

PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTORY COURSE - WISDOM

Session Four

The Present Moment

Summary

1. The Present Moment
2. Attention - four states
3. The Eternal Present
4. Pausing – a practical tool

Practice

1. Remember to practise the Awareness Exercise.
2. Practice focussed / centred attention.
3. Put in a stop, a pause, between actions.
4. Try living as the wise do. Use the question,
‘What would a wise man or woman do now?’

Quotations

Samiddhi

A disciple of Buddha

I, friend, do not reject the present moment to pursue what time will bring. I reject what time will bring to pursue the present moment.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Into the Heart of Life, ch. 1

In being present in the moment, one of the things which first strikes one is how things are constantly flowing, constantly appearing and disappearing. It is like a dance. And we have to give each being space to dance their dance. Everything is dancing; even the molecules inside the cells are dancing. But we make our lives so heavy. We have these incredibly heavy burdens we carry with us like rocks in a big rucksack. We think that carrying this big heavy rucksack is our security; we think it grounds us. We don't realise the freedom, the lightness of just dropping it off, letting it go. That doesn't mean giving up relationships; it doesn't mean giving up one's profession, or one's family, or one's home. It has nothing to do with that; it's not an external change, it's an internal change. It's a change from holding on tightly to holding very lightly.

Swami Vivekananda

The Complete Works, Vol 6, Lectures & Discourses, Concentration & Breathing

To me, the very essence of education is the concentration of mind, not collection of facts. If I had to do my education once again, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then, with a perfect instrument, collect facts at will.

Jaques Lusseyran

The Blind in Society

Because of my blindness, I had developed a new faculty. Strictly speaking, all men have it, but almost all forget to use it. That faculty is attention. In order to live without eyes it is necessary to be very attentive, to remain hour after hour in a state of wakefulness, of receptiveness and activity. Indeed, attention is not simply a virtue of intelligence or the result of education, and something one can easily do without. It is a state of being. It is a state without which we shall never be able to perfect ourselves. In its truest sense, it is the listening post of the universe.

Wangari Muta Maathai (1940 – 2011)

Unbowed, p. 47

Nothing is more beautiful than cultivating the land at dusk. At that time of day in the central highlands the air and the soil are cool, the sun is going down, the sunlight is golden against the ridges and the green of trees, and there is usually a breeze. As you remove the weeds and press the earth around the crops you feel content, and wish the light would last longer so you could cultivate more. Earth and water, air and waning fire of the sun combine to form the essential elements of life and reveal to me my kinship with the soil. When I was a child I sometimes became so absorbed working in the fields with my machete that I didn't notice the end of the day until it got so dark that I could no longer differentiate between the weeds and crops. At that point I knew it was time to go home, on the narrow paths that criss crossed the fields and rivers and woodlots.

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, p. 28

Tanzen and Ekido were once travelling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was falling. Coming around the bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection. 'Come on, girl', said Tanzen at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud. Ekido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he could no longer restrain himself. 'We monks don't go near females', he said to Tanzen, 'especially not young and lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?' 'I left the girl there on the road', said Tanzen. 'Are you still carrying her?'

William Blake

Auguries of Innocence

To see the world in a grain of sand . . .

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo (1943 -)

I have made a vow to attain enlightenment in the female form – no matter how many lifetimes it takes.

An Archaeologist

We had to sweep dirt to make it look clean and we used picks to excavate. The attention with which we had to do this was incredible and the whole process was very therapeutic. We couldn't look around while we were doing it, we had to notice the feel of the earth that we were digging (in order to report back to our supervisor to inform the next part of the excavating), we also had to sort through the dirt so that we didn't miss anything, we had to use the right pressure with

our pick, look carefully while we were sweeping the dirt to make sure we got it perfect for a photo; all the while contending with the heat, the sun, the physical discomfort we were in because we had to squat or bend over, and not sit down. We were there from 7 am, and worked until 2 pm, only with small breaks, but were still focussed. Even pottery washing days involved attention and focus. As a result of it all I ended up feeling extremely calm, and my mind, which was on overdrive before that at school, quietened down immensely.

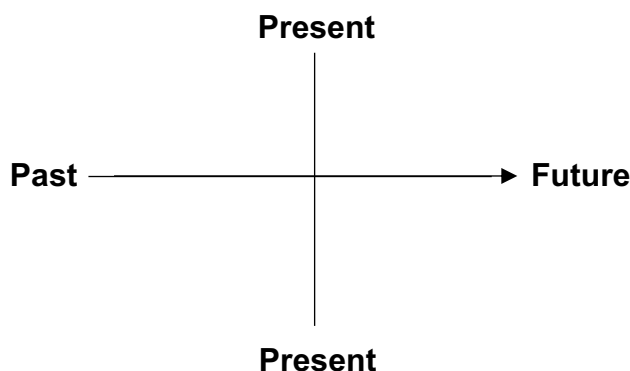
A Teacher

The lesson was a feedback based lesson, where students had to respond to comments I had made on their work, and set themselves targets from my comments. I had taken care when marking their work to ensure that they would be able to do this and be able to set clear targets for themselves. The lesson just seemed to click! They focused on the tasks that I set them, and enjoyed reading and examining a particularly good answer from someone in the class. They were able to identify from that work what made a good answer and then apply that to their own work. I was at the front of the lesson and guided them through it, but almost felt like I didn't exist, but in a good way! I was fully present in the lesson and was able to talk to some of the students about their work and give them further advice and guidance, which was clear and useful. They worked in silence for a good 10-15 minutes, which in classrooms these days is almost unheard of! The lesson progressed systematically and smoothly and in perfect time, and simply flowed from one aspect to the next. It was very complete and measured and felt very calm throughout. They and I were both there in the moment, dealing with whatever needed to be done. It was a lovely lesson.

Diagrams

Diagram 4(b)

THE PRESENT MOMENT



Diagrams – *contd.*

Diagram 4 (c)

STATES OF ATTENTION

<u>Present</u>	<u>Not Present</u>
Centred/focussed	Captured
Open	Scattered

Diagram 4(d)

ATTENTION

