

Dharmette: Being Your Own Teacher

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So, good morning everyone and welcome. And what's on my mind, my heart at the moment, is one of the purposes of mindfulness practice is so that we can become our own teacher. And I'd like to believe that part of my job is to work my way out of a job. It's just this, but people keep getting bored and more people keep showing up, so I keep having a job.

But the idea is to train people to be able to have the capacity of attention, of mindfulness, so they can monitor themselves, know themselves well enough, and to know where the choices are, to know where the places are they get stuck, and to know how to unstuck themselves. To know how to be present and be able to read oneself well enough so that one can make wiser choices about how to live the life.

And so, you know, there's this wonderful expression like a whisper, a horse whisper, you know, and we're becoming, in a sense, we're becoming our own whisper, where we can really learn to listen and track and feel all the subtlest little movements within us of what's making us tick, what's happening for us. And in particular, discovering where we have a choice. Where do we have some choice about how we meet our situation and what we pick up, what we engage in, what we put down, what we let go of.

And one of the key metrics for tracking ourselves, being our own teacher, is our suffering, is our tension, is the stress that we have. And this is, goes very much against many people's popular idea that when we suffer, we're supposed to avoid it, or fix it, or drown it out, or anything but bring a careful attention to it. But when we bring our attention, wise attention, to where we have stress, where we hold tension, where we have suffering, where we feel caught and frozen in our mind, in our hearts, there's so much more there to discover.

And the analogy that one teacher has used is that if you go to the plains of Kenya, of Africa, as a nature photographer, and you want to take pictures of lots of animals, the wisest way to do that is to plant yourself at a watering hole. And all the animals have to come to the watering hole sooner or later. If you're just going to race around the vast expanse of land, you have to be pretty busy to find all the animals. So the watering hole that we sit at, for us practice, can seem like bad news. It's the watering hole of suffering. And all that Buddhism means by suffering, the tension, the stress, the despair, the resistance, the sadness, the griefs, you know, and to really stop and pay attention to it. So that if we do that, then so many things have come to that. And so many, everything we need to learn and discover for how to become free of suffering is found right there in the suffering itself.

And we can't necessarily learn everything we need to learn to live a smart life. You know, even a worldly successful life, it's hard to do that sometimes. But we can become our own teacher around

our own suffering, and our own freedom from that suffering. And is that good enough to do that? Is that worthwhile to do that? I think so. Because when we suffer, suffering interferes. We're stuck in our suffering. We're stuck in some way. If we're attached to something, that interferes with our ability to engage in the world in a wise and caring way. And when we're no longer stuck, then we have a better chance to understand how to meet the world and meet the people in the world that we have around us.

And one of the core ways that we can have confidence in, hopefully, that I think what Buddhism is pointing to, is that we might not know what we're supposed to do. But we might know what we're not supposed to do. And we know that becoming attached, being unethical, turning away, ignoring, avoiding, doesn't really work. And if anything, what works is to turn towards life, turns towards what's happening, to turn towards what's difficult here. And as you know, they say that firefighters rush towards the fire, everyone else runs away. Medics rush to where people are injured. And practitioners learn to be counterphobic towards their own fear, towards their own suffering, their own challenges. And just the willingness to be present so that we can learn from our lives and learn how to be free.

So the task of this practice is, in fact, to become your own teacher. And I think it's very important to understand that. Because sometimes people keep looking outside of themselves, that something else is going to do it for them. And I've known people who have even done Buddhist meditation, and gone on long retreats even. But they were operating under the assumption that something was going to fix them. Something was like a magic. Like, if I just go on a long retreats enough, then something will be transformed. If I just meditate enough, and it doesn't matter that I, it looks like meditation, but I'm just thinking. You know, sometimes I just take the posture, it'll be something big time. Or if I go listen to enough Dharma talks, and something will happen. Or read enough Dharma books, something will happen. And, you know, something will happen. Things are always happening. But it might not be really what you're looking for.

For what Buddhism is pointing to, the answer has to come from yourself, from within. It has to come from how you meet yourself, how you meet the world, how you turn around and, and kind of look inside. And then the paradox is that at some point you go deep enough, you realize even something more challenging. Is that yes, it's not up to anything external to you, that's going to fix you. But then it turns out it's not up to you either. But that's, that you have to wait until you come to that point. It'll become obvious. Up until, before you get to that point, it's up to you. And then at some point you see, oh, this, even this idea that it's up to me is too much. Even that now I see is getting in the way. What's the alternative to being, getting the world to save me or getting me to save myself? What's the alternative? And that's when mindfulness becomes even more important. And if you've learned to trust mindfulness and really value it more than anything, when you get to the point where it's not up to you, it's not up to the world, and you continue being mindful, that's where something, something different can happen that cannot happen if there's all this pointing of fingers for everything. And to get there, we have to be our own teacher.

And one of the things that I've learned to trust, one of the things, great gifts that I've received from mindfulness practice, is I've learned to trust mindfulness almost more than anything. I often don't know what's to be done in situations. Life is complicated. I don't have the universal wisdom that knows how to find my way through all the complexities of life. But I've learned that if I can stay present and mindful, then I'll see the path as it opens up in front of me. And I've learned to trust that because I've seen it over and over again, I trust the path that opens when I'm mindful. When I'm not mindful, I probably won't even see the path that's available. And then it's hard to know what to do.

So that's my offering today. That you orient yourself around the idea that you're meant to be your own teacher. And to take that up. Maybe don't let anything get in the way of that. Because if it does, it's probably not healthy for you.

So thank you. And thank you for being here.