

CHAPTER TEN

MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE

BHAVANA

WE HAVE COME to the last day of our six-day retreat. We have been practising *mindfulness meditation*. Some prefer to call this mindfulness meditation *Insight Meditation*, which is the translation of the Pali word *Vipassana*. It is important to understand another Pali word *bhavana* in order to understand mindfulness meditation. *Bhavana* means developing mental ability.

Any method that develops our mental ability enhancing our ability to cope with life, to enjoy life, to be peaceful, happy and calm, is called *bhavana*. There are many types of meditation. Some people meditate using various techniques that mainly emphasize acquiring concentration, which practically means not allowing your mind to wander but to focus on one chosen object; maybe a mantra, breathing, a candle, a kind of reflection, chanting, gardening or even golfing. People would use anything that makes the mind concentrated. Since they develop the mind in a certain way, they may be called *bhavana*.

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

In mindfulness meditation, the emphasis is somewhat different. It is *not* about acquiring concentration only for the sake of it. Concentration is *not* everything that is required. There are many other factors that have to be developed together. It is vital that the uniqueness of mindfulness be seen in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path is a composition of the eight factors: right understanding, right attitude, right effort, right concentration, right mindfulness, right action, right speech and right livelihood. This Path is known as the *Middle Path* that transcends two extremes. The two extremes can be found in whatever unenlightened being does. They are diametrically opposed to each other such as like and dislike, have and have-not, eternalism and nihilism, self-indulgence and self-torture, indeterminism and pre-determinism. Only by seeing the two extremes and abandoning them, can the *Middle Path* be discovered. Mindfulness meditation is indeed a practice that is directly aimed at developing the first five factors to form the Path. Here, each individual has to form the Path for himself or herself.

The word used by the Buddha is not merely "*mindfulness*" but "*Right Mindfulness*". Mindfulness is right only when it is developed with the other seven factors. Mindfulness becomes a part of the Path at the point it has helped develop the other seven factors. **Here**, there are two kinds of mindfulness, intensive and general. The first one is developed in intensive meditation while the latter is in normal working life. Today we are going to discuss how to develop the general mindfulness in daily life.

RIGHT ATTITUDE

I have often emphasized in this course of meditation retreat that suffering is very much a part of our life and it is very important to have the right attitude towards it. Let us take pain as an example. It is important to be aware of the fact that pain is common to all living beings. Pain that is being experienced may increase or decrease. This is suggested as *anatta*, the doctrine of non-self. Do not expect it to work one-way, that is to decrease. Keep the mind open to both possibilities. Be flexible with and be prepared for either of the outcomes. This is the right attitude, which is relevant to the reality of life. Otherwise, we are not prepared for the worst in good times and forget to hope for the best in bad times. The nature of non-self (*anatta*) is the ultimate reality. This means we are not in ultimate control of pain. Things are the way they are, and are not always the way we imagine them to be. For this reason, generally the way things work for us is very unsatisfactory.

To be unsatisfied and frustrated with things around us is called *dukkha*. There are three aspects of ultimate reality; impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and non-self or no-creator (*anatta*). Our attitudes to life have to be based on life itself, and not on an abstract imagination of life. These three aspects make up the very characteristics of our daily world. Anything that we see when we go shopping or when we are at home including all the objects we experience during meditation has but these three characteristics. They encompass the nature of the whole universe. They are ultimate.

REALISTIC VIEW

When observing the pain, if we expect it to respond in a certain way, say, to go away, then our mind is not open to the other half of reality. Consequently as the pain increases, we start reacting with impatience or frustration. This is because we are not in touch with the whole of reality. Wrong attitude can make us suffer more. So to have the right attitude is very important. This kind of right attitude is what we call *sammaditthi* (right understanding) — right understanding of life in the context of change, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. This basic right understanding is very important in order to develop a realistic view of life. Otherwise, you can develop a pessimistic or optimistic view, and not a realistic one.

As a doctor, you can see that if you have a pessimistic view, you are not going to try your best to save a life. If you are too optimistic, then you are not going to be seriously taking any measures you should be taking. If someone suffers from a certain disease, to know that that person is suffering from that disease, to know it correctly, this is the realistic view. Realistic view is safer than either the pessimistic or the optimistic views. The Buddha was a realist. He had a realistic view. He was neither optimist nor pessimist.

Intensive mindfulness is what we have been doing for the last five days, with 20, 30, 40 minutes and one-hour sessions. You were determined to practise and develop mindfulness intensively. You pay attention to even a slight sound and a mild pain intensively. You try to develop unbroken mindful-ness continuously. This is intensive

mindfulness. We have retreats of ten days, one week, one month or a few months. Those are all intensive retreats.

Intensive mindfulness is mainly for training. As a soldier under training you learn how to put instruction into practice, use weapons and respond to the situation. You study how to do certain things intensively. However, some of those methods you learn may not be directly useful in battle, but they provide a basic knowledge and a good foundation based on which you act in battle. For someone who has never had any training in a camp, it would be very difficult to respond correctly in the frontline. Therefore, for us, the purpose of intensive training such as this is to learn the techniques under the close supervision of a teacher.

In intensive mindfulness practice, when you walk, you try to be aware of each movement, first the physical movement and later on the intention and sensations. This is the way the mind functions. What we do is try to be aware of the functions of the mind. We have concerned ourselves with establishing mindfulness (*sati*) rather than concentration (*samadhi*) because as far as I understand it, in Vipassana meditation, *sati* is the basic and chief factor. Only with the help of mindfulness will we be able to see what we do not have and what we have. Say when our posture slumps forward, we detect it because of awareness. Otherwise, our posture would be slumped the whole day. We would not be aware of it. We also discovered that we react to things in a certain way. When pain comes, we feel agitated and frustrated. We learn about these reactions. We also learn that we do not react sometimes. We learn about something, which is there, and which is not there. We will be able to apply our

efforts only when we discover both the presence and absence of something. Mindfulness needs to be understood in the context of right effort — applying it when necessary.

However, intensive mindfulness is not practicable all the time in working life. When you drive a car, you cannot be intensively noting all of your movements or thoughts. Just as the purpose of putting a soldier in the training is not to confine him to the camp but to equip him with the practical knowledge to face real battles.

GENERAL MINDFULNESS

Let us talk about general mindfulness, also known as daily awareness. General mindfulness is what you practise in daily life — at work, at home, when you drive, when you play golf, or when you go shopping. This is the ultimate aim of establishing intensive mindfulness. In the case of successful meditator such as an arahant, mindfulness is ever present in daily activities. For them, they do not need to sit to develop mindfulness intensively, although sometimes they do that to increase a certain ability such as concentration or a certain calmness and peace. Now people ask me, *"How can you do this? If you have to note lifting, forward, placing, how will you cross the road? If you note seeing, seeing, how will you drive? If you note hearing, hearing, how can you speak to someone?"* This is a practical question. To answer this question, it is necessary to know about general mindfulness. Indeed, unless and until we know this, our life is not going to really benefit from mindfulness practice.

JUST ONE AWARENESS

Just have one awareness when you cross the road. Develop the awareness that you are crossing the road. When you are walking, you will not be noting *lifting, forward and placing* in the middle of the road. Before you go into the kitchen, you bring one awareness to your mind "*going to the kitchen.*" You do not need to do the naming exercise. However, try to produce direct awareness of what you are doing without saying anything mentally. We do naming in intensive practice only. Naming will come to an end at a certain level even in intensive practice. It is just like using a raft to cross a river. Once you are on the other side, you do not need the raft or boat anymore. Naming is just a raft. The technique is just a raft used to cross to the other side.

When you are going to work, bring about one awareness in the mind "*going to work.*" When you are going to drive "*going to drive.*" In case you have to drive continuously for a few hours, often bring in an awareness that you are behind the wheel. You come to a traffic jam, there should be one awareness "*traffic jam.*" Make yourself aware of it as soon as possible. If you do not have that awareness, you may forget that you are sharing the road with other people. If you want to go quickly, you may want other vehicles out of your way so unreasonably that you create agitation in yourself. So when you are behind the wheel — have just one awareness — you are behind the wheel. You go to the supermarket and have picked up many things. In front of you is a long queue. Retain one awareness "*a long queue.*" This will sustain your ability to be patient. Otherwise, you will be standing in the queue feeling miserable. We spend many years of our lives in

anxiety, worry, frustration and fear. How nice it would be if we could reduce these negative emotions that take away our ability to enjoy life. We will then have more good times.

You go to work as a doctor and see so many patients in the surgery/ clinic/ hospital. You allow yourself to make a conscious awareness by observing "*many patients.*" Otherwise, you will come under pressure unconsciously. This will cause you work-stress. If you have to finish your work by lunchtime but more patients keep coming, the pressure will keep building up.

Suppose, you have forty-five minutes to finish your meal and clear the kitchen. Please pay one awareness to the period time, which is likely to create pressure. Pay one attention to what you have to do such as warming up food in the microwave, taking the correct plates out, and to cleaning them up after eating. This will give you awareness of the overall situation in the kitchen and dining room. Such awareness gives you some realistic undertaking for the 45 minutes. It prevents you from being too ambitious and helps you relieve some pressure of time. It helps you to plan and execute your daily routine.

Otherwise, time can create a lot of pressure so that you would not enjoy the meal. You would not finish washing or cleaning. Do not forget your primary object when under pressure. This suggests that you should be aware of taking some regular breaths while work pressure is mounting. The *primary object* (e.g. breathing) always helps you not to be overwhelmed by *secondary objects* such as stress and agitation and helps you to maintain your calm and peace at

work. Just be aware of the *time* and the *situation* in which you are.

For example, you go into your office. Someone comes to work with a disturbed mind maybe having had some problems at home. You are not sure what he has been through for the last few hours. What you should do is to be aware of the fact that you are in the office with others, and you are not at home where things are at your disposal. It is a different environment. This prepares you to face something uncertain. You would not take things for granted as you do at home. If you see someone speaking very impolitely or in a stressful manner, you have to observe him as "*being stressful.*"

INTROVERTED AND EXTROVERTED MINDFULNESS

Here meditation can be split into two, introspective (*ajjhatta*) and extroverted (*bahiddha*) mindfulness. In introspective mindfulness, you note your own movements, emotions and feelings. It is an inner-directed attentiveness. However, in extroverted mindfulness, you note objects outside you. If you are aware that your office colleague is depressed, you are not going to take offence at what he says or how he behaves. Otherwise, you are in a vulnerable situation, taking everything on a personal level.

We discussed yesterday that mindfulness serves as a protection. If mindful, you will be protected from the bad consequences of having problems, arguments and being upset. If you have to work with someone who has a short temper in the office, then you should go to the office with one awareness that you are with that kind of person at work.

Then you are in a better position to cope with things. Otherwise, you can get upset easily and react endlessly towards what he does and says. This is extroverted mindfulness in daily life.

LIVE IN THE PRESENT

When the weather is cold, if we are aware that it is winter, we can enjoy it rather than complain about it. During winter, it is supposed to be cold. It is natural. Instead of complaining about the cold, we should learn how to live with it and enjoy it. There is no point in complaining about the cold during winter in England. We cannot change it. This is the way it is. During summer, of course, it is warm. But, in summer people say, *"It's too hot!!, It's terrible!"* They are unable to accept things as they are, there is no end to their complaining and frustration. We tell ourselves to live in the present, but when summer comes, we long for winter. In the winter, we look forward to having summer. It is always unsatisfactory.

We can never be satisfied with what we have and with the situation we are in. Life could always be miserable because of the lack of right attitude and awareness. Whenever we think of the past, it always sounds better than what we have now. Our golden past exists only in memory. This is because we forget many situations surrounding the reality of the past. We keep remembering only what we want. It is not that the past is more pleasant than the present in general. Actually in Buddhism, the past and future exist only in perception — not in reality. The future never comes and the past exists only in memory. It is only a concept. It is just like morning and evening that are concepts and exist in relation to the

movement of the earth. Concepts are developed based on the existence of other things. There is a concept of space in this room. But this concept exists only when depending on the existence of walls from different directions. Space does not exist alone. But the walls do and are not a concept. Time does not exist alone. Past, present, future, morning, evening and so on are relative reality. There is a concept of morning or evening because there is the movement of the earth, something real to depend on and develop a concept. Nevertheless, awareness of time is very important. To be aware of the place you are in, the environment and the people around you, the pressure and the time are all important. Without abandoning the use of conventional reality such as concept and words, we have to try to realise the objective nature, the ultimate reality.

So just have one awareness before you do something. This means you will not take things for granted anymore and you will not follow your habitual way of doing things. You insert one awareness at a time. This is for people practising general awareness in daily life. If things are difficult, then be aware that you are going through a tough time. Do not forget to hope for the best while facing the worst. Only then will you be in a better position to cope with things.

General mindfulness is assisted and sustained by regular practice of intensive mindfulness. Therefore, it is important to adopt a regular intensive meditation practice as a way of life.