Morning Instructions

Myoshin Kelley · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Three-Month Retreat (IMS 2007) · 58:30

Establishing the sitting posture, checking that there is a sense of relaxation. Checking the attitude in the mind as we enter into this period of practice. Is there an agenda, a wanting, or a sense of receptivity, openness? In any moment, recognizing what is being known.

There will be experiences through all of the sense doors—hearing being known, sensations in the body arising, being known, and disappearing again. States of mind. The atmosphere in the mind.

Sometimes the terrain will be quiet, calm, still. At other times it will be volatile, changing rapidly. There may be many mind states coming in quick succession—anger, sadness, disappointment—all to be known as they are.

Noticing how thoughts can affect mind states. How mind states can affect thoughts. Types of thoughts. Awareness of thinking itself. Recognizing when thinking is occurring.

With all of these experiences, some of them will be pleasant, unpleasant, neutral. At times this feeling tone will be what's predominant. It too can be known.

With all these experiences, check: How are we relating? What's the attitude? Is there a subtle sense of trying to get rid of this? Not wanting? Or is there a wanting for some experience to continue, or trying to create something? When reactions are present, this becomes the experience to be recognized. Aversion or wanting.

At times greed, hatred, and delusion will be very strong in our experience. We look to understanding, knowing, being with these experiences, to learn from them. Understanding what it is that fuels or feeds these states. Understanding the suffering that comes when we identify with them. All of these experiences to be known in their nature.

Working with continuity—not a continuity that is trying to bear down, that is straining, tightening, but a continuity that comes from perseverance, a willingness of heart to remember, to recognize what is being known.

When experiences become overwhelming, consuming, and mindfulness is lost, one can let the attention steady with one aspect of experience: hearing, breathing, sitting. Before using skillful means, or before shifting a body posture, it can be helpful to just notice what's happening for a moment. And then, if wisdom says change is needed, to follow through, but to recognize what is occurring, to bring it into consciousness.

Letting there be a balance between tranquility and alertness. Tranquility is strengthened through this sense of receptivity, receiving experience, and alertness through interest or investigation. If the tranquility becomes too strong, spaciousness turns to spaced-outness, and we need this quality of interest. If investigation becomes overactive, the mind becomes agitated, needing to invite this quality of receptivity.

Relaxing into the awareness of present moment experience with interest.

Many times throughout the day, check the attitude. How's the mind relating? This often goes unnoticed. Sometimes checking to see if there's anything in your experience in this moment that you're subtly trying to push away or ignore. And just noticing the reactivity in the mind, and seeing what happens.

I wanted to continue on a little bit more on the theme of continuity because it is so important. And the continuity not just being during a period of sitting meditation, but that we really are working with continuity of practice from the time we wake up in the morning until we go to bed at night. I offer a small suggestion of something that I found very helpful.

And that was to notice where in the day I was having the most trouble. Where in the day the mind was habitually checking out. And then just to take an interest in what was happening there. Many times I'd notice that there was just some thought that got identified with: "I'm too tired." And then we listen to the thought—end of practice. "It's too hard. I can't do this." So just seeing what's happening in these moments in a totally non-judgmental way, but from the place of interest, noticing the scenes where we keep checking out.

In exploring this, we find there are different intensities, different flavors to these moments of checking out. The invitation is to become familiar with all of it, to come to really know it in your own experience.

In one sense, how you work with this is really up to you. What we need to do is become familiar with our own tendencies of mind. It might be that one's tendency is to sit down, and if one doesn't do something like the body scan, to just sit and get lost for fifteen minutes, and then go, "Oh, yeah—meditation." In that case, it's going to be helpful to have a way to really establish some continuity of recognition of what's happening in our experience. But if one is doing the body scan because one doesn't like what one's feeling and just wants to get away from something, then it might not be so skillful.

I like to take practice out of habit. So when you sit down, listen and have a sense: does this feel like it could be something really useful to do? And then open up. There's nothing wrong with doing body scans—it can be very helpful at times. It's just our learning to listen to when those times might be, and what the underlying motivation is.

There's a question around craving, and the observation that it seems to have a strong relationship with aversion. Last night when I was speaking very briefly about craving, I mentioned that there are three types. There's the craving for sensual pleasure—anything through our sense doors, pleasant experience,

just craving that. There is the craving to become—the sense of "I am," the sense of identifying with experience. And then there is this other one, which is to get rid of, to not want, to not want to be.

By investigating pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, you're beginning to see that there is a lot of this craving not to be. And that's just to be recognized. That doesn't need to be judged. This, again, is our teacher. It's here. We can learn from it. Can you really just know that aversion? Know the nature of aversion. And just see what happens in the knowing of it when there is mindfulness with the experience.

It really can be life-changing, because so often we are directing the whole course of our life from that place of aversion without recognizing it. It's conditioning what we will do, how we will act, how we will respond. Any time that we see these things, we can really rejoice in the seeing, the recognition.

It's important to recognize how things are being known. If things are moving really quickly, this is just one way that, at times, experience is known. Things can be rapidly changing, and there's no need to try and focus in on one aspect of that. Sometimes, even within that, one aspect may become more predominant. That's okay. You don't have to try to make it be one way. Relax with how it's being known.

Even though the experience may be changing quickly, there can be a real steadiness when there's continuity of mindfulness. It's really just that steadiness that we're working with, and then experience will arise in many different ways.

There are times where focusing on one aspect of experience will bring the seeing of many different nuances to it. The wanting that you spoke of coming in—that needs to be recognized.

You might experiment with this. Just sitting here, having a sense of settling back with the eyes open, you don't need to focus on anything. Just relax with that knowing. As we do so, many aspects of experience can be flickering through.

For many years I focused a lot, believing that was how I would see more. But what I've really been discovering is that whether there is just seeing one object or many, it's the relaxation in the mind that allows things to be known. When we tighten—and one of the things about working with one object is that often we do just what you described—we try hard, we try to focus more, we want to see more. All of that has an effect in the mind of tightening. It's like when the fist is tight, it can't hold much. When it's open, it can hold a lot. Whether you're working with one object or a very open awareness, the quality of relaxation allows so much to be known.

You are describing a very common experience—an aspect that leads to craving for intensity in our lives. It's difficult to be with neutral experience. In our lives, neutral experience tends to be what we don't pay attention to. I would just encourage investigation around that. You don't need a theory about why it is this way or what it is, but really just investigate. Anything it reveals to you will be interesting. Just the encouragement to be interested.

I love that this is a come-and-see practice. I've had my own experience of hearing things from teachers and thinking, "Hmm, I'm not so sure about that." But then looking into my own experience—we can get caught in evaluating and judging, but if we use that as inspiration to look more closely, the truth reveals itself. We see for ourselves.

Okay, so... Onward.

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