

## Friday Dharma talk

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So the next feature in the journey, the next landscape to enter into, is tranquility. And in a few different lists, tranquility follows joy. And it is a wonderful partner to joy because joy has a little bit of excitement in it. And so to have that excitement become quieter, become calm, opens up a new vista in the practice. And tranquility, calm, serenity, peace, is a wonderful companion to the practice. It supports the practice, it guides the practice, it leads the practice onward.

So tranquility here is not a dullness. It is not a numbness. It is not, you know, going asleep. It is not a kind of, “Good, easy. We’re just going to cruise along here.” It is not a place where nothing matters. “Oh, whatever. It’s fine.”

The tranquility is alive. There is aliveness to it. There is often a kind of clarity to it. There is almost, almost like it has energy, like it is energized. And I say almost because maybe it is not quite that, almost that. But it is certainly not a lack of energy.

It is certainly not having too little energy. Maybe it is just the right energy in some way. So the energy is just right, so it disappears. You cannot see it. Something like that.

And so the first kind of the five kind of deepening of tranquility is to recognize it, is to have some familiarity with it. And in the beginning of the practice, there might be no state of tranquility that we can recognize. But an important thing we can recognize is that we can relax. The word that I use as relax is, in the Pāli, more technically called tranquilize, make tranquil. I like the verb to calm.

And that is something sometimes we can do. We can relax tense muscles. We can soften the shoulders. We might be able to relax the belly. In my early years of Zen practice, there was a regular practice for me to relax my tense belly.

I did not make it an ongoing project. I was content that in one 40-minute period of Zen meditation, I would relax it maybe two or three times. And so just then, but you know, I sat so many periods of 40 minutes that probably the accumulated effort of that kind of began to change something, drop by drop. Then slowly my belly started to be relaxed more and more, until it kind of did not need to be relaxed anymore.

And as I said in the beginning of the retreat, that was the Buddha's beginning instructions for mindfulness, is to know your breathing, feel the body, the whole body as you breathe, and then relax the body, calm the body, help the body become tranquil. And so in that regard, there is something called tranquility of the body. In the real feeling of the body, there can be a feeling of a lightness in the body. There can be a feeling of clarity, a feeling of being open, porous, kind of this clarity where there are no edges to the clear space around you almost. Or it might be more centered in some parts of the body. And it feels maybe a feeling of healthiness, feeling very healthy in the body.

And then there is the calmness of the mind, tranquil mind. And especially there, I liken it a lot to the calm surface of a lake. And for me, I have had some very significant, I did not realize it at the time, but some of my experiences early in my life turned out to be like food for me or something, or they had a big impact on me in ways I did not realize until years later. And they kind of almost shaped me, or, you know, it is in my bones or my muscles. And I have gone back to some of these places as an adult and been surprised by it. Those feelings are there when I thought, that is where I first felt this in a powerful way.

And one of the things that happened with my early years of Zen practice, I had recovered memories. Wonderful. Usually people think that is bad news. But recovered memories, I started having some feelings of calm or tranquility. And I said, "Oh, I remember this when I was six years old."

I would take this white sheet and cover the kitchen table so that it went all the way down to the floor. And then I would go underneath the white sheet. There was a particular time of day when the sun would come in through the window and fill this under-the-table area with light. And it was so clean and clear and calm that there was a complete tranquility. And I would feel so cozy and safe there. And I would just sit there and just, I do not think I did anything.

I do not know what I did. I just took in the peace, tranquility. And so as I did the Zen meditation, "Oh, this is what I know. This is my under-the-table feeling. Wow, cool." And still, recovered memory, I remember that.

And then another one is that of being either on a boat. Being from Norway, there was a lot

of time on boats. Being on a boat and waking up early in the morning, dawn, and there is no wind, and the fjord is completely still, the water not a ripple, blue sky and lots of clarity. And everything seemed like it was in order, was at peace in the world. And as a kid, I would take that in.

I just loved sitting there and just, I do not even know what I was gazing at. Maybe, where do you see peace? So my eyes could not really, probably did not focus on any particular thing. It was just kind of like the eyes were just roaming gently, softly over the landscape, over the water. And so these metaphors, these analogies for me, you know, speak to my own experience of mental calm, mental tranquility.

And one of the things that I started learning when I was introduced to *Vipassanā* practice, where there was a strong emphasis on knowing in a way that Zen did not have, and that was introduced with this kind of more emphatic knowing called mental noting and labeling, was that I learned after a while that even if I did not feel calm, if I felt agitated and my body was troubled and I had all kinds of challenges, I started paying attention to how I noted, how I knew something. And I could, even if I was totally certifiably agitated and anxious, somehow reorient myself, my mind. I could kind of bring my mind to be calm as I knew, as I noted, a calm noting. I could adjust myself. At least I can, when I am going to note something, I am going to note it calmly.

And it is the kind of adjustment that maybe a person can make. Maybe you have done this too, in the old days, when you would go into a library. And you would go up to the librarian to speak, and you would go very quietly. It was like the most natural thing in the world to be quiet in the library. And so it was a quiet voice. One of the great experiences of tranquility, where it was completely natural if there was going to be any speaking at all. It would be so calm and slow and tranquil.

Of course, I was going into my kids' preschool when they were napping. It is like one of the most precious things in the world is a room full of napping preschoolers. Oh, you do not want to mess with that. It is so important to keep them quiet. I mean, not important to keep them quiet, but it is just like so precious, and the consequences if they wake up sometimes.

In fact, my older son, his whole academic career started off terribly. Maybe it was like, was this going to be a foretelling of what was in store? He was expelled from preschool the first week. I mean, like just, "Don't come back," because he woke up during the nap and woke all the kids up. It was a little bit weird that this is how the preschool teacher treated him, but she did not want to have anyone disturbing things. So he did not get a second chance. That is how the beginning of his academic life started. I do not think he remembers, but his parents

recovered.

And so this noting, even if you are agitated, can you calmly know it? Can you reorient yourself? Could you somehow shift things in your mind? Can you find kind of in your back room of your mind someplace to calm?

I remember there was also the same son when he was probably in third grade. We realized he was dyslexic. And so we had this dyslexia program he did for it. And it seemed to have made a big difference. But the biggest thing was when his dyslexia, he was very visual, and his visual field would start spinning sometimes in his mind somehow. And there were times when it looked like he was possessed. It was really something to see. Kind of a different mind would take over.

But his dyslexia program taught him how to get oriented. And it was that he would imagine he had a green light in the back of his head, and he would take a deep breath, and imagine that from this green light he would breathe out and send his light going straight out in front of him to focus on something. And there were times where he was, I think it would probably be okay, appropriate to call it crazed, possessed or something with this condition, and we would tell him, "Orient." And he would stop, stand tall, take a deep breath, and then he could do this long exhale. And when he finished his exhale, he was back to who he normally was. It is quite something that he could make that adjustment.

So there is a way sometimes that we can make some kind of adjustment in our mind. We can turn things around. We do not have to be stuck just because this is the state that we are in. "This is who I am, thank you." This does not have to be how it continues. There might be some healthy and very appropriate way to make an adjustment with the mind.

And the adjustment I am suggesting is the one that you can maybe have the most ability to adjust, is how you know, how you are mindful. And maybe this is where mental noting can be helpful. If you ever should get close to feeling crazed, it is, "Crazed. Let me really focus on that. Oh, it is just being crazed. That is all." Just say it in a calm way. Or, you know, not that any of you are crazed, but maybe agitated.

Or maybe you hear a sound, and you note, "sound." Because there can be very subtle ways in which the way we talk to ourselves, the way we feel and sense and know, has been influenced by the mood music. And so then we hear a sound, and it is not just a sound, it is sound and fear. "What's that sound?" Or there is a sound, "Is that something good that I want?" Sound comes out of the kitchen. "Are they doing cookies?" So the knowing can get excited, it can be agitated, it can be a little tensing going around it.

So can you begin finding an appropriate, healthy way to adjust how you know, how you are mindful, so that that brings along a little bit of calm, a little bit of tranquility? Can that be an orientation, a settling? “Okay, here I am going to not just know it in some kind of dutiful way, just as a technique. But can I know whatever I am knowing in the present moment? Could I know it in a way that has me oriented,” or in our language, maybe being focused, concentrated? Can I really know it, and use the knowing as a settling, calming way of really connecting to what is there?

Suffering we have, can suffering be known calmly? And then to appreciate whatever calm you have. And so the first thing is to recognize it is there or bring it forth, and then to support it. To support the calm. And calm can be supported by relaxing.

The Buddha’s teachings talk about tranquility of the body and tranquility of the mind. And so you kind of think that then there are two separate things, mind and body. And that is a whole philosophical, metaphysical issue. But I think I have said this already, that I think the mind is different than the brain. I think the mind is wherever the nervous system is in the body, with the nerve network.

So wherever, you know, even at the end of the fingertips, if there are nerves there that pick up sensations, then the mind is there as well. And so the mind is actually almost the same as your body, in the sense that the mind is the same as the body that you can experience. If you have a felt-sense experience of your body, there your mind is, because that is where your nerves are. You are not going to sense and feel your body without there being nerves.

And so this kind of broad, and the reason I am mentioning it now, is that the mind and body are kind of intimately connected and communicating back and forth. So if there is a relaxing of the body, calming of the body, it will calm the mind. If there is calming of the mind, it will relax the body. And so these work together. So recognizing calm of the body, recognizing the calm mind, is very important.

The Buddha said that the way to develop calm is to recognize calm. The literal way in which he talked about it, he said, “The nourishment of tranquility is tranquility.” So if you have some beginning of feeling calm, take time to know that. Take time to feel that. Because if you do not, then you miss the nourishment that can come from calm.

And so actually calm grows as you are nourished by it, as you take it in, let it fill yourself. So one way to support the growth of calm is to recognize it well. Feel it in the body, feel it in the mind. Feel it in how you know and how you are aware.

So there is recognizing the calm. There is supporting calm to grow. And then there is more of

appreciation, not of the particular sensations of calm, but what can be called a state of calm. And a lot of these things are states more than particular events.

One of the interesting things about practicing *Vipassanā*, especially in Burma in the early years in which I practiced, it was so object-focused. Like every moment of mindfulness was supposed to have an object. And so there was, you know, know that, know that. So like the object was pain. The object was an in-breath, was a sensation in your body. The object is a sound.

And so some people point out that this Mahāsi practice is very object-focused. And in a sense it is true. But what tends then not to be included are those things that do not make specific objects. And these are the states we can have.

If you look around this room at the space in the room, it does not really work to stare at the space. You will lose the space if you stare at it. Your eyes will get cross-eyed or something. But your eyes have to float in the room, kind of move gently. And you can kind of know there is space here. But space is not an object that is specific to a moment of seeing. It is the absence of objects in a sense. So it is more like a state than it is a singular object.

So there is a whole class of things that we can experience in our body-mind which are not specific objects of attention that you can kind of just know precisely and sense directly, but you can still know them with a wider mind. So there are states that we have. So something like faith tends to be more like a state, or confidence is more like a state. And certainly joy can have a lot of particular, and gladness and appreciation can have a lot of particular things you can know about it, but also it is a broader thing. It is like a state. Tranquility is more like a state.

So at some point the deepening of *Vipassanā* practice is supported by being nourished by these states, appreciating them, taking them in. And it supports this idea that it is not all just a mental exercise. It is not like you have to just kind of get yourself revved up. And there was a school of *Vipassanā* that existed a little bit 10, 15 years ago in the United States where the faster you noted, the faster you would get enlightened. So like speed noting was notes per minute, 0 to 60. "I went 0 to 60 in five seconds."

And that particular school of *Vipassanā* had a lot of people who ended up in the psych wards. It was not very healthy for some people. But the opposite of that is these wonderful states that nourish us, that feeling of healthiness, feeling of goodness, feeling of wholesomeness. And so to take time, this like forest bathing, dipping into the lake and really feeling the state that is there of serenity, of peace, of calm, and taking that in, and not missing it because you

are trying so hard to do this noting practice or this just knowing this, this, this.

But yes, know specifics. Get close to the specific sensations for sure. But, you know, with the support of joy, with the support of appreciation, with faith, with the support of tranquility. So again, all this is very closely connected to suffering well. That is what we are looking to do here, to suffer well, to suffer better.

Most of us suffer worse. That is what we know how to do. Very few people know how to suffer better. So if you have suffering, know it calmly, know it peacefully. It is possible to know suffering and know it joyfully. But now we are talking about suffering better. And so today, this calm knowing of suffering, it is a world of difference from an agitated knowing of it.

So then, you know, this tranquility can also be a state. And so it is also something we can allow ourselves to be immersed in. We can kind of settle into it, open up into it. This is good.

And then, so there is recognizing it. There is practicing with it, softening, relaxing. There is immersing yourselves into the state. And then there is being wise about it, just being discerning, to be able to really be skilled at what is going on, to know how to use the tranquility to further the practice.

And one of the ways is that tranquility is a wonderful reference point for noticing the ways that you lose your tranquility. The more quiet and still the surface of the lake is, if there is no movement at all, then you will see the little fish kind of pop up, a little circle of waves. But if it is really windy and choppy on the lake, the fish might be coming up all the time, but you never see it because the water is so agitated. So you can see something.

So with the mind, you could see, for example, maybe you are pretty quiet and peaceful, and you might see certain thoughts arise. And you can feel that now there are waves, there is agitation. And because you can see that you are better off without thinking, it might occur to you, maybe I will leave this alone. I will let it pass. Let it pass through. And it goes. And things settle back down, calm.

The calm gives you a vantage point to see. If the mind is more agitated, if you have one more agitated thought, you do not even get to notice you have it, because that is just the nature of everything. But the calm can show you that maybe it is not necessary to be involved in that thought. You might have the world's most wonderful thought, but actually it is nicer to be calm than have the agitation of that thought. You might have the world's worst thought, certifiably the worst thought that anybody has ever had in the world. That would be quite an accomplishment. And you see it come. Why even care that it is the worst thought? Why get

involved? Just let it pass. Let it go. Do not get involved, because you know something better, to be at peace, to be tranquil.

So because I have this weird relationship to words, the word in Pāli for tranquility is *passaddhi*. It begins with P-A-S-S. So let it pass. I like that. It helps me remember. I just let it pass. *Passaddhi*, let it pass.

And so there are all kinds of things you will see in that reference point to tranquility, of how you lose tranquility. And learning how you lose tranquility is a tremendous exercise in self-understanding. I do not want to understress, I do not think you can overstate, how important it is to see what goes on inside of you that causes you to lose your peace, your tranquility, your ease. Because that is information that is so useful, to understand the tricks, the magic of the mind.

You know, that magic trick that the person has on stage can be fascinating to watch. “How did that happen?” It is just amazing until they explain how the trick is done. And then you are not interested anymore. Then it is not so interesting. So by understanding how the magic of the mind works, you might not be so fascinated by some of the things that go on in there. You leave it alone.

So tranquility is a wonderful point in this practice where we start seeing and understanding how we get caught, how we get attached, how we get resistance, how the mind moves in all kinds of ways. And that is valuable. It is not a mistake. It is the very thing that we want to be able to study and see more clearly.

And it is also fascinating to see with a tranquil mind that joy might arise, and to see that joy arise as just another wave, just another splash in the surface. And then you might say, well, joy is good, but it was actually better to be peaceful. “Oh, I have been trying to be joyful for decades. And now finally I know something, you know, I am not going to pick up that joy,” because, I mean, it is disorienting for some people. But no, because now you know something better. There are all kinds of things you start seeing are not needed when the mind is quiet and peaceful enough.

One of them, which is fascinating, is interest. At some point, interest is really helpful in practice. To be interested, it keeps you engaged and involved. But at some point, when the mind is quiet and still enough, interest is too much. It is just another wave. Curiosity. Shouldn't we all be curious? Yes, until it is a hindrance.

And so why this is important in relationship to joy is that the joy factor, the *pīti* factor, it can feel like it is completely natural, and that we are innocent participants in it. But in fact, it is

very easy, and it is almost part of this *pīti* factor when it is strong, that we are actually a little bit encouraging it. We are leaning into it. And sometimes it is only because we are interested in it. There is interest in it, and so that is kind of keeping it going.

And so to see the added interest, “Oh, I do not need to be interested. It is okay.” Let that wave calm down. Curiosity, there is this kind of, you can see the excitement, which is a lot of waves. Just let the waves settle. Let’s settle down. Let’s not throw any more stones in the water to agitate it. Let’s have it calm.

So one of the ways that there is an important deepening of this practice in relationship to tranquility is to let the tranquility support you in seeing more clearly, seeing what is happening more clearly. And because sometimes self-knowledge is not good news, it is very important to learn how to know calmly. “Oh, look at that. I have a foible or two.” It is just a foible, as opposed to, “Hope no one noticed. Maybe they will kick me out of IRC because who knows? Because I wanted more broccoli.” You know, we get so excited and reactive. But just know, “Oh, there is an extra thought.” That is all.

*Kornfield*, maybe you know this, but there was a time he gave people the instructions to count how many distracted thoughts they had during a day. And it seemed to work really well for some people because by the time they got up to like 322, they just thought, “This is ridiculous.” And that was enough to keep the allure of their thoughts, or the power of being involved with thoughts, from continuing. It would dissipate.

And then tranquility is onward-leading. Tranquility in itself kind of shows you, if you are really sensitive to it, if you are really settled in it, quiet, you can sense that it is almost like there is an opening in it. There is an invitation in it here. It is almost like it is creating an opening. It is calming something, it is settling something, and creating an opening for a new state to arise, some new kind of opening to some possibility.

Sometimes it has felt like it was the bottom for me, the bottom of a bowl, and now the marble in the bowl had rested at the bottom, but was poised as if the bottom of the bowl had a hatch. If that hatch opened, it would fall through. It would, yes, to a whole other world that was underneath there. And sometimes it is just like an opening, like the door is about to open or is opening.

So I do not know if these kinds of language I am using make any sense for you in your experience. Everyone has a different way in which these things work. But tranquility itself, if you are really present for it, will not feel like the end. It will not feel like, you know, that you will get attached to it. You will not feel like this is where the practice ends. But rather it just keeps

going, it keeps opening, it keeps kind of feeling like, “Oh, something is unfolding here.”

The drops from the rain have become streams, have become lakes, and they are overflowing the lakes. And now the water is down on the maybe flat plateau, and just moving along peacefully, quietly, tranquilly. But it is still moving. There is a flow in the peace.

So perhaps it is nice to, we came to this tranquility stage of the *Upanisā* sequence before a quiet day tomorrow. Maybe the IRC will feel a little bit more tranquil, or you will have a little more tranquility than on a day that is a little more spacious in the schedule. And I hope that you are nourished by any degree of calm, tranquility that you might experience within you, outside of you, or both. Thank you.