

2020-11-23 Eightfold Path Right Mindfulness (3 of 6)

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SPEAKERS

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So today I'm going to continue, certainly on this longer series on the Eightfold Path. But on the talks about right mindfulness, the seventh step of the Eightfold Path.

Mindfulness is a great joy. It's a great pleasure and it's such a wise teacher for us. That it brings so much wisdom and freedom. And it's just a fantastic thing. And here we're calling it right mindfulness. And what makes it right? We have to go back to the first step of the Eightfold Path, which is the right view. And right view, which indicates or points to how all these other steps are right or complete or invaluable for the purpose of becoming free of suffering. So right mindfulness is that mindfulness, that attention that's used, to help us live a healthy, wholesome life. A mentally healthy life. A life that supports us in the direction of bringing suffering to an end, to alleviate suffering, to discover some kind of profound peace. Or mine right mindfulness is a mindfulness that we cultivate or live in as we discover freedom, freedom from suffering. And that freedom from suffering is then a reference point for the growing of this mindfulness. That freedom of suffering, to be aware of that, to have an awareness that has no suffering in it, that is without any attachment or clinging to it, is a phenomenal thing. And to have a taste of it. And then to know that clearly enough that taste, that sense of it, that then we keep coming back to that way of being aware. So it's the awareness of that helps us to become free of suffering. And it's the awareness that is an expansion of that suffering into our fullness of our lives.

So that's what right mindfulness is. And there's plenty of wrong mindfulness in the sense that there's mindfulness, is ways of using attention, that doesn't really contribute to us being free. And so one example recently, maybe still today, is the way that some people their attention gets pulled into the world of politics. And politicians are sometimes experts at getting our attention, having people wake up in the morning and regularly check through the day, what's happening there, what's happening there. And the attention that goes into some politics, tension that goes into other areas of life, into the entertainment industry, that goes into our greed and our hatred, that attention. That precious resource of awareness, when it goes into that, that would be considered not right mindfulness. Because it's not leading to freedom. It's not bringing the end of suffering. And so we want to learn how to use this attention, this awareness, in some way that brings the end of suffering.

And so the Buddha provided four different areas in which we can apply our attention or awareness. Some people call it frameworks. Four different frameworks for being present for our experience, regardless of what it is. Whatever is going on in our experience, whether we are reading about politics, learning about it, or whether we are involved in whatever it might be. The right mindfulness is to apply our attention to these areas here for the purpose of freedom. And these four are the body, feelings, mind states, and kind of mental activities. So I'll talk about each of these over the next four days. Today being the body.

And the way that we know that we're coming into the fullness of this mindfulness, this awareness that's going to move towards freedom, is when awareness has been freed enough from its attachments, enough from all the identifications we have about who we are. So that awareness can settle back in a sense, and just observe phenomenon. Observation doesn't interfere with what it looks at. It just sits kind of there and just sees. Awareness is not seeing, is not impacted usually by what is seen, unless it's bright light or something. It's the impact goes deeper in, in the mind. But to have the inner mind have no attachments. So the seeing is just seeing, clear and full. The ability to observe.

Some of the deepest states of meditation, the Buddha taught, he uses the verb observing to describe how to be with those experiences. He doesn't talk about watching or observing earlier in practice, but he does at when the mind is really well established. And one of the great metaphors for this that I love is a shepherd or a cow herder, who is during the growing season when rice is growing in India, a shepherd has to be very close to the cattle in order to keep them from eating their farmer's rice. But once the rice has all been harvested, then is no longer needed to be careful. So now the farmer, the cow herder, rests against an oak tree, acts against the tree, and looks out across the land at the cows, keeps track of them, but in a very relaxed way. The cows can wonder where they go and back and forth. And the cow herder can just rest there and observe without having to stay close and stopping them from going into the fields and things like that. So at some point as the mind gets settled, and the mind's cows are not going around eating everything or causing damage, then we can just relax and settle and observe. How we get to this mature observation is what the exercises in the four areas, the four foundations of mindfulness, are about. And it's how to develop an acute or strong or effective way of being present and attentive here and now.

And in mindfulness of the body there are a variety of different ways that stimulate or evoke a heightened sense of awareness. This is what we're trying to develop, a heightened sense of awareness, a lucid awareness eventually. And so one way is to do mindfulness of breathing. This is really central. And first and foremost, how the Buddha taught mindfulness. To settle into the breathing, to start noticing it and being intimate with experience of breathing. Notice how the body is tense. And then as we're breathing, to relax the body. And some of you know that when I do guided meditations, that this is often kind of the basic thing that I start off with. Almost like a kind of preparatory work is to relax the body, breathe, and then relax at different places of holding on the exhale. It is kind of a variation of what the Buddha was teaching.

He also taught about being carefully attentive, with clear recognition. Of presence of mind. To be knowingly as you do these things. To knowingly live our life, our daily activities of life. When you're

walking, clearly state knowing that you're walking. When sitting, know you're sitting. When lying down, know you're lying. When standing, know you're standing. So all these different ways, clearly know it. And so the contrast to that is just walking down the street, walking the town. Just completely lost in our daydreams, and our thoughts, our concerns. And there's no real attention to the fact that we're walking, it's so effortless to walk, there's not no obstacles. And we're not really paying attention to walking. The Buddha, right mindfulness, the mindfulness. If, the big underlying if, if what we want more than anything else is to really get to the bottom of our suffering, really uprooted, really discover how to live an effective and peaceful life for ourselves and for the world around us. Then when we're walking down the city street, knowingly, know that you're walking. Walk in a sense with awareness of walking as part and parcel of what you're doing. You can still think about things that are important, but a very strong sense of presence is there in the body. So you really connected as you walk and as you think about things. You're not lost in daydreams.

Also, he said to do the same thing in all kinds of daily activities. And when you're sitting stretching your arm to do something, you're picking something up, when you're caring for whatever you're taking care of. He even talks about defecating, do it mindfully. So all the activities of life, to bring attention to those. That is right mindfulness, meaning that's the mindfulness that's useful to cultivate if what you want is freedom. Remember always this, the background of this whole enterprise of the Eightfold Path is this big if. This is if. This is right. This is approaches, if you want something. If you want freedom. And if you really want it, pay careful attention to this.

But also there's other ways in which the Buddha talked about the heightening attention. And I think we can probably kind of stretch these or apply them in different ways. He talked about reviewing, visualizing, imagining all the different parts of our body. And some people I know have gone to morgues and seen cadavers. And there's something about really appreciating, reviewing and thinking about our body in all its physical detail, that is fascinating. And somehow sobering. And kind of opening that encourages us to stay here, this is special, this is precious. Also to review, or to see, or understand the body, not as a unified body as one whole thing. But as it made up of component parts. The four elements. That really kind of sense this is to begin also, not necessarily to understand the physics of the body, the elemental physics, but to understand anything that supports us to remember to be here in this body. To have awareness becomes stronger. And that's all for the purposes of how do we wake up. He also said, uses the language of comparing. There's a way of comparison that can also heighten awareness. And the example he gives is comparing our body ourselves to that of a corpse. Just like, we will become like the corpse someday. We'll die. And this is not supposed to be morbid reflection, it's supposed to somehow or other and each person maybe it's a different way, have that comparison, give a spark. Oh, I'm alive, I'm animated now. The whole feeling of being conscious, the capacity of consciousness, exists only when you're alive. And this whole body won't have consciousness in it when you're dead. The mind won't have consciousness in it when you're dead. And so by comparing ourselves to a corpse, the hope is that you start appreciating being aware. And are willing or allowing or inspired to live an aware life. And a life aware through the body, embodied awareness.

And so this first foundation of mindfulness is to begin cultivating a heightened embodied awareness. Awareness of the body. Awareness that grows as we somehow or other different ways connect to the body. Meditating on breathing on the body. Being aware of our bodies as we go through daily life.

Reflecting on how the body's made up of all these component parts. Or comparing ourselves to a corpse. All for the purpose of heightening awareness. Encouraging us to stay in a field of awareness, stay in the continuity of awareness until the awareness becomes more lucid. Until awareness is something that just can peacefully observe what's going on without reacting to what's happening.

All those practices, are the practices that lead to Sati. Lead to being able to abide in awareness. And that ability to abide, to observe is a form of freedom in itself. And it's the foundation for the deepest kind of freedom. The release that is not letting go. Relaxing, letting go is what's prepares the ground for our heart to release where it's held, where it's constructed.

So mindfulness of the body. The Buddha emphasizes this repeatedly over and over again. Very, very, very powerful, very central to what the Buddha at least was teaching. Takes a lot of compassion, a lot of care how to do this because of what goes on in the body for people. But it's the first foundation of mindfulness.

Thank you.