Practice Notes: Being the Trunk and not the Leaves

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So, to say just a few things about the practice, maybe to support you this morning, I think there's a wonderful analogy of ourselves in a tree. Imagine a big tree, maybe an oak tree or some tree that you like, that has a very strong, solid trunk. If you travel up out the trunk, you come to the first branches, and then those branches divide and become more branches. As you go out, the branches become thinner and thinner. At some point, they're so thin that even the squirrels can't walk on them.

If you go out to the end of those, you find all these leaves. The leaves are just—you know—they're the victims of the wind. The wind blows, and they're fluttering around, and squirrels can't stand on the leaves. Most things can't. The leaves don't support most things, except maybe butterflies or something.

But they're fluttering around, and they don't stay very long. Maybe a leaf stays for a season and then falls off. But the trunk stays for a long time. The trunk isn't moved by the wind at all. It's just solid.

So we're like that. If we travel from our trunk, some solid, safe place within—I like to think of it in the torso—and we travel out to the branches, the divided branches, and go all the way out to the leaves, those are just kind of where the winds of the world blow. Just a little bit, and they flutter, and sometimes fall off. Sometimes they're fluttering so much, they look like they're in distress.

And so the outer branches are like some of your thoughts. Thoughts have no weight at all. Thoughts are not really good things to stand on. Squirrels can't manage even that trick, standing on a thought. The thoughts are insubstantial.

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They're just kind of whatever the winds are from inside or outside. They come and they go and they flutter. Sometimes they can be quite anxious, fluttering quite a bit. Leaves are important for trees; thoughts are important for humans. But that's not the trunk.

The trunk is where the tree is solid and stable, maybe strong. So where's your trunk? If you live on the end of your branches all the time, branches break in the storm. If you live very far out on the branches and just think that the leaves are where to be all the time, you're in a very unstable, unreliable place to stand. It's hardly worthwhile standing on there at all.

Don't stand on your thoughts. There's a deeper place. There's a more secure place within. Some people might call it the core. Some people might call it the deep mind, the deep heart that we have.

And so, to be here practicing this morning, maybe see if you can intuit, sense, or feel some place inside that's more like a trunk. Some place inside that's a stable center, that's always going to be here in the present. The future and the past are the leaves, because all they can be are thoughts, ideas, projections, memories. But the trunk is always here.

Stay close to it, and you'll feel solid. You'll feel steady. You'll be wiser, more discerning. You'll see more clearly. So when you're walking, doing walking meditation, see if you can find that trunk.

In your sitting, see if you find that place of stability and strength that's within you. It's much more reliable than what's out at the end of the branches. So, thank you.

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