

## The Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness...and Relationships

Rick asked me to continue to explore Mindfulness, particularly the fourth foundation of mindfulness – the dhammas. And the dhammas in the context of relationships. We will still be sitting here when he returns in three weeks.

Tonight we will explore relating to the dhammas, and relating through the dhammas. And then explore relating more, connection and inter-connection, personally and in sangha, next week.

To review the first three foundations of mindfulness very briefly. Mindfulness is simply being present, in this moment, open to experience, engaged with our experience in a receptive, accepting way. Loving awareness, as more and more teachers in the West are fond of saying.

The four foundations of mindfulness suggest what we can be aware of, as a reliable path to the end of suffering and as gateways to enlightenment.

1. body sensations: awareness of the body, our sense perceptions, can be a hologram, a microcosm of self and non-self, suffering, impermanence; it's all in there. Serendipitous synchronicity, found a lovely article by Ajahn Sucitta in the Fall issue of *Buddhadharma*, on feeling stuck in our practice. And how in becoming aware of the energy we embody in our bodies, we find spaciousness and inter-connectedness, to get us unstuck.

Many ways to practice awareness of the body in our daily lives, one of my favorites, Jon Kabat-Zinn recommends it, too, is mindfulness in the shower. You are deliciously in your body, and you don't really get to do much else, and if you're planning your day or worrying about your day, you can notice that and simply come back to the sensations of warm water on your skin and the miracles of living, standing, breathing.

2. feeling tone: emotional valence of experience, traditionally pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. To me, most related to revving up of nervous system, where there's revving up or mobilizing with fear, can be unpleasant, fear, anxiety, anger rage. When without fear, can be pleasant – interest, curiosity, exploration, enthusiasm. And the calming down of the nervous system. Immobilizing without fear can be pleasant – meditation, the glow after making love, lying in the sun on the beach. Immobilization with fear can be unpleasant, feeling paralyzed, helpless, lethargic, even depressed. Neutral, which is so plain can often be overlooked is actually in psychological terms when we're in our window of tolerance, in Buddhist terms, when we're in equanimity: calm and relaxed, yet engaged and alert. The state of being where we can most easily be mindful, aware and accepting.

Many ways to practice catching the feeling tone in our daily lives. One of the most useful is to catch a startle, the (quick intake of breath) and pause to notice before being hijacked off into a cascade of reactive feelings and thoughts.

3. constructs of the mind – so much in here! Our brains perceive, process and respond to experience all the time and work very hard to make sense, make meaning of experience. And so constructions of the mind are a natural by-product of living and processing experience. We're not ever going to not do that, to stop constructing meaning; that's what the human brain does.

We experience body sensations, a feeling tone, an emotion and name it; we make sense of it. We may be confused or deluded in the meaning we give it, but making meaning is what the mind is doing. We have thoughts and we name them. We can see our opinions, our judgments, our stories, our belief systems, our world views, and name them as such. We can name the processes of the mind: thinking, feeling, planning, judging, yearning, cultivating, practicing, as processes of the mind. One of the benefits of being on retreat is that our minds slow down enough that we can catch the constructs of the mind and go oh! Delighting or grumping or rehearsing the next argument with our partner; we can lovingly become aware of how our mind is operating and what novels or nightmares it is churning out. We can see how we construct a sense of self – in Ajahn Sucitta's phrase the apparent self - as the continuity of "I" that is experiencing these experiences. If we have to get a sense of self before it is psychologically safe to let go of it into the spacious emptiness of non-self, then I think it's worth honoring the tremendous capacities of our mind to find and make meaning before we let go of that and rest in pure awareness, dissolve into the non-dual.

I think it's great to have wise view as a compass to guide our practice and guide our lives. And we remain aware that a view, even a wholesome view, is a view, is a construct, and can dissolve into emptiness. On the way to enlightenment, these constructs are a necessary part of making meaning, making sense of experience and conveying meaning to and from other human beings, other meaning makers. Much of the time these constructs are helpful – they are essential to shared meaning, learning, understanding, shared connection. They are the maps that help us navigate our lives.

But like maps, which describe and guide us through the territory we are moving through to get here or get home again, constructs are not the same as lived experience, and when we identify with the constructs as though that's where we live and that's who we are, or that's who somebody else is, we miss the experience of who we truly are, the deep abiding non-personal true nature or Buddha nature of awareness. I remember in an interview with Christina Feldman once becoming somewhat proud of myself that I was finally understanding some of the wise views of Buddhism, happy to be organizing my practice around these dhammas we'll be looking at next, and she reminded me that eventually nibbana, the ceasing of suffering, of clinging and grasping, involves letting go even of these views I was so happy to be cultivating. So we practice mindfulness of these constructions as a practice to bring us to a knowing of ourselves as the awareness that is aware.

4. Which brings us to the fourth foundation of mindfulness, the fourth category of objects of mindfulness, which is the teachings, the dhammas, the wisdom the Buddha taught after his awakening. The wisdom of any enlightened being.

We've come to know these teachings in the Pali Canon as

1. The Four Noble Truths
  - a. life is full of suffering
  - b. suffering is caused by grasping
  - c. there is a release from suffering
  - d. the 8-Fold path is the path of liberation from suffering
2. The 8-fold Path
  - a. wise view (constructs of the mind as part of the 8-fold path)
  - b. wise intention
  - c. wise speech
  - d. wise action
  - e. wise livelihood
  - f. wise effort
  - g. wise concentration
  - g. wise mindfulness
3. The three characteristics:
  - a. suffering
  - b. non-self
  - c. impermanence
4. the Four Brahma Viharas or Heavenly Abodes
  - a. loving kindness
  - b. compassion
  - c. sympathetic joy
  - d. equanimity
5. The 10 paramitas
  - a. generosity
  - b. morality
  - c. renunciation
  - d. wisdom
  - e. energy
  - f. patience
  - g. truthfulness
  - h. determination
  - i. loving kindness
  - j. equanimity
6. The 7 Factors of Enlightenment
  - a. energy
  - b. joy
  - c. investigation
  - d. tranquillity
  - e. equanimity

- f. mindfulness
- g. concentration

## 7. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness, themselves.

The lists.

Every item on each of these lists could be the subject of an entire dharma talk, an entire daylong, an entire retreat, and they have been. Each of these dhammas is also a practice, or points to a practice, that leads to awakening, to the complete liberation from suffering.

Reiterating here, these dhammas are maps or guides, not the lived experience. CIIS Public Program, Monday, Martin Luther King Day, Roshi Joan Halifax, abbot of Upaya Center in Santa Fe, and Daisy Kahn, director of American Society for Muslim Advancement in a Buddhist Muslim dialogue. Roshi Joan Halifax talked about Thich Nhat Hanh, when he created the order of inter-being, said the first precept was: all precepts, all dhammas are constructs; we must never take any construct as absolute truth. (Even that one.)

So tonight I want to explore how we relate to these practices and how we relate through these practices.

There is a fable, one of Aesop's fables, that is helpful to me here. A magpie announces that she is giving a free daylong to all the birds of the forest who want to learn how to build a nest. So the birds gather, and she lays a bowl of twigs on a branch in a tree, and the oriole says, "Oh! That's how nests are built!" and goes off, and that's how orioles have been building their nests ever since. The magpie then daubs the bowl of twigs with some mud to seal the cracks and the jay says, "Oh! That's how nests are built!" and flies off, and that's how jays have been building their nests ever since. The magpie then lines the caulked bowl of twigs with some soft downy feathers and the robin say, "Oh! That's how to build a nest!" And goes off, and that's how robins have been building their next ever since. The magpie continues teaching throughout the day, and various birds continue to fly off until the end of the day, when the only birds left to learn how the magpie is building a nest are the other magpies.

I used to think the moral of that fable was that if you didn't stay until the very end, you wouldn't learn everything there was to learn about building a nest, and that would be a failure. But now I think that every single species of bird did learn how to build a nest and what they learned was good enough to survive and thrive as a species, and that when we practice the dhammas, any one of them, like joy, or gratitude, kindness, or mindfulness, our sincere and dedicated practices can be good enough to get us all the way through to wisdom and liberation and enlightenment.

As Meister Eckhart says, "If the only prayer you ever said in your entire life was 'thank you' it would suffice."

Because when we consciously intentionally practice these practices, and are aware of the fruits of practice, integrity of our practice, our awareness and our acceptance, wisdom and compassion, can lead us all the way.

I can still remember my experience on retreat at Spirit Rock, and the place I was standing outside the meditation hall, when I realized: when there is no fear, when there is no shame, being is effortless and life is joy. It came, just like that. And when I remain aware, that is enough of a wise view to practice for a lifetime.

So these dhammas, these wisdom teachings, are practices, and we relate to them as practices. In this year of mindfulness practice, I have taught on forgiveness practice, gratitude practice, James taught last week about practices that cultivate joy; Rick teaches cultivating wholesome states and taking in the good.

So how do we relate to them? We become present: we show up, focusing our awareness in the moment on the object of awareness, any of the four foundations of mindfulness, any practice in any of the lists, we stay open, engaged, accepting (loving presence, loving awareness) And we experience, embody, and express they lead us to.

Last week James taught the experiencing, embodying, and expressing of joy. We'll do a brief exercise now of taking a moment to go inside and invite into awareness a moment of joy, feeling the sensations of joy in your body, and then, if you wish, turning to a partner and sharing for a moment each perhaps what the moment of joy was, but especially the experience of experiencing the you. You're expressing your joy to your partner.

[Guided meditation, then sharing in dyads.]

So perhaps we've just had an experience of relating to each other through the practices, through the dhammas.

There is a tremendous power to heal and awaken into aliveness and wholeness when we relate to each other through these practices. Another list – the three jewels.

Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Buddha who was the awakened one, taught the dhammas, the teachings, in sangha we relate to each other through those teachings. That's the common ground, the energy field, in a sitting group, in Awakening Joy, in Deepening Joy, in a Year To Live group, or a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction class. We find our dharma buddies on the dharma trail; I have talked monthly with my friend Rose Saint John for 12 years, ever since we met in Sylvia Boorstein's class at Spirit Rock, and what we talk is dharma, is our practice, which deepens relationship as it deepens our practice.

So we'll do one more exercise of relating to each other through the dhammas, relating to each other's true nature through the four Brahma Viharas. Turn to your partner, or turn inward if you wish. We do this exercise in noble silence. Simply gaze into your partner's eyes, allowing your self to see in them the nobility of their true nature. Their

innate goodness and radiance of their being, and silently wish them well, sending them expressions of loving kindness: may you know the deepest happiness, may you have ease of mind and heart, and let yourself know that your partner is sending you expressions of loving kindness as well. Taking in that kindness.

Then allow your awareness to shift. Imagine what human sorrows your partner might have experienced in their journey, what losses, what griefs, what pain of the human condition. Silently begin to send them expressions of compassion: May your sorrows be held in loving awareness, may your sorrow ease, may you feel my care for your suffering. And let yourself know that your partner is sending you compassion for your sorrow and suffering as well. Let yourself take in that care and compassion.

Then allow your awareness to shift. Imagine what human joys your partner may have experienced in their journey. What accomplishments and competencies they might have achieved. What blessings of abundance and love they might have experienced on their journey. And silently begin to send them expressions of sympathetic joy, happiness for their happiness. May you fully delight in your delight; may you feel your joy deeply. And allow yourself to know your partner is sending you expressions of joy in your joy as well. Let yourself take in the sweetness of their joy in your joy.

Then allow your awareness to shift again to expressing wishes for calm abiding to your partner, wishes for equanimity: Whatever happens on your journey, may you perceive and respond to it with a calm ease of mind and heart. May you have deep inner peace. And allow yourself to know your partner is sending you expressions of the wish for equanimity, for calm abiding for you as well. Let yourself take in the calming energy of their well-wishing.

Allow your awareness to shift one more time to simply being in your own being, noticing whatever is going on for you right now. Awareness of your inner experience, and awareness of your awareness.

[De-brief.]

We'll do way more personal practice next week. Sylvia says wise relationship is the 9<sup>th</sup> step of the 8-fold path. So we'll look at applied mindfulness of the fourth foundation in personal relationships next week

Let's sit for a minute.