

# 2001-06-10: Completeness

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

funeral, life, people, present, son, person, impulse, completeness, garden, vibrancy, sense, feel, recognize, psyche, moment, letting, kinds, died, compulsion, drives

## SPEAKERS

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I was thinking this week some about the kind of spiritual teachings that point to the sense of perfection that's said to be ever present, that things are perfect or the sense of completeness, sometimes a feeling of completeness and things are complete, then fine just the way they are. And the sense of things being complete their sense of things being perfect. Sometimes can come very powerfully on a person, and sometimes they occur in very special circumstances where it's easy to feel that way and sometimes they come out of the blue. And as we find a lot, a lot of teachings emphasize this. In the Lotus Sutra, which is one of the central sacred scriptures of East Asian Buddhism talks about this a little bit in the sense that Kinda like we're almost as if we're already Buddhists, but we just don't know it. And the analogy analogy is used is, is that it's as if someone came along and sewed a wonderfully precious jewel inside your coat. And then you wandered off and became homeless and destitute. And, and, and, you know, had a lot of a lot of struggles. But in fact, you had this wonderful wealth just inside your coat that you didn't know was there. And that's the way our spiritual life is like we have this tremendous treasure inside of us that we don't recognize. That would make us spiritually quite rich if we just learned to take the lining out of our coat. And there it is. There's another story in the same sutra of a son that comes of age, his son, a very wealthy man, wealthy family, and he decides to go and see the world and go often Explore and do what young men might do. And he wonders for many years and he has a bit of hard luck and becomes homeless, himself destitute, poor, and struggles and is one various wanderings around. North, probably Northwest in India, the story was probably made made. And he spent many, many years decades kind of wandering around homeless, begging, down and out. And it is it kind of forgets his history but gets us past it gets that he was in his own parents and the fact that he's a son of wealthy people. And it is wondering, at some point, he comes back to his hometown, and he's walking down the street in front of where his father's house is mentioned. And his father soon sees, recognizes his son but also recognizes that his son being quite destitute and down and out and kind of little bit desperate straits doesn't even remember who he is himself. Let alone Remember that, you know that I'm his father. So as fathers realizes that he can't just run up to him and says, oh, you're my son, my long lost son, I'm so glad to see you. If he feels that they now

he's young boy anymore, he's not going to recognize him. So he goes after him down the street and he says, oh, sir I have this house right here and I need someone to shovel shovel the horse manure from the barn. And I need someone who can do that and you look like you're you know, out of work and just wandering around and maybe you had the capacity to maybe at least shovel shit. And, and you know, I'll pay you I'll pay you a little bit money if you want to come for the day and shovel and so the son says, Yeah, I can do that. And he's happy to have a little job and see shovel some manure for the day and after the day, the sons the father says to him, Well, that was you did a really good job here. You know, actually, I could use someone to work in the stables and regular basis. And the son who doesn't have a very high opinion of themselves, of themselves thinks, but at least I could, you know, show up on the newer and maybe it's nice to have the stability here. And so he does that he does a pretty good job shoveling manure and the stable. And after a while the facade is you know, actually, you know, you do this really well, the shoveling, what I really need now as someone to work in the garden and a gardener, and wonder how you'd be apt to be at doing that. And so the sun learns the garden and eventually learns to take over the garden crew and, and over many years, becomes a great gardener. And after many years of this, the father says, you know, actually, you know, you're doing a really great job here, you're managing this crew, I need someone to manage the whole, you know, the whole crew and the estate and all the servants and people and maybe you can become the foreman of the servants or whatever. And so he does that then. And then he becomes a trusted accountant for the for the father and takes care of his was money and, and, and then after many, many years, it's as if the sun is it's as if the sun is becoming Son because you're

so close, you slowly kind of grown in trust and confidence and ability and all that. And then the father says, Oh, and by the way, you are my son. But you weren't in a good enough shape to see that 20 years ago. So we had to do this kind of slow approach, gradual approach to before you're ready to hear this wonderful teaching that you're actually our my son, and you're going to inherit all this wonderful stuff here. So the Lotus Sutra says they were like that, that it's very hard for us to believe in our own sense of worth or a sense of well, being our own preciousness that we all we all are the sons of the Buddha or daughters of the Buddha, we're all we all are perfect, or in some some spiritual way. And so maybe perhaps it takes a year as a spiritual practice, to kind of first in the first years of your practice, you're mostly shoveling manure, and, and then you kind of get into the garden for a while and it's kind of nice, and then into the house for a while. It's really Nice after a while you kind of dawns on you, maybe it is true. Something was true all along. So these are these kinds of teachings that were already perfect just the way we are or that things are complete just the way they are nothing more as needed. Certainly goes against the common sense. seemingly obvious perception that things are not okay. That things should be improved on that there's too much unfinished, unfinished busyness in our lives or there's too much tragedy going on or too much loss or people are dying too soon or, and we're left without, you know, the benefit of their love, where there's a lot of things a lot of loss and how can things be complete? How can you say this? You know, in my mind, the husband is in Stanford hospital fighting for his life. How can you say things are complete and perfect in this kind of world. As long as the teachings on completeness, the completeness of the present are just Teaching spiritual teachings from whatever tradition you're connected to. It's easy to kind of dismiss them. You can say anyway, get

out of my way. I don't want to, I don't want to I'm too busy. To be told there's no one. There's nothing that is so important. That requires me to be busy. Think I'm too busy to listen to the message that you don't need to be busy. I'm distracted from my distractions, by my distractions is so caught up in the world we live. But he dismissed the kind of teachings you know, as they go against the common sense of how things are. They go against the momentum and impulsive drive the compulsion which many people live that, you know, in order to be seeking for completeness, seeking for things trying to accomplish things. And as long as but people also isn't just teachings people have the experience of things being complete in the moment. As long as those experiences are happening to other people, then it maybe it's also easy to dismiss it, you know, those people, you know, they're kind of myopic, they're idealists, you know, and they don't really connect it to the real world. And I don't want to be that kind of airy fairy kind of person. Or that person doesn't have this kind of responsibilities that I have or the history, their difficulties or problems that I have and what their experiences is like, it doesn't really relate to me. However, when the feeling of completeness occurs in yourself for oneself, then maybe it's not so easy to dismiss it. Because it's not out there anymore. And it might happen sometime, maybe sometimes it happens once or twice in childhood, or sometimes it happens in adulthood and very circumstances. And it might happen in a context where it seems okay. It's okay in this context, but we don't kind of then universalize that as it being a strategy or understanding perception for how we live our lives. But when it happens to ourselves, some feeling of things are perfect or I feel complete or things are complete right now or things are just as they should be. How do we understand that? What's that? What kind of meaning do we use to understand that kind of experience? What kind of value do we put both on the experience and the memory of having that experience? What kind of context we put it in. So I had an experience this week. That was quite poignant.

experience of feeling quite complete in the moment, and I was sitting in a friend's garden. She had a beautiful little garden. She's tended to it for many years. And we were sitting outside and that kind of in the garden chairs under the shade and hats a little bit stuffs a little water to drink and little coffee cake and we're sitting there and it was quite pleasant the temperature that was quite beautiful was in the morning around nine o'clock and so it's kind of stillness even though I could hear traffic and distance. The garden itself had this wonderful quality of stillness and a light to shade it was kind of filtering through the redwood tree and other trees and at some point I was just looking out at the garden and it was kind of like an opening above the lawn where life was kind of filtering through and you can see all these wonderful little insects of flies and flying just hovering there. It's not hardly almost still in the air just hovering there and then the dash off for a while and come back in the light and I just sat there and it's felt things felt complete, wonderful, just perfect. I felt no need to be anywhere else or do anything else or be anything else or say anything special to this woman that I was sitting with. Just it was it was there. But what what's interesting and what gave some idea, my idea for giving this talk was the context in which I was feeling a sense of completeness. The day before, I had been at the, at the funeral of the 29 year old son of the woman who I was visiting. So, I stopped by in the morning to see how she was after being in her funeral at the funeral of her son. And, and so that, you know, she was in mourning and grief. And so that gave a certain kind of contrast of nice feeling sense of completeness against her tremendous loss certainly gave a kind of, you know, a very different context,

at least for what is going on here with this feeling of completeness that I was feeling and I was feeling actually quite it wasn't that that was it was ignore ignoring her ignoring you when it happened the funeral the day before the death of her son, it was very present for me that experience The funeral was quite a powerful event. And as those of you maybe have been to funerals, you know, certainly the powerful sense of loss, the grief that can be a sense of absence. And also, occasionally a sense of Greg, various ways, a great sense of fullness that can happen at funerals, maybe a painful kind of fullness. But one fullness was sometimes when different people speak, you get all these different angles of the person who's died and you sent you get a bigger, bigger picture of the person that maybe you had, you've kind of knew yourself, because you saw the person always in one context. You hear all the different contexts of their lives and Wow, I didn't know that person had so much to me, different angles and so much richness in that person sends a fullness of that. Certainly the fullness of the feelings and emotions that can come which can be quite wild. Ranging a funeral about the grief and the sadness, but also the love and remembering back at the joy, the good times, the bad times and all kinds of things.

funerals can add a sense of immediacy to our lived life, the vibrancy of what it is to be alive now the contrast of the loss that's there, versus the fact that we're still alive and what is it to be alive and certainly being there at the funeral at the cemetery, on a sunny Tuesday afternoon and blue skies up in Colma was, you know, it's had a quality of presence of immediacy of just being there. Sometimes it's not so easily tapped into in a busy life. And we often brings up questions like What is it to die? What is death? What is it to live? What is living and dying? What is it to live? I'm quite fond. I've told this before of old photographs. Preferably, once they're at least maybe 100 years old, and of people and there's something about for a long time I just noticed I gravitated towards old photographs I would start with there was someplace to stop and look at them or books, I would kind of go through them and look at them. And, and read, it slowly dawned on me the reason I was attracted these old photographs was that these are people who are long dead. And I would look at their faces and look at their eyes, and sometimes be kind of blurry, you wouldn't see much but sometimes pictures are quite sharp, and you would see their expression was theirs or the kind of expression in the face, some expression of all kinds of things sometimes of hope of joy sometimes have have kind of playfulness, or sometimes have kind of a little bit of arrogance right there you see a little arrogant kind of, you know, some young man kind of arrogant. And you know, he's long dead, you know, what's the arrogance about and, and sometimes sadness and exhaustion, all kinds of expressions in the face. And sometimes the eyes themselves have this kind of vibrancy and a lightness to them and sometimes a dullness. But sometimes almost as if you look at the life of that person who's captured for a moment. And that moment of life for that person is no longer here was 100 years ago or more. And part of the reason that I felt attracted these photographs was not so much the thinking back into the past. But it was, for me a very powerful reminder that for me to be alive and present for this moment of my life, that that was their moment of being conscious that was there a moment to be alive and present for their life they're given everyone who's born is given a certain amount Time are given or has a certain amount of time to be present for their live life or to be conscious to be here. And whether it's 100 years ago or 200 years 1000 years ago, and regardless of what the technology is, or the benefits are the medical

advancements or whatever the wonderful things that we have now, sometimes certain things don't change over time. And the ability to be conscious to be present, to be aware of one's thoughts and feelings are basically the same over the centuries. And that was there a moment where they had the opportunity to do that to live their lives. And this is my moment, to live my life. And so just like in the funeral, sometimes looking at that old funeral, the old photographs brings a kind of vibrancy to being present here and now when the funeral was over, in coma, I never I've never actually been to the cemeteries of coma before. So it was kind of a new experience for me. And you know, they're kind of big, vast areas of just stone after stone after stone, gravestone after grain stove. And so wandering around there looking at the different gravestones. I was standing there, you know, with a funeral with a casket going down into the ground and being covered and looking around and seeing all the other stones that all the other people buried over the years that they've been there coma.

A sense of, you know, each of those stones, gravestones marks one human's life. And there's a certain level of universal commonality in people's lives that are somehow Simpson for me was symbolized in each of those gravestones. Each of those persons who was there at some point was born and was born to a mother and may perhaps, for some of them, a lot of them perhaps there's a lot of joy early times in there, the birth and then a lot of people died obviously and probably there was a level of grief from people who knew them. And that person's life was surrounded by other people who at times felt joy and delight in their presence and sometimes felt a loss and sadness. That person probably had struggles and joys of all kinds. Not all births are happy producing. Not all deaths are sad producing. So a wide range of ways way that you know, and human lives are experienced. My friend Barbara Gates is doing research in her neighborhood and write a book. He's writing a book over in Berkeley, and she was studying history of her house. And she went through the desk tickets of the people who first built and lived in the house that she lives in now. And the first woman to live in the house who lived there for many years. She found her death certificate, and I'm not sure exactly how old she was she when she died, but the medical examiners wrote in the cause of her death, without the cause of her death was exhaustion. That's quite powerful, you know, someone who died 100 years ago. And that was one of the causes of death of 100 years ago.

So all these feelings, all this sense of, you know, vibrancy and poignancy of Tuesday of the funeral and the loss. So it's sitting there with a grieving mother, feeling a kind of completeness, completeness of the moment. But it certainly seems strange since the present in the very present was was also a sad absence of a loved one. never to be seen again. Was it okay for me to feel complete, as if things did not need to be any different Was it ethical, given the context for me to feel that way? Was it okay to feel that way. One more a bit more about the context for sitting in the garden, that sense of completeness. The feeling of completeness was not automatic for me for spontaneous. In fact, it arose only when I had recognized an impulse inside of me to be elsewhere to get on with the important activities of my day. I've been sitting there for some time, and certainly, it seemed like, you know, as I've been there, certainly the appropriate length of time, whatever that is, and so inside of us, okay, let's get on with things, you know, important things to do, right. And so I felt this kind of just contraction inside of me this kind of compulsive drive and upwelling of energy and kind of a little bit of

restlessness that arose a little bit a little bit was certainly there and I recognized it in rows. As much spiritual practice, much of spiritual practice I believe mindless practice is learning to recognize these kinds of impulses, these little contractions little forces of restlessness and compulsion, draw givenness that arises for us. And then learning not to believe it necessarily learning how not to be driven or enslaved controlled by these kind of compulsive drives. And they take many different forms. And you know, the grass is greener somewhere else kind of drive, okay, this is what's happening now is not enough. If I stay here, I'm missing something, have to go somewhere else where I can get something, you know, more important. I was embarrassed. There's a number of years ago, where I realized that when I went to many years ago went to parties. And no matter who I was standing and talking to, I always thought there was someone else I was supposed to be talking to. It was better to be talking to you more interesting to be talking to. And so I would, I could never be kind of settled here. Little restless talking to me, well, it doesn't matter, you know, it's like, and then I go find someone else. And then I think I'm missing something else somewhere else. And it was, you know, kind of horrible thing to notice. But it's kind of horrible imagine is horrible, you know, way of being with someone when you feel like, you know, there's something more interesting somewhere else. You know, I'm missing out on something unless I, you know, do something. The sense of missing out is a very common one for many people.

There's some sometimes people it takes the impulse of if only the idea is that only if only things were a certain way, and then you know, everything would be okay. And so it keeps us from going to compulsion searching and getting and making something to happen different. Our plans were wonderful ability to plan seems like seems like maybe our society is better has produced better planners than any society in history of the world. It seems you know, it's like epidemic, the planning mind, narco And, and then when planning is fine, it can be innocent in itself. But then we feel compelled to act on those plans and follow through on them. And planning is always about something in the future. And so sense of kind of like, we're kind of leaning ahead of ourselves into the future, not able to recognize any sense of completeness or well being or ease in the present moment, because the planning kind of pushes us forward. The planning also can lead to lead to not only inability to be present, but also frustration to the present moment, because the present moment is getting in the way of my plans. And so there's kind of frustration can be quite physical because the energy in the body that kind of is ready to burst forward, go forward. And the Scituate situation keeps us from going forward. And so this, you know, pull push kind of situation arises can be very painful within us. Sometimes, it's an impulse to get away the compulsion. Let's get it From here, I can't stand it here I don't want to be here. This is not comfortable. And is what keeps us really being present and full. So a lot of mindfulness practices learning to recognize these drives what drives us that compels us to compulsions that often pushing us beyond the present situation, the present moment, the live moment as it is right now. So I was sitting in this garden, and this impulse to move on arose. However, I was not only that, I noticed that but I was helped by remembering that what I was going to do, the important thing that I was going to go do was that that day, Wednesday, I had dedicated to doing a self retreat. I was going to go and meditate for the day. I was I had a really important thing to do. I was really important to get to the place. My meditation place so I can really be in the present moment

except the present moment as it was. So I was helped by this realization, because there just seemed absurd What do you know, get away from here so I can really be present in some other place. However, so I recognize the absurdity of sacrificing now for a future now. But I think many of us It takes a sense of real power or authority or something to get her attention enough that it feels okay to really be present for life as it is. And I think some of the grander of religious institutions sometimes is human beings need a lot of convincing and you need some English really powerful authority figure to say it's okay to just be present and notice the skies. So funerals Are you know, that kind of way but Sometimes, but then you go into great cathedrals. And it's so still and quiet and kind of the vibrancy of the present moment can come alive for you. They can feel like it's okay to relax and just be there for that. And, and put us, you know, you enter these big quiet cathedrals or whatever and go up into the high Sierras and you know, and we kind of, okay, it's okay to put everything else behind just be present. We don't get we don't feel like we have the justification for doing it in the normal, ordinary mundane activities of our daily life. So it's kind of like the story of that son, you know, who needed a lot of convincing that before he could be told or love, prepare preparation for he's told that he was the son of his father. So we need a certain level of preparation or context or a certain thing, to realize the preciousness the treasure of the present to the vibrancy of lived life in the moment.

So I was able to let go that impulse there's also the desire inside of me my wish to be present for my greeting friend. And so not only that, I saw the absurdity of my, my impulse so I could let go of it. But also I genuinely want genuinely wanted to be there present for my friend and do what I could to help but that that wish to be present for my friend ease could easily lead to all kinds of other impulses inside of me. That would have kept me in a sense from really kept some sense of completeness or well being in the present moment. I could have been completely preoccupied about saying the right thing you know, what do you say to someone who's grieving the loss of her only only child.

Sometimes the kind of contraction perhaps of taking responsibility from my friends, state of mind well being, oh, I have to say something or do something or You know, whenever and, and that kind of preoccupation and anxiety would have also prevented the sense of well being completeness from being there. So I let go of my impulses and let go of these compulsions. And I felt a completeness that included the sense of loss that was the reason for us being together, the sadness of the time, the weight of that moment, my wish my friends will be and it also included the wish for my friends well being. What was absent was my own contraction, resistance clinging givenness for those moments where I sat there just looking at the garden

when I let go of all the impulses to get away, to fix, to defend, to impress, to avoid To get things to acquire to be someone, then there was a sense of being with things as they are in the sense of peace, a sense of completeness, sense of perfection.

Now it's easy to assign a label or meaning to the sense of peace or well being, as being this experience of being complete. It's kind of the theme of this talk sense of being complete in the

moment. But that's an interpretation. It's an assigning of an understanding to that moment. It feels kind of complete feels kind of feeling nothing else is needed. So we say things are complete.

But to really do it, well, this kind of even the sense of things being complete has to be let go of, you can't carry around this interpretation, this idea that they Complete. It's not the idea of completion, which is important. What's important is the letting go, that happened. It's not so much about arriving in some ideal state or some appropriate way of being some wonderful spiritual state of being whatever in the moment. The point is to let go, let go of all things that pulls us away all the drivenness and anxiety and fears. The point is to let go. And what is it that's left? When we are not driven by compulsion, by desire by fear and aversion? What is it that's left when we are brave enough to let go of our illusions when we let go of all the ideas have what we need we brave enough to let go of all the ideas of what we need, what needs to happen. All the ideas of who we are or who we need to be brave enough to let go of all the ideas of who we are based on our memory of what happened to us in the past.

brave enough to let go of all the worrying about others, or worrying about what others will think about us. That takes a lot of bravery. Talk about courage like what other people we think other people are thinking about us. Let go of all the conclusions we've made about life. There's a lot of very subtle attitudes about life that we carry with us, that are kind of like little compulsions, little givenness little ideas that are in the background, kind of like an operating system in their mind that we've come somehow acquired over a lifetime of experience. One particular powerful experience that somehow formed us that the world is not safe people are not safe, I have to protect myself or the world is this is a world where everyone has to fight for themselves and you know, all kinds of attitudes about all kinds of things we carry with us kind of operating attitudes, which really gets in the way of any possibility of deep peace and deep sense of completeness, because they never, never let us rest.

So what happens when we simply let go, it isn't so much that we need to have a sense of completeness. And in fact, maybe completeness is not a very good word for the experience I had in the garden because it was obvious it wasn't complete. So there was a powerful sense of absence or there was you know, within things didn't have to be any different or, or to say a little bit more appropriately. More accurately in that moment of well being and well being is the right word because I was certainly feeling sad that part of it kind of heavy in the moment so it's almost better not to characterize what is left when we let go have some idea of who was supposed to be what is supposed to look like how we're supposed to be feeling so we can measure our experience Oh, that's it. I finally got it. I think some certain certain there was a certain groups and spiritual groups in America. But it was all about getting it right getting it. I got it. Buddhism, you know, I get the enlightenment. This is enlightenment. There's we're chasing after Is this what it was? This is it finally got it. I think the idea I think it's not so useful to look at it and look for the solution the answer to look for a state but rather to be in a constant state of willing to discover, what is it, what's left, when you let go of all the compulsions, and all the needs to be different, all the drives and anxieties. So the in Buddha spirituality that point is not an IT. The point is letting go, letting go and then letting what's left, bubble

up and be what it is. What is left? It would be easy to say, love, peace, in ability to respond to life out of our native innate intelligence as opposed to our anxious intelligence, but decode those things are called love and peace. Maybe it's dangerous because it can make it into another it would rather in mindfulness practice, we try to be brave enough and mindful enough even in the most mundane activities of our life, to notice our compulsions and to let go, let go and let go and then letting go to appreciate the very vibrancy of our lived life at this very moment, complete, perfect as it is.

So, that was my thoughts so,

Maybe it's complete enough. Yes, please.

The yes, sometimes rituals can be very helpful because of I mean to be to because it's this, you know, sometimes our letting our clinging or holding on is happening at almost subconscious levels within us in our psyche. And so even though you might understand very well principles of letting go and how to let go of certain things, the psyche doesn't parts of the psyche doesn't necessarily know how to do it. And so the language of the psyche sometimes is ritual. And so sometimes occasionally, I meet someone were really rituals. Which call is called for, because you reach into that part of the psyche, which is quiet. And then it's really a matter of kind of figuring out what's appropriate for each person. There's a becoming a monastic, a monk or a nun is a ritual letting go in shaving your head and, you know, living a renunciant life is a powerful ritual. And for some people, that's what it takes to stick that through that kind of archetypical act of renouncing the world becoming monastic that there are there are smaller, there's all kinds of smaller things to do. The Buddha's funeral ceremonies often has a very important element of letting go as part of it. Part of the preparation of helping someone die is is a preparation, helping people to let go or helping the loved ones who are remaining, learning how they can let go. Sometimes you get the sense of someone hanging on there to their life, because what they need to hear is that the loved ones who are left there's okay with them. They die and into the into the cave, you know, it's okay. So, or funeral sometimes there's kind of an expression of in Buddhist funerals occasionally a sense, you know, you know, we're letting you go now. So that helps the psyche and maybe the person who died. There are the some for some Buddhists there's daily rituals of having an altar and, and making offerings to the altar and making offerings and bowing to an altar is for some people acts of letting go to actually have to put your hands together and Lower your head and bow all the way down to the floor. Some people you have to let go of a lot, psychically kind of almost unconsciously. pride, arrogance, all kinds of things and send in that Act of, of kind of humility of bowing down. And to do that on a regular basis is quite powerful for both the heart and the psyche inside and, and

in other powerful practice of letting go the Buddhist tradition have his confession. The person that Buddhism doesn't talk about that a lot, but much of Buddhism has, is a confession as part of the scene. And confession is sometimes necessary to confess or to acknowledge or to, to stay truthfully what's happened in order to be able to let go of something about what's happened. And so confession

is, you know, maybe the word confession, maybe it has kind of too much of a Catholic flavor for us to feel comfortable with it for some of us, but, but I don't know exactly what the Buddhist word is, but sometimes translated into English as confession. Okay, so may each of you appreciate each vibrant moment of life. While you have it, rather than someone hundred years looking at your photograph and wondering, was that person present for their moments? May you all appreciate the life you have. Thank you