

Wednesday Dharma talk

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A metaphor that's personally meaningful for me is that of home, and to have found a way of feeling deeply at home in this body. And it's kind of nice to be a turtle that way, that you can bring your home with you anywhere you go.

A similar metaphor, I think, for the Buddha was that of the ancestral homeland. He was born and raised in the foothills, lower parts of the Himalayas. And maybe it was there he encountered a species of monkeys that they had. The homeland for the monkeys was this kind of hill, this lower Himalayas, high enough so hunters couldn't go hunt them. But if the monkeys came down lower and lower toward the plains of India, then they were easy prey for the hunters.

But if they went too high up in the Himalayas, where there were quite steep cliffs and mountains, these monkeys didn't do well there. Maybe they were good monkey tree climbers, so they were in danger of falling and dying if they went too high in the mountains. But if they stayed in their ancestral homeland, they'd be safe. So he tells that metaphor, that simile.

And then he says the ancestral homeland for us is the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, which is your direct experience, a particular way of understanding your direct experience here in this body and mind. There's something about who you are here and now, in the present moment, that can be your home, or not just your home, but your ancestral homeland.

And one feature of that is that we have a lot of faculties; we have a lot of abilities. Like, some of us can see, some of us can kind of hear. And we have these ancestral faculties that, you know, predated becoming our particular species of mammals. We share them with other mammals, and we have these faculties and abilities within us.

And the Buddha emphasized that we have faculties for trust or faith, what Kodo talked about. We have a faculty for well-being of all sorts: joy and happiness and contentment. And part of

what we're doing with this cultivation part of Buddhism, this cultivation part of this retreat, is we're tapping into abilities we all have, capacities we all have, and allowing those capacities to grow and develop, become stronger, to support us.

They're part of our ancestral homeland, to have these abilities. And I'm kind of inspired by this idea that we're actually relying on something that's already in us—abilities we have naturally, in a certain way. That if we can come home, come into ourselves in the right way, we can allow these to grow and develop and flourish for us.

And just because maybe you don't hear the word “flourish” in Buddhist language very often, I'll give you the Pāli word for it. You don't have to remember this, but just so that you know that there's an ancient Pāli word the Buddha used for flourishing: *vipula*, *vipula*.

So we have these faculties that we can develop, and they're natural faculties, and we all have them to some degree. Some of these are operating. So, like trust is operating to some degree all the time, maybe in small ways, small ways that would be ridiculous to emphasize.

But, you know, some of you have plenty enough trust that most of you can walk up the steps to come here to the meditation hall. Not everyone can walk up the steps. Maybe some of you are using the elevator, in which case you trust the elevator. You trust your ability to push the buttons or something.

But trust is built into human life in so many ways, and to build on that, to grow on that, gives a lot of confidence, gives a lot of faith. And in being a faculty, it's not just kind of like a mechanical mechanism inside that you kind of get going and oil. It's more—it's almost like a state of being.

That faith is a state of being, and trust is a state of being that maybe doesn't have any particular spot within us. Rather, it's kind of something that spreads throughout parts of our body. Maybe we might feel it in your arms or in your legs or in your torso. But we're looking at something and developing something which is not like a thing exactly, but more like a feeling or an attitude that pervades us as we come along.

So what does it take to be present with oneself? To not just cultivate or grow these faculties, but to make ourselves available internally so that the part of it that's a pervasive feeling has room to grow in, has space to grow in, can grow. So one of the things we have to do is know that we have these abilities, we have these capacities.

So a little bit we can identify them and appreciate when they're there, but also, oddly enough, understand and recognize when they're not there. Often in Buddhist practice, this practice of cultivation, some of the things we're cultivating can be seen as ideals, and people chase

them directly. But sometimes it's better actually to understand well what gets in the way of them, so that it's kind of more realistic. It's kind of like we're working through some of the hindrances, some of the blocks for it.

So to understand how we might have doubts or insecurities or mistrust even, so that maybe we can address them or settle them, or recognize how some of the mistrust we have is paradoxically a way that we lose ourselves. We lose the homeland, the ancestral homeland. We lose being at home in ourselves.

So with well-being as well, to understand how we don't have well-being, we have ill-being, and recognize what that's about, and understand it, and maybe care for it. Mostly, ways that we don't feel well, we feel unhappy, represent places that we need deep care, deep love, and attention, and to hold well.

And if we're holding what's here, the ancestral homeland or home, with care and love, then there starts being space for something to grow and develop and show itself that can't be there if we're constantly beating ourselves up, or critical of ourselves, or constantly afraid. But if we're afraid and we hold the fear lovingly, if we're self-critical, we hold that lovingly, make space for it, recognize this is the place of home. Let's care for the home, care for what's difficult. Then the well-being feels well-rooted, feels well-grounded as it begins to grow.

So the topic for today is what I'm calling stability. There's a lot of different other words that can be used for it. Sometimes, steadiness: to become steady.

When my son had a kind of a severe case of something—we don't exactly know what—but it was diagnosed as dyslexia when he was young, he had a very quick mind that was jumping around, a very visual mind. And there was a period of time when that was at its peak that it was almost like he was possessed, like he'd be crazed. Like, you'd put your hand in front of the kind of person—you put your hands in front of their eyes and say, “See there.”

But luckily, he went to this dyslexia program that taught him what he could do, almost like at the same time it was starting to develop. And they call it orientation. And sometimes, as parents, our intervention was to say, “Please get oriented. Orient yourself.”

And what he would do—he never protested—he'd stand kind of a bit tall and take a deep breath. And he'd close his eyes, and he'd exhale, and he imagined he had a green light at the back of his head, and that green light was going to look straight ahead, right down at some object in front of him. And this would steady his mind.

His mind would stop spinning and jumping around so much and be caught in all these images. And it was, like, dramatic. He was back; our son was back, just from that steadying, becoming

steady. So he had this technique of steadying his mind with his focus.

And so the idea of stability, steadiness—the Pāli word that I am using kind of in this camp is *samādhi*, a word which is often translated as concentration. But concentration, the English word, all too easily suggests that it's something kind of like a laser focus in the mind. And I have, and maybe some of you have, thought you're supposed to get concentrated and tightened up, get tense and strive and push, in the very opposite direction of something that helps you relax and be at home here in yourself.

It's more of a way of being separated from yourself almost, or shut down even, in some forms when it's really tight and narrow. But the word *samādhi* is very closely related to a word that means settled or steady. And sometimes, in fact, the word is so close in spelling that translators sometimes will translate *samādhi* as concentration, but literally it means a steadiness or a settledness.

And so there, too, sometimes it's important when you hear that we're trying to cultivate steadiness, stability, unification, stability, to be realistic and appreciate how you're not that way when you're not. Otherwise, you might be trying to ignore it or override how you are, or fight against yourself and try to attain something that's not what's really happening. Really, what we're doing here is coming home to ourselves and recognizing what's here.

And to cultivate stability, maybe you have to first appreciate, “Boy, I'm unsteady. Boy, am I agitated! Boy, am I spinning out a lot! Boy, am I jumping around! I can't even—you know—I can't even stay present for half a breath. Isn't that amazing? Wow!”

You know, here I am, and I feel like I have the jitters, and everything is just kind of restless in me. There's all—I mean, I'm just—I don't know—it's all kind of different ways that this can happen. It's possible to be steady in your body but feel unsteady in the mind. It's possible to feel steady in the mind but feel restless and agitated in the body. And it's possible to have both mind and body agitated, both mind and body steadied.

So to take some time with yourself, like that deep check-in the first day, to check in: “Oh, this is how it is for me,” and not immediately think that you're supposed to overcome it or push it away or override it again. But to love it, to be here. All this is who you are. All this is part of being home.

To be home with this too. We have to be home with this too. We have to hold and be with and care for it. So that the attitude for how we're going to cultivate steadiness is not one of aversion, not one of trying to pretend that something is wrong, or believe something is wrong, or somehow override it without being realistic about who we are.

It's like my son when my wife and I would tell him, "Please orient." We weren't barking. It wasn't like we were drill sergeants yelling at him, "Attention! Orient!" No, I mean, we were loving him, we cared about him, and we were there to support him, and it was done with love, I hope.

And so, same with ourselves. But to recognize that there are things we can do to get a little more stable, we can arrive and get here. But first you have to really know well how you're not stable, not settled. "Oh, that's how it is. That's how it feels."

Okay, now that I know how it feels, my body—the body—is the medium for a lot of this. The mind is the medium. So now I know how the mind is this way. This is good. I needed to know this. Thank you.

Rather than, "Oh no, not again." So, "Oh, this is what it's like today. Okay, now I know. Now, what can I do to cultivate steadiness? What can I do to be stable?" And each of you will have a different answer to that question. It's very personal.

But some basic things are like: feel your body, feel the solidity of your body, the substance of your body, the weight of your body. Feel your body against the chair or the cushion. Feel the ground if you have your two feet on the ground. Really feel the ground.

Stay, you know, and then maybe take some deep breaths. And as you exhale, settle into the weight of the body. Settle into the way the body can rest on whatever surface is holding it up against the pull of gravity. Okay. I'm here.

You want to be careful with your posture. We didn't tell our son just to stand up straight when he would get oriented. We would just tell him, "Okay, could you, you know, why don't you orient?"

I think it's a nice thing to do that. Somehow intuitively he knew he should do that. He was, like, getting himself ready and settled and kind of stable. Maybe, you know, maybe—I don't know what he knew it from—but he loved to play baseball when he was a kid. So standing in the batter's box, you know, he knew about getting ready there. So maybe he was doing something like that.

And so it could be just being with a breath a few times. If you remember, also the first morning I offered you what I call a three-breath journey. That sometimes is really good, to keep your ambitions low of how well you can stay present. And even three breaths might be too high an ambition sometimes. Maybe one breath is all you can do.

But sometimes, just doing a three-breath journey, and just count three breaths, especially

nice in daily life. It's remarkable how much can change in three breaths, especially if you don't try to do anything else. Just stay with it very simply.

Part of this idea of understanding yourself well for the purpose of cultivating stability is to understand how you get in your own way, how you maybe strain or try too hard. I used to—you know, my mind was thinking too much, and I tried to use mindfulness as a bazooka. I'll just note it and recognize I was thinking, and just see if I can blow my thinking out of existence.

You know, that didn't work. But it took me a while, took some headaches, to find out that that didn't work. It could be that you recognize that there's a second or a third arrow. There's a way of reacting to being agitated, to being unsettled, that's keeping you unsettled.

Like, “I hate this. I don't like this. I must be doing something wrong.” And there's all these other things we're doing that keep things stirred up. It could be as simple as feeling unsettled can feel uncomfortable, but being uncomfortable is not good. There's a reactivity to being uncomfortable.

And maybe it's more settling and stabilizing to explore: how can you be comfortable with being uncomfortable? How can you hold it? How can you make space for it? How can you make room for it?

That settling, trying to override it, maybe is not settling very much. There's also some settling in the body, some in the mind, and some of it might be in the heart. And each of those might need something different from you. The heart maybe does well with forgiveness, does well with some *mettā*.

The heart might do well with tender loving care, hold it well and kindly. Something settles. The body might do well with physical relaxation, to go through the body and see what you can relax. What are the obvious things that can be settled?

Some agitations, some thinking—a lot of thinking, agitated thinking—it seems like, at least for me, it's almost like the tension I carry in my body is the very pressure that's pushing the thoughts out. And so, if I don't care for the tension in my body, then I'll just keep spinning the thoughts out. But if I can relax the tension in the body, then the thoughts have a chance to relax too.

The connection between the mind and the body is really close. And so, the tension of the body probably represents tension in the mind. And tension in the mind is, in my analogy, kind of like a tube of toothpaste, a full tube of toothpaste that you take and the lid off, and you squeeze it.

But you don't want it; you want it to stop coming out. So you take your hand and brush it away, but your other hand is still squeezing it, and it just comes out, just keeps coming out, keeps coming out. Why does it keep coming out? You shake it, you try to stop it, but it just keeps coming out. You have to stop squeezing it.

So tension in the mind, tension in the body, can be part of the reason why your toothpaste doesn't stop pouring out, you know. And toothpaste is useful a little bit, you know. A small piece is useful, but thinking is useful a little bit. But, you know, there can be too much of it too.

So this relaxing can be a great help and great support. The stability can also come from beginning to recognize how you're already stable, where you're already steady. And even in a very agitated state, it might be possible to find some place in your system where things feel settled or stable or calm.

It might be your little fingers, your little toe. There was someone who, many years ago—a teacher I know, actually—the person told me she was hospitalized for a lot of unremitting physical pain. And this *vipassanā* teacher went to see her in the hospital and did a guided meditation with her.

And he asked her, “Is there any place in your body where you can feel pleasure?” And she said, “No, because the whole thing is racked with pain.” “Really? Can't you just look around? Look around.”

And she came back and said, “Well, there's this little square inch on the inside of my thigh.” And he said, “Now bring your attention to that,” and that was a whole new world for her. Her attention was only on the pain. And so she found that shifting her attention to where there was pleasure steadied her mind, steadied the agitation in her mind, the reactivity of the mind.

That gave the mind something to do; that let the mind calm down some. And that was the beginning of her *vipassanā* practice. That allowed it all to open up for her and deepen. And eventually, she was able to go home.

So, is there some place that is stabilizing for you? Maybe because it is pleasant. Maybe because it feels calm. Maybe there's some place deep in your belly that feels calm. Okay, out there it's safe and comfortable.

Maybe it's the base of your spine. It can be almost anywhere. I've known people who found it was a—May yesterday talked about the pleasure of your hand. I've known people who found

stability and confidence in their hands. So where do you find it? You know, where might it be there?

And then in the mind, where do you live when you live in your mind? You know, maybe you don't use that kind of language for yourself, but there's a fair number of humans who kind of take up residency in their thinking. Like, their address should be—you know, they live in their thinking more than anywhere else, and so that should really be the address.

And some people, you need to have that thinking address because otherwise you'll never reach them. That's where they're living. But where is that place? Do you think mostly in images, and it's a little projection in front of your eyes of scenes that you see? Is it mostly a voice in your head?

And where's the mouth in the head, or where's the speaker in the head? Where's the projection of the images coming from? And some people will say that it can be kind of vague where it is. But you know it's not in their little finger. It's not in their jaw. It's not in the tip of their nose. It's not right on the skin of the forehead, maybe.

Well, the area gets kind of smaller and smaller as you kind of ask, “Where is it?” You kind of whittle away, and it still might not be very clear where your center of thinking is. But it might be some vague place between the ears, between the forehead and the back of your skull. There's some place.

For not a few people, it tends to be in the forefront of the brain near the forehead. And what does that center feel like there? Is it, in fact, like a squeezing-the-toothpaste feeling? Is it tight? Is it agitated? Is it pressure? Is it hard? Is it contracted and constricted?

So to feel that might allow it to relax. But to not know it's that way, maybe it can't relax. But if you find the place where the thinking is contracted, is that the whole brain, the whole mind? Are there other places in the mind that are more peaceful, more calm? Can you find a calm place?

If you think calmly, where do you think from? Does it feel like it's a different location than when you think in an agitated way or forcible way or addictive way? What is calm thinking? What is that like?

Do you have any control over the quality of your thinking? Are you just a victim of whatever your brain kicks out, how you think? Or can you adjust a little bit your thinking in a way that doesn't feel artificial, doesn't feel like you're overriding?

Just like you would maybe if you go—in the old days, I don't know what it is now—most peo-

ple, when they would go to the library, would quiet their voice in the old days. It just felt like a natural thing to do. Or when I used to sometimes occasionally go to see my son or his preschool class when all the kids were napping, the most natural thing in the world was to lower my voice, be really quiet.

The last thing you want to do in the world is to wake up preschool kids who are napping. It's kind of a sacred time. It's so peaceful. It's so nice. World War Three has been averted, and, you know, just keep it that way.

So are there other ways like that you can do for yourself if you're really attuned with yourself, feeling yourself? Is there actually a way of talking to yourself with your thoughts that's actually caring for yourself, that's actually calming for yourself? That's a little bit like now you're not just your own enemy with the kinds of ways you think, but now you become your friend because you're on a meditation retreat where it's allowed to be your friend, your own friend.

So what other simple, ordinary things could you maybe tap into where there is calm, where there is stability? And then are there a little bit more spiritual places, spiritual ways to feel a place of calmness, steadiness, peace?

So I'll tell you a story that I've been told many times. Maybe you have as well, about Mother Teresa. Someone asked this saintly person caring for the poor and destitute in Calcutta, in India, "You know, do you pray?" She said, "Oh yeah, I pray to God."

"What do you say to God when you pray?" "Oh, I don't say anything. I just listen." "What does God say to you?" "Oh, He doesn't say anything either. He's listening to me."

I think that's amazingly evocative and profound. They're both listening to each other. What happens when God and Mother Teresa meet in the listening?

When we bought IMC many years ago, the place in Redwood City, we bought it from elderly Christian ministers. A couple—they were ministers—and they were kind of a little bit mystical Christians, maybe. And they wanted us to buy their church because they sat in silence listening to God, and we sit in silence. And so they thought we were good people to receive the church.

However, from the time that they told us they were interested in selling it to us until the time they showed it to us was a year and a half. And I think the reason for that is that there were three parties in the negotiation. There were the ministers, there was us, and there was God. And one of those parties was slow.

And so we finally got to see it. And so I was the first one there at the church then. By the time I talked to them a lot on the phone, and we were like best friends. It was really nice people.

And so I got there before everybody else. Other people from IMC came to visit, to tour, to visit the building. And so they gave me a tour. And the place is pretty small.

And so we were talking, and they were giving me a tour, and we were talking, and in that short walk around the building, talking happily with each other, there started to be these gaps and pauses in the conversation. And those pauses got longer and longer. We finally came into the sanctuary, which was where meditation is now, where there were pews, and we sat down on the front pews facing the platform there.

And we sat down, and we had one of those pauses, and we didn't stop talking. We didn't—we just stayed there silent together. It was exquisite. And then after about ten minutes or something, the IMC members started coming to the front door and knocked.

Then we got up to let them in, but before we did, I went over to them and whispered, “I have to continue where we left off.” So, what is it that's listening? What listens deeply? What listens to God listening to you?

What listens to the *Dharma*? The *Dharma* is listening to you. What do you listen to in your own mind when your mind is listening to you? The mind wants to know you, and you want to know your mind. What is there, something sacred, something special that happens?

That's not the world of content. It's the world of contentment. It's not the world of what we're thinking about. If we're thinking about something, our thoughts are concerned with content. Some people live in the world of aboutness.

But for silence to listen to silence, it's not about anything. Is there a way to feel a steadiness that has no purpose? It's not about anything. It's just a steadiness. It's just allowing something to settle.

Is there some kind of steadiness to be found in a way of listening or sensing or feeling deeply, and just allowing each thing to be itself, and not to make it a project, not to make it something to do, but just, “Ah, this.”

I've learned over these years of *vipassanā* practice to really cherish the specialness, the sacredness almost, of being rooted, centered in my body, and to be in the sensations of the body. And I find that it's almost like Mother Teresa and God. My relationship between the sensing the body does and the sensations that come because I'm sensing—they're sensing, because I can't distinguish between the two.

I can talk about it as two separate things. But there's no sensations without sensing. There's no sensing without sensations. We have the ability to sense, but sensing doesn't come alive until there's a sensation. There's some object that causes us to have sensations.

There can be a sound, but we have to be able to hear the sound. Sometimes when I'm in the meditation hall here on Wednesdays, I don't hear the music across the street. Every Wednesday, they're playing music across the street. If I leave the building, then I hear it.

I know some of you hear it. He gets together with his boyfriends and they do putt-putt golf on Wednesday afternoons for years. We've been invited over. But sensing and sensations—that's a special place. What's there? That meeting, what's there, right there?

As opposed to feeling it and then having a whole conversation about what it means, what it is, how to fix it: "It's wrong," or, "That's great, I'm doing good." We get so much involved in the mind that thinks and figures and engineers and makes it into something, makes up things about it.

For Mother Teresa to listen to God and God to listen to her, there's nothing being made up. There's nothing being constructed, invented. There's no drama. There's nothing being—people often think of prayer as petitionary prayer. You're asking for something. Nothing's being asked for.

What's the equivalent for us in this non-theistic Buddhist thing? To feel and sense, to hear and see, to know—all these capacities are pretty special. The capacities to know, sense, and feel, hear, see the present moment—that's the means by which we recognize the ancestral homeland. That's the means by which we come home to ourselves.

And as you do that more, the more you do it, you'll get more and more attuned to how you lose that. I think probably a fair number of you are calmer now than you were three days ago, four days ago. And those of you who believe you are not calmer now than you were three, four days ago, I believe you are. Sometimes we're not the best reference for this.

As I tell the story, I was doing a month-long retreat by myself, a self-retreat, and I was packing up and leaving. And I remember arriving at the place, it just felt like such a sacred place and so special, and the whole place had a vibe of meditation and quiet. And as I was packing to leave, it was no longer that way. It was like just an ordinary place, and I was ordinary.

And I said, "Well, you know, that was a wasted month." And then I went to the office to check out. And I went up to the desk, and I couldn't speak. I didn't realize how calm I was; it became normal.

So what I'm trying to say here, though, is as we get calmer, we start seeing how we lose the calm. That's actually important to see. You want to actually register that well. Don't be upset. Don't try to avoid it or fix, fix, fix it right away.

Really, “Oh, look, there it is. I was calm; now I'm not so calm. I was quiet; now my mind is noisy. I was content; now I'm lost. I'm discontented. Wow! Look at that.”

The more you can see the differences between these two states, the wiser you'll become about these states. The more you can see the difference between how you are one way and how you are the other way, the more information you're going to have about how your whole inner life works, and how to be wise about it, and how to recognize it, and see the early warning signs, and to know what to prioritize, and where to rest your attention.

Some people think that they need to arrest their attention in the place they're most anxious. The deep belief is that anxiety somehow is true; anxiety means there's an imminent threat, and we have to make ourselves safe and figure something out. And that's the important place to go.

Eventually, by doing this understanding when you're calm and when you're not, you might slowly begin to have the wisdom to know, “No, actually, anxiety is really loud, but that's not what I have to give my attention to. I don't have to be against it, but it's not what I have to give myself over to. I can give myself to where it's calm.”

There's still a little place of calm in my belly or in part of my breathing. I think that's a more useful place to be. Parts of me can still be anxious, but I don't have to take this precious resource of attention and give it up to the anxiety.

We want to be able to start discovering how to have some choice about where our attention goes. It's really a precious resource. We don't want to have it hijacked by thinking and thoughts. And what I'm suggesting is that one of the ways to learn how not to get hijacked is to take time to notice when you are hijacked. Recognize that's what's happening.

“Oh, here it is! I'm supposed to learn, understand this, and see how this works and feel it.” I've asked some people, for example, when your mind gets caught in thoughts, what does it feel like? And some of the answers I've gotten are: it feels like it gets really small. The mind gets really tight and small.

Some people say, “It feels like my mind has gone dark.” When I'm not caught in my thoughts, it seems my mind feels bigger. It feels that there's light. There's space. Just beginning to recognize that many people don't recognize what it's like to be caught in their tight mind because they're more concerned about what they're thinking about.

That's so important; they get lost, and it's mesmerizing. But what we're trying to do is get the bigger picture here. So, "Oh, that's what it's like when I'm caught in thoughts. I feel tight. I feel dark. I feel small. Oh, okay. Now I see how it happens."

"I think that maybe I don't have to go there anymore. Let me go. Let me relax. Let me settle. Let me come back to where it feels more peaceful in me." The mind might be agitated, but the heart is peaceful or settled. Or maybe there's a gentle settling with every breath.

The rhythm of breathing is comforting. It is settling. It is kind of a home. It is kind of a letting go. It's kind of like leaving things alone.

Just be with the breath, feeling the rhythm of breathing. Feeling the massage of breathing in your body, seeing: can you not have a one-pointed focus on the breath, but can you have a broad settling into the breath? Can the breath be like the gentle waves on the ocean?

That son of mine who had dyslexia, his mind was so active, active, he had trouble sleeping. So he grew up with me doing lots of guided meditations to get him to fall asleep at night. And the most common one I used was he was like a sea otter, resting on the kelp with the others, back, and the waves would gently rise and fall.

And I started doing the rise and fall to the rhythm of his breathing, rising and falling. So content, so safe, everything is good. Gentle waves coming, rising, falling, and then he'd fall asleep. It was nice. It was nice for him, nice for his parents to get him asleep.

And so, you know, to settle on the breath. And some people like to have an image to help them to really settle into the breathing. I remember when I was at Zen Center with a Zen priest, her image was a great big bird with great wings. And so the breath was kind of like the wings lifting and moving.

Sometimes mine has been—maybe you won't like this—but a jellyfish, because it goes out in all directions. So the inhale is the jellyfish expanding, and somehow that was a whole embodied way of being with the breath. And it was settling; it helped me to be absorbed, to get into it.

And the last thing I want to say about this theme of stability, steadiness, maybe calm, serenity, a gathering together, a unification—in the same kind of family of states—is harmony. To come into harmony with ourselves: body, mind, heart are there together and harmonious. That's the function of *samādhi*: to bring everything into harmony. Everything comes together into a kind of wholeness.

But sometimes what *samādhi* can feel like is a deep, immersive feeling. Like you're really

immersed in yourself, immersed in your felt sense, immersed in your whole living experience of being alive. Just like you're dipping down.

And some people actually describe it as you're floating in water, and you just kind of sink underwater for a while, and it feels so good and fluid. And then you come up and breathe, and you sink again. But it's an immersive experience.

So in terms of where is the stability, where is the steadiness, where is the calm, where is the peace, sometimes it's just beyond the edges of where you're agitated. It's beyond the edges of where you're thinking a lot, because your thinking, in spite of what you might believe, does not fill the whole universe. It's actually a very teeny little, itsy-bitsy part of you.

I know your thinking is very important. I don't want to dismiss it or undervalue it, but it is really a small thing. You know, most of the world is not touched by your thinking. Most of the world doesn't even know your thinking. You know, there's a lot, a lot of space in the world.

It's not like you're a radio signal that's going out. It's just a little thing, and beyond the edges of it, there is vast peace. Beyond the edges of your body, there's space. Beyond the edges of your agitation, there is stillness.

And one way sometimes to help settle the whole nervous system, to gather ourselves together, to allow ourselves this immersive feeling, is to feel like you're immersed in a wider field of peace, of calm, of well-being, a wider field of stillness or spaciousness, openness. Different people might have different preferences in how they feel this. But to hear, "Oh, there's much more going on here."

Just like for Mother Teresa, where do you think God was when she was listening to him or her? Where do you think he was? Where is God? Where are you? Where's awareness? Where is what's listening to you? What's beyond you? Where's the beginning and end of you?

Can you immerse yourself in the peace that's here? Can you settle into this deeper place of peace inside, peace around you, that is larger, more valuable than just about anything you can think?

Please don't overvalue your thinking. Please don't underappreciate your ability to think. Don't overvalue it and don't underappreciate it. But maybe there's a way you can think that will settle you, help you be stable, help you be present.

Help you become concentrated, just here on the breathing. Settled here. If you're going to think anyway, think in ways that support the practice. Think about how can I think so the thinking is calming. Think about how can I encourage my mind to stay with the breathing.

Think about how can I be with a breath so that I can hang in for three breaths? How can I be more settled with my breathing? How is it I can breathe so breathing is settling? There's all these very—that's not making a lot of stories and fantasies and reactivities and getting lost in the thinking mind.

It's possible to use a thinking mind to help you think less. It's possible to use a thinking mind to help you do the practice itself. My Zen teacher was once asked what he does when he does Zen meditation, and he said, “I give myself meditation instruction.”

After sixty years, seventy—sixty years of meditation practice, he still needed instruction. But, you know, he was using his thoughts to stay present, to gather, to be here. Rather than letting the thinking mind have free rein to think whatever it wants to think about.

Stability, steadiness, settledness, calm—these are all things we can grow and develop and feel. And my hope is that in giving this talk, you'll be a little bit more oriented, sensitive to this particular ability you have: the ability to be settled here and now in this home, in this ancestral homeland that you are.

Don't leave your home. This practice is about really coming home to yourself. Stay here. Stay here. Discover what this is like to stay here in a settled way.

And as you go about the retreat center this evening and tomorrow, see if the way you walk, the way you eat, the way you go to your room, the way you use the bathroom—can you just keep thinking: “How do I stay settled now through this? How do I not give my settledness away by suddenly getting agitated or forgetting the practice?”

Can you somehow have settledness, steadiness, stability be the guide to coming home to yourself in a deep, deep way? Where maybe you listen to yourself in the way Mother Teresa listened to God. Thank you all very much.