

Thursday Guided Meditation; Non-Clinging in the river of change

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So first with an analogy for what we'll practice today. If you make your hand into a fist and you never ever open it again, is it a hand? In some ways of course it is, but it doesn't function anymore with all the capacities of a hand. So much you can't do. Well, but you can't hold the hand of a friend. No, holding a baby or petting an animal.

You feel very different. It'd be awkward to give a gift with a... Well, your hand is fisted. It'd be hard to show a person your open hand as an expression of being harmless or being generous. But if you're committed to the fisted hand because we believe that that's really the true nature of the hand. That's what the hand really is. Of course, the hand has to be something, so it has to be stationary and fixed and never change, staying a fist forever.

So in a similar way, many of the constructs that we make of self all too easily are forms of clinging. Forms of tightening up and holding on tight, whether consciously or unconsciously, with the idea this is who I really am, and this is how I will always be. And we stay tight in that clinging, in that insistence, and it might be a fine option, occasionally. But if it's always tight, the mind is tight, gripped, around a particular idea of self, the full functioning of our hearts, our minds, are not available, just as the hand, to really be a free hand, shifts and changes and adapts itself to so many conditions. Sometimes it's open, sometimes it, two fingers will pick up something small and delicate. Sometimes it... lifts up and feels the wind or feels the flow of water over the palm.

Sometimes it holds a gift for the world, but it has freely by releasing it. Our hands are constantly shifting and changing their shape, what they're holding, what they're doing, what they're touching. And in a sense, what a hand is functionally is an ever-changing phenomenon. Just because you use your pointing finger, to point the direction that someone

can go. Doesn't mean you should always keep your hand pointing it. Never take it out of that positioning.

So in the same way with self, if we cling to anything as this is who I am, we limit the fluidity, the shifting nature, the adaptability to the environment, to the situation. And to not cling allows the self, whatever that is, whatever construct we have, whatever way it manifests, to freely and generously and compassionately, kindly adapt itself to whatever is needed in the circumstance. And a self without clinging will not be informed by greed, hatred and delusion, a self without clinging will be informed by what is wholesome, what is part of the whole. So much so that the self without clinging is free of itself. The self without clinging makes room for us to be just here we are so thoroughly that we can be ourselves without being self-conscious and without being self-conscious. We're available to sense and feel and to experience this world, to experience ourself directly.

It's been said that selfing, the attachment to self, is a kind of wind drag that slows us down, interferes. And you could see that and feel that in meditation. And our thoughts flow into thinking. Thinking about me, myself and mine. It's one of the reasons why there's so much energy, so much power in thinking. Because of this clinging to self, holding on to self, the grip of self, and in mindfulness practice, we don't want to make that a problem, but we do want to feel it, to feel any contraction, pressure associated with our thinking.

To feel and be amazed at times by the strength of thinking. Buddha thinking itself is kind of its own steady stream, not just a stream, a river, not just a river, but a flood. The Buddha talked about the great floods that overwhelm us, and that come in the form of thinking. And to feel it, to know it not as a problem, but as to know it so clearly and simply thinking that there's space around it. In a sense, you've stepped, taken a step away from it. And in a way, you're not identifying with it.

To know thinking, to feel thinking, and to relax. Calm to thinking mind. And maybe then to shift the center of your being from thinking to be into your body, lower yourself into your body, maybe to a place within that feels calm or peaceful, or feels like it's stable, a place of inner settledness. And maybe breathing can flow from and through a centeredness within the body. And as you're breathing, notice how the experience of breathing is a continually shifting and changing flow of sensations. If you open your awareness to your body, full torso.

It allows for global awareness there. The different experiences of expansion in the torso as you breathe in, the different sensations of contraction coming back in as you exhale. Some sensations might be smooth and pleasant. Some might be staccato, appearing briefly. There's a rhythm of breathing in and breathing out. Stay close to that rhythm.

Ride on the wave of breathing in. Relax on the wave of breathing out. Noticing all that's easy to see, changing, shifting, moving. And if focusing on breathing, has any tension in it, pressure, feel that, know it, feel it, and if it's easy, relax, soften, perhaps relaxing and opening awareness to become attuned to all the shifting, changing sensations that appear in the present moment, not all at once, but to allow them to come into awareness with the receptivity and openness to the direct experience of sensations and sound as they appear and as they disappear, as they appear and linger for a while, but then something else appears and disappears.

Letting yourself to be intimate, close in, to the river of changing sensations that are here. And even if something seemed to not change, that's okay. Give attention to what is changing, shifting, flowing, moving. Maybe something like sitting in a relaxed way in the riverbank leaning against a tree. And you watch the ever-changing, shifting flow of the river. Settle back. Watch and relax with a shifting river of direct experience.

Noticing whenever you get caught in an eddy, you somehow stop the flow of awareness by getting into thoughts, by clinging to something. Don't make it a problem, but use it as an occasion to relax and return to experiencing the river of change. And part of the shifting river of change are all the shifts in how you're aware, sometimes hearing, sometimes sensing in the body in different ways. Sometimes cognitively knowing, maybe a nonverbal knowing. Sometimes it might feel more like an inner eye that watches. And awareness shifts sometimes in the hands and chest, the ears of the face.

Notice the gentle shifts and changes in the river of awareness, aware in the present moment. Sometimes aware of being aware. Sometimes aware that awareness is tense or trying or pushing, relaxing, going behind, below the tense awareness and see if there can be a soft, relaxed, flowing awareness with no agenda, with shifting and changing way that you're aware. Sometimes knowing, sometimes sensing, feeling in the body, and like two rivers, forks of two rivers, join at the confluence that the river of changing sensations merge with the river of awareness to become one river of change, that river of change where no self is needed, just the flow, the risings and passings, shiftings, peering and disappearing, flowing, ever flowing.

And as we come to the near the end of the sitting, if you're at all inclined, notice how at the end of the sitting you shift into your thoughts more, into awareness being stuck more or caught up in something. You shift away from the flow of present moment experience. You shift away from awareness being fluid, soft, gently moving. You—so today is Thursday, to say it more accurately. This particular manifestation of the present somehow has been given the name

Thursday. It's a little bit like painting with watercolors on a flowing river to call this Thursday.

The word disappears constantly. There's nothing solid about this being Thursday. There's nothing inherent that that's the name. It's a convention. It's a convenience. So that those of you who are scheduled to see, to have the group meetings on this particular manifestation of the present, you can go check the sheet, remember what time, and you'll see, we'll meet today, Thursday. And we'll have finished the second cycle of meetings with all of you.