

Don't Make It Worse (3 of 5) Rest

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Hello and welcome to this third talk in a five-part series where I am discussing the practice of not making things worse.

What I'm offering this week are these five different ways of not making it worse. Today the idea is to **rest**. The first day with the "**W**" is "**Wait**", so if you feel like you're going to make it worse, maybe you can restrain yourself from acting or speaking. Wait. Don't give in to the impulses that are going to make it worse. As you wait, **Organize** yourself, put yourself back together. Often when we're going to make something worse out of anger, frustration, fear, or strong desire, we're actually losing a part of ourselves, becoming partial. We're not fully present for all of who we are. We've gotten narrowed into some kind of concern and preoccupation. So taking time to wait and bring ourselves together allows us to begin to be here and be at **Rest**.

This may seem very simplistic. It doesn't sound very profound. Buddhism is a religion offering profound experiences of awakening and enlightenment. This simple, ordinary thing, just "don't make it worse", can be easy to dismiss. I'd like to propose that all of Buddhism can be found through this practice of "don't make it worse", and that it's certainly valuable for beginners, as well as for ordinary life and everyday circumstances. To live this way with mindful attention to "don't make it worse" is a path that opens to all of what Buddhism has to offer, even full awakening.

To give an example, let's say you're fuming with anger around some computer device that's not working the way you want it to work. You've been trying to fix it and make it work for way too long and you can feel the impact. You want to throw that device across the floor, maybe through the window. Then you hear, "remember this little teaching: don't make it worse." So you stop and you don't throw the device. But then you hear again, "don't make it worse." Then you feel, "Oh, I'm so impatient because I really want to go and get an ice cream today. It's a hot day, the ice cream would be so good, I really want that, and this computer is causing me problems." Don't make it worse.

Impatience is a strong clinging onto some idea. Maybe you can relax that. Then you hear, "don't make it worse." After that, what's left is a feeling of being a little bit lonely from having been too much on a computer and away from people and friends. You feel loneliness as a kind of contraction and tightening and a pressure inside from feeling insecure or worried about the future without any people. You're anxious, thinking a lot about what it means to have spent too many hours alone on a computer. Don't make it worse.

Now you find yourself relaxing that pressure, relaxing that sense of the future and the anxiety. Then you feel, "Look, now I'm breathing. Okay, I'm here. It's nice, but actually my breathing feels contracted." Don't make it worse. You relax that breathing. What does "don't make it worse" mean now? It means to quiet the mind and not think so much about the future. Just be soft and relaxed with the breathing. Stop straining or pushing or being aggressive around being with your breath. Don't make it worse.

Then you feel good. There's a sense of complacency: "Oh, this is good! I'll just rest back and not work so hard," but then you feel as though that's a little bit off. There's a loss of some kind of vitality and clarity. Don't make it worse. Open up to the clarity of being with the breath. and then start seeing the softening of some deeper places of attachment. The whole process goes deeper and deeper and deeper. So this idea of not making it worse is not a simplistic, everyday teaching. Inherent in it is something very profound in Buddhism. We turn towards. We want to understand how we make it worse so we can learn how not to make it worse.

The stepping stone to finding a place of rest is the other R, which is to relax. Relaxing is such a profound thing. Just as I said that "don't make it worse" can be a very profound practice, relaxing can be a very profound practice for the same reasons. Anything that's in the way of profound peace, profound awakening, liberation, is something which is tense, contracted, tight. One way of describing the whole path of Buddhist practice is to describe a deeper and deeper relaxation.

At the end of relaxation, find a place where there's some kind of rest. That's a challenge in difficult situations where there's a lot of pressure, a sense that something has to be done: "I have to figure something out, it's dangerous for me, I'd better have the right rejoinder in this conversation." The lawyers of the mind can really insist how important it is to act impulsively or do something, but not rest. Part of the value of waiting, getting organized, resting, is that we now have a chance to respond from a deeper, more healthy place: from our wisdom, from our goodwill, from our peace, from our sense of wholeness, rather than from our sense of inadequacy or insufficiency.

This is not about becoming a couch potato and doing nothing. The emphasis in Buddhism of abiding in our experience is that it's possible to have a place of rest from which we operate, even in the busyness of life. It's like taking your car through a car wash. There's the chaos of these big brushes and water and suds all on the outside of the windows, but inside the car, it's quiet, it's peaceful, it's safe, it's cozy even. Now you can watch all this excitement in a peaceful way. It wouldn't be peaceful if there was no car, and you were being taken along the conveyor belt with all that stuff spraying directly on you and brushing against you. It's possible to find a place of rest inside yourself that's like being inside the car during the car wash. If we're not disconnected from the world, it actually allows for a deeper connection and participation in the world.

Being at rest in the middle of all experience doesn't mean being passive or not putting effort into doing things. It means that somehow deep in your belly, the heart of awareness is at rest. There's no need for awareness to be in a hurry or to be assertive and aggressive. The awareness, the knowing, the mindfulness can be at ease while you engage fully and healthfully with what needs to be done in your life. So rest: wait, organize your body, your sense of self, your experience in the psychophysical being, and then rest.

Some people might call it a deeper letting go or release, but if there's a need for release, there's the opposite of it: there's tightness, there's holding. Relaxing is not a lightweight thing to do but then, at the end of the relaxation, there may be a little bit of peace, rest, or ease; a little bit of release. Appreciate that. Feel that. Be attuned to it. It's very easy going through daily life to be so caught up in the world of aboutness: the things, what's happening, what needs to be done, the ideas, the fears, the projections.

We tend to overlook some of the most important things that we can be in touch with: our own sense of inner well-being, of being at ease or at peace, our own deep sense that, "yes, I don't have to make it worse." At least you can stay close to this place where it's possible for what's most healthy, most wonderful about being alive to have a chance to surface and flow through you.

Maybe for these next 24 hours until tomorrow you want to explore this concept of inner rest and how you understand it. How do you tap into it and touch into it? Is part of you protesting about being at rest?

What are the lawyers of your mind saying? How can you allow some deep sense of inner rest to be with you as you do things in your daily life? You might begin with simple things, like maybe sweeping your kitchen floor, cleaning the dishes, cooking, or something that for you is relatively easy. See what it's like to do it with a reference point of inner rest.

So, thank you, and I look forward to continuing worse tomorrow!

