

We reviewed the circle diagram map of practice, please take a look at this (attached).

Being in the lucid awake state, not forgetting ourselves, has two components:

1) Being aware of your focus of attention. This means some of it remains in the seat of consciousness, the Experiencer. With this, you are able not be totally consumed by thoughts, feelings, sensations and the world around you. Not lost in the movie of your life.

2) Not putting “I” next to everything you think and feel. Again, this comes from the Experiencer, which sees that it does not share the characteristics of the objects (I.E., that which is aware of anger is not itself angry).

These two go hand in hand, they develop in tandem.

The more you realize you are not your thoughts, sensations, feelings or perceptions, the more you find yourself resting in the seat of consciousness.

This shift towards attention remaining within the seat of consciousness at first is an effort, later comes naturally with the growing insight that we are not what we think or feel, and we find ourselves less consumed by the experiences of the day..

As this grows, there's a natural inner resiliency and equanimity that grows also, that supports not losing ourselves.

While this insight is developing, this is the place for mindfulness practice. To remember and return: to what's happening in the moment, to remembering to breathe and come back to the center, to the observing consciousness.

THE DIFFERENT STRANDS OF PRACTICE;

Practice is like a several-ply rope. It is made of of several threads or strands, all of which are co-equal. If only one ply is growing, the rope cannot grow longer and stronger.

We started with the insight thread of practice, looking at staying present in the moment, and the growing insight, or understanding the true nature of ourselves. But insight is not the end all and be all. It must be balanced with other factors to be whole and healing.

In a previous semester, we explored the sila (ethics) thread, which is how we live our day to day life.

This rests on the precepts (living without harm), and the leg of the Eightfold Path known as sila (ethical living) - right speech, right action, right lifestyle - which is traditionally where the path begins, the first thing newcomers were taught in traditional communities.

In the Dharma there are what are called balancing factors. These are the different plies in the rope that ideally develop in tandem.

- **wisdom** (insight) and **heart** (acceptance, compassion, kindness, openness)
- **mind** (nama) and **body** (rupa) - we tend to be a bit disembodied, to be a head on a stick. Deeper awareness is accessed through the body, not through the mind, so embodiment is a factor in our practice. This is somatic practice, which we will touch on later. Focusing on the heart is center, for example, is embodied practice. Walking meditation helps move us into the body as well.

Right now, we'll now look at this **balance of wisdom and heart**.

Along with wisdom (understanding and insight), we also need to develop the openness of the heart. The heart is the felt experience of oneness and connection. It is where the sense of ego-identified separation is dissolved.

Two parts of heart practice:

- 1) Noticing when the heart is closed - inquiry practice (next class).
- 2) Cultivating the open heart - metta practice.

1) noticing when the heart is closed

Last semester, talked about active energy drains and the heart. Review that on the web site.

NOTE: To find the previous semester class reviews, go to the 'classes' tab on the Insight Ann Arbor web site, then then 'teachers' tab, then the tab with my name on it. Past class reviews are all there, and you can review them at any time.

The heart is our basic energy valve. When the heart is open, energy flows in freely, We feel inspired, motivated, can conquer the world.

However, when the heart is closed, the energy valve shuts down. Things feel flat and gray, we find ourselves dragging through the day.

Last semester, we had homework practice of noticing when energy felt low or dragged out, and checking in with the heart. Was it open or closed?

The heart closes when we don't want to be present with whatever is arising in our experience, usually pain. Practice includes being deeply present with difficult feelings and situations. We did a special class last semester (October 15 class - please check the class review on the web site) dedicated to this, as it is central to life and practice. We will touch on it again this semester.

2) Cultivating the open heart - metta practice

In this tradition we speak of the four 'brahmavilharas' (translation means abode of the gods) as worthy of cultivation: loving kindness, compassion, joy for the good fortune of others, and equanimity.

We start with loving, or unlimited, kindness. The pali word for this is "metta", so you often hear it referred to as metta practice.

St Paul, in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians chapter 13, wrote so movingly:

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

In the Dharma, the fundamental text is the metta sutta, which is attached for your review. One of the last lines states, "This is the greatest, or sublime abiding." Take that seriously.

In a recent teaching Rupert Spira, a non-dual teacher, mentioned that the whole of the teaching and understanding is embodied in loving friendship. He mentioned students who never really 'got' the ideas of the non-dual understanding, yet were awakened to it by opening to the field of love it creates in a community. The dharma often refers to "Noble friends and noble

conversation” as a remedy for almost everything. This is about loving kindness in friendship.

The heart is innately open and loving. This openness gets covered over, buried: by fear, ill will, not seeing clearly, protecting the separated ‘me’.

So we cultivate this loving kindness, to encourage and train the heart to remain open and aligned with our deeper being.

Metta is a specific meditation practice used to cultivate the openness of the heart. The power in it lies in the connection one makes within the heart to the meaning of the words. The practice of metta turns the mind to the possibility that the loving sentiments expressed align us with the heart’s innate openness.

By repeating this practice over time, it will take on a life of its own, and begin to penetrate the deep resistances that keep us from acting out of our inner goodness and kindness.

At first, this practice may seem mechanical or even a little irritating. This is fine, just receive whatever arises with patience and kindness for yourself.

HOMEWORK:

- 1) Keep up with noticing where your insight practice is centered. On and off the cushion, be aware of your focus of attention, and how we tend to identify with the content level of our life.
- 2) Every other day, do metta practice as your practice.