

Linda Clair
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 4B – Tuesday afternoon discussion

Question: So for the most part I've just been coming back to the breath, and doing it pretty much with whatever I'm experiencing, just coming down into the breath and the direct sensation of it. About the stability that you were talking about, there have definitely been periods where I felt more of that – and the abdomen feels like a strong base – and at other times feeling quite emotional with the whole thing. There has still been quite a lot of mind-stuff going on. I try to get fairly close to the breath, and my mind comes in and says, "You're concentrating too much." I can see that and sort of drop it and just come back into the breath, but then it kind of gets me, like, "Maybe I am focusing too much on the breath and excluding other things." Then it's not so much of a base as I'm doubting my breath, and it takes a while then I come back again. Then the same thing happens again. And I have justifications for my emotions too. There are situations on the retreat where I feel emotionally heightened, and then I don't feel very stable when those things are emerging. When I'm sitting with the breath and down in the abdomen, at times it feels like I'm in a safe space where those things aren't happening, so I think "Maybe I am blocking certain things out." And that if I was more open in a different way maybe these things would emerge more in the sitting.

Linda: No, not necessarily. I feel you are doing the right thing. Never listen to your mind – if you feel it's your mind, don't listen to it. If it says you're focusing too much it's probably just threatened by that. I doubt you are focusing too much, and don't get too pedantic about the whole thing, just come back to your breath. The emotional stuff during retreat is going to come up – it needs to. If you're feel really comfortable in this environment you're probably not working hard enough. So, I'm not saying you shouldn't enjoy it, but at times you're not going to feel comfortable, you're going to feel very uncomfortable. And everything has to come up, so the emotions coming up doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong. If they don't come up when you're sitting that doesn't matter. A lot of stuff you're going to feel when you're not sitting, and it's because of the sitting, because of that coming back, the groundedness. Don't get too nit-picky about the whole thing, which you do tend to do sometimes – look closely, "Oh, I'm not doing this properly," whereas you are. Just try and let that go when it comes up and come back to the basics, to the breath.

Question: That does feel right when it happens, when I do just let go down into the abdomen.

Linda: Well trust that, trust that intuition. You can feel it in your body, that, "Yes, okay, this is right." So try and trust that rather than anything your mind comes up with, and it's going to try and come up with anything to stop you doing this, and that happens for a long time. So just keep doing what you're doing.

Question: For the most part I can sort of go, "It doesn't matter," and come back. But they're not the same intensity as some of the emotions are in social situations. Do you gradually get better at doing this in a social situation?

Linda: For me, I didn't feel completely at ease in social situations until realisation, until the fear wasn't there. Before that I never knew if I was suddenly going to get uncomfortable, self-conscious, not know what to do and feel inadequate, and all that stuff – that could still come up anytime. So in this it's not like you get better and better at it; you do become more and more mature, but your mind becomes more sneaky so it sneaks in and you just miss it sometimes because you're tired or busy or whatever. So it's not like you're necessarily going to feel more and more socially adept, socially comfortable, until the mind dissolves, the fear dissolves. And then it changes.

Until then it might change a bit – and you've seen that yourself – but it can come up when you least expect it and get you, and you go, "It's just as bad as it was before." Whereas it's not, you just see it more clearly. So it will still surprise you. Try not to assume anything or see this as a progression, because it's not. It's hard, it makes it difficult, because you're always looking for pointers to judge your progress and to say, "This is worth doing because I feel better." Most people to start with go through a honeymoon period and it feels amazing, where you go, "Wow, this is incredible, it's amazing." But then you start to get into the deeper stuff and that's when people either stop, going, "Oh no, this is not for me," or they become maybe intrigued and keep going, and then anything can happen.

But there are times when you just feel awful. Maybe more aware of feeling awful than you ever have because you're not trying to repress it anymore; you can't repress it anymore so it comes up. You become more and more aware of the self-consciousness and the inadequacy and the suffering – it's the suffering really. And then all you want to do is be free from it.

Question: That then becomes the motivation to keep going?

Linda: The suffering pushes you on, not all the happy stuff. Not that there's that much happy stuff (laughing). The love for something other than yourself. There are times when you feel amazing, but there are a lot of times when you don't feel amazing, you just feel just horrible, that you're trudging through sludge. (laughing) I'm just being realistic, and people don't talk about this. People expect this to be this amazing thing and if you don't feel great, you're not doing it properly – whereas it's usually the opposite. But I don't like to get too much into that and say it's all horrible, because it's not of course. There's something amazing underneath, driving you, this love of something underneath, and it is a love of something that's greater than you – it's not just this little person. So it's a combination of that and, "I don't want to suffer anymore." Whereas a lot of people do feel quite comfortable in their suffering. They don't really want to give it up when it comes to the crunch – it's their security to suffer. Some people don't know that there is a way out of it. I didn't until I met Peter and then I went, "Oh, well, maybe it's possible."

Question: That makes sense. I know what you mean when you say feeling a lot of sludge coming up.

Linda: So does R., everyone's going yes. (laughing)

Question: And using that to motivate me, because I have glimpsed the other side of that.

Linda: And everyone has, even though they might say, “No, I haven’t felt that,” everyone has. But you forget about that and get back to the sludge and go, “Oh, my god this is awful, I’m not progressing.” But you have glimpsed something and even a few seconds of a glimpse is enough to keep you going sometimes for six months, because that’s in you, it’s something amazing in you, and you go, “Oh, maybe this is possible, not just for someone else but for me.” But it’s not easy. But it’s worth it, and then suddenly you’ve forgotten all about the sludge. Once you’re here it’s like all that stuff never even happened. It’s quite amazing. And then you go anything is worth this, it’s indescribably real and amazing, *everything* you’ve ever wanted.

Question: I’m trying to work out where to start. I remember talking to you back at other retreats and sometimes getting this big spacious feeling in my head, like there’s a massive space from another dimension sort of cutting through my head. It comes and goes. Sometimes it’s spontaneously there when I’m sitting but often not, and occasionally when I’m just walking or doing something, when I remember to look for it, it’s like I can feel it just there and it can be quite an interesting sensation. Sometimes a giddiness but usually a big clarity around it as well. So sometimes when I’m sitting and feel quite stable in the breath and the sensations in the body, I feel like I can redirect my attention, almost like looking up, and feel that. Often it’s felt like a useful thing to do because when that happens I can move into the spaciousness, but at the same time, because it’s just space and emptiness, it doesn’t detract from feeling my body – sometimes I can feel my body even more clearly. But it feels like it takes a lot of energy to sit in that state. So I was wondering how actively should I cultivate that in terms of purposefully looking for that and feeling into that? It feels like when I do that I can be aware of my body in a more wholistic way, but it also feels like I’m trying and looking for it, and making an effort, and looking up and connecting to it.

Linda: I would not do it too much, because then it could start to get in the way, and you’re looking for this interesting... I would say don’t look for it too much. Sometimes, to break the monotony maybe 😊 but not too much. Let it happen spontaneously. And a lot of things, when it does happen when you’re just walking in the bush or by the river or whatever, it’s because of this. A lot of what you feel in between your practice sits and retreats is a result of this. I know you do associate it with this but we tend to dismiss it as something separate from the actual sitting, whereas it’s all part of it. And you’re feeling that because of the work that you’ve done. But I would say don’t try and cultivate it because it will become something else then.

Question: Even when I’m out walking it never happens spontaneously. Just if I remember to look for it I can sort of feel into it and it’s there.

Linda: It’s sort of spontaneous in a way though because you suddenly remember that it’s there and look at it. Rather than thinking, “I’m going to go for a walk and look for this sensation.” So when that happens it’s fine, and sometimes when you’re sitting, but I wouldn’t try and cultivate it too much.

Question: Also, up until yesterday I felt like my sits were solid and good, then yesterday I did a longer two-hour sit through the break and really pushed myself, like white-hot nails into my buttocks and really having to do a lot of work just to be with the pain. But then for the rest of the day I felt so exhausted I couldn't really connect with my body at all and I was sleepy. It made me wonder, "Did I overexert myself and would it have been better not to sit for so long?" Because leading up until then it felt like really solid sits, and each one with a deep connection to the body.

Linda: I feel, during a retreat, if you can, it's good to pace yourself for the first couple of days and then do something like you did yesterday.

Question: It felt like the rest of the day was a write-off after doing that.

Linda: It's not, it does exhaust you, but it is still a really valuable thing to do, at least once during a retreat. Maybe today would have been a good day to do it rather than yesterday, but you just do it when you feel that motivation to do it. So no, it wasn't the wrong thing to do, it was a great thing to do. And the rest of it wasn't a write-off, it was just that you were tired and it stirred things up – you had to work a bit harder to sit, to just be here. How have you been today?

Question: A lot better but I feel I haven't got back to that grounded solidity I had the first day-and-a-half of the retreat. A fair bit of stuff got stirred up and I didn't sleep well last night.

Linda: Well, that's what's going to happen when you do sit for longer like that and have that degree of pain. It is going to stir up the deeper past in you, and that needs to happen. So the first couple of days of grounding prepared you for that, and even though it's been really uncomfortable, it's kept you from getting too emotional about it. But it needs to happen, you need to at times get down to the deeper layers of your personal past, it doesn't matter what it is. And it is going to make you feel very uncomfortable.

But never see any sit as a waste, whatever happens or whatever doesn't happen. It sounds really good to me. Tomorrow will be different again. But something like that can often take quite a while to recover from. And what you're doing is your body is absorbing that energy that you opened up to during that sit, with the pain.

Question: Okay, thanks.