

In the Chan practice of mindfulness, **GUO GU** explains, four steps help us realize the three marks of existence and the four noble truths.

Exposing, Embracing, Responding & Letting Go

THE PALI WORD *sati*, which in modern times is rendered as “mindfulness,” actually means “recollection” or “bearing in mind.” What do you recollect? What do you bear in mind? You recollect the true nature of phenomena, which can be summed up as impermanence, suffering, and no-self. These are not concepts but methods of practice in daily life.

Impermanence means that in moment-to-moment experiences, there is nothing graspable as a fixed self or reified existence. For example, as soon as we feel “this is *my* body, *my* feeling, *my* thought, or whatever situation I find myself in,” we have already frozen the natural flow of conditions into a “story.” Suffering is maintained through stories we tell ourselves about how we or the world are fundamentally fixed. To be the changing flow of conditions without fixation is the truth of no-self.

In other words, impermanence is the key. If we resist it, then we swing to the side of suffering. If we don’t resist it, then we realize the wisdom of no-self. Practicing according to these three principles of buddhadharma is mindfulness.

In the Chan tradition, which became Zen in Japan, the practice of mindfulness can be approached in four ways: exposing, embracing, responding, and letting go.

Mindfulness means *exposing* all forms of reification or attachment to permanence—this is the way to end suffering.

Embracing means not rejecting vexations and life because they show us the causes of suffering as we turn them into the conditions of liberation.

Responding means uncontrived action, in which we work creatively with causes and conditions without attachment. This is the truth of cessation as wondrous function.

Letting go refers to no-attainment, the antidote to our incessant desires, which is the truth of the path.

These practices can be simple or profound, depending on the practitioner’s insight. They realize the three seals of buddhadharma and the four noble truths in either a gradual or sudden manner. This is the wisdom of mindfulness practice in Chan. ❶

GUO GU (Jimmy Yu) is Sheng Yen Associate Professor of Chinese Buddhism at Florida State University and founder of Tallahassee Chan Center.

