

Week 6 – Mindfulness

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Ethics

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Two or three nice natural objects: eg. stone, feather, flower

Pens & paper

Worksheets

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Relate to the centrality & importance of mindfulness practice, and hence value (at least in theory) mindfulness over intoxication.

Recognise activities in one's own life that tend to cultivate mindfulness or intoxication.

Leave with pointers to develop mindfulness

Understand the scope of mindfulness practice in terms of the four dimensions, and the role of the body as a useful entry point into sati.

MEDITATION (10 MINS)

Set up: will be asking questions to reflect on: they're not questions that need answers or to be thought about, but to direct attention in a particular way.

Lead through awareness of body for a time

Then drop in some questions to start wondering about the mystery of awareness

"If I ask you to become aware of your navel, how do you do that?"

"If I ask you to notice how you're feeling, how do you do that?"

"What is this awareness?"

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

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

Negative form: "I undertake the training principle to abstain from drink and drugs that cloud the mind"

Pali: "Surameraya Majja Pamadatthana Veramani Sikkhapadam Samadiyami

Last precept, in a way the most important one.

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

So what is awareness?

Self-consciousness – what distinguishes us from animals?

Home practice review

Previous class Review

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.

Sangharakshita in Breaking through to Buddhahood, CD063

The Buddha (in the Dhammapada) 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

Discussion in 3s: Why is mindfulness so important?

Please note down points to report back.

Plenary

Note on whiteboard people's reasons

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. [continued from previous Sangharakshita quote]

Self-awareness is what makes us fully human

“With mindfulness clear and radiant, I purify my mind” – how does mindfulness purify the mind?

Awareness as all we have – only difference between samsaric & nirvanic experience.

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

DIMENSIONS OF AWARENESS

We'll do an exercise that will show the scope of mindfulness practice – the different dimensions, or spheres, in which to cultivate mindfulness.

Exercise: mindful passing of an object

In groups of 4-6 (probably divide class into 2)

Each group arrange seats in a circle. Give each group an attractive, natural object (eg stone, flower, feather...)

Ask them to pass it from person to person in the circle. After a while:

1. Notice especially the object: its shape, texture, colour, weight...
- 2a. Notice your body: the touch of the object in your hand, the weight of body on chair etc...

- 2b. Notice especially how you're feeling about doing this
- 2c. Notice any thoughts that drift through your mind while you're sitting here ("stupid exercise", "when will this stop", etc)
3. Now take in the people in the group; notice how they sit, give, receive; and take in especially the people you receive from and give to as you do so.
4. Now broaden out the perspective to notice the whole scene. Notice how the time flows, how your experience is in flow, constantly changing.

Is there any sense of lack in the this experience? Or any sense of unease, discomfort, frustration?

Where is the boundary between yourself and the people you're giving to / receiving from? At your skin? Behind your eyes? In the air in between you? Who is having this experience?

Plenary

Feedback about exercise.

What do you think the different dimensions were? Try to brainstorm up Bhante's 4 dimensions:

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.

Eg. remember communication exercises last week – was it difficult to keep a sense of own body & emotions while being very aware of other?

IMPORTANCE OF BODY AWARENESS

Why should body awareness be important?

- Tangible gateway into present moment – it's always in the present
- Holds clues to mental / emotional state – close linkage
- Stops us becoming alienated in awareness "running before we can walk"

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

Alienated awareness is awareness of ourselves, especially of our feelings and emotions, without actually experiencing ourselves, without actually experiencing our feelings and our emotions. So in its extreme form alienated awareness is awareness of one's own non-experience of oneself..

Integrated awareness, on the other hand, is awareness of ourselves while at the same time actually experiencing ourselves. 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.

TEA BREAK

HOUSEKEEPING

Next module on Ritual & Devotion starts 24/25th April – ie. No meeting on Easter Mon

Recommended reading: Ritual & Devotion by Sangharakshita

Who wants to do it? Please take names

This Thursday is mitra ceremony for Nicholas, Loren & Jeff. All welcome from 8.30pm onwards – do encourage them, great occasion.

Who wants a day on mindfulness? Such a big topic, VP (& DS???) is putting on a day if people want: Sat 29 April. Please take names

INTOXICATION

The original Pali version of the precept focusses strongly on drink as the main source of intoxication to avoid. We would nowadays probably add recreational drugs. But maybe there's others.

Exercise in 3s – recognise conditions

Under what circumstances have you found yourself:

- a) Losing mindfulness, becoming “intoxicated”
- b) Becoming more mindful, more present?

Note them down in the group

Plenary

Write up everyone's answers:

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

[Discussion point: distinction between absorption in work and alienated compulsive working eg at computer.]

Plenary discussion

How can we bring more mindfulness into our lives?

By appreciating the qualities of mindfulness – value, cherish & delight in the mindful state.

Very difficult to be mindful all the time – so try to have “bookmarks” where you consciously do become mindful – take a few conscious breaths. Mindfulness reminders – eg. phone ringing, hearing your name etc, opening a door. What could you use?

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.

Group discussion in pairs

Think of one simple routine activity you do each day in which to bring some more mindfulness, and one mindfulness trigger to recall yourself 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

HOME PRACTICE

Do what you resolved to do.

FURTHER READING

From Alienated Awareness to Integrated Awareness, Sangharakshita, CD 084
Right Mindfulness, Sangharakshita, CD053 or chapter in Vision & Transformation
