

June 2016

Greetings!

I hope everyone has been having a pleasant spring. Here in Seattle we have had a nice combination of sunny and wet weather. In turn we have had a beautiful and plentiful season of flowers and plants. On my roof we have also had an exceptional year, but I have to admit that I have not added to the beauty on the roof, with my kale, tomatoes, leeks, and peppers. However, my neighbors seem appreciative of the fresh organic produce.

In this email, I would like to talk about mindfulness in training - both in formal meditation and in everyday life. "Mindfulness" is a very popular word these days, particularly as it applies to everyday life. I want to focus on its more spiritual aspects. In formal meditation, mindfulness allows us to let go of thoughts and feelings that pull us away from the flow of the Eternal - the flow of love, compassion, non-judgement, and kindness. The Eternal flows through everything, both animate and inanimate, and in everything that we do. When we lose this mindfulness we suffer, not seeing the true nature of things. A very simple example is the washing of dishes. Often it is easy to let our mind wander while doing such a menial task, thinking of what we have to do later or something that is bothering us, leading us to do a haphazard job. It is important to remain in the moment and to be aware that the true nature of the dishes and the process of washing them is the Eternal. This is also why we maintain orderliness in our daily routines - for example, we keep our shoes straight and we maintain a general cleanliness. When we do this we are acknowledging the true nature of the things we come into contact with on a daily basis, and we are also demonstrating another important aspect of mindfulness, which is respect. Since everything is of the Eternal, everything is worthy of respect. So, we respect everything, keeping an open heart, knowing all is of the Eternal flow.

Let me now give an example of how I recently went far off the path in my own mindfulness. To give a little background, I am from the '60's generation. Before I started my training I took politics very seriously, becoming very emotional, judgmental, and argumentative. As a monk, this kind of settled down, and I really didn't pay too much attention to politics. However, in this recent political climate the old karma resurfaced. I became angry, fearful, and anxious about the future, and my heart hardened towards politicians with different positions from myself. I discussed politics with my friends back east and with some groups here in the Seattle area. I was so consumed by this that I was totally unaware of how far off I had strayed. Then one day during meditation, mindfulness brought me back and a still quiet voice made me aware of how I had gotten pulled into politics, how my heart had hardened, and how I needed to let it go. It was as if a heavy weight had been lifted off my back. My mindfulness had strayed and I was concentrating on the karmic tendencies of the candidates, such as delusional thinking, greed, and thirst for power, instead of seeing the ever present flow of the Eternal in everyone and everything. This had caused me great suffering, bringing my own karmic tendencies to friends and group members. It went against one of the

precepts, "selling the wine of delusion" to others. I went around and apologized to everyone.

I would like to interject here the idea of concern, which can be helpful and mindful. There is a place for concern, but we have to be quite careful that we keep an open heart, unencumbered by the control of emotion and delusion. As an example, let us say that a chemical company is considering opening a plant close to your neighborhood. Concern for family and friends is reasonable, but a problem can arise if we begin to think of the company and its leaders with a hardened heart, thinking of them as evil. Great Master Dogen said, "Don't get into good or evil and don't get into right or wrong." He is speaking of the delusions of absolutes and judgements, which can lead to mean spirited actions, such as physical confrontations or angry letters. Instead, some of the alternative actions we could take might be peaceful picketing or writing to a congressman out of sincere concern. We try to be mindful of the true nature of the Eternal present in everyone, and can then express our concern in a productive way.

Mindfulness can also help us when we experience feelings such as despair, inadequacy, and fear. Early in my training, and actually for most of my life, if I experienced a sense of failure (a delusion) or if I unintentionally caused emotional hurt to someone, instead of being mindful of the flow of the Eternal, I would turn against myself. I would get really down on myself, thinking of myself as no good, inadequate, and inferior. This attitude can often transfer to others, usually those we are closest to, who we love and who love us the most. We start to think of them as the cause of our painful feelings. This occurs because we experience the delusion of a strong lack of love, and in an attempt to reduce our suffering, we blame others. So instead of reducing suffering, we cause a great deal of suffering for ourselves and our loved ones.

Mindfulness in my formal meditation and in everyday life is something I still have to be very "mindful" of. As you continue further in your training, it becomes something that is an integral part of your life, as it has in mine. I cannot express how helpful this has been to me, and I'm sure you will experience this as you continue.

With all my heart,
Reverend Basil