

Continuity of Mindfulness

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What is mindfulness?

- Spacious presence
- Focused attention
- Wakefulness
- Recollecting recognition of experience

Generally, mindfulness in the Buddhist sense entails being:

- Relaxed
- Aware
- Receptive
- Inclusive

The reasons for continuity of mindfulness:

- Any mindfulness is a good thing - it's one of the seven factors of enlightenment and the one that catalyzes the others - so the more mindfulness, the better.

As Dipa Ma put it when asked, What is the use of mindfulness: *"Let me tell you an example. If I told you there was some jewelry hidden somewhere and I asked you to go collect it, you would leave your house and go to where it was hidden. On the way to find the jewelry, you might see a fight break out, and you would stop and watch. But after awhile, you would proceed, You might see a marriage party going by with their drums, and you would stand there, but again, after a while you would proceed. You might see a street rally, and you would stop and later proceed. If you are not mindful, you cannot reach your destination to collect the jewelry I have asked you to get. But whenever there is mindfulness, even if there are interruptions and obstacles you will not get lost, you will proceed on. Mindfulness allows you to reach your goal."* (p. 144)

[Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from [Knee Deep in Grace: The Extraordinary Life and Teaching of Dipa Ma](#), by Amy Schmidt]

- Ongoing mindfulness helps you be aware of larger and long-term patterns of cause and effect, thus breeding more insight.

- It allows us to use daily, householder life for liberating practice and to deepen realizations.

"Dipa Ma was a living example of how to live in this world, of how practice and the mundane activities of our day-to-day existence can be made one. She insisted that the practice be done all the time, and that we do the things we do throughout the day without making them into problems. Dipa Ma wanted to know, "How awake are you in your life? Are you just thinking about being mindful, or are you really doing it?" Dipa Ma said that even while she was talking, she was meditating. Talking, eating, working, thinking about her daughter, playing with her grandson---none of those activities hampered her practice because she did them all with mindfulness. "When I'm moving, shopping, everything, I'm always doing it with mindfulness. I know these are things I have to do, but they aren't problems. On the other hand, I don't spend time gossiping or visiting or doing anything which I don't consider necessary in my life." (p. 83)

"There is nothing ultimately to cling to in this world, but we can make good use of everything in it. Life is not to be rejected. It is here. And as long as it is here and we are here, we can make the best use of it." (p. 130)

"The great changes happened during the intensive training. And then I cultivated them in my daily life. They became deeper and deeper that way." (p. 144)

- It really changes you to get a critical mass of mindfulness. Your brain actually changes its fundamental resting state.
- The great teachers are characterized by great continuity of mindfulness.

"I never ever saw Dipa Ma have a restless or distracted moment, and I used to watch her all the time. When she would stand, it was like a rock dropping. She would just stand. And when she sat, she sat. Period. There was never anything else going on. She didn't look around or ever lose her focus." (p. 88)

The objects of mindfulness:

- The Four Foundations:
 - Body sensations (through all five senses)
 - Feeling tone (pleasant - unpleasant - neutral)
 - All other contents of mind (thoughts, emotions, etc.), notably the presence or absence of the Five Hindrances (i.e., Greed/Lust, Aversion/Ill-will, Sloth/Torpor, Restlessness/Anxiety, Doubt)
 - General quality of consciousness, awareness

- The Three Characteristics:
 - Endless change, impermanence
 - Complete interdependence of everything, thus nothing has an inherent and independent nature or existence (including the self, the "I"), so everything is "empty"
 - Suffering and the causes of its decrease or increase

The occasions for mindfulness:

- During the four bodily postures: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down
- During acts of the body, speech, and mind

What supports continuity of mindfulness?

- Remember that mindfulness is a natural ability. As a meditation master once said, "Even children, drunkards, madmen, those who are old, or those who are illiterate, can develop mindfulness."

- Meditative experience (with both concentration and vipassana modes)
- Staying aware of the body
- Staying aware of the breath
- Slowing down
- Not contending with anything, including objects

"When I knocked on the door, Ma's daughter Dipa answered. I was quite excited about meeting Dipa Ma and had a bundle of questions I wanted to ask her about meditation. After a few minutes an elderly woman [Dipa Ma] appeared. She seemed totally uninterested in my presence. She didn't even look at me; she didn't acknowledge me. She was so incredibly silent and quiet, so grounded and present that I knew I would have to wait until she was ready to relate to me. It wasn't aloofness, exactly. Rather it was a sense of real stillness." (DM 85)

- Simplify your life

Dipa Ma said: "Live simply. A very simple life is good for everything. Too much luxury is a hindrance to practice." In every way, Dipa Ma lived in the greatest simplicity. She refrained from socializing. She did not engage in unnecessary talk. She didn't involve herself in other people's concerns, especially complaints. Her guideline for herself and her students was to live honestly and never blame others. Often Dipa Ma simply rested in silence. "Whenever I get time alone, I always turn my mind inward," she said. She did not spend time at any activity

that was unnecessary to her life. Just as in meditation we practice giving our full attention to one thing at a time, Dipa Ma did each thing completely without worrying about the next. "Thoughts of the past and future," she said, "spoil your time." In whatever she did, she was fully present, with ease, stillness, and simplicity." (p. 135)

- Rest in a peaceful happiness

"Eric Kolvig remembers a group interview in which Dipa Ma's playfulness was expressed in an unforgettable image. "Dipa Ma's grandson became upset about something in the kitchen. He let the world know about it in the willful way that is common in two-year-olds and dictators. She called him to the couch, where she laid him face down across her lap and comforted him by stroking his back and patting his tush---an age appropriate blessing. A blue and yellow plastic toy dump truck lay beside them. With the profound serenity that never left her, Dipa Ma picked up the toy, placed it upside down on her head, and continued with the dharma point she was making. She kept it on for the rest of the interview. That is how I will always remember her: patting the butt of the pacified child on her lap and discoursing on the dharma with a blue and yellow dump truck on her head. Dipa Ma was a great spiritual warrior, the greatest I have known. On her head that toy truck became the warrior's noble helmet. I say that only half in jest." (p. 134)

Special opportunities/challenges to be mindful:

- While being present with other people

"At these sittings, sometimes fifty people might arrive to receive her blessings, but no matter how many came she would take each person one by one and be completely present. In watching the singularity of her focus and connectedness, I could see she was relating to each person as God." (p. 88)

- While speaking
- When upset

"When she mentioned that women could go deeper and more quickly into the practice than men because our minds are softer, that surprised me. That softness brings more emotion, more movement in the mind. A lot of women think that the emotions are a hindrance, but Dipa Ma said, "'Women's tendency to be more emotional is not a hindrance to practice.'" She advised us, "'Just watch the emotions and don't identify. Increase the mindfulness of noticing and the concentration.'" (DM 118)

- When dealing with money

- While making love
- While parenting
- During focused thought

The possibilities of total mindfulness

"The . . . concentration . . . referred to in the eightfold path as right concentration, or perfect concentration . . . [is] developed on a moment-to-moment basis in insight meditation. Only moment-to-moment concentration following the path of mindfulness leads to the destruction of defilements. This concentration is not developed by fixing the mind motionless to one object, but by being mindful of the changing bodily sensations, feelings, consciousness, and mind objects. When properly established in the inner body and mind, moment-to-moment concentration leads to the destruction of the rounds of rebirth. Through this concentration, we develop the ability to see clearly the five aggregates---form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness---which make up what we conventionally call men and women." (Living Dharma, pps. 260-261)