

Contemporary Buddhism

An Interdisciplinary Journal

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcbh20>

Taking a Mindful Run with Murakami: A (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach

Håkan Nilsson

To cite this article: Håkan Nilsson (2020) Taking a Mindful Run with Murakami: A (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach, Contemporary Buddhism, 21:1-2, 351-368, DOI: 10.1080/14639947.2022.2043038

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2022.2043038>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 02 Mar 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1112



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Taking a Mindful Run with Murakami: A (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach

Håkan Nilsson

Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Division of Psychology, Education, and Sociology, University West, Trollhättan, Sweden

ABSTRACT

Long-distance running is an intra-subjective activity that orients the individual towards his/her own experiences and struggle for achievement within both the narrow context of training and competition and the broader context of life itself. This article takes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the obstacles and opportunities entailed in running; within this framework, mindfulness training will be prominently featured. These practices have been shown to strengthen the mind–body connection, increase situational awareness and enhance psychophysical well-being. The aim here is to examine the experiential aspect of long-distance running, aided by various understandings gleaned from mindfulness, phenomenology, Buddhism and sports, with a special emphasis on the memoir *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running*, by Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami.

In the article ‘Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship’ (Schutz 1951), Austrian sociologist and phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1899–1959) attempts a phenomenological analysis of music making. Although the focus of this article is on long-distance running rather than music, I intend to apply Schutz’s basic approach in making a (hermeneutic) phenomenological¹ analysis of the obstacles and opportunities entailed in this sport. Within this framework, the practice of mindfulness will be prominently featured. Mindfulness, which has proven effective in terms of overcoming mental obstacles and enhancing performance in sports, involves the practices of body scanning (sitting and walking) meditation and yoga (cf. Baltzell and Akhtar 2014; Gardner and Moore 2007; Kaufman, Glass, and Arnkoff 2009; Mipham 2012; Shapiro 2009). These practices have been shown to strengthen the mind–body connection, increase situational awareness (Mipham 2012; Shapiro 2009) and enhance psychophysical well-being, both individually and collectively (Nilsson 2014). Certainly, all

CONTACT Håkan Nilsson  hakan.nilsson.2@hv.se  Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Division of Psychology, Education, and Sociology, University West, Trollhättan, Sweden.

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

sportspersons would find such benefits to be advantageous, including those involved in individual sports such as long-distance running, the topic at hand.

Running is an intra-subjective activity that orients the individual towards his/her own subjective experiences and struggle for achievement within both the narrow context of training and competition and the broader context of life itself (cf. Koski 2015; Mipham 2012; Murakami 2009; Pullen 2017). This is confirmed by Japanese novelist and marathon runner Haruki Murakami (1949), who notes in his memoir, *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running* (2009), that long-distance running can bring greater meaning to life in general. The aim of this article is to examine the experiential aspect of long-distance running, aided by a close reading of Murakami's memoir as well as various understandings gleaned from mindfulness, (hermeneutic) phenomenology, Buddhism and sports. I approach this topic from the perspective of an academic who is both a mindfulness scholar and practitioner and a passionate runner – undertakings that have obviously influenced my preconceptions, readings and interpretations of texts.²

I begin by briefly describing the method employed in this article, followed by a discussion on the Tendai school's running monks. After this comes an overview of general mindfulness practice as it relates to the physical and mental spheres, which is followed by a discussion on the experiential dimension of both running and mindfulness, entailing an examination of the 'intentional mindfulness model'. At the end, I hope to provide some sense of how mindfulness can contribute to the sport of running through the practice of 'walking meditation' and yoga: embodied processes that improve physical, mental and spiritual equilibrium.

Methodology

Influenced by Polkington (1983), this article supports the use of *methodology* rather than *method* to describe the use of (hermeneutic) phenomenological traditions. Thus, a methodology is not a correct method to follow, but a creative approach to understanding, using whatever approaches are responsive to particular questions and subject matter. A (hermeneutic) phenomenological investigation, as this article aims to conduct, is characterised by its focus on relatedness and the intuitive essences and description of a phenomenon (i.e. long distance running) (Wilcke 2002). Using this approach, I am mostly concerned with how to understand the phenomenon of long-distance running, from both a Western and a Buddhist perspective. A first step in this direction was taken by orientating myself about this phenomenon (i.e. long-distance running), by *reading* works by historical and contemporary Buddhists, and clinical and non-clinical articles and books on running and mindfulness, and by a close reading of

Murakami's memoir *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running* (cf. Wilcke 2002). 'Close reading' is an additional method employed in this article; Brummet (2018, 2) defines it as 'the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meaning'. In this regard, text and reader are fused into a dialogical attempt to discover new landscapes. A second step involved interpreting, describing and contextualising long-distance running on the one hand and mindfulness, from both a Western secular perspective and a traditional Buddhist perspective, on the other.

Marathon monks of the Tendai school

Although Murakami – whose grandfather was a Buddhist priest – is himself neither a mindfulness nor a traditional Buddhist practitioner, there are certain similarities between the aims and experiences described in his memoir on running and those of the running monks of Tendai. Tendai is a Mahāyāna Buddhist school, founded in 806 by the Japanese monk Saichō (767–822). Shortly after his death, a monastery was established in his honour on Mount Hiei (northeast of Kyoto) (Stevens 2013). In order to attain enlightenment (*hongaku shishō*), the Tendai school emphasises asceticism and the reading of the *Lotus Sūtras*, one of most revered Mahāyāna Buddhist texts; the school teaches that enlightenment is attainable in this lifetime, but only through extreme self-denial. According to Stevens (2013), priests who intend to remain as abbots either in the Hiei monastery or in one of Tendai's numerous sub-temples must undertake a three-year retreat. During that retreat candidates select either the meditation course or the esoteric rites course and are expected to perform at least one of the traditional Tendai practices: cleaning, chanting or walking/running, with the last of these involving participation in a 100-day marathon (Stevens 2013).

Apart from this 100-day marathon, there is also a gruelling 1000-day marathon known as *sennichi kaihōgyō*, which also dates back to the eighth century, having been established by the Tendai monk Sōō (831–918) (Cao 2020). To strengthen their endurance for this 1000-day walking/running event, participants are required to engage in various forms of manual labour (e.g. chopping wood, carrying heavy provisions from temple to temple, etc.). In addition, they must spend years as attendants to senior monks in preparation for their own marathon runs. For the Tendai monks, however, the real secret lies not in physical but in spiritual strength. As they prepare and serve their seniors, the aim is to develop a desire to realise Buddhahood – i.e. to transform themselves into Saint Fudō Myō-o (a reincarnation of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi) (Stevens 2013; Cao 2020).

In contrast to modern marathon runners, who often don the latest moisture-absorbing outfits and ultralight running shoes, these austere yet charismatic³ athletes (*gyōja*) are provided with only straw sandals, an

elongated hat made of *hinoki* wood, and a white uniform (the colour of death in Buddhism). Around their waist is wrapped a white 'cord of death' with a sheathed knife tucked inside. The Tendai tradition dictates that if the participant does not complete his prescribed runs/walks along with all accompanying tasks, he must either hang or disembowel himself (Stevens 2013). He also carries a small bag containing two candles, a *sutras* book, and a handbook intended to guide him on his journey and remind him of the 250 sacred stops he must make along the way (Stevens 2013).

The marathon takes seven years to complete, with each year involving different tasks and challenges as well as visitations to diverse temples, shrines, tombs and pilgrimage sites (Stevens 2013; Cao 2020). After the 700th day, the walking/running monks face their most arduous trial, known as *dō-iri*: for nine full days all running ceases as the participating monks go without food, water, rest or sleep, and yet are expected to perform all daily duties, recite the *Fudō Myō-o mantra* 100,000 times, and chant all 28 chapters of the *Lotus Sūtras* (Covell (2004, 259). Metaphorically, *dō-iri* is designed to bring these monks face to face with death (Stevens 2013). When the 1000-day run has been completed, all monks that have prevailed earn the title *Daigyoman Ajari* ('Saintly Master of the Highest Practice') (Cao 2020). To punctuate the difficulty involved in completing the Tendai marathon, since 1885 only 46 monks have done so (Stevens 2013).

Are there legitimate parallels, or at least similarities, that can be drawn between Murakami's motivations for running and those of Japan's Tendai monks? In his memoir, Murakami (2009) writes of the old Buddhist saying, 'pain is inevitable; suffering is optional'. Pain, he notes, is an unavoidable consequence of long-distance running; the degree to which a given runner is able to endure that pain, however, varies from person to person (Murakami 2009, 4). Murakami considers this pain and hurt to be a necessary aspect not only of running but of life itself: '[e]xerting yourself to your fullest within your individual limits: that's the essence of running, and a metaphor for life ...' (12). Apart from this, Murakami explains that he runs 'to acquire a void', noting, 'thoughts and ideas that invade my emotions as I run remain subordinate to that void' (11). While running Murakami tells himself to think of a river or clouds, but within himself he's not really thinking of anything; he merely continues to run 'in [his] own cozy, homemade void' – his own reflective 'silence' (14). Murakami notes that running also provides time for him to reflect on his life, his writing and so forth.

Along similar lines, the aim of the running Tendai monks is to become so absorbed in Mount Hiei and its surroundings that all physical pain and discomfort more or less disappear. In his book *The Way of the Runner*, Adharanand Finn (2016) describes an encounter with a master Tendai monk who explains that the constant motion of running/walking exhausts the mind and body to the point where nothing remains – a perspective that possibly is

similar to Murakami's void. He goes on to note that running has a unique way of clearing the mind and that when one becomes empty in this way, a sense of oneness with the universe emerges to fill the void. Stevens (2013, 133) notes in this connection that '[f]acing death over and over, the marathon monks become alive to each moment, full of gratitude, joy and grace ... [They] always aim for the ultimate [and] never look back ...' This positive attitude towards adversity, this opening oneself to the sights, sounds and smells of the surrounding environment is also reflected in Murakami's memoir, as noted above.

The embodied temporality of runners and mindfulness

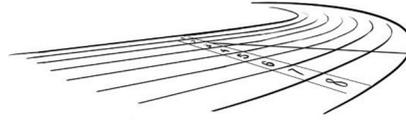
Both the sport of running and the practice of mindfulness require 'being situated' in these performances. According to Kabat-Zinn, the purpose of body scanning is to become 'more present' in the body (Kabat-Zinn 2013). Body scanning can be practised for either a short or a long period of time, either at night or in the morning while in bed, and either sitting or standing; indeed, there are countless creative ways of bringing body scanning and other forms of lying-down meditation into one's life (Kabat-Zinn 2005). A body scan is conducted by allowing the mind to 'sweep through' the various parts of one's body, from one's toes to the crown of one's head.

The practice of mindfulness meditation is performed in a variety of postures, while either lying down, sitting or standing (Kessen 2009). In the beginning stages of the practice, the most comfortable meditational position is lying down; then, depending on one's level of experience, one can meditate while in a number of different sitting postures. In the West, it is customary to meditate while sitting on a chair, 'meditation bench' or pillow, since this requires less effort than sitting directly on the floor (Kabat-Zinn 2005).

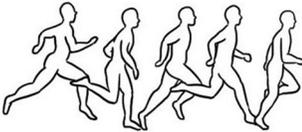
Hatha-yoga is the most common type of yoga used in Western mindfulness training as taught by Kabat-Zinn and others (Kabat-Zinn 2005). Kabat-Zinn (2005) describes the practice as follows: 'Through ... mindfulness yoga, we can expand and deepen our sense of what it means to inhabit the body and develop a richer and more nuanced sense of the lived body in the lived moment' (276).

During both running and mindfulness training, the ultimate aim should be to reside in the moment between past and future – an experience that is considered both spatial and temporal (see Figure 1) (Mipham 2012). Sport psychologists generally refer to this state of awareness as 'being in the zone' – i.e. existing in the present moment without being distracted by external visual and/or auditory phenomena. 'Being in the zone' is generally regarded as an optimal psychological state in which one's mind and body are in harmony and all forms of negative thinking and self-doubt are absent (cf. Kaufman, Glass, and Arnkoff 2009; De Petrillo et al. 2009). In short, it is a state

The world around: (*Umwelt*; i.e., the track)



Being-in-the-world: (*Dasein*; i.e., the situated meaning of human in the world)



The world of interpersonal relations (*Mitwelt*; i.e., other runners)



Spatial dimension: "the lived body"
The world of oneself (*Eigenwelt*; i.e., the mindful runner)

Temporal dimension:

Past

Present
(a *being-mode*)

Future

Figure 1. *The intentional mindful model.* The mindful runner (*Eigenwelt*; the world of oneself) is (spatially) situated in the present moment, a being mode, between past and future (temporal dimension) and in relation – a shared spatiality – to the environment (*Umwelt*, the world around, i.e. track) of interpersonal relations (*Mitwelt*; the world of interpersonal relations, i.e. other runners). Being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) illuminates the situated and relational context of *Eigenwelt*, *Mitwelt* and *Umwelt*.

of enhanced functioning (Pineau, Glass, and Kaufman 2014) and ‘wide-awakeness’ (akin to what Buddhists describe as *sati*) (Schutz 1945). Murakami speaks of such a moment as follows:

As I run I tell myself to think of a river. And clouds. But essentially I’m not thinking of a thing. All I do is keep on running in my own cozy, homemade void, my own nostalgic silence. And this is a pretty wonderful thing. No matter what anybody else says. (23)

This state of mind can also be described in terms of the ‘being mode’, in which the mind is directed non-judgementally to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn 2013; Koski 2015; Nilsson 2017). This direction, or intentionality, is to be understood as a dialectical interaction between the lived body (the internal system) and the environment (the external system) (Koski 2015; Nilsson and Kazemi 2016). Within (hermeneutic) phenomenology, this sort of conscious act is commonly described as a dialectical act between the subject, the environment and the objectified body (Heidegger 2008). In the next section, this interaction will be analysed in terms of what it means to cultivate a mindful running mentality.

Cultivating mindful running

Long-distance running requires one to achieve physical and mental control over both the lived body and the flow of sensory data (Mipham 2012; Murakami 2009; Shapiro 2009). While this is obviously not that easy to accomplish, runners can take help from both the sixth and the seventh step of Buddhism’s eightfold path: right effort (*sammā vāyāma*) and being mindful (*sammā sati*). Right effort enables one to transform negative emotions into positive ones, thus alleviating suffering/pain (*dukkha*) (Mipham 2012). Murakami (2009) notes, in this connection, that ‘through repetition you input into your muscles the message that this is how much work they have to perform. Our muscles are very conscientious. As long as we observe the correct procedure, they won’t complain’ (71). This sort of ‘correct procedure’, which entails the right amount of tension, is also a way of gaining control over the constant stream of thoughts and feelings that easily overrun the mind during marathon running (cf. Dreyer and Dreyer 2009). In this way a mindset is produced in which the runner maintains his/her focus regardless of what arises in the mind. The runner maintains total awareness in the present moment – a state that resembles what is known in the Tibetan Buddhism as *selwa*: awareness and clarity. This particular mindset is described by Mipham (2012) as follows: ‘When the mind is totally present, it is relaxed, nimble and sensitive. It feels lighter and clear. It notices everything, but it is not distracted by anything. It is the feeling of knowing exactly where you are and what you are doing’ (152).

In his book, Murakami (2009) describes the experience of ‘being present’ during his participation in a long-distance marathon: ‘[F]orget about beer. And forget about the sun. Forget about the wind. Forget about the article I have to write. Just focus on moving my feet forward, one after the other. That’s the only thing that matters’ (64). This description fits very well with the aims of mindfulness training, which claims to help athletes concentrate on the here and now, increase their focus on the body, and become mindfully present with non-judgemental awareness (Gardner and Moore 2007; Kaufman, Glass, and Arnkoff

2009; Koski 2015; Moran 2012). In addition, we should likewise note that this description by Murakami clearly supports the idea of non-action (*wuwei*) or ‘*samādhi-at-play*’ (i.e. actionless action) in terms of Zen Buddhism – an action that is not forced or burdened with effortful striving (Nagatomo 2019).

Having explored the role of awareness and attention in both mindfulness and long-distance running, we now examine the role of breathing. Mindfulness training teaches one how to anchor respiration within the body and mind (Kabat-Zinn 2013; Lesley Wood 2009; Nilsson 2016a). By focusing on breathing (‘I-myself-breathing’, in a Merleau-Pontian sense), the participant strives for personal balance and greater awareness in the present moment of the performance (cf. Hockey and Collinson 2007). Both the mindfulness practitioner and the long-distance runner employ what is known as ‘harmonised breathing’, which helps to transcend bodily sensations (e.g. pain), ignore mental distraction (e.g. boredom, anger, thirst and fatigue), and thus return to an awareness of the present moment (cf. Hockey and Collinson 2007). Murakami (2009, 13) describes this in more poetical terms as follows: ‘The sounds of my footsteps, my breathing and heartbeat, all blended together in a unique polyrhythm’.

To deeply breathe in and out moves the breath from the throat to the stomach via the vagus nerve, which controls the parasympathetic nervous system. The heart slows down and the body calms, enabling us to better recognise and cope with adversities (Kabat-Zinn 2013; Nilsson 2016a). Given this description, it is easy to understand how the development of proper breathing techniques would help to decrease stress and improve one’s running as well as one’s mindfulness performance (Hockey and Collinson 2007; Mipham 2012). In their book *Chi Running*, Dreyer and Dreyer (2009) write that belly (or diaphragmatic) breathing helps the body to relax while running. Belly breathing releases a helpful mixture of hormones (e.g. serotonin and beta-endorphin), lowers heart rate and blood pressure, improves circulation and produces an overall feeling of calm and well-being. Belly breathing while running is accomplished by breathing in for two steps and breathing out for three steps. Coordinating one’s in-going and out-going breathing with one’s cadence is said to give rise to a more mentally and physically relaxing run (Dreyer and Dreyer 2009).

Mindful presence in running: the intentional mindfulness model

Although running is an activity that is largely practised alone, there are occasions where it is practised with others (e.g. marathons or with a running partner). While running, the individual is said to place the perceived self between two force fields: internalisation (*incorporation*) and externalisation (*excorporation*). During a marathon, for example, each runner experiences her own body in the present (*incorporation*), but also experiences herself as being part of a collective effort (*excorporation*). In this regard, being attuned to one’s own body while running also attunes one to the

bodies of the other runners and to Nature (cf. Koski 2015; Cao 2020). Thus, for Heidegger (2008) we are committed to Being-with-others. During a marathon in Athens, Murakami's attention alternates between the passing scenery (Nature) and his own bodily feelings:

I run on and on. The sun reveals all of itself, and with unbelievable speed rises in the sky. I'm dying of thirst. I don't have the time to get sweaty, since the air is so dry that perspiration immediately evaporates, leaving behind a layer of white salt . . . my whole body starts to sting from the salty residue . . . I start to dream about an ice-cold beer, one so cold it burns. No beer around, though, so I make do with getting a drink from the editor's van about every three miles or so. I've never drunk so much water while running. I feel pretty good, though. Lots of energy left. (63)

To be 'incorporated', as Mead (1967) once noted, 'is to be an active subject', something that closely corresponds to what Merleau-Ponty (1999) has called 'the lived body'. 'Excorporation', on the other hand, consists of the interaction between oneself and the other runners, thus enabling one to see the world of running through others' eyes (cf. Koski 2015). The term excorporation suggests that the lived body of the runner disappears in the interaction with the object of perception (i.e. the run). According to Merleau-Ponty (1999), the lived body is seen as the root of our perception, and works through a dialectical interaction between the body and the life-world (cf. Koski 2015). For Merleau-Ponty (1999), the body exists primordially – before there is a thought or reflection about the world – and the world exists for us only in and through our body (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997). In practical terms, this means that a person (i.e. the runner) experiences the world (i.e. the landscape, Nature) through the senses (Koski 2015). In a Merleau-Pontian sense, both the subject and the object are constructed in the process of perception (cf. Spickard 2014).

The dialectical interaction between the body (i.e. the subject) and the life-world (i.e. the object) is also a matter of interaction with others – known as haptic experiences⁴ by some (hermeneutic) phenomenologists (cf. Hockey and Collinson 2007). Thus, the lived body acts in this context both as an *instrument* or *tool* and as an *object* of reaction, meaning experiencing the body as having limits just as ordinary objects have limits (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997). The lived body as instrument and object is illustrated by Murakami, who, during a marathon, repeated the *mantra* 'I'm not a human. I'm a piece of machinery. I don't need to feel a thing. Just forge on ahead' (110).

In Schutz's (1951) analysis of music-making, a central point is that individuals are capable of sharing inner (i.e. subjective) time even though they are separated in outer (objective) time and space (Neitz and Spickard 1990). The perceived self, or background, finds itself between two force fields: *internalisation* and *externalisation*. (Hermeneutic) phenomenology describes this as

a ‘dialectical act’ between the subject and the object (cf. Koski 2015; Heidegger 2008). From this perspective, while running, one’s lived body is situated in the present (cf. Koski 2015), and thus one is supposed to be intentionally here and now – that moment between past and future where we simultaneously attend to the intertwinement of three worlds (Figure 1): (1) the world of oneself (*Eigenwelt*; *the mindful runner*); (2) the world around (*Umwelt*; *the track*); and (3) the world of interpersonal relations (*Mitwelt*; *other runners*) (Schutz 1967). Thus, space and time are *a priori* concepts – i.e. they are not derived from experience, but rather precede it.

This perspective is similar to Heidegger’s conception of *Dasein*, being-in-the-world. *Dasein* consists of time outside oneself, but can also consist of time within oneself (*sein zum tode*) (Heidegger 2008). Heidegger calls this specific human mode of being ‘existence’ (Heidegger 2008). *Dasein*, with a resemblance to Buddhism, not only *is*; it also *exists* as a unitary phenomenon without a beginning and permanent self (cf. Breivik 2007; Heidegger 2008). Koski puts it this way: ‘... the goal and finishing point of running are located somewhere and are always in relation to *Dasein*. The body cannot be “here” and “yonder” simultaneously’ (2015, 83).

When running, a further dialectical interaction takes place beyond the model described in Figure 1 – i.e. excorporation (already referred to above), which consists of the interaction between the individual and the other runners, thus enabling the capacity to see the world of running through others’ eyes. Schutz (1970) writes: ‘I can be aware simultaneously of what is going on in my mind and in yours, *living through* the two series of experience as one series – what we are experiencing together’ (192). On the other hand, the runners are also there to learn more about themselves, their running, and their intentional act in the present moment (i.e. the being mode). For Murakami, intentional action in the present moment means to tolerate the pain (a leitmotif in this memoir!) and to exist within the action itself:

If pain weren’t involved, who in the world would ever go to the trouble of taking part in sports like the triathlon or the marathon, which demand such an investment of time and energy? It’s precisely because of the pain, precisely because we want to overcome that pain, that we can get the feeling, through this process, of really being *alive* – or at least a partial sense of it. Your quality of experience is based not on standards such as time or ranking, but on finally awakening to an awareness of fluidity within action itself. If things go well, that is. (171)

Runners also share the common goal (*task cohesion*) of becoming more mindful in both their training and their everyday life. This is something that can provide a sense of personal joy, confidence, skilfulness and meaning (Greeson 2009; Birrer, Röthlin, and Morgan 2012). To achieve this goal, however, one must acquire the ability to become a ‘mindful’ runner.

Mindful or mindless running

The 'or' in the above heading is meant to indicate that running can be performed either as an intentional act that unifies mind and body or as a routinised act in which running is taken as a necessary evil or to cope with stress, solve a problem or just have an enjoyable moment. It is important in mindfulness practice to fix the mind in the here and now without allowing it to wander into the past or future – a state of consciousness likened to the being mode, which resides between past and future without judgemental evaluation (Nilson and Kazemi, 2016), a notion similar to Zen Buddhism's notion of meditative absorption (Nagatomo 2019). Klein (1994) asserts, in this connection, that 'mindfulness is a way of being there. It does so by fostering a capacity to relate to oneself without trying to oppose, judge, or change what is observed' (1994, 121). The being mode is the opposite of the doing mode (Hick 2009), which is more of a reflective state of mind that evaluates different situations in terms of what has been done in the past and what must be done in the future so as to achieve a certain goal (Nilson and Kazemi, 2016).

In a running marathon, evaluating and reflecting are important in terms of developing strategies for improvement, but too much evaluation and reflection can disturb the runner's 'flow', causing him/her to forget to be in the moment of the race. The process of cultivating the mind so that thoughts and feelings do not give rise to disturbance or mindlessness involves switching from the doing mode to the being mode (Anālayo 2010; Hick 2009; Kabat-Zinn 2013). Murakami writes:

I didn't think about anything. I didn't feel anything. I realized all of a sudden that even physical pain had all but vanished. Or maybe it was shoved into some unseen corner, like some ugly furniture you can't get rid of. In this state, after I'd passed through this unseen barrier, I started passing a lot of other runners. (113)

Thus the being mode, in terms of running, can be defined as 'running in the moment', which involves an enhanced awareness of one's body and one's surroundings (Shapiro 2009). In this regard, mindfulness training is said to bring awareness to the body and to activate the being mode as opposed to the doing mode (Kabat-Zinn 2013). Two of the most important positive outcomes of mindfulness training are the release of tensions and the elimination of an incongruent self-image (Baer 2003; Didonna 2009; Grossman et al. 2004; Kabat-Zinn 2013). This is something runners must bear in mind when they participate in a race. In mindfulness training, an effective way of releasing tension and establishing the being mode is through the performance of walking meditation and yoga. These practices are described in the next two sections.

Walking meditation for the mindful runner

Walking meditation is known in Zen Buddhism by the Japanese word *kinhin*; its aim is to release bodily tension by walking back and forth in a line or round and round in a loop (Kabat-Zinn 1994). In terms of one's running routine, walking meditation is best suited for a familiar route. Ideally, walking meditation should be practised either as a 'mindful starter' (e.g. five minutes before beginning one's route) or as a 'mindful warming down' between two runs, when a feeling of fatigue dominates the body and mind (e.g. 1–2 km of walking meditation). The practice of walking meditation is intended to be performed with 'right effort' and full attention to breathing and the placement of feet (Kessen 2009). Kabat-Zinn (2005) provides the following instruction:

Beginning with lifting just one heel, we then bring awareness to moving that foot and leg forward, and then to placing of the foot on the ground usually first with the heel. As the whole of this now forward foot comes down on the floor or ground, we note the shifting of the weight from the back foot through to the forward foot, and then we note the lifting of the back foot, heel first and later the rest of it as the weight of the body comes fully onto the forward foot, and the cycle continues: moving, placing, shifting . . . (269–270)

The runner can practise walking meditation at any pace, from ultra slow to very brisk (Kabat-Zinn 1994). However, the balance is crucial, as the above quotations from Kabat-Zinn indicate. Walking meditation is important for distance runners because knowledge of tension is crucial for good performance. According to Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hahn (2011), walking meditation has the power to alleviate mental and bodily tensions and enhance inner serenity, joy and present-centredness. For his part, Murakami himself has admitted that walking during a race is sometimes more advisable than continuing with the pain:

Instead of forcing myself to run, perhaps it would have been smarter if I'd walked. A lot of runners were doing just that. Giving their legs a rest as they walked. But I didn't walk a single step. I stopped a lot to stretch, but I never walked. I didn't come here to walk. I came to run. (111)

Despite Murakami's determination to run rather than walk, at one point during a marathon he was forced to walk:

So the last three miles or so I had to walk. This was the first time I'd ever walked a marathon instead of running. Up till then I'd made it a point of pride that no matter how hard things might get, I never walked. (53)

Becoming aware of one's body from one run to the other, and learning how to control tension through breathing, impacts emotions regarding the outcome of a race (Mipham 2012). Including walking meditation in training for

a race can enable the runner to achieve a high level of attentional arousal while remaining deeply relaxed in the present moment of the race. Echoing this view, Sheehan writes:

But more than anything, that hour on the road is for ideas and principles, for meditation and contemplation. Somehow in the relaxation, the letting go, we arrive at a state that Heraclitus described as ‘listening to the essence of things’. We open up to the world. (cited in Koski 2015, 104)

Mindfulness yoga for the runner

Running is a repetitive exercise, and the force of impact on each foot is about three to four times the runner’s weight. Side effects of this repetitive force include tight muscles, knee pain (known as runner’s knee) and sore feet (e.g. plantar fasciitis and stress fractures) (Shapiro 2009). Over time, tight muscles can become hard and inflexible. Mindfulness yoga is a beneficial tool in terms of preventing this from happening; at the least, it can help to decrease stiffness in the muscles, loosen up tense tendons or joints, and increase muscle flexibility and range of movement (Kabat-Zinn 2013;). In my experience, mindfulness yoga (especially *hatha-yoga*) utilises postures that are particularly useful to runners, since these are meant to increase the flexibility of the pelvis. Long-distance runners risk pelvic stress fractures due to the excessive repetition of muscle contractions (cf. Noakes, Smith, Lindenberg, and Wills 1985). Research has shown that a strong and healthy pelvic floor is essential to overall health and fitness (Stein 2009). For this reason, it might be argued, mindfulness yoga should be integrated into a runner’s training regimen.

Kabat-Zinn (2005) describes the practice of mindfulness yoga as follows: ‘Through the practice of mindfulness yoga, we can expand and deepen our sense of what it means to inhabit the body and develop a richer and more nuanced sense of the lived body in the lived moment’ (276). In other words, runners must learn to look at their running as a performance of the lived body in the lived moment – a performance ‘that comes not only from physical equilibrium but from mental and spiritual balance as well’ (Couch 2016, 5).

The practice of mindfulness yoga affords a sense of psychological well-being through its programme of physical, mental and spiritual exercises, which lead to an increase in the runner’s muscle flexibility, personal resilience and heightened sense of purpose in life (cf. Kay 2007; Koski 2015). Indeed, for the runner, mindfulness yoga is a powerful tool that not only strengthens physical endurance, but also provides an opportunity for spiritual growth (cf. Kay 2007). As Kay (2007) reminds us: ‘... like yoga, running can also be a spiritual exercise – a means to spiritual enlightenment or spiritual fulfilment’ (4).

Conclusion

Running, in all its various forms – from power walking to jogging to long-distance running and beyond – is, today, one of the most popular and practised outdoor activities in the world. Indeed, at present, there are literally millions of people worldwide who run for exercise, pleasure, sport, competition and so on. In 2017, for example, in the United States alone, an estimated 60 million persons took part in jogging as well as trail or street running, while an estimated 110 million were involved in walking for fitness (Running and Jogging 2018). Long-distance running, in particular, has become an extremely popular individual and collective form that admits the participation of both professional and non-professional athletes alike: over 800 marathons are held throughout the world each year, with the vast majority of competitors being recreational athletes. Focusing again on the United States, in 2018, an estimated 502,470 persons completed a marathon (Marathon Statistics – FindMyMarathon.com).

The simple aim of this article has been to provide all types of runners, but especially long-distance runners, with techniques, understandings and tools of consciousness that will enable them to obtain a more profound running experience, not only physically, but also mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Towards this end, here are but a few of the many suggestions and ideas that have been introduced herein: maintaining mental and physical focus; remaining present in the here and now; adding mindfulness yoga and walking meditation to running routines; heightening the sense of one's own as well as other runners' bodies; increasing awareness of the dialectical interplay between the mind and the external world; directing attention towards the 'lived body'; transforming negative to positive emotional energy; and cultivating a state of 'wide-awakeness', or 'full attention to life and its requirements'. A careful reading of these suggestions in the light of this article's content makes clear the influence of both mindfulness and traditional Buddhist thought as well as Murakami's memoir.

This article has encouraged a (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach to long-distance running, highlighting Heidegger and Schutz's (hermeneutic) phenomenology as well as the *intentional mindful model*. By taking advantage of mindfulness methods, marathon runners can become more present in their training and competition, which ultimately enhances their running, not only in terms of their physical development but in terms of their mental and spiritual development as well.

Notes

1. The use of the term (hermeneutic) phenomenology is meant to indicate that some parts of this paper have been influenced by Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology (i.e. Being as a fundamental ontology), while other parts have been influenced by Schuzian phenomenology (i.e. life-world actors).
2. My own experiences as a runner and mindfulness practitioner reflect what Koski (2015) refers to as the 'method of participatory philosophy of exercise', a new trend in the academic philosophical tradition. This method entails, according to Koski, the researcher him/herself practising the sport that is the subject of the study, making himself/herself a research subject as well.
3. According to Covell (2004, 260), charisma is a term used by the new religions of Japan. He identifies two types: primary charisma, which is divinely endowed; and secondary charisma, which is endowed upon a certain class of individuals, such as monks. The *kaihōgyō* practitioners (the running/walking monk) are said to possess both types of charisma.
4. Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2011/2006, 123) define haptic experiences as 'A combination of tactile and locomotive properties [which] provides information about the character of objects, surfaces and whole environments as well as our own body'.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Håkan Nilsson has a Ph.D in Social Science, a Licentiate degree in Religious Studies, M. Th., M.Ed., MSS and MB. He have a longstanding practice of meditation, yoga, Qi-gong and budo, and has published more than a dozen of article that deals with mindfulness. He holds a position as a Senior Lecture in Psychology/HRM at Department of Social and Behavioral Science, University West, Trollhättan, Sweden.

References

- Allen-Collinson, J., and Hockey, J. 2011. Feeling the way: Notes toward a haptic phenomenology of distance running and scuba diving. *International review for the sociology of sport*, 46(3), 330–345.
- Anālayo. 2010. *Satipaṭṭhāna – The Direct Path to Realization*. Cambridge (UK): Windhorse Publications.
- Baer, A. R. 2003. Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: a conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology and Practice*, 10, 125–142.
- Baltzell, A., and V. L. O. Akhtar. 2014. "Mindfulness Meditation Training for Sport (MMTS) Intervention: Impact of MMTS with Division 1 Female Athletes." *The Journal of Happiness & Well-Being* 2 (2): 160–173.
- Birrer, D., P. Röthlin, and G. Morgan. 2012. "Mindfulness to Enhance Athletic Performance: Theoretical Considerations and Possible Impact Mechanisms." *Mindfulness* 3 (3): 235–246. doi:10.1007/s12671-012-0109-2.

- Brevik, G. 2007. "Skillful Coping in Everyday Life and in Sport: A Critical Examination of the Views of Heidegger and Dreyfus." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 34 (2): 116–134. doi:10.1080/00948705.2007.9714716.
- Brummet, B. 2018. *Techniques of Close Reading*. Sage: Sage Publications.
- Cao, C. 2020. "The Spiritual Athletes in a Mountain of Sorrow: Bodily-Mediated Cultural Performances Here and beyond the Kyōto Landscape." In *Crossroads. The University of Michigan Undergraduate Journal of Anthropology*, and M. Toper, 87–101. Michigan, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Ann Arbor – Department of Anthropology. Fall 2020.
- Couch, J. 2016. *The Runner's Yoga Book: A Balanced Approach to Fitness*. California: Shambhala Publications.
- Covell, S. G. 2004. "Learning to Persevere: The Popular Teaching of Tendai Ascetics." *Comparative Religion Publications* 4. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/religion_pubs/4
- De Petrillo, L. A., K. A. Kaufman, C. R. Glass, and D. B. Arnkoff. 2009. "Mindfulness for Long-distance Runners: An Open Trial Using Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE)." *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* 3 (4): 357–376. doi:10.1123/jcsp.3.4.357.
- Didonna, F., Ed. 2009. *Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness*. New York: Springer.
- Dreyer, D., and K. Dreyer. 2009. *Chi Running. A Revolutionary Approach to Effortless, Injury-free Running*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Finn, A. 2016. *The Way of the Runner. A Journey into the Obsessive World of Japanese Running*. London: Faber.
- Gardner, F. L., and Z. E. Moore. 2007. *The Psychology of Enhancing Human Performance: The Mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC) Approach*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Greeson, J. M. 2009. "Mindfulness Research Update: 2008." *Complementary Health Practice Review* 14 (1): 10–18. doi:10.1177/1533210108329862.
- Grossman, P., L. Niemann, S. Schmidt, and H. Walach. 2004. "Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction and Health Benefits, a Meta-analysis." *Journal of Psychosomatics Research* 57 (1): 35–43. doi:10.1016/S0022-3999(03)00573-7.
- Hahn, T. N. 2011. *The Long Road Turns to Joy. A Guide to Walking Meditation*. Berkeley CA: Parallax Press.
- Heidegger, M. 2008. *Mindfulness*. New York: Continuum.
- Hick, S. F. 2009. "Mindfulness and Social Work: Paying Attention to Ourselves, Our Clients, and Society." In *Mindfulness and Social Work*, edited by S. F. Hick, 1–30. Chicago: Lyceum Books.
- Hockey, J., and J. A. Collinson. 2007. "Grasping the Phenomenology of Sporting Bodies." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 42 (2): 115–131. doi:10.1177/1012690207084747.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. 1994. *Wherever you go there you are. Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. 2005. *Coming to Our Senses. Healing Ourselves and the World through Mindfulness*. New York: Hyperion.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. 2013. *Full Catastrophe Living. Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness*. 2nd ed. revised and update. New York: Piatkus.
- Kaufman, K. A., C. R. Glass, and D. B. Arnkoff. 2009. "Evaluation of Mindful Sport Performance Enhancement (MSPE): A New Approach to Promote Flow in Athletes." *Journal of Clinical Sports Psychology* 4 (4): 334–356. doi:10.1123/jcsp.3.4.334.

- Kay, W. A. 2007. *Running – The Sacred Art*. Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing.
- Kessen, C. 2009. Living fully: Mindfulness practices for everyday life. *Mindfulness and social work*, 31–44.
- Klein, A. 1994. "Presence with Difference: Buddhists and Feminist on Subjectivity." *Hypatia* 9 (4): 112–130. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.1994.tb00652.x.
- Koski, T. 2015. *The Phenomenology and Philosophy of Running. The Multiple Dimensions of Long-distance Running*. New York: Springer.
- Lesley Wood, S. 2009. "Training Professionals in Mindfulness: The Heart of Teaching." In *Clinical Handbook of Mindfulness*, edited by F. Didonna, 463–475. New York: Springer.
- Marathon Statistics. Accessed 4 January 2018 . FindMyMarathon.com.www.findmy-marathon.com
- Mead, G. H. 1967. *Mind, Self, and Society. From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Edited and with an introduction by Charles W. Morris. Works of Georg Herbert Mead Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 1999. *Kroppens fenomenologi*. Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos AB.
- Mipham, S. 2012. *Running with the Mind of Meditation. Lesson for Training Body and Mind*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Moran, A. 2012. "Thinking in Action: Some Insights from Cognitive Sport Psychology." *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 7 (2): 85–92. doi:10.1016/j.tsc.2012.03.005.
- Murakami, H. 2009. *What I Talk about When I Talk about Running*. London: Vintage Book.
- Nagatomo, S. 2019. "Japanese Zen Buddhism Philosophy." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved 2 August 2021. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/japanese-zen/#ZenAnt>
- Neitz, M. J., and J. V. Spickard. 1990. "Steps toward a Sociology of Religious Experience: The Theories of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Alfred Schutz." *Sociological Analysis* 51 (1): 15–33. doi:10.2307/3711338.
- Nilsson, H. 2014. "A Four Dimensional Model of Mindfulness and Its Implication for Health." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6 (2): 162–174. doi:10.1037/a0036067.
- Nilsson, H. 2016a. "Socioexistential Mindfulness: Bringing Empathy and Compassion into Health Care Practice." *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 3 (1): 22–31. doi:10.1037/scp0000092.
- Nilsson, H. 2017. "Cultivating Mindfulness through the Practice of laido." *Contemporary Buddhism* 18 (1): 37–46. doi:10.1080/14639947.2017.1297343.
- Nilsson, H, and Kazemi, A. 2016. From Buddhist sati to Western mindfulness practice: A contextual analysis. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 2016, 35(1–2), 7–23
- Nilsson, H., and A. Kazemi. 2016. "Reconciling and Thematizing Definitions of Mindfulness: The Big Five of Mindfulness." *Review of General Psychology* 20 (2): 183–193. doi:10.1037/gpr0000074.
- Noakes, Timothy D., James A. Smith, Graeme Lindenberg, and Clive E. Wills. "Pelvic Stress Fractures in Long Distance Runners." *The American Journal of Sports Medicine* 13, no. 2 (March 1985): 120–23.
- Pineau, T. R., C. R. Glass, and K. A. Kaufman. 2014. "Mindfulness in Sport Performance." In *Handbook of Mindfulness*, edited by A. Le, C. Ngunoumen, and E. Langer, 1–58. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Polkington, D. 1983. *Methodology for the Human Sciences: Systems of Inquiry*. Albany: States University of New York Press.

- Pollio, H. R., T. B. Henley, and C. J. Thompson. 1997. *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life*. Cambridge, UK: University Press.
- Pullen, W. 2017. *Run for Your Life. Mindful Running for Happy Life*. New York: Penguin Random House UK.
- Running & Jogging. 2018 Retrieved 21 08 2021. Accessed 4 January Accessed. <https://www.statista.com/topics/1743/running-and-jogging/>
- Schutz, A. 1945. "On Multiple Realities." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 5 (4): 533–576. Published by the International Phenomenological Society. doi:10.2307/2102818.
- Schutz, A. 1970. *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Schutz, A. 1951. "Making Music Together. A Study in Social Relationship." In *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, and A. Brodersen. The Hague: Marinus Nijhoff 76–97 .
- Schutz, A. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Trans. G. Walsh and F. Lehnert. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Shapiro, L. 2009. *Zen and the Art of Running. The Path to Making Peace with Your Pace*. Avon, MA: Adams Media.
- Spickard, J. V. 2014. "Phenomenology." In *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, edited by M. Stausberg and S. Engler, 333–345. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stein, A.M. 2009. Heal pelvic pain: A proven stretching , strengthening, and nutrition program for relieving pain, incontinence, I.B.S, and other symptoms without surgery. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Stevens, J. 2013. *The Marathon Monks of Mountain Hiei*. Brattleboro: Echo Point Books & Media.
- Wilcke, M. M. 2002. "Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a Research Method in Social Work." *Currents: New Scholarship in the Human Service* 1: 1–10.