

HOMEWORK:

- try to have a dailiness of your meditation practice
- work with connectedness every day:

What cultivates connectedness? What moves me away from it? How does living appear when I am connected, when I'm not? How does this relate to living with non harm? Come back to class prepared to share whatever your experience is.

- Reading Assignment: p. 9-23 in "Heart of the Buddha's Teaching".
-

REVIEW OF THE PRECEPTS

Last week, we began with the precepts, each of us picking one to work with. Continue looking at them, picking different ones.

There were several themes in our shared feedback:

- what seems simple at the outset (do not lie), ends up being connected with everything else, reaching into unexpected corners of our lives. Each precept contains the others.
- observing them is not so much a process of accomplishing them as a process of awareness and mindfulness. We begin seeing the strength of our habitual responses, which leads to:
 - as we begin to see our actions, thoughts, and patterns more deeply, we also see our inner confusion and blind spots. How often we do not say and do the things we know will serve us and others best? This is an intrinsic part of the process:
 - There's a physical law that every action has an equal and opposite reaction.
 - When you put the force of intention out to see more clearly, it also provokes resistance, and it can feel like we are going backwards. This is actually an encouraging sign that we are engaging deeply.
- Precepts include both things we do and things we refrain from, both link to the other. They involve both commission and omission. Not only what we refrain from (not lying), but what we do (speak the truth). Including both of these aspects brings the precepts into play more fully.

PRECEPTS = NON HARM

CULTIVATING NON-HARM = CULTIVATING HAPPINESS AND JOY.

The Egyptian culture had a meaningful clue. When you died, you went to the goddess Ma'at, who was the keeper of the soul gate. Ma'at held a scale in one hand, and a feather in the other. When you met her after death, your heart was placed on one side of the scale, and the feather in the other. If your heart was heavier than the feather, you needed to come back to earth and learn in another lifetime. The spiritual path is one of living with a light heart.

In the anapanasati sutta - sort of the original set of meditation instructions, right after breath and body centeredness, the first instructions, before starting the insight process, is to connect with happiness and joy.

Here we might define happiness as the personal emotion of well being, that comes from an inner connectedness.

Connectedness comes, in part, from having our lives be in line with the aspirations on our practice. Thus, the precepts.

We might define joy as an impersonal characteristic of the ground of being. When we remove the barriers to the ground of who we are, joy is there innately.

The implication is that there is no way to well being and joy, well being and joy ARE the way. We cannot truly find insight and liberation apart from our innate happiness and joy.

This immediately brings up the question of loss and grief. None of us are untouched by sorrow, loss and grief, sometimes profoundly so. The first Noble Truth tells us that this is implicit in life.

- In the parable of the mustard seed, the point is that there is no household untouched by sorrow and loss.

- The story of late in the Buddha's life, when he outlived his two closest companions, and how he spoke of his deep loss in saying it was as if the sun and the moon had disappeared. It's obvious we cannot avoid pain, so it's not about having a life untouched by loss.

So how does loss and grief connect with well being? We are not in control of the outer circumstances of our lives, so well being cannot be found in trying to make our lives more perfect, or only available when everything is fine and dandy.

Ironically, we lose well being when we try to control our lives to have only pleasant things arise. (This is not able the value of having a well ordered life, we're talking about something deeper, an urge to 'solve' an inner fear by controlling circumstances outside of ourselves.)

Decades ago, before we moved into the house where we lived for 22 years, I used to drive down the road it was on. The road is dirt, lined with trees, and reminded me of the road to the lake cottage where my family used to vacation when I was a child. It seems so beautiful, so perfect. I thought: when we move into this house, and I drive this every day, life will be really happy, problems will be solved. Of course, nothing could have been further from the truth. But how often we think something external to ourselves will bring lasting salvation: a new job, new friendship or success, getting out task list completed, and so forth. These only lead to temporary happiness and peace.

We are interested in something deeper, something lasting and that cannot be taken away.

This leads to a radical idea: Well being and joy = the amount of inner connectedness we bring to whatever is on our plate. It's very hard to express this in words. There's an inner touchstone, an authenticity and aliveness, inside of us. When we are fully present with our current experience, when we are open and connecting to it, we feel more awake.

We feel the right place and the right time-ness, knowing what to say and what to do. A sense of okayness, even in the middle of something tough. That this is part of life, part of loving.

When you first meditated, there was a sense of peace, and joy. Was it not from a feeling of coming home to yourself?

A surprising fruit of practice: well being is possible even in the midst of difficulty.

The death of my dad, whom I was very close to, was the first major

loss by death in my life. The well of grief was deep, unstoppable, and profound. Yet there was a connectedness and authenticity, an aliveness in allowing myself to feel fully what I was feeling. I remember walking around in the grocery store, barely functional, seeing other people around me who were just going through their lives. I recognized that most of the time, I AM these folks in the store, just stopping to get milk on the way home. This seeming paradox, that I was both them and now my deep grief, felt deeply “true”. It made my heart more open, seeing life revolve between dailiness and in the midst of crying jags. Something opened in me, of experiencing great loss and grief, that I had not known before. It led to being more fully human.

It may be fair to say that spiritual practice is bringing inner connectedness, loyalty and authenticity to who we are, what we feel, to our lives. When pain is intense, our spiritual work is to feel it fully, to accept it as the truth of our being in this moment.

This is well being.

We shared a class exercise of connectedness and joy.

We each wrote a list of what opens inner connectedness.

Some responses:

- making and sharing tea
- feeling our feelings
- being in nature, hiking, trees
- being vulnerable and open
- being present
- taking notice and care of the body's needs
- stopping to listen, being listened to, silence with others
- compassion and acts of kindness
- staying with a difficulty, not numbing out
- taking time for what's important

Then a list of that gets in the way of it, what closes us down.

Some responses:

- “doing”
- reviewing stores and opinions
- ‘shoulds’ - cultural pressures and conditioning
- feeling like we are following some else's agenda

SEMESTER ONE CLASS TWO – connectedness; Happiness and Joy

- acting from fear and scarcity expectations
- too busy
- we 'hafta' do things - obligations
- perceived neediness - problem solving others' problems
- anger, assuming ill intentions
- pushing the body aside
- not speaking our truth

Interesting to note the that the plus list is not all about pleasure. Some of the things on it can be challenging and require discipline (being present in difficulty, getting outside and moving around). Sometimes compassion requires us to do some difficult things. It's about being present and accepting whatever came up. Also interesting that the minus column is not about giving ourselves the things that are lovely and feel nourishing (like a hot bath for a good meal).
