

At this time of year, the question, "What is the perfect present to give the ones we love?" is never far from our mind. In search of something for my mum, I hit the shops; the packed shelves heaved with gift sets; the jewellery stores with the promise of love delivered with a shiny stone and the colourful jumpers guaranteed to keep us warm and cosy. Christmas overloads our senses: Garlands and Christmas trees, chocolate and cheese, all (somehow) delivering a message that we need to do this or buy that in order to have what we desire and make the ones we love happy.

We all know in a deep place inside us that these 'things' do not give us happiness. It has been shown, and we can feel it if we listen to ourselves, that the anticipation of buying something or receiving something materialistic is far greater than the actual acquisition. Our mindfulness practice gives us this knowledge, but it is easily dulled by tinsel and cake!

There was a time that I would be in those shops with my mum and as I walk around those same places now I know the best present I could ever receive would be for her to be able to do that with me again. My mum has dementia and her health and memory have steadily deteriorated over the last year and it is so easy, and I am so aware, that my mind will drift to how I would like things to be rather than how they are. Sometimes, I liken the life I have now to feeling as though I am in a parallel universe. I am being coerced along this unknown, treacherous path and alongside me is another path that is soft and inviting and with the guaranteed destination of happiness. I am easily seduced as I have a powerful imagination!

My mindfulness practice has allowed me the possibility of acceptance and the deep pain I suffer as I watch my mother's health and memory deteriorate is lessened by compassion. So, at this time of year, when I search for the perfect present, I know that, really, it is already with me. Happiness is not just laughter and our memory does not necessarily make us who we are. Love is not something that can be bought but it must be noticed. Being Mindful has allowed me the possibility of sitting with emotions both painful and joyful, both pleasant and unpleasant (and rarely neutral). Knowing there is a possibility of befriending these feelings and welcoming these emotions has allowed me to cultivate compassion in a way that has evolved alongside the changing relationship with my mum.

Christmas is a season where we like to give presents as well as receive them, but sometimes we can glimpse this time as just being another moment when we can practice compassion. Why is this time any different from any other time? The truth is it isn't. Living with Mindfulness allows us the possibility of being with heartfelt gratitude and compassion for what ever arises and whatever happens and as I search for the perfect present to give to my mum, I know the perfect present is time and it is already here. Time, and another moment to spend with my mum, to just sit and listen to her and be with her because I know that this time, right now is the best gift of all.