



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

## Healing mindfulness as a defence

*“A mind guarded by mindfulness is freed from the bonds of Māra.” ~  
Gotama (the Buddha)*

*“Each time you return to the present, you are choosing freedom over  
habit.” ~ Jack Kornfield*

## Mindfulness as the vigilant watchman

We now begin with the third of the ‘Five Defenders’ – Healing Mindfulness (*sati*). If Confidence provides the trust to step aboard the raft and Courageous Effort provides the energy to move forward, then Healing Mindfulness serves as the vigilant watchman. It is the attentive, clear-seeing presence that allows the raft to be steered wisely.

The Pāli word *sati* literally means ‘to remember’ or ‘to keep in mind’. In this practice, it is remembering to pay attention to the present-moment experience without judgment, but with wise discernment. It is a clear, alert, and non-judging awareness of what is happening now – sensations in the body, tones of feeling, movements of thought, and changes in the world around us.

Healing Mindfulness is the direct antidote to the mindlessness, dissociation, and distraction where patterns of escape and self-sabotage thrive. It helps us

meet pain without avoidance, pleasure without clinging, and impulses without automatically acting on them. By cultivating Healing Mindfulness, we create a crucial pause, a space between stimulus and response where choice becomes possible. This clear seeing is the primary tool for recognising the persuasive whispers of Māra – the voice of craving, aversion and confusion – before it can take hold of the raft's rudder.

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### **Self-reflections**

- ★ How often does the experience of being on ‘autopilot’ arise, compared with being consciously present?
  - ★ What happens when a craving is observed without an immediate action being taken?
  - ★ When physical or emotional discomfort arises, what is the typical response of the body-mind?
  - ★ What role does self-judgment play when trying to be mindful? Does it help or hinder?
  - ★ What conditions support the recognition of craving in its early stages, before it becomes overwhelming?
  - ★ Can a time be recalled when simply being aware of a situation, without trying to change it, brought a sense of calm or clarity?
  - ★ How might mindfulness support the other Defenders (Confidence, Effort, a Gathered Mind, Discernment) on the journey from suffering to freedom?
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### **Journaling prompts**

- ★ **Mindful moment:** Choose one routine daily activity (for example, drinking a morning beverage). Commit to doing it mindfully for a few days. Journal about what is noticed – sensations, thoughts, impulses – when focused awareness is brought to it.

- ★ **Observing an urge:** The next time a significant compulsion arises, try to pause and observe it mindfully for at least one minute before deciding how to respond. Afterwards, write about the physical sensations, thoughts, and intensity that were noticed. Did it change during the observation?
  - ★ **Noticing judgment:** Pay attention to moments of self-judgment. When the inner critic arises, simply note it – ‘judgment is present’ – without judging the judgment itself. Write about this experience – what is it like to observe the critic without engaging?
  - ★ **The observer:** Reflect on the idea of an ‘observing awareness’ that can notice thoughts, feelings, and sensations without being identical to them. Write about moments when this sense of being the observer has been experienced.
  - ★ **Tracking ‘Feeling Tone’:** For one day, notice when feelings are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Journal about how awareness of these tones influenced choices and reactions.
  - ★ **Mindlessness and habit:** Reflect on the relationship between mindlessness and compulsive behaviours. When is the mind most likely to be on ‘autopilot,’ and how does this state contribute to harmful patterns?
  - ★ **Mindfulness and the other Defenders:** Reflect on a situation where mindfulness worked together with confidence, effort, A Gathered Mind, or Discernment. How did this teamwork support freedom?
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## **Remember to remember**

Healing Mindfulness is the gatekeeper of freedom. It is the practice of remembering to return to the present moment, again and again, with kindness and clarity. As the vigilant watch on our raft, it stands guard, noticing the storms of craving and confusion as they gather on the horizon. This early awareness gives us time to prepare and respond wisely, rather than being capsized by their force.

Remember that mindfulness is not about eliminating thoughts or feelings; it is

about noticing them with a kind and steady attention, neither clinging nor rejecting. Each moment of awareness weakens old patterns and strengthens freedom. Together with the other Defenders, Healing Mindfulness ensures balance: Confidence provides trust, Courageous Effort fuels persistence, A Gathered Mind brings stability, and Discernment guides the course. Healing Mindfulness weaves them all together, allowing the voyage to be guided with clarity and care.

*“Mindfulness isn’t difficult; we just need to remember to do it.” ~ Sharon Salzberg*

*“Each act of mindful awareness is a small rebellion against the tyranny of habit.” ~ Stephen Batchelor*

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