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**Meditation and Affect**

**By**

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## **Meditation and Affect**

### **I**

Regular meditation practice reforms old patterns by cultivating awareness of individual moments wherein voluntary acts affect involuntary actions, eventually leading to continual intentional acts. Those practicing meditation seek to obtain mastery of awareness and control of both perception and action, engendering an understanding of selfhood in a combination of witnessing, knowing, and acting. Foucault's "Technologies of the Self" supports such an understanding of meditation. Tanya Luhrmann, Nusbaum, and Thisted's "The Absorption Hypothesis" also enhances my discussion of meditation. As Luhrmann, Nusbaum, and Thisted explain, absorption "is the name of the capacity to become focused on the mind's object—what humans imagine or see around them—and to allow that focus to increase while diminishing attention to the myriad of everyday distractions that accompany the management of normal life" (Luhrmann, Nusbaum, and Thisted 2010).

Meditation cultivates the human capacity for self-transformation through repetitive action. Meditation is not the force that makes a person content or exhibit positive behavior. Instead, it develops the capacity for intentional decision-making. Self-transformation lies in the ability to conscientiously decide in each moment what the self should do, in turn deciding what the self will become through cumulative actions. The mastery of knowing and doing is cultivated by being aware of the complex entirety of each situation: understanding the effects of each action—what would be the least harmful most useful action—before initiating the action. Yet as the nature of human experience derives from continual minute moments, there is no continual state of virtue that can be attained. Rather, there is the continual process of choosing virtuous

acts depending on the subject's cultural inclinations and understanding of virtue. In a sense, then, virtue is derived from a string of never-ending moments in which the subject decides to do right.

In trying to master the mind, meditators must first understand what the mind is. In Derrida's book "On Theory and Practice" which was published in 2020 although Derrida's concept of theory and practice is generally applied to social action, it can also effectively be applied to how people use meditation, which affects both mind and body, or theory and practice. Meditation affects thought patterns—the mind—as well as habitual patterns. The process of transformation can only be achieved through both knowledge and action. Derrida explains that intellectual theory has tangible effects on the world and that practice constitutes theory. In meditation, theory includes the sutras, which detail the process of meditation to achieve individual exemplarity. Knowledge of the sutras is not the same as experiential knowledge—*affectual* knowledge gained through the physical meditative process. In order to embody the sutras and become an exemplary figure, the practitioner must have access and mastery over the purpose, theory, and practice of meditation. Meditation cannot be fully embodied without both experiential knowledge and scriptural/theoretical knowledge. It is not a passive process but a means of modifying habitual thought, of allowing the individual to gather knowledge of both the external and internal world and decide to react in a way that reflects their highest intent.

Meditation cultivates the ability to both understand and interact.

Action is not necessarily thought, nor is thought action, yet because they stem from the same essence—impulses or needs—they must be treated in the same way: through cultivating the meditative state in order to achieve mastery over decisions and reactions to the impulses of both thought and body. In such a manner, knowledge enables thought and vice versa because it is the transformation of an *affectual* state. Having a thought is an action that the observer must treat the

same way as bodily action because it has the same weight and internal effects as bodily action in developing the habitual self. The individual cannot control their thoughts or impulses but can control how they react to them. The discipline of deciding how to react to impulses is developed through understanding where the impulses come from.

## II

The habit of meditation or contemplative practice serves as the keystone for developing one's actions so they become closer to one's individual ideas and intentions for proper behavior. This awareness of the interconnectedness of body and mind expressed through meditation enables one to change involuntary action into voluntary action, in turn allowing for more intentional voluntary actions to arise. Once the practitioner creates a habit of these voluntary actions, the habit becomes involuntary. Introspection develops into a series or pattern of actions, and decentralized knowledge is achieved in tandem with intentional action. The experiential knowledge gained through the combination of the two allows the state of the body to become the state of the mind and the inverse.

Saba Mahmood describes this phenomenon in her research on Salat, the ritual prayer Muslims must perform five times a day. In particular, Mahmood studied Egyptian women's response to the political climate vis-à-vis their strengthened ties to piety. She describes the women's goal as "repeated bodily behavior, with the appropriate intention (however simulated in the beginning), lead[ing] to the reorientation of one's motivations, desires, and emotions until they become a part of one's 'natural' disposition" (Mahmood 2001). The awareness of prayer and practice of it are cultivated continuously through each moment. This method of prayer used by Mahmood's interlocutors focuses on how one responds to impulses: either following them blindly or examining them and controlling the reaction to them by reinforcing practice of prayer.

The Buddhist Sattipatana Sutta shares the same intention. “Again, monks, when walking, a monk understands: ‘I am walking’; when standing, he understands: ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he understands: ‘I am sitting’; when lying down, he understands: ‘I am lying down’; or he understands body both internally and externally” (Bodhi 2005). Although difficult, constant practice leads to greater ease in intentional action, thus preventing unwarranted and unintentional reactions to uncontrollable situations—a feat achieved by the Egyptian women in Mahmood’s study, who strived “to bridge the gap between how one ‘really felt’ and how one was ‘supposed to feel’—thereby making a distinction between simulation and reality rather porous” (Mahmood 2001). In this endeavor, it is advisable to remain aware so that the mind and body do not slip back into old habits that are contrary to desired action. Mahmood summarizes the process, which also relates to Buddhist meditative practice:

vices and virtues—insofar as they are considered to be products of human endeavor, rather than revelatory experience or natural temperament—are acquired through the repeated performance of actions that entail a particular virtue or vice, until all behavior comes to be regulated by the habitus. Thus habitus in this tradition of moral cultivation implies a quality that is acquired through human industry, assiduous practice, and discipline such that it becomes a permanent feature of a person’s character. (Mahmood 2001)

With an awareness of each moment’s impulses and reasons for actions, practitioners attain the ability to create a desired habit that, after a prolonged period, becomes the default action—in time reducing the need to maintain the same level of awareness.

Simone Weil similarly describes the cultivation of ethical action in *Lectures on Philosophy*, where she seeks to answer the question, “Does introspection enable us to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary actions?” She believes the answer is yes, arguing that people can have immediate awareness of their own virtues in each individual moment. First, she describes virtue as “awareness of one’s own faults. Humility... becomes an intellectual virtue.

Virtue goes with self-awareness, but the awareness it implies is awareness of what is faulty, involuntary. The will is what understands, it is not an object of understanding. Pride is above all an intellectual fault” (Weil 1978). This definition of virtue corresponds with the previously established process undergone in the initial stages of meditation. Weil states that action and thought are engaged in a feedback loop in which one informs the other: “in all these cases, the action, which appears to be brought about by judgment, itself brings about the judgment” (Weil 1978). Weil refers to involuntary action that happens through involuntary thought as “Reflexes,” yet her wording connotes a physical more than a mental or psychological response. A more suitable word would be habit, which is a continuous pattern of action.

Weil perceives voluntary awareness and action in a dualistic sense—centered on the mind, which controls the body. “In any case of attention,” she writes, “the part the mind plays in relation to the body is one of control” (Weil 1978). Contemplative practice does proclaim an element of control over voluntary actions and thoughts. However, Weil pays less attention to how the body affects the mind, such as in psychosomatic elements, or how the mind is not always in control since passive thoughts arise as an effect of the body, such as the body sending hunger signals to the brain and the mind then thinking (in a passive thought process), “I am hungry,” or not thinking at all yet gravitating towards food. Therefore, if neither the mind nor the body has control, what does? Weil describes it as, “The will [which] in these cases would be the relationship between reasoned thought and what is done, thought determining what is done. What is done exists in a man’s mind and is translated into reality” (Weil 1978). Yet from where does ‘will’ arise except from within the self, who is the witness and the actor? There are socio-cultural, epistemological, economic, and environmental factors that influence the decision to seek out contemplative practice.

Will or intent is the action of the ego. For Weil, introspection of the self—in contrast to the ego—is essential to solving the problem of “evil.” As Weil states, “The problem is not one of trying to do good, but of trying to avoid evil” (Weil 1978). This may be accomplished by cultivating an inquisitive nature that distinguishes between involuntary and voluntary action and remains vigilant moment to moment to produce intentional decisions not to act in association with “evil.” Embodying Weil’s theory, Stan describes the necessity of habit metaphorically:

“The way I experience it, is that usually the first part of the meditation session, often is a little bit less comfortable and sometimes less comfortable feelings arise. Usually some kind of restlessness, some agitation, usually getting past those first twenty minutes, I would say requires me to cope a little bit with that. And so if I may make a metaphor it’s like climbing a hill. If I don’t meditate for a while or if I skip a couple of meditations, then climbing that hill becomes a steeper, more difficult climb.”

The process of meditation allows the practitioner to perceive human experience holistically. Similarly, this study of participants in group meditation practice examines the interlocutors’ theoretical conceptions of meditation and the effects of their meditative practice in an effort to present a relational interpretation. Participants’ presentation in their responses to my queries of theological belief and systems of embodiment suggest common patterns in the relationship between spiritual belief and practice.

### III

Although Derrida’s comments on theory, specifically the relationship between academic theory and social practice, do not focus on meditation or religious practice, the same relationship he presented can be found in studying the theory of practice in Buddhism and the experiential practice itself. Derrida’s “On Theory and Practice” delves into the dichotomy of social versus academic knowledge. In his argument, he claims theory and practice are not separate but rather influence and become one another. He explores theory and practice to support the unification of

academic thought and social action, stating that the act of thinking can no longer be regarded as simply theoretical:

“this defining discourse itself is also an act, a political gesture, a practice, it is no longer a purely theoretical language, nor even an essentially theoretical practice. Theoretical and/or philosophical discourse, like discourse in general, overflows itself in the course of its operation” (Derrida 2017).

Derrida specifically emphasizes the role of technique in two ways. First, he notes technique as a way of understanding—how through the process of understanding, theorists have created the separation of theory and practice through the action of creating this divide. Technique in this sense is the process, the action through which individuals understand the world, focusing on the epistemological etymology of this division. Second, he views technique as similar to creation and that:

“As a result, the theoretical is not a specification of the practical and, more generally, of the technical. The traditional theoreticism of philosophy is an effect of its practiciness and not its opposite; a specific effect of its initial practiciness and hence of its technicism. In what seems a slightly different sense, but one that is perhaps fundamentally analogous, Heidegger will here speak of theory as a theoretical practice. The theoretical is privileged only within a space that privileges the *praxical* and technical dimension” (Derrida 2017).

Theory (thought) and praxis (action) coexist alongside technique—the mode of rendering beings and knowledge manifest. This theory in regard to understanding the mind as thought is useful in order to know and utilize the connection between thought, action, and technique. Individuals who seek to cultivate a specific ethic quality or character through training the mind/body also must incorporate the element of technique to transform the self. Meditation hence acts as a technique of the self, which Foucault describes:

“technologies of the self, permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and semis, thoughts,



conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1988).

Through the technology of the self, the meditator gains mastery over selfhood. In order to transform the self, meditation focuses on the development of decision making. Derrida’s merging of theory and praxis through the mode of technique of the self allows for a holistic understanding of the mind, wherein the process of interpreting external and internal stimuli is not separate from acting upon that stimuli. Through awareness and forethought of actions, the practitioner can affect themselves, others, and the world in an intentional way. By emulating theory and advanced practitioners, the individual wishing to transform the self develops a map or guide to cultivate self, constructing intentional action through awareness of selfhood and moments of decision-making.

#### IV

A recent (2022) issue of *Anthropology Today* focuses on the discourse surrounding meditation along with various elements of meditative experience. The research on meditation presented in this special issue of *Anthropology Today* corresponds to my own study in the relationship between remembering, altering, or enhancing elements of one’s character and using social support to continue the process. My own emphasis on the American eclectic style, similar to Francis Mckay’s in “Am I Going Mad?: Adverse Meditation Events and the Anthropology of Ethics,” does not involve a particular tradition but instead utilizes meditation as a secular act of cultivation. Mckay focuses on sense-making and the uncertainty that arises in a mixed-tradition environment. This sense making which is crucial to Mckay is similarly crucial to developing psychosomatic habit patterns. In meditation practices detailed in *Anthropology Today*, practitioners utilize the technology of the self by participating in group practice, which enables

the practitioner to continue meditation even when difficult in part because it is a group activity that nevertheless affords solitude. In all cases presented in this issue of *Anthropology Today*, meditation is used as a method of intense introspection connected to psychosomatic components—as in McKay’s study of how meditation may lead to psychosis, in Pagis’s case regarding “Collective Mindfulness” wherein physical and social elements affect the mental experience of solitude, and in Cook and Cassaniti’s historical and scientific analysis “Mindfulness and Culture” outlining the cultivating effects of meditation. In the Theravadan tradition which Cook and Cassaniti describe, this is achieved through “remember[ing] to bring the mind to the present by using past experiences to inform one’s interpretation of current events” (Cook and Cassaniti 2022).

However, if traditional contextualization fails as in McKay’s work “Am I going Mad” there can be harmful mental and physical effects. McKay’s article frames the context of meditative study during the contemporary period as disparate. His interlocutors were people who engaged in meditation outside of its original context with little assistance from professional meditators and thus were more susceptible to experience the unsettling effects of meditation such as disassociation and psychosis. The participants of my study similarly make sense of the meditative tradition without its original context but still find meditation useful for their individual goals. ‘The group’ setting for my interlocutors acts as the groups in “Collective Mindfulness” act, the group supports each individual in guiding the practice to prevent disassociation and psychosis. The meditative context such as helpful stories and tips for practice provided by senior meditators enables group self regulation. Leading members are able to ground the interpretation of events in fellow members' lives. The group is however non-religious or spiritually inclusive and so senior members are tasked with guiding meditators in spiritual

practices while maintaining spiritual inclusivity to both prevent psychosis and to allow for spiritual and practical growth. The Meditation group at the University of Chicago inhabits the same operational space as that of the group mentioned in “Collective Mindfulness” while the leaders of the group guide the group in context which is expressed in Cook’s Mindfulness and Culture. ‘The group’ reminds the practitioner to practice meditation by providing the space and support needed to continue with developing meditation skills. The group becomes a space to gain control over psychosomatic interactions in daily life. Meditation for the students at the University of Chicago then becomes a ritualized practice that can be utilized for a general audience with spiritual inclusivity at its center while preventing adverse effects of disassociation and psychosis. The method used by the students in the group is to strip meditation down to its singular function of moderating psychosomatic interactions so that it can be applied to each individual's particular life circumstances and goals. Using meditation as a nonreligious act to achieve generalized spiritual growth is the approach taken by the students at the University of Chicago and has helped them achieve their own personal spiritual goals as detailed in the next section.

## V

Aspects of the American meditation movement may be found in the University of Chicago Spiritual Life Center, where I studied many eclectic meditators who congregated in a previously established group to practice together. Group sessions were advertised across the campus on billboards and near classrooms, and all were welcome to join. The group met every Tuesday at Ida Noyes Student Center. In the office before the sessions began, meditators would chat briefly, and whoever arrived first would begin rearranging the office furniture and bringing

in cushions and pads from the other meditation room. Members arranged the cushions in a circle facing inwards to facilitate personal connection. They performed their various tasks in silence. One meditation leader guided each session, often either Niki or Mark, who both were advanced meditators. The first part of the session, seated meditation, would last 30 minutes. Afterwards, the meditation leader would guide walking meditation, in which people would focus their attention on how the movement felt in their knees or under their feet. Then they would sit again and discuss any feelings that arose during the session or the previous week. These discussions opened a space for sharing and for guidance from fellow meditators immersed in Buddhist theoretical concepts or contemplative practice. Sessions primarily consisted of asking for advice in difficult life situations or revealing the struggles a person had recently gone through and transforming these anecdotes into lessons in dharma, a Sanskrit term meaning the Buddha's teachings. The purpose for gathering weekly rests on the definition of meditation and its function in people's lives.

Traditionally, meditation is the action the self performs consciously and repetitively. In meditation, awareness is actively directed back upon itself. The witness observes the self, which over time allows the practitioner to know how selfhood functions. The meditator can then act intentionally by accessing awareness of impulses and cultivating the ability to make voluntary decisions in individual moments until the intentional action becomes a habit. A developed habit constitutes the reformation of involuntary action, thus meditation is a technique of behavioral transformation. Though there are various types of meditation, they all seek to foster the skill of awareness by provoking introspection, reflection, and consistency. Meditation develops active awareness and diminishes inactive awareness, which is the practitioner's primary state. While the experience of meditation differs for most people, similar patterns arise.

Lyn, a secular PhD student of physics who began meditating a little over a year ago, spoke inquisitively and with frequent pauses reflecting intense thought. She described her experience with meditation as synonymous with introspection, which allowed her to create space to understand her mental processes:

“Depending on what the thoughts are which arise when I am seated, I will engage or I will not. But I’ve actually found that when I have something on my mind and I’m trying to meditate and then that thing comes up, I have found it to be very helpful and very enlightening to investigate the thoughts more so than to ask myself about the origin of the thoughts or the feelings that are associated with the thoughts. What am I attached to? What am I expecting? What am I afraid of? Questions like that are helpful. So that’s kind of more of the kind of meditation that I do”.

Here she states that although she realizes that the practice generally involves asking about the origin of thoughts, she finds it easier to act introspectively. She questions why a certain thought or action arises in order to find the source impulse or concept behind the thought. In that way, she gains better knowledge of the cause of the thoughts arising. She adds:

“I do want to get better at having the stillness of my mind through meditation, though. But I’ve actually found that me being introspective and inquisitive about my thoughts and feelings has helped me to understand myself better. Have I noticed any differences in actions or thoughts? I would say yes, because before I began practicing meditation, I had a propensity to have anxiety and depression. So meditating has helped me to bring myself back to a point of understanding the bigger perspective, to help me manage my mental health. So I’ve noticed a difference in the way that I think about certain things that may trigger my anxiety or depression. I remember to bring a calmness and a stillness to myself when those thoughts come about. I think the difference for me is just that I have more prominence of thoughts and then those thoughts bring actions. However, I think the actions have just been a little bit more subtle.”

Meditation has hence served as a method for understanding the self and why certain thoughts and actions arise. It acts as a therapeutic measure for Lyn, who finds that through meditation, she gains a greater understanding of the connections between her internal and external world. In meditating, she chooses to bring peace to the self, which otherwise has a tendency towards anxiety. Lyn also notes her observation of the cyclical factor of how her thoughts and actions

depend on one another for transformation.

Stan is also a PhD student (psychology). He has been meditating for six years and ascribes to the Buddhist religion. As opposed to Lyn's focus on introspection, Stan described his understanding of awareness as tied to psychology and mentality. He, too, spoke slowly and with intention:

“The way I look at meditation is very much affected by Western psychology. I think meditation helps us resolve our inner conflicts. We have conflicting desires or fears that inhibit actions or if we have some issue a lot of it goes back to some trauma that we have from a former incident, which can be anything. I think that meditation helps these things. In a sense, it helps me become a more unified person. So a more integrated person as if you're better integrated in the world.”

Stan gravitates toward transforming the self using Western psychology as a touchstone alongside meditation to compose his knowledge. He also couples internal knowledge with external action, denoting the feedback loop of how mastering thought enables the expression of internal intent through external action.

The earliest source explaining Buddhist meditation is the Theravada Satipatthana Sutta. This Sutta constitutes the theory of meditation and provides the conceptual understanding of how a practitioner is supposed to meditate. Its information is of no use, however, without experiential knowledge of meditation. The foundational practice of meditation is observation of the breath, which because of its nature is always observable, allowing practitioners ease of access continually or whenever they choose to direct their attention to it. The section in the Satipatthana Sutta titled “Mindfulness of Breathing” dictates the process:

“Venerable sir, is there one thing which, when developed and cultivated, fulfills four things? And four things which, when developed and cultivated, fulfill seven things? And seven things which, when developed and cultivated, fulfill two things?”

Concentration by mindfulness of breathing, Ānanda, is the one thing which, when developed and cultivated, fulfills the four establishments of mindfulness. The four establishments of mindfulness, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven factors of

enlightenment. The seven factors of enlightenment, when developed and cultivated, fulfill true knowledge and liberation” (Bodhi 2005).

In the Buddhist sutras, the path to nirvana is a continual pointing game that directs the practitioner to look past their current practice until they reach the core of meditation: the realized state that is referenced, though not explicitly named, in the eightfold path that is split into eight sections. If the sections are combined to their fundamentals, the state involves mastery over the affectual knowledge of both body and mind in order to comprehend every situation in totality and to act according to the most beneficial path for all parties involved through the physical realization of internal intent.

The breath is the subject of focus throughout the entire examination process and each subsequent Jhana (stage). Observing the breath develops the skill of voluntary watching, the one act that through cultivation allows for the accumulation of knowledge. Once mastered, it leads to complete understanding in each moment, which is an aspect of awakening. Mastery over the breath and cultivation of voluntary awareness are made difficult, however, through previous habitual action and self-perception. Focused awareness is an inquisitive physiological exercise that develops experiential knowledge that is tangible and real to the individual because it has been gained through firsthand experience.

Awareness through isolated focus on the breath is the initial teaching and a foundational practice in the American Theravadan tradition. It is therefore the most common style practiced in meditation groups. Focus involves either placing attention on the area beneath the nose or noticing the rise and fall of the abdomen with each inhale and exhale. The extended version of meditation involves moving through several Jhanas (stages of awareness and focus) by engaging the seven factors of mindfulness, although this is less common for the lay practitioner. However,

the four establishments of mindfulness are taught to lay people as a means of developing their practice. The eclectic American Theravadan tradition primarily engages with awareness of breath and the four establishments of mindfulness—the style practiced by the meditation group in which I conducted my research.

The evidence I collected centered on American Theravadan Buddhist practices and their eclectic style of obtaining knowledge, which leads people to seek out group meditation. There are also meditative practices that vary in style and that do not center on the foundation of examining the breath in this way. However, since they are not described in the Sattipatana Suttas, the oldest source that describes meditation, I will not discuss them here. Rather, I focus on the regular interlocutors in the University of Chicago Spiritual Life meditation group, who described their experiences with and primary usage of meditation. Lyn describes her practice as self-care and scientific introspection:

“My practice is funny, it is scientific in a way. I’m a microbiologist, so the way that I do my practice is that I remember to bring myself back to awareness and I try to remember that I’m an observer and that I’m watching everything while also playing a part in the world that I’m observing. I’m participating, but I’m also watching. It’s kind of like participant observation. I think maybe I’ve been more consistent, not with just meditation, but with self-care. Collectively, I would say that my self care routine has been more consistent”.

Lyn discusses her process of understanding the external and internal world as comparable to science. She feels connected to her meditation practice in that by understanding the nature of herself, she can provide the essence of what she needs intentionally. She can therefore intentionally shape her habits to perpetuate self-care.

Liz, another participant in the study, is an undergraduate student in her early twenties who embraces New-Age spirituality. She describes her meditation practice as a tool for



regulatory purposes. Unlike her peer participants, she spoke at a regular pace, less contemplatively and less extensively. She indicates her understanding of meditation here:

“I was just trying to make myself feel better and also improve my productivity. So I’ve thought of meditation more as a tool for emotional regulation than anything else these days. And over the years, I would say, especially in the past, like three or so years, it’s really blossomed into what I would think of as a spiritual practice”.

Liz approaches the act of meditation as a means of emotional regulation as it has enhanced her awareness of the emotions that have presented themselves over the years. While this is not necessarily the intent of meditation, the repeated action has transformed and shaped her thoughts to a point where she now perceives meditation as a spiritual practice. Her experience represents how meditative action can change the meditator’s thoughts and perspective on both herself and the external world.

Mark, a law student in his late twenties who had trained intensely at monasteries over the years, occasionally led the group meetings. He identifies as Buddhist and has incorporated Buddhist meditation in his life for seven years. He describes his first meditative experience with an upright but relaxed demeanor:

“The first time I sat down, something really wonderful happened. I realized my thoughts weren’t coming from some place, and I could not control them. Thoughts are not decisions, such as when to turn on a water faucet, but instead thoughts just bubble up. I had never before known that there was a way to look introspectively. So when I realized that, I was open to the idea of fixing some of the problems that often happened in my life through meditation”.

An experienced meditator, Mark has learned much of what meditation can teach and offers a deeper look at how the practice can affect a person’s thoughts and actions. First, Mark gathered internal knowledge on the process of thoughts—that they arise and that we have no control over them. He separated the function of thought or uncontrollable impulses and the subsequent action,

which he understood as a preliminary step to improving his life situations. Mark also commented on the practice of observing the breath, an orienting technique to return to awareness:

“Having an anchor on your breath is really just saying, well, we need to find some way to get your body in mind to return to a settled place where the neutral or neutral pleasant sensation can open you to how to habitually turn back to this mode and then you can use it”.

He focuses on the technique of anchoring awareness so that his self-knowledge and his external situation become apparent and merge. In addition, he speaks of ease of practice through consistency, whereby he may access knowledge of his external state. He then described the goal of meditation in two ways:

“I have an explicit goal to recognize the intrinsic nature of reality, in other words to realize enlightenment and my personal understanding of that through many moments, small moments, and constantly. Enlightenment doesn't seem like the sort of thing that is automatic or completely stabilized from the beginning. Certain insights, if you keep on practicing with them, do produce long-lasting realizations and changes in your experience. There are stories of people who experience no-self, and then never attain the same solidification of self again. But I guess my explicit goal is enlightenment in small moments. So the practical way that I think that's done, in my life, is trying to integrate intellectual engagement and thought. For instance, when I'm reading my legal text and trying to understand case law, or doing other stuff, how do I combine that with meditative understanding, so as to not get distracted by my thoughts all the time?”

Here, Mark references Theravadan teachings derived from the sutras. He wants to understand in totality the internality and externality. He realizes that the self and the world are composed of little moments and therefore aims to acquire a habitual pattern of realization, which can fade if not continually recalled and embodied through practice. The integration of constantly arising thoughts and practical engagement within each moment is his ideal state of being.

“My goal, which is basically not to get so caught up in the story of my life or the narrative that bleeds over from being so engaged in my mental phenomena all day so that I don't lose sight of the intrinsic piece of reality that I already am. Which already exists in the space in which everything else arises. So it's not a very well defined goal. I guess there are other things, like wish well to people, to be, like, may you be peaceful and happy. May you be healthy and strong. May your life unfold with ease. It breeds a

good hearted nature in yourself”.

Mark aims to achieve constant awareness of decentralized knowledge—knowledge that is not biased by selfhood. This leads to his practice of Metta (Loving-Kindness), a natural next step for the individual trying to achieve an unbiased present understanding of interactive phenomena. Elaborating on his thoughts regarding the goal of meditation, he indicates his understanding of meditation as a disciplined spiritual practice:

“The goal is sort of no goal, which is like if the more and more you try and find a way to understand “progress” in your practice, the more and more you’re not really progressing. Meditation is not about getting anything. It’s about how to not become distracted by thoughts and ceasing to use thoughts as a way to get involved in clinging to sense desires, as well as to lose this notion that you’re a steady self-operating behind your eyes. These are not things you get. They’re like things that are true and then we obscure them. So the goal is to stop creating so many goals. But that’s not a very satisfying answer because it’s so paradoxical. It doesn’t communicate some of the important conceptual truths that can be helpful to people who don’t know: to everyone, maybe even to yourself, right?”

“No goal” refers to the Buddhist ideal of non-clinging and relinquishment of control over the effects or progress during meditation. There is no goal because although there are notable changes in mental and physical experiences in meditation overtime the process presents differently in different people. Hoping for an outcome prevents the practitioner from fully knowing and reacting to the present situation in an intentional and measured way hence clouding the process of cultivation and clouding the mind. Mark is in fact describing the Buddhist understanding of the function of meditation—that it is a tool for cultivation, not a means of reaching a goal. When the practitioner confuses the tool with the goal, they become unable to progress to a state of complete affectual knowledge, which includes both experiential and internal self-knowledge of impulses and internal and external situations. Meditation can seem paradoxical if the practitioner does not understand the nature of the mental and bodily affect

feedback loop, where the practice changes the thought, and the thought changes the practice. It is difficult to intellectualize because the individual must examine the self as an observer and not as in association with the mind, which is the traditional perception of selfhood. Mark claims that the core of Buddhist practice is gained through developing meditative capacities:

“The Buddha at bottom was really an ethicist. The message was truly a moral message. If we think about the Four Noble Truths or Dukka, there’s the truth of Dukka, there’s the causes of Dukka, there’s the possibility of the end of Dukka, the cessation of Dukka, and there’s the way to the end of Dukka. That seems to touch on what is morality in our societies, stemming from engagement of at least two people, and often many more, coming together in relation. It is about figuring out how to interact with people, and each other’s experience to promote a sense of wellbeing, and wellbeing can only be had through our experience. So the Buddha was really talking about how long-term dissatisfaction, this suffering, how does it relate to experience and wellbeing? And he illustrates a very clear path. That you must observe your mind, right? One of the first teachers said this to Joseph Goldstein when he first went overseas: if you want to know your mind, sit down and observe it”.

For Mark, morality—the moral message of Buddhism—is relational since human beings live in relation to one another. He references the Four Noble Truths and Dukka—the Pali word for suffering—as a means of understanding this moral message: there is suffering (Dukka), the cause of suffering is clinging, there is an end to clinging—the cessation of suffering—realized through Nirvana, and there is the eightfold path—the way leading to the end of suffering, a foundational doctrine in Buddhism. He also mentions Joseph Goldstein, a prominent teacher in the American Theravadan tradition who founded one of the biggest contemporary meditation centers in America, the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. At its core for Mark, meditation is about developing the capability to produce the most beneficial and intentional interactions with both the self and the external society. Meditation is the observation method to know the self, which allows for experiential wellbeing. Mark continues calmly:

“So the Buddhist message is to observe the causes and effects. When you do this, what happens? If you are angry and hateful and greedy, bad things result and you’re more prone to violence and shouting or the rest of it that we’d rather go without in society. So

at the bottom of everything the Buddha is talking about when you understand these Four Noble Truths deeply, you arrive at a place of intrinsic caring for others because that's the natural state of what's coming up. These things are here. The obvious implication for experience as it rests is to come about and manifest in this certain way".

Observation, the concept behind awareness, is the fundamental faculty that meditation cultivates combined with the ability to act with intention. As Mark explains, complete awareness allows for compassion through being able to move through the world without bias.

"So those are all practices that tend to see truly that it's not that there's a self-there to see past. It's that there is an illusion that is the self. Right? It's a sense of self. It's not really, truly stable this thing[self] through which experience is going. Experience is a stream, and then there's a noncausal implicated self; it is the stream. It's about this understanding of the selfless nature and then the resting and stabilizing of that understanding to free yourself from suffering".

When describing the illusion of self, Mark speaks of the false narratives that the mind creates: that there is a mind composed of thought instead of simply a pattern of behaviors and actions, that there is something to be attained, and that it is the biased centralized selfhood that inhabits and interacts with the world. Through meditation practice, we achieve an awareness of the world as a realm in which the self coexists in a relational, inseparable, and equally decentralized way with all creatures. This decreases the amount of the world that is experienced solely through thought. It is through the unbiased view, the complete understanding of the world through various human sensations and an inclusive nature, in which suffering ceases.

Lastly, Mark comments on the process of coming into a meditative state and the tendency to stray from it:

"When you're relaxed, you're opening to awareness. You're investigating things with curiosity and compassion. When you're casual, you're sort of, like, mind wandering, like, letting every thought lead you on a train. You're not dedicating yourself to coming back and beginning concentration again. There is a huge difference between being super dedicated to watching the breath and the body sitting and thoughts coming and going and being very vigilant and punishing yourself when you go away. Those two things don't have to be mixed. But I think oftentimes when someone, a meditation teacher,

says, be very committed to not being distracted, what people hear is okay, I should punish myself when I get distracted. No, no one's saying that. Just be committed to the nondestructive part. And then when you get distracted, be gentle and calm and bring yourself back".

As he stated before, the practice for him is about accepting reality, so when a person strays from reality, they are advised to accept reality and return to awareness. During the meditative practice, the individual is not expected to be a master. Expecting to experience meditation in a certain way blocks the practitioner from fully experiencing the present moment. It is both humbling and crucial for development that the practitioner let go of any ideas of progress or craving towards a certain pleasant emotional or physical state because clinging to those ideas inhibits the acceptance of reality, one of the main goals of meditation. Without accepting reality, the practitioner is unable to react to or understand these mental or physical states and thus is unable to respond with their own personal goals or highest intentions to develop their own character. Such skills are learned and developed only through compassion, perseverance, introspection, and openness and can only be employed effectively with a clear comprehension of the current self, not through delusions of an idealized self.

In addition to cultivating awareness, meditation works to uncover the distinction between voluntary and involuntary acts. It is through understanding the process in which the observer recognizes and reacts to such impulses that meditation fosters the skill of disciplined action. Voluntary action is a cognitive process that includes thinking silently and reacting to external stimuli. Deciding to perform an action is a function of self that meditation utilizes for change, such as deciding to think (internal speech) or deciding to move. Involuntary action is not premeditated; rather it denotes the workings of the mind and body's natural processes, such as blinking, breathing, or digesting. Meditation or contemplative practice targets involuntary

thought and action for change by first changing the voluntary acts, which then become automatic for the individual.

## VI

Human beings may of course change over time, yet once an individual develops the meditative habit and a heightened sense of awareness, they are able to judge their thoughts and actions before acting upon them, making their interactions purely intentional and concomitant with their highest selfhood and ideals. In effect, they embody the change they originally sought, yet they must maintain awareness or this skill will diminish. If this is done properly, the person will continue to cultivate the mind and body and change the way they think, generally developing a sense of Metta. Metta is Loving-Kindness, a sense of love and joy that is both a mental state of compassion and a physical experience of warmth centralized in the chest or “heart center.” Metta is a learned mental and physical state that arises after long stints of practice focusing on loving, the self, “easy beings” such as loved ones, “neutral beings” such as strangers, and “difficult beings” such as enemies. Metta is another step in the meditative practice to cultivate mental states of happiness and physical acts of kindness towards the world in general. Repeating the Sutra on loving-kindness to close meditation sessions or Buddhist gatherings cultivates this sense of compassion: “May all beings be happy and secure! May all beings have happy minds! / Whatever living beings there may be Without exception” (qtd. in Bodhi 2005).

Metta alters the practitioner’s mode of living to reflect this sentiment, providing a disposition to move through the world with compassion and a propensity to display compassionate actions. This is another example of habit—the cumulative experience of personhood, consisting of patterns of action and decisions that arise. Meditation leads to patterns of personhood changing, which then changes other individuals’ experience of and identification

with the dedicated practitioner. Stan, Mark, and Liz commented on their development of their own ideas of ethics through experiential knowledge gained by meditative practice. Liz, who has practiced only three years, began the discussion by saying:

I think you can make an argument that Buddhist practice has a clear prescription of how to go about the world. But I also think you can make a compelling argument that it really isn't as prescriptive as other belief systems, and it can be used to rationalize a lot of different ways of going about the world. And so that's kind of been a puzzle for me, given that I hold these spiritual beliefs. What should I be doing? Buddhism really for me has been like a rationalization of principles that I already held, which I do believe in and what I identify politically as a socialist. And I'm really hung up on climate change and environmentalism. I have a whole kind of network of beliefs about capitalism, power and climate and stuff. The point is, I feel like the Buddhist beliefs have strengthened my commitment to those things. For example, I am vegan and the food that I prepare for myself and stuff that I buy is all vegan. I guess the practice of why veganism is discernment is because it's how I figure out what to do in the world. Since there isn't really a prescriptive framework. A lot of it comes down to staying attuned to inside my body and mind.

Liz noticed her own confusion on merging the theory of Buddhism with her everyday actions.

The less-prescriptive, more versatile nature of Buddhist practice allows her to apply it to her individually held philosophies. The practice allows for concentration and awareness of action and being, but it does not require specific goals for its practitioners' everyday lives.

Stan, on the other hand, views the changes he has gone through as not solely ideologically based but in tandem with both ideology and practice:

I think an important part of it is that the more you are self-integrated, the less inner conflict you have, the better you harmonize with the world. And I find that meditating for years has affected my life a lot. So in what ways? I think it has made me more equanimous. I began looking at life with less attachment to results or to whatever happens. So I go with the flow more. I accept things, and I try not to get worked up about things. And if things don't go the way I hoped they would go, I'm better at dealing with that. So I think that's one of the main differences.

Stan appreciates the state of equanimity he has cultivated through years of practice. He is less attached to specific outcomes or what the self wants and more in control of his reactions to



external situations. He has achieved a less biased understanding of the world and is able to accept what happens in life. Mark replied to the question similarly to Stan, emphasizing awareness of the self:

I think one of the things meditation and Buddhism did was shift my attention towards this moment. Each moment is enough as it is. That's the understanding that is helpful to embody. It also made me very keenly aware of what causes pain and suffering to those around me and what doesn't.

Mark understands the connection between centralized selfhood and suffering. Through meditative practice, he has become aware of individual moments and their importance to the development of self through habitual action. He has been able to transform the self through full awareness and intentional action in each moment.

## VII

Embodied action is the measure of an evolving selfhood. Theory becomes practice, mind and body are disciplined in the same way through control over impulses, and through philosophy, the ego understands itself. In mastery of meditation, the practitioner embodies their individual ethics, translating their ethical theory into reality. All perception originates in the body through thought and senses. Religious experience is also grounded in thoughts, senses, and thus the body, something other disciplines must acknowledge as well. Thomas Csordas, in his article, "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology," explains why it is important for anthropologists to incorporate the material in studies of perception:

"Anthropologists have (1) Considered perception strictly as a function of cognition, and seldom with respect to self, emotion, or cultural objects such as supernatural beings; (2) isolated the senses, especially focusing on visual perception, but seldom examining the synthesis and interplay of senses in perceptual life; and (3) focused on contextually abstract experimental tasks, instead of linking the study of perception to that of social practice" (Csordas 2002).

Csordas discusses anthropology's failure to merge theoretical reality, social reality, and experiential reality. Thus while examining the individual in relation to the larger group's actions, he states:

“The hermeneutic circle of this argument is completed with a return to the subject-object distinction, which in my view frames the central methodological issue of embodiment... [the] objection was that the object of perception would then have to be either possible or necessary. In fact it is neither—instead, it is *real*. This means that “it is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which it is given exhaustively” (Csordas 2002).

Here he describes the phenomenon of subject-object distinction as similar to a mathematical principle wherein the object may be described in infinite ways, and the subject only describes a segment that they perceive. “Basically,” Csordas writes, “both superstructure/cultural and environmental influences and individual and biological and emotional influences which makes it difficult to pin down one point and so it is better to look at human experience and embodiment as a holistic and interdependent activity” (Csordas 2002). The sum of human experience that the meditative practice examines is similarly perceived as holistic. The combination of voluntary action with board knowledge reflects Csordas's theory. In both, the method of study alongside the interlocutors and their own practice this decentralized approach is applied.

Hence in studying meditation, I have attempted to include both its physical and mental aspects. This has led to the overall claim that meditation acts as a method of absorption as previously described: a process in which awareness of and introspection into mind and body are cultivated and become intentionally habitual. Meditation thus becomes a technology of the self used to reform mental and physical patterns through voluntary acts that over time become involuntary—“reflexes” or habits of intentional actions that align with the individual's ideals of self-cultivation. Through meditation, mastery over awareness can be obtained to separate the

idealized self from the present and real self, thus establishing a starting point to enable growth through witnessing, knowing, and acting. This mastery then becomes an embodiment as proclaimed by Thomas Csordas.

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### **Methodology.**

Anthropology is especially useful in studying psychosomatic phenomena because anthropologists attempt to understand physical interactions and meanings in various ways. Anthropologists also attempt to understand the context of a person's relationship to the general subject matter, which both interact in an inseparable way and create how the interlocutor relates to the subject of study; in this case meditation. This is an informative approach that aligns with psychosomatic research currently being conducted in the field of anthropology.

In "Sin Embodied," Eve-Riina Hyrkäs studies the connection between Christian faith, morality, and physical manifestations of disease, an approach that attempts to expand the usage of medicine to incorporate attention to emotional and mental wellbeing. This approach is reflected in my own research, where the attempt is also to connect mental states to physical wellbeing. However, the purpose of the two forms of research differs because he is specifically engaged in medicine, while my research is centered on will or the ability for cultivation of self. In "Agency, Embodiment and Enactment in Psychosomatic Theory and Practice," Laurence J Kirmayer and Ana Gómez-Carrillo advocate for coupling mental and physical events, arguing that "any attempt to explain and categorise a collection of symptoms inevitably reflects its proponents' ontological and epistemological commitments. As a result of cognitive-social looping effects, the symptoms themselves and their evolution over time may be shaped by clinicians' viewpoint and explanatory models." This is a useful approach in anthropology that enables a totalistic approach to mental and physical issues.

The research method involving both psychosomatic features is also at play in such works as "Sociosomatics: The Contributions of Anthropology to Psychosomatic Medicine," by Kleinman, and "Anthropology and Psychosomatics," by J. Henry. While these articles are not

about meditation, their chosen methodologies—participant observation and in-depth interviewing—contribute to knowledge about the psychosomatic nature of meditation and working alongside these conditions to deepen understanding of the connection between behavior and physicality per Francis Mckay’s “Am I Going Mad?”

Throughout my investigation on meditation and its role in an individual’s attempts to change habits, I utilized the methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing. Participant observation involved attending meetings, which were held weekly. During the meetings, activities included an initial seated meditation, a short period of walking meditation, and afterwards a session where group members sat together to discuss or analyze their weekly struggles while figuring out a response to such troubles that aligned with their meditative and Buddhist practice. Participant observation is not a methodology that allows the researcher to fully understand their interlocutors, a deficit I supplemented with participant interviews. However, because I have six years’ experience with the practice and techniques associated with Buddhist meditation, it was easier to integrate into their community as the language and ways of interacting within the group were familiar to me.

Through participation, I was able to understand meditation as a tool, a set of actions that enable the individual to change their mindset. Meditation makes the practitioner aware of minuscule fluctuations of mental and emotional states. Such awareness allows them the possibility of choosing their reactive interactions. For instance, if a person suddenly experiences anger, their immediate reaction is no longer rage but inquisitive introspection of the self and the cause of the anger. Through meditation practice, the inquisitive nature flows to not only mental states but also physical actions. People begin to question why they have done things or why things done to them elicit an emotional response. The ability to probe and to distance themselves

from their programmed understanding of situations allows for them to interact with phenomena through a more intensely objective perspective, although full objective understanding is not attainable and not the goal. In fact, although the general goal of meditation is self-improvement, practitioners never claim any goal at all since doing so is fundamentally opposed to general Buddhist practice, which involves letting go of goals and expectations in order to rid oneself of desire.

Through observation of their sessions, the eclectic Buddhist style became apparent through each person's way of practice, some belonging to the Tibetan style and some belonging to Mahayanan or Theravadan traditions. Participants' connection to the movements, though, remained the same during seated meditation as all participants, with eyes closed or open, focused on their breathing—either focusing on their noses as they breathed or the way their abdomen rose and fell. The walking style of meditation varied greatly, with some walking slowly, breaking down each movement to a separate instance of lifting, moving, and lowering the feet, while others walked at more rapid speeds, not focusing their attention on such tiny details. The experience is different, but the product of a closer connection to the body remained consistent throughout the different forms of meditation, whether walking, standing, or sitting.

The group studied consisted of around 10 people. Interviewing them in addition to observing them during their meditation practice, I was able to understand their relationships with meditation. The interviews varied, but all participants spoke of using meditation as a way of being introspective about themselves and their experiences in daily life. Meditators often have similar outcomes despite their differing concerns and lives.

During the interviews, I asked several open-ended questions so that the interviewee would be able to guide the process and describe what they thought was most important about

their relationship to meditation. The goal of my methodology was to establish a rapport with my interlocutors by being an integrated part of their weekly meditation practice. Interviews were often conducted after the group session, when the meditators' experience was still within recent memory. The timing allowed for close analysis of recurring patterns in both speech and action, especially reactions to group discussions, which involved curating good or useful responses to emotional deregulation, in turn pointing to meditation as a tool to promote emotional, physical, and mental regulation. This tool provided comfort, especially when participants departed from the group and no longer had an outlet for communal caregiving, where small acts and emotions are given significant weight, unlike in general experience outside of the group setting. In the group setting, participants were soothing but realistic guides and friends for one another. The group presented a way of facing an oftentimes difficult reality, similar to therapy, wherein a person has a discussion about life issues and then completes an exercise to promote introspection or offer comfort. Participants perceived obstacles in life as opportunities for growth and for meditation on ensuing feelings. They could then curate their responses accordingly.

Meditation, however, is not what solves their problems. Rather, practitioners come to understand a particular situation or feeling more deeply. Then, through their own awareness, they can change their habit. It is a continual effort to build habitual patterns in what they desire and how they interact. It is also a difficult endeavor because it requires constant awareness and responsibility, with no expectation of developing a strong habitual pattern. Participants' behavior combined with the interviews led to the discovery and analysis of apparent patterns, such as participants distancing themselves from the world to obtain a more objective understanding of themselves and their situation. Thus meditation affords an active problem-solving solution with the promise of eventual change and happiness if the effort is continued indefinitely.



Analysis of the transcripts and field notes taken showed a clear pattern of psychosomatic responses to meditation to which the participant would then have an emotional, physical, or mental response. It became clear upon analysis that meditation acted not as a theological or spiritual ideology would but nevertheless had a significant effect on the behaviors and mentality of the practitioner, regardless of their goal in undertaking meditation. This effect can be traced to practitioners' intention and motivation to continue the practice, thus creating a habitual pattern and enhancing or subduing whichever characteristics they choose. My findings reflect Foucault's technologies of the self, although I strive to remain neutral on matters of philosophy and theology, particularly because the research aimed at studying the mental and bodily reactions that adhere more easily to the abstract theory. Once I collected the qualitative data, I identified patterns present in the transcripts of my interlocutors and assembled common themes that arose specifically focusing on mental and physical states. I compared these themes to predominant literature in theory as well as contemporary study, enhancing the validity of the argument.

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## Literature Review

In Michel Foucault's "Technologies of the Self," he writes of the human capacity and will to change behaviors. Simone Weil, from a philosophical perspective, speaks of developing the will through learning how to change what she labels as reflexes through being constantly aware and trying not to be good but to prevent oneself from committing vices. Mahmood uses the hermeneutic approach to evaluate women performing salat and overcoming accompanying difficulties by continuing salat even when they are less inclined to, which then changes their emotional and mental responses to salat, making it easier for them to perform salat in the future. In each instance, the connection between mental and physical states is overwhelmingly and undeniably present, demonstrating that the key to embodying any change comes from constant motivation and awareness of these connections so that the person can shift their behavior. In each instance, they discuss ways to embody change, not how to enable or encourage change. Similarly, this study does not closely examine ways to enable or encourage change, although a simple analysis shows that change may stem from community and resources such as a meeting space, a core group, and access to the spiritual teachings. The embodiment of change of course can be accomplished without a group or such resources but would take a considerable amount of effort, consistency, and motivation, which are the keystones of my research on meditation. Through research of the eclectic style he came to the conclusion that meditation is a practice used for ethical

The common themes across the various sources that describe cultivation of the self through consistent action all center on the relationship between the actor and the action. The sources identify the action as originating in a motivation, either an urge stemming from bodily cravings or the thought to do something, which is associated with desire for a certain mental

state. In the same vein, the tendency throughout religious traditions to control the development of habits all center around the body and the mind. This constant association hints at how body and mind work together to provoke an action. The method of cultivation generally consists of the practitioner identifying their motivation or urge, identifying their usual reaction to that urge, identifying how they would like to react, and then using the ritualized spiritual action to maintain awareness so they can shape their reactions continually throughout the little moments that accumulate to form their overall life pattern. Due to their awareness, they are now able to shift their behavioral patterns to adhere to their goal for themselves. The result of cultivation is similar throughout various practices. The individual feels more connected to themselves, more in control of their life, and more connected to their specific spiritual or theological tradition.

Sources generally disagree about the goals for such introspection and change of action. The goals range from “avoiding evil,” as Simone Weil states, to becoming close to God or cultivating moral behavior. Since spiritual practice is deeply rooted in particular traditions, it is unsurprising that there is disagreement on the spiritual goals of such rigorous introspection and behavioral adjustments. There are also different actions that elicit similar states of mind and behavior. The development of habit is less associated with the consistent action and more so the mental relationship to the action. In Mahmood’s research, the ritual action the participants underwent was prayer. In American Buddhism, the ritual action entails meditation. In Simone Weil’s case, which is a philosophical understanding of the Christian contemplative practice, the emphasis is on introspection. In all cases, the relationship between the action of embodiment and the conceptualization of mental and physical states in association to goodness is paramount. The relationship between introspection concerning behavior and the consistent motivation towards

change creates in the individual the ability to react to situations by adhering to their utmost desire instead of following their immediate urges.

Within the nuance of spirituality, especially with its ties to theology, examining the spiritual action as a function of the mind and body without also involving the effects of theology is rare and often left to the field of philosophy. The ethnographic method, which examines actions through participant observation and considers epistemology through first-person accounts, renders the field of anthropology especially useful for examining patterns in differing groups. A comparative approach to understanding these patterns of behavior is not prominent in the academic literature, though it would be useful to put together the collective pieces of similar behaviors for a greater understanding of the impact on the relational aspect of introspection and habitual change. The connection between introspection and habitual change is the focus of Foucault's "Technologies of the Self." However, why this connection is present and so crucial is generally a secondary focus if any focus is given to it at all.

The research presented in the 2022 special issue of *Anthropology Today* focuses on different aspects of meditation communities in various spaces. McKay focuses on American meditators and their experiences with eclectic meditation styles, either mixed together with various traditions or secular to Buddhist traditions using meditation as a cultivation tool removed from tradition. McKay concludes that meditation is an ethically transformative tool but due to the eclectic American style, people can become lost through mixing traditions or working without a guide when faced with unexplained altering mental states. In collective consciousness, the focus is mostly on collective solitude, where the retreat experience offers sociality and the comfort of community but emphasizes seclusion and limits speech in certain spaces. As Cook and Cassaniti suggest, meditation cannot be separated from the cultural and historical aspects of the studied

group. Cook and Cassaniti also note that through meditation, a person can either enhance or subdue characteristics within their personalities. This ability to change characteristics could stem from the ability to remember, which is the purpose of meditation in the Theravadan tradition: The process of meditation begins with remembering to maintain awareness or remembering to meditate, which is inseparable from the process of meditation itself and is perhaps the first step in its sequence of practice.

In “Am I Going Mad?” Francis Mckay studies an institution where meditators can go if they are experiencing disturbing mental and emotional side effects from meditation. He finds that people can experience these side effects if they are not grounded in a single tradition but borrow from multiple traditions without the help of a teacher. He names the style of meditation that borrows from different traditions as the “American eclectic style” of Buddhism. Mckay focuses on sense-making and the uncertainty that arises in a mixed-tradition environment. This sense making which is crucial to Mckay is similarly crucial to developing psychosomatic habit pattern. Through meditation the practitioner becomes aware of the mind and body's connections it is through sense-making that

In “Collective Mindfulness,” Pagis and Orly focus on the experience of collective silence, the purpose of meeting spaces, and the rituals involved in collective practice. Pagis and Orly observe in collective mindfulness patterns of association similar to those present in my own research. Pagis and Orly find that group mindfulness practice is one of collective solitude. The individual practitioner maintains the solitude of internal speculation by remaining silent and avoiding eye contact with others in the group, thus isolating themselves in the meditative act. At the same time, there is social engagement through the presence and support of peers. This collective solitude extends beyond the group experience and continues in individual practice, wherein the

practitioner utilizes objects to remember the larger group. Pagis and Orly argue that silent group meditation occurs in the liminoid, “a space where one can step out of the rules and roles of daily social order. It is a space organized by society as a sanctuary from the demands of daily sociality. The collective practice of mindfulness serves as such a liminoid space” (Pagis and Orly 2022).

In “Mindfulness and Culture,” Cook and Cassaniti discuss historical and scientific understandings of meditation through an anthropological lens. They emphasize the importance of the socio-cultural context of meditation and how current meditation practices must be understood within such frameworks. They reference Michael Poulin’s physiological study that claims, “paying attention to the mind using techniques like mindfulness may enhance tendencies that already exist in our personalities and predilections. It shows how mindfulness works in culturally patterned and individual personal ways.” In the Theravadan tradition, this is achieved through “remember[ing] to bring the mind to the present by using past experiences to inform one’s interpretation of current events” (Cook and Cassaniti 2022).

Mckay’s research, though rooted in the American Buddhist tradition, seeks to understand the process and implications of trying to make meditation a secular action and examines the problems that arise when people approach it this way. He also discusses solutions to such problems as offered by the organization he studied. The research I undertook, centered in the American eclectic style, describes an underlying pattern of psychosomatic relationships and responses to meditation as a secular act that develops habits. My work differs from Mckay’s in its focus on detailing the process of meditation in relation to intention and mentality involving a magnified segmented approach to understanding the process. Mckay focuses less on the effects of aspects of meditation than on the relationship to advanced meditators who experience adversity.

My study on meditation as a tool to embody change aligns with the works of Foucault, Weil, and Mahmood, although my research falls more within the context of Foucault's, which focuses on the development of self and how people might accomplish such development. The main difference is that my research attempts to combine theories of self with theories of body not solely through theoretical texts but also through participant observation. This study on meditation is closely related to Mahmood's research on Salat. However, because American eclectic Buddhism tends to be less religiously based and more centered on spirituality and philosophy, it is useful in examining Foucault's concepts because it is less entangled in solely religious interpretations of meditation practice, especially given the large number of Americans who participate in meditative activity while not subscribing to Buddhism at all. Meditation as practiced today is closer to Foucault's theory on the technology of self and therefore has great potential to uncover why introspection and action are so intertwined. This research thus builds upon past studies while offering the idea that it is both mental and physical action itself that is the object of spiritual cultivation of the self, providing access to less religious but still spiritual activity. Such activity yields similar results to the theoretical and philosophical frameworks presented by Weil and Foucault. It is also present in anthropological research on mysticism and religious piety, as is present in Mahmood's work.



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