Supporting Harmonious Relations through
Using Buddhist Principles to Conduct Process Groups

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This paper discusses the application of Buddhism and Buddhist mindfulness practices to the contemplative group process model at Naropa University. I begin by giving some background to the dialogue between Buddhism and Western psychology and then describe the contemplative group. I will discuss its structure, contract and leadership interventions that cultivate reflection, attunement and self-regulation. Finally, I will describe how these groups can contribute to harmonious and skillful relationships through encouraging personal and interpersonal capacities and the Buddhist pāramitās.

Background of this East – West Dialogue

In the early 1900's, when William James, who is considered the father of American psychology, was giving a lecture at Harvard University, he recognized a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka in the audience and abruptly departed from his lecture saying to the monk, "Take my chair. You are better equipped to lecture on psychology than I. This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty-five years from now" (Epstein, 1995, pp. 1-2). James was interested in self-discipline, will and the relationship between attention, mental health and spirituality (McDermott, 1977). Much of his life's work was devoted to understanding the varieties of spiritual experience, and his interest in Buddhism, along with other aesthetic practices, was an important aspect of the early dialogue between Buddhism and Western psychology. Following him, in the 1950s and 60s, the psychoanalyst Karen Horney (Morvay, 1999) developed an additional parallel between Buddhism and Western psychology. The three psychological forces she recognized—moving towards, moving against and moving away from—reflect the essence of the three Buddhist poisons: passion, aggression, and ignorance (Nimmanheminda, Kaklauskas & Sell, 2003). Between 1960 and 1980, this East-West dialogue flourished, as seen in the works of people such as D. T. Suzuki (1963), Alan Watts (1966), and Chögyam Trungpa (1969, 1973, 1975, 1976).

In the last couple of decades, dozens of books have been published in Europe and the U.S. regarding the relationship between Buddhism, mindfulness and mental health. Safran's (2003) observation that, "Buddhism gives every sign of being here to stay within our [Western] culture, and its influence on psychoanalytic thinking[1] is growing" (p. 1) can't be contested. This convergence has been further strengthened by the Dalai Lama's work with Western psychologists and scientists from diverse fields at the Mind and Life Institute, as well as other research on the effects that meditation and mindfulness have on the brain. Such research has spawned numerous publications on the subject (see, for example, Segal, et al., 2002, Hayes, et al., 2004, & Germer, et al., 2005).

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[1] Psychoanalysis is clearly not alone in its appreciation of the relationship between mindfulness and mental health. Cognitive behavioral psychotherapies have also embraced and expanded on the therapeutic use of mindfulness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of intentionally paying attention to what is occurring in the present moment without judgment and grasping. Western psychology has utilized this aspect of Buddhism more than any other (Langer, 1989, 1997; Hayes et al., 2004; Germer et al., 2005; Safran, 2003; Siegel, 2007; Segal et al., 2002). Traditional Buddhist teachings of mindfulness are given in *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness:* mindfulness of body, feelings, mind, and mental objects. As Gunaratana (2001) observes, these teachings incorporate "our whole life into meditation practice" (p. 197). Through training the attention to be non-judgmentally alert to direct experience of the present moment, mindfulness is the ground for tranquility and insight.

As practitioners know, and recent research validates, mindfulness will "directly improve the functioning of body and brain, subjective mental life with its feelings and thoughts, and interpersonal relationships" (Siegel, 2007, p. 3). The practice helps to develop a mind that is self-reflective, open, relatively free of entrenched biases, and able to stabilize and attend to perceptions (Siegel, 2007, p. 108). It has the effect of freeing one from his or her habitual cognitive and perceptual patterns and enabling direct engagement with experience. Through regular mindfulness practice, the mental qualities it cultivates become increasingly stable character traits (Siegel, 2007).

Bringing Mindfulness into the Group Setting

The Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation was initially an individual or solitary practice—awareness of self while sitting, standing, and lying down. However, mindfulness can also be a practice involving oneself and others in a group setting. At Naropa University's Master's of Contemplative Counseling Psychology program (referred to hereafter as the MACP program), along with a regular sitting meditation practice, students participate in group process classes (Nimmanheminda, et al., 2010). In this class, groups of six to twelve students are instructed to practice mindfulness with regard to what arises in their body (sensations), is perceived through their senses, and occurs in their mind (thoughts, impulses, fantasies, memories, plans, etc.) within the context of interpersonal engagement with others. Perhaps the biggest difference between mindfulness on the cushion and mindfulness in group is that the interpersonal context often involves a complex, rapidly changing array of stimuli including verbal and non-verbal communication.

In these contemplative groups, along with practicing mindfulness of self, students are encouraged to gain greater sensitivity to what people *do* to each other, the non-reflective and presymbolic behavior of *reciprocal influence* that occurs interpersonally.
In the Western psychotherapeutic setting, this practice was first described within a psychoanalytic orientation developed by interpersonal analysts such as Harry Stack Sullivan (1953 & 1954) and Edgar Levenson (1972 & 1983). As they envisioned the psychoanalytic process, the practice of non-judgmental attention involves a detailed inquiry of tracking "the subtle choreography of interpersonal micro-adaptations, generally within the 'here-and-now'" (Mitchell, 2002, p. 60) of the (patient-analyst) relationship. The focus of attention is on the *action* of the verbal and non-verbal language—how the language of one person is affecting the other(s). These effects may be recognized through any or all aspects of the mind-body field. The reciprocal influence of communications are often preconscious (out of awareness, but subject to being known) or

unconscious (out of awareness and warded off, hence inaccessible), but with the practice of mindfulness, phenomena that are implicit and outside consciousness can become conscious.

Procedural/Implicit and Declarative Knowledge

Another way of discussing what can occur in the contemplative group is that the objects of attention are the processes which normally occur automatically, as expressions of our procedural or implicit self.

A great deal of what we experience escapes our awareness and passes without any consciousness. However, fragments of perception are stored as part of our procedural memory. Procedural memory, which is part of implicit memory, has to do with the learning and retention of processes that are habitual and automatic (Grigsby & Stevens, 2000). These processes include motor skills (e.g., walking, riding a bike), perceptual abilities (e.g., visual pattern recognition), cognitive skills (e.g., solving mental arithmetic problems), cognitive-perceptual skills (e.g., reading), and other complex activities including interpersonal relating.

The efficiency of the human brain allows processes of life that require little conscious attention to become "automatic." They can go on in the background, out of awareness while allowing us to direct our attention elsewhere, and be carried out far more rapidly than processes which require consciousness. Most of our interpersonal acts and patterns become part of our procedural learning and are carried out without deliberate attention or thought. For example, with little or no awareness, we may smile back at a smiling face, greet others in our customary way, avert eye contact when confronted and habitually say "fine" when asked how we are.

The contributions of the procedural or implicit brain have a down-side: we miss the opportunity to consciously register and appreciate perceptions and events that are received implicitly. Stored as part of our implicit memory, they become stabilizing (some say "solidifying") mental representations of the system we call "self" and are not readily available for reflection, contemplation, analysis or discussion. Reversing this process of the construction of self may require an external destabilizing event. Another route is the practice of mindfulness, that is, the deliberate exercise of an open, accepting attention to perceptions, experiences and actions. While shorter periods of mindfulness are often found to be calming, regular and extended practice can disrupt one's conditioning and relax the grasp on habitual reference points causing experiences of groundlessness, confusion, anxiety and significantly disorganized states of mind. However, as uncomfortable and painful as such experiences may be, they can also be creative opportunities for new awareness; previously uncharted layers of experience can become available to one's declarative or explicit mind—to reflective consciousness, symbolization and language.

With mindfulness of our interpersonal interactions, we're engaging parts of our brain that would otherwise be marginalized, and we can metabolize a wider range of events. As Daniel Siegel (1999) describes it:

Each of us has a 'window of tolerance' in which various intensities of emotional arousal can be processed without disrupting the function of the system. For some people, high degrees of intensity feel comfortable and allow them to think, behave, and feel with balance and effectiveness. For

others, certain emotions (such as anger or sadness), or all emotions, may be quite disruptive to functioning if they are active in even mild degrees….*One's thinking or behavior can become disrupted if arousal moves beyond the boundaries of the window of tolerance.* (pp. 253-4, italics in the original)

Our window of tolerance, the zone of autonomic and emotional arousal that is optimal for well-being and effective functioning, fluctuates depending on any number of factors, such as, health, fatigue, hunger, and social context. Outside this window our nervous system goes into hyper- or hypoactivity, preparing us for fight or flight. When the sympathetic nervous system, the system which contends with sensed threats to our existence, is activated, we may feel increases in heart rate, body temperature and muscle tension. An activated sympathetic nervous system is ideal if we're being attacked physically or about to be hit by a car because it engages our implicit memory/knowledge; we don't have to think in order to attend to our survival—we do it "on reflex."

However, this state is also one of emotional dysregulation, which is "characterized by either excessive rigidity or randomness [that is] inflexible or chaotic, and as such [is] not adaptive to the internal or external environment" (Siegel, 1999, p. 255). It is not the optimal position from which to make decisions or communicate interpersonally. We do these tasks better when more fully somatically resourced, that is, self-regulated and within the window of tolerance, with an experience of basic well-being and competence (Ogden, 2006).

The ability to remain within a zone of optimal arousal, rather than hyper or hypo-arousal, is critical to finding adaptive responses to other people and environmental conditions. The neuroscientist Stephen Porges (2001, 2003; Ogden, 2006) proposes a polyvagal theory of neurological functioning in which there are "three hierarchically organized subsystems of the autonomic nervous system that govern our neurobiological responses to environmental stimulation: the ventral parasympathetic branch of the vagus nerve (social engagement), the sympathetic system (mobilization), and the dorsal parasympathetic branch of the vagal nerve (immobilization)" (Ogden, 2006, p. 29). These branches correlate to levels of arousal: optimal arousal involves the ventral vagal (also referred to by Porges as the social engagement system), hyperarousal involves the sympathetic system, and hypoarousal involves the dorsal vagal. The ventral vagal or social engagement, system is directly involved with wakefulness or consciousness. These three systems are also evolutionarily hierarchical: the parasympathetic being the most basic for survival; secondly, the sympathetic system; and finally, the social engagement system, "which provides humans with a great degree of flexibility in communication and regulates areas of the body that are utilized in social and environmental interaction" (Ogden, 2006, p. 30).

While interpersonal events that are at the edge of tolerance can be retraumatizing to an individual, they can also become opportunities for learning greater affect regulation (Fonagy, et al., 2004; Schore, 1994, 2003a & 2003b). Defined concisely, affect regulation involves the "processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions…to accomplish one's goals" (Thompson quoted in Fonagy, et al., 2004, p. 94). It is both an intra- and interpersonal capacity that includes neurophysiological and informational processes, coping mechanisms, communication and expression, and the

ability to predict and influence the environment. An important aspect of affect regulation is that it involves regulating affect *while within the affective state*. The Dutch Jewish philosopher Spinoza gave us a precedent for this, "while he stresses the use of reason over the affect, he emphasizes the value of allowing the affect to be felt for self-understanding" (Fonagy, et al., 2004, p. 95).

Groups trigger interpersonal patterns; patterns which are laid down neurologically through traumatic and/or repetitive experiences over years, and it is during group experience, especially at the moments when these patterns are triggered, that new learning (and new neuro-pathways) can develop; the element of "state-specific processing" being a critical ingredient for the integration of learning and neurological change (Ogden, 2006, pp. 248-250).

Mindfulness Group Contract and Interventions

The Buddhist perspective has led the faculty at Naropa's MACP program to develop a group contract that helps members bring their attention into the present and relate through their social engagement nervous system. The contract that we use for these group classes encourages students to come to group (on time) and be attentive (with equanimity and acceptance) to the internal and external events that they become aware of, which includes whatever is seen, heard, and felt, as well as all of their thoughts and sensations. They are encouraged to touch into their experience with awareness and recognition so that it may become conscious and accepted for what it is, and then to let it go (Wegela, 1998). Ideally, the membership of these groups is stable for the three years students remain in the program. The groups are intended to be a supportive place for students to process their experiences and cultivate mindfulness within the interpersonal context. Solving problems and alleviating suffering are considered as secondary. Desire for a specific outcome or type of process will be recognized and spoken to, but the emphasis is on the praxis mindfulness as opposed to achieving a particular outcome or solution (Nimmanheminda, 2008).

Some aspects of the group contract are included as part of the written course syllabus; the objectives of mindfulness are explicit. Other aspects become part of the group rules and norms—its culture (Yalom, 1985)—through the leader's interventions directing students' attention to their experience. Immediacy is critical to all mindfulness practice, and it can be brought into the group process through observations and questions from the leader. S/he may ask, for example, "what went through your mind when you heard what John just said?" Or, "I'm noticing that you're pretty quite today, where's your attention?" Students may be preoccupied by something that is not directly in the present moment, but we consider any mental event that occurs during group as being in the "present." However, to bring experience more directly into the moment and encourage members to "keep communications within the emotional current of the group" (Ormont, 1968, p. 148) the leader may offer specific interventions, for example, "you're talking about how you need more support from your parents, but what about me? Am I giving you what you need?"

The leader's interventions may carry the most influence in terms of power and effect; however, students strongly affect one another and the process through their verbal and non-verbal communication. Though the contract requires members to communicate verbally, we are constantly communicating vast amounts of information non-verbally.

Posture, facial expression and clothing, are but a few of the innumerable non-verbal signals sent and received in group. Non-verbal communication often has a powerful impact, one which the leader can bring into the verbal field thereby making the implicit explicit.

As mentioned above, individuals have a window of tolerance for experience and nervous stimulation. In the contemplative group, mindfulness enables students to become increasingly aware of their tolerance and of their tendencies to react to stimuli with hyper- (the heat felt with the activation of the sympathetic system) and/or hypoarousal (the numbing and dulling of the parasympathetic system). Ideally, tension within the group remains mostly within a range where the majority of the group members are at the social engagement level of functioning. With awareness to the level of tension in group, the leader's interventions can sooth and/or stimulate members, engaging especially their social layer of functioning via nuanced verbal and non-verbal communication.

Fruits of the Contemplative Group

Bottom-Up and Top-Down Processing

People come into interpersonal encounters with expectations strongly conditioned by their past experiences, which have left mental representations that are templates for the projections and transferences that Freud (1912) recognized as core to a person's psychology. These mental maps influence our perception and experience in such a way that our expectations are at least partially confirmed by what we consciously or unconsciously anticipate. These maps or representations stabilize our world and make it familiar (sometimes painfully familiar), and they also inhibit new information and adaptations.

Neurologically, this is referred to as top-down processing. The top two layers of the neocortex contain "*invariant representations,* meaning that they anticipate what will happen next, based on past experience" (Badenoch, 2008, p. 179). Alternately, the practice of applying attention to the senses, body, mind, and the nuances of the relational field, activates a bottom–up neurological process: the bottom two layers of the cortex process new information as it is taken in via the senses. "When we focus on our senses or the arising of experience, we are [strengthening the strands of bottom-up information and] cultivating the ability to be a bit free of the automatic processes that have accumulated in our invariant representations" (Badenoch, 2008, p. 180). This process is critical for fresh insight and new ways of relating.

Putting It into Words

The contemplative group contract requires that students verbalize their experience, which is a conspicuous departure from many contemplative Buddhist contexts where silence is kept or talking is minimal. Silence can encourage the mind to let go of discursive thoughts and access bottom-up processing of direct experience. However, sometimes reducing the external chatter will amplify the internal discursive voices and they become all the louder. For many, silence is a relatively unusual experience, and it can push against one's window of tolerance; the nervous system may become either hyper- or hypoaroused, neither of which are comfortable. When this happens silence has provided opportunity to experience and work with one's mind; it is

another chance to "tame and train" the mind in an extreme state. These conditions, for some, may expedite the Buddhist truth of the absence of any solid, essential core self. As Sakyong Mipham (2003) puts it, "we begin to discover who we really are right now, just by seeing that the web of thoughts we solidified as 'me' is actually a series of vibrations" (p. 63). An experience such as this, when the top-down structuring is interrupted, is a precious step in "the beginning of enlightenment" (p. 63).

In the contemplative group, verbal expression is required and there are no explicit rules governing the type of speech, vocabulary or tone. The written contract does not explicitly require students to practice non-violent speech (Rosenberg, 2003). However, through the bottom-up processing of language and perception, which comes through intrapersonal and interpersonal feedback loops, students learn how their communication affects their state of mind/emotion—be it confusion, pain, clarity and/or a sense of well-being. This insight is central for learning to practice non-violent speech, where language that is "utilized with increased intention, specificity and compassion to create positive exchange between human beings" (Bowman, 2010, p. 426).

Attunement, Empathy, Exchange and Emotional Intelligence
The practice of mindfulness enhances attunement to oneself and others, which can lead to a greater capacity for compassion and loving-kindness. Siegel (2007) discusses how introspection, especially of the mindfulness type,[2] helps develop interpersonal attunement and skills. He writes, "anecdotal reports suggest that mindfulness meditation enhances the capacity for individuals to detect the meaning of facial expressions without verbal clues" (p. 200). Experiences from within an attuned interpersonal field include empathy and exchange. Empathy is sometimes defined as "comprehending" another's experience and as a synonym for pity (Morris, 1973). The term *exchange* is sometimes used to denote the experience of "catching" another's emotion; "it is our actual felt experience" while with someone else (Wegela, 2009, p. 49 & Wegala, 2010).

Contemplative groups allow for "careful attention to the flow of energy and information" (Siegel, 2010, p. 214) between individuals. This practice of mindfulness to communication and body states helps group members accrue emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), which is the ability to identify, monitor and regulate their feelings (the ability to sooth and stabilize autonomic arousal and be within the window of tolerance), and recognize the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence is closely related to empathy and exchange; each of which is positively related to mindfulness. "Empathy requires enough calm and receptivity so that the subtle signals of feeling from another person can be received and mimicked by one's own emotional brain" (Goleman, 1995, p. 104), and a nervous system trained in neutral, i.e., non-judgmental monitoring, is more capable of staying connected to inner and external stimuli (Shapiro & Izett, 2008).

Mindsight and Mentalization
Daniel Siegel has coined the term *mindsight* to refer to a seventh sense, the sense of the mind's activities: "thoughts, feelings, intentions, attitudes, concepts, images beliefs, hopes and dreams" (Siegel, 2007, p. 122). He maintains that the ability to witness the activity of one's own mind is an important part of what "enables us to gain deep

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[2] In Buddhist discourse "introspection" usually refers to *monitoring and viewing,* whereas in Western psychology it generally designates a process of *analysis and speculation*.

insight and empathy" (p. 122) for others. He proposes that it leads to an eighth sense, the "relational sense," (p. 123) which allows us to perceive that we are felt by others, and that we belong and have membership within a social network. Mindsight is a process that is very close to mindfulness; it is supported by "the tripod of openness, objectivity and observation and enables us to see the mind with more clarity and depth" (Siegel, 2010, p. xxi). A group process where members are encouraged to find the "core place beneath their individual adaptations, the receptive state buried under layers of reactive defense" (Siegel, 2010, p. 217) has a dynamic that puts group members in closer proximity with their own and other's core consciousness—the direct, unmitigated contact with experience (Damasio, 1999; 2010).

What Siegel has called mindsight is similar to the process that has been termed *mentalization* by the British psychoanalyst Peter Fonagy (2004) and his colleagues. They define mentalization as "the mental process by which an individual implicitly and explicitly interprets the actions of himself and others as meaningful on the basis of intentional mental states such as personal desires, needs, feelings, beliefs and reasons" (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004, p. 21). Mentalizing includes "attending, perceiving, recognizing, describing, interpreting, inferring, imagining, simulating, remembering, reflecting, and anticipating" (Allen, 2006, p. 6).

Mentalization, as Fonagy and others see it, is more than a cognitive process; it is "suffused with emotion" (Allen, 2006, p. 8)—one's own and others'. The ability to mentalize is positively related to the sense of attachment[3], and it enhances the relational aspect of group experience: the more secure the attachment to other group members and the leader, the greater the capacity for mentalizing the experience, i.e., for awareness of one's own and others' mind and feelings, and for empathy and loving-kindness.

Interdependence

Group relationships help members recognize and directly experience the Buddha's teaching of interdependence, *pratītyasamutpāda*. The truth of interdependence can be vivid in groups, which are opportunities for heightened awareness of both the relative truth of our separateness and aloneness, *and* the absolute truth of our interdependence.

Students are often acutely aware of their differences. For example, a student may be the only one in the group who did not grow up speaking English. In this situation, s/he is painfully aware that no one would understand the only words s/he has, words from his or her mother language, that express what s/he's feeling. The student may respond to this experience of difference by feeling isolated, turning inward, remembering experiences from home and, for the moment at least, become far removed from the others in the room. On the other hand, a student may find him or herself in a group where everyone is responding with the same emotions of anger and frustration about an assignment's ambiguity or quickly approaching deadline. S/he experiences cohesion and solidarity with the group members. Sometimes the rapidly shifting states—of identification with others alternating with solitude and isolation—can help students recognize the ultimate emptiness of a stable sense of self.

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[3] The term attachment is used here to denote connection and relationship and not craving and/or clinging. A secure attachment includes the ability to be in relationship with others without anxiety regarding abandonment or engulfment.

Conclusion

In concluding this paper on the contemplative model of group process, I'd like to say something about the ultimate fruits of the practice: the pāramitās. Tibetan Buddhism maintains that there are six perfections, or pāramitās, which are part of the bodhisattva's path (Novick, 1999; Chödrön, 2005): generosity, discipline, patience, enthusiasm, meditation, and wisdom. The bodhisattva is Tibetan Buddhism's hero archetype, dedicating her or his life to freeing all sentient beings from suffering. The inextricably interwoven pāramitās are the bodhisattva's actions which embody bodhicitta, i.e., wisdom and loving-kindness. With bodhicitta, an action "is not a fixed response or a habitual pattern but customized to each particular moment" (Siefer, 2009, p. 23) and it further cultivates the pāramitās for all.

Wisdom, like enlightenment, usually comes about not all at once, but as a process resulting from our basic buddha nature and the opportunities of life. As a product of leading contemplative groups, I've come to believe they are rich opportunities for the practice and development of wisdom and the other pāramitās.

These groups call each individual to give generously of him or herself—to share knowledge, awareness, and experience—as well as to receive from others. The groups require discipline, asking students to show up, speak openly and honestly about their experience, work with the fluctuations of their physical and emotional tension that can, at times, put them at the edge of their tolerance. Patience, usually translated as the willingness to be with whatever is occurring, is unconditional acceptance for what is. These groups are predictably unpredictable, and, inevitably, interactions and feelings that are difficult to experience and digest occur. Group dynamics often induce in students and leaders feelings they would rather not feel. The patience to persevere with mindfulness is an exercise that cultivates wisdom and each of the other perfections.

Practice in any of the pāramitās feeds the fourth perfection of enthusiasm, also translated as exertion and effort. The pāramitās, like everything else we practice and cultivate, gain momentum and strength. Exertion, as a pāramitā, is "joyful effort in the direction of wakefulness" (Siefer, 2009, p. 32), and it leads to more of the same—greater joy and happiness. Mindfulness is the fearless openness to all of one's impressions and experience, which leads to deeper awareness of the richness of one's inner and outer world. As Trungpa Rinpoche (1999) said, "whatever occurs in the samsaric mind is regarded as the path: everything is workable. It's a fearless proclamation—the lion's roar" (p. 124). The fifth pāramitā, meditation, is also translated as concentration and "clarity of the mind" (Novick, 1999, p. 123). Mindfulness, as has been discussed throughout this paper, is the type of meditation (Lutz, et al., 2007) practiced in these groups.

As you may know, the goals of Buddhist practice differ depending on the particular teaching of Śākyamuni Buddha. From the Buddha's earlier teachings, disciples understood that reaching nirvāṇa, "a condition of void without mind or body, in which the endless series of births and deaths and the suffering of this world would cease forever" (Kirimura, 1982, p. 88) was the ultimate goal of the practices. But, in the Mahayana tradition, this goal is superseded by Buddha's teachings in the Lotus Sutra, where he "encouraged his disciples to become bodhisattvas and postpone their entry into nirvāṇa…so that they could help others" (Kirimura, 1982, p. 88). Very close to these ultimate goals, is the sixth pāramitā, enlightened wisdom, *prajñā*. In Tibetan Buddhism,

this realization is symbolized by the sword, which cuts through confusion revealing the ultimate wisdom of non-duality and emptiness of self, *shunyata*. Emptiness, here, doesn't mean void, rather it is the apprehension or intuitive recognition that "phenomena do not have inherent, solid characteristics" (Ponlop, 2003, p. 146). With this wisdom, all emotions, perceptions and thoughts are felt as "sacred appearances of the enlightened mandala…we see them as equal, of one taste" (Ponlop, 2003, p. 146). The mindfulness and bottom-up processing that occur in the contemplative group enable members to increasingly see the interdependence, impermanence and emptiness of the processes called I-you and mine-yours. Their sense of self (hopefully) retains continuity and relative reality is not dispersed. But, along side the familiar experience the relative is perhaps a growing glimpse of the ultimate.

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