

Thank you everyone for your sharing; actually working the program with 'wise action'. So much wisdom and insight in the circle. The idea:

What we focus on tends to become bigger in our lives, we found we agreed with. It's worth it to put in some effort in this training.

OUR HUMANITY IN THIS PROCESS

What leads us into unskillful (speech and) action?
From the dhammapada:

We are what we think.
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.
Speak or act with an impure mind
And trouble will follow you
As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart.

We are what we think.
All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts we make the world.
Speak or act with a pure mind
And happiness will follow you
As your shadow, unshakable.

Knowing that right action brings peace, happiness and harmony, it seems like we would not act against our own self interest by committing unskillful action. Yet we do, even though we see the unwelcome fruits of it over and over in our life.

There must be powerful forces within us that cause us to act against our own happiness. Much of it seems to be unconscious, we feel blindsided or overwhelmed by emotions that rise before we become aware that they are there. It's worth taking a careful look.

Why don't we normally look at the places we seem to be broken, or not acting as a whole being? We shared some of the reasons together:

Some of the reasons we came up with:

- shame
- physical contraction feels unbearable
- loneliness
- unworthiness
- insecurity
- following learned behaviors and beliefs

- embarrassed, I 'should' be better
- entitlement of others or self
- numbness
- laziness- not wanting to deal with it

An important premise of the dharma that goes against much of our cultural religious grain: we are not 'bad'.

The dharma does not assume that we do unskillful things because we are evil, unworthy, or inherently flawed in some way. Understanding this deeply allows us to look fearlessly, as we would look at anything in the way.

What we experience in practice is buddha nature and innocence at our core. What's deep inside is peaceful, loving, compassionate. Thus, as rational beings, we assume powerful, perhaps unseen, forces are at work. Our work is to find them and uproot them.

Let's look deeply. Why do we do what we do?

The dharma describes three basic difficulties we encounter as human beings: ill will, greed, and ignorance. I would add a fourth one: fear. All are based on our ego-identified separateness.

There are various translations: defilements, poisons, afflictions... The first two are rather loaded. Let's start by redefining the term as not defilements or poisons, but as afflictions.

For me, a defilement means something that damages us or makes us bad or ugly. Poisons imply inherent killing properties. Afflictions, on the other hand, are something we experience but does not define the nature of who we are. Please note from this point on, we'll refer to ill will, greed, delusion and fear as the afflictions.

One of the delusions we usually come to practice is is having shame about our afflictions, worrying that experiencing them makes us bad people. Our experience in practice shows us something quite different. When we train ourselves to hold steady with difficult arisings, we find they are more like certain clothes we wear. We touch them, and they touch us, but they are not who we are.

To get a better idea of exactly what the afflictions are, we compiled a list of how they appear for us, both in how they feel and also the actions they may express as:

Here's what we came up with.

ILL WILL

clenched
agitated
hurt
hopeless
reactive
helpless
righteous
broken
inflexible- certain of our viewpoint
anger
feeling unappreciated
low self esteem or negative inner talk
resentment
irritation
withdrawing or withholding
unwilling to accept
judgemental
bored
getting even
jealous
self pity
feeling left out

GREED

controlling - anxious - need it 'now'
self centered - my needs are more important
insecure
rationalizing
'must' have it - obsessive quality
this will fix everything thinking
fixated / myopic
jealous
entitles
selfish - looking out for what's mine
wanting more than we need or more than our share
trying to get too much done at the same time
not being satisfied
doing something for a particular payback
fear of not enough

IGNORANCE / DELUSION

blind
assuming the worst
catastrophizing
stereotypical thinking
pessimism and optimism- thinking you know how it will turn out
false assumptions
fantasizing
being superior or inferior
scared
confused
unworthiness - feeling inadequate
feeling more powerful than we are (thinking we can control)
not seeing things as they are
having a warped viewpoint
overly believing our inner story about something
insecurity
exaggerating or minimizing
defensive
needing to protect a self image or self concept
having fixed views and opinions
shamed
guilty
following habitual responses
feeling separate and cut off
believing things to be true that aren't

FEAR

anxiety
need to control
just afraid in general

We did a writing exercise, finding examples where we felt the stickiness, the residue of unskillful speech or action, and seeing which of the afflictions were present.

For most of us, we have a predominant relationship with one of them. It tends to be the lens through which we view life, and is good to know about ourselves. It helps us see ourselves more objectively.

Important: Our work is to observe the afflictions in our lives, to see them more clearly. The desire to fix will arise from the ego-identified personality. Oh my goodness! This is terrible! I need to DO something!!

The ego-identified personality, which is based upon not wanting to experience fear or the afflictions, cannot transcend them by avoiding or moving away from them. Trying to 'fix' only more deeply mires us in the afflictions, makes them more powerful.

Something different, larger needs to step in.

Sometimes we can experience these forces and refrain from unskillfulness. Other times, they overwhelm us and we act in ways that bring unhappiness to ourselves and others. What makes the difference?

What makes the difference from being able or unable to restrain ourselves from actions that will hurt us?

- A) Seeing it - not being blindsided. My own pattern is that I tend to be caught by things I'm not aware of. This is the job of mindfulness. The meditation we did of checking in with the felt sense in the body and heart is a powerful way of keeping tabs on the stresses we live with. As Amy said, asking ourselves the question from the heart, "What do I need right now?"
- B) Holding it - Being able to make an inner container that can hold it and be with it without reacting. Seeing and holding with a bigger inner container - this is what our practice is cultivating that we refer to as the observer. Another short hand term is ABC: A Bigger Container.

Charlotte Joko Beck coined the term ABC. She writes:

How do we actually separate ourselves from others? ... the solution is a practice in which we experience this separating emotion as a definite bodily state. When we do, A Bigger Container is created.

What is created, what grows, is the amount of life I can hold without it upsetting me, dominating me. At first this space is quite restricted, then it's a bit bigger, and then it's bigger still. It need never cease to grow. And the enlightened state is that enormous and compassionate space. But as long as we live we find there is a limit to our container's size and it is at that point that we must practice. And the strength of our practice is how big that container gets.

We another writing exercise where we remembered a time when there was an affliction, but we were able to hold steady with it.

Were these factors present? Yes.

Our job is to hold steady, to observe and see as deeply as we can. NO fixing. The awareness itself does all the cutting through. At some point, when we see something enough, it will transform. When this happens, it feels effortless and sort of miraculous, and often we do not even notice it has occurred until later. We simply reflect it is not happening any more.

I shared an experience from a self retreat I did 20 years ago when all the inner demons of unworthiness arose. It was intense, feeling like an imposter, a fraud, how could I think I could find realization? At the same time, a profound samadhi (that feeling of timelessness, deep 'muchness' and peace) arose. At some point, it became obvious that these thoughts were just thoughts - they did not have the power to separate me from the ground of peace and well being. The energy that was supporting them fell away and they did not come back.

HOMEWORK:

A) **Keep a watchful eye out for affliction when it arises.** Refer to your list and begin to notice the patterns. Find out what your primary ones are.

B) **When causes for unskillful action are present:**

1) **Seeing it** - noticing it is present. What is the underlying affliction here? Reflect on what affliction or fear was the proximal cause. Use the list for guidance. Not to fix! Just notice what noticing itself does.

2) **Holding it** - Being able to make an inner container that can hold it and be with it without reacting

Practice ABC as you are able to. Notice if it begins to grow stronger. Are you able to hold back from some trigger that has overwhelmed you in the past?

The qualities to do this are kindness and compassion for ourselves and others, curiosity, courage and gratitude.

From the Dhammapada, "Choices"

*The wind cannot overturn a mountain.
Temptation cannot touch the one
Who is awake, strong and humble,
Who masters themself and minds the law.*

Mistaking the false for the true

*And the true for the false,
You overlook the heart
And fill yourself with desire (suffering, wanting things to be different).*

*See the false as false,
The true as true
Look into your heart.
Follow your nature (the natural clarity, wisdom and compassion in the mind).*

*An unreflecting mind is a poor roof.
Passion, like the rain, floods the house.
But if the roof is strong, there is shelter.*

And from Rumi's poem: "The Sunrise Ruby"

Be courageous and discipline yourself.

*Work. Keep digging your well.
Don't think about getting off from work.
Submit to a daily practice.
Your loyalty to that is a ring on the door.*

*Keep knocking, and the joy inside
will eventually open a window
and look out to see who's there.*