

John Travis:

I'd like to start with a poem; it is called:

Thanks

Searching through the catalogue of my own mind
Adventuring down the back ally ways
Caught in the maze of my own manufacturing
These narrow streets, so colorful
Canopies, blocking out the sunlight.

The busy-ness of the Casba
The smell of mint tea
Where was I going?
Where did I come from?
Who is it that knows this?

Stopping suddenly in the center of the ally ways,
Feet glued to the cobblestones,
That old familiar fear rising in the pit of the stomach
once more
Remembering somehow that the maze goes on forever.

Turning back, all the way back
Time standing still
The hush of all the voices

Wonder of wonders,
Remembering the silence at the gateway to the monastery
Some deep surrender
Where some measure of faith
Loosens the fear at last.

No more searching through the darkened streets
No more pulling out of hair, asking:
Which way to go?
Why is this so difficult?
Who started this?
How far? How long? How high?
Will I ever reach some kind of peace?

Giving up, giving way, just giving
Some thanks, giving.
The heart, like a lotus flower
Barely open, so sensitive

Rising out of the muck of the back streets of my mind
Finally, finding its own way.

I wanted to explore with you, journey with you, some of the facts or some of the truths about how this practice works in its fundamentals.

This is a piece, I'm not sure if it is from David Whyte or John O'Donohue, the poet.

You start to realize, after a while, that the consuming wish for safety and security is the wish to hold yourself back from the frontier experiences of your own life. There is nothing wrong with security and safety in their right place – with our families and all the rest, but the individual human path and the pilgrimage is a radical journey of encounter in appearances and disappearances, and if you take the understanding of safety too literally throughout your life then you will be unwilling to die at the appropriate moments and disappear. And you lose your sense of courage also because when things get difficult, instead of leaping towards the center of the flame itself, you are looking for a place away from the heat.

There is a way we should be eaten by life; that we should be absolutely consumed by it. There is nothing worse than getting to the death bed and finding you have been gummed to death. You have never been able to give yourself over to the teeth of existence.

Q: Who's the author of that?

A: That is either John O'Donohue, the poet who passed away just maybe 2 years ago [Irish poet 1/1/56 – 1/4/08] or David Whyte [English poet, now living in Pacific NW]. I'm not sure which of these it comes from, but – one of them - since they were giving a talk together.

One of the pieces here is that we have come together and we use this word, of trying to find some kind of safety, and some kind of ground. We have always been looking for it outside of ourselves – maybe a bank account or a car or house or relationship – something outside ourselves. We come to this practice and we have to pick up a mirror – is it Rumi where he goes to the bank and the teller asks him: 'Do you have your identification?' So he pulls out a mirror and says: 'Yup, that's me.'

When we come to this practice we've already constructed some kind of external reality which is based on safety. From the Buddhist point of view, that is not where safety lies because all we have taken refuge in (and I use the word 'refuge') is in changing phenomena. That is really what we have taken refuge in. So again and again we have been disappointed because it is actually not where it exists. We come, and like Rumi we've had to pick up the mirror. Instead of having some idea on the outside we have to identify who we are in some way. To do that, this turning around, this practice of turning around says first we have to explore the insecurity. Alan Watts [British philosopher 1/6/15-11/16/73, lived in Bay Area, best known as an interpreter and popularizer of Eastern philosophy for Western audiences] wrote a book called The Wisdom of Insecurity.

Somehow this is a challenge in taking and identifying - that we may have just gotten this a little mixed up; not only us, but the whole culture. So we have to turn around and begin to explore the simple truths; the simple truth that, in all notable experience – when I say that I mean: all there is...I don't know why I got into...Should I get into this yet? Well...I think I should. OK, [laughter] I know...

There is all this on the outside which we have trained ourselves to power the outside world. That means that we are trying to control the environment. That controlling of the environment is based on transient objects – it is all temporary, right? We begin to recognize it is temporary, and because it is temporary and we'd like some safety – we'd like to freeze it or keep it and have some security in it. The only thing is: we have been disappointed. The Buddha simply called that 'dhukka' or suffering. Over and over again – don't rely on it, that is not what it [safety] is.

We come, and first we have to have been informed by the outside objects; about their transiency and their unreliability and that they are not what they appear to be. That does have, initially, some form of wisdom in it. I think so many people come to these practices because of the suffering. They get it and so they start looking for something else.

From this point of view then there are the [1] outside objects and from Buddhist psychology we have the [2] knowing of those objects which is, first of all, through your [3] sense doors. If you are seeing an object – you are seeing me out here if you have your eyes open – I appear to be here. Actually I'm an external object, and I'm not [here]; I'm just upside down, actually, on your eye which is then going to your brain and then the brain kinda translates that and associates with that.

So: there is the outside object and there are the sense doors – the eye, the ear, the wonderful taste buds, and the smell, and the body sensation, and thinking – those are the 6 sense doors. That is the second wave. There is the outside and then we start getting that there are these sense doors and what is experiencing, and then there is the knowing of it. These are the 3 things which happen at these 6 sense doors (including the thinking, by the way).

Q: That was my question: thinking.

A: Thinking is not different. In Buddhist psychology we do not differentiate between the sense doors. That may not make sense right away. It is subtle because it is how you identify who you think you are. **This is a little trickier one, but it's not, from the simple fact that: we know things called thoughts – do you have those?** Those are objects – there are thoughts which are objects which go through the mind. Then there is the mind itself, which is the organ which experiences it, and then there is the knowing of it. So it is actually no different; in Buddhist psychology they are just considered 'the 6 sense doors.' The thoughts are like external objects and we can make thoughts into about as solid a thing as any external object. Isn't that interesting? Particularly with views and opinions, judgments – we get pretty solid, as solid as anything else out there actually is.

The whole process here is to begin to see: OK we've taken this mirror and started to look at it. We begin to study the fundamentals. The fundamentals here are based on the fact that when you turn your attention around – we put it on a simple object. The simple object here is your breathing. That is a primary thing. Your breath is an object, an internal object, so we have turned around from the external to the internal. That is really the beginning of a spiritual exploration, from *this* point of view, because we are not making something up with the mind as one of these sense doors, right? We aren't playing with thinking here, we are actually using the mind to touch into a simple experience which then allows the mind to connect to...I shouldn't say 'connect'...*let go* of the past and future because what is always true is the breath is a physical experience, it does not exist [except in the present]...you cannot experience your breath in the past, and you cannot experience it in the future, either. So you are beginning to train yourself just to be present.

We are a river of information which is based on these 6 objects. What happens is: the mind will stay...that which knows will stay with the sense door for a few moments. Seeing for a moment and then suddenly your butt will itch and you will scratch it – where does your mind go when that happens? It goes to that physical experience. Then there is some other experience, maybe in the body or a sound – a car drives up and the mind suddenly goes to hearing– it is jumping from object to object.

In the tradition it is talked about as 'monkey mind,' because it is just jumping. That which knows, or that which is aware, is jumping from object to object. It stays – how long- on an object? 5,6,7 moments and then it jumps. We can get caught up in thinking but then there are aspects of thinking. From a very simplistic point of view, and this is fractions of a moment, only one object arises in one mind moment at a time. That is debatable because it is happening so fast that it appears that you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, thinking, physical sensation all at the same time. But actually from experiential point of view, that is not so. I can tell you about that, but it is something you have to experience – it comes from a deep momentary experience – very profound, and a tremendous amount of concentration has to be there to know that. So let's just take a little bit on trust.

But now, what are we doing? In the sense of training ourselves?

We are beginning to simplify the objects. So, in essence, spiritual practice is: we have created this boundary, this is a very boundaried world here which has to do with simplifying external experience. Retreat is based on– no computers [cell phones, etc]... We minimize all external objects. We have minimized those objects, so what happens first is, of course, there is a...what is it called when you take something away?

A: Withdrawals? [laughter]

You have this incredible reaction to the taking away of things and it stirs up for a little while the reaction of taking something away. That does happen here, I understand that; it is part of what can happen, at least at the beginning. Then, suddenly, there is a noticing which begins to happen. We asked this morning: Slow Down. Y'know? Start to slow

down. 'Slow down' is simply beginning to turn the mind around to make contact with this simple truth of the breath and the step, these simple objects, and the body itself. As we begin to simplify, there is this capacity to begin to notice how this is working.

One of the very fundamentals here...this goes back to where I started this, in the sense of: is there safety in the objects? NO. But, in turning around and simplifying and beginning to start connecting with our physical experience, in the sense of the breath just breathing itself, is that – when we put our attention in that, we cannot be in the past or future so we're beginning to put ourselves into not a place of time but a place of timelessness which we begin to experience more and more – just a momentary experience which is not based in time.

There are certain factors when you let go of the complexity of past and future. That complexity is something which has to do with acknowledging that the mind is making a connection and that connection has a natural support in it. So this is why I'm getting to this piece around safety. The safety is not in the objects but it is not that it does not exist, it just doesn't exist. This sounds a little nutso, but, of course, I'm a little nutso. It's not based on time, it is based on the timeless. Something out of time. If there is no past and future, there is just present, and if it is present, it is actually forever – you are talking about something which is forever. So we begin to recognize there is a possibility of releasing what we know as past and future and begin to put our attention in presence. Not just notice what presence is but that it has its own information for you.

What has happened to us is that we have been trying to trust; we have been taught that through our minds and our power with the external objects we are going to find our safety. Unfortunately it is not true. If you don't know it now, you will keep testing this one out.

There is also this phenomenal truth here that, as you begin to train yourself in timelessness – it means when the mind begins to fully connect and the awareness itself, that which knows, is...we use the word 'embodiment,' – that it is actually embodied, that it is actually suddenly aware of the changeable object which we work through. It is no longer 'the objects out there,' but it is actually the senses themselves so we begin to learn that there is a possibility that presence has in it a sense of trust or safety which is inherent in it.

The thing is: you have to hang out there. You have to take and change your mind that has always been looking for its happiness in outside objects. It has to turn itself around and begin to recognize that there is maybe another place to sit.

This morning in the instructions I talked about the fact that this is the play of...the body itself is the play of these elements and that our practice here is that there is the play of the elements which are based on a process of identification. There is the quality of experience such as the fire element, let's say, of hot and cold. That is just a simple experience in time. It happens, it arises due to causes and conditions and it disappears, but the possibility here is that what we do with it is that we identify and we put something

extra on it. This is what we are trying to study. That extra which we are putting on it is that it is 'mine.' It is I, me, or mine – some kind of identification. What we are trying to do here is to see how we do that [identification]. There is the experience, what they call the 'bare experience' or 'choiceless experience' which arises due to causes and conditions and then there is an identification which we put on it: we don't like it/we like it. That is what we are doing with it. Suddenly, as we begin to see this, there is a willingness to thin out the identification itself. Thinning out the identification allows something quite simple to reveal itself. It can be a revelation that when we put the attention, when the mind is connected to our physical experience, but not needing it to be different than it is – there is a possibility of being free within it, and that itself has a sense of...

Heather: Safety?

John: Well, the lack of safety is something to do with separateness. Does that make sense to you? When you don't feel safe it means that you are separated from something. What this is saying is: if I'm connected (and it is only momentary) then a fear doesn't arise there. All that arises is the that-which-knows and the sense door. I'm trying to keep it really simple, because this is what we are trying to study. I know it is a lot. You begin to rest in the experience of just that which knows and the sense doors and that they are momentary experiences which are out of time. They arise due to causes and conditions. We begin to, slowly, as we understand them, see that they aren't 'you.' They are simply a process which is going on. By the way, it would be nice to say you can just get out of this...but unfortunately it doesn't actually work like that. We aren't trying to transcend this. Do you understand the difference? One is to get out of it, but this is actually saying: "I'm going to get *into* it."

Getting into it means: I own it so completely that I'm not separate from it, and the body you inhabit with the knowing, if it is not separating itself then it is not different than any other body in this room, by the way.

Q: No judgments...

A: Well, no, there is not any comparison which is the thing which separates. When you were very young, *really* young– there was a sense we had to be taken care of and that we knew...our instinctual nature was that we wanted to be loved, we wanted to be taken care of. Pretty simple. It would be simple if all of our needs had been taken care of. We would have known that we were loved for who we are, not what we could do. Unfortunately the way the world works is that we begin to recognize that those who are our caretakers, because of their needs, have certain expectations. With those expectations, then, we, in our intelligence, recognize that somehow we have to accommodate them. Right at that point we begin to use our sensitivity to accommodate them so suddenly there is a kind of self abandonment which happens so that we can be loved. We start then a process called 'comparison.' If I do this, they are going to be happy; if I do that they are going to be unhappy. Then we start this comparison process in which, very young, we begin to abandon this simple truth.

When we come to this, we know: OK, that is how we did it and we created a whole world in the mind of self abandoning and doing things and then we knew we'd be loved back,

well, we believed that. I think we've all learned a bit about that: ain't necessarily so. But it is what's there. It is what we've learned. So here we are, turning around, putting our attention on a very simple thing, letting go of external objects, we have our sense doors. You aren't going to get rid of them, by the way, until, well...when you stop breathing, the heart stops – you will be rid of them. Until then, you have them. Your relationship to them can either be that they are caught in the objects and the content of things or they are experienced in the simplicity of what they are. Does this make sense to you? The simplicity of what they are simply means: if there is a sound; it is just a sound. If there is a sight; it is just a sight. If there is a taste; it is just a taste. So suddenly we begin to get the functionality – that's what all these sense doors are, they are functionalities. We are going from the content, whether it is the thinking or the sensing, to releasing those things and coming back to the bare experience. Then there is the knowing and the object; there is still a duality, I haven't gotten past that yet, we are still caught in that. To understand this is a basic function of turning the mind around and beginning then to look for: Oh, there is a safety in the timelessness of experience.

I'm going to take this farther, don't worry, because we also have to deal with that which knows in its dualistic sense because this in not *freedom* at this point, it is just simply a subtler awareness of how it happens. That is essentially what we are doing: we are taking this, like building blocks. This is one of the building blocks – coming to recognize that we can actually break our connection to the outside objects and thoughts and find a place where we can rest outside of time which has its own...I'm thinking the word 'safety,' but it is also this piece which says, one of the things which either Whyte or O'Donohue [spoke of]...is that we have to be able to not be afraid of the life we have been given. So it is not about hiding from it, it is about being curious. That the objects themselves, whether it is a person or a whether it is things – whatever- that they are like things which appear out of nowhere and they are going to disappear back into nowhere. So *live* it. If it appears, live it. There are the precepts, because you can also go crazy with this and I think it is part of the craziness that we look for freedom in objects. At some point we have to turn it around and start seeing that we can let go of the objects and find there is a safety and peace which exists in the here and now.

I'm just kind of circling around this now.

When I first came to this practice I had this idea that somehow I could get up and out and beyond this in some way. That there was an ability to transcend, and oh, by the way I did learn how to transcend, but there wasn't freedom there. The Buddha spent 6 years doing austerity practices. They were all based on transcendence. They all were where he learned how to go into altered states which, and I'm not saying [they are bad] because I like them, but they weren't freedom, they were just altered states. They give a person a different relationship to objects. Does that make sense to you? You learn that there is pleasure and pleasantness and equanimity, a balance. which is so much greater than our physical experience of the objects. In the transcendence there is a kind of mental pleasantness. But it too is temporary; it too arises due to causes and conditions and it goes away.

That was the Buddha's insight, coming back and walking in the marketplace and realizing – Oh, I still have delusion, there is some part of me which is still deluded; I don't know it for what it is, and I still experience some kind of greed and aversion. He recognized that and he said: there has to be another way here. Whatever it was, he turned his mind around and began to look at what I'm talking about. He began to look at the objects and realized that by studying those objects, he did not free himself from the objects but transformed his experience of them. That is what I'm trying to get at here – transforming your experience of the knowing and the sense objects. He also was quite emphatic that...he had a thing about that they were trouble, it is easy to get caught up in them. That is where he stood about it. I think, for us in our worldly life, there is more about learning how not to be entranced by things but to keep an awake mind which walks through and inhabits the world, not retreating from it totally. To come to a threshold – if it is all just objects and they are empty of any inherent existence (which is pretty much what was said), don't run away from it, it is OK, you are here, you can actually inhabit the world without getting lost in the world.

I have another place to go here and it has to do with the knowing itself. The knowing is something right now that there is something behind your eyes, behind your sense doors which is knowing. That which is aware, knowing, is based on these objects. The objects have been based on some very simple truths. Those simple truths are that you experience pleasantness and you experience unpleasantness. Our training is that we push away one and one we hold on to. That is our habit. So when we pull back one level, they are a little simpler on this level. We've turned our internal world inward and the practice here...our freedom is based on the fact that we are not trying to get rid of or attached to anything, we are beginning to recognize that when there is a pull, we simply bow to it. When there is something we don't like, we simply bow to it. When it is soft or short or long or tall or whatever – we just bow to it. So there is this constant letting it be what it is. We are just letting it be what it is. In that there begins to be a sense of comfort. That we are not engaging in the liking or disliking any more, simply there is the knowing of it and the object of experience and the reactivity to it. That is just what happens. As we begin more and more to see and experience this, we begin to notice there is something – unfortunately it is subtle – that is why not everybody is going to get this stuff. The subtlety has to do with the fact that, in the center of that experience, a pleasantness or unpleasantness, there is a non-reactive place. That non-reactive place means I'm not being pulled into the object and I'm not pushing the object away but I'm just observing it for what it is. We are always looking at the object – you are addicted to looking at the object.

Part of my job here is to say: Well, you've kind of rested for a moment, you see the object, now I want you to notice what you *feel* when you are not moving towards or away from the object, because there is such a mind which sticks, it is sticky, it sticks to the liking or disliking. Suddenly there is a possibility there of not moving with it but actually staying right here. The fundamentals here go back to what Heather was talking about last night. Ultimately, suddenly, you are choosing – you could use the word 'peace' here. Because it means you have not been pulled into the objects and you are simply with the

knower and the sense door and you have just released a hundred years, a thousand years of grasping or pushing away of that object.

We are always going to be playing with this at a very simple level. The more we play with this, the more confidence you are going to get that there is another place which is available to you which has nothing to do with the experience at the sense door of liking or disliking but is something which is inherent here. The Buddha simply used the word 'peace.' It is inherently available to you.

I'll keep referring back to this over and over again because you are going to keep forgetting it over and over. And what I say gets very complicated sometimes and yet it is actually quite simple. What I'm pointing directly at is: the nature of your mind is not dependent on the liking or disliking or the objects, either internal or external. There is something else which exists here. Exists in this room, exists in every moment; it is something which is subtle. It is so subtle that the Buddha said: 'I'm not going to teach this stuff.' He actually said that. He said: 'I don't think so. I don't think people are going to get this.' So after his 7 weeks, after his 49 days, he simply was going to say: 'OK, this is it.' Of course, one of the great wonders was, one of the great sky beings or something, you can also say it came from the outside, but maybe it just came from inside of him, understanding what he understood, that he was not separate from others, that he could help. He simply called it 'that there was very little dust on some people's eyes,' from seeing this.

I think, in this time, there is very little dust covering your eyes.

So, that was fun. I like this stuff. I have spent all these years trying to figure out a way to explain it and I know, at the same time, that I'm using words to explain something which is not about words. It is something about a choiceless experience which is so multileveled, from the outside to the deepest internal. I just want to make sure that you understand how the lens works, that you are going to get caught up in your story, you are going to get caught up in something outside, you are going to be caught up in the objects. Then you are going to slow down and experience just the rawness of a breathing moment or just a moment of a step where it is just the physical experience of touching the ground. Then you are going to take a step back from that: Who is this, knowing this?

I'll read you my poem again. Don't worry, I'm not going to let you off the hook here. This is not something which is not learnable. It is very learnable.

Searching through the catalogue of my own mind
Adventuring down the back ally ways
Caught in the maze of my own manufacturing
These narrow streets, so colorful
Canopies, blocking out the sunlight.

The busy-ness of the Casba
The smell of mint tea

Where was I going?
Where did I come from?
Who is it that knows this?

Stopping suddenly in the middle of the ally way,
Feet glued to the cobblestones,
That old familiar fear rising in the pit of the stomach once more
Remembering somehow that the maze goes on forever.

Turning back, all the way back
Time standing still
The hush of all the voices.

Wonder of wonders,
Remembering the silence at the gateway to the monastery
Some deep surrender
Where some measure of faith
Loosens the fear at last.

No more searching through the darkened streets
No more pulling out hair, asking:
Which way to go?
Why is this so difficult?
Who started this?
How far? How long? How high?
Will I ever reach some kind of peace?

Giving up, giving way, just giving
Some thanks, giving.
The heart, like the lotus flower
Barely open, so sensitive
Rising out of the muck of the back streets of my mind
Finally, finding its own way.

So... You got to get this. I will be pounding this over and over again at you.