



In exploring narratives we are looking at how we cobble together the language, vocabulary, moments, and experiences that ultimately give us a sense of self that we bring into a group context or a collective situation. We may also do this in the context of a different challenge where we try to stake out our own identities.

I thought it might be helpful to go into a short period of meditation where we can consider the dynamic of the group and the self, along with the things we talked about earlier—having a sense of altruism and the compassion, warmth, and loving-kindness that underlies that, as well as the our uniqueness and inherent goodness. These are all messages that emanate from countless Buddhist masters, and we can have a relationship with these thoughts and concepts over time to enrich the vocabulary that we use for ourselves. This helps us to change negative, unhelpful, or maladaptive thoughts into ones that are more helpful, adaptive, and positive.

To that end, I invite you to gently close your eyes. It's not a requirement, but close your eyes if you find it helpful. Breathe as naturally as you might at this moment and just notice your own unique presence—your own heartbeat, pulse, and breathing—all has a certain rhythm or cadence to it. All the atoms in your body have a story at this moment as you make a conscious effort to turn to a meditative place. Even if this has been a rough day, an up day, a down day, or in-between, the sentence doesn't end there if you continue to edit, to write, and rewrite. When we hear the tone of the bell ringing several times the invitation is to take a few opening breaths at whatever depth and pace feels right. (*Sound of a bell ringing*).

If we consider that the world is composed of atoms, and that those atoms come together into stories, then we have more or less the same ingredients the Buddhist masters have had over the years. We don't have to replicate their experience with the same atoms, moments, and stories. We can find the inspiration to cultivate our own unique path. We have the same ingredients: oxygen, space, time, and this body. At the moment we are responsible for our own meditation,



but ultimately we're going to connect with other people, storylines, and narratives once we conclude this sitting and go on to whatever comes next.

I invite you to just take a few moments to notice the body that has brought you this far. Within the natural ebb and flow of your breathing take a few moments to cultivate a relationship with stillness wherever you can find or sense it, as well as any silence that you can sense.

As we're sitting, thoughts may arise in the mind—helpful or unhelpful thoughts, to do-lists, worries, concerns, or a combinations of these things—and that's perfectly natural.

I'd like to direct your attention to a visual of roadside grass. There is a short poem by Shinjo Ito that goes as follows, "Roadside grass is often trampled upon yet it retains the spirit to endure and grow." Again, "Roadside grass is often trampled upon yet it retains the spirit to endure and grow." We ourselves may experience moments of feeling down, or moments where we feel up when we're growth-oriented. That visual of roadside grass can remind us that somewhere in between there is resilience, something that we have within that helps us to come back time and time again. We may not always feel like we have that resilience, but considering that we've made it this far in our lives, there's no doubt that we have tapped into that beautiful inherent goodness and inner resource of resilience. It's likely that we've found our own unique way of connecting with people, of sharing that resilience, and going about our day-to-day activities.

This is where I'd like to explore how we share our stories and how they're shaped by the people and the environments that we're in and that we connect with. If you aren't sitting at this moment, I invite you to take a seat now and sense the surface that is literally giving you uplift and support; whether it's the chair or the floor. If you happen to be standing and cannot take a seat, then just notice the ground and the uplift that you get there; the foundation, the stability, and the support. Reflect on who has given you support like this seat or this surface. You don't have to think of



everyone under the sun. See what naturally arises in the mind and heart and be present with that for a few moments.

*(Silent meditation.)*

Then we can flip that around. Consider, contemplate, and reflect on who you have supported like this surface is doing for you at this moment. Whether it's a small thing, a big thing, or somewhere in-between, even if it's someone you just held the door open for.

*(Silent meditation.)*

Can we also create some inner space to consider that this meditation and reflection on who we've helped and who has helped us is now part of our story for today? If you feel any sense of gratitude or appreciation for those that you've been able to help, especially those who have helped and supported you, then maybe we can sit with that gratitude. Let it fill up every cell and every atom of the body, as though with each in-breath we're breathing it in, letting it permeate more and more all throughout our being.

*(Silent meditation.)*

One last thing that can be shared before we hear the tone of the bell and conclude this sitting is something I've heard from my own spiritual teachers: gratitude is one of the first steps toward enlightenment. Even this time we've taken to step outside of ourselves—to consider who we've connected with and embody any gratitude that we sense—becomes a part of the ink with which we paint and express ourselves onto the canvas of the world outside of this sitting. The words that we choose, the actions, the thoughts, and the intentions—these are the pigments with which we color, shape, and script our realities. If there's been anything positive or helpful, even if it's



just a sensation or feeling that you cannot quite articulate, the invitation is to be present with that as we hear the tone of the bell ringing several times just as we started.

As we conclude our sitting, see if there's anything positive, helpful, adaptive, inherently good, or unique about yourself that you could connect with. Even if it's just the fact that you sat and saw this meditation through to the end, even if it's a feeling that you cannot quite articulate, the invitation is to be present with it as we hear the tone of the bell. Take three or more closing breaths at whatever depth and pace feels right, knowing that these elements become the ink and pigments with which we write, script, and express ourselves onto and within the world. (*Sound of a bell ringing*).

As that tone of the bell fades out, you can slowly return from this meditation—opening the eyes if they were closed to begin with, getting reacquainted with the lighting in the space, becoming aware of where we are and what we're doing.

I thank you very much for spending this time to consider not only our personal narratives but how they connect with others. I appreciate you paying to me your most valuable asset and that's the attention and time that you have. Thank you.