

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

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[From “Remarks on the Tradition of Mindfulness” (Garuda IV, p. 16):

The following exposition of mind and the foundations of mindfulness, taken from my talks, does not correspond specifically to the letter of Buddha's *Satipatthana Sutta*. Rather it is taken from the treasury of the living oral teaching, which seeks to make Buddha's instruction palpable to the contemporary practitioner in whatever age. This particular teaching seeks to open the way of mindfulness by showing the essence of each of the four foundations, the inner key to its practice.

1. Thus the mindfulness of body of the *Sutta* is seen through the understanding of the psychosomatic body and the sense of being.
2. The *Sutta's* mindfulness of feeling develops the intimacy of the mindfulness of life.
3. The core of the mindfulness of mind is expounded as the effort which prepares the ground for a flash of abstract mind.
4. The mindfulness of mental objects becomes the mindfulness of the projection of the world in terms of the total simplicity of single acts of mind.]

Mindfulness is a basic approach to the spiritual journey that is common to all traditions of Buddhism. But before we begin to look closely at that approach, we should have some idea of what is meant by spirituality itself. Some say that spirituality is a way of attaining a better kind of happiness, transcendental happiness. Others see it as a benevolent way to develop power over others. Still others say the point of spirituality is to acquire magical powers so we can change our bad world into a good world or purify the world through miracles. It seems that all of these <325> points of view are irrelevant to the Buddhist approach. According to the buddhadharma, spirituality means relating with the working basis of one's existence, which is one's state of mind.

There is a problem with one's basic life, one's basic being. This problem is that we are involved in a continual struggle to survive, to maintain our position. We are continually trying to grasp onto some

solid image of ourselves. And then we have to defend that particular fixed conception. So there is warfare, there is confusion, and there is passion and aggression; there are all kinds of conflicts. From the Buddhist point of view, the development of true spirituality is cutting through our basic fixation, that clinging, that stronghold of something-or-other, which is known as ego.

In order to do that we have to find out what ego is. What is this all about? Who are we? We have to look into our already existing state of mind. And we have to understand what practical step we can take to do that. We are not involved here in a metaphysical discussion about the purpose of life and the meaning of spirituality on an abstract level. We are looking at this question from the point of view of a working situation. We need to find some simple thing we can do in order to embark on the spiritual path.

People have difficulty beginning a spiritual practice because they put a lot of energy into looking for the best and easiest way to get into it. We might have to change our attitude and give up looking for the best or the easiest way. Actually, there is no choice. Whatever approach we take, we will have to deal with what we are already. We have to look at who we are. According to the Buddhist tradition, the working basis of the path and the energy involved in the path is the mind—one's own mind, which is working in us all the time.

Spirituality is based on mind. In Buddhism, mind is what distinguishes sentient beings from rocks or trees or bodies of water. That which possesses discriminating awareness, that which possesses a sense of duality—which grasps or rejects something external—that is mind. Fundamentally, it is that which can associate with an "other"—with any "something" that is perceived as different from the perceiver. That is the definition of mind. The traditional Tibetan phrase—*yul la sems pas na sems*—defining mind means precisely that: "That which can think of the other, the projection, is mind."