

The Four-in-One Establishing of Mindfulness

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Mindfulness is one thing. The establishing of mindfulness is something else. Mindfulness is the ability to keep something in mind, and it can apply to anything. But when you establish mindfulness to make it *right* mindfulness, you establish it right close to the present moment. That's one of the implications of the word "establishing."

In other words, you're not mindful of things far away. You're mindful of things that are really relevant to what you're doing right here, right now. You're trying to keep the breath in mind. You're trying to remain focused, as the Buddha said, on the breath. And there are four things that are right close to here and now that you can remain focused on.

One is the body in and of itself: in other words, simply you're looking at the body on its own terms, without reference to anything outside. Even when you start thinking about the body in the future and the fact that the body's going to die and then decompose, it's still the body on its own terms. One of the aspects of the body on its own terms is the breath that you're experiencing right here, right now.

Then there are feelings in and of themselves: feeling tones of pleasure, pain, and neither pleasure nor pain. Those are right here, too. You try to breathe in a way that's pleasurable, easeful. That sense of pleasure and ease is right next to the breath.

Then there's mind in and of itself. This refers to the quality of the mind. Here we're trying to develop a mind free from greed, free from aversion, free from delusion, one that's centered and not scattered, but enlarged. In other words, you're aware of the breath throughout the whole body. That's right here. Your range of awareness is enlarged.

Then finally, there are dhammas. These can be the five hindrances or the seven factors for awakening. In other words, you're looking at what's going on in the mind in terms of different Dhamma lists, and what those lists tell you to do. Those dhammas are here. If you're wandering away from the breath, it could be because of sensual desire, ill will, torpor and lethargy, restlessness and anxiety, or uncertainty. If you're with the breath, it's because of mindfulness; the analysis of qualities, which is basically your evaluation, as you evaluate how well the breath is going and how well the mind is staying with the breath. And then there the remaining factors of awakening that are developed as you settle in: persistence,

rapture, calm, concentration, and equanimity. All these things are right here, at least in potential form.

This is one of Ajaan Lee's favorite themes: Everything you need to be mindful of is right here, right now. That's when your mindfulness is established, when you stay with these things right here, right now. In the texts, the Buddha talks about how when you're with the breath, following his steps for breath meditation, you're with the body in and of itself because the breath is part of the body. As for the mind, you're mindful and alert with awareness of the breath. This cannot be done, he said, by someone whose mindfulness lapses and whose alertness isn't clear.

There are two really interesting ways, though, in the way the Buddha talks about how two of the four establishing of mindfulness are right here with the breath: feelings and dhammas. When it comes to feelings, he says that careful attention to the breath counts as a feeling. That's strange. Attention is not a feeling. But you have to remember that feelings, as the Buddha said, are fabricated. As you pay careful attention to the breath, that's how you fabricate a sense of ease. You try to make your attention continuous all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out-, and all the way through the spaces in between.

It's the spaces in between that are often hard to stay focused on. There'll be a slight gap as you tense up part of the body to breathe in. The question is: Can you breathe in without tensing up anything at all? Can you make the in-breath come from the out-breath? Can you make the out-breath come from the in-breath? Can you keep it smooth all the way through? If you really are careful and attentive, that will give rise to the sense of well-being we want in the concentration. After all, when you're establishing mindfulness, you're following the Buddha's directions for how to get the mind into concentration.

As for dhammas, the Buddha said in part of that formula for right mindfulness—for example with the body, “keeping focused on the body in and of itself, ardent, alert and mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world”—when you're putting aside greed and distress, you're looking on with equanimity. That, the Buddha says, is a dhamma. It's one of the dhammas of the seven factors for awakening. It's the one you're working toward and it can often be one of the hardest.

When you look at the condition of the world, it's very hard to be equanimous about it. But you begin to realize that the world is not a place for us to stay. The Buddha didn't teach the Dhamma for us to stay here; he taught it for us to escape. And it's not as if we're being irresponsible when we escape, because you don't escape by creating a mess or leaving things in a mess. And the world *is* a mess.

As Ajaan Chah said, when you see a cup, remind yourself that it's already broken. That doesn't mean you go around breaking it. You take care of it; you look after it. But you know in the back of your mind that someday it's going to break. When it does, you're not upset. And the same with the world: You look after the world as best you can, but you realize that someday it's going to turn on you. It's going to kill your body. Even though you're good with the world, you realize you've got to get out. So you make your focus *not* on the world.

Your focus is on the breath, on the feelings around the breath, and around the state of mind that you can use to maintain continuous awareness of the breath. As for everything else, learn to look on with equanimity, because this is your way out. It's like that *Far Side* cartoon with two penguins on an ice floe. One of the penguins has a little hat and a cane. Obviously, he's dancing. The other is playing the piano. And one of them is saying, "No, no. Take it again from the top. This is our only ticket out of here." That's it. Being focused on the body in and of itself is your only ticket out of here. This is why mindfulness and the establishing of mindfulness are so different. Mindfulness can be keeping anything in mind. Establishing mindfulness, making it right mindfulness leading to right concentration: That's your ticket out of here.

So hold on. Maintain this focus and realize that everything you need for safety is right here. The Buddha gives many different analogies for the establishing of mindfulness, and by far the largest number of them have to do with safety and protection: the gatekeeper guarding the fortress; the quail in its safe territory; the monkey safely away from human beings; the island in the midst of a flood. The world is an unprotected place. But when the mind is carefully established in mindfulness, you know you're not going to do anything that will lead to danger.

Right mindfulness is not just being aware of whatever arises. As the Buddha said, when mindfulness is a governing principle, then if there's something skillful that you haven't developed yet, you keep reminding yourself that it has to be developed, and you work on developing it, first by giving rise to it. Once it's there, you keep on maintaining it until it gets fully developed. In other words, you *make* good things arise, and you *prevent* them from passing away. It's in those good things that your protection lies. The good things you have to develop as you establish mindfulness: Those are your protection.

So your safety is right here. Try to keep your awareness of this right here as continuous as you can. Be careful. Be attentive, mindful, and alert. That's how you create your own protection. As King Pasenadi noted in one of his insights that he came to report to the Buddha: The people who look for their protection in terms of developing power in the world—raising armies and using physical force—leave

themselves unprotected because they do unskillful things with those forces. Those are the unprotected people. It's the people who develop good qualities, who are mindful to develop good qualities: Those are the ones who are protected. Your safety lies right here.