

The Uses of Mindfulness and Awareness

An excerpt from *SD 60.1e*

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(forthcoming).

3.2.1 This recognition of an interim reflects the early Buddhist conception of impermanence which differs from the doctrine of momentariness (*khaṇa*) that arose in later traditions.¹ According to this later doctrine of momentariness, any phenomenon will disappear immediately after having arisen. From an early Buddhist viewpoint, however, what has arisen can stand for some time before ceasing; yet this interim itself is a continuously changing process without any permanence.

The Buddha was, in fact, describing the elder Nanda's mind as being that of an arhat; that is, one whose mind is undistracted in mindfulness and awareness. However, even an unawakened person, with proper training and practice, will be able to observe such a continuous impermanence of mental processes in terms of feelings, perceptions and thoughts.

An unawakened person, with training and mindfulness, would be able to notice the mind during meditation when it is about to be distracted, prompting an adjustment that keeps the practice unbroken and undistracted. This effort to keep our attention fixed and flowing is well recognized in the suttas as a part of the task of mindfulness and awareness, a vital function that was given greater attention in some later developments.²

3.2.2 The **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** (M 10), as a part of its contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), includes the practice of clear awareness. The clear awareness instructions are given in connection with daily mundane activities, as follows:

A monk,	
(1) in going forward or going backward [stepping back],	clearly knows what he is doing.
(2) In looking forward or looking back,	clearly knows what he is doing.
(3) In bending or stretching,	clearly knows what he is doing.
(4) In carrying his upper robe, outer robe and bowl, ³	clearly knows what he is doing.
(5) In eating, drinking, chewing and tasting,	clearly knows what he is doing.
(6) In voiding or peeing,	clearly knows what he is doing.

¹ A von Rospatt, *The Buddhist doctrine of momentariness: a survey of the origins and early phase of this doctrine up to Vasubandhu*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995.

² J Dunne, "Buddhist styles of mindfulness: A heuristic approach," in (edd) B D Ostafin, M D Robinson, & B P Meier, *Handbook of Mindfulness and Self-regulation*, NY: Springer, 2015:251-270.

³ This whole line: *Saṅghāṭi, patta, cīvara, dhāraṇe sampajāna, kāri hoti*, lit "upper robe, bowl, outer robe ...". Traditionally, **the "3 robes"** (*ti, cīvara*) are (1) the outer robe (*uttar'āsaṅga* = "one-sided robe," *ekaṃsika cīvara*), (2) the under-garment (*antara, vāsaka*, also called *nīvasana*, V 1:46) and (3) the upper robe (*saṅghāṭi*) (V 1:94,8 = 2:272,11 ≈ 5:175,2). When "amongst houses" (ie, outside of the monastery, eg, for almsround) the outer robe must cover both shoulders. However, when showing respect to elders or the sangha, it should be placed on one shoulder (*ekaṃsaṃ uttarā, saṅgaṃ karitvā*, V 1:45,32, 46,5, 2:126,32). **Cīvara** is a generic term, meaning "robe," and can refer to any of the 3 above. Here, however, the context clearly refers to it being used as an "outer robe," *uttar'āsaṅga*. See CPD: *uttarāsaṅga*; also C S Upasak, *Dictionary of Early Buddhist Monastic Terms*, Varanasi, 1975: 88-91.

- (7) In walking, in standing, in sitting, in being asleep,
in being awake,⁴ in talking, or in remaining silent, clearly knows what he is doing.
(M 10,8/1:57), SD 13.3⁵

While mindfulness (*sati*) engages a mind in calm meditation *internally*, **clear awareness** (*sampajañña*) is directed to any kind of bodily activity *externally*, even mundane ones. A further benefit of such a practice is that of maintaining decorum regarding bodily actions observable by others. The mention of “robe” and “bowl,” of course, refers to the monk’s training. Clearly, then, such a practice also serves to ensure that a monk or nun would evoke faith in the laity, so that they too practise such clear awareness, and keep their faith in the sangha.⁶

3.2.3 From the way the **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta** sequences the exercises for our daily activities, we can deduce that we should not only be circumspect (mindful and aware) of our bodily actions, but that we should also be *clearly aware* that “this body is in such and such a gesture or posture.” We should, under proper conditions, ensure that our conduct is harmonious as well as dignified. The “ensuring” or monitoring is here done by the mindfulness (*sati*): ensuring that we are rightly focused on the mental object.

Notice that the inner speech quote *iti* is missing throughout the “clear awareness” exercise above [3.2.2 n]. While in the passage on mindfulness (*sati*), it is said, in direct speech, for example, “Going (forward), the monk knows, ‘I go forward [Walking]’” (*bhikkhu gacchan-to vā “gacchāmi ti pajānāmi”*) in the full awareness exercise, he is simply “well aware,” that is, he is focused on the knowing that he *is* doing so: like in breath meditation, where our focus is on knowing that we are breathing without any inner direct speech.

Our focus in these “full awareness” exercises is on fully knowing our bodily action itself: any kind of speech here would distract us from the flow of the action. The task is thus for us to simply perform the action in an appropriate manner, so that we are clearly aware (*sampajāna*) that we are doing so.

3.2.4 **Clear awareness** does not apply only to bodily actions, but also to speech. The suttas and the Vinaya (especially the latter) often apply clear awareness to *intentionally* speaking what is untrue (*sampajāna, musā*), “a falsehood consciously (spoken),” that is, a conscious lie.⁷ This is, of course, a breach of the precept of natural morality against lying, and entails

⁴ “In being asleep, in being awake” *sutte jāgarite* (both loc of reference). Comy glosses *sutte* as *sayane*, “lying down, reclining.” For details, see SD 13.1 (3.6.2).

⁵ (1) *Abhikkante paṭikkante sampajāna, kāri hoti*, (2) *ālokite vilokite sampajāna, kāri hoti*, (3) *samiñjite pasārite sampajāna, kāri hoti*, (4) *saṅghāṭi, patta, cīvara, dhāraṇe sampajāna, kāri hoti*, (5) *asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajāna, kāri hoti*, (6) *uccāra, passāva, kamme sampajāna, kāri hoti*, (7) *gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṅhī, bhāve sampajāna, kāri hoti* (M 10,8/1:57), SD 13.3.

⁶ S Mroziak, *Virtuous Bodies*, Oxford, 2007.

⁷ **Udumbarikā Sīhanāda S** (D 25/3:45, 47), SD 1.4; **Cakka, vatti Sīhanāda S** (D 26/3:68), SD 36.10; **Pāsādika S** (D 29/3:133), SD 40a.6; **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.1(10)/3:235); **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41/1:286, 288), SD 5.7; **Verañjaka S** (M 42/1:291x2); **Sandaka S** (M 76/1:523), SD 35.7; **Sevitabbāsevitabba S** (M 114/3:48, 49), SD 39.8; **S 3.7/1:74x2**, S 10.6/1:209, S 17.11/2:233, S 17.12/2:233, S 17.13-20/2:234, S 17.37-43/2:243x5; **A 3.28/1:128x2**, A 6.54/-4:370x2 372, A 10.176/5:265 267, A 10.211/5:283 285, A 10.217/5:293 295.

unwholesome karmic consequences, such as others not believing us even when we are telling the truth.

Understandably, the phrase “**conscious lie**” (*sampajāna, musā*) appears most frequently in the 4th rule of defeat (*pārājika*), that is, a monastic falsely claiming to have gained spiritual attainments, which makes him fall automatically from the monastic state.⁸ Since he has not gained any spiritual attainment, he is simply pretending or conning others in the hope of material or worldly gains. This is one of the heaviest offences (entailing losing one’s monastic status) because a monastic has openly taken the vows of training, having renounced the lay life, and depending on support by the laity, yet he is still unable to restrain himself verbally, not even keeping the precepts of a layperson.

Clearly, from this usage of *sampajāna*, “clearly aware,” the idea is that both our bodily and verbal activities should be executed consciously, that is, intentionally, and not automatically; and clearly, *not unmindfully* or *mindlessly*, that is, carelessly. However, in the Vinaya case, the opposite of “consciously” would be unintentionally, that is *without greed, hatred or delusion*, without any intention of falsehood or of breaking a Vinaya rule.

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⁸ Pārājika 4.1-5 (V 3:93-99), 103 refs, passim.