

The Potential of Facing Anger with Mindfulness

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Abstract:

In this paper I examine the potential of mindfulness in relation to facing anger and aggression from the viewpoint of early Buddhism. After a brief survey of relevant current research, I investigate the indication in one Pāli discourse that mindfulness on its own is not sufficient for emerging from enmity. A consultation of the Chinese parallels to this discourse suggests this presentation to be the result of a textual error. The instructions on the four establishments of mindfulness confirm that, from an early Buddhist viewpoint, mindfulness was considered an effective means to counter anger. Closer study of these instructions shows a considerable degree of overlap with current research findings and suggests a possible direction for future research.

Key words:

Anger, Awakening, Compassion, Early Buddhism, Internal and External Mindfulness, Satipaṭṭhāna

Introduction

The potential of mindfulness in facing anger has been corroborated by a growing body of research. Reviews of mindfulness-based interventions to counter aggression (Fix & Fix 2013) and of dialectical behavior therapy for the treatment of anger (Frazier & Vela 2014) corroborate the potential of mindfulness in this respect. In fact, “because of the accepting, non-reactive nature of mindfulness, it seems like an ideal strategy to reduce anger and aggression” (Denson 2015, p. 138).

An illustrative experiment involved subjecting participants to the experience of being either accepted or rejected. In addition, the group experiencing rejection was further divided into those who received a brief practical introduction to mindfulness and those who did not. This introduction involved the exercise of mindfully eating a raisin, which is part of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction curriculum (Kabat-Zinn 1990). The research findings “indicate that this simple experience of (temporarily induced) mindfulness reduced individuals’ aggressive behavior following social rejection to a level that was indistinguishable from that of individuals who were accepted” (Heppner et al. 2008, p. 493).

An intriguing aspect of the potential benefit of facing anger with mindfulness is that it “decreases behaving in automatic or impulsive ways. Mindfulness should help make people aware of feeling

and thoughts when they arise, rather than after they are already acted upon. This may be especially important when emotional association networks get active, as in the case of a perceived provocation” (Borders, Earleywine, & Jajodia 2010, p. 40).

A core element in several relevant mindfulness-based interventions is the creating of “a pause following an immediate emotional arousal that may lead to anger and aggression. The pause preempts the triggering of an automatic reaction that results in negative outcomes, with successive stages of the practice helping present-moment awareness and enabling the rising of a mindful response to the emotionally disruptive situation” (Singh 2018)

In addition, “mindfulness is thought to facilitate the development of decentering ... which enables one to view thoughts as transient and insubstantial events not representative of the true nature of reality. Mindfulness training provides the insight necessary to view thoughts and anger-producing situations as transient events within a broader context of the flow of life events ... and provides cognitive flexibility to facilitate responding in a nonaggressive manner” (Singh, Lancioni, & Winton 2017, p. 2).

A significant dimension here is that “mindfulness may reduce anger expression and hostility via reductions in anger rumination, a process of thinking repetitively about angry episodes that increases anger” (Peters et al. 2015, p. 871). “First, the basic attentional processes involved in mindfulness ... may facilitate awareness that rumination is occurring ... Second, the attitudinal qualities of mindful attention ... may

[p. 1967]

lead to fewer critical thoughts about oneself and others that typically trigger and perpetuate rumination. In addition, a nonjudgmental, accepting, and nonreactive stance toward one’s experiences may reduce the need for rumination” (p. 872). In fact, out of various aspects of mindfulness, “the nonjudging facet of mindfulness demonstrated the most consistent and strongest loading across all forms of aggression”, which in turn suggests the necessity “to cultivate nonjudgmental and nonreactive attitudes in addition to present-centered attention and awareness to see the greatest effect on anger rumination and aggressive behavior” (p. 880).

Does Mindfulness Suffice to Counter Anger?

Pursuing the same topic from the viewpoint of “early Buddhism”, reflecting Buddhist thought and practice roughly between the 5th to 3rd century BCE (Anālayo 2012), brings up an element of discord. This manifests in a dialogue recorded in a Pāli discourse (SN 10.4). A visitor expressed the following thought in front of the Buddha:

The mindful one is always fortunate,
The mindful one thrives in happiness.
Daily getting better, the mindful one
Is released from enmity.

(SN 10.4: *satīmato sadā bhaddaṃ, satimā sukham edhati; satīmato suve seyyo, verā ca parimuccatī ti*)

The Buddha's reply takes the following form:

The mindful one is always fortunate,
 The mindful one thrives in happiness.
 Daily getting better, the mindful one
 Is not released from enmity.
 Being one whose mind, all day and night,
 Delights in harmlessness,
 With loving kindness for all living beings,
 For such an one there is no enmity at all.
 (*satīmato sadā bhaddaṃ, satimā sukham edhati; satīmato suve seyyo, verā na parimuccati.
 yassa sabbam ahorattaṃ, ahiṃsāya rato mano, mettaṃ so sabbabhūtesu, veraṃ tassa na kenacī ti*).

In the Buddha's reply, the repetition of the first three lines spoken by the visitor leads over to a change of formulation in the fourth. Instead of the assertion that through mindfulness one is freed from enmity, in this discourse the Buddha asserts that one is *not* freed from enmity. Here the point at stake appears to be not just emerging from a momentary experience of anger and enmity. Instead, the issue seems to be becoming truly liberated in such a way that "there is no enmity at all" in the mind. This reflects a basic difference in orientation between clinical interventions and early Buddhist thought, where the aim is to cultivate a mind forever free from the slightest tendency to react with anger or aversion (or with sensual desire).

The Buddha's reply then continues by pointing to what is apparently required in addition to mindfulness, namely a continuous dedication to harmlessness (*ahiṃsa*) and loving kindness (*mettā*). In this way, although the cultivation of mindfulness receives full commendation as something that is always auspicious, that yields happiness, and that leads to daily improvement, overcoming anger seems to require more than that. The additional qualities mentioned are compassion, a quality here expressed in the form of harmlessness, and loving kindness.

In order to determine whether this conclusion accurately reflects the general early Buddhist position on the matter, a consultation of parallels to this Pāli discourse is required. Two such parallels can be found in discourse collections extant in Chinese translation. In neither of these two parallels does the Buddha censure in any way what his visitor states; in fact, in the version to be taken up first (SĀ 1319), he explicitly endorses the statement made by his visitor. This version has four verses spoken by the Buddha's visitor, each of which begins with the same two lines as follows:

The worthy and virtuous one has right mindfulness,
 The worthy and virtuous one is continuously with right mindfulness.
 (SĀ 1319: 賢德有正念, 賢德常正念,)

Based on the repeated premise that the worthy and virtuous one has right mindfulness and is continuously with right mindfulness, the subsequent lines in each of the four verses proceed in the following manner:

With right mindfulness one sleeps in peace,
In this world and another world.
(正念安隱眠, 此世及他世)

With right mindfulness one sleeps in peace,
And one's mind is always tranquil.
(正念安隱眠, 其心常寂止)

With right mindfulness one sleeps in peace
And one abandons the defeating of others in combat.
(正念安隱眠, 捨降伏他軍)

One neither kills nor instructs [others] to kill,
One neither oppresses nor instructs [others] to oppress,
One has a mind of loving kindness towards everyone,
A mind that does not harbour the bondage of enmity.
(不殺不教殺, 不伏不教伏, 慈心於一切, 心不懷怨結)

On hearing these verses, the Buddha is on record for expressing his agreement with the words “it is like this, it is like this, as you have said” (如是, 如是, 如汝所說).

[p. 1968]

Compared to the Pāli version, this discourse presents a substantially different perspective. Here mindfulness emerges as the core quality required, and loving kindness is a *result* of its cultivation, as is the overcoming of enmity. The worthy and virtuous one who has right mindfulness and is continuously with right mindfulness is for this reason one who does not kill or oppress (or have others do so on one's behalf) and therefore has loving kindness and is free from enmity.

A similar impression arises on examination of the other Chinese parallel (SĀ² 318). After an initial verse that also relates right mindfulness to peaceful sleep, this version proceeds in the following way:

With right mindfulness one gains virtue and happiness,
One does not harm and does not wield a stick,
One neither defeats nor is defeated,
Toward all living beings
One gives rise to loving kindness and compassion for all life,
Being free from any enmity and resentment.
This, therefore, becomes one's great happiness

And one is furthermore without any fault.

(SĀ² 318: 正念得賢樂, 不害不杖捶, 不勝亦不貪, 於一切眾生, 普皆生慈愍, 離一切怨憎, 斯乃為大樂, 更無有過者).

This version reports no reply by the Buddha, which in the ancient Indian setting implies agreement. It thereby confirms the impression of a substantially different attitude toward mindfulness as a means to counter anger. In both of these Chinese versions, loving kindness and compassion appear as the result of mindfulness practice rather than being a required addition for removing anger and enmity.

Returning to consult the Pāli version in light of these two Chinese parallels, it is noteworthy that the difference in formulation between the visitor's initial proposal and the Buddha's reply involves just a single letter. Instead of the conjunction *ca*, found in the formulation used by the visitor, the Buddha's reply has the negation *na*. This leaves open the possibility that, at some time during the transmission of this Pāli discourse, *ca* and *na* might have been confused with each other. This could only have happened at a relatively early stage, as the commentary on this discourse quotes the reading *verā na parimuccati*, "is not released from enmity" (Spk I 305). Assuming a confusion between *ca* and *na* occurred at an early point in the transmission of the Pāli discourse collections, the rest of the Buddha's reply in this Pāli discourse, in line with what the Chinese versions indicate, perhaps intends harmlessness and loving kindness to be outcomes of mindfulness practice.

The aptness of the suggested emendation can be corroborated by examining how other early Buddhist discourses regard the potential of mindfulness for removing anger and enmity.

The Potential of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness

An obvious source to consider for how the cultivation of mindfulness impacts anger is the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* which, together with its two Chinese discourse parallels, describes in detail the cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*, *smṛtyupasthāna*, 念處, *dran pa nye bar gzhag pa*).

What about the results of cultivating the four establishments of mindfulness? Do these have a direct relationship to anger? The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its two parallels agree in presenting the cultivation of all four establishments of mindfulness as the "direct path", the "single path", or the "one-going path" for complete mental purification:

This is the direct path for the purification of beings ... namely the four establishments of mindfulness.

(MN 10: *ekāyano ayaṃ ... maggo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā ... yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*).

There is a single path for the purification of beings ... namely the four establishments of mindfulness.

(MĀ 98: 有一道淨眾生 ... 謂四念處).

There is a one-going path for the purification of the actions of beings ... namely ... attending to the four establishments of mindfulness.

(EĀ 12.1: 有一入道, 淨眾生行 ... 所謂 ... 思惟四意止).

The last version additionally mentions the need to overcome the five mental hindrances. The second in the standard set of five mental hindrances is ill-will, a state closely related to anger. The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its other Chinese parallel in fact present detailed instructions on how one should recognize with mindfulness the presence or absence of this hindrance and explore the conditions for its arising and its removal, which forms part of their description of the fourth establishment of mindfulness.

Whereas instructions on exploring the conditionality of ill-will are not found in all versions, the three discourse parallels do agree on mentioning anger when describing the cultivation of the third establishment of mindfulness. In all versions, the chief task is clear recognition of the presence or absence of anger, ideally combined with an insight into the impermanent nature of this and all other mental states. I will return to this in more detail below.

Now mindful recognition of the presence or absence of anger does not constitute a full cultivation of all four establishments of mindfulness. At the same time, however, whatever potential the early discourses accord to the four establishments of mindfulness in general would likewise reflect the potential of cultivating mindfulness in relation to anger specifically. According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and one of its Chinese parallels, the degree of mental purification possible

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through cultivating the four establishments of mindfulness is as follows:

Of anyone who should develop these four *satipaṭṭhānas* in such a way ... one fruit out of two fruits can be expected: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.

(MN 10: *yo hi koci ... ime cattāro satipaṭṭhāne evaṃ bhāveyya ... tassa dvinnaṃ phalānaṃ aññataraṃ phalaṃ pāṭikaṅkhaṃ: diṭṭhe va dhamme aññā, sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā*).

If a male or female monastic with settled mind properly dwells in the four establishments of mindfulness ... then they will certainly attain [one of] two fruits: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a remainder [of clinging], the attainment of non-returning.

(MĀ 98: 若有比丘, 比丘尼 ... 立心正住四念處者, 彼必得二果: 或現法得究竟智, 或有餘得阿那含).

The two versions list various possible time periods for mindfulness practice to lead to one of these two fruits. These two fruits correspond to the highest two levels of awakening recognized in early Buddhist thought, which are becoming a non-returner or an arahant respectively. Both types of awakened beings have forever eradicated anger, ill-will, enmity, and animosity from their mind, which are incapable of manifesting again (likewise for any sensual desire).

The other Chinese parallel to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* expresses the potential of the four establishments of mindfulness in this way:

One is not agitated, and not being agitated one knows as it really is that “birth and death have in turn been extinguished, the holy life has been established, what had to be done has been done, there is no more experiencing of another existence.” Monastics, in dependence on the one-going path living beings attain purification ... and attain the realization of Nirvāṇa. (EĀ 12.1: 無畏怖, 已無畏怖, 生死便盡, 梵行已立, 所作已辦, 更不復受有, 如實知之. 諸比丘, 依一入道眾生得清淨 ... 得涅槃證).

The reference to having extinguished birth and death, done what had to be done, etc., is a standard formula used in the early discourses to express the realization of arahant-ship. In this way, although the formulation differs from the other two versions, this discourse also throws into relief the potential of the four establishments of mindfulness to bring about a complete removal of anger and aggression (as well as sensual desire).

In early Buddhist thought, the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness is an integral aspect of the noble eightfold path. Thus, statements referring to the potential of the four establishments of mindfulness should not be read as implying mindfulness practice on its own, without any need for a sound ethical foundation, etc. Nevertheless, none of the other factors of this noble eightfold path receives a distinction comparable to the above-translated statements on the potential of the four establishments of mindfulness.

This makes it fair to conclude that the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its two discourse parallels confirm the conclusion reached concerning the exchange between a visitor and the Buddha on the potential of mindfulness in regard to anger. The two Chinese accounts of this exchange appear to have preserved a presentation more in accord with other early discourses, in that the practice of mindfulness on its own can lead to overcoming anger. Although the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion offer a substantial contribution toward countering anger, the same problem can also be tackled through mindfulness practice on its own.

Dimensions of Being Mindful of Anger

As briefly mentioned above, anger is a mental state whose presence and absence should be known according to the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its two discourse parallels. Such knowing is part of the practice of the third establishment of mindfulness and requires an inward monitoring with the question: “How is the mind?” Usually one’s attention is directed toward external events, yet when implementing this establishment of mindfulness, what really counts is how the mind reacts to them. This is what needs to be noticed. In the case of anger, the instructions are as follows:

One knows a mind with anger to be “a mind with anger”, or one knows a mind without anger to be “a mind without anger”.

(MN 10: *sadosaṃ vā cittaṃ, sadosaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti; vītadosaṃ vā cittaṃ, vītadosaṃ cittaṃ ti pajānāti*).

Having a mind with anger, one knows, as it really is, that one has a mind with anger; having a mind without anger, one knows, as it really is, that one has a mind without anger.
(MĀ 98: 有恚心, 知有恚心如真; 無恚心, 知無恚心如真).

Having a mind with anger, one is in turn aware of it and knows of oneself that one has a mind with anger; having a mind without anger, one is also aware of it and knows of oneself that one has a mind without anger.
(EĀ 12.1: 有瞋恚心, 便自覺知有瞋恚心; 無瞋恚心, 亦自覺知無瞋恚心).

The instructions in the three versions agree on the need for clear recognition, aimed at either the presence or the absence of anger. As mentioned above, the task of mindfulness here is not confined to revealing the presence of anger, but also

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involves giving attention to the absence of anger. Familiarizing oneself with the difference between the presence and the absence of anger in terms of the texture and condition of the mind will make it intuitively clear why the latter is preferable to the former (Anālayo 2018).

A basic requirement in cultivating this third establishment of mindfulness concerns “seeing through the stream of thoughts that occurs at the surface level of the mind and recognizing the actual state of mind that stands behind them” (Anālayo 2013, p. 163). This relates to the potential of mindfulness reflected in current research, as such recognition will indeed “decrease behaving in automatic or impulsive ways” and “help make people aware of feelings and thoughts when they arise” (Borders, Earleywine, & Jajodia 2010, p. 40). It also serves to introduce a pause which “preempts the triggering of an automatic reaction” and instead facilitates “the rising of a mindful response to the emotionally disruptive situation” (Singh 2018).

Another feature that seems central in contemplation of the mind is that “maintaining non-reactive awareness in this way counters the impulse towards either reaction or suppression contained in unwholesome states of mind, and thereby deactivates their emotional and attentional pull” (Anālayo 2003, p. 175). The result is an inner freedom from thought processes, with which the practitioner is no longer fully identified. This ties in with a decrease of rumination mentioned above, in that “the basic attentional processes involved in mindfulness ... may facilitate awareness that rumination is occurring”, wherefore an “accepting, and nonreactive stance toward one’s experiences may reduce the need for rumination” (Peters et al. 2015, p. 872).

Observing one’s manifold states of mind comes with an inbuilt pointer to impermanence, simply due to the fact that, even though the mind might currently be in a condition of anger, for example, sooner or later it will be without anger, at least temporarily. A growing appreciation of the mind’s changing nature is therefore a natural result of cultivating the third establishment of mindfulness.

The importance of impermanence finds explicit mention in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and one of its two parallels. The relevant part occurs in a passage that concludes the description of contemplation of the mind. It reads as follows:

One abides contemplating the nature of arising in the mind, or one abides contemplating the nature of passing away in the mind, or one abides contemplating the nature of arising and passing away in the mind.

(MN 10: *samudayadhammānupassī vā cittasmiṃ viharati, vayadhammānupassī vā cittasmiṃ viharati, samudayavayadhammānupassī vā cittasmiṃ viharati*).

One contemplates the mind's characteristics as an establishment of mindfulness; one contemplates its nature of arising, one contemplates its nature of ceasing, and one contemplates conjointly its nature of arising and ceasing.

(EĀ 12.1: 心相觀意止. 觀習法, 觀盡法, 并觀習盡之法.

This does not mean that one invariably has to catch the exact moment of arising or of passing away. Instead, even just noting that anger is now present in the mind can suffice to arouse the understanding that it is of the *nature* to arise, as it has not always been there. Once the anger has disappeared, it has manifested its *nature* of passing away, even if the disappearance is noticed only after the actual moment when it vanished.

Such contemplation of the nature to arise and pass away concords well with the suggestion that “mindfulness training provides the insight necessary to view thoughts and anger-producing situations as transient events within a broader context of the flow of life events” (Singh, Lancioni, & Winton 2017, p. 2).

External Mindfulness

The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its two parallels also stipulate that mindfulness should be cultivated internally as well as externally. The relevant instructions for the case of contemplation of the mind are as follows:

In regard to the mind one dwells contemplating the mind internally, or in regard to the mind one dwells contemplating the mind externally.

(MN 10: *ajjhataṃ vā citte cittānupassī viharati, bahiddhā vā citte cittānupassī viharati*).

One contemplates the mind as mind internally and one contemplates the mind as mind externally.

(MĀ 98: 觀內心如心, 觀外心如心).

[In regard to the] mind one contemplates one's own mind internally as an establishment of mindfulness ... [in regard to the] mind one contemplates the mind externally ... as an establishment of mindfulness.

(EĀ 12.1: 比丘內自觀心心意止... 外觀心... 心意止」

The double reference to the mind in the above instructions appears to convey that any individual instance of a mental state, such as a “mind with anger”, should be related to the nature of the mind in general. Here the task of mindful contemplation is not only recognition of the particular moment of anger, but also to relate that specific experience to general characteristics of the mind.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and one of its Chinese parallels (EĀ 12.1) specify that, in addition to contemplating first internally and then externally, one should also contemplate “internally and externally”. This suggests merging the perspectives that have evolved from the earlier internal and external contemplations.

The idea of mindfulness of “external” states of mind requires some unpacking. In fact, in later tradition several

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alternative interpretations evolved (Schmithausen 2012). For the case of early Buddhism, a similar reference in another discourse suggests that “external” refers to other persons. The passage relevant for the case of contemplation of the mind proceeds as follows:

In regard to the mind one dwells contemplating the mind internally ... and one arouses knowledge and vision externally of the minds of others.

(DN 18: *ajjhattaṃ citte cittānupassī viharati ... bahiddhā paracitte ñāṇadassanaṃ abhinibbatteti*).

Having contemplated the mind internally, one arouses knowledge of the minds of others.
(DĀ 4: 內觀意已, 生他意智).

The Pāli version specifies that such knowledge of the minds of others requires accomplishment in concentration. In fact, both versions seem to be concerned with some form of telepathic knowledge.

The indication that “external” refers to others fits the context of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its two parallels well. Needless to say, the instructions in these discourses could hardly be meant only for those who have acquired telepathic knowledge. In fact, to know if someone is in a state of anger is possible without such abilities. Another person’s bodily posture, facial expression, tone of voice, etc., can all serve as indicators of the presence or absence of anger.

From a meditative viewpoint, such a form of external mindfulness is of considerable importance for a full understanding of a mental state like anger. The question is not only: “How does it feel to be angry?”, but also: “How does it feel when others get angry at us?”. This second question then provides the basis for appreciating more fully how others must feel when we get angry at them. If others look ugly when being angry, chances are quite high that we do not become more beautiful when we get angry. If anger causes tenseness of the body and a harsh voice in others, the same quite probably holds for ourselves. In fact, noting the beginning of bodily tension or a change of voice can help us become aware of mounting anger not only in others, but also in

ourselves. In this way, the internal and external dimensions of mindfulness practice complement each other.

It is only when these additional perspectives have fully emerged in the light of mindful observation that the problem of anger will be fully understood and the proper foundation will be laid for freeing oneself from patterns of angry reactivity.

The need for such external practice in order for mindfulness to unfold its full potential might provide a background for appreciating recent research. Although several studies confirmed the potential of mindfulness training in fostering compassion (Lim, Condon & DeSteno 2015; Winning & Boag 2015; Tan, Lo & Macrae 2014), other studies found no substantive effects of mindfulness training on empathy (Bayot et al. 2018; Ridderinkhof et al. 2017).

Of particular interest in relation to the last-mentioned study is that “the mindfulness exercise increased mind reading in non-narcissistic individuals, but ironically *decreased* mind reading in their narcissistic counterparts. Thus, mindfulness backfired among those who seemed to need it the most” (Ridderinkhof et al. 2017, p. 261). This gives the impression as if, for mindfulness to unfold its potential as envisaged in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its two parallels, its external dimension might need to be cultivated intentionally. This applies particularly to those who tend to be overly preoccupied with themselves, who naturally tend to cultivate mindfulness in line with their personal proclivities. In this way, some form of externally directed mindfulness seems to be called for, such as in relation to communication (Jones & Hansen 2015).

Conclusion

Current research and ancient Buddhist texts converge on the potential of a mindful pause that helps one emerge from automatic reaction. Ruminating can be countered by using mindfulness to see through a particular current of thoughts and discern the underlying mental state. Sustained practice of the third establishment of mindfulness can lead to a deepening appreciation of the changing nature of all mental events. An additional perspective evident in the early Buddhist instructions is the external dimension of mindfulness, in the sense of paying attention not only to anger within oneself, but also to its manifestation in others.

The impressive findings in current research on the potential of mindfulness to counter anger contrast with a Pāli discourse that at first sight seems to point in a different direction. Upon closer examination, this presentation can be discerned as the probable result of a textual error, thereby helping to correct the impression that mindfulness “on its own, despite its manifold advantages, might not suffice for eradicating ill will” (Anālayo 2003, p. 52). Instead, current research in cognitive psychology and early Buddhist meditation theory can be seen to agree on the potential of mindfulness to face anger and to overcome the tendency toward aggression, enmity, and ill-will.

The discovery of a probable textual corruption in a Pāli discourse, inspired by following up clinical research on mindfulness, serves to illustrate the potential of an on-going dialogue

between cognitive psychology and Buddhist studies to enrich and deepen an understanding of mindfulness in both camps.

Limitations and Future Research

Being a scholar of Buddhist studies, my acquaintance with current clinical research on anger and mindfulness is limited

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to the selected publications cited in this article. It is based on these that I voice the impression that in current research the external dimension of mindfulness may not yet have received as much attention as its internal dimension. If this impression should be an accurate reflection of the state of affairs in the field, a potentially fruitful area for future research would emerge. This would be to investigate to what degree training in external mindfulness can improve one's ability to notice when someone else is about to get into, or has already gotten into, a condition of anger or irritation. Mindfulness training intentionally directed externally should strengthen this ability and confirm the impression that compassion and empathy naturally emerge from a comprehensive and sustained cultivation of mindfulness.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval: This article does not contain any studies performed by the author with human participants or animals.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Abbreviations

DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>

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