

For me this is a 'timely topic' as I have recently gone back to basics, which only means that I've gone back to 'just sitting' practice in a more focused way. Sometimes this is wall gazing and sometimes it is even counting or watching breath... the early tool box. I didn't go back to this because I felt that I was 'supposed to' but because I found that learning and challenges require more in the way of capacity to pay attention at subtler levels without getting exhausted and frustrated.

I mean this in both a practical sense ie what I have to do in a day, but also in a sense of being responsive spiritually... flexible and open.

"Shoulds" don't work very well. I'm well capable of drawing a schedule and a list and a picture of what it looks like to be a good meditator, a good __, or whatever. This is the way that I once heard mindfulness, as evidenced in the following dream (and sorry to those of you who may feel like I'm getting out my home movies, hah):

I am sitting with a Tibetan lama, and there is a salad in between us. I begin to ask him all kinds of questions about practice and specifically, about esoteric practices. He points to my salad. I remember that before bed I'd eaten a salad at the computer in a rush, while multitasking. And I say to him "yes yes, I should have eaten that mindfully." This continues a few more times and the next time I say something to the effect of "Okay yes I knew you were going to tell me to eat the salad mindfully" thinking that when I got that 'right' then I could move 'on' somewhere. In other words that because I couldn't even eat a salad mindfully I wasn't worthy. :)

I felt deflated. It was a legalistic feeling, like being locked out of heaven for not having the right something or other, in this case "mindfulness"!

BUT, the lama then smiled at me and I knew in an instant that I already had permission to practice all kinds of things and that actually, digging deeper, the salad would then be eaten mindfully as a natural effect. IOW, I didn't need to worry about the salad. I didn't need to 'be' mindful as a kind of doing.

I wouldn't want to give anyone else a formula, however this sort of generosity of view was startling to me then, having been raised with a lot of guilt, etc. It was near this time when I found my rl group which had only recently moved near to my area. AND it doesn't mean that slowing down to eat a salad mindfully isn't a wonderful practice, just that my view was wrong.

Practicing with a generous view makes space to then hold the attention to eat the salad with appreciation.

Which is more I think what Thich Nhat Hanh describes.

Capacity for: Continuity of Presence. Stability. Sustained Awareness.