

Thursday sit with instructions

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Among the images the *Buddha* used for mindfulness practice is that of a cowherder with the cows in the pasture peacefully eating the way cows chew and eat, and the cowherder watching over them. Resting against the trunk of a tree in the shade, at ease, just gently keeping the eyes gazing wide and relaxedly to just track the cows that they were still there, they were safe, not wandering off. But this image of resting against a tree trunk, at ease. Eyes relaxed and soft, gazing out here, and the cows do what they do.

Another image for mindfulness that I want to combine with that is turning on the light. If when it's dark and you're in a room that's dark, or outdoors in the dark and you can't see anything, it's very different than turning on a light. And now you can see. Maybe when it's almost dark, completely dark, you have to work hard at being able to see what little little shapes there are in the dark that help you find your way in the dark.

But when the light comes on, it's effortless to see the path, to see your way around a room. Perhaps there's no sense of trying and working and intending and making self-conscious effort. It's easy—the seeing your way in the in the light. Operates on some deeper level in the mind than what you have to, what you're consciously engaged in doing.

So, for mindfulness practice to be the practice of turning on the light and gazing in a relaxed way on what's happening when the light is on. And in terms of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, where these different attentional faculties come into play, at times you might find that it's appropriate and wonderful to engage in some of these practices of knowing, feeling, sensing, relaxing, intending. Having clear understanding, clear comprehension, and other times you're more like the cowherder, at ease, resting against the trunk of the tree.

The light is on, and rather than doing the knowing, you notice that knowing is happening. Rather than doing the sensing, you notice sensing is happening. Rather than doing, relaxing, calming, you notice the system itself somewhere inclines towards relaxing, calming. You

might notice that somewhere from deep inside, without your thinking about it. There's intending something, and throughout the day, there's all kinds of small ways constantly where there's one of these or multiple of these are operating.

Even if at times you choose to do these things, right next to that is. Is a whole set of ways in which they're happening anyway, without you choosing. You're at the food, getting your food, and without consciously thinking about it and figuring it out. There's clear knowing of the difference between the fork container and the spoon container. There's clear knowing that for this meal a spoon is useful. There's a clear intention to choose a spoon, but it's happening almost intuitively, subconsciously.

It doesn't belong to the world of ordinary conscious activity, where the self is, the self preoccupation is, be myself and mine. But it's there effortlessly. At any given moment, chances are, if you turn the light on, you'll know something. The mind will know it, maybe non-verbally. Without a mental note, maybe it'll know it with very light, soft verbal recognition.

With the light on, and you're available with awareness to see what's here, to know what's here, to recognize what's here. The body will sense things. There'll be sensations. Maybe not the ones that you want to have. Maybe not in the place you think you're supposed to keep your attention. After all, the cows do wander a little bit here and there.

There can be intentions that you don't even recognize you have. There's a sound, and you turn your head to see what that is. One of the ways of practicing mindfulness is to not do these practices, but to see how they're occurring all the time, anyway. And there might be very simple, clear comprehension. Of what is wholesome and what is not wholesome, you might notice that if the light goes out because you're preoccupied in thoughts, that has a very different sensations than not being caught up in thoughts.

There might be tension or pressure. And the tension and pressure, if you feel it carefully, it's almost like there's an onward-leading feeling, intention, desire for that to release and relax, with a light on. You might notice sensations, or knowing, or clear comprehension that the light is on, together with tension and pressure, or the light is on with a very weak signal.

All these things that are occurring all the time—they have more wisdom to them, more understanding behind them than that you will ever know. But when the light is on, they communicate with each other. There's a coordination in the brain. There's a harmonizing, and it might be that what comes into awareness. It comes into awareness because it's useful, meaningful, significant at that time.

Whatever you need to know in this practice will reveal it to you, reveal itself to you, even if

you don't understand what it is. So right now, without any effort on your part, except to turn the light on, what appears to you is it more sensations in the body? Is it more something that you know?

The idea of turning on the light is the idea that you only need to know what is in the range of the light. That's the domain of practice. The domain of practice in the ancestral homeland is only what extends as far as your senses can take in right now. As far away as what you can hear, or see, or feel, what you can know—that's right here and now. If your clear comprehension is about things in other times and other places, nothing within your ancestral homeland.

Turn the light of awareness to how this is occurring in the present. Returned home to your true home here, to feel and sense and know everything as present moment unfolding. And because breathing is the biggest movement, usually during meditation, you might more often notice sensations of breathing, knowing breathing. Or you might know and sense wherever there's tension or pressure, whatever wherever there's resistance.

It's what's important is not the tension. It's okay to have it, but stay close to the knowing, the sensing, how your psychophysical system. Naturally, easily, has nose and senses, has clear understanding from the deep mind, deeper than the self-conscious mind. Your deep intelligence operates better, more fully, if you get out of the way, allow it to be there operating with a light on.

Allow your intelligence all the different ways in which the *Dharma* speaks to you. Allow it operate in ways that you don't even understand, but trust it. Trust that what comes into awareness when the light is on is bringing harmony, maybe beauty. Maybe healing. Maybe wholeness.

Instead of allowing yourself to keep thinking, turn on the light so you know and sense what's happening here. Your body wants to be known. Wants to be sensed. You relax and open into your body. Your body might begin to fill itself out, become more whole, more inclusive of all of its sensations. See what wants to show itself. In the relaxed, open mind.

Yeah. I believe it can be useful to see that we have different operating systems, mental operating systems inside of us, and the one that people are usually using, the self-conscious one, the one that we often identify with as being me, myself, and mine, or the one we have control over, or think we have control over, is often one that limits us. Because there's a selectivity process, we select certain things out of our environment to focus on, to be preoccupied with, to try to do, try to be. It's the operating system that lives in stories or constructs.

If it comes from the amygdala, maybe they say it. Maybe it's connected to fear. For the *Buddha*, this constructing operating system is connected to. Greed and hatred and delusion, and those all those things tend to limit us. Tend to involve preoccupation.

The deeper operating system is closer to what is operating automatically for human beings. A tremendous amount of subconscious, unconscious processing is going on all the time. To do this very complicated thing that is being a human being—it's a phenomenally complicated, involved, refined, skilled activity—to brush your teeth, and most of you probably don't give it any thought once you're starting to do it. To know. The position of different parts of the body in relation to each other, to clearly comprehend how much toothpaste to put on, to somehow decide which teeth to start with and move around.

And luckily, we don't spend a lot of time having to figure all this out. Our life would be truncated if we had to track every little detail. So it's good. It's automatic, subconscious. But we come into this world of practice. We're trying to support the deep mind to come forward, and that deep mind is closer to what happens automatically.

It allows something deeper to show itself. So when you, at times, it might be very nice for you to not be the knower, but be the doer of practice. But allow knowing to show itself to occur. Don't be the sensor, the feeler, but have the light on of awareness and see what senses arise. Between sensing and sensations, there's no gap. They occur right there in the body.

And one of the reasons to kind of begin trusting the deeper arising of knowing, sensing, intending, clear comprehension, understanding, is that the deep mind is in some kind of way communicating with us, just as if you're anxious and your shoulders are up by your ears. The sensations of tension there has within it the communication that it's good to relax. It's almost like the tension wants to relax.

There's a, in the different schools of Buddhism, there is a steep principle: come and see, inviting inspection. Something here wants to be known, and it's onward leading. Sometimes they make grand statements that everything is flowing to freedom. You don't have to be the engineer of your practice. You don't have to be the driver of your practice. But you do need to keep the light on.

And the longer the light is on continuously, the longer you stay present in a continuous awareness of what arises in the sensing, arises in the knowing, what arises in the understanding from this deeper place. The more something profound is starting to happen in the deeper operating systems of the mind, a harmonizing, a gathering, a calming. A centering, the growth of faith, inspiration, a feeling of rightness, wholesomeness, and the longer we spend time

thinking a lot and thinking about things which are not here and now. Things have nothing to do with this ancestral homeland. The more we are usually going in the opposite direction than harmony, wholeness, freedom.

As you go about your day today at the retreat center here, see if there's some inspired, loving way. You can stay close to your homeland. That is the world that's within the range of your senses, here and now. Anything else might not be needed. May you feel the deep care that the deep operating system has for you. It probably has more care for you than you realize.

Enjoy this day. Thank you.