

Practice Notes: Belonging

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And then to say a few words about the practice, somehow over the last 10, 12, 15 years, there's been a concept that has become culturally important, at least in circles that I travel in, seen as being very important, is the idea of belonging. To feel like we belong. And it's so central to many people that even sometimes the topics of DEI (diversity, inclusion, and equity) are subsumed under this word belonging, and it has a more personal feel to it than these more abstract words.

And I'd like to suggest that one way of understanding belonging is the first task of meditators is to belong to themselves. And what many people will discover, if you sit down to meditate and just really pay attention to what's here, is how disconnected many of us are from ourselves. How we're not settled on ourselves, where we're actually distracted from ourselves, disconnected from ourselves even. Or if we start connecting to ourselves, the experience of being here feels uncomfortable.

There's tension and agitation and maybe fear that abides in the body, that sometimes have accumulated in a culture where those kinds of feelings are kind of almost not encouraged exactly, but fostered by how the whole culture operates. It can be uncomfortable to sit with oneself. And so there's a kind of pulling back, pulling away, not really wanting to come closer to feel oneself, because what's happening inside is uncomfortable. And by doing that, we don't belong to ourselves.

And it's a radical thing to belong to oneself, or to say it in a different way, to inhabit oneself, to be living in oneself rather than beyond oneself, outside oneself, disconnected from oneself. So part of the practice of mindfulness, just sitting and breathing, and being aware of the body, and trying to come back here, is to begin to soften and relax those forces that keep us from belonging to ourselves, inhabiting ourselves, going back here to be here for ourselves.

And that task here, during a daft day like this, is to, if that's comfortable for you and understandable, that that's what we're here for, to inhabit ourselves, to live here in this body and mind, as opposed to living in thoughts about the future, thoughts about the past, thoughts in fantasy, thoughts about our judgments and preoccupation with whatever it might be, which take us away from ourselves. And it's a radical thing to live into oneself, to be present in oneself.

And the opportunity of that is then the whole world can radiate, can flow out of us into the world. And that's a very different experience than living in a way where it's what the world brings to you, which is the problem, which is that what we want, we want the world to provide, or the world is doing too much. And we're kind of oriented so externally sometimes. It's radically different to turn our insight out and belong to oneself, to be really present here, mindfully for one's own experience, and discover how that can be where the world is born and how it comes from us.

And then we're not necessarily so much the victim of the world anymore, but we're the contributor to the world, hopefully with our goodness. So hopefully that makes sense, and I hope that being here is a time for some deep embodiment, inhabiting yourself. Thank you.