

Ralph Steele
Week One, *Mindfulness of the Body*
February 6, 2017
“Establishing Right Mindfulness”



Hello. This particular Dharma Talk series is on mindfulness. My knowledge is coming from MN 119 of *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, co-written by venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, as well as from the study guide that Ajahn Thanissaro wrote titled "Mindfulness of the Body: A Reflection of 119."

I want to begin this particular talk by discussing the meaning of mindfulness. First, we need to look at it through the lens of the four noble truths, it's important. There's suffering, there's an illness. The cause of suffering, diagnosing the illness, stopping the suffering, treating the illness, and the eightfold path: [these are] prognosis and prescription. The Buddha was teaching us how to become our own physician, which is so important because all the teaching is right there. If you don't have the nobilities, if you're not looking through that lens, then you have some other agenda and I can't help you in that way.

In terms of the eightfold path, mindfulness falls under the category of concentration. Along with that is effort, mindfulness itself, and concentration. With regards to practice, they all go together. It's like having a crystal stick. On one end is mindfulness and on the other is concentration. How we handle the stick is effort. That's important.

With regards to perception, mindfulness is in our memory component. It's very active. It's a proactive process. Of course, it's in the mind, sati, but it is *anussati*, A-N-U-S-S-A-T-I. It's the recollection of thinking. It is the understanding that we are training one's mind in this process but we're training it in a healthy way: healthy conditioning, healthy habits, even training addiction.

We tend to look at addiction with a negative connotation. But for those of you who are serious practitioners, who love to sit for an hour once or twice a day, when you miss a few days, are just not yourself anymore. It's almost impossible to miss a few days. I remember that, for myself, I even got depressed. Practice itself can become an addiction, but you want it to be a healthy addiction. You want to know the difference. It takes understanding the cause and effect of practice to understand the difference between having it feed your system and becoming

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paranoid about it. When you begin to understand that, then we are moving more towards right mindfulness. That's where the word "right" comes in, *samma*, the Pali spelling for that is S-A-M-M-A.

Understanding where you notice the difference, where it may be causing any illness or helping us to move towards cleansing our system. I like to use the word "cleansing" in replace of "healing." What I have been saying in regards to the nobilities is that the practice of right mindfulness is not to be taken lightly.

These are the four pairs, the eight kinds of noble beings. These are the Blessed One's disciples. This is chanted at least twice a day in all the Theravada monasteries. It's very important that we get a clear and very good understanding of right mindfulness and how to utilize it. It's like we're weeding our garden. We're breaking unhealthy patterns. There are some skillful components one can practice with regards to desire. It's asking yourself, "What's causing stress in your practice?" and working on abandoning it. In that process of abandoning that particular stress, of course we're working on cultivating something that's new and different. That takes time. It takes time and it takes consistency to do that.

The real work comes even after you pull your weeds in the garden. One must be consistent with it, because if you're not consistent, that habit comes right back. In other words, that weed grows right back. We need to have the correct desire, the precise kind of desire without intent, because it affects the quality of our practice. Simply preparing to go into practice is so crucial.

It's like you're sitting on a plane and a person with an infant and a 5-year-old comes and sits next to you. The 5-year-old starts crying and the person turns to you and says, "Can you hold my child for just a few minutes?" The intent inside one's self can change your whole system. Turning towards that infant and reaching in a kind, gentle, ever so precious way; being very discerning on how you lift and hold that particular child up. That's the kind of attitude you want

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to bring to your practice. This is what you want to put into your intent. Then, intention begins to feel very good in our nervous system.

When we practice right mindfulness, we are working towards cultivating concentration and tranquility. It begins to develop. The mind becomes more at ease. We begin to find our rhythm and that is so important. My rhythm is different than yours. For example we find our rhythm in our voice. We find our rhythm when we are walking. We find our rhythm, of course, when we are dancing. We become more efficient. We become more efficient in managing our stress when we begin to do this.

Managing our stress more efficiently affects our character. It's a healthy awareness in both our mental and physical world. It affects how our minds take care of the various situations in our daily activities and in our meditation practice. It affects our daily activities with our physical world through nutrition and exercise. We become more efficient in carrying ourselves throughout the day, making sure we get the proper rest.

As you become more at ease, maybe, just maybe, you can look at what I call our "dark side." Just look at it. Not going into it, yet. Looking at it because our restlessness begins to decrease. We can then turn to the trauma that has occurred in our life and say, "Okay. I know you're there." We are giving, instead of numbing or spacing out. We become more present and that is so important. Attentiveness leads to ease. Because of this cultivation, there is a new level of equanimity that rises, a new level of sensation.

Another word that has a similar meaning to right mindfulness is "multitasking." Let's say you're practicing with the breath and you feel sensation in the right knee. In my experience, because everything is so connected, I remember noticing my right knee and loosening the tension in my jaw. I noticed the tension in my right knee decrease. By loosening the tension in the left

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part of my jaw, I noticed the tension in my right knee decrease. Working proactively with certain body parts can be very interesting. It's so intriguing to understand that this practice can be looked at from a linear perspective but, more importantly, can move towards a non-linear experience. It's difficult.

It's difficult but you'll hopefully be getting to the understanding of what right mindfulness is. It's not a couch potato, you're not just sitting around. You are being very active in your system.

As the breath is moving in, moving out, moving in, moving out, I soften the left side of my body. Moving out, I soften the right side of my body, noticing if there is tension there. This helps when working with discomfort, which is the next talk that I will be giving in mindfulness-how to work with discomfort in practicing right mindfulness.

Simply having the idea to meditate is so important. Because of this we become more self-assured. It's like doing push-ups. We become more strengthened in our practice by utilizing the appropriate process in practicing right mindfulness.

Thank you.