

The Eightfold Noble Path - Right Mindfulness (lightly edited transcript)
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So we've been in the middle of talking about the Eightfold Noble Path and we discussed how they fall under three categories--the higher training in ethics, higher training in concentration, higher training in wisdom. We did the three that fall under the higher training in ethics: Right Speech, Right Livelihood and Right Action. Being mindful of these and how they function in our lives, help us put our life in order, help us live some kind of life in which we can be happy this lifetime, avoid conflict with people and create good karma for future lifetimes, and also enrich the mind with positive potential that we can dedicate to Buddhahood. It's a very good thing if we do those three. We'll find a real change in our mind and a change in our life and our relationships with other people.

So before we engage in any high practices, it's very good to put our basic daily life in shape by practicing the right or brought-to-fruit speech and action and livelihood.

Higher Training in Concentration: Mindfulness and Concentration

Today we're going to talk about the ones that are under the higher training in concentration: mindfulness and concentration. (Right Effort can go either under the higher training in concentration or the higher training in wisdom.)

Right Mindfulness

Now, mindfulness is a real interesting thing because how it's described is quite different in different situations. We are going to talk about mindfulness and the 4 close placements of mindfulness; and they're discussed differently in different traditions. I'm going to predominantly approach it from the Theravada approach. And I might sprinkle in a little of the Mahayana approach as well.

Mindfulness is like a bare attention to or a bare observation of what is going on, and we develop the four close placements of mindfulness. They're called "close placements" because we think about them a long time, we familiarize ourselves with them a long time. Our mind is closely placed on them. We become extremely mindful of these four. And so these four close placements of mindfulness are: mindfulness of the *body*, of the *feelings*, of the *mind* and then of *phenomena or mental events*.

Mindfulness of the Body

Mindfulness of the body is being aware of what the body is doing. What's happening in the body, the sensations in the body. So if you're meditating on this, you might start just with the breathing meditation. You're placing the mind on the body, on the breath, the process of the breath and what the body is doing. Some teachers teach a kind of scanning meditation. You scan various parts of the body and you're aware of all the different sensations. Maybe going from the head down, back up again, being aware of the different sensations in the different parts of the body. And this is practiced not only when you're seated in formal meditation but also as you're walking around. So that when you're walking, you know you're walking. When you're running, you know you're running. When you're standing, you know

you're standing. So the mindfulness is just being completely conscious, completely aware of what your body is doing in that present moment.

We're often quite spaced out regarding our body. And especially sometimes with our body language. Sometimes we aren't aware at all of how we're sitting until other people say, "Boy, as I was talking to you, you seemed really kind of closed down". We didn't say anything. We didn't do anything. But if we were aware, we might have realized we were sitting like this, our arms protecting ourselves. Or we're sitting there a little nervous. But we're not aware of it. How many times have you picked something up and played with it while you're talking, or you're shaking your foot as you're talking. So often we're totally spaced out just in the simple matter of what's going on with our body. What our body language is conveying to other people. How we're standing. How we lie down. What's going on in our body as we're lying down. What are the sensations? What's the position?

This is really bringing us back to the present moment in terms of what our body is doing, so that we know what it's doing.

And so similarly in your meditation sometimes you pay attention to body sensations. Your knee hurts. Instead of instantaneously moving it, you watch it a little bit. And you separate the sensation from the idea of: "This hurts and I don't like it" and "Why are they making me sit here?" So just be aware of the sensation. Something itches – be aware of the sensation. Your sunburn is burning – be aware of the sensation.

It's just a bare awareness of the sensation, of the body position, of the body language. This is something we can do in meditation. It's also something that is quite effective and quite important when we're not in meditation. And I think as we become aware of this, we also get a lot of information about ourselves and the messages we give to other people through the way we hold our body and the way we use hand gestures and the way we move our head. All these different things. We communicate a lot but sometimes we're spaced out.

Mindfulness of the Feelings

Feeling is another example of an English word that doesn't match the Tibetan meaning or the Buddhist meaning. Because when we hear "feeling", we think of things like "I feel anger" or "I feel joy" or something like that. Here we're not talking about "feelings" in the sense of emotions. That's falling into the next category. Here we're talking about "feeling" in the sense of pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neutral feeling. And all of our feelings, both physical feelings and mental feelings, fall under these three categories.

You might have a pleasant physical feeling when you're lying in the sun, or an unpleasant physical feeling when you've lied there too long, or a neutral feeling when you've fallen asleep or if you're not paying attention to it. You might have pleasant mental feelings when you think about somebody you really like, or unpleasant ones when you think about somebody you don't like, or neutral ones where you're just kind of staring at the highway.

Pleasant Feelings

Mindfulness of feelings is being aware of what the feeling is. So when you feel something pleasant, you're aware of it. When you feel something unpleasant, you're aware of it. Again so often we're totally spaced out just about this very raw data of what our feelings are. And when we aren't aware, it gets us into a lot of jams. Because sometimes we have a pleasant feeling and we're not aware that we have a pleasant feeling. So what happens is our attachment jumps in and sticks on to the pleasant feeling. It says "This feels good. I want more". And then we all know what happens as soon as attachment gets in. As soon as "I want more" comes, we're going to get more! And it doesn't really matter what we have to do to get it (as long as we don't look too impolite).

So attachment arises in response to pleasant feelings when we're not aware of the pleasant feelings. Because it's so easy when you just have a pleasant feeling, to immediately cling to it. We want more, we want it to continue. Or if we don't have it, we want it to come back. Whereas if we're really aware of the pleasant feeling when it's happening, then we're just aware that it's there. We're able to be with it and leave it at that instead of the mind immediately jumping to the future and grasping on. So you might try that the next time you have a bowl of ice cream or frozen yogurt – non-fat kind for the dieters [laughter]. When you eat it, just taste it. See if it's pleasant. See if it's unpleasant. See if it's neutral.

And see if you can just let the pleasant sensation be, without the mind immediately saying: "I want more. Where is the next spoonful?" Just experience the pleasant sensation and let it be.

Unpleasant Feelings

Similarly when we have unpleasant sensations. When we aren't mindful of those, then what happens? Anger: "I don't like it! I have aversion to it. I want to make it go away." So again when we aren't aware of the unpleasant sensation, the anger comes up very, very quickly after that. And you can see that sometimes when you're talking to somebody. Or maybe when you hear a sound, maybe some music. That might be a better example. You hear a sound or music or something and it sounds unpleasant, but instead of just acknowledging: "Yes, that is an unpleasant feeling" – if we don't do that, then what happens is – the mind jumps in and says: "That's unpleasant and I don't like it. How come they're playing that kind of music so loud anyway? Why don't they be quiet?!"

So the key here is if there is an unpleasant sensation, like you're hearing something unpleasant, just to be there with the unpleasant sensation, just to feel what it feels like without going on to the next step of getting angry.

Indifferent Feelings

Similarly with indifferent feelings. Indifferent mental feelings, indifferent physical feelings. When we aren't aware then what do we generate? Spaced out apathy. We don't care. Indifference, ignorance, bewilderment. Just kind of out of touch. So we're driving on the highway, nobody is cutting you off, nobody is letting you in, just driving, spaced out [laughter]. So it's kind of encouraging the neutral feeling. If we're not aware of it, then apathy just sinks in at that moment.

Remember when we studied the twelve links? There was the link of feeling? That link is a very important one. Because if we can just be aware of what the feeling is, then we don't go on to the next link which was craving. Either craving for more of it or craving for less of it. So it becomes a very good way to stop the creation of karma. If you're just aware of the feelings and don't react so much with the different afflictions [[Note: 'afflictions' is the translation that Ven. Chodron now uses in place of 'disturbing attitudes'](#)], then it stops us from creating a lot of negative karma.

Conclusion

So when you're meditating on this, you can just sit there and be aware of the different feelings. You can be aware of physical feelings: pleasant sensations, unpleasant sensations, neutral sensations in your body. You can also be aware of pleasant, unpleasant, neutral mental sensations too. As different thoughts come into your mind, or different moods, just be aware of what they are.

Mindfulness of the Mind

Here we're aware of the quality of the mind. What you're feeling; and here I'm using "feeling" in terms of emotion. So the emotional tone of the mind. What's going on in the mind. If you have many thoughts you're aware you have many thoughts. If your mind is agitated, you're aware it's agitated. If your mind is dull, you're aware it's dull. If you're angry, you're aware that you're angry. If you're jealous, you're aware that you're jealous. If you're blissed out, you're aware that you're blissed out. If you have a lot of faith, then you're aware that you have a lot of faith.

Whatever emotion it is or whatever attitude that you're experiencing, whatever mental factors that have arisen here, you're aware of that. So similarly when your mind is tight, you're aware your mind is tight. When your mind is relaxed, you're aware of that.

And again just having this kind of knowledge of what our own emotional experience is would be quite something, isn't it? Because then instead of our emotions getting acted out in our speech and our action (after which we go: "Why in the world did I say that? What will they think of me?") we're able to catch them when they're small. So it's like you're sitting in the dentist's chair and you feel fear. You're aware that there's fear and you just sit there and you experience the fear without the mind going on to: "Oh the dentist is here and I'm sure he's going to miss and the drill's going to come out the other side of my jaw". So you're just aware of: "What does it feel like to feel afraid?" When you're afraid, what does it feel like? It's quite interesting just to sit there and watch, "What does my body feel like when I'm afraid? What is the emotional tone? What is the mind feeling when I'm afraid?"

Similarly we're often not aware when we're anxious. We're quite nervous. We're bouncing off the walls.

The people we live with are wondering what's going on? And yet we're saying: "I'm not nervous. I'm not anxious. Shut up!" But if we were aware that we were anxious; what do you feel like when you're anxious? Do you get any special physical sensations when you're anxious? What is the feeling in your mind when there's anxiety? What is the feeling tone in your mind? The mind feels quite unpleasant.

How about when you have a real feeling of compassion for somebody else? Your heart's completely open, not afraid of getting involved, really compassionate to somebody. What does that feel like in your body, in your mind?

So being able to discriminate these different mental factors, these different attitudes, these different emotions, being able to recognize what are our own experiences.

On the higher states, when you get into high meditation, you're able to know what level of practice you're on; when your mind is a worldly mind and when it's a transcendental mind; when you're concentrating and when you're not; when you have this experience and when you're in the other experience. And these all follow from the initial practice of becoming quite aware of just what our emotions are. So when you're meditating, you might just sit there and just be aware of whatever emotions that come into your mind. And what's so amazing when you do that is to watch how quickly they change. They change so fast.

Lee is a hospice nurse. She sees so many people with incredibly strong emotions of grief or anger or whatever. And she says that she's completely convinced that nobody can hold a super strong hysterical emotion more than forty-five minutes. Even if they tried. Even if you're so overwhelmed by grief because everything in your life totally fell apart. She says that after forty-five minutes the mind changes. And even within that forty-five minutes, each moment of grief is different from the previous moment. And if you're mindful, you're aware of the different moments of grief and how they're different. Or if you're feeling sad and you're mindful, you'll be aware that there are different moments of sadness. It isn't like sadness is one thing. When you're in a sad mood, it's changing. There are all sorts of different things going on.

And here also you can start being aware of what are the *causes* for these different emotions, both the positive ones and the negative ones. What is it that makes them arise? And how is it that they fade away? And really watch the emotions. It's just incredible. Especially sometimes you're sitting there and you're trying to meditate and, I don't know about you but it's happened to me, that all of a sudden incredible anger would come.

I'd remember something that happened years ago that I hadn't thought about in ages. And I'm just sitting there in a totally peaceful room, totally calm environment, kind people all around me and I feel like there's this raging fire. Everybody thinks I'm in the middle of samadhi but inside me (...[laughter] ...very easy to fake it...) there's an incredible anger and you feel like you just can't sit there anymore. But you just sit there and you just watch this anger. And it's fascinating to watch the anger. You don't jump in and get involved in it. You just watch as it rages and how it feels in your body and how it feels in your mind. And you watch it and watch how it changes. And it just keeps changing and then after a while you're not angry anymore. And you're going, "Wait a minute. I was really furious a minute ago. What's going on?"

And then it's so weird because you realize that the anger arose totally because of the way you were thinking. And the anger passed because everything is impermanent. It gives you a whole different insight on what's going on when you're angry. Because usually when we're angry we're completely convinced that the anger is coming from the other person into us. "You're making me angry. It's coming from you into me. So I'm going to give it back!"

So just be aware. What does it feel like when you're feeling really open towards somebody? Or when you're feeling really loving. When you open the door on a sunny day and you look out and your heart just feels like: "Wow, it's nice to share this world with other people". Then how does that feel? What's the emotional tone of that? What causes that to arise? How does that change? How does that fade away? What's going on? Just being aware.

Mindfulness of Phenomena or Mental Events

Here we're aware more of the contents of the thoughts. With the previous type of mindfulness, we might

notice there are many thoughts or few thoughts. With this mindfulness of phenomena, we're looking more at the contents of the thoughts.

But we're not looking at them in the sense of getting involved in them. Again it's not this whole reactive mechanism to "Oh goodness I'm thinking about that again. Wouldn't she know it? Can't keep my mind off that. I'm so stupid". So you're not getting into that. Or if you're getting into that, then you're able to say: "Oh look at the thoughts that are accompanying my judgmental mind". It's very interesting when you get into a real self-critical thing: "I'm so bad! I'm so terrible!" Watch the thoughts. Look at the contents of the thoughts. What are we telling ourselves? What lies are we involved in? "I can't do anything right! Nobody loves me!" Very logical? Totally truthful, huh?

So just look at the contents of the thought: how the mind takes one thought and then links it to another and links it to another one. How you travel the whole universe without going anywhere just because the mind is on free association. Sometimes you can watch this when you're in a conversation with a friend. They say one thing and your mind gets stuck on that sentence. They keep on talking but you've gotten stuck at that one sentence and you really want to react to that. It's like you're not listening to what they're saying afterwards, you're not really tuning into that. You're just waiting for them to be quiet so that you can come back to that sentence that you got stuck on. It's quite interesting to watch that.

So be aware of the content of the thought. How at that certain time when we get stuck, we start thinking about that one sentence that they said and what we want to say in response. And then we tune them out. Again this is mindfulness; noticing when you get stuck, being mindful of when you get stuck. And then maybe instead of just letting that thought process continue around the thing you're stuck on, try and keep an open mind and really listen to everything else that person has to say. Because you might get a totally different view on that one sentence if you do.

But it's really a feat to make the mind listen sometimes. Make the mind be open. It's like sometimes I have to sit there and say: "OK, just listen. Keep your mouth closed. They're still talking. They might just answer your question if you gave them a chance". You don't have to jump in right away and ask a question.

Questions & Answers

[Audience:] How does mindfulness help stop attachment and aversion?

Basically if you're mindful, then you're just with that present moment and what it's feeling like. Whereas the attachment and the aversion are very much reacting to the present moment. It's kind of half experiencing it but already leaping towards the future, already leaping towards: "I want more", "I want less". So by just being there with it, and being content to be there with it, then you stop that mind that's jumping to the future.

[Audience:] What do we do with the thoughts that come up, e.g. when we start to itch?

The best laboratory is in our own mind. Watch what your mind does when something starts to itch. Initially there's the physical sensation. Then there's the thing of "It's unpleasant". And then the mind starts to wander: "Oh I wonder if a mosquito bit me", "I wonder how long I have to sit here before I can rationalize scratching it", "I wonder if I have a fungus", I wonder this, I wonder that. [laughter] And sometimes you sit there and you wonder so much that you're totally convinced that you have a huge rash all up and down your leg. So you have the physical sensation and together with that, the feeling, and then the thoughts just flood in. And so this is the thing to be aware of.

Do research in your own laboratory. Otherwise we're just intellectualizing about it. Just watch your own experience and watch (if your mind operates anything like mine), how your mind immediately jumps in and starts making up some story about it, about what's going on. Just watch that. Step back and watch it like you're watching a movie. I'm not talking about dissociating. I'm not talking about becoming a psychological space case, but instead of reacting immediately to everything that goes on, to be able to say: "Oh yes, that's happening".

[Audience:] If we concentrate so much on listening to the other party instead of working out our response while listening, we may not be able to respond promptly to them.

There is no need to worry because sometimes you can just sit there and listen to somebody and just try and take it in without thinking of what we're going to say in reaction. Even if after they stop speaking, let there be a pause and silence for a couple of moments. That's sometimes nice. I noticed at Cloud Mountain when we have the discussion groups, very often people speak and after a person speaks there's like a couple of moments of silence before another person speaks. And it's really nice because it lets what that person said sink in. So I don't think we always need to be afraid of having nothing to say. We can maybe slow down the tempo of the conversation.

[In response to audience:] Yes, you're probably aware of a lot of things. Because there's probably an unpleasant sensation, either physical or mental. And then there's the emotion of the anger. And then there's the thoughts going on with it. So you can focus on one or the other. But it's interesting to watch also how they are inter-related.

[Audience:] Why do we want to hang on to our anger?

Because we're stupid. Really. And this is the interesting thing, that as you meditate, you watch your mind doing these things that make no sense at all. Then that's the thing that gives you the space to say: "Well maybe I don't need to keep on doing this if this isn't making any sense".

[Audience:] Once you recognized what's going on and that it doesn't make any sense, what kind of tools or advice can you give to make it go away?

There are different things that you can do at different times. What we need to be mindful of, is to not try to avert the aversion, i.e. you're trying to push that feeling of aversion away. So what we need is some kind of clarity of: "This isn't making any sense" without "This isn't making any sense and here I go again!" It's just: "This doesn't make any sense to do. I'm making myself miserable by the way I'm thinking." Then sometimes at that point, what you can do is apply one of the antidotes, e.g. with anger, you meditate on patience; with attachment, you meditate on impermanence around the ugly aspect of the thing. You apply a different way of thinking.

I've had it happened to me just last weekend, for about three days, where I had the opportunity to watch my mind. I knew it was coming because I was going to be with Rinpoche (my teacher), and when I'm with my teacher my buttons get pushed, even if he doesn't do anything. So I had reminded myself to look at what goes on in the mind. I knew it was going to be an entertainment session.

So there I was in California, and what was very interesting was I started seeing people that I hadn't seen in years that I had known at various times of my Dharma life – there were people that attended the first course I went to nineteen years ago in July. There were people I knew in France, in Singapore. And it was like I kept meeting these people that were like ghosts from my past except they weren't ghosts. They were living people. And then watching all these thoughts come up of: "Oh god, they've seen how I acted in the past and what do they think about me because I was such an idiot! They know all those stuff about me." All the shame! And so sometimes you can sit there and you can watch it and say this is stupid and this is nonsensical. And you've already worked it out, and you're completely convinced... it's like I didn't really need to apply the antidotes very much, because I knew it was all stupid. But it wouldn't go away.

So I just sat there and I watched it. And I watched these really weird thoughts kind of float in and float out. All this attachment to reputation and what people think about me from all these places that I lived and the things that I did. And I just watched it. Whereas what I could have gone into is either a totally paranoid thing or a total thing of: "OK, now I've got to make a really good impression on these people. Let them know how much I've changed." Instead of recognizing: "OK, this is a lot of attachment to reputation arising which is really dumb because it really doesn't matter. I really should trust these people enough after all these years of knowing them to know that they're going to give me some space. And if they don't, what to do." So it's like I understood it. So I just sat there and let it dance and then it went away. And by the second day I was totally okay.

[This part of teachings lost due to change of tape.]

... so you stop and watch: "This is attachment to reputation." It's actually quite interesting. "Look how attached I am to my reputation. All these people whom I haven't seen in years, all of a sudden when I see them, I care about what they are thinking even though I hadn't thought about them in years. As if what they think about me is so important. If it's really so important I should have thought about them all these years. What they think about me is not important. It comes and it goes."

And then I was thinking too that all of us had been in the Dharma for so long that if we'd been in the Dharma this long and if we don't have the ability to give each other space and be a little bit tolerant, then we haven't made any progress. I realized I've been able to work on my mind and give them a little bit of space and be a little more tolerant, so they're probably doing the same thing for me. They probably are and I'm sure they have made some progress in their practice. So let's trust that and let's relax. And if they haven't and they still think I'm an idiot, what to do?

Checking the validity of our thoughts

[In response to audience:] What's quite useful is to write down what those thoughts are. Just to bring them into conscious awareness, be mindful of what those thoughts are. Write them down. Write them all down even though they all sound so completely horrible and you don't want anybody to see them. You don't have to let anybody see them but you're going to put them out in front of you.

And then go back to the beginning and really read each one and stand back as a separate person and look at that thought and say: "Is that true?" Or to what extent is that true and to what extent it's exaggerated? "If people only knew what I was really like, nobody would like me." We've got to give people some credit. They can put up with something.

And also let's recognize that: "OK, I might have those awful qualities but I also have a whole lot of good ones too". And how is it that I never think: "If only people knew what a kind heart I have inside, then they'd love me". We always think: "Oh the people know what an awful heart I have inside of me and they hate me". How come we always think one way and not the other way? Because there have been times in our lives when we have completely open, kind hearts. How come we forget about that? So, to be able to look at those different things that we're saying to ourselves and really assess their validity. We really lie a lot to ourselves.

[Audience:] Is there any difference in the interpretation of "mindfulness" by the different Buddhist traditions?

Now in the Theravada tradition mindfulness often refers to just that bare awareness of what is happening, in this moment.

Gen Lamrimpa made a very clear distinction in his book. He was saying in the context of developing concentration, contemplation isn't just being aware of what's going on. You're also aware of what the antidote is. So the mindfulness isn't just being aware that I'm angry and watching it, but it's also trying to be mindful of what the antidote (to anger) is as well. You might start contemplating the antidote and you start being mindful of the antidote.

So different traditions handle things in different ways. And different people will handle things in different ways too. Some people, when anger arises, they find it completely okay just to sit there and say: "Anger" and watch anger. For me I cannot do that unless I have gone through the whole process of recognizing why my anger is a complete hallucination and I'm thinking in a totally wrong way. And so I have to sit and really think of all the meditations on patience and look at the situation this way and look at the situation that way. And apply the antidotes and then the anger starts to subside.

And then if the anger comes again on the same topic, the way my mind works is, if I've really understood it deeply, then at that time I can just sit and watch the anger. But if my mind again gets involved in it because I wasn't mindful of the anger early enough, then I might have to start playing with the antidotes again and thinking in a different way.

[In response to audience:] You mean thinking that that's what you should be or actually getting yourself into that state? You mean taking all your thoughts and saying: "Shut up" and then just sitting there like

that? I think maybe instead of judging the thoughts and judging the feelings, just look at the laboratory, do the research, look at what's going on. Instead of saying: "I shouldn't be doing this. This is all wrong. I've got to make a change." Look at what's going on and as you look you can start to recognize how the anger is, what its disadvantages are and how it's unrealistic. So you don't have to sit there and do a big "Shut up!" in your mind.

Mindfulness of Feelings and Mindfulness of Body

[In response to audience:] "Feeling" refers to pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feeling. They can be physical or they can be mental. Examples of feelings classified as physical: when you stub your toe, the unpleasant feeling of what it feels like when you stub your toe. Or the unpleasant feeling of when you are falling asleep. The placement of the body refers to watching the sensation. These things are not like they're in nice, neat categories. Our mind is just starting to become aware of all these things that very often seem to be happening at the same time. So, for example, when you bump into something, focus on how it feels, kind of a tingling sensation. And then switch it to: "Well, does this feel pleasant or unpleasant?" And pay more attention to the pleasant or unpleasant feeling. And those things are very, very close, aren't they? But slightly different emphasis.

[Audience:] Could you elaborate? I'm confused between physical sensations and feelings.

When you're angry you get physical sensations, don't you? Maybe you can feel your temples like this. And you can feel the skin getting hot. You can feel the energy. So there's a physical sensation. And there might be either a pleasant or unpleasant physical sensation. This is something to do research on. When the adrenaline starts pumping, is there a pleasant physical sensation? I don't know. This is something which we should watch. Just be mindful. And just what happens when the adrenaline starts going. Physically, is it pleasant or unpleasant? And then as you're getting angry is there a pleasant or unpleasant feeling? What does the anger feel like? What is the feeling of the anger? What does it feel like to be angry?

Watching anger

You can watch how anger is in your body and then watch what anger is in your mind. The thing is, we are so unused to watching and they all happen at the same time. And we're usually in the mode of reacting to them that just to get ourselves to slow down for a minute: "What's going on in my body when I'm angry? What does my mind feel like?" And here I don't mean "feel". "What's the tone of my mind? How do I recognize anger? Is there something else mixed in with it? What kind of anger is it?" Because there's some anger that's more on the resentment side, another anger that's on the hatred side, another anger that's on the frustration side, another anger that's on the irritation side, another anger that's on the judgment side, another anger that's on the critical side. There're many different kinds of anger. How do you identify them? What's going on?

Having Faith and Trust

[In response to audience:] Well to go back to that situation that happened to me a few days ago with all this stuff coming up of what other people think about me, the faith and devotion came in there. These people have been practicing for a while and they won't keep coming back if the practice wasn't working for them. And if it's working for them, then I can relax more around them because this is just completely my own mental creation. So there was some faith and trust in these people. And also some recognition that I wasn't that important that they were going to spend so much time thinking bad thoughts about me. They had better things to think about.

[Audience:] Can anger be justified?

What I do is sometimes I recognize the anger and then I recognize that there might be some element of factual truth, something that is understandable in a factual way. But that is something different from my anger about the situation. Like maybe somebody stole my wallet. Most people would get angry about that. That isn't a kosher thing to do. It's a negative action. So it's fair enough to think that that was an unethical action and it's better if people don't do that. But that's something different from getting all flipped out because of it.

[Audience:] What part does intuition play in this? Should we follow our intuition?

People often ask: "Well, what about intuition? How about when you really know something? You know something's right?" There are different levels. And sometimes I'm extremely skeptical of my intuition because I know in the past it's been totally off sometimes. And if I believe in my intuition sometimes, then what I do is I just lock myself into some small category. So sometimes I recognize: "Well, okay, there's this feeling, there's this intuition but let's just be aware that it's there but I'm not really going to believe in it until I get some more evidence."

[Audience:] What is the purpose of practicing mindfulness?

Well first of all your ethical conduct is going to improve. Second of all you're going to be able to concentrate more. You're going to be able to see impermanence, you're going to begin to see non-self. So there are different levels of understanding that mindfulness is going to bring.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>