

Dharma talk 5/4/13

This afternoon I would like to talk about feelings....sensation
Emotions and physical pain

We often automatically shut down when strong energy arises.

We associate strong energy with certain thoughts, memories, fantasies.

The energy gets frozen, locked in
---in fairly predictable ways, specific to us, and very human

When energy and thought are coupled they become vivid and strong.

And they become ours, part of our story, our identification. We create a coherent narrative, with us as the primary actor.

Emotions come with a lot of mental conversation
Hard to determine what is thought and what is emotion.

So how do we work with this?
The constructed narrative can be our clue that it is time to investigate what we feel.

What is the felt sense of the emotion?
---dread, loneliness, disinterest, boredom, anger, our response to physical pain?

If we interrupt the conversation even for a few moments, then we can have an actual experience of the energy, the feeling of the emotion.

Of the felt sense of emotions.
Going from the thoughts, the stories, the understanding, to the feeling of it.
Letting it become energy within the body.

----Where in the body--heart, belly
----sharp, dull
----participation of the breath
-----color, texture

We can breathe more deeply so a sense of spaciousness, openness, and friendliness can come in and support us. We can deliberately remember this possibility.

And this spaciousness opens up on its own when we attend with interest. When we attend to it completely, then the energy can move and transform. It is no longer locked in, locked up.

In order to let this spaciousness develop, we also need to check that we have not become fascinated by the metaphors that we have created about the sensations, or the analysis of the sensations. We need to make certain that they too are held lightly, as ephemeral phenomena.

This requires stability of attention and equanimity. And I count you among the brave for even undertaking this task.

It is part of our human nature to avoid difficult emotions and pain. Early on in our development, we created elaborate structures, some may call it our ego, just to protect us from feeling. It is a natural protection that can come with a high price. That price is a kind of insulating ignorance which inevitably gives rise to even more suffering. And when we have insight into these habitual responses, and as we let go of them, it can feel frightening, feel like a death to ego. And we lose the boundaries of the constructed familiar universe. We step into the unknown.

And it is by repeatedly doing just this that we develop trust in the process of letting go. There is no secure universe and we understand the wisdom of insecurity. But only by doing.

As we drop the stories, and feel what we feel as we feel it, we can develop trust of the process. We learn to allow impermanence.

We are anchored by equanimity and trust.
We practice letting go, over and over again.

So watch for the stories we attach to feelings, and go toward the perception of the feeling. The story churns things up and makes them a fixed object. As a feeling they can arise and pass.

In this way we cultivate equanimity, and wisdom and compassion. And we are holding on to nothing.

Then the thought process can just think, and feeling process just feels, and our senses just sense according to their own conditioning....

An endless stream we don't control.

Arising and dying away continuously.

Like the weather.

Here is an image:

Flags on flag poles. Some time wind is still, other times blustery. The flag pole holds steady.

When wind is blustery, the flags are whipped around, emotions escalating, thoughts all over the place. At other times the air is still and stale, and the flags lie limply. And some days there is a lovely light breeze and the flags just flutter gracefully. All on their own. Using these flags as the object of meditation, we are anchored by the flag poles, our ability to attend wakefully, with interest. And the weather always changes all on its own.

Resources:

Pema Chodron, Tricycle Magazine, summer 2013, beginning p. 81

Goldstein and Kornfield, Seeking the Heart of Wisdom. p. 174