



STEP 5

Skillful Livelihood

MINDFULNESS OF SKILLFUL LIVELIHOOD

Accepting that our job situation is an aspect of our spiritual practice is not easy. Many people box off their work from their spiritual life. When we sit down to meditate and review our past actions, however, we must acknowledge that the things we do at our jobs are our own actions, even if they were instigated by the boss or required as part of the job. Lying is still lying, even if we get paid to do it. We must bear the current, and future results of whatever we say and do. Thus we should hold our job-related activities to the same ethical standards we hold for our other actions. As with Skillful Speech and Action, Skillful Livelihood requires that we continually purify our behavior, whether at home or on the job.

When we work in a job that fulfills Skillful Livelihood, throughout each workday we should remain sensitive to issues of morality as they arise. We must be very clear about the five precepts and take care never to violate them. Moral issues not directly involving the five precepts call for us to reflect upon whether we can live with the consequences of our actions.

As our practice of mindfulness meditation deepens, we may develop so much calm and patience that a previously unacceptable situation becomes no problem, and just about any honest job becomes perfect for us. The most important consideration is that a job does not interfere with our ability to make spiritual progress. So long as we are not hurting ourselves by breaking precepts or becoming involved in other worrisome ethical situations, our mind can become calm and peaceful. With a calm and peaceful mind, we can grow. Once we clear away the obstacles, the rest takes care of itself.

The situation is comparable to the way we stay alive. When we are hungry, we eat. When we are thirsty, we drink. We put on a sweater when we are cold. We do things to avoid illness. We avoid harmful and dangerous activities and situations. But we do not go around saying, "I must live, I must live!" If we just take care of our basic needs, the body maintains itself in life. Similarly, in Skillful Livelihood, our only responsibility is to avoid causing harm to ourselves or others, so that we remain calm and peaceful. So long as our mind is calm and peaceful, we can meditate and progress on the Buddha's path to happiness. If we wish to progress more quickly, we can seek employment that nurtures our practice and propels us along more quickly. Such a job presents situations that challenge our weak areas in a way that strengthens them without being overwhelming, and avoids presenting us with problems we are not currently prepared to deal with. For example, someone trying to cultivate refined, sublime states of concentration may be best served by a job that provides easy, routine work that does not overly excite the mind. Someone who is deliberately cultivating patience may flourish in a job that requires working with challenging situations and difficult people.

In your meditation period, take some time to use the three-tiered inquiry (see below) to assess to what extent your current job constitutes Skillful Livelihood. You may decide that your current job has

aspects that need improvement. Ask yourself what you can do today to make your job situation more actively helpful to yourself and to others.

KEY POINTS FOR MINDFULNESS



OF SKILLFUL LIVELIHOOD

Here are the key points to remember concerning mindfulness of Skillful Livelihood:

- Our means of sustenance should not interfere with our spiritual development.
- We can assess whether a job qualifies as Skillful Livelihood by means of a three-tiered inquiry.
 - At the first level of inquiry, we examine whether a job is inherently harmful to others or to oneself.
 - At the second level, we consider whether a job causes us to break any of the five moral precepts.
 - Finally, we ask whether other factors related to the job make it difficult for the mind to settle down.
- Loving-friendliness may improve a difficult job situation.
- If you lack harmful intentions, your mind will not be harmed by a job's adverse consequences.
- Skillful Livelihood is a goal to be sought gradually as our spiritual practice matures.