

THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

AN INVESTIGATION BY MEMBERS OF THE WILMSLOW GROUP AND OTHERS,  
SPRING 2020

PRESENTATIONS MADE BY PARTICIPANTS AT THE END OF THE COURSE

## A SPRING WALK

### MINDFULNESS AND THE 5 AGGREGATES

Early one morning I found myself free  
Walking through woods and looking at trees  
So strong and upright they stood, so constant  
Drew my mind to bodily tensions present  
Shoulders tense, body tight  
Letting go and feeling light

Feelings of joy at being alive  
Tingling, swinging I strode along  
The sun on my face  
The wind in my hair  
A feeling of freedom so rare

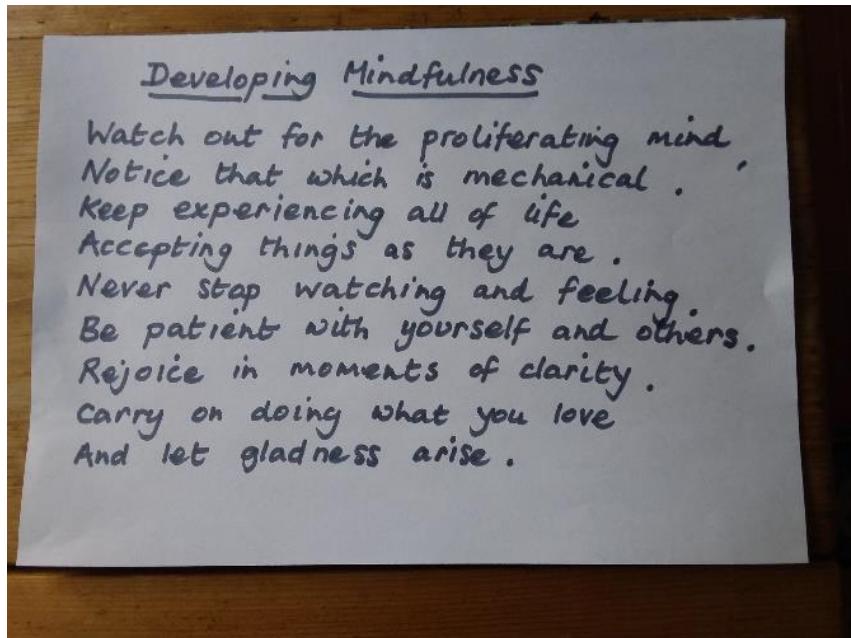
Ah thoughts come now quick and fast  
As mind leaves the present and into the past  
Mulling over how things used to be  
Lost now in reverie

Perceptions of children running, laughing with joy  
Those times are past  
Conscious of my thoughts now and into the present  
Aware of impermanence I recover my ease  
And continue my journey  
With peace and tranquility

Sunlit glades, birds singing  
Wren, robin and blackbird I can hear  
Delighting in their singing  
Thoughts, perspectives come and go  
Then stillness when everything ceases



The garden Buddha rupa is seen as a representation and reminder of the quality of mindfulness. It was noted that mindfulness was more likely to arise when joy or the feeling of openness were present, and connecting with nature in the garden in times of difficulty was conducive to these qualities.



The poem includes reference to the 'Words of the Week' referred to above, and served as a reminder of the investigation process. It was noted that memory and understanding was stronger for things that had actually been experienced, rather than just considered as abstract ideas.

## The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Feeling grounded, at its base  
the four foundations turn and face  
full awareness of the thirty two  
conscious of unconsciousness coming through

Noticing through the open sense doors  
the elements of internal and external cause  
the self a delusion with its transient changes  
breath body insight sees subtle rearranges

Residing in awareness and staying present  
we notice three feelings, of one which unpleasant!  
discernment of sensations subtle and crude  
brings clarity to what once was delude  
Equanimity is the way to aspire  
to replace egos greed, hate and desire

The minds states, memories, images and dreams  
emotions which stab through the senses it seems  
detachment helps stops the train of thought  
but this requires effort, its not easy as it ought!  
external conditions the habit of proliferation  
one takes on the strength of mindful cessation

The Dhamma, the teachings, the gems of the truth  
with practice and knowledge, we will see its proof  
the insight is there, the comprehension is clear  
the seven factors, the path, the freedom draws near

#### **4 Foundations of Mindfulness Course**

It has been really useful to work on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness course and address each foundation in turn. There is much to consider!

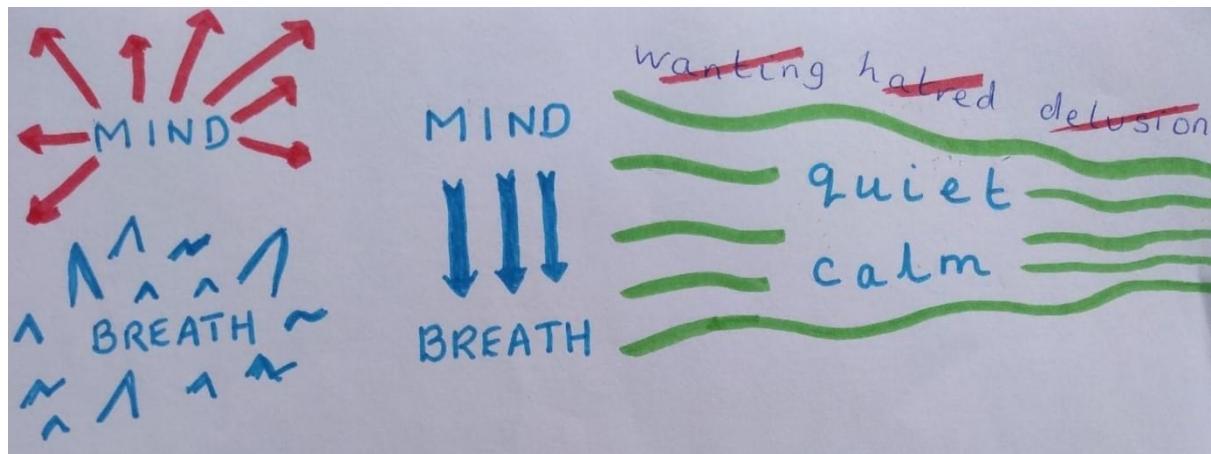
I find it requires effort, enthusiasm and commitment to investigate and remember to be mindful, relating the elements of the teaching to your everyday experience - I am aware I need to put the time in. It is all so easy to be caught up with 'doing' and trying to achieve tasks in everyday life. It is helpful to have a focus for the day, written down as a visual reminder, including on my hand!

Here are some observations of my experiences when working on the four foundations:

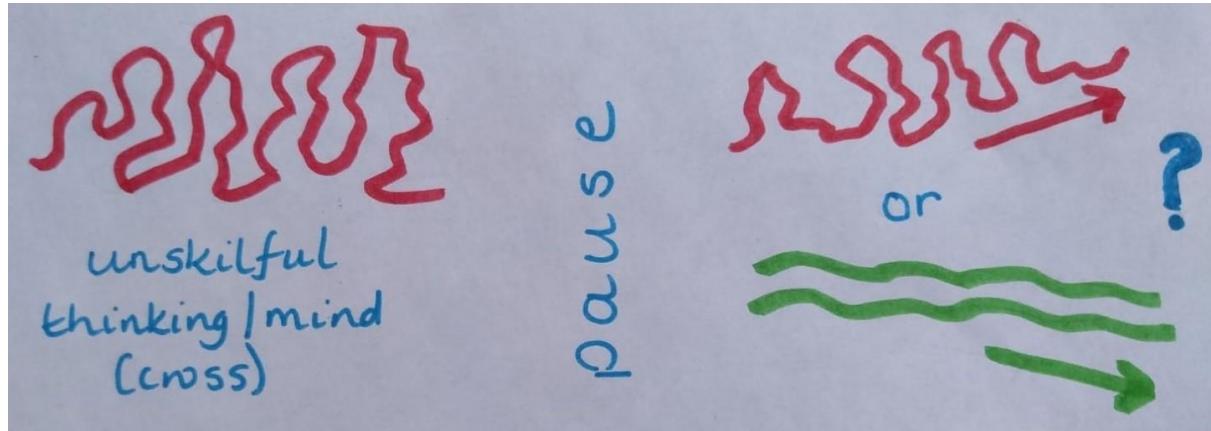
- Mindfulness is increasingly helping me to notice when I'm delaying doing a task that I don't really want to do as it may not be appealing (root = aversion). It's easy to ignore as there are always more enticing tasks to do! I can almost feel the resistance and the sense of procrastinating in front of me. Noticing my aversion / reluctance, rather than ignoring it, has made me to tackle more of these lesser inviting tasks there and then. When I have done the task, it has generally been straight forward. I've been glad I've completed it afterwards and sometimes wonder why I resisted it!
- Noticing myself starting a new task before completing the current task, I completed the first.
- Practising mindfulness of eating (slow down!)
- Trying to choose / phrase words carefully and kindly
- Being aware that someone's perception is different to mine and trying not to assume you know what's behind their thinking.
- Trying to maintain equanimity ('combines an understanding mind with a compassionate heart') – this developed in my case, into trying to offer metta and patience, when faced with adversity.
- When faced with another's unskilful comments, mindfulness can be really useful. Ignoring comments, making allowances, practising karuna and picking my battles carefully can all help to not get drawn into an unpleasant situation.
- When I am experiencing pleasant times, I have been aware that I sometimes think, 'life is good' and want to cling onto it.
- I've noticed the impermanence of physical sensations - they can be all consuming, yet it is surprising that when you are focused on other things and getting on with life, how they assume less importance and are forgotten about. Also I have experienced pleasant sensations (based on desire), becoming unpleasant (based on aversion).
- I've noticed there can be a pull / magnetism towards unpleasant emotions, with the mind looking for more negative feeling, for example, looking for news stories during the current pandemic and replaying difficult experiences/situations which have occurred.

## Making Changes

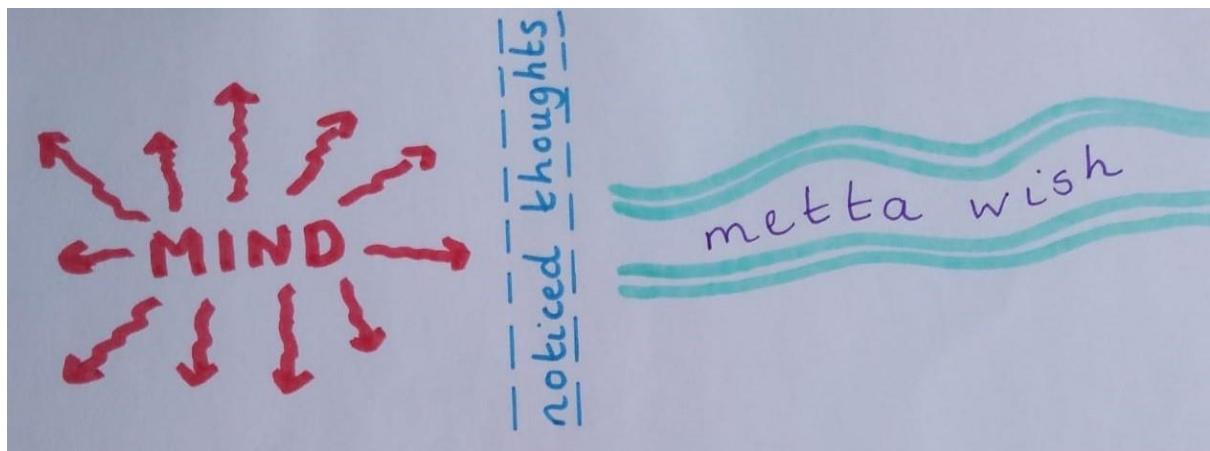
At times, through mindfulness, I have been able to make changes to unskilful thinking, breathing or actions:



On noticing tension caused by worrying and thinking, I focused on my breathing, which was laboured and fast. All the thinking stopped and my breathing became calm and relaxed, feeling similar to the 'touching' stage.



On some occasions, I have noticed I was getting caught up in a situation and not acting skilfully. It's like a space or pause opened up and I knew I had the choice of which way to continue – by choosing the skilful way out, I was avoiding impulsive and unskilful actions.



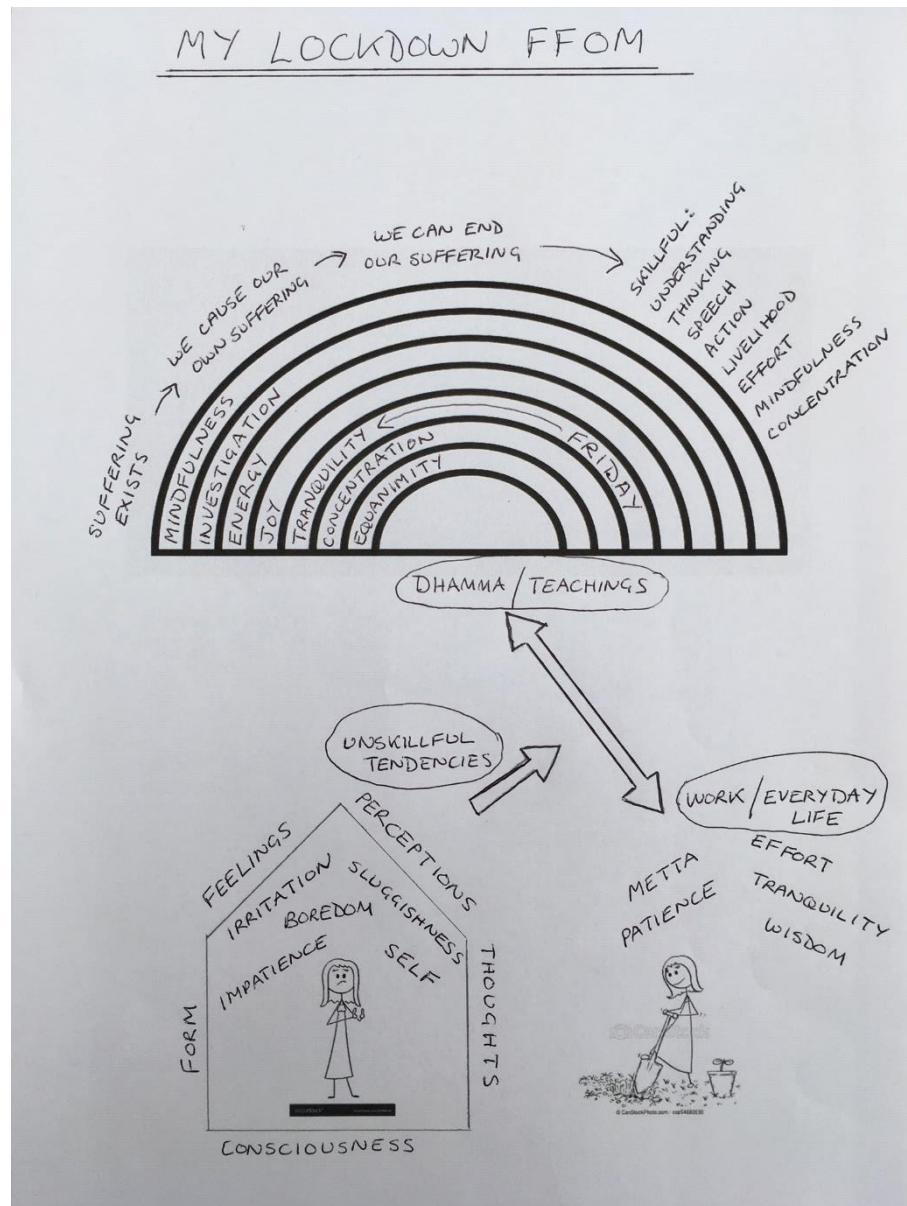
Becoming mindful of the impact on my state of mind of a falling out between some people close to me, I diverted my attention to a brief metta wish for those involved, 'Many they be well and happy; may they be at peace.' This synchronised with the breath. I was surprised that it worked really well - it stopped the thinking and ruminating. I used this technique on several occasions over the next 2 days and intend to use it again if needed in the future.

The 4 Foundations of Mindfulness course has felt so beneficial that I'd now feel I'd like to start again at the beginning of the book! It's a great resource for ongoing investigation and has given me a helpful toolbox of techniques and strategies.



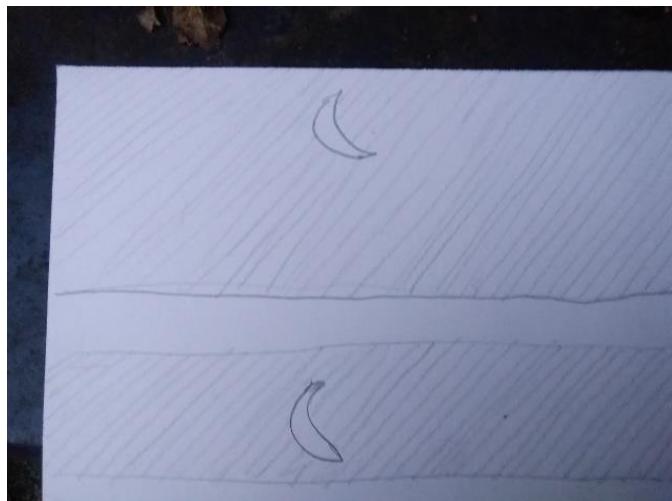
The four photos were taken on family holidays in the same place over four different years, where changes in the children and the scenery can be observed. Four images were chosen as a link to the four foundations of mindfulness – body, feelings, mind and dhamma – and also to depict change and impermanence.

The ability of children simply to be in the present moment – with feelings, emotions and states of mind – can provide important lessons for adults, particularly the recognition that all things pass. Noticing the way mindfulness benefits the way we speak to and interact with children can also help develop greater kindness towards ourselves.



The text referred to in the introduction quotes the Buddha as saying ‘mindfulness is the chief of all the dhammas’, and the author describes mindfulness as the ‘crown jewel’ of the Bojjhangas, or the seven factors of enlightenment. The text concludes with brief outlines of these seven factors, plus the four noble truths and the eightfold path, as a way of directing readers/students towards their goal of liberation.

The diagram considers this in the context of lockdown, moving in a clockwise direction from the bottom left. Unskilful tendencies are modified by working with the major teachings, including the seven factors of enlightenment depicted as a rainbow, the iconic symbol of optimism within lockdown. These are then developed and cultivated in everyday practice, with constant interaction between the teachings and everyday reality.



The two pictures represent the moon with its reflection in water. In both, the moon in the sky is just 'as it is'. In the first picture, the reflection, being pure consciousness, is undisturbed. In the second picture, the image is shattered when consciousness is disturbed. When mindfulness is absent, consciousness is disturbed, and when mindfulness returns through skilful effort, the clear reflection returns.

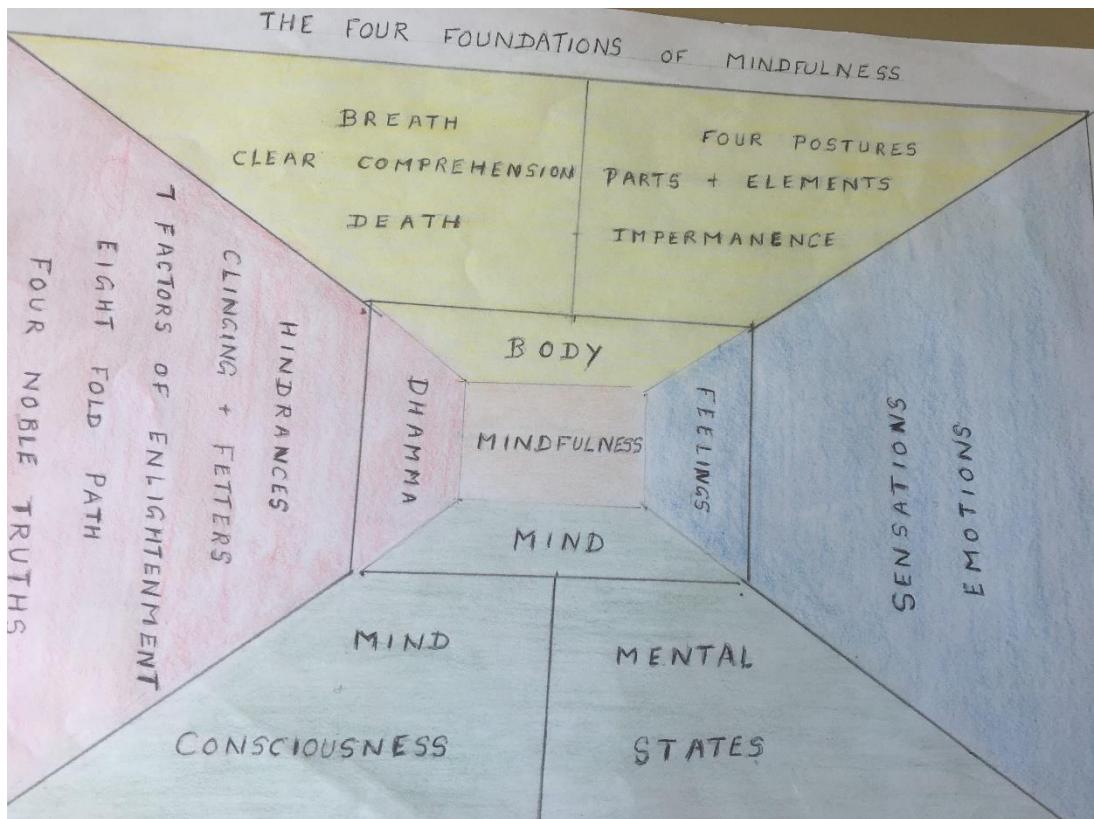


The photos are of an alium plant, showing the full blossoms and individual petals. Close examination revealed a number of links to the dhamma, numerically and qualitatively, and these led to various interpretations and connections.

The number of blossoms is twelve, seen as possibly representing the four noble truths and the eightfold path. Each floret is composed of six petals and a green centre, representing the seven factors of enlightenment (bojjhangas). From the centre there arise six fronds, some with pollen on, that represent the six senses that are connected to the mindfulness centre.

The colour violet is part of the rainbow spectrum, which led to consideration of the other colours and their perceived representation in the bojjhangas – green for sati (mindfulness), yellow for dhamma-vicaya (investigation), red for viriya (energy), orange for pīti (joy), indigo for passadhi (tranquillity), blue for samadhi (concentration), violet for upekkhā (equanimity). All the rainbow colours together result in white light, representing the unborn, the formless and realisation.

As with nature itself, the common thread in these observations was the combination of simplicity and complexity. The same connection can be made with all phenomena and the Dhamma itself.



The diagram captures the essence of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, as interpreted by Bhante Gunaratana Henepola in the form of a pyramid as observed from above. Colour and the geometric design is used to give a three-dimensional impression, with mindfulness at the apex, and the four angular 'walls' depicting the respective elements of the four foundations.

The following additional commentary was offered:

There seems to be a life force energy that is responsible for the birth, existence and experience in the form of body, feelings, sensations, consciousness and mind. When annihilated or purified by clearing the clutter of hindrance and fetters, one's vision is clear to see everything in its true nature. With clear comprehension, there is no clinging or desire for rebirth, with its accompanying suffering birth, old age, disease and death.