

Buddhist Psychology

with Jack Kornfield, PhD

Module 1: Finding the Beauty and Goodness All Around Us

Part 1: Wakening to the Possibility of Dignity and Goodness

Wakening to the Possibility of Dignity and Goodness

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Dr. Kornfield: Good morning! I'm happy to see you all here. If we've not met before, my name is Jack Kornfield. It's a great pleasure to welcome you to teachings on the essence of Buddhist psychology, mindfulness, and more.

Today, I want to offer the best of what I have learned: bringing together the Eastern psychology principles and practices I have studied for such a long time with the understandings and training in Western clinical psychology that I have studied as well.

Some of what you will hear, if you have an established mindfulness practice, will be familiar to you. In some ways, you'll be hearing reminders.

You can hear in the spirit of "beginner's mind" reminders of that which you know, and hopefully, grow and deepen those practices in your life.

We'll start with the basics and go through quite a bit today, since my intention is to offer the essence or the gist of this in a comprehensive way.

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Beginning with the Basics

Dr. Kornfield: Buddhist psychology is best described as a science of mind. It's practical, it's experiential, and its fundamental purpose is to lead to the best of human possibilities – to bring healing, well-being, inner freedom – no matter what the changing circumstances of life might be.

“Buddhist psychology is practical, experiential, and its purpose is to lead to the best of human possibilities.”

It starts really simply. We often move through life lost in a small perspective of our conditioning: we're lost in thought, caught up in fears or anxieties, suffering or depression. These are the ways in which we

lose our sense of well-being.

Yet, we also know there are possibilities of being open, gracious, wise, more loving, and more compassionate. There are possibilities for having a flexible and really *present* life where we are living *in* our life and not so much caught in the history and the troubles of our past.

So I will start with a story. There was a young army lieutenant who was bad-tempered, flew off the handle, got angry quite easily, and his superior officer remanded him to an eight-week mindfulness training, which they have in the army now.

“There are possibilities for a flexible and *present* life where we are living in our life and not so much caught in the history and the troubles of our past.”

In fact, this training is used for the entire marine corps, especially for people who are coming in for training. I just hope it goes up the chain of command!

This young army lieutenant began his training in breath and mindfulness, and after about six weeks, he was on his way home and stopped at a supermarket to do shopping. He filled his cart – it was crowded, late, and he got in line. The woman in front of him was in the wrong line – she had one item, and she was supposed to be in the express line.

He was in the army, knew how things were supposed to be done, and was irritated by this. To make it even worse, she was holding a baby and when she got to the checkout clerk, they started to talk about the kid – coo over him or whatever you do over babies. He started to get more irritated – "Don't you know there's a long line! It's late."

As he got angry, because he had learned to pay attention, he could feel the heat in his body and the contraction, the suffering, but he took some deeper breaths and let it go.

As he got up to the checkout clerk, he noticed that the baby really was a cute kid so he said, "That was a cute little boy."

In fact, as the woman who brought the baby in and the checkout clerk had been talking, she passed him over to the checkout clerk to hold!

The checkout clerk looked at the army lieutenant and said, "Did you like him? He's my boy. You see, my husband was killed in Iraq last year and so I have to work now and my mom takes care of him – and she tries

to bring him in once a day so I can see him."

"With one breath—one simple invitation to be present and mindful—everything gets transformed."

We are so quick to judge another person – or even more so – to judge ourselves. And yet with one breath, one simple application, if you will, or invitation to be present and mindful – to see not just with our judgments but to see with the clarity of mind and an openness of heart – everything gets transformed.

The essence of Buddhist psychology is the respect for this possibility in any moment – for goodness, for generosity, and for the dignity that is born into you as a human being.

We are not limited by our history. We are not limited by the circumstance in which we find ourselves, even if it is very difficult.

When Nelson Mandela walked out of twenty-seven years of Robben Island prison with such magnanimity, graciousness, compassion, and forgiveness, he not only changed all of South Africa, but in many ways, he changed the imagination of the world.

So we begin by seeing this fundamental possibility: the dignity, the goodness that is possible in any moment, no matter the circumstance – and as Nelson Mandela said, "It never hurts to see the good in someone. They often act the better because of it."

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All of the trainings and practices that we will work with are to awaken to this.