

Third & Final Dharma Talk

Spring 2017 Retreat in Philadelphia

It is wonderful to see so many people getting settled in their practice, confirming it in their bones. To guide, challenge, and inspire is one thing, but each one of us must realize it for herself or himself. There is no other way. Bad guidance causes one to look to the teacher for something, which is already turning in the wrong direction. Of course, mutual respect and trust go without saying. However, you cannot be taught this. You do not need to be taught this. Yet we come together and practice intensely for several days at a time, often in silence, supporting, inspiring, and challenging each other. This is what we do.

Except for these Dharma Talks, this is a silent retreat. I trust you have savored the value, the virtue, of silence. No, it is not the answer to everything. Maintaining silence, however, is very helpful in our practice. Not just refraining from speaking, but silencing body and mind, for example, sitting together in deep silence in the early mornings.

And it is something to continue in our daily lives: to find that we do not need to speak, to fill in the silence, to make an impression by saying something. This is helpful as we go back to our workaday world, where we sometimes need to speak. We cannot just remain silent there.

What then is noble **speech**? Buddhism is clear about the need to speak appropriately, to speak truthfully, not to put one self up and put others down, not to speak unnecessarily. I urge you as you go back to the busy world, to speak from **here**. Just as there is noble silence, there is noble speech. Work on it; work at it. Don't just babble.

I asked in the beginning: what does not manifest our original face? What does not reflect our original countenance? Does noble silence express our original face? Not dumb silence, but a silence in which everything has been put to rest. Noble speech expresses this as well. It manifests our original face. The other often can hear, see, and feel this, although we don't do it with that intention. We simply speak from here. If we are misunderstood, it is unfortunate. Perhaps we can clarify, but at least we have spoken truthfully and sincerely. We may agree to disagree. There is a way to do that. Respectfully listening and appreciating what the other is saying before we jump in to disagree. It helps to understand what the other is saying or thinking or feeling before we hasten to disagree with them. To listen with love and then, when needed, to speak from there is a crucial part of practice in the world.

We have sat in noble silence for several days. We need to learn how to remain silent when nothing needs to be said, to rest in that silence. People can feel it, be nourished by it and comfortable with it. You can enjoy and appreciate each other in silence. Please do not give

yourself to this silence – then go out in the world and start babbling. Buddhism stresses practice with body, mouth, and mind. Not just the mind. Not even just the body and the mind. That would be enough; after all, the mouth is a combination of mind and body, forming thought into words and using the mouth to speak.

Over the years, looking again and again at the Buddhist sutras, I came to realize how much emphasis is placed on speech, and for a very good reason. 2,500 years ago they had the same problem as we do today. As the chant goes, “All of the evil karma” that comes out of our mouths! It’s up to us.

“Sitting is the new smoking” – this recent catchphrase reminds us of the importance of the body, of physical posture. Maintaining proper physical posture is exactly what we are doing in this retreat, as well as regular movement. Sitting poorly for hours in a poorly made chair cannot be good. Even if we sit in a chair here, we do not break our posture and lean against the back of the chair. Indeed, by holding the lower back erect, we strengthen the muscles to healthfully support us. I am not saying that you must always sit like this. I am urging you to be aware of your posture and how you sit. Slumping over is not the way to sit. Often when I am riding in a plane or a car I put one leg up in lotus and leave the other leg down. I find it helpful for the back.

Pay attention as you return to the world and to your daily routine. Be grateful to those who were taking care of things so you could be here. What they were doing is at least as important as what we are doing here sitting on our butts. Instead of going back with the intention of showing what you have learned, the experience that you had here, go back curious about what the other – your spouse or the people at work – has experienced, how has it been for them? The same principle applies: remain open to what is and the way is clear. The way remains clear.

If our practice is true, nothing can really get in the way. Challenges, difficulties, sharpen the practice. If something gets in the way, maybe something is lacking in our practice? Look forward to challenges and criticism. They can sharpen, clarify, and reveal blind spots. Welcome that. I am not looking for trouble, but I welcome challenges and criticism. That’s why I often ask, in all sincerity, “Does anyone have a question, comment, criticism, or condemnation?” If there is one, bring it up. It can only make the living truth clearer. If it can be destroyed, the sooner the better!

Questioner: How do you feel when you’re in samadhi?

It doesn’t matter.

The purpose of entering and sustaining the concentrated oneness of samadhi is not simply to remain in that samadhi. I don’t know if this is what lies behind your question, but it is easy to fall in love with that state. For you are relatively free of the sensuous taints while in that state.

As valuable as that is, however, that is not the point. If you are doing it as a Buddhist practice, it gives you the clarity and calmness to see, unmistakably, **what remains**. That is why we enter and sustain samadhi. We do not enter samadhi to feel good or to escape from the troubles of the world. True samadhi shows us what remains to be done, where we need to apply ourselves. We do not just abide in a temporary, pleasant state. Do you see how that itself can become a kind of disease, a kind of addiction? That is not Buddhist practice.

I appreciate your question. Others also are probably curious about this samadhi. Yet you all already know, from your own experience, what it is, at least to touch the surface. We all enter samadhi everyday. Whenever we forget ourselves and are one with what we are doing, that is a kind of samadhi. We are never far from it, because there really is no self-identity to hold onto. We are always slipping into samadhi. And we are always slipping out of samadhi as we return to our supposed self-identity. In a sense, that's the problem. We all lose ourselves naturally. My old friend Marty and I used to do it all the time playing Frisbee.

Marty's Comment: You said before that you have no talent, but Frisbee was one of your talents.

I stand corrected! We were good at Frisbee. It was always something I could do fully and enjoy fully. The focus came naturally.

We all have that natural "talent" to lose ourselves. Reading a book, watching a movie, playing a sport, performing or listening to music, and so on. I have seen people drive a car and, as soon as they start the engine, they're in samadhi: concentrated on what is there, with no sense of impatience if there's a traffic jam.

You are constantly on the verge of samadhi because there is no self. You are constantly being shown that what you are is precisely what you so desperately seek! How can you not see this? There's no self; never was, never will be. Stop trying to put Humpty Dumpty back together again!

Pardon me for giving you a hard time.

Questioner: I forgive you.

Retreat is precious. Now we let it come to its natural conclusion as we return to the world. Retreat and "the world" are not two separate things. However, it can be a bit clunky moving from one to the other, especially if you are not used to it, so pay attention. When you leave here, **leave!** When you get back home, do what needs to be done. We have other responsibilities and other demands. That's fine. Take those responsibilities seriously and do them well, just as you did this retreat well. That is our real place of practice. This retreat is just an artificial, temporary arrangement we have set up. Beware of falling back into your old

patterns. Practice is not just something we do on our little cushions. It **is** something here on your little cushion, but if it ends there, you might as well not bother in the first place.

This is the last Dharma Talk. Does anyone have a question?

Comment: Earlier when you were speaking about entering samadhi you asked, "what remains?" I understood that as referring to some transcendent state, but today I understand it as "what remains that you are still escaping from?"

With "what remains" I do not mean anything transcendent at all. I am sorry if I gave that impression; maybe I was not clear.

Questioner: So "what remains" is what you are still escaping from?

It could be. But I am not talking about anything transcendent. Simply put: What remains when all mental activity – including the dialogue you are having with yourself now – naturally dissolves in samadhi? What keeps the "I?" bound to itself? I am not pointing to a transcendent experience, but rather to the immediate experience you are having right now. Are you holding onto something in that experience? Have you made it into something? Is there still some underlying grasping? **What remains?**