

To practice with the five—sense-contact, attention, sensation, perception, and volition—we must first know and remember them. Sense-contact is a moment of sense data: a sound, a color, a bodily feeling. Attention is the directionality of mind, where awareness is aimed. Sensation is a very base-level sense that something is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Perception is the ascribing of basic concepts, often names, to sense data. Volition is the impulse or inclination to do something. Here's an example: you feel an itch and scratch yourself. If you are practicing mindfulness of the five universal factors, you notice the following: sense-contact, a sensory experience in the body with no concepts or value attached to it; attention directing awareness to the sensory experience; sensation arising that deems the feeling unpleasant; perception calling it "itch"; and volition arising, seeking to scratch.

We practice mindfulness of the five universals/aggregates by seeing what is arising in the moment and labeling it according to these categories. If we do this, some-

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thing will happen that is rather interesting. Rather than thinking, "I have an itch, I want to scratch it," we see that there is sense-contact, attention, sensation, perception, and volition happening, in this very particular way, right now. We see a process happening that forms a sense of *I*, of *itch*, of *want*, of *unpleasant*. If we practice this in seated meditation and stay still for a little while, it is likely that we will also see all these things pass away. Watching these aggregates arise and fade and allowing that to soften our sense of *I* is a profoundly powerful means to weaken the karma that drives us to constantly be dissatisfied, that makes a brief moment of sense contact into something we must judge and control. Rather than acting on unconscious impulses we can be aware of the process of their coming and going.

It's important to note that the labeling of the aggregates should have a softness to it. The naming is there to help us actually be intimate with the experience. The point isn't to sit and think about sense-contact but to actually see the changing evening light moving across the wall without naming or judging, to deeply know the motion of the breathing belly, to truly feel the keys of this keyboard as I type. The point is to deeply experience the arising of a volition, an impulse to act, at the very

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moment of its arrival and to know it, to sense its texture, its shape. When we are about to berate a small child we have just stopped from running into the street, we can be aware of the racing heart, the clenched hand, the concepts proliferating about the child's foolishness, the intense unpleasant sensation of fear and loss of control, the impulse to shout—and we can take a moment to let this arise and pass, see that it is not “I,” but an occurrence, deeply colored by the process of karma, in consciousness. We can see that the child is safe now; we don't need to unconsciously teach this child that to alleviate your own fear you should try and control other people. We can say something kind, and firm, and helpful, and we can be honest about how it feels to see the child in danger. We can foster connection and safety and plant seeds of kind speech and compassion for ourselves and for the world.