

# Be, See, Free, We (5 of 10) Being Stable

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**Gil Fronsdal**

It is sometimes thought that liberation, the spiritual freedom that Buddhist practice is about, is some radically other kind of experience that's quite separate from how we live our lives and what we have access to in everyday experience. But I think that one way of understanding liberation is that it takes what's quite ordinary and expands and develops it. Liberation allows what is ordinary to grow and flower into its fullness.

For example, a liberated mind is sometimes described as imperturbable. It cannot be shaken up or disturbed by anything. But I think that everyone can discover that the mind is stable, unshakeable, and undisturbable in some little ways. This could be very mundane and trite. It could be as simple as when you're looking for your cup when it's not in its usual place, and you don't get disturbed, upset, or agitated. You just look around the kitchen to see if maybe it's on the other counter or in another room.

In those moments, things are not the way you wished. The cup was not where you wanted it to be. But there was an ease, a stability, a steadiness – an unagitated state in relation to looking for that cup. Very simple.

Sitting in meditation, can we recognize where there is stability? Can we recognize where there is steadiness? Rather than seeing stability as something new that we have to make happen and figure out how to do, we recognize it.

We recognize stability with the idea that even if it's a small kernel, that is what's going to grow and develop. Stability grows and develops partly because we do recognize it and appreciate its value and usefulness. We make room for it to grow and to be there as a support for us.

The idea that we're developing supports for practice is an integral part of Buddhist practice. In the language of the Buddha, supports were called "conditions." He very rarely talked about causes. Rather, he talked about the conditions that are required for certain things to happen. They are not necessarily the cause for things to happen, because a wide range of conditions needs to come together. When they are there, something in the natural world begins to unfold and move.

It is the same way with us. What we contribute to the practice is to put in place the supportive conditions for the practice to grow. Rather than being responsible for the practice's growth, we're responsible for putting in place the conditions that allow it to grow. That saves the practice from us trying to engineer it, being the doer, or carrying the burden of responsibility, so it is all up to me to make it work and figure out what to do. Rather, our responsibility is to put in place the conditions and then allow the Dharma to move through us. We allow this process of inner growth to happen, Dharma willing.

One of the remarkable things I see about this kind of meditation practice is that we don't always know the best direction or the next direction our practice is going to take. We don't know what we might have to face, work with, work through, and resolve. The Dharma knows. Our inner life, our heart, knows what needs to come up next. As we go through layers and layers of the mind and the heart, different things will come up and we have to face them, work with them, and be mindful of them.

It is not a linear process where we go from an agitated state steadily and linearly to a calm state. It is more like a spiral. We go around and around, and after a period of settled, quiet peacefulness, the practice can easily open up to some challenge that arises where we are agitated. This is not because we're going backward, but because we're going through the layers of the mind and we have different things to sort through and work through in

practice. I like to think that the Dharma knows what we need, and our job is to keep showing up and offering the conditions that support us to be present.

One of the conditions I'm emphasizing today is the family of things related to stability. This includes stillness, steadiness, imperturbability, non-agitation, and non-disturbance. Rather than feeling that you're agitated and it's impossible for you to become still or stable because you're so agitated, then feeling bad about yourself, I think everyone can find some little kernel, no matter how small, where things are stable.

In the meditation we just did, I suggested finding where the body touches the object that supports us from the pull of gravity. We can feel the weight of our body against the chair, our cushion, the floor, or the bed. Sometimes it's quite wonderful to think of that place of contact. Literally, if that place of contact was absent and not there – just space there instead – you would fall. Gravity would pull you. Because that object is there and not just space, you don't fall. The weight of your body through the pull of gravity is making contact with that object.

Maybe that's where you can feel some groundedness and rootedness. Maybe there are some other places. Then, by prioritizing, valuing, and appreciating that little kernel of stability, we can grow it, spread it, and find more of it. We develop it and align ourselves with it, attuning ourselves to that stability. Once you have a little feel for stability, maybe then you can relax other parts of your body to be similar to it. Perhaps you can start behaving in ways that support that stability, that steadiness, that stillness inside, that unagitatedness.

For example, if you can get a little feel for what it's like to be unagitated in meditation, when you get up from meditation to make breakfast, clean the dishes, or take care of the next thing, how would you act? How would you behave, in a natural way, to support that unagitated state? As opposed to jumping up and running around like your hair's on fire to take care of everything else, and then coming back to meditate.

Can we begin to make how we live and how we act in the world in harmony with or attuned with the very things that support the growth of the practice? In this growth, we're growing the very things that mature with awakening. The stability, steadiness, and groundedness that we begin to find in practice are what are going to grow, until someday with awakening, with liberation, they become imperturbability.

The goal of liberation is found in the mind, the heart, and the body, of someone beginning meditation practice. It's there, but maybe hasn't been recognized because it's still just a little kernel, a little seed somewhere. But it's there. As we settle in and do the practice and follow the instructions, hopefully, we begin to recognize more and more the various seeds, the various supports and conditions that are going to keep developing and grow into liberation.

One of the very important conditions is stability. I realize that word might not work for everyone, so that's why I offer words like "steadiness," or "stillness." There's a strong tradition in Buddhism to not use positive nouns but to talk about the absence of something – so, "unagitated," or "imperturbable." Then it's not about something you have to be, but mostly something you let go of, settle into, and open up into.

As this imperturbability, steadiness, and stability grow, a variety of things begin to have space to grow more and more. One of them is insight – to be able to see clearly. Others are a greater degree of calm, a greater degree of concentration, and a greater capacity to be at rest in the present moment, rather than the mind being like a hot skillet. I don't know if this is fair to anybody's mind, but when you drop a drop of water on a hot skillet, it immediately sizzles and the water disappears. Sometimes my mind has been so busy that it feels like every moment of mindfulness where I notice what's happening is like that drop of water, and my mind disappears right away into its distracted thoughts.

But slowly the mind quiets down, steadies, and rests in the present moment. Stability allows for a deep, deep rest and peace. That stability that we're looking at and developing is the foundation for having a clear insight into that which is unstable. There is something very liberating about seeing impermanence, inconstancy, and change. But the usefulness of seeing the changing nature of phenomena increases the more we have this meditative stability, where we have cultivated stillness and the capacity for steadiness.

For today, the idea is to cultivate stability. Later I'll talk about how stability leads to a deep insight into inconstancy. May you be an explorer and an enjoyer of whatever stability, steadiness, and stillness you can align yourself with, be in harmony with, support, and allow to grow.

Thank you very much.