

Stories and Reflections

Uncontrived Online Weekend Retreat

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So I want to begin by reading a story called "To Be Buddha." A nun once asked the Abbas of the monastery, "Who was the Buddha really?" Smiling and leaning forward mischievously, the Abbas said, "Don't you already know?" Confused by this answer to her question, the nun felt overwhelmingly self-conscious. She couldn't find the words to even say that she didn't know. So then the Abbas explained, "To know who the Buddha is, you have to start with something simple. Take breathing, for example. Like you right now, the Buddha breathed. When you are aware of your breathing, you are aware of physical experiences the Buddha knew as he breathed. When you see how your breaths arise and pass away, it is just as the Buddha saw his breaths arise and pass away. Like you right now, the Buddha experienced physical sensations in his body. When you see that many sensations you experience through the day arise and pass away, it is just as the Buddha saw his sensations arising and passing. Like you right now, the Buddha experienced pleasant and unpleasant feelings. When you see directly how your experiences of pleasure and pain arise and pass away, it is just how the Buddha saw pleasure and pain come and go. Like you right now, the Buddha had thoughts. When you see those thoughts come and go, you are experiencing how the Buddha saw thoughts arise and pass away. Like you right now, the Buddha experienced particular states of mind. When you see your state of mind arise and pass, you are experiencing how the Buddha saw his mind states change. Like you right now, the Buddha was aware of himself. When you see how your ideas of who you are arise and pass away, you are experiencing how the Buddha saw his ideas of self arise and pass away. Hearing this, the nun became aware of her experience as it was happening in the present moment. In a way, she never imagined possible. She felt physically close to the Buddha. Rather than someone who lived thousands of years ago, she sensed a timelessness in which no time separated her from the Buddha. "I understand," said the nun. "Is this all I need to know?" In reply, the abbess said, "No, there is one more thing. When you see clearly that clinging to breathing, sensations, feelings, thoughts, states of mind and self also arises and passes away, then you will know who the Buddha is, then you will be free." So we sit with our experience, coming and going, mind and body, self, pleasant, unpleasant, and one more thing that comes and goes is our attachment to that. Sometimes we are quite free, we are just experiencing that and sometimes we are not.

Sometimes we have grabbed all and we get wrapped up in the content, we depart into the past or the future. But that too comes and goes. That very clinging is also worth observing and knowing how that happens. One more thing, we can sit and observe with the mind. So let's sit together. I won't offer any guidance during this sit, but I suggest that maybe we try about 50% serenity practice and 50% vipassana of your choice, just to see how that flow is. Starting to manage our own sits as to how we balance that is something that we learn in practice. And I'll have a little bit more to say at the end of the sit. Thank you.