

LIFE AS PRACTICE WEEK 3

CONTENTMENT

Part of insight is to cultivate the qualities of big mind, much like we do metta or loving kindness meditation, as a formal part of practice. We do this not to 'get' those qualities, but to uncover what's already part of us, but is covered up or blocked. We bring it to the surface. These qualities are what naturally flows from the ground of being, or big mind.

A fellow teacher sometimes calls this 'fake it till you make it', which means that actively digging down to the qualities that arise from the ground of our being helps us awaken to this ground more fully.

A basic tenet of this path, as expressed in the first and second noble truths, is that life, while inherently containing pain, cannot cause suffering. Suffering is caused by our resistance to what comes up in life.

A word that is closely related to resistance is discontentment. We are discontented with what we have. The feeling from the ego-identified small mind is that there is always something missing, or that needs to change for us to be happy for more than just a short while.

It also persistently thinks "If only I have this, or that, I will be happy." When we look back on our history of this, it is obvious there is nothing in life that will make us happy that can happen 'to' us. Remember thinking if only this person loved us, or if we got that job, or were able to do this or that, life would be solved? (...and they lived happily ever after....) Every conditioned object is impermanent and inherently will not 'fix' our lives. Happiness is not in outer circumstance, it is from the skin in, in our relationship to the present moment in our bodies and minds.

The opposite of being trapped trying to measure up to the ego ideal is contentment. Let's talk about cultivating contentment.

We shared in class what discontentment is like:

not wanting what is present
wishing things were better
something is missing or out of place
anxious and fearful

wanting things to be different
irritation
disappointment
wanting it to go away

We shared what contentment is like:

not needing anything to be different
happy with what is
relaxed
gratitude
feeling lucky and appreciative
finding peace in our environment
acceptance
having enough
joy
satisfaction
stillness and peace
right place - right time
lightness

Here's a comment on contentment from the sutras:

(When we are) endowed with the noble aggregate of virtue, the noble restraint over the sense faculties, and noble mindfulness & alertness, we have noble contentment.

— *Digha Nikaya 12*

The verse names three things that feed contentment:

- 1) **sila** - right speech, right actions, right lifestyle and the precepts (living with non-harm),
 - 2) **balancing the sense doors**. Watching what kinds of stimuli and conversation we fill our minds and hearts with, how we spend our time. Also self care - eating and sleeping well, keeping our bodies healthy.
 - 3) **mindfulness and presence in the moment**
-

Is contentment more about getting everything you want, or being satisfied with what you have?

Stop reading for a moment, close your eyes, and ask yourself: Without referring to the mind, is there anything missing in this moment? The present moment answer is that nothing is missing, all is complete right now.

Now close your eyes and bring back a moment of discontentment. How was that moment of discontent different than this present moment? You will find that discontent happens out of the moment, when we are rehashing something in the past or projecting into the future.

It's not so much what is happening or not happening in the moment, but how **accepting and present** we are with it.

We did a metta-style practice to connect with our inherent contentment. Please see the handout for reference.

We began this series by looking at the precepts, or living with non-harm. That often means things we are refraining from.

We ended class by looking at sila, what it is we DO want to put out into the world. In terms of the eightfold path, this is right (skillful) speech, right action, and right lifestyle.

We did a short worksheet, remembering things we have said or done that align or didn't align with right speech, action and lifestyle.

When we do things that align with sila, here are the results:

- feeling love and connection
- hopeful
- clarity
- feeling light
- OK-ness
- appreciative
- sincerity - solidity with our action
- freedom
- happy

And here's what resulted from actions NOT aligned with sila:

- felt bad
- sticky
- guilty! guilty!
- crappy
- small
- out of control
- regretful
- numb
- exhausted
- physically feeling bad

The point is to demonstrate the premise of these three classes: life as practice is for our own happiness, and thus the happiness of others.

We practice not to be 'better' people, or to get some kind of gold star, but for our own benefit.

And, in case you think this is self centered, the happier and more contented we are, the happier and more content everyone is around us.

Last week there was a 'stretch' talk about small will and big will, about how all this cultivation is so that we can get the small mind up to the altitude where it can be connected to and have energy pour in from the big mind. Notice how this works for you.

HOMEWORK

1) Take some practice time and work with the contentment practice. It will bring up areas you feel discontent as well - welcome these areas and hold them. They will show you places of mistaken belief and identity.

2) Clear comprehension of purpose (we didn't get to this in class, but worth the effort):

Make an effort to notice what the purpose is for what you do and say during the day. Is it to have a particular pleasure, to be seen in a

certain light, to be right, to have fun, to care for yourself or another? Is it to maintain control over a situation or relationship? Is it to avoid conflict or pain?

Helps to see when we are living from the small mind.

We wanted to meet again after working with contentment. It's radical, disorienting, to see clearly how our conventional conditioning and beliefs about life aren't true and do not lead to joy. It can feel stronger, foreign, to live from a different basis, and takes some support and getting used to.

be well, and thank you,
Susan