

Good morning.

This morning I bought some carbon offsets. I bought 25 tons of carbon offsets this morning, and I did it through this organization called Carbon Offsets To Alleviate Poverty, and what they do is—it was like \$25 or something—but what they do is get people to give them money, and take the money to impoverished areas and they pay impoverished people to plant trees and maintain these trees. So I did that this morning in response—I was just in San Francisco, and took an airplane there, so apparently air travel is kind of a big thing in terms of carbon footprint. So, I was thinking about that this morning.

Carbon Offsets to Alleviate Poverty. The web site is cotap.org.

So I think that deserves a round of applause. <clapping>

Not what I did, but that it's possible for us to do that kind of thing. Oftentimes we think that someone else should do something about it.

At least, I think that. It shouldn't be this way, I shouldn't be having to buy carbon offsets, you know? And someone else should do something else about this. But it doesn't seem like -- well, it seems like the other person that is going to do it is all of us, so...I mean, I've been waiting for things to change. For the environment to become healthy and our communities to become healthy and this planet to become happy and healthy. But it doesn't seem to be happening so much; I've been waiting for peace as well. World peace and all that.

But it doesn't seem to be happening so much.

For me this is a big source of suffering, a big source of pain for me. Because I really want things to be different.

So, I'd like to do a little bit of meditation with you this morning. What I'd like us to do is to close our eyes. Get comfortable, close your eyes.

And I'd like you to concentrate on the center of your chest. The center of your chest is the heart center, the center of this being. It is where love and compassion is located. I want you to concentrate on the center of your chest, your heart center, and I want you to think about somebody that you love. It could be a person, it could be an idea like holding a newborn baby. Just something so loving. This is the center of love. So it's actually, well its capacity is infinite. And interestingly enough this heart center is also where sorrow is located. Sorrow, so, this is where compassion is located. So I'd like you to concentrate on love and compassion in the heart center, allowing it to be expansive, and big.

Fill up the center, fill up the heart center. Now I'd like you to make contact with your breath and be aware of it going in and going out. And be aware that passing over the heart center, be aware of your breath passing over and becoming infused with love and compassion.

It's not an idea, you can actually feel it in your body. This breath and heart, this is where we can put all of the virtue. Okay you can open your eyes, or you can keep your eyes closed and keep doing that if you want.

This is, umm, this can be your primary practice. In meditation. First thing in the morning when you wake up make contact with the breath over the heart center and, you know, set some intentions for the day, every day. You can do it any time. You can make contact with the breath flowing over this love and compassion which is in you. It's in the center of you.

You know it's funny, I had this sense when I came to practice that I could get rid of my suffering. Maybe if I just wait a little longer, I won't need to buy carbon offsets. If I just sit a little bit more, maybe my suffering will just go away, my pain will just stop, my habits will go away. The things that I don't like about myself will go away. Maybe if I stay up all night, sitting; maybe if I stay up all day and all night for a whole day or two days or three days or seven days, it'll work.

Eihei Dogen, a funny, funny person. He's the founder of this lineage of Zen in Japan; many of you know this already. He went over to China and found a teacher and connected with a lineage that we still hold today. This lineage of patching a robe together, a robe of virtue. Patching a robe of virtue together and wrapping it around your body. So he brought this tradition from China to Japan and then Suzuki Roshi brought it from Japan to the US. And he passed away in the early 70s but he had Dharma heirs; he passed on the lineage. My teacher, who I was visiting in San Francisco -- his teacher was a student of Suzuki Roshi. So he was kind of my great grandfather.

Dogen wrote this essay called 'Katto'? Twining vines. The image of it like a wisteria or some kind of viney plant that kind of twines all over itself, wraps around anything actually, wraps around all kinds of things and grows. He says this is kind of like our life. Our habitual ways. They sort of twine around things. He says this funny thing, he says: those of you who think that just cutting the plant at the base are stupid. And then he says something like "no one has ever before thought about cutting the twining vines with the twining vines." So it's like cutting the twining vines with your twining vines. What does that mean? It means that our suffering, our habitual ways? We need them. We need them so that actually make contact with the breath over the heart center. So we need our difficulties so that we have the opportunity to connect with the breath over the heart center and cultivate virtue in the heart every day. So that when our difficulties arise, this is the place that we come from

to engage them. It's a funny thing -- because we really don't want it. So it's kind of an unfortunate teaching in this school of Buddhism, but that's the teaching. That our suffering arises so that we can make contact with our heart, with love and compassion, and so that we can engage our suffering. And I would say not only our suffering but the suffering of the world.

Does anybody have any questions? I mean, I don't exactly know what else to say.

Student: Why is that an unfortunate teaching?

Teacher: Because A) we don't believe it so we suffer lots more, and B) because the request is to be with what's arising. To be with the discomfort and the pain and the suffering. Who really wants to do that? We just really want to get away. We want to move to what's pleasant. So I guess it's unfortunate because it's so difficult. It is difficult. I think that's why it's like, the request is to meditate. Meditate meaning not daydreaming, but really, it's a time to cultivate virtue. Your virtue. It's not like really cultivate, either, it's more like: expose the virtue, the love and compassion that is already there by concentrating on it.

And then we can meet the world that way. But if we don't do the practice and we don't expose this love and compassion as a virtue then we meet the world in another kind of way which can exacerbate the difficulties in our lives and put obstacles in our lives.

Student: For many years I've been focusing on the hara area. And now when I'm concentrating on the chest area, it's strange because I'm used to my attention being elsewhere. I'm kind of wondering what do I do with that? What do I do with my confusion? Do I go to the hara or the heart or what? What's the difference? I hear this is the heart area -- so where is the hara? I mean in terms of awareness, I guess I'm just confused.

Teacher: I think of the hara as like a power center, you know. It's like meditating on the hara is like very grounding, very centering, and very directed. We actually move, we can move from the hara core. It's very nice to be centered in this place and move out of it, it unifies the body. And this is good practice, it's really good to have a unified, centered, stable body. You need that stability to be able to access what I'm talking about. You need some stability. And in terms of what you want to do, you could try: the first part of your meditation could be the hara; and then carry that stability into the virtue practice of the heart opening. I'd be interested to hear where it goes.

Student: In your own practice do you focus on the chest or the hara or either?

Teacher: Right now it's just doing the breath over the heart; it's actually -- I'm finding it very friendly. I think I've befriended my breath, befriended

this -- well the breath is always just right there. You can just go there and feel it. So I'm really happy about that actually, I'm really thankful for the breath and thankful for the teachings that I have received where I've been told that it's a good idea -- or that it's possible for me to make contact in this way, with this life.

Student: I appreciated your comment about the things in the world that cause suffering, I identify with that. Feeling powerless is one of those things that is really hard to sit with. How do you sit in powerlessness when there isn't something like buying a carbon offset to make anything better? To just sit in it.

Teacher: In about the 6th century there was a teacher who put together a practice manual. Huge thick manual, the "path of purification". Name was Buddhagosa.

From that tome: "The inner tangle and the outer tangle, this generation is entangled in a tangle. So I ask of Gautama this question: who succeeds in disentangling this tangle?" Response: "When a wise person established well in virtue establishes consciousness and understanding, then as a practitioner of the Way, ardent and with discernment do they succeed in disentangling this tangle."

The point is that this is actually -- I mean, the Buddha said this 2500 years ago. "This" generation. Well, this generation is entangled in a tangle. How do we untangle it? I would say that there is this -- there's being able to see the tangle through the lens of virtue, so practice virtue in our meditation. In our meditation we practice this base. Actually something that we can trust. Someone to rely on, actually. But I know that in the Buddhist world, saying you can rely on something is kind of a little bit of a faux pas. But try it out -- try trusting your virtue. Try opening this heart center that actually is your love and compassion and virtue that is already there. So, trust this. Go there. Go there, and keep going there, over and over. It's so close, you know? It's just a moment of awareness away, this breath over the heart center. It is available all the time, and then start to see the world from there. Live in the world from there.

Student: Could you say a little bit about what you mean by virtue?

Teacher: Goodness. Your goodness. And that might be really difficult when I think about it. Because oftentimes we don't think we have any goodness. So, and in a way, it's kind of good that we don't think we're good because then it's like we have an opportunity to examine this not feeling good and then actually do something about it. Virtuous activity is merely doing good in the world, doing good in your life, telling someone you love them is virtuous. Petting a cat can be virtuous. Many things can be virtuous; things we might not know.

Things that appear a bit non-virtuous might actually be virtuous. But it's actually -- you can discover what virtue is by allowing it to be revealed to you in your meditation, in your opening of the heart meditation, in the developing trust in your life meditation, in your feeling the breath over the heart meditation, you can find out what virtue is by doing this practice every day. I find first thing in the morning is really good because it sets the frame for the day; it can be done in 2 minutes by the side of your bed. Just make contact with the part of you, contact with this Buddha nature, actually. That which actually is transmitted from Buddha to Buddha, ancestor to ancestor, it's what we share. It's what we share with one another is this awareness. This awareness of love and compassion.

Student: I'm sure there's not really a right answer here, but how much time do you suggest every day? It would depend on the person, but what, 20 minutes, 45 minutes? 2 minutes?

Teacher: It really depends on the person, you know. I think it's really -- just make contact. Develop a relationship with yourself, get to know yourself. You don't want -- when you first start a relationship you don't want to spend ALL of your time with that person -- or maybe you do, but only if you really really like them. At AZC we do a schedule of 35 minutes zazen, 10 minutes kinhin, 35 minutes zazen in the morning, and then in the evening we do 35 minutes of sitting. That's a LOT to commit to for people working, so the most important thing is just to make contact every day. Really, every day -- just make contact. And it could be for 2 minutes. It could just be "Hi, Bye." You know? Also it's so close -- it's not like you really have to do anything. It's not like, okay after I do the laundry I'll make breakfast and then I'll get in touch with my heart center. No candles, no incense, no place to do it, just do it. Make contact with the breath.

So let's just do that again together. Can we close our eyes and just make contact? And we can close our eyes and concentrate on the heart center, concentrate on someone that you love, or an idea of love, like holding a baby. The deepest part of you. The virtue. Your basic goodness. Your beautiful wishes for the world, for yourself, and for your loved ones. And then run your breath over that, infuse your breath.

From this place let's engage the world. I know you don't want to stop but it's time to stop.

I wasn't going to do this but I'm going to do it anyway. Can you repeat after me?

"I love you."