

Introduction to Mindfulness Pt. 2 (14) Bundle of Stories

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Hello, and welcome to the fourth talk on grasping or clinging. We will look at how we create bundles of clinging, not just a single occurrence of grasping or clinging. Some of us specialize in clinging, grasping, holding on, and attachment to many things.

It is almost like we go through the day collecting things to be attached to. We start the day not knowing what new thing we're going to attach to today. Sure enough, something comes along. It may be something we never even thought about. Maybe we have a smartphone and suddenly there appears a new operating system or app that does something we never dreamed of before. Now, we really have to have it, and we have collected a new attachment.

We can acquire more and more attachments throughout the day. When we see something beautiful, we want it. When we see something ugly, we want to push it away. Wanting it to go away is a kind of clinging or attachment. It is fascinating to watch the appearance of new attachments, with the mind latching on or fixating on them. The mind can be fixated either for or against them. We have an amazing capacity for one-pointed attention when we are attached or clinging to something – either wanting something really strongly or wanting to get away from it.

The Buddha put a tremendous emphasis on understanding clinging. We want to understand what we cling to and how clinging feels. He lists five different bundles, or five different categories that we bundle up into forms of clinging and attachment. On Monday, we talked about the first bundle which is appearances, physical appearances. The second bundle is feelings of pleasantness and unpleasantness. The third is our perceptions or our re-cognitions of things.

Today we will consider the constructions of the mind. The Pali word is *saṅkhāra*. This can be translated literally as “constructions.” Thānissaro Bhikkhu, a monk who translates Pali into English, calls these “fabrications.” I like to use the word “constructions.” Some translators use “mental formations,” but that seems a little weak or abstract. “Fabrications” implies they are something we just made up, something we make, and “constructions” means kind of the same thing.

Saṅkhāra is not just any activity of the mind. It is not all mental activities. It is a particular kind of mental activity that has to do with constructing stories, judgments, or identities. It is about constructing ideas that are about the future and the past. It is about building up an edifice of self with all the different ideas of what a self is (Who am I? What am I supposed to be doing?) We create edifices and complicated worlds of constructions.

We might live in these constructions, fantasies, or delusions 50, 90, or even 100% of the time. At 100%, we are sometimes considered to be mentally ill. The more we live in our constructions and in the delusions that the mind creates, the more disconnected from reality we become. Most of us do not go so far that others worry about us.

There is a range from having no stories and no constructions about things and being very innocent, simple, and naive, to being completely disconnected from what is here and just spinning out in the stories. In between those, there is a range. In that range, there are times we get attached to the stories, constructions, and built-up identities that we have. We make these things up in our minds. We build things up in the mind and get attached to them.

This can be very simple. For example, maybe I have never been on one of the electric scooters that they have around town. Today I try one, and it turns out that I have an aptitude for riding it easily and simply, zipping around town between pedestrians and cars. After a few hours of zipping around on the scooter, I conclude that I am the best scooter driver in Redwood City. “No one is as good as me. Look at me. My role in this town is to show people what a good scooter rider I am.”

Before I woke up today, I had no identity and no story about myself on a scooter. Then this story gets constructed right in front of my eyes or behind my eyes. I have a sense of pride and status. There are wonderful delusions of grandeur. I will probably be interviewed by Oprah because I am so good. I am drifting off into the world of story-making.

The Buddha said that the world of constructs is one of the bundles of things that people get attached to and cling to. To become free – the kind of spiritual liberation the Buddha emphasized – all grasping must stop. All the ways in which we tighten up and get fisted up in the heart and the mind want to be released.

We release the mind that holds on to stories. We release the mind that has an attachment that is the fuel for building and making the stories. We can feel that as tension or pressure in the mind. We can feel it as an effort that is operating. The effort can be tiring or forceful. We can feel it as a limitation, where our world narrows down into a little world of story-making. It narrows down to a little world in the head, from the neck up.

We are spinning around and around making up these things. Sometimes one story makes the next. I make up an identity around being a good scooter driver. That gives birth to the idea that there must be a nice scooter outfit that I should be wearing. It becomes important to appear just right. Now, I get attached to my appearance. Then I want to have comfortable gloves for my scooter driving. Now, I am attached to the comfort of what I am going to wear. This can go on and on.

I collect more and more bundles of attachments in relation to something that I had no attachment to when I woke up this morning. I create a universe around this thing. By the end of the day, nothing else is important in my life except everything to do with my scooter, what it means, and all the different aspects of it.

Some of us will live in these mental constructions, abstractions, or fabrications and not know that is what they are. They seem as if they are just part and parcel of how the mind operates, so we think that they are true and this is how it is. We believe these constructions are accurate.

If we sit and meditate and get quiet enough, we can feel the tension and tiredness of that kind of thinking. We can start feeling how it limits us from the whole. We can learn how to quiet the constructing down enough to begin bringing our attention here, in a radical simplicity of being.

The story-making mind will criticize this as simplistic, unimportant, not fun, and not where life really is. It will tell us that the real world is about building, succeeding, and making something wonderful that requires that kind of thinking, story-making, and ambition. The story-making mind will say that resting in the simplicity of being is a betrayal, it is not as much fun, and it won't get us ahead in the world in important ways.

Letting go of our grasping opens a door, a capacity to be present for ourselves and the world in a fantastic way. It gives us depth. It gives us fullness. It gives us access to all the workings of the intelligence of this body and mind. If we are living from the neck up in our stories, we are disconnected from the amazing capacity this body-mind-heart has for knowing here and now. Our whole system, body and mind, has been designed to be intimately attentive to, processing, responding to, and interacting with the present moment reality.

So much of the fullness of who we are comes out when we turn off the story-making mind and can come from this deeper operating system that we have. This is so much richer than anything the story-making mind can do for itself. When we are more connected, settled, and not attached to the story-making mind, it is fun because we can still tell stories, but we know they are stories. We are not grasping onto them. They can arise out of this deeper place of creativity within that can have its own fun, wonderfulness, and wisdom. That place of creativity cannot operate if we are living from the neck up.

Today, consider looking at what stories about your future you are actively living in. Reflect on and think about your stories and ideas of the past. What stories are you making up about the self – who you are, and who you are in the eyes of others? A lot of story-making has to do with me, myself, and mine.

See if you can notice the contrast between the stories you live in and the simplicity of being that you can live in. May you live in the fullness of your life without having the story-making mind obscure or be an obstacle to the fullness of your being.

Thank you.