

19 April 2010 Dharma Talk on Second Life
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This A-B-C mindfulness exercise is something that you can carry with you through your whole day and will allow you to live in an expanded, enlightened state of being. During our discussion be aware even while paying attention to the discussion to also maintain some awareness of your breath coming in and out through your heart.

Greetings to all of you who are “attending” today. We're all perfect right now, even if we don't realize it, we are perfect complete whole, right in this moment. If we can still be aware of the breath going in and out through our heart, and on our inner energy body, and allow our senses to become permeable, not filtering sensations through concepts, not shutting things out, accepting without resistance, we immerse ourselves in the perfection all around us, we are right in this moment.

(A participant comments about the earthquake in Tibet and how they need help there).

Remember the four great bodhisattva vows:
Sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them.
Desires are inexhaustible; I vow to put an end to them.
The Dharmas are boundless, I vow to master them.
The Buddha Way is unsurpassable, I vow to attain it.

Anyone who decides to follow these vows is taking on four impossible tasks. We each have to help in our own way. Whether that means actually going there and participating in the relief effort, or sending equipment and supplies to support the relief effort, or sending money to the relief organizations. We have had four major earthquakes since January, and now a volcanic eruption.

(A participant comments, every seven seconds a child is dying of hunger).

Suffering is everywhere, even if we do not hear about it. It reminds me of the Zen koan, if a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it does it make a sound? If we did not have the marvelous technologically advanced communication system that we have today, many people would never hear of these disasters. A couple of hundred years ago, most people would not hear this news for years, and some people would never hear it at all. How can you save all sentient beings if you don't even know who is suffering or how many are suffering? The whole point of that koan and these questions is that we are all one, we are all connected, one person's suffering impacts us all. But also we are in different places and times, we can't go everywhere there is suffering and save everyone.

By “saving” ourselves, in the sense of becoming present, and ending our own personal suffering, that sense of separation that adds to collective consciousness of all sentient beings in the universe, that is the only way we can fulfill the first Bodhisattva vow, by fulfilling the second, putting an end to “desires” (based in attachment and separation),

putting an end to the negative vibrations that you put out when you are mired in thought and achieving that higher vibration level. The vibrations you create in your mind affect every, atom, molecule, energy wave in the entire universe, they are all connected and your higher vibratory level raises the vibration level of a greater number of beings and their higher vibrations that of others, etc. It's quantum physics; it's the hundredth monkey phenomenon. The only way be able to save all sentient beings individually is to diligently work on ourselves, to become present, to drop our own sense of separation and become enlightened ourselves and to share that with as many people as we can through example. And others will come to you and say, wow, I would like to live that way too, and you would tell them, you can, just stop listening to your mind, the separative thoughts that keep reinforcing the sense of separation, being alone, being apart, the thoughts that keep you on that treadmill of continually trying to get, get, get, all the things that people try to get in order to feel fulfilled. We are already fulfilled, right here, right now. By doing that, we add to the raising of the vibrational quality of the entire universe. The 100th monkey phenomenon posits that if a certain number of people raise their vibratory level, and that that raising affects enough people to reach a "critical mass" of people, there will be a quantum leap of consciousness that will affect all sentient beings instantaneously. That is truly the only way we are going to save the world.

Not through relief work, although we should do that too, it's the compassionate thing to do in whatever way you can, but the most important thing for us is that we purify our minds and hearts of negative emotions, greed, anger, selfishness, and share that expanded purified consciousness with everyone. On the physical and on the quantum vibration levels, every vibration within you goes out the ends of an infinite universe and affects every atom, molecule, subatomic particle, pure energy level of the entire universe. You are that same energy just in a condensed form. Your physical body seems separate but it's not. A human body is like an ice cube floating in the midst of an infinite ocean, it seems like a separate entity but it's the same water and is connected to every part of the ocean. Our job is to see ourselves not only as those ice cubes, at least while we are in this human incarnation, but also as seemingly separate sparks of that universal consciousness, each of us with free will and individual traits and characteristics, and also an aspect of all that is, totally connected, interrelated, down to every molecule and atom and energy wave.

That is what the Heart Sutra is saying, that form and emptiness are simultaneously coexistent. The problem is that we feel ourselves to be in form but do not also experience ourselves also as pure energy. But we are "frozen" energy, in a way, we seem to have precipitated out of this field of formless energy into solid form but we are not solid at all, we are frozen consciousness just as ice is frozen water vapor. Even atoms are not separate and discrete, are not solid but rather are energy waves dancing around in space, they are vibrational patterns that take on the appearance of solidity and separateness, but they are not any more solid than if you were to look at a fan spinning round. It looks like there is solid matter all round but that is because of the rate of speed at which it moves. That grey haze you see, that is what we are, energy vibrating at speeds and in configurations that make it take on an appearance of solidity. Because of circumstances

and conditions we are exposed to in our early years, we start to identify with this feeling of solidity, but we are truly infinite energy even as we appear to be like solid matter.

Each of us comes to realize that we are not just this form but also the emptiness that is not “nothingness” but rather is “no-thing-ness”. As we raise our vibrational level by transcending greed, fear, obligation, vengeance, we purify ourselves, drop our desires, and that affects our entire universe. The “melting” of our ice cube will affect every other ice cube in the ocean. As we heat ourselves, we will help to melt all other ice cubes.

(A participant questions, how does grief fit in? Is it part of desire?)

When you are able to get rid of and transcend attachment, it doesn't mean you don't have emotions; that you, for example, won't get angry. I used the example in my last dharma talk of Jesus with the moneychangers, he was angry, or frustrated, or annoyed, but the important point to make is that it was pure anger, not tinged with hatred or hostility or vengeance. They have emotions, let them flow through them and then they are gone, they are released. Grief is the same. If we realized fully that we are eternal we would not grieve when somebody died, we would know we are always connected with that consciousness and with the consciousness of everybody in the universe. We still would grieve but not be despondent, depressed or in despair, we would have anger without hatred or vengeance, fear without anxiety, not to worry about all of the things that *might* happen to us.

There is a difference between fear and anxiety, although both stimulate our fight-or-flight response, the sympathetic side of the autonomic nervous system, where blood is shunted to our skeletal muscles, heart rate and blood pressure increase, and stress hormones start flowing through the bloodstream. In fear the reaction is to something real, in anxiety the emphasis is on thinking.

Wherever you are sitting now, imagine that the door bursts open and a tiger comes in and is looking at you, ready to jump on you and you react with shock and panic, that is fear, fear is having that response to something real, something objective in your physical presence that threatens to harm you and is a survival mechanism. This mechanism harkens back to our primate and “cave people” roots, and is an appropriate response to an actual threatening situation. If somebody shoots the tiger and we are safe, the reaction drops away. Anxiety will provoke the exact same physiological reaction but there is no real tiger, no actual threat, just thoughts. We are worried sick but there is nothing objective there. You are the one creating this distress and suffering, reacting to thoughts as if they are real. It's like a psychotic hallucinating, the terrors they experience are created by the mind but they are incorrect interpretation of objective facts.

So becoming enlightened, dropping the thought based ego mind, and negative emotional reactions doesn't mean that you drop your individuality and personal traits and preferences, there will still be things that make you angry, sad, afraid, but it will be anger without hostility, you will not stew over it or wish bad things for that person in your mind, obsess about it. We will grieve when we lose someone or something we love,

a relative or friend, family pet. The people involved in a disaster who have had homes destroyed but miraculously no one killed, but everything they owned was destroyed, they will feel grief over those things. But from an enlightened perspective, one wouldn't hang on to it, attach to it, and turn oneself into a victim. That would only send out more vibrations into the universe that would draw more victim episodes to you.

(A participant comments, we personalize it...grief...how do we not identify

Danika has just lost her mother, and we understand that yes, you are struggling with your grief and that it is absolutely appropriate for you to feel this way, there is no shame or guilt about feeling grief at that kind of loss. It is not unspiritual, you are just being fully human, and it would be inappropriate for you not to grieve. And I thank all of you gathered here today for your kind and helpful words of sympathy to Danika.

The problem with attachments is that when we are attached, we have emotions but are uncomfortable with many of our emotions; we try to second guess them or resist them, or feel bad for having them. When we lose someone we love, the appropriate response is to grieve and not feel uncomfortable about feeling that grief. Death is one of those things that the ego is particularly troubled by, other peoples' deaths, that is, because the ego's prime directive is to control. Remember that the prime premise of the ego is separation, and the prime directive is control. "I am the boss here". And the death of someone you're attached to is a slap in face to ego, because we can do nothing to control it.

How many of you, and I am one myself, have been in a situation where someone you love has an illness that you know he or she is not going to recover from. You want so much to do something and there's absolutely nothing you can do. The only thing you can do is simply be present for them, hold them in your heart and mind, wish them love, strength, courage. Remember that we all have free will, we all choose what our path, our destiny is, and those people are making their choice, we have nothing to say about it. We accept a situation that is not changeable.

(A participant comments, you could do metta...loving kindness meditation...for him)

Yes, you can meditate, offer service, send loving kindness, but there is nothing you can do other than that to change the outcome, just keep that person in your heart and send loving kindness, and be thankful for time you have spent together in this lifetime.

The ego is threatened by this because it feels that it doesn't have control over preventing the loss of someone or something that we are emotionally attached to. The stronger the ego is, the more desperate the grief will be. Remember that the prime premise of the ego is separation, and death is the end, is the final separation from our loved one, we will never be together again, so the ego tells itself. The more we transcend ego, the more we realize and feel our connectedness with everything and all beings, the less attached we are to grief. While we are still in this physical being, we will still experience grief and loss, the sense of "if only we had more time together", but that sense of grief will not devolve into depression and despair, it will be felt, we can grieve and then accept and

then release. Once again, you have my deepest sympathy and my words to reassure you that what you are feeling is the perfect, natural and proper response to what you are going through now. Don't feel bad about feeling bad; keep her in your heart.

(A participant questions, to know yourself beyond name and form?)

Yes, that is the idea, get to that point where you transcend ego, then you are transcending name and form. The ego is based in name and form, in labels, abstractions. It is dense, and identifies with form. The idea is to transcend ego. Don't lose your form, rather become able to experience yourself as both form and emptiness simultaneously. Once you can do that, what death is there to fear, either yours or someone else's?

(A participant questions, is life happening to us or through us?)

If I answered that question, I would be guilty of intellectualizing and theorizing. *You* have the answer to that question, all you need to do is to become present and you will see whether if life is happening to us or through us or both or neither.

(A participant questions the idea of identifying with concepts.)

When we drop identification with concepts, instead of it seeming that we are living, it seems we are being lived and in a sense we are. From the point of view of ego, *you* are doing the living, but once you dissolve ego and see this universe and see yourself for what you truly are with no more sense separation, then "living", "being lived" loses meaning, you just *are*.

(A participant comments, that was a nice answer.)

My comment is that that answer is already in you. All spiritual teachers are charlatans, because you ask me to tell you stuff that I know that you already know, and I tell you just to get your ego out of the way and you will find that the answer is right there within you.

(A participant questions, is it like that for you sometimes?)

Ask me again when I completely transcend my ego, LOL.

(A participant questions, what is the difference between being and living?)

I don't know that either, again, that answer is within you when you transcend the thought based, emotionally reactive mind, go beyond concepts, theories and beliefs, then you will understand, without intellect, and experience what this is all about.

(A participant questions, who will transcend?)

Right. Who are you? You could say I'm this...or that...a name, a role, a label. You are nobody going nowhere, we are all already here. Look within you are already Buddha,

there is nowhere to go and nothing to do except to, in this moment, create what it is that expresses the joy, the love, the enthusiasm, the wonder and the bliss that we are, individually and collectively. There is no place to start, we are already here.

The “pursuit of happiness” is oxymoronic. The idea of chasing happiness is absurd. If you chase it you will always be running and never catching, because happiness is who you are right here right now. There’s nothing to chase. If you create a game plan, or set a goal to do something to get or create something for the purpose of being happy, you may be happy when you get it, but not happy now. Trying to manifest something to “make you happy” without being happy in your presence “right now” is like trying to run a marathon starting from the middle of a pool of quicksand. You’ll never get anywhere. When you are present, you start from a reality that is “solid”, and you can get where you want to go but be the happiness that you are with every step you take on the journey.

(A participant questions, is “being” passive and “living” active?)

Lao Tzu said in the Tao Teh Ching, “the way to do is to be”, meaning that doing and being one and the same

(A participant comments that when she close her eyes and stretches out her arm all she feels is spaciousness, no arm, no head at all, just space.)

Yes remember the third part of the A-B-C formula, “corporal awareness”, tuning in to your inner body, the space inside, your heart, hands, arms, head, feeling your body from the inside out. That is your energy body; it is the foundation of the physical body. If you can really tune in to that you would be in a state of physical bliss as you are aligning your awareness with the energy you are.

(A participant comments jokingly, I was never good at running, good thing I don’t need to go anywhere and that there’s no place to go.)

That’s perfectly true. When we are present each moment, we can go to all sorts of wonderful places, but it is always here.

(A participant comments, Tai Chi does that to me.)

Yes absolutely, I’ll repeat a point I’ve made before, that in Tai Chi or Qi Gong, when you are fully present and fully aligned with your energy body, then *every* movement you make, every breath you take *is* Tai Chi, *is* Qi Gong, is bliss, and it is all based in your full attentiveness to who you are, to your energy. There is no magic in the particular movements and positions of Tai Chi or Qi Gong, the magic is in the attention we pay to every movement we make.

(A participant questions, I need to earn money, should I wait that it comes to me?)

That would entail another whole dharma talk, one that deals with this whole “law of attraction” movement. Suffice it to say that if you became fully present and feel whole and complete and then visualized money already here with you, then pay attention to situations, circumstances, and people that occur in your life, you will “attract” opportunities that will open up and create channels for that money to flow to you. If you identify with poverty, you won’t see those opportunities. But become present and feel that everything you want or need is with you right now, and each “right now” will bring you whatever you need to keep doing that in an ever more expansive way.

(A participant questions, I am the creator?)

Yes indeed, and so am I and so is every sentient being. We are all aspects of that one, universal, divine source energy, and our job is to channel that energy from emptiness to form, we start by incarnating into our unique physical form and character and then project and manifest objects and situations into form in the so-called “outside world”.

(A participant comments, that is how I paint.)

That is what art is, it is seeing not with the eyes but with pure mind and heart, all things in the universe, all objects, all circumstances, as divine, wonderful, miraculous, energy, and having the gift to be able to channel that vision into a physical form that can be appreciated by other people, allow them to experience to some degree the same “magic”.

(A participant questions, who is judging my actions?)

There is no judge outside of you.

(A participant comments, when I write I see the scenes and the story writes itself).

In aikido it is similar, as in any sport activity, when we practice different techniques repetitively, and eventually internalize them, and then when someone throws an attack, it is not so much you doing the technique as it is the technique doing itself, the technique “does” you. You have made the switch from the ego trying to control your behavior to getting the ego out of the way and becoming a channel for divine source energy moving through you into physical expression. We get to that point by continuing to transcend the ego mind, the separative illusion and negative emotional activity of our normal waking lives. Wake up; the answers are there, beyond your wildest imagination.

(The same participant comments, “I want it now!”)

You *have* it now; you could drop all of that in an instant, just by shifting attention away from the thoughts that keep you feeling separate. The answer is “within us and without us”, and not the “without” we think is there, because there is no boundary but that which we create with our egos.

(A participant comments on the George Harrison tune “Within you, Without you”)

Wow, that tune came out in, I believe, 1966, that's a long time ago. :)

There's nothing to wait for, it's all within you right now, just wake up!

On the Buddha Center website this exercise is posted under "text-based teachings" and under the title "The A-B-C of Mindfulness", it's a guided meditation. That is the way to shift from ego based consciousness to enlightened, awakened consciousness. You are "All That Is", you are the Buddha, the kingdom of heaven is within you, you are enlightened right now.