

Stage 2: Delving Deeper

Sometimes in order to open your eyes, you need to close them.

Week 1: Non-striving

In Thich Nhat Hanh book entitled "The heart of the Buddhas Teachings" he recounts how before the Buddha attained full realisation of the path, he had tried various methods to suppress his mind, and they did not work. In one discourse, he said:

"I thought, why don't I grit my teeth, press my tongue against my palate and use my mind to repress my mind? Then, as a wrestler might take hold of the head or the shoulders of someone weaker than he, and, in order to restrain and coerce that person, he has to hold him down constantly without letting go for a moment.

So I gritted my teeth, pressed my tongue against my palate and used my mind to suppress my mind. As I did this, I was bathed in sweat. Although I was not lacking in strength, although I maintained mindfulness and did not fall from mindfulness, my body and my mind were not at peace, and I was exhausted by these efforts. This practice caused other feelings of pain to arise in me besides the pain associated with the austerities, and I was not able to tame my mind."



Society in general has a problem mentality which invokes the do-ing mentality.

"What do you do?" is one of the first questions that we get asked when we meet someone new. The sense of who you are is associated with what you do.

"How much did you get done today" seems to be a measure of our success.

We are constantly on the go, doing, striving, forcing, ticking things off a list, multitasking etc. I found myself completing an email, having a conversation and eating my lunch all at the same time, none of which I was doing very well!

This constant do-ing and striving mentality isn't good for us. It sends our bodies into a state of constant stress and anxiety. We make rash decisions, can't think clearly and become more and more reactive.

The more we do the more we need to rest. It makes common sense.

Sisyphus

In Greek mythology there was a man known as Sisyphus, he was punished by Zeus for general trickery and his penance was to have to repeatedly roll a huge stone up a hill.

However no sooner did he have it just at the top when it would roll down and he would have to start over again. This went on and on, never ending.



Like Sisyphus, we're hooked on pushing, pushing, pushing. Hooked on do-ing and yet we never arrive. We're in a state of ceaseless frenzy. We long for being-ness. We don't take time to pause and so we live our lives automatically and shallowly.

The brain is wired so that we always have to be doing something. We're always thinking that something is wrong and we're always tensing as to what's around the corner. For example, the to-do lists that seem so important, the tasks that get red flags.

Why do we think something is wrong and we have to do something about it? We have a sense of impending loss

The ego feels it should be able to work it out. Yet what if we could:

- ✓ Have the patience to wait until wise action arises by itself &
- ✓ take guided intentional action

We all have an Inner Sisyphus and you'll know the energy by:

- ☸ The thought that you have a problem to solve (and yet we all want to run away from our problems)
- ☸ Hiding the parts of yourself that you don't like
- ☸ The need to control or be in control
- ☸ Fight energy. Struggle. Forcing. Striving.

Signs of being in this energy

- ✓ Exhaustion.
- ✓ Using your will to make things happen
- ✓ We become disconnected from others. Unable to feel intimacy. Not able to listen to our hearts. Too busy managing.

We generally bring this Sisyphus energy to anything new that we are learning and mindfulness is no different. We have learnt to be goal orientated, pushing ourselves and striving to master a skill. Lots of students expect that they have to have instant peace or experience some sort of nirvana within days of their first session. They're chasing a dream and in fact missing the point.

In Mindfulness there is no goal (sorry!) Nothing is being asked of you. There is nothing that you're striving for. Being present with a non-judgemental, kind, curious, compassionate presence to whatever happens is both the means and the end.

Every time you practice your experience will probably be different. Some days it will be very easy and it will feel lovely, other days you might not enjoy it so much. It doesn't actually matter what your experience is, you will still get the benefits. If you start chasing after a particular experience then that becomes your goal and you've wandered off the training.

With regular practice, you will see and feel the benefits. You will enjoy it but sometimes to get to that place you need to confront a little discomfort! This is all very natural and normal.