

Wednesday sit with instructions

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So, before this happened, and earlier, when I woke up this morning, I thought of telling you that, in the ancient language of the Buddha, the English word reassurance is the Pāli word for that can also be literally understood as an easeful breath, an easy breath. So, this connection with potential connection between our breathing and reassurance.

We have these different operating systems, neural networks inside. We have the deep mind that I talk about, and the surface mind. We have the fear center in the mind. We have the integration center. And the surface mind, the fear mind, needs reassurance. It doesn't need to be fed.

The reassuring mind, the integrating mind, the deep mind, doesn't need anything except for us to be aware, to sense, to know, in a simple, relaxed way. Knowing without any baggage, knowing without fear, is a wonderful exercise. This practice, more than an exercise, is to know that we're afraid and find our way to knowing it without fear, to know fear without fear. The knowing is fear-free. Not easy to come to, but it's possible. So, the knowing is reassuring.

The knowing is supporting the growth of this deeper wisdom. To sense what's happening, and if what we have is fear, it is sometimes possible to sense the fear, but the sensing itself is relaxed. The sensing itself is not afraid. Then, for some people, the rhythm of breathing can be reassuring. For some people, having something neutral in the body—if breathing is neutral—to come back to, that's rhythmic, that comes and goes and keeps us kind of here, here, here.

The steps, as we do walking meditation, keep us here, here, here. That's kind of the thread that's woven between all that the mind goes to, all the reactivity. It's always coming back here, here, to this place, to this time. And as I said in the talk yesterday, it's very meaningful,

important for this deep mind, for this reorienting ourselves in a way that's deeply reassuring, to be able to see when the mind wanders off.

And I've known, I know people, including myself, who somehow thought that as soon as the mind wanders off, we're supposed to jerk the mind back, quickly come back. You're not supposed to wander off, so just start over right away, and that's a lost opportunity. It's really useful to give yourself time to clearly recognize, "Oh, this is the mind wandering off. This is the mind beginning to think. This is what it's like to be thinking for three minutes and not know it, not really know it."

And then take time. Make a habit of just having this relaxed, open, nonjudgmental recognition: "This is the mind wandering off." With the idea that, slowly, you learn to see that earlier and earlier. You're developing the capacity to monitor, to see, to know. "Ah, there it is again, the wandering mind."

And to know it without judgment, without fear, without condemnation; to know it without making a story about oneself. It seems that the fear centers are very strongly connected to being self-conscious, stories of self, me, myself, and mine. And to know clearly, relaxedly, in whatever way that is possible for you, is easy for you, useful for you, over and over again: here, now, what's directly visible, what's immediate, what invites.

Inspection invites you to see, invites you to know. What invites you to feel and sense? What invites you onward? Here, this is good. This is where something good begins to grow. Something becomes integrated.

This is where unification, coming together and being whole, can happen. Because there's room. And it can be helpful to notice if you have been thinking a lot, especially maybe at the beginning of a sitting. It's helpful to notice the energy of thinking. What's activated, maybe in the brain, the head, maybe in the shoulders or the belly? What's being activated and energized by all the thinking?

What is tense? What has a compulsion or drive in it? Have you somehow placed yourself in your thoughts, in your thinking? Have you taken up residence there? And maybe, like a light object that's dropped into water, floats down and down, so let your awareness, let whatever it is you feel is you, settle into your body.

Maybe this deep mind is found more deeply in the body, feeling your body as broadly and widely as is easy for you. And while you're there in your body, how does your breathing show itself to you? It isn't that you go and look at the breathing, focus on it. How does it come to

you? How does the breathing want to be known? In what way do you know you're breathing?

If knowing is not work, if knowing can happen on its own because you're there, present for breathing, what is the easiest way that knowing breathing occurs? What are the sensations of breathing that might be inviting you to come and look, come and feel? Is there anything about breathing which is reassuring, calming? Sometimes the exhale is associated with calming and relaxing, a gentle letting go. Maybe a calming of how you know breathing, or how you know something else. Maybe a calming of sensing.

As you breathe, breathe while feeling the breathing room around breath, the wider space of your body, just beyond the edges of how you sense breathing. As gently as you can, allow for the relaxing of your body. Especially if you can sense and feel the body wants to relax, soften, release. Gently, slowly, allow for a softening of the body.

Gently giving yourself over to a few moments of a simple knowing of breathing, giving yourself over to a few moments of simply sensing breathing, whatever way it is. Moments of knowing and sensing, which have all the time in the world just to know, just to sense, no hurry, in such a way that relaxed, calm knowing, relaxed, calm sensing is gathering with it a wider sense of room, space, connection. The knowing doesn't happen in isolation. It's as if it invites a richer inner world to be integrated, to come together.

Hmm. Cough.

There is a wondrous English expression, and this wondrous expression is “coming to our senses.” And as I understand the word and the expression, it often refers to finally getting smart, finally doing something intelligent instead of something foolish. But the fact that coming to our senses has the word “senses” in it, I think, is very significant. There's something about becoming intelligent in being really present for our sense world, the sensory world of our body, waking up in our body.

And I think partly how that works is that all these different ways in which we can know operate in unison, operate together. To really come to our senses and our body gives us so much more information, so much more data that gets processed in this subconscious way that we do become more intelligent. We get more integrated.

It's so easy to see, for some of us, how we get limited by overthinking—that sometimes the mind gets scattered and just jumps around from one thing to the next. Sometimes the mind gets obsessed by something, and everything gets narrowed and tight to that one event, that one concern. It's natural enough that we do this, but we get out of our senses. We get out of

the whole. We lose that more integrated, holistic way of being intelligent.

And pretty often, when we get overthinking, we're also reinforcing reactivity, reinforcing fear, reinforcing desire, reinforcing conceit. And it's not that it's wrong to do that; it's just incomplete. And it's not to deny or push that away. But it's to come into our senses, to allow for this bigger field, this bigger presence.

And so, as we relax and come into our senses and come into this relaxed knowing, it's the operating system that gets reinforced. It's the operating system that integrates, that begins to allow and grow the whole. It's not something you can do. This, I think, is what's remarkable about these deep neural networks that I talked about yesterday. Some of it, so much of it, happens deep and unconsciously. But we can support it to do the healthy side of it, the integrating side.

In this study of neurology, they say that when there's a stimulus from outside, in the first quarter seconds in the mind, before we know, already some things get activated there. And there's a world of difference if we, as we know this famous expression, have the gap between the stimulus and response. This is not an idle thing. This makes room for not being caught, preoccupied, let the fear responses arise, or the selfish, you know, the preoccupied, but makes room for some other network, another source of wisdom and understanding to arise.

So, to know clearly and calmly is not a small thing. To sense your experience calmly, spaciously, allowably, it's not a small thing. To allow yourself to be just the way you are, it's not a small thing to do that. Please do allow yourself to be the way you are. But then, in the middle of it, come to your senses about it. Just feel it better. Know it clearly, without condemnation or embarrassment.

So, one of the things that really supports this coming into wholeness, coming into some kind of integrated home, is the ways of being that allow things to come and gather together, allow things to kind of be in the same flow. We're not at cross-purposes. We're not scattered. We're not multitasking, but kind of get onto the same—everything has a chance to get onto the same track, and to do so kind of continuously.

And that is, when you're doing something, do one thing at a time. So, if you're walking down the steps from here, just walk. Be in the walking. Don't walk and already be thinking about all kinds of things because you've abandoned your mindfulness. But just walk the steps, walking across the community hall.

Not walk across it and see what's new. "What's new? What's happening? What's new? What's

changed? Who's sitting there? And what are they wearing?" And there's something about giving yourself over to one activity. It gives a chance for this integration to happen, this gathering to happen here, an integration into the continuity of the present.

And you can get a feel for that at some point. You can feel what it's like to be in the continuity of the present moment, here, not jumping around, not scattered, not distracted. Inviting inspection, the invitation, the call: to hear, just hear with this, just with this, and to feel the loving feeling that here is good, here is reassuring. Just stay with this, and to begin recognizing what's lost if we get preoccupied in our thoughts, caught up in them.

Of course we will be, but there's also a loss of the whole. It's okay. Know you're thinking. "Oh, this is thinking." Right there. To know it calmly and peacefully, no problems. Just know: thinking a lot.

So, the continuity of practice: doing one thing at a time. Walking meditation is a wonderful place to gather together. Just practice one thing at a time and invite the integration. Invite everything to kind of come into the middle with you, and just walking, eating, just eating, drinking, just drinking.

It isn't that this is a practice, an exercise that you're supposed to work hard at, try to master something. It's more that you're inviting, making room for some deep natural process of integration, of coming together, coming to our senses, coming into wholeness. Here, here, here. And may it be that you enjoy it. May you love it. May it be a form of love to be present for yourself, moment by moment.

Thank you.