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Online 10-day Retreat Nov 3, 2020, with Delson Armstrong

This video is part of the 10-day online retreat series.

It is a daily 30-minute QA on the suttas, dhamma talk and reflections. This QA is focused on the practice around Effective Application (Right Effort) and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

<https://www.suttavada.foundation/10-days-reference-material/>

(Slightly edited to improve readability)

Day 0 Q & A

Question:

In the resource material there is a lot of reference to the 6R's, and at the same time reading the suttas we see the reference to the Four Right Efforts. How do you see the relationship between the two?

Answer:

When you read Day 1 tomorrow, it will give a little more in-depth explanation. The 6R's are the modern version, if you will, of the Four Right Efforts. The Four Right Efforts and the 6R's are intertwined. The process of the 6R's, when you start with Recognize, aligns with the First Right Effort.

Let me go through the Four Right Efforts:

The First Right Effort is the preventing of unwholesome states from arising. That is your hindrances and your distractions.

The Second is abandoning presently arise unwholesome states or hindrances.

The Third is to bring up your wholesome qualities of mind.

The Fourth is to maintain that wholesome quality of mind.

When you're using the 6R process, you see that the mind has gotten distracted and is no longer paying attention to the object of meditation (OoM). When you see this and you Recognize this, you're preventing the distraction to further flow with your attention. So, you prevent any further distractions from arising, when you Recognize.

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When you Release your attention, you take your attention away from that distraction and bring it to the Relax process. Which is to Relax the craving, the tension, that is a result of the craving in both the mind and the body. You are using the Second Right Effort, which is to abandon the unwholesome states of mind, presently arisen.

When you come back to your Smile, making sure you are smiling, and come back to your OoM – which is Loving-kindness, Compassion or whatever it might be – you are then bringing up the wholesome quality of mind.

Finally, as you Return and stay with your object, you are maintaining that wholesome quality of mind. And then you Repeat whenever necessary, whenever your mind gets distracted yet again.

Question:

When you have 6 steps, when it becomes like one, when it *rolls* like one, and the last step is Repeat, can you explain more about how you see the Repeat part? And is it always six R's?

Answer:

Sometimes you five R, which means that you don't have to Repeat. So long as you are staying with your OoM, so long as your attention, your awareness, is on it, you don't have to Repeat. 6R's are only used whenever you see that the mind was distracted. If you find that there are thoughts in the background of your mind, while you have your awareness on the OoM, you don't have to 6R those. They will go away on their own, because they have no attention that will feed them. But whenever your attention is no longer on your object, you 6R. It's always the same steps, and it's a flow as you said. It happens in about three, four seconds at the most. As soon as you Recognized you were distracted, you don't have to verbalize in your head 'Oh, I Recognize'. You already know that you got distracted. Knowing that you were distracted, that's recognition, that's Recognizing. In putting your attention to the Relax of the 6R process, you have Released your attention from the distraction, and put your attention now on Relaxing the tension in the mind and in the body.

Now you've already done the first two Right Efforts, which is the preventing and the abandoning. And now bringing up the wholesome state, you come to your Smile and you come back to the Feeling, metta (Loving-kindness), Karuna (Compassion), whatever it is. It's always the same steps in the progression, but the Repeat is only whenever you get distracted again.

Question:

Is there any guided meditation from you at any stage, or are we relying on the materials to guide our meditation?

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Answer:

The materials, the suttas and the videos, are really to start to get an understanding of the different parts of the Eightfold Path. We start off with what is known as Effective Choice and Effective Application. That's talking about Right Intention and Right Effort, that is really the basis. As you get deeper, you're going to Mindfulness, or Effective Observation; Samadhi, or what is the Collectedness - we don't like to use the word concentration - and then you start to get into deeper subjects, like Kamma, Rebirth and Consciousness. These are materials to help you on your own self-directed meditation. I won't really be leading any kind of group meditation, this is more a path of self-discovery, in your own time and the amount of effort you put into it.

Question:

We spoke of the meditation object of Joy, is this one of these Four Foundations, or does it include one of them? How is the relation between one meditation object versus the Four Foundations? And can you explain Dhamma of the last Foundation?

Answer:

It really depends on the translations. Bhante Ananda's translation likes to call it the Four Resting places of Awareness, that's another way of looking at it. What this is, is first and foremost the Body. Understanding how your body is feeling in any given moment. The Sensations that are arising from the body is the second, the third is your mind, or consciousness they call it. I call it Mindset, because a mindset can continually change and is a collection of thoughts that creates a certain mindset. When you get into the jhanas, each jhana is a particular kind of mindset, because it has different kinds of factors within each jhana. And Dhamma is really phenomena. Any kind of phenomena related to the mind, whether it's thoughts, emotions, memories, Formations, things like that. These are the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

When you are practicing the jhanas, practicing metta and you get into jhana, the way you know you are in jhana is that your mind is collected. Effective or Right Collectedness is being in one of these four jhanas, first and foremost.

Going back to Dhamma, you have other aspects of it; you have phenomena related to the five hindrances; you are aware if any of these hindrances are in the mind. Any time a hindrance is present, you are no longer in jhana. This is how you are utilizing Mindfulness. By seeing whether a hindrance is present or not in the mind, because when you are distracted, you know there is a hindrance there. So, you use the 6R's to come back.

And as you are doing this, you are also starting to activate and balance the Seven Factors of Awakening. This is also part of the Dhamma aspect of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. When it comes to the Seven Factors of Awakening, they start to be utilized more and more as

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you get higher into the process, into higher dimensions of perception let's say, beyond the four jhanas.

But for the time being, all you should know if you are starting on the Path or you're still working with the first four jhanas, is if your mind continues to stay with the object, and you are not pushing. Because if you push, you are not utilizing Mindfulness anymore, you're using too much effort, too much one-pointed focus. You just observe. In the observation of that, you are collectively being observant of the body, of the mind, of the sensations and of the mental contents within the mind. It's an open awareness. In the awareness of that, you are being attentive to the feeling, but you are also aware if there are any thoughts in the background, or if the mind is being distracted.

Question:

So, the Four Resting places are not just separate things, but have been integrated into this one and the same observation process?

Answer:

Yes. On day 2 there will be an entire focus so to speak, on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. When you watch the video and read the material, it will go even more in depth into it. The two foremost suttas are the Satipatthana Sutta from the Majjhima Nikaya (number 10), and the Maha satipatthana Sutta (Digha Nikaya 22), which is identical except for the elaboration of the Four Noble Truths. There are different ways of doing it, you can also divide them in four categories. You can solely pay attention to what is happening in the body, the mind, or the sensory experiences that arise. And in just the observation, the pure awareness without trying to control it, you will start to see insights into the body, the mind, sensory experiences, and into the mental contents. You start to see the impermanence of these things, and you see there is no controller there. There is an emptiness of self in that. And it happens with continually being observant, being aware, mindful; whenever you do get distracted, you utilize the 6R's. The Recognition part primarily is the beginning of that Mindfulness. Whenever you are in the jhana, whenever you are staying with your object of meditation with an open awareness - that is being attentive but not focused, not too concentrated - you are practicing Mindfulness, you are applying the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. So long as you are openly aware, you can know that a hindrance has arisen or not. If you focus too much, you are actually suppressing the hindrances, you are not able to know when, where and how you got distracted.

Question:

Is it advisable to look for tension when you are in a jhana and there is no tension?

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Answer:

No, you don't want to look for any kind of tension in the body. Earlier somebody asked a question about doing the Relax step, but not necessarily finding any tension in the body. That's fine, you don't need to. The Relax step is not only letting go of the craving in the form of that tension, another aspect is that it's also tranquilizing the bodily Formations. It's something that is mentioned in the Anapanasati Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya 118); whenever you breathe in or out, you tranquilize the bodily Formation. This tranquilizing is the deeper effect of that Relax step.

If you are aware of tension and see that it's there, you intend the Relax step to let go of that tension, which is that Craving.

Even if the tension is not there, utilizing the Relax step whenever you get distracted, will release Formations, will let go and relax the Formations, no matter how subtle they are.

Question:

Is it ok for this retreat to now and then switch to anapanasati – Mindfulness of Breathing –while using the 6R's - instead of the Brahma Viharas? I sometimes use it before falling asleep, because then I am too tired to radiate Metta.

Answer:

For this retreat stay with the Brahma Viharas, or with tranquil mind if you are at that point.

If you want to fall asleep, you could come back to the quiet mind and use the Relax step and nothing but the Relax step. That will definitely help you sleep.

Question:

When I meditate for an hour and I feel I could do more, I'm afraid I might push myself too much. Can you suggest how to go about timing?

Answer:

Sit for as long as you can. If you want, you can do an intention that you want to sit for an hour the first time. And the next time an hour 10 minutes, an hour 15 minutes.

If you have the inclination to sit for longer, that's always good, that's always suggested. If you want to sit for longer, do sit for longer. In terms of pushing, it is not necessarily pushing. Let's say the body wants to stop, but the mind does want to meditate for longer. You cajole the body, saying: how about five more minutes. Let's see what happens for five more minutes.

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Likewise, if the mind is restless and doesn't want to meditate anymore, you can sit for five more minutes. Treat the mind like a little child. In that way the mind won't be pushing, it will accept it, and you can continue on with the meditation.

Question:

How do we apply this meditation when we are not doing formal sitting or walking meditation? When we are with family, in the evening, or doing chores or other work?

Answer:

You can bring loving-kindness into your chores, eating your food, in your speech, in your interaction with family and friends. The more you do this with having an intention from the beginning of the day that *I am going to be loving and kind. Or I'm going to be compassionate*, the easier it will be when you sit (to meditate) to stay with that feeling. It provides a very good foundation. The more you are able to cultivate loving-kindness in a way that you can bring it to your daily activities; you can do things with a smile; you can do your chores with compassion; radiating when you're walking on the street; doing grocery shopping, where you meet people, you can send loving-kindness as you cross their path, the more in tune, the more in touch you become with the feeling. And the easier it is for you to stay with it and generate it, in the beginning of your sitting practice.

Question:

At the moment I have a lot of technical complications in my work. In the past I used forgiveness, but I realized I could do compassion too. Do you have any other suggestions?

Answer:

This is also a great way to start to develop the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. You can start to slow your mind down and bring it back to the present, bring it back to the awareness of what you are doing with your mind, the body, the sensory experiences that are arising in whatever your activity you are doing, related to your work. Instead of approaching it from what is not working out, flip the switch and pay attention to where your mind is and how it responds to it. Accordingly, if the mind has aversion to it, you 6R it and bring in your choice of Compassion, Loving-kindness or forgiveness. Consider everything you are doing in this retreat, as a way to develop the practice through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, and through practicing the 6R's continuously.

Any time there is a situation that might not be going your way, or there is resistance, you want to be able to practice mindfulness. Slow things down, relax. Tomorrow you will read about react

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versus response. A reaction is really reflexive, without thinking, without reflection. It's just the old part of our brain suddenly reacting and going into fight or flight mode. Which brings up anxiety and stress, which brings up a lot of different thoughts about the thing you're doing, and so on. This creates a lot of mental proliferation and obviously a lot of mental suffering. If you respond, you pause, relax, slow things down and allow the mind to take some time to come up with a response, that comes from reflection, understanding and compassion.

That also means that if you choose to bring in some forgiveness or compassion, you are actually responding, because you have allowed the mind the space to take a pause and say *wait, there is a hindrance arising here, an unwholesome state of mind*. You use mindfulness to see that this is the kind of mind state that might be arising. Then you replace it through the 6R process with a more wholesome state of mind, while applying mindfulness. They are different parts of the puzzle and they all come together and culminate in every moment, if you do it right.