

Article

Mindfulness of Death as a Tool for Mortality Salience Induction with Reference to Terror Management Theory

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Received: 30 April 2019; Accepted: 29 May 2019; Published: 30 May 2019



Abstract: In this article, I argue that “mindfulness of death” (*marāṇasati*) can be a tool to induce mortality salience and can have a positive psychological impact. The mindfulness of death is described in detail in the early Buddhist texts *Āṅguttara Nikāya* and *Visuddhimagga*. The texts stress that death should be consciously connected with temporality and mindfulness. Here, I look at the mindfulness of death in relation to the mortality salience of terror management theory. “Mortality salience” is a term proposed in terror management theory that means “the state of conscious activation of the thoughts of death”. In addition, after conscious activation of the thought of death, I examine the psychological changes, such as the increase of pro-social attitudes which emphasizes ethics and morality, and the emphasis on the intrinsic value of life due to the operation of a cultural worldview and self-esteem. In this paper, I conclude that mindfulness of death can be an effective tool to induce mortality salience.

Keywords: mindfulness of death (*marāṇasati*); mindfulness (*sati*); mortality salience; terror management theory; early Buddhist texts

1. Introduction

Can we be happy regardless of external conditions such as money, success, honor, and residence? What is the true meaning of happiness and well-being? What is a more fundamental way to be happy? If someone knows that they and their loved ones are going to die, will they maintain the goals and values of their lives? I propose that awareness or thought about death can be a powerful tool for well-being and happiness in life.

Death does not occur in age order, nor does it tell us the time remaining or the place where it will occur. As Shelly Kagan said of “ubiquity”, “variability”, and “unpredictability” in the nature of death (Kagan 2012, pp. 264–78), death happens unexpectedly to everyone. Most people know that but ignore death consciously or unconsciously.

“Mortality salience” (MS) means a state of awakening death by raising an unconsciously forgotten death into a conscious world. MS has been studied in experimental existential psychology for about 30 years, and the possibility of a positive psychological impact on the thought of death has been explained through “terror management theory” (TMT). In TMT, it is argued that if death is awakened, there could be positive psychological changes, such as a limited recognition of the time of life, reorganization of life centered on intrinsic values, and an emphasis on relationships with others (Vail et al. 2012, pp. 307–18). Awakening of death is emphasized in early Buddhism, especially in the *Marāṇasati Sutta* of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, in which the Buddha emphasizes meditation on death; and the *Marāṇassatikathā* of the *Visuddhimagga*, which emphasizes speculation about death. The concrete way to think about death presented in early Buddhism is “*marāṇasati*”, that is, mindfulness of death.

Mindfulness originated in India, the birthplace of Buddhism, has spread through Sri Lanka, South Asia, China, Korea, and Japan, and has recently spread beyond the traditional religious boundaries to

the West. In particular, mindfulness has been combined with Western medicine and psychology to demonstrate its efficacy in new areas (Bodhi 2011, p. 35). Kabat-Zinn developed Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) based on mindfulness and proved its effectiveness by applying it to various diseases. Mindfulness has been reported to be effective in physical diseases such as breast cancer, prostate cancer, chronic pain, and psoriasis, as well as in psychiatric diseases such as anxiety and depression (Carlson et al. 2004; Kabat-Zinn et al. 1998).

In many cases, TMT uses empirical tools such as writing an essay on death, writing a death questionnaire, speculating about death, and visiting a cemetery for the induction of MS (Moon 2016b, p. 162). I argue, however, that mindfulness of death—which contains the benefits of mindfulness meditation—can be a more direct tool for mortality salience induction than TMT's tools. In this paper, I explore the possibilities of mindfulness of death as a tool for inducing MS and examine mindfulness of death in early Buddhism how it can affect human psychology.

2. Mindfulness of Death in Early Buddhist Texts

Studies on applying mindfulness have increased rapidly since the late 1990s. The application of mindfulness was initially studied in the area of behavioral medicine, but since 2000, it has been applied to various fields, such as clinical and health psychology, cognitive therapy, and neuroscience (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2011, p. 2). In particular, thanks to Kabat Zinn's MBSR, mindfulness meditation has proved its efficacy in medicine beyond religious boundaries. Moreover, in South Korea, MBSR has been introduced, modified, and applied to various fields (e.g., medicine, education) by constituting a "Korean Version of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction" (K-MBSR) (Bae and Chang 2006; Yoon 2014). Mindfulness, which was passed from Asia to the West, is returning from the West to the East again.

The way of mindfulness is presented in *Nikāyas*, where the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* describes how to practice the "fourfold mindfulness" of the body, feelings, thoughts, and ideas.¹ There are also ten objects of mindfulness in the *Ekadhamma vagga* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.

"Bhikkhus, there is one thing that, when developed and cultivated, leads exclusively to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to nibbana. What is that one thing? Mindfulness of the Buddha ... mindfulness of the Dhamma ... mindfulness of the Saṅgha ... mindfulness of virtuous behavior ... mindfulness of generosity ... mindfulness of the deva ... mindfulness of breathing ... mindfulness of death ... Mindfulness directed to the body ... mindfulness of peace".²

As we can see from the above quote, mindfulness of death (*marāṇasati*) is one of ten types of mindfulness, wherein the subject of mindfulness is death. Mindfulness refers to the Pāli "sati", which is translated as "念" (niàn) in Chinese characters and "mindfulness" or "awareness" in English. *Sati* means "memory", "remembrance", "reminiscence", "calling to mind", and so on. *Sati* is derived from the root "√smṛ", which means "to remember", and is the same as the Sanskrit "smṛti", so the basic meaning is "memory" (Bodhi 2011, p. 22). However, this refers to the state of "remembering the moment right now", or "a state that does not miss the present moment", rather than the memory of the past. Therefore, "mindfulness of death" means "a state of not missing the thoughts of death".

An explanation of mindfulness of death is described in detail in the *Marāṇasati Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. In this *sutta*, the Buddha says, "Mindfulness of death developed and made much is very beneficial and ends in deathlessness. Bhikkhus, do develop mindfulness of death.", and he

¹ See more in (Davids and Carpenter 1976), *Dīgha Nikāya II*, pp. 290–315.

² "Ekadhammo bhikkhave bhāvito bahulikato ekantanibbidāya virāgāya nirodhāya upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati. Katamo ekadhammo? Buddhānussati. ... Ekadhammo bhikkhave ... Katamo ekadhammo? Dhammānussati. ... Saṅghānussati. ... Silānussati. ... Cāgānussati. ... Devatānussati. ... Ānāpānassati. ... Marāṇassati. ... Kāyagatāsati. ... Upasamānussati". *Aṅguttara Nikāya I*, A1.16, (Richard 1961, p. 30). The translation refers to (Bodhi 2012), p. 116.

emphasizes mindfulness of death and asks the disciples to practice mindfulness of death. The six disciples answer the Buddha's questions as follows:

"If I live just a night and a day, I would attend to the dispensation of The Blessed One, and that would be much done by me". "I attend to mindfulness of death in this manner"

"If I live this day, I would attend to the dispensation of The Blessed One, and that would be much done by me". "I attend to mindfulness of death in this manner".

"If I live until I partake my meal of morsel food, I would attend to the dispensation of The Blessed One, and that would be much done by me". "I attend to mindfulness of death in this manner".

"If I live until I chew and partake four or five morsels of food, I would attend to the dispensation of The Blessed One, and that would be much done by me". "I attend to mindfulness of death in this manner".

'If I live until I chew and partake one morsel of food, I would attend to the dispensation of The Blessed One, and that would be much done by me.' "I attend to mindfulness of death in this manner".

"If I live until I breathe in and breathe out, or until I breathe out and breathe in, I would attend to the dispensation of The Blessed One, and that would be much done by me". "I attend to mindfulness of death in this manner".³

In the quotation, "if I live until ... (temporality)" means the same as "... after if I die" and each sentence has a structure of "... after if I die, I would ... " ... Thus, each of the above sentences can be seen to consist of temporal clauses (after if I die) and conditional clauses (if I do something, I would ...) related to death. In addition, important points in mindfulness of death are "temporality", related to death, such as "a night and a day", "until I partake my meal of morsel food", "until I chew and partake one morsel of food", and "until I breathe in and breathe out".

Considering how to apply mindfulness to death, the above six sentences are separated by different disciples' responses, but if we group the contents related to temporality together, death gradually becomes closer as the time unit decreases. Therefore, I propose that if the above temporal clauses are grouped together to make use of mindfulness of death, this can have the function of a highly effective mortality salience induction. In addition, the fact that the mindfulness of death is in the framework of meditation practice implies a more systematic possibility of death. Mindfulness meditation includes a physical attitude that keeps the spine straight and maintains "Burmese posture"⁴, breathing with slow inhaled and exhaled, and a mental attitude that keeps track of the present moment. Thus, the mindfulness of death in the frame of mindfulness can cause an awakening to death while maintaining concentration in a calm state.

³ "Aho vatāhaṃ rattindivamaṃ jīveyyamaṃ Bhagavato sāsanaṃ manasi kareyyamaṃ bahuṃ vata me kataṃ assā' ti"., "Aho vatāhaṃ divasaṃ jīveyyamaṃ Bhagavato sāsanaṃ manasi kareyyamaṃ bahuṃ vata me kataṃ assā' ti"., "Aho vatāhaṃ tadantaramaṃ jīveyyamaṃ yadantaramaṃ ekapiṇḍapātaṃ bhuñjāmi Bhagavato sāsanaṃ manasi kareyyamaṃ bahuṃ vata me kataṃ assā' ti"., "Aho vatāhaṃ tadantaramaṃ jīveyyamaṃ yadantaramaṃ cattāro pañca ālope saṅkhāditvā ajjhoharāmi, Bhagavato sāsanaṃ manasi kareyyamaṃ bahuṃ vata me kataṃ assā' ti"., "Aho vatāhaṃ tadantaramaṃ jīveyyamaṃ yadantaramaṃ ekamaṃ ālopaṃ saṅkhāditvā ajjhoharāmi Bhagavato sāsanaṃ manasi kareyyamaṃ bahuṃ vata me kataṃ assā' ti"., "Aho vatāhaṃ tadantaramaṃ jīveyyamaṃ yadantaramaṃ assasitvā vā passasāmi passasitvā vā assasāmi. Bhagavato sāsanaṃ manasi kareyyamaṃ bahuṃ vata me kataṃ assā' ti"., *Aṅguttara Nikāya III*, A6.19, (Hardy 1976, pp. 304–6). The translation refers to (Bodhi 2012), pp. 876–78.

⁴ Kabat-Zinn explains Burmese Posture of mindfulness in his book: "There are a number of cross-legged sitting postures and kneeling postures that some people use when they sit on the floor. The one I use most is the so-called 'Burmese Posture' which involves drawing one heel in close to the body and draping the other leg in front of it". (Kabat-Zinn 2005, p. 62)

There is also an explanation of mindfulness of death in the *Visuddhimagga*. In Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, Chapters 7 and 8, mindfulness is explained in detail by addressing the ten topics of mindfulness. In Chapter 8, the *Maraṇassatikathā*, the mindfulness of death is explained in detail. The contents are first roughly divided into definitions of death; second, into eight ways of mindfulness of death; and third, into benefits of mindfulness of death.⁵ In the definition of death, Buddhaghosa refers to death as termination, dissolution, timely death, and untimely death. He presents attitudes of mindfulness like "mindfulness of death is the remembering of death", "One who wants to develop this should go into solitary retreat and exercise attention wisely in this way: 'Death will take place', 'the life faculty will be interrupted,' or 'Death, death.'", and so on.⁶ In addition, Buddhaghosa says,

"Just as the risen sun moves on towards its setting and never turns back even for a little while from wherever it has got to, or just as a mountain torrent sweeps by with a rapid current, ever flowing and rushing on and never turning back even for a little while, so too this living being travels on towards death from the time when he is born, and he never turns back even for a little while".⁷

Moreover, he says that death must come to everyone. In other words, the important thing in the mindfulness of death is the "desperate thought of death", which reminds us that we ourselves will die. In addition, in the *Visuddhimagga*, eight ways of mindfulness of death are presented: (1) As having the appearance of a murderer, (2) as the ruin of success, (3) by comparison, (4) as sharing the body with many, (5) as the frailty of life, (6) as signless, (7) as the limitedness of the extent, and (8) as the shortness of the moment (Nāṇamoli 2010, p. 226). Likewise, the *Visuddhimagga* adds a very detailed account of the mindfulness of death in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Based on the mindfulness of death in the early Buddhist texts we have seen so far, in Sections 5 and 6 in this paper I will discuss in detail how mindfulness of death can be applied to modern society in a way similar to MBSR.

3. Terror Management Theory and Mortality Salience

Mortality salience (MS) is a term presented in terror management theory (TMT). Representative scholars on TMT include Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski, and TMT is based on the idea of Ernest Becker (Solomon et al. 2004, pp. 13–14). Becker argues in *The Denial of Death* that the fear of death is a fundamental motive for human beings, and that "fear of death" lies behind all psychological phenomena. The self-preservation instinct continues to work in the human conscious–unconscious dimension. The state in which the self-preservation instinct is maintained is the state of "death-alertness", which means that death continues to be located in the psychological basis (Becker 1973, pp. 17–21). Becker also states that the fear of death seems to be absent because it is not usually revealed, but that it is appropriately repressed to enable everyday life to be latent in the unconscious. Repression is a psychological defense mechanism that erases a nasty or unpleasant experience from consciousness. Repression allows something that has consciously tormented one to seem to disappear so that one can enjoy a normal life, but the problem is that the repression is placed in the unconscious and continues to affect life, and so does the fear of death (Becker 1973, p. 17).

One of the greatest traits of human beings is that we are capable of self-awareness. Through self-awareness, we can recognize ego by identifying the difference between our own internal and external. We can also recognize that "I" is presently "alive" and the living state is "present", and we can recognize the past and future based on the present. Through thinking about the future, we can finally become aware of death, that is, the end of life (Solomon et al. 2004, p. 16). The idea that one day

⁵ *Visuddhimagga*, pp. 189–97.

⁶ "maraṇaṃ bhavissati jīvitindriyaṃ upacchijjissatī ti vā, maraṇaṃ maraṇaṃ. ti vā yoniso manasikāro pavattetaḍḍho"., *Visuddhimagga*, p. 189. Translation, (Nāṇamoli 2010), p. 226.

⁷ "Tasmā esa satto jātakālato paṭṭhāya yathā nāma utṭhito sūriyo atthābhimukho gacchateva, gatagatahṭṭānato īsakampi na nivattati. Yathā vā nadī pabbateyyā sīghasotā hārahārīnī sandateva vattateva īsakampi na nivattati, evaṃ īsakampi anivattamāno maraṇbhimukhova yāti". *Visuddhimagga*, p. 190. Translation, (Nāṇamoli 2010), p. 227.

a person will die will cause “awakening to his own death”, which will form “the potential for fear of death”.

According to TMT, “potential fear” evolves with living and operates with a “cultural worldview”, which acts as an anxiety buffer to maintain normal life (Rosenblatt et al. 1989, p. 681). In the term “cultural worldview”, the word “culture” consists of activities such as the arts and philosophy, which are considered to be important for the development of civilization and people’s minds. In other words, culture is a term that encompasses all forms of human behavior. Thus, “cultural worldview” is a kind of “integrated idea system”. If death is the object of consciousness, fear or anxiety about death occur, and fear and anxiety are reduced after the reinterpretation of death through an integrated notion system of a “cultural worldview”. In this sense, the cultural worldview serves as a buffer for the anxiety of death.

Based on the above theory, TMT assumes two hypotheses. The first is the mortality salience hypothesis. This hypothesis is that if death is salient in consciousness, humans will try to sustain their survival in consciousness by adhering to their cultural worldview or by increasing self-esteem. The study on the first hypothesis has been conducted experimentally by exploring the reinforcement of belief in a cultural worldview and the increase of self-esteem after MS induction (Vail et al. 2012, p. 304).

The second hypothesis is the anxiety-buffer hypothesis. This hypothesis states that if a person becomes aware of their death, certain psychological factors will act to mitigate death anxiety or fear. As mentioned, in TMT, cultural worldview and self-esteem play a role in mitigating anxiety about death. In particular, cultural worldview and self-esteem are mainly used as buffers for the fear of death. For example, research has shown that death anxiety decreases when self-esteem rises after MS induction (Solomon et al. 2004, p. 20). Another study shows that a person with low self-esteem demonstrates a very strong defensive worldview after MS has been triggered (Pyszczynski et al. 1997, p. 3). Through these studies, TMT suggests that the increase and decrease of self-esteem result from psychological changes caused by MS.

So far, we have looked at TMT, which is the background of MS. What is the more specific meaning of mortality salience? In the term “mortality salience”, “mortality” refers to “the way that people do not live forever”, the “condition of being mortal”, and “subject to death”; and “salience” means “prominence”, “the fact of being important to or connected with what is happening”, etc. In addition, the etymological meaning of “mortality” is “doomed to die”, “destined to die”, “deserving of death”, “subject to death”, and so on. Furthermore, in the literature on MS, the term MS expresses “death awareness”, “to ponder one’s own mortality”, “conscious death thought activation” (Burke et al. 2010; Solomon et al. 2004; Vail et al. 2012), etc. Taken together, MS means that death is awakened, there is a deepening of thoughts about death, and death becomes a subject of consciousness.

In ordinary life, death is repressed. Death in everyday life may need to be repressed appropriately to maintain a normal state of consciousness. However, a complete obliviousness of death may lead to a distorted view of life. If one is aware that life is not eternal and everyone will inevitably die, the view of wealth and success as the highest priority in life can be changed. In order to correct a distorted view of life, it is necessary to consciously think about the oblivion of death in unconsciousness, meaning, in other words, “the induction of MS”.

The triggering of MS requires stimulation associated with death. Stimulations are experimental methods used in TMT, such as death essay writing, a cemetery visit (Vail et al. 2012, p. 304), or mindfulness of death (*maraṇasati*) and death education. In this paper, I emphasize mindfulness of death among those stimulations. The contents of mindfulness of death inducing MS will be discussed in detail in Section 5. In the next section, I will examine in detail the psychological process that occurs after the induction of MS.

4. The Psychological Processes after Mortality Salience Induction and the Tools for MS Induction

As previously mentioned, TMT’s experimental tools—mindfulness of death and death education—stimulate death so that it becomes a subject of consciousness and those stimuli invoke MS

to bring unconscious death to the conscious world. As shown in Section 2, when fear or anxiety about death occurs after MS induction, a defense system consisting of self-esteem and a cultural worldview appears. In order to have a stable defense against attack, self-esteem and the cultural worldview will be strengthened after MS occurs because the defensive system must be robust. Thus, when death is awakened, a person strongly adheres to their cultural worldview. Then, in response to their own cultural value standards, they are given stability within cultural boundaries.

In TMT, it is argued that if one's own death is perceived, anxiety about death occurs and then the cultural worldview plays the role of an anxiety buffer. In addition, the anxiety buffer consists of two beliefs: First, it is the belief that the standards, values, and norms in one cultural worldview are correct; second, it is the belief that one has fulfilled the legitimacy of the standards (Burke et al. 2010, p. 155). Therefore, the cultural worldview provides the belief that one is accepted as a valuable member in society, and it also acts as a buffer against anxiety and stabilizes the mind when it comes into contact with death. In other words, through the cultural worldview, we are provided with the belief that doing good work will not cause unfortunate events, or that we will be reborn in a good place after death. As we have seen in Section 2, when MS is activated in consciousness, a cultural worldview is activated, and cultural values and norms are then strengthened. Because a cultural worldview provides the standards and values of a society, such standards and values provide systematic and meaningful ideas (especially related to the anxiety of death) to an individual in real life.

Based on the above, various psychological phenomena are derived from the cultural view triggered by MS. Studies related to death awareness and cultural worldview have shown that serious thoughts about death changed people's attitudes toward peace (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002), MS promoted the value of good for others (Gailliot et al. 2008), death awareness increased charity (Jonas et al. 2002), and so on.

We have found that self-esteem, along with the cultural worldview, is another axis of the psychological defense system for death. In Section 2, referring to the mortality salience hypothesis, if death is perceived, one will try to maintain survival in consciousness by adhering to the cultural worldview or by increasing self-esteem. We also looked at the anxiety-buffer hypothesis and noted that self-esteem functions as a buffer against anxiety of death.

The work of self-esteem caused by MS induced various psychological phenomena, such as the cultural worldview. Related studies include a study on the awareness of death due to earthquakes, which increased the attitude to pursue the intrinsic meaning of life (Lykins et al. 2007); a study of contemplations about death that emphasized internal goals (Vail et al. 2012, p. 308); and a study of awareness of death that led to intrinsic priorities rather than extrinsic goals (Sheldon and Kasser 2008). Thus, various psychological changes derive from the awareness of death. The operation of the cultural worldview leads to an attitude emphasizing coexistence with others, and the operation of self-esteem leads to an attitude that emphasizes the intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals of life. Ultimately, this series of psychological processes act to mitigate fear or anxiety about death. Taken together, it is believed that awareness of death induces positive psychological changes in life.

TMT uses various death-related stimuli (i.e., experimental tools) to induce MS. Examples include writing about one's own mortality, being primed with death-related imagery or words, passing a funeral home, engaging in death-related health screenings (Sheldon and Kasser 2008), or writing a questionnaire related to death (Rosenblatt et al. 1989).

Among the various methods, the one most commonly used is writing an essay on death or writing a questionnaire related to death. However, I argue that mindfulness of death can be a more direct, effective, and appropriate MS induction tool than TMT's experimental methods. First, in mindfulness of death, one of the various methods of mindfulness is in the area of mindfulness meditation, as we saw in Section 2. Mindfulness includes a physical attitude that keeps the spine straight and

maintains Burmese posture⁸, a breathing technique with slow inhales and exhales, and a mental attitude that keeps track of the present thinking. Mindfulness of death, which makes death the subject of mindfulness, can cause arousal of death while maintaining concentration in a calm state. The point of awakening death in the framework of concentration and awareness is more direct than TMT's MS inductions tools.

Second, Kabat-Zinn's MBSR has already proven the effectiveness of mindfulness in modern society. MBSR has already proved its efficacy not only in physical diseases, but also in mental disorders. In particular, MBSR is well applied in contemporary society, and its effects are apparent. In this regard, mindfulness of death is not only a cause of MS, but also has the possibility of obtaining a positive result even after induction. While it is still very difficult to find studies that have proved the psychological effect of MS by applying mindfulness of death, I confirmed some of the effects of my research by applying mindfulness of death. The application of the mindfulness of death and its effects will be discussed in the next section.

5. Mindfulness of Death as a Tool for Mortality Salience Induction: Application and Effect

As discussed in Section 2, mindfulness of death is practiced in such a way that one can use the phrases "If I live just a night and a day", "If I live this day", "If I live until I partake my meal of morsel food", "If I live until I breathe in and breathe out", and so on. The important thing is that death is related to temporality, using expressions such as "for a night a day", "while partaking meal of morsel food", and "while breathing in and breathing out".

In the *Marāṇasati Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, six attitudes of mindfulness of death are separated by different disciples. However, if we group the six attitudes into one, the time unit gradually decreases from "for a night a day" to "while breathing in and breathing out". If we combine the six types of mindfulness of death together into one, we will realize that the time interval of death is getting closer. This could be a way to effectively raise awareness of death.

If mindfulness is practiced while recognizing that death is getting closer,⁹ MS can be induced very effectively, and this shows that mindfulness of death could be a more direct and effective MS-inducing tool than TMT's experimental tools. Additionally, with reference to the "time" of recognizing the approach of death, it can be expressed variously, such as "if I die after a few months", "if I die after a few days", and "if I die after some time". Therefore, two concepts are important: Mindfulness of death and connecting death to temporality. If the mindfulness of death is to be applied to various aspects of modern society, like Kabat-Zinn's MBSR, these two factors should be centered, and the specific method of practice should be appropriately modified according to age and circumstances.

Research on applying MBSR is actively conducted both in Korea and abroad, but unfortunately, studies on applying mindfulness of death are difficult to find. However, I have conducted a study on "Mindfulness of Death Based Death Education" (MDBDE) in which I have applied mindfulness of death to adolescents, although the age and number of subjects are very limited. Since the subjects of the study are adolescents (ages 13–15), the effects of mindfulness of death can be very limited, but a small part of the effect can be seen.

MDBDE was developed by the writer, one social science expert, one professor of religious education, and three current teachers. MDBDE is a death education program using mindfulness of death as the main tool. The research experiment was conducted for a total of thirteen sessions with 123 middle school students in Korea in 2015. Of the 123 students, 62 were the experimental group using mindfulness of death, and 61 were the control group. During the 45 min of class time, 15 min were spent on practicing mindfulness of death, and during the remaining time, the students were taught the

⁸ See, footnote 4.

⁹ "If I live just a night a day ... "→" If I live this day ... "→" If I live until I partake my meal of morsel food ... "→" If I live until I chew and partake four or five morsels of food ... "→" If I live until I chew and partake one morsel of food ... "→" If I live until I breathe in and breathe out ... ".

death education curriculum. The mindfulness of death was modified in consideration of the situation and age of the classroom by referring to the teacher's consultation and MBSR's sitting meditation. Mindfulness of death was conducted with the breathing method and attitude of sitting meditation, and the contents of mindfulness of "If there were not much more time to live, what would I do?"

Originally, as mentioned above, mindfulness of death was composed of reflecting on the temporality of death and the content of the *Maraṇasati Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, as follows: "If I die a few months later, or if I die a few days later, or if I die in a few hours, how will I live?" However, through discussions with current teachers, it was determined that this was not appropriate for adolescents and it was judged that there was a possibility of causing excessive anxiety about death. Therefore, after the discussion with the current teachers and experts, I concluded that the sentence "If there were not much more time to live, what would I do?" would be appropriate for adolescents. The important points in the practice of mindfulness of death are "practicing in the frame of mindfulness meditation" and "associating death with time", which makes people aware of their death. Mindfulness of death can be applied variously if we set these two factors as the center axis and make appropriate adjustments according to age and situation.

Although the subjects of the experimental group were very limited, MDBDE had some effect. The tools used to measure the effects were the Revised Version of the Purpose in Life Test (PIL-R), the Revised Collett–Lester Fear of Death and Dying Scale (CLFDD-R), and the Death Attitude Profile-Revised (DAP-R). PIL-R was used to measure the effect of thought of death on attitudes to life, CLFDD-R was used to determine whether MS was induced, and DAP-R was used to measure the acceptance of death. The effect of MDBDE's application of mindfulness of death was measured using multivariate analysis of covariance in SPSS. "Attitude of life" ($t = -3.5, p < 0.01$), "anxiety of death" ($t = -4.3, p < 0.01$), and "neutral acceptance of death" ($t = -7.1, p < 0.01$) showed significant results. In particular, the anxiety of death was significant, and it was interpreted that MS was induced. This supports the hypothesis that "the induction of MS will increase the anxiety of death". In conclusion, mindfulness of death influenced the attitude of life, MS induction, and acceptance of death (Moon 2016a, pp. 116–225).

As I mentioned in Section 1, this article discusses whether mindfulness of death can be used as a tool to trigger MS and what effects it can have. The purpose of TMT is not only to induce MS, but to study phenomena after MS induction, such as an increase of prosocial behavior and an increase in attitude to pursue the intrinsic value of life. Furthermore, the goal of mindfulness of death is not just an awareness of death, but a positive influence, such as a change in the attitude or meaning of life, and the right acceptance of death after death is recognized.

In regard to acceptance of death, Paul Wong argues that there are three attitudes of death acceptance: "Neutral acceptance", "approach acceptance", and "escape acceptance". Approach acceptance is an attitude that focuses on the afterlife rather than the reality, and escape acceptance is a way of avoiding death in order to escape the painful reality. Neutral acceptance is a neutral acceptance of death as part of life (Wong et al. 1993, pp. 122–25). Neutral acceptance refers to the right attitude toward death, which perceives death as equivalent to birth, rather than as a means of avoiding life. Additionally, the practice of mindfulness of death can help develop the power of the right acceptance of death.

Interestingly, the *Visuddhimagga* refers to the benefits of mindfulness of death, which are similar to the psychological phenomena after MS induction in TMT. The *Maraṇassatikathā* of the *Visuddhimagga* states:

A bhikkhu devoted to mindfulness of death is constantly diligent. He acquires perception of disenchantment with all kinds of existence. He conquers attachment to life. He condemns evil. He avoids much storing. He has no stain of avarice about requisites. Perception of impermanence grows in him, following upon which there appear the perceptions of pain and not-self. But while beings who have not developed [mindfulness of] death fall victims to fear, horror and confusion at the time of death as though suddenly seized by wild beasts,

spirits, snakes, robbers, or murderers, he dies undeluded and fearless without falling into any such state.¹⁰

Among the quotations, the following are noteworthy: (1) “A bhikkhu devoted to mindfulness of death is constantly diligent”, (2) “He condemns evil”, (3) “He avoids much storing. He has no stain of avarice about requisites”, and (4) “He dies undeluded and fearless without falling into any such state”.

Firstly, the phrase “constantly diligent” in (1) means not being lazy in life. This is similar to a study on TMT which showed that the induction of MS caused the “limited-time perspective” to be perceived as a limited time of life (Vail et al. 2012, p. 317). Secondly, the phrase “condemning evil” in (2) means to shun unethical and immoral acts. As we saw in Section 3, TMT asserts that when a sense of anxiety occurs, the cultural worldview acts as a buffer against it, and that meeting cultural values is guaranteed in its cultural boundaries (Rosenblatt et al. 1989, p. 681). Furthermore, in order to meet the value standards of the culture to which an individual belongs, they have to follow the ethical and moral practices of the culture. This is because, in accordance with ethics and moral practices, one can obtain an ideological or symbolic immortality from the religion or norm of the culture. In the end, anxiety about death leads to a psychology that adheres to the social norms of the culture to which one belongs. Thus, “condemning evil” in (2) is similar to TMT’s claim that MS induction adheres to ethics and moral values.

Third, the piece “He avoids much storing. He has no stain of avarice about requisites” in (3) is similar to the “Scrooge effect” of TMT. The term “Scrooge effect” comes from “Scrooge”, the name of the main character of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol”. The study reports that people who are MS-induced are more committed to charity than people who are not, and that they donate more money (Jonas et al. 2002). On the basis of this, an MS-induced person is psychologically motivated to act charitably, which is also in the same context as the contents of the *Visuddhimagga*’s “avoiding much storing and having no stain of avarice about requisites” in (3).

Lastly, (4), “He dies undeluded and fearless without falling into any such state”, is related to the effects of death education rather than TMT. Similar to “neutral acceptance” above, the ultimate educational effect of death education is that death should be recognized as one of the natural laws, such as birth and living, and not as a means of avoiding life and as an object of fear or anxiety. The practice of mindfulness of death, as it says in the *Visuddhimagga*, will provide the power to not be afraid or panic when one dies, and is not different from the effect pursued by death education. Therefore, mindfulness of death can help to increase the power of acceptance of death. Through the contents we have seen so far, mindfulness of death can have a number of positive effects after the practice. TMT’s studies also provide evidence supporting the effects of mindfulness of death.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I explored the idea that mindfulness of death can be a tool for inducing MS and can have a positive psychological impact. The specific method of mindfulness of death—one of ten types of mindfulness—is explained in the *Marāṇasati Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. The *Visuddhimagga* also says that one should practice mindfulness of death “as if there is a murderer next to me” and stresses the effects of mindfulness of death, such as condemning evil, abandoning greed for material things, and being able to maintain peace upon dying.

I examined the mindfulness of death in the early Buddhist texts in relation to terror management theory and mortality salience. As we saw in Section 4, mortality salience activated (i.e., the state in which the thought of death is consciously activated), psychological changes such as the increase of

¹⁰ “Imañca pana maraṇassatiṃ anuyutto bhikkhu satataṃ appamatto hoti, sabbabhavesu anabhirat-isaññam paṭilabhati, jīvitānikantiṃ jahāti, pāpāgarahī hoti, asannidhibahulo pariikkhāresu vigatamalamacchero, aniccasaññā cassa paricayaṃ gacchati. . . . Yathā abhāvitamaraṇā sattā sahasā vāḷ amigayakkha sappa cora vadhakābhībhitā viya maraṇasamaye bhayaṃ santāsaṃ sammohaṃ āpajanti, evaṃ anāpajitvā abhaya asammūḷho kālaṃ karoti”. *Visuddhimagga*, p. 231. Translation, (Ñāṇamoli 2010), p. 236.

pro-social behavior (e.g., charity) and one emphasis on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values due to the operation of a cultural worldview and self-esteem. In particular, I argued that mindfulness of death could be a more direct and effective tool for inducing mortality salience than other tools of terror management theory.

Additionally, I looked at the ways in which mindfulness of death can be applied to current society, like Kabat-Zinn's MBSR, through which mindfulness has been integrated very successfully in modern society. In order for the mindfulness of death to be applied well, I suggested that meditation on death should be linked to "temporality" and should be practiced within the framework of "mindfulness" with breathing, posture, and content of meditation. In this article, we looked at MDBDE as an example of a study applying mindfulness of death, but generalizability is limited by the young age of the subjects and the small sample size. Until now, it has been hard to find empirical studies applying mindfulness of death. In the future, I hope that many experts in diverse fields will study the application of mindfulness of death and its positive effects on life.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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