

EIGHTFOLD PATH COURSE

Practice Guides

Wise Understanding

By Rebecca Dixon, Alameda Sangha, Nov. 4, 2018

Week 1 – Awareness of Views

- 1) See if you can notice your views, your attitudes, orientations, or beliefs. What are they? How do these views influence your life? Are you very attached to them? Which views are beneficial? As you consider these questions it can be useful to write your responses down in a journal and then later go back and re-read and re-consider what you wrote.

If you're having trouble identifying what a view is, here's a story that might help:

From the San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday, Nov. 4, 2018

A man-eating tiger that stalked the hills of central India for more than two years, eluded capture many times and was suspected of killing at least 13 villagers was felled by a bullet Friday night, officials said. The plan had been to tranquilize the female tiger, called T-1. But according to the hunters who tried to capture her in Maharashtra state, she roared and charged after being hit by a tranquilizer dart at short range, and there was no choice but to shoot her dead. Villagers in the area terrorized by T-1 erupted in joy when they heard about her death, shooting off firecrackers, passing out sweets and pumping their fists in the air. But wildlife activists were furious. "This is a coldblooded murder," said Jerry Banait, an animal rights advocate.

Can you understand the views of the villagers? Can you understand the views of animal rights advocates? With whom would you ordinarily agree? Can you identify your views in this case, and any attitudes, assumptions or values you have that support them?

Week 2 – Awareness of Freedom from Suffering

For purposes of this exercise there's a difference between ease and relaxation. Relaxation has more to do with the lessening of tension and stress. Ease is an inner peace and harmony that can exist without any reference to tension. In this exercise, try to notice times you have some sense of ease. Maybe there are small moments of ease that appear briefly throughout your day, perhaps even during stressful occasions. During this week, see what you can do to bring more ease into your life, to whatever extent is possible. What do you learn from this focus on ease?

Week 3 – Awareness of Views and Dukkha (Nov. 21, 2018 pre-Thanksgiving)

Now that you've practiced noticing your views and when you experience ease, make a point of watching as these mindstates come and go during the holiday weekend. You will probably have many opportunities to observe views, both yours and others'. Watch for times when views disturb your ease, causing you dukkha. Just let yourself see these phenomena arise and pass, and possibly any connections between views and your dukkha.

Week 4 – Studying Dukkha and its Causes

Either while you're meditating or going about your daily life, notice 1) when you're suffering. Can you 2) identify what mental activity caused it? Pay attention to any 3) resistance you have to acknowledging that you're experiencing dukkha. Allow yourself to feel both the initial distress, and 4) the stress that comes from resisting it. What are the 5) views related to each? Add your observations to what you've written so far.

This may seem like a complex exercise, but take it one step at a time. Just spend some time trying to notice each element, and see what you can identify. Don't worry if there are elements you don't notice. Just observe what you can. You may want to talk with other students in this course or email me about questions or concerns you have.

Week 5 – Questions about Wise Understanding

During this week, formulate as many questions as you can about Wise Understanding – both the teachings about it and your own relationship to Wise Understanding. Go over the past 4 weeks' practices and note any challenges you encountered. How did you deal with them? Write down any questions that come to mind, and then share the ones that are most compelling for you with one or more other people.