

Dharmette: Q&A

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So, I don't think I have anything on my mind to teach. But maybe if you ask some questions, I might have something I could say, if you'd like me to. And you might need to turn up the volume for my sake.

Could you just speak a little bit about effortless effort?

Right, effortless effort. Well, there's effort. There's putting energy into activities we have to do, and then there's all the stuff we add on top of that which is extra. And sometimes we put more effort into doing the extra than doing the activity.

So, it could be that someone stops you on the street and asks you for directions to go someplace, and it's easy enough. You just go down there and take the first right. That's easy. It's kind of almost effortless to tell them that. But then, I mean, this is a person that you clearly should impress. This is a person that you want to show that you're really good at giving directions, and you want to prove it to them.

And so you lean in, you get all tense. It's so important to give the directions, and you want to show them that you're really helpful. And you're going to say, "And I'll take you down there." And there's all this extra that gets put on top because of all kinds of conceit and ideas.

So, rather than answering your question about effortless effort, I think it's more interesting to understand over-efforting and then see what's left. It's kind of whittling away, kind of slowly carving away all the over-efforting, and seeing what's left. Is that okay, not to answer your question directly?

Hi. Could you give some thoughts—you know, oh, can you hear me here? Could you give some thoughts or guidance around knowing when you have bad breaths?

For when you have bad what?

When you have bad breaths and when you don't have bad breaths.

Am I not being understood? And I can't hear that word “bad.”

When you have capacity for something and don't have capacity for something. Or capacity.

Yeah. So your question is: talk about capacity and the absence of capacity?

Yeah, yeah, and combining that with a skillful mindful life.

Combining that with skillful—I'm sorry.

Yeah, yeah. You know, my ears are not so good either. It's just mindful life.

Well, I love the topic of capacity, and one of the things that we are doing in this practice is increasing our capacity for many things—our ability to have things be, to have room in the awareness, room in our body, room in our hearts for more and more things. And one of the things is to have a greater capacity to be uncomfortable.

And so, to have capacity to be uncomfortable means that we don't add a lot of extra on top of it. We don't get reactive. We don't get angry. We don't get tight and narrow. But we actually relax. Okay, this is uncomfortable, and we're like this. And the capacity to be uncomfortable grows.

The capacity for people to be angry with us grows. Oh, look! Here's another person who's angry with me. This is interesting. As opposed to, like, if they're angry with me, I'm going to be angry with them. You know, this means that—but, oh, look at that! I know how to be with an angry person. I'll irritate them because I'm just smiling and saying, “Please come tell me.”

And capacity to be with the difficult emotions that we have. We might be angry. How can you open up and make space for your anger so that the anger doesn't take over, doesn't direct you, doesn't govern you, and tell you? And you start speaking the anger to someone else. Oh, I can hold this. I have the capacity for this.

So, to be able to be present in a non-reactive way, present to just feel it and make room for it in the body—that capacity goes together with the capacity to have more room to feel good feelings. The capacity to hold your anger in a big, wide-open body-heart makes room to feel love in the same way, or generosity in the same way, or to feel your faith, if you have faith, or confidence.

That can be not just a little thing in the head, but there can be lots of room. The confidence moves through your whole body in a beautiful way. Is that a good enough answer?

That's great! Totally different than I expected.

Oh, are you satisfied? Are you not? Are you very?

Thank you.

Oh, wow! I got away with that one.

Thank you, thank you, Gil. I love the way you explained how it can be expanded.

Can be what?

Expanded, you know, to be vast. Because when you first started this half-day, you were trying to have us focus on the impermanent. You know, things change, come and go. I thought, oh, that's the *Three Characteristics*, and it related to the *Right View* that we just worked on last Sunday.

And then I thought, well, I can't just say, "Oh, the *Right View*—I mean, impermanence—supports the *Right View*. I'm done," you know, putting it in a box. I understand this, put it away. But it's a different level of maturity to understand impermanence.

So, you know, I'm not following you well enough. Some of the words are horrible. How about this one? Bring me the hearing-system devices, because I'm ready for them, and I have them. But what happens when I wear them when I teach? Then my voice gets even quieter.

And so I—but I think if I wear that, then I can hear better. If I just wait here—thank you, Nancy. Yes. So, go try it now.

Okay, if I hold this and talk slowly, can you hear me now?

It's really clear now.

All right. I'm just trying to link the *Three Characteristics*, for example, impermanence, to *Right View*. And I say, okay, I understand it's a fine foundation of *Right View*. However, like everything else, impermanence—we can have different levels of understanding of impermanence. So they depend on the level of maturity of our practice.

So, I think my question is that instead of just saying, "Oh, I connected. I know," then instead of trying to, like you said, expand more to find out what's my real understanding, what's really supporting my view on this level of impermanence?

Yeah. So, that was a really great question, partly because of our conversation earlier and partly because of how you ended it. What do you have to say about this? How would you respond to this question? How does it work for you in your practice?

Well, what works with my practice is that I have this habit: connect something, I think I know, then just put it in a box and just say, “Okay, that's it.” Then next, what's next?

And has that been useful for you?

No.

Oh. Oh, so you've learned something important. So it seems to me you've learned something invaluable.

Can you elaborate a little bit more? Like somebody like me, I just shortcut the learning, so the attitude is just to hold it longer before I draw the conclusion.

That sounds good to me. What doesn't sound good to me is that you're kind of doing another shortcut to learning by asking me to answer.

I can't win today. I think I dig a hole for myself.

Yeah. What the rest of you don't know is that we had a conversation earlier about how, when Lydia, who teaches here sometimes—when people ask questions, all she has to do is ask them why this is an important question for them, and for her to respond only from her experience. That's all she has to do. That's all she needs to know, is her experience. She doesn't have to know what some crazy teacher thinks about something, right?

Yes, that's why we're doing it right now this way. We're doing a role play right now. I'm just trying to make it easier for myself.

Well, the reason I ask questions is so I can imprint your teaching in my mind.

Oh, that's another box. Oh, I think I failed as a teacher if that's what you're doing.

Thank you. It's very helpful.

So, we have time for one more, if anyone dares now.

Yes. Yes, I was thinking these practices, like, you know, mindfulness of the thoughts, mindfulness of the breath, and mindfulness of the body. Yeah, there seem like three variations, three types of exercises. How do I know which one to use, and when, and how much?

Ah, very good. It's a good question. There's different answers you could have at different times. One is: whatever feels right. Just, you know, you can kind of feel, “Oh, this seems right right now.”

A little bit more direct: whichever one is most compelling, wherever it seems to be loudest—the body, the breath, the emotions. It could also be if you're working on something particular in practice. Some people are completely disconnected to their body. “I need to spend more time getting to know my body.”

For some people, it's their emotions, so you make that a subject for a day or two or a week or a year. And for some people, it's something else. It's their thinking or their breathing. “I think I want to spend time getting to know this and develop this area for myself.”

So, whatever is needed, whatever you think is most useful, whatever is most compelling, whatever is intuitive and feels like the nice place to be, whatever is useful, and wherever you feel like you need to grow and develop.

Thank you.

Great. Well, thank you. So.