

2005-10-24 Four Aspects of Practice

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SPEAKERS

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Good afternoon, everyone. So, here we are first day of our five day, non residential retreat. And some of you have been here the day some of you have been here, part of the day. Either way, we do make a little bit of a community. We're in it together, we're practicing together. And it's each individual person's presence in practice is a contribution to everyone else. Because, you know, it's a lot easier to practice when you know other people are practicing. It's the community that puts together the retreat that makes the retreat. You've come to the retreat. You want to people who've made it, made it so we have no community. And I thought it might be nice to go around the room before I give a talk and everyone could say their names. At least know here hear people's voices. Once Very soon. So I think when a lot of people First, start doing a Buddhist practice or mindfulness practice, there's a lot of learning that goes on around, letting go, learning to let go. And it becomes really clear, I think early on if you're practicing that the mind is often caught in the grips of preoccupations, thoughts, emotions, all kinds of things. And it's holding on for dear life, or just holding on tight or just there's attachment there. Things were caught by And, and that in order for us to somehow be at peace, be at ease, be here in the present moment and pull away, there has to be some letting go of the preoccupations that keep us from being present. So for many people, the beginning of practice is becoming familiar with all those statistical forces that pull us away, carry us away, take us into the future into the past to fantasy, get us caught up in our emotions and feelings. And it can be quite humbling to try to practice mindfulness and to realize how much the mind wanders off and has a mind of its own and you come back, wanders off again. And so you might start identifying particular themes, particular things that you really wish you could let go, you really wish you could let go. You know, it can be as petty as as songs are going through your head is going on and on and on any songs or you can let go Have the inner judge critic or self critic that's judging yourself for judging what's going on. Or you can let go of certain emotional patterns you can let go. I wish I wasn't always afraid in every breath I take, I seem like I'm afraid I'm never going to have another breath again. This is it could be fear can be quite pervasive. Or it could be judgments. You know, it just I'm realizing how much I'm always judging and judging is so painful. And it's so painful just to think that I'm seeing the world always to my judgment. So it would be like to be aware of other people without judging so quickly, I wish I can let go of that judging. So to some degree, a big part of Buddhist practice is learning to let go. And it takes a lot of skill. Some of the letting go happens directly. Some of it happens indirectly. So if you focus on your breath, which some people can do get concentrated, the more the life, more your energy of attention, the attention of energy goes into

the breath, the more of it that's Available less of it is available for distractions or for other things. And the more absorbed to get in the breath, the least temporarily there's tends to be a lot of letting go of things. So the signs, can these become peripheral and fall away. Sometimes it's only temporary come out of the concentrated state and the preoccupations come back. Sometimes, just being in a relaxing environment on a retreat and giving enough time and space away from your normal activities, lets you kind of slowly begin to relax and relax and relax and the usual preoccupation stars are getting more and more distant. I think some of them especially if you go on a long retreat, you can steal how certain things seem so powerful, important, them psych, the psyche, the first day, or the first two days, but then you could offer a 30 day retreat, for example, by tweet day 28 are they 14 or something? What was that I was concerned about? What was that about? You know, it's it's Seems so distant. And you can do that if you go up. You're going to see her as I go on vacation in pro weekend you go up to CRS go hiking for two days, you can pretty much very quickly leave a lot of things behind that are hardly bind. Because when we're so we're in the middle of it all. So sometimes letting go happens kind of, you know, naturally in a sensor, and sometimes it happens because we can identify the place we're beholding to identify the place of clinging, we can identify that somehow the mind has picked up some thoughts and feelings which are resisting or it's churning away. It's kind of somehow there's something with drift. And sometimes that sense of being gripped it can be felt physically, and you can feel how taking something up thinking something up and getting absorbed in something attached to something feels like tension in the body. You might feel it and your shoulders and your jaws and your neck and your forehead and your eyes, many different places where that might be there. It can also be somewhat more mental the feeling of being attached to be holding on tight, you can feel sometimes, perhaps people feel like a contraction in the mind or the tightness or a narrowing, a darkening even sometimes you can kind of focus there. And so there's a variety of ways of feeling it. And often and feeling and experiencing it sometimes you feel it's very intimately connected to our emotional life. Let's say various kinds of emotions are very closely give fuels support to strength, to holding on tight grip. So then becoming aware of how it feels like then sometimes you can begin to let go, learning to identify what needs to be like. Sometimes it's a physical thing we go into the body and like let go of the physical tension in the holding and sometimes letting go of the body is enough to let go of the attachment be attached to something that you want to have. Say you Want to have, I don't know what really you, what you really want is a cup of coffee. That is a bad example. But say you really want to know, a smoothie. And that's what you really want to smoothie that's going to make your day just perfect. And you really want that smoothie. And you feel that this tension in your belly and your shoulders are on warning, as some of you have leaning forward a little bit, you kind of like hoping that bell rings, you can rush out to Jamba Juice and get that smoothie. And you feel the tension you feel leaning forward, you feel it's like, you can feel the physicality of it. And then it might be possible to relax it and settle back. And as the body relaxes some of that dry forge ability to relax at the same time, because of connection to the body in the mind is so intimate, so close. Sometimes you relax the body, it's enough. Sometimes you see that there's certain beliefs that you're attached to. And so perhaps you can let go of that belief for something can soften around the belief or you have some new information you see The new way, I can't let go of that belief and that is like dominoes, a lot of things can let go of. And in the wake of that sometimes it's through the powers of mindfulness, you can find the place of attachment, you don't see how you can let go. But you bring it, mindfulness to where the tension holding us and just hold it in awareness for a long time very lovingly, clearly, just hold it. And it's very hard. Sooner or later, what's holding will let go. It's the nature of holding to one let go. without holding is a doing. It takes energy.

And whenever something takes energy, it's inherent in that, that he wants to relax and rest. So I kind of believe inherent in all our attentions, our whole day holdings is an inherent movement to for release for relaxing for letting go. But we keep fueling it we keep feeding it we keep keep it up, keep it up. We don't just attach once and freeze Generally, we attach and reattach. We detachment by moment if you really pay attention, so you can so by holding it in awareness, sometimes finally the, we step out of its orbit, we step out of the reactive mode to it, we start, start participating, it can relax. So for many people, the beginning of practice has a lot to do with learning as a lot to do with learning about letting go. When we have let go to some degree, then there's a whole other phase of practice. And that is, when we let go, well, then we have two choices. After that. One choice is the things that come along. We can pick them up or we can let them be and some things should be Picked up, you go in a 30 day retreat, let go so many stuff you let go of so much. And as you leave the retreat, certain things should be picked up. certain ideas and concepts should be picked up and used. So, for example, on the retreat, you might need to use any concept of green and yellow and red lights, traffic lights, that's not needed concept. So you can let go of it, get on the road after the retreat, you better use that concept, you have to pick it up. There's a lot of concepts we pick up that are useful in certain contexts. And so he has to pick it up. There might be certain ideas of identity, there might be certain ideas of, you know, needs that have to be picked up. There's a lot of things that should be picked up, you come home, refrigerators empty. And so you pick up the idea of getting going to a store and going shopping. But when you let go some whatever way you'd like go it gives you a greater choice. About what you choose to pick up. And some things that you did before, maybe you don't never want to pick up again. And some things you say whether you did before you do want to pick up, or some things you've never done before you decide that this is something I want to pick up. This is something I want to incorporate into my life. So, you know, if you spent a lot of time gossiping, or slandering other people you might feel you know, when I come back from that retreat, you know, I'm not going to pick that up. Thank you. So I can see that impulse to slander, but I'm not gonna pick it up and let it you know, I'm gonna let it be. If you just let it be not gonna pick it up, not gonna get involved. Or it could be that, that you've been introduced to loving kindness practice, and you come back to your life into a very difficult situation. Maybe you're in conflict with someone someone's in conflict with you. And I said, Well, you know, I could use the I could go to my old patterns. So reactivity when someone conflict, I could run away I could attack them I could with all kinds of things, or what but what I could do is I could pick up loving kindness, and I can be here loving kindness to that person. And loving kindness has a tremendous effect. Sometimes very unseen. So there's there's more choice available if we have learned likho Well, but what we pick up, if you carry if you're carrying four big suitcases, down the road, and holding on tight, you can't put them down because it can't. And then you know, you see some beautiful treasure in the road or CT in their suitcase or someone's they're kind of struggling with a suitcase and they could use help. But, you know, if you're carrying you know, these poor big suitcases, you don't you know, you don't have any hands available to, to take to respond to what's happening next. So, but You'd like go. If your hands are open, then you're available for comes along. So people who are completely caught up in their attachments, there's not much space to pick up new things. When you let go really well, then they can be much more creative than what you choose to pick up. And that creativity is part of the function of letting go of greater creativity, greatest choices. And I love those stories from the Chinese Buddhist tradition of a seeker who was climbing up the mountain for the mountains and mountains of enlightenment to get to the top I guess you get enlightened. The Secret was going up the mountain and coming down the mountain was Manjushri and you're sure is the embodiment of wisdom. The bodhisatta Folk wisdom.

You're supposed to be supposed to be enlightened. And he was coming down the mountain in the guise of, I guess. Go out there man carrying this big bag over his shoulder and The seeker sees my jewelry and says, How do you get in life? That's the that's what the seekers love searching searching for. And so Manjushri is holding this big bag, and he drops it back. That's the answer. And, and the secret, so thank you. That was a very clear answer. And after enlightenment, what then? The third question, what do you do then? Once you retire we supposed to do then that's a question after enlightenment, what do you do then? And so then my judiciary, tickers a bag, puts it over shoulder and continues down the mountain. So you know, there's a time for letting go and there's time for picking up. But you don't necessarily pick up the same bags as you had before. You could pick up new bags. But one of the I find one of the really remarkable opportunities that come along, when the mind has let go to some degree doesn't have too much. But I think the greater the degree, the more the more poignant this kind of practice becomes. And that's the practice of letting things be. So you can let go, you can pick up and you can let be. So you see a thought arise in the mind. And use Let it be that there's no mental movement to pick it up. No contractions, no reaching out. No holding on, no picking it up, let it be and passes through. Or someone feeling comes up and use Let it be. Don't pick it up, you don't push it away. The presence of things doesn't mean that you've picked it up. It can be it can mean that but it doesn't mean you've picked it up. Just kind of coming through. One way to pick up things is to take them personally. Have a thought arise in your mind. Oh no. How could I have that kind of terrible thought? Oh, no, my noticed in here. You know, I'm the one. I'm going to To me, it's my thought and I'm the one who's being defined by this thought, I hope no one sees me this way. There's a lot of selfing in there, we've picked it up with the grip of self. But to have some, you know, unsavory thoughts go through the mind. And not to take it as self is to let it be that there's a thought going through. You might feel you might, you know, you know, if you even be going down the street and you see a shop window, it has something for sale there. And you can see the impulse is I want that. So you can pick that desire up and go and buy it. Or you can just let it be see the desires, let it be. And there's a tremendous freedom, feeling of really, joy that comes from a mind that it's like a hand that stays open, open hands feels kind of good. And you go across things and buy things and just feel so good not to have contracted at hand. So many different ways we can contract it right? We can return your contract it just kind of like, you know stays open, open for the breeze, open, fresh, nice. Available for what's needed if something needed. So to have a mind that learns not to pick things up, just goes through the expression sometimes in Buddhism is like clouds in the sky. The sky is very spacious, very open, and serene. Sooner or later, things will pass through the sky. thoughts will pass through and just let them drift through like clouds, clouds Don't disturb the sky. The sky doesn't disturb the clouds and just let it be, let it prove through. So to let things be. So three choices to like go. Make a complicated, four choices that you can do. You can study your holding steady, your attachments. You can like go you can be and you can pick up for wonderful activities and in different times in practice different ones that post activities is what's called four times you want to study what's going on, study the attachments, good times we can we just like go there. Come on retreat today, a lot of you had to do some kind of letting go I imagine you probably hit other things you could have done today and other thoughts and ideas and you know, got to let go of speaking for the most part, you come here. Letting Go being here. And then letting be induced, let be, don't get caught up in a reactive mode to what happens. Don't before against things. Just let them come through. And then it's just exquisite to learn to let things be. If you don't have to learn the right way. They're out there. A healthy way of doing it. And sometimes it feels to the tantalizing anchor tenant a real vulnerable to let things be because because it's kind of like, your palms

open to men come along kind of lightly tickle your palm. It's kind of tantalizing or a little bit tender. So in your mind is that kind of open, letting things be some of these things come along and kind of Tickle, tickle, tickle attempt. And you get and I think it's particularly interesting when there's tempt temptation there. So you let things be, but there is just movement to pick it up people's temptation. And so just let it be. It's kind of, I kind of enjoy it. And then and then there's a movement of picking up and picking up the things that are wise to pick up. Pick up those things that further your Spiritual Growth or further the welfare of your community. So that's all I have. So some of you are here for much of the week or the whole week to do one residential retreat. And you have a variety of choices of what you do when you leave here. One is when you leave here to actually go and see until you conduct for mourning and other possibilities to pick up the idea of a retreat and extends beyond being here in this building. And so, to pick up some ideas of of how you want to conduct yourself this evening as you can hear, what you do at home, what you do at home in the morning and And there's many choices. Some people might choose to be really quiet, maybe if you can go home and just be silence people like that. And you just have to discontinue maybe even sitting in the sitting practice meditation practice into the evening and keep it really quiet and keep the whole thing kind of a more much more of a quiet retreat mode. Maybe not check email or email or phone calls, if you can just keep it really simple. Some people find that holding holding on to something outside of the retreat itself is counterproductive. It's like holding on something's not happening. And it's better just to forget about when you leave here and just throw yourself into what's happening at home. Okay, go do this well be here. I can try to hold on to some mode I'm supposed to be and by giving yourself that kind of freedom just going to be present. You actually come back the next day more refreshed than if you did try to you know, some people like to do some kind of moderate you know, some anything in between perhaps some people like to go home and Maybe read a little bit of a spiritual book, if you're in the flow of it, some people you know, all kinds of things you could choose to do. But what I asked you to do those of you who have come through the week, or is to do with whatever you decide to do is to do it consciously with thought with consideration, whichever option you take, so you'll just leave here and it's mindless. What happens next you go back to life as bit as usual, without thinking about it. They actually think no matter how you what serves you the best was most useful then shake up and how to be as you go from here. Do you have any questions about what I've said or about the retreat this week? Anything you'd like to ask?

often wonder,

walking out here, she hasn't counted. And you will you're giving your documents also put your hand up when you see what

it's talking about. It's a mood or a gesture of fearlessness. So it's a kind of an offering of being of safety. Offering safety to the world. You don't you have nothing to fear for me. Like you know, if a dog comes along barking, you show them you open your hand, and I'll show you and you know, you're safe. You're holding a stick or anything. And so it's the gesture of fearlessness.