

HOMEWORK:

PRECEPTS: Pick one precept. Rewrite it in your own words as a positive statement. It can be a sentence or a paragraph. Print it out. Put it where you will notice it during the day: on the bathroom mirror, on your desk, read it after you meditate.

Focus on it over the next week. Change to a second one in a week.

Example, I picked:

1. Do not harm, but cherish all life.

Being alive is a precious experience. Feeling the joy of vitality is part of it. I commit to refraining from words and actions that make those around me feel less vital, that might discourage or diminish someone, including myself. I commit to looking at my lifestyle choices to allow the protection of life around me, both seen and unseen, near and far away.

Seeing that time and energy are also vital resources, I commit to not wasting or being careless with these resources, for both myself and others. I commit to noticing how I use my time and energy and how I might impact these resources of those around me.

MEDITATION: Review the practice guidelines before you sit. Notice which ones jump out at you. Try to sit in formal meditation every day.

Come back next class prepared to talk about your experience. We're not looking for dharma success stories. Most meaningful and helpful is seeing all the places where we can't seem to 'change', seeing ourselves saying or doing the unskillful thing we had just determined NOT to say or do.

CLASS ONE REVIEW

This is the start of an ongoing series of classes. It is designed to start where a fundamentals class left off.

PURPOSE

- to support your meditation practice
- to model community and support in an open hearted way
- create a safe space for vulnerability and to be who we really are

- learn the container of teachings from the insight meditation tradition that holds this practice.

CLASS GUIDELINES (adapted from the American Indian Rules of Council)

- 1) Speak from the heart: from your own experience rather than from an idea or concept.
- 2) Listen from the heart: Listen beyond the mere words, listening with empathy and for the “fourth voice”, the underlying need of the speaker.
- 3) Sacred space: no cross talk, allowing the speaker to fully have the floor. Not responding or giving advice, knowing that each person has inner wisdom.
- 4) Brief of expression: Honoring the need for each of us to participate in a limited time frame. Not speaking repeatedly if others have not yet spoken.
- 5) Confidentiality: everything in the circle stays in the circle. We also do not talk about class sharing outside of class when it involves a third person not present.

PRACTICE REVIEW

At the beginning of each semester, its helpful to review the practice itself. Both so that our time in meditation is as useful as possible, and also because the practice changes with developing realization. The instructions we started with need to change and evolve with our understanding.

As with learning anything, whether an instrument, or working out in the gym, it's good to look at what we are actually doing for a tune up whenever we can.

Practice progression guide:

Highway analogy 1: we think of this practice as a multi lined highway going in a certain direction.

- The initial concentration we do at the beginning of a sitting to bring ourselves into the present moment is similar to the on-ramp.
- In the first lane, are the drivers who are holding closely to the breath, to stay in the lane, going forward.
- In the next lane are folks who are more steady at staying in the lane, and can go at a different speed, moving from object to object.

- In the next lane are those who have changed their sense of identification to the awareness that is watching the objects arise.
Important: all lanes are moving in the same direction and have the same destination.

Highway analogy 2:

- First lane: When we start, we are in the driver's seat. Checking the map, the speed, our driver is "in control".
- Next lane over: softer, more trusting, less doing. Following the flow of traffic.
- Next lane over: we switch drivers and move to the passenger seat. We backseat drive, correcting and directing the driver, but our hands are not on the wheel.
- Next lane over: we have moved to the back seat. We are no longer concerned with direction and speed, but are just watching the scenery as it passes by.

Each lane the driver is more relaxed, is doing less. Allowing the road itself to determine the direction.

USEFUL attitudes:

- 1) surrender: soft - kind - allowing.
- 2) stop 'doing': stop fixing and analyzing. Rather, be present with. As Eugene Gendlin said, anything more than being with turns out to be counterproductive to healing.

Helpful analogy:

Puppy analogy – when we are first training a puppy to heel, we keep the leash short, like keeping the mind leashed to the breath. It seems like every other second the puppy has wandered away. We bring the puppy back continually, but with kindness, knowing it's just learning.

Understanding that being harsh or judgmental to the puppy will only produce an unhappy, neurotic dog. In the same way, we bring ourselves back with kindness.

USEFUL signposts:

- 1) more stabilization – as mind becomes steady, we find we notice when we have been pulled away, and return more quickly. The cycle of wandering away and returning becomes a bit quicker.
- 2) clearer seeing – like an onion, as we see the most obvious layer, another layer appears below. (For example, we might see our mind

stuck in a repeating story. As we stay with it, we see and underlying anxiety below that is driving it. Below the anxiety, we see beliefs we are carrying that do not serve us.) We see more and more, understanding ourselves, and thus, those around us. Compassion opens.

- 3) less identification - we stop identifying with the objects arising and stay with the observer that experiences them. With kindness and acceptance - we allow more and more to happen with loving kindness towards ourselves, seeing the lack of a self in control of our life experience and our reaction patterns.
- 4) less fixing - trust awareness itself to do the heavy lifting. We see that we can release a lot of the urge to fix. The small 'me' begins to let go and let the flow of life direct things.
- 5) heart opening - This is a path with heart. A signpost is feeling more connected, more accepting with everyone and everything around you.

THE PRECEPTS AND THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

This semester of classes will be focused on the “operating instructions” of Vipassana, how we live our lives as practitioners: the precepts (living with non-harm) and the Noble Eightfold Path (aligning our thoughts, efforts and actions with our true or Buddha nature).

Freedom comes from realization. However, there is also an important training component to any spiritual path, a discipline that reflects a commitment to healing and wholeness. While this discipline cannot lead us to awakening and freedom, we cannot reach freedom and awakening without the discipline.

Analogy: Like a basketball player running miles for conditioning. It will not give him a great bank shot, but the conditioning is necessary for him to be able to make that shot in a game.

The basic illusion that causes suffering is that we are seemingly a separate person. There is a sense of a me in here and the world out there, and this separation drives us constantly to cling to the wanted and pleasant experience in life and to avoid or control the unpleasant experiences.

Awakening is the recognition that we are not separate at all, everyone and everything shares the same empty, open awareness out of which the world is created. From this place, a person 'doing' a discipline does not make a

lot of sense. Aren't we just reinforcing the idea of a separate person by doing a discipline?

Yet the teaching makes a compassionate concession, understanding that this is where we are. A good teaching can move on several levels, and the precepts and the eightfold path start on the dualistic level. It can meet us where we are from the ground of our true being.

This is not a self improvement program. It's not about being perfect or not making mistakes.

When separation dissolves, the precepts and the eightfold path are what naturally flow from true nature. So we mimic them, a loving co-operation until the illusion begins to become more porous and we live as a matter of course from these guidelines.

The fact that they co-align with our true nature means that on a deep level, we already understand and embody them. They make common sense to us, seem natural and good. And we all experience the discomfort and regret that follows when we move away from these guidelines, when we say and do unskillful things.

Rather than looking at unskillful actions as a failure, unskillful shortcomings act as light bulbs that go off, reminding us as often as needed who we truly are and an alert that we can shift into our home, the ground of our being, of peace and happiness.

Because we all touch true nature every day, we know these compass points already. It's more about noticing and releasing the reactive and fearful tendencies that get in the way.

We might think of this as small mind (ego or separation identified mind), and big mind (connected to the open empty spacious of awareness). Big mind is always there, and we disconnect from it. When in big mind, we experience a completely different set of thoughts and reactions to things.

For example, our child says something hurtful to us. Small mind reacts with judgment and wishing our child were different. "Gosh, when are they going to grow up and take responsibility?" This feels crappy. The feeling itself can alert us that we have disconnected from big mind.

Big mind does not take the comment personally, can look at the child with compassion and ask them what's going on, knowing that a hurtful

comment comes from discomfort and fear. Big mind sees the child as the open awareness we know them to be.

In this way, what comes up in our hearts and minds can be a sign post alerting us to where we are centered in any given moment. This is the value of the discipline of keeping the precepts and the Eightfold Path.

Knowing all this, we become willing to take on the discipline of a spiritual path.

INTRODUCING THE PRECEPTS

Life and practice are not separate. What happens in life is what will arise in practice, and how we are present with things in practice sets the model for how we are present with things in life.

Thus, our daily life must be lived in a way as to not be a barrier for the path of practice. The precepts, or living with non-harm, are the foundation for spiritual practice. In many SE Asian countries, every service and retreat begins with taking the precepts.

The Insight path begins with what is called in the Vissudhi Magha “Purification of Virtue”. Sounds a bit perjorative, but it is the realization that our lives are not separate from our practice. Living with non-harm is the fundamental value. It also is the understanding that living with virtue, or right speech and action, is the foundation for peace and joy in our lives.

We start with the precepts, or guides for daily behavior supporting non-harm. In traditional Buddhist societies, taking the precepts happens regularly and is the re-commitment to the path that one does over and over again. Class handouts of the precepts came from different sources on the internet, some were more of the “thou shalt not” flavor. Thich Nat Hanh’s were the most descriptive of the awareness and the more subtle levels that keeping the precepts involves.

The Buddha’s teachings have many parts, and can seem a little confusing to keep it all straight. But each part is a hologram, or contains the whole. As we work more deeply with the precepts, we see that to keep even one of them requires a level of awareness and mindfulness, that, if developed, will lead us home.

SEMESTER ONE CLASS ONE – practice review, precepts

We went over them in class as an initial exploration. I would encourage you to make an online search, as there are many versions, and thoughtful commentaries available. Some of the versions have a finger shaking kind of sentiment. Others are more positive. Do not be afraid to disagree with any version. Your task to find out what feels true and useful for yourself.
