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ORIGINS OF MINDFULNESS & MEDITATION
INTERPLAY OF EASTERN & WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

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"The East and the West must unite to provide one another with what is lacking"
Abdu´l Baha in Sinha & Sinha, 1997

Mindfulness & meditation are gaining popularity in the Western psychological practice in the past 4-5 decades, especially within psychotherapeutic approaches, health promotion, and stress reduction. The origins and the broader context, however, seem to be overlooked in some of these practices.

This article focuses on the origin of these phenomena in the first part, as it is important for both their interpretation and application in the current Western context. As these practices, entered Western psychology through India, basic assumptions about human nature in Indian psychology, monoism of body-mind, centrality of consciousness and meditation as a part of daily conduct are presented. The basic constructs of Buddhism, an integral part of Indian psychology, in relation to mindfulness and meditation, are also delineated as illustrations of these assumptions.

The second part reflects on the application of the meditative practices through cognitive existential study of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) and a study on the phenomenology of meditation (Madsen, 2007). Both emphasize an experienced instructor, regular practice as a part of daily life, conceptual consciousness understandings for beneficial effects of these practices.

The last part reflects critically on perils of mindfulness and meditation in the context of modernity. There is an appeal for considering these as a part of daily life, not just a technique, along with considering their origin and aspects such as spirituality considered as compassion and interconnectednes, spirituality as compassion, interplay between the Eastern and Western psychological understandings and the broader context.

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Introduction

Meditation is perceived as a 'tape for mental cleaning' which minimises the risk of stress and brings about a 10-20 % increase in the mental capacity (Funch, 2010). Moreover 'mindfulness meditation' practices are considered beneficial not only for dealing with everyday life but also for the treatment of phobia and other psychological problems (Ebdrup, 2011), among others when mindfulness is combined with existential psychotherapy (Borg Hansen, 2005, 2009). These scientific studies being conducted by researchers in Danish institutions, illustrate an interest in the meditative practices prevalent in the broader Danish society. Studies about Mindfulness based Stress Reduction (MBSR) for patients and corporate managers, integration of mindfulness into multiple domains of human experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2004; Santorelli, 2011), mindfulness seminars for organisations (Goleman, 2006), illustrate similar tendencies within the field of organisational psychology as well as health care and promotion in the international context.

At the same time it is imperative to note with Moodley & West (2005), that in the past few decades, many traditional 'psychotherapy' methods seem to have appeared in reformulated and reconstituted ways in the West, often in an uncoordinated way. However, it has not been until the past 4-5 decades that the ancient Buddhist systems of alleviating suffering has been rediscovered and are being applied in the Western world. These practices appear to address some of the many shortcomings of conventional medicine, and a healthcare system perceived as hegemonic despite the effects of globalization. However these practices also raise an array of questions such as:

What is the genesis of such meditative practices, including mindfulness? What are the similarities and differences in the contexts where these practices began and in the contexts they are being applied? Do the Western psychological constructs reflect the purported aspect and effects of meditation described in the traditional Indian thought? What are the adaptations made and the implications of these practices in the current Western/Danish context? What are the benefits and perils? What are the dilemmas and paradoxes involved? How can the problematic aspects be dealt with? This article proposes to answer these questions.

In the first part of the article an understanding of origin of mindfulness and meditation is presented, which is considered pertinent for both appropriate applications and subsequent adaptation in the current Western/Danish context. This understanding is also important as these practices can 'trouble' the hegemonic, narrow Western conventional health care systems, including the psychological ones.

This part includes the very origin of mindfulness and meditation from the East. Particularly Buddhism and Yoga practice within the broad Indian psychology directs our attention to the following three major assumptions about human nature within Indian psychology: the monoism between body and mind, the centrality of consciousness and the focus on meditation as a part of daily conduct. Secondly, the four Noble truths and Eightfold path, basic constructs of essential Buddhism in Theravada Buddhist tradition (Thera, 1956/1996) and all forms of Buddhism, also the Mahayana, are delineated in an understanding of mindfulness and illustrate the basic assumptions of human nature in Indian psychology. Furthermore, light is thrown on the genesis and common elements of meditation conceptual as well as praxis level through Kristeller & Rikhye's (2008) views on meditation.

The second part of the article presents shortly a couple of strategically chosen intervention studies as a point of entry and reflects on the application of the meditative practices based on the aforementioned theoretical concepts and the ways to fit the Eastern psychological knowledge into the matrix of Western psychology. Later, a cognitive existentially inspired understanding of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) and, a Danish empirical study on the phenomenology of meditation (Madsen, 2007) is delineated.

The last part of the article reflects on perils of mindfulness and meditation as a part of transforming a worldview in the context of modernity. Moreover, the article appeals for the application of these practices as more than just techniques to solve specific problems, considering their genesis, the broader context and closer interplay between Eastern and Western psychological understandings.

1. First Part: Human nature in Indian Psychology and Buddhism

1.1. Three major assumptions

The very origin of mindfulness and meditation from the East, particularly Buddhism and Yoga practice within the broad Indian field of psychology directs our attention to the following three major assumptions about human nature within the Indian psychology, based on Rao[3] (2008).

- The monoism between body and mind in Indian psychology in contrast to the dualism between body and mind in mainstream Western psychology.

3 Rao, K. Ramakrishna is a philosopher, psychologist educator, international authority on Indian psychology, currently chairman of the Indian council of Philosophical Research (Rao, Paranjpe & Dalal, 2008).

- The centrality of consciousness rather than a strengthening of the Western conceptualisation of 'ego'.

- Focus on meditation as a part of daily conduct, rather than as a means of just attaining a very limited goal.

To delineate human nature in Indian psychology,[4] we start with its focus on the *monoism between body and mind* in the subject, which differs from Descartes' division of the subject into body and mind. Overall, these understandings vary from mainstream Western understandings, which mostly exclude the spiritual dimension and to some extent promote a body-mind dualism. Within a psychohistorical perspective on the Indian traditions, Kumar (2008) partitions the human beings into *deha* (the gross body) on the one hand and *manas* (mind) and *atman* (soul) on the other, which may be seen as parallel to the Greek notion of *psyche*. However, the concept of *atman* is unique to Indian ethos and forms its basis, for it is predominantly spirit-centeredness, while Western thinking has veered towards body-centeredness.

This absence of dualism has direct implications for the practice of meditation as it assumes that through meditation one learns to control the mind, subdue the consciousness and bring the *deha* physical body under the control of will. Similarly mindfulness is also considered as a form of mind control, which is also seen in other forms of the traditional practices.

In a delineation of different traditional healing practices, including Buddhism, Moodley & West (2005) point to the Western Cartesian body/mind division, which forms the basis for the biomedical approaches for the treatment of a number of human diseases.

> 'On a more historical scale, we seem to have come full circle regarding the fragmentation of the subject through the Cartesian body/mind *division*, which presents itself as an absent phenomenon in the philosophy of traditional healing [among others Buddhism].' (Moodley & West, 2005).

The second major assumption is the difference in perspectives on *consciousness,* which is pivotal when we compare Indian psychology with mainstream Western psychology. In contrast to the bio-centric bias of Western psychology, consciousness is the central core of Indian psychology, of which

4 According to Rao (2008), in the term Indian psychology, the emphasis is not on geography. For instance, Buddhist psychology, which is an integral part of Indian psychology, was developed in Sri Lanka, Tibet and Japan among other countries. Besides it is the name used by those who pioneered the area of applying classical Indian thought to contemporary psychology.

Buddhism is an integral part (Rao, 2008). At the same time, it is relevant to point out that along with Buddhism, two other religions of India, Hinduism and Jainism, share the same profound awareness of higher states of consciousness, of levels of reality, and individual perfectibility. However, the fundamental truth about consciousness as an ultimate reality exists *alongside* with strife and competition in Indian thought (Smith, 2003).

The study of the person is considered as the subject matter of Indian psychology and the person functions as a composite of consciousness, mind, and body. In other words the "person" is consciousness embodied. Furthermore, Rao (2008) emphasises that Indian psychology is essentially positive, as it is concerned with:

> "– understanding how the mind-body complex limits human potentials, corrupts one's understanding of truth and causes suffering so that remedies may be found and humans elevated to higher levels of awareness, achievement and happiness" (ibid., p. 7).

The human mind has dual functions as conceived in the Indian tradition, implying access to two different sources of *knowing and being* – one which is *transactional* and involved in the mind's interface with the brain and sensory system, and the other which is its *transcendental* connection with consciousness-as-such, implying significance of the immediate experience. Rinpoche (1983) points to the openness to new viewpoints and critical attitude towards itself as strengths of Western psychology but *missing acknowledgement of the primacy of immediate experience* is considered as a weakness and a challenge.

The third major assumption is related to the aforementioned individual perfectibility. Rao (2008) emphasizes that Indian psychology attempts to provide an understanding of the nature of the person, the causes and consequences of her conduct, and explore the methods and means of *transforming* the person in pursuit of *perfection* in being, *certainty* in knowing and *happiness* in feeling.

Khalakdina (2008) has described lucidly the relation between the philosophy & daily conduct within the modern Indian context. Within a socio-cultural framework on the human development in, she emphasises, the constant flux between the confrontation between tradition and modernity. Generically Indian philosophy has commonalities with the world philosophy, but differs in its spiritual interpretation, also of duties and obligations. This implies continuity of the *atman* (soul) over many lives and its absorption into creativity when it arrives at the stage of *moksha*. These philosophical perspectives form the background for a common ethos of non-violence, interdependency, collectivism, adherence to ritualism, simultaneous with the pursuit of happiness through morality.

An array of practices such as yoga and meditation is considered as *a part of the daily conduct* for personal transformation and to alleviate suffering in the human condition. What is crucial in Indian thought, according to Rao & Paranjpe (2008) is the emphasis on pragmatics of the knowledge about consciousness to render humans free from imperfections, ignorance and consequent suffering. In the Indian context, however, these practices comprise *a way of life* historically.

We should, however, be aware that we are dealing with highly complex conceptualizations with multiple meanings within Eastern psychology. We can consider with Cortwright (2002), the two different strategies in the dialogue between Eastern and Western approaches to psychology: one strategy claims the superiority of Eastern views over Western psychology. The second strategy seeks to integrate Eastern and Western psychology into a coherent whole. Invoking the second strategy we can raise the questions what happens when these complex phenomena are applied by researchers and practitioners within a Western context. Do we witness that psychological reductionism takes place? How do we relate to the above mentioned basic assumptions and is the basis totally different assumptions in the Western context?

In line with the objective of the article, we now focus on an understanding of human nature in Buddhism as an illustration of the three major assumptions about body-mind unity, the centrality of consciousness, and meditation as a part of daily conduct. This is primarily based on Premasiri´s (2008) delineation of cognition in Buddhism combined with Daya's (2005) delineations. Our focus is on Buddhism as a more than two and a half thousand years old religious path, as well as a developed philosophy and a system of human psychology. Buddhism, like a number of other theories of psychology, is the codification of one person's insights about psychology developed in the course of that person's self-investigations.

1.2. Buddhism: The three Dharma Seals and the Four Noble Truths

The essence of the Buddha's teachings are presented as the three marks of existence, or the three *dharma* seals: *Impermanence* – no fixed points we can cling to: *Suffering* – attachment to anything, including ideas or experience, will ultimately result in loss and therefore suffering; and *No-self* – we experience the world from the point of our ego-self, which leads us into a false belief about our separateness from all other things.

In addition, the Four Noble truths, which can be placed within the domain of psychology, are seen as the core insights of the Buddha, and highlight the aspects related to suffering. The truth of *suffering (dukha)* does not refer to human suffering but to the common human experience, with a combined view of the total human condition. It maintains that unenlightened living in-

volves suffering. The second truth also presents a psychological explanation of suffering – as produced by *three kinds of craving*: for sense gratification, for eternal existence and for annihilation (to destroy completely). The third truth recognizes the cessation of suffering by the *removal of craving* and achieving the destruction of the three roots of evil, namely greed, hatred and delusion (false belief). The fourth truth is about the *cessation of suffering* through the *Eightfold path,* which can be conceived in psychological terms as a path of behavior modification ensuring perfect peace of mind as its goal. This path provides guidance on the conduct of lives and relationship with other beings, together with instructions on how to understand the teachings more generally and to put into practice. The path is often grouped in three divisions: *wisdom*, *ethical conduct* and *concentration*. In some ways these qualities can be equated with virtues in the Western traditions.

Wisdom concerns the qualities of *right view* and the *right intention*, whereas *right speech*, *right action* and *right livelihood* are aspects of the path relating to ethical conduct. Under concentration are the paths involving *right effort*, *right mindfulness* and *right concentration*. In accordance with the major themes of the article – mindfulness and meditation, the next section delineates concentration related aspects of the Eightfold path. It is however important to keep in mind that the remaining aspects of the path are also significant for achieving the goal of perfect peace of mind.

1.3. Right Effort and Right Mindfulness: Meditative Traditions and Contemporary Psychology

In simple terms right mindfulness describes the Buddhist goal of speaking, thinking and acting with an alert mind and body. Mindfulness is easily destroyed by ego-based emotions and intoxicants such as alcohol. *Right concentration* basically means the cultivation of a meditation practice to achieve the enlightened state. If we analyse these practices within the contemporary psychological understandings and the aforementioned three major assumptions the analysis indicates that mindfulness refers to *introspectively observable contents of inner experience*, which are often not translated into an externally observable physical language. Premasiri (2008) emphasises:

> "It is precisely the nature of the inner mental experience of the human beings that becomes the primary focus of Buddhism in its endeavour to acquire knowledge that has *self-transforming* consequences upon human kind" (ibid., p. 101).

The 'insight' meditation, described later, to achieve mindfulness shows how such observations could be carried out to acquire knowledge about the inner experiences. Furthermore, the earlier mentioned 'third truth', relating to

the destruction of greed, hatred and delusion within a Buddhist perspective, is not a metaphysical statement but a psychological matter of fact and has cognitive significance.

We are aware that there are very different understandings of meditative practices. According to Goleman (1988), the meditative practices can be grouped into two primary approaches, *concentrative* meditations (Samadhi), *mindfulness/insight meditations* (Vipassana – to see clearly*)*. The second one can be further divided into mindfulness/calming the breath and the thoughts, achieving mental calm, while insight is gained from observation and analysing the way the mind works.

In the concentrative meditation, there is use of a repetitive object of focus: a *mantra* (the Sanskrit term mantra derives from the root term '*man*' – the mind and '*tra'* – control, but usually means a spiritually meaningful word or phrase such as "Aum") or a picture or a physical experience, while in the *mindfulness/insight meditations*, developed out of the Buddhist tradition (Thera, 1956/1996), there is less use of attention to a single object as a focus, though the breath is used as a repetitive, rhythmic anchor for awareness, often referred as 'bare attention'.

According to Kristeller and Rikhye (2008), in mindfulness meditation there is an emphasis on staying present in the moment and maintaining *an alert, aware state* rather than an emphasis on physical relaxation or induction of an alternative state of consciousness (ASC), such as a trance-like experience.

Although the above delineations emphasize the cognitive processes involved, the broader holistic understanding of mindfulness also involves the other aspects of the Noble Eightfold path. The mindfulness practice that involves training the mind to observe thoughts as *just thoughts*, feelings as *just feelings* and similarly physical sensations as *just sensations* rather than letting the mind move, as it usually does, into chains of interpretation, reactions or associated memories, it is not *just a technique*. It is a state of mind rather a way of life. Meditation involves not only the cognitive but also physiological, emotional, behavioral domains, spirituality and relation to self as well as others.

1.4. Buddhism and Western psychology

In the meeting of Buddhism and Western psychology, Rinpoche (1983) advocates a balance between experiential training and theory as it is part of the Buddhist tradition that such a balance is necessary for genuine learning to occur. He further adds that Buddhism teaches the Western psychologist how to relate more closely with his own experience, in its freshness, its fullness and its immediacy. To do this, one does not have to be a Buddhist, but one does have to practice meditation. At the same time we agree with Dalai

Lama (2001), that mindfulness traditions may also place a strong emphasis on the cultivation of compassion, empathy and altruistic action, by disengaging attachment to *self*, consistent with the Buddhist doctrine of '*no self'*. On the level of daily conduct, Dalai Lama's understanding of spirituality emphasises compassion, interdependency, relatedness to others and limitations of human being:

"Try to help others, and if you cannot help them, at least do not harm them."

Summing up our presentation of mindfulness, meditative practices in contemporary psychology along with the three major assumptions of Indian psychology regarding the mind-body unity, centrality of consciousness and meditative practices as a part of daily conduct, we can further see the potential of these practices. Considering the path shown by Buddha as a broad framework, illustrates concretely these assumptions, which imply a holistic understanding. The next part of this article deals with some current examples of mindfulness and meditation, in the modern Western societies. These societies are characterised by social fragmentation, family instability, inequalities, technological development and work demands.

2. Second part: Contemporary applications of Mindfulness & Meditative practices

2.1. Two interventions programmes in a Western context

I wish to present the earlier mentioned incorporation of mindfulness into Western health and treatment practices. With just two strategically chosen illustrations based on a classical educational sector intervention in the USA (Napoli, 2004) and a recent health sector intervention (2011) in a Danish context, we can reflect on the aforementioned assumptions about Indian psychology. The two interventions are not based on the dualism between mind and body, but reflect an increasing centrality of consciousness, as in the so called third generation behavior therapies where a paradigm shift from behavior science to consciousness science has taken place. (Grossman, 2004, 2010). The educational intervention illustrates the positive effects of mindfulness perceived as a 'life skill', not just as techniques, through the experiences of a school teachers' training program based on mindfulness, Napoli (2004).

> "The life skill of mindfulness can offer many benefits to improve the quality of life for teachers both *in and out* of classroom. This gift, of *being in the moment,* can create harmony among many *challenges and stresses*, teachers and children face today" (ibid., p. 40, author's italics).

It is furthermore discussed that with mindfulness one can learn to experience difficult thoughts, emotions and pain, but in a way that is less overwhelming, less judgmental, and less reactive. In doing so one can bring about *a balanced* approach to accepting experience. This study is conducted in a modern Western setting, where the participants experience everyday life demands and stresses, and the results explicitly confirm that Buddhism based mindfulness practices contribute positively to both the classroom situation and the daily life in the broader society.

Similarly, a recent study in Denmark (Ebdrup, 2011) mentioned in the beginning of this article, conducted in the Copenhagen University, confirms that mindfulness meditation is effective for stress, psoriasis, depressions, sclerosis and phobia. The results point out that this can also be beneficial to managing everyday life. However, the practical difficulties are also pinpointed:

> "If one is open, it is relatively easy to benefit from meditation. It is rather difficult to integrate it in the everyday life – to get time for this … One should meditate every day – just for a few minutes (ibid., p. 29)."

Regardless that these studies support the beneficial effects of mindfulness for coping with everyday life problems outside as well as inside the classroom, the fundamental issues related to the broad practices are hardly questioned or problematised. Moreover, the third assumption about meditation as a part of daily conduct is mentioned though with limited placing. These illustrations also raise some further questions. Is it optimal to simply use meditative practices as techniques, without considering the rationale? How to communicate the importance of the experiential dimension and nuanced understanding of inner experience in the Western context? How do we forward our understanding of both the subjective first person and the objective third person experiences? What are the dilemmas and conflict involved? How can the problematic aspects be minimized in applying and adapting the Eastern psychology based practices in the Western context?

We attempt to answer these questions through the classical study by Kabat-Zinn (2003), based on a cognitive-existential approach, and a study by Madsen (2007),[5] deals with these issues through a phenomenological perspective, bringing in existential psychological conceptualisations.

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5 Master dissertation, combining the disciplines of Psychology with Philosophy. He attempts to answer the research question: "what happens in the consciousness, when one meditates?" through in-depth empirical study of the first person meditational experiences of four participants (Madsen, 2007).

2.2. Pivotal issues in a classical mindfulness study and in a phenomenological existential study

Both the studies mentioned in this section (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Madsen, 2007) explicitly mirror the first two major assumptions in the Indian psychological practices regarding the unity between the mind and body as well as centrality of consciousness. To some extent, the third assumption about meditation being a part of the daily conduct implies an emphasis on regularity of the practice, especially for long term benefits. These studies confirm that the basic assumptions of Indian psychology are significant for application of these phenomena in the contemporary Western context and that these practices are not based on totally different assumptions.

2.2.1. Kabat-Zinn's MBSR intervention

Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as the particular qualities of attention and awareness that can be cultivated and developed through meditation. Since 1979, he and his colleagues have contributed to the development of mindfulness training programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which is a scientifically tested program that aims to increase mindfulness and thereby help ease physical and psychological suffering and build greater happiness and contentment in life. It is described as an intensive training that asks participants to draw on their inner resources and natural capacity to actively engage in caring for themselves and finding greater balance, ease, and peace of mind (cfm, 2011).

Kabat-Zinn encountered and learnt from the Buddhist Zen masters and further developed mindfulness in the Western context in the past three decades. His appeal for intimate sensitivity and respect in adapting and applying Buddhism based mindfulness in secular or medical contexts brings out some dilemmas and paradoxes. Defining mindfulness as the fundamental attentional stance underlying all streams of Buddhist meditative practices, he emphasizes considering the larger context of these practices and the significance of daily extensive training, regular disciplined practice for delivery of mindfulness-based interventions in various settings.

In these traditions the actual practice of mindfulness is, however, always nested within a larger conceptual and practice-based ethical framework oriented towards nonharming (an orientation it shares with the Hippocratic tradition of Western medicine).

> "Buddhist traditions have been taken by several generations of westerns, who practice these methods in their own lives on a daily basis as

> well through participation in periodic teacher-led, intensive meditation retreats …" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 146).

However, it is a dilemma when Kabat-Zinn cites Hayes that practices such as mindfulness must be separated from their religious and spiritual traditions, so that they can be conceptualised and integrated into Western psychological understanding. This raises an array of epistemological and ontological questions about the nature of science, spirituality and the hegemonic Western scientific discourses. An additional dimension is added to this discussion in the context of the current resurgence of religion and spirituality, making inclusion of the broad ethical and spiritual conceptual of Buddhism imperative.

> "If anything is agreed upon, it is that a straight forward narrative of progress from the religious to the secular is no longer acceptable" (Asad, 2006).

Thus the argumentation by Kabat-Zinn (2003) that any true integration of a new and fundamental element into psychology is likely to contribute to a broadening of the field itself and its perspectives on alternative epistemologies is an important issue. If spirituality in Buddhism based practices is perceived as compassion and interconnectedness, then excluding it would be counter-productive. The dharma dimension of Buddhism is a description of the mind related to the common human suffering and relationships with other beings. This quality implies an affectionate, compassionate quality combined with the meditative practices involving both mind and heart. However it is erroneously mentioned by Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145) that the words for mind and heart are the same in Asian languages. Lastly, according to these ideals, mindfulness based interventions are seen as an 'art form' that develops over time, enhanced through *regular disciplined practice on a daily basis*, not just as techniques or exercises for fixing what is broken.

2.2.2. Madsen's phenomenological and existential intervention

Similarly, an empirical study conducted in Denmark within a phenomenological and existential framework also describes beneficial meditational practices. With a point of entry in an in-depth delineation of meditation and interviews with experienced meditators, Madsen (2007) emphasizes the significance of following the Eightfold path to the extent possible in modern society, not just the aspects related to concentration and mindfulness. He argues that it would be a good idea for any person practicing meditation to keep in mind that meditation alone cannot reduce the suffering one experiences. One should try to live a balanced and healthy life, if one would have

a good meditation practice. The aspects are interconnected. One does not meditate day and night; if the rest of the time is disturbed and disconnected, then meditation can hardly result in improvement. If the person is stressed most of the time, hates him or herself, is too anxious, lethargic and consumes large amounts of harmful drugs etc., and meditates only a little once in a while, then great changes can hardly be achieved (Madsen, 2007).

A positive practice of meditation thus implies considerable efforts and positive changes with one's lifestyle and basic values, not just application of a narrow technique. Madsen (2007) is, furthermore, critical about judging the effects of meditation, altered states of consciousness (ASC) especially the experiences of peace, joy and well-being from a narrow, material, Western approach.

Based on the analyses of the subjective experiences of the meditation practitioners and the theoretical concepts from Buddhist psychology, Madsen (2007) attempts a holistic and sustainable framework for a positive meditation practice in the Danish context. This late/postmodern society is characterised by social fragmentation, family instability, inequalities, work demands, and especially demands for efficiency. He makes us aware of the possible problems and at the same time suggests the way by which one can overcome problems in the practice such as arising of difficult feelings related to existential conditions: freedom, death, meaninglessness. He maps the path to a positive meditation practice through following points (Madsen, 2007, p. 85):

- Instructions from and conversations with an experienced instructor.

- Analytic as well as conceptual understanding of the consciousness under meditation. What is the aim and how to reach it? What happens in the different phases of meditation and what is the objective?

- Regular/everyday practice, a healthy and balanced everyday life in relation to sleep/daily rhythm, food and nutrition, drugs, family, social condition, and work.

- Ethical daily conduct.

He also clarifies that these points should not be understood in order of priority but as factors which are reciprocally interrelated and contribute together to a beneficial meditation practice. Understanding and the practice itself continue side by side and the meditator should communicate regularly with her instructor to get guidance regarding analytic understanding and the meditation practice itself, especially the concrete problems which may

arise. Thus the meditation practices point towards the experience of the *fundamental ground of health,* rather than giving a set of techniques to persons.

2.3. Mindfulness and meditation: an art of living

2.3.1. Further aspects related to meditative practices

The two meditative practice-studies with differential theoretical approach indicate that regular and daily practice implied in the basic assumption about the human nature in the Indian psychology, combined with understanding of the conceptual framework is the common denominator.

Mindfulness and meditative practices are seen as 'an art', a way of living and relating to oneself and the world around for the persons positioned in the first two category. This analysis underlines all the three major assumptions of Indian psychology by directing attention to not only mind/body *monoism* and *centrality of consciousness* in these practices, but also to the third assumptions implying significance of mediation as a part of the *daily conduct*. This applies largely to those who practice meditation for instructing others, providing treatment for others or for their own health promotion. While some may meditate to get relief or cope with specific disease or dis – ease, for those meditative practices can hardly be a part of daily life in the beginning.

We can agree that these meditative practices have a broad appeal and potential, seen both from Kabat-Zinn's cognitive existential perspective as well as Madsen's phenomenological perspective. Exploring the field of meditative practices and contemporary psychology from another paradoxical interpretation however, Kristeller & Rikkhye (2008) from the US context indicate that meditation as a therapeutic tool has remained rather marginalized, either as an exotic approach, or simply as a stress management tool. They underline that there has been substantial research on the psychological and physiological effects of meditation in the Western context, yet far less attention has been paid to the underlying processes involved. They appeal for a continuance of research with high standards and methodological rigor, though still restricted to the cognitive theory:

> "Development of meditation practice in the West has demonstrated the potential for widespread benefits even for beginning mediators; translation and *greater understanding of the traditional literature* as it relates to contemporary psychology and cognitive theory holds promise for even further understanding of all levels of meditation practice" (Kristeller & Rikhey, p. 529, author's italics).

We have delineated the potential for mindfulness and meditative practices in the current Western context. It can be concluded that mindfulness and meditative practices have their origins in Indian psychology, reflecting the three major assumptions regarding mind/body monoism, centrality of consciousness and meditation as a part of the daily conduct. Over the past few decades it has been increasingly investigated by scientists with a view to assessing its potential social and health benefits. We could analyze the differential focus of three major 'schools' of modern psychology on meditation (Kristeller & Rikhey, 2008). In the psychodynamic school the focus is on meditation as a tool to heighten access to unconscious material in the service of self transformation (Rubin, 1999).While in the humanistic school the focus is on meditation as means for producing altered states of consciousness (ASC) in pursuit of self-actualisation and we note that in the cognitive-behavioral school, meditation is mainly perceived as a tool of relaxation and means for self-management.

Indian psychology is thus seen as more than simply an indigenous psychology, for the reason it offers fruitful psychological models and theories, derived from classical Indian thought, that hold pan-human interest. It is noted that Yoga has now acquired panhuman[6] relevance going beyond the Indian community. For example, it is today a billion dollar business in the USA (Rao & Paranjpe, 2008, p. 186), and, similarly, Buddhism inspired mindfulness based stress reduction has been used by a large number of persons (19.000 in the past three decades) in the USA (cfm, 2011). These concrete illustrations confirm the panhuman relevance and the further potential of these practices in the contemporary period.

However, at the same time it is imperative to pay attention to the critique and limitations of these practices, in order to enhance the beneficial effects and to avoid naïve, inappropriate use of these practices which can be ineffective but also harmful.

3. Third Part

3.1. Mindfulness and meditation: avoiding perils in a transforming worldview

We have described the origin and application of the meditative practices, primarily focusing on the potential and benefits in a modern society characterised by social fragmentation, family instability, technological development, work demands. We can conclude that it is not optimal to simply use meditative practices as techniques, without considering the rationale. Through instructor/expert the importance of the experiential dimension

6 Relating to all humanity.

and nuanced understanding of inner experience can be communicated, thus avoiding the peril of psychological reductionism. We can forward our understanding of both the subjective first person and the objective third person experiences through discussion with the instructor and observations. The dilemmas and conflicts may involve an understanding of the ethical as well as the spirituality perceived as compassion (Dalai Lama, 2001) and the positive transformation in the daily conduct. The problematic aspects in applying and adapting the Eastern psychology based practices in the Western context can be minimised by accepting the need for considerable efforts in regular practice, open attitude, involving an instructor and addressing the perils.

The perils and limitations involved should not be overlooked. Wallace & Shapiro (2006) argue that that narrow ethnocentrism could, however, lead to interpretation of some altered states of consciousness (ASC) as being psychotic or artificially schizophrenic. Simultaneous attention should be paid to these practices with an open understanding within an ethical framework which also considers the broad societal conditions.

Nevertheless, attention should be paid to findings by Engler (1986), Epstein (1995), and Elsass (2010-conference), which indicate that mindfulness can be unsuitable for persons with a vulnerable or delicate self. The Buddhist viewpoint emphasizes the impermanence and the transitoriness of things, thus these practices are primarily *ahistorical,* with a focus on living more fully *here and now*, with historical information primarily useful in understanding current conditions. The broader societal context should be considered when applying these meditation practices.

At the same time, there is a great concern that some more profound parts of Buddhist philosophy can be disregarded by focusing only on practical aspects of Buddhism within the context of mental health. Sugamura, Haruki & Koshikawa (2007) comment that four substantial themes should be considered: reality, identity, causality and logicality. They suggest that the way to interpret Buddhism as practices for well-being would certainly be viable in encouraging the study of Buddhist teachings in psychology. Yet, such attempts should not result in *superficial imports and applications of Buddhist practices* but give due weight to the deeper philosophical issues to build more solid bridges between Buddhism and psychology (Sugamura, Haruki & Koshikawa, 2007, p. 690).

At present, there are not only in the West, but also in India Buddhism's country of origin, a growing number of centers for research as well as training in meditation that are informed by the contemporary principles of science and practice. A number of studies are being conducted on psychology of

meditation and 'Retreat experiences', an important aspect of meditation experiences. There are, moreover increased efforts to integrate meditation and Yoga into school settings, nursing homes, hospital emergency services, palliative care settings and prisons. Furthermore, a study of these phenomena in a context, where these comprise *a way of life*, has advantages as well as disadvantages. For the study of altered states of consciousness through meditation (ASC) and/or drugs, the millennia old traditions of being interested in such phenomena, and of supporting people who want to investigate the mind as is the case in India, are major advantages. On the other hand, Tart (2008) argues that the millennia old traditions, especially as they become implicit assumptions and biases, can severely limit observation, thinking, motivation and action, so they are a major disadvantage (2008, p. 605).

These dynamics confirm the significance of collaboration between West and East, which has also been emphasised in the Danish context. (Singla,1998, 2003; Elsass, 2003). It is thus important to have both an integrative and critical attitude to these meditative practices focusing on the perils involved as well as consider the broad context.

Conclusion and perspectives

This limited and humble study of origins of complex phenomena such as mindfulness and meditative practices and applications in the Western context leads to the conclusion that these practices originate from the Indian psychological context and reflect its three major assumptions: the *mind/body monoism*, the *centrality of consciousness* and meditation as a part of the *daily life*. At practical, everyday life level beneficial applications of these assumptions imply learning of these practices from an instructor who is trained, understanding of a conceptual and ethical framework, balanced everyday life, and regular preferably daily practice. Thus beneficial and sustainable meditative practices imply considerable efforts, expert instructors as well as considering it as a part of daily conduct. The empirical studies of these practices in the Western/Danish context indicate the potentials and beneficial effects in the modern society characterised by social fragmentation, family instability, technological development, and work place demands. When these complex phenomena are applied by researchers and practitioners within a Western context, the benefits are documented. At the same time we witness that there are a number of challenges implied. It is imperative to pay attention to the critique and limitations of these practices, in order to enhance the beneficial effects. Attention should be directed to perils of psychological reductionism in conceptual understanding of these practices, a naive, narrow application of mindfulness and meditation practices, with the narrow, single goal of ending suffering. Not addressing these could

be lead to harmful effects, rather than just lack of positive effect. A narrow individual-based understanding of mindfulness and meditative practices, without considering the origin has to be avoided. One illustration, which may sound idealistic, is to pay attention to the teachings of Buddha as the basis for mindfulness. These teachings emphasise spirituality as *compassion and interconnection with others* thus include the societal context, as the path encourages not just right concentration, also right view, right intention, right speech, right action and right livelihood.

These practices have an immense potential within multiple domains of human experience such as health-care and promotion, psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, and organization psychology. The increasing interest and numbers of centers and persons practicing mindfulness and meditation in different countries at different societal levels confirm the potential but also poses the ethical and professional challenges, not just considering it as a narrow technique, acknowledgement and acceptance of the origins, including the major assumptions of the Eastern psychological understandings which seem to have now acquired pan human relevance. Some of the basic assumptions of the mainstream Western psychology are being broadly questioned in the contemporary late/post modern society within different psychological approaches and disciplines.

It is thus important to examine fundamental issues such as the basic assumptions as well as outcomes associated with mindfulness and meditation from both subjective first person and the objective experiences in different contexts. The challenges are with both the Eastern and Western understandings, as well as the knowledge of the broad context, in order to expand horizons of psychology, making it more inclusive to contribute to alleviate sufferings of mankind.

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