

THE SPIRAL OF INSIGHT AND PAINFUL PLACES

When you start the inquiry of finding out what the heart wants, your life will be lighter and more joyful.

And, right along with this, the barriers, the hindrances that get in the way, are also activated. You may feel fearful, anxious, find yourself nursing old grudges and hurts, or see avoidance behaviors coming up anew.

What is it that hinders you from following the heart's deepest desire? What holds you back from, as the Hafiz Poem from last week said, casting ALL your votes for dancing?

Sometimes it feels like you are moving 'backwards'.

This does not mean you are doing it wrong, or failing. It actually means you are doing it right. This is an intrinsic part of any spiral of realization: change towards wholeness brings up 'change back' messages. The spiral looks like this: an opening of insight, then the opening reveals a painful, stuck place, being present with that, then more opening.

We tend to think 'oh crap!' when these painful unresolved places come up. That's human. **The message tonight is that it's important to actively welcome and engage pain that is uncovered to keep the spiral of realization moving.**

One of us made a comment from an earlier class from Michael Singer's book "The Untethered Soul". Singer advises to simply resolve to never close the heart. I've not found that particularly workable. It does not take into account the tremendous power of the unconscious.

The missing piece is not to shut out the fearful closed parts, but to hold them with compassion, understand and hear them deeply. Otherwise they stand in the shadow, and that which we do not see clearly has enormous power.

So what do these painful, closed places in the heart look like? From our list in class:

- fear
- anger
- expectations (of self and others)
- sadness
- what other people want of us
- comparison
- overwhelm
- painful childhood messages and beliefs

- overwhelm
- trying to control

However, the heart also carries the exact energy we need stay open in pain, to spiral upwards and onwards:

What are the qualities we can find in our hearts that help us through?

- courage
- not letting fear control our actions
- self compassion
- patience
- openness
- to come back after falling short, not letting mistakes define us
- curiosity
- self trust
- knowing our worthiness, our value

We spoke about three helpful qualities we want to cultivate in order to continue the open heart inquiry:

1) THE WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT OUR HUMANITY: to be not perfect and whole at the same time

We all have an ego ideal of perfection that we think we are supposed to be, but that's not how a human is. This quality means accepting we might not get it right the first, or even twentieth time around. It's the willingness to come back to the table again and again. Key here is not thinking we need to be, or to make our minds to be, perfect, in order to have self worth or value.

We accept that our mind contains all the extremes possible to human beings. When we read about people who commit atrocities, or great achievements, we acknowledge that had we lived in their shoes, we would also be able to commit those actions. We accept our shadow side, both negatively and positively. When we accept our shadow side, we're less likely to pulled off center by our reactions - because we know the reaction is fueled by something that we do not want to accept in ourselves. When we put someone on a pedestal, this is also the shadow side expressing - we are projecting outwards the positive attributes we don't want to accept in ourselves.

When we accept our humanity, we accept the humanity of everyone around us. We loosen up on judging other people - and ourselves. We become more compassionate, both with ourselves and with others.

2) THE WILLINGNESS TO LET GO OF THE STORY OF THE PAST: to allow new possibility

This means dropping the story of your life and living in the now. **This does not mean rejecting anything in your past**, but choosing to be fresh and present and allowing new possibilities to occur, instead of expecting what happened before to create what happens now. Ironically, resigning yourself ahead of time to always repeat the past is exactly what blinds you to finding a new way to be in a difficult relationship or circumstance.

In Carlos Castenada's books, sorcerer Don Juan talks about "erasing personal history". To live out of your personal history means to put more credence in a memory than in the present. Giving up our identity with the story of our lives is huge, it creates immense freedom. The world becomes renewed with possibility, where life can unfold from moment to moment.

It means living outside of time - meaning stuck in the past or creating the future ahead of time. Time comes from the projections of the mind, which are not in the present moment.

Projection + Fear = reliving the past, trying to control the future.

Carrying an old story (or grudge, whatever) means to put more credence in memory than your ability in the present moment.

This quality is useful when you notice you are trapped in an old mind tape or story rather than being present and open.

It means not letting what happened before decide in advance what might happen now. It is about not cherishing of the hurts and griefs of the past and carrying them into the present and future. You will find it will give you more awareness to respond more skillfully to abusive or hurtful situations, rather than just sinking into an old mentality.

3) THE WILLINGNESS TO BE PRESENT WITH PAINFUL EMOTIONS: to know that you are bigger than any conditioned object, no matter how painful

Deeply ingrained in our habits is the tendency to reflexively flinch or move away from anything unpleasant. This has a useful component - if it weren't so, we'd all starve to death, or not put a coat on in the winter and die of exposure.

But it happens so quickly and automatically, we don't see the depth to which avoiding the unpleasant controls the way we live our life.

We avoid painful emotions in so many ways. We distract ourselves with TV or entertainment, we go to the fridge, we slam doors, or my favorite: having a story going in the mind, over and over, like a broken record, about it.

The reason the willingness to stay with difficult emotions works is that:

- Avoiding them which includes suppressing them, paradoxically feeds them and holds them in place.
- Trying to fix or control them takes a lot of energy, drains us, and actually serves aversion, keeps them frozen as above.
- If we make room for them and hear them out, we find the way to transform their energy is with aware presence, staying with and making space for, not fixing.
- Difficult arisings show us where our fears are, where we are trapped in pain, where we are holding unconscious beliefs that limit our lives. Thus they also the doorway to greater peace and joy. As Rumi says "each one is sent as a guide from the beyond."

An opportunity to cultivate this willingness comes whenever you are feeling a painful emotion, and resist (oh crap!).

THE RESULT: TO LIVE FROM AN OPEN HEART

As we experience the difference between the closed heart, and living from an open heart, it seems obvious which way to live.

From the Hafiz poem last week:

"Now dear Ones, be wise. Cast ALL your votes for dancing!"

Casting your vote for dancing is to not resist the fearful closed parts, to understand and hear them deeply. Otherwise they stand in the shadow, and that which we do not see clearly has the power to control our lives

Important: this is NOT a forcing of the heart to be open. When the heart is closed, we notice that it is closed. When we see what closes our hearts, letting the pain know we are holding it, giving it all the room it needs, what's operating is that which opens the heart, because the heart is inherently open.

We've all been hurt, experienced the armoring of our hearts. We close up in an attempt to protect the heart from further injury. But what happens? If we close

ourselves off to the disappointments of life, we also close ourselves off to the joy of intimacy.

HOMEWORK:

MEDITATION PRACTICE

We introduced a new kind of practice in our meeting, which we will refer to as heart practice as shorthand. A recording of the guidance for this is included.

Here's a written outline:

Make yourself comfortable for meditation.

We tend to meditate from our head, from that place behind the eyes. Find that place, and, like the ball dropping in Times Square on New Year's Eve, slowly let that point of focus descend. Down the face, the neck, and into the heart center.

Keep your center of practice here, your center of gravity here, in your heart center. This is the most important of the instructions.

Here in the emotional heart, is where the felt sense of life lives. It is usually noisy, it feels like Grand Central Station. Every day, hundreds of different emotions, some fleeting, some which knock us off our feet, arise all throughout the day. These emotions have a felt sense in the heart center. There could be feelings of contraction or tightness, heaviness, emptiness, also peace, contentment, openness, and lightness. None of these is any better than any other ones. We are not trying to only experience the pleasant ones. The practice is to simply notice all of the footprints that emotions leave in the heart center.

Notice and welcome them all. Tell each one, I see you, stay as long as you need to, take as much space as you need to, I am here for you, I'm holding you. That's it. Don't follow thoughts or stories, just stay with the felt sense in the heart center.

You'll notice as you do this that just being seen and allowed in this way feels great to these felt footprints. Our emotional heart likes being seen \,relaxes when it is allowed.

The emotional heart center is noisy and active, which is why we miss what contains and holds it all, the larger spiritual heart. The spiritual heart is silent, all encompassing, all accepting, and understands the connection, the oneness, we share with all of creation. There is no separation in the spiritual heart.

So explore this openness beyond the emotional heart, imagine it if needed. The spiritual heart may be clearly palpable to you, or it may be fairly invisible. It

doesn't matter because it is there. It is from and through the spiritual heart that looks at the emotional heart.

Spend some time in practice, feeling the emotional heart, sensing the larger spiritual heart every practice period.

NOTEBOOK PRACTICE

The homework is to open to, to welcome the fearful, armored parts closing the heart.

Everyone in class was given a small notebook. Keep this notebook nearby - in your pocket or on your desk. When you notice the heart closing, jot a short description down in your notebook.

At the end of the day, if you haven't written anything in, review the day and find one and write it in.

Simply keep a log, so you can start to see heart closing more clearly, which is what vipassana is all about, without feeling any need to change. If helpful, also list the heart qualities from the lists above that are at your side as well.

Here's some of my own entries:

- Find myself critical of how I had explained an idea to a class.
- helpful heart quality: willingness to be human, self compassion
- Find myself exhausted after a day at the hospital. Stunned at how my brain is completely fogged, feel unable to think clearly, remonstrate myself for not being more capable.
- helpful heart quality: willingness to be human, to be with a difficult emotion
- My husband mentions something someone said to him that bothered him. Feel myself shut off a little - to both of them.
- helpful heart quality: to let go of the story of the past, patience
- Find myself reaching for entertainment while feeling anxious.
- helpful heart quality: to stay with a painful emotion, self compassion
- Anticipating a meal with someone, I go over past interactions and find myself bracing in anticipation.
- helpful heart quality: to let go of the story of the past, openness

- Make a mistake on an online order. Realize it later in the morning. Adrenaline and story arise, blame myself.
- helpful heart quality: willingness to be human to be human, patience, self acceptance

IMPORTANT: do this with kindness and compassion. The point of this is to understand being a human being, and to not block the spiral of opening to open to what your heart wants.

Come back to class with your notebooks.

See you in two weeks,
Susan