

## Leading and Following Part 2

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Pick up the topic from earlier in the morning. So I talked about that there's two interesting movements in practice, mindfulness practice, that can be understood as the movement to lead or the movement to follow. Okay. And sometimes we're leading with too much of a self-conscious effort. We're leading from the control tower with the practice. And so we're leading maybe with our thinking mind; thinking's in charge.

We're judging what's going on, we have commentary going on, we have expectations, we have judgments, we have opinions, all that are coming to bear on how we're paying attention. And we're directing our attention. It's a mental effort, like, here, I have to pay attention here. And the extreme version of it is that there are some people who are a little bit more like their attention is more like poking a finger at something, you know, or a fork. Like you're going to penetrate this, and you're up in a control tower looking down and staring at something.

And to follow is to let something else besides you and your self-conscious effort take the lead, and that your attention follows that lead. So you have to choose something to follow that is meaningful and helpful. And so in meditation, it might be following the rhythm and the cycles of breathing, coming and going. Let that take the lead and let attention just follow it. Let it come along, let it surf on it, let it stay there.

So it isn't so much the self-conscious effort that's the emphasis, but more that then you're resting with the experience. You're being carried along. Just like if you're leading a group of people through a city that you've never been to before, but they're all following you, you're going to be looking and studying the map and reading the signs and looking out for potholes. You're going to be so busy and responsible for all these people because you're in lead, wondering what they think of you. Are you doing a good enough job for them?

But if you're following, and the person knows where they're going, you can relax. You've never been in the city before, you never know anything, but you trust this great guide, and you just relax, and you follow. It's enjoyable. You enjoy the city, but you're following someone's lead. So the same way in meditation, to follow the lead of your breathing, and just trust it.

Give yourself over to it. Be with it. And what that allows is that it allows a settling, a gathering, that is often very difficult if the effort to be mindful is self-conscious. Self-conscious meaning it's connected to so many layers of thoughts and stories and identities and purposes and so many things that's driving us. And so it's driven attention.

As opposed to you're sitting in the passenger driver's seat of a car, as opposed to in the passenger seat or in the back of the car. Or maybe it's more like you're driving a bus that's difficult to drive, as opposed to sitting in the back of the bus and just trusting the bus driver. You can just relax and just kind of read a book or talk to a friend or do something. I've been on buses where I spend time looking out the window, and I got so, so peaceful, just letting everything disappear, just looking at what was going on, because I was being carried in this trusting way by this nice, comfortable bus.

So if we give ourselves over to something, like, oh, let's just follow, and follow intimately, don't follow far behind, but kind of stay with it, then I don't have to think about what I'm doing. I don't have to engineer it. I don't have to be so involved with being self-conscious about it or wondering about it, judging it. Let me just follow where it goes in the coming and going of the breathing. Something can begin settling and organizing itself around it.

Also, all the tendencies to be distracted, to be caught in the, you know, sometimes not even self-conscious, we go kind of unconscious in drifting off into our stories, and we don't even know that we're dreaming and fantasizing. That all those are fragmenting, all those disconnecting. And so to be really here and beginning to settle in, quiet the disconnecting movements of the mind, the resisting movements, the wanting movements, the aversive movements of mind, let all those kind of settle in along with this following the breath, following along, just being with it.

And what can begin happening is that we start kind of gathering ourselves to become whole. We gather ourselves to not be separated from ourselves or fragmented. And it can feel like one of the most sweetest ways of being, or healthy ways of being, is unified or organized peacefully around following something like the breathing. And it can change our inner state dramatically and give us a sense of what's possible in terms of being not stressed, possible in terms of not being scattered, possible in terms of not spinning out in our thoughts and minds

and feelings and emotions.

Nothing's pushed away, but all of those forces relax. And in that relaxation, we kind of settle. We're relaxing into what we're following, the breath as it breathes. And it's kind of, for the most part, a natural phenomena that can happen on its own to breathe. So we're trusting that and following along.

Sometimes people control their breath. And the encouragement there is, don't worry about it. Don't go up into the self-conscious mind and judgment-type mind and idea mind that says, well, it shouldn't be that way. Just go, you know, just, okay, somehow I'm controlling my breath, so I'll just follow it that way, get to know it, and let that be how it works. And so the same thing can be true in other ways.

There's other choices of what to follow. Okay. Some people, you know, with walking meditation, as I talked about, it could be following the sensations, the rhythmic sensations of the feet as they walk. Or it might be a whole kinesthetic sense of the body moving through space and trusting the body and just following along with what the body reveals. And you're following the body.

Different times, different moments, the body does different things. A form of mindfulness meditation I'm very fond of is standing meditation. And, um, and, uh, I love it because there I close my eyes, and there's so many rippling, changing, shifting little sensations in my body because my body is constantly making adjustments to stay upright. And there are all these micro-movements in the body to adjust.

And I just love to just follow the body taking care of itself, all these sensations, and it's just kind of a delight. And I just settle into and get into the somatic way in which this dance is going on in my body. And I'm just there to follow along, to trust the body to know what to do. And I don't have to get involved. I can just stay and feel and sense and follow along.

There are activities we do. You know, it could be cleaning in the house or folding laundry or ordinary domestic things. We're there too. It's interesting to see, rather than being the one who's directing the show, trying to be efficient, trying to be able to show off to everybody else how well you can fold a T-shirt, you know, and prove that you're an adequate human being by something. It's just like you're standing there, and then the task is to fold the T-shirts, and you're following the instinct.

You're following the movement to do so. You're not running the show. You're not in a hurry. You're not trying to do it so you can do something else. You're just there. What is being asked in here?

What am I called to do? What is the instinct that says, you know, is it just to throw it into the drawer in a big lump of clothes? Or is it something that you want to follow that has time and wants to fold it nicely, but not too nicely? You know, what is it that wash dishes, and what are you following as you wash the dishes to really give yourself over to it? What's the instinct? What's the call?

You know, and maybe you'll, it's fascinating to watch that you take, you know, a dirty plate. Oh, the fried beans have gotten caked onto the plate. I think this requires more than just a sponge. I think I should bring a scrubber. So it's a simple thing, but you're kind of going, you're following what the need is as opposed to being in charge. Everything should have a green scrubbing. You know, that's what I'm going to do and forget about it. You know, you're following the need.

And in *Zen* Buddhism, sometimes they have the teaching to live in your life responding to the request of the moment. What is reality requesting in any given moment? What is it that has to do? So when I put down my glasses here in the *Zen* mode, you know, you wouldn't go, you know, just like, I have important things to say to people. I'm just going to, you know, get rid of this.

You would kind of be following the situation, kind of the request of the moment. Given the situation I'm in, what is the request now? What am I following? What is the situation called for here? Well, there's a room full of people meditating in silence, right? I don't think I should just slap it down, you know, to make it all noisy.

Some people might get frightened, startled. Why don't I put it down quietly? That's what, to follow the moment, the situation is: put it down quietly. And maybe it's nice to just do it in a way that at least feels in harmony with what else is here. And, you know, it seems like just a simple following.

You know, I took into account what was there in some intuitive way. And it wasn't, you know, some planned idea, engineered idea of what to do, the most efficient way to put the glasses down. It was just like, oh, what's needed here? I'm following something, the intuition.

So in the end, this notion of following rather than leading sometimes allows us to live in this world from a deeper place inside than if you're up in the control tower being in charge, leading the show, being the one who knows, being the one who has to show off, being the one who has to prove themselves. There's something about deep participation in following something this way that can be settling and allow you then to connect to some deep place inside that is sensing and knowing not just what's happening but also you, yourself. And you gain

yourself rather than lose yourself in this process.

So I hope that description made some sense to you, and that's something you can experiment with and support you in your meditation. And now the opportunity is here for those of you who can to discover the requests of the moment in volunteering for a particular task.