

Getting the Lingo (Short Version)

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Pole pole

“Go slow and let it come gradually.”

— Swahili greeting

Narau yori nareyo

“Don’t study it; get used to it!”

— Japanese proverb

MARCH HARE: ...Then you should say what you mean.

ALICE: I do; at least—at least I mean what I say—that’s the same thing, you know.

HATTER: Not the same thing a bit! Why, you might just as well say that, ‘I see what I eat’ is the same as ‘I eat what I see’!

MARCH HARE: You might just as well say that, ‘I like what I get’ is the same thing as ‘I get what I like’!

THE DOORMOUSE: You might just as well say that, ‘I breathe when I sleep’ is the same thing as ‘I sleep when I breathe’!

— Lewis Carroll

Alice in Wonderland – The Mad Hatter’s Tea Party

Section 1: The Importance of Active Learning

An important part of learning any science is becoming comfortable with its technical vocabulary. One of the distinctive features of Basic Mindfulness is that it provides you with a crystal-clear, detailed, and precise vocabulary for describing any and all sensory experience, even seemingly intangible ones such as thought and feeling. Becoming comfortable with this technical vocabulary involves two very different kinds of learning:

Passive learning – You understand what the technical terms mean when you hear them or read them.

Active learning – You actually use the technical terms to think about, talk about, and write about your experience.

Most people are willing to do the passive side of the learning, but tend to be a bit hesitant when it comes to the active side. However, it is of the utmost importance that you make a concerted effort to *speak* in and *think* in the special vocabulary you will be learning. Only by doing this consistently will you be able to internalize the underlying concepts at all levels of your being. When the words and their definitions become second nature to you, you will be able to maintain clarity even within the most intense vortex of daily life. Conversely, until this happens, even minor life challenges will have the potential to overwhelm you.

Active learning requires...

- An abiding *intention* to talk about, and think about your experience in terms of “spaces,” “states,” “aspects,” “focus methods,” “focus options,” “application strategies,” and so forth.
- *Asking* questions whenever you’re not sure how to describe something.
- *Memorizing* a few core category lists in standard order.
- *Memorizing* a few core definitions verbatim.

Section 2: Tips for Memorizing Definitions and Lists

In the following sections you will find the definitions and lists, which at some point you should memorize. But before going there, let me give you the specific criteria for what constitutes “memorization.”

We will say that you have memorized a definition when...

- You are able to say the definitions out loud rapidly, confidently, and verbatim whenever asked to do so. (If I wake you up in the middle of the night and ask you to define Feel Space, there should be no hesitation whatsoever.)
- You are able to write the definition verbatim.
- You have some idea of why the definition is worded the way it is. (In the definitions that appear in the next section I explain all the key points regarding wording.)
- By verbatim I mean using *all* and *only* the words that make up the standard definitions appearing in the following sections

The criteria for memorizing a list of categories are...

- You are able to rattle off the list in standard order any time.
- You are able to write the list.
- You know why the list is ordered the way it is.

ORDERING

The last point about ordering is actually quite simple. All you need to remember are the following principles:

1. Active precedes restful
2. Objective precedes subjective
3. Somatic precedes visual
4. Visual precedes auditory

For example, the 12 basic states are listed thus...

Active						Restful					
Objective			Subjective			Objective			Subjective		
Somatic	Visual	Auditory	Somatic	Visual	Auditory	Somatic	Visual	Auditory	Somatic	Visual	Auditory
Touch	Sight	Sound	Feel	Image	Talk	Relaxation	Light	Silence	Peace	Blank	Quiet

Section 3: The 6 Basic Spaces

TOUCH SPACE

DEFINITION: The 3-dimensional volume of the sensed body when experienced from the perspective of detecting Touch or Relaxation.

COMMENTS: The basic states of this space are Touch and Relaxation.

SIGHT SPACE

DEFINITION: The volume of colored and patterned light that appears in front of you when your eyes are open.

COMMENTS: This space is what people commonly call “the material world.”

The basic states of this space are Sight and Light.

SOUND SPACE

DEFINITION: The total volume of perceived sound and silence around you in six directions.

COMMENT: The basic states of this space are Sound and Silence.

FEEL SPACE

DEFINITION: The 3-dimensional volume of the sensed body when experienced from the perspective of detecting the presence or absence of Feel.

COMMENTS: If you have one or more emotional centers in your body, then Feel Space consists of those centers especially, plus the rest of the body. Feel activity often splashes in the emotional centers then ripples through the rest of your body.

If you do not have any emotional centers, then Feel Space is simply the whole volume (height, width, depth) of your body.

An emotional center is a place in your body where Feel activity tends to be prominent. Emotional centers are often, though not inevitably, located along the front central axis of the body.

The basic states of this space are Feel and Peace.

IMAGE SPACE

DEFINITION: The totality of locations where Image activity or Blankness may occur.

COMMENTS: There are three such locations:

- *In front of or behind your eyes* – Where memory, planning and fantasy images tend to occur.
- *Out around you* – Where images of your surroundings and images triggered by sounds tend to occur.

- *Back or down on your body* – Where your overall image of self and images triggered by body sensation tend to occur.

We will sometimes refer to the area in front of or behind your eyes where memory, planning, and fantasy tend to occur as the Center of Image Space. Some people call this area their mental screen. Other people use the term mental screen to refer to the whole of Image Space.

The phrase “mental screen” can be misleading. The first problem with this phrase is that people often interpret it to mean that they should be able to find a rectangular border within which to localize Image activity (like a TV screen). They then consider themselves failures because they cannot find a screen in that sense. Another problem with the phrase “mental screen” is that it seems to imply that Image Space is supposed to be a flat 2-dimensional surface. That is true for some people, but for many people it is more like a 3-dimensional stage than a flat screen, especially when one includes images of one’s surroundings or one’s body.

So, the phrase “mental screen” is meant to be a loose metaphor. You’ll get in trouble if you take it too literally.

The basic states of this space are Image and Blank.

TALK SPACE

DEFINITION: The place where you tend to listen to Talk or Quiet.

REASON FOR WORDING:

1. The phrase “listen to Talk or Quiet” is meant to remind you of the following...
 - Verbal thinking is both a motor act (you generate internal words) and a sensory act (you *listen* to those words). Working with Talk Space is concerned with the sensory part of the experience. For most people that will be located somewhere in the head or at the ears.

COMMENTS: When focusing on Talk, some people are naturally drawn to sensation in their lips, tongue, throat, and so forth. Those sensations represent the motor part of verbal thinking. Unless you *really* want to define such areas as your Talk Space, it is probably best to focus somewhere in your head so that you can contact the auditory part of the experience.

Talk is the least spatial of the basic spaces. The size, shape, and exact location of Talk Space are often rather vague. That’s fine. “Somewhere in your head” is sufficiently specific for the purpose of our work. If you are not sure where Talk Space is for you, simply define it to be at or between your ears.

The basic states of this space are Talk and Quiet.

Section 4: The 12 Basic States

TOUCH

DEFINITION: Any body experience *other than* Feel, Peace, or Relaxation (these three are defined below).

COMMENTS: In other words, Touch covers the whole range of ordinary body experience – body experiences that are not special or “marked” by virtue of being either *emotional* or *restful*.

Smell and taste (“the chemical senses”) are considered special types of Touch. In the standard formulation, they can be labeled simply “Touch.” Some people, however, prefer to apply the more specific labels “smell,” and “taste” to these forms of Touch.

Erotic sensation may be interpreted as...

- 1) A flavor of Touch, or
- 2) A flavor of Feel, or
- 3) Composed of both Touch and Feel components.

Note that as we will be using the word, Touch has a broader meaning than in ordinary English. It includes things like the sensations of sleepiness, fatigue, hunger, pain, ordinary breathing, ordinary heart beat, as well as hot, cold, touch of clothing, etc.

SIGHT

DEFINITION: Looking at physical objects.

SOUND

DEFINITION: Listening to physical sounds.

FEEL

DEFINITION: Any body sensation that seems to be emotional in nature.

REASONS FOR WORDING:

1. The word “any” is meant to remind you that...
 - Feel does not always have a well-defined describable flavor (anger, fear, joy, smile). Sometimes Feel is just a vague emotional something. To get an idea of the range of common Feel flavors, see the list in Section 12.
 - Feel does not always have a well-defined location. If you subtract Image and Talk from an emotional experience, what you’re left with will be “in the direction of your body” whether it has well-defined locations there or not. Indeed, if you’re not sure where Feel sensation is located, it’s safe to assume that it’s subtly present over your whole body. In such cases the even coverage method or the zooming out option may be helpful.

- Feel is not necessarily an intense experience. (Subtle is significant!)
2. The word “seems” is meant to remind you that you may not be sure if a certain body experience is emotional in nature or not. In such cases it’s perfectly okay to guess. In fact, it’s expected that you will be guessing quite a bit regarding Touch, Feel and Peace. The purpose for having the category Feel is to gradually increase your ability to detect the somatic component of your emotional experience. You *are* being asked to note Feel if you happen to notice that something changes in your body when your subjective state becomes emotionally colored. That will make your body sensitive. You *are not* being asked to analyze each sensation in your body and pigeonhole it as either a Touch or a Feel – that will make your mind crazy. The following points may be useful.
 - Heads up 1: If something arises in Touch, Sight, Sound, Image, or Talk Spaces and at the same time or a moment later something, *anything* changes in your body in reaction to it – heads up! That change is very likely Feel activity.
 - Heads up 2: Whenever you have desire, wanting, longing, will, need, and so forth – heads up! There may be pleasant sensations in your body (joy, interest, excitement) at the prospect of getting what you want and/or there may be unpleasant sensations in your body (fear, sadness, impatience) associated with the prospect of not getting what you want. Those pleasant and/or unpleasant sensations are Feel activity.
 3. The phrase “emotional in nature” is meant to remind you of that...
 - As we define it, Feel is not synonymous with pleasant vs. unpleasant. It is true that just about every experience of Feel can be characterized as either pleasant or unpleasant, or some combination of the two. However, there are pleasant and unpleasant experiences that are not intrinsically emotional in nature. Pain, for example, is not emotional in and of itself. On the other hand, the anger, fear, sadness, or helplessness coloring that may be produced in your body in reaction to pain most assuredly is emotional in nature.

COMMENTS: As we define it, Feel is not synonymous with liking and disliking. It is, however, related to liking and disliking in the following way. When you like a thing/person/object/situation, it will probably trigger pleasant Feel. When you dislike a thing/person/object/situation, it will probably trigger unpleasant Feel. So the experience of liking and disliking something often involves Feel activity, but liking and disliking are not *synonymous* with Feel because liking or disliking may also involve Image and Talk activity. Moreover, Feel may arise in other circumstances, which do not involve liking or disliking something.

It is also true that one may speak of “liking” pleasant Feel flavors (such as joy), and one may speak of “disliking” unpleasant Feel flavors (such as fear). In this idiomatic usage of language, like and dislike represent a *relationship* to Feel. If you like a certain flavor of Feel, you will probably resist its passing. If you dislike a certain flavor of Feel, you will probably resist its arising. From this point of view, equanimity can be described as freedom from preference with regard to Feel. When you have no preference (like, dislike, pull, or push) with regard to Feel, then all Feel

takes on the “taste of purification.” Once the taste of purification arises, all Feel, pleasant or unpleasant, becomes in a certain sense “pleasant.” Therefore, paradoxically and perhaps confusingly, the attitude of neither liking nor disliking any particular flavor of Feel can be described as **LIKING** every flavor of Feel!

Note that in Basic Mindfulness, Feel has a narrower meaning than in ordinary English. In ordinary English, Feel can refer to thoughts or opinions: “I feel this is a reasonable proposal.” Or Feel can refer to any body experience: “I feel the smoothness of the material,” or “I feel a headache coming on.” Feel can even refer to physical influence: “The moon feels the gravitational tug of the earth.”

IMAGE

DEFINITION: Any visual thinking.

REASON FOR WORDING:

1. The word “any” is meant to remind you that...
 - Mental images are typically *vague* and *fleeting* impressions of the form of the people, places, and physical objects you are thinking about. For most people seeing mental images is not at all like seeing well-defined pictures of things.
 - Subtle images related to your own body outline and your (eyes closed) awareness of what is around you count as Image activity in addition to the more obvious Image activity associated with remembering, planning, and daydreaming.
 - Images may be still like a photograph or move as if animated.
2. The word “thinking” reminds you that patterns of color or geometrical shapes are not considered Image activity because, although they are visual, they are not forms of thinking per se. (Neither do they constitute blankness. See below.)

TALK

DEFINITION: Any auditory thinking.

REASON FOR WORDING:

1. The word “any” is meant to remind you that Talk can occur at many levels, from preverbal stirring, through explicit words, all the way to imperious screaming. It also reminds us that the voice may be one’s own (self talk) or that of another (parent, child, acquaintance).
2. The word “auditory” reminds us that Talk need not be specifically verbal (in words). Other forms of auditory thinking such as tunes in your head, or the “internal onomatopoeia” through which you remember or imitate external sounds also count as Talk.
3. On the other hand, the word “thinking” reminds you that ringing in your ears (tinnitus) does not count as Talk because, although it is internal and auditory, it is not something *through* which you think (although it may be something *about* which you think).

RELAXATION

DEFINITION: Any perception of bodily repose or muscle relaxation.

REASON FOR WORDING:

1. The word “any” reminds you that...
 - Even the most subtle sense of settling or muscle relaxation still counts as an instance of Relaxation.
 - Relaxation may be confined to one or a few locations or it may affect much or all of your body.
 - Relaxation is often present somewhere in Body Space even though its opposite (physical tension or emotional impatience) is strongly present elsewhere. If you wish to make use of this fact you have to...
 - Learn to detect that Relaxation (it may be subtle).
 - Learn to concentrate on it. (This involves letting go of the automatic tendency to focus on what is intense and unpleasant, and learning how to maintain focus on what is subtle and pleasant. It takes practice, but it’s worth it.)
2. The word “repose” refers to your sense of settling into a posture. The easiest posture for detecting global repose is obviously lying down. You are encouraged to make use of this fact to intentionally cultivate and enjoy a “samadhi on relaxation” whenever you lie down.
3. The “muscle relaxation” may be intrinsic to the posture, or it may be intentionally created or enhanced in one of 3 ways:
 - Straightening up and settling in
 - Intentionally relaxing individual body areas
 - Relaxing on an out breath or series of out breaths

COMMENT: Alternative terms for Relaxation are Relax, and Relaxed. These are frequently used for labeling.

LIGHT

DEFINITION: Looking through or around physical objects rather than at them.

COMMENTS: There are many synonyms for this way of relating to external visual experience. Some of those synonyms are: defocusing your eyes, soft focus, open focus, and far mountain gazing.

Using the word “Light” for this way of relating to the external world may be a bit misleading, in that it seems to imply that we’re trying to get some special experience called Light. That is not the case. When you look through and around things rather than at them, you’re ignoring their color and form, and instead relating to them as volumes of light/space in front of you. The word Light is just a short, convenient label for that experience. So, as we’ll be defining the term, Light signifies *nothing more than the soft way the world looks when you slightly defocus your eyes.*

The label Light refers to the restful flavor of external visual experience. So, by definition you only experience “Light” with your eyes open. The corresponding restful flavor in internal vision (Image Space) is labeled Blank. “Real Blank” is defined as looking inward toward Image Space, but not at any image. Real Blank is thus the perfect internal analog of Light. For more on this, see the definition of Blank below.

SILENCE

DEFINITION: When you are in a location where there is little or no sound, Silence means tangibly listening to that absence of sound. When you are in a location where there are sounds, Silence means listening through, around, or away from those sounds.

COMMENT: Silence represents the restful aspect of Sound Space.

PEACE

USUAL DEFINITION: The conscious awareness that the body is free from Feel activity.

COMMENTS: The phrase “usual definition” is meant to remind you that some people can detect emotional peacefulness even when Feel is active. This situation is not considered better than the “usual” case, wherein Feel and Peace are experienced as mutually exclusive phenomena.

Peace is an abbreviation for “emotional Peace.” Notice that we will be using the word Peace in a very narrow way.

BLANK

DEFINITION 1: *During closed-eye practice* – The sense of darkness and/or brightness in front of or behind your closed eyes.

DEFINITION 2: *During open-eye practice* – Looking inward toward Image Space but not at any Image.

REASON FOR WORDING: *Closed-eye practice*

1. The word “darkness and/or brightness” reminds you that (depending on the person and circumstances) there may be mostly darkness, mostly brightness, or a mottled mixture of dark areas, bright areas, and gray areas. This third possibility is the most common. We’ll consider whiteness or gray to be a form of brightness.
2. The words “darkness” and “brightness” remind you that closed-eye mental Blank is defined in terms of the simplest visual experience that is possible – the grey scale of light without regard to its color or form. Many people experience colors when they close their eyes (pinks, purples, and blues tend to dominate). By our definition, such color itself is not part of Blankness, but the degree of its darkness or brightness is. So if you get colors in Image Space and wish to focus on Blankness, focus on the darkness or brightness of the color rather than its hue.
3. The phrase “in front of or behind” reminds you that different people may localize the center of Image Space differently – some more forward, some more back in the head.

COMMENTS: *Closed-eye practice*

Most people use Blank instead of Blankness when labeling this state. If darkness or brightness predominates, some people like to replace the generic label Blank with the more specific label Dark or Bright.

Strictly speaking, closed-eye Blankness is actually a mixture of two restful states.

1. The intrinsic darkness/brightness of the mind, i.e., Real Blank. (See below.)
2. Some physical darkness/brightness that seeps in from the outside through your eyelids. That's why closed-eye Blank will often seem brighter when you face a window and darker when you're in a darkened room.

COMMENTS: *Open-eye practice*

Looking into Image Space, but not at any Image might be referred to as “Real” Blank. By way of contrast, the darkness/brightness definition might be referred to as “virtual” Blank – a convenient way of representing a “blank mental screen.”

It often takes a bit of practice to learn to detect Real Blank, which is why I start people out with the closed-eye virtual Blank. It should be noted, however, that some people experience Real Blank with their eyes closed as well as open.

QUIET

DEFINITION: The conscious awareness that there is little or no Talk activity.

REASON FOR WORDING:

1. The phrase “conscious awareness” is meant to remind you of the following...
 - When you go from a noisy street into a quiet room, you actually hear the silence for a moment. People usually quickly acclimate to that silence – they no longer have a conscious awareness of it. The trick in focusing on mental Quiet is to not acclimate, but to hear it anew moment-by-moment. If the Quiet happens to last for awhile, this will produce a continuous samadhi whose object is the (relative) absence of activity in Talk Space. This, by the way, was the original meaning of the phrase Noble Silence before it came to be used for “no social talking during retreats.”
2. The phrase “little or no talk activity” is meant to remind you of the following...
 - There can occur a kind of “triple point” state in Talk Space that shares the characteristics of all three aspects – activity, rest, and flow. It is a subtle level of preverbal processing because it is the matrix of activity from which clear words may arise. Thus, it can be looked upon as “subtle Talk.” But it is so subtle that it's restful, and therefore could also be looked upon as “course Quiet.” Finally, it tends to be experienced as a kind of fluid vibratory energy and so could also be looked upon as “Flow.” If you experience this triple-point state, feel free to interpret it as Talk, Quiet, or Flow, depending on which aspect you are interest in exploring at the time.

Section 5: Comprehensive Classification of States

