

Letting Go

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So to begin by thanking you all for being here today and practicing, and I certainly appreciate the chance to be here and participate in this, and to offer some thoughts about the practice today.

I want to offer something as the companion of mindfulness. Mindfulness is kind of the primary reference point for practice at IMC, but it has a very important partner for it when it becomes part of Buddhist practice. And that is something in the family of letting go, releasing, whatever we're holding on to, whatever we're clinging to. And it's, some people like to say it's enough to be mindful. And to some degree it's true because if we're very, the mindfulness is really clear, it's a remarkable thing at some point, the letting go happens by itself. We don't have necessarily do it. But still, it's there, the letting go.

But sometimes we do let go. Sometimes we say, no, thank you. Don't want to pick that up. Don't want to keep doing that over and over again. And so these two partners, mindfulness and letting go, and mindfulness is associated with clarity in the Buddhist tradition. As mindfulness develops, it leads to a state of clarity where we see clearly, we understand clearly, in the present moment.

We don't understand clearly about international economic strategies. But we have clarity around this moment and how we're responding to it, how we're reacting to it, what we see, what we feel. And that makes all the difference. So mindfulness is associated with clarity. Letting go is associated with happiness. And sometimes mindfulness can really be a happiness-producing activity, to be really mindful.

But my kind of best kind of understanding of that is that, in fact, when mindfulness is really clear, really strong, there is a kind of letting go there. There is a kind of freedom there that you're not picking up, you're not reacting, you're not getting involved. There's something

has been let go in order for the mindfulness to be really clear. And maybe that if there's... If mindfulness is happiness producing, which it is, I suspect it's because of the letting go that's inherent in that clarity of seeing, of being. But in the Buddhist tradition, the happiness, which is considered to be important part of the path of practice, an important reference point for finding our way in practice, comes with letting go.

So that's a little bit unfortunate for those of us who want to hold on to our happiness, who are pursuing happiness by clinging and wanting more. So, you know, so, you know, so I'm sorry to tell you that Buddhism is offering a different approach. And that's the happiness that comes from letting go, from not holding on. And this mindfulness and letting go, they work together. Clarity and happiness work together. And so the partnering these is part of the wisdom factor that comes into play with Buddhism.

Because as we get clear, as we really are able to stay in the present moment in a non-reactive way and really, really have clarity about what's here, will have clarity about what hurts. We'll have clarity about what is unwholesome, clarity about what is unfortunate, clarity about what we're doing that makes a situation worse. Look at that. I'm reacting. I'm angry. Look at that. I'm filled with conceit. Look at that. I'm hoping and holding on tight to something.

And we'll see, this hurts. There's stress in it. There's agitation involved in it. There's a feeling of being undermined, debilitated by it this certain way. There's a way in which the clarity of the mind is lost in that. And so we start seeing that for ourselves. No one has to tell you that you shouldn't react.

In fact, it's better not to have a should. It's better in this practice to develop that clarity so you see for yourself, oh, look at that. Look what I'm doing to myself. This is not needed. Look how I'm constantly judging and complaining. Do I, I've done, you know, if you're a complainer, and probably no one knows they are, but if you have a tendency to complain... try to run the calculation, add it up how many times you've complained in your lifetime.

Like if you just complain once an hour, then do the math. You probably get a pretty big number. If you like big numbers, you're like, wow, that's pretty cool. But the point about mindfulness, you see it, and you see that in some maybe subtle way that something... goes dark when we complain. Something gets shut down. Something gets limited. Something gets kind of lost in complaining because we're caught up in some idea.

And being caught in an idea is not the same as being open to the present moment, what's here. And it's certainly reasonable occasionally to see that some situation we're in is not ideal. Some situation we're in is problematic, is someone has made the wrong choice, a difficult

choice that we have to live with, maybe, or... There's wisdom about seeing that things are, you know, but complaining is a contraction on top of it, a limitation on top of it. So to see that clearly, oh, look at that. I'm making the situation worse.

Look at that. I've, you know, I don't think I need to add that on top of it. The difficult situation is difficult enough. Why am I making it more difficult by living in the complaints? Maybe I can look for wisdom. Maybe I can look for how I can help and what I can do to make a difference, at least for myself. Maybe I can look for how to be compassionate. I wonder what the compassionate thing is to do here.

So the mindfulness helps us to see more clearly. And on one hand, we learn that we can do something better, like being compassionate. On the other hand, we can learn what would be best if we could to let go of? No, thank you. I don't have to pick that one up. I have done 32 million complaints in my lifetime so far.

I think it's okay. They come easily, so maybe it's okay not to pick this one up. I'll let it be. I'll let it go. And... And so, or maybe it's the anger. Maybe that's the one that you add up the number of moments of anger you've had or resentment.

So wait a minute, maybe this hasn't really done me much good. Maybe it's appropriate to let it go. Or if letting go is too much, we have a powerful thing in this practice that's associated more with mindfulness perhaps, but is a kind of letting go is let it be. But let it be means we're not picking it up. We're not reacting on it. We're not carrying it along. Just leave it alone.

That's a kind of letting go. Leave it alone. Not going to go there. Not going to go down that road anymore. And so because these two are partnered, mindfulness and letting go, both of them require something from us. Mindfulness requires us to show up and show up in some higher quality way, show up to pay attention, show up to be receptive, to be present for what's here.

And letting go kind of requires something of us, which is to let go. Sometimes we can do it. It's possible to let go of something. I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to think that. I'm not going to follow that desire. I'm not going to get caught up.

Sometimes the best we can do is to let be. It's wiser. Just let it be, but don't do anything more with it. But letting go also involves doing less. And at some point in practice, letting go involves doing less and less. Partly it involves letting go of control.

Getting letting go of trying to make everything fit just the way we're supposed to be. They're trying to get everything, all the ducks lined up, they say, or to engineer happiness or something, to get everything just right. There's something very profound in this practice by let-

ting go of control, of the experience, of what's happening. It's a kind of doing less, less control, less building, less making, less. And at some point, as we do this mindfulness practice... There comes a time when the mind becomes kind of calm and quiet.

It's doing less. There's less pressure to think. Sometimes one of the reasons we think a lot in practice or in life is because there's a contraction or tightness in the mind, in the thinking mind. And so as long as that tightness is there, there's an oomph. There's an emphasis on think, think, think, think.

But if it really starts relaxing that thinking mind, softening the body, then there isn't that pressure to think. We might still be thinking, but the thinking is kind of recede into the background. It gets quieter, softer. They almost become like unrecognizable, because we're not really involved in them anymore. And things get quieter, more focused, more still.

And then it might be that you see that... maybe that it's also desirable to let go of things which are good. You might have compassionate thoughts, compassion for someone. And that's a good thing to do generally. But you see that in this state of calm and peace, even compassion is a kind of agitation, a kind of activation. It's not really needed right now.

As wonderful as compassion is, it's not really necessary right now. There's something better than that. Could there be anything better than compassion? In certain moments, yes. Certain moments of peace and subtleness and calm. So a wise practitioner also lets go of wholesome things, positive things.

Maybe you like to do service work in the community. That's wonderful, please do it. But after doing it for 13 hours straight, maybe it's not the best thing you can do anymore. And maybe you'll come back the next day to do a better job at it, if you get a good rest, if you don't work all day like that. Two or three hours of it is really good, but 13 hours maybe not.

So the idea of knowing when to let go of even good things is part of the wisdom of this practice. And for that wisdom, we need mindfulness. We need to see that what we're doing, what the effect is, the consequences of what we're doing. So after maybe... Six hours are doing service in the community. Something tells you, you know, wait a minute.

I'm beginning to feel tired. I'm beginning to get a headache. I'm beginning to feel tense. Maybe I've crossed a line and I'm doing too much of it now. Maybe it's okay to stop being of service.

Maybe six hours is too much for me. I want to be fresh for the next thing I do in my life. But the mindfulness keeps giving us the information we need. to make the choices in our life of what

to do, what to pick up, what to put down. And sometimes we pick up things, some things we put down things.

Sometimes we pick up compassion, sometimes we put it down. Sometimes we pick up thinking about things. Sometimes we have to think about things wisely sometimes. And sometimes we put it down. And hopefully we start seeing each one.

But on the Buddhist path of practice, um... The two partners that are mindfulness and the clarity that that brings, and letting go and the happiness that brings. And that happiness becomes a very important reference point for knowing wisdom, knowing what this whole question, what do I pick up, what do I put down. When we start seeing happiness as part of the ingredient and part of the kind of healthy dharmic happiness as part of what's good to kind of cultivate and develop, that becomes a fantastic reference point for what not to pick up, what not to let go of.

Don't let go of that which diminishes your dharmic happiness. Let go of that which hinders it. Let go of that which is causing suffering. or getting in the way of the dharmic path. So two things, mindfulness and letting go as partners in the path.

Cultivate mindfulness so you can be wise at letting go. So those are my words for today. And maybe we can see if, take a few minutes, if any of you have any questions you want to ask, I'm happy to try to respond, yes. And maybe if we could use the mic, partly for my sake, my hearing is not good. And then if you hold it, yeah, like that, yeah.

Oh, hello, thank you. So I think of letting go and then I think maybe allowing what's there, I was thinking can be a type of letting go. Yes, allowing is letting go. It can't be allowing. When I said letting be, allowing can be that way. Yeah.

And so I was wondering if you... Excuse me, but can I say something for you? Yes, yes. One of the reasons I gave this talk in the back of my mind is that there's a very strong tendency in Western teachings of mindfulness to almost teach it together with allowing. And what I've seen is some people end up being just allowing their thinking.

I'm supposed to allow. And so I'm thinking, I'm supposed to just allow it, and I'll just track my thinking and just think away. I mean, I'm a good thinker, and I have important things to think. And that's what mindfulness is, is just be mindful of thinking. And so I've seen some people get caught and spend too much time thinking because they've kind of misunderstood this idea of allowing.

So... So that's why the letting go is important. But please, I... Yeah, so I was wondering, thank you, I was wondering if I'll, you know, there's, you know, like I have a kind of tensing

up around what's there because I might not like what's there. And so if I let go and allow, it's not pleasant sometimes.

So do you have any advice for like slowly just like being able to just be with it? And any advice about how to be with it, how to allow? Yeah, like if I am tensing up against something to stop something that's not pleasant or to experience that. Yeah. Sometimes it's a wise thing to not pursue the ideal.

So if the ideal is to allow, learn how you don't allow. Learn how you cling. And then let go of that. And then... Yeah, the allowing might be too much. It might be a doing.

The alternative it may be is to neither reject or accept. I will think about that. Thank you. What? I said I will think about that. Thank you. Yeah.

Yes, here. Hi, Gil. Something came up for me earlier that I felt was like really powerful. It was like, the challenges of life do not hinder our happiness but rather you know I have trouble a little bit hearing yeah but talk slower too for my sake of my ears yeah something that came up for me earlier that was like really powerful was sort of like the challenges of life do not hinder our happiness but are of a means through which it is possible. I was wondering if you had any thoughts or... You know, I apologize. You know, the problem with my hearing is I don't hear all the consonants sometimes, so I need extra help.

Okay. Maybe come closer and maybe you don't... Maybe every adult's all heard, but if you come closer and you don't use the mic. Yeah, yeah. It was something came up for me earlier that felt really powerful, that was like... The challenges of life do not hinder our happiness, but rather the means through which it is possible.

I was wondering if you had any thoughts or is that something that, like, I don't know, any elaborations? Is that an idea of that? So the means by, so what part of it is a means to what's possible? The means through which happiness is possible. Like the challenges of life are what allow happiness. to occur rather than being hindrances to our happiness.

Oh yes, that's wonderful, I understand. So rather than focusing on the hindrances to happiness, focus on what evokes happiness, what brings happiness. Or I guess I kind of meant like what challenges of life do not hinder our happiness, but never allow happiness. Which challenges allow happiness? Yeah, like which- That's a great question.

Not which challenges, but all the challenges allow happiness. Okay, then the question for you is, I think it's wonderful what you're saying, but a question, what have you learned about how all the challenges of your life can bring you happiness? What do you have to do? How do you live? How are you?

Because most people have the opposite experience, that they have too many challenges, they're not happy. So what do you know about all the challenges kind of being a source of happiness? What does it take? It seems to take like a lot of mindfulness and a lot of like, maybe even like burning through the challenges in a way like great that's a great answer thanks so maybe one more one more over here hello okay um thank you for bringing up about compassion for someone and when it's time to go um it's It's been a big, I realize that sometimes, you know, like I went to an event and like, you know, like one of my friends like bring up a problem and everyone's like, oh, I mean, they give good advice.

And then sometime I didn't say anything or I said something and I go home and I was like, oh, I should have give better advice. It's kind of like compassion for that person. I'm not sure it's going to make any difference, but sometimes just eating me for all the things I would do in my life. I'd be washing dishes and I would thinking about it and I'm not being mindful of it. And after a while, it's just making me angry to myself that why can't I let it go?

So the issue is the things you didn't do right. You weren't compassionate. You didn't give the right advice. Yes. So in the way of, you know, I have compassion for that person, and I also feel I should have a compassion for myself.

I should have let it go. But I couldn't do that, and I can see that it's really bugging me. Do you have any advice on how to work with it? Yeah. Yeah. So, have you ever been someplace where there was a sunset, a beautiful sunset?

And were you kind of like, you stopped to look and it's like, wow, like, wow, that's like a little inspired. And that wow and that inspiration, was that something you had to work to do and like go through the manual, human manuals, see a sunset, you're supposed to be inspired, let you get it, you really crank it up, or was it more of a natural kind of response? It is a natural kind of response, but I guess either I didn't see that it's happening to me or maybe it's happening to me and I just couldn't feel it.

So, but what I want to suggest to you is rather than answering your question and your problem, I think that find a way to live closer to where the natural response comes out of you. And trust that. And it's possible that if you're with a friend and what you thought was needed was compassion, later you said, oh, I should have been more compassionate. I should have done something for them.

But if you're there and relaxed and at ease, really to be present for the natural response, like you would for the sunset, your friend who may be suffering, you find out the natural response is, actually compassion is not the right thing. Maybe right now what they needed was a glass

of water. Because that's what they really need. And then they can settle.

Or maybe you see what they maybe need is to go for a walk. what they need, maybe some humor. Who knows what they need? But if you have a fixed idea, it should have been compassion. You're not smart enough. And none of us are smart enough after the fact to know what we should have done.

That's a good point. So I think finding more ways to live from that natural response place. Yes, thank you. Is that okay? Yeah, I think I get it. It's just having like a formula in my head that should be this way rather than when I'm in the moment, like when I feel or when I feel or when that person feel like what is needed, that is also in compassion for myself and compassion for that person as well.

Yeah, and what's the natural response here? And maybe that's an expression of compassion to the response. Maybe it doesn't, if you're compassionate and the compassionate response, you might recognize that the compassionate thing is not to offer compassion. Maybe they need something else. Maybe they're so troubled that anything that's directed at them is too much.

And they'll experience the compassion as kind of like, leave me alone, it's too much, you're coming into my space. And so something else is needed. So what's needed there? So learn how to come from the place, the same place by which you go, wow, looking at sunset. From that place, see how you respond to your friends. Thank you.

I will... Great. Thank you. Okay. So I want to thank you for being here. It's the custom.