



LION'S ROAR

Deep
Dive *into*
Insight &
Mindfulness



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All You Need Is Breath

The Buddha taught mindfulness of breathing as a complete approach to awakening. Buddhist teacher *Shaila Catherine* outlines his 16-step breath practice that guides us to liberation.

I have been fond of mindfulness of breathing since I began meditating in the early 1980s. The breath offers meditators a versatile meditation subject based on the ordinary, accessible experience of breathing in and breathing out. It can be used in conjunction with a wide variety of practices to steer attention away from distractions and anchor attention on a present experience.

Mindfulness of breath is a simple method to extricate our attention from proliferating thoughts about daily activities, obsessive plans for personal projects, and agitating reactions to the barrage of sensory and social encounters that occur every day. By observing the experience of breath, habitual attraction

toward sensual thrills quickly subsides and the mind becomes still, refreshed, tranquil, and equanimous. Observing the breath is a portable vehicle for developing mindfulness, calmness, and deep understanding.

Although meditators before the Buddha engaged in various kinds of breath control practices, the Buddha taught a uniquely effective practice of mindfulness of breathing as a complete approach to awakening. Since the Buddha himself enjoyed practicing mindfulness of breathing, this practice is sometimes called the “Tathagatha’s dwelling.”

The Buddha’s practice of mindfulness of the breath does not require extraordinary zeal or physical strength, nor does one need advanced education or ritual blessing. It is recommended for both beginners and accomplished meditators. By skillfully utilizing the natural breath, any person, monastic or lay, can realize the fruit of awakening. The broad appeal and availability of this practice is breathtaking!

The Buddha’s teachings in the *Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing, the Anapanasati Sutta*, include a set of sixteen step-by-step instructions that together map a comprehensive, joyful, and liberating path. Anapana is the Pali word for breathing; sati is the word for mindfulness. Anapanasati is widely considered to be one of the most important meditation subjects taught in the early discourses of the Buddha.

The opening section of the *Anapanasati Sutta* sets the stage for this important teaching. It begins with a gathering of well-known and highly respected disciples of the Buddha, each of whom were themselves guiding newer monastics. Instructions given to this audience of great teachers and new monastics would ensure the broad dissemination of the teachings.

The *Anapanasati Sutta*, along with teachings in the collection called the *Anapanasati Samyutta* and the instructions given to the Buddha's young son Rahula in *The Greater Discourse of Advice to Rahula*, declares that the cultivation and development of mindfulness of breathing will be "of great fruit and benefit." The entire path of training, from the dispelling of hindrances to the realization of nibbana (Sanskrit: nirvana), can unfold around skillful attention to breath.

Breath is a versatile meditation subject that can be recognized through different sensory or mental signs. This versatility offers practitioners a range of skillful methods for cultivating concentration and insight. You can:

- Cultivate mindfulness of the body by noticing tangible sensations caused by movement, or by the touch of each breath.
- Settle your attention by knowing the breath as a whole or that the breathing process is occurring.

- Discern the conditions of the body, feelings, mind, consciousness, and causality while attending to the breath as the foundation of this practice.
- Contemplate impermanence and death by recognizing the changing nature of breathing.
- Develop deep concentration and attain the four states of meditative absorption called the jhanas through a refined mental sign of breath (patibagha nimitta).

The Sixteen-Step Training

The Anapanasati Sutta presents a comprehensive sixteen-step training sequence that is organized into four tetrads. The steps guide meditators to strengthen concentration, recognize the qualities and functions of the meditating mind, contemplate the impermanence of all experiences, and incline toward the peace of release.

After establishing the preliminary conditions by going to a secluded place, settling the body in a meditative posture, dispelling the hindrances, and cultivating mindfulness and clear comprehension, the meditator takes up the meditation subject of the breath. The first three tetrads explore and develop mindfulness and concentration, and then the fourth tetrad develops insight through contemplating phenomena as not permanent.

This contemplation exposes the impermanence of the wholesome states that were just developed and sees them as fleeting events that cannot be clung to.

The first tetrad corresponds with mindfulness of the body and refines the meditation object—breath. Beginning with “breathing in long, one knows: ‘I breathe in long,’” the first four instructions emphasize skillful attention by knowing the long and short breath, experiencing the whole body (of breath), and tranquilizing the bodily formations. In this tetrad, you can learn a variety of ways to attend to the breath and discover how to know breath so that the perception produces calmness, clarity, and the conditions conducive to concentration and insight.

The second tetrad recognizes and strengthens the wholesome qualities that develop in conjunction with mindfulness, such as joy, pleasure, volition, and attention. As you focus on these qualities, you can come to understand how feeling functions, allow joy to refresh interest in the breath, recognize the powerful role volition plays in directing attention, and tranquilize mental activities.

The third tetrad spotlights the mind’s clarity, purity, and readiness for deep concentration. The experience of the mind at this stage will reveal a remarkable absence of hindrances. Having directly seen the profound purity of your well developed mind, you can confidently let go of excessive effort, attachment to spiritual gains, or the habitual tendency to manipulate the meditative

process. The stability, gladness, and confidence that is evident at this stage of practice matures as the mind inclines toward deep concentration and temporary liberation from obstructive states.

After refining the wholesome conditions of mind, the meditator progresses in the fourth tetrad to contemplate the arising and passing of mental and material conditions. When the perception of impermanence is vivid, you see everything with dispassion. This dispassionate attention leads to the cessation of craving and manifests in letting go, because once you have seen the impermanence of any experience of body and mind, you will clearly realize that nothing can be clung to. And, by keeping the breath at the center of the training, you will be reminded that the liberation of mind through not-clinging is available in this very life, while breathing in and breathing out.

These sixteen instructions form a meditative framework that describes the natural trajectory of mindfulness of breathing and points directly toward the goal of liberation. Specific facets of meditative experience are highlighted with each of the instructions. Working with each step, you learn to meet the breath in ways that refine, purify, and tranquilize the mind as the conditions mature that will enable the liberating experience of letting go. The sixteen-step sequence can accelerate the deepening of concentration, guide the mind into the absorption states of jhana, and incline the mind toward release.

These steps, which appear to provide specific and clearly articulated instructions, might read as a formulaic “how to meditate” guide. However, a number of teachers with whom I have studied have interpreted these instructions in remarkably different ways. Some teachers encourage attaining four jhanas before practicing insight. Others make the contemplation of impermanence the primary focus, highlight the development of the awakening factors, or favor a nuanced analysis of body and mind. As a meditation object, the breath may be perceived through a touch sensation, as a mental sign, as sensations throughout the whole body, or as a general experience. A wide variety of ways of cultivating mindfulness of breathing can successfully establish the conditions for concentration and liberating insight.

The different ways that the rich teachings on mindfulness of breathing are interpreted and practiced may reflect the unique dispositions, aptitudes, and aims of different teachers and practitioners. Over decades of meditation practice, I too have evolved my own interpretation and approach to these steps. You can feel empowered to monitor your own practice as you explore and adjust your approach to effectively cultivate sustained mindfulness, balanced energy, and conducive conditions for concentration, insight, and awakening.

The practice of mindfulness of the breath gradually exposes all areas where attachments might fester—to the body or meditation object, mental functions, mind, or insight knowledge. As such, anapanasati practice is said to fulfill the satipatthanas, the

four foundations of mindfulness—mindfulness of body, feelings, mind states, and phenomena—and cultivate the seven factors of awakening.

As the Buddha declared in the *Anapanasati Sutta*, “When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated, they fulfill the seven factors of enlightenment. When the seven factors of enlightenment are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and deliverance.” The Buddha’s teachings on mindfulness of breath offer a comprehensive meditative path that develops a calm and undistracted mind, cultivates liberating insight, and culminates in awakening—all while simply breathing in and breathing out.

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The Buddha's Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi unpacks the Buddha's original mindfulness manual.

The Buddha's most detailed teaching on the practice of [mindfulness](#) is found in the famed *Satipatthana Sutta*, "The Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness."

The Buddha opens this discourse by declaring that the four foundations of mindfulness are the "one-way path" for the overcoming of suffering and the attainment of nirvana. The expression "four foundations of mindfulness" refers to the mindful contemplation of four objective domains that, between them, comprise the entire field of human experience: the body, feelings, states of mind, and *dhammas*, a term I leave untranslated.

With regard to each contemplation, the text tells us that the practitioner dwells "ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having put away longing and dejection concerning the world." These terms indicate that the practice involves not only mindfulness, but the coming together of mindfulness, energy, and discernment, coupled with detachment from the claims of the mundane world.

Of the four applications of mindfulness, the contemplation of the body is concerned with the material side of existence, the middle two with the mental side, and the last with the exploration of experience in ways reflecting the goal of the teaching. The four unfold in a definite sequence, starting with the body as the coarsest and culminating in the last, which is the subtlest.

First Foundation: Contemplation of the Body

Contemplation of the body (*kayanupassana*) is said to comprise fourteen exercises, but since the last nine are mere variations on a single principle, these effectively amount to six.

The first is mindfulness of breathing. This was the meditation subject the Buddha himself used on the night of his enlightenment, and throughout his teaching career he praised it as “an unadulterated blissful abiding that banishes unwholesome thoughts as soon as they arise.”

To undertake this practice, one puts the natural process of respiration under the lens of mindful observation. Breathing naturally through the nostrils, one focuses on the breath at the point around the nostrils or upper lip where the air can be felt moving in and out. The key to the entire practice is succinctly expressed in the Buddha's statement: “Just mindful one breathes in, mindful one breathes out.” The awareness of breath cuts through the complexities of discursive thinking, pulling us back from mental meandering and anchoring the mind securely in the present.

According to the sutta, mindfulness of breathing unfolds in four stages. In the first two stages, one simply observes the inhalations and exhalations by way of duration, noting whether they are long or short. At the third stage, along with in-and-out breathing, one experiences the body in its entirety. And in the fourth stage, one “calms the bodily function,” letting the breath and other bodily functions gradually quiet down until they become extremely subtle.

The next practice in contemplation of the body is mindfulness of the postures, which extends mindfulness to all postures: walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and to the change from one posture to another. When walking one knows that one is walking, when standing that one is standing, when sitting that one is sitting, when lying down that one is lying down. Contemplation of the postures illuminates the impersonal nature of the body, revealing it to be a configuration of living matter subject to the direct influence of volition.

The next exercise, called mindfulness and clear comprehension, applies mindfulness to the diverse activities of daily life. When performing any action, one knows exactly what one is doing and why one is doing it. In this way such ordinary actions as going out and coming back, looking ahead and looking aside, bending and stretching the limbs, dressing, eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, falling asleep, waking up, speaking, and remaining silent

all become part of the process of meditative cultivation. Everyday life itself becomes full-bodied practice and the practice becomes fully embodied in everyday life.

The next two exercises in mindfulness of the body are analytical contemplations of the body's real nature. The first is the meditation on the body's unattractiveness, proposed as the direct antidote to sensual lust. The Buddha teaches that lust arises and proliferates through the perception of the body as sensually alluring. To counteract lust, we look deeply into the body's anatomical constitution, mentally dissecting the body—our own body—into its components to bring to light its unattractive nature. The texts mention thirty-two bodily parts, which include various organs, tissues, and bodily fluids. When these are seen with the eye of meditative vision, the body's lovely appearance dissolves and sensual lust, left without a foothold, withers away.

The other analytical contemplation is meditation on the four physical elements. This aims to counter our innate tendency to identify with the body by exposing its impersonal nature. In this practice we mentally dissect the body into its four primary elements, referred to as earth, water, fire, and air, representing the four properties of solidity, fluidity, heat, and pressure. Having analyzed the body into the four elements, one then considers that all the elements are essentially identical with their external counterparts. This shows that the body is nothing more than a particular constellation of changing material processes, without any substantial basis for the notions of "I" and "mine."

The last exercise in mindfulness of the body is a series of nine charnel ground contemplations, meditations on the body's disintegration after death. This can be practiced imaginatively or with the aid of pictures. One obtains a clear mental image of a decomposing body in nine stages and then applies the process of decay to one's own body, reflecting: "This body, too, is subject to the same fate. It too must eventually decompose." The aim, though, is not to incite a morbid fascination with death and corpses, but to sunder our instinctive clinging to the body by exposing its inexorable transience.

Second Foundation: Contemplation of Feeling

The next foundation of mindfulness is contemplation of feeling (*vedananupassana*). The word "feeling" here does not refer to emotion but to the bare affective tone of experience, whether pleasant, painful, or neutral.

Feeling is of special importance as an object of contemplation because it serves as fodder for the latent defilements. Pleasant feeling nourishes greed and attachment, painful feeling provokes aversion, and neutral feeling sustains delusion, manifesting as apathy and complacency.

The link between feelings and the defilements, however, is not inevitable but can be severed by bringing the feelings that arise into the range of mindfulness. Turning a feeling into an object

of mindfulness defuses the feeling so that it doesn't trigger an unwholesome response but is instead seen as merely an impersonal factor of experience.

In the early stages of the contemplation of feeling, one simply observes the distinct qualities of the feelings as pleasant, painful, or neutral. One sees feeling as a bare mental event shorn of all subjective references, all pointers to an "I" that experiences the feeling. As practice advances, one distinguishes whether the feeling is worldly, tending to attachment, or spiritual, tending to detachment. In time the focus of attention shifts from the tone of the feelings to the process of feeling itself, which is revealed to be a ceaseless flux of feelings arising and dissolving, one after another without a pause. This marks the beginning of insight into impermanence, which, as it evolves, overturns greed for pleasant feelings, aversion for painful feelings, and delusion over neutral feelings.

Third Foundation: Contemplation of Mind

The third foundation of mindfulness is contemplation of mind (*cittanupassana*), which actually means observation of states of mind. Since mind in itself is just the bare awareness of an object, states of mind can only be distinguished through their associated factors, which give them their distinctive coloring.

Under this contemplation, the Buddha mentions sixteen mental states grouped in eight pairs: the mind with lust and without lust; with aversion and without aversion; with delusion and

without delusion; the cramped mind and the scattered mind; the developed mind and the undeveloped mind; the surpassable mind and the unsurpassable mind; the concentrated mind and the unconcentrated mind; and the freed mind and the bound mind.

For practical purposes it is sufficient at the outset to focus on the first six states, observing whether the mind is associated with any of the three unwholesome roots or is free from them. When a particular state of mind is present, it is noted merely as a state of mind, not identified as “I” or “mine.” Whether it is a pure state or a defiled state, a lofty state or a low state, there should be no elation or dejection, only a clear identification of the state, without clinging to the desired ones or resenting the undesired ones. As contemplation deepens, the seemingly solid, stable mind reveals itself to be a stream of mental acts flashing in and out of being, coming from nowhere and going nowhere, continuing in sequence without pause.

Fourth Foundation: Contemplation of Dhammas

The final foundation of mindfulness is contemplation of dhammas (*dhammanupassana*). Here the word “dhammas” refers to groups of phenomena organized in ways that reflect the goal of the Buddha’s teaching. The five groups mentioned in the sutta are: the five hindrances, the five aggregates (*skandhas*), the six pairs of sense bases, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the four noble truths.

The five hindrances constitute the obstacles to realization, while the seven factors of enlightenment are the qualities that conduce to realization. The aggregates and sense bases are phenomena for exploration with insight, and the four noble truths constitute the sphere of realization itself.

The five hindrances are sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry, and doubt. Whenever one of the hindrances crops up, its presence should be noted, and when it fades away, a note should be made of its disappearance. To ensure that the hindrances are kept under control, the sutta introduces an element of comprehension. We are instructed not merely to note the hindrances, but to discern how they arise, how they can be removed, and how they can be prevented from arising in the future.

When the hindrances subside, we then proceed to investigate the field of experience. This can be undertaken through either of two complementary objects of contemplation. One is the five aggregates, the objective domain of clinging: material form, feeling, perception, volitional activities, and consciousness. The other is the six sense bases, arranged in pairs of sense faculty and object: the eye and visible forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tactile objects, and the mind and mental objects. These are to be directly noted, together with any attachment or aversion that arise through the encounter

of sense faculty with object. One is to discern how these “fettters” arise, how they are abandoned, and how they are permanently eliminated.

The two schemes organize experience from different angles. The six sense bases give priority to the domain of cognition, the sensory sphere in which experience unfolds. The five aggregates lay bare the constituent factors of experience, with greater attention to the mental components.

As the process of contemplation proceeds, it brings into play the seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. When any one of these factors arises, its presence should first be noted, and then one should see how that factor can be aroused and how it can be brought to fulfillment.

The seven factors unfold in sequence. Mindfulness initiates the contemplative process. Stable mindfulness gives rise to investigation, the probing quality of intelligence. Investigation calls forth energy, energy generates rapture, rapture leads to tranquility, tranquility to concentration, and concentration to equanimity. The whole evolving course of practice leading to enlightenment thus begins with mindfulness, which remains constant throughout as the regulating power ensuring that the mind is clear, cognizant, and balanced.

Finally, when the seven factors of enlightenment reach maturity, they blossom in the direct realization of the four noble truths: the truths of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. It

is this realization, the penetration of the four truths, that permanently uproots the defilements and brings the extinction of suffering. This fulfills the Buddha's promise at the opening of the discourse, his declaration that these four foundations of mindfulness lead in one direction: toward the full purification of beings, the ending of sorrow and grief, and the realization of nirvana.

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Oh, Hello There, Body

From your facial muscles down to your toes, tuning into how each part of your body feels can help you discover what your body really needs. This article was produced in collaboration with the Greater Good Science Center at University of California, Berkeley.

In a body scan, we systematically focus our attention on different parts of our body, from our feet to the muscles in our face. This creates a rare opportunity for us to experience our body as it is, without judging or trying to change it.

This exercise is designed to help us develop a mindful awareness of our bodily sensations, and to relieve tension wherever it is found. Research suggests that this mindfulness practice can help reduce stress, improve well-being, and decrease aches and pains.

How to Do It

The body scan can be performed while lying down, sitting, or in other postures. The steps below are a guided meditation designed to be done while sitting, but can be adapted for the posture you choose.

The time required is twenty to forty-five minutes, three to six days per week for four weeks. Evidence suggests that benefit increases the longer you do the exercise.

1. Begin by bringing your attention into your body.
2. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.
3. Notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair and on the floor.
4. Take a few deep breaths.
5. As you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen, enlivening the body. As you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.
6. Notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor—the weight, pressure, vibration, heat.
7. Notice your legs against the chair—the pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.
8. Notice your back against the chair.
9. Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.
10. Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight? See if you can allow them to soften.
11. Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.
12. Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.
13. Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.
14. Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.
15. Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. Then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

Why It Works

According to research, by simply noticing any stress or pain we're experiencing, without trying to change it, we may actually feel some relief.

This exercise allows us to notice and release any source of tension we weren't aware of before, such as a hunched back or clenched jaw muscles. Or it may draw our attention to a source of pain and discomfort. Our feelings of resistance and anger toward pain often only serve to increase that pain, and to increase the distress associated with it.

The body scan is designed to counteract these negative feelings toward our bodies. This practice may also increase our general attunement to our physical needs and sensations, which can in turn help us take better care of our bodies and make healthier decisions about eating, sleep, and exercise.

Evidence It Works

In the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, J. Carmody and R.A. Baer report that among participants in an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, time spent engaging in the body scan was associated with greater levels of two components of mindfulness—observing thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, and non-reacting to stress—and increased psychological well-being.

This article was produced in collaboration between Lion's Roar and the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley. You will find more than fifty science-based practices for a meaningful life at **ggia.berkeley.edu**

Mindfulness and the Buddha's Eightfold Path

To understand how to practice mindfulness in daily life, says **Gaylon Ferguson**, we have to look at all eight steps of the Buddha's noble eightfold path.

In his first teaching at Deer Park, the Buddha praised mindfulness: "The Noble Eightfold Path is nourished by living mindfully."

From the beginning, the path of awakening includes all aspects of our human lives: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social. The aim is a mindful life. This means that our relationship to our sexuality and our consumerist economic system, our parenting, and our politics are all part of the path.

This approach to living fully is outlined in the eightfold path. "Right mindfulness" is one aspect of this path, alongside right view, right intention, right effort, right meditative engagement, right speech, right livelihood, and right action. The Sanskrit word *samyak*—often translated as "right" or "perfect"—can also mean "complete." Engaging mindfulness encourages complete engagement with life.

Let's walk through these aspects of the Buddhist spiritual path, returning mindfulness to her rightful place among her seven less famous but equally important sisters and brothers.

Right View

The central view of the Buddha's teaching is a middle way, avoiding the extremes of aggressive asceticism (being harsh with ourselves and others) and laissez-faire indulgence (spiritual laziness). We approach all our experience with basic friendliness and respect. In the context of meditation practice, this means gently placing awareness on our bodies and minds in a "not too tight, not too loose" manner. Without this view of fundamental loving-kindness, there is no mindfulness meditation. Practicing mindfulness as mere mental gymnastics leaves us feeling even more depleted.

In a culture where "Just do it" now has the well-worn familiarity of a mantra, jumping into mindfulness practice without first contemplating the view seems an attractive option. Why study the classic teachings on meditation when the main point is to practice? Isn't the whole point not to think too much about it? But the Buddha wisely suggested study and contemplation as supports to any practice. Yes, experience is the heart of the matter, but we need first to understand what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how mindfulness relates to the rest of our lives.

Right Intention

Why are we engaging in mindfulness? Contemplating our intention at the beginning of a session rouses our motivation. Our aim may be calmness or peace, stability or a more compassionate heart, or all of the above. The point is that we have already entered the session with some sense of purpose or direction. Take

a moment for self-reflection and nonjudgmental self-awareness before rushing on. This gesture of self-respect can gently cut some of the momentum of our accumulated neurotic speed.

Acknowledging the motivation we already have can be the first step in an expanding journey. The stress and anxiety we sometimes feel are surely shared by others around us—in our families, our workplaces, our communities. Including a sense of practicing for their well-being and liberation is called “the great motivation.” We are walking a path of awakening that includes being generous and caring, patient and helpful. This expansiveness of intention brings spaciousness and warmth to our sitting practice, allowing those heartfelt qualities to pervade our daily living with others.

Right Effort

Effort also has an associated slogan in contemporary culture: “No pain, no gain.” If we don’t try and try again and try harder, we are told, no result can be attained.

This can lead to a one-sided approach to exertion, as though the Buddha’s meditation instruction was to place the attention “not too loosely, not too loosely.” We can find ourselves practicing with hypervigilance, eager participants in a new spiritual sport called Extreme Effort. Meditators can develop a habitual tightness instead of cultivating the relaxed spaciousness of heart and mind that originally inspired us toward awakening.

My first Buddhist meditation teacher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, spoke of non-effort as a worthy partner to effort: “Effort, non-effort and effort, non-effort—it’s beautiful.”

Yes, it is important to apply ourselves, to engage fully in mindful living. But it is equally important to release all trying and confidently trust our innate mindfulness to shine through. All the Buddhist traditions of natural wakefulness, original goodness, or buddhanature are based on this sense of inborn wisdom not produced by meditating or walking the path. This is the practice of basic sanity through what is called “just sitting” or “non-meditation” or “primordial great perfection.” As the pioneering Zen master Shunryu Suzuki Roshi phrased it: “The point we emphasize is strong confidence in our original nature.”

In this view, mindfulness is not a special attainment or an extraordinary event in our life journey. Mindfulness is an innate capacity, present in all sentient beings. Walking the path, we are gently cultivating our own nature, allowing seeds of potential to blossom. From this perspective, awakening is as natural as the dawning of the sun. We are invited to begin each session by feeling this naturally awake quality—and to return to this original openness again and again during practice and everyday life.

Right Meditative Engagement

The Sanskrit word *samadhi* is often translated as “meditative absorption,” but this can suggest being so absorbed in something (such as a favorite piece of music) that we are oblivious to everything around us.

If we engage our bodies and minds and breathing and emotions fully in mindfulness practice, on the other hand, that same quality of spacious connection can continue as we rise from meditation. Mindfulness goes hand in hand with noticing the environment around our body, around our breathing, around our thoughts and emotions. We listen to what our partner is saying rather than mentally replay the tense moments from our day at work. We notice the swaying of the trees in the wind, just as we notice the movement of our legs in walking meditation. Same directness, same inclusiveness.

Right Speech

From mindful listening can arise mindful speaking. Here non-effort may provide another helpful hint: leaving pauses in our speech allows for genuine dialogue. Slowing down the impulsive momentum of saying one thing after another is a natural result of mindfulness. Mindful communication is the basis of mindful communities.

Mindless speech is speech that causes harm through gossip, slander, lying, and deception. The result of such speech—as when politicians play on our fears to incite hatred—is a divided society; we feel more disconnected from each other. Mindful speech is acting to heal societal wounds.

Right Livelihood

Mindfulness brings a sense of well-being, an inner richness we share with others by our work in a kindergarten or hospice, corporate offices or a bank. The ordinary meaning of “livelihood” connects it with surviving—the way we earn money in order to live. Right livelihood lifts our gaze from the simple mechanics of survival. Our work is the way we contribute to the common good. Livelihood is our offering, an act of generosity. We are called—the root meaning of “vocation”—to serve and inspire, to propagate healthiness and sanity in myriad ways.

Right Action

Meditation in action is the natural expression of mindfulness. These steps on the path of awakening remind us that the proof of our practice is in the pudding of daily life. The whole purpose of this training, it has been said, is to manifest. Sitting still and radiating compassion are useful first steps, but now the old slogan is reborn amid the urgent necessity for compassionate activity to meet the challenges of climate change, increasing social inequality, and disintegrating societies based on fear: “Don’t just sit there, do something!”

Let’s conclude our contemplative walk by returning to where we began: the Buddha. The practice of mindfulness meditation and the teaching of the eightfold path have been handed down to us in human lineages of transmission beginning with the Awakened One. Thus, the Buddha stands as original ancestor as well

as embodiment of the teacher principle. Living human teachers—sometimes called “spiritual friends”—remind us of the necessarily expansive quality of walking the path. We all have habitual blind spots, and so we contract from time to time into our own narrow versions of the path of awakening. Spiritual friends encourage and provoke and challenge us to engage mindfulness as a step toward a completely awakened life.

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Forum: What Does Mindfulness Mean for Buddhism?

Diana Winston, Barry Boyce, Melissa Myozen Blacker, and **Trudy Goodman** address Buddhists' questions about secular mindfulness: Where are the ethics? Does it go deep enough? Will it help or hurt Buddhism? Introduction by Jenny Wilks. Excerpted from *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Guide*, published by *Lion's Roar*.

In my dog-eared 1956 edition of Nyanaponika's *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, the preface by Graham Howe makes a prescient observation:

Founded in the East, as wisdom usually is, I believe that satipatthana [the establishment of mindfulness] will prove at least equally beneficial to us in the West, especially when it has been digested by us in our experience, and perhaps been a little modified to meet our special tradition and requirements.

The current explosion of interest in mindfulness—including eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy courses, mindfulness programs in schools and organizations, and smartphone meditation apps—would suggest that this prophecy is coming to pass. This key dharma practice has indeed been modified in various ways and is touching the lives of more and more people. One might therefore assume that long-standing practitioners and teachers within

Buddhist traditions would be delighted. Yet what we find is a very mixed range of responses—from enthusiasm to ambivalence to outright criticism.

Concerns include the question of whether, in being extracted from its Buddhist roots, mindfulness might lose its ethical stance: Is it still “right” mindfulness, and what is its relationship to the other limbs of the eight-fold path? The Buddha’s teaching is often described as “going against the stream” of greed, ill will, and delusion. What are the implications of this when teaching mindfulness in the modern world, where these are in evidence on a global scale?

Concerns are also expressed in the secular realms of science, education, and health care, including the suspicion that mindfulness instructors are propagating some kind of stealth Buddhism or covert recruitment drive for dharma centers, as well as a caution that the current enthusiasm for mindfulness-based programs outstrips the evidence for their efficacy. For those of us who teach both secular mindfulness programs and Buddhist meditation, it can sometimes feel like we are under attack from both sides.

These issues raise valid questions that need to be expressed and debated. An uncritical convergence of aspects of Buddhism and Western psychology could lead to a superficial understanding of both, greatly reducing any potential benefits. But it is unhelpful for the debate to become polarized or for it to be based on a lack

of understanding of what is actually going on or the motivations of those in either field. Entrenched positions do nothing to untangle the views and opinions surrounding mindfulness.

We are still in the very early phase of the establishment of a “Western” Buddhism—if the term even has any meaning in this age of globalization—and it is much too early to see where this is all going and how it may be influenced by the wider applications of mindfulness. The process is likely to be enriched by well-informed and open communication that addresses concerns and enables mutual learning to support the shared aim of relieving suffering and enhancing well-being. The following discussion offers a small step on the journey.

Buddhadharma: Increasingly, mindfulness is talked about not just as a teaching or practice but as a movement. Is that a fair assessment, do you think?

Diana Winston: Mindfulness is being adapted by institutions across the U.S.—in schools, health-care settings, and academia—and in many countries around the world. With this expansion, and with all the research being conducted on the benefits of mindfulness, I would definitely call it a movement.

Trudy Goodman: It was over thirty years ago, in the basement of the UMass Medical Center, that I worked with Jon Kabat-Zinn in the early days of the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program,

which is what MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) was called then. We chose the phrase “stress reduction” because we thought that people wouldn’t feel stigmatized by learning mindfulness for stress reduction. Everyone experiences stress. It’s been amazing to watch what’s happened from those early days of getting doctor referrals only for those patients who had reached the end of the medical line. Now, many people who have been through the program for a variety of reasons and benefited are referring their friends and loved ones.

At this point, I would say mindfulness is going viral. That does complicate things for us in a way, because many see mindfulness as a panacea and don’t realize there’s actual work involved in being present and mindful. But it’s very gratifying for those of us who have been working with both Buddhist training and secular paths to see this influx of people from all walks of life.

Buddhadharma: Mindfulness can mean different things to different people. How is the word “mindfulness” understood in a non-Buddhist context as compared to a Buddhist one?

Melissa Myozen Blacker: I worked with Jon as well, perhaps ten years later than Trudy, in that same basement, and I remember him creating a beautiful working definition of mindfulness, which was about paying attention on purpose and without judgment in the present moment. Ellen Langer had written a book on mindfulness at about that same time, and there were differences between

his definition and hers, but both were aimed at relieving suffering for people out in the world. There are, of course, also many different Buddhist definitions of mindfulness. We all use the same word, but I'm not always sure we're talking about the same thing.

Trudy Goodman: Ellen Langer's definition of mindfulness is about the process of actively noticing new things, relinquishing preconceived mind-sets, then acting on the new observations. From the point of view of her research, that's fantastic, but for those of us who are teachers of mindfulness, with backgrounds in Buddhist philosophy, psychology, and deep practice, we know there's so much more to it than cultivating bare attention. If we look at the Pali canon and the Abhidharma definitions of mindfulness, there are eighteen elements or factors of mind that support mindfulness. Mindfulness is starting to be used as a catchall term for all of them.

Barry Boyce: "Mindfulness" is a term that's been used in so many different ways and carries many different meanings; you have to pay attention to the context. Within Buddhism, several different words are translated as "mindfulness," and the definitions vary by tradition. The way Tibetan teachers talk about mindfulness is different from the way it's talked about in the Theravada or Zen traditions. If you're studying the dharma, it's helpful to figure out which term is being translated and how it's being used.

More broadly, the term is used as a label for the entire movement. Within that context, I would say Jon's definition of mindfulness best describes it. But Jon also considers it important to not get stuck in one canonical definition. He says that MBSR teachers, for example, ought to be able to put mindfulness in their own words if they need to.

Unfortunately, the word mindfulness is used to refer to both a basic human capability and the practices that cultivate that basic quality. So if somebody says, "I'm into mindfulness," what does that mean? Are they talking about that way of being, or are they talking about the actual practices?

Diana Winston: The word "mindful" is now being used as a catch-all term to describe a lot more than just paying attention to present-moment experience. There's mindfulness as an application of attention, but then there's mindfulness almost as a translation for the word "dharma," in this sense meaning the array of teachings arising from and connected to being mindful. When we talk about the mindfulness movement, we're not just talking about people paying attention. We're talking about the cultivation of many qualities, which we can think of as "outcome qualities," such as compassion, patience, and equanimity.

Buddhadharma: In the early days of this movement, many teachers had some kind of Buddhist training. How does that compare to what's happening today? What kind of training is necessary to become a mindfulness teacher?

Melissa Myozen Blacker: In our teacher training programs at the Center for Mindfulness, we used to get two cohorts of people who wanted to be MBSR teachers, and it was interesting to see what needed to be cultivated in each cohort. Those who had come through dharma traditions sometimes needed a grounding in Western psychology and medicine, as well as an understanding of how to communicate with a group, since MBSR was always taught in a group setting. There was another cohort of people who were missing the Buddhist element entirely and needed almost remedial Buddhist help. For example, the MBSR course was partly based on the teachings of the four foundations of mindfulness found in the *Satipattana Sutta* and the classical teachings on mindfulness of the breath, and we included this and other traditional Buddhist teachings in our teacher training. And we emphasized the importance of attending silent, teacher-led silent retreats. I do know that the folks at the Center for Mindfulness are now working on offering secular mindfulness retreats, which I think will be important for the future of the movement.

Trudy Goodman: It's important to have a grounding in the four noble truths in order to have some understanding of how suffering arises and how it can end. It's so clearly laid out in the Buddhist tradition; at InsightLA, when we teach mindfulness, we put the essential teachings into secular terms.

Diana Winston: The most important requirement is that teachers must have an experiential, lived understanding of practice. A requirement for my mindfulness facilitator training program at UCLA (Mindfulness Awareness Research Center) is that participants have to have sat retreats, because of how valuable we know them to be. It's important to have both a daily practice and some retreat practice, as well as training in how to facilitate groups and apply the teachings with others. Developing a peer-based learning community is also a significant aspect of the training.

Our program also involves a lot of practical teacher training, such as how to embody what you're teaching, how to teach from a place of presence as opposed to teaching from your head, as well as teachings on ethics and the language and science of mindfulness. So many people have now gone through this program, many of whom are not Buddhists. By now, there are people who have grown up in the mindfulness world and have never identified as being Buddhist at all.

Barry Boyce: Certainly, the first teachers of mindfulness came out of Buddhist training, and many continue to do so. But as the mindfulness movement develops, it is increasingly possible for people to have real secular training in which they make their own discoveries and come up with fresh ways of talking about these discoveries.

Trudy Goodman: The beauty of the Buddha's teachings is that people don't have to become Buddhists; they can practice their home path or religion and integrate the Buddhist framework for understanding suffering, how it ends, and how to cultivate the conditions for insight to arise.

Often people who tell me they've been on retreat before haven't been on a silent retreat. Insights are possible in all kinds of contexts, but I do think there is something powerful and perhaps irreplaceable about getting to know oneself in the protection of silence.

Barry Boyce: If silence is not a major component of a retreat, then it's not a retreat in my definition. As new frameworks develop outside a Buddhist context, they need to have rigor; they need to be real and effective.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: In the twenty years I worked at the Center for Mindfulness, we were very careful to say that the practice was not just Buddhism—in fact, for the longest time, we didn't say it was Buddhism at all. There was never any reference to Buddhism in the standard eight-week MBSR class; only in teacher training did we require retreats and learning about Buddhist psychology. We never led with Buddhism but rather with science, research, and psychology, so mindfulness training became acceptable in all kinds of institutions. That's the key to its mainstream success.

Buddhadharma: Are the current requirements to become certified as a mindfulness teacher enough, or is there a need for more rigorous standards and training?

Diana Winston: Among people presenting themselves as mindfulness teachers, there's an enormous range. Someone just sent me information about an online training program to become certified in three months, no personal practice required. Some people take a weekend workshop and call themselves mindfulness teachers. This is the Wild West of mindfulness. There are also highly qualified people teaching, so there's a huge range, which to me has always spoken to the need for standards. I'm currently involved with creating a national accreditation board for certifying programs and individuals, which I hope will also involve continuing education units and an ethics board.

Of course, just because you have a certificate in mindfulness training doesn't mean you're good at it, but I think it's a step in the right direction. Ten or twenty years ago, when the mindfulness movement was so much smaller, the need for accreditation wasn't as great. But now that it's become so big and popularized, I think there has to be some quality control and standardization, some professionalization of the field.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: I'm happy to hear that Diana's program will include an ethics board. I've heard from other Buddhist teachers that there are ethical ramifications to teaching people how to

look deeply into their own nature that are not addressed in the Wild West of the mindfulness movement. In the past thirty-five years, I've seen ethical considerations arising naturally out of sincere mindfulness practice, but I've also heard of abuses, not just in the mindfulness movement but everywhere the dharma is taught.

Buddhadharma: What are some other questions that Buddhists have raised with regard to the mindfulness movement and the way it's evolving? What concerns do you think the Buddhist community should have?

Diana Winston: Perhaps the top concern I hear is that mindfulness is watered-down Buddhism for the masses, that it's separated from its liberating potential. There's also a popular notion, again usually coming from Buddhists, that mindfulness is divorced from ethics—that, for example, it's used in the military to create better killers, in schools to anaesthetize children, and in corporations to increase productivity and further the bottom line. That's a fairly common critique, but not what I have witnessed in the people doing it on the ground level. The third critique is that it's narcissistic and about self-improvement, that it's teaching people to acquire, that people's responses to toxic workplaces are being subdued and they're just learning how to be better producers. The last critique is coming more from the socially engaged Buddhist world. The concern is that mindfulness is teaching people

to ignore the larger cultural and economic forces that produce so much suffering. I don't see any of these as reflective of the actual movement.

Trudy Goodman: There has always been a range of benefits for people. The early Zen texts refer to “bonpu Zen,” Zen that’s just supposed to make one’s health better and is considered a lesser vehicle. And there has always been a range of reasons why people come to practice. That’s why the dharma is called the wish-fulfilling jewel. Whatever wish you come with—reducing stress at work, high blood pressure, migraines—you can generally find some relief.

I don't take the charges seriously. I heard the same charges leveled against psychotherapy decades ago—that it helps people adjust to a bad situation, that instead of questioning the social order and capitalism, it's basically palliative care. So I'm not so concerned, especially about watering down the dharma. I don't think the dharma can be watered down, actually. If it really is our true nature to be clear, calm, sane, and good, and if we practice, then we're going to realize it eventually.

Barry Boyce: Before I met Jon Kabat-Zinn, I was a critic—not a vocal or rabid one, but I'm a natural skeptic. I think what is lacking in most of the criticisms of the mindfulness movement is an investigation of the people who are teaching and the context in which they're teaching it. Certainly, we're ready to criticize people who

are cheapening mindfulness, for example by calling themselves a mindfulness teacher after a short online course; that's watered down by definition. To my mind, it really does come down to the person doing the teaching, because mindfulness training isn't just a case of passing on information. It's something that needs to be embodied.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: If you've seen Jon Kabat-Zinn teach, he's a fully embodied, clear teacher. There are a number of people like that, for whom a felt sense of authentic embodiment shines through, no matter what their training has been. I even know someone who started teaching mindfulness after reading Jon's book—that was the only training he had, and he was a marvelous teacher! He was very popular and really got the deepest message across. So it's a big question for me, how these people come to be.

One issue that does concern me in Diana's list is the self-improvement angle. I think that emphasis may be a product of a teacher not quite getting the nondual aspect of mindfulness; this is a presentation of something that isn't just for making everything better but of something that will eventually wake everybody up to their true nature, to what it means to be a human. So this goes back to the training question: if teachers are just presenting information, then people go on with their lives after the eight-week course and nothing has happened. But I was always amazed at how much really did happen after eight weeks; people in these

classes were really touched, even transformed. They were getting glimpses into the same thing that people encounter when they're on retreat or studying with a dharma teacher.

Buddhadharma: But is it fair to say that people first approaching a mindfulness class may still be drawn in by the notion that it's going to be a self-help class? Isn't that how it's largely marketed in the mainstream?

Barry Boyce: There's such a range of what self-help means. You could say I started Buddhism because of self-help—I was a mess and I wanted some help. The concern, I think, is people expecting easy, instant results. The good programs, of which there are many—like at InsightLA and MARC and the Center for Mindfulness—do not market mindfulness as facile self-help and instant gratification, like Instant Breakfast. It's presented as real help.

Certainly, in all my Buddhist training, I was discouraged from trying to go after immediate benefits in working with my mind, because the more you try to grasp after a benefit, the more it eludes you. The benefits generally come as by-products. But I would say that as a result of my forty years of meditation practice—as a pretty lousy practitioner—I've become better at some things. So I think it's honest to present mindfulness to athletes as something that offers an increase in performance. They may find out after a while that there's a lot more going on.

Trudy Goodman: I think most of us come to practice for self-help. Our own suffering is actually the most authentic reason to begin practice. The problem is when claims are made—enhanced performance, lower blood pressure, and so on—that occlude the clarity of the beginner’s mind, which is really what we’re trying to teach people. If you approach something with a very narrow goal, you may not be open to the wider possibilities that exist. In George Mumford’s book *The Mindful Athlete: Secrets to Pure Performance*, he talks about sports, but the “pure” element is about being purely present, about what happens when we try to keep a clear, open mind and heart.

In dharma practice, we were taught not to have gaining ideas, but of course we all did. If we hadn’t, we wouldn’t have trained so hard, and our teacher knew that. He used to hold it in front of us like a carrot and say, “Don’t you want to be enlightened? Just practice hard and soon you’ll get everything.” We believed him; it took me years to realize what he meant by “everything.” We thought we would get everything good. In fact, we just got everything; we learned how to be with everything.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: After *Full Catastrophe Living* came out and Jon was on the Bill Moyers show, we had people come to orientation for the MBSR class with very high expectations. We would say to them, yes, you’re going to have side effects, your blood pressure might go down, but what you’re really going to learn is how to have a different relationship with your suffering.

So we would emphasize that, and as time went on, people discovered what that meant, just as they do in Buddhist practice. We all come in with those fantasies.

Diana Winston: Thousands of people come through our classes, and they're all coming in for different reasons. Most come because of suffering and physical or mental health reasons. Some people want to perform better or want to become more productive. Some people do one class and never come back, and others stay and go deeper. Sometimes we hear from people years later who say, "No, I don't meditate anymore, but I'm still aware during the day. I still practice." So I let go of the results and trust that people are going to get what they need.

Buddhadharma: In what ways might the mindfulness movement be affecting our understanding or practice of Buddhism in the West? Are there any significant effects or trends in that direction?

Trudy Goodman: I see several of the large dharma centers that used to question the completeness of mindfulness teachings now jumping on the bandwagon with their own mindfulness trainings and courses. They see that this is a big part of the future and that being closed to it marginalizes them. Some genuinely want to be part of the larger movement. I see the mindfulness movement as

having encouraged centers to open their doors, minds, and hearts to the full range of people who want to learn and who don't necessarily want to be Buddhists.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: I was a Zen student before I met Jon Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli and some of the other wonderful teachers at the Center for Mindfulness; now that I'm a Zen teacher, I've brought a lot of what I learned at the Center into my teaching. A primary approach is presenting the dharma so it's not exclusive; I don't generally use Buddhist buzzwords. Jon was so creative in coming up with vernacular alternatives to some of the esoteric language from my Zen training. I also adopted an open presence to anyone coming in the door. We have a Buddhist center, so people who come here know they're going to encounter Buddhists. But they don't feel any pressure to change who they are.

More broadly, I think the mindfulness movement has normalized Buddhism in our culture; it's not some mystical, magical thing but rather something that allows you to sit down and be still for a while and discover things about yourself. We get people from all walks of life coming into the temple who, even ten years ago, wouldn't have come to a Zen temple. The mindfulness movement has also offered a way of engaging the sangha in dialogue that's more group-oriented than teacher-centric. It's a way of communicating that I hadn't experienced in practice before I encountered mindfulness.

Barry Boyce: In my experience, the so-called secular mindfulness world has an incredible amount of depth to it. One natural outgrowth of the mindfulness movement is that there are more candidates who might want to get involved with more rigorous training in the various Buddhist traditions. I'm as interested in seeing those traditions be healthy and continue as I am in seeing the greater mindfulness movement flourish.

Buddhadharma: Do you feel that Buddhists have a special responsibility to help guide the mindfulness movement?

Diana Winston: Well, if you think of the mindfulness movement as emerging from Buddhism, which is how I see it, then the answer is yes. At Spirit Rock, there's been a lot of conversation about how we relate to the wider mindfulness world. Many practitioners feel that Spirit Rock has an incredible wealth of practices, teachers, and teachings, and it would be a disservice not to provide them to the mindfulness movement as source material for deeper understanding.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: I think there's a parallel growth as Buddhism continues to Westernize. I see mindfulness and Buddhism as almost intertwining. I don't know if Buddhists have a particular responsibility other than to maintain an openness to the

mindfulness movement and an appreciation of it, recognizing that it's establishing its own growth. I see us as equals in this new culture that we've transplanted Buddhism into.

Barry Boyce: If we talk about the mindfulness movement as an outgrowth of Buddhism, or even just mindfulness as an outgrowth of Buddhism, I think that's a narrow and self-serving framing, because the fundamental mindfulness that we all have, which includes awareness and joy and caring and all sorts of other qualities, is obviously not an invention of Buddhism. The best training to cultivate those qualities arguably still comes from the Buddhist tradition, and the people who first gave shape to secular mindfulness came out of that kind of training, but I don't know if Buddhists have a special responsibility. I think every teacher who's involved has a responsibility to teach authentically, whether they're using a Buddhist framework or not.

Diana Winston: Mindfulness is still young. MBSR has done an incredible job teaching its eight-week program for the past twenty years, but there's so much more to develop. I think the Buddhist world will likely play a role in the development of more advanced teachings, of retreat models in the secular world, and of adapting more in-depth teachings for mindfulness practice.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: As I teach secular mindfulness retreats around the world, I do see a growing hunger for authentic guidance from those who want to be teachers. Maybe that's a place where Buddhism, the slightly older sister of the young mindfulness movement, can be helpful. We've got the technology down—we know how to run retreats, for example, and people can benefit from that experience.

Trudy Goodman: Yes, Buddhist teachers have profound gifts to help the new generation of mindfulness teachers preserve what's possible in deep practice, then offer this in sensitive and attuned forms to the different communities of people coming to learn.

Barry Boyce: Another area would be in how we plant intention. The Buddhist traditions are very good at that. For example, in the morning I say things like, "May I have no desire for honor and gain; may all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness." The way the dharma traditions plant intention is very powerful.

Buddhadharma: How should Buddhists view the mindfulness movement going forward?

Diana Winston: I've been thinking about what makes mindfulness different from Buddhism. I used to wonder if mindfulness is just the dharma repackaged for a different audience, but now I realize

that we have the possibility of repackaging it in a way that is not going to replicate some of the negative aspects of Buddhism, such as the paternalism, hierarchy, and sexism that comes certainly through Theravada Buddhism. There's an incredible opportunity to consciously shepherd the growth of mindfulness so it's not done haphazardly, which is why I'm interested in standards and certification. I'd like us to take the best from Buddhism, incorporate other influences like science and Western psychology, and see what evolves.

Melissa Myozen Blacker: I hadn't thought of the chance to modernize some things in our Buddhist heritage. Sexism strikes me as an important thing to change, although sexism is everywhere in Western culture too, including in the mindfulness movement. I think it's unavoidable, but we can be awake to it and perhaps shape certain influences more beneficially.

Trudy Goodman: The mindfulness movement can be seen as a blessing for people who would never want to be Buddhists but are looking for support to cope with their suffering with dignity and grace, or for those who are longing for better relationships with others, themselves, and their world. I agree with Barry that realization is our birthright as human beings—it's not Buddhist, or any "-ist." I sought out Buddhist teachers to help make sense of powerful spiritual openings that I experienced before I ever studied

or practiced Buddhist meditation. Buddhists can keep open minds and hearts and view the mindfulness movement as full of potential for awakening and liberation too.

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Barry Boyce is editor-in-chief of *Mindful* magazine and editor of *The Mindfulness Revolution* and *In the Face of Fear*. He is a longtime Vajrayana practitioner and student of the late Chögyam Trungpa.

Trudy Goodman is the founder and guiding teacher of InsightLA. She has practiced Zen and Vipassana meditation since 1974 and has trained extensively in psychotherapy and mindfulness-based stress reduction, which she taught with its creator, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. She was the co-founder of the original Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the first center in the world dedicated to integrating these two disciplines. She teaches retreats and workshops nationwide.

Diana Winston is the Director of Mindfulness Education at UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center and a member of the Teachers' Council at Spirit Rock. She is the author of *Wide Awake: A Buddhist Guide for Teens* and coauthor of *Fully Present: The Science, Art, and Practice of Mindfulness*.

The Mindful Judge

Intentional awareness has served **Gretchen Rohr** well in her challenging work as a magistrate judge in Washington, D.C.

“I solemnly swear that I will administer justice without respect to persons, and do equal right to the poor and to the rich . . . that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, that I will faithfully and impartially discharge all duties incumbent upon me.” –from the Judicial Oath of the United States 28 U.S.C. § 453

Two oaths serve as the foundation for my daily practice: my Judicial Oath of Office and my oath to follow a spiritual path of awakening for the liberation of all beings. I serve as a magistrate judge within the District of Columbia’s trial court. I also practice Buddhism, training in the Theravada tradition under my primary teacher, Gina Sharpe.

Judging gets a bad rap. To many, a judging mind is to be avoided. Back when I used to teach mindfulness as “paying attention to everything that arises *without judgment*,” someone asked, “Can you be mindful and be racist?” My answer: Only if mindfulness is uprooted from its moral underpinnings.

The Buddha spoke of how he came to his own judgments in upholding the monastic codes. The *Dhammatthavagga Sutta* advises wise judges to unhurriedly and impartially weigh both

right and wrong judgments before making a decision according to an intelligence in line with the dharma, guarding the dharma, and guarded by the dharma.

Drawing from these teachings, I now understand mindfulness as intentional awareness. The practice of mindfulness involves weighing our alignment and realignment with our truest intentions. For me, these intentions may be the eightfold path, commitments to loved ones, the Judicial Code of Conduct, or my Oath of Office.

Much of my understanding of the first noble truth has come from sitting on the bench and witnessing the 10,000 joys and sorrows arise and fall within all walks of life. Our communities, homes, and institutions are plagued with addiction, unemployment, violence, and abuse. Often, our misguided and clumsy attempts to secure our own physical or financial safety and guard against pain only cause more suffering. At the epicenter is the courthouse, where communities seek to “make things right.”

Trial judges, by necessity, develop thick skin because one half of all parties before us believe our decisions are wrong. Sometimes the only way to know the law has been applied fairly is when all parties are equally unhappy.

Upholding the values shared by both my code of conduct and my practice while presiding over a high-volume court docket requires skillful effort—and some reliable tools. Indeed, if Martin

Luther King, Jr. is right, and “Justice is power correcting everything that stands against love,” then every judge needs to acquire a set of personalized power tools.

A daily sitting practice, dedicated dharma study, and a network of spiritual friends are all part of my personal tool belt. Community volunteerism, in particular, allows me to remain mindful of a vision of justice that’s broader than what’s defined by laws. My engagement with a local restorative justice dialogue forum called Justice in Balance allows me to support the empowerment and reconciliation of community members impacted by the forms of violence not typically prosecuted in court.

My responsibilities on the bench are a constant resource for the tangible application of and support for mindfulness. Mental restraint and discipline are tools I rely upon much more often than external threats or commands. Instead of using a gavel, my training as a judge has taught me to use respectful words and disciplined listening to communicate legitimate authority. For, as the *Five Remembrances* says, *My actions are my only belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions.* If I cannot remember this simple rule of karma, I can at least recall that every statement I make in court is contemporaneously recorded, often transcribed, and periodically appealed.

One of my spiritual mentors, Bhante Buddhharikkita, enjoyed laughing at the shared formalities within our chosen livelihoods—starting with the love/hate relationships with our robes. I understand how the black robe might intimidate and create distance,

increasing perception of my size and power. But it also serves to remove some of my self from the equation. Just as we can't pick out only the laws that suit us personally, we can't pick a robe color meant to flatter us.

Through my spiritual practice, I have discovered that the judicial uniform can be used to cultivate connection: my robe is another mindfulness tool, holding me accountable to my oath of office as well as to my dharma practice off the cushion.

Immediately before I take the bench each morning, even when I'm rushing, I commit to a brief "robing meditation," which returns my attention to internally cultivating nonself and externally communicating collective strength. I ground myself in the humbling impact of being cloaked in a symbol of the justice I am charged with administering. I take stock of present bodily sensations and thought formations and examine which of them may interfere with my faithful and impartial discharge of duties. Guided by my court training and the *Vitakkasanthana Sutta*, I then endeavor to either set distractions aside, relax their grip on my mind, or if all else fails, crush my egocentric mind with clenched teeth and open awareness.

Finally, the robe is a great reminder that I am responsible for the laws I've vowed to uphold—even when it's uncomfortable or the laws are not equitably drafted or equally enforced. Ten to fifteen thousand members of the public enter my courthouse each day, and most are suffering. None, except possibly the newlyweds,

want to be there. People are distressed by the circumstances that brought them to court, and many are looking for someone to blame.

A lot of that blame, justifiable or unjustifiably, is directed toward the bench, and very little of it is expressed through wise speech. Chögyam Trungpa, in his commentary on Atisha's eleventh-century mind-training teachings, claimed that "everybody is looking for someone to blame—and they would like to blame you . . . because they probably think you have a soft spot in your heart." I have witnessed in my courtroom the transformative impact of training the mind to drive all blame toward self. Defensiveness inevitably feeds newly tapped rage. I surrender my verbal weaponry in order to defend due process from counterattacks. When I am the first to concede or affirm the harm of someone before me, I've found that litigants listen more easily and treat each other more respectfully. Sometimes the energy shifts away from seeking retribution and toward problem solving when I absorb unfair accusations. (Sometimes, nothing at all happens.) An entire field of research is now dedicated to this simple truth: if people have a voice and are treated with respect, they typically perceive the proceedings as fair and the system as just, regardless of the outcome of their case. Ironically, if I accept that sometimes the law "gets it wrong," people are more likely to believe the law got it right.

Like some monks and nuns, we trial judges are challenged to distance ourselves from and limit certain social and personal interactions—without succumbing to a sense of isolation. We are

challenged to deliver instruction in a vernacular relevant and accessible to all without overstepping the training rules formulated for us. We are tasked to apply the Buddha's teachings in wise speech and skillful means in highly visible settings. We are challenged to uphold, privately, the same vows we've taken publicly. To do otherwise would undermine the integrity of the law itself.

As I enter the courthouse, I am excited to meet each day's challenges. Sometimes I transcend them. Sometimes I feel beaten down by them—until I remember to bring appreciative attention to the never-ending freedom to practice with the pain and difficulty before me.

When I remove my robe at the end of the day, having stood witness to so much conflict and trauma, my heart is softened. I must remember that I always have the choice to close my ears or my heart. But as MLK put it, I choose love.

Though I am privy to only a sliver of each litigant's life, I am struck by how often I hear my sorrow in their voice, surprised by how often I see my own weariness in their eyes. In those brief moments, I get a small taste of the transformative power of King's vision of justice.

Then I bow to Kwan Yin and to King. And start again tomorrow.

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Brain, Body & Benefits: The Science of Mindfulness

Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. looks for the “active ingredient” that makes mindfulness so beneficial to our health, psyche, and overall quality of life.

The practice of intentional, nonjudgmental awareness of moment-to-moment experience has been practiced since ancient times in both East and West. Wisdom traditions have for thousands of years recommended mindful practice in a variety of forms to cultivate well-being in an individual's life. Now science is confirming these benefits. Here, we'll explore the common elements of these practices and review the research findings which affirm that daily mindfulness practice is good for your health. We'll then explore a new field called interpersonal neurobiology that integrates a wide range of sciences and other ways of knowing about reality into a common language that illuminates the subjective world of the human mind.

Mindful awareness practices include yoga, tai chi, qigong, centering prayer, chanting, and mindfulness meditation derived from Buddhist tradition. The science of mindfulness could have delved into any of the practices of intentionally focusing on the present moment without judgment, but through the impact of the Buddhist-inspired program of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction,

much of our in-depth research on the impact of mindful awareness on brain and immune function, as well as psychological and interpersonal changes, has emerged from the study of mindfulness meditation.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a microbiology Ph.D. then teaching at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, was inspired in the late 1970s to apply the basic principles of mindfulness meditation to patients in a medical setting. His work developing the MBSR program proved effective in helping alleviate the suffering of chronic and previously debilitating medical conditions such as chronic pain. It also served as fertile ground for a systematic set of research investigations in collaboration with one of the founders of the field of affective neuroscience, Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Kabat-Zinn repeatedly clarifies in his writings and teachings that MBSR, despite its Buddhist roots, is a secular application of mindfulness, which is a practice of carefully focusing attention, not a form of religion. Indeed, each of the mindfulness practices mentioned above share common, secular elements: cultivating an awareness of awareness and paying attention to intention.

Studies show that the ways we intentionally shape our internal focus of attention in mindfulness practice induces a state of brain activation during the practice. With repetition, an intentionally created state can become an enduring trait of the individual as reflected in long-term changes in brain function and structure.

This is a fundamental property of neuroplasticity—how the brain changes in response to experience. Here, the experience is the focus of attention in a particular manner.

A question that is raised regarding the specific features of MBSR is what is the “active ingredient” in its powerful effects. Naturally, the experience of joining with others to reflect on life’s stresses, listen to poetry, and do yoga may each contribute to the program’s scientifically proven effectiveness. But what specific role does meditation itself play in the positive outcomes of the MBSR program? One clue is that those practicing mindfulness meditation during light-treatment for psoriasis revealed four times the speed of healing for the chronic skin condition. And in other studies, long-term improvements were seen and maintained in proportion to the formal reflective meditation time carried out at home in their daily practice.

Further research will be needed to verify the repeated studies affirming that long-term improvements are correlated with the mindfulness practice, and are not just the effect of gathering in a reflective way as a group. Sara Lazar and her colleagues at Massachusetts General Hospital have found that people who have been mindfulness meditators for several decades have structural features in their brains that are proportional to their number of hours of practice. But this finding, too, along with studies of “adepts”—those who have spent often tens of thousands of hours meditating—need to be interpreted with caution as to cause and effect. Are those with differing brain activity and structure simply

those who've chosen to meditate, or has the meditation actually changed their brains? These questions remain open and in need of further studies.

MBSR has proven an excellent source of insight into these questions because it enables novices to engage in new practices which can then be identified as the variables that induce the positive changes that follow. What are these changes, whatever their specific causes? Studies of MBSR have consistently found several key developments that demonstrate its effectiveness as a health-promoting activity. These may be key to the “science of mindfulness.”

First, a “left-shift” has been noted in which the left frontal activity of the brain is enhanced following MBSR training. This electrical change in brain function is thought to reflect the cultivation of an “approach state,” in which we move toward, rather than away from, a challenging external situation or internal mental function such as a thought, feeling, or memory. Naturally, such an approach state can be seen as the neural basis for resilience.

Second, the degree of this left-shift is proportional to the improvement seen in immune function. Our mind not only finds resilience, but our body's ability to fight infection is improved. At the University of California, Los Angeles, David Cresswell and his colleagues have found that MBSR improves immune function even in those with HIV. Improved immune system function may help explain the increase in healing found in the psoriasis treatment studies with mindful reflection during treatment.

Third, MBSR studies reveal that patients feel an internal sense of stability and clarity. Using a modified version of a general MBSR approach in our own pilot study at the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, we've found that adults and adolescents with attentional problems achieved more executive function improvements (sustaining attention, diminishing distractibility) than are accomplished with medications for this condition. Other researchers (Alan Wallace, Richie Davidson, Amiji Jha) have also found significant improvements in attentional regulation in those who have had mindfulness meditation training, such as enhanced focus as revealed in the reduction of the "attentional blink," or times when new information is not seen because of prolonged attention on the prior stimulus. Some of these studies have been done during three-month retreats with the primary focus on isolated meditative practice rather than group discussions.

Fourth, researchers in a wide array of mental health situations have found that adding mindfulness as a fundamental part of their treatment strategies has proven to be essential in treating conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder, borderline personality disorder, and drug addiction, and is also helpful in the prevention of chronically relapsing depression.

Some insight into the possible core mechanisms that enable application to the treatment of a wide range of mental disorders was offered in a recent study by Norman Farb and colleagues in Toronto. After just the eight-week MBSR program, subjects were able to alter their brain function in a way that confirmed they

could distinguish the “narrative chatter” of their baseline states from the ongoing sensory flow of here-and-now experience. This ability to develop discernment—to differentiate our unique streams of awareness—may be a crucial step for disentangling our minds from ruminative thoughts, repetitive destructive emotions, and impulsive and addictive behaviors.

Finally, studies of mindfulness based programs have revealed that medical students experienced improved empathy and physicians had decreased burnout and enhanced attitudes to their patients.

The Learnable Skill of Mindsight

How do we make sense of this science of mindfulness? Here is a brief foray into the emergence of an independent way of knowing called interpersonal neurobiology.

At the same time as Jon Kabat-Zinn was creating the MBSR program some thirty years ago, I was starting medical school just a few miles east in Boston. Discouraged by the lack of empathy in my professors and the way patients—and students—were treated as physical objects seemingly devoid of an internal world, I stopped school to wrestle with this widespread blindness to the inner reality of the mind.

When I ultimately returned to finish my degree, what became clear to me was that there were two fundamental ways people could see reality. One was through a lens of the physical, the other through a lens of the mind. Many of my teachers in medicine had

honed the physical lens—seeing the subtle signs and symptoms of physiological disease. This was an important, but incomplete, aspect of being a healer. I came to realize that these professors lacked the development of the lens that enabled them to see the mind’s feelings or thoughts, its hopes, dreams, and attitudes. Theirs was a world of the physical, and the subjective, internal life of the patient was painfully missing from their worldview.

This realization set me on a decades-long journey to explore what the mind was, and how seeing the mind could help alleviate psychological distress and perhaps even enhance physiological well-being. First in pediatrics and then in clinical and research psychiatry, I dove deeply into the science of psychiatric suffering.

I found that patients seemed to come for help with situations of rigidity, chaos, or both. They were stuck in repeating unhelpful patterns of thinking or behaving, or flooded by intrusive and unpredictable feelings or thoughts. Accompanying their disabling states was an inability to see the mind clearly or deeply. If I could teach them ways to see their mind—the world inside—they could become open to shaping that world toward a more adaptive and flexible way of being. I came to call this ability to monitor and modify the internal world in oneself or others “mindsight.”

I became a researcher in the field of parent–child relationships, and studied how attuned communication from a caregiver to an infant cultivated a child’s healthy and resilient development. The 1990s were the Decade of the Brain and I was immersed in working with scientists from a wide range of disciplines, including

anthropology and neurobiology. We could now peer into the function and structure of the healthy, active brain, and then work to combine those findings with an exploration of the mind itself.

Ultimately, this journey led to the creation of an interdisciplinary field called interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB). It offered a working definition of the mind that researchers from more than a dozen disciplines of science could agree upon: A core aspect of the mind is an embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information. This definition enabled me to refine the concept of mindsight as the way we can sense and shape energy and information flow as it is shared in relationships, moves through the neural mechanism of the brain (seen here as the extended nervous system throughout the body), and is regulated by the mind. Relationships, brain, and mind formed a triangle of human experience that was the focus of our interdisciplinary investigations.

After I wrote a professional text on this subject, and then a parenting book that translated IPNB for practical use and suggested that “being mindful” was a basic principle of parenting, people in my workshops asked when they’d be taught to meditate. Not being trained in meditation, I was at a loss at first, but then I became exposed to the whole ancient world of mindfulness and its recent scientific discoveries. A chance meeting with Jon Kabat-Zinn at a conference led to a new world for me when he encouraged me to gain direct experience in mindfulness. I soon participated in the first weeklong silent retreat for

scientists offered by the Insight Meditation Society and the Mind and Life Institute, and then a week of MBSR training. This journey is described in my book, *The Mindful Brain*. Its basic concept is that mindfulness, instead of being seen primarily as attention or emotion regulation, might be considered an “internal form” of attunement—one in which the observing self is open and accepting, tuned-in, and curious about the experiencing self.

In my own exploration, I experienced mindfulness as a “wheel of awareness,” in which the central hub was the metaphor for awareness, the rim anything that I could be aware of, and the spokes the intentional focus of attention. A key to mindfulness, in my experience, was the capacity to separate hub from rim, to not become swept up by anything within awareness as the totality of one’s experience. This differentiation of rim from hub, and the reflection on awareness itself to enable a deeper sense of the present, the past, and the anticipated future, fit well with the IPNB theme of “integration.”

Integration is defined as the linkage of differentiated parts of a system. With integration we can achieve a flexible flow of energy and information—an adaptive and coherent state that has the subjective feeling of harmony and vitality. When we are not integrated, we are in chaos, rigidity, or both. That IPNB view enabled me to finally have an explanation for why my patients came for help with one of these states, now seen as impairments to integration. From the IPNB perspective, integration is health. The way we move toward integration is to use mindsight to promote



the necessary differentiation and then linkage of elements in the system—our brain, our relationships with other people, the larger planet of interconnected life.

Mindful awareness from this IPNB perspective can be seen as a powerful way to integrate consciousness. With kindness and compassion, we differentiate awareness from that which we are aware of. Attuning to the self is like attuning in a loving way to a friend or an infant: we are fully present and accepting with care and concern.

Mindfulness also enables us to differentiate distinct streams of awareness that can include sensations, observations, constructed concepts, and even nonconceptual knowing. Once we strengthen mindsight's lens with training exercises that promote openness, objectivity, and observation, we are then given the opportunity to cultivate integration in our individual and collective lives. The unfolding of well-being, compassion, and resilience from such practices is a wonder to watch.

Reflection, relationships, and resilience can become the new “R’s” of basic education. Reflective practices that help integrate the brain, mind, and our relationships can offer new hope for how youth can grow toward health and more compassionate ways of being. In many ways, such reflective practices combine the ancient wisdom of mindfulness and the contemporary discoveries of interdisciplinary science. With reflection, we come to see clearly that the mind is real and our interconnections with one

another the vital pulse of life. Our brains can become integrated, our relationships empathic, and our minds honored as they are cultivated to develop resilience in our lives.

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Why Mindfulness Isn't Enough

Scholar **Sarah Shaw** explains why mindfulness must work together with ethics, compassion, and wisdom – in Buddhism and in life.

The modern mindfulness movement has swept through international culture, and, like many Buddhists, I have felt intrigued and pleased about this. Mindfulness is, as the Buddha said, a way to happiness. It puts the responsibility for our mental state right where it belongs: in ourselves. It is a powerful way to work with and feel comfortable with our own minds.

As the basic practice of mindfulness becomes more widespread, it is helpful to consider what Buddhist philosophy—specifically the noble eightfold path and the early teachings on psychology called the *Abhidhamma*—says about mindfulness and what it can do. In Buddhism, mindfulness is more than the stand-alone practice of bare attention, as beneficial as that is. Right mindfulness is a key part of the complete path to enlightenment.

During the present pandemic crisis, one ancient Buddhist image for mindfulness keeps on coming to my mind. Mindfulness, in this metaphor, is like a gatekeeper who guards a city that is on a dangerous border. It watches carefully who comes in, protecting the city from thieves and enemies and letting in visitors and goods the city needs to survive and for people to be happy. The city is

compared to the mind: the ramparts at the top are like wisdom, and the food and other supplies like the reserves of meditation practice. Everyone in the city needs to work together to keep well, just as factors in our mind do.

Living in the world of the pandemic has felt like being in that besieged city. We are all at risk, having to be careful about what comes in and out of our house. We all have to work together to get through it. We are in one sense solitary—we are in the end the only ones responsible for our mental state, the “city”—but as social creatures we need human warmth and friendliness.

The Buddhist system of psychology known as the Abhidhamma expresses this need for interaction and of the whole mind working together very well. It says that when mindfulness is present, a number of other factors come into being too, quite naturally. For Buddhists, this is very good news: that the different factors of awakened mind help each other and can grow together.

Many of these factors concern how we relate to others in daily life. So there is an ethical sense, in the presence of two factors called self-respect (*hiri*) and regard for consequences (*ottappa*). These arise when mindfulness does.

These ethical factors are called “the guardians of the world,” the intuitive controls that come into play when there is mindfulness. They watch over our own mental states and how we interact with others: they prevent us from doing or saying something

that could cause harm to ourselves or others. They are rather like inbuilt ethical instincts that come into action when mindfulness is present.

This works in daily life too. Let's look at a very basic example. If I go to the supermarket, I need to be alert and mindful, to choose just what I want and find the right things. But I also have to be aware of others and how I interact with them. It is not just mindfulness of me! If I barge in front of someone about to buy some cat food and just ignore them to get the last few tins for myself, according to the Abhidhamma I have stopped being mindful. I am not being ethical either—I have ignored the needs of the other person.

The Abhidhamma says that if there is mindfulness of one's own feelings and body, then this includes the feelings and bodies of others too. And in social situations, if there is mindfulness of feeling, you will be less inclined to make that nasty remark, because you are mindful of the effect it would have on the mind of the other person, and on your own mind.

Another factor that the Abhidhamma says arises with mindfulness is a sense of balance. Often in life we have to be aware of a number of things that are going at the same time. If I am cooking, I need that sense of balance so I can keep track of the pans bubbling, how to manage to chop things in time for the meal, and how to answer the phone if need be.

Balance, in Pali *tatramajjattata*, literally meaning “being right there in the middle,” helps us to do this. This feels a bit like the equipoise of steering a bicycle through the wobbly events of the day. Simply being aware of the breath as a mindfulness practice during the day will help us start to do this.

Something that is said always to arise, even if only a little, with mindfulness is confidence. If you are feeling nervous before meeting someone or giving a public talk, the Abhidhamma says that trust will arise if you are mindful of that feeling. Mindfulness of the situation will produce confidence and help you in what you are doing.

When there is mindfulness, Abhidhamma says one of the four brahmaviharas, or “divine abodes,” will also arise. The four are loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, and the one will arise that is appropriate for the situation. If there is a need for friendliness toward oneself, loving-kindness will come; if there is a need just to let go and be equanimous, that will arise. It is as if mindfulness finds the reserves that are needed at the time. Another ancient image compares this to a treasurer of the king, who finds the money that the king requires when it is wanted. Mindfulness, according to the Abhidhamma, helps steer us to the qualities we need as the situation demands.

The fourth noble truth, the path to the end of suffering and enlightenment, says there are eight ways we can keep the middle way and ensure that our minds and bodies are happy and in good

shape. We need to get a good “view” of events, and not be ill-disposed to others, so right view and right intention keep the city of the mind safe.

We need ethical behavior, in the form of right speech, right livelihood, and right action, to keep the peace. And to ensure the mind is happy and protected, we need what is loosely termed “meditation,” but could be seen now as forms of mind development: right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Stillness could be another translation for concentration, which lets the mind come to rest, recharge itself, and experience the revitalizing effects of quiet and a meditation practice.

So “right mindfulness” in the Abhidhamma is something different from just noting or being basically aware. The Abhidhamma says that as we become aware, our mind tends to naturally find other positive factors too. Mindfulness needs and thrives on them, just as they need mindfulness to keep them fresh and awake.

This complete right mindfulness helps in daily life. If I have a friend who is unhappy at losing her job, doing the right thing to help her—what could be called right action—also needs mindfulness. She might suggest we go out and get blind drunk. But it is clear that would not help her, or me. So I need to be alertly resourceful and suggest a way to cheer her up, like going for a meal, where she will feel better, not worse.

As we see in this example, right mindfulness is intuitively ethical, which is not the same as judgmental. It is inclined to be friendly, to smile at problems, and be aware of other people's needs as well as one's own, and to find skillful solutions.

In Buddhist psychology, the “skillful,” or healthy and awake mind, is accompanied by many factors. Mindfulness supports and is supported by the others, like one instrument is supported by the others in a chamber music group. In Buddhism, mindfulness never plays solo.

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Take a Deep Breath

Beth Wallace, Associate Publisher for Lion’s Roar, writes about the importance of breath in her editorial for the September 2021 issue.

“We can always return to the breath.” Many years ago, at an introduction to meditation for beginners, I heard this instruction and learned of the connection between the breath and our ability to return to balance and ease.

My reaction landed somewhere between irritation and relief. I was irritated that the key to undoing my tendency toward anxiousness and distraction was something I’d had access to all along. And I was relieved that an essential foundation of practice—at a time when so much about meditation felt odd and otherworldly to me—was so readily available, even mundane!

As the Theravada Buddhist teacher Shaila Catherine explains, the Buddha recommended going into the forest, sitting under a tree, and “being with” the breath. He was the first person to teach this practice of *anapanasati*, “mindfulness of breathing,” and it is a core practice across most Buddhist traditions.

Twentieth-century science has demonstrated what meditators have known for thousands of years—that deep, abdominal breath encourages full oxygen exchange and is beneficial, even transformative, for body and mind. This scientific evidence has supported the adoption of breath awareness as the fundamental

instruction in Western secular mindfulness programs. Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike have learned the power of returning to the breath.

The instruction to “take a breath” is common, practical, and often reassuring advice. Caring elders say it to children who’ve lost their cool. Coaches say it to athletes during practice. Dou-las say it to women during childbirth. We can all appreciate the power of a deep inhale–exhale.

Zen teacher Karen Maezen Miller writes here about how babies naturally breathe diaphragmatically from deep within their bellies, under the rib cage. We can watch their belly draw in and push out. As we grow into adults, however, we lose contact with this natural body wisdom and the message that deep diaphragmatic breath reinforces in the body and mind—that we are safe. Our thinking, planning, ruminating, reactive brain hijacks this deep, natural state, and we slip into the high, rapid breath that is “lung breathing.”

While quick and somewhat efficient, this shallow breathing can trigger the body’s fight or flight response, sending blood and oxygen to our extremities to help us escape from a threat. This would be helpful if we were being chased by a tiger, but it’s problematic if all we’re facing is rush-hour traffic or a disagreement with our partner.

The good news is, we can override this response and return to a parasympathetic state—a place of balance—by shifting our breathing deep into our belly. As one of my first meditation

teachers would exclaim with glee: “Breathe deeply and allow your belly to expand! This is not time to worry about sexy abs!” This playful advice reminded me how holding the belly in, which so many of us do subconsciously, makes shallow breathing seem normal.

Shaila Catherine reminds us: “The Buddha’s teaching on mindfulness breath offers a path that can calm the mind, increase insight, and perhaps even lead to awakening.” May you and those you love find an opportunity to return to the breath—again, and again, and again...

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