

Dharmette: The Throughline of Practice

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So one of the things I've done in my life is gone backpacking, and some of those backpacking trips are challenging, arduous, and all kinds of environmental conditions have come to play, and you have to somehow deal with the walking, with the wind, sometimes the rain, the challenges. And sometimes the trail, things are not ideal. There's all kinds of things on the trail that are challenging. Trees have fallen down, landslides have occurred that have to deal with and go around. The roundabout way to get there is difficult. And the temperature is not right.

Too hot, too cold, but you're in the wilderness, you're backpacking. There's no choice. You've got to walk. Maybe it's even dangerous if you don't, if you kind of said, I don't really like this. I'm going to stop because this is too much. But then it gets to be night and below freezing.

So it's not ideal. It happens sometimes. But what you do is just keep walking the next step, keep walking the next step. And one of the things that happens is the continuity of the walking is reassuring, is engaging, is steady. There's a steadiness, even if your foot hurts, you have blisters or something's happened. You know you have to keep walking.

There's no other thing to do but to walk. And all the other things, you're there with it, you're taking into account, you're doing the best you can. But you're not stopping in order to contemplate the meaning of every challenge you have along the way because you just keep walking. The walk, keep going. So our life is like that. Life is full of challenges.

Life is full of things that come along that are not ideal. That in a certain kind of way you could say it shouldn't happen even. There's a lot of things that happen in life that are not what you want to have happen. Sickness, old age, death, accidents, catastrophes, war zones. You know, I think at this point we should not expect anything about our social life in this country

to not be turned upside down tomorrow. Civil war in the streets. Who knows? All kinds of things can happen.

But if you have a practice, that's the walking. No matter what happens, you keep practicing, you keep practicing. No matter what happens, you take the next breath. You take the next moment of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the stepping. Okay, wake up to this, be present for this. What's happening now? What's happening now? Hold this lightly. Hold this with care.

Hold this with goodwill. Keep practicing, steady. But it's not enough. It can't be enough. It's silly. The sky is falling down. Just keep practicing. I have to respond. My car is a flat tire. I can't just sit and practice it there and keep breathing and keep being mindful.

I have to fix the tire. Mindfulness doesn't work when you have a flat tire. No. Keep practicing. Change while you change the tire. Stay present. Be with everything having to do. Be awake. Change a tire in a careful, dedicated way, but just being awake, changing the tire, changing the tire. Whatever is going on, you have to respond.

You have to do, but don't give up the journey. Don't stop the practice. That's the through fear. That's the continuity. That's the journey. That's the path in the woods. That's where you're hiking. That's where the path is found, not in fixing anything in the world, not in changing the world even. Maybe you change the world in a nice way. That would be nice, thank you.

But that's not where the path is found. The path is really simple. Be awake now. Be awake, be aware now. Be here now. But I have things to take care of. Take care of them being awake now. But I'm burning the food on the stove. Be awake when you turn the flame down or off. Just whatever you do.

And have that be the steady rhythm, the beat, that through everything. Let that be so that you don't lose your presence, so that you don't lose yourself in all these challenges that go on. People collapse, people react, people get angry, people despair, people identify so strongly with all these forces that takes us off the trail. Stay on the trail. It's really important to stay on the trail. It's maybe the most important thing you're doing.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of you trusted me saying that. The day will come and you look back at what's happened for you. Oh, I'm so glad I trusted the trail. Staying on. Keep practicing. Keep showing up. Show up for what you need to do, but stay there. And that creates a safety valve. It creates a little bit of freedom from being over-identified with anything, over-receptive to anything, over-burdened by anything, over-reactive to anything. It just keeps...

It doesn't mean you ignore. It's not a denial. It's not pushing away. It's not shutting down.

It's just nuts. It's just staying wise, clear, free in the middle of it all. Now, what's now? What's now? Now, here, wake up. And maybe you want to do is be careful as you do this to notice when you give the practice up.

What do you give it up for? And maybe you don't have to give it up as often as you do. Maybe sometimes you just need to sit on the couch, lay on the couch and read a good book and not think about practice anything more because that's relaxing. There might be a time, but be very careful. Don't give it up too easily. Don't get off the trail unless it's a wise thing to do. But stay through your whole life. And this is the beauty and the power of this practice, is to have this, the through line, the thread, the... that goes through your whole life, the practice. And when you do that, all these different aspects of your life and you and your personality and your emotions and your feelings, they all start getting included in this amazing processing, the amazing work of the *Dhamma*, of the practice. Everything gets included.

Everything that you need to see and learn from will come up and show and appear to you. And one of the wonderful conclusions from all this is you kind of come to the idea that maybe nothing is a mistake. Maybe nothing is wrong in a certain kind of way, in the way that it's the next thing to practice with, next thing to discover, next thing to learn how to be free, next thing to learn, next thing to, next thing that's happening that's going to teach you not how to be free, but to show you how unfree you are. How caught you are. See how caught you are and don't stop. Keep, oh, this is caught. Boy, am I caught. This is what caught is. Oh, I feel it in my shoulders. I feel my hands clenched.

Stay, okay, feel this. Be awake to this. This is what it's being caught is like. Oh, now the pot and stove is burning. Well, forget about being caught. Okay. In that thing, now I have to do mindfulness of the stove. That's the next step. So this is our journey. This is the Buddhism is a path that we walk.

And the walking is each moment of waking up, each moment of being present for this, just this, even if it's not ideal. And occasionally, you'll see things about yourself on this journey, very occasionally, that are not ideal. Okay? Just trust the path. Trust showing up. Don't get off the path because of that. Don't ignore it, but don't give yourself to it and forget the path. Stay present. Keep that as the habit, the continuity. Just stay on the path.

So may we all be on this path together, step after step, breath after breath. Thank you.