

Dharmette: Eightfold Path (8 of 10) Holistic Mindfulness

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So hello everyone and welcome. And continuing this series on the Eightfold Path. And we're coming now to... mindfulness. Again, traditionally it's called in English right mindfulness. I'm calling it holistic mindfulness. And one of the advantages of this word holistic over right is right implies wrong in English.

It's not so clear that right, that the word *sammā*, translated as right or now as holistic, whole, complete, right, whether wrong is really the right translation of the opposite. There's a word *micchā*, M-I-C-C-H-A. And it means something like contrary or separate, that which separates, that which is contrary to the whole, that which separates us from the whole, that which takes us in the wrong way, it takes us away from the whole. So there are things we can do that we lose the sense of wholeness, the sense of completion where all of who we are is included, all of life is included in a certain kind of wonderful way. And that's part of that special task of *sati*, often translated as mindfulness. It is to open up to kind of a luminous awareness, an awareness that's inclusive of it all.

And so in this regard, this word *sati* is more like a state than it is to a particular activity. There's a strong tendency as Buddhism went along and into the modern world to think of *sati* as a unique action that we do, mental action of knowing or some people, it's noting. And there are things that we do, there are mental actions involved in mindfulness practice just as there is for *samādhī* practice. But the word *samādhī* refers to a general state that we enter into when we apply our attention to be focused, one-pointed, to be continuous. There are these things we do, continuity, focus, one-pointedness, letting go, staying here, that then opens up to a state of deep, calm, peace, well-being, that is *samādhī*. So the same way with *sati*, there are particular things we do.

We know the breath. We sense and experience. We know, we sense, we feel, we observe. There's things that we offer, we contribute in doing mindfulness practice. But *sati* itself is a

kind of open, broad sense of awareness that's more of a state. And never in the suttas does the Buddha tell people, give instructions to do *sati*.

Sati is something we enter and abide in. It's something that we establish. So we establish ourselves here in present moment awareness. But it's not a specific action as it is more of an allowing of our natural capacity to be conscious, to be aware, to be here. And to support that, and to stay in the flow of it, we offer this little kind of gentle, relaxed kind of footsteps in the middle of the wide field that we're walking, to stay in the field, to stay present, and that's to know, to recognize what's happening. This is an in-breath, this is an out-breath.

Or we sense it, we sense, oh, this is what an in-breath feels like, the sensations of it, this is the out-breath feels like. Where sometimes we're very settled, and it's more like we're on a settled, relaxed, and we have a grand vista view, like of being at the beach and looking out across the ocean and to the horizon, or in a vista point in the mountains, in a vast view. And we can just settle back and just observe, and we're observing the spaciousness in the natural world. And sometimes what keeps us in the present moment, keeps us in this state of being aware, is this capacity to settle back and just observe the present moment as it's unfolding. So there is this kind of wonderful play at work in holistic awareness, holistic mindfulness between what we offer to show up and be present for something, to be here, and what we allow.

And that play, sometimes we have to emphasize our contribution, show up, wake up. Give time so we can be in this awareness. Give time for whatever is happening so you can stay present, stay awake to it, stay aware of it. And in my vocabulary, I like the language of getting to know something. If you want to get to know someone really well, it isn't just listening to their story and hearing what they have to say. But is to be aware of the whole, how they are feeling emotionally, their mood, how they are in their abilities and how they walk and how they sit and how they... what's being expressed in their gestures.

There's so much going on in a human being to get to know them is to kind of pay attention to all that's there, as if all of who they are is respectable, is valuable. You want to get to know someone. And so to give time. And so one of the, I find that one of the little kind of tools of being present, being aware in this kind of a state of awareness is to be calm and to be calm and relaxed. I don't think I can over-encourage people to really learn how to relax deeply. Really, not just the surface tension, but really develop a capacity to recognize tension, subtlest tension, and learn to soften and relax while staying alert.

Relaxing the mind. Right. Relaxing the heart, softening, letting go of the way we brace ourselves to life. Settle, relax the belly, make room for the breathing. There's a calming that

happens. The whole system calms the more relaxed we are. Softens. There's a way in which tension, when we hold tight, it actually, it's almost like we're fueling thinking. We're fueling rumination, spinning thoughts, the more physically tense we are. And so to relax deeply.

And that supports kind of an open awareness, a kind of relaxed awareness, a present moment awareness that is more like a state of being here. And now we have more we can offer others. Now we can give time to others. And this little tool of giving time, I like the word giving, it's a form of generosity. And if someone is having, is maybe they're, you know, having had some tragedies happen to them, they're quite upset, and then it's okay, I have other things to do, but I'm going to give this person time. I'm going to sit with them and just be present for them.

Maybe they don't need much from us, but someone who sits on the bench with them and just accompanies them. But giving people time. And giving the present moment experience time, giving ourselves in our present moment experience, giving time. If we feel tense and not relaxed, give time to feel that tension. Give time to it. Allow it to be there. Know it. And this combination of relaxing and giving time is, makes more room for the total combined ways that we sense and know. Our whole psychophysical system... A big part of it is attuned to take in data, information from the whole world around us.

All the senses we can see, we can hear, we can smell, we can taste. It's a whole slew of ways in which we sense through the body. Warmth and coldness and pressure and energy. There's appropriate perception. The physical sensation, what goes on in the body, so much information comes in. We're aware of what goes on internally to ourselves through what's happening in the body. We're aware of what's going on outside. The body and mind are very responsive to the sensory input that comes in. And also it's very responsive to what goes on in the mind that gets expressed in the body. And so there's all these, there's knowing and sensing and recognizing and remembering.

There's a whole field that operates in a relaxed way, in harmony, in unity. And that unified, relaxed way in which we make room for the whole inner intelligence of sensing and feeling the present moment, knowing it. That's what's available when we have holistic awareness, the seventh factor in the Eightfold Path. When we step into a kind of more of a state, more of an abiding, more of a resting, more of a holistic, unified state, way in which all our senses, all our knowing can operate together, that can't operate altogether if the mind is contracted, is tight, fixated on one thing, fixated on fear, fixated on desire, fixated on certain thoughts and ruminations over and over again. We limit ourselves then. And to practice this Noble Eightfold Path is to learn how to step out of the ways in which we live a limited life, a contracted

life, a life which is separate from the whole, a life that moves away from the whole, to learn how to move towards the whole of who we are.

And so... And the great fruit of all this is holistic mindfulness, a state of being aware. And it's the seventh step in the Eightfold Path. And I like to kind of believe that the first six, if we practice those well, each of those have a wholism to them and are waking up a whole sense of who we are, that they support the... holistic awareness, holistic mindfulness. So you might try today as you live your life to see what it's like to give awareness, give attention to whatever is happening in the moment.

Give yourself extra time so that you have time to really be in time as time is alive, as time is alive because you're alive in the present. Give time to be in time. Give time to be aware of what's happening here. Give time to your friends, to your activities, and see if in that give time you find yourself more at ease in a state of awareness. May this day be a day of luminous awareness. Thank you.