

Good morning.

I've something quite urgent to talk to you about this morning. (Long pause.)
Can you tell that it's really urgent? (Laughter.)

It's about our lives, and it's about how we hold onto things. How we hold onto things, and how this fixation that we have blocks us from truly and fully living. So when we hold on, when we hold onto a thought and our body starts to tighten, or when we have a want and we find our mind "outward," reaching for something, this blocks us from what is.

Fortunately, there is a form that humans can take on that allows for a capacity of radiant light. This radiant light allows us to see clearly without delusion. It is what's been passed on from generation to generation in the Buddha's lineage. So do you know what I mean by holding onto something?

Sangha member: "Not letting something go."

Yes. So it's not that we want to stop this, actually. That's not what the radiant light is. So we pick it up and we put it down. That's the form. We pick something up and we hold onto it and we squeeze it, we can feel our body tighten. And then we have the capacity to release that, we can release it. Have you experienced that freedom before?

No!?

Sangha member: "It's kind of like taking off your shoes sometimes after a hot day; kind of refreshing."

Taking off your shoes, yes. Mako and I just flew back from Baltimore yesterday, and when we got back to the house I took off my shoes and it was really nice. Have you heard the expression "turn the light inwards" or something to that effect? Turning the light? To face the true person.

So turning the light, this activity of turning the light inward to reveal the faceless fellow is the activity of releasing our fixation, and it allows us to be free. This turning the light inward is noticing what's going on, just noticing what's going on. Noticing our thinking, noticing our body, clenching, or relaxed. And this light, like I said, has this capacity for seeing clearly. And seeing clearly is actually non-judgmentally, so without judgment. Have you done that before? Have you had the experience of being non-judgmental.

Sangha member: "To yourself or to others?"

To others, first. (Many audience members say yes.)

Okay, how about to yourself?

Sangha members: "Sometimes." "That's scary."

Sometimes? It's scary? Yeah, it's hard! And I can assure you that there is something that you have, that you all have, that has the capacity to view what's going on inside you non-judgmentally. I have faith in this. I have trust in this. I trust this.

This is really the heart of our meditation practice. So there's many different styles of meditation, and the heart of the Zen tradition is this meditation of non-judgment. And judgment, right? Because if we're truly non-judgment then we have to be non-judgmental about our judgments, right? So how many of you were at the zazen period this morning? Most of you. What was your experience?

Sangha members: "Irritation." "Judging." "Thinking about the future." "Going away and coming back." "Wanting things to be different." "Listening to the lawn mower." "Some moments of contentment."

I would like to do a little bit of meditation with you. If you could just close your eyes and get comfortable. Close your eyes and I'd like you to take a couple of deep breaths. Very deep. You can make some noise if you want. But feel what it is to have your breath in your body. Is it smooth? Or bumpy? Do you feel the ribcage expand and contract? Are there places that are difficult to get to? Are there places that are easy? The breath is like an anchor. Whenever we get distracted, whenever we go somewhere else, we can return to the breath as an anchor to what's happening. Feeling the whole experience of the breath moving in and out of your body.

Now take your attention off of your breath and move it into whatever it is that is arising. To the vastness of all of your senses. And notice how things come up. And you attach to them. Once you attach to something can you breathe into that attachment and release it? Just let it go! Breathe into your body of attachment and let it go. Now move back into spaciousness and see what else comes up, and see how you attach to that, and then breathe into it, and let it go. Just relax the body, breathing into the attachment-body and relax. Keep doing this practice. This breath doesn't judge you. These feelings don't judge you. This activity is non-judgmental. If you've attached to judgment, breathe into that body of attachment and relax and let go.

How did that go? Was there some release there? Did you have release?

Sangha members: "Yes." "No."

Yes? No? Sometimes? Were there things that were more difficult to do than others? Some big ones? Some big, sticky ones? And they'll keep coming up. So it's just this process of disattachment, of breathing into the attachment

body and relaxing the physicality and mentality. It's the process. It's not the end, it's not the to-get-rid-of, it's that process.

So that's turning the light inwards. Observing what's going on internally within the framework of release and non-judgment. And then I've noticed that there's something else, and that's turning the light outwards. So how do you turn the light outwards? How can you turn it outwards in such a way that you can support other beings to be free from their attachments in a non-judgmental way? Is it telling them what to do?

Sangha members: "Just being present with them, non-judgmentally." "Affirming quietly that they are good." "Offering compassion." "Taking them seriously." "Listening to both what they say and they don't say." "Giving good advice."

You know, it's really hard to know, right? Listening. Being able to really listen in a way that allows them to freely express what they are perceiving as going on within themselves? To be someone who can hold that. This is also a quality of radiant light that is your true face. So you have this capacity to hold someone else in a non-judgmental way that allows them to be free from their attachments. You have this capacity.

So we have this capacity to turn the light inward, and this capacity to turn the light outward. And it doesn't look the same. It never looks the same! Like, every time you breathe, it feels different. It's different. It's a different experience, so it's very difficult to pin down, to create a formula, because it's different each time. So it means that you have to be really present, right? It means that we have to be really present, we have to be here. So this practice of turning the light inward and being aware of the sensations, the thoughts, and the grasping, and to be able to breathe into it and release, not as an end product or method but just as the process. The practice IS the realization. So it's not I become a professional meditator, it's like I'm practicing meditation and I'll practice meditation until I die. We don't get to a stage where we stop practicing meditation and the same could be said about our lives. Turning the light outward, it's like we practice. Practicing, practicing.

Sangha member: "How do you turn the light outward on situations, and on people, say situations that might be going on in the workplace around the world?"

Yeah, in a lot of ways, it's turning the light inward. So when I hear you ask that question, I hear it like, "How do I stand turning the light inward?" "How can I stand it?" "How can I stand these feelings without moving away from them with some fantasy or activity or twitter?" (I just started twitter. I've got followers and stuff but I haven't done any...things.)

So I feel like we're pretty self-deceived. Oftentimes we realize that we're self-deceived by seeing someone else who is self-deceived. "That person is really self-deceived, they're not meeting their life!" And then, for me what

happens is that I start to reflect on myself and I'm like I'm not really meeting my life either, you know? So this turning the light inwards is very difficult because we want to actually move away. There's this built-in thing where we are very slippery that way. So can you feel it? Can you feel the mind clenching on something and the body clenching around something, and can you breathe into that attachment-body and feel that release? And then from that place, can you meet somebody else? Can you be with somebody else? Or something else? Does that make sense?

I'd like to read something to you:

"It is this old fellow whom we all truly, and essentially, are. This true self has been our constant companion in life after life and has never left us. It is beyond all prediction, such as pure and impure, annihilation or eternity, and is identical in fools and sages. It never divides itself into self and other, or subject and object, but merely wears the faces of self and other. Mind, the objective world, delusion, and awakening, are all nothing but names for one's true self. All that we are and do is the result of its presence. It gives us life and makes us die, and we see and hear through the presence of this faceless fellow. It is the source of our minds and bodies, and even the use of ordinary discriminative thinking is the doing of the true self. It itself is speechless and mindless, has no form and sense faculties, but it is not mere nothingness or emptiness. It is, on the contrary, a reality possessed by all beings and the true place to which we all return. Although we are born here and die there, constantly arriving and departing in the cycle of rebirth, the true self does not die nor is it reborn but remains eternally the undying lord of the house, who merely wears the different faces of ordinary beings. Buddhas, demons, and donkeys, when the world is periodically destroyed by fire, water, and wind, it is not destroyed. In humans it is nothing but bright light, a clear distinct knowing."

So this aspect of ourselves includes the grasping onto things, the fixation on what's right and what's wrong in the world. It includes that, and it includes this capacity to release it, for self and other. So it's those things. In our whole life, and it's much more than that, it's what we share. It wears different faces, it sometimes looks like this, and sometimes looks like that.

So the urgent thing that I wanted to tell you this morning was to let you know that you have this capacity. That we have this capacity. To be holding onto something in our life, to an idea, to any idea, for our body to be holding something, to clench around something, right then -- right now -- we have the capacity to release it. To let it be free. To free it! And this is the product of what has been transmitted by the Buddhas and ancestors. This is the awakening of Shakyamuni Buddha, that I, together with all beings, have this capacity of radiant light, which is a release in the present moment from fixation of body and mind.

Okay, well, I read these poems a little while ago to the class we had on developing trust in your life, but I'd like to read them again. Three poems written by Ryokan, which is his dharma name, a relatively contemporary Zen monk who spent most of his life in a monastery and then kind of wandered the countryside and wrote poems. His name translates into "great fool."

"Everyone eats rice, yet no one knows why.
When I say this now, people laugh at me.

But instead of laughing along with them,
you ought to step back and give it some thought,
think it over and don't let up.

I guarantee the time will come when you'll
really have something worth laughing at."

"Everyone eats rice, yet no one knows why.
When I say this now, people laugh at me.

But instead of laughing along with them,
you'd better just stop fooling yourselves,
stop fooling yourselves and then you'll know

just how wonderful my words are."

"Everyone eats rice, yet no one knows why.
When I say this now, people laugh at me.

If they laugh, that's just fine.
Laughing is something I like too.

Laughing and laughing, we won't stop.
We'll welcome the future Buddha here and now."

So thank you, and please don't forget to eat your rice.