

Day One Notes for Reflection

Effective Choice (Samma Sankappa)

What is Choice?

Every thought, word and action begins with a choice, rooted in intention. Think and reflect on the following and see for yourself how your choices, thoughts and intentions arose –

Why did you join this retreat? Is it to find more peace in your life? Is it to attain Nibbana? Is it something else?

Reflecting on the intentions behind your choices, now clarify whether they arose from a Craving Mindset or a wholesome Mindset, born from letting go for the need to control and accepting Reality as it is.

Once you understand the intentions behind your choice, you begin to see how choices come to be.

Reflect on how your intentions come to be. Do they arise as a reaction or as a response?

Reaction vs. Response

A reaction is immediate and filled with taking everything personal and the need to control a situation, and therefore it doesn't provide a space for thoughtful reflection.

In choosing to react, one is choosing to act out of Craving and when Craving blinds one, one does not act with wisdom or understanding and may choose to cause harm through thoughts, words, or actions

A response is reflective, arising out of wisdom. A response provides you a pause between what you have received in the way of your senses and the output you provide to the world.

In this way, one acts from a choice rooted in wisdom and as such one is attentive to each situation as it occurs, always being understanding and always thinking, speaking or acting out of lovingkindness, compassion, joy, equanimity or tranquility, in which case one does not harm another through thoughts, words, or actions.

This choice rooted is therefore rooted in Effective Vision, in that one understands, first on an intellectual level, then on an experiential level, the Four Noble Truths, and therefore strives, using Effective Application to know when Craving has arisen, which causes one Suffering, then lets go of it and experiences peace by applying the Eightfold Path.

Effective Application (Samma Vayama)

The 6Rs

Say that one's object is Metta. One suddenly thinks back to a time with nostalgia or considers the future or thinks about anything other than the Metta.

One RECOGNIZES, seeing the distraction.

RELEASING is the immediate letting go of the distraction - not attending to it, turning mind's Attention now to -

The RELAX step - the stilling of Formations. Having relaxed the Craving in the form of tension in the mind and body, the mind is now clear and free of tension and Craving. It is the step through which a mundane preview of Nibbana is experienced, and now one is ready to attend to -

RE-SMILING, or checking if one is still smiling,

then RETURNING to the object of meditation,

then REPEATING every time one sees mind has been distracted.

All of this happens in less than 5 seconds. It is a flow, a rolling of the R's.

Relax – the cornerstone of the practice

Many people seem to glaze over the Relax step, not really taking time to understand what it is. It is the relaxing of the mind, body and tightness in both.

Relaxing the bodily, mental, and verbal Formations leads the mind into like a clear space, a pristine, thoughtless space with no Craving. Body is relaxed but not slouching. Mind is clear, like a cloudless sky, and thoughts are gone, barely wisps if they are present at all.

When one learns to pinpoint the relaxing of the Formations in this manner, they can immediately understand the Relax step.

The suggestion here is to just let mind be and then intend the relaxation. Relax, relax, relax - then, one is able to see what it means to cease Craving and have that open spacious mind so one can quickly go to it as one lets go of the distraction, and then sees that open mind.

Some people seem to associate the Relax step with a sharp intake of air and a letting go of breath. This is a reactionary aspect of the Relax step, but not the Relax step of stilling Formations in and of itself.

Just Observe, Don't Force It

Now, the other thing to consider is that mind may have the tendency to attach itself to the Metta (Lovingkindness), or Karuna (Compassion), or Mudita (Empathetic Joy), or Upekkha (Equanimity).

Here, it's important to pay Attention to mind **observing** - just watching, *not becoming* the object. It's an object, therefore, one is **watching** it, *not becoming* it.

The Feeling that come up from the object must be observed, and 6R'd if they distract one from their object.

Likewise, one observes that one was distracted – *not becoming* the distraction by fighting it or ignoring it. Any such effort will only cause more Craving and clinging.

Allow the mind to do its work. **It will unravel itself.**

You let mind observe (“I” do not observe) and let mind (not “my” mindfulness) develop its mindfulness with Effective Choice and Effective Application.

Observation is not focus – it is the mere watching and seeing what occurs, not becoming involved or identifying with the Feeling or the object. This then becomes absorption concentration, too much focus, pushing down insights to arise naturally.

Focus is something “I” am doing for an extended period of time, “I” identify with the action, with the sensation and with the object and hence mind is not developing mindfulness.

This is why relaxing is important - it provides the mind space required for insights to naturally arise.

Of course, one caveat - one mustn't just relax during the actual meditation. Once you understand what it feels like, one uses it as part of the 6R effort. Then, there is development and progress as it is intended. Besides, one mustn't just relax, relax, relax in the beginning because mind will then become dull with no object.

It's only after one's mind has reached stability through the jhānas that mind can then watch its own clarity, luminosity, and radiance - the bright, quiet, clear mind, where at this point all crude formations have been relaxed, and now one lets go of the subtler formations.

The Four Effective Applications and the 6Rs

The Four Effective Applications are fundamental to root out unwholesome notions, concepts, and conditions in mind and to replace them with wholesome conditions.

In doing so, one is effectively purifying the Formations in order to create the circumstances for mind to experience Release.

Preventing

It's when a bhikkhu generates enthusiasm, tries, makes an effort, exerts the mind, and strives so that bad, unskillful qualities don't arise.

When one RECOGNIZES that mind has strayed due to a hindrance, one effectively sees and then prevents that hindrance from further distracting the mind .

Releasing

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen are given up.

When one RELEASES their Attention from the hindrance, they have effectively given up that hindrance and when one RELAXES the tension in mind and body, they have let go of the Craving that arose due to that hindrance.

Bring Up Wholesome Qualities of Mind

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities arise.

When one SMILES (or RE-SMILES) one is immediately and effectively bringing mind back into a wholesome state.

Smiling reconditions the mind to be light and relaxed, to see Reality without taking it personal or imposing demands upon it.

When one smiles, one understands Reality as it is and is not fighting it. If that Reality is unwholesome for that present moment, smiling shifts that Perception and brings mind back to a state of balance, replacing the previously unwholesome quality of mind.

Maintaining

They generate enthusiasm, try, make an effort, exert the mind, and strive so that skillful qualities that have arisen remain, are not lost, but increase, mature, and are completed by development.

When one RETURNS to their object (one of the Brahmaviharas), which is itself a wholesome quality, one is effectively allowing that quality to grow and come to fruition to the next level of a wholesome quality.

When one REPEATS the process, if required, they are fundamentally tranquilizing the Formations and reconditioning those Formations to be able to bring about a wholesome level of thought, word and action.

In doing so, one is practicing in meditation the deepening of Effective Observation and Effective Collectedness, and in daily life one is applying Effective Choice, Effective Speech and Effective Behavior.