

There are many instances where mindfulness is described and illustrated with an image rather than defined. Some of the images are elaborate, some almost casual. Their range is quite astounding. Here a few examples:

### **Simile**

A person stuck in a thicket of thorns, moving very carefully so that they don't hurt themselves.

A gatekeeper (1) awaiting two messengers from afar. When they arrive, unfamiliar with the city, the gatekeeper helps them to deliver their message swiftly to the mayor.

A gatekeeper (2) protecting the city and its people by welcoming acquaintances and warding off strangers.

Mindfulness as a strong post to which the six wild animals of the senses can be tied. After struggling initially, the animals become gentle and peaceful.

A person moving with a bowl full of oil on their head through a crowd, at the risk of losing their life at the first spilled drop. Would this person stop attending to the body and let their attention drift away to other things?

Mindfulness as the ploughman's goad and ploughshare. The goad encourages the ploughing animal to maintain a straight furrow and the plough, weighted by the foot of the plowman, ensures appropriate pressure so that the ploughshare travels just deep enough.

Mindfulness as the surgeon's probe – an instrument to aid the removal of a buried arrowhead. The surgeon can't see the shape, size, and depth of the arrowhead. However, gently inserting the probe into the wound he receives tactile feedback to facilitate the swift removal.

Minding the cows – (1) the cows are unruly in the last month of the rainy season. They want to run into the neighbor's ripe field. So the cowherd uses a stick, shouts, and waves her arms to keep the animals out: this is called "keeping in check."

(2) After the monsoon is over, the fields are harvested and the cows are placid on their meadow. The cowherd only raises her head occasionally to look across from her shaded tree to find her cows calm and with no intention to leave. This is called "establishing mindfulness."

A mother caring for her child. *The Metta Sutta* describes the practice of mindfulness as cultivating an attitude of

### **What is being conveyed**

An attitude of care, prudence, vigilance, circumspection.

Mindfulness as a gatekeeper in the service of economy and efficiency.

Mindfulness, guarding the heart, lets wholesome impulses enter and wards off unwholesome ones.

Mindfulness as discerning, inquiring, and protecting.

An image that speaks of the aspect of stability, firmness and a willingness to restrain and bear impatience.

An image of undivided body awareness and continued vigilant application.

The straight furrow: continued clarity of direction. Appropriate pressure: balanced effort.

Mindfulness as an attitude of investigation, examining, probing into – even though it may hurt.

If needed: "keeping in check" – vigorous, pragmatic intervention.

If not: mindfulness as spacious, calm and detached awareness. Preferable.

An attitude of radical benevolence, universal goodwill, and active interest in

affectionate friendliness and suggests cherishing all beings as a mother cherishes her only child.

A person's vantage point and view after climbing a tower.

A careful charioteer who has a good view of the road, people, and animals.

Mindfulness as that which keeps streams of water in check. Capable of temporarily constraining the flow, mindfulness aids the wisdom faculty that consequently succeeds in damming the stream.

(Many images describe mindfulness as supporting or giving rise to wisdom.)

An elephant, lacking dexterity in its neck, turns its entire body when looking, thereby giving full presence to its object of attention.

Just as salt brings out the taste of any food, mindfulness brings about the particularity of each kind of experience.

Mindfulness as the king's precious adviser in all things beneficial and unfavorable.

Mindfulness as a royal steward reminding the king of his wealth and power, his elephants, horses, gold, and property.

Mindfulness as not floating or slipping away, "unlike a gourd thrown into a stream."

Someone with little dust in their eyes.

Two acrobats working together: one climbing on top of a pole the other is holding. Both look out for themselves and the other at the same time.

others' wellbeing.

Mindfulness as spacious, detached, and panoramic perspective.

Mindfulness as a circumspect, detached and spacious awareness.

Mindfulness is not just observant. It's also a protective, restraining function of mind.

Mindfulness as giving full presence to whatever it attends to.

Mindfulness as versatile and reinforcing agent in the service of manifesting the inherent characteristic.

Mindfulness as capable of discerning, recollecting, and bringing back what may have been temporarily lost.

Mindfulness as recollection of what is good, worthy, and effective; of what is precious and enables wholesome action.

Mindfulness recalls the presence of wholesome resources.

The capacity to sustain presence, keep attentional focus, and not lose the object, event, or process. The direct opposite of forgetting and absentmindedness.

Mindfulness as seeing clearly and effortlessly, recognizing the evident.

Mindfulness practice is a way of protecting both oneself and others.

Mindfulness is at the hub of Buddhist ethics: acknowledging the intrinsic inter-relatedness of self-care and self-protection with the care and protection of others.