Saturday Dharma talk

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After May's wonderful guided meditation this morning, it seemed besides the point to give a *dharma* talk. It seems strange, at the end of this wonderful week of teachings about cultivation, which is something that you do personally, teachings about insight, something you do personally, to talk about teachings. Explain things to you—it just misses the point, I think.

So, what I'd like to do, because it's better to become the teachings than to learn about the teachings, I would also like to do a guided meditation. And some of it will probably overlap with May. When there's good things, sometimes you copy it. We'll see. So, if you'd like to get ready.

And as an introduction, there are accounts of people asking the Buddha who he is or what he is, and he answers with a very precise word: that he is such. He is thus. It can seem like a very vague word. But it's very precise because it doesn't limit who he is. He's not defining himself in any kind of way that would limit.

And part of the child, part of the teachings on not-self, is a teaching pointing us to not limiting ourselves by any definition of me, myself, and mine. We define ourselves and limit ourselves. We define ourselves with value. We define ourselves in relationship to others and to values, our worth. We define things in the world as mine or not mine, as good or bad.

But to not be involved in living in definitions of who you are. Not limiting yourself to any particular judgment idea, except for the idea that you are thus—that you're allowed to be thus. You're allowed to be exactly as you are. Especially sitting quietly, not speaking. What a gift to give yourself, just here, just now.

The week began with her evoking attention to breathing. You might say it's your breathing that you control or don't control. Regardless, you share breathing with all mammals. It's

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just your mammalian body is breathing; it knows how to breathe. And right in the breathing, there's change.

If you define yourself by the in-breath, then who are you when it's no longer there? When it becomes the exhale, if you make a story about yourself having to do with the exhale, who are you then when you inhale? If you make a story based on the inhaling and exhaling, then you're living in abstractions. You're living in memory and anticipation. You don't inhale and exhale at the same time.

The comings and goings of breathing, the birth and death of an inhale. And part of this practice is to learn not to define ourselves by our breathing. In a sense, to free our breathing from ourselves. We talked about mindfulness of the body.

Sometimes it's possible to be aware of the global experience of breathing. How breathing engages, touches, moves different parts of the body. The front of the torso expands and contracts, as do the sides of the rib cage. The back of the rib cage, the back rib cage. The shoulders move, and maybe as you breathe in, there's a gentle pressure downward toward the pelvic cavity. The diaphragm downward.

Maybe to feel the global breathing and to steady yourself in the breathing. Breathing in and feeling stability, maybe in that gentle downward push. A settling in the body as you exhale. And as you breathe, letting your attention be broader, more global, as if awareness radiates outward through your whole body with every breath. Maybe a rhythm of attention spreading outward as you breathe in, settling inward and downward as you exhale.

And in this wide, broad awareness, is there any feeling of well-being, of contentment? Maybe of intimacy. As awareness arises from your breathing out into the body and beyond, and settles on the inhale, on the exhale, is there any trust or confidence in your body, in your breathing?

As you inhale, letting your awareness spread outward and maybe in all directions, so you're aware beyond the edges of your body to the spaciousness that surrounds you. Maybe as you breathe in, there's also space within your body that is continuous with the space around you, or it feels that way. As you breathe in, awareness spreads outward into the silence that's here. Silence beyond the edges of your body, the silence within your body, the direct experience of the body breathing. Movement of expanding and contracting, with a silent awareness, silent sensing.

And touching in again to well-being and contentment. That's not so much thinking well-being, but feeling it, sensing it with a silent awareness—a quiet contentment, a quiet sense of

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happiness. And then there's awareness of thinking. And is your thinking in harmony with the quiet, the silence, the awareness? Or does your thinking feel like extra noise, extra agitation on top of it?

Breathing in with a global awareness up into your head. Feeling any tension and pressure that's there, and as you exhale, relax the center of your head behind the forehead. And if thinking becomes quieter, slower, maybe it can feel in harmony with the rest of the meditation. Not a distraction. Maybe just little fish swimming in the great ocean, peacefully, quietly.

As you breathe in, your awareness can spread to touch whatever needs to be touched, whatever needs to be felt, whatever calls attention to itself. And then on the exhale, let the awareness come back to a settled place. Ah. With awareness riding the waves of breathing, awareness doesn't have to be fixed anywhere or stuck anywhere. It expands and touches and returns. It knows briefly, and the knowing vanishes.

If you don't use words to answer this question, where do you feel the answer? Who are you? If you answer that in words, does it limit you? Does it somehow define you in a way that you're less whole? If you allow the answer to who you are to be: you are such. You are thus.

Is there a silent, peaceful, quiet way of sensing the suchness of just being? What if there's no need to answer the question, “Who are you?” You don't have to be anything except just be. Can you see that defining anything as me, myself, and mine is extra? It is not needed in this simplicity of being. Thus, simple being.

Me, myself, and mine attracts complications and stories and ideas. And there's an alternative to that. Here, breathing in, breathing out, awareness growing and spreading on the inhale. Settling, steadying on the exhale.

Finding where in your body you feel most calm and most settled, that supports you to breathe in and out, expanding and contracting awareness through whatever is uncomfortable. Whatever *dukkha* is here too, it's okay; that can be included. And if you notice any clinging, any holding on tight, as you exhale, can you let go? Not because you should, but because it's better without the clinging. You settle back in.

To here, to thus, to this place of just being, with it all—no parts left out. So, just a couple more minutes here. Maybe knowing we're coming, you can come to the end soon. Maybe some thinking can let go. Is there some way to let go globally? Every exhale, global letting go.

In small steps, small ways, big ways. Letting go of any holding. Letting go of whatever wants

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to go. Another word for letting go is release. Release what is tight, contracted, and held in check.

So there won't be a bell to end the sitting. You can end as you wish. It's now four forty-five. Continue as you wish; end the sitting as you wish. But may you be careful to notice unnecessary ways you limit yourself by defining yourself in any way.

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