevalent mental factor. Whereas in the first stage forbearance focusses on restraining anger and hate to prevent moral misconduct and the accumulation of negative karma, in the second stage non-hate focusses on counteracting resentment (he abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me) as well as thoughts of vengeance (wishing to pay back hate with hate).

Whereas in the first stage of Buddhist forgiveness, forbearance is accompanied by the realization of the dangers of anger and moral misconduct, in the second stage, non-hate or non-hostility are accompanied by the realization of the eternal Dharma: "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased". This realization of the eternal Dharma is preceded by awareness of the uselessness and harmful nature of resentment. Resentment does not heal our minds and hearts, and it does not contribute to the solution of any conflict. Quite the contrary, those who experience resentment are never at peace, and harboring thoughts such as "he abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me" only feed our wish to pay back hate with hate, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence and vengeance.

Whereas in the first stage of Buddhist forgiveness one decides to let go of moral misconduct rooted into anger, in the second stages one decides to let go of resentment and the wish to payback hate and hostility with more hate and hostility. In other words, in the first stage of Buddhist forgiveness one decides to let go of stronger manifestations of hate, whereas in the second stage one decides to let go of subtler expressions of hate. Both stages of Buddhist forgiveness serve to counteract unwholesome mental states and immoral actions, but they address distinct degrees and manifestations of hate.

The third stage of Buddhist forgiveness is marked by the increasing

⁷⁹ Ja. 313.

presence of lovingkindness and compassion, which gradually grows until the practice of forbearance becomes unnecessary. That is, once lovingkindness and compassion become prevalent in the mind, the need to cultivate forbearance in the sense of restraining anger and hate disappears. Practitioners are supposed to cultivate forbearance as well as lovingkindness and compassion at all stages of the process of Buddhist forgiveness. However, it is at this third stage that lovingkindness and compassion begin to take off and become truly abundant (*vipula*), exalted (*mahaggata*), immeasurable (*appamāṇa*), without hostility (*avera*) and without ill will (*abyābajjha*).

A paradigmatic example of this third stage of Buddhist forgiveness, that is, of a response to those who harm us with lovingkindness and compassion, can be found in the *Kakacūpamasutta* (M. M. 21). There, the Buddha explains that when someone addresses us with harsh words, intending our harm, and with inner hate, we should train the mind to respond with lovingkindness and compassion. In Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation: "Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading that person with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with him, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind similar to a catskin bag, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will." That is how you should train, bhikkhus.⁸⁰

After encouraging monks to train their minds so that they can respond to verbal abuse with lovingkindness and compassion, the Buddha uses the famous simile of the saw to underscore his point. The simile of the saw, however, goes even further to suggest that one should respond with love and compassion not only to those who harms us verbally but also physically. In Bhikkhu Bodhi's words: "even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching."⁸¹ This response to those who physically harm us represents an ideal type of behavior, which requires a higher degree of forgiveness or forgiveness as an expression of love and compassion.

It should be noted that the simile of the saw states that those who fail to carry out the Buddha's teachings are those who give rise to a mind of hate, which only requires the first stage of forgiveness or forgiveness understood as restraining anger through forbearance. Yet the ideal type of Buddhist forgiveness is not to respond to those who harm us with forbearance, but rather with a mind imbued with lovingkindness and compassionate for their welfare.

Eventually, the gradual replacement of anger and hate by lovingkindness and compassion renders forgiveness redundant. Strictly speaking, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have nothing to forgive because their minds have reached the highest level of lovingkindness and compassion. For advanced Buddhist practitioners, there is no need to let go of anger and hate, no need to let go

⁸⁰ M. I. 129.

⁸¹ M. I. 129.

of resentment and vengeful feelings, and no need to train the mind further to respond to verbal and physical abuse with lovingkindness and compassion.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are living embodiments of lovingkindness and compassion without any need to forgive anybody or anything. No matter how bad someone treats a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, their response will always be an expression of immeasurable love and compassion. In this sense, it could be said that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are beyond forgiveness, not because they would not be willing to forgive someone who harm them, but rather because their first response is always unconditional love and compassion. However, to avoid possible misunderstandings I prefer to say that the forgiveness characteristic of exemplar Buddhist practitioners is always unconditional, absolute and universal. Like Chien-Te Lin, I view ideal types of Buddhist forgiveness as unconditional and without presupposing “repentance as a necessary prerequisite”⁸². However, I do not think it is correct to suggest that all forms of Buddhist forgiveness are unconditional.

Buddhist social forgiveness is usually conditional or dependent on the transgressor’s acknowledgment of a fault and commitment to future restraint. However, some practitioners may choose to forgive others who harm them without the repentance of the offender and without reparations. Likewise, psychological forgiveness is conditional whenever it is cultivated as spiritual practice by someone who has committed a fault or done something wrong. Without repentance and commitment to avoid the same transgression in the future, a practitioner cannot cultivate psychological forgiveness as a spiritual practice. Asking Buddhas to be witness or invoking the three Jewels while acknowledging one’s faults without repentance and commitment to future restraint does not make much sense from a Buddhist perspective.

From the perspective of the victim or the person who has been wronged by others, however, it is true that repentance of the offender is not a prerequisite to forgive. A Buddhist practitioner who has been harmed by others can and, from a Buddhist perspective, should emulate Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and choose to practice forgiveness unconditionally, that is, without requiring repentance and amendments from the transgressor. This spiritual practice of unconditional Buddhist forgiveness should be distinguished from what Donna Lynn Brown calls “individual forgiveness”. Unlike “individual forgiveness”, forgiveness as an unconditional spiritual practice presupposes clear ethical standards of right and wrong, as well as personal accountability.

The spiritual practice of psychological forgiveness, which offers unconditional forgiveness, is compatible with social practices of forgiveness, which require conditions such as confession, commitment to future restraint, and even amendments are indispensable. There is no contradiction between forgiving everybody for everything at the psychological level, and requiring certain conditions to be forgiven at the social level.

⁸² Chien-Te Lin (2021): 268.

In conclusion, the basic distinction within Buddhist forgiveness is not between conditional and unconditional forgiveness but rather between psychological and social forgiveness. Both psychological and social forgiveness can be either conditional or unconditional depending on the spiritual development of practitioners as well as the needs to reestablish healthy relationships and harmony within communities.

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UNDERSTANDING TRUE NATURE AND LOVING ONESELF: PATH TO FORGIVENESS, MINDFUL HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

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Abstract:

This study explored Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and how to train the mind to achieve positive results. It analyses the causes, actions, and consequences of hatred, and offers methods to overcome it. By understanding the true nature of oneself and practicing compassion, joy, and equanimity, one can overcome hatred. The results of the study highlight the benefits of overcoming hatred, including peace in this life and the chance of a better rebirth. The study points to the importance of mindfulness in forgiveness, which does not mean condoning wrongdoing but rather overcoming the negative effects of hatred. Ultimately, the study shows that a positive mind can lead to enlightenment and benefit both oneself and others.

Keywords: *Buddhism, forgiveness, mindful healing, reconciliation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In general, understanding the receiver gets the benefit of forgiveness. Therefore, in general, there is a reluctance to forgive others, thinking it can be used to show power over others. However, according to Buddhist teachings, the benefits received by the benefit receiver are very less compared to the benefits received by the benefit giver. And also not forgiving and keeping grudges on others may lead to negative outcomes as well as being born in lower planes, including in the next life. In the *Mallika sutta*, Buddha stated that everyone loves themselves more than any other thing. “Searching all directions with

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awareness find no one dearer than oneself”¹

As a result, individuals prefer to get positive things to themselves than others. If one lives one's life and wishes good, he/ she should not keep grades with others and forgive them. Buddhist teachings explain the importance of protecting one's mind as it can lead the person to either the upper plains and enlightenment or the lower plains, including the hells.² Purpose of this research is to identify the Buddhist concept on forgiving and training the mind to gain the positive outcome.

1.1. Methodology

Documentary study, specially focusing on *Pāli Tipitaka* and *Attakatha* – Commentaries, is the method used to collect data, and content analysis is the method to analyse the data.

1.2. Results and Discussion

Hatred arises from feelings of dislike and becomes the root cause of an unwillingness to forgive. Every individual has expectations, standards, attitudes and values on everything. When these expectations, standards, attitudes and values are matched, positive reactions occur. When the expectations, standards, attitudes, and values are not met, negative reactions or hatred occur. Due to hatred, individuals keep grudges and do not forgive. But not keeping the grudges and not forgiving leads to a negative outcome for the individual than others. Buddhist teachings discussing the importance of not keeping grudges with others and forgiving them, in many aspects as it directly affects the individual rather than others. Buddhist teachings can be categorized under the following topics for better understanding.

- Reasons, Actions and Outcome of Hatred
- Root causes of hatred
- Concept of individual
- Methods of overcoming hatred and enmity.
- Benefits of overcoming hatred and forgiving
- Practical approach to the guidelines given to overcome hatred.

II. REASONS, ACTIONS AND OUTCOME OF HATRED

The thoughts come to individuals' minds based on the main three areas of time: the Past, the Present, or the future. As a result, the mind creates thoughts either thinking of the past experiences, or the experiences of the present or future expectations. Hatred also occurs due to the thoughts of past, present, or future. According to the *Āghata Vatthu sutta*, hatred occurs due to ten reasons. The ten reasons are:

- (1) Thinking he has done me harm.
- (2) Thinking he has done me harm.

¹ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1981):140 - 43 (S. I. 3.8).

² *Khuddaka nikāya* (1960):102 – 05 (*Dhp.* XXII).

- (3) Thinking he is going to do me harm.
- (4) Thinking he has harmed the people who are dear to me.
- (5) Thinking he has done me harm to the people who are dear to me.
- (6) Thinking he is going to do me harm to the people who are dear to me.
- (7) Thinking he aided the people who are not dear to me
- (8) Thinking he is aiding the people who are not dear to me
- (9) Thinking he is going to aid the people who are not dear to me
- (10) Without proper reason, hatred occurs³

Out of these ten reasons, nine are related to the way individuals think of themselves and others. So it is clear that one gets angry and keeps grudges with others due to the way they think of themselves and others. As mentioned above, everyone loves themselves more than anything. If anything happens to the individual which is not like his expectations, he feels unhappy. If anyone makes the individual unhappy in the past, present, or future, then he hates it. Hatred occurs due to it.⁴ The first three reasons for hatred are related to the love one has for oneself. Due to that, we keep grudges.

We categorize the people around us into two main categories as Our and Non-our persons. The people we categorize as Non-us are not affecting us. Whatever happened to them is not related to us. For instance, when we heard about the success, sickness, or death of a person, we never know we don't feel sad or happy. We feel neither happy nor sad. Because we are not related to that person or not bound to that person. Among Our category, we have Dear ones and Non-dear ones. For the dear ones we prefer if they get good experiences all the time. When this expectation is not met, we feel unhappy. As a result, if someone causes any unhappiness to our dear ones, we feel unhappy. Due to that hatred occurred. The fourth, fifth, and sixth reasons occur due to the love we have for our dear ones.

For the Non-dear ones we prefer if they experience bad things all the time. If someone or something is supporting and helping those people, whom we do not like to be happy, then we feel unhappy. Because we think that any person who is helping the non-dear ones or the one whom we do not like, as our enemy. So if anyone is helping our dear ones, in the past, present, or future, we think that person is also our enemy and hate him. Seventh, eighth, and ninth reasons occur due to the unpleasant feeling we are having for our Non-dear ones. When one has hatred in mind, he may get angry even without a reason. That is the tenth reason.

When one hates others, he/ she feel angry and have grudges with them. We treat them as enemies, hoping the destruction and unsuccessful things may happen to them. As a result we hope our enemies fall and wish the bad things for them. According to the *Kodhana sutta*, there are seven things that an

³ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1977): 462 - 63 (A.VI. 10. 80).

⁴ *Khuddaka nikāya* (1960): 01 - 02 (*Dhp. I*).

individual wishes for the people whom he hates. The seven wishes are:

- (1) Wishing the enemy to become ugly,
- (2) Wishing the enemy to have bad sleep,
- (3) Wishing the enemy not to have any profit,
- (4) Wishing the enemy not to have any wealth,
- (5) Wishing the enemy not to have any reputation,
- (6) Wishing the enemy not to have friends,
- (7) Wishing the enemy to be born in lower planes after death.⁵

When we wish these things for our enemy, due to our negative mind-set, it will create more bad outcomes for us than the enemy. The *Kodhana sutta* further explains the outcomes of wishing bad for others. According to it, by wishing others bad due to hatred having in the mind, one receives the same or more than the wish they had for their enemy.⁶

- Wishing the enemy to become ugly and because of that mind-set, becomes ugly. - When one is with anger and enmity with others, he is not pleased to see the enemy's pleasantness and good looks. Anger is like a burning smoke, and makes the individual ugly. Therefore, when a person is angry, his appearance becomes unpleasant. Because of this hatred feeling in the mind and overcome with anger, even though he cleans himself well and dresses well with good clothes and adornments, he looks ugly.

- Wishing the enemy to have bad sleep because of the hatred, losing the good sleep. - When one is with anger and enmity with others, he does not take pleasure in seeing the enemy's good sleep. Because of this hatred feeling in the mind and overcome with anger, even though he got the best sleeping facilities, he may not have had good sleep and suffered during the sleep.

- Wishing the enemy not to have any profit, because of the hatred, he loses the profit. - Because of the hatred feeling in the mind and overcome with anger, he was unable to take correct decisions, as a result, he purchases bad things assuming it is good and not purchasing good things assuming they are bad. When he is unable to see the reality and true nature, due to poor decision-making ability, and sees it has the opposite nature, it will lead to long-term profit loss.

- Wishing the enemy not to have any wealth because of the hatred loses one's wealth. - Because of the hatred feeling in his mind and overcome with anger, when he does physical, verbal, and mental actions due to that, he destroys his wealth. And also, the wealth he earned with his effort, may be taken by the government.

- Wishing the enemy not to have any reputation and fame, because of the hatred, losing their own reputation and fame. - Because of the hatred feeling in the mind and overcome with anger, he has become unpleasant to others and

⁵ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1977): 418 - 25 (A. V. 7. 60).

⁶ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1977): 418 - 25 (A. V. 7. 60).

destroyed his status. As a result, he became unpopular among others.

- Wishing the enemy not to have friends, because of the hatred, loses their friends. - Because of the hatred feeling in the mind and overcome with anger, he became unpleasant to others. Even his close ones also feel uncomfortable to be with him. As a result, his relatives, companions, friends, also avoid or depart from him.

- Wishing the enemy to be born in lower planes or hell after death, because of the hatred born in lower planes or hell. -Because of the hatred feeling in the mind and overcome with anger, when he does physical, verbal, and mental misconducts due to that, as a result, he is born in lower planes or hell after death.⁷

The *Culakammavibhanga sutta* also stated that one who is angry and with rage, even for the little things, becomes furious, resentful, and ill tempered, that person is born ugly in his or her next life.⁸ In the *Mallika sutta*, Queen Mallika questioned the Buddha why women become ugly and have an unpleasant colour. Then Buddha explain, when a women having bad temper, rotatable, hostile, for a small matter even lose the temper and become annoyed, and hard-hearted, displaying annoyances, hate, and bitterness, and also not offering food, drink, clothing, vehicles, garlands, fragrance and cosmetics, bed, house, and lighting, to the ascetics or Brahmins, and having jealous, envy, resenting, and not respecting the clergies, when that person born in human plane, she will become ugly, unattractive, bad looking, and poor. Then Queen Mallika agreed with Buddha by saying that in her past life, she was having bad temper, irritable, hostile, for a small matter even lose the temper and become annoyed, and hard-hearted, displaying annoyances, hate, and bitterness. Due to that in this life she is ugly, unattractive, and bad looking.⁹

The *Panchaka sutta* in *Āṅguttara Nikāya* explains how one can get a good sleep. Once Buddha slept in a *Simsapa* – rosewood forest in the kingdom of Alav during the winter, where the ground is trampled by cattle hooves. Prince Hatthaka Ālavaka, who was taking morning work, saw the Buddha and asked whether the Buddha slept well. Buddha replied that he was also one among the people who sleep well. Then the prince asked how Buddha slept on the floor during the cold winter night, even snowfall was happening while cold wind also blew, and the ground also had cattle hooves, on a very thin leaf spared. Buddha explains hatred is one reason among three which leads to restless sleep. The other two are passion, and dilution.¹⁰ When one is not having these reasons that person can sleep well.

The *Saṅgarava sutta* in *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha using the simile of the vessel with boiling water on a heated fire, to explain the mind with hatred.

⁷ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1977): 418 - 25 (A. V. 7. 60).

⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 434 - 35 (M. III. 135).

⁹ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1962): 388 - 89 (A. II. 4. 197).

¹⁰ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1960): 252 - 53 (A. I. 3. 40)

When the water in the vessel is boiling due to the heat, one who has good eyesight cannot see his reflection. In the same manner, when an individual is possessed with ill will and hatred, and overwhelmed with it, he cannot see things as it is. And also what is good for him and others.¹¹ As a result, his judgments are not correct. Due to that, he will lose the profit, wealth, and reputation.

In many places Buddha emphasis that if an individual having hatred in mind and do the mental verbal and physical actions due to it, he will definitely go to hell. The *Culakammavibhanga sutta*, the *Mallika sutta*, the *Kodhagaru sutta* and the *Kodhana sutta* in *Samyutta Nikāya* are some examples.

The *Kodhana sutta* emphasis that, anger brings the loss for individual as mention above. And also inflames the mind. And the individual doesn't realize the danger born within him because it leads to many misdeeds.

- An angry person cannot see his benefit, nor the *Dhamma*. Due to the darkness created by anger, one takes pleasure in bad deeds, thinking they are good. But later, when the anger is gone, he repents and suffers, as burning in fire.

- When one is with anger, he does not feel shame, or fear, and is not respectful in speech,

- Anger makes everything go wrong. Nothing gives the positive outcome, as to anger one even can kill his mother, father, clergy, or even many people.

- Anger also leads the individual to kill oneself without realizing he is ruining himself.¹²

So it is clear that keeping hatred and not forgiving others makes the individual suffer. Having the enmity in mind leads to more suffering than the enemy's capacity of creating suffering to the individual. Because even the worst enemy cannot send anyone to hell. But our mind can. In *Dhammapada*, Buddha says that no enemy can harm an individual as much as one's mind. "A thief may harm a thief; an enemy may harm an enemy; but a wrongly directed mind can do oneself far greater harm".¹³ Therefore Buddha's advice to direct the mind correctly. Because our correctly directed mind can help us than the parents or our well wishes. "Not a mother, nor a father, nor any other relative can do more for the well-being of one than a rightly-directed mind can".¹⁴

2.1. Root causes of hatred

Buddhist teachings explain how the individual suffers. Every person suffers because of the clinging. Due to clinging, three basic mental components of the individual occur. The three basic mental components are:

(1) Passion – *Rga*

¹¹ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1982): 228 - 35 (S. Vi. 46. 55) and *Ānguttara Nikāya* (1968): 374 - 81 (A. III. 5. 193)

¹² *Ānguttara Nikāya* (1977): 418 - 25 (A. V. 7.60).

¹³ *Khuddaka nikāya* (1960): 34 - 35 (*Dhp.* III).

¹⁴ *Khuddaka nikāya* (1960): 36 - 37 (*Dhp.* III).

(2) Hate – *Dōsa*

(3) Delusion – *Mōha*.

According to the *Samma Ditti sutta in Majjhima Nikaya*, these three mental components occur due to the attachment we are having to the senses we get through our five senses and mind.¹⁵ Due to the way we categorize these sensations, above three mental components occur. If the sensations are according to the likeness of the individual, then Passion – *Rāga* occur. If it is not according to the individual's likeness, then Hate - *Dōsa* occur. When an individual cannot decide whether it is a good or bad sensation, then Delusion - *Mōha* occurs. And also these three mental components are interrelated. From one component, the other two can occur. For instance, for any sensation, if we like and are attached due to passion, then we are afraid of losing it. If someone is caused to lose that sensation, then hate occurs. For the same likable sensation, because of the attachment, we may get confused when we see the negative and positive factors together. Therefore, individuals should be careful with all three mental components as all three can lead to feelings of hatred and enmity. Hate also occurs due to clinging, hating binds us to the thing we hate.

The *Nasanthi sutta* says that external factors or objects, including the people, with whom we are reacting due to clinging are not the objects of clinging. These objects have no characteristic of clinging. But our conceptual thinking. If we want to overcome clinging, we have to understand the concept of self, and detach from it.

“Misery is born of desire, suffering is born of desire, when desire is removed, misery is removed, when misery is removed, suffering is removed.

The objects in the world are not sensual pleasure. Greedy intention of the person is the sensual pleasure. The objects stay as they are, but wisdom removes the desire for them.

The world's pretty things stay just as they are, but a wise one removes desire for them.

Give up anger, get rid of conceit, and get past all the fetters. Sufferings don't torment the one who has nothing, not clinging to name and form.”¹⁶

2.2. Concept of individual

Our attitudes, values and behaviour occur due to the self-concept we have. According to that people may have different opinions for the same objects. Whether we like it or hate it, or getting confused is based on the way we think of ourselves. For example, if one is a vegetarian, they like to eat vegetables. With a complete vegetarian meal, he will be satisfied and happy. But a person who is a non-vegetarian, and does not like vegetables, with a complete vegetarian meal, he may not be satisfied and unhappy or hate it. If a person has little preference

¹⁵ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 498 - 99 (M. I. 9)

¹⁶ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1982): 40 - 43 (S. I. 1. 34).

and changes their preferences over time, they can become confused whether to be happy or hate the complete vegetarian meal. Therefore, understanding how the self-concept of individuals occurs is important to understand, how that concept is created. Buddhist teachings explain the concept of individual in two approaches. The two approaches are

- (1) Analysis of the concept of individual
- (2) Synthesis of the concept of an individual

In the *Tipitaka* analysis of the concept of individual, it is explained in eight ways. Purpose of these analyses is to explain the true nature of the individual. There are eight analyses in the *Tipitaka*, are:

(1) Six Elemental analysis – Analyse as combination of six elements, five Great Elements and consciousness:

a. *Pathavi* – Earth Element, *Āpo* – Water Element, *Tejo* – Fire Element, *Vayo* – Air Element, *ĀKasa* – Space Element and *Viññāna* – Consciousness.¹⁷

(2) Six Base analysis – Analyse as a combination of six sensations getting through the five sense organs, and the mind or consciousness:

a. *Chakkhu* – Eye, *Sota* – Ear, *Ghāna* – Nose, *Jivha* – Tongue, *Kāya* – Body, *Mana* – Mind.¹⁸

(3) Twelve Base analysis – Analyse as a combination of six sense organs, and six sense objectives:

a. *Chakkhu* – Eye, *Sota* – Ear, *Ghāna* – Nose, *Jivha* – Tongue, *Kāya* – Body, *Mana* – Mind (six sense organs) and,

b. *Rupa* – Visual objects, *Sadda* – Sounds, *Gandha* – Smells, *Rasa* – Tastes, *Potthabba* – Touch, *Dhamma* – Mind objects (six sense objectives).¹⁹

(4) Eighteen Element analysis - Analyse as combination of six sense organs, six sense objectives, and six types of consciousness relevant to six senses:

- *Chakkhu* – Eye, *Sota* – Ear, *Ghāna* – Nose, *Jivha* – Tongue, *Kāya* – Body, *Mana* – Mind (six sense organs),

- *Rupa* – Visual objects, *Sadda* – Sounds, *Gandha* – Smells, *Rasa* – Tastes, *Potthabba* – Touch, *Dhamma* – Mind objects (six sense objectives).

- *Chakkhu Viññāna* – Eye, *Sota Viññāna* – Ear, *Ghāna Viññāna* – Nose, *Jivha Viññāna* – Tongue, *Kāya Viññāna* – Body, *Mana Viññāna* – Mind (six types of consciousness relevant to six senses).²⁰

¹⁷ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 498 - 99 (M. III. 40).

Vibhaṅgappakarana (1974): 124 - 25 (Vb. 2).

Majjhima Nikāya (1974): 594 - 95 (M. III. 38).

Samyutta-nikāya (1981): 152 - 53 (S. IV. 4.17).

Samyutta-nikāya (1962): 07-08 (S. II. 48. 38).

¹⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 498 - 99 (M. III. 40).

¹⁹ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1981): 258 - 61 (S. IV. 1. 5, 6).

²⁰ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1981): 148 - 51 (S. IV. 35. 93).

(5) Twenty-two Phenomenological Faculty analysis – Analysing the concept of individual as the 22 *Indriyas* - Phenomenological Faculties or controlling powers to create and maintain the concept of individual. This 22 includes 6 sensory faculties (sense organs), 3 physical faculties, 5 feeling faculties, 5 spiritual faculties, 3 knowledge faculties

- *Chakkhundriya* – Eye, *Sotidriya* – Ear, *Ghāṇi driya* – Nose, *Jivhidriya* – Tongue, *Kāyidriya* – Body, *Manidriya* – Mind (six sensory faculties).

- *Ittiidriya* - Femininity, *Puridriya* – Masculinity, *Jivitidriya* – Life energy (three physical faculties),

- *Sukidriya* Pleasure, *Dukkhidriya* - Pain, *Somanassidriya* - Joy, *Domanassidriya* - Grief, *Upekkhidriya* – Indifference (5 feeling faculties),

- *Saddhidriya* – Faith *Viriyidriya* – Courage, *Satidriya* – Mindfulness, *Samādhidriya* – Concentration, *Paññidriya* – Wisdom (5 spiritual faculties).

- *Anaññothaññassamindriya* – Making all understood, *Anaññōindriya* - Understood, *Anaññotavindriya* – Having all understood (3 knowledge faculties).²¹

(6) 5 Aggregates analysis – Sensation process is divided into five stages as *Rupa* - form, *Vedana* - feeling, *Saññā* - Perception, *Saṅkhārā*, *Viññāna* – consciousness.²²

(7) 18 Mental indulging analysis - Identification of the sense objectives through the six sense organs are divided into 3 categories according to the way individuals feel them, as Pleasure, Displeasure, and neutral.

- Seeing a form, the mind thinks discursively, settled in pleasure, seeing a form, the mind thinks discursively, settled in displeasure, seeing a form, the mind thinks discursively, settled in neutral.

- Hearing a sound, the mind thinks discursively, settled in pleasure, hearing a sound, the mind thinks discursively, settled in displeasure, hearing a sound, the mind thinks discursively, settled in neutral.

- Cognizing a scent, the mind thinks discursively, settled in pleasure, cognizing a scent, the mind thinks discursively, settled in displeasure, cognizing a scent, the mind thinks discursively, settled in neutral.

- Enjoying a taste, the mind thinks discursively, settled in pleasure, enjoying a taste, the mind thinks discursively, settled in displeasure, enjoying a taste, the mind thinks discursively, settled in neutral.

- Experiencing a touch on the body, the mind thinks discursively, settled in pleasure, experiencing a touch on the body, the mind thinks discursively, settled in displeasure, experiencing a touch on the body, the mind thinks discursively, settled in neutral.

- Cognizing an idea in the mind, the mind thinks discursively, settled in pleasure, cognizing an idea in the mind, the mind thinks discursively, settled in displeasure,

²¹ *Vibhaṅgappakarana* (1974): 220 - 25 (*Vib.* 52).

²² *Samyutta-nikāya* (1981): 464 - 65 (S. III. 22. 48).

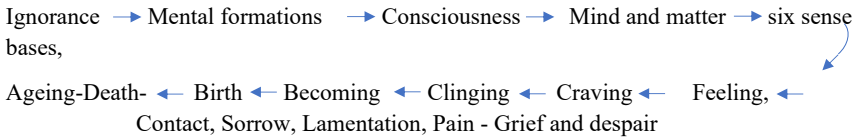
- Cognizing an idea in the mind, the mind thinks discursively, settled in neutral.²³

(8) Four Foundations analysis - describe as the collection of four foundations: the foundation of wisdom, the foundation of truthfulness, the foundation of liberality, and the foundation of peace.²⁴

The synthesis of individual is called *Paticca Samuppada* - Dependent Origination. It is based on two main concepts. The two principles are:

- "When this is present, this is. With the arising of this, this rises."
- "When this is not present, this does not come to be. Without this arising, this does not rise."²⁵

Concept of *Paticca Samuppada* is also explained in many ways in *Tipitaka*. The simplest way to explain the synthesis of the concept of individual in 12 steps is as follows.



All these explanations on the analyses and synthesis concept of the individual, are helping to understand the true nature of the self-concept. In First and Second *Palāsa sutta*, using the Twelve Base Analysis, as an example for the concept of individual, the Buddha explains how one should understand the self-concept. Buddha says that the components which create the concept of individual, and the materials of *Jethavanārama* are similar, when it comes to the Three Characteristics of Existence: *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, *Anatta*. When someone takes away the materials of *Jethavanārama*, and does what they like, one does not feel as if it is me he is taking, or harassing. In the same manner one should think about the internal and external bases.²⁶ When we understand there is no permanent self as we imagine, it is easy to detach from it. Because all hatred occurs in our mind due to the self-concept we have.

III. METHODS OF OVERCOMING HATRED AND ENMITY

In many places, Buddha's advice is not to keep the hatred and enmity in mind as it gives a negative outcome. The *Āghatapativinaya sutta* in *Dasaka Nipāta*, *Ānguttara Nikāya*, after mentioning the ten reasons for occurring hatred, Buddha advises to think that, even though these reasons are happening, what can be expected other than that. When one understands the nature of the things happening he can let it go. By doing so, he can suppress the hatred as follows.

²³ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1964): 498 - 99 (M. I. 26).

²⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1964): 498 - 99 (M. I. 26).

²⁵ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1962): 122-23 (S. II. 12.49).

²⁶ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1981): 258 - 61 (S. IV. 1. 5, 6).

(1) Thinking he has done me harm. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(2) Thinking he has done me harm. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(3) Thinking he is going to do me harm. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(4) Thinking he has harmed the people who are dear to me. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(5) Thinking he has done me harm to the people who are dear to me. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(6) Thinking he is going to do me harm to the people who are dear to me. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(7) Thinking he aided the people who are not dear to me. But “what should I expect” from that person?

(8) Thinking he is aiding the people who are not dear to me. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(9) Thinking he is going to aid the people who are not dear to me. But “what should I expect” from that person.

(10) Not having hatred without proper reason.²⁷

By thinking that way, one can overcome the hatred. Forgiving should be mindful, as forgiving does not mean blind action and forgetting the other person’s behaviour and keeping him close to us, and believing that he will not do any harm to us. One should not forgive others expecting that person will change, and be good to him/her. Main purpose of forgiving is to overcome the bad effect we can have due to hatred. Sometimes, due to the lovingkindness and compassion we direct to them, they may change. But expecting that, and letting the person with enmity to come close to us, without changing our mind set may create danger. In the *Sabbasava sutta*, Buddha advice that one should identify the harm that can come to the individual and avoid it. These harmful factors are called in the *sutta* as fermentations to be abandoned by avoiding.

“There is the case where a, reflecting appropriately, avoids a wild elephant, a wild horse, a wild bull, a wild dog, a snake, a stump, a bramble patch, a chasm, a cliff, a cesspool, an open sewer. Reflecting appropriately, he avoids sitting in the sorts of unsuitable seats, wandering to the sorts of unsuitable habitats, and associating with the sorts of bad friends that would make his knowledgeable friends in the holy life suspect him of evil conduct. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to avoid these things do not arise for him when he avoids them. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by avoiding.”²⁸

²⁷ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (1977): 462 - 63 (A. VI. 10. 80).

²⁸ *Sabbasava sutta*, translated by, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Burma Pitaka Assn.1997, accessed on [February,10.2025], available at: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.002.than.html>

If we let another person get closer, it will increase the hatred in our mind. It is better to forgive him and keep a distance with him. If our mind can overcome the hatred fully, then only we are free from others' behaviour. Therefore, one should overcome the hatred of others thinking that he may prevent himself from the danger of getting bad outcomes. And also the positive outcome one can get by doing it.

The *Patama Āghatapativinaya sutta* in *Pancaka Nipāta*, of *Āṅguttara Nikāya* Buddha's advice to practice five methods to suppress the hatred.

(1) When hatred occurs regarding a person, one should practice Loving kindness towards that person.

(2) When hatred occurs regarding a person, one should practice Compassion towards that person.

(3) When hatred occurs regarding a person, one should practice Appreciative joy Equanimity towards that person.

(4) When hatred occurs regarding a person, one should practice Equanimity towards that person.

(5) When hatred occurs regarding a person, one should not pay attention.

When one replaces the hatred with the four *Brahmavihares* – divine abodes, or not paying attention to it, then suppress the hatred.²⁹ In the *sutta*, the Buddha advice to think that one should take the responsibility of one's/ her actions. As one is the doer of his/ her actions, heir of his/ her actions, born of his/ her actions, related by his/ her actions, has actions as his/ her attributer. Whatever action is done by him/ her, whether good or bad, he/ she will be the hero. When one remembers this reality, one's hatred and anger will be helping to suppress the hatred and can overcome it.

The *Duthiya Āghatapativinaya sutta* in *Pancaka Nipāta*, of *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, categorizes the person's individual can hate, due to the behaviour of them. *Suttas* provide method for each category to overcome hatred by focusing on the point that suppress the hatred. The five types of persons are:

(1) The person who with impure bodily behaviour and pure verbal behaviour

(2) The person who with impure verbal behaviour and pure bodily behaviour

(3) The person who with impure bodily behaviour, impure verbal behaviour and from time to time who gains a purity and brightness

(4) The person whose impure bodily behaviour, impure verbal behaviour, and who from time to time does not gain a purity a brightness

(5) The person whose with pure bodily behaviour and pure verbal behaviour and who from time to time gains a purity a brightness.³⁰

Majjhima Nikāya (1964): 26 - 27 (M. I. 2).

²⁹ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1962): 302 - 03 (A. II. 5. 161).

³⁰ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1962): 302 - 03 (A. II. 5. 161).

For these five types of persons, an individual should react in way.³¹

(1) The person who is with impure physical behaviour and pure verbal behaviour - should only focus the pure verbal behaviour and should not focus on the impure physical behaviour. Like the *Bhikkhu* who sees a rag robe, a worn out cloth in the street, would pull it with the left foot, spread it out with the right foot, and tearing the essential and take it away, only should give the attention to the positive part and neglect the negative part.

(2) The person who is with impure verbal behaviour and pure bodily behaviour - should only focus the pure physical behaviour and should not focus on the impure verbal behaviour. There is man who is with grate thirst due to the hotness and tiredness, came to a pond which is covered with moss and water plants. To overcome his thirst he remove the moss and water plants with his hands and drink the water and goes away. In the same manner, one should remove the focus on negative and should focus on the pure physical behaviour.

(3) The person who is with impure physical behaviour, impure verbal behaviour, and form purity and clarity in mind, time to time. - Should only focus on the purity and clarity from in his mind, time to time. There is man who is with grate thirst due to the hotness and tiredness, find a rut made by the hoof of cattle with little water, to overcome his thirst, thinking that if the water is shaken it may not drinkable. So he goes down with his arms and legs and carefully bending and dink the water, and goes away. In the same manner very carefully study the person and should only focus on the rarely form purity and clarity in mind time to time.

(4) The person who is impure physical behaviour and impure verbal behaviour and does not form purity and clarity in mind even time to time. - If there is a person who is severely ill and suffering and on the middle of the long journey alone, no place for resting nearly, not having food or medicine, or assistance or treatment, when a another person sees him, with compassion and sympathy, wishing that, may this person get suitable food, medicine, attendant or a doctor, or someone take him to a village, where he can get proper treatment. In the same way due to the ignorance of the impure person, understanding his critical situation, due to the impure behaviour, as he may go to hell or lower planes after death, should wish may this person give up his bad behaviour.

(5) The person who is with pure physical behaviour and pure verbal behaviour and who from time to time gains a purity a brightness - Should get rid of the hatred on that person and focus on his pure physical behaviour and pure verbal behaviour and the purity and clarity form in his mind time to time. When there is a pond with cold water, clean and with smooth banks, delightful, and shaded with many trees. There is man who is with grate thirst due to the hotness and tiredness. When he see the pond with cool pure water, he get down to the pond drinking the water and having a bath, staying under the shade trees and refreshing himself. In the same manner, one should focus on the positive

³¹ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1962): 302 - 03 (A. II. 5. 161).

behaviour and the purity and clarity form in his mind time to time, and should overcome the hatred and get the benefit of association such person.

This *sutta* explains very clearly how we can focus on the positive thought regrading others without hating them. Because hatred and not forgiving others leading us to the negative outcomes. It is too bad if we are having negative outcome in this world and go to hell after death because of our enemy.

In many places Buddha advice to overcome the three basic mental components including hate, as it leads to suffering of the individual. The *Vitakka Santhana sutta* is giving five methods or steps to overcome these negative basic metal components. The five steps or methods are:

- (1) Replace the negative mind-set with positive mind-set.
- (2) Examine the drawbacks of the negative mind-set.
- (3) Given up the negative mind-set.
- (4) Relaxing the mind by questioning mental state due to negative mind-set, - step by step - why staying in uncomfortable state?
- (5) Torture the negative mind-set with mind positive mind set.

These five steps or methods can be used to overcome the hatred and enmity between individual.

When an unwholesome thought occurs in the mind, it is advice to give attention to another theme. Like the skilled carpenter using a small peg to remove the larger peg, one should replace a positive theme with the negative thought. When this happens, one may able to overcome the negative thought. In *Dhammapada*, Buddha advice to replace the negative thoughts by positive thoughts as negative thoughts themselves not suppressing. "Conquer the angry one by not getting angry (i.e., by loving-kindness); conquer the wicked by goodness; conquer the stingy by generosity, and the liar by speaking the truth".³²

As mentioned above, all thoughts coming to our mind occur due to the three main mental components: passion, hate, delusion. In the *Atthama sutta* in *Āṅguttara Nikāya* explain how these three mental components occur, and how to overcome them.³³ According to it, when the passion occur, one should focus to the disagreeable signs of the same sense object. When hate occur, one should change the mindset of hatred and practice loving kindness. When delusion occur, one should focus on wise thinking and concentration (see table 1).

Table 1: Nature of 3 Main Mental Components

	Passion	Hate	Delusion
Reason for Arising	Agreeable sign	Aversion sign	Unwise thinking

³² *Khuddaka nikāya* (1960): 82-83 (*Dhp. XVII*).

³³ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1960): 257-59 (*A. I. 3.68*).

Reason for Developing	Giving attention unwisely to an agreeable sign	Giving attention unwisely to the aversion sign	Giving attention unwise to unwise thinking
Leads to	Greed	Unhappiness	Confusion
Taniqué to Reduce	Giving wise attention to the disagreeable sign	Practicing Loving Kindness	Giving wise attention to wise thinking

When the unwholesome thoughts are not controlled by replacing one can use the second method. To analyse the disadvantages of negative thoughts. Like a well-dressed young man or woman, who feels disgusted and humiliated due to the dead body of a snake, or of a dog, or of a human, that is hung around his/ her neck, one should see the drawbacks of an unwholesome mind set. When it comes to hatred if one can focus on the disadvantages of hatred mentioned above and understand these thoughts will degrade and disgrace the individual/ she can overcome the hatred. At least one can focus worst outcome that is going to hell due to hatred, which Buddha emphasizes in many *suttas*, and he can subside the hatred.³⁴

If the unwholesome thoughts are not controlled by focusing on disadvantages, and it is more powerful, one should use the third method. That is not paying attention. Like a person closes his eyes or looks away, when he sees an bad sense, which he does not like to see, one can avoid the negative thoughts which are harmful to him.³⁵ According to Buddhist teaching only one thought is coming to one's mind at a time. Next thoughts relevant to that object are created by us after the first thought. Therefore, replacing with a positive thought or not giving attention can be decided by the individual. By doing so one can subside the unwholesome mind-set.

By practicing up to the third method also if one cannot subside the unwholesome mind-set, he can use the fourth method. That is relaxing by questioning mental state due to a negative mind-set, step by step gradually, 'why staying in an uncomfortable state?'. When a man is walking quickly, the thought may occur to him, 'Why am I walking quickly? Why don't I walk slowly?', then he will slow down. While walking slowly, the thought may occur to him, 'Why am I walking slowly? Why don't I stand instead?', then he will stop walking and stand. While standing, the thought may occur to him, 'Why am I standing? Why don't I sit instead?', then he will sit down. While sitting, the thought may occur to him, 'Why am I sitting? Why don't I lie down?', then he

³⁴ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1977): 418 - 25 (A. V. 7. 60).

³⁵ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1964): 300 - 09 (M. I. 20).

lie down and relax.³⁶ In the same manner one can question his unwholesome mind-set and relax. For instance, when hatred occur in the mind of individual, his will have the burning feeling physically and mentally and have thoughts to destroy things. Then he can question 'Why should I am burning inside and outside and having a destroying mentality because of my enemy?'. Then he can give up that destroying mentality, and control the anger. When he control his destroying nature he can question 'Why I am burning inside and outside due to my enemy?' and become relax. This way step by step he can relax, and can overcome the hated.

Even using the forth method also if one cannot subside the hatred in mind, then he can torture the negative mind-set with mind positive mind set, like the strong man seizing a weaker man by the head, or the throat, or the shoulders and beat him and crush him. Individual should control his negative mind-set and beat down and crush those thoughts, with his teeth clenched and tongue pressed against the roof of mouth with grate effort.

As mentioned above Buddha gave many advices to overcome the hatred as it is giving a grate harm to the individual. By using all these method one can overcome hatred and forgive others.

IV. BENEFITS OF OVERCOMING HARED AND FORGIVING

Buddha explain in many places the benefits of overcoming hatred. In the *Cūlakammavibhanga sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya* and the *Mallika sutta* in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* Buddha explain two benefits of overcoming hatred. The two outcomes one can get by not being furious, angry, resentful, dose not showing ill temper, or hate, are:

- After death will born in good planes or heavenly planes.
- If comes to human plane, become beautiful³⁷

And also Buddha explain in many places the benefits of overcoming hatred and spreading loving kindness. According to the *Mettanīṣṣa sutta* in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* there are elven benefits one can gain. The eleven benefits are:

- (1) Sleeps blissfully
- (2) Awakes blissfully
- (3) Does not see bad dreams
- (4) Is dear to humans
- (5) Is dear to non-humans
- (6) Deities protects him
- (7) Fire, poison, weapons, come not near to him
- (8) Concentrates the mind quickly
- (9) The colour of his face is pleasingly bright

³⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1964): 300 - 09 (M. I. 20).

³⁷ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 436 - 37 (M. III. 135).

Aṅguttara Nikāya (1962): 388 - 89 (A. II. 4. 197).

(10) At the time of death he is not bewildered

(11) If he attains not the sublime state, he is reborn in the world of Brahma

In the *Māpuññabhai suta* Buddha explain the benefits he gains by practicing loving kindness, as he didn't return to this world for seven *Saṅvatthavivatthakappas* - eons of cosmos contracting and expanding. During that time, he was, when the cosmos contracting went to the Ābhassara Plane when the cosmos expanding bone as a *Sakka* – King of Gods for thirty-seven times and Many times, king *Cakkavatti* – wheel turning monarch.

See the result of good deeds, of skillful deeds, for one seeking happiness. I developed a mind of living kindness for seven years, for seven *Saṅvatthavivatthakappas* I didn't return to this world again.

As the world contracted I went to the realm of Abassara plane. And when it expanded I went to plane of *Suñña Brahmas*.

Seven times I was a *Sakkha*, and at that time I was the wielder of power. Thirty-six times I was lord of gods, acting as ruler of the gods.

Then I was king, a wheel-turning monarch, lord of the Jambudipa. An anointed aristocrat, I was sovereign of all humans.

Without rod or sword, I conquered this land. Through non-violent action I guided it justly.

After ruling this vast territory by means of principle, I was born in a rich family, affluent and wealthy.

It was replete with all sense pleasures, and the seven treasures. This was well taught by the Buddha's, who bring the world together.

This is the cause of greatness by which one is called a lord of the land. I was a majestic king, with lots of property and assets.

Successful and glorious, lord of the Jambudipa, would not be inspired by this, even someone of dark birth.

Therefore someone who cares for their own welfare, and wants to become the very best they can be, should respect the true teaching, remembering the instructions of the Buddha's³⁸

Not only the worldly benefits, but also the enlightenment can be gained by overcoming hatred. According to the *Metta sutta* by practicing the four divine abodes, one can attain *Nibbāna* - enlightenment through that practice, as it leads to the Seven Factors of Enlightenment- *Bojjanga*.³⁹ According to it, if one concentrates in one of the four divine abodes, it will lead to the first factors of enlightenment- *Satisambojjanga*. Then it will lead to the other six and attain *Nibbāna*.

³⁸ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1968): 412 - 15 (A. III. 7. 62). *Māpuññabhai Suta*, translated by, Sujato, accessed on [February,15.2025], available at: Sutta Central. <https://suttacentral.net/an7.62/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

³⁹ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1982): 218 - 21 (S. Vi. 46. 54).

V. PRACTICAL APPROACH TO THE GUIDELINES GIVEN TO OVERCOME HATRED

In the *Kakachupama sutta*, Buddha explains how one can tame his/ her mind and not let the hatred develop because of others' behaviour in detail. Buddha's advice not to disturb the mind due to others' behaviour as follows.

- When the people criticise the closed ones, of ours in front of us
- When the people hit us with their hands and fists, with clods or stones, with sticks, or attack with weapons, our minds should train to think following this way.

"My mind will not be affected. I will not utter any bad words, I will remain my mind with compassion with living kindness, and will not let hatred come to my mind".⁴⁰

Buddha advice to abounded what is unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome. If one can train his mind to this way no one can affect his mind. No one can control his behaviour. A man come with various colours, and a brush and telling he will draw pictures in space. But he cannot do that. In the same manner if we make our mind trained properly, no one can disturb us. Like a man trying to heat up the river Ganga by a grass touch, and failed others affects to disturb us will failed.⁴¹ In this sutta Buddha emphasis that if one's mind disturbed when the bandits, cut the body with two handled saw if one change his mind from loving kindness and compassion, that person is not suitable to become a disciple of him.⁴²

The *Punnovada sutta* is a very good example to understand how we can practice this concept.⁴³ Venerable Punna met the Buddha before he visit to the Sunāparantha, to get advice. When Buddha came to know that Venerable Punna is going to Sunāparantha to spend his rainy season, asked Venerable Punna, as this place known as a place where very rude and fierce people live what if these people abuse and insult him. Then Venerable Punna replied he will think the people of Sunāparantha are gracious since they didn't hit me with their hands and fists.

Then Buddha asked what if they hit him with their hands and fists?

Then Venerable Punna replied he will think the people of Sunāparantha are gracious since they didn't throw me stones or clod.

Then Buddha asked what if they throw him with stones or clod?

Then Venerable Punna replied he will think the people of Sunāparantha are

⁴⁰ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 312 - 13 (M. III. 145).

⁴¹ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 318 - 21 (M. III. 145).

⁴² *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 322 - 23 (M. III. 145).

⁴³ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 546 - 51 (M. III. 145).

Sabbasava sutta, translated by, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Burma Pitaka Assn.1997, accessed on [February,17.2025], available at: [https:// https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.088.than.html](https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.088.than.html)

gracious since they didn't hit me with stick.

Then Buddha asked what if they hit him with stick?

Then Venerable Punna replied he will think the people of Sunaparanta are gracious since they didn't hit me with weapons.

Then Buddha asked what if they hit him with weapon?

Then Venerable Punna replied he will think the people of Sunaparanta are gracious since they didn't take my life by using a sharp weapon.

Then Buddha asked what if they take his life by using a sharp weapon?

Then Venerable Punna replied he will think that, "There have been disciples of the Blessed One who, being humiliated and disgusted by the body and by life, sought to have their lives deprived by the knife. But I have had my life deprived by the knife without seeking for it."

The *sutta* says that at the end of the rainy season, five hundred men and five hundred women become lay disciples of Buddha, because of this mentality of the Venerable Punna.⁴⁴

So it is clear that overcoming hatred and forgiving is providing more benefits to individual than the others. And it will lead to enlightenment.

VI. CONCLUSION

Hatred keeping grudges and not forgiving occur due to the self-concept individual is having. Due to that one's expectations standards, attitudes and values created. When the expectations standards, attitudes and values are not met, negative reactions or hatred occur. Due to hatred individual keep grudges and not forgiving. This can occur relevant to the past, present or future and relevant to all three main mental components: Passion Hate or delusion.

Keeping grudges and not forgiving giving negative outcome to the individual who has it then his enemy. one's mind-set can lead the individual to either, positive or negative outcome.

There are many methods Buddha explain to overcome hatred. Understanding the true nature of the concept of individual is the make it easy to overcome the hatred.

There are many benefits one can gain by overcoming hatred and practicing four divine abodes including attaining *Nibbāna*.

Having a positive mind-set can even leading others to the correct path also.

⁴⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1974): 546 - 51 (M. III. 145).

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FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING: A PATH TO RECONCILIATION

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Abstract:

This research explores the path to reconciliation through forgiveness and mindful healing from a Buddhist perspective, delving into these interconnected concepts crucial for personal and social well-being. While forgiveness applies to letting go of anger, trauma, resentment, and suffering from past experiences, it is not condoning someone for their harmful actions, but rather freeing oneself from the attachment to having been harmed. Although mindful healing is a process of freeing oneself from the negative experiences of the past, the path to reconciliation is the outcome of forgiveness and mindful healing. These processes help develop an individual's mind and foster relationships between groups of people, requiring both parties to agree upon reconciliation. However, forgiveness, mindful healing, and the path to reconciliation depend on personal feelings and intuitive understanding. Therefore, different people experience this process differently. For some individuals, forgiveness, mindful healing, and reconciliation may be easy, while for others, it may be difficult. Research has found that those who spend more time cultivating mindfulness tend to exhibit higher levels of forgiveness than those who spend less time practicing mindfulness. Furthermore, the Buddha's emphasis on individual reconciliation before reconciling with others signifies the importance of self-healing and reconciliation. This is necessary to deal with hatred and delusion. Delusion veils one's ability to see the truth and forces one to cling to the ego with notions such as "This is I, this is me, this is mine." To be free from such concepts is crucial, and overcoming them requires diligent effort.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, Mindful healing, Reconciliation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

For a victim, forgiving the perpetrator is hard; letting go of the difficult experiences of the past is hard, but holding on to difficult memories such as sadness, anger, grudges, and resentment is easy. As the victim becomes

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entangled in anger, worry, anxiety, resentment, and grudges, they become attached to their unhappy memories. Although anger generates energy for a short time, holding onto such unhappy memories for a long time affects one psychophysically. According to Buddhism, the mind affects the body. Mental disturbances have physical consequences. The *Dhammapada* states: “Everything is mind-made.”¹ A negative mind leads to suffering. When one thinks, “He abused me, he struck me, he overpowered me, he robbed me,” those who harbor such thoughts will never end their hatred.² Hatred is considered one of the three poisons, which slowly destroys the victim, generating long-term emotional pain.

To overcome this mental state, the victim must understand the importance of forgiveness. It is not condoning the criminal for their wrong actions but freeing oneself from attachment to painful past experiences. Forgiveness is not for the sake of the culprit; rather, it heals the victim by freeing them from emotional pain, reducing stress, sadness, anxiety, and anger, improving mental and physical health, increasing empathy, compassion, and strengthening relationships.

II. DEFINING MINDFUL HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

Mindful Healing is based on the mind-body connection.³ The term *mindful* refers to being aware,⁴ while *healing* refers to overcoming difficulties.⁵ Mindful Healing begins with awareness of the present moment, acknowledging and accepting all thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations without judgment.⁶

Jon Kabat-Zinn stated:

To be in relationship to what you are going through, to hold it, and, in some sense, to befriend it—that is where the healing or transformative power of the practice of mindfulness lies. When we can actually be where we are, not trying to find another state of mind, we discover deep internal resources we can make use of. Coming to terms with things as they are is my definition of healing.⁷

Reconciliation is the process of restoring friendship and harmony between two people or groups after a serious conflict that has caused separation.⁸

¹ *Dhp* 1.

² *Dhp* 3.

³ Leiphart, V. (2016). *Mindful healing*. InHealth: A Washington Hospital Channel. [YouTube video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8i9tuXiQKE>

⁴ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Mindful*. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved January 3, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindful>

⁵ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Healing*. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved January 3, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/healing>

⁶ Skaer, T. L. (2015). *The healing power of mindfulness*. Washington State University. Retrieved from <https://spokane.wsu.edu/wellness/2015/10/12/the-healing-power-of-mindfulness/>

⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸ Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Reconciliation*. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved Janu-

According to the *Pāli Vinaya*, reconciliation (*patisāraṇīya-kamma*) is more than mere forgiveness. It involves returning to amiability and reestablishing mutual trust, respect, and friendship. Both laypeople and monastics are required to seek reconciliation with one another. Laypeople seek forgiveness before accepting the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*). Following forgiveness, the monk administers the precepts. The same disciplinary rule applies to monks, who must seek forgiveness from one another by acknowledging and accepting their wrongdoing.⁹ This confession ensures that one will not harm another through words, actions, or intentions.

The process of reconciliation, formulated by the Buddha, was designed to maintain harmony within the *Saṅgha*, thereby preventing division and ensuring the continuation of the Buddha's dispensation (*sāsana*).

III. UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

3.1. What Is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is the act of forgiving or the willingness to forgive.¹⁰ It involves showing grace, mercy, or pardoning someone for their wrongdoing, or choosing to forgo resentment and estrangement despite the offender's actions. Forgiveness is the process of letting go of negative emotions through cultivation and the development of a positive attitude, such as compassion, benevolence, and understanding toward the offender.¹¹ It is a conscious decision by the victim not to seek revenge against the perpetrator.¹² The philosopher Joseph Butler defined forgiveness as overcoming resentment and moral hatred.¹³ Overcoming moral hatred refers to the transformation of deeply ingrained negative attitudes toward an individual or group based on personal, religious, social, cultural, or political differences.

3.2. Misconceptions about Forgiveness

There are misconceptions about forgiveness enumerated below: (1) Forgiveness is condoning the offender for his wrong doing; (2) Forgiveness is for a weak person's attitude; (3) Forgiveness is to forget everything that happened to the victim unjustly and trusting the perpetrators again; (4) Forgiveness is to restore a former relationship; (5) Forgiveness is to release an offender from consequences; (6) Victim waits until feel forgiving; (7)

ary 3, 2025, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reconciliation>

⁹ Bhikkhu, T. (2011, July 18). *Reconciliation, right and wrong*. Access to Insight. Retrieved from <https://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/reconciliation.html>

¹⁰ Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Forgiveness*. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved January 4, 2025, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/forgiveness>

¹¹ Philpot, C. (2006). *Intergroup apologies and forgiveness* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved from <https://shorturl.at/TfIdP>

¹² Fletcher, T. (n.d.). *Relationship misconception – Forgiveness* [YouTube video]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UUK43CDep4>

¹³ Newberry, P. A. (2001). Joseph Butler on forgiveness: A presupposed theory of emotion. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62(2), 233–244. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3654356>

Victim waits for the offender to express an apology; (8) Forgiveness is always beneficial to offenders; (9) Victim must reconcile with the offender.¹⁴

As long as the victim remains entangled in the misconceptions of forgiveness mentioned above, they will be unable to truly forgive their perpetrator. Consequently, they will continue to experience emotional trauma and suffering. To free themselves from such emotional pain, they must overcome these misconceptions and embrace a deeper understanding of forgiveness.

3.3. Psychological and Emotional Benefits of Forgiveness

There are many psychological and emotional benefits of forgiveness enumerated below: (1) Reduced Stress and Anxiety; (2) Improved Mental Health; (3) Enhanced Relationships; (4) Positive Effects on Cardiovascular Health; (5) Improved Immune Function; (6) Enhanced Coping Mechanisms; (7) Better Sleep Quality; (8) Increased Life Satisfaction.¹⁵

3.4. Cultural and Religious Perspectives on Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a universal virtue. As long as humanity exists, the practice of forgiveness will continue to be nurtured. It serves as a means of healing for victims, alleviating trauma, rage, anger, and resentment. While Abrahamic religions are based on belief in God, and Dharmic religions are based on belief in the law of action (*kamma*), despite their differences in belief systems, all major religions emphasize the importance of forgiveness.

In Abrahamic faiths such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as in Dharmic religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, forgiveness holds a significant place.

In Judaism, if a person sins against God, they must seek forgiveness from God. However, if a person commits a wrongdoing against another individual, they must directly approach the victim and sincerely seek their forgiveness. As Sir Jonathan Sacks stated, “It is not that God forgives while human beings do not. On the contrary, we believe that just as only God can forgive sins against God, so only human beings can forgive sins against human beings.”¹⁶

Forgiveness is a core ethical teaching in Christianity. According to Christian belief, God forgives wrongdoers for their transgressions, except for eternal sins—often referred to as unforgivable sins or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is considered the third person of the Holy Trinity, a central doctrine in Christianity that consists of the Father (God), the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit (the divine presence of God in the world,

¹⁴ Johnson, K. A. (2020). 7 misconceptions about forgiveness. Spectrum Magazine. Retrieved January 4, 2025, from <https://spectrummagazine.org/views/7-misconceptions-about-forgiveness/>

¹⁵ Dunn, L. (2024). The many benefits of forgiveness. *Wellness and Safety*, 34(4). Retrieved from <https://shorturl.at/4XOZ9>

¹⁶ Sacks, J. (2006, January 7). *The force of forgiveness*. *Covenant and Conversation*. Archived from the original. Retrieved January 5, 2025, from <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/thoughts/vay-igash5766.pdf>

guiding, empowering, convicting, and comforting believers).

In Islam, if wrongdoers sincerely seek forgiveness and repent after committing a wrongful act, Allah grants them forgiveness.¹⁷

In Buddhism, the Buddha regards both the victim and the perpetrator as wise – the victim who forgives despite being harmed and the perpetrator who sincerely seeks forgiveness after wrongdoing. In contrast, both are considered unwise – the victim who refuses to forgive and the perpetrator who does not seek sincere forgiveness.¹⁸ The Buddhist practice of forgiveness lies in letting go of resentment from the past, as attachment to painful experiences only generates more suffering. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya*), the Buddha advises his disciples to cultivate equanimity in response to others' speech and actions through mental training and development:

Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who lets his heart get angered even at that would not be following my teachings. Even then, you should train yourselves: 'Our minds will remain unaffected, and we will speak no evil words. We will remain compassionate, with a mind of goodwill and no inner hatred. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with goodwill, and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill – abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will. That is how you should train yourselves.'¹⁹

Forgiveness (*kṣamā*) is one of the cardinal virtues in Hinduism. According to Hindu teachings, one should not only forgive others but also seek forgiveness if they have wronged someone. The *Mahābhārata*, one of Hinduism's ancient scriptures, highlights forgiveness as one of the six essential virtues that one must uphold.²⁰

Forgiveness is also a fundamental virtue in Jainism. Jains not only seek forgiveness from fellow human beings whom they may have harmed but also extend sincere forgiveness to all living beings, including plants.²¹

¹⁷ Khattab, M. (n.d.). *The Quran* (Surah 5). Quran.com. Retrieved January 6, 2025, from <https://quran.com/5>

¹⁸ Bhikkhu, T (Trans.). (2002). *Bala-pandita Sutta: Fools & wise people*. Access to Insight. Retrieved January 7, 2025, from <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an02/an02.021.than.html>

¹⁹ Bhikkhu, T (1997). *Kakacupama Sutta: The simile of the saw*. Access to Insight. Retrieved January 7, 2025, from <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.021x.than.html>

²⁰ Ganguli, K. M. (Trans.). (n.d.). *Mahabharata: Udyoga Parva, Chapter XXXIII*. Sacred Texts. Retrieved January 8, 2025, from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m05/m05033.htm>

²¹ Mukherjee, A. (2022). Jaina ethics and meditation: Self-purification process through karmic cycle. *RUDN Journal of Philosophy*, 26 (2), 305 – 324. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-2-305-324>

It is established that many of the world's major religions emphasize the importance of forgiveness. While Abrahamic religions focus on belief in a singular God or Creator, Dharmic religions emphasize *Dhamma*—cosmic law, righteousness, and moral duty—as the foundation for practicing forgiveness.

IV. MINDFULNESS AS A TOOL FOR HEALING

4.1. What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is regarded as the heart of Buddhist meditation. Its significance lies in both its practice and application. By paying close attention to each moment as it arises, mindfulness helps one disengage from discursive thoughts.²² According to *Mindful Staff*, mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present – aware of what one is doing without being reactive or overwhelmed by external circumstances.²³ The Pāli term *satipaṭṭhāna* is a compound word. *Sati* refers to mindfulness, while *paṭṭhāna* refers to foundation. This is a direct translation for “the foundation of mindfulness.” However, an alternative interpretation is that *sati* means mindfulness, and *upatthāna* means establishment—thus, the compound term can also be understood as “establishment of mindfulness.” The *Satipaṭṭhana sutta* of MN discuss four areas of focus (*Cattāro Satipaṭṭhānā*) such as contemplation on body (*Kāyanupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*), contemplation on feelings (*Vedanāupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*), contemplation on mind (*Cittanupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*), and contemplation on mental qualities (*Dhammānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*).²⁴

4.2. Practicing Presence: Steps to Mindfulness

The aim of practicing mindfulness is to cultivate inner peace and reduce anger, distress, and resentment. The practice begins with a simple step – finding a quiet and secluded place. This could be a peaceful room or an isolated natural setting, such as sitting under a tree, where a *yogi* feels comfortable. He sits in a relaxed position, takes a deep breath, and focuses on his abdomen. As he inhales, his abdomen rises, and he mentally notes “rising.” As he exhales, his abdomen falls, and he mentally notes “falling.” As this step-by-step process unfolds, a *yogi* may experience physical discomfort, such as back pain, leg pain, or numbness. He may also encounter mental challenges, such as fear, restlessness, painful memories, discursive thoughts, drowsiness, or dizziness. All these physical and mental phenomena are interconnected with the four foundations of mindfulness: the body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities. Whatever arises, the practitioner should observe it with mindfulness, without judgment or attachment. As stated in the *Dhammapada*, “The mind is the

²² Kabat-Zinn, J. (n.d.). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life* (Hyperion eBook). Retrieved January 3, 2025, from <https://shorturl.at/wEtTm>

²³ Mindful Staff. (2020). *What is mindfulness? Are you supposed to clear your mind, or focus on one thing? Here's the Mindful definition of mindfulness*. Mindful. Retrieved January 11, 2025, from <https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>

²⁴ Bhikkhu, T (Trans.). (n.d.). *The agendas of mindfulness*. Dhamma Talks. Retrieved January 12, 2025, from <https://www.dhammatalks.org/books/KarmaOfQuestions/Section0010.html>

forerunner of all things.” The mind tends to wander between the past and the future, but unless one detaches from this wandering state and anchors it in the present moment, true peace will remain elusive.

Mindfulness can be practiced not only during meditation but also in everyday activities – while sitting, walking, eating, talking, listening, taking a shower, using the toilet, brushing teeth, sleeping, and waking up. Cultivating mindfulness in daily life helps reduce errors in speech, improves focus and efficiency at work, and enhances relationships. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes the importance of deep listening. Deep listening is compassionate listening.²⁵

4.3. Cultivating Compassion and Self-Awareness

Loving-kindness is a wish for all beings to be happy, while compassion (*karuṇā*) is a sincere wish to help all beings be free from suffering (*dukkha*). It is an empathetic feeling toward all beings. Siddhattha Gotama, who led a homeless life, witnessed the four sights of universal suffering: a sick man, an old man, a corpse, and an ascetic. He later became the Buddha, following the Middle Path, initially concerned with his suffering and liberation. He intended not to teach his doctrine, *dhamma*, which is difficult to penetrate. Then, a heavenly deity, Brahmā Sahampati, appeared and requested him to teach *dhamma* to those who would understand the teaching and liberate themselves from suffering. Only then did the Buddha decide to teach his *dhamma* out of compassion. However, his compassion is more profound than general compassion, which is often a strong feeling of sympathy or sadness for the suffering of others and a wish to help them. His compassion is a selfless attitude toward others, coupled with the desire to alleviate suffering.

The cultivation of compassion begins by radiating loving-kindness toward oneself, a beloved one (May I be happy), a neutral person (May I be peaceful), and a difficult one (May I be free from suffering). Sending compassion to loved ones: May he be happy; May he be peaceful; May he be free from suffering. Sending compassion to neutral person: May he be happy; May he be peaceful; May he be free from suffering. Sending compassion to difficult person: May he be happy; May he be peaceful; May he be free from suffering.²⁶

Cultivating self-awareness: Self-awareness is the state of being aware of oneself – one’s mental attitude and actions. It is the understanding of one’s suffering and happiness. When one is truly self-aware, they know what they are saying, how they are saying it, and to whom they are speaking. They are conscious of their actions and mindful of their attitude toward others. Through the cultivation of self-awareness, one can recognize their pain and suffering.

²⁵ Hanh, T. N.. (2023, September 6). *Deep listening, believe in yourself* [YouTube video]. YouTube. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5Umo4P8tS8>

²⁶ Ribeiro, M. (n.d.). *What is compassion meditation? (+ Mantras and scripts)*. PositivePsychology.com. Retrieved January 16, 2025, from <https://positivepsychology.com/compassion-meditation/>

This mental attitude enables them to overcome past suffering, grudges, resentment, hurt, and feelings of burnout. To cultivate self-awareness, one must develop mindfulness, compassion, and forgiveness.

4.4. The Connection Between Mindfulness and Forgiveness

Research has shown a direct link between mindfulness and forgiveness. Those who cultivate mindfulness tend to forgive more easily than those who do not. People who practice mindfulness toward their painful past experiences tend to experience less emotional distress and have greater control over their emotions. They also exhibit fewer negative emotions toward the perpetrator. The cultivation of forgiveness enhances positive emotions and reduces negative feelings toward the offender.²⁷ According to the American Psychological Association (APA), an experiment conducted by Karremans et al. Study 1, Study 2, Study 3, Study 4, and Study 5.

Study 1: There were 160 participants (105 women, 55 men). 72 participants had meditation experience and they practiced meditation regularly, while 88 participants did not have meditation experience. This study showed two types of personalities: (1) Practice mindfulness, (2) Do not practice mindfulness. Those who practiced mindfulness had a higher tendency to forgive than those who did not practice mindfulness.²⁸

Study 2: There were 87 participants (70 females, 17 males). This study was conducted on a Question-and-Answer basis. Each participant was questioned privately based on mindfulness and forgiveness. The study aimed to see if the prediction about mindfulness and forgiveness applied to different measures of forgiveness. Two renowned tests were used to assess people's general tendency to forgive: (1) Tendency to forgive (TTF). This test focuses on how likely individuals are to forgive others when they experience harm, offence, betrayal; (2) Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF). This test especially focuses on how individuals deal with harm and transgression. This study suggested that mindfulness was associated with a higher level of forgiveness. However, this result has yet to draw any outcome.²⁹

Study 3: 124 participants (108 female; 16 male) were students of Radboud University. This study was conducted on a Question-and-Answer basis. Every individual asked a question on a cubicle basis. The participants were instructed to recollect an incident that happened in the past, such as they felt hurt by someone, and write it down that there was an argument with a partner or a good friend of mine who spread a rumor about me that I had an affair with a married guy. The victims were advised to see the situation from the offenders' perspective. This resulted in victims' closeness and commitment to the offenders after describing their offenses.

²⁷ Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020). *Is mindfulness associated with interpersonal forgiveness?* Redbound Repository Sharing Science, p. 306.

²⁸ Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020), p. 299.

²⁹ Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020), p. 300.

Study 4: This study was sought to provide an initial causal test of the link between mindfulness and forgiveness. Ninety-eight participants, mainly students (23 male, 74 female), have participated. Two tests were conducted on mindfulness and its connection to forgiveness. For the first test, the participants cultivated mindfulness. This helped them to experience less negative emotions towards offenders along with experiencing a higher level of forgiveness. Two weeks later, the same participants were tested for the second time. This time the participants did not experience less or more negative emotions towards offenders. However, the researchers accepted the limited power of statistical data. Therefore, they concluded that the participants with higher levels of mindfulness tend to be endowed with higher levels of forgiveness.³⁰

Study 5: This study was conducted based on heterosexual couples' mindfulness and forgiveness. 123 participants participated. This study was conducted based on the Question and Answer. Participants answered online questions and were invited to ask their romantic partners to participate in the Q&A sessions, but they were requested to refrain from discussing the questions among themselves.

The study found that forgiveness in relationships was based on mutual understanding. When Partner A forgave, Partner B was also more likely to forgive. Additionally, Partner A's forgiving tendencies were linked to Partner B's level of relationship satisfaction. The findings suggested that forgiveness is reciprocal and influenced by each partner's perception of the other's forgiveness tendencies.³¹

V. THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

The process of forgiveness involves recognizing hurt and pain; letting go of resentment and anger; developing empathy and compassion; moving toward acceptance and closure.

5.1. Recognizing Hurt and Pain

The First Noble Truth is suffering (*dukkha*), and ignorance (*avijjā*) is its primary cause. Only wisdom (*paññā*) serves as an antidote to ignorance. The cultivation of right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*) and right concentration (*sammā samādhi*) leads to the development of wisdom. According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, contemplation on feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) – one of the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) – involves recognizing one's suffering. Feelings can be pleasant (*sukha-vedanā*), unpleasant (*dukkha-vedanā*), or neutral (*adukkhamasukha-vedanā*).

Whenever a feeling arises about the body and mind, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, a yogi is advised to mindfully acknowledge and note the experience. Suffering intensifies and becomes more harmful when mindfulness (*sati*) is absent. However, by recognizing and accepting it, the painful experience becomes less severe. In such a situation, one will naturally

³⁰ Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020), p. 303.

³¹ Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020), p. 304.

seek skillful ways to overcome it. Along with the cultivation of mindfulness, the practice of gratitude, forgiveness, and radiating loving-kindness (*mettā*) toward oneself and others becomes a focal objective. The Buddha says: “*Diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ, sute sutamattaṃ, mute mutamattaṃ, viññāte viññātamattaṃ*”³² - “In the seeing, merely what is seen; in the hearing, merely what is heard; in the sensing, merely what is sensed; in the cognizing, merely what is cognized.”³³

5.2. Letting Go of Resentment and Anger

Letting go of resentment and anger is the path to freedom from suffering. Suffering arises due to attachment to one’s ego, which is a combination of thoughts, emotions, and physical experiences.

Striving to understand why one is hurt and recognizing the nature of suffering is essential for overcoming it. One must not only comprehend the mistreatment but also understand the reason behind their reaction to it.

A tortoise once advised a bull, who was emotionally distressed due to mistreatment by his owner, to become the master of his emotions and recognize the nature of hurt to be free from suffering. Only through deep observation of one’s reactions, without judgment, can one attain emotional mastery. To achieve such a state, one must focus the mind on the present moment without overthinking. This requires avoiding unnecessary mental fabrications, such as dwelling on memories or making assumptions based on mistreatment. Mental calmness is essential for freeing oneself from unnecessary thoughts and emotional reactivity. The tortoise further advised the bull to purify his mind through mindfulness (*sati*), as the mind becomes entangled in suffering due to greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) – known as the three defilements (*kilesa*). Through mindfulness, one realizes that all phenomena arise due to causes and conditions.

Understanding this reality enables one to see that the body (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*), mental volition (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) are all impermanent (*anicca*), subject to change, and devoid of any inherent self. There is no “I,” no “Me,” or “Mine.” By realizing this profound truth, one can let go of suffering, including pain, grudges, and resentment.³⁴

5.3. Developing Empathy and Compassion

Empathy is the ability to see a situation from another person’s perspective by putting oneself in their place and understanding their emotions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. The *Dhammapada* states: “*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbe bhāyanti maccuno; attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye.*” – “Everybody trembles at punishment; everybody fears death. Having made the comparison with

³² Steinthal, P. (1982). *Udāna*. London: Pali Text Society, p. 8.

³³ Ireland, J. D. (Trans.). (1997). *The Udāna & the Itivuttaka*. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. p. 21.

³⁴ Karunaratna, S. (1996). *The healing of the bull: A story*. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 7 – 8.

oneself, let one not kill, nor cause another to kill.”³⁵

By seeing oneself in the situations of others, one can develop true empathy. The five Buddhist precepts (*pañca-sīla*) guide individuals to refrain from: (1) Killing (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*); (2) Stealing (*adinnādānā veramaṇī*); (3) Indulging in sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī*); (4) Telling lies (*musāvādā veramaṇī*); (5) Consuming intoxicants (*surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī*).

These precepts form the foundation of a peaceful society. As long as they are upheld, social harmony and peace are protected.

The cultivation of compassion (*karuṇā*) goes beyond empathy. It does not only involve understanding another person’s suffering, such as emotional trauma, but also developing a strong desire to help that person overcome their suffering.

In the *Maha-Rahulovada Sutta* (MN 62), the Buddha advised Ven. Rāhula to cultivate compassion as a means to overcome cruelty.³⁶ Similarly, the *Aghatavinaya Sutta* (AN 5.162) teaches that one should develop compassion to subdue hatred toward others.³⁷

To develop compassion, one should cultivate it through radiating the well-being of oneself, beloved one, neutral person, and the difficult one.³⁸

5.4. Moving Toward Acceptance

Accepting difficulties in life is a crucial step in overcoming adversity. According to Buddhism, past *kamma* (*intentional actions*) affect the present life, and present *kamma* shapes the future. Wholesome actions (*kusala-kamma*) generate wholesome thoughts, leading to happiness, while unwholesome actions (*akusala-kamma*) result in suffering.

The good actions of an individual influence their current well-being and happiness, while the present wholesome deeds will shape a better future. Conversely, past unwholesome actions contribute to present suffering. By accepting one’s current suffering as the result of past unwholesome actions, an individual transforms a negative mindset into a positive one. Thus, one is encouraged to perform wholesome deeds, aiming for a good rebirth and a future free from adversity.

The Buddha states: “*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*” – “*All conditioned things are impermanent*”. Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences are impermanent. When facing adversities, one should endure them with the understanding that

³⁵ *Dh*, 129.

³⁶ Bhikkhu, T. (2006). *Maha-Rahulovada Sutta: The greater exhortation to Rāhula*. Access to Insight. Retrieved January 23, 2025, from <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.062.than.html>

³⁷ Bhikkhu, T. (1998). *Aghatavinaya Sutta: Subduing hatred (1)*. Access to Insight. Retrieved January 23, 2025, from <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.161.than.html>

³⁸ Read chapter 4.3 Cultivating Compassion.

this moment will pass. Conversely, when experiencing success and happiness, one should enjoy them mindfully without becoming attached or prideful.

VI. HEALING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness can be a powerful tool for healing relationships. When one chooses to forgive the person who has hurt him, he lets go of the resentment, anger, and desire for revenge. Forgiveness is hard and it is difficult for an individual to forgive! One needs a lot of effort to forgive.

Relationships start healing when people forgive each other. However, forgiveness should be begun with oneself first, between husband and wife; between father and son; between mother and daughter; between friends; between leaders; between two groups of people; between two countries, etc. It affects the micro to macro level of human relationships. Although it is difficult to forgive, there is no alternative to recovering a genuine relationship than cultivating genuine forgiveness. By forgiving one is not just letting go of his traumatic experience of the past caused by others, he is also creating a path to peace and happiness for oneself and others.

A poor bull, who was emotionally suffering from mistreatments of his owner, approached a wise tortoise for advice to cure his emotional pain. The tortoise encouraged him to think of the little acts of kindness that his owner had done to him and to be grateful about. He also advised him to radiate loving kindness towards his owner. Whenever negative thoughts arise, beware of them. Cultivate thoughts of kindness. Be always mindful.³⁹

6.1. Rebuilding Trust after Conflict

Rebuilding trust after conflict is only possible through genuine forgiveness, which develops through mindfulness and transforming negative thought patterns by cultivating loving-kindness toward oneself, a beloved person, a neutral person, and a difficult one. Indeed, it is challenging to rebuild trust, especially with someone who has betrayed you. However, genuine forgiveness arises from understanding and accepting that the past cannot be changed. Holding a grudge only prolongs one's suffering. In reality, people make mistakes, but some may develop understanding and regret for their wrongdoing. By seeing the situation from the perspective of the wrongdoer, including their struggles and negative emotions that led to their harmful actions, the victim may find a way to rebuild trust. However, this does not mean condoning the perpetrator's wrongdoing – rather, it is a way to free oneself from emotional suffering.

According to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, one can rebuild trust through genuine expressions such as: “I am sorry. I hurt you out of my ignorance, out of my lack of mindfulness, out of my lack of skillfulness. I will try my best to change myself. I don't dare to say anything more to you.” Additionally, one should strive to bring out the best in oneself. When a person genuinely improves, their positive transformation will be noticed by others, creating an

³⁹ Karunaratna, S. (1996). *The healing of the bull: A story*. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 6.

opportunity to restore relationships.⁴⁰

6.2. Effective Communication for Reconciliation

Effective communication plays a vital role in reconciliation. It is a mindful, ethical and compassionate approach to express oneself in engaging with others. The Buddhist way of communication encompasses mindfulness speech, compassionate speech, and Right Speech (*Samma Vaca*), which is one of the Noble Eightfold Paths, which is abstaining from Lying (*musāvāda*), Slandorous speech (*pisuṇāvācā*), Harsh speech (*pharusāvācā*), and Idle talk (*samphappalāpa*).

Mindful Communication is speaking and listening with full awareness of one's words and intention. This will help both parties to avoid harmful words, which can create misunderstanding. When one speaks mindfully, he will avoid using harmful words, while attentive listening will help the listener to grasp the meaning of the words. The purpose of communication is to be understood and to understand others. According to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, there are two effective communications: (1) Deep listening (compassionate listening), (2) Loving speech (mindful speech). The main purpose of deep listening is to help others suffer less. Even if the person says wrong things, expresses bitterness, or blames, one should listen compassionately as long as possible. When one understands such expressions of anger and resentment are coming from suffering, one can listen mindfully. The listener bears responsibilities to help the victim suffer less. Mindful listening is vital. Without mindful listening, he may irritate or lose his temper towards the victim easily. Consequently, one must keep compassion in his heart to deal with unexpected irritation, anger, and temperament.⁴¹

Loving speech refers to mindful speech. It conveys the message without harming others internally. According to Buddhism, loving speech is Right Speech, which is a Key component of the Noble Eightfold Path. This speech is based on truth (*sacca*): avoiding lies and deceit, kindness (*mettā*): Speaking in ways that are gentle, respectful and uplifting, harmony (*samagga*): Avoiding divisive speech or gossip, and meaning (*atthasañhitā*): refraining from Idle chatter and ensuring words have purpose.

VII. CONCLUSION

Without genuine forgiveness, mindful healing is not possible and without forgiveness and mindful healing, a path to reconciliation is not possible. Mindfulness plays a key role in developing forgiveness and mindfulness to heal a person from deep traumatic experiences, along with reconciling with the preparatory. As one practices mindfulness while talking, he speaks the right speech, uses kind and compassionate words, which do not hurt others internally, but bring more harmony among individuals. Yet, forgiveness is

⁴⁰ Hanh, T. N.. (n. d.). *Quotes by Thich Nhat Hanh*. Goodreads. Retrieved January 25, 2025, from https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/9074.Thich_Nhat_Hanh?page=15

⁴¹ Hanh, T. N. (2014). *The Art of Communicating*. Harper Collins.

hard for a victim, and it takes a long effort, and self-exertion to forgive. The first step of forgiveness is to forgive oneself; the second step is to forgive the beloved one; the third step is to forgive the neutral one, and the fourth step is to forgive the difficult one. Even the main goal is to forgive the difficult one (perpetrator), but it requires a step-by-step process to develop forgiveness through a step-by-step process. If an individual cannot forgive himself, he will not be able to forgive others. Hence, the practice of forgiveness should be towards oneself first. Due to constant forgiveness, he will heal from such a grudge and resentment. However, the capacity of forgiveness depends on the duration of one's practicing mindfulness. As one practices mindfulness, the forgiveness level will increase. In this regard, the cultivation of forgiveness for a long period tends to forgive more than those who spend less time in practicing mindfulness. Since three interconnected terms are linked, therefore it shows that cultivation of mindfulness is connected with forgiveness and mindful healing. Reconciliation is only possible when one recovers from grudge, resentment, and painful experiences of the past. Significantly, it is a long-time cultivation of mindfulness, and forgiveness in today's life.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF APOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS: AN EXAMINATION OF BUDDHIST TEACHING AND PRACTICES AS A FRAMEWORK FOR PEACE, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND RECONCILIATION

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Abstract:

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the key Buddhist teachings and practices of apology and forgiveness and to propose a structured framework applicable to conflict resolution, peace-building, and reconciliation. The study was conducted as a textual analysis using qualitative research methods, collecting data from Buddhist canonical texts and secondary sources. Following the thematic analysis method, four major themes and relevant subordinate themes under them were generated: foundations in Buddhist teaching and practice, Buddhist monastic practices of apology and forgiveness, meditative practices supporting apology and forgiveness, and contemporary application and framework for reconciliation. The study concluded that the practice of apology and forgiveness can be identified from the Buddha's era and plays a significant role in resolving conflicts and maintaining peace and harmony. The Buddhist monastic ritualistic practice of apology and forgiveness provides an exemplary model for the process of requesting and offering forgiveness. The holistic framework provided by Buddhism for apology and forgiveness can be identified with effective implications for modern conflict resolution, peace-building, and reconciliation initiatives. Cultural sensitivity and potential barriers to implementing the Buddhist teaching and practice-integrated method for conflict resolution, peace, and reconciliation should be addressed in future research.

Keywords: *Apology and forgiveness, Buddhist teaching and monastic practices, conflict resolution, peace-building, reconciliation.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Peace, harmony, and reconciliation are universal expectations in the context of wars and social conflicts in various regions of the world today. In general, humans are often driven by the intention to exert power over others, including individuals, countries, nations, and different ethnic groups. Furthermore, emotions like anger and hatred have risen, suppressing the humanitarian qualities of compassion and loving-kindness. Therefore, there is a strong need to establish peace among nations and individuals through genuine apologies and heartfelt forgiveness. The Buddha's teaching and traditional Buddhist practices possess the capacity to guide people and communities toward a peaceful world and reconciliation. According to psychological perspectives, apology and forgiveness are significant psychological mechanisms in mental health, social relationships, and emotional well-being.¹ The intention and action of apology and forgiveness play a key role in peace-building and creating a harmonious world. The word apology refers to a verbal, non-verbal, or written expression of regret or contrition for a fault or failure, taking responsibility for a particular action. The Oxford English Dictionary defines apology as "The pleading off from a charge or imputation, whether expressed, implied, or only conceived as possible; defense of a person, or vindication of an institution, etc., from accusation or aspersion."² The act of forgiveness is regarded as psychologically valuable, and psychologists introduce it as a conscious decision to release feelings of hatred and resentment toward a person or a group.³

The Pāli term *khamā* (verb formation: *khamati* / *khamāmi*; Sanskrit: *kṣamā*) is used for both requesting forgiveness (apology) and granting forgiveness. Thanissaro Bhikkhu indicates that the Pāli word *khamā* also means "the earth."⁴ According to Buddhist teaching, apology and forgiveness are not merely social conventions; rather, they reflect human ethics and wholesome intentions, actions, and emotions. Forgiveness is considered a wholesome act and a skill for removing anger and hatred, while an apology reflects the wholesome qualities of humility, humbleness, and acceptance of one's faults or wrongdoing.⁵ Buddhist teachings explain that mental concomitants such as *taṇhā* (desire), *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion) are the fundamental psychological roots and causes of harmful actions and the oppression of others.⁶ By understanding and

¹ Lazare (2004): 11 chapter; Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000): p. 13 – 27.; Govier & Verwoerd (2002): p. 97 - 111.

² Oxford English Dictionary, "apology (n.), sense 1," accessed on [January 18, 2025], available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6695379707>.

³ Luskin, F., *What is Forgiveness*, accessed on [January 20, 2025], available at: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_is_forgiveness.

⁴ Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2004): *Reconciliation, Right & Wrong* (BCBS Edition, 2011), accessed on [January 21, 2025], available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/reconciliation.html>.

⁵ Harvey (2000): p. 246 - 248.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 10.

realizing these mental factors, humans can gradually reduce such destructive tendencies and harmful behaviors. Buddhism has the potential to introduce a framework for reconciliation based on apology and forgiveness, drawing from its traditional teachings and practices to foster peaceful relationships and prevent future harm.

This research paper presents a comprehensive exploration of how Buddhist teachings and traditional monastic practices related to apology and forgiveness can contribute to the establishment of a meaningful framework for conflict resolution, peace-building, the cultivation of harmonious relationships, and reconciliation. By drawing upon both canonical and secondary sources, this study delves into the ethical foundations of apology within Buddhist thought, emphasizing its role in moral and spiritual self-cultivation, as well as the psychological dimensions of forgiveness as a transformative force in interpersonal and societal healing. In the initial section, the paper examines the doctrinal and ethical underpinnings of apology and forgiveness, highlighting their significance within Buddhist moral philosophy. It further elucidates the mental dispositions essential to these practices such as *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *upekkhā* (equanimity) and their profound influence on emotional regulation and interpersonal harmony. Through a detailed analysis of these qualities, the paper demonstrates how Buddhist principles promote inner tranquility and serve as a pragmatic approach to resolving conflicts at individual, communal, and even geopolitical levels. The later sections of the paper shift focus to the practical application of Buddhist apology and forgiveness as an integrative model for reconciliation and sustainable peace-building. This research underscores the universal relevance of these principles beyond religious contexts by exploring contemporary case studies and historical examples where Buddhist-inspired approaches have successfully mediated conflicts. Ultimately, this study argues that incorporating Buddhist frameworks of apology and forgiveness into modern conflict resolution strategies can offer a viable, ethical, and deeply transformative path toward global harmony and mutual understanding.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous literature shows the psychological and social benefits of the intention and act of apology and forgiveness. Enright and Fitzgibbons indicate that the act of apology helps a person relieve negative emotions such as anger and humiliation, and it serves as a means to cultivate kindness and empathy.⁷ Even though social scientists and sociological theories initially overlooked the value of forgiveness, researchers after the 20th century conducted studies emphasizing its social and psychological significance.⁸ For instance, Ashy, Mercurio, and Malley-Morrison investigated orientations toward apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation using an ecological approach. Their study identified key predictive factors influencing people's attitudes toward

⁷ Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000): p. 13 - 27.

⁸ McCullough & Witvliet (2002): p. 446 - 458.

apology and forgiveness, including attachment styles, religiosity, tolerance, and non-violence.⁹ Furthermore, Ashy and colleagues highlighted the need for future research on the utility of apology and forgiveness in the context of conflict resolution. A study conducted by Oluremi Bolanle Ayoko examined apology and forgiveness as essential social skills in conflict management and their role in fostering cooperative engagement after workplace conflicts.¹⁰ Thus, researchers have explored the developmental, personality, and social aspects of forgiveness and assessed its value for social and psychological well-being. Buddhist literature, particularly the *Sutta Piṭaka*, *Vinaya Piṭaka*, and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, serves as a crucial source for studying the significance and mechanisms of apology and forgiveness, especially in the contexts of morality, ethics, and mental healing. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* instructs monks on how they should request forgiveness for their offenses toward one another and how they should seek reconciliation - the Pāli term: *patisāraṇīya-kamma*.¹¹ Furthermore, the value of apology and forgiveness has been illustrated by contemporary Buddhist scholars in relation to ethics and morality, as well as a method for eradicating *dosa* (hatred) and other unwholesome mental factors while cultivating wholesome states of mind.¹² However, this study examines the significance of an integrated framework based on Buddhist teachings and traditional practices for peace, conflict resolution, and reconciliation, illustrating the Buddhist sources of apology and forgiveness.

2.1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are threefold: first, to examine the fundamental Buddhist teachings and monastic practices related to apology and forgiveness, with a particular emphasis on their ethical significance in shaping moral conduct; second, to assess the contemporary relevance and practical implications of these teachings in the context of conflict resolution, exploring how they contribute to interpersonal, communal, and societal harmony; and third, to propose a structured framework grounded in Buddhist principles, which can be effectively applied to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in diverse cultural and geopolitical contexts.

2.2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing textual analysis to examine and interpret Buddhist canonical texts as primary sources, alongside secondary sources from contemporary scholars. The research process involves a systematic review, critical analysis, and exploration of these texts to gain deeper insights into the Buddhist perspectives on apology and forgiveness. The collected data is analyzed using the thematic analysis method, identifying

⁹ Ashy & Malley-Morrison (2010): p. 17 - 26.

¹⁰ Ayoko (2016): p. 172 - 198.

¹¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2004): *Reconciliation, Right & Wrong* (BCBS Edition, 2011), accessed on [January 21, 2025], available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/reconciliation.html>

¹² Harvey (2000): p. 246 - 248; De Silva (2000): p. 122 - 135.

key patterns and recurring themes within the literature. Based on the findings, the study offers well-founded conclusions and provides recommendations for future research, aiming to expand the discourse on the application of Buddhist ethical principles in conflict resolution and reconciliation.

2.3. Data Analysis and Discussion

Utilizing the thematic analysis method, the collected data on apology and forgiveness was systematically categorized and examined under four overarching themes, each encompassing several subordinate themes. The primary themes identified are as follows: (1) Foundations in Buddhist Teaching and Practice: This theme explores the doctrinal basis of apology and forgiveness within Buddhist philosophy, drawing from canonical texts and ethical principles. (2) Buddhist Monastic Practices of Apology and Forgiveness: This section delves into the structured monastic traditions surrounding apology and forgiveness, highlighting their role in maintaining harmony within the monastic community. (3) Meditative Practices Supporting Apology and Forgiveness: This theme examines the role of meditation, particularly *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *upekkhā* (equanimity), in cultivating a mindset conducive to genuine apology and forgiveness. (4) Contemporary Application and Framework for Reconciliation: This section discusses the practical application of Buddhist principles in modern conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconciliation efforts at both personal and societal levels. In short, each of these themes is further elaborated in the subsequent sections, providing a comprehensive understanding of the Buddhist approach to apology and forgiveness as a transformative process for individual and collective well-being.

III. FOUNDATIONS IN BUDDHIST TEACHING AND PRACTICE

3.1. Supremacy of the mind and intention

According to Buddhist teachings, the foundation of all bodily and verbal behaviors is generated by the mind, and therefore, the mind is the major and foremost factor for all. Without the force of the mind and the intention that arises from the mind, no verbal or physical action can be performed except specific unintentional occurs. The first two verses in the *Dhammapada*, the handbook of the Buddhist, indicate, "Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind in chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one... If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one..."¹³ Further, the Buddha emphasized in the *Nibbedhika sutta* in *Anguttara Nikaya* "Intention (*cetana*), I tell you, is *kamma* (deed). Intending, one does *kamma* by way of body, speech, and intellect."¹⁴ Thus, the Buddha teaches that one's volition is more influential than the action and the intention (*cetanā*) determines the action and its karmic consequence. Therefore, as a wholesome intention, the apology plays an ethically meaningful role in one's life, and it stimulates the person's desire to perform

¹³ Sri Dhammananda (1988): p. 41 - 42.

¹⁴ *Anguttara Nikaya* (1997): 6.63 (AN 6.63 PTS: A iii 410).

moral conduct in the future. Request for forgiveness and forgiving someone is not merely a simple act, but it requires a profound mindset accompanied by influential mental factors like loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).¹⁵ In contrast, violation of social norms, conflicts, aggressive behaviors and wars are rooted in negative mental concomitants such as anger, hatred, greed and delusion which may directly influence one's suffering in now and future.

3.2. Consequence (*Karmic*) effect of an action

As mentioned above, each action generated through mind or intention (*cetanā*) becomes a *kamma* which gives rise to a future effect in consequence (*vipāka*) which manifests now or in the future.¹⁶ The actions, verbal or physical, with wrong, wicked mind such as anger, hatred, delusion, and greed generate unwholesome consequences (*akusala vipāka*) which produce suffering to one, while wholesome actions derived by moral mental factors like loving-kindness and compassion generate positive consequence (*kusala vipāka*) in now and the future.¹⁷ Thus the apology and forgiveness, usually emerging from positive mental factors, naturally facilitate one to have healthier results in consequence. Forgiving someone benefits not only the person who conducted wrongdoing but also the others, creating healthier relationships among individuals and nations. It also includes positive verbal actions called right speech (*sammā vācā*)¹⁸ that foster true, complimentary and trustworthy words, refraining from lying and aggressive, hateful words, which are contributing to the relationship building.

3.3. Ethical and moral conduct

The cultivation of morality and ethical behavior serves as a foundational platform for peace and reconciliation. In Buddhism, ethical conduct (*sīla*) is deeply rooted in the commitment to refrain from actions that cause harm, including killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the use of intoxicants.¹⁹ However, beyond mere abstinence from harmful actions, Buddhist ethics also emphasize the cultivation of positive virtues such as *kṣamā* (forgiveness), *tyāga* (self-sacrifice), *parārthakriyā* (altruism), and *dāna* (generosity). The practice of *apology* (*paṭidesanā*) and *forgiveness* (*kṣamā*) is inherently linked to these moral and ethical principles, as they facilitate the restoration of harmony in interpersonal and communal relationships. By fostering a sense of accountability and compassion, ethical conduct strengthens the foundation for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Through the sincere acknowledgment of wrongdoing and the compassionate act of forgiveness, individuals and communities can transcend discord and cultivate a culture of reconciliation and mutual understanding.

¹⁵ *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* (2010): p. 291 - 310.

¹⁶ Harvey (2000): p.17, 246 - 248.

¹⁷ Sri Dhammananda (1988): p. 41 - 42.

¹⁸ *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* (2010): p. 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 10 - 55.

IV. BUDDHIST MONASTIC PRACTICES OF APOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS

4.1. Buddhist monastic disciplinary procedures

The traditional monastic procedures established during the Buddha's era provide a structured and systematic process for seeking and granting forgiveness within the *Saṅgha* community. Rooted in the monastic code of discipline (*Vinaya*), these procedures are designed to uphold moral integrity, foster communal harmony, and ensure the ethical conduct of *bhikkhus*. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* - one of the primary canonical texts - outlines essential rules, regulations, and procedural guidelines that guide monastic life, emphasizing both corrective measures and the cultivation of reconciliation. One such fundamental practice is the formal act of seeking forgiveness from the *Saṅgha* when a monk has committed a transgression. If a disciplinary rule has been violated, the offending monk is considered unfit for communal living within the monastic order until he acknowledges his wrongdoing and expresses sincere remorse. This process requires not only a verbal apology but also a resolute commitment to refrain from repeating the offense in the future. Upon reviewing his request, the *Saṅgha* deliberates on whether to grant forgiveness, with the primary objective of guiding the monk back onto the path of righteousness rather than condemning him. However, in some cases, a monastic penalty (*patisāraṇīya-kamma*) may be imposed as part of the corrective process, ensuring that the transgressor fully understands the gravity of his actions while reinforcing the discipline essential for the long-term sustainability of the *Saṅgha*.²⁰ Another significant practice associated with monastic discipline and reconciliation is the *Pāṭimokkha* recitation (*Pāṭimokkhuḍḍesa*). This ritual, observed fortnightly on *uposatha* days, serves as an occasion for monks to collectively reaffirm their commitment to the monastic precepts. During the assembly, each monk is required to reflect on his conduct and publicly confess any intentional or unintentional breaches of the disciplinary rules. This act of open acknowledgment not only reinforces personal accountability but also fosters an environment of trust, allowing forgiveness to be extended within the community. By emphasizing self-reflection, moral responsibility, and the opportunity for renewal, these traditional monastic practices illustrate a profound ethical framework that continues to shape Buddhist approaches to conflict resolution and communal harmony.

4.2. Psychological method for conflict resolution and reconciliation

Requesting forgiveness from a senior monk by a junior monk is also a practice of seeking an apology for any wrong done in thoughts, words, or deeds.²¹ When the junior monk makes this request of apology reciting three times, the senior monk/s accepts it saying "I/ we forgive you, venerable" (*khamāmi/ khamāma*). Moreover, the Buddhists often seek forgiveness from the triple gems, Buddha, Dhamma and Sanga reciting the verse "*kāyena vācā*

²⁰ Thanissaro Bhikkhu (1994): chapter 1.; *Vinaya Texts: Maha Vagga* (1899): p. 239 - 297.

²¹ "*paṃādena, dvārattayena kaṭaṃ, sabbaṃ aparādhāṃ khamatu me bhante.*"

*cittena, pamādena mayākatam, accayam khama me bhante...*²² Thus, by reciting these stanzas, the Buddhist expects a kind of psychological relief from mistakes or faults even if done unintentionally. The performance of Sāmaggi Uposatha, out of the three types of Uposatha in the Sanga tradition, is also significant in the practice of reconciliation.²³ The Sāmaggi Uposatha is a which can be held on any day by the Sangha in contrast to other *uposatha* days.²⁴ The Sāmaggi Uposatha takes place when the groups of monks come into reconciliation after a conflict or quarrelsome incident. These Sanga groups meet each other and conduct the Sāmaggi Uposatha extending mutual understanding, apologies and forgiving each other so that they ensure long-lasting peace and harmony among the Sanga. In case a monk commits a wrong or offence against another monk, the initial step is to request forgiveness. When a monk confesses an offense, such as insulting someone, he should acknowledge his misconduct, request forgiveness, and make a sincere commitment to refrain from such actions in the future. The incident of the quarrelsome *bhikkhus* of Kosambī serves as an ideal example of this. The dispute, which arose over a minor disciplinary rule, escalated beyond control - even for the Buddha. Eventually, they understood their fault and begged for apology and forgiveness from the Buddha, and eventually they apologized to one another and established harmony among themselves.²⁵ Another such incident is the supreme penalty (*brahmadanda*) on Bhikkhu Canna. After the Buddha's passing away, the Sanga decided to impose the *Brahmavihāra* penalty on him, but eventually, he requested an apology from the Sanga, the Sanga forgave him, and reintegrated into the Sanga community.²⁶

V. MEDITATIVE PRACTICES SUPPORTING APOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS

5.1. Practice of the sublime states of the mind

A key meditational practice that directly aligns with spreading peace, harmony, and reconciliation is the cultivation of four sublime states of the mind, called *Brahmavihāra*. The meaning of the *Brahmavihāra* is the mental states of divine beings such as gods and *Brahmas*. These mental factors are also considered as the higher mental qualities of humans, which are essential for peaceful and harmonious lives. They are namely; *Mettā* (loving-kindness), *Karunā* (compassion), *Muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *Upekkhā* (equanimity), and have been elaborated in detail in Path of Purification.²⁷ *Mettā* is the unconditional positive wish for all living beings to be happy, healthy, and refrain

²² Harvey (2000): p. 28.

²³ Thanissaro Bhikkhu (1994): chapter 1.; *Vinaya Texts: Maha Vagga* (1899): p. 239 - 297; Tin (2021): p. 26 - 29.

²⁴ Tin (2021): p. 26 - 29.

²⁵ *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)* (2001); Sri Dhammananda (1988): p.6.

²⁶ *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)* (2001): p. 34 - 35; *Dialogues of the Buddha - 2 (Dighanikāya)* (1910): p. 71 - 191.

²⁷ *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* (2010): p. 291 - 310.

from suffering. It is also called the loving-kindness. The term *Karunā* refers to the sensitive feelings about others' suffering and feelings to help them escape from troubles and suffering. *Mudithā* is the genuine feeling of pleasure looking at others' health and wealth instead of the jealous mind. *Upekkhā* is the equanimity and balanced mind which arises through the understanding of the fluctuations in life. In the context of apology and forgiveness, the cultivation of positive mental states plays a fundamental role in facilitating reconciliation. Without the capacity to extend *mettā* (loving-kindness) and to cultivate *karuṇā* (compassion) toward others, one may find it difficult to truly forgive and release resentment. Loving-kindness fosters an attitude of unconditional goodwill, allowing individuals to see beyond personal grievances and recognize the shared human experience of imperfection. Compassion, in turn, enables one to empathize with the suffering of both the offender and the victim, thereby mitigating the impulse for retribution and nurturing the willingness to forgive. Moreover, the ability to rejoice in others' happiness (*muditā*) is crucial in the process of forgiveness. True forgiveness does not merely involve letting go of anger but also includes the ability to find peace in the knowledge that reconciliation brings relief and joy to all parties involved. If one harbors jealousy or resentment toward the offender's restored well-being after being forgiven, true reconciliation remains incomplete. Equanimity (*upekkhā*), another essential mental quality, strengthens one's capacity to remain balanced amidst the emotional, psychological, and social complexities that arise in the process of seeking and granting forgiveness. Equanimity allows individuals to maintain composure, neither being overwhelmed by guilt when seeking an apology nor clinging to a sense of superiority when offering forgiveness. Thus, these four *brahmavihārās* - loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity - create an internal psychological foundation conducive to both seeking and offering forgiveness. By fostering these qualities, individuals can move beyond personal grievances, embrace genuine reconciliation, and contribute to a more harmonious and compassionate society.

5.2. The role of *sati* (mindfulness) in apology and forgiveness

Sati is the Pāli term for Mindfulness. Some scholars translate that word as "attention, bare attention, awareness" etc. even though such translations do not denote the perfect meaning of the word *sati*.²⁸ *Sati* (mindfulness) is a vital use in the doctrine of the Buddha, i.e. the seventh factor of the Noble Eight Fold Path (right mindfulness - *sammāsati*), the first factor of *Satta Bojjhanga* (the factors leading to *Nibbāna*), the third factor of five *indriya dhammas* (*satindriya*) and the third factor of the five *bala dhammas* (*satibala*). *Sati* is prescribed in the *Abhidhammatthasangaha* of *Abhidhamma piṭaka* as a wholesome common mental concomitant (*sobhana sādārana cetasika*) which has a potential to develop in every mind.²⁹ Thus, *sati* (mindfulness) or *sati cetasika*, according to Buddhist sources, does not arise with unwholesome states but arises only with

²⁸ Nyanaponika Thera (1962): p. 3.

²⁹ Bodhi (2016): p. 85, 77 - 110.

virtuous, wholesome, and meritorious mind, speech, and actions. Furthermore, highlighting the significance of this mindfulness practice for various purposes today, several Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) have been developed and introduced into the field of psychotherapy, and hundreds of research studies are being conducted.³⁰ Scholars such as Michael M. Tophoff³¹ and Bingiriye Sunandabodhi³² proposed the applicability of meditation practices for conflict resolution in different settings. According to the *Mahā satipaṭṭhāna sutta* in *Dīgha Nikāya*, practising mindfulness provides a person with types of benefits including worldly/ mundane and super-mundane/ transcendental benefits. It also helps to purify the minds of beings, overcoming sorrows and lamentation, and destruction of suffering and grief.³³ Thus, regular practice of mindfulness - the practice of moment-to-moment awareness - enables a person to observe, identify and prevent distracting motivations such as delusion, anger, hatred and jealousy which helps in developing a desire for apologies and forgiveness. Also, mindfulness helps him to understand the mental obstacles to forgiveness and prevent them, cultivating sublime states.

VI. CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION AND FRAMEWORK FOR RECONCILIATION

Buddhist teaching and monastic traditions have originally introduced and practiced different teachings and methods for the survival and better management of them, resolving conflicts and maintaining mutual relationships among the members of the Sanga community. However, those principles and practices related to apology and forgiveness can be effectively applied to resolving conflicts in today's world, building peace and creating reconciliation. For instance, Michael Tophoff indicates the meditator's behavior in personal practice and interpersonal conflict resolution strategies, models from the character of the Bodhisattvas as contributions to contemporary society.³⁴ Furthermore, Bingiriye Sunandabodhi pointed out that Buddhism is capable of addressing the root causes of modern conflicts such as unwholesome mental concomitants i.e. greed, hatred and delusion, and developing fundamental principles such as tolerance, loving-kindness and equanimity which direct the society for peace and conflict resolution.³⁵ Further, Siddhi, Mahatthanadull and Vuḍḍhikaro showed the Buddhist practice of *Mettā* (loving-kindness) integrated method for conflict management in modern societies, elaborating conflicts in various regions and countries, and exploring the applicability of Buddhist teachings like loving-kindness and noble-eight-fold path.³⁶ These Buddhist principles related to conflict resolution can be applicable in different settings.

³⁰ Kabat-Zinn (1990); Shapiro (2008): p. 55.

³¹ Tophoff (2020): p. 55.

³² Sunandabodhi (2024).

³³ *Dialogues of the Buddha* - 2 (*Dīghanikāya*) (1910): p. 322 - 346.

³⁴ Tophoff (2020): p. 55.

³⁵ Sunandabodhi (2024).

³⁶ Siddhi, Mahatthanadull & Vuḍḍhikaro (2018): p. 24 - 48.

For example, it can be applied in organizational settings such as schools and workplaces to minimize or prevent conflicts and to establish healthier relationships in resolving conflicts.³⁷ People in organizations and communities can be made aware of the apology, and forgiveness practiced in Buddhist traditions, and they can be trained to request apology, pardon, and offer forgiveness as in monastic methods. This method is beneficial for both members of those organizations as well as the administrative faculties, where this process helps to promote mutual understanding and re-establishing trust among each other. In the context of conflict resolution within organizations and institutions, the Buddhist approach to apology and forgiveness can serve as a powerful framework for fostering peace and reconciliation on a broader, international scale. The principles of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) should not be confined to individual relationships but rather extended across nations and ethnic groups, promoting harmony and mutual understanding. In geopolitical conflicts, nations and communities often grapple with historical grievances and deep-seated mistrust. However, by cultivating a culture of ethical responsibility and open dialogue, countries can acknowledge past mistakes and work towards reconciliation. Those who have committed errors - whether through misguided policies or actions - should be encouraged to recognize their faults and express sincere remorse. At the same time, the affected parties must practice forgiveness with a sense of equanimity (*upekkhā*), transcending emotional and psychological barriers that hinder genuine reconciliation. By integrating these ethical and contemplative principles into diplomatic efforts and international relations, nations can foster a sustainable model for conflict resolution - one that is not merely transactional but deeply rooted in moral integrity and long-term peace-building. Future research and policy initiatives could explore the practical implementation of this framework, ensuring that Buddhist-inspired reconciliation strategies contribute meaningfully to global peace efforts.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Apology and forgiveness hold profound significance in the realms of conflict resolution, peace-building, and reconciliation, gaining recognition among scholars and practitioners in the social sciences. From a Buddhist perspective, these practices are deeply rooted in the ethical and philosophical foundations of the tradition and have played a pivotal role in fostering peace and harmony since the Buddha's era. The *Tipiṭaka* - the Buddhist canonical texts along with contemporary Buddhist scholarship, provides a vast repository of knowledge for constructing a meaningful framework for addressing modern-day conflicts. A distinctive aspect of the Buddhist approach to apology and forgiveness lies in its emphasis on intentionality (*cetanā*) and the karmic consequences of one's volitional actions. This perspective underscores that the moral and psychological weight of an offense is not solely determined by the act itself but also by the underlying motivation and the willingness to make amends. Within Buddhist monastic traditions, formalized rituals of apology and forgiveness

³⁷ Fehr & Gelfand (2010): p. 37 - 50.

serve as an exemplary model for seeking and granting pardon. These rituals, whether conducted for intentional or unintentional transgressions, reflect both the humility of the wrongdoer and the compassionate nature of the one who forgives. Beyond its ethical dimensions, the practice of apology and forgiveness in Buddhism serves a crucial psychological function. It provides offenders with an opportunity for self-reflection, allowing them to acknowledge their faults, undergo moral rectification, and cultivate a sincere commitment to refraining from future wrongdoing. Moreover, the integration of mindfulness (*sati*) and the cultivation of the four *brahmavihārās* - loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) - enhances the transformative power of these practices, fostering genuine reconciliation at both individual and communal levels. Given its holistic nature, this Buddhist-inspired framework offers valuable insights for contemporary peace-building and conflict resolution efforts. However, the effective application of these principles in diverse sociocultural contexts requires further investigation. Future research may focus on the cultural sensitivities, practical challenges, and potential barriers to integrating Buddhist ethical and contemplative practices into modern reconciliation initiatives. By doing so, a more comprehensive and adaptable approach to conflict resolution, grounded in both ethical integrity and psychological healing, can be developed.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE TERM “FORGIVENESS” FROM VIETNAM BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

At the outset, I express my sincere thanks to the organizing committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and the National Vesak Committee of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025 for allowing me to participate at this auspicious event being organized for the fourth time in Vietnam. Buddhist psychology offers specific teachings and practices for the development of forgiveness. According to Kornfield, “forgiveness” is one of the important ways to end suffering, to bring dignity and harmony to our life as well as repair the world. Forgiveness is fundamentally for our own sake, for our mental health. It is a way to let go of the pain we carry. Like the practice of compassion, forgiveness does not ignore the truth of our suffering. Forgiveness is not weak. It demands courage and integrity. Yet only forgiveness and love can bring about the peace. Forgiveness is mostly seen as a virtuous human response to wrongful conduct. But what happens when there is no acknowledgement of wrongdoing on the part of the wrongdoer? Does the forgiveness of the unrepentant still count as forgiveness?

Keywords: *Buddhism, Dhamma, Sangha, forgiveness, compassion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Term forgiveness has not been used directly in Buddhism. Thus, there is a need for an analytical study. The present paper assesses the term Forgiveness from the Vietnamese Buddhist perspective. Forgiveness is the core element of mankind’s religion, as pronounced by Buddha and Buddha Dhamma. Vietnam, a dynamic country in Indo-China, located to the East of the South China Sea, Laos and Cambodia on the West, Thailand on the South-

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West borders, and China on the North. Being in its situation in Indo-China, it is influenced by both India and China. According to George Coedès, “Expansion of Indian Civilization to those countries and islands of the Orient where Chinese civilization with strikingly similar aspirations seems to arrive ahead of it”.¹ Sylvain Lévi mentions that “India gave her mythology to her neighbors who went to teach it to the whole world. Mother of law and philosophy, she gave to three-quarters of Asia a god, a religion, a doctrine, an art. She carried her sacred language, her literature.”² The concept of Forgiveness has been widely used in Brahmanical religion. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Purāṇas* are full of instances of Forgiveness. In Buddhism, Forgiveness seems to be percolated from Vedic religion.

II. ORIGIN AND MEANING OF THE TERM “FORGIVENESS”

The word ‘forgive’ appears to be taken from the Latin word “perdonare”, which means ‘to give completely, without reservation’. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Forgiveness is an act of forgiving someone or something. It is also the attitude of someone willing to forgive other people. Oxford Dictionary gives the term “forgiving someone” means willingness to forgive someone, to pray for God’s forgiveness “the forgiveness of sins”. Forgiving, therefore, involves an act completely abolishing any feelings of resentment or retribution. Forgiveness is an interaction involving a wrongdoer and a wronged party, and the act of forgiving is generally considered a way in which victims of wrongdoing cease to harbor negative emotions towards the wrongdoer and endeavor to restore their relationship with the wrongdoer.³ Forgiveness is generally defined as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they deserve your forgiveness. As such, it is seen as an appropriate virtuous response to wrongful or unfair treatment.

Forgiveness is a focal point of Buddhism and it is in general practice. It is associated with a supernatural being, thus many people have made a significant approach. An Indian sage Meher Baba opines, “True love is not for the faint-hearted”. Jack Kornfield⁴ explains forgiveness based on a very serious incident that happened with a woman who had only one son. Her son was shot dead by a boy of 14 years old without any reason. On imprisonment of the boy, she visited the boy and helped him continuously later she adopted. Thus, she forgave him. Based on this story, Kornfield defines forgiveness as:

“Forgiveness is, in particular, the capacity to let go, to release the suffering, the sorrows, the burdens of the pains and betrayals of the past, and instead to choose

¹ Coedès, George, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, 1967, p. xvi.

² Lévi, Sylvain, *l’Inde civilisatrice: Aperçu historique*. Paris, 1938, p. 136.

³ Hughes, Paul M., and Brandon, Warmke, *Forgiveness*, accessed on [January 9, 2025], available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/forgiveness>.

⁴ Kornfield, Jack, *Forgiveness Repairs the World*, accessed on [October 18, 2024], available at: <https://jackkornfield.com/the-practice-of-forgiveness-2>.

the mystery of love. Forgiveness shifts us from the small separate sense of ourselves to a capacity to renew, to let go, to live in love.”

The *Bhagavad Gītā* says, “If you want to see the brave, look to those who can return love for hatred. If you want to see the brave, look to those who can forgive.”

Thus, Forgiveness is not a sentiment, or quick. One cannot paper things over and smile and say, “I forgive.” It is a deep process of the heart. And in the process, you need to honor the betrayal of yourself or others - the grief, the anger, the hurt, the fear. It can take a long time. Sometimes when you do a forgiveness practice, you realize that you are never going to forgive that person. And never takes a while. Forgiveness is also not for anybody else.⁵

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama⁶ is a figure who has highly promoted the value of forgiveness. His homeland has been occupied by China since 1950, yet he maintains that he forgives and feels no enmity towards the Chinese government. The Chinese authorities, for their part, have never admitted to wrongful invasion of the ‘roof of the world’, hence there has been no acceptance of the Dalai Lama’s forgiveness.⁷

The “Forgiveness” is understood as an inseparable part of Buddhism. It is well practiced by the Buddhist clergy and lay practitioners. Samai Amal Pragma opines that Christian-Buddhist studies suggest that no single Buddhist concept is equal to forgiveness. If we go deeply into Buddhist literature, however, Buddhist teachings point to practices of forgiveness.⁸

“If one abuses you, there is a temptation to answer back, or to be revenged.

One should be on guard against this natural reaction.

It is like spitting against the wind, it harms no one but oneself. ...

Misfortune always follows those who give way to the desire for revenge.”

Dhammapada

The *Dhammapada* records, Śākyamuni Buddha spoke of the suffering and pain caused by the desire for revenge. Its remedy is not taking revenge, but the ultimate remedy is forgiveness. The Buddhist psychology relates “forgiveness” as a way to end suffering, to bring dignity and harmony in our life. Forgiveness is fundamentally for our own sake, for our mental health. It is a way to let go of the pain that we carry. Forgiveness means different things to different people. But in general, it involves an intentional decision to let go of resentment and anger. The act that hurt or offended you might always be with you.

⁵ Kornfield, Jack, *The Ancient Heart of Forgiveness*, accessed on [January 23, 2025], available at: <https://www.dailygood.org/story/669/the-ancient-heart-of-forgiveness-jack-kornfield/>.

⁶ Lin, Chien-Te. “With or Without Repentance: A Buddhist Take on Forgiveness” in *Journal of Ethical Perspectives*, Vol. 28, no. 3, (2021): 263 – 285.

⁷ Kornfield, Jack, *The Art of Forgiveness, Loving-Kindness, and peace*. New York: Bantam Dell, 2008.

⁸ Pragma, Samani Amal, “Forgiveness Across Major World Religious Traditions” in *Journal of Tulsī Prajñā*, Vol. 44, no. 175 - 176, (2017): p. 80.

III. FORGIVENESS IN BUDDHISM

Buddhism offers teachings and practices for forgiveness. Like the practice of compassion, forgiveness does not ignore the truth of our suffering. Forgiveness is not weak. It demands courage and integrity. Yet only forgiveness and love can bring about the peace we long for.⁹ When we practice forgiveness individually, we start by recognizing that we have all betrayed and hurt others, just as we have knowingly or unknowingly been harmed by him/her. It is inevitable in this human realm. Sometimes our betrayals are small, terrible.

Extending and receiving forgiveness is essential for redemption from our past. To forgive does not mean we condone the misdeeds of another. We can dedicate ourselves to make sure they never happen again. But without forgiveness the world can never be released from the sorrows of the past. Someone quipped, “Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past.” Forgiveness is a way to move on.

In Buddhist psychology, forgiveness is not presented as a moral commandment. It is understood as a way to end suffering, to bring dignity and harmony to our life. Forgiveness is fundamentally for our own sake, for our mental health. It is a way to let go of the pain we carry. For most people, the work of forgiveness is a process. Practicing forgiveness, we may go through stages of grief, rage, sorrow, fear, and confusion. As we let ourselves feel the pain we still hold, forgiveness comes as a relief, a release for our heart in the end. Forgiveness acknowledges that no matter how much we may have suffered, we will not put another human being out of our heart.

Buddhism teaches the importance of the state of mind as well as a peaceful way of life. In Buddhism, there is no concept of creation of God with the power to punish or forgive. However, the idea of forgiveness is an important part of the Buddha’s teaching.¹⁰ The notion of forgiveness comprises two factors: 1. Removal of an expectation of revenge and 2. Renouncing of your anger towards those who have offended you. Both the factors point to a change of your attitude. They are highly valued in Buddhism.

Buddhists believe that justice is maintained by karma. If you have done good things for which you will be rewarded. On the other hand, if you have done a bad deed, you will be punished one day. According to *Dhammapada*,¹¹ “those who attempt to conquer hatred by hatred, are like warriors who take weapons to overcome others who bear arms. This does not end hatred, but gives room to grow.

Lord Buddha himself instructed for both fierce and compassionate. “If someone has abused you, beat you, robbed you, abandon your thoughts of

⁹ Kornfield, Jack, *The Practice of Forgiveness*, accessed on [January 20, 2025], available at: <https://jackkornfield.com/the-practice-of-forgiveness>.

¹⁰ Pragya, Samani Amal, (2017) *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹¹ Tin, Daw Mya Trans, *Dhammapada: Verses and Stories*. Rangoon: Burma Tripitak Association, 1986, Verse 5.

anger. Soon you will die. Life is too short to live with hatred." With forgiveness we become unwilling to wish harm to another. Whenever we forgive, in small ways at home, or great ways between nations, we free ourselves from the past. We all must find ways to forgive.

IV. UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS IN BUDDHISM

The Biography of Bodhisattva Āryadeva states that having defeated his opponent in philosophical debate, Āryadeva, a scholar from the Mādhyamika tradition and student of the famed master Nāgārjuna, was killed by his opponent. During his dying moments, however, Āryadeva forgave his attacker and displayed deep compassion towards him, giving him daily supplies and advising him on a viable escape route while imparting the Buddha dharma to him.¹²

Forgiveness is an act of compassion towards another as well as a means to achieve self-transformation. Thus, Āryadeva showed gratitude to allow him to advance spiritually. Forgiveness is a recurring theme in Buddhist teaching. The story of Puṇṇa can be another example cited. Puṇṇa was one of the ten foremost disciples of the Buddha. Once the Buddha asked Puṇṇa what he would think if he was scolded, assaulted or even killed for introducing the Buddha dharma to the savages, and Puṇṇa replied that he would be fortunate to be badly treated under such circumstances. The Buddha then praised Puṇṇa for his forbearance.¹³

As per Buddhism, all wrongdoing is rooted in Ignorance and Suffering. Forgiveness is one of the important factors for earning merit and gets rid of suffering. The first contributing factor to any wrongful act is considered to be an ignorant state of mind. The Buddhist practice of loving-kindness helps to engender a sense of sympathy for the transgressor. Just as it is not the bite of a snake that kills us, but rather the poison; it is the presence of ignorance in the mind of the transgressor that is at fault, rather than the transgressor him or herself. When we reflect on our enemies in this way, a sense of forgiveness naturally arises in our mind. This same approach to forgiveness is illustrated in Jesus' appeal: "Father, forgive them, for doing so."

There are two reasons to forgive the another: firstly, those who harm us do so because they are in a state of ignorance which causes them to experience pain and suffering; and secondly, even though the person may not currently be experiencing any pain or suffering and may not be aware of his or her state of ignorance, the negative karma created by a wrongful deed will eventually ripen in future suffering. The realization that our adversaries will have to suffer in the future engenders a sense of real concern for their wellbeing, and negates the impulse to feel anger or hatred towards them.¹⁴

¹² Lin, Chien-Te, (2021), op. cit., p. 268.

¹³ Lin, Chien-Te (2021), op. cit., p. 284.

¹⁴ Dalai Lama, et al. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in the Changing World*, New York: Random House, 2016, p. 33.

V. BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM

5.1. Introduction of Buddhism

Vietnam had been a bridge between India and China, the two ancient civilizations of Asia. The majority of Vietnamese practiced Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) form of Buddhism. But some monasteries are followers of Theravada Buddhism. The Chinese called Vietnam “Giao Châu” (Jiaozhou in Chinese). The *Mahāvamsa* mentions “Golden Land” (Suvarṇabhūmi) where Sona and Uttara were dispatched as one of the nine missionary groups to abroad to spread Buddhism by Emperor Asoka of Magadh empire. Vietnamese scholars, based on historical evidence, opine that Buddhism was introduced in Vietnam directly from India before the Christian era. The earliest Buddhist centre is Luy Lau now in Thuan Thanh district in Bac Ninh province,¹⁵ where an Asoka relic has been found. It was the most important Buddhist Centre at that time. Along with traders, Indian monks used to visit here and introduced Buddhism. Vietnamese source *Co Chau Phap Van Phat ban hanh* refers to the visit of Indian monk called Kaudra alias Kālācārya (Gis La Cha Le in Vietnamese) also known as “the Black Master”.¹⁶

The Centre was well known for the translation of the Buddhist texts. There were learned monks who had supernatural powers too. The talent of the monks must have attracted the people of the locality to adopt Buddhism on a large scale. By the 5th century, the centre became a famous Buddhist learning center. There were twenty relic worshipping towers and more than five hundred monks engaged in studying *Buddhist Sūtras*.¹⁷

5.2. Nature and development of Buddhism

Vietnamese Buddhism is a syncretic religion imbibed with mainly elements of Vietnamese folk beliefs, Confucianism and Taoism.¹⁸ From the first century to the tenth century C.E., Vietnam was under the Chinese domination. To maintain everlasting control, Chinese political power imposed its socio-religio-cultural policy to destroy the identity of the Vietnamese. As a result, Vietnamese, though did not completely forget their culture, they assimilated their elements. Vietnamese people accepted Sino-Vietnamese as the new national language. Without losing national identity, based on tenets of Mahayana Buddhism, Vietnamese Buddhism became a duplicate of Chinese Buddhism based on particularly Pure Land, Zen, and Tantric Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.¹⁹ To promote cultural adaptation and nationalism,

¹⁵ Tan, Ha Van; Ku, Nguyen Van; and Long, Pham Ngoc. *Buddhist Temples in Vietnam*. Hanoi, 2008, p. 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁷ Kumar, Bachchan, *The Buddhist Art: Vietnamese Perspectives*. Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corporation: 2007, pp. 44 - 45.

¹⁸ Nguyen, Cuong Tu and Barber, A. W.. “7. Vietnamese Buddhism in North America: Tradition and Acculturation”. *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, edited by Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p. 132.

¹⁹ Most Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Ed., *Buddhism in Vietnam: History, Traditions and*

Vietnamese Buddhism had become inseparably intertwined, with Vietnamese culture.

The Ngo, Dinh, Tien Le dynasties all contributed to the development of Buddhism. The Ly and Tran dynasties are considered the most prosperous for Vietnamese Buddhism. They not only escaped from political suppression, Vietnamese Buddhism during the Ly dynasty, under the leadership of Ven. Van Hanh, aided Vietnam's independence from China in terms of geopolitics, culture, religion, education, and economics. Vietnamese Buddhism during the Tran dynasty helped Vietnam become powerful and defeat the formidable Mongol forces three times. In the historical epochs above, while not formally recognized in the country's constitutions, Buddhism prevailed as the national religion of Vietnam. After the periods of prosperity, under the Later Le dynasty, Confucianism became recognized as the national religion, leading to the decline of Buddhism in all aspects. At the end of the eighteenth century, Buddhism lost its place politically, religiously, and culturally. Buddhist Reformation movements began to take shape at the start of the twentieth century, first in Southern Vietnam and then quickly spread to the North, calling attention to the social, ethical, and therapeutic roles of Vietnamese Buddhism. Despite the vicissitudes, Vietnamese Buddhism has never been interrupted.

Followers of Buddhism in Vietnam practice different traditions without any problem or differences.²⁰ Few Vietnamese Buddhists would identify themselves as a particular kind of Buddhism. For example, Christians identify themselves by a separate denomination. Although,

Vietnamese Buddhism does not have a strong centralized structure, the practice is similar throughout the country at almost any temple, commonly chant *Sūtras*, recite Buddhas' names (particularly Amitābha), doing repentance, and praying for rebirth in the Pure Land. *The Lotus Sūtra* and the *Amitābha Sūtra* are the most commonly used *Sūtras*.²¹ The most *Sūtras* and texts are in Văn ngôn and are merely recited with Sino-Xenic pronunciations, making them incomprehensible to most practitioners. Gaining merit is the most common and essential practice in Vietnamese Buddhism with a belief that liberation takes place with the help of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

5.3. Buddhism as practiced in Vietnam

Buddhism is in the heart of the people of Vietnam. It is considered not only a religion but the whole social set up is based on Buddhism. Vietnamese Buddhism is more practical, flexible, and tolerant compared to Buddhism in other countries. The Buddhist Followers practice different traditions without any problem or sense of contradiction. Although Vietnamese Buddhism does not have a strong centralized structure, the practice is similar throughout the country at almost any temple.

Society. Hanoi: Religion Publisher, 2019, p. VIII.

²⁰ Nguyen & Barber, op. cit., p. 135.

²¹ Ibid. p. 134.

Vietnamese chant Buddhist *Sūtras* regularly three times a day, i.e. at dawn, noon, and dusk. The reading of *Sūtras* includes reading with niệm Phật and *dhāraṇī*, including the chú Đại Bi (*the Nīlakaṇṭha Dhāraṇī*), recitation, and kinh hành (walking meditation). Lay people sometimes visit the temple, and some devout Buddhists practice praying at home. Special pray such as sám nguyện/ sám hối (confession/ repentance) take place on the full moon and new moon each month. The Niệm Phật practice is one way of repenting and purifying bad *karma*.

VI. THE CONCEPT OF FORGIVENESS IN VIETNAM BUDDHISM

Vietnam has seen ups and downs in their history. They had their language, script, and culture as different from the Chinese.²² Under Chinese domination (from the first to the tenth century), they have faced the Chinese's oppressive and assimilative attitude. They struggle hard to save their identity. Moreover, they followed the middle path of Buddha. Nevertheless, Vietnamese spirit of forgiveness was never diverted as laid down in Buddhist scriptures. In the *Dhammapada*, for example, verses 184, 197, 202 illustrate forgiveness. The *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN) 11. 4 further advises that repaying an angry person with anger makes things worse not only for others but for oneself as well. It is also said that not repaying an angry person with anger, is the cause for winning a battle that is hard to win. The *Anguttara Nikāya* (AN) 2. 21 and the SN 11. 24 explains that there are two types of fools: the first being a person who does not see his or her offence as offender, and the second, one who does not rightfully pardon (by the *Dhamma*) another who has confessed his or her offence. There are also two types of wise people: the first being one who sees his or her offense as an offender, and second, one who rightfully pardons another who has confessed his or her offense.²³

6.1. Forgiveness is an act of compassion

According to Anh-Huong²⁴, "happiness can only be recognized against the background of suffering. To be happy, one should cultivate understanding and compassion. It is by getting in touch with the suffering that understanding comes and compassion arises." But sometimes when someone suffers so much, they just can't forgive. Or He does not want to forgive. He would be afraid that if he is forgiven for his cruel act, his suffering won't be adequately heard. So let the act of cruelty continue.

Moreover, Vietnamese Buddhists view that forgiveness helps to generate compassion (Pāli: *mettā-karuṇa*; Sanskrit: *maitrī-karuṇa*) towards others. In the teachings of the Mahayana tradition in particular, a Bodhisattva is a Buddha-to-be who works tirelessly for the benefit of sentient beings, even to

²² Most Venerable Thich Nhat Tu, Ed. (2019), op. cit., p. vii.

²³ Bodhi, Bhikkhu, Tras, (2012), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Anguttara Nikāya*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom, pp. 150 - 51.

²⁴ Anh-Huong, *Forgiveness and Buddhism*, accessed on [January 15, 2025], available at: <https://www.lauriemedwardspsyd.com/storage/app/media/forgiveness-in-buddhism1.pdf>.

the point of being willing to sacrifice his or her own life to serve others.²⁵

As Shantideva's *A Guide to Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) teaches that a Bodhisattva should commit himself to all sentient beings without reservation. The Metta Sutta also says that we should cherish all living beings with a boundless heart. Bodhisattvas are encouraged to cultivate a level of compassion which allows for unlimited and universal forgiveness, such that there is nobody and nothing that cannot be forgiven. Since compassion is seen as an antidote to suffering, the practice of forgiveness is invariably recommended for the benefit of the Buddhist practitioner – irrespective of whether there is repentance from the transgressor.²⁶

The Dalai Lama's views also support it. He opines that the main aim of living is to achieve ultimate happiness, and that a crucial way to realize this aim is by cultivating compassion and altruism. Compassion is rooted in the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination (Pāli: *paṭicca-samuppāda*; Sanskrit: *pratītya-samutpāda*)²⁷ which aims to reveal the interrelatedness of all things and help a practitioner realize the true nature of existence. Vietnamese Buddhism also has the same and opines "all beings have at some time in the past (i.e. previous lives) been our relatives, just as we have at some time been theirs. In this present life, our friends and our enemies have the same right as we do to experience happiness and avoid suffering". 'Exchanging-self-for-other' is a Buddhist practice in which the forgiver visualizes as another sentient being who is experiencing suffering, thus allowing them to stand with another to take on the suffering of another.

6.2. Forgiveness is an act of self-interest

In Vietnamese Buddhism, forgiveness is considered an act of self-interest. The idea of interrelatedness implies that if good things happen to others, we too derive advantage, whether in the short or long run. By contrast, if other people suffer, we suffer too. Hence, the practice of forgiveness benefits both others and us. That is, forgiveness helps to achieve not only external harmony with others, but also internal harmony with ourselves. Since hatred is an undesirable internal state of mind and a form of self-punishment, a victim must cultivate a forgiving attitude for his own sake.

Dalai Lama opines that forgiveness is not only a form of self-interest, but it is the best form of self-interest.²⁸ If we keep animosity and refuse to practice forgiveness, we disturb our equanimity and give rise to unwholesome thoughts which can be detrimental to both our mental and physical health. Viewed in

²⁵ Chutiwongs, Nandana, *The Iconography of Avalokiteshvara in Mainland South East Asia*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2002, p. 12.

²⁶ Wallace, Vesna; and Wallace, B. Alan, Translator, *Shantideva/Śāntideva: A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life-- Bodhicaryāvatāra*. New York: Snow Lion, 1997, pp. 133 - 34.

²⁷ Thera, Piyadassi, *Dependent Origination: Paticca Samuppada*. Wheel Publication no 15, Candy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2008, pp. 4 – 7.

²⁸ Dalai Lama; and Victor Chan, *The Wisdom of Forgiveness: Intimate Conversations and Journeys*, New York: Riverhead, 2004, p. 69.

this light, hostility is a form of fearful weakness; and by allowing it to arise in our minds, we will be consolidating egoistic safety in a deluded way. Forgiving others is thus a way of setting ourselves free from the prison of our inner torments and a powerful remedy that aids our spiritual growth.²⁹

6.3. Forgiveness for spiritual upliftment

Vietnamese Buddhists consider forgiveness as a good deed which culminates spiritual upliftment. It is one such virtue that is closely linked to other wholesome mental states. Besides being a precursor to compassion and protecting us from the harmful mental state of hatred, forgiveness helps to develop tolerance, comity, forbearance, endurance, mercy, softness, kindness and magnanimity. Thus, one indirect consequence of choosing to forgive is that we become a better person. The Vietnamese Buddhism explains: “we ought to regard the enemy as a precious teacher because our adversaries provide an opportunity to practice patience and tolerance and to cultivate forgiveness and compassion.”³⁰

By reflecting on the opportunity that adversity presents in so much as it creates the very environment which allows us to learn the value of patient forbearance and practice disciplined behavior, we can generate a sense of gratitude towards those who bring harm upon us. But if we choose to retaliate, we simply perpetuate the cycle of affliction by creating more negative *karma*. Practicing forgiveness also helps us deal with adversity. Buddhist traditions exhort the cultivation of a similar attitude towards our adversaries. Irrespective of whether the wrongdoer has repented or not, forgiveness is for mental stabilization. The value of this practice lies primarily in the betterment of oneself, not so much for anyone else. This especially holds when a person intentionally chooses to develop morally and spiritually.

6.4. Forgiveness is the ultimate goal of coming out of suffering

The Vietnamese also consider forgiveness as another way of acquiring merit to come out of suffering. It is intention-based, it is devoid of self-attachment, it is considered a practical competency, and it is an indication of prudence and mental strength. Vietnamese Buddhist perception of forgiveness emphasizes volition precisely because the accumulation of *karma* is closely linked to the quality of mental state of suffering. All mental activities such as intentions, thoughts, perceptions, imagination and so forth directly impact the process of karmic accumulation. To quote the Buddha: “It is volition (*cetanā*), *bhikkhus*, that I call *karma*. For having willed, one acts by body, speech, and mind.”³¹ Since the subject’s mentality is like a field on which the seeds of *karma* are continuously sown, any intent of kindness towards another can be likened

²⁹ Dalai Lama et. al., *Ethics for the New Millennium*. New York: Riverhead, 2001, pp. 104 – 105.

³⁰ Dalai Lama, *The Dalai Lama’s Book of Wisdom*. London: Thompson, 1999, pp. 77 – 78.

³¹ Bodhi, Bhikkhu Trans, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the Anguttara Nikāya*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2012, p. 963.

to the planting of a seed that could potentially ripen into a positive result for the subject. What is indeed paramount to determining the karmic potential generated through the act of forgiving, is the mental volition of the forgiver. For this reason, provided that the subject can maintain a sincere thought of forgiveness and forsake harmful thought, the mental quality generated in his or her mind will not be influenced in any way by the presence or absence of the offender’s repentance.

Due to the importance of intention, forgiveness comes into existence, not from an objective recognition, but from subjective validation. When we are intentionally, and also thoughtfully, willing to forgive, the so-called forgiveness is generally established.³² To illustrate this point, the Dalai Lama cites Shantideva’s view: “it is through the intention of harm that we classify a person as an enemy, and it is also through the intention of forgiveness that we will be released from the vicious cycle of suffering.”³³ Since our intentions determine our relationship with others and the outside world, it does not make sense to define the enemy as an external agent – our inner negative thoughts and emotions remain the major enemy”.

6.5. Voided (*Suññatā*) forgiveness

Vietnamese Buddhists link forgiveness to the concept of Emptiness or voidness (*Suññatā*). *Suññatā* mentions that all things are impermanent and void of self. They are non-self because of the words, “what is suffering that is void of the self, and because of the four reasons that are in the sense of voidness, of having no owner-master, of having no overlords, and of opposing self.”³⁴ The voidness means that nothing can be identified as “I” or “mine” or “myself”.³⁵ For example, if a person today is your enemy, he can, next day, become your friend. This means that forgiveness is not only possible, but also a plausible course of action. According to the Buddhist theory of emptiness (*suññatā*), the ‘three wheels’ are empty during an act of giving (*dāna*): there is no agent that gives, no receiver, and no gift. Similarly, during an act of forgiving, ultimately no agent forgives, no one who is being forgiven, and there is no wrongdoer to be forgiven. When we try to hold a superior kind of view and not lower ourselves to the same level as the one who hurt us, forgiveness represents one’s noble quality and spiritual status. But paradoxically, if it is a spiritual practice, forgiveness should not imply the forgiver must be superior to those he has forgiven. Strictly speaking, it should be different from pardon or absolving, which considers remission from top to bottom or from the higher levels to the lower ones. Since a truly moral deed should be selfless, true forgiveness is also without any egoistic concern.

³² *ibid*, p. 963.

³³ Wallace, Vesna; and Wallace, B. Alan, Trans., (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 133 - 134.

³⁴ Nanamoli, Bhikkhu Trans. (1956), *The Path of Purification*, Vol, 2, no. 3, p. 746.

³⁵ Feuer, L.; and Rhys Davids, C.A.F. Ed. (1884-1925), *Samyutta Nikāya*, Vol. 5, London: Pali Text Society, p. 22.

Attachment to an existing 'self' diminishes the beneficial value of virtuous acts. The soteriological aim of achieving the cessation of suffering is a salient feature of both the Theravada and Mahayana sects, and without the realization of the truth of 'non-self' (*Pāli: anattā/ Sanskrit: anātman*), a practitioner is unable to cut the mental afflictions and achieve individual liberation. A Bodhisattva who is on the path of the Mahayana aims to achieve full enlightenment, and therefore needs to go a step further in not only realizing the emptiness of 'self,' but also the emptiness of all things. So, while different Buddhist traditions may have varying degrees of understanding with regards to the ultimate nature of reality, the purest form of forgiveness is seen to conform to the theory of selflessness and emptiness.

6.6. Forgiveness to make amendment

In the concept of Buddhism in Vietnam, forgiveness gives wrongdoers a chance to amend. It does not necessarily mean blind acceptance of others' faults. On the contrary, we can be compassionate towards our adversaries yet still be intolerant of their misconduct. By standing firm against wrongdoing, we not only protect those who are being harmed, but also the person who is harming others since he or she will eventually suffer too. It is not merely for the sake of justice, but also out of a sense of concern for the long-term wellbeing of the wrongdoers.³⁶ So, a Willingness to forgive does not preclude punishment. Punishment can be meted out with the intent to allow a wrongdoer opportunity to recognize his wrongful deed.

VII. CONCLUSION

The concept of Forgiveness is deeply rooted in Buddhism. According to Vietnamese scholar, the practice of forgiveness is the practice of understanding and compassion. Understanding is the substance of true love and true compassion. If love is in our heart, every thought, word, and action can bring about a miracle.³⁷ Forgiveness is generally meant for a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group regardless of whether they deserve your forgiveness. According to the words of Buddha, "Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is the ancient and eternal law".³⁸

In Buddhism, forgiveness does not take repentance as a necessary precondition – it is unconditional. Even when there is no repentance from the wrongdoer, a Buddhist practitioner will continuously train his or her mind to practice forgiving. As a spiritual practice, forgiveness not only benefits the one being forgiven but also the one who forgives.

Buddhism is deeply rooted in Vietnamese religious, social and cultural life. Vietnamese Buddhism is a syncretic religion imbibed with elements of Vietnamese folk beliefs, Confucianism and Taoism. Moreover, forgiveness

³⁶ Dalai Lama et al., (2016), op. cit., p. 234.

³⁷ Anh-Huong, (2025), op. cit., p. 2.

³⁸ Kornfield Jack, (2019), op. cit., p. 1.

played a significant role in Vietnamese Buddhism. The core concept of Vietnamese Buddhism is based on *karma* where forgiveness has been well analyzed.

The Buddhists in Vietnam have a view on forgiveness that agrees with certain contemporary philosophical views. It holds a gracious response to human wrongdoing. The Buddhist practice of forgiveness, however, also has certain features that distinguish it from the ordinary sense of forgiving: it is based on intention, it is devoid of attachment to 'self', it is a practical competency, and it is a sign of a practitioner's prudence and inner strength. Hence, apart from the mundane moral and social dimensions of forgiveness, the Buddhist practice of forgiveness has spiritual and transcendent aspects which enable unconditional forgiveness of wrongdoing in the absence of repentance. To quote *Dhammapada*: "Those who attempt to conquer hatred by hatred are like warriors who take weapons to overcome others who bear arms. This does not end of hatred, but gives it room to grow."³⁹ The ultimate solution of hatred is forgiveness.

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BUDDHIST WOMEN'S JOURNEY OF SELF-HEALING AND FORGIVENESS

Thich Nu Dieu Hanh*

Abstract:

This study was conducted to investigate the role of forgiveness and self-healing in the spiritual lives of Buddhist women, drawing upon the Buddha's teachings. The research methodology integrates an examination of the Pāli Canon with a dialectical analysis of Buddhist philosophy, aiming to clarify the principles guiding the inner transformation process. The research results indicate that mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*mettā*) and gratitude (*kataññū*) are not only moral values but also powerful practical tools to help women overcome suffering, cultivate forgiveness and liberate themselves from the constraints of negative emotions. The study also mentions some typical cases from the *Pāli Canon*, demonstrating the effectiveness of these practices. Additionally, it outlines concrete methods for Buddhist women to cultivate forgiveness, and self-healing in their present lives. By emphasizing the transformative potential of Buddhist teachings, this study highlights their practical application in fostering inner peace and strengthening the capacity for forgiveness.

Keywords: *women, Buddhism, forgiveness, healing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In modern society, women have increasingly faced complex pressures from work, family, and ever-changing social norms. Mental and emotional wounds become significant barriers, reducing the ability to find happiness and peace in life. Beyond its ultimate goal of liberation (*mokkha*) and enlightenment (*bodhi*), Buddhism also offers practical methods to support the process of self-healing and developing the capacity for forgiveness.

The Buddha's teachings emphasize the importance of mindfulness (*sati*) and compassion (*mettā*) in transforming suffering. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,

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he expounded that observing the body, feelings, mind, and *dhamma* with mindfulness helps practitioners recognize, accept, and ultimately release afflictive emotions, thereby fostering inner peace.¹ Many scientific studies have increasingly affirmed the practical value of these methods in reducing stress and improving mental health, particularly among women. Some studies have also shown that mindfulness-based stress reduction programs are significantly effective in reducing anxiety in women with breast cancer.² Furthermore, mindfulness practice also creates a natural compatibility with family therapy methods.³

Traditional Buddhism approaches self-healing through meditation (*samādhi*), compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*paññā*).⁴ Healing in Buddhism is not limited to the physical realm but also includes psychological and spiritual dimensions, helping people to free themselves from inner suffering.⁵ This is considered an important foundation in applying Buddhist philosophy to a modern context, particularly in its intersection with psychotherapy and mental health disciplines. Another empirical study confirmed that practicing mindfulness also helps improve cardiovascular health in women under high pressure.⁶ The combination of the essence of Buddhism and modern science not only brings personal value but also contributes to building a more compassionate and harmonious society.

Recent scholarship has also explored the role of women in Buddhist healing practices, particularly within the contexts of Western and Theravāda Buddhism. Interviews with female practitioners revealed that women tend to approach healing in two predominant ways: (1) *Embodied meditation* – women frequently employ meditation to process emotional trauma, including suffering related to domestic violence, bereavement, and societal pressures; (2) *Compassion-centered healing* – unlike men, who often prioritize wisdom and analytical reasoning, women tend to emphasize loving-kindness (*mettā*) and empathy in psychotherapy. Consequently, Buddhism has become a means of empowerment that helps many women escape from oppression, not only in the study area but also around the world. Many women turn to Buddhism not merely to escape from the socially imposed stereotypes but also to seek spiritual freedom instead of being bound by traditional norms.⁷

¹ D. II. 290 – 315.

² Tacón, A. M., Caldera, Y. M., & Ronaghan, C. (2004): 1993 – 203.

³ Cohen-Katz, J. (2004): 204 – 206.

⁴ Gethin, R. (2004): 78 – 95.

⁵ Gethin, R. (2004): 78 – 95: Research shows that healing behaviors in the Buddhist tradition include: mindfulness (*sati*) – recognizing and transforming negative emotions; loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) – extending loving-kindness to oneself and others; and insight meditation (*vipassanā*) – being aware of the changing nature of emotions and the body, without clinging to suffering.

⁶ Kyoung-Im Cho (2016): 103 – 112.

⁷ Tworckov, H. (1994): 42 – 57.

From a Buddhist philosophical perspective, forgiveness is not simply forgiving others but also the profound process of letting go of anger and resentment to free oneself from psychological constraints. In the *Mettā Sutta*, the Buddha expounds on generating compassion for all living beings, regardless of whether they are close or hostile: “As a mother’s heart / Towards her child / She protects / His only child / Likewise, towards all / Sentient beings / Cultivate a mind, Limitless, vast, and unbounded.”⁸ These principles are not only applied by Buddhist women in religious settings but also in modern life. Combining mindfulness, compassion, and gratitude helps women confront adversity with greater resilience, fostering harmony between body and mind and ultimately cultivating a life imbued with inner peace and liberation.

II. WOMEN: FORGIVENESS AND SELF-HEALING

2.1. The pre-Buddhist context of women

In ancient Indian society, patriarchy⁹ is a major barrier to women’s advancement, reinforcing gender discrimination, social inequality, and the hierarchical structure of the caste system, in which women are systematically degraded. At the heart of this system was male dominance, where men (particularly fathers) held ultimate power and compelled their subordination.¹⁰ This is not only a social structure but also a moral framework in which men dominate, oppress women and impose restrictive gender roles, maintaining an unequal relationship between the sexes.¹¹ Women’s roles are largely confined to the family, primarily as wives and mothers. According to Brahmanical texts, women are considered as subordinate to their fathers, husbands or sons, their autonomy severely restricted.¹² They are excluded from various intellectual and religious domains, particularly from participation in *Vedic* traditions, which were reserved for men. However, the Buddha’s teachings introduced a revolutionary shift, offering the path to enlightenment to all, irrespective of gender. This not only reflects the spirit of compassion and equality in his doctrine, but also affirmed that gender is not a decisive factor in the ability to attain liberation. In the *Accharāsutta* of the *Samyutta-nikāya*, the Buddha unequivocally stated that only the *Dhamma* is essential, regardless of gender, anyone who practices the *Dhamma* with diligence correctly can attain *Nibbāna*.¹³

⁸ Sn. 1.8: “*Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ, āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe; Evampi sabbabhūtesu, mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ*”.

⁹ Patriarchy is a type of social structure of power that maintains male power over women in all aspects of daily life. In a very common sense, it based on masculinity, in which women are considered weak, ignorant and mentally inferior. In a more specific sense, it is – “The absolute rule of the father or the eldest male over his family”; Dieu Hanh (2024) quoted from Geetha (2007): 4 – 5.

¹⁰ Kapadia (1966): 82.

¹¹ Walby (1990): 20.

¹² Gombrich (1988): 43.

¹³ S. I. 33: “*Assa etādisaṃ yānaṃ/ itthiyā purisassa vā/ Sa ve etena yānena/ nibbānasseva santike*.”

A pivotal moment in the history of Buddhist gender equality was the establishment of the Order of Nuns (*bhikkhuni-saṅgha*). As recorded in the *Cullavagga Vinaya* in the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, the Buddha formally granted women the right to ordination.¹⁴ This decision not only marked a turning point in the spiritual rights of women but also affirmed that they had the same capacity to attain enlightenment (*arahant*) as men. The case of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī – the first person to be ordained by the Buddha – is a clear demonstration. She became the leader of *bhikkhuni-saṅgha* and attained arahantship, demonstrating that women had the same capacity to practice and attain liberation as men.¹⁵

The Buddha's vision of spiritual equality transcended the constraints of his time. He affirmed that there were no obstacles for those who diligently practiced the *Dhamma*, regardless of gender.¹⁶ By establishing the *bhikkhuni-saṅgha* and allowing women to be ordained, the Buddha dismantled the restrictive gender norms of ancient Indian society, affirming that all beings, regardless of gender, have the potential for liberation. This decision reflects a timeless philosophy of compassion and wisdom, which has become the basis for many discussions about the role of women in Buddhism today.

2.2. Self-healing from a Buddhist perspective

2.2.1. Mindfulness (*sati*)

In the spiritual practice of Buddhist women, mindfulness plays a central role in recognizing and observing emotions without judgment or reactive attachment. This is particularly significant as women face social pressures and family responsibilities that are bound to traditional gender stereotypes. Practicing mindfulness not only fosters inner self-regulation but also transforms negative emotions into understanding and equanimity. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha declared: "This is the only path leading to purity."¹⁷ This implies that the development of mindfulness through contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and *dhamma* helps to purify the mind and provides women with a profound and holistic process of self-healing. Through this practice, they can escape from mental trauma and maintain peace in their daily lives.

The Buddha emphasized that regardless of gender, those who are heedless (*pamāda*) and fail to uphold mindfulness in the body (*kāya*), speech (*vācā*), and mind (*mano*) inevitably generate corresponding karmic consequences. He affirmed: "This bad *kamma* is your own; it does not arise from your mother, father, brother, sister, friend, or relative, nor is it created by a monk, a Brahmin, or a deva. You are the one who sows the cause; you are the one who will reap the result."¹⁸ The law of cause (*hetu*) and effect (*vipāka*)

¹⁴ Vin II. 256: "Anujānāmi bhikkhave bhikkhuniyo upasampādetuṃ."

¹⁵ Thig. 157 – 162.

¹⁶ S. I. 129: "Itthibhāvo kiṃ kayirā/ cittamhi susamāhite/ Ñāṇamhi vattamānamhi/ sammā dhammaṃ vipassato/ Yassa nūna siyā evaṃ/ Itthāhaṃ purisoti vā/ Kiñci vā pana aññasmi/ Taṃ māro vattumarahati."

¹⁷ D. II. 290 – 315: "Ekāyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo... cattāro satipaṭṭhānā."

¹⁸ M. III. 178: "Ambho... vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvedissasī'ti."

functions impartially, without distinction of gender, social status, or lineage. Consequently, individuals must maintain mindful awareness of their actions, recognizing that all consequences arise from causes and conditions (*paccaya*) that they create. No one can evade the results of their *kamma*, yet *kamma* itself can be transformed through diligence (*virīya*) in spiritual practice. The Buddha declared that the path to the cessation of *kamma*, and the eradication of greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*),¹⁹ lies in the practice of the noble eightfold path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*) and the four right efforts (*sammappadhāna*).²⁰ With diligence on this path, practitioners can escape the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) and attain final liberation (*parinibbāna*).²¹ On the journey of liberation, there is no distinction between men and women, for all beings stand equal in the presence of enlightenment. Through right mindfulness (*sammāsati*) and right effort (*sammāvāyāma*), any individual – regardless of gender – may realize *Nibbāna*, the ultimate state of liberation.

A true marriage must be founded upon principles of equality, mutual respect, and unconditional loving-kindness within family life. Husband and wife are not merely life companions, but also companions on the path of practice, supporting one another in the cultivation of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*saṃādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), thereby fostering a household imbued with peace and harmony. Within family life, a true marriage must be founded upon principles of equality, mutual respect, and unconditional loving-kindness. Husband and wife are not merely life companions but also fellow travelers on the spiritual path, supporting one another in the cultivation of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*saṃādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), thereby fostering a household imbued with peace and harmony. The woman, with a compassionate heart (*mettā-citta*) and wisdom (*paññā*), not only performs family responsibilities skillfully and sincerely but also maintains harmony through every act of gratitude (*kataññutā*), truthfulness (*sacca*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).²² When husband and wife cultivate these noble qualities together, the family becomes an environment that nurtures wholesome *dhamma* (*kusala-dhamma*), contributing to the prosperity and well-being of society.²³

The Buddha taught that married life expresses *kamma-vipāka*, reflecting

¹⁹ M. I. 359; III. 29; D. III. 232.

²⁰ M. I. 299; II. 23: “*Sammā paṭimokkha...sammā saṃādhi; Dukkhaṃ samudayaṃ nirodhaṃ maggaṃ, sabbhaṃ sabbā nirodhaṃ, sabbhaṃ sabbā nirodhā saṅkhāra*”.

²¹ M. I. 489: “*Na hi tasmaṃ kālena, saṃādhiṃ anapāyā, taṃ patvā na ca kālaṃ punappunaṃ upacīyati*.”

²² D. III. 180 – 93: “*Āyatim vā kāle vā, manāpaṃ vā silavaṃ vā, vācaṃ vā cittacittaṃ vā, jānaṃ vā aññamaññaṃ vā – Patidevaṃ, bhikkhu, nam samvibhāgāni, nam samāpattiṃ; Sākhā-pi vā dhammaṃ vā, dāniṃ vā dhammikaṃ vā, pānaṃ vā niyyānikaṃ vā, pattaṃ vā piyaṃ vā*” – *Sā patibhaṭṭhāyā, bhikkhuni, itthi hi paṭiggaṇhāti, dhammehi dhammasā*”.

²³ Thīg. 147: “*Yāva naṃ paṇaṃ cittaṃ/ Na ca dhammaṃ paṭicca/ Taṃ viraṃ sāsane kāru/ Khinnaṃ taṃ karuṇāya*”.

past causes and conditions (*paccaya*).²⁴ When entering married life, women often have to leave behind their familiar surroundings to live with people they have never been with. This is a great challenge, requiring a mind of relinquishment (*vossagga*) – a capacity to release attachment to the past to adapt and establish a new life. The Buddha mentioned that women need to practice eight principles to live a virtuous life (*silācāra*), and fulfilled in marriage when living together with strangers;²⁵ respecting one's husband, protecting one's property, abstaining from harmful speech, maintaining a pure body, being skillful in her responsibilities, fostering affection for her husband's family, generating merit, and practicing the *dhamma*. These values transform marriage from a mere worldly obligation into a sacred ground for the deepening of wisdom (*paññā*), the cultivation of loving-kindness, and the advancement toward spiritual liberation.

2.2.2. Loving-kindness and gratitude

Loving-kindness (*mettā*) and gratitude (*kataññū*) are not only moral virtues but also powerful spiritual disciplines that empower women to confront injustice and suffering in their lives. Loving-kindness leads them to unconditional love for themselves and others, while gratitude cultivates a joyful mind, which helps reduce resentment and negativity. In the *Mettā Sutta*, the Buddha encourages the development of boundless loving-kindness, wishing all beings happiness and peace.²⁶

In fact, by practicing *mettā*, women not only reduce their stress and suffering but also open up the possibility of reconciliation and forgiveness towards those who have hurt them. The combination of compassion and gratitude helps them develop strong inner strength to overcome adversity while fostering an enduring sense of inner peace.

This study also showed that applying mindfulness and compassion to the lives of Buddhists has many similarities with modern psychotherapies. Previous studies have emphasized that mindfulness and compassion are inseparable elements of inner healing.²⁷ The convergence of classical teachings and findings from modern scientific research affirmed that Buddhism is a path of spiritual liberation and offers a practical framework for self-healing, emotional resilience, and the deep practice of forgiveness.

2.2.3. Forgiveness in Buddhism

In Buddhism, forgiveness is not a concession or for the benefit of others but an act of freeing oneself from anger and resentment. For Buddhist women,

²⁴ A. II. 57, 9: “*Yena kenaci puggalaṃ paṭiggaṇhāti, tena puggalaṃ apaccayā paṭiggaṇhāti, tassa puggalaṃ paññāya paṭiggaṇhāti, yathā piṭṭhipaṭiggahaṇānaṃ.*”

²⁵ S. IV. 239: “*Yamhi khandhe, saṅkhārā samuppādā honti, tasmā bhikkhave, yo ca khandha, saṅkhārā samuppādā honti, evaṃ pātubhāvā honti, tatra ekekassa paṭilābhā honti.*”

²⁶ Sn. 1.8: “*Diṭṭhā vā ye va adiṭṭhā/ Ye va dūre vasanti avidūre/ Bhūtā va sambhavesi va/ Sabbasattā bhavantu sukhittatā.*”

²⁷ Harvey (2013): 45 - 63.

forgiveness is not only a means of maintaining social harmony, but also a crucial step on the path toward enlightenment and self-healing. The Pāli Canon demonstrated that the Buddha emphasized the practice of forgiveness (*khama*) and letting go (*vossagga*) throughout his teachings. Three representative sources of scripture that reflect this view include: (1) *Kakacūpama Sutta* (*The Simile of the Saw*) – the Buddha advises that even in the face of injustice, one should still cultivate a forgiving mind and not be overcome by anger;²⁸ (2) *Mettā Sutta* (*The Loving-Kindness*) – practicing loving-kindness meditation helps dissolve anger and foster forgiveness;²⁹ (3) The *Therīgāthā* – a collection of verses by early Buddhist nuns, many of whom overcame psychological trauma through the cultivation of compassion and forgiveness. From the above teachings, it can be seen that in Buddhist teachings, forgiveness is not simply ignoring the faults of others but also a disciplined process of mental purification helping practitioners to eliminate anger to achieve liberation. Similarly, *vossagga* – the practice of relinquishment – is not an avoidance of reality but a conscious renunciation of psychological attachments, fostering a life of greater freedom. These principles extend beyond individual well-being to contribute to a society based on compassion and wisdom.

Many recent studies have confirmed the vital role of mindfulness and forgiveness in improving mental and physical health, especially for women who have experienced psychological trauma. Buddhist scriptures provide systematic guidance on mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) and compassion, offering a structured foundation for such practices. As mentioned, practicing mindfulness in the spirit of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* helps practitioners develop the ability to observe and recognize emotions without judgment, which is the only path to purity.³⁰ Once again, affirming, forgiveness and letting go (*vossagga*) – is considered the journey of transforming women's consciousness in Buddhism. The Buddha's teachings are a compass for wisdom and morality and a practical method to help practitioners transform their consciousness. When negative emotions are not relinquished, they become the source of suffering (*dukkha*).

The Buddha repeatedly emphasized that clinging to anger only breeds suffering, whereas forgiveness (*khama*) is the key to breaking free from the cycle of affliction. For women, forgiveness is not solely an ethical virtue but also a means of liberation from psychological burdens. When women choose the path of renunciation, they open their minds to tranquillity (*samatha*) and serenity (*passaddhi*), just as the Buddha taught in *Dhammapada*: "Overcome anger with non-anger / Overcome non-good with goodness / Overcome stinginess with generosity / Overcome falsehood with truth."³¹ True victory

²⁸ M. I. 123 – 9.

²⁹ Sn. 1.8: "Karaṇīyamattakusalena/ Yanta santam padam abhisamecca/ Sakko ujū ca suhujū ca/ Sūvaco cassa mudu anati mānī/ Dīṭṭhiñca anupaggaṃma/ Silavā dāssanena sampanno/ Kāmesu vinaya gedham/ Na hi jātuggabbhaseyya punareti".

³⁰ D. II. 290 – 315: "Ekāyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo... cattāro satipaṭṭhānā".

³¹ *The Sutta Nikāya* I (2022): 58; equivalent to the Pāli version: "Mettāya pāramiṃ

does not come from revenge or attachment but from overcoming the negative emotions. A woman who cultivates non-anger (*adosa*) overcomes hostility, just as the cultivation of wholesomeness (*kusala*) overcomes moral defilements. The Buddha mentioned: “Form is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, and perception is impermanent...”³² – illustrates that recognizing the nature of impermanence and non-self is not merely a philosophical exercise but a practical realization that enables women to transcend suffering and embrace deep forgiveness.

In Buddhism, forgiveness is not only a virtue but also linked to understanding two fundamental principles: non-self (*anattā*) and impermanence (*anicca*). When women deeply realize that all phenomena are impermanent (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*) – including pain, injustice, and suffering – they find it easier to let go (*vossagga*) of negative emotions. Furthermore, contemplating non-self (*anattā*) helps them realize that there is no fixed or permanent “I” that suffers. Anger, if no one clings to it, will naturally dissipate. When they no longer identify themselves as a wounded entity, they can face adversity without clinging to anger or grief. Thus, forgiveness in Buddhism is not simply an emotional reaction but an inner transformation, an awakening to the true nature of all phenomena. Through this profound realization, women can traverse the path of liberation, serenity and freedom from the bonds of suffering.

Many modern psychological studies also showed similarities between Buddhist principles and the science of forgiveness. The process of forgiveness not only reduces hatred but also improves mental and physical health. Empirical findings affirmed that genuine forgiveness, when cultivated as a disciplined practice, is an essential step in healing and self-liberation.³³ The combination of Buddhist philosophy and modern psychology showed that practicing forgiveness helps women overcome suffering and builds a more peaceful and free life. By understanding the impermanent and selfless nature of life, women are no longer bound by past afflictions but can move forward with equanimity and wisdom.

2.3. Case study: the journey of healing and forgiveness

Throughout Buddhist history and practice, numerous women have emerged as luminous exemplars of resilience, transforming suffering through compassion and the practice of the Buddha’s teachings. These stories demonstrate the power of the teachings of compassion and forgiveness and open up profound insights into women’s ability to heal themselves. The *Therīgāthā* – a section of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* – is not only a collection of verses composed by enlightened female *Bhikkhunis* but also a living testimony of the journey of transforming suffering into wisdom. As one of the oldest

katvā, sabbāni pāṇāni hāpeti; Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ, kusalassa upasampadā; Cittaṃ sukhumamāyanti, paññāya samāhito”.

³² S. III. 67: “*Rūpaṃ aniccaṃ, vedanā aniccā, saññā aniccā...*”

³³ Brown and Leary (2018): 115 – 130.

extant texts recording voices in religious history, the *Therīgāthā* reflects the courage of those who renounced the world in pursuit of liberation through meditation and the *dhamma*.

One of the most striking stories in the *Therīgāthā* is that of Paṭācārā, whose life was experienced the ultimate pain of loss – her husband, children, and her entire family – before she found solace in the Buddha's teachings. Overwhelmed by grief and driven to madness, she encountered the Buddha, who instructed her on the nature of impermanence (*anicca*): "As the rain pours from a thatched roof / My tears have fallen / More than the water in the four oceans."³⁴ Through insight into the doctrine of non-self (*anattā*), she realized that suffering lacks an inherent essence but arises and ceases due to attachment (*upādāna*). This realization enabled Paṭācārā to relinquish her sorrow, transform her suffering into wisdom, and become an elder nun well-versed in the *Vinaya* and *Dhamma*. The verses of the *Therīgāthā* are not only the spiritual legacy of Buddhist women but also a powerful demonstration that forgiveness, enunciation, and contemplation of impermanence are essential paths to liberation.

Queen Sāmāvatī's story vividly illustrates the power of compassion, forgiveness, and self-healing. As the queen of King Udena of Kosambi, she was renowned for her wisdom and boundless compassion, even amidst hostility and injustice. When her concubine Māgandiyā hated her and sought to harm her, Sāmāvatī did not harbor resentment but responded with love and forgiveness. She understood that hatred cannot be extinguished by hatred but only by loving-kindness (*mettā*). Even though she was eventually crushed to death in Māgandiyā's plot, Sāmāvatī remained resolute in her equanimity and forgiveness.³⁵ Her equanimity and forgiveness demonstrate that a mind unfettered by hatred is true liberation. Sāmāvatī's story is a lesson in self-healing and affirms that forgiveness is a core element of the Buddhist path to spiritual freedom.

The story of Bhikkhunī Kisā Gotamī profoundly illustrates the transformative power of the Buddha's teachings on impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anattā*). As a grieving mother, devastated by the loss of her only child, Kisā Gotamī initially clung to the desperate hope of reversing death. Instead of comforting her with promises or miracles, the Buddha asked her to find a mustard seed from a family that had never experienced death. As she journeyed from home to home, she encountered the universality of suffering and realized that death was not hers alone to bear but an inescapable aspect of *saṃsāra*. Kisā Gotamī realized that death was not just her pain but the inevitable law of life. Through mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*), Kisā Gotamī gradually realized the illusory nature of negative thoughts and emotions. When she understood that all dharmas are impermanent (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*), she cut off all attachments and to attain *Arahatta*, completely free from suffering.³⁶

³⁴ *Thig.* 127 – 132.

³⁵ *Ud.* 7.10.

³⁶ *Thig.* 127 – 132: "Na gāmadhammo, nigamassa dhammo. Na cāpiyaṃ ekakulassa

Among the most eminent female lay devotees of the Buddha's time was *Visākhā*, also known as *Migāramātā*. Despite being born into wealth, she encountered considerable hardship in her marital life, she demonstrated admirable wisdom and patience.³⁷ While living in her husband's family, *Visākhā* encountered many difficulties, particularly from her father-in-law, *Migāra*, who initially resisted the Buddha's teachings. Instead of resenting her, she used compassion and wisdom to guide him along the path of enlightenment, causing him to completely change and view her as his "mother" in his spiritual life.³⁸ One of the critical lessons from *Visākhā*'s life is the ability to forgive and let go of suffering. When she suffered the profound loss of her child, she sought the Buddha's guidance. He imparted to her the truth that nothing in existence is permanent and that attachment to what is ephemeral only begets suffering. Through meditation and mindfulness, *Visākhā* transformed her pain into peace and continued to dedicate her life to Buddhism. As the founder of *Pubbārāma Monastery*, she played a crucial role in supporting *bhikkhunīs* and fostering a space where women could engage in spiritual cultivation through discipline, meditation, and compassion. Her story is a powerful testament to the power of forgiveness and the ability to heal through the Buddha's teachings.³⁹ These stories are not only a precious spiritual legacy of Buddhism but also timeless spiritual inheritances, offering profound inspiration across generations. They demonstrate that the Buddha's teachings are a path to enlightenment and a profound foundation for self-healing and the practice of forgiveness, particularly for women, past and present.

2.4. Modern Buddhist Women – practice mindfulness and forgiveness

Most studies on forgiveness have consistently demonstrated a strong link between forgiveness and human health. These studies have noted that the practice of forgiveness not only reduces psychological stress but also fosters a more tranquil and harmonious life. These findings underscore the physiological value of forgiveness and reaffirm the importance of applying Buddhist teachings in daily life. From a scientific perspective, these results showed the potential of combining Buddhist teachings with modern psychological methodologies to facilitate profound healing, particularly for women coping with psychological trauma. In the context of contemporary psychotherapy, the application of Buddhist principles serves as a transformative tool for women in overcoming emotional distress and mental barriers, ultimately guiding them toward inner liberation. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the use of Buddhist-based therapies such as mindfulness meditation and loving-kindness practices is effective in treating psychological problems such as depression and anxiety disorders.⁴⁰ These findings open up new ways for a more holistic approach to mental health care, wherein Buddhism functions as both a therapeutic and

dhammo. Sabbassa lokassa sadevakassa. Eseva dhammo yadidaṃ aniccatā".

³⁷ IB Horner (1951): 224 – 226.

³⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012): 99 – 101.

³⁹ Analayo, B. (2010): 23 – 41; Harvey, P. (2000): 67 – 71.

⁴⁰ Kabat-Zinn (2003): 140 – 1.

spiritual framework for women seeking to heal from past traumas and cultivate inner transformation. Some practical applications have been proposed to facilitate healing and nurture compassion and forgiveness in daily life. These include mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness practices, forgiveness journaling, and participation in *vipassanā* or *mettā* meditation retreats.

First, the Buddha mentioned the practice of mindfulness (*sati*) as a means to cultivate awareness of thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, he delineates four foundations of mindfulness that serve as pathways to transcendental wisdom.⁴¹ Mindfulness meditation enables practitioners, particularly women, to recognize and regulate emotions in the present moment, fostering compassion and the capacity for forgiveness. Additionally, loving-kindness meditation (*mettā*) plays a crucial role in developing unconditional love, as the Buddha taught in the *Mettā Sutta*.⁴² Previous studies have demonstrated that more and more women in modern society have shared their journeys of overcoming mental trauma through the practice of mindfulness and observing impermanence (*anicca*); their experiences demonstrate the effectiveness of meditation in healing the mind.⁴³ The practice of the *Vipassanā* meditation, in particular, has been shown to reduce stress, enhance emotional regulation, and improve overall life satisfaction.⁴⁴ Research indicated that mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs significantly contribute to mental well-being by increasing self-awareness and mitigating stress. Notably, Kabat-Zinn's studies on mindfulness interventions in medicine and psychiatry have provided empirical validation for the clinical benefits of meditation, demonstrating its capacity to alleviate symptoms of psychological distress and enhance overall quality of life.⁴⁵ This demonstrates the role of meditation and mindfulness in promoting mental and physical health, providing a scientific basis for applying these methods in clinical practice and daily life.

Second, forgiveness journaling offers a structured approach to processing repressed emotions and fostering inner peace. Modern psychological research has shown that writing about the forgiveness process not only helps relieve psychological pain but also improves mental and physical health. Buddhism also encourages the use of words and actions to transform suffering. The Buddha encouraged us to overcome negative emotions such as anger with wholesome actions.⁴⁶ Writing a forgiveness journal aligns with Buddhist teachings by aiding practitioners in transmuting anger and resentment into compassionate responses.

The final approach proposed in this study is for women to participate in *vipassanā* or *mettā* meditation courses. This form of profound Buddhist practice

⁴¹ D. II. 290 – 315: “*Cattāro satipaṭṭhānā bhikkhave appamādaya pāramīyaṃ gacchanti*”.

⁴² Sn. 18: “*Sukhino vā khemino hontu, sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittatā*.”

⁴³ Goldstein, J., & Kornfield, J (2019): 78 – 92.

⁴⁴ Creswell, J. D., et al (2016): 34 – 48.

⁴⁵ Kabat-Zinn, J (2003): 144 – 159.

⁴⁶ Dhṛp. 26: “*Akkodhena ji ne kodhaṃ, asādhun sādhanā jine*.”

helps women achieve inner peace and the capacity for forgiveness. *Vipassanā*, often translated as “insight meditation,” trains practitioners to observe reality clearly, enabling them to comprehend existence’s impermanent, selfless, and unsatisfactory nature. By adopting a non-attached perspective, individuals can more effectively release emotional wounds and harmful attachments. Conversely, *mettā* meditation emphasizes the cultivation of boundless compassion, extending not only to oneself but to all beings – including those who have inflicted harm. The Buddha’s discourse in the *Mettā Sutta* encourages the generation of universal compassion, which serves as a potent mechanism for psychological and spiritual healing. Through engagement in *vipassanā* and *mettā* meditation retreats, women can actively participate in emotional release and reconciliation, allowing them to embrace the past with wisdom and foster a life of more significant serenity and compassion.

III. CONCLUSION

Buddhism opens a path of universal liberation, affirming that all beings, regardless of gender, possess the inherent potential to attain enlightenment. The Buddha affirmed that wisdom (*paññā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) transcend all gender distinctions. That liberation (*vimutti*) is the rightful pursuit of every individual, unhindered by the constraints of social caste. The ordination of women into the *Saṅgha* was not merely a historical milestone but a profound testament to the egalitarian essence of Buddhist teachings. The four noble truths, the noble eightfold path and all of the Buddha’s teachings are directed toward ultimate freedom – liberation from suffering, delusion, and all forms of discrimination – leading all sentient beings toward the shore of lasting peace (*nibbāna*). This is a theoretical doctrine and a path of practice that helps everyone, particularly women, discover profound tranquillity and freedom in their present existence.

In the modern context, the journey of self-healing and forgiveness is not only a spiritual aspect but also an essential dimension in the spiritual development of Buddhist women. Buddhist teachings are firmly grounded in three fundamental principles: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). Buddhist teachings illuminate a path toward inner freedom and mental purification. The Buddha mentioned that forgiveness (*khama*) is a potent means of liberation, not merely as an act of benevolence toward others but as a profound practice of releasing oneself from the burdens of anger and resentment. Forgiveness is not simply an act of concession but the key to freeing oneself from the cycle of negative emotions. For Buddhist women, this journey is not only a form of psychological healing but an integral part of the spiritual path, drawing them closer to the ultimate goal of liberation (*nibbāna*).

Buddhist teachings extend beyond the realm of religious doctrine, offering pragmatic methods for addressing the psychological challenges that modern women face, including stress, anxiety, and trauma. Core principles such as mindfulness (*sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and insight meditation (*vipassanā*) have been extensively validated as effective practices for cultivating inner peace,

overcoming suffering, and advancing toward liberation. The Buddha emphasized the transformative power of mindfulness in observing and comprehending the nature of all phenomena, thereby unshackling the mind from its conditioned attachments. By applying in contemporary life, these practices enable women to deepen self-awareness and navigate adversity with greater equanimity and clarity.

To support women in their healing and spiritual development, integrating Buddhist wisdom with modern psychology offers a promising avenue for holistic well-being. Psychological approaches, particularly cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic therapy, can be harmoniously combined with Buddhist principles such as impermanence, selflessness, and renunciation (*vossagga*). The study has demonstrated that the linkage between Buddhist teachings and psychological interventions enhances women's ability to manage stress, alleviate anxiety, and cultivate emotional resilience. For instance, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been widely adopted in clinical psychology to mitigate symptoms of stress, depression, and emotional distress, thereby improving overall quality of life.

Thus, Buddhism is a pathway to ultimate awakening and a profound resource for modern women seeking to transcend suffering, foster inner peace, and cultivate boundless compassion in their daily lives.

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MINDFULNESS PRACTICES AND MENTAL HEALTH



THE CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MINDFULNESS PROGRAMS INTEGRATING BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES INTO MENTAL HEALTH SCENARIO IN VIETNAM

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Abstract :

This article critically examines the integration of mindfulness programs rooted in Buddhist principles into Vietnam's mental health landscape. It highlights the current advancements, challenges, and gaps in implementing such programs. While mindfulness has gained significant global recognition as a tool for enhancing mental well-being, its application within Vietnam presents unique cultural, structural, and contextual complexities. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics and recommend optimizing mindfulness programs for sustainable mental health development.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Buddhist Principles, Mental Health, Vietnam.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mental health has emerged as a critical public health concern globally, and Vietnam is no exception. Despite increased awareness, mental health services in the country remain underdeveloped, with limited access to professional care, particularly in rural and underserved areas.¹ Compounding this issue is the cultural stigma associated with mental health disorders, which often discourages individuals from seeking help. In response, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), particularly those rooted in Buddhist principles, have gained traction as a complementary approach to traditional mental health care.

While mindfulness programs have shown promising results in improving mental well-being globally, their adaptation and integration into Vietnam's mental health scenario remain underexplored. Existing studies predominantly

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¹ World Health Organization (2022).

focus on Western models of mindfulness, overlooking the potential benefits of culturally tailored programs grounded in Vietnam's rich Buddhist heritage. This presents a significant gap in research and practice, as mindfulness approaches must be contextually relevant to resonate with local populations.

Vietnamese Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh, a globally renowned proponent of mindfulness, elaborates on this practice in his book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. He explains mindfulness as:

Mindfulness is the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment of daily life. To be mindful is to be truly alive, present, and at one with those around you and with what you are doing.²

This interpretation aligns with the broader Mahayana perspective on mindfulness, emphasizing compassion (*karuṇā*), interconnectedness, and social engagement, which resonate deeply with Vietnam's cultural and spiritual ethos.

Application in Vietnamese Context, Vietnamese Buddhism often integrates mindfulness into daily life, community rituals, and mental health practices. In Plum Village, founded by Thích Nhất Hạnh, mindfulness is practiced through walking meditation, mindful eating, and collective mindfulness practices. This reflects the cultural value of community (*tình làng nghĩa xóm*) and interdependence.

The influence of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (*Kinh Hoa Nghiêm*) is significant in Vietnam, particularly its teachings on the interdependent nature of all phenomena: "All things are interconnected like a web; to see one is to see all."³

This principle underscores mindfulness as a practice of recognizing interdependence, a concept deeply woven into Vietnamese Buddhism and society.

Additionally, the implementation of mindfulness programs in Vietnam faces several challenges, including:

- i. Lack of Trained Practitioners: Few professionals are adequately trained in mindfulness practices that integrate Buddhist principles.
- ii. Limited Research: There is a scarcity of empirical studies examining the effectiveness of these programs within Vietnam's socio-cultural context.
- iii. Cultural Adaptation: Adapting mindfulness practices to align with Vietnamese cultural and spiritual traditions remains an ongoing challenge.

This article aims to address these gaps by critically evaluating the role of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs in Vietnam's mental health framework. By analyzing existing literature and case studies, this study highlights opportunities for integrating Buddhist principles to foster a more holistic and culturally sensitive approach to mental health care. Mindfulness, as presented in Buddhist doctrine and Vietnamese Buddhist literature, offers

² Thích Nhất Hạnh, (1999): 11.

³ *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, Chapter 39.

a profound framework for mental and spiritual well-being. Its emphasis on present-moment awareness, compassion, and interconnectedness aligns with Vietnam's socio-cultural values and addresses contemporary mental health challenges.

II. OBJECTIVE

To critically analyze the role of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs in Vietnam's mental health framework.

2.1. Mindfulness practitioners in the Modern scenario of Vietnamese

In contemporary Vietnam, the practice of mindfulness is gaining popularity across various sectors, from education and healthcare to corporate settings. Mindfulness practitioners in the country represent a diverse group, including Buddhist monks, lay practitioners, healthcare professionals, and educators. This growing interest reflects both a revival of traditional Buddhist practices and the influence of global mindfulness trends.

2.1.1. Buddhist Monks as Traditional Practitioners

Vietnamese Buddhist monks have historically played a central role in teaching and preserving mindfulness practices. These monks often conduct meditation retreats and workshops, emphasizing mindfulness as a pathway to both spiritual growth and mental well-being. Prominent figures like Thich Nhat Hanh have been instrumental in bringing Vietnamese mindfulness practices to the global stage,⁴ advocating for their relevance in addressing modern challenges such as stress and anxiety. Vietnamese Buddhist monks have long been central to the preservation and dissemination of mindfulness practices, reflecting the deep integration of Buddhism within Vietnam's cultural and spiritual fabric. These traditional practitioners not only maintain Buddhist teachings but also adapt them to meet contemporary challenges, offering both spiritual guidance and practical tools for mental well-being.

The Contributions of Thich Nhat Hanh, among the most influential figures in modern Vietnamese Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh has significantly shaped the global mindfulness movement. His teachings, rooted in Vietnamese Buddhist traditions, extend mindfulness beyond its spiritual origins, advocating its application in addressing modern stressors such as anxiety, environmental degradation, and interpersonal conflict.⁵ Through his global network of Plum Village communities, Thich Nhat Hanh has inspired millions to integrate mindfulness into their daily lives, thus bridging the gap between traditional practices and contemporary needs.

Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the most influential figures in modern Vietnamese Buddhism, has played a transformative role in shaping the global mindfulness movement. Renowned as a monk, teacher, and activist, he has redefined mindfulness as a practical tool for addressing the multifaceted challenges of

⁴ Sankapal, (2024): 87.

⁵ Hanh (1998): 37 - 42.

modern life. His teachings, deeply rooted in Vietnamese Buddhist traditions, emphasize mindfulness as a practice that transcends its spiritual origins to address real-world stressors such as anxiety, environmental degradation, and interpersonal conflict.⁶ At the heart of Thich Nhat Hanh's contributions is his ability to distill complex Buddhist concepts into accessible teachings. His approach integrates traditional practices like mindful breathing, walking meditation, and compassionate listening into everyday life. These practices, he argues, can help individuals cultivate inner peace while fostering harmony within families, workplaces, and communities. His seminal work, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, exemplifies this ethos by presenting mindfulness as an accessible and universally applicable practice.⁷

Thich Nhat Hanh's global impact is further amplified through the Plum Village communities he established, beginning in France in the 1980s. These centers serve as hubs for mindfulness training and spiritual retreat, attracting practitioners from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Through these communities, Thich Nhat Hanh has bridged the gap between traditional Buddhist practices and contemporary needs, demonstrating mindfulness's potential to enhance mental well-being, environmental awareness, and social cohesion.⁸

Beyond individual transformation, Thich Nhat Hanh has advocated for the application of mindfulness in addressing collective challenges. He has championed "engaged Buddhism," a philosophy that integrates mindfulness with social action. This approach encourages practitioners to confront societal issues – such as war, poverty, and ecological destruction – through compassionate and mindful engagement. His work has inspired numerous initiatives in education, healthcare, and environmental activism, underscoring the relevance of mindfulness in fostering systemic change.⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings continue to resonate globally, influencing not only Buddhist practitioners but also secular mindfulness programs, educators, and mental health professionals. His profound ability to bridge the ancient wisdom of Vietnamese Buddhism with contemporary challenges cements his legacy as a transformative figure in the modern mindfulness movement.

2.1.2. The Historical Role of Buddhist Monks

Historically, Buddhist monks in Vietnam have served as custodians of mindfulness traditions, emphasizing their role in cultivating inner peace and spiritual development. Through meditation practices, dharma teachings, and community engagement, monks have sustained the relevance of mindfulness across generations.¹⁰ Their commitment to preserving these practices reflects

⁶ Hanh (1998): 79 - 85.

⁷ Hanh (1998): 27 - 31.

⁸ Nguyen & Le (2019): 101 - 115.

⁹ World Health Organization, 2022: accessed on [December 02, 2024], Available at: <https://www.who.int/vietnam/health-topics/mental-health>

¹⁰ Nguyen & Le (2019): 45 - 48.

a profound understanding of mindfulness as a dynamic interplay between the self, society, and nature. Historically, Buddhist monks in Vietnam have been central to the preservation and dissemination of mindfulness traditions, serving as both spiritual guides and community leaders. As custodians of these ancient practices, monks have played a vital role in promoting inner peace and spiritual development through meditation, dharma teachings, and community engagement. These activities not only strengthen individual mindfulness but also foster collective well-being, highlighting the interplay between personal transformation and social harmony.¹¹

Meditation, a cornerstone of Buddhist practice, has been one of the primary tools employed by monks to cultivate mindfulness and self-awareness. This practice, rooted in centuries-old traditions, emphasizes the development of concentration and insight as a means to transcend suffering. Dharma teachings provided by monks further enrich this process, offering ethical guidance and philosophical frameworks that empower individuals to navigate life's challenges with clarity and compassion. Through these teachings, mindfulness is presented as a dynamic process that integrates individual well-being with the broader social and natural world.¹² Community engagement has been another significant aspect of the monks' role in maintaining mindfulness traditions. Monks often serve as mediators and advisors in their communities, addressing spiritual and emotional concerns. This engagement not only reinforces the relevance of Buddhist practices in daily life but also helps to create supportive environments where mindfulness can thrive. The monks' ability to adapt these ancient practices to address contemporary issues, such as stress and interpersonal conflict, further underscores their importance in the modern context.¹³

The enduring commitment of Buddhist monks to preserving mindfulness practices demonstrates their understanding of mindfulness as an interconnected phenomenon that transcends individual experiences. By integrating meditation, ethical teachings, and community service, they ensure that mindfulness remains a living tradition capable of addressing the evolving needs of society. This multifaceted approach highlights the profound potential of mindfulness as both a personal and collective resource for achieving balance and harmony.

2.1.3. Modern Applications of Traditional Practices

In the contemporary Vietnamese context, Buddhist monks continue to play a pivotal role in advancing mindfulness education. Meditation retreats and workshops led by monks often incorporate ancient techniques adapted to modern mental health needs. These programs emphasize mindfulness as a practical tool for stress reduction, emotional regulation, and personal growth,

¹¹ Nguyen & Le (2019): 51 - 60.

¹² Hanh (1998): 11 - 13.

¹³ World Health Organization (2022): accessed on [December 02, 2024], Available at: <https://www.who.int/vietnam/health-topics/mental-health>

aligning with global interest in mental wellness.¹⁴ Challenges and Opportunities, despite, their contributions, Buddhist monks face challenges in promoting mindfulness practices in modern Vietnam. One major issue is the perception of mindfulness as a solely religious practice, which may alienate non-Buddhist individuals. Additionally, the urban-rural divide limits the reach of monastic teachings, as access to retreats and workshops is often confined to urban centers.¹⁵ However, opportunities exist in the form of digital platforms, where monks can share teachings more widely, and government support, which could help integrate mindfulness into public health and education systems.

In contemporary Vietnam, Buddhist monks maintain their pivotal role as educators and facilitators of mindfulness, adapting traditional practices to meet modern mental health challenges. Their work demonstrates the enduring relevance of mindfulness in addressing issues such as stress, emotional dysregulation, and the pursuit of personal growth. Through meditation retreats, workshops, and community initiatives, these monks bridge the gap between ancient Buddhist teachings and contemporary needs, fostering a culture of holistic well-being.¹⁶ A notable aspect of these modern applications is the adaptation of traditional techniques to align with global trends in mental health. Meditation practices, once primarily associated with spiritual enlightenment, are now being reframed as tools for managing stress and enhancing emotional resilience. These practices are particularly effective in helping individuals navigate the complexities of modern life, from work-related pressures to interpersonal conflicts. By offering guided meditation sessions and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs, monks make these age-old techniques accessible and practical for diverse audiences, including those with little or no prior exposure to Buddhism.¹⁷

Workshops and retreats led by Buddhist monks also emphasize personal growth, encouraging participants to develop self-awareness and compassion. These programs often integrate mindfulness with ethical teachings, providing participants with a framework for living a balanced and meaningful life. Additionally, monks incorporate elements of Vietnamese cultural identity into these practices, ensuring that mindfulness remains culturally relevant while addressing universal mental health concerns.¹⁸ Beyond individual benefits, the modern application of mindfulness practices extends to broader societal impacts. Monks frequently collaborate with educational institutions, healthcare providers, and community organizations to promote mindfulness as a public health initiative. Their efforts contribute to a growing recognition of mindfulness

¹⁴ World Health Organization, 2022: accessed on [December 02, 2024], Available at: <https://www.who.int/vietnam/health-topics/mental-health>

¹⁵ Nguyen & Le (2019): 102 - 103.

¹⁶ Nguyen & Le (2019): 110 - 115.

¹⁷ Hanh (1998): 111 - 128.

¹⁸ World Health Organization, 2022: accessed on [December 02, 2024], Available at: <https://www.who.int/vietnam/health-topics/mental-health>

as an essential component of mental wellness, reinforcing its importance in both personal and societal contexts.¹⁹ This ability to adapt traditional practices to modern needs not only ensures the continuity of mindfulness in Vietnam but also positions Buddhist monks as key contributors to global mental health initiatives. By integrating ancient wisdom with contemporary methodologies, they offer a unique and valuable perspective on achieving holistic well-being in the modern era.

Summary, Vietnamese Buddhist monks remain vital in preserving and promoting mindfulness, bridging traditional wisdom with modern applications. Figures like Thich Nhat Hanh exemplify the transformative potential of these practices when adapted to address contemporary issues. Moving forward, leveraging digital tools and fostering inclusivity could enhance the accessibility and impact of mindfulness practices, ensuring their continued relevance in Vietnam and beyond.

2.2. Buddhist-Inspired Mindfulness Programs within Vietnam's Socio-Cultural Context

Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs in Vietnam occupy a unique position within the country's socio-cultural framework, blending ancient spiritual practices with contemporary mental health interventions. Rooted in Vietnam's rich Buddhist heritage, these programs address both individual well-being and broader societal concerns, creating a culturally resonant approach to mindfulness. Their adaptation to the Vietnamese socio-cultural context is critical for ensuring relevance and effectiveness in addressing modern challenges²⁰ Vietnam's predominantly Buddhist cultural environment offers a robust foundation for integrating mindfulness into daily life. Deeply rooted in the teachings and rituals of Vietnamese Buddhism, traditional mindfulness practices such as mindful breathing (*ānāpānasati*) and walking meditation have been central to spiritual development for centuries. These practices encourage an acute awareness of the present moment, fostering mental clarity, emotional regulation, and a deeper connection with oneself and the surrounding world.²¹

In contemporary Vietnam, these ancient techniques have been successfully adapted to modern contexts, extending their benefits beyond spiritual realms to address practical needs in workplaces, educational institutions, and healthcare settings. Mindful breathing exercises, for instance, are utilized to manage workplace stress, enhance productivity, and promote mental resilience. Similarly, walking meditation is employed in schools to help students develop focus and reduce anxiety, while healthcare practitioners incorporate mindfulness techniques to support patients in coping with chronic pain and emotional distress. These adaptations not only meet modern demands but also ensure that the cultural essence and authenticity of these practices are preserved.²²

¹⁹ Nguyen & Le (2019): 112.

²⁰ Tsang, & Nguyen. (2023): 1 - 12.

²¹ Hanh (1998): 79 - 81.

²² Nguyen & Le, (2019): 114.

The enduring relevance of mindfulness in Vietnam exemplifies the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation. By bridging the gap between ancient Buddhist principles and contemporary needs, mindfulness practices continue to resonate with Vietnamese society, providing practical tools for navigating life's complexities while maintaining a deep connection to cultural and spiritual heritage. This integration highlights the transformative potential of mindfulness as a holistic approach to well-being in Vietnam's socio-cultural context. One of the distinguishing features of mindfulness programs in Vietnam is their emphasis on communal harmony and interconnectedness, reflecting the country's collectivist cultural values. Unlike individualistic approaches often seen in Western mindfulness models, Vietnamese programs prioritize group activities, shared experiences, and the collective cultivation of mindfulness. This aligns with the Buddhist principle of interdependence and reinforces social bonds within communities.²³

However, implementing these programs within Vietnam's socio-cultural context is not without challenges. Limited access to trained practitioners, particularly in rural areas, hampers widespread adoption. Additionally, the association of mindfulness with Buddhist religion can pose barriers for individuals from non-Buddhist backgrounds or those hesitant to engage in religious practices. Addressing these issues requires careful cultural adaptation, ensuring that programs are inclusive and accessible while retaining their Buddhist roots.²⁴ Despite these challenges, Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs hold immense potential for contributing to Vietnam's mental health landscape. By integrating traditional practices with evidence-based methodologies, they offer a holistic approach to mental wellness that resonates deeply with the country's cultural and spiritual values. This synergy between ancient wisdom and modern needs underscores the transformative power of mindfulness in Vietnam's evolving socio-cultural context.

Vietnamese Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs, deeply rooted in the nation's spiritual and cultural traditions, have garnered international interest for their unique integration of ancient practices and contemporary mental health applications. These programs, characterized by their emphasis on interconnectedness and holistic well-being, have become a focal point for researchers exploring mindfulness as a global phenomenon.²⁵

Foremost among the global influences is the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, whose development of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) demonstrates how traditional mindfulness can be adapted to Western contexts. Kabat-Zinn's research highlights the universal applicability of mindfulness while recognizing the importance of cultural tailoring to enhance its relevance. Vietnamese Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs reflect this principle, adapting practices such as mindful breathing and walking meditation to fit

²³ Zsolnai, & Kovacs, (2021): 57 - 70.

²⁴ Gleig, (2021): 2 - 6.

²⁵ Kabat-Zinn, (2003): 144 – 156.

modern settings, including schools, workplaces, and healthcare environments.²⁶ Additionally, international research underscores the effectiveness of culturally tailored mindfulness programs in addressing mental health challenges. A study by Hofmann et al. (2010) found that mindfulness practices significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression across diverse populations.²⁷ Vietnamese programs, which integrate Buddhist teachings into mindfulness training, offer a culturally resonant model that aligns with these findings. By emphasizing collective well-being and ethical living, they provide a distinctive approach that appeals to the collectivist values of Vietnamese society while addressing universal mental health concerns.

Furthermore, Thich Nhat Hanh's global advocacy for mindfulness has positioned Vietnamese Buddhist practices on the world stage. His teachings, which bridge traditional spirituality and contemporary mindfulness applications, have inspired numerous international mindfulness programs. The Plum Village tradition, for instance, has influenced mindfulness initiatives worldwide, demonstrating the adaptability of Vietnamese Buddhist principles to diverse cultural and institutional contexts (Hanh, 1998). Global research also highlights the challenges of implementing mindfulness programs in specific cultural settings. For instance, Shapiro et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity in program design to ensure acceptance and efficacy. Vietnamese Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs address these challenges by maintaining their spiritual authenticity while incorporating modern scientific insights. This balance allows them to resonate with both traditional practitioners and secular audiences, enhancing their accessibility and impact.

In summary, Vietnamese Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs serve as a compelling example of how traditional practices can be adapted to meet contemporary mental health needs while retaining cultural authenticity. Their integration of ancient wisdom with modern methodologies not only benefits Vietnamese society but also contributes to the global understanding of mindfulness as a dynamic and transformative practice.

2.3. Vietnamese Cultural and Spiritual Traditions on Mental Health within the SDG Framework

Mental health is a vital aspect of human well-being, intricately connected to cultural and spiritual traditions. In Vietnam, traditional cultural and spiritual practices play a significant role in shaping individuals' understanding and approach to mental health. These practices, deeply rooted in Vietnamese society, often integrate elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous spiritual beliefs, providing a holistic approach to mental wellness. In recent years, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have emphasized the importance of mental health, positioning it as a key factor in

²⁶ Kabat-Zinn, (2003): 144 – 156.

²⁷ Hofmann et al., (2010): 169 – 183.

achieving overall well-being.²⁸ This paper explores how Vietnamese cultural and spiritual traditions contribute to mental health and aligns with the SDG framework. In Vietnam, Buddhism has long been a cornerstone of spiritual and cultural life, influencing various aspects of mental health. Buddhist teachings emphasize mindfulness, meditation, and the practice of “sangha” (community), all of which have profound effects on mental well-being. For example, mindfulness practices, such as meditation, help individuals cultivate emotional regulation, resilience, and a sense of inner peace, thereby supporting mental health.²⁹ Furthermore, the Buddhist belief in karma and the impermanence of life encourages individuals to accept challenges and maintain a sense of hope, which is crucial in addressing mental health issues like depression and anxiety.³⁰

Confucianism, another influential tradition in Vietnam, places a strong emphasis on family, social harmony, and respect for authority, which also impact mental health. The Confucian concept of “filial piety” promotes strong family bonds, which serve as a protective factor for mental well-being. In this context, family support and intergenerational relationships provide emotional stability, especially during times of personal crisis or mental distress.³¹ However, the Confucian value of maintaining social harmony can sometimes lead to the suppression of emotions, potentially contributing to mental health challenges, especially when individuals feel compelled to conform to societal expectations.³² Additionally, indigenous spiritual beliefs in Vietnam, including animism and ancestor worship, also influence mental health practices. These traditions often involve rituals and ceremonies aimed at restoring balance and ensuring spiritual well-being. For instance, rituals honoring ancestors are believed to foster emotional healing and reduce feelings of isolation or grief, thereby promoting mental health.³³ These spiritual practices offer a community-based approach to mental wellness, reinforcing the interconnectedness of individuals and their environment.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the integration of mental health within global health frameworks, particularly under SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Vietnam’s cultural and spiritual traditions align with this goal by promoting mental health through holistic approaches that incorporate physical, emotional, and social dimensions of well-being. In particular, SDG 3.4 calls for the reduction of premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, including mental health conditions, through prevention, treatment, and promotion of mental

²⁸ United Nations, (2015): 5 - 12.

²⁹ Nguyen, (2018): 56 - 67.

³⁰ Nguyen, (2019): 45 - 69.

³¹ Phan, (2020): 77 - 92.

³² Chau, (2021): 23 - 34.

³³ Hoang, (2021): 45 - 58.

well-being.³⁴ The Vietnamese approach to mental health, which incorporates traditional practices and community involvement, provides valuable insights into achieving this target. Moreover, the role of community-based mental health interventions in Vietnam, such as support from local temples or family-based care, aligns with the SDG framework's focus on inclusive health systems and accessible mental health services for all. By incorporating spiritual care, these interventions not only address the psychological aspect of mental health but also ensure that cultural relevance is maintained, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of mental health care in the Vietnamese context.³⁵

In conclusion, Vietnamese cultural and spiritual traditions offer a unique and effective approach to mental health that aligns with the principles of the SDG framework. By emphasizing mindfulness, family support, and spiritual practices, these traditions contribute to overall mental well-being and serve as a model for integrating cultural wisdom into global mental health strategies. As mental health becomes an increasingly important component of global health discourse, Vietnam's cultural and spiritual perspectives offer valuable lessons in promoting mental wellness and achieving the SDGs.

2.4. Critical Analysis of Vietnamese Cultural and Spiritual Traditions on Mental Health within the SDG Framework

The role of culture and spirituality in shaping mental health has gained significant attention, particularly in the context of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mental health, which is recognized under SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), emphasizes the importance of addressing mental health in an inclusive and holistic manner. In Vietnam, the integration of cultural and spiritual traditions, particularly Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous practices, plays a central role in fostering mental well-being. This critical analysis explores the intersections between these traditions and the SDG framework, focusing on both the benefits and challenges of these traditions in promoting mental health in contemporary Vietnam.

2.4.1 Buddhism and Mental Health:

Buddhism offers an integrated approach to mental well-being that emphasizes mindfulness, meditation, and inner peace. These practices directly contribute to mental health by reducing stress, promoting emotional resilience, and enhancing cognitive functioning.³⁶ However, while Buddhist teachings can provide a foundation for coping with mental health challenges, there is limited formal integration of Buddhist-based mental health practices into the healthcare system. The lack of professional mental health training for Buddhist practitioners might hinder the widespread application of these practices, limiting their accessibility and impact in broader mental health interventions.³⁷

³⁴ United Nations, (2015): 11 - 16.

³⁵ Nguyen, (2018): 57.

³⁶ Nguyen, (2018): 59 - 60.

³⁷ La, et al, (2022): e0271959.

2.4.2 Confucianism and Mental Health:

Confucianism, which places high value on family and social harmony, offers protective factors for mental health, particularly in the form of family support. The emphasis on filial piety and community well-being strengthens social networks, which can alleviate feelings of isolation or loneliness, common mental health challenges.³⁸ However, the Confucian emphasis on conformity and maintaining social harmony can also foster pressure to suppress emotions, potentially exacerbating mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.³⁹ This duality highlights the tension between the need for social conformity and the importance of individual mental health expression.

2.4.3 Indigenous Spiritual Practices and Mental Health:

Vietnam's indigenous spiritual practices, including ancestor worship and animism, emphasize communal rituals that promote emotional healing and spiritual well-being. These rituals offer a strong sense of community support, which can contribute to mental wellness.⁴⁰ However, these practices may not always align with modern mental health treatments, creating a potential gap between traditional practices and scientific psychological models. This gap could affect the acceptance of mental health interventions, especially among younger generations who may perceive traditional practices as less relevant.

2.4.4 Alignment with the SDG Framework:

The SDG framework, particularly SDG 3, aims to ensure universal access to mental health services and promote well-being for all. Vietnam's cultural and spiritual traditions contribute to this goal by offering community-based approaches to mental wellness. However, the lack of integration between these traditions and formal mental health services presents a challenge. To meet SDG 3.4 (reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, including mental health conditions), it is crucial to incorporate traditional practices into formal health systems, combining cultural relevance with scientific approaches to mental health care.⁴¹

Table 1 Vietnamese Cultural and Spiritual Traditions and Their Role in Mental Health within the SDG Framework

³⁸ Phan, (2020): 77 - 79.

³⁹ Chau, (2021): 23 - 34.

⁴⁰ Hoang, (2021): 45 - 58.

⁴¹ United Nations, (2015): 16.

Cultural/ Spiritual Tradition	Role in Mental Health	Contribution to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well- Being)	Challenges
Buddhism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mindfulness and meditation for stress reduction - Promotes emotional resilience and inner peace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports SDG 3.4 by promoting mental well-being and coping strategies for anxiety, depression, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of formal integration into health care system - Limited accessibility due to the absence of mental health training for Buddhist practitioners
Confucianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasizes family support and social harmony - Provides a strong protective factor against isolation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports SDG 3.8 (Universal Health Coverage) through community-based support systems - Promotes collective well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pressure to suppress emotions can lead to mental health issues like anxiety - Conflicts between social conformity and individual mental health needs
Indigenous Spiritual Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rituals for emotional healing and community support - Promotes interconnectedness and belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides community-based care that supports SDG 3.8 - Strengthens emotional well-being through social cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mismatch with modern psychological interventions - Younger generations may find traditional practices less relevant

Cultural/ Spiritual Tradition	Role in Mental Health	Contribution to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well- Being)	Challenges
SDG Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focus on promoting mental health as integral to overall well-being- Aims to reduce premature mortality from mental health conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Directly aligns with SDG 3 by calling for inclusive mental health services- Aims to promote equitable access to mental health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Challenges in integrating traditional and modern practices- Need for policy changes to accommodate diverse mental health approaches

Summary, Vietnam’s cultural and spiritual traditions play an integral role in shaping approaches to mental health. These traditions align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3, which focuses on promoting mental well-being and ensuring access to mental health services for all. While these practices offer valuable insights into community-based mental health care, challenges exist in integrating them with modern mental health systems. Addressing these challenges through policy reform and healthcare integration is essential to achieving the SDG targets and ensuring comprehensive mental health support in Vietnam.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF VIETNAMESE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS ON MENTAL HEALTH WITHIN THE SDG FRAMEWORK

The integration of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs into Vietnam’s mental health framework strongly resonates with the theme of “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development.” Mindfulness, rooted in Buddhist teachings, embodies principles that promote inner harmony, interconnectedness, and compassion—values that form the foundation of human dignity and sustainable peace. By fostering emotional resilience, reducing stress, and enhancing self-awareness, mindfulness practices help individuals achieve mental well-being, which is a prerequisite for personal and societal harmony.

3.1. Unity Through Collaboration

The implementation of mindfulness programs highlights the importance of uniting traditional Buddhist principles with modern mental health approaches. Encouraging collaboration between Buddhist monks, spiritual leaders, and psychologists reflects a harmonious integration of spiritual

and scientific perspectives, breaking down barriers between traditional and modern practices. This unity is not only a practical approach to addressing mental health challenges but also a reflection of inclusivity, where diverse methodologies converge for a shared purpose of enhancing human dignity and well-being.

3.2. Inclusivity in Mental Health Access

The recommendation to integrate mindfulness into Vietnam's national mental health policy underscores inclusivity, ensuring that culturally relevant practices are accessible to all. Mindfulness programs, deeply embedded in Vietnam's socio-cultural fabric, resonate with the collective values of the Vietnamese people. They provide a bridge between traditional practices and modern needs, making mental health care more relatable and acceptable to the population. This approach aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3, which advocates for equitable access to health services, including mental health.

3.3. Human Dignity Through Holistic Well-Being

The emphasis on mindfulness as a tool for self-awareness, emotional regulation, and compassion highlights its role in fostering human dignity. By addressing mental health challenges such as stress, anxiety, and depression, mindfulness programs empower individuals to lead fulfilling lives. This empowerment not only enhances personal well-being but also contributes to societal harmony, as individuals with sound mental health are better equipped to contribute positively to their communities.

3.4. Buddhist Insights for Sustainable Development

The critical perspective provided in the analysis highlights how mindfulness programs contribute to sustainable development by addressing the intersection of mental health, cultural heritage, and societal progress. Mindfulness, as a Buddhist practice, aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development by promoting inner peace, reducing conflict, and fostering resilience. These qualities are essential for building a society that values both individual and collective well-being, ensuring a sustainable future grounded in compassion and understanding.

In conclusion, the integration of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs into Vietnam's mental health framework offers a profound opportunity to address mental health challenges in a manner that aligns with the themes of unity, inclusivity, and human dignity. However, realizing this potential requires concerted efforts to bridge the gap between traditional and modern practices, develop inclusive policies, and foster public awareness about the benefits of mindfulness. By doing so, Vietnam can set an example of how cultural heritage and modern innovation can come together to create a sustainable and harmonious future. These efforts not only advance Vietnam's mental health landscape but also contribute to the global discourse on sustainable development, showcasing the timeless relevance of Buddhist insights in addressing contemporary challenges. A unified, inclusive approach to mental

health, grounded in Buddhist principles, can serve as a beacon for other nations striving to build frameworks that uphold human dignity and peace in a sustainable world.

The integration of Vietnamese cultural and spiritual traditions into mental health practices, particularly within the context of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), offers a unique opportunity to address the mental health challenges faced by the population. In Vietnam, traditional cultural and spiritual frameworks such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous practices hold immense value in shaping how individuals perceive, experience, and manage mental health. However, to fully implement these traditions in the modern mental health framework, several key steps must be taken to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary approaches. Below is an outlined approach for implementing these traditions within the SDG framework:

3.4.1. Policy Integration and Cultural Sensitivity

To begin with, Vietnam's mental health policies must recognize and integrate cultural and spiritual traditions into formal healthcare practices. SDG 3, which emphasizes good health and well-being, stresses the need for inclusive, culturally sensitive healthcare systems. Policymakers must develop frameworks that respect traditional practices, such as mindfulness, community-based support, and family-centered care, while also ensuring that they complement modern medical and psychological treatments.

Action Steps:

- Create policies that acknowledge the role of Buddhism, Confucianism, and indigenous traditions in mental health care.
- Promote culturally sensitive mental health services in both urban and rural areas.
- Integrate traditional spiritual practices with modern psychological and psychiatric care to offer more holistic and accessible care options.

3.4.2. Training and Capacity Building for Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals in Vietnam need training that includes both contemporary psychological methods and an understanding of cultural and spiritual practices. This dual approach can enhance their ability to offer tailored interventions that resonate with patients' cultural and spiritual beliefs.

Action Steps:

- Develop training programs for mental health practitioners that include education on Buddhist practices (e.g., mindfulness, meditation) and Confucian values (e.g., filial piety, community support).
- Equip healthcare providers with the tools to integrate indigenous spiritual practices into mental health interventions.
- Encourage collaboration between mental health professionals and local spiritual leaders to create culturally relevant treatment plans.

3.4.3. Community-Based Mental Health Programs

Vietnam's cultural and spiritual traditions place great emphasis on community and family. Community-based mental health programs, especially those that utilize Buddhist and indigenous practices, can be an effective way to improve mental health outcomes. These programs should be designed to address not only individual mental health needs but also the broader community's mental well-being.

Action Steps:

- Implement community-based mental health programs that include mindfulness and meditation practices to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.
- Engage local Buddhist monasteries and spiritual centers to provide counseling and support, leveraging their established community trust.
- Establish peer support groups within communities, especially in rural areas, where mental health resources are often scarce.

3.4.4. Promoting Awareness and Reducing Stigma

In order to ensure the effectiveness of integrating cultural and spiritual traditions into mental health care, there must be a concerted effort to raise awareness and reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health services. This can be achieved by leveraging the influence of Buddhist teachings, Confucian family values, and other cultural elements that promote well-being.

Action Steps:

- Conduct public awareness campaigns that highlight the mental health benefits of mindfulness, family support, and spiritual practices.
- Collaborate with local leaders, monks, and elders to publicly promote mental health as part of spiritual well-being.
- Reduce stigma by emphasizing that mental health care is not a sign of weakness but a part of maintaining overall health and harmony.

3.4.5. Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure that the integration of cultural and spiritual practices into the mental health framework is effective, regular monitoring and evaluation are needed. This will help measure the impact of these practices on mental health outcomes and determine areas for improvement.

Action Steps:

- Implement evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of culturally integrated mental health programs.
- Collect feedback from both patients and practitioners to improve the integration of spiritual and cultural elements in care.
- Monitor mental health outcomes in areas where community-based, spiritually-informed programs are implemented to gauge their success and areas for improvement.

3.4.6. Advocacy for Global Recognition of Cultural Approaches

Vietnam’s approach to integrating cultural and spiritual traditions in mental health care can serve as a model for other countries in the region and beyond. Advocacy for the inclusion of cultural practices in global mental health frameworks could enhance the SDGs’ mental health targets, particularly SDG 3.4 (reducing premature mortality from mental health conditions).

Action Steps:

- Advocate for the global recognition of culturally specific mental health interventions in international forums such as the United Nations.
- Share successful models of culturally integrated mental health care from Vietnam in international conferences and research publications.
- Work with global health organizations to incorporate cultural sensitivity into their mental health policies and programs.

Summary, the implementation of Vietnamese cultural and spiritual traditions within the SDG framework for mental health can contribute significantly to achieving the goals outlined in SDG 3. However, this integration requires thoughtful planning, collaboration across sectors, and a focus on creating culturally sensitive healthcare policies. By enhancing mental health education, promoting community-based care, reducing stigma, and advocating for global recognition of cultural practices, Vietnam can lead the way in promoting holistic mental well-being that aligns with both its rich traditions and the global SDG framework. In doing so, Vietnam will not only advance its national mental health agenda but also contribute to global efforts toward better health and well-being for all.



Figure 1 Implementation of Critical Analysis of Vietnamese Cultural and Spiritual Traditions on Mental Health within the SDG Framework

IV. CONCLUSION

In critically analyzing the role of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs within Vietnam's mental health framework, it becomes evident that these programs offer significant potential for improving mental well-being, but they also face both opportunities and challenges. Mindfulness practices, deeply rooted in Buddhist principles, provide a holistic approach to mental health by focusing on self-awareness, emotional regulation, and the cultivation of compassion. These principles have been shown to reduce stress, improve resilience, and promote emotional balance in the modern context of Vietnamese society, where mental health issues are increasingly prevalent. The integration of Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs within Vietnam's socio-cultural context further highlights the relevance of traditional practices in contemporary mental health care. These programs resonate with the broader cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Vietnamese people, especially the emphasis on community, interconnectedness, and the importance of inner peace. Mindfulness practices, informed by Buddhist teachings, align well with Vietnam's collective values and can be instrumental in addressing the mental health challenges faced by the population, particularly those associated with stress, anxiety, and depression.

Furthermore, these programs' alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3, underscores their potential contribution to global mental health initiatives. The SDG framework emphasizes the need for inclusive, equitable, and accessible mental health services, and Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs offer a culturally relevant, community-based approach that fits within this vision. However, the critical analysis reveals that the integration of these programs into formal mental health systems remains a significant challenge. The lack of structured training for mental health professionals in Buddhist practices, coupled with the potential resistance from modern psychological models, impedes the widespread adoption of mindfulness programs in Vietnam's mental health framework.

In conclusion, while Buddhist-inspired mindfulness programs have a strong potential to enhance mental health outcomes in Vietnam, there is a pressing need for further research and policy support to bridge the gap between traditional and modern mental health practices. By fostering collaboration between cultural, spiritual, and scientific approaches to mental health, Vietnam can develop a more holistic and inclusive mental health framework that aligns with both its rich cultural heritage and the global SDG objectives. To realize this potential, it is crucial to integrate these programs into the national healthcare system, ensure proper training for mental health professionals, and address the societal perceptions of mental health treatment. Mindfulness, as a Buddhist practice, has demonstrated significant benefits for mental health. A national policy that acknowledges these benefits could create a more inclusive, culturally sensitive mental health framework that appeals to both traditional and modern approaches.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Collaboration with Traditional and Modern Mental Health Practices

Encourage collaborations between Buddhist monks, spiritual leaders, and modern psychologists to develop integrated care models. These models should offer a combination of spiritual and psychological support, addressing both the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals.

5.2. Enhanced Integration of Mindfulness into National Mental Health Policy

Develop national mental health policies that formally recognize the value of mindfulness programs rooted in Buddhist principles. These policies should ensure that mindfulness practices are considered alongside conventional mental health treatments, particularly for stress, anxiety, and depression.

5.3. Public Awareness Campaigns on the Benefits of Mindfulness

Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the general population about the mental health benefits of mindfulness practices rooted in Buddhist traditions. These campaigns should focus on reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health care and highlight the role of mindfulness in promoting mental well-being.

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INTEGRATING BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL HEALING

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Abstract:

This research examines the integration of Buddhist psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) as an innovative and effective method for addressing emotional and behavioral disorders. While Buddhist psychology emphasizes mindfulness, non-attachment, and the impermanence of suffering, CBT focuses on cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, and behavior modification. Their integration creates a holistic therapeutic framework that combines mindfulness with cognitive restructuring to foster emotional resilience and self-awareness. Buddhist teachings highlight the transient nature of emotions, helping individuals break free from habitual suffering through non-attachment and mindfulness. Similarly, CBT identifies and restructures maladaptive thought patterns to address emotional distress. By merging mindfulness with cognitive restructuring, individuals can develop healthier relationships with their emotions and reframe negative beliefs, leading to improved mental health. However, challenges arise in adapting Buddhist concepts to Western cultural contexts, where individualism often conflicts with Buddhist notions of *anattā* (non-self) and impermanence. Misinterpretations, such as confusing non-attachment with emotional detachment, could undermine therapy. Additionally, spiritual bypassing - where clients use mindfulness to avoid confronting deeper psychological issues - requires careful handling. Therapists must balance mindfulness as a regulatory tool while ensuring unresolved trauma is addressed. Despite these challenges, empirical evidence supports mindfulness-based interventions like MBCT, which have shown significant benefits in emotional regulation and anxiety reduction. While further research is needed, this integration

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holds great potential for sustainable psychological healing. With ethical and culturally sensitive applications, this approach offers a promising mind-body methodology for lasting mental well-being.

Keywords: *Buddhist psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness, emotional disorders, behavioral therapy, psychotherapy integration.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a widely recognized and empirically supported psychotherapeutic approach that focuses on modifying dysfunctional thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.¹ While CBT has demonstrated significant effectiveness in treating various psychological disorders, recent studies highlight the potential benefits of integrating mindfulness-based techniques rooted in Buddhist psychology to enhance therapeutic outcomes.² Buddhist psychology, which emphasizes self-awareness, emotional regulation, and compassion, provides complementary strategies that align with CBT's cognitive restructuring and behavioral modification principles.³ Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), derived from Buddhist meditation practices, have gained considerable traction in clinical psychology, particularly for treating stress, anxiety, and depression. These interventions encourage individuals to cultivate present-moment awareness and adopt a nonjudgmental stance towards their thoughts and emotions, reducing cognitive distortions and maladaptive behaviors.⁴ Additionally, the integration of compassion-focused therapy (CFT), inspired by Buddhist teachings, has shown promise in addressing self-criticism and enhancing emotional resilience.⁵

This paper explores the theoretical and practical integration of Buddhist psychology into CBT, with a focus on key principles such as mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and non-attachment (*anicca*). It examines how these elements can be utilized to manage emotional and behavioral disorders, including depression, anxiety, and addiction. By bridging the gap between Eastern contemplative traditions and Western psychotherapy, this integration offers a more holistic approach to mental health treatment. The paper further discusses empirical evidence supporting this integration and highlights potential challenges and ethical considerations in clinical practice.⁶ The integration of Buddhist psychology and CBT has become an area of interest in the field of psychotherapy due to the shared conceptual ground on understanding human suffering, emotional regulation, and mental well-being. While originating from distinct traditions - Buddhist psychology being

¹ Aaron T. Beck (2011): p. 23.

² Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990a): p. 135.

³ Christopher K. Germer et al. (2005): p. 95.

⁴ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2018): p. 90

⁵ Paul Gilbert (2009): p. 110.

⁶ Christopher K. Germer et al. (2005): p. 95.

grounded in ancient Eastern philosophy and CBT emerging from Western psychological research - the convergence of these frameworks offers powerful insights into therapeutic interventions. Both systems provide practical tools to understand and manage psychological distress by examining thought patterns and their impact on emotions and behaviors. This theoretical framework explores the key concepts and commonalities between Buddhist psychology and CBT, focusing on how their principles can be integrated to promote mental well-being.

II. BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY: CORE PRINCIPLES

Buddhist psychology is based on the core teachings of the Buddha, which emphasize the understanding and alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*). It is rooted in ancient texts such as the *Abhidhamma* and *Sutta Piṭaka*, which describe the nature of the mind, suffering, impermanence (*anicca*), and non-self (*anattā*).⁷ Buddhist psychology posits that suffering arises from attachment, aversion, and ignorance, and that the cessation of suffering is achieved through mental transformation and insight.

The Four Noble Truths lie at the heart of Buddhist teachings and provide the framework for understanding human suffering and its cessation. These principles align with key psychological processes addressed in Buddhist and modern therapeutic frameworks such as CBT: (1) *Dukkha* (suffering) - The First Noble Truth acknowledges that suffering is an inherent part of life, resulting from physical pain, emotional distress, and existential dissatisfaction. This suffering is caused by craving and attachment, where individuals constantly seek pleasure and avoid discomfort, which is ultimately futile due to the impermanent nature of all experiences.⁸ (2) *Samudaya* (Origin of Suffering) - The Second Noble Truth identifies the cause of suffering as craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). It suggests that attachment to transient experiences and failure to recognize the impermanent nature of life lead to suffering.⁹ This concept directly relates to cognitive distortions in modern psychology, where individuals attach excessive meaning to thoughts and emotions that are transient and not grounded in reality. (3) *Nirodha* (Cessation of Suffering) - The Third Noble Truth asserts that it is possible to end suffering by letting go of attachment and craving. Achieving this requires insight into the impermanence and non-self nature of existence. This principle parallels the goals of CBT, where clients learn to detach from maladaptive cognitive patterns and gain healthier perspectives on life.¹⁰ (4) *Magga* (Path to Cessation) - The Fourth Noble Truth outlines the Eightfold Path as the practical steps for attaining liberation from suffering. These practices involve ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), each contributing to a balanced and harmonious life. The ethical and mindful aspects of the Eightfold Path resonate

⁷ Peter Harvey (2015): p. 52.

⁸ Walpola Rahula (2007): p. 40.

⁹ Rupert Gethin (1998): p. 60.

¹⁰ Aaron T. Beck (1976): p. 45.

with the self-regulation and emotional control promoted in CBT.¹¹

The Eightfold Path comprises eight interconnected practices that address the moral, cognitive, and emotional aspects of human experience. These practices are: (1) Right View & Right Intention - These practices emphasize seeing the world without distortion and cultivating intentions rooted in kindness, compassion, and wisdom. In CBT, these concepts align with cognitive restructuring, where clients are encouraged to identify and modify dysfunctional thought patterns.¹² (2) Right Speech, Right Action, & Right Livelihood - These practices emphasize ethical behavior, honesty, and the pursuit of a livelihood that does not harm others. In CBT, these aspects are reflected in behavioral activation, where individuals are encouraged to engage in healthy and purposeful behaviors to counteract emotional distress.¹³ (3) Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, & Right Concentration - These practices focus on cultivating mental discipline through mindfulness, concentration, and the cultivation of right effort. These principles resonate strongly with mindfulness-based cognitive therapies, which are an integral part of modern CBT techniques.¹⁴

III. COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

Core Principles is one of the most widely researched and practiced therapeutic approaches in psychology. Developed in the 1960s by psychiatrist Aaron Beck, CBT is grounded in the idea that cognitive processes significantly influence emotional responses and behaviors. Through structured techniques, CBT aims to alter negative thought patterns and maladaptive behaviors, leading to healthier emotional functioning. The theoretical foundations of CBT are rooted in cognitive theory, which asserts that dysfunctional thinking is a core component of psychological distress. This section explores the key theoretical principles of CBT, the cognitive models developed by its founders, and the therapeutic techniques that derive from these foundations.

Cognitive theory, the cornerstone of CBT, emphasizes the connection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. According to Aaron Beck, the founder of CBT, thoughts are the primary determinants of emotional states and behaviors. He proposed that it is not the events themselves that cause emotional distress but the way individuals interpret and process these events. Therefore, altering distorted thinking patterns can lead to changes in emotional and behavioral responses. Cognitive theory identifies key cognitive distortions or errors in thinking that contribute to psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. (1) The Cognitive Triad - One of the most important concepts in cognitive theory is the cognitive triad, which Beck identified as a core factor in depression. The cognitive triad consists of three types of negative thoughts: Negative thoughts about the self - Feelings

¹¹ Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990b): p. 136.

¹² Aaron T. Beck et al. (1979): p. 67

¹³ Robert L. Leahy (2017): p. 50

¹⁴ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p. 120

of inadequacy, worthlessness, or guilt; Negative thoughts about the world - Viewing the environment or people as hostile, unfair, or unchangeable; Negative thoughts about the future - Pessimistic expectations, such as believing that things will never improve.¹⁵ The cognitive triad is central to depression and other psychological disorders because it reinforces negative emotions and behaviors, creating a cycle of distress. When a person perceives the world through a distorted cognitive lens, these negative beliefs shape their emotional and behavioral responses. (2) Cognitive distortions are habitual patterns of faulty thinking that reinforce negative emotions and maladaptive behaviors. Beck and his colleagues identified various cognitive distortions that commonly occur in individuals with psychological disorders.¹⁶ Some of the most common distortions include: All-or-nothing thinking - Viewing situations in black-and-white terms without considering the nuances of reality; Catastrophizing - Expecting the worst possible outcome in any given situation; Overgeneralization - Making broad, sweeping conclusions based on limited evidence; Personalization - Taking responsibility for events outside one's control, leading to unnecessary guilt; Emotional reasoning - Believing that negative emotions reflect objective reality, such as "I feel worthless, therefore I must be worthless." These distortions often create and maintain emotional difficulties by reinforcing maladaptive thoughts and behaviors. CBT seeks to identify, challenge, and modify these cognitive distortions to reduce distress and promote healthier coping strategies. (3) Key Principles of CBT - The theoretical framework of CBT is based on several key principles that guide the therapeutic process: The Cognitive Model posits that attention, interpretation, and memory shape emotional and behavioral responses. A person's perceptions of the world, themselves, and their future can either promote psychological well-being or contribute to distress.¹⁷ The Role of the Therapist - In CBT, the therapist takes on an active and collaborative role. Rather than being an authoritative figure, the therapist works with the client to identify and challenge negative thought patterns and behaviors. This collaboration is fundamental to the process of cognitive restructuring. Goal-Oriented and Structured - CBT is a goal-oriented therapy that is typically short-term, focusing on achieving specific therapeutic outcomes. Each session targets particular cognitive and behavioral issues, making the treatment process transparent and measurable. Focus on the Present - CBT emphasizes the present rather than delving extensively into past experiences. Although past events are considered, the primary focus is on current thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and how they contribute to a person's distress. Emphasis on Self-Efficacy - CBT promotes self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to manage emotions and behaviors. The therapist helps the client develop skills and strategies for coping with distress, reinforcing their confidence in their

¹⁵ Aaron T. Beck et al. (1979): p. 67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

ability to change.¹⁸ (4) Core Components of CBT - CBT employs several key components to help clients achieve their therapeutic goals. These components include cognitive restructuring, behavioral interventions, and mindfulness and relaxation techniques. Cognitive restructuring, also known as cognitive reframing, is a core component of CBT. It involves identifying and challenging distorted thinking patterns and replacing them with more balanced, realistic thoughts. The process typically includes: Identifying automatic thoughts - Recognizing spontaneous, often negative thoughts that arise in response to specific situations; Evaluating evidence - Examining the validity of these automatic thoughts by assessing supporting and contradicting evidence; Generating alternative thoughts - Developing more balanced, constructive ways of thinking; Testing the new thoughts - Applying alternative perspectives in real-life situations to observe their impact on emotions and behaviors. By challenging negative automatic thoughts, clients are better able to manage distress and adopt healthier coping mechanisms. (5) Behavioral Interventions - CBT also incorporates various behavioral techniques aimed at reducing maladaptive behaviors. Two important behavioral interventions include: Behavioral activation - Encouraging engagement in positive, rewarding activities to counteract the withdrawal and avoidance behaviors seen in depression; Exposure therapy - Helping individuals confront fears or anxieties in a gradual and controlled manner, reducing avoidance behaviors and desensitizing fear responses over time.¹⁹ (6) Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques - More recently, mindfulness-based interventions have been integrated into CBT. Mindfulness involves being fully present in the moment and observing one's thoughts and emotions without judgment. This practice increases awareness of cognitive and emotional patterns, leading to greater self-regulation. Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation, are also used in CBT to help clients manage physical symptoms of stress and anxiety.²⁰ (7) Applications of CBT is effective in treating a wide range of psychological disorders, including: depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, substance abuse, chronic pain and sleep disorders CBT's effectiveness has been well-documented through numerous studies, making it the gold standard for treating many psychological conditions. Additionally, CBT has been adapted for various formats, including individual therapy, group therapy, and online therapy, expanding its accessibility and applicability.²¹ In conclusion, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a structured, evidence-based approach grounded in cognitive theory. Its theoretical foundations emphasize the role of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in shaping psychological distress. By identifying and challenging cognitive distortions, CBT helps individuals develop healthier thought patterns, reduce emotional suffering, and engage in

¹⁸ Bandura (1977): p. 191 – 215.

¹⁹ Lewinsohn (1974): p. 157 – 78

²⁰ Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990): p. 135 - 136

²¹ Hofmann et al. (2012): p. 427 – 40.

more adaptive behaviors. The core components of CBT including cognitive restructuring, behavioral interventions, and mindfulness techniques are essential to its therapeutic effectiveness. CBT's widespread applicability across various psychological disorders underscores its significance in contemporary psychotherapy and its enduring impact on mental health treatment.

IV. COMMON GROUND BETWEEN BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND CBT

Buddhist psychology and CBT, despite originating from distinct traditions, share several fundamental principles that allow for meaningful integration: (1) **The Role of Thought:** Both systems emphasize the power of thought in shaping emotional and behavioral outcomes. In CBT, negative cognitive distortions are seen as the root cause of psychological distress, and the aim is to challenge and change these thought patterns.²² Similarly, Buddhist psychology teaches that attachment to thoughts and desires leads to suffering, and through mindfulness and insight, one can observe thoughts without becoming attached to them.²³ (2) **Mindfulness and Awareness:** Mindfulness and Awareness: Mindfulness is a central practice in both Buddhist psychology and contemporary CBT. In Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is essential for developing awareness of thoughts, emotions, and sensations without attachment or aversion. In CBT, mindfulness-based interventions, such as MBCT, promote awareness of the present moment and acceptance of thoughts and emotions without judgment, helping to reduce the emotional reactivity often seen in anxiety and depression.²⁴ (3) **Non-Attachment and Cognitive Restructuring:** Buddhist psychology's focus on non-attachment to thoughts, emotions, and the self aligns with the cognitive restructuring process in CBT. In both approaches, individuals are encouraged to develop a less reactive relationship with their thoughts, recognizing that they are transient and not inherently tied to one's identity or emotional state.²⁵ (4) **The Concept of Change:** Both Buddhist psychology and CBT acknowledge that change is possible through conscious effort. In Buddhist teachings, the path to the cessation of suffering involves cultivating wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline through practices such as meditation.²⁶ In CBT, change is facilitated through techniques like cognitive restructuring and behavioral activation, which encourage individuals to alter negative thinking patterns and engage in positive activities to improve mental well-being.²⁷

V. INTEGRATION: MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY (MBCT)

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) represents a successful

²² Aaron T. Beck et al. (1979): p. 67.

²³ Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990): p. 135 - 136.

²⁴ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p.120.

²⁵ Dalai Lama (2001): p. 15. & Aaron T. Beck et al. (1979): p. 67.

²⁶ Rupert Gethin (1998): p. 60.

²⁷ Lewinsohn (1974): p. 157 – 78.

integration of Buddhist psychology and CBT.²⁸ MBCT combines mindfulness meditation techniques derived from Buddhist practice with the cognitive restructuring strategies of CBT. The primary goal of MBCT is to help individuals prevent relapse into depression by fostering mindfulness and non-attachment to thoughts and emotions, which are often precursors to depressive episodes. For MBCT incorporates mindfulness meditation practices, such as body scanning, mindful breathing, and mindful observation of thoughts. These practices help individuals become more aware of their thoughts and emotions in the present moment, without judgment or attachment. By observing thoughts as they arise and pass away, individuals can avoid getting caught in the cycle of rumination and negative thinking that often leads to depression. (1) Cognitive Restructuring: MBCT also incorporates traditional CBT techniques, such as cognitive restructuring, to help individuals identify and challenge negative thought patterns. Through this process, clients can develop more adaptive and realistic thoughts, reducing the likelihood of emotional distress.²⁹ (2) Prevention of Depressive Relapse: Research has demonstrated that MBCT is effective in preventing relapse in individuals with recurrent depression. A study found that individuals who completed an MBCT program had a significantly lower risk of relapse compared to those who received traditional treatment. The combination of mindfulness and cognitive restructuring helps individuals build resilience against future depressive episodes by fostering a non-reactive relationship with their thoughts and emotions.³⁰ In conclusion, the integration of Buddhist psychology and CBT offers a comprehensive and holistic approach to mental health treatment. Both systems share a focus on the role of thought in emotional regulation, the importance of mindfulness and awareness, and the goal of non-attachment to thoughts and the self. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) represents a successful fusion of these two approaches, combining the wisdom of Buddhist mindfulness practices with the practical tools of CBT to prevent depressive relapse and enhance emotional well-being.

VI.APPLICATIONSINTREATINGEMOTIONALANDBEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS

The integration of Buddhist psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in treating emotional and behavioral disorders has led to significant advancements in clinical practice. By combining the mindfulness-based principles of Buddhist teachings with the cognitive restructuring strategies of CBT, therapists have been able to develop more holistic and effective interventions for a range of emotional and behavioral disorders. The application of these integrated approaches is particularly prominent in the treatment of mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and stress-related conditions, as well as in promoting overall emotional regulation and well-being.

²⁸ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p. 120.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Kuyken et al. (2008): p. 966 – 74.

Treatment of Mood Disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder, often involves persistent negative thought patterns, emotional dysregulation, and dysfunctional behaviors. Traditional CBT techniques have been widely used to treat these disorders by targeting cognitive distortions and promoting behavioral activation. However, when combined with mindfulness practices derived from Buddhist psychology, the treatment approach becomes more comprehensive and sustainable. (1) Depression: One of the most well-established applications of integrating Buddhist psychology with CBT is in the treatment of depression, particularly through mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT). MBCT aims to prevent relapse in individuals with recurrent depression by teaching clients to observe their thoughts and emotions without judgment or attachment. This non-judgmental awareness helps individuals detach from negative thoughts and emotional patterns that trigger depressive episodes.³¹ Buddhist principles of impermanence and non-self further enhance this process by encouraging individuals to see their thoughts and emotions as temporary and not an intrinsic part of their identity. Studies have shown that MBCT significantly reduces the risk of relapse in individuals with recurrent depression, demonstrating the efficacy of combining mindfulness and cognitive restructuring.³² (2) Bipolar disorder is characterized by extreme mood swings between manic and depressive episodes. While traditional CBT focuses on managing the cognitive distortions and behaviors associated with these episodes, the integration of Buddhist mindfulness practices can help individuals develop greater emotional stability and self-regulation. Mindfulness meditation helps individuals observe and accept their emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them, which can be particularly beneficial during manic or depressive episodes.³³ By incorporating mindfulness practices, individuals with bipolar disorder may learn to manage emotional fluctuations more effectively and prevent the escalation of mood episodes.

Treatment of Anxiety Disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder (SAD), involves excessive worry, fear, and avoidance behaviors. Traditional CBT interventions for anxiety focus on cognitive restructuring to challenge irrational thoughts and behaviors and exposure therapy to reduce avoidance. The integration of mindfulness-based strategies derived from Buddhist psychology can enhance these treatments by helping individuals develop greater awareness of their anxiety and respond to it with acceptance rather than avoidance. (1) Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD): Individuals with GAD often experience excessive worry and rumination about future events. Mindfulness practices, as outlined in Buddhist Psychology, encourage individuals to focus on the present moment and observe their thoughts without becoming attached to them. This practice of mindfulness can help reduce the constant stream of worry and rumination

³¹ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p. 120.

³² Kuyken et al. (2008): p. 966 – 74.

³³ Dalai Lama (2001): p. 15.

that characterizes GAD. By fostering acceptance and non-attachment to anxious thoughts, clients can reduce their anxiety levels and develop a more balanced perspective on their fears.³⁴ Additionally, mindfulness meditation can help regulate the physiological symptoms of anxiety, such as rapid breathing and tension, by encouraging relaxation and self-awareness. (2) Panic attacks are characterized by sudden and intense fear, often accompanied by physical symptoms such as shortness of breath, dizziness, and chest pain. In CBT, clients with panic disorder are taught to identify and challenge the catastrophic thoughts that trigger panic attacks. The integration of Buddhist mindfulness practices can further enhance this process by helping individuals observe their bodily sensations and thoughts in the moment, without labelling them as dangerous or threatening.³⁵ This mindfulness-based approach helps individuals develop a more balanced and non-reactive relationship with panic symptoms, reducing their intensity and frequency over time. (3) Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD): Individuals with SAD experience intense fear of social situations, often due to concerns about being judged or negatively evaluated by others. In CBT, exposure therapy is used to gradually desensitize individuals to feared social situations. The addition of mindfulness practices helps individuals accept their anxiety in social situations without judgment or avoidance. Buddhist Psychology's emphasis on non-self and impermanence encourages individuals to recognize that their social anxieties are not fixed aspects of their identity and that social situations are temporary.³⁶ This perspective helps individuals develop greater self-compassion and resilience, which can reduce the intensity of their anxiety.

Treatment of Stress-Related Disorders, stress is a significant contributor to emotional and behavioral disorders, and it often leads to or exacerbates conditions such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Integrating mindfulness practices from Buddhist Psychology with CBT techniques can offer a comprehensive approach to stress management by addressing both the cognitive and emotional aspects of stress. (1) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a condition that results from experiencing or witnessing traumatic events. It is characterized by intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, and heightened arousal. Traditional CBT for PTSD often involves cognitive restructuring and exposure therapy. However, incorporating mindfulness techniques from Buddhist Psychology can help individuals develop a more compassionate and non-reactive relationship with their traumatic memories. Mindfulness meditation encourages individuals to observe their thoughts and emotions related to the trauma without becoming overwhelmed or detached from the present moment.³⁷ This process fosters emotional regulation and can reduce the intensity of PTSD symptoms. Studies have shown that mindfulness-based

³⁴ Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990): p. 135 - 136.

³⁵ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p. 120.

³⁶ Dalai Lama (2001): p. 15.

³⁷ Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990): p. 135 - 136.

interventions are effective in reducing PTSD symptoms and improving overall well-being.³⁸ Chronic Stress: Chronic stress can lead to a variety of physical and mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and cardiovascular disease. Mindfulness-based interventions that integrate Buddhist Psychology encourage individuals to focus on the present moment and practice self-compassion. This approach helps individuals reduce their stress levels by fostering greater awareness of their stress triggers and encouraging a non-judgmental response to these stressors.³⁹ In addition, behavioural activation techniques from CBT can help individuals engage in stress-reducing activities, such as exercise or relaxation, thereby enhancing emotional resilience.

VII. APPLICATION IN PROMOTING EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND WELL-BEING

Beyond treating specific emotional and behavioural disorders, the integration of Buddhist Psychology and CBT can also be applied to promoting general emotional regulation and well-being. Both approaches emphasize the importance of cultivating mindfulness, self-awareness, and acceptance, which are essential for emotional balance. (1) Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences healthily and adaptively. Both Buddhist Psychology and CBT teach individuals to observe their emotions without becoming overwhelmed or reactive. By practicing mindfulness, individuals can develop greater awareness of their emotional states and learn to respond with equanimity and self-compassion.⁴⁰ This practice of emotional regulation can prevent the escalation of negative emotions and promote psychological flexibility, enabling individuals to adapt more effectively to changing circumstances. (2) Overall Well-Being: The integration of Buddhist Psychology and CBT fosters a holistic approach to mental health that promotes overall well-being. Mindfulness practices help individuals cultivate a sense of inner peace and acceptance, while CBT techniques help individuals develop healthier thought patterns and behaviours. Together, these approaches enhance psychological resilience, reduce emotional distress, and promote greater life satisfaction.⁴¹ The integration of Buddhist Psychology and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy offers a promising approach for treating emotional and behavioural disorders. By combining the cognitive restructuring techniques of CBT with the mindfulness-based practices of Buddhist Psychology, therapists can help individuals address the root causes of emotional distress, develop healthier coping mechanisms, and improve overall psychological functioning. This integrated approach has shown particular promise in treating mood disorders, anxiety disorders, stress-related conditions, and in promoting emotional regulation and well-being. As research continues to explore the benefits of this integration, the application of

³⁸ King et al. (2013): p. 1011 – 19.

³⁹ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p. 120.

⁴⁰ Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990a): p. 135 - 136.

⁴¹ Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p. 120.

Buddhist Psychology and CBT will likely become an increasingly valuable tool in the field of mental health.

VIII. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND CASE STUDIES

The integration of Buddhist Psychology and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been supported by a growing body of empirical evidence, particularly through the development of mindfulness-based therapies such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). Empirical research has explored the effectiveness of combining these two approaches in treating various emotional and behavioral disorders, with promising results across a range of conditions including depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders. This section reviews key studies and case examples that highlight the empirical support for this integrated approach.

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Depression is one of the most well-known integrations of Buddhist mindfulness principles with CBT. MBCT was specifically designed to reduce the risk of relapse in individuals who have recovered from depression. It combines mindfulness meditation, a core component of Buddhist Psychology, with the cognitive restructuring methods of CBT. MBCT helps individuals become more aware of their thought patterns and emotional reactions without getting caught up in them, which is in line with Buddhist concepts of impermanence and non-attachment. (1) Empirical Evidence: A key study demonstrated the effectiveness of MBCT in preventing relapse in individuals with recurrent depression. In a randomized controlled trial, participants who received MBCT showed significantly fewer depressive relapses compared to those who received treatment as usual. The study concluded that MBCT, by teaching individuals to observe their thoughts non-judgmentally and recognize early signs of depression, helped them manage negative thought patterns and break the cycle of depressive relapse. This is consistent with Buddhist teachings of mindfulness and non-attachment, which encourage individuals to let go of unhealthy thought patterns rather than trying to suppress them.⁴² (2) Case Study: A follow-up study further confirmed the long-term benefits of MBCT, showing that it not only prevents relapse in those with recurrent depression but also improves overall well-being. These findings underscore the importance of mindfulness, as taught in Buddhist Psychology, in promoting emotional regulation and mental resilience.⁴³

Mindfulness and Anxiety Disorders, including Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder, have been effectively treated with CBT-based interventions that incorporate mindfulness. Mindfulness helps individuals gain awareness of their anxiety and view it with acceptance rather than resistance, a practice that aligns with the Buddhist principle of acknowledging suffering without attachment. (1) Empirical Evidence: A study reviewed the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions

⁴² Zindel V. Segal et al. (2002): p. 120.

⁴³ Kuyken et al. (2008): p. 966 – 74.

(MBIs) in treating anxiety disorders. The authors found that MBIs significantly reduced anxiety symptoms across a range of anxiety disorders, including GAD and social anxiety disorder. The study highlighted that mindfulness practice helps individuals increase their awareness of bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions, which allows them to disengage from automatic, anxious reactions. This finding aligns with Buddhist Psychology's emphasis on mindfulness as a tool for cultivating greater awareness and acceptance of one's internal experiences.⁴⁴ (2) Case Study: Additionally, conducted a study that specifically focused on mindfulness meditation in individuals with social anxiety disorder. They found that individuals who engaged in mindfulness meditation showed significant improvements in self-reported anxiety levels and experienced reduced physiological symptoms of anxiety during social situations. This finding supports the notion that mindfulness can be a powerful tool for managing anxiety by fostering acceptance and non-judgment toward anxious feelings, rather than exacerbating them with avoidance or negative self-judgment.⁴⁵

Case Studies in the Treatment of Stress-Related Disorders - Mindfulness-based interventions, particularly those integrating Buddhist principles, are effective in treating stress-related disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and chronic stress. The use of mindfulness meditation allows individuals to cultivate a sense of calm and resilience in the face of stress, in line with Buddhist teachings of equanimity and non-attachment. (1) Empirical Evidence: A notable study examined the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Exposure Therapy (MBET) for individuals with PTSD. MBET integrates mindfulness practices with exposure therapy, a standard CBT technique for treating PTSD. The study found that participants who received MBET showed significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, including intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal, and avoidance behaviors. The mindfulness component of MBET allowed participants to develop a more accepting and less reactive relationship with their traumatic memories, which helped reduce emotional distress.⁴⁶ (2) Case Study: A case study explored the use of mindfulness in treating chronic stress and burnout in healthcare professionals. The study involved a healthcare worker who had been experiencing high levels of stress, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. The participant engaged in a mindfulness meditation program that incorporated Buddhist principles of acceptance, non-attachment, and compassion. Throughout the intervention, the participant reported significant improvements in emotional regulation, decreased stress levels, and an overall increase in well-being. This case study highlights how mindfulness, integrated with principles from Buddhist Psychology, can be an effective tool for managing chronic stress in high-pressure professions.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Hofmann et al. (2010): p. 169 – 83.

⁴⁵ Goldin and Gross (2010): p. 311 – 30.

⁴⁶ King et al. (2013): p. 1011 – 19.

⁴⁷ Davis and Hayes (2011): p. 573 – 86.

The Role of Mindfulness in Enhancing Emotional Regulation is a key component in the treatment of various emotional disorders, and mindfulness practices derived from Buddhist Psychology are particularly effective in promoting emotional self-regulation. Mindfulness allows individuals to observe their emotions without becoming overwhelmed or reacting impulsively, which is crucial in managing mood swings, anger, and anxiety. (1) Empirical Evidence: A study examined the relationship between mindfulness and emotional regulation in individuals with emotional dysregulation, including those with borderline personality disorder (BPD). The study found that mindfulness training significantly improved emotional regulation and reduced impulsivity in participants with BPD. These findings are consistent with Buddhist teachings of mindfulness, which emphasize observing emotions without reacting or becoming attached to them.⁴⁸ (2) Case Study: Another study focused on the effects of mindfulness training on emotional regulation in individuals with GAD. The study found that participants who received mindfulness-based interventions showed significant improvements in their ability to regulate emotions, leading to reduced anxiety and increased well-being. These results suggest that mindfulness, as taught in Buddhist Psychology, enhances emotional self-awareness and fosters emotional balance, making it an essential tool for managing anxiety and other emotional disorders.⁴⁹

Applications in Treating Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) are responsive to integrated approaches combining mindfulness with cognitive restructuring techniques from CBT. Mindfulness helps individuals become more aware of their cravings and emotional triggers, allowing them to respond with greater awareness and less impulsivity. (1) Empirical Evidence: A meta-analysis reviewed the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in treating SUDs. The analysis found that mindfulness interventions significantly reduced substance use and improved psychological well-being. The authors noted that mindfulness helps individuals recognize the early signs of craving or emotional distress and respond with acceptance rather than acting on these impulses. This aligns with Buddhist teachings of mindfulness and non-attachment, which encourage individuals to recognize the impermanence of their cravings and emotional states and to avoid identifying with them.⁵⁰ (2) Case Study: A case study examined the use of mindfulness-based relapse prevention (MBRP) for individuals recovering from alcohol use disorder. The participant, a middle-aged man with a history of alcohol abuse, engaged in MBRP sessions and reported a significant reduction in alcohol cravings and a greater ability to manage stress without turning to alcohol. The study concluded that mindfulness, integrated with CBT techniques, helped the individual develop greater emotional regulation and avoid relapse, demonstrating the

⁴⁸ Davis and Hayes (2011): p. 573 – 86.

⁴⁹ Roemer et al. (2008): p. 1036 – 48.

⁵⁰ Zgierska et al. (2008): p. 266 – 294.

effectiveness of Buddhist mindfulness practices in substance use treatment.⁵¹ The integration of Buddhist Psychology and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has been empirically validated in the treatment of various emotional and behavioral disorders. Mindfulness-based interventions, such as MBCT and MBET, have demonstrated effectiveness in treating depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD, chronic stress, and substance use disorders. Through the cultivation of awareness, non-attachment, and emotional regulation, individuals can develop more adaptive coping mechanisms and greater psychological resilience.

IX. CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN INTEGRATING BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

Offers promising therapeutic benefits, particularly through the incorporation of mindfulness, emotional regulation, and non-attachment. However, blending these two distinct approaches poses several challenges, both in terms of clinical practice and ethical considerations. These challenges include cultural compatibility, potential for misapplication, and the balance between spiritual and psychological elements. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the efficacy and ethical soundness of the integrated therapeutic approach. (1) Cultural Compatibility and Applicability - One of the primary challenges in integrating Buddhist psychology with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the cultural compatibility of Buddhist principles within Western therapeutic frameworks. Buddhist psychology, deeply rooted in the spiritual and philosophical traditions of Buddhism, emphasizes concepts such as non-attachment, impermanence, and the cessation of suffering. These principles may be unfamiliar to clients in predominantly non-Buddhist contexts, and their application may need to be adapted to respect the cultural and religious beliefs of the individual. For instance, the Buddhist notion of *anattā* (non-self or the absence of a permanent, unchanging self) may be difficult for individuals from Western cultures to accept or incorporate into their worldview. In CBT, clients are encouraged to identify and restructure maladaptive cognitive patterns, but the Buddhist emphasis on transcending the self may be in tension with the CBT goal of self-improvement and mastery over one's thoughts. Balancing these potentially conflicting perspectives requires careful, sensitive application of the integrated approach. For solution, one way to address cultural compatibility issues is to frame Buddhist principles in more secular terms that do not require adherence to Buddhist religious beliefs. For example, the concept of mindfulness can be emphasized as a universal skill for enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation, independent of religious context. Additionally, therapists should engage in cultural competence training to ensure they understand their clients' worldviews and can adjust their interventions accordingly. (2) Potential for Misapplication of Buddhist Principles - Another challenge lies in the potential misapplication or oversimplification of Buddhist teachings in the therapeutic

⁵¹ Sarah Bowen et al. (2014): 88

context. Buddhist Psychology is a rich and nuanced system that encompasses more than just mindfulness meditation. It includes complex teachings on suffering, ethical conduct, and spiritual development that may not align with the goals or practices of CBT. Over-simplifying or reducing these teachings to a tool for emotional regulation may undermine their deeper philosophical and spiritual meanings. For example, the Buddhist practice of detachment can be misunderstood as emotional numbing or avoidance, which is contrary to the therapeutic aims of CBT, which encourages confronting and processing emotions. In integrating Buddhist Psychology into CBT, there is a risk that the principle of non-attachment might be mistakenly applied in a way that encourages avoidance of uncomfortable emotions, rather than accepting and dealing with them healthily. For solution, to prevent misapplication, therapists should receive adequate training in both Buddhist teachings and CBT to ensure a deep understanding of how the two approaches can be effectively combined. Therapists should be clear about the purpose of Buddhist principles, such as mindfulness and non-attachment, and how they align with CBT's goals of emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring. The aim should be to incorporate Buddhist practices that enhance awareness, rather than promoting avoidance or suppression of emotions. (3) Therapist Training and Competence - Another significant challenge is the need for specialized training for therapists who wish to integrate Buddhist Psychology and CBT. While both CBT and mindfulness-based interventions have shown efficacy in treating a range of disorders, the integration of Buddhist teachings into clinical practice requires a high level of expertise in both traditions. Therapists must not only understand CBT techniques but also have a comprehensive knowledge of Buddhist psychology, meditation practices, and the underlying philosophical principles. The training of therapists in this integrated approach is crucial for ensuring that they can deliver treatment in a way that respects the integrity of both CBT and Buddhist Psychology. Without adequate training, therapists may misapply Buddhist principles or overlook key aspects of CBT, leading to ineffective or potentially harmful interventions. For solution, the development of comprehensive training programs that address both CBT and Buddhist Psychology is essential. These programs should focus on the theory and practice of both approaches, as well as ethical considerations, to ensure that therapists are competent in integrating the two. Ongoing supervision and professional development opportunities will also be important for maintaining the quality and effectiveness of the therapy. (4) Balancing Psychological and Spiritual Elements - The integration of Buddhist Psychology into CBT can also create ethical dilemmas related to the balance between psychological and spiritual elements. Buddhist teachings are inherently spiritual, and their use in a therapeutic context may raise concerns about the potential for spiritual bypassing - when individuals use spiritual practices to avoid confronting unresolved psychological issues. While mindfulness and other Buddhist techniques can enhance emotional regulation and mental clarity, they should not be used as a substitute for addressing core psychological issues such as trauma, grief, or unresolved conflicts. Furthermore, therapists must be mindful

of the boundary between therapy and spiritual guidance. While mindfulness meditation is a secular practice in many therapeutic contexts, other aspects of Buddhist psychology, such as teachings on reincarnation or the afterlife, may not align with the therapeutic goals of CBT, which focuses on the here-and-now and the cognitive restructuring of maladaptive thought patterns. For solution, ethical practice in integrating Buddhist Psychology and CBT requires clear distinctions between psychological therapy and spiritual guidance. Therapists should avoid encroaching on spiritual or religious domains unless explicitly invited by the client, and they should focus on using Buddhist principles that are directly relevant to the therapeutic goals, such as mindfulness, compassion, and emotional regulation. Additionally, therapists should be trained to recognize when clients may benefit more from traditional psychological interventions rather than spiritual guidance. (5) Informed Consent and Client Expectations - Informed consent is a critical ethical consideration in any therapeutic relationship, and it is especially important when integrating Buddhist practices with CBT. Clients must be fully informed about the nature of the therapy and the role of Buddhist teachings in the treatment process. Some clients may have strong religious or spiritual beliefs that could influence their receptivity to Buddhist practices, while others may be more focused on the psychological aspects of therapy. It is essential that clients understand the integration of these approaches and that their expectations align with the therapeutic goals. For example, a client may enter therapy with the expectation that Buddhist mindfulness practices will provide a spiritual solution to their problems, rather than a psychological one. Misalignment between client expectations and therapeutic outcomes could lead to dissatisfaction or disengagement from treatment. For solution, clear communication about the goals of therapy and the role of Buddhist principles is crucial for informed consent. Therapists should take time to discuss the specific practices that will be used in therapy, explain their psychological benefits, and ensure that clients are comfortable with these practices. Clients should be encouraged to ask questions about the integration of Buddhist Psychology and CBT, and therapists should be prepared to adapt the approach based on client preferences and needs. (6) Cultural Sensitivity and Potential for Cultural Appropriation- Another ethical consideration is the risk of cultural appropriation. Buddhist teachings, which have their roots in the cultural and religious traditions of Asia, may be misappropriated when adapted for therapeutic use in non-Buddhist settings. Therapists must be careful to respect the cultural origins of Buddhist practices and avoid presenting them as mere therapeutic tools without an understanding of their cultural and spiritual context. For solution, therapists should approach the integration of Buddhist Psychology with cultural sensitivity and respect for its origins. This includes acknowledging the cultural and religious significance of Buddhist practices, using them in a culturally appropriate manner, and being transparent about their secular use in therapy. In conclusion, integrating Buddhist Psychology with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy offers powerful therapeutic tools for addressing emotional and behavioral disorders, but it comes with several

challenges and ethical considerations. Issues related to cultural compatibility, misapplication of Buddhist principles, therapist training, and balancing psychological and spiritual elements must be carefully managed to ensure the ethical delivery of therapy. By prioritizing informed consent, cultural sensitivity, and ongoing professional development, therapists can effectively navigate these challenges and provide clients with an integrative therapeutic experience that respects both psychological and spiritual dimensions.

X. CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN INTEGRATING BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Offers promising therapeutic benefits, particularly through the incorporation of mindfulness, emotional regulation, and non-attachment. However, blending these two distinct approaches poses several challenges, both in terms of clinical practice and ethical considerations. These challenges include cultural compatibility, the potential for misapplication, and the balance between spiritual and psychological elements. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the efficacy and ethical soundness of the integrated therapeutic approach. (1) Cultural Compatibility and Applicability - One of the primary challenges in integrating Buddhist psychology with CBT is the cultural compatibility of Buddhist principles within Western therapeutic frameworks. Buddhist psychology, deeply rooted in the spiritual and philosophical traditions of Buddhism, emphasizes concepts such as non-attachment, impermanence, and the cessation of suffering. These principles may be unfamiliar to clients in predominantly non-Buddhist contexts, and their application may need to be adapted to respect the cultural and religious beliefs of the individual. For instance, the Buddhist notion of *anattā* (non-self or the absence of a permanent, unchanging self) may be difficult for individuals from Western cultures to accept or incorporate into their worldview. In CBT, clients are encouraged to identify and restructure maladaptive cognitive patterns, but the Buddhist emphasis on transcending the self may be in tension with the CBT goal of self-improvement and mastery over one's thoughts. Balancing these potentially conflicting perspectives requires careful, sensitive application of the integrated approach.⁵² For solution, one way to address cultural compatibility issues is to frame Buddhist principles in more secular terms that do not require adherence to Buddhist religious beliefs. For example, the concept of mindfulness can be emphasized as a universal skill for enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation, independent of religious context. Additionally, therapists should engage in cultural competence training to ensure they understand their clients' worldviews and can adjust their interventions accordingly.⁵³ (2) Potential for Misapplication of Buddhist Principles - Another challenge lies in the potential misapplication or oversimplification of Buddhist teachings in the therapeutic context. Buddhist

⁵² Kabat-Zinn (2003): p. 119 – 29.

⁵³ Steven C. Hayes et al. (2006): p. 85.

Psychology is a rich and nuanced system that encompasses more than just mindfulness meditation. It includes complex teachings on suffering, ethical conduct, and spiritual development that may not align with the goals or practices of CBT. Over-simplifying or reducing these teachings to a tool for emotional regulation may undermine their deeper philosophical and spiritual meanings.⁵⁴ For example, the Buddhist practice of detachment can be misunderstood as emotional numbing or avoidance, which is contrary to the therapeutic aims of CBT, which encourages confronting and processing emotions. In integrating Buddhist Psychology into CBT, there is a risk that the principle of non-attachment might be mistakenly applied in a way that encourages avoidance of uncomfortable emotions, rather than accepting and dealing with them healthily.⁵⁵ For solution, to prevent misapplication, therapists should receive adequate training in both Buddhist teachings and CBT to ensure a deep understanding of how the two approaches can be effectively combined. Therapists should be clear about the purpose of Buddhist principles, such as mindfulness and non-attachment, and how they align with CBT's goals of emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring.⁵⁶ The aim should be to incorporate Buddhist practices that enhance awareness, rather than promoting avoidance or suppression of emotions. (3) Therapist Training and Competence - Another significant challenge is the need for specialized training for therapists who wish to integrate Buddhist Psychology and CBT. While both CBT and mindfulness-based interventions have shown efficacy in treating a range of disorders, the integration of Buddhist teachings into clinical practice requires a high level of expertise in both traditions. Therapists must not only understand CBT techniques but also have a comprehensive knowledge of Buddhist psychology, meditation practices, and the underlying philosophical principles.⁵⁷ The training of therapists in this integrated approach is crucial for ensuring that they can deliver treatment in a way that respects the integrity of both CBT and Buddhist Psychology. Without adequate training, therapists may misapply Buddhist principles or overlook key aspects of CBT, leading to ineffective or potentially harmful interventions.⁵⁸ For solution, the development of comprehensive training programs that address both CBT and Buddhist Psychology is essential. These programs should focus on the theory and practice of both approaches, as well as ethical considerations, to ensure that therapists are competent in integrating the two. Ongoing supervision and professional development opportunities will also be important for maintaining the quality and effectiveness of the therapy.⁵⁹ (4) Balancing Psychological and Spiritual Elements - The integration of Buddhist Psychology into CBT can also create ethical dilemmas related to the balance between psychological and

⁵⁴ Gergen and McNamee (2000): p. 1 – 10.

⁵⁵ Shapiro et al. (2006): p. 373 – 86.

⁵⁶ Mark Cullen (2011): p. 30.

⁵⁷ Ronald D. Siegel (2007): p. 105.

⁵⁸ Baer (2003): p. 125 – 43.

⁵⁹ Hofmann, Grossman, and Hinton (2011): p. 63 – 70.

spiritual elements. Buddhist teachings are inherently spiritual, and their use in a therapeutic context may raise concerns about the potential for spiritual bypassing - when individuals use spiritual practices to avoid confronting unresolved psychological issues. While mindfulness and other Buddhist techniques can enhance emotional regulation and mental clarity, they should not be used as a substitute for addressing core psychological issues such as trauma, grief, or unresolved conflicts.⁶⁰ Furthermore, therapists must be mindful of the boundary between therapy and spiritual guidance. While mindfulness meditation is a secular practice in many therapeutic contexts, other aspects of Buddhist psychology, such as teachings on reincarnation or the afterlife, may not align with the therapeutic goals of CBT, which focuses on the here-and-now and the cognitive restructuring of maladaptive thought patterns. For solution, ethical practice in integrating Buddhist Psychology and CBT requires clear distinctions between psychological therapy and spiritual guidance. Therapists should avoid encroaching on spiritual or religious domains unless explicitly invited by the client, and they should focus on using Buddhist principles that are directly relevant to the therapeutic goals, such as mindfulness, compassion, and emotional regulation.⁶¹ Additionally, therapists should be trained to recognize when clients may benefit more from traditional psychological interventions rather than spiritual guidance. (5) Informed Consent and Client Expectations - Informed consent is a critical ethical consideration in any therapeutic relationship, and it is especially important when integrating Buddhist practices with CBT. Clients must be fully informed about the nature of the therapy and the role of Buddhist teachings in the treatment process. Some clients may have strong religious or spiritual beliefs that could influence their receptivity to Buddhist practices, while others may be more focused on the psychological aspects of therapy. It is essential that clients understand the integration of these approaches and that their expectations align with the therapeutic goals.⁶² For example, a client may enter therapy with the expectation that Buddhist mindfulness practices will provide a spiritual solution to their problems, rather than a psychological one. Misalignment between client expectations and therapeutic outcomes could lead to dissatisfaction or disengagement from treatment. For solution, clear communication about the goals of therapy and the role of Buddhist principles is crucial for informed consent. Therapists should take time to discuss the specific practices that will be used in therapy, explain their psychological benefits, and ensure that clients are comfortable with these practices. Clients should be encouraged to ask questions about the integration of Buddhist Psychology and CBT, and therapists should be prepared to adapt the approach based on client preferences and needs.⁶³ (6) Cultural Sensitivity and Potential for Cultural Appropriation - Another ethical consideration is the risk of cultural

⁶⁰ Vago and Silbersweig (2012): p. 87 – 108.

⁶¹ Christopher K. Germer et al. (2005): p. 95.

⁶² Baer (2003): p. 125 – 43.

⁶³ Shapiro et al. (2006): p. 373 – 86.

appropriation. Buddhist teachings, which have their roots in the cultural and religious traditions of Asia, may be misappropriated when adapted for therapeutic use in non-Buddhist settings. Therapists must be careful to respect the cultural origins of Buddhist practices and avoid presenting them as mere therapeutic tools without an understanding of their cultural and spiritual context.⁶⁴ For solution, therapists should approach the integration of Buddhist Psychology with cultural sensitivity and respect for its origins. This includes acknowledging the cultural and religious significance of Buddhist practices, using them in a culturally appropriate manner, and being transparent about their secular use in therapy.⁶⁵ In conclusion, integrating Buddhist Psychology with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy offers powerful therapeutic tools for addressing emotional and behavioral disorders, but it comes with several challenges and ethical considerations. Issues related to cultural compatibility, misapplication of Buddhist principles, therapist training, and balancing psychological and spiritual elements must be carefully managed to ensure the ethical delivery of therapy. By prioritizing informed consent, cultural sensitivity, and ongoing professional development, therapists can effectively navigate these challenges and provide clients with an integrative therapeutic experience that respects both psychological and spiritual dimensions.

XI. CONCLUSION

Buddhist Psychology and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) both emphasize the influence of thoughts on emotional and behavioural experiences, yet they come from different traditions. The integration of these two approaches offers a unique therapeutic model that combines ancient wisdom and modern psychological techniques. Buddhist Psychology focuses on mindfulness, non-attachment, and the impermanence of suffering, while CBT relies on cognitive restructuring and emotional regulation. Together, these frameworks provide a holistic approach to improving psychological well-being, combining the mindfulness-based practices of Buddhism with the evidence-based techniques of CBT. The integration highlights mindfulness as a central element. Mindfulness, a Buddhist practice, allows individuals to observe their thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without judgment. This process helps clients detach from automatic thought patterns and maladaptive behaviors, which aligns with the goals of CBT - recognizing and challenging cognitive distortions. By combining these techniques, clients can regulate their emotions and gain a better understanding of their thoughts, leading to reduced anxiety and improved mental health. Buddhist Psychology also teaches the impermanence of experiences, encouraging clients to recognize that negative emotions are transient. This understanding complements CBT's focus on identifying and addressing cognitive distortions, enabling clients to challenge thought patterns that exacerbate emotional suffering. Together, these approaches help individuals shift their responses to thoughts and emotions,

⁶⁴ Hick (2004): p. 1 – 21.

⁶⁵ Christopher K. Germer et al. (2005): p. 95.

offering long-lasting improvements in psychological well-being. Despite the benefits of integrating Buddhist Psychology and CBT, there are challenges to consider. One challenge is the cultural compatibility of Buddhist concepts in a Western therapeutic context. Some Buddhist teachings, such as non-self (*anatta*) and the cessation of suffering, may conflict with the individualistic nature of Western models. Therapists must carefully adapt these concepts to ensure they are meaningful and accessible to clients. Furthermore, there is a risk of misapplying Buddhist practices, particularly the principle of non-attachment, which could be misunderstood as emotional detachment. Such misapplications could undermine the therapeutic process, requiring therapists to be well-trained in both Buddhist teachings and CBT. Another challenge is the risk of spiritual bypassing, where clients may use spiritual practices to avoid addressing deeper psychological issues. Therapists must ensure mindfulness is used as a tool for emotional regulation and not as an escape from unresolved trauma. The integration must also be culturally sensitive, avoiding the misrepresentation of Buddhist teachings and ensuring that they are applied in a way that respects their origins. The ethical principle of informed consent is crucial, as clients need to understand the role of Buddhist practices in their therapy and have realistic expectations. In conclusion, integrating Buddhist Psychology and CBT offers a promising approach to treating emotional and behavioral disorders. By blending mindfulness with cognitive restructuring, this integrative model can enhance emotional regulation and overall well-being. However, the cultural and ethical challenges must be addressed with care. With appropriate training and cultural competence, therapists can successfully integrate these two powerful traditions to offer transformative therapeutic experiences for their clients.

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BUDDHIST-DERIVED MEDITATION INTEGRATED MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY FOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDERS IN ADULTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIALS

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Abstract:

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) has shown efficacy in the treatment of depressive disorders. However, the integration of Buddhist meditation practices and techniques into MBCT and their potential benefits have not been systematically explored. This systematic review examines the potential benefits of MBCT that integrates Buddhist-derived meditation practices and techniques for treating depressive disorders in adults. A comprehensive literature search was conducted across six electronic databases to identify randomized controlled trials (RCTs) evaluating MBCT with Theravāda Buddhist meditation components for adult depression. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, and the methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the Cochrane Risk-of-Bias tool. In total 1151 screened studies, 18 met the inclusion criteria. The MBCT demonstrated effectiveness in reducing depressive symptoms, prevention of relapse rates, and improving overall mental well-being compared with treatment as usual (TAU). In particular, MBCT incorporating Buddhist practices showed efficacy in reducing rumination, enhancing emotional regulation, and increasing mindfulness and bare-attention skill. The integration of Buddhist-derived meditation practices into MBCT appears to be an effective approach for managing depression in adults. This intertwined intervention shows promise in managing acute depressive symptoms, reducing thought rumination,

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regulating emotions, and enhancing mindfulness. Further research is needed to fully elucidate the specific contributions of Buddhist meditation practices in clinical settings.

Keywords: *Buddhist meditation, MBCT, depression, adults, RCTs.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Depression is a mental disorder prevalent among adults,¹ with a global prevalence of 5% in the general population.² The condition significantly affects public health, leading to impaired functioning, reduced quality of life, and increased morbidity and mortality.³ Depressive disorders are the primary cause of disabilities worldwide. Global Burden of Disease (GBD) data revealed a substantial upward trend in the prevalence of depressive disorders, escalating from 170.8 million individuals in 1990 to 279.8 million in 2019.⁴

Pharmacotherapy, particularly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), is the primary treatment for the management of depressive symptoms.⁵ While combining medication and psychotherapy is the most effective, psychological interventions such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) are effective for mild to moderate depressive disorders.⁶ Supportive therapy and psychoeducational interventions that complement pharmacological treatment are recommended in severe cases.⁷

MBCT is an evidence-based eight-week psychotherapeutic intervention developed to manage depressive disorders and relapse.⁸ MBCT integrates principles from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with mindfulness practices derived from Buddhist meditation traditions, particularly the four foundations of mindfulness practices described in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.⁹ The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, comes in *Dīgha Nikāya*, and *Majjhima Nikāya*, provides detailed instructions on fundamental Buddhist meditation practice and techniques.¹⁰ The discourse explains the four foundations of mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*) and emphasizes the following direct path.¹¹

¹ Moussavi et al. (2007), p. 851 – 58.

² World Health Organization (WHO). Accessed February 11, 2025.

³ Culppepper et al. (2011), p. 265.

⁴ GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators. (2022), p. 137 - 150.

⁵ Karrouri et al. (2021), p. 9350.

⁶ Hofmann et al. (2012), p. 427 - 440; Cuijpers et al. (2013), p. 137-148; Nandarathana & Ranjan (2024), p. (online first)

⁷ Karrouri et al. (2021), p. 9350.

⁸ Segal, et al. (2012), p. 64.

⁹ Nandarathana & Ranjan. (2022), p. 338 - 64, Somers, Brian & Song. (2021), p. 247 - 280.

¹⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya* II (Ce) (2006) 436 - 503; *Majjhima Nikāya* I (Ce) (2006), p. 134 - 154.

¹¹ *Dīgha Nikāya* II (Ce) (2006) 436. “*Ekāyano ayaṃ, bhikkhave, maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā, sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya, dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya, ñāyassa adhi-*

“Bhikkhus, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *nibbāna* - namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.”¹²

The direct path explained by the *Sutta* includes the four foundations of mindfulness. *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* further elaborates on these four foundations as follows:

What are the four? Here, *bhikkhus*, a *bhikkhu* abides by contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind as mind, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.¹³

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta delineates a comprehensive framework for mindfulness practice, encompassing four primary foundations: (1) *kāyānupassanā* (mindfulness of the body), (2) *vedanānupassanā* (mindfulness of feelings), (3) *cittānupassanā* (mindfulness of mind), (4) *dhammānupassanā* (mindfulness of mental objects).

Within *kāyānupassanā*, the *Sutta* elucidates several specific contemplative practices: (1) *ānāpānāpabbhaṃ* (mindfulness of breathing), (2) *iriyāpathapabbhaṃ* (postures), (3) *sampajānāpabbhaṃ* (clear comprehension), (4) *paṭikūlamānasikārapabbhaṃ* (reflection on repulsiveness), (5) *dhātumānasikārapabbhaṃ* (elements), (6) *navasivathikapabbhaṃ* (nine charnel ground contemplations).

The *dhammānupassanā* section further expounds on various meditation methods: (1) *nīvaraṇapabbhaṃ* (five hindrances), (2) *khandhapabbhaṃ* (five aggregates), (3) *āyatanapabbhaṃ* (six sense-bases), (4) *bojjhaṅgapabbhaṃ* (seven factors of enlightenment), (5) *saccapabbhaṃ* (four noble truths). The *saccapabbhaṃ* includes *dukkhasaccaniddeso* (exposition on the truth of suffering), *samudayasaccaniddeso* (exposition on the truth of the origin of suffering), and *maggasaccaniddeso* (exposition on the truth of the path). This systematic approach to mindfulness practice provides practitioners with a structured methodology for developing insight and awareness.¹⁴

gamāya, nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya, yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā”

¹² Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005), p. 145.

¹³ *Dīgha Nikāya* II (Ce) (2006) 436 – “Katame cattāro? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. Vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. Citte cittānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. Dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā, vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ”; Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005), p. 145.

¹⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* I (Ce) (2006), p. 134 - 154.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) has been significantly influenced by the meditative practice of the four foundations of mindfulness, with a particular emphasis on *Kāyānupassanā* (mindfulness of the body). MBCT intervention integrates Buddhist meditation practices and techniques to manage depressive disorders and prevent relapse. While MBCT draws inspiration from *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, it does not incorporate all the meditation methods outlined in the original text. Instead, MBCT selectively adapts and integrates specific meditation techniques, often modifying the steps of the original methods to suit its therapeutic objectives. This approach allows MBCT to leverage the core principles of mindfulness while adapting practices to address the specific needs of individuals experiencing depression.¹⁵

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is a therapeutic approach that integrates elements of Cognitive Therapy and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs. The primary goal of MBCT is to facilitate a fundamental shift in how individuals relate to their thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations which contribute to depressive relapse.¹⁶ This approach is rooted in the four foundations of mindfulness, which serve as its theoretical foundation, incorporating practices such as body scanning, sitting meditation, walking meditation, and other contemplative techniques.

The eight-week MBCT program begins with a session focused on “Automatic Pilot.”¹⁷ This initial phase emphasizes the importance of recognizing the tendency to operate on autopilot, a state of mind characterized by actions performed without conscious intention or awareness of present-moment sensory experiences. As Crane explains in “Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy,” this concept of automatic pilot describes a mental state in which individuals act without mindful awareness.¹⁸

Buddhist teachings have long emphasized the nature of the mind through various teachings. The *Citta Vagga* (Mind Chapter) in *Dhammapada* provides insightful verses on this subject. One of verses describes the mind as flickering and fickle, and difficult to guard and control, suggesting that a wise person should strive to straighten it, much like a fletcher straightens an arrow.¹⁹ Another verse portrays the mind as wandering far, moving alone, non-material, and residing in the heart’s chamber. This suggests that those who can control their minds are liberated from the bonds of *Māra*.²⁰

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) incorporates various mindfulness practices, including the Raisin Exercise, to cultivate present-

¹⁵ Nandarathana & Ranjan. (2022), p. 338-64, Somers, Brian & Song. (2021), p. 247 - 280.

¹⁶ Segal, et al. (2012), p. 64.

¹⁷ Segal, et al. (2012), p. 109.

¹⁸ Crane (2017), p. 21

¹⁹ *Khuddhaka Nikāya, Dhammapadapāli* (Ce) (2006), p. 34: “Phandanaṃ capalaṃ Cit-taṃ/ Durakkhaṃ dunnivārayaṃ/ Ujun karoti medhavi/ Usukārova tejanaṃ.”

²⁰ .. *Khuddhaka Nikāya, Dhammapadapāli* (Ce) (2006), p. 34: “Durangamaṃ ekacaraṃ/ asariraṃ guhasayaṃ/ ye cittaṃ saṃyamissanti/ mokkhanti mārabandhaṃ.”

moment awareness and combat the automatic pilot thinking mode. Raisin Exercise, a brief 5-minute practice, encourages participants to engage fully with their sensory experience while eating a raisin, focusing on sight, touch, smell, and taste. This exercise aligns with the broader principles of mindfulness outlined in Buddhist teachings, particularly *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta's Āyatanapabbam* (Six Sense Bases) section. While the Raisin Exercise primarily engages five of the six sense organs, *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* offers a more comprehensive approach to mindfulness practice. As stated in the, “Here, monks, a monk understands properly the eye, he understands properly the visible object and he understands properly the bondage that arises dependent on these two.”²¹ This teaching extends to all six sense bases, including the mind, providing a framework for deep cognitive analysis and awareness.²² MBCT's adaptation of these principles, including the Raisin Exercise, aims to shift participants from habitual “autopilot” responses to a more embodied, sensory experience. This approach aligns with the Buddhist concept of understanding sensory objects and developing awareness of the bondage arising from sensory experiences. By incorporating these practices, MBCT seeks to help individuals recognize and manage the thought patterns and sensory experiences that contribute to depressive relapse, thus fostering a more mindful and conscious way of engaging with their internal and external environments.

The first session of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) introduces the ‘Body Scan Practice,’ which integrates breath awareness and body sensations through verbal guidance.²³ This practice begins by focusing attention on breathing sensations, then systematically exploring bodily sensations, encouraging participants to “breathe into” different body parts. Similar to the Buddhist *Paṭikūlamānasikārapabbam*²⁴ (Contemplation on the Anatomical Parts), MBCT's Body Scan focuses on cultivating non-judgmental awareness to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression rather than reducing attachment through contemplation of unattractive aspects.

MBCT also guides participants to practice ‘mindfulness of a routine activity,’²⁵ cultivating awareness in everyday tasks such as showering and

²¹ *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, assessed on [Feb 09,2025] <https://www.tipitaka.org/stp-pa-li-eng-parallel.html#14>

²² *Dīgha Nikāya II* (Ce) (2006) 436: “*Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu cakkhum ca pajānāti, rūpe ca pajānāti, yaṃ ca tadubhayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati saṃyojanaṃ taṃ ca pajānāti, yathā ca an-uppannessa saṃyojanassa uppādo hoti taṃ ca pajānāti, yathā ca uppannessa saṃyojanassa pahānaṃ hoti taṃ ca pajānāti, yathā ca pahānessa saṃyojanassa āyatim anuppādo hoti taṃ ca pajānāti*”

²³ Segal, et al. (2012), p. 122.

²⁴ *Dīgha Nikāya II* (Ce) (2006), 444: “*Atthi imasmiṃ kāye kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco maṃsaṃ nhāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhiminṇaṃ vakkam hadayaṃ yakanam kilomakam pihakam pap-phāsam antam antagunam udariyam karisam pittam semham pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo assu vasā khelo siṅghānikā lasikā muttam.*”

²⁵ Segal, et al. (2012), p. 109.

brushing their teeth. This practice helps shift from a ‘driven-doing’ mode to a ‘being’ mode, similar to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta’s sampajaññapabbam*²⁶ method of cultivating mindfulness in routine activities.

The ‘Thoughts and Feelings Exercise’ and ‘Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire’ in MBCT help participants recognize the correlation between thoughts and emotions, identifying negative thoughts related to depressive symptoms. This approach parallels the *cittānupassanā* practice, which involves recognizing various mental states such as “*sarāgaṃ cittam- vitarāgaṃ cittam*”, “*sadosaṃ cittam- vitadosaṃ cittam*”, and “*vitadosaṃ cittam- samohaṃ cittam*.”²⁷

The ‘Awareness of Pleasant and Unpleasant Experiences’²⁸ technique in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is used to practice mindfulness and shift patients’ mindsets. This approach involves identifying pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral emotions. Similarly, in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the *vedanānupassanā* (contemplation of feelings) guides meditators to recognize their emotions comparably.

Sitting meditation in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) integrates breath and body awareness, rooted in Buddhist traditions. The practice begins with focused attention on breathing, gradually expanding to encompass broader bodily sensations. When attention drifts, practitioners gently redirect their focus to the present.²⁹ This approach, inspired by the Mindfulness of Breathing from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, follows five key steps: breath awareness, observing breath length, experiencing whole-body sensations with each breath, calming the breath, and maintaining present-moment awareness. These stages aim to cultivate mindfulness and inner peace. The initial MBCT session introduces the ‘Body Scan Practice,’ guiding participants to focus on breath-related sensations in the lungs and abdomen before systematically exploring other body areas. This method shares similarities with the Buddhist *Paṭikūlamanasikārapabbam*, both involving methodical body awareness, but differs in its goal of fostering non-judgmental awareness rather than contemplating the body’s unattractive aspects.

Mindful walking, a key component of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), was introduced in session four to enhance bodily awareness. This practice involves slow, deliberate walking without a specific destination, focusing on each step and bodily sensations while releasing mental and emotional reactions. MBCT guidance emphasizes proper posture, with feet parallel and slightly apart, knees unlocked, arms relaxed, and a soft gaze

²⁶ Dīgha Nikāya II (Ce) (2006), 442: “*Puna caparaṃ, bhikkhave, bhikkhu abhikkante paṭikkante sampajānakārī hoti, ālokite vilokite sampajānakārī hoti, samīñjite pasārite sampajānakārī hoti, saṅghāṭipattacīvaradhāraṇe sampajānakārī hoti, asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajānakārī hoti, uccārapassāvakamme sampajānakārī hoti, gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṇhībhave sampajānakārī hoti.*”

²⁷ Dīgha Nikāya II (Ce) (2006), 464.

²⁸ Segal, et al. (2012), p. 181.

²⁹ Segal, et al. (2012), p. 182.

ahead. In contrast, Buddhist walking meditation (*caṅkama*) offers a more structured approach. It encompasses awareness of various body postures, including walking, standing, and sitting, and lying down, as described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* under *Iriyāpathapabbam*.³⁰ Buddhist practice involves three steps: concentrating on the movement of each leg, awareness of the leg's action, and paying attention to the complete motion of taking out, bringing forward, and landing each foot. While both MBCT and Buddhist approaches aim to cultivate bodily awareness and mindfulness in daily life, the Buddhist method provides a more comprehensive framework. MBCT's mindful walking serves as a simpler, more accessible practice, while the Buddhist approach offers a deeper, more holistic awareness of the body across various postures and activities.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) effectively integrates various Buddhist-derived meditation methods and techniques, particularly those outlined in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. By incorporating practices such as mindful breathing, body scanning, mindful walking, and awareness of thoughts and emotions, MBCT not only enhances participants' bodily awareness but also cultivates mindfulness in everyday life. Given its foundation in Buddhist meditation, MBCT offers a structured approach to managing depressive symptoms and preventing relapse. Therefore, this systematic review assesses the efficacy of MBCT in managing depressive symptoms, with the findings aligning closely with the positive outcomes of authentic Buddhist meditation practices as reported in scientific studies. This reinforces the potential of MBCT as a valuable therapeutic tool for the treatment of depression, based on ancient wisdom and modern psychological practices.

This systematic review aims to evaluate the efficacy of Buddhist-derived meditation integrated MBCT in treating depressive disorders in adults by analyzing randomized controlled trials. MBCT was developed to prevent relapse in recurrent depression by helping individuals shift their relationship to negative thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. It incorporates various mindfulness techniques such as body scan, sitting meditation, and mindful walking to cultivate present-moment awareness. While MBCT has roots in Buddhist contemplative practices, it has been adapted within a Western psychological framework for clinical application (Sipe et al., 2012; Tseng et al., 2023, Nandarathana & Ranjan, 2024). This study examines how MBCT interventions incorporating Buddhist-derived meditation practices compare to control conditions in managing depressive symptoms, preventing relapse, and improving overall wellbeing in adults with depressive disorders. By synthesizing findings from randomized controlled trials, this study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the therapeutic potential of integrating traditional Buddhist mindfulness approaches with modern cognitive therapy for depression treatment.

In recent decades, the number of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) evaluating the efficacy of sitting meditation in Mindfulness-Based Cognitive

³⁰ *Dīgha Nikāya* II (Ce) (2006), p. 442.

Therapy (MBCT) for depressive and anxiety disorders has increased. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have shown the effectiveness of MBCT's sitting meditation in managing depression compared to treatment-as-usual, including reducing depression and suicidal ideation in patients with major depressive disorders.³¹ However, qualitative systematic syntheses on the efficacy of MBCT and the integration of Buddhist meditation practices in reducing depressive symptoms in adults, particularly regarding its impact on breath awareness, bodily sensations, present-moment focus, and overall mindfulness skills, are dearth. This review addresses this gap by examining the specific effects of the Buddhist meditation component within MBCT on these aspects of mindfulness practice and their relation to depressive symptoms.

II. METHOD

This review was reported following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) guidelines.³²

2.1. Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this qualitative review analysis were randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with treatment and control groups, focusing on patients diagnosed with depression according to ICD-10 DCR/DSM-IV criteria, aged 18-65 years. The treatment group must have received MBCT following the protocol developed by Segal et al. (2002, 2013), with studies published in English, and involving face-to-face delivery of MBCT sessions. The exclusion criteria were controlled clinical trials, quasi-experimental designs, case studies, and studies involving pregnant women or high-risk suicide patients. Additionally, studies on participants with specific medical conditions other than depression, trials of MBCT delivered via Internet-based or video-based formats, duplicated data publications, and those lacking primary data were excluded from the review.

2.2. Literature sources and search strategy

Electronic databases (PubMed, Web of Science, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Scopus, Science Direct) were searched from March 13, 2024, to April 21, 2024 (Figure 1). The search strategy was developed using PRESS guidelines.³³ The following search strings were used across all databases: ("Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy" OR MBCT) AND (Depression OR "Depressive Disorder" OR "Major Depression" OR "Clinical Depression" OR "Major Depressive Disorder") AND ("Randomized Controlled Trial" OR RCT OR "Clinical Trials"). Database-specific filters were applied to refine search results. PubMed, JSTOR, Web of Science, and SCOPUS searches were limited to randomized controlled trials, human studies, and English-language

³¹ McManus et al. (2012):817; Hofmann et al. (2012), p. 427 - 440; Chan et al. (2020), p. 1 - 14; Ninomiya et al. (2020), p. 132 - 139; Jiang et al. (2022), p. 481; Liu et al. (2021), p. 935. Johannsen et al. (2022), p. 156.

³² Haddaway et al. (2022), p. e1230.

³³ McGowan et al. (2016), p. 40 - 46.

publications. EBSCOhost and Science Direct searches were restricted to peer-reviewed articles, human populations, and English-language studies. Additionally, the reference lists of relevant review articles were manually searched to identify further eligible publications.

2.3. Study selection

Two researchers independently screened potential articles using predefined criteria. The initial screening was based on titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text evaluation of relevant studies on MBCT for depression. Rayyan software was used to remove duplicates with manual verification.³⁴ The first authors conducted full-text screening, and disagreements were discussed by the authors.

2.4 Risk of Bias Assessment

The risk of bias in the included studies was assessed using the Revised Cochrane risk of bias tool for randomized trials (RoB 2).³⁵ This tool evaluates five domains: the randomization process, deviations from intended interventions, missing outcome data, outcome measurement, and selection of reported results. The assessment was conducted by the first reviewer, and disagreements were resolved through discussion with two additional reviewers.

III. RESULT

3.1. Study selection

The literature search yielded 1581 studies from the six databases. After removing duplicates and applying the inclusion criteria, 117 studies were selected for the full-text review. Of these, 98 were excluded for various reasons, including study design, participant characteristics, intervention format, and data insufficiency. Finally, 18 studies were included in the systematic review. The risk of bias in the included studies was evaluated using the Revised Cochrane risk of bias tool for randomized trials (RoB 2).³⁶ This tool assesses five domains: randomization, intervention deviations, missing data, outcome measurement, and result reporting. The primary reviewer conducted the assessment, with disagreements resolved through discussion with two additional reviewers (Figure 1).

3.2. Characteristics of included studies

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the 18 included studies, primarily conducted in European countries, with a few conducted in the United States, Iran, and other locations. Most of the studies were published between 2018-2023. The Beck Depression Inventory, Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression, and Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire were commonly used outcome measures. These studies employed diverse designs and measures to assess the efficacy of MBCT for depression and mental well-being across various settings and populations.

³⁴ Ouzzani et al. (2016), p. 1 - 10.

³⁵ Sterne et al. (2019), p. 366.

³⁶ Sterne et al. (2019), p. 366.

3.3. Risk of bias in the studies

The risk of bias assessment revealed varying levels of concern among the included studies. Two studies.³⁷ Were identified as having ‘some concerns’ regarding their overall risk of bias. Additionally, four studies.³⁸ Were found to have ‘some concerns’ specifically in the domain of ‘bias due to missing outcome data’. The primary issue contributing to bias in several studies was related to outcome measurement, particularly in cases with high participant dropout rates. Despite these concerns, the majority of the included studies demonstrated an overall low risk of bias. Figure 2A provides a detailed quality assessment of each study, while Figure 2B presents a summary of the appraised studies, offering a comprehensive overview of the risk of bias across the included studies.

3.4. Effectiveness of MBCT on depressive disorders

This study evaluated the effectiveness of MBCT in the management of depressive disorders. Patients with depressive disorders undergoing eight-week MBCT were part of the experimental group and patients who only underwent conventional modes of treatment were part of the treatment as usual (TAU), active control condition (ACC), or wait-list controls. Depressive symptoms, depressive relapse, quality of life, and rumination were considered as outcome measures in the present study.

This study evaluated the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which incorporates Buddhist meditation practices, in managing depressive disorders. Patients with depressive disorders underwent an eight-week MBCT program, which integrates *Vipassanā*, *Ānāpānasati*, and other meditation techniques derived from Theravāda Buddhism. The experimental group practiced these ancient contemplative methods, while control groups received conventional treatments or were placed on wait lists. The study assessed the impact of these Buddhist-inspired practices on depressive symptoms, relapse rates, quality of life, and rumination. By incorporating *Vipassanā*, participants learned to observe their thoughts and emotions without judgment which is a key principle in Buddhist mindfulness. This integration of Buddhist practices within MBCT aimed to provide participants with tools for greater self-awareness, emotional regulation, and compassion, potentially offering a more holistic approach to managing depressive disorders compared to conventional treatments alone.

3.4.1. Efficacy of MBCT in the treatment of depression

Research has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in treating depression, both immediately after treatment and in the long-term.³⁹ Several studies have shown significant

³⁷ Cladder-Micus et al. (2018), p. 371 – 377; Hamidian et al. (2013), p. 109 – 117.

³⁸ Van Aalderen et al. (2012), p. 989-1001; Manicavasgar et al. (2011), p. 138-144; Shallcross et al. (2015), p. 964; Barnhofer et al. (2009), p. 366 - 373.

³⁹ Musa et al. (2020), p. 101859.

reductions in depressive symptoms following 8-week MBCT programs, with benefits maintained in follow-up assessments ranging from 2-3 months post-treatment.⁴⁰ The effectiveness of MBCT appears to be linked to patients' history of depression. While patients with one or two previous depressive episodes showed significant improvement, those with three or more episodes demonstrated fewer benefits.⁴¹ Research has determined that MBCT works primarily by reducing cognitive patterns such as rumination and worry, which in turn helps alleviate depressive symptoms.⁴²

3.4.2. Reducing rumination and improving emotional regulation

The therapeutic efficacy of MBCT is attributed to its capacity to ameliorate maladaptive cognitive processes and enhance emotion regulation mechanisms. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates the role of MBCT in reducing ruminative tendencies, with studies documenting significant reductions in rumination that correlate with decreased depressive symptomatology.⁴³ Further, research elucidated MBCT's dual impact on both rumination reduction and enhancement of emotional regulation capacities, particularly in response to stressors.⁴⁴

Moreover, MBCT demonstrated efficacy in cultivating self-compassion, a crucial therapeutic outcome reported in several studies.⁴⁵ These findings suggest that MBCT operates through multiple therapeutic mechanisms, facilitating improved emotional awareness and regulatory capabilities while fostering adaptive responses to psychological distress through enhanced self-compassion and reduced emotional reactivity.

Enhancement of Mindfulness Skills and Self-Compassion: Empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated the efficacy of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in developing mindfulness capabilities. Multiple investigations have shown that participants exhibit significant improvements in mindfulness skills post-treatment.⁴⁶ Enhanced mindfulness skills are directly associated with better emotional regulation and subsequent reduction in depressive symptoms.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this review affirm the efficacy of MBCT as an evidence-based intervention for managing depressive disorders, promoting self-awareness, and preventing relapse. However, integrating Buddhist meditation practices such as *vipassanā*, *ānāpānasati*, *iriyāpata*, *sampajāna*, *cittānupassanā* and most Buddhist meditation practices found in Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta into MBCT provides additional

⁴⁰ Musa et al. (2020), p. 101859; Cladder-Micus et al. (2018), p. 914 - 926.

⁴¹ Geschwind et al. (2012), p. 320 - 325.

⁴² Van Aalderen et al. (2012), p. 989 - 1001.

⁴³ Cladder-Micus et al. (2018), p. 371 - 377; Van Aalderen et al. (2012), p. 989 - 1001.

⁴⁴ Schanche et al. (2020), p. 1 - 16.

⁴⁵ Schanche et al. (2020), p. 1 - 16; Hamidian et al. (2013), p. 109 - 117.

⁴⁶ Cladder-Micus et al. (2018), p. 371 - 377; Spinhoven et al. (2017), p. 112 - 117

depth, enriching its therapeutic potential with philosophical and contemplative frameworks rooted in Buddhism. Buddhist traditions, particularly Theravāda, emphasize the cultivation of mindfulness (*sati*) as articulated in texts such as the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. The discourse (*sutta*) outlines the Four Foundations of Mindfulness—body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects—offering a structured path for self-transformation and insight.⁴⁷ By incorporating these principles, MBCT aligns with a holistic approach to mental health, addressing not only symptom reduction but also fostering a deeper understanding of the transient and interconnected nature of experiences.

Recent studies on *vipassana* and Buddhist-derived meditation retreats further support the integration of these practices into MBCT. *Vipassanā* retreat participants reported significant improvements in mindfulness, anxiety, and depression, with sustained benefits at follow-up assessments.⁴⁸ Similarly, insight meditation retreats demonstrated significant reductions in stress and increased happiness.⁴⁹ A 9-day *Samatha* retreat led to enhanced mindfulness, attention, and self-compassion, with greater benefits among experienced meditators.⁵⁰ These findings suggest that traditional Buddhist meditation practices can reinforce MBCT's capacity to foster emotional regulation and psychological resilience.

The present review revealed that MBCT is an effective treatment approach for the management of the clinical symptoms of depression. It is evident that MBCT promotes self-awareness, reduces depressive symptoms by allowing individuals to observe thoughts without judgment, and aids in cognitive restructuring by identifying and challenging negative thought patterns. This process can lead to a reduction in the frequency and severity of depressive symptoms.⁵¹ Therefore, the findings of the present study suggest that MBCT produces both short and long-term treatment effectiveness in the management of depressive disorders. This therapeutic method helps prevent relapses, as the MBCT technique allows patients to recognize early signs of relapse and respond mindfully rather than automatically falling back into old patterns.⁵² These findings are consistent with several RCTs that have reported the efficacy of MBCT as an adjunct to pharmacological treatment methods, particularly in addressing residual depressive symptoms.⁵³ These findings are aligned with the recent meta-analyses which have also reported that MBCT is effective in the management of depressive disorder (Piet and Hougaard, 2011).⁵⁴ Similarly, a

⁴⁷ Nandarathana & Ranjan (2022), p. 338 - 64.

⁴⁸ Cohen et al. (2017), p. 1064 - 1077.

⁴⁹ Surinrut et al. (2016), p. 648 - 659.

⁵⁰ Kozasa et al. (2018), p. 222.

⁵¹ Segal et al. (2012), p. 300.

⁵² Ibid, p. 300-302

⁵³ Barnhofer et al. (2009), p. 366-373; Britton et al. (2011), p. 365–380; Kuyken et al. (2016), p. 565 – 574; Crane et al. (2013), p. 246 - 254. Kingston et al. (2006), p. 193 – 203

⁵⁴ Piet et al. (2011), p. 1032 - 1040; Goldberg et al. (2019), p. 445 - 462; Nandarathana &

network meta-analysis-based study advocated the superiority of MBCT as a preventative treatment in the management of recurrent depression.⁵⁵

While MBCT demonstrated higher remission rates than treatment as usual (TAU) among patients with chronic, treatment-resistant depression, both methods showed similar results in reducing depressive symptoms.⁵⁶ In contrast, Manicavasgar et al. reported that CBT was significantly more effective than MBCT in treating non-melancholic forms of depression.⁵⁷ These findings indicate that although MBCT is a well-established treatment for various types of depression, its effectiveness may vary depending on symptom characteristics and the duration of the depressive disorder.

It is also important to emphasize that the effectiveness of MBCT depends on the research design and patient samples involved in the studies. Some studies have reported higher recovery rates after post-intervention than after prolonged follow-up.⁵⁸ A 26-month follow-up study comparing MBCT to an active control condition found no differences between the groups in relapse rates or time to relapse between the groups. Both interventions resulted in relapse rates of approximately 50%.⁵⁹ Similarly, a 60-week follow-up study showed no differences between MBCT and active control condition in depression relapse rates or time to relapse.⁶⁰

Additional evidence supports the role of Buddhist mindfulness meditation in treating depression. A six-week focused meditation program significantly reduced depressive and anxiety symptoms in university students, with potential long-term benefits.⁶¹ Buddhist mindfulness meditation practiced at home was found to significantly improve depressive symptoms at six weeks, suggesting its potential as an accessible intervention.⁶² Furthermore, the Four Immeasurable Meditation has shown promise in reducing depressive symptoms, though further studies are needed to evaluate its full efficacy.⁶³

This variability in the long-term outcome of MBCT supports the notion that the severity of depressive symptoms and other factors must be considered when planning treatment, and booster sessions or other forms of treatment approaches deemed necessary to incorporate into therapeutic packages if therapeutic changes are not maintained for a longer duration.

Ranjan (2024) – (Online first)

⁵⁵ McCartney et al. (2021), p. 6 – 21.

⁵⁶ Cladder-Micus et al. (2018), p. 371 – 377

⁵⁷ Manicavasgar et al. (2011), p. 138 – 144.

⁵⁸ . Bondolfi et al. (2010), p. 224 – 231; Godfrin et al. (2010), p. 738 – 746; Kearns et al. (2016), p. 33 – 49; Kuyken et al. (2008), p. 966.

⁵⁹ Shallcross et al. (2018), p. 836 – 849.

⁶⁰ Shallcross et al. (2015), p. 964.

⁶¹ Carpena et al. (2019), p. 401 – 407.

⁶² Turakitwanakan et al. (2016), p. 171 – 178.

⁶³ Lv et al. (2020), p. 101814.

MBCT helps reduce depression by promoting mindfulness, redirecting their focus away from ruminative thoughts, and focusing on thoughts as just thoughts rather than truths, thereby impairing negative thoughts through reduced engagement in vicious ruminative cycles.⁶⁴ An exhaustive review by van der Velden et al. suggested the considerable superiority of MBCT in increasing mindfulness and self-compassion, and, in reducing rumination, obsessive thoughts, and worry.⁶⁵ Additionally, increased self-compassion has been reported to mediate the risk of depressive relapse. Therefore, mindfulness practices are efficient in improving emotion regulation, allowing individuals to respond to distressing thoughts and feelings with greater equanimity. Moreover, the broader adoption of mindfulness-based approaches in clinical practice has the potential to enhance therapeutic outcomes and promote overall psychological well-being.⁶⁶

The current study also provides an insight into the nature of depression, within which MBCT works best. MBCT was found to be more effective in TAU in remission rates for chronic treatment-resistant depression but there was equivalence when the two active interventions were compared based on depressive symptom reduction as provided by Cladder-Micus et al..⁶⁷ More specifically, Manicavasgar et al. reported that CBT is significantly superior to MBCT for all types of depression except melancholic depression. These outcomes support the conclusion that, although MBCT is a sound treatment for different kinds of depressive disorders, its effectiveness may be contingent upon the nature of depressive disease symptoms and disease severity.⁶⁸

Future research should assess the generalizability of the MBCT across diverse clinical contexts and populations to determine whether the present results can be extended to other settings or clients. Furthermore, applying the demonstrated effects of MBCT to other populations of children, adolescents, older patients, and patients with other medical or mental disorders would also be useful.

VI. CONCLUSION

The comprehensive review of studies on Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) incorporating Buddhist meditation practices for treating depressive disorders in adults demonstrated significant efficacy in reducing depressive symptoms, relapse rates, and improving quality of life. The integration of Buddhist-derived practices, particularly from Theravāda traditions, enhanced the therapeutic potential of MBCT in reducing rumination, improving emotional regulation, increasing mindfulness skills, and developing bare-attention abilities. While individual factors may influence effectiveness, the combination of MBCT and Buddhist meditation techniques

⁶⁴ Segal et al., 2012, p. 37.

⁶⁵ van der Velden et al. (2015), p. 26 – 39.

⁶⁶ Cho et al. (2024), p. 1431 - 1437.

⁶⁷ Cladder-Micus et al. (2018), p. 371 – 377.

⁶⁸ Manicavasgar et al. (2011), p. 138 – 144.

shows promise in managing depression, treating symptoms, reducing rumination, regulating emotions, and enhancing mindfulness. Further research is needed to enhance the integration of Buddhist practices and the development of psychotherapeutic interventions based on ancient Buddhist teachings in therapeutic settings.

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THE WISE THINKING DEVELOPMENT: CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS FOR SELF-HEALING FROM THERAVĀDA BUDDHIST PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Abstract:

This research paper entitled “Wise Thinking Development: Cultivating mindfulness for self-healing from Theravāda Buddhist Psychotherapy”. This study has two objectives as follows: (1) The concept of wise thinking development (*Yoniso-manasikāra*) from Theravāda Buddhist Scripture, (2) The effects of wise thinking development on cultivating mindfulness for self-healing from Theravāda Buddhist Psychotherapy. The methodology used primarily includes document, Suttanta, and documentary methods. During this work, wise thinking is the foundation to correct living in its entirety, and helps people think well, rationally, and able to find a solution in life, wise thinking development is an important condition on the journey to true happiness.

Keywords: *Wise Thinking, Cultivating, Mindfulness, Self-Healing, Psychotherapy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is the most psychologically interested of the great world religions. The point of mindfulness is not to get rid of thought but to learn to see thought skillfully. The Buddhist tradition trains thinking mind and intellect to think clearly and well. We need to plan, think, organize, imagine, and create. Considered thoughts are a great gift. Our thoughts can set a direction, bring us understanding, analyze and discern, and put us in tune with the life around us. When we rest in the heart, then we can use thought wisely, we can plan and imagine in benevolent ways. The process of wise thinking is motivated by emotions, subject to them, and having them deeply embedded in it, practical

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wisdom is a partnership of heart and mind. Here, the emotional system provides us with information, draws our attention to matters of consequence, weighs alternatives, recommends one or two of them and prompts action. Wise attention is not only a means on the path of mundane happiness but also a factor that leads to enlightenment, and supramundane happiness. Only using wise thinking can one go beyond the concepts and take the ultimate realities as one's object of knowledge.¹ The wise thinking development is an important condition on the journey to true happiness. When the wise thinking is developed, life becomes brighter and happier. Thus, the work title is as follows: "The Wise Thinking Development Cultivating Mindfulness for Self-Healing from Theravāda Buddhist Psychotherapy".

II. THE CONCEPT OF WISE THINKING DEVELOPMENT (*YONISO-MANASIKĀRA*) FROM THERAVĀDA BUDDHIST SCRIPTURE

"*Yoniso-manasikāra*" or wise attention, is the teaching of the Buddha in the art of thinking. It is the thinking system within Buddhism, that the Buddhists consider to be the wise and correct way of thought. In the Buddhists' perspective, *yoniso-manasikāra* is considered to be on the level beyond faith (*Saddhā*), because it is the thinking system that has to use your wisdom (*paññā*) independently. This makes it the important set of thinking system that the Buddhists first think of, when they need to think of something wisely and thoroughly. The Buddha, based on a complete understanding of humans and the world, proposed a personalized method to escape from suffering to each person who sought him out, and those who put his teachings into practice were all liberated from suffering. In this research, studies wise attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*), focusing on the main points: (1) The definition of wise thinking development, (2) The Characteristics of wise thinking development.

2.1. The definition wise thinking (*Yoniso-manasikāra*) development

2.1.1. The etymology of wise thinking development

The compound term *yoniso-manasikāra* is comprised of the two words *yoniso* and *manasikāra*. *Yoniso* is derived from the word *yonī* ('origin', 'place of birth', 'womb') and is variously translated as 'cause', 'root', 'source', 'wisdom', 'method', 'means', or 'path'.² *Manasikāra* is translated as 'mental activity', 'thinking', 'consideration', 'reflection', 'directing attention', or 'contemplation.' Literal meaning of "*manasikāra*" is a technical term that is translated in different ways by different scholars. Grammatically, it is composed of two words: *manasi* (in the mind) + *kāra* (doing). So, its literal meaning is "doing in the mind." is like drawing a blueprint that determines who When put them together, *yoniso-manasikāra* translated as fixing one's attention with a purpose or thoroughly, proper attention, having thorough method in one's thought.

¹ Ācariya Anuruddha, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*, Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed., (USA: Charleston Buddhist Fellowship, 2007), p. 22.

² A III 394; It 62; NdA II 463 *Yoniso* is defined as both *upāya* and *patha* (path).

2.1.2. The definition of wise thinking development from *Nikāya*

When reading suttas, we usually see the wise thinking developing *Yoniso-manasikāra* in all of the five *Nikāyas*. Before he talked about the *Dhamma*, the Buddha always reminded: “Listen and pay attention, I will speak”. Many suttas explain wise thinking as an important method to practice. To understand wise thinking in the *Nikāyas* deeply, we should reference the commentaries and sub-commentaries. In “*Buddhadhamma, The Law of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*”, it states that the commentaries and sub-commentaries have explained the term by giving it four definitions, as follows.

i. *Upāya-manasikāra*³: “methodical reflection”; to think or reflect by using proper means or methods; systematic thinking. This refers to methodical thinking that enables one to realize and exist in harmony with the truth, and to penetrate the nature and characteristics of all phenomena.

ii. *Patha-manasikāra*⁴: “suitable reflection”; to think following a distinct course or in a proper way; to think sequentially and in order; to think systematically. This refers to thinking in a well-organized way, e.g., in line with cause and effect; to not think in a confused, disorderly way; to not at one moment be preoccupied by one thing and then in the next moment jump to something else, unable to sustain a precise, well-defined sequence of thought.

iii. *Karana-manasikāra*⁵: “reasoned thinking”; analytical thinking; investigative thinking; rational thinking. This refers to inquiry into the relationship and sequence of causes and conditions; to contemplate and search for the original causes of things, to arrive at their root or source, which has resulted in a gradual chain of events.

iv. *Uppādaka-manasikāra*⁶: “effective thinking”; to apply thinking purposefully, to yield desired results. This refers to thinking and reflection that generates wholesome qualities, e.g.: thoughts that rouse effort; an ability to think in a way that dispels fear and anger, and contemplations which support mindfulness, or which strengthen and stabilize the mind.

These four definitions describe various attributes of the kind of thought referred to as “wise attention” (*yoniso-manasikāra*). At any one time, wise reflection may contain all or some of these attributes. These four definitions may be summarized in brief as ‘methodical thinking’, ‘systematic thinking’, ‘analytical thinking’, or ‘thinking inducing wholesomeness’. It is challenging, however, to come up with a single definition or translation for *yoniso-manasikāra*. Most translations will only capture limited nuances of this term and are not comprehensive. The alternative is to give a lengthy definition, as presented above. The difficulty of translating this term notwithstanding, there are prominent attributes of this way of thinking which can be used to represent

³ M II 346; S II 71; S III 133; A I 46.

⁴ D II 459; D III 777.

⁵ D II 459.

⁶ S III 165.

all the other attributes and which can be translated in brief, for example, ‘methodical thinking’, ‘skillful thinking’, ‘analytical thinking’, and ‘investigative thinking’. Once one has gained a thorough understanding of this *Pāḷi* term, it is convenient to rely on a concise translation like ‘wise reflection’, ‘systematic reflection’, or ‘careful attention.’⁷

2.1.3. The definition of wise thinking development from *Abhidhamma*

The wise thinking development according to the *Abhidhamma*, is the very first stage of the mind’s encounter with an object, and it holds the associated mental factors to the object. As such, it is a prominent factor in two specific classes of consciousness, that is, advertence (*āvajjana*) at the five-sense doors and the mind-door. These two states of consciousness, breaking through into the life continuum (*bhavanga*), form the first stage of the cognitive process (*citta vīthi*). *Yoniso-manasikāra* as such means “directing the attention to the roots of things”, that is, observing phenomena as they truly are, as being characterized by impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. Among the three kinds of *manasikāra* which “directs the mind to pay attention to the sense-objects.” Referring to this definition, it is often translated as attention, or paying attention to the objects. There are two other mental factors, *vitakka* and *cetana*, which are also defined in a similar sense.

In the first, *manasikāra* in harmony with the *Abhidhamma* mentioned above, our “attention” represents three mental factors collectively: *manasikāra*, *vitakka*, and *cetanā*. In other words, these three factors are working together to serve as our “attention.” So, the question is the difference among them. This point is illustrated with a simile in the sub-commentary as follows:

i. *Manasikāra* directs the attention of the mind to the object like someone who sits in the backseat and steers the boat to the goal.

ii. *Vitakka* resembles someone in the middle seat propelling the boat to the goal.

iii. *Cetanā* is compared to someone in the front seat commanding the mind to reach for the goal.

The second *manasikāra* is a certain kind of mind unit that predetermines our subsequent thoughts to be wholesome or unwholesome. In the five-sense door thought process (*pañca-dvārika vīthi*), it is the determining consciousness (*voṭṭho*); in the mind-door thought process (*mano-dvārika vīthi*), it is the mind-door advertent consciousness (*mano-dvārāvajjana*).

In the third *manasikāra* in the example below, the Buddha himself used the two words *manasikāra* and *avajjana* synonymously to describe his meditation practices: My practices (*samatha* and *vipassanā*) are related to investigation (*āvajjana*), aspiration (*ākaṅkhā*), and contemplation (*manasikāra*).

2.2. The characteristics of wise thinking development

⁷ Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto, *Buddhadhamma The laws of Nature and Their Benefits of Life*, trans., Robin Philip Moore, 2nd Edition, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2018), p. 1107.

These methods are originated within the *Tipiṭaka* and have been collected and put together by the contemporary Buddhists. The following headings for each method present here are from the translated book called *Buddhadhamma: The Law of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*.

- i. Investigation of Causes and Conditions
- ii. Analysis Component Factors
- iii. Reflection in Line with Universal Characteristic
- iv. Reflection in Line with The Four Noble Truths
- v. Reflection on Goals Principles
- vi. Reflection on Advantage, Disadvantage and the Escape
- vii. Reflection on the True and Counterfeit Value of Things
- viii. Reflection Rousing Wholesome Qualities
- ix. Reflection by Abiding in the Present Moment
- x. Reflection Corresponding to Analytic Discussion⁸

The wise thinking development is very important, it is a skill in the art of thinking in systems, helps people to reach effective thinking results, and form an effective solution, and helps thinking clearly to lay out a plan when we are doing something.

III. THE EFFECTS OF WISE THINKING DEVELOPMENT TO CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS FOR SELF-HEALING FROM THERAVĀDA BUDDHIST PSYCHOTHERAPY

3.1. The effects of wise thinking on the physical

The wise thinking results in bodily changes, which can be classified as external bodily changes and internal bodily changes. This part follows the external physical changes, the internal physical changes.

3.1.1. The external physical changes

Generally, wise thinking is identified with bodily changes. An emotion is guessed based on external physical changes. If a person grinds his teeth, we say that he is angry. When a person trembles, it is remarked that he is nervous. In love our face lights up, in grief our eyes are filled with tears, and in surprise our eyes dilate. In this way, a difference in the expression of the eyes, nose, mouth, forehead, is discernible in emotion. A person's voice is altered and he adopts a fresh posture. These are the external changes in the manifestation of thinking. These will now be described in detail.

i. The facial expression

When under the influence of emotion, the facial expression of the person is the first to be altered. It is easiest to read the emotion of love or hate from the face. No amount of effort can successfully disguise the facial contortions

⁸ P. A Payutto Bhikkhu (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*, (Thailand: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2018), p. 953.

in strong emotion, from an experienced observer. In an emotional state, the muscles of the face expand or contract. In pleasant emotion, it is said, that the face lights up with delight, this lighting up refers to the muscular expansion. Similarly, it is said that the face hangs down. The reference is to the contraction of the muscles, such as blushing with shame or averting the eyes, expansion of the eyes in fear, elevation of the eyebrows in anger, which are used to describe the changes in facial expressions in emotion. Many psychologists have experimented to determine the meaning of a variety of facial expressions by themselves are insufficient to enable a distinction to be made between the emotions, but the data collected from these studies is insufficient. In reality, it can not be said with any degree of certainty that it is not possible to recognise emotion from the facial expression. Even after the effects and impressions of the culture, there is a degree of similarity in the facial expression of emotions of the members of every society.

ii. The vocal expression

The emotions can be expressed through the medium of voice, and this medium, similar emotions can also be aroused in others. In the expression of emotions, the voice is influenced. For example, the pitch and loudness of the voice changes. The voice of an angry person is hoarse and loud, whereas a loving person's voice is rhythmic and sweet. Some of the stronger emotions can be thus distinguished by hearing the voice. Sometimes even language can successfully excite emotions.

3.1.2. The internal physical change

Besides the external changes mentioned above, there are some internal physiological changes too, which are an emotional state. When surprised, our breathing almost stops. Our heart beats faster when we are angry. But these internal changes can be known only when they are measured by instruments. Some major changes are detailed below.

i. The change in heart beat

Generally, the heart beats faster or slower if the individual is disturbed. This fact is utilised by literary people, as they mention this fluctuation of the heartbeat to show the presence of emotion. The face is flushed or bloodshot in anger, because the alternate contraction and expansion of the blood vessels sends an excess of blood to that part of the body. This abnormal activity is the result of the altered heart beat. The blood pressure of all those who were present rose when Scott, during his experiments, exhibited some sexually exciting photographs.

ii. The blood pressure changes

We saw above how the heart beat changes and affects the blood pressure, this change, being very prominent, is very noticeable and is generally considered to be a good indicator of emotion. It is measured with a Plethysmograph. It can be used as a lie detector, though its validity is restricted to the inexperienced deceiver, because only such a person will be disturbed or upset at the prospect. Contradicting all that we have been asserting all along are some experimental

results which prove that this change is not inevitable. Examining some soldiers injured in war, it was noticed that their blood pressure was not noticeably altered, despite the emotional experience of the war, while the visiting relatives were more severely affected, as was proved by their blood pressure.

iii. The change in the blood chemistry

This is not all, because in an emotional state some changes in the chemical condition of the blood also take place. Another reaction to the emotion is the excretion of adrenaline from the adrenal gland, which puts more sugar in the blood and gives a person a reserve of energy to rely on and face the situation. The effect of Adrenaline is felt in other quarters too. There is more sugar in the urine, blood pressure and heart beat increase and some capillaries in the skin start contracting.

iv. The changes in brain waves

The frequency of brain waves is affected in thinking. This change can be measured by instruments. These are major internal and external changes, but they do not include everyone. There are some other psychological changes which are apparent in emotion, for example, when a person is extremely frightened, he may excrete urine. This is a tendency present in every animal and bird. This comprehensive study of internal and external physiological changes must have made it very clear that in emotion there are changes, though it is not possible to determine with accuracy the connection of a certain emotion with a certain change. The psychologists do not agree as to the importance of physiological changes in a thinking state. The behaviorists place much emphasis on the physiological changes due to emotion and do not give any credence whatsoever to the mental responses. On the other hand, some physiologists lay an equal emphasis upon the mental changes. Looking at it realistically, the physiological changes cannot be assumed to be everything, but then neither can they be neglected and considered insignificant. Similarly, the mental aspect of emotion can neither be neglected nor relied upon exclusively. It is necessary to understand both the aspects to understand emotion completely. As experiments are still being conducted in both these aspects, it is necessary to keep in view the psychological changes as well as the functions of the different parts of the brain while making a comprehensive study of emotions. A fully satisfactory theory of thinking can be evolved in the future only with a balanced viewpoint. These changes due to emotion will be clarified further from the following:

The Influence of Wise Thinking on the Physical	
The External Physical Changes	The Internal Physical Changes
The facial expression The vocal expression	The change in heart beat The blood pressure changes The change in the blood chemistry The changes in brain waves

Table 1: The Effect of Wise Thinking on the Physical

3.2. Designing your life: build a life you love

3.2.1. The power of loving-kindness (*Mettā*)

The Buddha defines loving kindness as that which softens the heart. It is equated to the state of a true friend. It is a genuine wish for the welfare of the whole world. Four unbounded states of mind (*appamaññā*): the qualities to be radiated outwards towards all beings without exception, in an unlimited, immeasurable way. Most often these states are known as the four divine abiding *brahma vihāra*, excellent abiding, pure abiding, qualities of person with an expansive, noble mind.

The first and foremost ways of eliminating anger as taught by the Buddha, are to cultivate loving-friendliness or loving-kindness meditation, which is translated into English from the *Pāli* term *Mettā*.⁹ The term *adosa*, meaning non-hatred, is used for loving-kindness (*mettā*). Loving-kindness (*mettā*) is the opposite of anger (*dosa*). Lovingkindness (*mettā*): well-wishing, friendliness, the desire for all beings to experience happiness.¹⁰ Loving-kindness is a quality of the heart that recognizes how connected we all are. Sometimes it's described as extending friendship to ourselves and others not in the sense of liking everyone, or dispensing universal approval, but more as an inner knowing that all our lives are inextricably interconnected. When we experience loving-kindness, we acknowledge that every one of us shares the same wish to be happy, and often a similar confusion as to how to achieve that happiness. We also recognize that we share the same vulnerability to change and suffering, which elicits a sense of caring.¹¹ Loving kindness is not only sublime dhamma but also one of perfection. So, loving-kindness is an important one among the four noble dhamma because without loving-kindness, there is no compassion, equanimity. Therefore, loving-kindness is the most effective and remedy for the sickness of anger and ill-will. One can remove anger by contemplating the eleven benefits of loving-kindness. There are some conditions we should know before we start practicing loving kindness *mettā*. Venerable *Buddhagosa* mentions, we should not start practicing loving-kindness towards four kinds of persons:

- i. A person we hate most, for it is so difficult to concentrate our mind and send loving-kindness to a person whom we hate.
- ii. A person we dear most, for radiating loving kindness to a person whom we dear is also fatiguing.
- iii. A neutral person, because to send loving kindness to a neutral person is also fatiguing.

⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Philosophical Psychology of Buddhism*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2006), p. 86.

¹⁰ Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*, (Thailand: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2018), p. 1426.

¹¹ J. Mark, G. Williams and Jon Kabatt-Zinn, (ed.), *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on Its Meaning, Origins and Applications*, Sharon Salzberg, *Mindfulness and Loving-Kindness*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 178.

iv. An enemy, for if one recollects his enemy, anger springs more and more in him.¹²

Moreover, according to the Buddha's teaching loving-kindness can be practiced in deed (*mettākāyakamma*), in words (*mettāvācīkamma*), and thought (*mettāmanokamma*). They are understood as three manifestations of loving-kindness. In the *Abhidhamma* text, it says that our thoughts are transformed into speech and action.¹³ The practice of loving-kindness is the most essential thing to purify one's mind by reflecting upon the dangers of anger and advantages. That is a very first important step to practice the loving-kindness meditation. One can abandon things he dislikes only if he sees dangers in it, while he can develop things he desires only if he sees advantages in it. The danger of anger should be reflected on according to the teachings of the Buddha is exemplified in the *Visuddhimagga* thus:

Friends, when a man hates, is a prey to hate and his mind is obsessed by hate, he kills living things, and about the advantages in patience should be again reflected upon is thus: "Forbearance is the highest observance. Patience is the highest virtue".¹⁴

The Buddha delivered: "Practice of loving-kindness is the salvation for others, but also included the meditator, practicing meditation of mindfulness is the salvation for me, but also included others." Particularly, in meditation practice anger often can arise. When anger arises, we start practicing loving-kindness to overcome anger. This is a very wrong beginning of practicing loving-kindness. Buddhism points out anger is the far enemy of loving-kindness whereas lust, or greed or craving is said to be the nearest enemy of *Mettā*. When we practice loving-kindness towards someone whom we hate, instead of practicing *Mettā*, we may justify our anger. According to the *Mettā Sutta*, when one practices loving-kindness he is required to universalize the kind of love a mother has towards her one and only child. As *Mettā Sutta* said that:

Whatever living beings there may be feeble or strong, long (or tall), stout, or medium, short, small, or large, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born and those who are yet to be born may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded.¹⁵

The practice *Mettā* helps us drive away our negative thoughts and feelings and replace them with positive ones, primarily about ourselves and then, consequently, about all living beings. Focusing on ourselves, without guilt or our ego getting in the way, is a necessary and sufficient condition for a happy life. It improves our relationships, as well as our relationship with the environment

¹² Bhikkhu, Namamoli, *Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010), p. 292.

¹³ Mehm Tim Mon, *Buddha Abhidhamma Ultimate Science*, (2004), p. 220.

¹⁴ K. S. Dhammananda, *The Dhammapada*, (Malaysia: Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society, 1988), p. 133.

¹⁵ D, Andersen, and H, Smith, (eds.), *Sutta-Nipāta*, (Oxford: PTS), p. 1913.

we live in. We become loved, trusted and compassionate individuals, ready to have others if asked, while maintaining our peace of mind. The three thinks about being a good person: (1) Be a good person to make yourself happy not others, (2) Being a good person doesn't mean that always good things will happen to you, but one day what you did will come back to you, (3) When you be good you don't lose people, but people lose you. Loving kindness covers whatsoever living beings there be feeble or strong, long, stout or medium short, small or large, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born and those who are to be born, all beings without exception. The benefits of the lovingkindness are obvious during times of dispute and debate, when each party can consider the other side's reasoned arguments and even realize the truth of these arguments. An individual who develops loving kindness will not be born again as a human being.

3.2.2. The process of wise thinking development model

The model's name-wise thinking development stands for a circular compact. The wise thinking model rested on the power of cultivating mindfulness, emotional management, transformation awareness, right mentality, and true happiness.

3.2.2.1. Cultivating mindfulness: This mindfulness is practically said as the direct path for purification of beings. The Fourfold Foundation of Mindfulness consist of (1) The observation of the body in the body (*Kāyānupassanā Satipatthāna*), (2) The observation of the feelings in the feelings (*Vedanānupassanā Satipatthāna*), (3) The observation of the mind in the mind (*Cittānupassanā Satipatthāna*), (4) The observation of the objects of mind in the objects of mind (*Dhammānupassanā Satipatthāna*).

Mindfulness-being completely present to the life you're living and what you're doing is something that can't be understated. The awakened one saw that the root cause for the suffering and unhappiness which living beings experience in their lives is rooted in their minds. By cultivating awareness and acquiring control over the operation of the mind, a person can alter, undermine and destroy those root causes which bring misery, sorrow and frustration in his life. He can cultivate and develop other root causes to become firmly planted in the mind, which will enable him to experience the gradual and eventual ending of all sorrow and confusion. He could then live in a stable state of calm and happiness, free from all doubts, regrets, anxiety and so forth which disturb his well-being. Expanding your awareness changes every aspect of your life, in every way. It is as simple as that. The more you do, the more you'll discover your unique peace, joy, and the more you'll be able to let go of personal struggles. Awareness is the key to awakening. Through awareness you can see your monkey mind and all its mischief. Almost everything we do is to achieve something: If we do this, then we will get that, if we do that, then this will happen. But you have mindfulness, you do it just to do it. There is no ulterior purpose other than to be here, in the present moment, without trying to get anywhere or achieve anything. You are just aware of whatever is happening, whether pleasant or unpleasant, no right or no wrong.

3.2.2.2. Emotional management: The emotional management according to Four Developments (*bhāvanā*):

i. Development of the body (*kāya-bhāvanā*): the development of one's relationship to surrounding material things or to the body itself. In particular, to cognize things by ways of the five faculties skilfully, by beneficially relating to them, does not cause harm, increases wholesome qualities, and dispels unwholesome qualities.

ii. Development of morality (*sīla-bhāvanā*): cultivation of virtuous conduct; to develop one's behavior and one's social relationships, by keeping to a moral code by not abusing or injuring others or causing conflict, and by living in harmony with others and supporting one another.

iii. Development of mind (*citta- bhāvanā*): to develop the mind; to strengthen and stabilize the mind; to cultivate wholesome qualities, like lovingkindness, compassion, enthusiasm, diligence, and patience; to make the mind concentrated, bright, joyous, and clear.

iv. Development of wisdom (*paññā-bhāvanā*): to develop and increase wisdom until there arises a comprehensive understanding of truth, by knowing things as they are and by gaining a clear insight into the world and phenomena. At this stage one can free the mind, purify oneself from mental defilement, and be liberated from suffering. One life act and solves problems with penetrative awareness. All of the above-mentioned doctrines are all methods and techniques of meditation practice exactly related to the development of the mind as the foundation of emotional management in Theravādā Buddhism.

3.2.2.3. Transformation awareness: To refer to replacing bad emotion with good thinking or unwholesome instead wholesome by developing the right understanding, awareness is knowledge that something exists or perception of a situation or subject at present based on information or experience. Three of the best ways to heal your heart: (1) accept that there is pain and suffering in life, (2) accept that humans are imperfect, (3) accept that not everything is fair in this life.

3.2.2.4. Right mentality: It is considered as the center point of right verbal action, right physical action, and right verbal action that led to its expression in the form of systematic behavior. The wise thinking based on a Buddhist provides a powerful tool that can facilitate the visualization and understanding of individuals, groups of people, and all kinds of natural and man-made systems. Systematic thinking can be used to design things of excellence, things that perform well.

3.2.2.5. True happiness: The happiness that arises within us every time we reflect upon our good deeds of kindness, generosity, patience, self-discipline, serenity and wisdom outlasts throughout our life and surpasses all other temporary and greedy happiness which arises by indulging sensual pleasures. Why do human beings have a lot of possessions in their lives, such as wealth, cars, houses, but they are still unhappy with all this. This is a big question; the reason is that what they receive every day is no true happiness

but false happiness, and overthinking kills your happiness. True happiness does not arise if our minds do not have peace, not only can peace build true happiness, but it also brings it to other people who follow us or live beside us.¹⁶ There are three main attributes to this true happiness.

i. It is constant: It need not be searched for, it is an inherent quality of the heart.

ii. It is free: It is not dependent on anything else.

iii. It is pure: It is complete, there remains no latent or lingering suffering.

The true happiness is constant because it has become an inherent feature of one's life. For this reason, one need not search for it.

The true happiness is independent and free. This differs altogether from sense pleasure, which is completely dependent on external, material things. Sense pleasure requires the pursuit and appropriation of things. One must look after and guard these things zealously. One loses one's independence, and one vies with others, leading to conflict and oppression. By developing independent happiness, one is inwardly free and one need not compete with anyone else. The true happiness is pure and complete. No disturbances or irritations remain in the mind. Many people claim that they are happy, but deep down they still suffer, or the causes suffering.¹⁷ Here we arrive at the highest happiness, which in Buddhism is succinctly described, *Nibbāna* is the supreme happiness.¹⁸ One more we must make the universal fact of suffering the starting point of our quest. And if this time our goal is the highest, the best, the final attainment of *Nibbāna*, even that goal ought to be understood in the light of the truth of suffering. For *Nibbāna* is the deliverance from all sorrow. "As a departure from that kind of craving which is lust, it is called *Nibbāna*." This was said by the Blessed One, spoken by the Holy One, and thus I have heard: There are, O monks, two aspects of *Nibbāna*: (1) The *Nibbāna* element with the groups of existence remaining (*sa-upādisesa nibbānadhātu*); (2) The *Nibbāna* element with no groups remaining (*anupādisesa nibbānadhātu*).¹⁹

What is now the *Nibbāna* element with the groups of existence remaining (*saupādisesa nibbānadhātu*), in that case, O monks, a monk is an *Arahat*, he is taint-free, has fulfilled the holy life, accomplished his task, thrown off the burden, attained his goal, cast off the fetters of existence and is liberated through right wisdom. But there remain with him, the five sense-organs that have not yet disappeared and through which he still experiences what is pleasant and

¹⁶ Hansa Dhammhaso, *Wisdom for a Harmonious and Awakening Society*, (Bangkok: MCU Press, 2014), p. 15.

¹⁷ Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*, (Thailand: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2018), p. 953.

¹⁸ Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto (Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya), *Buddhadhamma: The Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*, (Thailand: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2018), p. 952.

¹⁹ Nyanaponika Thera, *The Roots Good and Evil: Buddhist Texts*, (Srilanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1978), p. 98.

unpleasant, as well as bodily ease and pain. The extinction of greed, hatred and delusion in him, this is called the *Nibbāna* element with the groups of existence remaining (*saupādisesa nibbānadhātu*). And what is the *Nibbāna* element with no groups remaining (*anupādisesa nibbānadhātu*), in that case, O monks, a monk is an *Arahat* liberated through right wisdom. In him, all those feelings, no longer relished, will even here come to extinction. This is called the *Nibbāna* element with no groups remaining (*anupādisesa nibbānadhātu*).²⁰ The happiness of liberation, once there was greed, and that was evil, now that is no more, and so it is well. Once there was hatred, and that was evil, now that is no more, and so it is well. Once there was delusion, and that was evil, now that is no more, and so it is well. Thus the *Arahat* lives, even during his lifetime, free of craving's hunger, stilled and cooled feeling happy, with his heart become holy.²¹ The Process of Wise Thinking Development Model

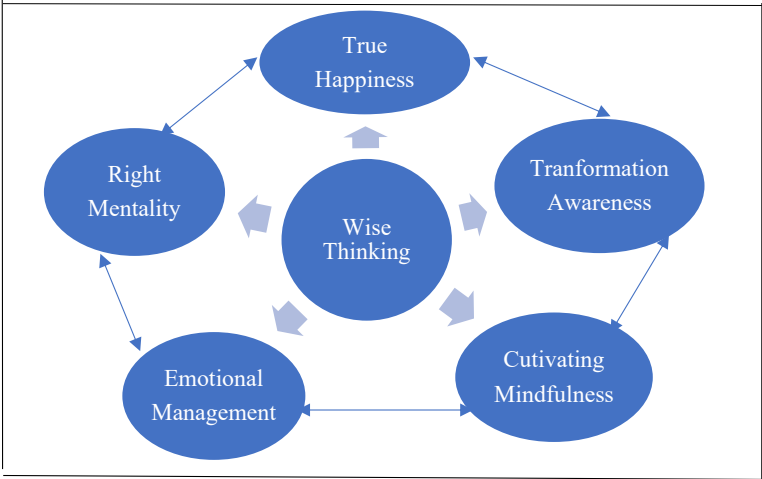


Chart 1: The Process of Wise Thinking Development Model

IV. CONCLUSION

The cultivation of wise thinking (*yoniso manasikāra*) plays a pivotal role in human development, serving as the guiding force that directs cognitive processes toward clarity, purpose, and ethical discernment. Much like a rudder steering a ship, wise thinking ensures that intellectual faculties remain aligned with constructive and meaningful objectives, enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of life with rationality and insight. It is not merely an abstract ideal but a structured methodology of cognitive management - one that fosters sound judgment, enhances decision-making, and facilitates effective problem-solving in both personal and societal contexts.

To engage in the practice of wise attention is to cultivate a disciplined mode of thinking that is oriented toward truth, free from distortions caused

²⁰ It 44.
²¹ A III. 66.

by afflictive emotions and unwholesome mental states. When guided by wise reflection, thought processes become refined, leading to a deepened capacity for discernment (*prajñā*), ethical awareness (*śīla*), and right action (*samyak-karmānta*). This transformation is not merely theoretical but experiential, as it replaces mental corruption with clarity, allowing one to perceive reality with greater depth and accuracy.

The significance of wise thinking extends across temporal boundaries - it has been a foundational principle in the past, remains highly relevant in the present, and will continue to serve as a cornerstone for intellectual and spiritual evolution in the future. Despite its profound applicability, research on the systematic cultivation of wise thinking remains incomplete due to constraints in time and access to comprehensive resources. Nonetheless, its importance cannot be overstated, as it provides a framework for continuous self-refinement and contributes to both individual and collective well-being.

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PAIN AND STRESS MANAGEMENT THROUGH MINDFULNESS AND BUDDHIST PRACTICES

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Abstract:

The study was conducted to explore the pain and stress management through mindfulness and Buddhist practices. The research shares personal experiences and insights from Buddhist scriptures to shed light on the nature of suffering and the path to liberation. The research details the Four Noble Truths, mindfulness practices, meditation (*Samatha* and *Vipassāna*), and practical methods such as appropriate medication, redirection of attention, listening to Dharma talks, and objective reflection. The study emphasizes the importance of compassion, letting go, and mental preparation for hardship. Ultimately, the research results affirmed that the combination of mindfulness and Buddhist practices provides a comprehensive approach to achieving well-being and reducing suffering. Through this, we can change our relationship with pain and stress, leading to a happier and more balanced life.

Keywords: *Buddhism, pain, stress, mindfulness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Pain and stress affect a huge number of people all over the world. These have a big effect on our physical, mental, and emotional health, whether they are caused by illnesses, social problems, or the stress of modern life. Traditional ways of dealing with stress and pain often include medication, therapy, or changes to one's lifestyle. However, more and more people are looking for answers in ancient wisdom. Mindfulness and Buddhist practices are two of these that are well known for their ability to make people ease their pain, and make them feel calmer.

The title I have chosen is personal, drawn from my own experiences with stress and anxiety. And also from my personal confrontation with patients and people who underwent painful experiences while afflicted with sickness. In this paper, several examples are taken from textual studies "*Tipiṭaka*" and also from

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various other sources. My sincere wish and hope is that all beings remain free from pain, sickness and misfortunes. Yet, life is so uncertain and unpredictable, we cannot fully comprehend the consequences of our past actions - whether positive or negative, which have the potential to give results in the present life. Hence, we never know what the future awaits us. Nevertheless, if we are fully prepared with the right tools, we can encounter the difficulties effectively.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE PAIN

Pain and Stress are inevitable in life. Oxford Dictionary defines pain as: “the feelings that you have in your body when you have been hurt or when you are ill”¹. According to Buddhist Psychology, Abhidhamma, Pain or *Dukkha vedanā* is merely a feeling of discomfort (*vedanā*) experienced by the body consciousness associated with physical pain². The body plays a significant role in the arising of pain. Without the body, physical pain cannot manifest. Hence, in the Arūpa Brahma planes, where beings exist without the physical form, there is no experience of physical pain for them. On the contrary, beings like the Asaññasatta Brahmas, who just have the body but no mind, also do not feel any body sensitivity. It is only the beings in the (sensuous world) Kamaloka and rupa brahma beings who have both the mind and the body experience either physical pleasure (*kāyika sukha*) or physical pain (*kāyika dukkha*).

Vedanāsamyyutta mentions three main types of feelings:³

- (1) *Sukha vedanā* – the feeling of happiness.
- (2) *Dukkha vedanā* – the feeling of pain.
- (3) *Adukkhamasukha vedanā* – the neutral feeling, neither pleasant nor painful.

These three feelings can further be expanded to five types of feelings⁴:

- (1) Pleasure Feeling (*somanassa vedanā*).
- (2) Displeasure feeling (*domanassa vedanā*).
- (3) Neutral feeling (*upekkhā vedanā*).
- (4) Physical painful feeling (*dukkha vedanā*).
- (5) Physical happiness feeling (*sukha vedanā*).

Feeling falls under the category of Universal mental factor. Whether it is classified into three or five types, feeling is part of our daily experiences and is constantly arising in different forms. It is the tendency of most ordinary people (*Puthujjana*) to cling to pleasant feelings, desiring to have them again and again. But when confronted with an unpleasant sensation, particularly the pain, they seek to avoid or eliminate the unpleasant as quickly as possible. It

¹ Oxford Dictionary, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/pain_1?q=Pain

² Narada Maha Thera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, 1987, 28.

³ Suttas.com, *Vedanāsamyyutta*, accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at: <https://www.suttas.com/chapter-2-vedana-samyutta.html>.

⁴ Narada Maha Thera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, 1987, p. 17.

is stated in the *Vimuttimaggā* as follows: “The one in pain desires happiness; the one in happiness seeks more; The one with neutral feelings remains calm, And thus, even this is considered a form of happiness.”⁵

2.1. Pain is certain, suffering is optional

In reading the life stories of great saints and meditators, we observe that even the most enlightened individuals - who were mentally pure and liberated from all unwholesome states - still physically suffered. The Buddha, during his final days, experienced intense stomach pain and persistent dysentery, which weakened his body⁶. Similarly, esteemed arahants such as Mahamoggallāna and Maha Kassapa faced extreme bodily pain while residing in the Gijjhakuta hill and the PipPāli caves⁷, respectively. Many others great beings have experienced similar afflictions. Nevertheless, even though they physically suffered, they were not mentally disturbed, their mind remained at ease and serenity.

When, we most of us encounter bodily discomfort, sickness, and pain in our own lives, we suffer physically and also we suffer mentally. Hence, it is important to examine the nature of pain and stress and explore the ways to manage it so that we may reduce at least our mental suffering.

2.2. Understanding the Stress

Stress as defined by Oxford Dictionary is ‘Pressure or worry caused by problems in somebody’s life or by having too much to do’⁸. The Buddhist psychology does not give a direct equivalent term for stress. However, it is linked to the term ‘*Dukkha*’ Suffering. Suffering itself is not the cause, but the effect of some causes such as attachment or aversion. As an example, ‘*yampicchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ*’⁹ (Not getting of what one wishes or desires is also suffering). Stress has a similar nature which can arise from various causes and conditions.

2.3. Understanding Pain and Stress in comparison with the Four Noble Truths

Four Noble Truths are fundamental teachings of the Buddha. It is like the footprint of an elephant where all the footprints of all animals can fit inside¹⁰.

⁵ Nyanatusita bhikkhu, *Vimuttimaggā*. Vol -2, (2021). 619: “*Dukkhi sukhaṃ patthayati, sukhi bhiyyopi icchati; Upekkhā pana santattā, sukhamicceva bhāsītā*.”

⁶ Sutato Bhikkhu. *Mahāparinibbana sutta*, (DN 16), accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none-es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

⁷ Paṭhamagilānasuttaṃ, samyuttanikaya, Tipitakapali. Accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at: <https://tipitaka.org/romn/#173>

⁸ Oxford Learners Dictionary, accessed on [February 4, 2025] available at: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/stress_1?q=Stress.

⁹ Pañcavaggiyakathā, Tipitakapali, accessed on [February 5, 2025], available at: <https://tipitaka.org/romn/#22>.

¹⁰ Mahahattipadopama sutta, accessed on [5, February, 2025]. available at: <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.028.than.html>.

All the phenomena can be connected and related to the four noble truths. Pain and stress can also be understood using the four noble truths.

(1) *Dukkha* (Suffering): Pain and Stress are part of normal life. It should be understood well and acknowledged¹¹.

(2) *Samudaya* (Origin of Suffering): Attachment to expectations and wishes, as well as an inability to accept impermanence, are the main causes of stress.

(3) *Nirodha* (Cessation of Suffering): By the development of inner purity and calmness and detachment, one can achieve stress-free living and finally total pain and stress eradication.

(4) *Magga* (Path to the Cessation of Suffering): The Eightfold Path offers systematic path in the form of ethical conduct (*sīla*), development of concentration (*Samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) for the overcoming of Pain and stress.

2.4. Mindfulness in Buddhism

Mindfulness, or Sati in Pāli language, derived from the root sar - to remember¹². It belongs to the category of mental factors (*cetasika*) called sobhanasadhara in *Abhidhamma*, the mental factors which are common to all the beautiful or good consciousness. It is present in all the good, wholesome consciousness. The discourse on the foundation of Mindfulness '*Mahasatipatthana sutta*' describes four ways to develop the mindfulness:

Kāyānupassanā: Mindfulness of the Body: to be aware of bodily movements, breathing and postures.

Vedanānupassanā: Mindfulness of Feelings: to be aware of the feelings as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral without craving or hating.

Cittānupassanā: Mindfulness of the Mind: To be aware of the mental states and emotions, recognizing their impermanent nature.

Dhammānupassana: Mindfulness of Mental Objects: to be aware of various mental objects which include the Five Aggregates, the four noble truths, etc.

2.5. Practicing Mindfulness in Everyday Life

Being mindful isn't just about meditating while sitting down. Practitioners are told by the Buddha to be mindful in all of their daily actions, such as when they eat, walk, take things, put on clothes, and so on. So, awareness leads to peace and well-being. In the last few decades, the Buddhist mindfulness program has become more well-known around the world, especially in the health and psychology areas. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)¹³, which was created by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, has been used a lot to help chronic pain,

¹¹ Dhammacakkapavattanasutta, accessed on, [5 February, 2025], available at <https://sut-tacentral.net/sn56.11/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>.

¹² Narada, *A manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 102, 1979.

¹³ jonkabat-zinn. accessed on, [6 february, 2025], available at: <https://www.mindful.org/everyday-mindfulness-with-jon-kabat-zinn/>.

anxiety, stress, and depression. Furthermore, mindfulness-based exercises are now used in business productivity programs and educational programs. Even though these are different from traditional Buddhist teachings, the basic idea of becoming more aware of the present moment is still there.

By being aware of the present moment without judging it, people who practice mindfulness can look at their thoughts, feelings, and physical experiences more clearly. This method is great for dealing with pain and stress because it makes you less likely to overreact to discomfort and more likely to stay calm. Mindfulness training helps people deal with stress and pain better by teaching them to accept them without getting overwhelmed by them. Neuroscience study shows that mindfulness exercises can change the structure of the brain¹⁴, making it easier to control your emotions and less active in areas that are linked to stress and pain.

Vipassāna Meditation Centre, especially of Goenka tradition, where Body scanning is made to observe the sensation of the body, also helps people relax deeply and become more aware of how their bodies feel by having them focus on different parts of their bodies in a planned way. By training people to be aware of tension and pain without judging them, this method helps them step away from their pain and deal with it more easily.

Practicing Mindfulness and meditation every day can help one in the long run by making one less sensitive to pain, less reactive to stress, and more emotionally strong. These techniques help people change how they feel about pain and stress by seeing them as temporary things rather than very dangerous.

Mindfulness and meditation are strong ways to deal with pain and stress because they help us become more self-aware, control our emotions, and relax. People can develop more equanimity, make themselves calmer mentally and improve their general health by practicing regularly. Mindfulness and meditation are still useful, easy to access, and long-lasting ways to get long-lasting relief from pain and stress, as long as scientific study also backs them up.

Mindfulness and meditation are very important for dealing with worry and pain. These helpful habits should be done even before someone gets sick. People who haven't practiced on time and were not regular during their good health period, may find it hard to deal with pain and stress when they arise. Hence it is important to make it a daily habit to practice Meditation awareness. One must strive to practice it even if it's just for a few minutes. Thus one becomes fully ready and prepared for the unseen situation which might arise in the future.. The Buddha reminds us not to postpone the things. "Regret doesn't help when chance passes by".¹⁵

¹⁴ Dolan Eric, *Neuroscience research shows how mindfulness meditation fosters a unique state of relaxed alertness*, accessed on [11 February, 2025], available also at: <https://www.psypost.org/neuroscience-research-shows-how-mindfulness-meditation-fosters-a-unique-state-of-relaxed-alertness>.

¹⁵ Buddhārakkhita translated *Dhammapada*, accessed on [10 February, 2025], also available at <https://www.accesstinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.22.budd.html>.

2.6. Buddhist Practices

Buddhist practices come in many forms and are different from tradition to traditions. However, all start with moral practices such as following the 5 precepts or 8 precepts. Here we will focus more on the meditative side of the Buddhist Practice.

There are the two main types of meditation used in Buddhist practice: *Samatha bhāvanā*, also known as “Serene” or “Tranquility” Meditation, is a way to focus and calm your mind. One well-known way is mindfulness of breathing (*Anapanasati*). Another is loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) which is frequently used by many. There are also other objects of meditation, such as Kasina objects, which can be used for *Samatha* meditation. Among those, the Recollection of Generosity (*Caganussati*) is a strong help for covering pain and stress:

*Caganussati*¹⁶, also known as the reflection on generosity, is a contemplative meditation practice. The purpose of this practice is to generate the feelings of enthusiasm, thankfulness, and joy in the heart. To cultivate a heart of kindness and compassion, it is a practice that entails meditating on one’s acts of giving and generosity, as well as the generosity of others, as a means of generating positive good vibes. This practice is one of the ten recollections (*Anussati*)¹⁷ that the Buddha recommended to achieve mental purity and spiritual development at the same time.

One of the fundamental goals of *Caganussati* is to train the mind to focus on acts of selflessness and generosity to combat the negative emotions of attachment, greed, and selfishness. Through the practice of remembering acts of generosity that have been performed in the past, one can cultivate feelings of joy (*pīti*) and satisfaction (*sukha*), which in turn naturally leads to a mind that is calm and focused (*samādhi*) overcoming of once pain and stress.

Vipassāna Bhāvanā (*Vipassāna* Meditation)

The word *Vipassāna*¹⁸ derived from vi + root dis = ti see, literally meaning perceiving things in diverse ways. Or meaning “insight” or “clear seeing.”

Vipassāna entails watching body sensations, thoughts, and emotions without attachment or aversion, unlike concentration-based practices (*samatha*) that calm the mind. After developing a certain amount of concentration, when the mind is calm and composed, the attention is widened to watch physical sensations, mental formations or emotions as they arise and pass. The practitioners recognize all those phenomena as impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*). By objectively viewing phenomena without naming them “good” or “bad,” craving and aversion, which cause pain and stress. This purifies the mind and develops wisdom covering all pain and stress and ultimately

¹⁶ Mahamenava, Buddhist Nuns, accessed on [13 February, 2025], available at: <https://www.buddhistnuns.org/caganussati-meditation>.

¹⁷ Narada Maha Thera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, 1987, p. 385.

¹⁸ Narada Maha Thera, *A Manual of Abhidhamma*, 1987, p.394.

attaining the attainment of Nirvana, the freedom from all sufferings.

2.7. Practical Approaches to Pain and Stress

2.7.1. Taking the Right Medicines

While on sickness, experiencing physical discomfort and pain, the first course of action is to seek proper medical advice and treatment. Just as one would drink water when thirsty. Immediate relief through the right medicine can alleviate the pain, enabling the individual to return to a state of normalcy. Even Venerable Sāriputta, during his time of suffering from stomach pain, sought timely relief through medicine, recalling that his mother used to prepare a rich gruel to ease his discomfort¹⁹.

2.7.2. Shifting the focus of Attention

When pain or stress intensifies, a useful technique is to shift the focus of attention. The shift of focus brings to an end the temporary pain or stress. According to Abhidhamma, only one *citta* (state of mind) can arise at any given time. For instance, if someone is listening, the process of mere listening is taking place, not the seeing. I witnessed this with my mother, who while in pain due to some sickness, was able to ease her suffering by focusing her attention on the recitation of the Three Refuges (*Tisarana*) and the Buddha's qualities. When her attention was fixed on the Dhamma, her pain subsided. That is why even during meditation, if some unwholesome thoughts persist arising, the Yogi is instructed to change the meditation object to some wholesome one²⁰. The same process can work even for the people with stress. Going away for a walk or holiday, meaningful conversation, especially with a noble friend. Some turn towards alcohol, which is not encouraged in the Buddhist way. It damages more than it cures.

III. LISTENING TO DHAMMA TALKS (DHAMMASAVANA)

Dhamma are the words of the Buddha that came out from his omniscient knowledge (*sabbannuta nyana*) of the Buddha. The words based on truth have enormous power to heal and cure all kinds of mental sickness, physically, and mentally. There are numerous advantages to listening to the Dhamma. It offers us direction on how to lead a decent and fulfilling life. By hearing the teachings, one can learn how to give up negative qualities like greed, hatred, and delusion and develop good ones like patience, kindness, and compassion.

Deeper down, hearing the Dhamma helps in eradicating ignorance (*avijjā*), the primary cause of all our problems. Listening to the Dhamma reveals the essence of reality of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness. One can overcome the attachments and false beliefs that prolong pain by being aware of these facts. Dhammassavana is therefore an important instrument for overcoming pain and stress and finally all the problems.

¹⁹ Catuparisuddhisilavannana, *Visuddhimagga*, accessed on [February 5, 2025], available at: <https://tipitaka.org/romn/#2309>.

²⁰ vitakkasantanasutta, *Thanissaro Bhikkhu*, majjhimanikaya, accessed on (February 5, 2025) available at: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.020.than.html>.

King Ajatasattu, after killing his devoted father King Bimbisara, could not sleep for days. Fear and doubt haunted him, leaving him stressed and in great agony. After hearing the Dhamma from the Buddha, his mind became calm, free from agitation²¹. The divine king of Tavatimsa, Sakka, upon the last days of life span was stressed and fear came running to the Buddha, upon hearing the Dhamma, he was then and there attained Sotapatti hood, which brought him total freedom from stress and fear²². Thus, listening to the sublime words of the Buddha brings understanding and clarity, dispelling all doubts and fear and stress. Hence listening to dhamma itself is a big blessing said by the Buddha²³.

IV. RECITING AND CONTEMPLATING ON HEALING TEACHINGS

From the time of the Buddha to the present day, the practice of reciting specific sutras or teachings such as the *Bhojjanga Sutta*, has been noted for its healing effects. Venerable Sobhitavamsa from Chanmyay meditation centre of Myanmar,²⁴ who was diagnosed with a terminal liver disease, found profound relief and eventually healed his sickness through the daily recitation of the *Bhojjanga* and *Mettā Suttas*. There is another friend of my friend who was also suffering from cancer for quite a long time, once she went into a ten-day Meditation and Yoga retreat. It was quite surprising to notice, after the retreat, she had recovered from her sickness. It is quite astonishing how this might happen? Buddhist Abhidhamma says material form is formed or produced by four factors²⁵: action (*kamma*), mind, season, and nutriment. Here I would like to focus on the mind producing materiality. When someone has a kind mind and is happy, happiness manifests in his face in the form of the glowing face. On the contrary, if someone is carrying an aversion and an angry mind. The face changes to black and blue. The mind produces matters, colors the face according to the types of consciousness it produces. Every calm and serene mind which arises generates new good cells. These newly produced good cells replace the bad and harmful cells in the body. Thus, when the process is repetitive, all the bad cells of cancer get replaced by the good cells produced by the meditative calm and serene mind. This is a testament to the power of mindfulness and dedicated practice in overcoming illness.

V. VIEWING THE PAIN/ STRESS OBJECTIVELY

In daily life, people often crave pleasant sensations and seek to avoid discomfort. However, if one sees the sensations objectively and not subjectively, one can overcome many of our problems. This is understood better by this

²¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu trans. *Samannaphalasutta*, accessed on [10 February, 2025], Available at <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.02.0.than.html>.

²² Sarada Mahathero Translated. *Illustrated Dhammapada*. accessed on (9 February, 2025). Available at: <https://www.wisdomlib.org/buddhism/book/dhammapada-illustrated/d/doc1084418.html>

²³ Piyadassi Thera Translated. *Mangalaasutta*. Accessed on (9 February, 2025). Available at <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.04.piya.html>

²⁴ The Bhojjangas, *Chan Myaing Sayadaw*, 2008, p. 11.

²⁵ Narada, *A manual of Abhidhamma*, (1979), p. 302.

analogy, which my meditation master²⁶ used to present: Imagining pain as a radio broadcast. Just as a radio tune drifts onto a certain frequency, plays on its own, unaffected by the listener's wish or desires. Similarly, when a pain or stress arises, one observes it in the body without adding any personal views or idea to it. One does not see the pain as "mine" or something to control. Practically, this was quite visible when someone goes for a retreat or longer meditation practice. By observing the pain objectively, without any attachment or aversion, one can easily reduce the emotional suffering that accompanies it.

VI. REDUCING MENTAL EXAGGERATION AND KEEPING THE MIND RELAX

Pain is experienced in the body, but it is the mind that amplifies it. When we become attached to the pain, adding thoughts such as "I am suffering," "This is unbearable," we increase the mental anguish surrounding the physical sensation. By removing the "self" from the equation, we can reduce the suffering associated with pain. As the Buddha taught, even in the face of sickness, one should not let the mind become sick with craving or aversion.

Stress can usually multiply, especially when the mind is agitated and not calm. During the pandemic, I and my English friend had COVID-19 at the same time. It came to us from a sick man who was also sharing with us the same dormitory in a meditation Centre. After the infection, we were both isolated and kept in a separate place. I had a calm and relaxing mind and I was able to recover within a week. Whereas my friend who was very agitated and was always complaining took around ten days to recover. The stress and agitation have weakened his immune system, which delayed his recovery. Hence, a relaxed mind is very much essential during the time of Stress.

VII. SELF-COMPASSION AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

One is the heir of one's own *Kamma*²⁷. We are the result of our past actions, whether they were positive or negative. The majority of us tend to blame others for our misfortunes and negative experiences. It is undeniable that we must take precautions to counter such situation; however, it is equally important to recognize that the misfortune that has befallen us may also be the result of our previous unwise actions that have caused harm to others. Therefore, we must forgive ourselves for our past unwise actions and extend forgiveness to those who have caused us harm.

Loving kindness and Compassionate is an important part of Buddhist practice for relieving pain and stress. Loving kindness and Compassionate make it possible to deeply understand and connect with oneself and others, which leads to a stronger relationship that eases pain and stress. Integrating kindness into daily life and meditating can help us change how to deal with stress and pain more effectively.

²⁶ Shweoomin Pariyatti and Patipatti meditation teacher in Hmabhi, Myanmar.

²⁷ Dasadhammasutta, *Piyadassi therā*, accessed on (February 5, 2025), available at: <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.048.piya.html>

Pain and stress are normal parts of life. But we can deal with the pain with Loving kindness and understanding instead of dislike or hate towards the pain or stress. Practicing compassion means being aware of one's own and other people's pain and wanting to make it less severe.

Loving-Kindness Meditation (*Mettā Bhāvanā*) is one of the best techniques to relieve Pain and Stress. Creating the feelings of love, kindness, and compassion towards oneself and others is the goal of this practice. The *Mettā* meditation usually takes a methodical approach, starting with projecting or wishing the good and well being of oneself, which systematically further radiates and expands towards those beloved ones, then to neutral people, and even to those people with whom one disagrees. A frequent loving-kindness meditation practice can lower stress, anxiety, and chronic pain, as the *Mettā Sutta* says no harm can fall on him/ her²⁸.

Compassion can be described as Loving kindness in Action. Loving kindness merely wishes the good and well-being of all beings, compassion goes a little further, it cannot tolerate seeing the suffering of others. It needs an immediate action to remove the suffering of others. Compassion Meditation focuses on the removal of suffering of others in particular, the practitioner by visualizing their own and other people's misery, practitioners develop a strong desire to end that suffering.

VIII. TRAINING TO DETACH AND LETTING GO

Attachment to our material possessions such as wealth and money, attachment to our near and dear ones, and the fear of loss they can create immense stress and pressure on our mind. Hence, making the best use of wealth in a wise way with the right understanding of the impermanence nature of material things, and thus training to detach ourselves from material things is a good preparation for encountering stress in the time of loss of things and loss of closed relatives. Similar attachment to one's ego can be incredibly stressful once things do not go according to one's wishes. Through the practice of letting go of Ego one can be stress-free. In fact, 'the giving up of Full Ego is the highest happiness said by the Buddha²⁹'.

In the busy, demanding world we live in, stress is something that almost everyone feels. Many things can cause stress, from pressure at work to problems in personal relationships. Based on what Buddha taught, letting go is not the same as giving up or being passive. It means letting go of attachments to wants, dislikes, and false beliefs that cause pain. People can find permanent peace and freedom from stress by committing to this practice.

Dhammacakkapavattana sutta says pain, suffering (*dukkha*) comes from

²⁸ Sujato Bhikkhu Translated. *Mettanissamsasutta*, accessed on [10 February, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/an11.15/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

²⁹ Mucalindakathā, Mahavagga, Vinayapitakapali. Accessed on [February 4, 2025], available at: <https://tipitaka.org/romn/#22>

clinging to the five aggregates³⁰. We hold on to things, people, and events because we think they will make us happy and safe. But this connection can make us sad, angry, and stressed when things don't go the way we thought they would. The Buddha taught that everything in life is temporary (*anicca*), and holding on to temporary things will always cause pain. Because of this, letting go means realizing that everything is temporary and letting go of what we can't control. When we learn to go with the flow of life instead of fighting it, this shift in viewpoint can help us feel a lot less stressed.

Mindfulness (*sati*) is also one of the most important ways to let go. Being mindful means paying attention to the present moment without judging it or being closed off to it. When we practice mindfulness, we become aware of the ways our thoughts, feelings, and body reactions make us stressed. We might notice that we worry a lot about the future or keep thinking about the mistakes we've made in the past. Knowing how to be aware teaches us to watch our thoughts without getting attached to them. We can let them come and go like waves in the ocean. This practice helps us break out of the circle of stress and reactivity, so we can handle the problems in life with more calm.

The growth of understanding (*paññā*) is another important part of letting go in Buddhism. Wisdom means knowing the truth about reality, which includes the fact that everything changes, isn't satisfying, and doesn't care about itself. When we understand this, we realize that our attachments are built on false ideas and that real peace comes from inside, not outside. With this knowledge, we can let go of our wants and dislikes, which eases the mental and emotional stress that comes from them.

To let go, one also need Loving kindness and compassion. A lot of the time, worry comes from judging and criticizing others and ourselves. By developing compassion, we learn to be kind and understanding to ourselves and others, which frees us from the need to be perfect and accept ourselves as we are. This change in attitude can make you feel much less stressed and more at peace with yourself.

IX. CONCLUSION

Mindfulness and Buddhist practices for managing pain and stress provide a comprehensive and long-lasting approach to wellbeing. These methods, which have their roots in ancient wisdom, give people the means to develop a balanced state of mind and peace. Mindfulness and Buddhist practices promote awareness, acceptance, and equanimity, which promote a significant change in one's relationship with pain and stress, in contrast to traditional medical therapies that mainly concentrate on symptom relief.

Mindfulness, which has been modified for use in modern therapeutic contexts, is essential for treating psychological and physical suffering. People

³⁰ Bodhi Bhikkhu translated *Dhammacakkapavattana sutta*, accessed on (10 February, 2025) available at <https://suttacentral.net/sn56.11/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

can learn to notice their pain and stress without getting overwhelmed by it by cultivating present-moment awareness.

People can respond to challenges with more calmness because of this increased awareness, which increases mental clarity. The effectiveness of mindfulness-based therapies, including Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), in reducing chronic pain, anxiety, and depression has been supported by several scientific studies. This program shows how traditional knowledge and contemporary science can work in hand to promote well-being by incorporating Buddhist practices with scientifically supported psychological treatments.

Furthermore, Buddhist practices of various techniques also provide ways to calm the mind. Understanding on the teachings on suffering (*dukkha*), impermanence (*anicca*), and non-self (*anattā*) offer a mental framework that aids people in reframing their experiences of pain and stress. Practitioners can cultivate a sense of detachment, which lessens the severity of suffering, by realizing that all occurrences, including discomfort and distress, are temporary. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that compassion-based activities like loving-kindness meditation and compassion meditation enhance interpersonal relationships towards oneself and others.

To sum up, Mindfulness and Buddhist practices combine philosophical insights, ethical ideals, and meditation techniques provide a comprehensive approach for the management of pain and stress.

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BUDDHIST SCIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH: FORGIVENESS, COMPASSION AND MINDFUL HEALING AS PATHS TO RECONCILIATION

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Abstract:

This study, “Buddhist Science of Mental Health: Forgiveness, Compassion, and Mindful Healing as Paths to Reconciliation,” explores Buddhist principles as therapeutic tools for mental health and reconciliation. Amid a global mental health crisis, conditions such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and interpersonal conflicts continue to impact quality of life. Current mental health interventions, like cognitive-behavioral therapy and pharmacotherapy, often focus on symptom management without addressing the roots of emotional suffering. In contrast, Buddhism provides a framework focused on holistic healing and transformation through compassion (*karuṇā*), forgiveness, and mindfulness (*sati*). This study addresses the need to understand how Buddhist principles can be systematically applied within therapeutic practices to support not only symptom alleviation but also deeper personal and social healing. It investigates how these elements contribute to reconciliation and sustainable mental health, addressing the question: How can Buddhist principles of compassion, forgiveness, and mindfulness aid mental health treatment and support reconciliation on individual and societal levels? The study has three main objectives: to explore Buddhist perspectives on mental health through canonical texts, to analyze how compassion, forgiveness, and mindfulness function as therapeutic agents for fostering emotional regulation, resilience, and empathy; and to propose Buddhist-inspired methods for reconciliation within mental health frameworks. Considering the research methodology: a comparative thematic analysis was conducted on selected Buddhist texts and contemporary psychological literature to evaluate the therapeutic value of these Buddhist concepts. Findings reveal that Buddhist practices foster emotional resilience, reduce attachment, and grievances, and enhance self-awareness, providing pathways to address not only individual mental health

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but also broader societal reconciliation. These insights suggest that integrating Buddhist teachings can lead to more holistic and sustainable approaches in mental health care, addressing both cognitive and emotional sources of suffering.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Mental Health, Compassion, Forgiveness, Mindful Healing, Reconciliation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

In the past decade, the prevalence of mental health issues has surged across diverse populations, affecting people regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural background. The World Health Organisation estimates that one in every eight people globally suffers from mental health conditions, underscoring the need for accessible and effective mental health interventions. Mental health challenges, which range from anxiety and depression to trauma and interpersonal conflicts, significantly impact individuals' quality of life and hinder their capacity for personal growth, healthy relationships, and social integration. In response to this mental health crisis, there is a growing demand for therapeutic approaches that not only treat symptoms but also promote long-term emotional and relational healing.

Modern psychology and psychiatry have developed a variety of treatment methods, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), psychoanalysis, and pharmacotherapy. While effective, these approaches often focus primarily on symptom management, sometimes lacking a holistic view that considers the underlying causes of suffering and the need for personal transformation. In recent years, the therapeutic world has begun to explore and incorporate ancient wisdom traditions, such as Buddhism, which offer time-tested, integrative approaches to mental well-being. The teachings of Buddhism, particularly those rooted in compassion (*karuṇā*) and mindfulness (*sati*), present unique perspectives on mental health that extend beyond symptom reduction to address the fundamental causes of suffering and support reconciliation, both at the individual and societal levels.

Buddhist Science of Mental Health (a new subject field introduced in this research), an emerging field within both mental health and Buddhist studies, explores how principles like compassion and mindfulness serve not only as ethical guidelines but also as therapeutic tools that foster emotional resilience, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Compassion, as taught in Buddhism, is an active wish to alleviate the suffering of oneself and others, cultivating a mindset that goes beyond self-centered concerns to embrace empathy, understanding, and kindness. Mindfulness, on the other hand, is a practice of present-moment awareness that helps individuals observe their thoughts and emotions without attachment or judgment. Together, compassion and mindfulness form a foundation for personal and collective healing, empowering individuals to overcome mental distress while fostering a sense of interconnection and mutual care.

1.2. Research Problem

Despite the clear potential of Buddhist teachings in mental health, there remains a need for systematic research that examines how these principles, particularly compassion and mindfulness, can contribute to therapeutic outcomes. The specific research question guiding this study is: How can Buddhist principles of compassion and mindfulness aid mental health treatment and contribute to reconciliation on both individual and societal levels? This question seeks to bridge the gap between traditional Buddhist wisdom and modern therapeutic practices, exploring the extent to which these concepts can be integrated into mental health frameworks that address the root causes of suffering and support sustainable healing.

1.3. Research Objectives

This study is guided by three primary objectives:

1. To explore Buddhist perspectives on mental health: By examining canonical texts and contemporary interpretations, this objective aims to understand how Buddhist teachings define and address mental suffering, resilience, and the process of healing.
2. To investigate how compassion and mindfulness serve as therapeutic agents: This objective focuses on analyzing how compassion and mindfulness contribute to mental health by fostering emotional regulation, resilience, and empathy, which are critical to personal growth and healing.
3. To propose Buddhist-inspired methods for reconciliation within mental health frameworks: By examining compassion and mindfulness through a therapeutic lens, this objective aims to identify practical strategies that can facilitate reconciliation at personal and social levels, offering methods adaptable to diverse cultural and clinical contexts in the world.

1.4. Research Hypothesis

This research is guided by the hypothesis that Buddhist approaches to mental health through compassion and mindfulness promote healing by addressing the underlying causes of suffering and fostering reconciliation. Unlike many conventional therapeutic models, which often focus on managing symptoms or behavioral modification, Buddhist practices of compassion and mindfulness provide a pathway for transforming one's relationship to suffering and interpersonal conflict resolution. Compassion encourages individuals to recognize and alleviate suffering in others, fostering a sense of shared humanity that is crucial for reconciliation. Mindfulness, on the other hand, enables individuals to become more aware of their mental and emotional patterns, leading to greater self-awareness and acceptance. Together, these practices offer a comprehensive approach to mental health that not only alleviates suffering but also promotes healing and understanding on both an individual and societal scale.

This paper proposes that integrating compassion and mindfulness into mental health frameworks can create a more holistic approach to healing and

reconciliation, addressing not only the symptoms of mental distress but also the underlying cognitive and emotional patterns that contribute to suffering. Through this exploration, we aim to provide valuable insights into how ancient Buddhist teachings can be adapted to meet the needs of contemporary mental health practices, ultimately offering new avenues for emotional and relational healing in a world increasingly in need of compassionate and mindful approaches to well-being.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Buddhist Science of Mental Health

Buddhist Science of Mental Health offers a unique framework for understanding mental health, one that focuses on the inner transformation of mental states, the causes of suffering, and the ultimate goal of achieving inner peace (*Nibbāna*). Buddhist principles recognise that mental suffering arises from *kilesas*, or negative mental states, such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).¹ These are considered the root defilements that cloud the mind and perpetuate cycles of suffering. By addressing these root causes through practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and ethical living, Buddhist psychology aims to cultivate positive mental states (*kusala*), which can alleviate suffering and promote well-being.

Buddhist Science of Mental Health emphasises the role of right understanding (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) and right practice (*sammā-kammaṇṭa*).² Right understanding involves seeing the nature of reality as it is, free from delusions, while right practice encompasses intentional actions and behaviors that foster mental clarity and ethical mindfulness. This perspective aligns with modern therapeutic models that focus on identifying and altering maladaptive thought patterns, such as in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).³ Buddhism, however, extends beyond symptom management to encourage personal transformation and insight, offering individuals a comprehensive approach to achieving inner peace and emotional resilience.

2.2. Compassion in Buddhism

In Buddhist teachings, compassion (*karuṇā*) represents a fundamental mental state that transcends mere empathy, emphasising an active desire to alleviate the suffering of others.⁴ While empathy involves understanding others' emotions, compassion extends this awareness into an actionable wish to provide relief. This compassionate response is a crucial aspect of Buddhist Science of Mental Health, as it nurtures kindness, patience, and connection in relationships.⁵

¹ Gethin, R. (2008). *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 234.

² Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha Taught*. New York: Grove Press, p. 20.

³ Hayes, S. C., Follette, V. M., and Linehan, M. M., eds. (2004). *Mindfulness and Acceptance: Expanding the Cognitive-Behavioral Tradition*. New York: Guilford Press, p. 213.

⁴ Dalai Lama, H. H. (2001). *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, p. 29.

⁵ Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind*. London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, p. 46.

Research supports the therapeutic value of compassion, linking it to decreased stress, heightened resilience, and greater emotional stability. For instance, studies indicate that compassionate practices lower levels of stress and anxiety by reducing self-focused rumination, fostering a sense of interconnectedness, and cultivating emotional well-being.⁶ In this regard, Buddhist compassion-based approaches resonate with Western therapeutic models like Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), which emphasize the role of compassion in psychological healing.⁷ Through this lens, compassion is not only a moral ideal but also a powerful therapeutic tool for fostering resilience and inner strength.

2.3. Mindfulness in Healing

Mindfulness (*sati*) is another central practice within Buddhist teaching, highly regarded for its role in cultivating awareness and acceptance of the present moment. In Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is understood as the act of paying full attention to one's present experience with an attitude of non-judgmental awareness.⁸ The mindfulness practice encourages individuals to observe their thoughts, emotions, and sensations without attachment, fostering a deep understanding of the transient nature of all experiences through impermanence, suffering, and selflessness.⁹

Over recent years, mindfulness has become an integral component in therapeutic interventions for mental health, especially for anxiety, depression, and trauma-related disorders. Clinical research has shown that mindfulness practices enhance self-awareness, emotional regulation, and psychological flexibility, which are essential for managing distress and cultivating mental well-being.¹⁰ Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) are two prominent therapeutic approaches that draw upon mindfulness principles to promote healing and emotional resilience.¹¹ These therapeutic models echo Buddhist insights on the benefits of sustained mindfulness practice in transforming harmful thought patterns and reducing mental suffering, underscoring mindfulness as a holistic approach to healing.

⁶ Feldman, C. and Kuyken, W. (2011). *Compassion in the Landscape of Suffering. Contemporary Buddhism*, 12 (1), pp. 143 – 155.

⁷ Neff, K. D. and Germer, C. K. (2013). *A Pilot Study and Randomized Controlled Trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program. Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69 (1), pp. 28 - 44.

⁸ Bodhi, B. (2011). *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, p. 169.

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2.4. Reconciliation in Buddhist Thought

Reconciliation, both internal and external, holds a significant place within Buddhist teachings. At its core, reconciliation in Buddhism involves the resolution of conflict, healing, and the restoration of harmony, which applies both to interpersonal relationships and to one's inner self.¹² The Buddha emphasized reconciliation as a practice of forgiveness, understanding, and acceptance, which are essential for resolving tensions and building positive connections within communities.¹³

In the context of mental health, Buddhist reconciliation extends to personal healing by encouraging individuals to reconcile with their past, accept their suffering, and cultivate a peaceful state of mind. Through compassion and mindfulness, individuals can let go of negative emotions and grudges, thereby fostering a sense of inner peace and balance. Buddhist teaching thus provides tools for self-reconciliation, helping individuals release past traumas, alleviate emotional burdens, and achieve a harmonious mental state.¹⁴ This approach resonates with therapeutic frameworks that emphasize the role of forgiveness, self-compassion, and interpersonal harmony in achieving mental well-being.¹⁵

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive research approach, aiming to explore Buddhist principles of mental health and their application to modern therapeutic frameworks. The qualitative nature of this research is suited to examining concepts like compassion, mindfulness, and reconciliation in-depth, allowing for a nuanced understanding of these themes within the context of Buddhist Science of Mental Health. An interpretive approach further enables the exploration of how these Buddhist principles can be understood in contemporary mental health frameworks, bridging ancient wisdom with modern therapeutic needs.

The interpretive aspect of this study relies on analyzing canonical Buddhist texts, focusing on the meanings conveyed by the teachings and their implications for mental well-being. This approach allows for a deep examination of the moral and philosophical underpinnings of Buddhist principles, which are often context-dependent and require thoughtful interpretation. Additionally, contemporary psychological perspectives on mental health and healing are examined to assess how Buddhist teachings can be applied practically in modern therapeutic settings, particularly those dealing with mindful healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

3.1. Data Collection

The data collection process involves a thorough analysis of both primary

¹² Thich Nhat Hanh (1993). *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, p. 39.

¹³ Harvey, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 69.

¹⁴ Kornfield, J. (2009). *The Wise Heart: A Guide to the Universal Teachings of Buddhist Psychology*. New York: Bantam Books, p. 33.

¹⁵ Worthington, E. L. (2005). *Handbook of Forgiveness*. New York: Routledge, p. 289.

and secondary sources. Primary sources include *Pāli* Canon texts and essential commentaries that provide direct insight into Buddhist principles. Key texts such as the *Satipatthana Sutta*, which details mindfulness practices foundational to Buddhist Science of Mental Health, and discourses on *karuṇā* (compassion) form the core of the primary data examined in this research. The *Satipatthana Sutta* offers a structured approach to mindfulness, which is integral to mental clarity and healing, while *karuṇā* discourses illustrate the role of compassion in addressing suffering. Together, these texts provide a comprehensive view of Buddhist methods for fostering mental well-being.

In addition to these canonical texts, the study also analyzes various commentaries and sub-commentaries to clarify complex doctrinal elements and explore interpretations made by Buddhist scholars over centuries. These sources enable a deeper understanding of how compassion and mindfulness are viewed within traditional Buddhist teaching and offer essential insights into applying these teachings in mental health contexts.

Secondary data sources include academic articles, books, and case studies on mindfulness-based therapies (such as MBSR and MBCT) and compassion-focused counseling approaches. These secondary sources are used to examine how Buddhist-inspired practices have been integrated into contemporary mental health interventions, shedding light on their effectiveness and adaptability within therapeutic frameworks.

The combination of primary Buddhist texts and secondary academic sources on contemporary therapeutic practices provides a robust dataset for analyzing the relevance of Buddhist principles in modern mental health care.

3.2. Analysis Framework

The research adopts a thematic analysis framework, focusing on the interconnected themes of compassion, mindfulness, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Thematic analysis, as a qualitative method, is suitable for identifying patterns and relationships between these themes, allowing for a systematic examination of the data across different sources.

1. **Compassion:** This theme explores *karuṇā* as a foundational element in Buddhism, examining how compassion is perceived and practiced within Buddhist teachings and counseling. This includes analyzing textual references to compassion's role in relieving suffering and fostering resilience, both internally and in relationships. The thematic analysis will involve identifying passages related to *karuṇā*, exploring their therapeutic implications, and comparing these insights with contemporary compassion-focused counseling methods.
2. **Mindfulness:** Mindfulness (*sati*) is investigated as a therapeutic tool within Buddhist Science of Mental Health, with the *Satipatthana Sutta* serving as a primary source. This theme examines mindfulness practices that encourage self-awareness, emotional regulation, and detachment from negative mental states. The thematic analysis will involve extracting key practices and teachings on mindfulness from the texts and evaluating

how these align with contemporary mindfulness-based therapies, particularly their applications in addressing stress, anxiety, and trauma.

3. **Reconciliation:** Reconciliation is studied as both an internal and interpersonal practice essential for mental well-being. This theme analyses how Buddhist teachings encourage reconciliation with oneself and others, facilitating a sense of inner peace and social harmony. By exploring Buddhist approaches to conflict resolution, forgiveness, and healing, the analysis will draw connections between these practices and their therapeutic applications in modern mental health.

The thematic analysis will synthesize findings across these three themes, revealing how Buddhist teachings on compassion, mindfulness, forgiveness, and reconciliation interrelate to support a holistic view of mental health and healing. By examining these interconnected themes, this study seeks to offer a comprehensive interpretation of Buddhist approaches to mental well-being and how these principles can be adapted to support reconciliation in contemporary therapeutic contexts.

Overall, the methodology aims to bridge Buddhist insights with modern therapeutic practices, providing valuable guidance for mental health professionals seeking integrative approaches to emotional healing and reconciliation.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Buddhist Compassion and Mental Health

In Buddhist teachings, compassion (*karuṇā*) is an active mental state directed toward alleviating suffering in oneself and others. Compassion acts as a form of emotional therapy, allowing individuals to address and transform their suffering. By developing compassion, individuals learn to recognise and understand the root causes of their negative emotions, which can include anger, fear, and grief. Compassionate awareness thus becomes a vehicle for emotional resilience, helping individuals face challenging emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them.

From a therapeutic perspective, cultivating compassion reduces stress by shifting the focus from self-centered ruminations to a broader understanding of shared human suffering. This shift not only alleviates emotional burdens but also promotes emotional regulation, as it helps individuals approach difficult situations with empathy and patience rather than with reactive emotions. This approach aligns with contemporary therapies like Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), which integrates compassion into mental health care to build emotional resilience and manage stress effectively.¹⁶

4.2. Compassion for Reconciliation

Buddhist compassion extends beyond individual well-being, emphasizing reconciliation as an essential component of healthy relationships and

¹⁶ Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind*. London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, p. 35.

community harmony. In Buddhism, compassion promotes forgiveness and detachment from anger and resentment, which can otherwise fuel personal and social discord. Cultivating compassion allows individuals to let go of grievances, which fosters reconciliation both within oneself and with others. This approach is crucial for mending fractured relationships and reducing interpersonal conflict.

By developing a compassionate mindset, individuals can learn to forgive and release negative emotions, which promotes emotional healing and supports positive relationships. In the context of mental health, this ability to forgive and let go is vital for overcoming grudges and emotional wounds that contribute to mental suffering. Reconciliation, therefore, becomes an extension of compassion, encouraging individuals to cultivate empathy and understanding in their interactions, thereby reducing mental stress and enhancing social harmony.

4.3. Mindfulness as Mental Healing

4.3.1. Mindfulness Techniques

Mindfulness practices, such as mindful breathing and body scanning, form the foundation of Buddhist mental healing methods. By fostering awareness of the present moment, these techniques promote a sense of calm and focus, which helps to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress.¹⁷ For example, mindful breathing teaches individuals to concentrate on their breath, grounding them in the present and allowing them to observe their thoughts without judgment through impermanence, suffering, and selflessness. Body scanning, on the other hand, involves directing attention to different parts of the body, which cultivates self-awareness and helps individuals recognize tension and discomfort that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Research on mindfulness-based therapies, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), has shown that these techniques effectively reduce stress, enhance emotional regulation, and improve overall well-being.¹⁸ The Buddhist emphasis on mindfulness as a therapeutic tool highlights its value in mental health care, offering individuals a means to develop self-awareness, observe their emotions without attachment, and ultimately attain inner peace.

4.3.2. Healing Traumas through Mindful Reconciliation

Mindfulness practices play a significant role in processing and healing traumas by enabling individuals to confront and reconcile with painful experiences. Through mindfulness, individuals learn to observe their emotions including their origin, and cease without judgment, which allows them to process complex feelings such as guilt, shame, or resentment in a safe and

¹⁷ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*. New York: Hyperion, p. 87.

¹⁸ Segal, Z. V., Williams, J. M. G., and Teasdale, J. D. (2013). *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression*. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press, p. 65.

controlled manner. This process is essential for healing personal and relational traumas, as it fosters emotional processing and promotes self-acceptance and forgiveness.

Mindfulness-based approaches encourage individuals to embrace difficult emotions as part of their healing journey, leading to a form of reconciliation with oneself. This inner reconciliation is a critical aspect of trauma recovery, as it helps individuals let go of negative self-perceptions that often accompany traumatic experiences. In cases of relational trauma, mindfulness facilitates empathy and compassion, allowing individuals to view others' perspectives and cultivate forgiveness. This perspective aligns with Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and acceptance, underscoring the value of mindful reconciliation in restoring mental and emotional health.

4.4. Buddhist Path to Reconciliation

4.4.1. Healing the Self and Others

Buddhist teachings advocate a holistic approach to healing, encouraging individuals to develop compassion and mindfulness not only for their well-being but also for fostering harmony with others. The cultivation of self-compassion, or kindness toward oneself, is a prerequisite for extending compassion to others. Through self-compassion, individuals can recognise and forgive their flaws, which helps alleviate self-criticism and fosters a more positive self-image. By nurturing self-compassion, individuals build the emotional resilience necessary to navigate personal challenges and engage in healthy relationships.

This approach encourages individuals to view their interactions with empathy and understanding, which promotes reconciliation by strengthening emotional bonds with others. Buddhist practices of compassion and mindfulness thus create a foundation for mutual respect and emotional connection, which are essential components of interpersonal healing and conflict resolution. The Buddhist path to reconciliation is, therefore, an integrative process that encompasses both self-healing and the fostering of positive, compassionate relationships with others.

4.4.2. Integrating Compassion and Mindfulness into Modern Therapy

Integrating Buddhist principles of compassion and mindfulness into modern therapeutic frameworks offers a comprehensive approach to mental health and reconciliation. The fusion of compassion-focused and mindfulness-based therapies creates a balanced framework that addresses both emotional regulation and interpersonal healing. Compassion-focused therapies, like CFT, guide individuals to develop empathy and self-compassion, which reduces stress and promotes emotional stability.¹⁹ Meanwhile, mindfulness-based therapies emphasize present-moment awareness, which aids in managing anxiety and depression by enhancing self-awareness and emotional resilience.²⁰

¹⁹ Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). *A Pilot Study and Randomized Controlled Trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program*. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69 (1), pp. 28 - 44.

²⁰ Chiesa, A., & Serretti, A. (2010). *A Systematic Review of Neurobiological and Clinical*

This combined approach provides mental health practitioners with versatile tools to support both individual well-being and interpersonal reconciliation. Buddhist teachings on compassion and mindfulness can thus be applied as a complementary framework for modern therapies, offering a holistic and culturally inclusive approach to mental health care. By emphasizing both self-compassion and awareness, Buddhist-inspired therapies empower individuals to achieve emotional healing, promote empathy, and ultimately cultivate peace within themselves and their communities.

4.5. Research Findings

4.5.1. Mental Health Benefits of Buddhist Compassion and Mindfulness

In Buddhist psychology, compassion (*karuṇā*) and mindfulness (*sati*) are seen as key elements in cultivating mental stability, awareness, forgiveness, and resilience. The *Satipatthana Sutta* from the *Majjhima Nikāya* illustrates mindfulness as an essential path to understanding the nature of the mind and overcoming mental defilements, or *kilesas*. The *Sutta* describes mindfulness in these words: “*Ekāyano ayaṃ, bhikkhave, maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā, sokaparidevānaṃ samatikkamāya, dukkhadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamāya, ñāyassa adhigamāya, nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya, yadidaṃ—cattāro satipaṭṭhānā.*”

“This, monks, is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of *Nibbāna*: namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.”²¹

Mindfulness is practiced to gain objective self-awareness, fostering emotional stability by enabling practitioners to observe their emotions without judgment through the three characteristics of existence. This aligns with contemporary findings in psychological research showing that mindfulness-based practices can significantly reduce impulsive and distress-driven reactions.

Compassion as an emotional therapy is also emphasised in the *Karuṇā Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, where compassion is said to provide relief from one’s suffering and cultivate an empathetic connection with others. In both ancient and modern contexts, compassion supports emotional resilience, allowing individuals to engage with their suffering gently and constructively. Studies in Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) align with these teachings, showing that compassion can reduce self-criticism, enhance emotional resilience, and improve mental health outcomes.²²

Further, in the *Brahmavihara* teachings of the *Digha Nikāya*, the Buddha advocates developing the four immeasurable – loving-kindness (*metta*),

Features of Mindfulness Meditations. Psychological Medicine, 40 (8), pp. 1239 – 1252.

²¹ Bodhi, B. (2000). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, p. 95.

²² Gilbert, P. (2009). *The Compassionate Mind*. London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, p. 58.

compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) – to overcome negative states like anger and fear: “*Idha bhikkhave, bhikkhu mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati. Tathā dutiyaṃ. Tathā tatiyaṃ. Tathā catutthaṃ.*”

“Here, monks, a monk dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness ... Likewise the second, third, and fourth quarters...”²³

4.5.2. Pathway to Reconciliation: Compassion and Mindfulness as Tools for Personal and Social Harmony

The Buddhist principles of compassion and mindfulness extend beyond individual healing, serving as pathways for reconciliation on a societal level. In the *Metta Sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, loving-kindness is presented as a tool for creating both inner and outer peace: “*Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe, evampi sabbabhūtesu mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ.*”

“Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless loving kindness towards all beings.”²⁴

By fostering forgiveness and empathy, individuals are able to dissolve feelings of resentment and cultivate harmonious relationships. This practice has modern therapeutic parallels in interpersonal and trauma therapies, where empathy and forgiveness play a central role in healing interpersonal wounds.

Mindfulness, according to the *Satipatthana Sutta*, also contributes to reconciliation by enhancing self-awareness, which is essential for addressing deep-seated emotional patterns. The *Sutta* states: “*Atthi kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ.*”

“One remains focused on the body in and of itself—ardent, aware, and mindful—putting aside greed and distress concerning the world.”²⁵

This practice of non-judgmental awareness allows individuals to observe thoughts and emotions, reducing emotional reactivity and promoting patience. In therapeutic practices, mindfulness training is widely recognized for enhancing emotional regulation, a critical component in resolving personal conflicts.

In the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha further emphasises the importance of compassion in preventing conflict, suggesting that hostility can be overcome through kind understanding: “*Na hi verena verāni, sammantīdha kudācanaṃ; averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano.*”

“Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving-kindness. This is an eternal law.”²⁶

²³ Walshe, M. (1987). *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. London: Wisdom Publications.

²⁴ Bodhi, B. (2000). *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, p.1189.

²⁵ Bodhi, B. (2000). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, p. 867.

²⁶ Bodhi, B. (2000). *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta*

This aligns with modern approaches to conflict resolution that emphasize the importance of empathy and non-retaliation in healing interpersonal tensions.

4.5.3. Therapeutic Implications: Integrating Buddhist-Inspired Techniques into Modern Mental Health Practices

The findings suggest that compassion and mindfulness, as understood in Buddhist teachings, offer valuable insights for enriching modern therapeutic frameworks. Compassion-focused approaches, when integrated into therapy, facilitate the development of empathy and forgiveness, encouraging deep and lasting personal and interpersonal healing. Research on Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) highlights that these practices reduce anxiety and social isolation, supporting the findings of the *Karuṇā Sutta* that compassion aids mental and emotional well-being.²⁷

Mindfulness practices from the *Satipatthana Sutta* provide a structured approach to enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation. These techniques, widely recognised in mindfulness-based interventions, are effective in treating anxiety, depression, and trauma. Mindfulness-based therapies such as MBSR and MBCT find roots in the mindfulness practices laid out by the Buddha, showing that they not only support emotional resilience but also foster greater acceptance of self and others.²⁸

V. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Buddhist approaches to mental health, particularly those centered on compassion (*karuṇā*) and mindfulness (*sati*), present a comprehensive, transformative model for emotional and relational healing. Rooted in an understanding of suffering and the path to liberation (*dukkha* and *magga*), Buddhist practices offer both theoretical and practical methods to manage and transform difficult mental states. Through compassion, individuals are encouraged to develop a genuine wish to alleviate suffering - both their own and that of others. Meanwhile, mindfulness practices enable them to observe and understand their emotional experiences with clarity, non-judgment, and detachment. This dual approach supports personal healing, reduces internal conflicts, and fosters interpersonal reconciliation, making it an invaluable model for addressing both individual mental health challenges and broader social disharmony.

Buddhist teachings on compassion go beyond a simplistic notion of empathy, extending to a profound dedication to the alleviation of suffering. This depth of compassion fosters resilience and enhances emotional regulation, supporting healing and growth. In conjunction with compassion, mindfulness practices, as outlined in the *Satipatthana Sutta* and other primary Buddhist texts,

Nikaya. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, p. 485.

²⁷ Neff, K. D., & Germer, C. K. (2013). A Pilot Study and Randomized Controlled Trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69 (1), pp. 28 - 44.

²⁸ Chiesa, A., & Serretti, A. (2010). A Systematic Review of Neurobiological and Clinical Features of Mindfulness Meditations. *Psychological Medicine*, 40 (8), pp. 1239 - 1252.

offer a structured approach to cultivating awareness and acceptance. Through continuous practice, mindfulness can help individuals to navigate and process negative thoughts and emotions, contributing to emotional well-being and enhancing relational harmony. Together, compassion and mindfulness act as a transformative pathway, not only for personal well-being but also for fostering understanding, empathy, forgiveness and reconciliation within communities.

5.1. Research Implications

The findings from this research indicate that incorporating Buddhist principles of compassion and mindfulness into contemporary mental health frameworks has significant potential for therapeutic practice, especially within multicultural contexts or when working with clients from Buddhist backgrounds. In many regions, mental health professionals encounter clients whose cultural and religious beliefs shape their perceptions of suffering, healing, and reconciliation. By integrating Buddhist approaches, therapists may provide culturally sensitive care that resonates deeply with clients' values, thereby enhancing therapeutic outcomes. Compassion-focused and mindfulness-based therapies, already widely used, could benefit from further inclusion of Buddhist teachings on emotional transformation and healing, enhancing these therapies' depth and efficacy.

In particular, the structured methods for developing compassion, as presented in the *Karunā Sutta* and the Brahmavihara teachings, offer therapists an additional toolkit for addressing issues like self-criticism, resentment, and unresolved interpersonal conflict. Similarly, the foundational mindfulness techniques from the *Satipatthana Sutta* align closely with practices in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), making them accessible for modern integration while retaining their roots in ancient Buddhist wisdom. For therapists in clinical settings, incorporating these perspectives can add a meaningful dimension to traditional treatment modalities, especially when treating anxiety, depression, and trauma-related disorders as a mindful healing.

5.2. Future Research

This study opens several pathways for further research, especially on the practical integration of Buddhist mental health principles within clinical settings. Future studies could focus on designing and implementing clinical interventions that specifically incorporate Buddhist compassion and mindfulness techniques, followed by a systematic measurement of outcomes. For example, researchers could examine how a Buddhist-informed compassion training program influences self-compassion, emotional resilience, and forgiveness in clients, or how a mindfulness-based intervention rooted in Buddhist principles impacts clients dealing with trauma or anxiety.

Additionally, further research could explore the effectiveness of these interventions across different cultural settings, examining how Buddhist mental health practices contribute to reconciliation processes within communities experiencing conflict or social fragmentation. Given the rich diversity

within Buddhist teachings, studies could also investigate which specific Buddhist practices are most applicable to various mental health conditions, such as trauma, addiction, or chronic stress, and how these practices might complement or enhance existing therapeutic approaches. By examining these aspects, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intersections between Buddhist teachings and modern mental health, thereby advancing both fields and promoting a more holistic model for mindful healing and reconciliation.

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION, UNITY, AND GLOBAL HARMONY



BUDDHIST INSIGHT FOR PEACE THROUGH SOCIAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION – A HISTORICAL APPLICATION BY DR. AMBEDKAR IN INDIA

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Abstract:

‘Social Conflict’ is a challenge faced by nearly every nation worldwide. The most severe conflicts confronting the world primarily include community conflict, caste conflict, regional conflict, religious conflict, and economic conflict.

The primary causes of these conflicts are: (1) Hatred and vengeance. (2) Inequality and discrimination. (3) Supremacy and dominance of a particular class. (4) Denial of others’ rights, resources, and liberty. (5) Injustice. (6) Lack of resource and opportunity sharing. (7) Immoral behavior and violence.

Resolving conflicts plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining peace. Buddhism as a social system has the potential to address social conflicts. In India, Dr. Ambedkar tackled caste conflict by introducing Buddhism as a Social System to half a million untouchable caste individuals in 1956. This event significantly contributed to fostering a peaceful environment in India, facilitating growth and development. It holds great significance in Buddhist history as the revival of Buddhism in India. In his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Dr. Ambedkar interpreted Buddhism as a Social System infused with social values essential for the welfare and harmony of any society. These social values, forming the foundation of a Social System based on Buddhism, play a crucial role in establishing and sustaining lasting peace.

Following Dr. Ambedkar’s approach to Buddhism, this paper explores how Buddhism can function as a Social System that promotes social peace and harmony while contributing to global peace.

Keywords: *Social conflict, Buddhism as a social system, Dr. Ambedkar, caste conflict, global peace.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social conflict is the most common factor destabilizing the peace and harmony among the population of a region. Social conflict has become a challenge to almost every nation in the world. Even though it is categorized as domestic, it does have a global impact and contributes to global disturbance. Social conflict resolution contributes greatly to establishing and maintaining peace in the region, contributing to the maintenance of global peace. Most grave conflicts challenging to the world are mainly community conflict, caste conflict, regional conflict, religion conflict, and economic conflict. The chief causes of these conflicts are: (1) Hatred and vengeance. (2) Inequality and discrimination. (3) Supremacy and Rule of one class. (4) Denial of others' rights, resources and liberty. (5) Injustice. (6) Non-sharing of resources and opportunities. (7) Immoral behavior and violence.

Addressing the root causes of social conflict often requires efforts to promote social, economic, and political equality, foster mutual respect and understanding among different groups by adopting moral behavior, create inclusiveness through institutions that promote mutual well-being, strengthen organizations that combat inequality and discrimination, and implement inclusive policies that address historical injustices. In India, Dr. Ambedkar, as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, incorporated these principles into the nation's fundamental law.

Buddhism as a social system has the answer to all these problems. In India, Dr. Ambedkar resolved caste conflict by way of offering Buddhism as a Social System. Based on Dr. Ambedkar's views about Buddhism and finding its support in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka*, this paper discusses how Buddhism can become a social system promoting social peace and harmony and contribute to global peace.

Social conflict is a conflict between groups of larger populations identified differently based on caste, creed, race, religion, region, class, etc. The root cause of the conflict is the immoral and discriminatory behavior fueled by hatred and violence. They can escalate to a level when peaceful co-existence becomes impossible, and vengeance receives top priority. For the resolution of such conflict, vengeance has to be first restrained and brought to an end. A condition of peaceful co-existence has to be established which can be done only when 'equality of status and opportunity' is granted and maintained.

Buddhism as a social system can play an eminent role in the resolution of such social conflicts because when adopted it first grants equality of status to the confronting groups and brings down the levels of feelings of vengeance first through restraint and later its weakening by understanding it as an act of unwholesome nature.

II. RESOLUTION OF SOCIAL CONFLICT IN INDIA BY DR. AMBEDKAR USING BUDDHIST INSIGHT

In India, Dr. Ambedkar demonstrated such social conflict resolution through the adoption of Buddhist social system in administration and as a way

of life. India was a caste ridden society with the untouchable caste people at the bottom of the social system receiving inhuman treatment of untouchability, bonded labor, and indignity. They were the class with no human rights, serving the upper caste people as slaves. They were devoid of any opportunity of growth and development. They will live their life on the mercy of the upper caste people.

Dr. Ambedkar belonged to this untouchable caste. Through painstaking efforts, he grew to become one of the most learned men of the world. On his matriculation he was introduced to Buddhism by Mr. Arjunrao Krishnaji Keluskar. Throughout his life he fought for the upliftment of lower caste people and to establish equality in the Indian society. His wisdom was guided by the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity from the teachings of the Buddha. Even though Buddhism was poorly represented in India during his time, he chose to embrace Buddhism and offer Buddhism to his half a million brothers from the untouchable class as a new social system for dignity, growth, and development. This event happened in 1956.

In 1950, Dr. Ambedkar could become the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and had put excessive efforts, at the cost of his health, to convince the Constitution assembly to enshrine the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity as the guiding principles of the political system adopted by India. The administrative authority delivered to the political values of liberty, equality and fraternity weakened the discriminatory social system of castes and provided human rights to all irrespective of their caste. Yet, a long battle was there to be fought by the untouchable people to uplift, rise, and restore their dignity equal to others. This was done by adopting to the new social system on the foundation of the Buddha's teachings, by embracing and practicing Buddhism as guided by Dr. Ambedkar.

Dr. Ambedkar drew the pre-requisites of such a new social system as the Norm of Justice and the Norm of Utility: Norm of Justice: Provision of liberty, equality, and fraternity is the test of Justice: It helps the people to judge what is right and what is wrong in the conduct of men. Norm of Utility: Usefulness to society: What constitutes moral good in society. An unjust society cannot be useful, therefore, it follows that satisfying the test of justice is a must to stand the evaluating norms.¹

He saw that the Buddha's Dhamma satisfies these norms. He told his followers 'Buddhism shall free you from the bondage of the caste and provide you liberty, equality and fraternity' which according to him were the fundamentals of Buddha's teachings and essential requirement of any society to develop and grow.

Dr. Ambedkar gave four tests for the religion of the modern era. These

¹ Ambedkar, Dr. B. R. – *Philosophy of Hinduism* - (Dr. Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches, vol.3, Part – I, Chapter I) Dr Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 2020 (Reprint), p. 25, 66, 71.

were: (1) Morality must be the foundation of religion, (2) it must be rational and scientific, devoid of superstitions, (3) it should promote and teach equality, liberty, and fraternity, and (4) it should not praise poverty.

According to him no other religion but only Buddhism satisfies all tests.² Dr. Ambedkar transformed Buddhism into a Social System useful for all societies. In his book “Buddha or Karl Marx” Dr. Ambedkar evaluated the creeds of Karl Marx and the Buddha for the usefulness to the Modern Society with its inherent Social Conflicts. He found that Karl Marx considered economic classes of owner and worker as the classes undergoing constant conflict, and to establish equality between the two, he proposed the abolition of private property and the means of achieving this is to establish the rule of workers called the dictatorship of proletariat for which force and violence can be used. Dr. Ambedkar argued that this may establish equality but under dictatorship liberty and fraternity cannot be guaranteed. In the case of Buddha, he proclaimed equality of all irrespective of social gradation, economic gradation or other differentiations of conflicting interests. He denied the use of force and violence as a means of establishing equality. The Buddha proposed the rule of Righteousness to establish the equality and considered voluntary acceptance of Morality (Social Moral Values) which granted Liberty and Fraternity. In Dr. Ambedkar’s opinion, Equality, Liberty, and Fraternity are the real social values whose adoption provides peace, harmony, and welfare of modern society. Buddhism is the way where the three can co-exist.³

Dr. Ambedkar demonstrated this by accepting Buddhism as a new Social System, discarding the Old discriminatory Hindu Social System through embracing Buddhism as a religion along with half a million untouchable caste people in 1956. At the time of embracing Buddhism, Dr. Ambedkar gave 22 vows to half a million untouchable caste people, discarding the old discriminatory social system and adopting a new one founded on Buddhism. These vows were significant because they not only helped the oppressed caste people abandon an inhuman social system but also encouraged them to practice non-vengeance toward the upper caste, despite centuries of suffering. This was a decisive step toward resolving caste conflict. “Enmity cannot be brought to an end by enmity but only by non-enmity (loving kindness). This is the everlasting law.”⁴ (*Dhammapada*, 5) What an exemplary application of the insight of the Buddha’s Dhamma promoting peace in the society.

² Dr. Ambedkar, *Buddha and future of his religion*, (Dr. Ambedkar’s Writings and Speeches, vol.17, Part – II), Dr Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 2020 (Reprint), p. 104.

³ Dr. Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx*, Dr. Ambedkar’s writings and speeches, Vol.3, Part IV, Chapter I, Dr Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 2020 (Reprint), p. 462.

⁴ *Dhp* 5, “Na hi verena verāṇi, sammantīdha kudācanaṃ, Averaṇa ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano.”

Dr. Ambedkar's book "The Buddha and His Dhamma" became the guidebook for these new converts to adopt and practice the social values of Buddhist Social System and achieve conflict resolution, dignity, peace, growth, development, and to achieve equality of status and maintain it. For the past seven decades, these social values have delivered good results in India and contributed to the maintenance of peace.

III. BUDDHIST INSIGHT THAT MAKES IT THE FOUNDATION OF A NEW SOCIAL SYSTEM SUITABLE FOR MODERN SOCIETY

Dr. Ambedkar's book "The Buddha and His Dhamma" is the book which interprets Buddhism as a new social system that is most suitable for the modern society anywhere in the world. In this new social system, we find solutions to the problems of conflict of any kind. The Central idea of this book is to bring forward "the Buddha's social message that he teaches the values of justice, love, liberty, equality, and fraternity."⁵ In this book Dr. Ambedkar identified Buddhism with social values of morality, righteousness, virtue, rationality, liberty, equality, fraternity, compassion, loving kindness, justice and wisdom. The identification of these Social Values from Buddhism and their contribution to Peace is discussed below with references from Pāli *Tipiṭaka*.

Morality: Morality in other religions requires sanction of God and is practiced as a side wind to please God. It is not the main theme of those religions. In case of Buddhism, Morality is the essence of Dhamma, it is the foundation of the Dhamma, and therefore is sacred and universal. Morality enjoys the highest place in Buddhism the place which is occupied by God in other religions.⁶ In Dr. Ambedkar's opinion, man and morality must be the center of religion, if not, religion is cruel superstition. It is not enough for Morality to be the ideal of life only, it must rise to become the law of life.⁷ Practice of the path of purity, i.e. Morality, should receive recognition as the true standard of life.⁸ "These complexities of life are resolved by an ardent and righteous monk, who is a man who is established in morality and has acquired wisdom."⁹ According to Buddhism, the quality of life is judged by Morality, and strengthening of Morality is always promoted.

Righteousness: The purpose of other religions is to explain the origin of the world, and they ascribe God as the creator and ruler of the world. The

⁵ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 225 - 226.

⁶ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 322 - 325.

⁷ Dr. Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx, Dr. Ambedkar's writings and speeches*, Vol.3, Part IV, Chapter I, Dr Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India, 2020 (Reprint), p. 441 - 442.

⁸ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 122 - 123.

⁹ SN 1.23: "Jaṭāsuttaṃ, Sīle patitṭhāya naro sapaṇṇo, cittaṃ paññaṇca bhāvayaṃ, Ātāpi nipako bhikkhu, so imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭanti."

actions of the followers are aimed at pleasing the God, or to become one with him, or to seek entry into Heaven from Him. The purpose of Buddhism is “to make the world a kingdom of righteousness”. To remove misery each one must learn to be righteous in his conduct about others and thereby make the earth the kingdom of righteousness.¹⁰ Ashtanga Marga i.e. Eightfold Noble Path is the path of righteousness.¹¹ In Dr. Ambedkar’s opinion, Dhamma (Buddhism) is righteousness, which means right relations between man and man in all spheres of life.¹²

The Buddha wants to inculcate upon the mind of man the supreme necessity for being righteous in his conduct.¹³ The fundamental teachings of the Buddha are summarized in the following verse, which focuses on moral and righteous behavior: “Not to do any evil action, to acquire good actions in abundance, to purify own mind from defilements, these are the teachings of the Buddha.”¹⁴

Virtue: Buddhism is the only religion that advocates practicing virtues (*pāramīs*) to remove suffering. The ten perfections (*pāramitās*) are: (1) *Sīla* – Moral conduct: Doing good and refraining from evil. (2) *Dāna* – Generosity: Giving for the welfare of others. (3) *Upekkhā* – Equanimity: A mind free from attachment and aversion. (4) *Nekkhamma* – Renunciation: Letting go of worldly pleasures. (5) *Viriya* – Right effort: Striving without giving up. (6) *Khanti* – Patience: Forbearance, opposing injustice with non-hatred. (7) *Sacca* – Truthfulness: Being truthful in speech and action. (8) *Adhiṭṭhāna* – Determination: Resolute commitment to a goal. (9) *Paññā* – Wisdom: Acting wisely for the welfare of many. (10) *Mettā* – Loving-kindness: Unconditional goodwill free from hatred. The path of virtue is the full cultivation of these ten perfections.¹⁵ By reflecting on these virtues, one can realize that most of them are essential qualities recommended by modern-day management gurus and counselors for self-development and achieving success. Their utility for both the individual and society is unquestionable. The path of virtue is the path of ten perfections (*pāramitās*) that one must practice to his utmost capacity.¹⁶

“Having performed different difficult acts of perfecting the virtues (*pārami*), arises the mighty hero endowed with vision inclusive of the sublime

¹⁰ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 282 - 283.

¹¹ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 123.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 316.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 284.

¹⁴ *Dhp*, 183: “*Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ, kusalassa upasampadā, Sacittapariyodapaṇaṃ, etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ.*”

¹⁵ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 127-128

¹⁶ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 127-128

world.”¹⁷ (*vinaya piṭaka*) The Buddha is praised here for his perfection of virtues and attainment of supreme vision.

Rationality: Dr. Ambedkar highlights rationality as an essential aspect of Buddhism, emphasizing its opposition to superstition and speculation. Buddhism is based on the law of cause and effect, grounded in logic, and supported by evidence. The strong tenets of Buddhism that characterize its rational nature include the denial of the soul, the denial of God as the creator and ruler of the world, the denial of transmigration of the soul, the rejection of the supernatural, the rejection of baseless speculation, and the rejection of the infallibility of scriptures.¹⁸ Buddhism would lose its essence if it were not rational and scientific. The existence of suffering is supported by evidence, while the law of impermanence, the law of *anattā*, and the cause of suffering are outcomes of scientific investigation. The removal of suffering and the method for its elimination represent a discovery backed by experiential evidence. It does not call upon any supernormal power to bestow happiness but provides a practical method that any person can adopt and practice for his and others' happiness. The Buddha invites everyone to come, experience, and discover it for themselves by following his path. “One attains to unshakable faith in Dhamma that – the Dhamma is well expressed by the Blessed One (the Buddha), it can be directly observed, without any delay, inviting one to come and see (himself carry out the test), leading to one's welfare (*nibbāna*), to be individually experienced by any wise person.”¹⁹

He expresses the law of cause and effect: “When this cause is, that effect comes to be. With the arising of this cause, that effect arises. When this cause is not there, that effect cannot be. With the cessation of this cause, that effect ceases.”²⁰

Dr. Ambedkar makes his best efforts to express the rebirth and *kamma* Theory as expounded by the Buddha in a rational way and to differentiate them from irrational theories based on the soul and speculations.²¹ In his efforts, he even rejects the traditionally proposed reason for the Great Renunciation found in some scriptures²² and replaces it with a more rational and logical one.²³

¹⁷ *Vinaya piṭaka*: “*parivārapāli, Samuṭṭhānasāsasāṅkhepo, Samuṭṭhānassuddānaṃ Dukkaraṃ vividaṃ katvā, pūrayitvāna pārami, Uppajjanti mahāvīrā, cakkhubhūtā sabrahmake.*”

¹⁸ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 104.

¹⁹ SN 12. 41, Pañcaverabhayasuttaṃdhamme “*aveccappasādena samannāgato hoti — ‘svākhātā bhagavatā dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko opaneyyiko paccattaṃ vedītabbo viññūhī ti.*”

²⁰ KN 3.3 “*Iti imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ/ uppajjati, imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.*”

²¹ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 329 - 344.

²² Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 329 - 344.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 24 – 35.

Liberty: The Buddha was the great practitioner of liberty. The *Kesamuttisuttaṃ* (*Kālāma Sutta*)²⁴ is the greatest exposition of liberty. The Buddha dared himself and his teachings to be questioned by others for their trueness and usefulness.²⁵ He used no means other than making oneself learn and understand willingly to establish his teachings among the people. He used neither supernatural power²⁶ nor support of the king's powers or for that matter any other force,²⁷ to enforce his teachings. His teachings, however, guard misuse of liberty by morality, which is the inherent part of his Dhamma. He advocated the right to learn, the right to speech, the right to practice one's own culture. He believed in persuasion, convincing and arbitration rather than enforcing against the will.²⁸

“O *Kālāmā* do not go by reports, by lineage, by traditions, by scriptures, by logical conditions, by leading conditions, by reflection on appearance, by views in your agreement, by charismatic appearance, by respect that this monk is our teacher. But, when O *Kālāmā* you know by yourself (self-experience) that these teachings (qualities) are skillful, these teachings (qualities) are blameless, these teachings (qualities) are praised by the wise, these teachings (qualities) when acquired and practiced lead to welfare and happiness, Then O *Kālāmā* you should accept them and live with them.”²⁹

Equality: The Buddha placed every human on the equal footings without any discrimination. “One cannot find distinctions in the human bodies, the distinctions among humans are merely verbal designations.”³⁰

“I do not call one a *Brāhman* out of his origin and lineage. Anyone (of whatever origin and lineage) whose attachment prevails is just one who can be addressed by calling him ‘friend or sir.’”³¹ He made everyone responsible for his acts. One is neither respectful nor disrespectful out of his birth (origin and lineage). The action of a person brings him respect or disrespect.

²⁴ AN 3.66.

²⁵ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 276 - 178.

²⁶ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 441.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 444 – 447.

²⁸ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 24 - 32.

²⁹ AN 3.66: “*Etha tumhe, kālāmā, mā anussavena, mā paramparāya, mā itikirāya, mā piṭakasampadānena, mā takkahetu, mā nayahetu, mā ākārāparivittakkena, mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā, mābhabbarūpatāya, mā samaṇo no garūti. Yadā tumhe, kālāmā, attanāva jāneyyātha – ‘ime dhammā kusalā, ime dhammā anavajjā, ime dhammā viññūppasatthā, ime dhammā samattā samādinna hitāya sukhāya saṃvattanti’ ti, atha tumhe, kālāmā, upasampajja vihareyyātha.*”

³⁰ MN 98: *Vāsetṭhasuttaṃ*: “*paccattaṇca sarīresu, manussesvetam na vijjati./ Vokāraṇca manussesu, samaññāya pavuccati.*”

³¹ MN 98: “*na cāhaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ brūmi, yonijaṃ mattisambhavaṃ. bhovādi nāma so hoti, sace hoti sakiṇcano.*”

“By birth one is neither a *Brāhmin* nor a non-*Brāhmin*. One is *Brāhmin* or a non-*Brāhmin* out of his acts.”³² Here ‘*Brāhman*’ refers to the person who deserves higher respect out of giving up of attachment to sensual desires. The Buddha is placing all four *varṇa* (classes) of ancient Indian society at equal footing.

Equality was an issue that the Buddha addressed vehemently. He advocated and practiced equality vigorously. The *saṅgha* he established was the live example of people joining from various strata of the society being treated equally in all respects. He did not put a bar on caste, race, region or sex for admission to the *saṅgha* as well as for admonition when requested. He converted the high and holy, the low and lowly, the women, the fallen and criminals and taught them the same Dhamma, most of whom achieved desired results of *nibbāna* out of practicing the Dhamma.³³ He did not hesitate in visiting Ambapālī, the courtesan, denying the Licchavi merchants and generals for she was granted the visit early.³⁴ He treated himself as the member of the *saṅgha* and all rules of the *saṅgha* were equally applicable to him as they were to any other *bhikkhu*.³⁵ As a crusader of inequality and casteism Dr. Ambedkar very strongly emphasized the equality practiced by the Buddha. A complete section (section IV of Part V of Book III) of his book “The Buddha and His Dhamma” is devoted to social equality. In addition, he specially included the events of conversion of people belonging to various strata of society as supporting evidence.

IV. FRATERNITY, COMPASSION, LOVING KINDNESS

Actions of human (*kamma*) are the main subject dealt with by the Buddha. He categorizes the actions into two – *akusala* (unwholesome) which results in harm and sufferings to oneself and to others and *kusala* (wholesome) which results in non-harm and welfare of oneself and others.

“Greed, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, non-greed is wholesome, hate, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, non-hate is wholesome, delusion, *O Vaccha* is unwholesome, non-delusion is wholesome. These three things are unwholesome, and three things are wholesome.

Killing living beings, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, abstention from killing living beings is wholesome. Taking what is not given, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, abstention from taking what is not given is wholesome. Misconduct in sensual pleasure, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, abstention from misconduct in sensual pleasure is wholesome. False speech, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, abstention from false speech is wholesome. Malicious speech, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome,

³² MN 98: “*na jaccā brāhmaṇo hoti, na jaccā hoti abrahmaṇo kammunā brāhmaṇo hoti, kammunā hoti abrahmaṇo.*”

³³ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, Book II – Part III, V, VI, VII, VIII, p. 135 - 160, p. 179 – 210.

³⁴ DN 16.

³⁵ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 583 - 584.

abstention from malicious speech is wholesome. Harsh speech, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, abstention from harsh speech is wholesome. Gossip, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, abstention from gossip is wholesome. Covetousness, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, uncovetousness is wholesome. I will, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, non-ill will is wholesome. Wrong view, *O Vaccha*, is unwholesome, right view is wholesome. These ten things are unwholesome, and the other ten things are wholesome.”³⁶

These actions define the inter-relationship between the humans and their groups. Therefore, to abstain from unwholesome actions and to pursue wholesome actions is the advice of the Buddha.³⁷ This is the behavioral pattern in the social system which gives rise to ‘fraternity’ and maintain it. It overcome hatred, ill will, towards others by way of self-restrain and thus provide fertile soil for the growth of fraternity.

Compassion is a higher degree of fraternity. It inspires a person to help others come out of their pain or sufferings. The Buddha taught the Dhamma out of compassion towards the beings of the world and he ordered the same to the saṅgha of bhikkhus: “Monks, live the wanderer’s life for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion towards the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of humans and gods. Teach them the Dhamma which is beneficial in the beginning, beneficial in the middle and beneficial at the end.”³⁸ The Buddha recommends developing compassion (*karuṇā*) through meditative practices so that the strong established mental state of compassion can transform into the actions in the welfare of the world.

Loving kindness (*mettā*) too is the higher degree of fraternity focusing on the good will as against the ill will and hatred. In the developed form, it has to function as a force directing actions in the welfare of all, inclusive of those who had been one’s opponents or enemy. “Monks, I do not see even one thing other than liberation of mind through Loving Kindness (*mettā*) on account of which

³⁶ MN 73: “lobho kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, alobho kusalaṃ, doso kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, adoso kusalaṃ, moho kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, amoho kusalaṃ. iti kho, vaccha, ime tayo dhammā akusalā, tayo dhammā kusalā. “pāṇātipāto kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, pāṇātipātā veramaṇī kusalaṃ, adinnādānaṃ kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, adinnādānā veramaṇī kusalaṃ, kāmesumicchācāro kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇī kusalaṃ, musāvādo kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, musāvādā veramaṇī kusalaṃ, piṣuṇā vācā kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, piṣuṇāya vācāya veramaṇī kusalaṃ, pharusā vācā kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, pharusāya vācāya veramaṇī kusalaṃ, samphappalāpo kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, samphappalāpā veramaṇī kusalaṃ, abhijjhā kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, anabhijjhā kusalaṃ, byāpādo kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, abyāpādo kusalaṃ, micchādīṭṭhi kho, vaccha, akusalaṃ, sammādiṭṭhi kusalaṃ. iti kho, vaccha, ime dasa dhammā akusalā, dasa dhammā kusalā”.

³⁷ Dhṛp 183: “Sabba pāpassa akaraṇaṃ, kusalassa upsampadā.”

³⁸ Vinaya Piṭaka: “Mahāvagga, Mārakathā Caratha bhikkhave, cārikaṃ bahujaṇahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ, desetha, bhikkhave, dhammaṃ ādikalyāṇaṃ majjhakalyāṇaṃ pariyosānakalyāṇaṃ”

un-arisen ill will, is stopped from arising, arisen ill will is abandoned.”³⁹ “For one who attends carefully to the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness, un-arisen hatred does not arise, and arisen hatred is abandoned. This, friends, is the reason un-arisen hatred does not arise, and arisen hatred is abandoned.”⁴⁰

Fraternity, compassion and loving kindness are the wholesome actions that can restrain, decline and bring to end the hatred and ill will. That is the need for peace to prevail. Compassion and loving kindness when developed to higher degrees are also categorized as *brahmavihāra* indicating that they are the states of meditative absorption which delivers mental state of supreme bliss equivalent to the gods of *Brāhma* realm.

The Buddha cautions about the harmful results of hatred which obstructs fraternity. “Whatever hatred occurs, it springs out of an unwholesome root. Whatever action a person filled with hate performs by body, speech, or mind, that action is unwholesome. When a person filled with hate, overcome by hatred, with his mind obsessed by hatred, inflicts suffering upon others by killing, imprisonment, confiscation, censure, or banishment under a false view that ‘I am powerful, I want power,’ that too is unwholesome. Thus, numerous harmful unwholesome qualities originate in him born of hatred, caused by hatred, arisen from hatred, conditioned by hatred.”⁴¹

Fraternity is love, goodwill towards fellow beings. Practice of morality helps in the development of fraternity. To overcome and erase hatred strengthens and establishes fraternity.⁴² Compassion (*karunā*) and loving kindness (*mettā*) are the higher levels of fraternity. They are the Sublime States of Mind (*Brahmavihāras*) whose practice is propounded by the Buddha as the requisites of achieving Nibbāna. As per Dr. Ambedkar, the Buddha placed *karunā* and *mettā* (*maitri*) higher than *pradnyā* (wisdom) and are the characteristics of *Saddhamma*.⁴³

Justice: The Buddha framed a complete social system for the *saṅgha* (the community of monks) which was the group of renunciate persons who had given up the household life in the spiritual quest by practice of his teachings.

³⁹ AN 1.17: “*nāhaṃ, bhikkhave, aññaṃ ekadhammampi samanupassāmi yena anuppanno vā byāpādo nuppajjati uppanno vā byāpādo pahīyati yathayidaṃ, bhikkhave, mettā cetovimutti.*”

⁴⁰ AN 3.69, *Aññatitthiyasuttaṃ tassa mettaṃ cetovimuttiṃ yoniso manasi karoto anuppanno ceva doso nuppajjati uppanno ca doso pahīyati. Ayaṃ kho, āvuso, hetu ayaṃ paccayo yena anuppanno ceva doso nuppajjati uppanno ca doso pahīyati*” ti.

⁴¹ AN 3.70, *Akusalamūlasuttaṃ “yadapi, bhikkhave, doso tadapi akusalamūlaṃ, yadapi duṭṭho abhisankharoti kāyena vācāya manasā tadapi akusalaṃ, yadapi duṭṭho dose-naabhibhūtopariyādinnacittoparassaasatādukkhaṃ uppādayativadhenavābandhanenavājāniyā vā garahāya vā pabbajānāya vā balavamhi balattho itipi tadapi akusalaṃ. Itissame dosa-jā dosanidānā dosasamudayā dosapaccayā aneke pāpakā akusala dhamma sambhavanti.*

⁴² Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, Book III Part V Section III, p. 297 - 300, MN 21 *Kakacupamsutta*.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 295 – 300.

He made the rules and regulations for this community. These regulations had righteousness as their fundamental principle.⁴⁴ They were aimed at putting minimum dependence on lay followers and to practice goodwill towards lay people without getting attached. This helped to maintain harmonious relations between the community of monks and lay people. He developed a judicial system within this community which provided for minimizing the violations of regulations and disputes.⁴⁵ The *Saṅgha* when functioning as a judicial authority treated every monk as equal and fair. The administration of the Buddha's *saṅgha* is the early system of judiciary practiced in ancient India.

Equality is the undisposable characteristic of Justice. According to Dr. Ambedkar, Equality may help the best to survive even though the best may not be the fittest, and that society wants the best not the fittest.⁴⁶ He calls the religion of the Buddha a perfect justice springing from man's meritorious disposition. It is the religion which promotes the happiness of others simultaneously with the happiness of oneself and tolerates no oppression.⁴⁷

V. NOT WITH ONLY LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE BUT WITH WISDOM

The Buddha made a distinction between knowledge and Insight.⁴⁸ Learning and Knowledge were important but mere learning and knowledge is insufficient. It may be harmful if used by the immoral person for a destructive purpose.⁴⁹ Therefore, the Buddha insisted upon Morality acquired along with Knowledge to develop experiential Wisdom. "These complexities of life are resolved by an ardent and righteous *bhikkhu*, who is a man who is established in morality and has acquired wisdom."⁵⁰

Establishment of morality is the pre-requisite, righteousness is mode endowed with wisdom for resolving the complexities of life. Without morality and righteousness, the complexities of life remain and can become more complex. Dr. Ambedkar interpreted that "man and the relationship with human as the center of the Dhamma".⁵¹ "Dhamma is social. It is fundamentally and essentially so".⁵² This is the new identification of Buddhism. As a practitioner of Buddhism, who took refuge in the Buddha and his Dhamma, Dr. Ambedkar humbly owes this new identification to the Buddha and his

⁴⁴ *Vinaya Piṭaka, Pārājika, Pācittiya, Bhikkhuni Vibhaṅga.*

⁴⁵ *Vinaya Piṭaka, Campeyya Khandhaka, Kosambi Khandhaka, Cūlavagga*

⁴⁶ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 308.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 309.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 291.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 272.

⁵⁰ SN 1. 23: "*Jaṭāsuttaṃ Sile patiṭṭhāya naro sapañño, cittaṃ paññaṇca bhāvayaṃ, Ātāpī nipako bhikkhu, so imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭanti*".

⁵¹ Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997, p. 254 - 121.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 316.

Dhamma. Throughout this book he provides proof and argues in favor of this new identification. These Social Values have an eminent role in establishing and maintaining peace anywhere in the world.

Equality, liberty, and fraternity requisite for global peace

In an increasingly interconnected world, the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity are pivotal for fostering global peace. These social values not only form the foundation of democratic societies but also serve as universal ideals that transcend borders, cultures, and religions.

Equality, at its core, is about ensuring that every individual has the same opportunities and rights, regardless of their background, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. When people are treated equally, it reduces the root causes of conflict and violence, such as discrimination, exploitation, and inequality. By promoting equality, societies can build more inclusive and just communities where everyone has a share in peace and prosperity.

Liberty is the right to live one's life freely, without oppression or undue restrictions. It allows individuals to express their opinions, practice their beliefs, and pursue their dreams. Liberty is essential for personal growth and societal progress. When people are free to think and act, they can contribute more effectively to their communities and the world. In a society that upholds liberty, dialogue and cooperation replace fear and coercion, paving the way for lasting peace.

Fraternity is the sense of brotherhood and solidarity among people. It emphasizes the importance of non-harming and well-being towards all in achieving peace and social welfare. Fraternity encourages empathy, compassion, and understanding, fostering a sense of belonging. When people see each other as brothers and sisters, they are more likely to resolve conflicts peacefully and work together for the common good. Together, these three principles create a powerful framework for peace. Equality ensures that everyone has a voice, liberty ensures that voice can be freely expressed, and fraternity ensures that all voices are heard and valued. By embracing these values, the global community can move towards a more harmonious and peaceful world, where differences are reconciled, and social conflicts are resolved.

VI. RIGHTEOUSNESS – A CORE VALUE FOR LASTING PEACE

Righteousness acts as a force behind justice and fairness. Leaders with righteousness can create an environment of trust and respect within and between the communities. Righteous individuals seek non-violent means of resolving conflicts. They are more likely to de-escalate tensions and find peaceful solutions through understanding, empathy and dialogue. Thus, righteousness provides the foundation for more just, fair and compassionate society, which are essentials ingredients for lasting peace.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar articulated that the ultimate aim of Buddhism is “to make the world a kingdom of righteousness”⁵³ and that Eightfold Noble Path

⁵³ Dr. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Buddha Bhumi Publication, Nagpur, 1997,

(*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*) is the path of righteousness.⁵⁴ Emphasizing its role not only in individual transformation but also in the creation of a just and harmonious social order.

VII. CONCLUSION

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's resolution of caste conflict in India through Buddhist insight and his proposal for a new social system based on Buddhism serve as a powerful example of social conflict resolution. His approach demonstrates how Buddhist principles can provide a framework for social transformation. By embracing the ethical and philosophical foundations of Buddhism, Ambedkar envisioned a social system that transcends hierarchical divisions and fosters a more just and egalitarian society. His advocacy for Buddhism was not merely a religious conversion but a deliberate socio-political movement aimed at dismantling entrenched structures of discrimination and inequality.

One of the defining characteristics of Buddhism is its rejection of the very causes that lead to social conflict. The Buddha's teachings emphasize the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*) through the eradication of attachment (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*), which are often the root causes of societal discord. By cultivating ethical conduct (*sīla*), wisdom (*paññā*), and mental discipline (*samādhi*), individuals and communities can reduce sources of conflict and foster harmonious relationships.

Regardless of whether one perceives Buddhism as a religion or a philosophical way of life, its core social values – equality, liberty, fraternity, righteousness, justice, compassion, and wisdom – serve as fundamental principles for peace-building. Ambedkar's vision closely aligned with these principles, advocating for a social order grounded in dignity and mutual respect. Integrating Buddhist ethics into the fabric of society not only helps mitigate conflicts arising from communal, regional, religious, and economic disparities but also provides a sustainable foundation for global peace.

Historically, Buddhism has played a significant role in conflict resolution by offering nonviolent strategies for addressing societal grievances. The Buddha himself engaged in diplomatic interventions, advocating for dialogue over aggression. In the contemporary context, Ambedkar's application of Buddhist insight to the caste struggle in India serves as a model for resolving systemic oppression through peaceful means. His reinterpretation of Dhamma as a socially engaged practice underscores the relevance of Buddhist teachings in addressing structural injustices.

The social system envisioned by Ambedkar, grounded in Buddhist principles, remains one of the most effective paradigms for minimizing social tensions and fostering inclusive societies. By upholding the values of ethical governance and moral responsibility, a Buddhist-inspired social framework can contribute to the resolution of both localized and global conflicts. Thus,

p. 282 - 283.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 123.

Ambedkar's historical application of Buddhist wisdom offers a profound lesson on how spiritual insight can be harnessed to cultivate social harmony and lasting peace.

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RECONCILE CONFLICTS WITH FORGIVENESS AND INSIGHT MEDITATION FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD

Ven. Dr. Thích Đạo Nhãn*

Abstract:

To reconcile (*anuneti*) and end conflicts, wars, hatred, and violent disagreements, we must clearly see (*pajānāti*) the arising of unwholesome mental states (*akusalacetasika*) and eliminate them as they truly are. We should not quickly judge or criticize; instead, we simply note and contemplate their arising and passing away. They are always changing and impermanent (*anicca*), so hatred, conflict, violence, discontent, and resistance also change in relation to the wholesome mental factors of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Conditioned phenomena (*dhammas*) do not truly exist as independent entities; they are non-self (*anatta*), and therefore, conflict and hatred are not inherently ours. Their nature is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). Seeing them clearly as they are, we no longer cling to disputes or conflicts, which arise due to the increase of the five sensual desires (*pañca-kāmaguṇa*) - form, sound, smell, taste, and touch - or due to perception (*sañjānāti*) and discriminative consciousness (*vijānāti*) of the senses (*indriya*): eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. It is meditation (*vipassanābhāvanā*) that helps us cultivate mindfulness (*sammāsati*) and clear comprehension (*sampajañña*), allowing us to control our actions of body, speech, and mind so that we do not harm ourselves, others, or both. Light exists because of darkness; in the same way, when mindfulness fully embraces hatred and conflicts, there is no need for revenge. Instead, we radiate loving-kindness and compassion to all living beings, regardless of status, size, or appearance. This is the practice of forgiveness meditation (*khama-bhāvanā*) and insight meditation, which reconciles conflicts and dissolves hatred, bringing about a peaceful (*santa*) world free from war.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, reconcile, vipassanā, insight meditation, mettā, loving-kindness, patience, anicca, dukkha, anatta, pajānāti.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

“*Na hi verena verāni, sammant’idha (sammati+idha) kudācanam* (any time);/ *Averena ca sammanti, esa (ta, this) dhammo sanantano.*” (Dhammapada No.5). The Buddha always taught that hatred never ceases (*na kudācanam*) through hatred in this world (*idha*, here); only through love (*avera*) do they cease. This is an eternal law. Anger (*kodha*), hatred (*vera*), ill-will (*paṭigha*), and grudge enmity (*upanāha*) should indeed (*hi*) cease (*sammati*) and be reconciled through mutual forgiveness meditation (*khamā-bhāvanā*), cultivating an open mind, always being mindful (*sati*), and seeing that all Dhammas are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*). Seeing everything clearly as it truly is - this is insight meditation (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*), which transforms hatred (*dosa*) into compassion (*karuṇā*) and allows one to live in loving-kindness (*mettā*). That is to say, *avera* (non-anger) is the virtue opposed to anger, and it alone vanishes (*nirujjhati*) when the right understanding (*pajānāti*) arises. This is an eternal law (*sanantana-dhamma*), an ancient principle followed by the Buddha and His disciples to live together in a peaceful world.

In order for our world to be peaceful and develop sustainably, without war, each individual must cultivate a good mind (*kusala citta*) and wholesome mental state (*sobhana cetasikā*). When people detach from evil and unwholesome Dhamma, society will surely no longer be plagued by hatred, jealousy, or envy that harms others. The way to reconcile conflicts and hatred is to practice forgiveness meditation (*khamabhāvanā*) through cultivating the four immeasurable minds (*cattāro brahmavihāra*). The Blessed One forgave Devadatta, who insulted and harmed him, as well as Ciñcāmāṇavikā and Sundarī, who falsely accused Him. The Blessed One (*Sugato*) resolved the water dispute between the Sakyas and the Koliyas through loving-kindness meditation. Venerable Puṇṇa used insight meditation to forgive when the *Sunāparanta* people ferociously insulted and harmed him. The self-immolation of Bodhisatta Thich Quang Duc in Vietnam was a compassionate act that opposed the religious persecution under the Ngo Dinh Diem government. On the occasion of the 2025 United Nations Vesak Celebration, held in Vietnam, I present this paper to commemorate the three great events of the Blessed One: His birth, enlightenment, and final *nibbāna* on the full moon day of the month of Vesākha (*Vaiśākha*).

II. RETALIATING FOR REVENGE DOES NOT LEAD TO PEACE

2.1. Holding on to hatred cannot destroy hatred

Retaliating with hatred cannot cease, vanish, or stop hatred in this world. Only loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy in others’ welfare (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) can lead to forgiveness, allowing us to let go of mistakes, sins, guilt, and even crimes. Only when we are mindful (*sati*) and fully aware (*sampajāna*), practicing insight meditation (*vipassanā bhāvanā*), do we free ourselves from attachment to likes and dislikes, greed and anger? With true insight, all anger, hatred, malcontent, intolerance, and resentment will be eliminated, allowing us to release our past mistakes and

forgive those who have harmed us, without clinging to anger forever. This is the only path (*ekāyana*) that leads to emancipation from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. It is the way of sacred reconciliation - without violence, without swords and spears - bringing peace and freedom from conflict and war, which only cause suffering to one another.

Usually, when we have not yet cultivated inner peace (*santa*) if someone abuses (*akkosati*), scolds, insults our dignity and honor, slanders, denigrates, ridicules, or provokes us; if they beat (*vadhati*) us, defeats or conquer (*jināti*) us, or rob (*harati*) us of our material possessions, homes, or even our bodies, we immediately feel anger (*dosa*), seek revenge, and retaliate to satisfy our resentment (*upahāna*), if we have the power to do so. But if we cannot take revenge, we hold on to anger and hatred in our hearts, unable to let them go. However, the more we cling to hatred and vengeance, the more they persist - never ceasing, never extinguished, and never leading to forgiveness. Because the unpleasant things we dislike are a form of inner fire that burns us from within. Therefore, the Tathāgata declared in Dhammapada verse No.3 of the Twin Verses as follows: “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me, In those who harbor such thoughts, hatred is not appeased (*sammati*, ceased)”¹.

2.2. Don't hold grudges, grudges will be self-destruct

On the contrary, if someone scolds (*akkosati*), abuses, beats (*vadhati*) us, defeats or conquers (*jināti*) us, or robs (*harati*) us of our material possessions, homes, or even our bodies, at that moment, we do not judge or criticize. Instead, we remain calm, simply noting, being mindful (*sammāsati*), and fully aware (*sampajāna*) of the arising anger towards sights, sounds, scents, tastes, touches, and Dhammas perceived by the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. When discriminative consciousness (*vijānāti*) and perception (*sañjānāti*) arise, we mistakenly think (*moha*) that these things belong to us, that they are us, or that we are ourself. However, in reality, they are no-self (*anatta*), impermanent (*anicca*), and ultimately unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). Thus, we do not cling to the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) as our own. As a result, we do not harbor unwholesome anger or seek retaliation, allowing hatred to cease even when insulted, beaten, or robbed. Therefore, the Sugata declared in Dhammapada verse No.4 of the Twin Verses as follows: “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me; In those who do not harbor such thoughts hatred is appeased.”²

Once upon a time, a newly ordained monk named Tissa was arrogant and haughty (*māna*), showing no respect for the senior monks. As a result, he was reprimanded. Feeling angered, he went to the Blessed One to complain. The


¹ Nārada Mahāthera (1993), *The Dhammapada-Pāli text and translation with stories in brief and notes*, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C. p.6-8ff., Yamakavagga: “*Akkocchi maṃ avadhi maṃ, ajini maṃ ahāsi me; / Ye (who) ca taṃ (ta, those) upanayhanti (harbour), veraṃ tesaṃ (ta) na sammati.*”

² Dhammapada 4: “*Akkocchi maṃ avadhi maṃ, ajini maṃ ahāsi me; / Ye ca taṃ n’upanayhanti, veraṃ tes’ūpasammati (tesaṃ+upasammati, calm, cease)*”

Buddha advised him to repent, but he remained stubborn. Then, the Buddha recounted the story of Tissa's past life. Upon hearing it, he repented and sought forgiveness from the elders, as illustrated in Dhammapada verses No. 3 and 4 of the Twin Verses (*Yamakavagga*).

III. BUDDHA'S LOVING KINDNESS FORGIVES THOSE WHO OFFEND HIM

3.1. Bhagavā used forgiveness meditation to overcome Devadatta's hatred³

Devadatta () was a cousin of Gotama Buddha. When he lived in Kapilavatthu, he was known for his cruelty and aggression. On one occasion, Devadatta shot and injured a swan, but the compassionate Prince Siddhattha rescued it. Devadatta was always jealous of Siddhattha.

When Devadatta became a monk alongside the five Sakyan princes - Bhaddiya, Anuruddha, Ānanda, Bhagu, and Kimila - he attained only worldly supernatural powers (*loka abhinnā*). However, due to his innate nature of anger (*dosa*), jealousy (*issā*), and other defilements, he sought to compete for power and aspired to lead the *saṅgha*. Three times he requested this from the Buddha, but each time the Buddha refused, stating that even Sāriputta and Moggallāna had not yet been entrusted with such a role. Moreover, the Blessed One rebuked him, saying he was like one who feeds on saliva (*khelāsaka*, 吃痰者, referring to the four impure foods). Enraged and dissatisfied, Devadatta left and established his sect.⁴

Devadatta used his worldly psychic powers to transform into a boy carrying snakes around him. He went to Rājagaha and bewitched Crown Prince Ajātasattu, inciting him to kill King Bimbisāra. He also hired assassins to kill the Buddha, but they failed, and instead, all of them attained *sotāpatti* (stream entry). Devadatta then attempted to kill the Buddha by rolling a rock down from Mount Gijjhakūṭa, but it only wounded the Buddha, causing him to bleed. The wound was later treated by the physician Jīvaka. Becoming even more hateful, frustrated, and enraged, Devadatta devised another plan - he made the elephant Nālāgiri drunk and released it to attack the Buddha while he was on his alms round. However, through the Buddha's immense power of compassion (*mahā mettā*), the elephant was pacified and did not harm him.

Not stopping at his attempts to harm the Buddha, Devadatta also gathered five hundred young monks in Vesālī, in the country of Vajji - monks who were inexperienced and unaware of the *Vinaya* (monastic discipline). He then established five new rules to divide the *saṅgha* (𑖦𑖻𑖫𑖜 合僧, *Saṅghabhedakakkhandhaka*, referring to one who causes dissension in the monastic community). According to these rules, monks were required to live their entire lives in the forest, survive solely on alms, wear only dust-heap robes (*pamsukūla*, 糞掃衣衲衣, garments made from cast-off rags), dwell at the roots of trees, and abstain completely from

³ Ven. Mingun Sayādaw (1996), *Mahā Buddhavaṃsa-The Great Chronicle of Buddhas*, Ti=Ni publishing centre, Yangon, Myanmar.

⁴ Horner, I. B. (1963). *The Book of Discipline Vol. 5* (Cūlavagga, Vinayapīṭaka), London Luzac, p. 264 – 265.

eating meat or fish. When Devadatta proposed these rules to the Buddha, the Buddha refused. Enraged, Devadatta led the five hundred young monks away from the Buddha to Gayāsīsa. However, later, these monks were persuaded by Sāriputta and Moggallāna to return to the Buddha.

Devadatta was a villain, filled with anger (忿怒, *kodha*), hatred („ , *upanāha*), jealousy (¶...), and malice toward the Buddha. However, the Blessed One never showed even the slightest trace of hatred. Instead, he always responded with forgiveness and tolerance, using boundless loving-kindness (*mettā appamaññā* - ཐུགས་སྦྱོར་) to foster peace and solidarity - both within the royal courts of neighboring kingdoms and among the *saṅgha*. Due to the Buddha's limitless compassion and practice of forgiveness meditation, Devadatta eventually realized the errors of his ways. He attempted to go and seek the Buddha's forgiveness, but it was too late. On his way, the earth swallowed him, and he descended into the uninterrupted hell (རྩ་འཁོར་ *avīci niraya*) as a consequence of his evil deeds.

Before his death, Devadatta repented to the Buddha and was forgiven. The Buddha then gave him a prediction (རྩ་འཁོར་ *veyyākaraṇa*) that in the future, he would become a *Pacceka*buddha (“ X , - §•) - a “solitary awakened one” (X), who attains enlightenment independently without teaching others.

No matter how much Devadatta harmed, opposed, or tried to hurt the *tathāgata*, the Buddha always responded with great loving-kindness (*mahāmettā*). He overcame hatred not with retaliation, but with boundless compassion, love, and forgiveness. For hatred (*upanāha*) cannot be extinguished by more hatred - only through compassion and forgiveness can it be neutralized. This is an eternal law.

3.2. Cīncāmāṇavikā slandered the Buddha

When the Buddha was residing at Jetavana, the number of monks and lay disciples grew rapidly during the first twenty years, a period known as “*paṭhama* bodhi.” Meanwhile, the influence of heretical sects declined, leading to jealousy (*issā*) among them. Out of envy, they conspired to ruin the Buddha's reputation by using the beautiful and graceful Cīncāmāṇavikā. She was instructed to slander (*pisuṇa*) the Bhagavā. Cīncāmāṇavikā frequently walked toward Jetavana Monastery just after the Buddha's sermons had ended and the audience had dispersed, creating a suspicion that she had been spending nights there. After some time, she falsely claimed to be pregnant by the monk Gotama. In front of a large gathering of Dhamma listeners, she publicly accused the Buddha. The Buddha, remaining calm, gently addressed her: “Cīncāmāṇavikā, only you and I know whether what you have just said is true or false.”⁵

At that moment, the heavenly king Sakka witnessed the situation and descended to the place where the Buddha was preaching the Dhamma.

⁵ Ven. Mingun Sayādaw Bhaddanta Vicittasārabhivamsa (1990), *Mahā Buddhavaṃsa - The Great Chronicle of Buddhas*, SBVMS Publication.

Accompanied by four deva-angels, he transformed them into four mice, which gnawed through the rope tying the wooden board to Ciñcāmāṇavikā's belly, causing it to fall. Exposed before everyone, she was immediately condemned and dragged out of the monastery. The ground then split in two, swallowing her, and she was consumed by the fires of *Avīci* hell. Those who do not speak the truth and frequently lie (*musāvāda*) forfeit their chances of attaining *nibbāna* and being reborn as gods or humans. Devoid of moral integrity, there is no evil act they would not commit, and they are destined to fall into the realms of suffering.

3.3. The Sugato was merciful and forgiving when Sundari slandered him⁶

When the Blessed One was residing at Jetavana in the city of Sāvattthi, both gods and humans deeply respected Him and made offerings to Him and the *saṅgha*. Out of jealousy and envy (*issā*), the heretics conspired to destroy the Buddha's reputation. They hired a beautiful woman named Sundari to falsely accuse the Buddha of violating her purity. Taking their scheme further, they incited a group of drunkards to murder Sundari and secretly dispose of her body near the Buddha's perfumed chamber (*gandhakūṭi*). Afterward, they spread false rumors, accusing the Buddha and the *saṅgha* of raping and killing her, hiding her remains within Jetavana Monastery, causing both the king and the people to doubt him.

The Buddha told them that those who sow deceit will reap its consequences. Despite their rude words, slander, and insults, He remained unshaken, knowing that such false accusations would last only seven days. He then spoke the following verse: “*Abhūta* (false)-*vādi nirayam upeti* (obtain)/ *Yo* (whoever) *vāpi ratvā* (raṭati, scold) *na karoni c'āha* (āha, he has said)/ *Ubho* (both)-*pi te pecca* (after death) *samā* (sama, equal) *bhavanti/ Nihina* (low)-*kammā mānaja parattha* (hereafter).”

A person who habitually lies by claiming, “I saw, heard, met, or knew about it,” despite having never seen it with their own eyes or clearly knowing the truth, is deceitful. Likewise, someone who denies their own wrongdoing is equally guilty. Both of these contemptible individuals, having engaged in vile and dishonest actions, are destined to be reborn in realms of suffering after death.

The noble Buddha neither cared for nor sought revenge against vulgar words, insults, curses, or slander. He endured them with patience (*khanti*), lived gently, and acted courteously (*soracca*) to uphold the truth of His innocence. When people realized the truth and saw that they had not personally witnessed the incident, they repented for their slander and baseless accusations.

The killers of Sundari quarreled over the unequal distribution of their reward. As a result, they were discovered and arrested by King Pasenadi's soldiers, who interrogated them to uncover the mastermind behind Sundari's murder. Under questioning, they confessed that they had been hired by

⁶ Ven. Mingun Sayādaw (1990), *Mahā Buddhavaṃsa - The Great Chronicle of Buddhas*, Ti=Ni publishing centre, Yangon, Myanmar. Cf. Udāna Pāli Text 4 Maghiya vagga 1: 8. Sundari Sutta Pāli and Commentary.

heretics to kill her in an attempt to destroy Gotama's reputation. The king then punished them for both murder and slander.

A similar story is told that, once upon a time, after being bribed by a lady of the court who held a grudge against the Buddha, many people severely abused Him. Venerable Ānanda, unable to bear such insults, suggested that the Buddha leave the place and go to another city. However, the Buddha advised him to practice patience (*khanti*) and compared himself to a battle-hardened elephant, ready to endure all attacks upon entering the battlefield.⁷

The Buddha uttered words of inspiration (*udāna*) in Dhammapada verses Nos. 320, 321 of the Elephant Chapter (*Nāgavagga* 23) as follows: "*Ahaṃ (Tathāgata) nāgo'va (nāga+iva: as) saṅgāme (battle),/ Cāpato (cāpa, bow) patitaṃ (fallen) saraṃ (arrow);/ Ativākyam (abuse) titikkhissam (endure), Dussilo (du+sīla) hi (indeed) bahujjano (bahu+jana, most people).*" (Dhp.320)

As an elephant in the battlefield withstands the arrows shot from a bow, even so will I endure abuse; verily most people are undisciplined: "*Dantaṃ (dameti, trained) nayanti (lead) samitiṃ (assembly),/ Dantaṃ rājābhirūhati (rāja+abhirūhati: ascend);/ Danto seṭṭho (excellent) manussesu,/ Yotivākyam (yo: whoever+ativākyā: abuse) titikkhati.*" (Dhp.321)

They take trained horses or elephants to an assembly; the king mounts the trained animal. The best among men are those who are trained and endure abuse.

IV. BUDDHASĀSANA HELP RECONCILE HATRED BETWEEN KINGS AND NATIONS AND BRING WORLD PEACE

4.1. The Buddha conciliated the dispute between Sakya and Koliya

In the month of *Jeṭṭhamāsa* (May-June), water resources were scarce, leading to a dispute between the Sākīyas (Æ) and the Koliyas (— ß) over the waters of the Rohiṇī River, which lay between the cities of Kapilavatthu and Koliya. They exchanged bitter words, quarreled, cursed, scolded, and insulted each other. Eventually, both sides armed themselves, ready for war to assert their strength and power in this conflict between the two royal families (*ñāti-kalaha*).

At dawn, when the Buddha observed the world, he saw his kinsmen preparing to destroy each other. To reconcile them (*ñāti kalaha vūpasamana vatthu*), the Blessed One used His miraculous powers (*abhiññā*) to sit cross-legged in the air above the middle of the Rohiṇī River. Upon seeing Him, His relatives immediately threw away their weapons and paid homage to him.

Then, Sugato taught that destroying the precious Khattiyas family over a mere water source was an inappropriate action. He said, "If the *tathāgata* had not appeared, you would certainly have turned the Khattiyas family into bloodshed. You live in hatred (*verī*) and anger, suffering from the disease of desire, craving for the five sensual pleasures, whereas I (the Buddha) live without hatred, free from illness, dwelling in liberation, no longer desiring anything in this world." He

⁷ Ibid. *Nārada Mahāthera* (1993), p. 252, chapter 23 - elephant (*nāgavagga*).

then recited verses 197, 198, and 199 of the Happiness Chapter (*Sukhavagga*) as follows:

Oh, happily let us live! free from hatred (disease/longing), / Among those who hate (are afflicted with disease/are possessed with longing); / Among men who hate (are afflicted with disease/are possessed with longing), / Let us live free from hatred (disease/longing).⁸ Amongst the hateful be without hate amongst the sick be in good health amongst the passionate be without passion.

4.2. King Bimbisāra forgave prince Ajātasattu's plotting

King Bimbisāra's tolerance, *mettā*, and forgiveness: King Seniya Bimbisāra (𑀧𑀺𑀭𑀸𑀓𑀾𑀢𑀺), who ruled Magadha with his capital at Rājagaha, was the Buddha's first royal patron. He ascended the throne at the age of fifteen and reigned for fifty-two years. The cruel Devadatta instigated Prince Ajātasattu to plot against his father, attempting to seize the throne. However, the prince was caught red-handed. Despite this, King Bimbisāra, with great compassion (*mettā-karuṇā*) instead of hatred (*upanāha*) and indignation (*kodha*), did not punish his son harshly but instead rewarded him with the coveted crown.⁹

Prince Ajātasattu¹⁰ (𑀧𑀺𑀭𑀸𑀓𑀾𑀢𑀺), was ungrateful and committed the grave crime of unfilial piety. He imprisoned his father, King Bimbisāra, and starved him, forbidding anyone, including his mother Vedehī (𑀧𑀺𑀭𑀸𑀓𑀾𑀢𑀺), from visiting. Despite being deprived of sustenance, the king, who was a Sotāpanna (𑀧𑀺𑀭𑀸𑀓𑀾𑀢𑀺), found solace in spiritual happiness as he paced up and down in his cell. However, the wicked prince ultimately decided to end his noble father's life. He ruthlessly ordered his barber to cut open the soles of the king's feet, rub them with salt and oil, and force him to walk on burning charcoal. The barber mercilessly carried out this inhumane command, and the virtuous king died in unbearable agony.

Ajātasattu was overjoyed at the birth of his first son, Udayabhadda (*Udayibhadda*). His love for the child was so immense that it was beyond words. A deep fatherly affection filled his heart, sending shivers of joy throughout his body and penetrating to his very marrow. Overcome with emotion, he turned to the queen's mother and asked, "How much did my father, the king, love me when I was born?"

Queen Mother Vedehī told him: "When you were conceived in my womb, I developed an intense craving to sip a few drops of blood from your father's

⁸ Eugene Watson Burlingame (2004), *Buddhist Legends*, Publisher: Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, Happiness chapter (*sukhavagga*), Dhṛp 15-197, 198, 199), p.642-644: "Su-sukhaṃ (su+sukha) vata (Oh!) jīvāma (jīvati, live),/ Verinesu (āturesu/ ussukesu) averino (an-āturā/an-ussukā); / Verinesu (Āturesu/ Ussukesu) manussesu, / Viharāma (live) averino (anāturā/ anussukā)."

⁹ Nārada Mahā Thera (1988), *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Publication of the Buddhist missionary Society, Malaysia. p. 190- 196.

¹⁰ Ven. Mingun Sayādaw (1996, vol. 4), *Mahā Buddhavaṃsa - The Great Chronicle of Buddhas*, Ti=Ni publishing centre, Yangon, Myanmar, chapter 37.

right hand. I dared not reveal this strange desire, and as a result, I became pale and weak. Eventually, I was persuaded to confess my inhuman craving. Joyfully, your father fulfilled my wish, and I drank that abhorrent potion. The soothsayers foretold that you would one day become your father's enemy. Because of this prophecy, you were named Ajātasattu, meaning 'unborn enemy' (अजातशत्रु). Once, when you were suffering from a painful boil on your finger, no one could soothe you or help you sleep. But your father, who was presiding over his royal court, took you into his lap, gently caressed you, and lovingly sucked the boil. To his misfortune, it burst open inside his mouth. Oh, my dear son! That pus and blood - your affectionate father swallowed it, all out of love for you."¹¹

Ajātasattu's realization and repentance came too late - his father, King Bimbisāra, had already closed his eyes forever. He shed hot tears, only now understanding the depth of a father's love after becoming a father himself. King Bimbisāra passed away and was immediately reborn as a *deva* named Janavasabha in the *Cātummahārājika* (चतुर्माहात्म्य) heaven.

King Ajātasattu's repentance in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*¹²

After killing his father, King Ajātasattu was deeply repentant and asked his ministers about the noble conduct of monkhood. The royal physician Jīvaka Komārabhacca advised the king to visit the Buddha and inquire about the practice of monastic discipline (*sandiṭṭhika sāmaññaphalaṃ pucchā*) in Jīvaka's mango grove (*Ambavana*). The Blessed One then expounded, step by step, on the wonderful and supreme fruits of monkhood (*pañītataṛa sāmaññaphala, O' ^*), including the purity of minor morality (*cūlasīla*), intermediate morality (*majjhima-sīla*), and great morality (*mahāsīla*); abstinence, restraint, and sense discipline (*indriya-saṃvara*); mindfulness and clear comprehension (*satisampajañña*); contentment (*santosa*, "अ); the elimination of hindrances (*nīvaraṇappahāna*); and the cultivation of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*)...

After listening to the Blessed One's discourse, Ajātasattu's heart was uplifted (*upāsakattapaṭivedanā*), and he exclaimed: "Wonderful, Bhagavā! Just as one raises (*ukkujjeti*) what has fallen (*nikkujjita*), opens up (*vivarati*) what is hidden (*paṭicchanna*), shows the path (*maggam ācikkhati*) to one who is lost (*mūḷha*), and brings light (*tela-pajjotaṃ dhāreti*) into darkness (*andhakāra*) so that those with eyes may see forms (*cakkhumanto rūpāni dakkhanti*), in the same way, the Dhamma has been revealed and expounded by the Blessed One in manifold ways. From this day forward (*ajjatagge*), I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Bhikkhu *saṅgha* as a lay disciple until my last breath (*pāṇupetaṃ*). May the Blessed One accept me as His devoted follower. Lord Buddha, I have committed a grave offense (*accaya*). Out of ignorance (*bāla*), delusion (*mūḷha*), and unwholesomeness (*akusala*), I have wrongfully taken (*voropesi*) the life of my righteous father, the king, in my greed for the throne (*issariya-kāraṇā*).

¹¹ Ibid., *Nārada Mahā Thera* (1988), p. 196.

¹² *Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Walshe, Maurice (1995), Boston, Wisdom Publications.

May the Blessed One accept my confession (*paṭiggaṇhāti*) so that I may restrain myself (*saṃvara*) from such wrongdoing in the future (*āyatiṃ*)."

Because King Ajātasattu recognized his wrongdoing (*accayaṃ accayato disvā*), confessed, and atoned (*paṭikarosi*) in accordance with the Dhamma-law, the Buddha accepted (*paṭiggaṇhāti*) his confession. This is considered a reform (*vuddhi*) in the law of the Noble Ones (*Ariya*). Those who, having acknowledged their misdeeds (*yo accayaṃ accayato disvā*), confess in accordance with the Dhamma (*yathādhammaṃ paṭikaroti*), and resolve to restrain themselves in the future (*āyatiṃ*), are on the path of purification.

On the occasion of King Ajātasattu's repentance, the Blessed One said to the monks: "That king's heart is deeply repentant and remorseful. If he had not taken the life of his father, a righteous king, then while sitting here, he would have attained the Dhamma-eye (*Dhamma-cakkhu*), becoming a Sotāpanna (" i , Stream-enterer A`), free from defilements (*viraja*), and stainless (*vītamala*)."

According to the original Pāli text: "*Khatāyaṃ bhikkhave rājā, upahatāyaṃ bhikkhave rājā...*", the Buddha said, "Monks! This king was deeply affected (*upahata*), his heart was troubled (*khata*)..." *Khata* (past participle of *khaṇati*) means "uprooted," and *upahata* (past participle of *upahanati*) means "destroyed." This expression indicates that Ajātasattu was obstructed by his *kamma*, preventing him from attaining the spiritual fruits he would have otherwise achieved. Parricide is one of the heinous acts with "immediate results" (*anantarika-kamma*), ensuring inescapable consequences in the next life. According to the *Aṭṭhakathā* (Commentary) of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, he was unable to find peace or sleep until he visited the Buddha.

King Bimbisāra, out of compassion, forgave Prince Ajātasattu. However, the evil *kamma* created by the prince could not prevent its inevitable consequences. Although Ajātasattu ascended the throne with full power, he was unable to find peace and suffered from sleepless nights. The fires of greed (*lobha*, *abhijjhā*), anger and ill-will (*dosa*, *vyāpāda*), ignorance and doubt (*moha*, *vicikicchā*), as well as restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), constantly tormented his mind. These are among the five hindrances (*pañca-nīvaraṇa*) that cloud wisdom and inner peace. Because of his grave crime - parricide, one of the five heinous offenses (*ānantarika-kamma*) - Ajātasattu was destined to face the consequences of his deeds, ultimately falling into Avīci Niraya, the endless hell.

The great compassionate heart (*mahākaruṇā*) of the Sugato moved Prince Ajātasattu to awaken, repent for his *kamma*, and vow to take refuge in the Three Jewels (*tiratana*). He later became a devoted Buddhist king, actively protecting the Dhamma during the Buddha's lifetime. He also played a crucial role as the guardian of the First Buddhist Council (*saṅgīti*) at Sattapaṇṇi in Rājagaha.

V. ANGER IS CONQUERED BY LOVING-KINDNESS AND FORGIVENESS

5.1. Commentary of Dhammapada verse No. 5

Once upon a time, in the city of Sāvattthī, in the country of Kosala, there was a young man who had two wives - one, a barren wife (*vandhyā*), and the

While Subhā Therī was resting in the Jīvaka Mango Garden, a young libertine, driven by his sensual desires, became captivated by her eyes. In response, Subhā immediately gouged out one of her eyes and offered it to him. Overcome with fear and horror, he repented and apologized to her. Then, Subhā recited the following verse: “Harming a person like you, is like embracing a blazing fire, / It’s as if I have seized a poisonous snake. So may you be safe. Forgive me.”¹⁶

5.3. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) without hatred as the simile of the saw

When the Blessed One was staying at Sāvattṥī, in Jetavana, the monastery of Anāthapiṇḍika, he spoke about the monk Moliyaphagga, who was often angry, dissatisfied, and quick to question anyone who spoke ill of or fabricated lies about *bhikkhunis*. The *bhagavā* instructed him to train as follows: “My mind will be unaffected, and I shall utter no evil words; I shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate.”¹⁷

By the way, the Blessed One told the story of a female householder named Vedehikā, who was reputed to be gentle. However, when her maid Kālī woke up late a few times, Vedehikā became angry and struck her, injuring her head. Similarly, only when a monk is subjected to unpleasant and insulting words - yet remains patient, gentle, docile, and peaceful - can he truly be considered as such.

There are five types of speech that monks may use when speaking to others: timely or untimely (*kālena vā akālena vā*), truthful or untrue (*bhūta vā abhūta vā*), gentle or harsh (*saṇha vā pharusa vā*), beneficial or not beneficial (*atthasaṃhita vā anatthasaṃhita vā*), and spoken with loving-kindness or with anger (*mettacittā vā dosantarā vā*).

The *bhikkhus* should train as follows: “Our minds will remain unaffected (*vipariṇata*), and we shall utter no evil words (*pāpikā vācā*). We shall abide with compassion (*anukampī*) for their welfare (*hita*), with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading that person with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, and, starting with him, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind like a well-stretched catskin bag - abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill will.”¹⁸

16 <https://suttacentral.net/thig14.1/en/thanissaro/>. Subhā jīvaka ambavanikā Therīgāthā: *Tiṃsa nipāto* (Therī. 150), Khuddaka Nikāya: “Āhaniya (hurt) *edisam* (like) *janam*, *aggim pajjalitam* (burnt) *va līngiya* (clasped); / *Gaṇhiya* (held) *āsivisaṃ* (snake) *viya* (as), *api nu sotthi* (safety) *siyā khamehi no*.”

¹⁷ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005). Simon and Schuster publisher.

¹⁸ *The Middle Length Discourses*, HT. Thích Minh Châu, in Vietnamese Translation from Pāli, *Kakacūpama sutta*. Cf. Pāli Text: “*na ceva no cittaṃ vipariṇatam bhavissati, na ca pāpikam vācam nicchāressāma, hitānukampī ca viharissāma mettacittā, na dosantarā. Taṃca puggalam mettāsahagatena cetasā pharitvā viharissāma, Tadārammaṇaṃca sabbāvantam lokam mettāsahagatena cittena vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjhena, pharitvā viharissāma’ti*.”

When offended, one should spread loving-kindness (*mettā*) toward the offender. Then, using that person as the object, the monk should practice pervading the entire world with a mind that is compassionate, generous, boundless, and free from hatred. At that moment, the mind is like the earth element, which cannot be destroyed by anyone; like space, which cannot be stained; and like the Ganges River, which cannot be boiled by a torch of dry grass - just as one should remain undisturbed by another's harsh words.

Even if a lowly person were to cut off his limbs, the monk would not utter evil words nor harbor anger in his heart. If a monk always remembers the Simile of the Saw, he will be able to cultivate patience and endure any kind of speech directed at him.

5.4. King Viḍūḍabha's hatred for the Sakya royal family cannot be revenged

Because words carry the nature of contempt (*māna*, 𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛) - including conceit, arrogance, pride, looking down on others, and presumptuous thinking such as "I am nobler than the rest of the royal Sakya family" - the *māna* mind is an unwholesome mental state (*akusala cetasika*) that causes offense and suffering among people. Enraged, provoked, agitated, and indignant (*kodha*), deep hatred (*upanāha*) arose in King Viḍūḍabha (𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛, Virūḍhaka) due to a disparaging and defamatory remark from the Sakya family. In brutal retaliation, he massacred the entire Sakya clan, the relatives of the Buddha. On his return journey, he and his followers camped on a riverbank. That night, a sudden flood swept them all out to sea. Upon hearing of their tragic fate, the Buddha commented that those who act out of hatred perish without ever achieving their goals, as expressed in Dhammapada verse 47, the Chapter of Flowers (*Pupphavagga*): "*Pupphāni h'eva pacinantam* (picking), *byāsatta-manasam* (attached-mind) *naram*; / *Suttam* (slept) *gāmaṃ mah'ogho* (flood) *va, maccu ādāya* (having taken) *gacchati*." The man who gathers the flowers of sensual pleasure, unawakened and with a distracted mind, is carried away by death, just as a great flood sweeps away a sleeping village.¹⁹

VI. FORGIVENESS AND MINDFULNESS MEDITATION HELP TATHĀGATA'S DISCIPLES OVERCOME SUFFERING

6.1. Transforming Aṅgulimāla with *mettā* without swords

6.1.1. Dependent arising is called Aṅgulimāla

Aṅgulimāla (𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛), meaning "a necklace (*māla*) of fingers (*aṅguli*)," was originally named Ahimsaka ("harmless person", 𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛) or Ahimsa ("non-violent" 𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛). He was born in the city of Sāvattī, in the country of Kosala, into a brāhmaṇa caste family. Exceptionally intelligent, his parents sent him to Takkasilā (present-day, Pakistan) to study under a renowned teacher. Excelling in his studies, he became his teacher's favorite, which provoked jealousy (*issā*, ... 𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛𑖔𑖞𑖟𑖛) among the other students. Seeking to harm him, they falsely accused Ahimsaka of seducing the teacher's wife. Enraged, the teacher devised a cruel punishment, demanding that Ahimsaka offer a thousand

¹⁹ Ibid., Nārada Mahāthera (1993), *Pupphavagga*, chapter 4, p. 51 - 52.

human fingers as payment for his tuition.

Ahimsaka lived in the Jālīni forest, where he ambushed travelers, cut off their fingers, and wore them as a garland around his neck - thus earning the name *Āṅgulimāla*. He needed only one more finger to complete the thousand-finger count. The Buddha, foreseeing that *Āṅgulimāla*'s mother was on her way to visit him and knowing that *Āṅgulimāla* had the potential to attain Arahantship, appeared before him just in time. Killing one's mother is one of the five heinous crimes (*pañcānantariya-kamma*, རྒྱུ་མཚན་ལྔ་ལྟོས་ཀྱི་མཚན་ལྔ་) that lead to immediate rebirth in the *Avīci Niraya* (འཁོར་ལྔ་པ་), the realm of endless suffering. To prevent him from committing this grave offense, the Buddha intervened.

The cowherds, shepherds, farmers, and travelers warned the Buddha not to take that path, as He would fall into the hands of the murderer *Āṅgulimāla*. However, He remained silent and continued walking. The Blessed One, using the basis of psychic power (*iddhipāda*, རྒྱུ་མཚན་ལྔ་ལྟོས་), walked at a normal pace, yet *Āṅgulimāla* could not catch up. Frustrated, *Āṅgulimāla* shouted, "Stop (*thita*), monk!" The Blessed One replied, "I have stopped, you should stop too!"

Āṅgulimāla was puzzled by the Buddha's statement, so he asked for clarification. The Blessed One replied, "Hey *Āṅgulimāla*, I have stopped - meaning I have abandoned the sword and stick (*daṇḍa*) against all living beings. I have renounced violence and ceased harming any sentient being. But you, who have not restrained yourself (*asaññata*) from killing, have not yet stopped. That is why I have stopped, and you have not."²⁰

According to the Commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) of *Majjhima nikāya*²¹, *Āṅgulimāla* suddenly realized that the monk standing before him was none other than the Buddha Himself, who had come to the forest solely to transform him. At that moment, the murderer threw away his sword and weapons into the abyss, prostrated himself at the feet of Sugato, and right then and there, asked to become a monk²². The Enlightened One, the Sage of Great Compassion, the Teacher of *devas* and humans, then spoke the words: "Oh! Come here, monk" (*ehi bhikkhu*, རྒྱུ་མཚན་ལྔ་ལྟོས་). Thus, *Āṅgulimāla*'s virtue as a *bhikkhu* was confirmed by The Blessed One.

6.1.2. Tolerance and forgiveness brought peace to king Pasenadi's Kosala country

The people of Sāvattthī were resentful and indignant at *Āṅgulimāla*'s cruelty, brutality, bloodstained hands, and lack of humanity. His terrifying presence had

²⁰ Cf. Pāli Text: "Thito ahaṃ *Āṅgulimāla* sabbadā, Sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ; Tuvañca pānesu asaññatosi, Tasmā thito haṃ tuvaṃatthitosi". Cf. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi translated: "Āṅgulimāla, I have stopped forever, I abstain from violence towards living beings; But you have no restraint (*asaññata*, pp. of *asaññānāti*) towards things that live: That is why I have stopped and you have not."

²¹ Cf. Pāli Text: *Āṅgulimāla suttam*, *Rājavaggo* No.4, *Majjhima paṇṇāsapāli*, MN 86.

²² Cf. Pāli Text: "Itveva coro asimāvudhañca, Sabbhe papāte narake akiri; Avandi coro Sugatassa pāde, Tattheva naṃ pabbajjaṃ ayāci."

instilled fear, causing the city to become deserted. Distressed by the situation, the people approached King Pasenadi, urging him to punish Aṅgulimāla.

King Pasenadi, accompanied by his soldiers and about five hundred horses, went to Jetavana Monastery, paid homage to the Buddha, and spoke about the murderer Aṅgulimāla's brutality, violence, and lack of compassion for living beings. However, he admitted, "But I could not prevent him" (*na paṭisedhissāmi*).

King Pasenadi forgave this murderer Aṅgulimāla when he became a monk

"Great King, suppose you were to see that Aṅgulimāla had shaved off his hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and gone forth from the home life into homelessness; that he was abstaining from killing living beings, from taking what is not given, and from false speech; that he was eating only one meal a day, was celibate, virtuous, and of good character. If you were to see him thus, how would you treat him?"²³

The merciful king forgave Aṅgulimāla's mistakes and prostrated, donated to him

Venerable sir, we would pay homage to him, rise up for him, or invite him to be seated; we would invite him to accept robes, alms food, a resting place, or medicinal requisites; or we would arrange for him lawful guarding, defense, and protection. But, venerable sir, how could such an immoral man, one of evil character, ever possess such virtue and restraint?"²⁴ The Blessed One then revealed to the king that venerable Aṅgulimāla was sitting nearby. Seeing him, the king was frightened but soon calmed himself and declared that he would provide robes, alms food, a resting place, and medicinal requisites for the noble lord Gaggā Mantāniputta.

6.1.3. Sugato's *mettā* has conquered, neutralized violence and terror without swords

Then King Pasenadi said: "It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvelous how the Blessed One tames the untamed, brings peace to the unpeaceful, and leads to *nibbāna* those who have not attained *nibbāna*. Venerable sir, we ourselves could not tame him with force and weapons, yet the Blessed One has tamed him without force or weapons."²⁵

²³ Cf. Pāli Text: "Sace pana tvaṃ, Mahārāja, Aṅgulimālaṃ passeyyāsi kesa-massuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitaṃ, virataṃ pāṇātipātā, virataṃ adin-nādānā, virataṃ musāvādā, eka-bhattikaṃ, brahma-cāriṇ, sīlavantaṃ, kalyāṇa-dhammaṃ, kinti naṃ kareyyāsi"ti?"

²⁴ Cf. Pāli Text: "Abhivādeyyāma vā, bhante, paccuṭṭheyyāma vā āsanena vā nimanteyyāma, abhinimanteyyāma vā naṃ cīvara-piṇḍapāta-senāsana-gilānappaccaya-bhesajja-parikkhārehi, dhammikaṃ vā assa rakkhāvaranaguttiṃ samvidaheyyāma. Kuto panassa, bhante, du-sīlassa pāpa-dhammassa evarūpo sīla-saṃyamo bhavissati"ti?"

²⁵ Cf. Pāli Text: "Acchariyaṃ, bhante, abbhutaṃ, bhante! Yāvañcidaṃ, bhante, Bhagavā adantānaṃ dametā, asantānaṃ sametā, aparinibbutānaṃ parinibbāpetā. Yañhi mayaṃ, Bhante, nāsakkhimhā daṇḍenapi satthenapi dametuṃ so Bhagavatā adaṇḍena asattheneva (asatthena) danto..."

6.1.4. Āṅgulimāla shared his merit and spread *mettā* to suffering pregnant woman

According to the Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā, although Āṅgulimāla had killed almost a thousand people, he had never given rise to a thought of compassion (*mettā*). But now, through the power of his ordination, compassion arose in him as soon as he saw a woman in painful labor. In the morning, venerable Āṅgulimāla went into Sāvattī for alms. There, he saw a certain woman suffering in difficult and painful labor. Contemplating the scene, he thought: “Indeed, how beings are afflicted!”

The Buddha taught him to say: “Sister, since I was born, I have never intentionally taken the life of a living being. By this truth, may you be well, and may your child be born safely.”²⁶

Venerable sir, if I said that, I would be intentionally lying, for I have intentionally taken the lives of many living beings. The Buddha then instructed him: “In that case, you should say the following: ‘Sister, since I was born as a Saint (*Ariya*), I have never intentionally taken the life of a living being. By this truth, may you be well, and may your child be born safely.’”²⁷ And with those words, the woman became well, and her childbirth was safe.

Jāti means birth and lineage (*gotta*), *jāti* here refers to the lineage of Buddhas, signifying the second birth of Āṅgulimāla in a spiritual sense as an *Ariya* (Noble One). This sincere act enabled the woman to give birth safely, and this verse later became known as Āṅgulimāla Paritta, a protective chant recited by Buddhist monks to bless pregnant women close to delivery. The transformation from a cold-blooded, ruthless killer to a compassionate protector of life marks a profound change.

6.1.5. Āṅgulimāla practiced insight meditation and attains Arahanta

The Vietnamese Buddhist idiom “Turn your head to see the shore” (» ^ °° ¶) conveys the idea of repentance and liberation (*vimutti*, % ^), meaning that by realizing one’s mistakes and changing course, one can find true freedom. Similarly, “Put down the butcher’s cleaver and become a Buddha” (°~” ¶ ¢ ‡ •) implies that even great wrongdoers can attain liberation the moment they renounce evil. Venerable Āṅgulimāla embodies this transformation - he first forgave himself and was also forgiven by King Pasenadi, society, and the people for his past misdeeds. With this, he diligently practiced *vipassanā-bhāvanā* (insight meditation), clearly seeing the arising and ceasing of phenomena, ultimately attaining Arahantship.

Before long, dwelling alone in seclusion, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the venerable Āṅgulimāla, through direct knowledge, realized for himself the supreme goal of the holy life - the very purpose for which clansmen renounce

26 Cf. Pāli Text: “Yatohaṃ, bhagini, jāto nābhijānāmi sañcicca pāṇaṃ jīvītā voropetā, tena saccena sotthi te hotu, sotthi gabbhassā.”

27 Cf. Pāli Text: “Yatohaṃ, bhagini, Ariyāya jātiyā jāto, nābhijānāmi sañcicca pāṇaṃ jīvītā voropetā, tena saccena sotthi te hotu, sotthi gabbhassā.”

the household life. He directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been fulfilled, what had to be done has been accomplished, and there is no more becoming.” Thus, the venerable Aṅgulimāla attained Arahantship.²⁸

6.1.6. Patience, tolerance, and forgiveness to be mindful of the enmity that has been created

When we cultivate mindfulness and awareness of present actions arising from past *kamma*, we let go of anger, blame, and criticism toward those who have harmed us. Instead, we develop acceptance, forgiveness, and loving-kindness (*mettā*) toward all beings, even those who seek revenge. One day, while venerable Aṅgulimāla was on his alms round in Sāvattihī, people, still resentful of his past deeds, hurled clods of earth (*leḍḍu*), sticks (*daṇḍa*), and gravel (*sakkharā*) at him. He suffered a head wound (*bhinna sīsa*), bled (*lohita galanta*), had his alms bowl shattered (*bhinna patta*), and his outer robe torn (*vipphālita saṅghāṭi*).

The Blessed One saw him and said: “Be patient (*adhivāsa*), brahmin! Be patient, brahmin! You are now experiencing the consequences of your past *kamma*. Had you not renounced your former ways, you would have suffered for many years, many hundreds of years, even many thousands of years, boiling in hell.”²⁹

According to the Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā, any volitional action (*cetanā kamma*) can yield three types of results: one to be experienced in the present life, one in the next existence, and one in any future life as long as one remains in *saṃsāra*. Since Aṅgulimāla had attained Arahantship, he was freed from the latter two types of results. However, even Arahants are still subject to experiencing the present-life consequences of past actions committed before their enlightenment.

According to Buddhist teachings, enlightened disciples no longer create new *kamma*, but they may still experience the effects of past *kamma* they once accumulated³⁰. The consequences of past *kamma* are inevitable, and even the Buddha cannot prevent them from unfolding.³¹

When the Buddha declared that Aṅgulimāla had attained *nibbāna*, some monks were astonished. They wondered how someone who had killed so

²⁸ Cf. Pāli Text: “*Atha kho āyasmā Aṅgulimālo eko vūpakaṭṭho appamatto ātāpī pahitatto viharanto nacirasseva – yassatthāya kulaputtā sammadeva agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajanti tadanuttaraṃ – Brahmacariya-pariyosānaṃ diṭṭheva dhamme sayamaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja vihāsi. ‘Khiṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇiyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā’ti abbhaññāsi. Aññataro kho panāyasmā Aṅgulimālo Arahataṃ ahosi.*”

²⁹ Cf. Pāli Text: “*Adhivāsehi tvaṃ, brāhmaṇa, adhivāsehi tvaṃ, brāhmaṇa. Yassa kho tvaṃ, brāhmaṇa, kammaṃ vipākena bahūni vassāni bahūni vassasatāni bahūni vassasahassāni niraye pacceyyāsi tassa tvaṃ, brāhmaṇa, kammaṃ vipākaṃ diṭṭheva dhamme paṭisaṃvedesi.*”

³⁰ Loy, David R. (2008), *Awareness Bound and Unbound: Realizing the Nature of Attention*, Philosophy East and West, p. 40.

³¹ Attwood, Jayarava (2014), *Escaping the Inescapable: Changes in Buddhist Karma*, Journal of Buddhist Ethics, p. 28.

many people could still reach enlightenment. The Buddha explained that no matter how much evil a person has done, they still have the opportunity to change, cultivate virtue, and attain enlightenment.³²

This reflects the spirit of tolerance and forgiveness in Buddhism, which upholds human dignity by guiding wrongdoers toward repentance through mindfulness (*sammāsati*) and clear awareness (*sampajāna*). When these qualities are cultivated in all actions, Buddha-nature (• — , *buddhagotta*, *buddhatā*), the essence of enlightenment and wisdom (*paññā*), naturally manifests. This is the path of profound reconciliation and transformation. Buddhism affirms humanistic and ethical values, declaring: “I have attained Buddhahood; all sentient beings are Buddhas and will become Buddhas.”

6.2. Venerable Puṇṇa’s tolerance and reconciliation to propagate the Dhamma in the violent Sunāparanta country

6.2.1. The Bhagavā’s brief teaching to Puṇṇa

While residing at Sāvattī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park, the Blessed One gave brief advice (*saṅkhittena ovādena ovadatu*) to Puṇṇa³³. Puṇṇa, originally from a merchant family in Suppāraka (present-day Maharashtra), renounced worldly life after hearing the Buddha’s discourse. However, Puṇṇa Mantāniputta, mentioned in the *Rathavinīta Sutta* (MN 24), came from a Brahmin family and was ordained by Venerable Aññā Koṇḍañña in Kapilavatthu before later visiting the Buddha at Sāvattī. The Buddha later declared him the most eminent preacher of the Dhamma. The Blessed One advised Puṇṇa to abide alone (*vihareyya*), withdrawn (*vūpakaṭṭho*), diligent (*appamatto*), ardent (*ātāpi*), and resolute (*pahitatto*). He explained that there are sensory experiences - forms, sounds, odors, flavors, tangibles, and mental objects - that are desirable, pleasurable, and provoke attachment.³⁴ If a *bhikkhu* clings to these experiences, delight arises in him, and with the arising of delight, suffering follows. Conversely, if he does not delight in them, suffering ceases. The Buddha thus instructed: “With the arising of delight, Puṇṇa, suffering arises. With the cessation of delight, suffering ceases.”³⁵

³² Wilson, Liz (2016), *Murderer, Saint and Midwife, Refiguring the Body: Embodiment in South Asian Religions*, SUNY Press, p. 285 – 300.

³³ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995), *Discourse of Advice to Puṇṇa* (‰], » ‘ ~‰. *Puṇṇovāda Sutta*, MN.145), p. 1117 - 1119. This Puṇṇa was from a family of merchants residing in the port city of Suppāraka in the Sunāparanta country (present-day Maharashtra). On a business trip to Sāvattī he heard the Buddha give a discourse and renounced the home life to become a *bhikkhu*. But Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāniputta (*Rathavinīta sutta* - The relay chariots in MN24, notes 287, p. 240) belonged to a *brahmin* family and was ordained by Ven. Aññā Koṇḍañña at Kapilavatthu, where he continued to reside until he decided to visit the Buddha at Sāvattī. He was later declared by the Buddha the most eminent *bhikkhu* among the preachers of the Dhamma.

³⁴ Cf. Pāli Text: “Cakkhu (*sota*, *ghāna*, *jivhā*, *kāya*, *mano*) *viññeyyā rūpā (saddā, gandhā, rasā, phoṭṭhabbā, dhammā) iṭṭhā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajaniyā.*”

³⁵ Cf. Pāli Text: “*Taṃ ce bhikkhu (na) abhinandati, (na) abhivadati, (na) ajjhosāya tiṭṭhati. Tassa*

According to the *Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, this instruction is a concise teaching on the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariya Saccāni*). Delight (*nandī*) is an aspect of craving (*taṇhā*). When delight arises in relation to the eye (*cakkhu*) and forms (*rūpa*), it leads to the suffering of the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). Thus, in the first part of the instruction, the Buddha explains the cycle of existence through the first two truths - suffering (*dukkha*) and its origin (*samudaya*) - as they manifest through the six senses (*cha āyatana*). In the second part, He teaches the cessation of this cycle by presenting the remaining two truths - cessation (*nirodha*) and the path (*magga*) - which are realized by abandoning delight in the six senses and their objects.

6.2.2. Puṇṇa's tolerance, reconciliation to propagate the Dhamma in *Sunāparanta*

The people of *Sunāparantajanapada* are known to be violent (*caṇḍa*) and rough (*pharusa*). If they were to revile (*akkosati*) and defame (*paribhāsati*) Venerable Puṇṇa, he would still regard them as people of good quality (*bhaddaka*), even very good (*subhaddaka*), because they did not strike him (*pahāra*) with their hands (*pāṇi*), a clod (*leḍḍu*), a stick (*daṇḍa*), or a knife (*sattha*). Moreover, they had not taken his life with a sharp blade (*naḥime tiṇhena satthena jīvita voropenti*). But if they were to do such things, he would reflect: "There have been disciples of the Blessed One who, troubled (*aṭṭiyati*), depressed (*harāyati*), and disgusted (*jigucchati*) with their bodies and lives, have sought (*pariyesati*) a knife to end their suffering. But I have received this knife without even searching for it."³⁶

The Blessed One praised Venerable Puṇṇa, saying that if he could subdue, conquer, and soothe, while being tolerant and forgiving of the obstacles caused by the people of *Sunāparanta* - even when they harmed or hurt him - then he would be able to stay there and propagate the Buddhasāsana. During the rainy retreat (*vassāvāsa*), Venerable Puṇṇa guided about five hundred male lay followers (*upāsaka*) and five hundred female lay followers (*upāsika*). During this *vassa*, he realized the threefold knowledge (*tisso vijjā*, "three knowledges") and, after that, attained *nibbāna*.

6.3. Conflict reconciliation by the immortal mettā heart of Bodhisatta Thich Quang Duc

6.3.1. Bodhisatta Thich Quang Duc's heart letter to the Ngo Dinh Diem government

Bodhisatta Thich Quang Duc used the fire of loving-kindness to eliminate hatred and religious discrimination under the Ngo Dinh Diem government. He

taṃ (an) abhinandato, (an) abhivadato, (an) ajjhosāya tiṭṭhato, (nir) uppajjati nandī. 'Nandī samudaya' (nirodhā) dukkha samudayo (nirodho), Puṇṇa'ti vadāmi."

³⁶ Cf. Pāli Text: "Santi kho Bhagavato sāvakā kāye ca jivite ca aṭṭiyamānā (aṭṭiyati, repelled) harāyamānā (harāyati, depressed) jigucchamānā (pr.p. jigucchati, disgusted shunning) satthahārakam pariyesanti (seek). Taṃ me idaṃ apariyitṭhamyeva (a+pariyitṭha=pp. of pariyesati, looked for+yeva: even) satthahārakam laddha'nti."

was born in 1897 in Hội Khánh hamlet, Vạn Khánh village, Vạn Ninh district, Khánh Hòa province. At the age of seven, he renounced the world (*pabbajjā*), became a novice monk at fifteen, and was fully ordained as a *bhikkhu* at twenty. He established many pagodas and propagated the Buddhasāsana from Ninh Hòa district to Sai Gon – Gia Dinh. He studied both *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

In response to the anti-Buddhist repression of the Ngo Dinh Diem government - including the prohibition of displaying the Buddhist flag and the brutal massacre of Buddhists at the Huế radio station during Buddha's birthday in 1963³⁷ - Bodhisatta Thich Quang Duc, with boundless compassion (*mettā-karuṇā*) and wisdom (*paññā*), made a solemn vow. He self-immolated, offering his body and the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) as a supreme donation to the Buddhas. Through this act, he sought to awaken the ignorant (*avijjā*), the craving (*taṇhā*), the jealousy (*issā*), and the attachment (*upādāna*) of Ngo Dinh Diem's government, as expressed in his final heart letter.

The Bodhisatta realized that Buddhism in the country was facing a decline. As a monk, known as the *tathāgata*'s eldest son, he could not sit idly by and watch the Buddha Sāsana perish. Thus, he willingly vowed to burn himself as an offering to the Buddhas, dedicating the merit to the preservation of Buddhism. He hoped that the Buddhas and the *saṅgha* of the ten directions would help him fulfill his aspiration: May the Buddha bless President Ngo Dinh Diem with the wisdom to accept the five minimum aspirations of Vietnamese Buddhism, as stated in the declaration. By the grace and virtue (*guṇa*) of the Buddhas, may Vietnamese Buddhism remain eternal and unshaken. May the Buddhas and the *saṅgha* protect Vietnamese Buddhists from terror, persecution, arrests, and imprisonment by evil forces. May the country and its people find peace. Before closing his eyes and departing for the Buddha realm, he respectfully sent a final message to President Ngo Dinh Diem, urging him to show loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) for the nation and to implement a policy of religious equality to ensure the country's lasting stability. He earnestly called upon venerable monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists to unite and sacrifice for the preservation of Buddhism.³⁸

Through this heart letter, it is evident that the Bodhisatta harbors no anger (*dosa*) or hatred (*upanāha*) toward the government that oppresses Buddhism. Nor is he driven by greed (*lobha*), craving (*taṇhā*), or ignorance (*moha*) regarding the five aggregates. Recognizing the impermanence of this temporary body, he willingly vows to self-immolate to protect the Buddha

³⁷ Jacobs, Seth (2006), *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950–1963*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. Cf. Nguyễn Hiến Đức, "Dhamma disaster in Hue during Buddha's Birthday in 1963". Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute. Archived from the original on November 2, 2013.

³⁸ Nhị Tường (2005), *Biography of Bodhisattva Thich Quang Duc*, in Vietnamese, Quảng Đức Monastery (published May 1 2005), retrieved August 20 2007; or https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thích_Quảng_Đức.

VII. PRACTICING THE FOUR IMMEASURABLE MINDS IS THE TRUE PATH OF RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD

People often possess two characteristics: one follows the path of good Dhamma and the purity of the Saints, while the other leans toward evil, unwholesome Dhamma, sin, and the impurity of cruel, inhuman tendencies. Everything arises from the mental state of intention (*cetanā cetasika*). Those who aspire to serve humanity for sustainable development should strive to eliminate the impurities and bad habits of the unwholesome mind. They should persistently and patiently (*khanti*) cultivate and develop wholesome mental qualities, leading to inner transformation and the well-being of all.

7.1. *Mettā appamaññā*

Anger (*dosa*) and hatred (*vera*) are destructive habits that fiercely burn the forests of merit, causing division, disunity, and cycles of revenge. In contrast, the mind of immeasurable loving-kindness (·° O` ċ—~) is a gentle and uplifting quality that brings joy, peace, and happiness to all sentient beings.

7.2. *Karuṇā appamaññā*

Violence (*hiṃsā*) is a harmful habit that leads to countless crimes, spreads suffering, and fosters brutality in the world. In contrast, immeasurable compassion (—fl O` ċ—~) acts as a healing medicine, eliminating suffering, disasters, epidemics, and the devastation of brutal wars.

7.3 *Muditā appamaññā*

Jealousy (*issā*) is a poison that drives people into unhealthy competition, conflict, disputes, and a mindset of winning or losing, good or bad. In contrast, a mind rooted in immeasurable joy (°S† O` ċ—~) rejoices in the good deeds of others, their efforts to reduce suffering, and their attainment of peace and happiness. One who cultivates this mindset finds joy in the success of others without jealousy or denigration.

7.4. *Upekkhā appamaññā*

Attachment (*lobha*) and delusion (*moha*) toward what is liked, or anger (*dosa*) toward what is unpleasant, disturb the mind's calmness. In contrast, the mind of immeasurable equanimity (· O` ċ—~) remains free from craving (*taṇhā*), resentment, or partiality. It fosters a state of equality, where no thoughts of greed, sadness, or grief (*domanassa*) arise, nor feelings of love or hate. One lets go of both liked and disliked things, maintaining an even mind. True equanimity means being undisturbed by opposing extremes, free from attachment to anything in the world.

These four virtues help people achieve perfection and embody the lifestyle of a Saint (*Brahmavihāra*). In this very life, they have the power to transform ordinary individuals into noble ones. If everyone practices and cultivates the four immeasurable minds (·~ O` ċ—~ – *catasso appamaññāyo*), regardless of religion, race, skin color, or gender, the world will be filled with peace and happiness. There will be no more wars, conflicts, hatred, or cycles of

retaliation.³⁹

The mind is noble and immeasurable (*appamaññā*) because Loving-kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity are vast, boundless, and limitless - beyond space and time - embracing all living beings, whether human or animal, big or small, near or far, visible or invisible, friend or enemy. Not a single tiny creature is excluded. Regardless of one's religion, culture, or education, each person composed of the five aggregates can practice and cultivate these four noble virtues (*cattāri brahmavihārā*), bringing immeasurable blessings both to themselves and to others, creating a peaceful world free from swords and seas of war. These four divine qualities are also subjects of meditative concentration (*samathabhāvanā*), leading to the attainment of the Brahma realms through form-realm meditative absorptions (*rūpadhātujhāna*). For this reason, they are called the Four Sublime States (*cattāri brahmavihārā* – 四禪).⁴⁰

VIII. PRACTICE FORGIVENESS, LOVING-KINDNESS, AND INSIGHT MEDITATION

8.1. *Khamabhāvanā*

When others offend us through actions (*kāya*), words (*vācā*), or thoughts (*mano*), we should forgive them - just as we forgive ourselves - freeing our hearts from anger (*paṭigha*) and hatred (*upanāha*). Instead of seeking revenge, we practice loving-kindness meditation (*mettābhāvanā*), which calms the mind and allows for an easier entry into *Vipassanā* meditation. *Khama* (patience and forgiveness) is a noble and admirable human quality, reflecting equanimity in the face of unpleasant sights (*rūpa*), sounds (*sadda*), smells (*gandha*), tastes (*rasa*), and tactile sensations (*phoṭṭhabba*). Rather than reacting with judgment, protest, or anger, we simply acknowledge and observe these experiences mindfully. When attacked or insulted (*akkosantaṃ na paccakkosati*), we respond with loving-kindness speech - without hatred or retaliation. Practicing forgiveness meditation helps eliminate the guilt that may arise during meditation due to past mistakes in body, speech, or mind that may have harmed others. Defiling thoughts can hinder our spiritual progress, but forgiveness meditation acts as a cleansing process, purifying the mind and allowing us to move forward with inner peace.

When practicing forgiveness meditation, we should chant as follows: “If, through deed (*kāya*), speech (*vācā*), or thought (*mano*), I have acted wrongly out of ignorance, may all wise and compassionate beings forgive me. In turn, I freely forgive anyone who has harmed or injured me, and I also forgive

³⁹ Nārada Mahā Thera (1988), *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Publication of the Buddhist missionary Society, Malaysia.

⁴⁰ Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga - The Path of Purification*, translated from the Pāli by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (2010), publisher: Buddhist Publication Society, talking about 40 *samatha* meditation topics, there are 4 topics about the four immeasurable meditations in Bhadanta Anuruddhācariya, *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, A Manual of *Abhidhamma*, translated by Nārada Mahāthera, Publisher: the Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 1987.

myself.”⁴¹

8.2. *Mettābhāvanā* is love without attachment (*upādāna*), craving (*taṇhā*), or lust (*kāma*)

If someone has wronged us, we may feel anger (*dosa*, ཏོས་པ་) and resentment (*upanāha*, རྒྱུ་ལྡན་པ་) toward that person. To overcome these negative emotions, we must practice loving-kindness meditation wholeheartedly, sending boundless loving thoughts to all beings without obstruction - since anger is one of the five hindrances (*pañcanīvaraṇa*, རྒྱུ་ལྡན་པ་). If we cannot forgive others, our loving-kindness meditation will remain incomplete. Similarly, we must also learn to forgive ourselves; without self-forgiveness, it becomes difficult to cultivate loving-kindness within and extend it to others. Therefore, before practicing Vipassanā meditation, we should engage in forgiveness meditation - both for ourselves and others - while maintaining a calm mind through concentration meditation (*samathabhāvanā*, རྒྱུ་ལྡན་པ་) and loving-kindness meditation (*mettābhāvanā*).

It is a wholesome (*kusala*) and sincere (*sacca*) aspiration for the happiness of all sentient beings, including ourselves. When we practice loving-kindness meditation and wish for our well-being, saying, “May I be well, happy, and peaceful,” this should not be mistaken for selfishness or miserliness (*macchhariya*, ...). Rather, to generate true loving-kindness toward others, we must first cultivate these thoughts within ourselves.

To cultivate *mettā* towards other beings, we must first develop loving-kindness toward ourselves.⁴² We can radiate loving-kindness to all sentient beings, expanding outward - starting with those in our house, then our area, city, county, state, country, the world, and the entire universe. When we embody such *mettā*, we cannot bring suffering to ourselves, our parents, relatives, friends, social communities, districts, provinces, or even nations. Filled with loving-kindness, free from craving and attachment, we perceive the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) and practice insight meditation (*vipassanā*), fostering a world of true peace - free from war, conflict, and suffering.

When practicing loving-kindness meditation, we silently recite the following phrases about ten times each: “May I and all beings in this house, area, city, county, state, country, world, and universe be well, happy, and peaceful. May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful. May those who suffer be free from suffering. May those who are fearful find courage. May those who grieve release their sorrow, and may all beings find relief.”

Loving-kindness can also be practiced by directing it towards specific individuals, as follows: “May I, my teachers, parents, relatives, friends, those who are neutral, those who are unfriendly, all meditators, and all beings be well, happy, and peaceful. May those who suffer be free from suffering. May

⁴¹ Sayāḍaw U Silānanda (2001), *Four Foundations of Mindfulness-An Exposition of the Summary*, Inward Path Publisher, Penang Malaysia, p. 46 - 50.

⁴² Khuddaka pāṭha pāli, *Khuddakanikāya*.

those who are fearful find courage. May those who grieve release their sorrow, and may all beings find relief.”

8.3. Vipassanā bhāvanā

After extending thoughts of loving-kindness to the entire world and all beings, we may then begin our practice of Insight meditation. We abide in contemplation of the body (*kāya*), feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and Dhamma - observing them internally, externally, or both. We contemplate their arising, their passing away, or both their arising and passing away. Alternatively, mindfulness is simply established with the understanding that ‘this is a body, these are feelings, this is mind, this is Dhamma’ - to the extent necessary for clear knowledge and awareness. Abiding independently, without clinging to anything in the world, we cultivate Insight in this way.

IX. MINDFULNESS TO SEE THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS (*TILAKKHAṆA*) OF THE PATH OF RECONCILIATION FOR WORLD PEACE

All emotions - whether sadness, anger, hatred, revenge, happiness, suffering, discontent, war, conflict, contradiction, pleasant or unpleasant - are selfless (*anattā*) and without inherent substance. If these mental states were the self (*attā abhavissā*), a permanent and unchanging entity, then there would be no permanent criminals, no offenders, no forgivers or forgiveness receivers. They would not lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, or despair, nor would we have the wish that our mental state be one way and not another. Because human emotions - happiness, sadness, anger, jealousy - are selfless (*anattā*), they arise and pass away. Therefore, we cannot control them by wishing for them to be a certain way or not to be a certain way.

All conditioned Dhammas are impermanent (*anicca*). Anything impermanent is inherently suffering (*dukkha*) and unsatisfactory. That which is impermanent, subject to suffering, and constantly changing (*vipariṇāma*) should not be perceived (*sañjānāti*), recognized, or distinguished (*viñānāti*) as “mine,” “me,” or “myself,” for it lacks any true self.

Therefore, all conditioned Dhammas - whether past, future, or present; internal or external (*ajjhata bahiddhā*); gross or subtle (*olārika sukhumā*); inferior or superior (*hīna paṇīta*); far or near (*dūra santika*) - must be contemplated with right wisdom (*yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññā datṭhabba*) as they truly are: “This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self” (*netam mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti*).

With mindfulness (*sammāsati*), awareness (*sampajāna*), and clear insight (*pajānāti*) into the three characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*) of conditioned Dhammas - suffering, impermanence, and non-self - the practitioner engages in insight meditation (*vipassanā bhāvanā*) without attachment to this temporary body of five aggregates. In this state, anger and revenge dissolve, even when faced with insults or harm from others. Free from defilements (*āsava*) and without grasping (*anupādāya*), one forgives both oneself and others, harboring neither hatred nor resentment, but instead seeing things as they truly are. This is the

path of forgiveness and reconciliation, leading to true world peace.

The Discourse on the Not-Self Characteristic states: “Seeing this clearly, the learned Noble Disciple becomes disenchanted (*nibbindati*) with the five aggregates. Through disenchantment, detachment (*virajjati*) arises. With the abandonment of greed, liberation follows. Upon liberation, wisdom (*paññā*) arises: “I am liberated (*vimuttami*).” He fully understands: “Birth has ended, the holy life has been fulfilled, what was to be done has been accomplished, and there is no more return to this state.”⁴³

X. CONCLUSION

In short, the only way to reconcile (*anuneti*) conflicts, hatred, contradictions, and wars - both past and present - is through the path of forgiveness and non-violence. By practicing the Four Immeasurable Minds, mindfulness, awareness, and Vipassanā meditation, we can cultivate a truly peaceful world. This is why the Buddha always advised his disciples not to seek revenge or return evil for evil but to practice patience (” Ā kṣānti/khanti) and the four *brahmavihāras* (*mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*) in all situations, even when faced with provocation. The Buddha praised those who embody patience, endurance, and forgiveness - those who let go of resentment and do not retaliate, even when they have the power to do so.

Throughout Sugato's life, many instances demonstrate that the Buddha consistently practiced patience (𑖦𑖩𑖪𑖫𑖬𑖭𑖮𑖯𑖰𑖱𑖲𑖳𑖴𑖵𑖶𑖷𑖸𑖹𑖺𑖻𑖼𑖽𑖾𑗀𑖿𑗁𑗂𑗃𑗄𑗅𑗆𑗇𑗈𑗉𑗊𑗋𑗌𑗍𑗎𑗏𑗐𑗑𑗒𑗓𑗔𑗕𑗖𑗗𑗘𑗙𑗚𑗛𑗜𑗝𑗞𑗟𑗠𑗡𑗢𑗣𑗤𑗥𑗦𑗧𑗨𑗩𑗪𑗫𑗬𑗭𑗮𑗯𑗰𑗱𑗲𑗳𑗴𑗵𑗶𑗷𑗸𑗹𑗺𑗻𑗼𑗽𑗾𑗿𑘀𑘁𑘂𑘃𑘄𑘅𑘆𑘇𑘈𑘉𑘊𑘋𑘌𑘍𑘎𑘏𑘐𑘑𑘒𑘓𑘔𑘕𑘖𑘗𑘘𑘙𑘚𑘛𑘜𑘝𑘞𑘟𑘠𑘡𑘢𑘣𑘤𑘥𑘦𑘧𑘨𑘩𑘪𑘫𑘬𑘭𑘮𑘯𑘰𑘱𑘲𑘳𑘴𑘵𑘶𑘷𑘸𑘹𑘺𑘻𑘼𑘽𑘾𑘿𑙀𑙁𑙂𑙃𑙄𑙅𑙆𑙇𑙈𑙉𑙊𑙋𑙌𑙍𑙎𑙏𑙐𑙑𑙒𑙓𑙔𑙕𑙖𑙗𑙘𑙙𑙚𑙛𑙜𑙝𑙞𑙟𑙠𑙡𑙢𑙣𑙤𑙥𑙦𑙧𑙨𑙩𑙪𑙫𑙬𑙭𑙮𑙯𑙰𑙱𑙲𑙳𑙴𑙵𑙶𑙷𑙸𑙹𑙺𑙻𑙼𑙽𑙾𑙿𑚀𑚁𑚂𑚃𑚄𑚅𑚆𑚇𑚈𑚉𑚊𑚋𑚌𑚍𑚎𑚏𑚐𑚑𑚒𑚓𑚔𑚕𑚖𑚗𑚘𑚙𑚚𑚛𑚜𑚝𑚞𑚟𑚠𑚡𑚢𑚣𑚤𑚥𑚦𑚧𑚨𑚩𑚪𑚫𑚬𑚭𑚮𑚯𑚰𑚱𑚲𑚳𑚴𑚵𑚷𑚶𑚸𑚹𑚺𑚻𑚼𑚽𑚾𑚿𑛀𑛁𑛂𑛃𑛄𑛅𑛆𑛇𑛈𑛉𑛊𑛋𑛌𑛍𑛎𑛏𑛐𑛑𑛒𑛓𑛔𑛕𑛖𑛗𑛘𑛙𑛚𑛛𑛜𑛝𑛞𑛟𑛠𑛡𑛢𑛣𑛤𑛥𑛦𑛧𑛨𑛩𑛪𑛫𑛬𑛭𑛮𑛯𑛰𑛱𑛲𑛳𑛴𑛵𑛶𑛷𑛸𑛹𑛺𑛻𑛼𑛽𑛾𑛿𑜀𑜁𑜂𑜃𑜄𑜅𑜆𑜇𑜈𑜉𑜊𑜋𑜌𑜍𑜎𑜏𑜐𑜑𑜒𑜓𑜔𑜕𑜖𑜗𑜘𑜙𑜚𑜛𑜜𑜝𑜞𑜟𑜠𑜡𑜢𑜣𑜤𑜥𑜦𑜧𑜨𑜩𑜪𑜫𑜬𑜭𑜮𑜯𑜰𑜱𑜲𑜳𑜴𑜵𑜶𑜷𑜸𑜹𑜺𑜻𑜼𑜽𑜾𑜿𑝀𑝁𑝂𑝃𑝄𑝅𑝆𑝇𑝈𑝉𑝊𑝋𑝌𑝍𑝎𑝏𑝐𑝑𑝒𑝓𑝔𑝕𑝖𑝗𑝘𑝙𑝚𑝛𑝜𑝝𑝞𑝟𑝠𑝡𑝢𑝣𑝤𑝥𑝦𑝧𑝨𑝩𑝪𑝫𑝬𑝭𑝮𑝯𑝰𑝱𑝲𑝳𑝴𑝵𑝶𑝷𑝸𑝹𑝺𑝻𑝼𑝽𑝾𑝿𑞀𑞁𑞂𑞃𑞄𑞅𑞆𑞇𑞈𑞉𑞊𑞋𑞌𑞍𑞎𑞏𑞐𑞑𑞒𑞓𑞔𑞕𑞖𑞗𑞘𑞙𑞚𑞛𑞜𑞝𑞞𑞟𑞠𑞡𑞢𑞣𑞤𑞥𑞦𑞧𑞨𑞩𑞪𑞫𑞬𑞭𑞮𑞯𑞰𑞱𑞲𑞳𑞴𑞵𑞶𑞷𑞸𑞹𑞺𑞻𑞼𑞽𑞾𑞿𑟀𑟁𑟂𑟃𑟄𑟅𑟆𑟇𑟈𑟉𑟊𑟋𑟌𑟍𑟎𑟏𑟐𑟑𑟒𑟓𑟔𑟕𑟖𑟗𑟘𑟙𑟚𑟛𑟜𑟝𑟞𑟟𑟠𑟡𑟢𑟣𑟤𑟥𑟦𑟧𑟨𑟩𑟪𑟫𑟬𑟭𑟮𑟯𑟰𑟱𑟲𑟳𑟴𑟵𑟶𑟷𑟸𑟹𑟺𑟻𑟼𑟽𑟾𑟿𑠀𑠁𑠂𑠃𑠄𑠅𑠆𑠇𑠈𑠉𑠊𑠋𑠌𑠍𑠎𑠏𑠐𑠑𑠒𑠓𑠔𑠕𑠖𑠗𑠘𑠙𑠚𑠛𑠜𑠝𑠞𑠟𑠠𑠡𑠢𑠣𑠤𑠥𑠦𑠧𑠨𑠩𑠪𑠫𑠬𑠭𑠮𑠯𑠰𑠱𑠲𑠳𑠴𑠵𑠶𑠷𑠸𑠺𑠹𑠻𑠼𑠽𑠾𑠿𑡀𑡁𑡂𑡃𑡄𑡅𑡆𑡇𑡈𑡉𑡊𑡋𑡌𑡍𑡎𑡏𑡐𑡑𑡒𑡓𑡔𑡕𑡖𑡗𑡘𑡙𑡚𑡛𑡜𑡝𑡞𑡟𑡠𑡡𑡢𑡣𑡤𑡥𑡦𑡧𑡨𑡩𑡪𑡫𑡬𑡭𑡮𑡯𑡰𑡱𑡲𑡳𑡴𑡵𑡶𑡷𑡸𑡹𑡺𑡻𑡼𑡽𑡾𑡿𑢀𑢁𑢂𑢃𑢄𑢅𑢆𑢇𑢈𑢉𑢊𑢋𑢌𑢍𑢎𑢏𑢐𑢑𑢒𑢓𑢔𑢕𑢖𑢗𑢘𑢙𑢚𑢛𑢜𑢝𑢞𑢟𑢠𑢡𑢢𑢣𑢤𑢥𑢦𑢧𑢨𑢩𑢪𑢫𑢬𑢭𑢮𑢯𑢰𑢱𑢲𑢳𑢴𑢵𑢶𑢷𑢸𑢹𑢺𑢻𑢼𑢽𑢾𑢿𑣀𑣁𑣂𑣃𑣄𑣅𑣆𑣇𑣈𑣉𑣊𑣋𑣌𑣍𑣎𑣏𑣐𑣑𑣒𑣓𑣔𑣕𑣖𑣗𑣘𑣙𑣚𑣛𑣜𑣝𑣞𑣟𑣠𑣡𑣢𑣣𑣤𑣥𑣦𑣧𑣨𑣩𑣪𑣫𑣬𑣭𑣮𑣯𑣰𑣱𑣲𑣳𑣴𑣵𑣶𑣷𑣸𑣹𑣺𑣻𑣼𑣽𑣾𑣿𑤀𑤁𑤂𑤃𑤄𑤅𑤆𑤇𑤈𑤉𑤊𑤋𑤌𑤍𑤎𑤏𑤐𑤑𑤒𑤓𑤔𑤕𑤖𑤗𑤘𑤙𑤚𑤛𑤜𑤝𑤞𑤟𑤠𑤡𑤢𑤣𑤤𑤥𑤦𑤧𑤨𑤩𑤪𑤫𑤬𑤭𑤮𑤯𑤰𑤱𑤲𑤳𑤴𑤵𑤶𑤷𑤸𑤹𑤺𑤻𑤼𑤽𑤾𑤿𑥀𑥁𑥂𑥃𑥄𑥅𑥆𑥇𑥈𑥉𑥊𑥋𑥌𑥍𑥎𑥏𑥐𑥑𑥒𑥓𑥔𑥕𑥖𑥗𑥘𑥙𑥚𑥛𑥜𑥝𑥞𑥟𑥠𑥡𑥢𑥣𑥤𑥥𑥦𑥧𑥨𑥩𑥪𑥫𑥬𑥭𑥮𑥯𑥰𑥱𑥲𑥳𑥴𑥵𑥶𑥷𑥸𑥹𑥺𑥻𑥼𑥽𑥾𑥿𑦀𑦁𑦂𑦃𑦄𑦅𑦆𑦇𑦈𑦉𑦊𑦋𑦌𑦍𑦎𑦏𑦐𑦑𑦒𑦓𑦔𑦕𑦖𑦗𑦘𑦙𑦚𑦛𑦜𑦝𑦞𑦟𑦠𑦡𑦢

Conflict (—ñ”ṣaṅgāmita) and hatred (— , upanāha) are fundamental defiled mental states (mūlakilesacetasika) rooted in affliction and anger (dosa). They are not mine, not me, not myself. Their function is to cause division within families and society, leading to disunity, intolerance, violence, war, and ongoing conflict (saṅgāma), bringing suffering to ourselves and those around us. So why do we continue to hate and engage in endless conflict? It is because ignorance (— , avijjā), craving (— , taṇhā), and grasping attachment (— , upādāna) obscure our pure mind. We mistakenly accept these defilements as our own, which is why we experience suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

We must clearly see (*pajānāti*) the arising and passing away of conditioned Dhammas through the lens of the three characteristics. When we do so, we

⁴³ *‘Khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karanīyaṃ, nāparaṃ ithattāyā’*ti. See “*Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*: The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic”, translated from the Pāli by Ñāṇamoli Thera, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. 1981. <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn22/sn22.059.nymo.html> .SN 22.59 PTS. p. 66.

are not quick to judge, criticize, get angry, or seek revenge for anything good or bad that happens to us. Conditioned Dhammas are ever-changing (*anicca*), marked by suffering (*dukkha*), and devoid of self (*anatta*). Hatred (*vera*) does not truly exist as an inherent entity; instead, it is replaced by non-hatred (*avera*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), forgiveness (*khama*), and mindfulness (*sati*). Through insight meditation (*vipassanā*), we clearly see things as they really are. When hatred, conflict, and war cease, we cultivate a peaceful world in accordance with the Buddha's teaching: "*Averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano*" - Hatred is not overcome by hatred; this is an eternal truth. Only through loving-kindness and insight meditation can hatred cease - this is an eternal law.

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“*AHIMŚĀ*”: A BUDDHIST RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

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Astracts:

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of interpersonal violence that women and girls suffer from men and boys, especially when they are dating. It is a salient form of gender-based violence, also known as domestic violence. IPV includes the physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse of one partner by the other. More often, IPV entails one partner exercising control over the other's behaviour, making life unpleasant for the victim partner. It is a foregone conclusion that IPV is the worst affront to social cohesion and peaceful male-female co-existence. However, over the years, I have observed that, while there has been research on reconciling survivors of other forms of interpersonal violence such as genocide, war and colonial exploitation, research on the possibility of reconciling perpetrators of intimate partner violence with survivors of the same violence is scant. Arguably, most research has been on the causes, effects and/ or impact of gender-based violence and domestic violence, as well as the preventive strategies that can be instituted to avoid and consequently end violence in relationships between men and women. Not much has been said about national peacebuilding through forgiveness, reconciliation, and compensation of victims of violent intimate relationships for the good of the greater society or community. Thus, the argument in this article is that the Buddhist principle of “*Ahimsā*” is the best alternative that Buddhism has offered to the world. I argue that “*Ahimsā*” can end any form of violence, including intimate partner violence, and bring social justice and reconciliation at intimate partner relational level. It can also guarantee family stability, community cohesion and national healing and peacebuilding throughout the world.

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Keywords: *Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), “Ahiṃsā”, social justice, reconciliation, mindful healing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is full of violence at all levels of human interaction, be it personal and interpersonal. In most communities, intimate partner violence (IPV) is generally misconstrued as a private matter unless and until one partner, usually the wife, goes out to seek intervention. Even then, she does so secretly by consulting her aunty or grandmother who, more often than not, discourage her from taking private matters into the public domain. IPV is the worst form of interpersonal violence for humanity.¹ This kind of violence makes women suffer physical, sexual and/ or emotional abuse, making IPV a salient killer of family peace and community harmony. More often, IPV entails one partner exercising control over the other's behaviour, making life unpleasant for their partner. It is a foregone conclusion that IPV is the worst affront to social cohesion and peaceful male-female co-existence. However, existing research on violence has focused on reconciling perpetrators and survivors of other forms of violence such as genocide, war and colonial domination. Not much, if anything, has been done on the possibility of reconciling perpetrators of IPV with their victims. This article proceeds by discussing the possibility of forgetting abuse and forgiving perpetrators of IPV for purposes of achieving family peace and community harmony.

It should be noted that forgiveness is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been debated by philosophers, psychologists, and spiritual leaders for centuries. Buddhism has brought a fascinating approach to forgiveness. While forgiveness can be a challenging and often painful process, it is also a powerful tool for healing and reconciliation. In this article, I will explore the relationship between forgiveness, mindful healing, and reconciliation, and guide how to cultivate forgiveness in our lives.

This paper is constructed from an argument anchored on three premises, that is, that forgetting is a psychological or spiritual process which takes time to happen, that forgiveness is a deliberate personal effort to erase all the bad memories about a painful past, and that forgiveness without the perpetrator openly admitting wronging the victim is provisional and fictitious. Thus, the paper claims that without personal commitment to restitution, survivors of IPV cannot forgo or forget the painful abusive experience and forgive the perpetrator. In the final analysis, the import of the argument is that without admission by perpetrators and restitution to reconcile with the victim, family, community and national peacebuilding remains a pipe dream.

¹ Intimate partner violence is regarded as an issue between those in love. Once the woman tells anyone about what pains her in the marriage such as violence, she is regarded as a failure and her case becomes village gossip material.

II. MOTIVATION

Writing this article was inspired by a case I witnessed in my community. A neighbour and his wife always fought and we never noticed until the fight went out of hand. For me, being way younger than the man involved in this case, it was uncultured to intervene between the couple. From an African cultural perspective, it is taboo for the young to advise the elders on anything, let alone on marital issues.² Thus, this paper was inspired by a real life scenario involving a couple known and very close to me. For ethical reasons, I refer to the couple as Mr. and Mrs. X or, simply the X's. The couple was always nice and welcoming everyone into their home. Neighbours hardly noticed anything unusual between them because neither of the couple would show that they were always arguing or fighting. On very few occasions, the couple would miss community gatherings, Church services, or being seen together in public. So, for years, nothing became evident until recently when the wife decided to break the silence and the circle of violence in her married life. One day, she reached out to me as a member of the Community Campaign against Violence (CCaV) team and asked me a pertinent question. The question was on whether it is possible to forgive an abusive intimate partner for what he has been doing to her and forget all about the painful experiences. This happened following a community outreach and awareness campaign against gender-based violence programme that we had carried out in the neighbourhood in respect of the 2022 United Nations' theme: "UNITE! Activism to end Violence against Women and Girls by 2030."³ I listened to her account of the abuse she was suffering from her husband. From her narrative, I noticed that she was acrimonious and needed help to make peace between her and her husband. She needed a victim-offender reconciliation dialogue with her husband to achieve interpersonal reunion and peace. This is the gap I identified which required urgent attention. Undoubtedly, IPV victims are demanding significant attention from their abusers to get the closure and peace of mind required for a continued and happy intimate relationship.

So, in response to the woman's question, I directed her to our counselling services as I investigated the possibility of post-abuse forgiveness and reconciliation among intimate couples in Zimbabwe. The assumption I made was that peaceful co-existence between intimate couples was a microscopic reflection of community harmony, which in turn became a recipe for national unity and peace. This incident opened a plethora of issues which I sought to investigate and expose through this article.

III. WHAT IS MINDFUL HEALING?

Mindful healing is a holistic approach to wellness that combines the

² In an African communitarian set-up, there is no room for the young to advise the elders. Doing so is tantamount to breaking a sacred code of conduct.

³ U.N. (n.d.). What we do: Ending violence against women. UN Women. Retrieved December 10, 2024, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>.

principles of mindfulness with the process of forgiveness. Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment, without judgment or attachment. When people practice mindfulness, they become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, allowing them to respond to challenging situations with greater clarity and compassion.

In the context of forgiveness, mindful healing involves cultivating awareness of people's emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations related to a painful experience. By acknowledging and accepting their feelings, rather than suppressing or denying them, they can begin to release the negative energy associated with the experience.

3.1. A path to reconciliation

Forgiveness and mindful healing are not only essential for personal healing but also for reconciliation. When people forgive, they create space for new relationships, new experiences, and new perspectives emerge. Forgiveness allows people to let go of the past and move forward, rather than remaining stuck in a cycle of resentment and anger.

3.2. Intimate partner violence: Some definitions

There is already a wide range of literature on what intimate partner violence is.⁴ For purposes of putting the reader of this article into perspective, I reiterate that intimate partner violence is one of the many forms of domestic violence that disproportionately affect women and girls in intimate relationships more than men and boys. While domestic violence broadly refers to abuse of any family member such as elderly persons, parents, children or siblings, IPV refers to any abuse or aggressive behaviour that occurs in a romantic or intimate relationship. According to the World Health Organisation (2012) report, intimate partner violence is widespread as it occurs in all settings and among all social, economic, religious and cultural communities worldwide.⁵ However, there are various definitions of IPV. For example, Mukamana et al. (2020:13) define IPV as "...any assaultive and coercive behaviour that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to a person in a relationship."⁶ These definitions present IPV as a version of domestic violence as it directed to or occurs between people in an intimate relationship and invariably, all the definitions point to four types of IPV as identified by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2015:5), namely, physical violence, sexual violence,

⁴ Several authors including Konyana, E. G. (2018) and Burrill, E. et al, (2010) published on domestic violence including IPV, covering a wide range of issues such as causes, interventions strategies and preventive mechanisms.

⁵ WHO. (2012). *Intimate partner violence*. World Health Organization (WHO). Retrieved January 13, 2024, from https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf?sequence=1.

⁶ Iman'ishimwe Mukamana, J., Machakanja, P., & Adjei, N. K. (2020). *Trends in prevalence and correlates of intimate partner violence against women in Zimbabwe, 2005-2015*. BMC International Health and Human Rights, 20, 2 - 5. 10.1186/s12914-019-0220-8.

stalking and psychological aggression.⁷ The idea is to come up with coherent and uniform conceptions of IPV to improve the collection and analysis of data and help to identify trends and make comparisons in different social settings.

3.3. Manifestations of forms of abuse in intimate relationships

Intimate partners are persons who live, or may have lived together, and share life and emotions. This comes from their love for each other, which, in the first place, is the reason for them to accept and share love, compassion, and resources. Their closeness implies that they become familiar with each other and strongly feel like being together forever. However, intimacy makes each of them susceptible to abuse by the other at some point in their love life. 'Abuse' may set in at any stage, taking various forms and shapes. For instance, it can come in as one partner, usually the man, supported by some African cultural beliefs and practices, realises that he has power to control his partner. Such power shows itself through control over resources and decisions on certain procedures and processes in the home. The man gradually emerges as the more powerful of the two and, at that point, the love relationship begins to take an 'abusive' trajectory. By 'abusive' I mean that the powerful partner begins to control the unsuspecting partner in very subtle ways, which include giving instructions, refusing to be questioned, irritability, and hiding their feelings. When this happens, especially between married couples who live under one roof, abuse can escalate and become nasty. The discomfort that the victim partner suffers gets to unbearable levels to the extent that the victim has no option but to react.

As indicated in the section above, IPV takes various forms. It can take the economic dimension where the woman would have to seek her husband's approval to buy groceries, including feminine hygiene products for her and her girls' use. In some instances where a married woman is gainfully employed, the abusive husband may conjure behaviour that seeks to get the woman unpopular at her workplace and get her dismissed.

In some instances, the perpetrator may stalk his wife, surprisingly showing up at places where his wife would have gone to. He may also call her on her mobile phone, asking about where she would have gone and what time she is likely to come back home.⁸ Whenever this happens, then the intimate relationship becomes toxic and the most likely outcome is physical violence. This is what happened in my motivational case where the wife was beaten several times before she finally broke the silence. While she had kept silent for purposes of keeping peace, she was in fact at war within herself.

⁷ Saltzman, L. E., Fanslow, J., McMahon, P. M., & Shelley, G. A. (2002). *Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements* [Report]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

⁸ Chuma, M., & Chazovachii, B. (2012). Domestic violence act: Opportunities and challenges for women in rural areas: The case of ward 3, Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 3 (3. 4).

3.4. Restorative justice and reconciliation

According to Zehr (1995: 3 - 39), restorative justice, also known as victim-offender reconciliation, is an approach to justice whose objective is to repair the harm suffered by victims of abuse by providing an opportunity for those harmed and those responsible for the harm to meet, discuss and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime.⁹ It is a process that invites the victims of a crime, those that committed the crime, and the community to participate in a process of dealing with offenders and repairing the harm that the offenders caused.¹⁰ In essence, restorative justice processes are three-way, and provide opportunities for the perpetrator to reflect on the harm they inflicted on their victims, take responsibility, show remorse and seek forgiveness from those that they offended. This is to say that, unlike viewing justice as punishing the offender, restorative justice looks at justice as repairing the damage caused by the criminal or offender.¹¹ Usually, the approach to restorative justice is open discourse, allowing the victim to pour out their grief and also permit a repentant offender to express regret in the presence of the offended and the arbitrator. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, restorative justice has a traditional background.¹² It has always been used by families and communities when they resort to the traditional court institutions such as the family court (*Dare remusha*), the Headman's Court (*Dare raSabhuku*) or the Chief's Court (*Dare raShe/Mambo*). However, a successful restorative justice process does not set the conciliation terms for the offender. It should be made possible at the offender's instigation and not by the victim or the arbitrator.

3.5. Is intimate partner violence forgivable? Some ancient contestations.

The issue of forgiving is closely linked to that of forgetting. One cannot forgive without having to forget whatever it was that went wrong. This concept was emphasised by Bhattacharya, H. (2009: 19) who claimed that, in the context of interpersonal violence, to forgive involves emotions to forget, to let go and tolerate pain or suffering to move on with life.¹³ Conceived thus, forgiveness operates on the behest of the victim's preparedness to sustain an offence and excuse the offender at any cost. Nevertheless, the philosophy of forgiveness is a contested one and it dates back to the ancient Greek classical

⁹ Zehr, H. *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Waterloo, Herald Press, (1995), p. 33 - 39.

¹⁰ Bonta, J., Wallace-Capretta, S., & Rooney, J. (1998). *Restorative Justice: An Evaluation of the Restorative Justice Project*. Ottawa: Solicitor General, Canada.

¹¹ Pointer, L., & Buchanan, C. D. (2021, August 5). What is "Restorative Justice" and How Does it Impact Individuals Involved in Crime? bja nttac. Retrieved February 23, 2025, from <https://bjatta.bja.ojp.gov/media/blog/what-restorative-justice-and-how-does-it-impact-individuals-involved-crime>.

¹² Bourdillon M. (1991). *The Shona Peoples: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to their Religion*. Gweru: Mambo Press, p. 127.

¹³ Bhattacharya, H. (2009). Introduction to gender violence and identity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(2), 267-275. SAGE Publications, p. 104.

philosophers' time, Plato and Aristotle. For instance, in Plato's theory of justice, there is no room for exonerations. An offender is never to be forgiven or pardoned without serving their punishment or repaying for the damage they caused. This principle is well situated in Practical Philosophy and it requires that both the victim and offender expressively reciprocate and operate in morally appropriate ways. The appropriate thing to do or way out for the offender is to compensate the victim, who, in turn, should accept the atonement and forget the offense. In all practical realities, Plato holds that mere forgiveness is not a possibility.¹⁴ For him, it is forgiveness rather than forgiveness, that rides on the victim's benevolent willingness to forget the painful past on the understanding that some people cannot help being bad or behave badly due to some forces they cannot overcome. This conception of forgivingness makes forgiveness a function of exaggerated human existence because it is impossible for the victim to completely forget the experiences of crime until they are atoned. Instead, Plato believed that only forgiveness or kindness can be extended to the offender by the victim after abuse without this amounting to forgiveness itself. The idea is that, since forgiveness entails that the victim ought to willingly forget what they suffered at the hands of the offender, it also implies that the offender ought to incentivise the victim to forget the pain they subjected them to. The incentive, which is a form of compensation, is meant to encourage the victim to deliberately forget the crime and the pain suffered.

Contrary to Plato's convictions on forgiveness, Aristotle believed that forgiveness is possible as it rests within the victim's capacity to do so. For Aristotle, forgiveness is a virtue, a sign of wisdom and personal growth of character.¹⁵ It is a demonstration on the part of the victim or the offended that they are mature and understand that blaming offenders for wrongdoing is failing to understand them well. This is to suppose that intimate partners ought to appreciate each other and tolerate each other's weaknesses and shortcomings, including the disposition to be violent.

While Aristotle's conception is a good approach to saving an intimate partner relationship that would have become toxic through violence, the challenge comes when the perpetrator does not understand that they have a problem seated within their violent temperament. Tolerating abuse and staying with such a perpetrator may prove to be a very difficult and dangerous decision. A victim may desire to find happiness again after abuse, which may not come while they continue staying with the perpetrator. Ultimately, the victim may leave an abusive relationship when the pain of staying and tolerating intimate partner abuse is stronger than the pain of ending the abusive relationship. However, some victims may choose to stay with the abuser for various

¹⁴ Griswold, C. L. (2007). *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 89.

¹⁵ Griswold, C. L. (2007). *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 101.

reasons¹⁶ and desire reconciliation with their abusers because they believe that it is the perpetrator's responsibility to accept accountability and compensate the victim for the damage and pain suffered.

IV. BUDDHIST APPROACHES IN ADDRESSING IPV

In addressing intimate partner violence (IPV), Buddhism offers a threefold approach that emphasizes inner transformation, emotional resilience, and ethical living. These approaches are rooted in Buddhist philosophy and psychological well-being, providing survivors with tools for healing and empowerment.

4.1. Mindfulness and meditation (*sati* and *samādhi*)

The cultivation of mindfulness and meditative practices serves as a foundational method for survivors of IPV to regain a sense of inner stability. Through practices such as *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing) and *vipassanā* (insight meditation), individuals develop heightened self-awareness, mental clarity, and emotional equilibrium. This enables them to process trauma with greater detachment, reducing overwhelming distress and fostering a sense of inner peace.

4.2. Loving-kindness meditation (*mettā-bhāvanā*)

The practice of *mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation encourages individuals to generate unconditional goodwill and compassion (*karuṇā*), both towards themselves and others. For survivors of IPV, this meditation serves as a means of self-reconciliation, allowing them to cultivate self-compassion while gradually transforming resentment or emotional pain. Importantly, this practice does not necessitate reconciliation with the perpetrator; rather, it empowers survivors to heal by fostering an expansive and liberating sense of compassion.

4.3. Forgiveness and letting go (*khanti* and *vossagga*)

Buddhist teachings advocate for the practice of forgiveness - not as an obligation to the perpetrator, but as a means of releasing oneself from the burden of negative emotions. Forgiveness in Buddhism is not about condoning harm but rather about achieving emotional liberation (*vimutti*). By letting go of resentment and anger, survivors free themselves from cyclical suffering (*dukkha*) and create space for their own psychological and spiritual well-being.

At the heart of this approach lies the ethical principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), one of the most fundamental tenets of Buddhist morality. *Ahiṃsā* is grounded in the understanding that all sentient beings possess an inherent right to live free from harm, fear, and suffering. It calls for the cultivation of deep empathy, compassion, and kindness (*mettā-karuṇā*) toward all living beings. In the context of IPV, the principle of *ahiṃsā* reinforces the necessity of

¹⁶ Konyana, E. G. (2018). Domestic violence legislation in Zimbabwe: probing into the security of women in rural communities. In M. C. Green, T. J. Gunn, & M. Hill (Eds.), *Religion, Law and Security in Africa* (pp. 336 - 338). African Sun Media. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv21ptz2w.26>.

rejecting all forms of violence - physical, emotional, and psychological - while advocating for justice, healing, and the restoration of dignity for survivors. By embodying *ahimśā*, individuals and societies move toward a path of peace, ethical integrity, and genuine transformation.

4.4. Practicing *ahimśā* for world peace

To achieve peace in the world, the renowned Buddhist Hanh says that:

"To prevent war, to prevent the next crisis, we must start right now. When a war or crisis has begun, it is already too late. If we and our children practice *ahimśā* in our daily lives, if we learn to plant seeds of peace and reconciliation in our hearts and minds, we will begin to establish real peace and, in that way, we may be able to prevent the next war."¹⁷

Within the Buddhist tradition, the practice of *ahimśā* (non-violence) is regarded as a fundamental ethical precept that fosters harmony, compassion, and the alleviation of suffering. Rooted in the understanding of interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and karmic consequences, *ahimśā* extends beyond the mere avoidance of physical harm to encompass speech, thought, and social conduct. Its application can contribute to a more peaceful world in several significant ways:

4.4.1. Refraining from harming or killing (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*):

Buddhists uphold the principle of non-harm by consciously avoiding any action that causes suffering, injury, or death to living beings. This commitment extends not only to human interactions but also to the treatment of animals and the natural environment, reflecting the broader ethical responsibility toward all sentient beings.

4.4.2. Cultivating compassion and empathy (*mettā-karuṇā-bhāvanā*):

The practice of *ahimśā* is deeply intertwined with the development of *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). By fostering an attitude of understanding and concern for the well-being of others, Buddhists strive to reduce hostility and promote a culture of mutual care and respect.

4.4.3. Speaking with kindness and truthfulness (*sammā-vācā*): Ethical speech is a critical aspect of *ahimśā*, as words possess the power to heal or to harm. Practitioners of Buddhism are encouraged to engage in *sacca-vācā* (truthful speech) and *piya-vācā* (kind and pleasant speech), avoiding harsh, deceitful, or divisive language that could lead to suffering or discord.

4.4.4. Engaging in non-violent conflict resolution (*avirodha-dhamma*): In alignment with Buddhist teachings on harmony and right action (*sammā-kammanta*), non-violent approaches to conflict resolution are essential. Rather than resorting to aggression or coercion, Buddhists advocate for dialogue, patience, and reconciliation, fostering peaceful coexistence within families, communities, and societies.

¹⁷ Sieber, A. (2015). Hanh's Concept of Being Peace: The Order of Interbeing. *International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, 5(1), 1-8. 10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v05i01/51097.

Through the practice of *ahiṃsā*, Buddhists contribute to the cultivation of a world where violence, exploitation, and suffering are minimized. By integrating this principle into daily life, individuals and societies can foster ethical integrity, deepen their spiritual practice, and create a foundation for lasting peace and harmony.

4.5. The benefits of *ahiṃsā*

Practicing *Ahiṃsā* brings numerous benefits, including:

- i. Cultivating compassion and empathy: *Ahiṃsā* helps develop a sense of connection and understanding with others.
- ii. Reducing suffering: By avoiding harm and promoting kindness, *Ahiṃsā* contributes to reducing suffering in the world.
- iii. Promoting peace and harmony: *Ahiṃsā* fosters a sense of peace and harmony within individuals and communities.
- iv. Supporting spiritual growth: Practicing *Ahiṃsā* is considered essential for spiritual growth and development in Buddhism.

V. CONCLUSION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) stands as a profound relational crisis due to the immense harm and destruction it inflicts upon individuals and families. The enduring psychological, emotional, and physical scars left by IPV often render the path to healing arduous, with victims struggling to move beyond the profound trauma they have endured. In this context, the discourse surrounding forgiveness, particularly its role in fostering reconciliation and social harmony, becomes critically significant. The absence of external pressure to forgive, alongside a nuanced understanding of the consequences of interpersonal forgiveness, is essential in the broader framework of family, community, and national peace-building efforts. While forgiveness remains a deeply contested concept, its underlying purpose is to facilitate the restoration of peace and mutual understanding between conflicting parties. However, forgiveness can only yield positive outcomes for the survivor if the perpetrator demonstrates genuine remorse, takes full accountability for their actions, and actively engages in a process of transformation.

Reconciliation in the aftermath of intimate partner abuse is contingent upon the abuser's willingness to acknowledge their culpability, accept responsibility for the suffering they have inflicted, and take meaningful steps toward amends. Mere verbal assurances of change are insufficient; rather, reconciliation necessitates tangible, sustained behavioral transformations. The process must be accompanied by concrete actions - such as reparative gestures, engagement in therapy, or participation in rehabilitative programs - that substantiate the sincerity of the abuser's commitment to change. Without such evidence, reconciliation remains superficial, offering little assurance to the survivor that genuine reform has taken place. The burden of proof, therefore, lies with the perpetrator, whose actions must align with their words to rebuild trust and foster a sense of security for the survivor.

In a broader ethical and philosophical context, the Buddhist principle of *ahimsā* (non-violence) offers a profound framework for addressing intimate partner violence and fostering healing. Rooted in the fundamental precept of refraining from causing harm (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*), *ahimsā* encourages individuals to cultivate compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and ethical responsibility in their interactions with others. By internalizing and embodying *ahimsā*, practitioners strive to minimize suffering, nurture harmonious relationships, and advance spiritual growth. Within the discourse on IPV, this principle underscores the importance of a transformative justice approach—one that does not simply demand forgiveness from the survivor but instead prioritizes accountability, healing, and the genuine reformation of harmful behaviors. Thus, in alignment with Buddhist ethics, true reconciliation must be predicated upon a commitment to non-harm, mutual respect, and the active pursuit of justice and healing for all those affected.

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PRACTICING COMPASSION TOWARDS CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Debika Mitra*

His Holiness the Dalai Lama beautifully explains his understanding of compassion, "Compassion is an aspiration, a state of mind, wanting others to be free from suffering. It's not passive; it's not empathy alone but rather empathetic altruism that actively strives to free others from suffering. Genuine compassion must have both wisdom and loving-kindness." - Dalai Lama in Essence of Heart Sutra, 2016.

Abstract:

The contemporary world is suffering from the challenges of violent communication, emotional distress, unmet needs, differing values, social injustice, conflicts, disagreements, loneliness, and its heinous effects in every aspect and at all levels- from individuals to families, from societies to nations. The inevitable challenges of violent communication and conflicts hamper our daily lives. Promoting conflict-free and non-violent communication in every sphere of life at the individual and institutional levels is of utmost necessity. Compassion in mind and action is the key to triggering conflicts and violent communication. Compassion is the main pillar of our human life and provides the foundation for our well-being and happiness. In conflict situations, compassion makes a real difference; it doesn't just resolve it, it transforms the circumstances and contributes to the spiritual and emotional well-being of the entire community. It begins with self-compassion and extends compassion to other individuals and living beings. Compassion is the non-violent way to inculcate deep respect for all, whether human beings, nature, or other living beings. Compassion is the deep recognition of the fundamental connectedness of all life and nature, the essence of human interdependence. Practicing compassion intentionally cultivates goodwill and empathy toward oneself and others. Compassion in action reduces negative emotions, enhances emotional strength, and removes all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, stress, and

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despair, which are crucial for finding peaceful resolutions and building stronger relationships. It gives moral meaning to life and equips life's challenges with grace, and positivity is revealed through acts of compassion. Compassion is rooted in many spiritual and philosophical traditions; Buddhism is one of the oldest traditions that preach the practice of compassion as a cardinal principle of inner peace and constructive conflict resolution. The Buddhist vision for global spirituality and ethics is based on compassion. Compassion in mind and practice a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and others. Compassion entails the art of forgiveness, love, kindness, affection towards others, gratitude, and building inner resilience in every aspect of life. Compassion fosters inner resilience and promotes a profound sense of loving-kindness and inner peace. The present article discusses and emphasizes the importance and relevance of compassion in Buddhism towards conflict resolution. It also explores the Buddha's valuable teaching of compassion which inspires us to make an effort to sustain inner peace of human well-being.

Keywords: *Compassion, Buddhism, conflict resolution, peace, human resilience.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Human history reveals that human beings have always struggled against prevalent social evils and miseries, including emotional distress, unfulfilled desires, conflict, disagreements, social injustices, violent communications, loneliness, and their heinous consequences throughout life. These unavoidable challenges exist in all spheres and at all scales, from families to societies to countries. A conflict arises when two individuals or groups involved in an issue significantly differ in their beliefs or interests. In this relational phenomenon of conflict arising from failed interactions, both parties must play a part in reestablishing their identities and relationships to restore their humanity. Conflicts entail not only quarrels but also lingering negative feelings. Sometimes conflicts result from parties having conflicting and incompatible goals and viewing one another as a rival or barrier to reaching their objectives. Sometimes, even though both parties are working toward the same objective, it results from different priorities, attitudes, interests, and ways of thinking. Conflicts may occur at a macro level (i.e. between nations, ethnic groups, etc) or on a micro level (in a family, an organization, etc.). Emotional distress, unfulfilled needs, and divergent values are some other important causes of conflicts. There are several levels at which a conflict can be observed: individual (between an individual and another individual), individual and group, society (between two groups or between two classes), national (between a state and a segment of the community), and global (between one nation and another nation). Yet there is never a better time to resolve conflicts at the individual level as well as global level through compassion and maintain human resilience in every sphere. Compassion is one of the virtues that are crucial in resolving conflicts in all aspects of life.

Compassion has a significant impact. It starts with having compassion for oneself and others. Many philosophical and spiritual traditions have roots in compassion; Buddhism is among the oldest to advocate compassion as a cardinal principle of inner peace and amicable dispute resolution. The foundation of Buddhist ethics and spirituality is compassion. The teachings of Buddha on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love- in mind and putting them into practice, emphasises healing, transformation, and happiness. Buddhism provides a holistic framework for peace that includes developing inner resilience in all facets of life as well as the skills of forgiveness, love-kindness, affection for others, gratitude, and interconnectedness. Thus, it increases human resilience, inner peace of mind, and outer peace. Therefore, the enormous importance of compassion has a significant influence on human well- being, society, and the world at large. The present article discusses the importance and role of compassion in Buddhism towards conflict resolution. It explores the Buddha's valuable teaching of compassion which inspires us to make an effort to sustain inner peace of human well- being.

II. ROLE OF COMPASSION IN BUDDHISM

Compassion is a fundamental concept of Buddhism, permeating its ethical framework, practices, and teachings. Compassion, or "*karuṇā*" in Sanskrit and Pāli, represents the understanding that everyone experiences suffering (*dukkha*) and is the sympathetic reaction to lessen one's own and other people's suffering.¹ In Buddhist philosophy and practice, compassion is highly valued as one of the Four Immeasurable Virtues (*Brahmaviharas*), which also include equanimity (*upekkhā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and empathetic joy (*muditā*). The core teachings of Buddhism, which date back to the time of the historical Buddha, i.e., Siddhartha Gautama, emphasize the importance of compassion. The teachings of the Buddha place a strong emphasis on the interdependence of all beings and the necessity of developing compassion for both oneself and others to achieve spiritual liberation and break the cycle of suffering. The Buddha's life is a powerful illustration of compassion since he committed his life to ease people's suffering via his teachings, counsel, and deeds of kindness. However, compassion is strictly distinguished from what Buddhism refers to as grasping love and attachment. Buddhist philosophy holds that suffering is inevitable when love is viewed as desire. According to Trungpa, love is considered the need to cling to other people to feel safe and included.

Rather, Buddhism promotes openness and fearlessness as well as love and compassion. Since they are freely given and received, true compassion and love are not limited by geographical boundaries.² In Buddhism, *mettā* and *karuṇā* are

¹ Harvey, P. (2012). *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*. Cambridge University Press, p. 278.

² Trungpa, C. (1973). *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism*. Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc, p. 100.

two terms that convey the idea of compassion. According to several Buddhist scholars, the term “*mettā*” (Pāli) in Theravāda Buddhism means benevolence, loving-kindness, friendliness, and amity.³

In Buddhism, *mettā* represents half of the four *Brahmaviharas*.⁴ This includes compassion, empathetic joy, equanimity, and loving-kindness or benevolence. Compassion is not just a theoretical idea in Theravada Buddhism; rather, it is a virtue that can be developed via deliberate work and moral behaviour. A fundamental technique in Theravada Buddhism, *mettā*, or loving-kindness, aims to develop compassion and goodwill toward oneself and all sentient beings. To lessen suffering and promote spiritual development, the tradition places a strong emphasis on the value of showing compassion in daily interactions, both toward oneself and others. Through the cultivation of *mettā*, practitioners transcend their prejudices and limitations and cultivate a compassionate attitude toward all beings. In addition to promoting inner peace and harmony, this practice helps develop an unbounded love and compassion-filled heart that radiates kindness and positive energy to others. *Mettā* meditation is practiced by methodically extending feelings of joy, equanimity, compassion, and loving-kindness to oneself, loved ones, acquaintances, neutral individuals, and even challenging people or opponents. While compassion is valued in all schools of Buddhism, Mahayana places a special emphasis on it. It is also connected to the notion that merit can be passed on to others, which ultimately led to the Mahayana Buddhist ideal of the *bodhisattva*. *Karuṇā*, or compassion, is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism. In terms of compassion, the bodhisattvas are the primary actors. The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* states that a *bodhisattva* develops great compassion because of sentient beings, the Bodhi Mind develops because of great compassion, the Bodhi Mind leads to Buddhahood.⁵ A Bodhisattva’s journey to the *Bodhi* path cannot be considered complete if, after witnessing the suffering endured by all beings, he or she does not feel compassion or strive to become a Buddha and save all beings from suffering. Thus, for a *bodhisattva* to become a Buddha, compassion is a prerequisite.⁶

Compassion is a multifaceted response to suffering, grief, and agony. It encompasses acceptance, generosity, kindness, and empathy. Compassion is equally intertwined with the threads of courage, tolerance, and equanimity. Above all, compassion is the ability to accept the existence of pain and strive toward the resolution of it. According to Trungpa, real compassion may come across as cruel or irrational. *Prajñā*, or transcendental wisdom, is necessary for

³ Harvey, P. (2012). *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*. Cambridge University Press, p. 439.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 154.

⁵ Yun, H. (2002). *From the Four Noble Truths to the Four Universal Vow*. California: Buddha’s Light Publishing, p.57.

⁶ Yun, V. M. (2002). The Buddhist Perspective on Compassion. *Universal Gate Buddhist Journal*, p. 1.

compassion because it allows one to look past outward manifestations and recognize actual pain and need.⁷ *Prajñā*, or transcendental wisdom, is necessary for compassion because it allows one to look past outward manifestations and recognize actual pain and need. Because of this, showing compassion may entail providing someone with what they truly need rather than what they desire. Furthermore, compassion is an unrestricted act of generosity. Buddha emphasized the development of wisdom (*Prajñā*) and compassion (*mettā* or *karuṇā*), two essential traits for achieving *Nirvāṇa*.⁸ Compassion and wisdom are like two wings that aid in the journey to enlightenment.

The significance of compassion is evident from an examination of the Eight-Fold Path and the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*). The truth of suffering, the truth of its cause, the truth of its end, and the truth of the way to that end are identified as the Four Noble Truths.⁹ In other words, there is suffering, it has a cause, it has an end, and it has a cause that induces it to end.

The First Noble Truth is that there is suffering (*dukkha*). It demonstrates the fallibility of human nature, which may also reveal the fallibility of our planet. Individuals must unavoidably experience bodily suffering throughout their lives, including pain, illness, injury, exhaustion, old age, and ultimately death. It suggests that we will never be able to achieve our goals indefinitely. Sorrow follows joy, and so on. It displays a great deal of sympathy for the ignorance of people who believe that this world and its pleasures will never end. In contrast, identifying the cause of the Second Noble Truth aims to understand the nature of suffering. It is referred to as the cause of suffering as *samudaya*. Suffering is primarily caused by ignorance and desire.¹⁰ 'Desire' is the term used to describe the longing for monetary possessions, pleasure, and immortality, all of which are demands that will never be fully met. As a result, merely desiring them can result in suffering. Being unable to understand the world as it is, the definition of ignorance. It alludes to the world's illusionary aspect. This ignorance is the root cause of vices like jealousy, greed, wrath, and rage. This admirable fact, which portrays a kind-hearted attitude toward other creatures while they succumb to ignorance and desire, is also brimming with compassion. A remedy for the suffering is evoked by the Third Noble Truth. It offers hope for the eradication of the suffering. Giving hope to someone in suffering is another way that we can show compassion to others. The Eightfold Path is provided by the Fourth Noble Truth as a means of overcoming suffering. In many ways, the Eightfold Path is entirely founded on compassion. It encompasses the right view or right

⁷ Trungpa, C (1973). *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism*. Boston. Shambala Publications, Inc, p. 100.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.180 - 181.

⁹ Yun, H (2002). *From the Four Noble Truths to the Four Universal Vows*. California. Buddha's Light Publishing, p. 30.

¹⁰ Shan, G (1998). *The Four Noble Truths: The Essence of Buddhism*. USA. Buddha's Light Publishing, p. 15 - 16.

understanding.¹¹ In terms of perceiving the world and everything in it as it truly is, rather than as we wish or think it should be, this is a crucial step on the journey. If people don't apply reality to their lives, simply knowing it isn't worth anything. Right Intent is the second stage in the Eightfold Path.¹² This action shows dedication to the path. The first step informs us of reality, and the second step establishes our intention to accept the reality that the first step has shown. Put more simply, it cultivates a desire to follow the path that the initial step has cleared. Knowing the truth is a prerequisite for speaking the truth. Right speech of thoughtful communication can bring people together and resolve conflicts. Committing never to talk rudely or angrily fosters a thoughtful attitude that brings individuals one step closer to a compassionate daily life. Right action acknowledges the necessity of living an ethical life and taking into account other people and the environment.¹³ This entails respecting the agreements we make in both our personal and professional lives and not taking what is not given to us. The term Right livelihood refers to a profession that does not cause harm to others. Making the Right effort entails developing a balanced enthusiasm and optimistic outlook.¹⁴ Being mindful of the present moment and concentrating on it are key components of Right mindfulness. Meditation is based on right mindfulness, which is strongly related to it. It is the reverse of an endeavour to exclude the world. Being mindful of the present and our activities at the same time is a requirement of right mindfulness.¹⁵ The practice of right mindfulness requires us to pay attention to the present and the things we are doing. Turning the attention to concentrate on a flower, a lit candle, or an idea like loving compassion is known as Right concentration.¹⁶ After seven years of arduous labour, Buddha finally achieved the Eight-Fold Path and the Four Noble Truths. His battle at first sought to identify the personal source of his suffering. He saw four indications, and he wanted to be free of the suffering he saw. He preached it to the masses to release them from the tide of suffering, just as he had wished for himself when he had achieved enlightenment or the alleviation of suffering. The Buddha emphasized that he was describing a path, or a way of life, founded on principles and deeds that result in a comprehensive perception, an experience, or a realization, rather than an opinion. According to the Buddha, the Dhamma is a way to end suffering by working for a lifetime to understand fundamental truths about the moral life.

¹¹ Sumedho, A. (1966). *The Four Noble Truths*. England: Amravati Buddhist Centre, p. 82.

¹² Shan, G. (1998). *The Four Noble Truths: The Essence of Buddhism*. USA: Buddha's Light Publishing, p. 30.

¹³ Sumedho, A. (1966). *The Four Noble Truths*. England: Amravati Buddhist Centre, p. 93.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 96 - 97.

¹⁵ Shan, G. (1998). *The Four Noble Truths: The Essence of Buddhism*. USA: Buddha's Light Publishing, p. 32.

¹⁶ Yun, H. (2002). *From the Four Noble Truths to the Four Universal Vows*. California. Buddha's Light Publishing, p. 34.

III. MEANS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND BUDDHISM

Conflict is a phenomenon of mutual interdependence and interpenetration. Individuals realize that it is impossible to draw a clear line or picture that determines whether the parties involved are completely right or wrong; rather, they are interconnected on a fundamental level, despite their conflictual and dichotomous relationship and clash of distinct values, perspectives, and seemingly incompatible or contradictory goals.¹⁷ Conflict and violence are brought on by social inequalities, external verbal and physical violations, and other factors. However, as violence and injustice are reactions to external stimuli generated by inner mind operation, those behavioural, structural, and institutional causes are rooted in the human mind.¹⁸

In the transformation of a conflictual situation, violence against others turns into an act of violence against oneself when a dualistic perspective on conflict is transcended, and it is viewed as an undesirable and impractical alternative or course of action.¹⁹ Therefore, it becomes essential to look beyond the pursuit of conflicting goals and investigate new values and aims that take into account the constraints of both parties.²⁰ It is necessary to develop a person's self-transformation and openness to diverse, or even opposing, viewpoints or frames of reference when he becomes aware of the fundamentally interrelated and interpenetrating character of conflict. This serves as the foundation for exploring objectives and goals that both parties may agree upon. As a result, human beings observe a close relationship between their conversations with others and themselves. In this respect, Buddhism maintains that human situations, individually and collectively, determine the condition of the outside world. In broader contexts, Buddhism acknowledges that social systems are indirect forms of violence. Thus, these social systems are one of the external sources of conflict. On a larger scale, people suffer even more from violence, conflict, and war brought on by injustices in political and economic systems.²¹ Besides, any conflict has deeper roots that are found in each person's internal thought processes. For instance, it is normal for humans to experience fear, dislike, resentment, anger, or hate when people are threatened with bodily or verbal damage. They would once more revert to violence as a result of this negative mindset, which leads to conflict. In this regard, Buddha attributes all of our attachments, the harmful behaviours that follow, and the suffering that results from them to human ignorance, which is the inability to see the

¹⁷ Park, J. Y (2008). *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Buddhist Postmodern Ethics*. Plymouth, United Kingdom. Lexington Books, p. 126.

¹⁸ Brantmeier, J. E. (2007). Connecting Inner and Outer Peace: Buddhist Meditation Integrated with Peace Education. *Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice*, 1(1), p. 126.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 112.

²⁰ Braud, W., & Rosemarie, A. (1998). *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience*. London. SAGE, p. 12.

²¹ Sivara, S (1992). *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*. Berkeley, CA. Parallax Press, p. 87.

world as it is and to see ourselves as such. Buddhism goes even further from the mental, behavioural, and structural causes of violence and conflict to the ultimate fundamental cause that underlies all of the suffering caused by these events. The cosmic reality that everything in the world is interconnected and dependent upon everything else is something human beings are ignorant of. Because people did not embrace the Buddhist worldview, they believed that they were independent creatures with different opinions and properties from other people. As a result, the concepts of “me” and “mine” reinforce our attachments to opinions and desires.²²

To create solutions and to get rid of these challenges of human life that are long-lasting and self-correcting, conflict resolution entails changing the relationship and the structural circumstance. Conflict resolution encompasses both the cooperative method of resolving disagreements and the results that the involved parties mutually accept. In addition, it necessitates a sufficient level of reconciliation between the parties, wherein harmony has been restored through procedures including confession of wrongdoing, victim forgiveness, and promises of future peace. Socially engaged, Buddhism is a continuous contemplation of social action as a spiritual practice manifested in non-violence, grassroots empowerment, compassion, and non-judgmentalism. In Buddhist teachings, compassion is compared to any other art that is created through consistency and commitment to practice. It involves re-educating the heart to understand what it is to be present and kind even when suffering is going on.²³ Besides, Buddhism provides useful techniques for resolving conflicts, such as compassionate communication, mindfulness, and meditation. These resources can be used to encourage communication and amicable solutions on a personal, social, and global scale. According to the Pāli Canon, Buddha typically sought to resolve conflicts peacefully. For instance, the Buddha (who was still a *bodhisattva*) actively participated in a war during one of his past incarnations.²⁴ Here are some of the means that lead to conflict resolution through compassion underlaid in the teachings of Buddhism. Those are:

3.1. Dialogue

Buddhism views dialogue as the most effective ‘weapon’ for resolving conflicts, whether they arise within a group, on an individual basis, or internationally. According to Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, “real dialogue with others is possible when we have peace within.”²⁵ In a genuine dialogue, the

²² Yeh, T. D. -I. (2006). The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11, p. 98.

²³ Nikkyo, N. (1980). *Buddhism for Today: A Modern Interpretation of the Threefold Lotus Sutra*. New York. WeatherHill, p. 56.

²⁴ Roberts, T. B., & Tulku, Y (2018). *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/KarandavyuhaSutra/page/n5/mode/2up>.

²⁵ Hanh, T. N. (1995). *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/ThichNhatHanhTheArtOfPower58pp/Thich%20Nhat%20Hanh%20%26%20Elaine%20Pagels%20-%20Living%20Buddha%2C%20Living%20Christ/>

participants share their ideas and hopes while also hearing and understanding the views of others. Since dialogue holds the key to transforming people's hearts, it is the only approach to address the underlying causes of conflict. It is easier said than done, though. All parties must be dedicated to being involved until a strong resolution is reached. In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin was a firm believer in the absolute power of language. The unavoidable conflicts of human life would undoubtedly be resolved more easily if more individuals pursued communication with the same tenacity. Like, war would give way to peace, and prejudice would give way to empathy.²⁶ In addition, Shakyamuni Buddha espoused Buddhism, which rejects violence and teaches that dialogue is the most effective means of resolving conflicts, and he exemplified this throughout his life. True dialogue transforms opposing viewpoints from wedges that drive people apart into bridges that link them together. Dialogue requires the openness to be challenged and transformed by encountering others' viewpoints and values, as well as the willingness and ability to engage in active listening and understanding of them as well as the ability to participate in active listening and understanding of them.²⁷ In one story, the minister of his home kingdom of Magadha, almost at the end of his life, contemplated capturing the neighbouring state of Vajji and sought Shakyamuni's advice. Rather than criticizing the minister, Shakyamuni provided seven scenarios to show how all attempts at violence would fail, which prevented the planned attack.²⁸ To foster respect for one another and a sense of unity, the primary goal of dialogue is not merely to exchange knowledge but also to reveal the processes that mold people's challenges. It is possible to view dialogue as an intersubjective mechanism by which people with different or even opposing viewpoints foster understanding and change among themselves. The practice of mindfulness transformation plays a vital part in establishing a mindset that allows one to have productive conversations with others. Its primary goal is to enable people to observe, regulate, and alter their thoughts and viewpoints. Reactive and impulsive interactions between/ among people with different values, viewpoints, or frames of reference are what need to be addressed both before and during discourse. Practicing Buddhism and chanting "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" for the happiness and best solution for all parties can help us learn to release stress, anger, and irritation and create value-oriented dialogues.

3.2. Meditation

The cultivation of empathy and care for the well-being of others is a key component of *karuṇā*, also known as compassion meditation. Compassion

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²⁶ Ikeda, D. (2020). *A New Way Forward: US University Lectures*, California. Middleway Press, p. 43.

²⁷ Ferrer, J. (2002). *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*, New York. State University of New York Press, p. 166.

²⁸ Ikeda, D. (2020). *A New Way Forward: US University Lectures*, California. Middleway Press, p. 41 - 42.

meditation is an activity that uses the emotional state as an object of focus and attentive awareness, whether it be through experience or imagination. It is not appropriate to view the activities as merely mechanically repeating sentences or images. Instead, it is assumed that understanding the nature of these emotions and one's ties to them is obtained by carefully examining what happens when one tries to develop loving-kindness or compassion. A change in these affective states toward increased loving-kindness and compassion is also said to occur when one turns toward this focus of experience in a gentle, open, patient, and tolerant manner. These meditation techniques are thought to strengthen empathy and compassion, improve pleasant emotions, decrease negative ones, and change one's fundamental perspective of oneself in connection to others.²⁹ By reflecting on their own and other people's pain and struggles, *karuṇā* meditation practitioners develop a profound sense of empathy and compassion for all living things who share the experience of suffering. This practice encourages practitioners to take selfless action to lessen suffering wherever feasible and fosters a deep sense of interconnectedness with all living things.

3.3. Mediation and arbitration

In both public and private settings, the Buddha emphasized the value of compassion in words, deeds, and thoughts. He also emphasized the significance of sharing one's possessions without reservation, living by the precepts, and adopting a perspective that leads to liberation. Mediation techniques have different forms like private reflection and empathetic storytelling, creatively rephrasing differences to reveal underlying similarities, asking conflicted parties to imagine what it might have been like to have gone through what the other person went through, asking them to speak directly from their hearts; bringing their attention to what they are going through at the moment or the way they are speaking to each other; asking each other what the other could do to help them listen or speak more openly; and using feedback to reinforce awareness and ongoing practice. The Compassionate way of medication can deal with the challenges of the daily life of human beings.

3.4. Other methods

There are other methods of resolving conflicts. Monks must use the method of confrontation to extract the Dhamma's rules and then resolve conflicts in keeping with them. The majority's opinion, i.e., if the first method fails to result in a conclusion, the monks must relocate to a location with a higher concentration of monks and continue in the same manner, arriving at a conclusion that is consistent with both the majority's choice and the Dhamma. Due to memory or prior insanity, the argument may be dropped if a monk cannot recall committing an offense. The lawsuit may be dropped if a monk claims that he was insane when he committed the crime. Acknowledgment of an offense is another way in which a monk's transgression is pardoned if

²⁹ The Dalai, L., & Howrad, C. C. (1998). *Cutler, HC. The Dalai Lama. The art of happiness: A handbook for living*. NewYork. Riverhead Books, p. 105.

he confesses to an elder his fault, makes it obvious that he was wrong, and reaffirms his resolve to exercise restraint. Lastly, a monk will be declared to be of poor character if he initially denies recalling a transgression and then, under duress, admits to committing it.³⁰

How Compassion Works in Conflict Resolution? Compassion practice can change how an individual handles conflicts. Buddhism is centered on compassion, which embodies the core goal of eliminating suffering and fostering happiness and well-being for oneself and other sentient beings. There are two types of compassion: compassion for oneself and compassion for others. It promotes understanding, lessens hostility, and increases empathy—all of which are essential for resolving conflicts graciously and forging closer bonds with others.³¹ Through meditation, moral behaviour, and charitable deeds, practitioners develop compassion, embodying the highest principles of the Buddhist path and helping to create a more compassionate and peaceful world. To cultivate self-compassion, one must reexamine and research their fundamental ideas about being unworthy, unlovable, and imperfect, which feed endless cycles of internal rejection and condemnation. Learning to pay attention to, confront, explore, and dissect negative core belief systems internalized by others or derived from one's own experiences of rejection or failure is a key component of self-compassion. Harsh self-judgment undermines the innate ability to accept, be kind, and have compassion, and it only helps to reinforce emotions of inadequacy, powerlessness, and fear. The goal of self-compassion is to reframe one's own story. Compassion is not just a pleasant emotion; it is a radical transformation of our view of suffering and our view of "self."³² Rather than being viewed as personal failures and inadequacies, anxiety, depression, or obsession are now seen as suffering, deserving of the same compassion that we would extend to anyone else who was suffering. Gradually, the realization arises that emotional affliction can be embraced with kindness and generosity, forgiveness and acceptance. This profound shift in one's relationship with one's suffering starts to alter the perception of inadequacy and failure that underlies the seemingly endless stream of aversive thoughts that constitute depressive rumination.

(1) Mindfulness: One useful strategy for overcoming conflict is mindfulness. Disciplining one's mind by concentrating on a single thought while letting go of all other ideas and feelings to notice whatever comes up in consciousness is known as mindfulness.³³ We can transform the contents of our

³⁰ Nāṇamoli, B. (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha. A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*. (B. Bodhi, Trans.) Kandy, Sri Lanka. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 855.

³¹ Brantmeier, J. E. (2007). Connecting Inner and Outer Peace: Buddhist Meditation Integrated with Peace Education. *Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice*, 1 (1).

³² Feldman, C., & Kuyken, W. (2011). Compassion in the land of Suffering. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12, p. 150.

³³ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). Catalyzing Movement Towards a More Contemplative/Sacred-Appreciating/ Non Dualistic Society. Retrieved from <http://www.contemplativemind.org/>

consciousness, thoughts, feelings, and reactions into objects of contemplation and analysis rather than allowing them to dictate our habitual behavioural patterns, emotions, and thoughts.³⁴ His Holiness Dalai Lama said that since only compassion can bring about such peace of mind, we seek true happiness that can only be achieved by having a tranquil mind. We must work hard to cultivate it; we must use every experience of our everyday lives to change the way we think and act.

By practicing mindfulness, individuals become less attached to their mental patterns and points of view and develop first-hand knowledge of the social conditioning of their thinking and knowing.³⁵ It can cultivate the capacity for moment-to-moment awareness of internal states, including feelings, emotions, thoughts, and attitudes, by practicing mindfulness.

A key component of Buddhism, mindfulness meditation makes people more conscious of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Increased emotional intelligence and the capacity for amicable dispute resolution are two benefits of this self-awareness. The stream of consciousness is slowed down and automatic and impulsive reactions to new ideas, values, or identities are suspended when we observe our mental states mindfully. We cannot choose whether or not we will experience pain and sorrow in our lives, nor whether or not we will participate in the life of our body and mind; we can only choose how we respond to those encounters and how we participate. Researchers studying people who have developed self-compassion through meditation traditions have discovered that sustained mindfulness practice is linked to the formation of new neural pathways.³⁶ This is an undoing of the habits of aversion through repeatedly returning to the actuality of pain at this moment with kindness.

(2) Give birth of positive feeling: Compassion is a transforming discipline that cultivates empathy and is more than just a positive feeling. People can dismantle obstacles, foster understanding, and make room for healing by addressing issues with a compassionate mentality. As everyone aligns their behaviours with beliefs and fosters harmony within themselves and others, this process not only eases tensions but also brings about a deep sense of inner delight.

(3) Embrace human values: Every human being's life is impacted by human values, which lead to the realization that self-compassion is a crucial aspect that starts with ourselves. Self-compassion, or taking care of ourselves when we are upset, is the first step. Compassion for oneself can be interpreted as what the

programs/academic/kabat-zinn.pdf, p. 4.

³⁴ Hart, T. (2001). Teaching for wisdom. *Encounter; Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 14 (2), p. 8.

³⁵ Gunnlaugson, O. (2007). Shedding Lights on the Underlying Forms of Transformative Learning Theory: Introducing Three Distinct Categories of Consciousness. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 5, p.139.

³⁶ LUTZ, A. J. -L. (2008). Regulation of the neural circuitry of emotion by compassion meditation: Effects of meditative expertise. *PLoS ONE*, 3, p. 7 - 8.

Buddha aimed for. Individuals are far more able to show compassion to others once they can accomplish it. Values like empathy, respect for others, and the idea that everyone has inherent worth have realized how important this is. One must first cultivate these principles within oneself to be genuinely joyful. People cannot show compassion to others unless they have developed compassion for themselves. This brings to mind Mahatma Gandhi's conviction that all beings are fundamentally one. This potent concept reaffirms how our internal change impacts not only ourselves but also everyone around us. We are enhancing the welfare of the entire globe when we act with compassion.

(4) Cultivates inner strength: Whether it is a personal setback or a conflict with a loved one, everyone has had moments when life does not go as planned. It is frequently demonstrated how simple it is to feel as though there is no way out. But what keeps us rooted during these difficult moments is the application of virtues like compassion. By fostering an emphasis on inner strength and resilience, compassion makes us more capable of managing life's challenges.³⁷

(5) Transform differences: This is when our interactions truly benefit from compassion. Self-compassion, or taking care of ourselves when we, the individuals, are upset, is the first step.³⁸ They are far more able to show compassion to others once they can accomplish it. Compassion for others comes more easily to us when we practice self-compassion. This is particularly crucial when there is disagreement. By cultivating empathy, we, the people, make room to see things from another person's point of view, even if we do not agree. The secret to changing conflicts is understanding.

(6) Annihilate fear and aversion: Compassion provides a crucial antidote to fear and aversion. It is what enables us to face pain and suffering instead of running away from it. It enables us to approach suffering with inquiry and love instead of guilt or blame. Aversion and fear splinter our connection to everything. The first step in making friends with anything that has been rejected in the past is compassion.³⁹

(7) Reduce negative emotions: It's an essential part of practicing compassion to reduce negative emotions. When we start to recognize the good in others, even those we're in conflict with, we begin to soften the negative emotions we've built up. It doesn't happen instantly, but over time, we've found that practicing compassion helps transform how we view difficult situations. The teaching of *Visuddhimagga* emphasizes that understanding compassion helps remove annoyance, which is often a root cause of ill will. By practicing this, we weaken the negativity that fuels conflict, allowing us to approach the situation with more empathy and openness.

³⁷ Chappell, D. D. (1999). "Buddhist Peace Principles." In D. D. Chappell, *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*. Boston. Wisdom Publications, p. 199.

³⁸ Feldman, C., & Kuyken, W. (2011). Compassion in the land of Suffering. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12, p. 150.

³⁹ Feldman, C., & Kuyken, W. (2011). Compassion in the land of Suffering, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12, p. 145.

(8) Establish trust and support growth: Compassion transforms disputes rather than merely resolving them. It changes the dynamic to one of win - win rather than win - lose. This is important because healing starts when both sides feel heard and respected. It is clear that this strategy encourages growth on both sides and allows them to gain knowledge from the dispute. This idea of interdependence was central to Buddhism. He believed that one person's spiritual development may spur the development of others, highlighting the significance of fostering not only our well-being but also that of others. By demonstrating compassion, we are not just settling disputes but also enhancing the community's overall emotional and spiritual health. Imagine what might happen if more people adopted loving-kindness as a means of resolving conflicts and encouraging harmony in a society that is frequently preoccupied with outwitting opponents.

(9) Cultivating inner resilience and fulfilling life: Compassion practice can lead to positive life changes. It not only makes us happier and more resilient, but it also makes it possible for everyone to handle disagreements with dignity and empathy. People can change how we interact with the world and spread compassion by cultivating it inside ourselves.⁴⁰

(10) Grow a healthy relationship: Healthy relationships require empathy and understanding, both of which are fostered by compassion. It eases tension and promotes forgiveness, which enables one to establish deeper connections with people.⁴¹

(11) Conflict transformation: The goals of conflict transformation are restorative justice and constructive peace. Compassion goes beyond conflict resolution and management in both theory and practice. It emphasizes bringing relationships back to their pre-conflict state. Additionally, values are essential to human social well-being. Values are core convictions that cannot be compromised. According to Burton, values are the concepts, behaviours, traditions, and convictions that define specific social groups. Any attempt at problem transformation as part of the conflict transformation process must give careful consideration to both needs and values since they cannot be compromised. Values and wants must be handled thoroughly and skilfully via compassion to transform difficulties.⁴²

(12) Personal and group transformation: This approach takes into account the possibility that every person has some positive changes inside themselves that may be used to resolve conflicts constructively. In essence, it is necessary to use mutual respect to rectify misrepresentations, mistrust, intense hatred,

⁴⁰ Chappell, D. D. (1999). "Buddhist Peace Principles." In D. D. Chappell, *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*. Boston. Wisdom Publications, p. 199.

⁴¹ Gyatso, T. (n.d.). *Compassion and the Individual*. Retrieved from His Holiness: The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet: <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion-and-human-values/compassion>.

⁴² Burton, D. (2002). Knowledge and Liberation: Philosophical Ruminations on a Buddhist Conundrum. *Philosophy East and West*, 52.

purposefully skewed perceptions, etc. It promotes the idea that people should be open to making amends with those they have previously clashed with. That is, rather than being inflexible and purposefully biased, people ought to be receptive to the concept of reconciliation. Compassion highlights the necessity for people to accept the concept of forgiveness and consider making amends with their past enemies or adversaries. To effectively manage the dispute, the personal transformation agenda must persuade the opinion leaders or community elites to support it.⁴³

(13) Offers emotional support: Offering emotional support, such as a hug, encouraging words, or simply listening without passing judgment, may be incredibly relieving and consoling. These modest deeds of kindness frequently have the most impact; large gestures are not necessary for this kind of compassionate action. Being present for others when they are in need demonstrates our concern and lets them know they are not alone.

(14) Building peace: According to a fundamental tenet of conflict resolution and transformation, the objective of conflict resolution and transformation in interpersonal and intergroup conflict should be to transform conflicts to create peaceful relations with others that can be more vibrant, innovative, and productive. This movement toward more peaceful relations and the development of social capital is thus viewed as a process of peacebuilding.⁴⁴ Peace-building initiatives aim to prevent conflict from reoccurring by addressing specific problem areas, such as physical violence or social and structural inequalities, and by fostering a compassionate and contemplative mind in individuals that contribute to constructive conflict resolution and a wave of lasting peace. By fostering cooperation and dialogue among various identity groups, compassion can help parties manage their conflict of interest through peaceful means, which may include establishing institutions that provide procedures and mechanisms for handling and resolving conflict.

IV. ROLE OF COMPASSION TOWARDS PEACE

Peace lies in significant interdependences between various physiological, psychological, social, cultural, economic, and political aspects.⁴⁵ Living in peace includes the objective of living conditions, psychological and spiritual well-being, and social and personal fulfilment.⁴⁶ The integration of inner and exterior peace is what is meant by “durable and sustainable peace.” It denotes a comprehensive peace in which everyone’s physiological needs are met,

⁴³ Gyatso, T. (n.d.). *Compassion and the Individual*. Retrieved from His Holiness: The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet: <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion-and-human-values/compassion>.

⁴⁴ Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation Divided Societies*. Washington, DC. United States Institute Press, p. 94.

⁴⁵ Herschock, P. D. (2006). *Buddhism in the Public Sphere: Reorienting Global Interdependence*. London. Routledge, p. 166.

⁴⁶ Sunim, V. K. (1999). *My Way of Pilgrimage to Peace*. In D. Chapell, *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*. Boston. Wisdom Publications, p. 121.

institutional and structural injustices are upheld, and individuals cultivate and exercise a variety of mental faculties to view others favourably and become innovative in turning peaceful conflict into a chance to advance a relationship that is interdependent and permeating.

The goal of Buddhism is to free people from suffering by gaining a profound understanding of the interconnectedness, interpenetration, impermanence, and emptiness of the fixed and unchanging nature of reality, including human existence. This understanding can play a big part in changing how an individual perceives the world and how he relates to other people, including those who hold different or opposing beliefs and values. Human beings realize that our well-being and the well-being of others are inextricably linked. The inner peace of an individual cannot be achieved in his way if he does not take into account and acts in ways that promote the peace of others.⁴⁷ Acquiring this knowledge and practicing compassion introspectively will encourage the development of altruistic mental skills to recognize the interdependence and inseparability of one's social justice and others. People can train themselves to cultivate all via compassion, which frees them from the self-centered pursuit of peace and security. Achieving lasting peace will be facilitated by cultivating nonviolent ideas and deeds via the application of wisdom and compassion as well as introspective practice on our thoughts and feelings.

To attain any semblance of peace, the Buddhist practitioner must turn inward and cultivate the opposite virtues of wisdom, compassion, and loving-kindness. Non-dualistic peace, based on a compassionate mind, is to be understood as a shift from self-centered, dichotomous tensions of in-group and out-group processes to an all-inclusive state of awareness of our fundamental interdependence and interpenetration. Buddhism emphasizes both inner and outer peace, and its teachings can promote international understanding and cooperation. This understanding motivates us to try to meet everyone's fundamental needs, advance justice and freedom for ourselves and people with different identities, and use nonviolent means of resolving conflicts positively and innovatively. Furthermore, unity in diversity is made possible by a broader understanding of how interrelated and ultimately non-dualistic human interactions are. Diversity in this sense encompasses more than just the existence of distinct racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious groupings. The practice of complex and coordination-enriching interdependence is known as "touching diversity."⁴⁸ In this approach, we view uniqueness and difference as a chance for mutual understanding and inspiration to try something new rather than as a threat or a target of hostility or assault. It does not mean giving up or rejecting particular beliefs, values, or conventions that shape our social and cultural identities. Instead, it alludes to their significant

⁴⁷ Vaughan, F. (2002). What is Spiritual Intelligence?, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42 (2), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Herschock, P. D. (2012). *Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflection on Realizing a More Equitable Global Future*. NewYork. State University of New York Press, p. 368.

reworking and reorientation to allow us to give them new interpretations or meanings in a mutually reinforcing connection. To achieve and maintain their interdependent, mutually liberating, and transformative relational dynamics, people with different - or even opposing - frames of reference engage in an exploratory, continuous, and eternal process that explains or unfolds new values and meanings. This is known as unity in diversity. The growth of these attributes will benefit society at large.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study explores the core teachings of the Buddha that support global peacekeeping and peacebuilding through the ideal of compassion. All people would be inspired to pursue peace by the genuine values of compassion that Buddhism promotes. Peace-making, peace-keeping, and peace-building - in all of these forms aim to create a more equitable and compassionate world, is an immediate, shared duty that is required by the interconnectedness of our existence and must thus be shared by all of us. Irrespective of colour, creed, or race, to provide basic needs and ensure equal access to political, economic, and social activities, social conditions must be changed, and individual effort is crucial. Inner resilience brings peace to the outer world. Now is the moment for each of us to shed our limited, self-imposed viewpoints and restrictions and encourage more discussion within the broader framework. Practicing compassion in mind and action, whether in any of the methods above or more, will lead to Enlightenment.

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ABANDONING ANGER FOR PEACE: ANALYSIS OF THE THREE STAGES OF ANGER AND METHODS TO DEAL WITH THEM¹

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Abstract:

“Peace” is one of the characteristics of *Nibbāna*, and achieving it involves abandoning anger. Hence, Buddhist texts offer a wealth of strategies to accomplish this goal. This paper examines anger through the framework of the three stages (*avatthā*) of defilements: the latent stage (*anusaya*), the activated stage (*pariyutṭhāna*), and the transgressive stage (*vitikkama*). The study draws on the stratification of anger into latent, cognitive, and behavioral stages, as outlined in the *Pāli* commentaries. This method, commonly employed in the commentarial texts to explain the workings of mental defilements, helps to understand the mechanics of anger at each level and to formulate strategies for dispelling it. Although the *Pāli* texts do not explicitly stratify anger into three stages, this approach proves to be a useful tool in clarifying the mechanism of anger and in developing appropriate countermeasures. Furthermore, this paper explores the causal relationships between the three levels of anger, emphasizing the importance of addressing each one. After outlining the concepts of the three levels of anger, the paper provides an overview of methods for effectively managing anger at each stage. The analysis presented here offers Buddhist methods of anger management and contributes to insights for developing anger management programs within the Buddhist framework.

Keywords: *Anger, anger management, anusaya, pariyutṭhāna, vitikkama.*

I. LATENT STATE (ANUSAYA)

Literally, the term *anusaya* can be understood as an “inactive” or “sleeping”

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state. It has been translated variously as “latent biases”,² “latent disposition”,³ “inherent tendency”,⁴ “bias”, “inclination”,⁵ and “underlying tendency”.⁶ In addition to these interpretations, the PTS PED dictionary further defines it as “proclivity and persistence of a dormant or latent disposition.” From a psychological perspective, Padmasiri refers to these tendencies as dormant passions, emphasizing their latent nature.⁷ Grammatically, the term *anusaya*, derived from the root \sqrt{si} , is explained in the commentary as a “sleeping state” (*sayito viya*).⁸ The usage of the term “sleeping” implies two things: an inactive state and the potential for activation. This dual meaning likely reflects the sense in which *anusaya* is used in the Pāli texts.

In this paper, the term “latent anger” for *paṭighānusaya* is used in the same sense as “potential” or “continuation” of anger. According to commentary, *anusaya* refers to the defilements that have not been abandoned: “It is latent in the sense of not having been abandoned” (*appahīnatthēna*);⁹ “it remains latent because of not having been abandoned” (*appahīnatthāya anuseti*).¹⁰ “They [latent tendencies] arise when suitable conditions exist” (*anurūpaṃ kāraṇaṃ labhitvā uppajjanti*).¹¹ Sometimes, this is further underlined by using the expression “fit to arise” (*uppajjanāraha*).¹² In the discourses, instead of verbs such as “exists” or “arises,” mostly the verbal form *anuseti* is used. For instance, “latent tendency of aversion becomes latent” (*paṭighānusayo anuseti*). But in the exegetical literature, the term ‘arises’ is also used. This shows that from the Theravāda perspective, the defilements in general can be considered as “*anusaya*” even when they are arising, for they can remain dormant until conditions are favourable for their arising. Additionally, *anusaya* also refers to the persistence or continuation of mental defilements (*anu anu sayanti*).¹³ Until they are abandoned, the possibility of their arising always exists. For instance, *anusaya* “lies” even in an infant.¹⁴ Thus, *anusaya* can be understood as mental defilements that remain latent and have the potential to become active when suitable conditions arise.

² Anuruddha (1910), p. 172

³ Bodhi (2016), p. 268

⁴ Buddhaghosa (1999) para. I, p. 13.

⁵ Nyanaponika (2007), p. 98 – 9.

⁶ Analayo (2018), p. 22.

⁷ Silva (2014), p. 18.

⁸ M. II. 368.

⁹ D. II. 505.

¹⁰ M. III. 144.

¹¹ Commentators have also explained *anusaya* as ‘defilements which are strong’ (*thāmagata*) (Abhi-a.iii, 86; Paṭi-a.ii, p.399). According to this explanation, the defilements which arise strongly remain latent.

¹² D-abhñṭ.i, p.101: ‘B’ indicates Burmese version of the *Chattṭhasaṅgāyana Tipiṭaka*.

¹³ D. III. 336; Janakābhivamsa (2002), p.560; Ledi (2003), p. 339.

¹⁴ M. I.433

According to Buddhist analysis, both wholesome and unwholesome states of mind are impermanent phenomena that arise dependent upon conditions and pass away. From this perspective, the concept of latency applies to all mental states, including wholesome ones. For example, the arising of feeling requires the contact between the visible object, visible base, and eye consciousness.¹⁵ Based on this explanation, feeling can also be understood as possessing the stage of *anusaya*. This idea can be further illustrated by the simile of blowing a conch and the simile of a lute.¹⁶ In the case of the conch, at least three conditions must be met for sound to emerge: a human being, effort, and air. Similarly, for the lute, sound arises only when various conditions – such as the presence of strings and the musician’s effort – are fulfilled. Speaking, in both cases, the sound can be considered as *anusaya* as it is latent before supporting conditions arise. From this perspective, the expression “latent anger” implies that anger has the potential to arise when the right conditions are present, just as sound emerges from a conch or lute when the necessary factors are in place.

As a technical term, however, *anusaya* is used in the *Pāli* texts exclusively to refer to the latency of mental defilements. It is never used in an ethically neutral or positive sense; rather, its meaning inherently carries a condemnatory connotation. One of the reasons *anusaya* applies only to the latency of unwholesome states of mind is its relation to the concept of abandonment (*pahāna*). For instance, in the *Pāli* texts, the highest stage of liberation is often characterized as “cessation of *anusaya* (s)”.¹⁷ This usage further reinforces that the term *anusaya* specifically refers to unwholesome mental states.

In illustrating the nature of *anusaya*, the potential of a tree to bear fruit is a commonly used simile.¹⁸ Just as a tree possesses the latent potential to bear fruit when conditions are favorable, *anusaya* exists within the continuum of the five aggregates. This analogy is employed in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* to explain how *anusaya* is eradicated by the Noble Path.¹⁹ It states that if the root of a fruit-bearing tree is destroyed, the tree can no longer produce fruit – thus, unborn fruits do not arise (*ajātāyeva na jāyanti*). The implication is that if the causes leading to *anusaya* are eliminated, it will not manifest. In his commentary,²⁰ Ācariya Buddhaghosa employs the same simile. He reinforces the idea that the potentiality of a tree to bear fruit mirrors the nature of *anusaya*. While this analogy is primarily used to illustrate the eradication of *anusaya*, it also effectively highlights its latent nature.

Sayadaw Janakābhivaṃsa offers another example, likening latent defilements to a cobra: when struck, a cobra instinctively raises its hood, symbolizing how dormant *anusaya* can become active under the right conditions (2002: 561).

¹⁵ M. III. 281

¹⁶ D. II.337; S. IV. 197.

¹⁷ A. II.157; III.74.

¹⁸ Janakābhivaṃsa (2002), p. 560; Mon (2002), p. 267

¹⁹ Pṭs. II. 218

²⁰ M. III. 252; Vism. II. 327B

Similarly, Venerable Nyanaponika compares latent defilements to microbes in the body, which may remain inactive but can become active when conditions are favorable (1998: 97, 191). His emphasis, like others, is on the dormant nature of defilements.

In the Pāli texts, *anusaya* represents one of the categories of mental states. This category typically consists of seven unwholesome mental states: lust for sensual pleasure (*kāmarāga*), aversion (*paṭigha*), wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), conceit (*māna*), craving for existence (*bhavarāga*), and ignorance (*avijjā*).²¹ However, in a specific instance in the *Mahāmālukiya Sutta*, only five *anusaya(s)* are listed, and they are explained in relation to the category of ‘fetter’ (*saṃyojana*).²² Notably, this list resembles the category of lower fetters (*orambhāgiya saṃyojana*).²³ According to this instance, *saṃyojana* appears to represent the active form of defilements, whereas *anusaya* refers to their dormant state. However, this distinction is not absolute.

The nature of *anusaya* is one of the topics debated in the *Kathāvatthu Pāli* (p. 405). Some of the issues discussed in this text regarding *anusaya* may stem from the attempt to strictly classify defilements into three stages. For instance, one debated question is whether *anusaya* has any ethical significance - are they merely indeterminate (*abyākata*)?²⁴ The explanations provided in commentaries, such as the one mentioned above, often aim to refute views that contradict the *Theravāda* standpoint.²⁵ However, examining this issue is not the objective of this paper. Instead, this study focuses on the practical utility of stratifying anger into three stages for the purpose of anger management.

II. LATENT ANGER (PAṬIGHĀNUSAYA)

The term *paṭigha*, used to refer to latent anger, literally means “impact,” “resistance,” or “striking against,” suggesting an immediate negative reaction. Grammatically related terms with similar meanings include *paṭighāta* and

²¹ D. III. 254; M. I. 47; S. V.60; A. IV. 9

²² M. I. 433. The spelling *saṃṇyojana* is also found (D.III.234). The five are: wrong view related to five aggregates (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), wrong view related to habit and religious observances (*silabbataparāmāsa*), sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), and ill will (*byāpāda*).

²³ D. III. 210; A. IV. 7.

²⁴ Sayadaw Silānanda (2012): 19. Also points out disagreements as to the question: Whether *anusaya* belongs to the past, present, or future?

²⁵ It is likely that the term *anusaya* has a specific purpose in explaining eradication of defilements. In the *Papañcasūdanī* (M. III. 144), Ācariya Buddhaghosa rejects the notion that the fetter and latent tendency are different. From the *Abhidhamma* point of view, authors such as Mon (2002), p. 267 say that latent states do not have the characteristics of arising and passing away. Similarly, Sayadaw Silānanda says “when they [latent tendencies] reach the three stages of existence, they are no longer called Anusaya. They become Kilesas [defilements].” Accepting the latent tendencies as having the moments of arising and passing away and belonging to time poses difficulty in explaining how latent tendencies are abandoned by Noble Paths. In the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (ii, p.218), for instance, it is said: “One does not eradicate past defilements, present defilements, future defilements.”

āghāta.²⁶ However, there does not appear to be a specific reason for using *paṭigha* to denote the latent form of anger instead of other terms such as *byāpāda*, *kodha*, or *dosa*. In fact, these terms could be used interchangeably.

In the highest sense, the phrase “state of not being abandoned,” used in the definition of *anusaya*, refers to defilements that have not been eradicated by the Noble Path.²⁷ In the case of anger, this specifically refers to the abandonment of latent anger by the third Noble Path, the Path of Non-returner (*anāgāmi magga*).²⁸ The second Noble Path also eradicates gross forms of anger, thereby weakening its latent tendencies.²⁹

There are three types of abandonment: momentary (*tadaṅga*), suppression (*vikkhambhana*), and uprooting (*samuccheda*). The abandonment mentioned in the definition above refers to “uprooting.” However, the concept of “potential” or arising can also be understood concerning the other two types of abandonment. Regarding these three forms of abandonment, a commentary states: “Absorption concentration is like cutting off the bark [of a tree]; insight meditation is like cutting off the outer core; the Noble Path is like cutting off the inner core.”³⁰ Thus, the absence of insight and concentration creates conditions for anger to become active.

Latent anger, however, is not merely dormant; it can strengthen or weaken depending on its activity at the levels of mind and behavior. This explains why individuals exhibit varying dispositions toward anger. Based on the frequency with which anger arises and the ease with which a person is provoked, individuals can be placed on a scale of “hateful temperament” (*dosa-carita*). Although the term *hateful temperament* originates from commentarial sources, a similar classification of personality types is implicitly present in the Pāli texts. For instance, references to *hateful temperament* can be observed in the Pāli texts through terms such as *kodhano* (angry person), *upanāhī* (vengeful person),³¹ *upāyāsabahu* (very irritable), *tibbadosajātiko* (wrathful person),³² *duṭṭho* (hateful person), *doso* (hateful person),³³ and *dosussado* (one whose anger is abundant).³⁴ While these terms are not explicitly categorized under *hateful temperament*, they can be understood as descriptions of individuals who exhibit such tendencies.

²⁶ Kacc, §571; Mogg, §99; *Abhi*. I. 190

²⁷ *It*. II.11

²⁸ *Paṭi*. I. 195

²⁹ *Paṭi*. I. 71

³⁰ M. III. 144. *Tacacchedo viya hi samāpatti dattṭhabbā, pheggucchedo viya vipassanā, sāraccchedo viya maggo*; M. II. 68: *Kilesānaṃ samāpattivikkhambanassa sāraccchedassa anusayassa dūrabhāvato*

³¹ *D*. III. 45

³² M. III. 204; I. 308.

³³ *A*. I. 201.

³⁴ *Nidd*. I. 72.

Furthermore, individuals are often classified based on how anger arises and persists within them. For instance, in the *Lekha Sutta*,³⁵ beings are categorized into three types according to two criteria: whether they become angry frequently and whether their anger endures for a long time. In this context, the expression “*becomes latent*” is used to convey the idea of *continuation*, as indicated by the wording of the *Sutta* itself. The three classifications based on duration are: “*one whose anger lasts long*” (*dīgharattam anuseti*), “*one whose anger lasts for a brief period*,” and “*one whose anger does not persist for long*” (*na cīraṭṭhitikā hoti*). While this classification specifically describes how anger continues in individuals, in the context of the present study, it can also be applied to explain three distinct dispositions related to anger.

The first kind of person in the *Lekha Sutta* is always angry, and his or her anger lies dormant for a long time. This anger is compared to writings on a stone which do not go away easily. In the same way, this person harbors anger for a long time. The second person is also always angry, but his or her anger does not lie in a dormant state for a long time. It means that he or she does not continue to be angry for a long time or harbor resentment for a long time. This kind of anger is compared to writings on sand which go away easily compared to writings on stone. This suggests that the second individual’s tendency to anger is not strong. The third person is not angry always, and his anger also is not dormant for a long time. This anger is compared to writings on water. Among these three, the first two can be considered as subtypes of hateful temperament. The third can be considered either as a person with amiable temperament or a person with hateful temperament who has cultivated positive states that counter anger.

The first type of person described in the *Lekha Sutta* is someone who is frequently angry, and whose anger remains dormant for a long time. This type of anger is compared to inscriptions on stone, which do not fade easily. Similarly, such a person harbors resentment for an extended period. The second type of person is also prone to frequent anger, but the anger does not remain dormant for long. In other words, they do not continue to be angry or hold onto resentment for an extended period. This type of anger is compared to writings on sand, which disappear more easily than those on stone. This suggests that the second individual’s tendency toward anger is less intense. The third type of person is rarely angry, and even when anger arises, it does not persist for long. This type of anger is compared to writings on water, which vanishes almost instantly. Among these three, the first two can be considered subtypes of *hateful temperament*. The third can be classified either as a person with an *amiable temperament* or as someone with a *hateful temperament* who has successfully cultivated positive mental states that counteract anger.

In the *Āsivisa Sutta*, a similar classification is presented, with the addition of a fourth type of individual. This new category describes a person who is not

³⁵ A. I. 283

frequently angry but whose anger remains dormant for a long time.³⁶ Here, too, the term *anuseti* is used to indicate the continuation of anger. The simile given in this discourse involves snake venom. A person who often becomes angry is compared to a snake whose venom is quick to emerge, while someone who is rarely angry is likened to a snake whose venom is slow to appear. Furthermore, a person whose anger lingers for a long time is compared to a snake with virulent venom, whereas a person whose anger does not persist is likened to a snake with non-virulent poison. According to this discourse, individuals can be classified into four personality types based on their disposition toward anger.

Unlike the general classification of *anusaya* into seven types, many instances in the *Suttanta* mention only three latent tendencies: the tendency toward sensual pleasure, aversion, and ignorance.³⁷ This classification provides a different perspective on the meaning of *anusaya*, as it also indicates *where* these latent tendencies reside. The tendency toward sensual desire *lies* in pleasant feeling (*sukkhā vedanā*), the tendency toward aversion in unpleasant feeling (*dukkhā vedanā*), and the tendency toward ignorance in neutral feeling (*adukkhamasukkhā vedanā*). In the *Abhidhamma*, this analysis is extended to encompass all latent tendencies. For instance, regarding aversion, the *Yamaka* states: “Where does the latent tendency to aversion lie? The latent tendency to aversion lies in unpleasant feeling.”³⁸ From a psychological perspective, the idea that aversion lies latent in painful feeling suggests that painful experiences are a major trigger for anger. In this sense, the concept of *anusaya* also reveals the proximate causes of mental defilements

Feelings have a strong causal relationship with all unwholesome states of mind. This is supported by the commentaries,³⁹ where all seven latent defilements are explained in relation to the three types of feelings. This connection becomes even clearer from an *Abhidhamma* perspective. In the *Abhidhamma*, wrong view, conceit, and craving for existence are associated with greed, while doubt is linked to ignorance.⁴⁰ Furthermore, both wrong view and conceit are connected to pleasant feelings. From this perspective, all seven latent tendencies can be related to the three types of feelings, suggesting that the arising of unwholesome states is, to some extent, dependent on feelings.

Besides being a significant trigger for anger, painful feelings also contribute to the reinforcement of a latent disposition toward aversion. For instance, each time an individual reacts to painful feelings with aversion, the tendency becomes further ingrained. The *Salla Sutta* states that when one experiences painful feelings and responds with aversion, the latent tendency to aversion is strengthened.⁴¹

³⁶ A. II. 110: “*Idha, bhikkhave, ekacco puggalo na heva kho abhinham kujjhati. So ca khvassa kodho digharattam anuseti.*”

³⁷ M. I. 303; M. III. 285; S. IV. 205.

³⁸ A. II. 55.

³⁹ *Abhi.* III. 87; *It.* II. 11.

⁴⁰ *Abhi.* II. 340; CMOA (2016), pp. 38, 268.

⁴¹ S. IV. 285.

Conversely, if one does not react with aversion to painful feelings, aversion does not become latent.

A similar explanation is found in the *Chachakka Sutta*,⁴² where the cause of latency is attributed to emotional distress, such as sorrow and lamentation. The statement that “aversion becomes latent” can be interpreted in two ways. First, it indicates that the individual reacting in this manner has not yet abandoned aversion - an explanation provided in the commentary.⁴³ Second, it can also be understood as the reinforcement of the tendency toward aversion.

The latent tendency to aversion is also explained in relation to undesirable sensory objects. This is evident from statements such as, “one has ill will towards displeasing objects” (*appiyarūpe rūpe byāpajjati*).⁴⁴ The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* expresses this idea even more explicitly, using the same phrasing as for unpleasant feelings: “The latent tendency to aversion lies in the undesirable object” (*Paṭi.i*, p.123).⁴⁵ In this context, the undesirable object is presented as the ‘location’ of aversion, rather than the unpleasant feeling that triggers its arising.

However, it is important to note that painful feelings themselves can also serve as objects that provoke aversion (*Abhi-a.iii*, p.87). The commentary explains that aversion arising from undesirable objects is instinctual or a common habitual response among beings (*Paṭi-a.ii*, p.401).⁴⁶ This automaticity is likened to a person in the middle of an ocean, seeing water in every direction. Thus, the ‘locations’ upon which anger arises are twofold: painful feelings and undesirable objects.

It is noteworthy, however, that aversion toward undesirable objects primarily arises from unpleasant feelings. For instance, in the *Chachakka Sutta*, it is stated that aversion arises due to unpleasant feelings, which themselves arise from contact between six types of unpleasant objects and their corresponding sense bases.⁴⁷ This implies that objects are perceived as desirable or undesirable mainly based on the feelings associated with them. This does not mean that anger is constantly *present*. Rather, it remains latent and arises when the necessary conditions – such as recalling the object – are met. For example, anger may surface when one reflects on harm caused by another person in the past, present, or even the future.⁴⁸ This suggests that anger arises from perceiving an object as a source of past unpleasant feelings or as having the potential to cause future unpleasant feelings.

To distinguish between object-specific aversion and the general latent tendency present in all human beings, commentarial literature explains two

⁴² *M. II*. 285.

⁴³ *M. V*. 100.

⁴⁴ *S. IV*. 189.

⁴⁵ *Yam loke appiyarūpaṃ asātarūpaṃ, ettha sattānaṃ paṭighānusoṇaṃ anuseti*.

⁴⁶ *Rāguppatti nāma sattānaṃ āciṇṇasamāciṇṇā. Tathā anīṭṭhārammaṇe paṭighuppatti*. (*Abhi-a.ii*, p. 460).

⁴⁷ *M. III*. 185.

⁴⁸ *A. V*. 150.

types of latent tendencies. The first, “*latency in object*” (*ārammaṇānusaya*), refers to the tendency that remains within undesirable objects.⁴⁹ The second, “*latency in continuum*” (*santānānusaya*), describes the persistence of aversion due to its non-eradication. As explained earlier, beyond being a cause of aversion, *latency in object* also implies that objects previously met with aversion are likely to elicit the same response when encountered again. This kind of aversion is object-specific, meaning that certain stimuli repeatedly provoke similar psychological reactions. For example, if one generates aversion toward a particular individual, two things happen: first, the tendency to respond with aversion strengthens; second, encountering that person again is likely to trigger the same reaction.

It is crucial to understand that the tendency toward aversion lies dormant in unpleasant feelings and undesirable objects. This means that the latent stage of aversion becomes active - manifesting as thought or a state of mind - primarily due to these two causes. In simpler terms, unpleasant feelings and undesirable objects are the primary triggers of anger. This point can be inferred from *Pāli* literature. For instance, craving arises in response to desirable and pleasant objects.⁵⁰ Similarly, aversion arises in response to unpleasant feelings and undesirable objects. Therefore, latent anger can be defined as the potential for anger, which becomes a psychological reaction to unpleasant feelings or undesirable objects.

III. COGITATIVE ANGER

The *Pāli* term *pariyuṭṭhāna*, which literally means “arising all around,” represents the active stage of defilements (*Karunaratne, Kilesa, EOB*), in contrast to the sense of “inactivity” associated with *anusaya*. *Padmasiri* describes it as a dormant level of the thought process.⁵¹ *Karunādāsa* interprets it as “going beyond.”⁵² According to the commentary, *pariyuṭṭhāna* literally means “arising and occupying,”⁵³ justifying its rendering as “obsession.”⁵⁴ More generally, the verb *pariyuṭṭhāti* is used to mean “becoming active” or “being occupied.”⁵⁵

In *Abhidhamma*, *pariyuṭṭhāna* is explained in relation to *anusaya* as the active forms of the seven latent defilements.⁵⁶ In the *Suttanta*, however, the term *pariyuṭṭhāna* also refers to defilements not included in the category of *anusaya*.⁵⁷ It frequently appears in connection with the arising of the five hindrances.⁵⁸ It is clear, however, that *pariyuṭṭhāna*, like *anusaya*, is used in

⁴⁹ *Abhi. II.* 213.

⁵⁰ *D. II.* 308; *M. III.* 800; *Abhi. II.* 112.

⁵¹ *Silva* (2014), p. 18.

⁵² *Karunādāsa* (2018), p. 255.

⁵³ *A. III.* 337.

⁵⁴ *Buddhaghosa* (1999), para. I, p.13.

⁵⁵ *Vin. II.* 277 – 89.

⁵⁶ *Abhi. II.* 383.

⁵⁷ *S. IV.* 240; *A. V.* 156 – 63.

⁵⁸ *M. I.* 323; *III.* 14; *S. V.* 121.

the *Pāli* texts specifically for the arising of mental defilements. The term itself implies the presence of hindrances and other unwholesome states of mind.⁵⁹ Thus, *pariyuṭṭhāna* can be understood as the arising of any mental defilement.

In the *Pāli* texts, the active stage of anger is expressed in many ways. It is often simply referred to as “becomes angry” (*byāpajjati*; *kujjhati*).⁶⁰ Sometimes, the adjective “angry” (*byāpanno*) is also used.⁶¹ In many cases, the cognitive stage is suggested by the expression “mind associated with hatred” (*sadosaṃ cittaṃ*).⁶² Occasionally, the term *pariyuṭṭhāna* itself or its derivatives are used in relation to anger. For instance: “mind seized by hatred” (*dosapariyuṭṭhitam cittaṃ*);⁶³ “dwells with the mind that is seized by ill will” (*byāpādapariyuṭṭhena cetasā viharati*); “dwells mostly with the mind that is seized by anger” (*kodhapariyuṭṭhitena cetasā bahulam viharati*). Sometimes, the expression “the mind that has followed anger” (*dosaparetena cittena*) is also used in conjunction with the mind seized by anger.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the arising of mental defilements, suggested by the term *pariyuṭṭhāna*, can be found in relation to almost all anger-related terms: arising of hatred (*dosa*), ill will (*byāpāda*), anger (*kodha*), and aversion (*paṭigha*).⁶⁵ According to this analysis, when a person is said to be angry, it refers to the mental level of anger.

In the *Pāli* texts, the active stage of anger is often expressed in terms of two kinds of wrong thoughts: the thought of ill will (*byāpāda vitakka*) and the thought of cruelty (*vihimsā vitakka*).⁶⁶ These thoughts are frequently explained as *saṅkappa*, particularly in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. In translation works, *saṅkappa* is rendered in various ways, such as “aspiration,” “intention,” “aim,” “thought,” or “thinking.” For example, in the *Dialogues of the Buddha*, “*sammā saṅkappa*” is mostly translated as “right aspiration,” though sometimes as “right intention.” In the *Book of the Kindred Sayings*, “right aim” is used, and in the *Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, the preferred translation is “right intention.” On the other hand, Venerable Nyanaponika (1962), Venerable Ñāṇamoli (Buddhaghosa, 1999), and Walshe (1996) have generally used the rendering “right thought” or “right thinking” in their works. Although *saṅkappa* can imply “intention” or “aim” in some contexts,⁶⁷ in the context of

⁵⁹ M. I. 323

⁶⁰ M. I. 266; A. I. 283.

⁶¹ A. V. 163.

⁶² D. II. 237.

⁶³ A. II. 285; *Abhi.* II. 141.

⁶⁴ S. III. 174.

⁶⁵ A. III. 285, V. 156; M. I. 323; S. III. 3.

⁶⁶ D. III. 225

⁶⁷ For example, in “*sabbe purentu saṅkappā*” (May all aspirations be fulfilled) (*Dhp* 127) and “*paduṭṭhamanasāṅkappo*” (defiled mental thought) (M. I. 21), ‘*saṅkappa*’ can be interpreted as ‘thought’, ‘aspiration’, or ‘intention’. Another example is in the *Apādāna Pāli* (i, p. 71), where there is a verse which reads: “*mama saṅkappamaññāya... mama dvāraṃ upāgami.*” Here a donor wishes to offer food to the Buddha and just makes a wish: “May the Great Sage

the Noble Eightfold Path,⁶⁸ it is synonymous with *vitakka* and is best translated as “thought” or “thinking.” The use of “intention” for *saṅkappa*, however, does not significantly alter the meaning, as intention is an integral part of the thought process.

Among the two kinds of hateful thoughts, the thought of ill will is a comparatively weaker form of anger. It is primarily mental in nature and is explained as a mental action.⁶⁹ The thought of cruelty, however, can become extremely violent in nature. Ill will generates desires for beings to be destroyed, killed, or wiped out of existence.⁷⁰ In contrast, the thought of cruelty involves both verbal and bodily elements. This distinction can be understood from the explanation of the two kinds of wrong thoughts in the *Vibhaṅga* (p.86).⁷¹ According to this *Abhidhamma* text, unlike the thoughts of ill will, which consist solely of a mental element, the ‘element of cruelty’ is explained as comprising both mental and behavioral aspects as follows:

Therein what is the element of cruelty (*vihiṃsā*)? The mentation, thinking, thought, fixation, focusing, application of the mind, wrong thought, associated with cruelty. This is called element of cruelty. Herein a certain one hurts (other) beings with the hand or with a clod or with a stick or with a sword or with a rope or with one thing or another; that which is similar, harassing, hurting, annoying, injuring, provoking, enraging, striking others. This is called element of cruelty.⁷²

Hateful thoughts play an important role in the development of dispositions related to anger. For instance, if one engages in hateful thoughts excessively, one is likely to develop a hateful temperament. In simple terms, this means that a person can be easily provoked to anger. This is due to the tendency of human thought to repeat itself and become more firmly established through repetition. This point is highlighted in the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*.⁷³ The *Sutta* emphasizes a very important nature of thoughts: whatever one thinks frequently, one’s mind inclines toward it. In other words, thoughts are psychologically significant in the formation of temperament or mental inclination. For instance, whenever one is angry or engages in hateful thoughts, one consolidates the tendency

come”. The Buddha knows his ‘*saṅkappa*’ and comes to the door. Here, it can be understood as both intention and thought without any change in meaning. See also D. III. 42.

⁶⁸ D. III. 180; It. 5.

⁶⁹ *Abhi.* II. 364.

⁷⁰ M. I. 287.

⁷¹ Here, they are explained as “elements” (*dhātu*). In the *Suttanta* also sometimes thoughts are explained as “elements” (A. III. 447).

⁷² *Abhi.* II. 86: *Tattha katamā vihiṃsādhātu? Vihiṃsāpaṭisaṃyutto takko vitakko...pe... micchāsankappo – ayaṃ vuccati “vihiṃsādhātu”.* *Idhekacco paṇinā vā leḍḍunā vā daṇḍena vā satthena vā rajjuyā vā aññataraññatarena satte viheṭheti, yā evarūpā heṭhanā viheṭhanā hiṃsanā vihiṃsanā rosanā virosanā parūpaghāto – ayaṃ vuccati “vihiṃsādhātu.”* (Thiṭṭhila (2010), p. 111).

⁷³ M. I. 15.

to become angry again. Seen from this viewpoint, openly expressing anger increases the likelihood of being angry again.

On the other hand, by restraining anger, one prevents the consolidation of the tendency to anger. Furthermore, the repetition of hateful thoughts may be one of the causes of the formation of hateful temperament. In this regard, Ledi Sayadaw states that the repetition of thought can make the latent stage stronger.⁷⁴ He suggests that hateful thoughts or mental states have the potential to strengthen the latent tendency to anger.

The active stage of anger can sometimes manifest as intentions to act. In the texts, the *Pāli* term most commonly used in relation to this is *ceteti*. For example, the intentions associated with a hateful mind are shown in passages like: “Because of hatred, a person who is angry intends (*ceteti*) to hurt oneself, hurt others, or hurt both.”⁷⁵ If the term *ceteti* is interpreted as ‘thinks,’ it can be understood that hatred gives rise to two kinds of wrong thoughts: the thought of cruelty (*byāpāda vitakka*) and the thought of violence (*vihiṃsā vitakka*). While the *Pāli* term *ceteti* primarily refers to intention, it can also be understood more generally as ‘thinks.’ Both interpretations are valid, as intention is an integral part of thought itself. According to *Abhidhamma*, intention is a universal mental state that arises with every moment of consciousness.

IV. MENTAL STATES ASSOCIATED WITH ANGER

According to the *Abhidhamma*, several unwholesome states of mind arise associated with anger. First, the hateful mind itself arises in two forms, differentiated by whether they arise spontaneously or not. One consideration in this regard is whether anger arises in response to external prompting.⁷⁶ The arising of anger with deliberate premonition is also called “prompted” (*asaṅkhārika*). If anger arises due to internal causes, without being instigated by external agents or deliberate premonition, it is considered “unprompted” (*asaṅkhārika*).⁷⁷ This type of anger may also be referred to as “spontaneous” anger.

Second, anger can arise in various forms and associate with several other distinct states of mind. In explaining this, Venerable Janakābhivamsa (2014, p. 44) categorizes hatred (*dosa*) into two types: active and passive. Active forms of hatred include grudging, abusing, quarrelling, fighting, killing, and planning to kill others, among others. On the other hand, passive forms of hatred include sorrow, grief, lamentation, depression, fear, and worry. For Venerable Janakābhivamsa, active anger has both mental and behavioral components, while passive anger has only a mental component. This analysis is based on the *Abhidhamma* explanation that, in all these states of mind, the mental root of hatred (*dosa*) operates in some form. In other words, there is something

⁷⁴ Ledi (2003), p. 342.

⁷⁵ S. IV. 339; A. I. 157.

⁷⁶ *Abhi. I. 2: Domanassasahagataṃ paṭighasampayuttaṃ asaṅkhārikamekaṃ, asaṅkhārikamekaṃ*. Also see CMOA (2016), p. 36.

⁷⁷ *Abhi. I. 299; Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 478, Abhi. I. 100 – 01.*

one strongly dislikes or has aversion to. Notably, the inclusion of fear in the category of mental states related to anger is significant. In *Abhidhamma*, fear is explained as a state of mind connected to hatred, as there is no need to fear something one does not dislike or hate.

Among the unwholesome mental states associated with hatred, three are particularly noteworthy: envy (*issā*), stinginess (*macchhariya*), and remorse (*kukkucca*).⁷⁸ These states are sometimes grouped together as part of an ‘anger-class’ of mental states. What this implies is that when a person experiences envy, stinginess, or remorse, some form of hatred is also present. According to *Abhidhamma*, these three mental states are mutually exclusive, meaning they never arise together. For instance, if envy arises, the other two do not.⁷⁹ Anger, however, can arise independently of these mental states, and to varying degrees, it can arise with each of the three separately. From this analysis, it can be concluded that there are four possible permutations of consciousness pertaining to anger.

In general parlance, stinginess is often associated with greed (*lobha*). A similar suggestion can be found in the *Pāli* texts as well. For example, it is stated: “In a generation obsessed by the stain of stinginess, I dwell at home with my heart free from the stain of stinginess, freely generous and open-handed.”⁸⁰ According to commentary, stinginess appears to be linked not only to greed but also to hatred. It is said that the characteristic of stinginess is the inability to bear sharing things with others.⁸¹ Here, “not to bear” suggests the presence of aversion, while “sharing” points to generosity, the opposite of greed.

The issue of placing *macchhariya* in the hatred class, however, is not addressed in the commentaries, nor is it found in the *Abhidhamma* works extant today. Instead, support is given to the inclusion of stinginess in the anger class. For example, it is stated: “It partakes in the characteristic of aversion and involves resistance to sharing one’s belongings with others.”⁸² Explaining based on the roots of mind, Venerable Nārada, in the same vein, says that *macchhariya* cannot arise in consciousness rooted in attachment because there is an element of aversion in it, rather than greed: “*Macchhariya* is a kind of aversion to another’s vying with oneself.”⁸³ From the perspective of *Abhidhamma*, *macchhariya* is included in the anger class mainly because hatred is a co-nascent state of *macchhariya*. While stinginess may be caused by *lobha*, at the actual instance when *macchhariya* arises, it is associated with hatred. In simple terms, one is uncharitable toward the recipient whom one dislikes.

According to *Suttanta*, greed (*lobha*) can also give rise to *issā* and *macchhariya*. For example, in the *Sakkapañha Sutta*, it is stated that *issā* and *macchhariya* are

⁷⁸ *Abhi.* I. 10; CMOA (2016), p. 96.

⁷⁹ CMOA (2016), p. 96 – 9.

⁸⁰ A. II. 253.

⁸¹ *Abhi.* I. 299; Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 478. See also Gorkom (2010), p. 174.

⁸² CMOA (2016), p. 96.

⁸³ Nārada (1956), p. 147.

the main causes of conflict in the world. The root cause of *issā* and *macchariya* is the propensity of human beings to be partial, prejudiced, and biased on various grounds. These prejudices are further conditioned by thoughts connected with craving (*taṇhā*), wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), and conceit (*māna*).⁸⁴ According to *Abhidhamma*, these three mental states arise with greed-rooted (*lobha-mūla*) consciousnesses.⁸⁵ Thus, it can be said that *issā* and *macchariya* arise through the interplay of craving, hatred, wrong view, and conceit.

As already explained above, there is one more noteworthy mental state associated with anger that has implications for managing it: unpleasant feeling. First, a hateful mind is always associated with painful feeling (*dukkhā vedanā*). In the *Suttanta*, this is indicated in statements such as, “being obsessed by ill will, one lives painfully”.⁸⁶ Additionally, a hateful mind is often a reaction to painful feeling. In this way, the reaction to unpleasant feeling creates a vicious cycle, making it difficult to halt the proliferation of anger.

V. BEHAVIORAL ANGER

When the active stage of defilements leads to actions of body or speech, these are said to be at the stage of transgression (*vītikkama*).⁸⁷ Literally, the term *vītikkama* means “going beyond” or “crossing a certain boundary”.⁸⁸ For instance, one violates the King’s order (*āṇaṃ vītikkamati*) (Mil, p. 227). When used in the context of moral practice, it refers to the transgression of moral precepts.⁸⁹ It is often used to describe the violation of the moral “boundary” that one has undertaken to observe.⁹⁰ To support this point, moral virtue itself is explained as having the sense of “non-transgression” (*avītikkamaṭṭhena*).⁹¹ Thus, the term *vītikkama* suggests that verbal or bodily actions caused by defilements are unwholesome in nature and transgress some form of moral precept. From a psychological viewpoint, Padmasiri refers to this as a level of impulsive action.⁹² In simple terms, from a Buddhist perspective, the transgressive stage of anger involves the violation of ethical norms.

The point that a hateful mind instigates a person to engage in various verbal and bodily actions, which are unwholesome in nature, is highlighted in many texts. For instance, it is said that hatred itself is an unwholesome state, and whatever actions one performs under the influence of hatred – whether by body, speech, or mind—are also unwholesome.⁹³ This point is elaborated

⁸⁴ M. II. 220; 31.

⁸⁵ CMOA (2016), p. 79.

⁸⁶ A. I. 202.

⁸⁷ Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 9.

⁸⁸ A. III. 227.

⁸⁹ M. II. 241; A. IV. 66; Paṭi. I. 43.

⁹⁰ D. II. 115.

⁹¹ Paṭi. I. 225.

⁹² Silva (2014), p. 18.

⁹³ A. I. 201: *Yadapi, bhikkhave, doso tadapi akusalamūlaṃ; yadapi duṭṭho abhisankharoti kāyena vācāya manasā tadapi akusalaṃ*. According to this Pali, hatred as a root seems to be

more specifically in the *Kesamutti Sutta*: “When the mind of a person with a ‘hateful nature’ [hateful temperament] is overwhelmed and inundated by hate, [he] may kill beings, steal, and engage in adultery, lie, or even make others do these things - actions that cause harm and suffering for a long time.”⁹⁴

According to Buddhist analysis, intentional verbal and bodily actions originate first in the mind. For example, the Buddha says in the *Nibbedhika Sutta*: “Monks, I call intention the *kamma*; for one intends and does action - by body, by speech, and by mind.”⁹⁵ Here, intention is shown as the cause of even mental actions. Furthermore, the primary motivating factors for unwholesome actions are greed, hatred, and delusion. Ethically, these are also called unwholesome roots, and they lead to unwholesome actions.⁹⁶ This means that actions of body or speech done under the influence of these three roots are unwholesome. Additionally, engaging in thoughts caused by these roots is also unwholesome.

According to *Abhidhamma*, delusion is a co-nascent state of anger. This means that when one is in the grip of anger, one’s reasoning and intelligence are impaired. This point is suggested in the *Suttanta* through passages such as, “When obsessed by hatred, one does not know what is in one’s welfare, others’ welfare, or both persons’ welfare.”⁹⁷ An angry person does not know what is beneficial; one who is obsessed by hatred is in blinding darkness.⁹⁸ Furthermore, greed can also cause hatred to arise when the object of greed is either unobtained or destroyed.

The point that anger can cause mental action indicates that if anger is not restrained, it leads to the proliferation of hateful thoughts, which can potentially result in unwholesome actions of speech and body. In this sense, transgressive anger can be called “behavioral anger” or the “action stage of anger.” As noted above, the term “action” also refers to mental actions in the form of thoughts and intentions. In relation to the doctrine of *kamma*, actions are classified into three categories: mental, bodily, and verbal. From this viewpoint, hateful thoughts are mental actions, while behavioral anger refers to actions of speech and body. From the perspective of the three levels of anger, mental action belongs to the cogitative stage, while bodily and verbal actions belong to the transgressive stage.

One noteworthy reason behind a person’s inability to restrain unwholesome actions of speech and body is the weakness of the mental ability to abstain from such actions. According to *Abhidhamma*, the ability to refrain from verbal and bodily actions is an inherent human capacity. Three states of mind prevent transgression of moral precepts through speech and body; these are

explained as the cause of ill will, the mental action as it is mentioned in the texts.

⁹⁴ A. I. 190.

⁹⁵ A. III. 415.

⁹⁶ A. I. 201.

⁹⁷ A. I. 158.

⁹⁸ *It.* 84.

called “abstinences” (*virati*).⁹⁹ The inability to restrain the proliferation of hateful thoughts and abstain from overt actions caused by anger is due to the weakness of these abstinences. Abstinence itself is threefold: occasional abstinence (*sampatta*), moral abstinence (*samādāna*), and Noble abstinence (*samuccheda*).¹⁰⁰ One may occasionally abstain from expressing anger due to considerations such as one’s social position; one may abstain because one has taken moral precepts; or one may abstain because the disposition to aversion has been uprooted by the Noble Path.

If the latent tendency of anger has not been abandoned, cogitative anger arises whenever conditions are favorable. If hateful thoughts are not restrained, one will then engage in actions of speech and mind (Nett-a., p.249). This mechanism is clearly explained in the *Sanidāna Sutta*, which states that the element of ill will causes the perception of ill will.¹⁰¹ The perception of ill will leads to hateful thoughts, which in turn cause hateful desire, restlessness, and quests. Ultimately, these mental states result in wrong actions of body, speech, and mind.

VI. WORKINGS OF ANGER AT THREE STAGES

The *Mahāniddeśa* (p.215) and its commentary (*Nidd I-a.ii*, p. 321 - 322) succinctly explain the relationship between the three stages of anger. Although the concept of three stages is not explicitly used, the progression of anger from a mere disturbance of the mind to extreme physical violence is well illustrated. Initially, anger is purely a mental event; it creates a disturbance in the mind but does not manifest in facial expressions. This stands in contrast to the Western notion that emotions are inherently physical and can be studied solely in terms of physical events.¹⁰² This explanation not only demonstrates how anger can begin as a purely mental event but also how it later manifests in speech and bodily behavior.

Mahāniddeśa and its commentary explain that anger may initially cause physical changes, such as facial distortions, but without affecting the vocal cords. This means that while the mind may be disturbed, the intention to speak or the physical readiness to speak has not yet appeared. In the next stage, anger begins to affect the vocal cords, but harsh speech is not yet emitted. This indicates that one can still restrain oneself from speaking harshly. Sometimes, harsh words are spoken, but there is no desire to harm others physically. At this point, anger has manifested in verbal behavior, yet one is still able to contain it. In the following stage, anger may lead a person to pick up a weapon, though they may not actually use it. In other cases, a person may raise a weapon but refrain from striking. Sometimes, anger may cause someone to strike with a stick or sword, but without the intent to kill. At its most extreme, anger can lead a person to kill others or commit suicide. These stages of anger illustrate not only how latent

⁹⁹ *Vism.* II. 92; *D. I.* 304; CMOA (2016), p. 88; Rewata-dhamma (2004), p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ *Abhi.* I. 103.

¹⁰¹ *S. II.* 151.

¹⁰² See Premasiri, “emotion” in EOB.

anger can first manifest as a mental state and then later in behavior, but also how this process can be halted at any point.

The nature of the three levels of anger, as explained above, is clearly illustrated in the story of Vedehikā and her servant in the *Kakacūpama Sutta*.¹⁰³ Vedehikā, a householder known for her amiable and gentle nature, had a female servant named Kālī, who was obedient and skilled in her work. One day, Kālī decided to test whether her mistress' reputation for kindness was genuine. She purposely woke up late, and when Vedehikā discovered this, she became angry and scolded her. This represents the mental and verbal manifestation of anger. When Kālī performed her duties well, Vedehikā showed no signs of anger. However, at the slightest shortcoming, her anger surfaced. On the second occasion, when Kālī woke up late again, she was harshly scolded. On the third occasion, Kālī slept in much later than before, and this time Vedehikā physically beat her. This demonstrates the manifestation of physical violence fueled by anger.

Kālī observed firsthand that her mistress' anger only surfaced when she disobeyed or failed to meet expectations. The Buddha points out that in the same way, a monk may appear gentle if no one provokes him. It is only when someone utters unpleasant speech or provokes him that his true nature can be tested. In other words, the latent potential for anger becomes evident only when a person is provoked, and the intensity of anger reveals itself in both mind and behavior.

VII. DEALING WITH THREE LEVELS OF ANGER

The stratification of anger into three stages is significant in that it provides a crucial strategy regarding the preventive and curative methods of dispelling anger. It means that in dealing with anger, the antidotes and remedies should be sought at three levels. This was also perhaps one of the reasons in commentarial texts for stratifying defilements into three stages. For instance, in the *Visuddhimagga*,¹⁰⁴ Ācariya Buddhaghosa suggests this by saying that the latent stage should be dealt with by applying wisdom (*paññā*); the thought stage by applying concentration (*samādhi*), and the action stage by undertaking moral precepts (*sīla*).¹⁰⁵ In the context of the present study too, the practice of virtue, concentration, and wisdom can be applied to manage behavioral anger, cognitive anger, and latent anger respectively. Since virtue, concentration, and wisdom form three trainings (*sikkhā*) in the doctrine of the Noble Eightfold Path, it can be said that the practices alluded by the Noble Eightfold Path can be utilized in dispelling different levels of anger. There are also, however, methods which are helpful in dispelling anger, but not explicitly suggested by the three trainings.

The stratification of anger into three stages - latent, cogitative, and transgressive - holds great significance as it provides a clear framework for

¹⁰³ M. I. 125.

¹⁰⁴ *Vism.* I. 5. B.

¹⁰⁵ Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 9.

both preventing and curing anger. By understanding anger in these stages, one can apply antidotes and remedies at each level to manage it effectively. This stratification is likely rooted in commentarial texts as a means of addressing defilements in stages. In the *Visuddhimagga*, Ācariya Buddhaghosa suggests a method for dealing with different stages of defilements: the latent stage should be addressed through wisdom (*paññā*), the thought stage through concentration (*samādhi*), and the action stage through the observance of moral precepts (*sīla*).¹⁰⁶

In the present context, the practices of virtue, concentration, and wisdom align well with the management of the three levels of anger. Specifically, virtue can be used to manage behavioral anger (transgressive stage), concentration can be applied to cognitive anger (thought stage), and wisdom is crucial for addressing latent anger. These practices form the Three Trainings (*sikkhā*) within the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path and can thus be utilized to dispel anger at each of its stages. Furthermore, there are other methods to address anger that may not explicitly fall under the three trainings but still play an important role in anger management. These methods can complement the Eightfold Path's teachings and offer additional tools for cultivating patience, mindfulness, and compassion.

The most effective strategy for preventing behavioral manifestation of anger is to practice wholesome verbal and bodily conduct. This is emphasized in the commentaries, which state, "One restrains anger by restraining bodily and verbal misconduct by practicing morality".¹⁰⁷ The importance of kind and harmless speech is underscored in Buddhist practice, both for monastics and lay practitioners. For example, when a monk intends to rebuke another monk, he must first establish five considerations in his mind: he speaks at the appropriate time, speaks truthfully, speaks kindly, speaks in a way that is beneficial, and speaks with amity rather than with hatred.¹⁰⁸ This approach ensures that the monk does not disturb the one being addressed.¹⁰⁹

Ācariya Buddhaghosa highlights the role of proper speech in dispelling anger, noting that cultivating kind and amiable speech can be particularly effective in managing both thought and latent stages of anger.¹¹⁰ By engaging in wholesome and compassionate speech, one not only prevents the outward expression of anger but also reduces the internal conditions that give rise to it, thereby addressing anger at its deeper mental roots.

Verbal anger can be abandoned through the cultivation of right speech, which is one of the key components of the Noble Eightfold Path. Right speech involves abstaining from four types of wrong speech: telling lies, harsh speech,

¹⁰⁶ Buddhaghosa (1999), p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ *Sn* 1. 9.

¹⁰⁸ *D.* III. 236; *M.* I. 126.

¹⁰⁹ *A.* III. 196.

¹¹⁰ *D.* III. 779.

malicious speech, and vain talk.¹¹¹ These guidelines form the moral framework related to speech in Buddhist practice. By avoiding harsh and malicious speech, one directly addresses anger at the verbal level. Moreover, lies and vain speech may arise from anger or hatred towards someone or something, further emphasizing the connection between speech and anger.

Similarly, physical actions that harm others are the bodily manifestations of anger. In the practice of the “nine precepts” (*navāṅga-uposatha*), there is a focus on preventing the expression of anger even at the mental level. The ninth precept, which is cultivating amity, is added to the eight basic precepts.¹¹² Monastic codes also contain specific precepts aimed at curbing actions born of anger. For example, monks are instructed not to raise a hand to strike another monk,¹¹³ thereby preventing anger from turning into physical aggression.

Furthermore, among the ten unwholesome courses of action,¹¹⁴ actions such as killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, telling lies, uttering malicious speech, harsh speech, and vain talk are categorized as behavioral misconduct. The first three fall under misconduct of the body, while the latter four are categorized as misconduct of speech. Anger, whether directly or indirectly, can lead to any of these unwholesome actions.¹¹⁵ From this perspective, one of the main goals of ethical practice is to prevent the manifestation of anger in both speech and bodily actions.

The cognitive level of anger, which involves hateful thoughts, can be addressed in various ways. The most significant method is to cultivate thoughts that are the direct opposites of anger. According to the teachings on right thought, this strategy involves fostering “thoughts of amity” (*abyāpāda vitakka*) and “thoughts of harmlessness” (*avihiṃsā vitakka*). In the context of the Noble Eightfold Path, these two thoughts are often collectively referred to as *saṅkappa*, with the specific terms *abyāpāda-saṅkappa* and *avihiṃsā-saṅkappa* denoting non-hatred and non-cruelty, respectively.

Literally, the term *abyāpāda* can be translated as “non-hatred,” “amity,” or “loving-kindness.” Meanwhile, *avihiṃsā* is typically translated as “harmlessness,” opposing cruelty or harm.¹¹⁶ The negative prefix *na* in *Pāli* also indicates an opposition to something, so *avihiṃsā* can be understood as “non-harming thoughts,” or simply the opposite of destructive thoughts. In essence, both *abyāpāda* and *avihiṃsā* can be seen as equating to amity (loving-kindness) and compassion, respectively.

The important point in the context of managing anger is that these two thoughts counteract the two main forms of hateful thinking - thoughts of ill will

¹¹¹ D. II. 312.

¹¹² A. IV. 388.

¹¹³ Vin. IV. 147.

¹¹⁴ CMOA (2016), p. 207.

¹¹⁵ Abhi. I. 102; CMOA (2016), p. 208.

¹¹⁶ Nārada (1956), p. 245.

and thoughts of cruelty. In the practice of the *brahmavihāra* (sublime abodes), cultivating these thoughts is integral to developing the virtues of amity and compassion, which serve as antidotes to anger and hatred. By actively engaging in these positive thoughts, one can prevent the rise of anger at the cognitive stage.

As explained above, from a psychological perspective, *byāpāda vitakka* refers to a weaker form of hateful thoughts compared to *vihiṃsā vitakka*. When angry thoughts are not controlled, they give rise to destructive thoughts (*vihiṃsā vitakka*). It is this kind of thought that manifests as aggressive verbal or bodily actions. When destructive thoughts appear, one wants to harm others or oneself. Thus, the preventive strategy in curbing aggressive behavior is to remove the hateful thoughts before they develop into destructive thoughts. The two kinds of benevolent thoughts also help in preventing anger. In this regard, the cultivation of mindfulness of thoughts is very useful.

As explained above, from a psychological perspective, *byāpāda vitakka* refers to a milder form of hateful thoughts compared to *vihiṃsā vitakka*. When angry thoughts are left unchecked, they can evolve into more destructive thoughts (*vihiṃsā vitakka*). These destructive thoughts are the ones that typically manifest in aggressive verbal or bodily actions. When such thoughts arise, the intention is to harm others or oneself, signaling the development of fully-fledged anger.

The key preventive strategy, then, is to address these thoughts before they escalate into harmful, destructive ones. By intervening at the level of milder hateful thoughts, one can prevent them from evolving into more intense and destructive manifestations of anger. Additionally, the cultivation of benevolent thoughts, like those of amity and compassion (*abyāpāda* and *avihiṃsā*), plays a crucial role in preventing the development of anger. These positive thoughts counteract and reduce the influence of ill will and cruelty.

In this process, mindfulness of thoughts becomes especially valuable. By being mindful, one can become aware of the rise of hateful thoughts and intervene before they have a chance to grow into more destructive or aggressive forms of anger. Mindfulness helps in recognizing and halting these mental patterns early, thus preventing the harmful outcomes that might otherwise follow.

The Buddha's emphasis on using wholesome thoughts to counter unwholesome thoughts is a central strategy in the cultivation of mental discipline and the cessation of negative emotions such as anger. This approach is mentioned in various places throughout the scriptures. For example, it is stated that in someone who has developed right thoughts, wrong thoughts become weakened and less influential.¹¹⁷ This highlights the transformative power of cultivating wholesome, virtuous thoughts in the face of negative mental states.

The *Dhātu Sutta* further elaborates this idea by describing three kinds of

¹¹⁷ M. III. 76; A. V. 215.

right thoughts that serve to counter three kinds of wrong thoughts.¹¹⁸ Similarly, the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* points out that all thoughts can be divided into two categories: wholesome and unwholesome and encourages the cultivation of wholesome thoughts to eliminate unwholesome ones.¹¹⁹ This division offers a clear framework for understanding how mental states can either support or obstruct one's path to enlightenment.

A more specific application of this principle can be found in the *Vitakka Sutta*, where the Buddha recommends developing thoughts of amity (*abyāpāda*) to overcome thoughts of ill will, and thoughts of compassion (*karuṇā*) to overcome thoughts of cruelty.¹²⁰ These specific antidotes to negative thoughts are crucial for cultivating a mind free from harmful emotions. Furthermore, the *Peṭakopadesa* (Peṭ., p. 160) reinforces that thoughts of amity work directly as antidotes to thoughts of ill will, showing how the cultivation of positive mental states can lead to the reduction or cessation of anger.

In the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*, the Buddha also points out a very significant characteristic of the mind: thoughts tend to repeat and create a mental bent.¹²¹ If one engages in a certain kind of thought, one creates a mental inclination associated with that thought. The relevant passage from the *Sutta* is as follows: "Whatever a monk thinks frequently and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind; if he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of ill will, he abandons the thought of amity and generates much ill will; his mind bends toward thoughts of ill will."¹²²

This passage not only warns against the formation of a mental bent toward ill will but also points out the remedy. If one engages in thoughts of amity, one creates the mental bent of amity. Furthermore, by doing so, the thoughts of ill will are abandoned. On the other hand, if one does not restrain oneself and frequently engages in thoughts of ill will, one abandons thoughts of amity. This means that by developing thoughts of amity, one can remove thoughts of ill will, and by cultivating thoughts of compassion, one can remove thoughts of cruelty.

In the texts, the mind is often classified based on the presence of wholesome or unwholesome roots. This classification of roots also seems useful in understanding the antidotes to unwholesome roots. From this viewpoint, Jayasuriya suggests that by knowing to which class a thought belongs, one can address its root.¹²³ The antidote to greed is non-greed (*alobha*), to anger is non-anger (*adosa*), and to delusion is non-delusion (*amoha*). Here, non-

¹¹⁸ A. III. 447.

¹¹⁹ M. I. 114.

¹²⁰ A. III. 446.

¹²¹ M. I. 162 – 163.

¹²² *Yaññadeva, bhikkhave, bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, tathā tathā nati hoti cetaso. Byāpādavittakkaṃ ce, bhikkhave, bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti, pahāsi abyāpādavittakkaṃ, byāpādavittakkaṃ bahulamakāsi, tassa taṃ byāpādavittakkāya cittaṃ namati.*

¹²³ Jayasuriya (2016), p. 100.

hatred can refer to both the absence of hatred and its opposite states, such as amity and compassion. From this perspective, the method outlined in the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* can be understood as a way of weakening unwholesome roots by strengthening wholesome ones.

One of the paradigms of right thoughts that help dispel cogitative anger is the application of wise reflection (*yoniso-manasikāra*). The scope of wise reflection is broad. In simple terms, within the context of this study, it refers to the exercise of attention or modes of reflection that assist in preventing or dispelling anger. The reflections encompassed by the broad definition of “wise reflection” include practices such as reflecting on the ownership of *kamma*, considering the harm of anger, contemplating the welfare generated by thoughts of amity and compassion, and so on.

About right thought, the role of right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) is also significant. The *Mahācattārīsaka Sutta* states that knowing wrong thought as wrong thought and right thought as right thought constitutes right view.¹²⁴ It is also mentioned that right thought should be supported by right effort, right mindfulness, and right view. In this regard, right mindfulness plays a key role in abandoning wrong thoughts and cultivating right ones. Furthermore, right effort itself refers to the effort made to abandon wrong thoughts.¹²⁵ Thus, all the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are integral.

Most importantly, the cultivation of mindfulness helps in curbing both behavioral and cognitive anger. It is important not only as a preventive but also as a curative method. Among the mindfulness practices, contemplation of the mind (*cittānupassanā*) and contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*) are particularly significant.¹²⁶ In the contemplation of the mind, the key point is recognizing the presence of anger. In other words, when anger arises in the mind, one should be aware that it is present. Similarly, contemplation of feelings becomes crucial because painful feelings often trigger anger. If one can be mindful of painful feelings, it is possible to prevent aversion.

Cultivating right concentration (*samādhi*) also appears to be a possible method of dispelling anger. One of the primary benefits of cultivating right concentration is the suppression of the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*). In the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, it is said that to dispel hatred, one must cultivate the absorption stages of concentration.¹²⁷ In Buddhist meditation, two approaches are shown to develop concentration. In tranquility meditation (*samatha-bhāvanā*), the concentration levels of access (*upacāra*) and absorption concentration (*appanā*) are capable of suppressing hindrance.¹²⁸ The momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), attained through insight

¹²⁴ M. III. 72.

¹²⁵ M. III. 73.

¹²⁶ D. II. 236 - 237.

¹²⁷ A. III. 557.

¹²⁸ Gunaratana (1980), p. 81.

meditation, also suppresses hindrances.¹²⁹ This momentary concentration is not disturbed by hindrances and keeps the mind stable, much like absorption (*appito viya*).¹³⁰ There is no significant difference in concentration and stability between absorption concentration and momentary concentration.¹³¹ Since anger is one of the hindrances, the cultivation of concentration serves as an effective method for dealing with anger.

One of the noteworthy psychological effects of attaining a deeper level of concentration is that the mind becomes joyful.¹³² Since the joy and happiness born of concentration are opposed to unpleasant feelings, they can be an effective way to deal with anger. When a person is happy, they do not become angry easily. Thus, as anger is a response to unpleasant feelings, joy and happiness become crucial tools. According to commentary, the five hindrances are countered by the five *jhāna* factors. In this analysis, each of the five *jhāna* factors is explained as suppressing one of the hindrances, with the hindrance of anger being opposed by joy (*pīti*). “Joy (*pīti*) is the opposite of ill will” (*pīti byāpādaṣṣa paṭipakkho*).¹³³ From this perspective, it may also be possible to say that joy and happiness derived from other wholesome activities can similarly mitigate anger.

Joy and happiness may also arise when one perceives or obtains pleasurable five cords of sense objects. However, this kind of happiness does not seem to help in dispelling anger. The joy and happiness derived from sensual pleasures condition further craving for them, and when they are not obtained, perceived to be unobtainable, or recollected as unobtained, aversion and painful feelings arise. According to the *Kīṭāgiri Sutta*, only the pleasant feelings that lead to the increase of wholesome states and the decrease of unwholesome states are helpful.¹³⁴ Feelings that cause wholesome states to decline and unwholesome states to increase are not helpful.

As mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga*, the method that most directly affects the latent level of anger is the insight into the true nature of formations. The insight related to the comprehension of the characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and the absence of self appears to help in several ways. First, at a deeper level, not understanding the impermanent nature of things is itself a cause of anger. In the *Nakulapitu Sutta*, a significant relationship between the notion of self and emotional distress is highlighted.¹³⁵ It is said that the change

¹²⁹ Mahāsi (2008), p. 86; Gunaratana (2009), p. 152: “*Samathayānikassa hi upacārapanāppabhedam samādhim itarassa khaṇikasamādhim, ubhayesampi vimokkhamukhattayaṃ vinā na kadāci pi lokuttarādhigamo sambhavati.*” See also Mahāsi Sayadaw, 2008, p.86.

¹³⁰ *Vism.mṭ.i*, p.131 B: *Sopi hi ārammaṇe nirantaram ekākāreṇa pavattamāno paṭipakkhena anabhibhūto appito viya cittam niccalaṃ ṭhāpeti.*

¹³¹ Mahāsi (1993), pp.102, 145

¹³² *D. I.* 37.

¹³³ *Vism. I.* 137.

¹³⁴ *M. I.* 475.

¹³⁵ *S. III.* 3.

and alteration of feeling do not elicit emotional distress if one does not identify with the feeling as 'self' or as one's possession. The states of emotional distress, such as sorrow, lamentation, suffering, displeasure, and grief, which arise from experiencing painful feelings, increase one's tendency toward aversion: "When one is touched by a painful feeling, one sorrows, grieves, and laments, weeping and beating the breast, losing self-control (*sammohaṃ āpajjati*), then the tendency to aversion becomes dormant."¹³⁶

The cultivation of higher dwellings (*brahma-vihāra*) is another practice that can be used to abandon anger. For instance, this point is highlighted in the *Paṭhama-āghātaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*.¹³⁷ These practices also have the potential to affect anger at the level of latency. The cultivation of higher dwellings is also significant in the restraint of behavioral anger. This point can be inferred from the *Milindapañha* (Mil, p. 394),¹³⁸ where the practice of amity is presented as a method to prevent anger. In this text, Venerable Nāgasena compares amity to a medicine, a kind of vaccine, to be "applied to the mind" to prevent the arising of anger. He gives the example of a mongoose going out to catch a snake. Before going out, it covers its body with an antidote to protect it from the poison it may encounter. This suggests that the practice of amity prevents the arising of anger.

Although cognitive anger is presented above as causing behavioral anger, according to Buddhist analysis, all three levels of anger are closely interrelated. Intentional actions of speech and body are caused by the mind. By engaging in actions driven by anger, one not only reinforces and strengthens the psychological disposition toward aversion but also accentuates the frequency with which thought processes related to anger arise in the mind. For example, by becoming constantly angry or expressing angry behavior, one reinforces the latent disposition of anger and creates an environment for the frequent arising of hateful thoughts. This relationship between thought and behavior is illustrated by the example of washing two hands: "Wisdom purifies virtue, and virtue purifies wisdom."¹³⁹

The causal relationship between three levels of defilements has been succinctly stated by Premasiri thus: The base of unwholesome emotional and motivational traits become strengthened by the constant repetition of patterns of behaviour which accompany their expression. On the one hand, a behavioral change at the level of overt expression of a person's emotional nature becomes necessary in order to weaken or eliminate the unwholesome emotions. On the other hand, as long as a person's motivational and emotional constitution is unwholesome, his overt behavior responses also tend to be unwholesome.

In this passage, Premasiri highlights the role played by overt verbal and bodily behavior in the enhancement of one's tendencies towards certain

¹³⁶ D. III. 285.

¹³⁷ A. III. 185; M. I. 424; M. III. 140.

¹³⁸ Davids (1894), p. 329.

¹³⁹ D. I. 124.

emotional and motivational traits. Based upon this observation, it can be said that one may either enhance or eliminate the mental tendency to anger by either engaging or abstaining from certain behavior patterns. This means that actions play a very important role in the consolidation of tendencies and thought processes. Furthermore, although the tendency to aversion is latent in all ordinary human beings, it is through the thought and behavior patterns that it gains strength. This is also perhaps the mechanism through which hateful temperament develops in a person.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper examined anger through the framework of three levels of defilements: latent (*anusaya*), activated (*pariyuṭṭhāna*), and transgressive (*vīṭikkama*). Latent anger refers to the inherent human tendency to become angry, which is often triggered by painful feelings or unpleasant objects associated with such feelings. This latent tendency is object-specific, meaning it persists toward certain individuals or objects and resurfaces when these are encountered or recalled. If unchecked, latent anger can escalate into hateful thoughts, intentions, and aggressive verbal or physical behavior.

The three levels of anger are interconnected, with each stage influencing the others. The persistence of latent anger increases the likelihood of its activation, while indulging in hateful thoughts or behaviors reinforces the latent tendency. To counteract this cycle, cultivating wholesome mental states such as kindness, compassion, and mindfulness is essential. Practices like mindfulness, concentration, and joy are particularly effective in creating an amiable mindset and reducing anger.

The stratification of anger into latent, activated, and transgressive stages provides a clear framework for understanding its mechanics and developing strategies to address it. Latent anger represents the potential for anger to arise, akin to the sound produced by a lute under favorable conditions. From a psychological perspective, this latent tendency is an inherent aspect of human nature, and its presence indicates that anger has not been fully uprooted. The activated stage involves anger manifesting as malevolent thoughts, intentions, or a hostile state of mind, while the transgressive stage refers to anger expressed through harmful speech or actions that breach ethical precepts.

Painful feelings and perceptions of undesirable objects are the primary triggers of anger. Painful feelings, in particular, provoke an impulsive rejection, leading to anger. Similarly, objects associated with pain - whether through personal experience or social conditioning - can activate anger. However, subjective factors such as mood, perception, and judgment play a significant role in determining whether anger arises. For instance, a person in a pleasant state of mind may not react angrily to situations that would otherwise provoke them.

Several factors contribute to the failure to prevent anger from escalating. A lack of mindfulness, especially regarding feelings and intentions, is a key factor. Without mindfulness, one cannot recognize the onset of anger or restrain its expression. Ethical principles and moral precepts are also crucial,

as they provide a framework for restraining harmful speech and actions. These practices are closely linked to the cultivation of mindfulness and sublime states, which together strengthen one's ability to manage anger.

From a Buddhist perspective, addressing anger requires strategies that target all three levels. The practice of sublime dwellings (*brahmavihāras*), such as loving-kindness and compassion, is particularly effective, as it counteracts anger at every stage. Serenity meditation and higher concentration practices also help by generating positive mental states like joy, which serve as antidotes to anger. Mindfulness plays a preventive role by enabling awareness of painful feelings and unpleasant objects before they trigger anger. By cultivating mindfulness, one can recognize and dispel anger as soon as it arises, preventing it from escalating.

Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
A-a	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abhi	<i>Abhidhamma-piṭaka</i>
Abhi.i	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>
Abhi.ii	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
Abhi-s	<i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i> (Burmese edition from CSCD)
Abhi-a.i	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā (Aṭṭhasālinī)</i>
Abhi-a.ii	<i>Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā (Sammohavinodanī)</i>
Abhi-a.iii	<i>Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abhi-mṭ	<i>Abhidhamma-mūlaṭikā</i> (Burmese edition from CSCD)
Kacc.	<i>Kaccāyana Byākaraṇa</i>
It	<i>Itivuttaka</i>
It-a	<i>Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā</i>
D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
D-a	<i>Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Sumaṅgalavilāsini)</i>
D-ṭ	<i>Dīghanikāya-ṭīkā (Līnatthapakāsini)</i>
D-abhnṭ	<i>Dīghanikāya-abhinavaṭīkā</i> (Burmese edition from CSCD)
Dhp-a	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Nidd I	<i>Mahāniddesa</i>
Nidd-a I	<i>Mahāniddesa-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Nett-a	<i>Nettipakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Paṭi	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Paṭi-a	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā (Saddhammapakāsini)</i>
Peṭ	<i>Peṭakopadesa</i>
M	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
M-a	<i>Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā (Papañcasūdanī)</i>
Mogg	<i>Moggallāna Byākaraṇa</i>
M-ṭ	<i>Majjhimanikāya-ṭīkā (Līnatthapakāsini)</i>
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>

Vin	<i>Vinayaṭṭaka</i>
Vin.ii	<i>Pācittiya Pāḷi</i>
Vin.iv	<i>Cūlavagga Pāḷi</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga (Burmese edition of CSCD)</i>
Vism-mhṭ	<i>Visuddhimagga-mahāṭikā (Burmese edition of CSCD)</i>
S	<i>Saṃyuttanikāya</i>
Sn-a	<i>Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā</i>
CMOA	Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma
PD	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> by Ledi Sayādaw (Burmese edition of CSCD)
PED	PTS Pāli-English Dictionary
POP	Path of Purification (Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli)

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THE WAY TO OVERCOME RESENTMENT (ĀGHĀTA) WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ĀGHĀTAPAṬIVINAYA SUTTA IN AṄGUTTARA NIKĀYA

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze and present ways to overcome resentment (*āghāta*) within oneself based on the teachings of the Buddha and his disciples, particularly through the practice of meditation. It focuses on four main aspects: understanding resentment, exploring the teachings of the Buddha and his great disciples on addressing resentment, practicing meditation, and recognizing the benefits of overcoming resentment. Special emphasis is placed on the *Pāli* texts, commentaries, and sub-commentaries. The study employs analytical and explanatory methods, primarily data collection, classification, and analysis. This paper aims to confirm the true origin and importance of wisdom and reveal the profound value of practicing *vipassanā* meditation. It highlights the substantial benefits of meditation practice in daily life as guided by Theravāda Buddhism. Consequently, a meditator who understands resentment, its causes, its disadvantages, and the benefits of overcoming it will achieve true liberation from suffering, leading to ultimate happiness and peace.

Keywords: *Overcoming resentment (āghāta), brahmavihāra, yonisomanasikāra, vipassanā.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term resentment (*āghāta*) is one of the feelings associated with hate or anger (*dosa*). According to the *Āghātapaṭivīnaya Suttas*, this paper provides substantial knowledge about the method for overcoming resentment. There

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are two discourses: the *Paṭhama Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Sutta*¹ and the *Dutiya Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Sutta*.² The first sutta was preached by the Buddha to the *bhikkhus*, and the second sutta was preached by Venerable Sāriputta to the *bhikkhus*. These suttas emphasize these methods as essential tools for a *bhikkhu* to overcome resentment completely, maintain inner peace, and foster harmonious relationships with others. The focus on the *brahmavihāras* (divine abodes) and the technique of wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) underscores their importance in ethical and spiritual development within the Buddhist path. Therefore, this study helps readers understand the nature of resentment and the ways to address it from a Buddhist perspective. Furthermore, all beings can understand and practice the Buddha's teachings to improve their minds and achieve positive outcomes in this life and future lives.

II. THE GENERAL TERM OF RESENTMENT (ĀGHĀTA)

The term *āghāta* can be found throughout the Buddha's teachings, with special reference to the *Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Suttas* from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. These suttas provide guidance and instructions on how to overcome resentment, highlighting its benefits, which can cultivate positive emotions in one's daily life. The English term resentment refers to a feeling of anger or unhappiness about something perceived as unfair - such as feeling, harboring, or bearing resentment toward or against somebody. In the *Tipiṭaka Pāli-Myanmar Dictionary*, the word *āghāta* is of masculine gender and is defined as "tormenting the mind" or "the cause for the arising of anger." It can signify anger, grudge, or spite, and may also convey meanings such as resentment, annoyance, irritation, repugnance, and loathing.³ From a grammatical perspective, the word *āghāta* is a primary derivative noun (*kita*) derived from the verbal root $\sqrt{\text{ghaṭ}}$ ($\sqrt{\text{ghaṭ}}$ or $\sqrt{\text{han}}$ in Sanskrit) with the suffix *a* or *ṇa*. In the first option, the short vowel *a* of the root $\sqrt{\text{ghaṭ}}$ is lengthened to *ā*, resulting in the root changing to $\sqrt{\text{ghāt}}$. The second option is based on the root $\sqrt{\text{han}}$. According to *Kaccāyana Pāli Vyākaraṇam* no. 591, Volume II, it combines with the suffix *ṇa* to become *ghāta*. From these options, the derivative noun *āghāta* is formed. Based on the above definitions, it can be seen that *āghāta* (resentment) is a form of or one of the levels of hatred and anger (*dosa*). The *Pāli* word *dosa* is derived from the root *dus*, while the Sanskrit word *dveṣa* comes from the root *dviṣ*, generally translated as anger, ill-will, evil intention, or hatred.⁴ It also encompasses meanings like corruption, defect, and fault. However, the full unwholesome connotations of *dosa* are not always adequately captured by English translations, making its understanding in *Pāli*

¹ A. II. 186. *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., Boston: Wisdom Publication, (2012), p. 773.

² A. II. 187. *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., Boston: Wisdom Publication, (2012), p. 774.

³ *Tipiṭaka Pāli - Myanmar Dictionary*, vol 4. 71.

⁴ T. W. Rhys Davids, William Stede, *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary*. Oxford: The Pāli Text Society, 2001, p. 371.

more precise. Each *Pāli* term represents different levels of intensity, even the weakest of these afflictions. Next, the term *paṭivīnaya* will be examined from a grammatical viewpoint. In *Pāli*, the word “*paṭivīnaya*” is a primary derivative noun (*kita*) derived from the prefix “*paṭi*” - and “*vi*”, the verbal root $\sqrt{nī}$ ($\sqrt{nī}$ in Sanskrit), and the suffix “*a*”.⁵ The prefix “*paṭi*” means against, opposite, or in opposition to, while *vi-* means away from. The root $\sqrt{nī}$ means to carry, to lead, to bring, to convey, to take, to conduct, to guide, to direct, to govern, to lead away, to carry off for oneself, to spend, to pass, to ascertain, to investigate, to inquire into, to settle, to decide. The vowel *ī* of the root $\sqrt{nī}$ is changed into *e*, then converted into *aya*. The root $\sqrt{nī}$ thus becomes \sqrt{naya} , and with the suffix “*a*”, it forms the derivative noun *paṭivīnaya*. Therefore, the word means “taking away something that works against someone”, or more simply, “removing.” It is a rare word, found only in this compound in the ancient texts but appearing more frequently in later texts and commentaries. As mentioned above, the examination of the *Pāli* terms *paṭivīnaya* and *āghāta* provides important insights into their grammatical formation and conceptual meaning in Buddhist literature, where mental states play a major role. Understanding *āghāta* in the context of *dosa* (hatred or ill-will) underscores the complexity of mental afflictions in Buddhist teachings. This term, along with related concepts, illustrates this complexity. This analysis highlights the importance of precise terminology in understanding complex emotional and psychological concepts in both ancient texts and modern interpretations. According to *Saṅgīti Sutta*,⁶ *Āghātavattthu Sutta*,⁷ and *Vibhaṅga*,⁸ there are nine types of resentment due to the nine grounds for resentment. They are (1) Someone has done me harm; (2) he is doing me harm; (3) he will do me harm; (4) he has done harm to one dear to me; (5) he is harming one dear to me; (6) he will harm one dear to me; (7) he has done good to one not dear to me; (8) he is doing good to one not dear to me; (9) he will do good to one not dear to me. These are also the reasons for resentment to arise.

In the teaching of the Buddha, the Buddha often uses greed (*lobha*)⁹, hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*)¹⁰ which are three unwholesome roots (*akusala mūla*). Among them, the second unwholesome root is hatred or anger (*dosa*). The unwholesome consciousness rooted in resentment (*āghāta*) is “*dosamūla citta*.” *Dosamūla-citta* is always accompanied by *domanassa* (unpleasant feeling), associated with aversion (*paṭigha*) and unprompted (*asaṅkhārika*)

⁵ Kb. p. 527.

⁶ *The Long Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, Bhikkhu Bodhi, (trans.), Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1995, p. 506.

⁷ A. III. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourse*, p. 1286.

⁸ *The Book of Analysis: A Translation of the Vibhaṅga*. Ashin Thiṭṭila, (trans.), Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995, p.501.

⁹ *Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma*. Wijeratne, R. P. and Rupert Gethin, (trans.), Oxford: The Pāli Text Society, 2007, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 19.

or prompted (*sasaṅkhārika*). It can never be accompanied either by joy or by equanimity.¹¹ *Dosa* is also one of fourteen unwholesome mental factors. In the *dosa cetasika* group, *dosa* is the first one of four unwholesome mental factors, namely, hatred (*dosa*), envy (*issā*)¹², stinginess (*macchariya*)¹³, and worry (*kukkucca*)¹⁴ associated with two types of consciousness primarily motivated by aversion (*paṭigha*).¹⁵ Furthermore, according to *Abhidhamma*, *dosa* is defined as cause (*hetu*)¹⁶, root (*mūla*)¹⁷, knot (*gantha*)¹⁸, hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*)¹⁹, fetters (*saṃyojana*)²⁰, defilements (*kilesā*)²¹, and latent defilements (*anusaya*).²² And also, in *Sīlakkhandhavagga Tīka*, Ācariya Dhammapāla explains *dosa* as clinging (*upādāna*)²³, according to the *suttanta* method. Buddhism describes *dosa* in two distinct forms: coarse and subtle. Coarse *dosa* refers to the more obvious and overt expressions of aversion, anger, or hatred. It includes strong and intense negative emotions. Subtle *dosa*, on the other hand, refers to more concealed or latent forms of aversion. It includes milder expressions of resistance, irritation, annoyance, or subtle feelings of discomfort that may not be immediately noticeable. It can manifest as a mild dislike or discomfort toward something or someone without the intensity of overt anger or hatred. Subtle *dosa* can also involve passive-aggressive behavior or a tendency to withdraw from situations or individuals. As discussed earlier, the resentment is known as “*dosa*” in the ultimate sense. “*Dosa*” is an unwholesome mental state (*akusala cetasika*). The *Aṭṭhasālīnī* defines *dosa* as follows: “It has flying into anger or churlishness as characteristic, like a smitten snake; spreading of itself or writhing as when poison takes effect, as function; or burning that on which

¹¹ Shwe Zan Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy: Abhidhammatthasangaha*, rev. & ed. Mrs. Rhys Davis. London: Pali Text Society, 1972, p. 83. & Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Manual of Abhidhamma*, p. 36.

¹² Gorkom, Nina van. *Cetasika*. London: British Library Publication, 2010, p. 135.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁵ *Abhs.* 10: “Doso, issā, macchariyaṃ, kukkuccañcāti dvīsu paṭigha sampayuttacittesu.”

¹⁶ *Piṭṭh.* I. 1.

¹⁷ *Abh-a.* I. 91.

¹⁸ *Abhs.* 46: “Cattāro ganthā: abhijjhā kāyagantho, byāpādo kāyagantho, silabbataparāmāso kāyagantho, idhamaccābhīniveso kāyagantho.”

¹⁹ *Abhs.* 46: “Cha nīvaraṇāni: kāmaccanda nīvaraṇaṃ, byāpada nīvaraṇaṃ, thinamiddha nīvaraṇaṃ, uddhaccakukkucca nīvaraṇaṃ, vicikicchā nīvaraṇaṃ, avijjā nīvaraṇaṃ.”

²⁰ *Abhs.* 46: “Dasa saṃyojanāni: kammaragasamyojanaṃ, bhavarāgasamyojanaṃ, paṭighāsamyojanaṃ, manasamyojanaṃ, diṭṭhisamyojanaṃ, silabbataparāmāsasamyojanaṃ, vicikicchāsamyojanaṃ, issāsamyojanaṃ, macchariyasamyojanaṃ, avijjasamyojanaṃ abhidhamme.”

²¹ *Abhs.* 46: “Dasa kilesā: lobho, doso, moho, māno, diṭṭhi, vicikicchā, thinam, uddhaccaṃ, ahirikaṃ, anottappaṃ”

²² *Abhs.* 46: “Satta anusayā: kammagānusayo, bhavaragānusayo, paṭighānusayo, mānānusayo, diṭṭhānusayo, vicikicchānusayo, avijjānusayo.”

²³ *D-ṭ.* I. 163: “Abhidhamme hi taṇhādiṭṭhiyova upādānanti āgatā, suttante pana dosopi upādānanti vutto kodhupādānavinibandhā vighātāṃ āpajjantiādisu.”

it depends as function, like jungle-fire; offending or injuring as manifestation, like a foe who has got his chance; having the grounds of vexation as proximate cause, like urine mixed with poison.”²⁴ The *Visuddhimagga* also defines *dosa* as hate or hate itself or just mere hating.²⁵ Resentment has the function of *dosa*. It is spreading of itself or writhing as when poison takes effect or a jungle fire that burns that on which it depends. Therefore, resentment belongs to the category of *dosa*, it has the unwholesome root of *dosa*. It has the same intrinsic nature, characteristic, classification, and function as *dosa*.

III. THE CAUSE FOR THE ARISING OF RESENTMENT

Every result, at least, has a cause or various causes. Resentment also has ignorance as its cause. Ignorance is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as lack of knowledge, understanding, or information about something.²⁶ In the Pāli-English Dictionary, the word “*avijjā*” is identified as feminine in gender. It means ignorance, illusion, not knowing, not understanding.²⁷ In Buddhist philosophy, “*avijjā*” is translated as ignorance and signifies the lack of direct and objective understanding of the nature of reality. It has the characteristic of unknowing, its nature is confusion, it manifests itself as concealing, its proximate cause is cankers (*āsava*).²⁸ *Avijjā* is an unwholesome state that produces suffering, described as “*dukkhavipāka-lakkhaṇa*.”²⁹ It means the characteristic of *avijjā* is that suffering is the result. It is *moha*, an unwholesome phenomenon, which leads to negative outcomes. *Avijjā* is associated with 12 unwholesome consciousnesses (*akusala citta*), including: 8 greed-rooted consciousnesses (*lobhamūlacitta*), 2 aversion-rooted consciousnesses (*dosamūlacitta*), doubtful consciousnesses (*vicikicchā*), and mental restlessness consciousnesses (*uddhacca*).³⁰ *Avijjā* is often described as a lack of awareness or knowledge about the Four Noble Truths. In the context of the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination (*paticcasamuppāda*),³¹ *avijjā* is the first link. This indicates that ignorance leads to mental formations, which in turn leads to consciousness, and so forth, perpetuating the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The opposite of *avijjā* is “*vijjā*”. *Vijjā* means the knowledge which is represented as the contrast with *avijjā* and signifies knowledge or understanding.³² The two are constantly contrasted throughout the *Nikāya* and it is held that with the elimination of ignorance (*avijjā*), knowledge (*vijjā*) comes into being, as much as light arises with the disappearance of darkness and

²⁴ *The Expositor: A Translation of the Atthasālinī*. Pe Maung Tin, (trans.) Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1976, p. 342.

²⁵ *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, (trans.), Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010, p. 478.

²⁶ Hornby, Oxford Dictionary, p. 644.

²⁷ Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, p. 545.

²⁸ *Abh.* II. 180.

²⁹ M. I. 95. “*dukkho kaṭuko, dukkhamo vā vipāko etesanti dukkhavipāka*.”

³⁰ *Nt-a.* 201. “*sabbesaṃ vā akusaladhammānaṃ avijjāpabbhaṅgamattā*.”

³¹ U Than Daing, *The Doctrine of Paticcasamuppāda*. California, 1995, p. 35.

³² M. I. 378. “*avijjā kho, āvuso Visākha, vijjā paṭibhāgo*.”

vice versa. Overcoming *avijjā* is a central goal in Buddhist practice. Achieving true insight (*paññā*) or wisdom leads to *Magga*, *Phala* and *Nibbāna*, the end of suffering, and the cessation of the cycle of rebirth. Practices such as ethical conduct, meditation, and the cultivation of wisdom are aimed at dispelling *avijjā* and attaining a clear, unobstructed view of reality.

In many philosophical and spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, ignorance is seen as the root cause of resent emotions and suffering. Ignorance, or *avijjā*, clouds one's perception of reality, leading to misunderstandings and misconceptions about oneself, others, and the world at large. These misconceptions can give rise to negative emotions such as resentment, anger, jealousy, and hatred. *Āghātavatthu* means a ground for resentment. It is the proximate cause of resentment. In the *Aṅguttara Pāḷi*, the Buddha states that there are ten grounds for resentment. One conceives resentment in the mind: (1) Someone has done me harm; (2) he is doing me harm; (3) he will do me harm; (4) he has harmed one dear to me; (5) he is harming one dear to me; (6) he will do harm to one dear to me; (7) he has done good to one not dear to me; (8) he is doing good to one not dear to me; (9) he will do good to one not dear to me; (10) One is groundlessly annoyed.³³ These ten grounds stand to be ten causes of resentment. It cannot arise without reason but arises in one's mind dependent on several causes and conditions. In the *Aṅguttara Pāḷi*, the Buddha states that there are two main causes for the arising of resentment: unpleasant objects and unwise reflection.³⁴ An unpleasant object attended unwisely arouses not arisen resentment and develops arisen resentment, while unwise reflection leads to resentment and unwise decisions. When resentment oppresses one's mind, it can cause numerous disadvantages to oneself and others. And in the *Aṅguttara Pāḷi*, the Buddha says that a person overwhelmed by resentment and oppressed by resentment thinks of harming oneself, harming others, or harming both oneself and others and thus experiences mental pain and grief.³⁵ Therefore, a resentful person is very fierce, rough, and cruel, and he burns himself and makes other people sear. When the mind is oppressed by resentment, one cannot differentiate right from wrong, and cannot peacefully live in life. He feels sick in many lives and cannot reach a happy destiny because of his resentment. The Buddha says that one who is a tormentor of beings with resentment after death is reborn in hell. If he, after death, is not reborn in hell, if he returns as a human being, then whatever he is reborn as, he is much sicker.³⁶ To abandon resentment, one of the best ways is to develop loving-kindness (*mettā*). In this world, there is no force greater than *mettā*. There is nothing more peaceful than *mettā*. It is likened to clear and cold water. Whereas hatred is hot like fire. One who cultivates *mettā* can extinguish any and every fire of *dosa*. The nature of *mettā* is wishing other people to be happy. It does not wish

³³ A. III. 375.

³⁴ A. I. 86.

³⁵ A. I. 156.

³⁶ M. III. 245.

the other to suffer. It does wish only to be free from suffering. So, if one wants to attain peace and happiness and to be free from suffering, he must cultivate *mettā*. Therefore, the Buddha affirms that to dispel resentment, *mettā* should be developed.³⁷ For these reasons, one should remove resentment because one's resentment may be able to cause harm to himself or others, just like a man who wants to hit another and picks up a burning ember or excrement in his hand and so first burns himself or makes himself, and then burns others or makes others.³⁸ In conclusion, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of removing resentment, as it can cause harm to oneself or others. By cultivating *mettā*, one can dispel resentment and achieve peace and happiness.

According to the *Kodhana Sutta*, the Buddha spoke about the disadvantages of resentment or hatred, explaining that when a person is angry, seven misfortunes befall him, which help his enemies rejoice: (1) He will be ugly through being well bathed, well anointed, with trimmed hair and beard, dressed in white clothes. (2) He will experience pain, even if lying on a soft and comfortable couch. (3) He will act in ways that bring harm and suffering, mistaking bad for good and good for bad, being reckless and ignoring reason. (4) He will lose his hard-earned wealth and may even face legal troubles. (5) He will lose his reputation and fame, which were acquired through diligence. (6) His friends, relations and kin will avoid him and keep their distance. (7) After death, he will be reborn in an unfavourable state of existence, as a person controlled by anger performs unwholesome actions through body, speech and mind which bring unfavourable results. These misfortunes are what one's enemies might wish upon him, yet he is the very consequence that befalls a person overcome by resentment.³⁹ An uncontrolled mind is dominated by the unwholesome thoughts of selfishness, greed, hatred and delusion. The Buddha taught that an untamed, unprotected, unguarded and unrestrained mind brings about great disadvantage. One must learn to control one's thoughts to gain better control over one's body and speech. Thoughts can be classified as wholesome and unwholesome. Wholesome thoughts contribute to developing a positive character, proper attitude and right behaviour. Such thoughts are conducive to the benefit and well-being of humanity. On the other hand, thoughts that undermine the development of a positive individual and contribute to humanity's detriment are unwholesome. Furthermore, there exists in this world a type of person whose mind is like an old sore. Some people easily lose their temper and become furious; even trifling remarks make them angry, wrathful, resentful, and harsh. They visibly express their indignation, resentment, and displeasure. Just as an old sore, when struck by a piece of wood or pottery, produces an excessive discharge of blood and pus, these individuals are easily provoked, becoming furious over minor matters. This is what the Buddha described as "This is called the person whose mind is like

³⁷ M. III. 120.

³⁸ A. II. 163.

³⁹ Boddhi, *The Numbered Discourses*, p. 1066.

an old sore.”⁴⁰ Similarly, just as a burning piece of common wood, when struck by a piece of wood or pottery, sizzles and crackles excessively, or a pit of feces, when struck, emits an excessively foul smell, some individuals in this world are easily angry and become furious over trivial matters. Everyone is advised to avoid associating with or accompanying such a person because they might abuse, threaten, or harm others.

IV. THE ARISING OF RESENTMENT BASED ON WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

Based on Western psychology, Dr. Hannah Devlin, who is a science correspondent for The Guardian, defines anger as “the flash of fire that sparks in the brain when it has been shortchanged.”⁴¹ Anger refers to a negative feeling toward someone or something that has caused a perceived wrong. Anger is a reaction of a negative feeling to an event, experience, thought, or feeling threatened. Scientists and psychologists believe that an angry reaction is often proportional to the perceived scale of the threat. A scientific perspective on anger can help a person understand why they feel it and how to control it better. According to Dr. Charles Spielberger, a psychologist specializing in the study of anger, he determined that anger is “an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage.”⁴² It is a normal feeling, much like joy, fear, and sadness, and often arises from disappointment and suspicion of others’ intentions. For someone, managing reactions to negative emotions is relatively easy, but controlling anger becomes challenging in tense situations. The anger arousal cycle typically progresses through five stages: trigger, escalation, crisis, recovery, and depression. Anger can cause physical reactions such as increased heart rate, high blood pressure, and muscle tension. If left uncontrolled, it can lead to harmful actions or words and negatively impact both mental and physical health. Understanding anger and applying control techniques such as mindfulness meditation can help reduce its negative effects and improve responses to stressful situations.

V. PRACTICAL WAYS TO OVERCOME RESENTMENT

5.1. Development of loving-kindness (*Mettā bhāvanā*)

Mettā bhāvanā, often translated as the practice of loving-kindness meditation, is an essential component of Buddhist practice aimed at cultivating unconditional love and compassion towards oneself and others. This practice helps practitioners develop the quality of benevolence and goodwill toward all beings, especially useful for overcoming negative emotions such as resentment, which arise from anger, hatred, or unfulfilled expectations. In the *Pathama*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴¹ Hannah Devlin, “Science of Anger: How Gender, Age and Personality Shape This Emotion”, The Guardian, May 12, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/may/12/science-of-anger-gender-age-personality>.

⁴² Charles Spielberger, “Control Anger Before It Control You”, American Psychological Association, November 3, 2023, <https://www.apa.org/topics/anger/control>

Āghātapāṭivinaya Sutta, it mentions “to overcome resentment, one should practice loving-kindness meditation.”⁴³ The practice method is described in great detail in the *Visuddhimagga*, which was compiled by *Buddhaghosa Bhikkhu*.⁴⁴ According to the *Visuddhimagga*, *Mettā* is one of the four *brahmaviharas* or divine abidings, alongside compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.⁴⁵ *Mettā* is an immeasurable and boundless love that can transform the heart and mind, making it the antidote to ill will and hostility. To overcome resentment, a practitioner focuses on cultivating *Mettā* by systematically directing goodwill toward different groups, starting with oneself, then gradually expanding to loved ones, acquaintances, strangers, and even enemies. Furthermore, the *Visuddhimagga* suggests that *Mettā* should be developed towards oneself, using repetition of phrases like “May I be happy and free from suffering” or “May I keep myself free from enmity, affliction and anxiety and live happily.”⁴⁶ Then, in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* said that “May all beings be free from enmity, affliction and anxiety and live happily.”⁴⁷ and in *Mettā Sutta* said that “In joy and safety may all beings be joyful at heart.”⁴⁸ So, repeated practice like this will help the mind to anchor in the quality of loving-kindness. This consistent practice not only counters negative feelings but also helps to purify the mind and prevent the accumulation of resentment over time. In summary, developing *Mettā bhāvanā* is a powerful tool for overcoming resentment, as it helps transform the heart and mind, replacing negative emotions with compassion and goodwill. Through regular practice, supported by the teachings in the commentaries and sub-commentaries, practitioners can gradually erode resentment and cultivate a more peaceful, harmonious state of mind.

5.2. Development of compassion (*Karuṇa bhāvanā*)

Karuṇā is derived from , to do, to make. In the *Vibhaṅga*, it is said that “And how does a bhikkhu dwell with mind accompanied by compassion, suffusing one direction? Just as (he), seeing, may have compassion for a miserable, wicked person; in the same way he suffuses all beings with compassion.”⁴⁹ Another definition of *karuṇā* is “That which dissipates the suffering of others, *karuṇā*”⁵⁰. According to *Visuddhimagga*, “*Karuṇā* has the characteristic of promoting the removal of suffering in others. Its function is not being able to bear others’

⁴³ *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bhikkhu Bodhi, (trans.), Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012, p.774. Pali equivalent: “*yasmim, bhikkhave, puggale āghāto jāyetha, mettā tasmim puggale bhāvetabbā*.” (A. II. 186)

⁴⁴ Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, p. 291.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, p. 292.

⁴⁷ *The Path of Discrimination (Paṭisambhidāmagga)*, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, (trans.), Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1982, p. 317.

⁴⁸ *Sn.* 45

⁴⁹ Thittila, *Vibhaṅga*, Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995, p.359.

⁵⁰ *Pv-a.* 94. “*Kirativā paradukkhāṃ vikkhipati, kiṇātivā paradukkhāṃ hiṃsatīti karuṇā*.”

suffering.”⁵¹ In the *Pathama Āghātapāṭivīnaya Sutta*,⁵² it mentions: “To overcome resentment, one should practice compassion meditation.”⁵³ *Karuṇa bhāvanā* or compassion meditation, is a practice detailed in the *Visuddhimagga*, which was compiled by Buddhaghosa Bhikkhu. It serves as a remedy for resentment, a negative emotion rooted in perceived injustices and grievances. Resentment arises from hatred and anger, which can be countered by developing compassion, which is a heartfelt wish for all beings, including those who resent, to be free from suffering. Cultivating *karuṇā* requires deliberate practice and reflection, beginning with the recognition of suffering as a universal experience. By acknowledging that all beings, even those who have wronged others, endure pain and challenges, one should foster a deeper sense of connection and understanding. Developing empathy is another crucial step, shifting perspective to see others not as adversaries but as fellow beings trapped in cycles of suffering.

5.3. Development of sympathetic joy (*Muditā bhāvanā*)

Muditā is derived from , to be pleased. In the *Visuddhimagga* explains it as: “Gladness is characterized as gladdening produced by success.”⁵⁴ Rooted in the *Visuddhimagga* and other canonical texts, the practice of *Muditā* shifts focus from self-centeredness to rejoicing in others’ achievements, diminishing jealousy while nurturing connection and goodwill. According to the *Aghātapāṭivīnaya Sutta*’s commentary, it mentions that “*Yasmā pana yaṃ puggalaṃ passato cittaṃ na nibbāti, tasmim muditā na saṇṭhahati, tasmā sā na vuttā*.”⁵⁵ It means that sympathetic joy is not started here because in those whose consciousness is associated with anger, it is not quenched when seeing someone. Therefore, sympathetic joy is not mentioned (in this context). The development of sympathetic joy (*muditā bhāvanā*) is absent because it is difficult to feel gladness for the person who has resentment. However, *Muditā* is a *brahmavihāra* that counters jealousy and resentment by calming them through the practice of loving-kindness meditation. By cultivating, developing and repeatedly practicing it, he should increase the absorption to triple and quadruple *jhāna*. In *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, *Muditā* is classified as a wholesome mental factor and its role in countering envy and jealousy. In the *Dhammapada*, verses highlight the value of developing loving-kindness towards all beings. “Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone hatred appeased. This is a law eternal”⁵⁶ or “Let a man guard himself against irritability in thought; let him be controlled in mind. Abandoning mental misconduct,

⁵¹ Vsm. I. 248. “*Dukkāpanayanā kārapavattilakkhaṇākaruṇā, paraḍukkāsaṇanarasā*.”

⁵² A. II. 186. *yasmim, bhikkhave, puggale āghāto jāyetha, karuṇā tasmim puggale bhāvetabbā*.

⁵³ *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bhikkhu Bodhi, (trans.), Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012, p. 774.

⁵⁴ Vsm. I. 248. “*Pamodanalakkhaṇā muditā*”.

⁵⁵ A-a. III. 50

⁵⁶ Chekinda, B (2023). *The Dhammapada in Daily Life*. Yangon: Hsu Pyae Sone Htun Publication. p.10. “*Na hi verena verāni, sammantīdha kudācanaṃ; averana ca sammantī, esa dhammo sanantano*.”

let him practice good conduct in thought.”⁵⁷ Similarly, the *Samyutta Nikāya* contains discourses that discuss the benefits of loving-kindness. In the *Mettasahagata Sutta*,⁵⁸ the Buddha describes how the development of loving-kindness leads to the liberation of the mind. The *Dhammapada* and the *Samyutta Nikāya* both emphasize the importance of cultivating *Mettā* and *Muditā* to foster positive mental states and reduce ill-will.⁵⁹ By cultivating these positive mental states, individuals can foster harmonious relationships and liberate the mind from negativity and division. This practice gradually transforms feelings of resentment into goodwill, promoting harmony within oneself and in relationships. It also deepens one’s capacity to embrace others’ joy, reinforcing a sense of unity and shared humanity.

5.4. Development of equanimity (*Upekkhā bhāvanā*)

The four boundless states are called *Brahmavihāras* or divine living culminate with *Upekkhā*. The Pāli word *Upekkhā* usually translated as “Equanimity,” meaning the balancing of mind, mental attitude of neutrality. The essential element of sublime living of *upekkhā* is *tatramajjhataṭṭatā cetasika*. It is included in the nineteen beautiful universal mental factors (*sobhaṇa sādharmaṇa cetasika*) which accompany all *sobhaṇa cittas*.⁶⁰ *Tatramajjhataṭṭatā* and *upekkhā* are sometimes used as synonymous terms.⁶¹ In *Pāli Text Society’s Pāli - English Dictionary*,⁶² *Upekkhā* is defined as “looking on”, hedonic neutrality or indifference, zero point between joy and sorrow; disinterestedness, neutral feeling, equanimity. Sometimes it is equivalent to *adukkhamasukha vedanā* (feeling which is neither pain nor pleasure). Next, *Upekkhā* is defined in *Aṭṭhasālinī atthakathā* as follows: “It is known as *upekkhā* for being able to see and observe the object as may be appropriate.”⁶³ Moreover, *upekkhā* is given in the *Visuddhimagga*: “It looks on at abandoning such interestedness as thinking ‘May they be free from enmity’ and, having recourse to neutrality, thus it is equanimity.”⁶⁴ Equanimity is characterized as promoting the aspect of neutrality towards beings. Its function is to see equality in beings.⁶⁵ In the *Pathama Āghātaṭṭapaṭivinaṇṇa Sutta*, it mentions: “To overcome resentment, one should practice equanimity meditation.”⁶⁶ *Upekkhā bhāvanā* or equanimity

⁵⁷ Ibid. p.485. “*Manopakopam rakkheyya, manasā saṃvuto siyā; manoduccaritam hitvā, manasā sucaritam care.*”

⁵⁸ S. III. 101.

⁵⁹ A. I. 445.

⁶⁰ Abhs. 8.

⁶¹ Srd-ṭ. I. 379. “*Yadi tatramajjhataṭṭatā idha upekkhāti adhippetā.*”

⁶² PTS Dictionary, p. 150.

⁶³ Vv-a. 33. Pali equivalent: “*Upapattito yuttito ikkhati passatīti upekkhā.*” (Dhs A. I. 85)

⁶⁴ Vsm. I. 248. “*Averā hontūti ādibyaṭṭāpārahānena majjhataṭṭabhāvūpagamanena ca upekkhatīti upekkhā.*”

⁶⁵ Vsm. I. 248. “*Sattesu majjhataṭṭākārapavattilakkhaṇā upekkhā. Sattesu samabhāvasanarasā.*”

⁶⁶ *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bhikkhu

meditation, is a practice detailed in the *Visuddhimagga*, which was compiled by *Buddhaghosa Bhikkhu*. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, *jhāna upekkhā* can be attained only after having already obtained the triple or quadruple *jhāna* in *mettā*, *karuṇā* and *muditā*. A meditator should emerge from the third *jhāna*. He should see danger in the three divine livings and the advantage in equanimity. Then he should arouse equanimity by looking on with equanimity at a neutral person, after that at a dear person, then the boon companion, and then the hostile one, and lastly himself. And he should cultivate that sign, develop and repeatedly practice it. The *Pāli Canon*, *Abhidhamma*, *Dhammapada*, and *Visuddhimagga* highlight the potential of these meditative practices to dissolve negativity, cultivate inner freedom, and pave the way toward lasting peace. By embracing these teachings, practitioners can transform their inner lives and foster harmony in their interactions with others.

5.5. Development of *Yonisomanasikāra*

The concept of *Yonisomanasikara* (wise attention) in *Buddhist* practice is a powerful method for addressing and overcoming resentment. This practice involves directing the mind with clarity and wisdom to deeply understand the causes and conditions behind emotional responses, including resentment, which stems from ignorance and distorted perceptions. The *Dutiya Āghātaṭṭhavinaya Sutta* focused on teaching the technique of wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) to overcome resentment. This *sutta* mentions five kinds of people towards whom one is likely to feel resentment: (1) Someone impure in deed but pure in speech, (2) Someone impure in speech but pure in deed, (3) Someone impure both in deed and in speech, (4) Someone impure both ways, and shows no faith, and (6) Someone pure both ways and shows faith through meditation. Here, the resentment arises probably on account of jealousy, disagreement, misunderstanding, or prejudice. The *Sutta* illustrates each method for overcoming resentment with a parable accompanied by wise attention. Discourses such as *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*⁶⁷ and *Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta*⁶⁸ focus on mental training and overcoming unwholesome thoughts. In the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, the Buddha highlights *yonisomanasikāra* is essential for eradicating mental defilements, including resentment.⁶⁹ Mindfulness and reflective practice help in observing emotions like resentment as impermanent and conditioned phenomena. Reflecting on their transient nature weakens their intensity, fostering peace and freedom. In summary, *yonisomanasikara* enables the practitioner to overcome resentment by cultivating a clear understanding of its impermanent, suffering, and non-self. This practice, as supported by the *Pāli Canon*, *Abhidhamma*, and *Visuddhimagga*, serves as a transformative

Bodhi, (trans.), Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012, p.774. Pali equivalent: “*yasmiṃ, bhikkhve, puggale āghāto jāyetha, upekkhā tasmīṃ puggale bhāvetabbā.*” (A. II. 186.)

⁶⁷ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya.* Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (trans.), Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995, p. 396.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 211.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 91.

tool for breaking the cycle of emotional defilements, leading to greater mental peace and liberation.

5.6. Development of Vipassanā meditation

Vipassanā meditation is a practical way for training and purifying the mind. The Pāli word “*vipassanā*” is derived from two words: *vi*, which means “in various ways,” and *passanā*, which means “seeing.” In Sanskrit, it is *vidarśanā*. It is derived from . It means “to see,” “to have intuition,” or “to get spiritual insight.”⁷⁰ Thus, *vipassanā* means seeing all objects or phenomena as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*) in various ways or special ways.⁷¹ Resentment is a negative emotion arising from ignorance and attachment to the concept of self. In Buddhist practice, *vipassanā* is a powerful method to overcome resentment by cultivating mindfulness and insight into the impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature of emotions and mental states. The *Visuddhimagga* describes the process of observing and understanding the impermanent nature of emotions like resentment. The *Dhammapada* (verse 223) emphasizes overcoming resentment as a key to inner transformation. “Overcome the angry by non-anger; overcome the wicked by goodness; overcome the miser by generosity; overcome the liar by truth.”⁷² Or *Dhammapada* (verse 52) emphasizes that true nobility or spiritual status is not defined by external factors like appearance, heritage, or birth. Rather, it is one’s actions, specifically living a virtuous and righteous life, that defines their true character and spiritual worth. “As from a great heap of flowers many garlands can be made, even so, should many good deeds be done by one born a mortal.”⁷³ By applying *vipassanā*, practitioners develop deep insight into the impermanence, suffering, and the non-self nature of resentment, enabling them to release it and cultivate a mind free from afflictions, paving the way for inner peace and liberation.

5.7. The benefit of overcoming resentment

Practicing *brahmavihāra* can be transformative, cultivating inner peace, emotional resilience, and profound connections with others. It serves as a blueprint for a harmonious and meaningful life. The meditator practices this method, he can transform his emotional states, and relationships in life. *Mettā* encourages wishing happiness and freedom from suffering for all beings, while *Karuṇā* invites responding to suffering with care and support. *Muditā* celebrates the joy of others, helping move beyond jealousy, while *upekkhā* cultivates peace and balance amidst life’s challenges. By applying the *brahmavihāra* into daily lives, he can build stronger relationships, create lasting inner peace, and contribute to a more harmonious world. *Yonisomanasikara*, or “wise attention,”

⁷⁰ Monier-Williams, Sir Monier. (1951). *A Sanskrit - English Dictionary*. London: The University Press Oxford. p. 491.

⁷¹ *Psm- a*. Vol. I. 98. “*Aniccādi vasena vividhehi ākārehi dhamme passatī’ti vipassana.*”

⁷² Chekinda, B. (2023). *The Dhammapada in Daily Life*. Yangon: Hsu Pyae Sone Htun Publication. p. 465.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 110.

or proper attention, is a central concept in Buddhist meditation practices, particularly in overcoming negative emotions such as resentment. It refers to cultivating a deep, reflective awareness that helps individuals see things as they truly are, going beyond surface-level reactions and mental conditioning. Wise attention encourages meditators to reflect on the root causes of resentment, they can break free from the cycle of resentment. Wise attention in dealing with resentment is recognizing the impermanent nature of all things. Instead of fixating on the person or event that triggered the resentment, wise attention encourages meditators to see the situation through the lens of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. This perspective helps reduce the intensity of negative emotions, as practitioners come to realize that all experiences, including resentment, are transient. Moreover, wise attention includes an understanding of *kamma* and its result, which teaches that every action has consequences. Harboring resentment, like any harmful mental state, will only lead to suffering. Therefore, through wise attention, practitioners can cultivate wholesome states of mind, reducing negative emotions like resentment and fostering compassion and detachment. Applying *yonisomanasikara* into daily life, particularly in situations where resentment might arise, offers significant benefits. Meditators develop emotional resilience, greater clarity, and deeper insight into the nature of their experiences, ultimately leading to inner peace and more skillful responses to life's challenges. In the *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, it mentions seven benefits, helps develop insight into the nature of reality, ultimately leading to the cessation of suffering.⁷⁴ By cultivating awareness of the body, emotions, mental states, and mental objects, individuals can experience greater clarity, reduce stress, and develop resilience against life's challenges. Insight meditation, or *vipassanā*, is a powerful tool for healing and overcoming negative emotions such as resentment. It sees the things as they are. Resentment, often born from clinging to past grievances or unmet expectations, can be overcome through the practice of *vipassanā*, which provides a framework for addressing its root causes and cultivating emotional freedom. One of the first steps in overcoming resentment through *vipassanā* is developing an awareness of it as a mental formation. During meditation, the meditator observes his feelings of resentment without judgment, simply noting the emotion and its physical manifestations, such as tightness in the chest or tension. This creates space between the person and the emotion, allowing them to see it as a temporary mental event rather than a permanent part of their identity. *Vipassanā* also encourages exploring the root causes of resentment. By reflecting on questions like "What expectations or attachments are fueling this emotion?" and "How does holding onto resentment harm me?" meditators begin to understand that resentment often arises from unmet desires or misunderstandings. This deeper awareness helps dissolve the illusion of the emotion's permanence, making it easier to let go. *Vipassanā* transforms resentment into wisdom by turning challenging emotions into opportunities for growth. By reflecting on the

⁷⁴ D. III. 231.

lessons learned from these emotions, practitioners can respond more skillfully in the future and develop greater self-awareness and compassion. Finally, the insights gained from *vipassanā* are not limited to the meditation cushion. Practicing mindfulness in daily life helps reduce the recurrence of resentment and builds emotional resilience. By integrating the principles of impermanence, compassion, and non-self into everyday interactions, individuals can cultivate a more peaceful and compassionate life.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has defined the term “*āghāta*” in Buddhism, elaborating on its etymological origins and its application in both ordinary and literary contexts. It has explored the methods to overcome resentment according to the *Theravāda Vipassanā* perspective. Additionally, it discusses associated mental factors, classifications, synonyms, and specific scenarios where the results of *kamma* manifest, highlighting the critical role of *yonisomanasikāra*. Just as every object casts a shadow, every *kamma* is accompanied by its inevitable effect. A seed represents *kamma*, and the resulting plant symbolizes *vipāka* (the fruition of actions). What one sows today, he will reap either in this life or a future one. Similarly, what he reaps now is the result of actions performed in the present or the past. *Kamma* is the cause, and *vipāka* is the effect. The cause produces the effect, and the effect explains the cause. This universal law of cause and effect governs all existence. After analyzing an in-depth study of resentment (*āghāta*), with a particular focus on the *Āghātapapaṭiṣṭhāna Sutta* (*Anguttara Nikāya*), it becomes evident that meditators can gain a clear and profound understanding of how to overcome resentment. This is because every wholesome or unwholesome action inevitably brings about corresponding results. In the teachings of the Buddha, numerous *suttas* emphasize the necessity and benefits of concentration as a means to overcome resentment. However, to overcome resentment, meditators must understand and mindfully observe their six sense doors moment by moment in daily life through *vipassanā* meditation. Therefore, the teachings of the Buddha provide a foundational basis for cultivating and sustaining an ethical lifestyle in society.

List of Abbreviations

A. I.	<i>Ekaka Duka Tika Catukka Nipāta Pāḷi</i>
A. II.	<i>Pañcaka Chakka Sattaka Nipāta Pāḷi</i>
A. III.	<i>Aṭṭhaka Navaka Dasaka Ekādasaka Nipāta Pāḷi</i>
A-a. III	<i>Pañcakādi Nipāta Anguttara Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abh.	<i>Abhidhamma Piṭaka</i>
Abh-a. I.	<i>Aṭṭhasālinī Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abhs.	<i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i>
Kb.	<i>Kaccāyanabyākaraṇa</i>
D. III.	<i>Pāthikavagga Pāḷi</i>
D-ṭ. I	<i>Sīlakkhandhavagga Tika</i>
Dhp.	<i>Dhammapada Pāḷi</i>

<i>Dhs.</i>	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī Pāḷi</i>
<i>Nt.</i>	<i>Netti Pāḷi</i>
<i>Pṭṭh. I.</i>	<i>Paṭṭhāna Pāḷi. Vol. I</i>
<i>Psm-a. I.</i>	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā. Vol. I</i>
<i>Pv-a.</i>	<i>Petavatthu Aṭṭhakathā</i>
<i>M. I.</i>	<i>Mūlapaṇṇāsa Pāḷi</i>
<i>M. III.</i>	<i>Uparipaṇṇāsa Pāḷi</i>
<i>Vsm. I.</i>	<i>Visuddhimagga vol. I</i>
<i>S. III</i>	<i>Mahāvagga Saṃyutta Tīkā</i>
<i>Sn.</i>	<i>Suttanipāta Pāḷi</i>
<i>TPMD</i>	<i>Tipitaka Pāli-Myanmar Dictionary</i>
<i>PED</i>	<i>Pāli English Dictionary</i>
<i>PTS</i>	<i>Pāli Text Society</i>
<i>SED</i>	<i>Sanskrit English Dictionary</i>

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MODERN APPLICATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FORGIVENESS AND HEALING



COLLABORATION EFFORTS TO FOSTER UNITY AND GLOBAL HARMONY

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Abstract:

Building strong relationships between employees and employers is a journey that requires consistent effort, empathy, and understanding. When nurtured effectively, these relationships create a thriving work culture, boosting employee engagement, productivity, and loyalty. By prioritizing transparent communication, mutual respect, recognition, and growth opportunities, employers can lay the groundwork for a harmonious and prosperous workplace where both employees and employers flourish together. Remember, a united workforce is a powerful force that can drive any organization toward success in today's ever-evolving business landscape. Creating unity within a community is essential for fostering a supportive and harmonious environment. When people come together and support each other, it creates a sense of togetherness that can have a powerful impact. Meditation helps us find ourselves, realize the deep spiritual connection we have with the world, and recognize the inherent dignity and worth of each person. Inner peace and global harmony will be our self -Embrace the power of mindfulness this World Meditation Day. The beneficial effect of meditation is now well recognized by medical sciences in various studies on a global level.

Keywords: *Relationships, communication, workplace, meditation, mindfulness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business landscape, building strong relationships between employees and employers is not just a "nice-to-have" but a necessity for organizational success. A workplace where trust, respect, and open communication thrive fosters a culture of unity and prosperity. This article is written to explore practical strategies and actionable tips to cultivate robust relationships between employees and employers, creating an engaged and motivated workforce.

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Importance of strong relations – building a strong relationship between employers and employees is of paramount importance for the success and sustainability of any organization. This relationship forms the foundation of a positive work environment and contributes to various aspects of organizational growth. Positive edges of building relations – establishing and nurturing a strong relationship between employers and employees brings forth a wide array of benefits that contribute to the overall success and growth of an organization. Some key benefits include:

Employee Engagement: A strong relationship enhances employee engagement. Engaged employees are more committed, motivated, and enthusiastic about their work, which leads to increased productivity and higher job satisfaction. **Retention:** A positive relationship reduces turnover rates. Employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to stay with the organization, reducing recruitment and training costs associated with high turnover. **Productivity:** Strong relationships lead to improved morale and job satisfaction. Happy employees are more focused, efficient, and willing to go the extra mile to achieve organizational goals. **Communication:** An open and trusting relationship encourages transparent communication. Employees feel comfortable sharing ideas, concerns, and feedback, fostering a culture of collaboration and problem-solving. **Innovation:** When employees have a strong relationship with their employers, they are more likely to contribute innovative ideas and suggestions. This can lead to process improvements and creative solutions to challenges. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Employees who have a positive rapport with their employers are more likely to embrace change and adapt to new initiatives, fostering a culture of agility and flexibility. **Organizational Loyalty:** Employees who share a strong bond with their employers tend to develop a sense of loyalty towards the organization. They are more likely to promote the company's interests and uphold its reputation. **Positive Work Environment:** A healthy employer-employee relationship contributes to a positive work environment. Employees are more likely to feel supported, respected, and included, which creates a sense of belonging. **Conflict Resolution:** In organizations where relationships are strong, conflicts are addressed more constructively. Employees and employers can work together to find solutions, preventing escalated disputes. **Company Culture:** A strong relationship between employers and employees reflects and shapes the company's culture. A positive culture attracts top talent and contributes to a harmonious workplace. **Employee Well-Being:** When employers show genuine concern for their employees' well-being, it can positively impact their mental and emotional health. A supportive environment promotes work-life balance and reduces stress. **Organizational Performance:** A cohesive employer-employee relationship leads to improved overall organizational performance. When everyone is aligned and motivated, goals are achieved more effectively.

II. THE BEST PRACTICES TO ESTABLISH A RELATION

(1) Cultivate transparent communication: Communication lies at the heart of any successful relationship. Foster an environment where open

and honest communication is encouraged at all levels of the organization. Employees should feel comfortable expressing their ideas, concerns, and feedback without fear of judgment or repercussions. Employers, on the other hand, should actively listen to their employees, demonstrating that their voices are valued. (2) Open communication: Foster a culture of open and transparent communication. Encourage employees to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions without fear of retribution. Listen actively and provide regular avenues for feedback. (3) Lead by example: Strong relationships start from the top. Employers should lead by example, embodying the values and behaviors they expect from their employees. Show empathy, demonstrate integrity, and maintain a genuine interest in the well-being of your workforce. When employees witness their leader's commitment to the organization's values, they are more likely to align their actions accordingly. (4) Establish trust and mutual respect: Trust is the bedrock of any healthy relationship. Employers must prioritize building trust by delivering on promises, being consistent in their actions, and supporting their employee's growth and development. Similarly, employees must respect their employer's decisions and demonstrate professionalism in their conduct. (5) Recognize and appreciate efforts: Acknowledging and appreciating employee's contributions is crucial for morale and motivation. Implement a robust recognition program that celebrates employee's achievements, whether big or small. Recognize exceptional performance publicly and privately, showing genuine gratitude for their dedication. (6) Provide growth opportunities: Employees seek growth and development opportunities within their organizations. Offer training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities that empower employees to expand their skill sets and take on new challenges. A workforce that sees growth potential is more likely to remain committed and loyal to their employer. (7) Promote work-life balance: Striking a balance between work and personal life is essential for employee well-being and productivity. Encourage a healthy work-life balance by offering flexible work arrangements, time off, and wellness initiatives. Show empathy towards employee's commitments and support them in maintaining a healthy equilibrium. (8) Foster a positive work environment: A positive and inclusive work environment lays the foundation for strong relationships. Employers should actively promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring that all employees feel valued and respected. Create opportunities for team-building activities and encourage collaboration among employees. (9) Address conflicts promptly: Conflicts are inevitable in any relationship. The key lies in addressing them promptly and constructively. Encourage employees to communicate and resolve issues early on, either directly or through HR channels. Mediate conflicts with fairness and impartiality, striving for win-win resolutions.

III. EFFECTIVE WAYS TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND STRENGTHEN BONDS IN THE WORKING COMMUNITY BY:

(1) Encourage inclusivity: Embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity is a crucial step in building unity within a community. Encourage participation from all members, regardless of their background, beliefs, or abilities. By

creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, you can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among all individuals. (2) Collaborate on projects: Collaborative projects are an excellent way to bring people together and work towards a common goal. Whether it's a community clean-up, a fundraising event, or a volunteer initiative, collaborating on projects can unite individuals in a shared purpose. By working together, community members can build connections and strengthen bonds while making a positive impact. (3) Host community events: Organizing and hosting community events, such as picnics, block parties, or cultural celebrations, provides opportunities for people to come together and connect. These events can foster a sense of togetherness and provide a platform for community members to interact, share experiences, and build relationships. By creating a space for people to come together, you can deepen connections and strengthen community ties. (4) Promote open communication: Effective communication is key to building unity within a community. Encourage open dialogue, active listening, and constructive feedback among community members. By promoting transparent and respectful communication, you can address issues, build understanding, and create a supportive and cohesive community environment. (5) Support and empower others: One of the most impactful ways to foster unity is by supporting and empowering others within the community. Whether it's offering a helping hand, providing mentorship, or advocating for those in need, supporting and empowering individuals can create a culture of compassion and solidarity. When community members feel supported and valued, it strengthens the overall unity and collective well-being of the community.

Collaboration between physicians and nurses is essential to healthcare delivery and is associated with high-quality patient care, greater patient satisfaction, and better health outcomes. Hence, doctors and nurses must have a particular set of interprofessional collaboration skills. This descriptive cross-sectional study assessed how medical students in the pre-clinical and clinical years perceived attitudes toward collaboration between physicians and nurses in a hospital setting. The attitudes of the medical students in his study toward physician – nurse collaboration across year levels are lower than other students from other medical colleges. These results imply that students need to be more efficiently provided with inter professional education and training that they need to become future collaborative team members in the healthcare industry. Despite the ample integration of teamwork and collaboration content in our MBBS curriculum, there is a need to revisit the curricular content in different courses across all year levels to better implement and assess IPE and incorporate it into teaching and training. The College of Medicine and Nursing must require inter-professional educational courses between medical and nursing students. In addition, hospital administrators need to offer ongoing IPE and collaboration experiences for all interdisciplinary team members because effective health care depends on multidisciplinary collaboration and teamwork.

IV. UNIVERSAL INTERFAITH HARMONY

Vivekananda went to America not as a prospective immigrant but, as we

realize now, an incipient prophet of harmony and peace, enhanced with the radiant, revitalized experience of the truths of major religions embodied in and exemplified irrefutably by his great mentor, Sri Ramakrishna. The young *Narendra* was not a piously submissive *chela*. He was a fiery challenger of faith-based claims to Truth. And he met the one who affirmed the truths of spiritual experience not quoting texts like a *pāṇḍita* but exemplifying them in every aspect of his life. Above all, let us recall that on the eve of voluntarily and gently stilling his body into the great Void, Sri Ramakrishna gifted all that he garnered and lodged in his body, mind, and spirit to his beloved disciple *Narendra*.¹ And in turn the recipient, relentlessly and readily, enriched the world consciousness with the knowledge and wisdom that are required as unquestionable channels for enlightenment. For every major or minor challenge, secular or sacred, evident in the ethos he faced, he had the unique art of transforming them into channels and choices of immense potential. In a situation where the colonial regime, rooted in the ruthless agenda of a company floated purely for profit and pleasure, Vivekananda bore holes through the hard granite of allegedly impregnable intentions of that company and eventually of the empire. In a revealing insight, Vivekananda himself talked about what his stay in the US resulted in. He confided to John Henry Wright, Professor of Greek studies at Harvard, that 'his stay in America had taught him a great deal. He said he worked on and out of a new way of life: That the practical living in America had brought his old problems before him in a new light.'² In fact, besides Professor Wright we learn that 'all of these philosophers' who met Vivekananda, 'had earlier come in contact with Classical Vedanta'. Was that 'contact', intellectual understandings, what *Swamiji* himself had and nothing else of Vedanta?

Even today this tendency continues. Individuals like Perry Anderson, who, like parrots caged in their frame, go on sputtering that India is not a 'nation' at all. Let alone the concept of nation, for India watchers we do not even have history, only legends and myths. As recently as 2013 Amartya Sen tells us that we have glory – thank God – but, alas, it is uncertain – perhaps if *Nalanda* University alumni start coming out, the glory would become certain. Even as Vivekananda admired the American's pragmatism, as Marie Louise Burke has rightly noted, 'he foresaw great turmoil and tumult in the coming age, he anticipated gigantic worldwide problems that would have to be faced and solved, and he knew that men strong to the depths of their being could stand up to these problems and not be overcome.'³ The glorious and the gory coexist, engineered by imbalances. Marie Louise Burke, a meticulous scholar who has given us a vast account of *Swamiji's* life in the US, and Perry Anderson from

¹ John D Caputo, *Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1997, p. 183.

² *Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana*, Saint Sara. Kolkata: Dakshineswar, Sri Sarada Math, 2002, p. 176.

³ Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda: Prophet of the Modern Age*. Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2009, p. 27.

California, who rubbishes the very identity of India as a nation – both embody one of Vivekananda's tenets: 'The very basis of our being is contradiction, everywhere we have to move through the tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice versa. Nor can this state of things be remedied.'⁴ Concerning this inextricable duality, one can also cite the paradox of Chicago: The city that was the center of Vivekananda's emergence as a world prophet has also the University of Chicago, which publishes some of the most offensive books on Hinduism, particularly on *tantra*. But then, the University of Chicago has now a Vivekananda Chair! Therefore, we have to accept all this with Vivekananda's philosophy of practical life: Every challenge is a choice, a channel to harness what is enriching, not enfeebling to our being.

The context now is the enthusiastic, often euphoric, response to Vivekananda. The enthusiasm that goes to the extent of dressing up selected youngsters like so many modern Vivekanandas! Of course, some scholars shy to write about him directly, others feel so overpowered that they bring out studies, individual or anthologies, without little concern for editing. Invariably, the emotions of reverence far outweigh analyses of relevance and its pragmatic potential. In short, we have jesting Pilates as also jeering debaters – debating without understanding. But one very important present-day 'change' is to shed the usual, unexamined, load of adherence to the Western – mostly Euro-American – paradigms of human development. Once we regretted the word, and plight of, 'untouchables'.

Now we adopted, some scholars feel, a strange ethic: Studies from the hermeneutics of the West are 'untouchables', you cannot even touch them to know whether they exist or are mere 'phantoms of the tell-tale brain' – in the catchy words of neurologist V S Ramachandran's books – constructed as universally valid frames of irrefutable relevance to all cultures and societies. In essence, the hermeneutics is like Caesar, impeccable above any questioning or suspicion. We seem, however, to have woken up to these recurrent assumptions that pass as 'truths'. In his essay in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, 'The Challenges to the Social Sciences in the 21st Century: Some Perspectives from the South', Aditya Mukherjee has noted the paradox that 'when the various disciplines of the human and social sciences, such as history, economics, and political science evolved in the 19th and early 20th centuries, much of the present developing world was under colonial rule and European ideological hegemony held sway in most of the world. The human and social sciences in this period remained largely Eurocentric.'⁵ This ended, it seems, with World War I. Going further (and despite the 20th century being called 'the American

⁴ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, p. 1–8, 1989, p. 9, 1997, p. 2.97.

⁵ Aditya Mukherjee, 'Challenges to the Social Sciences in the 21st Century: Some Perceptions from the South,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 September 2013, p. 31.

century') Professor Mukherjee, says, 'Human society from the ancient period to the present, thus, continued to be often viewed, understood and interpreted in Euro-centric western ways. The 21st century will have to face this challenge and recover and forefront alternative voices.' More ambitiously, 'Notions of what constitutes identity, development, progress, scientific achievement, secularism, nation, justice, ethics, and aesthetics have to be widened to incorporate the much wider human experience.'

Though Professor Mukherjee does not, understandably, mention religion as such, many of the agendas he hopes to get widened can be found in Vivekananda's life and works. And without any self-conscious apologies, our intellectuals may accept reasons why religion matters and needs in-depth study if it comes from the West. In a workshop on 'Thinking Ethics' in Geneva in 2005, the group concluded that in the areas that engage our serious attention for checks and balances, religion occupies the first place. The other areas are business, the military, science, and the media. More explicitly, in her note on 'Ethics and Consciousness', Christene Wicker says: 'Respect for religious diversity and engagement with people of various faiths will be an essential ethic of the future. Bible classes that might once have been taught as part of a liberal arts education must be replaced with interfaith ethics. This is not to say that the distinctiveness of each faith system ought to be compromised.'⁶

Vivekananda had long ago experienced this vision as a fact. He articulated memorably: 'We must grow according to our nature.' Not GDP growth alone, with or without measurement, but growth in 'harmony and peace.' In short, not *sāhāna*, patiently tolerant, but *sāmarasya*, the coexistence of the dialectics of contradictions – yet retaining the ability to function.

Human will to conquer – Benoy Kumar Sarkar, the Bengali scholar and one of the most prominent intellectuals of the 1930s who was inspired by what used to be called the 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda complex', observed that, 'It is not Nature, region or geography that in the last analysis determines man's destiny. It is the human will, man's energy that recreates the topography and natural forces, humanizes the earth, and spiritualizes the geography.'⁷ Citing this, in his study of 'Germanism in Colonial Bengal', Andrew Sartori says that Sarkar 'would thus explicitly identify the technical and economic creations of the industrial era as directly "spiritual" expressions of the "human will conquer".'⁸ This is a perception that Vivekananda inculcated and empowered others with: 'What we want is progress, development, and realization. No theories ever made man higher. No amount of books can help us to become

⁶ *Thinking Ethics: How Ethical Values and Standards Are Changing*, ed. Beth Krsna. Delhi: Viva Books, 2006, p. 98.

⁷ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, 'The Expansion of Spirituality as a Fact of Industrial Civilization', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 41/5 (May 1936), p. 413.

⁸ Andrew Sartori, 'Beyond Culture-contact and Colonial Discourse: Germanism in Colonial Bengal', in *An Intellectual History for India*, ed. Shruti Kapila. New York: Cambridge University, 2010, p. 82.

purser. The only power is in realization, and that lies in ourselves and comes from thinking. The glory of man is that he is a thinking being. What are the challenges Vivekananda faced and later fashioned into channels of perennial, integrated art of living in harmony? In his early life, he experienced the comfort of a loving family with undoubted affluence. But he tasted the harrowing poverty that human treachery engendered. Relationships with former friends proved futile. Even faith in God floundered. The channel of marrying into a rich family, and restoration of familial comfort, was open but never seized. His outstanding intellect and learning did not help him procure a job. And even when his Master assured him that the Divine Mother could come to his rescue when approached sincerely, he tried, the very idea of asking never surfaced – instead, he asked for *Viveka*, *vairagya*, and *bhakti*. The amazing phenomenon that later manifested in him was that of *shakti*, power, which was so palpable that when Lillian Montgomery, who was not a devotee, heard *Swamiji's* public speeches in 1900, expressed: *Swami Vivekananda* was so entirely different from anything that we had known in America. I had heard all my life, it seemed to me, of power and repose, and the first time I had seen it was in the presence of *Swami Vivekananda*. And it all came as such a surprise because I wasn't prepared for it. Power seemed to emanate from him. It seemed to me that there was an ocean of consciousness back of *Swami Vivekananda*, and in some way it focused and flowed through his words, there was a purity, and an intense power, such a power as I think we have never seen – that I had never seen, and I don't expect I will ever see it again. It seemed to pour from an infinite source, and it was perfectly calm, perfectly reposed.

The explication of this 'power' is a challenge to consciousness studies, as also a component of brain research. The Oxford Companion to Consciousness states: 'Consciousness expansion, or extended awareness, is a rather broad concept, usually referring to certain states of consciousness in which either the self or the space seen around is greatly enhanced or enlarged. These states can happen spontaneously in mystical experiences, they can be achieved deliberately through practices such as yoga, prayer, meditation, and sensory deprivation and they can be induced by taking drugs.' Moreover, 'the ultimate expansion of consciousness can occur in spontaneous mystical states in the form of a complete loss of self and resulting oneness with the universe. In this state there is no individual awareness, rather, one's previously separate self seems to have merged with everything else.' And Black cites William James who pointed out, 'such mystical experiences are difficult or impossible to describe and come with a sense of passivity or surrender in the face of what seems to be true knowledge or insight'. In his massive, meticulous study on Zen and the brain, James H Austin points out that 'paradigm clash' prevents scientists from taking up altered states of consciousness seriously: 'Altered states of consciousness do seem subversive enough to threaten many people's prejudices. Indeed, the few scientists who work in this general area tend to be defensive about their research, because much of it still has to gain scientific respectability.' In short, they are consigned to the multivocal catch-penny word 'subjective'. Vivekananda's commentary on the Yoga Sutra, especially

on his experience of *kundalini*, if carefully put together should enrich without challenging the current quantum of research – perhaps we may get the complete picture of brain and consciousness.

World Meditation Day 2024: Inner peace, global harmony. Meditation helps us find ourselves, realize the deep spiritual connection we have with the world, and recognize the inherent dignity and worth of each person. Inner peace and global harmony will be our self-Embrace the power of mindfulness this World Meditation Day. Take a moment to connect with your inner peace and find balance in the chaos of life. Global Harmony (GH) is a small, humanitarian foundation with worldwide reach and vision coupled with innovative forms of help for the deprived yet hopeful. It was established in Solothurn, Switzerland, in January 1989, with a tax-deductible status. The Foundation is non-political, non-denominational, and non-profit-making. India's rise in the world would mean global peace, global stability, and global harmony. As leaders-in-making, you are the principal stakeholders in generating this ecosystem.⁹

V. TWO THINGS DEFINE YOU: YOUR PATIENCE WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING AND YOUR ATTITUDE WHEN YOU HAVE EVERYTHING. THUS YOU ARE LIVING IN THE PRESENT

If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious you are living in the future. As part of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga, meditation complements other forms to deliver sustainable universal health and well-being of humanity. United Nations unanimously declared December 21 as World Meditation Day. The resolution, introduced by Liechtenstein, was co-sponsored by *Bharat* among other nations like Bulgaria, Burundi, Dominican Republic, Iceland, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Mongolia, Portugal, Slovenia, etc. In his post on X (formerly Twitter), India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Parvathaneni Harish stated, "India had taken the lead in the declaration of 21 June, which marks Summer Solstice, as International Day of Yoga by the UN in 2014. In a decade, it has become a global movement which has led to common people across the globe practicing yoga and making it part of their daily lives." Indeed, as UN declaration acknowledged "the link between yoga and meditation as complementary approaches to health and well-being". Meditation, indeed, has its roots in the ancient Indian philosophy of Yoga. The writer of *Yoga-Sutras* – one of the most authoritative ancient texts on Yoga-Patanjali introduced us to *aṣṭāṅga* yoga (eight limbs of Yoga) with *dhyana* (meditation) as its seventh step. In *Bharatiya* tradition, the Winter Solstice or "*uttarāyaṇa*" is one of the most auspicious times of the year. As recounted in the Mahabharata, the great Bhishma chose to leave his body on this very day. Declaring the Winter Solstice as World Meditation Day is therefore deeply symbolic and fitting.

VI. WHAT IS DHYANA?

The Sanskrit word *dhyana* comes from the root word '*dhi*' which means to

⁹ Dhankad, J.2025. *Vicepresidentofindia*. <https://www.instagram.com/vicepresidentofindia/p/DBQ8btfPdDg/>

contemplate or ponder over. *Dhyana* can be understood as focused attention. Its roots can be traced to the concept of the four types of speech found in the Upanishads – *vaikhari*, *madhyama*, *pashyanti*, and *para*. The latter two are not outward expressions of speech but inner, soulful processes. In the Sankhya philosophy (one of the six vaidik schools), *dhyana* is described as: *Dhyana* is the state where the mind is free from troublesome desires and thoughts. Patanjali defines it as: Constant and unbroken contemplation. The centrality of *dhyana* in *Bharatiya* spirituality is evident from its presence in even non-Vedic traditions like Jainism and Buddhism. It is no coincidence that sculptures and paintings of ancient masters and sages from these traditions commonly depict them in the *dhyana* mudra the posture of meditation. Buddhist meditational practices like *shamatha* and *vipashyana* and Jain practices like *preksha* are still prevalent today. From India, the practice of *dhyana* spread to China as “Chán” and later to Japan as “Zen.” While the pronunciation evolved, the essence remained unchanged.

6.1. Modern science and *dhyana*

Dhyana exists at the intersection of science and spirituality. With the growing global influence of yoga, modern science has turned its attention to meditation. Notable studies such as “Mindfulness Meditation and Brain Structure”¹⁰ and “Effects of Meditation on Stress”¹¹ demonstrate that meditation has a clear and measurable positive impact on mental and physical well-being. In today’s fast-paced world, where stress and anxiety have become inseparable from modern lifestyles, yoga and *dhyana* are receiving rightful global recognition. World Health Organization (WHO), in its self-help tools for anxiety management, encourages individuals to: “Develop the habit of mindfulness meditation, even if it’s just a few minutes per day.” Practices like meditation offer a profound tool to relieve individuals from stress, enabling a calmer and more balanced state of mind. By cultivating mindfulness and focused attention, meditation reduces anxiety, improves emotional regulation, and creates compassion – towards oneself and others. As more individuals embrace these practices, the ripple effect can create a world where people are less reactive, more understanding, and empathetic. This shared mental peace can transcend boundaries, helping build a harmonious global family united by values of inner well-being, mutual respect, and collective happiness. Results for the analysis of the two main effects (group difference and age) were corrected for multiple comparisons of family-wise error rate (FWE)-corrected. No regions/voxels from the analysis of group-by-age interaction survived FWE-corrections. Given that a regular decline in WM with age is

¹⁰Hölzel, B. K., Carmody, J., Vangel, M., Congleton, C., Yerramsetti, S. M., Gard, T., et al. (2011). *Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density*. *Psychiatry Res.* 191, p. 36 – 43. doi: 10.1016/j.psychres.2010.08.006

¹¹Laner D, Schuster V, Dietsche B, Jansen A, Ott U and Sommer J (2016) *Effects of Long-Term Mindfulness Meditation on Brain's White Matter Microstructure and its Aging*. *Front. Aging Neurosci.* p. 7 - 254. doi: 10.3389/fnagi.2015.00254

considered to be a normal process in healthy subjects (meditators and controls both consisted of healthy individuals), interaction effects are expected to be much subtler than the group's main effects differences. They observed that apart from the right amygdala, right hippocampus, and right thalamus which showed an opposite trend in the group-by-age interaction (probably due to their nuclei subdivision), meditators showed a weaker negative slope for FA values compared to non-meditators.¹²

6.2. Meditation over military might

The human desire to conquer the world is as old as civilization itself. *Bharat*, being one of the oldest civilizations, has witnessed its share of conquerors and dictators. Yet, *Bharat* was among the few that transcended this mirage. It is no coincidence that every ancient tradition of *Bharat* – *vaidik*, *Buddhist*, or *jain* – regardless of their internal differences, emphasized *dhyana*. In fact, in Jainism and Buddhism, meditation occupies an even more central position. Moreover, the founders of these traditions, like Mahavir and Gautama Buddha, hailed from the *kshatriya* (warrior) class. Having understood the futility of worldly conquest, they turned inward and realized that true victory lies in mastering the self – conquering one's *indriyas* (senses and desires). Such a person is called *jitendriya*, and only the truly brave (Mahavir) can achieve it. Gautama Buddha, born in the Shakya tribe, mastered the science of meditation and spread it across the world. He was fittingly called Shakya-Simha – the Lion of the *Shakyas*. *Bharat's* outlook toward the external world has always been shaped by its profound understanding of the human mind and soul. The Indian adage “*yat pinde tat brahman*” (As is the body, so is the Universe) underscores this philosophy, encouraging introspection as a path to understanding the greater cosmos. *Bharat's* traditions endured because its people were already pursuing the ultimate victory – mastery over their senses (*indriyas*). Meditation and Yoga, deeply rooted in India's ancient traditions, have the potential to serve as powerful instruments of soft power on the global stage. Unlike hard power, which relies on military or economic might, soft power influences through culture, philosophy, and values. The universal appeal of Yoga and meditation as tools for holistic well-being resonates with people across nations, cultures, and ideologies. India's leadership in initiatives like the International Day of Yoga and now World Meditation Day showcases its ability to offer solutions to modern challenges. These practices not only promote physical and mental health but also inspire inner peace, empathy, and collective mindfulness – *values* the world deeply needs. Promoting meditation and yoga in India as well as on the World level positions itself as a cultural and spiritual guide, strengthening its image as a nation that leads through wisdom, healing, and universal well-being.

¹² Subhedar, Aniruddh. 2024 Meditation, *Sure Shot Way to Global Harmony*. <https://cihs.org.in/meditation-sure-shot-way-to-global-harmony/> December 16, 2024, p. 103.

VII. A GLOBAL ALTERNATIVE

This is not to suggest that the world will suddenly become a utopia free of conflicts and greed. Real politics will continue to exist. However, a significant part of the global community is searching for an alternative path – a path that balances material progress with spiritual wisdom. If nurtured well, this silent revolution through meditation has the potential to lead the world towards a peaceful and prosperous future that humanity has long dreamed of.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In an era of globalization, where military and economic competition continue to shape international policies, turning inward through meditation presents a promising alternative. History has shown that material power, no matter how vast, cannot guarantee lasting peace. On the other hand, self-mastery – the ability to control emotions, perceptions, and desires – is the true key to harmonious coexistence. This is the core message of Bharat's ancient spiritual traditions, where meditation is not just a personal practice but a globally relevant philosophy of life.

Today, as meditation and yoga gain widespread recognition, they are no longer just cultural artifacts but powerful tools for addressing modern challenges such as stress, anxiety, and social unrest. The United Nations' recognition of World Meditation Day is a testament to Bharat's soft power in shaping a future of peace and well-being. This acknowledgment reinforces the deep link between meditation and sustainable health, emphasizing its relevance in a world that increasingly seeks balance and inner stability.

However, this does not mean that the world will instantly be free from injustice or conflict. Yet, if more individuals cultivate meditation and develop inner awareness, the resulting transformation will ripple outward – from personal well-being to societal change – ultimately creating a world that balances material progress with spiritual wisdom. This may not be the only path forward, but it is undoubtedly a solution that humanity must seriously consider.

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THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS: PATHWAY TO INNER GROWTH AND RENEWAL

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Abstract:

Forgiveness is a profound process that paves the way for personal growth, emotional healing, and inner transformation. While religions may differ in their doctrines, the core human values they promote are strikingly similar. Forgiveness, with its psychological, emotional, and sometimes spiritual aspects, empowers individuals to let go of anger, overcome personal challenges, and cultivate inner peace. This paper delves into the dynamics and advantages of forgiveness, focusing on its positive effects on physical, emotional, and mental well-being. It also examines forgiveness within interpersonal relationships and communities, emphasizing its role in fostering empathy, resilience, and collective harmony. Techniques such as cognitive reframing, self-compassion, mindfulness, and therapeutic approaches are explored as effective strategies to nurture a forgiving mindset. By presenting these perspectives, the study highlights forgiveness as a transformative force that can reshape life experiences and promote emotional well-being.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, Inner growth, Emotional healing, Personal renewal, Mental well-being, Psychological resilience, Emotional intelligence, Self-compassion, Interpersonal relationships, Spiritual growth, Conflict resolution, Mindfulness, Letting go, Healing trauma, Personal transformation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is a multifaceted concept extensively explored across disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, and theology, with definitions that often encompass emotional, cognitive, and relational aspects. According to Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000),¹ forgiveness involves letting go of resentment and

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¹ Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000): 277 – 285.

judgment toward those who have caused harm, while cultivating emotions like compassion, generosity, and even love. Far from being a single act, forgiveness is an intentional and transformative process that promotes emotional healing, enabling individuals to restore inner peace and achieve personal growth.

II. ARE THERE DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL APPROACHES TO FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a universal concept, yet its meaning and importance differ across cultural contexts. In Western societies, forgiveness is frequently regarded as a personal decision closely associated with emotional relief, self-enhancement, and individual well-being, fostering emotional health and personal development. On the other hand, in many Eastern cultures shaped by philosophies such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, forgiveness is often perceived as a collective practice integral to maintaining social harmony and fulfilling moral obligations. For instance, in Buddhism, forgiveness is considered essential for alleviating suffering and progressing toward enlightenment.²

2.1. The Art of Letting Go Through Mindfulness and Compassion

The teachings of the Buddha consistently highlight the importance of forgiveness and its profound significance. A striking example is the relationship between the Buddha and his cousin, Devadatta, who, driven by jealousy, sought to harm and even kill the Buddha. Despite these acts of malice, the Buddha chose compassion and forgiveness over retaliation, famously stating, “Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” In Buddhism, forgiveness is deeply intertwined with compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*), promoting the release of anger and resentment to achieve inner peace and enlightenment.

Buddhist traditions often include forgiveness rituals aimed at restoring harmony and strengthening interpersonal bonds, reflecting the interconnected nature of all beings.³ Central to this philosophy is the cultivation of *metta*, or loving-kindness, which encourages individuals to extend compassion to themselves and others. Buddhist practices of forgiveness frequently incorporate meditation techniques designed to foster empathy and understanding. For example, Loving-Kindness Meditation involves wishing for the well-being of all beings, including those who have caused harm, reinforcing the transformative power of forgiveness.⁴

2.2. Christianity: Embracing Grace and Redemption

In Christianity, forgiveness is a cornerstone of faith, deeply embedded in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Central to Christian theology is the concept of grace – unearned favor granted by God to humanity. This grace serves as a model for Christians to forgive others, reflecting God’s boundless love and mercy.

² Lin YY, Swanson, D. P., Rogge RD. (2021): 12.

³ Kornfield, J. (1993): 83 - 86.

⁴ Germer, C. K. (2005): 14.

One of the most powerful illustrations of forgiveness in the Bible is the Parable of the Prodigal Son, found in the Gospel of Luke. In this story, a younger son wastes his inheritance on indulgent living but, driven by hardship, returns to his father in repentance. The father, seeing him from afar, runs to embrace him and celebrates his return without reproach, exemplifying unconditional love and the joy of reconciliation. Similarly, during his crucifixion, Jesus demonstrated ultimate forgiveness by praying, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” embodying the selfless love central to Christian doctrine.

Forgiveness in Christianity is both a moral imperative and a spiritual pathway. It is enshrined in the Lord’s Prayer, which emphasizes reciprocal forgiveness as vital for spiritual growth and communal harmony: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This underscores the idea that forgiveness is essential not only for personal salvation but also for nurturing relationships and building cohesive communities.

Christian worship often incorporates forgiveness through prayers, rituals, and sacraments. Practices like confession and reconciliation services encourage believers to release grievances and seek unity with others, promoting personal healing and collective restoration.⁵ These traditions reinforce the transformative power of forgiveness as an expression of divine love and a means to strengthen interpersonal and communal bonds.

2.3. Hinduism: Cultivating Ahimsa and Inner Peace

Hinduism emphasizes forgiveness as an integral part of spiritual growth and social harmony, deeply rooted in the principles of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Karma* (the law of cause and effect). Forgiveness is seen as both a personal virtue and a societal necessity, promoting reconciliation and unity.

The *Bhagavad Gita* offers profound insights into forgiveness through the story of Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava. Following the devastating Kurukshetra War, Yudhishtira is consumed by guilt over the immense loss of life, including that of his family and revered teachers. Guided by Lord Krishna, he learns that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but a vital component of *Dharma* (righteousness). Krishna advises Yudhishtira to rule with compassion, forgive those who have erred, and prioritize the welfare of his kingdom. This journey teaches that forgiveness is essential for overcoming suffering and fostering a harmonious society, illustrating the moral and spiritual strength that forgiveness embodies. The *Bhagavad Gita* highlights forgiveness as a key virtue, stating, “Forgiveness is the noblest quality of a man; it is the greatest virtue.”⁶

Hindu practices further reinforce the significance of forgiveness. Rituals like *Prayaschitta* (atonement) and *Kshama* (forgiveness) are central to restoring harmony and mending relationships. Acts of reconciliation during

⁵ Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L. (2005): 1112 – 1123; and, Hoffman, M. (2007): 213 – 22.

⁶ Radhakrishnan, S. (1999): 8 - 12.

festivals, such as Diwali, encourage individuals to let go of grievances and rebuild connections with family and friends, fostering communal togetherness. Ceremonies like Pradakshina, where devotees circumambulate sacred objects or deities while seeking forgiveness for their transgressions, exemplify the role of forgiveness in spiritual practices.

Hindu scriptures, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, underscore forgiveness as a pathway to inner peace and societal cohesion, advocating for it as a means to transcend anger and conflict, thereby nurturing understanding and unity.⁷ Through its teachings and practices, Hinduism presents forgiveness as a powerful tool for personal transformation and the creation of a harmonious world.

2.4. Jainism: Spiritual growth and liberation

In Jainism, forgiveness is a fundamental principle intricately linked to *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Aparigraha* (non-attachment). It is regarded as a vital practice for spiritual growth, purification of the soul, and the prevention of negative karma accumulation. Forgiveness is not only a personal virtue but also a means of fostering harmony within oneself and the community. Jains express this value through the phrase *Micchāmi Dukkadam*, meaning, “If I have caused you to harm, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word, or action, I seek forgiveness.”

A poignant example of Jain forgiveness is the story of Acharya Harikesha, who embodied patience and compassion when confronted by Prince Kuniya. The prince attacked and insulted Harikesha, yet the Acharya remained calm and refrained from retaliation, adhering to Jain principles of non-violence and empathy. Instead, Harikesha prayed for Kuniya’s well-being and gently advised him on the destructive nature of anger. This act of profound forgiveness moved the prince, leading him to repent and seek forgiveness. The story illustrates the Jain belief that true strength lies in forgiveness, which nurtures inner peace and inspires compassion in others.

Jains emphasize forgiveness as a communal and personal practice, particularly during the *Paryushana* festival and *Samvatsari Pratikraman*. These occasions are dedicated to self-reflection, seeking forgiveness, and granting it to others, fostering spiritual renewal. During this period, Jains actively engage in rituals and prayers, asking for forgiveness from those they may have harmed and forgiving those who have wronged them. This collective practice strengthens unity and compassion within the Jain community, highlighting forgiveness as both a moral duty and a path to liberation (*moksha*).⁸

Through its stories, rituals, and teachings, Jainism underscores forgiveness as an essential virtue, promoting spiritual purification and harmonious coexistence. It demonstrates how forgiveness, rooted in non-violence and detachment, can lead to inner tranquility and inspire positive transformation in others.

⁷ Rao, M. S. (2013): 55.

⁸ Jain, Viney. (2014): 238.

2.5. Islam: Seeking Allah's Mercy and Practicing Reconciliation

In Islam, forgiveness is one of the central attributes of Allah (God) and a profound moral virtue encouraged among believers. The *Qur'an* and *Hadiths* (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) provide extensive guidance on the importance and practice of forgiveness. A key verse in the *Qur'an* states, "And let them pardon and overlook. Would you not like for Allah to forgive you?" (*Qur'an* 24:22). This verse highlights the reciprocal nature of forgiveness, urging believers to forgive others as an act of emulating Allah's boundless mercy.

Forgiveness in Islam is seen as both a divine attribute and a pathway to spiritual purification. Through the regular practice of *Salah* (prayer), Muslims are encouraged to reflect on their actions, seek forgiveness for their sins, and extend forgiveness to those who have wronged them. Communal prayers often include appeals for Allah's mercy and encourage believers to reconcile with one another, fostering harmony within families and communities.⁹

One of the most significant occasions for forgiveness in Islam is *Eid al-Fitr*, the celebration that marks the conclusion of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting and spiritual reflection. This festive period is often characterized by acts of forgiveness and reconciliation, as families and communities come together to renew bonds and resolve conflicts.

Islamic teachings emphasize that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but a manifestation of strength and mercy. By forgiving others, believers reflect the divine qualities of Allah, who is frequently referred to as *Al-Ghaffar* (The Forgiving) and *Al-Rahim* (The Merciful), encouraging a culture of compassion and mutual respect. Through its practices, rituals, and teachings, Islam underscores forgiveness as a means of personal growth, spiritual elevation, and communal harmony.

2.6. Judaism: Balancing Justice and Mercy

Judaism emphasizes a balanced approach to forgiveness, integrating the principles of justice and mercy. Central to this practice is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, regarded as the holiest day for seeking forgiveness from both God and others. This day provides an opportunity for introspection, repentance, and renewal, underscoring the importance of repairing relationships and fostering communal harmony.

The process of forgiveness in Judaism is deeply rooted in *Teshuvah*, a structured approach to repentance. *Teshuvah* involves several key steps: acknowledging one's wrongdoing, expressing sincere remorse, seeking forgiveness from those harmed, and making restitution where possible. This process culminates in a commitment to avoid repeating the offense, demonstrating genuine transformation and a desire to rebuild trust.

2.7. Sikhism: Emphasizing Forgiveness and Equality

Sikhism emphasizes forgiveness as a pathway to inner peace, spiritual

⁹ Fisher, S. (2006): 175 – 192.

growth, and social harmony, deeply rooted in its core values of equality, justice, and compassion. Central to Sikh teachings is the practice of *Naam Jaap* (repeating God's name), which helps individuals maintain focus, cultivate humility, and develop a forgiving heart. By constantly connecting with the divine through *Naam Jaap*, Sikhs are encouraged to rise above anger and resentment, embodying forgiveness in their daily lives.

Community involvement plays a significant role in fostering forgiveness within Sikhism. The principles of *Sangat* (holy congregation) and *Pangat* (equality through communal meals) emphasize mutual respect, support, and egalitarianism. These practices encourage Sikhs to seek reconciliation, forgive others, and strengthen bonds within the community.

Forgiveness in Sikhism is also seen not as a weakness but as a strength, aligning with the broader goal of maintaining harmony and upholding justice. By embodying forgiveness, Sikhs strive to live in accordance with divine will, contributing to both personal and collective spiritual well-being.

III. INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY

Indigenous cultures often emphasize collective approaches to forgiveness, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals within their communities. In many Indigenous spiritual traditions, forgiveness is seen as crucial for healing communal wounds and restoring harmony.

For instance, in certain Native American cultures, forgiveness practices are integrated into ceremonial rituals that promote collective healing, such as the *Sweat Lodge Ceremony*. These ceremonies often involve storytelling, prayer, and deep reflection, allowing individuals to express grievances, seek reconciliation, and work toward emotional healing. Through these practices, the community comes together to address conflicts, mend relationships, and reinforce social cohesion.¹⁰

The communal aspect of forgiveness in Indigenous traditions underscores its importance not only for individual well-being but also for maintaining balance and harmony within the group. As these diverse spiritual and religious traditions illustrate, forgiveness is not merely a personal choice but a profound spiritual practice that fosters transformation at both the individual and collective levels. Ultimately, forgiveness plays a foundational role in ethical behavior, emotional healing, and the restoration of social harmony across various cultural contexts.

3.1. Forgiveness Demystified: Exploring Common Misconceptions

Still, forgiveness is often confused with concepts like reconciliation, condoning, and forgetting, each with unique meanings and relational implications. Understanding these differences clarifies forgiveness's role as an internal process distinct from these other approaches.

3.1.1. Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation - Forgiveness involves the internal release of negative emotions toward an offender, whereas reconciliation is a

¹⁰ Glover, J. (2014): 27 – 45.

relational process focused on rebuilding trust and requires active participation from both parties.¹¹ It is important to note that forgiveness can occur without reconciliation, allowing an individual to find inner peace without re-establishing a relationship with the offender. In contrast, reconciliation requires the willingness of both individuals to restore trust and repair their bond.¹² While forgiveness can create a foundation for reconciliation, it does not necessitate it.¹³

3.1.2. Forgiveness vs. Condoning - Forgiveness is often confused with condoning, which involves excusing or accepting wrongdoing. However, unlike condoning, forgiveness acknowledges the harm caused while choosing to release resentment. Forgiveness recognizes the impact of the offense without justifying or accepting it, allowing for the emotional release of negativity without diminishing the wrongdoing.¹⁴ In contrast, condoning downplays the severity of the offense and can undermine accountability. Forgiveness, on the other hand, empowers individuals by providing them with the agency to control their emotional response, independent of the offense's justification.¹⁵

3.1.3. Forgiveness vs. Forgetting - Forgetting involves erasing or disregarding the offense, whereas forgiveness requires consciously remembering the wrongdoing but choosing to change one's emotional response to it. Forgiveness allows individuals to integrate the experience without allowing it to negatively shape their self-identity, facilitating healing without resorting to denial or repression.¹⁶ In contrast, forgetting can leave unresolved emotions that may continue to affect emotional well-being over time.¹⁷

These differences highlight forgiveness as an internal process that empowers individuals to manage their emotional reactions, ultimately promoting resilience and emotional well-being.

3.2. When Forgiveness Feels Impossible: Psychological and Social Obstacles

Forgiveness is often challenging due to a variety of psychological, emotional, and social factors that complicate the process. Few of these are evident in the current literature, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

3.2.1. Emotional Pain and Psychological Scars: Forgiveness can be especially challenging when emotional wounds are profound. The pain of betrayal or hurt often persists, leading to repetitive mental replays of the past injury¹⁸ explain that negative emotions can become ingrained over time,

¹¹ Worthington, E. L., Jr., Mazzeo, S. E., & Canter, D. E. (2005): 235 – 257.

¹² North, J. (1998): 15 – 34). University of Wisconsin Press; and, McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. A. (1997): 985 – 1001.

¹³ Exline, J. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000): 409 – 429.

¹⁴ Fincham, F. D. (2000): 36 – 43.

¹⁵ Rye, M. S., et al. (2001): 451 – 469.

¹⁶ Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996): 155 – 170.

¹⁷ Exline, J. J., et al. (2003): 6 – 12.

¹⁸ Freedman, S. R., & Enright, R. D. (1996): 155 – 170; and, Lichtenfeld S, Maier MA,

creating habitual patterns that make it difficult to release these feelings and move forward.

3.2.2. Justice and Fairness: Many individuals struggle with forgiveness because it can feel like a betrayal of their sense of justice, especially when the wrongdoing remains unresolved or unacknowledged. Exline et al. (2003)¹⁹ found that people who prioritize fairness or retribution may view forgiveness as excusing or minimizing the offender's actions. This perception of injustice can create a significant emotional barrier, making forgiveness feel morally wrong or undeserved.

3.2.3. Fear of Vulnerability and Future Harm: Many people hesitate to forgive because they fear it might leave them vulnerable to further harm. Forgiveness involves letting go of anger and resentment, which can feel like relinquishing protective emotional boundaries. Research by Karremans and Van Lange (2008)²⁰ suggests that individuals may be reluctant to forgive because they worry it will make them appear weak or exposed to exploitation. This fear of being taken advantage of often prevents people from embracing forgiveness, as they may see it as a loss of control or a potential invitation for further hurt.

3.2.4. Ego and Pride: Forgiveness can be challenging when pride or ego are involved, as it may feel like a personal loss or a blow to one's self-esteem. Baumeister et al. (1998)²¹ explain that individuals may resist forgiveness because they perceive it as a form of surrender, potentially diminishing their sense of self-worth. In situations where pride is tied to the conflict, forgiving the offender may feel like an admission of weakness or an acknowledgment that they were wronged. This internal struggle between maintaining self-respect and letting go of negative emotions can create a significant barrier to the forgiveness process.

3.2.5. Attachment to Anger: For some individuals, anger serves as an empowering emotion, especially in the aftermath of repeated harm or betrayal. Enright et al. (1998)²² found that anger can provide a sense of control over the situation, giving individuals a way to protect themselves from further hurt. This emotional response can act as a defense mechanism, allowing individuals to feel empowered in the face of injustice. However, forgiveness requires letting go of that anger and control, which can feel uncomfortable or even risky. Surrendering anger in favor of healing may feel like relinquishing the power that anger once provided, making forgiveness a daunting step for those who rely on their anger as a form of emotional protection.

3.2.6. Difficulty with Empathy: Forgiveness becomes significantly easier

Buechner VL, Fernández Capo M. (2019): 1425.

¹⁹ Exline, J. J., Baumeister, R. F., Bushman, B. J., Campbell, W. K., & Finkel, E. J. (2003): 658 – 666.

²⁰ Karremans, J. C., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2008): 1 – 12.

²¹ Baumeister, R. F., Exline, J. J., & Sommer, K. L. (1998): 31 – 35.

²² Enright, R. D., Freedman, S. R., & Rique, J. (1998): 46 – 60.

when individuals are able to understand the perspective of the person who has wronged them. Empathy (the ability to recognize and share the feelings of others) helps to soften the emotional barriers built from past harm. When empathy is present, people are more likely to move past their own pain and see the situation from the other person's viewpoint, which makes forgiveness more accessible.²³ However, when empathy is lacking, forgiveness can be much more challenging. Without the ability to appreciate the offender's intentions or circumstances, individuals may become stuck in their own pain, which only deepens the emotional divide. The absence of empathy can lead to a defensive mindset, where individuals remain emotionally distant and less likely to seek reconciliation. In this state, forgiveness may seem like an unfair concession or an emotional vulnerability, making it difficult to heal or rebuild relationships. Therefore, fostering empathy is critical in overcoming the challenges of forgiveness. It allows individuals to transcend personal hurt and see the situation in a broader, more compassionate light, which paves the way for reconciliation and emotional healing.

3.2.7. Fear of Losing Boundaries: Forgiveness can be challenging when individuals fear it may compromise their personal boundaries, allowing the offender to repeat hurtful behavior. Hall and Fincham (2005)²⁴ note that forgiveness is often misunderstood as an invitation to be harmed again. In reality, forgiveness is an internal process of letting go of negative emotions, without condoning the behavior or permitting further harm. The difficulty in forgiving arises from emotional scars, cognitive biases, and social factors, making the process feel risky or counterproductive. Forgiveness does not mean losing boundaries; it involves finding peace while still maintaining self-protection.

3.3. The Psychology of Forgiveness: Personality Differences in Letting Go

What They Are Not Letting Go Of:

3.3.1. Ruminative and Grudge-Holding - Individuals who struggle with forgiveness often hold onto past wrongs, replaying the hurt and keeping anger and pain alive in their minds. They may be prone to bitterness, vengefulness, and dwelling on negative experiences. Research by Niven et al. (2012)²⁵ shows that rumination, or the tendency to repeatedly think about past wrongs, can intensify negative emotions and hinder psychological well-being, making the process of forgiveness more difficult for such individuals.

3.3.2. Low Emotional Resilience - Individuals who have difficulty forgiving often find it challenging to move on from emotional wounds, as feelings of anger, hurt, and betrayal take over. These strong emotions can cloud their thinking and obstruct their healing journey. They often experience emotional vulnerability, struggle with managing stress, and are highly sensitive

²³ McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. A. (1997): 985 – 1001.

²⁴ Hall, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (2005): 459 – 466.

²⁵ Niven, K., Holman, D., & Stride, C. (2012): 2712 – 2726.

to perceived offenses, all of which make it harder for them to release negative emotions and embrace forgiveness.

3.3.3. Strong Sense of Justice and Retribution - Individuals with a strong belief in fairness and a desire for justice may struggle with forgiveness, as they perceive it as condoning the wrongdoing or letting the offender avoid consequences. Their high need for fairness, desire for retribution, and strong moral compass make it difficult for them to reconcile the act of forgiveness with their sense of right and wrong.

3.3.4. Ego-Centerism - Individuals with a strong sense of pride may view forgiveness as a threat to their self-image. For them, letting go of anger or admitting vulnerability can feel like relinquishing control or losing power. Their ego-driven nature, defensiveness, self-righteousness, and pride make it difficult for them to embrace forgiveness, as it challenges their sense of superiority and personal strength.

3.3.5. Insecure and Fearful of Vulnerability - Individuals with deep insecurities often fear that forgiveness will leave them vulnerable to further harm or strip away their sense of protection. Struggling with trust, they may have difficulty believing in the goodwill of others. Their distrust, anxiety, insecurity, and fear of being hurt again create a barrier to forgiving, as they are wary of being taken advantage of or betrayed once more.

3.3.6. Lack of Empathy - Forgiving requires the ability to understand the offender's perspective, but people who lack empathy often struggle with this. They may find it difficult to put themselves in the other person's shoes and might view the offender as unforgivable. These individuals tend to have low empathy, an inability to consider others' feelings, and rigid thinking, which hinders their ability to forgive.

What They Are Letting Go Of:

i. High Emotional Intelligence - These individuals are skilled at processing and managing their emotions, which helps them move beyond negative feelings and forgive more easily. They can empathize with others' shortcomings and grasp the reasons behind harmful actions. They possess strong emotional awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and social skills.

ii. Non-judgmental and Open-Minded - Individuals who forgive easily are typically open-minded and refrain from making quick judgments. They recognize that everyone is fallible and are willing to give second chances. They possess a high level of acceptance, open-mindedness, and a non-judgmental attitude.

iii. Compassionate and Kind - Individuals with a strong sense of compassion are able to overlook wrongdoings and focus on the well-being of others. They often practice forgiveness to foster peace and harmony in their relationships. They are characterized by kindness, empathy, understanding, and a genuine concern for others' welfare.

iv. Secure and Confident - Individuals who forgive easily tend to have

a strong sense of self-worth and are not easily affected by others' actions. They possess confidence in their ability to forgive while maintaining their integrity and self-respect. They are emotionally stable, self-assured, and secure in their values.

v. Spiritual and Philosophical - Individuals who adhere to spiritual or philosophical teachings often see forgiveness as a vital practice for personal growth and emotional tranquility. They emphasize releasing negative emotions to maintain inner peace and harmony. These individuals embrace spirituality, mindfulness, inner peace, and acceptance of human imperfection.

vi. Resilient and Positive - Individuals who find it easy to forgive often demonstrate resilience, recovering quickly from challenges without harboring lingering resentment. They prioritize the positive elements in their relationships and are open to moving past previous conflicts. These individuals possess emotional strength, a hopeful outlook, a present-focused mentality, and a future-oriented perspective.

vii. Altruistic and Selfless - People who forgive easily often have a deep sense of altruism, driven by a genuine desire to support others' growth and healing. They prioritize the well-being of others and choose to forgive as a means of releasing emotional burdens and fostering healing. Their actions are rooted in selflessness, compassion, and a focus on the collective good.

The ability to forgive is influenced by a variety of personality traits. "Let go of the past, let go of the future, let go of the present, and cross over to the other shore. With mind wholly liberated, you shall come no more to birth and death." Letting go of past grievances is essential for spiritual liberation and peace. Individuals who find it difficult to forgive often exhibit higher levels of pride, emotional sensitivity, and a strong sense of justice. In contrast, those who are more inclined to forgive typically possess emotional resilience, empathy, and a compassionate outlook. Recognizing these personality differences can help us understand both the obstacles and advantages of forgiveness, offering pathways to improved emotional well-being and better interpersonal relationships for everyone.

IV. DECODING FORGIVENESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS AT PLAY

Forgiveness is a multifaceted psychological process that involves mental, emotional, and behavioral transformations. It requires shifting away from emotions like anger and resentment and moving toward a positive or neutral stance on past hurts. This transformation occurs through cognitive restructuring, emotional regulation, empathy, and self-compassion. It includes the following mechanisms

4.1. Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring is a therapeutic technique that involves reframing the offense to diminish negative emotions. It encourages individuals to view the situation more objectively, acknowledging the offender's human imperfections and limitations. This shift in perspective can reduce anger and

resentment, leading to emotional relief. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) frequently incorporates cognitive restructuring to alleviate emotional distress and promote healthier emotional responses.²⁶

4.2. Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is a critical skill for managing and responding to emotions in a constructive way, especially in the context of forgiveness. It involves choosing to release negative emotions like anger and resentment, which are often tied to an offense. By using emotional regulation, individuals can work through these challenging emotions, allowing space for compassion and understanding. This process helps people avoid reactions that might worsen the hurt. Techniques such as mindfulness and relaxation can aid in emotional regulation, enabling individuals to reflect on their emotions without becoming overwhelmed. Research indicates that emotional regulation is strongly linked to better mental health and plays a crucial role in forgiveness, helping to reduce stress and negative emotional responses.²⁷

4.3. Empathy Development

Empathy is the ability to understand and connect with the offender's perspective, which helps reduce judgment and softens feelings of anger. By developing empathy, individuals can consider the motives or struggles of the person who caused harm, fostering a sense of compassion. Research has shown that empathy plays a key role in increasing the willingness to forgive by diminishing negative emotions tied to the offense.²⁸ As a result, empathy exercises are often integrated into forgiveness training programs to encourage a more compassionate and understanding approach.

4.4. Forgiving Yourself: How Self-Compassion Fuels Emotional Recovery

Forgiveness often starts with self-compassion, which involves treating oneself with kindness, especially when dealing with feelings of guilt or shame. The story of Angulimala can prove the same.

Meera, a wise and compassionate woman from a peaceful village near the Ganges River, was well-known. However, her life was not always easy. She walked with a limp. When asked about it, she'd tell a narrative that inspired everyone who listened. Meera was a young, angry, and resentful woman years ago. She had suffered many losses, including the death of her father at a young age, recurring crop failures, and betrayal by her closest friend. One day, as she wandered through the forest, her thoughts were muddled by sorrow and frustration. She was so engrossed in her feelings that she didn't notice the thorny bush and a sharp thorn penetrated her foot, inflicting pain throughout her body. She yelled, sitting by the side of the path, blaming herself for not paying attention, and blaming life for its incessant harshness. At the same time, a learned monk passed by and heard her sobbing, he stopped. "Why

²⁶ Hargrove, T. (2020): 123 – 135.

²⁷ Keng SL, Smoski MJ, Robins CJ. (2011) :1041 - 56.

²⁸ Moudatsou M, Stavropoulou A, Philalithis A, Koukouli S. (2020): 26.

do you sit here crying, child?" he inquired, sensing her agony. She pointed to the thorn and remarked, "This is just another example of how unjust my life is. Everything hurts, and nothing goes right." The monk thought quietly and smiled. "Tell me, what would you do if your best friend sat here with a thorn in their foot, weeping as you are now?" She paused and reflected for a time. "I would help her pull it out and soothe her pain." "And yet," the monk replied gently, "you let your pain fester. You sit here in rage instead of assisting yourself. Wouldn't you treat yourself with the same kindness and compassion, you would show to a friend?" The woman felt extremely moved by the monk's words. For the first time, she regarded her pain not as a punishment, but as a natural part of existence. She cleansed her wound and removed the thorn. Her bitterness began to soften as the pain subsided. The monk went on, "When life throws thorns in our path, we have two options: blame the world or care for our wounds with compassion." Only by caring for yourself will you be able to move forward without bitterness.

Self-forgiveness allows individuals to let go of these burdens, promoting personal growth and self-acceptance. Research by Neff (2003)²⁹ highlights that self-compassion improves emotional resilience, reduces negative self-judgment, and supports the ability to forgive others. By cultivating self-compassion, individuals are not only better able to forgive themselves but also others, contributing to improved well-being. Incorporating these practices into therapeutic settings can facilitate personal transformation and create a culture of compassion.

4.5. Forgiveness as a Path to Spiritual Growth

Forgiveness is a deeply transformative process, intertwining emotional healing with spiritual growth. Spiritually, forgiveness is integral to cultivating compassion and achieving inner peace, often regarded as a pathway to higher values and deeper beliefs³⁰. It goes beyond being a mere emotional response; it is fundamentally connected to spiritual evolution and the pursuit of tranquility. By releasing anger, resentment, and hurt, individuals make room for healing, peace, and harmony in their lives. Forgiveness, across many spiritual traditions, is revered as a sacred practice that nourishes the soul, strengthens connections with others, and fosters a deeper bond with the divine or one's own inner self. It invites self-reflection, empathy, and a greater understanding of others, transforming negative emotions into a force for personal and communal well-being.

Approaching forgiveness as a spiritual practice not only benefits others but also offers personal liberation from emotional burdens, bringing about true peace and freedom. In various spiritual contexts, forgiveness holds great importance: in Buddhism, it is seen as a means to attain inner peace, while in Christianity and Islam, it is regarded as a divine act aligned with moral and spiritual integrity³¹. Ultimately, forgiveness promotes moral development, helping individuals move

²⁹ Neff, K. D. (2003): 85 – 101.

³⁰ Thoresen, C. E., et al. (2000): 529 – 558.

³¹ Rye, M. S., et al. (2001): 451 – 469.

beyond personal grievances and toward greater compassion.

4.6. Embracing Forgiveness: Its Role in a Fulfilling Life

Forgiveness plays a vital role in promoting mental health and emotional well-being, acting as a powerful pathway to healing. By releasing negative emotions and lingering resentments, forgiveness helps cultivate inner peace, which in turn reduces stress, anxiety, and depression. Studies have shown that individuals who practice forgiveness tend to experience lower levels of psychological distress and higher levels of life satisfaction. This underscores forgiveness as an effective therapeutic tool for enhancing mental health and overall quality of life.³²

4.7. Physical Health Benefits of Forgiveness

Forgiveness supports physical health by reducing anger and psychological stress, which can manifest physically. It also encourages positive emotions like empathy and compassion, which enhance health outcomes.

4.7.1. Blood Pressure and Cardiovascular Health - Stress and negative emotions are key contributors to high blood pressure, and research indicates that forgiveness can help alleviate these factors, leading to improved cardiovascular health. Worthington et al. (2005)³³ found that forgiveness interventions resulted in significant reductions in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Long-term studies suggest that individuals who regularly practice forgiveness are more likely to maintain healthier blood pressure levels, highlighting the cardiovascular benefits of forgiveness.³⁴

4.7.2. Heart Rate Variability and Emotional Regulation - Heart rate variability (HRV), an indicator of the body's ability to manage stress, has been shown to improve with forgiveness, promoting better emotional regulation and resilience. Lemay et al. (2016)³⁵ discovered that individuals who practiced forgiveness had higher HRV, suggesting that forgiveness enhances emotional regulation and supports more balanced physiological responses to stress.

4.7.3. Immune Function - Forgiveness has significant benefits for immune health by reducing inflammation and promoting faster recovery from illness. The positive psychological states that come with forgiveness help lower stress-related inflammation, which in turn supports a stronger and more effective immune response.

4.7.4. Reducing Inflammation - Chronic inflammation is linked to a range of health issues, including cardiovascular and autoimmune diseases. Forgiveness has been shown to reduce inflammatory markers, such as pro-inflammatory cytokines, in the body³⁶. Studies also indicate that individuals who practice forgiveness exhibit lower levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a

³² Toussaint, L., Worthington, E. L., & Williams, D. R. (2001): 305 – 338.

³³ Worthington, E. L., et al. (2005): 658 – 669.

³⁴ Witvliet, C. V., et al. (2001): 191 – 217.

³⁵ Lemay, E. P., & Prentice, M. A. (2016): 150 – 159.

³⁶ McCullough, M. E. (2001): 62 – 75.

marker of inflammation, suggesting that forgiveness may help protect against inflammation-related health conditions.³⁷

4.7.5. Quicker Recovery from Illness - Forgiveness plays a significant role in promoting faster recovery from illness by reducing stress and enhancing immune function. Research indicates that patients who practice forgiveness tend to recover more quickly and face fewer complications during their recovery process.³⁸ This suggests that the psychological benefits of forgiveness can support physical healing by improving immune system functioning and reducing stress-related barriers to recovery.

4.8. Mental Health Benefits of Forgiveness

Forgiveness improves mental health, particularly by reducing anxiety and depression. Studies indicate that it lowers physiological stress markers, including cortisol, blood pressure, and heart rate.

4.8.1. Cortisol and Stress Response - Forgiveness has been shown to lower cortisol levels, a stress hormone linked to various health issues.³⁹ By releasing feelings of resentment and embracing forgiveness, individuals can reduce the negative impacts of chronic stress, promoting both physical and mental well-being. This reduction in stress hormones helps to lower the risk of stress-related health problems, contributing to better overall health.

4.8.2. Anxiety and Depression - Forgiveness plays a key role in emotional healing by alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression.⁴⁰ It interrupts the cycle of rumination, where individuals obsess over negative experiences, helping to reduce emotional distress.⁴¹ This emotional release fosters a sense of relief and promotes overall mental well-being.

4.8.3. Emotional Regulation and Positive Emotions - Forgiveness promotes emotional regulation by encouraging the development of empathy, compassion, and gratitude. These positive feelings play a key role in enhancing mental well-being and building resilience. By fostering empathy, compassion, and gratitude, forgiveness helps strengthen emotional health and coping abilities.⁴²

Forgiveness in Post-War Recovery- Forgiveness is crucial in the process of post-conflict reconciliation, assisting both individuals and communities in healing from the trauma of war, violence, or systemic injustices. By addressing deep emotional scars, forgiveness allows people to move past past grievances, promoting societal healing, rebuilding trust, and fostering lasting harmony.

4.9. Other Benefits of Forgiveness

4.9.1. Forgiveness Leading to Peace - Forgiveness plays a critical role

³⁷ Tkach, P., et al. (2017): 121 – 134.

³⁸ Keng, S. L., Smoski, M. J., & Robins, C. J. (2011): 1041 – 1056.

³⁹ Lawler, J. M., & McCullough, M. E. (2005): 106 – 122.

⁴⁰ Harris, M. A., Thoresen, C. E., & Forgiveness, W. (2006): 1012 – 1035.

⁴¹ Lynch, S. M., & Reed, M. (2005): 1019 – 1031.

⁴² Maltby, J., Day, L., & Macaskill, A. (2002): 151–160; and, Toussaint, L., Worthington, E. L., & Williams, D. R. (2001): 305 – 338.

in providing peace that mends the harm caused by criminal actions through inclusive processes that engage victims, offenders, and the community. The direct dialogues between victims and offenders allow victims to express the emotional impact of the crime, fostering forgiveness and promoting personal healing. “Forgiveness is the path that turns wounds into wisdom and enemies into friends.” Forgiveness, rooted in love, is the path to overcoming hatred and resentment. These conversations also encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions and recognize their consequences.⁴³

Restorative justice initiatives not only facilitate healing in individual relationships but also benefit the broader community by promoting forgiveness and accountability. This approach helps reduce recidivism, strengthens community bonds, and cultivates a sense of belonging. By embracing forgiveness, individuals and communities build stronger, healthier connections, fostering personal growth and collective resilience.

4.9.2. Forgiveness: A Key to Unlocking Self-Transformation - Forgiveness is often seen as an act of kindness toward others, but it also serves as a powerful catalyst for personal growth and self-improvement. The act of forgiving requires individuals to confront their emotions, reflect on their experiences, and make conscious choices about responding to past hurts. This introspective process often leads to profound insights and transformations. By letting go of resentment and negative emotions, individuals reclaim their emotional energy and redirect it toward positive growth. The main benefits of forgiveness for personal development include.

i. Enhanced Self-Acceptance - Forgiveness helps individuals accept both their own flaws and those of others. By understanding that everyone is prone to making mistakes, people nurture self-compassion, which in turn promotes greater self-acceptance. Neff’s (2003)⁴⁴ research emphasized that self-compassion, which is closely linked to forgiveness, is associated with enhanced emotional well-being.

ii. Greater Emotional Resilience - Practicing forgiveness strengthens emotional resilience by providing individuals with better-coping mechanisms for dealing with adversity. Releasing grudges opens up mental space for positive experiences and personal growth. Research by Worthington et al. (2005)⁴⁵ found that individuals who embrace forgiveness tend to show greater resilience, helping them recover more effectively from life’s difficulties. “Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” This emphasizes that harboring resentment harms the person holding it more than the one who caused the hurt.

iii. Increased Life Satisfaction - Several studies have established a

⁴³ Yi Z, Wu D, Deng M. (2023): 747.

⁴⁴ Neff, K. D. (2003): 85 – 101.

⁴⁵ Worthington, E. L., et al. (2005): 658 – 669.

connection between forgiveness and greater life satisfaction. Coyle and Enright (1997)⁴⁶ discovered that individuals who participated in forgiveness exercises experienced significant improvements in life satisfaction and happiness, compared to those who did not. Letting go of past grievances allows individuals to focus more on the present and future, leading to a more enriching and fulfilling life.

iv. Promotion of Positive Mindsets - Forgiveness fosters a positive mindset by helping individuals shift their focus from past negative experiences to the lessons learned and opportunities for growth. This cognitive reframing plays a vital role in personal development, as it enables people to view challenges as opportunities for learning. According to research by McCullough et al. (2004)⁴⁷, individuals who practice forgiveness are more likely to develop an optimistic outlook, which contributes to improved overall well-being. "In separateness lies the world's greatest misery; in forgiveness lies the world's true strength." Forgiveness brings unity and healing, reducing suffering for oneself and others.

v. Strengthening Identity and Values - Forgiveness can serve as a catalyst for individuals to reflect on their core values and reassess their priorities, ultimately strengthening their sense of identity. Through this reflection, people often uncover new passions and interests that align with their deepest beliefs, fostering personal growth. Research has shown that those who practice forgiveness often develop a clearer sense of purpose and direction in life.⁴⁸

The transformative effect of forgiveness on personal growth is well-documented. For instance, a longitudinal study by Wade and Worthington (2003)⁴⁹ revealed that participants who engaged in forgiveness exercises reported significant improvements in self-esteem, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction over time. Likewise, research by Coyle (2001) demonstrated that forgiveness training enhanced self-awareness and contributed to greater overall life satisfaction.

4.10. Barriers to Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a complex process that can be obstructed by various personal, social, and psychological barriers. Understanding these obstacles is crucial for facilitating forgiveness and promoting emotional healing.

4.10.1 Personal Barriers - Personal barriers refer to internal challenges that individuals face when attempting to forgive. These may include Resentment and Anger. Intense feelings of resentment and anger toward someone who has caused harm can create a significant obstacle to forgiveness. These emotions are often held onto as a way of validating one's pain or maintaining a sense

⁴⁶ Coyle, C. T., & Enright, R. D. (1997): 111 – 127.

⁴⁷ Worthington, Everett & Scherer, Michael. (2004): 385 – 405.

⁴⁸ Luchies, Laura & Finkel, Eli & Fitzsimons, Gráinne. (2010):. 1251 - 80.

⁴⁹ Wade, N. G., & Worthington, E. L. (2003): 343 – 353.

of control over the situation. “You will not be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger.” This reminds us that anger creates suffering within us and can lead to harmful consequences. According to Enright et al. (1998),⁵⁰ unresolved anger acts as a major barrier to forgiveness, especially when individuals perceive their anger as a protective mechanism for emotional self-defense.

4.10.2. Fear of Vulnerability - Forgiveness can seem risky because it involves opening oneself up to potential future pain, making individuals hesitant to engage in the process. This fear of further harm can create reluctance to forgive. Worthington (2004)⁵¹ highlights that the vulnerability required in forgiveness can be difficult, particularly when individuals are uncertain about the offender’s future actions or sincerity.

4.10.3. Lack of Self-Compassion - Individuals who struggle with self-criticism often find it challenging to forgive others. A lack of self-compassion can lead to feelings of unworthiness, making it difficult to believe they deserve forgiveness themselves. This creates a negative cycle. Neff’s (2003)⁵² research on self-compassion emphasizes that cultivating kindness toward oneself is vital for breaking this cycle, enabling individuals to extend forgiveness to others.

To heal, it’s essential to acknowledge the emotions tied to hurt. Rather than suppressing or denying these feelings, individuals must allow themselves to fully experience and accept them as part of their healing journey. Journaling is one effective method for processing these emotions, offering a private space to reflect and express thoughts. Talking to a trusted friend or therapist can also provide support and a broader perspective. Research by Pennebaker and Beall (1986)⁵³ suggests that such expressive practices help process painful emotions, making it easier to move past them.

Developing self-compassion is another key step, as it helps individuals recognize their value and capacity for forgiveness. Neff (2003) highlights that exercises in self-compassion are effective in fostering inner kindness. By nurturing a compassionate mindset, individuals not only learn to forgive others but also extend forgiveness to themselves. This foundation of kindness promotes resilience, especially when confronting painful experiences, and encourages a forgiving attitude grounded in self-worth.

Another effective strategy for overcoming obstacles to forgiveness is reframing perspectives. Cognitive restructuring allows individuals to shift their focus from anger to understanding, promoting empathy. Instead of seeing the offender as an antagonist, reframing helps individuals view them as a fallible human being. McCullough et al. (1997)⁵⁴ found that when individuals

⁵⁰ Enright, R. D., Freedman, S. R., & Rique, J. (1998): 61 – 87).

⁵¹ Worthington, Everett & Scherer, Michael. (2004): 385 - 405.

⁵² Neff, K. D. (2003): 85 – 101.

⁵³ Pennebaker, J. W. (1997): 162 - 166.

⁵⁴ McCullough, M. E., Fincham, F. D., & Tsang, J. A. (1997): 985 – 1001.

approach others with empathy and understanding, forgiveness becomes more accessible and achievable.

4.10.4. Social Barriers - Social factors also impede the forgiveness process, including:

i. Cultural Norms - Certain cultures place a stronger emphasis on retribution than on forgiveness, fostering societal expectations to hold onto grievances and seek justice rather than reconciliation. This cultural norm can make forgiveness seem less viable or even undesirable. Hook et al. (2012)⁵⁵ underline the significant impact of cultural frameworks in shaping individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward forgiveness, showing how these values influence whether forgiveness is embraced or resisted.

ii. Cultural Influences - Cultural perspectives on forgiveness significantly influence a client's willingness to engage in forgiveness-based interventions. To provide effective support, therapists must take these cultural factors into account, tailoring their methods to align with the client's unique values and belief systems. This culturally sensitive approach ensures that interventions are meaningful and resonate deeply with the client's worldview.

iii. Negative environment - Family and friends who perpetuate a victim mindset may unintentionally hinder the forgiveness process by fostering anger and resentment. Fincham et al. (2006)⁵⁶ highlight that social circles emphasizing negativity can create barriers to forgiveness, as they may discourage letting go of grievances and promote holding onto past hurts.

iv. Fear of Losing Identity - For some individuals, holding onto grievances becomes intertwined with their sense of identity, making it challenging to let go. Releasing such hurts may feel like losing a core part of themselves. Lawler-Row and Piferi (2006)⁵⁷ note that attachment to these negative aspects of identity can impede the emotional release needed for forgiveness.

Creating a supportive social environment can significantly aid in the forgiveness process, especially when cultural or relational barriers exist. Being surrounded by people who encourage emotional healing and value forgiveness fosters a positive atmosphere that supports personal growth. Fincham et al. (2006)⁵⁸ suggest that supportive networks reinforce attitudes conducive to forgiveness, making it easier to adopt these practices.

Challenging cultural norms that discourage forgiveness through education and open dialogue can also create meaningful change. Sharing knowledge

⁵⁵ Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Utsey, S. O., & Davis, D. E. (2012): 508 – 528.

⁵⁶ Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2006): 611 – 622.

⁵⁷ Lawler-Row, K. A., & Piferi, R. L. (2006): 535 – 555.

⁵⁸ Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R. H., & Davila, J. (2006): 611 – 622.

about the psychological and emotional benefits of forgiveness helps reshape perceptions within social circles. Hook et al. (2012)⁵⁹ emphasize that these discussions can promote greater acceptance of forgiveness, encouraging individuals to reevaluate traditional views and embrace emotional resilience.

Identifying role models who exemplify forgiveness offers additional inspiration and guidance. Observing how others have navigated the path to forgiveness can motivate individuals to pursue similar healing in their own lives. McCullough (2001)⁶⁰ highlights the influence of such role models, demonstrating that their experiences can provide hope and practical examples for overcoming resentment.

4.11. Psychological Barriers to Forgiveness

Psychological factors often play a significant role in hindering forgiveness. These may include Cognitive Distortions. Negative thought patterns, including black-and-white thinking and catastrophizing, often distort perceptions and intensify feelings of hurt, making forgiveness more challenging. Worthington (2001) emphasizes that confronting and reframing these cognitive distortions is essential for cultivating forgiveness. By adopting a clearer and more balanced perspective, individuals can better understand the situation and move toward emotional resolution.

4.11.1. Trauma and Unresolved Grief - Experiencing significant trauma or unresolved grief can make the process of forgiveness more complex. According to Greenberg and Warwar (2006)⁶¹, such past traumas often lead to lingering emotional barriers, as individuals grapple with unresolved emotions that hinder their ability to forgive. Addressing these underlying issues is crucial for overcoming these obstacles and fostering emotional healing.

4.11.2. Fear of Repeating Mistakes - The fear of forgiveness leading to further harm or betrayal often causes hesitation. Wade and Worthington (2005)⁶² suggest that addressing underlying anxieties about trust can help alleviate this concern, enabling individuals to approach forgiveness with greater confidence and emotional security.

4.11.3. Resistance to Forgiveness - People may initially struggle with forgiveness due to unresolved feelings of anger or betrayal. Therapists need to approach these emotions with care and patience, giving clients the time and space to process their experiences at their own pace.

Overcoming barriers to forgiveness is a complex process that requires self-awareness, intentional effort, and external support. Viewing forgiveness as a gradual journey rather than an immediate goal empowers individuals to take manageable steps toward healing and reconciliation.

⁵⁹ Hook, J. N., Worthington, E. L., Jr., Utsey, S. O., & Davis, D. E. (2012): 508 – 528.

⁶⁰ McCullough, M. E., and Worthington E. L. (1999): 1141 - 1164.

⁶¹ Greenberg, L. S., & Warwar, S. H. (2006): 574 – 588.

⁶² Worthington, E. L., et al. (2005): 658 – 669.

Therapeutic interventions can be particularly helpful for those encountering psychological obstacles to forgiveness. Trauma-informed therapies provide tools to address unresolved pain, challenge harmful thought patterns, and foster healthier emotional responses. Research by Wade and Worthington (2005) and Greenberg and Warwar (2006)⁶³ demonstrates the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) in guiding individuals through these challenges and creating pathways toward forgiveness.

Mindfulness practices also play a crucial role in breaking through psychological barriers. By promoting present-focused awareness, mindfulness helps individuals let go of entrenched negative emotions and thought patterns, creating mental clarity for forgiveness. Kabat-Zinn (2003)⁶⁴ underscores the benefits of mindfulness in reducing the emotional weight of past grievances, enabling individuals to move forward with greater ease.

A gradual approach to forgiveness, starting with smaller acts of self-forgiveness or addressing minor offenses, can make the process more manageable. Enright et al. (1998)⁶⁵ highlight that incremental steps allow individuals to confront their emotions in a less overwhelming way, building the confidence and emotional capacity to tackle deeper wounds over time.

4.11.4. Breaking Barriers: Practical Techniques for Moving Forward

Forgiveness techniques offer valuable strategies for managing the challenging emotions and situations associated with hurtful experiences.

i. Journaling: Writing about one's feelings allows for deep self-reflection and the expression of pain and anger, providing a constructive outlet to process emotions and move toward forgiveness.

ii. Mindfulness Practices: Focusing on the present moment helps individuals detach from persistent negative thoughts and regulate emotions, creating space for calm and thoughtful reflections on the hurt.

iii. Visualization: Mentally rehearsing forgiveness—such as imagining conversations with the offender or visualizing the release of resentment—can make the concept of forgiving feel more tangible and attainable.

iv. Seeking Support: Talking with trusted friends, therapists, or support groups offers external validation and fresh perspectives, fostering a supportive environment conducive to healing and forgiveness.

v. Setting Boundaries: Establishing limits with the offender ensures protection from future harm, reinforcing that forgiveness does not equate to accepting harmful behavior.

vi. Gradual Exposure: Taking incremental steps, such as forgiving smaller offenses or practicing self-forgiveness, builds confidence and

⁶³ Greenberg, L. S., & Warwar, S. H. (2006): 574 – 588.

⁶⁴ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003): 283 – 303.

⁶⁵ Enright, R. D., Gassin, E. A., & Wu, C. (1998): 155 – 171.

emotional resilience to address deeper wounds over time.

vii. Acts of Kindness: Demonstrating kindness – toward oneself or the offender – can nurture compassion and empathy, which are essential for achieving forgiveness.

viii. Therapeutic Interventions: Structured methods like trauma-focused therapy offer valuable tools for processing emotions, reframing negative thought patterns, and fostering forgiveness within a supportive, guided environment.

By integrating these techniques into their lives, individuals can effectively navigate the forgiveness journey, ultimately achieving emotional healing, personal growth, and enhanced well-being. To conclude, forgiveness is more than a virtue; it is a transformative journey toward inner growth and renewal. By choosing to forgive, we release the burdens of resentment and open our hearts to healing and compassion. This powerful act not only liberates us from past wounds but also fosters a deeper connection with ourselves and others, guiding us toward a more peaceful and fulfilling life. True renewal begins within, and forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door to lasting emotional freedom and personal growth.

V. CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is a transforming process that promotes personal development, emotional healing, and psychological well-being. It is more than just forgiving others; it is an intentional decision to relinquish animosity, allowing people to break free from the cycle of negativity. Research has shown that forgiveness has a significant impact on mental health, relationships, and even physical well-being, suggesting that it is both a psychological and physiological imperative.

Individuals who embrace forgiveness develop empathy, resilience, and self-compassion, opening the way for greater personal strength and healthier social ties. Furthermore, forgiveness is profoundly embedded in a variety of cultural, intellectual, and spiritual traditions, demonstrating its global importance. While the journey to forgiveness might be difficult, it ultimately allows people to restore their tranquility and purpose.

Forgiveness acts as a link between past traumas and future growth. It is a road to inner regeneration that benefits not only the person but also society by fostering more compassion and harmony. As more people acknowledge and practice forgiveness, communities' collective emotional and psychological well-being can improve, resulting in a chain reaction of healing and transformation.

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LOVE CONQUERS THE WORLD, NOT ARMS

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Abstract:

This paper explores the Buddhist concept of *mettā* (loving-kindness) as a transformative force for personal development and global peace. Moving beyond conditional affection based on reciprocation, *mettā* is examined as an unconditional, boundless mental state — one of the *Brahmavihāras* — that fosters harmony within individuals and among communities. Drawing from the teachings of the Buddha, classical scriptures such as the *Dhammapada*, and cultural reflections like those of Kabirdas and Cāṇakya, the study emphasizes that love is not a transactional feeling but a spiritual discipline rooted in empathy, ego-surrender, and goodwill. The paper also critiques the limitations of arms and aggression, suggesting that genuine peace arises not from dominance but from the cultivation of selfless love. Despite challenges in a modern world rife with mistrust and violence, the practice of *mettā* remains a timeless remedy for conflict and suffering. Ultimately, love is portrayed not only as a moral virtue but as a powerful tool for sustainable peace, bridging the personal, social, and political spheres.

Keyword: *loving-kindness, mettā, Buddhism, brahmavihāra, peace, non-violence, compassion, ego-surrender, social harmony, global ethics.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper aims at understanding the concept of love, friendliness, or goodwill (Pali-*Mettā*, Skt. *Maitrī*) and its various dimensions, as well as its significance in the personal and social life of a person as preached by the Buddha.

In the gross sense, love is taken as a physical relationship between a boyfriend and a girlfriend, or as an emotional relationship existing between two or more family members like brother-sister, parents and kids, grandfather and grandkids, etc. However, when the circle of love gets widened, its physical aspect may get subsided and emotional part becomes more prominent.

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A sense of lust, attachment, and expectation from the partner or the responding person(s), however, may naturally exist with the initiator. As a result, this sort of love may not be lasting, obviously because it is conditional and depends on the attitude, emotion, and reciprocation of the second party. The Buddha has cautioned against such a loving attitude or relationship. He repeatedly says in *Dhammapada* (*Piyavaggo*) :

“Piyato jāyate soko, piyato jāyate bhayaṃ/

Piyato vippamuttassa, natthi soko kuto bhayaṃ//”¹

In other verses of the same chapter of *Dhammapada* (*Piyavaggo*), the Buddha repeats the same concept of lustful love and affection, which ultimately results in sorrow.²

While preaching the sermon (first turning of Dhamma-wheel) at Sarnath, the Buddha revealed that desire, passion, lust, or attachment is the root cause of suffering, which is manifested in different forms, stages, and dimensions.³

Love at the surface level begins with the expectation of return or reciprocation, which is quite natural also. A person who thinks about love and acts upon that normally expects the same in return. Such acts of love are commonly seen in day-to-day life in the family and other groups of people. This is indeed indicative of a kind of ‘relationship’ or ‘friendship’. Friendship always depends and functions based on mutual faith, respect, and confidence.

A person desirous of love, affection, or kindness cannot get freedom from lust or expectation. However, it is not less important that he should begin cultivating and developing such friendly feelings and exhibit them through such actions. His physical actions or behaviour with others should be helpful. He should be kind and caring for his brothers, sisters, parents, teachers, masters, servants, colleagues in the office, and other workplaces.⁴ This may help in creating a congenial atmosphere in the conjugal life, family, society and even beyond.

The foundation of the UN lies in the very concept of mutual love, trust, respect, and confidence among the nations. Pañcaśīla, or the modern term ‘Panchasheel’ (The five principles of Peaceful co-existence), is a set of principles that defined the friendly relationship between Bharat and China. The principles had been agreed upon by the two countries in 1954.⁵ These principles included mutual respect, non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs of each other, equality, and mutual benefit. These principles

¹ *Dhammapada*, verse No. 212.

² *Ibid.* verse Nos. 213 – 16.

³ *“Idaṃ vuccatī, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ, seyyathidaṃ-kāmatanṇhā, bhavatanṇhā vibhavatanṇhā.” Mahāvaggapāli, Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap, Nalanda, p.19.*

⁴ *Dīghanikāyapāli (Sigālovādasutta)*, 1958, 2016 (reprint), Bhikshu Jagdish Kashyap (ed.) Nalanda.

⁵ Trumbull, Robert (1979-02-18). “Panchasheel is Revived, But ...”, *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331. Retrieved 2024-07-05.

prepared the base for the United Nations as well. Although breaches of them have also been witnessed among nations, ultimately involved and affected parties sit at the table of negotiation, and peace is finally restored to ease the tension and normalize the situation.

So far as *Mettā* (love, loving kindness, good-will) is concerned, it is somehow different from *mitratā* (friendship) as we have seen earlier.

The way to the destination of lasting peace, whether at a limited level or even at the global level, passes through the way of love. Love is the strongest power and always advocates non-hatred. It can conquer all. No hurdle or difficulty cannot ultimately be overcome by love.⁶

It is said that love conquers all. But is it so easy? Can it be started at once like a vehicle? No. Instead, love is an emotion, a feeling for others' well-being. So the practitioner should first of all prepare such an emotion in his mind and heart. Because of having an unnecessary ego and pre-conceived notions, we do not yield. So, for generating feelings of love, generosity, benevolence, and goodwill, a person is suggested to forego ego and yield before the might of love. It helps in melting his false ego and motivates him to proceed on the path of love. Submission to love removes hatred from the heart and smoothens the way to harmony in the public life and purity of mind within.

In recent times, we have observed various conflicts in the family and society and wars at the international level. The Russia-Ukraine war, Israel-Hamas war, etc., are no longer confined between two countries; rather, many other countries have also joined wars directly or indirectly. As a result, an atmosphere of hatred, violence, and fear of insecurity has developed not only among the warring countries, but even in the other parts of globe. War or warlike situation affects the politics and economy of other countries as well.

Saint Kabirdas has, therefore, aptly said that love is not planted and grown in the kitchen garden, nor is it sold in the market. It is instead available free of cost for kings as well as for ordinary people. Whosoever wishes love has liberty to take it away.⁷

Kabirdas further says that a person does not become wise or scholarly simply by reading texts. Instead, he becomes wise in the real sense only if he inculcates love within his heart and exhibits the same with others through his speech and actions.⁸

Love, as discussed earlier, carries the seed of expectations of return, involves lust and attachment, and in a nutshell is based on reciprocation or two way traffic notion. It is placed in the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path as well. When a person goes to the refuge of the Triple Gem, he vows to follow the ten precepts/ commandments (in case of a homeless recluse) or the five precepts/ commandments (in case of a householder follower, i.e., *upāsaka*/

⁶ B. Labh, *Paññā in Early Buddhism (1991)*, Delhi, Eastern Book Linkers, p. 20.

⁷ Kabirdas, *Amritwani*, <https://Kabir-k-dohe.blogpost.com/>

⁸ Ibid.

upāsikā). The first one, ‘*pāṇātipātāveramaṇī*’, teaches one not to commit violence or hurt anybody. Second, ‘*adinnādānā veramaṇī*’ teaches abstinence from unjustifiably taking something from others, stealing, robbing, snatching, rooking, etc. Third, ‘*kāmesumicchārā/ abrahmacariyā veramaṇī*’ teaches not to get indulged into a sexual relationship and remain satisfied and confined with one’s spouse in the case of a householder and total celibacy in the case of a homeless recluse. Fourth, ‘*micchāvācā veramaṇī*’ teaches abstinence from wrong speech like lying, harsh speech, slandering, and frivolous speech; instead, it teaches how to speak truth, sweet and soft, praise of others and meaningful talk. Fifth, ‘*Surāmerayyamajjappamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī*’ teaches to keep away from consuming intoxicants. The rest of the five commandments meant for recluses too, teach morality and the path of inner and outer peace.

If we look at the global situation, many countries are seen to be engaged in fierce fighting, the sale of lethal weapons, bombs, missiles, etc. In such wars, one party wins, and another gets defeated. But what is the outcome? The Buddha reveals that victory generates enmity, and the defeated one undergoes suffering and humiliation. On the contrary, if one overcomes the problem of victory and defeat, he indeed enjoys peace —

“*Jayaṃ veraṃ pasavati, dukkhaṃ seti parājito/
Upasanto sukhaṃ seti, hitvā jayaparājayam/*”⁹

However, the cultivation of selfless or unconditional love is not as easy as we normally understand.

This is the reason the Buddha has differentiated *mettā/ maitrī* (love or loving kindness) from *mitratā* (friendship). Friendship hints at a relation based on reciprocation, whereas friendliness (*mettā*) is a selfless feeling or emotion that does not care for any return. It is unconditional and unbounded, which does not differentiate between friend and foe, favourable and unfavourable. It thinks and acts only for giving and not for taking back. This is the reason *mettā* has been described as a mental condition, which is attained in the higher realm (*Brahmavihāra*).

As it has been discussed earlier, pure and higher states of *mettā* cannot easily be developed or attained. Nevertheless, a sincere practitioner should not get disheartened or disappointed if someone does not reciprocate his goodwill in equal intensity. He should keep his continuity of showing love and good-will to one and all. Over time, his sincerity will start yielding desirable fruits, and he will start feeling inner happiness.¹⁰

This marks the beginning of *Mettā* – the first stage of *Brahmavihāra*. The Buddha advises his disciples to inculcate within themselves such a selfless feeling of goodwill. He expects from a practitioner of *mettā* to remain firm and

⁹ *Dhammapada*, verse No. 201.

¹⁰ Cf. Thanissaro Bhikkhu. ‘*Mettā* means Goodwill’, Access to Insight (BLBS edition), 24 November 2013. http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/metta_means_goodwill.html.

dedicated like a mother to her only son, and does not hesitate even to get into troublesome situation for the safety of the latter —

“Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttaṃ, āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe/
Evampi sabbabhūtesu mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ//
Mettaṇca sabbalokaṣmiṃ, mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ//”¹¹

Mettā (Skt. *Maitrī*), *Karuṇā*, *Muditā*, and *Upekkhā* are the four constituents of *Brahmavihāra* — a sublime state of living. *Brahmavihāra* is quite different, distinguished and sublime in comparison to ordinary living, in the sense that whereas all the four constituents are limited and confined to expectations, reciprocation and return; in case of *Brahmavihāra*, the four are free and above such desires, expectations, fruits, favourable outcome etc.; and remain pure, selfless, action for the sake of action only. They proceed with the notions of ‘go on’, ‘keep it up’, and ‘never say die’.

Ācārya Buddhaghosa has defined *Mettā* (love) as ‘*Mejjatī’ti mettā; sinehatī’ti attā*’.¹² *Mettā* is an emotion that smoothenes the roughness of the heart and paves a way further to move on with the feeling of goodness to all. Characteristically, *mettā* is a wish for others’ well-being (*hitākārappavattilakkaṇā mettā*)’ its essence is the deed for others’ favour (*hitūpaṣaṃhāraṇā*).¹³

Love (*Mettā*), being a superior or sublime state of living (*Brahmavihāra*), has some prerequisites, like an unconditional commitment of goodwill for one and all. It suggests that a true practitioner of friendliness sleeps easily, works up easily, and dreams no evil incidents. He loves to and is loved by human beings and other beings as well. His mind gets concentrated easily. He remains active for others in every condition, whether sleeping, rising, sitting, walking, running, or standing till he is awake. He never performs any action for which others could blame or abuse him.

The practitioner of *Mettā* continuously thinks or acts for the well-being of others, whether they are moving or unmoving, dynamic or static, big or small, middle-sized, small or subtle; he thinks and acts good and good only for them.¹⁴

Universal love crosses over the limits of selfish feeling and instead embraces all. If it is taken at national level, it may spread the message of social and national harmony and solidarity in the country. Further if taken with utmost care to global level, first of all it spreads, the notion of the whole world as one family. Bharat has a firm belief that the entire globe is our own family. The wickedness of mind is gone, and a sense of universal love develops. Ācārya Cāṇakya has expressed that ‘this is mine’, ‘that is yours’, etc. is the mentality of a short-sighted, mean person, whereas a true humanist and noble person takes

¹¹ *Suttanipāṭapāli* (*Mettasutta*), Bhikkhu Dharmarakshita, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidass, p. 36.

¹² *Aṭṭhasālinī* by Buddhaghosa, 1989, Ram Shankar Tripathi (Ed.), Varanasi, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, p. 304.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Suttanipāṭapāli*, op.cit.

the entire world as his own family —

“*Ayaṃ nijaḥ paro veti, gaṇanā laghucetasāṃ/
Udāracaritānāṃ tu, Vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam* /”¹⁵

Application and difficulties, and suggestions

Love (*Mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) are the first two *Brahmavihāras* very closely and intimately inter-related. Both are to be conceived, thought, and applied towards others. In other words, they are outward. Love in general condition and compassion in the case of someone undergoing suffering or trouble, is usually applicable and visible. Both *Brahmavihāras* know no discrimination and exhibit to all equally, like the sun and the moon show their light equally to all.

There are certain difficulties and obstacles also in the application of *mettā*, as in the modern times, when disbelief, distrust, selfish motives, etc. are functional strongly as well as rampantly, and people even with best and purest intentions are seen with doubt. Generally, people look at the philanthropist or practitioner of love/good will and empathy with some ulterior selfish motives. It may hurt the sentiments of the practitioner and he may get disappointed.

However, as *mettā* and *karuṇā* are not an ordinary state of living, rather a sublime state, the practitioner should be firmly committed to the pious vow he has taken. He should endure such blame and sustain his practice —

“*Selo yathā ekaghano, vātena na samīrati/
Evaṃ nindāpaṣaṃsāsu, na samañjati paṇḍitā* /”¹⁶

The noble fruits of love and empathy may be delayed but will not go to waste. To convince minds of different types, sometimes even negative, egoistic, erratic, conflicting, and quarrelsome is not so easy as theorists think. However, love and goodwill are the ultimate solutions to bring peace and harmony. Arms can silence the sound of protest, difference, and dissatisfaction for some time, but the fire of hatred and revenge inside the ashes may continue. That is why the message of love has been conveyed by the saints and seers as the ultimate means to resolve conflict. It is a power that goes beyond arms.¹⁷

‘*Sabbe sattā bhavantu Sukhitattā.*’

¹⁵ *Mahopaniṣad*, chapter 4, verse 71.

¹⁶ *Dhammapada*, verse 81.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* verse 5.

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A SYNERGISTIC MODEL FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND HEALING IN BUDDHIST CONTEMPLATIVE CARE AND CHAPLAINCY

Ven. Tan Paññādīpa*

Abstract:

Buddhist chaplaincy is a relatively recent profession that started in the West and has become increasingly popular among Asian Buddhists. This professional career provides counseling and spiritual and contemplative care, using Buddhist teachings as the guiding principle. A Buddhist chaplain is a socially engaged Buddhist involved in healing people from various psychological crises, especially in managing sicknesses and death. Therefore, at the emergence of psychological crises, the presence of a professionally-trained Buddhist chaplain becomes particularly warranted. In this paper, I discuss how Buddhist chaplains can apply their Dharma knowledge and skills to succeed in their healing roles. The proposed working model features four synergistic skills: theoretical *Dharma*, meditation contemplation, communication skills, and personal qualities that sit at the center stage in the training of Buddhist contemplative care and chaplaincy. These four skills in practice work collaboratively and in concert whereby development of one skill can synergistically aid in developing the others, and vice versa. The mutually supportive skill sets constitute the essential training a skillful Buddhist chaplain should ideally receive. By mastering these skills, I believe that a trained Buddhist chaplain is at their full capacity to help others ease through difficult times.

Keywords: *Buddhist chaplaincy, counseling, contemplative care, compassion, mindfulness meditation.*

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I. PREAMBLE AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.1. Championing Buddhism as guardian of global mental health

For over three decades, the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors study (GBD) has identified mental disorders as one of the leading causes of disease burden globally, without evidence showing signs of reduction or stagnation since 1990.¹

A coordinated implementation of effective prevention and treatment programs involving collaboration between governments and global health communities is especially warranted to curb this worldwide public health challenge. In addressing the treatment gap between the number of people with mental disorders and the number receiving treatments, the WHO World Mental Health Survey (2017) found that it was individual education levels, rather than the personal economic (income) factor, that had a stronger association with an increased likelihood for seeking treatment.² To target the dwindling global mental health, we should focus on educational interventions, effectively delivering current knowledge of mental disorders and state-of-the-art, evidence-based treatment options in preventative and treatment programs.

Meanwhile, the recent surge in the prevalence of mental health disorders may causally be attributable to the parallel decline in religious belief and religiosity. A meta-analysis of 147 intercontinental studies involving 99,000 participants reports a significant inverse relationship between religiosity and depressive symptoms.³ Likewise, religious practices may bestow protection against mild to moderate forms of depression⁴ and, in certain circumstances, mitigate anxiety episodes.⁵ Another systematic review study further concludes that religious involvement is positively correlated with reduced substance abuse, suicide, dementia, and stress-related disorders.⁶ Hence, there is growing scientific evidence to date to suggest that engaging in religious activities (e.g., meditation and prayers) is beneficial in preserving mental health.

Among religious activities ascribed to allaying mental suffering, Buddhism, with its assortment of psychologically uplifting teachings and meditation practices, appears to gain the most worldwide recognition. Of these, mindfulness (*Pāli*, *sati*), with its various modes of application

¹ GBD 2019 Mental Disorders Collaborators (2022): 137. GBD is the most comprehensive and influential study of disease burden in the world today. In this 2019 study, it collected data of 204 countries and territories encompassing 12 mental disorders: depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, autism spectrum disorders, conduct disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, eating disorders, idiopathic developmental intellectual disability, and a residual category of other mental disorders.

² Evans-Lacko et al. (2018): 1560.

³ Smith et al. (2003): 614.

⁴ Strawbridge et al. (2001): 68 – 70; Koenig et al. (2012): 145 – 47.

⁵ Koenig et al. (2004): 554.

⁶ Bonelli and Koenig, (2013): 657.

rooted in ancient Buddhist texts such as the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta*,⁷ stands out as the most referenced psychological remedy. Germinating from this practical Buddhist concept, therapeutic applications of mindfulness via highly adaptable modules, most notably the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), have increasingly become a therapist-choice treatment modality in psychotherapy and a wide range of clinical and secular settings.⁸ The popularity and widespread reception of these mindfulness-based programs have been mainly fostered by media, bestseller books, and influential therapists, in addition to positive findings from accumulating clinical studies. In a systematic review of cumulative clinical studies in 2021, Zhang and coworkers show that mindfulness-based interventions may advance a plethora of biopsychosocial advantages encompassing depression, anxiety, insomnia, addiction of various kinds, stress, psychosis, pain, weight management, hypertension, cancer-related symptoms, and prosocial behaviors.⁹ We expect that in time to come, the integration and adoption of Buddhist concepts and meditation techniques into various secular settings to grow as we continue to uncover and examine the therapeutic value of Buddhist teachings.

Nevertheless, the secularism of the above Buddhism-inspired regimens has raised concern among many Buddhist experts.¹⁰ The acts of compartmentalizing and segregating a supposedly integral Buddhist practice, mindfulness in this case, from its traditional spiritual context may undesirably discount the full benefits the comprehensive Buddhist practice has promised. In Buddhist traditions, practitioners always practice mindfulness alongside foundations of ethics, correct understanding and application of Buddhist teachings, and many other supportive skillful factors.¹¹ The omission of such mutual collaboration may render mindfulness interventions' effectiveness relatively modest, unsustainable, or even associated with adverse consequences.¹² Considering these potential caveats, there have been efforts to incorporate comprehensive Buddhist elements into clinical psychology and counseling. This move led to emerging Buddhist psychology, counseling, and

⁷ Bhikkhu Sujato, *DN 22 The longest discourse of mindfulness meditation (Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta)*, accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at <https://suttacentral.net/dn22/en/sujato>

⁸ Kabat-Zinn, Jon (2013): 1 – 9. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Revised and updated edition. Bantam Books; and Segal, Zindel V., Williams, J. M. G., & Teasdale, J. D. (2002): 146. *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach to preventing relapse*. Guilford Press.

⁹ Zhang et al. (2021): 41.

¹⁰ Lee et al. (2017): 113 – 114; Farb (2014): 1062.

¹¹ In the *Mahācattārisaka-sutta* (MN 117) explains the foundational, leading role of right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) should usher in the successive development of the Noble Eightfold Path factors of ethics, concentration and wisdom that collectively gears toward spiritual awakening. See: Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Great Forty*, accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/mn117/en/bodhi>

¹² Farb (2014): 1066 – 1067.

contemplative science fields. Along with this development came the advent of Buddhist chaplaincy.

1.2. Emerging roles of Buddhist chaplaincy and contemplative care

Originating in the medieval Christian church as early as the 4th century C. E., a chaplain (Latin *cappellani*) was a king-appointed priest or clerical minister to serve mainly the monarch on both ecclesiastical and secular matters (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). In modern times, a chaplain is a professional clergy member appointed by religious or corporate bodies mainly as a counsellor at cemeteries, prisons, hospitals, hospices, schools, universities, embassies, legations, or armed forces to provide religious guidance, counseling, and pastoral care to those in need. The presence of a chaplain is beneficial to one easing through significant crises in life, particularly in dealing with major sicknesses and inevitable death. Traditionally, a chaplain plays a pivotal role in providing end-of-life religious services, including much-needed emotional support, to terminally ill patients and criminals headed for a death sentence within Christian communities.

Inspired by this millennia-old beneficent work, Buddhist chaplaincy is a relatively recent profession still in its formative stage. In recent decades, this people-serving career path has grown in the West with increasing demands from the steadfast growth of new Buddhist converts. The intent of a Buddhist chaplain echoes the compassionate-in-action, suffering-relieving spirits of engaged Buddhism spearheaded by influential Buddhist leaders such as the late Thich Nhat Hanh and Venerable Xing-Yun, whose charity works continue impacting the world. As a professional career, monastic or lay Buddhists can now aspire to a career in Buddhist chaplaincy. Numerous higher institutions, including the University of Toronto and the University of the West in North America, have launched postgraduate programs in Buddhist chaplaincy and pastoral care.¹³ Despite its growing presence in the West, Buddhist chaplaincy remains largely unheard of as a spiritual care profession in traditional Theravāda Buddhist nations in Southeast Asia. This disparity may be due to the availability of a sizeable population of monastic members, of which a significant number comprise those most educated and respected. Even though not specially trained as spiritual counselors, they would have long served similar roles as a Buddhist chaplain in the West. However, there is a proposal that urges professional Buddhist chaplains to be trained in Theravada countries as well.¹⁴

In East Asian nations with a majority of Mahayana Buddhists and relatively fewer monastic members, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, the needs for Buddhist chaplains and counselors are also increasingly felt.¹⁵ To cater to this emerging trend, a one-year Master's program in

¹³ See: Master of Pastoral Studies in Buddhism: <https://utbccs.wordpress.com/mps-buddhism/> and Buddhist chaplaincy graduate programs: <https://www.uwest.edu/buddhist-chaplaincy-graduate-program/>

¹⁴ Munasinghe, H. L. M. (2023): 124.

¹⁵ Lee and Oh (2019): 132.

Buddhist Counseling and a more career-oriented Postgraduate Diploma in the Professional Practice of Buddhist Counseling have lately been offered at the Centre of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong.¹⁶ It is likely that the demand for professional Buddhist chaplains to rise as the world speeds towards the artificial intelligence era, where people will heavily seek highly specialized and personalized spiritual care beyond what traditional Buddhist institutes can provide.

A Buddhist chaplain shares many roles and functions with their Christian counterparts. However, there are fundamental differences in their theoretical premises and ways of discharging spiritual and pastoral services. A fundamental difference is that the Buddhist chaplain emphasizes self-reliance, awareness, mindfulness, and mental cultivation in delivering spiritual care.¹⁷ This approach is somewhat different from its Christian counterparts, making the Buddhist chaplaincy more like an art of contemplative care. Giles and Millers (2013), in one of the pioneering works, define contemplative care as:

Practitioners provide contemplative care by offering spiritual, emotional, and pastoral support, informed by their personal, consistent contemplative or meditation practice.¹⁸

Moreover, Buddhist chaplaincy guides its principles based on core Buddhist values, particularly compassion and wisdom.¹⁹ The combined maxim that weighs in equally both affective and intellectual aspects is quite a contrast to the predominantly affective trios – faith, hope, and love – central to the spiritual care of Christianity.²⁰ Here, rather than hankering exclusive hope on an external salvific agent for relief, the Buddhist chaplain encourages sourcing inwardly for internal strength in managing unanticipated vicissitudes in life.

A Buddhist chaplain's career is a direct pathway of applying Buddhist teachings to relieving human suffering. In this paper, I propose a working model for Buddhist contemplative care and chaplaincy and highlight the essential skills for which we should train a Buddhist chaplain. This paper will delineate synergistic yet practical strategies as to how ancient Buddhist wisdom could be instrumental in assisting us to cope with anxiety, fear, and depression upon occurrences of life adversity.

II. BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY IN ALLEVIATING PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS

According to the fundamental Buddhist philosophy, the most pertinent

¹⁶ See Master of Buddhist Counselling at HKU: <https://www.buddhism.hku.hk/ap/mbc/admission/>; Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice of Buddhist Counselling: <https://www.buddhism.hku.hk/ap/pgdbc/>

¹⁷ Giles, C. A. and Miller, W.B. (2012): XVII - XXI.

¹⁸ Ibid: XVII

¹⁹ Yamaoka (2013).

²⁰ Christman & Muller (2017): E1 – E7.

problem facing all sentient beings without exception is the unsatisfactory nature (*dukkha*) underlying this body and mind. All bodily and mental experiences inherently involve *dukkha*, characterized by oppression by successive transient phenomena. Myriad causes and conditions perpetually fuel these manifestations, mostly against our will and beyond our control. Such uncontrollable characteristics exemplify the key message of Buddhism concerning all phenomena: the doctrine of non-self or egolessness (*anattā*).

Out of ignorance (*avijjā*) of not recognizing this selfless reality with correct insight (*yathābhūtañāṇa*), we instead habitually tend to attach to this evanescent body and mind obsessively, identifying either or as a collective whole entity, as I, mine, or my “Self.” This personality view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) keeps nourishing our subconscious craving (*taṇhā*) and attachment (*upādāna*) that constantly seek insatiable delight in virtually everything, animate or inanimate, that comes in contact with our six-sense experiences. At the same time, the personality view also gives rise to the unexamined perception of the dualism of subject and object, leading to discriminatory conceptions of individualism and otherness, separating us from seeing us as being a part of the mutually dependent whole. Consequently, distorted hallucinations (*vipallāsa*) accompanied by conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) surface, leading us to regard ourselves and others as substantive, “self-existing,” and unchanging, everlasting entities. All these corrupt views (*micchadiṭṭhi*) will prompt us to experience a psychological crisis when undesirable alterations strike upon the above long-held notions. Given the unpredictability and impermanency of all forms we experience, encountering various psychological crises in life is unexceptionally a universal human destiny.

Psychological crisis or emotional distress, if left unattended, can lead to both physical and psychological disorders that further disrupt personal, family, and social well-being.²¹ It is observable that psychological crisis is one of the most recognized precursors of various social issues and biological dysfunctions.²² The Buddha Dharma precisely combats these psychological crises through its teachings. Hence, teaching is a remedy for the above maladies, as it addresses the root causes of psychological crises, i.e., greed, aversion, and delusion. For this, Buddhism offers an attested path of over 2500 years, namely the Noble Eightfold Path. This ancient path not only promises effective practical means to overcome psychological crises but also, if undertaken to perfection, can uproot the *sine qua non* of all psychological crises, culminating in attaining the highest spiritual freedom.

The Buddha himself would have sowed the seeds of the spirits of Buddhist chaplaincy. Starting from the end of the first rain retreat after he founded the monastic Saṅgha, he had dispatched sixty newly enlightened monk disciples to walk alone and carry out the mission of spreading his teachings to the world,

²¹ Hobfoll (2004): 1 – 15.

²² Greenberg, Carl, and Summers (2002): 508.

out of compassion for the happiness and welfare of all beings.²³

I am free from all snares, both human and divine. You, too, are free from all human and divine snares. Go wandering, monks, for the benefit and happiness of humanity, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and humans. You should each go a different way!

Such a compassionate act could have become the precursor for popularizing the Bodhisattva's path in Mahayana Buddhism, which places a great emphasis on uplifting the suffering of all beings.²⁴ The keen enthusiasm to place other beings before oneself aligns well with the Mahayanist vows of cultivating great compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*paññā*), which are considered the pair of wings on the path to Buddhahood.²⁵ Although compassion is not as emphasized in Theravada Buddhism, any effort to bring relief and welfare to suffering beings is still highly admired and praised. In a discourse in the *Anguttara-nikāya*, the Buddha refers explicitly to the most praiseworthy humans as those who can bring actual benefit to both themselves and others.²⁶

Therefore, a professionally trained Buddhist chaplain is one who skillfully applies Buddhist teachings to solving psychological and spiritual issues in various contexts. With that said, the legitimate role of a Buddhist chaplain in alleviating psychological crises is beyond question. I envisage that Buddhist chaplaincy will become an endeavor of great prospect for socially engaged Buddhists who vow to reduce human suffering.

2.1. A synergistic model of Buddhist chaplaincy for crisis management

A well-structured, regulated curriculum encapsulating essential training modules for Buddhist chaplaincy is still lacking within and across different Buddhist denominations. This curriculum mainly draws insights from core Buddhist teachings across various traditions. The trusted interpersonal bond anticipated between a Buddhist chaplain and their clients (patients) means that being cognizant of the latter's specific racial, social, and cultural conditioning is essential. Incorporating counseling with meaningful, therapeutic religious liturgies into spiritual and pastoral care is also necessary. Hence, Buddhist Chaplaincy training strategies should consider the peculiar cultural contexts and spiritual elements existing in different regions and among different Buddhist traditions. Despite this diversity, there are yet essential training and shared principles in Buddhist chaplaincy to which most, if not all, major Buddhist traditions apply.

²³ An excerpt of the Vinaya-pīṭaka Mahavagga 8 *Māra-kathā* (The account of the Lord of Death) by Bhikkhu Brahmali, accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/pli-tv-kd1/en/brahmali/>

²⁴ Bodhi (2013): 3.

²⁵ Lee and Oh (2019): 132 – 135.

²⁶ Bhikkhu Sujato, AN 4.95 A Firebrand discourse (*Chavālātasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/an4.95/en/sujato>

Many of the general training schemes of Buddhist chaplaincy could have sought and benefited from the existing sources of their Christian precedents. Dr. David G. Benner, a prominent Christian pastoral and spiritual care expert based in the USA, has spent over two decades formulating training elements that should be acquired and delivered by a pastoral caregiver. Mainly drawing from his vibrant professional experience as a chaplain, therapist, and academic, he has authored more than thirty books on various subjects in Christian spiritual care.²⁷ He has thus propounded several spiritual care elements essential in Christian chaplaincy and pastoral care. His works bridge psychology, spirituality, and theology, offering a holistic approach to understanding and nurturing a healthy human soul through the lens of Christianity. Among those elements I find to be equally valuable for informing Buddhist spiritual care are:

1. A healthy philosophy of life²⁸
2. A set of values for ethical choices²⁹
3. Experience of self-transcendence³⁰
4. Inspire a love of life³¹
5. Trust and confidence³²
6. Hope and acceptance³³
7. Forbearance and forgiving³⁴

In a nutshell, Benner's elements of spiritual care regard fundamental spiritual and theological philosophy as the primary source of inner strength, allowing individuals to garner solace and positive emotions upon encountering hardships in life. In this top-down model, spiritual faith for Christ forms the fountainhead from which supportive elements necessary for consolation and healing spring. Using a similar approach but more schematically, I have created a working model depicting key skills and training to orient Buddhist spiritual and contemplative care towards managing psychological crises.

Referring to the schematic representation as in **Figure 1**, the spiritual and contemplative care provided by a Buddhist chaplain forms the base and support system for individual clients (i.e., patients or victims of a crisis) suffering from a psychological crisis, e.g., terminal illness. This support system offers spiritual, psychological, emotional, and psychosocial care tailored to individual clients' unique needs. Besides, by direct or indirect side interventions, contemplative care may also provide additional, often *ad hoc*, care for the client's relatives

²⁷ Various authors, Wikipedia on David G. Benner. Accessed on ;Jan 12, 2025]; available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_G._Benner

²⁸ Benner (1998): 21 – 50.

²⁹ Benner (2004): 11 – 30.

³⁰ Benner (2012): 1 – 18.

³¹ Benner (2015a): 19 – 98.

³² Benner (2011): 65 – 96.

³³ Benner (2015b): 17 – 33.

³⁴ Benner and Harvey (1996): 6 – 54.

and friends who may similarly be affected by the crisis. It aims to aid the client and/ or their loved ones in achieving personal equilibrium and well-being by leveraging the psychological burden of the crisis.

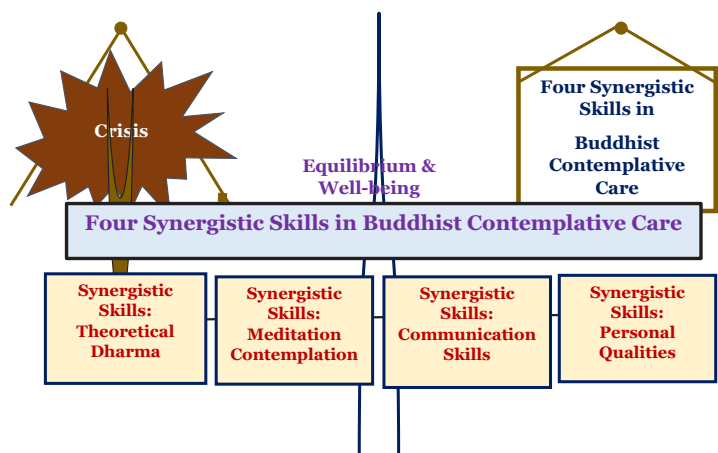


Figure 1: Synergistic Model in Psychological Crisis Management and Healing in Buddhist Contemplative Care and Chaplaincy

Meanwhile, to be a successful Buddhist chaplain for the above tasks, there are four essential but synergistic skills one needs to acquire and master. We call these skills “synergistic” because each set works in concert by synergism. In other words, developing one set of skills promotes the development of others and vice versa. We liken these synergistic skills to an ever-growing store of personal resources that comes from continuous self-investment in personal and professional development, encompassing intellectual, spiritual, socio-emotional, and behavioral aspects.

In the above model, there are four main themes of synergistic skills. First is theoretical knowledge of the Buddha Dharma, which provides the foundational and referential support for the remaining categories. Second is mental training on mindfulness supplemented with other beneficial meditative contemplation techniques that put the theoretical Dharma one has learned into practice. The outcome of mental training would further enhance a Buddhist chaplain’s ability to develop and integrate the other two essential soft-skill strategies: desirable personal qualities and interpersonal communication skills.

I need to emphasize again that the above four synergistic skills never work in isolation. When developed in a balanced way, they will serve the best personal resources available to Buddhist chaplains to accomplish their role as a contemplative and spiritual care provider. In the following sections, I will discuss these four synergistic strategies and make references, where necessary, to the current clinical Buddhist chaplaincy practices in a few hospitals and hospice centers in Hong Kong.³⁵

³⁵ Much of the ideas that led to the creation of the current Buddhist contemplative care

2.2. Synergistic skills: Theoretical *dharma*

The theoretical premise of Buddhist counseling and spiritual care lies centrally in the teachings of the Buddha, his direct disciples, and the lineage of Buddhist masters of various Buddhist traditions. Grasping the core Buddhist teachings well, in theory, is thus the first and foremost prerequisite to ensure that the contents of spiritual care align with the essence of Buddhist teachings. With foundational knowledge, a Buddhist chaplain can skillfully steer towards their goals by incorporating interdisciplinary approaches into their work. The Buddhist chaplaincy training modules will include relevant science subjects such as introductory clinical psychology practices, basic counseling theory and methods, and palliative and hospice care ethics.

Generally, all Buddhist traditions center their most fundamental teaching on the Four Noble (Ennobling) Truths, addressing our most pressing existential problems. They are the ubiquitous unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), the cause of this unsatisfactoriness, its removal, and the path leading to its removal. Recognizing the pervasiveness and preponderance of unsatisfactoriness is the first inquiry that impels us to seek and understand its original cause. The search brings us face to face with the most profound teachings of the Buddha: The doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) or, in the broader perspective lobbied by *Mahayana* Buddhism, the doctrine of inter-dependent conditionality that connects us all.

By comprehending this doctrine deeply, one starts to realize the impermanent nature of all phenomena is as such simply because various impermanent causes condition them. In turn, another prior set of impermanent causes conditions these causes. The tracing of successively preceding causes could go on *ad infinitum*. Such a chained conditioning-and-conditioned process is ever-changing, devoid of an independent participating actor. All phenomena are thus marked by devoid of a central controller or the emptiness of a lasting and substantial “self-nature” in the *Mahayana* doctrine. Therefore, *dukkha*, with its most conspicuous representations as sickness and death separation from the beloved, is just a very natural process of life that no one can escape.

Embracing the impermanency of life has thus become the most important “lesson” a Buddhist chaplain should convey to his/ her clients, especially those undergoing terminal illnesses. The counseling goal is to learn to develop positive acceptance (patience and equanimity). The Buddhist teachings on the laws of *karma*, where life goes on a cyclic trip of birth (*samsara*) and death whilst no number of good deeds (including wholesome mental states) would go unnoticed, will help. To remain positive and calm through the passage of dying, simple-to-follow mindfulness and/ or compassion meditation techniques may be instructed to the dying patients.³⁶ Patients with a calm state of mind will recognize and distinguish the most precious things and be given

model come from a theory-and-practice course project on Buddhist counseling and pastoral care I undertook at the University of Hong Kong.

³⁶ Paññādīpa (2018): 32 – 34.

priority in this critical stage of life. From this, they will learn to forgive, release, and accept the inevitability of death and to inculcate compassion towards themselves and others.

Knowing the truths of impermanency, conditionality, and karma in their own right is not a mere “passive acceptance” of one’s fate. The patients should not give up on their hope of locating supportive causes and conditions that facilitate healing. It includes continuing to seek proper and advanced treatment options available within their capacity upon weighing the associated financial and physical costs. The common misconception that the law of karma is fatalistic does not comply with the actual Buddhist teaching. The workings of karma are never rigid and linear; the ripening of karmic fruits is sensitive to modifications by present karma (actions) and changes in conditions. Not all sicknesses and miseries directly result from one’s *karma*.³⁷

In a nutshell, the workings of *karma* that drive the wheel of *samsāra* are rooted in the laws of dependent origination fueled mainly by ignorance and craving. The dominancy of karmic force propels all sentient beings to be reborn among the five or six realms of existence according to the ripening of karma at the time of death (*Theravāda* teachings) or during the intermediate between-life state (*antarabhāva*) (*Mahāyāna* teachings). The general principle is that wholesome karma (seed) begets good rebirth (fruit) in the happy realms, whereas unwholesome karma begets unfortunate rebirth. There is consensus among all Buddhist traditions that a good passing (death) is critical for a good rebirth. Hence, maintaining a wholesome mental state during the dying phase is paramount for one’s ultimate welfare in the next existence. Here, it shows how noble and significant the role of Buddhist chaplains was. They are the ones who earnestly assist the dying to transition successfully to a better rebirth and afterlife.

Meanwhile, to free ourselves from the entrapment of ignorance and craving, we need to cultivate the liberating wisdom of seeing the true nature of *dukkha*. The Noble Eightfold Path succinctly molds this wisdom, comprising three integrative, mutually supportive Buddhist practices: morality, concentration, and wisdom. Note that concentration and wisdom can only arise from mind development, which I will explore in the next subsection of meditation contemplation.

Among diverse Mahāyāna Buddhist practices in East Asia, there are numerous practices and skillful means for Buddhists to choose from in their long journey on the *Bodhisattva* Path. A commitment to walk this difficult path, which dedicates oneself to attaining the perfectly self-enlightened Buddhahood (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), will surely make a Buddhist chaplain greatly appreciate their profession. Buddhist chaplaincy is a perfect career choice conducive to cultivating the six perfections (*pāramitā*) essential for accomplishing *Bodhicitta*. It is a sublime mind endowed with perfect

³⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 36.21 Sivaka (*Sivakasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn36.21/en/bodhi>

wisdom and compassion, poised to the perfect state of the Buddha.

Another hugely popular form of Mahayana Buddhist practice today in East Asia is the devotional practice towards the Buddha *Amitabha*. This Buddha has manifested the Western Pureland (*Sukhāvatī*) and vowed to allow beings with faith in him to be reborn there and continue their practice to perfection. Reciting the name of the Buddha *Amitabha* alongside the acquisition of required merits has become the most attractive practice for many East Asian Buddhists. Chanting of the *Amitabha sūtra*, coupled with the repetitive recitation of the *Amitabha* Buddha's name, is also a common liturgical and prescriptive meditative practice necessary to be mastered by a Buddhist chaplain who works with East Asian Buddhists. The chanting often intensifies and can continue ceaselessly during the patient's critical dying period, ideally lasting at least 6 hours after death. Another equally potent afterlife destination, though not as popular, is the vow to be reborn at the *Tushita* Heaven, where the next Buddha on earth, *Maitreya*, resides.

Most East Asian Buddhists are also exceptionally devoted to and fond of those supremely compassionate and powerful *Mahāpurusa Bodhisattvas*, such as *Avalokitesvara* and *Kṣitigarbha*. Many believe these great guardians of Buddhism have extraordinary power to rescue beings in danger and guide them through difficulties on their holy path. Reciting their names and mantras and sūtras associated with them is thus well-received and welcomed by most Eastern Mahayana Buddhists today. Mahayana recitation practices are particularly popular with dying patients and at funerals because many believe that chanting can positively affect the departed "spirit" stuck in the intermediate state, helping it achieve a smooth transition for a better rebirth.

2.3. Synergistic skills: Meditation and contemplation

Meditation brings the intellectual learning of Buddha *Dharma* to fulfillment, i.e., to become the direct benefactor of *Dharma*. Daily meditation practice is considered the primary support for the chaplaincy work as it brings a much-needed clarity of mind, gentleness of heart, and a listening ear to any intense environment. Buddhist spiritual care is about helping people access the stillness, clarity, and love in their hearts.³⁸ Of course, it would need years, if not decades, to reach proficiency in our meditation, allowing changes in our mind to manifest in our behavior and appearance, which people around us would notice. Cultivating a composed and tranquil mind, accentuated with mindfulness and wisdom, allows us to control our negative emotions driven by underlying defilements. With heightened mindfulness, our mind can stay aloof amidst all the ups and downs, thick and thin, in life. Moreover, we would be more resistant and less reactive towards changes in our physical body, including sickness and death. It is where the analogy of being shot by two darts comes to our appreciation: the initial shot of physical pain is inevitable, whereas the following second shot of emotional pain, as a result of identifying and clinging to the body or pain as belonging to "I," "mine," or my "self," is

³⁸ Giles and Miller, 2012: II.

optional.³⁹ Concurrent with this notion, there have been numerous scientific studies indicating how meditation may effectively reduce pain signals and pain perception through novel neurophysiological pathways.⁴⁰

Mindfulness meditation and contemplation so far remain the most popular forms of Buddhist meditation nowadays, and its practice may involve all postures and circumstances of our daily activities, not restricted to a passive sitting posture. Lately, psychotherapists and counselors in search of non-pharmacological treatment options have formulated a variety of psychotherapeutic regimens based on mindfulness in managing mental stress, pain, and different affective mood disorders. In worldwide scientific research, mindfulness-based interventions have received considerable recognition, with encouraging results and underlying mechanisms being continually unraveled.⁴¹

Although specific mindfulness practice presentations can vary from instructor to instructor, the basic instructions are the same. That is, to maintain an open-monitoring awareness of bodily sensations, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and/ or emotions in every present moment. Cultivating awareness with a curious, accepting, non-judgmental, and non-engaging attitude helps us observe the phenomena arising in our body and mind without the filter of a stereotypical, prejudiced mind. This practice curbs habitual autopilot reactions to bodily and mental phenomena, often resulting in unnecessary emotional pain. Notably, Thich Nhat Hanh's non-sectarian mindfulness practices offer a wide range of skillful means to connect with our inner peace and joy in every moment.⁴² All Buddhist chaplains should regularly practice mindfulness meditation, which can be done anywhere and anytime with noticeable benefits.

Moreover, as a professional provider of contemplative care, a Buddhist chaplain should aim to become an adept practitioner of mindful care for oneself as well as for their clients. Mindful care stresses the importance of establishing mindfulness within oneself as a means of self-guarding and self-protection. Such a seemingly self-focused training is indeed not selfish at all. By such an initial act, the subsequent protection extended to surrounding people can take effect through its natural course.⁴³ In other words, it is through equipping sufficient strength of self-mindfulness that propels us the capacity to help others to develop the same quality of mindfulness. In this way, a healthy balance of bilateral healing is accomplished, first by the Buddhist chaplain and later channeling out to others, as the Buddha utters in the *Sedaka-sutta*⁴⁴:

And how is it, bhikkhus, that by protecting oneself, one protects others?

³⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi. SN 36.6 The Dart (*Salla-sutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn36.6/en/bodhi>

⁴⁰ Panyadipa (Tan KP) (2019): 1 – 34.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Thich Nhat Hanh (2014): 9 – 20; Paññāpā (2019): 416.

⁴³ Lee (2024): 52 - 53.

⁴⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 47.19 Sedaka (*Sedakasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn47.19/en/bodhi>

By the pursuit, development, and cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness. It is in such a way that by protecting oneself, one protects others.

Practitioners refer to *Dhyāna* in Sanskrit or *Jhāna* in Pāli as a deep meditative state akin to achieving intense mental concentration (*samādhi*). In some meditation lineages, it is an integrated concentration and insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. In brief, meditation begins with developing mental stillness and concentration by focusing on an object that could be our breathing, a visualized image, a mantra, a recollection of Buddha's qualities, or a recitation of the Buddha's name. Practice brings the mind to one-pointedness and calm, effectively suspending the five hindrances (sensual desire, aversion, restlessness, sloth and torpor, and doubt).

A tranquil mind free from hindrances is malleable, bright, steadfast, appropriate to work, and attained to imperturbable. It then investigates bodily and mental phenomena with penetrative clarity, following their true nature. It brings in the insight contemplation where direct seeing of the empirical reality enables us to understand its dependently arisen, impermanent, unsatisfactory, non-self, and empty nature. Such a deep insight into reality is how the liberating wisdom sprouts, whereby a direct glimpse of concept-less reality, as it truly is, can ignite our inner awakening engine. This advanced meditation technique is time-honored and suitable for a Buddhist chaplain who wishes to develop deep tranquility and insight in his Dharma practice.

Loving-kindness and compassion meditation are potent tools to infuse our mind with a wealth of positive energy, in addition to being a remedy against anger, frustration, and violence. As an essential virtue and mental quality, particularly in the Bodhisattva's path, compassion provides us the fountain source to carry out the impossible task of relieving the pains and suffering of all beings. In ancient Buddhist texts, loving-kindness and compassion meditation belong to the group of Divine Abiding (*Brahmavihāra*), which gives rise to a boundless mind conducive to awakening. The mind that dwelled in loving-kindness invokes joy and pleasant feelings in surrounding people, a much-desired element that makes a successful Buddhist chaplain. Moreover, with regular practice, a Buddhist chaplain would be able to maintain a continuous stream of love and enthusiasm to uplift the suffering of all beings that come to him. Even frequent blessings to every being we meet daily to be free from suffering would be beneficial. It is said to be the daily practice of the renowned Catholic sage, Mother Teresa, which qualifies her as a role model for those on the Bodhisattva's path.⁴⁵

Meditation and contemplation training are critical in Buddhist spiritual and contemplative care. It helps Buddhist chaplains develop inner qualities and strengths to succeed in serving people and develop transferrable skills that their clients can nurture to uplift their mental and physical suffering. Meditating helps us comprehend the truths of impermanency and dukkha, allowing us

⁴⁵ Tsomo (2013): 96.

to appreciate the art of letting go. According to Buddhist wisdom, loosening our attachment to our body and mind grants us significant spiritual benefits, as this practice builds a sustained, wholesome mental state. A wholesome mind endowed with mindfulness and seven awakening factors is known to have healing effects on diseases.⁴⁶ Such ancient records align well with today's medical discoveries in which meditation appears to positively affect a vast array of psychological and physical ailments.⁴⁷

2.4. Synergistic skills: Personal qualities

Desirable, supportive personal qualities are those soft skills that make a Buddhist chaplain a suitable spiritual caregiver and a people person who is sensitive to the needs of others. Among those qualities extremely valuable to possess include, but not limited to, being highly ethical (virtuous), mindful, a good listener, empathetic, patient, tolerant, forgiving, friendly and amicable, loving and harmlessness, conscientious, just and non-judgmental, accommodating and accepting, emotionally stable, tactful, grounded, grounded, contended, good self-control, self-respectful, industrious and zealous, humorous, genuine, non-acquisitive, and an upholder of high integrity and professionalism. Although some of these qualities might have existed as inborn personal traits, they are also learned skills that can be acquired and further cultivated through possessing a habit of constant self-examination and self-reflection.

Noteworthy, furthering these qualities in Buddhist contemplative care can be enhanced by effective training in theoretical Dharma and meditation. For example, the establishment of mindfulness in mindful care (see 2.3 meditation and contemplation) requires one to simultaneously cultivate patience (*khanti*), harmlessness/ non-violence (*avihiṃsā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and sympathy and understanding (*anuddayā*) as in an instruction given by the Buddha to Sedaka⁴⁸:

And how is it, bhikkhu, that by protecting one protects oneself? By patience, harmlessness, loving-kindness, and sympathy. It is in such a way that by protecting others, one protects oneself.

In addition, a determined effort to continue developing and safeguarding ethical virtues will keep us on track with continuing self-improvement. However, the learning journey of any soft skill is never a smooth sail – we may sometimes fall short of what we hoped for and anticipated. For whatever wrongs or unskillful actions we may have committed, we shall sincerely ask for forgiveness from the people we hurt and capable of forgiving ourselves and forgoing our shortcomings. In Mahayana Buddhist practice, verbalizing our

⁴⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 46.16 Ill(1)(*Paṭhamagilānasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2015], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn46.14/en/bodhi>

⁴⁷ Panyadipa (Tan KP)(2019): 1 – 34.

⁴⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi, SN 47.19 Sedaka (*Sedakasutta*), accessed on [Jan 12, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn47.19/en/bodhi>

unskillful acts and determination to retrain from repeating them in the future before the Buddha or Bodhisattva statues in a repentance chanting rite is often conducted. The power of repentance reckoned by Mahayana Buddhism is that it not only empowers one to overcome present regrets and future obstacles but also gives us hope to undo things and start anew.

Of all personal qualities, patience (*khanti*), empathy, and compassion appear to stand out as the most precious ones all Buddhist chaplains shall work to embody. To develop these qualities, *khanti* or *kṣānti* in Sanskrit represents the prerequisite factor that brings into fruition most of the other qualities. With this quality of *khanti*, one develops enduring patience, acceptance, and forgiveness;⁴⁹ these qualities, in turn, grow simultaneously with compassion and empathy. Empathy and compassion enable us to contemplate others' feelings as our own, facilitating connection on an equal footing when discharging our spiritual care. Along with it, this connection fosters the qualities of being non-judgmental and perspective-taking. Empathy is genuine, free from condescending and conceited superiority that always comes with mere 'sympathy.'

2.5. Synergistic skills: Inter-personal communication skills

Effective interpersonal communication is undoubtedly essential for a Buddhist chaplain to acquire. After all, it is how a Buddhist chaplain enters the crisis zone of his clients and makes a positive impact. These skills involve thoughtfully choosing words, expressions, and non-verbal gestures, considering the client's context and social conditioning. Effective communication builds bridges between people and can be a significant solution to most of the crises we experience.⁵⁰ It is also a valuable set of soft skills that corresponds with the above three skill sets. For example, when dealing with terminal illness and death, Dharma teachings from a Buddhist chaplain may help patients steer right to a wholesome, positive frame of mind. Encouraging patients to recollect and rejoice in their past wholesome deeds and to reassert their faith in the Triple Gem can achieve this. Also, it would be beneficial if the chaplain could guide patients into appropriate meditative contemplation that suits their unique conditions and temperaments. Hopefully, with the help of Dharma and meditation, dying patients would pass on with less emotional pain and, from the Buddhist perspective, be assured of a fortunate rebirth. Note that all the above instructions would not be possible without the Buddhist chaplain equipped with practical communication skills.

Non-verbal communication skills mainly reflect the personal qualities of a Buddhist chaplain. A good personality with overflowing inner qualities will certainly shine, influence people, and help one communicate effectively. Even the presence of love and compassion alone may be enough to bring trust, calm, and joy to dying patients. Furthermore, the peaceful passing of the patient will help to comfort his loved ones, easing their passage of grief and bereavement.

⁴⁹ Lee (2004): 54.

⁵⁰ Speck and Herbert (2017): 324.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The work of a Buddhist chaplain is an integral part of utilizing an interdisciplinary approach that pivots Buddhist teachings as the guiding principle. This profession has no fixed standard operating protocol but an amendable, constantly improving guideline catering to people's needs. And it is contingent on changing social and cultural milieus. This socially engaging work concerns people and sees everyone as a unique and spiritual unit yet inseparable from the rest. It sees the values of ancient wisdom left by the Buddha and his many great lineages of disciples and how this great inheritance may be applied to benefit people today.

In this paper, I propose that acquiring four synergistic skills can accomplish Buddhist chaplaincy's spiritual and contemplative care. They are theoretical Dharma learning, cultivation of a calm, beautiful, and wisdom-infused mind through meditation and contemplation, development of essential personal qualities, and refinement of interpersonal communication skills. These four skills work collaboratively to support one another, and they are to be continually perfected by a Buddhist chaplain along the career path.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>

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A STUDY OF THE APPLICATION FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING FOR SOCIAL HARMONY AND SOLIDARITY

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Abstract:

This paper explores the Buddhist teachings of *khanti* (forgiveness) and *sati* (mindfulness) as transformative tools for social harmony and reconciliation in a world divided by conflict, hatred, and historical grievances. Drawing from canonical sources such as the *Jātaka*, *Saṃyuttanikāya*, and *Majjhimanikāya*, the study illustrates how the cultivation of forgiveness and mindful awareness provides an ethical and spiritual foundation for healing individual trauma and collective unrest. The discourse further emphasizes the functional role of mindfulness not only as recollection but as nonjudgmental, present-moment awareness essential for moral decision-making. Through narratives such as the *Sangāmasuttas* and the *Sedakasutta*, it becomes evident that mindful reflection and compassionate action are key to protecting both self and others. The paper argues that these Buddhist principles, when internalized and practiced, can dissolve the roots of hostility and foster solidarity rooted in empathy, patience, and wisdom.

Keyword: *forgiveness, mindfulness, Buddhism, social harmony, reconciliation, khanti, sati, conflict transformation, compassion, ethical living.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism does not approve any means or methods that are used for the self-indulgence or promotion of one's faith through unleashing violence over others under any circumstance. But such incidents of unleashing violence for extend the borders of countries or obtaining wealth of other nation have been taken place in many parts of the world. The repercussions of those eruptions run for many centuries and create a plethora of social issues and divide societies into vivid sects by the name of faith, race, or nations. Examples of such tragedies are visible in both the East and West in the present world. Celebration

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of one's victory of one's loss has become a serious pain for oppositions. So, the question Infront of entire human kind is what is the substantial solution to overcome this remorse? In answering this question, we can gain from Buddhism is extremely great. The concept of Mindfulness taught in Buddhism can contribute immensely to coping with said situations.

Buddhism emphasizes the value of right mindfulness in all endeavors of life for the culmination of one's spiritual well-being. The importance of mindfulness in the path of liberation has been pointed out by the Buddha as "Oh monks, I preach you that mindfulness needed everywhere."¹ Mindfulness covers many aspects of a person's memory and awareness. Therefore, in the process of providing substantial solutions for reconciliation vitality of mindfulness is indeed great. This paper examines how Buddhist teachings related to forgiveness and mindful healing for social harmony and solidarity.

II. BUDDHIST TEACHINGS ON FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING

The Pali term Khant can be bears the shadow of English word forgiveness. According to PTS Pali dictionary terms, Khanti has many different shades of meaning as "patience, forbearance, forgiveness."² In order to the Buddhism Khanti is recognized as one of the ten perfections nascent Buddha should fulfill in his path of enlightenment. The Jātaka commentary contains an interesting account of the way the Bodhisatta should practice the perfection of forgiveness or forbearance.

"Then, reflecting further that 'These are not the only qualities needed to become a Buddha,' he saw the sixth perfection, the Perfection of Patience, and this thought occurred to him: 'Wise Sumedha, from this day forward, you should also fulfill the Perfection of Patience. You must be patient both in honor and dishonor. Just as the earth tolerates both pure and impure things thrown upon it, showing neither attachment nor aversion, but endures and bears with them, similarly you too must be patient with both honor and dishonor. Only then will you become a Buddha.' Thus, he firmly resolved to fulfill the sixth Perfection of Patience."³

In this explanation, two important aspects of forgiveness are implied as "*na tena pathavī sinehaṃ, na paṭighaṃ karoti*"; just as the earth tolerates all impurities without attachment and aversion, one needs to be patient with everything. These are the two key features everybody needs to cultivate in the process of forgiveness.

¹ satīṅka khvāhaṃ bhikkhave sabbatthikaṃ vadāmi. SN V, p. 115.

² Devids, R. and Williams, S. (1979) A Dictionary of Pāli Language. London: The Pāli Text Society. p. 233.

³ Athassa "na ettakeheva buddhakāradhammehi bhavitabba" nti uttaripi upadhārayato chaṭṭhaṃ khantipāraṃiṃ disvā etadahosi – 'sumedhapaṇḍita, tvaṃ ito paṭṭhāya khantipāraṃiṃ pi pūreyyāsi. Sammānanepi avamānanepi khamova bhavēyyāsi. Yathā hi pathaviyaṃ nāma sucimpi pakkhipanti asucimpi, na tena pathavī sinehaṃ, na paṭighaṃ karoti, khamati sahati adhiṇvāsetiyeva, evaṃ tvampi sammānanāvamānanakkhamova samāno buddho bhavissasi" ti chaṭṭhaṃ khantipāraṃiṃ dāhaṃ katvā adhiṭṭhāsi. JA I, p. 22.

Due to a lack of these qualities, people easily get agitated with each other, eventually fostering internal conflicts that become a social conflicts. Therefore, nonjudgmental awareness of people about situations he confronts is compulsory for one's spiritual advancement. This nonjudgmental awareness has been emphasized through the term Sati in Buddhism, which has been popularly rendered into English as mindfulness.

The scope and the functional aspect of Sati have been discussed in detail in an ample number of discourses. One of the most interesting discourses in Nagarasutta in the Aṅguttaranikāya. In the Nagarasutta, it has been very clearly explained that Sati or mindfulness does not cover only the aspect of recollection, but at the same time, it focuses on paying attention in a nonjudgmental way to the present moment or, in other words ability of raising awareness about what is going on one's surround. The point is illustrated in the Nagarasutta using a simile of a gatekeeper.

"Just as the royal frontier fortress has a gate-keeper – wise, experienced, intelligent – to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without; in the same way a disciple of the noble ones is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering & able to call to mind even things that were done & said long ago. With mindfulness as his gate-keeper, the disciple of the ones abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity. With this sixth true quality is he endowed.

It has been precisely discussed in this discourse that mindfulness is, in effect of reminding us of who we are, what our values are, and how we need to practice for the sheer betterment one's self and others.

Also, Buddhism emphasizes the fact that "all beings afraid of punishment, all beings afraid of death, therefore keeping other equal to one's self one should refrain from killing and causing other to kill."⁴ This statement set the perfect tone for set off the idea of maintaining a radical difference on rival party. This marginalization can happen, on the other hand, due to different adherences in moral conduct and the cultivation of ill will, conceit and many unwholesome factors.

An interesting account regarding the practical application of these values can be seen in the *Dīghāvuvaṭṭhu*⁵ in the Mahāvaggapāli of the Vinayaṭṭaka. In that narrative, it has mentioned that understanding of long-term consequences of one's action is important before an execution. Buddha has emphasized that it is an eternal law that hatred will never be appeased by hatred but only by non-hearted. This particular understanding makes rigorous mental changes in people to cope with situations with the insight of neither attachment nor aversion, which will be the core of mindful healing.

The person who is nurtured with these characteristics will be able to master another four qualities as,

⁴ DhP, p. 62.

⁵ VP I, p. 341.

Giving (*dāna*)

Endearing speech (*piyavacana*)

Beneficent conduct (*atthacariyā*)

Impartiality (*samānattatā*)

The practice of these four qualities is recognized as the linchpin of a chariot, without which the chariot won't be able to travel.⁶ Because these four provide a firm ground for all kinds of relationships and a foundation for mutual trust. In other words, societies devoid practice of these qualities will be degraded and disturbed with many social issues.

Saṅgamasutta-s in the *Kosalasaṃyutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* also provide some crucial information about the importance of forgiveness and mindful healing for reconciliation. According to the First *Saṅgāmasutta*, King pasenadi kosala was defeated by King Ajatasatthu. King Pasenadi Kosala was very upset after this defeat. But the Buddha explains to the monk that King Kosala's sadness is a very temporary one because he associates good friends and is guided by a good companion. Further, the Buddha explains that

"Victory breeds enmity; the defeated sleep badly. The peaceful sleep at ease, having left victory and defeat behind."

The opposite of the incident can be seen in the second *Saṅgāmasutta*. According to that, King Ajātasattu was defeated and captured by King Pasenadi Kosala. On this occasion, the Buddha explains to monks,

"A man goes on plundering as long as it serves his ends. But as soon as others plunder him, the plunderer is plundered."

For the fool thinks they've got away with it. So long as their wickedness has not ripened. But as soon as that wickedness ripens, they fall into suffering.

A killer creates a killer; a conqueror creates a conqueror; an abuser creates abuse, and a bully creates a bully. And so, as deeds unfold, the plunderer is plundered."

These examples set the perfect layout to understand the importance of forgiveness and mindful healing in the process of reconciliation and harmonious society. Further the Point has been well illustrated in the *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovādasutta* in the *Majjhimanikāya* while the Buddha instructs the novice Rāhula.

"Rāhula, action with the body should be done only after repeated reflection; action with speech should be done only after repeated reflection; action with the mind should be done only after repeated reflection."⁷

In the Pali text, the process of reflection has been specified as *paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā*; this reduplication of the term *paccavekkhitvā* greatly stresses

⁶ Giving, endearing speech, beneficent conduct, and impartiality under diverse worldly conditions, as is suitable to fit each case: these means of sustaining a favorable relationship are like the linchpin of a rolling chariot. SN II, p. 32

⁷ MN I, p. 416.

the value of this cognitive process. Ven. Piyatan points out that “Repeated reflection,” *paccavekkhitvā paccavekkhitvā*, is an example of a reduplicative (a verb repeating itself to show repeated or continuous action). Although the verb *paccavekkhati* usually means “he reviews” in the sense of an examination of conscience after the fact, here it is used as a synonym for *yoniso manasikaroti*, “he considers mindfully”, that is, before the deed, during the deed and after the deed as clearly evident from the three phases of each of the three doors of action: “when you want to do an action” “while you are doing an action” and “after you have done an action”⁸

A perfect illustration of the point can be seen in the *Sedakasutta* in the *Satipaṭṭhānaśāmyutta* of *Samyuttanikāya*, where it explains how by protecting oneself, one protects others;

“How is it, Bhikkhus, that by protecting oneself, one protects others? By the pursuit, development, and cultivation of four establishments of mindfulness. It is in such a way that by protecting oneself, one protects others.

And how is it, Bhikkhus, that by protecting others, one protects oneself? By patience, harmlessness, lovingkindness, and sympathy. It is in such a way that by protecting others one protects oneself.”⁹

Here, it has very precisely indicated the necessity of fourfold mindfulness in connection with protecting one’s self and others. This, on the other hand, emphasizes the necessity of perfect awareness on actions of physical, emotional, mental, and knowledge actions.

III. CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion evinces that the practice of *khanti* (forgiveness) and *sati* (mindfulness) as pathways to social harmony are connected with both individual and collective well-being, which align with the concept of *Mettā* (loving-kindness) and *Karuṇā* (compassion) taught under the four sublime states. Further, it is very much evident that the practice of forgiveness is a skillful means for transforming conflict and healing social divisions. Forgiveness, when practiced with mindfulness and clear comprehension, causes one to understand the in futility of greediness and aversion. Similarly, this middle-way approach of mindful healing enables individuals and communities to process trauma with wisdom and equanimity. Communities that embrace these qualities will be able to experience improved relationships, reduced conflict, and stronger social bonds.

⁸ <http://dharmafarer.org/>

⁹ Attānaṃ, bhikkhave, rakkhissāmiti satipaṭṭhānaṃ sevitaḥḥaṃ; paraṃ rakkhissāmiti satipaṭṭhānaṃ sevitaḥḥaṃ. Attānaṃ, bhikkhave, rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati.”Kathaṇca, bhikkhave, attānaṃ rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati? Āsevanāya, bhāvanāya, bahulikkamma – evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, attānaṃ rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati. Kathaṇca, bhikkhave, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati? Khantiyā, avihiṃsāya, mettacittatāya, anudayatāya – evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati. Attānaṃ, bhikkhave, rakkhissāmiti satipaṭṭhānaṃ sevitaḥḥaṃ; paraṃ rakkhissāmiti satipaṭṭhānaṃ sevitaḥḥaṃ. (SN V.168).

Abbreviations

MN - Majjhimanikāya

SN - Saṃyuttanikāya

DhP- Dhammapada

VP - Vinayapiṭaka

JA - Jātakatṭhakathā

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FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING: A PATH TO RECONCILIATION

Ven. Sumedha Bodhi*

Abstract:

This paper explores the concept of forgiveness and mindful healing as a path to reconciliation in a world plagued by conflict and violence. Drawing on the wisdom of major religions and spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, the paper examines the importance of forgiveness, mindfulness, and compassion in promoting social cohesion and reconciliation. The paper also introduces the Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement, a revolutionary concept that seeks to transform individuals and society through the principles of mindfulness, self-transformation, and social engagement.

Through a review of the literature and case studies, the paper demonstrates the effectiveness of mindfulness and meditation in promoting peace and harmony and highlights the potential of the Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement to bring about positive change in individuals and communities. The paper also explores the interfaith benefits of the movement, including its ability to promote understanding and empathy between individuals from different religious backgrounds.

The paper argues that forgiveness and mindful healing are essential for reconciliation and peace and that the Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement offers a powerful framework for promoting these values. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for further research and dialogue on the role of mindfulness and meditation in promoting peace and harmony and highlights the potential of the Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement to contribute to a more compassionate and peaceful world. Overall, the paper provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of forgiveness and mindful healing and highlights the potential of the Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement to bring about positive change in individuals and communities.

Key words: *Forgiveness, mindfulness, healing, dhamma soldier movement.*

* Founder Association of Dhamma Soldier (A socially Engaged Buddhist Organization).

I. THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS IN THE *DHAMMA* PATH

In a world plagued by conflict and violence, the importance of forgiveness and mindful healing cannot be overstated. As we navigate the complexities of human relationships and the challenges of global citizenship, we must draw upon the wisdom of major religions and spiritual traditions to guide us toward a more compassionate and peaceful world.

The guided use of religious and inter-religious teachings on peace, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation can help in the healing of a divided nation. By exploring the principles and practices of various faith traditions, we can deepen our understanding of the importance of forgiveness, mindfulness, and compassion in promoting social cohesion and reconciliation.¹

1.1. Civilizational conflicts: A present-day challenge

The world today is witnessing unprecedented civilizational conflicts that threaten global peace, stability, and prosperity. These conflicts arise from the clash of cultures, ideologies, and identities, leading to devastating consequences, including terrorism, nationalism, and migration crises. To address these challenges, we must promote cultural understanding, tolerance, and empathy and encourage dialogue and diplomacy to resolve ideological conflicts peacefully.

1.2. Buddhist perspectives on peace and conflict reconciliation



Buddhism, a religion that originated in ancient India, has been a beacon of peace and nonviolence for centuries. The teachings of the Buddha, encapsulated in the *Dhamma* principles, offer a profound framework for resolving conflicts and promoting peace. At the heart of Buddhist philosophy lies the understanding that all beings are interconnected and that harm caused to one being ultimately affects all others.

The *Dhamma* principles, which form the foundation of Buddhist thought, provide a robust framework for conflict resolution. Non-violence,

or ahimsa, is a fundamental principle that emphasizes the importance of avoiding harm to all living beings. Furthermore, the principle of mindfulness, or sati, encourages individuals to cultivate awareness of their thoughts, words, and actions, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict.

¹ Lorna Davies, Susan Crowther, *Mindfulness in the birth sphere: practice for pre-conception to the critical 1000 days and beyond*, Hunter 2006.

II. MINDFULNESS AS A GROUND FOR INNER HEALING

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. It's a quality that every human being already possesses, and it can be cultivated through proven techniques. Mindfulness is not something that requires us to change who we are or become something we're not. Rather, it recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present, aware of our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, and not judgmental of them. It's about paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with what is. Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do, but rather it's a way of being that can be cultivated through simple practices.

2.1. The types of mindfulness practice

There are several types of mindfulness practices, including:

(i) Seated, walking, standing, and moving meditation: These practices involve paying attention to the breath, body, or surroundings while engaging in physical activity.

(ii) Short pauses: Taking short breaks throughout the day to focus on the breath or body can help cultivate mindfulness.

(iii) Merging meditation practice with other activities: Mindfulness can be practiced while engaging in daily activities such as eating, walking, or even doing the dishes.

2.2. The benefits of mindfulness practice²

The benefits of mindfulness practice are numerous and well-documented. Some of the benefits include:

- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Enhanced performance and productivity
- Increased self-awareness and emotional regulation
- Improved relationships and communication
- Increased feelings of compassion and empathy

2.3. Facts about mindfulness

Here are 8 interesting facts about mindfulness:

- i. Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic: It's a natural human ability that can be cultivated through simple practices.
- ii. Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do: It's a way of being that can be integrated into daily life.
- iii. You don't need to change: Mindfulness recognizes and cultivates the best of who we are as human beings.

² Lorna Davies, Susan Crowther, *Mindfulness in the birth sphere: practice for pre-conception to the critical 1000 days and beyond*, Hunter 2006.

- iv. Mindfulness has the potential to become a transformative social phenomenon: It can bring people together and promote positive change.
- v. Anyone can do it: Mindfulness practice is accessible to everyone, regardless of age, background, or ability.
- vi. It's a way of living: Mindfulness is not just a practice but a way of being that can be applied to all aspects of life.
- vii. It's evidence-based: The benefits of mindfulness practice are well-documented and supported by scientific research.
- viii. It sparks innovation: Mindfulness can lead to creative solutions and new perspectives on problems.

2.4. Mindfulness is not all in your head

Mindfulness is often associated with the mind, but it's not just about thinking or mental activity. It's about paying attention to the body and the present moment. Meditation begins and ends in the body, and it involves taking the time to pay attention to where we are and what's going on.

2.5. How to sit for meditation practice³

Here's a simple guide to sitting for meditation practice:

- i. Take your seat: Find a stable and comfortable seat, either on a chair or on a cushion on the floor.
- ii. Notice what your legs are doing: Cross your legs comfortably in front of you, or place your feet flat on the floor.
- iii. Straighten your upper body: Keep your spine straight but not stiff, and let your head and shoulders rest comfortably on top of your vertebrae.
- iv. Situate your upper arms: Let your upper arms rest parallel to your upper body, and place your hands on your legs.
- v. Drop your chin and gaze downward: Let your chin drop slightly, and gaze downward, either with your eyes open or closed.
- vi. Be there for a few moments: Take a few deep breaths, and pay attention to your body and the present moment.
- vii. Begin again: When your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to the breath or the present moment.

Remember, the goal of mindfulness practice is not to achieve a specific state or stop your thoughts completely but to cultivate awareness and acceptance of the present moment. With regular practice, you can develop greater mindfulness and enjoy the many benefits it has to offer.

III. A STORY FROM LINKEDIN: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MINDFULNESS AND FORGIVENESS

In the stillness of our minds, we often find the turbulence of past regrets and future anxieties. Mindfulness, the practice of being fully present in the

³ How to Sit for Meditation Practice, www.mindful.org.

moment, is the anchor that can ground us amidst these storms. As I looked back on my life, I realized that my outward achievements masked an inner turmoil. Despite the accolades and the successes, an underlying discontent haunted me, and anger, more often than not, was its most vocal representative. It wasn't until I truly confronted these emotions that I began to understand the transformative power of forgiveness and emotional healing.

My journey, punctuated by both moments of despair and enlightenment, became the canvas upon which I would come to understand the depth of these concepts. There's a rawness, a vulnerability, in admitting to oneself the intensity of one's emotions. But it's in this vulnerable space that healing begins. Anger, I discovered, was merely the gatekeeper to deeper emotions: feelings of hurt, betrayal, and disappointment. Yet, in acknowledging this anger and the pain beneath it, I also found the path to healing. The linchpin? Forgiveness.

Forgiveness isn't just an act; it's a conscious decision, a deliberate choice to release oneself from the chains of resentment and pain. It was through the act of forgiving both myself and those I believed had wronged me that I was able to achieve true emotional freedom. But how does one truly forgive? How can we move past the weight of our past traumas and pains to find peace?

Through introspection and the guidance of age-old practices, I uncovered actionable steps to facilitate forgiveness and mindfulness. This isn't merely a recounting of my experiences but a guide, a compass, for those seeking solace and understanding. And so, as you delve deep into this narrative, you'll find exercises, reflections, and practical insights that can steer you toward a more harmonious and joy-filled life.

Amidst life's vast landscapes of challenges and uncertainties, may you find solace in your inner stillness, allowing the wisdom of introspection to guide your journey towards healing and enlightenment.

But remember, this journey isn't linear. It's a dance between confronting our shadows and embracing our light. The beauty lies not in perfection but in the endeavor. For it's through understanding, empathy, and compassion for both ourselves and others that we pave the way for a more connected and joyful existence.

So, as you turn each page, may you find the kindness, understanding, and compassion that has been both my teacher and my savior. And may you, too, in embracing mindfulness and the power of forgiveness, uncover the boundless potential of your emotional healing.

Dear reader, I want you to pause for a moment and truly reflect on the beautiful intricacies of your journey. We all have our own stories, marked by successes, failures, joys, and sorrows. But it's essential to remember that amidst this tapestry of experiences lies the incredible power of mindfulness and forgiveness. You see, being present, truly present, allows us to confront the emotions that often hold us back, and in this confrontation lies the key to our emotional well-being. Your past does not define you; it is your relationship with it and your capacity to forgive both yourself and others that paves the way for profound healing.

You are not alone on this journey. Every one of us grapples with emotions, memories, and events that challenge our peace. But remember, it's through understanding these feelings and nurturing a compassionate heart that we truly set ourselves free. Embrace mindfulness as your daily anchor, and let forgiveness be your compass. By doing so, not only will you heal from the inside out, but you'll also discover a life illuminated with joy, connection, and a profound sense of purpose. Take this leap, dear reader, and witness the transformative magic it brings.

IV. FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS

The practice of mindfulness naturally provides the space and opportunity to allow for a process of letting go that can bring about powerful healing. By engaging in a consistent practice of purposeful observation without judgment, we naturally move into the process of forgiving ourselves, our parents, our siblings... whoever it is that did something or said something to us that resulted in some level of hurt.

Some practitioners believe that forgiveness is simply a switch to flip. Then, they feel guilty when they still feel angry despite choosing to forgive. The reality is, forgiveness is first a choice, but it is followed by a process that we must respect and observe gently and attentively.⁴

Here are some practical tools you might try to incorporate the process of forgiveness into your everyday life:

- i. **The Power of Breath & Visualization.** Conscious breathing is the anchor that brings us into the present moment and the physical body. It also helps to move uncomfortable emotions without running away from them or shutting them down. Breath, paired with mental imagery, is a powerful tool in the process of forgiveness. Close your eyes. First, envision a ball of white or golden light at the base of your spine. Begin counting very slowly to 108 as you visualize this ball of light softly moving up each vertebrae of your spine, holding the light at each area of you back for 5 - 6 counts. Slowly envision the light moving to the base of your skull, all the while breathing deeply and rhythmically. Then, allow the ball of light to expand all around your head and extend out in front of you. Visualize the person whom you wish to forgive surrounded and enveloped in this beautiful, soft white or golden orb of light. Breathe deeply and rhythmically as you hold this vision and silently repeat, "[name of person], I choose to let go of what has happened. May you be surrounded and filled with this light." Keep breathing through whatever emotion may stir or arise as a result. Hold the vision, repeat the statement, breathe through until you feel a sense of calm, and then gently open your eyes.

- ii. **Bilateral Stimulation: Swing Those Arms!** Bilateral Stimulation is a

⁴ Forgiveness and Mindfulness: 3 Techniques by Lynn Wonders on June 9, 2014, wonderscounseling.com

tool that changes brain chemistry. Walking briskly, swinging the arms (right, left, right, left) while feeling and thinking about the hurt that has happened provides stimulation to the right and left hemispheres of the brain, creating new pathways in the brain allowing for access to more positive emotions, memories, and beliefs. This practice helps negative emotions, memories and beliefs to have lesser and lesser impact. Mindfully observing the emotions and thoughts that accompany the past hurt while walking briskly will bring you to a place of feeling calmer. Notice the experience of being “calmer” while continuing to walk briskly and swing the arms. Be sure to breathe deeply and rhythmically as you are walking, feeling and noticing.

iii. Sit in Silence and Stillness. Dedicate 15 minutes every day to sitting with the spine straight, eyes closed, and simply focus your mind on the natural flow of your breath. Observe silence and stillness. This meditation practice creates an intentional space of simply being in the present with what is without actively doing, changing, or fixing. As thoughts and emotions arise during this time, return the mind’s focus to the flow of the breath and the sensation of your sitting. This practice trains the mind to be okay with what is rather than being hooked by memories and emotions.

As you embark on this journey of forgiving what has happened and thereby healing past hurts, be gentle with yourself and know that progress is being made bit by bit as you incorporate these practices into your daily life.

4.1. The *Dhamma* soldier education and reform movement

The *Dhamma* Soldier Education and Reform Movement is a revolutionary concept that seeks to transform individuals and society through the principles of mindfulness, self-transformation, and social engagement. At its core, the movement is rooted in Buddhist philosophy, which emphasizes the cultivation of wisdom, ethics, and mental discipline to bring about positive change.

The movement’s core principles are centered around mindfulness, which involves cultivating awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, and actions in the present moment. This mindfulness is not limited to individual introspection but is also directed towards understanding the interconnectedness of all beings and the social and environmental contexts in which we live.

4.2. Case studies: *Dhamma* soldier reform in action

The *Dhamma* Soldier Education and Reform Movement has been actively engaged in promoting peace and harmony in India and beyond. Through awareness campaigns, lectures, and activities, the movement has educated thousands of people about the importance of mindfulness, self-transformation, and social engagement in promoting positive change.

One notable example of the movement’s impact is the transformation of a small village in rural India. The village, which was once plagued by poverty, inequality, and social unrest, was transformed into a thriving community through the efforts of the *Dhamma* Soldier Education and Reform Movement.

By promoting mindfulness, self-transformation, and social engagement, the movement helped to empower the villagers to take control of their own lives and create positive change in their community.

4.3. Personal experiences

As a practitioner of the Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement, I have experienced firsthand the transformative power of mindfulness, self-transformation, and social engagement. By cultivating compassion, tolerance, and understanding, I have been able to navigate complex social and environmental challenges with greater ease and effectiveness.

One of the most significant experiences I have had as a practitioner of the movement was during a meditation retreat in the Meditation centers and Himalayas. During the retreat, I had the opportunity to practice mindfulness and meditation in a beautiful and peaceful environment, surrounded by like-minded individuals who shared my commitment to promoting peace and harmony.



As I sat in meditation, I felt a deep sense of connection to the natural world and to the other beings who were practicing with me. I realized that we are all interconnected and that our actions have the power to impact the world around us. This realization filled me with a sense of purpose and motivation to continue promoting peace and harmony through the Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement.

4.4. Interfaith benefits

The Dhamma Soldier Education and Reform Movement offers numerous benefits across faiths, including promoting compassion, conflict resolution, mindfulness, and meditation. By encouraging individuals to engage in open and honest dialogue, the movement fosters a sense of mutual respect and trust, which is essential for resolving conflicts peacefully.

One of the most significant interfaith benefits of the movement is its ability to promote understanding and empathy between individuals from different religious backgrounds. By encouraging individuals to engage in interfaith dialogue and cooperation, the movement helps to break down barriers and build bridges between different faith communities.

V. CONCLUSION: HEALING AS COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

As we tread the noble path illumined by paññā and guided by sati, the act of forgiveness ripens into something far greater than the release of personal resentment - it becomes a sacred offering at the altar of collective awakening.

Just as a single candle can dispel darkness in a vast hall, so too can a single act of inner reconciliation reverberate through the ten thousand beings, softening the knots of aversion and fear that bind us to *dukkha*. The Buddha taught: “By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another.”⁵ Yet within this solitary labor of purification lies a paradox - the more deeply we heal ourselves, the more we liberate the world.

In the ancient forests where the arahants once dwelled, silence was not emptiness but fullness. Every breath was a remembrance. Every footstep a letting go. It is in that primordial stillness that forgiveness blooms - not as permission for harm, nor as forgetfulness, but as wisdom that knows the suffering of clinging. Like a lotus rising unsoiled from muddy waters, the heart that forgives is not weakened but strengthened, its petals unfolding through patience (*khanti*) and metta.

To forgive is not to forget the wound but to touch it with the cooling balm of wisdom and compassion. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Blessed One instructs us to contemplate feelings as feelings, mind as mind, dhammas as dhammas - with ardent, clear comprehension, and equanimity. It is within such mindful awareness that resentment loses its fuel, that the fire of hatred is not fed but extinguished.

Forgiveness becomes a form of *dana* - the giving of freedom. It is the relinquishment of the past, the release of the prisoner within. In truth, to forgive is to cease reifying the illusion of separation. It is to see, with the eye of dhamma, that the one who harmed and the one who suffered are but passing formations - conditioned, impermanent, not-self. As the Buddha said, “Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal law.”⁶

Thus, forgiveness is not merely therapeutic but also transcendent. It is not a sentiment but a radical turning of the heart - toward peace, toward wisdom, and toward the cessation of suffering for all beings. When we sit in stillness and breathe through our scars, we are not retreating from the world but healing the very field in which others also walk.

Let the world be your *kalyāṇamitta*, your spiritual friend. Let each conflict be a bell inviting you back to the breath. Let each painful memory be a teacher whispering the truth of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*. In forgiving, we step out of the samsāric wheel for a moment, choosing the stillness of the middle path over the storm of reactivity.

And so, may our practice be not only for our liberation but for the healing of generations. May each breath we offer in awareness become a seed of peace planted in the fertile soil of human consciousness. And may the echo of our forgiveness resound, not as a whisper of the self, but as a great silence - spacious, luminous, and free.

⁵ *Dhammapada* 165.

⁶ *Dhammapada* 5.

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mindfulness and meditation.

Online Resources:

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(link unavailable) - This website provides a comprehensive introduction to Buddhism, including its principles and practices.

(link unavailable) - This website provides a wealth of information on Buddhist teachings and practices, including mindfulness and meditation.

(link unavailable) - This website provides a free meditation app, including guided meditations and timers.

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center - This website provides a wealth of information on mindfulness research, including studies and publications.

FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Lauw Acep^{*}

Abstract:

Forgiveness plays a crucial role in Buddhist teachings, serving as a fundamental element of spiritual growth and mental well-being. Rooted in ancient scriptures such as the Dhammapada and the Anguttara Nikaya, Buddhist forgiveness (*khama*) is emphasized as an essential virtue for personal transformation. The Buddha taught that hatred cannot be overcome by hatred, but only through love and compassion. This principle forms the foundation of mindful healing, which fosters inner peace and emotional resilience.

Furthermore, forgiveness in Buddhism is interconnected with other key virtues, including morality (*sīla*), wisdom (*paññā*), and generosity (*cāga*). By cultivating these qualities, individuals can develop a profound sense of inner harmony and liberation from negative emotions. Modern psychological studies also align with Buddhist perspectives, highlighting the therapeutic benefits of forgiveness in reducing stress, anxiety, and emotional suffering.

This paper explores the philosophical and psychological dimensions of forgiveness in Buddhism, examining its relevance in contemporary mindfulness practices. By integrating Buddhist teachings on forgiveness into daily life, individuals can achieve personal healing and contribute to a more compassionate society.

Keywords: *Buddhist forgiveness, mindfulness, healing, compassion, emotional resilience, khama, Dhammapada, Anguttara Nikaya.*

I. INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS

The Buddha taught that forgiveness (*khama*) is essential for spiritual growth and mental well-being. As stated in the *Dhammapada*, “Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone does it cease. This is an eternal law”. (Dhp 5)

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In the *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 5.161), the Buddha outlines five essential qualities that make a person “worthy of gifts” - a profound teaching that encompasses the core aspects of spiritual development and personal transformation. These qualities - virtue (*sīla*), learning (*suta*), generosity (*cāga*), wisdom (*paññā*), and forgiveness (*khama*) - form an interconnected framework for spiritual cultivation and ethical living.

The first quality, virtue (*sīla*), serves as the foundation for all spiritual progress. As stated in the *Dhammapada*, “Virtue is the foundation of all good qualities, as the earth is of all growing things” (*Dhp* 333). *Sīla* encompasses ethical conduct, moral discipline, and righteous behavior. It manifests through adherence to the five precepts and the cultivation of wholesome actions in body, speech, and mind. The Buddha emphasized that virtue creates the conditions necessary for mental purification and spiritual advancement.

Learning (*suta*) represents the second quality, highlighting the importance of acquiring knowledge and understanding of the Dhamma. In the *Kitagiri Sutta* (MN 70), the Buddha explains that learning must be accompanied by practice: “These two qualities - learning and practice - when developed and cultivated, fulfill wisdom.” This emphasizes that theoretical knowledge must be complemented by practical application for genuine transformation to occur.

Generosity (*cāga*), the third quality, extends beyond material giving to include the offering of fearlessness, wisdom, and spiritual guidance. The Buddha taught in the *Dāna Sutta* (AN 8.31) that “giving brings happiness at three times: when giving, thinking about giving, and recollecting one’s giving.” Generosity counteracts greed and selfishness, cultivating a mind of abundance and compassion.

Wisdom (*paññā*), the fourth quality, represents deep insight and understanding of reality. As taught in the *Dhammapada*, “Wisdom is purified by virtue, and virtue is purified by wisdom” (*Dhp* 144). This quality enables clear comprehension of the Four Noble Truths and the nature of existence, leading to liberation from suffering. Wisdom develops through study, reflection, and meditation practice.

The fifth quality, forgiveness (*khama*), holds particular significance in Buddhist practice. In the *Kakacupama Sutta* (MN 21), the Buddha illustrates the importance of forgiveness even in extreme circumstances: “Even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who entertained hate in his heart would not be one who followed my teaching.” Forgiveness liberates the mind from resentment and hatred, creating space for peace and compassion.

These five qualities work synergistically, each supporting and enhancing the others. As taught in the *Sonadanda Sutta* (DN 4), “Just as each foot of a tripod supports the others, these qualities support each other in the development of a noble character.” Their cultivation leads to both personal transformation and benefit for the broader community.

The practical application of these qualities in daily life involves consistent

mindfulness and intention. The Buddha taught in AN 8.54 that “these qualities, when developed and cultivated, lead to happiness here and now and to future happiness.” This suggests a systematic approach to incorporating these qualities into one’s lifestyle and relationships.

Modern Buddhist scholars and practitioners continue to emphasize the relevance of these five qualities in contemporary life. Thich Nhat Hanh notes, “These five qualities are like five stars guiding us on the path of transformation” (*The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*, 1998). Their cultivation supports mental well-being, harmonious relationships, and spiritual progress.

In conclusion, the five qualities described in AN 5.161 provide a comprehensive framework for spiritual development and ethical living. Their integration into daily life creates the conditions for genuine happiness and liberation from suffering. As the Buddha taught, these qualities make one truly “worthy of gifts” - not just material offerings but the gift of Dhamma and the opportunity for spiritual transformation.

II. FORGIVENESS AND PAST KARMA: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON HEALING AND LIBERATION

In Buddhist teachings, the relationship between forgiveness and past karma presents a profound pathway for spiritual healing and liberation. The Buddha taught that while karma operates as an immutable law of cause and effect, our response to past actions through forgiveness can significantly influence our present and future experiences.

The *Samyutta Nikaya* offers a fundamental teaching about dealing with past karma: “What’s done is done. What matters is what you do now” (SN 42.8). This teaching suggests that while we cannot change past actions, we can transform our relationship to them through forgiveness and wise understanding. The Buddha emphasized that dwelling on past misdeeds only creates additional suffering, while forgiveness opens the door to healing.

In the *Angulimala Sutta* (MN 86), we find a powerful illustration of how forgiveness can transform even the heaviest karma. Angulimala, who had killed 999 people, achieved liberation through genuine remorse, forgiveness, and spiritual practice. The Buddha’s words to him are particularly relevant: “He who has been heedless, but afterwards becomes heedful, illuminates this world like the moon freed from clouds.” This teaching demonstrates that forgiveness, combined with sincere practice, can lead to profound transformation regardless of past actions.

The process of forgiving past karma involves several key aspects outlined in various Buddhist texts. The *Dhammapada* states: “Let go of the past, let go of the future, let go of the present. Crossing to the farther shore of existence, with mind released from everything, do not again undergo birth and decay” (*Dhp* 348). This verse suggests that forgiveness requires a complete releasing of mental attachments to past actions.

Regarding the mechanism of karmic forgiveness, the *Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 61) presents the Buddha’s teaching to his son Rahula about dealing

with past unwholesome actions: “Having reflected on an action in thought, word, or deed, if you realize it was unwholesome, confess it, reveal it, and lay it open to the Teacher or to knowledgeable companions in the holy life. Having confessed it... You should exercise restraint in the future.” This outlines a practical approach to dealing with past karma through acknowledgment, confession, and commitment to future wholesome action.

The practice of karmic forgiveness is intimately connected with the development of wisdom (*paññā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). As taught in the *Visuddhimagga*, understanding the nature of karma helps us develop equanimity towards past actions: “Through understanding *karma*, one sees that beings are heirs to their karma, and this understanding leads to acceptance and forgiveness.”

The Buddha provided practical methods for working with past karma through the practice of the *Brahmaviharas* (divine abodes). In particular, the development of *metta* (loving-kindness) and *upekkha* (equanimity) helps create the mental conditions necessary for genuine forgiveness. As stated in the *Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8): “Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.”

Modern Buddhist teachers have expanded on these traditional teachings. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches: “Understanding and forgiveness are the practices that can help us transform the karma of the past” (The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching). He emphasizes that mindful awareness of our present actions is the key to transforming past *karma*.

The practical application of forgiving past karma involves several steps:

1. Acknowledgment of past actions without denial or suppression
2. Understanding the law of karma and its workings
3. Developing compassion for oneself and others
4. Practicing mindfulness to prevent creating new unwholesome karma
5. Cultivating wholesome actions to generate positive karma

In the *Upajjhathana Sutta* (AN 5.57), the Buddha reminds us: “I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.” This teaching encourages responsibility while also providing hope through the possibility of transformation through forgiveness and wise action.

III. COMPONENTS OF FORGIVENESS IN BUDDHIST PRACTICE: AN INTEGRATION OF LETTING GO, COMPASSION, AND WISDOM

The Buddhist approach to forgiveness encompasses three essential components: letting go (*vossagga*), compassion (*karuṇa*), and wisdom (*paññā*). These three elements work together synergistically to create a complete and transformative practice of forgiveness that leads to liberation from suffering and the cultivation of inner peace.

Letting go (*vossagga*) forms the foundational aspect of the forgiveness

practice. The Buddha emphasized this in the *Dhammapada*: “Let go of the past, let go of the future, let go of the present. Crossing to the farther shore of existence, with mind released from everything, do not again undergo birth and decay” (*Dhp* 348). Vossagga involves releasing our grip on resentments, grievances, and the stories we tell ourselves about past hurts. In the *Sallatha Sutta* (*SN* 36.6), the Buddha compares holding onto hurt to being struck by two arrows: “When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed worldling sorrows, grieves, and laments, beats his breast, becomes distraught. So he feels two pains, physical and mental.”

Compassion (*karuna*) represents the heart quality necessary for genuine forgiveness. As taught in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, compassion should be cultivated “even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child.” This compassion extends not only to others but also to oneself. In the *Samyutta Nikaya* (*SN* 47.19), the Buddha teaches that *karuna* helps us understand that all beings are subject to suffering and seeking happiness, which naturally softens our hearts toward those who have harmed us.

Wisdom (*pañña*) provides the understanding necessary to see the deeper truth of situations and relationships. The *Abhidhamma* texts explain that wisdom allows us to see the impersonal nature of harm and the chain of causes and conditions that lead to harmful actions. As stated in the *Visuddhimagga*, “Wisdom penetrates the true nature of phenomena, seeing their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self nature.” This understanding naturally leads to forgiveness as we recognize that harmful actions arise from ignorance and conditioning rather than inherent evil.

The integration of these three components creates a comprehensive approach to forgiveness. In the *Anguttara Nikaya* (*AN* 3.65), the Buddha teaches that these qualities support each other: “Just as the dawn is the forerunner of the rising sun, so right view (wisdom) is the forerunner of wholesome states.” When wisdom illuminates the situation, compassion provides the emotional support for letting go, and letting go creates space for deeper wisdom and compassion to arise. The practical application of these components involves specific practices. For letting go, the Buddha taught mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) as found in the *Anapanasati Sutta* (*MN* 118). For developing compassion, the practice of metta meditation as outlined in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta* provides a systematic approach. For wisdom development, the practice of vipassana (insight meditation), as taught in the *Satipatthana Sutta* (*MN* 10), offers a direct path to understanding. Modern Buddhist teachers have elaborated on these traditional teachings. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches: “Understanding is the essence of love. If you cannot understand, you cannot love” (Peace Is Every Step). This highlights the interconnected nature of wisdom and compassion in the forgiveness process. Similarly, Ajahn Chah emphasized the importance of letting go: “If you let go a little, you will have a little peace. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace. If you let go completely, you will have complete peace.”

The process of working with these components involves:

1. Recognizing the need to forgive
2. Understanding the role of each component
3. Applying specific practices for each aspect
4. Integrating the components in daily life
5. Maintaining consistent practice over time

IV. THE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS IN FORGIVENESS: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON CONSCIOUS HEALING

“When mindfulness is present, we can recognize both the hurt and the need to forgive” – Thich Nhat Hanh.

Mindfulness (*sati*) plays a crucial role in the process of forgiveness by enabling us to observe and understand both our pain and our capacity to forgive. The Buddha’s teachings emphasize that mindfulness serves as the foundation for transforming difficult emotions and cultivating genuine forgiveness. In the Satipatthana Sutta (MN 10), the Buddha presents mindfulness as the direct path to understanding and liberation: “This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearing of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way.” This teaching suggests that mindfulness allows us to observe our hurt and the process of forgiveness with clarity and wisdom.

The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 4.184) describes mindfulness as a protective guardian of the mind: “Mindfulness, I declare, is helpful everywhere.” In the context of forgiveness, this guardianship enables us to:

1. Recognize when we’re holding onto hurt
2. Observe our reactive patterns
3. Notice opportunities for forgiveness
4. Monitor the healing process

The *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN 54.13) emphasizes how mindfulness of breathing can help us work with difficult emotions: “When one thing is practiced and developed, the body is calmed, the mind is calmed, thinking and evaluating are stilled, and all wholesome states that partake of true knowledge come to completion by development.” This practice provides a stable foundation for working with the pain that requires forgiveness.

The Buddha’s teaching in the *Vitakkasanthana Sutta* (MN 20) offers five specific methods for working mindfully with difficult thoughts and emotions:

1. Replacing unwholesome thoughts with wholesome ones
2. Considering the dangers of unwholesome thoughts
3. Ignoring unwholesome thoughts
4. Stilling the thought-formation
5. Using force of will if necessary

These methods, applied with mindfulness, help us work skillfully with thoughts and emotions that arise around hurt and forgiveness.

In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha teaches: “The awakened one, mindful amongst the mindless, fully awake amongst the sleeping, advances like a swift horse leaving a weak one behind” (*Dhp* 29). This verse suggests that mindfulness allows us to rise above automatic reactive patterns and choose conscious responses to hurt.

The practical application of mindfulness in forgiveness involves several key aspects outlined in various Buddhist texts:

1. Body awareness (*kāyānupassanā*):

As taught in the *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* (MN 119), awareness of physical sensations associated with hurt and forgiveness helps ground the practice in direct experience rather than conceptual thinking.

2. Feeling tone (*vedanānupassanā*):

The *Vedana Samyutta* (SN 36) teaches the importance of recognizing pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings associated with both hurt and the process of forgiveness.

3. Mind states (*cittānupassanā*):

The *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta* (MN 19) emphasizes the importance of knowing the state of mind, whether it is contracted with resentment or expanded with forgiveness.

4. Mental objects (*dhammānupassanā*):

The *Abhidhamma* texts explain how the mindful observation of mental phenomena helps us understand the impermanent nature of both hurt and healing.

Modern Buddhist teachers have expanded on these traditional teachings. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches: “Mindfulness helps us recognize the presence of anger, the presence of hurt, the presence of wounds in us. And it also helps us recognize the presence of the positive elements that are there to help us heal” (*Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flames*).

Joseph Goldstein notes: “Mindfulness allows us to see clearly the entire landscape of experience, including both the pain we carry and our capacity for release” (*Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*).

The practice of mindful forgiveness involves:

1. Regular formal meditation practice
2. Moment-to-moment awareness in daily life
3. Conscious recognition of hurt when it arises
4. Mindful observation of the forgiveness process
5. Integration of insights into daily relationships

V. THE BENEFITS OF BUDDHIST FORGIVENESS PRACTICE: A PATH TO WELL-BEING AND HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Buddhist teachings emphasize that forgiveness practice yields significant benefits for mental, emotional, and relational well-being. The systematic application of forgiveness practices leads to transformative outcomes that

enhance overall quality of life.

5.1. Reduced stress and anxiety

The Buddha addressed the relationship between forgiveness and stress reduction in the Sallatha Sutta (SN 36.6), comparing the experience of holding onto hurt to being struck by two arrows: “When touched with a feeling of pain, the uninstructed worldling sorrows, grieves, and laments... So he feels two pains, physical and mental.” Through forgiveness, we remove the second arrow of mental anguish. The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 5.161) further explains that letting go of resentment naturally leads to peaceful sleep, reduced anxiety, and freedom from mental torment.

The *Vitakkasanthana Sutta* (MN 20) provides practical methods for reducing stress through mental cultivation: “By not holding onto thoughts of resentment, one experiences the natural peace of mind.” This teaching suggests that forgiveness practice directly contributes to stress reduction by releasing mental tensions.

5.2. Improved mental health

In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha states: “Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; through love alone does it cease. This is an eternal law” (*Dhp* 5). This fundamental teaching indicates that forgiveness practice contributes to mental health by transforming harmful mental states into wholesome ones.

The *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN 42.8) emphasizes that mental health improves when we release the burden of past hurts: “Just as a banana tree bears no fruits after producing its flower cluster, so too does one who has let go of resentment find natural happiness.” This metaphor illustrates how forgiveness creates space for mental well-being to flourish.

5.3. Enhanced emotional regulation

The *Anumana Sutta* (MN 15) provides guidance on emotional regulation through self-reflection and mindful awareness. The text explains that by understanding our emotional patterns, we can better regulate our responses to hurt and injury. The Buddha teaches that regular practice of forgiveness develops *khanti* (patience) and emotional stability.

The *Visuddhimagga* describes the development of emotional regulation through the practice of the four brahmaviharas (divine abodes): “Through the development of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, one naturally develops greater emotional balance and control.”

5.4. Better relationships:

The *Sigalovada Sutta* (DN 31) outlines the principles for harmonious relationships, emphasizing forgiveness as a key factor: “In five ways should one minister to friends and companions: by generosity, kind words, beneficial conduct, impartiality, and honesty.” These qualities naturally develop through forgiveness practice.

The *Mitta Sutta* (AN 7.35) describes the qualities of true friendship,

including the ability to forgive and maintain harmony: “A friend who is the same in happy and unhappy times... this is the highest kind of friend.” This teaching suggests that forgiveness practice enhances our capacity for meaningful relationships.

Practical application:

The implementation of the forgiveness practice involves:

1. Regular meditation practice focusing on forgiveness\
2. Application of the *Brahmaviharas* in daily life
3. Mindful awareness of emotional patterns
4. Conscious cultivation of harmonious relationships
5. Integration of forgiveness principles in conflict resolution
3. Mindful healing practices

VI. METTA MEDITATION: CULTIVATING UNIVERSAL LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

Metta meditation, the practice of loving-kindness, represents one of Buddhism’s most transformative methods for developing self-forgiveness, compassion for others, and universal goodwill. This systematic practice, as taught by the Buddha, creates profound changes in our relationship with ourselves and others.

6.1. Self-forgiveness

The Buddha emphasized the importance of self-directed *metta* in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*: “Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings” (SN 1.8). This teaching suggests that genuine self-forgiveness forms the foundation for extending forgiveness to others.

The *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN 47.19) states: “When watching over yourself, you watch over others. When watching over others, you watch over yourself.” This interconnected perspective shows how self-forgiveness naturally extends to universal compassion.

In the *Cunda Sutta* (AN 10.176), the Buddha explains: “One should first establish oneself in what is proper; then only should one instruct others.” This principle applies directly to self-forgiveness as a prerequisite for helping others forgive.

6.2. Compassion for others

The *Metta Sutta* outlines the development of compassion for others: “Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another” (SN 1.8). This teaching provides a framework for developing genuine compassion.

The *Visuddhimagga* describes the systematic practice of *metta* (loving-kindness) meditation as a progressive expansion of compassion in widening circles. It begins with generating loving-kindness toward oneself, establishing a foundation of inner warmth and well-being. Next, this feeling is extended

to a beloved person, someone who naturally evokes positive emotions. From there, the practitioner directs metta toward a neutral person, someone they feel neither strong affection nor aversion, cultivating an unbiased sense of goodwill. The practice then expands to include a difficult person, transforming feelings of resentment into compassion. Finally, metta is radiated universally to all beings without exception, fostering boundless and unconditional love.

The *Patisambhidamagga* explains that metta (loving-kindness) should be cultivated with four essential characteristics. It must be free from hostility (*abyapada*), ensuring that no feelings of anger or enmity taint the practice. It should also be free from ill will (*avihimsa*), meaning it is rooted in genuine kindness without any intention to harm. Additionally, metta must be boundless (*appamana*), extending beyond personal attachments to encompass all beings without limits. Finally, it should be well-developed (*subhavita*), practiced consistently and deeply so that it becomes an enduring and natural state of mind.

6.3. Universal goodwill

The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 11.16) describes eleven benefits of metta practice:

1. Peaceful sleep
2. Peaceful awakening
3. No bad dreams
4. Being dear to humans
5. Being dear to non-humans
6. Divine protection
7. Protection from fire, poison, and weapons
8. Easy concentration
9. Serene facial expression
10. Dying unconfused
11. Rebirth in higher realms

The *Digha Nikaya* (DN 31) emphasizes that universal goodwill should be actively expressed in daily life through five key aspects. It begins with kind actions, demonstrating compassion and care in one's deeds. This is supported by kind speech, using words that uplift, heal, and foster harmony. Equally important are kind thoughts, cultivating a mind filled with goodwill rather than judgment or negativity. True metta also involves open-heartedness, embracing others with warmth and acceptance. Finally, it requires unbiased treatment of others, ensuring that kindness is extended to all, regardless of status, background, or personal relationships.

6.4. Practical application:

The development of metta through meditation involves specific practices:

1. Traditional *metta* phrases:

As taught in the commentaries, using phrases such as:

- May I/ they be happy

- May/ they be peaceful
- May I/ they be safe
- May I/ they be free from suffering

2. Progressive development:

The Visuddhimagga outlines the stages:

- Preliminary practice (*parikamma-bhavana*)
- Access concentration (*upacara-samadhi*)
- Full absorption (*appana-samadhi*)

3. Daily integration:

The *Sutta Nipata* suggests incorporating metta into daily activities:

- While standing
- While walking
- While sitting
- While lying down

Modern Buddhist Teachers' Perspectives:

Sharon Salzberg emphasizes: "Metta means equality, oneness, wholeness. To truly practice metta, we first have to see how we set ourselves apart from others" (Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness) Thich Nhat Hanh teaches: "Love is a practice. Love is truly a practice". (True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart)

VII. INTEGRATION OF FORGIVENESS IN DAILY LIFE: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON LIVING WITH UNDERSTANDING

The Buddha's teachings on forgiveness emphasize its practical integration into daily life through understanding (*pañña*) and mindful awareness. This integration transforms theoretical knowledge into lived experience, making forgiveness a natural response rather than a forced action.

7.1. Practical application in daily situations:

1. Workplace interactions:

The *Sigalovada Sutta* (DN 31) provides guidance for harmonious relationships in daily life, including professional settings:

- Speaking with kindness
- Acting with consideration
- Maintaining goodwill
- Working for mutual benefit

2. Family relationships:

The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 4.32) describes four qualities for maintaining healthy family relationships:

- Patience (*khanti*)
- Gentle speech (*peyyavajja*)

- Beneficial conduct (*atthacariya*)

- Impartiality (*samanattata*)

3. Personal development:

The *Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 61) emphasizes self-reflection as a tool for understanding:

- Regular examination of actions

- Recognition of impacts on others

- Cultivation of wholesome states

- Learning from mistakes

7.2. Daily practice framework:

1. Morning contemplation:

The *Karaniya Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8) encourages starting each day with loving-kindness, guiding practitioners to cultivate a mindset of compassion and peace. This begins with setting positive intentions, consciously directing one's thoughts and actions toward kindness and wisdom. Next, it involves cultivating goodwill, generating a sincere wish for the well-being of oneself and all beings. Finally, the practice includes preparing for challenges, maintaining a steady and compassionate heart in the face of difficulties, and ensuring that metta remains a guiding force throughout the day.

2. Mindful activities:

The *Satipatthana Sutta* (MN 10) teaches the practice of mindfulness by cultivating awareness in four key domains. It begins with body awareness, attentively observing physical sensations, posture, and breath to develop a deep connection with the present moment. Next is awareness of feeling tone, recognizing whether experiences are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral without clinging or aversion. The third domain focuses on mental states, acknowledging emotions and thoughts as they arise, fostering clarity and balance. Finally, mindfulness extends to mental objects, observing perceptions, teachings, and phenomena with wisdom, leading to insight and liberation.

3. Evening reflection:

The *Abhidhamma* tradition emphasizes the importance of daily reflection, encouraging practitioners to review their thoughts, words, and actions each evening. This begins with examining difficult interactions, honestly assessing moments of conflict or unskillfulness to cultivate understanding and growth. It also involves acknowledging progress, recognizing positive efforts, and wholesome qualities developed throughout the day. Finally, reflection includes setting intentions for improvement, consciously resolving to refine one's conduct and deepen mindfulness, ensuring continuous spiritual development.

VIII. MINDFUL HEALING TECHNIQUES: BUDDHIST APPROACHES TO EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL RECOVERY

Mindful healing techniques in Buddhism offer systematic approaches to emotional and spiritual recovery through formal practices that integrate

forgiveness, compassion, and mindful reflection. These methods, rooted in ancient Buddhist teachings, provide practical tools for contemporary healing.

Formal practices:

7.1. Forgiveness meditation

The Buddha outlined the importance of forgiveness meditation in several teachings. The *Khama Sutta* emphasizes the transformative power of forgiveness practice:

“As I am, so are others;
As others are, so am I.
Having thus identified self and others,
Harm no one nor have them harmed.”

The *Visuddhimagga* offers a structured approach to forgiveness meditation, guiding practitioners through a process of inner healing and compassion. It begins with acknowledging the hurt, honestly recognizing any pain or resentment held within. This is followed by recognizing shared humanity, understanding that all beings are imperfect, make mistakes, and seek happiness. The next step is releasing resentment, letting go of grudges, and freeing the heart from the burdens of anger. Finally, the practice culminates in cultivating goodwill, generating sincere wishes for the well-being of oneself and others, and fostering inner peace and harmony.

The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 5.161) highlights five profound benefits of forgiveness practice, emphasizing its transformative power on both mind and heart. First, it leads to peaceful sleep, as a mind free from resentment rests with ease. Next, it cultivates mental clarity, allowing thoughts to be unclouded by anger or regret. Forgiveness also grants freedom from remorse, relieving the burden of past conflicts and fostering inner harmony. Additionally, it ensures a peaceful death, enabling one to pass away with a light and untroubled heart. Finally, this practice supports a favorable rebirth as a forgiving and compassionate mind paves the way for future well-being and spiritual progress.

7.2. Compassion cultivation:

The *Karaniya Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8) outlines the systematic development of compassion:

“Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life,
Even so, let one cultivate a boundless love.
Towards all beings.”

The practice of the four brahmaviharas (divine abodes) cultivates a heart filled with boundless love and wisdom. It begins with metta (loving-kindness), the unconditional wish for all beings to be happy and free from suffering. This extends into karuna (compassion), the sincere desire to alleviate the suffering of others with empathy and care. Next is mudita (sympathetic joy), the ability to rejoice in the happiness and success of others without jealousy. Finally, upekkha (equanimity) fosters a balanced mind, accepting the ups and downs of life with

wisdom and inner stability, embracing all beings with impartial goodwill.

The *Visuddhimagga* outlines a systematic development of loving-kindness, guiding practitioners through an expanding circle of compassion. It starts with self-compassion, fostering a deep sense of kindness toward oneself as the foundation for extending goodwill to others. From there, the practice extends to loved ones, strengthening the bonds of affection and warmth. Next, metta is directed toward neutral persons, those for whom we feel neither strong like nor dislike, cultivating impartial kindness. The practice then includes difficult persons, transforming resentment into understanding and forgiveness. Finally, loving-kindness expands to all beings, radiating unconditional goodwill to the entire world, embracing all with boundless compassion.

7.3. Mindful reflection:

The *Satipatthana Sutta* (MN 10) provides the foundation for mindful reflection through four foundations:

Body (*Kaya*):

- Breath awareness
- Bodily sensations
- Physical postures

Feelings (*Vedana*):

- Pleasant experiences
- Unpleasant experiences
- Neutral experiences

Mind (*Citta*):

- Mental states
- Thought patterns
- Emotional responses

Mental Objects (*Dhamma*):

- Five hindrances
- Seven factors of enlightenment
- Four Noble Truths

7.4. Practical implementation:

1. Daily practice structure:

Morning Session:

A morning session dedicated to mindfulness and compassion can set a positive tone for the day. It begins with 15 – 30 minutes of forgiveness meditation, allowing the heart to release resentment and cultivate inner peace. This is followed by metta cultivation, generating loving-kindness for oneself and all beings, fostering warmth and connection. Finally, the session concludes with setting daily intentions, consciously aligning thoughts, words, and actions with kindness, wisdom, and purpose, ensuring a mindful and compassionate approach to the day ahead.

Midday practice:

A midday practice helps maintain mindfulness and emotional balance throughout the day. It includes brief mindfulness breaks, pausing for a moment to reconnect with the present and reset mental clarity. This is complemented by compassion check-ins, reflecting on interactions, and ensuring that kindness and understanding remain at the forefront. Lastly, conscious breathing serves as an anchor, using slow, intentional breaths to cultivate calmness, focus, and a steady heart amidst daily activities.

Evening review:

An evening review offers a meaningful way to close the day with mindfulness and inner peace. It begins with reflection on daily experiences, observing thoughts, actions, and interactions with awareness and non-judgment. This is followed by forgiveness practice, releasing any lingering resentment or self-criticism to cultivate a compassionate heart. Finally, the day ends with gratitude contemplation, appreciating moments of kindness, growth, and learning, fostering a sense of contentment and well-being before rest.

2. Progressive development:

The *Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 20) outlines five methods for working with difficult thoughts:

1. Replacement with wholesome thoughts
 2. Contemplation of consequences
 3. Conscious non-attention
 4. Investigation of thought patterns
 5. Determined resolution
- ### 3. Integration Techniques:

The *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN 46.53) suggests incorporating healing practices into daily activities:

- Walking meditation
- Seated practice
- Daily activities mindfulness
- Interpersonal interactions

IX. INFORMAL PRACTICES IN BUDDHIST MINDFULNESS: INTEGRATING AWARENESS INTO DAILY LIFE

The Buddha emphasized the importance of informal practices as essential components of the spiritual path. These practices transform ordinary daily activities into opportunities for mindfulness and spiritual growth through reflection, awareness, and conscious response.

1. Daily Reflection:

The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 10.48) recommends five daily reflections:

“I am subject to aging, have not gone beyond aging.

I am subject to illness, have not gone beyond illness.

I am subject to death, have not gone beyond death.

All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become otherwise, will become separated from me.

I am the owner of my kamma, heir to my kamma...”

Structured Reflection Framework:

Morning Reflection:

The *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN 47.10) suggests:

- Setting daily intentions
- Reviewing ethical commitments
- Contemplating priorities

Evening Review:

The Dhammapada emphasizes self-examination: “One should first establish oneself in what is proper; then only should one instruct others” (*Dhp* 158)

Components of Daily Reflection:

- Actions (*kamma*)
- Speech (*vaca*)
- Thoughts (*citta*)
- Intentions (*cetana*)

2. Moment-to-moment awareness:

The Satipatthana Sutta (MN 10) outlines four foundations for continuous awareness:

Physical Activities:

“When walking, knows ‘I am walking’

When standing, knows ‘I am standing’

When sitting, knows ‘I am sitting’

When lying down, knows ‘I am lying down’”

Mental States:

- Recognition of emotions
- Observation of thoughts
- Awareness of mind states

Sensory Experiences:

- Seeing
- Hearing
- Smelling
- Tasting
- Touching
- Thinking

Environmental Awareness:

The *Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 61) teaches:

- Awareness of surroundings
- Impact of actions
- Relationship with others

3. Conscious Response vs. Reaction:

The *Vitakkasanthana Sutta* (MN 20) provides five methods for skillful response:

1. Replace unwholesome thoughts with wholesome ones
2. Consider the drawbacks of unskillful reactions
3. Shift attention to something beneficial
4. Analyze the cause of reactivity
5. Use determined effort to transform reactions

The *Abhidhamma* tradition outlines the process:

- Recognition (*sañña*)
- Feeling (*vedana*)
- Mental formation (*sankhara*)
- Consciousness (*viññana*)

Practical applications:

1. Daily life integration:

Integrating mindfulness into the work environment enhances focus, well-being, and interpersonal harmony. Practicing mindful communication ensures that speech is thoughtful, compassionate, and responsive rather than reactive. Maintaining task awareness allows for full engagement in each responsibility, improving efficiency and reducing distractions. Lastly, effective stress management through conscious breathing, short mindfulness breaks, and a balanced mindset helps maintain calmness and resilience, fostering a productive and positive workspace.

Home Life:

Bringing mindfulness into home life nurtures deeper connections, balance, and well-being. Engaging in family interactions with presence and kindness strengthens relationships, fostering understanding and harmony. Approaching household activities with awareness transforms routine tasks into opportunities for mindfulness and gratitude. Lastly, dedicating personal time for self-care, reflection, or meditation ensures inner peace and renewal, allowing for a more compassionate and fulfilling home environment.

Social Situations:

Navigating social situations with mindfulness fosters deeper connections and meaningful interactions. Practicing conscious listening involves giving full attention to others without distraction or judgment, ensuring they feel heard and valued. Engaging in mindful speech encourages thoughtful, kind, and honest communication, reducing misunderstandings and promoting har-

mony. Maintaining an empathetic presence allows for genuine connection as one responds with compassion and understanding, creating a supportive and positive social environment.

2. Specific techniques:

The STOP Practice (adapted from traditional teachings):

S - Stop what you're doing

T - Take a breath

O - Observe body, thoughts, emotions

P - Proceed mindfully

The RAIN Method (contemporary adaptation):

R - Recognize what's happening

A - Allow it to be there

I - Investigate with kindness.

N - Non-identification/Nurture

3. Supporting Practices:

Physical Awareness:

- Walking meditation in daily activities

- Mindful eating

- Conscious breathing

Mental Clarity:

- Regular pauses

- Intention setting

- Gratitude practice

X. BUDDHIST SOLUTIONS: UNDERSTANDING CORE PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSFORMATION

Buddhist solutions to life's challenges are rooted in three fundamental approaches: understanding impermanence (*anicca*), practicing non-attachment, and developing wisdom. These interconnected principles provide practical methods for addressing suffering and achieving lasting peace.

1. Understanding Impermanence (*anicca*):

The Buddha's Teaching on Impermanence:

The Samyutta Nikaya (SN 22.45) states:

"Whatever is subject to origination is subject to cessation."

Key Aspects of Impermanence:

Physical impermanence:

The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 3.47) teaches the nature of physical impermanence, emphasizing the ever-changing aspects of existence. It highlights the body's constant change, as aging, illness, and transformation are inevitable parts of life. This extends to environmental transitions, where

seasons shift, landscapes evolve, and natural forces shape the world around us. Additionally, it underscores material impermanence, reminding us that possessions, structures, and all physical forms arise, change, and eventually fade, encouraging a deeper understanding of impermanence and the need for non-attachment.

Mental impermanence:

The *Dhammapada* (*Dhp* 277) teaches that “All conditioned things are impermanent,” emphasizing the transient nature of mental experiences. Thoughts arise and pass, constantly shifting like clouds in the sky, reminding us not to cling to fleeting ideas. Similarly, emotions fluctuate, with joy, sorrow, anger, and peace continuously evolving, reinforcing the need for equanimity. Even perceptions are impermanent, shaped by changing perspectives and experiences, encouraging openness and wisdom in how we see the world. Recognizing this mental impermanence helps cultivate non-attachment and inner peace.

Practical Application:

The *Satipatthana Sutta* (*MN* 10) emphasizes the importance of observing phenomena with mindful awareness, recognizing their transient nature. It begins with noticing arising phenomena, understanding how thoughts, emotions, and sensations come into being. Next, it involves observing persisting phenomena, seeing how experiences unfold and temporarily remain. Finally, it highlights the passing away of phenomena, cultivating insight into impermanence as all experiences inevitably fade. This practice deepens wisdom, fostering non-attachment and a clearer understanding of the ever-changing nature of reality.

2. Practicing Non-Attachment:

Theoretical Foundation:

The Second Noble Truth teaches that attachment (*upadana*) is a primary cause of suffering, as it binds the mind to craving and clinging. Whether it is attachment to desires, relationships, identities, or material possessions, this grasping creates dissatisfaction and distress when change inevitably occurs. By recognizing the transient nature of all things and loosening attachment, one can cultivate inner peace, reduce suffering, and move toward liberation.

The *Majjhima Nikaya* (*MN* 72) explains:

“By the complete disappearance of delight comes the disappearance of passion;

By the disappearance of passion comes the disappearance of delight.
By this disappearance of delight and passion, the mind is liberated.”

Levels of Non-Attachment:

Material Non-Attachment:

Material non-attachment encourages freedom from dependence on external possessions, status, and wealth. Clinging to possessions creates fear of loss and a false sense of security, while attachment to status fuels ego and comparison, leading to dissatisfaction. Similarly, craving wealth can result in

endless striving without true contentment. By embracing non-attachment, one can cultivate gratitude, simplicity, and inner peace, finding fulfillment beyond material gains.

Emotional Non-Attachment:

Emotional non-attachment fosters inner peace by releasing the need for control over relationships, outcomes, and expectations. Clinging to relationships can lead to suffering when change or loss occurs, while attachment to specific outcomes creates disappointment if reality unfolds differently. Similarly, rigid expectations about people or situations can result in frustration and distress. By practicing non-attachment, one cultivates love, resilience, and acceptance, allowing life to flow with greater ease and wisdom.

Mental Non-Attachment:

Mental non-attachment cultivates openness and wisdom by releasing rigid clinging to views, opinions, and concepts. Holding tightly to views can create conflict and resistance to new perspectives, while attachment to opinions fosters ego-driven defensiveness. Similarly, rigid adherence to concepts can limit understanding and prevent deeper insight. By letting go of fixed mental constructs, one develops flexibility, humility, and the ability to see reality with greater clarity and equanimity.

3. Developing Wisdom:

The path to wisdom:

The *Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 43) describes two types of wisdom essential for deep understanding and liberation. *Sutamaya pañña* is wisdom through learning, gained by studying scriptures, listening to teachings, and reflecting on knowledge passed down by others. This intellectual foundation, however, must be complemented by *bhavanamaya pañña*, or wisdom through development, which arises from direct experience through meditation and practice. While learning provides insight, true wisdom is cultivated through mindfulness, contemplation, and lived experience, leading to profound inner transformation.

Stages of wisdom development:

Learning phase:

The *Kitagiri Sutta* (MN 70) emphasizes the importance of intellectual engagement as a foundation for deeper wisdom. It begins with the study of teachings, where one listens to, reads, and absorbs the Dhamma to gain initial knowledge. This is followed by contemplation, reflecting deeply on the meaning and implications of the teachings to integrate them into one's understanding. Finally, through theoretical understanding, one develops a conceptual grasp of the path, which serves as a stepping stone toward direct experience and deeper realization through practice.

Practice Phase:

The Noble Eightfold Path components:

- Right View

- Right Intention
- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration
- Right Speech

Realization Phase:

The *Anguttara Nikaya* (AN 4.49) describes four qualities of wisdom:

1. Seeing what is beneficial
2. Understanding causality
3. Maintaining mental balance
4. Following the path

Practical Implementation:

1. Daily practice framework:

Morning:

A morning practice framework sets the tone for mindfulness and wisdom throughout the day. It begins with an impermanence reflection, acknowledging the transient nature of life to cultivate detachment and presence. This is followed by setting non-attachment intentions, consciously aligning thoughts and actions with openness, and reducing clinging to people, outcomes, or material things. Lastly, engaging in wisdom contemplation deepens understanding by reflecting on key teachings, fostering clarity and insight as one moves through daily experiences.

Throughout the Day:

Integrating mindfulness into daily life involves mindful observation, where one attentively watches thoughts, emotions, and surroundings without attachment or judgment. This awareness supports non-reactive responses, allowing for calm and thoughtful actions instead of impulsive reactions driven by habit or emotion. Through wisdom application, one consciously applies learned insights to real-life situations, navigating challenges with clarity, patience, and understanding, fostering a balanced and insightful way of living.

Evening:

An evening practice fosters self-awareness and inner growth through mindful reflection. It begins with a review of experiences, observing the day's thoughts, actions, and interactions with honesty and without judgment. This is followed by a letting-go practice, releasing attachments, regrets, or lingering emotions to cultivate peace and freedom. Finally, learning integration allows wisdom gained from the day's experiences to be absorbed, deepening insight and guiding future thoughts and actions with greater mindfulness and clarity.

2. Specific Techniques:

Impermanence Practice:

Impermanence practice cultivates wisdom by deeply understanding the transient nature of life. It begins with observing change, noticing how thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations continuously arise and fade. This extends to noting transitions, recognizing shifts in relationships, circumstances, and environments as part of the natural flow of existence. Ultimately, accepting flux fosters equanimity, allowing one to embrace change with grace rather than resistance, leading to greater peace and freedom from attachment.

Non-Attachment Exercise:

A non-attachment exercise helps cultivate freedom by loosening the grip of clinging. It begins with identifying attachments, recognizing the people, possessions, beliefs, or outcomes one holds onto tightly. This is followed by investigating clinging, examining the underlying fears or desires that create dependency and resistance to change. Finally, practicing release involves consciously letting go, embracing impermanence, and fostering a mindset of openness and ease, leading to greater inner peace and resilience.

Wisdom Development:

Wisdom development is a holistic process that integrates knowledge, reflection, and direct experience. It begins with the study of texts, gaining insight from sacred teachings, philosophical works, and scholarly interpretations. This is deepened through contemplative practice, where one reflects on the meaning and application of wisdom, allowing understanding to mature. Ultimately, experiential learning transforms knowledge into lived insight by applying wisdom in daily life, fostering clarity, discernment, and inner growth.

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AN EXPLORATION OF BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE-BUILDING AS PRESENTED IN THE PALI DISCOURSES

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Abstract:

This exploration delves into Buddhist teachings on conflict resolution and peace-building as presented in the Pali discourses. Conflict, an inevitable aspect of human society, is examined from both its destructive and positive aspects, to transform violent conflicts into peaceful processes through understanding and addressing their root causes. Buddhism identifies three primary causes of conflict-craving, hatred, and ignorance-and advocates for their transformation through the development of non-craving, non-hatred, and non-illusion. Buddhist conflict resolution is rooted in the principles of causality and the Four Noble Truths, offering a comprehensive theory that can be applied both spiritually and socially. The *Mahānidāna-sutta* and other texts illustrate the psychological and social dynamics that fuel conflict, emphasizing internal transformation as the foundation for resolving external disputes. The Buddha's teachings stress the importance of cultivating inner peace through morality, mental concentration, and wisdom, intending to foster peace within oneself to bring about societal harmony. Furthermore, Buddhism highlights poverty, social inequalities, and other environmental factors as root causes of conflicts. Through practices like loving-kindness (*mettā*) and non-cruelty, Buddhism proposes a path to peaceful coexistence, not only for individuals but for all living beings. The Buddha's approach to peace-building involves ethical living, compassion, and mindfulness, and serves as a practical model for reducing conflicts and promoting long-term peace.

Keywords: *Conflicts, Resolution, Peace-building, Buddhism.*

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I. OBJECTIVE

This research seeks to investigate the doctrinal foundations within Buddhism that relate to conflict resolution and peace-building. It aims to understand how Buddhist principles can be applied in contemporary society, especially in areas afflicted by violence, to promote peaceful transformation and social harmony. The research will examine core Buddhist teachings, such as compassion, non-violence, mindfulness, and forgiveness, and analyze their potential to guide conflict resolution strategies. Ultimately, the goal is to explore how Buddhist values and practices can contribute to addressing the root causes of violence and help create a peaceful environment in societies impacted by conflict.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources to gather relevant data. Primary sources include Buddhist texts, scriptures, and teachings, while secondary sources comprise scholarly articles, books, and research papers related to the application of Buddhism in conflict resolution. Data collection was done through libraries, e-libraries, and scholarly discussions. Furthermore, the research method employed was primarily comparative in nature, allowing the researcher to compare Buddhist teachings with other conflict resolution theories, particularly from Western philosophies. This comparative approach helps in understanding the unique contributions of Buddhism to peace-building and how these teachings can be integrated into modern-day conflict resolution processes.

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Are there Buddhist teachings relevant to conflict resolution and peace? This question examines whether Buddhist philosophy offers specific insights or practices that can be applied to resolve conflicts, foster reconciliation, and promote lasting peace in societies struggling with violence.

If such teachings exist, how can they be implemented in a society that is deeply rooted in violence to foster peace and reconciliation? This question explores the practical application of Buddhist teachings in conflict-ridden societies. It seeks to understand how principles such as forgiveness, compassion, and the interdependence of all beings can be applied in modern-day social and political contexts to help transform violent behaviors and promote peaceful coexistence.

IV. DISCUSSION

Diversity is indeed a natural circumstance in the world, and the rise of conflict is also an inevitable fact in society. Conflicts are not always entirely negative, there are also positive aspects in conflicts; for example, the current conflict over water (the lack of drinkable water) promotes positive attitudes among people toward the preservation of water resources and the environment. The positive aspect of this conflict is the preservation of water and environment. The negative aspect of the conflict on water is that it would be a cause for world war in the future.

Conflict can arise at the individual level, community level, national level, and global level. Whatever conflicts arise, from the individual family level to the global level, the nature of conflict is that it is inevitable and cannot be eliminated from the world. Accounts of the past 5000 years of history reveal that only 92 years have passed with no conflict or war. This fact shows that for over 98% of the past 5000 years, society – in a global sense – has been affected by war.¹ This shows the inevitable nature of conflict. Hence, attempt should not be made to eradicate conflict but to transform the violent nature of conflict into a non-violent process through understanding and identifying the root causes of conflict.

Buddhism has recognized three root causes of arising conflicts at the individual level: craving (*lōbha*), hatred (*dōsa*) and ignorance (*mōha*).² These three root causes are latent in everyone's mind and are interdependent. Even though there is no destructive nature apparent in the latent state of the above three roots in one's mind, with contact with external objects they manifest as violent and destructive. The craving (*lōbha*) is an insatiable desire to acquire; the insatiable desire gives rise to covetousness (*abhijjhā visamalōbha*). This covetousness is the stage of conflict that arises due to the strong attachment to the things an individual likes. Hatred (*dōsa*) is the resentment directed toward the people and circumstances that cause the arising of ill will (*vyāpāda*). The ill will causes destructive violence in society, such as killing and injuring others. The ignorance (*mōha*) is the lack of understanding and unawareness of the real circumstances. Ignorance causes a strong attachment to wrong views (*miccādiṭṭhi*). Many religious conflicts arise due to the misunderstanding of the real meaning of religion. Thus, Buddhism distinguishes the above three mental conditions as the root causes of the arising of conflict from the individual level to the global level.

As a consequence, the Buddhist way of transforming conflict into a constructive and non-violent state depends on the development and cultivation of opposites of the above three roots. The positive counterparts of craving, hatred and illusion are non-craving (*alōbha*), non-hatred (*adōsa*) and non-illusion (*amōha*).³ The Buddha said, "Because of craving, there arise grievances or sorrow and fear. When freed from it, there is neither sorrow nor fear."⁴ In *Sigālōvāda-sutta*, desire (*chanda*) hatred (*dōsa*) fear (*bhaya*) and ignorance (*mōha*) have been identified as the mental drives that cause harm to the individual and the society and there mentions that for the person who is freed from the above vulgar states of mind, his goodness and repute grow like the moon when waxing.⁵ Buddhism emphasizes that conflict resolution

¹ Gary and Solis (2010), available at: <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AUIntLawJl/2010/21.pdf>.

² AN.10. 174.

³ AN. 10. 47.

⁴ *Dhp* 32.

⁵ D. III. 181.

should be started within man himself in reducing his or her vulgar mental drives like craving, hatred, and ignorance by developing non-craving, non-hatred, and non-illusion. The transformation of destructive mental conditions like craving, etc. into constructive positive counterparts is not a short-term process. It is a long-term gradual process based on the practical engagement of charity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*).

The Buddhist interpretation of conflict and the root cause of conflicts have mostly been elaborated in terms of the central teaching of Buddhism, causality (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). According to Buddhist causality, every process of arising conflict and resolution of conflict into a non-violent stage depends on the causal theory. Buddhist conflict resolution theory depicted in the analysis of the Four Noble Truths is one of the best theories manifested in the Indian philosophical context, and relates to the theory of cause and effect. The four levels to be consistent with what follows preached by the Buddha are, 1) Conflict, 2) The cause of conflict, 3) The resolution of conflict, and 4) The way to the resolution of conflict. The first two levels are understanding and recognizing the nature of conflict and the root causes of conflict. The third and fourth levels deal with the conflict resolution process. Prima facie, this theory appeared as a way elaborated by Buddha to attain only spiritual mental states, however, it is not only a way to attain *Nibbāna* but it is the clearest way that can be implemented to solve any conflict condition in society.

The *Mahānidāna-sutta* is one of the suttas that explains the causal conditionality of origin conflict and social problems. Here, it explains the causal relativity of conflict in the following way. “Feeling conditions craving, craving conditions seeking, seeking condition acquisition, acquisition conditions decision making, decision making conditions lustful desire, lustful desire conditions attachment, attachment conditions appropriation, appropriation conditions avarice, avarice condition girding, girding conditions taking up stick and sword, then, there arise quarrels, disputes, argument, strife, abuse, lying and other evil unskilled states.”⁶ It should not be misunderstood here that the feeling (*vedanā*) or craving (*taṇhā*) is the first cause of arising conflicts because all the above links are interrelated to each other and process relatively with the contact of external objects through internal faculties of the individual. One of the famous suttas, which explains the method of contacting external objects with internal faculties, is *Madhupiṇḍika-sutta*. For example, here it explains how an individual contact forms through the eyes “Through the contact of eye and forms, there arise eye-consciousness, the coming together of three is sense impression, sense-impression is conditional feeling, feeling is conditioned perception and so on”⁷ Other sense organs also operate similarly on contact with respective external objects. This psychological process causes various conflicts to arise in the external society. For example, the above characterization of causal relativity of the *Mahānidāna-sutta* clearly shows how the internal mental process of the

⁶ D. II. 58.

⁷ M. I. 111.

individual gives rise to destructive behaviour in society. Thus, according to the Buddhist explanation of causes of conflict, all the conflicts arise in man himself. Therefore, the conflict resolution process should be started within man himself rather than finding outer solutions through the external world. Once a certain deity, asked the Buddha, "A tangle inside, a tangle outside, this generation is entangled in a tangle, I ask you this, *Gotama*, who can disentangle this tangle." The Buddha replied to him: "A man established on virtue, wise, developing the mind and wisdom, a *Bhikkhu* ardent and discreet, he can disentangle this tangle."⁸ The deity asked for the solution for the internal and external conflicts that were entangled with each other. The Buddha presented a solution addressing three levels that should be implemented by the person himself. They are, 1) Behavioural or moral transformation (*sīla*), 2) mental transformation (*samādhi*) and 3) Cognitive transformation (*pañña*). Morality means the protection of precepts preached by the Buddha. Mental transformation means the development of mental concentration, and cognitive transformation is the understanding of the real nature of the world or the capacity to see things, as they are. The person who has developed and cultivated the above three levels is completely free from all types of internal and external conflicts. He is called *Arahat*. He neither causes harm to himself nor causes the arising of external conflict. Even though it is difficult to reach such a state (*arahat*) for people in modern society, this theory enables development to an extent effective to reduce conflicts in day-to-day life.

Buddhism does not recognize only psychological calamities as the only causes of arising conflicts, but it distinguishes some social issues and interactions as root causes of arising conflicts. Poverty is one of such root causes cognized by the Buddha. In the *Cakkavattisihanāda sutta*, the Buddha mentioned "not giving of property to the needy, poverty become rife, from the growth of poverty, taking of what was not giving is increased, from the increasing of theft, use of weapons increased, from the increasing use of weapons taking of life increased and from the increasing in taking of life, peoples life span decreased."⁹ Modern sociologists also recognize poverty as a root cause of many social problems and conflicts. The poverty is caused by the unconstructive economic system of the county. The interpersonal conflict between the rich and the poor always arises due to the unfair distribution of the limited wealth among the people. The conflict between the rich and the poor can never be solved without reducing the gap between the poor and the rich. In the *Kuṭadanta sutta*, it mentions that the king should distribute grain and fodder to those who engage in cultivation, should give capital to those who engage in trade and should give wages and food to those who engage in government service.¹⁰ Buddhism has recognized poverty as suffering and points out that it is impossible to implement a reconciliation process or peace-

⁸ S. I. 13.

⁹ D. III.67.

¹⁰ D. I.134.

building programme without eliminating the poverty. The above discourses give ample account of how Buddha has explained the conflict resolution theories while understanding the root causes of social conflicts.

Apart from the above factors, there are some other social impacts, which cause conflicts and problems to arise in society. In the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*¹¹ it is mentioned that various types of mental suffering and conflict arise due to social or environmental causes. Fire, flood, terrorism, as well as fear and suffering arising due to ageing, decay and death cause mental suffering and conflict in the individual. The *Kalahavivāda-sutta*¹² reveals that conflicts arise due to debate and argument between people.

According to the *Aggañña-sutta*¹³ conflicts arise in the world at the very first beginning of the universe due to the craving (*tanhā*) of man. Even today, many conflicts and wars indeed arise because of insatiability. Therefore, Buddhism emphasizes that man as is always lacking, unsatisfied and a slave to craving. The dissatisfaction of the individual gives rise to all conflicts from the family level to global war. In the *Raṭṭapāla-sutta*¹⁴ it is mentioned that because of his insatiability, a king who conquered all the land as far as the ocean was still not content. Therefore, he fought to conquer the overseas territories too. Thus, Buddhism recognizes insatiability as the major cause for the arising of conflicts.

Regarding conflict transformation, Buddhism reveals three stages in the unfolding of a conflict. They are: 1) The stage of transgression (*vitikkama*); in this final stage, physically or verbally the individual engages in the action or conflict, therefore, this is the stage of engaging in violence; 2) the stage of manifestation (*pariyutṭhāna*); this is the preceding stage of the emotional stimulus process in the mind. In this stage, the mental preparation for the violence is started; 3) latent disposition (*anusaya*); in this stage, mental cankers and defilements are submerged as latent dispositions.¹⁵ At the same time, Buddhism explains three corresponding stages of resolving the conflict: 1) temporary solution (*tadaṅgapahāna*) 2) short-term solution (*vikkhambhanapahāna*) 3) stable solution (*samucchadapahāna*).¹⁶ These three stages can be understood through the following example. In a war, a cease-fire is the temporary solution, the holding of peace talks is the short-term solution and complete eradication of war is the stable solution. The stable solution mentioned here is not a solution achieved by only ending hostilities. It is, however, the stable solution achieved after a successful reconciliation process and after healing all the wounds of the parties involved. Therefore, the immediate post-conflict period belongs to the second of the above stages.

¹¹ A. I.110.

¹² Sn. 862 - 877.

¹³ D. 3.III.79.

¹⁴ M. II. 54.

¹⁵ D. III. 254.

¹⁶ *Khuddakanikāye Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā, Chatṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka* (1995).

V. PEACE BUILDING

Peace is the central theme discussed by many societies as it is essential to human survival on the planet. The peaceful atmosphere of society degenerates due to conflicts that originate through differences in religious, political, cultural, ethnic, and other such backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, conflict is an inevitable fact of human society. Therefore, establishing peace is also vital to society. With the process of building peace, there are some important Buddhist discourses, which provide a considerable amount of theoretical and practical subject matter. The main admonishment given by the Buddha to his first sixty disciples was "Travel in the tour for the well-being and happiness of mankind as a whole." Thus, the sole purpose of the Buddha and his disciples was to establish peace and happiness in society. Therefore, the Buddha is said to be born for the goodness and happiness of the human world, "*manussalōka hita sukhatāya jāto*"¹⁷ He is attributed with "Highest Compassion" (*mahā kāruṇika*). At the same time, He was known as the "*santi-rāja*" or the "Prince of Peace."¹⁸ He attained this stable peaceful position by himself after understanding the reality of the world. He said, "There arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, comprehension and light regarding things unheard of before."¹⁹ He was such a great human being that He never mentally, verbally or physically caused the least harm to Himself or the outer world. Every word expressed by Him was directed toward establishing peace in society.

People in modern society seek peace in the outer world through organizing different types of programs and conferences to discuss the matter of peacebuilding and protecting human rights. However, whatever program is organized on the matter of peace-building; it is ineffective without highlighting the necessity of building inner peace. Before establishing peace in the outer world, one should establish inner peace. Once Buddha said, "It is not possible, Cunda, for him who is stuck in the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud. But Cunda, it is possible for one who is himself not stuck in the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud. In the same way, the person who did not establish discipline and peace himself cannot bring peace to others, but the person who himself established inner peace and can lead others to peace."²⁰ The Buddha is the greatest example who, first of all, developed and cultivated peace himself and leads others to peace. The person who has developed inner peace should practice effacement as, "Others will be cruel, we shall not be cruel here..., other will kill living beings, and we shall abstain from killing living beings"²¹ Moreover, His mind should be inclined (*cittaṃ uppādetabbam*) thus, "Other will be cruel, we shall not be cruel here, and others will kill living being we shall abstain from killing living beings. Thus, those who mentally

¹⁷ Sn. 683.

¹⁸ Jayatilake, K. N. (2008): 2.

¹⁹ S. V. 422.

²⁰ M. I. 45.

²¹ M. I. 41.

practice peace and harmony must have the ability to tolerate any kind of violent situation. For example, the Buddha said to the venerable Phaggunna, “If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a clod, with a stick, with a knife, you should abandon any desire and any thought based on the household life. And here in you should train thus, my mind will be unaffected and I shall utter no evil words. I shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with the mind of loving-kindness, (*mettacitto*) without inner hate”²² This is the stable and unswerving inner compassion and loving kindness that should be developed by oneself to keep the peace in the outer world. As is mentioned above, peace-building in society can never be achieved without building peace in the mind. Therefore, Buddhism always emphasizes establishing inner peace rather than peace in society. It can very easily be understood that after establishing stable inner peace, man himself, there is no need to try hard to establish peace in society.

The most important doctrine that Buddha has elaborated to create a peaceful atmosphere is the cultivation of *Mettā* or loving-kindness. This single word has a very broad meaning in the context of bringing about peace and harmony, not only in the human world but also in the whole universe, including even unseen beings, flora, and fauna. The word *mettā* is the abstract noun from the word *mitra*, which means “friend.”²³ The friendliness or loving kindness that Buddhism emphasizes is not just friendliness, but that the friendliness should extend towards all living creatures in the human world. *Metta-sutta* explains the way of cultivating loving kindness toward all creatures as “whatsoever the living creatures there are, moving or still without exception, whatever are long or large, or middle-sized or short, small or great. Whatever is seen or unseen, whoever lives far or near, whether they already exist or are going to be, let all creatures be happy-minded. One should not humiliate another, one should not despise anyone anywhere, and one should not wish anyone misery because of anger or the notion of repugnance. Just as a mother who protects with her life her son, her only son, so one should cultivate unbounded loving-kindness toward all beings, and loving kindness toward the entire world, one should cultivate unbounded love above and below and cross, without obstruction without enmity, without rivalry”²⁴ If any party involved in a conflict can transform their mental attitudes up to the level of loving-kindness while forgetting all past bad experiences and agitations, then peace is not only a concept that cannot ever be practiced.

The loving-kindness or friendliness (*mettā*) to be spread toward all creatures is also mentioned in the Four Sublime Abodes (*brahmavihāra*).²⁵ *Mettā* here means friendly feelings towards others, *Karuṇā* refers to the compassionate attitudes that arise on the occasions of others’ distress to assist or help them. *Muditā* is sympathetic joy, which means the ability to rejoice

²² M. I. 123;

²³ Jayatilake, K. N. (2008): 3.

²⁴ Sn. 24.

²⁵ D. III. 196.

without any jealousy by seeing others' happiness and successes. *Upekkhā* means the equanimity or the ability to experience any happy or distressful condition without mental agitation.

The opposite of the angry, enmity or ill will is loving-kindness (*mettā*). Therefore, to overcome such bad attitudes, the individual must cultivate compassion or loving-kindness. Buddha said that friendliness should be cultivated to eradicate ill will "*mettā bhāvētabbā byapāda pahānāya*."²⁶ At the same time, in the *Sallekha-sutta* the Buddha said to Cunda, "a person who practices cruelty must practice non-cruelty to abstain from it, the person who engages in killing must abstain from killing to avoid it"²⁷ According to Buddhism, it is not enough to only refrain from killing living beings, but it is also necessary to cultivate the positive quality of loving-kindness. "One refrains from killing creatures, laying aside the stick and the sword and abides conscientious, full of kindness, love and compassion towards all creatures and beings."²⁸

To support the building of peace and harmony in society, the Buddha has recommended right livelihood (*sammā-ajīva*) for lay people, prohibiting all types of livelihoods which cause harm and the violation of peace in society. The Buddha prohibited five trades which are harmful to maintaining peace in society. They are: 1) the sale of arms, 2) the sale of human beings or animals, 3) the sale of flesh, 4) the sale of intoxicating drink, and 5) the sale of dangerous and poisonous drugs. Today, many human rights violations and crimes happen in the world owing to the dealing in the above trades. There is no single country or region in the world where the above trades are not to be found; each country engages in these trades directly or indirectly. In particular, powerful countries in the world, whilst engaging in and organizing peace talks and admonishing the confronted parties to build peace, strategically sell their weapon and bullets to foolish combatants of less powerful countries. When the ruler of a country becomes unrighteous, the people of that country follow the same process. Therefore, the ruler must be an ideal to the society. The Buddhist concept of the ideal king depicted in the *Cakkavattisihanāda-sutta* explains the role of the king in the matter of peacebuilding in a country. He is the Universal Monarch who rules his country and imposes punishments for offences, but without using a stick or sword. He is thus a good ruler who practices moral virtue and righteousness. This ideal king advises his fellow men not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to tell lies, not to use intoxicants.²⁹ This concept of the ideal king in Buddhism was practically employed by some Buddhist rulers like King *Dharmasōka* to establish peace in the society following a war.

The Buddha was an ideal leader who practically engaged in the spreading of loving-kindness and compassion towards all living beings without any

²⁶ Ud. 37.

²⁷ M. I. 46.

²⁸ D. I. 4.

²⁹ D. III. 62.

discrimination. In his daily routine, a few hours were spent resting, and during all the remaining periods of the day he assisted people who wanted help. A few such people he assisted were *Āṅgulimāla*, *Paṭācārā*, *Kisāgōthami*, *Sunīta Sōpāka*, *Rādha*, *Cullapanthaka* as well as animals like snakes and elephants. The Buddhist concept of peace has practical values as Buddhism has not fought with people to spread its doctrine and never did the Buddha recommend any holy war against any religion or any race.

VI. CONCLUSION

Buddhism acknowledges that conflicts emerge from within humanity, arising from the interaction between internal faculties and external phenomena. The root causes of such conflicts lie in defilements such as craving, hatred, illusion, and ignorance. To foster a peaceful and conflict-free environment, these defilements must be overcome through the cultivation of virtuous thoughts, such as loving-kindness.

In conclusion, it must be noted that the Buddha not only taught the principles of conflict resolution but also actively mediated in numerous situations to resolve conflicts without discrimination. He intervened in the disputes of royalty and commoners, guiding kings like *Pasenadi Kosala* in the resolution of their daily challenges and assisting marginalized individuals, such as *Sunīta* and *Sopāka*, in rising above their oppressive social conditions. For example, when a conflict erupted between the *Sākya* and *Kōliya* tribes over the use of the Rohini River's water, the Buddha made repeated efforts to mediate and avert violence. He also intervened in ideological disputes among monks on several occasions, seeking to guide them toward constructive dialogue. Even when his initial efforts proved unsuccessful, the Buddha's silence and wisdom led the opposing parties to recognize the futility of their conflict.

Thus, Buddhism presents numerous doctrinal teachings on conflict transformation, and peace-building. A central tenet of the Buddha's approach to these issues is encapsulated in the phrase: "Hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred ceases by love; this is an eternal law."³⁰ Following this, Buddhism teaches that, to bring about peace, individuals must first cultivate inner peace by letting go of past grievances and forgiving those who have wronged them. When one attains inner tranquility, peace naturally extends to the surrounding environment and society.

³⁰ Dhṛ. chapter 1, verse 5.

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Abbreviation

- A. *Aṅguttaranikāya*
 D. *Dīghanikāya*
 Dhp. *Dhammapada*
 M. *Majjhimanikāya*
 S. *Samyuttanikāya*
 Sn. *Suttanipāta*

NEW TRENDS IN BUDDHIST RITUALS AND PRACTICES USED FOR THE MENTAL HEALING OF INDIVIDUALS

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Abstract:

This research article hopes to identify new trends in Buddhist practices and behavioural methods used in Sri Lankan society to achieve individuals' mental health. Buddhism in Sri Lanka was established after the arrival of Mahinda Thero (*Mahindagamanaya*). As historians have accepted, the people who lived in Sri Lanka before *Mahindagamanaya* knew about Buddhism, but Buddhism was established with the support of the state after the arrival of Mahinda Thero. The people who lived in ancient Sri Lanka did not have the mature knowledge needed to understand the Philosophical facts of Buddhism, but they accepted Buddhism as their religion. The common belief was that the accumulation of merit was the only path to spiritual growth. In such a background, it led to the formation of a complex of practices even in Sinhala Buddhism. Among the existing religious traditions in Sri Lanka, Buddhism was the oldest and the first religion to have a philosophical basis. Buddhism that is practiced in Sri Lanka can be seen in two parts: the original Buddhism and the applied Buddhism. Early Buddhism is a concept based on the practice of the 'middle path' (*Majjhima pathipada*). It has a deep philosophical basis, deep teachings such as the noble eightfold path (*Ashtangika margaya*), and four Noble truths (*Chathurarya Sathya*). Karma and rebirth, etc., belong to it. Buddhism, which was formed in this way, became a popular religion with time, combining various elements and customs. It is used as a popular Buddhist practice today. With the arrival of Buddhism to Sri Lanka from India, its basic principles began to change to some extent. Also, the changes occurred according to the socio-cultural and environmental factors specific to each country. Accordingly, from the past to the present, various Buddhist practices are seen to be used by man to achieve spiritual healing. Therefore, ritual practices have become an integrated concept in human life. Thus, the research problem of this research is to identify

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what are the new trends in Buddhist practices used for mental healing. In this research, which was conducted as quantitative research, the case study method and functional method were used as the research method. Observation and Interview methods were used for data collection. Gampaha district, a highly urbanized area in the Western province of Sri Lanka, was used as the research area. There are many new trends in the Buddhist practices used in the urban society of today's society that could be identified. *Fen sui* rituals, *Ganadevi pooja*, *Bodhi pooja*, etc., many practices have developed in the society with a Buddhist face. Powerful mental healing can be achieved through these Buddhist practices used by humans. Man has been tempted to change the various symbols that were traditionally used for rituals to suit the urban society of today. Humans are motivated to practice Buddhist rituals and achieve spiritual healing through the use of communion media and modern technology. Thus, the Buddhist practices used in Sri Lankan society today have become very popular.

Keywords: *Middle path, the Noble Eightfold Path, Four Noble Truths, rebirth, karma.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is one of the three oldest missionary religions in the world. It is a religion that is as important as the influence of Christianity on the Western countries in its spread in the Asian continent. Buddhism was established in Sri Lanka with the arrival of Mahinda Thero. It is stated that the people living in Ceylon before Mahinda Thero's arrival knew about Buddhism, as it has been accepted by historians. However, Buddhism was established in this country with the support of the state after the arrival of Mahinda Thero. The Buddhism that was established after *Mahindagamanaya* was shaped according to the local conditions of that time. This process happened effortlessly because there were opinions that were acceptable to the common people living in Sri Lanka at that time. Therefore, it is justified to regard Buddhism as Sinhala Buddhism, which was adapted to the attitudes of the people of Sri Lanka.

After the transformation of public property into private property, the norm of this is my property and this is the property of others arose. Acts such as theft and lying were based on this. In order to prevent such mistakes, a moral ruler was appointed. The rule of law was given to the ruler to implement such things.¹

Historians have this opinion about what religions the tribal people who lived in this country believed in before Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese people came to Sri Lanka from North India and settled about five hundred years before the beginning of Christ. Therefore, it is possible to think that the religious beliefs in North India at that time may have influenced them.² The Government in Sri Lanka at that time provided great support for the establishment of Buddhism.

¹ *Dīgha Nikāya* 3, *Aggañña Sutta* (1995): 155.

² Ivan (2006): 19.

It is mentioned in the Mahawamsa that when Mahinda Thero came to Sri Lanka, there was a simple culture in this country. Thus, a civilization that existed in Ceylon for a long time took shape after the Buddhist invasion. It is said that the culture of Ceylon reached a higher level after the Mahindagamanaya.³ At that time, people believed in demons. They also worshipped some trees, considering God as Vimana. The tree that led to the pilgrimage of the hunters was the palm tree. The fact that King Pandukabhaya built a monastery for Jain leader shows that there were also Jains in Ceylon.⁴ It seems that the people who lived at that time accepted Buddhism, established in Sri Lanka, as their religion. Also, there does not seem to be any conflict between the new religion and the old religion. Instead, the new religion seems to have absorbed the old religion. Many groups of people who came to Sri Lanka embraced Buddhism and joined the Sinhalese people. However, there were two social groups living in Sri Lanka who protected their religious identity without coming together. Those two communities are Tamil Hindus and Muslims. As a religion, that teaches that living means suffering. It is truly a miracle that Buddhism spread throughout the world as a great missionary movement and won millions of followers.⁵ Although Buddhism says that life is suffering, Buddhism can be described as a religion that contains all the causes and solutions to all the sad problems that come before us in human life. Apart from Sri Lanka, Buddhism is recognized as the religion that has helped semi-civilized and uncivilized people to become civilized and develop the spiritual condition of man in several countries in Asia. Buddhism has presented many valuable ways to improve the lay life of man. No one can dismiss the teachings of Buddhism as impractical. This quality has greatly contributed to the existence of Buddhism as well as to the spiritual healing of man.

Most of the research so far conducted on the history of Buddhist Philosophy has mainly concentrated on the doctrinal aspects contained therein. The attention has been drawn particularly towards man's spiritual, mental, and moral concerns.⁶ Max Weber identified Buddhism as a religion that neglects social problems and directs its attention towards the supra-mundane liberation only. It is a specifically unpolitical and anti-political status religion, more precisely a religion technology of a wondering and intellectually schooled mendicant monk.⁷

II. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to identify the current trends in Buddhist practices used for mental healing. In order to achieve this main objective, it is necessary to use an appropriate research method to collect data. Research methodology consists of various research methods and data collection

³ Mahawamsa (1955): 11 – 12.

⁴ Ivan (2006): 20.

⁵ Ranaweera (2004): 89.

⁶ Ariyananda (2009): 02.

⁷ Ariyananda (2009): 02.

techniques. There are many research methods used in the field of social sciences. Such as the comparative method and the case study method. The historical method, the statistical method, the survey method, and the functional method.⁸ Among this functional method, the negative and positive impacts of behavioural practices can be identified. A case study can be identified as a careful examination of a particular unit or problem. When a researcher conducts research using qualitative data, he tends to connect with the sociocultural background of the study and collect data related to it. To collect the qualitative data required for research using Ethnography as the methodology, qualitative data collection techniques should be used. Researchers are encouraged to use techniques such as the observation method, participant observation method, and interview method.⁹ Qualitative data were used to collect data on the individuals' mental healing through the use of Buddhist practices. Therefore, the interview method and observation method were used as data collection methods, and the participant observation method was used as data collection techniques for this research.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Popular Buddhism

Every religion in the world has a philosophical side as well as a popular side. Among the religious traditions in Sri Lanka, Buddhism is the oldest and the first religion to have a philosophical basis. Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka can be identified in two main areas. That is early Buddhism and applied Buddhism. Early Buddhism is a concept based on the practice of the middle path. It is largely based on a deep philosophical basis. Deep teachings such as the Noble Eightfold Path, four Noble truths, Karma, Rebirth, etc., belong to early Buddhism. As a result of the influence of various factors, the original Buddhism was born, and with time, various elements were added to Buddhism. In this way, Buddhism became a reformed religion by combining various elements. It is known as popular Buddhism; it contains many different faiths that are used for the spiritual healing of man. Lord Buddha has four dharma recommendations specifically related to the individual.

- i. The man is approaching death. (*Upanieti loko Addudhuvo*)
- ii. The man is defenseless; there is no one to give comfort. (*Attano loko Anahissaro*)
- iii. The man has nothing of his own; everything must be abandoned. (*Assako loko sabban Pahaya Gamaneeeyan*)
- iv. The man lacks everything. No satisfaction. (*Uno Loko Athiththo Thanhadaso*)

This makes it clear that Buddhism provides great support for the spiritual well-being of man.

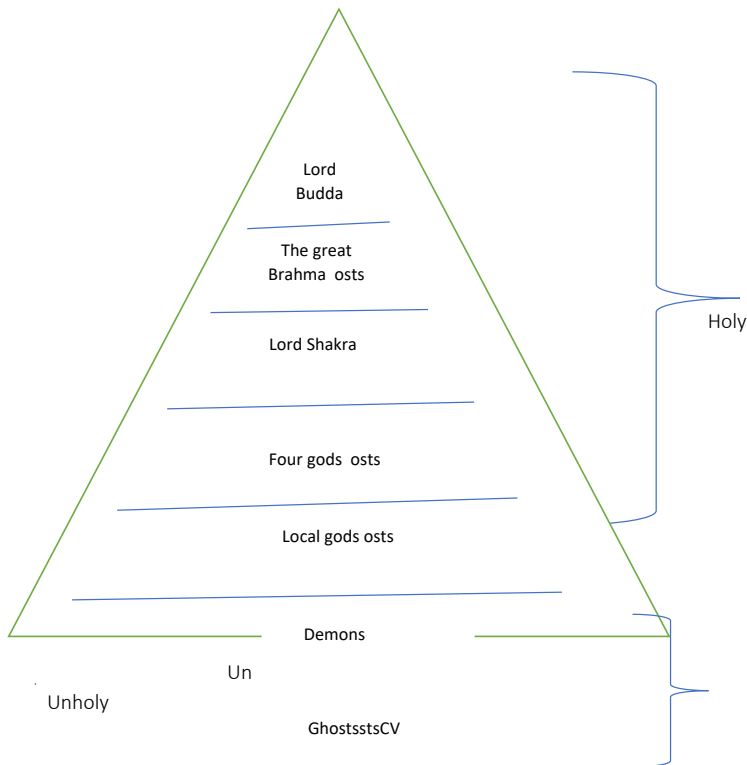
⁸ Weber (1960): 206.

⁹ Rao (1990): 47.

In Buddhism, the middle path, also known as the noble eightfold path, is a practical guide to enlightenment emphasizing a balanced approach. That avoids the extremes of indulgence and self-mortification and promotes a path of moderation and mindful living.

Different rituals are used in Buddhism today to settle the various problematic situations that man faces in worldly life. There, people were motivated by the activities formed by using beliefs related to supernatural forces such as various objects, gods, demons, ghosts, etc. In the practical religious beliefs of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community, Lord Buddha is given the highest respect. After that, people were motivated to align other beliefs and rituals. The Buddhism that includes the beliefs built up with such activities is called popular Buddhism. There is a hierarchy in Sinhala Buddhism.

When examining the hierarchy of Sinhala Buddhism, it is clear that Popular Buddhism is included. The hierarchy seen in Sinhala Buddhism is as follows.



In the hierarchy of Sinhala Buddhism, Buddha is recognized as the chief among gods. He preached the Dhamma to Lord Shakra to protect the people. Lord Shakra has given that power to four gods. Examining the hierarchy of Sinhala Buddhism makes it clear that four gods have delegated that power to local gods. This shows that through the spread of Sinhala Buddhism. Sinhala Buddhists use three basic factors to ascertain how various troubles arise in

everyday life. That is the influence of planets as the influence of demons, gods, and the influence of Karma. Buddhists admit that the influence of demons and gods is as strong as Karma. *Theravada* Buddhism has a combination of religious beliefs and various practices.

Buddhism is concerned with the practical problems of human life. The Buddhist analysis of man and the world does not regard the source of knowledge as a question or a puzzle because the primary concern of Buddhism was the attainment of emancipating knowledge¹⁰. Human history confirms that humanity without ethics cannot exist. In the past, there was some ethical system among the people who lived in the Stone Age. It is mentioned in the *Aggañña Sutta* that people who had sexual intercourse in the open air were scolded and chased away by throwing ashes¹¹ for emancipation and mental healing. It can be seen that Sri Lankan people have many different manners and customs. Such activities have become very popular in Popular Buddhism.

3.2. Buddhist rituals used in Sri Lankan society

In the belief of the Sri Lankan community, a complex of practices was formed even in Sinhala Buddhism based on Buddhists, thinking of merit as the only way of spiritual growth. Anthropologists admit that there is no organized religion without practices. It can be especially noted that among the rituals, symbolic actions are often included in the rituals.

About three centuries ago, the attention of anthropologists was drawn to Buddhist practices. Scholars like Robert Knox (1681), Hugh Nevill (1887), Seligman (1908), and Dave (1821) are some of the writers who drew attention to the practices of Sinhala Buddhist rituals. However, anthropological studies on Buddhist practices in Sri Lanka only began after the 1950s. In the research conducted by sociologists such as Nur Yalman (1964), E. R. Leach (1962), Bryce Ryan (1958), and Gananatha Obesekara (1958), they have presented a comprehensive analysis of the rituals that existed in the respective areas.

Ames, who presents a comprehensive analysis of Sinhala Buddhist practices, mentions that meditation is not about achieving happiness in this world but in the accumulation of merit based on worship and almsgiving. But his analysis makes it clear that demonic beliefs and god-related practices are capable of subduing worldly intentions¹². After carrying out an extensive study on the Buddhist practices of the Sinhalese society, Nur Yalman drew attention to the fact that there are non-Buddhist forms of Buddhist practices. There man has resorted to practices to cure life, death, sorrow, happiness, health, sickness, etc. The unique nature of Buddhist practices from the past to the present is that the Sri Lankan people are used to combining Buddhism and God's faith. However, the bottom line here is that these practices directly contribute to a person's mind reaching a more spiritual nature. *Bodhi Pooja* has a major place among the

¹⁰ *Noble Eightfold Path* (n.d.). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noble_Eightfold_Path

¹¹ Ven. Ariyananda (2009): 156.

¹² *Dīgha Nikāya, Aggañña Sutta* (1995): 150.

Buddhist practices of today's society. *Bodhi Pooja* is performed by Buddhists as a form of pilgrimage. To get rid of disease, to get rid of evil spirits, to pass exams, to get jobs, to get rid of enmity, to overcome life, to develop business, to keep the mind calm, for spiritual healing is a very common Situation.

According to Buddhism, among the three pagodas, the *Bodhi* is a consumer object. Thus, when a Bodhi branch dies, there are rituals to cut it and cremate it. Many traditional rituals are adopted in conducting a *Bodhi Pooja*. During the *Bodhi Pooja*, many chants are recited to offer to the Bodhi¹³. Water is purified as *Pirith* and used in *Bodhi Pooja*. According to Fernand Sergiev, a Russian Scientist who has done water research, the special feature of universal energies is that they work closely with water. Also, water has to absorb the energy rays coming out of our bodies. When testing that water, more hydrogen atoms are removed from it. Recently, Japanese scientists showed that pure holy water has great power to cure diseases. Many scientists think that water has a special feature of absorbing universal energies. Therefore, due to the chants recited during Bodhi Pooja, the devotee is absorbed by the cosmic energy, which thereby benefits the devotee. A case where it is more confirmed is included in *Apadana Pali*. It is said that a monk named *Bodhisinchaka* attained *Rahath* status during the time of *Gautama Buddha* by his penance at Patali Bodhi during the time of *Vipassi Buddha*¹⁴.

Paththini worship in Sri Lanka is a form of worship that has existed since ancient times. If there is a female deity in Sri Lanka, it is the *Pattini* mother worship. The *Pattini* faith came to be believed in this country based on several factors, namely

1. Agricultural fertility
2. *Bosath* is regarded as a goddess
3. Eliminating epidemics¹⁵

The speciality of the *Pattini Deva* faith is that the alms for nursing mothers (*Kiriamma*), which is most popular among the rural people of Sri Lanka, is done in a Buddhist way. The concept of the Hindu god, the concept of the Buddhist gods, the beliefs of the *Vedda* community, and all the faith systems have been organized into the concept of *Kiriamma*. The practical behaviour taught by Lord Buddha is the three (03) disciplines (*Thrivida Shiksha*) those three disciplines are *Sila*, *Samadhi*, and *Prajna* ethical education aimed at the development of personal character, the spiritual development based on it and the real knowledge philosophy that is built from it are taught there as a way to get rid of filth, this is and death, the suffering of the world.¹⁶

Sri Lankan people are part of a religious life that is constantly connected with Buddhism. Because of this, there are many different forms of rituals that

¹³ Ames (1964): 21.

¹⁴ Ven. Soratha (2021): 352.

¹⁵ Herath (2021): 390 – 91.

¹⁶ Ven. Dhammarama (2021): 436.

Buddhists use for mental healing. Thus, many new trends can be identified in Sri Lankan Buddhist practices. Sri Lankan people are seen adopting meditation practices very fast nowadays. Even in countries that use Western medicine, *Anapanasathi* meditation is successfully used as a treatment for diseases, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, stress, etc. Today, even many Western countries have accepted the rebirth. Nowadays, many people think that the pursuit of worldly pleasures does not bring comfort and, therefore it is better to enter into a path of comfort found in Buddhism.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was carried out as a qualitative study of new trends in Buddhist practices for mental healing. Gampaha District, which represents the largest population apart from Colombo city in Sri Lanka, was selected as the sample of this research. In the Gampaha District, there are generally Buddhist, Catholic, and Islamic communities living in this area. Apart from the Muslim population, Catholics and Buddhists in both communities seem to have turned to Buddhist practices. Among these, there is an increase in the female population who are devoted to Buddhist practices. Against such a background, Gampaha District was selected for this research.

Population of Gampaha District by religion

Divisional secretariat division and sex	All religions		Religion			
	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Roman Catholic	Other Christian	Other
Gampaha District						
Total		52,973				869
	2,304,833	1,642,767		112,746	449,398	46,080
Male		27,536				416
	1,116,893	802,048		55,326	210,348	21,219
Female		25,437				453
Negombo	1,187,940	840,719		57,420	239,050	24,861
Total		8,317				130
	142,136	15,732		20,374	92,828	4,755
Male		4,202				61
	68,600	8,479		10,100	43,555	2,203

Female			4,115				69
Katana	73,536	7,253		10,274	49,273	2,552	
Total			3,923				155
	235,291	141,353		4,799	75,385	9,676	
Male			1,887				72
	112,803	68,590		2,371	35,444	4,439	
Female			2,036				83
Divula-	122,488	72,763		2,428	39,941	5,237	
pitiya							
Total			616				22
	144,506	122,905		151	19,395	1,417	
Male			384				13
	70,089	59,657		84	9,298	653	
Female			232				9
Miri-	74,417	63,248		67	10,097	764	
gama							
Total			651				20
	164,580	153,905		7,676	1,794	534	
Male			357				8
	79,185	74,315		3,402	859	244	
Female			294				12
Minu-	85,395	79,590		4,274	935	290	
wango-							
da							
Total			662				19
	178,331	157,739		6,315	11,512	2,084	
Male			382				11
	85,959	76,189		3,055	5,351	971	
Female			280				8
Wattala	92,372	81,550		3,260	6,161	1,113	
Total			22,782				144
	175,525	52,405		11,407	79,334	9,453	
Male			11,550				71
	84,426	25,879		5,617	36,875	4,434	
Female			11,232				73
	91,099	26,526		5,790	42,459	5,019	

Divisional secretariat division and sex	All reli- gions	Religion					
		Bud- dhist	Hindu	Islam	Roman Catholic	Other Chris- tian	Oth- er
Gampaha District							
Ja-Ela			4,235			7,746	
Total	201,521	87,772		2,115	99,515		138
Male			2,523				
	97,574	44,134		1,016	46,310	3,525	66
Female			1,712				
	103,947	43,638		1,099	53,205	4,221	72
Gampaha Total			855			2,137	
	197,667	173,095		463	21,085		32
Male			454	237			
	95,570	84,086			9,810	967	16
Female			401	226			
	102,097	89,009			11,275	1,170	16
Attanagalla Total			1,105			677	
	179,565	151,786		22,303	3,685		9
Male			521				
	86,489	72,997		11,030	1,636	300	5
Female			584				
	93,076	78,789		11,273	2,049	377	4
Dompe Total			514			776	
	154,005	145,586		2,419	4,691		19
Male			339				
	75,233	71,034		1,329	2,173	349	9

Female			175				
	78,772	74,552		1,090	2,518	427	10
Mahara							
Total			1,333			2,459	
	207,782	176,491		9,255	18,183		61
Male			753				
	101,389	86,342		4,483	8,658	1,127	26
Female			580				
	106,393	90,149		4,772	9,525	1,332	35
Kelaniya							
Total			6,415			2,331	
	137,339	102,634		12,439	13,458		62
Male			3,336				
	67,461	50,490		6,094	6,433	1,080	28
Female			3,079				
	69,878	52,144		6,345	7,025	1,251	34
Biyagama							
Total			1,565			2,035	
	186,585	161,364		13,030	8,533		58
Male			848				
	92,115	79,856		6,508	3,946	927	30
Female			717				
	94,470	81,508		6,522	4,587	1,108	28

Source: Census of population and housing: 2012

Among the Buddhists and Catholics living in the Gampaha District, the most common Buddhist practice is to perform *Bodhi Pooja*. It is special that they have mostly chosen Saturdays for *Bodhi Pooja*. Performing *Bodhi Pooja* is something that is implemented for various purposes. That is, curing the diseases of children and adults, passing exams, and factors such as getting jobs, getting foreign scholarships and foreign education, as well as business development and getting mandates for studying abroad are more common. The content of *Bodhi Pooja* performed by one person identified through the

sample is as follows. She performed this *Bodhi Pooja* for her daughter. For this Pooja, there are twenty-five lamps according to the age of her daughter, nine lamps for *Navagrahas*, and three lamps for *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Sanga*. Another lamp for god *Ganesha*, *Bodhi*, and external gods. Fifteen betel leaves are washed with turmeric water and decorated with blue flowers for offering sacrifices. Put water in three clay pots with sandalwood powder and white flowers, and that water they ride around the *Bodhi* and finally pour into the *Bodhi*. Her mother said that at the end of this Pooja, which was held for seven consecutive Saturdays, she was able to obtain the mandate. Because of this, not only the Buddhist people of the Gampaha district but also the Catholics have to firmly accept that there is an immense benefit in the *Bodhi Pooja*.

In the Gampaha district, the practices used to delay marriages could be recognized in a Buddhist way. As a remedy, they strongly believe that reciting the three *Sutta*, the *Dasha Disa Piritha* and the *Jaya Piritha*, for seven consecutive days will bring results. Four women who underwent this type of treatment could be identified from the sample. Gampaha District was able to identify many behaviors performed for the safety of houses and performed during the construction of a new house. The ritual performed for this purpose is known as *Bahirawa Pooja*. Even outwardly in a *Bahirawa Pooja* worshipping the trinity of *Buddha*, *Dhamma* and *Sanga* is seen first. It is seen here that the hierarchy found in popular Buddhism has been properly replaced.

Protection from legal problems, protection of vehicles, and solving problems in the workplace, the *Feng shui* ritual method is commonly used by people today. *Feng Shui* has changed the behaviour of Sri Lanka. It has been able to change from Indian and Buddhist rituals to Chinese practices. The use of *Tao Dharma* and the use of ancient Chinese architecture have contributed to the change of the subject. *Feng shui* programs are often held in conference halls with urban facilities. In the past, Buddhist practices were often performed on threshing floors or similar public places. But these kinds of rituals used in urban society also charge money. The speciality of *Feng shui* is that instead of demons, the gods enter a spiritual power into it and it gives them the ability to heal humans.

The ancient people believed that the able black prince (*Kalu Kumaraya*) would gaze upon the young women at the bath. Because of this, it is said in history that when young women are bathing in the evening in the rivers and streams, the black prince will come inside her body. It is mentioned that women face various crises when they fall under the gaze of the black prince. Several characteristics can be seen in young women who have been subjected to this type of crisis. Women in this kind of crisis are sometimes tempted to laugh alone. Some women started crying very loudly. Another bad thing here is that women lose all opportunities to get married. Married women who fall in the eyes of the black prince also face various crises. It can be mentioned that such women cause delayed childbearing and miscarriages in those who are about to have children. Several such women could be found in the Gampaha District. It can also be seen very clearly now that Buddhism took necessary

actions in such a crisis. For women like this, wearing auspicious rings and after continuous *Bodhi Pooja*, these women are handed over to Mother *Paththini*. Regardless of the results of these, it is clear that women gain some good by developing their spiritual healing.

Even Catholics who don't want to follow astrology and rituals are now able to heal those afflicted with the black prince problem. It can be seen that even Catholics are following the practices of seeking religious help for women affected by the black prince problem with the Buddhist aspect. It is clear from this that after the arrival of *Arahath Mahinda*, a new meaning was added to the religious belief in this country. At present, Catholics follow various methods of dealing with various problems that they cannot solve. Nowadays, the majority of women are considered to suffer from the black prince problem when they are mentally weak. In order to avoid this problem affecting women, it is very common for Buddhists and Catholics to recite *Pirith* in a Buddhist guise. In the past, Sri Lankans had to spend a lot of money to solve such problems. Because there live in the past many people known as *Kattadiya* who were dedicated to solving such problems. The villagers think that they did not get what they expected from such actions after spending a lot of money. But they think that spiritual healing was obtained from things like *Pirith*, which were practiced in a Buddhist way.

God *Ganesha Pooja* is another popular ritual used by Sri Lankans. God *Ganesha Pooja* can be called a behavior method that is widely used to make educational activities successful. Here are some things that Buddhists use for God *Ganesha Pooja*: seven types of red flowers, a few betel leaves, Mangoes, oranges, Bee honey, Bananas, Milk, and Rice things like are used for that. First, flowers are offered to Lord Buddha, and second, a garland of fragrant flowers is worn to the god *Ganesha*. Villagers consider this a special offering for the children who are going to the five-year scholarship examination. The Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations will bring better conditions to the children. God *Ganesha* is considered the God of Wisdom. In the past, God *Ganesha Pooja* was rarely offered sacrifices. But nowadays, it seems that God *Ganesha Pooja* is being made daily. Also, it is a common feature today to make offerings in groups during exams, etc. Further traditional offering was made in the Hindu temple in the past. But nowadays, it is a special feature to conduct these sacrifices in a Buddhist way. It can be seen that the hierarchy of Sinhala Buddhism is working from these kinds of offerings made for god.

Another form of behavior that is popular among Sri Lankans is the use of *Valampuri*. They believed that placing a *Valampuri*, the place where the Lord Buddha resides in the house, brings prosperity to the house. The bad situation here is that traders are tempted to sell at very high prices. The person who owns the *Valampuri* worships it in the house itself. They believe that the praise of the Lord Buddha is here, and it brings mental healing. Born out of Hindu rituals, such practices are carried out by wealthy businessmen. Buddhist monks preach that nothing will happen with the actions performed by *Valampuri*. A competition to sell *Valampuri* has arisen in society nowadays, this competition has also created opposition in *Valampuri*.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Some conclusions that can be reached in this research are on how Buddhist practices and rituals can be used for mental healing. Buddhist rituals and practices that reduce stress and achieve mental relief are common. Among them, making *Bodhi Pooja* in everyday life is a ritual that is constantly performed by the Buddhist people. When someone is sick, *Bodhi Pooja* is performed for that patient. Also, students perform *Bodhi Pooja* for seven days to successfully overcome the exams in their lives. This will reduce the stress that they have to face in difficult situations in life. Therefore, it can be recognized in Sri Lankan society that they regularly perform *Bodhi Pooja* to fulfil their needs and reduce mental stress in every situation they face. Buddhist people have accepted that *Piritha* is extremely important in every situation of life. By tying a *Pirith* string on the right hand of a patient, the patient is provided with extra courage to successfully pass the difficult time. When facing an exam, students will be able to reduce mental stress by tying a thread like this. A lot of Buddhist rituals are practiced in the Sinhala society, which are shaped for the spiritual healing of man. These ritual units and related behaviors can be divided into three parts. Physical behavior, verbal behavior, and sacrifices. After that, the rituals can be divided into two parts, *Chakra Avarthi* and *Chakra Punar Varthi*. This categorization suggests that Sinhala rituals can have either negative or positive effects. Negative influences included practices such as blaming others and chanting curses at them. There are two parts of Sinhala poetry rituals, *Seth Kavi* and *Vas Kavi*. In general, *Seth Kavi* (Seth Poetry) helps to move the human mind to a spiritual state. But *Vas Kavi* is used for the evil of others. Apart from that, performing *Valampuri* and other rituals at very high prices is another negative in Sinhala rituals.

But all kinds of *Bodhi Pooja* meditation methods used in Buddhist practices and all other things done to seek peace have led the spiritual conditions of man to a more developed status. The division of Sinhala traditions into Buddhist and non – Buddhist is not taken into account in the practice of the people. Even *Yak Tovil*, which is recognized as non-Buddhist, contains Buddhist inspiration. In the hierarchy of Sinhala Buddhism, Lord Buddha holds the highest position. No one can live up to the next things without permission from the Lord Buddha. In this way, many concepts of God and mixed Buddhist practices could be recognized in the Sinhala society. Centuries ago, a Sinhalese person was called a Buddhist. But now the situation has changed. Nowadays, it can be seen that many people who are considered non-Buddhist have turned to Buddhist practices. A religion exists among the people, along with ritual practices. When the practices were lost, the religion was alienated from the common people. Sinhala Buddhism was never alienated from the people. The reason for that is the freedom given to the common people to create customs to suit their needs. It is more evident that Sri Lankans today strive to live as moral citizens based on Sinhala Buddhist practices.

Nowadays, Sri Lankan people can be seen getting more and more involved in rituals. Many Sri Lankans nowadays are tempted to think that spiritual

healing is more important than pursuing material comforts. The special feature here is that on Saturdays and Poya days, the temples are filled with a population that is devoted to the rituals. Meditation methods have taken precedence over all the current behavioural methods. In the past, people turned to all Buddhist practices and meditation methods only after they reached the age of fifty. But the current specialty of Sri Lankan society is that young people have turned to meditation practices and other Buddhist rituals in large numbers. Among them, a large number of young people who are addicted to drugs and involved in various crimes can be seen. Many special institutions dedicated to them have been established in Sri Lankan society at present. The particular direction of these institutions is that the young men and women involved in these crimes are making great efforts to redeem themselves through meditation and other Buddhist practices.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE PATHWAY FOR EMOTIONAL HEALING THERAPY REFLECTED IN BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

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Abstract:

“A Pathway to Emotional Healing Therapy Reflected in Buddhist Teachings” explores the integration of Buddhist principles into emotional healing therapy to address psychological well-being in contemporary society. The research investigates how Buddhist teachings, such as meditation as a Healing Tools Such as mindfulness (*sati*) and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness), and Meditation techniques of the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, overcoming Emotional Challenges *Parittas* (Protective Chants), and compassion (*karuṇā*), Ethical Conduct and Emotional Stability, and Understanding the Nature of Emotions through the Four Noble Truths and Eight Fold Path, can provide therapeutic pathways for emotional healing. This Research Question The research question is: *How can Buddhist teachings be systematically applied to promote emotional healing and mental well-being?* Research Methods: This research is a qualitative approach utilizing textual analysis of primary Buddhist scriptures, including the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, *Sabbāsava Sutta*, and *Kassapaṭṭhera bojjhaṅgā* (even Factors of Awakening), complemented by secondary sources. As well as practicing mindfulness-based therapy compassion-focused interventions are also analysed to draw insights into practical applications. The findings reveal that Buddhist teachings provide profound insights into managing emotions, reducing suffering, and fostering resilience. Mindfulness practices enhance self-awareness and emotional regulation, while compassion-focused exercises reduce feelings of isolation and foster interpersonal connections. The integration of these practices into therapeutic contexts significantly improves emotional stability and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression. The study concludes that Buddhist teachings offer a transformative framework for emotional healing, emphasizing self-awareness, compassion, and equanimity. Incorporating these principles

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into modern therapeutic practices holds potential for creating holistic healing pathways that address both the root causes and manifestations of emotional distress. Further interdisciplinary research is recommended to bridge Buddhist psychology and contemporary therapeutic models.

Keywords: *Emotional healing therapy, mindfulness, self-awareness, Buddhist teachings.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Definition of emotional healing therapy

Emotional healing therapy refers to the process of addressing, managing, and resolving emotional pain, distress, and trauma to achieve psychological well-being and balance. It involves various practices aimed at understanding and transforming negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and guilt into positive states like peace, resilience, and happiness. Emotional healing is often a gradual journey that integrates self-awareness, acceptance, and inner growth.

In modern mental health, emotional healing therapy is recognized as a crucial component of holistic well-being. This study highlights its importance in reducing the long-term impacts of unresolved emotions, which are linked to anxiety, depression, and physical health issues (Greenberg, 2002). Emotional healing not only helps individuals cope with life's challenges but also fosters personal growth and improved relationships, contributing to a more fulfilling life.

Emotions are an integral part of the human experience, shaping thoughts, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships. They serve as both adaptive and maladaptive responses to environmental stimuli, influencing decision-making, social interactions, and overall well-being. Defined broadly as complex psychological states involving subjective experience, physiological responses, and behavioral expressions, emotions are deeply rooted in human cognition and play a crucial role in survival and self-regulation.

The study of emotions spans various disciplines, including psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy. Evolutionary perspectives, such as those proposed by Darwin (1872), emphasize the biological basis of emotions, arguing that they have evolved to facilitate adaptive responses to challenges and opportunities in the environment. Contemporary research, however, has expanded to explore the cognitive, cultural, and social dimensions of emotions, underscoring their contextual and subjective nature.

From a psychological perspective, emotions are often classified into basic emotions (e.g., joy, anger, fear, sadness) and complex emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, pride), with each category serving distinct psychological and social functions. Furthermore, emotional regulation – the process of managing and modifying emotional states – is recognized as a critical determinant of mental health and well-being.

In addition to their psychological implications, emotions are a significant

focus in philosophical and spiritual traditions. For instance, Buddhist teachings highlight the trans-formative potential of emotions, emphasizing practices such as mindfulness and loving-kindness to cultivate positive states and transcend negative emotional patterns. This multidimensional understanding of emotions underscores their complexity and importance in human life.

Emotional healing has become an essential area of focus in contemporary mental health and well-being, as individuals face increasing of psychological challenges such as stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional distress etc... Despite the advancements in modern psychotherapy, there is a growing recognition of the value of integrating ancient wisdom traditions into therapeutic practices to foster holistic healing. Buddhism, with its profound teachings on the mind, emotions, and liberation, offers a unique perspective on addressing emotional suffering through transformative pathways.

This research explores the pathway for emotional healing therapy as reflected in Buddhist teachings, focusing on how these teachings provide a systematic framework for understanding and overcoming emotional afflictions. The central problem addressed in this study is the lack of a comprehensive integration of Buddhist insights into therapeutic practices despite their proven potential to enhance emotional resilience and well-being.

The significance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, bridging Buddhist psychology and modern emotional healing practices. By analysing core Buddhist doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths (*catu ariyasacca*), mindfulness (*sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), this study seeks to demonstrate how these teachings offer practical methods for emotional transformation. Furthermore, it underscores the relevance of ancient Buddhist principles in addressing contemporary mental health challenges, paving the way for a sustainable and culturally inclusive approach to emotional therapy. This study aims to contribute to the field of mental health by offering an in-depth understanding of the Buddhist approach to emotional healing, thereby inspiring further exploration and application in therapeutic settings worldwide.

II. DISCUSSION

2.1. Insights from Buddhist teachings on emotional regulation, transformation, and healing

Buddhist teachings provide a profound framework for understanding and addressing emotional challenges, offering transformative pathways for emotional regulation and healing. These teachings emphasize awareness, ethical conduct, and mental cultivation to achieve emotional balance and resilience.

(i) Emotional regulation through mindfulness (*Sati*)
Mindfulness, a cornerstone of Buddhist practice, involves non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. This practice allows individuals to observe their emotions without reacting impulsively, fostering emotional stability. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (The Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness)

highlights how mindfulness helps identify and manage emotions, reducing their intensity and promoting clarity of mind.

(ii) **Transformation through insight (*Vipassanā*)**
Insight meditation (*vipassanā*) facilitates a deep understanding of the impermanent and interdependent nature of emotions. By recognizing that emotions arise and pass away, individuals can detach from unwholesome emotional patterns, transforming suffering into equanimity and peace.

(iii) **Healing through loving-kindness (*Mettā*)**

The practice of loving-kindness (*mettā bhāvanā*) nurtures compassion toward oneself and others. This practice is particularly effective in healing emotions such as anger, resentment, and fear by fostering positive feelings of goodwill and connection. The *Karaṇīyametta Sutta* (The Discourse on Loving-Kindness) extols the trans-formative power of *mettā* to alleviate emotional distress.

(iv) **Equanimity (*Upekkhā*) for emotional balance**
Buddhist teachings encourage the cultivation of equanimity, a state of mental calmness and impartiality. Equanimity enables individuals to respond to emotional upheavals with steadiness and acceptance, promoting long-term emotional resilience.

(v) **Understanding and letting go of craving (*Tanhā*)**
The Second Noble Truth identifies craving (*tanhā*) as the root of emotional suffering. By practicing non-attachment and cultivating contentment, individuals can release emotional burdens and achieve healing. The *Dhammapada* advises letting go of attachments as a pathway to inner peace.

(vi) **Ethical conduct (*sīla*) as a foundation for emotional well-being**
The ethical principles in the Noble Eightfold Path, such as Right Speech and Right Action, contribute to emotional healing by fostering harmonious relationships and reducing guilt, anger, and remorse.

By integrating these principles, Buddhist teachings provide a holistic approach to emotional regulation and healing, addressing the root causes of emotional suffering while promoting profound inner transformation. These insights remain deeply relevant for contemporary mental health challenges, offering practical methods for achieving emotional well-being.

In an era where emotional challenges such as anxiety, depression, and stress have reached unprecedented levels, there is a growing recognition of ancient wisdom traditions as valuable resources for addressing these issues. Buddhist teachings, with their deep insights into the nature of the mind and emotions, offer a timeless framework for understanding and healing emotional suffering.

Buddhist principles such as mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and non-attachment (*anatta*) have gained widespread acceptance in contemporary therapeutic practices. Research demonstrates that mindfulness-based interventions, rooted in Buddhist meditation, effectively reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Similarly, practices like loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) are shown to enhance emotional well-being and foster positive social connections.

This study is significant because it:

- **Bridges ancient and Modern Approaches:** Buddhist teachings address the root causes of emotional suffering, such as craving and aversion, offering insights that complement modern therapeutic frameworks.
- **Promotes Holistic Healing:** Buddhist pathways integrate ethical conduct, mental training, and wisdom, providing a comprehensive approach to emotional well-being (Nyanaponika Thera, 1998).
- **Supports Culturally Diverse Solutions:** The universality of Buddhist practices makes them accessible and effective across diverse cultural and therapeutic settings.

By emphasizing the relevance of ancient Buddhist wisdom, this study highlights its potential to address contemporary emotional challenges, contributing to the development of integrative and sustainable emotional healing practices.

2.2. Core concepts of Buddhist teachings on emotions

Buddhist teachings provide a profound and systematic approach to understanding, regulating, and transforming emotions. Unlike modern psychological perspectives, which often focus on managing emotions, Buddhism delves into the root causes of emotional suffering and offers pathways for liberation. Several core concepts from Buddhist philosophy and practice illuminate the nature of emotions and their role in the human experience.

2.2.1. Four noble truths and emotions

The Four Noble Truths form the foundation of Buddhist teachings and offer a framework for understanding emotional suffering:

- **First Noble Truth (*Dukkha*):** Emotional suffering is an inherent part of existence, arising from dissatisfaction, grief, and unfulfilled desires (*Samyutta Nikaya* 56.11).
- **Second Noble Truth (*Samudaya*):** Craving (*tanhā*) and attachment to pleasant emotions or aversion to unpleasant ones are identified as the primary causes of emotional turmoil.
- **Third Noble Truth (*Nirodha*):** Liberation from emotional suffering is possible by relinquishing craving and achieving detachment.
- **Fourth Noble Truth (*Magga*):** The Noble Eightfold Path provides a structured approach to understanding and regulating emotions, leading to emotional resilience and peace.

2.2.2. Mindfulness (*Sati*) and emotional awareness

Mindfulness is a central practice in Buddhism for cultivating awareness of thoughts and emotions without judgment. It helps individuals observe emotional states objectively, reducing reactivity and impulsivity (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10). Modern research has validated mindfulness-based practices for enhancing emotional regulation and mental health (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

2.2.3. The doctrine of impermanence (*Anicca*)

Buddhism emphasizes the transient nature of emotions, asserting that all emotional states – whether joy or sorrow – arise and pass away. Recognizing impermanence reduces emotional attachment and fosters equanimity. This concept encourages individuals to experience emotions fully without clinging to them or fearing their cessation (*Dhammapada*, Verse 277).

2.2.4. Equanimity (*Upekkhā*) and emotional balance

Equanimity is one of the Four Sublime States (*Brahmavihāras*), teaching individuals to maintain a balanced mind amidst life's highs and lows. It supports emotional resilience by cultivating impartiality toward both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, reducing emotional volatility.

2.2.5. Compassion (*Karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*Mettā*)

The cultivation of compassion and loving-kindness transforms negative emotions into positive states. Loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) is particularly effective in alleviating anger, hatred, and fear, fostering emotional healing and interpersonal harmony (*Karaṇīyametta Sutta*).

2.2.6. Dependent origination (*Paṭicca Samuppāda*) and emotions

The doctrine of dependent origination explains how emotions arise through interconnected causes and conditions. Understanding this interconnectedness allows individuals to break the cycle of emotional reactivity and cultivate emotional freedom (*Majjhima Nikāya* 38).

2.2.7. Non-self (*Anatta*) and emotional liberation

The concept of non-self challenges the belief that emotions are an intrinsic part of the self. By realizing the non-self-nature of emotions, individuals can detach from emotional identification, reducing the intensity of emotional suffering.

- Meditation as a Healing Tool, Such as mindfulness (*sati*) and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness)
- Meditation Tequilas of the *Sabbāsava Sutta*
- Overcoming Emotional Challenges *Parittās* (Protective Chants)
- Compassion (*karuṇā*), Ethical Conduct, and Emotional Stability,

Understanding the Nature of Emotions through the Four Noble Truths and Eight-Fold Path Therapeutic pathways for emotional healing.

2.3. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs)

Programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) are inspired by Buddhist principles.

- *Example:* Incorporate these evidence-based practices into sessions.

Behavioural practices from Buddhism

- Encourage altruistic acts (*dāna*) or community engagement to reduce self-centered emotional struggles.

Therapeutic techniques inspired by Buddhist psychology

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can align with Buddhist insights by focusing on identifying and transforming negative thought patterns.

2.4. Training for therapists

- Familiarity with Buddhist Psychology: Therapists need foundational knowledge of Buddhist concepts like the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and Satipaṭṭhāna.
- Personal Practice: Regular mindfulness and meditation practice help therapists embody the principles they teach.

Sabbāsava Sutta (MN 2, *Majjhima Nikāya*) outlines meditation techniques and strategies to overcome the āsavas (mental defilements or intoxicants). Below are the primary meditation and contemplative techniques highlighted

2.4.1. Seeing (*Dassanā*)

Contemplative insight is developed by seeing things as they truly are, particularly the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self-nature of phenomena. *Vipassanā* (insight meditation) is encouraged to overcome delusion and ignorance.

2.4.2. Restraint (*Samvarā*)

Mindfulness is cultivated to restrain the sense faculties (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). Practicing mindfulness (*sati*) when encountering sensory objects helps prevent the arising of defilements.

2.4.3. Wise use (*Paccayā-parisevanā*)

Meditation involves the proper contemplation of the requisites of life (food, clothing, shelter, and medicine). By using these necessities mindfully and purposefully, craving and clinging are reduced.

2.4.4. Endurance (*Adhivāsanā*)

Practicing meditation that develops equanimity (*upekkhā*) allows the meditator to endure physical and mental discomfort without developing aversion.

2.4.5. Avoidance (*Parivajjanā*)

Meditators are encouraged to avoid situations, people, or environments that trigger defilements. A mindful retreat from harmful situations supports mental clarity.

2.4.6. Removal (*Vinodanā*)

Defilements that have already arisen are dispelled through meditative techniques such as thought replacement and body contemplation. Focusing on positive objects of meditation removes negative thoughts.

2.4.7. Development (*Bhāvanā*)

Developing wholesome qualities such as loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and the factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*). Concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) are cultivated through formal meditation practices. These techniques collectively form a comprehensive

approach to mental purification, guiding the practitioner toward liberation from the intoxicants (*āsavās*).

III. CONCLUSION

Buddhist teachings offer a profound and holistic pathway for emotional healing by addressing the root causes of emotional suffering and providing transformative methods for achieving inner peace. Through core principles such as mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuṇā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), and the recognition of impermanence (*anicca*), Buddhism provides timeless insights into emotional regulation, transformation, and liberation.

This analysis highlights the relevance of ancient Buddhist wisdom in addressing contemporary emotional challenges, emphasizing that emotional healing is not merely about symptom management but also about cultivating a deeper understanding of the mind and emotions. By following the framework of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, individuals can transcend craving, aversion, and attachment, ultimately attaining emotional balance and resilience.

Furthermore, the integration of Buddhist practices such as loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā*) into modern therapeutic approaches demonstrates the adaptability and universality of these teachings. This underscores the growing recognition of ancient wisdom in promoting psychological well-being in diverse cultural and therapeutic contexts.

In conclusion, the Buddhist pathway for emotional healing is not only transformative on an individual level but also contributes to a more compassionate and harmonious society. Future research and practice can further explore the potential of integrating these teachings into contemporary mental health frameworks, enriching both traditional and modern approaches to emotional healing.

Buddhist teachings offer timeless insights into the nature of emotions, emphasizing awareness, detachment, and transformation. These principles not only help in regulating emotions but also provide a pathway for lasting emotional liberation. By integrating these teachings into contemporary therapeutic practices, a holistic approach to emotional well-being can be achieved.

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FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING IN ANCIENT AND MODERN CONTEXTS AS PATHWAYS TO RECONCILIATION

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Abstract:

Today, the world witnesses increasing conflicts and disputes in every aspect of life - at personal, family, communal, and global levels. All walks of life desire happiness or at least a conflict-free living environment. Forgiveness has often been assumed to be the domain of religion. However, philosophers, scientists, psychotherapists, and psychologists increasingly consider forgiveness as both an art and a science. Forgiveness began to capture scientists' attention in the mid-1980s and then gained momentum in both individual counseling and group therapy. Forgiveness and mindful healing are deeply interconnected. Only mindful healing can genuinely heal the physical or mental wounds incurred. A mindful forgiver learns to accept the wounds and genuinely understands that there is a distinction between the wrongful acts and those who committed them. The wrongdoer's nature is inherently good, but they inflicted harm on others out of ignorance. Integrating Buddhist teachings and the science of forgiveness can foster personal reconciliation and contribute to global harmony.

Keywords: *forgiveness, mindful healing, Buddhist teachings, reconciliation, science.*

I. INTRODUCTION

With their transformative power, the science of forgiveness and mindful healing have long been recognized as powerful tools for transforming individual suffering, resolving global conflicts, and achieving societal reconciliation. Forgiveness, a key to releasing emotional disturbances and attaining inner peace, and mindfulness, a pathway to emotional healing and reconciliation, offer hope and inspiration. Findings in psychology and neuroscience have

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underscored the significance of these practices for individual well-being and global harmony. This study examines the intricate interrelationship between forgiveness and mindful healing, offering a hopeful path to reconciliation through the lens of Buddhist teachings and scientific perspectives. From the outset, the cultivation of the four divine abidings (*brahmavihārā*), especially compassion, as well as non-attachment, clarity, and insight, is highlighted as a means to transform unwholesome states of mind - such as resentment, hostility, grief, and agony - into wholesome expressions of body, speech, and thought. In the same vein, scientific research has demonstrated that forgiveness and mindfulness play a crucial role in healing the mind and body. The profundity of the Buddhist approach and the mindfulness-based science of forgiveness offer lasting inner and outer healing. This paper aims to provide a holistic analysis of the Buddhist perspective on forgiveness and mindfulness, particularly its connection to emotional healing and reconciliation. Furthermore, it seeks to integrate scientific research on forgiveness and mindfulness, incorporating selected case vignettes to illustrate how reconciliation unfolds in post-conflict settings. Overall, the profundity of the Buddhist approach and the mindfulness-based science of forgiveness offer enduring inner and outer healing.

II. OVERVIEW OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness has been investigated as an interdisciplinary subject. Worthington defines forgiveness as follows: "Forgiveness is typically recognized as distinct from pardoning, overlooking, absolving, rationalizing, ignoring, and (in many instances) mending. Additionally, most scholars characterize forgiveness as a constructive change in one's thoughts, feelings, motivations, or actions."¹ In the book *Ethics of Forgiveness*, L. Toussaint et al. state, "Researchers largely concur that forgiveness is an internal experience resulting from various offenses that typically occur in social contexts. Additionally, a consensus exists among them that forgiveness should not be viewed as a justification for ignoring or excusing wrongful actions."² This perspective highlights the dual role of forgiveness in fostering personal tranquility while aligning with broader spiritual values. Psychologically, Joseph Butler (1718 - 1896) defines forgiveness as "the overcoming of resentful emotions that are instinctively triggered when we are harmed by others and that give rise to resentment." Later, Lewis Smedes (1984) describes forgiveness as beneficial to personal health and well-being both therapeutically and scientifically.³ This description demonstrates how forgiveness serves as a therapeutic tool employed by psychologists, counselors, and similar professionals to aid in the healing of

¹ Worthington, E. L. Jr. (2020) "Forgiveness and reconciliation: Theory and application", in Worthington, E. L. Jr. and Wade, N. G. (eds.) *Handbook of Forgiveness*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 423 - 436.

² Fricke, C. (ed.) (2011). *The Ethics of Forgiveness: A collection of essays*. Routledge, p. 119 - 120.

³ Singh, A., Tiwari, G. & Deurkar, P. (2023) "Why People Do Not Forgive? An Exploratory Study of Unforgiveness among Indian Adolescents", *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(2), p. 72 - 75.

victims. Additionally, Fricke (2011) illustrates this by referencing the case of the apartheid regime in Rwanda, a period of intense conflict and human rights abuses, and the subsequent process of forgiveness and reconciliation that the country underwent. This case garnered broad attention in discussions on the phenomenon of forgiveness.⁴ This viewpoint underscores the profound ethical implications involved in the act of forgiveness and suggests that it serves as a highly effective instrument for restoring both individual and societal dignity. From another perspective, Worthington (2020) argues that “as an art, forgiveness handles the basic inquiries of our age. It narrates how we manage wrongdoings related to individuals and society. In this way, our mental health and welfare are involved. Also, forgiveness makes transactions in society vivid. It’s art lies in individual experience.”⁵ Fricke contends that it is no surprise that people find forgiveness an appealing practice and that a forgiver is likely to gain merit through the act of forgiving. Furthermore, he states that “the practice of forgiving has been an object of interest for theologians.”⁶ Worthington (2020) concluded that numerous definitions of forgiveness exhibit considerable similarities. The majority emphasize the personal dimension of forgiveness, whether that involves making a choice, feeling a pull toward the offender, or managing one’s emotions. Although each definition acknowledges the relational context in which these experiences occur, they incorporate contextual factors differently: as a broader setting, part of the reconciliation process, or as fundamentally intertwined with individual experience.⁷

2.1. Forgiveness in religious contexts

Forgiveness is considered a virtuous practice that fosters personal growth and communal harmony. Firstly, according to Jewish tradition, in *Parshat Tanna De-Vei Eliyahu*, the Jewish people were commanded to walk in the way of God, who was prepared to have compassion on the wicked, was willing to accept them if they repented, and therefore, they were to have compassion on one another. Just as God accepted all who came seeking repentance, people are to be good and to live their lives with compassion, loving-kindness, and acceptance of those who seek forgiveness.⁸ Cardinal Luis Antonio Gokim Tagle cited that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI highlighted the importance of forgiveness in Christianity in his Sunday speech in 2005:

The only thing that can defeat evil is forgiveness. It must be an effective forgiveness, but only the Lord can grant us this forgiveness - one that not

⁴ Fricke, C. (2011), p. 2.

⁵ Worthington, E. L. Jr. and Wade, N. G. (eds.) *Handbook of Forgiveness*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 34.

⁶ Worthington, E. L. Jr. and Wade, N. G. (eds.) *Handbook of Forgiveness*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 1 - 2.

⁷ Worthington, E. L. Jr. and Wade, N. G. (eds.) *Handbook of Forgiveness*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 14.

⁸ Pettigrove, G. & Enright, R. (eds.) (2023) *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy and Psychology of Forgiveness*. London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781003360278-5. p. 39.

only verbally repudiates sin but also actually destroys it. This is only possible because of suffering, and it has happened because of Christ's love, which is where we get our capacity for forgiveness.⁹

From the Hindu perspective, hymns of forgiveness highlight the integral role of forgiveness (*kṣamā*) within the Hindu philosophical framework, particularly as articulated in the well-known *Mahābhārata* prayer of praise for forgiveness:

Dharma, sacrifice, and the Vedas are all examples of forgiveness (*kṣamā*). Anyone who understands forgiveness can handle anything. *Brahman*, the truth, the past, and the future are all aspects of forgiveness. To be forgiven is to be austere, pure, and uphold the world. Beyond the realms of the austere and *Brahman*-wise. Beyond the rite-knowers, some are forgiving. The strong's strength is forgiveness; the brahman of ascetics is forgiveness.¹⁰

The passage reflects a profound understanding of forgiveness as a holistic principle rooted in Hinduism's ethical, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions. It invites reflection on forgiveness as a strength and a pathway to moral purity and existential clarity. This perspective can guide individuals seeking personal growth and conflict resolution, highlighting that embracing forgiveness fundamentally enriches individual and communal life. By recognizing forgiveness as a strength rather than a weakness, practitioners can cultivate a more compassionate and harmonious existence.

2.2. Manifestation of forgiveness through forbearance and patience, compassion and loving-kindness

Concerning Buddhist scriptures, forgiveness is depicted in the three baskets of *Buddhasāsana*. It is viewed as a practical strategy for addressing the mental states that lead to suffering rather than simply a moral duty. The *Pāli Canon* highlights the need to let go of grudges, control anger, and develop compassion (*mettā*) towards those who have caused harm. In the often-quoted verses of the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha emphasized that only compassion can truly overcome hatred, underscoring a fundamental truth. The Blessed One exemplified the conquest of hatred through loving-kindness in the Story of *Kāḷayakkhīnī* (*Kāḷayakkhīnī Vatthu*), which conveys a powerful lesson on hatred and reconciliation. In *Sāvatti*, the Buddha shared this story at *Jetavana* monastery, recalling the feud between a barren wife and her rival after the husband took a second wife. This rivalry led to tragic outcomes, including the death of the rival during childbirth. In subsequent lives, they were reborn as a hen and a cat, then as a doe and a leopardess, before becoming a nobleman's

⁹ Newberg, A., et al. (2001) "The measurement of regional cerebral blood flow during the complex cognitive task of meditation: A preliminary SPECT study", *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, 106, pp. 113–122. doi:10.1016/S0925-4927(01)00074-9, p. 45.

¹⁰ Newberg, A., et al. (2001) "The measurement of regional cerebral blood flow during the complex cognitive task of meditation: A preliminary SPECT study", *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, 106, pp. 113–122. doi:10.1016/S0925-4927(01)00074-9, p. 87.

daughter and an ogress named Kālī. When Kālī pursued the mother and her baby, the woman sought refuge with the Buddha. Although the ogre was initially denied entry, both were eventually reprimanded by the Buddha. Next, He revealed their shared history and emphasized that their hatred only led to more suffering. The Buddha taught them that true peace comes through friendship, understanding, and goodwill. By the conclusion of the discourse, the ogre attained *Sotapatti* Fruition, and the long-standing conflict was finally resolved.¹¹

The uniqueness of the forgiving spirit in Buddhism lies in patience or forbearance. The Buddha affirms patience/forbearance (*khanti*) as one of the essential qualities cultivated by any Buddhist. Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna texts consider *khanti* (*kṣānti* in Sanskrit) as one of the *pāramī* in the ten *pāramī* of the Theravāda tradition and the sixth perfection in the Mahāyāna tradition, respectively. The Buddha highlights the importance of practicing this virtue in the following verses: “The highest moral virtue is patience and tolerance (*khanti*). *Nibbāna* is the ultimate goal, as proclaimed by the Buddhas. A bhikkhu refrains from causing harm to others. A person who mistreats others cannot be considered a true bhikkhu.”¹²

Due to their importance, these verses should be memorized immediately after going forth for monastics, especially in Mahāyāna monasteries. Buddhist masters interpreted *khanti* as being as vital as the observance of precepts. A person may seem to observe the external precepts, but without *khanti*, he can break all precepts. Without *khanti*, the ultimate goal of a typical Buddhist cannot be fulfilled. Furthermore, without patience and forbearance, people are likely to be aggressive and easily agitated, and they will treat others unjustly. It is commonly said that an angry person will burn a forest of merits. Overall, in both mundane and supreme worlds, people with *khanti* will likely be successful. In another teaching, namely the *Vepacitti Sutta*, the Buddha commended the virtue of patience in the context of the conflicts between gods and *asuras*. The Buddha affirms that the root of not repaying an agitated person leads to victory in hard fighting. He ended the discourse by praising Sakka, king of gods, and advised his disciples, namely mendicants, to cultivate patience and gentleness. “Therefore, mendicants, even Sakka, the lord of the gods - who experiences the results of his good and bad actions while reigning as the sovereign over the thirty-three gods - still speaks highly of patience and kindness. Given that you have embraced such a well-articulated teaching and practice, it would be truly admirable for you to embody patience and gentleness.”¹³ Indeed, the

¹¹ *The Dhammapada: Pāli Text and Translation with Stories in Brief and Notes*. Narada Thera (trans.) (1993) Ebook. The Corporate Body of The Buddha Educational Foundation, p. 8.

¹² *The Dhammapada: Pāli Text and Translation with Stories in Brief and Notes*. Narada Thera (trans.) (1993) Ebook. The Corporate Body of The Buddha Educational Foundation, p. 165.

¹³ *Vepacittisutta in The Saṃyutta Nikāya (SN.56.52)*. Bhikkhu Sujato (trans). PTS (2nd ed.), 1.476 - 1.479. Accessed on [January 5, 2025]. Available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn11.4/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=->

cultivation of sweet or gentle words is highly recommended for Buddhists, especially monastics, as beautiful speech (*priya-vāḍita-saṃgraha*) is one of the four practices in the four means of pacification (*catvāri saṃgraha-vastūni*). In general, beautiful words come from decent minds, and most people feel better if things are handled gently, however harsh the truth may be. It is commonly known that the “selection of words appeases the minds.”

From another angle, in the *Samyukta-āgama sūtra*, Puṇṇa, one of the great disciples of the Buddha, expresses his wish to go to the remote and potentially dangerous region of Sunāparanta to propagate the *Dharma*. The Buddha questions him about how he would respond if people there were to mistreat or even harm him. The account of Elder Puṇṇa showcases the practice of unconditional forgiveness or natural forgiveness through cultivating *khanti/kṣānti*. This story resonates deeply with the beacon of *khanti/kṣānti* practice. The Buddha progressively tests Venerable Puṇṇa’s patience and forbearance, beginning with abuse, insults, and beatings by the wild people of Sunāparanta to even being killed by them. That being the case, Venerable Puṇṇa told the Buddha:

Bhante, if the people of Sunāparanta were to take my life, then I will think to myself: Truly, there have been disciples of the Blessed One who have sought to take their own life by the “blameless use of the knife,” to put an end to being stifled and disgusted with this body and the hampering they feel with life itself. However, here, Blessed Lord, I would be gaining such an end for myself with the knife at the hands of the people of Sunāparanta without having sought or asked for it! “This is what I would do, Blessed Lord. This indeed is what I would think, O Blessed One.”¹⁴

Then, the Buddha commended Venerable Puṇṇa for cultivating great self-control and mental composure. Therefore, the Buddha felt confident that Venerable Puṇṇa could go and propagate the *Buddhasāsana* to the people of Sunāparanta: “Very good! Very good, Puṇṇa! By possessing such self-restraint while being supported by the quiet contentment of the heart, you can now go to Sunāparanta. Now, Puṇṇa, you may do what you think is appropriate.”¹⁵ As such, five hundred laymen and five hundred laywomen were showered with *Dharma* teachings from Elder Puṇṇa. Moreover, the Blessed One confirmed that Venerable Puṇṇa attained final *nibbāna*.

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¹⁴ *Majjhima-Nikāya* 145. *Puṇṇovāda Sutta*. “Advice to Puṇṇa”, Candana Bhikkhu (trans.). Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/578af02af5e231074e974635/t/620b4f3e8ce4f04c3301243e/16449083>

¹⁵ *Majjhima-Nikāya* 145. *Puṇṇovāda Sutta*. “Advice to Puṇṇa”, Candana Bhikkhu (trans.). Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/578af02af5e231074e974635/t/620b4f3e8ce4f04c3301243e/16449083>

Similarly, *The Simile of the Saw (Kakacūpama Sutta)*¹⁶ and *The Simile of the Pond (Pokkharani Sutta)*¹⁷ describe the advantages of cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā*). In particular, one of the Buddhist commentaries, namely *The Path of Freedom*, also notes the benefits of *khanti*: “Patience is power. This is armor. This protects the body well and removes anger and resentment. This is an honor. This is praised by the wise. This causes happiness in not falling away. This is a guardian. This guards all.” As such, a person with *khanti* does not hold anger or resentment against others. As a result, forgiveness naturally happens. Interestingly, confession is closely related to forgiveness in early Buddhism and Mahāyāna literature and is a must-practice for any Buddhist aiming for ultimate enlightenment. Fortnightly, all monastics make confessions before the *poṣadha* ritual. The standard confession includes the recitation and prostration of eighty-eight Buddha names, or they can make public confessions if necessary, depending on the offenses.

Concerning confession and forgiveness, *the Discourse on Transgression (Accaya Sutta)* narrates that two monks disagreed, and one wronged the other. The monk who had committed the transgression admitted his fault, but the other refused to forgive him. Several monks then went to the Blessed One to share what had transpired. The Blessed One replied:

Monks, there are two types of fools: the first does not recognize a transgression as a transgression, and the second, when someone confesses their wrongdoing, does not offer forgiveness. These are the two types of fools. Conversely, there are two kinds of wise individuals: the first sees a transgression for what it is, and the second, when someone confesses their fault, extends forgiveness. These are the two kinds of wise people.¹⁸

The Discourse on Transgression presents a nuanced examination of confession and forgiveness through the interaction between two monks. This narrative highlights the complexities of human relationships and the moral imperative of acknowledging wrongdoings. The Blessed One categorizes two types of fools: those who fail to recognize wrongdoing and those who, despite recognizing it, refuse to forgive. This suggests that ignorance and an unwillingness to forgive are equally detrimental, leading to unresolved conflict and hindered personal growth. Such attitudes can create rifts and perpetuate negativity within a community.

¹⁶ Majjhima-Nikāya. *Kakacūpama Sutta & Pokkharani Sutta*. Bhikkhu Sujato (trans.) Accessed on [January. 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://suttacentral.net/mn21/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>.

¹⁷ *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā) The Arahant Upatissa*. (1961) Translated from Chinese by Tipiṭaka Sanghapāla of Funan; translated into English by The Rev. N. R. M. Ehara, Soma Thera, and Kheminda Thera. Edited by Dr. D. Roland D. Weerasuria. Ceylon. p. 185 - 6.

¹⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.) (2016) *The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony*. Ebook. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, p. 147.

In contrast, the *Sutta* defines wisdom in terms of awareness and compassion. Wise individuals acknowledge transgressions clearly and offer forgiveness when others admit their mistakes. This dual capacity promotes a culture of accountability and healing, where open communication fosters mutual understanding and strengthens bonds among individuals.

Overall, the *Sutta* underscores the importance of recognizing wrongdoing and practicing forgiveness. Encouraging these virtues advocates for a harmonious community where individuals can learn from their mistakes and support one another in their moral journeys. This holistic view reflects a pathway toward deeper relationships and personal development within the framework of ethical conduct.

In the Mahāyāna literature, *The Golden Light Sūtra* beautifully encapsulates the confessional spirit, depicted as follows: “O buddhas endowed with the ten powers, Those dreadful, evil deeds have previously perpetrated, I admit them all in front of you.”¹⁹ Then, the wrongdoer goes on to elucidate his or her list of defilements, i.e., disrespect to parents and buddhas, failure in the observance of virtuous deeds, haughtiness due to wealth, conceit of affluence and caste, afflicted accumulation of food, drink, and attire, and so forth. Additionally, misdeeds committed under a flighty mind - especially disrespect to the *Dharma* and those who preach the *Dharma* and the rejection of sublime *Dharma* - are acknowledged in full. Finally, the wrongdoer completes his or her repentance: “Juvenile and shrouded by foolishness, unmindful of greed and hate, nescience, conceit, and vanity, these acts I acknowledge in full.”²⁰ After the purification of his misdeeds, his bodhi aspirations emerge out of compassion: “Respecting those who are endowed with ten powers, those abiding omnipresent I shall pay homage to. I shall liberate all creatures living in all domains from all hardships.”²¹ As a result, he aspires to put innumerable beings upon the ten grounds of bodhisattvas, abiding them in these ten *bhūmis* (stages) so that they all attain the perfect enlightenment of the *Tathāgatas*. Then, he shall strive to free all creatures from incalculable suffering for ten million eons until nobody is left behind. Last but not least, he will unfold the *Golden Light Sūtra* to even a single being to rid them of every harmful misdeed.²² This reminds me of the vows of *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva*: “to save infinite hell citizens until there is none in all hells. Until this noble end is completed, he will become a *Tathāgata*.”

¹⁹ *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Sūtra. The King of Glorious Sutras called the Exalted Sublime Golden Light*. Losang Dawa (trans) (2011). Ebook. FPMT Inc. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: www.fpmt.org. p. 24.

²⁰ *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Sūtra. The King of Glorious Sutras called the Exalted Sublime Golden Light*. Ebook. Losang Dawa (trans.) (2011). FPMT Inc. www.fpmt.org, p. 26.

²¹ *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Sūtra. The King of Glorious Sutras called the Exalted Sublime Golden Light*. Ebook. Losang Dawa (trans.) (2011). FPMT Inc. www.fpmt.org, p. 26.

²² *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Sūtra. The King of Glorious Sutras called the Exalted Sublime Golden Light*. Ebook. Losang Dawa (trans.) (2011). FPMT Inc. www.fpmt.org, p. 27.

In sum, forgiveness takes place when we separate wrongdoers from their wrong acts. In this way, it is not hard to let go of our resentment or negative emotions by abiding our minds in *karuṇā*, since the wrongdoer was unhappy or dissatisfied when harming us physically or mentally. Only by abiding in *karuṇā* - first for ourselves, then for the wrongdoer - can our state of mind be released from grief, stress, resentment, and disgust. Furthermore, our negative *karma* can be reduced when we accept the wrong done to us as causes and conditions that brought about that wrongdoing. By keeping in mind that “either in this life or previous lives, I might have caused harm to the wrongdoer; let me repay willingly,” we can prevent further negative *karma*. Otherwise, if we harbor ill thoughts toward the wrongdoers, more negative *karma* will accumulate due to our grasping and defiled minds. Generally, both Buddhists and scientists state that forgiveness involves relinquishing resentment and hatred, fostering inner peace, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and contributing to societal harmony.

III. MINDFUL HEALING

Let us examine how mindfulness is depicted in Buddhist scriptures and commentary. The Blessed One encapsulates the benefits of mindfulness in one of his speeches: “Dear friends, it is by cultivating the profound clarity of mindfulness that one can release the desire to cling to the past and future, transcend attachment and sorrow, relinquish all forms of grasping and worry, and attain a steadfast freedom of the heart in the present moment.”²³ Concerning mindfulness of respiration, the *Path of Freedom* describes: “Inhalation refers to the act of breathing in, while exhalation refers to breathing out. Awareness of the incoming and outgoing breath constitutes mindfulness, specifically right mindfulness. Maintaining a calm and focused mind during this practice is essential.”²⁴

Then, the Arahant Upatissa describes the benefits of applying mindful breathing as follows:

Those who engage in mindfulness of breath lead a peaceful, beautiful life filled with joy. They effectively eliminate harmful thoughts as soon as they arise. They remain attentive to their body and eyesight, and their body and mind remain steady and composed. They embody the four foundations of mindfulness, the seven factors of enlightenment, and a sense of liberation. The Blessed One highly regards this practice.²⁵

In the *Ānāpānassatisutta*, the Blessed One describes sixteen ways of training in mindful respiration. Similarly, the *Path of Freedom* elaborates on these methods for a yogin to train himself:

²³ Kornfield, J. (2008) *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. New York: Bantam Books. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/wiseheartguideto00korn>, p. 96.

²⁴ *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā) The Arahant Upatissa*. (1961), p. 156.

²⁵ *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā) The Arahant Upatissa*. (1961), p. 157.

(1&2) Mindful of short and long-breathing; (3) Breathing in, I experience the entire body. (4) I breathe in, calming the physical formations (5) Breathing in, I cultivate joy through the object of focus. (6) I breathe in, experiencing bliss. (7) I breathe in, recognizing the mental formations. (8) Breathing in, I calm the mental formations. (9) I breathe in, observing the mind. (10) I breathe in, cultivating gladness within the mind. (11) Breathing in, I concentrate the mind. (12) I breathe in, liberating the mind from distractions. (13) Breathing in, I discern the impermanence of all phenomena. (14) I breathe in, cultivating a sense of dispassion. (15) I breathe in, contemplating cessation; (16) Breathing in, I embrace renunciation.²⁶

This version maintains the original teachings on mindfulness of breath and mental states while deepening the focus on liberation, impermanence, and dispassion, which are core to Buddhist practice. Most importantly, the practitioner can attain bliss after completing the last step. The concepts of tranquility and the sublime should be understood in the following manner: all actions are brought to cessation, all defilements are abandoned, craving is eradicated, and passion is absent. It is the peace attained through the cessation of all desires, akin to extinguishing a flame. Of the sixteen aspects described, the first twelve serve to cultivate both *samatha* (serenity) and *vipassanā* (insight), and they are recognized as manifestations of impermanence. The final four, however, serve the purpose of cultivating only *vipassanā*. Thus, serenity and insight must be comprehended in their respective roles and interrelationships.²⁷ Most importantly, the connection between mindfulness and healing is self-awareness. True healing or mindful healing comes from transformative minds - minds that are free from anger and resentment and loaded with loving-kindness, self-compassion, and universal compassion. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion to uproot thoughts of anger, grief, resentment, and the like.

According to the *Path of Purification*, Elder Buddhaghosa describes loving-kindness as:

“Its inherent purpose is to encourage a mindset of kindness and positive regard for others. This is expressed by letting go of *dosa* (negative feelings) and nurturing compassion. The essence of *mettā* is rooted in viewing others through a framework of kindness and goodwill. When practiced effectively, it eliminates negative emotions. However, if it strays off course or becomes distorted, it can transform into a selfish form of attachment or desire, which lacks the genuine selflessness that characterizes *mettā*.”²⁸

²⁶ *Majjhima-Nikāya*. MN.118. *Mindfulness of breathing*. Bhikkhu Sujato (trans.) Accessed at [January 5, 2025] at <https://suttacentral.net/mn118/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&high>

²⁷ *The Path of Freedom (Vimuttimaggā) The Arahant Upatissa*. (1961), p. 160 - 163.

²⁸ *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*. Buddhaghosa, H. (2010). tr. by Nānamoli, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. p. 290 - 308.

In the *Mettānisaṃsa Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha outlines eleven benefits associated with the cultivation and practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*): (1) One will sleep with ease and comfort. (2) One will awaken from sleep feeling refreshed and at ease. (3) One will be free from the disturbance of bad dreams. (4) One will be cherished and well-regarded by fellow human beings. (5) One will be esteemed by non-human beings as well. (6) Protective deities and gods will watch over the practitioner. (7) One will be impervious to harm from fire, poisons, or weapons. (8) The practitioner will find it easy to concentrate the mind. (10) The practitioner's expression will radiate serenity and calm. (11) At death, the practitioner's mind will remain clear and composed. (12) After death, the practitioner will be reborn in a higher, divine realm (Brahma world).²⁹

All in all, the eleven benefits outlined in the *Mettānisaṃsa Sutta* illustrate the multifaceted nature of lovingkindness and its profound implications for personal well-being and societal harmony. Cultivating *mettā* contributes to an individual's peace of mind and resilience and fosters connections with others, promoting a compassionate community.

Furthermore, the spiritual aspects emphasize the significance of loving-kindness in the broader context of Buddhist ethics and metaphysics, linking personal transformation with cosmic harmony. Ultimately, this sutta serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of love and kindness in fostering both individual happiness and collective wellbeing, urging practitioners to engage with the world from a place of compassion. This grounding in compassion is echoed in the work of Farhadian and Emmons, who explore how forgiveness - a critical element of loving-kindness - differs across Buddhist traditions. They argue that "forgiveness is grounded on sheer self-reliance in Theravāda Buddhism, whereas in Mahāyāna Buddhism, this practice is rooted in the Buddha's vows/aspirations as a *mahāsattva bodhisattva*, at least in the eighth stage."³⁰ This contrast highlights how the act of forgiving, much like love and kindness, not only influences personal spiritual growth but also reflects a more profound interconnectedness with the cosmos, reinforcing that both practices are essential for individual and collective flourishing.

Typically, one of the forty-eight vows of the great bodhisattva Dharmākara, who attained complete and perfect enlightenment as Amitāyus Buddha, highlights the vital significance of the practice of reciting his name to foster forgiveness: A wise individual will also lead him to unfold his hands in prayer and recite, "Adoration to Buddha Amitāyus" (*Namo Amitābhāya Buddhāya* or *Namo Amitāyūṣe Buddhāya*). By uttering the name of the Buddha, he will be liberated from the transgressions that could otherwise bind him to the cycle of rebirth for

²⁹ *Benefits of Love: Aṅguttara Nikāya* 11.5. Bhikkhu Sujato trans. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at <https://suttacentral.net/an11.15/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

³⁰ Kalayjian, A. and Paloutzian, R. F. (eds.) (2009) *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Psychological Pathways to Conflict Transformation and Peace Building*. New York: Springer, p. 65.

fifty million kalpas. This profound practice nurtures a sense of forgiveness and connects practitioners to a lineage of compassion and spiritual awakening.

In a modern context, J. Kornfield identifies the four currently popular principles for mindful transformation - RAIN, which includes recognition, acceptance, investigation, and non-identification - interwoven into Western retreats. Integrating these principles with the transformative act of reciting Amitāyus' name suggests a bridge between ancient practices and contemporary psychology. Just as the recitation liberates individuals from their past transgressions, the RAIN framework offers a structured way to acknowledge and release emotional burdens in the present. Together, these practices emphasise the timeless value of forgiveness and mindfulness, illustrating how both can lead individuals towards profound healing and spiritual growth, ultimately freeing them from cycles of suffering.

The first principle, recognition, serves as a powerful entry point, transforming our awareness into that of a gracious host, welcoming all emotions - sorrow, anger, joy, and excitement - without denial³¹. This openness is akin to the recitation itself; just as the name of Amitāyus helps dispel ignorance and attachment to negative emotions, recognition allows us to light the lamp of awareness, illuminating the path to healing. Following recognition, acceptance invites us to remain receptive to the harsh realities we face, including injustice and suffering. This mirrors the acceptance inherent in Buddhist teachings, where acknowledging both joy and sorrow as part of the human experience fosters a non-judgmental mindset essential for inner transformation.

As we delve deeper into the second and third steps - acceptance and investigation - we are encouraged to understand the roots of our suffering, promoting a holistic healing process. The call to explore the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, i.e., body, feelings, mind, and *dhamma*, as the Blessed One taught in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, aligns with the intention to thoroughly engage with our physical, emotional, and mental states, reinforcing the idea that actual internal change must precede external transformation. Lastly, the principle of non-identification liberates us from erroneously attaching our identity to transient experiences. This crucial step allows us to let go of the belief that our emotions define us, echoing the essence of Amitāyus' teachings, which remind us of the inherently fluid and interconnected nature of existence. Together, these elements of RAIN and recitation weave a rich tapestry of healing, where recognising, accepting, investigating, and relinquishing identification collectively guide individuals towards a profound understanding of themselves and their place within the life cycle. In Buddhist psychology, non-identification is regarded as the foundation of enlightenment, indicating the cessation of attachments and leading to genuine peace and tranquillity, ultimately achieving *nibbāna*. By stepping away from identification, we can compassionately care

³¹ Kornfield, J. (2008) *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. New York: Bantam Books. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/wiseheartguideto00korn>, p. 102.

for ourselves and others; nonetheless, we are not confined to the mirage of the narrow-minded self. Amazingly, when we shower the planet with these four principles - recognition, acceptance, investigation, and non-identification - freedom can accompany us wherever we are, just as the rain fosters every creature without judgment. Kornfield (2008) observes:

Mindfulness allows experience to be a teacher, supporting individuals in steering through problems with consciousness and forbearance. By mindfully observing his breath, a layperson with asthma reduced his attacks, whereas a cancer patient used mindfulness and loving-kindness to confront fear and complement treatment. Through mindfulness, healing is achieved more or less in the manner the Blessed One did in the forest. The above cases, undoubtedly, are testaments that forgiveness and mindful healing are by-products of a mind imbued with loving-kindness. In other words, whereupon inner transformation prevails, mindful healing is available.³²

IV. CASE VIGNETTES

The vignettes provided present compelling examples of how mindfulness and forgiveness intersect to foster healing and personal growth. In analyzing each case, several key themes emerge: mindfulness's transformative power, emotional regulation dynamics, and the interplay between individual experiences and broader psychological theories of forgiveness.

4.1. Case 1: Peter's journey

Peter, a middle-aged computer designer, sought solace at a meditation retreat to escape the pressures of a failing business, a strained marriage, and an ailing mother. However, meditation was challenging as his anger and disappointment emerged in the serene setting, hindering his concentration. Matters escalated when a woman nearby incessantly coughed and fidgeted, leading to Peter's growing frustration and anger. Overwhelmed, he approached his co-teacher, Debra Chamberlin-Taylor, and voiced his wish to leave. Debra encouraged him to close his eyes and mindfully observe his tension and pain. With her guidance, Peter began to accept his discomfort and recognized that understanding his pain was the essential healing he sought.

As the retreat progressed, Peter's focus sharpened. He realized that his own anxious and angry thoughts concerning his family and business could elicit the same tension and tightness as the woman's coughing. Previously, he had always strived to maintain control over his life, but with circumstances spiraling out of his grasp, he found himself ensnared by habits of anger, blame, and judgment. Each time he reacted, he felt the buildup of tension, but he learned to pause mindfully afterward and infuse a sense of ease into his experience. Gradually, he began to trust in mindfulness. By the end of the retreat, he felt grateful to

³² Kornfield, J. (2008) *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. New York: Bantam Books. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/wiseheartguideto00korn>. p. 103-6.

the restless woman beside him, wanting to express his thanks for the lesson she had inadvertently provided.³³

4.1.1. The challenge of mindfulness: Through mindfulness, Peter discovered relief and recognized the importance of curiosity and openness - a concept Shunryu Suzuki famously called “beginner’s mind.” He described this approach as paying attention with respect and interest, not to manipulate but to uncover the truth. In perceiving this truth, he found freedom for his heart. Peter’s initial struggle with mindfulness highlights a common barrier many face: the emergence of difficult emotions. Rather than allowing the serene environment to soothe him, his anger and disappointment manifested, obstructing his ability to concentrate. This illustrates that mindfulness practices can serve as a magnifying glass for unresolved emotions, forcing individuals to confront feelings they might typically avoid.

4.1.2. Awareness and acceptance: The guidance from Debra Cabin-Taylor to observe his tension and pain can be seen as a pivotal moment. This aligns with mindfulness principles that advocate for acceptance rather than avoidance. Peter’s ability to acknowledge his discomfort is essential to the healing process; it symbolizes a shift from reactivity to observation. The act of recognizing one’s emotional state without judgment is foundational in mindfulness practice, as it fosters self-awareness.

4.1.3. Transformation through reflection: As Peter progresses through the retreat, he realizes that his reactions to external triggers (like the woman’s coughing) mirror his internal struggles. This insight demonstrates a profound understanding of the concept that much of our emotional landscape is influenced by our interpretations and reactions. By learning to pause and introduce ease into his experience, Peter illustrates how mindfulness can alter one’s relationship with their thoughts and feelings, leading to greater emotional regulation.

4.1.4. Beginner’s mind: The concept of “beginner’s mind” as described by Shunryu Suzuki represents a broader philosophical approach that encourages openness and curiosity. For Peter, this meant observing situations with fresh eyes rather than relying on preconceived notions of how things should be. This attitude facilitates personal growth and has far-reaching implications for interpersonal interactions, fostering empathy and understanding.

4.2. Case 2: Duane’s confrontation with his demons

Another account involves a layman during a ten-day mindfulness retreat, who found inspiration in non-identification teachings. He was particularly moved by the story of the Buddha, who confronted his demons in the form of Mara’s armies on the night of his enlightenment. Duane resolved to stay awake all night to face his demons directly. He focused on being aware of his breath and body for several hours, interspersing his sitting meditations with periods

³³ Kornfield, J. (2008) *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. New York: Bantam Books. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/wiseheartguideto00korn/page/98-100>.

of walking meditation. He experienced familiar waves of drowsiness, physical discomfort, and critical thoughts throughout each sitting. However, he realised that each shifting experience was consistently accompanied by one unifying element: awareness itself. Eventually, all of his struggles and the painful feelings and thoughts came and went without causing any disruption to awareness itself. Awareness became his sanctuary. When he emerged from this state, his day overflowed with joy. Even as his doubts resurfaced, awareness observed them. Like rain, his awareness embraced everything without discrimination.³⁴

4.2.1. Facing internal struggles: Duane's commitment to staying awake all night to confront his demons mirrors the legendary challenge faced by the Buddha against Mara. His dedication to being present through discomfort exemplifies the courage required to engage fully with one's fears and doubts. This illuminates a core aspect of mindfulness: the willingness to experience discomfort as a pathway to transformation.

4.2.2. The role of awareness: Duane's realization that his painful feelings and thoughts passed without disrupting his awareness is a critical learning point. By recognizing the distinction between awareness and the continuous flow of thoughts and feelings, he cultivates a deep sense of inner peace. This highlights the Buddhist teaching that thoughts are transient and that one's essence lies in pure awareness, rather than identification with emotional experiences.

4.2.3. Non-identification: The practice of non-identification allows Duane to observe his thoughts without attachment. His awareness serves as a refuge, showcasing a key aspect of mindfulness: the ability to step back from the self. This concept is crucial for individual healing and enhancing relationships, as it fosters a compassionate understanding that transcends personal grievances.

Research shows that mindfulness practices can lead to structural changes in the brain, indicating that our mental habits can reshape our neural pathways. This neuroplasticity reinforces the idea that individuals can cultivate healthier emotional habits and coping mechanisms through consistent practice. This scientific backing lends credibility to the anecdotal experiences of both Peter and Duane, connecting their emotional transformations to tangible physiological changes.

In sum, these studies showcase that the forgiver's mind plays a vital role in their forgiving attitudes and actions. The mind can evolve and align with new, wise, and meaningful choices in life - specifically, forgiving others can reduce personal pain and enhance happiness.

V. SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON FORGIVENESS

Among recent studies on forgiveness, the stress-and-coping theory of

³⁴ Kornfield, J. (2008) *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. New York: Bantam Books. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/wiseheartguideto00korn>. p. 105.

forgiveness can be considered fruitful. It connects four key processes: it seeks to explain how forgiveness relates to individuals' perceptions of justice, societal justice, reconciliation, and coping mechanisms for dealing with injustice. The theory illustrates the complex interrelationships between forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice, highlighting that forgiveness is challenging, primarily because it requires individuals to manage and regulate often tumultuous emotional responses. Researchers find that forgivers experience better physical health, better mental health³⁵, reduced physiological stress,³⁶ and an improvement in positive affect.³⁷ It also benefits victims by facilitating the restoration of valued relationships.³⁸

Researchers increasingly view the stress-and-coping model of forgiveness as a key framework for understanding forgiveness outcomes. Effective coping strategies are more likely to foster forgiveness, while maladaptive ones tend to hinder it, reinforcing the idea of forgiveness as a proactive response to transgressions. However, most research has focused primarily on the individual effects on victims or offenders, often neglecting their mutual influences. To better understand the forgiveness process, we should explore the dynamic interactions within the dyad. By framing forgiveness as a collaborative coping mechanism that treats transgressions as shared challenges, we can advance theory and research in this area, highlighting the critical role of relationship dynamics in the healing process.³⁹

Another remarkable factor regarding forgiveness is personality traits, as stated in a Review of Research by Mullet, Neto, and Rivière (2005): "A forgiving individual tends to be pleasant and does not respond negatively in an emotional way. Traits such as introversion and extroversion do not appear to be connected to the ability to forgive, nor do conscientiousness or openness to new experiences."⁴⁰

³⁵ Griffin, B. J., Worthington, E. L., Lavelock, C. R., Wade, N. G. & Hoyt, W.T. (2015) 'Forgiveness and mental health', trong Toussaint, L. L. & Worthington, E. L. (eds.) *Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health*. New York: Springer, p. 77 – 104.

³⁶ Larkin, K. T., Goulet, C. và Cavanagh, C. (2015) "Forgiveness and physiological concomitants and outcomes", trong Toussaint, L. L., Worthington, E. L. Jr. và Williams, D.R. (eds.) *Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health*. New York: Springer, p. 61 - 76.

³⁷ Cheadle, A. C. D. & Toussaint, L. L. (2015). "Forgiveness and health: A review and theoretical exploration of emotion pathways", In Toussaint, L. L., Worthington Jr., E. L. & Williams, D. R. (eds.) *Forgiveness and Health: Scientific Evidence and Theories Relating Forgiveness to Better Health*. New York: Springer, p. 75 - 97.

³⁸ McCullough, M. E. (2008), Strelan, P., Covic, T. (2006), & Worthington, E. L. (2020), available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8414137/>

³⁹ Strelan, P. (2019) "The stress-and-coping model of forgiveness: Theory, research, and the potential of dyadic coping", in Worthington, E. L. Jr. and Wade, N. G. (eds.) *Handbook of Forgiveness*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 65 - 71.

⁴⁰ Mullet, E., Neto, F., & Rivière, S. (2005) & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2020). p. 115 – 6.

Regarding forgiveness and neuroplasticity, Hozel et al. carried out research demonstrating that “The adult nervous system exhibits plasticity, allowing brain structure to adapt through training.⁴¹ Increased gray matter is typically linked to repeated activation of a specific brain region,⁴² with prior studies showing activation during meditation.⁴³ Although the cellular mechanisms of training-related neuroanatomical changes remain unclear, research indicates that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) enhances psychological health.⁴⁴ The data suggest that increases in brain region volumes could signify lasting structural changes that enhance mental functioning, highlighting the need to understand the neurobiological mechanisms behind behavioral interventions for effective applications.”⁴⁵ All in all, the common trait in these studies showcases that the mind of the forgiver plays a vital role in his forgiving attitudes and acts. The mind can be updated and fit into the new wise and meaningful choice of life, i.e., forgiving others makes oneself less painful and likely happier.

VI. FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Forgiveness and reconciliation are intertwined. Reconciliation is a natural process that children and adults engage in as they strive to restore a sense of unburdened connection with themselves and others, aiming to resolve an event or relationship conflict perceived as a threat to their well-being or a valued relationship. This process is closely tied to the ability to self-soothe. When a typically self-assured child struggles to regain composure after a distressing situation, a caring adult steps in, providing the secure psychological foundation,⁴⁶ interpretive dialogue,⁴⁷ and supportive intentions necessary for the child to reconcile after the temporarily overwhelming event and to progress forward. Forgiveness involves relinquishing resentment and the urge to punish or impose consequences on someone who has caused pain or harm. Reconciliation and forgiveness cyclically influence each other. The pursuit of reconciliation initiates the pathway to forgiveness, while both the giving and receiving of forgiveness strengthen, deepen, and contribute to completing

⁴¹ Gage, F. H. (2002), Draganski, B., et al. (2006). Colcombe, S. J., et al (2006), Driemeyer, J., et al (2008).

⁴² May, A., et al. (2007). & Ilg, R., et al (2008).

⁴³ Lou, H. C., et al. (1999), Lazar, S. W., et al. (2000), Newberg, A., et al. (2001), Hölzel, B. K., et al. (2007), Lutz, A., et al. (2008).

⁴⁴ Grossman P, et al. (2004) & Carmody J, et al. (2009).

⁴⁵ Hölzel, B. K., et al. (2011). “Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density.” *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, 191(1), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2010.08.006>.

⁴⁶ Bowlby, J. (1988) *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. New York: Basic Books. accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/securebase00john>.

⁴⁷ Siegel, D. J. (1999) *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. New York: Guilford Press. Accessed on [January 15, 2025], accessed at: https://www.guilford.com/excerpts/siegel_ch1.pdf.

the reconciliation process.⁴⁸ Reconciliation and forgiveness are rooted in the mutual commitment of those involved in the relationship and arise from their attentiveness to repairing the minor fractures that inevitably happen as individuals navigate their personal and shared experiences. In parent-child relationships, these processes are essential for helping children learn suitable interpersonal behaviors and develop strategies to cope with distressing interpersonal or external circumstances. Reconciliation and forgiveness lie at the core of what Kegan (1982) calls natural therapy - the informal problem-solving that occurs when individuals seek guidance and support from friends, family, coworkers, or other trusted figures. These processes offer practical ways to navigate life's minor disruptions and help individuals move past frustrating disappointments in their relationships with themselves and others.

Negotiations for reconciliation and restoring peaceful relationships usually involve partners with equal power and status, such as two children resolving a conflict, a couple addressing a marital dispute, or two countries negotiating a border issue. If this approach is insufficient, a facilitator with greater authority may step in, like a parent or teacher helping schoolchildren, a counselor assisting a couple in conflict, or an international body mediating between opposing nations. Furthermore, the teachings of the Buddha illustrate how a monastic is qualified to revoke an act of reconciliation through AN 8.89:

Monks, when a monk has eight qualities, the *Saṅgha* may revoke an act of reconciliation; or, if the *Saṅgha* is pleased, it may revoke an act of reconciliation. What eight? (1) He does not stop laypeople from attaining gain; (2) he does not cause harm to laypeople; (3) he does not abuse and revile laypeople; (4) he does not divide laypeople from one another; (5) he praises the Buddha; (6) he praises the *Dhamma*; (7) he praises the *Saṅgha*; (8) he fulfills a genuine promise to the people. And when a monk possesses these eight qualities, the *Saṅgha*, if it wishes, may revoke an act of reconciliation done for him.⁴⁹

The passage outlines the specific qualities that a monk must possess for the *Saṅgha* (community of monks) to either revoke or maintain an act of reconciliation. The eight qualities emphasize the monk's responsibility toward laypeople and the broader community, highlighting the importance of non-harm, support, and respect. Key aspects include refraining from actions that undermine communal harmony, such as preventing laypeople from gaining or sowing discord among them. Additionally, the monk's commitment to praising the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha* indicates a reinforcement of core Buddhist values. Overall, fulfilling these qualities serves as a foundation for maintaining trust and ethical conduct within both monastic and lay communities, reflecting the interconnectedness of their roles in the Buddhist tradition.

⁴⁸ Kalayjian, A. & Paloutzian, R.F. (eds.) (2009) *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Psychological Pathways to Conflict Transformation and Peace Building*. New York: Springer, p. 87.

⁴⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.) (2016) *The Buddha's Teachings on Social and Communal Harmony*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 158.

Lastly, according to Monica Renz (2023), forgiveness and reconciliation stem from empathy, “Whenever we succeed in empathizing and experiencing, even in small ways, from another’s viewpoint, forgiveness becomes attainable - and genuine reconciliation is given a real chance.” A young woman seeking to understand her partner better stated: “In his position, I can feel a deep divide running from top to bottom: decisions are made above, while below resides frozen anger.” This empathy exercise allowed her to appreciate her husband despite his tendency to suppress his feelings, which pleasantly surprised him.⁵⁰ In this instance, forgiveness and reconciliation go hand in hand with empathy.

Wrap up

Mindful healing is fundamentally rooted in true forgiveness, which yields both psychological and physiological benefits, thereby positively influencing the lifestyles of individuals who engage in this process. As evidenced by Buddhist texts and supported by contemporary scientific research, mindfulness practice - primarily through meditation - plays a critical role in this healing journey. The brain and heart exhibit neuroplasticity, enabling them to adapt and reorganize, which facilitates the release of negative emotions and allows individuals to assimilate the transformative benefits of forgiveness. This capacity for adaptation enhances one’s ability to respond wisely to challenges. Mindfulness provides a vital framework for addressing internal and external wounds while fostering reconciliation. The teachings of Buddhism offer a comprehensive approach to healing emotional injuries that hinder interpersonal understanding and forgiveness. In a world increasingly characterized by conflict, integrating Buddhist practices - such as mindfulness, meditation, loving-kindness, forbearance, and patience - with scientific insights into forgiveness presents a valuable means of promoting healing, peace, and reconciliation. This synthesis not only contributes to sustainable well-being but also enhances the quality of life for individuals and communities alike. The myriad benefits of forgiveness underscore the need for further research into integrating Buddhist scripture recitation with meditative practices. However, there remains a gap in clear scientific evidence regarding how forgiveness among Buddhist practitioners and Buddhist-based interventions can profoundly impact well-being, both internally and externally, at personal, communal, and global levels. Addressing this gap through interdisciplinary research would provide deeper insights into the transformative potential of Buddhist-based approaches to healing and reconciliation.

VII. CONCLUSION

Forgiveness and mindful healing, deeply rooted in ancient wisdom and modern scientific research, serve as transformative pathways to reconciliation. The integration of Buddhist teachings with psychological and neuroscientific insights underscores the profound impact of forgiveness on mental, emotional,

⁵⁰Renz, M. (2023) *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Initiating Individuation and Enabling Liberation*. Translated by M. Kyburz. Ebook. Abingdon: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003310907, p. 35 – 39.

and societal well-being. Through mindfulness practices such as loving-kindness meditation, patience, and self-awareness, individuals can release resentment, cultivate inner peace, and foster harmony in their relationships and communities. Moreover, the scientific evidence supporting the neuroplasticity of the brain highlights the tangible benefits of forgiveness, demonstrating its ability to reduce stress, enhance emotional regulation, and improve overall well-being. Case studies further exemplify the power of mindful healing in overcoming personal struggles and interpersonal conflicts. As the world continues to grapple with conflicts at various levels, the practice of forgiveness offers a viable path toward reconciliation and lasting peace. By cultivating compassion, understanding, and mindfulness, individuals and societies alike can break free from cycles of resentment and foster a more harmonious world. Future interdisciplinary research will be crucial in further exploring the applications of Buddhist-inspired forgiveness and mindful healing in diverse social and cultural contexts.

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BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY ON THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS AND WARS

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Abstract:

Human history has witnessed tens of thousands of conflicts and wars on different scales, occurring in all continents in the world, causing suffering to all sorts of people. While people aspire to live in peace, harmony, and love for all, conflicts and wars always cause serious consequences for them, destroy infrastructure, and have long-term effects on socio-economic development and the environment. Resolving conflicts and wars to build a peaceful, free and happy life is always the desire and goal that Buddhism strives for. This paper is not aimed at criticising other religions when mentioning religion-related conflicts and wars or analysing in depth the Buddhist philosophy on resolving conflicts and wars towards building a peaceful life and prosperous development in the world.

Keywords: *Buddhist philosophy; conflict and war resolution.*

I. OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT AND WAR SITUATION IN THE WORLD

According to statistics, in 3,400 years of recorded history, only 268 years humans have been entirely at peace, accounting for about 8%. In addition to destroying physical facilities and socio-economic infrastructure, conflicts and wars have also caused a serious loss of human life. In 3,400 years, there have been from 150 million to 1 billion people died, of which, in the 20th century alone, 108 million people died due to conflicts and wars¹.

Since the end of World War II 1945, the world has continuously witnessed military conflicts and wars, including many religion-related ones, including conflicts between Sunni and Shiite Muslim communities or other sects in Syria

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¹ Hedges, C. (2003, July 6). *What every person should know about war*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/what-every-person-should-know-about-war.html>

and Iraq; between some Arab Muslim countries; between Judaism and Islam (Israel and the Islamic Resistance Movement - Hamas); between Islam and Catholicism in the Philippines, Indonesia; between Islam and Buddhism in Southern Thailand, Myanmar...

The outstanding characteristics of religion-related conflicts and wars are their complexity, prolonged nature, causing serious consequences to political stability, security, economy, and life of residential communities, especially causing death to millions of innocent people, including women and children... Religion-related conflicts and wars often originate from long-standing contradictions and disputes in history concerning territorial disputes, differences in interests, doctrines, cultures... Typical examples of conflicts and wars that have occurred recently include: Israel - Hamas and Azerbaijan - Armenia conflicts and the conflict between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Myanmar.

Regarding the Israel - Hamas conflict, the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip originates from historical, political, and geographical complexity, in which religion is considered the underlying cause of the conflict. The long-simmering conflict between Jews and Muslims has resulted in at least six Middle East wars, two Palestinian Intifadas, and hundreds of clashes of varying scales across the Middle East. Israel is a Jewish State, and the Jews consider it their historical and religious homeland, based on Biblical promises, while Palestinians, with a majority Muslim population, also consider Jerusalem (Al-Quds) to be holy. Jerusalem is not only a symbol of religions (Judaism with the Western Wall, considered the holiest site in Judaism; Islam with the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque, associated with the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad according to Islamic legend; and Christianity with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, one of the holiest sites in Christianity, where Jesus was crucified and resurrected), but also the center of long-standing political and cultural conflicts, making it one of the “hottest” regions in the world.

Hamas is a Sunni Muslim movement and has a hardline view on religion. The Charter of Hamas declared in 1988 when the movement was founded, emphasises the importance of Islam in the resistance against Israel and calls for the establishment of an Islamic State over all of historic Palestine². Hamas often invokes religion to legitimise its actions and political goals.

Regarding the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, the territorial dispute over Nagorny Karabakh between the two former Soviet Republics (Azerbaijan and Armenia) has been simmering for more than a century, at times erupting into armed conflict, but has yet to be completely resolved. One of the causes of the long-standing conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is religious differences. Armenia is a predominantly Christian country, specifically the

² United Nations. (2006, July 4). *The Charter of Hamas*. The Association for World Education & the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ). Non-governmental organizations on the Roster. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-182893/>

Armenian Orthodox Church, one of the oldest branches of Christianity³. Armenians pride themselves on being the first country in the world to officially adopt Christianity in 301 AD. Christianity is an important part of the Armenian cultural and historical identity. Azerbaijan is predominantly a Muslim country with a Shia majority, although there are some Sunni communities. Islam plays an important role in the social and cultural life of Azerbaijanis⁴. It is worth noting that both Armenia and Azerbaijan have very different religious views. Armenians consider Christianity to be part of their national identity, while Azerbaijanis, who are predominantly Muslim, have a different culture and value system. During the conflict, both sides have accused each other of attacking and destroying each other's religious sites. For example, several churches and Christian monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh have been damaged in the conflict; Armenia accuses Azerbaijan of destroying its cultural monuments, while Azerbaijan accuses Armenia of doing the same to Muslim structures.

Regarding the conflict in Myanmar, Buddhism is the main religion in Myanmar, with Buddhists making up the majority of the population⁵. Meanwhile, Muslims are mainly Rohingya, an ethnic minority group living in the Rakhine region of western Myanmar. The Rohingya have long faced religious and ethnic discrimination. The Myanmar government does not recognise them as full citizens and often treats them as illegal foreigners. Some extremist Buddhist groups, such as the 969 Movement led by Buddhist monks, have called for a boycott of Muslims and other minorities, arguing that Muslims pose a threat to the identity and survival of Myanmar's Buddhist people. This has led to clashes and violence between Buddhist and Muslim groups. The conflict between Muslims of the 786 Movement (representing the slogan "In the name of Allah, the Merciful and Merciful") and Burmese Buddhist nationalists of the 969 Movement (representing the "Three Jewels" of Buddhism, with the numbers representing "9 Buddhas", "6 Dharmas", and "9 Sanghas"), has resulted in conflicts that have left hundreds dead and injured across the country. Conflicts cause the country's economy to stagnate, social order and security are under threat, and people's lives face many difficulties...

The above-mentioned situation shows that resolving conflicts and wars, in general, and religion-related conflicts and wars, in particular, is a very complicated issue, requiring the joint efforts of all humanity, all countries and states, and international organisations, religious

³ Bin Ali, M., & Si Xing Theresa, C. (2020, October 20). *Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: A religious strife?* RSIS Commentary Series. <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-a-religious-strife/>

⁴ Ilia Brondz & Tahmina Aslanova, *Sunni-Shia Issue in Azerbaijan*, 5 *Scientific Research An Academic Publisher* 1 (2019), <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paper-id=91359>.

⁵ Harvard Divinity School. (2018). *Conflict in Myanmar: Buddhism case study - Violence & peace*. <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/case-studies/violence-peace/conflict-myanmar>.

organisations, including Buddhist communities, to maintain peace, stability and prosperous development in the world.

II. BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON CONFLICT AND WAR

2.1. On the causes of conflict and war

According to the Buddhist perspective, the causes of conflicts and wars are divided into the external, the internal, and the root causes.

2.1.1. The external causes

From a Buddhist perspective, the external causes of conflict and war are deeply rooted in the internal states of individuals and societies. Buddhist teachings focus on understanding the mind, emotions, and the root causes of suffering, and these internal conditions often manifest as external conflicts.

Desire for power and control

Desire can be seen as potentially problematic for several reasons, especially, it may lead us into conflict with other people - in a finite world with infinite desires, this seems inevitable⁶. From a Buddhist perspective, the craving for power and control generates negative karma⁷. Actions rooted in greed, manipulation, or harm will lead to negative consequences for the individual and others. Such actions can create external conflicts, as the accumulation of negative karma causes a person to become entangled in suffering and may lead them to act in ways that harm others. This is consistent with the idea that the law of karma (cause and effect) governs not only personal lives but also social and political dynamics. Buddhism emphasises letting go of the desire for control and power, as these often lead to suffering. When leaders or groups seek dominance, whether through military might or political control, it can escalate into violence and war.

Attachment to self and identity

Buddha's teachings on attachment to self and identity are central to his philosophy of suffering and liberation. In his view, attachment to the self (known as "*atta*" in Pali or "*atman*" in Sanskrit) and rigidly identifying with a fixed sense of who we are is a significant source of conflict, both internally and in our relationships with others. Buddhism teaches that attachment to the self, whether at the individual or group level (such as nationalism, ethnicity, or religion), fosters division. The ego, or the idea of a solid "self," is often the source of conflict. When groups become overly attached to their own identities, they may feel a need to protect or expand their perceived interests at the expense

⁶ Webster, D. (2005). *The Philosophy of Desire in the Buddhist Pali Canon*, RoutledgeCurzon, New York, p. 7, accessed on 18 March 2025, available at: https://www.routledge.com/The-Philosophy-of-Desire-in-the-Buddhist-Pali-Canon/Webster/p/book/9780415600002?srsltid=AfmBOorL_wfj_XFPwejOEeLIC4iEEBPkTbO_Y2oTuzFxdEdlZHDH-eUs

⁷ Michie, D. (2024), *Purify karma: the Four Opponent Powers*, 15 June, accessed on 18 March 2025, available at: <https://davidmichie.substack.com/p/purify-karma-the-four-opponent-powers>.

of others, which can lead to wars. The ego, which is built upon the attachment to self and identity, leads to the dualistic thinking of “me versus others.” This sense of separation creates friction and competition, leading to interpersonal conflict and social strife. Since each person is attached to their perspective, desires, and identity, misunderstandings and clashes arise easily. When we feel that our identity or sense of self is challenged, we often react defensively, out of fear or pride.

Cultural and ideological differences

The influence that cultural differences have on conflicts that arise in organisations is because people react and deal with situations differently (Yeh, 2009: 113)⁸. Buddha's teachings, while primarily focused on personal enlightenment, provide a foundation for understanding the role of cultural and ideological differences in creating conflict. According to Buddhist philosophy, the root causes of conflict- whether internal or external- are often tied to desires, attachments, ignorance, and misunderstanding. Though Buddhism teaches tolerance and nonviolence, it recognises that cultural, religious, and ideological differences often fuel conflicts. When people cling to their worldview without openness to others' perspectives, misunderstandings and tensions can grow, often resulting in conflict. Buddha's teachings suggest that cultural and ideological differences can lead to conflict when rooted in ignorance, attachment, aversion, and desire.

The role of external structures

Buddhism acknowledges that societal structures - such as political, economic, and military systems - can exacerbate conflicts. Regarding **political systems**, in societies where power is concentrated in the hands of a few, inequality and injustice may arise, leading to social unrest and conflict. Regarding **economic systems**, economic disparities can also create significant suffering. When there is an unequal distribution of wealth or resources, people may become attached to material gain, leading to greed, exploitation, and competition. This can create a cycle of suffering for both the rich and the poor. Regarding **military systems**, military forces, especially when they are used to impose control or resolve disputes through violence, can exacerbate suffering. Buddhists believe that peace can only be achieved when these structures are based on compassion, justice, and the welfare of all sentient beings.

Karma and collective responsibility

The view of peace as a collective product is well in line with the Buddhist worldview based on the principle of dependent origination, which emphasises

⁸ Koyuncu, A. G., & Chipindu, R. D. (2019). How cultural differences influence conflict within an organization: A case study of Near East University. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 8, 112–128. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341445792_How_Cultural_Differences_Influence_Conflict_Within_an_Organization_A_Case_Study_of_Near_East_University.

the mutual influence of all the elements involved in any situation⁹. Buddhism teaches that actions have consequences, not only at the individual level but also collectively. Wars and conflicts can be seen as the result of collective karma - the accumulated actions of societies, communities, and nations. If a society perpetuates cycles of harm through greed, oppression, or violence, it may lead to the manifestation of conflict in the external world. Therefore, from a Buddhist perspective, it is not just individuals but entire communities and nations that bear responsibility for the creation of peace or the perpetuation of war.

Poverty

According to the Buddha, poverty can be a source of conflict, but not just because of the lack of material wealth. The Buddha understood that suffering (*dukkha*) arises from craving (*tanha*) and attachment to things, people, and ideas, which often leads to dissatisfaction and inner turmoil. When people are caught in the cycle of wanting more - whether it's wealth, power, or security - this desire can create division, inequality, and ultimately conflict.

Poverty often exacerbates people's cravings and attachment to material possessions. This desire can manifest as greed for wealth or resources, which can lead individuals or groups to fight to satisfy their desires. In Buddhist thought, craving (*tanha*) is considered one of the root causes of suffering. When people or nations are desperate to escape poverty, they may resort to violence or war as a way to fulfill their desires.

Poverty can create stark divisions between the rich and the poor, often leading to resentment and social unrest. From a Buddhist perspective, such inequality arises from the attachment to a self-centered identity, where people prioritise their interests over the well-being of others. This division can fuel social tensions as people fight to maintain their status or claim what they believe they are owed.

2.1.2. The internal causes

According to Buddhist teachings, the major causes of conflict and war lie within the mental activities of each living being. For example, when faced with the threat of physical and verbal harm, we often feel fear, dislike, resentment, anger, or hatred. From this negative mental state, we will resort to violent reactions, and thus, conflicts arise. Similarly, organisations or groups of people will react to situations by establishing policies or laws to protect their interests; this can lead to conflicts. Accordingly, human mental states such as craving, hatred, and delusion are considered by Buddhism as internal causes of conflict and war.

Greed, hatred, and delusion (the three poisons)

Buddhism identifies three primary mental afflictions - greed, hatred, and

⁹ Yeh, T. D. L. (2006). The way to peace: A Buddhist perspective. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11(1), 94. https://www3.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol11_1/11n1Yeh.pdf.

delusion - as the causes leading to suffering and conflict¹⁰. When these mental states are present in individuals or groups, they can drive destructive behaviors:

Greed (*Lobha*): Desire for more than what one needs, whether it be material wealth, power, or control. It leads to competition, exploitation, and a disregard for the well-being of others. When attracted by material desires, their rapaciousness will lead people to acts of appropriation, fighting for property and power, and when their needs are not satisfied, they are prone to violent and antagonistic behavior. People's desire for material and spiritual wealth can easily exceed the necessary level and become greed. The desire to have and possess motivates individuals, groups, and nations to compete to get what they want; conflicts, even wars, can become tools for competing for benefits. In war, greed can manifest as a desire for territorial expansion, resources, or dominance over others, often driving nations or groups into conflict.

Hatred (*Dosa*): Hatred arises from anger, fear, and resentment. It causes people to dehumanise others, viewing them as enemies or threats. Hatred leads to division and violence, making the peaceful resolution of differences nearly impossible. In war, hatred fuels aggression, cruelty, and the desire to destroy or subjugate the perceived enemy, and makes people "blind", causing them to commit violent and cruel acts without seeing the serious consequences.

Hatred is seen by Buddha as the core that leads to harm to others. Anything that causes harm, disturbs the peace of others is a cause of conflict. The Buddha taught: If people want to live a life of absolute happiness without harming themselves, they should begin by avoiding harming others physically and verbally, on an individual level, because people fear physical violence and resent harsh words; and the physical and verbal harm we inflict on others often leads to hatred and conflict, which in turn harms us and robs us of our happiness.

The Buddhist principle of dependent origination crystalizes the injunction of many peace advocates for non-violent interpersonal communication and interaction because they are indispensable to what humans pursue - a happy life. That is, the practice of non-violence in speech and action will ultimately benefit the practitioner¹¹.

Delusion: Misunderstanding reality, clinging to false beliefs, and ego-driven identification can lead to the belief that one's group or nation is superior, justifying harm toward others.

When these negative emotions and beliefs are unchecked, they spread throughout society, often leading to large-scale conflicts.

¹⁰ Le Duc, A. (2017). Greed, hatred, and delusion: The Buddhist diagnosis of the root cause of the ecological crisis. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323979676_Greed_Hatred_and_Delusion_The_Buddhist_Diagnosis_of_the_Root_Cause_of_the_Ecological_Crisis.

¹¹ Yeh, T. D. (2006). The way to peace: A Buddhist perspective. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11 (1), 95.

The intransigence

Intransigence can be seen as an important cause of conflict and war, as it promotes inflexible, uncompromising actions that can easily lead to confrontation. When one side in a conflict or war does not accept the views or interests of the other side, they may make extreme decisions and not seek a peaceful resolution. This increases tensions and leads to an escalation of the conflict. Intransigence can take many forms, such as: i) Extremism: When one side stubbornly defends its views without listening to or acknowledging opposing views, making it more difficult to find a peaceful solution; ii) Nationalism or extreme nationalism: When nations or ethnic groups insist on defending their rights or interests without considering the interests of other groups, it can lead to greater confrontation and conflict; iii) Lack of empathy and understanding: When one party does not understand or accept the other party's situation and feelings, issues cannot be resolved peacefully; iv) History and tradition: Long-standing tensions from history or past damaged relationships can also lead to stubbornness, when parties are unable to overcome the past to achieve harmony.

2.1.3. The root cause

In addition to the external and internal causes, which originate from the spirit, behavior, and structure of conflicts and wars, Buddhism also mentions the root cause that leads to all the suffering caused by conflicts and wars.

The Buddha attributes all our attachments, harmful actions, and suffering to ignorance (*avijja*); that is, we cannot see the world as it is and see ourselves as such¹². We do not know the fact that everything in the world is interrelated and interdependent. Without adopting a Buddhist worldview, we think of ourselves as separate from others as independent entities: Our views are different from theirs; our possessions are certainly not theirs... Thus, we develop our attachment to views and desires through the reinforced concepts of "me" and "mine". We are unfair in our perception of things. We tend to focus on the harm we suffer rather than considering the whole event in its context with all the causes and conditions that facilitated the event to occur.

Ignorance refers to a lack of understanding of the true nature of reality, including the interdependent and interconnected nature of all beings. When people or nations are ignorant of the consequences of their actions or of the shared humanity they have with others, it becomes easier to justify conflict and violence. Ignorance also leads to attachment to self-centered views, fostering a mindset that others are separate or inferior.

Ignorance of the true nature of things makes people susceptible to being deceived by false perceptions, which in turn leads to conflict. When people do not understand each other correctly, nor do they perceive the value of peace and cooperation, they are easily drawn into conflicts and wars. Ignorance

¹² Yeh, T. D. (2006). The way to peace: A Buddhist perspective. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11 (1), 97.

keeps us far from what is happening in a situation and the complex set of conditions surrounding any event; therefore, we lose the ability to assess events properly and respond promptly. Without the insight to distinguish the causes, developments, and impacts of specific events, we will inevitably cause conflicts and harm others as well as ourselves. The main cause of many conflicts between individuals, groups and even wars between nations and ethnic groups is ignorance. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh believes that even wars between states come out of great fear and collective ignorance¹³. This ignorance is what Buddhism identifies as the root cause of violence, conflict, and war, preventing people from living a peaceful life.

2.2. On the perspective of resolving conflicts and wars

According to the Buddha's teachings, to eliminate the causes of conflicts and wars, to build a peaceful world, it is necessary to practise moral values, wisdom, and compassion, in which, maintaining peace and resolving the causes of conflicts and wars are among the most important and artistic actions of the mankind.

2.2.1. Eliminating the hatred

Buddhism does not accept conflicts and wars in any form because war always causes suffering for all parties. In the Dhammapada, the Buddha taught: "Hatred is not overcome by hatred, but only by love. This is an eternal law. This is the eternal truth"¹⁴. If they follow the teachings of the Buddha, people won't have any conflicts with others. The Buddha advises his followers to practise a harmonious way of life (*samācariya*), which brings inner peace with others. The teachings of the Buddha are specifically aimed at preventing and ending conflicts and wars that occur within the minds of people in society. This shows that violence only creates more violence; peace can only be achieved through love and compassion.

Buddha emphasised the cultivation of metta, or loving-kindness, as a way to transcend the divisions that lead to conflict. From a Buddhist point of view, if people practiced metta, they would understand that all beings, regardless of their material wealth, deserve compassion and respect. This perspective could lead to greater peace, reducing the conditions that lead to war and violence driven by inequality and poverty.

According to Vishvapani, "Buddhism is a religion whose doctrinal foundation enables people to realise that the ultimate source of conflict lies in the minds and emotions of the people it involves"¹⁵.

According to Rev. Bingiriye Sunandabodhi, the Buddha advises us to

¹³ Wadigala Samitharathana Thero (2019), "The Buddhist Real Concept of Peace in Theory and Up Wards (Paṭisotagāmi) Practice Which Towards on Philosophical Revelation" in *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences*, 2 (4): 40 - 56, 2019, p. 45.

¹⁴ Vishvapani. (2024, April 16). Ending the Middle East cycle of violence. *Wiseattention.org*. <https://www.wiseattention.org/blog/2024/04/16/ending-the-middle-east-cycle-of-violence/>

¹⁵ *ibid*.

always practise the two concepts in life to protect peace in society. The origin of conflict is due to two characteristics of the mind: The first is sensual pleasure (*Kāmehivisamyuttam*); the second is desire (*Vitatanham*). From the Buddha's teachings, it can be argued that the main cause of the ongoing conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine is due to the sensual desire of the people. As per the Buddha's teaching, when we eliminate desires, war does not arise in the world¹⁶.

2.2.2. Practising the Four Noble Truths

The Buddha's teachings comprises of a wide range of belief systems, started with the Buddha's first preaching, which is often considered the essence of his teachings; that is, the Four Noble Truths (*Catur-aryasatya*), which include: the Noble Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha ariyasacca*), the Noble Truth of Origination (*Samudaya ariyasacca*), the Noble Truth of Cessation (*Nirodha ariyasacca*), the Noble Truth of the Path to Cessation (*Magga ariyasacca*). The first and second truths deal with the causes of conflict and war and the suffering that results, in which: i) Life inevitably involves suffering/ dissatisfaction (*Duhkha-satya*); ii) Suffering/ dissatisfaction originates from craving (*Samudaya-satya*). The third and fourth truths offer the solution towards a peaceful lifestyle and living in peace, in which: iii) Suffering/ dissatisfaction will cease if all cravings cease (*Nirodha-satya*); and iv) This state can be achieved by engaging in the Noble Eightfold Path (*Marga-satya*)¹⁷.

In fact, all Buddhist practices are developed in accordance with the Four Noble Truths; that is, they are designed to help people reduce this suffering and realise a peaceful state of existence at all levels. The Buddhist approach to peace can be classified into four dimensions in the comprehensive/integrative peace model in the field of peace studies, including: Intra-personal, interpersonal, in-group, and inter-group¹⁸.

2.2.3. Practising right mindfulness and right concentration

In Buddhist practice, the Noble Eightfold Path provides a solution to these issues. Right concentration (*samma samadhi*) and right mindfulness (*samma sati*) are two key components that guide the practitioner toward a balanced mental state. However, these should always be complemented by the right view (*samma ditthi*) and the right intention (*samma sankappa*), which focus on the understanding of impermanence, non-self, and the interdependent nature of all beings.

¹⁶ Sunandabodhi, B. (2024). Buddhist mindfulness practices in conflict resolution. *International Journal of Governance and Public Policy Analysis (IJGPPA)*, 6(1), accessed on 6 February 2025, available at: [///C:/Users/ASUS/Downloads/Buddhist+Mindfulness+Practices+in+Conflict+Resolution-1.pdf](#).

¹⁷ Yeh, T. D. (2006). The way to peace: A Buddhist perspective. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11(1), Spring/Summer, p. 97.

¹⁸ Yeh, T. D. (2006). The way to peace: A Buddhist perspective. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11 (1), Spring/Summer, p. 98.

Right concentration is about developing deep meditative states that are free from attachment and delusion.

Right mindfulness helps the practitioner stay present and aware of their thoughts, emotions, and actions, thus preventing harmful mental patterns from escalating into conflict.

When mindfulness and concentration are combined with wisdom and ethical conduct, samadhi can serve as a powerful tool to dissolve the internal causes of conflict and war. By developing insight into the nature of the mind, a person can overcome greed, hatred, and delusion, leading to peace, both internally and externally.

2.2.4. Mastering ourselves

Buddha taught: "Greater in battle than the man who would conquer a thousand-thousand men, is he who would conquer just one - himself"¹⁹, and advised people to seek about themselves, not about others. When people seek others, they tend to start conflicts with them. Therefore, everyone should seek for themselves and eliminate their weaknesses. In daily life, everyone should always think about the responsibilities and duties that they have to do with others. That is also the reason for conflicts. Therefore, the Buddha advised everyone to identify their responsibilities and duties and perform them properly²⁰, and everyone should spread compassion without hating their enemies. To resolve conflicts in a sustainable, long-term way, it is necessary to eliminate our habitual behavioral patterns from the root.

2.2.5. Promoting human rights and social, legal, political, and economic equality

Promoting human rights and social, legal, political, and economic equality of collective structures, not for one's benefit but for the benefit of all, becomes part of the Buddhist mission to eliminate the potential causal forces of violence and peace. Recognising the material need to sustain human life, Buddhism proposes the Middle Way as a criterion for decision-making at all levels of activity and encourages frugality as a positive virtue. The relentless pursuit of economic growth and personal wealth regardless of environmental or ethical consequences is considered inconsistent with the Middle Way because it destroys the balance between consumption and resources, as well as material well-being and spiritual development²¹.

Buddha's philosophy of the Middle Way advocates for a life of moderation, avoiding both extreme poverty and extreme wealth. In the context of poverty and conflict, the Middle Way suggests that materialism and excessive attachment to wealth can be harmful, but so too can the extreme suffering

¹⁹ Thanissaro, B. (Trans.). (1997). *Dhammapada: A translation* (pp. 103-105).

²⁰ Yeh, T. D. (2006). *The way to peace: A Buddhist perspective*. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11 (1), Spring/Summer, p. 95.

²¹ Yeh, T. D. (2006). *The way to peace: A Buddhist perspective*. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 11 (1), Spring/ Summer, p. 95.

of poverty. By striving for balance, people can avoid the negative emotional and social consequences of both extremes, creating a more peaceful and harmonious society.

2.2.6. Promoting the role of political and religious leaders in preventing conflicts and wars

According to the Buddha, political and religious leaders play a very important role in preventing conflicts and wars. A talented and wholehearted leader will propose domestic policies to unite all classes of people and the entire nation; develop the economy, solve employment, improve the material and spiritual life of the people; implement a peaceful and friendly foreign policy, and prevent conflicts and wars. On the contrary, an incompetent leader will lead the country into economic crisis; political parties will fight against each other for power; the society will be divided... and is one of the causes leading to a civil war or being exploited by external forces to make conflicts and wars. Buddha taught that if a leader does not treat others properly, his subordinates will do the same. A good leader will always be an example for everyone to follow, guiding everyone to follow the right path, building a peaceful and happy life, while a bad leader will always find a way to deny responsibility after putting everyone in danger.

2.2.7. Settling disputes and conflicts by peaceful means

The Buddha taught that we should always try to resolve conflicts by inviting people to analyse their mental processes and by using external means of conflict resolution such as arbitration, mediation, and discussion to reach a consensus²². In conflicts and wars, the winner will receive hatred from others, the loser will suffer for his loss. Both suffer in their minds. Accordingly, no one is a winner in war. The Buddha emphasized the importance of overcoming their minds from defilements. Buddhism is fundamentally a peaceful tradition; there is nothing in the Buddhist scriptures that advocates the use of violence as a way to resolve conflicts.

The Buddha's teaching, "I will never cause conflict with others,"²³ is a very philosophical idea. In fact, Buddhism has peacefully spread throughout the world. There has been no bloodshed in the history of Buddhism compared to other religions. If everyone protects their "words, actions and minds", there will never be conflicts. Therefore, according to the Buddha's teachings, protecting the above-mentioned "three doors" means that humanity eliminates conflicts in the world.

II. CONCLUSION

Conflict and war are social phenomena that have existed in the history of

²² Mazza, D. (2021, May 4). How did the Buddha deal with conflicts during his life? A Theravāda perspective. *International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), Thailand*, accessed on 6 February 2025, available at: <http://C:/Users/ASUS/Downloads/HowdidtheBuddhadealwithconflictsduringhislife-2.pdf>.

²³ Sunandabodhi, B. (n.d.), op. cit., p. 11.

mankind's development, manifested in different forms, from interpersonal, inter-group conflicts to conflicts between nations and states. Buddhist philosophy provides valuable insights into the prevention and resolution of conflict and war by emphasizing inner peace, mindfulness, and the elimination of unhealthy mental states, with key principles including the practice of compassion, understanding impermanence, and focusing on one's responsibilities rather than others. Buddhism advocates nonviolence and encourages individuals and societies to seek harmony and consensus through peaceful reconciliation measures, aiming to eliminate all sources of conflict and war for a peaceful and prosperous world.

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HEALING WOUNDS OF MISUNDERSTANDING AND CULTIVATING PEACE: MINDFULNESS-BASED APPROACHES TO FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION IN BUDDHIST THOUGHT

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Abstract:

From individuals to nations, all are entangled in various forms of conflict. While everyone longs for a peaceful life in a harmonious environment, each harbors at least a small degree of misunderstanding. This fosters wounds in the mind and leads to suffering. This article explores the value of prominent Buddhist concepts in training individuals through mindfulness-based approaches to cultivate forgiveness. Reconciliation fosters inner peace, which ultimately contributes to peace in the world. The discussion reveals that despite the profound effectiveness of Buddhist concepts in resolving conflicts, even Buddhist-majority countries have not fully embraced them. The proper application and practice of key Buddhist principles can lead to sustainable peace. However, literature suggests that promoting mindfulness-based practices faces challenges in different cultural contexts. The findings conclude that cultivating peace is a complex endeavor. The greatest obstacle is ignorance, which hinders understanding. A lack of understanding prevents commitment, making forgiveness a distant goal. The absence of forgiveness creates a barrier to reconciliation. To heal the wounds caused by atrocities, the relevant parties must uphold moral and ethical standards. Without proactive efforts, achieving lasting peace will remain an unattainable dream. The article concludes that global efforts to cultivate peace remain insufficient. The practical application of Buddhist principles would establish sustainability in peace and beyond.

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Keywords: *Buddhist thought, forgiveness, mindfulness, peace, reconciliation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Misunderstanding has been a persistent feature of the global community at both micro and macro levels. It is not confined to a single aspect of society; a misunderstanding in economics can escalate into political conflict. Even a minor misunderstanding by an individual can trigger a complex web of conflicts worldwide. Despite ongoing efforts to heal the wounds caused by misunderstandings, achieving lasting global peace remains elusive. It is noteworthy that forgiveness through mindfulness-based approaches is considered the ultimate solution,¹ yet the reality falls far short of expectations.² However, forgiveness is only one path toward reconciliation. Critical questions remain: Who is willing to forgive? In what manner should forgiveness be introduced? Are the concerned parties prepared to accept it? If they do, how should it be implemented? And how can the outcomes of such an effort be effectively measured? These challenges make reconciliation a complex and ongoing process.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are two powerful components of peacebuilding, particularly in post-conflict societies. Numerous nations, civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations (IOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have introduced various peacebuilding efforts to address the root causes of conflict and foster understanding for sustainable peace. In Buddhist thought, forgiveness and reconciliation are not only applicable to global, regional, and international conflicts arising from misunderstandings but also to intra-national conflicts caused by systemic injustices. Moreover, they serve as a means for individuals to heal wounds and cultivate a sustainable way of living.

Forgiveness occurs when the party subjected to harm chooses to subside its anger or hatred toward the offender. This process of releasing resentment or letting go of anger is not a simple psychological transformation, whether it arises at an individual or collective level.³ Reaching this higher state of forgiveness requires significant emotional control. It can serve as an attempt to cease retaliation and dissolve the hatred that fuels conflict.⁴ There are real-world examples demonstrating how reconciliation efforts promote coexistence and establish mutual acceptance.⁵ According to Buddhist philosophy, forgiveness can be cultivated through the practice of compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*). These mental disciplines foster both inner and outer peace,

¹ Frisk (2012), p. 52.

² Deegalle (2006), p. 1 - 21.

³ Exline & Baumeister (2000), p. 133 - 155.

⁴ Lederach (1997), p. 28.

⁵ Clark (2010), p. 220 - 256.

ultimately contributing to harmony from the individual to the global level.⁶

Reconciliation is possible only when forgiveness is genuinely accepted and practiced.⁷ In particular, a higher level of commitment is expected from the party responsible for causing harm in various forms. The restorative justice framework of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa is a widely cited example of this process.⁸ In Buddhist philosophy, reconciliation can be achieved through mindfulness (*sati*) and the principle of interconnectedness (*paṭicca samuppāda*). According to Harvey (2000), mindfulness-based practices play a crucial role in helping both parties foster meaningful engagement, even when past wrongs have been committed.⁹ The concept of interconnectedness (*paṭicca samuppāda*) further supports sustained efforts toward lasting peace and harmony.¹⁰

II. ADDRESSING MISUNDERSTANDING AND CONFLICT: A GLOBAL NECESSITY

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, misunderstandings at interpersonal and societal levels grow, leading to escalating conflicts. Fractured relationships at the micro and meso levels ultimately contribute to large-scale, macro-level conflicts. Interpersonal misunderstandings often stem from miscommunication and a lack of understanding and respect for others. To address these challenges, mindfulness can be used to cultivate awareness and compassion. Those who practice empathetic listening and respond with reason can serve as role models for individuals who act impulsively.¹¹ Mindfulness enables both individuals and groups to shift from misunderstanding to understanding, fostering conflict resolution¹² and promoting interpersonal harmony.¹³

On a macro scale, various historical and contemporary factors have driven many countries into ethnic, religious, geographical, and political conflicts. These divisions stem from an inability to manage diversity effectively. Whether historical or contemporary, such conflicts have invariably resulted in violence and long-term instability. Some of these issues involve systemic injustices that require structural solutions, but true resolution also depends on the psychological and emotional engagement of all involved parties. The concept of interconnectedness (*paṭicca samuppāda*), emphasized in Buddhist thought, offers a path toward reconciliation by encouraging all parties to recognize their shared responsibility in achieving a lasting solution. This approach fosters reconciliation through peaceful dialogue that minimizes misunderstanding.

⁶ Hanh (1991), p. 11.

⁷ Galtung (1969), p. 167 - 191.

⁸ Tutu (1999), p. 1 - 8.

⁹ Harvey (2000), p. 270 - 285.

¹⁰ Bar-Tal (2000), p. 60.

¹¹ Eisenberg et al (2010), p. 143 - 180.

¹² Hanh (1991), p. 111 - 112.

¹³ Rosenberg (2015), p. 133 - 135.

Tutu (1999) highlights the practical value of Buddhist teachings, which were applied in the South African context, albeit in a different form.¹⁴

Global problems have become increasingly interconnected, much like other elements of society, due to misunderstandings propagated by various parties. Media imperialism advances specific agendas worldwide, shaping narratives around particular contexts and conflicts to serve the interests of powerful nations. In the post-globalized era, conflicts have transcended geographical boundaries, evolving into forms of transnational activism. Yet, solutions to mitigate the severity of these issues remain rare. If global authorities seek to develop a universal framework for cultivating peace, mindfulness offers a response to both personal and large-scale challenges. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) can help individuals nurture compassion within themselves and extend it to others. According to Salzberg (1995), this practice reduces hatred and prejudice toward others.¹⁵ To foster global peace and solidarity, the most effective approach is to promote mindfulness training and practice.

III. INTRODUCING KEY BUDDHIST CONCEPTS

Those who explore Buddhist literature will find that its teachings emphasize key concepts that foster reconciliation and forgiveness. Through compelling examples, the Buddha has clearly illustrated how principles such as mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and non-violence (*ahimsā*) can be applied both in theory and practice to address conflicts at both micro and macro levels.

In Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness (*sati*) is one of the foremost concepts to cultivate awareness and understanding. It trains individuals to live fully in the present moment, to be conscious of it, and to act accordingly. *Sati* can be practiced through meditation, helping individuals regulate their thoughts, emotions, and actions with impartiality. Letting go of attachment and abstaining from aversion are two key objectives in the practice of *sati*.¹⁶ When seeking solutions to conflicts, non-judgmental awareness helps identify their root causes. The person who has caused harm gains insight into the suffering experienced by the harmed party. Through deep listening and reflection, they can acknowledge their wrongdoing and cultivate understanding. Hanh (1991) explains that mindfulness is an essential tool for healing wounds caused by misunderstanding and fostering forgiveness.¹⁷ Salzberg (1995) emphasizes that mindfulness plays a crucial role in facilitating effective dialogue, open communication, and the cultivation of goodwill and mutual respect.¹⁸

Compassion (*karuṇā*) enables us to respond to suffering with empathy.

¹⁴ Refer to <https://theinwardturn.com/part-i-the-dalai-lama-and-archbishop-desmond-tutu-on-the-four-qualities-of-the-mind-that-lead-to-joyful-living/>

¹⁵ Salzberg (1995), p. 27.

¹⁶ Kabat-Zinn (1990), p. 22.

¹⁷ Hanh (1991), p. 74 - 77.

¹⁸ Salzberg (1995), p. 11, p. 147.

In Buddhist ethics, this principle is emphasized throughout its discourses. As individuals reflect on their own suffering, they should also recognize the depth of suffering experienced by others. Compassion arises from well-trained mindfulness. When individuals cultivate an awareness of others' suffering, they inevitably develop a sense of interconnectedness (*paṭicca samuppāda*). As a result, pain and suffering are no longer seen as isolated personal experiences but as shared human conditions that must be addressed collectively.¹⁹ In a genuine process of reconciliation and forgiveness, compassion transforms vengeance and hatred into understanding and healing. If the party that caused harm is willing to practice compassion, and the affected party is open to forgiveness, suffering can be systematically alleviated. His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1989) states that this process fosters harmony and well-being for all.²⁰ Bond (2004) illustrates how the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka has successfully integrated compassion to build trust and mutual understanding in a post-conflict setting.²¹

Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) is a fundamental ethical principle in Buddhist practice that prevents harm in both thought and action. It fosters peace by promoting non-harmful approaches to conflict resolution.²² Practicing *ahiṃsā* naturally leads to reconciliation, as individuals committed to non-violence seek to resolve disputes through peaceful dialogue. Moreover, *ahiṃsā* strengthens *karuṇā* (compassion), reinforcing the ethical foundation of non-violence. History provides compelling examples of peacebuilding through *ahiṃsā*. Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent resistance movement, for instance, played a transformative role in achieving positive social change.²³ Another notable example is Sri Lankan Minister J. R. Jayawardena's speech at the San Francisco Conference in 1951, where he powerfully conveyed the Buddhist principle of forgiveness, stating, "Hatred does not cease by hatred but by love alone."

he interrelated and interdependent nature of the three concepts - *sati*, *karuṇā*, and *ahiṃsā* - demonstrates how awareness and understanding of suffering can be approached with empathy to foster peaceful coexistence. This holistic approach utilizes reconciliation and forgiveness to heal the wounds of misunderstanding and cultivate lasting peace.²⁴

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on the fundamental Buddhist concepts mentioned above, this article aims to assess how mindfulness-based approaches foster forgiveness and reconciliation, explore how mindfulness-based practices aid in healing misunderstandings and cultivating peace, and evaluate how mindfulness-based approaches contribute to achieving sustainable lives for humankind.

¹⁹ Harvey (2000), p. 104.

²⁰ Yeh, (2006), p. 97 - 104.

²¹ Bond (2004), p. 83.

²² Harvey (2000), p. 241 - 249, p. 281 - 283.

²³ Bondurant (1988), p. 23 - 25.

²⁴ Hanh (1991), p. 68 - 112.

V. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Key Buddhist literary sources serve as essential references for this article. For instance, selected verses from the *Dhammapada* can illustrate the role of mindfulness in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation. “Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal rule.” (verse 5)²⁵

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya* 10²⁶ highlights how the practice of mindfulness leads to psychological solace and helps individuals abstain from anger. The contemplation of feelings (*Vedanānupassanā*) cultivates emotional balance by observing both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Naturally, individuals tend to become attached to pleasant sensations and develop an aversion toward unpleasant ones. However, balancing attachment and aversion fosters mental clarity. Similarly, the contemplation of the mind (*Cittānupassanā*), which involves understanding anger and hatred, trains individuals to cultivate a balanced mind, laying the foundation for forgiveness.

The *mettā Sutta* in *Sutta Nipāta* 1.8²⁷ is a discourse on loving-kindness (*mettā*), emphasizing how one can cultivate unconditional goodwill toward all beings. For example, the verse, “Let none through anger or ill will wish harm upon another,” illustrates how *mettā* can suppress hostility within individuals and groups. Similarly, the *Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta* in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 5.263²⁸ highlights the significance of mental purification through right action and mindfulness. A highly disciplined mind accelerates the healing process for those who have been harmed, while also overcoming misunderstandings and fostering peace.

The *Sigalovada Sutta* in *Dīgha Nikāya* 31²⁹ serves as a layperson’s code of discipline. While one might argue that the practice of worshipping the six directions (*sadisā namaskāra*) primarily applies to family relationships and beyond, its principles can be extended to broader society. If individuals avoid harmful actions and cultivate mutual respect, reconciliation within families and communities can scale up to society at large. In an interconnected social fabric, understanding one’s duties and responsibilities, as well as how to interact with others, ultimately fosters peaceful coexistence. Another prime example is the *Brahmavihāras* (The Four Immeasurables - *mettā*, *muditā*, *karuṇā*, and *upekkhā*), elaborated in *Visuddhimagga*, Chapter IX.³⁰ This framework illustrates how individuals can cultivate both inner and outer peace through forgiveness and reconciliation.

The primary method employed in this research is textual hermeneutics, which is used to interpret texts and uncover meanings, particularly the linguistic

²⁵ The *Dhammapada* (2003), p. 22.

²⁶ Kusala, Bhante (2014), p. 31 - 33.

²⁷ Bodhi (2005), p. 90, p. 131 and p. 134.

²⁸ Chen & Chen (2005), p. 100 - 103.

²⁹ Walshe (1995), p. 461 - 469

³⁰ Ñāṇamoli (2010), p. 291 - 320.

nuances expressed both directly and indirectly.³¹ This method has been associated with various philosophers, including Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. In the present context, textual hermeneutics is essential because texts can be read and understood in multiple ways. In a global and pluralistic world, interpreting texts is a complex task. It is crucial to identify and contextualize relevant Buddhist texts that discuss mindfulness, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Buddhist scriptures are rich in symbolic meanings, and this research seeks to uncover the metaphorical dimensions of discourses related to healing misunderstandings.

Relevant extracts from Buddhist literature on conflict resolution and emotional healing have been selected for analysis. By examining specific words and phrases, both the explicit and implicit meanings of the texts can be uncovered. The narratives within these texts illustrate how individuals or groups should regulate their behavior and guide others in doing the same. Buddhist teachings are deeply interconnected with modern social and psychological issues. The mindfulness-based practices found in Buddhist literature can be effectively applied in contemporary peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.

VI. RESULTS

6.1. Buddhist approaches to forgiveness and reconciliation

Forgiveness and reconciliation, as emphasized in Buddhist literature, are essential for achieving peace and harmony. While forgiveness begins as a personal act, it becomes a crucial element in fostering peace as it extends into social networks. According to Rahula (1974), suffering arises from uncontrolled thoughts, leading to attachment, anger, hatred, ignorance, and fear.³² Forgiveness plays a central role in cultivating self-control, ultimately leading to personal liberation while also enabling others to experience the same freedom.

According to Buddhism, all harmful acts stem from ignorance (*avidyā*) - a lack of awareness regarding the gravity of one's actions and their consequences. Therefore, it is emphasized that individuals should cultivate compassion (*karuṇā*).³³ It is only after witnessing the consequences that the individual or group responsible for harm realizes the full impact of their actions. By understanding the root causes of harm, individuals can take appropriate steps for reparation based on the severity of their actions. Buddhism consistently highlights compassion as a transformative force in alleviating psychological suffering and fostering conflict resolution.

Mindfulness (*sati*) enables individuals to regulate emotions and enhance self-awareness, fostering the ability to release anger and cultivate forgiveness.³⁴ Meditation supports the development of non-judgmental attitudes and helps

³¹ Rogers (1993), p. 1 - 4.

³² Rahula (1974), p. 16 - 28.

³³ Harvey (2000), p. 103 - 109.

³⁴ Kabat-Zinn (1990, p. 151 - 159).

create a peaceful environment conducive to reconciliation. Bartholomeusz (2002) raises concerns about the underutilization of Buddhist mindfulness practices in post-conflict Sri Lanka.³⁵ These practices could have been integrated into community healing programs to mitigate ethnic tensions arising from distrust and misunderstanding.

The Buddhist concept of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*) teaches that all living beings are interconnected, and conflicts arise as a result of this interdependence. While conflicts may appear to have individual origins, they are often the product of collective actions. Therefore, finding solutions through collective efforts is more effective than individuals attempting to resolve conflicts in isolation. However, this does not diminish the importance of individual efforts. Vinh Tho (2021) highlights the non-violent activism of the Cambodian monk Maha Ghosananda, who organized peace marches to demonstrate how collective action can drive social and psychological transformation.³⁶

The greatest threat to an individual is their ego. For most people, controlling their ego is extremely challenging. When desires go unchecked, individuals may lose awareness of their behavioral limits. All negative thoughts stem from an uncontrolled ego. The Buddhist concept of non-self (*anattā*) guides individuals away from attachment to desires. The stronger the attachment, the greater the suffering. Therefore, detachment from unnecessary desires is key to mastering the mind. Practicing letting go allows individuals to gain deeper understanding, leading to self-liberation and harmonious coexistence with others.³⁷

Significant community practices in the Buddhist world highlight rituals that foster forgiveness and reconciliation. One such practice is the Pavāraṇā Ceremony, marking the end of the monks' rain retreat. It provides an opportunity for monks to confess offenses, discuss each other's behavior, and seek or grant forgiveness, promoting harmony within the clergy.³⁸ This ceremony is not merely a religious tradition but also a purification act aligned with the monastic code. Another notable example is the Tibetan Buddhist practice of *tonglen* (sending and taking) meditation, which cultivates empathy and forgiveness. Practitioners visualize inhaling the suffering of others and exhaling relief, fostering compassion for both themselves and others.³⁹

6.2. Mindfulness as a tool for healing in Buddhism

As discussed, mindfulness is a crucial tool for healing in Buddhism. Those who genuinely practice it can transform their lives by recognizing misunderstandings, regulating emotions, and letting go of anger. As a

³⁵ Bartholomeusz (2002), p. 136 - 166.

³⁶ Vinh Tho (2021), p. 414 - 436.

³⁷ Whitehead et al (2018), p. 1 - 12.

³⁸ Refer to <https://www.wisdomlib.org/concept/pavarana>.

³⁹ Drolma (May 28, 2019), p. 4.

fundamental principle in mainstream Buddhist practices, mindfulness fosters self-awareness and plays a key role in restoring both interpersonal and intercommunal harmony by healing psychological wounds.

Lord Buddha, in his discourses, emphasized the importance of right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), a key element of the Noble Eightfold Path. Practicing right mindfulness enables individuals to overcome ignorance and misunderstanding.⁴⁰ It fosters self-awareness, helping individuals recognize their perceptions and correct misunderstandings. If doubts arise, they should be questioned and clarified; otherwise, misunderstandings may continue to grow. Open communication plays a crucial role in preventing conflicts - when people are willing to talk through their misunderstandings, they can resolve issues before they escalate.⁴¹

Mindfulness also plays a crucial role in emotional regulation. When one's observations are judgmental, their thoughts and emotions may be tainted by negativity. However, by cultivating a non-judgmental perspective, individuals free themselves from harmful thoughts and emotions. Whether one develops anger or hatred depends on how they perceive others' actions and behaviors. A non-judgmental attitude fosters patience and equanimity (*upekkha*). In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 10), the Buddha describes three types of feelings (*vedanā*): pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral - arising from our perceptions. By balancing perceptions, individuals can cultivate pleasant feelings and maintain emotional stability.⁴² Additionally, Soma Thera (2003) explains that mindfulness can even be extended to bodily postures (moving, standing, sitting, lying down), helping individuals regulate their temperament.⁴³

Furthermore, mindfulness plays a crucial role in dissolving resentment. It enables individuals to recognize grudges and resentment as root causes of suffering. By letting go of these negative emotions, one can gradually reduce the intensity of their suffering. If an individual learns to control grudges, they can also extend forgiveness to those who have harbored resentment. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 21), the Buddha used the parable of the saw to illustrate this point, emphasizing that even in the face of mistreatment, one should not succumb to anger but instead cultivate loving-kindness. This teaching underscores how mindfulness helps regulate resentment and anger, ultimately preventing harm to oneself and others.⁴⁴ Similarly, in the *Mettā Sutta* (*Sutta Nipāta* 1.8), the Buddha highlights the transformative power of loving-kindness in overcoming ill will. "Let none deceive another, / Or despise any being in any state. / Let none through anger or ill-will / Wish harm upon another. / Even as a mother protects with her life / Her child, her only child, / So with a boundless heart / Should one cherish all living beings;

⁴⁰ Bodhi (2010), p. 75 - 92.

⁴¹ Walshe (1995), p. 335 - 350.

⁴² Analayo (2003), p. 41 - 43.

⁴³ Soma (1998): XXIV.

⁴⁴ Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 217 - 223.

Radiating kindness over the entire world: “Spreading upwards to the skies,/ And downwards to the depths;/ Outwards and unbounded, Freed from hatred and ill-will.” (source: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/khp/khp.9.amar.html>)

Based on the understanding developed so far, mindfulness in Buddhist teachings serves as a powerful tool for healing wounds caused by misunderstanding. First, it enables individuals to recognize and correct misunderstandings. Then, it helps regulate emotions, and finally, it dissolves resentment, fostering forgiveness and peace. An exemplary case of mindfulness-driven reconciliation is found in post-genocide Cambodia, where the Buddhist monk Maha Ghosananda organized peace marches in war-torn regions to promote healing and forgiveness. The genocide left behind immense devastation, making national reconciliation imperative. The annual *Dhammayietra* (Pilgrimage of Truth) provided a shared platform for survivors, monks, and other community members to come together, discuss their suffering, and seek solutions. Through the principles of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), Maha Ghosananda played a pivotal role in fostering peace and reconciliation among the affected communities.⁴⁵

The ethno-national conflict in Sri Lanka lasted nearly three decades, leaving deep-rooted distrust between the two main ethnic communities. Even after the conflict ended, this distrust has remained unresolved. The Sarvodaya Shramadāna Movement in Sri Lanka sought to apply Buddhist principles to rebuild faith and trust among communities. Kelly (2023) explains how the movement organized community meditation sessions and interfaith dialogues to cultivate forgiveness.⁴⁶ Participants engaged in various activities, such as forgiveness ceremonies, to express their commitment to peace. These collective rituals brought together former combatants and civilians, fostering reconciliation.

Zen Peacemakers organize and conduct various programs to foster understanding between different parties and promote coexistence. Their peace-building initiatives have taken place in Palestine, Israel, Poland, the United States, and many other countries. This movement seeks to heal the emotional wounds of people suffering from conflicts, diseases, or personal hardships. They provide support to immigrants, war victims, AIDS patients, prisoners, and the poor in both rural and urban areas.⁴⁷ These efforts across diverse geographical regions demonstrate how Buddhist mindfulness practices can be applied to alleviate collective trauma and facilitate individual emotional healing through compassionate understanding.

Tibetan communities displaced by the Chinese occupation have turned to traditional Buddhist practices to cope with trauma and loss. *Tonglen* meditation trains individuals to embrace the suffering of others while cultivating

⁴⁵ Vinh Tho (2021), p. 414 - 436.

⁴⁶ Refer to <https://wkelly1-19385.medium.com/the-sarvodaya-movement-7bd352ff071a>.

⁴⁷ Garfinkel (2006), p. 34 - 35.

compassion. Through the practice of breathing in the pain of others and breathing out kindness, practitioners learn to dissolve anger and resentment toward wrongdoers while simultaneously purifying their hearts and minds.⁴⁸

A review of reconciliation efforts discussed in the available literature provides substantial evidence that mindfulness-based practices have successfully fostered reconciliation and harmony through forgiveness. Mindfulness, compassion, and forgiveness have transformed the lives of millions, benefiting both those who have suffered and those who empathize with victims, regardless of differences. Practitioners of meditation and loving-kindness (*mettā*) exercises often experience emotional detachment, a crucial realization in reducing and releasing anger, resentment, and grudges. Analayo (2003) highlights the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* as an example of how mindful observation of thoughts and emotions can help dissolve negative feelings.⁴⁹ The outcomes of such practices include reduced psychological suffering, relief from emotional distress, and personal healing from anxiety, stress, depression, and trauma.

Mindfulness practices play a crucial role in restoring both interpersonal and community trust. The *Mettā Sutta* teaches how individuals can cultivate unconditional, wholesome feelings toward others. Forgiving those who have caused harm is essential in rebuilding trust between conflicting parties. Nānamoli and Bodhi (1995) assert that such behavior can reduce hostility and foster harmony through mutual understanding.⁵⁰ Reestablishing trust among conflicting groups is a challenging endeavor, but when achieved through genuine dialogue and cooperation, it can bring immense benefits to fragmented communities and their members.

Mindfulness has the power to reduce retaliatory and aggressive behavior by promoting positive and practical responses to challenging situations. It cultivates equanimity, the highest psychological state of balance. A clear understanding of circumstances diminishes the desire for revenge and prevents verbal or physical retaliation. When individuals mindfully observe their thoughts, emotions, and actions, they recognize the futility of irrational behavior. Practicing self-awareness enables them to regulate their mind (thoughts), body (actions), and speech (words), ultimately fostering self-restraint. By mastering these aspects, individuals can minimize harmful actions and maintain exemplary conduct in all situations.

The *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* exemplifies how boundless love can extend to all human beings. Love cultivated through mindfulness-based practices strengthens compassion - not only for others but also for oneself - through forgiveness and deep understanding. When individuals embrace empathy and a shared sense of humanity, they foster meaningful connections by genuinely understanding others. Community-based mindfulness activities, such as meditation and rituals mentioned in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, contribute

⁴⁸ Halifax (n.d), p. 1 - 12. Refer to <https://www.upaya.org/dox/Tonglen.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Analayo (2003), p. 67 - 91.

⁵⁰ Nānamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 405 - 414.

to collective healing.⁵¹ These collective efforts help restore harmony, reinforce social bonds, and empower resilience within communities. By transforming thoughts, actions, and speech, individuals lay the foundation for long-term peace through ethical behavior. Furthermore, striving to practice the Noble Eightfold Path serves as a structured approach to cultivating moral conduct and sustaining inner and outer harmony.⁵²

VII. DISCUSSION

By examining examples from the present global context, we can analyze how Buddhist mindfulness-based practices contribute to achieving forgiveness. Individuals who engage in Buddhist mindfulness exercises develop self-awareness and compassion, making it easier for them to cultivate empathy while suppressing harmful thoughts and emotions. Buddhist teachings emphasize living in the present moment, discouraging attachment to the past or future. If an individual practices non-attachment, they can free themselves from anger and hatred.⁵³ Staub et al. (2005) illustrate how mindfulness-based interventions were implemented in Rwanda to help genocide victims cope with trauma and loss.⁵⁴

In the Christian context, forgiveness is regarded as a divine command and a moral obligation.⁵⁵ Tutu (1999) highlights that South Africa's restorative justice model, as implemented by the TRC, integrated Christian ideals of confession.⁵⁶ Furthermore, psychological studies can incorporate Buddhist mindfulness principles to shape thoughts that influence emotions. When individuals reflect on their successes, they feel pride, whereas dwelling on failures leads to sadness. This aligns with the saying, "What you think, you become." Both rational and irrational thinking can significantly impact an individual's well-being, either positively or negatively.⁵⁷

7.1. How to overcome misunderstanding

According to Buddhist philosophy, three key components help individuals overcome misunderstanding: self-awareness, empathy, and non-attachment. Mindfulness-based practices play a crucial role in fostering forgiveness and resolving misunderstandings. Self-awareness enhances one's ability to reflect on thoughts and behavior, while empathy develops through recognizing others' suffering. Non-attachment, in turn, arises from learning to let go of unnecessary desires.⁵⁸

Self-awareness enables individuals to understand their emotional states and thought processes. People naturally develop biases based on the societal

⁵¹ Walshe (1995), p. 231 - 278.

⁵² Bodhi (2010), p. 43 - 60.

⁵³ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 144 - 156.

⁵⁴ Staub, et al (2005), p. 297 - 334.

⁵⁵ Worthington (2006), p. 17.

⁵⁶ Tutu (1999), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Enright & Fitzgibbons (2015), p. 15 - 29.

⁵⁸ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 144 - 156.

differences they encounter, which can lead to various challenges in social interactions. Fundamental factors such as language, religion, and ethnicity often act as catalysts for conflicts on a global scale. Salomon (2014) highlights numerous examples of persistent conflicts worldwide.⁵⁹ The longstanding tensions between Palestinians and Israelis, the Hindu-Muslim divide in India, the Protestant-Catholic strife in Northern Ireland, and the Serb-Croat conflict in Bosnia have not only disrupted regional peace and harmony but have also had global ramifications. To address such conflicts, numerous peace education initiatives have been launched by churches, religious institutions, NGOs, and governments, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness as a means to foster peace, reconciliation, and harmony.

Self-awareness naturally leads to empathy. Those who cultivate empathy can perceive, understand, and, most importantly, feel the suffering of others. This level of understanding is crucial, as it requires individuals to free themselves from biases and judgments. Throughout history, prejudice and misjudgment have contributed to countless personal and societal conflicts. Developing compassion for oneself and others is essential for fostering forgiveness.⁶⁰ Shonin et al. (2013) highlight the impact of mindfulness programs in American prisons.⁶¹ These programs have helped inmates develop empathy, recognize the consequences of their actions, and reduce aggressive behavior, ultimately improving their interpersonal relationships.

Self-awareness also fosters non-attachment. By cultivating non-attachment, individuals can control resentment and grudges. When one recognizes the irrationality of their thoughts, they begin to see the futility of their actions and emotions. Staub et al. (2005) describe how Rwandan genocide survivors were trained in mindfulness practices.⁶² These participants learned to let go of painful experiences and memories, with a significant outcome being their willingness to forgive those who had harmed them. Holding onto anger cultivates negative emotions while embracing forgiveness nurtures positive ones. Through positive emotions, forgiveness aids in healing wounds and fosters an environment conducive to reconciliation.

7.2. The limitations and challenges of mindfulness-based practices

There are diverse global contexts in which mindfulness practices can be integrated. However, limitations and challenges have restricted the integration of mindfulness-based practices in reconciliation processes. One major challenge is the misalignment between religious and cultural perspectives. However, Buddhist mindfulness practices have not been widely accepted or applied in societies where Christianity or Islam is prevalent.⁶³ In these religious traditions, forgiveness is considered a divine command. Therefore, believers

⁵⁹ Salomon (2014), p. 1132 - 1141.

⁶⁰ Hofmann et al (2011), p. 1126 - 1132.

⁶¹ Shonin et al (2013), p. 194.

⁶² Staub et al (2005), p. 297 - 334.

⁶³ Worthington (2006), p. 135.

in these religious traditions tend to perceive Buddhist practices as conflicting with their value systems. Tutu (1999) mentions that the TRC in South Africa employed Christian values of confession and redemption that focus on collective healing.⁶⁴ It has not directly incorporated Buddhist mindfulness-based practices.

Buddhist mindfulness-based practices tend to be individualistic. Individuals are responsible for empowering their mental capacity to understand reality and act positively by reducing incorrect thoughts and feelings.⁶⁵ However, many cultures opt for collective approaches in which communities take part in healing processes, rather than individuals. According to Murithi (2006), African communities prefer to have communal healing programs where reciprocal responsibility is expected of the participants.⁶⁶ The notion behind such a practice can be twofold. The first is the belief that addressing systemic injustices requires more than individual commitments. The second is that communal engagement can be more powerful than individual approaches.

Secularization is another challenge for Buddhist mindfulness-based practices in contemporary society.⁶⁷ The traditional ethical and philosophical approach of these practices does not suit contemporary contexts. For example, in a world where spiritual practices have been commodified, it is impossible to achieve the effect of in-depth engagement in powerful mental exercises. Therefore, workshops or other activities often introduce more secular approaches to reconciliation in order to encourage forgiveness. As a result, these organized activities often exhibit more flamboyance and reverence, resembling a new tradition.

The global context has developed various legal frameworks and institutions to punish wrongdoers. It is firmly believed that perpetrators should be brought to justice. Compensation and reparation alone are not sufficient. Contemporary law assumes that punishments should be imposed, without simply “letting go” of criminal or anti-humanitarian actions. Accountability is one of the most debated concepts in contemporary discussions. Some crimes committed against humanity can never be forgiven, and it is extremely difficult to expect victims or their families to simply forgive such atrocities. International organizations (IOs) and NGOs emphasize legal justice and negotiable levels of accountability, rather than focusing on personal healing. Staub (2006) questions the validity and practicality of meeting urgent and serious demands related to these issues.⁶⁸

7.3. International peacebuilding efforts for sustainable development

If the global community is striving towards long-term and sustainable

⁶⁴ Tutu (1999), p. 1 and p. 5.

⁶⁵ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 144 - 156.

⁶⁶ Murithi (2006), p. 25 - 34.

⁶⁷ Purser (2019), p. 22.

⁶⁸ Staub (2006), p. 867 - 894.

peacebuilding efforts, then the relevant authorities must develop realistic frameworks. These frameworks can aim at individual healing, group activities, and large-scale societal movements.

Mindfulness-based approaches can play a crucial role in fostering long-term peacebuilding efforts. The sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives should be the primary goal of each framework. Although the TRC in Africa relied on Christian practices of forgiveness, the activities they initiated to promote restorative justice were aligned with Buddhist principles of forgiveness and healing.⁶⁹ In the process, both perpetrators and victims gained a better understanding of their situations and reflected on the activities to foster mutual understanding. The empathy developed by perpetrators for the victims, along with the victims' readiness to forgive the wrongdoings, contributed to the success of the reconciliation process.⁷⁰

In the Rwandan context, mindfulness-based interventions were effective in many ways.⁷¹ The interventions were impressive in healing the suffering and horrors experienced by survivors. The systematic use of mindfulness-based approaches was also able to promote forgiveness toward the perpetrators. This contributed to the reintegration of different communities in post-genocide Rwanda. The cycle of violence and revenge was controlled, helping to establish social order. One of the critical success factors was the ability to emphasize non-attachment to past grievances, which greatly contributed to achieving sustainability in forgiveness and reconciliation. If the victims and perpetrators had remained attached to the trauma generated by those historical events, the sustainability of the peace process would have been futile.

7.4. Addressing structural injustice through mindfulness

Mindfulness is not only limited to healing the suffering of the individual but also to addressing systemic injustices. Sustainable Development Goal number 16 is "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions".⁷² In the global context, peace is violated, justice is absent, and poor institutions are the result of systemic issues. Peacebuilding frameworks can integrate mindfulness approaches worldwide to propagate peace, promote justice, and empower strong institutions.

As an example, there are many illegal immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, marginalized groups, and victims of human trafficking around the globe. In both home and host countries, many individuals suffer from various psychological conditions. To address these conditions, mindfulness-based activities can be organized. Wadi (2023) has begun research to investigate how mindfulness practices can be used in Myanmar to ease ethnic

⁶⁹ Tutu (1999), p. 1.

⁷⁰ Staub (2006), p. 867 - 894.

⁷¹ Staub et al (2005), p. 297 - 334.

⁷² United Nations (2015): Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UN. Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> Accessed on 25 January 2025

tensions caused by historical grievances between diverse ethnic groups.⁷³ These practices can help individuals understand the wrongs they have committed, the consequences, and how empathy can reduce violence.

However, to achieve the expected results, mindfulness practices should be integrated into policies to address the injustices prevailing in the social system. If one believes that mindfulness can quickly resolve all economic, political, and cultural issues, that is an impractical notion.⁷⁴ It can only help individuals and groups support their efforts to reach desired goals by addressing psychological barriers such as distrust, trauma, and fear.

7.5. Promoting global cooperation for sustainable development

At present, countries are fighting against each other or forming alliances to safeguard their economic, political, and military interests. At the same time, many countries seek to address issues collectively, such as global harmony, climate change, transnational terrorism, poverty, nuclear warfare, and sustainability in development. As a result, the world finds itself in a conundrum between togetherness and separation. Those who aspire to address these issues collectively can benefit from mindfulness-based interventions. Mindfulness-based activities can cultivate mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation. During the global COVID-19 pandemic, countries set aside their national interests and sought common solutions to minimize harm. Alex (2017) mentions a similar situation during the Paris Agreement on climate change, where collective well-being was prioritized over national interests.⁷⁵

Similarly, when trying to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), international organizations (IOs) are working to integrate and collaborate with governments to empower collective responsibility. The ultimate aim of the SDGs is to promote the well-being of humankind and ensure good governance by governments. From local-level governments, IOs, INGOs, and NGOs can integrate mindfulness practices into development strategies, fostering the right understanding (*sammā-ditṭhi*), empathy, loving-kindness (*mettā*), and interconnectedness (*paṭicca samuppāda*). If people understand the primary objectives of the development initiatives they are part of, their contributions can be given unconditionally. This will not only lead to material development but also enhance psychological, emotional, environmental, and overall social well-being.

The examples from South Africa, Myanmar, and Rwanda are just a few. Similar mindfulness-based interventions can be applied to other countries facing similar issues. Efforts starting at the individual level can be developed into sub-national, national, regional, and global levels to establish mutual

⁷³ Wadi (2023): *A Mindfulness Approach in Fostering Peace and Harmony in Myanmar*, a dissertation proposal submitted to Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Ayutthaya, Thailand.

⁷⁴ Purser (2019), p. 25 - 27.

⁷⁵ Alex (2017), p. 149 - 157.

understanding, respect, and cooperation. Thus, global peacebuilding activities that promote open communication, empathy, and healing will contribute to achieving sustainable development at the global level. These activities will subsequently enhance peace, equality, and equity through strong institutions.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The article tries to echo the ideas mentioned by His Holiness Dalai Lama (1989)⁷⁶:

“It is not enough to be compassionate; you must act. There are two aspects to action. One is to overcome the distortions and afflictions of your mind, which means calming and eventually dispelling fear. This is an action born of compassion. The other is more social, more public. When something needs to be done in the world to rectify wrongs, if one is truly concerned with benefiting others, one must be engaged and involved.”

Buddhist forgiveness and mindfulness-based reconciliation: All the Buddhist concepts discussed in this article are critical in achieving peace. Achieving peace is not a simple process; it requires a deep understanding of these concepts, how they can be applied in different social contexts, the various types of commitments people should make, and how to secure both personal and collective goals. According to Buddhist teachings, one should be able to free oneself from all suffering and attain inner peace.⁷⁷ Mindfulness is the fundamental principle through which all can cultivate proper behavior.⁷⁸

As Hanh (1999) says, mindfulness can strengthen one's self-control by rationalizing one's behavior, rather than acting on irrational thoughts.⁷⁹ It is understanding that forms the foundation of all rational or irrational behavior. Proper understanding will foster a positive environment for all, whereas misunderstanding will create the extreme opposite. A negative environment leads to the evils or vices that an individual may commit. Mindfulness, at this juncture, is important because it helps individuals or groups to discourage impulsive behavior.

The general public believes that releasing anger is sometimes beneficial because it helps an individual calm down, but the issue lies in how anger is released. If anger is released harmlessly, that is, through proper understanding, then there is space for healing. Reconciliation, as a result of a compassionate response, restores interpersonal, inter-group, and inter-ethnic relationships. However, it is more a transformation of the individual's personality. Both the perpetrator and the victim should benefit from mindfulness-based activities. If empathetic understanding is developed toward the victims, then collective well-being will follow.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Refer to <https://ecodharma.com/articles-influences-audio/engaged-buddhism>.

⁷⁷ Gethin (1998), p. 79 - 84.

⁷⁸ Kabat-Zinn (1990), p. 22 - 30.

⁷⁹ Hanh (1999), p. 61 - 81.

⁸⁰ Dalai Lama (2020), p. 113.

If one adheres to genuine Buddhist practices, building peace within oneself and in the world is not that difficult. As mentioned throughout this article, the fundamental principles of *sati*, *ahimsa*, *mettā*, and *Karuṇā* can lift anyone or any group from their distraught psychological conditions. If people are ready to let go of all their differences, accept others, and respect diversity, then inclusivity is automatically practiced. In such a harmonious world, sustainability would not be an issue. According to the Dalai Lama (2020), the cultivation of *silā* (moral conduct) will establish harmony at both the individual and social levels.⁸¹

Buddhist approaches to peacebuilding, inclusivity, and sustainable development

According to Buddhist philosophy, inner peace is vital for outer peace. All individual efforts with *mettā*, *karuṇā*, and *sati* help the individual maintain interpersonal relationships in their environment. These practices can then be extended to group and social levels. Thus, individual efforts will foster the collective well-being of society.⁸² This interrelatedness and understanding of collective goals will help people and the world address the complex challenges facing humanity.⁸³

Apart from that, mindfulness-based approaches facilitate peacebuilding in general by helping people understand the actions that follow their emotions and thoughts. These approaches will eventually assist in problem-solving and decision-making processes. Traditionally, development had been measured solely by economic indices, but now the world recognizes the norms and values attached to it. As a result, moral and spiritual capital in development efforts has been recognized as a vital component in the contemporary context.⁸⁴ Buddhist philosophy can play a critical role in shaping the moral and spiritual capital in development processes worldwide.

Sustainability in the world can be viewed from different dimensions. The world has already witnessed the devastation caused by lopsided development drives. Sustainability primarily focuses on the depletion of natural resources and how to ensure their fair use. However, the attention given to the depletion of moral and spiritual capital - factors that have shaped current environmental issues and numerous conflicts - remains minimal. The empowerment of moral and spiritual qualities through Buddhist concepts can foster a better world in which to live.

People have been extracting resources without understanding the harm they are causing to nature and humans. Similarly, people have been wasting their inner potential without using it properly, thereby harming themselves and others. The understanding of impermanence (*anicca*) will help people realize that exploiting human potential and natural resources in an unsystematic

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Hanh (1999), p. 165.

⁸³ Bonnedahl et al (2022), p. 150 - 158.

⁸⁴ Goleman (2003), p. 163 - 164.

manner leads to the downfall of both humanity and the world. Thus, it is people who are harming both nature and humanity.⁸⁵

Further explorations into other dimensions

Buddhist peacebuilding efforts can foster sustainability through peace and justice. Different nations and international organizations (IOs) can conduct studies to explore ways to ease various types of tensions in the world. In societies where conflicts have occurred or are ongoing, mindfulness-based approaches can be used to promote conflict resolution, regulate positive emotional interventions, and control social unrest or tensions.⁸⁶ According to Siegel (2010), mindfulness has been shown to reduce aggression and empower reconciliation⁸⁷. Therefore, in different cultural and social contexts, mindfulness-based practices can be implemented to introduce peace and harmony.

Buddhist peacebuilding efforts can be compared with those of other major religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. The cultural traditions of indigenous people can also be explored. In harnessing a more inclusive and sustainable approach, similar aspects can be shared to facilitate the peacebuilding process.⁸⁸ Non-violence practiced in Buddhism and forgiveness in Christianity can be combined to create a cross-cultural approach, as Tutu (1999) mentioned in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the South African context.⁸⁹ Research should be initiated to examine the successes and failures of Buddhist peacebuilding efforts implemented in post-conflict societies such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Cambodia. Gombrich (2006) believes that the introduction of Buddhist practices into reconciliation processes can restore harmony by reducing inter-group tensions.⁹⁰

Social justice, established and strengthened by mindfulness practices, can trigger development at all levels, including social, personal, and environmental sustainability. Marginalized communities, subaltern groups, differently-abled individuals, scheduled tribes or castes, and even migrant minorities can be supported to contribute to development. Strong community-building efforts can promote equity, equality, and justice in various forms.⁹¹ Perera (2017) also claims that social inclusion can be a vital element for vulnerable communities to integrate into mainstream society.⁹²

Economic models practiced in the current context are motivated by revenue generation and mass-scale profits. Therefore, the world needs to explore Buddhist economic models that can facilitate sustainability through

⁸⁵ Hanh (2007), p. 33.

⁸⁶ Kabat-Zinn (1990), p. 30.

⁸⁷ Siegel (2010), p. 50.

⁸⁸ Lederach (1997), p. 73 - 86.

⁸⁹ Tutu (1999), p. 6.

⁹⁰ Gombrich (2006), p. 146 - 154.

⁹¹ Hanh (1999), p. 417 - 423.

⁹² Perera (2017). Refer to <https://www.ivint.org/social-inclusion-social-integration/>.

collective well-being. High-quality service provision with lower profits and reduced exploitation should be the priority of such a model. Simplicity, care, and control over excessive attachment to material wealth should be the key features of a sustainable economic model.⁹³ Studies should focus on how Buddhist values can be integrated into the economy to promote responsible consumption and ethical standards.⁹⁴

Incorporating Buddhist insights into a common global solution: Recognizing and providing the correct value to each Buddhist concept significantly contributes to the promise of a sustainable, global society. As everything is interconnected, individual well-being is linked to the well-being of others. This interconnectedness promotes the notion of shared responsibility, convincing us that we must move away from self-centeredness and view global problems through the lens of empathy.⁹⁵ Training the mind to control violence, aggressive behavior, and atrocities committed against others is crucial for achieving reconciliation or creating the environment necessary for it. In this context, the value of Buddhist teachings serves as a force that helps liberate individuals and groups.

It is due to the clarity and compassion developed in the mind of the individual that they can face challenging situations. Those whose composure is extremely high can contribute positively to bringing reconciliation to the world.⁹⁶ The continued practice of Buddhist principles promotes awareness. Proper awareness controls violence, misunderstanding, and conflicts. The power of Buddhist principles to address the root causes of conflict through understanding paves the way for collective responsibility. Ignorance is the key to almost all the issues of the world. Countering ignorance transforms the thought processes of the individual, where mutual respect is established. Therefore, integrating all Buddhist concepts into our day-to-day living ultimately results in achieving the need of the hour – sustainability.

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⁹³ Hanh (2007), p. 87 - 94.

⁹⁴ Daniels (2007), p. 155 - 180.

⁹⁵ Dalai Lama. Refer to <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/world-peace/a-human-approach-to-world-peace>.

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CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS THROUGH FORGIVENESS: LESSON FROM BUDDHIST EDUCATION FOR A COHESIVE FUTURE

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Abstract:

It will be deep strategies for harmony and cohesion in this increasingly interconnected and divided world by mindfulness and forgiveness. The following paper explores the teaching of Buddhist education as a transformative lesson to help build a cohesive future. Founded on core principles of Buddhism, it probes into how mindfulness as a present-moment awareness intersects with forgiveness, a virtue that dissolves resentment and facilitates reconciliation. Such principles are applied through educational methods toward developing emotional resilience, compassion, and social coherence.

The study discusses case studies and contemporary Buddhist-inspired mindfulness and forgiveness practices in schools that aim at behavior change for the common good. This research reveals results reflecting the possibility of mindfulness and forgiveness being utilized in handling matters concerning the world, including issues like conflict resolution, mental health, and social fracture.

The findings call for education that does not follow the lines of mere scholasticism but instead for inner peace, subjective responsibility, and mutual harmony. The paper envisions Buddhist insights into reconstructing the premise of education. It provides practical solutions to create a more empathetic and compassionate society under the relevance of ancient wisdom amid modern challenges.

Keywords: *Forgiveness, patience, loving-kindness, mindfulness, compassion, Buddhist ethics.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness and forgiveness are the two most essential constructs in developing emotional well-being and social connection, especially in a learning context. New evidence from research studies reveals that these constructs are significantly related to psychological disorders in both student and teacher groups. For instance, one of the pieces in *Psychological Medicine* is an attempt to measure whether one can use one's ability to ruminate about anger to reduce it as a method for self-forgiveness.¹ According to the research, mindfulness will enable one to have control over emotional responses, thus further developing their ability to forgive others and enhancing relationships and mental health.²

The mediating effects of mindfulness training on the relationship between a college course and emotional regulation support further studies about the role of mindfulness in developing forgiveness. Research points out the idea that mindfulness training will have high levels of reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms, often contributing to difficulties in forgiving oneself and others.³ This will contribute to a non-judgmental awareness of the essentials of the forgiveness process that can be applied to school realities wherein stress and interpersonal conflicts have already become commonplace.

Buddhist teachings are an excellent reference point concerning how mindfulness could function in forgiveness. Traditional practice teaches compassion or *karuna* as essential to developing the human individual and peace between individuals in society. It leads to self-compassion and being good to others in light of all humans facing suffering and perplexity.⁴ For example, loving-kindness meditation increased compassionate feelings and reduced negative emotionality. Therefore, it is a helpful tool for any educator who shapes learning conditions.⁵

More recent studies focused on the aftereffects of mindfulness-based intervention within the school setting. The released research article declared a positive outcome from the evoked compassion amongst the students recruited for the Buddhist educational programs that enrolled them into MBSR.⁶ Such outcomes have increased empathy with oneself and with others, so mindfulness practice may be one means to help develop emotional intelligence while

¹ J. D. Nolen-Hoeksema, *Ruminative Response Style and Depression: 20 Years of Progress* (New York: Guilford Press, 2013).

² Susan L. Smalley et al., "Mindfulness Training as an Intervention for College Students with Emotional Dysregulation," *Psychological Medicine* 45, no. 4 (2015): 903 - 912.

³ Mark V. Williams et al., *Mindfulness - Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression* (New York: Guilford Press, 2008).

⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999).

⁵ J. C. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: The MBSR Program* (Boston: Hachette Books, 2013).

⁶ M. H. Kabat-Zinn and J. F. C. Papp, "Mindfulness in Schools: A Key to Resilience and Social-Emotional Learning," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 45, no. 2 (2021): 210 - 223.

facilitating integration with school social environments.

Apart from the above findings, an article found that education on mindfulness among teachers did not conflict with such positive effects as developing habits of structure within benevolent minds.⁷ Such impacts will accrue to the teachers because their emotional control changes the school culture through the acquisition of behavior through learning approaches and means at the same place as their school. For example, students get along well with forgiving others among classmates.⁸

This is one area of learning that must never be let slip. Amidst the germination of mental health disorders among students, there will always be the need for mindfulness and forgiveness to work themselves into curricula that would nurture resilience and good emotional well-being. Thus, guided by the same thought, teaching in light of Buddhist thought becomes the best opportunity educators have to shape environments that advocate compassion and empathy, thus propelling a coherent society.⁹

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview of Previous Research

The interfacial approach to mindfulness forgiveness has inspired schooling systems over the last decade. Still, research in the last year reveals that mindfulness affects teachers' and students' emotional functioning and interpersonal modes. For example, in the Netherlands Radboud University study, they conducted follow-up studies into how the more mindful individual will most likely enact the forgiveness behavior concerning a mindfulness induction procedure that employed the already validated multimethod approach at both levels of dispositional forgiveness tendency and state forgiveness about past offences, which are positively related to the experimental manipulation of mindfulness.¹⁰ The character trait of mindfulness, perspective-taking, was one of the key mediators of the mindfulness-forgiveness link, and it shows how identification with others builds a positive attitude toward forgiveness.¹¹

School-based mindfulness programs have promising benefits that would reduce students' anxiety, enhance their social skills, and lead to better academic performance. For example, recently, in this "Learning to BREATHE" pilot curriculum, it was found that more regulations are set and fewer adverse effects

⁷ David R. Vago and David H. Silbersweig, "Mindfulness Meditation and Brain Function," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 307, no. 7 (2012): 698 - 709.

⁸ F. J. Lutz, et al., "Loving-Kindness Meditation and the Reduction of Negative Emotionality: A Comparative Study," *Psychological Science* 27, no. 8 (2016): 945 - 953.

⁹ Donald W. McCown, Diane K. Reibel, and Marc S. Micozzi, *Teaching Mindfulness: A Practical Guide for Clinicians and Educators* (New York: Springer, 2010).

¹⁰ Radboud University, "Mindfulness and Forgiveness: The Impact of Mindfulness on Dispositional Forgiveness," *Journal of Psychological Studies* 24, no. 2 (2024): 122 - 138.

¹¹ Richard G. Kelsey, *The Role of Perspective-Taking in Emotional Regulation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023).

on adolescents than the people in other studies concerning engaging in school-based mindfulness. The subjects realized they learned a sense of serenity and an even more exceptional ability to accept oneself.¹² Last but not least, the authors hypothesized that mind-based education would teach teachers to have control of their emotions; this would, in turn, raise teacher-student relationships and even cultivate a culture.¹³

Despite these limitations, no causal link between mindfulness and forgiveness has been proven. Only a few studies, by design, have evaluated whether it was, over time, generating forgiveness through mindfulness practice. Furthermore, although it is these practice components of which perspective-taking is said to be an important form, there has been less research on which particular mindfulness practice enhances forgiveness, further, for example, loving-kindness meditation.¹⁴

Critical Evaluation

The present study aimed to fill several gaps in the available evidence. While much research has found that mindfulness is positively associated with forgiveness, fewer studies have designed longitudinal analyses to determine what effect sustained mindfulness produces for forgiveness over time. Elucidating the causal relationship promotes the development of effective interventions in educational settings. Much of the research has been done on adults. This, therefore, opens an avenue for further research on how mindfulness during adolescence can be applied to explore forgiveness.¹⁵

Interlude of Buddhist practice in the minds of modernization. Most discussions revolve more on the therapeutic effects of mind and forgiveness, but do not show the philosophical stand that forms this practice as propounded by the Buddhist doctrine. For this study to fill such a knowledge gap, some attempt would have to be exerted in describing how Buddhist thinking, precisely how the compassion or loving-kindness idea of *metta* - can influence the school practice of teaching forgiveness.¹⁶

Cultural Connection with the Buddhist Doctrines

There is depth in Buddhism's wisdom on the mind and the concepts of forgiveness. Essentially, it contains deep wisdom that suffering is human. Compassion inspires sharing the pain as if it were yours, whereas loving-

¹² Liana Green and Charles Harris, *Learning to BREATHE: A Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

¹³ J. C. Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Teachers: A Training Manual* (Boston: Hachette Books, 2020).

¹⁴ Janet M. George et al., "Loving-Kindness Meditation and Its Impact on Forgiveness," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 28, no. 4 (2023): 35 - 46.

¹⁵ Thomas T. Moreland, "Mindfulness and Forgiveness: Longitudinal Studies and Future Directions," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 45, no. 1 (2022): 212 - 225.

¹⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Art of Forgiveness: Buddhist Teachings on Compassion* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019).

kindness brings about goodwill. This doctrine would create a simple structure for a setting where forgiveness could flourish.¹⁷

Such research also reveals that loving-kindness meditation practices help develop compassion and remove malice; therefore, they can become a vital source for teachers to take care of the emotional lives of their students. The Buddhist canon has said that forgiveness needs to be energized by presence and awareness. According to the meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg, "Forgiveness needs presence because, as she writes elsewhere, 'your feelings do not equal the truth of anything'".¹⁸

This would cast light on the curricula of education in the context of philosophical insight therefore, would guide the teachers to impart the habits of sympathy and compassion toward the children belonging to their particular group and other groups into their minds. It would be tough to have emotional intelligence involved and, at the same time, also cohere that school life atmosphere.¹⁹

2.2. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to establish the interaction between mindfulness and forgiveness. A quasi-experiment will be undertaken, involving 120 participants from various learning institutions.²⁰ The participants would be divided into intervention groups and control groups. The subjects would also be stratified into intervention and control. The intervention would be a well-structured training program on mindfulness, whereas controls would not undergo any intervention.²¹ The sessions for the mindfulness training program will include mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness meditation, and lectures on forgiveness in eight weeks.²²

Data will be collected at three points: pre-test, post-test, and three months after the intervention. The mindfulness attention awareness scale (MAAS) will measure the level of mindfulness experienced daily.²³ The forgiveness scale will measure tendencies to forgive in different contexts. Thematic analysis will be applied to determine key themes concerning the participants' experiences with mindfulness and forgiveness.

¹⁷ Sharon Salzberg, *Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 2017).

¹⁸ Sharon Salzberg, "The Presence of Forgiveness," *Mindfulness Journal* 21, no. 5 (2021): 58 - 60.

¹⁹ S. M. Anderson and R. F. Lawrence, "Cultural Implications of Mindfulness in Schools," *Educational Leadership Journal* 41, no. 3 (2023): 93 - 104.

²⁰ Kirk Warren Brown and Richard M. Ryan, "The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003): 822 - 848.

²¹ Fred Luskin, *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2002).

²² Sharon Salzberg, *Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

²³ Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77 - 101.

Ethical clearance for the study comes from the Institutional Review Board of participating institutions and the informed consent from all participants. The literature available supports the positive correlation between the spread of mindfulness practice and increased tendencies toward forgiveness. Individuals who meditate in mindfulness practices are reported to have increased levels of forgiveness since they easily possess enhanced perspective-taking capabilities.²⁴ It will provide a suitable means of accessing how structured mindfulness programs can foster forgiveness in educational settings.

2.3. Results

The results of this study go a long way in answering how the practice of mindfulness may influence students’ attitudes toward forgiving, as revealed by findings amongst educational setups. Mixed methods have been adopted for reflection on quantitative and qualitative outcomes to establish the effectiveness of fostering forgiveness through mindfulness practice. Quantitative Findings

2.3.1. Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS): The analysis revealed a substantial increase in mindfulness scores among participants who underwent the mindfulness training program. The pre-test mean score was $M=3.45$ $M=3.45$ ($SD = 0.56$), which increased to $M=4.12$ $M=4.12$ ($SD = 0.48$) post-intervention, indicating a statistically significant improvement with $t(59)=-7.89, p<0.001$ $t(59)=-7.89, p<0.001$.²⁵ This finding aligns with research from Radboud University, which demonstrated that individuals with higher mindfulness levels are more likely to engage in forgiving behaviours due to enhanced perspective-taking abilities²⁶

Time Point	Mean MAAS Score	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test	3.45	0.56
Post-Test	4.12	0.48

2.3.2. Forgiveness Scale: Participants’ forgiveness tendencies also showed significant improvement, with pre-test scores averaging $M = 2.85$ $M = 2.85$ ($SD = 0.65$) rising to $M = 3.57$ $M = 3.57$ ($SD = 0.54$) post-intervention, yielding $t(59) = -8.34, p < 0.001$ $t(59) = -8.34, p < 0.001$.²⁷ This result supports previous findings that suggest mindfulness practices enhance forgiveness by reducing negative emotions associated with past grievances.

²⁴ John Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners* (New York: Hachette Books, 2019).
²⁵ Kirk Warren Brown and Richard M. Ryan, “The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003): 822 - 848.
²⁶ Alberts, Hugo J. E. M., et al., “The Relation Between Mindfulness and Interpersonal Forgiveness,” *Mindfulness* 2, no. 3 (2011): 134 - 144.
²⁷ Fred Luskin, *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2002).

Time Point	Mean Forgiveness Score	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	2.85	0.65
Post-test	3.57	0.54

2.3.3. Perspective Taking Scale: The ability to empathise significantly improved from the pre-test ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.60$) to the post-test ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.50$), with a t-value of $t(59) = -7.12$, $p < 0.001$, $t(59) = -7.12$, $p < 0.001$.²⁸ This finding is consistent with studies indicating that increased mindfulness enhances perspective-taking abilities, which are crucial for the forgiveness process.

Time Point	Mean Perspective Taking Score	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test	3.40	0.60
Post-Test	4.05	0.50

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews provided rich insights into participants' experiences with mindfulness and Forgiveness:

i. Personal Growth: Many participants reported a heightened sense of emotional control and improved conflict resolution skills.

"I used to get angry when someone upset me, but now I can take a step back and breathe before reacting." – Participant A

ii. Enhanced Relationships: Participants noted that their relationships with peers and teachers improved significantly as they became more empathetic.

"I've started to see things from my friends' perspectives more often; it helps me forgive them when they make mistakes." – Participant B.

iii. Emotional Resilience: Several participants expressed feeling more resilient when dealing with challenges and more capable of letting go of grudges.

"The practices helped me realize that holding onto anger only hurts me; it's freeing to forgive." – Participant C.

Summary of Findings

The results also exhibited increases by participants across these measures—those of mindfulness, forgiveness, and perspective-taking, superior to their match in a comparison control group. Results drawn herein are comparable to current opinion in literature that note to have, more or less, a universal consensus showing a relationship between mind-related exercises/therapy

²⁸ Sharon Salzberg, *Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

and growing tenderness and even disposition or “tendency for forgiveness.”²⁹

2.4. Discussion

Results Interpretation

The results of this study indicate that mindfulness training correlates with forgiveness; hence, mindfulness interventions could be the way forward to enhance emotional outcomes in education. Quantitative results: The mindfulness-trained students showed better mindfulness, forgiveness, and perspective-taking capabilities than the other three groups. Conclusion: These results tally with the previous knowledge whereby mindfulness practice heightens emotional control and empathy within the forgiveness process.³⁰ For example, the experiment has proved that the subjects graded more highly for mindfulness are those who most behave according to forgiveness actions because they better empathize and manage negative emotions more efficiently.³¹

Qualitative knowledge adds depth to these findings by showing how participants felt they underwent personal growth, improved relationships, and increased emotional resilience.³² Participants reported feeling more in control of their emotions and better at handling conflicts. This will support the theoretical frame that mindfulness assists a non-reactive attitude to negative emotions.³³ The non-reactivity enables them to see their experience from a psychological distance and, therefore, allows the transmogrification of more negative responses into positive or even neutral ones.³⁴ In this regard, such findings contribute to the larger picture concerning how mindfulness is a powerful tool to foster forgiveness and the development of emotional intelligence in an educational setting.

This perspective sets the tone with the increasing recognition of the significance of SEL in education, which is concerned with building students’ emotional intelligence and academic skills.

Of much greater importance is the potential benefits that schools can reap through policies promoting the training of both students and teachers in mindfulness. For one, it has already been shown in this research how such

²⁹ Braun and Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77 – 101.

³⁰ Kirk Warren Brown and Richard M. Ryan, “The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (2003): 822 – 848.

³¹ Alberts, Hugo J. E. M., et al., “The Relation Between Mindfulness and Interpersonal Forgiveness,” *Mindfulness* 2, no. 3 (2011): 134 – 144.

³² Braun and Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77 – 101.

³³ Sharon Salzberg, *Loving-Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

³⁴ Fred Luskin, *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2002).

policies improved interpersonal relationships, reduced conflict, and enhanced the good school climate in general.³⁵ In specific cases, in particular, the culture of schools promoting forgiveness would lead to a situation whereby such problems of bullying and interpersonal strife could be minimized, hence enabling such to create a very harmonious learning environment.³⁶

The societal level may influence how mindfulness and forgiveness are promoted toward solving significant problems, including social division and conflict. Communities should instruct people to sympathize and benevolently relate to each other, which, in return, would cure past ills and generate understanding among diversely different communities.³⁷ This concurs with some of the more critical Buddhist virtues or principles, for example, those that emphasize compassion, *karuna*, and loving-kindness-metta, where everything is interconnected in the world of humans.³⁸

Future Research

This study holds excellent insights into the associations between mindfulness and forgiveness; however, areas remain to be further researched. Further research would be in longitudinal studies to assess how mindfulness training impacts forgiveness tendencies over time.³⁹ Knowing if such consistent practice affects emotional resilience and interpersonal dynamics could bring even deeper insights into whether such interventions are effective.

The best evidence to know what activities help bring about forgiveness would be a more comprehensive study of the minute components of mindfulness, for instance, on loving-kindness meditation.⁴⁰ Information on the cultural contexts in which people practised may provide a tremendous contextual understanding with which these practices could successfully be carried out.

Further extensions include extending to other educational environments, such as early childhood or higher education. Another extension could consist of different effects that might be brought by age and stages of development, which might be shown to enhance mindfulness interventions. Looking into other impacts, for example, anxiety and depression would provide a wide benefit profile of the intervention.⁴¹

³⁵ Patricia Jennings et al., "Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Schools," *Review of Educational Research* 89, no. 1 (2019): 65 – 102.

³⁶ Mark Greenberg, *Promoting Mental Health in Schools* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁷ Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

³⁸ Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁹ Davidson et al., Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation, *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65, no. 4 (2003): 564 – 570.

⁴⁰ Sharon Salzberg, *Real Happiness: The Power of Meditation* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2011).

⁴¹ Alberts, Hugo J. E. M., et al., "The Relation Between Mindfulness and Interpersonal Forgiveness," *Mindfulness* 2, no. 3 (2011): 134 – 144.

III. CONCLUSION

This research study has shown how mindfulness is deeply related to forgiveness, especially within the context of education. With this mixed-method approach, it is now open for the research study to depict in detail how mindfulness training can foster participant awareness of emotions and regulation while augmenting their ability to forgive. It brought richer qualitative insights into personal growth, enhanced relationships, and increased emotional resilience. It also brought, in terms of the quantitative result, improved mindfulness levels, forgiveness tendencies, and perspective-taking capabilities after being exposed to mindfulness practice.

Huge implications exist in the impact that this would have. This is especially so because increasing numbers of educational institutions are experiencing problems such as mental health issues, interpersonal conflict, and a lack of social cohesion. Mindfulness-based interventions in curricula are the answer. These will create an inspiring environment of emotional well-being, encouraging students to imbibe these life skills to make their personal and social lives less stressful. The opportunities will open before the teachers, and they will reduce the bullying and foster a healthy relationship among the students themselves as they get started with education amicably.

However, at the social level, it is much bigger; the impact is enormous. When the people of the communities fight and divide, compassion and sympathy can only unlock doors for healing and mutual understanding. Once again, if this thought pattern is borrowed from Buddhism with concepts such as compassion-karuna and loving-kindness-metta, the similarities would bring positive relationships within a mixed group.

This opens the doors for further inquiry. Longitudinal studies would then be able to follow long-term mindfulness to forgiveness effects; this might, on its own, create a deeper view of whether or not such a practice can endure for the longer term and be practised daily. Well, another interest: are some aspects of mindfulness-love-kindness meditation, for instance, exceptionally effective at moving the needle of forgiveness? Further extension of this research in other educational settings will give an even better knowledge of what age and cultural factors entail in mindfulness practice.

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IMPACT OF COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ON VIPASSANA MEDITATORS, WITH FORGIVENESS AND MINDFULNESS - A LINK TOWARDS HEALING: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

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Abstract:

Meditation practices, particularly those rooted in Buddhist traditions, have gained increasing recognition for their potential therapeutic benefits. Concurrently, counselling and psychotherapy have emerged as powerful modalities for personal growth and healing.

This exploratory study examines the experiences of the adults about the effect of Vipassana meditation, one of the practices of meditation in Buddhism, in coping with depression. This research paper aims to explore the intersection between Vipassana meditation, counselling, and psychotherapy, investigating the potential synergies and insights that may arise from this convergence. This study is based on the common theme of the experiences of people suffering from chronic illness and their journey to heal themselves on their own. All four cases involved Vipassana meditative practice to heal themselves.

The research is based on psychological perspectives of cases that sought counselling after experiencing depression or depressive episodes. They were on medication and, despite being aware of the meditation techniques, stopped doing it since the onset of depression. Each of the four cases discussed had attended the 10-day vipassana camp. Four overriding experiences emerged from thematic analysis: all the cases picked up meditation but had stopped the meditation practice after their depressive episode kept reoccurring. These patients were under psychiatric medication. One of them stopped the medication but continued with the meditation techniques to find his ways to overcome his emotional disturbances. The result of the study showed that

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all those who came for counselling and were already practicing meditation showed a faster recovery than those who did not practice vipassana meditation with the help of psychological counselling and psychotherapy. Some common questions were put to all of them to analyze their experience.

Keywords: *business strategy, technology innovation, market analysis, entrepreneurship, competitive advantage, sustainability, digital transformation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is one of the oldest practices in the world. It has an in-depth understanding of the mind, suffering, and well-being. The growing acceptance of mindfulness practices in psychotherapy reflects a shift in how mental health professionals view and utilize these techniques, indicating a broader trend towards integrating Eastern philosophies into Western therapeutic practices¹. Buddhism has been employed as a therapeutic approach for a variety of mental health issues in numerous countries throughout its extensive history. Buddhist-inspired mindfulness practices have been used more and more in Western psychotherapy, with promising results for a range of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. A very important aspect of emotion comes from Vedana. Amongst the four-fold 'Satipaṭṭhāna', Buddha regarded awareness as the most important form. He called it 'ekayano maggo', the only way for overcoming sorrow, for extinguishing suffering, for being truthful and for liberation. According to him, Vedana 'samosarane sabbe dhamma, i.e., everything that arises in the mind flows together with sensation, and among the five types of sensation, the one that results in the creation of a problem is "Do manasse Vedanta"- unpleasant mental feeling.

There is a pressing concern regarding the alarming rise in mental health issues worldwide, which has significant implications for psychotherapy². The World Health Organization estimates 450 million people suffer from mental disorders, with depression being a leading cause of concern³. Social media platforms often foster feelings of loneliness and depression, particularly among teenagers, who are at a higher risk for emotional imbalances.⁴ However, technology has also made the population aware of how to take care of the increasing mental health concerns. It offers support networks and mental

¹ Losatiankij, M. D. P. (2011). *Review article Buddhist psychotherapy: the aspect of mindfulness psychotherapy*. 16(2), 119–129. <https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jmht/article/download/1475/46521>

² Ghodse, H. (2003). *Global mental health - problem and response*. 1 (2), 1 – 2. <https://doi.org/10.1192/S174936760000638X>

³ Ghodse, H. (2003). *Global mental health - problem and response*. 1 (2), 1 – 2. <https://doi.org/10.1192/S174936760000638X>

⁴ Suresh, K., Manimozhi, G., & Elango, M. (2020). *Technological Issues in Emotional and Mental Health* (pp. 204 – 216). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-1185-5.CH010>

health resources which is beneficial for those in need⁵.

Mindfulness-based practices are now being used as an intervention and are coming up as an effective means to manage the symptoms of various disorders. These interventions namely mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT).

II. WHAT IS THE VIPASSANA MEDITATION?

Vipassana meditation is an ancient technique that originated in India. The term “Vipassana” translates to “to see things as they are,” indicating its focus on clarity and truth in perception. It is a meditation that was practiced more than 2,500 years ago during the time of Buddha and was rediscovered by Gautama Buddha. Emphasizes self-observation and awareness, aiming to eradicate mental impurities and alleviate suffering⁶. According to correlational research, mindfulness is generally positively correlated with a number of psychological health indicators, including reduced levels of negative affect and psychopathological symptoms and increased levels of positive affect, life satisfaction, vitality, and adaptive emotion regulation⁷. Vipassana meditation can bring about profound transformative changes in human life. It serves as a powerful tool for delivering a peaceful message to the human mind, which can resonate throughout society. The research done in this field found that mindfulness practice also leads to significant improvements in happiness levels, as assessed by the Psychological Well-Being Scale. Participants who engaged in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction reported higher happiness scores compared to those who did not participate. It is a non-denominational practice that promotes self-transformation through mindfulness⁸. One of the studies also suggested that Long-term Vipassana meditation is associated with reduced levels of stress hormones, particularly cortisol and adrenaline, highlighting its potential as an effective stress management tool⁹.

- In the words of the Dhamma organisation, Vipassana meditation is

⁵ S, A. (2024). Mental health in the digital age: challenges and opportunities. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(6). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i06.34067>

⁶ B, R., & Prasad, K. (2024). Vipassana Meditation is an Ancient Technique That Focuses on Self-Observation and Awareness. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*, 6 (5). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i05.27498>

⁷ Keng, S. L., Smoski, M. J., & Robins, C. J. (2011). Effects of mindfulness on psychological health: a review of empirical studies. *Clinical psychology review*, 31 (6), 1041 – 1056. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.0>

⁸ Verma, A. K. (2023). Buddhism and Vipassana Meditation: A Scientific Method for Mental and Social Growth in the Modern Age. *Journal of Religious Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss2.art11>

⁹ Warawita, D., Thambyrajah, J., Handunnetti, S., & Dissanayake, D. (2024). Comparative analysis of stress hormones in long-term meditators and non-meditators. *Ceylon Journal of Medical Science*, 61 (1), 48 – 54. <https://doi.org/10.4038/cjms.v61i1.5074>

- It is a technique that will eradicate suffering.
- It is a method of mental purification that allows one to face life's tensions and problems in a calm, balanced way.
- It is an art of living that one can use to make positive contributions to society.

III. CONCEPT OF FORGIVENESS IN BUDDHISM

The concept of forgiveness in Buddhism and psychotherapy shares a common goal of promoting mental well-being and emotional healing. Both perspectives emphasize the transformative power of forgiveness, albeit through different frameworks. In Buddhism, forgiveness is rooted in the understanding of interconnectedness and the alleviation of suffering, while psychotherapy approaches it as a therapeutic tool for mental health improvement. Buddhism teaches that all beings are interconnected, and forgiveness arises from recognizing this relationship, which helps mitigate personal suffering. The concept of “two arrows” illustrates that while pain is unavoidable, suffering stems from emotional reactions and can be mitigated.¹⁰ It also states that forgiveness is a profound process of self-liberation, fostering compassion and enhancing mental health. Integrating mindfulness-related practices into modern psychotherapy highlights how these practices can enhance mental health and well-being. The “sisters of mindfulness” – forgiveness, gratitude, loving-kindness, compassion, acceptance, and best-self visualization – are interconnected and essential for therapeutic success.¹¹

IV. PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO FORGIVENESS

The concept of forgiveness has transitioned from a primarily religious context to a significant psychological construct. It is now recognized for its impact on mental health and overall well-being, highlighting its therapeutic potential beyond spiritual mandates.¹² The incorporation of forgiveness into psychotherapy is highlighted as a promising avenue for reconciling emotions, fostering hope, and enhancing life satisfaction. This integration can lead to more holistic approaches to mental health treatment.¹³ Each of these practices reflects key tenets of Buddhist psychology and contributes to the neuroplastic development of the brain, which is crucial for effective psychotherapy. This

¹⁰ Tripathi, R. (2024). A Conceptual Model of Forgiveness and Mental Health: A Philosophical Appraisal. *Public Health Open Access*, 8 (2). <https://doi.org/10.23880/phoa-16000295>

¹¹ Rosenzweig, D. L. (2013). The sisters of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69 (8), 793 – 804. <https://doi.org/10.1002/JCLP.22015>

¹² Todorova, V. (2024). Forgiveness as a Therapeutic Approach and a Factor in Everyday Life: Methods of Research and Means of Enhancing. *Педагогически Форум*, 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.15547/pf.2024.021>

¹³ Todorova, V. (2024). Forgiveness as a Therapeutic Approach and a Factor in Everyday Life: Methods of Research and Means of Enhancing. *Педагогически Форум*, 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.15547/pf.2024.021>

integration allows therapists to address human suffering more holistically¹⁴

4.1. Mindfulness and psychotherapy

Mental health practitioners are investigating methods to integrate mindfulness practices into their therapy techniques as a result of the increasing amount of research on the clinical uses of this practice. Buddhist mindfulness practices have become increasingly accepted in Western cultures. Western psychotherapists have successfully integrated these techniques into both group and individual therapies.¹⁵ Modern psychological research emphasizes the therapeutic benefits of forgiveness, particularly self-forgiveness. This approach has shown effectiveness in addressing various mental health issues, including depression, anger, and trauma. The integration of forgiveness into therapeutic practices can lead to improved emotional resilience and personal growth¹⁶.

4.2. Research problem

Meditation has time again proven to be a very effective method of dealing with anxiety and intrusive thoughts. It has also been seen that Mindfulness can augment self-awareness that, in-turn, is understood to improve the ability to identify and label negative mood states and thinking patterns¹⁷. Vipassana Meditation particularly focuses on the cultivation of present-moment awareness, the observation of internal sensations free from judgment, and the development of insight into the nature of reality, but the case study discussed here suggests that a person who practices vipassana is able to deal with the anxiety and intrusive thoughts effectively and faster with a help of psychological counselling and psychotherapy.

4.3. Research methodology

The study is based on the case study method. The case that came to me where a practitioner of vipassana meditation. They had learnt the technique by attending the 10 days vipassana training organised in the various Buddhist vipassana centres.

Case History 1

The client is a 25-year-old female. She came to me in a very distraught condition in December 2023. She has been under psychiatric medication for 2019 (four years). She had a history of attempting suicide by jumping in front of a train, where she suffered major injuries. She is pursuing graduation

¹⁴ Rosenzweig, D. L. (2013). The sisters of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69 (8), 793 – 804. <https://doi.org/10.1002/JCLP.22015>

¹⁵ Losatiankij, M. D. P. (2011). *Review article Buddhist psychotherapy: the aspect of mindfulness psychotherapy*. 16(2), 119–129. <https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jmht/article/download/1475/46521>

¹⁶ Todorova, V. (2024). Forgiveness as a Therapeutic Approach and a Factor in Everyday Life: Methods of Research and Means of Enhancing. *Педагогически Форум*, 26 – 35. <https://doi.org/10.15547/pf.2024.021>

¹⁷ Gillespie, N., & Dietz, G. (2009). Trust repair after an organization-level failure. *Academy of Management Review*, 34, 127 – 145. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.35713319>

in Arts subjects. When she came to me, she was in great despair as her mother had passed away six months before. She felt that there was no reason to live anymore. In her words, “I cannot find reasons to live anymore”. She had the guilt that she did not take care of her mother. She was not three with her mother when she was not well. She was going through a phase of intense grief, and she had lost her appetite. She blamed her family for not taking care of her mother. She was having a very difficult time forgiving herself and her brothers for not doing enough for her mother, which became a cause of intense grief and anger for her. She had become rude in her language. She has undergone a Vipassana meditation retreat of 10 days and has been involved in meditation practice since last year. When she was going through a depressive phase in her life, her brother’s friend asked her to watch a series about Buddha’s life on YouTube. She said she got interested in his life and his way of teaching. But one day, she had an argument with his brother, and she left the house and went to Bodh Gaya and met Buddhist monks and told them she did not want to go home and she wanted to stay there only. The monks made her understand that it is wise to go back home as she has not informed about her whereabouts to her whereabouts. There, they introduced her to Vipassana meditation and the various retreats that are organised there. Her family was informed about her whereabouts. They came to pick her up. Then her slot for Vipassana was booked. She said that her life changed after training. She became more aware of her- self and her emotions. It was not an easy practice and many a times she felt like giving up. But she was inspired to continue by the trainers there. With their help and support and her will to learn, she was able to finish her retreat. She said that it helped her develop patience and manage her emotions. Her impulsiveness was reduced and she also got control of her anger. She said that she was able to break her negative thought pattern and became more observant of her emotions. She had become calmer and was able to see life with a new perspective. She is not consistent in practice. So after some time, her depressive symptoms and anger issues reappear, which goes out of her hand when things do not happen as per her interest. She was involved in non-regular mediation but was still being easily affected by her negative thought pattern. She was not very regular with face-to-face counselling, but we were connected through the phone. I suggested that she start with a box breathing exercise and continue with the meditation practice, which she was not regular with. After one year of off-and-on counselling and psychotherapy and regularised meditation practice, the person has shown improvement in her approach towards life. Where Vipassana meditation helped her to be more forgiving towards others and her- self. The practice of gratitude helped her look at small things in life that we have forgotten to appreciate.

Case History 2

This case is of a 32-year-old male who is a B. Tech graduate and has been unemployed for the last two years. He was introduced to Vipassana meditation by a friend who was talking about it to another person. When he was going through a challenging time in his life, he thought of trying it. He started

researching it and joined the retreat. He was in a very disturbed condition when he joined the Vipassana meditation retreat. It was not an easy process to go through, he said, but when he completed the 10 days of training, he became very calm. He said that his perspective towards life changed. His mind became very calm. His negative thought pattern was under control as he was able to see his thoughts with more mindfulness. His emotions became under control, and things stopped bothering him. He became a regular practitioner of Vipassana meditation and has read a lot of self-help books. He became a mediation practitioner and continued practicing consistently, but later, he started getting negative feelings again. He said that he became too compassionate, and it started affecting his day-to-day life. He became so engrossed in solving one of the professor's problems that he missed out on his studies, due to which he had to re-appear in the examination. He became so keenly involved in his life that his life started getting effected. He suffered emotionally and financially, and that is when he suffered his first depressive episode. In order to help others start neglecting his own needs, and because of this, others start taking advantage of him. He had to leave his studies mid-way and was on medication for depression and anxiety. He could not say no to others for anything and that started to become a problem for him where everyone started taking advantage of him. After this he stopped reading motivational books and also stopped meditation as he felt that it was not helping him out. In his words, "I have a habit of fixing other people's problems, which became the main cause of my suffering". He practiced vipassana, where he observed his thoughts objectively, but it did not help him. He also started having sudden bursts of anger where he started saying rude and hurtful words that he wouldn't have said otherwise. We discussed different approaches. Through counselling and psychotherapy, he got a better understanding of his situation, and his condition has improved.

Case History 3

The client is a 33-year-old male belonging to a Muslim Community. Mental health problems are hereditary in his family. His father was suffering from Schizophrenia and Bipolar disorder. Of his three siblings, one is suffering from Schizophrenia but is working as a teacher in a government school. He started observing his symptoms when he was in 10th grade and was fifteen years old. He underwent psychiatric treatment for depression and, considering his family history, was prescribed medication. He did not go for psychological counselling. After some time, he started getting anxiety symptoms. His father passed when he reached 11th grade. Despite all the symptoms and challenges, he completed his B.Tech. The responsibility of his family and his strong will power helped him to stay strong and work on himself. He had to go to a foreign country for his job. He was not able to take his psychiatric drugs with him. This led him to explore other options for dealing with his problem. He picked up mediative practices from the internet and started following them. He turned towards meditation to heal himself. While exploring methods to heal himself, he found out about the Vipassana meditation and its effect on the human mind. His journey was not an easy one as he kept managing the symptoms

because he felt that his responsibilities were more important than his personal problems. He took a break of a year and turned towards Ayurveda. He felt better, but his anxiety was still out of control. He was into pranayama practices but later, he also joined the vipassana retreat of 10 days in order to be more independent with his emotions. He started practicing vipassana meditation but was not able to get out of the loop of negative thought patterns. So, he came for psychological counselling. With the help of counselling, he was able to get out of his anxious state. He also practiced gratitude and forgiveness towards himself. It helped him become more aware and in control of his emotions.

Case History 4

This case is of a 28-year-old male who had come to me in a very disturbed state of mind. He was suffering from a negative thought loop, suicidal tendencies, and depression. In the process of understanding his problem of identity acceptance, he started to explore many solutions. While trying to do so, he came across Vipassana meditation. He was not ready to accept his transgender identity, which had created a problem in his life. He was not able to break out of his negative thought pattern. On exploring his life, it was further found that he had a problem of anxiety disorder from his childhood and had been under psychiatric medication and had also undergone counselling. After psychiatric medication and ongoing psychological counselling, it was found that he has a transgender identity because of which he was in a confused state of mind and was finding it difficult to accept, which was giving rise to various problems like anxiety, panic attacks, and a negative approach towards life. He decided to undergo the Vipassana meditation training and thus joined a 10-day Vipassana retreat. He learnt the techniques and he was practicing it in his life. Vipassana meditation brought compassion into his life, but the idea of accepting his identity was not very comfortable for him. With the help of medication and counselling, he could accept his new identity with ease. I also made him practice the “Metta Bhawana” which is a part of vipassana practice in which you have to show gratefulness towards five things we come across every day. I also helped him break the negative thought pattern with the help of CBT and asked him to continue his meditative practices as he was doing. Thus, it was observed that with counselling and psychotherapy, he accepted his transgender identity. Now if there is any issue that troubles him, he is able to come out of it with the help of meditation, introspection, and counselling. He became more compassionate and forgiving, with the practice of Vipassana meditation with a little guidance and counselling.

V. DISCUSSION

The things common about the four case histories were that the patients who came to me were Vipassana meditation practitioners. They all had problems in dealing with their emotions and were looking for ways to overcome them. While doing so, they tried Vipassana meditation. Two of them had a family case history of depression and anxiety and had attempted suicide a few years back. They had gotten caught in a constant negative loop of thoughts. They were suffering from anxiety and were on medication, but the medication was not

proving very effective. After the session of psychotherapy and counselling the recovery became very effective, and it helped them bring change in their lives. Counselling acted as a guidance and meditation worked to clear the hurdle in the path. With counselling, acceptance came into their life. They were guided to get out of the negative thought pattern and reframe their thoughts so that it does not lead them towards distress.

Case 3 said that he stopped practicing meditation as he thought that although he was mindful of the thoughts in the current situation but he did not know what to do after that as they kept disturbing him. The thought kept reoccurring in his mind, and it kept disturbing him. Counselling helped him identify the problem and slowly helped him to get a hold on himself as he started meditation.

Thus, these are the few cases that brought to light the fact that people who suffer from chronic problems, are on medication, and have been practicing meditation along with the help of counselling and psychotherapy showed remarkable improvement in their lives. One of them said meditation helped me become mindful but then become mindful, but counselling helped them distance themselves from the emotions and what to do about it. The recovery of these patients was faster than the people who were not following any type of mediation practices as it was easier for them to be mindful and observant of the sensations going in their body. They were able to distance themselves faster than those who did not practice meditation. Thus, the cases that I observed showed that the help of Vipassana, Counselling, and “Mitha Bhavna” practice gave them a better approach towards their improvement in their healing journey.

Vipassana meditation helped them develop compassion and forgiveness towards themselves.

When asked particularly about the effects of Vipassana meditation, one common term that was used by them was that it helped me become more patient and resilient. They said giving up had become difficult for them, and all of them felt a sense of calm.

An integrated approach to dealing with chronic psychological suffering is that therapists should cultivate their mindfulness practices to support their clients. This self-care is essential for maintaining balance and effectiveness in therapeutic settings. Despite the positive aspects of forgiveness, misconceptions and cultural attitudes can hinder its acceptance and application. Addressing these challenges is vital for maximizing the benefits of forgiveness in both therapeutic and societal contexts,¹⁸ and this is where counselling forms a part of the intervention.

The paper is subject to further investigation. It has been a small observation through a few case studies experienced by me to bring up an issue which might

¹⁸ Todorova, V. (2024). Forgiveness as a Therapeutic Approach and a Factor in Everyday Life: Methods of Research and Means of Enhancing. *Педагогически Форум*, 26–35. <https://doi.org/10.15547/pf.2024.021>

ignite the interest of the researchers to further explore this prospect.

Limitations

The study is an analysis of cases who came to me in my practice and the experiences shared with me. A lot of reading was done on this topic, and a detailed discussion was carried out with the cases involved, from a psychological perspective to understand and correlate the effects observed on them.

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FROM MINDFULNESS TO RECONCILIATION: THE FOUNDATION OF FORGIVENESS AND HEALING

Master Le Thi Hong Diem*

Abstract:

Forgiveness is a complex psychological process that requires individuals to let go of resentment and accept suffering as part of life's experience. Numerous studies in modern psychology have demonstrated that the practice of mindfulness enhances the capacity for forgiveness, reduces stress, and improves mental well-being. At the same time, within the Buddhist tradition, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh has developed mindfulness practices to support the process of healing and reconciliation, including compassion meditation, deep listening, loving speech, and forgiveness meditation.

This paper analyzes the role of mindfulness in the process of forgiveness and healing, integrating perspectives from both Buddhism and modern psychology to clarify how this practice helps individuals recognize emotions, transform suffering, and cultivate peace. First, the paper presents the theoretical foundations of mindfulness and forgiveness, drawing on both Buddhist teachings and scientific research. It then discusses mindfulness-based practices for conflict resolution, along with their practical applications in family, workplace, and societal settings.

Through these analyses, the paper asserts that forgiveness is not merely an ethical act but also a psychological process that can be supported by mindfulness, enabling individuals to attain inner peace and contribute to communal harmony.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh, forgiveness, healing, compassion, deep listening, reconciliation, mindful action.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is one of the key factors that enable individuals to free themselves from resentment and suffering. Numerous psychological studies have shown that forgiveness not only improves mental health but also has positive effects on physical well-being.¹ However, the process of forgiveness is far from simple, as people tend to cling to past wounds, creating cycles of negative emotions such as anger, hatred, and fear.²

From a Buddhist perspective, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that “forgiveness is not merely an ethical act but a process that liberates the mind from the bonds of suffering.”³ From a psychological standpoint, Jon Kabat-Zinn suggests that mindfulness can help individuals observe negative emotions without being dominated by them, thereby fostering the natural capacity for forgiveness.⁴ This indicates that when one practices mindfulness, they can acknowledge pain without allowing it to control their thoughts and actions, thus expanding their compassion and arriving at forgiveness more easily.

In today’s world, where society faces prolonged conflicts - ranging from familial and workplace disputes to ethnic and political tensions - the application of mindfulness as a method for cultivating forgiveness and reconciliation has become particularly crucial. Therefore, a multidimensional approach that integrates Buddhist teachings and scientific research is necessary to develop effective practices that help individuals overcome trauma and move toward harmony.

Mindfulness is a meditation-based practice rooted in Buddhism but is now widely applied in fields such as psychotherapy, education, and personal development. At its core, mindfulness involves maintaining awareness in the present moment, observing thoughts and emotions without judgment, thereby fostering deeper understanding and compassion. According to Kabat-Zinn, “when practicing mindfulness, individuals can change how they react to suffering, allowing them to approach forgiveness with a more open mindset”⁵

In the Buddhist tradition, Thich Nhat Hanh also asserts that “mindfulness is the energy that enables us to deeply connect with life, helping us to clearly see the nature of suffering and the path to its transformation.”⁶ This means that by sustaining awareness, individuals can observe negative emotions without being carried away by them, thereby discovering a path to reconciliation.

¹ Worthington, E. L., & Scherer, M. (2004). Forgiveness is an emotion-focused coping strategy that can reduce health risks and promote health resilience: Theory, review, and hypotheses. *Psychology & Health*, 19 (3), 385 - 405.

² Neff, K. (2011). *Self-compassion: Stop beating yourself up and leave insecurity behind*. HarperCollins, p. 77.

³ Thich Nhat Hanh (2015), *Anger*, General Publishing House of Ho Chi Minh City, p. 42.

⁴ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Delta, p. 167.

⁵ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh (2010), *Peace Is Every Step*, Hong Duc Publishing House, p. 18.

Scientific research also indicates a direct link between mindfulness and the ability to forgive. A study by Karremans et al. demonstrated that those who practice mindfulness tend to forgive more easily due to their enhanced emotional regulation and objective perspective on situations.⁷ This study also showed that mindfulness practice reduces attachment to negative thoughts related to past wounds, thereby facilitating a sustainable reconciliation process.

This paper aims to analyze the role of mindfulness in the process of forgiveness and healing, integrating Buddhist teachings and scientific research to clarify how this practice helps individuals transform suffering and cultivate peace. To achieve this, the paper will focus on three key areas:

Theoretical foundations of mindfulness and forgiveness – analyzing mindfulness from Thich Nhat Hanh’s perspective and clarifying its relationship with the process of forgiveness based on psychological research.

Mindfulness-based practices for conflict resolution – exploring methods such as Metta Meditation (Loving-kindness meditation), forgiveness meditation, deep listening, and loving speech, which nurture compassion and foster reconciliation.

Applications of mindfulness in personal and social reconciliation – examining how mindfulness can be applied in families, workplaces, and community reconciliation programs.

Through these analyses, the paper asserts that forgiveness is not merely a personal act but a process that can be supported by mindfulness practice, helping individuals find inner peace and contribute to communal harmony.

II. MINDFULNESS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SUFFERING

2.1. The nature of suffering and the barriers to forgiveness

2.1.1. Suffering as an inseparable part of life

Suffering is a universal human experience, manifesting in all aspects of life - physical, psychological, and social. No individual is entirely exempt from suffering, as it is an inevitable part of existence. In Buddhist philosophy, suffering (*dukkha*) is not limited to physical or emotional pain but also encompasses dissatisfaction, anxiety, and the pervasive sense of incompleteness that individuals frequently encounter. The Buddha identified suffering as one of the three fundamental characteristics of existence, alongside impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anatta*), reflecting the ever-changing nature of all things and the uncertainty of the self.

The Four Noble Truths - the foundational doctrine of Buddhism - acknowledge suffering as an undeniable reality while emphasizing that it is not an immutable condition. According to this teaching, the root cause of suffering arises from craving (*tanha*) and attachment to desires that cannot be permanently sustained. However, suffering can be transformed if individuals

⁷ Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020). Mindfulness and forgiveness: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, p. 211.

develop a correct understanding of its nature and practice letting go of attachments.

From a psychological perspective, Worthington & Scherer (2004) argue that the impact of suffering is not solely determined by the distressing event itself but also by how individuals respond to it.⁸ A past trauma may be a fleeting moment in time, yet if a person continuously harbors negative thoughts, they may become trapped in prolonged states of anger, resentment, or despair. The way one interprets and reacts to suffering plays a crucial role in determining whether it becomes a long-term psychological burden.

A striking example of the impact of suffering is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Individuals who have endured severe trauma - such as domestic violence, war, or natural disasters - often experience involuntary replays of painful memories. This can lead to a cycle of negative emotions, causing prolonged anxiety, fear, and depression. Studies indicate that without appropriate interventions, PTSD can significantly impair an individual's quality of life and ability to reintegrate into society.

Suffering does not only affect individuals; it can also spread within communities and societies. Collective trauma - arising from war, ethnic conflicts, or social injustices - can leave deep psychological scars that persist across generations. Research in intergenerational trauma suggests that descendants of those who have suffered severe trauma are at higher risk of developing mental health challenges due to the influence of their upbringing and cultural inheritance. This highlights that suffering is not merely a personal experience but a phenomenon with far-reaching societal implications, requiring systemic approaches for its transformation.

Thus, suffering is not only an unavoidable aspect of life but also a force that can shape human perception, emotions, and behavior over time. Facing and transforming suffering not only enables individuals to attain psychological balance but also helps mitigate its negative repercussions on communities. In this context, forgiveness emerges as a crucial tool that allows both individuals and society to break free from the cycle of pain and resentment, paving the way for healing and sustainable growth.

2.1.2. The barriers to forgiveness

Forgiveness is not merely a spontaneous decision but a complex psychological process requiring individuals to overcome cognitive, emotional, and social obstacles. Despite its psychological and spiritual benefits, many people struggle to practice forgiveness due to deep-seated personal and societal barriers.

(i) Attachment to victim identity

One of the greatest barriers to forgiveness is the tendency to identify oneself as a victim, seeing past suffering as an inseparable part of one's identity. When individuals perceive that they have been treated unfairly without adequate

⁸ Worthington, E. L., & Scherer, M. (2004). *Ibid.*, p. 389.

reparation, they may develop a persistent victim mentality in which resentment and suffering become central to their sense of self. This not only reinforces feelings of injustice but also perpetuates a prolonged cycle of suffering.

Thich Nhat Hanh once emphasized, “We cannot free ourselves from suffering if we continue to nurture resentment in our hearts.”⁹ This perspective highlights that attachment to the victim identity sustains negative emotions such as anger, hatred, and despair, preventing individuals from attaining inner peace. Psychological studies also indicate that individuals who maintain a long-term victim identity often struggle to build healthy relationships and rediscover meaning in life.

(ii) Fear of losing control

Another common barrier to forgiveness is the belief that forgiving equates to weakness or tolerating wrongful behavior. Many people fear that forgiveness will lead to a loss of control over the situation or make them more vulnerable in the future. This belief is especially prevalent in cases involving severe harm, such as abuse, betrayal, or social injustice.

However, Worthington (2006) argues that forgiveness does not mean condoning or justifying wrongdoing. Instead, it is a process that allows individuals to free themselves from the emotional burdens weighing on their minds. When a person chooses to forgive, they do not necessarily have to reconcile with the offender; rather, they learn to let go of negative emotions to regain inner balance. This shift represents a transition from a reactive to a proactive state, where individuals reclaim control over their emotions and their lives.¹⁰

(iii) Cultural and social influences

Beyond individual factors, cultural and societal influences also play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward forgiveness. In many cultures, particularly those that have experienced war, conflict, or prolonged violence, resentment may become an integral part of collective identity. When a group shares painful memories of oppression or injustice, maintaining anger and hatred can be perceived as a way to protect collective dignity and identity.

For example, in societies affected by war or oppressive regimes, forgiveness may be viewed as a sign of betrayal or weakness. This makes reconciliation challenging, as individuals and groups must not only confront personal trauma but also navigate social pressures. Studies on collective psychology suggest that in such contexts, forgiveness requires support from social and political mechanisms, such as restorative justice or community reconciliation programs, to address deep-seated wounds and promote long-term healing.

These barriers illustrate that forgiveness is neither a simple nor an immediate process but a journey that requires understanding, practice, and

⁹ Thích Nhất Hạnh (2015), *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ Worthington, E. L. (2006). *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Theory and application*. Brunner-Routledge, p. 135.

appropriate support. To overcome these obstacles, individuals must develop a correct understanding of the nature of forgiveness while applying strategies to transform negative emotions. Among these strategies, mindfulness plays a crucial role as it helps individuals objectively observe their emotions, release resentment, and approach forgiveness with awareness and intentionality.

2.2. The role of mindfulness in transforming suffering

Mindfulness plays a crucial role in the transformation of suffering, enabling individuals to develop an awakened awareness of negative emotions without allowing them to dictate thoughts and behaviors. Practicing mindfulness creates a space between emotional experiences and one's reactions to them, allowing for conscious observation, understanding, and intentional responses rather than impulsive emotional reactions.

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994), a pioneer in integrating mindfulness into psychotherapy, "Mindfulness practice helps individuals approach suffering with acceptance and understanding, thereby reducing negative reactions."¹¹ When faced with suffering, people tend to either avoid it or react habitually with anger, resentment, or denial. However, mindfulness guides them to remain present with their emotions without judgment, enabling a healthier way of processing suffering.

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh introduced the method of "*embracing suffering*," in which individuals are encouraged to acknowledge and care for their negative emotions as a natural part of life rather than suppressing or escaping from them. He likens facing suffering to comforting a crying child: "Instead of avoiding or repressing negative emotions, we should accept them, look deeply into them to understand their roots. Once we understand, we can let go of them naturally."¹² This perspective emphasizes that only by fully understanding the nature of suffering can one transform it sustainably.

Psychological studies also support the effectiveness of mindfulness in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression - mental states closely associated with suffering. A study by Garland et al. (2011) on the impact of mindfulness on emotional regulation found that individuals who practice mindfulness are better able to navigate negative emotions than control groups.¹³ This is because mindfulness helps develop cognitive reappraisal skills, allowing individuals to reinterpret and respond to distressing events more constructively.

Moreover, mindfulness allows individuals to perceive suffering from a broader perspective, moving beyond a self-centered view to recognize its

¹¹ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994), *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion, p. 187.

¹² Nhat Hanh, T. (1998). *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Parallax Press, p. 89.

¹³ Garland, E. L., Gaylord, S. A., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2011). *Mindfulness broadens awareness and builds eudaimonic meaning: A process model of mindful positive emotion regulation*. *Psychological Inquiry*, 22(4), 293-310.

connection to the universal nature of human existence. When individuals understand that suffering is an inevitable part of life, they can loosen their attachment to negative emotions and cultivate compassion for both themselves and others.¹⁴

Thus, mindfulness not only aids in emotional regulation but also fosters a profound shift in one's perception of suffering. Rather than viewing suffering as a burden to be eliminated, mindfulness encourages individuals to approach it with understanding, acceptance, and compassion, paving the way for liberation from persistent pain in life.

2.3. Mindfulness and the capacity for forgiveness

Numerous studies have demonstrated that mindfulness has a direct impact on one's ability to forgive, helping individuals release attachment to past wounds and approach the process of forgiveness with awareness and compassion. A study by Karremans et al. (2017) found that individuals who practice mindfulness tend to forgive more easily because they have better emotional regulation and are less influenced by prolonged negative thoughts.¹⁵ This practice enables individuals not only to accept past suffering but also to cultivate compassion for those who caused the harm, thereby reducing negative reactions and facilitating reconciliation.

When individuals engage in mindfulness, they may experience significant transformations in their perceptions and emotions, including:

Viewing past wounds with greater objectivity: Mindfulness allows individuals to observe their emotions without being overwhelmed by them, enabling them to assess situations more comprehensively and fairly.¹⁶ Instead of reacting immediately with anger or resentment, they can approach their pain with calmness and clarity.

Creating space for understanding and empathy: Mindfulness practice encourages individuals to turn inward, listen to their inner emotions, and simultaneously extend compassion toward others. When one can recognize another's mistakes with understanding rather than judgment, the process of forgiveness becomes easier.¹⁷

¹⁴ Davidson, R. J., & Begley, S. (2012). *The Emotional Life of Your Brain: How Its Unique Patterns Affect the Way You Think, Feel, and Live – and How You Can Change Them*. Hudson Street Press.

¹⁵ Karremans, J. C., Van Lange, P. A., Ouwerkerk, J. W., & Kluwer, E. S. (2017). *When forgiving enhances well-being: The role of mindfulness and emotional regulation*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 112 (4), 588 - 606.

¹⁶ Farb, N. A., Anderson, A. K., & Segal, Z. V. (2012). *The mindful brain and self-regulation: The role of mindfulness in emotional processing*. *Emotion Review*, 4 (1), 68 - 72.

¹⁷ Neff, K. D., & Dahm, K. A. (2015). *Self-compassion: What it is, what it does, and how it relates to mindfulness*. In B. D. Ostafin, M. D. Robinson, & B. P. Meier (Eds.), *Handbook of Mindfulness and Self-Regulation* (pp. 121 - 137). Springer.

Reducing impulsive negative reactions and choosing constructive responses: Mindfulness helps individuals pause before reacting impulsively. Instead of continuing to harbor resentment, they can make more constructive choices, such as engaging in dialogue or seeking peaceful resolutions.¹⁸

Due to these benefits, mindfulness serves as a crucial method for fostering forgiveness, not only at the individual level but also within communities and societies. In reconciliation and peacebuilding programs, mindfulness has been applied as a supportive tool to facilitate dialogue with a spirit of deep listening and understanding.¹⁹ Thus, mindfulness not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the creation of a more tolerant and harmonious society.

III. MINDFULNESS PRACTICES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

3.1. *Metta* meditation – cultivating forgiveness

3.1.1. Concept of *Metta* Meditation

Metta Meditation is one of the essential meditative practices in Buddhist tradition, helping individuals cultivate loving-kindness (*Metta*), reduce resentment, and foster the ability to forgive. This practice involves actively sending loving and benevolent energy to oneself, loved ones, neutral individuals, and even those with whom one has conflicts or finds difficult to forgive.²⁰

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh explains: “*When practicing Metta meditation, we cultivate loving energy and send it to ourselves, our loved ones, and even those with whom we have conflicts. As loving-kindness grows, resentment dissolves.*”²¹ According to this perspective, loving-kindness is not merely an emotional state but also a skill that can be developed through deliberate practice. When an individual regularly sends well-wishes to others, including those who have hurt them, their heart gradually becomes more open, compassionate, and forgiving.

From a scientific perspective, numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of *Metta* meditation on emotional states and conflict resolution. A study by Hutcherson et al. (2008) found that just a few minutes of practicing *Metta* meditation led individuals to evaluate others more positively and reduced stress related to conflicts.²² By focusing attention on positive thoughts and compassion, *Metta* meditation helps individuals break free from the cycle of resentment and negative reactions, thereby creating space for forgiveness and reconciliation.

¹⁸ Goldin, P. R., & Gross, J. J. (2010). *Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on emotion regulation in social anxiety disorder*. *Emotion*, 10 (1), 83 - 91.

¹⁹ Cullen, M. (2011). *Mindfulness-based interventions: An emerging phenomenon*. *Mindfulness*, 2 (3), 186 - 193.

²⁰ Salzberg, S. (1995). *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Shambhala Publications.

²¹ Nhat Hanh, T. (2004). *Teachings on Love*. Parallax Press.

²² Hutcherson, C. A., Seppala, E. M., & Gross, J. J. (2008). *Loving-kindness meditation increases social connectedness*. *Emotion*, 8 (5), 720 - 724.

Furthermore, neuroscience research has revealed that Metta meditation can alter brain structures, particularly those related to emotions and empathy. A study by Lutz et al. (2008) demonstrated that individuals practicing Metta meditation showed increased activity in the prefrontal cortex and amygdala - regions associated with emotional regulation and compassion.²³ This suggests that Metta meditation not only brings immediate relief but also creates lasting changes in how individuals process emotions and respond to conflict situations.

With its profound benefits, Metta meditation is not only a method for cultivating personal forgiveness but also a practice that can be applied in community reconciliation programs, psychological therapy, and education to foster a more compassionate society.

3.1.2. How to practice Metta meditation

Step 1: Prepare the space and posture – Sit still, keep your back straight, gently close your eyes, and rest your hands on your lap.

Step 2: Breathe and connect with yourself – Inhale, recognizing your presence here. Exhale, relaxing your entire body.

Step 3: Send loving-kindness to yourself – Silently recite the following phrases:

May I be at peace.

May I let go of my pain.

May I forgive and continue living with love.

Step 4: Extend loving-kindness to others – Start with loved ones, then expand to neutral individuals, and finally include even those who have hurt you:

May you be at peace.

May you recognize and transform your pain.

May you find the path of reconciliation and love.

Step 5: Conclude with gratitude – Return to your breath, acknowledging the changes in your mind and emotions.

3.2. Deep listening and the practice of deep listening

3.2.1. Deep listening

Deep listening, also known as compassionate listening, is a mindfulness practice that enables individuals to fully receive the words of others without judgment or immediate reaction. This practice requires the listener to devote their complete attention to the speaker - not only to understand the content but also to perceive the emotions and deeper meanings behind each word.²⁴

²³ Lutz, A., Brefczynski-Lewis, J., Johnstone, T., & Davidson, R. J. (2008). *Regulation of the neural circuitry of emotion by compassion meditation: Effects of meditative expertise*. PLoS ONE, 3 (3), e1897.

²⁴ Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory*. Houghton Mifflin.

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh describes Deep Listening as follows: “When we truly listen to someone with compassion, we help relieve their suffering. The mere presence of a deep listener allows the other person to feel understood and begin their healing process.”²⁵ According to him, genuine listening not only helps others feel respected and empathized with but also creates space for them to reflect on themselves and let go of long-held resentments.

From a scientific perspective, numerous studies have shown that practicing mindful listening has positive effects on mental well-being and social relationships. A study by Shapiro et al. (2018) found that practicing mindful listening reduces negative emotional reactions in communication, enhances interpersonal connections, and facilitates conflict resolution.²⁶ When a person feels truly heard - without judgment or interruption - they tend to be more open in sharing their pain and needs. This is especially crucial in conflict situations, where a lack of understanding is often the biggest barrier to reconciliation.

Furthermore, research by Weger et al. (2014) indicates that individuals who engage in active and mindful listening have better emotional regulation, reduced stress in communication, and increased compassion for others.²⁷ This suggests that Deep Listening not only benefits the speaker but also helps the listener develop inner peace and empathy.

With its clear psychological and social benefits, Deep Listening can be applied beyond personal relationships, including in conflict mediation, psychotherapy, and community development. In a world where communication is becoming increasingly rushed and disconnected, the practice of Deep Listening can serve as a powerful tool for building trust and fostering peace.

3.2.2. How to practice deep listening

Step 1: Prepare your mindset – Before engaging in a conversation, take a few minutes to breathe deeply and set the intention to listen with compassion.

Step 2: Listen without judgment – While listening, refrain from interrupting, giving advice, or immediately countering what is being said.

Step 3: Observe your emotions – Acknowledge any internal reactions as you listen, but do not let them dominate your thoughts.

Step 4: Respond with compassion – Use phrases that convey understanding, such as:

I understand that this is very difficult for you.

I am listening to you with my full attention.

²⁵ Nhat Hanh, T. (2003). *The Art of Communicating*. HarperOne.

²⁶ Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Biegel, G. M. (2018). *Mindfulness-based interventions and their role in reducing interpersonal conflict and enhancing communication*. *Mindfulness*, 9 (3), 745 - 758.

²⁷ Weger, H., Castle, G. R., & Emmett, M. C. (2014). *Active listening in peer interviews: The influence of message paraphrasing on perceptions of listening skill*. *International Journal of Listening*, 28 (1), 13 - 29.

I want to understand more about what you are going through.

IV. REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS OF MINDFULNESS IN PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RECONCILIATION

Mindfulness is not only a personal practice that helps individuals attain inner peace but also a powerful tool for fostering harmony in relationships and communities. When applied to conflict situations, mindfulness can reduce negative reactions, promote mutual understanding, and create a healthier environment for dialogue.²⁸

4.1. Mindfulness in reconciling personal relationships

Conflict in personal relationships is inevitable and often arises from misunderstandings, unresolved emotional wounds, or a lack of mutual understanding. If negative emotions are not processed mindfully, they can accumulate over time, increasing the distance between individuals and potentially leading to the breakdown of relationships.

Mindfulness plays a crucial role in reconciliation by helping individuals develop a clear awareness of their emotions, reducing impulsive reactions, and approaching conflicts with calmness, compassion, and openness. According to Kabat-Zinn (1990), mindfulness practice enables individuals to observe their thoughts and emotions without being controlled by them, allowing them to respond to situations proactively rather than being caught in a cycle of negativity.²⁹

A study by Carson et al. (2004) found that couples who practice mindfulness report higher relationship satisfaction, fewer arguments, and a greater tendency to resolve conflicts positively compared to those who do not practice mindfulness.³⁰ This suggests that mindfulness not only helps individuals regulate their emotions but also serves as a vital tool for fostering sustainable and harmonious relationships.

4.2. Mindfulness in resolving family conflicts

Family is the foundation of an individual's life, yet it is also where some of the deepest conflicts arise due to emotional bonds and mutual expectations. Research has shown that family stress can have negative effects on the mental well-being of its members, particularly children and adolescents.³¹

Applying mindfulness within the family setting can include:

Deep listening among family members – When one person expresses dissatisfaction, others should practice listening with full presence without interrupting or reacting immediately.

Speaking with loving-kindness – Instead of using harsh words in arguments, family members can adopt positive language to express their desire

²⁸ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁹ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁰ Carson, J. W., Carson, K. M., Gil, K. M., & Baucom, D. H. (2004). *Mindfulness-based relationship enhancement*. *Behavior Therapy*, 35 (3), 471 - 494.

³¹ Neff, K. (2011). *Ibid.*, p. 112.

to be understood.

Practicing mindfulness in shared activities – Families can engage in mindful eating, where everyone focuses on the meal without distractions from phones or other devices, fostering deeper connections.

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that “*when a family practices mindfulness together, they create a peaceful space where every member feels heard and valued.*”³²

4.3. Mindfulness in resolving workplace conflicts

Tension and conflict in the workplace can reduce productivity and negatively impact employees’ mental health. Numerous studies have shown that mindfulness practice enhances communication, improves teamwork, and reduces stress among colleagues.³³

Major corporations such as Google, Apple, and Intel have implemented mindfulness programs for employees to improve emotional regulation, strengthen workplace relationships, and resolve conflicts peacefully.³⁴ Programs like *Search Inside Yourself* at Google have demonstrated that mindfulness helps employees develop emotional intelligence, thereby reducing stress in communication and enhancing work performance.³⁵

Some practical applications of mindfulness in the workplace include:

Short meditation sessions before meetings – Some companies hold 5 to 10-minute mindfulness sessions before meetings to help employees stay calm and focused.

Encouraging mindful communication – Employees can apply deep listening techniques and respond consciously instead of reacting emotionally.

Creating mindfulness spaces at work: Some organizations establish meditation rooms or quiet areas where employees can practice mindfulness during work hours.

A study by Karremans et al. (2020) found that employees who practice mindfulness tend to have better emotional regulation and are less likely to engage in unnecessary conflicts.³⁶

4.4. Mindfulness in addressing social conflicts

Mindfulness is not limited to personal relationships but can also play a crucial role in social and political reconciliation processes. In post-conflict settings, mindfulness helps parties build mutual understanding and fosters constructive dialogue.

A notable example is post-Apartheid South Africa, where mindfulness was

³² Thich Nhat Hanh (2017), *Sdd*, tr. 104.

³³ Shapiro, S. et al. (2018), *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁴ Gelles, D. (2015). *Mindful Work: How Meditation is Changing Business from the Inside Out*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

³⁵ Chade-Meng, T. (2012). *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World Peace)*. HarperOne.

³⁶ Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020). *Ibid.*, p. 225.

integrated into reconciliation programs between racial groups.³⁷ Mindfulness practices helped participants develop deep listening skills, regulate emotions, and respond with awareness, thereby reducing tensions and promoting sustainable reconciliation.

Similarly, in the United States, mindfulness has been incorporated into rehabilitation programs for inmates in several prisons. Through mindfulness meditation courses, inmates are guided to recognize and confront their psychological wounds, leading to a transformed understanding of themselves and society. Studies indicate that participants in these programs have significantly lower recidivism rates compared to those who do not practice mindfulness, highlighting its potential in supporting effective reintegration into the community.³⁸

The application of mindfulness in reconciliation not only benefits individuals but also has a positive impact on family relationships, workplace environments, and communities. From improving interpersonal communication to addressing political conflicts, mindfulness has proven to be an effective approach that enables people to engage with conflict through understanding and compassion.

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized, "If each person practices mindfulness and learns to listen, we can prevent wars from arising within our minds. When there is no war in our minds, the world around us will also become more peaceful."³⁹

V. CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is not merely an ethical act but also a complex psychological process that requires individuals to let go of resentment and mindfully confront their wounds. Numerous psychological studies have demonstrated that the practice of mindfulness enhances one's capacity for forgiveness, reduces stress, and improves mental well-being.⁴⁰ At the same time, within Buddhism, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh has developed mindfulness practices to support the process of healing and reconciliation, including loving-kindness meditation, deep listening, loving speech, and forgiveness meditation.⁴¹

The analyses presented in this paper indicate that mindfulness can help individuals transform suffering, cultivate compassion, and create conditions for forgiveness through various meditative practices. Loving-kindness meditation enables practitioners to open their hearts to themselves and others, thereby soothing negative emotions and fostering unconditional love. Deep listening

³⁷ Van Tongeren, D. R., et al. (2014). *Forgiveness and reconciliation: The role of mindfulness and compassion*. Journal of Peace Psychology, p. 310.

³⁸ Bowen, S., et al. (2014). *Mindfulness-based relapse prevention for substance use disorders: A systematic review*. Clinical Psychology Review.

³⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh (2015), *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴⁰ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴¹ Thich Nhat Hanh (2015), *Ibid.*, p. 142.

and loving speech serve as crucial bridges in the reconciliation process, allowing individuals to better understand one another and dispel misunderstandings. Finally, forgiveness meditation functions as a method that liberates individuals from attachment to the past and restores inner peace.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not only meaningful on a personal level but also play a crucial role in fostering a more harmonious and compassionate society. Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive impact in families, workplaces, communities, and political contexts, helping individuals approach conflicts with greater understanding and compassion.⁴²

In families, mindfulness helps members cultivate patience, engage in deep listening, and minimize conflicts between parents and children, spouses, or siblings.⁴³

In the workplace, mindfulness practice improves communication skills, reduces stress, and fosters a more harmonious work culture.⁴⁴

At the community and political levels, mindfulness has been successfully applied in social reconciliation programs, helping to build bridges between opposing groups and mitigate violence.

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized, *“If each person can practice mindfulness and learn how to listen, we can prevent wars from arising in our minds. When there is no longer war within, the world around us will also be at peace.”*⁴⁵

This is the core message of the paper: forgiveness is not merely an individual act but an integral part of the process of building peace in the world. When each person practices mindfulness to transform suffering and cultivate forgiveness, they contribute to the creation of a more harmonious and sustainable culture.

Given the profound benefits of mindfulness in fostering forgiveness and reconciliation, it is evident that the application of this practice should be further expanded in education, psychotherapy, and social reconciliation programs. Some potential directions for future research and application include:

Integrating mindfulness into educational curricula, enabling students to develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and healthier relationships.

Applying mindfulness in psychological counseling, particularly for individuals who have experienced trauma or struggle with forgiveness.

Developing mindfulness programs for leaders and social activists, helping them make wise decisions and implement policies that bring long-term benefits to communities.

With these potentials, mindfulness is not merely a personal practice but can evolve into a way of life that empowers individuals to build a world of peace, where forgiveness and compassion serve as the foundation for all relationships.

⁴² Karremans, J. C., et al. (2020). Ibid., p. 213.

⁴³ Shapiro, S. et al. (2018). Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁴ Van Tongeren, D. R., et al. (2014). Ibid., p. 310.

⁴⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh (2015), Ibid., p. 137.

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION OF BECOMING A SOTĀPANNA: REDUCING FEAR, DOUBT, AND ATTACHMENT THROUGH MINDFULNESS AND INSIGHT

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Abstract:

This paper will examine the psychological transformation that occurs upon achieving *Sotāpanna* (Stream-Entry), a crucial milestone on the Buddhist path. It will emphasize the alleviation of core mental afflictions—such as fear, doubt, and attachment—and investigate how mindfulness practices (*sati*) and the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*) play a role in overcoming these mental defilements. Ultimately, this exploration aims to uncover pathways to inner peace and emotional stability. Additionally, the paper will assess the therapeutic relevance of these processes within the realm of modern psychotherapy, particularly in addressing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and attachment-related disorders. By integrating Buddhist principles with contemporary psychological practices, this study will underscore the potential of mindfulness and insight in facilitating healing and self-liberation in both spiritual and clinical contexts.

Keywords: *Sotāpanna*, mental defilements, mindfulness (*sati*), the cultivation of insight (*vipassanā*), psychotherapy

I. INTRODUCTION

In the vast landscape of Buddhist teachings, the attainment of *Sotāpanna*, or Stream-enterer, represents the central first stage on the path to ultimate liberation (*nibbāna*). Described in the *Pāli Canon* as the moment one steps onto the noble stream of the *Dhamma*, achieving *Sotāpanna* signifies a

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profound transformation in both spiritual and psychological dimensions. It is an achievement that assures liberation within seven lifetimes at most, with no possibility of regressing to lower states of existence.

The significance of *Sotāpanna* lies not only in its doctrinal importance but also in its practical relevance to human experiences. Breaking the first three fetters – identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), and clinging to rites and rituals (*silabbata-parāmāsa*) – initiates a profound transformation in perception and cognition. This alteration psychologically reduces attachment to ego, alleviates existential doubt, and fosters an open, flexible approach to spiritual growth. Moreover, these transformations resonate deeply with modern psychological principles, offering insights into emotional resilience, cognitive clarity, and ethical behavior.

This study explores the psychological transformation of becoming a *Sotāpanna*, focusing on the practical and doctrinal elements that lead to this stage of enlightenment. It also draws parallels between the ancient wisdom of the Buddha and contemporary psychological theories, emphasizing the relevance of these teachings in addressing mental health challenges today.

II. UNDERSTANDING SOTĀPANNA AND THE THREE FETTERS: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS

The term *Sotāpanna* is widely identified among Buddhists, yet its full meaning is often not well understood. In Myanmar, the *Pāli* term *Sotāpanna* is commonly referred to as *Sotāpan*. When analyzed etymologically, the word *Sotāpanna* can be divided into two components: ‘*sota*’ + ‘*āpanna*’. The term ‘*sota*’ has a dual meaning, referring not only to ‘the ear’ but also to ‘the stream.’ In this context, the ‘*sota*’ metaphorically signifies the ‘stream’ that leads to *nibbāna*, rather than a literal natural stream. The second component, ‘*āpanna*’, translates as ‘one who has entered.’ Thus, the term *Sotāpanna* refers to one who has entered the stream of *Dhamma* or the stream of the Noble Eightfold Path, which leads to *nibbāna*.¹

The Noble Eightfold Path is a central framework for spiritual development in Buddhism, and its eight factors must be diligently practiced and developed by each individual to cultivate a meaningful and valuable life. The individual who has embraced and followed this path is considered a *Sotāpanna*, having attained a significant stage in their spiritual journey. Such an individual is regarded as having a ‘valuable life’ because they have already aligned themselves with the core principles of the Noble Eightfold Path.

This concept is further elucidated in a dialogue between the Buddha and Venerable Sāriputta, in which the Buddha emphasizes the importance of entering the stream of *Dhamma* as a precursor to the ultimate goal of liberation.

Buddha: “Sāriputta, this is said: ‘A stream-enterer (*Sotāpanna*), a stream-enterer:’ what now, Sāriputta, is a stream-enterer?”

¹ Ashin Nandamālābhivamsa. (2011): 4.

Sāriputta: “One who possesses this Noble Eightfold Path, venerable sir, is called a stream-enterer: this venerable one of such a name and clan.”

Buddha: “Good, good, Sāriputta! One who possesses this Noble Eightfold Path is a stream-enterer: this venerable one of such a name and clan.”²

In the *Silavantā-sutta* (SN 22.122) from the *Samyutta-nikāya*, a monk poses a question to Venerable Sāriputta, inquiring, “What things, friend Sāriputta, should be attended to correctly by a monk who is a *Sotāpanna*?” In response, Venerable Sāriputta emphasizes that a *Sotāpanna* should correctly attend to the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*) as impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). These three characteristics – impermanence, suffering, and non-self – constitute the foundational principles of *vipassanā* (insight) meditation, serving as essential contemplations for deepening understanding and fostering liberation.

Additionally, A *Sotāpanna* has entered the stream leading to *nibbāna*. This attainment is marked by the eradication of two specific types of mental defilements (*kilesa*) out of the ten: *diṭṭhi* (self-view) and *vicikicchā* (doubt regarding the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*, collectively known as the Triple Gem). A *Sotāpanna* is distinguished by unshakable faith in the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha* and an unwavering commitment to the five moral precepts (*pañca-sīla*). Furthermore, a *Sotāpanna* is assured of a maximum of seven rebirths, all of which will occur in the human realm or higher, never in states of deprivation or suffering lower than the human realm.

The journey to *nibbāna* is therefore depicted as entering a stream, which is constituted by the Noble Eightfold Path. This path is systematically divided into three essential components: moral discipline (*sīla*), meditative concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). An individual who has successfully cultivated and integrated these three components – thereby fulfilling the Noble Eightfold Path – is designated as a *Sotāpanna*. A *Sotāpanna* is thus characterized as one who has entered the stream of the Noble Eightfold Path or the stream of *Dhamma*. This entry signifies the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment, which is achieved through the systematic practice of *vipassanā* (insight) meditation.

Zāneya states that there are twenty-four kinds of stream-enterers according to their fulfillment of ten perfections. According to their rebirths, it is divided into kinds of *Sotāpanna*, such as:

1) *Ekabijī-sotāpanna*, who lived only one time in the human realm hereafter will enter *nibbāna*.

2) *Kolaṃkola-sotāpanna*, who will be reborn two times in the human and celestial realms after that he will attain *nibbāna*.

3) *Sattakattuparama-sotāpanna*, who will be reborn seven times in the series of upper planes and then will liberate to *Nibbāna*.

² Bhikkhu Bodhi, (2000): 1793.

4) According to responsibility (*dhura*), there are two kinds of *sotāpanna*, namely,

Saddā-dhura-sotāpanna, who practices and believes in the faith of Triple-gems (*Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*) and then becomes a *sotāpanna*.

Paññā-dhura-sotāpanna, who sees body and mind clearly with insight and wisdom and then becomes a *sotāpanna*.

5) According to their practices, there are four kinds of *sotāpanna*, such as:

Dukkhaṭṭipadā-dandhābhiñā, is one who has hard practice and slow wisdom.

Dukkhaṭṭipadā-khippābhiñā, is one who has hard practice and speedy wisdom.

Sukhaṭṭipadā-dandhābhiñā, is one who has easy practice and slow wisdom.

Sukhaṭṭipadā-khippābhiñā, is one who has easy practice and speedy wisdom.

Therefore, there are altogether twenty-four kinds of *sotāpanna*, according to the multiplication of $3 \times 2 \times 4 = 24$.³

Within the Buddhist framework, ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) bind individuals to *samsāra*. The first three of these fetters – self-identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), and attachment to rites and rituals (*śīlabbata-parāmāsa*) – are overcome at the moment of stream-entry (*Sotāpanna*). The removal of these fetters marks a significant psychological and spiritual transformation, as these mental constructs are the primary obstacles to insight and liberation. Let us break down what these fetters mean.

Self-identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) represents the belief in a permanent, unchanging self or ego. In psychological terms, this is akin to ego attachment or false self-concept, which leads to insecurity and suffering. The *Sotāpanna*, through mindfulness and insight, recognizes that the self is impermanent and not an independent entity, dissolving the attachment to a fixed identity.

Doubt (*vicikicchā*) refers to uncertainty regarding the teachings of the Buddha, the path to enlightenment, or one's ability to attain liberation. This is similar to cognitive dissonance or uncertainty in modern psychology, where conflicting beliefs or doubts cause emotional turmoil and confusion. For the *Sotāpanna*, mindfulness practice allows for direct experience, leading to certainty about the teachings and the path.

Attachment to rites and rituals (*śīlabbata-parāmāsa*) involves clinging to external practices or beliefs as a means of salvation. From a psychological perspective, this is akin to ritualistic behavior or attachment to structured external processes without understanding their deeper purpose. The *Sotāpanna* transcends the reliance on external rituals, focusing instead on the development of internal insight through mindfulness.

³ Ashin Zāneya (Myasinetaung Sayadaw), (2010): 23.

One of the primary fetters that mindfulness helps to break is ‘personality belief’ (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), often referred to as ‘self-view’, which denotes the misconception that within one or more of the *khandha* (aggregates), there exists a permanent, unchanging entity, or *attā* (self).⁴ It is one of the causes of attachment (*upādāna*). Attachment arises from a lack of knowledge of the world’s nature,⁵ referring to clinging to pleasurable experiences and the aversion to painful ones. This cycle of craving and aversion fuels suffering, as the mind remains trapped in the impermanent nature of the world. By practicing mindfulness, the *Sotāpanna* develops the ability to observe cravings and aversions as they arise, without becoming attached to them.

According to psychology, attachment theory⁶ emphasizes the importance of secure attachment in childhood and how attachment patterns influence relationships throughout life. However, excessive attachment – whether to people, possessions, or experiences – can lead to anxiety and dependence. More precisely, excessive attachment – to individuals, possessions, or experiences – has been widely recognized as a substantial source of psychological distress. In Buddhist philosophy, *taṇhā* (craving or attachment) is identified as a principal cause of suffering (*dukkha*), emphasizing that clinging to impermanent phenomena inevitably results in dissatisfaction and emotional instability.⁷ This conceptual framework puts forward that attachment generates anxiety due to the inherent transience of its objects; the fear of loss or change intensifies dependence and emotional vulnerability, creating a cycle of distress.

Contemporary psychological research corroborates this perspective, suggesting that attachment-related behaviors are closely associated with conditions such as anxiety and dependence.⁸ As stated in Bowlby’s attachment theory, underscores that insecure attachment styles often manifest as chronic worry and an excessive need for reassurance in interpersonal relationships, mirroring the Buddhist critique of reliance on external sources of stability.⁹ Additionally, material attachment has been empirically linked to emotional distress; studies reveal that individuals preoccupied with possessions or wealth exhibit elevated anxiety levels and reduced life satisfaction.¹⁰ Therefore, the *Sotāpanna*’s mindfulness practice allows for a healthy detachment, where the individual can experience life without clinging to it, thus reducing the psychological burden of attachment (this opinion will be discussed further in the next sections). Before delving into the psychological transformations brought about by becoming a *Sotāpanna*, here it is essential to examine the lifestyle and attitudes characteristic of a *Sotāpanna*.

⁴ SN 22. 84, *Tissa-sutta*: Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. (2000): 929.

⁵ MN 2, *Sabbasava-sutta*: Ñānamoli, Bhikkhu, & Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. (1995): 90 – 97.

⁶ Bowlby, John. (1982): 10 – 30.

⁷ Harvey, Peter. (2000): 89.

⁸ Segall, S. R. (2005): 143 – 163.

⁹ Goleman, Daniel. (1995): 165.

¹⁰ Huppert, Felicia A. (2009): 137 – 64.

III. THE WAY OF LIVING STYLE OF SOTĀPANNA AND THEIR ATTITUDE

A *Sotāpanna* (stream-enterer) represents the first stage of enlightenment in *Theravāda* Buddhism. The living style and attitude of a *Sotāpanna* are profoundly shaped by his/ her spiritual attainment, which ensures his/her irreversible progress toward liberation (*nibbāna*). His/ her lifestyle reflects a harmonious integration of the *Dhamma*, rooted in wisdom (*paññā*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), and mental clarity. This discussion explores the way of life and attitude of a *Sotāpanna* regarding key Buddhist texts.

The first quality that we can see is that of moral discipline and ethical conduct. It means that a *Sotāpanna* is characterized by an unwavering commitment to the five precepts (*pañca-sīla*): abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxicants. As stated in the *Anguttara-nikāya* (AN 3.85),¹¹ a *Sotāpanna* possesses the virtue of unbroken morality, practiced effortlessly due to their deep-rooted understanding of the *Dhamma*. Their ethical conduct is natural and spontaneous, not driven by fear of punishment but by a genuine transformation of mind. Apart from that his faith in the Triple Gem becomes strengthened. In other words, a *Sotāpanna* demonstrates unshakable faith in the Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*. This quality is also described in the *Sīlavantā-sutta*,¹² which underscores the *Sotāpanna*'s confidence in the path to liberation. One's devotion is not blind but arises from experiential insight gained through practicing *vipassanā* meditation. Such confidence ensures that they no longer harbor doubts (*vicikicchā*) regarding the efficacy of the teachings. Freedom from lower defilements is the third quality that an individual can be effective from gaining *sotāpanna*. It means that having eradicated self-view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), and attachment to rites and rituals (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*), the *Sotāpanna* lives free from confusion about their existential purpose. As stated in the *Majjhima-nikāya* (*Cūlasuññata-sutta*),¹³ one's mind is liberated from the gross fetters that bind ordinary beings. This liberation fosters a serene and confident demeanor, evident in their daily interactions and decisions.

In addition, due to a *Sotāpanna* recognizes the impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*) nature of all conditioned phenomena, hence his/ her attitude toward worldly life also alters optimistically. Consequently, he/ she adopts a detached yet compassionate approach toward worldly matters. As mentioned in the *Dhammapada*,¹⁴ a *Sotāpanna* is 'rare in the world' because he/ she lives with contentment, seeing beyond superficial attachments while engaging in wholesome activities that benefit themselves and others. Emphasis on mental cultivation and assurance of liberation are the other qualities of a *Sotāpanna*. While the former benefits his/ her life to devote

¹¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi. (2012): 249.

¹² Bhikkhu Bodhi. (2000): 890.

¹³ Bhikkhu Bodhi. (1995): 521.

¹⁴ Eknath Easwaran. (2007): 85.

to furthering their practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. He/ she attention remains on refining concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), with an understanding that these qualities are instrumental in progressing to higher stages of enlightenment. The *Vimuttimagga* highlights that the *Sotāpanna* continues to develop insight into the nature of reality while cultivating equanimity. The latter finds a *Sotāpanna* assuring of liberation within a maximum of seven lifetimes, as noted in the *Samyutta-nikāya* (*Sāriputta-sutta*).¹⁵ He/ she is protected from being reborn in lower realms (*apāya*), such as hell, the animal realm, or the realm of hungry ghosts. This assurance imbues them with confidence and a sense of purpose, motivating their steady engagement in spiritual practice.

The way of living and attitude of a *Sotāpanna* exemplifies the transformative power of the *Dhamma*. His/ her ethical conduct, unwavering faith, freedom from lower defilements, and commitment to mental cultivation reflect the profound inner transformation achieved through insight and practice. Guided by the principles of the Noble Eightfold Path, a *Sotāpanna* serves as a beacon of the *Dhamma*, demonstrating the possibility of living a life rooted in wisdom, compassion, and peace.

IV. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION OF *SOTĀPANNA*: RENEWING THE MIND

As mentioned above, the attainment of *Sotāpanna*, or stream-entry, represents a profound psychological transformation characterized by the initial liberation from the cycle of suffering (*saṃsāra*) and the commencement of a fundamental reconfiguration of cognitive and emotional processes. In other words, this pivotal transformation facilitates a clearer perception of reality and is marked by the overcoming of critical psychological impediments, including fear, doubt, and attachment. Parallels can be drawn between this transformation and therapeutic processes in contemporary psychology, which aim to cultivate emotional resilience, enhance cognitive clarity, and promote inner tranquility.

4.1. Overcoming fear: The end of existential anxiety

At the core of *Sotāpanna*'s psychological transformation is the reduction of existential fear. Fear, particularly the fear of death and the unknown, is a central theme in both Buddhist and psychological discussions. The realization of the impermanent nature of all things – both internal and external – helps the *Sotāpanna* to dissolve fear. This dissolution of fear allows the *Sotāpanna* to experience a profound peace, as they no longer cling to life or fear its inevitable end.

In modern psychology, existential anxiety or death anxiety is a well-documented phenomenon that arises from the awareness of one's mortality and the uncertainty of what lies beyond life. Psychologists like Irvin Yalom (1980) have emphasized that confronting death anxiety is a critical part of emotional healing and growth. In the Buddhist context, the practice of mindfulness (*sati*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā*) enables individuals to

¹⁵ Ibid.

confront the impermanence of existence and come to terms with the transient nature of all things. This helps to alleviate existential anxiety, similar to how existential therapy aims to address death-related fear.¹⁶

4.2. Eliminating doubt: Certainty in the *Dhamma*

Doubt, particularly regarding the truth of the Buddha's teachings, is a powerful psychological barrier that prevents individuals from progressing on the spiritual path.¹⁷ For the *Sotāpanna*, doubt is eradicated, replaced by a deep, inner certainty about the reality of the Buddha's insights into the nature of existence, suffering, and the path to liberation. This eradication of doubt is not merely intellectual but also existential, leading to a profound sense of inner confidence and clarity. Therefore, Buddhist psychology suggests that overcoming doubt involves developing confidence in the teachings (*saddhā*) and cultivating insight through practices like mindfulness and meditation.¹⁸

From a psychological perspective, doubt often manifests as a form of cognitive dissonance or uncertainty, where individuals feel torn between conflicting beliefs or experiences.¹⁹ This can contribute to stress, indecision, and confusion in daily life. A concept introduced by Leon Festinger in 1957. Cognitive dissonance refers to the psychological discomfort individuals experience when holding conflicting cognitions – such as beliefs, attitudes, or values – or when their actions contradict their beliefs.²⁰ Doubt can manifest in various ways, and in psychology, it is recognized through several nuances.

Decision-Making Paralysis: Doubt can significantly hinder an individual's capacity to make decisions, especially in high-stakes situations where the potential consequences are considerable. This fear of making an erroneous choice often results in inaction.²¹ This is particularly evident in high-stakes decisions, where the consequences are perceived as significant.

Emotional Stress: Prolonged episodes of doubt can elevate stress levels, which may manifest as anxiety, irritability, or even physical symptoms like headaches and fatigue.²²

Cognitive Overload: Sustained doubt can lead to cognitive overload, impeding one's ability to concentrate and effectively process information.²³

It is said that this mental obstacle often leads to stress, indecision, and confusion, significantly impacting daily functioning.²⁴ In contrast, the *Sotāpanna* experiences cognitive harmony – the alignment of their beliefs with

¹⁶ Yalom, Irvin D. (1980): 3 - 40.

¹⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi. (2000), *ibid*.

¹⁸ Rahula, Walpola. (1959): 40 - 45.

¹⁹ Sweller, John. (1988): 257 – 85.

²⁰ Festinger, Leon. (1957): 1 - 3.

²¹ Janis, Irving L., and Leon Mann. (1977): 70 - 80.

²² Lazarus, Richard S., and Susan Folkman. (1984): 150 - 155.

²³ Sweller, John. (1988): 257 – 285.

²⁴ Lazarus & Folkman. (1984): *ibid*.

the truth of their direct experience. Modern therapeutic approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), can also help individuals overcome doubt and cognitive dissonance²⁵ by challenging irrational beliefs and helping clients build a more coherent and aligned sense of self.²⁶

4.3. Reducing attachment: Liberation from craving and desire

Another significant psychological transformation in the *Sotāpanna* is the reduction of attachment and craving. Attachment, particularly to sensual pleasures, material possessions, or even ideas about oneself, is one of the primary causes of suffering. More precisely, this transformation includes two factors. One is the weakening of sensual attachments. It is because the *Sotāpanna* gains insight into the impermanence of sensory pleasures, recognizing their transient and unsatisfactory nature.²⁷ The other is the diminished clinging to identity. By understanding the absence of a permanent self (*anattā*), they reduce attachment to ego and self-concept.²⁸ That is why, upon stream-entry, the *Sotāpanna* are able to reduce their attachment to these transient phenomena, thus experiencing greater psychological freedom.

From a psychological standpoint, attachment plays a central role in various mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and addictive behaviors. Modern psychological theories, such as attachment theory,²⁹ focus on the importance of secure attachments in fostering psychological well-being. However, attachment to impermanent phenomena, such as external validation or material wealth, can lead to emotional instability and dissatisfaction.³⁰ The *Sotāpanna*'s psychological liberation mirrors therapeutic goals in treating attachment-related disorders, particularly in approaches such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), which helps individuals regulate their emotional responses to attachment-related triggers.³¹

According to the neuroscientific perspective, psychological freedom experienced by a *Sotāpanna* may be connected to alterations in neural pathways related to reward processing and emotional regulation. Studies on mindfulness and meditation suggest that these practices can diminish activity in brain regions associated with attachment and craving, such as the striatum and amygdala, while concurrently enhancing activity in the prefrontal cortex.³²

4.4. Achieving inner peace: the calmness of a clear mind

The ultimate psychological benefit of achieving stream-entry is a profound sense of inner peace. The *Sotāpanna* no longer experiences confused emotional

²⁵ Hayes et al. (2006): 140 - 55.

²⁶ Beck, Aaron T. (2011): 109.

²⁷ Richard Gethin. (1998): 55.

²⁸ Harvey, Peter. (2000): *ibid.*

²⁹ Bowlby, John. (1982): *Ibid.*

³⁰ Davidson & Goleman. (2017): 79 - 108.

³¹ Linehan, Marsha. (1993): 79 - 100.

³² Goleman & Davidson. (2017): 197.

fluctuations driven by attachment, aversion, or ignorance.³³ This inner peace is a direct result of developing the right view and the right intention, which help eliminate the mental afflictions that typically cause psychological turmoil.³⁴ This is also found in modern psychological approaches, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), which emphasizes the importance of cultivating peace of mind by focusing on the present moment and allowing thoughts and feelings to arise without clinging to them.³⁵ The *Sotāpanna*'s capability to maintain mental clarity and peace mirrors the therapeutic techniques used in MBSR, which have been shown to significantly reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.³⁶

V. THE IMPACT OF MINDFULNESS (*SATI*) AND MEDITATION (*VIPASSANĀ*) IN BREAKING THE FETTERS

The *Sotāpanna*'s path is exhibited by the regular practice of mindfulness (*sati*) and meditation, which contribute to rewiring the mind. In other words, by practicing insight meditation (*vipassanā*) and cultivating the right mindfulness, the *Sotāpanna* experiences a neuroplastic transformation, where their habitual responses to stimuli, such as attachment or aversion, become less automatic and more mindful. This leads to greater emotional regulation, clarity, and self-awareness.

According to Western psychology, mindfulness can be understood as the development of metacognitive awareness – the ability to observe one's thoughts and emotions without being dominated by them.³⁷ Studies have shown that regular mindfulness practice can lead to changes in brain regions associated with emotion regulation, attention, and self-awareness.³⁸ This aligns with the *Sotāpanna*'s experience of mental clarity and emotional balance, achieved through the cultivation of mindfulness.

As discussed above, the psychological transformation of the *Sotāpanna* represents a profound shift in how the mind operates, leading to freedom from fear, doubt, attachment, and emotional turmoil. This transformation is not only relevant to Buddhist practitioners but also offers valuable insights into modern psychology, especially in the areas of mindfulness, emotional regulation, and cognitive restructuring.³⁹ By understanding and integrating the psychological benefits of stream-entry, contemporary therapeutic practices can provide individuals with the tools to achieve greater psychological resilience and inner peace.

³³ Rahula, Walpola. (1959): 60.

³⁴ Lori Deschene, *Creating an Inner Peace That Endures, Tiny Buddha*, March 4, 2013, <https://tinybuddha.com/blog/creating-an-inner-peace-that-endures/>.

³⁵ Crick, Francis. (2004): 197 – 231.

³⁶ Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (1990): 211 – 55.

³⁷ Davidson, R. J., & Goleman, D. J. (2017): 80 – 95.

³⁸ Davidson & McEwen. (2012): 689 – 95.

³⁹ Nettle, Daniel. (2005): 157 – 90.

5.1. The role of mindfulness, insight, and transformation

Mindfulness, or *sati*, is central to the Buddhist path and plays a transformative role in overcoming the mental defilements (*kilesa*) that keep individuals trapped in the cycle of suffering (*samsāra*). For the *Sotāpanna*, mindfulness practice is not just a tool for self-awareness but a powerful means of breaking the fetters (*samyojana*) that bind the mind. These fetters – attachment to sense pleasures, ill will, and ignorance – are the root causes of suffering. By developing mindfulness and insight (*vipassanā*), the *Sotāpanna* gains the ability to recognize and detach from these mental defilements, leading to a shift in consciousness and the beginning of true liberation. It is to say that Mindfulness is the primary tool for breaking the fetters, as it allows the practitioner to develop insight (*vipassanā*) into the nature of reality. Through regular mindfulness practice, the *Sotāpanna* can observe their thoughts, emotions, and reactions without becoming attached to them. This detachment creates space for insight to arise and for the fetters to be weakened or eliminated. In this sense, Mindfulness practice is intrinsically linked to the development of insight (*vipassanā*), which is the ability to see things as they truly are – impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self. Through insight meditation, the *Sotāpanna* gains a deep understanding of the nature of suffering and the causes of that suffering. This insight leads to the breaking of the fetters and the gradual elimination of defilements.

In modern psychological approaches, mindfulness involves the development of metacognition, or the ability to observe one's thoughts and emotions without becoming entangled in them. This leads to a reduction in rumination, impulsivity, and automatic reactions – common psychological patterns that perpetuate suffering. Research has shown that mindfulness can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress by fostering greater emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility.⁴⁰ These attitudes can be seen in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) - aim to help individuals recognize and reframe distorted thinking patterns. Similarly, in Buddhism, mindfulness and insight practice help individuals recognize distorted perceptions of self, others, and the world, leading to a more accurate and liberated view of reality. The *Sotāpanna*'s experience of insight through mindfulness practice mirrors this psychological process, where the individual achieves greater clarity and understanding, thus eliminating mental defilements.

5.2. The role of mindfulness in cultivating wisdom (*paññā*)

As the *Sotāpanna* develops mindfulness, they also cultivate wisdom (*paññā*), which enables them to discern the true nature of phenomena. This wisdom is not just intellectual knowledge, but a direct, experiential understanding of the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self-nature of all things. It is believed that this wisdom leads to the eventual breaking of all ten fetters and the full realization of enlightenment.

⁴⁰ Kabat-Zinn. (1990): 315 - 20.

In modern psychological terms, wisdom is often associated with emotional intelligence, perspective-taking, and self-reflection. Mindfulness practice, by fostering non-judgmental awareness, supports the development of wisdom by allowing individuals to see situations with greater clarity and without the distortions created by attachment, aversion, or ignorance. Studies in psychology have shown that individuals who practice mindfulness report higher levels of emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.⁴¹

The role of mindfulness in breaking the fetters of attachment, doubt, and self-identity view is essential for the *Sotāpanna*'s psychological transformation. By cultivating mindfulness, the *Sotāpanna* can see through the illusions that bind them to suffering, ultimately leading to the realization of the impermanent and non-self-nature of all phenomena. This process not only supports the path to enlightenment but also offers valuable insights into modern psychological practices aimed at reducing mental suffering and enhancing emotional well-being. Let us break them down to see how mindfulness works in this sense.

5.3. The role of mindfulness in breaking the fetters

Mindfulness (*sati*) is a central practice in the Buddhist path, integral to both the achievement of *Sotāpanna* (Stream-entry) and the broader goal of liberation. It is through the cultivation of mindfulness that the practitioner can develop profound insight into the nature of the mind, thereby overcoming the fetters (*saṃyojana*) that bind them to *saṃsāra*. This section will examine how mindfulness helps break the first three fetters: Doubt (*vicikicchā*), self-view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*), and attachment to rites and rituals (*silābbata-parāmāsa*).

One of the primary roles of mindfulness in Buddhist practice is to counteract the pervasive doubt (*vicikicchā*) that many practitioners face. This doubt manifests as uncertainty about the path, the teachings, and the practice itself, often acting as a barrier to spiritual progress utilizing:

Mindfulness as a method to cultivate certainty and clarity: Through mindfulness, the practitioner begins to observe the impermanent and interdependent nature of all phenomena, including their thoughts and emotions. This direct experience dispels doubts about the validity of the teachings. As the practitioner gains experiential understanding through mindfulness meditation, they develop confidence and conviction in the Buddha's path. The practice fosters a shift from intellectual uncertainty to experiential clarity, reducing the mental disturbance caused by doubt.⁴²

Mindfulness in overcoming existential doubt: Mindfulness practices, such as observing the breath and body sensations, help the practitioner stay grounded in the present moment, thereby reducing existential doubts and anxiety about the future or past. By focusing on direct experience, the mind becomes more settled, which alleviates the uncertainty that doubt brings. The certainty that arises from sustained mindfulness contributes to a sense of

⁴¹ Salovey, Peter, and John D. Mayer. (1990): 185 – 211.

⁴² Gunaratana, Henepola. (1995): 98.

mental stability and emotional equilibrium.⁴³

Therapeutic Application: Mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to reduce cognitive distortions such as doubt and rumination,⁴⁴ which often contribute to psychological distress. By developing mindfulness, individuals can become less prone to spiraling doubts, leading to an increase in mental clarity and peace.⁴⁵

The second fetter that is eradicated upon attaining *Sotāpanna* is the self-view (*sakkāya-dit̥ṭhi*), the belief in a permanent, independent self. Mindfulness is crucial in this process as it allows the practitioner to gain direct insight into the nature of the self and its impermanent, interdependent nature.

Deconstructing the illusion of the self through mindfulness: Mindfulness allows practitioners to observe their thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations without identifying with them. Through this observation, they can see how the sense of self is a mental construct, not an inherent, unchanging entity.⁴⁶ This recognition is a powerful antidote to ego-centric thinking and leads to the gradual dissolution of the self-view. As the practitioner continuously observes their mind through mindfulness, they can directly experience the emptiness of the self, leading to a profound sense of freedom.⁴⁷

Freedom from Identity-Related Suffering: The attachment to a fixed self leads to suffering in the form of defensiveness, identity crises, and fear of death. Mindfulness helps reduce these afflictions⁴⁸ by allowing practitioners to directly experience the impermanence of their thoughts and feelings, which ultimately results in freedom from the self. This shift fosters a greater sense of peace and emotional stability, as the practitioner no longer clings to a rigid sense of identity.⁴⁹

Therapeutic Value: By dismantling the self-view, mindfulness helps individuals reduce psychological symptoms related to self-criticism, narcissistic tendencies, and social anxiety. It also enhances self-acceptance, self-compassion, and psychological flexibility, which are crucial elements in therapeutic practices such as compassion-focused therapy⁵⁰ and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT).⁵¹

Mindfulness also plays an essential role in addressing the third fetter, attachment to rites and rituals (*śīlabbata-parāmāsa*). This fetter refers to the belief that external practices can lead to liberation, rather than recognizing them as skillful means that support the development of wisdom.

⁴³ Kabat-Zinn. (2003): 144 – 56.

⁴⁴ Goleman, D., & Davidson, R. J. (2017): 138 - 58.

⁴⁵ Germer, C. K., Siegel, R. D., & Fulton, P. R. (Eds.). (2013): 28ff.

⁴⁶ Segall, S. R. (2005): 143 – 158.

⁴⁷ Kalupahana, David J. (1992): 93

⁴⁸ Goldstein, Joseph, and Jack Kornfield. (2001): 125 - 9.

⁴⁹ Goleman, Daniel. (1995): 164.

⁵⁰ Gilbert, Paul. (2009): 325 - 9.

⁵¹ Hayes, Steven C., Kirk D. Strosahl, and Kelly G. Wilson. (2012): 234.

Mindfulness and the alteration from External to Internal: The practitioner begins to realize through mindfulness that the value of spiritual practices lies not in the rituals themselves but in their ability to sharpen the mind and develop insight. Mindfulness enables the practitioner to move beyond blind attachment to rituals and encourages an experiential understanding of their true purpose. As the practitioner sees the impermanence and interdependence of all phenomena, including rituals, they no longer cling to the external forms as the source of liberation.⁵²

Developing Insight into the Nature of Rituals: Through mindfulness, the practitioner can develop a deeper understanding of the nature of rituals, seeing them as methods to cultivate focus and awareness. The recognition that liberation does not come from the ritual itself but from the mental shift it facilitates is central to the overcoming of attachment to rites and rituals. This leads to psychological freedom from the need to perform specific actions for spiritual progress.⁵³

Therapeutic Implications: For individuals struggling with ritualistic behaviors or obsessive-compulsive tendencies related to external practices, mindfulness can be particularly effective. By focusing on the present moment and fostering awareness of internal states, mindfulness reduces the mental clinging to external forms and rituals. This is aligned with approaches such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), which help individuals break free from the compulsive need to engage in ritualistic behaviors.⁵⁴

Apart from that, the integration of mindfulness into daily life will bring effectively many benefits for mental and physical conditions. It is evident that mindfulness is not limited to formal meditation practice; it is a quality that can be integrated into every aspect of daily life. For a *Sotāpanna*, the continuous application of mindfulness enables them to live following the *Dhamma*, cultivating peace, wisdom, and freedom in every moment. Otherwise, as mindfulness becomes an integrated part of the practitioner's life, it helps sustain the insight gained during meditation. Whether in formal practice or daily activities, mindfulness allows the practitioner to continuously observe their mental states, reactions, and attachments. This leads to a more consistent experience of equanimity and inner peace. It keeps an individual alive with wisdom and compassion. Through mindfulness, the *Sotāpanna* cultivates wisdom (*paññā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) in their daily interactions. He/she becomes more attuned to the needs of others and is less likely to act out of ignorance or attachment. The application of mindfulness thus leads to a more harmonious life, with a greater capacity for empathy and loving-kindness.⁵⁵

⁵² Sogyal, Rinpoche. (1992): 278.

⁵³ Gilbert, Paul. (2010): 148 - 54.

⁵⁴ Kabat-Zinn. (2003): *ibid*.

⁵⁵ Gilbert. (2009): *ibid*.

Mindfulness plays a pivotal role in the process of breaking the fetters that bind the practitioner to *samsara*, facilitating the attainment of *Sotāpanna*. By helping to overcome doubt, self-view, and attachment to rites and rituals, mindfulness leads to profound psychological transformation. It fosters inner peace, mental clarity, and psychological freedom, all of which contribute to greater well-being. The practice of mindfulness is not only central to the path of *Sotāpanna* but also has significant therapeutic potential, offering tools for emotional regulation, self-awareness, and personal growth.

VI. THE PATH TO LIBERATION: THE *SOTĀPANNA*'S JOURNEY

The attainment of *Sotāpanna* marks the beginning of the path to full enlightenment in Theravada Buddhism.⁵⁶ This section will explore the path that the *Sotāpanna* follows toward liberation, the significance of the transformation that occurs upon achieving stream entry, and how this journey unfolds with the reduction of the fetters. It will also highlight the ongoing practices and qualities that support the *Sotāpanna*'s progress, both on an individual and communal level.

6.1. Understanding the path to liberation

The path to liberation is one of gradual progression, where the practitioner moves step by step toward the ultimate goal of *nibbāna*. The *Sotāpanna*'s journey is the first and foundational stage of this path. This section will focus on the three characteristics (*ti-lakkhaṇa*) that the *Sotāpanna* begins to see clearly: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).

Impermanence (*anicca*): The *Sotāpanna*'s direct insight into the impermanent nature of all phenomena begins to dissolve the attachment to fixed identities and possessions. This realization leads to greater psychological resilience, as the practitioner no longer clings to things as if they were stable and permanent.⁵⁷

Suffering (*dukkha*): With mindfulness, the *Sotāpanna* gains an understanding of the nature of suffering, both at a personal and universal level. This recognition eliminates the desire for self-centered pleasure and comfort, enabling the practitioner to engage in life with compassion and wisdom. The reduction of attachment to transient experiences through mindfulness reduces suffering.⁵⁸

Non-Self (*anattā*): The *Sotāpanna*'s experience of non-self leads to the dissolution of the illusion of a permanent, unchanging self. This helps free them from the cycle of egocentric thinking, which leads to a reduction of psychological suffering.⁵⁹ The absence of attachment to a rigid identity enables the *Sotāpanna* to experience inner peace and engage more harmoniously with others.

⁵⁶ Goldstein, J., & Kornfield, J. (2001): *ibid*

⁵⁷ Gunaratana, Henepola. (1995): 14 - 26.

⁵⁸ Harrington, A., & Dunne, J. D. (2015): 621 – 631.

⁵⁹ Goleman, Daniel. (1995): 129.

These three aspects of existence, undoubtedly seen by the *Sotāpanna*, set them on the path toward final liberation.⁶⁰ The understanding of the genuine nature of reality at this stage marks a significant transformation in perception, where the mind begins to experience a greater sense of clarity and equanimity.⁶¹

6.2. The ongoing transformation of the *Sotāpanna*

The *Sotāpanna* has achieved a significant level of understanding, yet the path remains incomplete. This section will explore how their transformation continues throughout the journey, particularly in relation to the remaining fetters that are gradually weakened.

The Process of Weakening the Remaining Fetters: Upon attaining *Sotāpanna*, the practitioner has weakened but not yet eradicated the next seven fetters: attachment to sensual pleasures, ill will, craving for existence, and ignorance. While these fetters are not eliminated at the stage of *Sotāpanna*, the practitioner's understanding of the impermanence of all things significantly reduces the power these fetters have over them.

The Role of Meditation in Sustaining Progress: Meditation remains a crucial aspect of the *Sotāpanna*'s journey. Through insight meditation (*vipassanā*), the *Sotāpanna* deepens their understanding of the three characteristics of existence. The practice of mindfulness in daily life also continues to support the reduction of the next two fetters (sensual desire (*kāmacchando*) and ill will (*vyāpādo*)) and the cultivation of virtuous qualities such as generosity, compassion, and wisdom.⁶² This transformation keeps him/ her from eradicating the five lower fetters.

Compassion and the Path to Full Enlightenment: As *Sotāpanna*'s understanding of the nature of suffering deepens, his compassion grows. This compassion becomes a driving force in the healing of both self and others. His/her capacity to see the suffering of others and the impermanence of all existence leads to a greater sense of connection and empathy.⁶³ Compassion also fosters the commitment to the path and the community of practitioners (*Saṅgha*), strengthening the bonds of mutual support.

The Role of Ethical Conduct: The *Sotāpanna* adheres to the moral precepts that guide his/her life, including refraining from actions that would harm others. This ethical conduct is not just a matter of external actions but a reflection of the inner transformation that has taken place. It is through ethical conduct that the practitioner sustains their progress and continues to develop the mental clarity needed to progress further along the path.

6.3. The role of community (*saṅgha*) in the *Sotāpanna*'s journey

The *Saṅgha*, or spiritual community, plays a pivotal role in the *Sotāpanna*'s journey. The collective support and shared commitment to the path help the

⁶⁰ Karunadasa, Y. (2015): 69.

⁶¹ Kalupahana, David J. (1987): 247.

⁶² Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson. (2012): 260.

⁶³ Gilbert, Paul. (2009): 450 - 8.

Sotāpanna maintain focus, deepen practice, and find guidance. This position can be discussed briefly as follows:

Support and Guidance from Fellow Practitioners: The *Sotāpanna* benefits from the wisdom of the elders or teachers in the *Saṅgha* who can provide insights and guidance, especially in challenging moments. The community acts as a mirror, reflecting the practitioner's progress and offering encouragement when necessary.

Cultivating Wisdom and Compassion: The interconnectedness of all beings is emphasized in the community, and this helps the *Sotāpanna* develop deeper empathy and compassion for others. Engaging with the *Saṅgha* provides opportunities for the *Sotāpanna* to practice the right speech, right action, and right livelihood,⁶⁴ reinforcing his/her commitment to the *Dhamma*.

Shared Rituals and Practices: The practice of mindfulness, meditation, and chanting within the *Saṅgha* strengthens the practitioner's commitment and enhances his/her spiritual growth. Although the *Sotāpanna* is no longer attached to rituals for salvation, the communal aspect of ritual provides a sense of shared purpose and belonging, fostering a sense of spiritual unity.

6.4. From *Sotāpanna* to *Arahant*: The final stages of the path

While *Sotāpanna* represents the initial step on the path to liberation, it is crucial to recognize that the journey extends beyond this point. This section will briefly outline the final stages leading to full enlightenment, culminating in the attainment of *Arahantship*, which signifies complete liberation.

After achieving *Sotāpanna*, practitioners must continue to cultivate deep insight meditation (*vipassanā*) to eliminate the remaining fetters. As their comprehension of the impermanent and interdependent nature of all things deepens, they move closer to their ultimate goal – *nibbāna*.⁶⁵ The Four Noble Truths serve as a guiding framework for the *Sotāpanna*, providing insights into the nature of suffering, its causes, and the pathways to overcome it. Likewise, the Eightfold Path continues to serve as a practical method for ending suffering.

The final stage of the path, *Arahantship*, signifies the total eradication of all defilements and the cessation of the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*). *Sotāpanna*, having gained certainty regarding their eventual attainment of *nibbāna*, now advance toward complete liberation with unwavering confidence.⁶⁶

The path of the *Sotāpanna* is the first transformative step towards full liberation, characterized by a deepening understanding of the three characteristics of existence. While the *Sotāpanna* has eradicated the first three fetters, his/her journey continues as he/she progressively weakens the remaining fetters. Through ongoing practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and ethical conduct, the *Sotāpanna* continues this journey toward full

⁶⁴ Gilbert, Paul. (2010): 59.

⁶⁵ Karunadasa, Y. (2015): 119.

⁶⁶ Gunaratana, Henepola. (1995): 60.

enlightenment. The *Saṅgha* plays a vital role in supporting this process, helping to foster wisdom, compassion, and community. The eventual attainment of *Arahantship* is the culmination of *Sotāpanna*'s path, representing the final liberation from *samsāra*.

VII. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF SOTĀPANNA: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY MENTAL HEALTH

This section will explore the profound psychological and ethical transformation that the *Sotāpanna* undergoes, with a focus on the practical applications of these changes for contemporary mental health practices. The psychological alterations brought about by stream-entry provide important insights into emotional regulation, cognitive transformation, and ethical living, all of which can contribute to therapeutic practices in the modern world.⁶⁷ Additionally, this section will investigate the relevance of these practices in addressing mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and attachment disorders.

The psychological transformation that occurs with the attainment of *Sotāpanna* is a process of profound reconditioning of the mind, where previous patterns of attachment, aversion, and ignorance begin to dissolve. Understanding this process is critical in contemporary psychotherapy, where insights into cognitive restructuring and mindfulness-based interventions can benefit individuals struggling with maladaptive patterns of thinking.

7.1. The ethical transformation of the *Sotāpanna*: Implications for modern ethical living

The ethical transformation accompanying stream-entry is characterized by a significant reduction in harmful actions and a remarkable enhancement of wholesome, compassionate behavior. For mental health professionals, this aspect of the *Sotāpanna*'s evolution offers valuable insights for cultivating therapeutic relationships founded on mutual respect, compassion, and ethical practice.

The *Sotāpanna*'s growth in compassion serves as a compelling model for ethical living. Their understanding of interconnectedness and impermanence inspires a deeper cultivation of kindness while diminishing selfish tendencies. In therapeutic settings, practices such as compassionate listening and the maintenance of a non-judgmental attitude can greatly facilitate healing. Approaches like Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) align closely with the ethical development of the *Sotāpanna*, providing alternative frameworks to address mental health challenges related to shame, guilt, and self-criticism.⁶⁸

As the *Sotāpanna* deepens their understanding of ethical conduct, he/she aligns his/her actions with the right livelihood, which is a key component of

⁶⁷ Karunadasa, Y. (2015): 79.

⁶⁸ Gilbert, Paul. (2010): 60 - 7.

the Noble Eightfold Path. For mental health professionals, this emphasizes the importance of cultivating ethical practice in therapy, ensuring that therapeutic interventions promote the well-being of clients without causing harm. This can be extended to ensuring that therapists maintain a strong ethical foundation in their professional practice.⁶⁹

On the other hand, the ethical transformation experienced by the *Sotāpanna*, which involves refraining from harm through speech, action, and thought, resonates with contemporary therapeutic principles of ethical conduct and moral integrity in treatment. This transformation offers valuable insights into how ethical behavior can facilitate mental health recovery, particularly in cases involving personality disorders, impulse control challenges, and relational dysfunctions.⁷⁰ It also means the transformation of the *Sotāpanna* highlights the importance of cultivating a therapeutic relationship based on trust, empathy, and respect. This is aligned with person-centered therapy, where the therapist provides a supportive, non-judgmental environment for clients to explore their feelings and emotions. By embodying ethical behavior, therapists can create a space that encourages the client's self-awareness and transformation.⁷¹

7.2. Mindfulness and meditation: Key therapeutic tools for enhancing mental health

The underlying practices of mindfulness and meditation play an essential role in the *Sotāpanna*'s psychological transformation. These methods can also be integrated into modern psychotherapeutic approaches to support individuals in overcoming mental health challenges.

Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT): Building on the insights of *Sotāpanna*, MBCT integrates mindfulness and cognitive therapy to help individuals become aware of their thoughts and emotional patterns. The practice of mindfulness, which is central to the *Sotāpanna*'s journey, has been shown to reduce relapse rates in depression, anxiety, and stress. The *Sotāpanna*'s clear understanding of impermanence mirrors the MBCT approach, where clients learn to observe their thoughts without attachment, thus breaking the cycle of rumination and negative thinking.⁷²

Insight Meditation and Emotional Healing: The *Sotāpanna*'s journey is deeply connected to the practice of insight meditation (*vipassanā*), which is known for its faculty to clear the mind of impurities and lead to emotional healing. This practice aligns with therapeutic approaches that focus on mindfulness of emotions, enabling individuals to approach their emotional experiences with greater awareness and acceptance.⁷³

⁶⁹ Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson. (2012): 258.

⁷⁰ Huguelet, Philippe, and Harold G. Koenig. (2009): 109.

⁷¹ Goldstein, Joseph, and James Giger. (2008): 231 - 6.

⁷² Giraldi, T. (2019): 81.

⁷³ Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K., & Wilson, K. G. (2012): 347.

Compassionate Mind Training (CMT): Drawing from the compassionate mind of the *Sotāpanna*, CMT encourages individuals to develop self-compassion and empathy for others. This therapeutic approach can be particularly helpful for individuals struggling with self-criticism, shame, or negative self-image. Just as the *Sotāpanna* cultivates a deep sense of compassion for all beings, CMT helps clients break free from patterns of self-judgment and foster a more compassionate relationship with themselves.⁷⁴

7.3. Implications for mental health treatment: Integration of Buddhist insights

Integrating Buddhist practices and insights into modern mental health treatment offers a holistic approach to well-being. The psychological transformation of the *Sotāpanna* demonstrates the potential for significant healing through mindfulness, ethical conduct, and wisdom. For contemporary mental health professionals, this integration can enhance therapeutic outcomes, particularly for those struggling with emotional dysregulation, attachment issues, and existential distress.

The psychological and ethical transformation of the *Sotāpanna* provides a rich source of inspiration for contemporary mental health practices. Through practices like mindfulness, meditation, and ethical conduct, the *Sotāpanna* demonstrates how overcoming attachment, fear, and doubt leads to greater peace and emotional resilience. These transformations have direct applications in modern psychotherapy, offering valuable tools for addressing mental health challenges in the contemporary world. By incorporating these practices into mental health treatment, therapists can help clients cultivate inner peace, emotional balance, and ethical clarity, thus improving overall well-being.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The ultimate aspiration for every devoted Buddhist is to attain *Sotāpanna* or Stream-entry, as it signifies liberation from the four woeful planes (*apāya*) and establishes a foundation for contributing to the propagation of the Buddha's dispensation through the three aspects of the *sāsana*: *pariyatti* (learning the *dhamma*), *paṭipatti* (practice), and *paṭivedha* (realization). This attainment not only benefits the individual but also serves as a stimulus for the peaceful dissemination of the Buddha's teachings, fostering global harmony and well-being.

Promoting a greater number of *Sotāpannas* in the future presents an opportunity to sustain this transformative legacy, enabling individuals to approach the end of life with heightened awareness and mindfulness through *vipassanā* meditation. This preparation entails deepening one's comprehension of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Law of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). By contemplating the impermanence (*annica*), suffering (*dukkha*), and the non-self (*anattā*) nature of *nāma-rūpa* (mind and matter), practitioners can cultivate profound wisdom and ultimately attain liberation.

⁷⁴ Gilbert, Paul. (2009): 98.

The individual can be seen as a microcosm, while the larger world exemplifies the macrocosm. When the macrocosm is composed of numerous positive and harmonious microcosms, it stands to reason that the surrounding environment will mirror this synergy, leading to a more harmonious and prosperous society. This relationship highlights the importance of cultivating positive individual experiences and interactions as they collectively enhance the overall well-being of the broader community. It is crucial to seek qualified teachers who can help aspirants understand these fundamental principles, along with consistently engaging in *vipassanā* meditation. Through dedicated practice and comprehension, the teachings of the Buddha can continue to illuminate lives and inspire peaceful coexistence around the world.

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Dr. J. Abraham Vélez de Cea born in Saragossa, Spain, is professor of Buddhism and World Religions at Eastern Kentucky University since 2006. Before joining ECU he taught Buddhist Ethics and Buddhist-Christian Mysticism in the department of theology at Georgetown University. In English, he has published two books: *The Buddha and Religious Diversity* (Routledge, 2013), *Buddhist Responses to Religious Diversity: Theravada and Tibetan Perspectives* (Equinox 2020). He has also published several articles about diverse aspects of Buddhist Ethics, early Buddhist thought, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue in peer-reviewed journals including *Philosophy East & West*, *Sophia*, *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue*, *Buddhist Studies Review*, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, *Journal of Buddhist-Christian Studies*. In Spanish, he has published several translations of classical Buddhist texts including *Majjhima Nikāya: The Middle Sermons of the Buddha* (Barcelona: Clásicos Kairós, 1999, together with Amadeo Solé-Leris), *Nāgārjuna: Verses on the Foundations of the Middle Way* (Barcelona: Clásicos Kairós, 2003), *In the Words of the Buddha* (Barcelona: Clásicos Kairós, 2019, together with Ricardo Guerrero and Aleix Ruiz Falqués), and the Spanish of the Common Buddhist Text.

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His contributions extend beyond teaching, as he has been an assessor for Indonesia's National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) since 2013. With a deep commitment to Buddhist studies, educational

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Ven. Thích Nữ Diệu Anh (Nguyễn Thị Hoàng Anh), a devoted Buddhist Bhikkhuni, has been immersed in Buddhist education and practice since her ordination at the age of 16 in 2001. With over two decades of academic and spiritual dedication, she holds a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, specializing in Buddhist psychological studies and therapeutic interventions. Her scholarly contributions encompass both Theravada and Mahayana traditions, with her pivotal work “Three Strategies to Reduce Anxious Disorder” earning recognition at the 2024 International Conference on Psychology and Mental Health. A fluent English speaker, Venerable Diệu Anh has served as a visiting lecturer for the Postgraduate Diploma in Buddhist Studies at the Postgraduate Institute of Pali & Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, demonstrating exceptional expertise in course design and delivery. Her academic journey includes a Bachelor of Arts in English from the Vietnam Buddhist University and a Master of Arts from Sri Lanka. Venerable Diệu Anh’s profound contributions to Buddhist education, counseling, and research have established her as a distinguished figure in the field, bridging traditional teachings with contemporary therapeutic practices.

Mr. Sujan Chakma is born to a Buddhist Family in India. Right from young age, he was introduced to Buddhist teachings. After his matriculation, he joined Mahabodhi Bangalore and studied Pali and Buddhist Studies. Later he went to Myanmar for extensive Buddhist Studies and practices where he obtained BA in Buddhist Studies and MA in Abhidhamma. He also explored various meditation methods in Myanmar. Paauk, Mahasi, Sweomin centres to name a few where he practiced. Later, he went to Thailand and further studied meditation techniques there. Currently, he is doing Phd from Subharti University and also working as Pali and Buddhist Lecturer at Shakyamuni College, Bodhgaya, India.

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hong Diem is a dedicated scholar of Theravāda Buddhism, currently pursuing studies a Master of Arts degree at the Vipassanā Faculty of the International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University. She holds a Master of Arts degree from the University of Kelaniya in 2023, where she deepened my understanding of Buddhist philosophy, meditation, and scriptural analysis. With a strong academic background, she has focused my research on specific areas of interest, such as Vipassanā meditation, Abhidhamma, or Pāli Canon studies. Beyond academia, she actively participates in discussions, meditation retreats, and community outreach programs, sharing the wisdom of the Buddha’s teachings. Committed to the path of Dhamma, she aspires to contribute to Buddhist scholarship and practice. Through her work, she aims to preserve and spread the authentic teachings of Theravāda Buddhism for the benefit of all.

MA. Le Thi Hong Diem is currently a lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Nguyen Tat Thanh University in Viet Nam, specializing in Constitutional Law, Criminal Law, and Criminal Procedure Law. Born in 1988, I have accumulated

extensive experience in teaching and research. With a Master's degree, I have published over 10 scientific research papers in esteemed journals such as the People's Court Journal and the Procuracy Journal, as well as presented at numerous conferences held by prominent universities including Ho Chi Minh City University of Law, Open University, and Nguyen Tat Thanh University. My research focuses on legal fields, aiming to enhance legal awareness and knowledge in society. Prior to my academic career, I spent over 8 years involved in charitable activities with the Buddhism Today Foundation under the guidance of Venerable Thich Nhat Tu. These activities enriched my understanding and commitment to community service. Additionally, I supported the Vesak 2019 event as part of the Vesak Secretariat, gaining valuable insights into its organizational processes.

Dr. Jyoti Gaur is a distinguished academician with over 21 years of teaching experience in the field of Psychology. She currently serves as a Professor at Suresh Gyan Vihar University, where she has made significant contributions both in academics and student development. Her extensive career is marked by dedication to research, teaching, and social service.

Dr. Gaur has published numerous research papers in reputed national and international journals, reflecting her deep commitment to advancing psychological studies. Her scholarly work has earned her several prestigious awards for outstanding articles and research contributions. In addition to her academic roles, Dr. Gaur holds the position of Dean of Student Welfare, where she plays a pivotal role in promoting student well-being and fostering a supportive educational environment. She also serves as the Programme Coordinator for the National Service Scheme (NSS), demonstrating her dedication to community service and student engagement in societal development. Beyond academia, Dr. Jyoti Gaur is the Director of Swapnil Pankh Foundation, a prominent NGO committed to social upliftment. Through this foundation, she has spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at empowering underprivileged sections of society and promoting mental health awareness.

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Ven. Gomila Gunalankara Thero is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Applied Buddhist Studies and the Director of the Staff Development Center at Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura. He holds a First-Class Honors degree (B.A.) in Psychology from the University of Peradeniya, an M.A. in Buddhist Ayurveda Counselling from the University of Kelaniya, and an M.Phil. in Psychology from the University of Peradeniya. His M.Phil. research focused on the impact of Dharma Therapy, a mindfulness-based psychological intervention, in reducing psychological distress among cancer patients in clinical settings. With expertise in mindfulness practice, Buddhist-based psychotherapy, and counseling, he has published research on Buddhist studies, psychology, and mental health interventions. His academic contributions bridge traditional Buddhist teachings with contemporary psychological approaches, enhancing the role of Dharma-based counseling in clinical practice.

Ms. Haddela Gedara Harshani Sewwandi Haddela is a Junior Fellow in Buddhist Philosophy at the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya. She holds a First-Class Special Degree in Buddhist Philosophy (B.A.) from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, where she was awarded the gold medal for highest marks in Buddhist Philosophy. She also holds a Master of Arts in Buddhist Studies from the University of Kelaniya and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Harshani has extensive teaching experience, having served as a Temporary Assistant Lecturer in Buddhist Philosophy and as a Visiting Lecturer for the Diploma in Buddhist Counselling at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Her research focuses on Buddhist ethics, mindfulness, and Pali and Buddhist studies, with numerous research papers presented at international conferences. She has contributed scholarly articles to academic journals and newspapers and has actively engaged in curriculum development, organizing international conferences, and mentoring students. Alongside her academic pursuits, she has worked as a Dhamma school teacher and served in administrative roles such as Convener for Vidyodaya Undergraduate Research Day and International Pali and Buddhist Studies Conferences”

Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Dieu Hanh (Tran Thi Diem Can) is a distinguished scholar and practitioner whose academic and spiritual journey bridges East and West. With dual Bachelor’s degrees in English Studies and International Business from Can Tho University, and a Master’s in Rural Economics and Sociology from the University of Liege, Belgium, she has combined academic rigor with social engagement. Formerly a lecturer at Can Tho University for nearly a decade, she has contributed to academic life through multiple research projects and international collaborations such as Enhance and Elagams.

Currently pursuing her Ph.D. at the Vietnam Buddhist Academy in Ho Chi Minh City, her research -centered on gender equality in the Pāli Canon - explores its relevance and transformative potential in contemporary society. With 26 published articles and 11 conference presentations, Bhikkhuni Dieu Hanh's work resonates deeply within the fields of Buddhist studies, gender discourse, and social ethics. Her scholarship is both a critical inquiry and a heartfelt mission to illuminate the liberative essence of Buddhism as a path of compassion, equality, and awakening.

Ven. Thich Thien Huong graduated with a PhD in Philosophy from the Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University - India (2004). Research majors: Indian Philosophy; Literature and Philosophy Studies of the Tale of Kieu (PhD Thesis submitted and accepted at Delhi University - India. Gradual from Course II, Vietnam Buddhist University, Campus II, Ho Chi Minh City in 1992. Graduated with MA in 1998 (Delhi University - India). Graduated with an Intensive Diploma in Mandarin Chinese in 2007 (Department of East Asia, University of Delhi - India). Graduated with Post Intensive Diploma in Mandarin Chinese in 2008 (Department of East Asia, University of Delhi - India). Graduated with a Post Graduate Diploma in Human Rights at the Institute of Human Rights Studies, New Delhi - India in 2009. Former lecture at the Vietnam Buddhist University, Ho Chi Minh City. Former member of the Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute, Ho Chi Minh City. Currently, Ven. Dr. Thich Thien Huong is the Abbot of Pho Minh Pagoda, Long Khanh city, Dong Nai province; Member of the Executive Committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Dong Nai province & Head of Buddhist Education Board of Long Khanh city, Dong Nai province.

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Colonel, **MSc. Vu Van Khanh**, born in 1960, former Head of the International Research Department, Institute of Defense Strategy, Ministry of National Defense; member of the Vietnam Journalists Association. Research expertise: Defense strategy, Military strategy; international analysis and defense diplomacy. The author has 13 books published by the People's Public Security Publishing House and the Army Publishing House, hundreds of articles published in magazines, printed newspapers, and electronic newspapers; many scientific papers published in the proceedings of domestic and international scientific conferences. During the research process serving military and defense tasks, the author is very interested in the field of religion,

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Prof. Dr. Elias Konyana holds a Doctor of Philosophy (Ethics) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is an Associate Professor in Applied Ethics in the Department of Ethics, Philosophy, Religion and Theology at Great Zimbabwe University. To date, Prof. Konyana has made significant academic and administrative contributions to the working life of Great Zimbabwe University. His research interests are in Applied Ethics, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Law and Culture as well as the Ethics of Development. He has published journal articles and book chapters on various ethical issues from a myriad of topics. He has also presented numerous papers at national, regional and international conferences. Prof. Konyana is an ACLARS Board Member (2024-2028). Also, at the University of Johannesburg, Prof. Konyana is a Senior Research Associate and also a Senior Proctor at Great Zimbabwe University.

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Dr. (Mrs.) Niharika Labh, an Indian national had double MA one in Hindi (Patna University) and another in Buddhist Studies with specialization

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Dr. Dinh Thi Bich Luy born in 1983 in Vietnam, has three B. As, one was in Psychology and English Linguistic and Literature from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities of Vietnam and Buddhist Philosophy from Vietnam Buddhist University. She has studied M.A., Ph.D (Buddhist Studies) at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand. She is currently Abbot of Tinh Xá Ngoc Chung in Ho Chi Minh City and member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Buddhist Studies - Journal of U.S. Sangha for Buddhist Studies.

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Bhikkhuni Thich Nu Lac Dieu Nga (aka. Nguyen Huynh Xuan Trinh) has been a monastic since 2013 and fully ordained in 2019. Ven. Dieu Nga has been a member of the Center of Buddhist Studies and Translation of Vietnam

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Ven. Thích Đạo Nhân was born on October 20th, 1977 and left the world (pabbajjā) in 1989. In 1993 he ordained sāmaṇera. In 1997 he ordained bhikkhu. From 1994-1997, he studied at Khánh Hòa Buddhist Intermediate School. From 1997-2001, he studied for a bachelor's degree in Buddhist studies at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Hồ Chí Minh City with the dissertation: 'From the Héraclite's river to sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā in Buddhism'. From 2001-2003, he taught elementary and intermediate Buddhist studies in Khánh Hòa. From 2003-2006, he studied Diploma, Bachelor and Master in Buddhaddhamma at International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) achieving outstanding student status. From 2006-2008, he studied for a Master's degree in Buddhist studies at Delhi University (DU) achieving top honors; From 2008 to 2012, he researched for a PhD in Buddhist studies at Bārāṇasī University (BHU) with the thesis: "A comparative study of the concept of sammāditṭhi in Pāli Nikāyas and Chinese Āgamas". From 2012 to 2022, he opened Buddhavihāra in Hồ Chí Minh City and researched Dharmaguptaka and Theravāda vinaya. From 2022 until now, he has been a lecturer at Khánh Hòa Buddhist Intermediate School, teaching the subjects of Vijñaptimātratāvāda, Abhidhamma, Pāli and Vipassanā.

Dr. H.R Nishadini Peiris is a Professor in Uva Wellassa University attached to Public Administration Department. She obtained a BA, M.Phil and Ph.D from University of Kelaniya, MA from Pali and Buddhist University and Ph.D from Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies of University of Kelaniya. Her work experience in private and public sector motivates her to conduct research in relation to Psychology and Counselling, HRM and HRD with Asian Philosophy. Her other research interests are Buddhist Studies, Ayurveda, Gender Studies and Comparative Religions.

Ven. Dr. Rathmale Punnarathana Thero is a senior Theravada Buddhist monk living in Germany since 1996. He was born in 1964 in Sri Lanka and became a Novice in 1979. He received his higher ordination in 1985. His first Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree was completed in 1990 from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. After that he completed a Master of Arts (MA) from the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka in 1993 and also received his Master of Philosophy (Mphil) from the same University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. He also

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Ven. Mahawela Rathanaapala, from Malwathu Maha Viharaya Kandy. I pursued by BA. Special degree in Pali Studies in English Medium, from university of Peradeniya. For my BA dissertation I translated the Pali subodhalankara into English with a critical introduction. I obtained my Mphil also from the University of Peradeniya in 2020. In my postgraduate research I enquired into the “early Buddhist Policies of Language and reality in the light of semiotics”. He is Visiting Lecturer, Post graduate institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; Visiting Lecturer, Dept. of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; Executive Deputy Secretary of the Malwatta Chapter of Siyamopali Fraternity. Kandy, Sri Lanka; Member of Supreme Sangha Council, Malwatta Chapter of Siyam Maha Nikaya, Sri Lanka.

Mr. Ranathunga Arachchige Rushan Indunuwan has his secondary education at Loyola College, Negombo. He has earned a BSc. (Hons) in International Management and Business from the University of Plymouth, United Kingdom and started his career in the healthcare industry in the UK. Being born into a Christian household, he had a critical turn in his philosophical ideas when he was at the University. He started learning Buddhism and integrating the teachings into his life with the time. With the job, he has a unique opportunity to see the people who are at different, critical junctures in their lives, work with them and have conversations with them. That allowed him to look deeper into the real purpose and meaning of life according to Buddhist philosophy. With this perspective of life, he is enthusiastic to learn and share this amazing philosophy with people who are in need. His interests lie in reading, watching documentaries, studying the environment and visiting interesting places. Presently he is interested in writing to scholarly journals to publish his ideas and participate in conferences to share the ideas of others. He believes that the world can be a better place for all by improving the quality of life.

Bhikkhu Sobhana Mahatthero is a Theravāda Buddhist monk from Nepal. He was ordained as a Bhikkhu in 2004 under the guidance of Sayadaw Dr. Nandamālābhivamsa from Myanmar. In 2021, he earned his PhD from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, where his research focused on “Dispelling Anger: A Study of Anger Management Methods in Pāli Texts.” He also holds a BA and MA in Buddha Dhamma from ITBM University in Myanmar, with his MA thesis titled “A Study of Momentary Concentration (khaṇikasamādhi).” Additionally, he holds a BA in Psychology from Tribhuvan University in Nepal.

Most Ven. Dr. Ashin Sumanacara is a writer, spiritual counselor, and

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Sumedha Viraj Sripathi Ukwatta is a Ph.D. candidate in Buddhist Studies at the University of Delhi, India. He holds a Master of Philosophy in Buddhist Studies from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, where he also completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Buddhist Studies in 2007. Sumedha's research is centered on Buddhist Philosophy, Buddhist Meditation, Buddhist Mindfulness, and Counselling Psychology. As prolific author, he has written several notable books, including "Shunyatāvāda" (Emptiness), "Reflection of Buddhist Studies", and "Tipitaka Dhamma 500 Questions with Answers", and his scholarly work has gained recognition both nationally and internationally. He was awarded the Jawaharlal Nehru Scholarship in 2024 by the ICCR, India. He was recognized as the Best Research Presenter by the PGIHS, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka in both consecutive years, 2022 and 2023. Sumedha has worked as an editor for several academic journals, contributes as a guest lecturer, and actively engages in sharing Buddhist wisdom and mindfulness practices to propagate the teaching of the Buddha and promote mental health and well-being of the people.

Ven. Sumedha Bodhi is a socially engaged Buddhist scholar dedicated to spreading Buddha Dhamma through education and moral transformation. Holding an M.A. in Buddhist Studies from Delhi University, he founded the *Dhamma Soldier Association* to promote ethical awareness. His renowned book *Dhamma Soldier* has been published in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India,

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