**The Noble Eightfold Path: Right Mindfulness***“Practicing mindfulness makes quarreling with the world seem ridiculous.”*Bhante Gunaratana

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Mindfulness in our practice is foundational in particular because our practice is the practice of meditation on the cushion AND throughout the rest of the day and night.

Mindfulness is paying attention from moment to moment to what is.   
Dogen says “…to see things as they truly are…”  
mindfulness teaches us to temporaility suspend all concepts, images, value judgments, mental comments, opinions, and interpretations.  
“… without expectations or judgements…”  
  
Being here now.   
Thich Nhat Han: patience isn’t about “endurance til” but it is rather about being fully in the moment, fully aware, fully present.

And that “fully” puts me in mind of **Dogen’s three minds, particularly the   
magnanimous mind** – the boundless mind – the big mind: p.1.  
 -accepting everything as it is, without limitations of any kind  
**Accepting all things**, making space for all things, is an important aspect of Right Mindfulness.

The other two minds that Dogen writes of in the *Instructions to the Chief Cook*

Include the parental mind  
 = if everything I meet is part of my life then it is only natural that I take great   
 care with whatever I encounter; I sympathize and empathize with everything –   
 not for my own sake but for others.  
 ***In this triple world, all is my domain;  
 The living beings in it are all my children.***

The Lotus Sutra  
**Taking care** is an important aspect of Right Mindfulness.

-joyful mind  
 - a person is joyful when she is able to live her life according to Buddhadharma,

when she sees her life as the unfolding of the Dharma. If everything I do

supports her wish to become a Bodhisattva I become joyful. When the vow to

live an awakened life, to save all beings, fills my life and informs whatever I

do, I have a joyful mind.  
Congruency – constancy – is an important aspect of Right Mindfulness.

### Mindfulness is being aware of what our minds are doing. Mindfulness is being aware of what our minds are doing. Bhante Gunaratana tells this story:

### *Once there was a divine being who wanted to hide and important secret – the secret of happiness. He thought first of hiding the secret at the bottom of the sea. But then he said to himself, “no, I cannot hide my secret there. Human beings are very clever. One day they will find it.” Next he thought of hiding the secret in a cave. But he rejected this idea as well. May people visit caves. No, no, people will find the secret there as well.”*

### *Then he thought of hiding the secret on the highest mountain. But then he thought, “people are so curious these days. One day someone will climb the mountain and discover it.”*

### *At last he devised the perfect solution, “Ah! I know the place where no one will ever look. I’ll hide my secret in the human mind.”* This is why meditation is essential to our practice. And this is why we teach that meditation doesn’t only happen on our cushions for a 30 minute period. Our meditation practice is about – as Rev. Master Daizui calls it – “minute by minute meditation”. This is another way of saying “mindfulness”, but can also be called

“working meditation”, or “every-minute Zen”. Different schools of Buddhism have various ways of doing this; what follows is the way of our tradition. The method is incredibly simple and requires nothing more than the willingness to do it with some persistence, yet it forms a powerful aspect of the Eightfold Path. It can be summarized in five steps:

1. Do one thing at a time.
2. Pay full attention to what you are doing.
3. When your mind wanders to something else, bring it back.
4. Repeat step number three a few hundred thousand times.
5. And, when your mind keeps wandering to the same thing over and over, stop for a minute and pay attention to the “distraction”: maybe it is trying to tell you something.

The reason for the first two steps is not hard to see: if we accept that truth is one and undivided, then it can only be realized by a mind which is itself unified and aware. Such one-pointedness and mindfulness are impossible when you are doing two things at once.   
  
Thus, when you practice mindfulness you refrain from eating breakfast, talking to your spouse, and watching the morning news at the same time. Planning your ten o’clock meeting while you drive to work is out; so is thinking about your vacation while you wash the dishes, worrying about your finances while you plant the garden, and even reading a magazine while you’re on the toilet.

For most people there are many things which we could (or worse yet, should) be doing at any given time, and the temptation to do more than one is great. A person in this situation might find it helpful to add a “step zero” before the first of the five steps. Step zero is to decide what is the single most important thing to be doing at this moment. Then, do it.

Part of mindfulness - of not doing one thing at a time is paying attention to what we are doing. This attention is the same as that used in formal sitting meditation. One does not exclude anything from mind: thoughts, perceptions, emotions, intuitions, etc. Yet whenever one becomes aware of having become enmeshed in, or engaged by, any of these things, one brings one’s mind back to focus on the activity at hand. It is very important to understand this step.   
  
Mindfulness training is not the focusing of the concentration upon one object to the exclusion of all other things. That would be to create a duality, to divide up the world. It would also be dangerous: people who exclude things from awareness tend to have accidents. So, exclude nothing from awareness, but when you realize that you have become distracted, then return your attention gently to the present activity. This is repeated hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times a day. In the beginning, it is quite normal for the mind to wander off again almost immediately, and there is a certain amount of trial and error involved in learning how to bring back the attention with gentleness and persistence.

**Take distractions seriously**The first four steps are not really hard to understand; with them it is mostly a matter of whether one chooses to practice mindfulness or not. Step five, however, requires more exploration. Occasionally a thought, feeling, etc. will just not leave you alone. No matter how many times you bring your mind back to the matter at hand, this particular thought keeps insisting itself upon your consciousness. Sometimes there is a good reason for this: the thought or feeling is trying to tell you something. In this circumstance, try to stop what you are doing and take that “distraction” seriously for a moment. In other words, make thinking about that topic the “one thing you are doing”. The most common causes for persistent thoughts or feelings are that there is something else that you could be doing which is more urgent than what you were working on at the time, that there is something left unfinished or wrong or dangerous in what you are doing, or that there is a nice ripe insight waiting to come into your awareness if given the chance. If none of these things seem to be the case, and there does not appear to be anything further to be learned from examining the persistent thought, then it may well be simply a distraction, an old habit of mind that is hard to change, and the thing to do is to resume what you were doing before and again give it your full attention.

If the “distraction” is indeed telling you something, then this often means that it is necessary to put aside the first activity and start doing the more important thing which has been pointed out to you. This can also occur without a “distraction”: it simply becomes obvious at some point that something else is what needs to be done. This ability to switch one’s attention from one activity to another readily and without attachment does not come easily for most of us. With practice, it can be cultivated, and it is an important aspect of mindfulness. This aspect of the Eightfold Path can be likened to driving a car on an icy road: keep a gentle hand on the wheel, keep your eyes on the road (but don’t ignore your peripheral vision), and when you see another car skidding towards you, change course smoothly and don’t insist on the right of way!

#### ****Does this actually work in – and with - our contemporary “wired” lifestyle?****

There are two common difficulties with mindfulness training. The first is the fear that “I’ll never get my work done if I only do one thing at a time.” This is a reasonable concern; fortunately however, it is unfounded. What actually happens for most people (after the first few days of awkwardness) is that they find that they can actually do more and better work by doing one thing at a time, attentively. This may be because the advantage in time saved when one does several things at once is more than compensated for by the increased efficiency (and decreased tension) that results from the mindful approach.

The second problem is that practicing mindfulness is a lot of work and it interferes with customary social interactions. This is true, and it is for these reasons that one may not wish to attempt to do it all the time. Even in Zen monasteries a certain rest from this practice is built into the schedule, and the monks sometimes enjoy social conversation while drinking tea or eating an informal meal. So perhaps sometimes you may want to eat breakfast and talk to your spouse after all. Go ahead, and enjoy the meal together, but you’ll probably enjoy it more if you don’t also watch television at the same time.

A useful approach to mindfulness training, therefore, is to do one thing at a time — and pay attention to it — as much as it seems wise to do so, bring your mind back gently each time it wanders, but don’t be so strict with yourself that you make the practice unpalatable. Done in this way, the exercise of mindfulness is refreshing, liberating, and energizing. It acts to deepen meditation, increase awareness, promote all-acceptance, and reduce attachment. It tends towards right understanding and makes the reasons for practicing right action, speech, and livelihood more obvious. Together with formal sitting meditation, it can make a significant contribution to one’s training within the Eightfold Path.

The Buddha taught The Four Foundations of Mindfulness in the ***Maha-Satipatthana Sutta***. These “mindfulnesses” are certainly worth exploring in greater depth, but I suggest that we really do address them when we practice “Every-minute-Zen”.  
-Mindfulness of the body:  
 breath, posture, parts of the body (including itches and twitches)  
-Mindfulness of feelings  
-Mindfulness of the mind  
-Mindfulness of mental objects.  
  
One final story that gives us insight into mindfulness also comes from the Buddha: *Like balancing a pot of oil on one's head "Suppose, monks, that a large crowd of people comes thronging together, saying, 'The beauty queen! The beauty queen!' And suppose that the beauty queen is highly accomplished at singing & dancing, so that an even greater crowd comes thronging, saying, 'The beauty queen is singing! The beauty queen is dancing!' Then a man comes along, desiring life & shrinking from death, desiring pleasure & abhorring pain. They say to him, 'Now look here, mister. You must take this bowl filled to the brim with oil and carry it on your head in between the great crowd & the beauty queen. A man with a raised sword will follow right behind you, and wherever you spill even a drop of* oil, right there will he cut off your head.' Now what do you think, monks: Will that man, not paying attention to the bowl of oil, let himself get distracted outside?"

"No, lord."

"I have given you this parable to convey a meaning. The meaning is this: The bowl filled to the brim with oil stands for mindfulness immersed in the body. Thus you should train yourselves: 'We will develop mindfulness immersed in the body. We will pursue it, hand it the reins and take it as a basis, give it a grounding, steady it, consolidate it, and undertake it well.' That is how you should train yourselves."   
  
In the coming week please consider how we would translate this story into our contemporary life?