

You know, the first day is just...it's always...it has to be a train wreck. Sometimes we call it the 'swamp.' All the...no matter what you train for to come here to actually do it...guess what? It all gets caught between the first day's spacing out, telling these grand stories of how it is, or how it just was, or how way back was. You come in and you are assaulted by this on some level.

I said something last night: first day is really to be as kind to yourself as you can. There is no way to actually do this right. There is simply the reality that you have to try.

I thought I'd start with one of my poems I wrote many years ago. It is appropriate for a day like this. It is called: 'A Better Me.' I think you know about this one.

A Better Me

I went looking for a better me today
 One that sparkled in the sun,
 Inviting resistance and impatience to accompany me
 We again took the wrong fork in the road

Bowing deeply, I went my own way, leaving all the many voices behind
 The bushes inflamed by the fall sun gave completely to the bees
 I knew right then, surrendering to the bees, taking whatever it wants
 Nectar, moved by invisible wings,
 Calling my friends resistance and impatience back
 Holding myself
 We were all together again but nobody spoke this time
 The sky held us without question

This first day, one of the realities here is the fact that we have to actually work with...and you will during this time at different times...this truth of impatience and resistance. I think the first day is always a piece about...part of that train wreck is – no matter if you have been sitting 3 hours/day and you come here, it is still a switch, even for those of you who just came from another retreat, it is still the impact of this capacity to...it is simply this ability to stop. Stopping happens to be the opposite from the cultural reality we live in, which is a culture that really honors and supports bytes. It's down to how many bytes now – it moves from one thing to another that quickly. In one sense it is taking a thing called 'time.' What we are trying to do first is confronting time, which happens here.

In confronting time, there are 3 things which are aspects of that, which I'd like to explore with you this evening.

First is a thing called 'effort.' Effort is one of the primary pieces here, the second is 'ease' and the third is 'trust.' First this piece around effort is – we all come here and are listening to the intentions people have [there was a the day before for each person to state their intention for the retreat]– we all have a sense of purpose and direction of, possibly,

what we are doing here...possibly not...probably, even if you didn't have one when you came, one begins to reveal itself. This truth that the practice in the suttas, over and over again – one of the words which is used is 'effort,' in the lists, just as 'mindfulness' is used a lot. One of the pieces is coming here. We have the schedule, the rules of conduct of how we are going to manage this hall, whether each of the activities which happen is very much based on this piece around discipline, repetition, and effort.

There are 2 ways to hold it, and there is also a complexity in our culture around that word. The ideal is that somehow we can...Suzuki Roshi has this line: "Beginner's mind." The culture says: 'Effort is to get something;' it is based on competitiveness. Guess who you are competing with? Yourself. We bring that with us about the efforting; this idea that somehow what we are doing here is to get something.

I hope it is clear, through these teachings, that is *not* what we are doing. OK? The effort we need here is a very simple piece of effort. It is to just show up; it is just to not get caught up in a lot of thinking. I love...I have a piece here...if I can find it...this is from the venerable Tenzin Palmo on renunciation. I think it explains this whole piece pretty clearly because there is the fact that...I'll just read it.

The reason we are not enlightened is because we are lazy. There is no other reason. We do not bother to bring ourselves back to the present because we are too fascinated by the games the mind is playing. If one genuinely thinks about renunciation, it is not a giving up of external things like money, leaving home, or one's family. That's easy. Genuine renunciation is giving up our fond thoughts, all our delight in memories, hopes and daydreams – our mental chatter. To renounce that and stay naked in the present – that is renunciation.

It is a beautiful piece, on the fact that: yes it is true that there is awakening and it is also true that it certainly takes an effort, but *not* in the sense of getting something, the sense of a competitive piece. It is simply this willingness not to add to the world we already have. Every time a story comes through...a thought itself is just a thought, but our elaboration of it, whether it is like the metta phrases this afternoon, and then there's an extra line which goes with that, about how things happen. It's not so much that you're going to not do that but that there is an initial point where the effort is in 'not adding to.' We are just letting things be and we are not adding to it, but we keep adding to it. Your knee hurts. Then you create this story how, 'Oh gosh, 2 years ago I was running and something happened and so now I have to now figure it out how to work this.' It is not that the knee doesn't hurt, and it is not that your back doesn't hurt, it is the story line which goes with it and this *need* to figure it out.

It is in our nature to do that, but, from the point of practice, the effort is not to add. Thoughts are natural, sensations are natural, the fact that the mind wanders is; but not to add to it. I think sometimes one of the pieces here, the effort, is about self criticism and judgement. "Oh! I wandered off." Could you just say "I wandered off," and come back to your breath? But what happens a lot of times is that we have to add something to it. That can be the judge or the critic, or the 'I never get it right,' some habitual piece of old

language, old habit which...it is not that it isn't going to happen. I think it goes back to the metta in the sense that – at that point can you not elaborate or add to it? Leave it as simple as possible.

I think what I'm doing here is: I'm going to read to you the whole practice, everything you are doing here in one shot. OK? It is the best full explanation of what this is about. It comes out of the Chinese- called the **S'uo Chin Quan (?) by Master Tien Tie'd (?), the 6th century patriarch.** [? Seng-ts'an Third Patriarch of Chinese Zen died 606]

There are many paths to entering the reality of nirvana

But in essence they are all contained within 2 practices:

Stopping and seeing.

Stopping is the primary gate for overcoming the bonds of compulsiveness.

[This is really our primary piece here]

Seeing is the essential requisite for ending confusion.

Stopping is the wholesome resource which nurtures the mind.

[That is in essence our effort to stay present; to stay with the breath, to stay with the body, to actually know what is going on]

Seeing is the marvelous art which fosters intuitive understanding.

Stopping is the effective cause for attaining concentrated repose.

[That is what we are really doing with this first day]

Seeing is the very basis of enlightened wisdom.

A person who attains both the concentration and wisdom has all the requisites for self help and for helping others.

It should be known, then, that these 2 techniques are like the 2 wheels of a chariot

The 2 wings of a bird – if their practice is lopsided, you will fall from the path.

Therefore the sutras say: to one sidedly cultivate the merits of concentration -

Repose without practicing understanding, is called 'dullness.'

To one sidedly cultivate knowledge without practicing repose is called 'crazed.'

Dullness and crazedness, although they are somewhat different, are the same

In that they both perpetuate an unwholesome perspective.

So, our first practice here – I'm not worried about the 'seeing.' Right now we come here to go through this process which takes an effort- stopping. Stopping is not to get lost in things and I know you will. OK? But the effort here is just to let go; come back, come back to the breath and wherever you can, experience the simplicity of 'here.' All it means is that the mind is connecting to something fundamental and basic. It *does* take effort, but it cannot be done in a 'getting' way. The competitive mind or the 'getting' of something is counterproductive here.

What it is, is our ability to lightly bring the attention back, rest it for a moment and guess what it does? Adios. It will take off again, that is just how it is. So, each time that happens, we don't add to it or make some kind of criticism or comment about it- simply, "Oh, I'll come back." The effort is in this simplicity, the ability to bring the attention back, not add anything to it, and just start over. We just do this over and over. It is this

spiritual kind of – the effort is in the discipline and the repetition. It is a repetition of just bringing it back in its simplicity.

Again, part of the truth is that we come in and carry a lot of...I think it is called “garbage”- with us. That garbage will untangle itself. Sometimes it is some emotions, some stories, something – what we do is just hold it here in its truth and its kindness that just by bringing it back over and over again there is a loosening of the structure itself. Whatever it is- we don’t even have to know what it is - just that it happens naturally and this has been going on for thousands of years, there is nothing fancy about this, it is simple.

As we begin to recognize that we have the capacity to actually let go and come back; it is not so much being back as it is the letting go of whatever it is. You’ll stay for a few moments and you’ll be gone again. I’m not so worried about here in that sense of coming back, it is actually the ability to let go at this point, and not create more papancha, more mental proliferation, around it but simply to stay with the simplicity of it. Whether it is tiredness, sleepiness, storytelling, or some heart piece – all you are going to do is bring the attention back.

What happens out of that is: the recognition is not about the complexity of it, because if we can keep letting go in this repetition, there begins to grow something which is very fundamental to the coming back and it has to do with what is in the present when we are back. One of the things we have to become sensitive to – and this first day it is hard to do that, I have to admit - but what there is, is ‘ease’ in the coming back.

In the center of experience is this natural ease. It is a thing we are going to be cultivating here. It is a thing I have to point to because we can get into ‘what doesn’t work.’ But this is saying ‘OK, let’s look at what is working.’ There is something so powerful and simple in giving up on time. Time has something to do with the past and future. We catch ourselves – somehow we are more impressed with the past and future than we are with the present. If you can stay a little longer in the present. We give you a very easy object, simple object (maybe I shouldn’t say ‘easy.’) How about: ‘simple’ object, which is just the mind is on a physical experience which is simply all beings ‘be.’ It is not an object which you have to create the identity to, it is just simply to bring awareness back and stay a little while. It seems like the identity then jumps up and takes off again – that’s OK. What I’m trying to impress here is: when you come back and stay a moment – please look what’s available in that. So it is not looking for what is wrong, it is looking for what is right in those moments. Sometimes you don’t stay very long – it’s OK. But see what the components are: what are the components of that ‘just presence?’ We use the words: ‘the mindful.’ So the mind is full of that. In that there is no time. If there is no time, there can be awareness of this ease which is there. It is built in to presence.

So, I’m going to be saying this over and over again, trying to point again and again to the fact that, instead of warring with yourself, which this can be if you want it to be, for sure. You have some really valid stories and probably some really great inner judges and critics who know how to – a long list of reasons. My job is not about that, my job is to

point again and again to when there is a moment where you are not manufacturing anything, you are just here – that there can be a sense of ease and relaxation which isn't going to manufacture another - some idea, some self, some mind, some other thing. Our intention here is for you to begin to see that is a place of rest which has its own intelligence and that intelligence, once you start sensing what I'm talking about and start realizing that instead of putting our... we've built this belief system that somehow we have control over all this and that we can 'do.' What this is saying is there is something in being which is not noticed, it is not validated, it is not given any power, simply because the power is somehow in desire and the things we do and see and action and all that. What this is saying is: No, there is someplace else to look, once we begin to recognize this ease in it – there can be this peace which is underneath it in which there is a capacity to begin to trust.

We have always thought that trust had to be 'something,' and therefore it had to have a certain construction. What this is saying is: in the ease itself, if we can stay for a little while, you can begin to see: 'Oh, hey, this is enough. I don't need to look anywhere else, and I can actually begin to trust this ability, in the ease itself. The seeing which I was reading about –there is a natural wisdom which is not constructed.' By the way, it is something which is inherent in your nature and we sometimes refer to it as 'Buddha nature,' or 'basic goodness,' or... it's really this unclouded jewel. We can begin to see that when we – it's a deconstruction, that we deconstruct who we think we are in our belief system and find there is a place which is out of time. It is not in that restriction; it only exists here. It cannot be anywhere else but in this, almost this microsecond of, here.

When there is this deep... it is really a deep sense of relaxation about how things are happening - we don't need to control it, What we need is the ability to flow with what it is. It is not a stagnant thing. It is something which begins to inform you, that trust, no longer about the confines of who you think you are but actually how this is.

Suzuki Roshi always had this thing about this 'little mind' and the 'big mind.' The little mind is self constructing, has these core beliefs about how it all is. We all have a little different core belief. But there is also this training, when you begin to find that truth and begin to trust that you don't have to 'do' something, that there is a capacity to allow this 'big mind, 'or the fact that this longing for this view into some bigger spiritual world is not something unique or special, it is actually quite ordinary, and is quite available.

But you split the world in any way, as soon as you get out of the moment - into time – then we are back to constructing. You know how it goes. I know it is the first day, but I'm not going to back down on you. I've got to start off, not with gradual things - the fact is that this process we are in has some gradual stuff in it - but the truth is not gradual, it is always apparent and visible. But instead of looking simply – it is opposite of our cultural heritage - which is: we have to 'figure it out.' Figuring it out just gets in the way. What we have to do is learn to find the ease and then to find this inherent trust in something in ourselves which is completely unflawed. It is unflawed.

This is the best piece of it. It is called 'The Mind of Absolute Truth.' Sometimes it is known as the Hsin-hsin-ming in Chinese, and it is also 'Faith in Mind.' [Seng-ts'an Third Patriarch of Chinese Zen died 606]

The great way is not difficult.
 For those who are unattached to their preferences
 Let go of longing and aversion and everything will be perfectly clear
 If you cling to a hairbreadth of distinction
 Heaven and earth are set apart
 If you want to realize the truth, don't be for or against
 The struggle between good and evil is the primal disease of the mind
 Not grasping the deeper meaning, you just trouble the mind's serenity.
 As vast as infinite space it is perfect and lacks nothing
 But because you select and reject you can not perceive its true nature
 Don't get entangled in the world, don't lose yourself in emptiness
 Be at peace in the oneness of things and all errors will disappear by themselves

I really can't say anything more, y'know? Without having a preference, you have this capacity to...it is a bit of theater here, we create, in essence, struggle. This stopping is necessary to see, unfortunately. I wish...sometimes I used to go to Krishnamurti's talks. He had this thing about: you already have enough concentration, all you have to do is 'see.' I loved it. The only thing is, I would leave and 10 minutes later I forgot what he said. I would go...unh..yet I *really* got it [when I was with him] . This process the 6th century patriarch was talking about is that we have the 2 wings to balance. It would be nice if you had that amount of natural concentration. I would be thrilled. Just think: we could end this retreat right now, just be over – that would be it.

Unfortunately, and this is why I keep teaching these things and I feel so much that there is this effort which is necessary – the effort is in the stopping. I know you will see if you can stop properly. Part of the intention here is to create the collectedness and the concentration which is necessary to see. It takes repetition; it takes discipline; it takes effort to do it over and over again. Why? Because you are neurotic. You actually believe what you think. That is the danger, so we are going to work on that, you are going to get to see your stories and your constructions.

As a teacher, I know my job is simply to point at freedom; that is my sole purpose. But how it actually...the different angles of it. I also know there is a deconstruction which you have to do because you need to see how your mind works and really get to see what it causes you, what the 'selfing' causes you, and how much pain and suffering which are inherent in the self-creating of who we think we are. We have to see it to let go of it. 'Deconstruction' may be the wrong word because it is simply: when you see how it works, there is a loosening which naturally occurs. But first you have to have enough of this collectedness.

So you are going to sit here and you are going to say: 'OK, I'm really going to do it this time,' and bingo, there you are..."Last week I really couldn't believe when that guy

said...” there you go again. So we will keep working with this, keep untangling, story by story you will do it. It is flipping from content to process; that is what we are doing. We get caught in the content and we begin to see the process of how the thinking happens.

I think that is good enough.

Q: All day I’ve been wondering if ‘effort’ is the right word?

A: Well, it has always been used and I don’t know – like in Tibetan there are 13 words for ‘mind,’ or we have the word ‘love’ and ‘metta,’ – they are really different. And the idea of ‘getting something’ is built into the word ‘effort.’ But still there has to be the power to show up. How did you get here? There had to be not just intention, you actually had to do something to get here. There is something in that. I think it is a very tricky thing between the actual....

Heather: Resolve?

John: Resolve, yeah, maybe.

Q: Ardency?

A: Well, these are all still based on the fact that we forget and have to try again and the ‘try again’ is so...this is one of the things about these retreats, there is such honesty and...I guess you have to believe.

Q: I can see the effort of holding on as a problem but then the effort of letting go is also a ‘doing.’

A: That is what you have to learn. You are naming what it is – there has to be some kind of effort and then there is the ease. The ease is the result of proper...you still have to do it but there is one side which gets and there is another side which actually finds ease. It is like when I put my mind on my body and I stay for a moment, there is a sense of ease. You following what I’m saying? But it took me putting my attention there. It is a bit of a dichotomy, I realize that, and yet at the same time, just what Krishnamurti said: you walk out and you are just there so there is no problem. At some point I do believe it becomes effortless. But it is tricky in the culture, I realize that, because one of the things about this particular practice: there are 2 things in it. One is that it creates a doing... for being, and you could get caught for ages in the doing and not ever get to the being. It can be tricky that way. I do understand that but I will not pull back on the fact that you still have to show up.

Show up is in different categories. You had to show up here, you have to show up for your breath, you have to show up for your body, you have to show up for your feelings, you have to show up for your confusion. Each of those, it would be nice if you just had enough where there wasn’t any effort but the Buddha called it the ‘middle way-‘ tricky, because you can get caught in too much effort in this and wow- you just create suffering. But if you don’t have enough, you just circle around it. That is why I think this ‘stopping and seeing’ is so great. We need to have the stopping, otherwise, why come to this

retreat – you could just walk around and you’d get it. I’m not saying you wouldn’t; it is just that the conditions here are somewhat based on that. I hope that is helpful. It is a dichotomy, but if you don’t name it...it’s a tricky piece here. Anyone else have some answers?

Q: Balanced effort?

A: That’s still a tricky word, because of the culture, not because of the word. We have one of the most incredibly ‘doing’ cultures that exists; carries a lot of guilt if there isn’t doing. That is why I think there is a complementary piece here.

Q: Does ‘discipline’ convey it? Discipline seems to me to imply...

A: I can’t say ‘I know,’ because all I know is: at one point in my life it was all about effort and commitment to motivation and over and over and over and I got sick of it. I realize people actually have to turn around and go upstream, go against the cultural norm. Usually there is some kind of suffering which forces one to turn around, all sorts of types, but it is some kind of suffering. Then one says: ‘I’m going to go upstream’ and one has the idea: “Oh, awakening? Oh! That sounds cool.” So the first kind of stopping in the stream, going upcreek, like this first day – takes a little of that...

Q: Whenever you put words on anything, aren’t you going to run into this issue? When the Buddha was teaching, too. Whenever you put words on something you are creating limits and dichotomies and duality and yet when you are there experiencing it, in the moment it is a totally different thing, but the moment you try to speak to put that experience, when you are deep in...even just using the word ‘deep’ - it is a word, you are limiting...

A: It is a facsimile, yes. It is approximate. All this is approximate. But then there is the pointing which is going on. That is why I was hoping ‘ease’ and ‘trust’ – but I can’t start, it would be nice to be able to say: ‘let’s just do that.’ In a way we could because it is so built in. But, in some ways, I also feel that would be a disservice, because I really honor in myself and in the teachers – it is like, think about Suzuki Roshi for a minute – the way he just walked around, it was like this incredibly disciplined person who was soft as can be. Do you follow what I’m saying there? The way he did that- the way he felt- his muscles, it was like strong from the discipline, and yet he had lived it long enough where there was such a sense of ease – and so we could feel that we could trust this person. Maybe that is another way of saying the same things I’ve been saying. That there is that much effort at that point and discipline and that that became ease which allowed him to trust but also allowed us to trust his person. I think that is true with teachers, that they have to carry both of those pieces.

Tell you what: we could go on and on here. We are going to have time for all this stuff. Don’t worry, I won’t let you off the hook. What I’d like to do to complete this evening is to just finish reading this poem again to listen to it...it is brand new [again].

Q: The author?

A: Me

A Better Me

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