

Wednesday Morning Guided Meditation

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Yesterday I mentioned the idea of the path and the fruit, and that the path is an open space which we walk. We feel the place where there's an absence of obstructions, and that's where we step forward, step into. Then, eventually, something comes to fruition. So it is a change of metaphors.

But the metaphor of a fruit that matures, that grows—it grows and matures, ripens. It might be imperceptible in the moment, but with the sun, the light, it matures. The practice is more like that. The light of awareness is not there to change anything, but to allow something to grow and mature.

Dharma growth is not an engineering project. You don't bring your screws and your screwdrivers to put something together. But there's a deep trust that something inside knows what to do, knows how to unfold, to heal, to grow, mature. So the awareness that you hold it in is very important. How you're with it, how you bring that sunlight, the warm air that allows the apple to slowly mature.

Certainly, you don't want to have early frost. So at some point in practice, the path opens enough that we see absence. We see that something's not there. Then absence is profoundly important. But you can't stare at absence.

You notice some place where something is absent, like an empty space. Nothing's in it. If you stare at the emptiness, the absence, you probably just get a headache. It doesn't accomplish anything. But the way that you gaze upon an empty space, to gaze upon that absence, is more of a soft, diffuse seeing.

I sometimes think of it as peripheral vision rather than central vision. But maybe broad, soft, relaxed. We don't look at it for a purpose. We don't look at the emptiness to accomplish

anything, or look at the empty space to try to improve on it. It could be empty in a better way.

Then a time comes in this practice where it's all soft, broad, maybe diffuse awareness. It is what allows something to grow, mature, heal, open. Maybe it even allows something to show itself for the first time here.

When the inhale is finished, inhaling is no longer there. It's absent. During the exhale, where did the inhale go? What's that absence like? You certainly can't stare at it, go chase the absence.

But the absence of the inhale allows for the exhale. Rather than staring at the exhale, hold the exhale in that wide, diffuse, soft awareness. You might also look at the absence of something. When the exhale is done, gone and absent, have a soft, diffuse awareness of that absence.

You can't quite, you can't really see exactly. But the mind's eye can kind of softly see or recognize, in the soft gaze, seeing absence. Let that be the same soft gaze to feel what's here, to feel the inhale, to feel the exhale.

And then become aware of the empty space just beyond the edges of your body—space that's absent of anything that fills it. Maybe for some inches or a foot beyond your body, let there be that soft, diffuse, open awareness. You can't stare at the space, but can rest in it or float in it.

And with the same soft awareness, now become aware of the sensations of your body. But without straining, without trying to know exactly what you're sensing, with an absence of the mind working to try to figure out or to do anything. In the absence of straining, in the absence of a narrow focus, have a soft, diffuse awareness of your body sensations as they appear, in the same way that you would gaze upon an empty space.

Gaze and feel, sense, or as if awareness is like sunlight and the warm air in which a fruit can ripen. Let your whole body be within the warmth of a diffuse, soft awareness that doesn't stare at anything, allows everything.

And for the moments that the mind is without discursive thinking, without having a conversation in your mind, commentary, judgments, there might be moments of mental absence, mental space. That can be filled with a soft, diffuse awareness that doesn't stare at anything, but which is available for everything.

And if your mind starts thinking, don't stare at the thoughts. Let them also be known in this broad, diffuse awareness, as if they too can relax in the warmth of your awareness.

And if there's some part of you which is the doer, that part of you which is doing the practice, can that also receive the warmth, the softness of this diffuse awareness? Maybe there's something about the location where you are—the doer, the where—that would like to soften, relax, if it's known in this soft, broad awareness.

There might be some feeling or recognition of absence of clinging. Absence of clinging. Well, maybe a little bit remains. That's okay.

Maybe some kind of absence of agitation. Well, still there's a little left, which is okay. Maybe the whole body is diffuse in awareness, or maybe there's some solid particularity within the wide body. That's okay.

Maybe there's a wide, vast space that maybe is filled with a few things here and there. That's okay. You can't stare at space, but if you know the space around you, within you, the knowing and the space are not two different things. Awareness of space and space arise together.

Maybe there can be a wide, diffuse, soft awareness that is as wide as the space around you, within you, within which everything there—it's okay. Maybe everything smiles at receiving the warmth, warm gaze of awareness, without being stared at, as an apple probably smiles as it gets sweeter and sweeter. Yeah.

Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh.

We often focus on something specific, some kind of thought, a feeling, a sensation, and thereby miss the absences that are here. To look at the objects in a room, you might not notice that high ceiling and all the space. Notice the sacred absence, that seen and recognized with a soft, diffuse awareness, soft, diffuse gaze.

That's okay with whatever is known. Nothing needs to be known with precision. Everything can just be held in the broad, wide, soft awareness, so that what wants to relax can relax, what wants to heal can heal. What wants to be told is told. What wants to mature and grow, expand, can expand. And what wants to let go can let go.

And the letting go of holding tight, the letting go of tightening up, provides a new, greater, sacred emptiness, sacred absence.

Oh. Oh. Okay. The car is now in park.

As you continue practicing this day, may, for those of you who have sunny and warm weather, may it be a metaphor for how you're aware. Let this be a day of absence, of space, spaciousness. Of a great emptiness, which teaches us to be aware softly, diffusely, in a simple, relaxed way.

Be the warmth of our own awareness. Be the medicine that we most need, the medicine that heals us from clinging of all types, the medicine that matures our inner sweetness. May you notice the absences, both physically and mentally, in wherever you live and walk and are outside, and with whatever landscape, inner landscape, that you find yourself.

Thank you.