

Right Mindfulness

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That's loud enough. Not loud enough. A little bit louder. A little louder still. Is that good? Great. Ok, so welcome. So it seems like a long time ago now, but in the fall I started a series on the eightfold path, and giving one talk for each of the eightfold eight factors of the path.

And so every Monday, almost every Monday that I've been here, I've given a talk on going through them. And now we're up to the seventh factor, which is right mindfulness. So that's what I'd like to talk about today. So the context for this teaching on right mindfulness is the path of practice. The Eightfold Path and the image of a path suggest something you walk, so you bring all of yourself to it. And so the Eightfold Path is meant to bring all of yourself to it: your understanding, your orientation, your intentions, motivation, your behavior, how you relate to other people, and how you relate to your own mind, how you cultivate and develop your mind, not for its own sake, but rather to get somewhere, because a path goes from place to place.

But it's not a real path, and so not like you can come to I am C and find the Eightfold Path there. We don't have it here. It doesn't exist. I am C a. The path exists in you if you walk it. And so if it's a path to get somewhere, Oh, you know, where does it get you?

So generally when we think of going some place on a path, we think of going from a to b. And I prefer to think of the path of practice because it's not a real path. But rather a path in your heart or within you as a going from a to a. And why I like a to a is that it's not a matter of getting something or attaining something, or it's not. Now's kind of dangerous. It'll be a dangerous idea of a goal out there that you're can attain in the future. But to really inhabit here. To really show up here is quite an unusual thing, because most people don't really live very present in their lives.

And so it's a path to really be here, but be here in a way that's free and liberated. Some people might think that the path of being here is rather limited, because here is a limited world. You know, it's let with yourself. And it might seem a bit limiting to kind of really come here and be present in this life, in this body, here in clear away. And they'd rather be free, running around doing what they want. And if we look at what it means to be free, we need to look at what motivates the behaviour that's free behavior.

And So, for example, if what motivates you is desire and greed to get things, have experience, is acquire things, then freedom would be unfettered opportunities to get what you want. And some people like you have wonder lust. Feel most free when they're off wandering around the world, travelling, which is a beautiful thing to do. I don't want to knock it, but If the motivation for it is strong desire and that's what's driving it, then you can't sit still because a desire so compelling. The person's not really free. They're under the control of the desire, and the freedom is only the freedom to live. The desire is not real. It is freedom from desire. It's freedom to be propelled by desire and be unfettered in desire.

The same thing with fear. Some people are very motivated by fear. Fear is a big part of their life, anxiety, worry. And sometimes they can run in circles, or run around agitated, or run this way and that way, trying to fix things and take care of things. And as long as they're busy doing all the stuff and unfettered in their fear, then they can manage with it. But if they stop all the doing it, just sit with themselves, they find out that the fear is quite a strong, compelling force, and it's very hard and difficult, and they'd rather be free to run around like it, you know, in an agitated, restless way.

So freedom in Buddhism is not the freedom to do whatever you want freedom to shop, freedom to whatever. But rather, it's freedom from compulsion, freedom from restrict the inner restrictions, freedom from the forces within us that push us and drive us and require us to pursue our desires, our animosities, our hates, our angers that pursue, that somehow have us caught up in the whirlwind or the panic or the whirlpools of fear that can come along. So in Buddhist practice, from to is to really show up and be here, to dive into here, to enter into this world in a way that initially can seem quite limiting, because to be really here it doesn't seem as wonderful as being everywhere else. I've sometimes had the particular delusion and desire that is connected to the grass is greener somewhere else. So whatever I'm doing, it's not good enough, like somebody else has better things, you know? Or, you know, if neighbors are having friends over and they're laughing, and my friends are in my house with those friends are better friends over there, you? I'm wondering what's going on over here? What am I missing? And not really here for these friends.

So a soothe practice knows to is to really dive in here in such a way that we can work through the compulsions, the drivenness, the fears, the desires, so that we're not always on the move and have our freedom that way. But to have the freedom here, because we're not driven anyway. We're not afraid. We're not escaping from something. Some people find it seemingly very limiting to do that. But to enter into this world here opens up to something quite expansive. So this is what I like to try to describe today through the path of mindfulness.

So right mindfulness is the kind of mindfulness practice that helps us in this task of becoming free, of freeing ourselves from desire, from fear, from hate, from all these things that keep us ongoing and churning and rising and constricted. So in talking about right mindfulness, the Buddha defined it not by a singular term like a particular mental faculty to pay attention, for example, but he described it as being a set of different practices that you somehow work together in a coordinated way. And so the first thing about the set of coordinated practices is he talked about what's called the four foundations of mindfulness, and were the four places, four ways of establishing mindfulness. And so here the instructions are that it's useful to pay attention to four particular domains of four particular areas of our experience here at this time and place. Sometimes when mindfulness practice is given, it seems like where the goal is just to be in the present moment and be open awareness to whatever is happening now. That's a wonderful goal in and of itself.

But sometimes paying attention to everything leaves us paying attention to what isn't very productive. So, you know, I can, a lot of people in America can have one pointed attention on their television, but I don't think a lot of people have become liberated by watching television. I don't think that's been that effective, though you may be. I hope someone is. But then, or you know, you could pay attention to anything. So, well, let's pay attention to what my toe nail on our little toe. I don't know how many people have gotten enlightened by paying attention to or bringing careful attention there. I'm trying to say is that what the Buddha directed attention to four particular areas that he found to be particularly useful for the purpose of becoming free.

And these four areas are the first one he called the body. The second is something that he called feeling or feeling tone. The third is a mind or the mind states. And the fourth is I'd like to translate the word Dharma here as truths, the four truths, but different ways. It's probably best not to translate at all. but four dhammas. Or for the area, then well get to that, to four areas: body, feelings, mind, and the truth. And it starts with so its useful to pay attention to these areas of our life.

So it starts with the body. It's useful to pay attention to our body. The body is an amazing

place because it's the it's what houses or contains both our suffering and our happiness. It's where we find on both the ways we're constricted, limited, and the ways that we become free. So in fact, it's kind of like the same location for both, depending on what's happening in those locations. If I pay attention to my fist, my hand, and I make a fist, I can feel the limitation of my fist, my hand, being all bunched up and tight. If I release it, the same place, the hand now, I feel a certain kind of vitality and flowing energy and warmth and freedom and usefulness of an open hand. It's the same location.

If what I want, I want to have, is a free hand, I bring my attention to my hand and feel the restriction of the fist and release it. So the same thing on earth is this physical body of ours. Much of the ways in which we are caught, attached, limited, constricted occurs the physical basis of physical areas. This is the place as a location where the work is this container. Everything's within this phantom long body, the work that we're going to do. And the beginning of practice is to plunge into here, the of this body, this time, at this place, and here, to do that. For some people, it's quite difficult, because sometimes they've never done that in their life. And the momentum of their desires, their fears, the wandering mind, their preoccupations, the doing activities that they have are so strong that it feels like they're going to die.

Sometimes to sit there and be present for your body because they're not giving in to the usual activities that they want to do, it feels very limiting. Some people who have, you know, they are used to wandering around a lot, doing a lot and find their joy and their happiness from doing many things and going around in the world a lot, will find it kind of restrictive to sit here and be still and just be quiet and focus on your own body. But if you learn the art of it is like going into a you come out in a much more expansive. That's quite a beautiful process. So to begin by focusing what's going on here. And so he's a series of instructions for how to pay attention to the body. It usually begins with paying attention to your breathing, because for many people, mindfulness of breathing at once on the breath is a way of helping to train the mind to settle the mind, to stabilize the mind, the attention, so it can really be here in a high quality way.

So you begin paying attention more carefully to what is actually here. As people begin paying attention to here, to this body here, the body can provide lots of information. The body is a repository of a tremendous amount of information that's going on for us, our reactions, our responses, our feelings, our thoughts. And so much so that sometimes when people have come to me and ask me, It's not uncommon for people to ask me to recommend a book to read on Buddhism, and generally I don't like to answer the question. Causing Now, it's like matchmaking. How do you know? I don't know what book is a good match. So I'd usually say,

I don't know. But sometimes, you know, if you start the right person and I think I'm not at the risk of irritating them, I look at them and I say, Oh, the book you should read is right there, and I point right at them in the regular heart. That's the book you should read, because I generally genuinely believe that the what you really need to study is not what's in some book, but you really need to study what's in your psychophysical being, starting with your body.

The body is a door into the depths of who we are. So to train ourselves to learn how to stop and pay attention in some high quality way is a really important part of this mindfulness training. So then the second foundation of mindfulness is mindfulness of something called feeling or feeling tone. And this is something very simple. This is the idea that every experience that we have has one of three flavors. It's either pleasant or it's unpleasant, or it's neither pleasant or unpleasant. So, you know, if someone gently strokes your arm, maybe it's pleasant, but if they pinch you, it's unpleasant. Maybe if they kind of brush against you casually in the store, it's neither pleasant nor unpleasant, because it's not neither a massage nor is it a pinch, just a little mistake they brushed against you.

So everything is supposed to fit into those three categories. And it's kind of interesting or very interesting for some people to start, as you start being present in your body, for your experience, to notice that the experience that you have has these three flavors, because it's often why it's the nature of the flavor that we have, that we react and respond to. So if the flavor is pleasant, some people are driven to want more, to get attached. If it's unpleasant, some people will either push it away or pull away. If it's neither pleasant or unpleasant, some people just go to space out or something. So it's so to get a handle about how we tend to react to our experience. It can be helpful to tune in or bring into focus how are experiences unpleasant and unpleasant? Part of the power of this simplicity is that it cuts through the amazing brilliance of your mind to make things more complicated they need to be.

So I can be sitting here, and you know, I can be sitting here, and feel a little bit of some kind of unease in my what in my ankle. And then I can start thinking about, you know, what I did to day, and maybe I walk too much to day, and probably shall get more shoes. And it's hard to get shoes for my size, and why don't I make shoes my size? And I need to write to someone to fix this problem. And so, you know, I can go on and on with that. Or I can just bring my attention to the unpleasant feeling in my ankle, and feel carefully what's there, and feel that probably what I need to do is give my ankle a message. Or maybe just kind of not sitting half lotus when I've tired my ankle and you can tune into the simplicity of it and get a different kind of information than if I tune into the complexity of it. But this simple reaction being for and against is there. So I hope that was clear enough. Take your with me, because it gets

more interesting if you follow this simple thing in the discussion, so that he has to drop in to show up here for the direct experience of your life through your body.

So you have to really be here. When you can be here in your body for your experience, then you start noticing something about your experience. And the first thing the Buddha says directs your attention to is to notice a flavor pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. And then he divides up these three categories of feelings into these two kinds of feelings, into two categories, two domains. There's those feelings that belong to the world of our five senses, and it's those feelings that belong to an inner world not connected to the five senses. So if I get that message, that's a sense sensory pleasure, because it's my senses are being stimulated in a nice way. If I get pinched, that's a sensory experience because my senses, my senses, my skin I touch, my nerves are being stimulated. It's the same thing with smell or taste or things you see or hear. You can have pleasant or unpleasant things there, but there's also what we feel inside.

So if, for example, you feel peaceful, where do you feel that peacefulness? It's kind of make me feel in your heart. You feel in your chest. You feel a kind of inner radiance, perhaps, or stillness inside that you feel. If you feel a regret, say that you offended your best friend today by, say, doing something. It may be was not so nice to do. Then you may be you feel a kind of regret. You feel heavy and weighed down. Where's that feeling of being heavy and weighed down? It's somehow inside, and so it doesn't belong to the sensory world sense of the five senses. It belongs to some inner world that is not of the senses.

So the Buddha says it makes a distinction between this inner world and an outer world. And in both those worlds, you can turn into whether the experience is pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. So this is very interesting, because now we're beginning to be here, and this experience right here, and we're beginning now to distinguish between two different aspects of here. an inner world and an outer world. And as we begin moving into the inner world, that's where we discover the world of freedom. Because our freedom is not found by getting a better massage. That's not the point. Having more pleasant experiences in our life, if you are only free when things are pleasant, you are not really free. The idea that freedom is much deeper than that. That allows you to be free in any circumstances at all in such a way that your happiness, your peace, your well being is not conditioned by the censure world around you, with the conditions of the world around you. But there's something you have within.

So in the Second Foundations of Mindfulness, the instructions are to begin also becoming aware of this inner world and this very simple thing. Is it pleasant or unpleasant? How is it for you right now? Then we come to the third foundation of mindfulness, which is the word

is mindfulness of *citta*. And *citta* means usually translate it as mind. I think it might be better to translate it as a mind state and so the mind or the heart state. So as we become aware of this inner world, there is the general quality or state of this inner life that we have. It's not just pleasant or unpleasant, but it has different other characteristics as well.

So for example, and what the Buddha talks about is that if the if you're gripped by greed, then the inner state is characterized by greed. If you're a a If there is no greed there, then it's not characterized by greed. If it's gripped by hate, then its inner state is characterized by hate. In like a mood, you can feel this mood within you. So it's our becoming aware of the inner mood. It becomes part of the task of mindfulness, because as we become aware of the inner mood, the inner quality, I like to say, the quality of our inner life, then we start becoming the custodian of that quality. We begin realizing that probably the most valuable thing you have is the quality of your heart. Some of the most beautiful and profound and meaningful things that people have in their lives are not the things of their life, but rather the quality, the character, feelings that can be said of the heart love, peace, compassion, freedom that is felt from the inside.

You know, I consider to be the qualities of the inner life qualities of mind, qualities of heart. Some people, I will say no it's a he notes. My family that's important, or my friends are important. Yes, but probably the reason they're important is because of the way that you connect them through your heart, through the quality of heart. That's a high quality. If you go around being greedy and hateful and spiteful at home with your family or your friends, your friends still might be important, but you're probably not getting a very high quality connection to them. So when the Buddha talks of this third foundation of mindfulness, he talks of the mind state or the inner state. The quality of it, it's possible now to turn into that quality of our mood or inner life is variable, and you can feel it being a different ways at different times.

One of things you can feel is that sometimes it's contracted and sometimes it's expansive. So that the texts talk about an expansive or contracted mind, and probably that's something some of you have experienced from time to time, that sometimes your mind, your heart, your mood gets all contracted. You're caught up in some concern, and other times you feel quite relaxed and open and feel quite expansive. And if you have a nice snap, you've eaten a nice meal and things are going basically well for you. How you can go out on a beautiful sunny day and look at the mountains and feel quite expansive another day? You got the letter from the IRS saying that you haven't you know, I used a problem with your taxes, and you go out of your house, and you don't notice anything, but you know you just like, caught up in your

world. You know taxes, and you know, What am I owe now? And so you feel much more contracted or limited because of the concern you have. Oh, so you can feel Sometimes the consciousness, the inner life, sometimes darkens, gets small, gets heavy, gets weighed down, gets troubled. And sometimes it feels the opposite: feels expansive. It feels light. It feels transparent. It feels translucent. It feels expansive in some way.

So the instructions is to start noticing the shifting quality and characteristic of the mind state. The Buddha, in this instruction, doesn't say you should be one way or the other. He just says, In this instruction, just notice the shifting quality of how it changes through the day and over time. I become familiar with it. But he's talking to people who are meditating, and so part of the instruction is also to become aware of these things in meditation where you tend to have a much wider range. If you meditate well, expedient feelings of expansiveness, openness, a stability, a steadiness, and a sense of freedom. I'm sorry about that. Especially those give you the So all this is built, all this is its a kind of information gathering part of the practice. So we learn to arrive in the present moment, to be here at in some high quality way, and a means to really dive into yourself, into your body, your experience of breathing, experience of your body, the feeling tone, what it feels like. And as you cant go into this deeper and deeper, you start noticing, even without trying, start noticing that there's a mind state, there's a mood, there's a heart in there that has a certain quality, a characteristic. And that quality can be a high quality or can be a low quality, depending on what's going on in your life. Thats just information. Just notice these things.

Then we get to the fourth foundation of mindfulness, the fourth area of mindfulness training. And this is to begin to notice what's true about how we get? What effects the quality of a heart? What affects the heart, whether its enslaved, caught up, trapped, restricted, attached, clinging, or whether the heart is liberated or free? And its the truths about those things which keep the heart unliberated, keep it caught, and those things that keep the heart free. Those are the truths. We begin to notice noticing. It's the patterns, it's the causal connections, it's the cause and effect relationships that have a bearing on the quality of the heart. And the task here is now not just to gather information, but actually to begin to understand how this works, how attachment gives rise to feeling suffering, how the release of attachment gives rise to feeling of freedom and liberation and peace.

So the first task here is something called the five hindrances. So I'm not going to tell you the whole five because it's enough lists for one night, but these are the five different areas where we tend to. Five areas that we tend to lose our mindfulness, lose our attention, lose our wisdom, because were so caught up in desires and aversions. And so whenever you get

caught up in really strong desires, you hardly even know that you have a desire. Just want something. Then you know you're lost in this hindering quality of mind. It hinders our ability to have a heightened sense of attention, and also it creates suffering. So the task here is begin to notice: How is it that you get caught up in something like desire? And how do you free yourself from the desire? What's the path? What's going on here? What are the feelings, the emotions, the beliefs? What's coming into play that gets you so wrapped up around desire? And once you are wrapped up around desire, so how do you free yourself from it? How do you let go of it?

So this is the task as you see this, because as we begin bringing this kind of understanding, then we get a certain degree of mastery. We're not the victim of desire. We're not needing to just be able to. If we're suffering, weren't just suffering better. You know, sometimes the way mindfulness teachings is taught, it would seem that the instructions are: Be really mindful of your suffering, seemingly so you can just suffer better. But the task of being mindful of your suffering is not just to be mindful of suffering so you can suffer better, but rather to understand it in some deep way, so not only can you free yourself from the particular suffering of the day, but you understand the patterns, the causal conditions that bring about suffering, so you don't have to suffer so much in the future. So this is the task of the fourth foundation of mindfulness. And you have a much better place to study this, to pay attention to this, if you're really in a we, really here in a high quality way.

So we enter into the body breathing and body. As we begin to stabilize the attention here in this body and breath, then we start noticing some of the feelings and qualities of what goes on, and that helps us to separate out the inner life and the outer life. Something that's not often recognized so well in life as we begin sensing the inner life, which is where suffering and happiness and freedom resides or can be felt. Then we start noticing how it shifts and changes the quality of this inner life. And that gives us a possibility or vantage point to understand something about the causes and conditions for the shifting nature of our inner life, so that we can start on choosing, or have some mastery over what we do in relationship to it. So we're not the victims of our mood. We are not kind of just by accident and by circumstances that we feel free or happy or peaceful, but that we have some mastery, or we have some choice, or we have some ability to negotiate this life of ours. so that we can safeguard the high quality of inner life.

When we do this, and we have this higher quality of inner life, then the world feels quite expansive. And this is where mindfulness or attention or awareness has this really wonderful qualities that are probably hard to or difficult to characterize in some essentialist way or ab-

solute way. This is how it is. But people talk sometimes about today's meeting with people who talked about, Every experience, in the heart of every experience you have, is a taste of the infinite. A beautiful expression. I thought it was kind of nice. And so a taste of the infinite, what a great thing. So I'm just content with peace, OBU yet, or they feel one of the beautiful things is, as awareness becomes quite expansive, a lot of peace, the sense of self, of self referencing that we often live our life by, falls away. And its quite a relief, and quite beautiful, to have a certain kind of a transparent or ra m. You know, the classic Buddhist in that word is empty experience of self, to feel as the self referencing, self consciousness, is dropped away entirely.

So this peace and this freedom, theres a kind of lack of self referencing or lack of self consciousness, which is a feel so much better than how most forms of self referencing worked in our minds. And so in the Buddhists talk, about not self is part of that experience. And that, you know, then if you try to philosophise about that, it gets complicated very quickly. But if it's mostly a matter of relaxing and opening up and having consciousness become expansive, so expansive and so relaxed that there's no self referencing, that's fun, much more fun than philosophy. Then, so in this process, then, of the truth. The fourth foundation, the last of the of the things that you the Buddha emits, emphasize, that you want to understand, is the of whats called the four noble truths. And let us really see how the four noble truths work in the details of your own heart. So the four noble truths are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the end of suffering, which is the eightfold path.

So now we've got to come in a full circle, because the eightfold path begins with appreciating the four noble truths. But as a person goes along in the path of practice and goes deeper and deeper into this path at some point. But especially with mindfulness being strong, its possible to see and experience the Four Noble Truths in a much more intimate and visceral way, where it becomes obvious and direct that the Four Noble Truths are operating in our lives. And at that point, and when you can really see it for ourselves and have some tremendous confidence in the value of orienting our life around the Four Noble Truths, a person is said to become independent in the Dharma. Isn't that a great term? Independent in the Dhamma, so meaning that you understand the practice, you understand the Dharma for yourself, and you no longer rely on a teacher, because now you know something for yourself. And that's part of the goal of this eightfold path. It is to go from A to B in such a way that you can really be. You can be independent. You can be the teacher here.

And in case there's a danger of having too much conceit around being, you know, indepen-

dent, the Dharma. You can't be independent, the Dhamma. Well, there's a lot of self referencing going on that nice, so we can't take much credit for it. So the eightfold path there is right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, the right effort, and then to day right mindfulness. All these things work together, that they support each other, they coordinated together. And in right mindfulness is a really important stepping stone for this deep inner work that we're doing in this practice. And then the next time I'm here, I shall get it probably next, maybe next Monday. I'm not sure. But next time I'm here, the final step of the eightfold path, which is right concentration. It's the coupling of mindfulness with concentration in such a way that mindfulness can do its most penetrating work.

So we have about five minutes. If any of you have any questions or comments you'd like to make about this, you're welcome to. Something wasn't so clear. I just have a kind of humorous comment. So last night I watched Men in Black Three with my husband, and there was so much awareness of agitation in my mind, and body. As I'm watching the monsters flying and all the daggers going, I had to get up and leave. It was just it. It's ruined me. I can't want to move the movies that my husband enjoys any more. I hardly watch any movies at all. But anyway, I gave it a try last night and it was a horrible failure. And so the practice has ruined you? No, yes. We are in that. In as far as movie watching, yes. Alice, please express my apologies to your husband. I know coming here has somehow, you know, made your home life a little more awkward. I can't share this with him. But you'll get better as you become free. Or you'll be able to watch and not get agitated. Again, I was waiting for that to happen, but I was so aware of the bodily manifestations and the agitation of my mind and body. It was not pleasant yet, but might take a few years. Keep, keep, keep going with the practice. Eventually you can be there with your husband watching black, but men plan another in Blackie. I don't know this. So, okay, maybe it's not yet.

May I ask you to list the five hindrances? A list the five hindrances is at the hindrance of people who do our practice here, the mindfulness practice. It's really good to become experts on the five hindrances. It's like one of the important tasks of our practice is to really understand them, so you can smell them coming. So the usual list. There's actually two versions of the list, but the usual list is a desire, ill will in English Buddhist English. The next one is called sloth and torpor, and then the next one usually is restlessness and regret, and the last one is doubt. So these are I think I call them sometimes the black holes of the mind, because when they become strong black holes, you know, light goes in but can't come out. Awareness goes in. It doesn't come out. You know, you get caught up in one of these things.

Is that your issue? Is it in the issue at hand book? I don't think I have anything there but

the five hindrances. But on our web site, there's an article page. I have a lot of articles I've written that are not in the book, and there's a host. There's six articles on the five hindrances, a general overview of them, and then an article for each one, so you can read about it there. Okay, so what I like to say as we close is that if this kind of talk tonight seems complicated with all these things, you know, four things now: the five hindrances and the four noble truths. I'd like to encourage you to remember that the practice is meant to be simple, and a lot of these things open up and reveal themselves in due time by themselves. You don't have to go looking for them. And so maybe the most important thing I would like to leave with is a hugely big part of the practice is to go, as the path is, to go from A to B. So to really be here, and to learn how to be here for your experience right here, and then the rest of it. I hope they will open up for you. So may you be your quote, may you thrive, and your particular version of a.