

Friday sit with instructions

Gil Fronsdal

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So the sequence, suffering, faith, appreciation, gladness, joy, it's easy to lose track that the context for faith and gladness and joy is suffering, that our relationship to suffering can begin to become wiser in the context of these other factors that come into play. Then there is a deepening of the connection to suffering. So not only do we see our contribution to it, but also, because we're feeling very intimately and directly the sensations, the direct experience, we can begin seeing not only our contribution, but also the impact it has on us, the effect, the influence it has on us.

And some of the ways that we contribute to suffering certainly can be ways that we grasp and hold on or resist. But those things like grasping and clinging, being attached, resisting, can be part and parcel of fear, anger, aversion, greed, striving, desire, confusion. And so to know the suffering of all these states, and to know the impact it has on us. And part of that impact is that it adds a mood, it adds an atmosphere, in the same way that mood music in the movies creates an atmosphere around something which doesn't inherently have that.

So there might be a beautiful forest path, kind of a wide, wide-ish path, lots of space, open, beautiful trees glistening in the sun, leaves glistening, very beautiful place. And then the music devas decide to provide music for the forest path, and it's ominous music, and your hair stands on end, your belly goes in a knot, because of the music, not because of the... Or there's other devas who begin making drumming of war coming, trumpets of war, maybe supported by footsteps pounding on the ground of 10,000 soldiers. And now a whole different emotion arises, where the high school marching band comes along and playing happy music. The high school just won the local game, so everyone's screaming and yelling at happy music, and you're sitting there meditating, and now there's a whole different mood that passes over. The path was just a path in the forest, simple and beautiful.

So the same way, when we have these, our contribution to our suffering, sometimes we'll cast a mood on us, and then we take in that influence that gets absorbed in us. And sometimes, even if it gets absorbed in those ways that we perceive, we then perceive with fear, we perceive danger. We perceive with anger, hostility, and we see enemies. We see with greed, and we see all the things that we want. And we see with confusion, and everything is challenging.

As we go along in this practice, we start seeing how we're contributing this. We start being able to feel and sense what's happening, the influence it has on us. And we begin to feel lighter. We begin to feel like we don't have to believe the mood music. And as the practice continues, we can orient ourselves in a very appropriate, healthy way to the faith, the trust that's there, the appreciation of having a practice, the gladness of it, to the joy of practice, the joys that come with practice, that might be very subtle, but are there as well.

And instead of believing in the mood music of, but rather that's harmful for you, that contributes ever more suffering, you don't push it away, realize it's there. But to begin drinking in the joy, begin taking in the places where there's maybe a gentleness, tenderness, that there is another way. There's something more going on here. The thoughts that you have create mood music. And it isn't the thoughts that have such a big impact on you necessarily, but rather the mood of those thoughts, the atmosphere that they spread through your body.

You can sometimes feel how the mood of the thoughts spreads into the diaphragm, the belly, arms, sometimes the face. And that mood can have a much bigger effect on us if we're concerned with what we're thinking, the thoughts of the... Because occasionally those thoughts create a mood that undermines us, brings its own suffering. But instead of focusing on the thoughts and judge navigating them, trying to figure them out, maybe feel the mood that they provide. Then feel it with joy or feel it with faith. Feel it with the appreciation of having a practice that can just feel the truth of this without believing it, without somehow going along with it.

And then with time, there might be more joy that arises from a different place, that arises from within, maybe very subtle, maybe from the depths of your being. It can take many forms. It might be a contentment, a delight, a gladness. It might be a little spark. It might be a feeling of aliveness, vitality. It might feel like a gentle flow of goodness.

So as we're sitting here in the silence of the room, in whatever degree of stillness, spaciousness, within which you feel your body, feeling and knowing your body breathing, and as you exhale, are there simple and maybe enjoyable ways of softening your body? Simple ways of settling the body, especially ways in which you're pulling away from the pull of gravity,

tightening up, settling, letting the pull of gravity, the weight of your body, settle into a inner stability. As you exhale, might there be ways of softening the thinking mind, the control tower, releasing any tension associated with thinking? As you exhale, letting the thinking mind settle down into a stability, the thinking mind quieting like the waves on a lake becoming stiller, smaller, until the lake spreads out flat, peaceful, without any boundaries, without any shores.

So the mind settles, quiet, to where it has no edges, and then without trying too hard. With a light touch, look around to see if there's any pleasure. Maybe in the breathing, maybe in some spreading way through your body, maybe in the simplicity of being aware. And as you continue, perhaps any pleasure or gladness or joy that might be present, maybe you can be receptive to it, open to it. So that becomes the atmosphere, the mood that comes along with your practice, which somehow on its own begins to spread through your body with every breath.

If there is any pleasure, even the subtlest way of your well-being, as you breathe, almost like drinking it in, let it contribute to the mood music of how you're aware. Pleasant awareness. A very light, pleasant noting, knowing maybe with an intimacy, with breathing, an intimacy that subtly spreads its influence of well-being, pleasure, joy. If you find yourself distracted, let the distracted mind melt back into the simplicity and pleasure of being present.

Today, for this sitting, there'll be no bell to end it. For those of you who have something at 9:30 to go to, it is now 9:10. And you can end. It's right for you.