



The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

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The purpose of this series of talks is to explore and understand one of the best-known teachings of the Buddha, the Satipatthana Sutta, The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

The basic text will be The Four Foundations of Mindfulness in Plain English by Bhante Gunaratana¹. Other references will include The Four Foundations of Mindfulness by Venerable U Silananda², Wisdom Publications, 2002, Satipatthana: The Direct Path to Realization by Analayo³, and Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening by Joseph Goldstein⁴.

Talk 1 Introduction

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 1-10)

The Satipatthana Sutta

“This sutta (teaching) is one of the most widely commented upon texts in the Pāli Canon and continues to hold a central place in the modern vipassana movement. The sutta was preached by the Buddha to a gathering of disciples in the town of Kammāsadhamma in the country of the Kurus. The discourse enumerates twenty-one meditation practices for the cultivation of mindfulness (Pali. sati), a term that refers to an undistracted watchfulness and attentiveness, or to recollection and thus memory. In the text, the Buddha explains the practice under a fourfold rubric called the four foundations of mindfulness (Pali. satipaṭṭhāna)”⁵.

In this teaching, the Buddha addressed the community of bhikkhus (monks and nuns) who had dedicated their lives to spiritual practice. Today, a bhikku can mean anyone who has a serious intention to follow the spiritual path.

Introduction

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (FFM) state the underlying principles of mindfulness practice. These principles have the benefits of improving our daily lives, deepening our mindfulness and moving us farther along the spiritual path.

Mindfulness is defined by Bhante Gunaratana (Bhante G.) as “paying attention moment to moment to what is”. As we develop this awareness, we gain more insight to what we are doing. We can see if our motivations and subsequent actions are skillful or unskillful. Skillful motivations include generosity, loving kindness, compassion, and wisdom. Unskillful motivations include greed, ill-will or delusion (ignorance). Knowing which motivations and actions are skillful or unskillful is important because of the law of cause and effect (karma) which states that skillful actions bring happiness and peace and unskillful actions bring suffering. Actions include speaking, thinking, or acting. To be skillful, “When we practice mindfulness, before we **speak** we ask ourselves: “Are these words truthful and beneficial to me

and others? Will they bring peace, or will they create problems?” When we think mindfully we ask: “Does this thought make me calm and happy, or distressed and fearful?” Before we act, we ask: “Will this action be beneficial for me and for others or will it cause suffering?””

Without mindfulness, we get distracted by all that is going on. Our mind cannot be still, always wanting to see what is next, what is next, what is next. Mindfulness allows us to be in the present and see the constant flow of change and realize that all is impermanent and that to cling to all of these impermanent distractions is to suffer. “Resting comfortably in awareness, we relax into things as they are right now in this very moment, without slipping away into what happens in the past or what will happen in the future.... we understand that the only place to find peace and freedom from suffering is this very place, right here in our own body and mind.”⁶

The Four Foundations

At the beginning of the sutta, the Buddha tells us the purpose of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: *“Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhānas.”*⁷

He goes on to define the four satipaṭṭhanas:

*“What are the four? Here, monks, in regard to the **body** a monk abides **contemplating the body**, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to **feelings** he **abides contemplating feelings**, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to the **mind** he abides **contemplating the mind**, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to **dhammas** he abides **contemplating dhammas**, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.”* (bold mine)

The term, dhamma or dharma, has as many as ten translations. “In Buddhism, dharma has a number of distinct denotations. One of its most significant and common usages is to refer to “teachings” or “doctrines,” whether they be Buddhist or non-Buddhist.”⁸

Note that the Buddha defines how we contemplate each of the foundations: diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In essence, we have to be persistent and energetic, mindful (paying attention moment to moment to what is), and without attachment or judgment.

In practicing mindfulness of the body, we realize that the body has the three characteristics of being impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and of selfless nature. It is a body, not my body. Similarly, in practicing mindfulness of feelings and mindfulness of the mind, we can realize that the same characteristics apply. In practicing mindfulness of the dhammas, we realize the principles that help us to understanding suffering and the cessation of suffering.

Significant Spiritual Accomplishments

As noted in the beginning, studying the Four Foundations has the benefits of improving our daily lives, deepening our mindfulness and moving us farther along the spiritual path. We become more fully aware

of what is going on in the mind and body in the present moment, we are able to evaluate more clearly the purpose and suitability of everything we say and do and we see our body, feelings, perceptions, thoughts and consciousness more clearly. We see the world around us without distortion. Most importantly, we learn to dedicate ourselves fully to reflection and meditation.

The Buddha's Prediction

At the end of the sutta, the Buddha stated his promise: *“Monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning. Let alone seven years . . . six years . . . five years . . . four years . . . three years . . . two years . . . one year . . . seven months . . . six months . . . five months . . . four months . . . three months . . . two months . . . one month . . . half a month . . . if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning. So it was with reference to this that it was said: [DIRECT PATH] “Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhānas.” That is what the Blessed One said. The monks were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.”*

In summary, the study and exploration of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness will be most beneficial if you practice with persistence, energy, mindfulness and without attachment or judgment. The potential rewards are bountiful!

Talk II Mindfulness of the Body: Breath

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 17-27)

"And how does a monk remain focused on the body in & of itself?"

"There is the case where a monk — having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building — sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore [lit: the front of the chest]. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.' Just as a skilled turner or his apprentice, when making a long turn, discerns, 'I am making a long turn,' or when making a short turn discerns, 'I am making a short turn'; in the same way the monk, when breathing in long, discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long' ... He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself."

Meditation on the Breath

Using the breath for meditation has several advantages:

- Everyone breathes; it is universal.
- It is always with us.
- It is a constantly repeated action.
- No teaching is required to learn to breathe
- It is easy to meditate using the breath.

When we focus on the breath, we become aware of the life force and the universal nature of all beings.

Twenty years after the Buddha attained enlightenment, a senior monk by the name of Ananda became his personal attendant. One day he asked the Buddha, "Venerable sir, if people ask me whether you are still practicing meditation, what shall I tell them?"

The Buddha replied that, yes, he was still meditating

"What kind of meditation do you practice, venerable sir?" Ananda asked.

"Mindfulness of breathing," the Buddha answered."⁹

Practicing Mindfulness of Breathing

“There is the case where a monk — having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building — sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore [lit: the front of the chest]. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.”

Meditation on the breath is not a breathing exercise. The breath is just used as a focus for cultivating mindfulness. We are mindful of our breathing (paying attention moment to moment to what is). The meditations combine concentration (calmness) and insight (Vipassana). The meditations of the breath: Length, Breath-Body, and Calming Fabrications) are concentration practices. Practicing the meditations of Internal/External, Origination/Passing Away and Body open up to insight. These meditations are noted in more detail:

1. **Length:** The length of the breaths. "Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.'
2. **Breath-Body:** The cycle of the breath (beginning, middle and end). This is called mindfulness of the breath body and denotes the connectedness of the breath to the body. This is what the Buddha means by 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.'
3. **Calming fabrications:** Note that as we pay mindful attention to the natural rhythm of the breath, the breath slows down and the mind becomes quieter. When agitation (fabrication) arises, the breathing speeds up. If we apply mindfulness, it slows down again. This is what the Buddha meant by 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'
4. **Internal/External:** The connectedness of the breath with the internal and external world. "In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself.
5. **Origination/Passing Away:** The phenomenon of origination and passing away. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body.
6. **Body:** There is a body (not my body). Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance.

The Result

The Buddha concludes this section by stating “not clinging to anything in the world”. This refers to the five aggregates of clinging which we will cover later. “And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.”

Practicing the Breath Meditations

Here are Bhante G’s instructions

- Go to a quiet place where you will be alone and not disturbed.
- Bring your attention to the present moment.
- Sit in a comfortable posture that allows your upper body to be straight and relaxed, upright but not uptight.

- Place your hands on the lap, palms upward, with the right hand on top of the left and the thumbs touching at the tips.
- Close your eyes or leave them half-open.
- Focus your attention on the breath, coming in and going out.
- To deepen your mindfulness, try counting:
Inhale and exhale. Say silently “one.”
Inhale and exhale. Say silently “two.”
Continue up to ten and then reverse and continue down to one.
- Practice the meditations of the breath in this order after one or two cycles of counting:
 - **Length:** The length of the breaths in breath and out breath)
 - **Breath-Body:** The cycle of the breath (in breath, pause, out breath, pause).
 - **Calming bodily fabrications** (calming in breath, calming out breath).
 - **Internal/External:** The connectedness of the breath with the internal and external world (internal in breath, external out breath)
 - **Origination/Passing Away:** The phenomenon of origination and passing away (origination inbreath, passing away out breath).
 - **Body:** There is a body (not my body) (in breath and out breath).
- **If restlessness, agitation, or doubt occurs**, don’t intensify the distraction by following it. Instead, say to yourself, “Let me think how I started. I started from my breath. It is not difficult to find my breath.” Breathe several times quickly and return your attention to the breath and its natural pace.
- **If your mind wanders from its focus on the breath**, don’t get upset. Simply noticing that you have been thinking, daydreaming, or worrying is a wonderful achievement! Gently but firmly return your attention to the breath. And then do it again the next time, and the next time, and the time after that.
- **If you feel sleepy or dull**, try focusing with slightly more effort on the touch sensations of the in-breath and out-breath. If stronger focus does not help, stand up and continue meditating in a standing posture for a few minutes or try walking meditation.
- **If you begin to feel pain**, first try to address the situation as much as possible. Loosen your clothing and check your posture to make sure that you are not slouching. Move to a posture that’s easier to maintain. If these adjustments do not help, then work with the pain: try making the sensation of pain your object of meditation. Observe the sensation and watch how it changes over time.
- Keep practicing with **patience**.

Talk III Mindfulness of the Body: The Four Postures

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 29-41)

“Again, monks, when walking, he knows ‘I am walking’; when standing, he knows ‘I am standing’; when sitting, he knows ‘I am sitting’; when lying down, he knows ‘I am lying down’; or he knows accordingly however his body is disposed.

In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally, or he abides contemplating the body externally, or he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. Or, he abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of passing away in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Or, mindfulness that ‘There is a body’ is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.

“That is how in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body.”

For one entire night, Venerable Ananda practiced the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Because his mindfulness was pure, sharp, and powerful, he perceived that each part of his body, each tiny physical movement, feeling, perception, thought, and even consciousness itself is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. At dawn, as he was beginning to lie down, he lifted his foot. In that instant, he reached enlightenment. Certainly, when the mind is perfectly clear and mindfulness is strong, it is possible to attain enlightenment quickly, even while lifting a foot.¹⁰

Just as with mindfulness of the breath, paying attention to the other parts and movements of the body can benefit our practice and lead to peace and freedom.

Goldstein cites several benefits:

It strengthens continuity of awareness.

We can maintain our awareness longer by just noticing as we move from posture to the next throughout the day.

It reveals our states of mind.

When rushed, our walking posture can reveal this state of mind by our leaning forward as if we were toppling forward. When we are aware, we are just walking: “When walking, just walk.”

It supports our understanding of the three characteristics.

- Impermanence: each movement arises and falls away.
- Inability to have lasting satisfaction: we constantly shift positions to be more comfortable as noted in the saying, “Movement masks dukkha (suffering). Note that the suffering is more discomfort, a finer form of dissatisfaction or wanting things to be other than they are.
- Selfness nature: we see that movement just happens (arises from causes and conditions). As with shifting the body to avoid discomfort, this just happens. No one is directing the movement. “As we walk, we can hold in our minds the unspoken question, “Who is walking, and who is standing?”

The Four Postures: Sitting, Standing, Walking and Lying down.

Sitting

There are several postures for sitting in meditation: full lotus, half lotus, Burmese posture, easy style, meditation bench and sitting in a chair. Any of the postures may be used; consider what is acceptable for your body. Sitting with constant pain and discomfort is not treating your body wisely! When sitting a chair, try not to lean against the back support of the chair, if possible.

Mindfulness of sitting starts when you assume the sitting position. Immediately you can become aware of the body making contact with the cushion, bench or chair. You may feel hardness or softness and that the sensation changes over time. It may even become uncomfortable. Thoughts about the sitting position may arise. Note that all of these feelings, perceptions, and thoughts just happen and are constantly changing. Mindfulness of sitting reminds us that all is impermanent, inability to have lasting satisfaction and is of selfness nature. We can experience so much from just sitting!

Standing

When we stand, just as in sitting, we can be mindful of the sensations and thoughts that accompany this posture. Discomfort may arise and we can experience the three characteristics of impermanence, inability to have lasting satisfaction and is of selfness nature.

Walking

Walking is another opportunity for mindfulness. Walking can be experienced as a sequence of several actions as noted below:

1. We begin by standing for a couple of minutes, relaxing the hands and body and focusing on our breathing.
2. We lift the heel of one foot— let's say, the left foot.
3. We rest the left foot on its toes. We are mindful of the contact of the toes with the floor and the feeling arising from that contact. We notice how the feeling changes as the contact changes.
4. We lift the left foot.
5. We move the left foot forward. We notice that the feeling we had while standing is no longer there when we lift the heel of the left foot. Likewise, the feeling that we had while lifting the heel is no longer there when we rest the left foot on its toes. Now, new feelings arise as we lift the whole foot and move it forward. The thoughts "this is the foot; this is the movement; this is the forward motion; this is the change" arise, remain briefly, and pass away. Until the left foot is placed on the floor and firmly settled, we balance the body on the right foot. If we become unmindful, we lose the balance.
6. The forward motion of the left foot stops.
7. We lower the left foot.
8. We touch the left foot to the ground.
9. Finally, we press the left foot against the ground.
10. Then the cycle of movements, feelings, perceptions, and thoughts begins again with the other foot.

Walking Meditation

- Though you can practice walking meditation anywhere, a private place is best. Make sure there is enough space for you to walk at least five to ten paces in a straight line, though this is the bare

minimum distance. Ideally, the walking distance should be much longer; some meditation centers have thirty-foot long walking paths.

- Do not control your breath; perform the walking as the in breath and out breath occur
- As you inhale: raise the heel of one foot
- As you exhale: maintain this position
- As you inhale: Raise the entire foot and move it forward
- As you exhale: lower your foot to the floor
- As you inhale: lift the heel of the other foot
- As you exhale: maintain this posture
- As you inhale: raise the entire foot and move it forward
- As you exhale: lower your foot to the floor.
- After five to ten paces, rest in standing posture for one minute, turn around, stand again for another minute, and repeat the sequence to walk back to where you started.
- As you walk, keep your head up and your neck relaxed. Walk slowly and naturally. Keep your eyes open to maintain balance, but avoid looking at anything in particular.
- Strive to be mindful of as many of the changes taking place in your body and mind as you can.

Lying Down

Lying down can be challenging when practicing mindfulness because of the tendency to fall asleep. However, it can be a good technique to use when you want to fall asleep!

When lying down, you can be mindful of the sensations generated by the contact of the body with the surface. Notice the changing sensations and experience the three characteristics of impermanence, inability to provide lasting satisfaction and selfless nature. Until you fall asleep you can remain mindful.

Talk IV Mindfulness of the Body: Clear Comprehension

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 43-55)

“Again, monks, when going forward and returning, one acts clearly knowing; when looking ahead and looking away one acts clearly knowing; when flexing and extending one’s limbs one acts clearly knowing . . . when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting one acts clearly knowing; when defecating and urinating one acts clearly knowing; when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent one acts clearly knowing.”

In this section, the Buddha addresses the need for mindfulness in our daily activities. We pay attention moment to moment to what is. In order to see the “what is”, we need clear knowing or clear comprehension. If we aren’t mindful in our daily activities, suffering can occur.

As the Buddha noted in his introduction to the Satipatthana Sutta, there are five reasons to practice the four foundations of mindfulness:

1. To purify the mind (clearing away greed, hatred and delusion).
2. To overcome sorrow and lamentation
3. To end grief and despair
4. To progress on the path toward liberation
5. To attain liberation and the end of suffering

Clear comprehension is a critical factor to aid our practice.

What is clear comprehension? This means, according to Goldstein, seeing precisely or seeing thoroughly. Michael Gazzaniga notes that comprehension implies that one has intent and understanding of what one is doing. It is this understanding that makes human beings unique according to David Dennet, a famous contemporary philosopher. Clear comprehension means that we are aware of all four of the aspects of our activity: purpose, suitability, domain and non-delusion.

Purpose

Purpose is our intention or reason why we do any activity. Intention is not the same as setting a specific goal or outcome; it is more broadly based. Goldstein notes: “When we clearly comprehend the purpose and benefit of our actions, we open the possibility of making wiser choices. “Where is this action leading? Do I want to go there?”¹¹

We can ask ourselves this question regarding purpose of our activity: “Is the motivation behind this activity, skillful or unskillful?”

Suitability

Suitability is making sure that our activities are morally wholesome and suitable for achieving our spiritual goals. Bhante G notes the following examples: “We choose a job that gives us enough time to meditate and avoid associating with people who cause harm to themselves or others. We practice right speech and refrain from conversations that interfere with our ability to concentrate. We make healthy lifestyle choices, such as eating moderately and not sleeping too much.”¹²

We can ask ourselves this question about suitability of our activity: “Is it useful?”

Domain

Domain is setting our boundaries. The Buddha recommended that our spiritual domain (or pasture) can be confined within the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Wandering outside of the boundaries such as seeking sensual pleasures can cause suffering from attachment and lead to addiction.

We can ask ourselves this question of our activity: “In doing this activity, am I following the practice of non-attachment, non-addiction?”

Non-delusion

Non-delusion is the realization that all activities are impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and are of selfless nature. When we believe the opposite, we are in the state of delusion.

We can ask ourselves: “Do I truly know that this activity is impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature?”

Mindfulness of Clear Comprehension.

How can we practically apply clear comprehension to our daily lives? When we meditate, we can reflect on the four aspects of clear comprehension: purpose, suitability, domain, and non-delusion. When a thought or sensation arises, we can look to see if it is in line with our clear comprehension.

Likewise, off the cushion, we can apply the four aspects to all of our activities and see if the activity is in line with our spiritual path or whether it is unskillful and likely to cause suffering.

Before doing an activity, we can ask”

Examine **Purpose**: “Is my intention skillful or unskillful”

Examine **Suitability**: “Is it useful”?

Examine **Domain**: ““Am I following the practice of non-attachment, non-addiction?””

Examine **Non-Delusion**: “Do I know that this activity is impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature?”

All of these questions will assist our mindfulness to see what is.

Clear Comprehension in Daily Life

The Buddha has advised to engage in all of our activities with mindfulness and clear comprehension. We use clear comprehension to guard against attachment and to avoid greed, hatred and delusion.

We can use clear comprehension in our daily activity of eating. We become mindful of our eating and know that our **purpose** is eat to sustain our body in a healthy way, not to eat for amusement or intoxication. We know that eating is useful (**suitability**); we keep our eating within the **domain** of non-attachment. With **non-delusion**, we know that eating an impermanent activity, unable to provide lasting satisfaction, and is of selfless nature. Bhante G. offers some useful points for eating mindfully:

KEY POINTS FOR MINDFUL EATING

- I train myself to prefer healthy and nourishing food and drink.
- I train myself to eat moderately and to avoid junk food.
- I train myself to watch my mind while I am eating to avoid greed, hatred, and delusion.
- I train myself not to overfill my bowl or plate.
- I train myself to take whatever food is offered or available without being picky.
- I train myself not to look at others' food critically or with jealousy.
- I train myself to move my hands slowly.
- I train myself not to open my mouth before the food is carried to it.
- I train myself not to stuff my mouth with food.
- I train myself not to talk when I have food in my mouth.
- I train myself not to scatter food or be wasteful.
- I train myself not to smack my lips or make slurping sounds.
- I train myself not to lick my fingers.¹³

Talk V Mindfulness of the Body: Parts and Elements

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 57-68)

“Again, monks, he reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, enclosed by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: ‘In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.’ “Just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grain, such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: ‘This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice’; so too he reviews this same body.”

What is our body?

Our body, as with everything material, is impermanent, unable to give lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature. It is easy to forget this; when we encounter other beings or see ourselves in the mirror. We are only looking at the external components: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and skin. We can truly realize the true nature of the body by reflecting on each part without distortion, knowing that they are neither beautiful, nor ugly but simply pieces of an ever-changing process. In the sutta, 32 body parts are named for reflection on this. We can examine the first five parts to explore the three characteristics in each of them. Using mindful clear comprehension, we can see that each body part is always changing, is unable to provide lasting satisfaction and is not our “self.”

Head Hair

Starting with head hair, notice how this part is often perceived as an object of beauty. Next, note its impermanence. Hair falls out, changes in texture, gathers dirt, grease, and odors. Next, note its unsatisfactoriness as it doesn’t meet our expectations of always being beautiful and clean. Next, note its selfless nature. We cannot ultimately control its fate. As a result of these reflections, observe your attitude toward head hair. Is it still beautiful or ugly? Or is it just head hair?

Body Hair

With regard to body hair, notice how this part is often perceived as an object of beauty. Next, note its impermanence. Body hair falls out, grows on our chin, gathers dirt, grease, and odors. Next, note its unsatisfactoriness as it doesn’t meet our expectations of always being beautiful and clean. Next, note its selfless nature. We cannot ultimately control its fate. As a result of these reflections, observe your attitude toward body hair. Is it still beautiful or ugly? Or is it just body hair?

Nails

With regard to nails, notice how this part is often perceived as an object of beauty. Next, note its impermanence. Nails crack, grow longer, become discolored, can get infected with fungus. Next, note its unsatisfactoriness as it doesn’t meet our expectations of always being beautiful and clean. Next, note its selfless nature. We cannot ultimately control its fate. As a result of these reflections, observe your attitude toward nails. Are they still beautiful or ugly? Or are they just nails?

Teeth

With regard to teeth, notice how this part is often perceived as an object of beauty. Next, note its impermanence. Teeth become discolored, chipped, crooked, decayed, fall out. Next, note their unsatisfactoriness as it doesn’t meet our expectations of always being beautiful and clean. Next, note its selfless nature. We cannot ultimately control its fate. As a result of these reflections, observe your attitude toward teeth. Are they still beautiful or ugly? Or are they just teeth?

Skin

With regard to skin, notice how this part is often perceived as an object of beauty. Next, note its impermanence. Skin ages, cracks, wrinkles, bruises, becomes infected, can get cancer. Next, note its unsatisfactoriness as it doesn't meet our expectations of always being beautiful and clean. Next, note its selfless nature. We cannot ultimately control its fate. As a result of reflections, observe your attitude toward skin. Is it still beautiful or ugly? Or is it just skin?

Meditating on the 32 parts of the body

Meditating on the 32 parts of the body can be very beneficial to fully realize that all share the same three characteristics. Bhante G. notes that sometimes it is possible to accelerate healing by focusing the mind on a certain body part. He suggests meditation that requires strong mindfulness, concentration, and visualization. Here is a [website](#) you can use for visualization.¹⁴

Some important points as you meditate:

- Know that your intention is to regard all bodies and their part with a balanced mind of equanimity, not with lust or loathing.
- Know that all parts are essential and useful.
- How long you meditate on each body part may vary; there is no set amount of time.
- Remember that each of the body parts is impermanent, unable to give lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature ("not mine, not I and not my self").

Mindfulness of the body's elements

In the Buddha's time, the four elements were recognized as earth, water, heat and air. Today we might know them as solid, liquid, plasma and gas. Ultimately, as the body deteriorates, all that remains is in basic forms of the elements. Each of these elements have specific sensations that we can note while meditating. Each of these sensations or perceptions are just phenomena arising and falling away in our mind. As with the body parts, they are impermanent, unable to give lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature ("not mine not I and not my self").

- Earth (solid): hard, soft, visible, shape, expansion, contraction, size, color
- Water (liquid): soft, moist, cleansing
- Heat (plasma): warm, hot, burning, radiation
- Air (gas): breezy, cold, cool, warm, hot, dry, gentle, harsh

The body is not our "self"

By meditating on and experiencing the body parts and elements, we come to know that they all share the same three characteristics of impermanence, inability to give lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature. Our body is not who we are. Who we are is not subject to the three characteristics.

In his discourse on the elements, the Buddha noted that we are not the body (form): *"He has been stilled where the currents of supposition do not flow. And when the currents of supposition do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace." Thus it was said. With reference to what was it said? 'I am' is a supposition. 'I am this' is a supposition. 'I shall be' is a supposition. 'I shall not be' ... 'I shall be possessed of form' ... 'I shall not be possessed of form'..... Supposition is a disease, supposition is a cancer, supposition is an arrow. By going beyond all supposition, he is called a sage at peace.*

“And further, a sage at peace is not born, does not age, does not die, is unagitated, and is free from longing. He has nothing whereby he would be born. Not being born, will he age? Not aging, will he die? Not dying, will he be agitated? Not being agitated, for what will he long? It was in reference to this that it was said, ‘He has been stilled where the currents of supposition do not flow. And when the currents of supposition do not flow, he is said to be a sage at peace.’ Now, monk, you should remember this, my brief analysis of the six properties.”¹⁵

Talk VI Mindfulness of the Body: Death and Impermanence

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 69-78)

Once the Buddha was speaking with his disciple Ananda about the causes of death. “From birth as a requisite condition comes aging-&-death.’ Thus it has been said. And this is the way to understand how from birth as a requisite condition come aging & death. If there were no birth at all, in any way, of anything anywhere—i.e., of devas in the state of devas, of celestials in the state of celestials, of spirits in the state of spirits, of demons in the state of demons, of human beings in the human state, of quadrupeds in the state of quadrupeds, of birds in the state of birds, of snakes in the state of snakes, or of any being in its own state—in the utter absence of birth, from the cessation of birth, would aging-&-death be discerned?”

“No, lord.”

“Thus this is a cause, this is a reason, this is an origination, this is a requisite condition for aging-&-death, i.e., birth.”¹⁶

Death is inevitable

If birth happens, death happens as the Buddha noted above. The moment that you are born, you begin to die. Accepting the inevitability of death is the way to freedom. Otherwise, we become attached to the delusion of not dying (permanence). As Bhante G. notes: practicing mindfulness of death is the best way to overcome fear and prepare for a peaceful death. As the Buddha taught about heedfulness (mindfulness):

Heedfulness: the path to the Deathless.

Heedlessness: the path to death.

The heedful do not die.

The heedless are as if already dead.

the Dhammapada 21

Three Kinds of Death

Impermanence is experienced by the rising and falling away of all conditioned things. Death is the falling away. The Buddha taught three kinds of death. There is momentary death; constant change that is occurring every moment. Nothing stays the same. We age, our blood cells die, our thoughts die, our memories die, etc. As noted above, the moment that you are born, you begin to die. In a longer-term sense, there is conventional death when our bodies die. Lastly, there is eternal death when the cessation of suffering need not arise again; this is liberation or total freedom.

Mindfulness of Death

Mindfulness of death is paying attention moment to moment to the possibility of death. We constantly keep aware of impermanence particularly when we get trapped into delusion. We pay heed to the clear comprehension of non-delusion: all conditioned things are impermanent, unable to give lasting satisfaction and are of selfless nature.

The Corpse in Decay

The final contemplation exercise in the First Foundation of Mindfulness: Mindfulness of the Body is reflecting on what happens to our body after death. In this way, we can truly be reminded of and experience impermanence. Previously we have noted impermanence in mindfulness of breath, the four postures, clear comprehension, body parts and elements and now the ultimate fate of the body: decomposition.

The Buddha described it as thus:

“Again, monks, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground—ground— one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter . . . being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms . . . a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews . . . a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews . . . a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews . . . disconnected bones scattered in all directions . . . bones bleached white, the color of shells . . . bones heaped up, more than a year old . . . bones rotten and crumbling to dust—he compares this same body with it thus: ‘This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.’

“In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally . . . externally . . . both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising . . . of passing away . . . of both arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness that ‘There is a body’ is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That too is how in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body”.

Practicing Mindfulness of Death and Impermanence

The Buddha recommended reflecting on the decay of the body. In Asia, there are charnel grounds where bodies are reverently placed to decompose and to be eaten by vultures and bacteria. There are no opportunities for experience this in the West. Our funeral practices emphasize avoidance of seeing the body in other than a pristine state. As a practice, re-read the Buddha’s description above or observe the bodies of animals killed on the road in various states of decomposition.

Talk VII Mindfulness of the Body: Summary

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 17-78)

“In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally, or he abides contemplating the body externally, or he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. Or, he abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of passing away in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Or, mindfulness that ‘There is a body’ is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.”

Above is the refrain from the First Foundation of Mindfulness: Mindfulness of the Body. In this refrain, the Buddha notes important ways that we meditate on the body. We contemplate both our body and the bodies of others and that we contemplate all that arises and passes away in our body and the bodies of others. We do these contemplations with a minimum of thinking and keeping independent of attachment.

Below are the five areas covered in Mindfulness of the Body: Breath, The Four Postures, Clear Comprehension, Body Parts and Elements, and Death and Impermanence.

Breath

The Breath is the basic foundation for our meditation practice. With the breath we can practice concentration, mindfulness and insight (Vipassana). Just as we might have a daily routine of physical exercise for maintaining the health of our body, we can do the same for our spiritual growth.

The Buddha recommended meditation of the breath. Below is a simplified version from the Sattipatthana Sutta.

Mindfulness of Breath Meditation

- Getting ready: Sit in an erect position with eyes closed with awareness of breath directed to either the nostrils, chest or abdomen.
- Initial Concentration: Start counting 1 in-breath 1 out-breath, 2 in-breath 2 out-breath, etc. Do not control your breath; observe only. Stop at 10 and observe any changes in the breath. Count down to 1 and observe any changes in the breath. Continue for three cycles or until the breath appears finer (shorter in duration, more shallow, less forceful).
- Experience the whole body: Expand your awareness to the whole body including any sensations or thoughts. Take care not to get caught up in any specific sensation or thought, just be aware that you are experiencing the whole body.
- Calming the bodily formations: Bodily formations are what we are experiencing at the moment (sensations and thoughts). We can calm our bodily formations by using mindfulness and stating the intention, “calm” on each in-breath and each out-breath. When our attention is on the breaths and “calm,” our thinking stops.
- Contemplating the nature of arising/passing away: With each in-breath and each out-breath, observe the arising and falling away of sensations, thoughts, memories, and perceptions.

Observe and experience the true nature of all conditioned things, the three characteristics of impermanence, inability to have lasting satisfaction, and selfless nature.

- Loving Kindness: End your meditation by giving loving kindness (metta) to yourself and all beings.

The Four Postures (sitting, standing, walking and lying down)

There are several postures for sitting in meditation: Any of the postures may be used; consider what is acceptable for your body.

Sitting

We can experience so much from just sitting. You can become aware of the body making contact with the cushion, bench or chair. You may feel hardness or softness and that the sensation changes over time. It may even become uncomfortable. Thoughts about the sitting position may arise. Note that all of these feelings, perceptions, and thoughts just happen and are constantly changing. Mindfulness of sitting reminds us that all is impermanent, inability to provide lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature.

Standing

When we stand, just as in sitting, we can be mindful of the sensations and thoughts that accompany this posture. Discomfort may arise which allows us to experience that the postures exhibit the three characteristics of impermanence, inability to provide lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature.

Walking is another opportunity for mindfulness especially when we do walking meditation.

Lying down can be challenging when practicing mindfulness because of the tendency to fall asleep. However, it can be a good technique to use when you want to fall asleep!

Clear Comprehension

Clear comprehension is seeing precisely or seeing thoroughly with a clear understanding. Clear comprehension has four dimensions that we need to be aware of and consider when we are doing or contemplating any activity: purpose, suitability, domain and non-delusion.

Purpose is our intention or reason why we do any activity. We can ask ourselves “Is the motivation behind this activity, skillful or unskillful?”

Suitability is making sure that our activities are morally wholesome and suitable for achieving our spiritual goals. We can ask ourselves, “Is this activity useful?”

Domain is setting our boundaries for an activity so that we don't include unskillful activities or get too attached. We can ask ourselves this question, “In doing this activity, am I following the practice of non-attachment, non-addiction?”

Non-delusion is being mindful that all activities are impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and are of selfless nature. We can ask ourselves: “Do I truly know that this activity is impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature?”

Parts and Elements

Our body, as with everything material, is impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and is of selfless nature. It is easy to forget this when we encounter other beings or see ourselves in the mirror, that we are only looking at the external components: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and skin. We can truly realize the true nature of the body by reflecting on each part without distortion, knowing that these parts are neither beautiful, nor ugly but simply pieces of an ever-changing process. In the sutta, 32 body parts are named for reflection on this. We can examine the first five parts to explore the three characteristics in each of them. Using mindful clear comprehension, we can see that each body part is always changing, is unable to provide lasting satisfaction and is not our “self.”

Death and Impermanence

Death is inevitable. The moment that you are born, you begin to die. Accepting the inevitability of death is the way to freedom. Otherwise, we become attached to the delusion of not dying (permanence). Practicing mindfulness of death is the best way to overcome fear and prepare for a peaceful death. The Buddha taught three kinds of death. There is momentary death; constant change that is occurring every moment. Nothing stays the same. We age, our blood cells die, our thoughts die, our memories die, etc. In a longer-term sense, there is conventional death when our bodies die. Lastly, there is eternal death when the cessation of suffering need not arise again; this is liberation or total freedom. The Buddha recommended practicing mindfulness of impermanence using the decomposition of the body.

Talk VIII Mindfulness of Feelings Part I

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp. 81-90)

“Burdened with years, the householder Nakulapita went to see the Buddha. He said, “I am aged, venerable sir, come to the last stage, afflicted in body, often ill. Let the Blessed One instruct me.” “So it is, householder,” the Buddha replied. “If anyone carrying around this body of yours were to claim to be healthy even for a moment, what is that other than foolishness? You should train yourself thus: ‘Even though I am afflicted in body, my mind will not be afflicted.’”

Nakulapita delighted in the Blessed One’s words. He paid respect to the Buddha and left. Then he approached the Venerable Sariputta and asked him to explain in detail the meaning of the Buddha’s brief statement.

Venerable Sariputta said, “A person who is unfamiliar with the teaching of the Buddha regards the five aggregates as his self. With the change and decay of these aggregates, there arises in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. Thus, he is afflicted both in body and in mind.

A noble disciple who has heard the Dhamma, on the other hand, does not regard the aggregates as his self. The aggregates may change, but sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair do not arise in him. Thus, though he may still be afflicted in body, he is not afflicted in mind.”

Nakulapita rejoiced, since this wise advice would lead to his welfare and happiness for a long time.”¹⁷

The Five Aggregates mentioned above are form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. “We can say that the entire teaching of the Buddha is based on feelings. Toward the end of his life, after forty-five years of teaching, the Buddha said, “Bhikkhus, I have taught only two things: suffering and the end of suffering.” The story of Nakulapita points to the essence of the Buddha’s teaching on ending the feeling of suffering.¹⁸

As we continue exploring the teachings of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, it is important to remember that the Buddha gave these teachings for the purpose of freeing the mind from suffering. “He is talking about liberation, not about simply getting more comfortable in our lives or sorting out our personal histories. Although these may be helpful by-products of the practice, the teachings in this discourse address the very largest questions of birth, aging, disease, and death, and how we can be free in this great cyclical wheel of existence.”¹⁹

What are feelings?

In the Buddhist sense, feelings are not emotions (a separate aggregate called mental formations). Feelings arise from bodily sensations (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touch and thoughts). The focus is only on the quality: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant).

“Thus to contemplate feelings means quite literally to know how one feels, and this with such immediacy that the light of awareness is present before the onset of reactions, projections, or justifications in regard to how one feels”²⁰.

Feelings arise from contact of the sense bases with the sense objects. The sense bases are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. What the senses sense are sense objects:

Eye/Visible objects

Ear/Sounds

Nose/Smells

Tongue/Tastes

Body/Tangible Objects

Mind/Mental Objects

The process works as follows. The sense base makes contact with the sense object. We become aware of the sense object when we pay attention (consciousness). Feelings then arise (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral).

The intensity and clarity of a particular feeling depends on a number of factors. For example, in the case of seeing an object, factors include the condition of the eyes, the lighting, and our mental state. That is why two people can view the same object and have different feelings.

Meditating on Feelings

It is possible to retrain the mind so that feelings don't take over our lives. Feelings arise and fall away constantly. We can observe this in our meditation to see that feelings have the three characteristics of impermanence, inability to provide lasting satisfaction and of selfless nature. We can then realize that our feelings are not "us"; they arise and fall away just like all other phenomena. So, when an unpleasant feeling arises, we know that is just a mental impression and will fall away to be replaced by another. This leads to freedom as we become less attached and influenced by our feelings. Goldstein noted that "we don't need to analyze, judge, compare, or even particularly understand why these feelings are happening. It's simply to know that pleasant feeling is like this, unpleasant feeling is like this, neutral feeling is like this."²¹

Notes on feelings:

An advantage of working with feelings is that they are easy to notice once one becomes aware of their presence.

We often don't see that it is the feeling that we're attached or averse to, and not the object itself. Take for example, a loud sound that you hear in the middle of the night that keeps you awake. It is not the sound but the feeling of the sound that causes dissatisfaction. Similarly, if you feel annoyed by a person, it is not the person but the unpleasant feeling that causes dissatisfaction. Similarly, pleasant feelings can cause dissatisfaction. We can get attached to a pleasant feeling from having a cup of tea. It is not the tea but our feeling about it that is pleasant. It too causes dissatisfaction when the feeling falls away.

Often, we try to escape unpleasant feelings by seeking sensual pleasures. The Buddha noted: "*Being contacted by that same painful feeling, one harbors no aversion to it. . . . Being contacted by painful feeling, one does not seek delight in sensual pleasures. . . . If one feels a pleasant feeling, one feels it detached. If one feels a painful feeling, one feels it detached. If one feels a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, one feels it detached. This, bhikkhus, is called a noble disciple who is detached from birth, ageing and death; who is detached from sorrow, pain, displeasure and despair, who is detached from suffering. .*

. . *“This, bhikkhus, is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble disciple and the uninstructed worldling.”*²²

The Buddha summed it up as:

*“Desirable things do not provoke one’s mind,
Towards the undesired one has not aversion.”*²³

For our meditation practice, we can adapt our Meditation of Breath to note the arising and falling away of feelings.

Talk IX Mindfulness Feelings Part II

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.91-101)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 89-97)

“Then following on that memory came the realization: ‘That is the path to Awakening.’ I thought: ‘So why am I afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful mental qualities?’ I thought: ‘I am no longer afraid of that pleasure that has nothing to do with sensuality, nothing to do with unskillful mental qualities..”²⁴

Harmful and Beneficial Feelings

Feelings arise constantly. Some are harmful because they can lead to dissatisfaction and suffering. Some are beneficial because they can lead to peace and equanimity. It is important not only to be aware of the quality of our feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral) but also to discern which are harmful and which are beneficial. We can then mindfully practice with feelings to achieve peace and happiness.

Harmful or Worldly Feelings

All three qualities of feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral) can be activated by negative tendencies. Pleasant feelings can be activated by pleasant sensations or thoughts of greed, desire, or craving; unpleasant feelings by painful sensations and thoughts of anger or hatred; and neutral feelings by ignorance or delusion. All of these feelings are called “worldly” because they all arise from contact with the sense objects (visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and thoughts). Whether the feeling is activated by pleasure or pain, gain or loss, fame or disrepute or praise or criticism, all lead to dissatisfaction and suffering when clinging and craving arise.

Once we discern a harmful feeling, we have a choice to be mindful or to cling and want more. This doesn’t mean that we can’t enjoy a pleasant feeling; it means that we are mindful of the tendency to cling and crave

Beneficial or Unworldly Feelings

Beneficial feelings are called “unworldly” because they do not arise from the senses and are not activated by pleasure or pain, gain or loss, fame or disrepute or praise or criticism. Beneficial feelings are born from the joy of non-attachment (non-clinging and non-craving) and lead to equanimity.

Equanimity (Pali. upekkhā) is a term with at least four important denotations: (1) as a sensation of neutrality that is neither pleasurable nor painful; (2) as one of eleven virtuous mental concomitants (KUSĀLA-CAITTA), referring to a state of evenness of mind, without overt disturbance by sensuality, hatred, or ignorance; (3) as a state of mental balance during the course of developing concentration, which is free from lethargy and excitement; and (4) one of the four “divine abidings”, along with loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy. As a divine abiding, upekkhā indicates an even-mindedness toward all beings, regarding them with neither attachment nor aversion, as neither intimate nor remote; in some descriptions of the four “divine abidings,” there is the additional wish that all beings attain such equanimity.²⁵

Unworldly Feelings of Joy

Goldstein notes that there are several areas where we can experience unworldly feelings of joy. Experiencing unworldly feelings allows us to realize the benefit of these feelings as compared to the suffering of worldly feelings.

Generosity: When we are letting go and giving to others, rather than holding on things for ourselves.

Love and Compassion: When we are non-judgmental and wishing to relive the suffering of others.

Renunciation: When we follow the precepts and wish to do no harm to ourselves or others.

Concentration: When we practice concentration and seclude ourselves from unskillful states.

Clear Seeing: When we practice mindfulness, paying attention to what is.

What do all of these areas have in common? There are selfless states; we are not thinking or acting in terms of “I” or “me”. We are not creating a self to cling or crave. The concept of the self is absent. We are not attached to the feeling. As the Buddha said, “Nothing whatsoever is to be clung to as I or mine.

How to Practice with Feelings

The Blessed One said: *"Now how, Ananda, in the discipline of a noble one is there the unexcelled development of the faculties? There is the case where, when seeing a form with the eye, there arises in a monk what is agreeable, what is disagreeable, what is agreeable & disagreeable. He discerns that 'This agreeable thing has arisen in me, this disagreeable thing... this agreeable & disagreeable thing has arisen in me. And that is compounded, gross, dependently co-arisen. But this is peaceful, this is exquisite, i.e., equanimity.' With that, the arisen agreeable thing... disagreeable thing... agreeable & disagreeable thing ceases, and equanimity takes its stance. Just as a man with good eyes, having closed them, might open them; or having opened them, might close them, that is how quickly, how rapidly, how easily, no matter what it refers to, the arisen agreeable thing... disagreeable thing... agreeable & disagreeable thing ceases, and equanimity takes its stance. In the discipline of a noble one, this is called the unexcelled development of the faculties with regard to forms cognizable by the eye."*²⁶

The Buddha is saying that feelings arise very quickly. With mindfulness, we can discern these feelings and by doing so, “let equanimity take its stance”. We are mindful not to cling and crave. If we aren’t mindful of our feelings, those feelings will persist.

Our mindfulness changes our relationship with our feelings; we cannot control their arising.

To repeat from the last talk, the Buddha summed it up as:

“Desirable things do not provoke one’s mind,
Towards the undesired one has not aversion.”

Talk X Mindfulness of Mind: Mind and Consciousness

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.105-112)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 101-109)

“The Buddha was explaining to his bhikkhus what he had done to overcome unwholesome thoughts that arose in his mind while he was still an unenlightened bodhisattva.

“It occurred to me,” the Buddha said, “suppose I divide my thoughts into two classes. On one side, I set thoughts of sensual desire, ill will, and cruelty. On the other side, I set thoughts of renunciation, loving-friendliness, and compassion.

“As I abided thus, diligent, ardent, and resolute, a thought of sensual desire arose in me. When I considered that this thought leads to my own affliction and the affliction of others, it subsided in me. When I considered that this thought obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties, and leads away from nibbana, it subsided in me. Thus I abandoned it, did away with it, removed it....

“Whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks upon, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he ponders renunciation, if he has abandoned the thought of sensual desire to cultivate the thought of renunciation, then his mind inclines to thoughts of renunciation.”²⁷

The Mind and Consciousness

In the second foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of feelings, we observed in the sense objects, the qualities of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. In the third foundation, we observe the presence or absence of the mind states which can include the unwholesome ones of lust (sensual pleasure), anger, and delusion.

What is the mind? Bhante G. defines the mind as a non-physical phenomenon that perceives, thinks, recognizes, experiences, and reacts. Consciousness arises when one of the six sense bases (eye, ear, tongue, nose, mind) makes contact with a sense object (visual objects, sound, taste, smell, tangible objects, thoughts).

We can only know the mind or consciousness by its contents. We cannot know the mind or consciousness without an object. Consciousness and mind are pure but our awareness is of the object which may or may not be pure (wholesome). That is why it is important to avoid thoughts, words, and deeds motivated by sensual desire, anger, cruelty and others motivated by greed, hatred and delusion. Instead, we turn our consciousness and mind to renunciation, loving kindness, and compassion.

The Untamed Mind

Whatever thoughts we cultivate frequently become a mental habit. Reflect on your experience with this. If the mind is frequently occupied with sensual seeking thoughts, clinging and craving for these pleasures are bound to arise. In similar fashion, thoughts of generosity, loving kindness and compassion can become habitual with practice. When we are unaware, our mind can become untamed just like a wild animal. Training the mind through concentration and mindfulness will lead to more peace, joy, and balance.

It is important to observe the mind without judgement. As Goldstein notes, “For many people, it is an easy step from recognizing a particular mind state like greed or hatred as being unwholesome to the feeling that you’re a bad person for having it, or that somehow it’s wrong for the mind state to even arise. This pattern of reaction simply leads to more self-judgment, more aversion, and more suffering. It’s not a helpful cycle.”²⁸

Goldstein goes on to note that our suffering comes from unwholesome mind states being acted out. “As a simple experiment in meditation, when you’re sitting, you might ask the question, “What’s the attitude in the mind right now?” This question often illuminates whether the mind is holding on in some way or wanting some other state to occur and is a direct application of mindfulness of mind.”²⁹

Practicing Mindfulness of the Mind

The practice of concentration and insight (mindfulness) can help to redirect our thoughts to beneficial ones. Simple observation is all that is needed. “Watching an unwholesome state of mind without involvement in this way will deprive it of its fuel so that it will gradually lost its power.”³⁰

A first step in meditation is to observe what is experienced by the absence of unwholesome mind states. “As an experiment, pay attention to the next time you experience a strong wanting in the mind. Stay as mindful as possible of how it manifests in the mind and body. And then notice as the wanting disappears, either in a moment or gradually over time. Instead of rushing back to the breath or some other object of meditation, pay attention to the mind free of wanting, experiencing the coolness and peace of that state. A clear recognition of what is what— this is lust, this is its absence — then becomes the frame for the deeper direct experience of the mind state itself, free of any words or concepts.”³¹

The next step is cultivating beneficial mind states. “Worrying over or dwelling upon harmful actions we have done in the past is a waste of time and energy. Instead, we should put our efforts into cultivating beneficial thoughts to overcome and replace harmful ones. In fact, we must cultivate thoughts of generosity, compassion, loving-friendliness, and equanimity again and again in order to weaken and destroy harmful inclinations and create beneficial ones

We do this most effectively by practicing mindfulness meditation. As I have mentioned, our practice consists of two types of meditation: concentration meditation or samatha and insight meditation or vipassana. Concentration meditation suppresses the hindrances and makes the mind calm, peaceful, and luminous. Hindrances are negative tendencies that obstruct our spiritual progress and interfere with our ability to concentrate. I explain more about the hindrances in chapter 10. Insight meditation, which we have been calling mindfulness, eradicates the hindrances and all other negative tendencies. It helps us to overcome ignorance so that we can be liberated from samsara, the cycle of repeated births and deaths.”³²

“When you pay attention, the clouds of delusion slowly fade away and the clear blue sky-like mind appears again. You see that consciousness is always changing. Thoughts arise and disappear. They are impermanent. When delusion arises you pay attention to it, knowing that it is a delusion. Then it slowly fades away. Then you know mind as clear, aware, luminous.”³³

Talk XI Mindfulness of Mind: Mental States

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.113-122)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 105-118)

“And how, monks, does he in regard to the mind abide contemplating the mind? “Here he knows a lustful mind to be ‘lustful,’ and a mind without lust to be ‘without lust’; he knows an angry mind to be ‘angry,’ and a mind without anger to be ‘without anger’; he knows a deluded mind to be ‘deluded,’ and a mind without delusion to be ‘without delusion’; he knows a contracted mind to be ‘contracted,’ and a distracted mind to be ‘distracted’; he knows a great mind to be ‘great,’ and a narrow mind to be ‘narrow’; he knows a surpassable mind to be ‘surpassable,’ and an unsurpassable mind to be ‘unsurpassable’; he knows a concentrated mind to be ‘concentrated,’ and an unconcentrated mind to be ‘unconcentrated’; he knows a liberated mind to be ‘liberated,’ and an unliberated mind to be ‘unliberated.’”

The Mental States

In the last talk, we explored the general nature of the mind knowing that there are wholesome and unwholesome mind states.

The Buddha specifically noted eight pairs of specific mind states to observe. They are:

- Greedy or not greedy
- Hateful or not hateful
- Deluded or not deluded
- Contracted/distracted or not contracted/distracted
- Not developed or developed
- Not supreme or supreme
- Not concentrated or concentrated
- Not liberated or liberated

The first of each pair refers to an unwholesome state and the second, a wholesome state. The first four refer to states that we can observe while meditating or reflecting on during our everyday activities. The last four are states that require a higher degree of practice to fully realize.

Greedy or Not Greedy

The mental state of greedy is the wanting state. The mind is obsessed by desire. This can occur at any time, at any place and in any situation. This state of mind is one of the five hindrances to be discussed later in the Fourth Foundations of Mindfulness

Hateful or not hateful

Hate or anger can cause the mind to “simmer with jealousy, vengefulness, malicious thoughts, and thoughts of cruelty.” If the mind boils over with these thoughts, reaction can occur, and we might say or do unskillful things. This state of mind is one of the five hindrances to be discussed later in the Fourth Foundations of Mindfulness

Deluded or not deluded

Delusion occurs when we think that there is permanence, lasting satisfaction and a self. Because the mind prefers permanence, satisfaction seeking, and being in control (self), we constantly need to be mindful of what really is.

Contracted/distracted or not contracted distracted

A contracted mind is depressed or withdrawn. A distracted mind is one that expands beyond all boundaries and can lead to “monkey mind,” traveling all over the universe through imagination. This is state of mind is one of the five hindrances to be discussed later in the Fourth Foundations of Mindfulness.

Not developed or developed

Not supreme or supreme

Not concentrated or concentrated

These three pairs of mental states refer to the increasing degrees of concentration we may achieve in our practice.

Not liberated or liberated

“A liberated mind is free of all problems. It is not greedy, hateful, deluded, contracted, or distracted. It is developed, supreme, and concentrated. In the highest states of concentration meditation, it is possible to achieve temporary liberation. But even temporary liberation from harmful mental states is an extraordinarily beneficial experience. If we follow the steps of mindfulness very closely, eventually the mind may become fully liberated.”³⁴

Practicing Mindfulness of the Mind States

“It is noteworthy that contemplation of the mind does not involve active measures to oppose unwholesome states of mind (such as lust or anger). Rather, the task of mindfulness is to remain receptively aware by clearly recognizing the state of mind that underlies a particular train of thoughts or reactions. Such uninvolved receptivity is required because of one's instinctive tendency to ignore whatever contradicts or threatens one's sense of importance and personal integrity. The habit of employing self-deception to maintain one's self esteem has often become so ingrained that the first step to developing accurate self-awareness is honest acknowledgment of the existence of hidden emotions, motives, and tendencies in the mind, without immediately suppressing them. Maintaining non-reactive awareness in this way counters the impulse towards either reaction or suppression contained in unwholesome states of mind, and thereby deactivates their emotional and attentional pull.”³⁵

In the Vitakkasanthana Sutta: The Relaxation of Thoughts, the Buddha gives five instructions on how to replace unwholesome states of mind with wholesome ones. These are listed in order to be used:

Replace it with a wholesome thought (such as generosity for greed and loving-kindness for aversion)

Remember the suffering it causes (think ahead of the consequences)

Ignore it by paying no attention (we can ignore our friends' advice; do that for the mind as well)

Remember that it is impermanent: (it can only last so long)

Overpower it (only as a last resort)³⁶

Talk XII The Refrain: On Feelings and Mind

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 111-118)

“In this way, in regard to the body [feelings, mind, dhammas] one abides contemplating the body [feelings, mind, dhammas] internally, or one abides contemplating externally, or one abides contemplating both internally and externally. One abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body [feelings, mind, dhammas] . . . the nature of passing away in . . . or the nature of both arising and passing away in. Mindfulness that ‘there is a body’ [feelings, mind, dhammas] is established in one to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And one abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. . . .”

The Refrain

In the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha states the refrain thirteen different times to emphasize the most crucial aspects of meditation practice as they pertain to each foundation (body, feelings, mind, dhammas). For the second and third foundations, feeling and mind states respectively, there are some specific points regarding contemplating internally and externally, arising and passing away, establishing bare knowledge, establishing continuity of mindfulness, and abiding independently.

Practicing Mindfulness Internally and Externally

Practicing mindfulness is not just focusing on our own experience; it is also opening up to the experiences of others. The Buddha reminds us of this using the terms internal to mean our own experience and external to refer to the experiences of others.

In the previous talks on mindfulness of feelings and mental states, we have focused on our own experiences. To be mindful of the experiences of others in regard to feelings and mind states, we observe in others whether or not they are experiencing pleasant, neither pleasant nor unpleasant, or unpleasant feelings or unwholesome or wholesome mind states. We can’t read others’ minds but we can infer from our own feelings and mental states, what might be going on. By making these mindful observations, we feel compassion and sympathetic joy for others rather than resentment, jealousy, or anger. In this way, we develop wholesome mind states for ourselves.

In the mindful observation of the feelings and mind states of others, we can also gain insight into our own conditioning and reactivity. It is well known that what we react to in others is often what we have least accepted in ourselves. This is called our shadow side because we are not fully conscious of its presence.

“Reactions to others can be a powerful mindfulness bell, reminding us to pay attention. There is a lot to observe at those times. We can become mindful of our own reactive mind states, such as impatience, anger, or fear. We can then become mindful of the bodily actions, feelings, or mind states of others that have triggered our reactions, noticing if we’re also reactive to those same qualities in ourselves. And then we can pay attention to what happens as we settle into a mindful awareness of all these things.”³⁷

Goldstein notes that “Our practice is to be aware of whatever there is, whether within (internally) or without (externally), and in the end go beyond this division altogether.”³⁸ “In practicing mindfulness internally, externally, and both internally and externally, we begin opening to the understanding of

anattā, the empty, selfless nature of feelings and all experience. We shift our understanding from “I’m having a pleasant feeling” or “She is having a pleasant feeling” to “There is a pleasant feeling.” As Anālayo points out, in this contemplation, the boundaries of “I” and “others,” of separate selves, are left behind. It is the experience of phenomena independent of any ownership.”³⁹

Arising and Passing Away

All of our experiences arise in the mind and pass away. This is a continuous process occurring many times during each hour. Yet, it is easy not to be mindful of this and to be frustrated by all of the change that is occurring (happiness to sadness to boredom to fear to excitement to calm and on and on). When we ignore this process, we are in a state of delusion. We are not mindful that all experiences are impermanent.

“We can contemplate the impermanence of these states in several ways. When we focus on their arising nature, we emphasize awareness of the moments when they first appear: anger arises, desire arises, calm arises. We can further understand the impermanent, conditioned arising nature of mind states by seeing what triggers them. We can notice the relationship of thought to emotion and emotion to thought, and how each can powerfully condition the other.... By noticing both the trigger thought and the resultant mind state, we are contemplating the arising nature of these states and stay free in the current of changing experience. We can also be mindful of the passing away of mind states, emphasizing awareness of the moment when they fall away or disappear.”⁴⁰

“So often, in the throes of the wanting mind, we feel an urgency to fulfill the desire, that somehow we have to gratify it in order to feel fulfilled. We forget that it is the desire itself that desires, and that the great law of impermanence will resolve it all by itself.”⁴¹

The more that we are mindful that all experiences are impermanent, the less we are driven by them.

Bare Knowing

Goldstein notes that “bare knowledge” here means observing or knowing objectively what is arising, without getting lost in associations, reactions, judgments or evaluations, or, if we do get lost, to then become aware of those states themselves.” Once we are conscious of an experience, our mind adds to that experience by making judgements, commentary or decisions. We can only affect this process by being aware that this happens. “It means letting the mind settle back into noninterfering awareness, just knowing what presents itself. Bare knowledge is the simple and direct experience of knowing what is present, without making up stories about experience.”⁴²

Continuity of Mindfulness

In order to maintain our bare awareness, we need to apply effort to repeatedly come back to bare knowing. This effort is one of the seven factors of enlightenment that we will explore later in the fourth foundation of mindfulness.

“As the continuity of bare knowing becomes stronger, awareness becomes more panoramic. The emphasis moves from mindfulness of the content of the experience to mindfulness of the process of change itself. At this time, there is simply a flow of experience, and the three universal characteristics—impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness become increasingly vivid.”⁴³

Abiding Independent

“This leads to the last line of the refrain, which summarizes the result of our practice: “And one abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.” “Abiding independent” means not being dependent on objects of experience through desire or through the view of self, not identifying with anything as being “I” or “mine.” In one discourse, the Buddha said that whoever hears this, has heard all the teachings; whoever practices this, has practiced all the teachings; whoever realizes this, has realized all the teachings. We abide independent, not clinging to anything in the world.”⁴⁴

Practicing Mindfulness with the Refrain

The points noted in the refrain can be beneficial when meditating or reflecting on mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind and dhammas. As phenomena arise, go through each point as if it were a checklist and see what you experience.

Talk XIII Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Hindrances: Desire

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.125-134)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 121-129)

“And how, monks, does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas? Here in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of five hindrances. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances? “If sensual desire is present in him, he knows ‘There is sensual desire in me’; if sensual desire is not present in him, he knows ‘There is no sensual desire in me’; and he knows how unarisen sensual desire can arise, how arisen sensual desire can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sensual desire can be prevented”

Mindfulness of Dhammas

The Pali word, dhamma, has many meanings. Analayo suggests that in the Satipatthana Sutta, dhamma means “categories of phenomena” that can arise in the mind. There are five categories of phenomena: the hindrances, the five aggregates, the six sense spheres, the seven awakening factors and the four noble truths. Starting with the hindrances, there is a progression of contemplations leading to awakening.

“Michael Carrithers, who wrote about the forest monks of Sri Lanka, said that in this foundation of mindfulness “the propositions of doctrine are transmuted into immediate perception, here and now.” It is this transmutation of doctrine into direct perceptions that brings the teachings alive for us. Instead of a philosophical analysis or discussion, the Buddha is showing us how to investigate these truths, these dhammas, for ourselves.”⁴⁵ In other words, rather reflecting on just words, we can directly experience these dhammas for ourselves thus making it much more accessible and less abstract.

How will you know that these dhammas are true? The Buddha said in the Kalama Sutta: "Now, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness' — then you should enter & remain in them.”⁴⁶

The Hindrances

The hindrances are phenomena that obscure our perception. The Buddha used the following simile to describe how each hindrance obscures the mind:

There is a pool of clear water that reflects our image.

*When **sense desire** is present in the mind, it is as if the pool were suffused with a colored dye.*

Desires color our perceptions.

*When **aversion** is present, it is like boiling water. We can't see clearly.*

When we're heated up by anger, we're in a state of turbulence.

***Sloth and torpor** are like the pool overgrown with algae.*

There is a stagnation of mind that prevents us from seeing clearly.

***Restlessness and worry** are like water when it is stirred up by the wind.*

The mind is tossed about by agitation.

*And **doubt** is like muddy water, where we can't see to the bottom,*

and everything is obscured.

-- Sangaravo Sutta⁴⁷

The hindrances have an unwholesome effect on our minds. It is necessary to abandon them before moving on to the next dhammas. "He (the Buddha) said that when attended to carelessly, "these five hindrances are makers of blindness, causing lack of vision, causing lack of knowledge, detrimental to wisdom, tending to vexation, leading away from nibbāna." But when we attend to these states carefully, we learn to see into their empty, transparent nature and no longer get so caught up in their seductive power. They then become the focus of our mindfulness and the very vehicle of our awakening."⁴⁸

Desire

The Pali word for desire in the Satipatthana Sutta is chanda which means "willingness to have sense pleasure." Unwholesome sense pleasure is getting attached to more than what is needed. This willingness to have this sort of sense pleasure causes distraction, a hindrance to our mindfulness. As the Buddha noted in the simile of the pool of water, desires color our perceptions. Desire can hinder enjoyment because when we have strong desire, we are focused on the future getting of something rather than being in the present, enjoyed what is. For example, when eating, strong desire may cause us to eat quickly because we are focusing on the next bite that then enjoyed the one that is in our mouth.

Desire and fear are similar in that both are focused on the future. Desire is focusing on what pleasures might appear; fear is focusing on what might go wrong.

How can we deal with this state of wanting? The Buddha outlined five ways to contemplate desire:

- Recognize desire when it is present.
- Know when desire is absent.
- Know what conditions underlie the presence or absence of desire.
- Know what conditions underlie the removal of desire.
- Avoid future arisings of desire.

These five ways also apply to the other four hindrances.

Goldstein groups these five contemplations into three broader categories:

- Know when a hindrance is present or absent,
- Know the conditions leading to the arising and removal of a hindrance, and
- Know the conditions that prevent future arisings of a hindrance.

Contemplation of Desire

The three categories described by Goldstein can provide a mental checklist of contemplation.

First, we need to know if desire is present or absent. If desire is present, we can look to see what mental state is present. Usually this is the presence or absence of greed. We can be mindful of the strong feeling of wanting and the distraction that it causes. Likewise, when desire is absent, we can note the peaceful and luminous nature of the mind.

Second, when desire is present, we can investigate the conditions that led to its arising. Often, this occurs because we are not being mindful and we slip unconsciously into wanting. For example, we are

in a buffet and are influenced by the attractive appearance and smells of food. We feel compelled to eat regardless of our need for food. We are deluded because we assume that eating will lead to lasting happiness. We forget that everything is impermanent and lasting satisfaction is not possible. This is desire is just a phenomenon and not us. Likewise, with the removal of desire, we can see that being mindful is a major factor.

Third, to prevent future arisings of desire, we can strive to be more mindful and as the Buddha noted, guard our sense doors and not exposing ourselves to conditions that will lead us into wanting. As with the buffet, we anticipate desire and take mindful steps to avoid it controlling our behavior.

In summary, contemplation of desire in these three steps will lead to stronger mindfulness and ultimate prevention of future arisings.

How can we know if the desire that arises is a hindrance? We can apply clear comprehension as discussed in Talk IV Clear Comprehension. We investigate purpose, suitability, domain and non-delusion.

Talk XIV Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Hindrances: Aversion

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.125-134)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 131-139)

“And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances? “If aversion is present in him, he knows ‘There is aversion in me’; if aversion is not present in him, he knows ‘There is no aversion in me’; and he knows how unarisen aversion can arise, how arisen aversion can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed aversion can be prevented.”

Aversion

The Pali word for aversion is *patigha* which means “striking against” Bhikkhu Bodhi notes it as the attitude of resistance, rejection or destruction. These condemning states can include violent rage and hatred, anger, ill will, animosity, annoyance, irritation, fear, sorrow and grief.

“The Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung expressed both the potential and difficulty of this process: “One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular.”⁴⁹

Conditions that lead to the arising of aversion

Physical Pain

There is a saying, “Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.” When physical pain occurs, rather than just be with it, we add our conditioned reactions of dislike, fear, discouragement, contraction, frustration, impatience and so on. And we suffer.

Unpleasant thoughts

As with pain, when an unpleasant thought arises, we add our conditioned reactions often in the form of emotions (fear, anger, and so on). “It is revealing to notice the intimate relationship of thought and emotion. One often sparks the other, causing a chain reaction of mental proliferation. A certain thought arises, and if we’re not mindful of it as a thought, an emotion might quickly follow. The reverse can be true as well, with various emotions, including the hindrances, sometimes causing a flood of thoughts. But seeing this conditioned interrelationship over and over again helps to weaken our identification with what is arising, and we understand on deeper levels the conditioned nature of the hindrances and other mind states. We no longer take them so personally.

The Buddha gave some specific examples of this conditioning. In one sutta, he talked of how ill will and malice are stirred by thinking that someone in the past (or present or future) has done us an injury, or has injured a loved one, or has done favors for an enemy (someone we don’t like).

We should examine our own minds to see if, indeed, these are the types of thoughts that lead to ill will.”⁵⁰

Unpleasant Situations

We have reactions when we get into situations we dislike. This triggers unpleasant thoughts and emotions, just as with pain.

Personalizing Difficulties

When difficulties arise that are out of our control, such as getting caught in traffic or being delayed on an airplane flight, we often personalize the situation and see ourselves as the victim as if it were a

personal affront. We lose perspective on the reality (what is) that the difficulty just happened and is affecting others as well.

What do all of these conditions have in common? The Buddha noted that aversion arises because we don't get what we want, or we do get what we don't want. Or we fear that we won't get what we want in the future or that we will get what we don't want in the future. We want life to be other than it is.

Conditions that lead to the removal of aversion

Practicing mindfulness

As with all of the hindrances, being aware that the hindrance is present is the first and most direct approach. Analayo states, "By turning a hindrance into an object of meditation, the mere presence of awareness can often lead to dispelling the hindrance in question."⁵¹ Persistence is required in "paying attention moment to moment." Being mindful also includes the realization that all phenomena are impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and of selfless nature. If bare awareness does not work, then other methods as noted below should be tried.

When the aversion is of our "self", practicing self-compassion can be beneficial. The four-step process includes mindfulness, investigation, loving kindness and connectedness (realizing that this is a common human experience).

Knowing the relationship of mind to emotion

When aversion arises, we need to make sure that we are being mindful of it rather than allowing mental proliferation to increase its intensity. This means being mindful to see if we are adding judgements and commentary to our bare awareness. If the aversion intensifies, look to see what is feeding it. Are you being caught in the trance of aversion?

De-personalizing aversion

As with desire, we can fall into the trap of thinking that the aversion is ours and that we are justified in holding on to it. What we don't realize in the heat of the moment is that that our aversion is only causing us suffering and not to those with whom we are angry. We have created a "self" that feels justified and right. Realizing that aversion is just another selfless phenomenon that arises and falls away can be beneficial in removing it.

Thinking about something else

If the above methods aren't working, it is time to try thinking about something else. This will give a brief respite. The aversion may weaken enough that another application of mindfulness will succeed in removal.

Conditions preventing aversion

The ultimate preventative measure for aversion is practicing loving kindness (metta in Pali). This practice of generosity wishes that all beings be happy and peaceful. This act focuses on the potential good rather than the faults.

"It's important to realize that all aversion does not fall away with our first loving wish. The Bodhisattva spent years, and whole lifetimes, cultivating and purifying this quality. But as we practice it, recognize it, and become more familiar with it, mettā begins to arise more and more spontaneously in our lives. It becomes the way we are, rather than something we do. As lovingkindness grows stronger, both for ourselves and others, we feel more tolerance, are a little less judgmental, and slowly and gradually start

to live in a growing field of benevolence and goodwill. Here is where mettā as a dissolver of aversion also becomes the ground for wisdom. The more loving and patient we are with difficulties and disturbances, the less lost we are in reactivity. Our choices and actions become wiser, which in turn leads to more happiness, more mettā, and greater freedom."⁵²

Talk XV Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Hindrances: Sloth and Torpor

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.125-134)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 131-139)

“And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances? “If sloth-and-torpor is present in him, he knows ‘There is sloth-and-torpor in me’; if sloth-and-torpor is not present in him, he knows ‘There is no sloth-and-torpor in me’; and he knows how unarisen sloth-and-torpor can arise, how arisen sloth-and-torpor can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sloth-and-torpor can be prevented.”

Sloth and Torpor

Both sloth and torpor refer to laziness; sloth is physical laziness and torpor is mental laziness. When sloth arises, we feel a lack of energy that can come from withdrawing from experiences with resultant feelings of discontent, boredom or depression, overindulging such as with eating and drinking, or over exercising. We lack drive and energy and just want to lie down and nap. When torpor arises, our mind is sluggish, dull and confused.

Sloth and torpor can occur when we meditate and get so relaxed that we slide into it. This state can be very relaxed and comfortable, but it is not insight meditation. We lose our concentration and fall into laziness. Insight requires energy, vigor, and sharpness. Goldstein notes that sloth and torpor can be the tendency to withdraw from difficulties. He compares it to keeping a car in reverse gear, never going forward but always pulling back.

Sloth and torpor are different from aversion in that aversion is the condemning mind, “striking against” whereas sloth and torpor are withdrawal.

Conditions that lead to the arising of sloth and torpor

Discontent, Boredom, Laziness, and Drowsiness

Thinking about not being contented, bored, lazy or drowsy is called unwise reflection and are the causes of sloth and torpor. ““Unwise reflections” means thinking that there is no harm in boredom, languidness, lethargy and sluggishness and so on.”⁵³ What is boredom other than discontent with what is present? Two examples that can trigger our willingness to have boredom are listening to a speaker with whom we have lost interest or engaging in an activity with which we no longer want to participate. This discontent is tiring and causes us to withdraw.

Difficult emotions

Sometimes we repress very difficult emotions and when they start to arise, we use sloth and torpor (withdrawal) as a defense.

Overeating

Overindulging in food commonly brings on drowsiness and lack of energy. Not eating enough can also cause the same symptoms but this appears to be less of a problem in our affluent culture.

An imbalance of concentration and energy

Too much concentration can invite a dreamlike state that is pleasurable to remain in. There is a lack of energy that is a hindrance to mindfulness.

Conditions that lead to the removal of sloth and torpor

Mindfulness

When we feel drowsy, lazy or dull, we need to investigate the cause. We can ask, “What is this experience I’m calling sleepiness or dullness?” and pay mindful attention. If we aren’t mindful, we might just withdraw further and further. With mindfulness, we can often experience a surge of energy.

Develop mental clarity

We can include more objects in our field of awareness. This puts the mind to work. Also, as we can do the same while meditating,

Open your eyes or change posture

When sloth and torpor arise in meditation, opening the eyes or changing posture (e.g., move from sitting to standing) can be helpful.

Practice mindful reflection

This is the attitude of seeing difficulties as challenges rather than something to withdraw from.

Engage with good friends and profitable talk

Being with others with like intention can be invigorating.

Take rest

It may be that the answer to the question, “What is this experience I’m calling sleepiness or dullness?” may be that you are physically and emotionally tired. Taking rest for a sufficient period of time can be beneficial.

Conditions preventing sloth and torpor

“And what, bhikkhus, . . . prevents unarisen sloth and torpor from arising and arisen sloth and torpor from increasing and expanding? There are, bhikkhus, the element of arousal, the element of endeavor, the element of exertion; frequently giving careful attention to them . . . prevents unarisen sloth and torpor from arising and arisen sloth and torpor from increasing and expanding.”⁵⁴ SN 46-51

The three elements of arousal, endeavor and exertion are all producing energy. When we take our perceived difficulties as challenges, we adopt a different attitude and engage with the problems rather than withdraw.

Talk XVI Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Hindrances: Restlessness and Worry

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.125-134)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 152-162)

“And how, monks, does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas? Here in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of five hindrances. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances? “If restlessness and worry is present in him, he knows ‘There is restlessness and worry in me’; if restlessness and worry is not present in him, he knows ‘There is no restlessness and worry in me’; and he knows how unarisen restlessness and worry can arise, how arisen restlessness and worry can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed restlessness and worry can be prevented.”

Restlessness and Worry

The Pali word for restlessness is uddacca which means agitation, excitement, or distraction.

Restlessness is literally “without rest.” The Pali word for worry is kukkuccha which is the mind state of regret (remorse) or anxiety. We worry about what we did or did not do.

Restlessness manifests in the body as a physical sensation described by many as “jumping out of one’s skin. The mind is distracted with various kinds of thoughts. It is truly an inner turmoil with the mind tossed about by agitation. Restlessness can be more subtle posing as distracting thoughts during tasks or in meditation.

Worry can manifest as general anxiety about the future. Worry is a form of fear, anticipation, or uncertainty about what might happen in the future. Worry can also manifest as guilt, regret or remorse about what we might have done or not done in the past.

Conditions that lead to the arising of restlessness and worry

An imbalance of concentration and energy

Concentration focuses our energy. Insufficient concentration means that the excess energy can lead to distraction and restlessness. We pay undue attention to our thoughts. In other words, we tend to think too much (mental proliferation). Remember that insufficient energy leads to sloth and torpor.

Unwise attention

Paying constant attention to situation over which we have no control leads to discontent.

Too much talk

With the technology available to us today, we can easily get engaged in constant communication. This feeds unwise attention as we share our experiences over and over again. This makes concentration difficult to maintain, upsetting the balance with energy.

Dwelling on past unskillful actions

If we don’t look at past actions to see what was unwholesome, learn from it and then let go, we will constantly dwell on these actions with restlessness and worry ensuing.

Judging one's own progress on the path

Restless and worry can be caused by our striving too hard in our practice and being overly concerned with our progress. What is really happening is that we are setting goals and expectations when there is no need.

Conditions that lead to the removal of restlessness and worry

Practice mindfulness

“Whenever we feel the mind is not settled on the object, not at rest, we can become mindful of the restlessness itself. Notice the physical energies in the body. Notice the difference in the emotional tone between restlessness and worry, so that you can distinguish one from the other. Restlessness feels more scattered; worry feels more anxious. As we become mindful of these states of mind, rather than being lost in them, the mindfulness itself starts to bring the factors of concentration and energy into balance.”⁵⁵

Be precise with your attention

Use your mental zoom lens. “Focus the mind more precisely on a particular object like the breath, or we become quite precise in moving about, strengthening the quality of composure in our movements. Both actions help to calm all the obsessive thinking in the mind.”⁵⁶

Paying wise attention with patience

Instead of constantly ruminating, investigate the situation to see if there is an appropriate response. If there is no appropriate response that arises, we must be patient.

Open your eyes

When meditating or when your eyes are closed, such as when waking from sleep, just open your eyes as this gives you a physical point of reference to help you reconnect with the reality of the moment rather than the thoughts.

Practice wise reflection

Reflect on your purpose for practicing which is the purification of your mind to free yourself from greed, hatred and delusion. (ignorance). And know that you are doing this not only for yourself but for the welfare of others. Realize that guilt is simply reinforcing the concept of self with negative self-judgment. It is difference from remorse which is acknowledging the unskillful action, understand its unwholesomeness, making amends when possible and then moving on (letting go). Goldstein notes that “This is the act of self-forgiveness, which is honest in its assessment and wise in its understanding of impermanence and selflessness.”⁵⁷

Know that awareness of already present

This is the realization that awareness cannot be developed. It is already within you and you just need to come back to it. That is what the purification of the mind is all about.

Preventing the arising of restlessness and worry

Practice virtue

Commitment to the virtue of non-harming is freedom from non-remorse. Even the Buddha committed unskillful acts. As Goldstein notes: “Even if we have done unskillful things in the past, as we all have, we know that from this point onward, we are taking care with our actions of the body, speech and mind.”⁵⁸

Follow the eightfold path

The eightfold path is the Buddha prescription for freedom. This will be explored later as one of the Dhammas.

Reading Dharma books, conversing with good friends, and associating with wise teachers

These all help the mind to stay free from the hindrance of restlessness and worry.

Talk XVII Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Hindrances: Doubt

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.125-134)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 163-168)

“And how, monks, does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas? Here in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of five hindrances. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances? “If doubt is present in him, he knows ‘There is doubt in me’; if doubt is not present in him, he knows ‘There is no doubt in me’; and he knows how unarisen doubt can arise, how arisen doubt can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed doubt can be prevented”.

Doubt

There are two kinds of doubt. The first is a skepticism that leads to inquiry and investigation. In the case of the teachings, this kind of doubt is wholesome. The Buddha encouraged all to investigate for themselves and to discard what was not true for them. The second kind of doubt is the unwholesome mind states of uncertainty, wavering and indecision that immobilize us. With these mind states, we don't have the motivation to inquire and investigate. Instead, we remain stuck and our practice can be at a standstill or even abandoned.

Manifestations of doubt as it applies to our practice

Doubt in the relevance of the teachings – the Buddha taught over 2600 years ago and we might wonder if his teachings are relevant in the times in which we live. The Buddha asked us to look and see. The hindrance of doubt can lead us to give up rather than investigate.

Doubt in the path of practice

We may have doubt about various aspects of our practice such as the benefit of paying attention to the breath or following the five precepts. Like doubt in the relevance of practice, we need to investigate. If we broaden our perspective and can see that all practices done skillfully can help to free the mind in some way, we can erase the doubt.

Goldstein notes: “One of the strongest examples of doubt in my practice came as I was just beginning to learn about Tibetan Dzogchen teachings. Having practiced for so many years in the Burmese tradition of vipassanā, my mind was tormented by the question, “Which tradition is right?” I would go back and forth, playing the lawyer for both sides. Finally, after a month of this relentless doubting mind, I realized that I was asking the wrong question. It was not a matter of which tradition was right, but rather, coming to the understanding that all the teachings were skillful means for liberation. If we take teachings as statements of some absolute metaphysical truth, then different and often contradictory teachings become a big obstacle. If, though, we see metaphysics as skillful means, then the only relevant question is: Does this teaching help to free the mind? With this perspective, it's quite possible to find different teachings helpful at different times.”⁵⁹

Doubt in our ability to practice

We can have doubt about how we practice. “Am I meditating correctly?” or “This is too hard!” Overcoming this doubt is to build strong intention and not judge ourselves.

Conditions that lead to the arising of doubt

Unwise attention

Thoughts continually arise and fall away. If we aren't mindful of this process, we pay unwise (undue) attention to the thoughts of doubt and let uncertainty build. This careless attention is not seeing and recognizing the thoughts that give way to doubt. We lose our ability to discern what is wholesome and unwholesome.

Conditions that lead to the removal of doubt

Practicing Mindfulness

We practice mindfulness so that we can know when doubt is present. Knowing that uncertainty is present, we can see the being to remove doubt is by investigation. Whatever we are skeptical about, we ask "Is this wholesome?" If it is, we can continue our practice. If not, we abandon it. We remain in the present and do not get stuck.

In the case of doubt in the relevance of the teachings –look and see if the teachings are beneficial for you.

In the case of doubt in the path of practice, investigate asking "does this teaching help to free the mind?" Broaden your perspective to see that all practices done skillfully can help to free the mind in some way.

In the case of doubt in our ability to practice, build strong intention and do not judge yourself.

Preventing the arising of doubt

"Just as unwise attention gives rise to doubt, we can overcome this hindrance and prevent its arising by cultivating wise attention, not only in our meditation practice but also in our lives. It's interesting to note that the very opposite of doubt is the beautiful mental factor of faith. Bhikkhu Bodhi describes the function of faith as clarifying the mind, in the same way a water-clearing gem causes muddy water to clear. Through hearing and studying the teachings, and then through our own investigation of them, we develop a growing confidence in the Buddha, in the Dharma, in the Sangha, and in ourselves. At a certain point, we're no longer beset by the wavering of doubt, and even when we face difficulties and challenges, this confidence gives us the strength and determination to persevere. The gradual overcoming of doubt gives greater meaning and power to the taking of refuge, because, at least to some extent, it is verified in our own experience, leading onward through all the stages of awakening."⁶⁰

Talk XVIII Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Hindrances: Summary

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.125-134)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 121-129)

The hindrances have an unwholesome effect on our minds. It is necessary to abandon them before moving on to the next dhammas. “He (the Buddha) said that when attended to carelessly, “these five hindrances are makers of blindness, causing lack of vision, causing lack of knowledge, detrimental to wisdom, tending to vexation, leading away from nibbāna.” But when we attend to these states carefully, we learn to see into their empty, transparent nature and no longer get so caught up in their seductive power. They then become the focus of our mindfulness and the very vehicle of our awakening.”⁶¹

Below is a summary of the Five Hindrances. Please refer to the preceding talks for more detail.

The Five Hindrances: Summary

	Desire	Aversion	Sloth & Torpor	Restlessness & Worry	Doubt
Definition	Insatiable want	Condemnation	Physical & Mental Laziness	Agitation & Anxiety	Uncertainty Skepticism
Clear Pool Effect	Boiling	Turbulence	Stagnation	Stirred by the wind	Muddy
Manifestations	Excitement Greed, avarice, craving	Anger, ill will, hatred, animosity, irritation, annoyance, fear, sorrow, grief, violent rage	Lack of energy Withdrawal Sluggish, dull and confused mind	Jumping out of skin Distraction, fear, anxiety, remorse, regret	Skeptical about relevance of teachings, path of practice, ability to practice
Conditions leading to arising	Unwise attention to intense wanting Lost in (attached to) pleasure, gain, fame, praise	Physical Pain Unpleasant thoughts Unpleasant situations Taking experiences personally	Imbalance – more concentration than energy Bored, lazy, drowsy, discontent Overeating	Imbalance – more energy than concentration Unwise attention causing mental proliferation Too much talk	Unwise attention to uncertainty Lack of inquiry and investigation
Conditions leading to removal	Mindful awareness Wise Reflection on consequences	Mindful awareness Awareness of adding judgments & commentary Depersonalizing experiences	Mindful awareness More energy Engaging with good friends Take rest	Mindful awareness More concentration Wise Reflection Patience Contentment	Mindful awareness Inquiry/investigation Ask “Is this wholesome? “Does this teaching help to free the mind?”
Prevention	Mindfully guarding the sense doors No exposure to wanting conditions Moderate eating	Practicing loving kindness (metta) Focus on the good rather than the faults	Practicing the elements of Arousal Endeavor Exertion	Foster stillness of awareness	Paying wise attention in our meditation practice and in our lives.

Talk XIX Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Five Aggregates of Clinging

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.135-146)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 171-202)

“Again monks, in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the five aggregates of clinging. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the five aggregates of clinging? “Here he knows, ‘Such is material form, such its arising, such its passing away; such is feeling, such its arising, such its passing away; such is cognition, such its arising, such its passing away; such are volitions, such their arising, such their passing away; such is consciousness, such its arising, such its passing away.”

The Five Aggregates of Clinging

What does reality mean to you? How do you experience reality?

Each of us experiences a different reality due to many factors. We may pay attention differently, our senses differ, our beliefs may condition what we think we experienced. The Buddha defined everyday reality as what we sense when our sense bases (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, mind) come into contact with sense objects (images, sounds, smells, taste, bodily sensations, thoughts). However, we process these sensations. This is called conditioning. The Buddha called this process the Five Aggregates of Clinging.

The Buddha noted five aggregates (elements) that define the whole of our experiences in our ordinary state. The whole of our experiences includes all that we sense externally and internally. They are called aggregates because each element is composed of many instances of experience. For example, the aggregate of form has many objects. Analayo states, “aggregate is an umbrella term for all possible instances of each category, whether past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, near or far. The qualification “clinging” (upadana) refers to desire and attachment in relation to the aggregates. Such desire and attachment in relation to the aggregates is the root cause for the arising of dukkha (suffering).”⁶²

It is important to understand how we process reality because we can then start to distinguish what we really sense and what we add as conditioning. It is the conditioning that causes suffering and gives us a false sense of “self”.

The Five Aggregates of Clinging are Form, Feeling, Perception, Mental Formations and Consciousness.

Form

Form refers to all sense objects that come into contact with the sense bases. These include images seen, sounds heard, odors smelled, that which is tasted, that which is felt, and thoughts appearing in the mind.

Consciousness

Consciousness is the awareness that arises when a sense object comes in contact with a sense base. We cannot be aware of consciousness by itself. We can only be aware that consciousness is present when

consciousness is in contact with form. In other words, consciousness must always have an object to exist in our awareness.

Feeling

When we are aware through consciousness of a form in contact with one of our sense bases, a feeling of pleasant, not pleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant arises. This feeling can occur as a bodily sensation and/or a thought. Feelings are subjective, the “how” of the experience (“How do I feel about what is sensed?”). This is the first line of conditioning as these feelings are influenced by memories of past experiences. Feelings as used here are not emotions. Emotions come later as mental formations.

Perception

After the initial feeling, perception or cognition occurs as the sense object is identified. Perception is the “what” of experience (“What is it that I am sensing?”). The Buddha defined pure perception as what the senses sense without embellishment. If embellishment occurs because of past memories or other factors, the perception is distorted (conditioned). It is important to be aware that most perceptions are conditioned.

Mental Formations

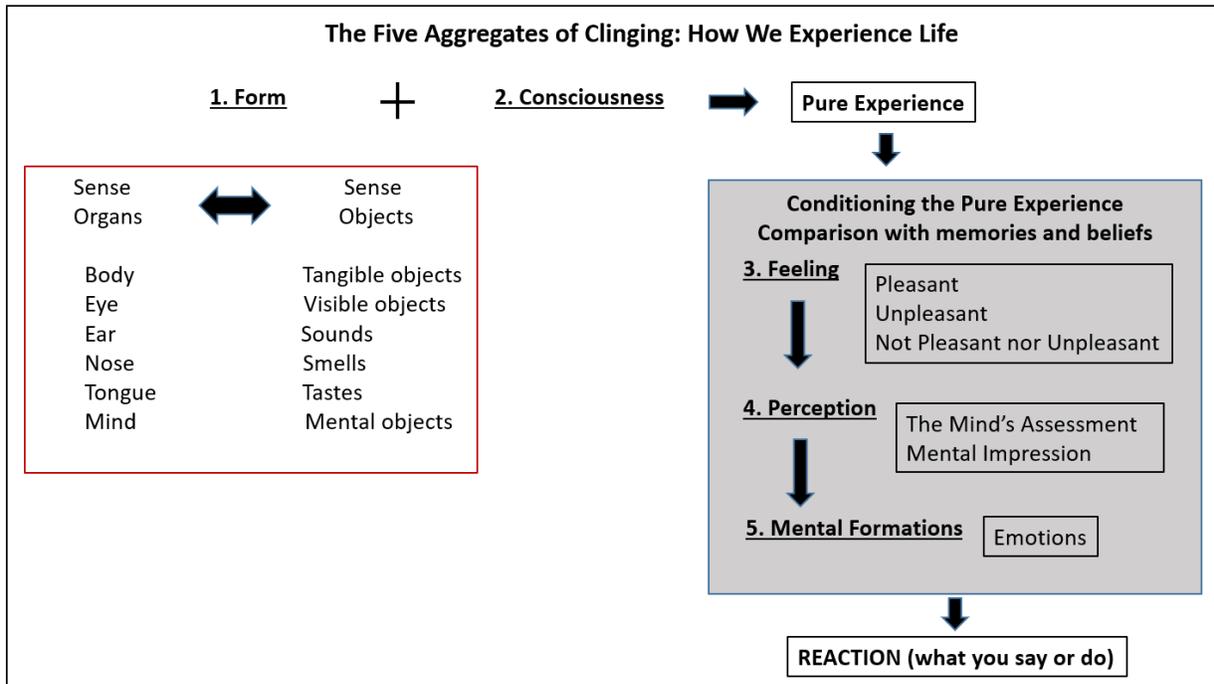
Depending on our perception (identification), certain mental formations arise and further condition our experience. For example, depending on how we perceive an object, a mental formation of anger or joy may arise. Mental can then cause us to react (what we say or do) and depending on the feeling, perception and the mental formation, this reaction can be unskillful.

How the Five Aggregates Function

In summary, the process flows as follows. One of the sense bases makes contact with its corresponding form sense object (**form**). For example, the eye makes contact with an image. Our awareness of the sense object arises through **consciousness** having made contact with the sense object through the sense base. This contact of form with **consciousness** is called the pure experience. Then a **feeling** about the sense object arises (pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant). Then **perception** (a mental impression) arises prompting the arising of a mental formations (ideas, fantasies, memories, fears, emotional responses) to arise.

The aggregates, **feeling, perception and mental formations**, are conditioning factors because they all arise from the mind. The mind conditions the awareness of the pure experience by comparing it with stored memories and beliefs. Depending on the intensity of the mental formation, a reaction might occur.

How we experience life through the five aggregates of clinging is shown in the diagram below.



The Importance of the Five Aggregates of Clinging

Why is it important to understand this process? Because we can come to understand how what we sense is conditioned through feeling, perception, and mental formations. Note that this conditioning is dependent on the concept of a self. “What I am feeling?” “What I have identified as what it is?” “What emotions and thoughts am I having because of what I have sensed?”

We also can see the constantly changing nature of our experiences and how they come to arise and then fall away as another arises. We can directly experience the impermanence of the aggregates and know that they are not who we are. And we can see that the concept of self that arises is also impermanent. It is merely our mind.

As noted above, clinging refers to the attachment to the aggregates which can cause suffering. For example, if we gaze in the mirror and have a feeling of pleasant, a perception of face, and a mental formation of self-love, we begin to believe that we are a self that is beautiful whereas in reality, we are just clinging an illusion created by our mind from the aggregates.

Talk XX Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Five Aggregates of Clinging II

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.135-146)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 171-202)

Some contemporary research on the process how mental formations arise validates what the Buddha said.

Lisa Feldman Barrett in her book, *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*⁶³ affirms the Buddha's teaching on the Five Aggregates. She refutes the classic view of emotions (the aggregate of mental formations). "The time-honored story of emotion goes something like this: We all have emotions built-in from birth. They are distinct, recognizable phenomena inside us. When something happens in the world, whether it's a gunshot or a flirtatious glance, our emotions come on quickly and automatically, as if someone has flipped a switch. We broadcast emotions on our faces by way of smiles, frowns, scowls, and other characteristic expressions that anyone can easily recognize. Our voices reveal our emotions through laughter, shouts, and cries. Our body posture betrays our feelings with every gesture and slouch. Our emotions, according to the classical view, are artifacts of evolution, having long ago been advantageous for survival, and are now a fixed component of our biological nature."

Instead, she notes: "When scientists set aside the classical view and just look at the data, a radically different explanation for emotion comes to light. In short, we find that your emotions are not built-in but made from more basic parts. They are not universal but vary from culture to culture. **They are not triggered; you create them.** They emerge as a combination of the physical properties of your body, a flexible brain that wires itself to whatever environment it develops in, and your culture and upbringing, which provide that environment."

She calls this new finding, The Theory of Constructed Emotion. "In every waking moment, your brain uses past experience, organized as concepts, to guide your actions and give your sensations meaning. When the concepts involved are emotion concepts, your brain constructs instances of emotion."⁶⁴ This is called simulation.

"Simulations are your brain's guesses of what's happening in the world. In every waking moment, you're faced with ambiguous, noisy information from your eyes, ears, nose, and other sensory organs. Your brain uses your past experiences to construct a hypothesis— the simulation— and compares it to the cacophony arriving from your senses. In this manner, simulation lets your brain impose meaning on the noise, selecting what's relevant and ignoring the rest."⁶⁵

"Emotions are not reactions to the world. You are not a passive receiver of sensory input but an active constructor of your emotions. From sensory input and past experience, your brain constructs meaning and prescribes action. If you didn't have concepts that represent your past experience, all your sensory inputs would just be noise. You wouldn't know what the sensations are, what caused them, nor how to behave to deal with them. With concepts, your brain makes meaning of sensation, and sometimes that meaning is an emotion."⁶⁶

To understand what Dr. Barrett is saying in the context of the Five Aggregates, once consciousness makes contact with the sense base and the sense object, our awareness is what Dr. Barrett terms

interoception. “Interoception is your brain’s representation of all sensations from your internal organs and tissues, the hormones in your blood, and your immune system.”⁶⁷ She calls the feeling aggregate, affect, and notes that “Affect is the general sense of feeling that you experience throughout each day. It is not emotion but a much simpler feeling with two features. **The first is how pleasant or unpleasant you feel, which scientists call valence.** The pleasantness of the sun on your skin, the deliciousness of your favorite food, and the discomfort of a stomachache or a pinch are all examples of affective valence. **The second feature of affect is how calm or agitated you feel, which is called arousal.** The energized feeling of anticipating good news, the jittery feeling after drinking too much coffee, the fatigue after a long run, and the weariness from lack of sleep are examples of high and low arousal. Anytime you have an intuition that an investment is risky or profitable, or a gut feeling that someone is trustworthy or an asshole, that’s also affect. Even a completely neutral feeling is affect.”⁶⁸ With perception, she notes that “You might think that your perceptions of the world are driven by events in the world, but really, they are anchored in your predictions, which are then tested against those little skipping stones of incoming sensory input.”⁶⁹ In other words, your perception or identification of what you are sensing is compared and then conditioned with what is stored in your mind.

She further notes: “I hope by now you appreciate the drama that is going on here. Emotion words are not about emotional facts in the world that are stored like static files in your brain. They reflect the varied emotional meanings you construct from mere physical signals in the world using your emotion knowledge. You acquired that knowledge, in part, from the collective knowledge contained in the brains of those who cared for you, talked to you, and helped you to create your social world. Emotions are not reactions to the world; they are your constructions of the world.”⁷⁰

As we come to realize how much the mind conditions what we sense, we can begin to become free from stress and suffering.

Talk XXI Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Six Sense Bases

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.135-146)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 205-222)

The Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases

We have seen in the last dhamma, the Five Aggregates of Clinging, that we become aware of form (an internal sense base such as the eye making contact with an external visible sense object) through consciousness. The arising of the entire world of our unfolding experience comes through these six sense bases.

The Buddha called these sense bases, the all:

The Blessed One said, "What is the All? Simply the eye & forms, ear & sounds, nose & aromas, tongue & flavors, body & tactile sensations, intellect & ideas. This, monks, is called the All."⁷¹

For example, with the eye sense base: *"Dependent on eye & forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives (labels in the mind). What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one objectifies. Based on what a person objectifies, the perceptions & categories of objectification assail him/her with regard to past, present, & future forms cognizable via the eye."⁷²*

In the Sattipatthana Sutta, the Buddha gives instruction on how to work with the all (the sense bases). For example, with the eye:

In regard to dhammas, one abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-spheres. And how does one . . . abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-spheres? "Here, one knows the eye, one knows forms, and one knows the fetter that arises dependent on both, and one also knows how an unarisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."

A fetter is conditioning that causes a distortion. It is also called a defilement. The Five Hindrances are distortions at a grosser level of the mind. The Buddha is saying that we need to understand how once the eye, for example, makes contact with the visible object and once consciousness makes contact, our awareness can become conditioned (through feeling, perception and mental formations). This was noted in the previous talk on the Five Aggregates of Clinging. The Buddha wants us to be aware of this conditioning (distortion, fetter, defilement) that arises and how we can remove this distortion and even prevent it from arising in the future.

As the Buddha mentioned, there are conditions that lead to the arising of distortion, conditions that lead to the removal of distortion and prevention of distortion.

Conditions leading to arising of distortion

Dwelling (spending too much time with the contact can lead to craving and clinging. Desire, aversion, and delusion are the causes.

*Forms, sounds, tastes, odours,
Tactiles, and all mental objects:*

*This is the terrible bait of the world
With which the world is infatuated.*

*But when he has transcended this,
The mindful disciple of the Buddha
Shines radiantly like the sun,
Having surmounted Māra's realm. SN 4.17⁷³*

Conditions leading to removal of distortion

First of all, one must be aware that the distortion is present. There are physical and mental symptoms that arise such as tightness, pain in the body, anger and depression in the mind. It is important to have mindful awareness and know that this contact of the sense base with the sense object is like all phenomena: impermanent, inability to have lasting satisfaction (potential for suffering) and selfless nature. By awareness and investigation, the conditioning can be removed.

Conditions leading to the prevention of distortion

There are several methods: sense restraint by not dwelling too much and by setting boundaries such as not limiting or eliminating exposure (e.g. a certain visible object that is a temptation). Also adding beneficial cognition which is changing our mental habits to develop beneficial ones based on impermanence, suffering and selfless nature.

Ledi Sayadaw, one of the great Burmese meditation masters and scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, likened the sense bases to six train stations from which trains travel to various destinations. Either they take us to situations of suffering, or they take us to realms of happiness or to freedom and full awakening.⁷⁴ Goldstein, Joseph. *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*

Talk XXII Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Seven Factors of Awakening Part I

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.147-158)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 225-284)

"And how are the four frames of reference developed & pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination?"

*"On whatever occasion the monk remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world, on that occasion his mindfulness is steady & without lapse. When his mindfulness is steady & without lapse, then **mindfulness** as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.*

*Remaining mindful in this way, he **examines**, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment. When he remains mindful in this way, examining, analyzing, & coming to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then **analysis of qualities** as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.*

*In one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, **persistence** is aroused unflaggingly. When persistence is aroused unflaggingly in one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then **persistence** as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.*

*In one whose persistence is aroused, a **rapture not-of-the-flesh** (unworldly joy) arises. When a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises in one whose persistence is aroused, then **rapture** as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.*

*For one enraptured at heart, **the body grows calm and the mind grows calm**. When the body & mind of a monk enraptured at heart grow calm, then **serenity** as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.*

*For one who is at ease — his body calmed — **the mind becomes concentrated**. When the mind of one who is at ease — his body calmed — becomes concentrated, then **concentration** as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.*

*He carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with **equanimity**. When he carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity, **equanimity** as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.*

The above passage is from the Anapanasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing as it provides a more comprehensive explanation.⁷⁵

The Seven Factors of Awakening

Just as the Five Hindrances describe the negative (unskillful) states of mind, the Seven Factors of Awakening describe the positive (skillful) states of mind to replace the hindrances. The Seven Factors of Awakening have been called the antihindrances.

The Buddha in the Satipatthana Sutta teaches contemplating the seven factors of awakening. In this sutta, each factor is contemplated as being present, not present, conditions leading to its arising and how it can be perfected by development. The Anapanastati Sutta as noted above also demonstrated the sequential progression of the factors. Joseph Goldstein notes: “And, as we will see, these seven factors form a progression, each one leading to the next. So if we prime the pump of the enlightened mind and practice the first of the awakening factors, all the rest follow along.”⁷⁶

The progression is as follows: As you cultivate your **mindfulness** (paying attention from moment to moment to what is), it becomes an established form of practice. Your mental object of mindfulness becomes mindfulness. You learn that with strong mindfulness, you investigate all phenomena to discover that they all share the same three characteristics (impermanence, dissatisfaction, and selflessness). Thus, the mental object of mindfulness becomes **investigation**. With investigation, you develop exert more **energy** (effort, persistence) and shift your mental object of mindfulness to energy.

With these three powerful factors in action, you feel joy which leads to **contentment**. With contentment, restlessness disappears, and you are able to cultivate powerful **concentration**. When all of these six factors (mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, contentment, and concentration), you feel that your life is in harmony and balance. When this occurs, you are experiencing the seventh and final factor, **equanimity**.

With equanimity, the desire ends for things to be other than they are. You don't wish for permanence, lasting satisfaction, or for a self. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment are then in alignment with the Four Noble Truths which will be discussed later.

“We can achieve this goal within this life. When we do, all suffering ceases. All questions come to an end. All anxiety, worry, fear, and tension disappear, never to return. There is no craving, no clinging to anything. We live in harmony, perfect balance. All our senses are sharpened. We still eat, drink, talk, and use our body and mind, but with full awareness, total mindfulness. Our morality does not make us believe we are superior to others. Our concentration does not make us praise ourselves and disparage others. Our wisdom gives us perfect loving-friendliness, perfect compassion and perfect appreciative (sympathetic joy). Enjoying perfect equanimity, we are never again troubled by life's ups and downs.”⁷⁷

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is paying attention moment to moment to what is. There are four applications of mindfulness that R.M.L. Gethlin, a noted scholar describes:

- Not forgetting - always coming back to mindfulness when we get lost.
- Presence of mind – directly facing and experiencing whatever is arising.
- Remembering – always knowing what is skillful and what is not (our inner moral compass).
- Close association with wisdom – paying bare attention with clear comprehension (purpose, suitability, domain, non-delusion).⁷⁸

The Practical Application of the Seven Factors of Awakening

The Satipatthana Sutta (The Four Foundations of Mindfulness) outlines a path for freedom. As noted in the beginning of the teaching: “..this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting

of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha (suffering) and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of Nibbāna (awakening)..”

The First Foundation, Mindfulness of the Body, gives us a concentration practice using awareness of the breath. The Fourth Foundation, Mindfulness of the Dhammas, gives us an understanding of how we suffer from the hindrances, how our minds are conditioned through the five aggregates of clinging, and how we can overcome the hindrances and conditioning by applying the seven factors of awakening, the positive qualities needed to achieve the goal of our practice.

Practicing the Seven Factors

Setting: Meditation

Time: about 30 minutes

- Recall an unpleasant experience you wish to work with.
- Look to see which of the Five Hindrances are involved:
 1. Sense Desire (wanting)
 2. Aversion
 3. Sloth and Torpor (physical drowsiness and mental dullness)
 4. Restlessness and Worry
 5. Doubt
- Begin with concentration practice using the breath as the object of attention. When the mind is sufficiently quiet (usually 10-15 minutes), proceed with the next step.
- Apply mindfulness by paying attention moment to moment to what is. With strong mindfulness, you can proceed to examine the “what is.”
- Investigate the “what is”
- Examine the conditioning aggregates of clinging:
 1. Feeling
 - Note the valence: pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant
 - Note the Intensity of the arousal
 2. Perception (identification)
 - Is this what is actually sensed or an identification of the mind?
 - Is it skillful or unskillful?
 3. Mental formations
 - What emotions are arising?
- Examine other questions:
 - Is this experience/action skillful or unskillful? Unskillful actions stem from desire, aversion and delusion and skillful actions are rooted in generosity, loving-kindness and knowing the three characteristics of all phenomena: impermanence, inability to provide lasting satisfaction and selfless nature. This is our moral compass.
 - Is this a habit pattern? If so, all the better to investigate.
 - Are you taking this personally? The universe is not selectively picking on you; others share the same experiences.
 - Do you understand the nature of thought? Thought is just another phenomenon - impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and of selfless nature.
- Apply energy (effort, persistence) and don't give up investigating.

- Notice if joy arises.
 - If joy doesn't arise, try increasing concentration on the breath and then shifting to a pleasant sensation such as a smile on your lips.
- Notice if calm (tranquility) arises
- Notice if your concentration is increased and becomes a pleasant abiding.
- Notice if equanimity, an evenness and balance of the mind, arises.
- Reflect on how you now relate to the experience you began with.

Talk XXIII Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Seven Factors of Awakening Part II

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.147-158)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 225-284)

In the previous talk, we discussed the progressive nature of the seven factors. Following is more detail about each factor.

Mindfulness

Definition: Paying attention moment to moment to what is.

- Paying attention – concentrating - not distracted
- Moment to moment – not in past or future
- To what is: not adding anything

What does mindfulness do?

- Brings us into the present
- Gives an awareness of conditioning – We add stuff and don't realize that that is what we are doing
 - Judgments
 - Commentary
 - Decision-making
- Promotes less reactivity

There are four applications of mindfulness that R.M.L. Gethlin, a noted scholar describes:

- Not forgetting - always coming back to mindfulness when we get lost.
- Presence of mind – directly facing and experiencing whatever is arising
- Remembering – always knowing what is skillful and what is not (our inner moral compass)
- Close association with wisdom – paying bare attention with clear comprehension (purpose, suitability, domain, non-delusion)

Investigation

Investigation can counteract the hindrance of doubt. There are several questions to explore:

- Is this experience/action skillful or unskillful? Unskillful actions stem from desire, aversion and delusion and skillful actions are rooted in generosity, loving-kindness and knowing the three characteristics of all phenomena: impermanence, inability to provide lasting satisfaction and selfless nature. This is our moral compass.
- Is this a habit pattern? If so, all the better to investigate.
- Are you taking this personally? The universe is not selectively picking on you; others share the same experiences.
- Do you understand the nature of thought? Thought is just another phenomenon - impermanent, unable to provide lasting satisfaction and of selfless nature.

“Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche noted: “When a rainbow appears we see many beautiful colors— yet a rainbow is not something we can clothe ourselves with, or wear as an ornament; it simply appears through the conjunction of various conditions. Thoughts arise in the mind in just the same way. They have no tangible reality or intrinsic existence at all. There is therefore no logical reason why thoughts

should have so much power over us, nor any reason why we should be enslaved by them. . . . Once we recognize that thoughts are empty, the mind will no longer have the power to deceive us. But as long as we take our deluded thoughts as real, they will continue to torment us mercilessly, as they have been doing throughout countless past lives.”⁷⁹ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, “Teachings on Nature of Mind and Practice,” Tricycle: The Buddhist Review, winter 1991.

Energy

Energy can counteract the hindrance of sloth and torpor.

Goldstein notes: “Through the wisdom arising from investigation, we become inspired to make efforts to fully actualize it. And this inspiration becomes the basis for the cultivation of viriya, or energy...⁸⁰” Energy can give us strength to develop skillful states of mind and courage for determination, resolve, testing the limits. Energy is best applied when the mind is relaxed through concentration practice so that there is less “efforting.”

Joy (Rapture)

When mindfulness, investigation and energy are applied, joy often arises spontaneously. This is the joy of non-attachment, of freedom. This factor is called piti in Pali. It is physical and can suffuse the whole body. The Buddha described it as: *“Suppose a skilled bath attendant or his apprentice were to pour soap flakes into a metal basin, sprinkle them with water and knead them into a ball, so that the ball of soap flakes would be pervaded by moisture, encompassed by moisture, suffused by moisture inside and out and yet would not trickle. In the same way one drenches, steeps, saturates and suffuses one’s body with the rapture and happiness born of seclusion, so that there is no part of one’s body that is not suffused by rapture and happiness.”*⁸¹

We can get a taste of joy by focusing on pleasant sensations in the body after reaching a sufficient level of concentration.

Calm (Tranquility)

After joy falls away, calm arises. There is a sense of serenity and peace. Calm can counteract the hindrance of restlessness and worry.

“When the mind is tranquil, free of desire, even temporarily, a kind of happiness and ease arise that are subtler and more refined than the joy of rapture, which can be a little excitable. And it is this happiness of tranquility that, in turn, becomes the conditioning factor for concentration and liberating wisdom.”⁸²

Concentration

We start meditation with concentration practice to calm the mind. After the first five factors of awakening have been experienced, we reach a new and deeper level of concentration which is what the Buddha called a pleasant abiding. It is seclusion from the hindrances.

Equanimity

Equanimity is an evenness, an unshakeable balance of mind. The eight winds of worldly reality: gain/loss, praise/blame, fame/disrepute and pleasure/pain are experienced as balanced rather than desiring only the positives and having aversion for the negatives.

The wisdom aspect of equanimity is beautifully expressed in the famous opening lines of “On the Faith Mind,” by the Third Zen Ancestor: “The great way is not difficult for those who have no preferences. When attachment and aversion are both absent, the way is clear and undisguised. Make the smallest distinction, however, and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.”⁸³

As the Buddha noted in the Satipatthana Sutta, equanimity can be likened to *“And as one abides Independent, not clinging to anything in the world.”*

With equanimity, there is a true letting go of all of the hindrances.

Talk XXIV Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Four Noble Truths Part I

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.159-166)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 287-323)

"Again, monks, in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths? "Here he knows as it really is, 'this is dukkha'; he knows as it really is, 'this is the arising of dukkha'; he knows as it really is, 'this is the cessation of dukkha'; he knows as it really is, 'this is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.'

The Four Noble Truths

In what is considered his first teaching, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion, the Buddha addressed five monks saying:

"Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress:[1] Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

"And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration."⁸⁴ Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

The "Noble" in the Four Noble Truths has several translations. Noble does not refer to the truths but to those who understand them. "They are four facts known to be true by those "noble ones" with insight into the nature of reality, but not known by ordinary beings."⁸⁵

In order to explore more deeply the Four Noble Truths, we draw on some of the Buddha's other teachings.

The Buddha as physician

The Buddha said in the Snake sutta: *"What I teach now as before, O monks, is suffering and the cessation of suffering."⁸⁶ In this way, he was like a physician specializing in the disease of suffering and how to heal it. A physician recognizes the existence of symptoms (e.g. cough and fever), diagnoses the cause (e.g. pneumonia), knows the cure (e.g. antibiotics), and prescribes the treatment (antibiotics). Similarly, the Four Noble Truths is arranged four parts: (1) the Buddha's description of suffering, (2) its cause, (3) its potential for cure, and (4) the prescription for cure.*

In this talk, we will explore the first truth:

The First Noble Truth: Dukkha (Suffering)

"Now this, monks, is the noble truth of stress:[1] Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful.

The original Pali word is dukkha and is often translated as stress or suffering. However, this can be misleading. In current times, suffering is defined as the state of undergoing pain, distress, or hardship. Dukkha is broader than that as it encompasses all conditioned phenomena including pleasant experiences. "We might begin to get a better sense of its meaning by remembering its etymological derivation. The word is made up of the prefix du and the root kha. Du means "bad" or "difficult." Kha means "empty....In more general philosophical terms, "empty" means devoid of permanence and devoid of a self that can control or command phenomena. Here we begin to get a sense of other, more inclusive meanings of the term dukkha. Words like unsatisfying, unreliable, uneaseful, and stressful all convey universal aspects of our experience....Now we can integrate the understanding that, indeed, all conditioned phenomena are dukkha— that is, unsatisfactory, incapable of giving lasting satisfaction, and at the same time, even in the midst of experience, able to bring the suffering of our minds to an end."⁸⁷

Phillip Moffitt noted "Life is a never-ending dance between moments of feeling good and moments of feeling bad."⁸⁸ All conditions including suffering and worldly happiness are impermanent, unsatisfactory and of selfless nature. Regarding selfless nature, the Buddha said, "There is suffering" not "I suffer".

Kinds of dukkha:

The dukkha of painful experiences

This includes pain caused by war, violence, natural disasters, political and social oppression, and injustice. There is the physical pain in the body from childbirth, sickness, aging, and injury. And lastly there is the conditioned suffering in the mind with emotions of fear, jealousy, anger, hatred, anxiety, grief, envy, frustration, and loneliness, to name a few.

The dukkha of pleasant experiences

A pleasant experience occurs when our feeling (of the five aggregates) is pleasant, not unpleasant or neutral. However, when our conditioning comes into play, we have reactions such as comparing ("this experience is not as good as the last time"), being jealous ("so and so is having a better experience than me"), or being sad ("this is great but it this sunset is going to be gone soon"). These reactions turn the experience into one of dukkha.

The dukkha of the changing nature of all things

The mind wants certainty and permanence. It expects pleasant experiences to last and unpleasant experiences to cease immediately. This sets up a conflict as we know from the three characteristics that all phenomena are impermanent. All is changing, that what happens to us also happens to others. When we forget this, we are deluded, and dukkha arises.

The dukkha of conditioned experience

As noted with pleasant experiences above, all experiences are conditioned through the filters of three of the five aggregates (feeling, perception, and mental formations) which adds expectations to what we

really are sensing. Bhante G. calls this unrealistic perception. When life doesn't turn out the way we want it to based on these expectations, dukkha arises.

The dukkha of no control

It can be very frustrating to think that you are in control and life doesn't turn out how you want. We don't realize that we are never in control. There is a saying: "Act like you are in control knowing that you are not." This means that in the conditioned world we use the terms "I" or "me" but we do not get attached to thinking that the "I" or "me" is real. How can what is not real be in control?

"...Truth of Dukkha is realized when you are able to distinguish between carrying the weight of your life with all its loss and pain, and collapsing underneath these difficulties. You nobly accept your suffering and acknowledge that your life is being characterized by it, despite your preference for it to be otherwise."⁸⁹

Talk XXV Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Four Noble Truths Part II

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.159-166)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 287-323)

“Again, monks, in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths? “Here he knows as it really is, ‘this is dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the arising of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the cessation of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.’”

The Second Noble Truth: The Cause of Dukkha

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the origination of stress: the craving that makes for further becoming — accompanied by passion & delight, relishing now here & now there — i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

The cause of dukkha can be explained very simply: we want life to be other than it is. This longing is often referred to as craving or desire. These words are a translation of the Pali word *tanha* which means **‘the fever of unsatisfied longing’**. This longing is bound up with greed, aversion and delusion (not knowing that all is impermanent). Our craving does not and cannot lead to lasting happiness, the peace that we seek.

The Second Noble Truth in Literature

Many examples of the fever of unsatisfied longing for life to be other than it is can be found in literature. Here are some examples from *Sky Bridge* by Laura Pritchett.⁹⁰

“Amber, though, is fair, just like her father, Simon. She’s got blue eyes and pale blotchy skin, and like her father she seems too wispy and empty to be real. That’s how every day she’ll be reminding me: Libby, things just don’t turn out like you think they will. Daydream if you want but expect the opposite to come true. And don’t go feeling sorry for your heart when it registers the difference.”⁹¹

“Juan (his child) asks for you. He’s got an opinion on everything these days. He was throwing a temper tantrum because the moon was the wrong shape —he wanted it to be full instead of crescent. He doesn’t get what he wants and he says, ‘Rompiste mi corazon. You break my heart.’ As if it’s my fault. I’m not in charge of the moon, man. I wasn’t in charge of his mom’s life.”⁹²

“I straighten my Ideal Foods Santa Fe Foods apron and scrape the manure off my shoes before heading out front. I love this job. Mostly because it’s just me and my mind and my daydreams, and time gets filled up, and so does my heart, and even though my life isn’t what I pictured, at least I have this, meaning that if I can’t have the life I want, at least I can have a job where I can daydream about the life I want.”⁹³

“Tess used to say: Libby, would you please tell me what you do in your mind all day? You daydream like nobody I ever met. You live in your head more than you live in your life. I’d say: Leave me alone, I’m thinking. She’d say: About what? A different life? And I’d say: No, a different me.”

“The last time we had that conversation, she said, Well, sister, it's Real Life that you need to focus on now.”⁹⁴

“Finally I say, 'You know Hippie Ed? He was out checking his bees and he said to me, out of the blue, 'People just let their lives happen to them, without a struggle, and that's a crime. The crime of not paying attention to your life.' I don't know, Derek. I don't know about her life or my life.”⁹⁵

“I look out his window because I don't know where else my eyes should go. "I don't want to be me anymore. Because if I was a different person, I could do this. And I want to do this. I just can't.”⁹⁶

When expressing dissatisfaction, people often use the phrase, “This didn’t meet my pictures.” What they are really saying but may not realize it, is that the mind has formed an expectation from the aggregates of feeling, perception, and mental formations and instead of experiencing the experience, they are trapped in the dukkha of comparing.

Three Types of Craving

The Buddha categorized fever of unsatisfied longing into three types of craving: craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

Craving for Sensual Pleasures

This is the most familiar type of craving that we get from our six sense bases (body, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and mind). As Goldstein notes, “All of these desires are just our usual engagement with life – enjoying and wanting what is pleasurable, avoid as best we can what is disagreeable.”⁹⁷ This engagement is never ending. As the Buddha noted, “*In the same way, beings not free from passion for sensualities—chewed up by sensual craving, burning with sensual fever—partake of sensualities. The more they partake of sensualities, the more their sensual craving increases and the more they burn with sensual fever, and yet they feel a modicum of enjoyment & satisfaction dependent on the five strings of sensuality.*”⁹⁸ The five strings of sensuality are the six sense bases minus the mind. However, the mind can also be a source of pleasure as noted in craving for becoming below.

Craving for Becoming

Craving for becoming is wanting to “be” a certain way. “We can see it in the planning mind, in the act of imagining ourselves in some future situation. We might be planning for something at work or perhaps for our next vacation. It all starts with just a thought, and then weeks or months or even years later, a whole chain of thoughts and actions has materialized in our lives. Notice how often we get lost in mind fantasies of a future self: “I’ll do this,” “I’ll go there.” Losing ourselves in these projects is a manifestation of craving for becoming.”⁹⁹

Craving for non-becoming

This is a desire to end it all. It happens when we want to get rid of whatever is bothering us and we get so distraught that we don’t want to live anymore. We reject existence.

Craving and the Sense of Self

All of these cravings are dependent on a sense of self.

“The problem here is that this craving for nonexistence, no less than the other two types of craving, is both sustained by and feeds the sense of self. And this is the fundamental wrong view that keeps the wheel of saṃsāra rolling along: a self to gratify, a self to clone in the future, a self to get rid of. The great discovery in our practice is that, on one level, birth and death, existence and nonexistence, self and other are the great defining themes of our lives. And on another level, it’s all just a dance of insubstantial appearances, what the Buddha called “the magic show of consciousness.” The twentieth-century Taoist philosopher Wei Wu Wei (Terence Grey) described this dance in his book *Posthumous Pieces*, in which he wrote, “Destroy ‘the ego,’ hound it, beat it, snub it, tell it where it gets off. Great fun no doubt, but where is it? Must you not find it first? Isn’t there a word about catching your goose before you can cook it? The great difficulty here is that there isn’t one.”¹⁰⁰

Talk XXVI Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Four Noble Truths Part III

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.159-166)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 287-323)

“Again, monks, in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths? “Here he knows as it really is, ‘this is dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the arising of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the cessation of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.’”

The Third Noble Truth: The Cessation of Dukkha (Suffering)

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of stress: the remainderless fading & cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, & letting go of that very craving.

To summarize the Second Noble Truth: Craving (wanting) is the cause of dukkha. Cravings arise constantly. It is when we cling to a craving that dukkha arises. Clinging is attachment. When we attach to a craving, we are in a trance, unaware of other possibilities and the effect that this craving is having on our life. It is not just wanting life to be other than it is, it is being attached to the concept, life should be other than it is. We then become dissatisfied and obsessed with the should. We have choices – continue the obsession, do something (act), or let go. Continuing the obsession with out acting just increases the dukkha.

The good news is that there can be freedom from attachment (clinging). There must be motivation to seek that freedom from the three types of craving (sensual, becoming, non-becoming). However, it is tempting to cling. As the Buddha noted, *“yet they find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in dependence on the five cords of sensual pleasure.”*

Freedom from attachment is not a onetime letting go but something to be practiced each time craving arises. This is letting go many times, moment to moment. It is helpful to realize letting go can happen because all phenomena are impermanent. After the Buddha gave his first teaching, one of the monks stated that *“Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”*¹⁰¹ However, when our attachment to a desire (craving) falls away, there is a tendency to attach to another. This can lead to an endless cycle of attachments. Sumedho noted, *“I was brought up in America --- the land of freedom. It promises the right to be happy, but what it really offers is the right to be attached to everything.”*¹⁰²

Sumedho asks us to reflect frequently on *“Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation.”* *“I would like to emphasize how important it is to develop this way of reflecting. Rather than just developing a method of tranquillising your mind, which certainly is one part of the practice, really see that proper meditation is a commitment to wise investigation. It involves a courageous effort to look deeply into things, not as analyzing yourself and making judgments about why you suffer on a personal level, but resolving to really follow the path until you have profound understanding. Such perfect understanding is based upon the pattern of arising and ceasing. Once this law is understood, everything is seen as fitting into that pattern.”*¹⁰³

What would it be like if there were complete cessation? As Moffitt notes, “Thus when there is cessation, your mind no longer burns in response to the arising of pleasant and unpleasant in your life...Your mind is willing to be with what is true in the moment and isn’t disturbed by it.”¹⁰⁴

To quote from a character in literature: “It was easier that way,” she said. “You get over what you can’t have faster than you get over what you could. And we shouldn’t always get what we think we want.”¹⁰⁵

Goldstein notes that Patrul Rinpoche, a nineteenth-century wandering Dzogchen master of eastern Tibet, said it very well in a teaching called “Advice from Me to Myself”:

Listen up, old bad-karma Patrul,
You dweller in distraction.

For ages now you’ve been
Beguiled, entranced, and fooled by appearances.
Are you aware of that? Are you?
Right this very instant, when you’re
Under the spell of mistaken perception
You’ve got to watch out.
Don’t let yourself get carried away by this fake and empty life.

Your mind is spinning around
About carrying out a lot of useless projects:
It’s a waste! Give it up!
Thinking about the hundred plans you want to accomplish,
With never enough time to finish them,
Just weighs down the mind.
You’re completely distracted
By all these projects, which never come to an end,
But keep spreading out more, like ripples in water.
Don’t be a fool: for once, just sit tight. . . .

If you let go of everything —
Everything, everything —
That’s the real point!¹⁰⁶

Stephen Batchelor sees the Four Noble Truths as tasks. Very simply, he noted them as:

1. Embrace life
2. Let go of what arises.
3. See its ceasing.
4. Act!¹⁰⁷

Besides considering letting go, what else is there to do? The Buddha addressed this in the Fourth Noble Truth which follows in the next talk.

Experiencing Cessation

“As life flows through you, you can investigate your own reactions and ask, “What does attachment feel like?” “For example, do you feel happy or liberated by being attached to desire? Is it uplifting or depressing? These questions are for you to investigate. If you find that being attached to your desires is liberating, then do that. Attach to your desires and see what the result is.”¹⁰⁸

Also, see what it feels like without attachment? Is it liberating? There is a peace and joy of nonattachment. Can you find it?

Talk XXVII Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Four Noble Truths Part IV

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.159-166)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 287-323)

“Again, monks, in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths? “Here he knows as it really is, ‘this is dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the arising of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the cessation of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.’”

The Fourth Noble Truth: The Way of Practice Leading to the Cessation of Stress

“And this, monks, is the noble truth of the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: precisely this Noble Eightfold Path — right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.”

The Eightfold Path is divided into three stages: wisdom, morality, and concentration. Bhante G. uses “skillful” instead of “right” and “understanding” for the first step instead of view and “thinking” instead of “resolve” for the second step. The steps as described by Bhante G are:

Wisdom consists of two steps

Skillful Understanding: We see that every action we take is a cause leading to an effect. We accept that it is up to us to create the causes for the good life we wish to have now and in the future.

Skillful Thinking: We cultivate positive thoughts, such as generosity or letting go, loving-friendliness, and compassion.

Morality is adopting core values and living your life in accordance with them. The three core values are: contained in the steps:

Skillful Speech We tell the truth and avoid harsh or malicious talk and idle gossip.

Skillful Action We lead moral lives, abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and intoxication.

Skillful Livelihood. We choose an ethical profession and conduct ourselves at work with honesty and integrity.

Concentration is the process for practice and contains three steps:

Skillful Effort: We are unrelenting in preventing and overcoming negative states of mind and cultivating and maintaining positive states.

Skillful Mindfulness: We practice mindfulness meditation daily and cultivate mindfulness as our approach to everyday living.

Skillful Concentration: We train our minds in single-pointed focus so that we can attain the jhana states of deep concentration.

The Wisdom Steps

Skillful Understanding

This step presents the understanding for why we are following the path. There are two factors to understand: cause and effect and the Four Noble Truths

Cause and Effect

Karma refers to how both skillful and unskillful behavior affects an individual over time. – everything is connected. The basis of Buddhist morality is that acting in unskillful ways leads to unhappy results and acting in skillful ways leads to happy results. There are ten unskillful actions that will cause harm: what we do with our body (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct); what we do with our speech (lying, malicious talk (e.g. gossip), harsh language, useless speech); what we allow in our mind (covetousness, ill will, delusion). Avoiding these of unskillful behaviors is not a doctrine or set of commandments to be blindly followed. Rather, behaviors (unskillful or skillful) are actions that will yield predictable results.

The Four Noble Truths (understanding the nature of suffering)

The Truths can be described succinctly:

First Noble Truth: There is Dissatisfaction (suffering).

Second Noble Truth: There is a Cause of Dissatisfaction.

Third Noble Truth: There is a way to create Cessation of Dissatisfaction.

Fourth Noble Truth: The way to Cessation of Dissatisfaction is through the (Eightfold) Path

Skillful Thinking

“And what, is Right Thought? Thought associated with renunciation, thought associated with absence of ill will, thought associated with absence of cruelty. This is called Right Thought.”

With Skillful Thinking, we learn how to recognize and deal with the unskillful thoughts that arise. As with all phenomena, these thoughts have the three characteristics of impermanence, inherent unsatisfactoriness (inability to cause lasting satisfaction), and selflessness. We do not control our thoughts; we practice mindfulness as they arise. Skillful thinking is about seeing these thoughts for what they are and knowing that we can let go.

Thoughts are fabrications of our mind. Thoughts can be skillful or unskillful.

Skillful thoughts are associated with letting go (renunciation), absence of ill will and absence of cruelty. Unskillful thoughts are associated with attachment (material objects, people, experiences, beliefs, and emotions), ill-will, and cruelty.

When unskillful thoughts arise, we can counter them as follows:

Attachment: Generosity

Ill-will: Loving Kindness

Cruelty: Compassion.

In the next talk, we will explore the Morality Step.

Talk XXVIII Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Four Noble Truths Part V

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.159-166)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 287-323)

“Again, monks, in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths? “Here he knows as it really is, ‘this is dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the arising of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the cessation of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.’”

The Morality Steps

The morality steps of the Eightfold Path are Skillful Speech, Skillful Action and Skillful Livelihood.

Buddhist morality teaches that acting in unskillful ways leads to unhappy results and acting in skillful ways leads to happy results. Happy means long lasting happiness not the short-lived happiness obtained through desire, ill-will or delusion.

Skillful means actions and thoughts that do not cause harm to yourself and others. Unskillful actions are those that cause harm. The morality steps of the eightfold path emphasize that unskillful speech, action and livelihood cause harm.

Skillful Speech

“And what, monks, is right speech? Abstaining from lying, abstaining from divisive speech, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from idle chatter: This, monks, is called right speech.”¹⁰⁹

Bhante G: “Wrong speech causes us many problems. We lie and then get caught in it; we say something nasty about a co-worker and get him into trouble; we speak inconsiderately and offend a client or friend; we spend a whole day in meaningless chatter and get nothing done.” These are the consequences of false, divisive, harsh and idle speech.¹¹⁰

Bhikkhu Bodhi: “Speech can break lives, create enemies, and start wars, or it can give wisdom, heal divisions, and create peace. This has always been so, yet in the modern age the positive and negative potentials of speech have been vastly multiplied by the tremendous increase in the means, speed, and range of communications.”¹¹¹

Thanissaro Bhikkhu: “As my teacher once said: ‘if you can't control your mouth, there's no way you can hope to control your mind.’ This is why right speech is so important in day-to-day practice.”¹¹²

To summarize, Skillful Speech has four qualities:

- It is always truthful
- It is uplifting, not malicious or unkind
- It is gentle not crude or harsh.
- It is moderate, not useless or meaningless.

Listening

Listening is also an important part of communication. Listening from a space of silence can be beneficial to the speaker as well as the listener.

Krishnamurti: "Can one listen without any conclusion, without any comparison or judgment? I think there is an art to listening, which is to listen completely, without any motive, because a motive in listening is a distraction. If you can listen with complete attention, then there is no resistance, either to your own thoughts or to what is being said. But it is only the very silent, quiet mind that finds out what is true, not a mind which is furiously active, thinking, resisting."

The impediments to listening from a truly quiet space:

- Judging what the other person is saying
- Having ideas of how to "fix" the issue the person is presenting
- Having ideas on how to "fix" the person being listened to
- Reflecting on how the issues being presented are similar to the issues you are experiencing in your own life
- Thinking about the past or future
- Thinking of how you will respond to what the person is communicating

As each of these thought processes are recognized, allow them to immediately pass out of consciousness and go back to listening from the space of silence.

When we do listen from this clear and open space and wait until the other person has completed their thoughts, our reply comes from our awareness and it will be more relevant and meaningful. The person to whom we are speaking will know that they were heard (truly listened to).

Insight Dialogue developed by Gregory Kramer is a powerful meditation technique to guide our speech. The six steps are pause, relax, open, trust emergence, speak the truth and listen deeply.

Skillful Action

"And what, monks, is right action? Abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual intercourse³: This, monks, is called right action."¹¹³

Skillful Action refers to how we conduct ourselves.

- Abstaining from killing
- Abstaining from stealing
- Abstaining from speaking falsely (from Right Speech
- Abstaining from sexual misconduct
- Abstaining from misusing intoxicants such as alcohol (because this can lead to unskillful behavior).

Skillful behavior is not following a set of rules. Doing so leads to rigidity and attachment to a set of beliefs. From Skillful Understanding, we know that there are consequences to everything that we do. We shift our focus from behavior motivated by greed, hatred and delusion to the those that cause no harm. Bhante G: "but by definition, mindfulness keeps us in control of what we think, how we act, and

what we say. It's impossible to shout at someone mindfully, or to abuse alcohol mindfully. If you are truly mindful, you cannot do these things!"¹¹⁴

"The observance of the Five Precepts is a voluntary act which each individual must take up on his or her own initiative. The Buddha did not formulate the precepts as commandments, nor did he threaten anyone with punishment for violating them. However, this much has to be said: The Buddha perfectly understood the workings of the universe, and he proclaimed the inviolable moral law of cause and effect: good deeds beget pleasant fruits, evil deeds beget painful fruits. The Five Precepts are the guidelines the Buddha has bequeathed us to steer us away from evil conduct and towards the lines of conduct that will prove most beneficial for ourselves and others. When we mold our actions by the Five Precepts, we are acting in accordance with the Dhamma, avoiding future misery and building up protection and happiness for ourselves and others both here and in the hereafter. Thus the closer we live to the Five Precepts, the greater will be the blessing power of our lives."¹¹⁵

Skillful Livelihood

*"And what, monks, is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood. This, monks, is called right livelihood."*¹¹⁶

Bhante G. adds: "Our means of sustenance should not interfere with our spiritual development."¹¹⁷

Some questions to examine the skillfulness of your livelihood:

- Is my job an inherently unskillful occupation? Does it cause harm by definition? For example, does it involve manufacturing, selling, or using weapons? Does it entail harming living beings? Does it support the formation of addictions such as gambling or drinking?
- Does my job or daily occupation cause me to break any of the five core precepts? (killing, stealing, Lying, sexual misconduct, intoxication)?
- Are there aspects of my job which disturb my sense of peace and spiritual development?

From the literature, *Roar of the Heavens* by Stefan Bechtel: "But the threat of natural disaster, especially hurricanes, was never far away. Wade and Julia Guice had thrown themselves into the task of defending their community against any threat, manmade or natural, as unpaid and overworked volunteers for various agencies. Eventually, they realized they were devoting so much time to the job that they either had to get out of real estate or out of civil defense. So they sold the real estate business. Julia went to work for the city of Biloxi, as its director of civil defense, and Wade went to work for Harrison County, as its director.

"We had never worked harder, made less money, or enjoyed any- thing more in our lives," Guice said later. "It was simply a matter of setting our priorities, of reassessing our values. It was a tremendous change from that attitude of 'we will become millionaires' to that of 'we will become effective servants.'

In the next talk, we will explore the Concentration Steps.

Talk XXIX Mindfulness of Dhammas: The Four Noble Truths Part VI

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (pp.159-166)

Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening (pp. 287-323)

“Again, monks, in regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths. And how does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas in terms of the four noble truths? “Here he knows as it really is, ‘this is dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the arising of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the cessation of dukkha’; he knows as it really is, ‘this is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.’”

The Practice Steps

The practice steps of the Eightfold Path are Skillful Effort, Skillful Mindfulness and Skillful Concentration. Gaining wisdom through Skillful Understanding and Skillful Thinking and living a skillful life following Skillful Speech, Skillful Action, and Skillful Livelihood are not complete without a daily practice. Practice is a constant effort of inquiry and reflection through mindfulness. Making your life your practice means applying the teachings to your whole being whether you are in the world or meditating.

Thich Nhat Hahn notes: “In Buddhism, practicing the teaching of the Buddha is the highest form of prayer.”¹¹⁸

Skillful Effort

“And what, monks, is right effort? (i) There is the case where a monk generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (ii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have arisen. (iii) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (iv) He generates desire, endeavors, activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This, monks, is called right effort.”¹¹⁹

Bhante G. notes “At every moment we choose whether to embrace wholesomeness or unwholesomeness.”¹²⁰ In order to be able to choose, we need to be mindful of our mind state which includes thoughts, perceptions, memories and body sensations. Mindfulness is paying attention moment to moment to what is. By being mindful we aware of our mind states and make skillful choices. This is paying mindful attention.

As noted in the Dhammapada: “The non-doing of any evil, the performance of what’s skillful, the cleansing of one’s own mind: this is the teaching of the Awakened.”¹²¹

As the Buddha noted, we can direct our effort four ways:

- Prevent the arising of unwholesome states of mind.
- Overcome unwholesome states which have arisen.
- Cultivate wholesome states of mind.
- Maintain those wholesome states which have arisen.

Prevent the arising of unwholesome states of mind.

Remember the unwholesome states of mind that have arisen in the past to kindle remorse preventing them from arising again. Also maintaining wholesome states of mind will drive out unwholesome thoughts.

From the literature, *Redemption: How I lived to bowl another frame* by Bob Perry and Stefan Bechtel: "But here's the worst part of it: I held the world responsible for what happened to me. As I would learn much later, in sobriety, it's your own attitudes and resentments that do the most damage, and it's only when you fix all them bad attitudes that you start to heal."

Overcome unwholesome states which have arisen.

Unwholesome states were categorized by the Buddha as the Ten Fetters or, in a grosser sense, the Five Hindrances. The fetters are restraints that tie us to suffering.

The Ten Fetters are:

- Belief in the existence of a permanent self or soul
- Doubt in the message of the Buddha
- Belief that one can end suffering merely by following rules and rituals
- Greed for sensual pleasures
- Hatred
- Subtle desire to exist in fine material form
- Subtle desire to exist in immaterial form
- Conceit or the underlying perception of self-identity.
- Restlessness and worry
- Ignorance

The Five Hindrances are grosser manifestations of fetters and were discussed earlier:

- Greed
- Ill-will
- Dullness and drowsiness
- Restlessness and worry
- Doubt

Cultivate wholesome states of mind

There are many ways to bring up wholesome or positive states of mind including:

- Remember any skillful act that you have done in the past and the wholesome states of mind that went with that action.

From the *Secrets of Resilience* by Meg Jay, WSJ 11/11/17: "Finally, remember the ways you have been courageous and strong. Too often we remember what has gone wrong in life rather than what we did to survive and thrive. Think back on a time when you were challenged and give yourself credit for how you made it through. You may already be more resilient than you think."¹²²

- Recall your past successes in battling greed, hatred, or delusion.
- Apply your mind to investigate what actions created the wholesome mental state.
- Cultivate generosity, loving kindness, compassion.

- Practice the seven steps to awakening.

Maintain wholesome states of mind

- Develop strong mindfulness by “paying attention moment to moment to what is”.
- Associate with good friends.
- Study the dharma.
- Meditate.
- Remember the big picture, maintaining perspective.
- Ask yourself, “What, in this moment, am I cultivating?”

Skillful Mindfulness

“And what, monks, is right mindfulness? (i) There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (ii) He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (iii) He remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (iv) He remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This, monks, is called right mindfulness.”¹²³

Bhante G. defines mindfulness as paying attention moment to moment to what is.

- Paying Attention: With mindfulness we are listening to life instead of letting the mind do all the talking.
- Moment to moment: We are always in the present, not letting our mind dwell on the past and the future
- To what is: we see how things really are: impermanent, unsatisfactory, selfless.

Without mindfulness, our thought patterns have several characteristics: limited, habitual, conditioned by delusion. Without mindfulness, we are unaware when we add judgement, commentary, and make decisions based on delusion.

Compare mindfulness to a mirror that reflects without distortion. To be like that mirror, we must understand the nature of reality. It is constantly changing. As Bhante G put it: reality is “a dynamic flow of incessant change.”

Practicing mindfulness confers several benefits:

- It prevents us from being caught up in or reacting to our thoughts and sensations. It gives us the time we need to practice Skillful Effort.
- It leads to insights, the “inner seeing” of how things really are. Through these insights, we find happiness and peace.
- It purifies the mind burning away the obstructions of greed, hatred, and delusion and leading to happiness and peace.
- It brings wisdom through knowing the three characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction, selfless nature.

Bhante G notes: “Skillful mindfulness is the incorporation of our whole life into meditative practice.”¹²⁴

Skillful Concentration

“And what, monks, is right concentration? (i) There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality,⁶ secluded from unskillful qualities⁷—enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. (ii) With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. (iii) With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ (iv) With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This, monks, is called right concentration.”¹²⁵

Skillful concentration has three characteristics:

- It is always wholesome (skillful)
- It goes into very deep and powerful levels of one-pointed focus
- It incorporates the use of mindfulness to develop wisdom.

Skillful concentration leads to happiness and peace. This is not from sensual pleasure but from the non-attachment of sensual pleasures (the joy of non-attachment).

Developing skillful concentration takes training. This means sitting practice so that you can bring up skillful concentration easily and at will.

Mindfulness and Concentration

Bhante G. notes: “When meditators cultivate sufficient concentration guided by mindfulness, they can trace back their mental images of events, time, thoughts, and previous behavior until they perceive the link between the present continuous flow and the events, thoughts, and actions of the past. That link is greed and ignorance. They see for themselves the relationship between impermanence, greed for impermanent things and suffering. The penetrating wisdom of the meditator also recognizes all negativities in all dimensions and how and why they arise. Wisdom recognizes that all negativities come from grasping. It recognizes that this grasping can end and that the way to end it is by ending one’s own greed.

Through this knowledge, the mediator comprehends, by personal and direct experience that everything is impermanent, that clinging to anything impermanent causes dissatisfaction, and that everything that exists is without permanent substance. Gaining this threefold knowledge is the doorway to enlightenment”¹²⁶

What Bhante G. says about perceiving the link between the present continuous flow and the events, thoughts and actions of the past is critical to our understanding. Memories and thoughts that arise from the past do so because in some way we are attached to them. We may be attached intentionally because we want to remember something for a reason (an appointment or where we put something). In this case, the memory of something is useful. On the other hand, memories from other past actions or experiences arise because we are clinging to them for some reason. Using mindfulness and concentration, we can look deeply and see the link of greed and ignorance.

The Practice

Practicing these three steps of skillful effort, skillful mindfulness and skillful concentrations takes commitment and time. I recommend a daily practice of reading the dharma, spending 30 minutes in meditation, leading a skillful life, and practicing mindfulness to the fullest extent possible.

Talk XXX The Four Foundations of Mindfulness: Summary

Going back to the introduction

At the beginning of the sutta, the Buddha tells us the purpose of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

“Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhānas.”

“What are the four? Here, monks, in regard to the body a monk abides contemplating the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to feelings he abides contemplating feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to the mind he abides contemplating the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world.”

Below is an outline of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

1. Mindfulness of the Body

- Mindfulness of the breath
- Mindfulness of the four postures: walking, standing, sitting, and lying down
- Mindfulness with clear comprehension: of what is beneficial, of suitability, of the meditator’s domain, of non-delusion.
- Reflection on the thirty-two parts of the body
- Cemetery Contemplations: Death and Impermanence

2. Mindfulness of Feelings

- Pleasant, painful, and neither-painful-nor-pleasant feelings, worldly and spiritual

3. Mindfulness of Mind

- Understanding the mind as: greedy or not greedy, hateful or not hateful, deluded or not deluded, contracted or distracted, not developed or developed, not supreme or supreme, not concentrated or concentrated, not liberated or liberated.

4. Mindfulness of Dhamma

- Five Hindrances
 - Sense desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, doubt.
- Five Aggregates of Clinging
 - Material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness
- Six Internal and six external sense bases
 - Eye and visible objects, ear and sounds, nose and smells, tongue and tastes, body and tangible objects, mind and mental objects
- Seven Factors of Awakening
 - Mindfulness, investigation of Dhamma, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity
- Four Noble Truths

- Suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering
- Noble Eightfold Path
 - Skillful understanding, thinking, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration

Below are what I consider three significant contemplations:

Mindfulness of the Breath – This is very useful for calming the mind, increasing concentration, and becoming aware of the life force and universal nature of all beings. This is the very basic tool that you have with you at all times. It can be used to reboot the mind!

Mindfulness of Feelings – This is one of the five aggregates of clinging and the first conditioning factor of the arising of “I” (self). Being aware of the feeling when it arises serves as an alert that the “I” (self) is arising can serve to deal with it before perceptions and mental formations (reactivity) come into play. The diagram below shows the three aggregates (feeling, perception, and mental formations) that are influenced by the “I” (self) and lead to reactivity and unskillful behavior.

Mindfulness of the Hindrances – These are the five ways in which the mind becomes clouded and impedes mindfulness: desire, aversion, physical and mental dullness, restlessness and worry, doubt). These phenomena obscure and distort our perception and prevent us from seeing clearly.

Summary

The Four Foundations has the benefits of improving our daily lives, deepening our mindfulness and moving us farther along the spiritual path. We become more fully aware of what is going on in the mind and body in the present moment, we are able to evaluate more clearly the purpose and suitability of everything we say and do and we see our body, feelings, perceptions, thoughts and consciousness more clearly. We see the world around us without distortion. Most importantly, we learn to dedicate ourselves fully to reflection and meditation.

The Buddha’s Prediction

“Monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven years, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning. Let alone seven years . . . six years . . . five years . . . four years . . . three years . . . two years . . . one year . . . seven months . . . six months . . . five months . . . four months . . . three months . . . two months . . . one month . . . half a month . . . if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.

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