

Clear Knowing and Mindfulness

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Abstract:

This article examines occurrences of the mental quality clear “comprehension” or clear “knowing” (*sampajañña/samprajanya*) in early Buddhist discourse with a view to discerning its function in relation to the meditative cultivation of mindfulness. These two terms occur often together, pointing to a collaboration between the more bare or receptive awareness provided by mindfulness and the cognizing or recognizing function fulfilled by clear knowing. Such collaboration can apply to a range of different contexts, from daily life activities, including sleeping, to deep states of concentration and the cultivation of insight into impermanence and emptiness. The understanding that emerges in this way might contribute to a better appreciation of the functions of mindfulness both on its own and in relation to other mental qualities closely associated with it, in the way this was understood in different periods of Buddhist thought.

Key words:

Absorption; Clear Comprehension; Clear Knowing; Contemplation of Feeling Tones; Divine Abodes; Emptiness; Impermanence; *satipaṭṭhāna*; *sampajañña*; *samprajanya*

Introduction

An understanding of the functions and characteristics of mindfulness in the Buddhist traditions could benefit from examining its relationship to other mental qualities which, in textual descriptions of meditation-related practices, occur in close association with it. Dunne et al. (2019) noted the role of clear “knowing” or clear “comprehension” (Pāli *sampajañña*, Sanskrit *samprajanya*, Chinese 正知/正智, Tibetan *shes bzhin*) as the capacity to notice when a distraction has occurred. An example would be alerting meditators that, instead of attending to the breath as the intended object of practice, they are rather daydreaming.

In an attempt to follow the lead provided by Dunne et al. (2019), which emphasized the perspectives of Tibetan Buddhist meditation traditions, the present article examines selected occurrences of clear knowing in the early discourses, in order to arrive at an understanding of this quality and its relationship to mindfulness during the beginning stages in the development of Buddhist thought.

The Establishments of Mindfulness

The quality of clear knowing occurs in a succinct definition of the cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness. This definition applies to each of the four establishments of contemplating the body, feeling tones, mental states, and dharmas:

Being diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, removing greedy desire and sadness in the world.

(SN 52.6: *ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*).

Being with diligent effort, right mindfulness, and right knowing, overcoming greed and sadness in the world.

(SĀ 537: 精勤方便, 正念, 正知, 調伏世間貪憂).

This succinct definition of the essentials of formal mindfulness practice reflects a collaboration of mindfulness with other qualities, one of which is clear knowing. The additional qualification of such knowing as “right” in the second version is in line with a general tendency of Chinese *Āgama* discourses to employ this term more frequently than their Pāli

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counterparts. Such employment in the present case does not imply a substantial difference as such, since the overall practice, described in both versions, corresponds to an implementation of the seventh path factor of right mindfulness. Hence, the indication that clear knowing here is of the right type only makes explicit what would already be implicit.

An early work of the Theravāda Abhidharma collection, the *Vibhaṅga* (Vibh 194), explains the significance of clear knowing by giving a standard register of terms related to wisdom, the first two of which are wisdom (*paññā*) itself and the act of knowing (*pajānanā*). As noted by Gethin (1992, p. 48), such correlations just

formalize something that is looser but already present in the Nikāyas. It would be hard, for example, not to recognize in the four primary Nikāyas the special association of probably all terms derived from the roots *jñā*, ‘to know,’ and *dṛś* and *paś*, ‘to see.’

The *Vibhaṅga*’s reference to an act of knowing (*pajānanā*) corresponds to a term that regularly occurs in the actual instructions given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels: the need to “know” (*pajānāti*/知). Taking the case of pleasant feeling tone as an example, the instructions are:

Or when feeling a pleasant feeling tone, one knows: “I feel a pleasant feeling tone.”
(MN 10: *sukhaṃ vā vedanaṃ vediyamāno, sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vediyāmi ti pajānāti*).

At the time of experiencing a pleasant feeling tone, one then knows one is experiencing a pleasant feeling tone.

(MĀ 98: 覺樂覺時, 便知覺樂覺).

At the time of getting a pleasant feeling tone, one is then aware of it and knows of oneself: “I am getting a pleasant feeling tone.”

(EĀ 12.1: 得樂痛時, 即自覺知: 我得樂痛).

The instruction in the Pāli version employs a particle to mark direct or reported speech, the quotative *iti* (here found in the form *ti*). This implies that some degree of inner verbalization is required, in the form: “I feel a pleasant feeling tone.” Such inner verbalization is the task indicated by the phrase “to know” (*pajānāti*/知), which appears to stand in place of the quality clear knowing mentioned in the succinct description of the establishments of mindfulness.

What emerges from all this is that, in the context of formal mindfulness practice, the role of clear knowing is to furnish an element of comprehending what one is experiencing. It is due to such clarity of understanding that one is able to state to oneself that “I feel such and such a feeling tone.”

Insightful Contemplation of Feeling Tones

A relationship between contemplating feeling tones and the cultivation of clear knowing recurs in a different context in the following form:

And when a monastic who is diligent does not neglect clear knowing, then [such] a wise one fully understands feeling tones in their entirety.

(SN 36.12: *yato ca bhikkhu ātāpī sampajaññaṃ na riñcati, tato so vedanā sabbā parijānāti paṇḍito*).

A diligently practising monastic, with unwavering right knowledge, is able to know, fully and with wisdom, these feeling tones in their entirety.

(SĀ 471: 比丘勤方便, 正智不傾動, 於此一切受, 點慧能了知).

This description proceeds beyond the mere recognition of types of feeling tones envisaged in the previous passage. Here, the role of clear knowing evolves to become penetrative and thereby productive of wisdom. This is not to say that the basic contemplation of feeling tones described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels could not also be penetrative and lead to wisdom. The point is only that this potential is more conspicuous in the present passage.

Knowing Impermanence

A particular feature of feeling tones that calls for a penetrative type of understanding is their impermanent nature. Such a cultivation of clear knowing of impermanence can cover feeling tones together with perceptions and thoughts. A description of this type of practice occurs as part of a report of the meditative contemplation cultivated by a monastic called Nanda. The relevant description is as follows:

Here, monastics, Nanda knows the arising of feeling tones, knows their persisting, knows their ceasing; he knows the arising of perceptions, knows their persisting, knows their ceasing; he knows the arising of thoughts, knows their persisting, knows their ceasing. Monastics, this then is Nanda’s being mindful and clearly knowing.

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(AN 8.9: *idha, bhikkhave, nandassa veditā vedanā uppajjanti, veditā upaṭṭhahanti, veditā abbattham gacchanti; veditā saññā uppajjanti, veditā upaṭṭhahanti, veditā abbattham gacchanti; veditā vitakkā uppajjanti, veditā upaṭṭhahanti, veditā abbattham gacchanti. idaṃ kho, bhikkhave, nandassa satisampajaññasmiṃ hoti*).

The clansmen's son Nanda is aware of the arising of feeling tones, aware of the persisting of feeling tones, and aware of the cessation of feeling tones, with right mindfulness being established in not allowing for distractions. He is aware of the arising of perceptions, aware of the persisting of perceptions, and aware of the cessation of perceptions [with right mindfulness being established in not allowing for distractions]. He is aware of the arising of thoughts, aware of the persisting of thoughts, and aware of the cessation of thoughts, with right mindfulness being established in not allowing for distractions. This is called the accomplishment of the clansmen's son Nanda in right mindfulness and right knowing. (SĀ 275: 善男子難陀覺諸受起, 覺諸受住, 覺諸受滅, 正念而住不令散亂; 覺諸想起, 覺諸想住, 覺諸想滅; 覺諸覺起, 覺諸覺住, 覺諸覺滅, 正念而住不令散亂. 是名善男子難陀正念正智成就; adopting the variant 而 instead of 心).

With painful feeling tones, pleasant feeling tones, and neutral feelings tones, he knows all of them to be dependently arisen. He knows that these feeling tones arise and sooner or later cease. He also knows that perceptions arise and cease due to causes and conditions. He also knows that thoughts will arise, persist, and cease due to causes and conditions. (SĀ² 6: 苦受, 樂受, 不苦不樂受, 悉知緣起, 知此諸受起滅久近; 亦知諸想起滅因緣; 亦知諸覺當住起滅因緣).

Monastics, the clansman Nanda knows feeling tones while they arise, knows them while they persist, knows them while they cease, disappear, and become exhausted. Thus, he is with mindfulness present, not without mindfulness. He knows perceptions and [thought] activities while they arise, knows them while they persist, knows them while they cease, disappear, and become exhausted. Thus, he is with mindfulness present, not without mindfulness. Monastics, this is said to be the clansman Nanda's excellence in mindfulness and clear knowing. (Up 2065: *dge slong dag rigs kyi bu dga' bo'i tshor ba ni rig bzhin du skye'o, rig bzhin du gnas so, rig bzhin du nub pa dang, yongs su zad pa dang, yongs su gtugs par 'gyur ba. de yang dran bzhin du yin gyi, ma dran bar ni ma yin no. 'du shes dang spyod pa rig bzhin du skye ba dang, rig bzhin du gnas pa dang, rig bzhin du nub pa dang, yongs su zad pa dang, yongs su gtugs par 'gyur ba. de yang dran bzhin du yin gyi, ma dran par ni ma yin no. dge slong dag 'di ni rigs kyi bu dga' bo'i dran pa dang shes bzhin mchog ces bya'o*).

In spite of some variations in formulation, the four parallels can be seen to agree on highlighting a clear recognition of impermanence, for the most part involving a discernment of arising and ceasing, as well as of an interim period during which feeling tones, perceptions, and thoughts persist as changing processes. The recognition of such an interim period reflects the early Buddhist conception of impermanence, which differs from the doctrine of momentariness that arose in later traditions (von Rospatt 1995). According to this later doctrine, any phenomenon will disappear immediately after having arisen. From an early Buddhist viewpoint, however, what has arisen can persist for some time before ceasing, although such persistence of course takes the form of a continuously changing process and does not involve anything permanent.

The observation of such continuous impermanence of mental processes in the form of feeling tones, perceptions, and thoughts must require some degree of continuous mental monitoring. This would be similar to the ability to notice when the mind during actual meditation is about to get distracted, enabling an adjustment that maintains the continuity of practice without becoming lost. Such monitoring therefore appears to be recognized already in the early discourses as a dimension of mindfulness and clear knowing, a function that receives increasing attention in some later Buddhist traditions (Dunne 2015).

Bodily Deportment

The *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and one of its Chinese *Āgama* parallels feature an exercise for contemplation of the body that explicitly mentions clear knowing. The instructions take the following form:

When going forward and returning, one acts clearly knowing; when looking ahead and looking away, one acts clearly knowing; when flexing and extending [the limbs], one acts clearly knowing; when wearing the outer robe and [other] robes and [carrying] the bowl, one acts clearly knowing; when eating, drinking, consuming

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food, and tasting it, one acts clearly knowing; when defecating and urinating, one acts clearly knowing; when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent, one acts clearly knowing.

(MN 10: *abhikkante paṭikkante sampajānakārī hoti, ālokite vilokite sampajānakārī hoti, samiñjite pasārite sampajānakārī hoti, saṅghātipattacīvaradhāraṇe sampajānakārī hoti, asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajānakārī hoti, uccārapassāvakamme sampajānakārī hoti, gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṅhībhāve sampajānakārī hoti*).

One rightly knows going out and coming in, one contemplates and discerns it well; bending, stretching, lowering or raising [any limb], one does it with appropriate deportment; wearing the outer robe and [other] robes, and [carrying the] bowl, one does it properly; walking, standing, sitting, lying down, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent; all this one rightly knows.

(MĀ 98: 正知出入, 善觀分別, 屈伸低昂, 儀容庠序, 善著僧伽梨及諸衣鉢, 行, 住, 坐, 臥, 眠, 寤, 語, 默, 皆正知之).

The basic thrust of this exercise appears to be the maintenance of decorum in executing various activities at the bodily level. The reference to robes and bowl shows that the instructions are aimed in particular at monastics. In the traditional setting, one of the functions of Buddhist monastics is to inspire by way of their exemplary conduct (Mrozić 2007).

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the present exercise comes after mindfulness of bodily postures has been described. For the case of walking, the instructions for such postural awareness are as follows:

Or when walking, one knows: ‘I am walking.’
(MN 10: *gacchanto vā gacchāmī ti pajānāti*).

Walking, one knows one is walking.
(MĀ 98: 行則知行).

The same instruction applies to standing, sitting, and lying down. This exercise is similar in nature to contemplation of feeling tones, in that here the role of clear knowing would again be the recognition that “I am walking.”

Given the sequence of exercises in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, it could be envisioned that such postural awareness lays the groundwork for then being able to cultivate an element of circumspection during various bodily activities. On this assumption, the role of clear knowing would evolve from a more verbalized form of recognition of the type “the body is in such and such a posture” to a form of continuously monitoring one’s conduct in such a way that it expresses itself in a dignified bearing. Here, the role of a propositional type of knowledge, in the sense of involving verbal, propositionally structured judgments, is less prominent. This is evident in the fact that the instructions no longer use the quotative *iti*. When going forward and returning, for example, the task is simply to do it in the appropriate manner. This takes place by doing these clearly knowing (*sampajāna*/知).

The function of clear knowing in relation to such bodily activities could be explored further with the help of another application of the same quality in the Pāli discourses, which relates to speaking intentionally what is untrue. Pāli descriptions of deliberately uttering a lie employ the expression *sampajānamusā bhāsati*, “knowingly speaking falsehood” (e.g. DN 26). One of two Chinese parallels to this occurrence renders this as “intentional speaking falsehood” (DĀ 6: 故作妄語), confirming the sense that *sampajāna* carries in the Pāli phrase, even though the term “knowing” itself is not found in the Chinese parallel.

Relating this sense to the present context, the idea could then be that these bodily activities are done with clear knowing in the sense of being executed intentionally or consciously rather than automatically.

Such conscious execution of one’s bodily activities features as the one exercise out of the whole range of contemplations, described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels, that finds explicit mention in descriptions of the gradual path of practice.

The gradual path of practice delineates key aspects of conduct leading a practitioner from the initial embarking on the path, which in the ancient setting normatively involved going forth as a monastic, all the way up to the realization of awakening. Although such expositions can exhibit some degree of variation, the cultivation of clear knowing in relation to bodily activities appears to be a fairly stable element of descriptions of the gradual path (Anālayo 2017).

In such contexts, this mode of practice often features as a detailed description of how a practitioner of this gradual path is endowed with “mindfulness and clear knowing.” The

combination of these two terms confirms that this exercise indeed involves mindfulness. In line with the suggestion made above, based on the sequence of practices in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel, the role of mindfulness could be understood to involve being aware of the bodily posture that forms the foundation for clear knowing in the form of executing any bodily activity with decorum.

A reason for the central role accorded in accounts of the gradual path to combining mindfulness and clear knowing in this way could be their foundational role in training the practitioner in continuity of both qualities during various bodily

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activities. Another reason could be related to the tendency for such accounts of the gradual path to be given to outsiders to convey to them some idea of the type of practice undertaken by the disciples of the Buddha. In such a context, a description of circumspect deportment could function as an easily recognizable type of practice. Whereas mindful contemplation of a pleasant feeling tone, for example, will hardly be a meditative practice visible to an outsider, the decorum maintained by Buddhist monastics in their behavior can more easily be witnessed. In fact, such practice of clear knowing appears to have a natural relationship to what is external, in the sense that practitioners see themselves almost as if from the outside.

Interrelation with Wholesome Conduct

A depiction of the gradual progression of various elements of practice shows how mindfulness and clear knowing support sense restraint, in the sense of preventing that one is carried away by reactivity to what is experienced through the five senses. This in turn supports wholesome conduct by way of body, speech, and mind, which in turn provides the foundation for cultivating the four establishments of mindfulness:

Monastics, I say, the four establishments of mindfulness also have a nutriment, they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the four establishments of mindfulness? It should be said: the three kinds of good conduct. Monastics, I say, the three kinds of good conduct also have a nutriment, they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of good conduct? It should be said: sense restraint. Monastics, I say, sense restraint also has a nutriment, it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for sense restraint? It should be said: mindfulness and clear knowing.

(AN 10.61: *cattāro p'ahaṃ, bhikkhave, satipaṭṭhāne sāhāre vadāmi, no anāhāre. ko cāhāro catunnaṃ satipaṭṭhānānaṃ? tīṇi sucaritāni ti 'ssa vacanīyaṃ. tīṇi p'ahaṃ, bhikkhave, sucaritāni sāhārāni vadāmi, no anāhārāni. ko cāhāro tiṇṇaṃ sucaritānaṃ? indriyaṣaṃvaro ti 'ssa vacanīyaṃ. indriyaṣaṃvaram p'ahaṃ, bhikkhave, sāhāraṃ vadāmi, no anāhāraṃ. ko cāhāro indriyaṣaṃvarassa? satisampajaññan ti 'ssa vacanīyaṃ).*

For the four establishments of mindfulness there is also a practice, they are not without a practice. What is reckoned to be the practice for the four establishments of mindfulness? The answer is: the three kinds of sublime conduct are the practice. For the three kinds of sublime conduct there is also a practice, they are not without a practice. What is reckoned to be the

practice for the three kinds of sublime conduct? The answer is: restraint of the senses is the practice. For restraint of the senses there is also a practice, they are not without a practice. What is reckoned to be the practice for restraint of the senses? The answer is: right mindfulness and right knowing are the practice.

(MĀ 51: 四念處亦有習, 非無習. 何謂四念處習? 答曰: 三妙行為習. 三妙行亦有習, 非無習. 何謂三妙行習? 答曰: 護諸根為習. 護諸根亦有習, 非無習. 何謂護諸根習? 答曰: 正念正智為習; another two parallels extant as individual translations, T 36 and T 37, do not explicitly mention right knowing).

Mindfulness and clear knowing feature here on their own and again as something implicit in the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness. This shows their functioning at distinct stages of practice that build on each other.

As the nutriment or practice required for sense restraint, mindfulness and clear knowing must be referring to a somewhat more elementary type of practice. This could be the type of circumspect and composed behavior discussed above. Undertaking various bodily activities intentionally and with decorum would indeed provide a basis for a type of embodied centeredness that can facilitate withstanding the usual fragmentation of experience through the senses.

Once that fragmentation no longer dominates the mind, it becomes considerably easier to establish wholesome conduct in the bodily, verbal, and mental domains, corresponding to the “three kinds of good conduct” or else the “three kinds of sublime conduct.” Based on the foundation of moral conduct laid in in this way, the cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness has its place, which would reflect a more refined deployment of mindfulness and clear knowing. In this way, a progressive refinement in mindfulness and clear knowing can be discerned.

This progressive refinement is also of interest insofar as it implies that the cultivation of mindfulness, together with clear knowing, stands in a reciprocal relationship with ethical conduct. It is not the case that ethical conduct has to be completely perfected before even undertaking the practice of mindfulness. Otherwise the presentation above would not have placed mindfulness and clear knowing before moral conduct in its three dimensions. Likewise, although situated at a level before the three sublime types of conduct are firmly established, mindfulness and clear knowing do not operate in an ethical vacuum. Otherwise the presentation above would not have shown them to be supportive of ethical conduct (via facilitating sense restraint). In addition, the more refined level of mindfulness and clear knowing cultivated with

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the four establishments of mindfulness clearly needs to be based on a firm moral foundation.

What emerges in this way is a collaboration between ethics on the one side and mindfulness and clear knowing on the other, by way of mutual enhancement and support. Both together lead onwards to the realization of full awakening, thereby resulting in a liberated condition of the mind. At this point, ethical behavior will become natural and mindfulness and clear knowing will be continuously present.

Mental Balance in Daily Life

Remaining balanced with anything experienced through the senses, due to being established in mindfulness and clear knowing, becomes indeed unshakeable once full awakening has been attained. In the case of visual experience, this takes the following form:

Having seen a form with the eye, one is neither joyful nor sad, dwelling in equanimity with mindfulness and clear knowing.

(AN 4.195: *cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā n' eva sumano hoti na dummano; upekkhako viharati sato sampajāno*).

Seeing a form with the eye, one is neither joyful nor sad, being equanimous and evenly unaffected, with right mindfulness and right knowing.

(MĀ 12: 眼見色, 不喜不憂, 捨求無為, 正念正智).

The two versions apply the same to the other sense doors (which include the mind as a sixth sense door). The presence of mindfulness and clear knowing here becomes a natural condition of an awakened mind, which invariably remains aloof from reacting with desire and aversion. Whatever happens will be met with equanimity, a balance of the mind that supports mindfulness and clear knowing and that in turn is supported by them. Their presence in a way marks the substantial difference between the type of equanimity described here and mere indifference.

Monitoring Time During Sleep

One of the activities mentioned in instructions on clear knowing in relation to bodily activities concerns falling asleep. Mindfulness combined with clear knowing can indeed fulfil a particular role in relation to sleeping. Here is an example that involves the Buddha himself:

Then the Blessed One, having done walking meditation during much of the night in the open, the night being near dawn, having washed the feet and entered the hut, lay down on the right side in the lion's posture, with one foot on the other foot, with mindfulness and clear knowing, having given attention to the perception of rising up again.

(SN 4.7: *atha kho bhagavā bahud eva rattiṃ abbhokāse caṅkamtivā rattiyā paccusasamayam pāde pakkhāletvā vihāram pavisitvā dakkhiṇena passena sīhaseyyam kappesi pāde pādam accādhāya sato sampajāno uṭṭhānasaññaṃ manasi karitvā*).

At that time the Blessed One did walking meditation from the early night until the late time of the night, when he washed his feet, entered his hut, and lay down on his right side with collected mindfulness and clarity of perception, with right mindfulness and right knowing, [having] formed the thought and perception of rising up again.

(SĀ 1087: 爾時, 世尊夜起經行至後夜時, 洗足, 入室, 右脇臥息, 繫念明想, 正念正智, 作起覺想, adopting the variant 想 instead of 相).

Instead of referring to mindfulness and clear knowing, another parallel speaks of “cultivating mindful wakefulness” or perhaps “cultivating discriminating mindfulness” (SĀ² 26: 修於念覺).

This type of difference recurs in another context related to the Buddha's endurance of strong pain. The same Chinese *Āgama* collection again has this expression (SĀ² 287), whereas its Pāli parallel and another Chinese *Āgama* version mention mindfulness and clear knowing (SN 1.38 and SĀ 1289). Other early discourses regularly indicate that mindfulness and clear knowing are required when going to sleep. This makes it fair to rely on the description found in the two versions translated above.

The task of these two qualities in such contexts appears to be related to a monitoring of time. In the ancient setting there were of course no watches to keep track of the time nor any alarm clock that could be set to ensure that one wakes up early. To prevent that one slept through the whole night until sunrise, meditators had to program themselves to wake up in time for early-morning practice. Such programming of oneself, if that is the right term for what this passage describes, appears to have been the task of mindfulness and clear knowing, based on having aroused the perception of waking up at the right time. This in turn implies that mindfulness and clear knowing would have to be, at least to some degree, continuously present during the time of sleeping.

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If this interpretation should be correct, it would provide an antecedent to the practice of lucid dreaming in tantric Buddhism (e.g. Norbu & Katz 1992 or Wangyal 1998; see also Crescenzi & Torricelli 1997). The cultivation of mindfulness does indeed appear to foster the possibility of experiencing lucid dreams (Stumbrys et al. 2015), in the sense of knowing that one is dreaming.

Making an Effort

Possessing mindfulness and clear knowing while asleep would presumably be a fairly relaxed modality of establishing these two qualities, otherwise one would not be able to fall asleep. A considerably more active implementation of the same qualities can be required when awake and realizing that an unwholesome condition is present in the mind. Overcoming such an unwholesome state can rely on the following qualities:

One should exercise extraordinary desire, effort, endeavor, exertion, indefatigability, mindfulness, and clear knowing.

(AN 10.51: *adhimatto chando ca vāyāmo ca ussāho ca ussoḥhī ca appaṭivāni ca sati ca sampajaññaṅ ca karaṇīyaṃ*).

Then, by swiftly seeking a means, one trains with utmost effort, with right mindfulness and right knowing, and with unremitting endurance.

(MĀ 110: 便以速求方便, 學極精勤, 正念正智, 忍莫令退).

Both versions illustrate the degree of effort required with the example of someone whose head or clothes are on fire, a predicament that will call forth an extraordinary effort to extinguish the fire. Clearly, the matter at hand requires strong and determined action.

Although this is not spelled out in the above passages, it seems fair to assume that the role of

mindfulness and clear knowing in this context again involves a form of monitoring. The task of overcoming an unwholesome condition of the mind can indeed require strong effort, yet such effort needs to be combined with some degree of monitoring in order to ensure that it achieves its goal without causing any imbalance.

Dwelling in a Divine Abode

The removal of unwholesome mental conditions features as a precondition for being able to cultivate states of mental calm and tranquility, such as the divine abodes. A description of the meditative transition required for this purpose proceeds as follows:

Free from greedy desires, free from ill will, without bewilderment, with clear knowing and mindfulness one dwells pervading one direction with a mind imbued with *mettā*, likewise the second [direction], likewise the third [direction], and likewise the fourth [direction].

(AN 3.65: *vigatābhijjho vigatabyāpādo asammūḷho sampajāno patissato mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ*).

Free from ill will, free from contention, discarding sloth-and-torpor, being without restlessness and conceit, removing doubt, overcoming arrogance, with right mindfulness and right knowing, and without bewilderment, one dwells accomplishing pervasion of one direction with a mind imbued with *mettā*, and in the same way of the second [direction], the third [direction], and the fourth direction.

(MĀ 16: 離恚, 離諍, 除去睡眠, 無調貢高, 斷疑, 度慢, 正念正智, 無有愚癡, 彼心與慈俱, 遍滿一方成就遊, 如是二三四方).

Both versions continue with the standard description of the boundless radiation of *mettā*. The task of mindfulness and clear knowing in the present context seems to go beyond their monitoring function during an overcoming of unwholesome mental conditions, taken up in the previous instance. Their role rather appears to be of continuous relevance for the ensuing boundless radiation of *mettā* as well. The suggestion that mindfulness and clear knowing can serve to monitor the condition of the mind while concentration deepens can be confirmed by turning to the standard description of the third absorption.

The Third Absorption

In early Buddhist thought, the third absorption appears to be an experience of deep concentration characterized by unification of the mind and the leaving behind of any type of thinking activity, which in fact would already be required for the first absorption (Anālayo 2019, 2020). Clear knowing features explicitly in the standard description of the third absorption in the following form:

With the fading away of joy one dwells equipoised, mindful, clearly knowing, experiencing happiness

[p. 869]

through the body and, being one whom noble ones designate as “one who dwells happily with equipoise and mindfulness,” one dwells having attained the third absorption.

(MN 27: *pītiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca viharati sato ca sampajāno, sukhañ ca kāyena paṭisaṃvedeti, yaṃ taṃ ariyā ācikkhanti: upekkhako satimā sukhavihārī ti tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati*).

Secluded from joy and desires, dwelling with equanimity and without seeking anything, with right mindfulness and right knowing, and experiencing happiness with the body, one dwells having attained and accomplished the third absorption, which is designated by noble ones as an abiding in a happy dwelling with the equanimity and mindfulness of noble ones.

(MĀ 146: 離喜欲, 捨無求遊, 正念正智而身覺樂, 調聖所說, 聖所捨, 念, 樂住, 室, 逮第三禪成就遊).

A Theravāda exegetical work, the *Visuddhimagga*, elucidates why clear knowing finds explicit mention in the standard description of the third absorption (Vism 163), whereas it is not specifically listed in the standard accounts of the first two absorptions. According to the explanation provided, a particular challenge in maintaining the third absorption is to avoid that the mind returns to the more intensely joyful experience of the second absorption. The *Visuddhimagga* illustrates this tendency of the mind with the example of a calf that will keep following the cow unless it is prevented from doing so. In the same way, in order to maintain the more subtle and deeper level of meditative concentration in the third absorption, mindfulness and clear knowing need to be on guard against the natural attraction of joy that can draw the mind back to the experience of the second absorption.

The description of the third absorption shows that mindfulness and clear knowing can function in a non-propositional manner. Whereas recognition of a particular feeling tone is explicitly marked as propositional, in the context of deep concentrative absorption the role of the same qualities can hardly involve some form of verbalization. Instead, clear knowing needs to fulfil its function in a silent and unobtrusive manner, supported by mindfulness, in order to maintain the unified condition of the mind in the third absorption.

In line with a general pattern in standard accounts of the four absorptions, the description translated above does not explicitly mention an object. Moreover, due to the depth of concentration reached, attaining an absorption would be a non-dual experience. This thereby provides a precedent for a concern in some later Buddhist practice traditions with nondual types of experiences where mindfulness is not overtly related to a particular object (Dunne 2011).

Dwelling in Emptiness

The cultivation of clear knowing is also of relevance to dwelling in emptiness. A pertinent discourse distinguishes between dwelling in emptiness internally or externally or both, followed by offering advice when attempts to abide in such a dwelling should not be successful. In case one is successful, however, one will clearly know that one is dwelling in emptiness. For the case of dwelling in emptiness internally, the description is as follows:

One understands: “attending to emptiness internally my mind then advances, acquires

confidence, becomes established in, and becomes released in emptiness internally.” In this way, one clearly knows that.

(MN 122: *evam pajānāti: ajjhataṃ suññataṃ kho me manasikaroto ajjhataṃ suññatāya cittaṃ pakkhandati pasīdati santiṭṭhati vimuccatī ti. itiha tattha sampajāno hoti*).

While contemplating, one comes to know that one has accomplished dwelling in emptiness internally, that the mind has become imperturbable, advances and progresses, attains spotlessness, is established, and is released in regard to emptiness internally: this is reckoned to be one’s right knowing.

(MĀ 191: 觀時, 則知內空成就遊, 心不移動, 趣向, 於近, 得清澄, 住, 解於內空者; 是謂正知).

A Tibetan version of this discourse differs insofar as it only mentions clear knowing (and mindfulness) at the end of the meditative progression depicted in all versions (Skilling 1994: 220: *de la dran pa dang shes bzhin can du ’gyur ro*). As a result, the Tibetan parallel does not explicitly relate these two qualities to the particular case of dwelling in emptiness internally. The implications would nevertheless be alike, in that the same qualities must be required throughout the meditative progression and not just for its final culmination point. On this reasoning, the role of clear knowing in relation to dwelling in emptiness internally would at least be implicit in the Tibetan version.

The function of clear knowing in this context seems to be similar to its role in the third absorption; in fact, a chief obstacle to being able to dwell in emptiness is an insufficient degree of concentration. Whereas in the third absorption the task of mindfulness and clear knowing was to beware of reverting to the second absorption, here the task might be to beware of reverting to the earlier-described condition of the mind that was not successful in dwelling in emptiness internally.

[p. 870]

From the meditative dwelling in emptiness, the cultivation of clear knowing continues in this discourse to extend to walking, where the continuity of insight into emptiness expresses itself in the ability to stay aloof from desires and discontent. Other dimensions of such continuous practice of emptiness, in the company of clear knowing, are keeping the mind free from unwholesome thoughts, avoiding unsuitable topics of conversation, and remaining aloof from the attraction of the five types of sensual pleasure. In this way, the range of applicability of clear knowing extends from its role in the meditative experience of emptiness to an implementation of emptiness in the context of various activities.

Facing Death

Another occasion calling for mindfulness and clear knowing is the time of one’s death. The early discourses regularly refer to being close to death with the idiomatic expression “awaiting one’s time.” In such a situation, the recommendation is:

Monastics, a monastic should await the time with mindfulness and clear knowing. This is our

instruction to you.

(SN 36.7: *sato, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sampajāno kālaṃ āgameyya. ayaṃ vo amhākaṃ anusāsani*)

When awaiting your time, you should be with right mindfulness and right knowing. This, then, for me becomes your undertaking of my instructions.

(SĀ 1028: 當正念正智以待時; 是則為我隨順之教).

Needless to say, for these two qualities to be one's companion in one's last hours, previous cultivation is required. From this perspective, in addition to the various benefits that accrue from developing mindfulness and clear knowing in relation to a remarkable range of activities and meditation practices, every moment dedicated to nurturing these two qualities is at the same time a way of preparing oneself to face the most challenging of human experiences: one's own death.

Mindfulness and Clear Knowing

Looking back over the passages examined above, a combination of mindfulness and clear knowing can fulfill a range of different, though related, functions. The two qualities occur together as essential components of formal mindfulness practice by way of its four establishments. Here, the task of clear knowing appears to be related to a more conceptual type of recognition that builds on the presence of mindful mental receptivity. But clear knowing can become more penetrative in its implementation and serve to reveal the impermanent nature of feeling tones, perceptions, and thoughts, a task that would require some degree of continuous monitoring of one's own mind.

Another possible usage can be to ensure that bodily activities are undertaken with decorum, or else to safeguard mental balance in relation to anything experienced through the senses. An intriguing application involves sleeping with mindfulness and clear knowing such that one will wake up on one's own at the right time, which requires the ability to keep monitoring the passage of time.

The two qualities can coexist, presumably again in a monitoring function, with strong exertion and effort just as much as with the meditative transition to the boundless radiation of a divine abode. Mindfulness and clear knowing are also present in the third absorption, at which point clear knowing is no longer propositional. They support dwelling in emptiness during formal practice and in daily life situations. The same two qualities can facilitate facing death.

In these different contexts, mindfulness would presumably furnish the mental presence needed to be aware of what is taking place, and clear knowing would add the element of clarity of recognition. Cox (1992/1993 p. 72) suggested that the linking of these two qualities

indicates that, in many contexts, the cultivation of mindfulness alone functions not as a self-sufficient practice, but rather as a necessary stage of simple observation that is merely preparatory to a subsequent stage ... [in such contexts] mindfulness is but a stage of calm and settled preparedness.

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.

Abbreviations

AN, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*; DĀ, *Dīrgha-āgama* (T 1); DN, *Dīgha-nikāya*; EĀ, *Ekottarika-āgama* (T 125); MĀ, *Madhyama-āgama* (T 26); MN, *Majjhima-nikāya*; SĀ, *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99); SĀ², *Samyukta-āgama* (T 100); SN, *Samyutta-nikāya*; T, Taishō edition; Up, *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*; Vibh, *Vibhaṅga*; Vism, *Visuddhimagga*.

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