

## **Tuesday Dharma talk: Coming into our senses**

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With the theme being the six sense fields, the world of the senses, I can't help myself but to think that the purpose of this retreat is to come to our senses, come into our senses.

And with this kind of wordplay around how we use the word sense in English, some people say that life makes no sense, or they try to make sense out of life.

And one of the pathways for discovering this, the sense of life in a sense, is to come into our senses, to live in our senses, to live close to our sense experience.

It's a huge part of what the Buddha, when the Buddha taught mindfulness, a huge part of it was this being close to our sense experience, in a variety of different ways.

And it can be very surprising how we understand ourselves, how we understand our life, how we understand the world around us, when we are living close to our sense experience.

Not to be a sensualist, but to be really close to the source or this origin of so much of where life flows and arises and grows.

And to be close to where it is the generative power of this life that we live.

When I was at, I spent three years living in the Zen monastery, and for one year I worked in the kitchen.

Yeah.

For the summer months, the monastery turned into a kind of a resort of sorts.

There was still a monastery, but guests would come to use the hot baths to be in this deep wilderness area.

And we would cook special meals for the guests that came.

And so I was the kind of kitchen manager.

And kind of, kind of under me, kind of next to me were three people who were the guest cooks, the ones who cooked for the guest meals.

And they were the ones who got to make the great meals.

So I would did a whole year being kind of the manager of the kitchen and became pretty good at cooking in that kind of way.

And so at the end of that year, I thought about, well, who's going to be the guest cooks next year?

And I thought, well, I looked around and it was clear that there weren't that many people qualified, but I was.

So certainly they would choose me, and I'd get to be the guest cook, and it'd be fun.

So then the winter periods, fall and winter, there's intensives and training periods.

And we're in the meditation hall a lot, including eating our meals in the meditation hall many days of the week, sitting in this posture, meditation posture, with bowls in front of us and servers that come serve food.

It's a whole ritual, a well-choreographed, beautiful ritual for eating.

That goes on, includes chanting and different things.

And so you're kind of sitting, you know, a lot of it is waiting for the food to come, waiting, all kinds of, you know, just sitting there in your meditation posture.

And I suppose a person could meditate then.

It wouldn't be so far-fetched.

But that's not what I did.

I would look at the food I was eating, I would analyze it, I would plan menus for next summer.

I was all...

I spent a whole...

You know, I spent, you know, about nine months or so, eight months thinking each of these meals, most of the time about how I was going to become a guest cook.

And what I was going to cook and how great it would be.

And so then the time came in the spring, in a classic kind of Zen way, it's a kind of ritual way, everyone gathers into the meditation hall and stands around the edges, and they're going to read out the assignments for the summer.

So I'm sitting there waiting to become a guest cook.

And they say my name, no guest cook.

I decided I made a completely different job.

And I was just stunned.

Not so much that I wasn't chosen to be a guest cook.

I was stunned.

What did I just do the last eight months?

All that time, I could have been meditating, could have been practicing in the meditation hall during those meals and really been present for the experience.

I was involved in desires and fantasies, sense pleasure and social pleasure and work pleasure and living in this fantasy that, so wow, you know, that's not what I came to the monastery to do.

I couldn't believe it.

I spent so many months doing that, living in that world of stories that I had.

And that was a little bit of a wake-up call for me.

But what, how strong the story-making mind can be and how much it can feel realer than real.

It can feel like this is where life is or, and then, you know, in a kind of, in time it takes to snap up your fingers almost, this whole world crumbled, this whole fantasies all just vanished.

It never existed.

And I had lived in it, caught in it, preoccupied in it.

So this mindfulness practice, the way the Buddha described it, or at least the way I understand it, is a journey out of fantasy.

A journey out of being disconnected from life and from oneself.

A journey from living in a core story-making mind, meaning-making mind, that is kind of creating worlds maybe that don't even exist, maybe never did exist, never will exist.

Maybe they half exist.

Maybe they kind of exist.

But it's a journey to relax the mind, settle the mind, to discover something very different, to quiet the mind enough from the story-making mind in order to see kind of ourselves in a deeper way, kind of almost at the operating system kind of level of our experience.

And why and what's the purpose for that?

One of the primary ones is to become conscious quiet enough in the mind, meaning not living in stories, not living in conceptual ideas, quiet enough to be able to have a very direct exceeding of how we cling, how we get caught, how we get trapped, how we get in desires, in aversions, in conceit, in opinions, and to really see the cost that it takes on us, to see that the cost is too high.

Once we realize that the cost for clinging is much more expensive than the promise clinging seems to present us, then the mind begins to relax further, settle, be willing to let go and not be so caught up in these stories and ideas and attachments that we have.

And it's a process of quieting things or clarifying the mind to be able to see deeper and deeper into our direct moment-to-moment experience that is hidden if you spend eight months planning to be a guest cook and living those fantasies.

Of course, none of you have done anything like that, I'm sure.

But so...

So the Buddha, often he has this orientation when he teaches that this *dharma* path is a journey and it unfolds.

And it unfolds from what is most coarse, most disconnected, to what is most refined and the most connected to life and to our experience.

And that when he teaches about the six sense doors, six sense fields in the classic text on mindfulness, the classic teachings called the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*.

He sets it up with two things that precede it.

So there's like a, almost a path in three steps, two steps to the third one being the six senses.

And both Andrei and I now have so far introduced these ideas of the six senses as something that you're going to connect to directly and how much it reveals about ourselves when we do that.

And in the Buddha's teaching in this text, there's all this learning and practicing that's leading to the simplicity of the sense doors, sense experience.

And it begins with understanding how to practice with what is called the hindrances.

There's what's called five hindrances, and very conveniently there was a time when every Tuesday on retreat would be a talk on the hindrances.

The hindrances are five states that we experience that hinder obstruct our wisdom, obstruct our clarity of seeing, that makes it really hard to delve into this more refined, subtle, direct experience that we have.

And makes it very hard to get concentrated, to be still enough to have see with clarity.

And so there are five of them, and for simplicity's sake, we can call them desire, aversion, shutting down, being overactive, and being indecisive, uncertain.

And many meditators struggle with these, and desire can be desires for sensual pleasures, desires for being guest cooks, desires for all kinds of things.

And we can get caught in this, in these stories, and sometimes with desire fantasies, part of the reason we get caught is that the fantasies are pleasant.

They're very promising.

There might be more pleasure in the fantasy than what we normally have in life, so it's really rewarding to have them.

But generally, if you sit at retreat, after a while, if you have the same fantasy, same desires, same repeated thoughts, it begins, starts becoming a drag.

After a while, like, give me a break.

It was good for a while, thank you, but, you know, broccoli is good once in a while.

But to have it at every meal, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you know, please, to, you know, to sit down to every sitting and have some kind of sensual desire.

And after a while, please, give me a break.

Aversion.

Sometimes aversion is much harder.

Right?

To let go of because of the intensity of the anger, the resentment, the self-righteousness, the justice of it all, injustice of it all.

And I've known people who've held resentment for decades, you know, they weren't going to put it down.

And one of the things that keeps the resentment going is retelling the story over and over again.

Reviewing it, saying it again, trying to figure out better responses, what could I have done, or reviewing stories about the impact that had on me and how terrible it was.

And so there are these stories of aversion.

The third hindrance, usually called sloth and torpor, I'm calling it kind of being kind of stuck or shutting down or becoming kind of resistant to experience.

It's not ordinary sleepiness.

It's when there's some kind of attitude or story we're living in that somehow makes us feel like it's something, it's too much, I can't do it, it's too difficult.

And so something shuts down or gets really kind of lethargic as maybe as a form of resistance.

And that can come from stories as well.

The stories that it's too, it's hard, I can't do it.

To other people who can do it.

That this kind of practice must be foolish to sit and do nothing.

And I, you know, and why should I do it?

And where is it going to go?

And, you know, maybe it's better to sit here and plan my summer vacation.

Maybe the time is better spent that way.

And but then they keep telling me to try harder.

And it's just, I just can't stand it.

And I might as well just go to sleep.

And what I'm trying to convey here is that these five hindrances, a key part of what they are, is we're caught in stories.

And many people try to practice with the hindrances and don't understand that there's a story going on in the background or in the foreground that just keep renewing it over and over again.

If they think it's desire, they're looking at the desire, not realizing that there's a story that's keeping it going.

And it's the power of these stories to paint and overlay our experience that makes it very hard to see through the story to our direct experience.

And sometimes it's that really useful, what the hindrance is, to recognize the story-making mind that's at play.

That when there's a lot of desire, see it, oh, that's a story that's keeping this going.

That's renewing it all the time.

Aversion, resentment, anger, hostility, there's probably a being repeated over and over again.

The fourth one, being overactive, is usually the classic thing is called either restlessness and regret, recklessness and remorse, recklessness and worry.

Different people have different translations.

And there too, there can be a story.

There can be a story of, you know, I did a terrible thing, I should have done something different.

And they say, you know, you have a lot of regrets and guilt and tell ourselves the same story again over and over again.

Restless might be because we have some feeling of responsibility, we didn't fulfill, or there's something better I should be doing, or I have to fix it, or, you know, there's some danger here and I can't just sit here and be it, I have to address and take care of something.

And so this activation of energy that keeps us kind of agitated.

The stories don't have to be so elaborate, but they can be.

And they can be almost subconscious.

They're kind of in the background, the stories.

The fifth one is usually in English called doubt.

Doubt.

And I think that's, the doubt is really great, covers a wide range of hindrances, stories, ideas that we have.

The doubt that I can't do it.

The doubt I don't know what to do.

I don't know, you know, these teachers what they know.

They probably don't know what they're talking about.

And, you know, certainly it looked like IRC was a good place.

But, you know, now I'm beginning to doubt the colors on the wall and you know, and plastic bowls to eat out of.

And I don't think this is a self-respecting insight meditation center.

You can't really practice with plastic bowls.

The bowls should be beautiful ceramic bowls coming, you know, come directly from the Japanese pottery, you know, kilns.

So we can really kind of, then I can really be present.

Then I can really kind of be with my food because the bowls are what's going to take.

And, you know, and how could they do it this way?

You know, they can't really practice this way.

And so I doubt this is a good place for me.

So there's stories we're making up.

So I'm just making things up right now.

But check it out.

See the effect that the story-making mind has on you.

Therapists will say sometimes one of the leading causes of depression is rumination.

Probably one of the leading causes of anger is rumination.

We're ruminating means we're like cows.

We're regurgitating things and chewing it again and again and again.

So, I don't know how much you want to be a cow, but that's kind of what rumination means.

And so one of the really useful things in this practice is to be attentive enough as you're meditating, as you're walking, as you're eating, as you're here on retreat, be attentive enough to notice when you're not really present, when you're lost in thought, when you're shut down, when you're too restless to pay attention.

And then say, what's going on?

What is this?

Chances are it's one of the hindrances.

Chances are you're living in some story.

When I was in that meditation, in the Zen Center, when they announced the summer jobs, I was really lucky because the story I'd been living in for eight months popped in a moment when they gave me a different job.

Maybe you'll be lucky.

If you clearly recognize the story-making mind, clearly recognize all these thoughts you're doing, clearly recognize you've been doing it for three days, wait a minute, what am I doing?

Is this really the way forward?

What's the track record of success from just telling stories all the time?

Probably it's not so great.

So stories is kind of a very coarse way of living in life, living in stories.

Some stories are wonderful, some stories are freeing, some stories are meaningful to hear, but it also can be a huge trap.

And so what we're trying to do in mindfulness is to see in a simple way, to step out of the complexities that stories are about, out of the complexities of past and future, to really see in the present, what's happening here?

The great *Vipassanā* question is, what?

What is this?

Here and now.

It's stories.

Oh, it's desire.

It's aversion.

It's sloth and torpor, it's restlessness.

It's regrets and remorse.

It's doubt and uncertainty and indecisiveness.

Having these things is not a crime.

Having these things does not make you a bad person.

It's not uncommon for teachers to say it just makes you a person.

It makes you a human.

They come with a territory of being human.

But it doesn't mean we have to give in to them.

We can be free of them.

We can't step out of their orbit.

We can't step away from them enough to see clearly what they are.

We can't take the attention and turn it 180 degrees around from the object of the hindrances to what's happening here and now as we're having these hindrances.

So desires usually have an object, and that object usually has a story connected to it.

And so the mind is directed outward.

The task of mindfulness is then turn around to see what's happening here in me in the present moment.

The mind is busy.

I'm tense.

I'm savoring for some things, for better food, better cookies, more cookies.

We haven't had cookies.

Shouldn't have brought it up.

And, because I don't know which hindrance it's going to trigger in you now.

But to turn around and really feel what desiring is like, feel what aversion is like, feel what sloth and torpor is like, feel what restless is like.

All these things are worthy subjects for mindfulness.

They're worthy to be present for.

And how would we be present for it?

One way, is at the level of the senses, the sensations, how they're directly experienced at the sense doors.

How is desire felt sensually?

How is aversion felt sensually?

How is all these?

What's a direct experience?

And the advantage of that is that you're getting closer to where it's generated from, or closer to the heart of something, rather than staying caught in the story.

Rather than being caught in this relationship to the object of desire, the object of aversion, the object of doubt, to staying close.

So what's really being experienced?

What's the direct, directly happening here?

And so things begin to quiet down.

At some point the hindrances are not operating so strongly.

And they don't hinder anymore.

We can see more clearly.

So then the Buddha comes to the next step in this journey.

And there's something that's more simple and more basic than stories.

There are simple ideas we can have, simple concepts we can be caught in, simple constructs of ideas through which we see our experience.

And we can get attached to these.

We can hold onto them for dear life.

We can be stuck in them.

And the Buddha described that we accumulate attachments, we gather them up.

We don't just have, you know, very few of us just happen once in a while, maybe, kind of have just one thing we're attached to.

Human beings generally are attached to a lot of things.

So the Buddha called them bundles.

And then they often, we're accumulating bundles, bundles of suffering that are related to all the things we're attached to.

If I just bring up the word politics, none of you are attached to anything to do with politics, but everyone else is.

There's a lot of attachments.

You know, you can gather them in a big bucket, a big basket, all the different things that just politics evokes.

And what about your history of relationships?

Has that been attachment-free?

Or has there been a few attachments that still persist in the world of relationships and how things work that way?

So the Buddha referred to this very simple movement of clinging, holding on, grabbing, and not letting go.

And it can be very deep in the mind, so it's not necessarily even conscious that we've gathered all these things together.

They become latent, they become kind of ready to operate for the trigger, but we are attached.

And he talked about different things we become attached to.

He listed five of them.

And the odd thing or the unusual thing that he says is that each of the things that we're attached to, in some way or other, of these five, we're kind of, the mind is actually constructing some aspect of that experience, some way that it's signified, something about what it means, something of how we select out of our environment to construct these kinds of things so that we get attached.

The idea is that we contribute to creating the very thing we get attached to.

So, the first one is, usually is described as form, I'd refer to it as appearance.

It literally means the thing that you can see with your eyes.

By usage it means anything that you can perceive that has to do with physicality.

But the idea is that here, I like to use the word appearance, because appearance is not only what something looks like, but it's also how it appears to us through our own process of selectivity, our bias, our preferences, our desires, our aversions.

Things appear to us in different ways.

And you could be walking down the street, and it could be that it's, you know, it's the local saint.

But the saint looks big and burly and snarly, and for all appearances, that's a dangerous, terrible person.

And so we're selecting out certain characteristics and then deciding that that person is terrible, even though it's the local saint.

So we're often selecting, so when we look at people, we're selecting certain parts of their characteristics, that when you see people, that is important for us, somehow or other, that we look at people and select out something.

And different people select different things, prioritize different things.

We don't just look neutrally onto the world.

We don't look neutrally on ourselves.

And when we think about ourselves and our appearance, we usually select certain things as being really significant.

Like when I was in middle school, what was really significant was a distance from my nose to my hairline.

I had a little bit of high hairline, and I thought that I was really worried.

And I spent an inordinate amount of time in middle school putting my finger in the kind of this valley of my nose, and just measuring, and to make sure it wasn't receding.

You know, because I was, you know, 14 and concerned about a receding hairline.

And, you know, and I can tell you, it's the same.

So, all the things to be concerned with, that's where my attachment was.

So there wasn't a big story around it, which was a little one maybe, but I had constructed some idea about what hairlines meant and forehands meant, and I was selected of all the things I could have selected, that's what I selected, and I was attached to it.

And probably the other things I did.

The hair was really important for guys in 1960s.

I used to sit in class pulling my hair, so it would grow faster, because it was important to have long hair.

So, you know, that was another of these things that...

Attachment.

So I had a bundle of, you know, physical characteristics I was attached to, or my attachment sometimes was a negative attachment.

And then there's the...

There can be...

All kinds of attachments to pleasure, comfort and discomfort, pleasure and what's pleasant and unpleasant.

And, you know, we're not innocent by standards of pleasure and pain.

To some great degree, we participate in constructing pleasure and pain.

There's a kind of process by which what we prefer, what we like, what we measure, what we think is important, all kinds of things.

And we tell stories of what it means.

And so there is these attachments, grabbing onto pleasure, resisting or being attached to not having discomfort, that can be operating a lot at time.

It can come up very strongly on retreat, because on retreat, the first few days, there's a few people that have a lot of physical discomfort.

It's been known to happen.

And so then people are struggling with that.

And part of the difficulty has to do not with the physical pain.

The difficulty is not the pain, but the struggle with it, the attachment, the aversion to it.

And at some point you can really, if you're quiet enough, still enough, and really be with the pain enough, you might be lucky enough to see that part of what's going on is your tension, your tightening, your activity, your meaning-making, your preferences coming into play around it.

I struggled once with very intense shoulder pain on a long retreat, and my teacher offered me lots of good advice, none of which worked.

And so I think one day it was so intense, I burst into his room and said, I can't manage anymore.

And he said to me, he looked at me kind of kindly and said, oh, you probably stabbed someone in the shoulder in your last life.

Now, I don't believe in rebirth, so that didn't mean anything literally for me.

But as soon as he said that, my mind went, oh, it's there for a reason, and I don't have to know the reason.

From then on, I still had the pain, from then on it wasn't any problem.

My attachments has what contributed to the problem.

My stories, my ideas, my sense of self, my sense of being a good practitioner, what I should do, what I shouldn't do.

There's a whole complicated world of attachments I had that came to play around the shoulder, and the teacher just said this little thing.

Maybe he was frustrated with me.

And that just kind of popped the ball.

And then the third place we accumulate attachments is our opinions, our ideas, our concepts.

If I say the word democracy, some of you have some attachment around that, some, you know, the whole slew of things that can be around that simple idea, that word, these days especially.

And so there's a lot, a lot of concepts we live by that we hold on to, we cling to, we're not going to let go of, and some of the concepts are good ones.

Even if they're good and true, do we have to cling to them?

Do we have to be attached to them?

So the Buddha said, we gather together lots and lots of ideas and concepts, and we have piles of them, bundles of them.

The fourth of these five bundles is...

I like to call it stories.

This is more the story-making mind itself.

The fourth one is the way the mind tells little stories that creates the selectivity of the other bundles, helps contribute to make the others.

So if I make a story, you know, as a 14-year-old, that, you know, I'll have more friends if I had a better hairline.

And now I'm concerned about my hairline.

It's that fourth bundle that tells that little story about having friends, which generates that concern now of my attachment to hairline.

And the hairline's important.

And now I'm looking at everyone else's hairline.

So the story-making mind that constructs and creates the conditions for the other attachments, the hindrance has come out of this story-making mind, the fourth of the bundles.

And the fifth one is attachment to the very notion of being conscious, the very idea of being cognizant in this world, the very idea of being aware.

Now this is really a great thing to do for people practicing mindfulness, is to be aware.

But not a few people start that sooner or later will get attached to the notion of awareness, to the idea what it means, to the feeling of it, the sense of it.

And it can be a real hindrance.

The same teacher that I told me about the, that I'd stabbed someone in the former life, that came to him once I said it to him, you know, I see in my practice, I'm sitting very quietly, very concentratedly, and I see that everything, all my experiences, all the sense experiences, hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, the awareness of what's on the going on, and the mind, and the intellect, it's all coming and going.

It's all impermanent.

But I don't think I can be a Buddhist, because there's one thing which is permanent, and that's consciousness.

That's stable, it's universal, it's always there, it's not going anywhere.

That's, I think I should become a Hindu.

That's what I told him.

And again, he looked at me kind of kindly or patiently.

And he said, just keep looking.

Just keep paying attention.

And so I did, and eventually I saw that.

That also is arising and passing.

And that was kind of eye-opening for me.

But I had been somehow holding on to this idea of a certain kind of attachment to the very idea of consciousness.

So the idea is that to start becoming, once you stop doing the story-making mind, things get simpler.

And now you can start having access to this movement in the mind of clamping down, getting tight, getting constricted, getting resistant, getting, pushing things away, trying to hold things close.

And that might take a form of physical tension.

It might be a tension in the thinking muscle.

It might be a tension inside the brain, between the ears, behind the forehead.

It might be tension in the forehead.

It might be tension in the jaw, in the arms, in the hands, in the belly.

The clinging usually is not...

Cost-free.

The more sensitive, the more quiet you are to feel attachments, how the actual attachments are, and the effect on you, you can feel the deleterious effects, deleterious effect it has physically in our whole system.

It can be quite subtle, but subtle doesn't mean unimportant.

So to, and it's so valuable to be aware, if now we're back in the world of the senses, the sense experience of tension, the sense experience of tightness, of constriction, to really feel that.

And one of the reasons I think it's so helpful is it's almost as if the very attachments we have, what they most need is care, love, kind attention.

They don't need us to be critical of them.

They don't need us to be pushing them away or angry with them or saying, you know, this has to stop, so I can be a good Buddhist.

What they most need is careful attention, careful presence.

And I like to think it's not so much a matter of getting rid of anything, as it is allowing it to dissolve, allowing it to relax, to settle away.

So I'd like to say that the problems we have, and when you do this practice here, mindfulness, many of the problems we have will not be solved, which is unfortunate.

But the fortunate things is an alternative to solving problems, and that is dissolving the problems.

And that's the magic.

That's the power of this practice, is these attachments begin to dissolve.

If we can meet them with care, attention, if we can be sensitive to them, if we can feel and sense them, and again, it's a deeper layer inside of us than the ideas themselves.

The idea of what we're attached to is not that important.

Don't navigate in this practice in the world of ideas, stories, but rather navigate it at some point, where's the clinging, where's the freedom?

Where's the ease, where's the openness, where's the tightness, where's the close down?

And to meet all of it generously, to meet all of it with a clarity of just simple knowing, simple awareness, simple presence, being content that you're getting closer and closer to the heart of the matter.

And then, once the world of clinging these bundles quiets down enough, there's, the world of practice gets very simple.

There might be very little attachment to self, because self is often, what we have as self, attachment to self, is often it's attachment to these bundles.

So the kind of the self-preoccupation, self-concern, the ideas of it, the concepts of it, become quieter, more settled.

We're more embodied.

We're here.

The sense world, the embodied world, becomes the somatic world, becomes richer, becomes more important.

For no other reason, this is where life is.

The vitality of life is found in the senses.

If you want to feel and sense the energy of being alive, the vitality of being alive, you have to be connected to your senses.

That's where the electricity that goes through our neurons, where they come out and where they show themselves and how we can know and feel the sense of being alive, is in the senses.

And the gestalt, the accumulation of this, all that gives a wonderful feeling of vitality.

If you have sensations, you're alive.

And the more you have sensations, the more alive people will feel.

If a person is living from the neck up, disconnected from their body, they're disconnected from some of the natural sources of vitality, of aliveness that they can feel and be in.

So, the attachment's quiet.

We're more connected to our body, this sense experience.

And so the next level, as things get quieter, still, or less attached, is we start becoming much more cognizant of just the sense world, the scene, just the scene, the herd, just the herd.

We start feeling the cold against the skin.

And this is where it's really valuable here at IRC, to spend some time outdoors.

We have this beautiful natural property here with beautiful trees, redwood trees, the garden, different plants, the pathways, the sky, the clouds.

It's an invitation to really feel the sense contact, sense world, and to allow yourself to walk around here and see how simple you can be.

It's just simple looking at a tree.

If you haven't found the biggest tree on the property yet, you might go look for it.

Treasure hunt.

But then see the trees, see the bark, see the size, and watch your mind that you don't spend the next two hours trying to plan how you can buy that from us and take it home.

Or how are you going to have the same kind of garden at home, or do this and that, but to go in there and let this sense experience of the natural world here at IRC guide you into a simplicity of being, where it's very simple, relax, kind of just allowing the sense world to come and go, flow, to flow through you, the river of sense experience that you cannot experience if you're caught in a story.

If you're caught in a bundle of clinging.

But be willing to go out and kind of trust your senses, trust the eyes, the ears, the nose.

And there's a river of, I think of it as a river, a constant stream of senses, sense experience coming in.

And if you just settle back and relax, just feel it.

Coming and going, coming and going.

The same thing can happen in meditation.

Just as the grounds here at IRC is a wonderful representation of the wonder, the beauty of the natural world, to close your eyes and sense and feel yourself, your inner life, it's as much of a marvel of the natural world as anything outside of you.

If you live in the world of your stories, your fantasies, chances are it's not much of a marvel.

Because it's a constructed and maybe even unnatural world that we construct.

If I sit, you know, and hear and start fantasizing and thinking about...

It would be really great.

You know, if I think I should really be the mayor of Redwood City, that would be the thing.

Yeah, you know, I could pass new rules for bike lanes and...

Take a good look at these traffic cameras and have a good talk with the police chief.

And being a mayor of Redwood City would be really great.

I've lost myself in that process.

I mean, in some ways I've abandoned myself because the lived life is right here in the senses.

And to really begin to feel the natural world within us.

And here too, there's the river of sense experience, the river of temperature and warmth and heavy and light and pressure and the release of pressure and tingling.

And there's a whole slew of things that we're...

Just kind of...

Then relax back and feel the river of sensations as they appear.

And then the Buddha said, as you do this, as you start being attuned, aligned, intimate with the immediacy of sense experience, then you might notice that you're not, you're still not so innocent.

You're still getting caught, entangled, even with that.

There can be a very subtle and a literal word that he used in ancient *Pāli* language.

There can be a not.

Or an entangle, you get entangled in that.

So you see the big redwood tree?

That's great.

But then I want it.

Now you've created an entanglement with it through that desire.

Or you have this idea, it's too big for IRC.

Shouldn't be here.

And you get caught in that idea.

Now you formed what's called a fetter.

Usually in English translations, you've created a knot.

And you're nodded to it.

If they do serve cookies here, he said, just seeing the cookie?

Is that all it is?

Oh, it's a cookie.

You look at the cookie just like you would at the tongs, which are right next to the cookie.

Tong, cookie, same thing.

Each is just as interesting.

Oh, and there's a...

It's on a plate.

No, it's a plate, cookies, tongue, a table.

It's all the same.

Or does your eye lock onto the cookies?

Does it zero in?

And just that is now you're caught, you're entangled.

But maybe cookies mean comfort.

I need comfort.

I need to get a glass of milk, and I need probably can I figure out how to get ten of them?

You know, ten doesn't work so well, and in a place where you're supposed to be non-attached, and how can I manage to get ten without looking attached?

And then we're planning all about, you know...

And so now we're back in the hindrances.

You left here the meditation also calm and quiet, and just with this river of sea, that river of sensations, and walking down the steps and just feeling the steps and changing sensations in your feet as you stepped, and then coming down on the floor downstairs and walking across it, and being aware of the light and the sounds.

And it was just kind of delicious to just kind of just be in the flow of sensations.

And that all came to a screeching halt, seeing the cookies.

And now we're back off, now slowly we build attachment to ideas, to cookies, then a story around the cookies, and how great it's going to be for you, and your meditation is going to be so much better afterwards if you can get 10 cookies.

So there's seeing.

There's the eye, and kind of between the two is the knot.

How we get caught, how we get entangled.

And it's fascinating when the mind gets still and quiet enough to not start at the story, not start at the simple attachment to an idea, but just at the very raw sense data coming in.

It could just be a simple kind of like it, not like it, for it, then against it.

A little tightening up, a little loosening up, and a little like, oh, look at that flower.

Oh, let me lean into it.

I'd like more.

I'd like to enjoy it more.

It's fine to do that.

But from the point of view of being very still and quiet and embodied, you might feel there's no need to lean forward.

It's extra.

It actually diminishes you, you lose something in the process.

In ordinary life, leaning forward to the flower might be an improvement compared to what you were doing.

But here, if you're really centered in yourself, and the vitality of this moment, vitality of the sense experience, quiet, peaceful sensing, you might feel that actually leading forward to the flower, you actually lose something.

You lose a little bit of that vitality, you lose a little bit of that freedom, that openness, that clarity.

So at some point the Buddha was talking about the value of noticing something very, very simple.

A simple moving forward, moving away, holding on, letting go.

That has then very, nothing to do with stories, nothing to do with ideas.

It's just a simple sense experience itself.

Pleasure, want more.

Unpleasant, want less.

And kind of caught in that.

And so to sit, walk, be here, and take this journey, to know that it's a journey that you're quieting the story mind, quieting the overactive mind.

You're centering yourself here in this sense experience.

So you can start becoming aware of the deepest places where there's still attachment.

And so you can offer a caring, warm-hearted attention to all of it.

And if you do that, at some point, you'll find the miracle of release, the miracle of dissolving, the miracle of this radical simplicity where your heart feels free here and now, just here, in the simplicity of being, where just to be alive is enough, just breathing is enough.

And anything more feels like it's too much.

It feels like we're caught.

So, coming into our senses is how we make sense of this world in *Vipassanā*.

May you enjoy your senses and sense your world well.

Thank you.