

2001-08-02: Working with Fear

Tue, 6/16 8:12PM • 51:06

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fear, people, worry, afraid, worrying, breathe, meditating, meditation, mind, feel, thought, retreat, body sensations, life, happen, anxiety, parent, worried, learning, bit

SPEAKERS

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Good evening, everyone. And I was nice to come and sit here with you all.

A little bit unsure of myself as I sit up here because I could just venture forth and talk about the topic I thought of addressing today, which is fear. I think I talked about fear earlier this summer, but it's still around so and, or we can just do questions. So you only hear just hear my words here. so afraid of that.

So

did I talk about it a few weeks ago, Monday, early in the summer here on Thursday. So What can I say this different

fear is very interesting, of course in something that is very pervasive in our culture and among many of us here in this room, it said that in our society, something like a quarter to half of the population are have serious difficulty with fear, worry, worry or anxiety. And as we know, there's many people who get medicated because of their anxiety level, either medically medicated or

alcoholic Li. All kinds of ways in which people try to reduce their anxiety and their fear apprehension. It's interesting that the Buddhist psychology ancient what's called Buddhist psychology is an ancient system of the mind study of the mind and different aspects of the mind. And they divide up the mental activity of your mind into a certain number of mental factors that can operate at different times. In one system, there's 52, mental factors that can operate, and they operate in different combinations and some are always there, some are there some of the time. And there are things like the ability to pay attention, the concentrate, to have intention to will something to have wish. It can include things like to be angry, to be desirous, to be generous, to be compassionate to be loving. There's a wide range to

be peaceful, to be agitated. There's a wide range of 62 factors, and is supposed to be kind of definitive it's supposed to be included all possible states of mind And fear is not one of them. That's interesting. The other thing that's interesting is that when the Buddha defined the three routes, three economies, he called the three root poisons the three root causes for why people suffer, what poisons us in our suffering. He finally was greed, hate and delusion. Again, he left out fear. Now, maybe there wasn't, the Buddha wasn't a fear type. And he didn't think about it much. But for the first thing about why these 52 factors in mind, exclude fear is usually said it's because fear is a subset of a version of pushing things away. And or hostility. hostility and aversion are one of these mental factors and two fears that want something to push it away or retreat from something, you don't want it there's kind of some kind of aversion to it, whether it's advancing aversion or retreating. version, some kind of version. So it's usually considered a subset of a version. And it's helps sometimes to see it that way. Because then sometimes it loses a little bit of its kind of seductive power, if you just you know, it's it's a form of aversion. As for the why it's not one of the root causes of suffering like greed, hate and delusion is the bottom line and not fear. I don't know why the Buddha did that, that actually, it could be that he was wrong. You know, fear is pretty fundamental. It's pretty, you know, sometimes it seems like you know, it's the absolute kind of route of some people's, you know, core existential concerns, their anxiety. I don't know who's right. I don't know how we actually decide on that. But we certainly can recognize fear as being in all its manifestations apprehension, anxiety, worry, trepidation, as being sometimes At the root of many of the ways in which we behave and how we behave in our lives, and for some people, it lays at the root of almost every every behavior and even the thought every thought that they have, is maybe not obvious in people's daily life, how pervasive their fear is. But some people will go on retreats. And the advantage of being in silent retreats and meditating all day, is you really get to see how your what goes on in your mind. You're not distracted from it. And so you know, you don't turn on the television, you don't go to call the friend and talk, you don't do errands or you don't, you know, all these ways in which we kind of distract ourselves. We don't really, we don't really in touch with each other moment by moment, over a course of 24 hours or seven days or however long it is. But if you really tried to do that, you know the underlying patterns, the prevailing attitudes of the mind that are operating sometimes show themselves with great clarity. And some people will come sometimes during interviews on retreats, and reports how surprised they are to discover how absolutely perfect Fear is in their life, they have no idea that it influenced seemingly every thought they have, and every behavior everywhere they every behavior.

When I was early meditation students, I was quite surprised by this. And fear and guilt were kind of very strong operating factors in my behavior in my mind. And I would be afraid of such simple things, seemingly ridiculous things as if other people around for example, how I opened the door. You know, I think there's a right way we'll think of doing the wrong way I didn't want to blow it. Or what how to walk through across a meditation hall floor for the people meditating in the hall. It wasn't simply I was being cautious not to disturb them. I was afraid that I was gonna be caught walking away. It was really surprised to see you know how then I felt guilty because I'm sure that I had done it the wrong way. And I was really surprised how pervasive fear was and was one of the biggest Wake up calls about the power of fear in my life was when I was in college, I think I was probably a freshman in college. And I

had English composition class, which we were all required to take. And so I had to compose, which was more or less okay to do right these last days. But once in the quarter, we everybody, every student in the class had to go and visit the professor in his office. And this was terrifying for me, it actually kind of had to be sitting in front of the professor and say something and report or something. And so I went in and I was pretty scared. But I don't know exactly the technical word or what happened with with something like this association. I remember sitting there in his office, and he was looking at me, and I thought it was very bizarre, because I, you know, I was kind of, I guess I was calm. I just wasn't there. And I was very bizarre that he was looking in my direction. Because all there was there was the wall. I just didn't think I felt like I just wasn't there I was in disappeared. And that was you know, and suddenly I found myself out in the hallway walking away. I hadn't, you know, I was so afraid that I disassociated or we just kind of disconnected I was just I had no idea how the conversation went. If I held up my own end of the conversation, I just know at some point I was walking walking down the hall. I passed the class but so maybe I didn't do that bad. But this conversation, maybe he said he understood how terrified I was. But that was a real surprise to see that fear could have such a hold over me and visiting someone like an authority figure like a professor, for me as a teen. So fear is quite pervasive and it seemingly is a good some people's lives. There are many kinds of fear and in the Buddhist tradition They have two very general divisions for fear. There is the fear which is healthy and the fear which is unhealthy, which I guess we can make that easily enough for ourselves. But what's a little bit different than the, in the Buddhist analysis among the healthy kind of fears is, is a certain fear for harming oneself in in context of doing unwholesome actions. So, it's still fear of harm, fear of being hurt, like if you're standing on the edge of a 900, square foot 900 foot cliff, and you're looking straight down with your you know, your toes, also your feet over the edge, you better be concerned, things normal to have a little bit a little bit apprehension, little with, you know, wondering, is a smart thing to do. And so you fear of hurting yourself and falling the fear of harming oneself through one's unethical activity. Being unethical is considered a very Healthy fear in Buddhism is a sign of self respect and healthy self regard to be have enough respect for yourself that you feel like you're damaging yourself. If you actively lie or steal or harm anybody else is it is considered a very healthy kind of fear. I was very surprised by this when I first was practicing in Thailand, my first meditation teacher. I've been meditating with him for a few months. And then he, he took me for a trip into the countryside. One day, I was driving with him and suddenly we were in a situation was a little more social than it had been during the Silent Retreat. So I asked him a little bit about himself and I asked him, I knew that he'd become a monk or nun, novice monk when he was a young teenager, being a monk all his life. And I asked him what motivated him to become a monk. And he said, it came through a translator into English because he didn't speak English. And the translator use these archaic Victorian translations of two English Buddhist words. You said the translator said,

and I forget exactly how it said but the moral dread and what kind of what's the word for sure it's additive for the shame that we use for the hearing tapa, you must know, some kind of shame, more moral dread and some kind of shame. And I was so surprised. That's, you know, a famous, wonderful, lovely enlightened Buddhist teacher would be motivated by moral dread and shame to enter into his meditation practice. It turns out that the English was a little bit off. What it was referring to was that he

was very concerned about causing this kind of self harm. He had enough self respect for himself, that he really wanted to be careful with his activities in his mind, that he didn't transgress and harm himself through a whole bunch of NFL kinds of activities. One way you harm yourself is by harming other people, you're actively intentionally harm others. It's also a way of harming oneself. So I don't know if it was just himself he didn't want to harm but he didn't want to harm he didn't want to be involved in that kind of activity. And that in Buddhism is understood as being a kind of a fear, a healthy form of fear, the fear of wrongdoing. There's also this unhealthy kind of fear. And we this is what most people are most familiar with. Worry, for example, is usually considered unhealthy worry usually has nothing to do with any imminent danger. It usually has to do with some thought preoccupation, worries, usually something intellectual, some thoughts and idea what's going to happen, what's going to happen in the future. You don't know what's gonna happen the future. So the future is only an imagination. And so the imagination is fueling the worry, what's going to happen, what's gonna happen, what's gonna happen. We're seldom worried about what's happening in the present moment. If it's happening. It's maybe You're afraid then more dramatically but but you're not worried that it's going to happen. We have many people who are chronic worriers it starts sometimes very early in life. And it has a big toll because worry any kind of fear chronically or on a regular basis is tiring for the system, the muscles a little bit tense and tight, the mind is exhausted. And as we know it mind which is exhausted has that kind of stress of constantly worrying is then more success, more success acceptable to further worry further fear further stress and become a self fulfilling kind of self cycling process, which some people will spiral downwards, to utter exhaustion by the end of the day or by into their life or whatever. If it builds up enough and becomes chronic in the muscles, and in the kind of psyche. Some people don't have to have anything, anything to worry about to worry. Sometimes feeling in their body that something is often Something is wrong, and they'll look for something and to fill in the blank. What is it I can worry about? But it's really just kind of sometimes just a habit formation that we've gotten so accustomed to, that the body somehow feels off and you know, gives us those signals. And then if it gets, you know, quite pervasive and builds up, then it can become a panic attack, which just kind of spirals and becomes worse and worse. For people who learn to watch the panic attacks, which is a classic, it's wonderful, the some of the classic anecdotes, and any antidotes for panic attacks, is sounds very much like meditation instruction. It's watch it, watch it, and maybe breathe a little more deeply or exhale more fully. But stop, stop whatever you're doing, stop worrying about it, stop being reacting to something afraid of it, and just watch it, which is basically the instructions for meditation but anything goes on just just kind of instant stuff and just watch what's happening. Be there within that kind of in the kind of observer mode, which is very powerful thing to do.

In that worry is sometimes intellectual or uses the imagination or thoughts or ideas. One of the ways to use mindfulness practice is to start learning to pay attention to some of the patterns in our thinking that relates to our worrying. Is there common themes to what you worry about or how you worry what triggers it? And if you don't see the common patterns, then each time it arises a particular instance of a pattern might be just as strong as any other time. But do you see it as a regular pattern, then sometimes it loses its power of use. Oh, there it is, again, my old friend my own, you know, it's kind of it's not nice. It's quite luck. It's a little bit more difficult for a worry or fear to be convincing. If you've

recognized this now happened 499 times today, you know, but if you don't know if you're trying Use that way. I know Jack Kornfield sometimes instructs his students to count how many times in the course of a day, they have a judgment, judgmental thought or a worrying thought. And part of the reason he does it is so that when they get to 499 finally they kind of like relax or smile or giggle or give up or, or hopefully don't despair. But part of the value of mindfulness is look, and then if you can see what the patterns and themes are, what it is, you're thinking about, then to ask the question, is it true? Is it really true? Or the supposition that this what you're supposing was the basis of the fear? Is it to what degree is it? Is it just your imagination you're, you're guessing at what might happen in the future. One of the ways that the one of the small ways I started to overcome some of my worries and fear was Through a lot of experience, painful experience, learning, recognizing how many times my worry about what was going to happen, my fear about how terrible is going to be euro, whatever, how many times the what I imagined the future was going to be like, was far removed my imagination. Simply I spend days worrying about meeting was canceled. You know, you know, two days of worrying about a meeting is cancelled. That was a waste of good at worrying. Why bother with that? And, you know, if you hear this, if you're just want this idea one time, it seems kind of silly to talk this way. But I saw it over and over and over again over and over and over again. How many times I was worrying about something that didn't turn out to be the case. And, and through this kind of hard, learned lesson, I started to relax the grip of these words. And as far as well, you know, I don't really know what's gonna happen, it could well be that it doesn't work out that doesn't end up that way, tomorrow, you know, to next day whenever. So who knows, you know, whatever. So I'll just take much, you know, just show up and see what happens here. I'll prepare and do what I need to do, but it's just a guess what's gonna happen and it's in so often, it's turned out different than we expected. I will just go along. I also also learned how many times what did happen I couldn't have planned for. That happened a lot too. So I still plan from time to time and I still, you know, you know, concerned about the future, but I'm much less inclined to worry now about it. Because I've learned this through this bitter along experience. So one of the sad bad news about the wisdom is there's certain level of wisdom which many people want arises only through experience. And that means that it only comes from making a lot of mistakes. You do the same thing over and over and over, over, over and over and over and over and over again. You finally kind of something sometimes penetrates the skull of ours we learn. I call this the wisdom of familiarity. Some wisdom only comes with familiarity. And you have to become really familiar with something to be free of it. So some people will do this intentionally with fear. They'll put themselves in situation where they're going to be fearful. And in traditionally, monastics in Buddhism in Southeast Asia and India, would seek out places that were fearful they seek out jungle jungles with tigers and snakes and elephants and whatever. And often they take out cemeteries, and they would sit in the cemetery and try to deal with that.

Maybe I mentioned this a few weeks ago, but I heard recently, someone had asked the Buddhist teacher about whether Americans should do this. Seek out you know, should they go to, you know, the inner city someplace, you know, where the crime rate is really high, you're guaranteed to be mugged if you walk around at midnight, you know, and go there and meditate there in the street corner. You know, they said we don't have Tigers around so much anymore. So we have to find some, some some

substitute to that. And the teacher said, No, Americans don't need to do that. They're already anxious. They do have to sit down where they are. And they'll confront fear. They don't have to go out of their out of their way to find it. Because it's so pervasive in our culture. But still, it can be useful for some people to go seek out things they're afraid of, and experiment and kind of go up against the edge. If you're afraid of encountering strangers for example, good or use certain kinds of conversations with other people. Go and find some. You know, some someone far away from where you live. Go, you know, go to a shopping trip, go to Safeway over in Fremont and try to have a conversation with someone else in the checkout line or the check, cashier, the cashier, someone you'll never see again, and experiment with what it's like to kind of push the edge of your fear around conversation with you and other people. If it's that kind of fears really dramatic. Sometimes it's very healthy to kind of begin pushing the envelope pushing the limits of where we're just doesn't mean dramatically, just find little places. And begin exploring that and seeing how we come to terms with it. So occasionally, it's helpful to really face a really big fear and go right up into the middle of it and if it seemed relatively safe, I remember there was one woman on retreat. I'm going on retreat tomorrow, advise your Pawnee to retreat center in the deep in the mountains of Boulder, Boulder Creek. And some years ago, a woman came there, and a lot of people in that retreat stay intense. And they tent out in the woods. And she decided to go on her own to go far away from everybody else far kind of over the ridge and down out of the way and someplace really isolated. intent there by herself. And she didn't tell me she was doing this, you started coming to interviews, and talking about how terrified she was at night. And how she stayed up all night. And every, every leaf, you know, it's kind of crunching outside. It's probably a deer, you know, or, you know, little mouse or a butterfly who knows what it was. But, you know, it would be amplified for her. And she was petrified. She, every day, she came into interviews and she was more tired. And I'd asked, you know, why don't you just, you know, move from there and come closer, you feel safer? And she said, Oh, no, no, then I wouldn't be facing my fear of the dark. And I thought it was really great that she took that opportunity to do that it was a safe place to do it. And,

and

later, she reported that she was really grateful made a big difference for her. So that's an example someone kind of pushes, you know, quite far into intentionally going to where the fear is. But I think it's It's very serious. If we don't have to go looking forwards, we have to create the conditions for it. The conditions appear all the time anyway. One of the simple things to do on fear, if you can, is to sit down and meditate when you have it. Or if he's meditating, you have fear already to sit, work with it sit with a man with a fear. And one of the things to do with fear with meditation is not to confront it directly. But to try to establish, make yourself calm in the midst of it. So in one of the classic way, just to breathe, to breathe mindfully, consciously is very helpful. The more fully your mind can be engaged with the breath, the less of the mind is available to engage with the fear. There's a wonderful article in The Chronicle this week, somebody read it about doing two things at once. It said that if you do two things at once, it isn't that you have twice as much capacity to deal with it. You have X amount of capacity and that X amount capacity of the mind is divided in between the two tasks so you're less efficient with each one And so if the mind is more fully engaged with the breath, less of the minds available for the

fear and the fear sometimes loses some of its power, but also just being with a fear and letting go the exhalation is very soothing, very calming, and can often kind of commerce out of the fear in Southeast Asia to some of these monastics who go out into the city in cemeteries or sit with the Tigers. That's often what they do they commit themselves to developing a very strong concentration and calm on their breath. Or on a mantra sometimes they use when they're confronted with what they're most afraid of. And the only the ones who report about it afterwards have great success. The ones that are eaten by Tigers don't come back to tell us However, there is no reports of any monk or nun in Thailand, everything by tiger, a lot of them confront Tigers but there's no I never really store any any stories of them, no bones found so calming oneself is very helpful. It's possible to be a calm addict to think that the only purpose of meditation is to become calm, somehow override our difficulties override our anxiety and fear to just get calm. Every time some anxiety comes up, we rush to the calm. It's not ultimately it's not a very helpful strategy, because it doesn't help us understand well, the anxiety and fear and how it works within us. So it's necessary sometimes to it's helpful to get a little bit Calm, calm enough, so you don't feel like you're in the grip of the fear. But now you don't have to get rid of the fear. At some point you want to turn the attention around and look directly at the fear itself. And that's one of the things you can do in doing that. is by looking at it, look at it in the face, see it for what it is and in doing that not be fooled by the fear not before. By the thoughts or the anxiety or the body sensations that might be there. It's kind of by being the clear observer of the fear, you step outside of the domain of the fear. Some, some therapists talk a lot about the very great importance of this identifies with your fear, doesn't mean disowning it like a gorilla, you know, saying to belong to someone else, it means you no longer you use the fear as a way of defining who you are, as definition of this is really more or claiming that this is mine as as a way of taking responsibility for some sense of, you know, this defines who I am. I don't know if that was said clearly or not, but hopefully it was no longer identifying with a fear, no longer seeing it as my fear, which is stuff fear. That's very helpful because then we're not so enmeshed with it. And it's easier to be the observer who's kind of unmoved around unentangled or I'm afraid or I'm judging Mental around worried about the fear that might be there. So turn around, look at the fear and really understand what it is.

One of the ways to do that is to feel the fear in the body. And it's great to be breathing, to feel the fear in your body and continue the breathing. You might feel for example, in your body, the fears perhaps maybe kind of butterflies in your stomach or tightening in your stomach or clenching in your stomach or, or worse, or someplace else in your body that you might be tight or holding or something or you might feel a kind of place a kind of very tenuous vulnerability. Painful vulnerability someplace in your body. And, and then to feel that place Don't go away from it, even though it's very uncomfortable. You want to hang in there with it. But hang in there with the discomfort and then breathe through it. Like the breath is a massage, or good breath. It's like a like a like an anchor that allows you to kind of wof through it. Without being caught by it, just breathe with it and breathe it in breathe with it. And that's one of the ways in which we can learn how to identify so strongly with what's happening within us breathing through it or with it or whatever. Writing the breath, instead of being sucked back into this body sensations that might be there or reacting to them. So breathing with a fear of breathing into the fear, breathing around the fear, holding the fear and the breath in within the body is very helpful. It's

also helpful to just kind of be very forget about the breath sometimes. And just be very exact, in particular, we're exactly in the body is the fear that you're having. Fear is strong enough will always have a location in the body. And if you can really anchor your attention in the bodily place, the strongest place in the body where the fear is, one of the things you do is you're disengaging yourself from the content that the ideas of what you're afraid about. And since 95% of the time or more, the ideas are With the irrelevant to what's happening the present moment, it's a fine thing to do. It's very helpful to do that to just forget about the ideas and just go and, you know, focus very carefully on the sensations. And by focusing on the sensations is marvelous thing will sometimes happen. Maybe focusing is the wrong word, because focusing has the implication of a narrowing of attention. But if you can hold the sensation in your body kind of hold the sensation, the sensations in your awareness, awareness, kind of like, it's kind of like awareness makes room for things. When we're worried, uptight and constricted around something, there's no room for things to move. It's like if you have, you know, if you want to give a big yawn or stretch, and you're in a crowded elevator, you know, there's no room to do that. You feel kind of like, you know, frustrated, inhibited or whatever. But if no one's in the elevator with you, it's a big elevator, then, you know, no problem too big of a big stretch and beyond whatever, and you can kind of unwind the inner life is that way Also if it's constricted by a very crowded mind, with crowded emotions and feelings and, and reactions and preoccupation and what's going on, there's no room for things to move, which is kind of a paradox because often we want things to move in to go away, but you're almost getting their own way by being so caught up by it. But if we just hold something in awareness, very gently, very lovingly friendly, not trying to force it away, not being aggressive or aversive to it just holding it in a gentle full way in awareness. It's like the awareness itself begins to make room for that experience. And as it has room, the body sensations can begin to do what they need to do, and tightening will begin to unwind will begin to loosen up and a lot of body sensations that involves attention or tightening or constriction will begin to unravel. If we can very gently lovingly use hold and lovingly hold them in awareness. So the first thing is to breed with them. The second one is to to focus on them or hold them in awareness very consciously and fully. The other thing that can be done is to look at the beliefs around her, our fears and our worries. You might be, you might recognize what you worry about, you might worry about what people are going to think about you. Or you might worry about what you're going to say worry about becoming late. You might have something as if you're chronically worried about, but you've never really studied why you believe you need to worry about this. Why do you believe it matters that, that people think about you in a particular way? Why does it matter when you go into a situation where no one you know?

You have never met these people before in your life and you never meet them again? Why should I be concerned about what they think about you? When I was young? In my teenage years, and early 20s I used to be extremely worried about anybody would think about me whether I knew I was going to see them ever again or not. I'd be worried About go into, you know to buy, go into some grocery store I never go never been to before and ever go into again. Maybe some I'll be traveling abroad some country I never go back to again and I'd be worried about something as silly as what they thought about the product I was buying. You know, I think, you know, I can't buy this because the cashiers gonna see just kind of like, you know you're going condoms right and you go you know sometimes

that's, you know where some people you know they go to the cashier and they're flipping if you don't usually throw your hands up in the air and, you know, how much are these you know, how much of the condom actually happened when I was used our discretion, discretion that's maybe the wrong word I wanted that discretion,

digression.

I, when I was 17 I was living for what Italy and didn't speak I spoke Italian pretty well but I my vocabulary wasn't complete so I went into a friend with a friend of mine into the pharmacy to try to buy some condoms, but we didn't know the word Italian for condoms. So we were we were trying to explain you know, what a concomitant valiant our best Italian try to explain and the pharmacist must have you know understood but I guess he was probably just thought was so funny and he just let us on and on we tried harder and harder. And finally someone from across the pharmacy yelled out, Oh, I know what they want they want so anyway, so the kind of feeling you might have you go and buy condoms with you know, Safeway and you're, you know, you know, I felt but everything I bought, I bought bread or cereal or milk, whatever he was gonna and it's absolutely absurd. You know? What Why does it matter why someone cares what I think about what they think about me? To look at that question very seriously and very honestly, and begin to massage that question, think about it. There's that very act of questioning the questioning the belief that's behind that can begin to take some of its power away from us and make it easier, a little bit easier, slowly, bit by bit. I think there's no magic formula, or very seldom a magic formula, magic insight that's going to solve a lot of things quickly. A lot of wisdom and freedom comes unfortunately, from familiarity, the small steps that we take and learning how it's going on, but being familiar with the beliefs, asking yourself, what do I believe when I worry about this? What's the fundamental belief that I'm operating on? A lot of people don't question that. And that's one way very useful thing to do around fear. And then related to that is just the thoughts means more. You know, many people worry without even knowing what they worry about. So I can say a lot more fear is a wonderful topic to announce your turn. I've talked for a long time. And do you have any questions or your comments or your testimonials around fear you're describing? Yes.

When I was in a situation where I might get criticized, and I don't react,

so I worry about that. And

I need to investigate why fear was.

Hi. So I did that. And one of the things that led to

was saying, sort of commitment to trying to just be myself and just be present.

And that led to some really good things. All these things are good, like some interviews that I had for a job that was very relaxed and actually

but sort of the most interesting one was were in a personal situation. I had been trying to please somebody. And I had been worrying and strategizing on how to make that work. When when they would criticize me ever react the way they would want me to. And I changed that behavior. And I was right that about what the person wants. And it's, we've sort of moved apart

but sort of the story is that it's a good thing because being myself is better for me. And it will lead to me to be around people who enjoy that person.

I guess the other thing that occurred to me is,

so I have this hang up about wanting to please everybody.

If, if you make this commitment to being yourself, and it doesn't work, it is actually likely you'll lose that person because that's yourself. You can't change change very easily who yourself is. If you have this other vision.

I'm gonna strategize and try something. Well, if it doesn't work, you can just come back next time and be another, you know, imaginary person and another one. And so as long as you're hooked to the goal is to keep everybody pleased by you. It's really enticing, but in the end

and what's it what's interesting is that the people who do That who are constantly adjusting themselves to please other people and other people who really don't know who they are. They're also getting just a facade to the game. But what if what I find interesting is that those people also tend to lose touch with themselves. And it becomes a very lonely life. And the relationships tend to be kind of shallow then and, and I'm often fragile. Thank you. Yes, please.

Here is this tender feeling of heart ache, that you

afraid of the certainty of impermanence.

Do you meditate? I mean, like a parent, you always give pride. Well, what happened to the kids? Yeah. So how

I don't have I don't think I I'll say something I don't feel like I understand that. I understand your question. I don't know if I understand the answer. But since you especially, especially since you brought up the issue of parental feelings, since I'm a relatively new parents myself, but what I've come to understand or believe or guess or assume or suppose or imagined is that certain kinds of fear

seems to be kind of biological hardwired into us. And the fear of a concern that parent has about a child, I think is like is I take it to be kind of a very natural thing, kind of part of part of just being a parent. I mean, I could overdo it with my child and my son. I can have neurotic concerns and worries about it. And, you know, oh my god, he's never To get into Harvard, I've had that thought before. But, you know, if I can imagine, you know, worried about, you know, silly things is that but, but I think that I suspect that part of you know, evolution kind of makeup is for parents is to, is to be tuned in to take care of their kids and keep the kids out of danger. And so to the kind of, kind of, I feel in myself now that I have the sun, a certain kind of tautness, or vulnerability or tenderness in kind of around my solar plexus area in relationship to him, they never had before in my life, and I just take it to be appropriate, normal thing and I think of as a problem, they're just not exactly comfortable. But who said that life's supposed to be comfortable all the time? Just it's, you know, seems like it's normal. And, you know, I don't think I have a problem. I don't think I'm neurotic around it. If I was thinking about Harvard all the time, I would think I was neurotic. But I had the first inkling of this when he was just beginning to walk, and how it might be just a natural thing of being a parent. When

I

was walking with Him in downtown Palo Alto, and rent rent some people I know. And we were talking, and I had my back to the street. And, and suddenly I became aware that he was next to me. And, and without moving, there was no thought at all involved, as far as I could tell it all. I just knew where the street was. And so I just pivoted around, you know, and, you know, as quickly as I possibly could to make sure that he was not in the street. And because that's where the danger lies. And somehow, you know, in the gut that kind of, you know, I was tuned into him and that level of taking care of him. So I think parents have To put up with a certain level of discomfort, how strong that discomfort is, how strong the fear is, probably has a lot to do with other factors besides the gut, biological instinct. And I think that what if my theory is accurate, that there is this kind of gut kind of biological instinct for parents, then I think that it's, it's it is uncomfortable. It's a magnet for all kinds of other attitudes and assumptions and beliefs we have about discomfort and fear. So if we're afraid of fear, or we think that's a proof that we're not, you know, that something's fundamentally flawed about us if we have it or prove the neurotic or if we're really from California, and you have to breathe deeply, and you have to be relaxed, then, you know, let it all hang out, and we would never have any, any uncomfortable feelings at all. Whatever you know, so it's all assumptions and beliefs and reactions to that. And one of one of the functions of mindfulness is not to is to clarify all the extra reactive ways in which we respond to what's going on. So if there's any extra attitudes that are needed in relationship to this vulnerability that a parent might feel functional mindfulness to clarify that and make that vulnerability simpler and less complicated. So that was a very long answer to a simple question is well enough to answer answer well enough. Please.

I want to talk about something for a second, that's beyond fear. And that's tear. And I think when we are sort of programmed to live a life a certain way, and then we're faced with a breastplate turning

away from that, that the terror of that degree of change can be in localizing and so it's hard for me to imagine

How we breathe, and how we observe and how we get quiet, when we're completely overwhelmed?

Great question. It's very helpful. If a person builds a foundation of a regular meditation practice regular mindfulness practice in normal times, so that a certain inner strength is developed, so that in times of crisis, we can call upon that inner strength. So that's, you know, so sometimes people don't have that opportunity. But if they, if you have moments of where you're not terrorized, build your credit during that time, and then bring it with you into the terror. The other thing is, is to look for help and not to feel like you have to do it alone. And help can be create a safe environment where it's safe. To, to go into that tier to make that kind of change. It can be having a therapist or friend or whatever, who, you know, hold your hand perhaps even that dramatically or you talk to regularly is available by phone or something. So you know, you have to you have severe a net that can catch you if it gets too much. retreats for some people are very good places, very safe places, because you're in 10 day retreat, nothing's gonna happen to you. With a 10 day retreat. It's one of the safest places in the world, nothing. Occasionally something happens but it's one of the safest places in the world. And it's a safe place to let all our normal conventional ways of living in the world fall away. Because you could become a completely unconventional person. No one's gonna notice on the retreat, even if they noticed, you know, everyone else is becoming unconventional also. You know, it's okay. You get a lot of support for that exploration and what some occasionally With great tear, it's helpful to actually go through it through it here means let it take you over. Occasionally that's the right call. And retreats are a good place to let something like here really kind of take over really see see it through, see what happens if you just give yourself over to it just a band, let it Let it be abandon yourself to it, you know and see what happens and go to the other side.

There's many reasons which hair like you're talking about doing some kind of radical change comes on. But getting support from others and knowing other people have gone through it in their community for you is helpful. The other thing is, is a little bit reflection perhaps on the fact that we have many different kinds of self In a sense, one of the kinds of selves we have is the relational self is a self that we form in relationship to other people. And this is really common most people idea of their self is the relational self, we, how other people see me and how other people react to me and how other people, you know, how I speak to them and the response I get, and it's going to be build a repertoire of feedback from our family and society and friends through a lifetime. That helped create an image of who we are. The world helps us with that image making. And, and so it's a relational self is defined in relationship to people. There's another kind of self and that's a self which is completely independent of any relationship to any other human being on the planet, or any other any being outside of ourselves. And it's possible to be completely at peace filled with peace and joy without any reference to relational self, to some people might call the essential self or the, the non self self or. And it's terror terrifying for some people to let go of their relational self. absolutely terrifying. And anybody who's going to do a

meditation practice, in a deep way, sooner or later, to some degree, whether it's terror or just mild apprehension, we'll probably go through an experience like this because we have one of the important movements in Buddhist spirituality is learning to shift our primary identity away from the relational self to a more kind of existential self. And then you no longer if who you how you define yourself no longer dependent on the world around you. You're going to be a lot happier. That makes sense.

Just a second that

I got this friend that's got this land and I go camping is five hours from here and another hour of dirt road and it's way back in there. Like wherever you're in some years I stay alone. They all left and I had another day off. But since getting low and I started to have all these fears, and we notice a bear up there saw it once it ran away. And there's paramilitary guys with guns and we're back. And you know, it's started getting late, I just decided to just pack up and leave and stay in some fleabag motel when people play TVs where they could have stayed in the woods and this happened a couple of times. That was before I was meditating. And now after nearly two years of meditation, I've been back up there and stay alone twice. In fact, stay alone for several nights and all day long. So this is my retreat. I'll just spend all day Observing my thoughts, and did some exercises like. And I realized that those times I left, I wasn't afraid of the bears or anything. I was just afraid of being alone. Because I didn't want to do I thought, should I be here? Should I maybe be home doing something? I think really, I was alone. And I was freaked out about it. And now I'm able to go there and just observe the feelings and, and, and it was really, really nice. And I absolutely attributed to the meditation, being able to stand back from the fear a little bit sale. I'll see people in a couple days, they'll be there, you know. And so it was just a great, great experience to really watch it after the previous times when I couldn't do it, you know,

beautiful.

We also found out the noise in the night like worrying about their toes. Yeah.

Thank you a lot. So let's just take a couple of minutes to sit quietly before the end.