

Daylong Sit 6

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The schedule calls for a 15-minute meditation and a 45-minute Dharma talk. That ratio doesn't seem to work well for my subtle sensations. I think we'll meditate longer, maybe at least 30 minutes, and then I'll say some words, but I don't promise them to be 30 minutes even. So we'll see how it goes. So hopefully you are prepared for this kind of news with your smile that you practiced.

And so to assume a meditation posture. And might there be some delight you have? Maybe not today, but something that you smile about mindfulness, about meditation, something that you appreciate. Do you ever feel lucky, fortunate to be able to meditate? Has it ever served you? Has it ever been useful for you? And can you imagine it'll be useful in your future?

That you'll even occasionally have a delight, a good fortune, to be able to sit down to meditate. So here we are in a meditation posture that works for you. And if it's available to you, feeling your way into your body, body and mind. And is there any vibrations, flowing energy, tingling, kind of warm coziness? It may be as subtle, and much more subtle, than whatever way you might be uncomfortable. But is it there, or anything?

It doesn't have to be dramatic, but some sense of the aliveness of your body, an aliveness that is present wherever there are sensations. Sensations are the proof that you're alive, if you needed it. And within this body of sensations, sensation body, some fuller breaths, some relaxing, settling in, letting your breathing return to normal, and as if you're lowering yourself into a refreshing cool lake of water over your awareness down into your body. And maybe as if the rhythm breathing in and breathing out are gentle waves in the lake of your body, lake of sensations, feeling the interplay between sensations of breathing and the wider sensations of the body in the feeling. What shifts in your body, how the sensations change, feeling what shifts you have in the mind, how the sensations there change.

See if you can bring forth a small smile, relaxed smile, turning up the corners of your lips until there's some pleasure there. And meditate with that pleasure, with what that does for your system. Let that serve you well, and staying close to the subtle sensations.

And as we come to the end of this meditation, in this day of meditation, so anything in your body, in your mind right now or through the day, that has taught you something new about having ease. Ease in your body, ease in your mind. Ease with the practice. The *Pāli* word for reassurance means, etymologically, to breathe easy, to have an easy breath. May you have learned something about ease today.

Oh, in the background of what I offer today, it was something that happened to me early in my practice. I had been meditating a little bit here and there, maybe for a couple of years. But then I went back to college, and for the last two years of college, I dropped out. And I suffered. I had some social suffering, personal suffering of it. I didn't have much understanding of it. I wasn't very self-aware, but I knew I suffered.

And I had this idea that meditation would help. So when I started my third year of college then, I started meditating twice a day for 40 minutes each time, because that's what I had learned to do in my visit I had done for two weeks at the San Francisco Zen Center. And so I did it every day except for Sunday, because at the Zen Center it took Sunday off for meditation. It's a day off. So I thought there was some profound meaning in that or something. I thought it was something of what you do. So I meditated six days a week, but not Sunday, twice a day.

And in retrospect, I think that's a little bit unusual for a college student maybe to do that. And I was in a, you know, I had roommates, college roommates. I think there were three or four of them. There were four or five of us in this house. Many, many years later, I met one of them, and he said that, yeah, I used to go off, you know, it's, I don't know when, 8:30 or something, to go and meditate. And that was like the timer for the whole household. Everyone would go to sleep. It was so unusual.

I had no idea what was going on. I just went to my room, meditated, and went to sleep. But seemingly that had effect on the whole household. Anyway, so I was meditating every day, and after some time, considerable time of doing that, something unusual happened. The kind of social suffering, suffering that I was trying to address, somehow dissolved, somehow wasn't there anymore. And I attributed it somehow to the meditation, but I had no idea how it happened. But I just noticed that this particular suffering I was trying to address through meditation wasn't there.

But what was really strange was that I kept meditating. I kept doing this twice-a-day thing. And I'm kind of a rational, logical person maybe at times. And I thought that was really strange, that I'd be doing something, taking so much time to do this twice a day, that I would do this without a reason anymore. And I thought I should be doing it for a reason, but I don't have a reason, but I kept doing it. And I said, why am I doing this without a reason? I was kind of perplexed, but I clearly kept doing it. You know, I wasn't gonna stop exactly, but I didn't know why.

So I kept meditating and had this question, trying to understand myself. And one day I came upon an answer. And that was that I was meditating to express myself. And maybe a painter expresses themselves with paints and a canvas. A dancer expresses themselves with dancing. A singer with singing. This was my way of expressing myself. And that's why I sat.

You ask, there's an artist ask, why do you dance or why do you paint? Maybe they have answers, but sometimes they don't. That's what they do. And so I was satisfied with that answer. I thought, wow, that's pretty cool. And that felt true to me. Like I sat down to meditate.

And I didn't know anything about, I didn't know much about meditation, which was very fortunate for me. And like I had no idea that you were supposed to maybe stop thinking or not think so much in meditation. And so I never tried to actively stop it. But also I wasn't troubled by it. And yeah.

But what I was practicing was unconditional acceptance of the present moment. So if I was thinking, I mean, that was accepted too. And I was just, just totally, totally accepted this. There's just this. Just be with this, whatever that was. And I wasn't particularly good at it, but I kept doing it whenever I could remember.

And somehow with doing that and settling in, doing it, I did it twice, you know, twice a day, as I said. I also, twice a week, went to a little room in an apartment where this couple had a small Zen sitting group in the college town. Sometimes it's just the three of us. Sometimes there were maybe four or five of us there. And so that was also going on during this time.

And it just felt somehow this thing slowly crept up. Somehow the suffering I wanted disappeared. I wasn't trying to address it. I didn't treat it as a problem exactly, but it kind of dissolved. And then I had this sense of expression. So that was very lucky for me, I feel, to have that. And that kept me going in the practice.

There was something about that sense of expression. I mean, I couldn't tell you what I was expressing. But now I would say it was a sense of vitality, aliveness that somehow was mov-

ing through my body. It felt like it had, oh, I started to feel like I had, that there was an integrity. That was a word I used back there. I don't know what I meant by the word when I was young.

Because at some point during these two years I was in college, this question arose for me. Why do I only have this feeling of integrity when I meditate? The line between meditation and non-meditation is an arbitrary line. Shouldn't I have this in the rest of my life too? Why don't I have it there? And that was when I began to consider, well, how do I bring this into the rest of my life?

And it was this word integrity, which I don't think I meant ethical integrity exactly. I don't know if that was, maybe ethics wasn't in my vocabulary. You know, I was young. But I think what integrity meant for me back then was wholeness. Maybe it was feeling wholeness, integrity becoming one maybe. I can't tell you what it meant. But yeah.

And maybe that was good, because if I knew I could say it, I would probably have messed it up. And so then this sense of integrity was part of this expression, the sense of wholeness, the sense of vitality, something, something that felt really good. It felt not just good. It just felt. It felt this is what life is. This is where a good life is. This is where the rightness is.

This is what to follow. This is what needs to be followed. This is what needs to live in me. And it didn't require any accomplishments. I didn't have to do well in school. I didn't have to have a lot of friends. I didn't have to, you know, it just didn't require, didn't really acquire anything in the world. It just came out of sitting quietly, sitting there, just practicing this strange thing about unconditional acceptance of the present moment.

Whatever I thought that, whatever I was doing when I did that, again, you know. So I'm saying, emphasizing this, you know, and that I didn't know much, partly as a, to apologize to all of you that I teach so much. And so you don't take it too seriously, all these teachings, that there's another way. That kind of what I'm pointing to is not more and more teachings and more doing. I'm trying to point to less doing.

And so then I wanted to let this, whatever was happening in meditation, I wanted that to become more part of my life. I wanted to be able to live from this place, or it just seemed like the most natural thing in the world to do. And it wasn't that I was interested in more meditation, but the only place I could think of where I can do more of this or let it be more part of my life was to go to the San Francisco Zen Center. And I hardly knew about any other Zen centers, any kind of Buddhism back then. So the only thing I knew, kind of. So I went there, and they had me meditating more.

And as I kept meditating, this inner feeling of meditation, of aliveness, of integrity, of something really healthy is going on in here within me, I think a sense of inner health is one way to describe it, wanted to express itself, became stronger. And I just wanted to have that become more part of my everyday life. And so I went deeper into Zen, which meant going to the monastery and meditating even more.

And it was more and more of this ripening or developing or fostering this inner source, this inner vitality, this inner intuition, this inner feeling of health that I had. And this inner feeling of health was a guide for me. This is no, it wasn't so explicit or so rational or so exactly clear. But this is good. This is where to base a life on. This is what shows me the way forward. This is what's important.

And at some point, it showed me that this inner health that was there was responding to the suffering of the world. And it was responding to the suffering of the world that I wanted to help, or to help alleviate suffering. And it wasn't me doing it. It was remarkable that, and one day I was walking around the monastery, and my Zen teacher was walking around too, right into each other. And spontaneously, I didn't, there was no thought about it. I just went up to him and said a very strange thing that you have to kind of not take literally too seriously. Rather, it's a metaphor. So be careful.

I told him, "I'm becoming a response machine." And what I meant by a response machine was that I didn't mean I was becoming a machine, you know, like automated and robot. What I meant was that there's something inside of me now was responding to the world. And it wasn't my usual sense of self. It was something deeper. And it was something arising out of this place of inner health that I was feeling more and more.

It was almost as if I got more and more out of the way. There was less and less of me living in my thoughts, living in my conceit, living in my anxiety, which I had plenty of. I had a lot of guilt. So living in my guilt, I used to say that Gail is short for guilt because I had so much of it. And that kind of all settled away, settled away. I was left with this resonance or this responsiveness, this mutual kind of reciprocity of this chest of mind feeling the world and this chest of mind responding to the world and wanted to live from that.

And then as I continued along this path and started studying early Buddhism, that gave me a more clear understanding of what had happened to me. And this teaching that I offered you today between these two kinds of, two levels of sensations, what I'm calling the surface sensations from the deeper, profound sensations, it's those profound sensations that start being born, start growing and developing. And there are sensations that come from the meditation, come from the letting go, come from the simplification of meditation. We become simpler

and simpler. We're not living in our thoughts as much, not living in our conceits so much, not living in the anxiety or the fear or the anger so much.

These start, maybe they don't disappear, but it's not what we emphasize. It's not where we prioritize. It's not what we're stuck in. And something else can have a chance to show itself. And this is these profound *vedanā*, these profound sensations that are there. And so that made a lot of sense to me when I started to read this. The Buddha was talking about this.

And some of this comes for meditators quite powerfully, especially if you have a lot of concentration built up. The *jhānas* are a powerful way to have these inner wellsprings of profound sensations move through your body very strongly. Sometimes it's almost too strong, how strong the joy, *pīti*, can be. But I've had those, but I think what I value the most is the subtle forms, the things that are not so dramatic, the quieter forms of it that are there maybe in daily life, or can be there if we're quiet enough, sensitive enough, slow down enough, if we're unpreoccupied enough.

Because I certainly lose touch with it when I have to do something that, you know, I get caught in or lost in or preoccupied with it. I certainly lost it recently when I was trying to do my taxes. And, you know, I think wasn't the best of me did not come out in that setting. So there wasn't much subtlety and profundity there in me. So these things happen.

And so what I learned from Zen, and one characteristic of Zen practice that is not really taught much in *Vipassanā*, is that Zen meditation is not a practice, it's not like a technique, but rather it's an expression. And in Zen they talk a lot about getting out of the way, about letting the meditation meditate you. Don't you be the one who does the meditation, allowing something to grow or surface or flow or reveal itself. And a lot of what we have to do is get out of the way. That's what they would say in Zen, I think, and people I know.

But what we say in *Vipassanā*, which is, that's fine to get out of the way, but you have to know what you're getting out of the way of. And otherwise you might miss it because it's subtle. And we're getting out of the way of these profound sensations, this profound vitality that is very healthy. And the reason that's kind of healthy is because it comes from being undivided. It comes from starting to become a whole.

And so the whole of who we are starts working together in a certain kind of harmony. And that brings with it a lot of intelligence, a lot of love and compassion. It's that receptivity and responsivity to the world.

So to discover this deep sensitivity, profound, in this text, the ancient teaching and the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, there is this teaching that I offer today between the surface and

the profound. The literal translation of the term in *Pāli* is sensations of the flesh and sensations not of the flesh, which is kind of odd. I mean, in English at least, if the Buddha was speaking English, you probably wouldn't have chosen that. I don't know in ancient *Pāli* what the associations were. Maybe a little bit like carnal and non-carnal maybe, but I don't think that inspires too many of us English speakers. And so I've tried surface and profound.

But what's very interesting, I think, about this *Four Foundations of Mindfulness* instruction, especially for those of you who haven't seen it before, it goes through and talks about mindfulness of the body first. And so the very first thing it does, it talks about these two practices that I've offered in the morning, between sensing and knowing, knowing and sensing and relaxing. It's the first thing he offers. But he offers that in the context of feeling your whole body, feeling the breathing, knowing the breathing, and feeling and sensing the whole body. So that's kind of what the background is of what we did today.

And then at some point in that discussion about mindfulness of the body, he talks about being aware of sensations. And here they're defined by sensations related to the earth, or earth-like sensations, water-like sensations, fire-like sensations, and air-like sensations. So fire-like is heat, temperature we feel, and earth-like sensations are sensations of the body, of stability and hardness and softness. And so it's entering into the world of our sensations.

After he introduces to us our sensations as a subject of attention, the Buddha offers an extensive exercise on imagining, visualizing a human corpse that's been left in the charnel grounds and what it looks like in the various stages of decay, all the way to it becoming just bone dust in the earth, and everything in between. One day dead to being just everything dissolved as becoming dust. So for some of us it's a little bit graphic, the descriptions. And it says, you know, you're supposed to kind of imagine this in your mind and then be reminded, "I too will become like this someday."

And in ancient India, they had charnel grounds where they just left corpses on top of the ground, and that was the end of it. So that is what happened there. These days, maybe there's cremation or other things that people do. So it's not quite the same, but still the body dissolves at some point. So it's kind of a graphic discussion. And some people say, why is this even in here? It seems very different than this present-moment mindfulness, moment by moment. Right.

And one answer I have for that is that the Buddha introduces sensations, then talks about a corpse. A dead body has no sensations. The nervous system is not operating. You need electricity in the nerves to have sensations. So there's a corpse. The definition of a corpse is it's senseless. It has no sensations.

And then the Buddha introduces how sensations have these three characteristics, either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. It's almost like he's touching into the idea of death and corpses so that after you've done that exercise, you now have a new appreciation, enthusiasm for being tuned in to the sensations of vitality, sensations that are the proof that you're alive. Like this is what life kind of at the heart is, to have the whole nervous system operating and flowing and communicating with each other, and to drop into that level of sensations that is where we're beginning to center ourselves in this text. Why? So that you can then transition into feeling the profound sensations.

And then there's an integration, a harmonizing, a gathering, an expression, an opening that can happen, that cannot happen if you're not aware of it, if you're not present for it. And then the text goes on and it switches from the body and the sensations to the mind. And it describes how there is a transition in the mind as well, to the mind state, starting off being kind of caught in greed, hate, and delusion, caught in attachments, to becoming free of attachments. And the mind that's free of attachments becomes big, becomes expansive, starts feeling free. In my language, feeling at ease. The mind starts feeling settled and unified.

The mind has its own unfolding in this process. And so it's kind of like we dip deep into the body, deeper into the profound sensations. And then from there, we surface into the mind. And that's where knowing becomes more important. And we know the spacious mind. We know the liberated mind. We know the unified mind. And that's preparation to go further in this process of mindfulness.

So profound sensations. And maybe this has given you a little different sense of possibility. Maybe this shifts a little bit the way that you would like to do mindfulness. Maybe you're willing to kind of maybe be less interested in some of the things that have been distracting you from being concentrated, from being settled in the practice, because now you have this very fascinating thing to be interested in, to dip into, to get out of the way for, to allow it to come up, to allow it to express itself. And that is this profound nature of who you are.

And the final thing I'll say about it is that, as I said or mentioned earlier, that there are profound sensations and there are also profound thoughts. Not profound in the sense that it's, you know, some brilliant philosophy or something, but profound meaning it comes from a deep source within. That's not the surface mind where most people live. And the primary characteristic of that deep thinking that the Buddha talked about for himself was that as he deepened his practice, this profound source of thinking helped him to ask really good, helped the Buddha to ask good questions that opened his mind further and forth further.

Sometimes we think of profound thinking as providing answers, but for him, it was the pro-

found thinking provided questions. And questions can open, open the mind, open the heart, open the eyes, not to think about it, but to feel and see and know our way. What's here? What's happening? What's happening on the way to freedom?

So my friends, that's what arose today from maybe, if we're a little bit lucky, rose from my profound place. I didn't know what I was going to do today until I started. So hopefully it was nice for you. And I certainly appreciated being here. And I appreciated, I was a little surprised to open my eyes sometimes and look at the tiles and see how still you were. It felt very sincere, very dedicated. I felt, wow, I can feel this even on Zoom. It's very nice.

So I appreciated being here. And so we have two minutes. And I don't know how to end properly, but some people are ending with hearts. So it's very nice. And so thank you.

May whatever benefit that has come from this day of practicing together, may we, individually and as a community, find ways to share the benefits with the world, with the people we'll encounter and talk to and want to support. May we also respond to the suffering of the world. Thank you very much.