

2016-07-13 Dharmette 3 Phases of Practice

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SPEAKERS

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So when people are involved with a practice like meditation or mindfulness Buddhist practice, it's often helpful to realize that there are different phases that we go through. And so the practice looks different at different times, or we approach the practice with practice differently, depending on the kind of phase circumstances of what's happening. And I'd like to offer three phases, that there's more, there's different ways of dividing this up. But I like to offer three phases that might be relevant for some of you and to consider so that as you're track yourself, you can kind of recognize that you're maybe right now maybe, and this is their face a mat, this is what's needed. This is what's appropriate. And to introduce these three phases, I like to do it through an analogy that I'm fond of, that I borrowed from my son's kindergarten class. And then his kindergarten class once a week, they would make little sculptures out of beeswax. And so, the beeswax which was kept in the class, because they use it every week, so that was up on a shelf. And when beeswax hasn't been used for a while, it's hard. And when it's hard and cold, you can't really shape it, you can't do anything with it. Anything you can do is break or break it, but you can't really kind of start to flexible and soft enough to shape. So the kids would go to the shelf and pick off the way beeswax, and then they were instructed to hold it in their hand and between it between their two hands. So their body heat would warm it up. But it takes a while. So while it was warming up, the teacher would tell a story. And then within the story was finished, their body heat had softened the wax. So now they can shape it. So the first phase was just holding it. And allowing it used to feel the warmth and blowing it to melt or to soften. The second phase was then once there was soften, they would shape it into something beautiful into something, usually the middle animals, but they were shaken into something. And they would spend sometimes a lot of time kind of crafting and looking and working and redoing and, you know, and, and adjusting and you know, doing whatever needed to be done to get their idea what was the animal they wanted to shake they wanted. And that was part of the fun for the kids that making the doing the shaping to be involved in that was, you know, there was a part of their play. And then the third phase was to put the little thing that they've built and put it up back up on the shelf for display. To kind of just celebrate is appreciate it and just let it be and just free up no sense from yourself no longer need to do anything with it. And so it's liberated from you, and you put it up and let it be by itself for the next week. So sometimes in our practice, we're at this first phase where what's most useful to do, then necessarily first, but one phase where it's most useful just to be present in a warm hearted way, or be present in a nonreactive way, not trying to do anything. Because sometimes we try to do something about ourselves and fix something we see is happening too quickly. Maybe we're too brittle, we will break like the cold beeswax will break. And what's really needed is just to be accompany ourselves, be present with ourselves, hold ourselves in the warmth of our hands with a warmth of our hearts. So they have some compassion and kindness and forgiveness and acceptance, kind of just get it out just be present. And not be alarmed by anything and not be opposed to anything not be for anything. Just to hold it has to be with it. And that's done a variety of ways. And most simply it's in mindfulness is done with awareness, just something hold something in awareness,

without needing it to be different than what it is just this is the time to be to be for it to be held wherever it is. And sometimes that can take a long time, or certain things take a long time. If you go on retreat, sometimes you might have to be present for a certain sorrow or certain grief or certain anger for a long time before anything begins to happen. And you can feel so uncomfortable because I got to do something about this.

But what's really, the main thing you realize is that, no for a long time, nothing's needed to be done except to accompany it to be with it. That be patient with it and hold it Then something begins to thaw, some begins to relax, to doing that. Sometimes a busy mind, do you sit down your mind is really agitated spinning around. And it feels like this is not meditation, I need to do something, I need to try harder or focus harder or, you know, bear down or something. And maybe what's needed is just to kind of hold the agitated mind to be present. And then this is what an agitated mind is like, and hold that in your kind awareness for a while. Doesn't have to be different, you can be agitated, make space for it, and then see what happens. At some point, the second phase comes along. And that's a phase where it's possible to actually shape something. And the point of the traditional Buddhist language is to train the mind. The mind is the Buddha was described as a person who can train people who are trainable. The team, the trainer of the trainable. And so occasionally, we're trainable. Occasionally, there's a situation that circumstances are that we can train our minds or shape our minds or develop our minds, then one of the common words is cultivate, I love the word cultivate, because it's a little bit then we're not completely responsible, we're more like growing cultivating a plant, we create the conditions for it to grow, we can shape the mind. And as the Buddha said, Whatever you think, think regularly, and frequently becomes a habit of mind becomes the character. And so you have to be careful with what you do and what you say what you think and kind of what feelings with moods you pursue what feelings and moods, you get entangled within involved and support and continue. Because you're shaping your mind, one way or the other in your mind is being shaped either your ship, either it's being shaped, or you're shaping it. And if you're if you're not taking any role at all, and shaping your mind, there's many people in our society are paid a lot of money to be involved in shaping your mind. Advertisers, politicians, all kinds of people are constantly bombarding us trying to kind of change you know, us so you can become a more or, you know, better consumer, better buyer or something. And so the mind is malleable piece of beeswax that can be shaped once it's warm enough can be shaped. And so we have to take some responsibility for that shaping, otherwise, other people will do it for us. And so to be careful with what you're actually doing in your mind, what you're thinking, what you're engaged in what you're involved in. And so not to be careful not to just keep thinking, thoughts, which are self defeating, which are undermining you. Thoughts of anger or hostility towards yourself or to others, generally are not very helpful, it shapes a certain thing doesn't mean that you have to kind of, you know, doesn't mean you're supposed to repress it or deny it's happening. But it's the involvement with it, it's the kind of getting engaged and perpetuating it. So one thing for a thought of anger aversion to arise, that's fine. But then, to say, oh, now let's get into it really well, let's like, get in there and justify it and do it even better. And while I'm at it, you know, I might as well have a hostility towards everyone else. So this way of getting involved is very different than just allowing things to bubble up and then just let them be and then pass away. So to shape the mind to be involved in choosing what it thinks about a little bit and what direction it goes. And the most classic thing in Buddhism is to help it be shaped by loving kindness. So to make that a regular part of your life is to reflect and what's the kind of thing or the friendly thing or the loving thing to do in this situation for myself for others. And not that you have to be loving. But the fact that you would bring this up as a reflection and consider what would be the loving thing begins to change the inner shape the inner training the inner kind of habits of the mind. So it might be just the fact that you thought about and say, Well, I'm not going to do I'm not going to be kind now. If I was kind, this is what I would do, but No way. No way, but I'm definitely gonna reflect on it. Then it could be later in the day, or because you do it regularly, your mind is predisposed to to reflect from that

perspective. And it might come in handy in a situation where maybe it's really needed and you really kind of been more inclined.

So the mind is shaped or supported to think and reflect in that way to train the mind, to shape the mind to be generous to change shape. mind to be mindful, to be more attentive to shape the mind a patient, to shape it to mind to be have more joy, to kind of look at the joy, support the joy. Enter into situations where your pride where you're in your life, where maybe you're more predisposed to notice what is nice about it, what's wonderful what's to celebrate what's the feel joy about it. Rather than going into situations and beach, training your mind to be better at looking at all the problems that exist in a situation. Because you'll always find problems, there's no problem in finding problems. But if you're predisposing your mind to think that way, then it is kind of like you're beginning to put blinders on. If you do it a lot, you become the cold beeswax, meaning of the mind kind of gets locked in in that way. And it takes a while to put the warm hands on that tendency and let it soften and open up. So to be a little bit mindful about how you're shaping the mind, are you developing the mind, developing the mind to get concentrated develop the mind to being, you know, to let go, all these things can be developed. But if you try to shape the mind, too soon, too quickly, before you've allowed yourself just to be with what is there a company what's there, then it's sometimes can backfire. So you really, it's helpful to have a foundation first, have the ability to just be present for what is Don't be in a hurry to change anything. Learn how to bring a warm hand or a warm mindfulness awareness to what is there and take your time with it. Maybe it needs five minutes, maybe it needs two days, just to be accompanied and be present. And then at some point, it feels like oh, now it's time, my mind now I have the ability to kind of maybe now train the mind shape the mind, direct the mind in a way that's beneficial that lets it grow and cultivate and develop in ways that are healthy for me in the future. And then at some point, the mind has been shaped, maybe temporarily, where there is more generosity or compassion or joy or sense of freedom that's there. And then it's, you know, I don't know, if you, I don't know what the metaphorical with the shelf is exactly. But you want to appreciate it. And so one phase of practice is a phase of appreciation. Oh, this is good, even if it's just a little bit of ease or a little bit of joy or a little bit of patience or a little bit of wisdom that comes from going through a difficult time. to actually take time to appreciate that to enjoy it, to value it, to admire it. Whatever just not egotistically you want to overdo it. But it's important to give time to appreciation because that strengthens it and reinforces as part of the training of the mind. And so next time when the beeswax is cold and hard, not very good, nice looking, then you're happier and more contented and more trust and confidence that it's valuable just to come and meet it and hold it in a company. It's a good path to be on, it's a good thing to do, which is to be present and be with it. So sometimes we just be with experience. Sometimes we're involved in shaping and cultivating the mind. And sometimes we're involved in appreciating what's here, three phases. So maybe at different times. One of those will be more relevant for you and you can give it a little bit more emphasis. Thank you