

class 3 - exploring unconscious beliefs about life and ourselves

QUICK REVIEW

The homework last meeting was to open to and welcome the fearful, armored parts closing the heart.

Rather than seeing this as an oh crap! moment, we understand it is an integral part of the spiral of insight, the other side of the coin.

1) Small notebook exercise: to notice and jot down notes when you notice your heart closing down.

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 list that are at your side as well:

- 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

2) Heart centered meditation practice (NOTE: the audio file is on the web site on my teacher page, where all the class reviews are available)

- dropping focal center of gravity from where it usually is behind the eyes down into the body, into the heart center
- noticing and welcoming the footprints of all the emotions that have visited and are present
- becoming aware of the larger container, the spiritual heart, silent and connected to all creation

Thank you for the class sharing. As per the class, we saw how the armoring that protects our hearts actually close us down, and how simply holding and seeing the painful places shifts everything.

Seeing and welcoming the closed and armored places keeps us soft and open to pain. It's true, as we drop our armor, we feel more pain than before, because we are not walling it off. And it is balanced with more joy, more aliveness.

class 3 - exploring unconscious beliefs about life and ourselves

Moving towards, being accepting and open with painful feelings is a transformative practice. It will open you to whatever the painful feeling needs to show you.

from Rumi's poem "The Guest House":

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Welcoming the felt sense in the body may open to images, memories, that show why and how it developed, often from early in life.

However, one more step can be immensely helpful: uncovering unconscious belief.

This takes some skill to learn, and don't expect yourself to master this in one night. It's the inquiry into the false or mistaken beliefs that underlie suffering.

class 3 - exploring unconscious beliefs about life and ourselves

Difficult emotions rise from a foundation of something we believe to be true, some form of stressful thinking. Stressful thoughts tend to come from beliefs that fight reality.

Any belief that is cross-purpose to reality, or how things actually are, is going to cause suffering.

By having beliefs that fight reality, we mean many of our 'should be' beliefs: such as I 'should be' this way, they 'should be' this way, the world 'should be' this way. All these 'should be' thoughts create closing, rejection and stress.

These beliefs tend to be unconscious. We learned them at the knees of our parents and our world, beliefs of unworthiness, being unlovable, separation, and an ideal of how things 'should be' that simply is not the way things actually are. They've been there so long that they are simply the wallpaper we no longer notice. We no longer see what controls how we react and how we close down.

The opposite all this is inquiring into these beliefs and undermining them. Of seeing and accepting how ourselves, others, and the world actually is. This practice opens us to something different; what can I offer here? What is needed?

The first step is to identify the beliefs underneath stressful thinking and feeling and explore how they are not true.

First, we inquire to find what the belief is. This is inquiry, just as finding the heart really wants is inquiry. In class, we picked an example from our small notebooks and spent time inquiring into what the underlying belief might be. This takes time to do, usually through several layers, to the base belief that feels like a live wire, that resonates.

Sit quietly for a couple of moments here and ask: what is the underlying belief that caused my heart to close?

Common examples:

- 1) Critical of something said to someone else. Self judgement and rejection. Underlying belief: I'm not OK if I'm not perfect.

class 3 - exploring unconscious beliefs about life and ourselves

- 2) Feel irritated at someone else, then judge self for being judgmental.
Underlying belief: I am not a good person
- 3) Forget an obligation. Beat up on myself, what's wrong with me?
Underlying belief: it's not OK to make a mistake.
- 4) My parents never approved of me. Feel alone and unloved. Underlying belief: I need outside approval to be worthy.

Once you found the belief, there are a couple different paths that are helpful.

One is "The Work" from Byron Katie.

Byron Katie has a rather involved process here, which includes turnarounds of all untrue beliefs, so we can see the opposite of our beliefs are just as true as what we believe. That's beyond the scope of this class, and I encourage you to explore her work.

One of her fundamental tools is to ask yourself four questions of any belief that is causing stress.

- 1) is it true?
- 2) Are you sure beyond any doubt that it is true?
- 3) What happens what is your experience, when you believe this to be true?
- 4) What would your life or your experience be without this belief?

You may need to ask yourself each question multiple times to find the resonant answer. This is spiritual inquiry, and takes space and quiet to do.

EXAMPLE: from my own notebook list:

- 1) Was critical of my teaching in a meditation class. Felt my heart close to myself, a self rejection.
- 2) Inquiry into the belief: I'm not OK if I'm not perfect (you can see the stress in that one!)
- 3) Ask myself the four questions. I can see how this belief fights reality. Meaning it is simply not true.
What my experience is when I believe this to be true: I feel tense unloving and inadequate.

class 3 - exploring unconscious beliefs about life and ourselves

What would it be like without this belief: life would be free and open.

It's not that we are trying to 'fix' the belief, we can't. We simply believe what we believe. But the glimpse of a life possible without suffering - that we encounter when we ask these four questions shows us the validity of the Four Noble Truths. Life does not cause suffering. It is our resistance, our thoughts about life that cause suffering. This is great news. It means that the Third Noble Truth, the cessation of suffering, is possible.

One last idea: we did not have time to pursue this in class, but worth reflecting upon:

When we experience what we might call repeating karmic patterns in life, it's because on some level, we believe in and agree that these patterns are true. We tend to attract to ourselves, or other words, life is a mirror of what we believe.

My experience in any moment is the mirror for what I'm agreeing with inside, often unconsciously. So if I'm agreeing inside that I need more time, patience, energy, money, someone to treat me differently, whatever it is that I feel I need, then I'm going to have to keep experiencing what I'm agreeing with, which is that I need more of these things. My experience cannot change.

Our lives are always mirroring our beliefs about reality. This is the classroom of life.

Wherever pattern is playing is a reflection of my agreement with the thoughts about it. My focus on those thoughts, even if it seems automatic and involuntary, is giving agreement to it. The very fact that attention goes there means we are going to experience those thoughts over and over again.

When you question these unconscious beliefs, life changes. It has to.

Thank you.

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