

2020-11-24 Eightfold Path-Right Mindfulness (4 of 6)

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SPEAKERS

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Continuing these talks on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It could also, the word Foundation, it can also mean the four applications of mindfulness, the four areas of applying or developing mindfulness. Developing awareness. And second foundation is Vedanā in Pāli. It's a word which more generally just means feeling. It could also mean experiencing. It could also mean knowing. It has to do with how the present moment experience that we have, how it's felt, how it's known, how it's experienced in its directness, in its immediacy, before interpretations and stories we make about it. And of course, we have many feelings like this. And vedanā refers to all of them. And there's many different kinds of feelings for sure.

But in the practice of mindfulness, the Buddha points out that there are three fundamental feelings. That all feelings have these qualities, these characteristics. And to notice how feelings can be pleasant. How feelings can be unpleasant. And how feelings can be neither pleasant or unpleasant. And so sometimes people in in the Vipassana world will say vedanā means pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. But it's not really quite right. Vedanā is feelings more generally. And then we focus on how feelings are pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. And the reason for that is that feelings, these pleasant and unpleasant, is very much the trigger for being for against, for wanting or pushing away, or aversion. And so it kind of works like this, maybe, that if someone really likes candy. And so they just can't stop eating candy, eating lots of candy. And then they get sick, physically sick and bloated and often feel kind of tired. And after a while they realized this eating candy doesn't work. So okay, they stopped, it's great. So they start eating cookies instead. Eating lots of cookies, the same thing happens. I'll stop eating cookies, then they eat cake. And then they stop eating cake when they realize how terrible they feel. And then they just start drinking a lot of sugary sodas. Because the other things didn't work. Eventually, they discover that what the common denominator is for all these things that they're eating in an addictive way is sugar. "Oh, its sugar that's making me feel so addictive. And it's sugar, which is making me feel so bad. So why don't I just stop eating sugar." And so then that applies to all ways, all things that have sugar in them. And so it's seeing the common denominator and that applies to all situations. Of all the cravings for these things that had their root in sugar.

So in the same thing, there's can be pleasant. All kinds of things can be pleasant. And we can have all kinds of relationships with that pleasantness. We can have desires and wanting and addictions. And so sometimes we pursue a lot of pleasures. But it's not necessarily that the activities we're doing, that we're pursuing. Pursuing the feeling of pleasure, the feeling of comfort, the feeling of joy, or exuberance, or whatever it might be. But it's not really the thing we're doing. It's the pleasantness it provides us, the hit of pleasant sensations and hormones and whatever it goes on. And the same thing with unpleasant. We can react to unpleasant ways that are not appropriate if we don't understand what it's about.

When I was in my 20s, for seven years I had a wheat allergy and I had never heard of wheat allergies before and wasn't well known back then. And so before I'd realized it was a wheat allergy, eating wheat, I worked at a bakery, so there was a lot of bread to eat, and I was breathing in probably flour. And so I'd feel really bad. And my way, when I felt bad I wanted to comfort myself. And one of the comfort foods for me was baguettes and I had lots of access to baguettes. So I'd eat baguettes and I would feel worse. And since I felt bad, I would eat more baguettes, I didn't make the correlation. And at some point, it dawned on me that maybe it's all the wheat I'm eating. And I read about it. And then I discovered there were allergies and wheat allergies, and then I stopped eating it. And I felt better. And I didn't believe it, so then I would eat a little bit. And sure enough, I'd feel bad and back and forth for a while. And so it was the craving for pleasure again, in reaction to feeling unpleasant. I had to get better, I had to fix it. And I was doing the very thing that would make it worse for myself. But once I discovered the common denominator, the wheat, then I could find health.

So this idea of looking at the pleasant and unpleasant of experience, is to look at that common denominator of many different things. And if we can learn to identify how we generally react, respond to what's pleasant, and how we react to what's unpleasant, we get a lot of overview, a lot of wisdom. It kind of like becomes a key for a lot of different areas of our life, we don't have to then do sophisticated analysis of situations. We just have to realize that I'm reacting because of pleasant and unpleasant. So if you go to, you know before COVID, if you go to a crowded party or something. And you find no one knows you, you don't know anyone there, no one knows you. And everyone's having a good time with each other and you're left out and it's kind of unpleasant music. And maybe some of these conversations are unpleasant. And maybe there's a lot of smoke in this place, cigarette smoke. And you realize you really feel off and feel bad. And you start analyzing or interpreting it. And one popular way to do that is to blame oneself. I'm so unlikable, no one likes me, and everyone's avoiding me. And that's why I feel so bad. Or these people, I need to understand what these people are all about and kind of analyze them and try to understand how I can blame them for something about how I'm feeling. And then it dawns on you this pleasant and unpleasant things. And you say, "Oh, wait a minute, the whole situation is just unpleasant. And I don't have to understand exactly why it's unpleasant or what's triggering the unpleasantness. In order to not react to the unpleasant. It's just unpleasant. And I know how to be with unpleasant." With unpleasant you just let it be. Unpleasant, you don't pick it up. You don't push it away, you don't look for blame in yourself or others. It's possible just to be aware of it and hold it in a spacious mind. Hold it in a relaxed mind.

And the same thing with pleasant. You come to a situation that's really, really pleasant. And maybe it's a table full of pastries. I once taught a retreat at a monastery, Vipassana. We rented a space, someone went to space in a monastery in Missouri. And there was a meditation hall had a little room on the side. And the meditators kept going into that room back and forth over and over again. And I had no idea what were they doing there. And finally, I went to check that room. And it was full of pastries. I couldn't believe how much pastry through there was. And it seemed like there was a different pastry culture in Missouri back then than it was in California. And the meditators were reading a lot of sweets. So a very pleasant, but I wonder how good it was for their meditation. But to see, "Oh, pleasant, I want that." But then, "I don't need to do that. I can be free." And discovering freedom in relationship to pleasant and unpleasant is a wonderful thing. It's freedom. To be able to go into unpleasant place, uncomfortable place and be comfortable. To be able to go and approach something pleasant or experience something pleasant and certainly be comfortable, but comfortable enough that there's no addiction. There's no leaning, no grabbing, no wanting more. Just allowing it to be.

The reason why this is important for meditation is that if the mind is operating, chasing after pleasure, wanting pleasure, wanting comfort, reacting to it, being there holding on to it, or pushing away, or being upset with unpleasant and trying to fix it and push it away, the mind won't settle. And if it won't settle and calm down, you won't discover any freedom. The mind will live in its reactivity. And so to start understanding this common denominator is kind of like a little key. It's very simple. And sometimes sophisticated people feel it's too simple. But simplicity sometimes is the key. You can you come to the common denominator out of which so much reactivity arises. Someone's behavior, complicated behavior, complicated political philosophies, and religious philosophies, can have their source in this simple thing. This is pleasant, I want more of it. This is unpleasant, I want it to go away. It's a huge drive of human behavior. And to sit and be quiet, and see pleasant and unpleasant, and our reaction to it. And to learn to be free. Be free of reactivity, or be free of picking up and being involved in the reactivity. And eventually just seeing that between pleasant experience, there's a gap before reactivity kicks in. And then just in that gap to just leave the pleasant being the pleasant and leave the unpleasant to be the unpleasant. Then the mind can start discovering peace and freedom, calm, contentment, well being. That is almost, it is not dependent on the things of the world. A kind of inner, deep inner pleasure, deep inner contentment and happiness, which is not of the skin. Not of the world, in a sense of the world is. With something deep inside, maybe something of the heart.

So the second foundations of mindfulness. So you might explore this today, in the next 24 hours, you might, as you go about your day, you might just notice clearly when something is pleasant and unpleasant. And see if it's just that, pleasant and unpleasant. Or whether you also have reactions to it. And does it prompt behavior and feelings and all kinds of things. So thank you so much.

So as for announcements, I have two announcements. One is on Friday, after at 7:45 or so when we finished here, I'm going to set up a Zoom Room. And we can have one of our community meetings we have from time to time. And I'll be sure to use the large Zoom account. So there's room for everyone. And that's a time maybe to ask some questions and do Q&A after the discussion. And also, I will do one session of breaking you into breakout groups, maybe groups of five, so that you can meet some other people on this in our YouTube meditation community. So I'll post the information, the zoom link on the

IMC what's new, maybe on Thursday, and on the calendar IMC and also in the chat here at I'll post it at on Friday as well. So there'll be different ways of getting it. So that's one announcement.

The second announcement is that it is a community and you know. I think of all of you on YouTube now and as being part of that IMC community. And one of the things I do every year is I send out an end of the year letter to the community and it's a fundraising letter. And so I don't know if that interests any of you, but as part of the community, maybe you're interested in reading the letter and so forth. So that's also on the What's New page on IMC's website. And also it's on that it's been put on the underneath the video here and on YouTube, on the YouTube kind of description of what we are. There's a link to it as well.

So thank you for it. This morning and I look forward to continuing this series tomorrow.