

These chapters are rich and deep, speaking to individuals at all levels of meditation practice. As a teacher once told me when I was concerned about not understanding everything in a book we were reading...."Don't be concerned about that. Read and take what is meant for you at this time in your life and practice. As you grow in meditation and Buddhism, you'll appreciate and understand more of the material." I offer his advice to each of us as we talk about these 2 chapters during our dharma study group next Monday.

Chapter 16: The Ninth Insight: realizing cessation of suffering

What stood out for you from this short chapter?

Have you had times when your mind has been free from disturbance and reactivity? What was that like for you? How would you describe the impact on you?

Moffitt points out how important compassion (for ourselves and others) is in our life journeys, in our meditation practice, and in our exploration/examination of suffering in our lives.

- What helps you remember the importance of compassion, especially for yourself?
- Why is it so challenging to remember to practice compassion in our daily lives?

Moffitt says that "finding liberation from suffering is not the same as abandoning the world". He describes cessation from suffering in the following ways:

For the first time you are "just where you are" (fully present) in this very moment, fully available and responsive.

You do what needs to be done without taking it personally or being attached to the results of actions;

You have a feeling of freedom from attachment, are able to freely participate in life, and live wisely and in harmony.

- Where are you in this journey? What has helped you to grow in these ways?
- Do you know people who live from this place? What is it like to be in their presence?

Chapter 17:

Part 1: The Wisdom of the Third Noble Truth:

- Do you remember your first encounters with the experience of non-clinging?
- What was it like for you----physically, emotionally, mentally?
- What did you learn that you could apply to future experiences of clinging?

In the first pages of this chapter, Moffitt cautions us not to measure our progress by the number or amplitude of dramatic moments we've experienced, but rather to periodically ask ourselves some key questions: Is my practice stronger? Do I suffer less? Do I cause less suffering? Do I have a clearer/calmer perspective in daily life?

- How would you answer these questions for yourself?
- Do your answers give you hope and inspiration to continue on the path?
- How does "don't know" mind help you in your journey?

Part 2: Three Stages of Realization:

The first stage Moffitt describes is **transforming the ego**, and he highlights a number of steps we can recognize from our own experience, especially as we grow in meditation practice:

We begin from the ordinary stage of awareness, with good moments, but mostly with clinging and contraction.

We become more mindful of ourselves, seeing and acting more skillfully and giving more priority to our inner lives....becoming psychologically and emotionally healthier.

Small shifts in behavior/thinking gradually amount to substantive changes in how our minds are organized.

We realize that our suffering is a result of how we are, not how the world is.

We see the possibility of more growth, and focus more on wholesome behavior and serving others.

We are much less tormented by greed, ill will, and delusion.

- When you consider your own experience/aspirations with meditation, do these steps resonate with you?
- Are there any that have been/could be especially powerful for you in your daily life?

Transcending the Ego...less suffering, less inner resistance, more faith. Moffitt says that this can happen either gradually or suddenly due to a lightning-bolt awakening event. We still have our short-comings and imperfections, but we continue to develop in the following ways:

We are no longer thinking, speaking, or acting in ways that cause harm to ourselves or others.

We spontaneously and consistently respond to what is called for.

We have many more moments when our minds are at ease with whatever conditions are arising, regardless of whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.

The "dancing with life" is no longer a struggle; it's effortless and natural because of non-clinging.

- How might these ways of being motivate you to continue deepening your meditation practice?
- What might you be encouraged to do more/less of as a result?

Transparency: (aspirations to consider for advanced meditators)

All the moments of existence are equal and met with tranquility and compassion.

There is no clinging in the mind.

The mind remains open, available, and calm in challenging situations.

All sense experiences are empty of self-reference, the mind in meditation is empty of grasping and any hindrances.