

Immeasurable Meditations and Mindfulness

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Abstract:

Current research points to occasional problems experienced by practitioners of the immeasurable or boundless states. From a historical perspective, the standard mode of teaching these by way of directing specific thoughts to a particular set of individuals is a later development in the Buddhist traditions, not attested in the early texts. Instead of being the sole way of teaching the cultivation of positive mental attitudes like *mettā* and compassion, alternative approaches could be developed based on Buddhist canonical precedents that are less demanding in cognitive effort and closer in kind to the cultivation of mindfulness. In fact, mindfulness relates to *mettā* and compassion in various ways, which reflects its multifunctionality in early Buddhist meditation theory.

Key words:

appamāṇa, *apramāṇa*, *brahmavihāra*, boundless states, compassion, immeasurables, *karuṇā*, loving kindness, *mettā*, mindfulness

Introduction

A meditation practice repeatedly mentioned in early Buddhist texts involves the cultivation of four positive emotional states, qualified as being “immeasurable” or “boundless” (Pāli *appamāṇa*, Sanskrit *apramāṇa*, Chinese 無量, Tibetan *tshad med pa*). In particular the first two of these four have in recent times received increasing attention in psychological research: *mettā* (*maitrī*, 慈, *byams pa*), often translated as “loving kindness,” although perhaps better rendered as “benevolence” or “goodwill,” and “compassion” (*karuṇā*, 悲, *snying rje*).

The contemporary way of teaching the meditative cultivation of such immeasurable or boundless mental states (which also include sympathetic joy and equanimity) takes the form of directing the corresponding intentions towards selected others, often proceeding from oneself to a friend, then a neutral person, and finally a difficult person (Salzberg 1995). Such intentional directing usually relies on verbal formulas expressive of the positive attitude concerned, at times combined with some degree of visualization.

This way of cultivating the immeasurable or boundless mental states is not without adversities (Zeng 2019). A study by Barnhofer et al. (2010) found that participants high in brooding tended to respond to instructions in mindfulness of breathing and not to being taught the cultivation of *mettā*. Again, participants in a study by Lumma et al. (2015) were inclined to prefer mindfulness

of breathing over the cultivation of *mettā*, presumably because of the increased degree of cognitive effort involved in executing the latter in the traditional way. Another study by Boellinghaus et al. (2013, p. 271) brought to light that

participants found it challenging to intellectually engage with the concept and task of the L[oving] K[indness] M[editation] while experientially connecting with it. Some participants experienced the meditation as too structured or abstract, as it was “taking away from how I was feeling and it was just kind of trying to think certain thoughts about [it], you know, it was really cognitive, really brainy, and I couldn’t connect with it.”

The problem does not seem to be restricted to the employment of stereotyped verbal formula, as even the introduction of some degree visualization does not necessarily solve the issue for all participants. Galante et al. (2016, p. 338) reported that a participant, who had received instructions in *mettā* meditation that combined the standard approach with some degree of visualization, commented:

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I’m finding it really hard to summon up a feeling when I visualise people. I don’t feel any different, and I don’t have the same feeling that I would if I saw them for real.

In view of such difficulties, exploring the historical background to the standard instructions might offer new perspectives. In fact, the idea of employing a standard set of verbalized formula to direct *mettā* or compassion toward specific individuals, proceeding from oneself via a close and a neutral one to someone distant or even hostile, is not found in the texts representative of the early stages in the development of Buddhist meditation instructions (Anālayo 2015).

The Meditative Radiation

In the early discourses, roughly reflecting the period between the fifth and third century BCE (Anālayo 2012), cultivation of the four immeasurable or boundless mental states takes the form of a radiation in all directions. An example for such a description, taken from a discourse extant in Pāli and Chinese, proceeds as follows for the case of *mettā*:

One dwells pervading one direction with a mind imbued with *mettā*, likewise the second [direction], likewise the third [direction], and likewise the fourth [direction], so above, below, and all around; one dwells pervading everywhere and in every way the entire world with a mind imbued with *mettā*, abundant, become great, boundless, without aversion, and without ill will.

(MN 97: *mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ; iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbatthatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjhena pharitvā viharati*).

With a mind imbued with *mettā* one dwells accomplishing pervasion of one direction, and in the same way of the second [direction], the third [direction], and the fourth direction, the four

intermediate [directions], above and below, completely and everywhere. Being without mental shackles, without resentment, without ill will, and without contention, with a mind imbued with *mettā* that is supremely vast and great, boundless and well developed, one dwells accomplishing pervasion of the entire world.

(MĀ 27: 心與慈俱遍滿一方成就遊, 如是二三四方, 四維, 上下, 普周一切; 心與慈俱, 無結, 無怨, 無恚, 無諍, 極廣甚大, 無量善修, 遍滿一切世間成就遊).

The two versions continue with the same instructions for the other three immeasurable or boundless mental states. According to the narrative setting, these instructions were given by Sāriputta, a chief disciple of the Buddha, to a brahmin on his deathbed who clearly had not received such teachings before. Both discourses also report that this brahmin had at an earlier time been engaging in immoral conduct. The overall impression is that he was not a meditator, let alone someone endowed with the type of meditative expertise that would have enabled him to attain concentrative absorption. Nevertheless, and in spite of being in grave pain until the time of his death, according to both versions he was reborn in the heavenly realm of the Brahmā world. Such rebirth is to be expected of a practitioner who has successfully cultivated the above meditative radiation. The close relationship of the immeasurable or boundless states to these celestial realms finds reflection in another term often used for them: *brahmavihāra*, “divine abodes.”

Given that according to both discourses the brahmin was able to cultivate the *brahmavihāras* sufficiently well to be reborn in heaven, it follows that he must have been able to put the instructions on radiating them to good use, despite his afflicted physical condition and his probable lack of meditative expertise. The perspective that emerges in this way makes it fair to conclude that, in its original setting, the description of the immeasurable or boundless radiation of *mettā* and the other positive mental states was not confined to absorption attainment which, at least in the thought world of the early discourses, stands for rather deep meditative experiences (Anālayo 2017).

Instead of being presented as the sole reserve of very proficient meditators, in early Buddhist texts the radiation of *mettā* and the other immeasurable or boundless mental states in all direction appears to have been the way this practice was actually undertaken. A different Pāli discourse and its Chinese parallel illustrate the all-pervasive nature of this type of practice by comparing it to a person who blows a conch:

It is just like a vigorous conch blower who without difficulties would thus make himself be heard in the four directions.

(MN 99: *seyyathā pi ... balavā saṅkhadhamo appakasiren’ eva cātuddisā viññāpeyya*).

It is just as if, in an area where nobody has ever heard it, someone skilled at blowing a conch mounts a high hill at midnight to blow a conch with utmost effort, and a wonderful sound comes out of it that pervades the four directions.

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(MĀ 152: 猶如有人善吹於螺, 彼若有方未曾聞者, 彼於夜半而登高山, 極力吹螺, 出微妙聲, 遍滿四方).

In the ancient Indian setting, blowing a conch was a regular means of communication over longer distances. It was even employed in warfare for such purposes, as its penetrative sound stands a good chance of being heard over the din of a battlefield. The blowing of a conch, also used for religious ceremonies, requires skill and is not achieved merely through effort. The lips need to be puckered appropriately to create the vibratory effect that will then result in the conch producing sound. Once this has been achieved, the resultant sound is both penetrative and beautiful. Presumably, this combination of pervasiveness in all directions and beauty made conch blowing an apt illustration for the radiation practice.

Applied to the radiation of *mettā* and compassion, the image can be taken to convey the need for combining effort with skill. The most prominent sense communicated, however, is the immeasurable or boundless pervasion of all directions by the sound of the conch. The same pervasive nature of the corresponding meditative radiation finds reflection in naming the four mental attitudes cultivated in this way as “immeasurable” or “boundless” states. In other words, the boundlessness and immeasurability of the meditative radiation of *mettā* and compassion (as well as of sympathetic joy and equanimity) features as a prominent characteristic of these mental states.

From this perspective, it is perhaps less surprising to find that the standard description in the early discourses, as exemplified in the two extracts translated earlier, does not explicitly mention an object of such radiation, in the sense of specifying toward whom such *mettā* or compassion is being directed. Instead of being concerned with an object, the emphasis appears to be on the subjective experience of the boundless radiation. As noted by Dhammadinnā (2014, p. 90),

The *appamāṇa* meditative radiation takes the intentions and concepts of benevolence and the other *brahmavihāras* as its object and content. This shifts the emphasis and attention away from an object represented by an external situation or individual (and their internalised counterparts) to a subtler level of content and concept, that of the *appamāṇa* intention itself.

Objects of the Radiation

Although the standard description of meditation on the immeasurable or boundless mental states just depicts a pervasive radiation that extends to all directions, more specific information on the objects of such meditative practice can be found elsewhere. One such instance is a discourse in verse, found in the *Sutta-nipāta*, which has the cultivation of *mettā* as its main theme. Two of its verses articulate the wish for the happiness of all sentient beings without exception, be they strong or frail, large or small, seen or unseen, far or near (Sn 146–147). Subsequent verses in the same discourse then refer to the boundless radiation of *mettā* toward the whole world (Sn 149–150). Although no parallel to this discourse is known, it seems nevertheless fair to assume that the standard description of the radiation of *mettā* in the early discourses would have a similarly unrestricted sense of all sentient beings in mind, even though this is not explicitly stated.

Another relevant instance involves the famous simile of the saw. The Pāli version of this simile proceeds as follows:

Monastics, even if bandits were to cut you apart, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, one whose mind were to become hateful on that account would not be carrying out my teaching. Herein, too, monastics, you should train thus: “There will be no alteration in our minds and we will not utter evil words; we will dwell kind and compassionate, with a mind of *mettā*, without anger. We will dwell pervading that person with a mind imbued with *mettā*, and from that base we will dwell pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with *mettā*, abundant, become great, boundless, without aversion, and without ill will.”

(MN 21: *ubhatodaṇḍakena ce pi, bhikkhave, kakacena corā ocarakā aṅgamaṅgāni okanteyyumaṃ, tatrā pi yo mano padūseyya, na me so tena sāsanakaro. tatrā pi kho, bhikkhave, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: na c’ eva no cittaṃ vipariṇataṃ bhavissati, na ca pāpikaṃ vācaṃ nicchāressāma, hitānukampī ca viharissāma mettacittā na dosantarā. tañ ca puggalaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā pharivā viharissāma, tadārammaṇaṃ ca sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamaṇena averena abyāpajjhena pharivā viharissāmā ti*).

The dramatic depiction in this simile is probably best understood as referring to a situation where one is completely at the mercy of bandits, without any possibility of preventing them from their cruel deed. In other words, the description is not meant to discourage one from trying one’s best to avoid being cut up by bandits or undergoing any other type of abuse. The simile appears to be only intended to illustrate, with the help of a rather drastic situation, that even under the most excruciating circumstances an implementation of the teachings of the Buddha requires not reacting with anger and abuse.

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From the viewpoint of the meditative cultivation of *mettā*, it is of particular interest that the passage presents the bandit who is about to cut one apart as the recipient of the meditative pervasion, and this person-oriented approach then leads over to the boundless radiation in all directions. In this respect, however, the otherwise similar Chinese parallel differs:

If bandits were to come and with a sharp saw cut you apart, limb by limb, there should be no alteration in your mind, and your mouth should not utter bad words toward those who are cutting you up. In dependence on that, you should arouse a mental attitude of *mettā* and compassion. With your mind imbued with *mettā* dwell accomplishing pervasion of one direction, and in the same way of the second [direction], the third [direction], and the fourth direction, the four intermediate [directions], above and below, completely and everywhere. Being without mental shackles, without resentment, without ill will, and without contention, with a mind imbued with *mettā* that is supremely vast and great, boundless and well developed, dwell accomplishing pervasion of the entire world.

(MĀ 193: 若有賊來以利鋸刀節節解截, 心不變易, 口無惡言向割截人, 緣彼起慈愍心; 心與慈俱遍滿一方成就遊, 如是二三四方, 四維, 上下, 普周一切; 心與慈俱, 無結, 無怨, 無恚, 無諍, 極廣甚大, 無量善修, 遍滿一切世間成就遊).

Besides not stipulating any pervasion of the bandit with *mettā*, the Chinese parallel also differs insofar as it proceeds from the radiation of *mettā* to the other three immeasurable or boundless states, whose meditative cultivation is not mentioned in the Pāli discourse.

The occurrence of a reference to pervading the bandit with *mettā* in only one of the two passages could in principle be explained in two ways: either this reference was added in the Pāli version or else it was lost in the Chinese discourse. In an attempt to evaluate these two alternatives, it would seem that the suggestion to pervade with *mettā* someone who is cutting one's body apart with a saw is not easily executed. In such a painful situation, it does appear to be already quite demanding to keep the mind free from intentions of ill will and harming, which in early Buddhist thought are the exact opposite of *mettā* and compassion. If one succeeds to that extent, this could perhaps lead over to being "compassionate and kind, with a mind of *mettā*, without anger," as required according to the Pāli version, or else to "arouse a mental attitude of *mettā* and compassion," as instructed in the Chinese version. But to expect that in such a situation one should be able to implement an actual meditative pervasion of the bandit with *mettā* seems a bit unrealistic. Such considerations make it somewhat more probable that the first of the two options considered above fits the case, in that the reference to an actual pervasion of the bandit could be an addition in the Pāli version.

Individuals as Recipients

An individual person as the recipient of *mettā* features also in the context of a comparison made in a discourse in the *Itivuttaka* and its Chinese parallel:

If one has *mettā* just for one [sentient being] with a mind free from hate, one is [already] wholesome thereby; a noble one whose mind has empathy for all sentient beings achieves abundant merit.

(It 1.27: *ekam pi ce pāṇamaduttācitto, mettāyati kusalo tena hoti; sabbe ca pāṇe manasānukampaṃ, pahūtamariyo pakaroti puññaṃ*).

One who is able to cultivate a wholesome mind of *mettā* toward a single sentient being, such a one's merit is still boundless, let alone [doing the same] toward everyone.

(T 765: 於一有情所, 能修慈善心, 其福尚無邊, 何況於一切).

In both versions, the preceding text highlights *mettā* as an outstanding source of merit, to such extent that another way of acquiring merit does not amount to even a sixteenth part of the potential of cultivating *mettā*. In this context, the reference to a single person is probably not meant to encourage that one should take an individual as the actual object of meditative practice. Instead, the point appears to be to throw into relief the main teaching on the meritorious nature of *mettā*. This is so potent that, even if one were to direct *mettā* just toward a single person, it will have results.

A comparable occurrence can be found in an Abhidharma work of the Theravāda tradition, the *Vibhaṅga*. Whereas the *Itivuttaka* and its parallel were concerned with the making of merit, the relevant passage in the *Vibhaṅga* has a closer relationship to the meditative cultivation of *mettā*, as its purpose is to explain the pervasion of one direction:

And how does a monastic dwell pervading one direction with a mind imbued with *mettā*? It is just like, for example, when one would have *mettā* on seeing one person that is dear and liked. In the same way one suffuses all beings with *mettā*.

(Vibh 272: *kathaṇ ca bhikkhu mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati? seyyathā pi nāma ekaṃ puggalaṃ piyaṃ manāpaṃ disvā mettāyeyya, evam eva sabbe satte mettāya pharati*).

Although this passage brings the idea of a single person into the meditative radiation, it still does not amount to an instruction to take an individual as the actual object of

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meditation. Instead, the reference to the dear and liked person is only an illustration. The same work provides a similar illustration for compassion:

And how does a monastic dwell pervading one direction with a mind imbued with compassion? It is just like, for example, when one would have compassion on seeing one person in misfortune and misery. In the same way one suffuses all beings with compassion. (Vibh 273: *kathaṇ ca bhikkhu karuṇāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati? seyyathā pi nāma ekaṃ puggalaṃ duggataṃ durūpetam disvā karuṇāyeyya, evam eva sabbe satte karuṇāya pharati*).

Specific Individual Persons as the Object

The idea of actually taking an individual as the object of *mettā* or compassion receives a detailed treatment in the *Visuddhimagga*, a fifth-century Theravāda manual for meditation. The relevant exposition, which has provided the template for the way *mettā* and compassion are generally taught nowadays, quotes the above extracts from the *Vibhaṅga* (Vism 296 and 314). This gives the impression that a literal reading of the illustrations provided in the *Vibhaṅga* might have encouraged the person-oriented approach presented in the *Visuddhimagga*.

At the same time, however, the idea of taking individuals as the object is not confined to the Theravāda tradition, as a similar approach can also be found in Sarvāstivāda treatises (Dhammajoti 2010). This goes to show that the above passage in the *Vibhaṅga* is best understood as exemplifying a general trend rather than being the one instance responsible for this development.

The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, representing Sarvāstivāda exegesis, sets out on the premise that someone might be unable to cultivate the boundless radiation. In such a case, one should take as one's objects a friend in a threefold manner, a neutral person singly, and a hostile person in a threefold manner (Pradhan 1967). The threefold manner involves a distinction of friends and enemies into inferior, middling, and superior types. The resultant objects of practice then become: a very good friend, a good friend, a distant friend, a neutral person, a slightly hostile person, a hostile person, and a very hostile person.

This differs from the *Visuddhimagga* approach, which presents four objects: oneself, a friend, a neutral person, and a hostile person. The basic idea of progressing from a friend to a neutral and then to a hostile person is thus shared by the two traditions. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* presentation expands on this shared idea by introducing a finer distinction of the friend and the hostile person into three gradations. The *Visuddhimagga* model instead adds a fourth member to the basic set of three objects, namely oneself.

Directing *mettā* to Oneself

The idea of directing *mettā* to oneself might be related to a particular term used in the standard Pāli description of the meditative radiation. Different editions of the Pāli discourses vary in the spelling of this term, which can occur either as *sabbatthatāya* or as *sabbattatāya*. The difference involves a single letter, which is either an aspirated *th* or else an unaspirated *t* (after *sabbat-* and before *-atāya*). An aspirated and an unaspirated consonant can easily be confused with each other. The meaning of the two terms, however, is quite different. The first mentioned reading *sabbatthatāya* conveys the sense “in every way.” The other reading *sabbattatāya*, which is the version accepted by the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 308), can convey the sense “to all as to oneself.”

In the standard description of the radiation, the term in question occurs between *sabbadhi*, “everywhere,” and *sabbāvantaṃ lokam*, “the entire world.” The repetition of near synonyms occurs with high frequency in oral Pāli texts, making it fairly probable that the term under discussion expresses a meaning closely similar to what precedes and what follows it. This supports the sense “in every way” as the more likely reading. In fact, the alternative idea “to all as to oneself” does not seem to be attested anywhere else in the Pāli discourses (Maithrimurthi 1999). A comparative study of parallels to Pāli descriptions of the boundless radiation confirms the impression that the original idea would have been “in every way” (Anālayo 2015). Given that the *Visuddhimagga* opts for the other reading, the variant “to all as to oneself” might have triggered, or else at least supported, the arising of the idea that the practice should be directed toward oneself.

From the viewpoint of the meditative radiation, the idea of directing *mettā* and compassion to oneself does not seem to be required, as a practitioner cultivating the radiation will anyway be fully immersed in the respective immeasurable or boundless state. It would not be possible to pervade all directions with a mind imbued with *mettā* or compassion without being affected by such pervasion oneself. This makes it fairly probable that the perceived need to include oneself would have arisen only once the meditation practice came to rely on the employment of other individuals as the object. In such a situation, it would be more natural for the idea to arise that oneself must be explicitly included among the recipients.

Whatever may be the final word on the exact stages in the development under discussion here, there can be little doubt that the meditative approach to *mettā* and compassion by way of taking four individuals as one’s objects, proceeding from

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oneself to a friend, a neutral person, and then a hostile person, is a later element. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with it. The wide-spread appeal of this form of practice testifies to its practical value. However, it does mean that this mode of practice need not be considered the only possible way to go about the meditative cultivation of *mettā* and compassion.

In view of the difficulties some practitioners experience with this approach, surveyed at the outset of this article, the historical perspective could be relied on for encouraging a more flexible approach. For some practitioners too much cognitive effort and thinking activity can be counterproductive. In such cases, it might be commendable to give more importance to just dwelling in the felt experience of *mettā* and compassion, rather than insisting on the repetition of particular phrases. It can also be helpful to emphasize the experience of their boundless quality by eventually letting go of concern with particular individuals as the objects of practice.

Boundless Mindfulness

A cultivation of *mettā* and compassion as a boundless radiation would also align it more closely with the practice of mindfulness. Boellinghaus et al. (2013, p. 271) reported how a practitioner of the standard approach that follows the *Visuddhimagga* experienced this as differing substantially from mindfulness practice:

I was feeling like I was trying to create something, or cultivate something, so being quite active ... and that, to me, seemed to be ... pulling in the opposite direction to doing the mindfulness.

The degree of similarity between the meditative cultivation of *mettā* and compassion and the practice of mindfulness in early Buddhism becomes particularly evident in some depictions of mindfulness of the body (Anālayo 2019a). In such descriptions, mindfulness rooted in the presence of the body remains at the same time openly receptive to whatever may happen at any of the bodily sense doors. The relevant discourses explicitly indicate that such mindfulness practice results in a “immeasurable” or “boundless” condition of the mind, thereby employing the same term that serves as a designation for *mettā* and compassion (as well as sympathetic joy and equanimity):

One dwells with mindfulness of the body established and with a boundless mind.
(MN 38: *upaṭṭhitakāyasati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso*).

One establishes mindfulness of the body and has a boundless mind.
(MĀ 201: 立身念無量心).

In this way, the meditative radiation of *mettā* and compassion can share an immeasurable or boundless condition of the mind with the practice of mindfulness of the body. In both cases, the mind has become broad and mental negativity has gone into abeyance.

The Cultivation of *mettā* and Insight

Some degree of overlap in the meditative cultivation of *mettā* and mindfulness appears to hold also for current Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs), where according to Shonin et al. (2015, p. 1176) “loving-kindness and mindfulness meditation techniques are often amalgamated together.”

Such compatibility does not require, however, that *mettā* and mindfulness fulfil the same function. This appears to be assumed in the statement by Kristeller and Johnson (2005, p. 395) that “in the Buddhist traditions, one variant of Vipassana or insight meditation is ‘loving kindness’ meditation.” Whereas the four establishments of mindfulness constitute the direct path to liberation, a closer study of relevant passages shows that, at least in early Buddhist thought, the cultivation of *mettā* on its own was not considered to result in liberating insight (Anālayo 2017).

An illustrative example is the instruction given by Sāriputta to a brahmin, mentioned at the outset of this article. Although according to both versions this instruction was successful in enabling the brahmin’s rebirth in a heavenly realm, the two versions continue with a negative evaluation of this outcome by the Buddha:

How is it, then, Sāriputta, that having established the brahmin Dhānañjāni in the inferior heavenly realm of Brahmā you got up and left when there was still more to be done?
(MN 97: *kiṃ pana tvam, sāriputta, dhānañjāniṃ brāhmaṇaṃ sati uttarikaraṇīye hīne brahmaloke patiṭṭhāpetvā uṭṭhāy’ āsanā pakkanto ti?*)

Sāriputta, why did you not teach the brahmin Dhānañjāni a teaching that goes beyond the state of the heavenly realm of Brahmā?
(MĀ 27: 舍梨子, 汝何以不教梵志陀然過梵天法?)

The instruction had fallen short of guiding the brahmin to the normative aim of early Buddhist practice, by leading to freedom from any rebirth. Instead of only teaching the brahmin how to practice the radiation of the four immeasurable or boundless mental states,

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Sāriputta should also have instructed him in the cultivation of liberating insight.

Although the cultivation of *mettā* does not seem to suffice on its own for progress to liberation, it can nevertheless offer a substantial contribution to progress to awakening. For that purpose, *mettā* needs to be combined with another form of mental cultivation that has a liberating potential: the seven awakening factors. The relevant indications for the case of mindfulness as the first awakening factor take the following form:

Here, monastics, imbued with *mettā* a monastic cultivates the awakening factor of mindfulness in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, in dependence on cessation, culminating in letting go.
(SN 46.62: *idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu mettāsahagataṃ satisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ*).

Here, with a mind imbued with *mettā* a monastic cultivates the awakening factor of mindfulness supported by seclusion, supported by dispassion, and supported by cessation, leading to letting go.

(SĀ 744: 是比丘心與慈俱修念覺分, 依遠離, 依無欲, 依滅, 向於捨).

Here, a monastic cultivates *mettā* combined with the awakening factor of mindfulness, abiding in seclusion, abiding in dispassion, abiding in cessation, culminating in letting go. (Up 3063: 'di ni dge slong byams pa dang lhan cig par gyur pa'i dran pa yang dag byang chub kyi yan lag dang, dben pa la gnas pa, 'dod chags dang bral ba la gnas pa, 'gog pa la gnas pa, rnam par spong bas yongs su bsgyur ba bsgom par byed do).

The three versions continue with the same presentation for the remaining six awakening factors of investigation-of-states, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equipoise. It is in this way that *mettā* and the other immeasurable or boundless mental states can become truly liberating, namely by being combined with a cultivation of the seven awakening factors, undertaken in the way described above.

Differentiating Mindfulness from *mettā*

The above description of a combination of *mettā* with the cultivation of the awakening factor of mindfulness would imply that these two cannot be just the same. Yet, according to Peacock (2014, p. 11):

The final outcome of *satipaṭṭhāna* and *mettā bhāvanā* can be considered to be the same. The 'Right Mindfulness' (*sammā sati*) of the Buddha's Eightfold Path is Boundless Friendliness and Boundless Friendliness is *sammā sati* ... for the Buddha, maintaining oneself in *sammā sati* is the same as suffusing the world with universal friendliness: *sati* is *mettā*; *mettā* is *sati*.

This suggestion relies on a verse in the discourse on *mettā* from the *Sutta-nipāta*, already mentioned above. The verse in question commends continuous practice of *mettā* in any bodily posture and then states that

one should be determined on this mindfulness; this is called the divine abiding here. (Sn 151: *etaṃ satiṃ adhiṭṭheyya brahmam etaṃ vihāraṃ idhamāhu*).

The point made in this admittedly cryptic verse can best be appreciated by turning to other Pāli passages that also relate these two qualities to each other. Three such passages explicitly mention mindfulness as a mental condition present when practicing the radiation of *mettā* (or of the other immeasurable or boundless states):

Clearly knowing and mindful one dwells pervading one direction with a mind imbued with *mettā*, likewise the second [direction], likewise the third [direction], and likewise the fourth [direction], so above, below, and all around, one dwells pervading everywhere and in every way the entire world with a mind imbued with *mettā*, abundant, become great, boundless, without aversion, and without ill will.

(SN 42.8, SN 42.13, and AN 10.208: *sampajāno paṭissato mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharivā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ; iti uddham adho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbatthatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggaṭṭena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjhena pharivā viharati*).

Another relevant occurrence forms part of a verse found in two Pāli discourses. The verse also relates the presence of mindfulness to cultivating *mettā* in a boundless manner:

Mindful one cultivates boundless *mettā*.

(AN 8.1 and It 1.27: *mettaṃ bhāvayati appamāṇaṃ paṭissato*).

Although the presentation in these discourses does not receive support from parallel versions, whenever extant, it seems

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nevertheless fair to conclude that the same sense applies to the verse from the *Sutta-nipāta* (which also has no parallel). The main difference is that, presumably due to the constraints of versification, in the *Sutta-nipāta* verse in question mindfulness stands in place of *mettā*, rather than being mentioned alongside it. The above Pāli passages, however, mention both *mettā* and mindfulness, showing that they were not just considered equivalents. Understood in this way, what emerges is simply that mindfulness supports the cultivation of the radiation of *mettā*.

Besides, in early Buddhist thought *mettā* or the other immeasurable or boundless states feature as invariably wholesome mental qualities. Whereas mindfulness can be “wrong” (Anālayo 2017), the term *mettā* never refers to “wrong” types of affection, for which other terms are used. The ethical difference that emerges in this way prevents an identification of mindfulness with *mettā* (or the other *brahmavihāras*), however much they may overlap in the experience of a boundless mental condition.

Relating Mindfulness to *mettā* and Compassion

The role of mindfulness that emerges from the above Pāli discourses concurs with information that can be gathered from a closer inspection of the noble eightfold path, as described in parallel versions of the early discourses. Here *mettā* and compassion can be seen to correspond to two aspects of the second path factor of right intention, whereas the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness fulfills the seventh path factor of right mindfulness. Mindfulness also has a monitoring role to play in relation to right intention, and for this reason needs to be in place in order to establish and maintain the very intentions of *mettā* and compassion (Anālayo 2019c).

This presentation has its complement in descriptions of the gradual development of the eight path factors. These indicate that intentions of *mettā* and compassion can provide a foundation for a cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness. This goes to show that mindfulness can interrelate with *mettā* and compassion in different ways.

According to a simile that depicts two acrobats performing together (SN 47.19; SĀ 619; T 1448; Anālayo 2019c), the four establishments of mindfulness are the way to protect not only oneself but also others, and such protecting of others then finds its expression in *mettā* and compassion.

In sum, mindfulness can serve to arouse *mettā* and compassion, monitor their maintenance as modalities of right intention, and become a dimension of their fruition in the form of right mindfulness. In this way, mindfulness is relevant before, during, and after the cultivation of *mettā* and compassion.

What emerges from the material surveyed above is in particular the multifunctionality of mindfulness, evident similarly in relation to absorption attainment (Anālayo 2019b). In this way, *mettā* and compassion interrelate in various ways with mindfulness, whose versatility enables it to perform a pivotal role of continuous relevance to cultivating these immeasurable or boundless mental states.

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 to have no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

AN, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*; It, *Itivuttaka*; MĀ, *Madhyama-āgama*; MN, *Majjhima-nikāya*; SĀ, *Saṃyukta-āgama*; SN, *Saṃyutta-nikāya*; Sn, *Sutta-nipāta*; T, Taishō edition; Up, *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*; Vibh, *Vibhaṅga*; Vism, *Visuddhimagga*.

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