

A dharma talk is a very strange thing  
Dropping ideas into this silence

Is it a helpful idea, that sheds light within your practice?

Or is it an idea that is useful to someone else, but not the right idea for this moment for you?

Does it further understanding or does it twist you in knots or get you to arguing? If it adds confusion, let it go.

We are letting go of what is not wholesome for us and letting what fosters what is wholesome work within us.

As we just sit here.

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Because this is the time of day when the last stretch can loom before us like an uncharted desert or an arduous mountain climb.

I want to speak to skillful means,

how we practice in a way that values comfort and ease as well as alert clarity.

I want to speak about right concentration and right effort.

These become very important if there is a struggle for mindfulness,  
When we are ensnared by our familiar hindrances,

Then these ideas become useful,

perhaps.

Mindfulness and right concentration and right effort need each other.

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If our concentration is imbued with a kind of striving or pressing against the next moment, then we undermine the foundation of ease that we need to sit here.

We are better served by cultivating a relaxed dedication and sustained focus which leads to simply dwelling in well-being.

There is a natural shift in consciousness from an effort to get somewhere to simply dwelling in being.

Right concentration is attentive stillness. Any act of will disturbs the process of stilling the mind.

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Here is a teaching story I lifted from from someone else:

I can hold a glass of water in my hand and ask the observer to let me know when the water becomes still. No matter how hard I try, I can not hold the glass still enough to keep the water from moving. There is always some agitation. Trying to hold the glass of water still is like trying to hold your mind still. There is no way anyone can hold their mind still.

But if I place the glass of water on the ground, the water moves less and less, until after a few seconds, it comes to a stage of stillness that I can never achieve if I hold it in my hand.

If we let go of will, choice, controlling, directing, then the mind becomes increasingly still. It is a natural process. The cause of the agitation has been removed.

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Like being a passenger rather than a driver. I am simply sitting here, awake.

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Now I would like to consider right effort, which goes by many names-- right endeavor, or right persistence or right diligence.

With right effort we let go of the unwholesome which has arisen,  
And right effort brings up the wholesome that has not yet arisen in oneself.

There can easily be a mistaken notion that this means I am doing something to some aspect of myself, heightening a sense of I am doing something to it, with will fully functioning.

But it is not that.

It is more like right effort notices opportunities for something new rather than habitual conditioned responses.

Right effort is part of our curiosity and our investigation.

Right effort can be informed by our intention.

And our intention can inform what our attention seeks out.

Wherever we frequently dwell in body, in feelings, and in mind, becomes the inclination of our minds.

And where we habitually dwell seems as if it is the only important and essential thing.

However, if we form an intention for cultivating the wholesome, then opportunities for something new naturally follows.

When we are stuck in some familiar and compelling swampland, the intention of right effort helps us notice the inspiring sign, a new exit sign appears in the swampland. Turn this way for gladness and light. Attention remembers there is more to this internal landscape. With practice, this route out of the usual swamp becomes the familiar.

In that opening gladness, lightness will naturally arise.

Can we value gladness, lightness of being enough to allow it to arise?

When we fall back into the familiar discomforts and discontents, can right effort redirect what attention seeks?

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Let me add, there is another aspect of right effort that we know fairly well.

Right effort also informs our investigation into phenomena as it is.

It gives us the energy necessary for the task of penetrating phenomena, letting all phenomena become new and transient.

Our reactivity to our knees or our backs become interesting. The pain itself turns into a variable sensation. The fear that I fell asleep and won't ring the bell becomes scrutinized for its features: emotional, physical, and in mind.

As right effort partners skillfully with right concentration and mindfulness, the hindrances fall away. There is attentive stillness.

And we just sit here, resting in being.

No work to do.

Nothing to fix.

No right or wrong way to breathe or feel.

Nothing to hold on to.

Nothing to push away.

Inviting wholesomeness.

I hope a few of these words will be helpful to your practice.

