

**Dharma Talk on Second Life**  
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**2 March, 2010: The A-B-C of Mindfulness**

(DoK led the group through the usual A-B-C Mindfulness meditation which he had recently committed to text. After the meditation was finished, DoK comments.)

Basically, this is the written version of the mindfulness meditation we do at the beginning of each dharma talk. For the benefit of everybody who visits, it will be posted on the Buddha Center website, [www.thebuddhacenter.org](http://www.thebuddhacenter.org))

(A participant questions, is each meditation best when it combines all three meditations, A-B-C in harmony?)

Yes this is how to respond when people ask, “what is enlightenment”, or “what is waking up”? And these three factors, the A-B-C, are scientifically, practically, pragmatically, the hallmarks or criteria of an awakened mind.

To me the way to wake up the mind is to wake up from the dream of the constant mind noise that we find ourselves paying attention to during the course of our day during our normal waking consciousness, that state we call waking consciousness, which really isn't awake at all, because we're always reacting to situations based on the thoughts we have about them as opposed to the objective situation itself

(A participant questions, do we become self-aware via negation of the senses?)

We're not negating the senses at all; actually we're right here in this moment, our senses fully open. Somebody once said, “Enlightenment is getting out of your head and coming to your senses.” We are not negating our senses but negating (by transcending, not by resisting) the interpretive thoughts. We are not even negating. It's all a question of attention, attention is the key function here. Buddhism is about balance, and we, in the course of our normal daily lives, are unbalanced in that we have too much of an investment in or attachment to our thoughts. As the Buddha said, attachment is the problem. What are we attached to? We are attached to our thoughts, attached to the reactions to our thoughts, attached to the interpretations that we make of reality, of what's actually happening in front of us at any given moment.

In order to wake up to who and what we truly are, we need to break that attachment. So if we are negating anything, it's the attachment to the thoughts and the negative emotional reactions to thoughts that keep us in this feeling of misery, of suffering. As the Buddha said, “Life is suffering”. Suffering is being in a state of lack of balance, of existential ennui, the feeling of not being comfortable in our own skins unless we're doing something or getting something or pursuing something with what's called “purposeful” behavior.

So what are the practical criteria for waking up from this dream state we're in? It's all about shifting attention to the space between the thoughts and back to those things we were paying attention to as infants before we became embroiled in the state of separation, the sense of separation that we carry with us and have a tough time letting go of.

(A participant questions, how can I explain some of these ideas to my seven year old girl?)

She could probably explain it better to you! Children seem to have a natural sense of connection, unless that is damaged by abuse or neglect. And basically what we're doing here is becoming kids again in the best sense of the word. To me the best way to explain it is simply to say that it is not believing in the idea that there is something outside of us that is going to make us happy. So that is right understanding. If you can get that idea across to her and then explain basically the reasons why we are so miserable, that would be helpful. It is not believing in separateness, even if you don't trust or have faith completely that things are not the way your mind, your current belief system, is telling you they are.

(A participant questions, should one believe or not believe in oneness.)

Belief, any belief, is still embroiled in thoughts and thoughts are the problem not the solution. The ego will always try to tell you it has the solution to your problems, if you just indulge it, just think about things long enough and figure them out and take some kind of action in what's supposed to be the outside world, you will solve your problem. The mind is not separate by its nature. Its true nature is connectedness, oneness. We develop this sense of separateness and reinforce it, and then forget our true nature, forget our connectedness. All spiritual practices are geared toward making ourselves comfortable enough to be willing to let go of this idea of attachment and our need to control what's supposedly outside ourselves.

(A participant comments, mind is nature, we are nature, nature is mind).

Yes, that may be true but that description is just words. What we want is experience. That is why I developed mindfulness exercise, the A-B-C exercise, as a way to get back in touch, to reconnect, to bypass thinking mind, schemes, ideas, concepts, judgment, reactions, and emotions, all that stuff keeps us mired in attachment, and we become free. What are the hallmarks of this freedom? The connectedness that you experience in the A-B-C state. Attention without labels or judgment. There is a famous story about a Chinese Zen monk who was sweeping the courtyard, and his broom hit a small rock, the rock flew out and hit another stone making a sharp cracking sound. Just hearing that stone, he "got it", was enlightened, was catapulted beyond thinking mind. Does anybody here remember my telling you about the "Tibetan shortcut to enlightenment?" Here it is:

- 1) Hear all sounds as mantras.
- 2) See all beings as Buddhas.
- 3) See all phenomena as nirvana.

Pretty simple, huh? If we could all just do that in a heartbeat, how different things would be.

This little A-B-C formula helps you to do that, helps you to bypass the mental filters we see everything through when we see only through our thoughts, judgments, concepts, etc. It allows you to attend to the present moment, dropping interpretations, hearing things and seeing things in their “is-ness”, breathing, being aware of your breath every moment of the day and shift attention to breathing as often as you can. Just breathing more deeply in itself sends more oxygen to your body and improves your metabolism immeasurably.

Corporal or body awareness is becoming aware of the presence of your hands, arms, legs, feet, torso, head, eventually, your whole body. Most of the time the only time we are aware of our body is when one or more parts of it are in pain, and that grabs our attention, like a headache. But otherwise are you aware of the presence of your head sitting on your shoulders when you don't have a headache?

In another dharma talk, I describe an integral viewpoint and integral practice, using different techniques to develop all of the four major modalities or aspects of consciousness; body, mind, spirit, and emotions, the shadow side. So I teach Emotional Freedom Technique, or EFT, to deal with chronic pain. I have also written my own version of instructions for EFT that will be posted on the Buddha Center website.

(A participant questions, doesn't the mind always focus on some particular area and ignore the rest?)

The ego mind is what tries to always to focus on thoughts, concepts, judgments, negative emotions, attachments. Your true mind, true nature, is infinite and focuses on everything because it is everything, connected with everything that is. Training is persuading the ego mind to relax and not focus on separatist things. Then you start to experience your connectedness with all things. Shift the mind away from thoughts. Thoughts are great servants but bad masters. Thoughts are tools but we allow them to be the bosses, we allow them to beat ourselves over the head with them. We forget that they are just thoughts and have no particular meaning other than the meaning that we have given them. It's very simple, it has nothing to do with belief or knowledge, with trying to develop something or build something, it's not like practicing to play a musical instrument or sport. It's just learning to control our attention, to pay attention to what really matters, that being attention to present moment experience, breathing, and the inner energy body and attending away from thought dominated consciousness, because that in and of itself is the cause for all the suffering and misery that we experience in our life. You need not read or study, need not take classes; it's all within you already. The Buddha said, look within, the Buddha is within you, Jesus said the Kingdom of God is within you. You're already there, or here, really, I don't have any answers that you don't already have. I would like to read story from The Way of Chuang Tzu (this story was never read because of subsequent questions and discussion.)

(A participant questions, why do we come to listen to teachers?)

Every good spiritual teacher understands that he is a charlatan, that he is selling ice to Eskimos. You have all the ice you need, you just don't believe it. I am just here to remind you look inside and find your own ice.

(A participant questions, why then do people need to attend meditation retreats or workshops about being compassionate?)

All that means is that there are still a number of attachments; that you haven't polished enough off yet to be able to experience that sense of connectedness all the time. Every spiritual practice is paradoxical. Eckhart Tolle says in *The Power of Now*, in my opinion the best spiritual book of last decade) that ultimately every method, technique, practice must be transcended because they create time and effort between where you are now and where you want to be, that state of connectedness, liberation. The only time you can experience that is now, but when you "practice" you are creating time between this now and the time when you are feeling liberated.

The Buddha means "Look within, you are the Buddha". We are still holding on to attachments, behavior patterns, karma, emotional reactivity, we are afraid to let go of those, we don't really trust in that right view, in the fact that that state of mind we experience during our mindfulness exercise is the very liberation we seek. You might not feel completely that way, but you got a taste what it is like to be free of attachments, of concepts, of the egomind. The trick comes in trusting that you can go about all your daily life activities while still remaining in that state of minimal thinking. That's what spiritual practice is all about. It's paradoxical-not really necessary because we're already Buddhas, but necessary because we can't completely let go right now.

(A participant questions, if something really gets to you, what is your advice for that moment?)

The two things I use are consciously focus on my breathing, feeling the breath coming in and out through the heart and doing my best to drop concepts and emotional reactions and just perceiving and responding to whatever it is that's there. The answers come not from a cluttered mind, or an emotional mind, but from a clear mind, and A-B-C is the best way I've found to clear the mind. It doesn't mean you're not thinking or using the thoughts that are supposed to be there. It does mean that you are not dominated by those thoughts, that your consciousness is not dominated by those thoughts and the emotional reactions to those thoughts. The other advice is to use the EFT (Emotional Freedom) technique, which I use in my therapeutic practice and will teach here. In my experience, it's the best technique to dissolve negative emotions in minutes that would take years in conventional psychotherapy

(A participant questions, is the rest is up to you, nothing left to learn? Without teachers, how many make progress?)

I agree with you in a sense because we are to greater or lesser extent stuck. It's nice that in theory we are all Buddhas, Christs, enlightened beings, who need only drop everything and in this instant we would wake up and *be* the Buddha that we are; being a realized Buddha and trusting enough, having enough control of your attention so that you are in the A-B-C state consistently regardless of what is going on around you. But because we still have these attachments and don't want to let go of them out of resistance and fear. It's the same as that red hot coal in your hand that I talk about, you would just drop it as soon as it fall into your hand, let go of it immediately. But when you are experiencing negative emotion inside yourself, why is it more difficult to let go of that, which is as painful as a red hot coal in your hand? Why is it more difficult to let go of those emotions than the coal? It has to do with attachments. We are afraid to let go because of our belief that somehow they serve us. We think that if we drop them we are going to lose something that we think we need. That is why we do need to practice and practice and plant that seed, it is already here. It will accelerate your practice. But dropping your beliefs feels like danger.

Something that I practice and teach regularly is martial art aikido. When you practice aikido, you are continuing the tradition of the samurai, the Japanese warrior class. These were paid warriors, killers, whose job it was to do battle against the enemies of their lord and to show unerring loyalty to their lord and serve him with honor. If a samurai were going out to battle and met the enemy and faced another, opposing samurai standing before him, and the enemy samurai draws his sword, and the samurai draws his sword, and they are facing each other ready to cut the other down...what should the samurai be thinking about? About the fear he's feeling, that he might lose or be killed? Pride? I am better than him; I'm going to take him? The fact that he didn't have breakfast this morning or that he had a fight with his wife the night before? That his kid stayed out too late? That his car needs new tires or a tune-up? No. Thoughts will distract him from clearly perceiving what that enemy is going to do. The most important thing, and this is why many of the samurai practiced Zen, is to get into that Zen mind, the same state of mind we get into with our mindfulness exercise, getting out of your head and coming to your senses. Attention to what he and the enemy are doing just in this moment, without editorial comments. Thoughts are tools, but pay too much attention to them, and you're a dead man or woman. Does that answer the questions? Yes? Thanks.