

2020-11-26 Eightfold Path-Right Mindfulness (6 of 6)

Thu, 11/26 7:22AM • 13:49

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

light, mindfulness, awareness, hindrances, grow, awakening, mind, freedom, feeling, quality, sense, factors, unpleasant, aware, expansive, call, deeper, peacefulness, clear, distinguishing

SPEAKERS

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So, today's the last talk on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, as part of this series on the Eightfold Path.

I think of these different four areas of cultivating greater awareness, as both standing on their own is very significant practices, but also describing a path and unfolding. As awareness becomes more clear, and more settled. So it begins with mindfulness of breathing. And as we become settled in our breathing, there tends to be kind of an opening up in becoming aware of more of our body. And it leads to mindfulness of the body and body awareness. And it doesn't just stay in our meditation practice, but it goes into our daily lives, we walk around and do things. That there can be a growing sense of being embodied presence and mindful of the body as we do things. So there's this path, you know, of developing greater attention to the body.

And then as we continue, we become more deeply aware of this subjective experience of how that what goes on within this body, we experience things that either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. And this kind of subjective experience of liking and not liking, pleasant and unpleasant, becomes clearer and clearer. And not only that, but also what's pleasant, unpleasant, more deeply than just what's on the skin's, skin surface kind of surface stuff. And the deeper kind of wellsprings of our inner life. Some people would call that the spiritual life, the inner life. And so we feel what's pleasant, unpleasant there, becomes more alive if the quality of it becomes important. And becomes a powerful reference point for understanding something about more and more important when we're really connected to our inner life. And the pleasant and unpleasant is kind of a guide to help us understand the way forward into greater well being.

And then as we do this, we start becoming aware of something even deeper inside is the really the quality of our inner life. The state of the mind, the state of the heart, the quality. And we become aware there are also if it's more in the surface of things, and get caught up in the partial parts of the mind of greed, hatred and delusion. Or we're really connecting to something deeper and deeper, fuller, about

the mind, the heart, the inner life. Sometimes it can no longer be called an inner life because awareness starts feeling expansive, open, it has no boundaries anymore. And the mind, state of mind, the inner life, starts feeling expansive, wonderful, exalted. Can feel very settled, very much at peace, and can even start feeling liberated and free. And this sense of what inner freedom feels like, where the heart, the mind is no longer caught and trapped and preoccupied is a wonderful feeling. And start feeling that becomes a reference point for the fourth foundation of mindfulness, which has a lot to do, it's all about, what is it that, how is it that we lose our freedom, that sense of freedom, that inner inner quality of being unoppressed, unburdened, unfrayed, uncontracted? Just free and open, expansive. So what is it that in that awakening, that freedom is kind of a light, Then what is it that dims that light? And what is it that brightness that light even more? What brings greater freedom? And so the fourth foundation of mindfulness is really starting to notice this for ourselves. And not reading a book about what freedom is and loss of freedom, but really reading the book inside of ourselves. Having the inner reference point and feeling the difference. Making that distinction between dimming of the light and the growing of the light. Or contracting and expanding, being caught and being limited in our awareness and our thoughts and what we do. And becoming more unlimited and expansive and free.

And so that most classic features of this fourth foundation of mindfulness is on one hand is the five hindrances, which is the places of dimming the light, and the seven factors of awakening, which is really opening the light, expanding the light. And the Buddha talks about this in terms of a light of wisdom. Tthat the five hindrances, dim,the light of wisdom, and the seven factors of awakening, brighten it allows for more wisdom to be there. And so to start in the practice of mindfulness in a non reactive way and with openness and clear mindfulness, to start seeing and tuning into how these deep forces inside of us work. And so it's been a journey through the body to the inner life deeper and deeper, to the place where we start seeing there's some choice. Where it's really the kind of the operating of freedom and the loss of it, really goes on in the mind. And to really be able to connect deeply in the mind, that deep operating system, is really where the deeper work of practice begins to really benefit us in a deep way.

And so the analogy for the, well I'll say it this way, it's remarkable that just being aware of the hindrances and just being aware of the seven factors of awakening has a powerful effect on them. And with the hindrances, if we really see them clearly, it diminishes them. They tend to go away. They tend to become less strong. If we are clearly aware of the factors of awakening, it tends to strengthen them up to a point, till they're complete. And an analogy I use for this is that of a greenhouse, where maybe there's curtains over the greenhouse so that it gets hot inside the greenhouse kind of blocking the light from really getting into the plants. But it still gets hot in there and hot and humid. And so when the curtains are pulled, what grows is maybe mold, and lots of mold can grow and it just gets kind of stinky in the greenhouse. But if you pull the light, pull the curtains apart, and the sunlight come in. Then the plants that were planted in the greenhouse can begin growing. And so in a kind of way, the that's how the light light and lack of light, promotes mold. The strong light, the mold kind of recedes and the plant grows. When the curtains are pulled, the plants don't grow, maybe they even kind of get all weak and thin and fall over. So the same thing in when the is very little light of awareness, there's a tendency for things like the hindrances and attachments to grow and develop. And they're kind of like the mold, maybe. They're not so desirable, they maybe have a little, little bit of a, I don't know if it's fair to them to

call them a little stinky quality or something, moldy quality, moldy smell. And then, but when the light of awareness shines, then the seven factors of awakening grow, and the hindrances recede. So it's a remarkable thing. It just simply in the field of awareness. However it does require we recognize the hindrances. We know what they are. And we recognize the seven factors. We know what they are. And so that's why I was talking about it in last guided meditation, leading you through kind of a guided meditation on the seven factors of awakening. Which is amazingly wonderful qualities that they themselves can be seen sometimes as a path.

So much of this Dharma practice is an unfolding and maturing and evolving in a beneficial way. And to really feel the onward leading nature of this practice is to allow the pool of the gravitational pull of awakening, to respond to it to allow it to grow. So the seven factors of mindfulness, the second one is usually called investigation. But that sounds too analytical and too involved in the literal meaning of the word is closer to distinguishing experiences. So some translators will call it discriminating awareness because it's distinguishing, the highlighting the differences between things. Not through effort, but just because the mind gets clear and clear. And it's obvious. We start seeing the details of things and the clear distinctions of details. It's a delight, this kind of investigation, because of the wonderfulness of clarity. And then as this kind of mindfulness and clarity becomes stronger, it just feels to delight, it's joyful. And some of it's just joyful because it's just wonderful to have this quality of awareness. It's also a joy arises because there's a tendency to get now get kind of concentrated kind of engaged, kind of delightfully kind of absorbed, even in the experience of meditation with this clarity. And anytime we're fully engaged in something, it tends to produce a sense of well being. And then there's tranquility, a sense of relaxation, serenity, peacefulness. And then there is concentration. I like to call it unification everything becomes unified and working together in a concentrated way. And then equanimity, equipoise. And the ability to be aware, clearly, wisely. But to do it with a mind not getting activated in reactivity. There's no kind of leaning into or pulling away, no grabbing on or pushing away. We can still be wise and respond to the world effectively. But there's a steadiness in the mind, a peacefulness in the mind, calmness that is not disturbed.

So this is kind of the direction that mindfulness is going. And so when to cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness is to cultivate that capacity that is like the morning light, the dawn, that grows stronger and stronger, brighter and brighter and brighter in the course of the morning, until we no longer called the dawn. But now it's the full sunlight of the day. And then that full sunlight of the day, then even before that, that light of awareness is freeing. It leads to freedom. It gives us these qualities of freedom. That is the teacher on the Eightfold Path. That sooner or later the primary way of understanding we're finding our way in the Eightfold Path is not reading about it. But really getting a sense, a personal experiential sense of what it might be the Buddhist might talk about is liberation or freedom or release, the heart's release. And then to keep using that as the guide the support for greater and greater mindfulness and awareness.

And this mindfulness that we're talking about here, tends to come to maturity when their concentration is strong, which is also the sixth factor of the seven factors of awakening. And that'll be the topic starting tomorrow is right concentration. And right concentration kind of brings things into maturity for the purposes of awakening, freedom.

So thank you and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow. And may all of you, no matter where you are in the world, be thanked. I thank you all. And express your thanks and offer at Thanksgiving for all the things that are wonderful in this world, usually much more than we realize. Thank you.