

2014-09-01 Foundations of Mindfulness Ways of Knowing Vedana...

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SPEAKERS

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When I was here two weeks ago, I gave a talk about mindfulness, focus mostly on mindfulness of the body. But I talked about the, what's called the four foundations of mindfulness, as of could be seen as a four step process, of going in going inward into oneself. And deeper and deeper. And so the body being bringing attention to the body is the outermost kind of layer. In a sense. It's the first most obvious place and then we from there we go in. So today, I'd like to talk about the second step that could be said to kind of like they don't take me too seriously with the words but going in, and this is what's called in Pali, vedanā, and one way of translating with the 19 English is a very, very interestingly so translated as ways of knowing. Sometimes it's translated as feeling, and I guess, feeling is a way of knowing when you feel something and you feel the blower, air conditioner against my skin. I know it that's a way of experiencing it. So ways of knowing. So as introduction to this, when I was in India, I spent a little bit of time with a teacher named Mahindra. And one of his memorable teachings is that if it's not simple, it's not mindfulness. And so he encountered many people who heard the teachings or the instructions and somehow made it into an engineering project, made it complicated and, and became very thoughtful and analytical are different things. But they do. It's not simple. It's not mindfulness. So then when I had my traveler's checks back then stolen in Calcutta somewhat embarrassing circumstances. I went back to see him and he said, Gil, it's important to be simple, but don't be a simpleton.

So, to keep it simple, one way do I like to talk about is very, very, very simple terms is practice Buddhist practices is to take recourse to the way that so in meditation practice in Buddhism has two components. Two main components is mindfulness, or insight, mindfulness and concentration. And then when they translated these Sanskrit Pali words into Chinese, sometimes they would translate those two things, insight and concentration, with the words with the characters for stop and look. Stopping is the concentration looking is the insight. And so it's very simple. Just stop and look. I mean, your mother probably told you that stop and look. But to really do that a lot, and to do it as part of meditation, to stop the activities we're doing, where we're, sometimes they're so busy doing things are so involved in things that we're not really stopping to really take in what's really happening here. They sit down and meditate and begin stopping the incessant chatter in the mind, swirling in the mind. So we can stop and we can, once we kind of stop, we can see what's here in a deeper way in a clearer way. So we stopped to look and as we stopped, just sit down, meditate, sit and be quiet. One of the most obvious things you'll notice if you stop might be that you have a body and tremendous emphasis in Buddhism on being present in your body. Being mindful, being aware of your body, the body is a vehicle for deepening your practice. So we become aware of our body stop and then become more aware of our body, then the body becomes a means for knowing. We can know things through our body. So I mean, we already

know that I suppose I mean, our senses our ways of knowing, we see. There's the I seem to we know, through the seeing, we smell we know through the smelling, we feel tactically and we know through our tactile sense we are taste we hear we know these things is ways of knowing. And then there's more subtle ways of knowing in the body through our body or within the psychophysical body we have. And we can get a lot of information about ourselves as we take all this in. One Zen teacher I studied with, he said, the body is an antenna. And so you walk around with this antenna, and if you tune into it, you pick up a tremendous amount of information about what's going on inside of you outside of your relationship to the world around you. And one of the great ways is is if you feel subtly uncomfortable about something, someone's asking you to do something, and some feeling in your belly kind of like something off here. But your mind logically says, Well, maybe I should do this person a favor or something, but something doesn't seem right. That's gonna be a very good thing to stop and pay attention. Notice what that's about. It's subtle knowing when something's not quite right. But if you're busy and lost in your thoughts and involved in the analysis, rather than feeling what's in the body, that information would be available to you. Some people say there's intuition that we have. And so what I'm not sure what that is. My definition of intuition is when the whole world helps us understand something. I don't know what it is. But there's all kinds of ways of more subtle ways of knowing, that seem to be much more accessible when we're settled and attentive to all the cues that are coming from our body. One of the things That Buddhists are fond to say people who do mindfulness at least is that all our experiences of the world, the world around us, happens through our five senses. And these so that, you know, if we there we can be in very complicated worldly situations, but the raw data that comes in through our eyes or ears or nose is then interpreted based on past associations, memory assumptions, complicated mental processes, and it gets reconstructed into the event that we have. And it's relatively easy to point out how that's something our mind does.

So I mean, if you just for example, in this room here, we net we call it a meditation room, meditation hall or something. Because that's often what we do here is we meditate it before we bought this building, this was a sanctuary for a church. There were pews lined up here. And then be very funny if we all be sitting facing me because the pews face that way. And so it was a sanctuary maybe similar in ways but but a different feeling a different kind of idea the rooms the wall so much of this place is the same as before but because we use it as a as a meditation hall we call it that we could you know when when Les Paul comes in desert Dharma rocks here kids programs here it becomes a kid's playground. And it's kind of wild in here sometimes with the kids running around and they love these these authors these questions we have because they make castles and piles and they jump into them. And we've had music events here and so this is the music hall we've had social events, social Hall, we it kind of changes. I've come in here and done yoga, but no one else is here. It's my yoga private yoga room. So what this room is partly a construct of The function it has, but that that is something that is not in the, in the seeing of the room. That's, you see the sights you see the floor and the walls and the chairs in his office. And then it could that's set those sights come in. And based on our memory and what you've been taught, it gets constructed as a meditation hall in the mind. But the raw data for built for constructing the whole world comes through these five senses that we have, and then what goes on in the mind. So what happens if you start tuning in to how we know things, add each of the five senses, this most simple rudimentary place where it all begins in some ways, you begin at the building blocks in the bricks in a sense the to to build the house, you start paying attention to the at the very beginning, because sometimes, if you go to the beginning of something beginning where something grows You can discover that beginning how to be free, or how to relate to it in a wise way. There's much harder if you get involved, it's already getting quite abstract and complicated the situation. And so mindfulness practice has a lot to do with bringing the attention back to the building blocks, building back to the origin, where it all kind of begins, where all gets created. So we can watch more carefully. And notice what's actually how we're creating what's being built. Where How does, how this whole magic show happens, based on the raw, basic beginning of what we most fundamentally indirectly know. So the

Buddha talked about ways of knowing. So in the second foundation of mindfulness, he talked about two general classes, or divisions of ways that we can know. We can know Based on the sensory input that comes from the world around us, and we can know, certain things that are not from the sensory input from the world around us, but rather from the way that our inner life get activates, feeling feelings, activates emotions activates sensations within our body, independent of what's happening in the world around us. And so that division is a very important division. And in Buddhism, because remember, I'm talking about a journey to go in into our depths. So to know to know what's happening in the experience of the world is still a little bit on the outer surface of things. But when you start going in and noticing more deeply, what are the sensations, what are the senses, the feelings that arise that are stimulated by their inner life, then we're getting something that's more kind of closer to the heart. Closer deeper down, following me a little bit okay. So, ways of knowing. So these two ways, both ways to keep it simple, it said that you can know that it's either these things are either pleasant, unpleasant or neither pleasant or unpleasant. So, when we take in the experiences of the world, this you know, take in the sense data, that data can come in and be experienced as an insight and be known as pleasant would be known as unpleasant or known as neither pleasant or unpleasant.

So, it may be a little boring to hear that, but it's suppose this is this is really simple building block that experienced at this very simple level pleasant and unpleasant. Before we kind of make a whole story about it before we kind of make it on More complicated so if if someone gently strokes my arm that might be very pleasant if someone like my son did today in the pool kicked me in the water that would that hurt you know, it's a pleasant and unpleasant experience. The but it gets more interesting because if this person I find amazingly attractive Why just my dream person get hot just thinking about the person I guess it's at 82 here maybe it's maybe just the temperature. But anyway, this this person comes along and strokes my arm off just that's pleasant but then there's my old nemesis, just a person who irritates me no more than anybody else in the world and person who never showers and never shaves and just slobbers and never cleans his hands or anything all comes along same gentle stroke you know, unpleasant, or that wonderful, attractive person comes. But, you know, I have certain ethics I'm supposed to follow and, you know, this is kind of complicated now, and this is pleasant and unpleasant and, you know, now it's all a struggle with what else to do and basically don't do it. It's kind of too complicated, unpleasant. What I'm trying to say in my complicated way, is that the pleasantness and unpleasantness of experience is not only inherent in the experience itself, but has something to do with associations we have the meetings we have, I'll tell you a good story. There is a was a story that I heard about. One of the great found Founding Fathers I guess, or characters for a part of Korean Buddhism was a man named Juno. And he was going to study Zen in China. So he took a boat, you can take a boat from Korea to China. And on the way there is he got shipwrecked. And he made it ashore in the dark in the rain, and crawled up just exhausted, I suppose, and crawled up and onto the shore up on the up on top of the little plateau where it was safe, I guess, and crawled under a bush or something or cave or something. And felt that he was really thirsty after living in the ocean for a while, and he felt around the dark and he felt he felt a bowl and you know, been raining and stuff and the bowl had water in it. So he saw how lucky he couldn't see. So he drank the water and felt very refreshed. And the next morning he woke up and found out that He was in, in a tomb or grave or under some kind of situation. And it was a skull, and he drunk out of the skull. And so first he was horrified. But then he woke up. That was kind of one of his enlightenment experiences. And you can imagine that it was pleasant the night before it was dark. And then when you saw by it was associations, then everything that became something else. So our mental capacity to interpret and react to our experience is sometimes very closely entangled with how we experience the world. So to come back and start noticing and any experience you're in, that things are pleasant, unpleasant, or neither. begins tuning in to a deeper level of what's going on with how we experience the world, how we are in the world. It also can make things a lot easier and give you an example. If you're In a very difficult social situation, and whatever it might be. And because of social situation, there can be a lot of complexity involved, and a

lot of problem solving. And a lot of things you have to decide maybe are just a lot going on. And if you get caught up in analyzing and figuring out all the things that you could figure out this whole situation, you might be there for a long time. But if what you want is to find some ease, in that social situation, just a little balance a little bit, be free and not so entangled in it. Some people find it very helpful to simply recognize this complicated social situation. It's unpleasant.

And then they and then I know people say, Well, I know how to be Pro. I know how to be present for what's unpleasant. It just unpleasant and some people find just recognizing This hour, just unpleasant. And they kind of relax and they step back and they don't not so pulled in or entangled or caught in it, it doesn't mean that the problem solving necessarily stopped. It's just unpleasant. As a parent, I've, I've taken recourse to this little insight, a fair number of times. Oh, it's just unpleasant. I can do this. I said, unpleasant, unpleasant and, and I know it's not gonna last. So, or same thing pleasant. This isn't a pleasant experience. There can be a lot of wisdom to clearly recognize, oh, this is a pleasant experience. Because then sometimes, if you see it as pleasant, maybe you don't lean into it or get as infatuated and unpleasant. It's just unpleasant. It's a beautiful quote from the Buddha mind like at least, he said, someone who practices somewhere endeavors and practice does not get entangled in suffering or pain, the same word depending on the context does not get entangled in suffering and the person who practices does not give up or reject pleasure or who actually goes, the person who practices well does not get caught up in pain or pleasure or unpleasant unpleasant depends how you want to translate this word dukkha, suffering the unpleasant does not get caught up in the unpleasant and while not rejecting the pleasant does not get infatuated in a pleasant and nice smooth not giving up pleasant and rejecting the pleasant at the same time doesn't get infatuated. So you just see, and one of the reasons why it's so important. This thing is that it's rather embarrassing for a sophisticated human beings who have PhDs and such things to realize that so much of what drives human behavior, sometimes is simple reaction to what's pleasant and unpleasant. And sometimes very complicated stories, we make up excuses. We make up our excuses just to kind of justify avoiding the unpleasant or going towards the pleasant. You know, there's kind of this Amoeba like reactivity that can exist without any human beings. And if you can kind of be there right at the beginning and see that there's an unpleasant situation. We recoil, unpleasant situation we react and just be right there and see that, then we can learn how to not be so caught in reactivity. But just be there and let the unpleasant be the unpleasant. We don't have to do anything with it. But first you have to learn to see how often you do something, how you're not comfortable, you're not at ease just to be present for what's unpleasant. Or when things are pleasant, you do something with that. You don't just leave it alone. And so this stop and look that we do in mindfulness practice, when it applies to this Ways of Knowing this basic simple ways of knowing pleasant, unpleasant, means learning to stop, look, and stop even further, see what's going on and then see if you can be less reactive. And if you can learn this skill, of being present, for what's unpleasant, and be present for what's pleasant. Without being for or against it, you'll discover a lot of freedom. So much freedom that I can call that a kind of a power, because then you can go into many situations, and you're not going to be tricked and caught and reactive, you just kind of be there and when you can be there that way, then you have much more access to wisdom, then you can be wise about situation, to know how to be happy in it. So, so, Ways of Knowing at the very beginning of how we know things, the sense data coming in. The other category other side is that those sensations, those inner experiences, feelings that arise from the inside because of what's happening within us, our mental life.

So if you know our emotions, you know so it's great in meditation to sit in meditation, and mind your own business. And just sit there and breathe and maybe get calm and the mind gets kind of quiet and Then maybe there's a noise outside. And for some reason that noise outside reminds you of your high school boyfriend girlfriend, who didn't work out well. And now 40 years later, you know, and you start

feeling this inner heat and anger and you know, it would have been easier just to have stayed with the sound outside thought of it as sound or seen as pleasant or unpleasant. I just left it there. But no your mind has an associated with someone from 40 years ago and what happened there and the great story and how she treated you that way or how terrible he was and, and all these motions and feelings well up. Those inner feelings of welling up are not because of the sound but rather because of thoughts and feelings, associations, memories that we have inside. And they have a whole div with the same thing as true for them. We can learn to recognize them as play And unpleasant and learn to stop, leave them alone and see them more deeply. But that inner inner world that's more kind of where what drives us are operating principle operating systems or operating, how the choices we make in our lives often have to do what goes on deeper inside. And so to starts noticing there's a whole other layer within us of feeling tone to these feelings of these kind of ways of knowing, and to learn to stop enough to really start tuning in in a deeper way. What's happening is part of this path to freedom. And one of the reasons we do this, and as far as certainly part of Buddhist meditation, is that some of the meditation itself brings on these create some of these inner feelings that are pleasant and the pleasure of meditation, the joy, the delight, the calm equanimity And things that can bubble up are not being caused by the external world have to sense data coming in. But it has all to do with what's happening in the mind how the mind is being shaped or trained or settled or harmonized or unified. And some of the greatest joys and pleasures some of the ecstasy that a person can have without taking a drug emigrate, come from meditation practice. So this inner upwelling of really fantastic good feelings. And these good feelings from the inside, that arise through meditation practice, are something to tune into, and to notice and to nourish, to support to give space for because as we experienced this deeper pleasure what's inside, then this then gives capacity for us to go even deeper into the mind into our inner life. And one of the ways Go into deeper as you start then tuning into the third foundation of mindfulness, which is the states of our mind. And in terms of going deeper, maybe it's better to call it states of heart, this day, the quality of our hearts that we have, and our way into that next week or next week, I'll be here to talk about that. But, learning to tune in to this inner life, the quality of our inner life, is what we begin to have access to, when we go into this feeling tones, these ways of knowing ways of knowing what goes on from it in. But to do that, it really helps to have learned how not to be reactive, how to be able to be still kind of incentive kind of beautiful way unaffected or unmoved by our experience when they're pleasant, unpleasant or neither pleasant or unpleasant. As we learn to be unmoved you know, unaffected by it unreactive to it. Then we can start getting hung having the quiet or the stillness that allow As to go deeper and deeper within. But as long as we're reactive, then we can't really go so deep. It's kind of like, you know, I don't know what it's kind of like having you know, if the wind blows across the surface of the water, it agitates the water you can't see very deep into the lake goes with the surface of the water gets quiet, then you can see what's the depth and the depth of the lake. So the same way you know for if we're reactive to what's going on, then we can't really see what's deeper than our reactivity that serve those that agitation.

So part of the training in Buddhism is mindfulness tradition is first to begin to tune into our body, body, so important, as I said, and then it comes up as we're really present in our body, it gives us access to start noticing whether things are pleasant and unpleasant or neither pleasant or unpleasant. And that if you do that, then you start noticing the difference between those sensations that are produced by the world by the sense data coming in. Outside, and those that are welling up from the inside, some are pleasant, some are unpleasant, and to learn to be still with those. And one of the remarkable things about this deep meditative joy or well being that can well up, it comes from more and more letting go and more and more less and less doing. And so it's kind of like little bit counterintuitive for people like to desire want get more pleasure, it's almost like you have to want it less in order to get more of it. It's not great. Good luck.

So we have about 10 minutes or so. If some of you would like to ask some questions about that. You're welcome to I'll do my best to answer. Yes, and if you could say your use the mic and also say your name before you ask. Say something just It's nice people to hear each other's names and

I was wondering about the joy that wells up from within and whether there's a point at which wine can become infatuated with that.

Yes.

Darn.

It's usually self correcting. If mindfulness is the kind of the primary practice you're doing, then you are noticing that effectuation you notice the limitations, the limitations, the, the unpleasantness of that infatuation. And so I wouldn't worry about getting infatuated because I think it's self correcting. And sometimes a little bit, infatuation, just a little bit, is motivating, and keeps you engaged. It keeps you going, and helps you go deeper. So you don't want to let go of infatuation. You don't have But sometimes, some teachers say you shouldn't even let go of attachments until they get in the way. You know, just because you have your attachment Buddhism, right? You're not supposed to be attached, right? That's bad. But actually, if your attachments are helping you stay attached. And then at some point, especially if you're doing mindful, you'll notice when the attachment is becomes a hindrance, my problem, and then you can let go.

Hi, Abraham. And you said, mindfulness of feeling pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant. So I just want to hazard a guess, that I think I have noticed when I'm feeling neither pleasant nor unpleasant that I Want to develop a story around that? And it doesn't allow me to. So I begin to find that unpleasant. You know, I want to make a story. Great. Why isn't there something pleasant happening? Why isn't there something unpleasant happening? My mind needs to do this in order to have a story that satisfies me.

It's important to have stories.

Yeah. I mean, Why else do we exist? Right?

But somebody Someone once said, it's a cliche, little story that something like, you know, the world is not made of atoms. It's made of stories.

So is there more to that? Can you just Yes. Is there more to that whole? Neither pleasant nor way? I thought more, I thought for you more to work more, the more to that for you would be you need to get to the bottom of your story making mind. Yeah. And give it a vacation. Yeah. You don't need to make stories and you and so you're able to understand why when things are neither pleasant or unpleasant. You make a story, what's the nature of the reactivity? Maybe there's some aversion, there's some fear. There's some judgments going on some associations with it. If, you know one example of neither pleasant or unpleasant, that's socially I think, very kind of painful for a lot of people is. If you are threatening to someone, they'll pay attention to you. If you're desirable for the person, they'll pay attention to you. But if you're neither pleasant or unpleasant for them, then you're boring for them. And they'll leave you know this, like, don't don't pay attention to you. And that can be very painful that someone has a judgment. You know, you don't, you're not doing anything for them. You're in like the Nirvana value. But to learn how to not have a story, not have a judgment and just be with people as humans really meet them, or to be with any situation that a story is A great thing to learn how to do, and

then maybe you can be wiser. But the story is you make up if you have first have the ability not to have a story. So I think that's your task is to get underneath who what your reaction is to that either pleasant or unpleasant to understand it better. That is that satisfied, satisfied.

So, if the instruction is for us to note simply, what is pleasant, what is unpleasant? Notice our reaction to it. What is the reasoning or the rationale for noting what is neither pleasant nor unpleasant, because it's happening.

That's all the only rationale we need in our practices with mindfulness. We're trying to be present and note be aware of what's actually happening and if That way you're knowing something at that moment. You want to just just know it can keep it keep it really simple. It doesn't have to end and don't don't succumb to the belief it has to be different.

We're fighting. We're fighting over the microphone back here. I'm Anna loi. And I realized is I think maybe I haven't quite understand, understood the difference between recognizing this the reaction to external things, and the things that are coming up inside of you. Separate from that. Yeah. Because I'm thinking about a particular situation in my life, where I can see myself reacting to the external stimulation, yet at the same time, I feel all these things coming up in some me. And I realized that they're beyond or deeper than the external simulation. So I'm not making a very clear distinction between the two. And I don't,

I don't think you need to make a clear distinction, but it's okay level of gray zone between the two can affect each other. I go back and forth. And so but, but I think that I try to make it simple. The, there's this immediate direct stimulation of our senses based on external stimuli. That's a very simple, indirect, that has an impact on us. And if we're impacts our associations, our judgments, our memories, our stories, then those stories get activated. And then they have a life of their own. And you probably had the experience of having something happen in the world. It's stimulated some story and you lost touch. With a world, you're like completely now in your story, your memory, your situation. And so the so you're kind of so the inner world begins to take prominence. And I think most people, most of their experiences have very little to do with the direct external world. It's this inner world is so full and so active and such a big part of us that even when we think we're seeing the world out there, mostly we're seeing our projections and transference and all kinds of things going on. So it's a huge, hugely important area. Yes. And our the quality of our hearts has a lot to do with that what goes on inside. Yeah, and what's so what's and what's beautiful to distinguish. But what's important about distinguishing the external stimuli, and what goes on the inside, is to become free is to become is to have a heart. The quality of a heart exists independent of the situation's around If your well being and your quality of your heart is conditioned and dependent on what goes on the world around you, then you're always going to be a slave to the world in a certain way. But to carry your home in your heart, so that if your heart is at peace and happy, you carry that with you, no matter where you're at, even in difficult circumstances, you keep that peace, you're free, you're not your heart is not being unduly affected by what goes on around. So that that dittos you learn to make that distinction is important for that reason.

Thank you. That's very helpful.

Yeah, hi, my name is Chris. And I have kind of a two part question.

If I understand

what you're saying is like you observe the pleasant and the unpleasant, like sort of a scientist, you just they're observing Is that what you're saying? You could read than in a non attached way.

Try it, try it, try try to find some circumstances, meditation is a great place. And just spend a period of time just looking at whatever's going on for you in or out or whatever is going on. And just look at it through the lens of it's a pleasant or unpleasant and your reaction to it, and see if you can just stick keep it really, really simple. Letting the reaction go, and just keep stay that for a while, keep doing it and see what happens to you. Yeah, so it's sort of like,

I like the analogy of a scientist that's, you know, is not attached to an outcome is just experiencing what's going on so they can report on it. Okay, so the second part is, I want to get some clarity on the first question that was here about the pleasant and unpleasant. I'm thinking what about if you're going through a what if a person is going through a long period of sadness, and then they get into a pleasant experience they're observed. I don't know how you observe that without getting really attached, you know, it's

attached pride that don't worry about it.

To me it would be it would be, it would be rather difficult to

just you just saying kind of go with the flow

until it hurts so much to do so then you can stop. Okay, being too attached with joy and happiness, it'll start hurting and come back and bite you. Really, you can wait until it bites you.

Okay? I'm still kind of in a quandary here.

But it's just so natural to be drawn and to want to feel that good experience. Yes, it's pretty natural. You'd be a little bit careful with the word natural. It depends how you use the word because it Can Some people say it's natural? Some people then say it's justified there's nothing I can do about it. This is how I'm built this SPS way. It is possible to lessen our attachments to have less and less attachments. And I'm pretty confident that there are things that you were attached to when you were 1416 that you're no longer attached to. It not you wouldn't you say? So? Yeah, sure. Good. Okay. And I guess just know things just just watch the attachment when you are attached. It's a really central part of mindfulness practices when you're attached really bring careful attention to it. Notice what's just be really present and notice it. Without it now analyzing it almost like feeling it, sensing it, feeling it, don't get into it, but don't reject it. It's best not to let go of attachments the first chance you have. It's a good to really stay and get to know it and familiarize with it if you let go. Some if you let go of an attachment too quickly You might not really understand it well enough to really understand the depth of it and what's going on and really let go in an effective way. So I think sometimes it's good to stop and observe and watch and get to know it.

Yeah. Okay, that's helpful. Thank you.

Great. Thank you. Okay. So I hope tonight was pleasant enough. And if it wasn't, it's your job to to be nonreactive to that. So thank you all very much.