Mindfulness in the Three Trainings
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Introduction

In this talk I'm going to be looking at some quite familiar areas. What I'm hoping to achieve is some kind of a synthesis, or if that's too grand a term, a bringing together of various areas of our practice under the general term of 'mindfulness'. In particular, I want to explore, explicitly or implicitly, the question: what is mindfulness, really?

Let's start with some views about mindfulness. And unmindfulness. In some of his talks, Bhante approaches the question of what mindfulness is by giving a vivid description of unmindfulness – I'm sure you're all familiar with those talks and I'm sure all of us very familiar with the kinds of disastrous unmindfulness scenarios that Bhante paints (in others, of course)!

A general impression that one picks up sometimes is that we're not very good at mindfulness in the Order and FWBO. Mindfulness is not our strongest point. We're very good at friendship, kalyana mitrata, right livelihood, making the Dharma relevant to modern culture and so on ... but we're not so very good at mindfulness. This impression doesn't just come from Order members – it comes from Bhante too; Again and again I've heard him talking about people's lack of general, everyday mindfulness. This often seems to concern the area of awareness of and consideration for others.

Now, I'm not questioning at all the likelihood that we could be much more mindful in many different ways – or that when Bhante and others comment on unmindfulness there is really something that needs to be worked on. There's always a huge amount of work to do in this area. But I can't help noticing (and this isn't just a rationalisation!) that when someone accuses me of being unmindful – or us in general of being unmindful – they often seem to have a rather narrow or particular idea of mindfulness in view.

In my more jaded moments I sometimes think that people have a tacit definition something like: 'unmindfulness is anything that anyone else keeps doing which I find particularly irritating'. Now, it's perfectly natural to think in this way – well, perfectly natural in a reactive sort of way – but it's not a very good starting point for a definition of mindfulness. So let's broaden out our view of mindfulness, if we can.

In fact I don't' think that that we're so very bad at mindfulness in the Movement. It's just that some of the areas we are pretty good at we tend not to think of as 'mindfulness'. For instance, friendliness, the expression of metta, kalyana mitrata, right livelihood and so on are all very much aspects of the application of mindfulness. So we need to have a broader perspective on mindfulness so that we can get a more realistic view of what it really consists of and consequently what we need to strengthen or develop in terms of our own practice.

As you probably know, a point that Bhante has made about vipassana meditation (in the sense of 'the vipassana school') is that he believes some of these approaches use too limited a definition of 'mindfulness'. It's not that what they teach isn't mindfulness but rather that it's an aspect of mindfulness and he feels that other important aspects don't get enough emphasis – particularly the ethical dimensions of mindfulness.

But this isn't a matter of pointing the finger at other movements: the same point has been made about our own approach to mindfulness as well. For instance, Subhuti was recently reported as saying: 'In the FWBO [mindfulness] often tends to be reduced to mindfulness of the breath, and of the body and its movements.' So that is a general impression – obviously it doesn't apply to everybody. Nevertheless, as I've already said, I think that we all do generally need to develop a fuller understanding of the scope of mindfulness – both from the point of view of our own practice and from the point of view of how we teach it.

Subhuti put what I'm getting at quite succinctly at the Madhyamaloka-Vajraloka meditation colloquium two years ago: '*Mindfulness is a term whose denotations and connotations cover almost the whole of the spiritual life .... Our teaching needs to take into account not only smriti and samprajanya, but also the implications of apramada, which brings out the ethical dimension of mindfulness.*'

And Bhante commented on this: '*there needs to be a much greater awareness of mindfulness in a general, ordinary sense [in the Movement]. I notice still that people are very unmindful in everyday activities ... we need to put much, much more emphasis on this. One should be able to see the difference, [in the deportment of Order members] – there should be no gross unawareness or unmindfulness. Especially at centres, Order members should take care of how they speak, move and behave*.'

So a lot of what I've got to say is an expansion on these comments by Bhante and Subhuti.

Developing and embodying the faculty of mindfulness

The approach to mindfulness that I want to talk about mainly comes down to looking at things in a slightly different way. That's to say, rather than thinking about mindfulness as an aspect of our Dharma practice, it means seeing it as the essence. I suggest that we need to move away from thinking of mindfulness as a sort of separate practice – one among others. And I think we especially need to get away from thinking of mindfulness as something we can only give proper attention to occasionally, e.g. when we're on retreat.

I've often found, at Vajraloka, that it's not that easy to get people thinking in terms of overall mindfulness practice, rather than just their meditation. I thought that this point needed highlighting, so we've recently changed from having 'meditation interviews' to 'practice reviews' – I hoped this would bring out that we want people to review their mindfulness practice as a whole – not just what happens when sitting down inside the

shrine room. But it always seems to be an uphill struggle. Nine times out of ten – unless they're prompted – people will only talk about what's going on when they're sitting in the shrine room with their eyes closed.

Obviously, we're all aware that mindfulness and meditation are not two separate things – we know that mindfulness in daily life comes out of our meditation, and feeds back into our meditation. But there does seem to be quite a widespread notion that to practice mindfulness properly we need plenty of space and to really slow down – like slow walking... or mindfully doing the washing up just to do the washing up and so on.

There is nothing wrong with this way of practising mindfulness of course, and I know that I'm putting this a bit one-sidedly. I'm sure that we don't just see mindfulness in that kind of way ... but it does seem to me that there is a tendency in this direction. I can see it in myself – I have to catch myself not to think that mindfulness is just something I sort of 'do' professionally on retreats at Vajraloka. So I think the answer – or the direction towards the answer – is to persuade ourselves that mindfulness is not a particular practice, but that it's integral to all Dharma practice.

In particular, I think that it would be very helpful to understand mindfulness as integral to the practice of the Three Trainings – shila, samadhi and prajna. This is how I want to look at it. Training in mindfulness is what we are engaged in, and the Three Trainings are the principal areas of mindfulness. Mindfulness embodies the way in which we engage with the Three Trainings.

Practically speaking, I think it's helpful to look at mindfulness in terms of two main areas – you could call it the 'how' and the 'what' – that is, how we're mindful and what we're mindful of. The 'how' relates to the mental faculties that we have developed or need to develop in order to be mindful in the first place. I usually refer to this as the 'faculty' of mindfulness. The 'what' refers to what we're mindful of – and this in principle means anything whatsoever – whatever we can be aware of, whatever we can cognize, is potentially an object of mindfulness.

1. The 'how' of mindfulness – mindfulness as a faculty

So, first the faculty of mindfulness. This faculty consists of the application of the qualities of *smrti*, *apramada* and *samprajanya*. For the moment I'll just render smrti as 'receptive awareness', apramada as 'vigilant discrimination' and samprajanya as 'clear comprehension' – but more on these in a moment. These three qualities of mindfulness are what we have to apply all the time in order to practice the Dharma. So, they're not by any means unfamiliar to us, in principle or in practice.

But I think it's probably true – as Subhuti suggested – that in the past we've largely tended to think of mindfulness in terms of smrti and samprajanya. So it's Bhante's particular wish that we bring out much more strongly the emphasis on apramada as well. An important point about these three qualities of mindfulness is that they aren't just a

random selection of good qualities – they're qualities that work together. In fact they form what we could call a 'cycle of application' to our practice – to whichever of the Three Trainings we're specifically engaging in at this moment.

So let's remind ourselves about these three qualities and then see how they work in conjunction. Before I do that, though, just one point about the terminology: if you look up their meanings, all three terms are open to various different interpretations. In particular, the meanings of smrti and samprajanya are in some contexts virtually interchangeable. So, I'm putting a particular slant on the way I'm interpreting them. It's consistent with the etymology of the terms, and it's quite traditional. But you won't always find these terms discussed quite in this way. The important thing is to understand the principle and develop the quality.

i.) Smrti is our capacity to be aware. It's an open, and receptive quality of awareness. That's to say, it's our ability to take in whatever's going on – smrti doesn't discriminate. In fact, discrimination too soon would be quite unhelpful.

What does this mean? Well, take the example of trying to identify what emotion we're experiencing. Sometimes it's obvious what's going on: we're angry; we're mettaful – and it's quite straightforward. Other times it's not so clear at all. For example, the emotional quality might be quite low-key, so that we can't really identify what's going on. Or we might be in a situation with someone else who's getting quite angry or agitated – and a response arises in us that seems at first to be anger too – but we need to be aware of the possibility that it is not what it at first seems to be. It might be fear rather than anger. Or it might be firmness and clarity mixed with a degree of apprehension. Or a fair number of other possibilities.

So which of these is it? If we're concerned to act skilfully, we need a clear appraisal of the situation – because obviously if we are getting angry what we need to do is different from what we need to do if we're actually being firm and clear but feeling a bit apprehensive.

The basic point is that we need to know what's there – as clearly as possible – and then we can begin to discriminate about it. If we discriminate before we know what's there, the chances are that we'll so to speak 'discriminate out' things that we don't want to be there, or feel shouldn't be there. For instance – a familiar case – if we're in denial about the fact that we are actually angry, or upset. We simply don't want to admit it.
So we need to cultivate our capacity for objective awareness: awareness that straightforwardly and honestly accepts what's really there, all the time. There's a certain minor kind of wisdom in it – just accepting: this is how it is, without our likes and dislikes or wants and not-wants getting in the way.

A side issue here. In one of his lists of 15 points, Bhante talked about not accepting oneself – and he was perfectly right to make the point that he did in that particular context. If we're convinced we're 'perfect just as we are' then we're not really going to get much further. But I think we should rehabilitate the word a bit, in this context – the

context of smrti as self-honest, no bones about it awareness: unless we truly accept what's here, and how we really are, it's quite impossible to do anything with or about it.

'*Acknowledge*' is ok too, but sometimes it's a question of 'you're angry – just accept it'. In Sanskrit the root meaning of smrti is memory. To me this suggests the fact that smrti has to do with our reflexive awareness. In other words, when we have smrti our previous moments of awareness are so to speak implicit in our present moment of awareness. If this wasn't the case, every moment would seem discrete – we wouldn't be aware of the connections between things – e.g. between what's happening now and what we've just done. This quality of smrti is obviously crucial for ethical action: I'm not just aware 'I'm happy' or 'I'm fed up' and so on. – As part of that awareness I also know implicitly what got me into this state. So smrti gives me the basis on which to discriminate whether it's skilful or unskilful.

Although smrti (and mindfulness in general) is sometimes spoken of in terms of 'awareness in the moment'. I don't think this is an adequate way of looking at it. It's certainly true that in a certain sense there's only ever 'this moment' – but seeing smrti as just 'being in the moment' does seem to leave its reflexive character out of the equation. So anyway, that's smrti: open, receptive, honest, non-discriminating reflexive awareness which fully accepts 'what's here', from moment to moment.

ii.) Apramada. As a mental action, apramada follows directly on from smrti. You could call it 'vigilant, discriminating awareness'. Literally it's 'non-heedlessness' – in other words 'heedfulness' – or vigilance. But with the quality of apramada, you could say that discrimination is implicit in that vigilance. After all, if we're being vigilant, by definition we're looking out for something – you can't be vigilant with regard to nothing in particular. If you're a soldier standing guard, you're (presumably) distinguishing friend from foe. Well, of course that's exactly what we're doing when we're 'guarding the gates of the senses'. So what we're vigilantly discriminating is whatever our smrti picks up on – moment by moment – whatever this happens to be.

What we're looking out for first of all, from the point of view of our Dharma practice, is the relative skilfulness or unskilfulness of our mental states. First you recognise, then you evaluate – these two functions of mindfulness go hand in hand. So without the quality of apramada, (that's to say, without guarding the gates of the senses), there's no dharmic endeavour – our mind will just go where it pleases. And as we all know, all too often what 'pleases' it is something unskilful.

So it should be clear so far that smrti and apramada are implicit in and crucial to all kinds of Dharma practice. They're the basis of skilful action, of shila. They're also the basis of samadhi or shamatha meditation – they're vitally important for recognising and discriminating the presence of hindrances or positive (dhyana) factors. And they're also the basis of cultivating insight – prajna, in that in insight practice, we have to vigilantly discriminate whether the objects of our awareness embody the three lakshanas.

iii.) Samprajanya. The third quality of mindfulness is samprajanya. This is usually rendered as 'clear comprehension', which is fine – but we could also render it as 'recollection'. Or perhaps as something like 'clear comprehension with recollection'. As this suggests, it's slightly more complex than the other two qualities of mindfulness – it has two main elements:

a) The first aspect is that we clearly comprehend both the nature of the present situation and what needs to be done. For instance, we clearly comprehend that we've given rise to hatred. So, we're clear that hatred is unskilful and that we don't wish to cultivate it (or that the part of us which is going for refuge to the Three Jewels doesn't wish to cultivate it). So, we bring to mind an antidote that we intend to apply. All this is the first aspect – a clear comprehension of the overall situation which includes what we intend to do.

b) The second aspect involves the process of recollection – we actually do it while clearly and continuously recollecting our purpose – not losing it, not forgetting. We actively see it through, e.g. apply an antidote.

So we could say that samprajanya is clear comprehension functioning in three closely related ways: 1) we clearly comprehend the nature of the situation, 2) we clearly comprehend what needs to be done (i.e. which of the right efforts we need to apply), and 3) we clearly comprehend the effectiveness with which we engage in the process of actually doing it.

Another, simpler, way of putting it is that samprajanya is the process of forming intentions, and carrying them out. It's the function of knowing exactly what you are doing and why, from moment to moment.

How they work together

From what I've said already it should at least be clear in outline how these three qualities of mindfulness work together and support each other. Using hatred as an example again:

- Smrti is the act of seeing or knowing that hatred has in fact arisen. It's not rationalised or obscured – it's known for what it is.

- Apramada is the function of immediately distinguishing it as unskilful.

- Samprajanya is clearly comprehending the whole situation, including the appropriate right effort, and carrying it through.

An obvious but important point – I've mainly given examples using unskilful states but exactly the same process applies to skilful states as well – e.g. we recognise 'metta has arisen' (smrti), we distinguish that it's skilful, so that it's to be maintained (apramada), and we then proceed in the most effective way we can in order to maintain it (samprajanya).

I hope it's clear that these three qualities of mindfulness are the most fundamental way of 'working' not just in meditation, but in our whole Dharma practice. Without all three, working in conjunction, progress really would not be possible at all. This is one important sense in which mindfulness is the essence of our whole Dharma practice.

2. The 'what' of mindfulness – the objects and 'field' of mindfulness

So the way these three qualities interact and work together are what I referred to as the 'how' of mindfulness – how we're mindful. But this is only part of the picture. There's also what we're mindful of. As I've already indicated, this topic is potentially huge as what we can be mindful of obviously includes absolutely everything and anything.
One approach is to look at the objects of mindfulness in terms of analysis – so analysing possible objects of awareness into categories: the four foundations, the five skandhas, the six elements, the 51 mental events, the 100+ dharmas – and so on. Whether we use these or other categories, analysis generally underlies and supports our cultivation of smrti and apramada – we have to be able to recognise the nature of our experience in order to evaluate it and then act appropriately. So this approach is implicit in all mindfulness practice – we have to analyse and distinguish our experience (i.e. use dharmavicaya).

All the categories just mentioned are familiar – or perhaps we're in the process of familiarising ourselves with them (e.g. with the fifty-one mental events) so I'm not going to elaborate. As I said, I want to look at mindfulness training more broadly, in terms of its whole 'field' – that is, the field of the Three Trainings, shila, samadhi and prajna. Even this amounts to an intimidatingly huge area – and I take it for granted that we're all familiar with the three trainings as areas of application in general. So what I want to do is bring attention to the inclusive nature of mindfulness by bringing out some aspects of these Three Trainings that perhaps aren't generally included when we're thinking or talking about 'mindfulness.'

So: under shila, I mainly want to talk about manners (minding our manners); under samadhi I'm want to talk about shraddha and adhishthana in relation to sadhana; and under prajna, again I want to talk about sadhana and using the opportunities that it presents us with for cultivating insight.

Before I go onto this, I want to touch on a couple of points about the Three Trainings themselves – the tri-shiksha. Although '*shiksha*' means something like study, training, discipline or practice, I think that more often than not in the Order, following Bhante, we speak of it as the 'Threefold Way'. Now, it's fine to speak about shila, samadhi and prajna as a 'Way' – they're progressive, so they represent a path. And they do implicitly underlie most other formulations of the path to awakening, like the Noble Eightfold Path, or the six Perfections. If we regard them as a Way, it's also possible to look at our overall life and practice in terms of being 'on' one of these three stages: so we could say "I'm mainly at the stage of practising ethics", or "I've been in a cave for the last 10 years practising meditation" – and so on.

But although they can be talked of as a Way, in their original context, they're explicitly

referred to as shiksha i.e. trainings – what we study and practice to bring ourselves, ultimately, to awakening. This means we engage in a discipline, we train ourselves on an ongoing basis, moment to moment – and this is why the Three Trainings are a mindfulness practice, because we continually have to use the qualities of mindfulness – smrti, apramada and samprajanya – in order to engage in the cultivation of shila, samadhi and prajna.

So even if our 'general level' of practice is ethics, we obviously can't ignore meditation and wisdom. In fact without meditation and wisdom we can't actually practice ethics either. I'll give an example of what I mean. The whole Buddhist approach to ethics – shila – is based on having some clarity – that is to say, some degree of prajna – regarding the principles involved. So, a very basic principle that we'd want to get across when we introduce people to Buddhist ethics is that it's not a matter of following arbitrary moral rules – laws laid down by god or suchlike.

What we want them to understand clearly is the basic principle that actions have consequences – and that we can extrapolate principles of skilful and unskilful action from this, which are finally embodied in the various lists of precepts. I expect that most of us had the experience of seeing this for ourselves at some stage – that sort of 'eureka' moment when you realised that there was a perfectly coherent and creditable way of understanding and upholding ethical action without having to bring in divine lawgivers or the like. The fact that 'actions have consequences' is just implicit in the way things are is quite a revelation. And once you've 'seen' this – once you've had this small but genuine insight – it's quite impossible to go back to seeing the issue of ethics in any less clear – and obvious – a way.

So what I'm getting at here is that even a very basic practical understanding of shila necessarily involves a certain quantum of prajna – and this very basic prajna 'informs' our whole practice of shila. In a similar kind of way, prajna also informs our practice of samadhi, that is to say, the whole area of meditation. Unless we have an experiential understanding of the principles we can't act effectively in meditation. To a large extent we're working with the same basic insight that informs our practice of ethics: actions have consequences. Only, in the case of meditation, we're applying it to the cultivation of 'a continuous stream of skilful mental states' – but in the process we're learning – we have to learn – practical truths about the way things really are: for instance, to realise the minor insight that if we actively cultivate hindrances, concentration just won't happen.

So I think that as were working with the Three Trainings, it's important to be aware of the way in which all three are operative, and interacting, all the time (to acknowledge that they are all operating all the time) – so that we really are training ourselves in shila, samadhi and prajna, together.

There's something else I just want to mention in passing about the Three Trainings. I've already alluded to Bhante's reservations about the term '*vipassana*' – i.e. that the connotations of vipassana as he understands it should not become conflated in people's

minds with the approaches of the 'vipassana movement'. On the Madhyamaloka-Vajraloka colloquium two years ago, he suggested that we should see whether we could find alternative traditional terms for 'vipassana/ vipashyana' and 'samatha/ shamatha'.

I personally find it difficult just to stop using such familiar and ubiquitous terms. But the fact is that in the Three Trainings we actually do already have an alternative way of talking about the areas of shamatha and vipashyana, and I think we could well make much more use of them.

We've got samadhi-shiksha – the training in concentration – and this is broadly equivalent to shamatha-bhavana. And we've got prajna-shiksha – the training in wisdom or insight – which is broadly equivalent to vipashyana-bhavana. So we could speak of 'cultivating or training in samadhi' and 'cultivating or training in prajna'. I think that the advantage of using these terms rather than shamatha/vipashyana, is that the context of shila, samadhi and prajna makes it absolutely clear and inescapable that the foundation for both meditation and wisdom is ethical action.

Shila

Now on to the area of the training in shila and mindfulness. Shila is (of course) skilful action. In terms of mindfulness, it's our whole application of the principles of the Dharma to the world and to our everyday life – in short, it's the area of mindfulness and meditation in action. I don't think that I need to say much about the general relationship between mindfulness and ethics – especially the practice of the precepts. This is surely something that we learn about in our basic Dharma courses and it's a major part of our practice ever after.

Or is that an assumption? Well anyway, it's a very simple and basic point, and it relates back to what I've been saying about the three qualities of mindfulness - smrti, apramada and samprajanya. These three qualities all need to be present and operative before we can engage in skilful action, in the practice of the precepts. Subhuti has made the point that apramada – vigilance - brings out the ethical dimension of mindfulness. But in practice we need to go further than that because we need to be cultivating and using all three qualities of mindfulness in order to actually be ethical. So in the field of ethics – the field of our relations with other living beings, we need these three qualities:

1) First of all we need to have an objective, non-discriminating awareness of the situation. We need that honest self-awareness that acknowledges fairly and squarely what's going on in ourselves. And we also need an honest appraisal of what's going on with others – at least insofar as we can understand it and empathise with it.

2) Secondly we need constantly to be on the ball in evaluating the ethical implications of the situation – and,

3) Thirdly, we need clarity in deciding what our response is going to be so that we can act as skilfully as possible.

In everyday life, this 'cycle' – awareness, evaluation, response – may need to be happening very rapidly in some circumstances. For instance, let's say we're involved in some kind of conflict of interests. If we're concerned to be ethically responsible (rather than just out to get what we want) – a lot of things are going to be happening: First, we're trying to be objectively aware of what's going on in ourselves and what our motivations are. Then we're looking out for the arising of any reactivity (i.e. unskilful action) in ourselves and, given our evaluation of what's going on with the others involved, trying to act as skilfully as possible in relation to them.

Obviously in these sorts of circumstances, it's not going to be helpful (or even possible) to think through the development or use of the three qualities in a very deliberate and methodical way, such as 'ok now, let's develop some open, receptive awareness about what's going on here ... now vigilance – am I getting reactive here or not? ... now what intentions should I form? ...' But just because we're not aware of the qualities in this sort of way doesn't mean we're not using them. It may simply mean that we have assimilated them to such an extent that we apply them naturally and intuitively.

In fact, the more we've been cultivating them in relation to samadhi and prajna, the more likely it is that they're going to be 'available' to us in the sphere of ethics. The more we practice samadhi and prajna, the more effective our practice of shila becomes. And, of course, vice-versa.

So that's an outline of shila as the training in mindfulness of skilful action – our striving to ensure that all of our actions are informed by (or expressive of) skilful intentions. But the term 'skilful' also suggests action which is not just 'ethically wholesome', but which is also considerate, dignified, even attractive. Or as Bhante has put it, 'morally beautiful'.

As I've said, this is an area Bhante seems to return to repeatedly – and at first it might seem a bit prosaic. For instance, what I quoted earlier: '*I notice still that people are very unmindful in everyday activities ... we need to put much, much more emphasis on this. One should be able to see the difference, [in the deportment of Order members] – there should be no gross unawareness or unmindfulness. Especially at centres, Order members should take care of how they speak, move and behave.*'

You could say this is very basic mindfulness indeed – compared with 'mindfulness of reality' for example. But despite this (or because of it), Bhante comes back to it again and again and again – to my mind more than to any other area of mindfulness. Personally, I've been hearing Bhante come back to these kinds of things for some 26 years, and slowly and reluctantly I've come to the conclusion that he must have a reason!

It's notable that in the Jewel Ornament of Liberation, (at least according to Guenther's translation) Gampopa refers to shila-paramita as 'The Perfection of Ethics and Manners' – a chapter on which Bhante has led a seminar, of course. In terms of the Bodhisattva ideal and the development of bodhicitta, cultivation of manners – even an awareness of etiquette – is very important. After all, one could ask, how is a downright slob going to lead all beings towards awakening?

Gampopa quotes from Shantideva on the issue of manners:

'*I should not sit with my legs outstretched, nor rub my hands together. When eating I should not fill my mouth, eat noisily or with my mouth wide open. I should desist from inconsiderately and noisily moving around chairs .... As well as from violently opening doors.*'

So with the likes of Shantideva and Gampopa backing him up, it seems Bhante's on pretty solid ground in making these points, (and the hand-rubbers and leg-outstretchers among us are definitely not)! Of course, one could add to the list – almost indefinitely.

Let's just take up a few areas that Bhante seems concerned with. First, let's just get the matter of doors out of the way. I think as regards Shantideva's list, we'd have to include violently closing doors as well as violently opening them (perhaps at Nalanda they were only selectively unmindful about doors – or maybe it's more shocking to have someone come in suddenly and violently than leave in that sort of way). But I do find it interesting, looking at what Shantideva writes, just how little human nature changes, really – well over a dozen centuries ago, in a completely different culture, people were behaving in exactly the same inconsiderate kinds of way!

So we could very easily add to the list of inconsiderate behaviours – but there's a pitfall: if we live or have lived with others, whether in a community or with our families or whatever the situation, we've surely all had occasional running battles regarding what is 'acceptable behaviour' – e.g. is it acceptable to leave shared areas of the household looking like a pig sty? Is it acceptable to play music at a deafening volume ... or even just a volume that others can hear? Is it acceptable to leave a sink full of dirty crockery ... or a teaspoon unwashed. And so on.

The pitfall is that these areas are not always a matter of shila in the sense of 'natural morality'. It's not inherently immoral – or unskilful – to fail to wash up a spoon. Although in some households it may be regarded as a crime! So we need to be careful not to express personal preferences as if they were moral imperatives.

The more general point is of course awareness of others, and having consideration and respect for them. This is what these issues of 'manners' really boil down to. Being aware of how our casual, moment by moment, often unthought daily behaviour impinges on others.

And I think that the issue underlying this, really, is whether we're acting from metta – or lack of metta. The main point is: are we cultivating an attitude of consideration for others?

Consideration naturally arises from respect. So what do we actually mean by respect? I think in practice, respect comes down to the 'golden rule' – treat others as you'd wish to be treated yourself. And that in turn comes from having a sense of empathy and solidarity

with other living beings, human and non-human – knowing that they wish for happiness just as we do and that they experience suffering just as we do and – crucially – empathising with this rather than being indifferent to it.

As Bhante has made clear, our response to our awareness of others is implicit in the ten precepts. It's also implicit in our cultivation of metta – if we're really trying to act from metta, then we're naturally going to be cultivating qualities like respect, empathy, consideration and politeness as expressions of kindness and friendliness.

Generally we can more or less take it for granted that we all are attempting to embody the precepts in our actions. But in fact this can be a problem, because if we take something for granted, we're only one step away from losing it. So I guess that we all still have still blind spots – and that this is what Bhante is getting at. (Not just with this issue of manners, but with his whole concern for us to have a broader perspective on mindfulness.) His concern it that 'there should be no gross unawareness or unmindfulness' – obviously a certain basic level is assumed. But it's easy enough to lose it if we think there's a 'good' enough reason.

For me, 'losing it' is usually to do with lack of samprajanya in the sense of clear comprehension of purpose – in other words, not thinking ahead, not planning ahead, so that – for instance – I end up having to do something or get somewhere in a hurry. If I'm in a hurry, then other people and their needs are (of course) at best obstructions to what I need to do – so I 'need' to slam a door because I haven't got those extra 3 seconds available to close it quietly. And if I don't leave early enough to get somewhere by car, I know it's inevitable that I'm going go get frustrated by other drivers, with their completely irrational wish to drive slower than I want to drive... and so on. So ... actions have consequences – this whole area of manners is important – it's not just a matter of conventional morality.

Even etiquette has it's place in our practice – take Shantideva's issue of sitting with one's legs outstretched. This is quite a good example because of course it's not regarded as disrespectful to do this in Western cultures – matters of etiquette are usually in themselves a matter of conventional morality or even just social form and habit, but this doesn't mean that we should dismiss or ignore them. We have to bear in mind that the underlying issue is of one of empathy and respect for others – and we need to be especially aware of this if we're visiting different cultures, or are with people from different cultures from our own.

Many of these things are in themselves arbitrary, but they do uphold social cohesiveness and being aware of them is a matter of showing respect.

Going back to Bhante, he says that 'at centres especially' we should 'take care of how we speak, move and behave' – as he implies, a difference should make a difference. I'm sure this doesn't mean that we should be 'on our best behaviour' in a put on kind of way – yes, different kinds of behaviour are appropriate to different situations, and sometimes we're going to be less formal than others. But Bhante emphasises: 'there should be no

gross unawareness or unmindfulness' and he means anytime, anywhere. I think the important thing is that we should act with awareness, respect and consideration towards others (and of course towards ourselves) – always.

So this whole area is one where we strongly need to apply the qualities of mindfulness: being aware of the situation which we are in and what we're doing in it; vigilantly discriminating both what's skilful, and what's appropriate behaviour –including appropriate manners, and even appropriate etiquette; and recollecting all of this while acting appropriately.

Samadhi

Now let's move on to samadhi – in principle, of course, the whole area of meditation. I think that with regard to applying the three qualities of mindfulness to meditation, there's no need to go into this in detail –it's clear enough how we work with the three qualities of mindfulness as a 'cycle of application' in mindfulness generally, and this applies in much the same way in meditation. That is, we come to know what's there (this is also sometimes called 'developing broad awareness'), we evaluate and discriminate, and we decide how to apply ourselves – what we're going to cultivate, or what we need to eradicate and so on.

This is an ongoing process throughout any meditation practice – it's what we refer to as 'working in meditation'.

What I want to do now is to look at a particular aspect of meditation – one that I think is fundamental. This is concerned, at least in the first place, with how we enter meditation i.e. how we set up. Again, this has often been said but I think there's no harm in saying it again: the importance of setting up properly can't be over-emphasised. Although we've been teaching and practising 'setting up' or 'preparation' for a long time, I'm not always sure that the message has completely gone in to our 'collective' Order consciousness. I've sometimes been a bit surprised, even on Order events, to find people leading meditations – say the Order metta bhavana – without allowing any time for setting up before ringing the bell for the first stage. For some reason, I suspect that this is less likely to happen in Centre events or classes than in Order gatherings. But yes, we Order members do need time to set up our meditation properly, at least as much as do friends and mitras.

Setting up isn't just a matter of 'technique' – doing the right things in the right order, as some sort of fail-safe methodology. I know we've had 'PIPER', and 'CCE(+K)', and 'AIDA' ... among others. And many people have found them very useful, and still do. But even if using those methods, setting up is still much more about the 'spirit' than the 'letter'. It's the attitude we bring to our meditation practice which is crucial to the whole success of the endeavour.

There's one thing above all which in my experience makes all the difference between a successful and a mediocre meditation session. This is whether or not I start by cultivating

and contacting shraddha – that is, shraddha not just in the sense of confidence-trust, but in the sense of devotion. Even surrender. That means contacting a sense of something so to speak bigger than myself – something that I'm orienting myself towards and opening myself up to. Giving myself up to it. What I mean is Reality – the truth of things – the Dharma (not God!). How do I contact it? Well, as with most things dharmic, there's no 'fail-safe' method – it's not a method, it's a seeking of a heart-response to what the best in me aspires to – to however I can relate to awakening itself. I have to make that connection.

What helps most of the time – given my own general proclivities – is evocation of my yidams – evocation of Bhante in the form of Padmasambhava as the Guru – and addressing formal prayers and free-form aspirations to them. So I always start sessions of meditation with something like this. I realise that others might not find this sort of approach helpful. But it's contacting this sense of something 'bigger than me' that I think matters – bigger than me in the sense that 'me' is after all just a limited, unawakened being – and so what's 'bigger,' in this sense, than any of us?

Well obviously we all go for refuge to the Three Jewels – so these are certainly something bigger which we can all relate to in one way or another. If we find visualised or human embodiments of awakening less easy to relate to we could well recollect the qualities of the Buddha – or contemplate 'Buddhahood,' or the Dharma.

But I suppose for most of us, it's our yidam – or perhaps the refuge tree – that's likely to be the 'way in' to devotional feelings at the beginning of a meditation session. All the same, I've often found that although evoking my yidams and Padmasambhava starts the shraddha flowing, it sometimes isn't enough to really fuel my practice. I suppose it's like anything we do repeatedly – it or we can become a bit dry at times. So I need to look for ways of engaging – giving myself up to the Dharma – in a more immediate way.

Something that I've returned to lately and find very helpful is giving myself up to the blessing power of the Buddhas – their adhishthana. I suppose this is something like an 'other power' attitude. The sense I have is that the universe is filled with the blessings of the awakened ones – and that this is just 'there' for us like a medium, filling the whole of space, the whole of reality. Or like golden light, or rainbow light, or (for those that have read Phillip Pullman's trilogy), like Dust.

The main point is, whatever I imagine it as being like – or even if I don't have a visual image in mind at all – I do have a sense that this adhishthana is really there, that I am really blessed and all I have to do is open myself to it, to give myself up to it. This really gets the shraddha flowing! I think it's important to say that as far as I'm concerned this isn't just an imaginative method. I mean, there's a lot that's imaginative in the way I might approach it, but underpinning that is a profound confidence – shraddha again in fact – that this is really so: that the adhishthana of the Buddhas, the awakened ones, is here.

By this (to attempt to rationalise it – I find I need to, others may well not) I mean that we

live in a universe where awakening is possible. More than that, we live in a universe where what we awaken to is the truth about the nature of things – so in a sense, awakening is the true reality, not delusion. The defilements are adventitious, they 'come from without' – in other words (not to take that absolutely literally) the defiled mind, the unawakened mind is 'extrinsic' to reality (not to take that absolutely literally either – this is a minefield when it comes to expressing it conceptually).

The point is, adhishthana is just 'there' because reality, the true nature of things, is so to speak tantamount to awakening – its there because all things are 'marked' by shunyata, because 'the essence of mind is intrinsically pure.' So – that's how I relate to it though that's not what I'm thinking when I'm setting myself up for meditation – I just have a sense of being blessed and opening myself up, giving myself up, to that blessing. Which means, in however small a way, letting go into reality, letting go into the truth – or at least into my heartfelt response to the truth which, as Bhante said speaking of shraddha, is the 'emotional equivalent of prajna'.

So for me this really is 'setting up' – if I've opened up to the blessing power of the Buddhas, not only is shraddha there, but very likely many of the factors of concentration are there already too – and, as I've just explained, so implicitly is a certain quantum of prajna, of insight. So this is an excellent basis for any practice of samadhi-prajna (or shamatha-vipashyana). Which means, most if not all of the meditation practices that we do.

But it's a particularly excellent basis for the practice of sadhana. In fact, this is the other area that I want to mention while I'm talking about mindfulness and samadhi. In a sense it's not really another area but an extension of what I've been talking about already. I'd like to remind you (and myself) that we can make much more of our sadhana than we often do.

'Sadhana' means something we carry out, accomplish, effect, perform. In other words, it's a practice (so let's try to stop talking about doing our 'sadhana practice'!) It's not just a practice – in the original (tantric) context, a sadhana is a whole system of practice – almost a lifestyle – devoted to a particular system of meditation and a particular meditation deity.

Of course, we do have a whole system of practice ourselves; but I think that the thing with the sadhana is that it's the central practice. It's the one particular meditation practice that we take on in the context of the private ordination ceremony.

This is true even if our sadhana is not a visualisation practice. Although I'm speaking mainly in terms of visualisation practices at the moment, the general principles do apply to other kinds of practice as well. But I think it's still the case that the vast majority of Order members have the visualisation of a Buddha or Bodhisattva as their sadhana. The figure on whom the sadhana focuses is literally the centre of our bodhi-maTAala. On a 'mythic' level, it represents the bodying-forth of our aspiration, the apotheosis of our going for refuge – the fully-awakened being that we will eventually become. Because of

this, we can regard our yidam as embodying all the adhishthana of all the awakened ones - in fact some visualisation sadhanas do make this explicit in their structure. So if we find it possible to approach and respond to our yidam in this way, apart from anything else, we're creating an extremely powerful and efficacious means of cultivating shraddha, both in and out of meditation.

What I'm suggesting, then, is that we bring our yidam out of our sadhana in the more narrow sense (i.e. a meditation practice you do every day) and integrate our sadhana more with our daily life. This is where it can become more than just a meditation practice – in fact, it can be an important support to our general mindfulness practice as well. One thing I do – if I'm on the ball enough – is to bring my yidam(s) to mind as a way of recollecting mindfulness as soon as I wake up in the morning. Ideally I will have gone to sleep with the deity visualised as formless light in my heart the night before, with that intention in mind. In fact, it rarely works unless I do form that intention previously. I also bring in my yidams right at the beginning of a meditation session: receiving adhishthana from them and giving myself up to that.

The general principle of sadhana is that it's a symbolic letting go of 'me' – letting go of self-grasping – which has to occur in order for us to 'become' the deity – that is, to truly and literally come to embody the awakened qualities that the deity represents. So if our visualisation starts with the blue sky, we shouldn't just think that this 'symbolises' shunyata – we should remind ourselves that it actually represents an opportunity to realise shunyata – in other words, to let go of ourselves (our limited selves) – and even, symbolically, to 'die' so that we can (ultimately) be 'reborn' as the deity. This is what it's really about: spiritual death and rebirth.

If we can give rise to some sense of 'spiritual death' or letting-go of self in this first phase, then we can more 'truly' evoke the transcendental being that we aspire to become – that's to say, have more of a sense of our yidam as a being which is 'not-me' – as something more than a picture or a product of our visual imagination. I think that getting a sense of this is very important – what I mean is that we (initially) should feel the yidam as 'other' – that he/she embodies something that 'we' can't possibly possess – not a product of our ego, but something that is from some entirely different 'place' to our ordinary mundane mind. When the yidam is around, we so to speak breathe the air of another world.

And when the yidam goes – when we dissolve the meditation – we need to be alert to the fact that something equally important is happening. In the first place, in dissolving the visualisation we have the opportunity to see that the yidam is not to be taken literally – as a thing in itself, or as an end in itself. This brings home the fact that all dharmas are characterised by emptiness – even 'transcendental' beings such as our yidam.

Secondly, we have the opportunity to extend sadhana into our everyday activity. In some sadhanas you literally imagine yourself arising as the deity, and you go about your daily business seeing the world as a pure land, other people as Deities themselves, all sounds

as mantra and so on. That's asking quite a lot. But I think it is actually quite feasible for us to bring the sadhana and yidam into our daily life, whatever we happen to be doing – a way of recollecting our yidam and receiving its adhishthana – and this is simply to imagine the deity as having been dissolved and residing in our heart, as pure light. (Or as having re-arisen as pure light in our heart.)

Of course, another way of doing the same thing is to repeat the mantra from time to time. But for me, this sense of the yidam being there as light is much more directly and immediately contactable. I can be aware of it for a moment – a millisecond. That can be enough – enough perhaps to remind me that the mundane-seeming world in which I'm immersed isn't quite everything that it seems – and isn't quite going to get it all its own way.

So these are just a few indications regarding how our sadhana can enter our life more and enrich our mindfulness practice. In fact, in talking about samadhi in terms of shraddha, adhishthana and sadhana, I've already been talking quite a bit about things to do with prajna. In practice, they're not two separate things.

Prajna

Of course, prajna is another vast area. But partly because I've been touching on it already, and partly because I've already said a lot, I want to keep this quite brief. In terms of mindfulness training in prajna, I again need to take for granted most of what we know, do and practice in this area. The only general thing I want to say is to remind ourselves that the training in prajna (insight practice, reflection) has to be part of our daily practice – if it's not, if we're waiting until we get on retreat to do some insight practice, then we're really not going to get very far with it.

I don't mean that we have to do a formal insight meditation practice like the six-element practice every day (though obviously that's great if we can). What I'm saying is that the training in prajna has to have some effective presence in our daily practice. For instance, it could be recollecting in mindfulness of breathing that the breath is impermanent. Or in metta bhavana that all life is interconnected. There are plenty of ways in which we can cultivate insight in both of these practices.

Or it could be that we take more care to recollect the insight aspects of our sadhana – what I've just been talking about – rather than doing it just as a shamatha practice. Mr Chen famously said something like 'without shunyata, tantric [i.e. sadhana] meditation is just vulgar magic'. Well, I know that my own sadhana could do with some more magic sometimes, vulgar or otherwise! But nevertheless – we could paraphrase Mr Chen somewhat more prosaically and say 'without the prajna element, sadhana is definitely a missed opportunity'.

So: recollect and highlight the insight elements in your sadhana – and reflect on the Dharma as and when you can. If you can highlight the insight aspects of your daily mindfulness of breathing or metta bhavana practice, so much the better.

A mindfulness angle on this is: just remember! It's not actually so very difficult to do these things, and given that we've already made the effort to sit meditate in the first place, we might as well make go that furlong further and remember to do some prajna-training whatever practice we happen to be doing. So, use samprajanya for this – set up intentions to remember the insight elements of our practice and do them – in some way or other – every day.

Still regarding prajna, I want to come back to our visualisation practice and what I was saying just now about the dissolution of the visualisation. I said that we have the opportunity to realise emptiness. But I don't know whether we always are sufficiently aware of it and actually take that opportunity. What this opportunity means is that rather than doing anything, we have to give it some space to 'happen' after we've dissolved everything, including the clear blue sky.

In the text of Bhante's edition of the *Manjughosha-stuti-sadhana* there's a footnote by Bhante (I assume) which points out that the 'samadhi' we enter when we dissolve the visualisation 'belong(s) to the mahamudra' even though the sadhana as a whole belongs to the Kriya and Carya Tantras. Which – putting it as briefly as I can – means that this samadhi belongs to the highest level of insight and practice within that system. In fact, it's a 'transcendental samadhi'. I've always regarded this as being of the greatest significance, and I take it to apply to all of our sadhanas, not just to that particular one.

What it says to me is 'these sadhanas can take us all the way.' (Although I have to add that the same is true of the mindfulness of breathing, the metta bhavana and so on, if we choose to approach and develop them in that way.)

Anyway, this is the opportunity we have – we stop doing, we let go, we just be. We open ourselves ... you could say we come back to pure smrti – smrti which arises from this letting go of all form, even the form of a pure, awakened being. It's a sort of pregnant pause ... allowing the birth of insight – possibly. But I think that what we're being open to here, as much as to the dawning of prajna, is the adhishthana – the blessing which is inherent in the situation – inherent in the way things are – to which our proper response is shraddha.

All of these things come together in this moment because – well, because they're not really different things. So in the main part of the practice we've already been cultivating insight and devotion together with concentration – but that's not enough. The time comes when we have to get out of the way – only then can 'it' happen. So this is something to bear in mind. And it's a general thing with regard to cultivating prajna and in fact every other area of Dharma practice: if we're all activity and no receptivity, nothing much will be gained.

Prajna is about letting go of self. If we try to make it happen, it won't. I think for this reason it's of great value to our cultivation of prajna to allow for a good deal of pure awareness (aka just sitting). – This of course being a 'practice' where we don't try to do

anything, don't try to be anything in particular, we just let ourselves become open to the potential of this moment and what we truly are. Open to the blessings of reality.

Conclusion

So maybe to some extent I've gone into areas which aren't the first that come to mind when we think about training in mindfulness. But my main point is that training in mindfulness is tantamount to our whole Dharma practice – that we can bring the principles of mindfulness into all aspects of our spiritual life – and in particular the qualities of mindfulness (smrti, apramada and samprajanya). In fact, unless these qualities are present and we understand how we're applying them, whatever practice we do, it won't be as effective as it could be.

So, I hope that this has opened up some avenues that you find it useful to explore – or at least that it's reminded you of the vistas down certain avenues that you might think worth exploring again.