

BALANCING WISDOM (MIND) AND HEART

There are factors that must be in balance for a practice to be vital.

These are like two ends of a teeter totter, one is up, then the other is up, but must have a dynamic motion and balance between them. If the teeter totter is always up on one end, vitality is sapped and we get stuck.

Action is balanced against stillness. We need to be engaged in the world, but acting without stillness tends to serve reactive patterns.

Mind (wisdom) must be balanced with heart (love, compassion). We can think of examples where things were decided with good intention, but without understanding how people or other beings might be affected. We can also think of lovingly intentioned acts that lacked wisdom, and actually were dysfunctional.

Mindfulness is the one factor that is not counterbalanced, it stands alone.

Let's consider the balance of mind (wisdom) and heart. In our culture, we tend to be mind-dominant, especially in a university town like ours. It's often heart than needs to be consciously brought into play.

THE MIND: can understand, can see an objective, can see a benefit, can see the reasons for why we might want to do something, to commit to something, where we want to be of benefit to ourselves and the world.

THE HEART: among other things, the heart is where the will comes from to do this. Without the open willingness of the heart, we may have good intentions, but not the follow through energy (think of starting on a diet, for example). The heart is the energy valve. When it's open, we have endless energy pouring in for whatever we want to use it for. When the heart is closed. We feel limited tired, overwhelmed.

An excerpt from Michael Singer's book "The Unfettered Soul" was shared as a fun example of the open heart and the closed heart.

So we cultivate wisdom, right view and understanding: about the Dharma, our meditation practice, we have an understanding of how suffering happens, how we might make our lives, lighter, more peaceful, more deep and joyous. But we need more to have enduring willingness to stick with it.

We must have the engagement of the heart.

Understanding the role of the heart in this, it becomes indispensable that we understand how to access the heart's energy, and what it's like to live from it.

So these next three sessions, let's explore the qualities of the heart.

KNOWING THE DESIRES OF THE HEART

Desire gets a bad name due to a misapplication of the second Noble Truth. This principle can be misinterpreted as: all desire is attachment that brings on suffering.

And yet the entire reason we are on this path is that there's a homing device, and innate longing to return to our divine Being, the Real Self, connected to everything, to peace and happiness.

As Cheri Huber said: That which you are seeking is causing you to seek.

On the board, we shared what, on the deepest level, what does our heart want?

A clarification is needed: we are not talking about emotional or pleasure desires that serve the small mind. The spiritual Heart: not our emotions, or situational, but our deepest longing that underlie any particular life circumstance.

- to feel connection
- safety, the soft heart
- openness, being surrendered
- fulfillment
- meaning-purpose-contribution
- self knowing and acceptance
- held and cared for
- peace and happiness

The suttas talk about two kinds of desires: Wholesome and Unwholesome. Unwholesome desires are ones that serve the defilements: greed ill will, and delusion. These are the outflows of the small, separate small mind. The defilements don't need much explanation - we all know these deeply.

Unwholesome desires close the heart, shut down the loving willingness, the effortless kind of commitment that wants to do this work.

Wholesome desires are ones that leads to peace and harmony - pretty much the list from above. We might conclude from the dharma: Trust and follow your heart's deepest desire.

Leo Tolstoy, in the opening sentence of Anna Karenin, writes:

All happy families are alike, but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.

Like the opening lines of Anna Karenin, We find unwholesome desires are complex and ever changing, but wholesome desire is generally very constant. It is the expression of our true nature, the Ground of our Being.

In any situation where we encounter conflict, pain or fear, both will be there.

Unwholesome desire will lie to you, will say “this is the only way, I must defend myself, I must win.”

Unwholesome desire creates a story to justify itself. It activates small mind to do its bidding: complaining, justifying, rehearsing, and so on. In the class exercise, you likely noticed how forceful, how insistent and real these unwholesome desires feel.

Even when they ‘seem’ skillful, they are usually negative, they are about what we want to avoid more than what we truly want. Desire to avoid does not really open the heart energy. It is serving aversion.

Wholesome desire: the desire of the heart is simple. It asks:
What do I really want?

Most of the time when we don’t know it’s because we need to be silent and make time to listen to this inner compass.

When we find ourselves experiencing difficult emotions - worry, anger, irritability, it’s often because the heart is trying to tell us something and we are not wanting to hear it.

On the top is usually the emotional urge to not experience something unpleasant, or to fix.

This takes time and is a form of spiritual inquiry. We must dig down to the level where we find a strong resonance that feels joyful and alive.

It takes time to dig deeper and find the place that truly resonates. This is self inquiry, and is a part of an insight practice.

EXAMPLE:

There was person who irritated me at the barn where I board my horse. She

would come in and immediately start complaining in a way that was hard to walk away from or ignore. I begin to complain inside also: This is my horse time, I don't come here to be drawn into drama. I had to laugh, I was doing internally exactly what I did not like her doing.

On the surface, the unwholesome desires were:

- I want to be left in peace
- don't want to get involved in someone else's conflicts
- don't want to experience disharmony
- don't want to be forced to spend my time this way

I could feel the defilements here, tight, angry, and draining.

What does the heart want? This took a bit of inner searching.

- real connection
- seeing the good in everything

When that was clearer, a shift began in the body/mind, I began to feel more peace inside. The relationship began to shift. It had to.

Doing this pre-emptively works as well. Here's an example.

EXAMPLE:

I made a commitment to form small regional support groups for dharma community leaders last winter. I knew it had the possibility to be a chore, something that felt like a duty, another thing that needed to be done. It felt right to start with self inquiry.

What does the heart want?

With some inquiry, an intention card was written - Do this with joy, have fun, enjoy others, make new friends.

It has kept the heart engaged, the project has not felt like 'work'.

EXAMPLE:

A family member had a conflict with me: it was painful.

The unwholesome desire:

- not to be part of dysfunctional family patterns
- not to mess up, to respond with anger or lash out

These may seem skillful, but they were motivated by a desire to control and be 'better' than the other person.

What does the heart want?

- to communicate my needs and feelings
- to have compassion for myself and the others
- To be honest and vulnerable, and not back away from that.

WORKING WITH THIS - self inquiry

So how do we cultivate this balance? We did an exercise in class that we can make a practice:

In a situation where you find yourself caught by emotional reactivity, take a moment and name the emotions that are arising. What are the unwholesome desires, what defilement is it serving?

Now quiet down and inquire: what is the wholesome desire - what the heart really wants? This may not be on the surface, like the unwholesome ones. Keep your inquiry open until you hit pay dirt, something that feels resonant and alive.

HOMEWORK

IN LIFE

Take a moment in a situation: a relationship, a work project, a house project, and ask yourself first: What do I really want here? What is the deepest purpose?

- Find what the heart wants
- Make a commitment to what the heart desires.
- Do it with love, with joy.

IN PRACTICE

Listen to the heart as you practice, especially the places that are angry and afraid.

Listen to what's underneath any stressful thoughts and difficult emotions. Usually, a difficult emotion is the heart telling you it is not being heard.

What is the information the heart is trying to communicate?
What does the heart want?