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refuge in our nature of awakened mind itself, fish tank practice of witnessing with equanimity the totality of experiences

[00:06:37] So as most of you are familiar with the recitation to turn our minds to refuge in the Buddha. But also, just to... slightly expand the context, we often go for refuge in the Buddha... as if the Buddha was somewhere else or someone else. ... In a slightly more *inclusive* fashion... we need to understand that... our very nature is the nature of buddha... the awakened mind itself.

[00:08:08] In some way, it's slightly odd... that we walk into this tradition... and often spend decades, or the remainder of our lives... trying to see that awakened mind. Trying to feel it. Trying to see our ordinary experiences through the lens of that awakened mind. And when it doesn't come to us... so easily or so consistently... we become discouraged. ... It's not a mistake to become discouraged. ... Discouragement is also the nature of that buddha mind. ... To say that it is *not* the buddha mind... is to deny our very essence. We don't speak about it often, but... there is no such thing, the teaching that we have says, there is no such thing as an experience, which is not the buddha mind. Our confusion, our anger, our fear... our loathing of self and others... it is all buddha mind. ... So, when we feel discouraged, the discouragement itself is buddha mind. Let us not make a false distinction.

[00:10:59] When we look for the nature of our mind, we often look... with a predetermined label or name for what we expect to find. ... But really... there is no name. ... There is no name for the awakened mind. The words that I just used themselves are... barely appropriate. There is no experience that we have, pleasant or unpleasant... the fear of not discovering the awakened mind... is *also* the awakened mind. ... Therefore, it is appropriate to understand... that exploring our *deepest* nature... we will not have the false satisfaction... of ever... knowing its name. Yet of course, we will recite the names. ... But it's best to think of those recitations and those names... as pointers at best.

[00:13:45] So when we recite the refuge prayer... it's kind of a beginning spot. Recognizing that... most of our hours of every day and every night... we use names and labels... to remind us, or perhaps we're hopeful that we will have insight into our experiences. But mostly... it doesn't come like that. And when we don't find what we expect, we become disappointed and even fearful. ... If you're afraid... it's actually best to just stick with the fear. It is not your enemy. ... And in a short time... it will dissolve anyway.

[00:15:31] So we'll recite the refuge prayer this morning with the intention of... fundamentally turning our *intention* and our spirit... our thoughts and feelings that we often take refuge in. And so, we turn our minds to refuge in the Buddha. Which is turning our minds to refuge in the awakened mind. Which is not someone else's awakened mind... but the awakened mind that we are *each* endowed with. So, we put the Buddha at some distance in order to avoid a sense of arrogance. In order to understand that *really*, refuge in the awakened mind... is something that we can each enjoy as an aspiration, as an experience. ... *But we cannot own it.* Since it is already... our nature. So, if you can hold that aspiration and that sense of what we're doing lightly... then we can enjoy turning our minds to refuge in the Buddha with the aspiration to go for refuge.

sangha [00:17:55] reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer

[00:20:00] Now, in order to... successfully practice... calm abiding... we need to... allow the mind to remain still... so that we can have the experience of the resting mind. Which is *unusual*. ... Generally speaking... without naming it, our experience of that awakened mind is that it continuously produces experiences. ... Pleasant ones and really awful ones. Experiences of satisfaction in our meditation. And disappointment in them also. ... In an effort to understand... our meditation, how it works and how it doesn't work, we tend... to want to talk about it. And depending on who we are, we may chastise ourselves for not doing better. Or we may congratulate ourselves for having done it better than we thought. ... It's best while settling the mind in shamatha... to just take what comes. ... I think we could say that disappointment is not a problem. We need to practice equanimity with our own experiences. Not to overly congratulate ourselves for when they are pleasant. Nor to shame ourselves or think of ourselves as something less... when it doesn't go the way we expect.

[00:24:07] It's very difficult to witness the mind... in and of itself. And we normally say that witnessing of the mind cannot be accomplished with the *intention* to witness it. ... The more that our conceptual understanding invades our meditation... the less likely... we will have insight... Therefore... it can be helpful to put aside... our experiences and just allow the mind to rest... in those experiences as they rise... and fall. ... But in our *effort* to accomplish... something amazing... we fall short of our expectations... in trying to... pin something down. In our understanding, in our meditation, in our conceptual understanding *and* in our experiential understanding... it's a good sign... if you discover that there is nothing to pin down. ... If you can... right now, just allow your mind to rest. Kind of like... with the mind's eye open. ... The body's still. ... The mind still churns out one image, one thought after another. If we try to rest our awareness on *any* of those experiences... if you have tried, then you know, you are lost.

[00:27:41] So... I have an alternative for you this morning. ... And it's based upon an experience I had many times as a young boy. I liked to go to a restaurant down the street where they had a very large aquarium filled with more than 100 fish. And I like to sit down in front of that aquarium and just watch all those fish. Like watching every one of them. But without any special interest for any of them. And later it became clear... and clear today... that far more useful... in trying to discover the *still* mind... is to allow the bigger mind... to witness the myriad of experiences that we have... in every moment... without labels or names. Without hope or fear. Without wanting or rejecting. Just to remain still... and witness... all of the experiences that arise. Good ones. Pleasant ones and unpleasant ones. Terrifying ones. Disappointing ones and joyful ones. ... So this morning, if you can, just... without any expectation for any particular fish that you might see in that aquarium... of your mind. Let whatever comes come. And just rest your awareness... consecutively and all together at once... at the same time... on the totality of the experiences that you have in the moment.

[00:30:44] *period of meditation*

sangha [00:50:00] *dedicating the merit*