

Investigation

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Last week's talk. I don't know if anybody would come back this week. A few days ago, I went to my son's preschool during the middle of the day to take him out of the school for something we had to do. I never showed up at his preschool during the middle of the day. It's like no dropping him off, picking him up, and only once before had I been there, but I don't really know much what goes on there. Once before, he was sick and had a fever, so we had to pull him out of school, and we showed up at the preschool at nap time.

That was such a sweet thing. Only three, four year olds napping. It was so peaceful. And so I left. Some days ago, I came to pick him up, and this time I showed up, and they were having their lunch. Again, it was very sweet, with all the four year olds sitting around the little tables, on kid tables and kid chairs, eating very peacefully, very civilized, quietly eating their food, talking to each other a little bit, and doing whatever they do with their food.

So I showed up, and they continued for a little while, and then my son got up to come and see me, and the other kids started getting up, getting more active and more engaged, and running around again. I said to the preschool teacher, "I'm sorry if my showing up in the middle of lunch stirred things up, and now they're up and running already." His response was, "Oh, it's okay. I've come to understand that everything is a teachable moment." He said, "When I started here, if there was a siren, you know, a fire truck rushing down the street outside the school, and all the kids would rush out to see the fire engine, I would feel I was in competition against what I was trying to do with them. And now I go with it. I go with whatever they're doing. I see it as a teachable moment. Let's go out and look at the fire engine and talk about it or whatever."

That is such a great expression, you know, that everything is a teachable moment. What's

been on my mind this week is the factor of investigation, which is a very important factor in Buddhist spirituality. Investigation is that capacity of the mind to look more carefully, to study, to investigate, to discover more carefully, more precisely what's really going on in our experience. It's been said by some people that everything you want, everything you need to learn about Buddhism or freedom, you can discover through your own powers of observation. Your own powers of observing and investigating and seeing is really one of the hard aspects, core aspects of a *paṭipatti* practice.

The factor of investigation is enshrined in the Buddhist tradition in a list called the *Seven Factors of Awakening*. These are the seven mental qualities that get developed to a very high pitch in the process of a person approaching the awakening experience, the *bodhi* experience of the Buddha. These factors are understood as those that are conducive towards liberation, and also some people understand the *Seven Factors of Awakening* as those seven qualities that characterize perhaps a person who is liberated. The second of the seven factors is the factor of investigation, investigating the *Dhamma* as its expression, the factor of investigation. The other factors are mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, concentration, tranquillity, and equanimity.

I mention the seven factors not that you have to memorize them right now, but they're very good to memorize if you are involved in this practice for some time, to really have them down. The factor of investigation occurs together with other factors, and these other factors exist together in a balanced fashion, and the factor of investigation is best. I think this is my own kind of experience: it is best balanced with the factor of concentration. At least that's how it often works for me. When I first sit down to meditate, it often is not that useful for me to investigate, because my mind is often fairly busy.

When I first sit down, I'm in a kind of stream and flow of different thoughts and ideas. If I try to apply the investigative capacity of the mind in that stream of thinking, then the investigation becomes thoughtful, becomes more like an analysis and thinking about what's there. It's kind of like if you look through a telescope and there's maybe a haze or clouds or something covering over the lens, you can't see very clearly. So in my mind, when my mind is thinking a fair amount, I can't really see that clearly. The factor that is most useful then is to cultivate concentration, stillness.

I do that through a practice of acceptance, of allowing it to be there and not to be troubled by the fact that thinking is there. But then, in a very simple, straightforward way, I cultivate some stability of mind and concentration. Once there's some modicum of concentration and

stability in the mind, and the surface chatter of the mind has quieted down, that's when I find that investigation comes to the fore. I think of investigation as a really innate capacity of the mind, a beautiful quality of the mind. It isn't like a lot of work is to try to investigate as an investigative reporter or something, but rather, it's a natural capacity of the mind that sometimes is likened to the brilliance of the mind, a luminous quality of the mind.

You turn on a light and you see clearly what's there. I think of my four year old son, and sometimes he is very interested in what's going on, this beautiful kind of intent investigation: What's this? Sometimes you can see his investigation involves his entire little four year old body. He curls up and huddles over, really getting into it, to see exactly what's there. Sometimes it's a much more open kind of sense that occasionally happens there.

I think investigation is a natural faculty of mind, but it's a lot easier for that to come to the fore when the mind has become still or quiet to some degree. Then it's easier to understand that investigation is an activity of the quiet mind, not the discursive mind. It's kind of like having the question, "What is this?" and then allowing something to appear, like turning on the light. Then allowing what's in the room to appear to you. But what is this experience I'm having now?

The fundamental question in the *paṭipatti*: "What is this? What is this? Oh, you know, what is this?" Now, you never settle for an answer: "What is this? What is this? What is this?" As the mind becomes quieter, this quality of investigation, this clarity of mind, can be applied to look at different things. Then the question is, what do you look at? What do you apply the mind to look at?

It can be almost anything in your experience. Some people find it is very much a lot of fun, kind of playful. When there's ability to concentrate, to have concentration and investigation, you can use it to look at different aspects of our life in ways that usually aren't so accessible. For example, one interesting investigation is: where is the origin of your thoughts? Where do your thoughts begin? Where does a thought begin to be seen? Where a thought begins, the origin of it?

Have you ever occurred to think that's interesting? Your thoughts are interesting, right? Quite fascinating. You're probably enthralled by them. But what's the beginning of a thought? Where does it begin from? Where does it arise out of? What stimulates it? What is to investigate? For example, a reaction you might have to something.

So if you're sitting in here and you're trying to stay settled on your breath and being with

your breathing, and someone slams the door shut, or someone coughs, there are various responses that you might have. One response is to be irritated: “Hush! You know, this person, that person, slammed the door! And now my meditation’s been upset. I’ve been distracted and I need to get back on track. I hope that they figure out something to do about the doors in the centre.” There’s not a lot of investigation in that kind of response.

Rather than an investigative response, we want a kind of interest: what is this experience? Not what’s the mind, you know? Not to analyze, you know, “What kind of person could do that?” Not that kind of investigation. But rather, let’s investigate the qualities that go on inside of me, the qualities of mind, the reactions, the thoughts, the responses that I have in relationship to that. So take it as a teachable moment: “Oh, what happens to me in response to that door slamming?” Then that’s tended. Door slamming is not a distraction. It’s just another area to practice in.

There’s a lot you can learn from various reactions. Once you have the ability to investigate, you turn and investigate what is going on now in me, what’s happening here. The expression in the *Seven Factors of Awakening* for investigation is *dharmavicaya*, and *vicaya* I usually translate as investigation, and *dhamma* means Dharma. Some people take it to mean investigating Dharma as the teachings, investigating teachings. But I think it’s more likely that in this formulation, *dhamma* here refers to the mental qualities, the mental states, the state of mind, the quality of the mind, the mental qualities and factors that arise in you moment by moment.

That investigation is not investigating like a scientist studying things out in the world, but rather you are a scientist studying what is happening inside of you with your reactions, your responses, your mental states, your qualities of mind, and to actually investigate those very carefully. The word *vicaya* in *dharmavicaya* also seems to have the connotation in Pāli of sorting things out or distinguishing between things, and that has a little different meaning than investigation. Sorting things out and distinguishing maybe can be likened to, in the old world, maybe still in some places in the world, when they would harvest rice, they would have to separate out the waste, the kernel from the chaff, or the husk from the chaff, or they polish the rice and the bran, or the rice must be separated, or the bad rice would have to be separated from the good rice.

There is a sorting process that people would do, the villagers would do, and various ways of sorting this out to separate the good from the bad. Then they keep the good and the bad, the one they give to the animals or do something with it. So *dharmavicaya* has the same kind

of connotations: there's a kind of sorting process, a distinguishing process. It goes on in the mind. Just sort out what's actually going on in the mind. Investigate and see it clearly for what it is, but also to distinguish between that which is useful to have in your mind and that which is not useful.

That which is wholesome to have in the mind and that which is not wholesome, that which is skillful or conducive for the further development of your practice and that which is not. So this is to use your intelligence, in a sense, to be discerning about what your experience is. This is a very basic Buddhist practice, sorting out the wholesome from the unwholesome states of mind that you have, and then somehow being able to select out, abandon the unwholesome, and cultivate the wholesome. It's so basic in Buddhism that it's hardly ever taught by *vipassanā*, because *vipassanā* is like the advanced practice. Paying attention to wholesome qualities and unwholesome qualities is like the elementary practice, and no one wants to do the elementary practice.

Everyone wants to do the advanced practice now. But it's very useful to have some sense that you have some control and some ability to choose between what arises in your mind, so you don't have to be the victim of everything that arises in your mind, and all you have to do is somehow be graceful and accepting of what's there. It's appropriate to some degree to sort it out and choose one from the other. We use mindfulness to help with the sorting process. For example, say that you spend your days on, you know, raping and pillaging, and at some point you sit down and study the quality of your mind, and you might see the quality of your mind is not so good.

You know, I think maybe I'll do less of that. It might be good for you to do less of that. Maybe do none of it at all is even better. I think that person would be really healthy if they could sort through that kind of basic stuff and see that that kind of activity is not so good for me. I think, I'll not do that for a while. Or say that someone is really ambitious, filled with all kinds of ambition for various things, and they go to work, and they work twelve, thirteen hour days, seven days a week, and their mind is tight, in a kind of tight vice of effort and trying and pushing and greed and ambition.

When they pay attention to the quality of their mind, they see, "This is painful. To have this mind, maybe I should let go of this. Maybe I shouldn't be so ambitious, sort through my mind a little bit and not base my life on greed and ambition the way that I'm doing." To sort through like this is part of the function of investigation: to abandon that kind of activity if that's not really supportive and helpful for you. None of you do that kind of activity, probably, but I'm

trying to choose the extreme to give you the idea this is an acceptable thing to do, to sort through the quality of your mind, that there are times when it's appropriate to do this.

Perhaps one, like certain activities, like you go to certain movies. For example, if you go to really violent movies, what kind of quality of mind does that produce in you? Certain activities leave traces in the mind that predispose you to be agitated or to go along those tracks. So if you hang out with a lot of angry people and spend a lot of time being angry and pitching and moaning about everyone left and right, then that's probably not very good for the quality of your mind. If you pay attention to that, you might find that your quality of mind and heart is better served by not being engaged in that kind of discussion or talk, or those kinds of movies, those kinds of books, or certain kinds of activities are not very conducive to your own inner health and well-being.

The Buddha says it's very healthy to consider that and sort through that. So that's kind of the unskillful or unwholesome side. It's also considered healthy to cultivate that which is wholesome, to sort through the good and the bad, and then choose the good. You know how to do that in a way that's not poisonous, that's not a kind of overlaying some positive thinking in an artificial way, is a very important issue. But there are ways that we can cultivate the good, cultivate what is wholesome.

If you see a little, a little like a kernel of desire to be generous, and you notice that, "Oh, generosity is a good thing. Maybe I'll cultivate that. Let's see if I can water that seed of generosity and let it grow within me," or of kindness, or of wisdom, or of mindfulness. You see that mindfulness arises, you know, miraculously in the middle of your day. Where did mindfulness come from? You know, and then, "Oh, this is a good thing. I'll try to nurture that. I'll try to support that and develop that."

Are there qualities of mind which are helpful to develop for you? You recognize there are such things. Or do you let the quality of your mind, the states of your mind, the thoughts you follow, kind of have a life of their own, and you somehow have to navigate whatever is there without changing the direction of the streams of your mind? It's possible to change the streams of your mind, even as subtle a thing as your thoughts. I didn't know that growing up, that I could actually choose which thoughts I have.

There was a period of time I just thought my thoughts were just, you know, they're given. You take it for granted. You have your thoughts and then you try to live your life the best you can given them. But from the mindfulness practice, I've learned that I could, I can select my thinking, I can recognize that I'm not thinking along very useful tracks. This is not helpful for

me. Look, I'll think about something else. I'll think about something which is useful.

Sometimes I'm driving here to give a talk, and I think I should think about giving this talk. That's useful. These people probably think it would be very useful if I thought about it before, and so I'll turn my attention and focus on that. Or I focus on loving-kindness. I'll do loving-kindness practice. Or I'll engage in thoughts of kindness, actually take it on. There are ways in which we can condition or change the mind stream so that it's more for our benefit.

Investigation is that which allows us to do that. So it's a sorting out process. It's more than just mindfulness. Mindfulness is a non-reactive awareness, just sees things as they are. Investigation sorts through what it sees. It discriminates or distinguishes. There's something about that, and it is in particular distinguishing that which is useful or not useful, to help you abandon or cultivate that which should be abandoned or that which should be cultivated.

It's very helpful. So we don't take things for granted. A lot of us take much of our life for granted, maybe our thoughts or feelings or mind states. Investigation is that quality of mind which helps us not to take things for granted anymore and actually see it clearly. Not to take things for granted is very important, because when we take things for granted, more often than not, I think we get stuck in things.

I think of investigation as one of the lubricators of the mind that helps us to get unstuck, to loosen up the mind. I saw that in myself some days ago. I went through a little period of feeling discouraged, and you know, and you probably all know the kind of thought trains around discouragement. It might happen, things like, "Oh, poor me, and why is this happening to me, and all this, now what am I going to do, and this is so discouraging, and I don't know what to do, and oh, someone should help me," and you know, something like that. I don't remember exactly what went on, but as I noticed this was going on, it didn't seem like a very useful state to be in.

So I'll be mindful of this, and I'll investigate this experience. I investigated how it felt in my body, a kind of tightness and contractions, a kind of heaviness, kind of darkness. I investigated my mind and my thoughts, and how they felt kind of tight and very rapid and heavy, and it felt a kind of stickiness in my mind, like there was just a sticky putty somewhere, and I was into this kind of self-pity and discouragement. It was the investigation that allowed me to see that was the case. If I hadn't paid attention to it, I would have gone along wallowing in this kind of discouragement.

I wouldn't have noticed how there was a sticky kind of quality in the mind and body in rela-

tionship to feeling this way. Then I continued investigating. Investigation was very accepting and allowing. It wasn't like I was trying to get rid of it. It was just interest: what is this experience like? What's fascinating is that as soon as you bring interest, you've changed the ecology. It's a different terrain. It's a different world you're living in.

If you're not interested in what that experience is, what is this, it's a teachable moment. So it is: what is it? That itself is bringing a wholesome quality to that experience. As I investigated it, two things happened. One is the quality of investigation got stronger, and as it got stronger, it again changed the ecology of my mind. One thing that happens as investigation becomes more something you both appreciate, and a quality gets stronger within you, is that the place where you identify with can switch from some of the unwholesome places you identify with.

You can, instead, identify yourself with the fact of investigation. Who are you? Which thoughts, what feelings, what mental states do you in some way take as "this is who I am"? We all take something as "this is who I am," and often it's a burden on us to take it as "this is who I am." But if you shift your identity—you must have identity attached to identity in Buddhism—but if you shift your identity to that factor of investigation, I think you'll find yourself feeling much lighter and buoyant. You can't take yourself so seriously there.

So one thing was, I noticed that investigation became stronger, and I found a kind of happiness just being there in that place. Also, as I investigated, the stickiness between the thoughts, the stickiness between the state of mind and my body that was there, started to dissolve, and the thoughts of discouragement and some of the body sensations didn't go away, but the stickiness went away. That's what I call the lubricator. It cleared, lubricated, or took away the stickiness. Once the stickiness was gone, then very quickly the discouragement went away completely.

To add investigation or interest—what is this experience?—changes the ecology. It's to be willing to take on the possibility that this is a teachable moment right now. To take on that possibility changes the whole situation. Are you willing to make that change? Are you willing to change the situation, to bring "what is this experience right now? What can I learn from it? What is really going on here?"

An exercise that I taught a group some years ago—I recommend it to you—is, in the next week, find yourself in a situation, notice a situation, a regular situation, a normal situation you often find yourself in, maybe a situation where sometimes you react in a way that's not so helpful, or only makes you feel, you know, two times a habitual way of reacting in response. Don't

act in your habitual way. Rather, stay really quiet and study the situation. What's going on here?

I taught this when I taught a group some years ago. There was a husband and wife in the class, and they went to some kind of party, and something happened at the party that usually really ticked off the wife. It set her off. As it happened again one more time, the husband leaned over to the wife and said, "Remember that exercise you're supposed to do this week? This is a good time." And it was. It was a great time for her. It was really useful not to just react, but to settle back and say, "Okay, let's pay attention to what's going on here."

To investigate, to see this is a teachable moment, to be interested in that all the time, because Buddhists are not supposed to settle for anything in terms of having answers, but because the time is always moving ahead into the future, or the future is coming to us—I don't know which way we're going. But in any case, if you've settled on something, then you've already missed the boat, because mind is happening. So to keep the interest in investigation, always investigating what is, is a very key aspect of the development of practice.

The last thing I want to say is that investigation should be done without clinging or greed. In a sense, investigation with clinging, with wanting to be certain—some of my teachers use the word curiosity as the word to represent an interest or investigation with clinging. I don't know how that works in your vocabulary. The point is not to have a kind of leaning forward to grab, or to want it to be a certain way, to want to find out, but rather a kind of natural luminosity, which is, in a relaxed way, interested: "What is this? What is this? What is this?" Not expecting anything, not wanting anything, but just, "What is this?"

I said it was the last thing to say, but I'll say one more thing. Investigation is a huge topic, has many ways of investigating. I find it very much fun to be playful about it, and in various circumstances to investigate different things and different aspects of my experience. Sometimes it's useful to investigate with questions. There are various *vipassanā* questions which are useful to pop at various times in your practice.

Two that I'm thinking about tonight: one is the question, "What am I avoiding right now?" You can ask yourself, "What am I avoiding right now?" That's a great investigating theme. The other is, "What needs acceptance right now? What is it that needs my acceptance as opposed to resistance or condemnation or whatever it might be?" So investigation, the factor of *dhammavicaya*. That's probably enough. Now it's your turn. We have about ten minutes, if some of you have some thoughts or questions you'd like to ask.

Yes, please. You asked about *vipassanā* and practice, why I was praised. Somehow we say my laziness is very difficult. I, who feels a lot of soldiers, whereas I am not. That is to be arrogant. *Yathāsati gati* is all praise. *Sīsassa*, then, as wondering, “What’s great? Nothing, my boy. Great.” It’s a lovely question. One of the beautiful things about mindfulness practice is that it’s self-correcting.

So that’s what’s happening now. You’re beginning to look to correct something you don’t like. The very thing I thought of in response as you were speaking—the strongest one, or which maybe was particular for you, I don’t know, it’s relevant, just came to my mind—is to encourage you: don’t be bothered so much by your arrogance. That’s giving it too much authority, or giving it, you know, it’s got arrogant to give us, and just recognize it’s there. Just don’t be bothered, but just trust the practice, and eventually that’ll pass.

Sometimes, some things, it’s better just not to engage in too much. Just recognize it’s there and continue along with your practice. Another thing you can do is to do what you do now, and that is to practice mindfulness out loud, which means to tell people, confess. So, you know, if you find it in suitable circumstances to tell someone, “You know, I’m feeling really arrogant. I think I’m so much better than you.” That might cure you pretty quickly, but I’m serious. Find ways of talking about it with people and get your friends to help you, to point it out, you know.

Speaking it sometimes can take some of the power away from it. There is to do so as not just sitting inside of your mind. The third thing that occurred is to say that often when arrogance can arise—not always, but sometimes—arrogance arises basically out of some root of fear. If you can identify the fear that’s underneath the arrogance and then hang out there, bring your mindfulness to that, then eventually there won’t be any need for the arrogance, because the fear has been tended to.

Smita: Sure, but tell me how you see it related in your mind or dealing with your thoughts. I, so long, I constituted the mind. From time to time you have also thought as the not like the meditation involving the body in Lao, and there is also our talk from you and from other visitors as to how you should not take the pain in your body, proceed, the pain may. There is always, especially in the initial, nor any very interrupted portions. Don’t use in eating. I have always been in a severe dilemma and have made up my mind one way, but I just, all because I have, I suffered from fine pain from time to time. I have duly seen this episode. I have to go back to doing just the body meditation just because it is what I mean. I guess rules I don’t rely on. It indicates that that’s something I mean. I feel guilty, you know, my innocence because of

this emphasis on much more on the investigative forty, and then somehow that's supposed to get me ever. I'm supposed to be going faster, but I ignore it. I ignore the guilt because this is what I mean. I think there's something to be said about being compassionate through your own body and what you read. Compassionate conceiver mind, the ongoing spiritually, is what I give.

An interesting thing does happen, though, as I do, and sometimes mounts on it. That's all I can do on my side. It does change, and I do change. I mean, there is no quietness of sailing. I am less responsive, unable to see the whole situation. I'm able to see my own motivation, maturation of something. I'm talking to all the things that have to do with a quality of the mind, also gone through just this, and I wonder why this one is emphasized more. There might be other people, like me, who struggle in their minds, certainly with their guilt. Hi, this is if they want to do it so long, or the sharper. Can you say something?

I would guess that down seventy-five to eighty percent of my own meditation practice is mindfulness of the body. I don't feel guilty. Is that the most useful thing I could say? Yes, please.

As investigation, you really, you won't harm, is nice. Intestine actions, people, Mrs. Rishi is moving along so fast. I don't have time to, I mean, and not, if not so much, you mean, I mean, sometimes things don't have to be the way that you think they have to be. Sometimes things are going very fast, but they don't have to go fast. So you can say, "Let's stop for a moment," or you stop for a moment.

Or if you have a conversation that's going very fast, you just sit quietly for two seconds or three seconds, checking in with the body. I think the body is really one of the foundations of mindfulness practice. Having a habit of checking in with your body is very helpful. Having a regular practice that's building a strength of mindfulness, then you'll bring it with you into situations which are much more challenging. If you don't have that foundation of a regular practice, you won't have that as a resource in challenging situations.

Sometimes the investigation happens after the fact. So that was a teachable moment. What can I learn if I review it? Investigation is really a beautiful quality. I love it. That part of the mind, and again, as I said in my own practice, I think of it most as something I balance together with concentration, and they go back and forth, you know?

So sometimes, concentration needs to be developed, and then after a while, the investigation comes to the fore. But sooner or later, as I investigate and am present for things, I'll notice

that I need a further development of concentration. Then I let go of the investigation for a while, develop more concentration. Concentration is kind of like that idea. I don't know what the right analogy is, but it's kind of like, you know, you go two steps forward, and then allows, you take two steps forward, the other, maybe three steps forward with investigation, and then you realize that concentration lags behind. You take two steps with concentration, and then so it goes back and forth in accents.

So to balance those two factors, so the investigation doesn't become discursive or agitating, and so the concentration becomes more useful to you. You have something to do with your mind that's calm because you want to do something with it periodically, too. I hope that this was a helpful talk and helped you to realize the teachable moment-ness of life, and that you can change the ecology of your heart and your mind in such a way that you're freer and happier and kinder to each other. And may you all cultivate that mental quality of kindness. Thank you.