

Deborah David
Week Two, *Living Mindfully*
January 11, 2016
Bringing Awareness Back Home



Welcome back. This is Deborah and it's week two of a Tricycle retreat on living mindfully. Last week, we talked about mindfulness as an inner experience because, obviously, the experience of mindfulness is something we cultivate within ourselves and it begins inside. It begins with us individually. And from there we can extend our experience beyond.

This week we bring mindfulness to our home life. Home is a very subjective term and it means a great many things to many people. So one of the first things I want to encourage you to do is apply mindfulness to your definition, to your understanding of what home is. And to question your own assumptions, because if you say, *what's home*, and you think immediately of a physical place, then you can be mindful of that leap. Because home to you, in that place, is very different, perhaps from the next person who has no place and for whom home is a set of beliefs that they carry with them invisible. Or the next person, again, for whom home is family and community. And so home as a concept is very particular to all of us.

If we can work from the assumption that home is a place that's familiar, whether it's a physical environment and/or the relationships that are closest to us, home is the place where we have the deepest ties or the oldest ties in terms of our lives. It's the things that came to us before we even started thinking critically about relationships. And home carries with it then, in some ways, the deepest, rawest, most primitive experiences and also the greatest challenges because it is so deep and it's so intimate.

We don't choose home, at least not when we're children; home is what we're given. Bringing mindfulness to home is bringing it into your home physically, which means that we don't just practice mindfulness when we go to the center and we're around all sorts of nice, other mindful people. And then we go home to chaos and it's lost until the next time we got to the center. It means we bring the mindfulness into the chaos and that means we're mindful of chaos, including our own inner chaos, and that happens.

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It also means being in the home and recognizing *how does this space impact other people? What does this space do to help me and support me?* So when you look around your space, and our identities are very much tied up in the spaces that we live in, then it's worth thinking: *how can I work with the space so that it supports me better in the direction that I want to go? How can I be more mindful of my space? How can my space help me be more mindful?* I'm not saying go clean your house. But what I'm suggesting is that you look with fresh eyes, that you bring this practice of focus, observe, and refocus to the space that you live in physically. That you question what's there and what's in it.

And the measure is not good or bad. It's: *does it work for you? Does it help you be more present? Or is it more distracting? Is your space full of things that clutter your mind? Is there always music on? Is there TV always on? Is there always chatter? Do you read all of the time? Are there moments of silence?* Or are the only times where there's no distraction when you're formally practicing? If so, I encourage you try other times and include other times. Include times where there's unstructured openness. Go do something silly and funny; be mindful in the process of the joy of playing with your pet, or going and being goofy or whatever it is. Or enjoying something delicious—because all of that is part of home.

Mindfulness practice is not austere. It's not about rejecting anything. It's about being in what's there. And that includes the relationships. So some of the relationships at home are complicated and some are very, very simple and they all change over time. They change with incredible rapidity. Being aware of that, how you hold yourself in that, and what influences that is the application of mindfulness.

The first thing is, after you work with mindfulness practices with neutral objects of attention (like breath or sensation, physical sensation or taste, or sound), the next thing is to apply mindfulness to thoughts and to emotions, to focus on watching the appearance of those thoughts and emotions, feeling them, being in them. And then recognizing that you

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can watch them, and you can watch yourself watching them. And therefore they are just thoughts and they are just emotions. They come and they go and they change and they do not define you. We are not just what we feel. We are both more and less, or something other somehow.

What we feel comes through us and then it moves and changes. But the thing that can watch—that is the constant (although it, too, evolves). So the idea here is thoughts and emotions come into our home lives and they fill up space.

We have patterns from the past from a lifetime of relationships, and people trigger us because they replay the kinds of behaviors that cause us to see those patterns again—and then to react the way we always did. This is where the practice of mindfulness becomes so powerful in the relationships that are so precious for us. As much as possible we want to greet those we love the most freshly, cleanly, as they are, to give them space to have changed and to give ourselves, also, space for inevitable change. So that we can be in that moment, not rehashing what we've always done and not fearing what's going to happen again in the future, or predicting, but staying present with it. When we stay present with it there's really nothing to fear because all that exists is right there and you see it. There's nowhere to go.

When you have a family member who is constantly on your case or somebody who is so painful and conflicted for you to deal with, try, if you can, to bring mindfulness to your interactions with that person to your side and then to the interaction as well. Focus on being present, observe how it is. See if you can switch what you focus on. Instead of focusing on the tone of voice that always gets you, focus on the expression in the person's face. Find opportunities for compassion and for kindness because compassion and kindness are so much more constructive than anger or hatred or loss or fear.

The relationships at home are complicated and it's fine as you begin the practice of mindfulness to recognize that almost always, we lose it. And there are little glimmers of

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times when keep it. And then increasingly there are more times when we keep it and we *still* lose it and more and more and more and that's just fine.

When I started practicing meditation mindfulness, in particular, my family thought I was crazy. They really thought I had joined a cult and gone off the deep end. And then after some period of time I mellowed out a little bit and they began to realize I was a lot easier to live with. And all of a sudden I began to see that my practice was helping me, but it was really also helping me with them and that was somehow helping them. Things were much easier and it was a much better way of living. And so it's very practical. But it wasn't through proselytizing and it certainly wasn't telling them to be mindful. If you get into somebody's face and tell them that they need to breathe, their response is going to be the opposite because it's horrible. It's insulting. It's offensive to have that forced upon us. But if they can see you breathe then they'll follow.

That's the same with children and with mindful parenting. What I find works the best is not to tell them anything in particular, but to show them everything. And to describe what it is that works so they can see it. And as you narrate it as you do it, they will do it with you and they will discover it for themselves. It will be meaningful and it will stick.

So lots of people now are talking about mindful parenting and raising children with mindfulness and teaching mindfulness to young kids and in schools. And my encouragement for all of us is to recognize that curricula and techniques that can be brought in, these are outside things and they'll come and go. And some are better than others. But the most meaningful teaching comes from the quality of the interaction. So if as parents we practice mindfulness, our children will taste that in the flavor of our relationships. And it will be something they will value because they will recognize that it brings in their lives something beautiful. And that it gives them courage to face the things that are horrible. That we're honest in our anger and we're naked in our fear and that it's okay for them to see that too. That there's nothing that's off limits because it's

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frightening—because we can be present with these emotions. And that we also have the courage to take a stand, absolutely, according to what is ethically correct and what isn't. Mindfulness is not about relativism. It doesn't mean that we're mindful of everything and therefore everything is okay. At the level of living in this world it's not like that at all. Mindfulness is what allows us to be more present so we can notice what is ethical, and what isn't, so that we can do what is ethical and try to avoid what isn't. So we can teach our children what works best and what not to do. Mindfulness is applied in this sense. It's an inner practice that trains our minds and it is dedicated to a way of life in the world.

My encouragement for mindful parenting is: don't try to fix the kids. And don't try to fix your spouse or your partner. And if anyone wants to try to fix you, don't listen. Bring this basic practice that you find and discover on your own to your own life. Rely on friends in the process. Rely on teachers. And people in whom you see something that you want, that you like, that you admire, that you see functions and that you wish to have more of in your own experience. Then be mindful about bringing that into your life over and over and over, again.

So how do you do it? You can have reminders at home, whatever works for you. Some people use sticky notes, some people have statues, some people have posters, some people have things they wear, some people have tattoos. It doesn't matter. Whatever works for you. But it can be invisible as well. And we don't need to wear our mindfulness practice externally because it's an internal practice and it's in the quality of our lives, not in what we display. And that's not knocking people who chose to wear any of the external attributes of a mindfulness practice or a dharma practice. Not at all. It's simply to say you make your own choice, and you decide what works for you, and do it with mindfulness so that you're very aware of what you're doing—that you recognize the limitations of any external practice because in the end it all falls away and it's not there anymore.

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Mindfulness at home is about creating a home. It's about creating a safe space inside yourself to be as you are, absolutely present with what you are and as you are. And it's about creating a space around you for those closest, those that you love the most. And frequently, because we love them the most and we trust them the most we let down our guard. Sometimes we don't show them the best of ourselves. And so mindfulness is also about remembering to give that love, the highest quality of our attention, and not the lowest. To enjoy the process of giving it the highest. That may even be giving it the highest quality of attention in a moment of absolute misery or fear, not just the joy and the beauty and the ecstasy.

In this sense mindfulness at home is very visceral. It's very much lived. It's in the intimate moments that you share with your partner, your lover, your husband, wife. It's in being absolutely present with another body. And it's not about shutting off into a room and saying, "Oh, it's my time for mindfulness. Everyone has to be quite and tiptoe around while I go do my practice." In the beginning we all do that—maybe not all, but most of us do that—because we need to learn and it's easier to learn in that artificial setting. But as soon as you can, bring down those separations between the artificial and the home so that the mindfulness pervades, mindfulness is the constant and it's what you have with you when you practice formally, and what you do throughout your day as you live the practice.

At home we have a lot of control and at the office most of us have less control because it's somebody else's space. So next week, what we're going to talk about is how to bring mindfulness into the work environment, and how to bring it in seamlessly, so that work organization is almost a little bit more like home in the sense of being close and familiar. So that we're able to be present; so it's not just a job that we go to where we have to assume another identity or focus on something beyond ourselves. But as an extension of who we are and how we are. And that work is no different really than life. We'll get into that next week.

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I encourage you this week: breathe, pause, focus, observe, refocus at home. If you want to, just as an exercise, you might consider jotting down every day, at the end of every day, one or two examples of where you were purposefully, consciously applying mindfulness—focus, observe, refocus—to some very mundane experience that happened with your kids, with your kitchen sink, with your pet, when you were taking a shower. Begin to look at how mindfulness punctuates the day, all day, every day.

I look forward to seeing you next week. Thank you.