

Andrea Fella-09-30-09



This is the second of five talks by Andrea Fella on **Practice in Daily Life**, learning about tools that support our daily life practice.

Last week, we had two mindfulness projects to work on:

1. Pick a simple daily activity that takes several minutes (e.g. brushing teeth, unloading dishwasher, making bed.) Bring a simple, light mindfulness to the activity. Notice your posture, your mood, whether your mind is reacting to the activity, how your breathing is.
2. Pick something that happens regularly in your day and use it as a mindfulness bell. (E.g. closing a window on computer, opening doors.) It is helpful to pick an activity that you initiate, rather than one that is a response to something in your environment. For example, opening a door is an activity that you usually initiate; answering the telephone is a response to something in the environment.

We discussed our experiences on the projects over the past week. As expected, everyone often forget to be mindful – especially on the second project, for which we tried to be mindful about an activity that happens regularly during the day. Sometimes we could go through an entire day and forget all about being mindful about going through a doorway, or what we had selected as our project. Or we would be concentrating on getting something done, and realized afterwards that we had neglected to be mindful at the proper time. For some of us, remembering our project was a smack-your-head “Oh no! I forgot again!” moment.



You will find that you will forget to be mindful. That's okay, you are not a failure. When you remember that you have forgotten to be mindful, that is the return of mindfulness. Be aware of the here and now when mindfulness returns. Most importantly, *resolve to keep trying*. The resolve is a recommitment to mindfulness. If you keep making the resolve, you may notice that you begin to remember that you forgot sooner. We are not trying to change or stop our behavior, but to recognize it.

Every time you remember that you forgot to be mindful, *resolve to keep trying*.

As you continue to do this, you will find that you will get faster at remembering to be mindful. It will come closer to the experience, and become easier.

In the Satipatthana Sutta (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.than.html>) the Buddha says:

"And how does a monk remain focused on the body in & of itself?

...

When walking, the monk discerns that he is walking. When standing, he discerns that he is standing. When sitting, he discerns that he is sitting. When lying down,

he discerns that he is lying down. Or however his body is disposed, that is how he discerns it.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"Furthermore, when going forward & returning, he makes himself fully alert; when looking toward & looking away... when bending & extending his limbs... when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe & his bowl... when eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring... when urinating & defecating... when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself fully alert.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

When being mindful, just try to notice the obvious, not every last detail. Use a light touch, and don't try to hold onto the mindfulness too long. If it feels like a chore, you are putting too much effort into it.

Walking

Walking is an excellent place to cultivate mindfulness in our daily lives, because we because we walk all the time: from the house to the car, from the table to the bathroom or kitchen, from our office to a meeting room, through the grocery store, or around the neighborhood. As you consciously bring mindful attention to walking, the act of walking itself begins to remind you to be aware, and this practice helps to pull the thread of mindfulness through even more of your day.

When we practice walking as a formal meditation practice, often we slow down the pace of walking and carefully observe the sensations in the feet while we walk. But in our

daily lives, we don't usually have the time to slow down and pay such careful attention. Instead we need to learn how to be aware while walking at a normal pace, in our everyday activities.

Andrea's Burmese teacher, Sayadaw U Tejanaya, was once asked: "How do you practice walking meditation?" His response was: "I don't practice walking meditation, I practice awareness while walking."

One way to practice awareness while walking is to see if you can feel what pace brings a sense of ease to your body. Explore the speed of walking, find a pace that brings you ease, and walk at that pace. Any time you notice the mind has wandered into thought, connect again to the pace, and whether you feel ease or tension.

You might try putting your attention roughly in the area of your heart, and see if you can notice a sense of relaxation or tension there. Often, there is a pace where the speed of your movement and mindfulness naturally gravitate together, bringing a sense of relaxation and ease. This pace can vary throughout the day depending on what is happening in your life. But at any given time, there is a particular pace of movement that supports mindfulness. If you can find that pace, it is easier to stay present.

We don't always have the luxury of finding a pace of ease, sometimes we need to rush in our busy lives; in that case, we can explore what it feels like to rush! But if you have the option, explore the connection between the speed of walking and the feeling of ease.

While you play with the practice of exploring ease in walking, see if you can stay engaged with the world in a normal way: look around, notice what you see and hear, but see if you can stay connected with a feeling of ease at the same time. Mindfulness in daily life is about connection to and engagement with the world.

Another technique to practice with walking, which helps us to more directly connect with

our full sensory experience, is to consciously shift your awareness between four different experiences: seeing, hearing, moving (the body moving through space), touching (the touching of the feet on the ground). Alternate the attention between these four areas, shifting the attention from one to the next about every ten paces.

For the first ten paces, focus your attention on the field of vision. Just notice that seeing is happening: notice what your eyes are drawn to look at. For the next ten paces, focus your attention on hearing. Take in the sounds: the sound of cars, the sound of your feet hitting the ground, of the wind in the trees, of people laughing in the distance. For the next ten paces, allow the attention to feel the experience of the body moving through space. For the next ten paces, notice the contact of your feet touching the ground. Then go back to seeing, and repeat the cycle over and over again.

To help you stay connected with the changing focus of attention, it often helps to use a mental noting in this practice: a soft label in the mind that encourages you to connect with your experience. You could use the labels of *seeing*, *hearing*, *moving*, *touching*. You can remember the order by thinking of the awareness as moving from top to bottom: Seeing with the eyes, hearing with the ears, moving as the torso going through space, and touching as the feet touching the ground. You can also play with how many paces to stay with each of these areas. Some people find it helpful to shift the attention between them more quickly; others find it helpful to stay longer with each one.

This technique is often helpful because it gives the mind some specific things to pay attention to. Every ten steps or so, we change the focus of attention. If you use this technique enough, eventually you'll just notice the flow of awareness between seeing, hearing moving and touching, and you don't have to consciously try to do it. This practice helps to train the mind to be aware of many different things while you are walking.

When using these walking practices in daily life, see if you can let go of any extraneous thinking in favor of being with the actual experience of walking. In our daily life, we do

have to think about things, to plan how to accomplish some task. But often we find ourselves thinking about something unrelated to the task at hand: remembering an argument we had this morning with our partner, or perhaps drifting into happy thoughts about the vacation we just returned from. Or, while walking in the neighborhood, our attention is caught by the sound of barking, and we end up thinking about the next door neighbor's dog. Our minds use an amazing amount of energy thinking about things that are not very useful. So as much as possible, when you notice your mind wandering, bring it back to the embodied experience of walking.

If you practice letting go of thoughts during walking, you might find that you don't need to think nearly as much as you assume! Even at work, we can often let go of thinking for short stretches of time while walking around the office. For example, if you are working at a desk, and realize that you need to use the bathroom, try using one of the walking practices as you walk there. If you can let go of the thoughts about work in those few minutes of walking to the bathroom and back, and just notice *seeing, hearing, moving, touching*, you might find upon returning to work that your mind is refreshed, and able to pick up the task again.

Now I am aware...

Another practice for daily life is to note where your awareness is, moment by moment. Think to yourself, "Now I am aware of ..." and fill in what you are currently aware of. This would typically be a one word description and in the moment, rather than "Now I feel like going home and watching a movie". You may find yourself saying "Now I am aware of pressure... now I am aware of itching... now I am aware of irritation... now I am aware of frustration, etc. for whatever has your attention at that moment. You may also be aware of hearing a car, seeing birds, feeling warm or smelling flowers.

Sometimes you may find yourself trying to identify what you are aware of, and you could say "Now I feel like I am searching for something to say."

Avoid concepts, such as parts of the body. Don't localize the awareness into your hand, or leg, or ear. For instance, don't say "Now I am aware of my foot itching." Just say, "Now I am aware of itching." Don't say "Now I am aware of tension shooting down my neck," just say "Now I am aware of tension."

This exercise will help develop continuity of mindfulness. Use it during your daily life.

Continue practicing the two projects from last week – being mindful of an activity that takes a few minutes, and of an activity that is repeated throughout the day. Add the walking awareness and the "now I am aware of..." projects to these, and we will discuss them next week.