

In Praise of Stress Induction:

Mindfulness Revisited

Manu Bazzano

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Introduction

As the Dharma – the body of teachings of the historical Buddha – takes roots in the West, it becomes inevitably secularized. Mindfulness meditation, currently the most fashionable development in the comparative field of Dharma practice and mental health, may be apprehended within this process of secularization. Although there are positive corollaries to current applications of non-religious forms of Buddhist practice, these still rely on a foundational metaphysics whose matrix, because unacknowledged, remains unchallenged. Religion is abandoned in favour of positivism, which is effectively swapping one church for another. A ‘third way’ is advocated here, non-foundational (Loewenthal, 2011) as well as post-metaphysical (Rorty, 1989; Bazzano, 2012) one that honours the alterity and existentially challenging nature of the Buddha’s teachings; one that does not stoop to our arguably reductionist *Zeitgeist* nor relies on either spiritualist or materialist metaphysics.

A Phrenologist’s Dream

Good things did come about as a result of secularization; for instance, Buddhist monasticism is no longer deemed more worthy than lay practice. This egalitarian view is not novel, of course, but found already in thirteenth century Japan in Dōgen (1200-1253) who

cautioned those who erroneously thought that “mundane affairs hinder the practice of the Buddha Dharma” (Dōgen, 2002, p. 25).

Another positive implication of the secularization of the Dharma is the gradual shedding of a byzantine pantheon of deities, heaven and hell realms, of reincarnated gurus and lamas and a hierarchical machinery of liturgies and rituals. Many legitimately believe that the way the Dharma can best be practiced in western culture is via the strict preservation of a particular tradition (whether Zen, Tibetan, Theravada etc.) by means of a practice of received wisdom and the creation of solid religious institutions (Bazzano, 2012a). This approach is commendable but arguably sterile for it rarely allows for constructive doubt, perplexity and, most important of all, *paradox*, the literal meaning of which is to exceed (*para*) received opinion or received knowledge (*doxa*). This is even truer when the ‘knowledge’ (in this case the Buddha’s teachings) is beyond the reach of received opinion. To recycle the paradoxical teachings of the Dharma would surely mean taming them and avoiding their potentially disruptive/transformational impact.

It has been argued (Flanagan, 2011) that after shedding religious paraphernalia and beliefs, a secular Dharma would still comprise of an epistemology, an ethics and a theory. But which theory? It is revealing that the secular theory of Buddhism currently proposed is deemed compatible with, if not reliant on, neo-Darwinism, evolutionary biology and positivist science. Secular or “naturalized Buddhism” (Flanagan, 2011) would then quite simply swap one set of beliefs with another. As we shall see, mindfulness meditation is in itself, in its most widely used models such as MBSR and MBCT,¹ a worthy if strained attempt to supplement “positivist Western psychological paradigms” (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011)

¹ MBCT= Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

with an over-simplified (and often de-contextualized) compendium of complex Buddhist phenomenology of the mind.

This is not new: in Victorian times the Buddha was made to sound like Darwin, simplistically equating the law of karma with the theory of evolution. He has now metamorphosed into a neuroscientist, a validation *de rigueur*, one that nonchalantly sanctions the view that the brain is the seat of the mind. He gives his blessings to the proliferation of 'Joy Detectives' experiments, showing on fMRI scans what neurons are fired in the brain of shaven-headed monks when they think 'compassionate' or 'wise' thoughts or, being Buddhist, even 'non-thoughts'. A monk's shaven head must have been a phrenologist's dream, even in the heyday of that pseudo-science, Phrenology, which claimed to determine a person's moral fiber and acumen by the shape of his skull.

Things have moved on since then but the tendency to link Buddhism with scientific (or pseudo-scientific) developments continues. The current Dalai Lama (2005), a keen advocate of interdisciplinary dialogue between Buddhism and cognitive science, nevertheless acknowledges their difference:

“Cognitive science addresses this study ... on the basis of neurobiological structures and the biochemical functions of the brain, while Buddhist investigation of consciousness operates ... from ... a first-person perspective. (Dalai Lama, 2005, p. 165)

Most cognitive scientists believe that there is a “neural link for every mental event” (Flanagan, 2001, p. 86), the working hypothesis being that “consciousness emerges from neuronal features of the brain. Understanding the material basis of consciousness [requires]

... a much deeper appreciation of how highly interconnected networks of a large number of heterogeneous neurons work” (Koch, 2004, p. 10). The supposedly smooth dialogue between Buddhism and positivist science, which provides the backdrop and a validation of current mindfulness modalities, seems to polarize rather than finding a common ground, as the following passage from the Dalai Lama testifies:

“The view that all mental processes are necessarily physical processes is a metaphysical assumption, not a scientific fact ... In the spirit of scientific inquiry, it is critical that we allow the question to remain open, and not conflate our assumptions with empirical fact”
(Dalai Lama, 2005, p. 128)

‘Scientific’ or ‘modern’ Buddhism, dating back to the early nineteenth century (Lopez 2006), can be seen as “an offshoot of the new science of philology” (p. 249). It is a form of appropriation: an attempt to incorporate unfathomable teachings within an existing body of knowledge rather than being exposed to and possibly affected by their otherness.

Both procedures (ie recycling the ancient teachings of the Buddha or adapting them to modernity) are elaborate strategies aimed at circumventing the possibility of an *encounter* with the Dharma.

On Spiritual Bypass

Among the responses to the increased decontextualization and secularization of Buddhism, is the defence of its religious component. This is carried out in several ways; I will highlight two: a) emphasizing the *communitarian* aspect promoted by all religions. To be

sure, this is often done 'deviously' (Marx 1843/1977) through the creation of a false community where everyone is supposedly equal in the eyes of the deity. Yet this is a powerful argument: the role of the *sangha*, of the community of Buddhist practitioners is central to the practice, particularly in traditions which came to flourish in the Far East and in stark contrast with a *privatized* vision of spirituality which alongside double-entry book-keeping famously heralded the birth of the capitalist and Protestant worldview. The other, less persuasive argument is the promotion of an *eternalist* view of Buddhism. In the engaging paper 'Mindfulness Reconsidered'² David Brazier builds a case against the 'here and now' mystique of much popular Buddhism and of 'mindfulness' in particular, adding:

"A more complete reading shows that where this leads is not to an exclusive focus on here-and-now awareness so much as to a heightened sense of what is impermanent and what is not. In Buddhist terms, alertness to the transient brings awareness of the unborn, the deathless, nirvana".

The above is not 'a more complete' but a *subjective* reading of Buddhism. What is "a heightened awareness of what is not impermanent"? The very heart of Dharma teachings is the full recognition of impermanence in all aspects of living-and-dying. The teachings are designed to unsettle the practitioner yet through committed somatic practice to uncover the strength to recognize impermanence and be of some use to self and others. They rouse us towards a sharper perception of groundlessness, suffering, and the lack of inherent substance in the self, the world and the cosmos. The path begins with the realization of the

² Brazier, D. Mindfulness Reconsidered *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*

unsatisfactory nature of life. It does not offer a system of consolation or the vision of a permanent reality. To manufacture certainty out of the teachings is a metaphysical move, extraneous in my view to the teachings of the Buddha.

Although metaphysics is “often associated with theology in popular consciousness” and the two are often lumped together “under the general heading of transcendence” (Adorno, 2000, p. 6), to rely on a grand materialistic theory of the world is equally metaphysical. What makes Buddhism more relevant than ever today is its anti-foundational stance, entirely compatible with the best of post-metaphysical thought present in our post-modern world. Downplaying the transformative/disruptive nature of Dharma teachings and bending them to a metaphysical agenda – whether rooted in metaphysical materialism (as with the current mindfulness trend) or in a more conventional metaphysical spiritualism (as proposed by the author of the paper) – is effectively a *bypass* of groundlessness, of what the Buddha calls *śūnyatā* and the Zen tradition refers to as *kū* – the core ontological statement of Buddhism, which is nothing less than the articulation of a profound paradox: ontology without ontology, ontology of becoming: an anti-foundational perspective, a perspective of no perspective. Accommodating Buddhism into a metaphysical system is to tame it, to lose its irreducible otherness and to neutralize its impact.

An example from Buddhist literature might be helpful here. Nāgārjuna notably claimed that ‘things lack intrinsic nature’ (*svabhāva*) and was challenged by a clever-too-shoes, logically minded opponent (plenty of those in the history of Buddhism) who said: ‘If so, then this is true of your own statement, in which case you can’t possibly deny the intrinsic nature of things’. Nāgārjuna replied: ‘*Pratijñā, dam bca*’ — I have no thesis’ (Lopez, 2006).

The above view is not restricted to the Buddhist tradition. A similar stance is found in strands of the western anti-tradition, including Pyrrho’s radical scepticism and Heraclitus’s

philosophy of becoming, as well as in Montaigne, in the hermeneutics of suspicion represented by Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, in strands of existential phenomenology, Deleuzian empiricism and in post-structuralism. What Dharma teachings add to the mix is, crucially, the rigorous somatic practice of meditation and a corpus of poetical-ethical pointers.

Seizing an analogy taken from Christian theology, i.e. the seeming opposition between the apologetic and the dogmatic stance, D. Brazier sees current mindfulness as a shift towards the former, unintentionally crediting mindfulness programmes with a sophisticated expounding of the Dharma which is patently lacking. Apologetics are believers who *translate* faith into the language of science, logic and reason whilst fully upholding Christian dogma. They are employing something similar to *upaya-kausalya*, the Buddhist practice of skilful means at the heart of which is to be fully cognizant of the *context* – in this case, the audience. Every word the Buddha spoke was to a specific audience in a specific situation; the teachings themselves are not platitudinous ‘timeless wisdom’ but the distillation of a *field of resonance*. Dōgen called it *kannō dōkō*, infinite resonance; contemporary psychotherapists and Zen practitioners label it “unconscious interactive resonance” (Bobrow, 2010, p. 156), which is different from a-historical, transcendental truth. In the case of mindfulness meditation as currently practiced within the mental health field the initial (no doubt sincere) implementation of skilful means has regrettably given way to fully-fledged and uncritical obeisance to scientific reductionism.

Unfortunately David Brazier does not say anything about the *dogmatic* view in theology, leaving the reader to presume that he embraces such view espousing what he calls “faith commitment” to an ostensibly “original form and meaning”. But what is lost in the dogmatic position is the infinite subtlety of a Dharma practice which in this instance is akin (as with

Zen calligraphy, painting and poetry) to *affirmative art* (Bazzano, 2006). What we have in its place is an overconfident assertion of doctrinal certainty. If I'm allowed to linger a bit more within the Christian theology association, one notices something similar in the delightful tentativeness of Milton's early poetry – particularly in *Lycidas* (Milton 2008/1637) where instead of self-appointed espousal of 'revealed truth' we find the voice of human doubt and sorrow alongside the voice of a god (Burrow, 2013).

The points made by the author about the educational rather than medical nature of Dharma teachings is very apt: the Buddha encourages a spirited refusal of complacency: in various ways and in different language, for over two thousand and five hundred years the Buddhist tradition urged to strive as if our hair is on fire; it told us that all is burning; that we are trapped in a house on fire (Bazzano, 2013). Dharma teachings promote *stress induction* (Lopez, 2012) rather than fêted 'stress reduction'.

It remains to be seen whether the 'education' the author refers to is Platonic/Socratic maieutics (vertically imparted by a teacher/guru in a position of authority, the latter self-appointed or gained through political ascendancy in the ranks of this or that 'school'), or if it emerges from encounter (Levinas, 1961) with the otherness of the Dharma in a context of shared effort.

Transcendence and Trans-descent

As Caroline Brazier fittingly states in her paper 'Roots of Mindfulness'³, "Many people in the mindfulness movement are keen to distance themselves from the religious sources upon which mindfulness practices within psychotherapy are based". This position would risk "diluting a potent resource ... offering a limited ... version of the practice". The author goes

³ Brazier. C. Roots of Mindfulness *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*

on to say that Buddhism's original concern, watered down by the mindfulness movement, would consist in "the transcendence of *unhealthy mind states* and the attainment of higher mental faculties" (my italics). This is indeed the scope of some schools of Buddhism, which dualistically (and prescriptively) discriminate between healthy and unhealthy states of mind. For other Buddhist traditions, the very idea of *transcending* the human dimension, including its unhealthy states, is part and parcel of a dualistic system of thought more aligned with Judaeo-Christian values than with a genuinely Buddhist phenomenology of body/mind and an embodied Dharma practice. The latter can be indeed realized as a descent – perhaps as *trans-descent* rather than transcendence (Bazzano, 2012)

What are these unhealthy states? I assume the author refers to the greed and hatred engendered by ignorance, by the illusory conviction of being as a separate, self existing 'I'. Yet in the battle between the practitioner and the 'passions' the self is potentially *strengthened* rather than *deconstructed* (Bazzano, 2013). What's more, the *autonomy of affects* (Massumi, 2000) in relation to the self is not recognized. In spite of the disagreement, on this point it would seem that the author concurs with the 'mindfulness movement', since the latter is equally devoted to a prescriptive control over the unruly affects. The conventional religious Buddhist stance towards the affects is entirely consistent with the secular 'mindfulness' discourse in favour of affect management or "improved affect tolerance" (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro et al p. 2004, p. 234). This is reinforced by the author's rather chastising interpretation of "intentionality" (I assume what is meant here is 'craving' rather than the highly problematic notion of intentionality) as the culprit of our doomed condition in *samsara*, the wheel of birth and death.

Caroline Brazier's insistence on the 'spiritual' dimension of Buddhism as a 'system', with several references to the debatable and unreferenced notion of 'Buddhist psychology'

(debatable because expressed in the singular rather plural), presents a metaphysical stance potentially as misleading as the militant secularism of 'mindfulness'. This position becomes awkward when the author conflates Buddhism with twelve-step programmes and their notion of 'higher power'. Unless of course the higher power is defined as the group, for instance, the community of practitioners (incidentally one of the definitions of higher power in twelve-step programmes). There are of course *theistic* views of Buddhism, all deserving of respect, yet none of them would refer to itself as 'Buddhism' in the singular as 'the right view'. Similarly it is problematic to speak, as the author does, of 'enlightenment' without explaining further. The notion of 'awakening' (which I personally prefer to the other-worldly sounding 'enlightenment') is of course beyond the reach of reason and logic, being akin perhaps to what Blanchot (1993) calls the 'limit experience'. A justifiable interpretation of awakening within Buddhism is to be awakened to the reality of suffering, of being-towards-death and resolving to respond wisely and compassionately to the ambivalence of the human condition. Awakening is also to be able to appreciate one's life (Maezumi, 2001) in the midst of such profound ambiguity.

My own contention with 'mindfulness meditation' is not that it is not 'spiritual' but that its secularism betrays superficial metaphysics, or not-worked-through metaphysics. The very same charge is applicable to 'spiritual Buddhism', which is what the author essentially presents here.

Disorders of Time Present

Both Dharma practice and psychotherapy are elaborate responses to the tragedy and beauty of transience. Time is central in both explorations; strangely overlooked, it is

refreshing to find it at the heart of *The Times of our Lives*⁴. “We treat time as an object that we beat, count or kill” the author writes. Time is the devourer; in vain we try to assuage our anxiety by anthropomorphising it into a kind paternal figure. The classical distinction between *chronos* and *kairos* mentioned by Adshead is fertile and useful in acknowledging subjective experience and the way it furrows time’s alleged linearity – dynamically relating it to the domain of experience. It is parallel to the distinction between *fate* and *destiny*, one unyielding, the other mouldable into a composite net of individual meanings. Individual entry into *destiny* and *kairos* is of course via the present moment. Yet the notion of the *here and now* has been reified to such extent in mindfulness literature that it has now become the magical *telos* of practice. For Dharma practice as I understand it, *anything* surging to the status of the unassailable must be revisited and critiqued. In stark contrast to the contemporary mystique of the here and now, the great haiku poet and accomplished Zen practitioner Basho wrote:

How many, many things

Call to mind

These cherry blossoms! (Akita, 2009)

Memory, even *nostalgic* memory is not chastised. Dwelling away from the present is what we do. Stifling the mind’s likely movements into past or future is not meditation but censorship. A similar example of embracing rather than punishing the vagaries of the mind comes from a little-known story in the *Ch’an* tradition.

A monk asks Master Feng-hsueh Yen-chao: ‘Speech and silence are concerned with subject and object. How can I transcend both subject and object?’ to which Feng-hsueh Yen-chao replies: ‘In March my mind often wanders back to the Chiang-nan region. Partridges move

⁴ Adshead, G. The Times of our Lives *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*

about among the many flowers'(cited in Besserman & Steger, 2011). Being in the present and being mindful is all very well. But there is great value in involuntary memory and daydreaming. There we may find beauty, poetry and meaning – all precious aspects of human experience which the injunction to be in the 'here and now' at all times would insensitively flatten.

On Psyche as a Walled City

Mindfulness-based stress-reduction (MBSR) is candidly praised in *Things said and done long ago...*⁵, where the critique is reserved to one of its epiphenomena, the 'Mindfulness-based Mind-Fitness Training' in the US Marines – more “attentional control training” (emphasizing “the capacity for voluntary control and focus attention”) than the type of “broad open awareness” the author associates with mindfulness. Given their job of requiring soldiers to inflict considerable harm on others, it is no surprise that the emphasis of their mindfulness training is on stress reduction rather than on kindness and empathy towards 'the enemy'. The difficulty here is that MBSR lends itself to reductive interpretations because it is itself reductive in relation to its Buddhist matrix, clutching on superficial materialist metaphysics in obeisance to current orthodoxy. Yet there is a discrepancy here, one that is often overlooked. In spite of its earnest appeals to modernity and science, the mindfulness movement exhumes components of *one* ancient Buddhist tradition. Puritanical denigration of the human condition and stern dismissal of facets of *psyche* is arguably typical of strands within the *Theravada* tradition (one of several traditions within Buddhism). The author quotes a striking image, taken from the Pali canon. Gatekeepers in ancient India made sure that “only genuine citizens of the town were

⁵ Stanley, S. Things said and done long ago... *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*

allowed to enter”; a parallel is drawn with the arising of “unwholesome and detrimental associations and reactions” at the sense doors. The image is both arresting in its vividness and deeply worrying in its psychological and political associations. Equating psyche with the walled city has had more than ‘unwholesome’ consequences in history, which were precisely born out of wanting to expel that very unwholesomeness from its quarters. From its inception, psychotherapy is geared towards exploring and befriending all guests who come knocking at the door; and the same applies to several Buddhist traditions. In Zen, for instance, “unwholesome and detrimental associations” are seen as none other than manifestations of the Buddha himself. As to the ominous distinction between genuine citizen and stranger or non-genuine citizen, the implications are too far reaching for this paper. I have discussed them at length elsewhere (Bazzano, 2012); it may suffice to say here that it confirms the danger of Buddhist teachings being used in the service of a Manichean view of the psyche and the polis.

Crucially for a paper whose chief argument is ethics, the author does not provide a definition. Are ethics *Sittlichkeit* – the mores and customs of a particular epoch? Or the introjected assemblage of norms and injunctions? Does the author refer to a ‘universal’ notion of ethics? Are they of divine inspiration? And what about the contemporary, radical ethics of alterity? (Levinas, 1961; Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Bazzano, 2012). What kind of ethics is being suggested by a programme whose ethos is ‘stress reduction’? One obvious answer would be the ethics of the *knight of good conscience* (Derrida, 1995) rather than the ethics of the *knight of faith* (Kierkegaard, 1986), the latter being the mark of an ennobling spiritual practice paradoxically requiring the *suspension* of conventional mores and a refusal of obeisance to dominant modes of thought.

A city in the forest

It would be wrong to assume that the entirety of Buddhist practice comprises of what is today understood as 'mindfulness meditation'. For how is it possible to extract a set of 'introspective' techniques from a myriad of complex, multifaceted contexts without irreparably altering their meaning? This is achievable only if one follows the prevailing opinion which sees meditation as "a free-floating practice" (Faure, 2012, p. 74), product of a universalism proffering an "internalized view from nowhere above the conflicting claims of various religions and secular philosophies in a purified experiential realm" (MacMahan, 2008, p 269n).

One of the necessary *contexts*, overlooked in current practices of 'mindfulness meditation', is the *civic* aspect of Buddhist culture. This is famously epitomized by the parable of the city: the Buddha describes a traveler seeing an ancient city at the end of a barely noticeable path in a forest. The city, once great and renowned, is now in ruins. The traveler tells the king, and the king rebuilds the city. According to Buddhist scholar Stephen Batchelor (personal communication, 2011), the city represents the wider ethical, social and political dimension of the Buddha's teachings, something that is alive and well in the contemporary practices of socially engaged Buddhism and that is a long way from a practice of mere introspection and cultivation of a private 'inner life'. The latter is, according to Walter Benjamin (Hartman, 2007), not a creation of Nature or God but very much "a by-product of socio-economic developments" (Hartman, 2007, p. 65). The hope is that the isolation individuals feel in a society overruled by technology might be appeased by a push-button mentality of instant connection. He nevertheless experiences "Promethean Shame" (Anders 1956) as he cannot compete "with the inhuman beauty and technologic power of

the machines he has invented ... His whole body perhaps is rapidly becoming an appendix, a vestigial concern, a servant to the servant mechanism" (Hartman, 2007, pp 164-65)

But this demands in turn *sameness in attitude* and a high degree of *passive adaptation* which are also, in a sinister fashion, two key concepts of Nazi ideology: *Gleichshaltung* and *Anpassung* respectively. Hartman calls them 'servomechanisms':

Servomechanisms that diminish our dependency on others, on organic types of social cohesion, eventually force us to become servomechanisms ourselves, within some rigid political machine..."

(Hartman, 2007, pp 65-66)

In spite of its avowed good intentions, a de-contextualization of Buddhist mindfulness reduced to a set of technical modalities to be used by a privatized/isolated individual in order to manage stress is a problematic proposition.

Dharma as Pilgrimage, Pilgrimage as Encounter

The exercise of merely recycling a tradition, of preserving the Buddha in aspic, with "all of his wondrous aspects kept intact, frozen in time, the founder of a dead religion" (Lopez, 2012, p. 126) is ultimately pointless if it fails, as Dōgen (cited in Kim, 1975) admonishes, to reach the heart of ordinary people. For Dōgen, practising the Dharma is undertaking a pilgrimage (*hensan*): "not so much physical travelling ... as 'non-dual participation' (*dōsan*)" (Kim, 1975, p. 159). It requires a genuine *encounter* with its embodied teachings. If the Dharma fails to reach our heart/mind, our nominal bond with it may turn into a yoke or a

new decoration to our sense of identity, or more simply into a “worthless pastime” (Dōgen, 2002, p. 15), an appellation Dōgen reserves for the chanting of sutras, mantras and the ritual reading of holy scriptures:

“If you merely raise your voice in endless recitation you are in no way different from a frog in spring field – although you croak from morning to nightfall, it will bring you no benefit at all.” (Dōgen, 2002, p. 15)

The secularization of Buddhist teachings, on the other hand, de-contextualizes them and tailors them to fit the predominant ideology of our time – in this case, Promethean new biology in its current Frankenstein incarnation (Rose & Rose, 2012). In bringing the Buddha up to date and re-interpreting his teachings, something gets lost in translation, their otherness neutralized and neutered, their mythological and poetic force duly bleached and hung to dry.

Of Meditation as an Inglorious Activity

Another sphere that is arguably lost in current scientific Buddhism and its ‘mindfulness’ variations is the ‘sacred’ dimension of meditative practice. ‘Sacred’ here does not mean ‘transcendental’ but expresses the emergence within immanent reality of a dimension not subservient to the utilitarian sphere. In this sense ethics too, at least Kantian, post-Kantian ethics and the continental ethical tradition also share this ‘sacred’ domain. This can be also understood as the dimension of *play* (Huizinga, 1950) and of *practice/realization* (Dōgen, 2002).

Meditation is without justification. Like art, it cannot be 'justified' by "an authoritarian or religious standard, or even by an empirical yardstick, such as the precise amount of ... illumination it might yield." (Hartman, 2007, p. 162). In the *Georgics* Virgil speak of the unjustified enterprise of poetry as inglorious:

"In those days, I, Virgil, was nursed by sweet Parthenope, and rejoiced in the art of inglorious ease. I who toyed with shepherd's songs, and, in youth boldness, sang of you, Tityrus, under the canopy of spreading beech" (Virgil, 2013).

I see the practice of meditation in the very same vein, as something we engage for no reason whatsoever, more an act of giving, of playful absorption than as means to an end, which nowadays is increasingly subservient to a misguided notion of happiness. Playing also questions deeply what is serious and what is trivial, what is marginal or propadeutic as opposed to what is deemed worthy and fundamental.

Winnicott (1971) comes to mind here, with his emphasis on "transitional phenomena" and play and with his deep assertions on psychoanalysis as a highly specialized form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others.

Furthermore, play salvages meditation from the ravages of the religious and scientific positions, both essentially normative and prescriptive approaches.

In terms of practice as the *expression* of realization, rather than means to an end, this is wonderfully expressed by Dōgen in many of his writings: we do not practice in order to attain realization but because we are *already* realized, because practice and realization are not two but one and the same thing: practice-realization (Waddell & Abe, 2002). This entails

embracing the human condition, its inherently uncertain and flawed nature: a compassionate attitude that is far from the prescriptive approach of a reductive understanding of mindfulness.

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