Morning Instructions on Dhammavicaya (Investigation)

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 39:42

This morning in meditation, I want to introduce the factor that I discussed on opening night: the factor of investigation. Investigation is the second of the seven enlightenment factors. The understanding is that as we start to pay attention to our experience, we become a little interested in what's going on, and then we apply this factor called investigation—dhammavicaya.

Investigation in the context of meditation is different from what it might be in philosophical thought or ordinary life. It's mostly non-conceptual. So what we want to do in meditation this morning is investigate our experience, but in a non-conceptual way. Of course, we have to use concepts to describe it. You'll use concepts to report it, even to describe it to yourself. But the basic movement is not about thinking.

The real process we're going to be looking at is something Gil talked about yesterday: becoming intimate with our experience. As you notice the breath, for example, where do you feel it? Where in your body do you feel the sensations of breath most clearly? As you experience the sensation connected with the breath, what is the physical sensation that you're experiencing? Is it tightness? Is it relaxation? Is it expansion? Is it contraction? We don't have to think a lot about that. What we need to do is bring this factor of awareness closer to the experience that we want to know about. This is the quality of intimacy.

How close can our attention get into the sensation of the breath? For instance, just right now, if you take an in-breath and feel your abdomen, can you bring your awareness, your attention, right into the sensation of that rising movement? As you breathe out, can you bring your attention right into the sensation of the falling movement? It doesn't require a lot of thought. It just requires coming close to our experience.

This is the main attitude behind this factor of investigation. As we come close with our attention to the experience, that's when we learn about it. We learn about its personal characteristic of expansion or relaxation or tightness or ease. We also learn about the universal characteristics that Sally talked about last night: it's always changing, and there's no self or essence inside it.

The purpose of investigation is to spark or ignite the factor of wisdom. When we think of bringing more wisdom into our overall practice—and wisdom is one of the key factors of mind that we're developing—the factor that we can initiate that starts it off is this factor of investigation. We'll be using it this morning and probably in a number of meditations throughout the week as a way of exploring our experience.

The tricky thing in using investigation is: don't proliferate. This is the trap. You start to get into it: "Let's see, I'm feeling that rising motion. Now, is that expansion or is that pressure? Let me see. If I look on one side of the abdomen, it feels like pressure, but that reminds me of where I had an operation when I was five years old, and I don't really want to think about that..." You see how the thoughts can take off.

As you investigate, keep thinking on a very tight leash. This requires some vigilance. You're going to use words a little bit to investigate, but you don't want to rely on the concepts to be the investigation. The investigation comes from the meeting of the awareness and the experience. So just be guarded, be vigilant about this tendency to proliferate with our thoughts. Bring it back to the direct experience of the moment.

In the meditation this morning, we're going to continue a little bit along the track that Gil suggested yesterday, which is to have this natural sense of peace and ease and then be alert to whatever disturbs it. And things will disturb it. You know, this is the second day of the retreat. In a normal week-long retreat, this is the evening we would give the hindrance talk.

Why? Because this is when they really start to wake up. So be aware that as you're adjusting to the retreat experience, the hindrances—sense desire, aversion, sleepiness, restlessness, doubt—are all becoming activated. Certainly today, if they weren't yesterday.

Just be mindful that this will be part of your experience during the day, part of your experience during the meditation. Don't expect that you'll be able to abide in forty-five minutes of unbroken peace and ease. If you can, I bow in your general direction. But if you can't, then you're like me this morning.

So the meditation instruction is going to be: rest in this natural peace and ease and observe the phenomena of the senses. I'll give some instructions on how to do that. Then notice whatever disturbs that natural peace and ease. Particularly, I want to ask you to investigate two things.

When a disturbance comes, number one: what's the disturbance about? It could be about a number of things. It could be about just one of the hindrance energies being present, and there's a discomfort from it. There could be a pain in the body that's starting to disturb your balance. It could be a thought about a daily life situation, something at home from either the past or the future. It could be a reaction to something that's happening here on the retreat, something that you don't like. It could be a judgment about yourself that comes up, a way that you don't think you're good enough or lovable enough.

So notice just what the disturbance is about. And the second thing to investigate, once you've noticed it: how does that feel in the body? When there's a disturbance in the system, it will generally be reflected in the body in some way. So how would you describe that? Is that a feeling of being agitated? Is it a feeling of being tight or tense? Is it a feeling of being hot or cold? Is it a feeling of being shaky or fluttery?

These are the two things to investigate. What's the disturbance about? You can sum it up really briefly: thought about home, judgment about retreat, something like that. And second: how does that feel in the body? Then staying with that, if it passes, just return to being with the natural peace and ease and the

phenomena that are coming.

Those are the basic instructions. This will be our kind of entryway into working a little bit with this factor of investigation, the second factor of awakening.

Please sit comfortably. You can begin the meditation by just bringing the attention into your experience of the body. Sitting in a relaxed way in the here and now. Not needing to change anything about your experience. Letting the body be as it is. Relaxing as far as possible into the body as it is.

Relaxation is an expression of trust. We can trust the present moment in the way that it is. Let your mind be the way it is. Any mood that's present, notice it and allow. Any thoughts that are passing by, just allowing them to come and go.

As a way of suggesting this quality of natural ease, I'd like to invite you to let your awareness become really wide, filling the whole meditation hall, expanding beyond so that your awareness becomes like a big empty sky, or like vast space surrounding you on all sides—above, below. In this vast space, just noticing any sounds that arise there. Could be sounds from inside the room, the sounds of one another, sounds from outside, the sound of my voice. If there are no sounds, then just become aware of the vastness of the silence.

This awareness is like a big empty sky. All the sounds just appear and disappear. And then also becoming aware of sensations throughout your body. Sensations are also appearing, changing, passing in the same open space of awareness. You might have the sense that they're like little points of sensation, little points of feeling that are glimmering like stars in the sky at night.

Just allowing sounds and body sensations to come and go in this empty space of knowing. As you rest in this knowing, see if there's a sense of peace. See if there's a sense of ease.

Sometimes we find ourselves supported by this vastness. Things can arise and pass, and they can be held in a place of peacefulness.

Notice too that thoughts and moods can come and go within this space of awareness. Allow them to arise, express themselves, and pass through like clouds drifting across the sky.

We can simply rest with all this knowing of phenomena. There may be a sense of ease in it.

Then notice whatever comes to disturb that ease. What is the disturbance about, and how does that feel in the body? This is our investigation.

Remain clearly mindful of your present moment experience—sounds, sensations, thoughts, emotions. Investigation rests upon the foundation of mindfulness. Only when we're clearly in touch with this moment can we bring our attention closer to investigate it.

What's the nature of peace? What's the nature of disturbance? What's the response in the body?

This investigation into the very fabric of our experience reveals the wisdom that lies within each moment—the understanding that all phenomena arise and pass away in the vast, unchanging space of awareness itself.

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