



I want to have a talk about change as operating both internally and externally. Buddhist practice focuses primarily, if we understand it, on the inner life. Of course, the Buddha really pointed to this as the place where we get stuck. Our problem isn't the world out there and what's going on out there but our relationship to it.

We begin our practice by trying to look at that relationship. When we sit in meditation we watch our minds, and watch what our minds do with thoughts and wishes and obsessions and worries and dreams. We start to see how our minds want to go out and control the world and change the world. The simple practice of just coming back each time we realize that there's a thought is this retraining and letting go of those graspings. We start to see the habits of mind, the impulses. Then we start to bring that wise reflection and that mindfulness into our daily life and into our engagement in the world.

This is where we start to see the conditioning and the reactivity. It's relatively easy to stay peaceful in a quiet meditation group or in your silent meditation at home. But when you step out into the world, and your boss comes to you and starts pressuring you, or you and your partner get into a disagreement—to maintain that same kind of balance and equanimity is much more challenging. Our meditation practice, to some degree, is about training ourselves to recognize our own inner life and reactivity as it arises, as well as helping us to just have a more calm baseline that we are engaging the world with.

I want to talk about how the Buddhist core teaching, the four noble truths, can be experienced here and now in our practice, and how seeing that can train us to really let go in the moment.

As I said to you, the first noble truth is the truth of suffering. The truth that things are unsatisfactory. The second noble truth is that our psychological suffering is caused by the fact that we can't deal with that first noble truth. We wish it were different. We struggle with that. The third noble truth is letting go. It's the realization that we don't have to stay stuck there. The



fourth noble truth is the path that really trains us to not stay stuck. I'll talk about that path, but let me first talk about this work as a meditative process.

When we sit down to meditate, we're paying attention to the breath trying to do the practices we've been taught. We realize the mind has wandered. Right in that moment, if you can check in with yourself and see how you feel, what you will discover is that the thinking has caused some stress, discomfort, or agitation in your body that you can feel. We can say this is also psychological, but the easiest way to feel it is in the body. This is really the living practice that we notice how we're feeling as we're sitting.

Then we notice that the mind wanders. What you feel then is the dukkha: the suffering, the first noble truth that the Buddha talks about. You're feeling it because of the second noble truth. So you can see that right then the reason you're feeling uncomfortable, or the reason your shoulders are hunched or there's a tightness in the chest—however that's manifesting is because of the grasping in your mind. When you come back in that next moment, and you come back to the breath and settle again let the thought pass, connect again with the body. Right then notice that that tension dissipates. That's the third noble truth. In that simple form of meditation, these very profound truths are being realized in your own body.

This is the point of Buddhist practice. We can study all the Buddhist philosophy in the world, but it's not going to have meaning or transformative effect for us until we experience it for ourselves. This is what Joseph Goldstein means by the experience of insight. In Buddhism, we talk about having insight from the Theravada traditions of vipassana. In our culture, the word insight refers to the insight of a thought or an idea. “Oh, I figured something out mentally.” In the Buddhist world, insight refers to an experience: a felt experience. The experience of suffering from grasping and letting go—or the end of suffering through letting go—is the most key insight of Buddhism. The insight to suffering and the end of suffering is what we all want.



Now, you can have that experience without realizing you're having it. That's why I'm pointing it out because the Buddha talks about vision and knowledge. Vision is having the experience, but knowledge is understanding it. Once we understand that experience, we realize this is what this practice is about it really reinforces what we're doing. Often people will say, after meditating for a while, “Oh, it's okay. It's helped. It seem nice. It's sort of helping me, but what's the real point?”

*This* is the point. When we experience this insight over and over, and we understand it we retrain our mind and body to let go, to not grasp. It's not so much that we're telling ourselves just to let go. We're actually experiencing that release over and over. This is why we practice repeatedly, or daily, or why we go on retreats to retrain or recondition ourselves to respond differently to our mental experience instead of creating more stress and anxiety or craving out of our minds. We train ourselves that when that starts to happen there's a click. There's a waking up. A bell goes off—I feel my body. I feel the tension coming into my body, and we come back then.

One practice that I recommend to people that I learned early on was just the simple practice. Do this practice for a few sittings each time your mind wanders. Notice if you're having a thought of desire, aversion, or negativity—a thought that's about planning, or wanting something, or hoping for something, or a thought of judgment, fear, or resentment. Categorize these two kinds of thought. Of course, each time you have one of those thoughts, you realize it and you come back.

The purpose is to see that what the Buddhists said cause suffering—grasping, which takes the form of wanting and not wanting or aversion—truly is what causes suffering. This is another aspect of this Four Noble Truths practice, of really seeing how this works.

I would like to offer you a guided meditation that will incorporate one of the practices that I taught in this retreat: the practice of noticing desire and aversion in the mind. We will do this mindfulness practice for a few minutes and then start to watch that element of our mental



activity. As you're sitting there, you can do this with your eyes closed or just lowering your gaze. Settle into a comfortable posture where you're sitting upright.

We'll begin by listening to the bell. Relax the body, soften the jaw and all the muscles in the face. Relax the shoulders, soften the belly, feel the body in alignment and balance as you sit in stillness. Have a sense of arriving in your body. Feel the body as a single object and the sense of groundedness. Seeing that within that single object, there are many different sensations.

Let your attention be open, so that sounds can come and go without being a distraction. They're just part of your environment and your experience. With mindfulness, we don't try to push away any element of our experience but rather have a sense of openness and receptivity of allowing.

Let the attention come to rest on the experience of breath and body breathing. You might take a few deeper breaths just to connect with the breathing. Feel the breath at the nostrils or at the belly-- wherever it's easy to feel the breathing. If you're following the breath at the nostrils, feel the sensations of air touching in and out. If you're feeling the breath in the belly, notice the movement rising and falling. You can make a soft mental note.

If you're following the breath at the nostrils, note in and out with each breath. If you're following the breath at the belly, note rising and falling. Just saying those words silently in the back of the mind as a way of helping the attention to stay with the breath.

As we use the breath as a focus, it's very natural that the mind wanders. When you realize that you're thinking, I want you to notice if there's a quality of wanting or a quality of not wanting, or a negative or aversive quality to the thought. Most thoughts will fall into one of these categories. It doesn't mean it's a greedy thought necessarily. It just might be a thought like, “What's for lunch?” It's a slight wanting or a thought like, “Oh, work today. I don't want to go.” Whatever. We just notice these polarities in our thinking. Eventually we'll see that in some sense these are

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just two sides of the same coin. Wanting lunch is not wanting hunger: both desire and aversion.  
That's fine.

In this practice we just pick the first thing that we notice about it, not analyzing or trying to figure anything out; just noting desire or aversion. Then, right in that moment, come back into your body. Feel your body and see if there's any tension or discomfort, stress, agitation triggered by the thinking. Breathe. Take a deep breath right then. Release, come back to the breath, in, out, rising, falling, and noticing how that feels. A release.

Try doing this for a couple of days in your practice—in your daily meditation practice. Just note in, out or rising, falling. Whenever you notice a thought, note desire or aversion coming back. Note especially the whole felt experience. Then let your body learn the suffering of grasping and the freedom of letting go.

Thank you.