

Deepening Joy

Joy of Simply Being

November 2011

Centering Meditation: Allow yourself to come into silence... stillness... spaciousness; allow yourself to simply be here.

### Dharma Talk

After nine months of skillful “doing” in the Awakening Joy course, nine practices of wise efforting – intention, mindfulness, gratitude, dealing with suffering, integrity, letting go, loving one’s self, loving others, and compassion – we now shift gears. We let go of the “doing” and drop into a different state – a state of silence, stillness, spaciousness, presence, openness - and from this state we can be aware, be wise, be accepting, be compassionate. We can hang out here and return there whenever things get upsetting and we can re-engage with the world and act from here.

“Being” means letting go of activities and tasks, and the stresses and pressures of those tasks; letting go of plans and agendas, and the identities tied up with those plans and agendas; letting go of thoughts and reactions to thoughts, emotions and our reactions to our emotions. Temporarily letting go of suffering and memories of suffering, or any of the eight worldly conditions, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, pride and blame, success and failure. Even letting go of a sense of “me” that we have worked so hard to become authentic and whole, letting go of even that, and let all that dissolve into the spacious presence that holds all of that, resting in the awareness of the presence that holds all of that.

This state of simply being can happen quite spontaneously, a transformative experience of spontaneously waking up to simply being, here, now, and everything being OK.

We can sometimes skillfully create the conditions that allow us to drop into that sense of simply being. James Baraz mentions three conditions we can cultivate that make it much more likely that we will open into being: trust, equanimity, and awe. And then there are steps we can take to cultivate that trust, equanimity and awe.

Trust, as James teaches it in Awakening Joy, is primarily about opening ourselves and aligning ourselves with the deepest truths of our innately wise Buddha nature. There are elements of openness, showing up with integrity and virtue, surrendering to the mystery of the outcome. Trusting that 10,000 causes upstream bring us to the current moment. We engage with life, respond to life with our best mindfulness, wisdom, compassion, become part of the 10,000 causes downstream. We know we are part of life energies far vaster than we are, though with integrity and commitment, can be effective in affecting those energies.

Equanimity is the capacity to be engaged with life experiences, but not be reactive to them, or if we do have reactions - we are human and hard-wired to react - mindfully noticing and not reacting to our reactions. Equanimity is a state of being present, aware, engaged but not embedded or hijacked.

Awe is simply waking up to and opening to the mystery of – the fact of existence, the interconnectedness of existence, the sacredness of existence. Our cares and concerns, our sense of self and perspectives of self, dissolve into something larger and vaster. We can drop the doing and for a moment simply be.

### **Walk Slowly** by Danna Faulds

It only takes a reminder to breathe,  
a moment to be still, and just like that,  
something in me settles, softens, makes  
space for imperfection. The harsh voice  
of judgment drops to a whisper and I  
remember again that life isn't a relay  
race; that we will all cross the finish  
line; that waking up to life is what we  
were born for. As many times as I  
forget, catch myself charging forward  
without even knowing where I'm going,  
that many times I can make the choice  
to stop, to breathe, and be, and walk  
slowly into the mystery.

There are also practices that help us cultivate trust, equanimity and awe, precursors of simply being, or that simply bring us to a sense of simply being on their own.

1. Calm the body: calming the body is not just to “not be busy,” to antidote stress, which is good in itself, but as a gateway to presence and being. We have to work with the heritage of our evolution. Rick Hanson teaches in *Buddha's Brain* that our brain act like Velcro for the negative and Teflon for the positive. James teaches in the book: “It's hard to connect with receptivity of being and hear the truth inside when you're anxious and stirred up.”

#### a. Hand on the Heart

Sit comfortably in your chair or lie comfortably on the floor or in bed. Allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your awareness on your breathing, gently in and out. When that's steady, place your own hand on your own heart, feeling the warmth of the touch of your hand on your heart. Breathe gently and deeply into your heart center. Breathe into your heart center any sense of goodness, safety, trust, acceptance, ease, you can muster. Breathe in a sense of calm and peace into your heart center. You may elaborate this as you wish. Breathing in a sense of contentment, well-being, a sense of kindness for yourself, gratitude for others. Slowly gently breathing in qualities of self care and self-love into your heart.

Once that's steady, call to mind a moment of being with someone who loves you unconditionally, someone you feel completely safe with. This may, of course, be a moment with your beloved partner or a beloved child or parent, though the dynamics of those relationships can sometimes be complicated and the emotions mixed. So you may choose a moment of being with

a dear friend, a trusted teacher, a close colleague or neighbor -- a moment when you felt seen and accepted, loved and cherished. It may be your therapist, your grandmother, a third grade teacher or a spiritual figure like Jesus or the Dalai Lama. It could be a beloved pet. Pets are great for this, actually.

As you remember feeling safe and loved with this person or pet, see if you can sense in your body the feelings and sensations that come up with that memory. Really savor this feeling of warmth, safety, trust, and love in your body. When that feeling is steady, let go of the image and simply bathe in the feeling itself for 30 seconds.

b. **Ground in body:** Wiggle your toes and bring your awareness to your feet. Flex your ankles and bring awareness to your ankle joints. Notice sensations in your legs, knees, thighs, hip joint, the weight of your seat on the chair or floor. Notice the rising and falling of your belly as your breath, the rising and falling of your chest. Open your shoulder blades and shake out your arms and hands. Wiggle your jaw back and forth. Scrunch up your face like a prune, then release all the tension through a lion's roar. Let your eyes relax in their sockets. Become aware of your whole body breathing.

c. Vigorous exercise pumps more oxygen to the brain, helps work out tension accumulated in the body, release "feel good" endorphins in the brain, all of which help calm the body. Any kind of movement/exercise that involves alternating right and left movements – walking, running, bicycling, swimming – spurs an integration between the two hemispheres of the brain that strengthens our capacity to calm down anxiety in the body.

2. Calm the mind: we do this with meditation practice; we quiet the mind by a) setting the intention to calm the mind, b) creating the conditions of safety, stillness, silence, spaciousness that allow the mind to settle into a state of serenity and ease.

Discussion: What practices or intentions do you use to calm the body, calm the mind? Do they bring you to a sense of simply being?

We can also call on resources to help us build trust, recover equanimity, experience awe, drop into being:

It's so helpful to be in resonance with other people who already inhabit a sense of simply being. This relational resonance is why we go on retreat or come to Deepening Joy, rather than meditate at home by ourselves.

We can recall in memory, or create in imagination, when we have trusted, been equanimous, been in awe, been in simply being before.

We can call on a friend and cultivate a sense of appreciation, gratitude, kindness toward them or experience that from them to us.

We can experience, in the vastness of nature and wilderness, awe, amazement, miraculousness of mystery.

These resources especially help us recover a sense of trust, equanimity, awe, being, whenever we have been wobbled by life events, and help us return to a sense of centered beingness within.

Discussion: Experiences you've had of coming into resonance with someone already in a state of simply being, calling upon a memory or using your imagination to return to a state of trust, equanimity, awe, or simply being, moments in nature that have helped you re-right yourself and come into being again.

When we use these practices to live in trust and loving presence rather than fear or disconnection, then we can drop into the space – and grace – of being. Everything can safely fall away and we drop into silence, stillness, spaciousness. We can experience being, simply being.

Let's sit quietly together for a moment to see if we can develop and deepen a sense of trust, equanimity, awe, then drop into simply being.

Here we find qualities of rest, renewal and a new receptivity. New receptivity allows us to open again to life in new ways, with new eyes, allows us to shift perspective and see new possibilities.

We can hang out here for as long as we can hang out, five minutes, five hours, five days on retreat. We can listen deeply to the true nature of existence, and when we re-engage with the world, we can re-engage from that deep listening and be wise, authentic, empowered, a tender and fierce spiritual warrior.