

Mindfulness - approaching life as learning

“To live without making a conscious effort to evolve is escapism.” (Sangharakshita)

Three phases of mindfulness in any given moment:

- Present moment awareness (*sati/smṛti*): This is the bare **experience** of what is going on here and now (sensory impressions with their particular feeling tone). This is being fully alive to your experience moment to moment. You allow yourself to experience — with complete openness and honesty — whatever is going on.

Make it a point to notice and catch the signals that your senses are constantly giving you. Stay with them, explore them. Usually we move so quickly from perception to interpretation that we don't even notice the difference. Often, what we respond to is not the pure experience but our interpretation of it. — So, it's important to develop your ability of staying with the moment as it unfolds.

You can use ordinary and simple everyday activities as your training field: Experience the sensations of sitting/walking/standing. Use routine or 'auto-pilot' activities for practising bare awareness: waiting periods, bus rides, etc. ...

- Clear comprehension (*sampajanna/samprajanya*): Here, you let a **knowing**, an understanding, of the object/perceptive content arise so as to recognize it accurately (labelling, whilst being aware that labels are merely labels and not the 'thing' itself).

It is important to do this receptively, in a non-grasping kind of way. (E.g., when you notice a certain tension in your face, you might invite a word or image to come to you rather than conjure it up or, even worse, explain it 'away.' Check the word back to the actual perception. Does it really fit? With clear comprehension, you aim to understand your perception in its particular context.

Clearly distinguish clarifying thoughts from 'story-making'. For example, 'I am ruined' is a story. Stories limit you and prevent you from taking effective action. 'I have fifty cents left in my bank account' is a fact. Facing facts is empowering.

(For other aspects of clear comprehension, see reverse page.)

- Responding with diligence (*appamada/apramada*): Based on full perception and clear comprehension, you develop a conscious **attitude** to the perceptive situation. Through reflecting on consequences and implications of possible actions, you develop ethical sensitivity and a genuine responsiveness.

Negative, painful consequences will ensue in as much as your choices are based on a lack of bare perception and on unrealistic interpretations. Positive consequences will ensue in as much as your choices enhance openness, kindness, care, generosity, contentment—i.e., are in line with the interdependent nature of reality.

It is important, then, to develop a clear and experiential understanding of the ethically 'wholesome' and form an intention to let this deepen and unfold (recognising limitations and ways of letting go). Based on what is actually there, you encourage and gently nurture the positive. Again, inviting a word or an image for your experience may help. Preferably, choose one that can in fact 'hook' on to what is already there so that the emerging positive is strengthened or refined. Make sure that the tone of your (inner) voice matches the specific qualities you are encouraging.

Mindfulness involves clarifying your awareness in relation to each of these three aspects.

Make it a practice to reflect back at least once a day: "What have I learnt today?"