

Mindfulness' Access and Depth Practices for Insight- and Compassion-based Interethnic and Interreligious Benevolence

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Introduction

The Buddha's teaching on mindfulness (*sati*), as taught in the early Buddhist *suttas* of the Pāli Canon, includes mindful application of mind to specific relevant themes for insight in conjunction with the development of *sampajañña*, "clear awareness" or "clear comprehension," sometimes called "intuitive awareness" or "a special knowing" — which I would like to speak of here as "a deeply connected awareness." This deeply connected awareness and the insight knowledge that arises and is gleaned within it, when developed both internally and externally, naturally reveal and illuminate our innate commonality with all of humanity and all of life, at both elemental and vital levels, within our very own experiential knowing.

Such clear awareness and insight — in which we see and know these truths for ourselves — when developed in conjunction with both locative and immeasurable "Sublime Abiding" *Brāhma-vihāra* practices of *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion) and *muditā* (appreciative joy), together with the quality of *upekkhā* that is capable of both holding and passing through everything, have the effect of opening, unbinding and stabilising the heart-mind, allowing the practitioner to experience for themselves freedom from intolerant, prejudicial, delimiting views which afflict and divide our diverse and multifaceted humanity over "isms," including ethnic, racial and religious pluralism.

With such insight knowledge the heart becomes tender towards all forms of life — in the ancient Pāli language of Theravāda Buddhism: *anukampaṃ upādāya* — rising and moving with compassion, trembling with compassion for one another. A new human morality is born within us as we grow in deeply connected awareness and personal

insight through these practices. This is a morality common to all who develop such awareness into moral awakening, of enormous value not only for the realisation of the highest and most excellent human potential of individuals, but for the interrelated collective, offering a substantial contribution towards reduction of conflict and enormous pain and suffering, both for humanity and for our co-related diverse living beings with whom our human lives are interconnected and mutually interdependent.

Thus, these should not only be considered superficial practices, but both *Access* and *Depth* Practices, which are able to work progressively and effectively at the root level, as well as at all levels of the issue and process.

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Let me briefly summarise a few of the most effective and relevant practices we have worked with which are effective in these regards:

Foundations of Mindfulness and Clear Comprehension *both Internal and External*

Based on training in mindfulness and clear comprehension, including mindfulness of the body and breath, mindfulness of feelings, and mindfulness of mind, one intentionally develops mindful awareness of all of these, directing and applying one's mind, awareness and insight to these topics for developing clear awareness and insight, specifically, both internally and externally. That is, in oneself and in others, with regards to all of humanity and all living beings. Through this process, one becomes aware of blocks or hindrances in perception which may appear in oneself, challenging awareness and clear understanding of oneself in oneself, and of others in oneself.

Mindfulness and Clear Comprehension *of Hindrances*

Developing mindfulness of the blockages with regards to the hindrances can illuminate the causes of the blockages and hindrances. The antidotes or remedies for these hindrances are taught together and developed progressively and effectively. With the unblocking of such blockages to a fully interconnected awareness both internal and external, many people experience a release and a new freedom with the opening of their hearts. Afflictions and negativities which had plagued them previously, whether gross or underlying, begin to lose their grip, loosen and unbind, leaving the person far more free and psychologically healthy. Natural qualities of kindness, compassion and appreciation towards both themselves and others become free to manifest both in their heart-minds, as well as in their words and actions, and life choices. Tendencies towards self-harming and other-harming are progressively reduced and eliminated. These shifts can be seen both in oneself and in others who are fully undergoing the training. We are asked to turn our minds and hearts towards seeing and knowing how others are also experiencing the hindrances, with compassion and understanding. The hindrances are seen just as hindrances, as not permanent, as suffering, and as non-self. Arising and ceasing according to conditions. Skill and both passive and proactive awareness are brought to the conditions.

Mindfulness and Clear Comprehension of *Elemental Properties*

With mindfulness of the body as above, one turns mindful attention and awareness to the great elemental properties, of earth (i.e., of hardness, solidity, the earth element) internally and externally, both in one's own body and also in the world, as well as in the bodies of all other living beings. In another example, mindful attention is turned to the air element (gaseous elemental properties) both internally as in the breath, and externally in the world and in the breath of all other living, breathing beings. A deeply connected awareness develops, where the practitioner sees the interchangeability and the interrelatedness of all the great elemental properties, internally and externally. For example, the breath of one's own body, the breath of the world, and the breath of all people and all living beings is all the same, shared breath.

Designations of “internal” or “external” are seen and known as every so momentary, changing and in flux, as the breath enters and leaves the body. The same for the blood in our bodies, the rivers and streams of the world. This leads to insight into one aspect of non-self or non-individuality, and engenders compassion for all living beings, like oneself, sharing in the breath of the world, sharing in the waters of the world, sharing in earth, in warmth and coolness, and in all of the four, five or six great elemental properties. This is mindfulness of the body and insight developing a deeply connected awareness with regards to the great elemental properties. We can easily see how these properties are utterly non-discriminating with regards to race, class, ethnicity, gender, age, religion.

Mindfulness and Deeply Connected Awareness of *Death and Mortality*

With Mindfulness of the Body is also taught Mindfulness of Death, the great equaliser. Here, the mindfulness and clear comprehension is intentionally applied and directed to seeing and knowing the actuality of the shared processes common to all of life: of birth, of sickness, of ageing and of death. Having a basis of clear awareness and insight through seeing the rising and falling of the breath, the ongoing change and impermanence of the body, the continual transformation and non-identity of the great elemental properties, one’s attention is then turned to the common processes of birth. The ways that all forms of life emerge, the ways that all humans come to life, the commonality of being “womb-born forms of life.” The common qualities of healthy humans’ hearts towards love of their offspring, the common processes (both joys and pains) of growth, of environmental conditioning, of sickness and injuries, and of the pervasiveness of ageing. These are specifically looked into in order to see clearly, both in oneself, and in all that one knows, excluding none. With appearance also comes disappearance; with rise comes fall—mindfulness is turned to these universal truths, affecting all, sparing none. Then mindfulness and this deeply connected awareness are turned to death and the dying process, common to each one of us, and all who have ever lived.

Mindfulness of the skeleton and its breakdown and change teaches us. We are trained to see the whole skeleton, then the scattered bones, then the bones turned to dust, blown by the wind. Internal and external. Deep compassion often arises here with the clear understanding and awareness that emerges.

Mindfulness & Insight developed together with Lovingkindness, Compassion, Appreciation and Equanimity

Although compassion and appreciation, together with a great equanimity of mind, often arise naturally in the course of such mindfulness and insight training, they are also specifically, explicitly taught in conjunction, to work together, as complementary and mutually-supporting practices.

The Mindfulness and Insight Meditation tradition masters, in their practice instructions thus teach the intentional alternation of such mindfulness and insight meditation practices with practice of the four Sublime Abiding (*Brahma-vihāra*) meditations on Loving-kindness (*Mettā*), Compassion (*Karuṇā*), Appreciative Joy (*Muditā*), and the quality of mind which equalises, rebalances and frees the heart-mind, enabling the kindness, compassion and appreciation to go deep, being able to hold and pass through each and every one of all kinds of conditions, (*Upekkhā*), able to penetrate with these qualities into the unconditional level.

Thus loving-kindness, compassion and appreciation can arise from mindfulness and insight; and insight and clear seeing and knowing can arise from elimination of the hindrances through cultivating and developing the Sublime Abiding meditations. The latter meditations are explicitly taught as purifications of heart-mind and as liberations of heart-mind. The mind is purified and freed from the hindrances to deep mindfulness and insight, specifically those related to *vyāpāda*: hostility, ill-will, divisiveness, negative discrimination, conflicted perceptions; all those things that darken, restrict, divide and distort

the heart-mind. Pure, clean...so bright, so penetrative and so freed — and so able to hold and pass through everything — this highly sensitive, unlimited and unobstructed mindfulness and awareness is then able to be applied to seeing and knowing the truths of things as they are, reducing and eliminating the ignorance that is the basis for all non-benevolence.

Conclusion

With such thorough mindfulness training in clear comprehension developed in its traditional aspects of Mindfulness of the Body & Breath, Mindfulness of the Elements and Mindfulness of Death, together with the traditional complements and supports to Mindfulness & Insight training in the Sublime Abiding meditations, it is easy to see how these can be trained in, cultivated and developed by anyone and everyone as access practices for insight- and compassion-based inter-human, inter-ethnic & interreligious relationships, based not on superficials, but on deep and appreciative understanding of the commonality of the very bases of our lives and existence. Based on loving hearts, and the natural inclination of the pure and liberated mind and heart towards harmonious inter-relationship and peaceful, mutually appreciative co-existence. By “mutual appreciation” is meant: with appreciation for both self and others, “to all as to myself.”

With enormous gratitude to the Buddha for teaching these effective practices, we can see how they are just working with developing basic *human* qualities and potentials in positive and excellent ways, which are independent of race, religion, ethnicity or gender. And yet, in application, these practices directly touch into and work effectively with the very bases and roots of all kinds of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts and divisions; bringing light into darkness, showing a path where people get lost, turning right side up what had been overturned,...wonderful and excellent means for the needs of our beloved humanity.