

Dharmette: Contexts for Mindfulness

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August 27, 2026

Keywords: meditation, mindfulness, awareness, context, posture, grief, anger, wise life, inner life

So, when I came into the meditation hall just now and saw you sitting so still and quiet, I appreciated very much the context that you were creating here. That if I came in here, into the quiet, into the stillness, into the sense of intentionality around practice that I felt here, it had an effect on me. There was good. That would be very different if this was Grand Central Station at commute times, and I had walked in here and people were walking and yelling and busy and in a hurry and, you know, just pushing each other aside. It's a very different context. There's a context here that we've created.

And so, there's a kind of—it's useful in our life to consider that there are maybe kind of two things. There's what's happening to you, what's going on for you, and the context in which it's happening. And is the context the one that's most supportive for you, most helpful for you? Are there other contexts that might be helpful? Some of you maybe find the context of meditating in a group like this very supportive.

And, you know, you could have gone to Costco this morning instead. You know, even better, IKEA. And they had chairs there. You probably could have sat in some of those chairs for a while and meditated, but the effect might be very different on you, where you are. So that context.

So that's an external context, but there's also an internal context. There's what's happening for you, and we say it. There's kind of an emphasis we have in this practice: to hold everything in awareness. Whatever is happening, not to fight it or change it, but practice with it, breathe with it, be with it. And what we're doing there is offering a particular context for it that's different than if you weren't practicing with that.

It might be you might be believing it, or you might be hating it, or reactive to it. You're offering a different context for what's here. And so, are there different contexts that you can

contribute? That's not—you're not trying to get rid of anything. You're not trying to condemn anything or trying to make something different happen. But what is the context you would like to make that is most supportive for you?

So, for example, the context of just sitting upright and still with the body, to be really still and quiet, heightens the awareness to certain things, thins them out, and highlights them. It also might mean that you become more aware of the impulses to try to change what's happening or make yourself more comfortable, and you can see it more clearly. And the question is, do you give in to it? What should you do?

So, one thing that people—some people will come here and they feel very sad, they're grieving, and they feel ready to cry. This is meant to be a safe place to cry. But the recommendation is: don't collapse, don't give into the despair, don't give into the sadness, but create a context for it that allows it to be held in a still body, in a quiet body, in an upright body, a body that has a dignified posture. You don't try to fix it, you don't try to condemn it, but it makes a difference the posture you have.

If you give into it and collapse into it, you're going to create a different context for it. Is that the context you want to provide? It's kind of maybe a giving-up context. And so now the giving-upness that lives in you is flowering. It has its heyday at that. It's there, and it's not innocent.

It now creates a different context and might make it feel it's even more difficult now to be with what's happening because you've given up in the middle of it. So something as simple as having a good posture and sitting still can make a world of difference. And some of you probably find this out: that if there's a difficulty, a challenging time in your life, or you're overexcited and it doesn't seem quite useful to be that way, well, can you change the context? Don't just keep doing what you're doing. Maybe change your context.

You know, if you're having computer problems, I have a friend who has computer problems right now, and, you know, he could throw the computer across the room and stomp on it. You know, that's one option that does a certain kind of effect. But what happens if you sit still, walk away from the computer, and hold the frustration in this quiet, mindful posture, or go for walking up in the park and not think about it? Well, something else happens then. And what might happen that's different?

So, part of a wise, mindful life is to understand the importance of context—the context you put yourself in, and the inner context you provide for it. And that's one of the things we're doing. Just simply being mindful of it is a hugely different context, because if you're mindful,

if your mindfulness is strong, you're interrupting some of the other contexts that maybe were deleterious. If you feel a lot of anger, you know, one common policy with anger is to get into it, believe it, and justify it, and let it kind of, like, just, you know, get yourself all ready for a fight, for a fight, and give people a piece of your mind because it's justified and it was unfair and you're going to really kind of—you can do that, but you're providing a context.

Is that the context you really want to provide for your heart, for your inner life? Is there another context for how to be with your anger? What would be the context you want to have? So this is a question that you can—that it's very useful to have as you go through your days, go through your life, go through your practice. Is, yes, this is something happening here. X is happening. Given that X is happening, what's the context that I'd like to create for this to be happening? Is there a different context than the one I have?

And maybe if it's a charged event with someone, maybe it's better to leave. The last time I left—a couple of times in my life, I've left a room because of it. Just, this is too difficult. And one of those times was parenting. Parenting sometimes, for young kids, was, I don't know, challenging.

And I remember once being just so angry with my son that I thought, okay, I have to leave. So I went to another room for a while and created a different context to be with this because I didn't think that the context I was in was good for me, good for maybe other people in the family too. So the idea of changing context: what's the context you want us to be in?

And so some of you, maybe that was very intentional, to come here today, to come to and put yourself in a context of people meditating together. Be in a situation where there's a level of calm and steadiness and peace that maybe is not so obvious at home or at work or in your societies that are going around, and you wanted to get it. You wanted to place yourself in this context so that maybe you can see yourself in a different way or hold yourself in a different way to allow something to unfold.

So, kind of what I'm—to summarize all this for you—is that I wanted to heighten for you the importance of context. It's one thing to be mindful of what's happening. It's another thing to make choices around the context for holding it. And some of that you can—you're allowed to choose wisely. You're allowed to be considered, consider it, and consider: should it be a different context?

And I need to have this conversation that's difficult with someone. Is this the time and place for it? Is this the context for it? Or are we better off having this conversation at a different time, in a different place? And yeah, let's have this difficult conversation, but let's do it in the

park. And maybe just doing it in that kind of setting creates more space, more situations for you. You feel better, more grounded, and more able to be part of it.

So, context is important, and part of a wise life is to consider what context you want to have for whatever is going on in a moment. And if it's in meditation itself, even there you can ask, you can think, you have some choice. What's the context for this now that would be useful, so I can hold it or be wise with it? Context. So those are my thoughts for today. So thank you, and Kevin.