"DUAL AWAKENING?" – MINDFUL SOCIAL ACTION IN THE LIGHT OF THE DE-CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM

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Defining the Problem

The central theme of the paper deals with the idea of "dual awakening", which is based on the Buddhist mindfulness appropriated by socially engaged Buddhism as a method to recognize and implement a "wholesome" paradigm on both the social and individual level. I will be interested to know what the concept of "dual awakening" means in the Southeast Asian context presented by socially engaged Buddhism, and how it is transferred into the Western modernist paradigm.[1] The premise of the research is to ascertain whether and how this transfer (to a large extent) ignored the "dual awakening", individual as well as collective, and whether the central emphasis is shifted from the social action to personal "attention", which means building and/or correcting one's own personality. The research question derives from the paradigm of new religious changes that characterized Western societies in the final decades of the 20th century[2], as well as from studies by Tullio

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[1]   The terms West-East are used to indicate differences based on episteme and geopolitics.
[2]   For more se: Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement, The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996).

Giraldi and Thomas Joiner[3]. The latter, in his book Mindlessness, The Corruption of Mindfulness in a Culture of Narcissism,[4] describes the methods and market niche of modern psychotherapeutic practices and meditation workshops, which confirm Giraldi's initial thesis that it is important to "clearly examine the phenomenon of mindfulness because of the enormous number of books, studies and articles published on the subject – not only in scientific journals, but also in non-specialist publications and media …".[5] According to his investigation, a search of the key word 'mindfulness' in the PubMed database of the US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health shows "there were almost no scientific journal articles on the subject before the year 2000." The number of articles dealing with the topic of 'mindfulness'" then began to rise rapidly: 100 in 2008, 500 in 2013 and 900 in 2017. In 2015 alone, however, the number of articles dealing with the concept of 'mindfulness' grew to 30,000 articles in the general press. The niche that opened up in the religious and health market brought in approximately 1.2 billion US dollars in 2016 alone.[6] We are aware that mindfulness is a difficult construct to define, yet it can be described as a form of participant-observation that is characterized by moment-to-moment awareness of perceptible mental states and processes that includes continuous, immediate awareness of physical sensations, perceptions, affective states, thoughts and imagery.[7] The problem of the practice of mindfulness, in which interest has increased considerably in recent decades and which has moved from a type of Buddhist meditation to completely new secular forms and applications, primarily as a psychotherapeutic method and a means of improving well-being, is

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[3]   Tullio Giraldi, *Psychotherapy, Mindfulness and Buddhist Meditation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) and Thomas Joiner, *Mindlessness, The Corruption of Mindfulness in a Culture of Narcissism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[4]   Joiner, *Mindlessness.*

[5]   Giraldi, *Psychotherapy, Mindfulness and Buddhist Meditation*, 3.

[6]   *Ibid.*, 3–4.

[7]   Mindfulness focuses on number of qualities that include (a) a deliberate intention to pay attention to momentary experience, (b) a marked distinction from normal, everyday modes of consciousness, (c) a clear focus on aspects of active investigation of moment-to-moment experience, (d) continuity of a precise, dispassionate, non-evaluative moment-to-moment awareness of immediate experience, and (e) an attitude to openness, acceptance, kindness, curiosity and patience.

already pointed out in the thematic issue of Poligrafi from 2015.[8] In the process of massive popularization and secularization, mindfulness has been decontextualized, re-contextualized, and often reinterpreted in radically new ways, which raises a series of questions, such as why this ancient Buddhist meditation is spreading so rapidly today, and how different conceptions and definitions affect its applications and goals, as well as the practice process itself and the scientific research related to it.

My brief analysis will follow the following scheme: first, I will introduce socially engaged Buddhism and highlight some of its central concepts, and later move the context of the Western New Age paradigm by reviewing selected research on meditation of/and mindfulness. I will then critically evaluate these findings and place them in the context of socially engaged Buddhism and the imperative of action combined with mindfulness.

An Introduction to Socially Engaged Buddhism

The term socially engaged Buddhism was coined by Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926–2022), a Buddhist monk from Vietnam, who was marked by Vietnamese resistance to the French as well as the Vietnam War, and who has become known for his pioneer work promoting engaged Buddhism and social action. In 1966, he founded the Tiep Hien order (The Order of Interbeing) with the aim to promote active engagement and application of Buddhism in modern life.[9] Thích Nhất Hạnh introduced certain ideas and principles of socially engaged Buddhism, among others a sense of oneness, non-dualism, interdependence, interconnectedness, the understanding of co-responsibility and empathy for all beings, but at the same time the imperative of action combined with mindfulness.

According to his activity and understanding, Buddhism is (and has always been) socially engaged, because it addresses and attempts to over-

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8   Anja Zalta and Tamara Ditrich, ur., "Čuječnost: tradicija in sodobni pristopi," *Poligrafi* 20, 77/78 (2015).
9   For details see: Patricia Hunt-Perry and LynFine, "All Buddhism is Engaged: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West,* ed. Cristopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012), 35–66.

come human suffering. A counter-argument could be that Buddhism is about escaping samsara and not trying to fix it. Socially engaged Buddhists, however, emphasis that samsara should not be understood as a problem with the world as such, but with our individual engagement with it and co-creation of social reality based on our individual greed, delusion, hatred, mental habits, possession and attachments to identity.

Engaged Buddhism adopts the language of modern social and political theory: of human rights, egalitarianism, individual freedoms and democracy, as well as techniques of nonviolent resistance and peaceful protest rooted in the modern era[10]. There is also a global discourse about ecological issues, which adapts concepts of interdependence and compassion for all sentient beings. Whether these developments are simply hybridized forms of Buddhism that have elements of Western modernity could be a topic of a much longer discussion, yet we should not overlook the "mindful" nonviolent, ethical, social and political activism of these movements, which are oriented towards relieving suffering on a personal level as well as on a wide systematic scale. According to socially engaged Buddhists, in order to achieve this, "dual awakening", social and individual transformation is necessary. A number of socially engaged Buddhist groups (such as Fo Guang Shan and Soka Gakkai, and socially engaged Buddhists such as A.T. Ariyaratne in Sri Lanka, Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand, and Western Buddhists, such as Robert Aitken, Ken Jones and Joanna Macy) support the view that social and individual transformation cannot be separate. This position is also the central thesis of our writing.

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[10] For more see: Sallie B. King, "Socially Engaged Buddhism," in *Buddhism in the Modern World,* ed. David L. McMahan, (New York: Routledge, 2012); D. L. McMahan, *Buddhism in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 172; Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism* (Wisdom Publication, Boston, 2003); Christopher S. Queen, "Introduction: A New Buddhism," v *Engaged Buddhism in the West,* ed. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2000); S. Christopher Queen, and Sallie B. King, ed., *Engaged Buddhism, Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996); see also Nandasena Ratnapala, *Buddhist Sociology* (Sri Lanka: Vishva Lekha Publ., 2005); Geoffrey Ostergaard and Melville Currell, *The Gentle Anarchists: A Study of the Leaders of the Sarvodaya Movement for Non-Violent Revolution in India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

Wholesome Self, Wholesome Society – The concept of "dual awakening"

To analyze the initial thesis, it is necessary to highlight some central Buddhist concepts.

One of the key Buddhist concepts is the doctrine of dependent co-arising (*paticcasamupada*), the understanding that everything is a part of a limitless web of interconnections and that everything undergoes a continual process of transformation and relatedness. Since the transformation has to start with the individual, the Buddhist approach first focuses on the intra-psychic change with several ethical virtues that can assist Buddhist transformation processes. They include *metta* (friendliness), *panna* (wisdom) and *upaya* (appropriate means). To these *sangaha vatthuni*, grounds of kindness, the social application of the Buddhist ethical ideals can be added, such as the four principles of group behaviour, which comprise generosity (*dana*), kindly speech (*peyyavajja*), useful work (*atthacariya*) and equality (*samanatta*).[11]

These concepts translated into practice were first presented to me by the socially engaged Buddhism movement Sarvodaya in 2011 in Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya offers new ethical models for peaceful coexistence and new economic and political paradigms for social well-being. It arose in Sri Lanka in 1958 as one the manifestations of Buddhist revival that began in the late 19th century and continued into the 20th century (in the post-colonial period). Sarvodaya had started as what its founder Ariyaratne called "an educational experiment": forty high-school students and twelve teachers from Nalanda College, a Buddhist secondary school in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, went to live and work for two weeks in Kanatoluwa, a low-caste village. The work camp that they formed was called a *shramadana* ("gift of labour"); while working in a low--caste village, students experienced a different aspect of their culture, and at the same time, barriers between the upper and lower castes were

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[11] For more see: Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism, Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); A. T. Ariyaratne, *Buddhist Economics in Practice* (UK: Sarvodaya Support Group UK, 1999); Detlef Katowsky, *Sarvodaya, The Other Development* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980).

broken down.[12] As signified by its name *Sarvodaya* or "the awakening of all" or "uplift of all" supports the idea of "dual awakening", an awakening of both the individual and society at the same time. These two forms of awakenings are integrally related as a dual process in which the liberation of the individual depends upon the liberation of society and vice versa. Ariyaratne presents the idea of implementing the Buddhist Four Noble Truths in a secular context.[13] While interpreting these ideas socially, concrete forms of suffering from daily experiences and directly from the environment become the focus of awakening. Let's look at an example:

The first truth, *dukkha*, suffering or unsatisfactoriness, is according to him translated as "there is a decadent village". Villagers are encouraged to detect problems in their environment, such as egoism, possession, competition, harsh speech, destructive activity and inequality.

The second truth, *samudaya*, the cause of suffering, signifies that decadent conditions in the village have one or more causes, such as poverty, destructive engagement, disease, oppression, disunity, stagnation or ignorance. The third truth, *nirodha*, cessation, indicates that suffering can cease with the use of pleasant speech, constructive engagement, equality egolessness sharing, co-operation, love, etc. The way out of suffering lies in the fourth truth, *marga*, which means solving the problem by means of educational, cultural, spiritual, health-oriented actions.[14]

In his Collected Works, Ariyaratne presents the whole concept behind Sarvodaya activities:

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[12]   After this first achievement, Sarvodaya started appealing people to give whatever they can, their labour, their lands, their skills, their wealth, etc. with the intention to alleviate the suffering of the poorest and the powerless people living in rural and urban communities (from constructing wells to provide drinking water to tanks and canals to provide water for the cultivation of lands for producing food, shelter for people who have no houses to live in, building roads, community centres, schools and such other community facilities in education and health care, even establishing their own banks, etc.).

[13]   A. T. Ariyaratne, *Collected Works*, vol. IV. (Sri Lanka: Vishva Lekha Publ., 1999); A. T., Ariyaratne, *Collected Works*, vol. VII., (Sri Lanka: Vishva Lekha Publ., 1999); A. T. Ariyaratne, *Collected Works*, vol. VIII. (Sri Lanka: Vishva Lekha Publ., 2007)

[14]   Ariyaratne, *Buddhist Economics*.

"When a human being participates in any Sarvodaya activities, his or her primary objective should be to practice the four principles of Personality Awakening, which the Buddha taught. The first principle is loving-kindness (Metta) towards all beings. In the Discourse on Loving Kindness (Karaniya Metta Sutra) the Buddha has taught the importance of respecting and preserving all sentient beings. From one-celled living beings to the most evolved of living beings such as the human's friendliness and respect must be extended. Therefore, anybody joining the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement should a person who accepts the principle not to destroy sentient beings, but to protect all life."[15]

According to Ariyaratne, loving-kindness or *metta* is translated into compassionate action *(karuna)* by undertaking physical or mental activities to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings (whether by digging wells or building schools or helping the sick or educating the children or improving the economic life of all people or teaching the Dhamma to improve their spiritual life). All these actions are expressions of compassion. As mentioned previously, meritorious deeds form a special mental state of altruistic joy *(muditha)*, and over a period of time if/ when human actions are guided by these three principles of *metta, karuna* and *muditha,* such a person can progressively develop a state of mind called equanimity *(upekkha).*

The described Buddhist path constitutes the crucial link between the individual and society in Sarvodaya's whole scheme of awakening and development. Transforming the consciousness of individuals and communities toward compassion represents the starting point in Sarvodaya's plan to transform society and an essential step toward building a just and peaceful coexistence.[16] Social and environmental destruction demands new ethics and ethic consciousness, a new paradigm which deals with the new challenges of postcolonial and post capitalistic societies. Sarvodaya's approach to generate this critical mass of ethic consciousness has focused on the peace meditations (among other things), starting in 1983, when Sri Lanka's civil war erupted with a bomb blast that

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[15]   Ariyaratne *Collected Works, Vol. VIII*, 190–206.
[16]   The two terms that Sarvodaya has employed in its plans are *gram swaraj* – the liberation of the village through the creation of economic and social programmes at the grassroots level; and *deshodaya* – the national and political outcome liberation process.

targeted army personnel who were travelling in a truck.[17] In an interview conducted with Bandula Senadeera, Sarvodaya's international division, "this incident prompted Sinhalese people to destroy the property of Tamil people in the southern parts of the country. Violence occurred in every part of the country and the security forces were unable to contain the further spread. At this point, Sarvodaya intervened to change the minds of people who were engaging in violence, starting by organizing large-scale peace walks with the participation of people from different ethnic groups. The main peace walks originated from more vulnerable places in the country. While nationwide walks were taking place, there were also local level walks happening divisionally attended by eminent and ordinary people alike."[18]

According to him, apart from these peace walks, all members of Sarvodaya individually practice meditation and a number of national-level peace meditation programmes have been held. For example, in Anuradhapura in 2006, there were approximately one million people attending this meditation programme, while in Colombo 2008, there were about three hundred thousand participants. According to Bandula, all the political party leaders were on the meditation stage, including the ruling party presidents, the prime minister and opposition leaders.

Sarvodaya have district-wide meditation programmes covering every single district of the country. There are 24 districts and 24 meditation programmes spearheaded by the coordinators of the districts.

In all, nearly three million people have participated in these meditations. Why does meditation remain one of the key tools or methods of socially engaged Buddhists? A fundamental goal of meditative techniques is to train the mind to disengage from usual modes of thinking, attention and reaction to the object of consciousness. Research on meditation, mindfulness and *neuroplasticity*[19] (in the following we will

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[17]   This blast claimed the lives of nine army personnel.
[18]   The interview with Bandula Senadeera was held a Moratuwa, the Sarvodaya headquarters in Sri Lanka in August 2020 and updated online in October 2022.
[19]   *Neuroplasticity* is understood as the brain's capacity to change. Since the human brain is designed to be constantly scanning the environment and meaning is constructed on past experience, our response to our environment includes applying meaning well before experience reaches our consciousness. Once experience enter the consciousness, further response, interpretation and reaction occur. According to Kristeller, we have much of this

mention only a few) clearly shows that specific kind(s) of mental training can influence how our brains operate. As a consequence, our emotional and mental well-being can indeed be cultivated through mental discipline, which means through the development of awareness and the evolution (cultivation?) of consciousness.

A Brief Evaluation of Selected Research on (Mindfulness) Meditation in the West

Since the 1960s hundreds of empirical studies have been carried out on the range of effect of meditation. Buddhist meditative traditions emphasize that the extended goal of practice is development of empathy and compassion. However, an investigation into the research clarified for me that there has been surprisingly little systematic investigation of the impact of meditation on the traditional goals of practice: cultivation of empathy or compassion. Only a very few studies have examined the impact of meditative practice on these central components of (socially engaged) Buddhism. Mediation in the West or in the so-called global North is widely recognized as a tool to attain a variety of goals: physical relaxation; reduction of stress and anxiety, against depression, improvement in behavioural self-regulation, etc. One of the rare exceptions of the available research on the traditional effect of meditation dates from 1970. Lesh explored the effect of four weeks of Zazen training on 16 master's-level student therapists. They were compared to a waiting-list comparison group and a group of students who expressed

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"self"-centered and self-protective processes in common with lower organisms in order to survive, but we also share with them empathy, affiliation and social processing, which may be hardwired into virtually all mammals as a process necessary for caring for the young (Jean L. Kristeller and Thomas Johnson, "Cultivating Loving-Kindness: A Two-Stage Model for the Effects of Meditation on Compassion, Altruism and Spirituality," conference paper at Works of Love: Scientific and Religious Perspectives on Altruism, Villanova, Villanova University, June 3, 2003 http://www.metanexus.net/archive/conference2003/pdf/WOLPaper_Kristeller_Jean.pdf). Also, according to Eric Thompson, with neuroplasticity we can influence our brain function and development and go beyond our own neurophysiology, so the awakened conscious intention can open up to a transformational process (Eric Thompson, *The Neuroscience of Meditation: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of How Meditation Impacts the Brain* (Awake Technologies, LLC, 2011), https://www.sergioangileri.it/PDFSA/neuroscience_meditation.pdf).

no interest in meditation. Empathy was measured by the accuracy of responses to assessing emotions expressed by a videotape client. Only the Zazen group showed increases in empathy.[20] Within models of self-actualization, a shift from self-preoccupation to concern for others is considered a natural progression along stages of self-development. Yet questions still remain: how did this shift come about? How is it linked to the development of empathy?

In the following, we will look more closely at how the modern studies deal with the effects of meditation and what the central points and the consequences of meditation are.

A review of the literature on mediation and self-actualization in the 90s by Alexander identifies 46 studies that supported the value of meditative practice for development of self-actualization.[21] Without a doubt, this can be linked to the rise of new religious movements on the global scene, whose central goal is individual well-being and building one's own identity.[22]

So-called mindfulness psychotherapy has become one of the predominant representations of Buddhism in contemporary popular religious culture in the West, yet the particular understanding of mindfulness is based on the interests of stress reduction techniques of contemporary Western consumers, not as a technique to attain 'awakening'.

Mindfulness is being incorporated into a wide variety of therapies and interventions. Popular therapeutic approaches in the last two decades include mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Some approaches use various forms of meditation as a method for cultivating mindfulness, while others, such as ACT and DBT,

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[20]   Terry V. Lesh, "Zen Meditation and the Development of Empathy in Counselors," in *Meditations: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives,* ed. D. H. Shapiro & R. Walsh (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine Publishing, 1984)

[21]   Charles N. Alexander, Maxwell V. Rainforth, and Paul Gelderloos, "Transcendental Meditation, Self-Actualization, and Psychological Health: A Conceptual Overview and Statistical Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 6, no. 5 (1991): 189–247

[22]   Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture; Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 42–61; Heelas, *The New Age Movement.*

emphasize non-meditation experiential learning techniques. These interventions focus on therapeutic mindfulness or how mindfulness can be used as a key ingredient of therapeutic insight. Mindfulness--based therapy (MBT), such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (the most famous representative of which is undoubtedly Jon Kabat-Zinn from the University of Massachusetts Medical Faculty) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy have become a very popular subject in contemporary psychotherapy. The review suggests that MBT is a beneficial intervention to reduce negative psychological states, such as stress, anxiety and depression. Hofmann reviewed 39 studies encompassing 1,140 participants receiving MBT for a range of conditions, including cancer, generalized anxiety disorder, depression and other psychiatric or medical conditions.[23] A study by Carson explored the effect of mindfulness meditation in combination with guided mediation on relationship enhancement in married couples. A total of 44 couples were randomly assigned to either a waiting-list control or to an intervention programme based on mindfulness meditation practice. The couples were in generally well adjusted relationships and had been married on average for 11 years. The programme consisted of eight two-hour sessions and one full day's retreat. The practice programme based on mindfulness meditation significantly improved the quality of connectedness, including relatedness to and acceptance of the partner.[24] However, questions about the criteria for the accreditation of using mindfulness in therapy remain for further discussion, with a particular emphasis on who is qualified to offer mindfulness therapy, since a major aim of mindfulness meditation, at least in the Buddhist context, is a phenomenological investigation and understanding of how the mind works. According to Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness is a precondition to attain wisdom (which is synonymous with the understanding of the impermanence, unsustainability and co-dependence of all conditioned phenomena). With attained wis-

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[23]   Stefan G. Hofmann, Paul Grossman and Hinton D., "Loving-Kindness and Compassion Meditation: Potential for Psychological Interventions," *Clinical Psychology Review* 31, no. 7 (November 2011): 1126–1132, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.07.003.
[24]   James W. Carson et. al., "Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement," *Behavior Therapy* 35, no. 3 (June 2004): 471–494, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894(04)80028-5.

dom, empathy and compassion are the logical consequence. As already mentioned, the cultivation of empathy and compassion *(metta)* are fundamental aspects of Buddhism. The basic meditative practice for the cultivation of *metta* is so-called loving-kindness meditation. Loving-kindness meditation (LKM) in Buddhism starts with engaging compassion towards the self, then the focus is shifted to others (to a benefactor, a good friend, a neutral person, to someone with whom we experience interpersonal difficulties, even an enemy, and finally to all beings in the world).[25] LKM aims to develop an affective state of unconditional kindness to *all* beings, since it is closely linked to the Buddhist notion of *interconnectedness,* that all living beings are inextricably connected. Together with loving-kindness *(metta)* and compassion *(karuna)*, sympathetic joy *(mudita;* i.e. joy in others' joy) and equanimity *(uppeka)* constitute the four *brahma-viharas,* which are regarded as four noble states or qualities that can be cultivated. These four qualities form the foundation of the Buddhist ethical system and are necessary to achieve insights into the working of our own minds, as well as the world around us. Despite the existence of theoretical framework(s) regarding mindfulness as such, very little data exists on LKM as a clinical intervention method. Gilbert and Procter[26] developed a treatment method they called compassionate mind training. The treatment consists of a programme of 12 weekly two-hour individual sessions. The therapy targets self-criticism and shame to enhance self-compassion by encouraging clients to be self-soothing when they are feeling anxiety, anger and disgust. The treatment incorporates techniques of monitoring and cognitive behavioural therapy, dialectical

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[25] Beginning with extending compassion toward the self is considered essential for two reasons; first, it engages a sense of inner awareness of those feelings or experiences most likely to block the expression of compassion, especially anger; secondly, it cultivates awareness of inner resources to deal with such feelings. The first is important because otherwise the self may spring back too quickly into a protective mode; the second is important because cultivating the experience of compassion toward the self provides a foundation for extending that sense of love out to others. For more, see also: Sharon Salzberg, *Lovingkindness, The Revolutionary Art of Happiness* (Boston & London: Shambala Classics, 2002).

[26] Paul Gilbert and Sue Procter, "Compassionate mind training for people with high shame and self-criticism: Overview and pilot study of a group therapy approach," *Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy* 13, no. 6 (2006): 353–379, https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.507.

behaviour therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy. Participants reported a significant improvement on self-report measures of anxiety, depression and self-criticism[27]. The limited empirical evidence from the intervention literature suggests that elements of LKM can be trained within a relatively short time. The study by Hutcherson and colleagues suggests that even seven-minute training in LKM can produce small or moderately strong improvements in positive feelings toward strangers and the self. The LKM training period in the other studies with non-clinical populations consisted of six 60-minute weekly sessions. The LKM exercise itself was only 15–20 minutes in duration, although the effects were also modest. In clinical studies, the LKM training consisted of eight weekly one-hour sessions to reduce chronic low back pain. A slightly modified programme of 12 weekly two-hour sessions was employed for treating anxiety, anger, and mood problems. Therefore, LKM appears to have a positive effect on psychological functioning, even after a relatively short training time.[28]

Final remark

These research studies illustrate an association between mediation practice and attaining positive emotions and stress reductions on the one hand, and the cultivation of empathy, compassion and altruism on the other. However, the value placed on cultivating empathy and compassion was not made explicit as part of the goals of participation in the meditation process in the West, where it is mainly forgotten or (deliberately?) overlooked that these practices derive from the Buddhist tradition and that striving for personal well-being and/or wellness should not replace the ethical endeavour to (also) elevate compassion and empathy as a tool for mindful, ethical and compassionate social engagement.

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[27]   *Ibid.*
[28]   Cendri A, Hutcherson, Emma Seppala and James J. Gross, "Loving-kindness meditation increases social connectedness," *Emotion* 8, no. 5 (2008): 720–724, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013237; see also Salzberg, *Lovingkindness*.

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