

2014-07-23 Sustained Attention

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

Earlier I talked about the rhythm of the mind wandering off, and then coming back to the present moment. And sometimes it's a more friendly way of relating to our mind to our meditation practice to think of it as a part of a rhythm. And so that as it can be, our contribution is to be present, come back to the breath, or come back to the present moment in some way. And then inevitably, the rhythm was, you know, the wave will go out, inevitably the, your mind will wander off, and that's not a mistake or a problem. It's just how the mind works. But then your job is to come back and your contribution to the rhythm is come back again, and just get a sense that you're part of a rhythm of flow back and forth. And you're trying to ride the wave of the present moment. But if you fall off, then you get back on it. Next Wave best you can. So one of the important things of practice is coming back mind wanders off and gently come back without being angry or frustrated or without striving too much, but your contribution is to come back, being relaxed, but having wandered off. But there's one other thing about practice. And that is there's a skill, coming back skill of applying yourself back to the breath or whatever your focus of your practices. But the next skill is to hang in there to stay. So if you know if you're if you are, you know, if you're trying to catch a wave, to go surfing on a wave, I was just in vacation this last week, so I was with my son, we were body surfing. So, you know, it's one thing to be able to catch the wave. Sometimes we were too late or too early and didn't catch it, too. One thing to be able to get in onto, this is another skill to stay on it and stay on it properly, all the way all the way up to the sand beach. So there's this two skill. So with meditation as well, there's a, there's an A part of the practice is to come back. And some people are very good at coming back, coming back over and over again. But there's a separate muscle that needs to be used, which is to, once you're here, hang in there, stay there. And so so that's the muscle that most people need to cultivate and develop that muscle to hang in there. Stay there. Once you're once you're there. Once you're connected to your breath, once you're in the present moment, then your contribution is to hang in there with a rhythm, extend that rhythm, extend it longer, so you can stay more present. being fully aware that you're not you know, it's a temporary thing and you'll wander off and then you come back. So there are the there's a How do you stay present? How do you perpetuate what you're in with the breath? Once you're in the present moment with something, how do you stay there? And one of the ways is you stay is you have the intention to do so. There's a certain boom behind. Okay, now I'm here, let me not get casual. Let me not be kind of complacent. Now that I've arrived, some people focus on the breath and they give up, they feel like they've done their job because that's all they know how to do is to connect. But once you're there, there has to be intention. Now let me stay. Let me hang in there as long as I can, knowing it's not going to be that long. But let me push the envelope a little bit. Try to hang in there, hang out, ride the wave. The more classic Buddhist analogy for this is a bird taking off in flight, that the bird has to do what kind of work to flap its wings to get up. And then once it's gets enough momentum, I guess and high enough then it can collide. So the first part of coming back to the breath, for example, is the flapping. And then the idea is to glide or to hang in there or to float or to ride the wave or to stay there with experience.

And it a little different analogy with very different analogy would be that they give and the classic texts is, is you have a bowl that you're going to polish, and you have to bring your hand your your claw to connect with the ball. And then once you're there, you have to do something and that is you feel the ball, you rub the ball with a cloth. So once you connect it to the breath or to your body or to whatever your focus of meditation is, then you want to stay connected, kind of hang in there, rub it, feel it, sense it, hang in there. So that's the be the intention. The wish the to do that. And Then some people find it helpful to do the, what's called the mental noting. So to have your with the breath to note, yeah, breath, some people count the breath, one, you know, count the breath or note the breath in and out. And that little mental thought is a little reminder, hang in there, stay there with experience. And then it helps a lot if you feel it's valuable to stay presence, the mind as its mind of its own right. So the mind will often think that's really valuable to remember the past are really valuable to plan the future really valuable to worry about things. And, you know, that's kind of what the mind thinks is important. And so if you if you don't have any sense that yes, being in the present moment is important. Then guess what's gonna get, you know, get most of the attention is that other thing you think is important. So you have to kind of in some deep embodied sense, some deep kind of considered way. Understand that it's valid. To be in the present moment, at least for a few moments right here. So for example, maybe you're washing dishes at home, you might have really important things to do in your life. But in a time you're doing your dishes. Maybe it's okay not to think about those. Maybe it's okay to really give yourself over to washing dishes. And maybe there's a value and cultivating presence and attention just for this thing when you're washing the dishes. Are there chunks of time in your life where it's okay to put other other concerns aside, and really give yourself to one thing. And so meditation is meant to be that that time where you, you're willing to put aside concerns about the past the future, and really feel like here's where I cultivate the present moment, because the present moment moment is really the door to a really deeper connection to life to yourself. So unless you have some sense of the value of that importance of it, it's hard to sustain the attention. The other thing to do to help scale If this sustaining the attention is into find something you enjoy about the present moment. So if you're with your breathing, too, is there anything at all about focusing on the breath that you could enjoy? Maybe it's a relief to focus on the breath rather than everything else. And the relief, which is nice. Or perhaps there's something very smooth and satisfying about the exhale. Or perhaps the rhythm of breathing, just hanging in there being rocked by it being soothed by it even is makes it more compelling to stay with. If you can find something that's even moderately mildly pleasant or enjoyable, about breathing or anything you're focusing on, then the mind is going to want to stay there more easily. If it's not enjoyable mind, kind of, you know, not be so interested in saying so. So finding something that's enjoyable or pleasant about the present moment that you're connecting to, is one of the ways of helping you sustain that attention through time. At some Point, as the mind as we sustain the attention in the present moment sustained the attention with a breath, at some point, it becomes self fulfilling or self satisfying. Kind of like, you know, when I caught those waves on the beach at some point, you know, the first few moments of catching the wave I felt kind of pretty uncertain about myself, pretty uncertain device, what's the situation about that, you know, just safe ways of crashing I'm crashing into the, into the sand beach. But then after a couple of moments, I guess I got it to the safe, whatever. And then and so and then it was kind of a it was just a thrill to be wrapping been catching the wave and writing up. So at some point as we kind of catch the present moment and stay with it, becomes kind of a thrill is the right word, but it becomes kind of self fulfilling or self said. Fine. It doesn't have to be for long. And this is where we come back to this teachings about their rhythm. You just you just contributing to the rhythm. And you hang in there as long as you can, but you're part of the rhythm. And then your mind takes over and wanders off and get lost. And then you come back and do your part again. And you come do your part again. And so you're massaging.

And it's tremendously valuable, to not give free rein to your mind to do whatever it wants. But to begin lubricating it, loosening it up, freeing it up, from unusual preoccupations, concerns by coming back to the present moment, coming back to the breath, and doing this rhythm. I think of it as a massage of massaging and loosening up what's going on. And if you can sustain it for longer and longer, it tends to loosen things up faster. But you know, you still do the best you can. So two things there's what the technical words in Buddhism is that there is the initial application of Attention. And there's the sustained up like a sustained attention. So first we apply our attention to the present moment and then we sustain it. And those two things are considered integral important parts of meditation practice, and many people just know about the first. And so now talking about the second sustaining. So that's my thoughts for today. And now we have some time for cleaning the center and this is a part of