

Dharmette: What is Most Important Today

**Transcribed and edited from a short talk by
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Perhaps because it is my first Wednesday morning talk of the new year, I would like to say that the motivation to do meditation practice, to do mindfulness practice, to be involved in Buddhist practice can arise out of giving a tremendous amount of value to your heart, a tremendous amount of value to your inner capacity for peace, for freedom, for love, for compassion.

I think it is easy enough in Buddhist circles to think that Buddhism can dismiss those things as being valuable. Just let go; don't be attached to things; everything is ok. This can lend itself almost to a dismissal of these things as being important. But I think that the reason we let go of attachments and clinging is because there is really something important on the other side of letting go. What we do with our lives, what we experience in our lives, is actually quite an

important thing to be involved in. Questioning what is valuable is a very important part of Buddhist practice, because some of the things that we may consider valuable are not so valuable after all.

The question of what is valuable, of what we invest in, can be explored through the perspective of someone watching how you use your time – and they couldn't ask you – what conclusion would they get from watching you? What would be the thing that you spend most of your time doing? What would they see?

When you come home in the evening, what do you do? If someone came down from Mars and saw you, what would they see? Evening time in the United States is an important time with certain patterns for people. People sit in front of screens, almost like sacred altars. People spend more time in front of screens than in church. If you look at the values behind that, would that give you a different perspective on your life than if you just ask yourself directly what is most important for you?

To ask the question, "What is most important for you – what are the most important intentions

and values are that you want to live by?” is one of the great precious questions to carry. Again, Buddhist teachings can seem to negate the importance of these kinds of questions: just be in the present moment, and everything will take care of itself. Even sometimes when people ask the question of the meaning of life, a teacher may say that isn’t important – just be present fully. But to actually spend time considering what is important for you, what your deepest values and intentions are, I think, is a tremendously important part of practice. If you are in touch with what is important for you, then that can be a fuel, an inspiration to act on, to live by.

If you don’t spend time reflecting that way, it can be easy to live by other people’s values. Our society is filled with people who want to tell you the values that you should live by. For those people who sit in front of screens, there are a lot of people who have paid a lot in the advertising business to convince you how to spend your time and money. It travels through our culture: values of consumerism that people then elevate as being really important.

But what is really important? Part of the value of doing a morning of meditation like today or going

on retreat is not just the peace you might experience, or the spiritual experience you might have. But in the quiet and stillness of the letting go in this kind of practice, you can give yourself time and space to reflect more deeply from some deep place inside on what's important for you, and then make a decision that you are going to change your life, and do things differently.

The deeper a person's spiritual experience in Buddhism, the greater the opportunity there is to make a decision to align one's life by the vision one has from that experience. To go along with some idea that everything is going ok: to be present for things as they are, that to have deep spiritual experiences is fine, to have shallow experiences is fine, it's all fine. There is something really wise about that approach. But it can also do you a disservice when you don't take the lessons of the value and importance of the things that happen to us, and use them to understand or be inspired to live a life that comes from what is most important to us, that feeds and expresses what is most important for us.

Often as a culture we use the beginning of the

new year as a chance to step back and reflect on what our deepest values, our deepest intentions are. I find that that reflection is good to do every day, not just at the beginning of the new year. I spend a lot of my practice life with this kind of daily basic ordinary reflection: What is my deepest intention? For a year, I asked myself the question every morning, “If I knew I would die tonight, how would I live this day?” It was a way of asking myself from a different perspective, what is most important for me, what is my deepest intention? And what was fascinating over the course of the year was to see how things shifted and changed for me. That consistently asking the question of what is my deepest intention begins working the edges of that, begins exploring it. You begin finding that there are different levels of answers. If you only ask yourself the question once and get one answer, you might not be dropping deeper and deeper into the levels, the layers of what might be revealed through that kind of questioning.

My wish for all of you who are interested in meditation practice, in mindfulness practice, is that the practice supports your deepest intentions, what is most important for you, the deepest values of your heart that you know and

can be in touch with – that somehow
mindfulness helps you be in touch with that, and
supports you to live by it.

It's a great thing to do.