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TO: ~~Correspondence~~

SUBJECT: mp81 mind training

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mp 81 mind training: loving-kindness and similarities 1-17-15

As part of my Buddhist Correspondence course I did two weeks of meditation. The first loving-kindness and the second identifying comparisons between me and others.

Universal Loving Kindness mediation use the following phrases:

"May I be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to me. may no difficulties come to me. May no problems come to me. May I always meet with success. may I also have patience, courage, understanding and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems and failures in life."

Substitute for I: parents, teachers, relatives, friends, all indifferent persons, enemies and all living beings.

After doing Loving kindness for a week, I notice my non-loving thoughts during the day more. I have a CO (correctional officer) that I have a history of several tense interactions over the past 5 years. My first response is always anxiety, then a hateful thought about him. Before the hateful response was not challenged. But after I started doing loving kindness meditation with him on my mind as my enemy, the first two responses still happen (anxiety and hateful thought), but I follow it now with an acknowledgement that I have this negative thought of him and then I wish him peace and happiness (even if half heartedly). We shall see over the long term if the initial anxiety and hateful thoughts will subside. Another response is I am noticing more my negative self talk earlier. I usually notice but it is after the talk has been going on a while or after the fact later. I am picking up sooner when I start beating up on myself.

The next week our exercise was to try to make no comparisons between me and others. Comparison or its form most often used in prison - gossip is so prevalent. It is the fuel that drives moves of the conversations so if one tries to not gossip, conversations slows to a halt. Or more likely, one remains silent while your partner rattles on with the gossip of the day. I found this exercise a real breath of fresh air. Not easily applied in real time, but still a needed practice. First, on the cushion, I felt a real resistance to make similarities to the people I have a beef with. The last thing my ego wanted was to be similar to particular guards that I love to harbor hateful thoughts for. But over the week, forcing myself to "see" that similarities of our humanness began to soften the resistance. I can't say I think kind thoughts when I see them now on the compound, but I do follow my usual resistance to them with acknowledgement of my unkind thought and then think of one way we are alike. That is real progress for me.

Prison is organized by differences: racial, sexual, offense, inmate/staff, geography, etc. So to work across categories is to transgress. I can work across some categories easier than other. The most difficult one is the power hungry guards. Always looking for ways to humiliate an inmate. These are the ones I have to work hard to find similarities with. One of the big transitions for me in prison was when I started seeing my fellow inmates as similar rather separate from me. The hostility and tension I felt visibly lessened. I felt more at ease and less anxious. The more people I saw as having the same basic needs and motivations, the more at ease I became. But even with this experience of seeing the benefit in my own experience, I still kept few people in a special category of "love to hate." I really enjoyed dumping on them. This exercise challenged me to bring the out of their special box and placed them on even footing with everyone else, if only for a moment.

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