

Being: the Wellspring of Love and Wise Action

We're drawing to the close of a year, in this sangha, of focusing on the practice of mindfulness, of practicing mindfulness. We're also, some of us, drawing to a completion of a year of Awakening Joy, of Deepening Joy.

The closure of a year of awakening or deepening joy is, after all the practices to set intention, to steady our mindfulness, to cultivate gratitude, and loving kindness, and forgiveness, after learning to face and even embrace our suffering with compassion and equanimity, to live in integrity and blamelessness, after all this pro-active Wise Effort and skillful means, the awakening and deepening comes to a fruition in the deepening into a place of calm, effortless, inner peace and well-being of simply being.

Here's a poem by Rumi that speaks to this universal dropping into a sense of simply being.

Be empty of worrying.
Think of Who Created Thought!

Why do you stay in prison
when the door is so wide open?

Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking.
Live in silence.

Flow down and down in always
widening rings of Being.
- Rumi

There are many, many practices that can lead us to this flowing down into the silence, the stillness, the spaciousness of Being, or flowing out into the expansiveness of Being, including mindfulness of the breath, or mindfulness of experience in the moment. Many of these practices we do on a regular basis. You may have a regular metta (loving kindness) practice, or a regular tonglen (compassion) practice, or a daily gratitude practice, or a daily forgiveness practice, or generosity practice. All of these practices help us drop below the level of the self, the waves on the surface of the ocean, into the deep, quiet, expansive silence and stillness of being. We'll do a brief meditation now to experience this flowing down or flowing out.

Allow yourself to sit quietly, focusing your attention inward. Become aware of your body sitting in the chair, feet on the floor; come into a sense of presence in your body; come into a sense of peacefulness and ease in your body. Then focus your awareness on your breathing, gently breathing in, and out. Expand your awareness to your whole body breathing. Staying anchored in your own breathing, become aware of the breathing of the

person next to you, on either side of you, aware of the breathing of all the people near you. Then expand your awareness again to the breathing of all the bodies in this room, the breathing of life in this room. Staying anchored in your own breathing, you are aware of your own breathing, aware of the breathing of life energy in this room; then begin to become aware of energy being breathed beyond this room. Hold in your awareness other people in your life you know, they are not physically here in this moment, but they are in this world, breathing. Staying anchored in your own breathing, expand your awareness of breathing to people you don't know beyond this room breathing, beyond this neighborhood breathing, beyond this city or county breathing, all of life breathing. Anchoring in your own breathing, expand your awareness as spaciously as you comfortably can to all forms of life breathing together all over the planet, even becoming aware of awareness beyond this planet. Let yourself REST comfortably in this expanded consciousness, this Being-ness.

And then become aware again of your own breathing, sitting in this room, in your body.
Bell. De-brief.

Many practices in many traditions can lead us to this place, to this spacious awareness of a state of being in the Buddhist tradition sometimes called non-self. Rather than being caught in a tangle of fear-thinking, we can drop into the phenomenon of nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to be. Simply the absolute OKness of being.

Then, even after we arrive here, and know this state of being or non-being to be our true home, our true nature, we lose it. We pop back out into worry, we re-engage with the world in a way that is full of self and full of other selves full of the suffering of self-ing. It's that transition of re-engagement I want to address tonight.

I was reminded of another way of conceptualizing this transition over the weekend reading about the Greek terms for time - Kairos time and Kronos time. That kairos time is the open, spacious awareness of simply being that expands our relationship to time and space. Kronos time (which is the root word of our word chronology - literally the science of measuring time and assigning fixed dates to a historical record - kronos time measures time and schedules time and our relationship to time can become fixed and agenda'd and pressured and tense. Particularly at this season of the year, when Nature would have us go inward and become quiet as the earth, in most of the world, is becoming dormant, as we head into the darkest days and longest nights of the year before we turn back toward the light at Solstice. At this time of year when we could be dropping into silence and stillness and being, the world "out there" can be revving up into a frenzy of - celebration and joyful spirits, it's true - but also a rampant commercialism and self-ism that is just nuts.

So how do we drop into the silence and stillness of being-ness and then from there re-engage with the world in a way that embodies the kindness, compassion, the generosity that opened our hearts to being in the first place.

I've really come to see that this state of blissful being is not the end state of our practice. When we rest in the spaciousness of Being, we naturally open to a sense of life energy moving through us, the same life energy that moves through all beings, the same life energy that connects us with all beings. So we begin to experience the sacred inter-connectedness of all of life. From this sense of inter-connectedness, if we listen deeply, we can begin to hear the wisdom of how to be and act in the world, guided by awareness and compassion, wisdom and love. Being is the well-spring of all love and joy, of all caring and sharing, of all wise action in the world. We move in the world, we re-engage with the world and with the myriad details of ourselves in the world from this well-spring of being wisdom and love.

And that means we can meet the known, the certain, with new eyes, fresh perspectives, a living foundation of compassion that creates options, and we can meet the unknown, the uncertain, with a faith in the ultimate karmic order and harmony of things that gives us fresh courage and determination.

We're blessed to have many living examples in the Buddhist tradition of folks who embody engaging with the world and acting from the wise and loving heart. Over this past weekend Joanna Macy was offering a workshop in San Francisco on How To Face the Mess We're In Without Going Crazy.

As Lorraine Hansberry once said: One cannot live with sighted eyes and feeling heart and not know the miseries which afflict the world.

I wasn't able to attend the workshop, but heard from many friends who did, that Joanna taught, as she always does, drawing on her bodhisattva training in the Tibetan tradition, how to transform despair and apathy, through the experience of this deep Being-ness, the sacred inter-connectedness of all Being, to compassionate collaborative, constructive action.

I've heard her say on another occasion: You don't need to do everything. Do what calls your heart; effective action comes from love. It is unstoppable, and it is enough.

Sunday night, as part of the Buddhist film festival at the Rafael Theater, I saw the film Saint Misbehavin', the fabulous documentary about Wavy Gravy and his decades of endless creative humanitarianism – Camp Winnarainbow and SEVA Foundation, which has now restored sight to 3 million people in Asia and Africa. I hadn't realized til I saw the film how much the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh inspires his work to walk on this earth in peace and respond to basic human needs with basic human deeds. His mantra is "Put your good where it will do the most."

Both of these teachers, all the wisdom teachers, reiterate over and over again how the guidance of how to engage with the world, whether it's environmental activism or medical help or building schools or even contributing financially to those good works, has to come from our own personal experience of being-ness, and the inter-connectedness

of all of life. That's where the wisdom, the clarity, the courage and the power to put our love and compassion into action comes from.

We'll do another experiential exercise in three parts:

1. dropping into that spacious peace and ease of simply being again.
2. From there, identifying at least one practice you would be willing to do daily for the rest of this month (year) to bring yourself to this spacious awareness of being.
3. From there, deeply listening for one wise loving action you would be able to do from there.
Which could be repairing a ruptured relationship with an in-law, or clearing old clothes out of a closet to give to the homeless, or contributing to the scholarship fund at Spirit Rock.

I'll ring the bell; you can remain in this quiet place of inquiry if you wish. Or you can then turn to a partner and for 3-4 each share your process and discoveries with each other.

Exercise -De-brief

It is I Who Must Begin

It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try –
here and now,
right where I am,
not excusing myself
by saying things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
--to live in harmony
with the "voice of Being," as I
understand it within myself
--as soon as I begin that,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
not the most important one
to have set out upon that road.

Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on

whether or not I am lost.

- Vaclav Havel

Sit for a minute

The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.

- Frederick Buechner