

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: An Application of Buddhist Mindfulness for Counsellors

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### Abstract

In the field of counselling, there has been an increasing number of counsellors trying to incorporate Buddhist ideas and practices into their practise, but little pragmatic resources from the Buddhist framework are available. In response to this need, this paper focuses on the foundational Buddhist text on meditation, namely the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. Original Buddhist scriptures are not easily understood without guidance, thus this paper provide a commentary for counsellors by explaining the relevant Buddhist concepts and practices, proposing a Note, Know, and Choose model based on the *sutta*, and providing a case study to illustrate the application of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* for counselling.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Meditation, Buddhist Psychology, Buddhist Counselling, *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*

## Introduction

Buddhism provides a comprehensive analysis of the human mind and a systematic methodology to eliminate human suffering that has been a mental health treatment for millions of individuals in human history (Epstein 2002). Although there are many different schools and subcultures of Buddhism, all forms of teachings and counselling are congruent with the fundamental teachings of the Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Three Marks of Existence (Lee et al. 2017). The essence of all these teachings describe mindfulness as a central component of a comprehensive spiritual and/or religious practice with the end goal of eliminating suffering (Sun 2014).

Among all Buddhist scriptures on mindfulness practice, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* holds a critical position in both Buddhism and Psychology, as it was the foundation for Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress reduction model (Brazier 2013); it is also one of the most important, fundamental, and structured texts of Buddhist mindfulness practice, one that has been well accepted in all Buddhist traditions (Anālayo 2003). Because of the valuable position of this scripture, the current paper uses the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* as theoretical foundation to develop a Note, Know, and Choose model for counselling. The traditional Buddhist practice assumes mindfulness to be a personal and introspective practice to cultivate the mind and that suffering reduces through the advancement of experiential learning. This paper proposes an application of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* into counselling using counsellors as the guide for introspection in order to provide an alternative counselling method based on the same teachings. To accomplish this goal, this paper will describe the theoretical background in mindfulness, explicate the main ideas of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, and introduce a pragmatic application into counselling.

Several contemporary theoretical approaches and Buddhist-derived interventions, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, are influenced by Buddhism. They may share concepts and practices similar to those delineated in this paper. Since mindfulness is a multifunctional intervention that can align with and enhance many theoretical approaches, some such similarities are foreseeable. Moreover, this paper uses the word “practitioners” to refer to individuals who practice Buddhist mindfulness.

### **Theoretical Assumption of Mindfulness in the Buddhist Context**

The word *satipaṭṭhāna* is a combination of two Pali roots: *sati* and *upaṭṭhāna*. The literal meaning of *sati* has the sense of remembering and recollection, but it is generally translated as “the mind,” while *upaṭṭhāna* means “attending, “standing near,” or “guarding” (Lee 2017). Taken together, *satipaṭṭhāna* refers to the guarding or watching of the mind. The practice of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* teaches the Buddhist principle of Right Mindfulness, a key teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path (Nyanaponika 1988). One major clarification is that being right does not refer to correctness in following the doctrines; rather, it refers to whether the actions lead to wholesome, positive, and conducive consequences. In contrast, being wrong refers to negative and damaging results. Hence, one can make conscious, beneficial choices.

Before analyzing the *sutta*, it is important to elucidate two foundations of Buddhist mindfulness: *Samatha* (concentration) and *Vipassanā* (insight). *Samatha* is the concentration required for practitioners to pay sustained, comprehensive, and deep attention to an object (Dhiman 2008). Through devoted practice, one can expand one’s attention and length of sustained focus, can notice fine details in the object of meditation, can increase awareness of the

subjectivity of how the mind pays attention, can gain knowledge of how the external environment, body, and mind interact, and, finally, can attain a state of absorption into the object of meditation such that there is no longer any differentiation between the practitioner and the object, which is sometimes referred to as “one-pointed” meditation (Bodhi 1995). For example, the beginning practice of mindful breathing helps the practitioner to increase awareness of the sensations, rhythms, occurrences, and other physical mechanisms involved in breathing. When one dwells on the breath, awareness of how the whole body is involved in each in and out breath, how breathing in every second may be a little different, and how thoughts and bodily sensations interplay with breath will expand (Dhiman 2008). One important product of the practice is that practitioners gain a metacognitive view of all the body and mind activities, so that one can respond, instead of react, to internal and external stimuli (Kornfield 2009).

For example, before a practitioner reacts aggressively to an anger-provoking situation, he or she may note bodily sensations such as heat, muscle tension, or sweat, the unpleasant feelings that arise from these sensations, the mind’s habitual interpretation of these sensations and feelings as “anger,” and the mind’s activities, such as anger-provoking thoughts. With the awareness of all these body and mind processes, the practitioner will not be pulled into unpleasant feelings and thoughts, will have the mental capacity to think about the consequences of different reactions, and can consciously choose a more beneficial response to the current situation. Although *samatha* helps practitioners to calm their minds, its primary role is to enhance the capacity of the mind to gain insight. It is similar to upgrading the random-access memory (RAM) and central processing unit (CPU) of a computer to gain stronger processing capacity and a clear and detailed view of all the mind’s activities. In other words, *samatha* alone only strengthens the competency to complete certain tasks, but it is not a task or end goal in itself.

*Vipassanā* needs an enhanced mind, and it is usually translated as “insight” or the “insight into the nature of reality”. Unlike with most theoretical orientations in counselling, there is an assumption of objective reality or universal truth in Buddhism (Dhamma), and this is signified by the three marks of existence: *impermanence (anicca)*, meaning that every phenomenon is constantly arising and passing; *suffering (dukkha)*, meaning that attachment will eventually result in suffering because any object of attachment will inevitably change; and *not-self (anatta)*, meaning that the existence of self is ultimately dependent on some other things that are impermanent and, in turn, that the self is neither independent or stable (Bodhi 1995). As delineated in the Second Noble Truth, attaching, craving, or holding on to things that will inevitably change and disappear ultimately binds oneself to suffering. Truly seeing, understanding, and accepting these three marks of existence leads to ultimate liberation from suffering. Therefore, a core practice of mindfulness is to note, know, and see any one of the three marks of existence because truly seeing one of them will lead to understanding of the other two. However, seeing and accepting this reality can be very difficult.

*Vipassanā* in Buddhist mindfulness is a specific practice to enhance the practitioner’s ability to see the true nature of phenomenon. To practice *vipassanā* is to focus, observe, analyze, and, finally, gain insight. This process is not peculiar or mystical; instead, it is a detached perspective from which to see phenomena (Kornfield 2009). For example, when one uses in and out breathing as a guide to sustain attention, one can observe how bodily sensation, feelings, and thoughts arise, sustain, and dissolve. Breathing is used as an anchor for attention, allowing the mind to examine and investigate its activities rather than being pulled or lured into them. In these mental processes, practitioners can also gain first-hand knowledge of dissatisfaction, contentment, and other conditions that give rise to different feelings, understand the

consequences of thoughts and actions, and make conscious and deliberative decisions after the investigation.

For example, through *vipassanā* meditation, an anxious person can realize the chain of experiences that lead to the arising of anxiety: a thought about stress from work induces stomach pain and expansion, the perception of physical discomfort gives rise to feelings of anxiety, and the person attempts to control the anxiety by ruminating about work, which leads to intensified anxiety and physical discomfort. In such a situation, a counsellor using the Buddhist mindfulness approach may instruct the client to sit with the feeling, trace it back to the interpretation of a bodily sensation, note the chain of activities, and pay close attention to how the processes arise and dissipate. The aim of this practice is to be fully aware of experiences while not engaging, pursuing, or attaching to them (Dhiman 2008). By noting, knowing, and remembering the chain of activities, a practitioner can gain insight into how anxiety is impermanent and transient and how the rumination actually aggregates the anxiety, and then make a conscious decision to not engage in anxiety-provoking thoughts and perceptions (Kornfield 2009). In short, the practice can be described as *knowing* by gaining awareness of body and mind, *shaping* by making positive changes and adjustments based on insights, and *releasing* by freeing the mind from bondage to negative emotional states and using skilful ways to let go of unnecessary burdens.

### **The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta***

The next sections will focus directly on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. The text of the *sutta* used in this paper is from the version translated from the Pali into English by Jotika and Dhamminda (1986). The *sutta* begins with an affirmative statement by the Buddha:

Bhikkhus (monks), this is the one and the only way for the purification (of the minds) of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the cessation of physical and mental pain, for attainment of the Noble Paths and for the realization of Nibbāna. That (only way) is the four satipatthānas (Jotika and Dhamminda 1986, p.7).

The Buddha described the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness as the “only way” to for human beings to become liberated from all suffering (Karunadasa 2013). In the framework of counselling, the Buddha might be describing three common components of treatment: (1) psychopathology as sorrow, lamentation, physical and mental suffering; (2) the treatment method referred to as the four foundations of mindfulness; and (3) the treatment goal being to reach *nibbāna*. The following sections will discuss these three domains.

### ***Psychopathology in Buddhism: Dukkha***

*Dukkha*, translated as “suffering” or “dissatisfaction,” has two levels of meaning. On a basic level, *dukkha* refers to all physical and psychological experiences that lead to suffering, such as pain, aches, depression, sorrow, or anxiety (Jotika and Dhamminda 1986). On a metaphysical level, Buddhism further defines *dukkha* as a universal phenomenon and a common human experience that includes positive, negative, or neutral feelings (Karunadasa 2013). The rationale for this delimitation is that Buddhism holds that all phenomenon have an impermanent nature and, thus, clinging onto these everchanging phenomena will eventually lead to dissatisfaction. Suffering arises from the conflict between the subjective desires of the self and the ever-changing external reality that one clings onto as a permanent phenomenon—such as life, youth, beauty—and, thus, becomes unwilling to accept inevitable changes. From the view of impermanence, birth and death, health and illness, or togetherness and separation are all part of



the everchanging nature of the world, and no single human being can exert control over these unsustainable events (Karunadasa 2013). Denial of or unwillingness to accept loss, fantasizing relationships as everlasting, craving for sensual pleasure regardless of the consequences, or coercing through control to resist changes are all called ignorance and will eventually result in suffering.

When one becomes less attached to personal views, beliefs, and identities through repeated and constant application of the Buddhist mindfulness practices, the sorrow, lamentation, and suffering from the attachment will decrease (Kornfield 2009). For example, if a client criticizes a counsellor for being incompetent and irresponsible, an attached perspective may lead the counsellor to doubt his or her competence, become resentful of what one has done for the client, frustrated at being disrespected, and defensive or even aggressive to protect the self. A counsellor who can attain a more detached perspective will note physical discomfort in the body and reactive thoughts about being disrespected, have a mental pause between the feelings and reactions, have more mental space to consider client's reasons for complaints, and make a more beneficial decision in response.

### ***Treatment Method: Meditation***

In the third paragraph of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha summarizes the essence of mindfulness practice by elucidating its method and core components:

Here (in this teaching), bhikkhus, a bhikkhu (i.e. a disciple) dwells perceiving again and again the body (kaya) as just the body (not mine, not I, not self, but just a phenomenon) with diligence, clear understanding, and mindfulness, thus keeping away covetousness and mental pain in the world (Jotika and Dhamminda 1986, p.7).

First, the Buddha described Vipassanā as “dwells perceiving,” or “live contemplating.” “Lives contemplating” or “dwells perceiving” refers to two parts of a mechanism through which one “lives” or “dwells” when contemplating a specific object of meditation (Jotika and Dhamminda). In other words, it suggests a sense of sustained attention and an attitude towards “the body as just the body.” Living, dwelling, or staying with a bodily sensation can be extremely difficult. Buddhist mindfulness guides practitioners to turn toward and stay with the disturbance without proliferating and fabricating thoughts. This is based on the assumption that most emotional suffering is induced by unnecessary proliferation of judgements, criticisms, memories, or inferences about the future. In the *Sallatha Sutta* (Thanissaro 1997), the Buddha used a two-arrows paradigm to describe emotional suffering: that external events in life shoot the first arrow that induces unavoidable pain, while an unskilful mind uncontrollably aggravates the internal pain, which is the second arrow. It is an inevitable experience in life to be shot with the first arrow, which is the suffering that arises from physical pain, illness, ageing, the loss of loved ones, or other negative life events (Thich Nhat Hanh 2014). However, individuals can shoot themselves with the second arrow by holding perceptions and attitudes towards the first arrow that can multiply the suffering by creating resistance to inevitable events, grasping onto the transient pleasurable feelings, excessive focus on painful feelings, and ruminating and expanding on negative thoughts (Karunadasa 2013). For example, on hearing a loud horn while driving, the first arrow is a strong sound that causes some level of physical discomfort. However, the second arrow might be thoughts of being disrespected, offended, threatened, or accused of driving errors, which instantly gives rise to all sorts of emotional reactivity, such as annoyance and rage. This emotional suffering proliferates and multiplies easily and immediately through the pursuits of the

negative thoughts, which is controllable through the cultivation of a mind to see things as they are.

In a simplistic sense, contemplating “the body as just the body” can be understood as seeing the body without the necessary proliferations of ideas about the body, or to see things as their original form. When the interpretation of the honking driver is the most evil, arrogant, malicious, and raging person on the entire freeway, it is certainly not seeing things as they are. In contrast, seeing how the sound of the horn produced an unpleasant sensation, noticing how the interpretation of the situation through the other person’s thought, noting the mind’s anger-provoking reaction, and knowing the physical sensation of the heart beat increasing and palms sweating, can lead to refraining from negative assumptions and thoughts and seeing things as they are.

With mindfulness, diligence, and clear comprehension, the practitioner can contemplate “the body as just the body” to gain an understanding of the nature of the body (Jotika and Dhamminda 1986). Applying these mental qualities to *vipassanā*, observing the “body as just the body” can be a method to see through impermanence. In the meditative mind, the body’s participation in the in-breath and out-breath becomes crystal clear as the evanescence and inconstancy of the breath guides the practitioner to perceive the impermanence of the body (Nyanaponika, 1988). Whenever distractions to the mind arise, the practitioner will note the distraction, refrain from chasing any thoughts about the distraction, and resume focus on the body. This practice, different from controlling the breath or thoughts, requires letting go of the intrusive thoughts so that the mind can become appeased by itself. For example, to tranquilize a cup of rippling water, attempting to stabilize it by shaking it in opposite directions will only excite more ripples; instead, holding the cup still will gradually let the ripples calm down.

With continuous deepening of one's meditation on the "body as just the body," the practitioner will reach more insight into our understanding of, assumptions about, and the true nature of the body (Dhiman 2008). Notions and concepts (cognitive schema) are formed from experiences interacting with external environments; individuals develop cognitive schemas through assimilation and accommodation. As one experiences the body, he or she tends to conceptualize the body as permanent entities and uniform objects that one lives with everyday. The way that the mind functions is similar to computers, which can perform numerous highly complicated processes without knowing that they are computers since, in reality, they are merely a product of various components and mechanisms. In other words, human beings are usually not aware of what they are and how they function.

In the practice of body contemplation, practitioners may focus on anatomical body parts, experiences of the body (including pleasure and pain), changes in one's experiences in response to different internal and external stimuli, and the interaction between the mind and the body (Jotika and Dhamminda 1986). Again, with clear comprehension, mindfulness, and diligence, one can gain the insight that the body is nothing more than its constituents. The concept of a "body" refers to a collection of organs, skins, limbs, hair, body liquid, and other parts and components with which one's mind identifies (Anālayo 2003). When the mind forms such a concept, the thoughts and perceptions are limited within that concept. For example, when one has a concept of a car, one sees an image of that car, but the concept of a car does not represent the true nature of the "car" itself. When one looks deeply into the body, one realizes that the body is not a unity that exists independently. Rather, it is composed of many different parts, with each body part playing a role in supporting the major system, which is dynamic and ever

changing. Deepening this kind of awareness can help the practitioner to reach more insights into non-self.

### ***Ultimate Treatment Goal: To Reach Nibbāna***

*Nibbāna*, literally translated as “blowing out” or “extinguishing (a fire),” is the most common way to describe an ultimate state of liberation from suffering, according to early Buddhist scriptures (Karunadasa 2013). Since Buddhism holds that the existence of the self is a delusional grasping onto evanescent phenomena, the end of goal practice is to see clearly through the delusion. Seeing the “body as just the body” and understanding that the concept of self is fabricated is to realize gradually “the mind trick” of consciousness as it grasps for permanent conditions (Anālayo 2003). Once the realization of the emptiness of self and all phenomenon has come, the mind will become completely detached from desire and immersed in a state of peace without suffering. Using a psychological perspective to understand *nibbāna*, Johansson (1970) described a liberated person as emotionally free from desires related to egocentrism and attachments, cognitively seeing and understanding the nature of pleasure and suffering, and maintaining minimal survival needs to sustain life. In other words, *nibbāna* is described as a freedom or liberation because the mind no longer fabricates experiences or falls into the delusion of attachments or desires, thereby achieving a deep inner peace.

The Buddhist path to *nibbāna* is a transformation instead of a transient emotional or cognitive change (Kornfield 2009). It creates a systematic alternation of the conscious and subconscious mind, resulting in lasting changes to the perception of the internal and external world. *Nibbāna*, or the realization of non-self, is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path, and the foundational practices of Buddhism appear to be highly compatible with counselling, which will

be illustrated in the next sections. According to the original scripture, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is a comprehensive and sequential system of contemplative practices that can eventually lead to the elimination of suffering through the contemplation of the four foundations: body, feelings, mind, and dhammas (Anālayo 2003). However, the goal of professional counselling is to reduce clients' emotional suffering and functional impairment instead of helping clients to reach Nibbāna and relinquish their attachment to the self. However, the first stage of practice in the *sutta* is beneficial to helping individuals to diminish rigid attachments to the self, thereby reducing their emotional suffering.

### **The Application of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: Note, Know, and Choose**

The essence of Buddhist practice, described in *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, is to train the mind to pay sustained attention to appropriate objects in order to attain a more realistic and objective view of reality (Anālayo 2003) and the goal of treatment is to reduce the emotional suffering that arises from the second arrow. Instead of solely relying on the introspective effort of clients, this model proposes to have the counsellor guide the client in his or her discovery of insights. The practice can be divided into three components: note, know, and choose.

#### ***Note***

To understand how the “the body is just the body,” the practitioner notes bodily sensations and slowly strengthens and expands the awareness of bodily changes through constant practice (Anālayo 2003). An uncultivated mind has a limited capacity to sustain and direct attention and, hence, many bodily sensations become misinterpreted and aggravated through attachment ruminations. By pausing the proliferating thoughts and training the mind to stay focused at the

level of physical sensations, accurately noting the body's actions and reactions can prevent the arising of additional physical and emotional suffering (Dhiman 2008). "Noting" has a binary application in treatment: (1) counsellors can assess clients' verbal and nonverbal reactions in order to guide clients to note their bodily sensations and (2) clients can practice and learn the skills needed to note their bodily sensations as an internal assessment tool for physical and emotional reactivity. Teaching clients to note helps them to track their conditions and notice how different thoughts, feelings, and behaviors lead to different consequences. The noting stance manifests as a fully aware and present mind state that does not pursue a thought or dwell into a particular feeling. It also involves directly turning toward sensations and feelings without distractions, intentional relaxation, or other controls; it is a nonattached way of noting and seeing. When focusing on physical sensations without pursuing thoughts, one can mobilize the mental capacity to observe and know how each thought leads to different physical, emotional, and behavioral consequences (Kornfield 2009). As stated in the previous discussion, diligence is an important ingredient in practice and hence noting bodily changes requires a consistent and repeated effort.

### ***Know***

Along with conveying an increased attentive capacity to note, counsellors can teach clients to know the causes, conditions, and effects of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. To know is to understand, clearly comprehend, and discern the interrelationships between stimulus, bodily sensations, mental processes, and emotional reactivities (Jotika and Dhamminda 1986). For example, a road raging driver can learn to notice how the driving of others induces heat and tightness in his chest; when identifying these feelings as anger, he begins having thoughts about

being offended and threatened, which amplifies the sensation of heat and emotional suffering, causing him to drive with a sense of vengeance. By knowing how the chain of experience arises, the driver can clearly comprehend how a stimulus triggers a chain of reactions, resulting in suffering and unpleasant consequences. When the driver catches the physical sensation in the chest and identifies the anger provoking thoughts, he can examine his initial thoughts and explore alternative perspectives such as, “That person may be in a rush” or “It’s not worth it to race with crazy people on the road.” In the mist of various thoughts, one can see and know how paying attention to negative thoughts will result in more emotional suffering and how alternative thoughts result in less suffering.

### *Choose*

In the Buddhist understanding of mind, mental activities occur in a flash, and an external stimulus can become a highly disturbing emotional reaction in a millisecond (Kornfield 2009). However, embedded in every individual’s mental activities are numerous decisions that the mind has made before the escalated emotion results. With an enhanced ability to note and know, one can put these mental activities into slow motion in order to identify various choice points that might begin to lead to a negative thought, feeling, or behavior (Thich Nhat Hanh 2014). The job of a counsellor is to help clients to identify the choice points in an emotional event in order to increase the client’s awareness of the decisions they have made and to empower them to reflect and choose more constructive perceptions. When a raging driver decides to chase after a driver who has honked at him, he makes a series of decisions to grasp onto the initial thought of being disrespected, to proliferate the thoughts into being threatened and needing to teach the driver a lesson, to generate the intention for revenge, and to implement the response. In this situation, the



counsellor can help disrupt the driver's choice point by redirecting him to note the present moment, reflect on his physical and emotional reactions, process each choice point (from hearing another driver's honking to stepping on the gas pedal to chase the driver), and explore alternative decisions at each point.

### **Application to Counselling: Case Study Illustration**

A hypothetical case study summarized with counselling experiences from actual clients is described below in order to illustrate vividly the application of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* to the process of counselling. In this case example, *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is applied as a secular counselling method that does not require any religious beliefs or values:

Mrs. Leung is a 60-year-old Chinese housewife who was encouraged by her husband to seek counselling as part of their health services. The counsellor is a 32-year-old female who works at a community mental health center. During the initial session, Mrs. Leung denied any problem or disturbance and she described herself as the one who “keeps the family running” and “does everything for the family.” Mrs. Leung presented as defensive and distant, and she often doubted the counsellor's competency to help her. For example, Mrs. Leung asked the counsellor, “I have many more life experiences than you do. What makes you think you can teach me what to do?”

The counsellor has been practicing *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, which helps her to attain a balanced mental stance without imprisonment to emotional reactivity. She notes her physical sensation (heat on her face and an increased heart beat) as well as her initial thought: “Who are you to judge me?” The counsellor acknowledges her unpleasant feelings and focuses on Mrs. Leung's possible reasons for feeling insecure about going in therapy, being ashamed

of coming to see a counsellor, and doubting whether she would receive the services that she really need. Using a calm and neutral attitude, the counsellor responded with a smile, “You are right. I may have one PhD in psychology, but you have 10 PhDs about your life, and it would be my honor to learn from your life experiences. Would you mind sharing more of your story with me?” Since meditation can cultivate the intrapersonal experiences of being comfortable and relatively undisturbed by emotional turbulence, counsellors with consistent practice can give rise to equanimity, which can be extended to their clients (Watson 1998). The ease and respect of the counsellor dissolved some of Mrs. Leung’s defences and allowed her to share her husband’s complaints about her.

After two sessions, Mrs. Leung revealed that her husband’s family sees her as “cold,” “cruel,” and “dominant” and that there were many conflicts between Mrs. Leung and her mother-in-law as well as between her and her husband. Mrs. Leung feels hurt and angry for her husband’s incompetence in protecting her, and the fights she had with her husband usually escalated to her yelling or throwing things at him. Her husband ended up avoiding her, which made her feel more lonely and angry. The counsellor introduces the Buddhist mindfulness intervention to Mrs. Leung and asks if she feels comfortable with trying this intervention. As Mrs. Leung is atheistic but she has a good impression on Buddhism, she agrees to try. The counsellor then teaches Mrs. Leung basic mindfulness skills, including focusing on the in and out breath, noting the bodily sensations and thoughts while anchoring the mind using breathing, and examining different bodily sensations and interpretations in more detail. In particular, the counsellor uses three steps to teach Buddhist mindfulness throughout the next three sessions.

First, the counsellor guides Mrs. Leung to breathe to relax and increase her awareness to a sense of relief while breathing. The counsellor teaches Mrs. Leung to sit in a position that is upright, balanced, and relaxed. The counsellor collaboratively works with Mrs. Leung to help her find her balance by adjusting sitting postures, sensing the center of her support in the back bone, and ensuring that her back is strong and upright while her chest area is relaxed. Once Mrs. Leung finds a stable and comfortable position, the counsellor invites her to close her eyes and take five slow, deep breaths while thinking of filling her belly with air on inhalation and slowly releasing it like air coming out of a balloon on the exhalation, just focusing the mind on breathing. The counsellor discusses Mrs. Leung's experiences and difficulties with breathing and teaches her to mentally note "Breathing in" when she is inhaling and note "breathing out" when she is exhaling. The counsellor then guides Mrs. Leung to refrain from engaging in distracting thoughts for 5 minutes as she explores her feelings from breathing. Mrs. Leung states that she is able to feel "relaxed" and "a little peace" during some in breaths. The counsellor helps her to focus on and sustain such joy in breathing as the major goal of this beginning practice and suggests that Mrs. Leung practice mindfulness for fifteen minutes per day at home. Second, the counsellor proceeds to raise Mrs. Leung's bodily awareness and her interpretation of bodily sensations. After Mrs. Leung meditates for 5 minutes, the counsellor uses the following detailed questions to guide her understanding of the body: What happens to your chest when you breathe in? Does the chest expand when you breath in? What happens to your stomach when you do not breathe in; does your stomach expand when you do not breathe in? These questions can be applied to many different body parts, and increasing details were revealed through Mrs. Leung's increased mindfulness of the body. For

example, Mrs. Leung starts to notice that her shoulders are constantly tightening and that she can intentionally relax them. She also notes how her stomach expands and hurts when she cannot sleep at night. Third, the counsellor prompts Mrs. Leung to notice her bodily sensations during daily life and to choose these as points at which to make different decisions. When Mrs. Leung talks about how her husband's inadequacy "drove her crazy," the counsellor guides Mrs. Leung to slow down and focus on her bodily sensations. Mrs. Leung gradually becomes more mindful of her role in the interactions with her husband. When her husband triggers her anger, Mrs. Leung starts to notice and analyse her bodily reactions (teeth grinding, flushing, muscle tensions, and heat in the chest). She also begins to notice her initial thought, which triggers the chain of anger-provoking thoughts: "He did it again!" Through this exploration with the counsellor, Mrs. Leung realizes that there are situations in which her anger was disproportionate to the minor behaviors of her husband. In processing her feelings with the counsellor, Mrs. Leung realizes that her expectation of her husband to protect and care for her has been unfulfilled for years, and she is deeply wounded about her husband's unwillingness to stand up for her. Through counsellor's validation of her feelings and guidance to see the relationship with her husband from a more detached perspective, Mrs. Leung reaches a radical acceptance of reality: her husband is not a protective and caring person as she would expect, and pushing him to change only causes him to avoid the relationship. With this insight into her husband and the relationship as it is, Mrs. Leung feels more relieved and cultivates more compassion for her husband, who has been pushed and criticized constantly by her. After locating and accepting her unfulfilled expectations, Mrs. Leung learns to pause her reactions whenever she notices the physical reactions in her body and to explore different choices, such as

focusing on the present situation instead of resenting the past and ignoring the continuation of anger-provoking thoughts. Mrs. Leung reports less frustration and dissatisfaction, even though her husband remains unchanged, and she starts to engage in leisure activities.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although Buddhist mindfulness based on the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is not a faith-based intervention, there are important ethical considerations for counsellors wishing to use these techniques. It is important for counsellors to self-monitor their beliefs and attitudes about Buddhism and its Buddhist practices (Lee 2017). According to the American Counselling Association Code of Ethics (American Counselling Association 2014), counsellors should avoid imposing their religious values and biases on their clients while valuing clients' spirituality and religious beliefs instead. Although the practice of Buddhist mindfulness does not require any religious components, clients of different religious affiliations may not accept the concept of mindfulness, knowing that it originates from a Buddhist tradition. It is imperative, however, for counsellors to maintain their objectivity by providing psychological services to clients in their best interests and asking for clients' permission before implementing Buddhist interventions. It is also important for counsellors to seek clients' feedback throughout treatment in order to ensure clients' acceptability of and response to the intervention.

This paper focuses on using the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* to guide counselling interventions and teach clients basic Buddhist meditation techniques instead of teaching counsellors to teach advanced Buddhist meditation. Only skilled Buddhist meditation teachers should teach advanced meditation to students or clients, and counsellors should only use Buddhist mindfulness as an intervention within their scope of competence. Counsellors can foster their competence by

receiving training from a qualified Buddhist mindfulness teacher, completing training courses in qualified meditation centres, seeking supervision from qualified mental health professionals, and attaining additional education and training in Buddhist counselling, Buddhist Chaplaincy, or other related areas of applied Buddhism. Should counsellors observe any adverse effect in clients after practicing Buddhist mindfulness, they should stop their interventions, ensure clients' wellbeing, and seek proper consultation and supervision.

### **Conclusion**

In the current discussion, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* informed a counselling method, but it is not a treatment manual for clients. The goal of Buddhist practice is to help practitioners liberate themselves from suffering, and most of the time, suffering arises from one's denial, unacceptance, or rejection of reality. The Note, Know, Choose model aims to help these individuals accurately see reality and to know, shape, and free the mind from many bondages and burdens that are self-induced. In bridging individual Buddhist practice and counselling, this paper presents a preliminary application of the Buddhist practice in order to help interested counsellors learn the original Buddhist teachings to support their therapeutic work.

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