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Mindfulness and Meditation in the Educational System – a Paradigm Shift? ¹

For thousands of years the practices of mindfulness and meditation have proven to be invaluable tools for exploring one's own mind. Since the 1970s, the neurosciences in particular have researched these topics, discovering that mindfulness and meditation have the potential to not only relax mind and body but also to change entirely the functioning of the brain. More recently, there is growing interest in mindfulness and meditation in society. As a result, mindfulness and meditation have found their way into adult education centres, yoga centres, therapy centres, clinics, prisons and companies. Courses are now offered in schools and universities², while even in day-care centers simple mindfulness exercises are practiced.

In this context, the purpose of the present section is to encourage a closer look at the concept of self-awareness, with a view to it being seen as an important scientific field of study.

Science on the move

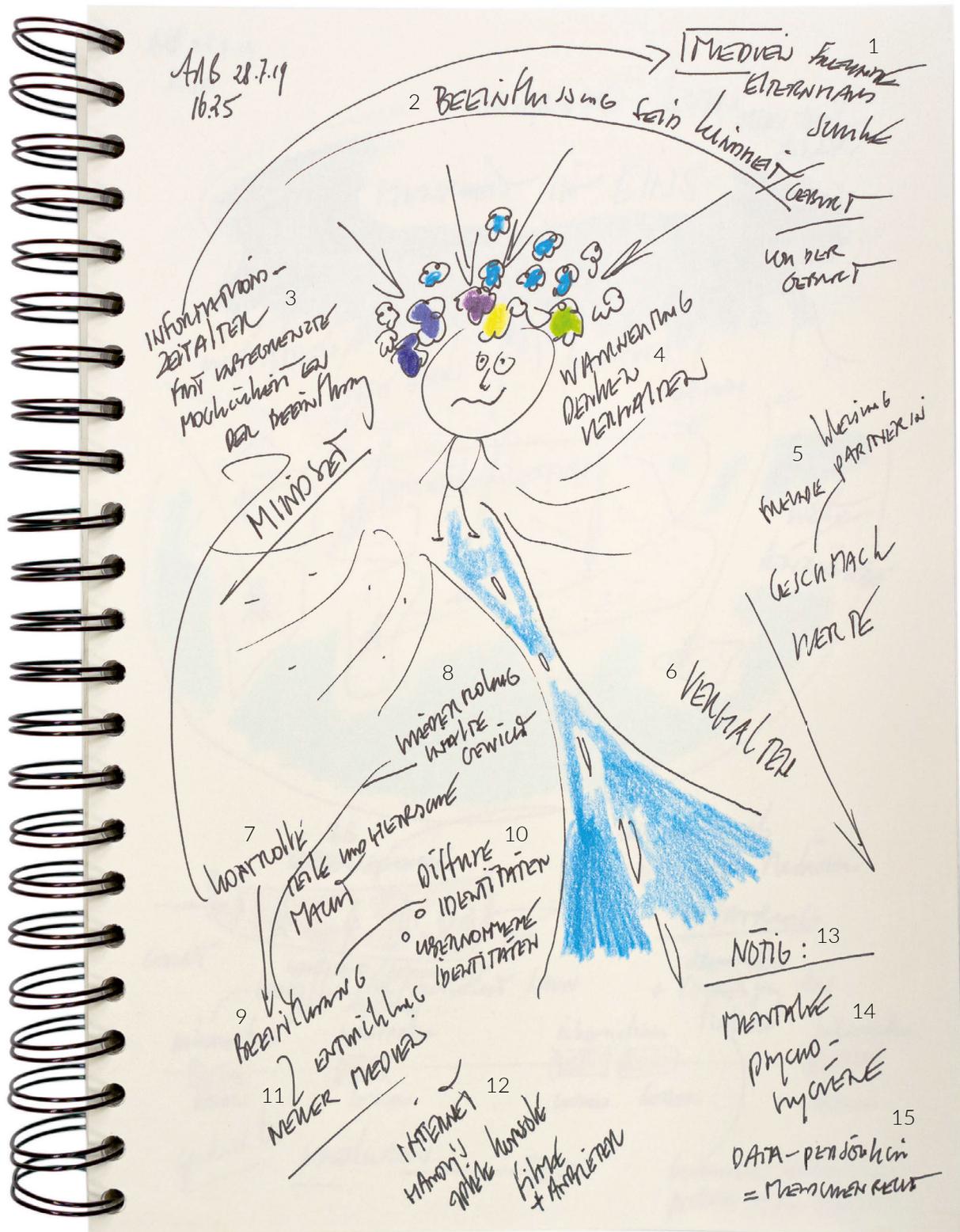
By its very definition, SCIENCE is a multifaceted subject. Above all, science strives for the achievement of knowledge, and to this end, recognized and comprehensible procedures, methods and approaches are employed, data is collected and theories developed. The field of science is composed of many sub-disciplines and individual sciences which research their own subject areas. The imparting of knowledge as well as its systematic storage and archival are also among science's tasks. The term is also represented by the many people working in the scientific community, as well as for the varied institutions and settings in which science takes place. For a better understanding of life, science can serve as a helpful compass, and in harmony with ethics and morals it can lead to social well-being.³

A look at the history of science showcases the manifold achievements accomplished by mankind over the millennia. From the historical perspective, science also proves not to be static, but something always evolving. For example, if it was once assumed that the earth is flat, at some point it was scientifically proven that the earth is in fact round, and that the earth rotates around the sun, and not the other way around.

In this context, the philosopher Thomas S. Kuhn (1922-1996) coined the term PARADIGM. For Kuhn, a paradigm represents a collection of fixed rules and criteria for how the world and science can be interpreted. According to Kuhn, a fundamental change of perspective within science, a so-called scientific CHANGE OF PARADIGM, can only take place when an alternative paradigm asserts itself with sufficient strength, in turn replacing the paradigm that up to this point had predominated. From Kuhn's point of view, this supersedure is not a modest transformation reflecting compromise but a shift right down to scientific foundations – in other words, a “revolution”.⁴

Periods of societal upheaval challenge science. Outdated social structures stagnate and must be revised or be completely replaced. New ones have yet to be tested, creating a certain vacuum and promoting uncertainty. We are witnessing such a time today. In the fields of politics, economics and religion, upholding the “status quo” no longer seems to work. Maintaining our materialistic lifestyles, especially in the industrialized countries, no longer seems appropriate.⁵ It turns out that we have overshot the mark: too much individualism and self-interest at the expense of others, overconsumption, living life too fast. And our connection to nature and the environment has also been thrown off balance, and climate change is the undeniable evidence.⁶

Thoughts shape one's path in life.



¹ media, friends, parent's home, school | ² influences since childhood / birth / before birth | ³ information age, almost unlimited possibilities of influence | ⁴ perception, thinking, behavior | ⁵ clothes, partner, friends; taste, values | ⁶ BEHAVIOUR | ⁷ control, divide and rule, power | ⁸ repetition, content, weight | ⁹ influence | ¹⁰ diffuse identities, assumed identities | ¹¹ development of new media | ¹² internet, cell phones, game consoles, movies + providers | ¹³ NECESSARY | ¹⁴ mental hygiene | ¹⁵ personal data = human right

Your spiritual Self is calling you every day. You must realize that you are not this body, but the Infinite Spirit within.

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952)

Happiness and success – or what is the meaning of life?

Today, happiness and success are currently still closely linked to material prosperity. Money in particular has become immensely important. By means of material goods and the symbolic meaning we attach to them, we strengthen our self-esteem and self-confidence. However, it's also clear that happiness and success achieved in this way is not permanent. The pursuit of money and power arouses destructive emotions such as envy, hate and greed, and these ultimately lead to dissatisfaction, conflict and, in extreme cases, war. It has long been evident that our happiness does not lie in the outer, material world, and that our destiny as human beings cannot be the pursuit of wealth and possessions.⁷ But then what is the meaning of life? What is important in life?

Freedom of mind

In his book *Think on These Things*, the Indian spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) aims exactly at this question when, at the beginning, he asks the reader if they have ever wondered what education means: “Is it merely in order to pass some examinations and get a job? Or is it the function of education to prepare us while we are young to understand the whole process of life? Having a job and earning one’s livelihood is necessary – but is that all?”⁸

For Krishnamurti an essential prerequisite for the understanding of life is “freedom of mind” and thus the absence of fear.⁹ “But how can we be free to look and learn when our minds from the moment we are born to the moment we die are shaped by a particular culture in the narrow pattern of the ‘me’?”¹⁰ According to Krishnamurti, only a mind free of conditioning is able to observe

and change thought and action: “In order to observe the movement of your own mind and heart, of your whole being, you must have a free mind [...]”¹¹

Research on the mind

His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate sees research on the mind as a task for science: “At the academic level, we need further research on the internal processes and relationships of the mind.”¹² Of particular note here are the “Mind and Life Dialogues” initiated in the mid-1980s by the neuroscientist and philosopher Francisco Varela (1946–2001), the American social entrepreneur R. Adam Engle in concert with the Dalai Lama. Together with other western scientists and Buddhist monks, the aim was to stimulate an exchange between modern science and Buddhism in order to discover the potential points of interface.¹³ Through this collaboration, mindfulness and meditation practices have gained increasing attention in the (neuro) sciences.¹⁴

For the American neuroscientist and mindfulness researcher Richard Davidson, who is one of the pioneers of mindfulness and meditation research¹⁵ and is also involved in the “Mind and Life Dialogues”, four components are important for a healthy mind: first, the basic recognition of *awareness*; second, *connection* – for example to be able to experience emotions such as compassion, kindness, gratitude and thus to relate to one’s environment; third, having *insight into one’s own self*; and finally, to recognize one’s own *destiny in life* and to be able to orient one’s own behavior towards it.¹⁶ At his Center for Healthy Minds¹⁷ in Wisconsin, around 100 people conduct research through numerous scientific projects to discover more about what constitutes a healthy mind and especially what is necessary to cultivate well-being. Among other subjects, the focus is on mindfulness and meditation approaches.

The molecular biologist and Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard, whose brain has for long been one of the most studied in mindfulness and meditation research¹⁸, sees meditation as an essential tool for gaining insight into one’s own mind: “Meditation is not just a luxury, but the best way to find out how our mind works. In essence, meditation is the work on our own mind. It is about transforming the mind, because it is the mind that experiences the world. He can be our best friend, but also our greatest enemy. That is why we must cultivate him. And this has an effect not only on

our inner experience, but also on our relationships and our environment.”¹⁹ Above all, meditation and a “compassionate awareness”²⁰ can promote important qualities such as compassion and altruism, which are essential for a happy and peaceful coexistence.²¹

Mindfulness as an attitude

A more general interpretation of MINDFULNESS, in wide use today, involves the conscious perception of one’s current state of affairs – merely observing, not evaluating. “Mindfulness is basically just a particular way of paying attention and the awareness that arises through paying attention in that way.”²² Many everyday activities are well-suited for this: for example eating, walking, talking to someone, cleaning, ironing, washing dishes, listening to nature and much more.²³ When washing the dishes, for example, most people’s thoughts are elsewhere. Mindful dishwashing means that I see what I am washing. That I can feel if the water is warm, if it is cold; how does the plate or glass feel. When we learn to do these things more consciously again, we train our “muscles of awareness” so that we are more in the now in everything we do. The important thing is not to do this in a too intellectual and mechanical way – for example, along the lines of: I must now eat mindfully; I must now breathe mindfully. The desire to be mindful should come from within. Mindfulness is an attitude.

Mindfulness and insight meditation

The mindful observation of physical states, thoughts and emotions is the main focus of the MINDFULNESS and INSIGHT MEDITATION. The aim is to observe the flow of thoughts and emotions and thus gain more insight into their mechanisms. To achieve this, one can practice more structured exercises, such as sitting in silence for 15 to 20 minutes a day and observing the breath in a relaxed manner, or the “body scan” – a relaxation method in which one can use one’s attention gradually “wanders” through one’s body feeling into its different parts. Also sutras (instructions) like: “Breathing in, I calm my mental formations. Breathing out, I calm my mental formations”²⁴ aim to relax the mind.

Metta Meditation

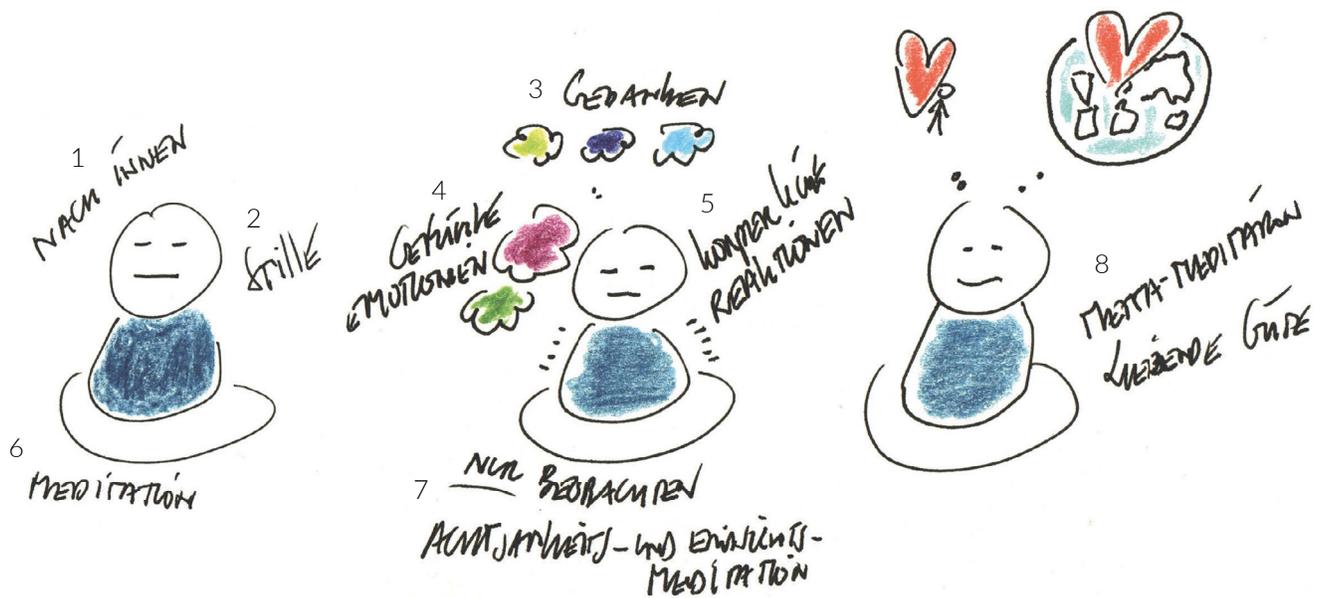
Among meditation techniques, METTA MEDITATIONS or MEDITATIONS OF LOVING KINDNESS form a category of their own. They focus in particular on the promotion of COMPASSION and CONNECTION. Normally, this takes the form of an inner recitation or the speaking out loud of loving phrases for oneself or others, such as, “May I be safe and secure. May I be happy. May I be healthy.” And in relation to others: “May this person be safe and secure. May this person be happy. May this person be healthy.” You can imagine a person that you like, or a person with whom you hardly have a relationship, or even people that you dislike or those whom you don’t hold in high regard. Another variant is to imagine a loving, benevolent feeling and to extend this warmth of heart more and more, and also to include not only people but, for example, nature as well. The radius can encompass a local environment, or extend to the entire planet or even further beyond.²⁵

Problems of mindfulness training

A problem with the rapid spread of mindfulness techniques is that they are now also being put to use with the primary goal of producing profit and maximizing performance. One such example is mindfulness trainings in companies, offered with the aim of making employees more resistant to stress, without changing the structures that cause stress. Another difficulty is that mindfulness can also increase complacency, so that people focus primarily on their own concerns.²⁶

And last but not least is the question of morals. For example, should snipers be trained in mindfulness techniques in order to increase their capacity to kill with greater concentration and precision? In this context, Richard Davidson stresses that the practice of mindfulness must always be accompanied by an ethical stance.²⁷ Jon Kabat-Zinn, the pioneer of the mindfulness movement and founder of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, also emphasizes this aspect: “Moreover, when we speak of *mindfulness*, it is important to keep in mind that we equally mean *heartfulness*.”²⁸ Matthieu Ricard speaks of compassionate mindfulness.²⁹ In his opinion, compassion ensures that mindfulness is lived with sincerity.³⁰

Meditation, mindfulness and insight meditation and metta meditation.



¹ going inward | ² silence | ³ thoughts | ⁴ feelings, emotions | ⁵ physical reactions | ⁶ meditation | ⁷ only observing; mindfulness and insight meditation | ⁸ metta meditation, loving kindness

Another complexity facing mindfulness is the question of dualism. In my role as a conscious observer, am I truly able to experience the event itself with awareness? For example, when I eat mindfully and try to be aware of it: I notice how I eat, what I eat, how it looks, how it smells etc. But the connection to myself as a point of reference creates a separation between me and the action of “eating”: a duality. Is it possible to eliminate this duality? This would involve the dissolution of the reference point “I”. Rather than “I eat a salad”, it would instead be “eating a salad”.

The inner observer

Taking up this point, the Indian spiritual teacher Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981) states: “The observer and his observation, as well as the world observed, appear and disappear together. Beyond it all, there is void. This void is one for all.”³¹ The main question is: what is meant by the observer? “Who says that he is alive? Find out, who is the Witness who *knows* that he is alive? This is Awareness of one’s existence, ‘I Am’, prior to thought. Who says, ‘I am alive’, who says, ‘I am not alive’, what is that? ‘I Am’ is not something that can be put into words; it is the knowledge, the Awareness before thought. You have to

just ‘Be’.”³² An essential point in the teaching of Nisargadatta Maharaj is the division between a *verbal* “I am” and a *non-verbal* “I am”, which can only be experienced without thoughts, memories, emotions, associations and perceptions. In order to reach your true inner being, you have to stick with the non-verbal “I am”.³³ If we succeed in remaining on this level without any attributions, we come into contact with pure consciousness. “Truth is permanent. The real is changeless. What changes is not real, what is real does not change. Now, what is it in you that does not change? As long as there is food, there is body and mind. When the food is stopped, the body dies and the mind dissolves. But does the observer perish?”³⁴

*The Self is that where there is
absolutely no “I” thought.
That is called Silence.*

Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950)

Practice of self-research

Already in the 8th century, the Indian philosopher and teacher of Vedanta, Shankaracharya (788-820), emphasized the importance of self-exploration: “Since I am always the One, subtle, the connoisseur, the witness, the always existing and immovable, there can be no doubt that I am THAT (Brahman). This is the way self-exploration should be conducted.”³⁵

The well-known Indian spiritual teacher Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) takes up this aspect and describes how the practice of self-exploration could be pursued – by asking the following simple questions and conscientiously getting to the bottom of the matter. “Who am I? Who sees when I see? Who hears when I hear? Who knows that I am aware? Who am I?”³⁶ Over time, one discovers that these questions lead to a point that is unchangeable. For example, if you look at yourself regularly in the mirror over the years, you will note that you appear to be getting older. But does the inner observer also change?

The fundamental work *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau (1912-2004) states: “In order to become a Buddha you must discover who it is that wants to become a Buddha. To know this Subject you must right here and now probe deeply into yourself, inquiring: ‘What is it that thinks in terms of good and bad, that sees, that hears?’”³⁷

Such a process of self-inquiry requires the radical abandonment of old conditioning and identification with it. The Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield points to this in his book *A Path with Heart. A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*: “Our world and sense of self is a play of patterns. Any identity we can grasp is transient, tentative. This is difficult to understand from words such as *selflessness* or *emptiness of self*. In fact, my own teacher Achaan Chah said, ‘If you try to understand it intellectually, your head will probably explode.’ However, the experience of selflessness in practice can bring us to great freedom.”³⁸

In short, it is about freeing oneself from the mind and *being with the whole being*. And this can be practiced in every moment. “For anyone to be, it is only necessary to be. No path to one’s own Being could be thought to exist, no path of realization of the impersonal God, the omnipresent Being, could be shown, because the very conception of ‘path’ takes one’s self out of one’s own Being. The very idea of a path introduces the conception of something far away, whereas the Being is the essential *oneself*.

[...] It is just a question of Being [...].”³⁹ This form of being is a deep form of mindful living.

Of course, this does not mean that in the context of mindful living thinking no longer has any function. Thinking is an extremely important tool for mastering everyday life. Drawing on the memory to store thinking, the knowledge one needs for a respective course of action can be usefully retrieved when needed. But on the psychological level, countless thoughts dealing with past and future, with fears and desires constantly keep us from experiencing the present moment.⁴⁰ Moreover, our thinking is not a fixed, stable state but is constantly changing.

English born lecturer and psychotherapist Phyllis Krystal (1914-2016) writes in her book *Taming our Monkey Mind. Insight, Detachment, Identity*: “So thought is obviously not always a reliable indicator of what is correct or incorrect. It merely presents us with a view of our personal preferences and aversions according to the way our senses have lured our monkey mind into becoming attached to certain objects, ideas, opinions, beliefs, superstitions, and the vast mass of human thought.”⁴¹

If we want to direct our attention inwards, we need silence: “[...] when the mind is very quiet, completely still, when there is not a movement of thought and therefore no experiencer, no observer, then that very stillness has its own creative understanding. In that stillness the mind is transformed into something else.”⁴² In this case we are talking about an understanding of mindfulness that goes far beyond a more general understanding of mindfulness. Mindfulness in all its depth is a meditative state, is MEDITATION. “Mindfulness can help us to communicate again, especially with ourselves.”⁴³ Or in the words of Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Most of all, it has to do with being in touch.”⁴⁴

Meditation and Self

“This source of wisdom is the Self”, says Indian spiritual teacher and peace activist Vishnu Devananda (1927-1993). “The Self is not the individual body or mind, but rather that aspect deep inside each person that knows the Truth.”⁴⁵

And in order to reach this truth, this deep inner state of being and nature, it requires meditative contemplation. Because: “Without the help of meditation, you cannot attain Knowledge of the Self. Without its aid, you

cannot grow into the divine state.”⁴⁶ And vice versa, if the SELF-AWARENESS is maintained continuously, this is called “true meditation.”⁴⁷

Outlook

To revisit Krishnamurti’s question about the importance of education, the following questions arise: “How can we learn to understand our own lives? How can everyone find out who they really are instead of imitating others⁴⁸ and how can we grow without fear in ‘complete freedom to grow and create a different society, a new world?’⁴⁹” In order to achieve this, it is important that we also learn through our education systems to promote and cultivate SELF-AWARENESS.⁵⁰ And for this the mind should be unbound and free. Mindfulness and meditation programs can make an important contribution here. “Meditation is about exploring the mind and strengthening the positive qualities. But what is meditation good for? It serves the inner development, so that we can act more from the basis of a healthy state of mind.”⁵¹

In comparing the early researches of neuroscientific mindfulness and meditation in the 1970s with today, a great deal has been achieved. As the research instruments and approaches become finer and more precise, there will inevitably be new insights.⁵² It remains to be seen to what extent it will be possible to scientifically record the existence and workings of the Self.⁵³ Ultimately, for this to be achieved would entail a necessary shift from the material level (for example the brain) to the immaterial level (the Self). And in such a case we would certainly be faced with a paradigm shift.

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² For specific examples of how mindfulness and meditation can be successfully implemented in a university context, as well as an overview of numerous universities already active in this area, see: www.hm.edu/meditationsmodell (accessed: September 13, 2020) See also <https://achtsamehochschulen.de> (p. 65) as well as www.netzwerk-achtsamkeit-in-der-bildung.de (p. 66) (accessed September 13, 2020).

³ Cf. de Vries 1985.

⁴ Cf. Kuhn 2012.

⁵ Cf. Dalai Lama 1999.

⁶ Cf. Dalai Lama 1999.

⁷ Cf. Dalai Lama 1999, p. 7.

⁸ Krishnamurti 1989, p. 1. For a summary of Krishnamurti's career and some of his most important statements, see the documentary film *Jiddu Krishnamurti – The Challenge of Change* by Michael Mendiza.

⁹ Cf. Krishnamurti 1989, p. 3.

¹⁰ Krishnamurti 2010, p. 19.

¹¹ Krishnamurti 2010, p. 18.

¹² Dalai Lama 2015a, p. 213.

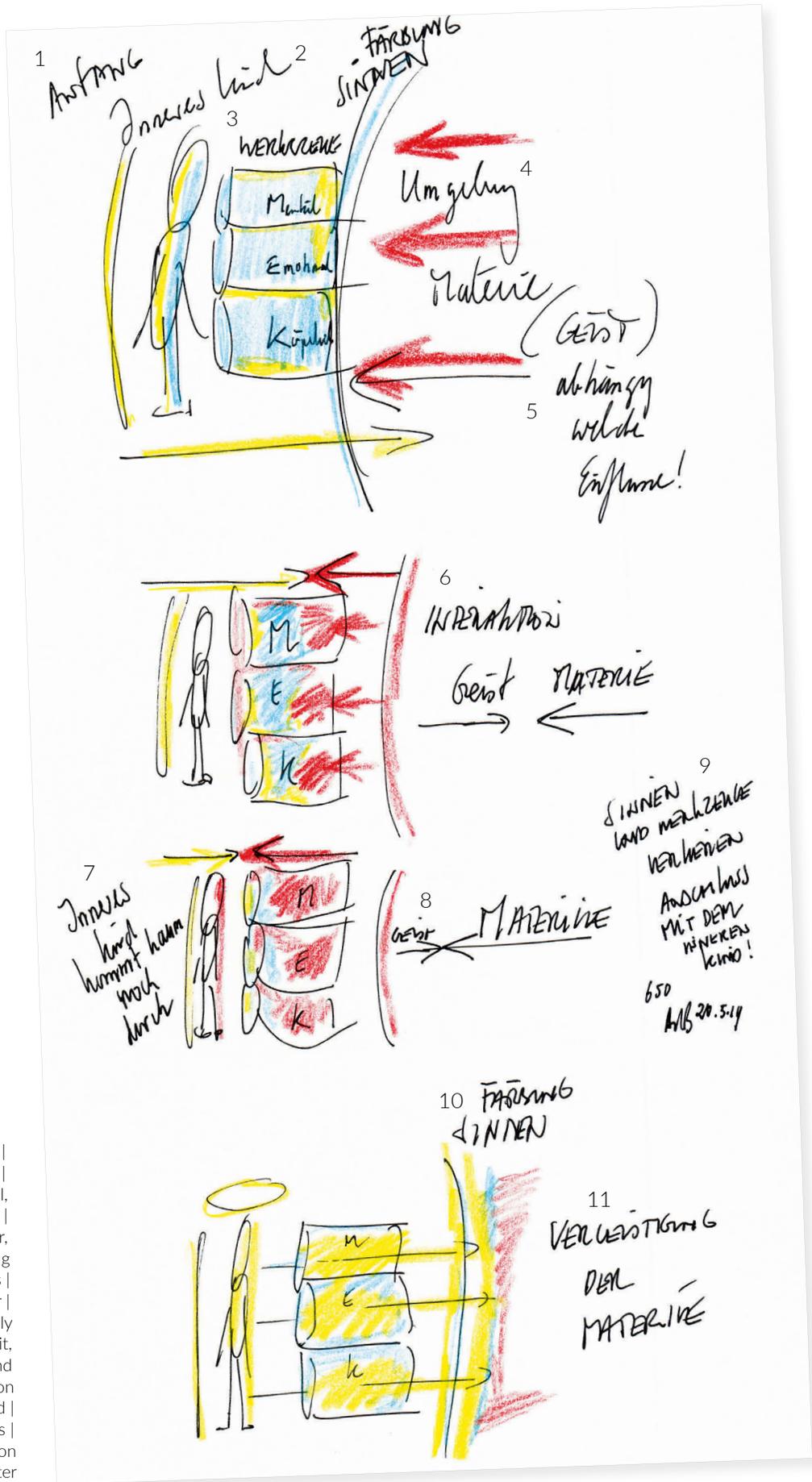
¹³ For more information, see www.mindandlife.org. (accessed: September 13, 2020). See also the film *Dalai Lama – Scientist* (2019).

¹⁴ Cf. Goleman 2004; Davidson / Goleman 2017.

¹⁵ Cf. Davidson / Goleman 2017; Ott 2015; Sedlmeier 2016; Tang 2019.

- ¹⁶ Cf. Davidson 2018, p. 61. See also the lecture and panel discussion "We can change the brain, by changing the mind" on March 19, 2019a, Professor Richard Davidson in Munich at the Forum für den Wandel of the Edith-Haberland-Wagner Foundation, www.ehw-stiftung.de (accessed September 13, 2020).
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- ¹⁸ Cf. Ricard 2018, p. 38.
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- ²² Kabat-Zinn 2013, p. lxii.
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- ²⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh 2008, p. 13 and 65.
- ²⁵ In the book: *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace* (2008) by Jack Kornfield a series of metta meditation or loving-kindness exercises are described. For more examples of exercises, see also Kornfield 1993.
- ²⁶ Cf. Davidson 2018, p. 61.
- ²⁷ See lecture and panel discussion of March 19, 2019a, Professor Richard Davidson, www.ehw-stiftung.de (accessed September 13, 2020).
- ²⁸ Cf. Kabat-Zinn 2013, p. xxxv.
- ²⁹ Cf. Ricard 2018, p. 42 [Author's translation]. See also Ricard 2015b, p. 239 ff. and Ricard 2016.
- ³⁰ Cf. Ricard 2016.
- ³¹ Wolinsky 2000, p. 8.
- ³² Nisargadatta 2014, p. 15. That the naming of the perceiver is a creation of one's own thinking is also found in Krishnamurti 1989, p. 195.
- ³³ Cf. Wolinsky 2000, p. 17. Nisargadatta Maharaj distinguishes in his teachings between the verbal and the non-verbal I am. An exercise on the "non-verbal I am" is shown by the long-time disciple of Nisargadatta Maharaj and founder of quantum psychology, Stephen H. Wolinsky, Ph.D., under "What is the I am?", "Nisargadatta Maharaj / Experiential Meditation", www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE6kS7vVsXw (accessed September 13, 2020). The exercise is also part of the film *I Am That I Am. Experience the Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj – Part 1* (2009, 7:33-16:39 min.). For more in-depth information, see the short article by Jack Kornfield about his experience with Nisargadatta: "Jack Kornfield on Nisargadatta Maharaj (2)", www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXuF8qmv5Nc (accessed September 13, 2020).
- ³⁴ Nisargadatta 2009, p. 201.
- ³⁵ Shankaracharya 2016, p. 39 [Author's translation].
- ³⁶ Singer 2007, p. 23; see also Maharshi 2011, p. 18 f. as well as Maharshi 2017, p. 115 f. U.S. spiritual teacher and economics professor Michael A. Singer also emphasizes the focus on the Self: "When you contemplate the nature Self, you are meditating. That is why meditation is the highest state. It is the return to the root of your being, the simple awareness of being aware." (Singer 2007, p. 37) See also interview "What do you really want?", www.youtube.com/watch?v=73-2PggJJW0 (accessed September 13, 2020).
- ³⁷ Kopleau 2000, p. 186.
- ³⁸ Kornfield 1993, p. 200.
- ³⁹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi 2019, p. 267 f.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Krishnamurti 2010, p. 42 and 103.
- ⁴¹ Krystal 1994, p. 120.
- ⁴² Krishnamurti 1989, p. 196.
- ⁴³ Thich Nhat Hanh. Citation in: Glogowski, Dieter (2016). *Buddhistische Ansichten. 365 Weisheiten aus dem Himalaya*. München: Frederick & Thaler, [Author's translation].
- ⁴⁴ Kabat-Zinn 1994, p. 3.
- ⁴⁵ Vishnu Devananda 1981, p. 5.
- ⁴⁶ Swami Sivananda in: Vishnu Devananda 1981, p. 1.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Krishnamurti 2010, p. 120 f.
- ⁴⁸ Cf. Krishnamurti 1989, p. 3.
- ⁴⁹ Krishnamurti 1989, p. 4.
- ⁵⁰ See also Maharshi 2017, p. 9.
- ⁵¹ Dalai Lama 2015b, p. 344 f.
- ⁵² Cf. Goleman/Davidson 2017, p. 288 ff.; Morel 2016.
- ⁵³ Cf. Morel 2016, 17:51 min.

Interaction between spirit and matter. The vehicles of the self, the soul, first become filled with matter. Through the spiritualization of matter the vehicles become permeable and clear again.



¹ beginning, inner child |

² coloring, senses |

³ vehicles, mental, emotional, physical |

⁴ environment, matter, (spirit) | ⁵ depending upon which influences |

⁶ interaction, spirit, matter |

⁷ inner child can barely come through | ⁸ spirit, matter | ⁹ senses and vehicles lose connection with the inner child |

¹⁰ coloring senses |

¹¹ the spiritualization of matter