

Love When It Is Hard (5 of 5) Pause to Love

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Welcome to the last talk on including love as part of the practice of being with challenges – love in times of challenge. I think it is fair to say that when we have challenges, almost the definition of a challenge is that it preoccupies us, it concerns us, and it affects us, sometimes in a deep way. In that preoccupation, it is easy to lose track of some of the important values and capacities we have. One of these is love.

In challenges, sometimes we can get caught up in anger and blame. There can be a loop of anger that triggers more anger, and blame that triggers more reasons to blame. We can be caught up in fear, and that can also be a loop, where fear gives rise to more fearful

thoughts that produce more fear. There can be greed or ambition. The problem-solving mind can come into play. The problem-solving mind is so absorbed in itself that it leaves out a lot of the background of who we are. That background is actually there to support us and help us find a way, a solution.

We need to pause long enough so that more of who we are – more of our resources and our capacities – can be present when we're there with a challenge, so our attention and concerns do not get narrowed, hijacked, or caught in loops that are not so helpful. One of the classic techniques for a wise life is to pause. A mindful pause can make all the difference in the world. That way, we are not on automatic pilot. We pause long enough to see where we have some choice.

One of the simple choices we can make is to pause a little bit longer. The technique of using three breaths is a valuable thing to do, in order to ground ourselves, to interrupt the mind streams, and to remind ourselves of what is important. Hopefully, you almost always have time for three breaths. If you do not feel you have time for this, then really take a good look at the situation. Is a truck barreling down at you? Is a mountain lion growling? Is there really some immediate threat and danger?

If not, then question whether you can't just pause for three breaths. One way of supporting this is to realize that love does take time. If love is important for you, it takes time, so make time for it, and make room for it. Even if love is not readily available, pause, and recognize that it is not present. Find out how important it is for you. Is love important enough for you that you wish it was there? The wish that love was there is, in fact, the beginning of love, provided the wish is soft, without expectations, without demands, without comparisons and judgments – just a very simple wish.

If you can, take the time to pause for three breaths – a three-breath journey. The simplest version of the three-breath journey is to simply stop and take three breaths, mindfully, with presence. In a busy life, running around, doing many things, this is sometimes where taking the three-breath journey is so powerful.

For example, after you have driven somewhere and parked – maybe you are a little late, or you are a little tense around it – before you get out of your car, sit there quietly and take the three-breath journey. The busyness and the racing of the mind might be quieted. You might reconnect to yourself. In a busy life, just three breaths can sometimes reset things – maybe not dramatically, but enough to make a difference.

If you're standing in line at a store, take a three-breath journey. When you turn on your computer to look at something, before you open the monitor, take a three-breath journey, so that the momentum of stress, tension, desires, and doing doesn't have the upper hand when you sit down to look at the computer. You ground yourself in something other than the momentum of the mind, which has maybe been busy all day long.

Another variation of the three-breath journey is to let the first breath just be a grounding in the breathing. The second one is to use the breath, maybe the exhale, to relax and soften. The third breath is to ask the question, "Where is the love?" or just say, "Love." In these three-breath journeys, it can sometimes be helpful if the breaths are a little bit deeper and longer than usual. It might be a bit hard to keep that up – you might get out of breath. But maybe you can do it for three breaths. The longer breath can be grounding and connecting.

See what arises when you ask the question, "Where's the love?" This might be enough to reconnect you to love. Doing this might be enough for you to realize that you think something is more important than love right now. If that is the case, it is good to really know that. See that in yourself – "Wow, am I pissed off at someone. And yes, certainly, that is more important than love. If I give in to love now or take the time to love during one breath, then I'm not following my

responsibility, or the requirements of the situation to be angry.”

Pausing and seeing that is what the mind is thinking and how it is might give occasion to pause even more: is that really true? Is that really how we want to live? Where’s the love? Can we be angry and have love at the same time? Maybe we can, but then the anger changes its nature to a very different form. Maybe it takes the hostility out of the anger. Maybe there is still fear when there is love, but with love, fear doesn’t take the center stage. It is not the only game in town.

Maybe what the fear needs is some love. This is often a good principle: when there is fear, there is a need for love, unless there is an imminent threat. If there is not an imminent threat, if it is a chronic anxiety, an underlying fear that has been going on for some time, maybe the need has more to do with reassuring the heart in some deep way – reassuring the fear with love, with care, with kindness, with acceptance, with generosity.

Exactly what happens when you ask the question “Where’s the love?” will depend on the circumstance, on how you are at different times. But it is a powerful question to ask. Keep it in the forefront – “where is the love in this challenge? Oh, I forgot that I care about this person.” Or: “I forgot that there is love here for myself. I

am so lost in the challenge that I'm not caring for myself. I am actually harming myself with the tension I have."

So, take time to pause for the three-breath journey. It is a wonderful technique. It is something that can be applied in daily life in many circumstances. No one needs to know you are doing it. It can be done in the bathroom when no one is around. It can be done when you park your car, before you start your car, when you are on your device, and in many other circumstances.

The three-breath journey allows us to reconnect to deeper values and a deeper sense of being alive. This might change our orientation or our perspective on how we want to continue. It is all too easy to be caught up in perspectives and concerns that are not so healthy, such as self-preoccupation, or giving our beliefs too much authority. We need a way to cut through, interrupt, and question those concerns in order to reconnect to something deeper.

Something as simple as the three-breath journey might work, sometimes better than simply pausing to be mindful of the situation. A mindfulness pause can still come after the three-breath journey, so we can really tune in. But the quality of the mindfulness might be a little bit different – softer or more caring, if you have gone through the three-breath journey first.

Where is the love?

Where is the care?

Where is the kindness?

Where is the friendliness?

Where is the generosity?

Where is the respect?

Where is the reverence?

Where is valuing ourselves? – valuing our own well-being, respecting ourselves, and caring for ourselves, so that we do not perpetuate unnecessary stress, tension, hostility, criticism, or anxiety – where we enter into automatic pilot so that we just live that way without questioning it, without dropping down deeper and offering love to ourselves in all the challenges that we face.

Life is challenging. Sooner or later, it is challenging for everyone. That does not mean we can't stop briefly to love, appreciate, and respect ourselves. I hope that the teaching this week on bringing love to inform how we go through challenges is useful for you. I appreciated the chance to talk about this. Thank you.