

Thank you everyone for your presence and openness in the circle. There's a lot going on for many of us, and we are entering a difficult time of year. The days are shorter, the weather is colder, and the holidays approach.

On the meditation path, our work is to stay present with difficult feelings. When we are resisting, the heart closes to the moment and what actually is, and everything freezes in place.

It feels counterintuitive to turn back to things we want to avoid feeling, instead of turning away. And, it is the only effective path.

From last week, very simply put:

ACTIVE DRAINS:

- being out of the moment

CLOSE DRAIN BY:

- coming back into the moment

This semester, we are exploring samadhi, the third leg of the Eightfold Path. We will summarize next meeting with how it is the basis for and underlies moving from reactivity to equanimity.

Samadhi is a deep presence in the moment. It is characterized by a acceptance and intimacy with experience, a lack of resistance. This acceptance closes down all active drains, all of which are fueled by not wanting to be present. Without the drains, the heart is open and energy flows in unimpeded. The felt sense of aliveness, the such-ness of experiencing life, is the result.

An important aspect of this is that this aliveness does not come from pleasant experience or things going well. It is independent of good or bad circumstances. Rather than being based on, or caused by, external circumstance, it is from non-resistance to whatever is.

Another way to language the premise we are exploring is: what's the lived effect of this leg of the Eightfold Path? Coming back to the moment (right concentration), and staying with what's happening in the present moment (right mindfulness)?

Why would we want to put effort into cultivating this - right concentration, right mindfulness? What's the benefit? Is it worth it?

Now we turn to the third factor in samadhi: right effort, called 'right diligence' in the Thich Nat Hanh book.

RIGHT EFFORT

Right, or wise and wholesome effort, is done with joy. It feels good because it aligns with something deeper in ourselves we are waking up to, our true essence or nature.

What does that mean? Let's think about 'wrong' or stressful effort for a moment. What might that be like?

Stressful effort might be described as effort from the small, separate, ego-identified mind. This does not align with our deeper nature, and so does not feed us.

We wrote down some aspects of what this can feel like:

- the inner critic tends to be in charge, there's an egoic spiritual ideal the small mind pushes us to fulfill. Nothing short of that will satisfy.
- we tend to notice any falling short, any imperfection, rather than what is working
- tends to be a bit of a boot camp
- effort with an expectation of a particular result, a transactional approach
- the 'doer' is in charge
- something to 'get through', thus is not living in the moment
- fulfilling the expectations of others, not our own
- feel anxious, doomed, tense
- feels meaningless, going through the motions
- faking or contriving who we are for others

Here's what right effort, or effort with joy can feel like:

- comes from the place where you know there is nothing wrong with you.
- a pull rather than a push
- light and easy, because you WANT to do it
- with contentment, happiness
- soft and kind, feels fun
- feels good and affirming
- making 'mistakes' is ok, we learn from them
- makes us feel more alive, connected
- "I get to", rather than "I have to"
- a giving up of following resistance to the present moment.

This is sometimes called effortless effort. Effort that comes from the draw of the homing signal that is in the center of your Being and aligns with your true nature, your Buddha nature. Rather than a 'doing', it is simply an expression of who you are.

When you effort without joy, a 'task list' approach, it will eventually run dry. You won't want to do it any more.

Effort from understanding also means we know why we are doing it and what the fruit is. So even if it's not a fun job, we want to do it because we understand the benefit.

Your practice is meant to bring you peace and happiness. Even when we are present with difficult feelings and events, being present brings relief and transformation.

We split into dyads to talk about what it feels like to effort from the egoic, separated self.

What pulls you into it... fear of failure, self doubt, self judgment...What does it feel like? Does it elevate or drain?

Also shared: something you do with a light, joyful ease. Even something simple, like cooking dinner, or having lunch with a friend.
Does it elevate or drain?

It's important to apply right effort to our meditation practice, which can become a duty, something we 'check off' the list.

How might we experience meditation practice from the small mind?

- expectations
- self judgement
- 'have to'

How could you water wholesome seeds of joy in your practice?

- nice setting: some quiet, a candle, looking to the ease of the body
- appreciating taking time to take care of yourself
- reflecting on the fruits of practice
- offering self compassion

HOMEWORK

This week we take seeing active drains and elevating factors one step further: Last time we simply noticed what elevated our energy and what was an active drain on our energy.

Now we are going add right effort.
Use a 3x5 card for this exercise. You are going to set uop a right effort alarm, similar to a mindfulness alarm.

Pick one thing you need to do that will require some effort.
Write it on the top of your card.

In class, we had examples ranging from family visits, to getting through paperwork, to difficult conversations, finishing work projects. (Mine was a list of calls I will be making to various sangha leaders around the midwest for a committee.)

Underneath this, write in several aspects from the effort with joy list that seem relevant. Feel free to come up with your own as well.

(Mine included calling with the thought that new friends may be discovered, and keeping responsibility for how ti turns out light.)

Actively fuel your task with aspects of right effort. Notice when effort may be coming from the ego identified or small mind, it will feel more stressful and out of the moment. Come back to effort with ease and joy, just this moment.