

Neuro-Bhavana: Brain-Based Tools for Cultivating Factors of Awakening

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Welcome to everyone. I'm delighted that this is a benefit for Sati Center. I met Gil Fronsdal. We were fellow board members many moons ago at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. And I remember a particular conversation with Gil quite informally. We had lunch together, and I appreciate him a lot as a teacher. And I asked him a question that is a good one to ask oneself and certainly to ask others.

And I think it's also quite helpful to ask people that we respect. And the question was, so what are you doing in your own practice these days? What's your practice these days? What's a fundamental focus for you? Earlier, I was reading a beautiful little teaching from Thich Nhat Hanh, bless his memory, and he was referring to the notion of a kōan in that, particularly the heart of it, as something that really concerns one in a good sense. One is really engaged with in terms of their own practice. It matters to them. They've brought their heart to it.

So in a short version, I asked Gil that question. So, Gil, if I could ask you, what are you really practicing with these days? And he looked at me, you know, his eyes kind of brightened. He twinkled and smiled a bit, and he said, I stopped for suffering. Woah, drop the mic, right? Stopped for suffering, his own and others.

And you could say that that was the central concern initially of the Buddha himself in his own journey, seven or so years, as best we know, toward his own awakening. He was concerned with and deeply interested in what are the causes of suffering and the causes of its end, which essentially he said is the one thing he teaches. And we have the suffering, the difficulties, the challenges of life, the stress, the anguish, the angst, the neurosis. You know, I'm a psychotherapist. All this stuff in my mind, you know, in minds of other people.

Can we stop for that? Can we take a breath and pause and bow and give what it's like to be ourselves its due, and to give what it's like to be others their own due? I am minded, if I can go to this kind of depth here, of a very famous story in the tradition of early Buddhism, represented by this surviving written record that's more extensive than certainly the written record of, you know, let's say, the Judeo-Christian Bible, the *Pāli Canon*. There's a story of a serial killer named Aṅgulimāla who had the mistaken belief that somehow his own awakening would be served by taking the lives of others. And he decided to try to get the Buddha.

And as the story puts it, Aṅgulimāla was chasing the Buddha, walking rapidly toward him, running toward him. And the Buddha was simply strolling serenely, but somehow Aṅgulimāla could never catch up with the Buddha. And finally Aṅgulimāla called out, Stop, stop. Why don't you stop? And the Buddha turned to him and said, Aṅgulimāla, I stopped a long time ago. Why don't you?

Stop for suffering. These are deep matters and also completely accessible. They are our endowment. They are our reality. And wisdom regarding them is freely offered by the Buddha and the lineage of teachers over two thousand five hundred years and practitioners, in which, certainly in early Buddhism, there were no secret teachings. It was freely offered widely.

The Buddha made it very clear in his last days that that's how he wanted it. And while certainly he extolled and practiced himself a monastic path with its very singular focus that did not have, as he put it, the dustiness of householder life, in which I certainly live, and I think probably everybody here lives, still, the opportunities for awakening were made available to householders and monastics alike. And with some grudging and arm twisting from his female relatives, the Buddha opened the doors wide, certainly for female monastics as well, and female householders to have full access to the teachings of awakening in his, you know, very patriarchal and medieval society in which he originally taught. So that's kind of a bit of a context for what he was doing there.

Point being, here we are, right? Can we stop for suffering? As Gil practiced, practices, and taught me, can we stop for suffering? Can we stop for our own suffering? Can we stop for the suffering of others? Not frozen, not immobilized in the face of it as a kind of trauma response, understandably as that can be when it's there.

And rather than that, as a mode of practice, can we engage suffering? Can this stopping be reflective and aspirational and productive as we engage the difficulties of life? So that's what I'd like to explore with you. And as I said, this is a benefit for Sati Center. One of the great practices that helps us and others in terms of suffering broadly is the practice of generosity.

Generosity is one of the six primary perfections, the *pāramīs*, that get developed over time. The Pāli word being *dāna*, one you're probably familiar with. There are many forms of generosity. Probably the least among them are, you know, monetary. And still, monetary generosity lubricates the wheels of organizations and enables people to have lives while doing their work for such organizations.

So whatever you're moved to offer financially, in addition to your other forms of generosity here, your other forms of *dāna* here, the *dāna* of attention, the *dāna* of *sīla*, of restraint, of self-regulation, the *dāna* of expressions of, you know, the four dwelling places of awakened beings, you know, compassion, kindness, happiness for others, and equanimity. Those are all offerings as well and really important to credit, to acknowledge, to appreciate in others, and to acknowledge and credit those of oneself. So in addition to those intangible and nonmonetary offerings, if you're moved to support the Sati Center, and I'm sure Rob has some kind of a link for you to click if you like, you know, that's very welcome.

None of that goes to me. Just if there's an opportunity to donate to me, don't do it. If you do, I'll just pass it along to the Sati Center. Okay? So my plan here, hopefully collaboratively with you, is to, for the next three hours or so, ending really pretty close to twelve noon Pacific Time, explore some depths of practice and tools for practicing in general.

You know, the kind of, in other words, if we learn increasingly how to turn straw into gold, how to engage the experiences we're having at the time and help them leave lasting value behind, that's what we'll be exploring here, particularly informed by some of what we've learned in the last two thousand five hundred years since the Buddha taught, especially the last two hundred fifty, and especially, especially in the last twenty five, about the intersection between mind and matter, mind and body here. And that's a lot of what we'll be exploring. So I hope to do this with a fair amount of experiential practice and questions and discussions with you all.

Feel free to use the chat. Some teachers turn it off. I'm an aging hippie. I kind of believe in, you know, adults are adults, and they can guard their sense doors, as the Buddha taught. And if the chat is bothersome for you, just turn it off. Or if somebody says something you don't like, just let your eyes keep going.

If you do use the chat, try to focus on your own experience, your own practice, what's helpful for you. Focus on, if you could please, questions that are your kōans. In other words, questions that you have intimate concern with rather than spinning out into philosophies of various kinds, as tempting as that can be for myself with this material and perhaps tempting for you. And definitely stay out of persuading, criticizing, selling, teaching, enlightening other people, if you could, in the chat.

We won't do breakout rooms. They're fairly complicated to manage. It's simpler just to keep going forward. I recognize this material can be really provocative and engaging. Of course, take good care of yourself. This is not psychotherapy of any kind. It's not a treatment for any condition of any kind.

There's a presumption here that you can manage your own stream of consciousness. You know, even if sometimes it's uncomfortable, you know, I'm not going to deliberately seek discomfort, that if it is uncomfortable, you can manage that on your own. Okay, it's kind of foundational. I hope to take about a ten-minute break roughly midway through for my own comfort, if not for yours, and then we'll keep on going. Okay. All right. Great.

So I'm going to do this partially by using PowerPoint slides. I still remember the first time that my teaching partner and friend and the neurologist Richard Mendius and I did a workshop at Spirit Rock, woah, way back in the day, actually almost ten years ago, 2016, and no, 2006, almost twenty years ago, nineteen and a half years ago, *The Neurology of Awakening*. And we brought in PowerPoint slides, and it was a whole three-ring circus at Spirit Rock. They let us get away with it.

And that kind of began the whole process for me, beginning essentially twenty years ago when right around this time I began creating the slide set for that neurology of awakening course or workshop, one-day workshop. Anyway, here we are. So I'm going to do this. I'm going to toggle back and forth. Hopefully the slides are not bothersome.

So I'm going to share my screen. Good. And here we go. I'm starting with one of my favorite quotes from the *Buddhadharma*. We will make the slides available to you. Rob will do this afterward. This is also being recorded.

Although I'm not seeing a sign of that, Rob, I assume you're recording this. And I'm recording it myself, so you'll have kind of a high-quality recording access to it. So I love this teaching. Train yourself in doing good that lasts and brings happiness. So, we see the fruits of our efforts here.

And then three fruits in particular: cultivate generosity, the life of peace, and a mind of boundless love. So, right here, we have deliberate practice. We have deliberate training, and we have the fruits of training. And one of the things I'll be exploring with you is how do we balance the two truths of our Buddha nature already and the fact that, hoy, it's a zoo in there, right, in the mind. And how do we deal with challenges in the world?

So, this is the workshop we're doing, Neurobhāvanā. *Bhāvanā* is a Pāli and I think even Sanskrit word for cultivation, for deliberate development. And I want to begin with a bit of just sitting here together, spending a little time, just kind of resting in practice. And then actually, I'll back up, and then we can dive into some of this material. Okay.

So how about we spend about ten minutes here maybe to kind of arrive, settle in? All right. I'll offer pretty minimal instruction. Finding a posture that is comfortable for you helps you be alert. Eyes open or closed. Establishing mindfulness as the Buddha taught, presence of mind.

And helping yourself settle in to what could be called the ground state or resting in which the body and the mind become increasingly quieter, settling. Letting go of little trains of thought that tug at you to carry you away. And remaining aware of some anchor for your attention, commonly the sensations of breathing, or anything else you like, such as a word or image or feeling.

If it's the breath, for me, it's a little like as the chest rises and falls and the air flows in and out, it's a little like rising and falling. Maybe staying in contact with a kind of buoy in a warm, comfortable tropical sea. And as the waves of thought and sound and sensation and image come and go, staying in contact with breathing, rising and falling as the waves pass on by through awareness.

And as you stay in touch with breathing, allowing awareness to widen and open, for example, your body as a whole as you breathe. And as you remain in touch with breathing, allowing awareness to widen and open, for example, to include your whole body as you breathe. Opening to the sense of already here. Already now. Already enough.

Okay. So I'd like to begin by exploring some wise views, some perspectives, and I'll move fairly briskly through these and then open it up for questions or comments. Feel free to put them in the chat. I can see them as we go. Maybe we'll have a chance to talk with some individuals along the way with a limited amount of time for that and staying focused on the topics here in general, and topics of general interest if I do end up talking with you. Okay.

So, I'm going to share my slides. Share my screen. We have this quotation where we began. What is the training of the body-mind that lasts and brings happiness and cultivates generosity, peacefulness, and love? What is that?

So, as context for this, we're going to be exploring at first what I think of as three fundamental kind of legs of the three-legged stool of practice: loving, knowing, growing. But first, some context. It is said that the cart of practice has two wheels. There are two tracks. This is a fundamental framework that's really useful.

There is certainly the track of gradual development. We gradually let go of afflictive, burdensome, harmful to others states of mind, actions, intentions, so forth. And then we also cultivate wonderful things. For example, seven factors of awakening. We cultivate mindfulness, investigation, energy, bliss, tranquility, concentration, equanimity. These are qualities that we develop over time. Okay.

And meanwhile, there is true nature already. The true nature of mind, the true nature of matter. Deep down, they have the same nature, as we'll see, and the ultimate deep nature of everything already, which is our own nature as well. The two tracks. It's normal in practice to kind of swing back and forth between them.

It's also not uncommon, unfortunately, for people to become somewhat dogmatic about one track or another, like this is the only way, and oh, that's the only way. They're both the way. And there's a natural rhythm in a person's life also when they kind of emphasize one or the other at different times. For myself, increasingly, I'm emphasizing the second track of true nature already.

It's also the case that they support each other. You know, as you do the difficult work of gradual development, it can be really helpful to appreciate, Hey, deep down, you're already beautiful. You're already good. You're already innately good. Underlying reality is innately profound and all right, right, on the one hand. On the other hand, to be able to simply rest in that underlying true nature, you know, for most of us takes gradual development.

We keep removing the obscurations. I think a little bit as if, you know, the ordinary habitual body-mind is kind of like a velvety shroud that obscures the light that's always already there. And with every little bit of practice, moments of insight, realizations, we put little pinpricks, little holes in that, you know, dark velvet shroud. And eventually, the shroud itself becomes increasingly gauzy. And the light that was always already there, you know, is more prevalent, keeps shining through. We're more and more continuously in touch with it.

So one understanding of practice is a lot of what we do is we help ourselves become increasingly permeable, increasingly lived by the good news that is always already true. So the two together, right? And that said, I want to start with a little emphasis on what is that true nature already, and then we'll mainly focus on the path of gradual development.

So here's a lovely quotation from Wendell Berry, not an official Buddhist. He writes, Move my mind now to that which holds things as they change. What is the unchanging ground, the unchanging? Words fail, of course. Container, space, field, mystery in which conditioned phenomena arise and pass away.

The Buddha and other Buddhists have spent a fair amount of effort, you know, in their own gradual development of the *Buddhadharma* to talk about what is this ground. Well, here we have Thich Nhat Hanh. Things appear and disappear according to causes and conditions. The true nature of things is not being born and not dying. Our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death. And we must touch our true nature in order to be free. Very direct, very clear.

Here's another quotation from the *Pāli Canon*, the early teachings of the Buddha. The entire world is in flames. And detail here. Usually when the Buddha uses the word world, he's referring to the world as it is perceived and constructed in the mind. He acknowledged that there are real things out there. There are real carts, real trees.

He basically grew up as a well-to-do, in that time, farmer, essentially. So he's very aware of real crops, real food, real bodies. That said, he's really particularly talking about our experience. So the world that we live in, you know, the stream of consciousness is in flames. The entire world is going up in smoke. The entire world is burning. The entire world is vibrating.

But that which does not vibrate or burn is experienced by the noble ones, where death has no entry. In that my mind delights. And then the born come to be produced, the made, the conditioned, the transient, conjoined with decay and death, a nest of disease, perishable, sprung from nutriment, things that feed these processes, and craving's cord, that is not fit to take delight in.

The escape from that, the peaceful beyond reasoning, everlasting, the not-born, the unproduced, the sorrowless state that is void of stain, the cessation of states linked to suffering, the stilling of the conditioned. Bliss.

So, what do we have here? We have mind, matter, and mystery. We begin with mind, which is to say broadly, we begin with experiences. There is hearing. There is seeing. There is tasting, touching. There is loving. There is hating. There is choosing. There is avoiding. There are these things.

And then from mental processes, we infer a physical reality. There really are rocks. There really are trees. There really are asteroids. There really are another one or two trillion galaxies literally in our universe. This is real. You know, there is a body here. There's a body that decays. There is a body that bleeds if it's cut. Mind and matter are both real.

So we have this. And we have, of course, the deep nature of both mind and matter, as the Buddha taught, as having these, basically being made of parts that are connected and changing. So everything is processes in relationships with each other. This is the nature of our experiences, and this is the nature of rocks and trees and clouds and galaxies. You know, everything is made of parts that are connected and changing.

Therefore, they are, in the technical sense, empty of absolute self-existence, empty of self-creation. You know, everything in the conditioned Big Bang universe is an unfolding process of parts that are connected with each other and changing. This is a very deep teaching. I'm not going to get philosoph-

ical about it. It's standard *Buddhadharma*, and it can be understood, and usually is initially, conceptually, even if you resist it.

I resisted this teaching a lot when I was younger and came upon it initially in Alan Watts's classic book, *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*, which annoyed me so much I flung it across the pavement next to a large swimming pool where I was reading it at the time. But anyway, like it or not, everything is made of parts that are connected and changing, even the sense, you know, the enduring sense of me, myself, and I. Okay.

And then, you know, maybe that's all there is. Boom. Mind, matter, Big Bang universe. That's it. And that's a position that many people take. On the other hand, it's clear to me, and I think to many others, that certainly the Buddha was pointing to something meaningfully distinct, categorically distinct from conditioned intertwining processes of mind and matter, thoughts and things. And we might call it mystery.

He referred to it ultimately as *nibbāna*, *nirvāṇa*. Others might use words like God, the divine, the ground, spirit, or simply mystery. I'm not going to argue whether there actually is more than mind and matter. I have teachers who just leave it at that and are not interested in going further and quite doubt actually that there's more to it all than simply the unfolding mind and matter of the Big Bang universe. And there are other teachers that I respect immensely and who say, No, obviously there's more to it than that. Okay?

So whether there is more to it or not, if there is more to it, if there is really mystery, if we have both, you know, conditioned mind and matter resting in unconditioned mystery, unless we're able to rest continuously in the extraordinary unconditioned ground of all and stay in contact with it, as I believe is a significant aspect of the awakening process, well, we need to work with mind and matter along the way.

So, we have this teaching from Tibetan Buddhism that the process of practice has qualities of gradual development, sudden awakening, gradual development, sudden awakening, and then gradual development after that. So, I'd like to talk with you about some fundamental ideas about, you know, the efforts we can make in terms of gradual development, particularly the ones at the intersections of mind and matter, mind and brain together.

So, one way to look at one's practice is in terms of, as I said, this sort of three-legged stool. In Pāli, *mettā*, *sati*, and *bhāvanā*, loving, knowing, and growing. And I'll come back to this actually with an experiential practice a little later on. I just sort of want to flag these aspects of practice.

I deliberately put loving first because I think actually that some kind of movement of the heart to practice precedes mindfulness, in a sense. I mean, I'm not going to argue about that. But it's more like, yeah, because we stop for suffering and we have a heart-centered, a heartfelt, there's a caring reaction. We're not merely, bleh, who cares about suffering? We want to do something about it in others and in ourselves.

What are the causes and conditions of suffering and its end? You know, we come at it from the heart with qualities of, you know, compassion, kindness, courage, friendliness toward ourselves, duties of care toward ourselves, and duties of care toward others. We start there. Okay, it's foundational. And also then we become increasingly aware.

Mindfulness is simply sustained present-moment awareness of the outer and the inner world, moment by moment by moment, right? There's a welcoming of the present. The root of the word, you may know this already, for *sati* in Pāli is memory. So there's a recollectedness. There's a metacognitive quality. We're aware that we're aware as we sustain present-moment awareness. Knowing, mindfulness.

And then growing. We're not merely heartfelt and merely mindful in the present, but we're developing along the way. We're healing our pain. We're healing the residues of our childhood that burden us and impede our practice and obscure the mind. We're learning from the experiences we're having. You might think about your own three-legged stool. And is one leg in particular pretty short these days? Shorter than the others? Maybe that's the one to really focus on.

And in my own journey through, I started meditating in 1974 pretty casually and, you know, foolishly in a lot of ways, you know, my little windbreaker and my long hair and my gold-rimmed glasses, sitting on a hillside in the grass waving in Southern California in the breeze. Okay, good start. But really kind of got focused in, you know, maybe thirty, thirty-five years ago. And in that journey, it was really helpful for me to realize at a certain point that I needed to work on the leg of loving.

You know, the knowing aspects of insight and mindfulness were there. And the effort to deliberately internalize beneficial experiences to grow lasting good inside, that was there too. But I needed to focus more on the loving side. On the other hand, having been in Buddha world now in the West for, you know, three or four decades, I think people tend to leave out *bhāvanā*. They tend to leave out deliberate internalization of experiences at the time.

Sometimes because they're afraid that, Oh, if I do that, I'm going to get all egoic about it and goal-directed and so forth. Not so. Not so. We can actually deliberately internalize beneficial experiences while releasing them as they pass through us. And in fact, as we'll see a little further on, as we deliberately internalize the healthy psychological nutrients that our heart longs for, we gradually fill ourselves up from the inside out and develop an increasingly unshakable core of resilient well-being as the container of it all, as the basis or field or ground of all that we experience, even as disturbances of various kinds, you know, understandably still pass through awareness. Both/and.

And a structure for this, a framework that I find quite helpful, is to regard the various psychospiritual tools in the warehouse, you know, from all the various traditions, including the one I know best, which is the Buddhist tradition, especially early original Buddhism. These tools can be sorted into kind of three major clusters. First, the foundational practice is to be with what we're experiencing.

Now, it helps us to be with it if we bring qualities of, you know, *mettā* to it, of lovingness, of compassion

for ourselves, you know, friendliness, kindness, kind of a welcoming. Certainly the opposite of, you know, hating it or being hostile to what we're experiencing or what is occurring around us. We simply be with what's there. But that's not enough, even if it's foundational.

Sometimes simply being with what's present in the mind releases it. It leaves. The tendency gradually is erased. Fine. But if not, we need to work with the mind, not just be with the mind. Being with and working with the mind are like the two wings of the bird of practice. We need both wings to soar.

So, working with the mind is summarized in the wise effort element in the *Eightfold Path*. It has two qualities: reducing, preventing, abandoning that which is burdensome, painful, harmful, unwholesome, afflictive, unwise, etc. I'll call it negative for simplicity. And the other practice is not just to clear the ground, to release what's problematic. It's also to turn to the good that is also true or potentially true and gently invite it without grasping, without clinging, gently, skillfully encourage it, open to it when it's already present, receive it into oneself, appreciate it, value it, have the humility that's needed to appreciate that, woah, we need to take in the good, take in the food that we're hungry for in this life.

Particularly, to make a quick point in passing, given the brain's negativity bias, given its inclination to be like Velcro for bad experiences but Teflon for good ones. That's Mother Nature's well-intended plan to help her little chickadees survive, you know, in Jurassic Park and the Stone Age and, you know, in really tough times sometimes today. But that negativity bias tends to tilt us toward suffering and craving, which creates more suffering.

The negativity bias tilts us toward conflicts with others, and it acts as kind of a bottleneck that obstructs the internalization of the beneficial experiences that are the fundamental pathway to the gradual development of what we are, you know, growing inside. So, all three of these are really important. They serve each other. As we release, you know, afflictive, distracting tendencies inside our mind, as we also decrease them out in the world, then we're more able to be with what's there.

Also, as we grow the good inside, as we grow mindfulness, we increase the positive of mindfulness, of attentional control, of executive functions that can sustain attention to this or that. As we develop, you know, perfections of patience and generosity and energy and effort over time and other things, as we do that, we're also more able to be with what's there. And as we be with what's there, we become increasingly skillful with letting go of what's harmful and growing what's actually good.

So, I think of this a little bit as like the garden. You know, we have a garden in the mind. We can witness it. We can pull weeds. We can plant flowers. All are important. And it's quite helpful to ask yourself, Okay, pardon me, is one of these important for me particularly to develop these days?

You know, I know a lot of people who are really good meditators. They can really be with what's there. And, you know, they're pretty much as unhappy as ever and pretty much as difficult to work with, live with, you know, as ever. They haven't really shifted much inside. Then on the other hand, I know

people, me included among them, certainly previously when I was younger, who are really into, you know, fixing, fixing, you know, changing, changing what's there, decreasing what's negative, out, you know, grow the good, hold on to it.

You know, they really get caught up in that. They turn their own minds into a huge self-help project. That's a problem too. They need to be able more able, they need to become more able to simply be with what's there. That certainly has been something for me to develop over the last, you know, ten or twenty years. Okay. So, we have this as kind of a framework.

All that said, now I'd like to do an experiential practice with you. But just before I do that, I want to see if there are any questions or comments about that fairly rapid, you know, talk I just gave right there. Anything unclear or you dispute or you want to know more about? Any questions or comments in the chat? You okay so far? Fundamental structure?

I sure wish someone had sat me down early in my practice. And by the way, if you want to raise your hand and talk with me, it would help me if you first wrote your question in the chat for other people to see. That'll speed us up. So, if that's okay, Debbie, that'd be great, if you don't mind. And it also helps me kind of understand things and get a little bit of a head start in responding to it. And maybe you inadvertently, you know, put your hand up there.

So myself, I sure wish I had a chance to, you know, just have somebody, you know, explain all that to me in ten minutes, kind of like I did right there early on. That would have served me a lot. Okay, so, Nevan, so what arose for you is the question of how social psychology influences practice. So, Nevan, I'm going to ask you to unmute. If you're willing to turn on your camera, that'd be cool. If not, it's okay. Hey there.

So when you say social psychology, are you referring to that as an academic field? Or probably I suspect more pragmatically, you know, how other people or societal structures, including injustice, affect us? Or what are you getting at there? Yeah. Okay. Oh, I think that's wonderful that you're talking about that. And I have a little calligraphy from Thich Nhat Hanh in my home, Walk like a Buddha.

In other words, yeah, if people are a little more able than we are, you know, maybe it's a stretch, but it's still within reach, they're rested in a quality or they respond in a situation or maybe they're a little more skillful interpersonally or intrapersonally. Yeah. And then we kind of channel them. And for me, this can be quite somatic, you know, to kind of feel into what it's like when Gil said stop for suffering with a smiling twinkle, right? I kind of felt that, and I, you know, that landed in me. So yeah, I think that's really aspirational.

A version of that for me is as a rock climber, you know, I'm an aging intermittent rock climber at this point. I would watch people who are like human geckos moving over the rock, and I would just kind of tune into what that would be like myself. Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, beautiful. Did you want to say more about it than that? Yeah. Fantastic.

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I'd certainly want to affirm that. In effect, you're talking about functions of empathy and empathic attunement. And there's a kind of a whole developing field called interpersonal neurobiology. Dan Siegel coined that term. You also have the work of Stephen Porges and others that really ground inner healing and personal practice, as well as with implications for society as a whole in our mammalian and then primate, you know, nature in terms of polyvagal framework, the ways in which we co-regulate each other.

And there's been a lot of developing work in that space that, if you're not already aware of it, you might want to check it out. Yeah, the terms I used: interpersonal neurobiology, polyvagal framework, co-regulation, attachment theory. There's a lot about that and increasing interest in applying it. I think, what's his name, Jeffrey—blanking last name. Someone might put it in the chat who talks about interpersonal mindfulness. People do interactive mindfulness. So, yeah. Okay, good. So that's that.

And, yeah, I want to respond here to, let's see, Debbie, and then I'll move on to a practice with you here. So, Debbie, I don't know if you want to raise your hand. Maybe I'll just actually, in the interest of time, if it's okay, I'll just speak to it right here. Hi there, Debbie. Do you want to raise your hand? Do you want to talk to me? So I'm asking you to unmute. And so we—Okay.

Oh, yeah. Aging hippies. Aging hippies climbing jeans. All right. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, oh, huge. We could take the next two hours, but we won't. But we could. You know, first, as you may know, the story of the Buddha encountering as a youth the so-called four heavenly messengers, the four messengers, the four wise messengers, you know, encountering someone who was aging, someone who was ill, someone who was dead, and someone who was practicing deeply in a path of awakening. And these are teachings for us.

So one way to, I think, relate to all this at an individual level is as teachers, and to feel the weight of it and to stop for it and to just let it land. To also recognize there, but for the grace of fill in the blank, go I, you know, so many causes and conditions. You know, I had the privilege. I had the advantage. An advantage occurs through disadvantaging others.

I have been given advantages structurally in American society as a male, straight, white guy born into a, you know, kind of lower-middle-class background, you know, in California. And just some fraction of what I have today is ill-gotten gains accrued through disadvantaging other people. And reckoning with that, as well as what one has that is the result of just luck, good and bad, and, you know, their virtuous effort, those three primary sources of what one has today.

So, you know, to me, it's really important to hold all that in awareness, including in a very, very moral way. So—and then what do we do? I think of this incredible teaching from Nkosi Johnson, who you may know is this boy born with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. And he became a spokesperson for people with AIDS, particularly children, including in a time when AIDS was very stigmatized.

And he said, and there are versions of this teaching that you can find elsewhere too, he said, Do all that you can in the place where you are with what you've been given in the time that you have. And I recall

as well this light-bulb moment in which, to Nevan's comment, a friend of mine who was just about to give his first Dharma talk as a Zen teacher many years ago in the San Francisco Zen Center, and I was teasing him that, in fact, it was known that a number of people in the audience would be unhoused. They would come in for the warmth and the coffee and the kindness, but they weren't necessarily very interested in the topic.

And I was teasing my friend, partly because I was envious that he got to be a teacher and I hadn't yet become. So I got to cop to that. But anyway, I said, so how was it like for you to prepare and give your total heart to something you care deeply about knowing that there's some people in the room who just don't really care? And he looked at me like I totally didn't get it, because I didn't get it. And he said, Rick, I'm there to make my offering.

And he gestured at my feet like he was setting something down, you know. I'm there to make the offering as skillfully as I can, toss in a joke or two to help people pay attention. But after that, it's out of my hands. And that's a framework as well, that when we do all that we can in the place where we are with what we've been given and the time that we have, we're making our offerings.

And then we ask ourselves, Okay, today, did I make the best offering I could? In a duty of care to our future self, the person we will be tomorrow, we have duties of care to that one over whom we have great influence and therefore great responsibility. We also have duties of care, as we feel them and know them and take them on ourselves, to others. Did I make my best offering today?

And, you know, go to bed knowing that you did the best you could. Or even if there's, as Suzuki Rōshi put it, you're perfect as you are and there's some room for improvement. Both/and. Right there we have the two tracks of the wagon of awakening. Yeah, that's how I would say it. And not be glib about it, you know, really take it on.

And I think, frankly, there's plenty of room, including for organizations that are devoted to personal well-being, like Spirit Rock, Sati Center, and others, to really start taking on increasing forms of collective action aimed at upstream sources of suffering that impair the well-being and the health and so forth unjustly of those that we're, you know, engaging with downstream. I think there's plenty of upstream opportunities, including in America today. And if you're interested in some stuff about that, you could check out globalcompassioncoalition.org.

The older I get, you know, I've been practicing for a while, the older I get, the calmer I get and the madder I get. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that combination, I think—Call me Rick. It's good enough. Ditto back at you, Debbie. Okay. So let's do a little practice here. Okay? Thank you so much for all that.

So I want to explore with you, just touching, the sense for you of broadly loving, knowing, and growing. There's a saying that we differentiate to integrate. So, it's really helpful to tease certain things apart, mental qualities included, to know what they are. What do they feel like, especially in your body, the somatic-emotional registration of important states of being? And then we're able to find our way back

to them increasingly, and we're reinforcing their consolidation and conversion into lasting changes of neural structure and function, you know, when we know what they're like. Okay?

So, we're going to do this with loving, knowing, and growing broadly. Here we go. Take about ten minutes here. So, first off, as you settle in, if it's okay with you, getting a sense of sensations of breathing in the area of your heart, the center of your chest. Technically, the physical heart is slightly to the left of center for most people. And as you breathe, you can make one or a few exhalations particularly slow and deep and long, inhaling deeply and then exhaling slowly, naturally slowing heart rate, coming home to the heart.

And some are already doing. If you like, you could put a hand over your heart just to bring awareness there. Bring to mind someone that you have heart for, that you care about, even if the relationship's complicated, just kind of focusing on whatever is available as friendliness toward them, caring, kindness, love, compassion, respect. In awareness, emphasizing the experience, not the complicated history, just the experience of lovingness, goodness.

Knowing that there are naturally other things flowing through the mind sometimes, and still, as you can, finding a sense of your own natural, innate goodness. Your simple, ordinary, good intentions toward others, good wishes toward them. Your own basic decency. In the natural mix of all this, there could be a soft and tender compassion. And also there might be a delighted friendliness, a happiness for others.

And in all this, you can particularly be aware of a quality of loyalty to others or allyship, being for them, you know, on their side, kind of helpfulness toward them. And know as well that you can bring these qualities of heart toward yourself, toward the soft, sometimes wounded, younger layers inside. You can bring kindness and compassion toward them.

Other things may arise in the mind that make this challenging. It's okay. They arise. Be aware. Let them pass away while refocusing, in a sense of being good to yourself in healthy ways, including in kind of muscular ways in which you're determined on your own behalf. You're bringing heart to yourself in supportive ways. Standing up for yourself.

And you can also be aware of lovingness flowing into you, not just outward from you. Other people supporting you imperfectly sometimes, but still others who care about you, letting this in, even if you wish there was more. Whatever is the case and has been the case, allowing these aspects of heart to be present for you too. Resting in relatedness.

And then widening the field of awareness to be aware of, to be mindful of whatever you're experiencing now in an open and spacious allowing kind of way. Finding a stability of presence. And while remaining mindful, in the third aspect here, deliberately receiving into yourself, allowing into yourself one or more qualities of being that you find beneficial here.

Staying with some quality of being that you find beneficial, such as the sense of being for yourself

with heart. Or perhaps you had an intuition that you could be kind to someone who's important to you while also knowing that all you can do is make your offering, and what they do with it is out of your control. Perhaps that's important to you here, to let in, to establish increasingly within you.

There might be a sense in your body of a kind of softening or opening to receive deep within yourself something that is important to you, to encourage, to stabilize increasingly within you. Learning is aided by micro-concentration practices in which we stay with an experience five, ten, twenty, or more seconds in a row, becoming increasingly absorbed in a wholesome way of being as we absorb it into ourselves.

It can help to explore what is rewarding about this way of being for you, what's relevant about it for you, and also what's enjoyable about it. What feels good about what you are internalizing? And you will get a sense, as we move toward an end here, of being this way, being this attitude, being this perspective, being the body sensations, the somatic qualities of this way of being, giving over to this way of being, surrendering to this way of being, letting it be a primary current carrying you along in the river of living.

I think it was Gil Fronsdal who pointed out, or certainly he was the first person I heard this from, that what is routinely translated as the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, this fundamental instruction from the Buddha's collection of practice guides for the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, could arguably be translated better, the *sati*, mindfulness, *paṭṭhāna*, the *paṭṭhāna*, as the four establishing of mindfulness.

Where is mindfulness to be established? And what are we establishing within us? And I like that. I like that languaging, you know, the sense of establishing, in a good sense, occupying, you know, what is occupying us. If you think of the translation of the word *Brahmavihāra*, the classic compassion, kindness, happiness for others, and equanimity, *vihāra* is a dwelling place. The *Brahmavihāras* are the dwelling places of developed beings, even, you know, heavenly beings.

And these are also places where we can dwell. We can dwell in compassion. We can dwell in kindness and so on. And compassion, kindness, equanimity, and altruistic happiness for others can dwell within us ourselves. So it's a really fundamental question. Where are you dwelling? What is dwelling within you?

I like that word dwell, you know, single-syllable rooted word, dwell. And so, when we did that practice there around loving, knowing, and growing, it opens us up into considering what is being established within us and where we dwell in our minds. What we attend to is gradually what dwells within us, for better or worse. And the nice thing about being with what's there is that we are aware of it.

But as soon as you move into that being-with relationship to it, I'm good, that mindful witnessing of it, you get some space from it. And that acts like a kind of a circuit breaker, so it stops getting reinforced in you while still being able to be with it. So—and then meanwhile, we can deliberately concentrate

in a good sense on and deliberately absorb into ourselves the qualities that we want to develop over time.

So, this aspect of dwelling, establishing in a good way, occupying, you know, is really important. I like the fact also that, as the Buddha said, as best we know, in his own kind of development toward awakening, as he developed, he referred to very painful things. We could apply them to very seductive and alluring things. Painful racking feelings arose, he writes here. He said, painful racking feelings arose, but they did not invade my mind and remain.

That's a crucial point about our worries, our sorrows, our anger, our addictive tendencies, our aversions, you know, our narcissistic clings. You know, I know what that's about. That, you know, okay, it arises, causes and conditions, it arises. Does it invade your mind? And especially, does it remain? Does it occupy you? Does it come to dwell within you? That's the key distinction here and a very practical one.

So, I'd like to now focus on some material about what we're growing in ourselves. What are we encouraging? What are the flowers? What are the seeds? What are the fruits we're trying to encourage in the garden of our own mind? And how do we do it? It's the fundamental how of practice. So, I'm going to move through some material quite rapidly in the slides. You'll have access to these slides later. You will not be tested on this in any official way, although life tests, of course.

And then I'll slow it down for discussion and some experiential practice. Okay, so here we go. Strap on your seatbelts. All right, so that's where we were. Now I want to explore with you what, and including for you, what are you trying to grow in yourself these days? What are you trying to—what's the good change that lasts that you're encouraging or aiming toward these days, even as you rest in true nature already?

So, a fundamental idea in medicine and psychology, the stress-diathesis model says that whatever is the case for us currently and in the future and the case for others is the result of three kinds of factors, three categories of factors: challenges, vulnerabilities, and resources. If we want to make things better, all three of these are important opportunities to focus on.

And personally, I think there's a lot of opportunity with resources because they are often more amenable to our influence, whether it's out in the world or the body or the mind, the three locations of challenges, vulnerabilities, and resources. And resources are more positive. It's more hopeful. It's more optimistic. So, in terms of resources, where are they located? Well, they're located, as also our challenges and vulnerabilities are, out in the world, in the physical body, and in the mind. All three are important.

Now, if you're kind of a dork like me, you realize, oh, we have a three-by-three matrix here. We have challenges, vulnerabilities, resources, world, body, mind. Gives us nine opportunities to make things better. I, in my career and generally, have focused on resources in the mind. They tend to be amenable

to influence, and we take the fruits of them wherever we go. And we can apply the resources we develop in our mind, as someone was bringing up earlier, to challenges out there in the world and ways of helping other people. Okay. So far, so good.

I'm going to be focusing here, as I think the *Buddhadharma* focuses generally, on resources, wholesome, beneficial factors and other qualities inside the mind. And when I use the word mind here, as I wrote in the chat, I mean it in the broadest possible sense. You could use a word like heart or heart-mind, the totality of our consciousness.

And most fundamentally, this is essentially how neuroscientifically oriented people use words like mind or related words like cognition, as referring to information that is represented by the physical nervous system. We have intangible information represented by a tangible nervous system that somehow, still not scientifically clear, is the basis for the experiences that animals with sufficiently complex nervous systems like humans, cats—I think cats are having experiences. I think honeybees with a million neurons, ten times more than a typical ant, sorry ants, I think honeybees are having experiences, and I like imagining what kind of experiences they're having.

In any case, the word mind here is used really broadly. Okay? So, mental resources. In psychology, if you're at all familiar with these terms, there are many examples of mental resources, intrapersonal resources, like executive functions, positive emotions, or inner resources, resilience, grit, determination, art. You know, we explore inner resources. Mindfulness is an inner resource. Learning how to learn, as we'll be getting into, is a major inner resource that gives rise to the rest of them.

So this is from classic clinical psychology or psychology in general. And then, of course, we have some major lists in Buddhism of inner resources. We have the seven factors of awakening. That's the list on the left: mindfulness, investigation, energy, bliss, tranquility, concentration, equanimity. We have the *Brahmavihāras*. I'm not going to repeat the word equanimity there. We have compassion, kindness, and altruistic joy.

We also have the three pillars of practice classically in Buddhism, *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. *Sīla* being virtue, also sometimes translated as restraint, morality, ethics. We have wisdom, you know, and insight and so forth. And then we have other elements such as in the *Eightfold Path*, wise view, wise intention, wise effort, and some of the perfections, generosity, patience, honesty.

All right. So it's not a heresy, what I'm exploring with you. I've had the experience sometimes of teaching this material and people standing up angrily sometimes saying, Oh, that's not mindfulness. Well, first of all, mindfulness should not be conflated with an utterly inert orientation to one's own mind. Mindfulness is to be present while doing the dishes, talking with a child, working your way through a conflict with somebody.

And mindfulness is certainly present as we engage in the heart and as we engage in the cultivation, the establishing of beneficial qualities within us. It's okay to be deliberate about this. So, pause here.

How about you? For you, what is calling your heart? You know, I think of meditation as fundamentally homecoming to the good news that is already true in the present moment, the enoughness of the present, the extraordinary giftedness of the arising present continuously at the front edge of now, always, you know? So that's a kind of homecoming.

And also, deliberately in meditation sometimes, we can rest our mind on what draws our heart. And in that resting, increasingly internalize, increasingly establish within ourselves that which draws our heart. So what draws your heart? What for you is the highest happiness? And for real, in the time that's remaining in your life, what are your own aspirations in practice? What calls to you?

What might you make more room for in your life these days? What do you kind of know is true and you've been resisting? Or what within you would just love to be more unleashed? And you've been kind of holding back or bottling it up out of understandable fears from the past, maybe your own childhood. All right. Now you're old enough to let it, to let go. And to honor your aspirations and to surrender to wholesome currents of practice running through you, what inner resources would help you these days?

All right? What are you leaning into so that it increasingly dwells within you? At this point, sometimes people go, Ah, it's too much, too complicated. One thing. What's one thing that you're particularly cultivating in the garden of your mind these days? It could be really quite modest. I've been cultivating deliberately for a while a bit to disengage extremely rapidly from kind of aggravatedness or contentiousness with my wife of now forty-four years, who I love dearly, who's a wonderful person.

You know, how rapidly can I just like step out of, you know, an unnecessarily irritable response, which sometimes includes, after a little bit of a pause, talking about something real, but how quickly can we pull out of a contracted craving mind state? That's the practice. Or maybe for you, there's something really quite exalted and aspirational that you're wanting to develop these days. All right. It's helpful to have some deliberateness about this.

Okay. So, I'm going to take a peek at the chat for a moment here. I'm going to stop sharing so I can see the chat. Great, great. I love how you're sharing yourselves, what you're cultivating these days in the chat. All right. So now in the interest of time, if it's okay, I'm going to keep scooting along.

Now that we've talked about what we're growing, which, of course, is an ongoing lifelong practice. You know, I have people I know who I consider to be really far along in practice, and they tell me they are still developing. They are still developing. I mean, yeah. So even after awakening, we keep developing. All right. So how are you growing the what that you're trying to grow? How do we grow it?

This is quite fundamental neuropsychology. So, the majority of a person's inner resources, the good that we develop over time, is acquired. Some fraction, on average, in the population, roughly about a third of our psychological qualities are heritable. They are grounded in fundamentally the DNA we inherited, you know, from our two parents who inherited from their parents, in an unbroken line back to the primordial seas. The other two-thirds is up for grabs.

Now, it's very shaped by external forces, to be sure. And for some people, they've been really shaped by external forces. Other people have been really shaped by innate heritable factors because that one-third, two-thirds loosely is an average across the whole population, across all qualities. So, of course, we should do what we can to help external conditions and influences and factors be as good as possible.

And if the long arc of history bends toward justice, I think Dr. Martin Luther King said that, still it's a really long arc. Meanwhile, we can focus on acquiring beneficial qualities, which are also good for other people, you know, through our own processes of learning. And this is fundamentally helpful to me.

Now, this fundamental process of learning, of development, the acquisition of greater trait tranquility or trait mindfulness, trait compassion, trait *bodhicitta*, that means changing the brain for the better. Any lasting mental change requires lasting neural change with a nervous system that, of course, is embedded in and intertwining with and co-created by other bodily systems: cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, the microbiome in the gut has a lot of influence on our mental processes, hormonal systems, the immune system. It's complicated.

And, you know, the final common pathway of all the causes creating this moment of what it's like to be you or me, hearing, seeing, thinking, feeling, this moment, the final common pathway of all the causes streaming together to construct this moment of experience passes through right between your ears to make this moment of being.

There are increasing studies that show how the physical brain is increasingly changed by the activities of the intangible mind. You know, thoughts exist intangibly. Mind and matter co-occur with causal processes flowing in both directions. I'm going to stay out of philosophy about that. And we have here an early study from Sara Lazar, a very groundbreaking academic, then at Harvard, I think still at Harvard, Sara Lazar and colleagues, who showed that longtime meditators had thickened neural tissue, cortical tissue, in three key regions of the brain.

Number one, in the insula, which is involved in self-awareness, especially embodied self-awareness. Number two, regions in the front portions of the brain that have to do with the executive control of attention. And a little bit of benefit, these are typically mindfulness meditators doing a lot of mindfulness breathing, somatosensory cortex in the very tip-top because they were tuning into their body a lot.

There's the classic line we'll get to in a minute, neurons that fire together wire together. So they got the neurons that were involved in those particular activities of internal awareness and regulation of attention, they kept them firing together, so they began to wire together as well. Interestingly, at the bottom in the scatterplot, there were many people in this study. The blue circles are meditators. The red squares are matched nonmeditators, matched by gender, age, maybe socioeconomic status. And there were more people in the study than that.

In any case, in terms of the thickness of cortex, which varies, it's roughly, you know, like half an inch thick, maybe a little less, a third of an inch thick, you know, it's really quite thin, that there was an improved thickness in these key areas. That's what's being measured here. And that's important to really understand because neurons are really small, and in your brain right now are roughly eighty-five billion neurons amidst another hundred billion support cells, glial cells and so on.

And a typical neuron makes several thousand connections with other neurons. That means, do the math, a little arithmetic there, several hundred trillion microprocessors, little synaptic junctions are sparkling away moment by moment by moment right now, here, you know, as we talk. Wow. You know, the neuroscientist Charles Sherrington referred to the brain as the enchanted loom continually weaving the fabric of consciousness.

So these little teeny-weeny synapses are so small, you could put several thousand in the width of a single hair. The cell body of a typical neuron is kind of fatter, a little fatter. Well, five of them in the width of a single hair. They're really, really small. Point being, if you get a little change of thickness that's a fraction of a millimeter, that's involving potentially millions of synapses.

Well, the point here is that if you look at the scatterplot on the bottom right, as people get older, naturally neurons die. Normal process that involves what's called cortical thinning due to age. It's not dementia. It's not Alzheimer's. It's a normal process that is associated with things like, where did I put my keys? Where are my glasses? Oh, they're on top of my head.

Well, take a look at the scatterplot. The red-square people, as they got older, had thinner and thinner cortex in these three key areas. On the other hand, the blue-circle meditators preserved cortical thickness in those three key areas. They kept using it, so they did not lose it, which has a lot of implications for everyone, including an aging population.

So, this process of deliberate cultivation is certainly supported by great teachers such as the Dalai Lama. Here we have the systematic training of the mind, the cultivation of happiness, the genuine inner transformation by deliberately selecting and focusing on positive mental states and challenging negative mental states, working with the mind, is possible because of the very structure and the function of the brain. Good news.

And experiencing alone does not equal lasting change for the better. Simply because some neurons are firing together in the moment does not mean necessarily that they start wiring together as well. This is humbling and wow important. In psychotherapy, coaching, daily life, most teaching, we're good, generally speaking, at activating beneficial states in the moment, beneficial thoughts, feelings, desires, sensations, intentions, enactments. Pretty good at that. We're pretty good at cultivating states.

We tend to be pretty poor in these professional fields, in which I've been for a long time, and including as a teacher in Buddhist tradition. We tend to be pretty poor at deliberately converting, deliberately

encouraging those passing states to become lasting traits, including the beneficial traits we're wanting to cultivate. It's humbling. What fraction of our thoughts, feelings, sensations, good intentions, and so forth have any lasting value, lead to, therefore, any lasting change of neural structure and function?

It's inherently a two-step process. We can talk about it in different ways. I've used the language of states and traits. Technically, we could talk about encoding of, you know, the sensation in the moment or, you know, an intention in the moment, the encoding, and then second, with learning, consolidation as a lasting change. I use language like activation and installation because I probably read too much science fiction.

This two-stage, necessary two-stage process of lasting growth is summarized in this famous saying from the work of the Canadian psychologist: neurons that fire together can wire together. People are pretty good at that first stage, but without that second stage, which is so easy to forget as we chase the next experience or we are interrupted by something else that dislodges the current experience from the container of working memory before it has time to sift down into producing lasting changes inside, that process is very powerful.

And then meanwhile, the negativity bias is operating, in which fairly momentary experiences of irritation, loneliness, sadness, guilt, shame, outrage, anger, frustration, vengeance, etc., become rapidly converted to neural structure. You know, there's a wonderful proverb in the *Buddhadharma* that could be summarized as, you know, the mind takes its shape from what it repeatedly rests upon. I'm paraphrasing some, you know, some key language in the *Pāli Canon*.

Well, a modern update would be your brain takes its shape from what the mind repeatedly rests upon. This gives us a sacred power. We cannot change the past. We actually have no influence over the present moment as it has arisen. But we can shape who we are becoming by where we rest our attention and by how we engage what we find there.

No one, no one can stop us from doing this. Even in the most horrific of conditions, as great teachers like Viktor Frankl, who survived—I'm going to use a word here—terrible, terrible Holocaust. He said even in those most horrific of conditions, there's a fundamental human freedom in how we relate to the experiences and the conditions we're facing at the time.

So, no one can stop us from doing this fundamentally and therefore gradually healing ourselves and growing and awakening. And no one can do it for us. No one can sneak into the inner temple of your innermost being and change it for you from the inside out. It's our beautiful opportunity in this one wild and precious life, as Mary Oliver put it. And we, therefore, will earn the fruits of our own practice.

So, in a moment, I want to explore the fundamental neuroplasticity of this process, the fundamental neuroplasticity that we can accelerate, of deliberately changing the brain for the better. But before I do that, I want to stop sharing my slides here and go back to you all and see what trouble I've created and hear from you. Okay.

All right. Okay, good. So, I love how people are talking about the work that they're doing. Good. You can see my own responses to a couple of questions that have come in. Technically, in Zoom, you can't, if you came late to a meeting, you won't be able to see the previous chat. You can maybe ask your friends here to send you the chat if you can't see it. I did respond to a couple of questions.

And then here I'm seeing how people are talking about what they're growing in themselves these days. And then I see a question, all right, from Emma. Let's see. I'm curious about the relationship between interoception and mindfulness and if interoception is part of the path. I work with people who have IDD. You might want to put in the chat here for everybody, you know, the translation of IDD. I work with people who have IDD and really struggle with interoception, but it seems to be something that can be developed even if some people struggle with it more than others. I find even in myself, I have a much easier time with being mindful of thoughts, the mind, than interoception, even like, how hungry am I, is really challenging. Is this part of the path?

Okay. Well, I so appreciate, Emma, you bringing this up because certain forms of diversity are socially constructed and become very consequential for people. And then we do what we can from a justice perspective about all that. Additionally, there is tremendous neurological, biological, temperamental diversity. It's normal. And I think about the ways in which as our hunter-gatherer ancestors evolved, let's say over the last several million years with the brain tripling in size, it became adaptive as they lived in small bands, typically with, you know, a dozen people ranging to larger groups, maybe with several dozen people, but forty, fifty people, pretty typical band.

Maybe loosely affiliated with some other bands out there, but very often competing with other bands out there, sometimes very violently, for scarce resources. During that long run, several million years, it was really adaptive, I think, to have neurological, temperamental diversity in the band. Just think about just one form of that diversity having to do with sort of attention control and stimulation seeking and, you know, kind of like, yeah.

In other words, we can have inside a band skittery-spirited, ADHD-ish jackrabbits. But also in the band, we need cautious, careful, highly focused turtles. And we need some tweeners in the middle. That's normal temperamental diversity. It's not a pathology inside a hunter-gatherer band. You need all types.

So for me, that's kind of a framework here in terms of really appreciating the normalcy and the worthiness of respect and support and care of all kinds of people, while particularly recognizing that there can be issues of fit between certain ways of being and modern environments today. So I would love to see more respect for neurological diversity in Dharma practice and Dharma centers.

You know, to use my metaphor of jackrabbits and turtles, a lot of Dharma practice, a lot of contemplative practice outside of the Buddhist world is taught by temperamental turtles in turtle pens to train others in becoming more turtle-like. And what do you do if you're innately, genetically more jackrabbit-y or have been trained by modern culture or traumatic experiences? As people are trauma-

tized, of course their attention becomes more skittery and vigilant. And of course, they're more easily activated, right?

So whether it's innate jackrabbit-ness or acquired jackrabbit-ness, we need to take it into account. So I think it's all really important, this framework here. Then to the particular question, interoception means tuning in. We tune in to body sensations such as mindfulness of breathing. We more broadly tune in to our gut feelings and to nonverbal underlying activities and awareness. We can tune in to that.

And people vary in their capacity to do that, both innate and acquired. I'm never going to bet against the human heart. I think that there is a dosing effect, as it were, between effort and results while still recognizing that there are ceiling effects or asymptotes, to be very dorkish here, that we approach with practice over time. But, you know, there's kind of some inherent limitations there.

So we develop the strengths that we really can, perhaps analytic insight. What's *rāja yoga* insight practice there? Other people are very somatically centered. The concentration aspects of very granular *vipassanā* are harder for them. But opening into lovingness, as arguably, according to Richard Gombrich in his wonderful book, *What the Buddha Thought*. This is a retired or emeritus Oxford or Cambridge academic with no more, I won't swear as a teacher here, but no more stuff to give, writing about what the Buddha thought, wonderful book, who makes the point that arguably the Buddha was saying all along, love is a wholly sufficient path of practice alongside the path of insight and equanimity. Wow. Right? People have different paths.

And so I think both are true. Respect for individual differences, which means individual strengths and/or talents, natural talents, as well as individual natural vulnerabilities or just not so good at certain things. I, as a psychologist, have given the standard IQ test for adults and children to a lot of people when I was doing assessments back in the day. And the normal profile looks like the Rocky Mountains or the Himalayas, peaks and valleys.

Someone who's all the same, valleys or midrange or peaks across the board, that's really abnormal, really unusual. What's normal are peaks and valleys. So, we build on our natural talents, our innate peaks, if it were, and we work with and try to compensate for and work around our natural valleys. And to me, that's part of practice. And as teachers, it's really important to take that into account in the people we practice with and teach, as well as the people we live with every day.

Okay, one more question comment, and then we're going to keep rolling. Oh yeah, so someone asked me, Google Pixel 3, could you explain a bit more about the second step of the brain change process to help cement lasting change? You bet. I'm really interested in this. And by the way, if you want to see the science behind it and my kind of tight academic summary, I wrote a paper with friends and colleagues called *Learning to Learn from Positive Experiences*, and you can see the full text online.

It's written in plain English, as psychology papers are. It is understandable, and it has references, the citations behind what I'm going to be talking about in a moment. *Learning to Learn from Positive*

Experiences came out a couple of years ago, a few years ago. All right. Well, someone asked, Y. S., how to approach when it's difficult to see, current or future, with clarity when the mind craves for close family connections.

So true. Sometimes it's just true that we are so flooded, so hijacked in the moment or so gripped by sorrow, grief, or longing that the most we can do is to do as little harm as possible in that moment to ourselves and to others. That's the most we can do. We just ride out the storm. And then we start to bring one half of 1% of mindful awareness to what's happening.

We start by naming it, maybe, including noting it, you know, rage, heartbreak, frozen, fawning, appeasing, placating, addiction, wanting. We name it. But that one half of 1% makes all the difference in the world. Mathematically, one is infinitely larger than zero, so that something rather than nothing is an infinite mathematical kind of improvement. And so then that half of a percent becomes 1%, 5%, 10%.

And then increasingly, there's a tipping point where the bulk of us is spaciouly stable with qualities in the mix of well-being, etc., with all kinds of storms flying through. But the bulk increasingly, the center of gravity, the deep keel in our personal sailboat, is more and more stable over time. And that's what we develop over time so that the next time, you know, we're swamped by, let's say, craving for family connections, we have more capacity to be with it in a mindful, compassionate, and equanimous way while helping ourselves learn as best we can.

So, for me, it's both/and. And important point, it's to appreciate that we would not be upset if at bottom we did not love something. At bottom, there is lovingness at the root of everything. And we would not be angry at being mistreated if we did not wish, in a loving kind of way, ourselves to be happier and maybe for others to be happier too.

So, can we find, even in the midst of our reactivity, that which is beautiful and pure, as if only the longing for justice, the longing for love, the longing for peace, the peace that passeth understanding, the highest happiness, which is peace, as the Buddha put it. And we can be aware of that as we can. We can try to listen for and be aware of that thread, that current, even in the midst of our most intense reactive patterns. That can help too. And there's a lot more we could say about all this.

All right. Well, I think I'm going to keep going. I'll say a word about what Dana and Susan brought up about Iain McGilchrist. So views vary. I'd say the increasingly widespread paradigm related to our brain, nervous system, body, and world is one that emphasizes, as the Buddha did a long time ago, interdependent arising, parts that are connected and changing.

And so, yes, there is some localization of function in the brain. Like you saw that image from Sara Lazar of the localization of function of the top-down executive regulation of attention, quite prominent in meditation. Also, localization of function of interoception, tuning into internal deep body sensations like the rising and falling of the chest as we breathe or gut feelings. Yeah, there's some localization of function.

In right-handed people, the left hemisphere is specialized for sequential processing, thus specialized for language processing, which is sequential. The right is specialized for *Gestalt* holistic processing, thus visual-spatial processing. And yet with the corpus callosum, these major information superhighways that connect the left and right hemispheres of the cortex, there's a lot of information flow back and forth. And a lot of it is simultaneous.

In other words, there's a simultaneity of different kinds of processing that interact. So then to say that, oh, the right hemisphere gets in first, right, to, you know, observe, as it were, to form a *Gestalt*, and then the left after that, the left analyzes it and makes up a story, a narrative that we then believe, I'm a little dubious about that kind of explaining. On the other hand, I celebrate and really appreciate the emphasis on nonverbal processing, nonsequential processing.

There's a kind of tyranny of the word in society and in the mind. And we need the word. The *Buddhadharma* is full of words. The Buddha offered words again and again in all kinds of ways for people. And words are the proverbial raft that we use to cross the river of suffering of different kinds. There's a place for analysis and words. I'm using words here. You're using words with me and with yourselves.

And yet ultimately, we get to the other side beyond the words. And along the way, nonverbal experience, embodied, somatic, emotional, increasingly granular awareness, granular mindfulness, moment by moment of what's happening for us nonverbally, beneath the chatter, really, really useful. Really useful. Okay. Now let's get into the how, all right, which will come to a practice. So far, so good? Okay. All right. Do do do. I think so.

Okay, good. Yep. Excellent. Appreciate, Gwen, your comment here. Really appreciate it. I would describe myself, by the way, and respect here, Gwen. I try to be scientific in certain domains, particularly the root of the word science, which is insight, knowing, like *vipassanā*, knowing. Yep. But I don't describe myself as a scientist because I produce very little research. I consume a ton.

So, I have a lot of respect for people that are working scientists, including cognitive scientists or neuroscientists. And, you know, I try to have some humility about what I don't know, and I'm trying to learn along the way. All right. So let's take a look again at my slides.

All right. So let's explore now the fundamental neuroplasticity, incredible neuroplasticity, of deliberately changing your brain for the better, which means changing your mind and therefore your life for the better. And we'll use a framework I've developed and explored experientially. The techniques, the methods that we will go through systematically are widely known in all kinds of places. I did not invent any of them. I have invented this structure, this framework for which I acronym HEAL.

Which is to say have a beneficial experience in the first place, usually because it's already happening. And then to install it, you know, to help that experience leave lasting traces behind that are beneficial for you and stay with you, you can E for enrich the experience, which intensifies it. And you can A, absorb the experience, which sensitizes the, you know, learning machinery of your brain. And option-

ally, as we'll get into the details, fear not, you can link that beneficial experience to painful, challenging material and gradually ease, soothe, contextualize, and even release and replace that underlying negative material, even going all the way back to very young material. H E A L. We'll get into it.

And we're going to apply that framework to one of the seven factors of awakening, which Joseph Goldstein, great American Buddhist teacher, just reminded people on retreat I was on with him one time about the importance of the cultivation of tranquility, which is not numbing, it's not suppressing. And there can be places, spaces, you know, layers, depths within us that are really quite tranquil, even as the surface of the pond is very agitated. But ten, twenty feet down, in the pond of the mind, blessed quiet. Okay, so that's a way of understanding tranquility.

Okay, so let's do this thing. This fundamental framework summarized in the acronym Have, Enrich, Absorb, and Link. This reflects the two-stage process of learning. We're going to emphasize the second stage because that's the one people could use typically more skills with. So let's start here. We're going to toggle back and forth between experiential practice and mindful reflection on what's happening inside you, sort of like doing an experiment in the laboratory of the body-mind. Okay. So, it can be challenging. Also, it could be kind of fun, I think.

So, let's start with having a beneficial experience of tranquility and knowing that you can certainly spend more time with this on your own. You can spend more time with this. If you're watching this, you can stop the recording here and just take some time with this. And I'll move through this fairly directly to make room for other things in this workshop that we're doing here. All right?

So, into tranquility. Typically in life, we are noticing an experience we're already having. On the other hand, there's a real place for creating beneficial experiences. And definitely in a workshop setting like this, we're going to be creating a beneficial experience. So, now let's start having a growing sense of easing, calming, relaxing, and tranquility.

You might take a full breath and exhale slowly, naturally slowing the heart rate. You're not suppressing yourself. It's more like you're opening into, you're inviting, welcoming a calming. As you breathe, releasing tension in your body. Taking a moment to register that you're basically okay where you are. You can afford to become increasingly tranquil.

People have different ways into tranquility. Always adapt my suggestions to what's good for you. It's helpful to know that you can allow and encourage a growing tranquility in your depths, even if alongside all that is physical pain in your body or emotional pain about something. And still, there can be a tranquility about that or a tranquility alongside that.

Imagery might help some people. For example, imagining sitting on the edge of a beach that's peaceful for you or in a favorite rocking chair, maybe under a tree. Perhaps an image or sense of yourself as a tranquil pond. All right. And we've been doing it already, but now I'm going to very deliberately, explicitly focus on this.

We'll be focusing on, in the second stage of learning, ways to internalize it, starting with enriching, helping this experience of tranquility to be big in your mind and helping it last. In other words, we're going to enrich this experience. There are five major ways to enrich an experience. We've been doing some of these already. Stay with being tranquil. Second, it may seem counterintuitive, but see if you can help yourself become increasingly intensely tranquil.

One way to do this is to have a sense of tranquility really pervading your mind and body. And some of these methods may be easier than others for you. We're doing experiments here as we become more skillful with them. See if you can literally dial up the intensity of tranquility so that you are very, very tranquil, if only for flashes or glimmers.

Third, you can engage multiple aspects of tranquility, being aware of what it feels like in your body. Body so tranquil, so at ease. Simply breathing tranquilly. Also, there could be thoughts of tranquility. I am tranquil. I am at peace. Fourth, you could bring qualities of novelty. In other words, exploring different aspects of the experience of tranquility or simply holding it with don't-know mind, freshness of tranquility, beginner's mind.

And what is called salience or personal relevance. In other words, knowing how tranquility is helpful for you as a quality of being that would be helpful for you in your life, to have more tranquility, at least in deeper layers of yourself. Appreciating how greater tranquility, when it's appropriate or possible, would be good for you, maybe for others too.

And now we'll shift to the second aspect of internalization, helping your brain be as receptive as possible to the big experience you're having. In other words, let's absorb it in three kinds of ways. Let's absorb tranquility. Let's allow it to establish itself within us, dwelling within us. For one, intend to be more and more tranquil now. Simple intention, not attachment, not grasping, just wise purpose, wise intention. And more generally, as having motivation to become increasingly tranquil.

Second, in various ways, visually or sensorially, in a sense of receiving tranquility spreading inside you, maybe like a calming, golden, soothing balm spreading inside places that are frazzled, rattled, frustrated, hurting. And third factor of absorbing, appreciate what is enjoyable or feels good in tranquility. Enjoy it. What do you like about tranquility?

So what we've explored are the three fundamental aspects of changing your brain for the better, including eight distinct factors in enriching and absorbing, of creating lasting changes in the brain. We've explored that already. That is sufficient. And if you like, as a bonus, you can bring the sense of tranquility into contact with places inside that might feel stressed, frustrated, frazzled, blue, and so forth.

This is what I call linking, in which you're aware of two things at once or toggle quickly back and forth between them in your mind, something that's beneficial, call it positive, and some related, call it negative, painful, burdensome, harmful material. To do this, you must keep the positive bigger, and you

must be able to remain aware of it without getting hijacked by the negative. So, let's do this with something mildly negative as a practice here. And of course, this method is widely used, including in therapies for trauma and other forms of healing. We're not doing that right now. We're picking something kind of mild. All right?

So, it can be a little challenging to be aware of two things at once. Reestablish tranquility in the foreground of awareness. And it could be kind of more generally a sense of peacefulness or easing, releasing, a letting go in tranquility. And then off to the side, smaller, you could be aware of some sense of frazzledness these days or pressure to get stuff done. Or maybe you're upset about something.

And without trying to change the so-called negative material, just be aware of both of them. Tranquility in the foreground of awareness, something unpeaceful off to the side. This might show up for you as being mainly peaceful while also being irritated or frustrated or worried about something. And then if you can and you like, you could get a sense of the tranquility actually kind of going into, I'll just use the word frazzled, that which is frazzled, that which is disturbed, making contact with it.

Not suppressing anything, but the peacefulness soothing, bringing perspective to, perhaps softening the negative material. Perhaps the peacefulness finding the hurt or grief that often is underneath anger and making room for that. And maybe finding a way into being peaceful about something that is upsetting. In other words, allowing the upset while also holding it in a vast space of peacefulness.

And then as we approach an end here, letting go of anything negative and resting simply in tranquility. Not trying to link any longer. Just resting only in the green bulk of tranquility. Okay. It's kind of nice to stay in touch with tranquility even as you open your eyes and start to move around the room a little, or move your body a little is what I mean, shift from side to side. Like, oh, I can still be pretty peaceful even as my eyes take in some of the busyness visually around me. And even as I move my body, I can still be pretty peaceful.

I think it was Howard Thurman, the African American minister, Los Angeles, bless his memory, talked about looking out at the world with quiet eyes. We can do that. To summarize and finish the process we did, we went through the complexity of it. We actually covered nine distinct methods, any one of which is good, the more the better in terms of lasting change. The essence is really simple.

The two parts of learning. Have the experience, usually because it's already there and you're appreciating it and noticing it, sometimes deliberately creating it. And then once you get that song playing on the inner iPod, turn on the recorder, enjoy it and receive it into yourself and let those green balls in. And as they come in increasingly, they could be dislodging some of those red balls out, releasing them. Okay.

So, I'm going to come back to see what sort of questions you might have about this process. And then we'll cover some additional material and wrap it up. So, kind of, were you able to do that? You know, it's a structured sort of on-demand situation. It's not so easy. Here we took, I don't know, tenish minutes with it. In the flow of life, it's usually five to twenty seconds. You know, Elisha Goldstein,

a young scientist, has this wonderful book coming out about micro-practices. And these are essentially micro-practices, typically, which is wonderful because it means that every day gives us multiple opportunities to take in the good.

We can recognize, you know, opportunities, typically small, mild, you know, in the flow of life. Think of them as the ordinary jewels strewn along our daily path. And we can look for those opportunities to really take in the good as we move through the day, including really valuing maybe one thing in particular that you're particularly, you're especially growing these days. Okay. Well.

All right. So, I'm going to bounce back to my slides, cover some, I think, particularly important applications of these general methods, and then, you know, finish up with a practice with you here. All right. Okay. So, we have the what we are trying to develop alongside true nature already. Then we have the general-purpose how, the fundamental how of deliberate cultivation. Great.

Now let's think about more specifically what we're trying to grow and why, including in a Buddhist framework. So, I'm going to move through this fairly directly, then we'll have a practice. So, we have it. We enjoy it. This also creates wonderful positive cycles around us because as we grow more and more of these inner strengths, inner resources, not perfectly, but we're more able to function and cope in the world, including in our work. Other people sometimes start treating us better, not perfectly, but could happen.

As the Chinese proverb puts it, keep a green bough in your heart and a singing bird will come. The Buddha talked about this, or whoever wrote the *Dhammapada* talked about this, drawing on the Buddha stream. I love this proverb. Think not lightly of good, saying, It will not come to me. Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the wise one, gathering it little by little, fills oneself with good.

So beautiful, you know, drop by drop. Now, this process is progressive. And this is where I love this reflection from the great Tibetan sage a thousand or so years ago, Milarepa, who was looking back on his whole life of practice toward full awakening. And he said that in the beginning, nothing came. In the middle, nothing stayed. In the end, nothing left.

In other words, in the beginning, he really couldn't feel stuff. He couldn't hold it in his mind. You know, nothing came. In the middle, he was able to experience states, but they were not yet traits. They had not yet fully established themselves in him. But in the end, nothing left. And I think in addition to the general life of practice, that's true about any particular thing we're working on.

It is said that there are four stages of learning that could be summarized initially as unconscious incompetence. You don't know what a bike is and you can't ride it. Second stage, conscious incompetence. You're trying to ride the bike, but you're tipping to one side or another. Then the third stage is conscious competence, in which you can ride that bike, but you really need to focus on it. And then in the fourth stage, it's unconscious competence. You know how to ride a bike without particularly thinking about it. It's with you already. And we can apply, by the way, those four stages to, oh, our relationships, including challenging ones.

Okay. I think, no surprise, that learning is the strength of strengths. It's the resource of resources. It's the superpower of superpowers because it's the one we use to grow the rest of them in terms of, you know, deliberate acquisition. Therefore, knowing how to learn, including in the context of the *Buddhadharma*, knowing how to learn the things that are important to you could be the greatest strength of all.

And now I want to apply this to the Buddha's drive theory of suffering, the *Four Ennobling Truths*. So, one way of describing the four truths, they're described as truths for the noble ones, not noble by birth but noble by deed of thought, word, and body, as the Buddha put it. So first, and these truths are—we're drawn to these truths by what's noble within us, and they ennoble us along the way. So I think of them as ennobling truths. Kind of cool.

So there is suffering, first. Second, as craving increases, so does suffering. That seems pretty true. As craving decreases, so does suffering. True. And there's an eight-part path that embodies and leads to the ending of craving.

If craving causes suffering, if suffering arises dependently upon craving, upon what does craving arise dependently? This is where a few centuries of biology and recently neurobiology are really helpful. Craving is embodied. It arises in relationship to an animal's needs. Squirrels, monkeys, lizards, rats, honeybees have needs. There are three major kinds of needs. And when a need is unmet or feels like it's unmet, craving arises in a fundamentally biological framework that is absolutely relevant to us here and now.

There are different models of needs. We have Maslow's needs and needs hierarchies. We have different theories. Basically, from a biological standpoint as well as psychological standpoint, our needs tend to cluster in these three areas. And many of our needs are combinations, and some needs don't really fit here. I'm using the word need and deep wants fairly synonymously. It's okay to be a little loose about this. And pragmatically, models, frameworks are not true or false. They are useful or not useful. So see if this framework is useful for you.

To look at our fundamental needs for safety, satisfaction, and connection that are managed by broad systems in the brain and body that enable us to avoid harms, to meet our need for safety, to approach rewards, to meet our needs for satisfaction, and to attach to others to meet our needs for connection. This gives us a framework.

Management of these three needs, these three broad systems, is loosely, loosely because the brain, the parts all work together. Yes, there is localization of function. Yes, there is emphasis on certain functions in our evolutionary history, which is still embedded in us in the neuroaxis. This is all true. Just because super-identifying, you know, one part of the brain with just one kind of need, that's a mistake. People critique that mistake. Fine. I appreciate that.

But the broad picture is certainly true, that as the brainstem evolved up through the so-called reptilian phase of vertebrate evolution, you know, there's a lot of capacity to deal with safety needs, founda-

tional. Then as the subcortex emerged, particularly with mammalian evolution—yes, there are some advanced reptiles that have some subcortical elements, but mainly it's the ancient, you know, warm-blooded, rat-like, squirrel-like creatures who could hunt in the darkness because they were warm-blooded, who bore their young live, mammals—who developed more capacities for goal pursuit that was really guided by emotion, developing that. Mammals can sustain pursuit. A crocodile can swim really fast for about twenty feet, maybe forty, and then peters out.

So goal pursuit, a mammalian level of evolution. And then again, oversimplifying, but it's a useful fiction. We have the primate roughly forty, fifty or so million years ago, really build out, especially in humans today, of cortical processes that really confer social capacities and massively build out our complex relationships and our capacities with language, empathy, prosociality and envy, jealousy, grievousness and impulses toward vengeance, as well as altruism and great love, you know, that enable us to connect with others. That's loose. Here's a takeaway.

Cultivation reduces craving. I would say I have in my slide set here the handful of most important slides. This is one of the handful. Craving is a drive state based on something's missing, something's wrong in the meeting, the perceived missing or disturbed or wrong in the meeting of our basic needs, such as safety, satisfaction, and connection. Craving arises from something's missing. Something is wrong.

As we grow inner strengths, inner resources, mental resources of various kinds to continue to meet our needs in the face of challenges, then we are increasingly able to meet challenges to safety, satisfaction, and connection without getting hijacked by craving. We can go rock climbing, including, woah, climbing El Capitan with no rope, while being super calm in the face of those terrible, incredible hazards because the inner strengths, the resources have been developed enough, including skillful motor skills, to meet that challenge without getting upset about it. That's very possible.

So just because there's a challenge, just because there's a threat, doesn't mean we need to be hijacked by craving. Just because there's an opportunity doesn't mean we need to be hijacked by craving. Just because there's an interpersonal issue doesn't mean we have to be hijacked by craving. Wow. If we grow sufficient inner resources to manage that challenge while staying in, I call it, the green zone.

Also along the way, if we repeatedly internalize experiences of needs met enough in the moment, then increasingly we build up embedded in the living body, you know, a kind of fundamental core of unconditional, not based on conditions, inner peacefulness, contentment, and love. In other words, cultivation reduces craving. The cultivation of inner strengths and the resting in fullness and balance, enough already, disentangles us from craving.

Now, over time, the practice of cultivation falls away, you know, like a raft that is no longer needed once we reach the farther shore. Right? But along the way, I think a lot of people in the Buddha world turn away from deliberate cultivation. Cultivation undoes craving. All right. So, I want to bounce forward kind of quickly, do a little practice with you, and then wrap it up. Okay.

So, moving forward kind of quickly, and you can come back to these in the slides. What inner resources these days would help you meet your challenges without craving? You know, I'm myself increasingly working on the capacity to rest in the present, in being, without being carried into becoming. And to be able to do that with a lot of granularity of attention, moment by moment by moment, while having a very busy life still, even though I'm getting less busy slowly, you know, is interesting. You know, what are you working on, right?

And in all this, as we develop ourselves personally, we develop a citizenry or a populace in the world that is harder and harder to push around with the classic manipulations of authoritarian leaders that we see all around us, manipulations of fear and anger about safety, greed and possessiveness for satisfaction, and us-against-them conflicts related to our needs for connection.

So, the internal development of ourselves at scale, I'm really interested in. How do we foster a billion brains rested in the green zone most minutes of most days, you know, at a tipping point, which would have huge implications for our world and our history. As we practice for ourselves, we practice for others as well.

So what's the ultimate point of all this? The Buddha talked about the heartwood of practice. And there's a lovely, lovely *sutta*, the *Heartwood Sutta*, in which he basically writes, and this is a summary of *Majjhima Nikāya* 30, The holy life is not for the purpose of gain, honor, and fame or for the attainment of virtue, concentration, or knowledge and vision. Those are means to an end or bonuses along the way.

Rather, the purpose of the holy life is this unshakable liberation of mind. That is the goal of this holy life, its heartwood, and its end. Unshakable liberation of mind, that is the result of many things: insight practices, recognitions of the emptiness of all phenomena, even as they exist, emptily, you know, the training and calming of the body-mind, and also certainly the cultivation of wholesome factors of, you know, awakening for yourself and for others. Aimed at this unshakable liberation of mind.

So, let's practice for just a few moments here in our natural home base. When we feel that needs are met enough in the moment, the biology of, you know, why zebras don't get ulcers in the title of Robert Sapolsky's book on stress, for ourselves, you know, we come home to, you know, peacefulness, contentment, and love in terms of safety, satisfaction, and connection.

So, as we finish together here, let's practice together. Returning in the present to whatever you can find as a sense of peacefulness. Safe enough in the present. Recognizing that you're basically all right right now and now. You can afford to be peaceful. While finding and increasingly resting in whatever is available to you now as a sense of peacefulness, also finding one or more things you are thankful for, grateful for, that you are receiving.

The Buddha said we should gladden the heart so that there can be a sense of enoughness in the present, knowing you can continue to pursue worthy goals while still feeling content in the present.

Can you find a sense of being peaceful and content? And third, while feeling peaceful and content, we can include the heart, a kind of blending of feeling connected, openhearted while being content and peaceful.

In whatever ways you are experiencing this home base, letting it spread within you. Kind of marinating and feeling at home. And we can draw on this quality of being at home, as they say in Tibet, as both the fruit of practice and a path of practice. And I really like this translation from Stephen Batchelor. You might open your eyes to look at the slide here as we finish.

Of the Buddha's last words, Stephen's translation is, Things fall apart. Tread the path with care. The Pāli for the word care is very common in the *Buddhadharma*. One other way of saying it would be to be heedful, to be mindful and heedful. Care. I like the sense of care as including both conscientiousness and heart.

Things fall apart. Tread your path with care. We can rest already in peacefulness, contentment, and love. And we can draw on these qualities that are our deep nature as we pursue our own path going forward. So, thank you so much. Thank you, Rob. Thank you, Gil. Thank you, Sati Center. Thank you for your kindness here and the *dāna*, the gift of your own attention.

It's been a treat for me to do this with you, and I've covered a lot of ground. You're just spending a little—I got my job done. And there are plenty of opportunities to come back to this. There are single words, you know, like the word heedful or care, that one can come back to many, many times. Certainly sentences, passages, you know, it's okay to come back to things and, you know, engage them again and again.

And I'm reading the chat here. I'm really appreciating what you've said. Yeah. And it's been beautiful to do this together. You know, we practice with others. You probably know the interaction between the Buddha and Ānanda, his cousin, who is also the speaker of so much of the *Buddhadharma* that starts Thus Have I Heard. That's Ānanda reciting the *suttas*.

You know, Ānanda was one day looking around at the gathering of monastics and saying, Oh, look, this is, Lord Buddha, this is half the holy life, you know, the presumption being the other half is somehow inside ourselves. Woah, you know, half the holy life, you know, *saṅgha*, community. And the Buddha replied, Not so, Ānanda, not so. It's the whole of the holy life.

You know, and that's where I think appreciating, like Richard Gombrich pointed out as a great academic, that really love, relatedness, the heart, service are profoundly important, even potentially wholly sufficient paths of practice, such as, you know, in some ways what we've been engaging with today. So, thank you so much. It's a wrap.

May you go—I think questions answered. Very good. I'm going to—I think Rob has the power to unmute himself. You are unmuted, Rob. I'm handing over the mic, the baton. Here you go. Great. And I'll finish on ringing the bell three times, and then I'll turn off my camera and we'll exit here. Take care,

and thank you so much. Bye-bye. So good. All right. Much gratitude to Gil as well. Take good care. And all the other teachers and the lineage and the volunteers and all the efforts over many years.