

Mindfulness in Buddhist and Islamic Thought:
Why Ethics Require More Than Awareness

Afra Alyousif

Supervised by: Shengmiao

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Arts:
Philosophy

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

January 2026

Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Abstract

Mindfulness in Buddhist and Islamic Thought: Why Ethics Require More Than Awareness explores the practice of mindfulness in Buddhism, Islam, and the West. The research question this study sought to answer is whether the secular practice of mindfulness alone can promote ethical conduct. The methodology of the research consists of comparative philosophical analysis and textual hermeneutics. Both methods have allowed for a cross-cultural and diverse comparison of the practice of mindfulness. Textual sources range from primary texts such as the Pali Canon, the Qur'an to scientific research, and discourse on the secular practice of mindfulness. Research findings suggest that the secular practice of mindfulness is *necessary* but *insufficient* in the *cultivation of ethical conduct*. The secular practice of mindfulness alone may promote personal wellbeing, which was the primary cause of its Western popularization by Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program. However, recent developments in the field of neuroscience further operationalizes a tradition informed practice of mindfulness. The difference between Western and Eastern philosophies of the *self* are also highlighted due to their essential nature. Foundational Buddhist ethical concepts such as the *Four Noble Truths*, the *Eightfold path* and Loving Kindness provided context around practice of *right mindfulness*; a concept that mirrored *taqwā* in Islam. The S-ART framework is a crucial, retentive, and peer-reviewed research article on the neurobiological mechanisms of mindfulness. Accordingly, if the intention of the practice of mindfulness is to cultivate ethical conduct it needs to work in tandem with compassion first and foremost. Further, the research provides other factors—some of which can be found in the eightfold path—that can make up for the insufficiency of secular mindfulness in cultivating ethical conduct. Finally, the research concludes that the intention behind the practice of mindfulness is foundational.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Motivation

Over the past few decades, the concept of mindfulness has gained a lot of traction around the world. It has become very prominent especially in the field of psychology, and for that reason I found myself compelled to gain a deeper understanding of mindfulness as a practice. My initial understanding of mindfulness was that it required a person to practice non-judgemental awareness. However, after knowing that mindfulness originated as a Buddhist practice, I felt as though there were missing components to the practice of mindfulness. After studying Buddhist philosophy and researching the topic of mindfulness, my predictions have been affirmed; the practice of mindfulness has been secularized. The Buddhist term ‘sati’ is what many people know as mindfulness. Although mindfulness may simply be defined as awareness, the origins of the practice of mindfulness do not exist as a stand-alone practice. However, in 1979 the practice of mindfulness was popularized in Western medical practice by Jon Kabat-Zinn through his ‘Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction’ (MBSR) program along with others. (Bodhi B. , 2013). Currently, mindfulness is being practiced either secularly, or as a component within different spiritualities and/or religions. How much of the origins of the practice of mindfulness has been retained after its secularization? Is the secular practice of mindfulness still inherently ethical or has it lost its ethical dimensions? This study is going to explore these questions and provide a solution for the discrepancy caused by the secularization of mindfulness.

1.2 Problem Statement

Psychological research suggests that practitioners of mindfulness may benefit from the practice of it alone. The most prominent benefits are pain/stress reduction, nervous system regulation, etc. (Bodhi B. , 2013) Nonetheless, the question remains whether the practice retains its ethical dimensions.

1.3 Scope and Delimitation

The main objective of this study is to highlight the distinction between mindfulness as a secular practice and mindfulness as a component within Buddhist and Islamic philosophy. This distinction will prove that mindfulness as a component (i.e. right mindfulness and taqwā) is inherently ethical. Further, it is to highlight the importance of secular mindfulness as it is necessary but insufficient for the cultivation of ethical conduct. The study will also examine the relationship between mindfulness (secular and religious) and ethical conduct. Focusing mainly on the Buddhist practice of mindfulness and secondarily on the Islamic practice of taqwā. All other religious and/or spiritual practices of mindfulness will be excluded. The study will also exclude investigation into what distinguishes and constitutes ethical from unethical conduct.

1.4 Significance of the study

It is undeniable that ethics are an integral part of human life. It is the way in which individuals decide what they value, what actions to take, or how to react to the world. At a time when we are unknowingly adapting to the constant changes in our environments, overcoming hardships collectively and individually, mindfulness is even more valuable. To live nowadays is to personify resilience, to not be discouraged by trials and errors. Personally, morality has always had the utmost importance to me; my family and friends have all instilled in me values that are worth having, and I constantly find myself striving for goodness. Socrates stated:

“Now, this point, I take it, is most necessary to assert of the good: that everything that has any notion of it hunts for it and desires to get a hold of it and secure it for its very own, caring nothing for anything else except for what is connected with the acquisition of some good.” (Plato, 1997).

Further, in Buddhist philosophy the idea of ‘the cessation of suffering’ resonated with me due to my own experience of suffering; at the age of twenty-seven I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease and since I was an adolescent I have struggled with different psychological

disorders. However, through my suffering I have grown more attuned to the suffering of others without the ignorance of diminishing a lesser one. It is with great sorrow that I acknowledge that the world is too familiar with suffering, especially in places like Gaza and Sudan where genocides are taking place. It would be inconsistent for me to write about ethics/morality and not mention crimes that are being committed against humanity. Finally, the significance of this study is to provide grounds for the practice of mindfulness to exist within a larger framework, especially if the intent of practicing mindfulness is to cultivate ethical conduct.

1.5 Research Methodology

The central research question this study will answer is whether the secular/stand-alone practice of mindfulness can cultivate ethical conduct. This study adopts a methodology of comparative philosophical analysis and textual hermeneutics. The research will analyse differing philosophies as well as texts from Pali Canon sutras and the Qur'an. Further, the research will also analyse critical discourse surrounding the secular practice of mindfulness. The purpose of the chosen methodology is to allow for a nuanced exploration of mindfulness in relation to ethical conduct.

1.6 Literature Review

In order to fully understand Buddhist ethics, a foundational literature is *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration*. A book by Jay L. Garfield that highlights the distinct approach of ethics in Buddhism. Garfield describes Buddhist ethics as 'moral phenomenology' an outstanding description of the transformative nature of Buddhist ethics. Further, Garfield offers a comparative analysis between Buddhist and Western ethics. However, Buddhist ethics is much broader than the topic of *mindfulness and ethical conduct*. Although brief Garfield also acknowledges a 'hijack' of the practice of mindfulness which he believes should lead to a redefining of the Pali term 'sati' which I will challenge in my study. Following, the exploration to understanding the definition of mindfulness begins. First, *What Does Mindfulness Really*

Mean? (Bodhi V. B., 2011) a thorough and authoritative article that investigates the definition of *sati* especially in respect to Pali Canonical texts. The article notes that the word *mindfulness* is not recognized enough as a translation of *sati* and provides two canonical definitions of *sati*: memory and lucid awareness. V.Bodhi also recognizes that *sati* (mindfulness) is not the same as *sammā sati* (right mindfulness) and concludes that if one were to find the practice of *mindfulness* useful then it is not reserved for only a certain kind of practitioner.

After reading both texts and firmly understanding the definition of *mindfulness* means, it is important to briefly review Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness as the practice was popularized by his MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) program. In his book *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, although Kabat-Zinn explains central Buddhist theories such as *interconnectedness*, and *karma*, there have been no mentions at all of foundational Buddhist ethics such as the *four noble truths* or the *eightfold path*—which may be a non-issue for those choosing to practice mindfulness secularly. Kabat-Zinn's writing may appeal to those that are somewhat interested in Buddhist meditation as it relates to stress reduction and improving one's quality of life. Although the book is useful it lacks details and the ethical foundations I have previously mentioned. Opposingly, Ron Purser's book titled *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality* harshly critiques the Western adaptation of mindfulness as it is secular and commodified. Purser makes compelling arguments against the secular practice of mindfulness as it perpetuates an unjust society. Instead, the practice of mindfulness is offered as a coping mechanism for tolerating oppression and suffering. V.Bodhi writes that the Buddha stated "The Tathāgata has no closed fist of a teacher with respect to teachings." (Bodhi V. B., 2011) However, one could argue that the Buddha means that he has not kept any secret revelations and that he did not discriminate among his students. Mark T. Greenberg and Joy L. Mirta's article *From Mindfulness to Right Mindfulness: the Intersection of Awareness and Ethics* also raise concerns about contemporary models of mindfulness. Firstly, I would argue that the intersection is not between awareness and ethics, the intersection is between intention and ethics. One could be aware that the practice of mindfulness is secularized and still intend to practice it secularly. Thus, one might not intend to practice mindfulness as a component of the eightfold path. *Why Right Mindfulness Might Not Be Right For Mindfulness* argues that if mindfulness is a

universal mental faculty, then one should not evaluate it according to Buddhism. Lindahl further argues without empirical evidence to prove that right mindfulness is more beneficial to a practitioner there is no need for one to practice mindfulness in accordance with Buddhism. I somewhat agree with Lindahl that mindfulness may very well be a universal faculty and that reserving it as part of a religion may be unnecessary. However, whether mindfulness is a universal faculty is not the point of contention. The case remains that the term ‘mindfulness’ is merely a translation of the Pali word ‘sati’ (Bodhi V. B., 2011). Consequently, the *popularized and secularized* practice of mindfulness (e.g. the MBSR model) finds its origins in Buddhism. Nonetheless, one is not required to practice right mindfulness, nor would I argue that right mindfulness is more complete.

As a Muslim, the practice of mindfulness is not foreign. Shah-Kazemi highlights the shared aspects of Buddhism and Islam in *Common Ground*. Shah-Kazemi briefly explains that the Arabic term taqwā may be translated as mindfulness’. Highlighting similarities between both religions may strengthen the relationship between both, and I would argue that this decreases ignorance of either. However, sammā sati (right mindfulness) and taqwā are inherently ethical in comparison to sati (mindfulness).

Finally, David R. Vago and David A. Silbersweig’s (2012) proposed framework for understanding how mindfulness may influence neural systems responsible for self-awareness, -regulation, and -transcendence (S-ART) is vital. Lindahl (2014) argued that operationalizing Buddhist theory and practice is crucial. The S-ART not only operationalizes the practice of mindfulness, but it also retains some traditional aspects of the practice. The integration of historical and contemporary perspectives towards operationalizing Buddhist theory and practice is increasingly significant. Although the evidence is not empirical as Lindahl argued it ought to be, the S-ART framework is grounded in a “growing understanding of the mechanisms for neurocognition” and “empirical literature”. (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012)

1.7 Gap and Study Contribution

The secularization of mindfulness has been extensively researched by many. However, that is not the purpose of this study. The most common gap is not the definition of mindfulness or the most

appropriate translation of *sati* any longer. Instead, the gap is whether the secular practice of mindfulness can cultivate ethical conduct. It is clear that *sammā sati* and *taqwā* inherently ethical but is it inherently ethical to practice mindfulness secularly. My first-hand knowledge of *taqwā* and second-hand knowledge of *sammā sati* invite me to believe that a growing need for *ethical conduct* exists. I submit that it is important to shift the question from *why* one should conduct themselves ethically to *how* one can conduct themselves ethically.

1.8 Definition of Ethical Conduct

The study will refrain from detailed explorations of ethics and what constitutes ethical conduct. However, this section will briefly define what is meant by *ethics* and what constitutes ethical conduct according to both Buddhism and Islam. First, *Ethics and Experience* by Tim Chappell explains that ethical is often wrongly defined as legal, political, or even religious. Chappell explains: “..what demarcates something as an ethical issue is that it is an issue about how we live our lives overall.” In the following manner this aligns within Buddhist ethical theory too; Buddhist ethics prioritizes perception and experience.¹ Chappell precisely defines *ethics* as what one ought to do as a *human being*. To conclude defining ethics, it is a sort of commitment one makes for themselves and others. This commitment is neither rigid nor doctrinal in nature but a commitment that I would argue stems from personal *perception* and *experience*. By explaining what constitutes *ethical conduct* this definition may be further clarified. Chappell describes ethical responsibility as pervasive, unlike professional obligations or the rules of a sport (e.g. tennis, football, etc.). He further explains that ethical responsibility is overriding in a way that other responsibilities are not. (Chappell, 2013) I would define ethical conduct similarly; it is the way one chooses to conduct themselves as *human beings*. Although, I would argue that ethical conduct has little to do with faith, ethical conduct may be guided by faith. For example, one may favour honesty because it is how one wishes to be perceived by others—potentially even themselves—in life overall. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman writes about how one presents themselves in front of others as a performance. Furthering this metaphor, social interactions may be either shaped or rehearsed backstage (Goffman, 1959). This

¹ Chapter 3.1 will discuss input ethics; how we perceive our lives and experiences.

may further be explained by exemplifying religious conduct as guidance in how one should preform (e.g. guided social interactions, or guided values). I would argue that this directly correlates to *perception* of reality as well as perception *self* and others. Buddhism, Islam, and other religions are a lens through which one perceives reality, self, and others. Garfield (2021) explains that Buddhism and the West do not have similar approaches to morality; at its core the contrast is grounded in their differing philosophies about the *nature of reality* and the *self*.² I would add that Islamic approaches to morality are more similar to Buddhism because of shared understandings on the *nature of reality* and the *self*.³

For the purpose of this study, *ethical conduct* will be defined as behaviours that may be cultivated in accordance with supreme moral principles. In Buddhism, Śīla (ethical conduct) is defined as: “overcoming thirst for the ephemeral both for the sake of one’s own relief from suffering and for the sake of liberating others from it. The opposite of suffering is not only a state of ease but that of the highest good or Nirvāna.” (Shah-Kazemi, 2010) In Islam, ethics cannot be separated from the quest of pleasing God. Kazemi (2010) writes: “This intended orientation towards God is the dimension that adds spiritual depth and even a divine quality to those acts of human compassion and selfless generosity towards one’s fellow human beings.” Further, as it was previously stated *ethics* is a commitment that is grounded in personal perception and experience. Thus, as a commitment ethics should be guided by *mindfulness* of one’s values as well as *continuous reflection* of one’s role in life overall, towards themselves and others. Correspondingly, unethical conduct will be defined as behaviours that partake in the causation of suffering; I believe this is a shared principle within Buddhism and Islam. Kazemi (2010) describes it as “ridding oneself of thirst for the impermanent” and explains that it is essential in both religions. However Kazemi (2010) explains that, the intention behind each of the practices differ; as previously mentioned Islam is a quest taken to please God. In Buddhism, the intention behind liberating oneself and others of suffering is “in a quest for the Dharma, the Buddha-nature” and “that which is incommensurable with the ego”. Consequently, detachment to the worldly life/materiality and practicing fundamental virtues such as compassion/kindness are at the core of Buddhism and Islam. (Chappell, 2013)

²Chapter 4.1, and the doctrine of *interdependence* and (Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration, 2021, p. 4).

³ Section 4.2 briefly identifies a core similarity between Buddhism and Islam.

Chapter 2: Mindfulness, Right Mindfulness, and Taqwā

This chapter will look at mindfulness, right mindfulness, and the Islamic practice of mindfulness or ‘*taqwā*’. The chapter will also criticise any efforts of making the practice of mindfulness inaccessible, especially in secular settings such as healthcare and schools. It is important to note that both right mindfulness and *taqwā* do not exist as stand-alone practices, and that both are rooted within Buddhism and Islam. In contrast, mindfulness is a completely secular practice and it lacks the ethical dimensions that both right mindfulness and *taqwā* contain.

2.1 Introduction to Mindfulness

A few years ago, I was gifted a book titled *Mindfulness for Black Dogs and Blue Days*. The book is about how mindfulness can help people that are battling with depression, and that was the first time I fully understood what being mindful meant—or so I thought. Most people have a very basic understanding of mindfulness as a practice. The practice of mindfulness originated in Buddhism and was popularized in Western medical practice by Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR program in 1979 and others. (Bodhi, 2011) In his book *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Kabat-Zinn briefly explains the practice of mindfulness:

“The practitioner is advised to bring calm, alert, and nonevaluative attention to the flow of present moments, letting go of thoughts, memories, and anxieties about the past and future. The objects of mindfulness can be one’s own thoughts and feelings, sensations, bodily states, memories, physical objects one encounters—indeed anything and everything that makes up the experience of the present moment in its continual flowing from future to past.” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

This probably sounds familiar to those with a basic understanding of what mindfulness is. However, the practice of “non-judgemental awareness of the present moment” only scratches the surface of what mindfulness really is and how it ought to be practiced.

My first-hand experience of mindfulness—non-judgemental awareness of the present moment—proved to be very useful for tackling mental health struggles. As someone that struggles with depression and anxiety, I am fully aware that the symptoms never go away in their entirety. However, I feel that mindfulness has created a space within me that allows me to feel my symptoms without being overcome by them. It was almost astonishing to find out that this practice is actually ancient. The roots of mindfulness trace back to twenty-five centuries ago, taught by the Buddha in northeast India in the fifth century B.C. (Bodhi V. B., 2011) The Buddha taught people practices and values that can enrich human life, but this excluded any kind of indoctrination. In the 1960s and 1970s modernity supported cultural exchanges between the East and the West because traveling became more accessible—many people were compelled by the teachings of the Buddha, and other spiritual disciplines. (Bodhi V. B., 2011) Original Buddhist scripture is written in two languages: Pali and Sanskrit. I will be mentioning some Pali terms when necessary for two reasons: the reader can further research a Pali word that has been mentioned and to maximize accuracy. The following paper will argue that the practice of mindfulness is necessary whether it is practiced secularly or not. However, practicing mindfulness secularly is an insufficient tool for cultivating ethical behaviour.

2.2 What is Right Mindfulness

There are many translations of the Pali word *sati*; one of the many translations given is *conscientiousness*, but the general population knows of *sati* as *mindfulness*. In a book titled *Buddhist Ethics* Jay L. Garfield (2021) believes that the word *mindfulness* has been very misconstrued from the original Buddhist practice which is why he offers a more accurate translation of what better captures the essence of *sati*.

“The term mindfulness has been somewhat hijacked in recent years by the “mindfulness industry” to mean a wide range of things that often have only the most distant relationship to the Buddhist tradition, and in particular to the system of ethical reflection in the context of which these terms find their home.” (Garfield, 2021)

Although I somewhat agree with Garfield, I do not believe it is necessary to redefine *sati* as conscientiousness because *sati* itself can be malpracticed; *miccha sati* is defined as *wrong mindfulness*. Ron Purser presents a superb image of *miccha sati* in an article titled *Beyond McMindfulness* as one applying mindfulness not as a means to awaken themselves from unwholesome roots such as greed, ill will, and delusion but instead to strengthen those roots (Purser, 2013). *Miccha sati* may occur as a result of other factors of the eightfold path also being malpracticed but most prominently wrong view. One of the most prominent Mahāyāna Buddhist monks and philosophers Nāgārjuna writes in *Nāgārjuna’s Precious Garland*:

*“Harmful intent yields fright;
Wrong views lead to error;
And drink to confusion of the mind.
Through not giving comes poverty;
Through wrong livelihood, deception;
Through arrogance a bad lineage;
Through jealousy, little beauty.” (Nagarjuna, 2007)*

Thus, the issue at hand does not lie within the definition of *sati* itself; at its core, the issue is *how* one perceives the nature of reality and the self as well as the *intention* behind the practice of mindfulness. If someone has not established the doctrine of dependent origination and right view, one could only be practicing mindfulness secularly or *miccha sati*. The practice of mindfulness is multifaceted; the next section will look at *why* in many cases the practice should not be unavailable as a secular practice too. I would also argue that the secularization of the

practice is not necessarily the same as *miccha sati*. As previously mentioned, wrong mindfulness is a misuse of the practice of mindfulness, one that is grounded in harmful intentions and wrong views. Lastly, harmful intent and or actions are not believed to occur without consequences. In Buddhism, it is believed that consequences have a cyclic nature; whatever good or harm you have caused will find its way back to you through *karma*.

Kabat Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” Although there is some truth to that, I think this definition and what has followed from it in the West, might have caused a divorce from Buddhist tradition and ethical reflection as Garfield points out. Purser further explains that the “secularization and commodification of mindfulness into a marketable technique may be leading to an unfortunate denaturing of this ancient practice which was intended for far more than relieving a headache, reducing pressure, or helping executives become better focused and more productive.” (Purser, 2013) So, if *sati* is just *mindfulness* and *miccha sati* is wrong mindfulness, then the third practice has to be *sammā sati* or right mindfulness. It is crucial for us to understand that mindfulness originates from Buddhism and although one is not required to be a Buddhist to practice mindfulness or even right mindfulness, Buddhism strongly advises that one practice *sammā sati*. *Sammā sati* is best defined as such:

“Right mindfulness (sammā sati) is the seventh factor of the path where, wedged between right effort and right concentration, it connects the energetic application of the mind to its stilling and unification.” (Bodhi, 2011, p. 6)

Thus, we come to understand that right mindfulness as it was originated is not a stand alone practice nor can it, or should it be divorced from its origins. In this manner, right mindfulness cannot be achieved alone. According to Greenberg and Mirta (2015), the factors of the eightfold path are intrinsically linked. Right mindfulness is the seventh factor of the eightfold path, which consists of; right view, right intention, right mindfulness, right action, right speech, right livelihood, right concentration, and right effort. In a translated version of *The Great Forty Sutta* The Buddha explains:

"One is mindful to abandon wrong view & to enter & remain in right view: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities — right view, right effort, & right mindfulness — run & circle around right view." (Bodhi B. , 2009)

The Buddha then repeats that one should be mindful of abandoning “wrong” factors of the eightfold path (e.g. wrong action, wrong speech, and wrong livelihood) and remaining in the “right” factors of the eightfold path. The Buddha describes this as right mindfulness. The Buddha explains that right view is essential in establishing the rest of the eightfold path and describes it as the ‘forerunner’. The way one acquires the right view is by coming to understand and see the four noble truths as the reality of existence.

The four noble truths are:

1. the truth of ubiquity of suffering
2. the truth that suffering has a cause
3. the truth to the cessation of suffering
4. and the path to the end of suffering (the eightfold path)

According to Garfield (2021), the four noble truths are the foundations of all of Buddhist philosophy, including ethics. Garfield further explains that Buddhist thought is entirely about solving “the existential problem of the ubiquity of suffering”. If we understand mindfulness as inherently connected to ethical practice, it clarifies why the cultivation of right mindfulness is essential for fostering ethical behaviour. Right mindfulness assures that one’s awareness is aligned with ethical intentions and actions.

“When we reflect morally in the Buddhist context, we reflect on the ways in which we contribute to suffering—including our own and that of others—and how we can diminish that contribution and become sources of well-being instead”. (Garfield, 2021, p. 30)

The previously mentioned quote entails not only the four noble truths—acknowledging the ubiquity of suffering—but also the eightfold path, as a way we can diminish our contributions to suffering.

2.3 Not Always Right Mindfulness

In an article titled *Why Right Mindfulness Might Not Be Right for Mindfulness* Jared R. Lindahl argues that recontextualizing the practice of mindfulness within a broader religious/spiritual framework may jeopardize its use in secular settings such as healthcare, public schools, etc. Lindahl urges against making *a priori* assumptions that right mindfulness is “more complete” without empirical validation. I agree with Lindahl’s argument for the practice of mindfulness to be used in secular settings where it is needed (e.g. Mindfulness-based-interventions). I would argue that right mindfulness is not “more complete” than secularized mindfulness, but that it has much more to offer its practitioner. In an article titled *On the Ethics of Mindfulness-based Interventions*, Howard Ruan writes:

“If secular mindfulness were to be made ethically unavailable by a fight over rightful ownership, then it can be argued that it would go against the heart of the Buddha’s teaching to make inaccessible a practice that has spoken to the needs and demands of today’s audience.”

Thus, I would argue against the practice of mindfulness to be made ethically unavailable. Especially if it were used in an intervention capacity. However, I would merely argue for one to

reflect on their intention for practicing mindfulness. The use of mindfulness in various secular settings may have entirely different purposes. For example, when corporations adopt the practice of mindfulness and require employees to attend MBSR workshops, the practice of mindfulness is weaponized to coerce employees into compliance. Thus, instead of addressing harmful policies and unhealthy work environments, corporations may shift the responsibility onto employees. Alternatively, MBI/MBSR can be a very useful tool for those who suffer from differing mental health disorders. For example, a psychologist may combine ‘Cognitive Behavioural Therapy’ (CBT)—a type of psychotherapy— with mindfulness to help alleviate Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) symptoms. In an article titled *Mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for OCD* Jon Hershfield and Tom Corboy explain that mindfulness techniques (i.e. awareness of the present moment, non-judgemental observation, and acceptance) may reduce OCD symptoms. However, mindfulness is insufficient as a standalone treatment and ought to be used adjunct to either CBT or Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP).

2.4 Mindfulness in Islam

Before I talk about the similarities between the practice of mindfulness in Buddhism and Islam, I would like to draw your attention to the representation of both religions/spiritualities. The widespread misrepresentation of Islam as a violent and threatening religion is extremely evident in recent times. Islamophobia has risen exponentially and Muslims living in the West are feeling the weight of it. I have seen videos of Muslims being harassed, disrespected, and in worst case scenarios Muslims are violently targeted. At the time of writing this, far-right riots have swept the UK causing not just Muslims to feel unsafe, but also minorities, immigrants, etc. I grew up watching a lot of Western movies and television shows, and the way that Islam and Muslims are portrayed is and has always been extremely dehumanizing. However, if we look at the Western impression and/or representation of Buddhism in comparison there is a lot more acceptance towards Buddhism. I suspect that this has a lot to do with ignorance surrounding Islam and Muslims. Alternatively, there are people that cling onto xenophobia and feel threatened by people that are different than them. Writing this paper as an Arab and Muslim woman with a

spiritual admiration for Buddhist philosophy, I am certain that mindfulness is an important practice in Islam as well. In a section titled *Building Muslim – Buddhist Understanding: The Parallels of Taqwā in the Qur'an and Satipatthana Mindfulness in Anapanasati Sutta* Imtiyaz Yusuf notes that it is widely unknown to contemporary Muslims and Buddhist that the two religions have a longstanding history of shared understanding and coexistence. Imtiyaz highlights two major shared doctrines within Buddhism and Islam; *karuna* (compassion) and *rahma* (mercy), *majjahima patipada* (the Noble Eightfold Middle Path of Buddhism), and *wasatiyyah* (the Islamic notion of the middle way). (Yusuf, 2021)

In this section, I will be exploring how the practice of mindfulness manifests in Islam, as well as finding commonalities between the practice of mindfulness in Islam and Buddhism. A few years ago, I chose to start praying more frequently, Muslims are required to pray five times a day. I made an effort to cultivate a disciplined behaviour towards praying, and I personally experienced the benefits of it. We live in such fast paced and mindless times; a lot of people are often so disconnected from themselves and lack awareness of how they live day by day. For a large part of my life, that was how it felt for me too. After I had started praying five times a day, and to the best of my abilities I try to pray as soon as I hear the call to prayer, I noticed that something in me was still lacking. I went through periods of praying with a lack of spiritual presence. The word '*taqwā*' is an Arabic/Islamic term to define what my prayers had been lacking; "being consciousness and awareness of the existence of God as the unseen creator and sustainer of the cosmos," "the core virtue of Islam". (Yusuf, 2021) In *Common Ground Between Buddhism & Islam*, Reza Shah Kazemi writes:

Mindfulness is a perfect translation of the Arabic taqwā. The latter term, though, strongly implies that the object of mindfulness is God. Given, however, that in Buddhism one's mindfulness is a form of permanent recollectedness of the Dharma in the very midst of all outward activities, the two terms can be seen to be indicating the same state of mind: an awareness of the Absolute which is not interrupted by one's engagement with the relative. (Shah-Kazemi, 2010)

Kazemi further explains that the translation of the root word *yattaqun* means 'to guard' or 'protect'. Thus, in Islam one must guard themselves from wrongdoing and act on good deeds

because they are conscious of God. On right mindfulness the Buddha states: “mindfully one abandons wrong intention and mindfully one enters upon and abides in right intention: this is one’s right mindfulness”. (Bodhi B. , 2009) We can see how cultivating mindfulness, whether it is mindfulness of God or the Dharma may shield a person from unethical choices or wrongdoings. The application of mindfulness as a daily practice simply means being watchful of your actions, words, and even your subconscious habits. I strongly believe that Islam is a very practical religion, which is another way in which it is similar to Buddhism. Additionally, it can be reasoned that both religions are phenomenological and transformative. In Islam, in addition to praying five times a day a Muslim is required to prepare themselves for the prayer, for example during ablution; which is a very ritualistic practice, i.e. washing your right hands three times, then washing your left hand three times etc. ablution alone requires the person to be present because it has to be carried out in a certain order with each action being done a certain amount of times. I personally find a lot of peace when it comes to rituals, although I do appreciate a change in my daily routine; my personal findings suggest that any activity that requires discipline may provide mental clarity and a sense of purpose. On *The Psychology of Rituals: An integrative Review and Process-Based Framework* Hobson, Schroeder, Risen, Xygalatas, & Inzlicht (2017) list several benefits of performing rituals. The benefits are categorized into three sections: regulating emotions, regulating performance, and regulating social connections. Each of these three sections contains descriptions of more detailed benefits. Islam requires that Muslims uphold the ritualistic and religious practice of praying in a disciplined manner. The word ‘taqwā’ and its derivatives are mentioned in the *Qur’an* over 250 times, Kazemi writes:

The key term, taqwā, is thus often translated as ‘piety’ or ‘God-consciousness’, but it can equally well be translated as ‘mindfulness’ a term so closely associated with Buddhist ethics. Those who are ‘mindful’ of God are, by that very token, ‘guarding’ themselves against the perils of attachment to the ‘life of the world’, al-hayāt al-dunyā. (Shah-Kazemi, 2010)

Islam and Buddhist philosophy also share a very similar perspective on attachment. The Buddha stated “attachment is the root of all suffering”. This would be applicable in Islam as well, however in Islam the only attachment that one should always try to strengthen and grow is their attachment to Allah, the following verse from the *Qur’an* states: “He is glorified there

[houses of worship] morning and evening by men whom neither trade nor business diverts from the remembrance of Allah.” (24:37) This verse from the Qur’an describes a Muslim that is not diverted by earthly possessions. This kind of Muslim favors the remembrance of Allah over the accumulation of wealth. Section 4.2, briefly discusses about those that are driven by greed. It should be very clear by now that both Islam and Buddhism ask that an individual partake in the cessation of suffering for all sentient beings, therefore one ought to conduct themselves ethically. Imtiyaz writes that according to the *Qur’an*, *taqwā* (piety) is not merely about the performance of rituals, piety is a matter of *ethics* as well. Communal participation, helping those in need, and practicing patience, are all forms of *taqwā*. (Yusuf, 2021) In essence, mindfulness in Islam and Buddhism are far more similar to each other than they are different. The prime example for that would be that mindfulness in both Islam and Buddhism guides the practitioner to recollect the values and beliefs of their teachings i.e. the *Qur’an* and the *Dhamma*. Thus, I would argue that both are inherently ethical; the following chapter will provide a deeper understanding of Buddhist ethics. Which should provide further reasoning into why right mindfulness is inherently ethical.

Chapter 3: Buddhist Ethical Framework

Chapter 3 will lay the foundations of Buddhist ethics. Firstly, by looking at how it differs in comparison to Western ethical systems. Following, the chapter will briefly explain foundational Buddhist teachings such as the four noble truths, the eightfold path, and the five aggregates of clinging. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the framework surrounding the origins of the practice of mindfulness. By gaining a deeper understanding of the framework right mindfulness exists within, it should be evident that the practice is inherently ethical.

3.1 Garfield’s Moral Phenomenology

Garfield (2021) explains that the difference between Western ethics and Buddhist ethics is something he calls “output vs. input ethics”. Western ethics is *output ethics* in the sense that; our actions or the intentions behind our actions are what take precedence. Whereas input ethics prioritizes experience and secondarily, the response to experience. If we look at Western ethical systems, such as utilitarianism or deontology, these systems do not take into account how one experiences the world, and they focus on actions and/or intentions. However, there are a few Western moral philosophers that I know of that reach beyond the description of input ethics. For example, Simone Weil writes in “Gravity and Grace”: “Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer”. This quote points to the sacredness of intentionally giving something one’s attention while suspending any judgements and/or prejudices, which is a prime example of a Western moral philosopher reaching beyond the scope of output ethics. Another Western moral philosopher that has been influenced by the works of Simone Weil is Iris Murdoch, in her essay titled *Against Dryness* Murdoch states:

“We need more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of our being; it is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place. Simone Weil said that morality was a matter of attention, not of will. We need a new vocabulary of attention.”

Murdoch further explains in *The Idea of Perfection* that she defines “attention” (inspired by Simone Weil) to describe “the idea of a just and loving gaze”. The concepts of “attention” and a “just and loving gaze” as moral practices align with the *input ethics* category, because they describe our experiences. However, it should be noted that Buddhist ethics is almost entirely *input ethics*. Our experience of the world and how we react to our experience of the world is of primary importance. Weil’s concept of “attention” as tuning into your experiences and Murdoch’s “just and loving gaze” are both transformational practices and that is largely what input ethics consists of. Further, Murdoch’s description of a ‘just and loving gaze’ may be understood in Buddhist ethics as gaining ‘right view’ which again tackles one’s perspective.

Metta-Karuna (loving-compassion) is of great importance in Buddhist ethics and is very similar to what Murdoch describes as the gaze that one ought to have.

The foundations of Buddhist ethical thought place more importance on how one might process life, and secondarily how one responds to their experiences. The reason why Buddhism places such importance on our experience of the world is because our actions flow from our experiences and our experiences are what shape us. In 1905, Edward Thorndike proposed a theory in psychology known as the stimulus-response theory (Jiyani, 2023). Without going into too much detail, the stimulus-response theory suspects that our behavioural process becomes a part of our conditioning, and our responses to stimuli almost become instinctive. “Behaviours followed by positive outcomes are more likely to be repeated, while behaviours followed by negative outcomes are less likely to be repeated.” (Jiyani, 2023) The reason for mentioning this theory is that Garfield describes Buddhist ethics as ‘moral phenomenology’, because “Buddhist ethical thought and practice is aimed at facilitating a *transition* from being *reactive* to being *responsive*.” This transformation is psychological, and it tackles how one experiences life. Garfield best describes this transition in the following way “a transformation of the nature of embodied experience and the replacement of constraint by one’s instinctive reactions with the freedom enabled by spontaneous responsiveness.” (Garfield, 2021, p. 29) To simplify this I would give an example of someone hastily chastising another person for maybe even an honest mistake that has been made. This response is what Garfield describes as “constraint by one’s instinctive reactions” i.e. being overcome by a certain emotion and not taking time to understand the situation at hand, that we are all prone to making mistakes. This allows one to respond in a more gentle and caring way thus people rid themselves of being overcome by negative reactions or as Garfield describes it “freedom of spontaneous responsiveness”. We will look further into the benefits of how mindfulness can help a person in transitioning from *reactive* to *responsive*.

3.2 Foundations of Buddhist Ethics

I have previously mentioned the importance of the four noble truths in Buddhism. In this section, I will be offering a more in-depth understanding of the four noble truths and the five aggregates of clinging (*khandhas*) as they are directly related. According to Garfield, a better translation of ‘the four noble truths’ is ‘four truths for those who would be noble’. Consequently, those that believe the following truths: the ubiquity of suffering, suffering has a cause, and that suffering can be alleviated this should lead them to follow the eightfold path. This is because they believe and understand the final noble truth: the path to the cessation of suffering. Garfield explains that “suffering” is not merely physical and/or mental discomfort that we are conscious of, but that it may also be subconscious undertones of fear or anxiety. Garfield further explains that according to the Buddha, suffering is the consequence of actions conditioned by attachment and aversion. Both of which stem from primal confusion in regard to the nature of reality. In the *Mahasatipatthana sutta* (The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) The Buddha was quoted saying:

“Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness and distress are suffering. Being attached to the unloved is suffering, being separated from the loved is suffering, not getting what one wants is suffering. In short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering.”

This quote establishes the first noble truth; the ubiquity of suffering. No one can go through life without experiencing some form of suffering not because life and suffering are one and the same, but because life and suffering are so closely entwined. It certainly is challenging to find an individual that has lived life without turmoil and if you believe this then you believe in the first noble truth. Garfield (2022) explains that suffering and pain are not the same, he writes that sources of suffering are usually internal. The second noble truth is logical. If you believe in the principle of causation—nothing happens without a reason and every effect or event has a cause—then you would agree that suffering would not arise without an underlying cause. The third noble truth is closely linked to the second one, if suffering has a cause, then discovering that cause can help in eliminating that suffering. One might argue that if life and suffering are so closely entwined, then how could one possibly separate the two. The Buddha’s answer to that is

the eightfold path. However, the quote mentions another concept in Buddhist philosophy known as the five aggregates of grasping or clinging.

The five aggregates of clinging (*khandhas*) are the following;

1. material form (e.g. matter, body)
2. feelings (e.g. pleasant feelings, painful feelings, neutral feelings)
3. perception (e.g. the five senses, plus mental perception)
4. volitional formations (e.g. physical actions, speech, wills)
5. consciousness/awareness (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental consciousness)

According to the Buddha, these are the causes of suffering. Garfield (2022) writes that the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering occurs as moral progress:

“—through ceasing to take my own immediate pleasures and pains as the default matters of concern— I can cultivate sensitivity to the interests of others, and I can thereby develop genuine benevolence, care, and impartiality toward them”

Garfield explains that in Buddhism ethical cultivation is not the result of changing one's actions, instead it is finding new ways to experience life. On *The Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* the Buddha instructs to observe “the body in the body”, “the feelings in the feelings”, “the mind in the mind”, and “the objects of the mind in the objects of the mind”. Right Mindfulness is then applied to the five aggregates of clinging, and it is how the establishment of mindfulness may come to fruition. By establishing mindfulness, The Buddha is offering a new way of experiencing life. It is further a kind of observation of things as they are, not as anyone perceives them to be. Finally, the aggregates of clinging are a source of suffering due to one's misidentification to them. I discuss this misidentification further in section 4.2.

3.3 The Eightfold Path for self-transformation

The final noble truth mentions “the path to the cessation of suffering” which is widely known as the eightfold path. Garfield mentions that there are several different ways Buddhism uses the metaphor of a path to structure Buddhist philosophy (e.g. the path of purification, the path of the bodhisattva etc.). Before one sets forth on the eightfold path the Buddha describes “right view” as a prerequisite for one’s journey on the eightfold path. As I have previously mentioned acquiring right view entails a firm belief of the four noble truths. Garfield describes the eightfold path as “a way of being” and “eight orientations in one’s thought and conduct”. Garfield also makes a distinction between an internal and external path; internally the path operates in a way that is physically unobservable, influencing one’s thoughts. (Garfield, 2021) I agree with Garfield that the internal path is more important than the external path. If we look at an example of believing the four noble truths as reality, this will represent movement on an internal path of personal transformation. Garfield further describes the external path as a “route from here to there”. However, ‘here’ and ‘there’ are not geographical locations, they are metaphorical states of being. (Garfield, 2021). To contextualize this, Buddhism is about leaving the cycle of *samsara* (rebirth) and entering *nirvana* (enlightenment). Garfield further explains that the internal path is a means to cultivating ethical behaviour, and “a way of being good”. The eightfold path is made up of the following practices:

1. Right view
2. Right intention
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

These practices can be grouped as such; ethics (right action, right speech, and right livelihood), meditation (right mindfulness, right effort, right concentration,) and wisdom (right view, and right intention), this is known as the threefold way.

3.4 How Right Mindfulness Eliminates the Five Hindrances

The metaphor of the eightfold path as a ‘path’ allows one to understand that any path one treads upon in life will come with obstacles. The five hindrances are used to describe five mental, physical, or emotional states of being and they are the following:

1. Sensual desire
2. Ill will
3. Sloth and torpor
4. Restlessness and worry
5. Sceptical doubt

This is especially important to note within the practice of right mindfulness because mindfulness is a meditative practice. In the Mahapatihana sutra, the Buddha advises one to simply observe these states of being; by doing that, the practitioner acknowledges that, for example, they are anxious. The practitioner must then come to understand that a hindrance has arisen, and once the practitioner rids themselves of the hindrance, they must cultivate the skill of overcoming it each time, repeatedly. Once the practitioner becomes more skilled in observing the mind, allowing these conditions (hindrances) to exist temporarily, overcoming them becomes increasingly easy for the practitioner to do. It is also the case that a practitioner that establishes right view will be able to identify these conditions as hindrances. Thus, being able to acknowledge that the condition is a hindrance can facilitate overcoming it. In *The Fives Hindrances*, Sean Oakes writes the following:

It is important to remember, when exploring the hindrances, that none of us are wrong, bad, or at fault for having these kinds of experiences. The hindrances can be thought of as symptoms of an underlying disconnection or dissatisfaction

(dukkha), or of old wounds, some of which may be personal, some familial, some cultural. They are impersonal, and if we can remember that they do not indicate anything about our worth or goodness, they will be easier to work with. The hindrances are habits of the heart and mind that, like many of our unconscious tendencies, are rooted in the heart's attempt to stay safe in an unsafe world. They are reactive, judgmental, and above all, not under our conscious control. (Oakes, 2018)

The translation of *sammā sati* as remembrance of the Dhamma may facilitate what Oakes (2018) argues it is important to remember. One that is cognizant of the Dhamma in this sense, recognizes that this is a hindrance as taught by the Buddha. Further, as previously mentioned because right mindfulness is a meditative practice, in the threefold way it is grouped with right effort and concentration. Right effort leads to right mindfulness, which leads to right concentration. It takes effort to overcome a hindrance, and the result of overcoming it is a mind that is more conscious of a hindrance arising. Lastly, a mind that is more aware of hindrances is much less likely engrossed by hindrances.

At this point, the practice of *sammā sati* should be recognized as factor of the eightfold path. Paired with that recognition is a deeper understanding of right mindfulness and its ethical dimensions. However, the question remains whether the secular practice of mindfulness retains any ethical dimensions from its origin: *sammā sati*.

Chapter 4: Western Versus Eastern Philosophy and the S-ART framework

This chapter will include a study of Western vs. Eastern philosophy. As well as offer a more thorough framework for the practice of mindfulness as understood through a neurobiological study. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the difference between Eastern and Western philosophy; as well as provide a middle ground where Western medicine and Buddhist philosophy combine in a fascinating manner. The aim of the provided middle ground is to challenge the decontextualization of mindfulness. Although it was previously argued that the

practice must not be made unavailable secularly, context regarding the practice is crucial in many cases.

4.1 ‘Self’ East vs. West

When asked who you are, you may respond by giving your name, age, and origins. The information you respond with may all be conventionally true. But what if someone asks you about your ‘self’ in a deeper, more literal sense. In the 17th century René Descartes, a well-known ground-breaking philosopher, introduced what would come to be called Cartesian dualism: a distinction in kind between the mind and the body—the assertion of two substances in the world, each existing in its own right. To this day, there are still debates about the self and for quite a while I have only really known of some of the Western conceptions of self (even with my Islamic-Arab roots). In a paper titled *The Concept of Self in Eastern and Western Philosophy* Peter Dimkov states that Western philosophy generally recognizes the existence of the human self with a few exceptions and Eastern philosophy strongly denies the existence of a human self, also with a few exceptions (Dimkov, 2020). Hence, Buddhism does not align with the Western concept of the self. To explain this briefly, Buddhism adheres to the doctrine of interdependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). Garfield (2021) defines interdependent origination as: “the thesis that every phenomenon is interdependent for its existence or occurrence on countless other phenomena in a vast web of interdependence”. This means that Buddhism does not believe that anything (e.g. humans, animals, nature) is a distinct and permanent entity that can be separated from the rest of all phenomena. Although the doctrine of interdependence is not identical in Buddhism and Islam the following verse from the *Qur’an* reflects further commonalities. “*Nay, surely man transgresses; for he believes himself to be self-sufficient.*” (96:6—7) Thus, the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*) follows closely and holds that personal identity, or a “core self” is nothing more than a conventional concept. Garfield (2021) explains that in Buddhism, “we are nothing but an open set of causally linked psychophysical processes with a merely conventional identity”. According to Buddhism the five aggregates (previously mentioned), are aspects that an individual may wrongly identify themselves as. For example: I

am my body, or I am displeased. They are called the five aggregates of clinging or grasping because they are understood as obstacles one would have to continuously overcome on the path to enlightenment (nirvana). All these five aggregates are subject to change, they are impermanent, therefore they can also be a cause of suffering if we cling onto them. In a book titled *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became The New Capitalist Spirituality* Ron Purser writes; “With the retreat to the private sphere, mindfulness becomes a religion of the self.” This quote resonates well with a verse from the Qur’an that states: “*Have you seen he who has taken as his god his [own] desire, and Allah has sent him astray,*” (45:23) Buddhism and Islam both view ‘desires’ as part of the human condition, and both religions think that one should not seek to fulfil unwholesome desire. A person that ‘worships’ their desires will relentlessly seek to fulfil their desires. After the temporary satisfaction or pleasure subsides they would find the next desire to ‘worship’. My interpretation of worshiping one’s desires is exactly as Purser describes it; a religion of the self. One could imagine this as a person who does not necessarily think highly of themselves, but places more value on themselves/their experiences, their desires and their suffering. Disconnected from others and the desires of others and the suffering of others. Even when they are not disconnected they simply do not place the same value for others as they do on themselves —at worst, they feel indifferent towards others. Thus, we see that the concept of ‘self’ in the West is very different from Buddhist and even Islamic concepts of ‘self’. This also explains why Western trends that celebrate hyperindividualism do not resonate in other parts of the world. Western mantras such as “Do What Makes You Happy” or “You don’t owe anyone anything”⁴ prioritize the self and its desires rather than the collective. Consequently, the concept of mindfulness is not translated well in the West because of how differently the concept of ‘self’ is understood in the East.

4.2 Westernized ‘mindfulness’

⁴ One could argue that these mantras are the result of ethical egoism. Although a single source could not be found for either of the sayings, both are very popularly recited in self-help books and motivational speeches.

I had initially made a noteworthy distinction of ‘mindfulness’ (sati) and ‘right mindfulness’ (sammā sati). Another point worth noting is that mindfulness is a very neutral term, it is neither bad nor good. Similar to other factors of the eightfold path, if one removes the word ‘right’ then they lack judgements. For example, if we remove the word ‘right’ from ‘right intention’ the second factor on the eightfold path, it no longer signifies the quality of that factor. Which begs the question, what does it mean for someone to be mindful? I would simply define mindfulness as ‘awareness’. If someone is mindful of the actions they are taking, then they are also acting with intent. If someone were to speak mindfully, then that person is much more likely to mean what is being said. Similarly, if a person was mindfully malicious, then that person is not practicing mindfulness or right mindfulness, instead they are practicing wrong mindfulness (miccha sati). In an article titled *Beyond McMindfulness*, Ron Purser states: *According to the Pali Canon (the earliest recorded teachings of the Buddha), even a person committing a premeditated and heinous crime can be exercising mindfulness, albeit wrong mindfulness.* (Purser, 2013) The practice of mindfulness is being sold to many as a psychological tool to exercise non-judgemental awareness, but the practice is quite flawed in that sense. One of the many ways it is flawed is as Purser explains it in his book: discounting suffering in our everyday lives. This means that the adapted version of mindfulness that was popularized in the West by Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR program entirely disregarded environmental, political, and economic issues. The invalidation of these factors is more harmful than one can imagine because it begs the practitioner to live a passive life and mindfulness is then used to comfort and distract the practitioner. Purser further explains that although there are many advantages to the secularized practice of mindfulness—decreasing stress, becoming less reactive, which can lead to calmness and a potential increase in kindness—ultimately mindfulness is merely cultivated awareness that can be put to any use. Purser states: “Although derived from Buddhism, it’s been stripped of the teachings on ethics that accompanied it, as well as the liberating aim of dissolving attachment to a false sense of self while enacting compassion for all other beings.” (Purser, 2019) The previous section explains what is meant by a false sense of self. Alternatively, the foundation of mindfulness and all the other factors of the eightfold path is about perception (i.e. right view). How one perceives their experience of the world, how they perceive themselves, and how they perceive others, is of the utmost importance. It is my understanding that most of Western philosophy describe the ‘self’ as an accumulation of things whether that is body, mind, or even

soul. Thus, the foundations on which mindfulness is being practiced are weak. As I have previously mentioned, in Buddhism there is only a ‘self’ conventionally, thus there is not a permanent and unchanging “I”, “me” or “mine”. Perception is extremely important because if we take the example of one identifying or perceiving themselves as tied to their accumulation of monetary wealth, money then becomes the centre of their life experience. Leading one to attach their worth according to the amount of money they own and perceiving others in the same respect. Consequently, if someone attached their identity to something that fluctuates, their experience will fluctuate accordingly. The amount of money they own could be meagre, then their self-worth must be meagre too. Someone may own a larger amount of money than them, then this person is more valuable than they are. Money would absolutely become something they cling to, and how to attain more of it will be their life’s purpose. Without going into further detail, one could only expect it to have severe negative effects.

Concerning the cultivation of ethical conduct, I would argue for mindfulness to exist as a component within a larger ethical framework. Further, the secular practice of mindfulness is necessary for ethical cultivation but insufficient. In her paper titled *Secularization of Mindfulness: Downfalls and Successes of Cross-Cultural Transmission*, Roxann Delman Giuliano suggests that spreading knowledge of the benefits of mindfulness can be effective in settings such as psychotherapeutic, educational, and social change-driven environments. Giuliano argues that the concept of mindfulness in the West remains “true to some aspects of the Buddhist tenet of “Right Mindfulness, “but in many ways the process of cross-cultural translation has skewed the meaning of the term.” She urges that practitioners of mindfulness gain a better understanding of the original definition of mindfulness and its framework in the context of Buddhism. Giuliano notes that the common denominator between the original practice of mindfulness and the Western practice is the cessation of suffering (Giuliano, 2018). Reiteratively, the mere practice of mindfulness is proven to be very beneficial to a practitioner, which is why I believe the practice is necessary. In an article titled *Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S-ART): a framework for understanding the neurobiological mechanisms of mindfulness*, David R. Vago and David A. Silbersweig (2012) describe mindfulness as a systemic mental training that enhances one’s meta-awareness (self-awareness), an ability to “effectively

modulate one's behaviour (self-regulation), and ultimately improve relationships between the self and others by way of transcending "self-focused needs and increasing prosocial characteristics (self-transcendence)". The article suggests that mindfulness can be cultivated in two ways: the 2500-year old model rooted in Buddhist science or the 25-year old contemporary model popularized by Kabat-Zinn (MBSR). It further states that they are both interested in the cessation of suffering. However, I would argue that the contemporary model popularized by Kabat-Zinn prioritizes the suffering of the individual rather than the collective—this may be a non-issue in secular settings such as healthcare and schools. Vago and Silbersweig explain that the practice of mindfulness has an impact on brain networks responsible for self-processing. The brain networks impacted by mindfulness practice are the Experiential Enactive Self (EES): this part of the brain is responsible for the automatic processes i.e. body movements, the Experiential Phenomenological Self (EPS): this part of the brain is what allows one to focus on whatever is currently happening, it can be thought of as the brain's spotlight. Lastly, the Narrative Self (NS): this is the storytelling part of the brain that creates one's sense of identity among other faculties such as self-evaluations, thinking about the past or planning your future. According to Vago and Silbersweig, the practice of mindfulness may strengthen the connections between these areas of the brain, allowing them to work more harmoniously. For example, mindfulness might help one's EPS (the "spotlight" part of the brain) take over from one's EES (the autopilot part of the brain). Thus, actions are carried out less automatically and more consciously. Mindfulness may also train the NS (the storytelling part of the brain) to let go of negative ruminations by guiding your awareness back to the present moment. Finally, Vago and Silbersweig explain that mindfulness may strengthen the fronto-parietal control systems (FPCS) the brain network that mediates interactions between all three mentioned parts of the brain (EES, EPS, NS). (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012) The S-ART framework is exemplary in bridging Buddhist teachings with scientific insights and offers a comprehensive study on mindfulness by including Buddhist insight into the nature of the self and reality. Further, the S-ART framework explores the neuroscience behind the practice of mindfulness by combining it with modern understandings of the brain, such as brain networks and cognitive processes. I would argue that in order to retain the roots of the practice of mindfulness without completely secularizing the practice, the S-ART framework ought to take precedence over the MBSR model. The MBSR model almost entirely focuses on the stress reduction and symptom management benefits gained by practicing

mindfulness. I would not recommend a complete disregard of the MBSR model but there ought to be a more detailed account on the practice of mindfulness, its benefits and origin. The S-ART framework includes self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence, this not only offers a broader scope of benefits within the practice of mindfulness, it also does not neglect the inherent essence of mindfulness as an ethical practice.

4.3 Mind Full of Ethics

Evidently, Buddhist philosophy has provided us with three ways one can be mindful: right mindfulness (*sammā sati*), mindfulness (*sati*), and wrong mindfulness (*miccha sati*). I suspect that because mindfulness is such a powerful practice—that is actually much more nuanced than a lot of people know—the practice of mindfulness alone captivates people. In the article *What Mindfulness Is (Not)*, Andrew Olendzki argues that consciousness and awareness are inherent qualities of the mind, and that we are always conscious unless we are comatose or dead. I strongly disagree with him. I believe that a lot of our habits and reactions stem from our subconscious mind. It is either after they surface or after a sufficient amount of self-introspection that we are actually conscious of them. Olendzki further states that mindfulness does not just mean attention, and that “we are always paying attention” (Olendzki, 2017). Although I would somewhat agree with mindfulness not just meaning attention, I would again strongly disagree that “we are always paying attention”. Scientifically speaking, there has been a “significant increase in adults seeking treatment for ADHD” (Tueller, 2024). Philosophically speaking, looking at something does not mean you are paying attention to it; your eyes could be looking at a blank wall, but your mind could be elsewhere. In that case, are you paying attention to the wall or are you lost in thought? Another example, when some decides to start practicing meditation, they sit in a comfortable position shut their eyes and try to centre their attention inward, more often than not a lot of people will find that their mind races or that they are very easily distracted. Moreover, a lot of people struggle with the consistent practice of meditation because many find it difficult to sit still for a period of time and do nothing. It is only after repeated practice that

meditation becomes easier and more comfortable. Attention is cultivated effort into stilling the mind and placing your focus on a subject. “25. By effort and heedfulness, discipline and self-mastery let the wise on make for himself an island which no flood can overwhelm.” (*The Dhammapada*, 2.25) As I have previously established, there are several ways mindfulness can be practiced. The question I am looking to answer is whether the secularized practice of mindfulness can help one cultivate ethical behaviour. It is evident that right mindfulness, is an inherently ethical practice. Greenberg and Mirta state: *Without a clear commitment to alleviating individual suffering in a manner that does not increase suffering for others, might we be reinforcing passivity and maintaining oppression for teachers, students, and others?* (Greenberg and Mirta, 2015) This provides us with grounds as to why the four noble truths must be established in order for one to practice right mindfulness. The four noble truths put perception at the forefront of experiencing life and they can be thought of as an oath taken by the believer; to journey on the eightfold path and alleviate suffering for all. Further, it presents the case that right mindfulness includes ethical values and efforts striven towards by the practitioner. A practitioner of the eightfold path seeks to alleviate suffering for all, the same cannot be said about a practitioner of the secularized version of mindfulness. This once again has a great deal to do with how we perceive life experiences. If one were to view the suffering of others as a nonissue they have not developed the first factor of the eightfold path; right view. Another commonly used translation of sati (mindfulness) is recollection, which provides us with a very different but entirely valid definition of the origins of mindfulness. In his book *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* Rupert Gethin writes:

“... sati should be understood as what allows awareness of the full range and extent of dhammas; sati is an awareness of things in relation to things, and hence an awareness of their relative value. Applied to the satipatthinas presumably what this means is that sati is what causes the practitioner of yoga to 'remember' that any feeling he may experience exists in relation to a whole variety or world of feelings that may be skilful or unskilful, with faults or faultless, relatively inferior or refined, dark or pure.” (Gethin, 1992)

Thus, more issues arise from the secularization of mindfulness. If we redefined mindfulness as recollection of the dhammas, the general population would most likely be unaware of what this means. The secular practice of mindfulness would also potentially be empty of content, because what would someone practicing mindfulness secularly be mindful of, or what would they recollect?

Imagine the following moral dilemma; a politician needs to decide whether to support a policy that is advantageous for the majority. However, the policy is harmful towards a vulnerable minority. The secularized practice of mindfulness may be useful in not making any haste decisions on whether or not the politician should support the policy. The politician could possibly recollect personal values and beliefs before making any decisions. These practices do not require one to be knowledgeable on the context of mindfulness and its origins. Nevertheless, right mindfulness has much more to offer its practitioner. Thus, it is my firm understanding that the secularized practice of mindfulness may facilitate ethical cultivation. However, it remains insufficient as a stand alone practice.

Chapter 5: Ethical Conduct Beyond Mindfulness

In this chapter, I will be looking at other values and/or practices that Buddhist and Islamic philosophy have given for the cultivation of ethical conduct. The purpose of this chapter is to offer more values and teachings for the cultivation of ethical conduct. These values and teachings would be greatly complimented alongside the secular practice of mindfulness. As previously stated, mindfulness alone is *necessary but insufficient* for ethical cultivation.

5.1 Overlooking the Path

Since previous chapters have established the many ways in which right mindfulness is an inherently ethical practice, it is important to look at some of the other factors of the eightfold path. The reason behind this is to not only to recognize that the practice of mindfulness exists within a larger ethical framework, but also to provide us with the other ways Buddhist philosophy suggests that one may cultivate ethical conduct. Garfield states that even when one is trying to cultivate a virtue such as generosity or an attitude of care, one is thus setting forth on a path. Further, as I have previously mentioned Garfield states that the path is internal, external, and transformational. It is apparent that the general population have come to know of mindfulness from Buddhist philosophy, yet they are unaware of how the practice has been isolated and commodified.

I have already stressed the importance of gaining right view, this section will highlight a few other factors on the eightfold path. Right intention, for instance is the second factor on the eightfold path and it is not foreign to Western ethical philosophy. Kant states that one having a good will is good regardless of outcomes (Kant, 1993). Right intention on the eightfold path is similar in the sense that having pure intentions are essential for ethical conduct. This moral responsibility or ‘duty’ one ought to have entails; not harming oneself or others, and an internal commitment that one’s actions are rooted in compassion. Moreover, both Kantian deontology and the Buddhist concept of right intention highlight a sense of moral responsibility one ought to have. In Buddhism, there are three kinds of right intentions: intention of renunciation, intention of good will, and intention of harmlessness. Intention of renunciation can be defined as an internal commitment to let go of attachments and cravings. Intention of good will is the intention to practice loving-kindness and compassion for all beings—section 5.3 looks further into loving-kindness/compassion. Lastly, intention of harmlessness is the intention of avoiding cruelty and ill will against all beings. Right intentions benefit the practitioner as well as others; I would argue that it is a way to live in harmony with oneself and others. Thus, it should be evident that right intention is not only useful for cultivating ethical behaviour, but also necessary. The next three factors are typically grouped together: right speech, right action, and right livelihood. They are essential for ethical conduct because they manifest externally and as Garfield states, they are

aspects of an internally cultivated path. Action, speech, and livelihood are all ways in which other people may perceive your character. For example, you may be perceived by another person as a truthful individual because your words are consistent with your actions. Further, one may perceive you as a caring individual because you chose to work in a profession such as healthcare or education.

5.2 Interdependent Arising

Aristotle, one of the most renowned philosophers once stated: “man is by nature a social animal”. (Aristotle, 1905) It was only recently that I have come to a better understanding about the importance of community. One of the most comforting things you can tell someone that is in the midst of personal struggles is ‘you are not alone’. My belief is that the ‘you are not alone’ phrase is reassuring because it reminds us that we do not have to carry the weight of our struggles alone. Further, that one should not feel burdensome by asking for help/guidance instead one should lean into whatever community they have; family, friends and loved ones. The doctrine of interdependent arising holds that all of phenomenon is dependent on other phenomena for their existence, this would mean that ‘you’ are verily not ‘alone’ and that should offer us great comfort. Garfield explains that this “web is multidimensional” not only is it causal, but it is also mereological (a phenomenon and its respective parts). Garfield further states: “our sense of individuality and distinctness from our environment is an illusion that masks both a thorough embeddedness and the incoherence of any independent existence”. The gap lies between most—if not all—of Western philosophy relying heavily on individualism and Buddhist philosophy relying heavily on what Thich Nhat Hanh calls ‘interbeing’ (Garfield, 2021). According to Thich Nhat Hanh even our bodies are communities with “trillions of non-human cells even more numerous than the human cells”. If the very essence of an ‘individual’ is actually a community of cells, organs, atoms etc. what compels us to uphold division from one another? A person ought to realize that although we may have differing genders, race, ethnicities, beliefs, etc. the oppression of another person is not separate from oneself. After Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested in 1963, he stated the following in *a letter from Birmingham Jail*;

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” (Martin Luther King, 1963)

The ‘network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny’ that Dr. King spoke of resonates with the doctrine interdependent arising through the recognition that suffering must be alleviated for all beings. Both call for a sense of collective responsibility, something that has become extremely overlooked at this point in time. Nowadays, there is an existing sense of apathy to the suffering of others that is apparent in the lack of response to ongoing genocides happening, and it is reasonable to assume that this is a reflection of one’s inner experience. Those that fail to address their own suffering are much more likely to be apathetic towards the suffering of others. In a book titled *The Gnostic Jung and the Seven Sermons to the Dead* Stephan A. Hoeller, an American author writes:

“As Buddha taught suffering and the cessation of suffering, so Jungian psychological teaching recognizes that those unaware of suffering are much more likely to have their developmental arrested at the level of shallow, personalistic concerns than their fellows who are aware of the facts of suffering. The neurotic personality, resentful and fearful of the growing pains of the soul tends to seek refuge in self-deception and thus frequently convinces itself that growth is unnecessary, for things are quite satisfactory just as they are at present.” (Hoeller, 1982)

This matter is not merely philosophical, it undoubtedly has a great deal to do with one’s psychology. Which is why input ethics should be given a lot more leverage. Thus, the purpose of the Four Noble Truths allows one to acknowledge that suffering is a universal condition with a cause and a solution.

5.3 Loving-Kindness/Compassion

Section 5.1 mentions other factors of the eightfold path that have not gained as much attention as the practice of mindfulness has. The section also mentions that practicing loving-kindness/compassion is a kind of right intention—intention of good will. Thus, it could be argued that another Buddhist and Islamic value that deserves the same amount of attention and recognition as mindfulness is Loving-Kindness/Compassion. This is a value that a practitioner of Islam and/or Buddhism should instill within themselves and ultimately embody. Kazemi (2010) writes:

We would therefore argue that for both Muslims and Buddhists, the quality of loving compassion must determine the core of one's personality, and it must dominate the nature of one's conduct in relation to others; this ideal, at once ethical and spiritual, derives its ultimate justification and transformative power from the fact that it expresses on the human plane a principle which is rooted in the heart of the Absolute.

The 'Absolute' could have been used to describe Allah. In Islam Allah has ninety-nine names, the two most mentioned of His names are Al-Rahman and Al-Raheem. Allah's names denote more than just a 'characteristic'; they are the essence of God himself. In an article titled 'The Meaning of Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem' Samuel Gonzalez highlights that the root of the Arabic word 'rahim' is defined as the womb of a woman and it also means "to have mercy or compassion". If we look at the etymology for the Latin word 'compati' it means 'to suffer with'. Gonzalez further explains that 'Al Rahman' is used to describe "a vast, abundant, infinite, ever-flowing stream of mercy that extends toward all of Creation". 'Al-Raheem' as Gonzalez notes is "a more particularized mercy" and can be translated as 'Beneficent Redeemer' (Gonzalez, 2023). In Buddhism the 'Absolute' is more likely used to describe the Dhamma. 'Loving compassion' is also of pivotal importance in Buddhism and is embedded in the foundations of Buddhism. Kazemi (2010) explains that it is out of compassion that The Buddha preached the Dhamma.

Furthermore, there are three kinds of meditations in Buddhism, the *Metta-Bhavana* is translated as the ‘loving-kindness meditation. *The Karaniya Metta Sutta* states:

*Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded, (Ratnaprabha)*

Similar to one definition of the Arabic word ‘rahim’ meaning a woman’s womb, motherhood is also a prime example in Buddhism of what it means to be compassionate. Loving compassion should be understood as a foundation from which all our actions should stem, in accordance with both Buddhism and Islam. Once an individual cultivates the characteristics of loving compassion this should be reflected in the way person perceives themselves and the way that others perceive them. The ultimate goal of such a person would have to be the cessation of suffering for all; not just themselves, or a selected group of people but everyone.

5.4 Cultivating Ethics Through Meditation

Thus far, the analysis indicates that the stand-alone practice of mindfulness is necessary but insufficient for the cultivation of ethical conduct. This has led me to provide several other practices and values in Buddhist and Islamic thought that ought to be used in tandem with the practice of mindfulness. These practices and values add quality to the practice of mindfulness.

However, the practice of meditation may cultivate both mindfulness and ethical conduct. In a book titled *The Good Heart* the Dalai Lama, the head of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, writes: *It is my belief that if prayer, meditation and contemplation are combined in daily practice, the effect on the practitioner's mind and heart will be all the greater.* (Lama, 1998, p. 40) In section 1.1 I briefly described that the practice of mindfulness has created a space within me. One that allows me to sit with discomfort (i.e. depression, anxiety), without being overcome by it. Another essential practice that has helped me in this regard is meditation. Meditation is a practice that could be defined by stilling one's mind to focus on a subject—either material or immaterial—for a period. Sometimes, meditative practices include chanting, for example in Islam praying five times a day consists of repeating phrases and reciting the Qur'an. Buddhism is similar, one can recite mantras, sutras, and/or phrases. In the book titled *Mindfulness: The Path to the Deathless* Ajahn Sumedho, explains that in Buddhism, there are two kinds of meditations: 'samatha' and 'vipassana'. *Samatha* consists of one focusing the mind on an object, for example the breath, acknowledging the sensations of inhalations and exhalations. The purpose of this kind of meditative practice is to attain a calm and tranquil mind. On the other hand, *vipassana* translated as 'insight meditation' does not require one to focus on a single object. Rather, one observes all mental objects (sensations, emotions, and feelings) and identifies them all as impermanent (Sumedho, 1994). The goal is not to analyse why something, or someone is the way that they are, the purpose of this meditation is to gain insight of the nature of reality: impermanent and in constant flux. In an essay titled *Meditation and the Neuroscience of Consciousness* Antoine Lutz, John D. Dunne, and Richard J. Davidson, explain the distinction between three meditative states that originate from Tibetan Buddhism. Firstly, 'Focused Attention' is explained as a mind that is "unwaveringly and clearly focused on a single object". Following, 'Open Presence' a meditative state that "may be considered a particular version of 'vipassana' (insight meditation). Lastly, 'Non-Referential Compassion' a meditative state with the purpose of cultivating unconditional compassion. Similar to mindfulness and its positive effects on the brain, according to Lutz, Dunne and Davidson, meditation may also positively restructure the brain. Areas in the brain related to attention, emotional regulation, and self-awareness are positively influenced by meditation. According to Lutz et al., the meditative practice that is described as cultivating a state of loving-kindness and unconditional compassion for all beings is the 'Non-Referential Compassion'. "Long-term training in Compassion

meditation is said to weaken egocentric traits and change the emotional baseline.” (Antoine Lutz, 2007) Further, meditative practices such as ‘Focused Attention’ and ‘Open Presence’ are described to have lasting effects on behaviors outside of meditation.

“The relevant longer-term traits that are expected to arise from cultivating Open Presence include most prominently a facility to regulate one’s emotions, such that one is less easily disturbed by emotional states. The mind is also said to be more sensitive and flexible, and the cultivation of other positive states and traits is therefore greatly facilitated.” (Antoine Lutz, 2007)

Lutz et al, emphasize that Buddhist meditative practices are rooted within a broader ethical framework. Certain moral precepts such as honesty and compassion are considered prerequisites for effective meditation, and this happens to be the truth for Islam as well. Shah-Kazemi shares that Buddhism and Islam both call for a form of avid prayer, introspective meditation or methodic invocation (Shah-Kazemi, 2010). My personal experience with meditation includes Islamic prayers, both guided and unguided meditations. Once I ascribed myself to the belief that praying five times a day is a religious and spiritual obligation—that required discipline and effort—I also took it upon myself to perform each prayer mindfully. Which means constantly guiding my awareness back to the phrases and/or recitations being said. Taking my time and refraining from rushing through each prayer. It has been at least three years since the start of my prayer/meditation journey, and it has been without a doubt one of the most transformational practices. Even when I am not amid prayer, I am much more observant of my thoughts, actions, and speech. Thus, I do not merely believe that ethics may be cultivated through meditation. I recognize in myself that through meditation, I shall never retire of cultivating ethics.

The Anapanasati Sutta

In a sutra titled the *Anapanasati Sutta* (Mindfulness of Breathing) The Buddha describes one of the most basic and foundational ways to cultivate mindfulness through meditation. The Buddha

addressed the monks in attendance for the *Anapanasati Sutta* as individuals that are steadfast in the development of good will, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity. The Buddha further explains that cultivating the “mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is of great fruit, of great benefit”. In the sutta, the Buddha provides a description of how to practice mindfulness meditation. He explains

“There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.” Majjhima Nikāya, Book 3, Sutta 118

The Buddha further explains that the practitioner’s awareness is placed entirely on his breathing, discerning between inhales and exhales. Thus, it is through this meditation that one may cultivate mindfulness, but it is *not* through mindfulness alone that one may cultivate ethical conduct.

Chapter 6: Recapitulations and Reflections

6.1 The Practitioner’s Reflection

To recapitulate my core arguments, I have explained that the Buddhist term *sati* has several translations; the most prevalent translation is mindfulness. A practice that has been popularized in the West by Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR model. The term mindfulness can either be described as **cultivated awareness** that can be used both secularly and spiritually/religiously, or **recollection of religious/spiritual teachings** (i.e. recollecting the dhamma or *taqwā* in Islam). Secondly, I have argued that mindfulness is a neutral term that is neither good nor bad. According to Buddhism there are several ways one may practice mindfulness (*sati*). The first way is *sati*

(mindfulness) a neutral cultivated awareness, neither right nor wrong, the second way is *sammā sati* (right mindfulness), and lastly *miccha sati* (wrong mindfulness). Another core argument I have made is that *right mindfulness* is inherently an ethical practice. To summarize why right mindfulness is an inherently ethical practice, we need to understand the context surrounding the practice of right mindfulness. Firstly, right mindfulness is a part of the eightfold path, which entails the four noble truths as a prerequisite. Next, the four noble truths holds that there is an cessation to suffering and that the eightfold path is the path to the cessation of suffering. Lastly, the cessation of suffering sought by one on the eightfold path is not merely their suffering, but the suffering of all sentient beings. Thus, one cannot practice right mindfulness unethically nor is the practice of right mindfulness neutral. *Miccha sati* (wrong mindfulness) is the third and final way one can still be practicing mindfulness. In other terms, if right mindfulness were to be understood as being aware of one's role in the cessation of suffering; wrong mindfulness can be easily understood as being aware of one's role in the contribution of suffering.

My dissertation sought to answer the following question: can *sati* (mindfulness) help in cultivating ethical behaviour? I have argued that the practice of mindfulness in cultivating ethical behaviour is necessary but insufficient. The research on the MBSR model and S-ART framework have shown that the practice of mindfulness alone has countless benefits for its practitioner. I have two reasons for titling this section: the practitioner's reflection. The first reason: my personal reflections. Initially, I disregarded the MBSR model as secondary, but as I have progressed through my paper, I have come to the realization that stress is a mental form of suffering. However, my disregard for stress as I have come to realize is a personal shortcoming of my earlier perspective. In the introduction of my paper, I mentioned in passing being diagnosed with an autoimmune disease. I would like to share more about that experience. Towards the end of 2023 I had to undergo a thyroidectomy due to a nodule that was rapidly increasing in size. Before my surgery I was going through a lot of mental health struggles, especially depression and anxiety. My nervous system was dysregulated, I was unconsciously dealing with chronic stress, which caused me to feel constantly fatigued. I strongly believe now that all my mental health struggles and chronic stress have manifested into physical illness as well (i.e. my autoimmune disease). Reflecting on my history with the issue of stress has allowed

me to gain a deeper understanding of myself. Two years post-surgery, I can say with confidence that I would not change a thing. It was through this experience that I fully understood the implications that stress has on an individual. Presently, I am aware that stress is a major contributing factor for autoimmune diseases. To conclude my personal reflections, I no longer believe that the MBSR model is secondary, nor do I believe that it should be disregarded.

The second reason: the practitioner's reflection. In a book titled *365 Ways to Live Mindfully* Pascale F. Engelmayer's first chapter on living mindfully is dedicated to *intention*. He explains that according to Buddhism *right intention* consists of three main factors: the intention of renunciation (letting go of unhealthy attachments/desires), the intention of benevolence (cultivating kindness and compassion), and the intention of not harming (not causing harm to self/others, and non-human animals). Engelmayer writes that "Buddhism's foundational values are compassion and wisdom. The entirety of Buddhist principles, sacred texts and practices stem from these two overarching values." (Engelmayer, 2022) He then asks the reader to reflect on their values. Accordingly, the practitioner's reflection is a missing component in the secular practice of mindfulness. Regardless of the context surrounding your practice of mindfulness, one should reflect on why one chooses to practice mindfulness. Whether one intends to practice mindfulness for stress reduction or cultivating ethical behavior; be mindful of your intention. If one is being intentional, then it is the case that one is being *mindful*.

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