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SPEAKERS

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What occurs to me just sitting here right now is that it's probably a poor introduction to what I'm about to say, as a talk is there was a Japanese pureland Buddhist monk who was living in San Francisco in japantown. Very early 60s. And he was youngest, 23 years old and he was depressed. And he ran into a bookstore. He ran into Suzuki Roshi. It was a Zen teacher up there. And Suzuki Roshi said, Oh, you should come and sit with me. And so he did he start sitting with Suzuki Roshi and i was there at some point securtiy asked him to give a Dharma talk, he should talk about dharma. So I can't because my English is so poor. And so then I think maybe the next time secure she wasn't given Dharma talk at this river in New gooeys Miss deputies was there. The grocery store he goes he tells the story itself was super she got up and started walking back and forth across the room here. And he started to say today

is today.

Today is today is not tomorrow. Today is not yesterday. Today is today. Today is

and then he ended the talk and left.

And revenue ghuli counted how many words were in that Dharma talk. And there was a total of five words used in various ways. And somehow the way the Suzuki Roshi was able to convey those five words had an impact on him and he realized oh, You don't have to know that much English. And you don't have to say much today is today. Is that profound? And

so

the reason I use this as an introduction to my talk is, I have a very, for me when I think it was a very significant topic to bring up to talk about today. But I don't feel like I have much to say about it. So I'll talk about talk about it for a little while, just some ideas about this sort of my relationship to this idea. And then we can open up and have discussion so you can talk about your relationship to this concept and, and your thoughts about it, your questions about it. And it's the idea of commitment and As I was introduced to Buddhist practice, through my Zen practice, the idea of commitment was a very important idea or kind of tied together with Buddhist practice it had been committed to practice. And I saw it in many of the people around me when I was first practicing Buddhism. I saw my teachers I saw it and the more senior students around me that I admired. There was a sense of being very strong intention that they were dedicated to, that there wasn't a commitment to and that they hung in there. And one of the most obvious things I saw was the commitment that people had to sit every day. And he said, day in day out, then pretty much you sat and sat and SAT. And there was kind of feeling of kind of being unwavering and one of the kind of metaphors I guess that was given to me at that time was by a Zen teacher who said, your commitment to sitting every day should be the same as your commitment to brush your teeth every day. It should be that kind of second nature that easy should almost like don't think about it is this is what you do, you know, you sit. And part of the value of that commitment, as it was explained to me was that when you do something that regularly and it's so second nature, like brushing your teeth, then the specialness of it disappears. And it just something quite ordinary. And when meditation is quite ordinary, and you're not trying to attain anything or get something from it, or trying to make it into something, then the mind actually can relax in a deeper way. But if you're kind of pushing and trying to get something in front of you, then the mind can't really relax in some very deep way that has to happen. In order to practice take you really far but if just second nature is no special deal, no special thing about it nothing, you're not going to you know, you're not trying to become the great meditator and it doesn't nothing good for you except you know, bread cavities. And then it actually can allow the mind to you know, settle in a much, much deeper way. Let go in a deeper way. So, you have commitment is sitting every day. And what I what I saw around meeting me is that commitment was not easy to something as simple as sitting every day that there are all these, all this momentum, desires and wishes and aversions and fears that you know, interfered with showing up every day for the simple thing of sitting. And that people because it was the meditation was happening not because of desire, not because it seems like a good idea, but because of a kind of a commitment that is really, really To be followed held to, it didn't matter whether people wanted to meditate that day or not. Or they liked meditation that day or not. Or whether it was, you know, a good idea, you know, many of the categories many of the ways in which we might evaluate is a good idea or not, I have a headache I'm not gonna sit there for 45 minutes and feel my headache it's not a good idea. Or you know, I have a cold I don't feel like I have the energy I need to rest. But do something within reason without you know, being too crazy. They did was just sad anyway. You sat and sat and sat with at all and in that seat, sitting with everything, a lot of number of things one thing to the way to which the mind rebelled or had other agendas or other ideas, you got to see it really well. And you got to see we got to see how the mind has a mind of its own. How the mind pulls us companies follow me do this commands us demands us, pushes us with its agendas and ideas and preferences and fears. As opposed to us being in charge.

The mind is in charge, your desires are in charge. And so when there's a commitment, oh, no, I'm not going to give it to anything. I'm just gonna do this one thing, then all the ways of the craziness of the mind shows itself. And it's fascinating to see that it's the beginning of freedom to see that. And because the commitment is right there, you're not going to waver from that commitment. Then with time, the mind the neurotic mind will begin to relax and let go will just get exhausted. And you give it a chance to get exhausted. If you just kind of say no, I'm not going to go there. I'm not going to I'm not going to go anywhere else. But right here. I'm going to do this this thing this thing is this thing. And eventually becomes like brushing your teeth and the mind gets settled. The analogy Jack Kornfield likes to use of training a puppy. more classic analogy, I think in Buddhism was that of training a horse, where you tie the horse to a stake, and the horse starts to run away, but eventually realizes it can't get away, and then eventually settles down and goes to sleep. And I saw the idea of commitment with my teachers in my early days of practice, still to this day that they just don't really keep showing up to meditate every day. But he just showed up. There was always there. They were just seemed like they were always committed to practice to being there. And a lot of what I learned at the San Francisco Zen Center was the value of just showing up. Just being there. being there to support other people in practice being there to be a teacher being there. For your meditations, just being there just showing up showing showing up. And so there was it wasn't this tendency is not a tendency to kind of rush off a lot and be in many other places. And just to be there, be there be there. And, and I saw that a lot of the strength and health of these early these communities that practice in my early years of practice, had a lot to do with the commitment. People have just been there showing up and not being elsewhere and the kind of community strength the community erodes around it.

The

and then there's things like people, I saw people who were committed to truth, to being honest, and how inspiring that was, to see people being committed to being honest, and your commitment to it. In the Buddhist tradition, there's a range of commitments that people make kind of Buddhist wise. people when they first come to Buddhism sometimes make a commitment to the triple refuge, the Buddha Dharma Sangha, and then with that, or sometimes later, they think commitment to the precepts By the precepts organizing the life by the precepts, and sometimes you know, we don't want to live by the precepts. But sometimes when there's a commitment there, that's what you've promised to do. It says what you vow to do, I'm going to do this thing. And, and it's a purification process, it's a mirror to do that. And because it's a commitment, there's a higher standard to hold oneself against then if you just, you know, a good idea. And then there's a in some schools of Buddhism, there's things like the Bodhisattva vows, which are commitment about how you live your life. It is commitment I saw around the thing very, very important. I saw this, you know, this is, you know, and I would venture to say that the commitment that people had, to their Buddhist practice was what gave power and strength to the meditation practice. That if they hadn't have committed not only to their commitment to meditation, but

their commitment to the other aspects To practice, without that sense of commitment, I don't think that their meditation practice would have been as strong or as powerful or had as much momentum.

You know, the analogy of

for momentum and perseverance in Buddhism is that of lighting fire with two sticks. And if you rub a stick for a while and then go off and have tea, and then come back and rub your stick for a while they decide it's time take a nap, and then come back and rub the stick for a while and then decide to go talk with a friend. And then realistic for a while as well, you know, I know these are good sticks near should find some other sticks. If you keep doing that, and interrupting the stick doesn't get enough friction to create a creative spark the flame and so you have to keep going. Or you know, boiling water, the same thing you have to have a continuity of the fire under the water to create the boil. So the value of commitment is that it gets things boiling within us gets the commitment going. gets the gets the momentum going in the practice. Now commitment is kind of an interesting word for Buddhists, because commitment has the connotation or as an aspect of being kind of holding on to something. And you think that Buddhists aren't going to hold on to anything. But actually, Buddhists do hold on. But it's not attached. They don't cling. So what's the difference, but what's the difference between clinging or being attached to something in a way and adding a commitment to something? And I would propose that the important difference is that over time, you will realize if you pay attention, that if you're attached to something or clinging to something, that the consequence and how you're feeling will be very different than if you're committed. clinging leads to further bondage to further kind of being kind of limited and contracted and commitment leads to a greater sense of freedom. If commitment doesn't lead to a greater sense of freedom, or doesn't, doesn't show you that, oh, there is a path here to freedom by dealing with these obstacles, then I don't think it's really very valuable, at least from Buddhist point of view to have that kind of commitment. So commitment shouldn't be something that makes you feel less free. This can vary commitment that helps make you free moves you towards freedom.

And I think it's easy enough to see that many people are not free when they're acting freely. fruitless, being able to act freely does not should not be correlated with being free. At least. In America, one of the ideals is to be able to shop freely You know, and that's our God given right to shop. And we've built some of the greatest churches of shopping in the world. In America, I've heard of this supposed to be someplace in the Midwest and in the great Mall of America. So it's cold. Anyway been there

been there is a big you got lost. And

so these great, you know, authors to consumerism, and, and so, you know, to to be able to shop freely. And it's great when people have your cards that help you do that. And so you can talk freely and freely and freely and then the next 20 years dealing with that freedom. And that kind of freedom is not considered freedom in Buddhism because Cuz what's what's propelling the freedom is clinging

attachment craving and so is it better now bit of a and so with Buddhism it with freedom and Buddhism is usually defined not as a freedom to

but freedom from

Derek went off

back on so to free up freedom Some notion of freedom is not freedom to do whatever you like, but rather it's freedom from bondage, freedom from the impulses that take us by the nose and pull us along. So it's a freedom from these kind of forces inside of us, that keep us from being to from, you know, the tell us and system insist that we act and respond in various ways. Freedom from ourselves. So, the idea of commitment, I love the word commitment, partly because etymological roots of the word it, it means commitment means, apparently could look in the dictionary it means to touch together, to touch with and, and I don't know what to have any idea how the expression to touch with or that Latin commit gets to our commitment as touching for the idea of touching and being tangible to me is very nice idea. And so what is it that commitment touches within us the movement of commitment. And Rachel Raman virtually maimane says something somewhere that commitment

is,

is a movement of the soul. Not exactly Buddhist vocabulary, but it's this kind of commitment, something of the soul. Whereas attachment is something that comes from our kind of surface impulses of the mind or the brain or something like that. So the idea of some commitment arises or some deep touching, of something that's really important and valuable within ourselves. And I think when I saw again, among the people who I With paid attention to learn from my early years of practice, I saw that their sense of commitment to practice came because they were touching something that was of great value to them. And because they had this great value and great understanding, they were going to be committed to this. And they saw the value of being committed of holding to it. Come with me, holding there and just letting I think things become clarify in the context of that commitment.

So the last thing I wanted to say, which again, is not so connected, but it occurred to me, it comes from the works of Carlos Castaneda, and he has this Don Juan apparently some point says that there are two kinds of people there's an ordinary people who see Their life, either through the category to the categories of blessing or curses, things that occurred or blessings or curses for them. That's the ordinary person. And the warrior, which is kind of what Don Juan's into, right? The warrior sees everything as a challenge. There's a great, great difference, right? Do you see things either as a blessing or a curse? Do you see things as a challenge? And I think the idea of Buddhist practice is much more the idea of seeing things as a challenge. whether things are happening or is blessing that happening to you or things or curse to you. Difficult, whatever it might be, it's all then fuel and food. To

keep working on a practice is to keep showing up, keep being mindful, keep the commitment of practice in the forefront. So, for mindfulness students, one of the primary commitments is mindfulness itself and to be committed Being mindful to being aware of what's happening now the inner world and the outer world without the commitment being mindful means that the mind stays fluid stays free with what is happening committed to to pay attention what's happening now as opposed to getting caught up in what just happened. So if someone comes in you know, to the meditation hall late and bangs the door and knocks over a few chairs in the way in one option is to see that as a curse, or blessing or something and then start thinking about how these kinds of people should never be allowed in the meditation hall and we should probably postcards at the door and video cameras with television screen here. So you know, it's kind of like public, you know, outing of them so everybody knows who that person is. Wherever the mind goes starts going even the way the mind does. The mind is lost its commitment to mindfulness, if it gets carried down those kinds of ways, but rather, the commitment is what's happening now, what's happening now? What's happening now? Let's look at this more deeply. What's this? What is this experience I'm having right now? Let's let go of the blame and judgments about that thing. Let's really be here and what's actually happening here, inner and outer. Let's keep looking. Let's keep looking. Let's keep looking. So the commitment in mindfulness practices always is very simple thing, just looking, looking or being aware what's happening now what's happening now. And that takes a tremendous commitment. Or if you prefer, tremendous trust in the practice, to keep it going moment by moment, if you're willing, in some sense to let go of any kind of holding on to what just happened, and to be willing to move into the next moment, as interested in next moment. The fresh way, what's this? What's this? What's this? And just keep this as the commitment mindfulness practices. What is this? What is this? What is this? And I guess it's the hopefully the last time I'll say this last thing I'll say is,

is

one of the notions that I saw in my early years also among my Zen teachers and fellow students, was not everyone talked about this, but I heard is a notion was kind of in the air of it's kind of ideal. Maybe me if I say go here at the wrong way. So when you hear it kind of interpret in the best terms of the best possible ways you can, but the idea of having dumb commitment being really dumb, dumb commitment. Stupid commitment equipment isn't stupid, but the way you hold it, you just dumb stupid to it means you do it, you hold on to it, you know, what's really stupid, just, you don't have any better idea or any better sense and just, you know, just be stupid with it. And that's good, within reason. And so commitment is very important and it's a lovely thing and if you prefer prefer, there's other words you could use. I also like the word dedication to be dedicated. Some people feel that's more heartfelt. They'll have a firm dedication. I suspect that Buddhist practice Won't it doesn't really work for people, unless there's commitment as part of it. So now I've talked long enough. So what are your thoughts about this topic, your experiences and challenges with commitment Yes,

this chart

we started traveling and the only way

people would have been touched.

So, instead of looking at this as a curse,

feel more

mindfulness

and you just touched

if you don't touch

That's beautiful. Very nice. You

won't be touched yourself unless you touch. So it's like, touching, touching with

people hear from friends or family

is they like the idea of meditation.

And I enjoy

but it's a benchmark for me

that I can see relationship to someone else's

information. Recently

with my job

feeling

more like

the rest of the team Thank you

commitment

is the essence of the practice.

I haven't developed sure to be in a mindful space all the time.

practices. Yeah.

The I like the distinction. I like it. I like to distinguish a commitment from a promise. Because a promise you don't want to break, but commitment is okay. You don't want don't really matter of breaking a commitment. These you know, I guess some commitments are kind of like promises. But a commitment is a kind of an intention to align oneself with certain values are intention to live a certain way or to practice certain way. And so we do our best to follow that intention. But there's no sense that you know, you can be perfect at it. You need the commitment because you're not perfect. But the promise you know, you kind of like, you know, I promise to sit every day. You break your promise that's feels kind of weird, doesn't it?

Somebody else

promises to other people and commitments to oneself.

If your intention is to sit there don't

bang your cell phone.

That's part of the mind. Separate

Sometimes as part of my challenge,

I feel like

I see a sea of black and white

slipping by

regularly

broken down into reestablishes at some point I will be now establishing later on when we get back on and feel like when I expect to mess with commitments, broken

promises

the best way for myself

Do you see a connection between commitment commitment to the present moment?

renunciation

is a connection between commitment to the present moment, being mindful to the present moment and minimization of things are the things.

There are times when in times when it's unless there's some kind of letting go of something, you're not going to show up, be mindful of the present moment.

But then when it comes to, like sitting

in meditation,

it's, it's requiring a lot of renunciation of thoughts that are delicious.

So it seems like Sometimes mindfulness requires a lot of renunciation of certain kinds of thoughts that seem very delicious, very compelling. And it can sometimes you know, sometimes there is a letting go of things thought in sometimes thoughts or different momentums of the mind, whatever. And, and it can be very important part of practice, learn to let go and like go and like go. But I think at the heart, it's not really a matter of letting go of anything that's necessary, if you're, if you're mindful is is very, very keen. It's not really recording this necessarily, like go, the thought would you let go of is the way that you related to the thoughts. And so the thought those were does, but you're not, you're no longer clinging to a thought or, or, or fascinated by thought or interest in thought, or it's somehow it's the relationship we have with a thought, which we let go of, rather than the thought itself. Because that's really the problem. Thoughts are pretty innocent. They just these innocent things that float by, but the way we relate to them, that's the Sometimes in meditation circles thoughts get a bad rap bad rap. It's really not their, you know, unfair to blame them all they get blamed for.

Yes.

I think again,

the main it makes sense that some people wouldn't you would have the kind of connotation with it. And I think again in the Buddhist situation, you don't want to necessarily measure a concept by how it sounds to us, but rather when we live by that concept, what are the consequences for us. So if in fact renunciation for you, the movement to what you call renunciation causes you to be more aversive or more afraid or more, you know, something, something which is unhealthy, then that's not a good movement for you. But if renunciation leads to greater freedom, greater lightness, greater happiness, then it's probably something which is really good to do. We will announce things all the time. When I get home, I take out the trash.

I'm happy let go of it. This

One of the places where sometimes the value of commitment or certain way within works shows itself is is when for parents with their children or with other people people are not people you know, caretaking elderly parents or friends or neighbors who are sick or something. And you know, there's kind of a sense of commitment even maybe having made some serious commitment. I'm committed to these people, you know, but these people are sick or something, you know, whatever, you get up in the middle of the night and then they throw up all over you and, and you know, and then you know, this and that and, you know, it's kind of a drag because you don't get tired next day, but you're committing that you're going to be there. And you know, a question where you're going to be there and out when this person is throwing up, all over. That's what you do. You're there. And, and, and something very valuable to be learned from that kind of commitment. Because it's kind of when we step, we step aside our own desires and preferences, step aside for something that needs to happen, and we can do that freely. I think that's a really important movement of freedom. And the kind of kind of a commitment like parents are committed to their kids or children are committed to their elderly parents as they're getting sick and frail. And you know, it overrides our self concern sometimes. Yeah.

far enough

Certainly they're getting somewhat clean.

Something about not being

the best job spaces.

So I find some other quality.

I agree man as sometimes said in the circles that, according to NATO, if sitting was sitting long periods of time, so chickens would be enlightened. So certainly many more

you know more than just to commit to the ship, show up.

Sit there. I agree. So then there's, you know, certainly a lot of discernment and that goes into, you know, knowing the meditation equivalent of exactly how to floss. But yes, we'll get the commitment to floss every day has to be there. And then you refine it. The dentist,

my commitment to practice, my personal experience, my inner experience, all those things. One of the interesting things lately

with people who are basically meditators, my family has other practices, my friends

into a little bit of

daily practice But the thing I'm hearing feedback now is how much they're influenced by my practice without being aware of what you think what I think about it really influenced

the practice and somehow that practice

for developing a practice was

surprising.

Nice reminds me of this. When I was a college

student, I lived in a communal household of five, six of us. And I sat every day, two times a day in the morning, I first got up for 40 minutes and then I think somewhere around 839 o'clock evening, I'll sit again with Dave Asprey very regularly every evening every Super Sunday, every evening every Morning. I just did it, you know, I just did it and I didn't think about it too much. They did it every day except Sunday. And then, and then several years later after we had a household that had disbanded. One of the roommates said, you know, well, I live in the house for a year, and then I moved on, and household continue for a while and they said, when you left, it became

chaos in the house.

You your regularity of sitting because you were so regular. It created kind of a structure for the house when you were there. And everybody kind of went to bed early then it kind of settled everything out and whatever. And when you weren't there sitting in my room and meditated close my door and sat, but somehow that you know, it spilled over beyond the door. And

well, you see, I was introduced to, to Zen Meditation at the San Francisco Zen Center. And the schedule, there was I said everyday by Sunday. They still do. They don't sit on Sunday, except, you know, when they have retreats, what they are, I don't know why. I don't know why that, you know, I just I never questioned it. So just so you know, that that was probably a good idea. Yeah, so, yeah, I didn't know. So I just thought was a good idea. And at that extension, basically my mind is similar, you know, you know, when be too fanatic about this. And somehow the psyche kind of gets, you know, a little bit of space and I don't know, just so I sat there, saying two periods a day is, you know, fairly serious.

I did it every day, but no, Sunday. No. So,

last one, then we'll stop

a very clear experience about this. As

I

started to become vegan for a while, this song

around the years

and a lot of people when they hear about it, you know,

pick up some kind of sense of restraint and confinement. And I've just really had a strong sense of being freed from

so many unhealthy foods but don't just don't just

I was on a ski trip, Austria in one day I had this whole big

thing for dessert. And

the waitress Is there anything here that? She said,

Well, there's this job.

So many people, Buddhists will talk about also that the freedom that comes from renunciation. A free translation can give a tremendous sense of lightness, Lightness of Being and freedom, commitment like this awesome.

So,

thank you so much. It was lovely. And I hope that this this topic has been interesting for you or kind of prompts you to think more deeply about it and how it might be useful in your life. And I hope you have a wonderful month and a committed month and I will be back here Monday at the end of the month of March. Thank you.