

Linda Clair
Five-day Meditation Retreat
Kallara Conference Center, November-December 2021
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 3A – Monday morning discussion

Question: If it's not sitting for longer periods and bearing more pain, is it just time doing this, and coming to the retreats, that eventually leads to reality?

Linda: It's everything. It's not one thing, it's a combination of everything. There are a whole lot of things involved but the main thing is your desire to be free. That's what will keep you coming to retreats, sitting at home, coming back to your breath.

Question: It feels like a leap of faith in a way to trust that if there's not a specific thing that I'm attaching to and trying to encourage, like trying to sit longer or get closer and closer to the breath, then it feels like I need to trust that's what's happening is correct.

Linda: Well, there is trust involved of course; there's a lot of logic involved too, to a degree. The last bit is definitely a leap – you're pushed over the edge. But leading up to that you see in your life how things have changed – something keeps bringing you here. It's not like there won't be any doubts, but yes, you do need to have trust: trust in this, in me, in other teachers who you trust are realised, saying that this is possible while you're in your body.

It's the most amazing thing you can do in your life, while you're in your body. So I can say that and you might trust me to a degree, but really you have to keep proving it to yourself, and proving that nothing in the world is going to completely satisfy you. Which doesn't mean you stop doing things in the world – it's important to keep reasonably balanced – but use everything you do as practice. What I used to do – it just happens, I didn't really have to try, this is the most important thing and my whole world revolves around this – I would put this first and everything would happen around that. This wasn't just a small part of my life, it became everything. It was always there whatever I was doing, whether I was sitting, or helping my children with their homework, or cooking, cleaning – it was always there. But as I've often said, it was my teachers who kept me going, and the trust that they were in a place that I desperately wanted to be in. And I knew I wasn't so I was prepared to trust them, take their advice.

So it comes down to the fact that really most people love themselves more than anyone else, anything else. That's what drove me crazy. I was the centre of my universe, I put myself first, and then suddenly this human being came along who, for whatever reason, I loved more than me, and that's what kept me going. I loved my children, my partner, but this was different.

And you can't help but underestimate this state, until you're in it.

Question: I feel very emotional just looking at you. It's been very varied but this morning you talked about stability and thoughts being your personal past, and it seemed to do something to me even though I've heard you say those words quite often before. I wanted to ask, with the personal past, when the personal past comes up and there it is, and you come back to the breath, do you use that to go deeper into understanding that that is the personal past? In other words, do you allow yourself to follow that thought? For instance, if I feel sudden anger do I look at that in relation to my past or do I simply come back to the breath?

Linda: No, don't try and relate it to something in your past. Feel it as a sensation as much as you can. Often with anger you'll feel it in your body – I've seen people shaking with anger, they're so angry – and that will come up in most people during this practice. And you'll feel like it's wrong, that you shouldn't be feeling that, but just feel it as a bodily sensation as much as possible. It's repressed anger. And just sitting with it is enough – seeing it, not pushing it away, feeling it in your body as a sensation – but don't get into analysing it.

I'd say everyone here has done enough therapy with other people, and I'm not saying you shouldn't do therapy but enough is enough. There comes a time when no amount of therapy, no amount of talking, no amount of throwing cushions or whatever is going to do anything for that anger. You need to be free of it so you take responsibility. If you go into your personal past you'll probably get into something that happened to you that you felt was unfair, that you felt someone else did to you, and say it's because of that. And it's not. You have to take complete responsibility for everything you feel. In truth nothing has caused it except your addiction to your own suffering and your obsession with yourself and how you feel.

So no, don't get into it, just feel it, whatever it is – anger, hurt, pain. And you're still going to feel physical pain in this state, but in a way there is no one feeling it, it's just there like everything else.

So we will keep trying to justify our thinking by any means, and that is really a subtle way of doing it, but don't get caught up in it.

Question: Yes, that's what I wasn't sure about, so thank you.

Linda: Eventually there is no personal past, it all gets wiped.

Question: And the stability, is that when you aren't taken by the personal past into a train-ride but you're steady in being in the present, in now?

Linda: The stability is so important because eventually there is nothing to hold on to – you disappear, there is this absence of anything to hold on to – so you need to be incredibly stable to be able to cope with that, to be able to be in it. Leading up to that it's really important because you need to allow things to come up, and the more stable you are the less you tend to allow yourself to be taken away. If you haven't got that firm foundation, that stability, you'll just float away with different things, become overwhelmed, confused, but if you've got this deep stability it enables you to allow that stuff to arise, see it, and come back.

Question: Can you work for the stability, or is that just part and parcel of the practice?

Linda: It's one of the main reasons why you do this practice, so you don't float away, you don't become spacy. It's just a natural consequence of this practice, it's why you do it. That's the main essence of Zen practice, you go to a monastery and everything is about stability, the body.

Question: So if I go into an upset inside myself and I'm totally carried away with it, that shows me that I'm not stable?

Linda: No, the fact that you come back from that eventually shows that you're stable. That's the thing, you see that as something wrong and something you're doing wrong, and then that compounds the whole thing because you start judging yourself saying, "I shouldn't be feeling this, I'm getting carried away, I'm not supposed to feel this." But actually, being carried away to that extent and then being able to come back means you're incredibly stable.

Question: That's good to hear.

Linda: It's this thing of judgement: "If I feel bad it means I'm not doing it properly. I'm supposed to feel perfect all the time." Of course, you wouldn't be here if...

Question: And that's so subtle.

Linda: It is subtle. But it's been drummed into us from a very early age: this is good, this is bad, this is progress, this is not, you're supposed to feel this, you're not supposed to feel pain. You're always supposed to feel pleasure, you're supposed to feel happy, "Oh, what's wrong? You feel sad." – of course you're going to feel sad sometimes. So it's very deeply ingrained in us from an early age.

Question: Does that also apply to the states where you're very okay, very easy and clear, that you come back from those as well? Something changes and I'm back into the very ordinary.

Linda: Not sure what you mean.

Question: Judging those as being better or right. Judging a state where I feel equanimity, ease...

Linda: Well, when you're in real equanimity there is no judgement, that's the thing. So until then there is going to be a slight judgement. Of course you're going to prefer to be like that and to feel that, and during this practice you do need times when – it's not all hard work and suffering – there are times when you just feel amazing, and you can't help but love those times, and you need them. So don't get too much into all the bits and pieces. Just enjoy the times when you do feel incredibly still and free. And use that to know that it is possible in you, and that is going to go into your body memory – not your personal memory – your body will feel that and recognise and remember that. So when you feel good enjoy it, when you feel not so good just use it.

Question: I'm curious about something. I spoke to you a couple of months ago about leaving work and having a prolonged break, which I've done, am doing. I guess it's the fourth week now and I'm practicing a bit more – an hour in the morning and thirty to forty minutes in the afternoon – and that's been consistent and I can feel it. What's been happening in the last few weeks is, for whatever reason, I've been hooking up with people I haven't seen since I was a kid. Although there is definitely agency in it, in that we've called each other and made times to meet, it feels like there is something bigger driving it. A couple of theories: one is it's loose ends getting tied up in order to let it go properly, and another one is it feels like I'm getting shown a less conditioned version of myself, because all these connections were easy.

Linda: Yes, I feel it probably is a combination of all of that. Seeing how much you have changed, seeing how much you haven't changed. Maybe you do feel more like you did when you were a kid now, tying up loose ends, seeing what is triggered in you from seeing your distant past being put in front of you.

Question: Or what's changed since then perhaps. Maybe I was more authentic then. I'm curious.

Linda: How old were you when you knew them?

Question: One was a kid I met when I was seven, and the others not long after – primary and high school, and pretty much haven't seen them since. I was curious if it was part of this and whether you had things like that, or I'm joining dots that aren't to be joined.

Linda: Definitely I had. So if you feel that strongly I'd say do it. And everything is part of this but right now you have the time and space to do something like that.

So it's time to move.