

Is mindfulness enough? ... a glimpse of the Buddha's insight

Are you doing mindfulness to get calm? To get to know yourself better? To resolve some difficulties? These are all good intentions, but fall short of the depth mindfulness can offer us.

The true purpose of mindfulness and meditation is to seek liberation from any sense of dissatisfaction. It is to experience mental freedom. Ultimately it is to know the true nature of mind.

Of itself, mindfulness is not complete. If it's just a tool, a technique, it will be of limited efficacy. By itself it doesn't resolve anything. It can just enable awareness of all the confusion, pain and dissatisfaction that we experience. If that's all we get from it, we probably won't continue, concluding that 'this doesn't work for me '.

The four foundations of mindfulness

2,500 years ago the Buddha articulated, for ordinary people, how he had achieved full enlightenment. In his first major teaching, the Satipatthana Sutta, he breaks down the process of finding mental freedom into four foundations, with seven factors of awakening.

The four foundations are:

- Developing awareness through body sensation
- Developing awareness of feelings and emotions
- Developing awareness of the mind
- Developing awareness of phenomena and their true nature.

This will be explored more fully in another note.

The seven factors of awakening

To awaken to the true nature of mind, all of the seven factors must be present. They are:

1) Mindfulness! In order to experience anything directly, internally or externally, one needs to be fully present and engaged. This is why a key instruction for meditation is to stay alert and awake. Meditation is not about going off into a dream world. For this reason it is good to learn to meditate with your eyes open.

2) Interest. There has to be genuine curiosity in investigating with great attention all that can be experienced. Without interest or without a questioning mind, meditation will be flat and dull.

3) Delight. There needs to be a sense of joy in the process of staying alert. The student will experience, at some point, the simple bliss of being fully present.

4) Tranquillity. There has to be calm and stillness in order to notice what's going on. It is important to note that tranquillity arises from patient attention itself; it is achieved without effort.

5) Concentration. One has to train the mind to remain focused on whatever the object of meditation may be. In the early stages this is often an object such as the breathing; but in the advanced stages one can meditate and stay concentrated without having an object, other than the mind itself.

6) Equanimity. This is the state of not being moved by whatever is experienced. It is not the absence of emotion, but it is awareness of the *tendency* to like or dislike, to judge, yet not to act accordingly.

7) Energy. There needs to be a commitment to stick with the process of discovery. This requires energy without effort.

Each of these factors needs to be present simultaneously. For example, it's impossible to stay concentrated without energy and interest.

The shortfalls of mindfulness as taught today

This wonderful teaching by the Buddha is as relevant today as it was when he first taught it. However, all too often, mindfulness is separated out, and considered just a toolbox of techniques. This approach was clearly articulated by the Buddha as being a 'wrong view'.

Mindfulness and meditation is a *craft* that needs to be learnt, and can only develop with ongoing committed practice. Whilst study, reading books or listening to talks, is useful to help understand the process, it's only through direct experience that we gain real insight and make progress.

This is also why we need a teacher with deep experience, because he or she can sift through the direct experiences of the student, pointing to the correct path, avoiding the many pitfalls.

There needs to be some tangible benefit, or meditation can become a chore. There are many stages on the path, some are very blissful, others are inexplicably uncomfortable. We have to ride these out with interest and curiosity, equanimity and calm. Eventually, sometimes imperceptibly, progress will be made and life becomes much richer and more easeful.

When we begin to understand what leads to better mental states and the sense of mental freedom, we can nurture the conditions that lead to this. We need to learn what works, and become masters of our own mind, just like learning to play an instrument. It will not happen overnight, but with real commitment and the inspiration of great teachers, we find ourselves changing and enjoying life better.

Mindfulness in daily life

It is important to recognise that this journey starts here, within us. We can't expect the external world suddenly to bend to our liking. Until we resolve the internal mental struggles and battles, we will never find peace in the world outside. If we have not resolved our own internal struggles, it will taint the relationships we have with other people; we will always

be looking for them to provide something to satisfy our needs. This is why Putin's war begins with Putin's personal dissatisfaction.

When we discover the intrinsic nature of our minds, that of openness, clarity and loving kindness, we are ready to be a force for good in the world. Compassion arises naturally from the tranquil mind. When we can be truly satisfied with just being, neither needing anything nor rejecting anything, then we can interact with people and the planet with love.

Most people want something back from the practice of mindfulness meditation. We want to resolve anxiety, pain, or loss, for example. So whilst there may be particular techniques and tools to employ in different situations, the core skills that we need to learn are the same. We need to develop our foundations before we go on to construct the edifice that we call 'me'.

Mindfulness appears to be incredibly simple. In the very first stages this is true, because it's seen as just being present and awake. That's a good thing and it's the place we need to start. Following on from that, and with a questioning mind, there is much to learn and it all appears to be quite complex. Finally with true insight, we learn again that it is very simple.

The simple truth is that mindfulness is always present. Awareness exists and knows itself. All we have to do is to let go of the habits we have learnt and tune into it.