

Mindfulness

Lynne Bousfield

This article is a talk given by Lynne Bousfield at a recent BMIMC retreat she taught with Steven Smith. It has been transcribed by Tara MacLachlan and Jenny McKinnon.

Lynne has been practising vipassanā meditation for twenty-five years, leading meditation retreats in Australia and Burma, assisting Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa, Steven Smith and Michelle McDonald. She works as a clinical psychologist specialising in pain management using mindfulness and psychological therapies.

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Lynne Bousfield with Steven Smith

Tonight I'd like to talk about mindfulness, which is something Steven and I will continue to talk about over the course of this retreat. Last night I mentioned that mindfulness has a quality of remembering—the remembering to be in the present moment—and described the various components of mindfulness. Mindfulness is not just a unitary quality, it has various components that arise with it. One of those components is energy or effort, the effort to remember to focus attention on the present moment without judgment and observe what's being experienced in each moment. It's important to remember that mindfulness just doesn't happen. It's not there in every moment of experience. We actually have to arouse mindfulness, to make an effort, but we also have to learn that it is a relaxed effort. It's not something that we strain to achieve.

Another quality is focus. Remembering to make the effort to focus attention is a collectedness or cohesiveness of mind, and it involves a quality of concentration. It's not a concentration that locks onto the experience and excludes everything else. It's a

momentary concentration. We are paying attention to whatever arises in each moment.

The quality of attention itself arises, is a part of every moment of consciousness and gets drawn to the most obvious or the most novel phenomena in our field of awareness. The ability to directly experience each moment will allow us to see that each moment is actually quite vivid. But if we lose the moment, get lost in thought and just start thinking about what we are experiencing, we lose our ability to directly experience. We have this tendency to self-reference everything or to want to identify with everything. It's so hard to just simply know experience, just simply see or hear.

A problem with thinking is that it brings in a lot of judgment. As soon as we are judging we are not being mindful because mindfulness has a non-judgmental quality. When mindfulness is present it allows us to see



experience from all perspectives and keeps us balanced in that place. This is one reason it provides a vivid experience. We understand that one perspective is not any better than another—that non-judgmental quality again. A common mistake we make in meditation practice when things are difficult or unpleasant is that we judge it and forget to be mindful. We don't understand that it's just one perspective. Usually when things are difficult we just want to be rid of them. Despite the fact that it sometimes takes a considerable amount of courage to know certain feelings, there are times in our practice, as there are in our lives, when we just have to feel the intensity, to feel the heat. There is an expression 'to burn in the crucible of strong passion'. At those times it's not that our practice is bad, it's just that's what's arising in practice. Therefore, in remembering this quality of mindfulness, recognise that the effort that we make in the moment is the effort to understand, the effort to observe the behaviour of the phenomena that we are being mindful of. The effort is not to judge something or to get rid of it.

The quality of mindfulness is not passive. This is a misconception we can have about meditation practice. It might look like we are all sitting here very passively, but mindfulness is a really active and engaged state of mind. It's really about directly stepping up and coming face to face with whatever it is that we are experiencing. Not getting attached to it, not getting tangled up in it, not identifying with it—just stepping up close. You know that expression 'getting up close and personal', well mindfulness is just about getting up close. Ordinary attention is not like this because it is driven by our judgments. The way we ordinarily observe is through our constructions, through the thoughts that we have about what we're experiencing rather than paying direct attention to the experience. We need to be able to get up close to phenomena in order to really understand them because that gives us a clearer awareness of what's going on. We need that clarity of awareness about anything that we are experiencing, but in terms of our suffering we really need to know what disturbs us before we are in any position at all to try to do anything about it.

We've already mentioned the discourse of the Buddha, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, that talks about the four domains or fields where mindfulness can be aroused and developed. This *sutta* explains what these domains are and the practices that develop mindfulness of them. These four domains of mindfulness cover all of our phenomenal experience. There is no phenomenon unworthy of mindfulness. It's a phrase that's always stuck in my mind – 'no experience is unworthy of being mindful of'. That is what we're meant to remember when times are tough;

There is no phenomenon unworthy of mindfulness ... that's we're meant to remember when times are tough, when we are having difficulty in our practice.

when we are having difficulty in our practice that is a place to be mindful.

The first foundation of mindfulness is mindfulness of the body. The Pali term for this is *kayanupassanā*, *kaya* meaning 'body' and *nupassanā* meaning 'repeated contemplation' or 'repeated observation'. The body includes the postures of the body and movements that we make. That is partly why we're paying attention to the rising and falling movement of the abdomen—we are working within the area of the first domain of mindfulness. When we are doing walking meditation we are also working within that domain.

The second foundation of mindfulness is *vedanānupassanā* and is translated as contemplation of feelings. This doesn't mean emotions but rather any pleasant, unpleasant or neutral quality that accompanies every experience that we have. Physical and mental phenomena are accompanied by either a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral impression. For example, a difficult sensation in the body, a sensation we would normally experience as pain, has both a physical sensation *and* a mental impression or feeling of being unpleasant. Or a

thought that we might have while sitting has a particular content and is accompanied by a feeling, which will be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. This is a very important domain for the development of mindfulness and is really critical in our understanding of suffering.

The third foundation of mindfulness is called *cittanupassanā*, mindfulness of consciousness or mindfulness of the mind. It's the knowing quality of the mind or the overall condition of the mind. Our consciousness is not something that is separated from what we know. Consciousness always arises with an object and that object is what colours consciousness at that time. For example, we may just know that the mind is concentrated, or we may know that it is restless, or we may know that it is peaceful, or angry. So when we know the overall condition of the mind the knowing quality is given more emphasis.

The next domain of the four domains is *dhammānupassanā*, which covers everything else. It includes the array of everything that contacts consciousness, everything that is input into consciousness via the six 'sense doors', the mind being included as a sense door in Buddhist psychology. The emphasis in this domain is on the objects themselves, for example sound or taste or physical sensations in the body, and includes difficulties that arise in practice, the things that we may encounter as obstacles to our practice. It also includes the beautiful factors of mind. As we become more mindful of the obstacles and consciousness starts to be reconditioned or transformed, we then begin to experience more beautiful factors of

mind. These qualities of mind are called the factors of enlightenment.

As we begin to develop mindfulness, what we see is the process rather than the content of experience. It may help to have a little intellectual understanding of what this means so it can help us understand the process when we begin to see it. One of the main reasons it is important to be mindful of the moment is that without mindfulness we just get locked into those habitual ways of thinking and automatic ways of responding. But the more we see process rather than content, because those habitual ways of responding often relate to content, the more we see that we have choice. The experience of choice, or knowing that we have choice in the moment, is fundamental to reducing our suffering.

The Buddha taught about the process of interconnectedness. The Pali term for this is *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, in English often translated as ‘dependent origination’. If you haven’t already begun to notice, you probably soon will, that when you maintain a posture for a prolonged period of time, sensations arise in various parts of the body, persist and become unpleasant. Normally we call this ‘pain’. This initial knowing of the physical sensation is a point of contact—when consciousness comes into contact with these physical sensations in the body.

In terms of Western biomedical science, these signals from the body are being sent by specialized nerve endings that are located all through the body. When the experience is painful there is this initial knowing of the sensations as unpleasant. There is at that point not a very reactive knowing, just an initial recognition that something is unpleasant. We may know that unpleasantness before we even completely recognise or understand where it is coming from in the body or what might be causing it. In terms of Western science the signal is being received by a particular part of the brain and is just being understood on a very basic level—whether it is sharp or hard or hot—but it *is* of an intensity for us to know that it is unpleasant.

Quickly arising on the heels of that somewhat passive knowing of the experience is the perception or recognition of the unpleasantness based on our past experience. So very quickly what kicks in, if it’s a painful sensation from the body, is the perception of threat. This is partly how we are wired. We are wired in a way to get out of harm’s way, to avoid threat. So there is this sense of initial contact, there is a knowing of it as unpleasant, and then there is the recognition of it as being a threat with the immediate sense that something needs to be done about it. In that knowing there is a lot of discrimination, a lot of judgments that

arise, lots of evaluations of what we might like or dislike in terms of what we are experiencing in the body. The proliferation of thoughts and emotional states all follow from that initial perception. This is happening very fast and it’s not happening in a linear fashion. This process may sound like it’s linear, because I can’t actually say everything concurrently, but it isn’t particularly linear. And we’ve got this process occurring even when there’s no threat of pain or harm.

This relationship to an experience that we perceive as unpleasant is something that has become automatic, is habit formation, and is what in terms of Buddhist psy-

chology we call ‘craving’. Even if something is not particularly threatening we just respond to it automatically as if it was, without being mindful. We’ve often acted or responded without even knowing what we are doing because we are just trying to get rid of the sensation. The ultimate outcome is dissatisfaction with our experience. Normally what happens in our daily life when we have unpleasant sensations or discomfort we just act automatically. We don’t often notice that we are moving when we move, and we move to alleviate the suffering. When we come on retreats and we are sitting still and not moving

as often, we are come more face to face with these experiences, and are able to see this cycle—this cycle of conditioning.

If we begin to have this understanding of the process of experience, what do we do in terms of mindfulness? Again, related to a physical sensation, we look at those four foundations of mindfulness, and as soon as we know the sensation in the body, the physical sensation, and we know it as unpleasant, we are operating out of the first two foundations of mindfulness—mindfulness of the body, in terms of the physical sensations, and mindfulness of feeling, of knowing those physical sensations as unpleasant.

In terms of knowing something about the physical sensations, we can direct attention to the area of sensation and see what we can notice about it. This is observing the behaviour of the actual physical sensations themselves. Are the sensations consistent through that entire area? Are there points of greater intensity? Do we notice any change as we pay attention to those sensations? We can move attention between different points within that area that we experience as painful. Or we can simply know the sensations as unpleasant, shift the emphasis to some degree from knowing the physical quality of the sensation to knowing the mental impression of unpleasantness. This process is happening quite quickly and there may be different thoughts and judgments and

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From the manager

Tara MacLachlan, Manager

Since the last newsletter there has been a significant change in my personal life, which has been extremely challenging. It forced me to deeply question the purpose of my life, and I was unsure whether I would be able enough to continue at the centre and fulfill the role of manager. My decision to stay is an expression of my commitment to the Dhamma but it would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of many people.

In the last few months I have been humbled by the incredible loving support I have received from my Dhamma community—teachers and friends, as well as from my wonderful family and local Blue Mountain friends. It has given me much cause to remember the conversation between the Buddha and his closest attendant and cousin, Ananda, who when suggesting that spiritual friendship was half the spiritual life, the Buddha replied, *Say not so Ananda. It is the whole, not the half of the spiritual life.*

I send my heartfelt thanks and much loving-kindness to you all.

The centre continues to flourish and since the release of our last newsletter we have seen the return of a number of our regular teachers. The Venerable Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa this November visited from Burma for his two retreats accompanied by his kappiya, Kyaw Htoo Aung. Sayādaw's first retreat was for Burmese-speaking yogis only and the second was conducted with a translator, Htay Aung. This has proven a popular format with many Burmese yogis keen to take the opportunity to sit with Sayādaw during his Australian tour. Sayādaw had a very full schedule, after BMIMC going on to Sydney, Canberra and Perth, as well as paying a short visit to the Melbourne sangha at Paṇḍitārama in Springvale.

During Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa's November retreats we were very fortunate to again have the generous support and great Burmese cooking of Daw Khin (Auntie) Pyone and Brenda Myat (pictured at right). Dr Thann Naing and the Burmese welfare group offered lunch to the Sayādaw, yogis and staff on one Sunday of the second retreat. There were several days when the meals were donated by yogis and their families. All in all, the month of November was a very busy one! I found it a profoundly inspiring and support-

ive time, with so much spontaneous generosity and devotion to the Dhamma.

In October, for the second year, we had Steven Smith and Lynne Bousfield teaching here together. Both Steven and Lynne are old and dear friends who I don't get to see often enough, so it was a pleasure for me to spend some time with them when they weren't occupied with the demands of teaching. Their two retreats were very well attended, although only one yogi took the opportunity to sit through them both.

Lynne and Steven are very dedicated teachers who give a lot of time and support to the yogis, which was very much appreciated. I want to thank Donald Elniff for managing the first retreat and all the enthusiastic and talented cooks over the October retreats, including locals Gayle Stanaway, Darren Procter and Gabrielle Cusack as well as Leona Kieran, Lesley Fowler, Erica Letsch and Pixy MacLachlan. Also, Justine Lee (with friend Claudia), who cooked for her husband Michael Dash's very popular October long weekend.

Michael draws a number of yogis from his regular spot at the Sydney group sit, (co-facilitated with committee members Graham Wheeler and Danny Taylor) as well as many 'first-time' yogis. The weekend and one day workshops are a great opportunity for people new to meditation practice or who have not sat an intensive retreat to test the waters before plunging into a longer retreat. This said, anyone who is keen to start with a longer retreat will not be discouraged.

Apart from my one day workshop in August, which was a very relaxing and enjoyable day for me (and, I hope, for the participants) Sayādaw U Paññāthami taught his regular eight day retreat. This retreat runs during the *Vassa*, the rains retreat season, and Sayādaw is only able to come away from his centre at Villawood for seven nights. Sayādaw is always a very supportive teacher, who now very skillfully brings together his years of experience of living and teaching in the West with his Burmese traditional training. After his retreat this year, several yogis chose to visit Sayādaw in Vil-



lawood to continue practising with him. Again Auntie Pyone came to cook for us all.

In July it was lovely to have the Venerable Sujiva back here after a break of a number of years. The Venerable was able to teach a second retreat at the last minute, due to the cancellation of another booking. While he was here the Venerable planted a Wollemi Pine in the garden bed that adjoins the teacher's path to the Dhamma hall.

The Venerable Sujiva has a very busy schedule, but we hope he will consider revisiting us in the not too distant future. Although I was away during these two retreats in July—many thanks to Beth Steff for managing and the cooks, who I'm sorry I can't acknowledge by name—I could tell from all the glowing reports from staff and yogis that he was an inspiration.

This is one of the great benefits that we gain from having such wonderful teachers at BMIMC. Apart from their Dhamma knowledge and teaching, our teachers' inspiring qualities contribute greatly to the development of the faith element—one of the five controlling mental faculties that enables our practice to mature—and help us keep our *sila* pure.

Due to the Venerable Sujiva's visit in July the self retreat was moved forward to June. As usual this is a quiet time with yogis coming and going according to the time they have available. For many yogis it is a more challenging way to practice but it can help develop more independence and self-discipline. It also allows the yogis to determine their own schedule and pace of practice. Next year it's likely we'll revert to July.

In September we held a very successful Dhamma service weekend. A number of people came up from Sydney, some staying for the whole weekend. Several new people came from Sydney thanks to an emailed message from John McIntyre, our webmaster. The weather was very kind so we were able to get a lot of outside work done including mulching and weeding, mowing and trimming.

The car park was cleared of many months of fallen pine needles. The south stucco walls of the main house were painted and the south facing weatherboards washed down so that the south face of the house now looks much fresher and cleaner. Also, some of the windows on the north side were painted. Those who preferred to stay indoors gave the house and accom-

modation blocks a spring clean. While we all were working two local yogis, Lisa and Margaret (*below left*), donated and made us lunch. It was a very companionable and satisfying weekend of work and I invite you all to come next September and share in the care of your centre and get together socially with your Dhamma community.

We have had a number of staff changes in the last months with Beth Steff leaving in early August headed for Burma and Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa's centre in Saging. Beth has moved on from there and last I heard she was in Penang at the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre. I had a great working and personal relationship with Beth, her support was invaluable.

Just prior to Beth leaving Myo Kyaw Aung (*centre left*) joined the staff. Aung came to Australia from Burma via Thailand in 1995. He has settled in very well at BMIMC, a helpful and considerate staff member and a great liaison person for the Burmese staff, yogis and visitors. Pixy, my daughter, is staying here for a few months to help out with some cooking and take a bit of time out from work and study, and Dave Smith will be here on and off until the end of January.

Jenny McKinnon (*lower left*) started her resident staff position a few weeks ago, moving down from Bellingen. Jenny is sharing many of the office duties with me, as well as taking on a bit of everything else—the nature of the job—though it's definitely not an ordinary job or an ordinary workplace. For me it's a great privilege to be here, supporting the yogis and devoting my life to the Dhamma.

Vale Joan King

We recently heard that Joan King had passed away. Gabrielle Cusack recalls that 'Joan almost single-handedly kept the Centre running for some months in the mid-90s. Joan was doing as much as would be expected of two staff members now.

'She had had a career with Qantas and was very efficient in all the organisation involved with managing (it was a thrill to have someone who regularly balanced the petty cash) but she was also warm, welcoming and motherly. Joan was a marvellous cook and up until literally the hour that she left BMIMC, she was planning, cooking and freezing meals for the next retreat'. We remember her very fondly.



Mindfulness *continued from Page 3*

emotions arising around the physical sensations as we sit. This is beginning to know the third and fourth domains of mindfulness. We may simply know the thoughts as thoughts, not so much getting lost in their content as we often do. We may know any anxiety that might be arising around the sensation simply as anxiety. We may see an interplay going on. We may get to the stage of realizing that we have to move. But we are not then just falling into an automatic or habitual way of responding. The automatic or habitual way of responding is simply, 'This hurts, I've got to get rid of it'. So we are allowing ourselves to investigate with some kind of curiosity, the experience. Of course we may eventually need to move, but it's not been something that we have not recognized. We've had a choice.

Mindfulness is seeing the process and its changing nature. The more we see change the more we actually have a choice. Mindfulness doesn't have to change anything. Mindfulness simply observes change. But by knowing change, many possibilities are open. When we fall into that habitual way of reacting we don't have any possibilities except the one that we are following, that we constantly followed, because it's been conditioned.

I sometimes move back and forth between Western psychological and Buddhist understanding because psychology is getting really fascinated with this whole idea of what mindfulness is capable of. Coming out of brain research, which wasn't understood previously, is that the brain is quite plastic or malleable. It used to be thought that once you hit a certain age, and not so old, that that was as good as its gets. But it's now been found that the brain continues to evolve, dependent on the kinds of things that we experience. This can be a pretty scary thought, unless you are a meditator. For example, there is a kind of reorganization of the brain for people who have chronic pain. When people are in chronic pain, there is an expansion in the brain of the areas that represent the pain.

My thinking is that if we get into automatic ways of responding, if we automatically respond mindlessly and negatively about experience, it would make sense that there is an expansion of the areas of the brain in association with that. If by practising mindfulness we can affect the brain in the same way, we can have an expansion of the areas that are responsible for 'firing off' when there are more positive emotions going on

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because that's what's happening when we are being mindful. The practice of mindfulness can then influence the brain's plasticity or malleability. It may be that mindfulness allows a cortical reorganization in these larger areas of the brain that are responsible for positive emotion. So it is worth practising.

The function of mindfulness is to remember to stay present with whatever the moment of experience is, and to remember to stay present with curiosity, with a soft and receptive interest. The function of mindfulness is not to try to control our experience. What-

ever arises, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, it's going to last as long as it lasts. Our practice is not one of resisting what's arising. When we resist, the mind becomes hard and rigid and tense. With mindfulness the mind becomes soft and accepting. That mental inclination when we practice with mindfulness is an inclination of loving kindness towards

whatever might be arising in our practice. We are not trying to control—we are just relating to our experience whatever it might be as an opportunity to be mindful.

Mindfulness, we must understand, is something that is experiential, it's not intellectual. We hear about what mindfulness is and how it functions, but we practice to experience that for ourselves. We have to have the desire to be mindful. We have to want to be mindful. We have to want to arouse mindfulness. It's a very penetrative quality of mind. It's not just glossing over the surface of things. It's trying to penetrate into understanding the characteristics of our experience, to understand how things behave and fundamentally to understand that things change.

Because of the work that I do I'm often making these translations between what we do in intensive meditation practice and what we might do in our daily lives. One of the best ways for me to understand the continuum of mindfulness is that we can think about mindfulness in three ways. There's an every day kind of mindfulness that is probably being employed at times without us necessarily recognizing that that's what mindfulness is. Then we develop, when we learn meditation techniques or other techniques, mindfulness to the level of a skill. Right mindfulness becomes quite skilful. Then when we are here on retreat doing something more intensively, we have the opportunity to develop mindfulness to the strength of a factor of enlightenment, to really cut through our conditioning and have the opportunity to have more freedom of mind.

Lynne concluded her talk by referring to the correspondence between the things experienced in meditation practice and the kind of mental qualities described in skill mastery by an Australian golfer, Geoff Ogilvy.

Improving paths and walkways

Ian Baird

Management Committee member

During 2006, with the new buildings completely finished, we decided to make some needed improvements to Sāsana House, including a new central heating system. We were able to do this thanks to the generous response of supporters to our building appeal. In our last newsletter, our annual Vesak appeal mentioned our plans to upgrade the paths and walkways around the Centre, as we build up our finances for the next stage of the building program.

As part of our planned landscaping, we will be constructing paths with lighting from the carpark up to the new student accommodation. There will be a new paved path from the accommodation to join the existing paved path and steps from the meditation hall—resurfacing the existing main access steps down to the meditation hall with a new linking path towards the accommodation blocks.

A new paved path from the old back verandah will run to the clothes line via the laundry, and the existing ‘teacher’s path’ from the stupa area down to the meditation hall will be resurfaced with a new path and steps. This path will provide much improved wet weather access for meditators heading to the dining room and interviews from the meditation hall.

Stage one will be completed in February next year

Helping Hands Network

Helping Hands Network is a Burmese charity run by Mrs Khin Baw. Mrs Baw is the mother of Theresa Baw who is a member of the BMIMC management committee. She recently attended the committee and described the charity’s work, which is to provide assistance to promising university students in Burma who could not otherwise afford to go to university.

The Committee decided that the Helping Hands Net-

Sydney Group Sit

The Centre sponsors a group meditation each week in Sydney. The meditation group meets at the Life & Balance Centre, 132 St John’s Road, Glebe from 7 – 9 pm each Friday evening (except long weekends). After the Christmas holidays, the group will resume on Friday 9th February 2007

Entry is via the side gate, not at the main entrance to the building. There is no charge for attending but donations are most welcome. The format is 30 min-

utes sitting, 30 minutes walking, 30 minutes sitting then usually a talk or some discussion. It is primarily a group sit for people who have attended a retreat at BMIMC but is open to anyone who is interested in meditation.

Three teachers from the Centre (Graham Wheeler, Danny Taylor, Michael Dash) take it in turns to lead the group and will give instructions on the practice if needed.

We hope that all of our supporters will wish to assist us in this work. In the meantime, donations are welcome using the form to be found on the back page.



work was a cause that it would be very appropriate to support, and in 2006, the Centre contributed \$200 to assist with the living expenses of a second year medical student at Megui Medical College in Burma for half a year.

A further \$500 to sponsor the student in 2007 was given to Mrs Baw who recently left for Burma where she will meet the students being sponsored.

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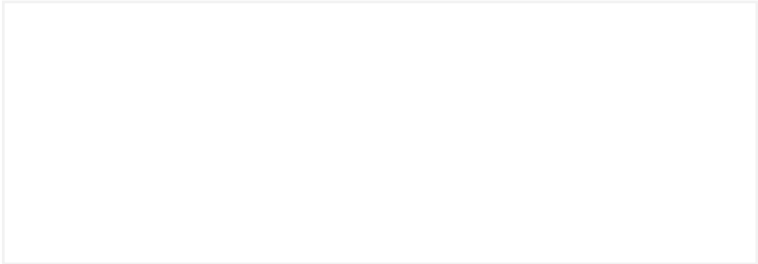
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