

2001-08-13: Independent Self

Tue, 6/16 8:12PM • 40:11

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

relational, suffering, people, life, tension, animals, define, watering hole, anxiety, exist, noticed, important, subtle, norwegian, sense, buddhist, sitting, independent, definition, grew

SPEAKERS

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Quite transformative for many people, and very meaningful. And so I wanted to take a couple of the ideas that I talked about a little bit during the retreat and talking about them again and maybe try to expand on them a little bit. And a little bit he describes the process, one way of looking at the process by which spiritual life spiritual practice unfolds. So first, his analogy which I taught there, I've taught various times before and maybe I've taught it here. If you want to go and be a nature photographer in the savannahs of Africa, you would apparently be fairly foolish to go around with your camera, walking all over searching out the animals all over. You spend a lot of time looking and looking and you might find some but You spent a lot of time kind of on your feet on your Jeep or whatever while you're traveling looking at some of the animals are quite shy and maybe nocturnal and difficult to see. But the wise way of taking pictures of animals, all you want is a picture of the animal, not how they behave in their habitat is you would sit by the watering hole, and all animals eventually come to the watering hole, they all need to drink. So if you say the water hauled away today at night, all the various animals will come and you can then take your pictures behind your camouflaged little huts or whatever way you have. So that's the easy way, just sitting at the watering hole. And to apply that analogy to Buddhist practice, Buddhist practice puts a lot of emphasis on suffering the importance of suffering. Part of the reason for the emphasis is that Buddhist practice is focused on alleviating that suffering. So if you went to your doctor and with some some problem that ails you, and the doctor wanted to know about your golf score, and wanted to know about what the weather was like in the day you were born and wanted to know about your second cousin, after a while you would be concerned this doctor is not really going to help you not really interested. You want your doctor to be talking to you listening and talking to you about what ails you, you're suffering your pain. So this is considered one of the great doctors of the spiritual life and he's interested in what ails us what the problems are of our lives. And which is which he defined and then defined but he kind of characterized this one word dukkha, which is often translated to English as suffering. And the suggestion is that if you pay attention to your suffering, that that's like sitting at the watering hole. There's a lot of things you can do in your life. A lot of things you can explore a lot of personal issues you can explore and reveal your history and your

past and what happened to you, you can think about your future and what you might become or what might happen to you. Or you might review all kinds of wonderful philosophical issues, existential issues about the meaning of life, and what might happen to you after you die and the nature of God and how the universe was created. And there's many, many things and a wide range of things you might think is very important for spiritual life or your personal life that you might want to explore. And it's kind of like going out into the plains of Africa, walking around looking for where the solution is for life's problems for life suffering. Some of the animals you're looking for might not even exist. You've heard rumors of Bigfoot. And so you go off spending years looking for something like Bigfoot. Maybe Bigfoot doesn't even exist. And but it seems very logical or do you have intuitive sense that Bigfoot should exist? And so you have a lot of faith in the possibility but you actually spend years and years and years traveling, I guess not plane to Savannah, but the forests of the Northwest, looking for Bigfoot. Or, perhaps these things do exist, particularly things we're looking for, but they don't necessarily pertain directly to the issue of suffering. So for example, someone might be looking for the meaning of life, which is one of the great quests What's the meaning of life. And some people might go to be philosophy major in college, and they might travel the world over trying to find the meaning of life, the meaning of life, and they might get various answers along the way. And some of the answers they hold on to for a while and they really work and they feel quite happy and secure that they can now they know what the meaning of life is. And then for some reason, that's doesn't hold anymore and the person then searches for something else the from a Buddhist point of view

Sitting at the watering hole looking at the suffering, you would look at what is it that motivates you to search for the meaning of your life, there might be very good reasons to do it. But it might also arise out of your own anxiety about your life. And anxiety is a kind of suffering. And then Buddhism say stop and turn around and look at the anxiety itself. Rather than trying to spend years looking for the meaning, in order to satisfy the anxiety or calm the anxiety, so spend so look at the anxiety itself and come to terms to look at that fear that might be there, which is a kind of suffering and resolve it. Buddhist practice is offered as a way of resolving dissolving our fears. And so somehow come to terms with that. And then anxiety is gone away. What happens to the fuel for looking for that meaning? You might still want to look for the meaning for life, but it's not driven by the anxiety or it might be they wants to anxiety that was fueling that quest has gone Then perhaps there's no longer any, you have better things to do with your life, maybe you notice that, you know, you're, you know, your kids need some help. And so there to help your neighbors or people around you to do all kinds of things that you might want to do instead. So sitting at the watering hole, sitting at where the suffering occurs. The other example perhaps would be, I don't know much about massage that much. I've had some nice massages in my time. But so they make this a little bit of a fantasy to make this example. But say you go to them a Seuss for massage, and massage masters kind of take stock of who you are. And notice is that is seemingly the most tense place in your body is your shoulders. So perhaps the misuse of seismic sensors start where the most tension is and work on that Relax the tension in the shoulders. After a while the tension the shoulders are completely relaxed. And then the sewage looks around. Where else is the tension right now? Oh, now to this there's a little bit not as strong anymore. But it's the next strongest tension happened to be in the stomach and the massages stomach and the jaws.

And they work their way down from what is most tense to what is more and more subtle, less and less tense, until there's absolutely no more tension in the whole bus psychophysical being and you leave just quite happy until you get in your car. Um

So, mindfulness meditation, awareness, meditation, at times, works this way. That it starts with what's coarsest in our life, and massages it works with it resolves it deals with it. And then It takes care of what's next courses. And then next. And each time it's taken care of where the tension is the holding of suffering. And some of that suffering is in our physical body. Some of it's in our mind, some of it's in our hearts. But wherever it might be, wherever the strongest is, it's somehow dealt with, or what's most obvious what's most kind of on the surface. So when you some people, when they first sit down to meditate, at the end of the busy day, it might simply be physical tension, which is the kind of the most obvious and they sit down and you feel the tension, your breath and your shoulders and you sit with it, you're aware of it and breathe with it, and it settles. And after a while, you realize that you a little bit settled, but now the mind is really busy. And the momentum or the daily concerns are still bombarding your mind, the mind kind of, there's a kind of a grasping in the mind, because certain themes won't leave you alone. Because the mind keeps gravitating towards reviewing that conversation, planning that event Next, you know, in the future, and it keeps going that direction is kind of like a holding a grasping in the mind, that latches on latches on. So once some of the come the course or physical tension might have settled, you start being aware of this tension in the mind, the holding suffering there. And then bring attention to that. And that kind of maybe settles enough calms enough. And then you're ready for the next strongest level of attention in your body. And it's more subtle now. And then you kind of follow these things down through the layers until eventually things get taken care of. Now, the bad news about this, which maybe makes it very discouraging this kind of description, is that the what you're what you're kind of tracking with if the path that you're following is your suffering, you thought you were going to get away from it or be free of it. But you actually fall in the track of suffering so that you can actually be have less and less, but when you hit when you when you eliminate or get rid of one block of suffering, you don't just live in bliss, then Would you go into the next one which might be more subtle. So just like the Miss Seuss, you know, who doesn't just massage your shoulders and say great, your shoulders are great, you know, go home. As soon as you know, we still have some time left, we then kind of deal with the next place in your body where there might be some tension hanging out there and work for a while. So this idea of, of going from what's most coarse to most, what's most refined or most subtle. As people meditate, a lot of the tension so part is looking at the suffering being letting suffering be the waterhole is almost synonymous with letting tension, holding grasping contraction, be the waterhole we sit we pay attention to when we seek out. And what it's what it said is that whatever issues really need to be addressed in your life. The real ones will come to you if you sit at the watering hole of suffering of tension. And that's an important teaching because of a tendency. We have Get lost in our abstractions, all the ideas we have that we've gotten society, from teachers, from our family, whatever. But But the important things that need to be addressed and taken care of. From the Buddhist point of view, a lot of those things might be misguided and unimportant to from the point of view of alleviating suffering, they're kind of misdirected, they keep you many, many. They keep you a great distance, familiar with the core issues really are the

same way as searching yours for for the meaning of life is avoiding the core issue the fact that actually you're afraid?

So in many times, when people ask very abstract, almost scholarly questions in a kind of setting like this, sometimes it's because they like to know. But sometimes when it seems really kind of very academic that kind of questions the person asks, it's useful for a teacher to ask, why are you asking? And then they say oh, Because of my mother, you know is about to die. And so I'm wondering about, you know, I'm suffering because of it. And I'm looking for some kind of solution, some kind of understanding of life that kind of makes me feel better about the fact that death is about to happen in my family. And what Buddhist practice would suggest is that rather than looking for some meaning, some explanation, some understanding about the nature of life in reality and rebirth and all that as a way of kind of feeling some security or some some sense of well being in the face of great crisis, it's possible to turn the mirror of awareness around directly back at the anxiety or fear suffering that is there. If a person asks an academic question, and the teacher responds in an academic way, it's all very interesting, but it maybe never touches the real core, what was fueling that question to begin with and making some sense so as we sit, then especially on retreat, we go through these layers of our experience. And, and we go, perhaps from the courses to the most refined, some people are in a hurry in the meditation practice, and we'll try to leapfrog over certain things. I happen to me on the retreat when I was sitting there, I was sitting there, I think, well, I'm going to sit and be with my breath for a while and get concentrated. And which seems like you know, that's what's advertised, it's what's advertised supposed to do there. So it seemed like a reasonable thing to do. So I was sitting there kind of trying to be with my breath. And I noticed that this particular time of being concentrate, concentrating my breath, I wasn't getting settled. And so I tried harder. And it wasn't getting settled. So I tried harder and wasn't getting settled. And what I noticed after a while, so it took me a while to realize that the certain frustration and tension was building up within me. I was blind to it because I kept chasing the breath. And finally, I had to Go of the breath and say what's really going on here? What's really going on. And then I noticed, certainly the frustration, but I noticed that there was a certain level of preoccupation in my mind. That was really the most operating the most coarser course activity was actually going on. And by ignoring it, I was trying to leapfrog over it to try to be at a more refined level before the coarser level was taken care of. So we go through these layers. Now, for many people, one of the very kind of most generally the widest kind of coarsest. I said we were careful for many people, one of the widest or most pervasive categories of issues. Yes, sorry. One of the important things that we have to address is what's what I call our relational self. Buddhism has a lot of teachings about the nature of self and not self and tends to perplex a lot of people. But I think it's useful to, to look for this category of relational self, which is this which is a sense of self, that understanding of self, who we are, that arises in relationship to other people. And my understanding is this is something every human being needs to develop in order to be a human being, we're social beings, and we need to fit ourselves into society into family, and our family and society helps shape who we are, who we are not in our core, but who we are in our as a relational being. And, and a lot of us then so so. So we're often trying to negotiate our life through the issues and concerns of this relational self. We're trying to improve it, we're trying to defend it, we're trying to present it to other

people. So they like us and all kinds of things. But this development of relational self starts, probably at birth or maybe even before birth. And it's very important that it gets developed in a healthy way. Some of the most pervasive suffering a lot of people have concerns the relational self, and some of it has its genesis very early in life

at a very early age, and I see this very clearly on retreats, I do interviews with people on retreat. And it's fairly common on these retreats, that people will start touching into issues that are that have a Genesis edge in childhood. It isn't that they're doing psychoanalysis and they think you know that they've read some book. It's wonderful. It's important to go in analysis and think about and reflect and remember all the details of your childhood, but rather, they're sitting there paying it attention to their body and their minds and the hearts trying to be present in the moment, noticing where the holding is noticing what keeps the mind, the body, the heart from relaxing and releasing. And what becomes obvious after a while is that there's some holding still going on, based on some childhood trauma. And as a young parent, I feel I've learned more about parenting by listening to people on retreat, talk about how they were missing parented, the traumas they went through as children, issues of, of being abandoned, of not being seen, or, you know, can shape a person's almost a character, that personality for the rest of their life. The holding that we carry with us there was a person on a recent retreat who was sitting there meditating. And she started noticing how anxious and afraid she was. And the fear kept her paralyzed, she couldn't actually breathe very deeply because her breath was held in her body was held constricted, and she noticed how much physical pain she had. And she thought, you know how to do it, maybe poor posture, or maybe she didn't exercise enough or whatever. But I could see her body how much it was held. So she was sitting there and sitting there opening up to this experience in the body, what was held there, and it became more and more frightening, more and more frightening. One more frightening so rather than going on retreat, and you know, more and more bliss and common relaxation, it was panic and terror started rising for this person. And what had happened was this person had touched in to the other tear as a three year old when she her parents decided to go for three week vacation and dropped her off at someone's house, who she didn't know and they had a big dog. They She was terrified of dogs. And for three, three weeks were three year old means forever. And this fear and terror and anger at being abandoned, was one of the pivotal kind of things that shaped this person's character, this person's personality for much of their life, and but it was held there in this tension. If you say to the watering, hole attention, pay attention to it, eventually that surfaces and shows itself it's there. And it was very frightening for this person to go through this. But she went through it and felt more relaxed in her body than she'd felt in all her whole life that she can remember, by going through it. Sometimes it gets worse before it gets better. You have to be willing sometimes to face the dark. The dark night of soul the dark darkness within us, in order to be come free. Children when they're born are invisible. obvious to all of us right are defenseless. And I believe one of the primary need one of the primary needs, the need is to feel protected, to feel safe to feel secure to feel like their needs are going to be met. And if for any reason that is not provided in an adequate way, then that fear then becomes often often lodged in their body, it often gets lodged in attitude towards life. Attitudes Towards Oh life cannot other people cannot be trusted. We carry with us attitudes then, that are shaped by early childhood experiences. There's some psychoanalysis who will

say argue that whole philosophies that people formulate great philosophers, great politicians and their political views and political views can be traced to childhood experiences. Because they're so formative in in how we the attitudes by which the eyes through which we see the world around us. So as we grow up this this relational self gets developed by other people Sometimes in unhealthy ways and sometimes unhealthy ways. And our life experiences contribute to it, our family, what they tell us to contribute to us how they look at us how they talk to us with the kind of things they respond to us about. I was quite, I was quite kind of wake up for me two years ago or so. When I realized that as I was raising my young child, I realized how very clearly what a powerful value it was, for me

a strong value for me, in raising him, that he become independent. And if I hadn't done all my studies that I've done, my mindfulness practice my Buddhist studies and everything, I probably would have taken that to be natural. That's the way the universe the order of the universe, that individual children should be taught to be independent as they grow up. That's just the way that is not the way it is. There should be good individuals and independent, but I've been I lived in enough different cultures and no and studied enough about different cultures and childbearing and all that to know, this is a culturally conditioned view in American society about how you should raise a child. And I was I was raised with those values from my parents, I was told that and maybe they're fine values, but they're culturally conditioned values that shape who a child is who they think about themselves. And that sense of I am an individual is belongs to the relational self, because it's a sense of self that arise out of the way people relate to them, and train them and teach them how to be. If you go to a country like Japan. You can see how it takes a while to get underneath the underneath the skin of Japanese culture. But at some point, you'll see that the Japanese are carrying themselves in society with a very different sense of what it's like to be a human person than we in the West are carrying ourselves. When I realized that in Japan, I was working together With a crew of other people in the monastery for doing the same kind of project for many days in a row. And some days, suddenly I kind of woke up in the middle of this project, this work experience. And I realized I was living in a different universe was the sense I had that moment. I was operating as if I was an individual on the many different individuals, all of us taking care of our own little task. And they will operating in a universe where they were a unit. They weren't individuals, they were all kind of extensions of each other. And there was, they were much more in touch with each other, flowing with each other, working with each other, in tune with each other. Then I could ever imagine anyone it could have been maybe maybe if you're, you know, on a sports team, maybe have that sense, perhaps if you're really good, but even to Bill Jackson. No, Phil Jackson had a hard time getting some of his players to understand that because individualism was so Powerful, I want to be the best, you know, I want to shine on the basketball court and stand out. So the sense of so it starts very early. There's a relational self that we develop, and it can look like it's the most natural thing in the world. As we developed, it's not well supported healthy and unhealthy ways. A couple of other examples, when I was very simple, innocent things, maybe how we can take things for granted. When I was in seventh grade, I took an art class. And at some point, I was drawing my left hand and the teacher came over to me and said, very matter of factly like, this is the way this is the way the universe is. You have no artistic ability. Can you imagine telling that to a seventh grader? Well, oh, I had no interest in being an artist. You know, I never thought about it that Oh, that's the way it is. I have

no artistic ability. That's, you know, I was defined And that's the way it was. I carried my carry that with me for a long time for the next probably seven more years, number of years until things may shifted in that particular definition. Society defines other members of society all the time, sometimes in horrendous ways. women know how it's like to be defined. minorities, ethnic minorities, racial minorities, know how awful it is to be defined by other people in society. And, and sometimes it gets internalized. And all of us in ways which we which we carry ourselves, we don't often know we don't even see the ways in which we define other people. I, you know, I didn't see until I kind of that wake up call that I was defining my son in a certain way around being an individual independent. I bet that seventh grade teacher had no idea she was defining who I thought I was an ethical statement. So we do that for you to each other. And it we could create tremendous suffering for each other because of it.

As we sit and meditate, any of the ways in which we are contracted, or holding or suffering because the relational self becomes highlighted, and it's one of the things that we have to work through, relax, let go. And because all suffering, the path of practice is to release all suffering, and not to have it, and the degree in which we suffer because a relational self that's suffering has to somehow or other be dealt with and looked at. There's no way around that. There are sometimes temporary bypasses. But eventually, sooner or later if the elaborations can be thorough, any places of holding or clinging, suffering has to be dealt with. And then my suggestion here is to tonight is that for many of us, one of the primary areas of our suffering has to do with this relational self. So that's part of the reason why psycho therapy has been such an important help in many people's lives. Because like the psychotherapy knows really well understands, well, it's kind of an important field of psychotherapy is the relational self. I don't think they use that word that term, but they explore, you know, the dynamics of your family and society, all kinds of things and help you understand those kinds of things. And the teachings of the Buddha. As I understand it, it's not good enough to simply have a healthy relational self. It's certainly important thing to have. It's not to be, you know, belittled to have that. But according to the one of the challenges of the teachings of the Buddha, is that even a healthy sense of relational self will have some kind of suffering as part of it. As long as we're using as long as Holding on to some definition of who we are any kind definition of who we are. There is some kind of suffering or anxiety, maybe a better word or restlessness that goes with that. And perhaps because anyway we want to define ourselves, it's fixed. goes against the impermanence, of self. The relational self is impermanent phenomena. It changes all the time in contexts and situations. And if those of you who might have grew up growing up in different countries, different cultures might have noticed how your sense of self changes from one culture to the other. I grew up with different cultures and when I can't speak Italian as well as I used to them, but there was an Italian Gil. And there are certain ways of expressing myself of being the only existed in Italian. And certain ways of being that only existed in English. And I remember kind of in college, you know, missing body text Certain things you know, and a part of me, and it would only come out in Italian. Because he that's, that's where that that's where it was. I remember a friend of mine and I'm Norwegian originally and I grew up in Norway and had a friend when I was 20. In Norway who Norwegian who I was living with him And on his farm, and he had traveled in America in their late 60s and kind of commune hopping in America as a young men teenager, I think, and he had learned his English on American communes in the 1960s hippie

communes. And so his whole his whole beingness the whole the way he was when he spoke English was like this really, really laid back hippie man. Yeah, everything cool whenever, you know, it was really fun to be with him. So we spoke mostly English together because his wife was American. But, but he also he was Norwegian. I'm Norwegian, I speak Norwegian. So sometimes We talked Norwegian together. And he grew up in Oslo in a kind of very formal, upper class stiff environment and uprooted prudish Norwegians. My cousin was visiting today from Norway and he define Norwegians as prudish. So he's Norwegian. So anyway, so my friend You know, he was a stiff upper class, reserved, conservative background, when he spoke Norwegian, I actually didn't like him was like a different self was there. So people go from culture to culture can see this different so it changes. The self you are now will change depending on the input you get over time the information you get. So any definition even a healthy one itself, that's fixed in some way, involves some anxiety or restless hold it in place. So the Buddhist challenge is that even the relational self

has some anxiety that needs some tension suffering needs to be letting go. Which means that the relational self has to, in some sense be letting go of, maybe not permanently. But if you really want to discover the possibility of being at DPS and deep happiness within yourself, you have to let go of any concern preoccupation with a relational self. The relational self, if you're if you're only trying to negotiate the relational self trying to fix it and adjust it and get a better one and defend it and do all these things. It's like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It's a nice thing to do when you're just leaving port. But sooner or later, you know, it's like you realize forget about the deck chairs and ships going down. So is there an alternative to the relational self I believe this is one of the very radical offering to the Buddhist tradition is that there is an alternative non alternative as a substitute for the relational self. It's always going to be with you, you always have to live in it. But an alternative or in a sense of you can take a vacation, you can find you could find that there's a more fundamental foundation for who you are, that is not relational. And when you know that foundation, then you have a different relationship to the relational self, you won't be so anxious about fixing it, you won't be so absolutely imperative that the relation self be a certain way because you know, something actually more profound and more central deeper. And what is that that's deeper for in a very unbiased way. I'm Buddhist terminology. Kind of as a temporary word. Temporary expression we could say there's an independent self. There's a self which is independent of all relationships, a sense of being a sense of consciousness awareness, which doesn't exist with any definite it doesn't define itself or need to be defined any kind of way, by the world around us, or other people tell us who we are, our experiences are our life is through whatever. And so the independent self, so we let go, we still hang out with suffering we go with I'll go with that go. And at some point at a very so refined levels, you might realize that any sense of self any idea of self any attempt to define the self is represents some lingering aspect of suffering and clinging. And this gets very subtle because there are some phenomenal from Buddhist point of view and please take it as that There are some very convincing definitions of self that people will settle back to, when they get into very deep meditative states and mystical states. One of them for example, is that the self doesn't exist. That's a common Buddhist one. Buddhists like that one. Another one is that the self is universal is cosmic itself and the cosmos, the universe are one. The world everything is one everything's interconnected, there is no self in, there is no small self, that

individual personal self, is overcome by the transpersonal self, that self which is connected to everything around it, kind of a mystical state of sorts. Or the self is that which knows our experience, the awareness that knows everything is self or the relation of self is not, not the truth. Self, but that which tries to create a relational self that that is the real self or that which is aware of the, of the relation of self. That's the real self. What, what the Buddha suggested is it any attempt to define yourself any kind of way entails some kind of clinging and suffering. Even those wonderful things you might have your own favorite one that you've quite cherished, and whether it's true or not your particular one. If you're gonna follow the path of mindfulness to the utter freedom, independence that it can offer you, you have to let go of those definitions also. And you can't, you can't look at life you can look at yourself and have any definition of what's here. For some people, that's the final tear No definition you know, beat up naked with nothing. You don't have to be in a hurry to do this.

All you have to do and you don't have to kind of figure out philosophically whether this is a good idea or not. All you have to do is sit at the watering hole and be very respectful and compassionate and kind to all the animals that come there and if it's the big elephants that come be wise how you sit there the watering hole treated great respect the elephants. But attend to the elephants. If it's the itty bitty little ads that come along, very subtle, that's what comes to the watering hole pay attention to that. It after the subtle, very refined and so been there for a long time. He says he said this is really are the insect You know insects in Africa are just so pristine and beautiful and this is great you know and I'm really down at the core isn't and then suddenly a human being shows up Oh no, not a human being I didn't think I thought it finished with all that the human being in relationship problems and all that. I thought it was finished with all that I'm dealing with a subtle insects. What's wrong with me I i backtracked in my spiritual life doesn't Don't, don't even don't be concerned one bit about what it is that comes to your watering hole. don't measure it or judge it or compare it to other people's animals or to animals you've had before that the animal that comes to your waterhole if you're just standing standing at the water horn watching the animal that comes to your watering hole is the one that supposed to come. That's the way it is. You don't have to be judged or think it's wrong. It's just it's your animal. So, enjoy it. offer it Your presence. Teach that animal that it can trust you that you're a kind. Don't try to chase it away or kill it or drown it in the water or you know, whatever. Whatever animal comes, be very respectful. Learn that through the respectful attention and awareness that simply sees very clearly how things are. That you'll, you'll become free. After all, one of the things I've learned is that, especially for children, that being seen and being loved are virtually not the same synonymous. Children horns Seen, don't feel like they're loved and grew up with problematic relational cells. And I think it's still true as adults. The simple act of seeing, we're asked to do when the animals come to a watering hole is simply to look at them and see them and see them and see them, see them and try to avoid the temptations of chasing away the scary ones and taking home, the cuddly ones. Just look and look and look. So may you all get a taste of that independent self

that cannot exist, if you call it an independent self. Thank you