

John Makransky

Week 1, *The Healing Power of Innate Love and Wisdom: Meditations from Tibet for Westerners*

June 2nd, 2014

“Letting Be”

Hello, my name is John Makransky and this is a *Tricycle* online meditation retreat. And I'm going to be talking about the healing power of innate love and wisdom, and meditations adapted from Tibetan Buddhism for Westerners, in order to bring out some of the underlying capacity of healing—and also deeper presence to oneself and to others.

So first, before I lead the first meditation, let me just say a few words about the purpose of meditation in the context that I'll be speaking from, which is coming out of Tibetan Buddhism. First, what is the basic problem that the meditations I'll lead are aiming to help solve? To put it very simply: much more than we are conscious, we are almost continuously mistaking our own limiting thoughts and associated feelings for ourselves and for other persons. So, for example, there's a story—this is a true story that a friend told me when he was traveling in Manhattan. He was taking a taxicab. The cab driver was a Haitian cab driver. The cab driver told my friend about something that had happened to him recently. He had been driving in Manhattan; he came to a stop sign, but he did not come to a full stop; he had to get somewhere quickly, and didn't fully stop at the stop sign. There didn't seem to be anybody there, and he went on through.

There was a man on the sidewalk nearby who saw the cab driver run the stop sign, and the man became absolutely indignant, enraged. He was screaming and yelling epithets at the Haitian cab driver. So, the cab driver stopped his cab, and lowered the window. And the angry man on the street came up to his window, and the cab driver said, "I'm sorry; you're right. I should have stopped." And the angry man on the street was just stunned for a moment. And then, after a pause, he said, "I take it all back. I take back all those epithets that I yelled."

So, what happened in that story? I think what happened illustrates the purpose of meditation in this context. Let's locate ourselves with the angry man on the street. Much more than we are conscious, we are reacting to our own limiting labels, thoughts: our own limiting reactions to others. And we are mistaking our own limiting thought of the other like of that Haitian cab driver for the person. And then, we're off. Much more than we're conscious, like in the story, like the angry man in the story, we are reacting to our own feelings elicited by our own limiting

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thoughts. And we don't even realize that we're mistaking our thoughts of others for the person; we don't see that at all.

So, what does the story illustrate? The Haitian cab driver stopped his cab and said a few words. And, in saying those words, he was expressing his deep humanity: "I'm sorry." And that expression of the cab driver's humanity spoke into the angry man's underlying humanity, and interrupted the angry man's reactive patterns. So, the angry man, in a sense, could no longer—the patterns within the angry man—could no longer function; they just had to collapse for a moment. And the angry man also was, in a sense, helpless to do anything but speak from his own fuller humanity.

Now, in this context, meditation's purpose is similar to what happened in that story. The function of meditations that I'll be introducing are to interrupt, decisively, our ongoing patterns of reaction to our own limiting thoughts and associated feelings, which we have long mistaken for ourselves and others. And, at the same time, the meditation's purpose is to bring out, or evoke, our underlying fuller human potential for connection; for recognition of each other as fuller people, not just our labels for each other; for empathy, compassion, joy, joy in others, and humor.

So, another way to phrase the purpose of meditation, then, in what I'll be sharing, is that we need a way to be pulled away from our ongoing reactive ways of thinking and emoting, pulled away and drawn down further into more of the depth of our being, more of our fuller potential. And from there, then, we can be empowered, through the meditations, to begin also to sense others more in the depth of their being, as more than our limiting labels for each other. Another way to phrase this, which is also in the title for this retreat—which is "Healing Power of Innate Love and Wisdom"—is that really, all of us would like to become a more healing presence for others in our families and communities, and those we work with and for. And to become a more healing presence for others, then we have to heal ourselves deep within. And for that—that inner kind of healing that can help empower us to be a more healing person for others—we need to connect to a more open, unconditional part of our being, beyond the painful grip of our own, narrow reactions, a place of inner rest and replenishment.

In Tibetan Buddhist terms—and here, I'm speaking especially from Tibetan Nyingma tradition—this means connecting to the basic ground of our experience; a space of unconditional openness that is in the background of and in and through

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all of our experiences. Within this spacious ground of experience—which is called "suchness" or "nature of mind," or "Buddha nature"—it's taught that there are latent powers of healing and kindness and compassion. And it's from this unconditional ground of our experience that we sense our inner unity with others; and from that sense of inner unity can also work with others; and, as needed, challenge ourselves and others, while upholding them in their deep potential and their deep worth. These latent powers of our being have been impeded by the ongoing confusion of our reactive emotions, as illustrated by the angry man on the street in the Haitian cab driver's story.

So our first meditation introduces the possibility of letting our patterns of thought and emotion and energy deeply settle, or letting be deep inside; to begin to let the basic openness and compassionate capacity of our being make itself known. For the first meditation, I'm calling the three deep letting-be's of body, and breath, and mind. Well, let's begin with what I'll call here some cleansing breaths. So, you just sit in a comfortable way; straighten up a little bit. Chin can be down; the eyes can be open slightly, gazing downward. You can sit in a relaxed way, not uptight. Then what we'll do is inhale slowly, a deep breath.

And imagine, as we inhale the breath, that the breath is going down into the lower part of our abdomen, even all the way down below the navel. And the lower abdomen, or the tummy, ought to expand, then, as we inhale. So, we're inhaling not mainly into the chest but more deeply, so that the abdomen expands. And then we'll hold for a moment. Inhale, tummy expands, hold. And release. And then, when releasing a cleansing breath, imagine that you're just releasing all of your worries and anxieties on the out breath. Inhale, tummy expands, hold. And release, releasing all worries on the exhale. Now on the next breaths, when we inhale, also imagine that your mind—which we usually feel as if it is in our head—drops down below, into the lower abdomen with the breath when we inhale. Just imagine the mind's dropping down below, as you inhale. Inhaling, tummy expands, hold. And release. And again: inhale, imagine the mind drops down below, with the breath. Hold and release. Now that you have the pattern of it, just relax into a bit, and we'll do it just a few more times: inhale, hold.

And release, inhale, and release. Inhale, mind drops down, hold. And release. Good. Now just breathing normally, just drop into the body; feeling the body as a whole in a relaxed way, with a sense of openness. Just feeling the body's groundedness. And notice any feelings of holding on within the body, and gently let them relax. Letting all the bodily feelings just settle in their own way. Just

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deeply let be within the body. Letting the body draw you into oneness with it—a little, at least. With a feeling of just letting be done. Letting the body do this meditation, by drawing you into oneness with it.

And then, feel the breathing process, wherever you feel it most vividly in the body. Sense any grasping or holding on to the breathing process anywhere, and let that relax. Let the breath just settle into its own, natural flow. Just letting be within the breath. Letting the breath draw you into oneness with it. With the feeling of being breathed. And similarly, in the mind, notice any grasping or holding on to the thinking process, or thought of oneself. And let that feeling—of holding on deep within—just relax a bit.

Giving the mind deep permission to just fall completely open. Just letting the mind fall open, without holding onto any framework. As much as you can. And let this openness of mind draw you into oneness with it. Letting patterns of thought and feeling just relax and unwind in this total openness of mind. Letting everything just unwind in this space of deep allowing, accepting, and letting be. Experiencing whatever thoughts or feelings, sensations arise within this welcoming space of deep allowing. The natural kindness of letting all be.

That was the gong. So we stop the formal meditation there. And this is the moment of transition. And at this moment, then, just permit the atmosphere of the meditation to just continue to resonate to whatever extent it does, in its own way, into whatever we do next. So that was the meditation of what I call, “Three Deep Letting-Be's”: letting-be of the body; letting-be of the breath, and its energy; and then, the deep letting-be of the mind.

The kind of genius of this practice is that we are instructed through it to permit the natural, underlying power of groundedness and concentration and wisdom within our body—our bodily awareness—we're letting that help lead the meditation; help us be to harmonized with it, to be drawn into oneness with that love, that bodily awareness. And that helps signal us how to also permit the breath, similarly, to draw us a little bit into oneness with it, help us harmonize with its underlying power of concentration, breath awareness, and groundedness. And the body and the breath, in turn, signal the mind how to harmonize with its underlying power of openness and deep simplicity; and peace, and underlying natural kindness to all of its experiences. What can unfold from this meditation of the “Three Deep Letting-Be's” into life and relationship and action?

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As we become more and more familiar with this practice—by repeatedly doing it over our days, those who choose to do that—what can begin to arise out of it is that by deeply accepting and letting patterns of thought and feeling unwind and release within the openness of mind, we can begin to discover a welcoming background of basic kindness, okayness, compassion in the background of our awareness. It's a basic kindness, warmth, compassion that was always already here. And that had peeked through, perhaps, in little moments in our lives—like after a long hike up a hill, when you sit on the hillside and watch a beautiful sunset after a day of hiking, exhausted. Your mind and body may just fall open, deeply relax. And, in this moment, the mind and body may permit patterns of feeling and thought to just begin to unwind, with a sense of deep okayness—everything's okay.

Have you ever experienced that? That's an example, in our ordinary life, of little moments when this background of our awareness—a background of deep okayness and natural kindness and warmth, which is always already here in the background of our awareness—starts to peek through, manifest. This meditation practice explicitly brings that out, puts us in touch with it, something we already know. And, secondly, this level of awareness is beyond patterns of alienation from ourselves and others. It's a level of awareness where you can begin to find some deep inner rest and healing, and an inner sense of safety and equanimity and replenishment, like on that hillside at sunset.

And, thirdly, a deep inner healing can begin to come from the deep acceptance instructed in this practice, an acceptance that expresses the natural kindness of unconditional openness, from the background of our awareness. And, from this space of inner healing, we can become a more healing presence to others—learning to hold them in the same unconditional openness that deeply accepts and allows their painful feelings, perhaps, and patterns of thought to relax and unwind.

And, finally, in this practice of deep letting-be we begin to release narrow patterns of self to experience a larger space of connection with others in our world. Without even having to think about that, the space of connection begins to disclose itself. By welcoming patterns of thought and emotion in the part of the practice where the mind is wide open, we're giving our patterns of thought and feelings space to unwind and settle and calm, which means we begin to become less identified with our limiting impressions of persons and world, permitting

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more of their fullness and mystery and humanity and potential to reveal itself to us, like in the story of the Haitian cab driver and the angry man.

When the angry man's patterns were interrupted or released for a moment, it's then that the cab driver's fuller humanity was permitted to reveal itself to the man on the street. So, this meditation of “Three Deep Letting-Be's” is something that you can do each day, now, for a little while. It could be for 10, or 15 minutes, or 20 minutes. Do it each day for the next week, and then I'll see you a week from today for the next meditation.