

Centering Meditation

Allow yourself to arrive here. Let your self rest in the sense of safety and benevolence of this gathering. Gently let go of the day, all the activity, all the movements and feelings and thoughts and concerns. Let yourself be present here, in this place, in this moment. Settle into being held in the peacefulness of this gathering, in this moment. Become aware of being in your body, feeling your back and your butt on the chair or couch, feeling your feet on the floor, relax your eyes, your jaw, your throat. Be present and open to this experience of sitting, breathing. Settle into an awareness of your breathing, gently breathing in and out. Let your awareness settle on your breathing.

When your awareness of being in this moment, here, now, steadies, bring in any sense of gratitude or appreciation that helps you open into a sense of ease, well-being, contentment. Notice any feelings of warmth, openness, relaxation in your body, and let yourself savor a moment of goodness.

If any distracting thoughts or feelings arise, simply acknowledge them, let them in, let them be, and then let them move through and return your awareness to a sense of goodness, ease, well-being.

If distracting thoughts continue to arise, evoke a sense of compassion for yourself in this moment, how hard it is to be a human being. And return your awareness to your breath, to a sense of goodness.

Dharma Talk: Integrity

I'd like to try a different format for tonight. This chapter – Bliss of Blamelessness – is an umbrella for so many topics, all of which could be a whole dharma talk:

- *honesty and integrity
- *alignment with values or True Nature
- *truth sense and truth force – acting in the world for social justice
- *conscience rather than self-judgment
- *developing the loving kindness and compassion to learn and grow from mistakes and failures rather than contract in blame-shame or disappointment
- *mindfulness to even see what we've done and to see the unconscious habits that would lead to actions of greed, hatred or delusion.

James included in his monthly letter a practice from Alan Marlatt of SOBER we'll look at later. Practices of forgiveness and reconciliation; James traces his whole story of abandoning his son and then re-connecting and adopting his son. The five traditional precepts of don'ts: non-harming, not stealing, etc, and James' beautiful update of five positive do's that we'll work with later. A very full chapter.

So, rather than one dharma talk, I'd like to lead us in five experiential exercises related to five of the topics in this chapter, do a mini-dharma introduction for each and weave the dharma into people's experiences as we de-brief, so that we actually get to experience and practice the wisdom of this chapter. We'll still have a break for snacks and dana; we'll still have resources and homework.

Experiential Exercises

One definition of integrity in Webster's dictionary is "the quality of being complete; unbroken condition, wholeness, entirety."

In our first exercise, you'll work with a partner in the sharing. We're doing this exercise to help us cultivate the felt sense of when we're in integrity, touching into our wholeness, and the felt sense of when we're not.

1. Experience moment of integrity.

First, allow yourself to settle quietly and focus your attention inward.

- a. Think of a time when you acted unskillfully. When you remember that moment, see if you can remember what it felt like in your mind and body immediately after the words were spoken or the deed was done?
- b. What contributed to your choosing to act in a way that you soon regretted?
- c. Complete this sentence: "I'm most likely to speak or act unskillfully when ____."

You'll allow yourself to remember a time when you acted from integrity, from alignment with your core values or True Nature, when you did the right thing, maybe easily and automatically, maybe after inner struggle with your conscience and old patterns.

- a. Think of a challenging situation when you somehow chose to act wisely. What did it feel like in your mind and body?
- b. What helped you decide to choose that route?

You'll see if you can remember how you felt then, but also how you feel now as you remember. Were there any ripples of good will or blamelessness that you were aware of or that people told you about?

- c. What can support you in choosing to respond with integrity in difficult situations?

Turn to a partner and take two minutes to each to share your experience but also what you are learning now from doing this exercise.

When we have an experience that creates a new pattern in our brain and we repeatedly reflect on it, it installs it in the brain as a reference point, a resource. Installs it as a complete state, not just the concept but the visceral feelings and body state. And we can use that memory, reference point, as a resource to bring us back to our True Nature or intention to act from True Nature again and again.

Cultivating integrity is the practice of mindfully listening clearly to your moral compass inside; the more aware of the feelings that accompany your actions – skillful or unskillful – you deepen this understanding.

There is a place in all of us that feels “off” when we’re not in alignment with our values. We all have a conscience which is hard-wired into us. We only need to listen honestly to our inner wisdom so we can discern between right and wrong. Mindfulness helps you become more aware of your conscience and so is a great ally in supporting your intention to be happy.

There is a price we pay as we become more conscious: we can no longer pretend we don’t know any better. Sometimes, as we become more aware of our unskillful habits, it’s humbling to see the ways we fall short of our ideals. [there’s a horror show of the TOP TEN.] This process of waking up requires genuine compassion and kindness when you see the depths of conditioning that cause you to act with attachment, aversion or confusion, even when you know better. As Ram Dass says in *Be Here Now*, “As you further purify yourself, your impurities will seem grosser and larger. Understand that it’s not that you are not getting more caught in the illusion. It’s just that you’re seeing it more clearly. The lions guarding the gates get fiercer as you go towards each inner temple. But, of course, the light gets brighter too.”

2. S.O.B.E.R. from Alan Marlatt from Awakening Joy monthly letter

S Stop

O Observe mindfully what you’re feeling in body and mind

B Breathe to calm your system down

E Expand perspective

R Respond wisely

Such a useful framing of mindfulness. I honestly like it better than RAIN, because rather than non-identify, it’s respond wisely. In our householder living that’s what we have to do so often. Non-identify, yes, but still respond wisely.

So we’re going to practice this because it fits nicely with the work we did last month to find joy in the midst of suffering, or the joy that is larger than the suffering – expand perspective. And it’s a pre-requisite for the next exercise we’ll do on forgiveness.

Take a moment, sit quietly, go inward, just go through the five steps of SOBER in this moment: Stop, Observe what you’re feeling in your mind and body; Breathe to calm your system down; Expand your perspective, holding whatever is happening in your mind or

body in this moment in a larger perspective; not the only thing happening in this moment; this moment is not the only moment. You can even remember a moment of lack of integrity, lack of total honesty or lack of alignment with your values; hold this moment in a larger perspective. Then Respond wisely, which may be let it go, or decide to relate to the moment differently, with more compassion or equanimity perhaps.

3. Mistakes-failures – forgiveness.

My May 2010 e-newsletter was on forgiveness, based on daylong with Jack Kornfield and Fred Luskin at UC Berkeley on forgiveness. Jack and Fred both outlined many steps of forgiveness. Most important, cultivating loving kindness and compassion for self to create inner space in heart from which you can forgive. Integrity is an expression of a desire to act in harmony with other living beings because of an innate love of life. In acting skillfully we can be touched by our own goodness. Allow time for grief and remorse. Wise reflection, wise remorse; what can I learn from this lesson to be more skillful next time? Must feel that for forgiveness to be real. And then practices of forgiveness, beautiful meditation from Jack in the e-newsletter.

Tonight, work with partner, simply identify one thing you would like to work on forgiving yourself for. Doesn't have to be as big and difficult as James' struggle about his son, could be an appointment you forgot or a traffic ticket you got or an unkind thing you said to someone or a relationship you dropped a long time ago and never found the time to pick up again. Work with partner simply to identify one thing to work on, identify grief that might come up., and set intention to cultivate forgiveness in the coming month.

4. Five Precepts

Traditional language and interpretations of the precepts are in the chapter, as are James updated version.

Five Precepts Updated

For one who leads a virtuous life,
It is a natural law that remorse will not arise....
For one free of remorse,
It is a natural law that gladness will arise....
For one who is glad at heart,
It is a natural law that joy will arise.
- Buddha

1) Honor all life (refrain from killing) James talks about the dilemmas – not enough vegetables and grains in the high plains of Tibet to sustain life, people must eat meat. We kill life every time we take antibiotics.

Respect the ideas and feelings of others

Protect the environment
Work for human rights
Support organizations that serve those in need
Work or volunteer in an organization that contributes to the health and well-being of others
Help insects trapped in your house find their way outside

2) Share your time and resources (refrain from stealing) [taking that which is not freely offered; someone's time or attention]

Listen to others
Slow down and let people in ahead of you in line or in traffic
Volunteer your time
Contribute your resources (and de-clutter!)
Re-use Re-Store Re-cycle

3) Take care with sexual energy, respecting boundaries, offering safety (refrain from inappropriate sexual relations) [cause no harm with power of sexuality]

Delight in giving physical pleasure (oxytocin-releasing hugs, head rubs, back rubs, caring touch on the shoulder)
Maintain conscious, health boundaries

4) Speak kindly and carefully (refrain from unskillful speech) [not lying, slandering, gossiping]

Speak compassionately – Non-Violent Communication
Listen empathically
Speak to yourself with loving kindness rather than harsh judgment (and have compassion for self when you catch yourself in judgment). And speak honestly to yourself. Not putting yourself down unnecessarily, and not hiding or denying the truth within.

5) Develop clear mind and healthy body (refrain from using intoxicants that cloud the mind and lead to heedlessness) [alcohol and drugs, anything addictive, video games or internet porn. Anything that clouds the mind, anger can be an intoxicant; power and control can be an intoxicant]

Meditate to cultivate clear seeing
Exercise, yoga, dance, hike to cultivate healthy body
Loving kindness and compassion practices to cultivate loving heart

Following these precepts leads to inner peace and joy, as the Buddha taught in the instructions at the top of the handout.

With a partner, perhaps a different partner, choose a precept from this list. Explore specific ways you might implement wise action around this precept in the coming month.

Be as specific and concrete and time measurable as you can. Something you can hold yourself accountable for, or your joy buddy can help hold you accountable for.

5. Truth Force – acting in the world for social justice. Absolutely Precept #1 Honor all life, including life of planet itself. Extending that to being so anchored in a cause you believe in that you are motivated, passionate, activated to do something about it. And when people see that resolve in you they are motivated, too, perhaps not for the same cause but for a cause.

I'm noticing a phenomenon, ever since Greg Mortenson wrote Three Cups of Tea about his passion to build schools in Afghanistan for children in remote villages, so they could have a chance for an education, a trade, a profession, a life other than being recruited for training in the Taliban.

Now I hear of folk all the time volunteering to build a school or teach in a school. I'll have to do a newsletter at some point. DJ member Johanna Brindriff and husband in Kenya now teaching biology at first all girls high school. Another friends' daughter is going to teach music in a township near Capetown for a semester.

We don't have to go halfway around the world to manifest the truth force. Nor are we all in a position to do what Daniel and Patricia Ellsberg did when they released the Pentagon Papers to the press, helping to end the war in Vietnam and catalyze Richard Nixon's resignation from the presidency. Nor can we all take off two years to sit in a Douglas fir tree is Julia Butterfly hill did to stop old-growth logging.

But we can all do something from a deep passion within. As a group, what have you thought of doing, yearned to do, have done, that felt to you like living from the truth force in this world?

Closing Meditation

May we find our own way to undertake and live the five precepts; may they guide our actions in our day-to-day living; may the intention to deepen our practice of integrity, in all the ways available to us, deepen our sense of blamelessness and joy.

Homework

1. Cultivate habit to awaken joy
 - a. choose one of the five updated precepts that you would like to cultivate as a way to bring more happiness and well-being into your life. You may want to choose one that is a particular challenge. For example, if you tend to speak sharply to your child, you might decide to work with "Speak Kindly".
 - b. Think of ways in which you might act in alignment with this new habit. Write them down, place the paper in a prominent location where you can readily see it every day, and

make a commitment to add these choices to your life for one week. Your old habits may rebel and struggle for dominance. Each time you are faced with the moment of choice, take a breath, remember your commitment, and choose integrity.

c. Every time you remember to make one of these choices (e.g., speaking kindly to your child even when you feel impatient) notice if you feel happier: a) in the moment; b) with the response you elicit; c) later when you recall your action.

d. Take this one day at a time. Notice if it becomes easier to make your positive choices. At the end of the week, notice if your level of well-being and happiness has increased.

2. Healing the Past

a. Think of an incident you still regret or feel guilty about. As you recall the situation, notice if fear or confusion motivated your words or actions.

b. Imagine that another person had harmed you in the same way and was coming to you to express their regret and ask forgiveness. Could you forgive them?

c. Now imagine yourself as a wise and kind being who understands how confusion and fear lead to your actions, and forgive yourself.

d. If it is possible for you to sincerely apologize and directly ask forgiveness from someone you may have hurt, do so, without expecting any particular response.

e. Reflect on what you have learned from this situation. How might you act differently in similar situations in the future? Make a deliberate commitment to act in that way.

Resources – Quotes on Conscience, Forgiveness, Community Service

Conscience

Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all thou shalt not be a bystander.

- Holocaust Museum, Washington, D.C.

When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?

- Eleanor Roosevelt

To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men.

- Abraham Lincoln

The inability of those in power to still the voices of their own consciences is the great force leading to change.

- Kenneth Kaunda

Justice is conscience, not a personal conscience but the conscience of the whole of humanity. Those who clearly recognize the voice of their own conscience usually recognize also the voice of justice.

- Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Cowardice asks the question, "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question, "Is it politic?" Vanity asks the question, "Is it popular?" But, conscience asks the question, "Is it right?" And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because one's conscience tells one that it is right.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Every human being has a work to carry on within, duties to perform abroad, influence to exert, which are peculiarly his, and which no conscience but his own can teach.

- William Ellery Channing

Though pride we are ever deceiving ourselves. But deep down below the surface of the average conscience a still, small voice says to us, "Something is out of tune."

Carl Jung

Then, without realizing it, you try to improve yourself at the start of each new day. Of course, you achieve quite a lot in the course of time. Anyone can do this; it costs nothing and is certainly very helpful. Whoever doesn't know it must learn and find by experience that a quiet conscience makes one strong.

- Anne Frank

Forgiveness

Forgo your anger for a moment and save yourself a hundred days of trouble.

- Chinese proverb

Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude. - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Never does the human soul appear so strong as when it foregoes revenge, and dares forgive an injury. - E. H. Chapin

When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free. - Catherine Ponder

You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well. - Lewis B. Smedes

Resentment is like a glass of poison that a man drinks; then he sits down and waits for his enemy to die. - Fred Luskin

It is very easy to forgive others their mistakes; it takes more grit and gumption to forgive them for having witnessed our own. - Jessamyn West

Forgiveness is a funny thing. It warms the heart and cools the sting. - William A. Ward

When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future.
- Bernard Meltzer

Forgiveness and reconciliation are not just ethereal, spiritual, other-- worldly activities. They have to do with the real world. They are realpolitik, because in a very real sense, without forgiveness, there is no future.
- Desmond Tutu

The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise.
- Alden Nowlan

Community and Service

In every community there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart there is the power to do it. - Marianne Williamson

Community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen. Together, our vision widens and strength is renewed. - Mark Morrison-Reed

Keep in mind that our community is not composed of those who are already saints, but of those who are trying to become saints. Therefore let us be extremely patient with each other's faults and failures. - Mother Teresa

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been — a place half-remembered and half-envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free.

- Starhawk

Consider the following. We humans are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence on others. Whether we like it or not, there is hardly a moment of our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness arises in the context of our relationships with others.

- HH The Dalai Lama

We cannot live for ourselves alone. Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads, and along these sympathetic fibers, our actions run as causes and return to us as results.

- Herman Melville

The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing. - Albert Einstein

Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all, thou shalt not be a bystander. - Holocaust Museum, Washington, D.C.

The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.-
James Baldwin

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

- Anne Frank

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

- John Wesley

Don't waste life in doubts and fears; spend yourself on the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be the best preparation for the hours and ages that will follow it.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

If I have been of service, if I have glimpsed more of the nature and essence of ultimate good, if I am inspired to reach wider horizons of thought and action, if I am at peace with myself, it has been a successful day.

-Alex Noble

How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.

- Annie Dillard