



Aging and Awakening - Introduction & Experiential Exercises

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I'd like to add my welcome to Rob's. It's great to see all of you here and I'm really delighted to have this opportunity to spend some time with you practicing meditation and taking a nice deep look at the relationship between Buddhist contemplative teachings and how they can inform our aging process.

I'd like to begin with a reading that's been a part of my own practice for many years and as a kind of a reset button on a regular basis that reminds me of why we're here today and why I practice meditation and study the Dharma. These are the words of Jack Kornfield. "My simple prayer is that in all things I learn to love well, that I learn to touch the ever-changing seasons of life with a great heart of compassion, that I live with the peace and justice I wish for the earth, that I learn to care fully and let go gracefully, that I enjoy the abundance of the earth and return to it from the natural generosity that is our human birthright, that through my own life, through joy and sorrow, in thought, word and deed, I bring benefit and blessings to all that lives, that my heart and the hearts of all beings learn to be free."

So what I have in mind for us over the next couple of hours involves some experiential exercises followed by a Dharma talk. There'll be a period for some walking meditation and personal needs and personal time, briefly, and some discussion. You can have a chance to share your comments and reflections or perhaps ask any questions that might come up toward the end of our time together.

These exercises that I'd like to do with you involve some writing. So if you don't have something to write with or write on or an iPad or something of that sort, take a moment, if you would, please, to find something that you can write with and write on. Both of these exercises for me are kind of a baseline that we'd like to establish in the sense of where are we at this moment in a more general sense on one level and also in relation to our experience of aging and becoming an older human being.

This particular exercise that we'll start with I call a core question and what it involves is this. In a few moments I'm going to do a brief reading from the Tao Te Ching to invite you to go inward to a place below the surface level of your thought process. I'd like you to consider what for you is a question that would be one of the most or the most valuable questions about your experience of aging that you could come away from this gathering today with a deeper understanding of. Said another way, if this time together were to be optimally beneficial for you, what question that you have in your heart in relation to aging would you deepen your understanding of significantly as a result of our time together? And with this and any other exercise you ever do with me that's experiential, we do these with a spirit of discovery. There's no particular right or wrong responses and it's helpful to liberate. If there's a sixth grader lingering inside who always tried to do things exactly right, it's a good time to give that little being a hug and ask them to relax. So you don't need to write a lot here necessarily, but just see if you can identify your core question or one of your core questions in relation to aging.



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So I'm going to read you something. Take a few moments to go back into a meditative posture and perspective. I'm going to read you something that's going to end with the phrase "in the world" and I'm going to then allow a period of silence and I'd like you to look inside yourself and see what kind of question comes up for you today. I know some of you have done this with me before. I can see on the basis of who's attending. However, do it with a beginner's mind if you would, even if you've done this with me before. So find that position that allows you to be alert and wakeful. As before, you can have your eyes gently closed or slightly downcast with a soft focus and listen to these words and then go inside and listen and see what the inner teacher has to say about how we could make the most of our time together.

Some say that my teaching is nonsense. Others call it lofty but impractical. But to those who have looked inside themselves, this nonsense makes perfect sense. And to those who put it into practice, this loftiness has roots that go deep. I have just three things to teach. Simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. Simple in actions and in thoughts, you return to the source of being. Patient with both friends and enemies, you accord with the way things are. Compassionate toward yourself, you reconcile all beings in the world.

[silence] And now take a little time as you enter the silence to sense or feel or intuit what feels like a core question for you in relation to the theme aging and awakening. [silence] [bell rings]

So let's please bring that to a close for the moment. There's one more brief process that I'd like to do together that also involves some writing. I'm going to give you a prompt, a very simple writing prompt, and I'm going to give you five minutes to write in a particular way that some writing teachers call first thought, best thought, which is to say that it's not analytical thinking as much as stream of consciousness. So I'm going to give you the prompt. I'm going to allow you five minutes to write, and my encouragement would be to write whatever comes without editing for this first round, and just trust whatever comes and bring a spirit of loving curiosity to what wants to be written rather than orchestrating it or designing it the way you would if you were doing an exam of some sort. Now I'll tell you a minute before I'm going to ask you to stop so it doesn't feel real abrupt, and then we'll go from there. So if you'd please write this prompt on your piece of paper or digital device. "For me, aging is." "For me, aging is." Now just keep writing. First thought, best thought, go with stream of consciousness and let it flow.

What I'd like to do at this point is open up for some general discussion briefly about what this was like for you, either in terms of doing the exercises or talking about what you did with a partner. Part of what I love about this particular topic and working with people who are in mature stages of life is that it's quite clear that we bring a tremendous amount of life experience and wisdom to this kind of gathering. And it's a delight to hear from different people and to learn from one another and to hear about each other's experiences.

So let me just see if you'd like to share a comment a little bit about your experience, if you'd go to the reactions button on the black bar across the bottom of your screen and click on that, you'll see a little icon that says "raise hand" and when you click on "raise hand" I'll see, Rob and I will both see that you've raised your hand and I'll invite you to unmute so people can hear your comment or what it is you'd like to share. Yeah, so if you, the alternative to that if you'd like would be you could put something in the chat which Rob will monitor and let me know if there's something there and one of us will read it out to the group that would be another way to share something about your experience.

David, would you go ahead and unmute please?

Questioner: Sure, thank you for the offering today. Briefly, myself and my partner just expressed a lot of enthusiasm and optimism for this process of aging and I found that



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refreshing because I may have been expecting the opposite either from myself based on your exercise or from others so it was just nice to know that we can go into this with excitement and a sense of mystery that's not melancholy or remorseful. Thank you.

David: Wonderful, thanks David. Mary, would you go ahead and unmute please?

Questioner: Yeah, I just wanted to say how much I appreciate having this forum because I think it was ten years ago I attended a retreat on aging at Spirit Rock, an in-person five-day retreat and it was wonderful but I don't know of anything else that's been available for us to be able to talk with one another about this process so I just want to acknowledge that and thank you for this and wish there was more.

And what I became aware of in sharing with my partner was that it was interesting I was writing about the resistance I've had to recognizing aging. I mean it's out of my control obviously and I don't have any say in it because it's happening but aging to me I'm aware of wow you know all my life I've been trying to achieve something, arrive somewhere, do something and suddenly it's not you know it's not necessary to do those things. So you know how did yeah and then suddenly it's like okay I get it we're all getting older and we're gonna die and that's just a shocker you know. But my partner said that her aging was about accepting changing conditions and I thought oh that's so interesting I'm in resistance to them she's accepting them and I thought I somehow I need to move more in that direction of being less resistant and remaining in the state of wanting things to be different than they are. So a surrender is needed on my part I think.

David: Well Mary I'll be mentioning some resources at the end of this gathering if you'd like to be involved with these kinds of activities on a more regular basis. Yeah. There's some great opportunities just one to mention at the moment is an organization called Sage-ing International. Sage-ing written out S-A-G-E hyphen I-N-G dot O-R-G is the website. But there's a very full and rich program of activities that would speak to the interest you have in spending more time with people interested in the kind of inquiry we're doing here. Yeah great okay thank you so much.

Ruth please good to see you go ahead and unmute.

Questioner: Yes I wanted to also thank you for this opportunity. It was a very wonderful experience to meet with someone who's really going through very much the same thing that I am and sharing our experiences and our challenges and definitely of accepting the diminishment of everything. Body and mind and the speed with which we can do anything. Like about half of what we used to be able to do. So yeah and also very grateful to have an opportunity to put it in the context of this process of acceptance and being in the moment which is a wonderful aspiration and sometimes it's possible to maintain it and a lot of the time it's not and accepting that too. So we it was thank you again.

David: You're very welcome.

Questioner: Yes so my name's Ann and this was just a very meaningful experience for me as was sharing with a partner. So I recently moved to a retirement community in Healdsburg Enzo village which is a spiritually based community which feels like and is a real opportunity and a blessing. When I was writing about aging I was writing some of the words that I think we all know well I know fear you know fearful and devastating and some of those kinds of things which really have to do with declining capacities. But what I really loved was some other things that I came up with and one was opportunity and another thing was a privilege. I was also



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reflecting on the opportunity that I have that others don't have to live to an old age and my parents both died when they were 10 years younger than I am now and they didn't have the opportunity. So you know I'm just right now on the side of understanding and appreciating the opportunity I have and wanting to make a contribution from that place. So that's my experience of this morning so thank you.

David: You're welcome. Thank you Ann. Sally please go ahead and unmute.

Questioner: Okay thank you. I've been yearning for a community a sense of talking with people about this whole topic so this is really timely and nice. So I think I just need to say out loud what I just came up with is fear and I kept wanting to have other things that were more positive so it was good for me to see how big that is in me right now. It's just a mystery and then I'm fearful and I think I've had some health things this year that have thrown me into that as well. So I just want to say it and it's bigger in me than I thought because as I was trying to write more positive things but they weren't coming so so anyway I appreciate it. I think for you to be present to the truth of your experience is itself a very important act. Thank you.

David: Thank you Sally. Jackie would you go ahead and unmute please.

Questioner: Hi my partner and I seem to connect on the the level of how do we continue our normal lives when we're in such pain with certain physical conditions and the physical conditions that require a lot of medical appointments and how not when so much time is consumed with doing having the pain and going to specialists how not have that be such a huge part of your life when I'm I'm full of curiosity and I live in Salida, Colorado and I've always been used to being very physical in the mountains and I've had some weird conditions that just are so different than the peers at my age and let's see I'm trying to think of anyway oh I know what I was gonna say we my partner was in in England and I'm not sure what kept happening with my computer but we just kept freezing and so it was not the satisfactory or enlightening experience I had hoped for with the sharing. It's a little frustrating so I don't know although we stated what is hard for us I'm not sure we got beyond that and I'm still like just wondering about that how to do that still be of service to my community still go to SIDS and have people inquire have conversations without wanting to go to my physical pain has it so dominant in my life and the detective work of certain conditions.

David: Well thanks for sharing that with us Jackie it's unfortunate that the technology does have its limits and sometimes the internet connections aren't as strong as we'd want them to be so I'm sorry that that happened for you. There's so much that could be talked about in regard to what you're bringing up but right now we don't have the opportunity to do that. Okay and I haven't seen any seen many resources through Sage-ing International and other places about that topic so thank you.

"Yeah, take a look at a book called 'How to Be Sick', a Buddhist-inspired guide by Toni Bernhard. Thank you."

"Yeah, it's 'How to Be Sick', T-O-N-I Bernhard. Yeah, okay, thank you."

"You're welcome. Elle, would you go ahead and unmute, please?"

Questioner: Yeah, I'm feeling pretty aware of the lusciousness of this ripening fruit and my sometimes rejection of being a big pool of mush and the benefit of a really long practice. Like,



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how could I have been practicing for 45 years if I wasn't 67, like wow. So, I really feel this kind of Dharma infused beingness and the steep capacity for equanimity being with and the delicacy of all this practice of all the pain I've been in my whole life. I don't think I've ever not been in pain. Some of it's not been as physically oriented about the limitations of the aging body, but I've always been in this sentientness which has its which can kind of bite you in the ass. And so, I have a lot of experience with being bitten in the ass by this body and this mind and this external circumstances. So, I'm not being Pollyanna like, I don't like my declining mental capacity, it's not my preference, and sometimes I'm afraid of it, and sometimes I'm really not. And so this kind of threshold that I'm experiencing is a threshold from at the survival mode of climbing of my younger life to the benefits of the goodness and a capacity or finally being open to goodness, which is new and part of this lushness for me of my aging process. And I pause. Thank you."

David: "Thank you. Let's take one more and then we'll take a little break on this portion. Judy, would you go ahead and unmute, please?"

Questioner: "Thank you. Well, I was very surprised because my partner looked so young when we broke into the breakout rooms. She was 40 years old, and I'm thinking, wow, what could a 40-year-old be thinking about aging? Well, I talked about the challenges of aging and how difficult they were, and she talked about the challenges in her life and how difficult they were. And I thought to myself, wow, I have had a lifetime of challenges, and I think I have handled them pretty well, and I think probably with aging, I'll handle them pretty well too. But we talked about the importance of patience and taking the time we need to get where we want to go, and sometimes we don't get there, but something better happens, and to be open to that. And we talked about self-compassion, to not be hard on ourselves, and to appreciate what we have done in life and to continue to think that way. But it was a very interesting experience talking to someone who's 40, and I'm 81, and we're both experiencing challenges in our life and the issue of being patient with that. Thank you."

David: "Thank you, Judy. It seems that perhaps the Buddha was on to something with the first noble truth in relation to what you're talking about. Let me just think about the time here for a moment because I noticed myself wishing we had about two more days together. And since that's not the case, I'm showing let's see quarter to 11 Pacific Time. Let me suggest this. Let's take a 15-minute break at this point. There'll be more opportunities for discussion at the end, but I know for some of us, we've been sitting for an hour and three quarters. If you're someone who's experienced in walking meditation and you would like to do some walking practice at this time, I would encourage that. If you want to use this for a personal break, personal needs, a cup of tea, or something of that sort, let's go ahead with that and let's come back right around 11 o'clock Pacific, 12 o'clock Mountain Time, and you can adjust the time according to where you are. And then we'll have another hour together. I'd like to share some reflections in a Dharma talk and allow some time for further discussion. Lucinda, if you can hold it and bring it back later. You want to go ahead and unmute quickly or you okay with waiting?"

Questioner: "I just want to say hi to Jeffrey. Jeffrey, I'm sorry that we didn't get to complete our process. Jeffrey and I were in a group and I hope somebody else appeared in your group, and I was happy to with my partner, but I just feel a need for closure to say you know we were electronically disconnected just so you know. Okay, thank you."

David: "Okay, well that puts us back in the limits of technology territory. So, Rob and I are sorry that that happened. Let's go ahead then and take a 15-minute break if we could, and we'll come back on right around noontime, and we'll continue. Thank you."