

how the nature of mind isn't stillness, the means to go deeper into understanding the mind is placing our awareness on the totality of our experiences

[00:04:03] So first, we'll begin with the. Refuge Prayer.

Sangha [00:04:19] reciting Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer

[00:07:30] So our practice this morning is the practice of calm abiding, which is what we generally do on our Sunday mornings. And calm abiding is a meditation practice in which we do our best to remain *still* physically.... and mentally. So the mental piece is usually the puzzle for us. ... Not that we are *incapable* of being still. But maybe also we're not entirely clear about what the point is. ... If we're not clear about what the point is... then the following steps become compromised. But it's thoroughly understandable that we would not know why we are being still. I speak from my own experience of not being clear about what the whole project was... since the nature of mind itself... is not still.

[00:10:01] And so we have a support... for being still... by resting our awareness on... something. And the something is often... an inanimate object that we might put in front of ourselves and place our awareness on it. Or it could be... placing our awareness on some form of mental activity. ... But if you try this for a period of time, along the way, you're likely to make a *disturbing* discovery. And that discovery, in essence, is... the very nature of mind... is not stillness. So if the nature of mind is not stillness, then how are we going to place our awareness on that nature? So if you have found that to be a puzzle, then we're in the right place.

[00:12:46] So I want to say a few things this morning that might be helpful, hopefully. ... It's my experience from the inside out and also talking with people, who have been practicing meditation for a long time, and those who have not practiced for a long time... and often, are not clear why we're doing it. ... And it's not like there's no benefit from it. We all get benefit from... sitting still, period! Even for one minute... or longer. But the promise of practicing the meditation, in particular of calm abiding, is that we will make some important discoveries... about who we are, what we are... and that other benefits might also accrue.

[00:15:22] But before those benefits can accrue, we also need to... understand a few more things. ... We are, as human beings and as members of this culture, quite adept at exploring things. Quite adept at looking at our own physical and mental states. ... Quite adept at analyzing. And being very intelligent about what we find and what we don't find. ... So why are we still here? ... If you're wondering... then we're in the right place. When we... explore our emotional states... and our efforts to go deep into... exploring the *nature* of all of our things, our habits, our likes and dislikes. We could make a long list, but not necessary this morning. A *singular* distinction to be made here is... as follows.

[00:18:45] When we sit down, I'll just use the example of our shamatha meditation practice, when we sit down to engage in the practice, we are likely to bring with us the tools that we have been most successful with. So if I, for example, suffer from a form of persistent irritation, [smiles] which I do. Don't you? And so I look at that irritation and I do various things to try and see how I could be free of that irritation. ... And then I have a little success. So the meditation ends and I go about my business. And I forget about the irritation and about the prospect of overcoming the irritation. And then the next day, maybe... if I'm not too discouraged, I try it again. ... When we

go to school, we learn to accumulate. To accumulate... facts and figures. To understand the way that mechanical things work, the way that conceptual things work. If we're interested in being historians, we gather the information about history. And we have to remember all those pieces and put them together in a certain way in order to understand the history. And here's where the rub comes.

[00:21:53] We're *really* good at accumulating. Accumulating knowledge. I mean, every one of us knows this, that extraordinary things have been accomplished by virtue of accumulating knowledge and learning how machines work and how electronics work and all sorts of things. ... And so we can work on it today and then we come back tomorrow and we work on it some more. And then we go to school and we learn a few more things and we come back and put those things together. And so, the physical and mechanical world becomes more sophisticated. But my guess is... a lot of you are like me. ... That process has not delivered its promise in the realm of knowing what I am. Who I am? Why are we here? All of those ancient questions.

[00:23:46] So it could be we're resting our awareness on the wrong thing. Or maybe we just haven't developed the ability to raise the awareness anyway. ... But I think it's the former. ... We are resting our awareness on the wrong thing. ... In the wrong way. ... In some way, I think I also have this... *defect* in the meditation practice. The many decades of habit in valuing the accumulation of knowledge about myself. And after so long, then we may find out that actually... we learned a lot about *something*. But not so much about the nature of our being.

[00:25:36] And so I want to make a suggestion. I mean, if I could, I'd pass a law. But we'll settle for a suggestion. Let's first look at a difference. ... If I am learning history, as an example, and I study it for an hour today, I put it aside after the hour. And maybe later in the day or tomorrow, I come back and I start again, taking off from where I left off. If you want to be an historian, that's how it works. You study this period or that period, for example, and you keep adding on to it and you build a set of facts, knowledge and so on. And you can publish that. And we can revisit it over and over and over again, back and forth, and we become the greatest historian on the planet. But we do not yet know the nature of the mind that did that. And that's what we came to sit down and discover.

[00:27:39] So we really have to walk that back because... I already know about the history book. I want to know about the mind. I want to know who I am in a way that cannot be spoken or measured. Or why I'm here, which I can remember wondering when I was 10 years old. And in a certain sense, not much progress has occurred. [smiles] Now, you just have to admit that's weird. With all of the things that we can do and have done... we all still have these questions. We *should* have the question. Not like we shouldn't have them. But *why* is it we're not making more progress? And not to say that no progress is being made. So, think about what we were just saying about the history. You could use an example of building computers or almost anything. I can build a piece of it and go on a vacation and come back and take off where I left off. We can have a conversation about what we're going to eat for lunch and take an hour's break and come back and continue the conversation uninterrupted. Everything feels like the thread is moving along just fine.

[00:29:35] When we look at the nature of mind... and this is really the big deal... you have to start fresh every time you look at... the mind. You cannot put the piece of paper in the book to remember your place and come back and say, oh, yes, I'm on page two hundred and thirty-six. Okay, we'll start there. Because that's not what it means to be a human being. Coming back to the place where you marked your text, will not get you deeper into understanding the nature of

mind itself. Coming back to the computer you're working on, we'll get you another level of understanding. But the nature of mind doesn't have a place that you can put a bookmark in. And so our habit of using those tools betrays the very thing that we want. In fact, I think it's even fair to say, that not only is there not a bookmark, there is not even a book.

[00:31:32] So when we come back to engage in the practice of *shamatha*, where we place our awareness with something like a leaf, even a really nice leaf that has a lot of symbolic things that can be said about this leaf. ... The leaf is static. If I come back after lunch, it's still the leaf. It still looks the same, but let's say that you made me angry. And I went to lunch and I came back thinking that I was going to have a peaceful meditation. But I'm not having a peaceful meditation because you made me angry. ... When we come back to continue our investigation of the mind, we are fundamentally investigating the past at that point. And you cannot explore the nature of mind by looking at the past. You can only explore the nature of mind in the moment that you are *in that place*. The moment that you are distracted, it is completely gone. Not just slightly gone, completely gone! And when we come back to it, you could say it's completely there! You with it. But it is not *feeling* like the same mind that you left earlier today.

[00:33:38] The antidote to that habitual pattern, the means of going deeper into understanding the mind... one of the antidotes, I think really one of the best is, instead of sitting down and placing your awareness on a leaf, or even... a mantra... or anything else... maybe, the more important thing, or let's say fruitful approach is... bring your awareness to the totality of your experience, every time that you sit down to practice. ... Don't just place your awareness on your fingernail, or something like that. Sit down and engage in the building of an ability to rest your awareness on the *totality* of experience that you are *experiencing*... in that moment. Whether it's anger. Or... stillness. ... Don't separate the anger from the stillness. Bring your awareness to the totality of what is happening in that moment. Maybe the way you're sitting, your legs hurt. But it's not only your legs hurt. It's also your aversion of the legs hurt. So let your awareness grow to encompass *all* of those experiences at the same time.

[00:36:15] Because in the moment that you do that, you're actually present. Not with something else. Not with someone else. It's all right there. If your legs hurt, then let the legs hurt. If you feel angry, be angry. I'm not saying you should rile yourself up and *get* angry. But if you feel that way in your meditation, rest your awareness on that *experience*. So we talk a lot about the *faults* of anger and other kinds of *defiled* emotional states. But if we think about it, even just for a moment, we know that the defiled emotional state is actually not the problem. The problem is the way we work with it or not. The problem is our *attachment* to that state or our aversion to it or that we blame someone else for our emotional state. But coming to think that we will make the... *discovery* about what we are and who we are... and all the other great promises from effective meditation practice... we cannot get there by focusing... on small things. We need to embrace the rich totality of what and who we are.

[00:38:31] So let's take a little time and see if we can do that. ... Just sitting and resting... with no intention other than to embrace the *totality* of our experience. Not the totality of what we remembered we *were* yesterday. But the totality of what we are in this moment. Free of yesterday. Which we sometimes say never existed anyway. This meditation of resting your awareness on... the totality of your experience, the subject of that meditation will never occur again. This is the only time it will happen. ... And when you rise from the cushion... and bring your awareness to other things, what you *understood* during the meditation is gone. And trying to pick up from where you left off is utterly futile. So when we come back to meditation, we need to sit down and bring our awareness to the totality of the experience again. It's *always* again. It

always *was* again. So we can see, kind of conceptually, how we could say, I have never done this meditation before. It's absolutely fresh. And when it's done, I will never have that meditation again. ... And so on. So let's take a bit. See if you can... engage at this level to the best of your ability.

Sangha [00:44:58] dedicating the merit

[00:46:01] I want to do a short guided meditation in the manner of which we were talking. And then following that, we'll do the Q&A together.