

Satipaṭṭhāna (37) Reactive Life, Emergent Life

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We are continuing with the topic of the second foundation of mindfulness. The practice taught in the second foundation is that of knowing – *pajānāti*. How to know is described as just knowing the simplicity of the experience itself.

If there is pleasure, know it as pleasure. If there is pain – unpleasantness – know it as unpleasantness. If there is neither, know it that way. As we go through the other foundations, we will see this simplicity. Just know whatever is arising; know what is there. Know it for itself, without adding anything to it – the judgments or the preferences we might have. Just to know.

This knowing is a very significant act. Different people know in different ways. Some people are more cognitive. Other people are more somatic – knowing and experiencing.

Whatever way you have of knowing, it allows each thing to be itself, without agendas, preferences, or commentary. Just to know, as if you are allowing a flower or a tree to just grow and be there. Just look at the tree; enjoy it; appreciate it. You do not say, “Well, that branch is too crooked.” It is just a tree, and you allow it to be a tree.

It is the same for whatever happens to us inside. These are all natural phenomena. Just see it as that of the moment. But the purpose of knowing is not only to know something. The purpose is also to discover a place in the mind that can be that simple.

Sometimes we are accustomed, almost habitually, to be reactive to input – our thoughts and whatever is going on. We are searching for how to be safe in every situation, what we can get, and how it can benefit us. We are searching for how it relates to me, myself, and mine – my self-concept. The constant searching, wanting, getting, making, planning, and reviewing is part of the reactive mind we live in.

Part of the wonderfulness of knowing is that we put to rest that way of being. We are emphasizing and inhabiting a different way of being in the world: just to know. It can create a tremendous amount of calm and peace because we are putting energy into knowing rather than reactivity.

With this allowing – letting things be – knowing begins to have qualities of spaciousness, peacefulness, stillness, and acceptance. I like to think of these qualities as beginning to make room for things. They make room for what inside of us is shy or easily eclipsed by what is loud. What oftentimes can be loud is desire, greed, fear, aversion, resentment, and envy.

We have all these afflictive emotions, which I think of as being surface phenomena. They are on the surface because they are reactive to the input we get from outside, but also the input provided by the mind. The mind has imaginings, thoughts, and memories that it drums up. And then there are reactions to those. Because the afflictive emotions have to do with our reaction to input, they are more surfacy.

But these surface emotions are louder. Maybe on the surface, they cover over. The hindrances cover over the wisdom that is inside. So what is quieter, maybe shyer in a sense, gets eclipsed by our surface emotions – the

reactivity. What is not reactive is that which exists for us independent of the input and reactivity.

Imagine, for example, that you cut your finger while putting manure in the garden. There is dirt and manure on your finger, but you keep working. You go to the compost pile. You clean out the outhouse. All the while, you do not take care of your finger. And so it festers and gets infected.

But, if you can stop all the doing and clean the cut well, cover and protect it, something can emerge from your whole physiological system to heal it. Lots of things get marshaled together inside you to heal the cut. It is not a simple phenomenon. It is amazing how complicated it is.

So, in the same way, if we can stop adding input from the outside and clean ourselves – clear out all the reactivity – and keep it clean, this allows a beautiful, complex inner world to emerge and take care of things. It is not like nothing is there within us. We have a rich heart, a rich inner life. Given a chance, it will bubble up and begin to do the work of healing and liberating.

In the second foundation of mindfulness, the Buddha says – I am interpreting now – first, know what is pleasant as pleasant, know what is unpleasant as unpleasant, and know what is neither pleasant nor

unpleasant as neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Just learn to make those distinctions. Learn to recognize this.

Once you have learned to recognize this, it allows you to get more settled. You know that which is pleasant because it belongs to the reactive world. You also know that which is pleasant because it belongs to another place that is nonreactive – the emergent world from deep inside.

When some people sit down and focus on their body and breathing, they are self-oriented. They focus on the sensual world. This sensual world responds to input – temperature, comfort, and physical sensations. It can be wonderful and profound to do that. But there is another world within that does not require input. In fact, it seems that the less input we have or the more the ground is cleared, the more something can grow there.

A farmer clears the field so the plants can grow. So what can grow within us when we do not have input – when we are quiet, focused, and calm? In Buddhism, this is primarily associated with meditation practice, but it does not have to be there. Maybe this association is due to our strong meditation tradition.

As we meditate and become calmer, more settled, and more concentrated, that which is quieter, nonreactive,

and emergent within us can begin to flow and move through us. At some point, we want to be able to recognize that this is happening. For the Buddha, this was called the pleasure that is not of the flesh and the unpleasantness that is not of the flesh. I refer to these qualities as worldly or spiritual. Some people say physical or spiritual. One translator uses worldly or unworldly, which reminds me of a location that is not even here – perhaps, the astral field.

This is valuable as we move along the path of insight, the path of mindfulness. It is something we begin to be attuned to. Usually, it is eclipsed by or hidden in our reactive, preoccupied minds. If we are always trying to navigate and negotiate the reactive mind – the mind that is all about input and rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic to make everything just right – we are missing the opportunity to become aware of these deeper wellsprings.

These deeper wellsprings become the reference point for the path of liberation described in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. These deeper wellsprings of the emergent, the spiritual, the non-sensual (non-sensual in that the sense doors are not impacted by input from the outside). This then creates a reference point for the last two foundations of mindfulness.

We have a switch now in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It is a pivot from mindfulness of the body – the physical, sensual body, which has a lot to do with input. For example, dancing – a beautiful, sensual activity – provides input. I do not want to say that the sensual is somehow less than, but it is different from this deeper, more spiritual place.

Here, we have a switch in the *satipaṭṭhāna* from that which is of the body – the physical sensuality – to focusing on something that some might call the mind, *citta*, which is the whole inner landscape. It is deeper, more intimate, and helpful for appreciating the path to freedom from suffering.

I hope this discussion about the distinction between of the flesh and not of the flesh gives you enough ideas so that you can search for your own terminology and way of finding something inside that is not dependent on the conditions of your ordinary body or the world. This belongs to the heart, the spiritual center, the *citta*, the mind – the wellsprings within us, where deep reservoirs of peace and happiness can be found.

In the next talk, we will begin the third foundation – mindfulness of *citta*, the mind state, or the inner life.