

Dharmette: Learn from the Past to live better in the Future

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May 21, 2025

Keywords: mindfulness, present moment, meditation, Buddhist practice, attachment, letting go, reflection, compassion, peaceful life, learning from the past

This is to learn how to be centered in the present moment. And a lot about mindfulness practice is seeing how we're not. To see how the mind wanders into the future, the mind wanders into the past, and stays there, or maybe into fantasy, which is in maybe no time. And so there's a lot of emphasis on the importance. So just showing up and being here. And there's a number of reasons for this.

One is the more you can be here and lessen your thoughts about other times and other places, the more here can be a place to become calm, to become peaceful, to become centered, to become connected to yourself in a deeper way. That's nice. Thank you. Once you're more connected to yourself, once you're more peaceful and calm, then sometimes we have to introduce the past and the future again. It would be naive to think that you're never supposed to think about the past and the future. But first, it helps that one of the functions of meditation is to put us in the present enough that when we think about the past and the future, we can do it in a wiser way, in a clearer way.

I like to use the word in a deeper way than if we're just kind of spinning our thoughts and anxiety and fears and angers and not going anywhere useful with our thinking. So in some ways, meditation prepares us for living an ordinary life where past and future actually is relevant. One of the ways that this works in Buddhist practice is that we don't ignore the past, but we also don't get burdened by the past. We don't get stuck in the past. And so many people have regrets, have angers, have hurts, it keeps them stuck in the past, living with it, reviewing it over and over again. And that's not so useful.

Learning to let go of that, come into the present moment, let go of it, come back to the present moment, can soften those attachments to the past. But we still might need to think about the past. And so one of the ways we do it in Buddhism is we try to learn from the past. What did

I do that didn't work? What did I say that caused someone to feel hurt? You know, what happened to me that I... somehow, how could it be that I, you know, ran out of food at home?

What happened? That I didn't realize I should go shopping. Oh, I was preoccupied with doing crossword puzzles. I guess I was too attached on that. So, okay, so, and the reason to review the past is to do what in Buddhism is more important than the past, and that is to plan to live a better future. In a certain way, Buddhism is a forward-looking religion.

It's not only about being in the present. It's looking at the past, learning from the past, so we can live better in the future. Be committed to working better in the future. So... Maybe, you know, you were in a hurry to go somewhere, and, you know, you noticed that your neighbor was having some kind of trouble with taking out their trash. They're old and the trash looked heavy, but you're hurrying to go someplace. So you kind of like zip off to your important thing you're doing, whatever it is.

And then you come back later, you found that your neighbor's back went out. And it got even worse. They didn't even make it to the curb with the trash can. They had to sit down and they had to wait for other neighbors to come and help them back and make it back to their house. And she said, wait a minute. What happened there? I saw them struggling. I was. Let me learn from what happened here. That wasn't... Oh, I was caught up and going someplace. I was attached to getting someplace, thinking that it was really important.

And so I didn't stop to pay attention to the needs of my neighbor. How can I do better in the future? In the future, I think I'm going to always leave my home five minutes before I have to, just so that when I go, I'm available to stop and pay more careful attention to what I see along the way in case someone needs my help, or so that I can be there early enough so that I'm not out of breath, and then I miss whatever. So I'm just making this up now. But this is an example of learning from what happened that maybe it didn't go so well, but not to be burdened by that, not to kind of beat yourself up because of that, but actually do the opposite. Do focus on what you can do that inspires you, that it feels good for you, that you're happy that you want to be that way.

And so if you say, for example, I want to live better in the future whenever I go driving someplace, and I'm going to always start to leave home five minutes early so that I can be more available to what comes. Maybe it means I don't cut people off in traffic. Maybe it means I have more time to say, you go first, give the right away. Maybe it means that someone has, it takes a long time to cross the crosswalk. I'm not impatient and angry. How could people walk so slow? I have enough time. It's fine. I have that extra time. So I can just look at them and say, well, I wish them well.

I wanted them to know that they can take all the time in the world. I'll just sit back and just watch and not, you know, not growl at them. You know, that... So, you know, so... How do I live better in the future? How do I want to live better in the future? Is a very important Buddhist question. And how do you learn to live better in the future? You learn better in the future by being honest about how you didn't live so well in the past. Oh.

Many people get stuck in the past and keep, it's almost like they have a whip, they're whipping themselves over and over again. Look how bad I am, I did terrible things, and I'm a terrible person. That's making a bad situation worse. If there was a bad situation, in Buddhism we're always looking, how can I make it better? How can I do better in the future? In such a way that you're inspired by what you want to do. It makes you smile. Oh, yeah, that would be good. That'll be a better life to live. It doesn't have grand things that you have to save the world.

It could be something as simple as, I'm always going to leave five minutes early. Who knows? If I arrive five minutes early, maybe it's someone when I'm going that I can be friendly to. I can be a friend. I can say hello to them and see who's here and see if I can help something. Okay. But who knows what possibilities open if you give yourself a little extra time to be good in the world, to be in a nice way in the world.

So in Buddhism, with Buddhist practice, we try to learn how to be in the present so that being peaceful and calm in the present, we can then reflect wisely how we can learn from the past and do better in the future. And then we return to the present to live that way. And so there's a kind of a constant moving in and out of past and future in the present, supporting a good life, a compassionate life, a caring life, a peaceful life. It's not one way or the other. It's not like a good Buddhist is always in the present. But we're in the present to practice so we can then reflect on our life in a good way so we can live better in a better way.

And that would be nice to live in a way that's good for the world. It makes it a little bit easier for the people we see and meet. So those are my thoughts for today. And now we have this time for cleaning.