

Andrea Fella-10-07-09



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

We now have four mindfulness practices to work on:

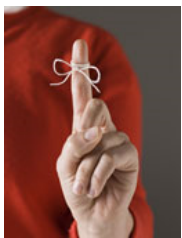
1. Pick a simple daily activity that takes several minutes (e.g. brushing teeth, unloading dishwasher, making bed.) Bring a simple, light mindfulness to the activity. Notice your posture, your mood, whether your mind is reacting to the activity, how your breathing is.
2. Pick something that happens regularly 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.
3. Being aware while walking is a good practice. Find the right pace while walking, and be aware of what is going on. Every ten paces or so, change your awareness. 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. 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.

4. 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.

There are two crucial processes to use in these projects.

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



If you are having difficulty with these, try using props. For example, put a sign or a Post-it where the activity will take place.

The reason we are practicing these daily life mindfulness activities is to help reduce suffering. Suffering comes from reaction, and reacting is optional. If we can just be present, and judge or react, our suffering will be reduced or eliminated.

For this week, focus on the theme of noticing and being mindful of habitual patterns. We all have habitual patterns, and they run our lives more often than we would like to admit. Sometimes it feels like our lives are on auto-pilot, with our habits running the show, sometimes leaving us with suffering in their wake. Often these patterns are based on old and deep conditioning. We can illuminate these tendencies with mindfulness, understand them, and see whether they serve us, or lead us into struggle and difficulty. Taking an interest in our habitual patterns can lead to a deeper understanding of the undercurrents that motivate us, and mindfulness of these patterns begins to give us a choice about whether we engage in them.

As an additional project for this week, choose one habitual pattern that you are interested in understanding. You can choose any kind of habitual pattern that you have noticed yourself engaging in. It might manifest as a behavior, as an emotion, as a thought pattern, or even a speech pattern. It can be a pattern that you have noticed throughout your life, or it could be a new pattern that you see yourself engaging in because of specific circumstances currently in your life.

Try to think of something you are interested in understanding about yourself. If you are motivated about understanding or changing this behavior, you will practice. For example, anger may be a pattern. Try to observe your anger instead of doing it. The Buddha associated an action with each of the Four Noble Truths. The first Truth, that suffering exists, is associated with the action of understanding. We have to move towards understanding our suffering or our anger in this case.

At this stage, we are not trying to stop the anger, fix, or change it. We are just trying to explore it. Understanding may transform the anger in ways you don't expect. Don't anticipate how it will be changed, just explore it. Ask yourself, what can I understand about this? What does anger feel like when it arises? How does your body feel?

Do you notice your anger ramping up with thoughts of self-justification, memories of previous similar situations, and the unfairness of it all? This feeds the anger, and causes more suffering. It is said that anger is like picking up a burning hot coal in hopes of throwing it at someone. It is also said that anger and resentment is like drinking poison in hopes the other person will die. We are the ones to suffer. Recognizing that we are angry is the first step in stopping the suffering and stopping the anger.

We may have other patterns that we need to let go of in our daily lives. For example, you might have a habit of procrastination that formed during your teenage years, or you might find that in the past few weeks, you get angry every time a particular person is around. While most people would agree that the first example as a habit, some might think that the second example seems more like a response to a specific situation than a habit. So, let's key on the word "pattern" more than "habit". Choose a pattern that is currently unfolding in your life that you would like to understand more about.

Other examples of patterns: a tendency to think about what we are going to say when people are speaking to us, a pattern of checking and rechecking that we have done something (like turning off the stove), a tendency to intensify experience, a pattern of thought, such as planning or fantasizing, or any mind state that recurs frequently, such as anger, frustration, stinginess, spacing out, excitement, loneliness, boredom, irritation.

A key quality to bring to this exploration is *interest*. We are exploring the pattern to understand it, not necessarily to try to get rid of it. Through the process of

understanding, you might uncover different aspects that hold the pattern in place. Some of those aspects might be skillful, others might be unskillful.

The main practice around patterns is to notice them! Choose one pattern as a project, and resolve to “wake up” when you are engaging in that pattern. It is most helpful if the investigation around the pattern has a very light touch: simply notice what is most obvious about your experience. There is no need to dig, or try to figure out *why* the pattern is happening. Just notice *what* is happening. You might notice a physical response such as tension or release, or you might notice an emotion, thoughts or images. You might also take an interest in what happens to the pattern while you are observing it.

Using mindfulness to explore and understand patterns can be one of the most powerful fruits of daily life practice. When we are in sitting meditation, these patterns might not come up very frequently, but daily life offers endless opportunities to observe and learn from our patterns.

Continue practicing the four projects from previous weeks – being mindful of an activity that takes a few minutes; an activity that is repeated throughout the day; while walking; and “Now I am aware of.” Add the pattern awareness to these, and we will discuss them next week.