

9_10_25 Talk*

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Speaker 1 [00:00:01] I'd like to talk about how we can stay present longer. One of my teachers in our lineage, Ajaan Shah, who is I think one of Rick's teachers in terms of inspiration in this lineage, would often talk about how mindfulness and concentration are two ends of the same stick. That it's difficult to separate them completely as separate practices. You know, on the one hand you have the noble eightfold path and you have mindfulness and concentration as two separate things. But they often work in tandem. Concentration, meaning a narrowing of attention, narrowing awareness, narrowing a focus onto something say smaller and smaller. Excluding a lot of your experience. Some teachers will say that it's like having a bulldog mind of biting down on one thing and one thing only and not letting go. Forgive me if that image is unsettling.

[00:01:52] But the point is, can we kind of lock in on one part of our experience and stay with it at the exclusion of anything else that's happening? A lot of mindfulness practice is more open in the sense that we're noticing things changing over time, opening to the rising and falling of emotions and sensory stimuli and mental chatter and reactivity and all sorts of things that may happen in our experience. Of opening to this unfolding wave. The fullness of experience. Um. In order to stay mindful with the unfolding now, one has to have cultivated some amount of focus or concentration in order to stay with the unfolding experience without allowing the mind to get distracted. And if it does get distracted, can we notice the distraction quicker and quicker and be with that. Um, with concentration practice, um, you know, there's some element of mindfulness baked into, to concentration to know what we're focusing on. To be aware that we're aware.

[00:03:50] And so it's difficult to tease out concentration and mindfulness in the actual experience sometimes. Sometimes we may sense into our belly as we breathe and be generally concentrated on the rise and fall of the belly as inhale and exhale. We might be slightly noticing other sensations in the belly. The changing rhythm of our breath. Noticing whether we're hungry or full. There's elements of mindfulness in concentration and there's elements of concentration in mindfulness. My first year as a monk, I didn't really know what I was getting myself into. And I went to a monastery where they really specialized in concentration practice. And I had... I didn't really know that that's what I was getting myself into. And so for the first year, we would sit in silence, for the vast majority of the day and oftentimes throughout the night, sensing into the belly as we breathe. And one of our main practices was one of the practices that we did today, which was...

[00:05:34] One of the more unique practices of sensing in the belly and visualizing a hollow, dark belly, like space in the bell and visualizing an object like a candle flame or a Buddha statue, a Buddha Rupa, or a piece of like clear crystal in the Belly. And we'd focus our awareness. Into smaller and smaller points at the center of the visual object. And we would first prepare for that by sensing into safety, gratitude, and develop a sense of ease. And. I really enjoyed that practice and felt like it was something that felt good to me in my experience. It just felt like I was a little bit more embodied in general by bringing my awareness into the belly, into the body. Even though I was visualizing to some degree, there was also this sense of groundedness by bringing awareness into the center of my belly as I breathe. And I had just come from a background where I was kind of a busy businessman traveling around China and Tibet and Vietnam and Thailand.

[00:07:24] And I found that the concentration practice was very peaceful in the sense that it offered me a sense of a refuge. I didn't have to think about anything. I didn't have to like notice all sorts of things. I didn't have to analyze anything or figure anything out. It was a very simple invitation. To visualize something in the belly and focus on more narrow and narrow points in it. And that simplicity felt like a breath of fresh air. And. That simplicity is found in all of the concentration practices we did today. We would focus on a visual cue outside ourselves and focus on something maybe on the wall, on a surface, something in front of us, but we would focus on one thing outside ourselves visually. Very, very simple practice. Counting exhales. I'm curious what number some of you got too. I know when I first started counting exhales as a concentration practice, I was lucky if I got to eight. And on some days I might get to four. If it was a really busy day or there's a lot going on.

[00:09:14] The good thing is that this is a practice that we cultivate and that the more we practice, generally speaking, the higher number we can get to, the longer we can stay with the visual object, the longer, we can say with the breath, the felt sense of breathing at the nostrils, the sensations of the heart, et cetera. We can repeat. You know, a mantra or a phrase or a word over and over and over. This is a cultivated practice and it becomes something that tends to feel easier over time, especially with consistent practice. Can really develop a sense of ability to concentrate the felt sense in the body, ears, eyes, can even do nose, visualizing. It's easier to cultivate this on retreats or on longer practices. Today was a relatively short practice of half hour. With concentration practice, it usually behooves us to try to lengthen the duration of our meditations and to string together as many meditations. Back-to-back or really close to each other in the same day, same weekend, same week. And we find that the more we're able to practice, the longer we're to practice. We start entering into different states of mind where a sense of stillness enters the mind, Sense of ease and oftentimes joy is felt in the body. A sense of perspective tends to come in our lives because we haven't been trying to process a lot of information or data. We've been stilling the mind so that our lives clarify. Like shaking up a snow globe, We can allow all of the energies of our lives to settle and there tends to be a perspective in our lives that occurs.

[00:12:21] For those of you interested in the eightfold path can lead to our understanding of right view. And can fuel right effort as well, because we're clear about our priorities and our values and what's really important. It's this practice of concentration that I found super helpful for adopting a life of simplicity. Because when we have the stillness of mind, we tend to sense into a greater sense of peace. And we realized that all the things we're kind of chasing or the things that we think we needed aren't actually the things that necessarily create happiness. A lot of that happiness and wellbeing, peace comes from simplicity. Sensor Ease. And just finding a sense of peace with this life as it happens. We don't always need the things that we think we do, whether it's possessions, approval. You know, bottle of wine.

Speaker 1 [00:14:32] In the second year I was a monk at the next monastery, it was much more focused on mindfulness and integrated mindfulness. And some of the monks would practice concentration by repeating the loving kindness phrases, may it be safe, healthy, happy and ease. Other monks would put something in front of them to concentrate on visually. And some of the monks would. Get a rock and stare at the rock and concentrate on the earth element and focus on smaller and smaller points of the rock. Others would have fire to concentrate on. And some people find fire as a really. Powerful concentration object. And there's a sense of change that happens with fire and heat and destruction, but also light. There's a lot of things that could come up as we focus on a flame. Others put water in front of them or an empty cup to focus on. The space inside something. So

sometimes the space will become the object. Um... The more I practice concentration, I notice my sense of happiness increase.

[00:16:37] And in fact, like I'd say three out of the top five happiest moments of my life have been while concentrating. Some of you may be familiar with the Jhanas, J-A, sorry, J-H-A-N-A S, Jhanas. And depending on who you talk to, like some people say there's four Jhanas Some people say there's eight. But most people describe the journey of going through the jhanas as basically being the same, where there's a stillness of mind, there's this sense of joy and rapture that can come from experiencing that simplicity and stillness, and then a sense of ease. Washes over us, sense of equanimity comes. And then in really concentrated states, there's neither pleasure nor pain. There's no like objects, there's a dissolution of separateness. For me, in my experience, there's often a sense of profound interconnection that's felt in a most subatomic way, where it feels like I'm really at one with everything. And I don't know all the chemical changes that happen in the brain, but I know that... You don't have to be Buddhist to do this. This is not belief-based. This is just a by-product of a very still concentrated mind.

[00:18:38] And in some cases, people, including myself, feel like even the breath disappears where the need to inhale. Ceases for very long periods of time. Um... With cell phones, you know, like. We're always surrounded by screens, it seems, like in our culture. TVs, computers, cell phones, watches, et cetera. And our ability to concentrate and stay present for longer and longer periods of time. Is diminishing largely. And I feel like we need more, say mindfulness teachers to teach concentration practices. Concentration practices tend to be overlooked by a lot of meditation teachers. And so my invitation really is to sense into which of those kinds of concentration practices resonate.

[00:20:13] And two. Experiment with trying one concentration practice for say, longer than you would normally meditate and to carve out time even for a mini retreat at home in which you come back to that practice over and over and over. And notice what happens. I think you'll find that you find that stillness and perspective and clarity and you'll be able to sustain integrated mindfulness or informal mindfulness in your daily life for much longer periods of time to the point where you pick up more nuance of rising emotions and the falling away of emotions in real time. The arising of certain thoughts and passing away certain thoughts in real time. The arising of physical sensations like hunger or pain or discomfort or tiredness in real-time. And we stay with that. And when there's those change too, we're able to stay with it. Not just noticing and logging it and then deciding, well, what do I do now? But rather actually staying with the arising of sensations and thought patterns as they happen and noticing how they change as they change and noticing what arises after that. Passes and staying with those waves. It's not just like one wave and then you fall off the surfboard. It's like you're riding a wave across the Pacific. It's like you're catching it in New York and by the end of the day, you're in Portugal.

[00:22:34] So it's really the fuel for mindfulness. Concentration is what sustains our ability to stay present. And without concentration, without having cultivated concentration by focusing on one thing and one thing only and locking in for as long as you can and keep coming back without that, our mindfulness is distracted at best. We might notice the superficial aspect of an experience, but not really sense into the deeper layers of what's actually happening, or staying with the unfolding of it for more than a couple of seconds. Um. It's important to note that, you know, this is not about suppressing anything or bypassing anything. We still need to bring the gentle awareness and mindfulness to our shadows, deep emotions that surface in our days. We do need to tend to those things too.

[00:23:58] But in the actual practice of concentration, and it's okay to exclude those things. For the time being to cultivate this fuel of awareness, sustained awareness. And for those of you who are familiar with the five hindrances, we can work with the Five Hindrances before concentration practice, working with sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry and doubt through a lot of the classic practices that we do to um, overcome the hindrances, uh, the hindrance is to mindfulness, the, uh hindrance is to, um, concentration practice. So we can adopt the, um antidotes to the five hindrances before a practice or during the practice to if, if they come up. Just some things to have on our radars. Um... So I'm seeing that there's 25, 26 new messages in the chat section. Yeah, just for the sake of time, maybe I'll kind of run through these briefly, if that's okay. Does that sound like a good idea, Jordan? Um, what is your own practice these days? Um, Like right now I'm resonating with that practice of sensing into the actual heart, the organ of the heart during sort of a loving kindness practice. Like I'll do a loving kind of practice and then sense into the feeling of care in the heart and use that sensation of care as an object of concentration. It's relatively new to me and I find it very helpful for feeling love, quite frankly.

[00:26:28] Um, seeing some comments. Beautiful. Do you also use different breathing patterns during your meditation teachings? Generally speaking, no, but when I work with certain clients, sometimes I'll invite box breathing, and I'm actually doing a breath work facilitator training program as a student, where I learn how to facilitate certain breath work. It's in the tradition of ASHA, A-S-H-A. I was in Tuscany a couple months ago with the founder of the Breathwork Retreat Center and I've signed up for the year-long training, but I've experienced very deep, profound transformation through this style of breathing. And the founder it is on my podcast. His name is Anthony. Abignano, highly recommend it. So I'll be doing more of that as a facilitator in the coming years. What was the title of Locke Kelly's book? Effortless Mindfulness. Could you please post your podcast info? Yeah, I've done it a few. I'm weary of promoting anything. I'm really just here to. Support, but I just posted it in the chat section. It's called the Mindfulness Exercises Podcast with Sean Fargo.

[00:28:21] Sean, if you could expand please on the concepts you described or outlined about how these types of practices can make priorities or ideas appear clearer in your mind or being. Um, yeah, it's kind of like how if you go on a vacation and then you come back and you're just like, Oh, wow. Like, this is the routine I used to have. This is, these are the thoughts I used have. These are the stories and the, you know, challenges that I had. It's like, okay, I can relate to these a little bit differently. Now it's kinda like vacation. In a way. Um, like a really restful rejuvenating vacation where the nervous system is settled. The mind is clear. You can process things more clearly. It's, it's kind of like that. But also like in the concentration practice when the mind becomes very concentrated, insights often arise in real time. So insights of the nature of interconnectedness, how a lot of the suffering that we experience is sort of self-created oftentimes. So a lot of insights arise, and this is actually a great practice for creators, which I would argue is all of us, we're all creators in some ways. And so having this spaciousness and stillness of mind can be very helpful for allowing creative thoughts and ideas to come. I often, today I got to 10 exhales. Yeah, that's great. Yeah, and you know, just as a challenge, like can you work your way up to 50? Can you get to 100? You know, not as a competition or as a way to feel good about ourselves, but rather just kind of cultivate our concentration and have those as sort of milestones. 14 exhales.

[00:31:13] I wonder how to practice choiceless awareness without falling into daydreaming with minimal awareness. So, choiceless awareness is sort of this open mindfulness of kind

of any aspect of our experience that arises, anything that's predominant. You don't have a preference for where you bring mindfulness. You're just kind of staying attuned to things as they happen. So, choiceless awareness. In my opinion. Requires prior work with concentration in order to stay with the unfolding now. So I think concentration is a underpinning to the ability to practice traceless awareness for very long. And so you could do a concentration practice and then segue into choices awareness. And if you find like that you're daydreaming, come back to concentration, fuel up, and then go back to choice less, just an idea. 15 exhales. Good job, Todd.

[00:33:05] A couple of questions around the antidotes to the five hindrances. It's funny, because I wanted to attach a book here that really goes into a deep dive on a lot of this, but I'm not seeing the ability to attach a book like a PDF. Oh, I know. I'm gonna send a link to a book that really goes into the best detail I've ever seen on this. So I just posted the link, but it's a book on the foundations of mindfulness. And in it, it goes into great detail on the five hindrances and the antidotes. So, but just as a bullet, you know, like some of the antidote as a monk are not exactly recommended for lay people. Some of the monk antidotes are quite intense and I've actually had to do years of therapy to unwind some of those patterns, especially around sensual desire. Having a wife, I cannot do some of the Monk antidotes. That's probably TMI, but, so, you know, classically speaking for central desire, you can contemplate impermanence, the human body's unattractive aspects, you know, certain things like breathing can be helpful. The ill will, usually we, the antidote for that is loving kindness practice. But also just, yeah, like empathy, compassion, curiosity for why we have ill will.

[00:35:46] And oftentimes that ill will is a reflection of how we feel about ourselves or a projection of a shadow that we're carrying. Sloth and torpor, I have a lot of experience with because one of my reactive patterns is to kind of zone out and get tired. And if something's uncomfortable, I'll start yawning. Or if I feel like I don't wanna be there anymore, I'll like start falling asleep. And I realized after I practiced, mindfulness of sloth and torpor of the sleepy, tiredness, checked out feeling, I would sense into my head and sense into my brain and sense into what I thought was tiredness and realize I'm actually not tired. There's actually a lot of energy here. This is just a reactive pattern that I would have in order to check out. But when I would check in with mindfulness, I would realize, oh, there's a lot of energy. Oftentimes, sometimes I was actually tired, but I was surprised by how often I wasn't. Restlessness and worry. Concentration practice is a great antidote. Mindfulness of breathing.

[00:37:25] And then with doubt, to me that's the trickiest of the 500 and says, And so with doubt, we can just bring curiosity to the teaching journal about whatever the teaching is that we're doubtful of, about our own experiential understanding and to talk to teachers about it and see like, am I missing something? Am I assuming something? What's happening with us that resonating with. So I hope that's helpful. Ummmmmmmm Dr. Love says, love is the antidote to fear. Yeah, beautiful. Love it. Um sloth and torpor often seems to rest on some level of depression accordingly self-compassion seems to help right the ship and i'll also sometimes help I had a strange visual distortion occur during concentrating on a ceiling pot light. Suddenly the ceiling around it started to swirl, making the light look as if it was moving. It actually frightened me. So I closed my eyes again.

[00:39:11] So oftentimes when we're highly concentrated in the Jonas themselves, this usually happens on retreat or in a mini self-retreat where very surreal, unusual experiences happen. Just happen that we've never experienced before. And oftentimes there's lights, visuals. I'm not talking about psychedelics. I'm talking about things that

happen visually with our eyes closed when we're highly concentrated. And so the practice is to stay with whatever's arising. And not hold onto it or push it away, but rather just stay with it with sort of an economist perspective, like allowing things to arise, allowing experience to happen and staying with it, and just allowing it to fade, allowing it increase, change into something else, dissolve, Um, and stay. Present with the unfolding now. So oftentimes lights are a part of that. Yeah, if anything feels overwhelming or unsafe, please back out, seek support, go for a walk, take care of yourself. We're not here to push ourselves into intense discomfort. So please consider that as well.

[00:41:14] When I meditate on loving kindness, I often feel strong emotions arise and end up crying. It feels like a combination of deep love and some grief underneath it. Is this an experience that is usual during loving kindness? Absolutely. It's more and more common, I'd say, because a lot of us need to grieve. And so that may be an indication that we're holding on to some sadness, some grief, some form of loss, just normal. And so the invitation would be to create some time and save space for. And I know Rick has a course right now that he's been offering on grief and loss. I know he has a free worksheet on his website around grief and loss. With loving kindness, it's not about forcing a sense of love. It's really about inviting a sense of love and then noticing what happens. Sometimes grief comes instead. Sometimes hatred, resentment, annoyance comes up instead. So can we tend to that with gentleness? So we don't know what's gonna actually come up with loving kindness practice. We just kind of invite a sense of care and then tend to whatever arises.

[00:42:44] Donald Rothberg, in my opinion, is one of the great teachers of loving kindness. He was on our podcast, can go to our podcast and go to Donald Rothberg, but he is an amazing loving kindness teacher and he actually talks about this type of experience and what we can do with that. Rick Krueger, thank you for bringing up those hindrances. Looks great. Yeah, box breathing was tested on veterans suffering from PTSD. Yeah, I support various departments of Veterans Affairs around the country and found, yeah, a lot of these breathing exercises to be very, very helpful.

[00:43:42] For a PTSD. What is the difference between grasping and concentrating on an object? That's a really good question. So, with, I guess I would frame it depending on what the concentration object or what the concentrated object and practice is. Like with the visuals, it's easy to grasp by going outside our eyes and like locking in on something outside ourselves versus receiving sites. With a felt sensation of breathing. I think it may. It's really about like surrendering thoughts about it and just feeling it, like sensing the breath right here, sensing the nostrils and kind of relaxing everything else around you and just allowing the sensations of breathing to be felt at the nostril with a sense of Yeah, that gentleness and that sense of safety that I talked about earlier. I think with counting breaths, it can be much easier to grasp per se. It's like, ooh, I gotta get to 10, I got to get to 20. So with grasping, it could come in the form of accomplishment, of self-worth. There's a different kind of grasping that I think is. That we're more prone to. And so if we notice ourselves grasping for a number, maybe that's not the concentration practice for us at that time. Maybe we do a different one.

[00:45:55] For me, actually, one thing to help with the grasping of counting is actually going from one to 10 and then 10 to one and then one to ten and then ten to one. So that I'm not trying to go for a high number. I'm simply kind of oscillating between one to 10 to one to ten to one, to ten. So it's more of a process driven practice rather than an outcome based practice. So those are a few thoughts on how we might differentiate grasping and concentrating on a few of those practices. I'm seeing, is it helpful to note resistance when it arises in response to a hindrance during meditation since resistance is just another form of

a hindrance? Absolutely, yeah, if there's any form of resistance then it's a wonderful note. I think that's very insightful, Linda. Oftentimes with hindrances, there's often a judgment. But yeah, noticing resistance to a hindrance is a wonderful note. Just because you're noting resistance doesn't mean you're identified with it. So I think noting can help us to. Just be aware of what's happening. And that awareness allows us more freedom to choose. So we're not the resistance, we're aware of the resistance. So the noting can be helpful for kind of unlocking from identifying with it. So if we're able to note it, we have much more agency than if we're identified with that. Uh, Jeffrey, thank you. I don't know where you are, but thank you, Laurie. Hi, do you want to share something?

Speaker 3 [00:48:23] The resistance on an unhealthy attraction. Like I tend to be attracted to unavailable partners. And I just can't help myself, you know? I feel helpless in that area. Is there anything you could suggest or help? And you know, it can have something to do with sexual or more romantic or the attention, something like that. Um, it's embarrassing, but you know, still I need some suggestion.

Speaker 1 [00:49:02] Yeah, um... Yeah, I feel like there may be a lot of follow up questions I would want to ask to really get to the heart of it for you, but you know, and there's a lot of nuance here, like, do we know that they're unavailable? Maybe, I think there's a lot nuance here, a lot of factors that could be involved. Yeah, I don't really have a great. Stock response for here right now, I'm sorry. But I wish you well. I hope that you find someone who treats you well

Speaker 3 [00:50:03] Thank you. I appreciate that. And the reason I know that they're unavailable is my therapist and I have like recognized a pattern. And so that's the key, I guess, is to, in this instance, notice the pattern and show some resistance.

Speaker 1 [00:50:28] Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think some, for some people, it's a matter of almost self protection. Like if we know that they're not available, then it's safe for us to like them because we know it won't get sticky. Again, I don't want to assume anything or. There may be, yeah, I'm glad you're working with someone. In terms of patterns, I will say that I really recommend this book called The Five Personality Patterns written by someone who lives here in the Bay Area named Stephen Kessler. But I'm- That's-

Speaker 3 [00:51:16] That's great. Yeah.

Speaker 1 [00:51:16] I'm really a big fan of the patterns that are laid out. Also a fan of Enneagram, but sometimes when we get to the core underpinnings of our pattern, we get a sense for why we're attracted to certain energies that compliment or supplement our pattern or. To satisfy something that we're longing for, so.

Speaker 3 [00:51:49] Yes, yes, that sounds, it resonates, and I'm going to get that book, so I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt.

Speaker 1 [00:51:58] Oh, it's okay. Like one of my favorite teachings was like, the Buddha had an attendant named Ananda, like his main attendant was Ananda. And there was a woman who loved Ananda like she wanted to marry Ananda like he's a monk, but this woman like was just so infatuated with him. And made a lot of advances to him. And basically, I think it was Ananda himself who said, you know, thank you for your compliments, thank you your kindness, but a lot of the things that you see in me that you like, that you've fallen in love with, are actually aspects of yourselves that you would love to sort of awaken to or appreciate inside yourself. And We can take that with a grain of

salt, but you know, when we're really attracted to someone and they may not be available, you know maybe we can say, okay, well, what is it about them that I love or that I'm infatuated with? And can I find those same qualities in myself and appreciate those qualities internally? And oftentimes when we really take that to heart, say clingingness to the other person will dissolve and appreciation for ourself increases.

Speaker 3 [00:53:54] That is beautiful, just beautiful.

Speaker 1 [00:54:00] So I'm guessing you have a lot of those qualities right now, Lori.

Speaker 3 [00:54:05] Oh, thank you so much. That was beautiful.