

Questions & Answers



ALBA Day of Practice 21 November 2020

'True Freedom - Beyond Happiness and Sadness'



Martin Evans & Randula Haththotuwa

Who is creating suffering?

To the theme of suffering...

If I am asking myself who is causing the suffering? Then it can lead to judging, looking for offender... and then I can feel as a victim and am fighting. But if everything is not mine, no self, then it makes no sense... or?

So many quickly, swift moving actions... Are they looking just for the opportunity to do distractions? (again judging but slighter, finer not using person, just accusing objects ?o)

Aim is perhaps to know the cause of suffering, but I am looking for better attitude.

To broaden heart to accept it as it is, is one solution.

To accept it as a state of wave which had started, risen, stagnated and is falling down is maybe acceptance in head.

Maybe it is good to have the acceptance from both sides in one moment.

Mind in heart and heart in mind.



Martin:

It is the self-creation process, i.e. delusion, which creates suffering. The judgemental mind comes out of comparing self and other - comparing ourselves with a standard based on conditioning. Looking for someone to blame - either someone or something else, or ourselves - is from the judgmental mind. If we don't take it so personally - that is stepping back isn't it. Stepping back from the self-creation process. And that enables us to see what is happening. You will see who is causing the suffering - we are creating suffering. It's the attitude you have towards your experience rather than the experience itself, which creates suffering - as you suggest in your last paragraph.

Randula:

Just look inside into your heart not the outside world -look into our heart and just pose the question -and see where this suffering stems from? Is it not this sense of self that causes suffering? This identification with our experience as me and mine and clinging to it and wanting it to be a certain way in line with my preferences.?

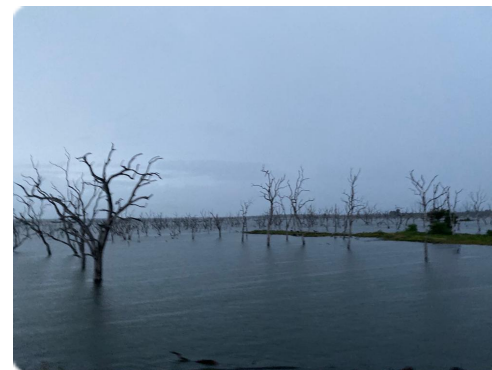
Can you observe and notice your experience? - see how the experience just changes on its own accord? Notice when there is suffering and when there isn't suffering?- can you just notice how it feels like in the heart - and notice what is behind it all?.

This practice is to understand our experience and find the answers for ourselves. It is not to come from a standpoint of there is a self or there is no self. It is to look at our own experience and understand its true nature, question who and what is causing suffering through our own heart - through sustained mindfulness - just watching and observing our experience when the mind is still - patiently - then the true answer reveals itself - then the heart truly understands and transforms - and it perceives experience according to how it has seen and understood for itself - which then doesn't need reminding - just like once you've been burnt by fire you will know it is hot and won't be fooled in to burning your fingers again. The heart that knows for itself through direct experience and understanding of the Path leading to the end of suffering, suffering, the cause of suffering and the end of suffering - is not fooled in to an existence in suffering again.

What is sadness? What is depression?

How do I let it be?

*Would you say something about experiencing depression as opposed to sadness?
How can this be observed/distinguished from sadness and how one might allow
sadness to come & go?*



Martin:

Sadness is a normal human response to painful or upsetting conditions. Sadness comes and goes. So, if we stay with it, we can experience it fully and let it run its natural course. This is not toughing it out or not giving into it - it is trusting or having confidence in the Dhamma - in nature of things to cease in their own time - which we call anicca.

Depression comes out of our resistance to sadness. By resisting it we don't allow it to be fully experienced. We resist it out of fear. We push it away - which the mind tells us is a logical strategy, our conditioning tells us 'not to let the side down' or whatever, but if we suppress it, it creeps up on us from behind. And it keeps on creeping up on us, until we turn and face it, and go through the sadness to its natural completion. If we never face it, it will always nag at us. And the next time something upsets us, our reaction is out of proportion to the event - and we push it away and eventually we get depressed and anxious and we don't really know why. So that's why mindfulness helps. To let it all out into the arena of mindfulness - simple, non-judgemental awareness.

Randula:

Sadness is a feeling. Depression - means something different to different people. We may feel sad for a day, and say 'I am feeling depressed' or we may feel sad more deeply - feel like shutting the curtains, hide under the duvet, lock ourselves in our rooms, stay in our pyjamas all day, crying our eyes out, seeing no hope for the future and say 'I am feeling depressed'.

In all of this as always, whether it's a drizzle or a storm the practice applies the same - of moment-by-moment awareness with kindness, compassion and acceptance of how we feel and then surrendering to this experience itself.

We approach it initially, just like we would look after a sick puppy or a child - we have kindness and compassion and we soothe the child - we so reflect on our own goodness in our own hearts -reflecting on our daily practice on this path of generosity, keeping our precepts and mental cultivation - we bring to mind this each day, and bring joy to our heart - knowing that we are training the heart in the right direction - and the heart is being 'filled' up with goodness - we are not a 'hopeless' case and gratefully accept this sadness and suffering as an opportunity to understand the teachings.

We see if we can notice the sadness and let it wash over us - if its too much if the storm is too strong - we allow a little bit in at a time - and do this for a few minutes each day.

We notice that we can't let them in because we don't like these feelings -so we create an aversion to it. So what we can do to help is to start developing feelings of loving kindness to these feelings themselves. Then when the aversion to them reduces the feeling itself becomes weaker and our hearts become more expansive the more we practice loving kindness - we are able to accept these feelings for longer periods of time and be with them patiently - then we can get to know the feelings for what they are without any narratives of why they are here, what is their purpose. The Buddha said such questions only result in more pain they serve no purpose in the healing process of ending our suffering. All we need to do is to understand feeling and the true nature of it. Once we are able to be with the feeling of sadness without fear, fully accepting it for how it is - and just stay with it - we can then question - what was the problem before? Sadness seems quite harmless now - Who was showing me sadness as something to be afraid of? Then look back into the mind and see what lies behind the mind that made the mind not see clearly - that fooled it in to fearing sad/painful feelings.

Craving for chocolate cake

I am grateful for the Reflection on a chocolate cake 😊. The cake provokes a physiological craving for sugar and fat, not just a mental craving. Are the people who market chocolate cakes bad people? Should chocolate cakes be included in the Fifth Precept? (as they are intoxicating)
(p.s. I did not have chocolate cake for lunch!)



Martin:

We learn more from restraint than avoidance – there is nothing wrong with a piece of chocolate cake..

Randula:

You may find chocolate cake enticing but someone with a cocoa allergy might not find it to be so. So, once you've identified where your cravings are – then you can watch your mind to see – what happens to it when it has what it wants? When it doesn't get what it wants? When it follows this desire? When it resists this desire? What is chocolate cake? What is it actually? Is it what you see? Is it what you taste? What happens to it when you eat it? Is it just a pleasant sensation? What happens to it if you were to bring it up again? It is the same cake? Did it feel the same? What was the real experience? Did you notice the sensations? Did you notice feeling in the heart when it grasps at a sensation it likes? And squirms at a sensation it doesn't? Compare this to the heart when it just observes sensations? Does it feel different? Where does the True freedom from happiness and sadness lie in the journey of the chocolate cake?

Nietzsche or Anicca or an Itch?

I might have mis-heard Martin but did he say Nietzsche on 2-3 occasions? Or was it Nature; or An Itcher? Nietzsche was trying to provide freedom of meaning for Europe at a difficult time. Is it also now the time when people need more Freedom in their lives? To escape the sadness of lockdown. I now realise that Martin was saying Anitya (Sanskrit) or Anicca (Pali) = impermanence.

Martin:

Exactly – anicca not Nietzsche – and I did also say that noticing an itch is a good way to notice anicca. Sorry – I can see why you found it confusing!



Helping others in the practice

It is comforting to be permanent residents in the three Refuges. But is the reason we need to keep leaving, to return to the material world, to help free those who are still suffering?

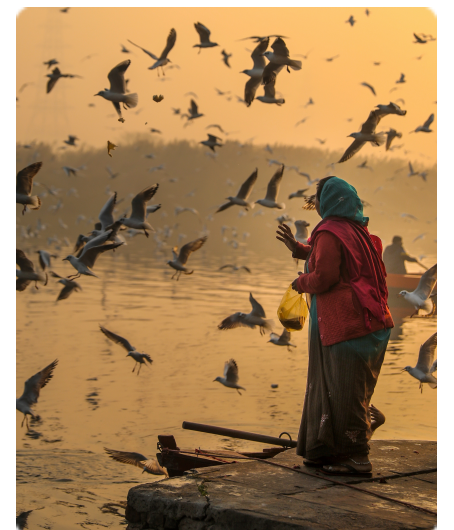
Martin:

We can only help pull someone out of a bog if we're on solid ground.

Randula:

If we keep leaving then we are not permanent residents are we? – we are still refugees then who are seeking asylum who haven't been granted permanent residency. So, we keep going back to the material world because we still don't see clearly the suffering in the material world – we still see it as something desirable. When we truly see it for what it is – we won't want to go back to the material world.

In helping others, the Buddha didn't ask us to go and convert others – if there are those who come to us and seek asylum – then we help them – but we don't go out to the world to try and convince people to come and join us.



Perceiving others

Is Donald Trump a bad person, or is it just our perception? He advocates for Freedom for people to do whatever they like.



Martin:

I don't have an opinion about Donald Trump. I can see he does and says things that are not 'praiseworthy' or even downright bad - but I don't need to label him as a bad person. If I do that, the next step is to start hating him - and then I'll suffer the karmic consequences of that. How would that benefit anybody? If we see a dirty stone we don't have to pick it up. In fact, even if it's clean and polished, we still don't have to pick it up. That's how to be with views and opinions.

Randula:

Who is a bad person? Who is a good person? Who is a person?

If we feel we need to consider Donald Trump to be a bad person or good person or something 'other', then what about the rest of the 7 billion people on the planet? What about our friends and family? Do we also go around labelling everyone as good or bad and 'other'? And how will we truly know who they really are? And what purpose will this serve?

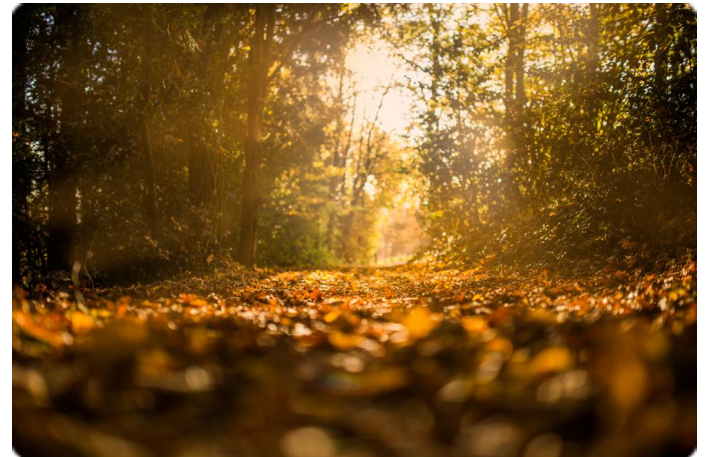
It might be useful to be aware of someone's conduct whether it is noble or not - when we are considering who to associate and whose guidance to follow - in choosing our friends wisely but beyond that we can just let it be - we don't need to judge or create people.

If we are to associate them - so if Donald Trump were to come and speak to us now - then we would just stay with what he has to say - listen to his feelings and thoughts - as he speaks - we let go of any thoughts of him being 'Donald Trump', a man, an American, a white man, a politician - all those stories are set aside and we just receive only thoughts and feelings to our heart - without any judgement of what is received - so when we are open to this - we can accept what they say with kindness and compassion - so when they have finished speaking we can then respond in the appropriate way - as they speak if it gives rise to frustration or fear we can look at this too - and wonder where that has arisen from. If such feelings are strong, we can practice loving kindness as they speak so there is no space for such feelings to arise.

How do I walk this Path to seek an end to 'my' suffering?

If one has developmental/relational trauma, how can one learn about the triple gem and 8 fold path in a way that can gradually heal this?

(Definition <https://www.bridgestorecovery.com/blog/my-wife-suffers-from-relational-trauma-our-journey-through-her-recovery/>)



Randula:

The Path is for anybody to find an end to their suffering. The Buddha didn't discriminate in terms of types of trauma and not even types of people - so he didn't discriminate in terms of education, gender, skin colour or amount of suffering one endures or type of suffering. He said all our existence is suffering. We all have our own experience of it in different ways - as there are so many different people on this planet but the Dhamma is all the same for everybody. We have to just start from where we are. We know for ourselves in our own hearts. The longer we delay it, we are just stretching our existence in not seeing clearly - causing confusion and so the suffering and pain just extends.

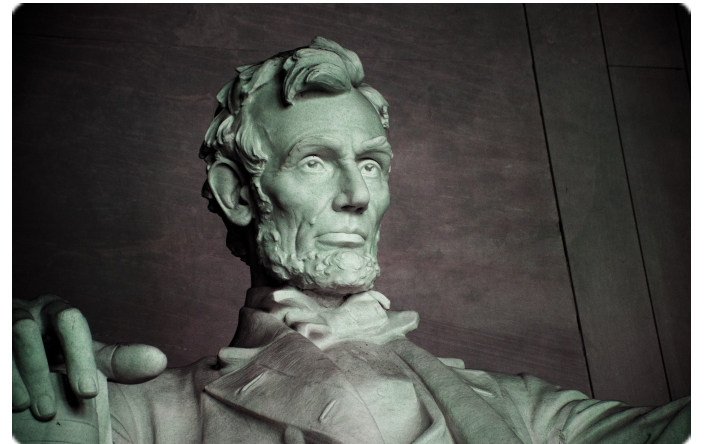
The practice always starts from having kindness and compassion to ourselves. It is only because we have kindness and compassion to ourselves do we seek a Path out of our suffering. So we can contemplate and generate this feeling in our hearts this will run parallel to the practice of the eightfold Path which is a holistic practice of Generosity, Virtue and mental cultivation - all three aspects incorporated in to our lives and reflected upon - will gradually bring joy to our lives - it will slowly shift our hearts from an existence where we see our world and experience as something very personal - to one of which the heart is able to just let happen and be at ease with no matter what the experience maybe - and we find a greater peace and contentment within our hearts which is then able to fully accept with kindness and compassion whatever the experience maybe as we understand that that is not truly who and what we are.

So to learn the practice - you are more than welcome to join us on our days of practice, listen to teachings and download books from the monastics from the Amaravati website. If you have any questions or want guidance in your practice do feel free to email us alba.amaravati@gmail.com.

Finally, this is a path of practice that becomes clearer and clearer the more you keep practicing - we just need to start it and then keep going

World Leaders - should they be virtuous? Or should we just ignore what they do?

We took the 5 precepts today. In Western society are examples of leaders not maintaining precepts in our news and social media streams constantly. Can one just ignore societies and leaders in order to find true freedom?



Randula:

The practice is about inner development - the practice is not about correcting others or society. Then we can become judgemental - creating an ego around our own practice. Also remember that whilst our hearts are still filled with defilements we cannot see clearly. It's like whilst riding a boat in a storm - instead of trying to steady our boat we try to tell those in the other boats how to fix themselves.

At the same time, we don't need to ignore them - we can be aware of them if they come in to our awareness - if we hear someone speak about it or if we read about it - and we just notice it and notice any reactions it will cause in our hearts and see how we can use it to develop our own minds.

If we are to choose a leader to rule our community then we can choose someone who we think will be a leader that we might feel will serve the community well.

Teachings on responding to hatred

Yesterday was the Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Did Buddha have any teachings about combating bullying, harassment and hate crimes?



Randula:

The Buddha always said one overcomes hatred not through hatred but through kindness and compassion.

He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me of my property. Whosoever harbour such thoughts will never be able to still their enmity.

Never indeed is hatred stilled by hatred; it will only be stilled by non-hatred – this is an eternal law.

– Dhammapada verse 4-5

This was one of the quotes President Jayawardena of Sri Lanka mentioned at the San Francisco treaty post World War II which convinced the rest of the world to forgive Japan and allow Japan to be free. If you look at other great leaders like Nelson Mandela and great sages like Jesus Christ, they all had this same approach of forgiveness towards their enemies.

The Buddha would say by harbouring anger against another one is just burning oneself. He goes on to say, even if a group of bandits were to chop us limb by limb using a two-handed saw – if we had an ounce of anger or resentment against that person we wouldn't be a follower of the Buddha – Kakacupama Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 21

So instead of harbouring anger - reflect on and see, if someone is bullying another or hating another person then they must feel weak and insecure within themselves to have to act and speak in such a way in order for them to appear superior. In so, they must be suffering a great deal within. Why should we then do the same? Through the laws of cause and effect – if we do the same, we will only bring about suffering to ourselves – we notice it don't we when we feel anger – it is not a pleasant feeling – we already suffer. When the heart is clouded with anger – we cannot see clearly – it is like looking through smoke and if our actions and words are now guided by this it will result in further chaos and suffering.

We instead develop our hearts – cultivating forgiveness, compassion and kindness – then our hearts are calmer – not agitated – then we can see clearly – our words and actions guided by this will be more skilful and beneficial.

Our differences and the Buddha's teachings

What teachings of his time might help support today's LGBTQ sangha and beyond?



Randula:

What would help any minority community is the fact that the Buddha didn't discriminate against anybody in terms of conventional divisions – he saw all humans as capable of finding an end to their suffering in their own hearts – we all have the potential as He did to discover this enlightened heart within us – as with every human – it doesn't matter who you are, whether you are white or brown or black, a man or a woman or not a man or a woman, a monk or a lay person, a bin man, or a tax-collector or a prince – anybody – everyone who puts forth effort to sincerely do the practice will find true freedom and peace within their own hearts.

My mindfulness - when will it get better?

It takes a lot of mindfulness to be able to watch your thoughts while you are eating. Sensations of taste influence your thoughts but other things come in as well. Like, you are eating one thing and you already think about the next mouthful, about desert.....how you will prepare the food differently next time....and off you go, mindfulness lost, thoughts in a rut. The runaway train under full steam. How often do we have to catch this before we really know?



Martin:

Mindfulness is like a stuttering car at first – it's very jerky. But when it becomes a habit it rolls along like when you are on the express train – you are not trying to catch it, you are on it. Or – you could see it in a different way – you see trains come and go, going here and there – but you don't get on them. You just watch them go by.

Randula:

Who knows? It is best not to know and just keep practicing. We don't know how much concentration and awareness is good enough? There is no such measurement - We just keep doing the practice and keep at it – and turn whatever we experience as something to learn from - whether it is a mind that was mindful or a mind that wasn't mindful or a mind that was concentrated or a mind that wasn't concentrated.

Those thoughts and feelings - in the way of my meditation....

I would be grateful for your advice about how to manage sudden, intrusive and distressing thoughts that sometimes occur during meditation. I try not to pay attention or react to the thoughts and manage them as I would any other thought by letting go, which has helped at times, but they still recur and then can lead on to negative feelings towards myself. I would grateful if you have any suggestions for this?



Martin:

Letting go isn't getting rid of. You need to turn your practice around and start opening up to and welcoming thoughts - try letting them in rather than trying to 'let them go'. Why are you trying to manage them? What is the problem with thoughts that recur? This is what the mind does. It delights in thoughts. The more you try to manage it the more it will rebel and give you exactly what you are trying to get away from. Letting go of what we don't like is bearing with it, not getting rid of it. You have to let it in. That is mindfulness - it is about acceptance rather than control. When you feel like controlling your thoughts - don't interfere. Just watch - and you'll realise that they gradually lose their power. You'll realise that thoughts and feelings just come and go - you were making them into a problem - but they are just what they are.

Randula:

Yes, and when they arrive be grateful for them arriving - for now you can learn to understand them - welcome them.

Who is controlling and observing the mind?

My question arises from the title for the day of True Freedom(s), as we work to understand the characters inside us, and whether we have an option to control or observe them differently in some way. How can we be truly free or zoned out of this subjective (viewing the object) reality? For example, when meditating I am invited to observe/monitor the subject of my thoughts, sensations, motor processes that all function from an 'I/Ego' or from my mind's centre cortex, therefore inhibiting true freedoms?



Martin:

Do all thoughts and sensations function from an ego or from some thing in the centre of the mind? Are you sure? Go there and investigate. Just hold up a mirror to the mind and keep looking, and don't believe anything. No logical argument, no story you like the idea of, no belief – just look until you see for yourself. Don't believe anything. And when the mind has completely given up everything – and has reached the stillness of not knowing – that's where you'll see. You'll see through the self – it won't fool you any longer. That's true freedom.

How to be truly free of sad days?

My question is that yes I have some relief when I work with a therapist, talking about what creates my happy days and then next sad, we know it changes but practicing the Dharma seems to get so much deeper into the root of the matter.

The weeds still come back despite pulling from the root what is the suggested practice for stopping the weed from appearing time after time and experiencing this True Freedom.



Randula:

It is not the sad days or happy days that are the problem – it's the tension that you have when the sad days come and you notice the relief you get when you talk to the therapist – the sad day didn't change did it? What changed for there to be a relief?

When the sad day comes, when things don't go according to how we like it – always come back to noticing how it feels – a sad feeling – see the resistance to the sad feeling, that's where the tension is – where there is a lack of ease – then look behind the mind and the heart – look inwards and question within you who is causing this tension – don't put an answer there – just wait for the answer to reveal itself – if an answer doesn't come that's okay too – it will arrive when the time is right – until then we keep watching these feelings as they arise – and we begin to understand feelings there true nature – watching the tension as it arises – we begin to understand tension/suffering/lack of ease – and keep posing the question who is causing this tension? What is causing this tension? Just stay with that curiosity – if a desire for an answer arises – notice this too – notice the tension here too – so we just keep doing this – we don't know how many times – just like a scientist just keeps doing the same experiment over and over again – until 'eureka' he finally gets the answer- but he doesn't know when he does the experiments when this would be or what the answer would be.

Running away from happiness

Sometimes I notice my mind (or my demeanour or behaviour) become uncomfortable with happiness (or a happy event) and turn away from it, and turns towards or search for sadness or unhappiness (or something negative, such as a negative memory, or a negative judgment of myself or someone else).

Why does it feel easier to be unhappy and harder to be happy sometimes? It seems easier to torture myself with uncomfortable feelings or things, such as doubt, anxiety and unhappiness and worries, and happiness seems too difficult to bear, at times. Is it because I'm worried happiness will be taken away from me at any point, and sadness or unhappiness is more reliable?

Why do I/we do that? And when it feels hard to experience happiness, is there anything helpful I could/should do?

Randula:

It is great that you have seem to have answered your own question – keep investigating this way – notice where your own true fears lie – watch it – see how it feels to be with happiness completely – notice the fear and anxiety – see how that feels – and watch it – see when sadness comes – how it feels – notice the duality – the preference for certain types of feelings – if certain feelings are more difficult to watch – let them in a little at a time – pretend they are your spiritual friends come to teach you the Dhamma – and say ‘what have you go to teach me’ – thank you for coming – welcome them with feelings of loving kindness as you would have welcomed a close friend – actively generate these and then just get to know all the feelings and just watch them like watching trains go by instead of getting on the train – if you get on the train you can’t see the train – what you see is the outside world – you don’t see the train – so always get off the train – stop running away and identifying with thoughts and feelings and just try and watch the feelings –so watch the feelings as they come, as they stay and as they go –get to know them – let them tell you what they are – by just patiently watching them with curiosity and interest – then we get to know them for what they truly are – we don’t need to know where they’ve come from or where they are heading – we just need to understand that these are all trains – coming and going – and then notice the desire to get on certain trains and run away from others – what’s that all about? If they are all just trains? All just feelings? Then look inwards and ask the question – where is this desire coming from? Again, not putting the answer in there – but just wait patiently for the answer to come to you.



What is the point of life - if we don't identify and connect with human happiness and sadness?



If the point of life isn't to be happy (in how we relate to ourselves, or others) what is it? If it's simply to be as we are, or to see things as they really are, that seems very boring and a very lonely experience. Surely as human beings, our purpose is to connect, create stories and to be happy with other people?

Randula:

What is the point of life? That means something different to many people. The Buddha advises that answers to such questions are immaterial. He has pointed out that the fundamental nature of this life is that it is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). In society as you say we are always trying to be happy - but through our own experience we see how that happiness either doesn't meet with our expectations or that happiness isn't always there so sooner or later we are met with sadness. So, this happiness in the world when we have contact with pleasant experiences, if we just depend on this to be the point of life or the ultimate happiness then we are inevitably going to be met with sadness because by nature it is impermanent and it depends on the conditions being just so.

Through this practice we also begin to see how even this happiness isn't that satisfactory in itself even when it is there. We begin to discover a happiness that is more refined. There are pleasant states of mind we begin to experience when we move away from sense pleasures and calm the mind. Yet, we notice this too is impermanent and depends on conditions. So as we then investigate our experience further and begin to understand its true nature and the cause of this 'unsatisfactoriness' we then taste the happiness - a sense of ease or bliss that goes beyond conditions being so. So, whatever the conditions this sense of ease and contentment remains. This way we can stay and connect with both happiness and sadness with equanimity - not running away from either or getting caught up in either - moving from one to the other with ease. We can then relate to any situation and be present in any situation fully experiencing and connecting with the situation - with who and what may be - this is truly connecting.

Moving beyond sense pleasure..

Whilst I maybe understood the inherent unsatisfactoriness in things intellectually (even those that are 'good' or pleasant), recently I have noticed that experiences or situations that once brought pleasure, or a 'high' no longer have the same effect or joy. Even happiness or pleasant experiences seem to have reduced in both their intensity and become more neutral. On this path, does practice, or effort to reduce or be free of suffering have an effect of pleasure and enjoyment? Is this equanimity? We seek to get beyond sense pleasure and obtain a higher happiness, but I feel in a no man's land where this hasn't been realised, yet worldly pleasure seem to have lost their effect



Randula:

When one continues in this practice, one sees how the happiness that one gets from sense pleasure is not so pleasurable as one had initially thought - one can feel numb - almost like a vegetable. This is a helpful feeling. It helps to let go of depending on sense pleasure. So one can let go of it and easily look inwards to try and understand the true nature of our experience - of consciousness, mind objects and the body. Whilst we are still enjoying sense pleasure it is difficult to calm the mind and look inwards - as the mind will continually be distracted to look out there and feel restless. You may recall one of the five hindrances to the practice is sense desire so the lessening of this is helpful.

If the feeling of 'numbness' hinders our practice so that it becomes a state of dullness - it is helpful to cultivate joy within the mind by reflecting on the goodness that comes out of the practice of this Path - generosity, virtue and meditation. If the state of numbness - hinders our practice by turning in to 'ill-will' or aversion - then it is important to also cultivate the practice of loving kindness so that this letting go is not out of an aversion but a letting go that happens naturally, once things are brought close to the heart, clearly seen for what they are.

As the heart slowly moves away from sense pleasure - it is less distracted - so it has no other interest to go wondering off - so it will naturally begin to turn inwards - so this is a time to look inwards- and observe the Khandhas (consciousness, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and body) as they arise, stay and cease in the awareness - just watch how they behave - and let them reveal their true nature - don't be afraid or cling to the understanding that arises either. Just keep observing the sense of dis-ease that comes when they are not allowed to be - and wonder where this dis-ease is coming from.

I want to practice Metta, but I can't feel it...

Could the speakers comment on numbness or absence of feeling. Quite often when attempt Metta practice, or wish to feel feelings of love and peace I feel blank, or devoid of these states. The desire to feel or be a certain way, is causing suffering, but to not feel anything or indifference / numb is also suffering. Could you say something about working through numbness, or an absence of loving feelings when trying to induce them through Metta.



Randula:

This somewhat relates to the earlier questions and answer. When this feeling of numbness can become dullness or an aversion. So one has to cultivate this sense of joy and loving kindness in the practice so that the numbness doesn't become a hindrance to our practice. Reflect on the practice that you have done during the day, in terms of being kind, generous, keeping the precepts, mindfulness and meditation practice - bring joy to the heart knowing that one is developing one's heart - to seek inner happiness - not depending on others or blaming another and bringing this goodness to the world - being harmless, kind and compassionate. This has to be balanced with bringing to mind times one hasn't been so with one's practice - where one could have been generous, kept the precepts better or been more mindful or kind - making a determination to do better the following day. Then as this joy is generated in the heart - one can then spread this joy to others.

One can also bring to mind a teacher one is fond of, or a person or a pet -where this feelings of care, kindness and compassion just comes up naturally - and get to know this feeling and be with this feeling for a while and then spread this feeling to yourself - your own experience and then to others - expanding the heart to include those experiences or people where one finds it more difficult to accept or be kind or compassionate towards.

Some people use words to guide these feelings but what's more important as you have pointed out is the generation of this feeling.

During insight meditation or mindfulness practice we can then use this feeling when we are investigating unpleasant thoughts or feelings that we would normally feel averse to so we can then bring them closer to our hearts and be with them and begin to understand them.

Words...when they get in the way...

During his talk Martin differentiated between the "mind" and "yourself".

Would he please help us to understand the difference between the 2

ie to expound on the meaning of each word?



Martin:

I don't think defining these words will help. It might just add to your confusion. Perhaps you identify a self (whatever that is) with your experience of mind (whatever that is) - but see them as two different things. Or perhaps you feel like the mind and the self are the same. Or is it possible that the self is a mind created idea - in which case the self is no more than a mental creation. If that is the case - the self depends on the mind but the mind doesn't depend on the self. But even if the self is just a mental creation - it still feels like 'I am'?

It can all seem very confusing - but the Buddha simplified it all. He doesn't try to prove the self exists or doesn't exist - he just showed that it is constantly changing. We are not the same 'self' from one moment to the next. It's like a bar of soap - you can't hold onto it. But you can let go of it. And that's where freedom lies - and you can realise it.

We don't need to define what or where the self is in order to let it go. You can take a look at the Buddha's teachings on the 5 aggregates - this is how he taught that there is no abiding self in the mind (and the body).