



# Confronting Racism with Mindfulness

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## Abstract

Racial oppression is a longstanding and widespread problem with significant repercussions and consequences for the health of those impacted. The roots of racial prejudice reach far back into the history of European culture. A contribution to the much-needed change can be found in the cultivation of mindfulness, in particular in its external dimension. This emerges from considering the background provided by the early Buddhist dismissal of caste prerogatives in the ancient Indian setting, granting priority to ethical conduct over birth. Besides opening up a new dimension for mindfulness-related research, which has so far predominantly focused on the internal cultivation of mindfulness, exploring the early Buddhist perspective also shows that diversity work can become an integral part of the Buddhist path of practice. This holds in particular for white Buddhists, who need to confront their superiority conceit as an obstruction to their own progress to liberation.

**Keywords** Caste · Diversity · Discrimination · External mindfulness · Racial oppression · Racism · Superiority conceit · White supremacy

A range of reviews and meta-studies converge on highlighting the injurious repercussions of racial oppression on mental health and consequently also on physical health (Brondolo et al. 2009; Carter et al. 2017; Cook et al. 2019; Lee and Ahn 2011; Lee and Ahn 2012; Lee and Ahn 2013; Paradies et al. 2015; Pieterse et al. 2012; Shavers et al. 2012; Williams and Mohammed 2009; see also Pascoe and Richman 2009 and Schmitt et al. 2014 in the context of discrimination in general).

In the USA, in particular, members of groups suffering from racial oppression tend to have inadequate access to mental health care and are in general likely to receive lower quality health treatment. Racial oppression, which besides health care also impacts education, employment, daily life, and criminal justice processes, acts as a chronic stressor that manifests in a broad range of ways. Its repercussions even result in members of racially oppressed groups suffering from higher rates of premature mortality. The horrible reality of racism has become only too evident with the recent killing of Georg Floyd by Minneapolis police (on 25 May, 2020), being yet another

instance in the unceasing series of killings of unarmed black men in the USA.

The staggering amount of harm caused in this way calls for widespread and sustained systemic change. By way of attempting to offer a contribution to the much-needed change, this article will explore the potential role of mindfulness in this respect, viewed from the context of relevant early Buddhist teachings. Before exploring these topics further, however, a survey of antecedents to racism in European history is required in order to evaluate how far contemporary manifestations of racism can be meaningfully approached from the perspective of the early Buddhist opposition to caste-related prejudices in ancient India. In doing so, what follows is not in any way intended as presenting some sort of universally valid definition of racism and its history in the world. Instead, the ensuing survey is only meant to enable building a bridge to the teachings of early Buddhism and show how these can help to counter internalized superiority and the way racial hierarchy impacts many dimensions of daily life in contemporary society.

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## Antecedents in European History

Racial discrimination appears to have early precedents in the history of Europe. Commenting on ancient Greek and Roman literature, Isaac (2010, p. 35) noted that a “characteristic

feature of Graeco-Roman (proto-)racism is the deployment of presumed evidence and reasoning in defence of irrational ideas of superiority and inferiority,” with several such proto/pseudo-scientific argumentations continuing to exert their influence in mediaeval times (Biller 2010). Isaac (p. 47) explained that “the essence of racism, as a conceptual mechanism serving to rationalize stereotypes and prejudices, has its origin in fifth-century [BCE] Greece.”

Commenting on the situation in ancient Rome, Goldenberg (2010, p. 94) noted that “there are three reports of the Roman soldiers under Brutus killing an Ethiopian whom they met on the way to the battle of Philippi [42 BCE], believing that the encounter portended a disaster” due to their belief in the inauspiciousness of the Ethiopian’s dark skin color. Goldenberg (p. 104) then traced the line of development from ancient to later times in the following manner:

The very dark skin color of the African was interpreted negatively in the classical world (as a color of ill omen and death), in Philo (as evil), and in Rabbinic literature (as sin). Christian interpretation then adopted this symbolism, greatly expanding its application for its own exegetical and theological purposes. From here, it influenced the West’s developing racism against black Africans.

Heng (2011a, p. 258) argued for the existence of “racial thinking, racial law, racial formation, and racialized behaviors and phenomena in medieval Europe before the emergence of a recognizable vocabulary of race.” For example,

the 13th century encyclopedia of Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, offers a theory of climate in which cold lands produce white folk, and hot lands produce black: white being, we are told, a visual marker of inner courage, while the men of Africa, possessing black faces, short bodies, and crisp hair are ‘cowards of heart’ and ‘guileful’ (p. 259).

In this way, already at this time physical aspects as the outcome of climatic conditions were mistakenly assumed to be reflective of mental qualities. Heng (2011b, p. 278) also reported that, throughout medieval Europe,

Jews were systematically defined and set apart via biomarkers such as the possession of horns, a male menstrual flux or the generationally inherited New Testament curse of visceral-hemorrhoidal bleeding, an identifying stink (the infamous *foetor judaicus*), facial and somatic phenotypes (the *facies judaica*, ‘Jewish face’), and charges of bestiality, blasphemy, diabolism, deicide, vampirism, and cannibalism laid at their door through a hermeneutics of theology exercised by

religious and laity alike across a wide range of learned and popular contexts.

According to Nirenberg (2010, p. 248), the term “raza,” the Spanish counterpart to the English word “race,” had during the early fifteenth century (and thus still before the birth of Columbus) developed from designating the pedigree of horses to being applied to human beings, in particular to distinguish Old Christians from converts who had previously been Jews or Muslims:

The ideological underpinning of these new discriminations claimed explicitly to be rooted in natural realities, as is most evident in what came to be called the doctrine of “limpieza de sangre” [purity of blood]. According to this doctrine, Jewish and Muslim blood was inferior to Christian; the possession of any amount of such blood made one liable to heresy and moral corruption; and therefore any descendent of Jews and Muslims, no matter how distant, should be barred from church and secular office, from any number of guilds and professions, and especially from marrying Old Christians (p. 242).

## Defining the Compass of Racism

In current usage in the West, the notion of “racism” tends to be applied in particular to the type of racial oppression that emerged in the modern period as a product of the colonial enterprises of European powers, where the slave trade motivated a tendency to dehumanize Africans to justify treating them as a commodity. Another aspect of the same tendency was the dehumanization of indigenous people in the Americas to vindicate their systematic genocide. What marks this period as particularly relevant to the topic of racism is the development of pseudo-scientific arguments that attempted to ground oppression in biology.

In view of the devastating effects of racial oppression on a large part of the population in the modern world, it is only natural that the term racism tends to be used in ways that are particularly tailored to this situation. However, for the overall purpose of confronting racism in all of its manifestations, it can at times be helpful if historical antecedents are kept in view. Adopting a broader view of the problem in question would also enable taking into account more recent events related to racial or ethnic prejudices. For example, Hahn (2001, p. 9) applied the concept of “racial discrimination” to the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides (although “ethnic” or “religio-ethnic” would perhaps fit these cases better), concluding that racism cannot be confined to acts of oppression based on skin color:

especially in the years leading up to the killings in 1994, racial discrimination between the minority Tutsi groupings (Hamites) and the majority Hutus (Bantus) depended on the revival and institutionalization of long-standing antagonisms among peoples not estranged by obvious divergence in physiognomy or color ...

Though color seems never to have been a prime term of abuse among Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Gypsies (Romany), and Jews, these diverse groups clearly thought of themselves as enmeshed in racial conflicts, and race remains an essential tool in exploring the warfare and the identity politics that lay behind the hostilities.

According to Hahn (2001, p. 9), research into these harrowing conflicts tends to “retain race as an appropriate category of analysis for cultural conflict where color does not function as the fundamental marker of difference.” Another relevant argument by Stoler (1997, p. 196) relates to

a basic assumption of much anti-racist discourse of the post-war period: namely, that if we can disprove the credibility of race as a scientific concept, we can dismantle the power of racism itself — that racisms rise and fall on the scientific credibility of the concept of race. Not only can racisms thrive without such certainty, racial discourses proliferate and produce new relations of power and knowledge in the contest over which of these linkages are “true” or “false.” Thus, for example, the fact that phrenology — the theory that a person’s character and intelligence could be deduced from the shape of the skull — was quickly discredited in the nineteenth century as an accurate measure of racial endowment did nothing to undermine the discussion of, and attention riveted on, the relationship between physical measurements and mental aptitude.

As noted by Ziegler (2010, p. 198), the historical perspective suggests that “racism can emerge in a purely religious context without any scientific or biological input.” For this reason, broadening the concept of racism could help to develop a comprehensive approach to countering racial oppression in all of its possible forms. Without thereby intending to dismiss the employment of a more stringent definition of racism in other contexts, at least for the present study the above considerations will hopefully make it acceptable to adopt a definition of racism sufficiently broad so as to keep in view various historical antecedents as well as related forms of discrimination and oppression. Hence, an attempt at providing a working definition for a broader conception of racism, relevant to the context of the present investigation, could be somewhat along the following lines:

Abusive, oppressive, and discriminative behavior by a particular human population that is in a position of

power and whose membership is acquired by birth and not otherwise accessible, involving notions of ancestral purity that would be lost by intermarriage and often are related to physical marks (such as skin color), where a pervasive sense of intrinsic superiority and hence entitlement to privileges tends to be grounded in religious and pseudo-scientific arguments as being divinely ordained or inherent in nature.

## Caste and Racism

Proceeding beyond European and American history, other manifestations of discrimination can be discerned in relation to the Indian caste system. In fact, a preamble to a statement issued by the UNESCO on July 18, 1950, in response to the horrors caused by racism during the Holocaust in Germany, stated that “racism is a particularly vicious and mean expression of the caste spirit” (p. 3). According to Pinto (2001), even constitutional provisions in modern India implicitly link discrimination based on caste to racial discrimination (although the official stance of the Indian government denies that caste can be equivalent to race).

Conversely, studies of racism in the USA have at times employed the term “caste.” For example, Warner (1936, p. 234) distinguished between the “Negro caste” and the “white caste,” based on the following premise:

Caste as used here describes a theoretical arrangement of the people of the given group in an order in which the privileges, duties, obligations, opportunities, etc., are unequally distributed between the groups which are considered to be higher and lower ... where marriage between two or more groups is not sanctioned and where there is no opportunity for members of the lower groups to rise into the upper groups or of the members of the upper to fall into the lower ones.

In more recent publications, Newman (2008, p. 447) spoke of the creation of a “constitutionally mandated racial caste system within the United States.” Alexander (2011, p. 7) argued that the “mass incarceration of poor people of color in the United States amounts to a new caste system” (on the causes for the mass incarceration of African American male youth in particular see also DeGruy Leary 2001).

Presenting the above quotations is not meant to encourage a wholesale identification of the Indian caste system as a form of racism. In fact, caste does not seem to be directly extrapolatable to modern day racial oppression in the USA and Europe. The point is therefore only that it does seem reasonable to propose that both share sufficient similarities to make it meaningful to turn to the situation in ancient India as a way of providing an additional perspective on the

problem of racial oppression in contemporary society. In the words of Bêteille (1990, p. 494), “when we compare caste and race at a deeper level, we find in both systems a prevalence of values and symbols relating to blood and natural substance, and beliefs regarding the strong constraints imposed by them on human character and conduct.”

Of particular relevance to the overall concern of the present article, which is to provide a Buddhist background for exploring the potential of mindfulness as a way of countering racial oppression, is material found among the Pāli discourses and their parallels that reflects the early Buddhist attitude toward caste-related prejudice and discrimination. The Pāli term usually rendered as “caste” or “class” is *vaṇṇa*, corresponding to Sanskrit *varṇa*, which literally means “color.” Monier-Williams (1899/1999, p. 924) commented that the nuance of designating a caste probably derives “from [the] contrast of colour between the dark aboriginal tribes” and the fair Aryans. According to Kariyawasam (1977, p. 691), “the origin of caste in India could be traced to the racial superiority which the ... Aryans claimed ... mainly on grounds of colour of the skin.” Kennedy (1995, p. 33) noted that in Vedic texts, non-Aryans

are described in unflattering terms regarding their physical appearance. Not only did they sport anasal faces, dark skins and short statures but they practiced revolting religious rites, mumbled a barbarous tongue and engaged in unacceptable behaviour. If these things offended the chanters of the Vedic hymns, perhaps it was because they themselves possessed elongated and prominent noses, fair complexions and tall statures.

Gombrich (1992, p. 163) commented that apparently

the typical brahmin was fairer than the typical *sūdra* [worker] or at least perceived to be so. Thus the brahmins are said to claim that their *vaṇṇa* is white and the other is black. We may assume that the brahmins considered those who had joined the [Buddhist] Sangha to have *sūdra* status because the Sangha kept no caste rules of purity, had people from all castes live together and accept food from anyone; we can further assume that they were blacker because they rapidly become sunburnt like *sūdra* labourers.

The impression of a disdain for those of dark color that emerges from the above comments needs to be counterbalanced by noting that ancient Indian texts at times feature heroes, sages, and beautiful women of dark skin (Mishra 2015). Moreover, at the time of the Buddha, the caste system was still in the process of

developing to the form it eventually came to acquire. In fact, several early discourses reflect the struggle of the brahmins to assert their superiority over all other classes by dint of their birth.

## Brahminical Claims in Ancient India

The relevance of notions of purity and superiority acquired by birth can be seen in descriptions of what, from the viewpoint of ancient Indian brahmins, were their distinctive qualities. An example occurs in a discourse reporting how a brahmin affirmed, in front of the Buddha, that he deserved respect. Below are the two extant versions of this affirmation, one of which based on a Pāli original and the other on an original preserved in Chinese translation. Here and elsewhere, juxtaposing the different extant version is meant to enable a direct appreciation of the similarities and differences between parallels:

Gotama, I am indeed a brahmin well born on both sides, mother and father, of pure descent up to the seventh paternal generation, unchallenged and unreproached in regard to reputation about birth.

(AN 5.192: *ahaṃ hi, bho gotama, brāhmaṇo ubhato sujāto, mātito ca pitito ca, saṃsuddhagahaṇiko yāva sattamā pitāmahāyugā akkhitto anupakkuṭṭho jātivādena*).

I have been raised by parents of pure descent for up to seven generations; on my father’s and mother’s sides there has been uninterrupted clan continuity of births without blemish.

(MĀ 158: 我為父母所舉受生清淨乃至七世, 父母不絕種族生生無惡).

In the two parallel versions, the brahmin continues by describing his learning as another of his endowments. Both versions report that the Buddha replied by distinguishing types of brahmins who, although being well born in the way described above, differ in their respective ethical conduct, concluding that the most inferior of these five types is actually an outcast. This reply implies a dismissal of the idea of purity by birth, to the extent of proposing that a brahmin who is of so-called pure birth for seven generations can be regarded as an outcast by dint of behavior. The reevaluation proposed in this way enshrines a central aspect of the early Buddhist attitude toward claims of superiority through birth: What really matters is one’s conduct.

The theme of color comes up in a derogatory phrase used by some brahmins to denigrate Buddhist monastics. One such instance involves a group of young brahmins who happened to pass by a hut in which a

Buddhist monastic was meditating, which motivated them to give vent to the following remark:

These shaven-headed petty recluses are menials, the dark offspring of our Kinsman's feet.  
(SN 35.132: *ime pana muṇḍakā samaṇakā ibbhā kaṇhā bandhupādāpaccā*).

A shaven-headed recluse stays in here; this is a dark person and not a superior person in the world.  
(SĀ 255: 此中剃髮沙門住, 是黑闇人, 非世勝人).

The two versions agree in associating the inferior states of recluses, a term comprising Buddhist monastics and other religious practitioners as distinct from brahmins, with being of dark color. The reference to the Kinsman's feet relates to the myth of the origins of the four classes or castes in the *Puruṣasūkta* of the *Rgveda* (X, 90). According to this myth, brahmins were born from the mouth of the primordial being, warriors (*kṣatriya*) from his chest, merchants (*vaiśya*) from his thighs, and workers (*sūdra*) from his feet.

Although a reference to the myth of the origins of the brahmins occurs only in the Pāli version of the two parallels quoted above, the same myth features in a standard description of the superiority claims made by brahmins, reported in comparable ways in parallel versions. An example in case is the following claim:

Brahmins are the foremost class; other classes are inferior. Brahmins are the fair class; other classes are dark. Brahmins are purified, unlike non-brahmins. Brahmins are the legitimate children of Brahmā, born from his mouth; they are born of Brahmā, created by Brahmā, and are the heirs of Brahmā.  
(MN 84: *brāhmaṇā va seṭṭho vaṇṇo, hīno añño vaṇṇo; brāhmaṇā va sukko vaṇṇo, kaṇho añño vaṇṇo; brāhmaṇā va sujjhanti, no abrāhmaṇā; brāhmaṇā va brahmuno puttā orasā mukhato jātā brahmajā brahmanimmitā brahmadāyādā ti*).

We [brahmins] are foremost; other persons are inferior. We are fair; other persons are dark. Brahmins are purified, unlike non-brahmins. The brahmins are the children born from [Brahmā's] mouth, by him brahmins have been created, and the brahmins are his property.  
(SĀ 548: 我第一, 他人卑劣. 我白, 餘人黑. 婆羅門清淨, 非非婆羅門. 是婆羅門子從口生, 婆羅門所化, 是婆羅門所有).

The proper attitude toward such claims, as expressed by a Buddhist monastic who had been asked his view on this matter, is to dismiss them as mere propaganda which the brahmins have been circulating in the world (MN 84: *ghoso yev' eso lokasmiṃ* and SĀ 548: 世間言說, literally “a saying in the world”).

The attitudes of ancient Indian brahmins evident in this way parallel seventeenth century European attitudes that found their expression in the pseudo-scientific creation of a racial hierarchy of human beings, which had the basic function “to justify social inequalities as natural” (Gupta 2018, p. 153). The promotion of such a racial hierarchy can similarly be considered to be just propaganda which those who benefit from it have been circulating in the world.

## Rejection of Substantial Differences Among Human Beings

A rebuttal of the idea that human beings differ from each other in substantial ways can be found the *Vāseṭṭha-sutta*. According to this Pāli discourse, of which no parallel is extant, the Buddha first surveyed in detail distinctions evident among different plants, insects, and animals, followed by arguing that no such distinctions can be found among humans:

Whilst among these species there are many distinct features determined by birth, among human beings there are no such distinct features determined by birth.  
(MN 98 or Sn 607: *yathā etāsu jātisu, liṅgaṃ jātimayaṃ puthu; evaṃ n' atthi manussesu liṅgaṃ jātimayaṃ puthu*).

The *Vāseṭṭha-sutta* continues by providing a survey of the human body from top to bottom, noting that no substantial differences can be found. This leads to the following conclusion:

Among individual human beings' bodies in themselves no [distinct features] are found; speaking of distinctions among human beings is [merely] a matter of convention.  
(MN 98 or Sn 611: *paccattaṃ sasarīresu, manussesvetaṃ na vijjati; vokāraṇ ca manussesu samaññāya pavuccatī*).

Chalmers (1894, p. 346) noted that the taking of this position “was the more remarkable inasmuch as the accident of colour did not mislead Gotama” into assuming that there is a substantial difference between human beings. The *Vāseṭṭha-sutta* is only extant in Pāli and thus lacks the support of a known parallel. Nevertheless, another Pāli discourse and its Chinese counterpart illustrate the irrelevance of class distinctions among human beings in matters of spiritual progress with the example of the irrelevance of skin color in the case of an ox employed to carry a burden. What really matters is whether an ox is strong and capable of bearing a burden:

They will just yoke a burden to it, without concern for its color. It is the same among human beings, whatever their birth.

(AN 5.179: *tam eva bhāre yuñjanti, nāssa vaṇṇaṃ parikkhare. evam evaṃ manussesu, yasmiṃ kismiṃ ci jātiye*).

It will be selected for its capability and not be rejected due its color. It is the same with these human beings, whatever their place of birth.

(MĀ 128: 取彼之所能, 莫以色為非. 如是此人間, 若有所生處).

The reasoning proposed here applies to the skin color of human beings, which is similarly of no further significance. What really matters is an individual's capability, not the degree to which melanin has darkened the skin. The same basic stance can also be seen in another passage, which takes up the question of children from parents of different classes (MN 93, MĀ 151, and T 71). The passage illustrates the ultimate untenability of innate superiority claims made by brahmins with the example of a horse mating with a donkey, where the resultant foal is a mule. Perhaps this relates to the tendency for mules to be infertile, something that does not hold for children from parents of different classes. On adopting this interpretation, the illustration would highlight that differences between human parents are considerably fewer than the distinctions that obtain between a horse and a donkey.

A related position can be seen implicit in the *Vāseṭṭha-sutta*, according to which among human beings there are no substantial differences in respect to their genitals, unlike the case of various animals (MN 98 and Sn 609). In other words, whereas different species of animals usually cannot mate with each other and fail to produce fertile offspring, such differences do not obtain among human beings.

In this way, according to Nanayakkara (1972, p. 329), “the Buddha stressed the fact that, biologically, man is of one species, and on this ground” rejected claims to class superiority acquired by birth. As noted by Gombrich (1988, p. 77), in various ways “the Buddha was able to show that what brahmins believed to be ingrained in nature was nothing but a convention.”

The same applies to attempts to ground racial oppression in pseudo-scientific arguments that attempt to establish racial hierarchies as ingrained in nature. Such attempts should similarly be dismissed as lacking any foundation.

## Criticism of Superiority by Birth

An emphasis on the individual's capability over qualities supposedly inherited by being born in a particular class or caste seems to have been characteristic of the Buddha. Judging from the early discourses, the position taken by him in this respect appears to have been considered by ancient Indian brahmins as a distinct feature of the Buddha's teaching, to the extent that they tried time and again to refute him on this topic. In a way,

it seems as if ancient Indian brahmins would have thought of the Buddha not so much as a teacher of meditation (let alone as a teacher of mindfulness) but as one who proclaimed that class or caste had no bearing on spiritual practice. Expressed in modern terms, the Buddha stood up for diversity and confronted discrimination and oppression based on skin color.

The *Assalāyana-sutta* and its parallel report an instance where the reputation the Buddha had earned himself for opposing brahmin prejudice comes up explicitly, voiced by a group of brahmins who wished to defeat him in debate on this issue:

This recluse Gotama proclaims purification of the four classes. Who would be able to debate this assertion with the recluse Gotama?

(MN 93: *ayaṃ kho samaṇo gotamo cātuvannaṃim suddhiṃ paññapeti. ko nu kho pahoti samaṇena gotamena saddhiṃ asmiṃ vacane paṭimantetun ti?*).

“The recluse Gotama asserts that all the four classes are purified; he declares it and proclaims it.” They thought: “Friends, who is there with the ability to approach the recluse Gotama and in relation to this matter defeat him in debate, in accordance with the Dharma?”

(MĀ 151: 沙門瞿曇說四種姓皆悉清淨, 施設, 顯示. 彼作是念: 諸賢, 為誰有力能至沙門瞿曇所, 則以此事如法難詰?).

“The Buddha opposes us, holding that our class is similar to [that of] ordinary persons.” They discussed with each other: “Who is able to debate this with the Buddha, to differentiate these [four] classes?”

(T 71: 佛反持我曹種與凡人等. 自相與議: 誰能與佛共講議分別是種者?).

It is worthy of note that the Buddha, born into a warrior class and thus a high position in the class system, was not merely concerned with defending his own class against the prerogatives of the brahmins. Instead, his proclamation of purification for all four classes shows that he was negating the validity of the entire system as far as matters of spiritual progress are concerned.

During the ensuing debate, the Buddha countered the brahmins' claims to superiority with several arguments (Anālayo 2011). Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, he noted that members of all four classes are capable of washing themselves. This argument is based on adopting a literal reading of the term *suddhi*/, which can mean “clean” in a physical sense just as “pure” in a wider sense. In other words, the claim by brahmins to be uniquely able to achieve such *suddhi*/ (meant in the sense of purification) is placed in contrast to the evident fact that others are also able to wash themselves. In the ancient Indian setting, washing could often take place at rivers and hence in public. For this reason, the argument that anyone can wash themselves would have had an immediate appeal among

the audience, who must have frequently witnessed that non-brahmins can indeed wash themselves.

A comparable argument involves the making of a fire. No matter what class a person belongs to or what type of wood may be used, they will be able to make a fire and use it for the purposes for which a fire can be employed. This argument takes up another item of daily life experience, readily accessible to the members of the audience. At the same time, fire has a range of deeper connotations in the ancient Indian religious milieu, where in particular the kindling of the Vedic fire was seen as a prerogative of brahmins. The Buddha's position was rather that, just as anyone can make a fire with any type of wood, in the same way anyone can kindle the inner fire of purification and religious progress.

The supposedly divinely ordained division into four classes is countered by pointing to the existence of other countries with only two classes. Besides its argumentative power, this reference is of additional interest as its wording gives the impression of reflecting knowledge of the two-class society in ancient Sparta (Anālayo 2012). A contingent of Indian archers had been part of the army of Xerxes that invaded Greece. The heroic resistance offered by the Spartans in the battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE must have left a deep impact on the Indian mercenaries, making it probable that, subsequent to their return home, some however imprecise knowledge of the existence of Sparta and its valiant warriors circulated in ancient India, together with other stories and rumors about the Persian campaign and its eventual failure.

Another argument involves the spirit of a being about to be reborn, whose presence was seen in the ancient setting as a necessary condition for conception to take place (Anālayo 2008). Yet, the class of such a spirit is undeterminable. In view of the idea that beings undergo repeated rebirth, influenced by the accumulated fruits of their past good and bad deeds, the implication seems to be that the class of the human resulting from such conception could hardly have a substantial bearing on inherent mental capacity.

The basic Buddhist position of according overarching importance to ethical conduct over birth comes to the fore in yet another argument, according to which brahmins themselves would give preference to a brahmin student who observed ethical conduct over one who is immoral, even if the latter was more learned. This argument occurs repeatedly elsewhere in the early discourses, in that one truly becomes a brahmin through ethical conduct rather than through birth. The same stance can be captured with a stanza from the *Vāseṭṭha-sutta*:

One does not become a brahmin by one's birth; one does not become a non-brahmin by one's birth. One becomes a brahmin by one's deeds; one becomes a non-brahmin by one's deeds.

(MN 98 or Sn 650: *na jaccā brāhmaṇo hoti, na jaccā hoti abrahmaṇo; kammanā brāhmaṇo hoti, kammanā hoti abrahmaṇo*).

In line with the ethical reevaluation proposed in this way, the Buddhist monastic order was open to members of any class. Just as the great rivers of India merge into the ocean and thereby lose their individual identity, in the same way, by going forth members of any class lose their previous names and social class status, and come to be simply reckoned as Buddhist monastics:

Having gone forth from the homelife into homelessness, they give up their former names and clans.

(AN 8.19: *agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitvā jahanti purimāni nāmagottāni*; see also Ud 5.5).

Having shaved off their hair and beard, donned yellow robes, and out of faith left the household life to become homeless and train in the path, they forsake their former names.

(MĀ 35: 剃除鬚髮, 著袈裟衣, 至信捨家, 無家, 學道, 彼捨本名).

Becoming recluses in my teaching, they discontinue their former names.

(EĀ 42.4: 於我法中作沙門, 不錄前名).

Another discourse argues that the retribution for evil and good deeds will not differ for members of the four classes (MN 84 and SĀ 548). Moreover, members of each of the four classes could become wealthy (MN 84) or even rule the country (SĀ 548), a position that will enable them to employ in their service members of other classes. In this way, a brahmin may end up in the service of someone from a class considered by brahmins to be substantially inferior to them.

The topic of who should serve whom comes up in another discourse, which begins with a brahmin proclaiming that all classes should serve brahmins, who in turn should never serve members of other classes (MN 96 and MĀ 150). The Buddha's reply to this proposal clarifies that the doing of service to another should be guided by ethical principles, in the sense that one should do service if that leads to one's betterment rather than one's decline. This reply, once again, replaces caste or class with ethics.

Another discourse begins with the brahmin Soṇadaṇḍa, already mentioned above, proposing five qualities required to be reckoned a brahmin (DN 4 and DĀ 22). These are purity of birth (up to seven generations), knowledge of the Vedas, handsome complexion, virtue, and wisdom. In the course of the ensuing discussion, the Buddha convinced Soṇadaṇḍa to reduce this list gradually to the minimal requirement for being considered a brahmin, which turned out to be the two qualities of virtue and wisdom. In this way, the discourse portrays the Buddha convincing an eminent brahmin to agree to the Buddha's own position that pure birth and beauty of complexion do not make one a brahmin.

The above surveyed passages show the Buddha's clear-cut opposition to superiority claims acquired by dint of one's birth. This opposition is based on the recognition of the basic similarity of human beings, which outweighs whatever individual differences may be found. The Buddha had evidently no qualms about openly expressing his opinion in this matter, to the extent that he acquired fame in the ancient Indian setting for dismissing claims made about the supposed preeminence of brahmins.

In actual debate, he can be seen to combine different strategies. One of these is the employment of examples taken from the daily life experience of the audience to show the absurdity of the brahmin's conceit of superiority. Another strategy relies on the breadth of his knowledge, enabling him to bring in apparent knowledge of Sparta, for example, as a society with a strong class division that involved only two classes rather than the supposedly divinely ordained system of four classes. At times humor has its place; at other times the actual economic conditions are taken up, which show that the theoretical model of class prerogatives did not really determine what happened on the ground.

All of these strategies could be applied to confronting racism in the contemporary setting, grounded in the knowledge that human beings belong to a single species. The above passages can be read as an invitation to be willing to defend this position in public, even by way of pointing out behaviors that do not conform to this principle. In actual debate, a good knowledge of the history of racism would be an asset, together with an acquaintance with research on its impact in systematically disadvantaging and harming people of color. Modeled on the example set by the Buddha, claims made in support of white superiority could be countered appropriately and be dismantled as strategies that serve to justify exploitation. Confronting racial oppression, whose roots are the unwholesome states of greed, aversion, and delusion, one is indeed following in the footsteps of the Buddha.

## Noticing Discrimination

Another dimension of the Buddha's ways of confronting discrimination comes up in a passage that involves Vāseṭṭha, who together with his friend Bhāradvāja was the recipient of the teaching given in the *Vāseṭṭha-sutta*, mentioned repeatedly above. At the time of the present passage, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja have recently joined the Buddhist monastic order. In the ancient setting, such a decision involved a complete loss of their earlier status and privileges as brahmins.

The present discourse sets in with Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja approaching the Buddha, who was practicing walking meditation out in the open:

Then Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja approached the Blessed One. Having approached the Blessed One and having

paid respect, they walked following the Blessed One in his walking meditation. Then the Blessed One said to Vāseṭṭha [and Bhāradvāja]: “Vāseṭṭha [and Bhāradvāja], you have gone forth from the home life in a brahmin clan into homelessness, being born brahmins and of a brahmin clan. Vāseṭṭha [and Bhāradvāja], do the brahmins not reproach and revile you?”

(DN 27: *atha kho vāseṭṭhabhāradvājā yena bhagavā ten' upasaṅkamimsu; upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantam abhivādetvā bhagavantam caṅkamantaṃ anucaṅkamimsu. atha kho bhagavā vāseṭṭham āmantesi: tumhe khvattha, vāseṭṭha, brāhmaṇajaccā brāhmaṇakulīnā brāhmaṇakulā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitā. kacci vo, vāseṭṭha, brāhmaṇā na akkosanti na paribhāsanti ti?*).

They together approached the Blessed One, paid respect with their heads at his feet and followed the Buddha in his walking meditation. Then the Blessed One said to Vāseṭṭha [and Bhāradvāja]: “Have the two of you gone forth from a brahmin class, going forth out of firm faith in my teaching to cultivate the path?” They replied: “Indeed.” The Buddha said: “Now that you have gone forth in my teaching for the sake of the path, do the brahmins not detest and reproach you?”

(DĀ 5: 即共詣世尊所，頭面禮足，隨佛經行。爾時世尊告婆悉吒曰：汝等二人出婆羅門種，以信堅固於我法中出家修道耶？答曰：如是。佛言：汝今在我法中出家為道，諸婆羅門得無嫌責汝耶？adopting the variant 汝 instead of 婆羅門).

Then Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja approached the Buddha, paid respect with their heads [at his feet], and followed behind him in his walking meditation. The Blessed One turned around and said to the two: “Vāseṭṭha [and Bhāradvāja], you two are brahmins who have left the brahmin class, shaved off your hair and beard, donned yellow robes, and out of faith left the household life to become homeless and train in the path. Having seen this, do the brahmins not greatly and repeatedly reproach you?”

(MĀ 154: 於是婆私吒及婆羅婆即詣佛所，稽首作禮，從後經行。世尊迴顧，告彼二人：婆私吒，汝等二梵志捨梵志族，剃除鬚髮，著袈裟衣，至信捨家，無家，學道。諸梵志見已，不大責數耶？adopting an emendation in the CBETA edition of 覺 to become 學).

Together they approached the Buddha. Then, having reached him, they together paid respect with their heads at his feet and followed the Buddha in his walking meditation. Then the Buddha said: “... Do the brahmins, of the three Vedas, not slander, humiliate, and denigrate you?”

(T 10: 同詣佛所, 到已, 俱時頭面禮足, 隨佛經行。爾時世尊告 ... 諸婆羅門, 於三明中, 豈無輕毀凌辱及譏謗耶?; adopting the variant 耶 instead of 邪).

Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja replied that this was indeed the case, as they were being strongly rebuked by other brahmins for having given up their superior status as members of the brahmin class and become recluses by going forth under the Buddha. The report of the actual rebuke involves an affirmation by those other brahmins of the superiority of their class, similar to the proclamations surveyed above, according to which brahmins are the foremost and fair class, in contrast to those who are inferior and from a dark-colored class.

The report given by Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja then motivated the Buddha to give a long discourse to the two, while the three of them kept walking up and down together. The exposition begins by countering some claims of the brahmins, for example, by pointing out that brahmin women are seen to become pregnant and give birth; hence, how could the brahmins claim to be born from the mouth of Brahmā? This is in line with arguments surveyed above regarding the ability to wash oneself or to make a fire as daily life examples to show the absurdity of the brahmin's conceit of superiority. After stressing the importance of ethics over birth, the discourse continues by depicting the evolution of life on the earth and the gradual emergence of human classes, which shows that the class of brahmins came into being as a product of social evolution and leaves no basis for their claim to innate superiority (Ariyasena 1981; Collins 1993, Gombrich 1992; Schmithausen 2005).

What is of further significance here, besides the actual arguments, is the description in the above quoted passage that the Buddha intuited the experience of discrimination by Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja. Once they confirmed his intuition, the Buddha gave them a detailed exposition, now found in the collection of long discourses, thereby offering his full support for countering such discrimination. The depiction of how this teaching was given contrasts with the standard way of delivering discourses, where the Buddha will sit down rather than keep walking. In other words, this rather long discourse has as its starting point the Buddha's sensing that Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja were suffering from discrimination, followed by immediately doing what he could to help them, in this case not even taking the time to sit down.

According to early Buddhist thought, a Buddha is continuously in the possession of mindfulness, as is the case for all awakened ones (DN 34 and DĀ 10; Anālayo 2020b). This in turn implies that the Buddha's attending to the discrimination experienced by Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja must have involved mindfulness.

From the viewpoint of the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta* and its parallels, this would have involved mindfulness directed to the mental condition of others. Such knowing of the mental states of others is an "external" type of mindfulness, which has its

"internal" counterpart in noting one's own state of mind. Although in the case of particularly gifted practitioners knowing the mind of another can, according to early Buddhist thought, take the form of telepathy, such recognition can also rely on mindfully noting the posture and facial expression of another as tokens of their mental condition (Anālayo 2020a). This possibility is of further relevance to the overall topic of countering racial oppression.

## Racial Oppression and Mindfulness

Turning from the situation in ancient India to contemporary society, mindfulness has indeed proved its worth in confronting racial oppression (Fuchs et al. 2013). King (2018, p. 5) succinctly presented the case for mindfulness in this way: "The best tool I know of to transform our relationship to racial suffering is mindfulness meditation."

Regarding the potential of mindfulness in this respect, Zapolski et al. (2019, p. 168) found "support for the buffering effect of mindfulness on mood symptoms as a consequence [of] discrimination." Feligh and Debb (2019, p. 2308) emphasized in particular the "importance of *nonreactivity*" as a central aspect of mindfulness leading to resilience in the face of racial oppression.

Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2014, p. 204) reasoned that "mindful individuals may be better able to reduce the emotional intensity and duration of the discriminatory experience, allowing for improved coping following an experience of discrimination." Graham et al. (2013, p. 334) reasoned that "through gaining a more accepting relationship with one's internal experiences, mindfulness might help individuals ... approach the anxiety they experience in the face of racism and gain a sense of agency over their life experiences," something of particular importance in view of the confounding dynamics of structural racism.

Hidalgo et al. (2020, p. 458) commented that a "protective potential of mindfulness was suggested by its attenuating impact on the main effects of sexual racism on psychological symptoms." Watson-Singleton et al. (2019, p. 1775) reasoned that "higher levels of mindfulness can be protective in the face of discrimination and race-related vigilance." Chesin and Jeglic (2016) in fact found mindfulness leading to an increased ability to observe experience to reduce the severity of suicidal ideation among those experiencing racial oppression. According to Shallcross and Spruill (2018, p. 1102), "mindfulness may promote the capacity to separate the experience of discrimination from conceptualizations of self-worth, thus mitigating the likelihood of developing depressive symptoms."

Apparently in awareness of the trend in current research to focus on those who are affected by racial

oppression, Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2014, p. 204) noted that their research “is not meant to suggest that the burden is on the targets of discrimination to learn how better to cope with these experiences.” In the same vein, Shallcross and Spruill (2018, p. 1105) made a point of highlighting that their results are not intended.

to suggest that individuals who have been harmed by discrimination should bear responsibility for reducing discrimination itself. Rather, results are hoped to inform strategies that individuals can employ to mitigate the deleterious effects of discrimination until structural and systemic changes that minimize or eliminate discrimination are realized.

Woods-Giscombé and Black (2010, p. 122) noted:

It has been argued that system-wide health policy changes are needed to solve the social determinants of health and that focusing on person-centered interventions places unfair burden on individuals to change despite obvious structural odds ... [yet,] both types of interventions, policy and person-centered, are needed ... without person-centered approaches, individuals could be left floundering and without adequate support or resources to manage multiple sources of stress while waiting for system-wide social and structural changes to be executed.

As noted by Aguilar (2019, p. 66), in relation to the potential of mindfulness in facing racism, “personal growth *can* spark change.” In order to foster the needed change, the potential of mindfulness to reduce racial bias is of particular relevance (Lueke and Gibson 2015; Lueke and Gibson 2016). Polinska (2018, p. 332) pointed out that “mindfulness offers a possibility of opening a conscious space that allows for reduction in automatic racist associations.” This can serve to counter a general tendency where “the white social lens distorts reality by refusing to acknowledge systemic discrimination, conveniently maintaining amnesia about the racial injustice in the past and present” (p. 327). Burgess et al. (2017, p. 374) noted that cultivating mindfulness can provide “a portal into the visceral experience of prejudice.”

In order to explore the full potential of mindfulness in this respect, it is of further interest to take up a reasoning by Womack and Sloan (2017, p. 414) in the context of comparing racial socialization with mindfulness as two coping strategies when faced with racial oppression:

While racial socialization messages teach thoughtful awareness of the views of others, mindfulness strategies encourage individuals to focus on their own current thinking, not about the thoughts of others ... While

mindfulness says “pay attention to everything you are experiencing internally,” racial socialization says “pay attention to or be aware of what is happening externally.”

The perceived contrast described in this way simply reflects a general pattern in contemporary research on mindfulness. Thus, what follows is not in any way meant as a criticism. At the same time, however, the perspective could be broadened based on early Buddhist thought. Mindfulness need not be confined to what one is experiencing internally. It can, in fact it should, also be applied to the external dimension of experience. Although research on mindfulness does not appear to have engaged actively with this perspective, the potential for such external mindfulness emerges naturally when teaching mindfulness to confront racial oppression.

For example, Woods-Giscombé and Gaylord (2014) and Watson et al. (2016) drew attention to the importance of adapting the teaching of mindfulness to the needs of African Americans. Such adaptation requires being mindful of the external repercussions of one’s way of teaching. Highlighting the same need for American communities suffering from racial oppression in general, Proulx et al. (2018, p. 362) noted that “biases often go unrecognized even as they are put into action ... how participants are addressed, attitude, language, metaphors, stories, or other means instructors may employ” can become counterproductive. Moreover, “microaggressions are commonplace, and intentional and unintentional daily derogatory comments and behaviors ... can lead to stress reactivity that may not be as apparent to other Americans” (p. 363).

The potential of mindfulness directed toward others has become quite apparent in research on its potential for strengthening multicultural competence in counseling. Lenés et al. (2020, p. 154) commented that “mindful nonjudging and nonreacting may be useful multicultural skills relevant to intercultural encounters between individuals who are socialized differently.” When working with Native Americans, for example, according to Napoli and Bonifas (2013, p. 206) there is a considerable need “to pay attention to nonverbal language by observing the client’s responses to what is happening in the session.” Campbell et al. (2018, p. 84) noted that “counselors that excel in observation may be better equipped to accurately interpret nonverbal communication of multicultural clients, as well as understand contextual messages better.” Ivers et al. (2016, p. 78) reasoned that “mindfulness may be a deeper, more internalized form of empathy that allows counselors to understand the phenomenological reality of a client.”

Although not explicitly mentioned, these aspects of counseling call for external mindfulness. In this way, adapting the teachings to the needs of the audience, paying attention to potential repercussions of unrecognized biases, and increasing multicultural counseling competence could all be strengthened by intentional cultivation of externally directed mindfulness.

## Broadening the Scope of Mindfulness

There is a clear need for those not directly suffering from racial oppression to broaden perspective through mindfulness and become fully aware of the larger context. Kivel (1996/2017, p. 10) explained:

There's absolutely nothing wrong with being white or with noticing the difference that color makes. You are not responsible for having white skin or for being raised in a white-dominated, racist society in which you have been trained to have a particular response to people of color. However, you are responsible for how you respond to racism ... and you can only do so consciously and effectively if you begin by realizing it makes a crucial difference that you are perceived to be and treated as white.

Along similar lines, Menakem (2017, p. 205) offered the following clarification:

Even if you are the most fair-minded person on Earth, at times certain privileges will be conferred upon you because of the color of your skin. Your whiteness is considered the norm, and the standard against which all skin colors—and all other human beings—are compared. That alone provides you with a big advantage. I'm not blaming you for this, or asking you to feel guilty or ashamed about it. But you *do* need to be aware of what those privileges are and how they function.

As a simple practice suggestion, he proposed making it a habit to counter such privileges by giving precedence to a person of color when serving or being served, making it a practice to sit close to people of color rather than to whites, and keeping an eye out for opportunities to assist people of color that may be in distress. In this way, white privilege can be confronted through “small, everyday courageous actions” (p. 207), which can take the form of mindfulness of privilege and its impacts.

Although from a Buddhist perspective the aspiration for non-harm (as one of the manifestations of right intention) would already suffice for arousing a sincere concern about directing mindfulness to the consequences of racial bias, it can additionally be helpful to keep in mind the broader repercussions of racial oppression. As pointed out by Smedley (2012, p. 935):

White Americans are harmed by racism against people of color in multiple ways. Racism damages social trust and cohesion, limits the potential societal contributions of marginalized groups, and drains social resources. The

health consequences of racial inequality present a significant economic burden for the nation ... racism imposes a human, social, and economic cost to all in the United States.

There is thus clearly a need to take responsibility and become active, as pointed out by Choudhury (2015, p. xi), given that “in a society where racism exists, it is not enough to be non-racist. For real transformation to occur, one has to actively challenge discrimination in all its forms.” For this to happen, as noted by Devine et al. (2012, p. 1268), “first, people must be *aware* of their biases and, second, they must be *concerned* about the consequences of their biases before they will be motivated to exert effort to eliminate them.” As explained by Magee (2016, p. 234),

mindfulness practice provides limitless opportunities for enhancing awareness not merely of racial difference, which alone may mean nothing, but of the many, various, and mostly subtle ways in which we relate to these differences. Over time and with practice, mindfulness brought to bear on this field of experience in our everyday lives can lead to insights about how these perceptions shape our own actions and those of others.

The above considerations point to the need for mindfulness practice by those who may, often unintentionally, inflict pain on those racially oppressed through a lack of awareness of how systemic racism can manifest in various forms of micro-aggression on a daily basis. The task would be in particular to relate training in mindfulness more explicitly to the external dimension, to noting how others are affected by what is done by oneself (or third parties).

Training in externally directed mindfulness in this way could become a resource for diversity training and open up a new field in research on the potential of mindfulness in relation to racial oppression. Simply said, the suggestion is that, in addition to the already-studied potential of mindfulness to help people of color suffering from discrimination and white people to become aware of their unconscious biases, another avenue of research would be how mindfulness can help white people to become aware of how their actual behavior can impact people of color and thereby come to notice their own biases at work.

In line with the attitude evident in early Buddhist discourse toward the superiority conceit of brahmins, such mindful monitoring can help to identify the impact of internalized superiority conceit (and related anxieties) on law enforcement, employment, housing, and health care. In this way, externally directed mindfulness could become an integral part of diversity training and lead to the implementation of modes of behavior that are more

race conscious and minimize harm. At the same time, such externally directed mindfulness would provide a feedback to internal mindfulness of one's own unconscious biases and prejudices. Due to being for the most part unconscious, such biases and prejudices can more easily be identified if awareness is broadened to notice their impact on others.

Such interrelation of internal and external mindfulness is in line with a standard pattern in early Buddhist instructions, which recommend that mindfulness be cultivated internally, externally, and also internally-and-externally. In this way, bringing mindfulness to bear on what happens within and without can be mutually reinforcing and thereby have a substantially greater impact than mindfulness cultivated only internally. External mindfulness training could in this way become an integral part of bringing about the much-needed systemic change.

## Diversity and Awakening

Besides potentially broadening the perspective adopted in current research in cognitive psychology to include also the possibility of externally directed mindfulness, relevant passages in the early discourses can also help situate efforts at diversity within the overarching orientation of early Buddhist thought toward awakening. A passage of relevance occurs in a survey of various types of conceit as obstacles for progress on the path to liberation. One such type of conceit concerns coming from a family considered to be of high standing in the ancient setting:

Monastics, here an unworthy person has gone forth from a high-ranking family and thinks: "I have gone forth from a high-ranking family; these other monastics have not gone forth from a high-ranking family." Thus, in relation to being from a high-ranking family, [such a person] praises oneself and disparages others. Monastics, this is the nature of an unworthy person.

(MN 113: *idha, bhikkhave, asappuriso uccā kulā pabbajito hoti so iti paṭisañcikkhati: ahaṃ kho 'mhi uccā kulā pabbajito, ime pan' aññe bhikkhū na uccā kulā pabbajitā ti. so tāya uccākulīnatāya attān' ukkaṃseti, paraṃ vambheti. ayaṃ, bhikkhave, asappurisadhammo*).

Suppose that a certain person has gone forth from a high-ranking family to practice the path. Others are not like that. Because of being from a high-ranking family, they praise themselves and despise others. This is the nature of unworthy persons.

(MĀ 85: 或有一人是豪貴族出家學道, 餘者不然. 彼因是豪貴族故, 自貴賤他. 是謂不真人法).

Suppose monastics are from high-ranking families. They enjoy being on the path and desire to train in the path. Suppose there are other monastics, training together with them, who are not from high-ranking families. Because of being from high-ranking families, these monastics are conceited about their own body and disparage others. This is the nature of unworthy persons.

(T 48: 若比丘大姓, 憇道欲學道. 若有餘同學比丘非大姓, 比丘大姓故, 為自憇身欺餘. 是非賢者法, the translation is based on adopting an emendation in the CBETA version of 憇 to become 憇).

Monastics, in this way persons, who are bad friends, in turn give rise to this thought: "I have gone forth from a high-ranking family to train in the path; other monastics have gone forth from lowly families." Relying on the prestige of their own family, they disparage other people. These are said to have the nature of being bad friends.

(EĀ 17.9: 於是, 比丘, 惡知識人便生此念: 我於豪族出家學道, 餘比丘者卑賤家出家. 依己姓望, 毀訾餘人. 是謂名為惡知識法).

The parallels agree in showing that worthy persons (or good friends) act in the opposite way. According to three of the four parallel versions, worthy persons reflect that unwholesome mental states do not just disappear because of being from a high-ranking family (MN 113, MĀ 85, and T 48). What really matters is whether one practices in the right way. According to the fourth version, worthy persons understand that their own body is not really different from those of others (EĀ 17.9).

The whole purpose of this exposition is to highlight forms of conceit that are an obstacle for progress on the path to awakening. The idea of coming from a high family in the ancient Indian setting could be applied to the general sense of superiority because of one's ancestry. In this way, the sense of white supremacy, which is so pervasive in US culture (Billings 2016), could be identified as an instance of the conceit of superiority. Such conceit needs to be overcome to enable progress to liberation.

In early Buddhist thought, such progress requires cultivating the eightfold path, which can be adjusted to the present task. Out of the eight factors of this path, three are of particular relevance for cultivating the entire path. These are right view, right effort, and right mindfulness (MN 117, MĀ 189, Up 6080; Anālayo 2019b). Right view provides the overall orientation. For the present purpose, an aspect of particular relevance would be the need to recognize that good and bad deeds have results. Although the original import of this aspect of right view refers to karma, it can be taken to reflect "the need to take responsibility for one's actions" (Anālayo 2019a, p. 67).

Based on such taking responsibility, right mindfulness continuously monitors to detect the impact of superiority conceit and the activation of racial bias. Such monitoring has right effort as its support, ensuring that action is taken on the spot to counter superiority conceit and bias.

Equipped in this way, the right intention for the absence of harm can come to percolate all aspects of daily life in the form of communications, general activities, and being at work (corresponding to right speech, action, and livelihood), ensuring that none of these situations results in anything that people of color may experience as harmful or disrespectful. Diminishing harm and undermining conceit in this and other ways will facilitate mental collectedness, leading to right concentration.

In this way, diversity work, rather than being perhaps at times seen by some as an annoying duty to which white Buddhists have to assent in order to be politically correct, can come to be right at the heart of their path of practice. The chief tool to work against the grain of superiority conceit in this way is none other than mindfulness, in its internal and external dimensions.

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** The author declares he has no conflict of interest.

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

**Abbreviations** AN, *Āṅguttara-nikāya*; DĀ, *Dīrgha-āgama (T 1)*; DN, *Dīgha-nikāya*; EĀ, *Ekottarika-āgama (T 125)*; MĀ, *Madhyama-āgama (T 26)*; MN, *Majjhima-nikāya*; SĀ, *Saṃyukta-āgama (T 99)*; SN, *Saṃyutta-nikāya*; Sn, *Sutta-nipāta*; T, *Taishō edition*; Ud, *Udāna*; Up, *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*

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