



## 53 – The fourth 'Anchor of Mindfulness': remember to remember

### Checking the charts and steering the course

*“Reflect, Rāhula, on bodily, verbal, and mental action – before, during, and after acting... If it leads to affliction, do not do it. If it leads to no affliction, then do it.” ~ Gotama (The Buddha)*

*“Everyone has the ability to affect the three feet around them by behaving more ethically, honestly, and compassionately toward those they meet.” ~ Sharon Salzberg*

#### **The map room of the raft**

A map is useless if you don't have a sense of which direction is safe and which is dangerous. The Fourth Anchor of Mindfulness is the map room. In traditional teachings, this is known as Mindfulness of the Dharmas (qualities or principles).

In this chapter, the traditional translation of *dharmas* simply means the repeatable patterns and principles we can learn to recognise and work with. This aspect of mindfulness focuses on 'remembering to remember'. It is not about moral perfection or being good. It is about keeping in mind all that we have learned and seeing consequences early – so we don't create avoidable harm for ourselves or others. In this and forthcoming chapters we explore the Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness in an applied way: learning to recognise the key patterns that shape experience, and using that recognition to support wiser action in daily life.

#### **Reading the map: the key sections**

To navigate the Training stage, we consult five specific sections of the manual, some of which we have already explored, and others that we will explore in coming chapters.

- ★ **The Hazards** (The Five Hindrances): Sensual Desire, Ill Will, Tuning Out, Anxiety and Agitation, Immobilising Doubt (Chapters 37–42). These are the

rocks and whirlpools that pull us off course or even cause us to sink.

- ★ **The five Components of body-mind** (Chapter 54): This is how we understand what we're actually made of in lived experience – the moving parts of body-mind that create the sense of 'me' and 'my problem'.
- ★ **The six sense doors** (Chapter 55): These are the ports of entry where contact happens and reactivity begins – what we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think.
- ★ **The Seven Supports** (Chapters 43–50): These are the conditions that make the crossing possible – the inner weather we deliberately cultivate so the mind stays bright, calm, and steady.
- ★ **Gotama's Four Realisations** (Chapters 5, 25, 34, 51): This keeps True North in view: not winning at life, but reducing harm, loosening reactivity, and moving steadily toward freedom. This includes Gotama's Middle Way programme (Chapters 56-64)

The fourth aspect of mindfulness has two closely related tasks. One is recognising, in real time, what kind of pattern is present: is the mind caught in a Hazard, shaped by habit, stirred by contact, or supported by the awakening factors? The other is understanding conditions: seeing how these patterns arise, what keeps them going, and how they fade. It is both immediate recognition and deeper understanding. Sometimes we simply need to know, clearly and quickly, what is happening now. At other times we look more carefully at the structure of experience itself, how these currents form, how they change, and what strengthens or weakens them. In this chapter, we focus mainly on recognising these patterns as they arise; later chapters explore more fully how mindfulness functions within the training stage of our journey.

### **The map versus the territory**

As we learned in earlier chapters, looking at a map of the ocean is not the same as navigating it. The map is an aid, not the journey itself. But without a map, we drift – relying on habit, guesswork, and whatever mood is blowing through. Here, the map refers to dharmas: the principles and repeatable patterns that shape experience, and the practical guidance for working with them.

Why do we need this map? Because mindfulness starts out quite fragile. At first it functions as something we have to remember to do, and something that can slip away easily when we are tired, stressed, or triggered. In this Training stage, our aim is to strengthen mindfulness into a steadiness that holds even when

conditions are rough.

## **Ethical Mindfulness**

Remembering to remember is what allows mindfulness of these principles to become ethical in practice. In Gotama's teaching, mindfulness is never merely attention; it is shaped by ethics and directed toward less harm, more care, and greater freedom. Once we know where we are on the map, we still have to steer. Ethical mindfulness is not detached watching from the sidelines, but attentive participation in the choices we make. It asks us to stay close enough to experience to recognise where a thought, word, or action is likely to lead before it gathers momentum and carries us away.

Ethical mindfulness matters deeply in the wider training of a human life. In remembering to remember, we are not only trying to feel better in the moment; we are learning how to stop feeding the patterns that keep us stuck and how to strengthen the ones that lead toward steadiness and freedom. Ethical mindfulness helps us pause before the old story becomes action, before the impulse becomes speech, before the mood becomes a decision. It keeps bringing us back to the same gentle but demanding question: what will this choice set in motion?

In the map room, the mind is trained to recognise the patterns (Dharmas) that either support the voyage or threaten it. To navigate this stage, we consult five specific sections of the manual. By recognising the Hazards as they arise, understanding the Components of the experience, and guarding the Sense Doors, the mind can maintain the Supports that keep the raft steady. This constant reference to the map ensures the raft stays aligned with True North: the realisation that freedom is found in the choices made right now.

## **Self-reflections**

1. When I am upset, triggered, or pulled by habit, how quickly do I remember to remember?
2. What most often makes me forget – tiredness, stress, urgency, emotion, craving, or self-justifying stories?
3. What helps me come back to the map when I have started to drift?
4. In difficult moments, do I remember what I value before I speak or act — or only afterwards?

5. Does my life change when I remember that choices have consequences and leave a wake behind them?
6. What would it look like, in one concrete area of my life, to remember a little sooner and steer a little wiser?
7. How does steadying myself through Ethical Mindfulness also protect others from my reactivity?

### **Journaling prompts**

1. **A moment of forgetting:** Write about a recent moment when you completely forgot your practice and were swept into an old reaction. What pulled you away? At what point did you remember again?
2. **A moment of remembering:** Write about a recent time when you *did* remember in time. What helped you pause? What was different because you remembered before acting?
3. **What makes me forget?:** Reflect on the conditions under which remembering is hardest for you. Are there certain moods, settings, people, or inner stories that make you lose the map?
4. **What helps me remember?:** Make a list of the small things that help you come back: a breath, a phrase, a pause, a sensation in the body, stepping away, prayer, honesty, or asking for help. Which of these works best when the waters are rough?
5. **Before the old story becomes action:** Write about a recurring pattern in your life. What does it feel like in the few moments before it turns into speech, behaviour, or retreat? What might help you remember yourself at that exact threshold?
6. **The wake of remembering and forgetting:** Compare two recent moments – one in which you remembered your training, and one in which you forgot. What kind of wake did each leave behind in you and in others?
7. **Remembering tomorrow:** Write a short note to your future self for the next time you are triggered, lost, or reactive. What do you most need to remember at that moment? Keep it simple, kind, and clear.

### **Supporting material: scientific and philosophical perspectives**

For those interested in the scientific and philosophical underpinnings of *remembering to remember*, the following overview highlights some key connections.

★ **Neuroscience:** In the language of neuroscience, the Fourth Anchor of Mindfulness is not only about the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) staying “online,” but about strengthening a wider cognitive control system that supports inhibition, planning, goal maintenance, and flexible responding. The PFC remains central, and mindfulness research is often associated with stronger prefrontal engagement and reduced emotional reactivity, but current models describe executive control as distributed across interacting networks rather than housed in one single “executive suite.” A helpful distinction here is between proactive control and reactive control. Proactive control means keeping a wise intention active in advance; reactive control means retrieving it when the cue appears in the heat of the moment. This fits the Fourth Anchor beautifully: we prepare the mind beforehand, then practise recovering the map when the seas suddenly change. Through neuroplasticity, each repetition helps strengthen the brain’s capacity to interrupt reactive habits and support more deliberate, values-guided responding.

★ **Psychology:** Psychologically, the most precise term for *remembering to remember* is prospective memory: the ability to remember to carry out an intention at the right moment in the future. This is highly relevant to recovery and everyday life, because prospective memory is more likely to fail when our ongoing tasks are demanding, our stress is high, or our cognitive resources are stretched thin. In those moments, we may still “know” the map in theory, but fail to retrieve it in practice. This is where metacognition becomes crucial. Instead of being fused with the content of a craving, fear, or grievance, we begin to notice the process itself: *this is a pattern, this is a surge, this is a familiar chain beginning again*. That shift from fusion to observation creates the psychological pause in which wiser action becomes possible.

A second useful idea is implementation intentions: simple “if–then” plans that help bridge the gap between knowing and doing. A recent meta-analysis found that these plans are effective across cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes. In practical terms, they help the Navigator decide in advance what to do when certain inner weather appears: *If craving rises, then I pause; if anger surges, then I breathe before replying; if I feel lost, then I come back to the body*. Rather than relying on last-minute willpower, we train the mind to recognise the cue and remember the next wise step. This is why the Fourth Anchor is not just

insight into patterns, but a training in timely recollection.

★ **Philosophy:** Philosophically, the Fourth Anchor sits most naturally within virtue ethics, especially the idea of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Practical wisdom is not merely knowing rules; it is learning how to recognise what matters in this situation, what direction an action is taking, and what response is most likely to lead toward the good. That fits this chapter closely. The Fourth Anchor is not asking us to become detached judges of experience, nor moral perfectionists. It is asking us to see clearly enough to steer wisely. In this sense, ethical mindfulness is a form of practical wisdom in training: recalling what is true, what is wholesome, and what kind of action is likely to reduce harm and increase freedom.

This also challenges the modern idea that mindfulness is simply a value-neutral attentional tool. In the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness belongs within a wider ethical training. Contemporary teachers such as John Peacock have repeatedly explored mindfulness, ethics, and character formation together, rather than treating awareness as morally empty technique. From this angle, the Fourth Anchor is best understood not as passive observation but as ethically saturated awareness: the ongoing discipline of consulting the map, recognising consequences, and choosing the course that leads toward less harm, more care, and greater freedom.

### **Remember to remember**

The Fourth Anchor of Mindfulness is the practice of remembering to remember. It is where the Navigator enters the map room and brings the teachings back into the living moment. We do not simply notice what is happening; we remember what we have learned about how experience works. We remember the map: that moods change, urges crest and pass, habits have consequences, and small choices can either deepen suffering or loosen its grip. This is what allows mindfulness to become more than bare attention. It becomes an active, ethically imbued way of staying oriented. To navigate the Training stage, the mind must keep returning to True North – Gotama’s Four Realisations – and the wider Middle Way programme that steers us away from harm, compulsion, and confusion, and toward steadiness, care, and freedom. Without this living reference to the map, the raft easily drifts back into old habitual currents.

This is why ethical mindfulness matters. We are not watching life from a distance like spectators on the shore; we are in the raft, steering. Safe passage

requires us to recognise, in real time, what is trying to board the vessel through the six sense doors, what Hazards are rising, and what conditions are strengthening or weakening the mind. By understanding the Five Components of body–mind, we begin to see the moving parts of experience rather than collapsing into a fixed and personal “me”; by cultivating the Seven Supports, we create the bright and steady inner weather needed for the crossing. Each thought we feed, each word we speak, each action we take leaves a wake behind it – in the mind, in the body, in our relationships, and in the conditions that follow. So we pause and ask: What is happening here? What pattern is present? Where is this likely to lead? Remembering to remember does not mean we never drift. We will forget, react, and sometimes only realise afterwards that we have gone off course. But this too is part of the training. The practice is not perfection but returning. Each time we remember, reflect, repair, and begin again, mindfulness becomes less fragile and more trustworthy, until it grows into a steadiness we can rely on when the waters are rough.

*“We learn to apply and reapply, moment to moment, with an effort that is calm and caring.” ~ Christina Feldman*

*“Mindfulness is always ethically imbued; it is never a neutral process.” ~ John Peacock*

## **Sutta References**

### ★ **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10) – The Foundations of Mindfulness**

- Summary: Describes the Fourth Foundation (mindfulness of dharmas) as observing the mental qualities (hindrances, aggregates, sense bases, factors of awakening, Four Truths) as they arise and pass away.

### ★ **Ambalaṭṭhikā-Rāhulovāda Sutta (MN 61) – Advice to Rāhula at Ambalaṭṭhikā**

- Summary: The Buddha instructs his son Rāhula on the importance of constant reflection on one’s actions (body, speech, and mind) before, during, and after performing them. This is the core text for Ethical Mindfulness.

### ★ **Sedaka Sutta (SN 47.19) – The Acrobat**

- Summary: Using the simile of two acrobats, the Buddha teaches that by protecting oneself (through mindfulness), one protects others; and by protecting others (through patience and harmlessness), one

protects oneself.

★ **Nibbedhika Sutta (AN 6.63) – Penetrative**

- Summary: The Buddha states, “Intention, I tell you, is action.” This confirms that the training happens at the level of the mind’s intent, not just external movement.

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