

Linda Clair
Four-and-a-half-day Meditation Retreat
Cold Ash Retreat Centre, Newbury, UK
13 – 17 November 2019
Transcription from Audio Recordings

File 2d – Thursday afternoon discussion session

Linda: Does anyone want to go home? (Laughter) Yes? A few? Desperately?

Question: If someone had not blocked my car in I think I'd be gone by now. (Laughter.)

Linda: It will change tomorrow.

Question: You mean we'll want to go home even more? 😊

Linda: Who knows? 😊 No, it usually settles down. You accept your fate. (Laughter.) You realise that by leaving you're just prolonging the inevitable. So just stay. Are you feeling really bad?

Question: I feel contempt for all of this at the moment. I don't know where it's coming from.

Linda: Your mind.

Question: I can't seem to look at anything in a positive light at the moment. So I'm just going through the motions, coming and sitting. I've been here before, this kind of resistance. What worries me is that the last time I had this it was on a five-day retreat and it never left. It was there till the very last minute and by the end of it I was exhausted. I hope tomorrow will be better.

Linda: It will be different; it doesn't mean it will be better. What is better? That's what this is all about – the hoping that things are going to get better. I'd say you will feel different tomorrow. And even though you talk about that other retreat, you're back doing another retreat. So something has brought you here. But this isn't how you think it's going to be. For me, that kept happening. The big thing is realisation – it was nothing like I thought it would be. It's not easy, it's not relaxing. It's so much more, so much deeper.

But really, this deep resistance needs to be gone though, needs to come up. Whatever comes up needs to come up. I know that doesn't help. I can't really say anything to make you feel better, to make it easier for you.

Question: I don't feel like I want you to put a band-aid on it to make it all better. I want to be able to push through it. I feel I've gone from quite a strong practice at home to not being able to meditate at all at the moment, nor wanting to, I just don't want to do it. I'm like a spoiled, petulant child. (Laughter) It's taken me by surprised and can't seem to get around that. So I'm going through the motions, coming in and pretending to meditate. That's the best I can do right now.

Linda: Well, do that. Do anything you can to just survive the retreat. (Laughter) The same for everyone. And try not to feel you *should* be meditating. You're here sitting – that's enough, particularly when you're feeling as you do. It's a huge thing to just to be here. You could go to your room and just hide away and not even come.

Nobody is really making you come to things and that's the hard thing, you're doing this willingly and putting yourself through this willingly. There's no one you can really blame for it because you came here, and that's the difficult part. So just try and survive the retreat. Don't worry about meditating properly or not meditating properly. Just come here and sit in the room and see what happens.

Question: I'm really struggling. I decided to get the number of the plate of the car that's blocking me in. (Laughter.) I think I feel a lack of control because I can't get out. My mind never shuts up. My inner critic is always at me, whatever I'm doing, I'm not right. It's like being in a war zone, I take a breath and then it's back at me. Everything else seems small and insignificant. I'm almost numb from holding myself against the torrent of my mind that zips from one thing to the next, the next, the next. It's as if it can't cope with the nothing so it has to make a mess so that there's something. I don't need to think about it, but I don't know how I can sit here for an hour. I guess I can't if I think about it. I'd like you to turn my mind off for me. (Laughter.)

Linda: When the mind is faced with reality it will sometimes go crazy. I know it was the same for me when I was sitting with my teachers, whoever it was, if they were realised. It would do the same thing, just go crazy. But I realised that was why I was doing it. Because that was happening all the time but I was using things to try and get some sort of break from it, to distract myself, anything but look at it. It's very difficult doing something like this. It's the hardest thing I have ever done, by far, harder than anything I've ever done. I would say to everyone take this moment by moment, sit by sit.

Give yourself permission to not do a sit if you really don't want to. Often by giving yourself that permission it will give you strength to do it. But know that nobody is going to judge you if you decide that sitting is too much. And if you need a rest, do that. The same for everyone. Don't feel you need to come to every sitting.

Like I said, I can't turn your mind off. And I don't want to, because I want it to drive you crazy, crazy enough that you're prepared to do anything to become free from it. And in my experience, this is maybe one of the most intense ways but also one of the most direct ways.

So don't be hard on yourself. Be soft on yourself. Don't limit your food. Don't do anything else extreme. Just try and survive. Have rests in between. Just try and survive. And it will change during the retreat. It will come and go. Sometimes the mind will be very, very strong. And other times it will give up because it hasn't got limitless energy. And just by the very fact that you're sitting here you are weakening it. It might not feel like that but you are. But it will fight for its survival because it can't exist right now. If you are here right now there's no room, no time, for the mind.

What' it's doing is fighting for its existence. But what you're doing is fighting for your sanity. It might feel like you're going crazy but you're actually becoming more sane. And to do that, everything gets stirred up and disturbed. The truth is, when the mind is in control, the authentic you has no control. This is about breaking the mind's hold over you, the control that it has. And there is this fear that if you don't have control – which you don't anyway – you'll fall apart and everything

will fall apart. In a way that happens but not in the way you think. Loosing your mind does not mean you go crazy, so it's a strange expression. You actually become sane for the first time in your life. So that's what this is all about.

When you're sitting here without the distractions of your worldly life it can seem like it's stronger than ever. So use that rather than getting too dismayed by it, too disturbed by it. Use it as an inspiration and reason to keep going. That's the reason I kept going, not all the amazing experiences – not that there were than many. It's not the mystical experiences that keep you going, it's this. When you've got no choice you go, "Oh!" And once you've seen your mind to this degree you can't pretend it's not there. And all the distractions that you used to use start to not work anymore. So it's like you haven't got a choice.

So I can just say, keep going. Things will change. Don't fight it. Just sit here, watch. Use your breath to try and slightly soften the whole thing. And like I said, give yourself permission to not attend a sit if you really feel like you need a rest or a sleep.

Question: Other than the criticisms of my mind, I don't have a sense of any feelings. I feel totally numb.

Linda: That will change, that does change. We do get obsessed with the fact that we should be feeling good, "I should be feeling good and if I meditate I'm going to feel really, really good." Eventually you feel joy, peace, all those things they talk about are true.

But not many people talk about what, in detail, it takes to get to that. I know with my teachers, they did talk about it. They talked about and I'd heard about all the amazing things about being realised. But what I wanted was a way of getting there. I didn't want to just sit and listen to someone talk about it. And they presented a practice that to me seemed really quite logical, and it is logical to a degree, but it's very intense.

So the practice eventually does give you power – not control but power, this deep feeling of power. And you start to realise bit by bit – and you probably will at times during this retreat – that it is possible to be free from it. You get glimpses of that possibility, and when you glimpse that it gives you this deep power. So I would say, persevere. Give it another day at least and see how you feel then and if you really feel like leaving, leave. But see me. If anyone wants to leave see me first. I won't try to persuade you to stay but give it one more day. And then another day. (Laughter)

I went to Japan to a monastery for a while. I remember the feeling going there – I felt like I was going to my death – it felt so horrible. And from the first day all I wanted to do was leave, it was so horrible. But something held me there; I just couldn't leave. But that's all I wanted to do off-and-on the whole time I was there. But I'm so glad I didn't.

Question: My view is that this intensity is what most of us really need because most people in the room – we don't have a lot of time left. (Laughter.)

Linda: Well, it doesn't matter what age you are. You really don't know.

Question: I feel I don't have a lot of time so intensity is what I need to get there more quickly.

Linda: Well, that was my attitude and I was reasonably young when I started but I thought, "I just want to get this over with. I want to live my life." There was this sense of urgency, "I don't want to waste time. I just want to get this over with." I didn't want to fluff around doing all the ritual stuff, I just wanted to get down to it and get it done as quickly as possible. So most of time I was prepared for it to be as intense as possible.

And that's what needs to happen. It needs to be intense. The mind is so deeply imbedded in the body and psyche, and we've spent most of our lives, whatever age we are, feeding it, nurturing it. It takes a lot to become free from it.

Question: I feel grateful that you did it earlier because now you still have time to teach.

Linda: Yes, I might have another 20-30 years teaching. I'll probably live till I'm, maybe ninety. So if I feel like this now – and maybe I'm just starting to come into my own as a teacher – in another 20 years, who knows? Or maybe another five years. I can feel things changing.

But it's true, it needs to be intense.

Question: What are you experiencing when you're meditating today? Is it any different from your normal state when you're talking to us?

Linda: No, it's not, in a way. There is a slight difference but that difference is becoming less and less. And it's always different. It's not like a state that you're in all the time. That's the amazing thing about it, it just changes every moment, and it keeps deepening. What I've been feeling today a lot – probably more so than I've ever felt – is an incredible sense of, "I don't want to be anywhere else." It's the most exquisite feeling. I don't want to be anywhere else but here with you.

Question: Are you affected by us in any way? If we're struggling, can you feel or sense that?

Linda: Not in an individual sense, but generally, yes.

Question: Would that affect your meditation?

Linda: To a degree, probably. In the deepest sense no, but to a degree, yes. Often, the first day or two of a retreat, my job is to keep you here. (Laughter) In every sense of the word. So yes, it can be a challenge. I often feel that. It's the same in Australia. We can have quite a few people sitting in the room and probably half of them want to go home and are wondering what they're doing sitting here. Then usually by the end nobody wants to go home, they want to stay there. Sometimes they still want to go home.

Question: Do you still meditate when you're not in retreat?

Linda: No, I don't meditate every day.

I worked out recently that I spend at least two months a year like this solidly meditating. I have a quite sporadic formal practice at home. I don't sit everyday but I still sit quite regularly. I remember my teacher saying, "I don't need to meditate anymore," but I feel it's still really important to keep grounding because more energy keeps coming in. And particularly if you're just living a normal life,

not living in a monastery, there's a lot of stuff in the world you need to deal with. And it keeps you humble.

Question: Do you believe in reincarnation? Do you believe you'll come back and you'll already be enlightened so you won't go through all this that we're going through now?

Linda: I don't think I'll come back as a body, no. I was something else before probably. What I feel is that the unenlightened cells regroup and come back into a body. The enlightened cells don't need to. So yes, I feel it would be a mistake to say, "No, I don't need to do anything now. That's the end. It's alright."

Question: Are you worried that you might regress?

Linda: No, not at all. I don't meditate for that reason. I don't do anything out of fear now, so there's no fear of that. I have to – and I'd say everyone in this state needs to – stay alert and keep an eye on things. It's not like the mind is destroyed; it's still there. If there's any sliver of ego that you feel, for me now, it's actually quite joyful to feel that because as soon as I feel it and see it I realise I can go more deeply into this and that does happen. But you really need to admit that there is still something there and not present yourself as this perfect person with nothing there. But compared to how it was before it's very, very little, almost nothing. You could say nothing but I don't think I'd ever say nothing.

Question: Do you think we could reach this state – instead of doing meditation like we're doing now – by working in a monastery and giving our service to others, and not thinking of ourselves – reducing ego that way?

Linda: Well, maybe. The thing is, you do need to get deeply into you. And giving to others can become a distraction. You can think you're giving to others but really, it's a way of avoiding looking at yourself. It all depends on your intention.

This can appear like a very selfish thing to do, and it sort of is. But what's wrong with selfish? You need to become incredibly obsessed with looking at yourself to really see things clearly. And that's horrible, and not many people are prepared to do that and you can see why. You see things about yourself that you just can't stand. But it's not like they're new, they've been always been there. That's the shocking part – that you've been avoiding it for most of your life.

Question: I find when I'm doing this sort of practice I sort of don't really care about the real world or suffering any more. There's that selfishness – this is more important than that.

Linda: Well, that's why you're doing this. I know I was the same. I didn't really care about anyone except me. Well, I did to a degree; I had my children and I loved them and I cared about them to a degree. But it was really still all to do with me. And that's what I couldn't stand and that's what I admitted to myself, and as I said, I just couldn't stand that anymore. I got so sick of myself I was prepared to do anything to be free from it. So in a way, it did feel quite ruthless. But that's how I was before. I was just pretending I was compassionate and nice and all that stuff. But really, it was all about me – everything was about me. And when I looked at it closely it was even more about me.

The only way I saw to become free from it was to really do that, “Okay, I’ll get totally into this: watch every movement away from here, watch every thought, allow all that emotional stuff to come up but come back to the body, stay grounded.” It was awful at times. But like I said, the glimpses of the possibility of freedom were amazing, and that started to become stronger.

I didn’t want to just follow someone and do a practice for the rest of my life, I wanted to be free, and could feel that that was possible. That’s the beauty and the power of this whole practice – it is possible for you, not just for someone else. And you don’t sit there waiting for grace to descend, you actually do something about it. How exciting – maybe it’s possible.

Question: I’m not quite sure what it is to be in my body. When I do the practice and try to be in my body there’s a tightness and contraction that is quite uncomfortable.

Linda: Well, coming into your body can be very uncomfortable. It doesn’t mean you’re really good in your body. It might feel uncomfortable but often there’s still a sort of rightness about it too. Even if it’s uncomfortable you can feel more alive than when you’re thinking.

Question: The thinking used to bother me a lot but I think I’ve been lucky about getting rid of stories and the mind attacks are not too bad. But the body sensation is horrible.

Linda: What are your feeling?

Question: For a long time I felt like somebody was strangling me.

Linda: That’s quite common to feel that tightness and tension in your chest and throat. Sometimes there’ll be this swallowing that you just can’t stop. I feel it’s an energetic thing, tension, and also a lot of what’s been left unsaid – expressing yourself, being real, the fear of being open, exposing yourself. A lot of it is centred around here.

So persevere. Really feeling those sensation means you’re in the body. It’s not always going to be that unpleasant. So don’t get into the mindset, “Oh, it has to be unpleasant. It’s always going to be like this.” It will change. But I know I felt that quite a bit too. Are you feeling it down in the lower part of your body too?

Question: I’m not used to meditating at all. I’ve listened to a lot of non-duality but I’ve hardly done any practice. The reason I wanted to come here is that I’ve heard everything but I just hear people talking about it, I don’t know what it feels like. I knew I needed to sit, that’s why I came. I knew I needed to be in my body but I don’t know what that is.

Linda: Well, you do. That’s what you’re feeling. But it’s not how it will be eventually be. And it’s not that it will necessarily be pleasurable but there’ll be this deep aliveness and it’ll feel more real. What you’re feeling right now probably feels much more real than any thought that you’ve ever had.

Question: But it’s horrible, it makes you feel sick. (In the stomach?) No, up here.

Linda: There’s no easy way. It’s still only the first day too.

Question: It's almost like every time I sit. If I distract myself it's fine, but every time I focus on my sense of self or that I am, it comes back.

Linda: Again, it will change. So persevere. But you are in your body. You can sense that. That's what you want but it's not how you thought it was going to be.

Question: Yes, I thought it would be relaxing.

Linda: Yes, well a lot of the non-dual stuff is, "Oh yes, it's relaxing, it's easy. You *just* do this and *just* do that," and it's not *just* doing anything. So take it moment by moment. Try and let go of your expectations of how it should be or how it's supposed to be. And again, just survive. It's work. A lot of people don't tell you that because you think, "If I'm going to meditate, I'm going to feel really good and relaxed, and peace, instant peace," but it's not instant.

Question: Do you just go into the feeling or watch it?

Linda: When you're feeling that, I'd say, use your breath in the abdomen to try and cope with it. It will soften slightly and make it more bearable. And that's why it's good to breathe down there, just to make it a bit more bearable. But it will change. So feel it as much as you can. If it gets a bit too much, have a break. You and everyone here are much stronger than they think. It's the mind that weakens you and makes you think that you're not strong and that you've got these limits. And there's all this fear there about what's going to happen. But coming into your body can be incredibly uncomfortable. There's going to be a lot of resistance to doing it.

Question: It feels like an energetic contraction. (Yes.) Is it fear?

Linda: It's all fear. All resistance is fear, and being in a situation like this is going to intensify that fear. Being around someone who's free from fear is going to highlight it too. So it's a huge thing. You're probably thinking this is not what I signed up for.

Question: No, it's exactly what I signed up for. (Laughter)

Linda: Well, keep that. Be strong. Go, "This is what I want." You want deep change and that's why you're here. And by the end of this retreat there will be a deep change.

Question: My first time with you was in Barcelona last year. That was awful – a lot of pain everywhere. I meditate on my own and I feel a lot of energy. I don't have any thoughts, no thinking – I'm always here – but lots of pain and energy coming from the top of my head. I know it's fear and resistance but I can't get away from it, and I don't want to anyway. I'm noticing now I'm starting to be friends with it and letting it do what it wants. Since then, I can watch and see my body reacting to it. But I feel this energy and this pain, not just when I'm meditating. As I'm talking to you I feel a lot of pressure here. And I've become more emotional as well. The other day I was crying just watching my dog running on the beach. More energy than pain, intensifies every day. When you are in the room it intensifies. In Barcelona it felt like a battery. I don't want to get away from it, I'm just watching it.

Linda: So don't try and get away from it because the more you try, and resist, it will give it more power. So the good news is the pain is a thought – eventually you'll realise that, that the pain itself

is not real. At the time it feels very real. The best thing to do is what you're doing – make friends with it, accept it as much as possible.

Question: I feel that when I do that, I feel like I'm dissolving into it. I don't feel like I'm my body.

Linda: Often it's good to do the opposite to what you habitually do. What we're taught is pain-bad, get away from of it, get rid of it. What if you try the opposite? Not say pain is good necessarily, just say pain is pain. Get as close to it as possible.

Question: I don't want to get attached to it either.

Linda: Well, don't worry about that for that for now. In fact, get as close to it as you can.

Question: That's what I'm trying to do, trying to be part of it.

Linda: Let it take you over. Good. Just keep doing that.