

Right mindfulness

These days most people associate mindfulness merely with living in the present, but this ordinary mindfulness is not enough to lead us all the way to enlightenment, to the complete end of suffering. In order for mindfulness to go as deep as is necessary for such radical results, it must be 'right mindfulness' (sammā-sati). This entails seeing and accepting impermanence in the right way – a way that leads to a peaceful, joyful letting go of our attachments; thereby we realise liberation of the heart. So what is then the right way to see impermanence? If we merely determine to live in the present we can actually be defeating this seeing altogether. We can even come to feel that this present moment is eternal, and it can actually seem so.

What, then, can right mindfulness be? Right mindfulness is not of another nature than ordinary mindfulness, it is a further development of it. As we sustain our mindfulness and strengthen it through meditation it is as though it soaks in to our minds and bodies and finds a new inner strength, developing beyond simple awareness into a quality of knowing, sure and bright. We come to know our deeper feelings, leading us naturally to a life of morality, letting go of selfishness as we connect more fully with others. Secondly we develop a stronger knowingness of the body, leading us to see and know its mortality. This is how we can truly see impermanence in the present moment and discover the amazing, blissful possibility of letting go of ourselves altogether.

So learning to live in the present is just the start of something that, if we choose to take it far enough, can completely transform our lives, taking us on the spiritual path to liberation. If we take such a path we need to be so patient, however, perfectly patient in fact, or all our efforts will be fruitless. Only with perfect patience can we both live in the present and strive for liberation in the future. Only with perfect patience can we be mindful of the situation for spiritual practice that we have and not keep trying to change it in our minds to fit the ideal. Yet if we, regardless of our situation, have truly and completely entered this stream of practice, then we have all the time in the world, for we will have found a way beyond the body.

I offer this for your reflection.

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