

Commentary on *A Preliminary Inquiry on Rosen Method and Mindfulness: What We Notice*

(*Rosen Method International Journal*, 7, Issue 1, pp. 49-62)

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I am not a Rosen Method practitioner but received a session many years ago. I have been a practicing Buddhist for nearly 40 years, and an artist in the Chinese painting tradition for longer than that. As a result, it is as a Buddhist in both the Chan and Tibetan traditions, and as an artist and teacher of Chinese brush painting that I offer these comments. Both Buddhist meditation and Chinese painting are arts that unite body, mind and heart, and the Rosen Method bodywork that I experienced appears to derive its healing power from the same synthesis.

As I read the article, I was looking for a mention of *Metta* (Pali – loving-kindness/compassion) in the discussion of *Sati*, mindfulness, and I came to the section on *Gentleness, Loving Kindness and Compassion*. With so much emphasis on mindfulness lately, especially in secularized settings, I would like to highlight this other aspect of traditional mindfulness practice. I recently discovered Dipa Ma, who was an enlightened female teacher in the Vipassana or Insight school of meditation, and a foundational teacher of several of those Americans who planted the mindfulness tradition of Buddhism in the West. She points out a fundamental truth of Buddhism: “*In my experience, there is no difference between mindfulness and lovingkindness*” (Schmidt, 2005).

In the practice of Buddhist meditation in its traditional cultural settings, the spheres of mind and heart are not separated from each other or from life itself. In fact, the Buddha considered great compassion to be the supreme energy of the cosmos. In Chinese, the word for heart and the word for mind sound the same, and the original written character for mind contains the glyph for the heart. My own first years of Buddhist training came in Taiwan, under the guidance of Chan Master Nan Huai-chin. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to come to Buddhist practice in a long-established ‘native’ sangha in which I could soak in the unity of mind training and loving-kindness.

When a tradition is removed or passed on from its original context, especially from East to West, with their radically different styles of perceiving and conceiving the world and our place in it, those who contact the old system may pick and choose since they did not grow up in the culture of origin. As a result, mindfulness practice in the West has sometimes been separated from the larger unity of the original tradition inasmuch as it has been transformed into management and psychological technique. Within the original tradition, the teachings on love and awareness, compassion and wisdom, were and remain a living whole. When mindfulness, in the process of secularization, is cut from its traditional root of loving-kindness, mindfulness may be in danger of becoming sterile and ineffective.

Thus, one sees in all the Buddhist traditions the importance of framing the main practice of

meditation or visualization or sacred dance or whatever it may be, between verses of dedication; or, offering the benefit of the practice to all beings as an integral part of the practice as a whole.

In order to facilitate this, one focuses the attention in pure motivation to benefit all beings, not just those one loves, or those present, but all of them in every realm of existence. Then one engages in the main practice. At the end of the main practice, one dedicates the results of the practice yet again to the benefit of all beings. Thus, the actual practice of mindfulness and the teaching of it cannot but include loving-kindness, bringing a much larger focus to awareness. A large intention brings a large result, whereas a small intention, a merely specific or personal one, brings a lesser result.

It is taught that motivation determines the effectiveness of the practice, and likewise the dedication of the result of the practice to benefit all beings increases the merit or intrinsic force of the practice exponentially. What is good for one becomes effective for countless unseen recipients. All things are understood to be interdependent—nothing can exist or flourish without all the rest. Mindfulness focuses the work, but compassion/loving-kindness is the real power. Dedicating the work to benefit all beings then seals the good to its highest and deepest effect.

I found especially interesting the correlations that participants of the study made between their personal spiritual paths and their practice of Rosen Method. Many of the interviewees report anchoring their mindfulness in physical sensations to remain engaged in their experience. This is the first foundation of mindfulness in action – awareness of the body. One participant mentioned that they sometimes could not differentiate between whether something had been learned in meditation training or if it had been learned in their Rosen training. Another spoke about yoga training as a source of skillful presence. Art has been a similar teacher of presence for me, as a kind of embodied and expressive meditation, and even sometimes evokes insight into the nature of the relationship of mind and body in an immediate, unmediated way.

Adding loving-kindness to awareness as part of mindfulness may give us a ground for forgiveness and expansion with which to continue and deepen the healing process, going directly to the true source of suffering of which the body is only the messenger. In my own Rosen session, my body revealed some feelings I had been unaware of — fear primarily — that I had been too distracted by my anger toward my outward situation to see or acknowledge. Just to acknowledge the fear was a great relief of both mind and physical pain. Letting it go allowed a space for a life transition to occur where it had been blocked. Meditation alone had not touched this level of my being. Thinking and understanding had not helped either; but compassionate attention to my physical being gave me an avenue back to attending to my heart with kindness and love and forgiveness; a pure moment of liberation.

Without compassion, the mind can be immobilized—it holds on to things and cannot let go. This is the nature of the ordinary mind; perception that attaches to something outside itself. This ordinary dualistic mind finds its first object in the body, and so the first foundation of mindfulness is mindfulness of body. Mindfulness of the body gives both awareness and groundedness. Mindfulness brings the body to the practice of meditation. Compassion sets it free.

Mindfulness is a process of bringing the mind back again and again to the breath. Compassion enlarges the field of the breathing of one to the breathing of all, to surpass the illusion of duality. Loving-kindness is the means of enlarging the field, the inner field of awareness, into a nonverbal, non-conceptual field characterized by simplicity, wholeness, universality and love. Artists fall into this field when deeply focused in their work and in this respect the Rosen Method is as much an art as a science.

Is mindfulness contagious? When a Rosen Method practitioner applies the attentive hands, does not compassion inevitably arise, both for self and others? A return to recollection that comes from the restoration of the balance of inner and outer, compassion and mindfulness, is the essence of Rosen Method. That compassion and loving-kindness is the medium by which healing flows and leads to an opening of the channels of body and mind, moves one toward their natural oneness.

Our true nature is clarity and its essence is great compassion. Negative emotion, ill health, and confusion can cover up that simple clarity and goodness of our true nature, and yet rising out of that proverbial mud of the human experience grows the lotus of enlightenment which is our true nature. Mindfulness can restore clarity, and compassion can give that clarity freedom to work in the world in ways that can transform our being. Love and awareness are one.

References

Schmidt, A. (2005). *Dipa Ma: The Life and Legacy of a Buddhist Master*. N.Y., N.Y.: Blue Bridge.