

Freedom's Body IV
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Good evening, bodhisattvas.

Okay, let's review. Sanctifying, good; the hand of thought closed like a fist, bad.

Boundlessness, good; living inside the small self, bad. Probably anyone in the room who has meditated for more than a week and a half has had the feeling like, *This isn't happening fast enough*, or *It's not deep enough*, or *I get glimpses of it but then it disappears*, or *Yeah, on retreat I can know all that, but then what do I do when I get home?*

Right? These are familiar thoughts. Sometimes you've heard people mention that they struggle with it. I want to talk a little bit about that, in terms of the themes we've been speaking about this week. If it doesn't seem to be happening fast enough or deep enough or you can't hold on to it, or you get glimpses and it disappears, or it needs special circumstances like retreats, or any of that kind of stuff, here are a few things to consider.

One is that the problem might not be that your aspiration is too large, but that your aspiration is too small. Maybe you are limiting your aspiration to *I want to feel better*, or *I want to stop suffering*, or *I want to fix what's wrong*. This is limiting yourself in a way that you shouldn't, and don't have to.

We've been speaking this week about a larger sense of aspiration, which Sarah [Bender, Sensei] and I have referred to as having a more realistic view of things. In that more realistic view, our self is not located in here, inside, bounded by our skin and our skull, and is not made up only of our thoughts, feelings, impulses, bodily sensations and all of that. But our self is located out there — somewhere at the intersection of what is particular to each of us and the world and all the other beings. It also intersects with the vastness, which is everything and the realm of that which doesn't change.

Perhaps you are limiting your aspiration to fixing the stuff inside, when it could be directed more fully and more often toward living in the self out there, in the space out there, which is, first of all, much larger; second of all, much more realistic; and third of all, you are not on your own.

You've got the world of beings and you've got the vastness itself to support you in your aspiration to open that up, to make that more known. So to limit yourself to what is going on inside your own heart, mind, and body is to cut yourself off from a lot of help. It is to cut yourself off from a whole world, maybe a whole universe of beings, awakening together. Because one way or another, that's what's happening.

We do better and worse at different times, we get it horribly wrong, we backslide like crazy. Sometimes it's hard to remember that there is even a movement towards beings awakening together, but there is. It's much easier to take your place in and be a part of that, than to be the lone alchemist in the basement working with your retorts and bunsen burners, trying to do it on your own.

Okay, that's the first possibility, that your aspiration is too small. Another thing is that matter, which is what we are working with a lot, is slow and obdurate. That's its nature. We can say, *Stop it, matter, stop being slow and obdurate*, but it's not going to, because that's what it is.

So let go of the feeling that that's a problem. That's the way it is. One of the results of matter being slow and obdurate is that when we can work with it, when we can make changes, they stick, they last, they're not evanescent. They're not like thoughts that come and go; they're something that can come to exist in the world that didn't before. And also, if the process of working with matter and making things new is so slow and challenging and sometimes difficult, when we succeed, it's really ours, we really have it. Everybody knows the experience in retreat of something becoming so clear, it's like when you wake up in the middle of the night and you've just had a dream, and *Oh, I really get it now*. You write something down on a piece of paper, you look at it in the morning, and it makes no sense at all. That's a kind of retreat experience, *I get it, I see it, I understand*. And then Tuesday morning it's like, *What was that?*

That is the nature of thought. It is very fleeting. It's hard to grab on to it and hold it. Matter is different. When we make that kind of change, when we adopt the right views, the right speech, the right relationships that Sarah is talking about, it really is ours, it lasts, and that's a helpful thing.

Something else that is particular to our situation but has to do with holding on to and spreading the glimpses of awakening we have, is that we're at the very beginning of the

establishment of a tradition here in the west and in North America. I can't say often enough. Try to take this in and really hear this.

This tradition isn't happening somewhere else. We are not some distant colony. There's no mother church in the home country, where all of this stuff is being generated and there's all of this support for it, and there are all these priests being trained. None of that is happening. This is it. That's pretty scary, but it's true. And it's exciting. Whether this sticks in the west is up to us. So that's scary and exciting because we get to say whether it sticks or not. It's up to all of us.

That's important, because what's happening when we feel as though it's not happening fast enough or deep enough is that it's not something that is happening just to us as individuals. It's something that's happening to us as a group, and we have the power, as a group, to create the container in which things can happen more quickly, deeply, and longlastingly. That's up to us. No one else is going to do it.

I want to encourage you to offer some devotion to creating the container in which your practice can happen more quickly and deeply, as well as everybody else's. So, however well you are treating one another — and as near as I can tell, you are treating each other very well indeed — do more. Treat each other better. Sanctify each other even more. We talked about sanctifying each other as being a process of supporting each other as we become holy. Do it more, do it extra, do it more than you think you can. Allow other people to do that for you. That's good for everybody's practice. You know the effect — you see it during a retreat when things go *voomph*, and go deeper, everybody gets taken down with it, everybody benefits from the energy that the group generates together. We can keep doing that. We can do that all the time, and it's important that we do.

Another thing to remember is that when we speak about the boundlessnesses — compassion, lovingkindness, sympathetic joy and equanimity — remember that they are not identical to our own emotional states. We don't generate them, we don't will them, we don't make them happen. They exist in the space among us that gets made by all of us together. We tap into it; we don't generate it.

So the more that we're living in the self that's out there, that partakes of the world and of the vastness as well as of the particularities, the more we are going to be able to tap into those boundlessnesses. And not only spread them around, not only offer them to each other, but

experience them ourselves. Because one of the miraculous things about them is that when we find and discover, when we tap like a maple tree, compassion, lovingkindness, or equanimity for someone else, we tap it for ourselves as well. So to participate in the boundlessnesses in that way is to give not only to the other, but to be replenished ourselves. We are not diminished by that action; we are replenished by it. That's a tremendously important thing.

I want to leave it there because I want to keep it simple. But in all seriousness : sanctifying — good; having the hand of thought rolled up like a fist — bad. Boundlessness — good; being stuck inside our own skin and skull — really difficult and not necessary. Not necessary.

So, take a big breath and when you exhale, feel yourself into the space around you. Let's be more accurate. Feel yourself in your self. That's you breathing into you. How far can that go? What's the edge of that? I challenge you to find the edge of that. I challenge you to find the place where you fall off the edge of yourself into something else.

The other implication of that, obviously, as we sit in this room together, is that self joins self joins self joins self, and makes something much larger than any one individual can do. Don't be the alchemist in the basement. Be part of this beautiful community which can make things happen exponentially because of our combined practice, our combined commitment, our combined sanctification of each other, of the work that we're doing and of the space we share.

If you think it's not happening fast enough or deep enough, make your aspiration larger. Make it as large as you can possibly make it and live there. And help make the circumstances for other people to find their largest aspiration and live there. Then who knows what we can make together?

Thank you.