

Dharmette: Growing a Spiritual Life

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Good morning and welcome. And one of the things that's been on my mind, my heart for a while now around this meditation practice is how the practice can grow in us as opposed to how we make the practice. Practices, what we call practice in Buddhism, often give the idea that you're supposed to do something like a technique, and you have to kind of just do the technique a lot. But if you ask someone, you know, what practice do you do? People will say, well, I do breath meditation, I do loving-kindness meditation, I do Zen meditation, I do, oh, my practice is running. It's something.

In *Pāli*, the ancient language of the Buddha, the word that they would use in the same way that we use the word practice literally means to grow, to cultivate, to develop something. And so if someone asked you, they didn't ask you, what are you practicing? But they asked you, what are you growing? How would you answer that? I mean, that's like very personal. Is that too personal?

No. What are you practicing? I do *vipassanā*, I do insight, I do mindfulness. That's safe. That's kind of cool in some places, mindfulness. But what are you growing?

I mean, wow, now we're getting personal. You know, and I don't know if I want to share that, because that's like, well, I never thought about that. What am I growing? The other way to ask it is not, what are you growing, but what is growing in you? What is evolving? What's developing in you?

And if practice is more about growing something than it is about practicing something, what is the attitude that you bring to your inner life if you're supporting something to grow versus it's an exercise like going to the gym? You have to do your reps. Well, mindfulness, meditation is just a rep. You have to do it a lot. You know, I'm going to do three reps a day, three meditation sessions a day, or something. That's very different than saying, I'm feeling it these days, that what's growing in me is calm.

I've never been calm in my life, and it seems to be growing. And how do I support this calm to grow? Maybe I slow down. Maybe I have to spend time feeling it. The Buddha said that the food that supports the growing of calm is calm. So you feel the calm.

Feel it. Feel it. Maybe what's growing is a sense of friendliness and kindness. And so, oh, now if that's what's growing in me, how do I support that? More kindness, more friendliness. Maybe it's how I look at people.

When I look at people and judge them by the kind of shoes they wear, I don't think that's so conducive to loving-kindness. What if I look at their hearts to kind of feel? What's going on here? Maybe I look at their face, take in their eyes, take in their smiles. What supports the growth of loving-kindness? How do you look upon people?

How do you look upon yourself? Maybe what's growing is a sense of integrity. I have a lot of favorites, but one of my favorite things is sometimes people will come to me here and say, I've been practicing now for a while, and I'm having a problem at work. And where around the coffee machine or the water cooler or something, it breaks, the medium, media for conversation is gossiping. That's how we bond and how we talk gossip about people. But now that I've been practicing for a while, I just don't want to do that anymore.

That doesn't feel right. And now I'm kind of out of harmony with work, like how do I do this? And so they ask me to answer that question. How do I do this? I'm not sure. You know, it depends on the circumstance, the place, the people.

But I just love the question. That something, some integrity is arising, growing inside that shifts how the kind of conversations people want to be part of. So to recognize that, and some of this growing that's growing inside of us, is just maybe the seed is just sprouting. It's really delicate, and yet be very careful and tender. Be sure you water it. Maybe it's already sprouted, maybe it's already opening leaves and it's growing and spreading in you.

And this idea that there's been growth, the Buddha then talked about sometimes spiritual growth as seeds sprouting, as growing into a tree. And that tree grows and becomes big, and it's a fruit tree. At some point, it has flowers, and then it bears fruit. And the full maturation of this practice is not an attainment. It's not, you know, like some great thing that we build and create for ourselves, but rather it's something that comes to fruition in us. It comes into fruit.

And then I just love it because when the apple is fully ripe on the tree, it drops from the tree. So this idea that coming to fruition, something can grow fully and fully complete its become itself. And what can drop then? What drops? What lets go? What is set free?

So what is set free in that fruition? So, some of you may be happy enough to hear about growing something, but it may be frightening to find out that if you fully grow, something will let go. Something will fall away. So, spiritual practice is not a practice, but rather a process of cultivating and growing something. And it's there to create, we create the conditions for something to develop and grow. But that requires some appreciation, some recognition that in fact there is something inside of us that's capable of growing, and to feel that, to sense that.

And that might be slow to come, and then... So in the meantime, practice. There's nothing wrong with that in and of itself, just practice. But as you practice, at some point, recognize that something's beginning to grow. Something's beginning to develop and come. That is not exactly you making it.

And this is also part of the great delight of this growing of something, is that you have to also get out of the way. You both provide the conditions for it, and you have to get out of the way. It's something that's happening to you, but you can't take it too personally. You can't claim it as your own. Like, I'm doing this, I'm making it any more than a gardener can claim that they're the cause for the flowers to grow. The gardener is just the condition.

They provide the conditions, the support for it, and then it can grow. But you can't claim to be the grower of it in the same way as you could be. If you get a Lego set that put the blocks into a certain place, shape, you make a house, yeah, then you made it. But the flower you don't make, that has to be, it appears in a different kind of way. So there's something about spiritual growth that it's hard to take credit for it. But you have your responsibility, you have your role to play.

Let something grow and develop and unfold, make time for it. And many spiritual traditions emphasize... the need for, one of the conditions for something to grow is time, spacious time, open time, free time. And that is very short and short supply in modern society for many people. And I think especially around this culture locally here in the peninsula, where there's so much, and so many activities, so many things to do, and so many emails to answer, so many websites to check out. We have so many opportunities now to fill our time.

And there's people who are afraid to not fill their time, afraid to let things be. But for this inner growth that the *Dhamma* is about, it needs time. It needs space. Something has to have time to grow and develop and not be drowned out by overactivity. And so I say that to you because if you begin to recognize that something in there is beginning to mature, grow, develop, shift and change, maybe you'll recognize it as something that needs time, that needs you, needs care, needs watering, so that you'll offer it to it, as opposed to one more website. Just, you

know, I'll just do two more, right?

Or whatever it is your thing is to be busy with and keep yourself going, going, going. Let your good heart grow and become even better. So thank you.