

Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation and Overview of the Teachings of the Buddha

Lesson Three: The Second Noble Truth The Three Characteristics The Second Foundation of Mindfulness Mindfulness of Feelings (Vedana) The Peace Treaty

The Second Noble Truth

The Second Noble Truth is that there is a cause that leads to suffering and that cause is craving. (The teachings of the Buddha were originally written down in the Pali language and the cause of suffering has been variously translated as craving, attachment, greed, grasping and desire). The major thing we crave is sensual pleasure. We crave seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, physically feeling and thinking pleasurable things. When unpleasant things are present, we crave their absence. Ignorance (also translated as delusion) is the root of craving. Ignorance refers to not understanding the Four Noble Truths and not understanding the **3 characteristics** of all conditioned things, namely impermanence, inherent unsatisfactoriness and selflessness.

First is ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. If we ignore the inevitable suffering that is part of life (Truth #1), we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to let go of it. It is only by looking suffering straight in the eye, with stable emotions and a steady mind, accepting its reality and not blaming others (taking responsibility for our life) that we start ourselves on the path to happiness. The Second Truth lets us know that craving is the cause of suffering. The Third Truth reassures us that we can end our suffering by letting go of craving. The Fourth Truth is the path that teaches us how to do this, which leads us to happiness, the end of suffering. Ignorance of this path deprives us of the ability to achieve happiness.

The Three Characteristics

Next is ignorance of the 3 characteristics of all conditioned things. Everything that we experience through our senses is conditioned. The Buddha included the mind as a sense organ and thinking as its sense. Basically, everything is conditioned except Nibbana (Nirvana). Conditioned means it comes from causes. It does not exist on its own. This idea is summarized in the phrase, “This is because that is”. This leads one to

the important understanding of interconnectedness or interbeing which we won't be addressing this lesson.

The first characteristic of all conditioned things is impermanence.

The second characteristic of all conditioned things is inherent unsatisfactoriness. Because of impermanence, things change, so what was once pleasurable is now unsatisfactory. For example, when our health fails, when a favourite pair of shoes wear out, or when a good friend moves away our pleasure ends. If we ignore the reality of change, we will suffer every time we are attached to things staying the same. Of course, we are happy when unpleasant things end! For example, when a noisy machine is turned off, when we find something we lost, when a toothache subsides etc. So there is a very positive side to impermanence.

The third characteristic of all conditioned things is selflessness. This just means we are not static, permanent entities. We are always changing, in process. We are a continual flow of arising, existing and ceasing. For example, an emotion arises, lasts awhile and ends. New cells in our body are produced, last for a while and then die. As one monastic said, "We are a verb, not a noun".

If you understand selflessness you can avoid suffering when unpleasant things arise, because you understand they are not part of a permanent you. An unpleasant thought is just a thought. It's not you. It has arisen and will last awhile but then it will cease. An unpleasant emotion is just a sensation. It's not you. It has arisen, will last awhile and then cease. The thought, "I am sad" leads to the false perception that you are a static entity and sadness is a permanent characteristic of you, which causes a reaction of aversion which leads to suffering. This is ignorance of selflessness. The thought, "sadness has arisen" helps one stay in touch with the truth of impermanence and selflessness which helps one not to react with aversion and thus avoiding suffering.

A final comment. Preferring things to be a certain way or desiring something does not in itself cause suffering. It is only when you attach your happiness to this specific way of being that you set yourself up for suffering if the desired outcome doesn't occur. But if you keep it as a preference and if a different outcome occurs and you accept its reality, you avoid suffering.

The Second Foundation of Mindfulness

The Second Foundation of Mindfulness is vedana (way-dah-nah) which refers to the feelings of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. These feelings come prior to our more complex emotional reactions of anger, fear, sadness, shame/guilt, excitement and contentment. The usual reaction to the first 4 emotions is aversion. We don't want them

to be present. We crave their absence. And we can react to the last 2 emotions with craving for their continuation or craving for more. There is no suffering when vedana arises. But there can be suffering when emotions arise. Since vedana are the precursors of the emotions, they are our early warning system that suffering may occur. If we are mindful of the warning, we can “stay in the driver’s seat, and change direction” and thus avoid suffering. The goal of mindfulness meditation is to avoid suffering, which is to discover happiness.

If our reaction to something is pleasant and we just enjoy it while it lasts and let go when it goes, there is no problem. But if we want more of the pleasant thing (greed) or don’t want it to end (grasping) we will suffer if there isn’t any more or suffer when it inevitably ends. Thus, being aware of “pleasant” means that we can be alert to preventing the arising of greed or grasping (craving) and thus avoid suffering. The same with the early warning reaction of “unpleasant.”

If something is unpleasant and there is nothing we can do about it and we can accept this, we don’t add any suffering. But if we develop hatred or aversion to the unpleasant thing then that is experienced as suffering. Experiencing the ways we create suffering for ourselves and having awareness of this is called insight. If we truly “know” we are hurting ourselves, we will drop the activity like a hot coal....no self discipline is needed to change our behaviour. We will automatically drop the "hot coal" of suffering. What we need discipline for is a regular meditation practice so that we can develop these insights.

In the first and second lessons, we practiced meditation that emphasized stillness. In this lesson we are going to lean towards insight meditation. This means gaining insight into what causes our suffering which is greed and aversion which in turn are caused by ignorance. Greed, aversion and ignorance are all intertwined.

Mindfulness of Feelings

It is helpful to begin any meditation by focusing on stillness in order to calm your mind, at least a little. It is difficult to gain insight if your mind is unfocused.

a) Focus on your body:

Refer to the notes from lesson one about getting yourself into a comfortable position to meditate.

b) Set your intention:

For background on intentions, refer to the notes from Lesson One. Start with your intention for mindfulness of breathing. Do mindfulness of breathing for about 5 - 10 minutes. Don't time this! Just switch after "a while". Even if your mind hasn't calmed down, switch anyway. The insight practice will also help your mind calm. Stillness and insight and very intertwined!

When you switch, you need to re-set your intention. Here is a sample intention for mindfulness of feelings: "I intend to be mindful of whatever arises in the present moment and to notice if my reaction to it is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral in an atmosphere of loving friendliness, not allowing it to progress into an emotion of craving or aversion".

Thoughts, when they arise, can be labeled thinking and then immediately let go of by switching 75% of your focus to your body to notice what your reaction to the snippet of thought was....pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. If it was neutral, return fully to your breath or whatever else is drawing your attention. If the reaction is pleasant or unpleasant, this is a physical sensation and you remain mindful of it until it fades.

c) The "Holding" Technique - what to do when emotions do arise:

Emotions have two parts, a mind part and a body part. For example, if anger arises, you may have thoughts of "how could she do that!" (mind part) and also feel a clenching in your chest (body part.) When you recognize the mind part, immediately shift about 75% of your attention to your body, leaving 25% with your breath. Scan your body to find the body part of the emotion. Then notice its physical characteristic eg. tight, heavy, sharp. Then notice if your reaction to this sensation is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Continue to be mindful of the sensation until it fades. Then return your awareness fully to your breath if nothing else is drawing it.

Thich Nhat Hanh likens this to "holding" a young child who is hurt. Let's say a toddler, learning to walk, falls down. This scares her and she begins to cry. You scoop her up in your arms and "hold" her. She hasn't really hurt herself, so you don't have to do anything except hold her so she feels your love and security. Then in a few moments she settles and is ready to try walking again.

The hurt child is yourself when you have an upsetting emotion. Your mindfulness is the loving arms that hold your internal state in awareness. However, there is a skillful and an unskillful way to "hold" your emotions.

If you hold your attention on your thoughts, that is like throwing fuel on a fire....it burns hotter. So your emotion will become stronger. Instead you hold your attention on the neutral, physical sensation that is accompanying the emotion eg. tightness in the

chest. Gently resting your attention there, filling your awareness with the physical sensation so thoughts about the emotion can't get in is like starving a fire of fuel. If you don't add fuel, the fire goes out. So too will your emotion cease once it's fuel source is gone. This can happen quite rapidly.

My first experiment with this technique was with an angry situation. My anger was gone within a couple of minutes. So I played with it. I let myself think again some of my angry thoughts. The anger reappeared! So I did the "holding" technique, keeping my attention on my tight chest, not allowing any thoughts in, and within moments I felt calm. I played back and forth with these scenarios to prove to myself how it was my thoughts that were generating the anger.....NOT the situation. The situation hadn't changed, only my thinking. That was a powerful moment of insight.

d) Continuing mindfulness of feelings throughout the day:

Our goal is to be mindful of the arising of vedana throughout the day. Vedana warn us of the danger of craving or aversion arising, giving us an opportunity to avoid them. If, as often happens, you find yourself beyond vedana and already into craving or aversion, just metaphorically take a step backwards to the prior feeling of pleasant or unpleasant. Then hold your attention on the accompanying physical sensation until it dissipates or, you are distracted by whatever you are doing at the moment.

And remember that neutral feelings set you up to forget about the 3 characteristics of impermanence, inherent unsatisfactoriness due to change and selflessness (no static self). You can respond to neutral feelings occasionally by running through a checklist of the 3 characteristics to ensure you haven't fallen into ignorance.

The Peace Treaty

This is a chapter from Thich Nhat Hanh's book, "Touching Peace". It was written as a method to deal with anger that arises in a relationship. I have found it equally useful with a variety of triggered emotions such as sadness, loneliness, anxiety, fear etc. So I have changed the word anger to "emotionally upset" or "feelings" to indicate this broader use of the Peace Treaty. I have also found the Treaty to be useful in non-intimate relationships. And in some cases it doesn't feel appropriate to make the Treaty with the other person (eg. with a boss) but it's still skillful to carry out the articles of the Treaty on one side.

Because a lot of suffering arises when we become angry or upset with our partner or other friends, at Plum Village we have created a "Peace Treaty" which we sign in front of the sangha. I would like to explain something about it.

The treaty was written to help us live happily together. It should only be signed after lengthy reflection and a lot of Dhamma discussions between the concerned individuals. This is because the treaty is about practice. When one person gets angry at another, if they have a copy of this Peace Treaty, they will know exactly what to do and what not to do.

When you have signed the Peace Treaty, you have to abide by the agreement. The treaty becomes like the Buddha. We have to respect, follow and abide by the terms. Otherwise, it can be very damaging, even dangerous. It is better not to sign the treaty, than to sign it and then not practice it. When the treaty is about to be signed, both of you should practice one Day of Mindfulness, with a lot of walking meditation. At the end of the day, you may bring each other into the meditation hall or some other special room. It is helpful if your community is present, in order to sign the treaty in the presence of the sangha and vow to respect and practice according to the treaty.

Basically there are two parts to the Peace Treaty. The first concerns the one who is angry or hurt. What should he or she do? What should he or she not do? The Peace Treaty should be signed in the spirit that we both want to live long and happily together. The second concerns the one who, knowingly or unknowingly triggered the other's feelings.

Practicing the Peace Treaty should be supported by articles and discussions so that those people who do not have experience with the teaching can also learn and benefit from it. Such articles can give insight into the nature of the treaty and how to carry out the practice of the treaty. I believe that a Peace Treaty like this may become an important part of our practice in the future.

Part One

The first part of the treaty is about what the person who is emotionally upset should do and not do. The first article is to refrain from saying things or doing things that can cause damage. When we know that we are emotionally upset, it is best not to say or do anything. It would be too dangerous. We should have something like a moratorium on speech and actions. It is our tendency when we are emotionally upset to say and do things that escalate the feelings in the other person and ourselves as well. We have to agree that when we get emotionally upset, we will refrain from saying and doing things.

The second article is to not suppress your feelings. We should express something about our feelings, but it is not yet the time. There will be a time in the future, even if it is only the time of three breaths, when it is safer and wiser to do so.

The third article is to practice breathing on your feelings, taking care of your feelings. Take refuge in the island of yourself. You know that a feeling is there, you don't suppress it, but you also don't deny it. You touch it with your mindfulness. In order for

your mindfulness to be with you in this difficult moment, you nourish it by breathing mindfully. You produce mindfulness of breathing and you embrace your suffering in the loving arms of mindfulness. "I am upset. I suffer now." You have to really touch your feeling and your suffering, using your mindfulness. You don't suppress it, ignore it or deny it. You can do it in several ways - sitting or walking are perhaps the easiest. Go into nature and practice breathing while doing walking meditation. Nature - the vegetation, the fresh air - will help support you. If you need half an hour, spend half an hour. If you need three hours of walking meditation, practice three hours of walking meditation. According to the treaty, you have up to 24 hours to calm yourself.

You have to abide by the fourth article. You must tell the other person that you are emotionally upset and that you are suffering very much, and you have to say it in a calm way. You have to tell him or her within 24 hours. You have no right to keep it for longer than that. If you do, your feelings become poisonous (also you violate the treaty), and it may destroy you and also the person you love. You may be ready to tell him or her in just 5 or 10 minutes, if you are used to the practice, but the maximum is 24 hours. You can say something like, "Dear friend, what you just said this morning made me very upset. I suffered very much and I want you to know it." That is the substance of the message.

Then, according to the fifth article, you end with this sentence: "I hope that by Friday evening both of us will have had a chance to look deeply into this matter." Then you make an appointment (Friday evening is a good time to defuse all bombs - big or small - so that you will have the whole of the Saturday and Sunday for your enjoyment). If you think it might not be safe for you to tell him or her directly, if you are not confident that you can do it in a calm way and if the deadline of 24 hours is running out, you can use this form. We call it a "peace note":

Date:

Time:

Dear

This morning (afternoon), you said (did) something that made me very upset. I suffered very much. I want you to know this. You said (did):

Please let us both look back at what you said (did) and examine the matter together in a calm and open manner this Friday evening.

Yours, not very happy right now,

Signed:

If you use the note, you have to make sure the other person receives it. You can't

say, "I put it on your table and you didn't look at it, so it's your mistake." This is for your own good, because the moment you know that the other person has received it, you will already feel some relief. It is best to tell him or her directly with a calm voice, but if you suspect that you will not be able to do it calmly, the next best thing is to use the note, fill out the form, and hand it to him or her. You have to make sure he or she gets it before the deadline. If he or she doesn't get it, it's your fault, and not the other's fault. That is important.

According to the sixth article, you should not pretend that you aren't emotionally upset. Perhaps you have too much pride - you are upset, you suffer, but you don't want to say that you suffer, because your pride is too great. Do not say things like, "I'm not upset. Why should I be upset? I do not suffer at all. There is nothing to be upset about. That is not enough to make me upset." Don't hide the truth. You suffer, you are upset. That is the fact. This is a very important part of the Peace Treaty. Pride should not be an obstacle, the thing that destroys our relationship. We are committed to each other, we support each other. We are a brother or sister to the other. Why should we be so proud? My pain must be your pain. My suffering must be your suffering.

According to the seventh article, while you are practicing sitting, walking, breathing, looking deeply, and living mindfully in your daily life, you focus your attention on these six points:

- 1. You recognize the fact that you are sometimes not mindful. You are not skillful at times. You see how you have hurt the other person on a number of occasions in the past.*
- 2. You have to acknowledge to yourself: "I have the habit energy of getting angry very easily, of getting hurt very easily." You have to see and acknowledge this fact. If you need to, you should have a copy of the Peace Treaty with you so you can practice according to it.*
- 3. You must look into this: "The seed of an upset emotion is strong in me. I have to acknowledge that she or he is not the main cause of my suffering. The main cause of my suffering is the strong seed of upset emotions in me. It has the habit of manifesting itself so easily." Think of friends who don't get upset that easily. The seed of upset is also in them, but not as strong as it is in you.*
- 4. "The other person is suffering also, and because of this, he or she has behaved in an unskillful way. He or she has watered the seed of upset emotions in me. I acknowledge him or her as a secondary cause of my suffering, and I also remember that he or she is not the main cause. Perhaps he or she is not even the secondary cause. Perhaps it was your misperception that was the secondary cause. Often we get very upset by someone and then find out later that he or she was not the cause.*

It was our misperception. They did not mean to hurt us.

5. *Because the other is suffering, he or she is just seeking relief. He or she seems to be destroying you, but it is because he or she suffers terribly and wants relief. When we get emotionally upset because something is said by the other person, we suffer and we believe very naively that if we can say something stronger and make the other person unhappy and suffer, we will get relief. This is unwise, but most of us do it. We have to look to see that the other person is not really trying to destroy us. He or she is only seeking some relief from their own suffering.*
6. *I see that as long as he or she continues to suffer, there is no way that you can be happy; because this is a relationship. Happiness is not an individual matter. If the other person suffers, you have to suffer. In order not to suffer, you have to help the other person not suffer. This is very true in a community of practice. When someone in the community is unhappy, the whole community cannot be truly happy. Everyone has to seek a discreet way to help that person. When that person has overcome his suffering, happiness in the community will become authentic. We all know that. There is a Vietnamese saying, "When one horse is sick, all the horses in the stable refuse to eat."*

The above six points are the objects of our practice of looking deeply. We have a few days before Friday evening. That time is to practice looking deeply.

The eighth article tells us that, during the process of looking deeply, if we realize our unskillfulness and/or our unmindfulness, we should apologize right away. We shouldn't make the other person feel guilty any longer. There is no need to wait until Friday evening. If we find out that we got upset because we have the habit energy of responding too quickly, or some misunderstanding, we have to go to the other person and say, "I'm sorry I was so unmindful. I got upset so easily and without any basis. You didn't do anything to harm me. You didn't have any intention of making me suffer. It was just my fault. I apologize to you. Please forgive me." He or she will be relieved. If he or she continues to suffer, eventually you will get it. It is better to stop the cycle of suffering as soon as possible.

The ninth article tells us that if by Friday, you feel that you are not calm enough to talk about the matter, you should ask him or her to postpone the appointment for three more days or another week. We have the time. If you are not calm, it is not time to talk about it yet. We need to practice for a few more days.

Part Two

These are the six things the one who has made the other emotionally upset should

practice:

First, when you see that the other is emotionally upset, do not make fun of him or her. Try not to say, "I haven't done anything and you're emotionally upset." You have to respect his or her feelings. A feeling needs time to die down. It has a life span - a moment to be born, some time to stay, depending on whether conditions are favourable or unfavourable to extend its life, and then it will die down slowly. Even if you see that his or her feelings are not founded at all, that he or she is completely wrong, don't press him or her to stop being upset right away. That is against the natural law. Help the person or leave them alone so that the feelings can die down.

Second, after you have heard the other person telling you that he or she is suffering or have read the peace note, don't press for an immediate discussion, because if you do press while the other is still upset, everything can be destroyed. Abide by the treaty and accept the Friday evening appointment. In the interim, you will have a chance to look deeply at the situation. "What did I say? What did I do to make him or her so upset?" While driving, walking, breathing, practice looking deeply. That is true meditation, even if you are not in a meditation hall.

Third, tell him or her that you have received the note and that you will be there on Friday evening. This is very important, because if he or she knows that you have received it, they will get some relief. If it is possible for you to say, "I know you suffer, I know", this too is very helpful.

Fourth, if you can apologize right away, do it. Don't wait. But when you apologize, do not make any attempt to justify yourself. Don't try to give a reason why you behaved as did. That would make the apology less effective. Just apologize. "I'm sorry I was not mindful and understanding."

Fifth, practice breathing, taking refuge in the island of yourself, in order to see three things:

- 1. You have the seeds, the habit energy of unkindness and anger. You have made the other person unhappy before. Acknowledge that, even if now you have not seen your fault in her suffering. Don't be too sure that you are not responsible this time.*
- 2. You were suffering and you may have thought that by saying something strong to him or to her you would get relief. This is the wrong kind of relief, and you have to recognize that seeking that kind of relief is a mistake. We shouldn't hope to suffer less by making another person suffer.*
- 3. You look deeply and you see that making him or her suffer also makes you suffer. Their suffering is your suffering, right now. You have to see the nature of interbeing of their suffering. If you do something to help them stop suffering, you will benefit*

from it also.

Sixth, if you can apologize, do it right away. Pick up the phone - don't even wait until you go home. To apologize even one minute sooner is better. There may be no need to wait for Friday. When you apologize, do not attempt to justify anything you said or did. A straightforward apology can have a powerful effect.

The Peace Treaty is a Dhamma practice. You may like to add one or more articles to it so that it will be more relevant to your situation. Study it deeply and prepare carefully for an occasion to sign it. The best way of signing it is in a meditation hall in the presence of the sangha. The witness and support of the sangha is very important for your practice. Be harmonious and happy! We will all benefit from your practice.

The Peace Treaty

(changes to Thich Nhat Hanh's text are in this font)

In order that we may live long and happily together, we the undersigned, wishing to restore our deepest love and understanding, gratefully agree as follows to these terms and conditions:

I,, (the one who is angry, sad, hurt, lonely etc), agree to:

- 1. Refrain from saying or doing anything that might cause further damage or escalate our feelings .*
- 2. Not suppress my feelings.*
- 3. Practise breathing and taking refuge in the island of myself.*
- 4. Once calm, tell the one who triggered my feelings about my feelings and suffering. If it is taking a long time to calm down, I will let the other know about my feelings and suffering before 24 hours are up by delivering a Peace Note to him or her.*
- 5. Ask for an appointment for later in the week (eg Friday night) to discuss this matter more thoroughly, either verbally or by note.*
- 6. Not say: "I am not angry. It's okay. I am not suffering. There is nothing to be upset about – at least not enough to make me angry, sad, hurt etc. "*
- 7. Look deeply into my daily life while sitting, walking and breathing, in order to see the ways I have not been mindful or skillful enough:*
 - a) how, in the past, I have hurt the other person because of my own habit energy*
 - b) how the strong seed of anger, sadness etc planted in me from multiple previous woundings is the primary cause of my present feelings*

c) *how the other person's* behaviour watered the seeds of my feelings and this is the secondary cause of my present feelings OR how my negative assumptions about the other person watered the seeds of my feelings

d) *how the other person is suffering also* and if they knowingly watered the seeds of my feelings, it is because they are *only seeking relief from his or her own suffering*

e) *that as long as the other person suffers, I cannot be truly happy.*

8. *Apologize immediately, without waiting until the (Friday) meeting, as soon as I realize my unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness.*

9. *Postpone the (Friday) meeting if I do not yet feel calm enough to do it.*

I, (***the one who "has made" the other angry***) **agree to:**

1. *Respect the other person's feelings, not ridicule him or her, and allow enough time for him or her to calm down.*

2. *Not press for an immediate discussion.*

3. *Confirm the other person's request for a meeting, either verbally or by note, and assure him or her that I will be there.*

4. *Practise breathing and taking refuge in the island of myself to see how:*

a) *I have the seeds of unkindness and anger as well as the habit energy to make the other person unhappy*

b) *I have sought relief from my own suffering by making the other person suffer (if this was the case)*

c) *By making him or her suffer, I make myself suffer*

5. *Apologize as soon as I realize my unskillfulness and lack of mindfulness, without making any attempt to justify myself or waiting until the (Friday) meeting.*

We vow to abide by these articles and to practice wholeheartedly.

Signed on thisday of.....in the year....., in the presence of (each other,

others?) in
