

Week 6 – Mindfulness

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Ethics

5TH PRECEPT

Positive form: “With mindfulness clear and radiant, I purify my mind.”

Negative form: “I undertake the training principle to abstain from intoxicants”

Pali: “Surameraya Majja Pamadatthana Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the conscious act of bringing us back to a state of awareness. We use mindfulness as a conscious tool to bring ourselves back to what we are engaged in.

Dharma Mind, Worldly Mind, David Smith

Mindfulness and awareness often used interchangeably, maybe it's useful to distinguish between self-conscious awareness, and the practice to develop it.

Awareness can't be fully defined. “Knowing” aspect, reflexive self-consciousness – is it what distinguishes us from animals?

CENTRALITY OF MINDFULNESS IN SPIRITUAL LIFE

We may even say that there is no spiritual life without awareness. To the extent that there is awareness, there is spiritual life. An action, a thought, a feeling, is spiritual to the extent that it is accompanied by awareness; and whatever it may be, if there is anything negative in it, anything that smacks of the conditioned, the awareness with which it is done will sooner or later eat away all that conditionedness, all that negative side. So awareness is of paramount importance in the spiritual life. No spiritual life without awareness. - Sangharakshita in Breaking through to Buddhahood, CD063

The Buddha puts it even more strongly – maybe as strongly as it's possible to put it....

Mindfulness is the Way to the Immortal, unmindfulness the way to death. Those who are mindful do not die, whereas the unmindful are like the dead

Dhammapada v21

Need awareness if we are to notice the arising of skilful or unskilful mental states: if we are to make any intentional changes, change habits etc. Need awareness to have continuity of purpose through time.

DIMENSIONS OF AWARENESS

Dimensions of Awareness	
“Things”	
Self	Body Emotions Thoughts
Others	
Reality	

Very difficult to be aware of all simultaneously – so easiest to focus down to one at a time.

Importance of body awareness

- Body is the tangible gateway into present moment – it's always in the present.
- Holds clues to our mental / emotional state – close linkage

- Stops us becoming alienated in awareness – too remote or “heady”

Alienated awareness is that awareness which is alienated from the experience of self, especially emotion; and integrated awareness is that awareness which is integrated with the experience of self, especially with the experience of the emotions. – Sangharakshita, From Alienated Awareness to Integrated Awareness

The more disembodied we are, the more mentally unbalanced we become – Reginald Ray in article posted on group website

INTOXICATION

The original Pali version of the precept focusses strongly on drink as the main source of intoxication to avoid. Today we can add recreational drugs. Are there more?

Conditions that may lead to greater...	
Intoxication	Mindfulness
Drinking alcohol, taking recreational drugs	Meditating
Being with raucous company	Being with one or two good friends
Computer work	Going on retreat
Distracting self through neurotic eg. sex, eating	Talking about mindfulness
Watching too much tv	Simple physical work
Being in visually “busy” surroundings	Being outdoors in nature
Feeling stressed with too much to do	Creating a sense of spaciousness
When there’s something you want or don’t want strongly (eg. being very hungry or randy!)	Sense of contentment

How can we bring more mindfulness into our lives?

- Appreciate the qualities of mindfulness – value & delight in the mindful state.
- Very difficult to be mindful all the time – so try to have “bookmarks” where you recall yourself frequently during the day (maybe by taking a few conscious breaths).
Mindfulness triggers – eg. phone ringing, hearing your name etc, opening a door.
- And we can intensify mindfulness especially in simple routine activities eg: Brushing your teeth, eating a meal, washing up, doing housework, walking to work, or walking around during the day.

HOME PRACTICE

Think of one simple routine activity you do each day in which to intensify mindfulness, and one mindfulness trigger to recall yourself frequently during the day. Be quite specific about what you’ll do when – eg. eat breakfast mindfully, take three conscious breaths each time I open a door.

FURTHER READING

From Alienated Awareness to Integrated Awareness, Sangharakshita, CD 084

Right Mindfulness, Sangharakshita, CD053 or chapter in Vision & Transformation