



Mindfulness and Mental Health in Buddhist Tradition: A Philosophical Investigation

Subrata Si¹ & Dr. Sneha Ojha²

1. Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, YBN University, Rajaulatu, Namkum, Ranchi, Jharkhand, 834010 (India), Email: ssmbelsuba@gmail.com
2. Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, YBN University, Rajaulatu, Namkum, Ranchi, Jharkhand, 834010 (India)

Abstract: *Mindfulness has gained widespread recognition in contemporary mental health discourse as a potentially beneficial practice for managing stress, anxiety, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. However, interpreting mindfulness merely as a psychological technique for attending to the present moment, while detaching it from its Buddhist origins, ethical foundations, and soteriological orientation, risks narrowing its broader philosophical significance. This paper develops an integrated account of mental health through key concepts of Buddhist philosophy, including sati (mindfulness), the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), impermanence (anicca), non-self (anattā), Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati), concentration (samādhi), wisdom (paññā), loving-kindness (mettā), and compassion (karuṇā). Through a comparative examination of selected perspectives from the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Zen traditions, the study argues that, within Buddhist philosophy, a healthy mind is not merely one that is free from psychological symptoms. Rather, mental well-being involves the capacity to recognize the influence of greed, aversion, and delusion; cultivate ethical responsibility; understand the impermanent and interdependent nature of reality; and respond compassionately to the suffering of oneself and others. The study employs a conceptual, interpretive, and critical methodology, drawing on primary Buddhist texts, contemporary Buddhist scholarship, philosophical literature, and research on mindfulness-based interventions. Although contemporary research suggests that mindfulness-based practices may provide significant psychological benefits, findings are not uniformly consistent. Conceptual ambiguity, methodological diversity, commercialization, and the possibility of adverse experiences therefore require careful critical consideration. The paper concludes that Buddhist mindfulness, when integrated with ethical cultivation, wisdom, compassion, social context, and appropriate mental health care, can provide a profound, humane, and complementary philosophical framework for contemporary approaches to mental health. Nevertheless, mindfulness should not be regarded as a universal substitute for professional mental health treatment.*

Keywords: *Mindfulness, Sati, Mental health, Buddhist philosophy, Four Noble Truths, Compassion.*

Introduction: Modern mental health discussions have shifted from symptom management to holistic well-being, defined as the ability to cope, realize potential, and contribute to society (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022, 2025). This positive framework invites constructive dialogue with Buddhist philosophy, which has long centered on understanding human suffering and developing transformative practices for its cessation.

In today's fast-paced, uncertain world, individual coping strategies are highly sought after, yet their popularity should not obscure the social and structural causes of suffering. Buddhism addresses this complexity by viewing the mind as trainable while simultaneously recognizing that individuals and the world are mutually interdependent. Consequently, mental well-being is treated as an integrated concern encompassing self-care, ethical relationships, and social responsibility. Within this context, mental health is not a clinical diagnosis but a holistic capacity for emotional stability, self-awareness, and values-aligned responses to suffering—a view that converges significantly with Buddhist conceptions of mental tranquility.

Philosophically, we must critically examine these concepts. Does mindfulness merely help individuals adapt to adverse circumstances, or does it cultivate the reflective wisdom necessary to transform both habitual patterns and environmental conditions?

In Buddhist philosophy, the path to liberation relies heavily on the purification of the mind through *sati* (mindfulness). While contemporary usage frequently reduces mindfulness to conscious, non-judgmental attention to the present, *sati* carries a much broader ethical and soteriological mandate. It involves remembering ethical teachings and discerning what to cultivate or abandon on the path to liberation (Gethin, 2011). Guided by Right View and Right Intention within the Noble Eightfold Path, Buddhist mindfulness operates within a wider ethical framework and is inseparable from moral consciousness.

Since the late twentieth century, secularized clinical programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) have successfully alleviated psychological distress. However, this clinical application raises vital philosophical questions: What is lost when mindfulness is stripped of its traditional foundations in ethical conduct, wisdom, and compassion? Should mental health be reduced to mere stress adaptation, or must it encompass the moral agency to question and transform unjust conditions? These interconnected questions regarding mindfulness, ethics, and social transformation form the central focus of this inquiry.

Research Questions: The principal research problem lies in the tendency to treat the Buddhist concept of “*sati*” and modern clinical “mindfulness” as essentially synonymous. Such an identification tends to obscure their historical and conceptual differences and may reduce the ethical and liberation-oriented character of Buddhist philosophy to an isolated technique of attention or mental training.

1. How is *sati* conceptualised within the doctrinal, ethical, and contemplative framework of Buddhist philosophy, and in what significant respects does it differ from ordinary attention as well as from contemporary psychological conceptualisations of mindfulness?
2. How do the foundational Buddhist doctrines of the Four Noble Truths, *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), *anicca* (impermanence), and *anattā* (non-self) provide a philosophical framework for understanding the origin, structure, persistence, and possible cessation of psychological suffering?
3. To what extent can contemporary mindfulness retain its transformative potential when it is abstracted from the ethical, wisdom-oriented, and compassion-centred dimensions of the Buddhist tradition? More specifically, does the secularisation of mindfulness preserve its broader transformative function, or does it risk reducing *sati* to an instrumental technique primarily concerned with attention regulation, stress reduction, and psychological adaptation?
4. In what ways can contemporary mental-health theory and clinical practice engage constructively with Buddhist philosophical and contemplative traditions while avoiding conceptual reductionism, decontextualisation, cultural appropriation, and the distortion or misrepresentation of their ethical, soteriological, and religious foundations?

Objectives: The objectives of the present study are:

- to analyse the meaning and nature of sati within the Buddhist tradition
- to conceptualise mental health in the light of the Buddhist understanding of ‘dukkha’ (suffering)
- to critically evaluate the potential and limitations of contemporary mindfulness-based interventions
- to propose an integrated framework that incorporates ethical principles, wisdom (paññā), compassion (karuṇā), and social responsibility.

The present study is guided by the following interrelated research questions:

Methodology: The present study adopts a qualitative, conceptual, interpretative, and critical approach to research. The primary sources include translations of selected Pāli canonical texts, notably the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, and selected Pāli discourses pertaining to the Noble Eightfold Path. These texts provide the primary philosophical and doctrinal foundation for examining the Buddhist conceptualisation of mindfulness and its relationship to the broader ethical and soteriological framework of Buddhist thought.

The secondary sources comprise relevant scholarly literature on Buddhist philosophy and ethics, conceptual and operational definitions of mindfulness, contemporary clinical applications of mindfulness-based interventions, as well as research concerning their methodological limitations and safety considerations.

The methodological framework of the present study operates at three interrelated levels:

[Three-Level Methodological Framework]

Level 1: Semantic & Conceptual Analysis (sati, sampajañña, samādhi, paññā, dukkha, etc.)



Level 2: Comparative Reading of Traditions (identifying convergence and differences)



Level 3: Critical Comparison (Buddhist categories vs. modern psychological constructs)

First, through semantic and conceptual analysis, the study examines the interrelationships among sati (mindfulness), sampajañña (clear comprehension), samādhi (concentration), paññā (wisdom), dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness), taṇhā (craving), and karuṇā (compassion). This level of analysis seeks to clarify the meanings, functions, and conceptual relationships of these terms within the broader framework of Buddhist philosophical and contemplative thought.

Second, the study undertakes a comparative reading of relevant Buddhist traditions without presupposing doctrinal uniformity among them. Rather than treating diverse Buddhist traditions as expressions of a single homogeneous system of thought, the analysis remains attentive to both their areas of convergence and their significant doctrinal and interpretative differences.

Third, Buddhist philosophical concepts are critically compared with contemporary conceptions of mental health on the basis of functional and conceptual correspondences. Such comparison does not presuppose a simplistic historical identity or direct equivalence between Buddhist categories and modern psychological constructs. Instead, it seeks to identify meaningful points of correspondence while remaining sensitive to their distinct historical, philosophical, ethical, and cultural contexts.

Discussions

Sati: Meaning, Nature and Moral Consciousness

The Pāli term *sati* is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *smṛti*. The word *smṛti* is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *smṛ*, which, in its general sense, refers to remembering a past event or experience. In Buddhist philosophy, however, *sati* does not merely signify the recollection of the past. Rather, it refers to the attentive awareness and observation of the body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena as they arise in the present moment, without distraction or mental proliferation.

Gethin (2011) points out that although the modern definition of mindfulness as “non-judgmental attention to the present moment” is significant, it cannot fully replace the traditional understanding of *sati*. This is because, within the Buddhist tradition, the practice of *sati* carries both ethical and cognitive orientations. Thus, *sati* is not merely a technique for attaining mental calm; in Buddhist philosophy, it constitutes an indispensable means for the cultivation of wisdom (*paññā*) and the attainment of liberation.

In Buddhist philosophy, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, or the establishment of mindfulness, is one of the principal methods of practice for attaining freedom from suffering, mental purification, and wisdom. The term *sati* means mindfulness or awareness, while *paṭṭhāna* refers to a foundation or establishment; thus, *Satipaṭṭhāna* may be understood as “the establishment of the foundations of mindfulness”.

[The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*)]

Sati (Mindfulness)

- 1. *Kāyānupassanā* (Contemplation of the Body)
- 2. *Vedanānupassanā* (Contemplation of Feelings)
- 3. *Cittānupassanā* (Contemplation of Mind)
- 4. *Dhammānupassanā* (Contemplation of Dhammas)

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* describes four foundations of mindfulness:

- ***Kāyānupassanā* (Contemplation of the Body):** Mindful awareness of the body, including breathing, bodily parts, and different bodily postures and activities, such as standing, sitting, and walking.
- ***Vedanānupassanā* (Contemplation of Feelings):** Mindful awareness of feelings or affective experiences, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- ***Cittānupassanā* (Contemplation of Mind):** Mindful awareness of various states of mind, such as a mind affected by greed or aversion, as well as states of concentration, distraction, and other mental conditions.
- ***Dhammānupassanā* (Contemplation of Dhammas):** Mindful awareness and contemplation of mental phenomena and categories of experience, such as the five aggregates, the sense faculties, and the conditions associated with the arising and cessation of phenomena (*Majjhima Nikāya* 10; *Dīgha Nikāya* 22).

These four foundations, as presented in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, demonstrate that *sati* is not merely a passive reception of sensations; rather, it involves a systematic and structured investigation of experience.

In Buddhist practice, *sati* is closely associated with *sampajañña*, or clear comprehension. While *sati* maintains awareness of and observes present experience, *sampajañña* provides a clear understanding of the purpose, appropriateness, and nature of that experience. It involves an awareness of what one is doing, why

one is doing it, whether the action is appropriate, and what mental state accompanies it. Such clear comprehension makes conduct ethically informed and purposeful.

For this reason, “non-judgment” in Buddhist mindfulness does not imply the abolition of ethical distinctions. Rather, through *sampajañña*, an experience is observed accurately without being accepted or rejected indiscriminately; subsequently, on the basis of wisdom (*paññā*), one is able to discern and choose wholesome (*kusala*) intentions and responses. Thus, Buddhist mindfulness combines attentive awareness with clear comprehension and ethical discernment.

The Four Noble Truths: Understanding and Transforming Psychological Suffering: *Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*, or the Four Noble Truths, provide a significant philosophical and practical framework for understanding mental well-being. They should not, however, be treated as a form of psychotherapy in the modern clinical sense. Rather, they offer a way to identify suffering, examine its causes, recognise the possibility of its cessation, and follow a path of practice directed towards that end.

In Buddhist philosophy, the Four Noble Truths—*dukkha* (suffering), *dukkha-samudaya* (the arising of suffering), *dukkha-nirodha* (the cessation of suffering), and *dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā* (the path leading to its cessation)—form a coherent framework for understanding and transforming human suffering. The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 56.11) presents these truths as foundational to the Buddha’s teaching.

[Flowchart: Transformation of Suffering via The Four Noble Truths]

[1] *Dukkha* (Presence of Suffering)

- > [2] *Dukkha-samudaya* (Conditioned Arising via Ignorance/Craving)
- > [3] *Dukkha-nirodha* (Possibility of Cessation / *Nibbāna*)
- > [4] *Dukkha-nirodha-gāminī paṭipadā* (The Noble Eightfold Path)

The First Noble Truth acknowledges the presence of suffering in human life. Observing suffering carefully, rather than denying it, can provide an important basis for mental stability.

The Second Noble Truth holds that suffering arises in dependence on causes and conditions. Accordingly, understanding and addressing those conditions is central to its cessation. In this account, ignorance (*avijjā*) is a fundamental condition of suffering, while craving (*taṇhā*) is identified more specifically as its origin in the formulation of the Second Noble Truth.

The Third Noble Truth affirms that suffering can cease: suffering is not the final condition of human existence. The complete cessation of suffering is called *nibbāna*, which is to be realised through direct personal experience.

The Fourth Noble Truth sets out the path leading to this cessation. Its practical expression is the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness (*sati*), and right concentration.

Thus, in the Buddhist understanding, mental peace extends beyond meditation or attention alone. It is closely connected with ethical conduct, wisdom, self-restraint, and mindful awareness.

From a mental health perspective, a principal strength of this framework lies in its recognition of individuals’ responsibility and capacity for transformation without assigning blame for their suffering. A socially responsible interpretation also requires attention to the economic, political, and cultural conditions that shape suffering alongside individual factors. Accordingly, a conception of mental health grounded in the Four Noble Truths can do more than help individuals cope with adversity: it can also guide the transformation of

personal habits, interpersonal relationships, and social conditions that generate suffering, through wisdom and compassion.

Pratītyasamutpāda: A Philosophical Framework of Relational Mentality: One of the fundamental principles of Buddhist philosophy is Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamuppāda/ pratītyasamutpāda). Its general philosophical significance lies in the insight that no phenomenon arises entirely independently; rather, every phenomenon comes into being dependent upon specific causes and conditions.

In the context of mental health, this concept is particularly significant. Anxiety, anger, depression, or attachment should not be understood as isolated or sudden occurrences; rather, they should be viewed as mental phenomena arising through the convergence of multiple causes and conditions. From this perspective, mental health cannot be regarded solely as a function of an individual's brain or willpower. Instead, it is shaped by a complex network of interdependent conditions, including family relationships, community structures, personal and social security, economic circumstances, and cultural factors, all of which contribute significantly to an individual's mental well-being.

In a psychological reading of the Twelve Links (dvādaśa-nidāna) of Dependent Origination, the causal sequence may be presented as follows:

[Flowchart: The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination]

1. Ignorance (avijjā/avidyā)
- ↳ 2. Volitional formations (saṅkhāra/samskāra)
- ↳ 3. Consciousness (viññāṇa/vijñāna)
- ↳ 4. Name-and-form (nāma-rūpa)
- ↳ 5. Six sense bases (saḷāyatana/ṣaḍāyatana)
- ↳ 6. Contact (phassa/sparśa)
- ↳ 7. Feeling (vedanā)
- ↳ 8. Craving (taṇhā/trṣṇā)
- ↳ 9. Clinging (upādāna)
- ↳ 10. Becoming (bhava)
- ↳ 11. Birth (jāti)
- ↳ 12. Ageing-and-death (jarā-maraṇa)

Thus, the Twelve Links do not merely explain the arising and continuation of suffering; they also indicate the path toward its cessation. With the cessation of ignorance, volitional formations cease; through the progressive cessation of each conditioned link, the causal process leading to suffering is interrupted, culminating in the cessation of birth and, consequently, aging and death. In this sense, the doctrine of Dependent Origination provides not only an account of the conditioned genesis of suffering but also a systematic framework for understanding the possibility of its cessation.

When psychological suffering is understood in the light of Dependent Origination (pratītyasamutpāda), it becomes possible to avoid two opposing misconceptions. First, it is inappropriate to hold an individual entirely responsible for their suffering and to blame them for it. Second, it is equally mistaken to assume that the individual has no capacity to bring about meaningful change.

Anicca (Impermanence), Anattā (Non-Self), and Mental Well-Being: According to Buddhist philosophy, nothing can be regarded as permanent or eternally enduring. Whatever arises at a particular moment is subject to cessation in the very next moment. In other words, whatever appears to possess permanence or stability is, in reality, continuously undergoing change. Accordingly, our happiness, suffering, feelings, thoughts, and mental states are all impermanent and subject to constant transformation.

From the perspective of mental health, the significance of the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence (anicca) lies in its encouragement not to regard any mental state as a permanent or unchanging reality. During periods of profound suffering, an individual may feel that “this condition will never change”. The recognition of anicca, however, can help challenge such a belief by revealing the transient and conditioned nature of mental experience. Similarly, an awareness of the impermanence of pleasurable experiences may open a path toward reducing excessive attachment and clinging.

The concept of anattā (non-self) is also significant in this context. The Buddha did not affirm the existence of a permanent and unchanging self (attā). According to the Buddhist perspective, since all conditioned phenomena are subject to change, the notion of an eternal and immutable self cannot be ultimately sustained. Buddhist philosophy elucidates this position through an analysis of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandha)—form (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā), mental formations (saṅkhāra), and consciousness (viññāṇa)—demonstrating that neither any single aggregate nor their combination can legitimately be identified as a permanent self.

This does not imply that the individual or their moral responsibility is meaningless. Rather, the person may be understood as a dynamic and changing continuum of interdependent psychophysical processes. From the perspective of mental well-being, such an understanding may help loosen rigid conceptions of the self, ego-centred comparisons, and defensive psychological reactions. In this sense, the doctrine of anattā does not entail the denial of lived personal existence; instead, it challenges attachment to a fixed and unchanging conception of selfhood.

However, the Buddhist doctrine of anattā should not be treated as directly synonymous with any single concept in modern psychology. The Buddhist theory of non-self is fundamentally embedded within a philosophical and spiritual framework oriented toward liberation, whereas modern psychological concepts are generally formulated and applied within specific theoretical, empirical, and clinical frameworks. Although it is possible to identify certain functional similarities between them, any claim of historical or conceptual identity requires considerable methodological caution.

A comparative approach should therefore acknowledge possible areas of convergence while preserving the distinctive philosophical aims, conceptual foundations, and historical contexts of the respective traditions.

The Noble Eightfold Path: An Integrated Framework for Mental Health: The eight components of the Noble Eightfold Path are also described in terms of Prajñā (wisdom), Śīla (ethical conduct), and Samādhi (meditative concentration). Prajñā signifies knowledge or, more precisely, right knowledge and wisdom; Śīla refers to ethical conduct, encompassing virtuous bodily actions and wholesome mental intentions; and Samādhi denotes meditative concentration, that is, the focused and sustained direction of the mind toward an object of meditation.

[The Noble Eightfold Path Categorization]

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| Core Discipline | Path Factors |
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| Prajñā (Wisdom) | 1. Right View, 7. Right Mindfulness |
| Śīla (Ethical Conduct) | 2. Right Intention, 3. Right Speech, |
| | 4. Right Action, 5. Right Livelihood, |
| | 6. Right Effort |
| Samādhi (Concentration) | 8. Right Concentration |
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Within this classification, the first and seventh factors of the Noble Eightfold Path—Right View (Sammā-ditṭhi) and Right Mindfulness (Sammā-sati)—are regarded as belonging to Prajñā or wisdom. The final factor, Right Concentration (Sammā-samādhi), falls under Samādhi, while the remaining five factors (2–6) are associated with Śīla or ethical discipline and are collectively described here as the fivefold ethical practices (Pañcaśīla).

From the perspective of mental health, the particular significance of the Noble Eightfold Path lies in the fact that it does not restrict mental well-being merely to the reduction of anxiety, stress, or negative emotions; rather, it relates mental health to the integrated development of ethical conduct, emotional balance, self-awareness, mental discipline, wisdom, and healthy social relationships. For instance, Right Intention (sammā-saṅkappa), Right Speech (sammā-vācā), Right Action (sammā-kammanta), Right Livelihood (sammā-ājīva), and Right Effort (sammā-vāyāma) contribute to the regulation and cultivation of an individual's ethical and social conduct. Right View (sammā-ditṭhi) and Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati) facilitate greater awareness of mental habits and emotional responses, thereby supporting more reflective and regulated ways of responding to experience. Finally, Right Concentration (sammā-samādhi) develops sustained mental focus by directing and stabilising the mind upon the object of meditation. Thus, the Noble Eightfold Path may be understood as a comprehensive framework in which ethical, cognitive, emotional, and contemplative dimensions interact in the cultivation of mental well-being.

However, the modern concept of mental health and the Buddhist notions of the cessation of suffering (dukkha-nirodha) and Nibbāna are not entirely synonymous. The Noble Eightfold Path is fundamentally oriented toward liberation and embodies ethical, philosophical, and contemplative dimensions, whereas the modern conception of mental health has developed within distinct clinical and psychological frameworks. It is therefore possible to explore functional similarities, points of convergence, and constructive dialogue between these two perspectives; nevertheless, they should not be regarded as simply identical or conceptually interchangeable.

The Four Brahmavihāras and Mental Health: The cultivation of the Brahmavihāras is closely associated with the Buddhist practice of Right Concentration (sammā-samādhi). The Brahmavihāras comprise four sublime mental qualities: loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā). The systematic cultivation of these four qualities plays an important role in Buddhist contemplative practice and contributes to the development of wholesome mental states.

[The Four Brahmavihāras]

[Mettā] (Loving-Kindness) —————> [Karuṇā] (Compassion)

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v v

[Muditā] (Sympathetic Joy) —————> [Upekkhā] (Equanimity)

- **Mettā (Loving-Kindness):** Mettā refers to the cultivation of a continuous and sincere concern for the welfare and well-being of all living beings.
- **Karuṇā (Compassion):** The quality of compassion is closely inherent in the cultivation of Mettā (loving-kindness). Karuṇā refers to the sincere and sustained aspiration to alleviate the suffering of all living beings.
- **Muditā (Sympathetic Joy):** Muditā refers to the cultivation of genuine joy in the happiness and well-being of others, transcending narrow self-interest and self-centred concerns.
- **Upekkhā (Equanimity):** Upekkhā refers to the cultivation of a balanced and impartial state of mind in relation to one's own happiness and suffering, gain and loss, and other changing conditions of life.

Rather than implying indifference or emotional detachment, it signifies maintaining mental equilibrium while remaining sincerely concerned with the welfare and well-being of all beings.

When these four qualities are considered in an integrated manner, they offer a broader understanding of mental well-being from a Buddhist perspective. Within this framework, well-being is not understood merely as the absence of psychological stress, anxiety, or negative emotions; rather, it also encompasses benevolence toward oneself and others, compassionate responsiveness to suffering, genuine joy in the happiness of others, and the capacity to maintain emotional balance in adverse circumstances. Mindfulness (*sati*) enables individuals to consciously recognise their own anger, jealousy, attachment, and other mental states, while the cultivation of the *Brahmavihāras* provides this awareness with an ethical and wholesome orientation.

Consequently, the cultivation of *Mettā* (loving-kindness), *Karuṇā* (compassion), *Muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *Upekkhā* (equanimity) may transcend the boundaries of individual-centred psychological tranquillity and contribute to the development of a healthy relationship with oneself, compassionate social relationships, and wisdom-informed emotional balance. Taken together, these four qualities may therefore be understood as constituting a holistic Buddhist psycho-ethical framework for mental well-being, integrating personal psychological cultivation with ethical sensitivity and concern for the welfare of others.

Conclusion: This study has argued that mindfulness (*sati*) in the Buddhist tradition cannot be adequately understood as an isolated technique of attention or as a value-neutral practice of present-moment awareness. Rather, it forms part of an integrated ethical, contemplative, and wisdom-oriented framework directed toward understanding and transforming *dukkha*. The Four Noble Truths provide a systematic account of suffering, its causes, its cessation, and the path leading beyond it; dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*/*pratītyasamutpāda*) reveals the conditioned and relational character of mental experience; and the teachings of impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anattā*) challenge rigid attachment to thoughts, emotions, and fixed conceptions of identity. The Noble Eightfold Path further situates mindfulness within a broader structure of ethical conduct, mental cultivation, and wisdom, while the *brahmavihāras*—loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), appreciative joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*)—extend mental well-being beyond individual tranquillity toward compassionate and ethically responsible relationships.

From this perspective, Buddhist approaches to mental well-being cannot be reduced merely to stress reduction, emotional regulation, or adaptation to difficult circumstances. Mindfulness becomes transformative when it is connected with ethical discernment, wisdom, and compassion, enabling individuals not only to observe mental states but also to understand the conditions that generate and sustain suffering. This framework also suggests that psychological distress should not always be interpreted solely as an individual problem, since suffering may arise through an interaction of personal, relational, social, and environmental conditions. Mental well-being, therefore, involves both the transformation of one's relationship to experience and the development of a compassionate and responsible engagement with the wider conditions of life.

Contemporary mindfulness-based approaches can enter into a productive dialogue with this Buddhist framework, but such engagement requires conceptual caution. Modern clinical mindfulness and traditional Buddhist *sati* may share certain functional similarities, yet they emerge from different historical, philosophical, and practical contexts and should not be treated as conceptually identical. A critical engagement that neither reduces Buddhist mindfulness to a therapeutic technique nor dismisses its contemporary adaptations provides a more balanced basis for interdisciplinary inquiry. In this sense, the enduring significance of Buddhist mindfulness for contemporary mental-health discourse lies in its integrated understanding of attention, ethics, wisdom, compassion, and conditionality. Such an understanding can contribute to a broader conception of mental well-being—one concerned not only with the

reduction of distress but also with self-understanding, ethical transformation, relational responsibility, and the cultivation of wiser and more compassionate ways of living.

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