

Reconsidering Mindfulness IV
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Good evening, bodhisattvas.

Just a few more words on mindfulness tonight. To finish I want to talk about aspects of mindfulness that are dear to me. When you look at the Sanskrit and Chinese words translated as mindfulness into English, in both there is a strong quality of remembering or recollection. That is in some ways the first meanings of those words. How is it that mindfulness is fundamentally a remembering or recollecting, which is a word I love because of the sense of gathering something back together that has been dispersed? For those of you familiar with the *Guanyin Sutra of Endless Life*, in the lines “Morning’s thought is Kanzeon / Evening’s thought is Kanzeon,” that word ‘thought’ is the Chinese word *nian*, which is sometimes translated as mindfulness. Literally (which would be too bulky to say as a chant) it is something like, “In the morning I recollect Kanzeon; in the evening I recollect Kanzeon.” That’s the quality we’re talking about with mindfulness.

There’s a warmth in remembering that might be brought into our relationship to mindfulness, if we take our cue from the Chinese and call it “heart-mindfulness”; the same word in Chinese means both heart and mind. There is a warmth that comes into the activity : you’ve got something careful going on in mindfulness, something focused and attentive; but in bringing in recollection and remembrance you’ve got something warm going on as well. Let’s just play with ‘heart-mindfulness’ for tonight and see how that feels. How does the quality of the practice change if we think of it as heart-mindfulness, when we add recollecting to focused attention?

The obvious question is, what is it that we’re remembering? Last time I spoke of mindfulness as an attentiveness to the reality of the other. We spoke about that as, in a sense, the moral dimension of mindfulness : one of the things that mindfulness does is impress upon us the absolute reality of all the others in the world, and that they’re as real as we are. If we truly take that in, it has a certain moral claim on us. That informs the way we treat others, the kinds of relationships we have, the things we do and don’t do, as a result of a deep acceptance

of the reality of others. This attentiveness to the reality of others is called, in the traditional Chinese literature, an attentiveness to the wondrousness of things.

The reality, particularity, and diversity of things is so perfect to be talking about at our first meeting after the beginning of spring. Moving from winter to spring, we move from the wisdom of equality to the wisdom of differentiation, where from that stripping down, that place where the snow covers everything and makes it equal in some way, we've got the glorious profusion of spring, the differentiations and particularities and beauties of that. This is what was called the wondrous quality of things : it is wondrous that things exist; it is wondrous that things rise and abide a while and fall away again. The attentiveness to reality in the kind of mindfulness we've been talking about is an attentiveness to the wondrous quality of things, the fact that they exist in all their multiplicity and diversity.

If one gate in our heart leads into the wondrousness of things, the other gate leads into the mysteriousness of things. Here we're talking about an attentiveness to the dreamlike and vast quality of everything. When we are attentive to the dreamlike and vast quality of everything, when that is a part of our mindfulness as well, we are being attentive to what the old texts called the mysterious nature of things. Everything is wondrous in that it exists, and everything is mysterious in how vast and dreamlike it is.

Here's a flavor of the remembering that's part of mindfulness. It's a bit from Zhaozhou : "It's as though you run into a word you don't know the meaning of yet, but you recognize the handwriting." When we talk about attentiveness to the mysterious quality of things, we're talking about recognizing the handwriting in everything —in every being, in every event, in everything we encounter. We don't know the meaning yet. We may never know the meaning. It's too early to settle on the meaning. But we can recognize the handwriting. We can say in each encounter, *I know you. We have a relationship as ancient and interpermeated as the world itself. We have always known each other.* That's recognizing the handwriting.

The paradox of that kind of recognition is that it happens in the territory of what we don't know. It is a remembering that occurs within not-knowing. As soon as I recognize the immensity of our previous acquaintanceship, as soon as I recognize how long and deep and wide our acquaintance is, it becomes impossible for me to imagine that I can grasp everything about you. How can I possibly, if I am mindful of this vast interpermeation that has gone on since the beginning of time?

I am mindful that I cannot fully grasp you. I am mindful that I cannot bring you completely into the spotlight of my conscious awareness, that there are vast continents in you that I don't know, and yet I trust in some fundamental way — because I recognize the handwriting, because I recognize the eternal process of interpermeation that has caused the relationship to exist and persist.

If we're engaged in a practice like heart-mindfulness that involves focus, attention, and being conscious of things, it's important that we preemptively antidote the difficulties that might arise from that kind of focus on consciousness and awareness. We preempt the pitfalls of that by remembering always what we don't know, recollecting always what will be impossible for us to grasp, and that that is the very nature of things. That's not something missing or something to fix, but is a fundamental quality of the nature of our relationship with things.

You may remember the Amichai poem about the woman writing the note in the street and leaving it there. In that poem Amichai says that he didn't see her face or what she wrote or the person who would receive her note. There is at once an acknowledgment of what we can't know, yet we have no feeling of lack, no feeling of something missing. The moment is perfect in and of itself, including what is not known. It's important to remember that in our practice of heart-mindfulness. Then we acknowledge that our mindfulness can never fully reveal a situation to us. Now that might sound weird, because isn't the whole point to become aware of things and to have an insight and clarity about them? Yes, it's a way of bringing us *closer* to what is real, of allowing us to be more intimate with what is real. But we can never fully possess anything, and that's an important part of the moral dimension of mindfulness from this vast aspect. We cannot ever fully grasp or possess anything, and that's probably *good*.

Another way of saying this is that we are not trying to awaken *out* of the dream of life, wake up *from* the dream of life; we're not trying to grasp it, get it, make it conscious, know it, be clear about everything. We are trying over and over again to awaken *into* the dream of life, to become aware in the way that it's possible to become aware in a dream. Mindfulness is one of the ways we wake up in the dream.

From this perspective, mindfulness is walking barefoot to feel the real contours of the land under our feet. Another of my favorite images is from the Roman festival of Vestalia, when the women would walk through the streets of Rome barefoot. The sense was that they were

walking on the older contours of the land, on the meadows and marshes and hills underneath the paving stones. That's the sense of mindfulness as waking up in the dream : we walk barefoot, we feel those older contours underneath the paving stones. We're aware of the *rio abajo rio*, the river under the river, the river of dreaming that's going on all the time underneath the paving stones and everything else. If we stop to think about mindfulness as walking on those contours of the land, that is an important expansion of how we usually imagine it.

At any moment in the middle of a shopping mall or waking up from a dream at three o'clock in the morning, we become aware right now, right here in this room, maybe in this very moment, that eternity is always passing through. Eternity is always leaving its footprints, its traces, the traces of its body as it moves through every moment — its soft impression on the air, on our hearts. Perhaps if we think of heart-mindfulness in this way, then part of it is to be aware of those traces of the vastness, those soft impressions; that's a part of the moment we're waking up in, the moment of which we're aware. The traces of emptiness in the world, the traces of emptiness in our own thoughts, the ways that the vastness impresses itself on our own feelings, our own thoughts, our own stories. Part of mindfulness is being attuned to that, looking out for that, thinking that's an important part of what's happening, too.

If we think of looking in these two directions with the eyes of the dream body, the eyes attuned to seeing the dreamlike nature of things and the traces of the vastness all around us, we're looking with fresh eyes, unhabitual eyes. We're looking with our dream eyes from our dream body and the dream body of everything else. If we have one eye turned toward the things of the phenomenal world with a just and loving gaze, in Simone Weil's beautiful formulation, what is the eye we turn toward the vastness and toward the vast aspect of everything, toward the traces of emptiness in everything?

That just and loving gaze delights in the particularity and the vividness of things. The mindful eye turned toward the vastness is the eye that has from time to time seen the world completely fall away and return, but return as a dream – and knows that the dream is beautiful. Mindfulness with that eye notices how everything is smudgy around the edges, that things aren't as solid, real, and inevitable as we often take them to be. They are particular and vivid, and at the same time, they're smudgy. Everything, even our own thoughts and feelings, are like a dream in exactly that way.

In the recent koan retreat we spoke of the *Lankavatara Sutra*, an old Mahayana text. The *Lankavatara Sutra* explains a relationship between what is eternal or continuous, and that which arises in the shape of a particular life, being, mountain, or freeway. What is the relationship between what is continuous and what rises and falls for a while out of it? The sutra used the language of classical Indian music to say that what is continuous, which is the tendency toward awakening in the universe, is that inherent buddha nature not yet fully expressed but here in potential. That's the great engine of the universe. The sutra called it music, in just the way we mean music. Then, out of that music arises individual melodies — the melody of each human life, the melody of every other kind of life that manifests in the world. Those melodies arise for a while and are sung, and fall back into that continuity.

One way to think about the things of which we are attempting to be mindful is that each of them is a melody that the music of the universe is singing in its momentum towards the awakening of the universe : *How about this one? I wonder if this will work? What does that sound like?* From that perspective, which is rooted deeply in Mahayana thought, our task then becomes to discover what we can about the melody that is singing each of us, and to join in. As people were saying in the retreat, to harmonize, to find ways to play and move with it. That is the nature of our lives, as the continuous asks through us, *What about this as a movement toward awakening? What about this?* I think all of us can feel that some attempts seem a bit further on than others, seem to move more in the direction of the expression of awakening, but apparently all the attempts are necessary. It's part of our mindfulness to understand that, too; that's the vast aspect of focused attention.

I would love to do something experiential with you for a moment. Just sit as you are, and bring into your thoughts the idea of being mindful as in focused attention or presence. Get the feeling of that. Then, at some point, bring in the idea of being heart-mindful : bring in the sense of recollection, of the mysterious nature of everything, the things we can't grasp, the things we'll never know, and that are complete already. Okay? So be mindful, and then be heart-mindful. I'd love to hear the differences you experience in doing that.

[meditation]

What was that like? Would anybody like to speak to that experience?

Q1 : What came to me was the passage from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I think he's sitting on the beach, but he starts to situate himself in the universe and goes through different areas. Do you know the passage? I was thinking *what would that be like?* So I started here, and then I went out to the outside, and then I went to the neighborhood, and then I went to the state, and then I went as far as the United States. That might be too literal, but it was an interesting investigation.

JIS : So there's a sense that being mindful here and now includes all of that, at least as possibility.

Q2 : There's something about mindfulness as being laser-like, which might be more of the concentration part. But there's something about how mindfulness feels very much about me and how I'm relating to the sensory stuff. In heart-mindfulness I felt my peripheral vision got broader and broader. It was more inclusive. It was more of a listening presence. It was less of an assessment.

Q3 : When I first knew you were going to talk about mindfulness, I started thinking about my son and how much I love him. I got really emotional. I felt intense warmth and joy for my kid, and a tear came out of my eye! What the heck is going on? But while I was sitting in the second part, I decided to smile more, have a bigger smile ... To me it is a complete miracle — what happens when you smile — the chemical bath of that.

Q4 : Maybe I was influenced by how you spoke about music. When thinking about heart-mindfulness I closed my eyes my mind started going “ding! ding!” And “boom! boom!” went the heart. You know, the breath connects the two. Ding! Ding! Boom! Boom! Ding ding ding! And the breath was the passage between the two. It was very much right here. It wasn't out there anywhere. I was just happy right here.

Q 5: When I first closed my eyes I got a reverse after-image where figures were very bright with a dark background. And, I thought, *that's beautiful*. Then I heard the water being poured and the breath pulsing of people around me, and that seemed like heart-mindfulness,

because it seemed so beautiful to me. Then I went into things that didn't seem to have quite that beauty. Maybe just mindfulness.

JIS : Can you talk about that shift? What was the difference there?

Q5 : I didn't feel as though I was controlling it, but it was just that the first three elements were so gorgeous to me. Then after that, I didn't have that feeling about what I was experiencing, I had more of a *this is just happening right here*. It was just neutral. I don't know why it shifted for me.

JIS : So that might be an interesting inquiry. What was that shift? What happened? Take that with you and consider : what happened in that moment?

Q5 : It went a little flat in a way, where what was coming up was coming up, but I didn't have any particular love or dislike; whereas with the other, I really felt love.

Q7 : So are we breaking down Simone Weil's just and loving gaze? Is the 'just' one element and the 'loving' the mysterious mindfulness? That's how it felt to me. I couldn't exactly do the exercise because I felt myself in love with that entry into the mysterious. I'd rather not know.

JIS : You'd rather not know. That's a big shift. Not just, I can *bear* not knowing, but I'd rather not know, rather not try to know.

Q7 : But not to the exclusion of curiosity, or of anything.

JIS : No, that's not a statement of denial, it's a statement of not needing to possess.

Q8 : I felt an acceptance, and this phrase popped into my mind that I read recently : something like, *regret is just the ego's way of tricking you into not accepting reality*. I thought *how heart-centered*.

Q9 : I'm curious about the difference between not wanting to know and denial. Because there's still a curiosity, as you were saying, and there isn't with denial, because it's like a shut-down. There's a block there. So is that the difference? It's coming from a different place?

JIS : I think the not-knowing we're talking about is actually the acceptance of something, which is : *I'm not going to be able to wrap my conscious mind around this, define it, stick a label on it, and put it in a drawer*. The true nature of this conversation is : there's what we can learn and what

can be made manifest and brought into consciousness; and, then there's all the stuff around it that cannot be grasped in that way. The shift we're talking about is actually not pushing that away but bringing that in. I take that, too. I take the dark part of the sense of what can't be seen. So it's a greater inclusiveness, rather than pushing anything away. Then in the territory of what we can learn, what can happen, there's all the curiosity in the world, all the interest in the world.

Thank you.