

An Investigation of Moral Principles and Mental Training in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and Their Implications for Behaviour Modification and Mental Health

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Abstract This article explicates the fundamental moral principles and mental training of Buddhism that have implications for behavioural transformation and mental health promotion. These techniques are considered to be effective for transforming the unwholesome thoughts and overcoming the afflictions (*āsavas*). It investigates some methods of mental training that can be designed to fit the behaviour of a practitioner. It also investigates the three key interdependent elements of mindfulness techniques and, in particular, how a simple practice of mindfulness (*sati*), full awareness (*sampajañña*), and proper attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*) can help us modify our behaviour and achieve mental health.

Keywords Behaviour · Health · Mindfulness · Moral principle · Mental training

Abbreviations

A	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
M	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mil	<i>Milindapañha</i>
Nidd	<i>Mahā-niddesa</i>
Nidd-a	<i>Mahā-niddesa</i> commentary (<i>Saddhamma-pajjotikā</i>)
Ps	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i> commentary (<i>Papañca-sūdanī</i>)
S	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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Introduction

To achieve behavioural and mental health, the Pāli *Nikāyas* have described different practices and methods depending on different factors, such as individual's behaviour, personality, background, and condition. In this sense, the very scheme of improving behavioural and mental health can be termed as psychological, which begins with the investigation of different mental states. The threefold training of morality, concentration, and wisdom can be taken as the most effective methods for promoting mental health and overcoming suffering in life in a skilful way.

In addition, the Pāli *Nikāyas* mention several other therapeutic techniques that include: observing morality to get rid of unhealthy behaviour; controlling destructive and unwholesome thoughts by switching thoughts; reducing desire and attachment through contemplating the impermanence nature of all things, and mindfulness practices (see M I 119–121; S V 353–355; A III 71; IV 357). These techniques have implications for healthy behaviour and mental well-being. It is noteworthy to mention that what the modern therapy is implementing today is parallel to the Buddhist psychology. de Silva (1996, 138; 2010, 102) has suggested that the Buddhist therapeutic techniques parallel to Western therapy to some extent, especially with modern behaviour and cognitive behaviour therapy. There is a growing acknowledgement in various therapeutic traditions that behavioural techniques of the therapeutic procedures are as important as the mindfulness-based techniques. Therefore, all the different Buddhist moral principles and mental training are mutually interrelated and can be applied collectively to solve behavioural and mental health problems. This article primarily explores some of these Buddhist techniques, particularly on the use of morality, and mental training techniques for promoting healthy behaviour and mental health.

The Principles of Morality

The Buddhist behaviour modification techniques generally begin with the training of morality. Morality consists of, negatively, abstinence from the unwholesome actions and, positively, observance of ethical principles (see M I 420). One's behaviour comes under control as well as purifies through refraining from bodily misconduct and verbal misconduct. It fixes the unwholesome actions and upholds the wholesome actions. Through upholding the wholesome actions, one could achieve mental and emotional well-being. According to the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (A I 99), the abandoning of the unwholesome actions and the cultivation of the wholesome actions also bring benefits and happiness and lead to the cessation of suffering. The wholesome actions are said to be born of the three wholesome roots: non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*) (M I 47). They are said to have reduced self-caused and self-elaborated suffering (Kramer et al. 2008, 208). If a person is able to control his actions, he will not be motivated by the unwholesome roots of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) (see M I 47). Consequently, he will be free from unhealthy behaviour and mental health problems.

Among the three principles of morality, the first is 'right speech' (S V 421). It refers to a speech that is right, proper, and kind. According to the *Dīgha-nikāya* (D II 312), it consists of refraining from false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, and frivolous talk. Instead, one should use his speech that is kind, gentle, peaceful, timely, true, soft, connected with

good, and spoken with a mind of loving-kindness (M I 126). Such right speech helps a person to avoid anger, hostility, and ill will. Through refraining from wrong speech, one can live a peaceful, happy, and healthy life.

The second principle of morality is ‘right action’ that is wholesome and occurs rightly (S V 421). It is expressed in terms of refraining from harming living creatures, taking what is not given, and sexual misconduct (D II 312). Thus, it is refraining from wrong bodily actions, which are rooted in either greed, or hatred, or delusion. Such unwholesome roots can affect the mental and emotional well-being of human beings. Therefore, ‘right action’ is the basis of behavioural and mental health.

The third principle of morality is ‘right livelihood’ (S V 421). According to the *Anguttara-nikāya* (A III 208), it refers to refraining from wrong livelihood, such as trading in weapons, living beings, meat, intoxicants, and poisons. The Buddhists are expected to avoid these five types of profession as each generates suffering, both to oneself and to others. For a peaceful and healthy living, one is required to avoid these wrong professions. From the above analysis, we can see that each of these three principles of morality provides support to refrain from the unwholesome actions. By avoiding unwholesome action and living morally, one can avoid and prevent unhealthy behaviour and illness.

Traditionally, the five moral principles that form the Buddhist morality are undertaken by the laities for healthy living and well-being. According to the *Dīgha-nikāya* (D III 181), the five moral principles are abstention from killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, telling lies, and taking alcoholic drinks and drugs that cause heedlessness. These moral principles are connected to human behaviours and make individual healthy. The Pāli sources emphasize abstention from drug and alcohol use because they ruin health of the addicts and create mental and social problems. Moreover, abstention from risky sexual behaviours has health benefits as such abstinence prevents sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV. The Buddhists are also expected to refrain from immoral activities, especially those that affect one’s health and the health of others (e.g. public smoking and alcohol consumption, engaging in illicit sexual intercourse). These principles are regarded as a basis of Buddhist morality, which also helps one to restrain one’s senses. Through restraining the senses, one overpowers the roots of unwholesome and achieves behavioural and mental health. Thus, different types of morality are recommended to different levels of people to suppress internal defilement as well as to achieve behaviour modification and health.

In several places, the Pāli *Nikāyas* have described the beneficial health implications of practicing morality. According to the Pāli *Nikāyas*, morality has the feature of blamelessness and its benefits include non-remorse, which leads to the attainment of joy and happiness. Eventually it leads to tranquillity and insight into the true nature of this phenomenon (see D I 196; S II 31–32). The practice of morality also leads to the attainment of wealth, reputation, confidence, unconfused death, and heavenly existence (D II 86). It is stated that observing the morality helps one to get rid of fear, anxiety, and remorse (M I 17, 33). It diminishes the fire of the three unwholesome roots and lessens suffering. To transform one’s unwholesome actions into wholesome actions, the practice of morality is recommended. Morality not only builds up moral behaviour but also improves healthy behaviour. Hence, it is to be viewed not only in a narrow sense of morality but also from the broader sense of recovery.

Transforming the Unwholesome Thoughts

The unwholesome thoughts agitate the mind and hinder one's progress of mental training. The *Majjhima-nikāya* (M I 119–121) presents the following five techniques for the removal of any discursive unwholesome thoughts (*akusala-vitakka*) associated with the unwholesome roots. Each of these following techniques has to be applied if the previous one fails.

1. Replacing to a different thought: If the discursive unwholesome thoughts arise owing to certain sign (cause), one is recommended to replace his attention to some 'other sign' (to a different object) connected with the wholesome.
2. Reflecting on the harmful consequences: If, yet, the unwholesome discursive thoughts still keep arising, one is recommended to reflect on the dangers or harmful consequences of the unwholesome thoughts.
3. Ignoring and forgetting: If that method fails, one is recommended to ignore the unwholesome discursive thoughts by forgetting or distracting them and not paying attention to them. In particular, one should be neither remembered nor attended to (the unwholesome thoughts).
4. Reflecting on the removal of the sources: If that, too, fails, one is recommended to pay attention on the removal of the sources or roots of the unwholesome discursive thoughts.
5. Controlling and dominating with forceful effort: If that method, too, fails, the last method is to control and dominate the mind with forceful effort, e.g. with clenched teeth and the tongue pressing on the palate.

Thus, one is required to crush the unwholesome discursive thoughts with a wholesome thought (see M I 119–121; de Silva 2010, 103–104).

The purpose of these different techniques is to tame the distracted mind that feeds the unwholesome thoughts. By their removal, the mind becomes unified and concentrated. In any circumstances, these techniques are effective to overcome any arising negative emotions or painful feelings. Through the practice of these techniques, the unwholesome discursive thoughts can be suppressed and gradually eliminated. By applying these five steps, one can change habitual unhealthy behaviour into healthy behaviour. These techniques are also effective for mental health treatment.

It is stated that during practice or any other time, there also arise unwholesome thoughts like lust (greed), hatred (aversion), cruelty, and ill will (A IV 357). To manage such mental disturbances, the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* prescribes five *dhammas*, to be practiced. They are:

1. Having good friends, good companions, and good comrades;
2. Being conscientious in undertaking the training rules, possessing of good conduct and good action;
3. Being able to listen talks that motivate one in the practice;
4. Being determined to arouse continuous energy for abandoning the unwholesome states and cultivating the wholesome states;
5. Developing wisdom by discerning the arising and passing away of all phenomena (A IV 357; see also Bodhi 2012, 1250).

Through the practice of these *dhammas*, the unwholesome thoughts can be suppressed and gradually eliminated. It is stated that when the 'freedom of thought' (*ceto-vimutti*) has not matured, these fivefold *dhamma* lead to its maturation (A IV 357).

According to the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* (A IV 357), the unwholesome thoughts can also be removed by occupying oneself with something else, reciting *dhamma*, reading *dhamma*, examining the parts of an object from his belongings, and reflecting his requisites. Elsewhere, it is stated that in order to abandon the unwholesome thoughts, one should live under the following fivefold *dhamma* supports: (1) living under the guidance of a teacher; (2) studying and teaching the *dhamma*; (3) inquiring into its meaning; (4) listening to the *dhamma*; and (5) inquiring into causes (see Ps II 88–89). The practice of *dhamma* will alone assist to preserve one's good behavioural discursive as well as mental health. By following these methods, one will be able to eliminate the unwholesome thoughts connected with the unwholesome roots.

Furthermore, the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* suggests that every person should often contemplate the following six themes in order to overcome the unwholesome thoughts:

1. 'I am subject to old age; I am not exempt from old age'?
2. 'I am subject to illness; I am not exempt from illness'?
3. 'I am subject to death; I am not exempt from death'?
4. 'I must be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me'?
5. 'I am the owner and heir of my *kamma*; I have *kamma* as my origin, *kamma* as my relative, and *kamma* as my resort'?
6. 'I will be the heir of whatever *kamma*, good or bad, that I do'?' (A III 71; Bodhi 2012, 686).

In fact, various health problems begin to arise as one ages and falls into illness. A regular contemplation of these six realities of life allows people to live without fear and anxiety. Such contemplation is also helpful for cultivating an uncultivated mind and to overcome the unwholesome thoughts that cause mental illness and suffering. Hence, a regular contemplation on these themes is important for improving behaviour and mental health.

Eliminating the Afflictions (*āsavas*)

The *Sabbāsava Sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* (M I 6–12) presents the following seven types of mental training for eliminating the afflictions (*āsavas*) that form an obstacle to the realization of the true nature of things: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self.

1. By seeing (*dassanā*): The afflictions to be overcome by seeing the true nature of things with 'right view' (M I 7–8). As one learns to see things more clearly, his perceptions of self and others become changed. He also sees how suffering arises in response to his grasping. Thus, through seeing one will be able to prevent and eliminate mental illness and suffering.
2. By restraining (*saṃvarā*): The afflictions to be overcome by restraining of the six senses (M I 9–10). It implies self-restraint, non-craving, and non-grasping of the senses. To restrain senses, one is required to control his actions. Restraint of sense faculties lies at the very heart of mental training as the mind is conditioned repeatedly in each moment of experience by the sensory stimuli that arise through the sense bases. Therefore, in order to seek freedom from domination of senses, one is required to overpower senses and attain mastery over them.

3. By using (*paṭisevanā*): The afflictions to be overcome by judicious use. It involves reflecting wisely for judicious use of the basic physiological needs like alms-food, medicines, robes, and lodging (M I 10). In Buddhism, a monk is expected to limit his uses of things and use only the four requisites for living a holy life devoted to practice. He is also required to use his requisites without being attached to them. Most of all, he should use them after making reflections (M I 10). Moderation in all things reduces greed and improves health. In addition, one can prevent disease by healthy living (e.g. eating with moderation). Therefore, one is required to use his basic things judiciously to protect against disease and develop meditation.
4. By enduring (*adhīvanā*): The afflictions to be overcome by enduring the unfavourable conditions that are beyond one's control (M I 10). It involves contemplating wisely and patiently to endure painful emotions and feelings, vicissitudes of life, and unsupportive or unhealthy environment. Kwee (2012, 207) has stated that 'the discipline to endure pressures secures freedom from unnecessary and needless worries'. This technique also relates on impermanence and unsatisfactoriness of life.
5. By avoiding (*parivajjanā*): The afflictions to be overcome by avoiding the causes of suffering in one's (own) way. It is like avoiding certain wild and dangerous animals, dangerous places, dangerous situations, and bad companions, by seeing the imminent danger (see M I 10–11). Here, one avoids unsuitable places, which endanger his life or hinder his practice. According to the Pāli *Nikāyas*, one should find a proper place that is suitable for obtaining the four requisites and meditation practice (see D I 63; M I 33). One also needs to avoid places, situations, and environments that may incite the unwholesome thoughts and create health problems.
6. By removing (*vinodanā*): The afflictions to be overcome by removing of defilement from the mind (M I 11), that is, getting rid of the afflictions through thoughtful analysis or reasoning. According to the *Majjhima-nikāya* (M III 72–73), it involves 'right intention', which is rooted in 'right view'. Thus, the main purpose of this method is to remove the unwholesome thoughts that cause suffering.
7. By developing (*bhāvanā*): The afflictions to be overcome by developing the mind to be calmed and purified, with the support of developing the factors of enlightenment. One can improve his overall mental health and eradicate suffering by developing mindfulness meditation.

The above analysis suggests that mindfulness practice is related to these seven techniques, but most specifically with the first and the last techniques, i.e. 'seeing' and 'developing'. This means that the first and last techniques destroy the afflictions, so that they never arise again. The remaining five techniques weaken the afflictions and make way for uprooting completely (see Buddhārakkhita 2004, 25). However, all these seven mental training techniques involve 'proper attention' (*yoniso-manasikāra*). As the *Majjhima-nikāya* (M I 7) states that the destruction of the afflictions is possible for one who knows internally and sees externally by 'proper attention' (*yoniso-manasikāra*). A complete mental health is said to be achieved when one frees himself from all afflictions (*āsavas*) (A II 142). Thus, it is mainly through 'mindfulness and proper attention' that the afflictions are destroyed and therefore a state of complete mental health is achieved.

The Two Main Forms of Mental Training

The development of the mind is the primary importance of the Buddhist training. The Pāli *Nikāyas* often highlight the importance of improvement and development of mind. It is apparent that the source of suffering and freedom from it lies within the mind. When the mind is purified, body and speech are also purified. The purification of mind leads to the destruction of craving and the cessation of suffering. In fact, the mental purity ultimately helps one to achieve a complete state of mental health. Mind can be purified through the mental training or meditation. It is considered an exercise in ‘metacognitive processes’ (Jankowski and Holas 2014). A constant meditation practice leads to modifications in behaviour and cognition.

The two main forms of mental training are ‘concentration meditation’ (*samatha-bhāvanā*) and ‘insight meditation’ (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) (A II 157). *Samatha* meditation aims at developing calm and concentrated states of consciousness (*jhāna*) for generating wisdom. According to the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 104), the suitable subject of *samatha* meditation differs according to the individual’s behaviour or character (*carita*). That is, the ten bodily impurities and mindfulness of the body are the suitable objects for a person with a lustful behaviour (*rāga-carita*). Contemplation on the four types of divine abiding (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) and the four types of colour *kaṣiṇa* (blue, yellow, red, and white) are suitable for one of the hateful behaviours (*dosa-carita*). Mindfulness of in-and-out breathing is suitable for both the deluded behaviour (*moha-carita*) and the speculative behaviour (*vitakka-carita*). The recollections of the Buddha, the *dhamma*, the community, virtuous conduct, generosity, and the gods are suitable for the faithful behaviour (*saddhā-carita*). The mindfulness of death, the recollection of peace, determining the four elements, and the perception of food as repulsive are suitable for the intellectual behaviour (*buddhi-carita*). The remaining *samatha* meditations are suitable for all kinds of behaviours (*sabba-carita*), namely reflection on earth, water, fire, wind, space, and light *kaṣiṇas*, and the four formless objects [meditations] (see D I 184; III 268; M II 14; Vism 110–111).

The purpose for prescribing these meditation objects according to the different behaviours is to find an object of meditation most suited to each individual aspirant. In fact, the behaviour of person is one of the important factors of good behavioural and mental health. Therefore, one should consider whether his meditation objects match with his behaviour or not. These different objects of mental training are effective in suppressing the defilements, strengthening the behavioural and mental health, and overcoming suffering.

Vipassanā meditation aims at developing wisdom by gaining direct understanding of the true nature of all phenomena (see Fulton and Siegel 2005, 35; Gunaratana 1980, 11). It is based on the ‘right mindfulness’ through which one contemplates rightly. Traditionally, it relates to the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānas*), namely contemplation of the body, contemplation of the feeling, contemplation of the mind, and contemplation of the mental objects (M I 56; see also Payutto 1996, 465). It is believed that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are able to overcome the causes of suffering effectively, through a gradual process that begins with bodily activities (see D II 291; M I 55). However, the four *satipaṭṭhānas* include the practice of both *samatha* and *vipassanā*. One might practice *samatha* until one attains *jhāna* and then develop *vipassanā* following the method of the *satipaṭṭhāna*. These two main forms of mental training, if undertaken correctly and practised frequently, can bring positive changes in body, mind, and behaviour.

The Three Key Interdependent Elements of Mindfulness Techniques

Sati, *sampajañña*, and *yoniso-manasikāra* are the three main interdependent elements of mindfulness techniques. In the description of the *satipaṭṭhāna*, *sati-sampajañña* and *yoniso-manasikāra* have often been used as conjunction. Understandings of these terms are significance as such understanding has a great role on the right practice of the mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness (*sati*)

The term *sati* has been commonly translated as ‘mindfulness’. The root meaning of *sati* is ‘to remember’ but as a mode of consciousness, it commonly signifies the presence of mind, and awareness (see Bodhi 1998, 70). In the *Majjhima-nikāya* (M I 356), sometimes memory is simply referred to as *sati* in the sense of remembering or bearing in mind. Here, we can see a close correlation between these two aspects of *sati*, memory and attention. However, we understand *sati* as ‘remembering’, not residing in ‘memories’. Memory signifies the observation of a present state of mind that remembers (with an insightful awareness) to be present at the present moment of experience. However, none of these words indicate the memory of the past actions or events, rather it indicates remembering to be aware and paying attention to the present moment (see Segal et al. 2003).

Mindfulness (*sati*) itself remembers the objects correctly, when it is developed. Wallace (2005, 15) describes mindfulness as ‘maintaining an unbroken flow of remembering’. This suggests that through mindfulness one remembers the object and bears it in mind. Therefore, mindfulness should be understood as remembering of any object that one experiences during his practice. Anālayo (2003, 58) defines mindfulness as ‘choice less in the sense that with such awareness one remains impartially aware, without reaching with likes or dislikes’. When one is mindful, there is generally awareness in the sense of knowing or experiencing an object.

When mindfulness (*sati*) is developed, following the practices of the foundations of mindfulness, it is called ‘right mindfulness’. According to the Pāli *Nikāyas*, ‘right mindfulness’ signifies an awareness of one’s inner and outer objects, including body, feeling, mind, and mental objects as they appear at the present moment (see D II 314; M I 56). It is stated that mindfulness as faculty includes not only memory or recollection, but also ‘mindfulness and understanding’ (*satinepakka*) (D III 252; A IV 15, 36). However, *satinepakka* denotes ‘understanding’ or ‘being adept’ rather than just remembering (see Cone 2010, 640). The practice of mindfulness involves in developing the wholesome cognition. Usually mindfulness becomes firm when it arises with ‘understanding’ (see Gethin 2003, 42). Mind is well guarded by mindfulness when it is associated with understanding. As a result, the unwholesome thoughts become weaker. In addition, it increases our well-being and allows us to live a healthy life. It is an integral approach to behavioural and mental health.

According to the *Māhaniddesa* (Nidd I 10), one of the main characteristics of mindfulness is ‘reminding’ (*apilāpana*). The *Milindapañha* (Mil 37–38) suggests that when *sati* springs up in the mind of a meditator, he constantly notes those qualities that should be contemplated and shuns those qualities that should be avoided. That is how ‘reminding’ is the distinguishing mark of *sati*. It keeps the mind on the object, free from wandering. On the other hand, a mind lacking of mindfulness does not stay on the object. One of the main functions of mindfulness is ‘having prevention of forgetfulness as its essence’

(*asammosana-rasa*) (Nidd-a 45; see also Cone 2001, 262). When mindfulness is firm, there is usually awareness of all phenomena. Thus, its function is not letting forget of any object. The main manifestation of mindfulness is ‘guarding’ (A IV 110–111). When *sati* is being present, it prohibits the unwholesome thoughts from entering the six sense doors. In the primary stage of meditation, such essence of *sati* mainly helps a practitioner to concentrate on his meditation object by guarding the senses. When the mind is concentrated, the unwholesome thoughts may not find any opportunity to arise. Thus, mindfulness helps to eliminate the unwholesome roots that cause mental illness and suffering.

Full Awareness (*sampajañña*)

Another key element of mindfulness techniques is ‘full awareness’ (*sampajañña*) (M I 57). It involves ‘clear knowledge and understating’ (Maharaj 2013). It signifies the comprehensiveness of the mind and specially concerns to bodily activities of one’s life, even though verbal and mental activities are included. Through *sampajañña*, one comprehends rightly the true nature of things.

For a healthy life and a mindful living, the commentary on the *Majjhima-nikāya* (Ps I 253) explains four categories of *sampajañña*. The first type of *sampajañña* is ‘full awareness of the purpose (of one’s action)’ (*sāthaka-sampajañña*) (Ps I 253). It includes full awareness of the purpose of an action, knowing the motivation behind the action, and understanding the direction of one’s action. It deals with the usefulness of one’s own activity. It is a certain discriminative quality—a skill to differentiate between the wholesome and the unwholesome and between the beneficial and the unbeneficial. For mental training, it is having a full awareness of the purpose and goal of mental training. It is how to keep focusing the mind without losing the object of mental training. In brief, it emphasizes that one’s aims and goals must be rightly directed.

The second *sampajañña* is ‘full awareness of suitability’ (*sappāya-sampajañña*) (Ps I 253). It emphasizes the advantage of one’s own action: adjustment to the circumstances of occasion, place, and character. It also emphasizes the need for a cleaner and healthier environment for the practitioner. Thus, it involves reflecting on the purpose of mental training and considers the appropriateness of the action about what is suitable and useful at the present moment.

The third *sampajañña* is ‘full awareness of domain’ (*gocara-sampajañña*) (Ps I 253). Here, *gocara* refers to ‘a sphere of action or attention, where the mind (properly) ranges and finds sustenance’ (Cone 2010, 65–66). It also refers to place where monks properly beg for food. Anālayo suggests that *gocara-sampajañña* involves ‘self-restraint’ (Anālayo 2003). The four *satipaṭṭhānas* are called the suitable domain of a meditation, in the sense of being the right sphere of one’s action. The progress in mental training usually depends on the suitability of certain practices, places, and times. Most of all it depends on the state of mind during meditation. So, ‘full awareness of domain’ means ‘setting up the direction of the mind’. It implies practicing mindfulness without abandoning the subject of meditation throughout one’s daily practice.

The fourth *sampajañña* is ‘full awareness of non-delusion’ (*asammoha-sampajañña*) (Ps I 253). It directs the mind to know the object of the mental training without being deluded by the habits of one’s mind. Its primary function is to overcome the deep-rooted, egocentric idea of ‘self’ and to comprehend with the true nature of reality (see Soma Thera 1981, 58ff). The primary purpose of this contemplation is to remain mindful always and to prepare one’s mind for advanced stages of mental development.

One should cultivate these four kinds of *sampajañña* through understanding of impermanence in each activity of one's life. Such self-awareness refrains one from the unwholesome actions and assists him to pursue the wholesome actions. Moreover, it helps one to be aware of the arising unwholesome roots as well as one's own physical and mental pain. Finally, it lessens one's suffering and illness. Thus, it helps to maintain a healthy life and alleviate suffering.

The progress of mindfulness is achieved when done with 'mindfulness and full awareness' (*sati-sampajañña*). 'Right mindfulness' is said to be achieved when *sati-sampajañña* works together (Nyanaponika Thera 1996, 29). While in right mindfulness, the mind is more released and able to perceive things more comprehensively. The formula of *sati-sampajañña* is particularly for alertness of bodily activities and they work together in the practice of the *satipaṭṭhāna* (D II 292; M I 57). However, in the development of the *satipaṭṭhāna*, the *sati-sampajañña* is not limited to bodily activities only. These two key elements of mindfulness techniques are the most effective ways to deal with the mental health problems.

Proper Attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*)

The term *yoniso-manasikāra* denotes 'proper attention'. According to the *Samyutta-nikāya* (S V 101), it is a proper reflection of the *dhamma*, which relates to bring about 'right view'. 'Proper attention' (*yoniso-manasikāra*) functions as nutriment for *sati-sampajañña* (A V 115). Anālayo (2012, 196) explains it as a form of 'attention' purposely directed in a manner that is 'wise', 'through', and 'appropriate'. It is the basic inner quality and right frame of mind, which fixes one's attention skilfully to the object by way of source. It enables one to see the things that are worth paying attention to and ignores the things that are not worth paying attention to. It is a skilful mental state, which can be applied to promote mental and emotional well-being.

According to the *Samyutta-nikāya* (S V 35, 101), no other mental quality is as helpful as 'proper attention' (*yoniso-manasikāra*) for developing the noble eightfold path, or the seven factors of enlightenment. It is considered a right means for developing the wholesome mentalities and overcoming the unwholesome mentalities (A I 13). It is also considered an important skill to develop wisdom in the path of the practice (S V 413). Thus, it helps in the arising of wisdom and functions as a bond between mindfulness and wisdom. Mindfulness is always present whenever there is 'proper attention'. They are related and both assist to develop wisdom and overcome suffering.

The end of suffering involves 'proper attention' (*yoniso-manasikāra*) at every action. For it is considered as the main basis for the non-arising of unrisen defilements and for the abandoning of arisen defilements (A I 199–201). The *Anguttara-nikāya* (A I 198) states that paying proper attention on the foulness of the body is useful for ceasing lust, while paying improper attention to an attractive object is the nutriment for the arising and growth of lust. Similarly, paying proper attention to the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness is useful for ceasing hatred, while paying improper attention to a repulsive object is the nutriment for the arising and growth of hatred (see A I 198). Therefore, the type of attention, which is the basis for the arising of the unwholesome roots, should be shunned and the type of attention, which is the basis for the arising of the wholesome roots, should be developed by proper attention. Through mindfulness (*sati*), full awareness (*sampajañña*), and proper attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*), one will be able to live a healthy life even with pain and disease. Therefore, the practices of these three key elements of mindfulness techniques have implications for healthy behaviour and well-being.

The Benefits of Mindfulness Techniques

The practice of mindfulness is regarded as the most beneficial in Buddhism and the Buddha called it ‘the only way’ for the cessation of suffering and attainment of *nibbāna* (M I 55–56). The Pāli sources often emphasize the benefits of mindfulness as it plays a significant role in promoting behavioural and mental health. Among the different forms of mental training, mindfulness (insight) meditation has a unique feature because of its particular value to mental healing. The benefits of mindfulness consist of increased concentration and self-awareness, and the ability to become less judgmental and less disturbed by the unwanted unwholesome thoughts and painful experiences. It helps one to calm the mind and the body. The practice of mindfulness not only helps to overcome negative emotions like anger, fear, and sadness, but also it is effective for alleviating painful feelings. Training one’s mind to be calm can eventually help one to be aware of painful feelings with a better clarity. This type of self-observation eventually helps to get rid of mental illness and suffering. As one becomes mindful, one can become aware of the causes and conditions of illness and suffering. Subsequently when one is able to deepen his thoughts through mindfulness, one becomes more tolerant towards illness and suffering.

Mindfulness is said to be always useful in all occasions (S V 115). The practice of mindfulness can lead to the cessation of suffering by overcoming the roots of the unwholesome. By focusing mindfully on one’s body, feeling, mind, and mental objects, one learns not just to prevent and tame negative emotions and painful feelings, but also to transform the consuming fires of the unwholesome roots and develop inner compassion for the mental and emotional well-being of others. With a serene and calm mind, one faces his illness and gradually regains sound mental health. The usual belief is that the practice of mindfulness can help one to recover losses of mental health, if properly practiced. Mindfulness is a way for both spiritual development and overcoming suffering.

Although mindfulness meditation is a form of mental training, it is also used in many traditions as an effective method of preserving mental health (Shonin and Van Gordon 2016). Today, there is a great interest in ancient meditative techniques like mindfulness meditation. Over the last few decades, mindfulness has also been utilized as a method for overcoming chronic pain (Hilton et al. 2016). Many therapists have recognized the importance of meditation such as mindfulness-based meditation and use it to reduce stress and improve performance (Aherne et al. 2016). It has been suggested that mindfulness-based technique is therapeutically beneficial for treating substance use disorders (Zgierska et al. 2009). It may also be effective for a number of harmful behavioural addictions, such as sex addiction, pornography addiction, and internet addiction. It has implications for healthy behaviour and mental well-being. The healing presence in mindfulness meditation has led us to consider using this practice as a method for achieving behavioural and mental health. Therefore, the practice of mindfulness can be incorporated into the mainstream of medicine and treatment.

It is noteworthy to mention that the above-mentioned different forms of mental training are somewhat similar to those of modern behavioural and cognitive-behavioural therapies that seek to promote emotional and mental well-being, and prevent illness. Therefore, we can see that Buddhist mental training has implications for behaviour modification and mental health promotion. However, in Buddhism, the goal of mental training is not merely the improvement of behavioural or mental health, but to attain *nibbāna*, which brings an end to suffering. Mindfulness techniques enable one to be aware of the true nature of suffering, thereby ultimately leading to the attainment of *nibbāna*.

Conclusion

This article has explored the principles of morality and mental training in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and their implications for healthy behaviour and mental well-being. For the purpose of controlling and preventing abnormal behaviours and improving health-related behaviours, the Pāli *Nikāyas* give emphasis on moral and ethical values. From the Buddhist point of view, the one who observes morality and abstains from immoral or unethical behaviour can be described as living a healthy life. Buddhist moral principles motivate one to refrain from the unwholesome and to do the wholesome. They promote mental and emotional well-being by managing and preventing the unwholesome thoughts associated with the unwholesome roots.

I have pointed out that many of the health problems have origins in underlying factors such as environment and behaviour of human beings. I have emphasized the importance of the surrounding environment, moderate eating, and other healthy conditions of living that promote health and well-being. So, we can see that changes in our unhealthy behaviours and lifestyles can have important implications for health and well-being.

Through a detailed analysis of the Pāli *Nikāyas*, I have explored different forms of mental training that can be effectively applied for transforming the unwholesome thoughts and eliminating the afflictions. These techniques are also helpful for cultivating an uncultivated mind. In fact, the cultivation of the mind helps one to eliminate the afflictions and therefore achieve a complete state of mental health. I have clarified the significance of concentration (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) and, in particular, how these two main forms of mental training lead to improving mental health and overcoming suffering of people.

According to the Pāli *Nikāyas*, mindfulness (*sati*), full awareness (*sampajañña*), and proper attention (*yoniso-manasikāra*) are the three key interdependent elements of mindfulness techniques that can become the foundation for purifying the mind and developing insight. These three key components of mindfulness, if undertaken and practised frequently, can generate health, happiness, and well-being. Therefore, the Buddhist mental training has a therapeutic significance. I have also pointed out the relevance of mindfulness for maintaining a healthy life, and ending of suffering. We have seen mindfulness practice promotes mental health and leads to the development of the various aspects of beneficial relationships, e.g. full awareness, self-restraint, and self-control. Therefore, mindfulness can be seen as conducive to good mental health and well-being, and cessation of suffering.

The probable conclusion based on the facts explored through this article is that the practice of moral principles and mental training play a significant role in promoting behavioural and mental health. An empirical study is needed to further explore the effectiveness of these different techniques. Therefore, I propose for empirical research that we expand our understanding of the effectiveness of these therapeutic techniques in preventing unhealthy behaviour and alleviating mental illness and suffering.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the author.

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