

## **Undermining the Causes of Addiction through Buddhist Psychology and Ethical Mindfulness**

### **Dave Smith: Against the Stream Buddhist Meditation Teacher**

**Introduction:** The English language is rich in many ways, particularly when explaining the features of the material world, but it is remarkably clumsy when it comes to articulating the nuanced terrain of inner experience. This is one of the reasons why the current conversations about consciousness, meditation and psychology in general can at times become rather confusing. As we are now beginning to understand the inner workings of the mind-body process thru cognitive and neuroscience it is quite humbling to see that a detailed and highly developed map of the mind and body as a system of “lived” experience had been delineated by the Buddha and his immediate followers some 2500 years ago. - *Andrew Olendski*

When we begin to study or attempt to understand the psychology of present-moment consciousness from a Buddhist perspective, we need to have a foundation for what it is that we are actually hoping to accomplish. The study of “consciousness” thru the practice of the Dharma is rich, fascinating, detailed, intellectually stimulating and can even give sense of superiority if the interest is merely academic. To begin, I will outline some simple criteria as to the purpose of this exploration.

- (1)** The end result of this exploration is to know stress its cause, its release, and the process that follows. The Buddha himself claims to teach just one thing- stress and its end.
- (2)** The “knowing” of this process is to be developed within the framework and practice of ethical mindfulness meditation, and then applied to all areas of our lives.
- (3)** Study of the Dharma and the practice of meditation should go hand and hand, as one has the ability to inform the other and vice versa. A balanced approach will produce the best result.

**Approaching the Mind:** Dr. Daniel Siegel from UCLA has done a lot to further our understanding and begin to offer some concrete definitions for the word “mind”. Several years ago Dr. Siegel conducted a research project where he interviewed a wide range of people from the mental health field and asked him if they had ever heard a lecture, received any training or took a course that offered a concrete definition of the word “mind”. This is what he discovered.

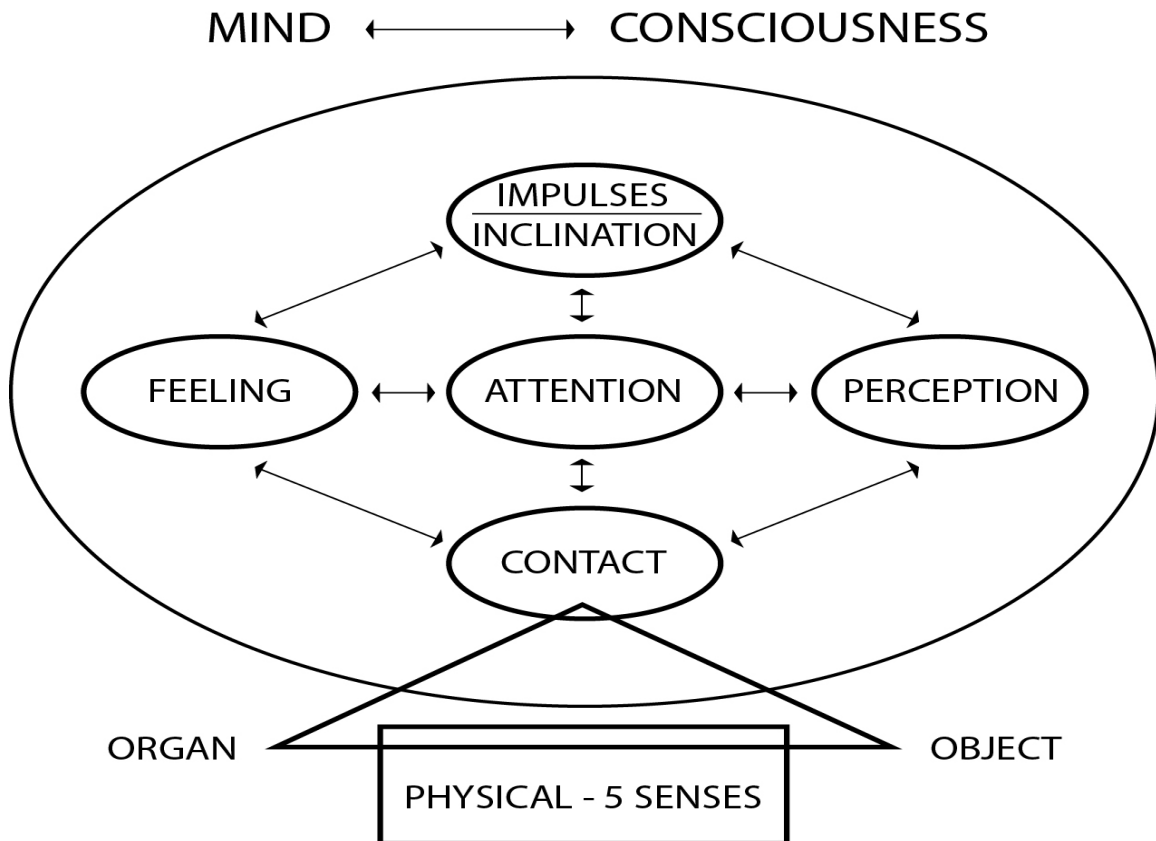
“What I discovered was that the fields of mental health, psychiatry, psychology, social work, nursing, occupational therapy, and educational therapy, didn't have a definition of the mind. We didn't even have a definition of mental health. Over the course of the last nine years, I have asked almost 90,000 officials from every discipline of mental health around the globe if they ever had even one lecture about what the mind is or if they ever had a lecture defining what mental health is. Well over 95% of professionals in the field of mental health don't have a definition of the mind or mental health. I personally felt this was a crisis because after all, if we are mental health practitioners, what is it we are practicing?” -Daniel Siegel

Dr. Siegel's definition of the word mind:

**Mind:** An embodied and relational emergent process; that regulates the flow of energy and information. The mind is a regulatory process that can be monitored, measured and modified.

Below is a diagram of how the mind is described within the context of early Buddhism, which is typically described and articulated as the “five aggregates” or sometimes called “universal mental factors”. This definition is built upon the idea that consciousness begins the moment that an organ comes into contact with an object. The Buddha uses the 5 physical senses but adds the “mind” as a sense gate, meaning that a “thought” is no different than a taste, smell or a sound. The mind is made up of 5 components that arise and pass away in each moment of consciousness or mind. They are: Pali is in (...)

1. Contact (phasso)
2. Feeling (vedana)
3. Perception (sanna)
4. Impulses/inclinations (sankara)
5. Attention (manisakaro)



**1. Contact-with-Materiality (physical forms):** We make contact with the physical world thru the 5 senses. This creates the conditions for c-ness to arise the moment that an organ comes into contact with an object. We can bring our awareness to all or any of these experiences at any given time. Although we see that most of the time our attention is pulled in a particular direction and we habitually follow whatever experience is the most prominent or whatever seems to be the most interesting-or important and so on. Tuning into sensory experience and developing sustained attention is the preliminary tool when developing mindfulness. We are encouraged to fully-embodiment the totality of our human sensory experience. Mindfulness practice typically begins by intentionally placing the attention on the sensation of the in-and-out breath.

**2. Feeling:** Once contact is made a feeling “tone” will arise. We have only 3.

1.Pleasant+ 2.Unpleasant- 3.Neutral 0

This may seem fairly obvious, but with further investigation we see that we almost always reach for what is pleasant and push away what is unpleasant. This is known as the pleasure/pain dichotomy or the law of attraction vs. resistance. Placing the attention on the feeling tone of the breathing body is very helpful because it is almost always pleasant or neutral. It is also always available and “only” available in the here and now. Feeling “tone” can and should be applied to all aspects of the experience: thoughts, sensations and emotions.

**3. Perception:** The role of perception is to differentiate one object from another. It is thru the aggregate of perception that the world makes sense to us; it is where we form “intelligence” through memory and analysis. People commonly struggle to a large degree with perception about past and future, which is the basis for anxiety and depression. Perception will often give rise to difficult emotions and mind/mental states. Based on our moment-to-moment perception we may begin to experience anger, fear, jealousy, doubt and an over all sense of “lack”. Many of us live in what can be summed up as “scarcity culture” which is rooted in the idea and perception of “never enough”. In mindfulness we are encouraged to learn how to question and investigate our perceptions. Are they causing us peace or restlessness? Are they even true? Letting go of the perceptual tendencies of the mind and simply returning to the breath is an important and useful action to take while practicing mindfulness meditation. Most cognitive behavior programs encourage people to question perception; to challenge views, opinions, core beliefs, theories and so forth.

**4. Mental formations-inclinations-intentions:** based on the information we receive from feeling and perception we are “inclined” to do something about what we perceive to be happening. This is what can be called the “to do” mind- as it motivates us to think, speak or act. If we take the time to pause and check out our motivating “pulls” we can actually intervene and take a different action. We see that we don’t actually have to follow our initial reactivity, we can learn to re-train, and we can let go of harmful or unskillful habits and work towards cultivating a better way to go about things. The fourth aggregate is translated from the Pali term (sankhara). Buddhist scholar and academic Andrew Olendzki *explains that the term can also be seen to encompass the majority of what we know as “emotions”*. There has been a wealth of practices and ideas developed

in Western Psychology that address the need for emotional awareness. The Emotional Intelligence movement led by Dr. Daniel Goleman provides a tremendous resource for working with and understanding the emotional landscape.

**5. Attention:** Early Buddhism defines attention as: “making in the mind”. Modern Neuroscience is constantly studying the role and affect of attention. This can be seen as the current crossroads where “east meets west” in the practice and theory of how the mind and emotions works. What we do know is that attention regulates emotion. Attention reaches forward and connects us to the world, defining and shaping our experience. Attention provides the mechanisms that underlie our awareness of the world and the voluntary regulation of feelings and thoughts. Attention defines and creates our reality. It is the most valuable and affective aspect of the mental apparatus, the mind.

**Consciousness:** Simply put, consciousness is the container that holds all of these factors together. From the view of Buddhist psychology, c-ness is an event, it’s an episode, and it arises and passes away one moment at a time. It is not a noun; it’s not a thing. It’s a verb; it’s what is happening. Again the same idea can be applied to mind. It arises based on conditions that allow it to do so, when and organ meets and object.

Let’s walk thru this process.

**1. Contact-** As we begin our practice we come into contact with the felt sense of our entire experience as it arises and passes away. **2. Feeling-** We begin to notice that the world/life feels a certain way to us- (+ - 0). **3. Perception-** Our experience also makes perceptual sense to us- (it appears intelligent)-we can differentiate one object from another thru memory and analysis. **4. Formations-** We are inclined to take a stance or disposition towards all that we experience- (a sense that something can be done “to do”). **5.Attention-** Attention manifests as a “confrontation” with any particular object- it literally means “making in the mind”-its characteristic is the conducting of the mental aggregates towards an object. All of these 5 factors arise together and pass away together in every single moment of consciousness. This is the core structure of what constitutes the experience of “mind” and Mindfulness is the ability to navigate the system.

The practice of mindfulness meditation is taught as a process that balances concentration with investigation. Using the factors found within the 5 aggregates provides the structure to perform that task. We can also bring confidence knowing that these factors are available in every single mind-moment. We can apply attention to connect and sustain with present time experience (contact). As we do this, we begin to investigate the ways we are relating to feeling, perception and formations. In this way, the mind is “relational”. We begin to learn how to navigate the core structure and inner workings of the mind-heart-body-process. Exploring the world and the on-going relationship between feelings, thoughts sensations and emotions.

## **Mindfulness terminology: Awareness and Attention.**

Two key terms that are used when discussing mindfulness are “awareness and attention”. The proper understanding and use of these words is of key importance when outlining the mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness practice instructions will often use the words attention and awareness interchangeably, which colloquially speaking does work, but is not entirely true. In fact, it is better to use consciousness and awareness as synonyms. In application, awareness is wide, attention is narrow, awareness is open, and attention is focus.

In classical Mindfulness training we bring focus and attention to the four foundations.

### The Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

1. Mindfulness of body/breath: sensations
2. Mindfulness of feeling tone: impressions
3. Mindfulness of mind states: attitudes
4. Mindfulness of mind objects: activities

## **EMOTIONS AND MINDFULNESS**

Most individuals who come into a meditative practice thru the suggestion of a mental health professional often struggle, to a large degree, with their emotional landscape. Working with emotions can be extremely challenging, confusing, frustrating and discouraging in the development of mindfulness meditation. The simple development of a skill that leans in the direction of a kind and friendly attitude is of utmost importance even before we begin to attempt mindfulness meditation.

One of the bi-products in the development of Mindfulness is Emotional Intelligence. (EI) is the ability of an individual to identify, assess and manage their emotional landscape. By employing the direct application of mindfulness, individuals can gain better access into the nature of their own emotions.

**Emotion:** A mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes. What we now is that emotions are automatic. The word "emotion" dates back to 1579, when it was adapted from the French word *émouvoir*, which means "to stir up".

Within psychology and philosophy, emotion is the generic term for subjective, conscious experience that is characterized primarily by bio-psycho-physiological expressions, biological reactions, and mental states. Emotion is often associated with, and considered to have influence over attitude, mood, temperament, personality, disposition, intention and motivation. Emotions arise automatically and are often the driving force behind actions and behaviors, positive or negative. The physiology of emotion is closely linked to arousal of the nervous system with various states of arousal relating, apparently, to particular emotions; that is to say, emotions effect emotions. Although those acting

primarily on emotion may seem as if they are not thinking, cognition is an important aspect of emotion, particularly the interpretation of events. Emotions have been described as discrete and consistent responses to internal or external events; which have a particular significance for the organism. Emotions are brief in duration and consist of a coordinated set of responses, which may include verbal, physiological, behavioral, social and neural mechanisms.

**Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability of an individual to identify, assess and manage their emotions. People who struggle with substance abuse typically suffer from a high degree of emotional stress and have little ability in managing emotions. By employing the concentrative and attention training aspects of mindfulness, individuals can gain better access into the nature of their own emotions. Most group exercises work with the 4-stage model: As each individual will vary in ability to access and process their own emotional states. Utilizing mindfulness practice as a process to begin to develop the stages of:

1. How to identify and perceive emotions. (Name)
2. How to access and embody emotions. (Allow)
3. Understanding the nature of emotions. (Describe)
4. Managing the onset and presence of emotions. (Regulate)

It can be extremely challenging for individuals to develop a skill set to work with difficult emotions in the early stages of addiction treatment. Because emotions are confusing and overwhelming it is best to build a framework and vocabulary that is simple to understand. The most reliable and effective door to enter the emotional landscape is thru “feeling”. As noted above, feeling is simply noticed as pleasant+, unpleasant-, or neutral 0. Once the individual can develop the root skill of mindfulness of breath/body they can begin to identify the “feeling tone” of the emotion and learn how to gain access to the emotion without being in such a state of reactivity towards it. Below is a basic step-by-step approach.

1. Developing mindfulness of body/breath for 10-15 minutes.
2. Being able to identify the experience/feeling as being + - or 0.
3. Being able to discern the “feeling” as emotional, bodily or mental.
4. Learning how to access difficult or challenging emotions without reaction.
5. Developing tolerance towards unpleasantness of mind, body and emotion.

The practice of Ethical Mindfulness balances two basic skills. (1). Learning how to find and place attention (2). Learning to adjust, modify, and influence “how” the attention is being placed; emphasizing an attitude kindness and non-harming.

The long term aim is to meet all experience with an attitude of kindness, friendliness and tolerance, to meet difficult and unpleasant experience with empathy, compassion and forgiveness, to meet pleasant and agreeable experience with appreciation and gratitude and to understand that grasping for pleasant and pushing away pain simply doesn't work- its an unsuccessful strategy. The practice leads to a radical acceptance and equanimity towards to mind-body process.

We develop four specific heart qualities in our meditation practice:

1. Kindness: May I (you) be at ease
2. Compassion/forgiveness: May I (you) learn to care about the suffering and confusion in my (your) life”.
3. Appreciation: (self & other): May I (you) learn to appreciate the happiness, joy and success that I (you) experience in (my) your life.
4. Equanimity: (emotional balance): May I (you) learn to understand that my happiness and well-being is dependent upon my actions, not on my wishes.

Mindfulness can also be translated as heart-fullness, in fact that is probably the better term to use. As we begin to settle the mind into the present experience we will want to develop wholesome heart qualities to meet the ups and downs of life. We strive towards meeting pain with compassion and forgiveness; joy, happiness and pleasure with a non-attached appreciation. Our aim is to develop emotional balance (equanimity) with the changing nature of our physical, mental and emotion experience; mindfulness that is infused with an attitude of kindness and friendliness.

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[www.againstthestreamnashville.com](http://www.againstthestreamnashville.com)

[www.againstthestream.org](http://www.againstthestream.org)

For more info on Emotional Intelligence and Mindfulness: [www.morethansound.net](http://www.morethansound.net)

For more info on Daniel Siegel: [www.mindsightinstitute.com](http://www.mindsightinstitute.com)

Resources for Dharma talks: [www.dharmaseed.org](http://www.dharmaseed.org)

Dave Smith, a Buddhist meditation teacher and addiction treatment specialist was trained to teach meditation by Noah Levine, founder of Against the Stream Buddhist Meditation Society and received training in Buddhist psychology from the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies (BCBS). As a long-time Buddhist practitioner and recovering addict, he has been working closely with recovering addicts for the past six years. During which time he operated intensive programs and trainings as the local director for the Mind Body Awareness Project (MBA). Dave has extensive experience bringing meditative interventions into jails, prisons, youth detention centers and addiction treatment facilities. He is the guiding teacher and program director of the Against the Stream Nashville Meditation Center and teaches over 300 meditation classes and workshops a year. He provides direct services for Mental Health Agencies, Community Colleges, Public Libraries, and he speaks nationally at Addiction and Behavioral Health Conferences.