Can mindfulness be contained within a behaviourist framework?

Glenn Burton
Ordained Mahabodhi[1]
Western Buddhist Order

ABSTRACT: This paper proposes that third-wave (mindfulness and acceptance-based) psychotherapies may be undermined when practiced in relation to second-wave frameworks, not because the practices in themselves are ineffective, but because a more comprehensive perspective of mindfulness cannot be contained within a behaviourist framework. The author compares the behaviourist and Buddhist perspectives, and in doing so, shows that the cognitive model of Padesky and Mooney (1990) can be extended to produce a model based on the Buddhist teaching of the four foundations of mindfulness (the four satipatthanas). This model can be used to better explain mechanisms relevant to third-wave therapies, such as acceptance and non-judgmental awareness.

KEY WORDS: mindfulness, acceptance, behaviourism, Buddhism, foundation, satipatthana.

Introduction.

When an individual seeks guidance and they make contact with a professional in order to get help with a psychological problem, the point at which they do so is the point at which they are offered advice, and that often includes a set of techniques. The sheer variety of conditions presented to professional psychotherapists, places them in a unique position. In some ways professionalism has taken the place of religion; people have a similar faith in it as they used to have in religions. Psychologists (Hillman 1991, Symington 2004), have commented on similarities between therapy and religion: Hillman comments that the term psychotherapist means *literally* 'the attendant of the soul'. But there is a growing recognition amongst some professionals that they need something more than simply techniques in order to offer people real help (Harpur, 2002, 180). Mindfulness is something that a number of professionals believe can be helpful to people; these make up what is called the 'third-wave' in behavioural psychotherapy (Hayes 2004). I am a practising Buddhist. As well as discussing and talking about mindfulness, I am also a practitioner. I continue to study and reflect upon what the Buddhist tradition has to say about mindfulness. In addition to which I regularly engage in meditation, which is the primary way a state of mindfulness can be attained according to the Buddhist tradition. It is this study and meditation that I bring to the discussion about the application of mindfulness within professional practice.

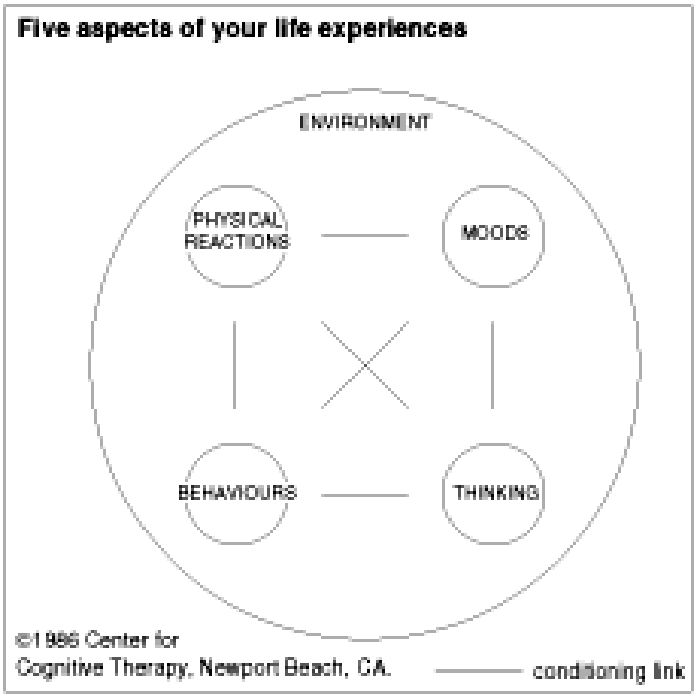
Mindfulness in Buddhism has a whole philosophy behind it to do with conditions, which includes creating the conditions supportive to helping people feel human. Included among them are the development of ethical sensitivity, participation in positive social networks that encourage a human approach, and an intelligent approach to goal-setting. Buddhism is not only about practising a set of techniques, but it is necessarily also about paying attention to the broader conditions that help a person feel human. Kabat-Zinn (2000) has begun to address this theme through his emphasis on participatory medicine. Even for those

[1] c/o Mahabodhi, Manchester Buddhist Centre, 16-20 Turner Street, Manchester M4 1DZ United Kingdom; email: dhmahabodhi@hotmail.com; website: www.mahabodhi.org.uk.

professionals who are using mindfulness as part of their professional practice, it is not yet clear to me whether they include all of the factors that Buddhism deems necessary in order for an individual to attain a full realisation of mindfulness. These factors are discussed in this paper from a Buddhist point of view, and the intention is to assist professionals who are using mindfulness in their practice.

In this paper I seek to introduce an intellectual framework that can help mindfulness grow and develop within professional practice. It is a framework based on a Buddhist teaching on mindfulness (Walshe 1987, 335), specifically the four foundations of mindfulness (four *satipatthanas* - *sati* means *mindfulness* and *upatthana* means *to place near*), which are probably the central teaching in Buddhism on mindfulness. Such a framework allows mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies to be described conceptually. Incorporating active mental and emotional states into its model does this. Two such states are mindfulness and acceptance. The framework also goes beyond the moods of the cognitive model by incorporating other types of feeling, namely physical sensations and ethical sensitivities. This broader framework can show, for example, how Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction works in helping people deal with chronic pain. By including these broader conditions, this model can provide a coherent theory on mindfulness that 'completes' the third wave. The second-wave framework - as represented by the cognitive model of Padesky and Mooney (Fig.1) - does not, in comparison, include such a broad range of conditions. It is my hope that in considering this framework when teaching or practicing mindfulness, people can not only be helped in solving their problems by becoming more mindful, but will also be helped by adopting the broader conditions that Buddhism values.

Fig. 1 Padesky and Mooney's Cognitive Model



The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Using the cognitive model of Padesky and Mooney as an example of the conditions that are acceptable within a second wave framework, this paper suggests that such conditions can be expanded in a way that better allows for an explanation of third wave processes. This expansion is achieved by substituting the four central conditions in the cognitive model of Padesky and Mooney, with the four foundations of mindfulness from within the Buddhist tradition. The four foundations are body, feelings, heart-mind (i.e. mental states),

and mental objects. In Buddhist psychological language, *kaya, vedana, citta* and *dhammas.* These four 'objects' are what a practitioner in Buddhism places their mindfulness 'near' in order to create a foundation for Buddhist practice. Opinions amongst Buddhists vary as to the exact manifestation of these 'objects'. A number of years of study and practice have led me to formulate the following descriptions:

1) **Body**: the body and breath are examples of 'objects' that can be tangibly experienced in the present moment. The body satipattana only comes into being when one is aware of what is tangible. And the tangible only exists in the present moment.

2) **Feelings**: being the hedonic quality of that experience. In this category there are three manifestations of feeling: i.e. mental feeling or *mood*, physical feeling or *sensation*, and *feelings arising from states of mind* (*states of mind* in Buddhism include emotional, mental and ethical states. An example in this category of a feeling arising from an ethical state is, the pain of regret (regret being the *state of mind*) due to conscience. An example of a feeling arising from an unethical state is, the pain of separation from an object of obsession (obsession being the *state of mind*).

3) **The Heart-mind**: in the Western World mind is generally understood to mean the intellect. However, in Buddhism, emotional and mental lives are seen to participate in the same 'mind' and the states of mind included within it. In order to emphasise this, it is therefore referred to as the heart-mind. This latter category includes emotional, mental, and ethical states of mind - or anything the heart-mind could be said to be doing. Importantly, these also include mindfulness and acceptance.

4) **Mental Objects**: these are the assessments, views, and conceptualisations (including the *contents* of thought, although the process of thought occurs in the heart-mind) that human beings have a tendency towards constructing.

It should be noted that these conditions are similar to those in the cognitive model of Padesky and Mooney. There are however two important disparities.

The first of these, as previously mentioned, is that the four foundations of mindfulness have descriptions for two additional kinds of feeling: as well as mental feeling or *mood*, they also incorporate physical feeling or *sensation* and *feelings arising from states of mind*.

The second disparity is the inability of Padesky and Mooneys' model to incorporate heart-mind or mental states in the way that the four foundations of mindfulness can. I propose that this constraint, is likely to limit the ability of researchers from adequately conceptualising mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies. This is precisely because mindfulness and acceptance, as included in the Heart-mind, are not accommodated in the Padesky and Mooney model. I believe that this constraint arises because the original behaviourist model was constructed upon the basis of observable behaviour within the framework of scientific practice. This constraint applies less within a Buddhist framework, because a comprehensive intellectual framework exists in order to empower an individual to take personal responsibility for assessing their internal states – which includes an ethical dimension.

The disparity between behaviours and the Heart-mind is actually an argument about 'behaviourism vs. Buddhism', in which Buddhism necessarily incorporates an ethical dimension, that allows an individual to take full responsibility for their internal states, in a way that behaviourism – born of a scientific perspective - cannot. In Buddhism, for a person wishing to express mindfulness in their lives, a consideration of the ethical dimension is seen as absolutely essential. Ethics within the context of a Buddhist philosophy, is strongly related to the essential nature of a person being human. A person acting against their nature, is acting unskilfully, and this has potential ethical consequences for themselves and others. A great deal of emphasis is placed on skilful action. When attempting to act skilfully, a person is encouraged to look at the conditions that might support skilful action; mindfulness and awareness are very much seen as skilful action. This view of ethics and its relationship to the nature of the individual, as well as the conditions through

which skilful action can be achieved, is in contrast to the more limiting view of behaviour as represented by the cognitive model.

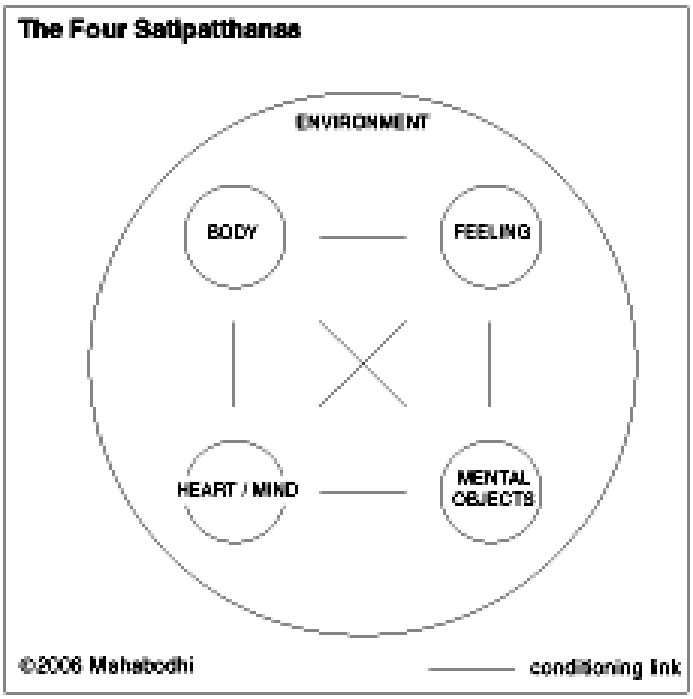
The Satipatthana Model.

Both Buddhism and behaviourism rely on conditioning. Buddhism's most central teaching is known variously as conditionality, Conditioned Coproduction, or Dependent Origination, which states that: 'everything arises in dependence upon conditions'.

The cognitive model, expresses the relationships between conditions that are acceptable to the second-wave. Christine Padesky describes her model in the following way: 'Its strength for use in therapy is that it is descriptive, captures interactions between different aspects of experience, and does not take a stance regarding which must come first: the thought or the mood or the behaviour or the environmental event or the biological response. Sometimes all happen simultaneously, other times one experience leads to another."

In order to extend the cognitive model, it is not unreasonable to use its *form* but to alter its *conditions*. This is the intellectual step taken in this paper. The four central conditions of the cognitive model, have been superseded with the four foundations of mindfulness. In doing so, the result is a Buddhist-influenced model that I refer to as *The Satipatthana Model*, see Fig. 2. The Model might alternatively be referred to as the *Four Foundations Model*, or the *Third Wave Mindfulness Model*. *The Satipatthana Model* is theoretically capable of encompassing the cognitive model – enabling it to continue to explain second wave processes; however, because it now relates the four foundations of mindfulness, it can now also explain third wave processes like acceptance.

Fig. 2 The Satipatthana Model



In order to successfully supersede the four central conditions of the cognitive model, with the four foundations of mindfulness, it is necessary to understand how Buddhism distinguishes between *experience* and *response to experience*. The Cognitive model does not make a distinction between experiences over which we do not have a choice, and responses to experience over which we do, in the way that *The Satipatthana Model* does. This is illustrated in the following way.

A person seeking help, for instance, in relation to a serious injury - over which they have been able to exercise little or no control – may not have enough awareness to understand that the injury and the pain associated with it are beyond their immediate control. Bringing awareness to this situation is the essence of mindfulness. Supporting an individual in understanding those aspects that are within their control, can be more effectively achieved by the use of *The Satipatthana Model.* This is because it clearly distinguishes between what is *experience* and what is a *response to experience*. For example, when in private consultation with an individual, *The Satipatthana Model* is adept at encouraging an individual to experience awareness directly - often through meditation or led exercises. Within these exercises, it is my experience that two things are likely to happen for an individual. Firstly, they are more likely to see what their actual experience is. And secondly, with that being clearer, they are more likely to begin to develop a distinction between what is *experience*, and what is a *response to experience*.

Although it is universally accepted amongst Buddhists that a distinction exists between experience and response to experience, the process of bringing this distinction to the Four Satipatthanas is not yet, in my opinion, complete. Based on my own study and experience, I suggest that the following correlations exist between the Four Satipatthanas and *experience* and *response to experience*, providing the intellectual step that allows *The Satipatthana Model* to be used in practice.

Within the Four Satipatthanas, body and feeling are experiences that occur *without any effort* on the part of the individual. Conversely, Heart-mind and mental objects are *responses to experience* and as such, they are not considered to occur without effort, but are seen as arising in consequence to decisions made by an individual. This point helps us to clarify a common confusion about feeling and emotion. In Buddhism feeling is always a resultant. Following an action (either by a third party, the individual themselves or the wider environment), it is a state that an individual 'arrives in' as a direct consequence of that action. This could be a mood, a sensation, or an experience of conscience. Emotion is distinct from this because it is an action. Emotion may be conditioned by the feelings being experienced, but the action that an individual takes may eventually be different from the impulse dictated by the feeling. This is because it is possible to choose a response. As such, feeling is distinct from emotion which is an action: emotion is how the heart-mind 'moves' under the influence of feeling.

Fig.3 explores how the satipatthanas interact with each other giving rise, for example, to different types of feeling and emotion. It shows how these conditions, some as experiences and some as responses interact within *The Satipatthana Model*. The diagram shows how a process arises when one satipatthana, here called the primary condition, impacts on another, here called the secondary condition. For example, sensation is the process that arises when feeling is conditioned by a physical body. Another example is when under the influence of mental objects (e.g. of conceptual content), the heart-mind is shaped into a process of thinking.

It is worth noting that the four rows in Fig 3., in which 'experience conditions response', are crucial, in that they are where mindfulness, acceptance, positive emotion and insight are possibilities that can be cultivated. This is because, with a response, an individual always has a choice. An individual implementing Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn 1990) - 'awareness in the present moment, with acceptance, non-judgementally' – will, I suggest, be attempting to choose these creative responses over their opposites i.e., distraction, resistance, negative emotion, and ignorance. On the one hand, they choose for example to allow their views to be changed by accepting difficult experiences; a process that is aided by not allowing their heart-mind to narrow into unproductive judgements. Alternatively, an individual can work against the habit of following an experience with a state of mind with a similar feeling to it. Examples of this might be, that of chronic pain followed with a 'chronic' state of mind, or against following the experience of a heavy mood like depression with a heavy heart. Instead, they can choose a response of compassion or mindfulness.

Fig. 3 Interactions between the Satipatthanas and Associated Processes

Primary Condition	Secondary Condition	Associated Process	Comments / examples
Experience co-arising with experience			
BODY	FEELING	SENSATION	e.g. chronic pain
FEELING	BODY	EXPRESSION	e.g. laughing and crying
Response co-arising with response			
MENTAL OBJECTS	HEART-MIND	THOUGHT	mental contents give rise to process of thinking
HEART-MIND	MENTAL OBJECTS	REFLECTION	reflecting on state of mind affects mind contents
Experience conditioning response			
BODY	HEART-MIND	AWARENESS	body awareness leads to greater presence / concentrated state of mind
BODY	MENTAL OBJECTS	IDENTITY / INSIGHT	frame views from experience of self and world
FEELING	HEART-MIND	EMOTION	where heart-mind is moulded by feeling
FEELING	MENTAL OBJECTS	ACCEPTANCE	accept experience and that forces change in view of world
Response conditioning experience			
HEART-MIND	BODY	MANIFESTATION	states of mind manifest in tension or relaxation in the body
HEART-MIND	FEELING	UN / ETHICAL SENSITIVITY	ethical state of mind gives troubled conscience
MENTAL OBJECTS	BODY	PRACTICALWISDOM	'body wisdom' e.g. guided relaxation / Alexander Technique
MENTAL OBJECTS	FEELING	MOOD	same as *thoughts conditioning moods* from cognitive model

Conclusion.

This paper has introduced ideas from the Buddhist tradition, applied them to the second wave model represented by Padesky and Mooney, and in doing so has allowed for the development of a model representing the third-wave therapies. It has shown how this model, referred to as *The Satipatthana Model,* can be developed by incorporating mental states, including emotions as well as feelings, other than mood. It has also shown how the mechanics of processes relevant to the third wave fit within that framework.

References.

Harpur, P. (2002) *The Philosopher's Secret Fire.* London: Penguin.

Hayes, S.C., Follette, V.M. & Linehan, M.M. (eds.) (2004). *Mindfulness and Acceptance: Expanding the Cognitive Behavioural Tradition.* New York: Guilford.

Hillman, J. (1989) *A Blue Fire.* New York: HarperCollins.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness.* New York: Delacorte.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2000). Participatory Medicine. *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology,* **14**, 239-240.

Padesky, C.A. & Mooney, K.A. (1990). Presenting the cognitive model to clients. *International Cognitive Therapy Newsletter*, **6**, 13-14.

Symington, N. (2004) *The Blind Man Sees: Freud's Awakening and Other Essays*. London: Karnac.

Walshe, M. (1987) *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya.* Somerville, Massachusetts: Wisdom.

Acknowledgement.

I gratefully acknowledge the close collaboration of Neil Ward, a research fellow at Hull University Business School, which has been invaluable in the development of this paper. Neil is an independent consultant and can be contacted at: www.nitroc.com.