

# Changing Perceptions of Buddhist Meditation in the West<sup>1</sup>

Sarah Shaw<sup>2</sup>



Recently, a gap-year student from England wrote about her travelling experiences in *The Times*:

I found myself with no money, no friends and a large dose of homesickness, and ended up staying in a Buddhist monastery in Bangkok for six weeks. I lived with the monks, meditating for eight hours a day. And, to my surprise, this turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened to me.....in the monastery, with no other option but to sit and at least try to meditate, I slowly found that I could sit for longer and longer, sometimes more than an hour. And I began to feel clean

<sup>1</sup> This article is mainly based on the paper presented at international conference co-hosted by Mahamakut Buddhist University and the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Bangkok on the occasion of the ninety-sixth birthday of His Holiness Somdet Phra Nyanasamvara, Sākala mahā sangha Parināyaka Saṅgharāja, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, in October 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Sarah Shaw holds a PhD in English literature from Manchester University and studied Pali and Sanskrit under Prof. Richard Gombrich at Oxford and Samatha meditation under Nai Boonman and Lance Cousins. Author of *Buddhist Meditation: An anthology of texts from the Pali cannon* (Routledge: 2006) and *Introduction to Buddhist Meditation* (Routledge: 2008), she teaches Buddhism at the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Oxford, UK.



and refreshed afterwards, as if I had bathed in a cool sea.... Since I returned from Thailand I've been living and working in London. Life is fun and exciting (mostly) and always busy. But somehow, between the traffic and the parties and running for the bus, I've managed to keep meditating. I don't practise every day, but I try to find time because it boosts my self-esteem and when I have a problem, it helps me to deal with it.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that this girl's account is reported so easily and naturally in a mainstream British newspaper is a reflection of a changed attitude towards Buddhist meditation in Britain over the last twenty years. Indeed during the article the girl says her mother also meditates, making her also a representative of a rather new phenomenon, an English second-generation contact with the Buddhist tradition. For at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Buddhist ideas and practices are now considered acceptable and even actively desirable within many spheres of popular, public, religious and private life.

'Perceptions' at every level are difficult to quantify, but this paper explores some ways meditation – or in a broader sense, *bhāvanā* – is being talked about, described, researched, tested, investigated and, most importantly, practised in Britain. The twenty-first century brings conditions unfamiliar for both Thailand and the North Atlantic world, with shared problems that have prompted a new sense of global interconnectedness. Fortunately the subject of mutual influences is now so large that a general survey of Western encounters with Buddhism would be impossible in one article. So the emphasis in this paper is on Britain and the impact of Southern Buddhism: the survey will, however, draw in a wider sense upon the way Buddhist traditions have impinged upon various aspects of culture of the United Kingdom, with some reference to other Western countries where appropriate. After a brief survey of the historical background, various areas of 'perception' will be discussed: the popular, the psychological, the psychotherapeutic, the medical, the neuroscientific, the academic and the educational. The paper finishes with personal 'perceptions', comment from those who practise meditation in Theravādin traditions.

<sup>3</sup> Clara Tait, speaking to Harriet Addison, in 'Why I stopped partying for meditation', *The Times*, July 26, 2008, recorded on Times Online (2008): [http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/body\\_and\\_soul/article4397576.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/body_and_soul/article4397576.ece).



## The historical background

Over the last thirty years study of the history of Western encounters with Buddhism has extended and matured. So it will be helpful to review this research, before considering the relatively new phenomenon within Britain and the West of the practice of Buddhist meditation. Robert Bluck's study of contemporary Buddhism in Britain notes that two hundred years ago, although contact with what we would call now 'Buddhist regions' had been going on intermittently for centuries, most people in Western Europe had never heard the word 'Buddha': the term 'Budun' first enters an encyclopaedia in the early nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Nor was there any understanding of the idea of meditation as it is described in a Buddhist context.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as a number of scholars have observed, this century, for all its problems, saw the start of a global appreciation of the traditions and the emergence in Britain and the West of a love of Buddhism, its textual traditions, its languages, and history and even by the end of the nineteenth century, its practices.<sup>6</sup> Through the Victorian period, as translation work was undertaken, words associated with Buddhism started to seep into English dictionaries: karma in 1827, nirvana in 1836, eightfold path in 1845, bhikkhu in 1846, arahat in 1850 and sangha in 1858 (Bluck 2008: 5). The Buddha also started to be taken seriously in the 1850s as a historical figure, with a lifestory that could be assessed and reconstructed from the texts: as Charles Allen's work *The Buddha and the Sahibs* (2002) demonstrates, many amongst the British populace, despite the policies of their government, were also being beguiled by archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic discoveries in India and Sri Lanka relating to early Buddhism. The stories of various British civil and public servants, such as James Prinsep (1799–1840), T.W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922) and R.C. Childers (1838–1876), who developed a passion for working with languages such as Pāli, the early Prakrits and Sanskrit, have now become legendary. Their work, as well as that of others visiting South and Southeast Asia, was instrumental

<sup>4</sup> For these and other dates of the emergence of Buddhist terms within British dictionaries, see Bluck 2008. His work gives an invaluable analytic overview to the way Buddhist practitioner groups are working in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

<sup>5</sup> On bhāvanā in Buddhism see Gethin (1998): 174ff.

<sup>6</sup> See, in particular, Harris (2009) and Allen (2002). The literature on this interchange is now extensive: see for varied comment and historical research Allen (2002), Batchelor (1994), Harvey (1990) 300ff, MacMahan (2008), Prebish and Baumann ed. (2002), Shaw (2006) 'Buddhist Meditation Practices in the West', in particular p. 10, n.11:

[http://www.vesakday.net/vesak49/article/pdf/Meditation\\_Practice\\_in\\_the\\_West.pdf](http://www.vesakday.net/vesak49/article/pdf/Meditation_Practice_in_the_West.pdf)

in bringing ancient texts to the global intellectual environment: they effected a rediscovery of Buddhism within its homeland, India, and, through the contagious enthusiasm of their scholarly and ethnographic discoveries, also ensured that Buddhist teachings, stories and inspiration were communicated at a popular level to those in the Western world. Edwin Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia*, (1879), the foundation of the Pali Text Society and continued contact with South and Southeast Asia helped to kindle a now often unrecognized passion amongst the intelligentsia for philosophical speculation about Eastern thought. As Elizabeth Harris has indicated in her work on colonialism in Sri Lanka, this was complex and far-reaching, with influences working in a number of ways between various parties (2009). Interest in Britain led to, for instance, popular articles on karma and rebirth in periodicals and short stories – often admittedly of a highly sensational kind – about reincarnation and Eastern religion.<sup>7</sup> These were read by newly-educated classes across the Western world able to take advantage of cheaper printing and distribution rates. This readership constituted an informed and curious public hungry for a new source of wisdom and ideas: the mystery of 'otherness' attributed to the East did include a genuine if bemused awe for its spiritual heritage.

Indeed when considering the difficult interchange between these loosely designated areas, a number of recent works have drawn attention to the great appeal of Eastern philosophy in the West: in Britain the possibility of reincarnation and spiritual development undertaken over many lives proved an attractive idea, as evinced by Edwin Arnold's son's novel, *Phra the Phoenician*, written in 1890, the work of Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933), the esoteric Buddhism described and promulgated by A.P.Sinnott (1840–1921) and Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891) and the popularity of the Sacred Texts series and Pāli collections such as the *Jātaka* stories: these, because so new to the West, were appreciated and read by British intelligentsia with an enthusiasm which has perhaps never been matched since.<sup>8</sup> All of these areas of interest and research laid the foundation for the development of twentieth-century philological, cultural and

<sup>7</sup> See Patterson (1857) Neale (1860) and Sinnott (1883). See also Edwin Arnold's introduction to *Phra the Phoenician*, which appeared as 'An Informal Introduction', in 1898 in *The Windsor Magazine* IX: 58–60 and was used as a preface to the 1913 edition of the novel. For a general study of this fascinating period see Harris (2009).

<sup>8</sup> See, in particular, Cousins (1994).



straightforwardly experiential research into Buddhist meditative traditions.

By 1913, just before the outset of World War 1, major work had been undertaken in the translation, adaptation and interpretation of Southern Buddhist texts and a trickle of Westerners had even become Buddhist monks. These admittedly modest beginnings ensured that some of their work took root in ways that are flourishing now. Rhys Davids founded the Buddhist Society for the first time in 1907: although its career has been broken, this continues as a hub for Buddhist groups in Britain, and, with its central London location, acts as a focus and meeting place for Buddhist groups from throughout the United Kingdom.<sup>9</sup> In 1930 the Meditation Group was started under its auspices. The Western monk, Ven. Metteyya, (C.H.A. Bennett), was ordained as a bhikkhu in 1908, and he described his experiences in meditation, that included for instance, the recollection of past lives as a meditative training, to audiences in London and in articles in the early periodical the *Buddhist Review* (Metteyya 1915). An audience of about a thousand people of completely mixed ethnicity, with dozens of representatives of the saṅgha in Britain attended a celebration of his life and work in Brent in West London in 2008. The Pali Text society, founded in 1881, continues its work, presenting and publishing scholarly discussion of Pali Texts. I do not think any such organization exists anywhere else in the world, a curious byproduct of Britain's often unhappy, but occasionally fruitful contacts with Southeast and South Asia in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

So what can we say about the years 2009-2010 in the West? What development has occurred in the understanding of Buddhism in the twentieth century? The nineteenth century saw the groundwork undertaken in scholarship that allowed Buddhist texts to be appreciated and understood. But it has been the meditative tradition that has been the striking and transformatory feature of British and Western interest in the Buddhism in the twentieth century. This legacy, at the beginning of the twenty-first, has started to take root in all areas of society, and is being gradually explored and integrated within a culture increasingly

<sup>9</sup> For more details of the British Buddhist society, which gives its foundation as 1924, see (2009) <http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> For further history and detail of modern projects, see 'The Pali Text Society Homepage' (2010): <http://www.palitext.com/>.



looking to Buddhism for ways not only of interpreting events in the mind and body, for which it had no satisfactory language before, but also for practicing and behaving in response to them.

### **Meditation in the twentieth century onwards**

The roots of interest in Buddhist meditative practice can be traced to the nineteenth century, but two world wars left their scars on intellectual and spiritual explorations in the field. By the 1950s however, the situation was changing and, as Bluck notes, by this time most of the major Buddhist traditions had small but keen groups of practitioners: 'The pattern of Buddhism in Britain between 1945 and 1965 is of gradually increasing complexity.' (Bluck 2008: 10). With the popularization of Zen Buddhism by Beat poets and writers in the fifties, the move to Eastern philosophies amongst the young in the sixties and seventies, and the continued contact between the cultures concerned, a growing interest in the study of the mind and ways in which psychological and psychotherapeutic understanding could be enriched by Buddhism started to percolate through to the academic environment and popular culture. Membership of Buddhist groups grew dramatically, so that although the proportion of the populace who practiced Buddhism was still tiny, the presence of these scattered representatives of Buddhist practice in some way acted as a reassurance and a conduit for making Buddhism at least mildly acceptable and 'normal' within British culture.<sup>11</sup> Over a period of time articles on Buddhism, meditation and various ways of alleviating what we like to call 'stress' and 'tension', modern articulations for phenomena early Buddhists called 'hindrances', or perhaps simply '*dukkha*', became absorbed into the mainstream culture, in magazine articles, television programmes and popular reading.<sup>12</sup> The idea of 'meditation' has been so deeply absorbed into popular culture as a byword for relaxation, that the usual way to describe activities perceived as being absorbing and restorative is that they are 'like a meditation'.<sup>13</sup> And although of course not always Buddhist,

<sup>11</sup> A good general survey on the scope of Buddhist traditions now practiced in Western countries is given in Wallace, B.A. (2002) 'The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West':

<http://www.alanwallace.org/The%20Spectrum%20of%20Buddhist%20Practice.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> At time of writing (2009–10) Buddhist monks are always shown in a clip that precedes the hourly news on BBC News 24 channel; although not explicitly here associated with peace and calm, that association is often made.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, an article on dance and meditation in *Dance Magazine*, by Nancy Alfaro November 2006 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1083/is\\_11\\_80/ai\\_n27032249/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1083/is_11_80/ai_n27032249/). Eileen Mulligan,



‘meditation’ has become linked in the popular mind with Buddhist practice.

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, a modern Westerner may only have an intuitive apprehension that Buddhism is associated with understanding and peace. There seems to be, however, an underlying level of respectful acknowledgement of what is perceived as a subtle resource of wisdom, offering a meditative heritage and psychological system that can bring great benefits. Buddhism was, for instance, voted the ‘most popular’ religious tradition at a conference of the International Coalition for the Advancement of Religions and Spirituality (ICARUS) in Geneva in July (2009), a reflection of what is now an underlying social perception of its character. ICARUS director Hans Groehlichen commented: ‘...with organized religion increasingly used as a tool to separate and inflame rather than bring together, we felt we had to take the unusual step of creating a “Best Religion in the World” award and making a bit of a stir, to inspire other religious leaders to see what is possible when you practice compassion’. Groehlichen said the award was voted on by an international roundtable of more than 200 religious leaders from every part of the spiritual spectrum. ‘It was interesting to note that once we supplied the criteria, many religious leaders voted for Buddhism rather than their own religion,’ said Groehlichen. ‘Buddhists actually make up a tiny minority of our membership, so it was fascinating but quite exciting that they won’ (July 15<sup>th</sup> 2009).<sup>14</sup>

### Psychology

One of the reasons such a shift has occurred over the last two decades is the promulgation of Buddhist practices and understanding by those working within the medical traditions and various psychological disciplines, who base their advocacy on evidence-based data and physiological and psychological research. Many articles in popular magazines advise that blood pressure is lowered by meditation,

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a personal success coach, recommends that her clients take regular exercise: ‘When you exercise, the conscious brain can go into a relaxed state, almost like meditation’, she says. ‘In this frame of mind the more creative half of the brain can start working.’ Reader’s Digest (2009) website: <http://www.rubbertreepplant.co.uk/bites/invent.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Moulin Tribune de Geneve: <http://blog.beliefnet.com/onecity/2009/07/freedom-from-religion-buddhism-wins-best-religion-in-the-world-award.html>





‘rather than medication’.<sup>15</sup> Although the category ‘meditation’, of course, also includes traditions such as TM, Buddhism features prominently and is inextricably associated in the popular mind with meditative practice.<sup>16</sup> The National Health Service website NICE lists 214 references to treatment of depression through meditation, many described as based on the Buddhist term ‘mindfulness’.<sup>17</sup> Activity described by this term has now been recognized by the British National Health service as a useful means of dealing with stress-management, short-term, trauma-related and recurrent depression and eating disorders such as anorexia. One study cited on the NHS website reports alleviation of mood problems amongst prisoners, treatment of stress related ailments and mild and serious depressive conditions.<sup>18</sup> Most doctors’ surgeries have notice-boards that suggest meditation is a good way of coping with various problems associated with the mind/body interface, such as stress, chronic fatigue and depression. Again, perhaps the word *bhāvanā* should be used as a term for much of the work conducted in these contexts.

Many of the most effective techniques, such as those involving ‘mindful’ cognitive behaviour therapy, are dependent as much on creating means whereby the patient interprets events in his mind as in his bodily awareness and the purification of the emotions we associate with the first two foundations of mindfulness. The method for this therapy is in part Western: it emphasises the way the mind narrates, describes and identifies various kinds of experience and personal history. It could be argued that in this regard it also follows a pattern of an eightfold path, which is concerned as much as how experience is described and the area of views, as a necessary accompaniment to meditative practice in its broader sense (*bhāvanā*). MBCT methods

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, ‘Lowering Blood pressure without Medication’, the ‘lifestyle magazine’ launched in 2007 Helium <http://www.helium.com/items/19227-lowering-blood-pressure-without-meditation> 2002-2010. The magazine has 13 articles in its cache on the subject of ‘meditation’ dealing with various simple explanatory procedures and indications:

[http://m.www.helium.com/search/search?search\\_query=meditation&search\\_context=Unknown](http://m.www.helium.com/search/search?search_query=meditation&search_context=Unknown).

<sup>16</sup> As just one example of the modern interest in linking stress management, meditation and Buddhist forms of practice, see ‘School teaches boys to meditate and reduce stress’, article in The Times, January 12th 2009, recorded on TimesOnline website (2010):

[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/education/article6984113.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article6984113.ece).

<sup>17</sup> See ‘The National Institute for Health and Clinical Guidance’ (2010): <http://www.nice.org.uk/>. All the material I have discussed with reference to this organization may be found on this site.

<sup>18</sup> See the above website, with reference <http://www.evidence.nhs.uk/search.aspx?t=meditation>, for the many studies connected with this clinical work and research.





do not postulate quite the same positive or liberating elements, either in terminology or aims, nor are the meditation practices geared to the states we associate with Buddhist practice.<sup>19</sup> But where such therapy teaches the patient to wish him or herself well, to recount his own story differently to him or herself, with less negative connotations, and to look for a sense of path through ‘steps’, which ensure the inclusion of a gradual, progressively defined element, we can see a broader counterpart to the way the Buddha often responded to pre-existing systems and linked work on views to the advice to follow basic awareness techniques. Other exercises in the treatment of those with, for instance, anorexia, involve encouraging the patients to ‘think’ less when considering themselves, rather applying awareness to feeling as it arises at the five senses. It is difficult to match terminologies, but in Buddhist terms, it could perhaps be said that this is working on moving away from excessive worry (*kukkucca*), or more generally the fourth hindrance, where restlessness and worry are linked (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), accompanied by wrongly applied thought (*vitakka*). Meditative exercises then lead to a clearer apprehension of feeling, and the first and second foundation of mindfulness.<sup>20</sup>

There is a great deal of research still to be conducted here: the aims of psychotherapy are not necessarily the same as those of Buddhist practice, though one hopes they are not mutually exclusive.<sup>21</sup> There is no stated concept of an implicit health in the mind, or the positing of any inherent predisposition to skillfulness, though these can be inferred firstly by techniques that serve to lessen discursive and often negative ‘constructions’ in the mind and directing the attention more to the simple experience of feeling, and secondly by an emphasis on the ability of patients to come up with their own solutions to their own particular problems, both features of MBCT. Buddhist practitioners

<sup>19</sup> For discussion of *bhāvanā* see Gethin 1998:174ff, Harvey (1990) 244ff. See also Shaw 2006: 194-8.

<sup>20</sup> The *Dhammasaṅgani* classifies *kukkucca*, the other side of the coin to restlessness when it features as the fourth hindrance to meditation, as ‘The perception that something is lawful where it is not, the perception that something is not lawful where it is, the perception that something is a fault where it is not, the perception that something is not a fault where it is: all this sort of worry, worrying, agonising, regretting and scratching of the head: this is called worry (DhS 1160, trans. in Shaw 2006:47).’

<sup>21</sup> This point was reiterated by Dr Jenny Quek, a practising Buddhist psychotherapist who also delivered a paper at this conference. For the importance of joy in the Buddhist path, see Walpola Rahula’s comments: ‘...a true Buddhist is the happiest of beings. He has no fears or anxieties. He is always calm and serene, and cannot be upset or dismayed by changes or calamities, because he sees things as they are.’ (Rahula 1967 27ff). For his insightful analysis and translation of the factors of awakening, see Rahula 1967: 72, 74, 117 ff. For the inherent radiance of the mind as described in Pāli texts, see A I 10, translated and discussed in Shaw 2006: 31ff and S V 29 (Shaw 2006: 29).

who also work in the field of psychotherapy and psychology sometimes feel that the aspect of *sīla* (good behaviour or ethics) and *dāna* (appropriate generosity), essential in Buddhist practice for their promotion of a sense of well-being and health in the mind, are not incorporated into such therapeutic systems, where the link between happiness and such activities is not felt obvious.<sup>22</sup> Those teaching the techniques may have only very limited experience of the effects of following and actively pursuing a meditative practice over a period of years: the *bojjhaṅgas*, of mindfulness, investigation, strength, joy, tranquility, concentration and equanimity, central to this aspect of the tradition, are not employed. But such assumptions perhaps lie tacitly and in a hidden sense behind the success of any system, which, like the Buddhist, pays considerable attention to the way practitioners start to identify problems differently and consult frequently with teachers/guides; the courses are taught, practiced and undertaken throughout with close one-to-one supervision and group work. In the manner of the ‘good friends’ of Pāli texts, such contacts can help them help themselves to recovering health, good heart and equilibrium.<sup>23</sup> Therapy such as MBCT is successful: there is an unusually high fifty percent non-relapse in cases of depression. This illness usually manifests in repetitive cycles, and is treated when the patient is in remission, when there is a good chance that such techniques will prevent further lapses. The success rate is higher than options involving medication or other forms of Western treatment; it is also decidedly cheaper, a factor Professor Mark Williams has noted.<sup>24</sup> Work on this is ongoing at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, which trains practitioners in the field, runs clinical programmes for the depressed and those suffering from chronic fatigue, and is involved in a research programme investigating the psychological and neurological base for such illnesses, that explores the mechanisms of actions of mindfulness based treatments.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See also note above. I am also grateful to discussion with various practitioners working as therapists for this feedback.

<sup>23</sup> See S V 78 (trans. Shaw 2006: 28) and It 10–11 (Shaw 2006: 29–30). The subject of ‘friendship’ is discussed briefly in Shaw 28–31.

<sup>24</sup> This point was reiterated by him at the Buddhism and Science Colloquium, convened by Professor Denis Noble, Professor Vesna Wallace and Dr Alan Wallace at the Physiology Department of Oxford University, March 2010.

<sup>25</sup> A centre within the University of Oxford’s Psychiatry department affiliated to SoWide and the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies. Founded in 2007, its purpose is ‘to realise the potential of mindfulness-based approaches in mental and physical health and to promote the well-being of people in their world of work, home and family life. Its aim is to be an international centre of excellence that



It is interesting that this means of bringing Buddhist meditative based techniques to the Western academic world has arisen from the strand of psychological and psychotherapeutic theory considered the most materialist, 'scientific' and traditionally linked with evidence-based physical research. So mention should be made of other strands of psychological and psychotherapeutic theory, at the other end of the spectrum, which are perhaps more often associated with those who are longstanding practising meditators and Buddhists. These, with a greater emphasis on privacy and intuition, are perhaps temperamentally less inclined towards scientifically based empirical research. Such formulations in Western psychology have traditionally been more predisposed to Buddhist perceptions of the nature of the mind and its wholesome roots; Jung himself acknowledged his debt in this regard.<sup>26</sup> Jung identifies the 'transcendent', that which is beyond the everyday, in the synthesis of apparently discordant or opposing qualities as part of a process of 'individuation'. The extent to which the formulation of such theories were influenced by Buddhism is beyond the scope of this study, and I would not dare attempt it, but we can perhaps see even in modern Western interpretation of events in the mind the imprint of Buddhist influences that have now been forgotten, that have nonetheless been absorbed into some perceptions of the mind, its relationship to the world and various responses to that.<sup>27</sup>

can also meet local need, and to extend our understanding of the relevance of mindfulness through research, training and providing classes for NHS patients': (2010) 'Oxford Mindfulness Centre': [http://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=9](http://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=9).

<sup>26</sup> I am very grateful to Dr Charles King, Oxford University, a clinical psychologist and Buddhist practitioner, for some extensive discussion about this subject (September 2009). Any interpretations and consequent errors in communication of this material are my own.

<sup>27</sup> Curiously, Jungian theory has been so successful and pervasive that his name is sometimes invisible: just as one cannot see a geographical feature like a bridge when one is standing on it, so his theories seem to have fashioned underlying patterns in how Westerners view their own and other's psyches. Many people in Britain, whether interested in the mind at a professional or a popular level, would consider that they had an 'inner' drives or volitions that might be at odds with or difficult to integrate with outer behaviour, that certain impulses deriving from the 'unconscious' mind might need creative integration with 'conscious' ones, and that when such an integration was achieved, often through a sense of the 'transcendent', the person would become 'fulfilled' or 'individuated', perhaps a kind of *ekagattā* within Buddhist understanding. This has influenced the popular conception of the mind, even where the name of the principal proponent of such ideas, Jung, has been forgotten. For some comment on Jungian influence see, for instance, Ron Sharrin in an article on the subject, (2003) 'Jung and Buddhism': [http://www.deepstreams.org/journal/i002/i002\\_03\\_JungBuddhism.pdf](http://www.deepstreams.org/journal/i002/i002_03_JungBuddhism.pdf). and Heizig, J.W. (1999) in a paper presented at Kyoto to the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, 'Jung, Christianity and Buddhism': [http://www.thezensite.com/non\\_Zen/Jung\\_Christianity\\_and\\_Buddhism.pdf](http://www.thezensite.com/non_Zen/Jung_Christianity_and_Buddhism.pdf).

In a more general sense many modern psychotherapists have written their acknowledgement of Buddhist influence, and many are meditators. The now deceased Nina Coltart was a proponent of Buddhist theory. She writes: 'It is my contention that the practice of psychoanalysis in harness with the practice of Buddhism is not only harmonious, but mutually enlightening and potentiating. There does not seem to me to any area of absolutely radical disagreement or clash between the two.' The first two signs she says, are self evident to anyone approaching a therapeutic solution, the third she says can be, and indeed now is, often interpreted by the therapeutic community to refer to the absence of a permanent self in our dealings and day to day life. Coltart points out that to say to a patient that 'you are not quite exactly the same person as you were when you got up this morning', is immensely helpful and liberating, allowing new perceptions and identifications about self-fulfilment to come into play. (Coltart 1996: 127–9)

So Buddhist theory and practice are exerting some influence in clinical therapeutic contexts, in the pursuit of practical research on meditative methods, in reassessing the understanding of procedures for examining the relationship between consciousness and matter, in preventative medicine and in the popular understanding of meditation. Study of Buddhism is prompting a reappraisal of the terminology of physiological and psychological research. Study is ongoing on physiological effects of meditation in lowering blood pressure, improving memory and arousing something even scientists call happiness, which, when the product of meditative practice, seems, according to research conducted at Wisconsin University in the States to have a highly restorative effect on our neural pathways, sense of well-being and general health.<sup>28</sup> Such research is expensive and there are all sorts of features of Buddhist practice, narrative and attitudes to the mind, central to the success and perceived restorative properties of localized expressions of *bhāvanā* in Asian countries, which have not yet been subject to this sort of scrutiny. Chanting, and recollections, such as of the Triple Gem, *sīla*, and generosity, as well as *mettā* practice, have not yet been included in Western psychological frameworks. Perhaps

<sup>28</sup> For research conducted by Prof. Flanagan, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which received widespread publicity in British newspapers (22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> May 2003) and see 'The Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience' (2010): <http://psychz.psych.wisc.edu/>.



these trainings, involving the wish to arouse the aspect of peaceful wisdom and happiness in oneself, are implied. One hopes they will, where appropriate, also be integrated and acknowledged within Western psychological systems, along with the idea of a graduated path in meditation, that takes time and has distinct stages of development requiring careful, experienced guidance.

### Neuroscience

An area closely connected in the twenty-first century, but with primarily physiological implications, is the discipline of neuroscience, where Buddhism is offering new paradigms for the articulation of the relationship between consciousness and matter and of the ways in which neurological patterns are observed, identified and understood. The Oxford professor of Cardiovascular Physiology, Denis Noble, has espoused Buddhist doctrine in his attempts to articulate what he terms ‘musical’ patterns of relationships that appear to operate in the evolution of the human genome. The only sequences of events that can be interpreted as programmatic do not inhere in the body itself or even the genetic programme, but in the biological processes themselves: a sense of what we call ‘self’ arises more from the process involved in these patterns of features rather than ‘thingness’. Neuroscience, he argues, has been limited by Western concept of self as an entity in some way attached or not to a brain, traditionally considered the seat of consciousness. Noting that from a neurological point of view the operation of what we call ‘self’ conforms to changing, repetitive yet not static blueprints for which musical metaphors are far more appropriate, he remarks that many languages influenced by Buddhism place far less emphasis on the first-person singular pronoun, and concludes, ‘Viewing the self as a process rather than an object becomes more natural’ (Noble 2009: 141). Indeed, arguing that great skill in areas of artistry in spheres such as music involves the diminishment of a sense of the self, with a corresponding increase rather than lessening of mastery, he cites the famous Chan ox-herding simile to demonstrate the way the mind trained in any discipline learns to master selfish drives which lead to a lessening of ego and an increased selflessness. He concludes that a Cartesian model of the self, on which so much neuroscientific theory depends, is inappropriate. From an experiential point of view, ‘selflessness’ is a feature of great musicianship and other areas of life where



increased skill lessens rather than increases preoccupation with oneself. A sense of *anattā* may arise in all kinds of situations such as helping others, or practicing meditation. He argues that this renders Buddhist terminology more appropriate when considering the physiology of factors that contribute to the biological understanding of consciousness and matter. 'For 2500 years,' he writes, selflessness 'has been part of the aim of Buddhist meditation. There are many forms of Buddhism around the world, with a wide range of practices and beliefs, but the idea of 'selflessness', 'the disappearing self', and 'letting go' is common. Where this does not involve belief systems he argues, 'it contains no possibility of conflict with science' (Noble 2006: 139).

The aims of scientific research are not the same as those of Buddhist meditative theory and practice; clearly however traditions that have been shaped by meditative understanding can produce formulations helpful to those working within scientific contexts.<sup>29</sup>

### **The study of religion, the academic environment and the literary world**

In the twentieth century the subject known as 'Buddhist Studies' has become fully integrated as an academic world of religious studies, with a strong emphasis on its meditative traditions. Buddhist Studies are still thriving, despite cuts in all university courses in Britain. Just before the retirement of Professor Richard Gombrich, who has promoted Buddhist studies in Britain and abroad, the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies was established in Oxford and a new and first professor in the subject, Vesna Wallace. SOAS, Oxford, Bristol, Cardiff and Lancaster and York St. John Universities are amongst those offering courses at undergraduate and post-graduate level on Buddhism. Professor Peter Harvey designed and takes a successful online interactive course in Buddhist Studies at Sunderland University. Rupert Gethin is now the first professor of Buddhist Studies at Bristol University. The subject is also studied in theology departments, where Buddhism is researched in conjunction with other traditions. In these courses, meditative principle is taught, often, where the student is a theologian for instance, in conjunction with study of the prayer and contemplative traditions of other religions.

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Lancaster (1997).





This academic interest has involved close analysis of terms and their implications in Western contexts. At the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, many translations of Pāli texts of this period describe *jhāna* with perhaps some bemusement as ‘mystic absorption’ or ‘trance’. Scholars in the early part of the twentieth century still clearly regarded the practice of Buddhist meditation, the concept of concentration and the development of mindfulness as arcane and alien: though interestingly, Rhys Davids, an early comparativist, does make real and useful attempts to explore the traditions, as his introductions to the *Dīghanikāya* (PTS: *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols.) attest. Work such as Cousins’ on *jhāna* (Cousins 1973) and on, for instance, comparative assessment of Buddhist meditation with St Theresa’s stages of prayer and its practice (Cousins 1989) have changed perceptions in religious studies of such states. Publications by Gombrich (Gombrich 1998 and 2009), Harvey (Harvey 1990), Gethin (Gethin 1992 and 1998) and Wynne (Wynne 2007) over the last two or three decades on various aspects of Southern Buddhist meditation have also deepened understanding of Buddhist meditation and its background for Westerners. Academic comparative work continues, as, for example in Gimello’s assessment of Christian and Buddhist contemplative methods undertaken at the University of Notre Dame.<sup>30</sup> Halvor Elfrig’s ‘Cultural Histories of Meditation’ Project, a major international venture devoted to comparative research, in particular on the nature of meditation objects, in a variety of traditions, includes reference to a number of different schools of Buddhism.<sup>31</sup> Such scholarship, and other research on Buddhist fields, is contributing to study amongst British theologians and those in other disciplines. One senior theologian at Oxford University told me, for instance, that he found the area of narrative and imagery a particularly useful means of studying Buddhism for his students, and cited *Selfless Persons* by Steven Collins (1982) as being his most helpful teaching aid and introduction to the subject.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Gimello, for instance, a leading academic at Notre Dame University, works on both Buddhist and Catholic theology (2009): <http://theology.nd.edu/people/all/Gimello.shtml>.

<sup>31</sup> For full details of this international venture, involving a number of books and articles which will be published over the next few years, see ‘Cultural Histories of Meditation’ project, University of Oslo (2010): [http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/halvor/Cultural\\_Histories\\_of\\_Meditation/participants.html](http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/halvor/Cultural_Histories_of_Meditation/participants.html).



The earliest literary depiction, to my knowledge, of a figure in seating meditation in the West is in Edwin Arnold's poem, but despite its enormous popularity the idea of meditation simply did not enter the Victorian consciousness as a personal possibility, in fiction or in speculation. It would be impossible to track the influence of Buddhism in works of fiction in this study, but the influence of the beat poets and Jack Kerouac has of course been central, as has the American love of Japanese literature and haiku.<sup>32</sup> In the literary world, however, Buddhism is still a marginal influence, though it is present. Dan Zigmund, in a book review in January 2005 of Anne Donovan's 2004 novel, *Buddha Da*, says 'We are witnessing an explosion of Buddhist fiction in the West': this has not impinged yet on popular British taste, but it is interesting to speculate when and if it will.'<sup>33</sup>

### Christianity

Christianity has its own meditative and contemplative traditions, but its system of gradual sustained and structured exercises, that can be consciously undertaken though careful and skilled preparatory work, had not been overtly stressed by the Christian churches, a situation that has changed in the last few decades. A number of committed Christians are practitioners of the various forms of Buddhist meditation now available. A significant figure is Laurence Freeman, a Benedictine monk of the Congregation of Monte Oliveto and Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation, who employs Buddhist meditative exercises in his guided retreats, while still retaining Christian allegiance.<sup>34</sup> While it is impossible to assess such features, this trend appears to be renewing interest amongst Christians in their own meditative exercises, such as those of Ignatius Loyola or St. Teresa of Avila, as evinced by a statement on Christian meditation (1989) made by the Catholic Church, which included this comment in its opening paragraph:

The interest which in recent years has been awakened also among some Christians by forms of meditation associated with some

<sup>32</sup> Buddhism in Britain has perhaps not got to the stage it has in America, as described in Whalen-Bridge and Storhoff eds. (2009).

<sup>33</sup> For reference to this and other modern works of fiction that discuss or describe Buddhist meditation, see his Shambala Sun book review (January 2005) at [http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2639](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2639).

<sup>34</sup> For more information on his work, see: <http://www.christianmeditation11step.org/laurencefreeman.html>.



eastern religions and their particular methods of prayer is a significant sign of this need for spiritual recollection and a deep contact with the divine mystery.<sup>35</sup>

The Buddhism of early Buddhist texts arises in part from its originality in working alongside and integrating pre-existing traditions of spiritual practice and doctrine in its formulation.<sup>36</sup> Such a principle seems to be operating in the way Western traditions are coming to work with Buddhism or respond to the interest demonstrated by many Christians in Eastern meditative traditions. While it would be necessary to undertake full research into the field to verify this claim, it seems that the use of the word 'meditation', though of course ancient in Western culture, is now far more frequent in Christian discourse, in a sense that has come to be associated with the practices of Buddhism and other Eastern traditions.<sup>37</sup>

### Practice traditions

The practice traditions amongst Buddhists are not linked obviously to such trends, which do, however, create a favourable environment for those interested in Buddhist meditation. In Western culture, where scientific research is valued, studies validating meditative procedures can be an important factor for Westerners in arousing a willingness to explore Buddhist systems. As meditation is now a subject for open discussion, it is also possible that those from other backgrounds do not feel the sense of internal division in adopting methods different from those of their family.

Changing perceptions of meditation are working within the community at large and are unquantifiably instrumental in attracting people to Buddhist practice. The image of the Buddha and the *bhikkhusaṅgha* as representatives of the teaching are positive. Travel brochures, films and television programmes often include

<sup>35</sup> The German original version of the article (15. Oktober 1989) is on: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19891510\\_meditazione-cristiana\\_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19891510_meditazione-cristiana_ge.html). The translation quoted in this article is taken from 'The Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of Christian Meditation; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith', anonymously translated from the German for Eternal Word Television Network (undated): <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfmed.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Gombrich (1998 and OCBs website (2010): <http://www.ocbs.org/> and 2009), and 2009), studies of the way the Buddha taught within a context of contemporary Indian thought and practice in which he reacted and sought creative adaptations of traditional notions and Wynne (2007).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, a book on Catholic meditation for young people, Zanzig and Kielbasa (2000).

a Buddha image, or a picture of some Buddhist monks, when they wish to communicate tranquil enjoyment and peace. Many British towns have Buddhist temples, and the sight of monks proceeding about their business has fostered an appreciation of the *saṅgha* as offering a less worldly way of life. In Britain, as one suspects elsewhere, small, perhaps only half-noticed details can be more effective in remaining in the mind and attracting interest than an overt advertising campaign or even scientific research. For instance, when asked to compose this argument, I compiled an informal survey and questioned a group (63) of experienced British *samatha* practitioners what had initially prompted their interest in meditation. Ten of these respondents cited memorable encounters with Buddhism at early stages of their life. One woman in her forties, that her first contact with a Buddhist meditation group, twenty years ago, had been through friends that she liked and wanted to spend time with, and she said that:

...an underlying reason was that when I was a child of seven I once saw a television programme showing some Thai monks on *piṇḍapāṭa*. The memory had always stayed with me and when I saw the poster for meditation I thought I would give it a try. I have stayed with the *samatha* group ever since and have always just felt at home there.

Clearly advertising is helpful, but such personal contacts with Buddhism, like a monk, a peaceful shrine, or, as many querents responded, a discussion with a friend, can have a deep effect.

The number of practice groups in Britain have grown considerably over the last forty years. Some of these are attached to temples. For instance in Oxford, the Oxford Buddha Vihāra has close links with the university, where its abbot, Ajahn Khammai Dhammasāmi teaches, but also acts as a cultural and religious centre for the strong Burmese and Thai diaspora working in and around Oxford. Such immigrants, often working in highly trained professions such as medicine and law, or in successful commercial enterprises such as restaurants, have sometimes married Westerners, and have children who visit the temple who are the product of both cultures. Significantly, there is a number of Western Buddhists associated with the temple. At its establishment, such Westerners made a very distinct grouping, interested primarily in meditation and theory. Now such





distinctions have blurred. Those from many backgrounds attend daily chanting and meditation sessions and the weekly sutta study group. Monks at the temple host visits from schools and visit local schools too, where their teaching is received with freshness and investigative interest. These quotes are from twelve-year old boys at a local school in Oxford:

I am writing to thank you very much for your visit to our theology class. I among others, found it to be extremely interesting and it greatly deepened my fascination for Buddhism. One thing that I found particularly enjoyable was the meditation session we participated in. In my opinion this was extremely helpful for understanding the world around us and our relationship with it. I have never meditated before and having tried it in the talk if only for a short time, discovered sounds that I had never heard and a new state of mind, which extremely interesting and peaceful.

Another writes: 'I would like to thank you for your discussion and revealing meditation session. It was the first time in Theology class when we'd all been totally silent and peaceful. It is amazing what you can hear when you listen!'<sup>38</sup>

### **Perceptions of practitioners**

The history of Buddhism in recent years and the attraction of many of its meditation traditions are now well documented.<sup>39</sup> So this discussion concludes with 'perceptions' from within my own tradition. This was introduced to Britain by Boonman Poonyathiro who taught a Thai form of Samatha meditation in the sixties. In order to do this he disrobed, as at that time such ventures were not being actively promulgated. He started teaching in Cambridge and in London, and in 1973 the Samatha Trust was formed. Three meditators from that time remain, providing continuity in the Trust: the academic and Buddhist scholar, L.S. Cousins, a one-time academic and now psychotherapist, Dr Paul Dennison, who spent some time ordained as a monk in Thailand, and Christopher Gilchrist, a financier and broadcaster.

It is difficult to count practitioners, but around 1,000 meditators have been involved in various groups around the country over the last

<sup>38</sup>Quotes from letters addressed to Ven. Khammai Dhammasami, October 2009.

<sup>39</sup> See Bluck (2008) and works cited in this article, n. 4.

few years. Over a hundred attended extended meditation courses this year at the national centre, Greenstreet, Powys, in Wales. Boonman Poonyathiro, teaching *rūpa* and *arūpa* meditations, took some of these weeks. The group has had visits, talks and courses taken by members of the Thai Saṅgha, such as Ajahn Khammai Dhammasāmi, Phra Sriyansobhon (Tan Suvit), Ajahn Maha Laow and Ajahn Tan Sudhiro. The national centre has relics of the Buddha, kindly donated by the Thai government, and a Buddha figure, Phra Buddha Dhammacakra, sponsored by the King of Thailand and made and generously donated by supporters in Thailand. Phra Sriyansobhon has also donated three Buddha rūpas he made himself.

The meditation technique undertaken by the Samatha Association perhaps needs explanation, as the word ‘*samatha*’ is a matter of a slant to a breathing mindfulness practice that includes elements of *vipassanā* too. In line with the emphasis that can be seen in the Pāli canon, such as the *sutta* on breathing mindfulness (M III 78–88), and the recommendations of experienced teachers, such as Ven. Saddhatissa, who pointed out that Westerners need to develop *samatha* before insight, the method encourages close attention to ensuring that there is a basis of calm before moving formally on to *vipassanā*.<sup>40</sup> The practice is, however, a mixture of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, inclining towards calm, though both elements come into play at different times. British people incline to the serious and intellectual so meditations are needed to balance this. At the outset the good feeling and the happiness that can arise from the sensation of the breath are established, while observing the breath’s movement and changing nature, its occasional unsatisfactoriness and observation that it is not ‘owned’ or self. The practice is broadly the same for all, following, with some modifications, the stages recommended by Buddhaghosa of *gaṇanā*, *anubandhanā*, *phusanā* and *thapanā*. Sometimes these stages are linked to the practice of each of the four *brahmavihāras* respectively. The intention is to arouse the balance of *sati* and *samādhi*, so that when the meditator is ready the *nimitta* can be cultivated to lead to a deepening of concentration. Emphasis is placed on the masteries in meditation, through the practice’s various stages and through ways of adverting, entering, sustaining, leaving and recollecting the practice. This flexibility is encouraged from

<sup>40</sup> See Saddhatissa 1971: 81.



the beginning, so that practitioners prepare the mind for meditation and can leave it behind clearly and cleanly for daily business. After the practice, or sometimes before, there is practice the *brahmavihāras*, with a particular emphasis on *mettā*, and investigation of the three signs within the breath.

The subject of this paper has been other activities that could be included under ‘mental cultivation’ (*bhāvanā*) as well as sitting meditation. So it should also be noted that practices of mindfulness, wisdom and *mettā* are encouraged in daily life, as well as regular reports on meditation to teachers, a personal contact that is a hallmark of the group. Reports on meditation are considered very helpful for arousing confidence and fostering new experience or events within the practice. Another distinctive feature of the *Samatha* methods is collaborative group work: on chanting, theory and mindful work on physical surroundings, such as decorating and gardening. These activities are discussed and related together through study of *suttas* and *Abhidhamma* material. Groups work on particular texts together, sometimes chanting them in Pāli, and sometimes reading them in English. Attempts are made to relate new similes, theory or observations to experience and to communicate and discuss this with others. The components of the *Dhammasaṅgani* list of factors present in skilful consciousness for instance have aroused great debate and discussion: can *kusala-citta* be present when playing tennis? Does the *cetasika* of *mettā* arise when cooking? Does the food taste better when it does? When do animals experience skilful consciousness? There are often have late discussions on these subject, during, for instance, breaks on mindful work sessions, or even when trying to plaster walls, under mindful conditions. On the *Samatha* website a book edited by Mark Rowlands, *The Abhidhamma Papers*, represents work conducted of this kind by those in groups where discussion is more formal and based on practice and individual prepared contributions.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See ‘The Samatha Trust Meditation Homepage’ (2010): <http://www.samatha.org/> and <http://www.samatha.org/publications/index.html> Rowlands, M. ed. (1998 HTML edn) *The Abhidhamma Papers*.



This sort of debate means that both daily life and meditation are examined and explored through discussion and listening. Stories are popular amongst Western meditators. Amongst the favourite are those derived from the *Dhammapada* commentaries and *Jātakas*, narratives that are felt to enrich meditation; these are also liked for their flexible and *mettā* based exploration of theoretical principle. Several groups are now meeting for a publishing project, ‘Samatha Adventures’, which is intended to present material on dependent origination, breathing mindfulness practice and personal ‘journeys’ to a larger public. In 2009–10 there are now 80 teachers in the UK in this tradition; beginners’ weekends are held regularly.

On the basis of the questions asked to a group of experienced teachers at Greenstreete, the centre in Wales, three main influences, of roughly equal importance, emerged as important factors in encouraging people to the group. Many had come through friends to practice, many had read books on Buddhism, and many stated, in various ways, simply that they felt at intuitively at home with the practice. A number recorded that they felt the main factor operating in the twenty-first century as regards meditation was the growth of lay meditative practice in the West. At the same time, most valued greatly contact with the monastic orders. Teachers over the years, as well as those I have mentioned, have included Ajahn Chah (Thailand), Ven. B. Anandamaitreya (Sri Lanka), Ven Candawanna (Cambodia), Ven. H. Saddhatissa (Sri Lanka) and Ven U Nyanika (Burma). There have been many lay visitors from Thailand. Since the year 2000 seven members of the group have also taken temporary ordination in Thailand and Sri Lanka and others have learnt a great deal from their enthusiasm and the increased understanding and knowledge they have brought back. Groups have had many visits and teachings as well from the British Saṅgha, such as Ajahn Sumedho and Ajahn Viradhammo, as well as nuns, who are all very popular. In this regard it should be noted that nuns are particularly liked by the women meditators, who find them an inspiring example. Ajahn Candasirī, for instance, who has been living as a nun for thirty years now with the British Saṅgha, is well known. Whether or not the *bhikkhunī* line is formally reestablished, with such distinguished teachers the United Kingdom can be said to have four assemblies practising meditation, thus fulfilling a feature of the teaching of each Buddha described in the Buddhavaṃsa.





I have only scratched the surface of the British practice of meditation in my own group; there are many other Southern groups spread around the UK, most notably the British Forest Sangha, and thriving groups within other Buddhist traditions that would warrant their own story (see Bluck 2008). But practitioners I questioned admired the specificity of early Buddhism, the way the Buddha taught to individuals in canonical texts and the great variety of meditation objects, suited to practitioner's needs. Buddhaghosa's work in suggesting techniques and practical methods for dealing with everything from attachment to views, *dhmma* excitement and following the breath is particularly valued. One person commented that in the teaching on the *brahmavihāras* in the *Visuddhimagga*, careful distinctions are made between oneself and other beings, to avoid confusion and imposing one's views on others (see *Visuddhimagga* IX).<sup>42</sup> Some observed that they liked the way that *mettā*, as described in the *Mettā-sutta*, and the practice of compassion as a *brahmavihāra*, as well as sympathetic joy and equanimity, are often taught and practiced in Southern Buddhism. One teacher noted that the divine abidings are often not discussed in texts, but embodied in graduated individual meditation teaching, in canon, commentaries and practice, and in the diagnostic basis for the meditational advice. Such features are felt to be central to the development of the Samatha Trust approach to theory and practice, and vindicate Ajahn Khammai Dhammasami's comment on the divine-abidings, 'Once fully developed, they also tend to influence the way we think' (Dhammasāmi 1999: 9). For many practitioners, Southern Buddhism's capacity to encompass meditative training and intellectual challenge, along with kindly care and humour, make it attractive to Westerners.

The title of this paper has included the word 'perceptions' and has demonstrated that perceptions of Buddhist meditation are changing, on many levels, in a number of ways. Indeed, as the varied viewpoints in this paper indicate, it could even be said that various perceptions of Buddhist meditation are transforming even Westerners' understanding of perception and how to exercise it in meditation.

<sup>42</sup> See also Aronson (1980), Dhammasāmi (1999): 9–19, Gombrich (1998 and OCBS website (2010): <http://www.ocbs.org/> and 2009), Rahula (1967): 68ff and Shaw (2006): 163–172. As these works argue, loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity animate and form an utterly essential part of the Southern Buddhist tradition, as manifest in its canonical and commentarial texts and its modern practices.

To include such a variety of fields, the paper has included, necessarily, much scientific and third-person allusion but also much first-person, anecdotal or particular comment too. The Southern Buddhist tradition places great emphasis on the interchange between teachers, pupils and friends. A sense of this importance of personal contact has been a prominent feature within several areas covered in this paper: the story of the girl at the outset, encouraged by Buddhist monks, the methods of those employing Buddhist practices in the therapeutic traditions, where personal contact is considered vital, the comments from those practicing meditation, who value work in groups and personal contacts, and the letters from those learning about Buddhism first-hand in schools. Indeed it is the great warmth and effectiveness of individual contact and friendliness, eliciting personal change, whether recorded by evidence-based research or experiential investigation, which seems to be the overriding feature of the various ways Southern Buddhist meditation is becoming gradually integrated and accepted into British society. As the global community is appreciating Buddhism in general, those wishing to explore meditation as a graduated and carefully taught path have come to recognize that Southern Buddhism offers a rare, subtle kind of spiritual practice. Its method of taking each step of the ‘*ehipassiko*’ way carefully, and its stress on individual friendship, the group and continued advice, are perhaps its most notable and influential features.



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