

John Travis:

So, some release from your own stories; somebody else's stories, right? That's kinda what happens....[long long pause]

You really expect something don't you? ...Really?... OK, you do expect something... OK.

I'll start with a poem, to frame the journey for our inner space journey.

Pilgrimage of Awakening

So why would I want to climb this mountain?
Maybe it was yesterday, last week, last month, last year.
Sometime long ago, long before now
For a minute moment, the clouds parted
Revealing a rocky snow covered peak
Somehow not knowing if it was real or a dream
Some impulse, deep down, knowing: no time to waste.

Fog
Surrounding everywhere
Which way to go?

Sitting down like sages, seers, seekers
Listening, listening
Breathing, fidgeting
Thoughts, like streams of every colour,
Darting off, landing no where.

Was it a month? 2 months?
Waiting for that inner compass
That trusted, voiceless instinct
Like a sleep walker, the heart knowing its way
Stepping on the old path
Humbly walking without seeing
Zero visibility
Feeling the steadiness and the support of the ancient ones
Who treaded this way before
We keep going, we keep going

So it is a great challenge to come [to retreat]...it goes back to that simple truth that this whole thing of stopping is not easy. It is hard on the knees, hard on the back, hard on all the old stories, and all the sensitivity which happens here – the retelling with all this judgment about maybe I should be more this or that, but I couldn't just be *this*. Somehow this has to be more.

There is a word, ‘damata,’ which translates as ‘suchness.’ Nice word, suchness. The suchness of things. Last night as I was attempting to explain the simplicity of how the mind and the senses and the outer objects exist in experience. This is a simply pointing to what is happening. It is that simple: just what is happening. Where we get confused or lost in either the external objects or the liking or disliking of what happens at the sense doors and the knowing of it.

Tonight I would like to take this a little farther, but not all the way. It has to do with that we come here as a practice and this practice is somewhat of an art. That art has some very fundamental rules which we can begin to understand as the yardstick of what is going on here. It is pretty straightforward, pretty simple – they talk of it as the balancing of the factors of awakening. It simply says there is a model, a simple model, which in the tradition is 37 factors. That is more than I can remember so it is really more about the fundamentals which allow us to...that Chinese text I read from – the difference between crazedness and dullness – somehow we have to find our balance between this capacity to stop and not fall into the dullness of being out of balance or energetically getting crazed.

I use the [image of] a teeter-totter, like in the kid’s playground. The teeter-totter is based on 2 [sets of] factors which we are working with all the time. The arousing factors and the stabilizing factors. These are the pieces of the puzzle which is based on the fact that, if for a fraction of a second – this is really cool – if it balances for a fraction of a second, we drop out. The mind, if it stabilizes just for a moment, there is complete release.

It is always, though, in flux, trying to get balanced. It is a bit of a tightrope. The fundamentals are based on one simple fact: that there is a fulcrum point. That fulcrum point is what the Buddha said was the basis for awakening. He used the word ‘sati,’ which simply is the word ‘mindfulness,’ which is simply that the mind is full. One place in all of his teachings he said: ‘there is one way.’ The one way is that mindfulness. It means that knowing factor is what he considered the sole means of that which takes us to full awakening. So it is a pretty important piece.

I’d like to dissect this. Then we are going to look at the arousing and the stabilizing factors. So: mindfulness. First of all, guess what? You are never here. The here and now was...in the 60’s when Ram Das wrote that – I had the privilege to be the only person in the room with Ram Das when he presented Be Here Now to Neem Karoli Baba. I’ve thought about that...that was a pretty important moment in time.

Q: Was it in Dharamsala?

A: No, that was in Brindaban, near Hardwar. I had the privilege of being in the room and watching him [Baba] pick up this book and thumb through it. Ram Das was all humble-bumble with his book. He [Baba] took and threw it across the room, like: ‘y’know? You think this is about something?’

But there was something really important in that. For Ram Das it was this huge thing – ‘I’ve done this for my teacher; I’m turning America on, or whomever.’

Q: How did he [Ram Das] respond?

A: Ram Das was crushed. That was definitely a pivotal point.

But let's go back to this mindfulness, because I think it is such an important thing. I always look at it –the etymology - here is a word which says 'the mind is full.' The mind is full of what? What is it full of?

Q: Static?

A: 'Here' [is what it is full of]. How's that? We can ask 'what is it full of?' Here, right here. That is all. Mindfulness is a basis for what is here even though (I have to correct this) even though we are always way back [from 'here']. We are actually not 'here.' If you are thinking – it already happened. What ever the experience is, between the sense experience and the mind it moves at 170 miles per hour but it is still not instant. Therefore we get close, but not that close. So, we are always a little bit behind everything. Especially if we think about something, because that is a whole other thing. One brain cell can hold 5 wikipedias. That is how remarkable these brains are.

We have this ability to train the mind to be in the moment, moment after moment. That is really the fundamental training here. The mind is in the moment, it is in the moment again, in the moment again, again. It is full, nothing else can happen when you are being really totally mindful.

The sense doors themselves are operating without any kind of...there is an organic operational system working. But there is no thinking which is happening as a part of that system; it is working on its own without your interference. Pretty cool. You aren't doing anything with it or making anything up- just these moments.

What happens is we start by bringing attention to a simple thing like the breath and we stay on it and we realize we get caught and we come back and we realize we get caught and we come back. As these moments begin to stabilize, the mind actually begins to stabilize, then there is a fundamental intelligence which is not about thinking. We think about it as: here is this analytical brain which has incredible capacity of its operating system. But, here you are not looking for that system. What we are looking for is that there is an operating system, a self-organizing intelligence, which is operating when we are here, mindful, for a series of moments.

The word is 'sampapajana.' It simply means 'clear comprehension.' What begins to happen is that we are beginning to recognize through being mindful of presence that there is an intelligence which is not about thinking. It is about a different operating system. Some people, Ajaan Sumedho would call it 'intuitive insight.' What is that? I don't actually know. In a sense it simply means that somehow we are connecting to something. Sometimes we use the word 'gut.' 'I feel it in my gut.' There is a bigger knowing, and that bigger knowing has some very specific components to it. That clear comprehension knows what the hell it is doing and it is not about thinking, it knows that underneath all of this there is a longing to awakening. Underneath it, even though we get so confused and

there is so much stuff going on in our lives, we get so complex, but underneath when we stop and really start to listen...you have been here long enough to really start to listen...there is an instinct in the mindfulness itself which understands you would like to awaken. I get that. I got it. OK?

What we are doing here is supporting *that*. In supporting that, the clear comprehension has to have a phenomenal amount of understanding because we are not going to the brain. Where are we going? We are going to some connection to our wholeness. The wholeness is a *whole* whole which is there. They use the language sometimes of ‘that clear comprehension of purpose.’ It is something about your basic goodness or your Buddha nature, or something which is in the Upanishads, the poetry of this light within you. You recognize that that is who you are, this light within you. There are many terminologies for this, but it is what is in there. What there is when we calm down and see how everything works- we get to know: this is something I can understand. There is a tremendous amount of relief which comes with this.

Another piece which happens in this is that you can begin to trust. This is a big deal, trust in intuitive intelligence or intuitive insight which has the ability to respond without thinking, it is instinctual in us. They speak of it as a ‘suitability’ or a ‘pliability’ or an ‘adaptability’ to the situation. You can stay mindful and there is some part of the organism which self-organizes because it trusts itself that it will adapt to the situation, so it does not have to leave the mindfulness, it actually strengthens the mindfulness of this momentary awareness of presence. This is an interesting piece of it, instead of getting lost again the mindfulness actually begins to strengthen itself. It is a third aspect of this. It begins to remember its own mindfulness which begins to strengthen.

We come to this retreat and it is like getting on a bicycle and you have to remember to pedal and the brakes and all that kind of stuff- but at some point it is just like driving a car – there is an automatic system which begins to work. This is the same thing: there is an automatic system which is there. With that automatic system, because it trusts the mindfulness and there is this intuitive intelligence, it doesn’t have to struggle or fight with things. Then it begins to start to understand deeply. They say, *sampajana*, at that point it begins to recognize reality.

That is a huge word and I don’t pretend to know. The way it is explained is that there are 2 aspects to this. One is the fact that, yesterday when I was talking about the objects which we see or hear or smell or taste or think- all the objects themselves can be deconstructed down to their bare minimum. The bare minimum is the fact that they have no inherent existence except in relationship to everything else. Do you follow that? This is a really big thing.

So, it has no inherent existence. We put a name on it, we impute a name on an object, a person, a thing, a process. When we do that, it [still] has no inherent separateness, no inherent existence on its own. So it is simply that we impute a name on it but underneath it, itself is not [the name]. Do you understand that? This is huge. It says: no object exists separate from anything else, therefore, even though we put a name on it, it is empty of

any inherent existence of its own. So it is only in relationship to everything else that the object exists. It is a deconstruction process which ends in the fact that there is not something there in the way it appears. It is not that it is not there. The way it appears, it is not what it appears, therefore it is empty of any inherent existence. We say that about objects, well, guess who else has that which they put a name on? John and Fred and Mary...these are all just constructed and they are not separate, they are all in this relationship which cannot be separated out.

From this vantage point, you don't exist as a separate entity, only in relationship to everything else. Isn't that cool? That's pretty cool. So you can relax. The separateness was a delusion, OK? From the real depth of the mind full of the moment. The rest is all made up.

Q: Are you saying it only exists in a relationship to the observer and the observed, is that the relationship, or any kind of relationship?

A: What we know is the observer and the observed because – we can only know that, each of us from our own center. The other I'm not sure we know about. Einstein had a theory, maybe we'll bust that theory, who knows? Laws of relativity...I don't know; quantum – I don't know. Who knows? But we know where we are in this process is that this is molecular construction which is constantly in motion and relative motion.

Q: What you were talking tonight - I understood pretty much of everything except you talk of this clear light within. It did not compute with my experience of the practice.

A: That came from the Upanishads. It is something which over the centuries has been saying there is still (and I did not want to get into this tonight) emptiness and form. You cannot separate form from emptiness. I'm simply going to the emptiness right now as a way to break down the solid imprint. I'm not saying what else is there. I will; I'll just move over a little bit –you can break it all down to nothing, and at the same time, guess what? Everything is just like it is. You can't take anything out of it. What is happening here is exactly what is happening here. That's the form, but it is also not what it appears to be, OK? This is part of Buddhist dialectics and it is rather...a bit of a mind stump, so don't rest on this too much.

But I have to explain it to you. It is imperative because this is what holds up this truth about trusting the instinctual or self organizing principles behind the mindfulness. This is just the principles behind it.

We are working on this. We are working on this in a way that there are forces which are always in a process of balancing. It is rather tricky in that, sometimes, if you could really be in the mindfulness: I'm talking about where you are holding the truth of the reality of the non-separateness of things and it's a delusion so it's empty of any inherent existence – if you could do that – cool. OK? But, in the meantime, you are working on a balancing act and that balancing act has to do with factors. Of the 7 factors, there are a group of arousing factors. They are simple, in the sense that they have 3 functions: one is the function of the body, another is the function of the mind and another is the function of the heart.

The first is- I'll just go to the mind. They talk about it as 'the quality of investigation.' There is a stimulating piece in that. One of the beauties of western mind, which I see, is that we have an abundance of the investigative quality.

I have to tell you there is a shadow side. The shadow side is anxiousness. If this particular factor, which is a kind of inquiry and investigation, is out of balance, then there is a bit of neurosis there. You follow that? It is just frenetic because...I'm just asking these questions over and over from all directions and some of them don't have any answers – all they are is questions about questions. Especially when you get to: 'Who am I.' Whew. That is pretty out there. Which one [of 'I'] do you want to look at? Which one arose in this moment? Which one arose in the last moment? Which one is going to arise in a future moment? I could really get carried away with that and drive myself bananas.

So there is inquiry. We could get to the point that we say: 'I'm not going to look for a path.' If we don't have enough of it, you aren't interested in this. So there has to be enough of it to bring the energetics so that you have the quality of looking, of investigating and this inquiry into the conditionality of things. The curiosity. That is a mental process.

The second one has to do with the energetics. It is also an arousing factor. The arousing factor has to do with energy. Things like: there all sorts of body ways of bringing the energy up, the arousing factor. Some of you may be runners, some of you hatha yoga, qi gung – these are all things which are somehow finding a way to bring some kind of balanced energy which is necessary, just like the inquiry is necessary. Again, you can take it too far and you'll be bouncing around the room like a ping pong ball or something which would be an extreme of that. But we need to know how to bring the physical energy up to match the mindfulness.

So it is imperative that we learn things like hatha yoga or tai chi – they all bring a matter of kind of a biochemistry of abouti (?) which works on the inquiry as well of as, the third one is joy. I can work on both of these.

This is all about having just the right amount of it. Too much of it causes a body restlessness so you actually can't sit because you are restless, too much going on in the body. That is the body.

We have the mind, we have the body, and we have the heart. I think sometimes we don't put as much emphasis in this particular practice as we could on the joy factor. That really has to do with the heart. That there is a way we bring interest and connection and love and compassion through – it is an arousing factor. Just recognize that, it is one of its truths. Again – it can get out of balance where we lose the mindfulness. We get so excited that we forget all about the mindfulness. That can happen.

I'm just trying to give the simple parameters. These are arousing factors. When you first come here you need to work these things.

What do we use to balance that investigation? What do we use to balance the energetics of the body and - you could call it the 'effervescence' of the heart? How do we hold these things?

We look at the body first in this case. The body's balancing factor is a thing called 'tranquility.' These factors all are fundamentals we use for stopping and they are based on mind, heart, and body. The first thing of the body itself is tranquility. Tranquility...oh boy...but it is the first thing we are doing here. So much of this is based on the fact that if you've stretched your body enough and gotten used to all this stuff, you can sit for *long*, long periods of time, for hours. When the body is loose enough, that tranquility is its own power in the sense that it is a truly grounded feeling in the body and it sits and doesn't move. That starts to stabilize the capacity of the mindfulness. These all directly link to mindfulness. In some ways I could say: 'If you really could just be mindful, these would do themselves.' But it is good to explain them and know this is an art and you can sometimes say, 'oh, I've just been dragging along and I really need to bring up my physical energy,' so you may go out and take a walk, throw some water on your face, keep your eyes open - there are ways of balancing that out, bringing up the energy. So you can just sit and create this strength of, maybe the word is 'stillness.' That the body then becomes still because it is relaxed enough to stay for long periods of time.

Originally I studied hatha yoga under Satchedenanda Saraswati, I was actually a monk with him. He was a kundalini yoga teacher and he was very much based on the fact that if you could get the body supple enough - mostly all the things were to stretch the spine and hips enough where the purpose was: so you could *sit* for hours and hours and be totally comfortable.

The second of these stabilizing factors has to do with the mind. As we have gotten our bodies ready and can sit them down and say: OK, just stay there and see how long you can handle not moving. That creates a gestalt - the mind then can begin to rest on an object. We start out with the breath and the body and there are many means, from the metta practice, which can be a concentration practice, to mantra practice, to visualization practice, to one point of the breath. With the tranquility as a complement, we really begin to focus where we stay on that point. They call this process 'getting to one pointedness.'

It is not necessarily the objective, by the way. Just to know. It is simply just the tranquility of body and the concentration of mind are factors to keep this thing in balance. In terminology, we are looking at creating, they call it: 'access concentration,' which is necessary for insight. It is a lot of concentration. We are supporting that factor. It is probably between the tranquility, which is the whole body and discomfort here which we do in this theatre, that is one piece of it. The other piece of it is the mind, steadying itself so that it can stay on the object so that there is a capacity of one pointedness. It stills the mind to a point where it really releases what you could say is 'the known world,' and can go into these absorptions. Some people are really adept at this and others aren't so adept. From a practice point of view, our ability to stay on that point and get fully concentrated

then gives us the possibility...that stability is enough to see into the sampapajana, to see into the clear comprehension of things.

This is just one way that we can do this. There are 'straight jhanas' and there are also 'vipassana jhanas,' which are much more about moving objects. Either way, because we are just working with this aiming and sustaining and our ability to still ourselves to such a point that we begin, with the mindfulness, see into the nature of conditioning. It's pretty simple. It is seeing into flow or flux. It is seeing into – the terminology is: all tainted states are painful, so any kind of clutching or grasping is: 'Yikes, you are not gonna feel so good.' Whatever you are making up about yourself, this mirror of the mind, from this point of view, is only due to causes and conditions, it arises temporarily. John, for a moment, arises, but in the flux and flow he disappears, over and over in fractions of a second. It is like a (I guess this dates me) like an old film where there are [frames] and it is moving so fast that we think it is a solid thing, that thing which is moving around. But we slow it down here and we start seeing the individual frames. That is what the concentration can do, begin to recognize the confusion when the film is going so fast that it looks so solid and real and you put a name on it and all that. Suddenly you break it down and: 'Oh, that is one moment, that is another moment,' and they are different, that's not the same as the moment before or the moment ahead. So we begin to have some 'insight,' I believe it is called. Quite wonderful stuff.

Again, one of the beauties in this balancing factor, is the concentration has certain specifics which come with it and not only the one pointedness. One of the lovely ones is lightness of body. Like: 'no problem,' because the mind is absorbed. That pain that you had does not exist in that state of concentration for that time. Not that it won't come back, but, during that time. Very helpful and part of the bedrock of what we are trying to do here, the tranquility and the concentration.

The third piece of this is referred to as 'equanimity.' Equanimity is one of the 4 Brahma Viharas, just as Joy, or Sympathetic Joy is one of the 5 Brahma Viharas. One is an arousing factor, the other is the even mindedness. That even mindedness, if you look at it from the heart's point of view, what you have is an incredibly strong heart which can rest in the truth of our world. Our world has confusion, suffering, tremendous amount of greed, and aversiveness which goes all the way to hatred, and we do things to each other which are heartbreaking. For us to enter the sphere of the disintegration, the process of dying. We don't want to look at it in this culture. Oh, we don't do that...we put a little makeup on and put them in a little box (oh, that was bad, John). The truth is that there is this process and we don't want to look at that. How is it that you are going to be able to work with that yourself, with others? This is not the kind of insight which the world wants.

You are a very unusual group of people. I could say you are a little NUTS. You come here and sit on your butts and walk around like a bunch of zombies...and you start slowing down, you take your fork up and stick the food in your mouth and chew it for 20 minutes and then put the fork down? You guys got to be bonkers, right? And you believe what we say? Oh my god...anyway...it really does come down to the fact that,

without this equanimity, the heart which, knowing the truth of the world – this is not about ‘Oh, everything is everything,’ it is really the sensitivity is there, but there is this openness and strength of heart which is not going to get lost in the pettiness of the pain or the world but has this incredible strength to hold it and stay with it. It needs that.

Sometimes these factors are talked about in a row, and sometimes I like to talk about them as how we are always working with the balance of these pieces. They can be talked about either way. Ultimately there is the piece around the heart and that there are rousing and stabilizing factors which are part of the Brahma Viharas. There is the fact that we have the capacity: when the energy gets to low we can bring it back up. And we have this truth of tranquility of taking and stilling the whole thing so that we can see.

Then there is this possibility of the quality of curiosity and inquiry and investigation which is buoyant and lifts us up. And there is the concentration which just dead steadies us. Our job is to work with these seven factors.

The crux of this all, though, is: even if you forgot everything I just said, is MINDFULNESS. If we put our attention on that which is awake and knows and even though it does not know anything about a past or future or any kind of figuring it out, because this is not about figuring it out, this is about staying in the mindfulness long enough to go from the personal deep into the universal. Then, these insights which come from the mindfulness are coming from our commonality, that we are all kind of the same here. There are these particulars on the surface but underneath it we are the same.

Ultimately the mindfulness is like an anchor or a rock. If we can stay long enough with all these factors lined up, a rock can just go down, and we can go deep from the personal and all our crap – you know what I mean – down into this heartfelt place which understands suffering and understands that it is not like we can stop it. What we can do is ourselves become free of it but then by going down into the universal we are simply part of it.

So, awakening, by the way, in the small print, does not let you off the hook. It is actually the opposite, except that you don’t suffer. You are part of it, but you don’t suffer, not the same way. That is *really* what we are doing here, is finding this stone which goes down. You really have to sit. Unfortunately it is not very comfortable which is why this will probably never be too popular, because you just have to stay too long and let the stone go down and touch this universal intelligence. That universal intelligence, recognizing non-separateness, it has tremendous compassion. But, intelligence, therefore it will also know how to act.

So...I went on and on.

Pilgrimage of Awakening

So why would I want to climb this mountain?
Maybe it was yesterday, last week, last month, last year.

Sometime long ago, long before now
For a minute moment, the clouds parted
Revealing a rocky snow covered peak
Somehow not knowing if it was real or a dream
Some impulse, deep down, knowing: no time to waste.

Fog
Surrounding everywhere
Which way to go?

Sitting down like the sages, and seers, and seekers
Listening, listening
Breathing, fidgeting
Thoughts, like streams of every colour,
Darting off, landing no where.

Was it a month? 2 months?
Waiting for that inner compass
That trusted, voiceless, instinct
Like a sleep walker, the heart knowing its way
Stepping on the old path
Humbly walking without seeing
Zero visibility
Feeling the steadiness and support of the ancient ones
Who treaded this way before
We keep going, we keep going.

Let's just sit for a moment...

Just 2 things I'd like to put out there again. One is: Please, please hold as much as you can this silence, it is not just for yourself, it is for everybody here, the container. We are right at that point where we have to re-tighten it and I'm just again reiterating that.

The other piece is: we are right in the middle of retreat so you may feel that somehow...if you aren't sleepy, stay and chant...sit afterward. If you are still awake, use the time. If you wake up at 3:00 in the morning, in the monastery one wakes up at 3:00...come in and sit and use this space, but not just as the formal part here but actually as in the sense of finding your own rhythm and you may wind up napping in the day because of it – that is OK – you have to find your own rhythm and balance. We set the schedule as a generic way of keeping you on track but each of you is going to be a little bit different with this and I encourage you to explore this.

I'm not going to say anything more. It is a big thing just to get this for a minute second. Takes a lot of work. But, this is something which has been held for centuries, thousands of years, and is *absolutely* reliable. How's that? It is quite wonderful to know...it is like: this does have a warranty. Multi-lifetime warranty. Thankyou.