

# 2010-02-07 Learning Reflecting And Practicing

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thinking, world, soften, life, feel, deeper, engage, dharma, thought, people, happening, structures, practice, stories, mutuality, important, experience, buddhist practice, reflect, person

## SPEAKERS

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This morning I would like to talk about how to engage in the Dharma, how to engage in Buddhist practice. And there is a traditional teaching that there are three major activities that you should, that a person can be involved in, when they engage in the Dharma. And one is they can learn the Dharma, they can study it. The second is they can reflect on it. And the third is they can practice it. And that those three, all work together. They're mutually supportive and beneficial. So the studying it traditionally the word is listening to it because in the time of the Buddha, there were no books. The only way to learn about it was by listening to someone who had memorized the teachings or teaching it. And, and so here today you guys are listening to me. So that's certainly part of it. But then also, it's for you to reflect on what's being said, either during a talk or afterwards you go home, is to engage the material. Don't just take it as a given this isn't good, but to question it, to explore it, to contemplate what it all means for you and your life. And that's a very important part of the Dharma practice. And the third is to practice it. And practice isn't any different than contemplating and thinking about it. And practice it has a lot to do with entering into our direct, immediate experience, you know, making direct contact with what's happening here. And some, I think it's best to have all three like a tripod that stable with all three legs, and if you don't have all three, it's easy to become kind of wobbling. And what I'd like to do is to talk about these three. In a way that kind of builds from the talk last week. Last week's talk was mindfulness of thinking, the world of thinking. And so might be interested to kind of continue with that theme a little bit for another week. So in hearing the Dharma, you might hear a variety of things about thinking, like you did last week. And you might learn the Dharma teachers that it's very important to be mindful of thinking, to understand what goes on when we think and to question maybe press question, not only what we think, but even question the whole process of thinking what is thinking itself. And many people can be engaged with their thinking by thinking more about it, but very few people actually take That kind of backward step, or that audit overview step, and actually observe the phenomena of thinking itself. And so we're told, look at thinking, you know, cakes explore it, that's the part of the Dharma teaching. One of the things we teach is that our thinking can also interfere with our direct experience. It can interfere with us living our life more fully and directly. And so we have to if we want to live fully or directly, it's very important to shift how we think or how I really shift to thinking. So thinking doesn't interfere. So there's inhibition, there's beliefs. There's fears that come through thinking we can think too much we don't see what's actually happening in front of us. And we don't hear what's going on because we're lost in our thoughts. And that interferes, but also it can interfere with ourselves, because we can be talking so much to ourselves in our head, or be so caught up in images that we Don't really know what's going on with us in a deeper way, which I think we do because we think that thinking is who we are. But there's much deeper it's a deeper aspects of who we are, that that can be cut we can be cut off from, if we're only negotiating our world, through the avenue of thinking about it, thinking about ourselves.

So and then Buddhism teaches that how we relate to our thoughts and ideas, is a very important source for our suffering. And if we're going to do is to become free of suffering, we have to at least understand, look at how do we relating to a thought that arises, a belief that arises an idea that arises and interpretation arises, a commentary a judgment we have for what's going on? How do we relate to the models of our reality? models of ourselves that our mind produces. The mind is a model making machine. It creates representations. And so we have representation for ourselves, for people outside of us for the world. And how do we relate to that? How do we hold that? We hold it one particular way, will suffer if we hold a different way we won't. If we hold it with clinging and resistance, more likely you're going to suffer. If you hold it very lightly with open hand, then you're less likely to suffer because of it. So that's an example of hearing the Dharma. Someone might say all those things. So then to then to take the next step of engagement in the Dharma. It's your job to reflect on that and question it, maybe you have some doubts about it, and it's just really to you know, do you agree with this? Do you not agree with this? How do you agree with this in what ways is useful for you to look at and What is it? What's my relationship to my thinking? How do I think? What's my thinking? Like? Do I think in words do I think in images? Do I think more tactically through my body? Do I? Do I believe every thought that I have? Do I my burden but my thoughts? Do I feel oppressed by them? What is my heart? How is it that we relate to the kind of cognition cognitive movements of the mind, the beliefs, the stories that the mind makes? I love my stories. You know, that's all I you know, that's what I like, you know, and it's a very entertaining and I'd rather spend time in my story than anywhere else. Or I hate my stories. All my stories are, are kept the cataclysmic you know, our, you know, they they predict the end of something, my universe and I just can't get it, you know, just they're tiring. You know, I'm frightened by my own story, making mind I love the Zen, the Zen story of the artists, Chinese artists who was painting a very realistic dragon. And so he was there painting it away and very close up to the canvas. And then he stepped back to get a view of what he had, what he had made. And he stepped back and looked at the dragon. It was so realistic, it frightened him. So he ran away. So we make stories in our minds, and some that sometimes we get frightened by our own stories. So to look at that. And, in fact, when we start reflecting on the teachings we've heard, it's not that interesting to agree or disagree. It's not interesting to like or not like it. I mean, you're welcome to do that. But some people specialize at that. And, and, and there's a lost opportunity. And that is what's most interesting is How can we engage whatever's being talked about? in a way that's useful for us? Even if you disagree with someone and dislike what's being said? You know, that's fine, you know, but maybe there's something in there that's useful. Maybe 90% of the time in your life 99% of time, this this teaching have no value whatsoever, or perhaps is 1% of your life one situation and like, Oh, yeah, in that situation, it might be true. And if it's not, so maybe I can kind of lease the milk, milk those teachings, the best I can for that situation. So as a way of engaging the Dharma, will we it's our job as in the reflective mode, to figure out how is this useful for me? And that can be very private. You don't have to tell the person that you disagree with him or her to tell me Oh, that was terrible. Yeah, you can if you want, but, you know, you know, I just mostly disagree with you have to say but because sometimes if we get into the mode, I disagree with what you said, or I agree with what you said. It's variable. interesting because often tied in to our self concept, building up ourselves or trying to prove ourselves or something. And so and so to not be involved in that, but see what's useful here so that I can become freer, but useful here so that I could move, move on and mature and develop my life for being more helpful for my community, what's helpful in this kind of teaching?

So in terms of thinking, What is your relationship to thinking? What have you learned about thinking in your life? What have you learned about what are the conditions that you get caught in the world of stories and ideas? And what have you learned your life, about the conditions that support you from not being so caught just taking you know, stepping back from it? You know, what have you learned there? what it would have been your experiences in your life as references points of what it's like to be caught

in thought, and what it's like not to be caught in thought. So I'll offer you an image that I have been meaningful for me and I've taught this image. Because for me, it's such a dramatic difference between being kind of in the world of thinking, and being. And not being caught in that world, that I liken it to a difference between living in a two dimensional world and a three dimensional world. And so, imagine going into, you know, imagine you always lived in living room with a very big 52 inch television, state of the art. And, and you had, you know, 500 or 1000 channels to choose from, you know, and, you know, I suppose it'd be pretty entertaining. You know, you'd watch all these shows, you get tired one show, you go to another show, and it's no big it's color, maybe it's even 3d by time you get your 52 inch screen. And so you know, it's, you know, you kind of living in the screen world. And, and that's all you know. And someone says, oh, there's another reality out there. And now No, no, there's nothing and by the way, I find out what happens to my mic program. It's and, and then one day electricity goes out. And you notice that there's this door to the outside world. So you thought maybe well, since electricity, I think I'll go out and you go out and you're surprised that there's a three dimensional world outside. And there's you feel the breeze against your cheek, you smell you know, the freshly cut lawn outside and, and you feel the sun against your skin and it kind of becomes alive and much more full than it could ever be. By just kind of being with a television. Even though television is pretty infinite. What nowadays you could show you it's a whole different categories, a whole different Kind of dimension almost to be out out in the world. So, being thinking living too much in our thoughts or preoccupy thoughts, is living a two dimensional or maybe a one dimensional life. And to be able to cultivate awareness practices, mindfulness practice, to wake up is the is as radical as going from two dimensional three dimensional, just like suddenly the world becomes the world but also ourselves becomes much more richer and deeper and fuller. And then, you know, to reflect a little bit about you know, what it's like to be in thoughts, but also what it's like to what's your experience of directing with life directly. And, and what experiences have you had for meeting life directly and fully, and when do you feel most the immediacy, the poignancy of this moment now, most clearly, most powerfully, in such a way that it's deeply satisfying Or enlivening for you? Are there times and moments for that? Does that have a value? And what's the difference between the value of that kind of experience versus the value of the kind of things that you pursue with your thinking mind your active mind, your ideas.

I like to talk this often enough, but there was a time in my life few years ago, where I really enjoyed looking at old photographs and had to be really old so that everyone it all the people in the photograph were long dead. And what I liked about it was that you know, Gov study their face, and particularly electrical look in their eyes, see their eyes and expressions in their face. And, and even some photographs are hundreds and even older, years old. Sometimes they're very clear, and you can see the expression in their eyes. Sometimes you see a certain kind of delight, or sometimes a mischievousness or sometimes sad This weariness, sometimes you see different expressions, and you know, it's expression of it was maybe momentary that moment when the picture was taken. And the reason why I like looking at these pictures was I would see those faces and those click the glimmer, that little kind of spark of consciousness and in life in that person and realize that that was that person's time for living. That was that person's time moment to be conscious and aware. And this is my time. So rather than being lost in the world of the past, it actually would prompt me or stimulate me in Kurt. Wow. Here. This is my moment. What is this magic moment like being aware, present, alert now, like, this is the only time I have this is my time. And how do we use this time? How do we engage this time? How do we enjoy this time? So that's kind of a reflection that can be done. So there's, you know, a wide range. And then there's a little more kind of classic Buddhist teachings that say that if you cling to something, you'll suffer. So then you can look, was this true for me? I have a lot of things I believe, do I cling to them as how I how do I cling to them? How is how is cling to them cause suffering. So all this has to do with contemplation with reflection, it's a very important and rich part of life. And one of the reasons why it's very important is that a lot of, of our character or a lot of, of our personality, or kind of

our self stress, or self, or self structure, belongs to the world of thinking and ideas. And there's kind of these personality structures or these these Are these belief structures with which we organize ourselves with. And sometimes it's very important to engage in those and rearrange them and understand different ones understand the limitations of them. And you need to kind of engage that world sometimes to understand it into engage in a kind of more direct meditation practice without reflection won't allow you to kind of really benefit from the full transformation that Dharma practice can entail. So for example, there are certain structures that people have, in their minds, belief structures that can cause a lot of conflict and tension within themselves. And we have to kind of question some of these structures. So one of the structures for example is the structure of self and other or autonomy and mutuality. If we fall on one side of the extreme, these will end up having problems Setting up a tension or conflict between them. So they say do being an individual United States, if we're hyper individualistic, that itself that structure will cause you know, cepheus as a logic to it didn't make sense. But that structure that belief structure will bring whether it's suffering, because it doesn't make sense to be complete individual individualistic, you know, be your own person, to say be your own person, and take it as an absolute extreme statement. Makes as much sense as saying speak your own language. You know, if you're if you're the only person who speaks a language, what good is language? You know, languages are meant for communication. And so, you know, you have to somehow be able to, and to be completely an individual cut off from other people. The mutuality of human life is to is to also To be cut off. But if we live totally into the mutual life, the way which were coded co interdependent on each other, then we kind of lose a certain kind of autonomy or mastery or, or, or ability to choose for ourselves.

And so if you live too much in one or the other, or if we set up this kind of, it's too easy to set up a conflict between others and self being independent, being being cooperative. And some people live in this tension or this world. And we have messages a society says you should be your own person. But then people say we supposed to also kind of get along with people. And how do these work or there's conflicts in their, in our minds or structures in our minds, that say that you should not be a certain kind of way. Should certain kind of expression you should not be angry. And so then when that part of me cannot be there, and so then I have to deny that part of me, we deny that part of me, that part says infestors, that festers, they become stronger. And then the idea that I shouldn't be angry, gets more to react against. And then there's this conflict that builds up inside of us, that that can really kind of be very detrimental to ourselves and cause a lot of suffering. So what I'm trying to say here is that we have these beliefs and belief structures that are very deeply connected to our sense of self, our sense of what it's like to be a person what we shouldn't, shouldn't be and how to be in society. And some of these structures need to be questioned and understood, and part of that process involves reflection and contemplation and questioning. The whole process of questioning in a deep way and reflection is greatly supported by the third way of engaging in the Dharma. And that is the approach of practice itself. And practice is very important, because it's one of the most powerful ways of getting underneath or behind the thinking mind. If all we do is negotiate the world through thinking and rearrange the structures of our mind to a better structures, then it's a little bit like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. And it's a nice thing to do. But maybe it's important thing to do. It's important to do at some degree, but you know, it's only going to take us so far. In order to really discover from the depths of our heart, the depth of possibility of freedom, the depths of our kind of afford the fullness of our kind of the life force that goes through us the emotionality that intentionality connections, with In the world, we have to find some way to drop into what is often called our direct experience. And a big part of what's called practice in Buddhism has to do with finding a way to engage in our direct experience to meet it to be it to discover it, independent, and independent. But on no way this doesn't get into feared by our thinking mind and our ideas. So many different practices of Buddhism have made different functions. But I think ultimately, they're really trying to encourage us to be fully in the present moment. So we can see what's really going on here in a way that we can't if we're thinking about what's going on here. So



how do we quiet the mind down in our thinking mind down enough? How do we stabilize it enough so we can see it in much more direct way. So I'd like to suggest that There are three ways of doing this. They're making this direct contact or three aspects of it. You with me still. So there is. First there is like recognizing what is happening as it's happening, the seeing part to seeing what's happening. The second is to feel what's happening. And the third is to soften around it, to soften into it, or to lighten up with it. So to see clearly, to feel it because to see maybe a little bit removed to feel means you really have contact with it and really they're present for the full way to see makes you a little bit free kind of steps back a little bit being the observer that But, but if you're only the observer and kind of detached, you don't really have the chance to really experience the fullness of what something is. and experiencing the fullness, the immediacy of it.

So, for example, if I watch my breathing, that could be useful, but to watch it and to feel the experience of breathing, which is right more deeply into the, into the, into the experience to really see and can be more full, more deeper. The third thing and then soften around it. So that means a lot of different things. But so I'm watching my breath. I'm feeling the experience of breathing. And then I noticed that I'm trying too hard. I'm pushing perhaps, or there's some contraction and you know, contracted around my belly as I breathe, or a little bit tight in my chest. Okay, so can I can just soften a little bit lighten up a little bit doesn't have to be dramatic. I like the word softening rather than relaxing, because relaxing is hard to do sometimes, but softening snickle the space around it, be kind of more gentle about it. And so those three steps to see, to feel, and then to soften at some point, it doesn't make sense anymore to soften anymore. Because you've softened enough, you're relaxed enough. So then it becomes see and feel. At some point, you don't need to feel it anymore. And so you know, just you have to enter into the experience more fully because you're there for it. So then, then you add falls away as a practice, and then you just have to see it. And then just see clearly in the heart of the personal practice is a means to to see clearly. to really see what's here. But this is to see what's here, to feel it and to soften, to relax, to allow what's here to be here, and then not too relaxed enough and soft enough that we're not in opposition to anything. We're not closed down to it. I found to be very, very helpful. Because there's this almost like this innate wisdom or this natural way in which we, that we can grow and develop. If we allow ourselves to take in or experience what is here. Very important part of this Buddhist practice is learning to trust in some profound way. That it's okay to experience our life as it is. If you can see and feel and soften, relax around what's happening. not react to it before it's not against it, but to feel it and allow it to come in. Then we can be changed By it will be matured by it, or will allow the process that it is to unfold with a natural unfolding kind of move through us. So it means very simple things like, if I'm looking at my thinking, for example, I'm caught up in some kind of thought, preoccupied with something. So I might go and notice that I'm thinking, see that I'm thinking, and that's good. But then, what does it feel like to be involved in that kind of thinking? Oh, it feels tight. I feel afraid when I have that kind of thought. I feel concerned about something. And so then what would it really take to soften around that thought? Maybe what it takes to softening dyes or softening the shoulders or softening some pressure energy that's in the head. What would it be so it's not just simply letting go of thoughts, but it's feeling the whole thought construct The whole thought phenomena, thinking phenomena, and then softening around it. If we don't soften or relax, the pressure to think, then the pressure will remain even if we let go of the particular thoughts that we have, and we'll keep thinking some more. So, but then say that I, I noticed I'm thinking about something, and then I feel it feel that experience. There might be some strong emotions connected to it. And so, for example, this weekend, I had a guest the other day, yesterday. I was kind of thinking, reviewing something that happened over and over again. And so I felt that it was like I felt Oh, I felt a little bit sad. About so what's that sadness about? And then I realized, so then I kind of felt the sandwich more fully and as I felt the sadness Fully allowed myself to kind of drop into some deeper feeling of a wonderful loving connection I feel for another person.

But if I'd stayed the level just thinking, I wouldn't have felt that deeper sense of connection. If I reacted to the sadness and said I shouldn't feel sad or recoiled from it, I wouldn't have kind of opened up and felt that kind of deeper, heartfulness. And from that place, then it was easier for me to go and make, kind of go back to the person and talk to the person that I need to. Let's talk about what happened and I feel some regrets about what happened. So what I was trying to convey with that is the idea that by seeing and feeling and allowing, it allowed me to have some deeper touch some deeper place of communication of contact with someone that I couldn't if I'd stayed kind of more superficial

So we see, we feel, and we saw often, this can be done to ourselves inwardly. And meditation practice is often seen as an inward kind of practice. And it can be done externally towards others. So inwardly I want to give you example from today. And two relates to thinking. Maybe some of you had this experience who meditate in the morning, I woke up around five o'clock, I was very comfortable in bed. And I had things to think about. First thing, boom, I was thinking about things. And just kind of interesting to think about these things. This is important to think about it. And I've meditated a lot in my life. I don't think I have to meditate. You know, I think I should lay here it's comfortable. Maybe I'll think some more it's very full is very rich, this thinking world and the thinking world had this very wonderful, compelling question. To like this this is the world this is it this is how you're going to solve the problems of your world your life this is where it's really at this is you know it's it felt really good feelings for me I don't know if any of you but thinking rock can feel more real than anything else and to answer that maybe I won't meditate this morning because you know if I meditate then I won't leave behind this rich world that seems so important it is the world and why should I leave that world this is who I am you know, this is this moment I my thinking and so I give myself up and go and meditate. So, anyway, so I got up and meditated and, and then immediately as I sat down to meditate, I said, Wow, this is a relief. This is so much better. This is you know, three dimensional. This is really a rich world. This is so much more settled in that world of thinking that was so compelling and, and so I had such authority when I was laying there in bed seems so important. it lost its, you know, who's, you know, lost its magic it lost its authority it lost its, you know we're seeing it we're seeing kind of more for what it was. And I realized as much as I realized as much as there's much more to being alive and being present than just laying in bed thinking, or just thinking and thinking, thinking, and I felt my life deepen and broaden. And I didn't stop thinking entirely through some of that sitting, but it felt like a much deeper, much more satisfying way of being in the world than it would have been, even though in bed thinking even though the thinking was pleasant, makes sense. So this kind of deeper connection, stop and feel and allow some deeper to happen. So it was very satisfying for me today. yesterday with a sadness, it wasn't so satisfying immediately. But it had to do you know, that allowed for somebody deeper, that feeling that sadness, I trusted it. And it allowed for something deeper to happen there as well as me fuller, more meaningful by myself to feel it, be present for it. So these are examples of being in the present moment for myself, feeling it directly allowing that present moment experience to work me to work through me. And then it can be done towards others with others, and one of the wonderful aspects, I think of life is our relationship to other people. And, and those relationships can deepen a lot to be much more richer if they don't happen only through the vehicle of our thinking. And probably most of you are thinking, well, I don't do that. Because I have you, but in fact Thinking is such a pervasive and powerful way in which we understand our world, that it's really a veil or a filter through which we think we really make contact. And sometimes it can interfere with us really seeing someone else fully and it can interfere with us, seeing ourselves fully, because in meeting someone else fully we meet ourselves. So I came up, I came across remind reminded of a couple of examples that I thought were quite powerful. One is there's a Zen teacher in San Francisco named Blanche Hartman, who has come and talk to her a few times beautiful woman. And she, she recapped, recounts an event in her life that propelled her into the world of Buddhist practice.

This event was so significant for her realized there has there is another way. There's another possible way of living in this world kind of another almost like reality. And I have to kind of find out how to do this. And she found Zen. It was the 1960s is eighth, I think. And she was I think she was a mother, I think for kids. And I think she had a child who went to San Francisco State. So she was in her late 40s, I think. And there were as that back that was in those days, there were all these college protests, demonstrations against the Vietnam War and other things going on. And some of these were quite violent. temsco state, the police roughed up demonstrators and there was, you know, beat them up and things. So that was part of what was going on. And so there was a call that went out asking for parents or community members to come and kind of help stand between the riot police and the students as a way of, you know, maintaining the peace. So she did, she went and there she was between these two groups. And she had a very antagonistic idea about police. And a lot of people didn't a lot of young people or people, a lot of people, people in the 60s maybe unfortunately, fortunately, but but the police was like the bad other. And there she was sandwiched between protesters and the police is riot police and I know exactly how they came into contact with each other but they were at one point she was directly facing One of the police officers and they looked each other's in the eye and something happened in looking him directly in the eye that she was changed forever and she stopped being an activist she's still a little bit of Mad you still continued in various ways but it's kind of active I guess active she was she stopped so what was it that happened What did you see what happened when she looked the police officer directly in the eye when they saw each other? What is it that when you when you what kind of contact Can you have with someone else? And somehow be changed by that direct and immediate fullness of that meeting complete stranger. What do you see in someone else's eyes? Who's a stranger? What can you see? When you drop your thoughts, your ideas idea that there's another out there, they're the bad person. You see the fullness of the person, if you see if you feel and if you soften. If you relax and let someone else come in, she said her sense of identity of who she was kind of. In a way, a sense of identity helps close identity or mutuality with the officer in a way that you'd never experienced before then you change your life.

So then, I think was yesterday I read in the current issue of tricycle. There's a story about Vinnie Ferraro, Vinnie has come and taught here at IMC also. He said Dharma punk Dharma teacher, punk Dharma teacher with all the tattoos and everything, tough guy you know, they say and I get the article that he sounds like like a Sopranos it's like a mafia people. Have you ever seen Right, so like they said, Sopranos I kinda like mafia. He, he called me once in my house. I wasn't home and my wife took the phone and said, This guy called you He knows sounds like mafia. He wants to talk to you. And, but I didn't call him back right away. So he called back and talk to my wife and Marcy, I think you better call this guy. And anyway, so he's a wonderful man. Does wonderful Dharma work. So there's an article about him and tricycle, a little bit of his life story. And he grew up in gangs in his poor neighborhood and very violent. He ran in a gang and he was violent gang member. And when he was 15, he came across, his gang came across a homeless man in their turf, their hood or whatever. And so they were going, they started beating him up. And as he was doing this, the homeless man said, looked right towards me and said, help me help me. And then he said, Why should I help you? The man said, when I look into your eyes, I see more compassion there, that in any woman I've ever seen, I've ever known. There's more compassion in your eyes than any woman I've ever seen that I know. That was the end of the beating. And that was, and that changed his life. He'd never known that part of himself. He'd never known his feelings. In that kind of deep way. He was reflected and seen something was seen. What do you see when you look into somebody else's eyes? What do people see in you? And what is it? What would it mean? to really see someone else? To feel in that seeing to feel yourself to feel the other to really feel? And then to relax and to soften? Who would you encounter? I've done this with complete strangers, and had a deeper, intense, loving, fuller connection with a stranger in five minutes than I've had with friends I've known for years. And it's so sick happen so quickly. And then how do we how are

we changed? How does that influence us? So this idea of the Dharma works through us, they were being worked. We're allowing something to affect us. If we think we're in charge, then we can't really allow This deeper movement to happen. So to simply see what's here, and to feel what's here to allow the feeling to be here, and then to soften, to relax, through relaxing, allows the feeling to be more full or allow something to kind of move through us or unfolding. So we enter into the direct experiment, direct moment, the direct experience, to see it. And to allow this deeper unfolding, to discover a world of trust where we can let something go through us, rather than us being in charge. So to engage in the Dharma, to learn the Dharma, to study it, to reflect on it and think about it, perhaps with the support and help of your friends who you've entered the conversations and what do you think of that. And then, to practice it, to practice it is to enter into your direct experience and leave the Dharma behind so thank you. And now you're engaged with Dharma happily