

2005-10-27 Composing Oneself on the Breath

Thu, 7/16 10:02PM • 13:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

settle, composed, relax, concentration, resolved, quiet, mind, breath, life, stability, practice, kids, whisper, approach, teacher, ignoring, stay, meditation practice, physical, body

SPEAKERS

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laying on the floor. And all these kids were climbing on him and jumping on him and doing this and that with him. And he was just in there kind of like another kid just playing with them all and a great, fun way. And I said, I said to him, I said, what I said to him, I was admiring his ability to to join, join in with the kids his play so freely. And he said to me, he said, he told me, one of the lessons I got from my improv teacher, is that improv you say yes to whatever comes your way. You don't say no, I say yes. And then you play with it. You work with it, you know, you have to work with it. We don't ever say no. So here were these kids that come to him and he worked with us. He said yes to it in some way. So another thing that I thought was very interesting I learned is sometimes when the kids are really How to control really noisy. And if a teacher wants to get the kids attention where the teacher can do is then the middle of the room can whisper whisper something really so you almost couldn't hear it. And then they get really quiet to hear what was it What was this important thing being said was being whispered and all the kids would quiet down. And so I was thinking about that then. And meditation practice is, you know, this settling process in meditation. And one way of course, meditation is you have to, you know, say yes to everything in a certain certain way you everything's a teachable moment, everything you find a teaching there you find how to work with whatever's going on. But you could, you know, in all the different fragmented parts of our being going off in different directions and being very loud and noisy. You could go around to each kindergarten kid and say, be quiet sit quiet, I'm gonna tell a story in a while, please be quiet sit there. And then the kid gets gets the teachers attention, the kid would quiet down. And then when you have, you know, 12 kids in the class, so you go on to each one of them and tell them to be quiet the time you get to the 12th one, the first one started up again, right? It doesn't work, you know, can't and sometimes it works that way. And certain kids need certain attention, certain kind of attention sometimes need very kind, loving attention. And sometimes they need they needed a strong now No, so you can't do that and very firm approach. Very clear. So sometimes in the mind is same thing. Sometimes things in our mind need a lot of kindness and acceptance and generosity of spirit with what's going on. And that helps it settle. And sometimes what we need is a very strong, disciplined approach. To say, No, I'm not going

to think that anymore, I'm not going to follow that train of thought or that activity or, you know, just very clear, kind of like a warrior approach. No, it's enough come from a place of strength inside of us. And in some ways, we pass the practices approach of meeting whatever arises and attending to take care of it. But sometimes it can be like a room of kindergarten kids, where if you go around to take care of one by 10, you know, it's settled, and then you take care of the others. The first one starts up again. So that's why we also have concentration practice. In addition to the positive practice, and the concentration practice is a little bit more like standing in the middle of the room and whispering and getting everybody's attention, everything else settles around that whisper. We have this in this place of stability. The teacher has to be stable, calm, relaxed, strong. It is a teacher. It is a grown up after all, it stands there. And in case that grown up position, and then the kids kind of aligned themselves around that. That reference point of calm, strong stability. And then they quiet down around it. And sometimes are the they're all the different fragmented aspects of our psyche. Rather than dealing with each individually, sometimes a useful approach is to somehow get them all to settle together. And concentration practice is one of those ways to do that. And they're very variety of ways of developing concentration. One certainly is to be very resolved and determined, which is very being resolved is a great quality of meditation practice. This is what I'm doing. I'm here to do it and the kind of strength of resolve is really important. But there's also a sense also at the same time at the same time, of being very patient and very, almost quiet. might not have done it, don't you Don't take a hammer to, you know, to, to, you know, to ceramic pot, you know if you want to clean it, you don't take a hammer and hit it over, you know you kind of bring a nice little soft cotton towel or something to clean it. So the same thing you know you can be quite resolved, but you have to have the right tool and sometimes sometimes people in being resolved sometimes have this sledgehammer approach to their inner life I'm going to get concentrated no matter what. And, and that can kind of destroy something. And I think somehow the inner life is being something quite shy. And sometimes you want to have this kind of required whisper approach that lets things have to get getting the chance to kind of fall into line all together to gather together. So you know, concentrating on something like the breath, that can be other things, part of the functionalities to create the right conditions that will whisper in the mind. whisper of attention are the right conditions of resolve stability of adult life presence. Calm presence in this noisy room, that that can start being the focus of everything else, everything else can relax and settle down. So our concerns about planning what's gonna happen tomorrow brings our anxieties about other things elsewhere. Or resentments about the past or in our fantasies or, you know, our judgments about ourselves or judgments about others, or all the different things that come up, make it difficult for us to stay present. All those things quiet down, relax, because we're kind of, we're primarily staying with the focus of concentration, kind of staying there being attached there, being being connected there. And then allowing everything else kind of settle around it. And the goal of concentration practice, there's a variety of goals, but one of the goals that I like to emphasize is that part of the goal of concentration practice is to become composed is to learn how to be composed on myself. And I like the word compose A lot because it's to me composed some of you do physically. Some of you do with your whole being, you're gonna compose you, if you tell someone compose yourself, probably they'll take a deep breath and kind of adjust their posture a little bit and kind of, you know, kind of it's both physical and something internal. And so the idea of concentration is something

that's very physical, includes all of who we are composing it, or relaxing it in a way that becomes grounded, settled, balanced, centered, you know, on itself. And if you develop concentration only as a mental phenomena I search for, you know, laser point to the mind. I think it's very fragile, and maybe something maybe even not so useful if you don't first have that stability, that broad physical embodiment of being composed in the body. So part of this process of settling the kindergarten class is to settle the body To begin to relax the body. So, being with the breath, focusing on the breath, I think it's very important initially not to be kind of narrow in the breath, kind of, but rather to be in the breath in such a way there's some spaciousness, some openness, some broader awareness that takes in the rest of the body, so that as you stay with a breath, there's an open awareness allows some kind of settling to happen in your body. So your, your stomach can relax your chest, shoulders, the face, back, back, shoulder blades, back rib cage, you know, the whole the whole kind of thing, the whole physical kind of settling that happens. The more composed we are physically, the more composed we will be mentally because the ways in which we're we lose our composure physically, is probably directly correlated to how we've lost our composure mentally, the mental and physical so closely connected And so to notice to stay on top of like the breath, as a way of not not dealing with all the issues in your life, not dealing with, you know everything as it comes up, but actually in some ways, not ignoring it. The kindergarten teacher doesn't ignore the classroom when she stands in the middle and whispers but she's allowing the conditions for everything else has settled down around her. So you're not ignoring all these different aspects of who we are. But that by concentrating, we're kind of having this open, open possibility to let everything else relax and settle down. So the things we're preoccupied about the things we're afraid about the things that we're, you know, places we go in our mind our thoughts and our feelings and our emotions, that there's so much understanding what we're doing is we're allowing all those things to settle down, to relax to unwind to a knot and I think it's a very important to understand Because the psyche, the mind can have a very strong belief that it's going to fix our life solve our life, by thinking about things. It's going to fix our life by somehow engaging into all of those problems, all the little details of our life and somehow doing something with it, manipulating changing it for the better fixing it. Now, sometimes we have to do that that's the personal practice kind of meeting the situations directly and finding a teachable moment in that. But, but there's a lot of wisdom sometimes not being direct with some of the difficulties of our life. But rather than basically just kind of like not ignoring them either, which kind of staying very simple, very relaxed, being focused, proposing oneself. Realizing you don't have to engage in all these things, and disengaging it, allowing them to settle and relax. You probably all know the saying, I think was Mark Twain who said I've had A lot of problems in my life most of which never happened. And it's remarkable when we start letting things kind of settle down. Many things maybe are, have an imaginary quality to our difficulties. And so if it gets settled, we could settle in, relax, settle and settle and so relax really deeply. Then I think what really needs our attention becomes clear and clear. We kind of separate out from the imaginary, separate imaginary from the real. composing oneself on the breathing might be an interesting way of practicing instead of concentrating than breath, composing oneself on the breath. So that it's all aspects of who we are, the physical aspects of who we are. It's the emotional aspects of who we are. It's the cognitive aspect sukha we are intentional aspects of who we are perceptual aspects of who we are. And then the whole, everything who we are all kind of gets composed settles

itself around the experience of breathing. And because one of the one of the ideas of concentration practice is it meant to lead to lead to kind of unification of the mind and the body. It's a unifying practice. It's a composing practice of all the unifying or composing all those places inside of us, which is, which are fragmented. So you might try, you know, during lunch now, when you sit down to eat your lunch, spend a little bit of time composing yourself before you start eating, and then eat from that composed place and see what that's like. I had a difference maybe from the usual ways in which you might eat