

The Art of Mindfulness

In Buddhism, there are three spiritual powers that require the art of mindfulness and have the capacity to generate genuine happiness for ourselves and others.

The first power is the ability to cut off our afflictions — to sever our passions, hatred, and despair. Thich Nhat Hanh states, “If we cannot cut off passion and hatred, we cannot ever have happiness. We can learn concrete practices to do this. Once we sever the ties of passion and hatred that bind us, we become light and free and spacious.”

The second power is the power of insight — in Buddhism it is called *prajna*. It is not the type of knowledge that we gain by reading books or learning in school. The insight of the Buddha and the *bodhisattvas* goes much deeper — what is called enlightenment — has the capacity to cultivate the qualities of compassion, loving kindness, and altruistic joy.

The third power in Buddhism is the capacity to forgive. When we develop the capacity to accept and to love, we do not need to hold onto resentments or be vindictive. Genuine love manifests through the words we speak and the compassionate way we look at another. In the Lotus Sutra, the *bodhisattva* Avaloketisvara looks at all beings with compassion. Looking at all beings through the eyes of compassion is a wonderful way of behaving like the *bodhisattva*.

Mindfulness is a spiritual art form that can also be cultivated in every area of your life; *upon waking* by greeting the day with gratitude, *before eating* by blessing the nourishment essential to your body, *when finishing the meal* by stating the following Buddhist practice: “This plate is empty. My hunger is satisfied. I vow to live for the benefit of all beings.”

Habits are opposite from mindfulness. Habits prevent us from perceiving the richness and growth offered in each moment. Washing the dishes the same way for the thousandth time, we get swept away in some other moment, missing the experience of the here and now. Greeting our partner as we have done countless times blocks us from truly seeing them. Mindfulness is born in each moment we turn our attention to where we are. We can play with our pets as if it was our last encounter with them. We can walk to the store as if it were the most important journey of our lives. We can listen to ourselves as if we were listening to a Buddha.

It was once said that “There’s nothing special about the present moment except that it’s all we have.” This holiday season, I invite you to take time to develop the art of mindfulness, to appreciate that this moment truly *is* all that you have.