

Linda Clair
Five-day Meditation Retreat
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Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 5B – Wednesday morning discussion

Question: I had an interesting experience of sitting with a lot of pain in my seat, my sit bones. Something you said to A. yesterday about opening to the intense pain, something about that, and I felt this feeling which I have had before when I'm sitting in that pain. I could feel the fear like a friction against it, like a thought really. I hadn't really experienced fear like a thought before. And just noticing that if I came out of the pain, the fear was there, which stimulated all these other reactions. Then I'd go back down into the pain and just sit in it, which I did for most of the sit till the last five minutes. Then the rest of my body started to go into this really strong fear response, and I was sweating and I started to feel quite unwell, ill, and I actually had to move, because I was really in the fear I guess. Part of me was going, "Stay, stay," and I couldn't for the last bit. But I really felt the difference between those two things. So I felt a bit disappointed I wasn't able to hang in there till the end of the bell. But it was a very clear thing of just resting in the pain in the body, and then noticing how that fear is just above it almost, and the thinking is like that.

Linda: Well, fear is a thought, so you're always fearful *of* something. Whereas when you're completely in that pain it's uncomfortable, very hard to bear, difficult to bear. And part of it was probably you got really tired with it, and it was so intense, and you can become very emotional, particularly afterwards when it's like that, so don't worry about the moving thing, that's alright. It's mainly that you saw that difference, that you *can* feel pain without suffering. So pain is pain, and the pain that you felt is necessary, it keeps you present. If you can be with the pain it actually helps you to stay here, and then the fear can't get in – when you're totally in it, the fear just can't get in.

Question: Yes, it was a very strong experience of being in the intensity of it – just breathing and the sounds, everything was happening. But at the end there I felt, "Oh, bugger."

Linda: The fear just came in in a crack and...

Question: It came in and it was in my body. I felt how thoughts are impregnated almost, and different parts of my body started to freak out. It wasn't to do with the pain in my butt, it was other parts of my body were going, "I can't do this anymore," like a habitual response to discomfort.

Linda: So that is really good. It's worth doing the whole retreat just to see that distinction, and to see that it is possible to bear that pain and to be there without feeling fear. Eventually the pain disappears when the fear goes. Then it's amazing, you go, "That pain, which I thought was real, was actually not real." But it feels very real, and it's much more real than any thought you'll ever have, that intensity. I used to start to crave that intensity – not enjoy it, but there was a certain exhilaration in being able to

sit like that for periods. And it raises your pain threshold, until you don't really know so much what's pain and what's pleasure, it all merges in together, it's just this intensity. But you feel much more alive when you're in that intensity, and that's what I used to crave, that incredible aliveness that you don't get with comfort – the comfort of thinking, the comfort even of fear. Because fear can be quite comfortable too: "I'm scared of something, so I can't be here because I'm scared of what might happen."

And it's what this practice is all about – seeing that, feeling it, experiencing it for yourself and knowing that it is possible in you. And nobody can tell you that. I can say that to you but it won't mean anything until you actually feel it. It's the same with this, you can't go home to someone and describe really what's happening, they'll just think you're crazy.

Linda: What's worrying you A.?

Question: I'm unworried. I'm a fearless thinker.

Linda: I told you, you can't be a fearless thinker. (laughing)

How are you J.?

Question: I don't know if there's much to say, just stuff going on.

Linda: What sort of stuff?

Question: Just thoughts and pain and breathing, all of it.

Linda: You're sitting pretty well. A really straight back for sitting cross-legged a bit.

There's nothing wrong with comfort. It's nice being comfortable.

Question: It's nice to be here.

Question: Just a simple question about length of sitting. A lot of people here are sitting for, looks like, hours they don't move. I feel I'll never be able to do that – maybe I will, but – is that actually going to be a requirement to become enlightened?

Linda: Not necessarily.

Question: I just don't feel my body...

Linda: Not necessarily, and you do build up to it. When I first started sitting half-an-hour just felt like so long! And they were sitting on a lounge. But you just build up to it. But you don't need to sit for hours, it's not a requirement for everyone. Maybe some people yes, and maybe some people are a little bit attached to it. I was just wondering that before, with a couple a people I want to stop sitting

every morning for two hours or however long they are sitting, because you *do* need to break it up sometimes, and you can get attached to sitting for that period. So it's good to chop and change, and sometimes challenge yourself and sit for a bit longer. And feel what A. just described, because the pain can be a really good teacher, you can see a lot with that. Not everyone gets it to that degree and not everyone needs to, so everyone is different. But some periods of slightly longer sitting can be really valuable, where you are facing that fear that you're going to feel – I know you've had a hip operation so it's a bit different.

Question: Yes, it's a bit damaged still, the muscles have been cut and it hasn't grown back properly – I'm working on it.

Linda: So do what you can physically to sit, and you will get pain, especially in places that are a bit weaker like that, you'll feel it more there. But occasionally challenge yourself and sit through something and see what happens.

Question: Yes, I had one of those yesterday or today, I can't remember. But because I was at the front I thought, "I've got to try and do an hour's sit with you at the front, whatever happens." It was after A. was talking about white hot nails, and I thought, "Okay, he's having that pain, I can have that pain." I could do it, I did push myself. Also, you said also one of your teachers said, "Is it unbearable?", and I thought, "No, it's not unbearable," and I had the most amazing transformation like I've never had before. It was like the pain, and I had to get past a lot of the mental stuff, but I hung in there, and all of sudden – I can't really describe it – it was like I could feel muscles and stuff spiralling. An absolute, completely different, body sensations in that leg, and all then moving into my body everywhere. I was scared that everybody could see it because it was so strong, I wondered if I was jerking or moving, but I don't think I was, I was handling it. Then it kind of cleared. But it felt like it was exactly like you said – I went past the point of, well, there's a lot of fear around the pain in that leg obviously – but it sort of moved in a weird way.

Linda: It's not strictly physical. So try and do that at least once during a retreat, but don't do too much. And maybe at home build up to it a bit as well. It's going to be more intense in a situation like this.

Question: At home I sit like this for an hour, easily, but I don't get the intensity of what's happening.

Linda: I used to crave sitting with my teacher for that reason – suddenly I felt all this pain. So I started to want to sit with him because it acts as a catalyst energetically, and you get into that field where your consciousness is going faster and the fear, or the past, is rubbing up against it. That's what that friction is and that's what the pain is. You start to feel that pain because you're trying to go faster, and because energetically, being in this room with me, with everyone, everyone is speeding each other up. But particularly someone who's going *really* fast. You're going to come up against blocks, and that's when you feel the pain. I'm not really into all the chakra stuff, you're just going to feel it in different parts of your body at different times. The bum is a big one where you feel it, and that's a sign of grounding, really intense grounding, but you'll feel it in lots of places.

It's just the energy in your body quickening and coming up against the past, the fear. And the way through it is just to sit with it. And if you can sit with it for periods, that can act as catalyst with the whole thing, but not overdo it. And you can get a bit over the top about the whole thing too and get into this habit of sitting every day for two or three hours, and no, I don't think that's a good thing to get into every time. Sometimes it's better and more intense, and more challenging to sit for half-an-hour than two hours. It changes, and you have to be flexible and go with it, otherwise you get caught in this groove that can become delusion. It's very tricky the whole thing, but you need to keep changing, moving, trying different things.

Question: I like it when you talk about it like that because it feels more natural, like the natural world.

Linda: It's natural but most people aren't functioning naturally, so it's difficult to know what's natural and what's not until the fear is gone. Then you become more natural, like a baby – you see a baby and everything they do is natural. But most of our behaviour is learned behaviour, so what we're doing is unlearning that behaviour, those habits, those deep-seated beliefs that we've got: that, "Pain is bad, pleasure is good," the fear of pain, "It's going to get so bad I'm going to die," and that's what is at the base of it.

So yes, the pain can be very good for facing your fear.

Question: I'm just grateful I've had that one experience of it, because now I know I can go there without that fear. Because I've never actually gone that far into the pain, and in that part of my body.

Linda: It will probably help your body in the long-run.

Question: It felt like it was re-structuring itself.

Linda: And it does, because I know a lot of the pain that I used to feel was fear-based. There was a degree of fear in it – not all of it, but there was a degree of fear in it. Once you get through this fear it's not like you never have pain in your body, you do, but there's not this huge fear that it's going to get worse, "This is going to happen." I very rarely take pain-killers now; I haven't taken one for a long time. And I still have pain in my body at times if I fall over or do something, but I can put up with it. I'm not against painkillers if I'm having an operation or something, but day to day life, no, I don't usually take them, because the fear thing has really changed the quality of the pain. It's interesting and I really don't feel as much pain as before, the intensity of it is not the same as before. It's really interesting.

Have you got a question?

Question: One of the ways my fear manifests is I'm scared you're going to ask me if I have a question. (laughter) One of the things you spoke about to me is how I'm involved in too many things, and my mind seems to reflect that. In that session it was focusing on things I'm working on and very cleverly coming up with solutions to problems, and that was extending the time before I went back to the breath in the abdomen. I guess my question is, people talk about a work-life balance – what is the work and this path balance?

Linda: If you put this first, as a priority – I don't mean you sit all day and you don't work; work is a big part of this because you can be very present when you're working – but when you put this first things do tend to fall into balance, you do tend to simplify your life. Because you just haven't got the energy to do as much as you were doing before. And it's not really to do with age or anything like that, it's more that this takes a lot of energy. The passion with work too tends to subside a bit, so things that you might have been passionate about before you see more as a way to support yourself, make an income, do something that you're good at and that you might enjoy. But often the passion goes out of it, which can be a bit disconcerting, but what you do is redirect that passion into this, and this becomes your passion. So things sort themselves out. I don't know if you ever get into this great balance. I know for me sometimes I was just totally into this, other times there were things I needed to sort out in my life. It is good to have some sort of structure in your life and other things that you're doing so you don't get too obsessed with this.

Question: I've certainly been experiencing the exhaustion that comes with this, way more than I've ever experienced. I've even occasionally had to take naps, and I've never done that in the day, but I feel like I need to a bit. So that's new. I'm incredibly aware of the whole change in my energy since really getting into this.

Linda: It will change everything. Don't worry about the work thing, just keep doing it. I know you love golf, that's a great thing to do too. You've got a beautiful partner, a great life, you've got a daughter, more family. So that's enough to keep you busy, I wouldn't look for anything else. This does make you exhausted. And it's a bit tricky sometimes because you can't explain to people why you're so tired, and they think you're a wuss or something, and you can tend to feel that about yourself. I used to have to take naps, and still sometimes, just to get through the day because there's so much happening in your body, there's so much energy there. And you feel so awake that it's very difficult to keep going, and that nap can just take the edge off it. Otherwise you can tend to get overtired, overstimulated, over-energised. Even just lying down without the intention of going to sleep, just lying down and having a rest sometime during the day, without feeling guilty about it. It is going to make you more efficient for the rest of the day if you can do that.

Question: Before I came a group of us were discussion our idea of what an ordeal is, and I said, "Still, silent, presence." And this has confirmed that as the attempt to reach that state is an absolute ordeal. That's hard to explain to people.

Linda: It's often better not to try and explain it, unless people ask you in detail about it, because they're going to get the wrong idea, and it makes a lot of people scared too when you start to say what you're feeling. Like if A. went home and described this pain, they go, "What are you doing that for? What a crazy thing to do." And it can subtly undermine the whole thing. It's one reason it's great to have times when you're in a situation like this, periods in retreat where you can talk about this openly and people understand what you're feeling, because they're feeling it too. So I wouldn't try and explain it too much to people. Sometimes it's better just to say something else and not get too into anything.

Question: Yes, that's been my experience. I just get blank looks mostly.

Thanks so much for this whole retreat, it's been extraordinary sitting with everyone too. It's lovely being with such strong meditators who are really committed to going on the journey.

Linda: Well, we only get committed people here because there's not much entertainment. I don't really talk all that much. I'm not going to sit up here and talk to you; I'd rather you experienced it. I prefer to have fewer people who are really committed than hundreds of people wanting to be fed.