

# 2003-11-30 Insight

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

perspective, world, person, son, people, meditation, happen, situation, god, felt, moment, include, future, peasant, present moment, learning, annoyed, different perspectives, walking, child

## SPEAKERS

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As I think all of you know, the sign out front says insight meditation center. And so the word insight is central to what we do in terms of meditation. Someone once said that, to use the word meditation generically, like I like meditation or don't like meditation, I think meditation is dangerous, or I think it's really great. Is, is is like doing the same thing with the word sports. You know, I like sports, or, you know, because you see football players getting injured on the field. You say, Well, football seems like such a violent game. I'm against sports. And there's all kinds of sports, right? So it's all kinds of meditation. And so the kind of meditation that our center primarily teaches is called insight. So what is it? That's insight what is insightful And that the word in Pali is vipassana. And vipassana means to see. And V is kind of a prefix V is kind of a emphasis. So it means perhaps to see in a special way, deep seeing or clear seeing. So what is it to see? This Week at home, we had a gathering of people, friends over and people over. And I was sitting opposite side of the room from my son. He was sitting with my wife and my older son. And at some point, I noticed, I was looking at him. And I saw an expression on his face that seemed very unusual. And so I looked at that expression for some time. What is that? What am I seeing there? My seeing some different seeming from a different angle, you know, I usually do and my seeing something by this character that hadn't seen before what is that I'm seeing? So I was looking, I was like, you know, I was certainly paying attention to him. Then later in the day, when we were kind of alone, my wife said, Oh, did you notice what happened back then? And I said, No, I noticed was an expression of space and I was studying it, trying to understand it and she said, Oh, someone had done something just before that which I had noticed but hadn't conveyed the connection. That had upset him quite strongly. My son either frightened him or upset him someone had had will burst of anger was over as soon as was done, but it was in his direction. And, and that expression that I saw, was my son kind of looking at my wife with kind of this frozen smile in his face that He was trying, as best he could not to cry. So I was really struck by this that I had, I had been looking at him. And I'd seen something. But what I hadn't seen, I hadn't seen, you know, what was really going on for him. I knew to pay attention, but I didn't really see. What is it to see? What do we see, you know, how do we see? And, you know, as a parent, I felt some responsibility to see him well.

And that's part of the perspective of being a parent, you have certain roles and responsibilities to your children. So I go, Oh, I need to pay more careful attention to this. They just see this, you know, see this through the perspective maybe of a parent, how you respond to something like this. And so there was a perspective I was bringing, but still I wasn't able to see what was going on. There's a story about a man who can't find his axe and then he sees this neighborhood a child walking down the road. And he has no he sees that child, his child walking just like a thief is, as the eyes of a thief seems to talk like a thief. Certainly that child has taken my axe and sometimes late sometime later, he sees he finds his axe, you know, probably in a storage closet someplace, realizes, you know, oh, he just misplaced it. And then a little bit later sees the same child walking down the street. And this time, the child walks like a child carries himself like a child talks like a child. So here again, you know, how do we see someone do we bring perspective DO WE ARE WE influenced by certain kind of events or certain ways certain previous To see in certain ways, and what does it like to clear our vision. So we may perhaps we don't see through the filter of perspectives of ways we have to see. And I think in meditation circles, like in Buddhist circles, there's a lot of emphasis placed on seeing things as they are. And that implies in some people's mind, that it's possible to free ourselves from all the filters, all the different perspectives that we bring to a situation and really see something as it actually is. But what is that? What does it mean to see something as it is? To see my son upset? I saw something there. And I had enough perspective to know that this is something to pay attention to. But somehow I didn't have the perspective or the memory, to connect it to what it happened just before or to kind of read him appropriately. Did it require having less perspective, you know, did require kind of emptying my mind totally. So I could see fresh? Or did it actually require seeing my son through some perspective, some understanding what happened just before some history of what his face looks like at different times and kind of picking up the subtle cues and did require some perspective I bring with me, or did really acquire just letting go dropping everything. We certainly know the problems that can arise when we see each other through perspectives which are false. And we don't like men with the axe, we kind of often will see people in false ways. And so that can be the emphasis in Buddhism on having beginner's mind. Having a mind that maybe doesn't come with preconceived ideas. So you can see things are fresh. And so we talk a lot about being in the present, not bringing the past or not bringing the future into the future. And perhaps we're not being lost in the past and the future, just being with things as they are in the moment. And that somehow, that gives us a truer perspective of what's happening right now. And we I think most of you know that that'd be spent a lot of time planning and worrying about the future. Often, our vision of what's going to happen in the future is not necessarily a true perspective of the future. What's going to happen often things work out differently. And often if we just stay in the moment with the experience, rather than anticipating what's going to happen, often, often enough that the situation unfolds in a much more healthy way than if we're anticipating and planning and all these things into the future. Now with my son, he anticipates the future for so I don't know why he does this. But he likes to know what's going to happen. Now I could sit him down on the cushion and say, you know, tell him something about being in the present moment. And how useful it is, but it's Not gonna work for a six year old or five year old? Yes. And, and he was this way since he was less than two, we noticed that he was much more settled at a very young age. If we very simply told them, oh, today we're going to be doing X, Y and Z. And he would

like, settle out. We didn't tell that tell him that he'd be kind of restless. So today, he asked me, What are we doing tomorrow? And I said, tomorrow's a school day. Yes. He said, I know. What are we doing after school? Because that's the time that's uncertain after school. So do I just always tell them be in the moment enjoy this day? I don't think I can tell my son that. Do I tell myself that girl just be in the present moment. Don't worry about the future. Don't think about tomorrow that's his problem I don't do that I gotta think about tomorrow I need to have that perspective to simply let go entirely into the present moment as a powerful as important that is useful it is it's not it's not enough sometimes other things are needed here's a lovely quote or column by a dear Laura and the title is be here now, but not on purpose. And so I'm starting to resent being told to live in the moment. Okay, doesn't come here. A multitude of books, glut the stores, all trying to bully us into applying this Zen insight into our lives, or the archives then people. When I when I hear such advice, I want to say, Well, I was going to live in the moment, but now you ruined it by telling me to. I myself did a book called slowing down in a speeded up world filled with hundreds of excellent suggestions from ordinary people for how to do just that. How to notice when you're happy after I wrote it, I tried following the advice in it. I tried to pay attention to the warmth of the water as I rinse dishes to the sight of red roses against the blue sky to the site of wet clothes billowing online. I try To remember to take my coffee out on the porch in the early morning enjoy the light. The result was not a more serene Zen like me. The result was more guilty me. I'm standing there fidgeting on my porch trying not to look at my watch, and, and be annoyed to find that I couldn't even take five minutes to enjoy the morning without wanting to be on the next thing. On to the next thing. Enjoy and enjoy the morning light check. If humans are truly meant to live in the moment, more humans will already be doing it. Moments come when they want to and leave when they like. Trying to live in the moment is like trying to be happy. It doesn't work that way. You can't deliberately concentrate on the richness of the feast before you without having the groaning table vanish, as if Samantha and bewitched had been Hold her nose at it. Happiness likes to come in by the side doors. moments like to just happen. Saturday Case in point, Bill and I had walked to the coffee shop shop, read the paper in the sun. Then rode our bikes to green apple to buy as many Booker Prize winning paperbacks as we could carry in our backpacks. On the way home, we stopped for grilled eggplant sandwiches at the grind around the corner from our house in gloated over our books. On Sunday, we look forward to another artist skip all this part. The truth is, we humans come equipped with imaginations so vivid, that are imagined or remembered moments are often precisely what enrich the moment as it's happening. I remember sitting in a beam of sunlight from an open window in a Parisian flat on an August morning last year, waiting for Bill and our friend Frank to come back from renting from Richard Turning a rental car. And listening to Juliet clerk song that I used to listen to when I lived in Paris at the age of 20. I was feeling absolutely happy in that moment, with a son on my neck and the music and Paris waiting. I was experiencing the moment fully. But the moment was made up partly of the memories evoked by the song, and the anticipation of a day walking around Paris with Bill and Frank. I was experiencing the moment fully but the moment was partly made up of memories and thoughts about the future. Is that true? There's a present moment include the past and the future and our thoughts about them. If we have some simplistic idea of the always being in the present moment and leaving out the past in the future, are we shortchanging ourselves but then in meditation, we often are training ourselves, to be in the present moment to let go

of the past and let go the future the best we can and it's true that in very good sessions of meditation, you can get like go a lot, let go a lot of the mind that wants to think about the future and things think of the past, and a tremendous amount of joy, and satisfaction and enlightenment. liberation can come when we learn to free the mind from this obsession about the past or the future, or bringing the past or the future into the situation. And to be able to draw all the perspectives we have, and have no perspective, in a sense, is one of the really liberating things about meditation. Does that mean that we're supposed to go around, always having no perspective, or always not, you know, being in the present moment, so there's no past in the future? I don't think so. It doesn't work for me, as a parent with my son. I have to pay attention to certain things. I have to have some perspectives. I have to anticipate what's going to happen after remember the past to some degree. In order to really understand my son. I have to remember where he's been. what he's done. His background and had to think a little bit about the future for him. And that has to be included in really seeing who we use in that situation. But I'm gonna see myself, do I just see that aspect? Also my heritage, my background, my experiences, my potential? What's gonna happen to me? Do I have to include that and really understanding myself? And I would suggest, yes, that's one way, an important way of understanding myself for ourselves. But there's another way of understanding ourselves. And that is that the understanding that comes when there is no perspective when there is no past in the future, just us in the present moment, in the simplicity of the present moment that needs nothing more. That's also another way of seeing ourselves. Could it be that there's different ways of seeing yourselves, each of them as valid as the other but each valid in their own context in a way and I think sometimes people and certainly religious people like to fall into a kind of reduction holistic mode. There is one way that's the true way. What I'm suggesting here is that actually there's different ways of being different perspectives at different times. And part of a life of mindfulness is developing the appreciation of the different perspectives that we could have at different times and then have the flexibility to go between them at different times flow back and forth between the perspectives. I had another experience this week of being annoyed with someone that will let you leave it at that. And, and well, actually a couple people I was annoyed with. One was the person who made my son so upset and both both people I Then I wondered, with what perspective Should I see this person? Should I see this person through the perspective of my annoyance? Should I see the person who took my son through the protective fierceness of the parent? Is it too good? No, you know, you know, protect my son at all costs or kick the guy out or I don't know what we're what perspective you see someone. see someone, this person is annoying me, it's gonna take a lot of time to kind of remedy the situation. What a headache. I don't need this. And I'd rather just be left alone. Thank you. So it's all about me. Or is there some way of seeing this person as being this person's a jerk? That's a good perspective, isn't it? I don't think so. That doesn't really not helpful for that person. not helpful for me. What's that? What's the appropriate perspective? See, so seeing someone who's annoy me. One of the people that annoyed me was out of this country, foreigner to America, relatively new to America, actually completely amazed at how different America is from his cultural background. I mean, it's like, in order to get his kind of view of the world, in America, you have to go back 100 years, perhaps I don't want to say that it's backward, you know, but a very, very different perspective. And he was learning very quickly. He was he said, at some point, he said to us, he turned to my wife and said, Mrs. Gill, and everyone in the room kind of

my wife said, someone said, my wife said, you know, no, that's that's my wife's. My wife's name is tomorrow, she said. That's Mr. Tomorrow. I got his attention. And he realized that, Oh, I see something wrong. And, you know, he was ready to, you know, to learn very quickly. So here was somebody a very different culture, radically different culture than ours. And how do I somehow take that into account when I understand how he, you know, was annoying me because of what he had done to my son? And how does that how do I include that? And how does that affect how I see the person and the compassion, that concern? Do I include as part of the perspective, the fact that he's such a good learner? He's learned so much in the few little bit of time. He's been in this country, and he's really trying to figure out how it all works. You know, do I include that as part of the perspective? From what perspective we see people? So there's a quote that I have it, it's from Walt Whitman. I've heard other people it's attributed to other people. So I don't know. If we read the Secret History of our enemies, we should find in each one's life, life, sorrow and suffering. Enough to disarm all hostility. Is that true? Do we take the time to learn someone? We take the time to bring perspective Oh, if I really pay attention to this person, then I could see them deeply and all hostility will evaporate if I really see deeply. So the difference that inspired this talk was the difference between looking and seeing. You probably all know what looking you know, looking is but you really know what seeing is. I don't think you know what seeing is, because I don't think anybody knows because seeing is something we're constantly discovering, over and over again to learning how to seize a lifelong lifelong activity. In any given situation. How do we see the situation, looking at something you bring with you everywhere you go, you can look, but to see is his situation specific. And so it requires being interested in this situation stopping looking, looking more deeply, looking more precisely. You know, I'm looking where you're telling me to look but I don't see what you're seeing is an expression we might say. Look over there. Do you see it? No, I don't see it. Oh yes I see it. Or I see what you mean. When someone you really kind of connect to them for what what the person has said or I don't see it yet. To see you see something specific to look at just kind of in turn the attention in certain direction. The Tick not Han talks a lot about seeing deeply into situations. But there it's including the past including the wider context that's brought it into being that thing. So he loves talking about parently bring holding up a piece of paper and says when you see the paper to really see the paper, you have to see the tree that it comes from. You have to see the people that cut the tree down you have to see the mills that produced it you have to see the truckers have brought it to here. You have to see the water that flowed into the roots of the trees, you have to see the sunlight, you have to see the whole world in a sense in the piece of paper. That's a way of seeing where you're bringing a lot of perspective to the situation. And you're enriching the situation by expanding this perspective, to include a lot more. So to look and to see or to, to listen and to really hear, what does it require us to really see or to really hear? And certainly one of the things is the interest to see the interest to really hear what's being said between the words when someone speaks. How do we listen deeply to someone or a situation? How do we see deeply so requires certainly interest in it, and it requires a certain kind of stopping a certain kind of willingness to kind of let go of some of our agenda, some of our concerns. Some of you are kind of rushing ahead with activities and listening take the time to listen. Take the time to see What is this year, take the time, give someone a time to really listen to them. And I gave it to my son. And I saw him in his face. And I kind of gave him the time took a time I stopped and just focus on that for a while. But it wasn't enough,



because I miss something. To see, to see narrowly, very precisely, to take a big picture. And to be able to have the flexibility of going back and forth between them, not to have just one perspective being the right one. But to go back and forth. So meditation, sometimes we can have very fine, refined, microscopic view of what's going on in our experience. And sometimes that's liberating to see that everything drops away, the past the future, the room, our body drops away, and it's very, very precise. Will we see other types of times trying to have that very, really refined Focus misses the big picture. And it's the wrong time to have that find perfect perspective, we need to back up and have a kind of wide angle lens to see the big picture what's going on between the sun, you know, interdependent world. That's all part of how do you know which perspective is the right one in any given time? I think there can be guidelines for it. But I don't think there is a simple rule book that says this is the right perspective. Part of life of mindfulness is a life that kind of experiments and goes back and forth and is willing to take on different perspectives, willing to try different lenses to see what is most useful than a given time and not to have one lens we're always carrying with us all the time, you know, with what's going on. So here's a quote. The Dutch writer and philosopher Abel Hertzberg tells a story of a rabbi who upon entering a room in his home saw his son deep in prayer. In the corner, he writes stood a cradle with a crying baby. The rabbi asked his son, can't you hear? There's a baby crying in this room. The son said, Father, I was lost in God. And the robe I said, One who is lost and God can see the very fly crawling up the wall. So there's kind of here is an expression, recommending kind of panoramic view that includes everything is going on in the world. The mindfulness, it includes that the crying child, you don't get absorbed in some deep Samadhi, some deep, mystical union at the expense of the child crying nearby. You have to have you have to know the appropriateness when it's appropriate to get absorbed and lost in a meditative subject. And when is it appropriate to expand the awareness to include the world around us that's crying needs our attention. What perspectives do we bring to this life of ours? Here's another quote that I like I used to read this a lot. I like it, I hope that you do enough. Other God, quote, we should try to be translated someday for the Dharma. Maybe it doesn't work, but God decided to become visible to a king and a peasant, and sent an angel to inform them of the blessing event. Oh King, the angel announced God has deigned to be revealed to you in whatever manner you wish. in what form Do you want God to appear? seated on his throne and surrounded by awestruck subjects, that King proclaimed? How else would I wish to see God saved in majesty and power? Show God to us in the full glory of power, a little bit of arrogant kind of King so God granted his wish, and appeared as a bolt of lightning that instantly pulverize the king in his court. nothing, not even a cinder remained. The angel then manifested herself to a peasant thing, God Dane's to be revealed to you in whatever manner you desire. How do you wish to see God? scratching his head and, and puzzling along while the peasant finally said, I am a poor man, and not worthy to see God face to face. But if it is God's will to be revealed to me, let it be in those things with which I am familiar. Let me see God in the earth. I plow, the water I drink, the food I eat. Let me see God in the faces of my family and neighbors. God granted the peasant his wish, and he lived a long and happy life. May God grant you the same. So each of the master different perspective on the ultimate what perspective Do you see? The food that you eat and your neighbors and the cars you turn you drive in? And what perspective Do you see all these in? Originally, I thought I should give a talk today and gratitude since you know, Thanksgiving weekend. But I decided not to. But that's a perspective to write perspective of gratitude

is that an optional perspective that comes by accident sometimes was a cultivated perspective that we bring isn't one that we could use more often. There's so many perspectives that we can have or some perspectives more useful than others. The word in another word for kind of seeing kind of word you use in Buddhism is that we're ditty which means view There's a wrong view and right view. And part of following the Buddhist path is, is knowing what the right view is. And as I like to teach the right view, is the perspective which helps us. Free the world of suffering. suffering of a personal suffering suffering of others, what's the view that helps that? And they're probably these are different various kinds of views. But that's a certain perspective we can bring, are we interested in suffering? are we interested in that which brings happiness or the deviation of suffering? As opposed to? am I interested in my status? If only if I can figure out the right kind of job that can make that much money, then I'll get the admiration of the people around me and things will be great. That's a perspective the person can carry right some people do carry that perspective. But there are other perspectives. What perspective do you choose to hold your life with carry your life with Joanna Macy offers in her book world as lover world itself, four different perspectives that people she says kind of general perspective people sometimes bring to seeing the world. I don't know I've never thought about them deeply. I haven't stopped to look at them deeply. But it's kind of maybe interesting just to kind of go through who for one is the world as a battlefield. And this is where the world is a threat. The world is a place you have to fight to fight for your own, you have to be competitive. You have to you know, dominance kind of dominate the world dominate others, one upmanship. There's all this, you know, the world is a battlefield. And there's various ways that people have this view they carry around with them. If I'm going to get something in this world, I have to fight for it and enroll over other people or, or relationships or battlefields. You know that if I could, you know, if I could dominate that person, then we can have a successful relationship. The second perspective is that of the world as a prison. And this person feels burdened, depressed by the world feels like the world's kind of trapped by the world of situation trapped by a relationship trapped by various, you know, job or whatever it is. And we bring them to perspective being trapped, and so on prison. And so the goal then is to escape, get out of the trap, get out of prison. And there's certainly a lot of religions, including Buddhism has in certain corners of the religion, that perspective, the world is an unfortunate place to be in the body is a bad place to be in is full of suffering from a sin or whatever. And the only way to have hope is when we can escape this world escape the situation, escape this mind, escape, you know our circumstance so we can find some place outside of the situation, that we can be happy. So that's a question We bring. And if we don't see these two as being perspectives, then we see them. And this is inherent in how the world is. The world is a battlefield, the world is a prison. That's how the world is. But if we see them as being perspectives that the mind has created, and overlaid on the experience, then you have a whole different situation because then you can say, oh, maybe it's not this way at all. Maybe there are other perspectives to understand my situation. Can I be creative now and see, are there other perspectives to understand? The fourth perspective join a mesa give her a third one she gives his world as lover and this is where I feel is a feeling of intimacy with the world feeling of cooperating the world feeling, not feeling like your person were dominating the world or superior in the world period to others. It doesn't really work to be lovers, I think right? Unless you feel some intimacy and equality and real sense of And connectedness with the person. And same thing with join I think suggests with about the

world itself. We can have that relationship to the world, the world has not to be exploited, dominated or fought with, with the world have something to feel cooperatively with somehow we're in it together and feel a sense of intimacy, sense of care and nurturing. That's a perspective you can we can we can bring to the world, one of being, you know, she calls being lover. And she offers a third perspective. Fourth perspective, which is the world itself, and certainly a lot of religions in the world which have focused on that sort of aspects of religions. And this is where we see a kind of it isn't always kind of like lovers, still kind of maybe dualistic kind of like the lovers there and I'm here and we have this wonderful, you know, relationship. But the world itself is not to see a distinction between self and other the world and oneself to have that kind of That kind of duality of separation of self and other fall away. And so it's so close to that, that if someone you know, I remember once having this perspective and I watched someone pull a leaf off a tree and I felt all this pain because this perspective of oneness it felt like that was happening to me. And, and that's the last one. The fourth perspective of the world itself is one that is very much cherished by some people. So, that's what Joanna Macy gives us those four perspectives. I don't know which one she prefers the most, but I think the last two at least this, you know, certainly better than the first two for her. What I like to offer and this is maybe the most important point I want to get across today is that the contribution of Buddhist practice to this issue of perspective is twofold. One is, as I've said, a willingness to be creative and flexible. With the perspective we carry. There's many perspectives we have. And not to be stuck on one perspective. We were willing to experiment with different perspectives to flow back and forth, not to take one weighs being ducked truth. In different situations, different perspectives are probably the most useful, the most helpful and most appropriate. So it's one to have be flexible, but perspectives we carry. But the second one, and this is where mindfulness practice becomes becomes very important is having the perspective having perspective. Having the mindfulness having the ability to see when a perspective is operating. To see the birth of a perspective, birth of the viewpoint, birth of a view, birth of a bias and see how we overlay that on a situation to watch the activity. of the mind, that creates a perspective. A perspective is an activity of the mind. The difference in looking and seeing the seeing is a mixture of perception and thinking, perception and cognition that we bring into play with a seeing. So there's an activity of mine that comes into play. And then mindfulness is helping us to see how that activity comes into birth. So someone walks in the room. And the person is who the person is. Because that person is really big and burly, like a big football player, or something like that. And because I've had bad experience with football players, so this big person comes into the door right? And then if I'm attentive enough, I can watch the seeing of that person come in the room. And I can watch the mind creating all that's a dangerous person for me. The mind makes that thought that activity, I can see the birth of that activity. And know that that activity of the mind that cognition, a thinking of the mind perspective is, resides in my mind, not necessarily in the person's walking through the door. It might be, but it might not be chances are, it's not. And so then because I can see the perspective operating, then I have some choice about how to relate to that perspective. Not to cling to it, not to take it in necessarily being true. To give it the benefit of the doubt, perhaps or give it to kind of test a little bit or look more carefully and see some perspective that's useful. It's useful to the person is really dangerous, but it's not useful if the person's not Exactly could actually add a lot of suffering to many people. So let me take time to find out what their perspective is, is accurate or not. And they go



and talk to the person. Remember happened here actually have everybody's story here. We had this meeting here about a year ago of about 15 or so senior teachers from the Zen center of San Francisco. And we're all sitting around, and most of them have shaved heads, you know, and wearing black and all that, whatever. And, and the front door was open. And I don't know if there's, I'm sorry, this is nothing necessarily story illustrating much what comes to mind. And this person walks through the door it looked a little bit unusual. Very unusual, doesn't offer a lot of perspective, right, just kind of maybe a safe thing to say. But it seemed like a person who needed attention. So I got up since I was kind of the host here. I got up and walk Over there. And I felt like was a person who I was appropriate to make real contact with. Even though the person felt dangerous behind like this person, I had to make sure there's real contact here. So I walked right up to the person. And I don't know if I said anything or not but as soon as sooner, almost immediately the person went like this Zen and turned around and walked away. Work perspective ever seen the person since? What perspective is the right perspective to hold that role, the story I chose not to have any perspective, just let it be. But to see the birth of a perspective to watch that activity of the mind. So rather One thing we have to escape from our perspective or be free of our perspective, I think that what mindfulness is trying to train us to do in the context of perspectives, is to be able to recognize when a perspective is there, and in the recognition of it, learning to be free. And that is probably enough. You enjoy perspectives. May you learn to see the play. And maybe you'd think maybe you never think that learning to see is a done deal. You're always learning to see and I hope you stay interested in that learning. Thank you.