

Taking the Practice home

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I want to say a few words about entering our daily lives. One of the things that I've thought about after retreat is that we spend, like, maybe those of us who have really regular practices, maybe an hour a day in formal practice. But then there's these other 23 hours. How are we doing those 23 hours? Yeah.

Many of us spend a lot of effort physically nourishing our bodies well. Maybe we've started eating really healthy food and really try to support our bodies as well as we can. And then, how are we feeding our minds? Things that I hear back from yogis, you know, in between retreats are, "You know, I had this wonderful retreat, and then, you know, I fed myself with doomscrolling for the last six months, and I'm ready for another retreat." Yeah.

And it's incredibly common. It's just incredibly common, you know. So, what's our relationship with how we're nurturing our minds? You know, what are we doing the rest of the time? How are we living our lives? Not what we're doing as much as how we're doing it.

And really being able to—there's a really natural, wonderful, positive creep effect from sitting daily, you know, where the mindfulness of the sitting, the wonderful things we cultivate in that time, kind of, you know, spread into the day. But then it's very easy for other things to catch us into very deep old patterns of the way we live our lives. And for myself, you know, I'll mention like three things that, for me, were particularly useful in integrating my life more. And I'll say them in the order that they showed up in my life, you know.

You know, the first one is—I remember reading the *Buddha's* line about, you know, like with every drop of water, a water jug is filled. And I realized that there was a way that I didn't value, you know, a moment of mindfulness. Unless it was like this big chunk of time, that moment, that's no big deal, you know. Why bother, you know?

And so I started doing this practice of a bro, you know. I call it a bro, like a brother that's always with you. And it's just a one-breath practice. You know, breathe, relax the body, and open to what's next. You know, put away the biases, put away everything. Just what's up, what's here, you know.

And it's very simple. It takes one moment, and it doesn't make a day busier. You know, some version of that—you don't have to do that—but just some version of, you know, especially in a busy day. You know, I would be going from one thing to another where I didn't have much choice, but I could always find that one breath, you know. The one breath to do that.

The next thing that arose at the end of the retreat, you know, I came home. You know, it was a time when I had over 300 emails waiting for me, and I took a look and I was, like, a little bit horrified. And I started working on it madly, and I started getting a headache. And, you know, okay, something's really off here, you know. I just had this beautiful retreat. What do I do, you know?

And it came to me to take the time. You know, I started doing it with one email and two emails, of smiling with each email. You know, taking a moment and considering the person I was writing, just for a moment connecting, whether someone I knew or whether it's a complete stranger. You know, just some other human being that wants to be happy, just like I do. Yeah. And taking that moment and smiling.

And I found that my emails—I actually got through them just as, you know, no slower. But my mental state at the end was so much better. And so that was a really sweet practice for me, and it's kind of natural for me now. You know, maybe texts I'm not so good at anymore, because they seem to show up in the middle of a *Dharma* talk, you know.

And, you know, I wear this watch for various reasons, you know. And I got this latest one for one reason: because if the text shows up, I'll have to just go, you know, bend my hand, and it stops. But anyways, that's—

And the third thing I want to mention is, again, this is after a long retreat. You know, I was really noticing in the retreat how attached I am to my thoughts, really acutely aware of the attachment to my thoughts. You know, like if I'm thinking about anything, you know, don't interrupt me. You know, I just wanted to finish those thoughts, you know.

And, of course, I sat down at my desk, you know, where I was doing some work and needed to go to the bathroom really badly. And I don't know if you need to hear that, but I had to finish what I was doing. And the tension in my mind at that time was really strong. I couldn't drop that thought. I had to finish it.

And so I decided to try an experiment. Every time I got out of my chair, I would mentally drop whatever I was working on and do mindful walking to the next thing, like going to the bathroom, going to the kitchen to get water, whatever it was that I did next. I would do mindful walking. Not slow, but just be in my body. Just drop the thinking and be in my body.

And then I kind of expanded it to be walking to the car, walking to the store, all those little in-between pieces. And they actually, they really helped develop my ability to stay in my body a lot of the day. And, you know, it was fascinating, you know. I mean, I wouldn't necessarily interrupt if I was doing something complicated. I'd wait till I was done.

But a lot of things I was thinking about, it wasn't about ruining my flow. It was really about attachment to my thinking, right? And, you know, really seeing how sticky that is, you know, that attachment to our thoughts, to ideas. *Ayya Khemā* used to say that, you know, she was a nun and she renounced everything, right? And she said, well, renouncing stuff is really easy, you know, compared to renouncing cherished thoughts. You know, that's really hard.

And, you know, that is exactly what I was experiencing. So maybe that, you know, I'll let Matthew say a few words. You know, we're having these very short arments. Sorry I was texting you. It's lonely. Sorry. Sorry.

Dharma is better at preventing fires than putting them out. Meaning that we all come to practice, and it doesn't stop when we start practicing, but we all come to practice with some karmic complications, you know. And ways in which our own greed, hate, and delusion, or the greed, hate, and delusion of those we have depended on, the greed, hate, and delusion of culture—whatever—somehow we've been backed into a kind of karmic corner where there's no *dukkha*-free path forward.

And the *Dharma* has value, but it's definitely not perfect in extricating ourselves from those complexities. And we can't ask the *Dharma* to be perfect in those respects. We kind of are gradually backing our way out of that corner, and the teachings will be of some solace, but imperfect.

And where I see the *Dharma*, and this is why it's a kind of long-term path, a life path, is that we are creating conditions in our mind that are less fertile for the arising of suffering. We are living in ways that are less likely to back us into the same karmic corners where there's *dukkha* in every direction. And we are discerning what we want and what is worth wanting. What is worth wanting?

And the way that we know we've hit on some through line of wisdom with that is we're not in the mindset of, "When I get X, Y, Z, then my life is resolved." That is almost always the

emanation of craving and the sense that one thing changes all other conditions. The fever dream of clinging, craving.

But there is something like desire which can be fulfilled, things that we want that are worth wanting. And when we start to align our heart with that, we're essentially, like, preparing our heart to enjoy whatever it is we get when we get what we want. And it's not like I'm waiting to be happy. It's not like I'm overestimating what this thing, what this experience, will do for my heart. And there's a sense of following some thread of wholesome longing all the way through, so no matter what we get or don't get, it was worth wanting this.

And then we just kind of find ourselves living into a *Dharma* life. And it's, of course, woven together with its own pain and sometimes tragedies. But it's a *Dharma* life. You can feel that. Okay. So, please...