

Eightfold Path - Right Mindfulness (1 of 6)

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

awareness, aware, greed, freedom, aversion, conceit, consciousness, lucid, lotus blossoms, hatred, *Sati*, *patisati*

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Good morning. We are continuing the series of talks on the eightfold path. Today we come to the seventh factor of the path, right mindfulness. All these factors are a direct expression, manifestation, or orientation of the first factor, right view.

For someone who hasn't had a taste of inner freedom, right mindfulness would be based on the notion, or the idea of being mindful in a wholesome or skillful way. It is to avoid being mindful in an unskillful, or unwholesome way. We try to avoid having mindfulness that is mixed up with greed for spiritual experiences, and ambition to become the next great human savior through meditation.

It is not to be free of aversion and hostility towards anything. It is not like we must get rid of something that is a bad part of us. It is not like we must overcome and push it away. Rather, it is a form of awareness that is simple, without a lot of desires mixed in. It is without any ill will or causing anyone harm. Hopefully, it is without any conceit.

Where do we find this? Someone who has had a taste of freedom knows a little bit about what it is to be free of aversion, greed, and conceit. They have had a taste of this. It is that taste that helps us find what mindfulness is. It is possible to be aware of experiences in a simple, friendly, open, nonaggressive way. Then we try to build and expand that awareness, so it becomes bigger and stronger.

In *The Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, the Buddha teaches that the momentum of mindfulness as it builds and expands becomes more inclusive. The word for mindfulness in the Buddhist language is *sati* – *s, a, t, i*. It develops to become something called *patisati* – *p, a, t, i, s, a, t, i*. Bhikkhu Bodhi sometimes translates *patisati* as lucid awareness. I also like to use this translation.

It is lucid in the sense that we know we are aware. The awareness, or the consciousness is strong enough that we are not blinded or lost in what we are aware of. Of course, we must be aware of something. There are two things. There is the thing that we are aware of and the awareness.

If we are aware of something dangerous, then we will be more involved in focusing on the danger than the fact that we are aware. There are many times when we are lost in what we are aware of – lost in thought, for example. It is almost like we are not aware anymore. There is awareness, but it has all been sucked into the world of thinking.

Mindfulness practice is about reclaiming that awareness, so it is not lost to us. When we are thinking, for example, we know we are thinking. When we are looking at a sunset, the sunset is beautiful and we appreciate it, but we also know we are aware.

When we are breathing, we are aware of breathing. There is a way that it is so obvious that we know we are breathing. It can be so obvious that we are aware of breathing that we don't consciously think, "Oh, now I'm aware." It is so clear that when someone asks you afterward, we say, "Yes, I was clearly aware." It's almost like the act of being aware, the phenomenon of being aware is as clear as what we are aware of.

These two things are said to arise together. We can't have one without the other. Lucid awareness means experiencing an awareness where we know we are aware. Awareness is almost like a thing in itself. It is something we can know in and of itself. Then we rest in that awareness, we are with it.

The momentum of freedom, mindfulness that has a taste or hint of freedom, occurs when we expand that freedom into awareness. Awareness is less constrained or defined by our greed, hatred, and delusion. It is less limited or hijacked by our conceit, ambition, despair, sadness, or anger. There is this amazing capacity for awareness to grow, expand, and change our lives radically without changing anything.

Say that I am really greedy for something. I am lost in that greed. I am planning to get it. I want to get it. Then I practice mindfulness. I became aware, "Oh, I'm greedy. Wow, I didn't know I was so greedy. This is what greed is like." Then I feel the effect greed has on my body. I am all tense and tight. It is like I have a foot in front of my body ready to go to the store to get this thing I so much want.

Slowly mindfulness becomes stronger and stronger. At some point, we can feel there is freedom here with mindfulness. Yes, we can have greed, but there is freedom in relationship to it. It just becomes an object of awareness. We don't use it to define ourselves. We don't use it as an object of aversion or hostility. Over time, that awareness keeps growing and growing. It is such a beautiful thing. This field of awareness is a profound, peaceful, inspiring place to be.

Maybe the greed hasn't gone away. It is still here, but now we feel the peace. This is the amazing thing about this practice. We don't necessarily have to get rid of anything or change anything to find peace, happiness, and well-being. We discover with awareness, we become free of these mind-states.

One of the wonderful metaphors for this in the Buddhist tradition is the lotus that grows out of muddy water. It arises from the mud. The lotus blossoms are completely clean, pure, and shiny. They are untouched by the mud. They flower above the mud. In the same way, as awareness gets stronger, it is no longer touched by the greed we have. The awareness is just there. It's like the lotus has blossomed.

There can be difficult states of mind – hatred, despair, sadness, or depression. Fear can be very difficult. But as mindfulness becomes stronger, these states don't have to go away. We don't have to fix or solve them. We are not defined by them. They are just here, and awareness is here. In a sense, awareness is so much bigger.

The mind becomes so much more than the particular state that we have. The mind is not defined by those states. We might be preoccupied with greed, hatred, depression, sadness, or even good states of mind. We might be preoccupied with enthusiasm or excited joy. It is like the mind becomes organized or defined around these states. As mindfulness becomes freer and more open, different states can just be there. Something wonderful is here. We are conscious; we are aware.

There are two forms of mindfulness. There is mindfulness that we engage with and learn to practice with in a wholesome way. It is a wonderful thing to do. It is a wonderful practice and engagement. And there is mindfulness that is part and parcel of our initial tastes and experiences of freedom. Both are moving towards becoming more and more lucid in awareness, and more and more present in consciousness. We are moving toward this amazing capacity to be conscious.

There is a saying, or a little cliché in the Vipassana world. *The practice of mindfulness is not to see something new, but to see in a new way.* It is not to see, or look for something new, but to see what is here in a new way – with clarity, and clear recognition.

I will continue to talk about mindfulness in these 7 am sittings for the next few days. Tomorrow I will talk about the different characteristics or forms of attention that come into play as we do mindfulness practice. Then we will go on with different aspects of this important practice next week.

Thank you for being here. I hope that for today or the next 24 hours, you get curious about consciousness being aware. Be curious about how awareness can operate effortlessly. If you start discovering the effortless operation of awareness, maybe you will begin to get a glimmer of the freedom there as well. You might experience freedom from effort, freedom from self, and freedom from trying. It is an amazing thing to be aware.

May your awareness bring you much freedom, delight, and maybe even a sense of awe, and wonder – the wonder of being conscious. Thank you.