

2006-12-10 The Value of Questioning

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SPEAKERS

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So this morning on in search of a good question, and I'd like you to help me. So questioning. There was once a once upon a time, man who wanted to join become a Zen monk. And so he went to local Zen monastery and asked if you can come in. And I went there said, What's your question? And he said, Well, I don't have one. So he sent them away. This, this monster is not right for you. And so then he went to another monastery and said, I'd like to come the monk here. And that I haven't asked him What's your question? And he kind of mumbled something about, well, you know, I'm here. To get enlightened, so he sent him away, he went to another monastery. I'm here to ordain and be in what's your question? And he didn't have the question. And so finally, he understood that the North again to the monastery, you have to have a question. So in order to get into practice, with this practice, I think it's helpful to have some idea of the question, what's your question? The idea of spiritual search for spiritual questing, having a question as part of it. And there's something very profound about the capacity to ask questions. It's also something quite annoying if you have a if you have a young child. It doesn't stop asking questions. But it's also supposed to be quite beautiful and you shouldn't be curtailed too easily.

When I was 14, I went to a boarding School in high up in the Alps is a beautiful place. And I was walking down the road one day with an older friend of mine he was 17 and I'm just in awe of the snow capped mountains in this beautiful green rolling mountainside hillside going down in the valley below and blue skies. This is awesome. And in that sense of awesomeness I asked, not really expecting an answer even but I asked him, What are we here for? And my friend said something like, that's a silly Don't be silly. And something inside of me is closed. So here's that little part of me to open again. Because you know, that sense of wonder that's it's wondering questioning What's this all about? What's is this? Somehow was embarrassed or you know, reprimanded and closed up

The question so when I review my you know, I practice life I had a series of questions that were important for me various times. One of the first kind of kind of questions that really interested me,

personally, in terms of getting involved in Buddhism, was the question of violence. In trying to understand violence, the nature of it is a little bit academic or intellectual, perhaps, but things What is this violence? What is it that prompts people to be violent? What is that about? What are the ways maybe to overcome violence. And then, I had this wonderful period of solitude for a week once and never been spend time alone before and time alone in a rural place. And never didn't talk to anyone for a week. And it was I was quite ecstatic. It was quite profound, very transformative time to be alone networks like being on retreat and then depth, personal depth that I felt the sense of intimacy I had with the world around me that I experienced, I felt was very, very precious. And my friends came back to where I was staying, that vanished. And then it became my question for a long time was, how can I? How can I be alone together with others? And it wasn't that it was gonna be a loose, you know, pulling myself back. But how can I have this sense of intimacy and depth and connection that I felt when I was alone? How can I have that with others to not be overcome by my anxieties or fears or concerns or worries around it have to happen when you socialize with people, you're involved with people? That's my question for a long time. And then on my way to Zen monastery down Tassajara when I was first gonna be a monk there, practitioner there. I was in a bookstore. And I pulled down a book from a bookshelf and a spiritual book and opened it up. Just for In the page, and the teacher said something like, are they remember anymore? It was something like, basic human problem is that people hold themselves back, hold themselves back from reality somehow. And so I thought that was interesting statement. So I try, I transform the question in my mind. And that's thinking one of my questions when I was practicing in the monastery was, was a turn around hundred 80 degrees. And the question was, how can I participate more fully? With what I'm doing? I participate here. And some of you have heard me tell a story, my carrot story of, you know, chopping carrots in our kitchen. And my question is, how can I participate more fully with these carrots? You know, chopping them and, and I didn't want to be there, right. So. So it's an interesting question. You know, I want to He was there for enlightenment and great meditation. And I was assigned to the kitchen we don't meditate so much. And this was not good news. So what did it mean to participate, you know, fully completely with chopping the characters you would be participate participate fully in your meditation practice. So, that was a question I had and I participate more fully here. Then a driving question I had for a short while for a while. It was actually quite driving for me, probably back to Asia second time to practice there was a question of, you know, what is the cell? What's the cell and I had touched something in deep meditation, that I call the self some sense of self. And, and, and it was kind of, I was mystified by this. It was like this kind of thing.

And it's a really important became essential for me. We got to touch that place. Again. Find out what that is. What is that? Is that place only In a sense, when I got close to it, it just dissolved. That was the resolution of an answer, but rather rather the dissolving of it.

So to ask questions, or ask questions means we're open to some new possibility. And often in life, we're not open. Often, I would suggest, as a thesis or as a premise, there's a kind of present kind of challenge to you that whenever you're suffering it's because you haven't asked enough questions. You haven't quite you don't have a question something and you might might you know, when you find yourself suffering, ask yourself is there a good question here? what's the what's the right question

here is my suffering arises because I'm not really I haven't really questioned something. What is it that needs to be questioned here? Sometimes with suffering, we kind of take it for granted though, for me, this is the way it is. Or we come to situations situations we have preconceived ideas of how things are supposed to be. So when you have a tendency to ask a question or have a questioning approach, then you're open to possibilities of what's possible here. And I find this very valuable for me, in situations in personal situations, and either as a teacher or sometimes as a friend to people, is there's no shortage of billions advice I can give people Thank you. And, and what I find often is more useful for me to do rather than give advice is to ask good questions, you know, and ask, you know, sometimes very simple questions, you know, can you come tell me more? How do you feel about that or what's really going on? Or have you thought about this part of it? But what was your intention? What's your intention in doing that? What's your help with respray And in asking questions, sometimes it can facilitate another person to open their mind open their thinking to new possibilities. Maybe they're stuck in some way. And they ask him questions help to unstuck them. And then they discover what's true for them, and they discover some solutions. And generally, if I do that, that way, the solutions or the insights that people get, are usually much better than my abilities, advice. And so it's nice to ask questions.

And then there's the questioning behind question buying questioning process. And that is, you might ask yourself a question like yourself, you could ask yourself, what's my intention? And what I'm about to do, and you might have a simple answer. Well, what's the intention behind that? And what's the intention behind that? So, you know, it could be that I'm going to the store today. What's your intention behind that? What's my intention of going to the store to buy Christmas presents? What's your intention behind that? What's that? What is it? I find Christmas? I know. I want to buy presents for my sister. What is it about that device intention, but what's the intention behind that? Well, I would like to somehow express my care for her my love for her and also try to do something that would help her in her life. She said one person who has a lot of illness, so like, get some kind of present that actually make her life a little bit easier. So, you know, starts off with the idea that the intention is to go shopping, chocolate, so you drop. And then if you kind of keep asking the question, you get to something more and more deeper, something more interesting coming down having to do with love and care and, and something else. And I think a lot of motivations that people have, whether they're all kinds of things if he's kind of to scratch the surface go deeper and deeper. Chances are you'll find something beautiful. Because my say my belief, but ask questions, you know, what is it? What's your intention? What's your motivation behind this? And then of course there are really bad questions to ask. Maybe bad questions are contextual good sometimes in bad Other times, but, you know, sometimes the bad question is like, What's wrong with me? You know, maybe there's better health helpful ways of stating something like that say, Well, you know, what's my on my attach to here? What's my fader here? You know, these ways of asking questions and oneself. But what's wrong with me is if that's a given, what am what happens if you ask the question what's right with me? And I have friends. I know people try to do sometimes who try to focus on other people and try to see what's good enough. What's really good here. What's beautiful here, this person With the idea is that if you focus on what's beautiful, that's what gets strengthened or enhanced or developed, pull it onto them. And

sometimes what I know people who might have a mean streak or something, they kind of hope that my my wish, my hope is like whatever is good flourish, and whatever is not good, but it just kind of atrophy away, rather than judging the person good or bad, focusing on the quality of these different aspects of them. The Buddha recommended the question, you know, where's the suffering here? If you're suffering, where's the suffering? Where's the clinging and the suffering? And sometimes people can be slow and appreciating their suffering. Or appreciating that they have some personal responsibility for that suffering. And so they might feel kind of burdened or troubled or anxious something, but so outwardly directed. And please turn the question around and say, rather than asking who's to blame, and ask the question, What am I holding on to here? What's my attachment? What's, what's, what's going on here with me? Now, one of the very interesting things about asking questions I feel is not necessarily the answer, that's you bring about, but rather, the very act, the process of asking a question is kind of opens the mind a little bit or asking a question disentangle this to some degree, from the kind of the ways in which the mind sometimes entangled with our life or concerns or worries or relationships or work, whatever. And sometimes we need to be quite kind of the Velcro with our life can be quite tight. And so to kind of asking question, kind of gets back. And maybe tries to get an overview of the situation tries to be a little bit free of the situation, but independent of it. And so instead of sometimes instead of solving a problem, sometimes the whole thing can be resolved by not identifying so tightly with it. So to ask the question, no steps back, what is going on here? Just that what's going on here? You know, you're kind of in some kind of mazing fray with some friends or something, and maybe an argument or something. And suddenly, one person's kind of say, wait a minute, what's going on here? And everyone kind of, Oh, you know, there's another kind of way of being here. We have to, we have to be locked into our struggle here. What's going on here? So there's a there's a way in which asking questions can sometimes kind of reinforce that part of the mind, which is independent and liberate are freed from The world around us situations and also for my inner kind of self identity and inner attachments and freedoms and your inner attachments. So, to ask the question, and find in the question, a process of questioning away, sets us free a little bit, or a lot. So to ask a question, and in the personal practice, there is sometimes, you know, you can use all kinds of questions you can ask, but there's one kind of common question. And the question is, what is this? What is this kind of, what is this? What's really what is it what is this really, this word, this is important, this means here and now, in this present moment, what is this? What is this? And not assuming, you know, even, you know, or kind of go below the surface I answers of what you think this is, and it's something very deep and very maturing about just keeping on this question. What is this what it is, and the very depth of the foster practice that can take one whole equilibration? Can it can be fueled by just constant asking what is this? What is this? And not not responding to that question with analysis or thinking but it can deeper looking deeper looking at what is this thing looking or sensing or feeling or greater awareness? What is this? And then things become more revealed, more understood or seen. So, there's something very profound about questioning, the Buddha recommended questioning many teachers I've known or recommended questioning. Well, here's an interesting question to carry with you. That I kind of learned through Zen practice. What's the request in this situation? What is it? What's this thing? What's the situation and then what's, what's the request of me here? As opposed to what can I get out of here? What's in it for me? What's the request here? And it can be as simple as

you know, you go home, and you see that the dishes are dirty. So their quest is to clean the dishes. Oh, that's what the world is requesting right now. What's the world requesting of you in any given time? What's the request? Interesting question, I think. So there's many questions. And I've had many questions in terms of my over my practice life. But I don't have a good question today. And this is not good. So it's good to have friends. So I was wondering if you'd be willing to help me out? So I was wondering if maybe it would be nice. If you guys could break into groups of maybe four or five and explore together what a really good question would be

And you know, the kind of work is talking about talking about it to come up with some questions talk about it. Maybe the process of talking about it, exploring it, offering some questions will help all of us kind of brainstorm to kind of come in deeper, deeper questions or more precise questions. And there might be some of you already know, some profound questions and ready to say it right. And maybe those are the most of the ones that stick but perhaps if you say, but then the open he says something even deeper, or more personal, you know, you might have some generic spiritual question, Who am I? before? That's a good idea, right as a question. But you know, maybe you know, it's kind of abstract if you've read the book. So in this exercise of trying to find a really good question, see if it can be something's really personal for you. Not only what you think I should think, I should question I should ask what is it okay. And then we'll do that for about 10 minutes or so. And then we can be gathered and then someone from some of the groups can you guys can somehow come to some consensus or close to consensus or something and an offer you need good questions I can have for today. That Okay, so please be a little groups of four or five. And if you don't want to, you can sit you're welcome to sit quietly and wait.

Now I'm eager to find out what kind of help I'm going to get. So what kind of questions you come up with? In the back

of the question, we came up with this, how can one Remember to be mindful when they get angry?
Thank you

Ergo came up with three questions.

One was, how can I lead live and undivided lives?

And am I resisting anything right now?

And is meditation narcissistic?

Or does it really help or can it help others?

Does the meditation practice bring you more in touch with a power greater than yourself? Or does it tend to dissolve that connection

We came up with a final question, but I think I want to mention questions that led us to our question. So one question was about competition. Why is it so often the case that we expect there to be a winner and a loser? And another question was, why is it that our minds sabot, TAs us? Why do we trip ourselves up with our minds? And so we had, I thought, a lovely discussion about all of this and the question we ended up with was, Why is it so often the case that we are motivated by or motivated by activated by, or led by fear rather than love?

Well, here are a few of our questions.

How do I love more unconditionally and less selectively? While at the same time guarding against dangers? A very similar question how do I listen more openly without prejudgment and that is with beginner's mind. What are my motivations for acting and thinking the way I do if I peel away the layers, what will I find? What impulses in me will I want to discover?

Do our teachers really know anything? Are they really?

Are they really more realized and we are?

Just more questioning?

And then finally, what is the ultimate question?

We also had an interesting conversation

concerning issues of life and death. And the final question that we arrived that is, what does it mean to have a life well lived?

I'll go headlong. Our group talks about suffering. And

the first question was, what is our relationship to suffering? And when is it the time to look at it and when is it the time to ignore it? And then the second question was when we talked a little bit about suffering being clean, and that the really the answer is release is, well, how do you release it? No, for me, at least Anyway, it was just intellectually understand it, but emotionally, I don't know how to do it.

After our discussion, we came up with the following question.

Does the question has to be profound in order to be helpful?

The three of us in my group, we all have children. And so the question for us, well, we started investigating the idea of questioning our children asking them what is because so often they're just emoting all over the place. And we're trying to deal with that. And so, you know, it might be a really, you know, revolutionary idea to ask them, What is this and get them to start practicing that you know,

A second question from our group. when death comes for me, what will be my relationship with myself?

What do I want for my relationship with others? And what do I want for my relationship with that?

So, our group ended with the question of when is questioning helpful versus when is it just sort of endless been spinning around and around? We talked

a lot about

what are we What am I here for? And so that was into Who am I? What am I and that kind of ends In

if there is some concept of reincarnation that something goes from one body to another one life to another. What is it about me as an individual that is in fact, reincarnated moves from one life to another?

Well, our group was fascinated with a lot of related questions that kind of eventually came. How do we step out of the continual process of judgment, ourselves and others that stops us from being present in relationship with others and ourselves?

Thank you. However, first,

your group had four people and we had four different questions.

We had a central theme, I guess it's how can I remove the obstructions that prevents me from understanding what I'm supposed to learn from the experiences?

That's a summary I just made up. So

hopefully other group members that don't disagree.

In our group, one question was, how is it that some people seem more resilient in life than others? And another question was, in any given situation, how can we act in the most appropriate way? And finally, the question, how can we be more peaceful with the ultimate mystery of questions that we can't answer?

My question was on can asking the right questions lead to unlocking and resolving physical ailments that we have. And knowing if we keep asking the right questions or keep going and deeper and deeper into the questions like you were talking about buying the gift, will we ever be able to unlock those? The cause of our physical problems?

Okay.

He doesn't want to ask his question.

Well

I just like the feeling Have questions the feeling of kind of just not exactly light bulbs going off in the head, but it's kind of like new possibilities. And new doors being opened. Oh, yeah. Look at something in a new fresh way. Oh, yeah, that's, that'd be profound. Any of those questions if you live with them for quite a while and really work them and work them, I think would take you quite far. Sometimes it's nice to live with a question for a long time. And don't just settle for one answer. And just keep keep asking and asking and seeing what comes up. Ask your friends. What do you think about this? What do you think about this and explore it, explore it and really let it a question kind of come more and more life for you and carry you.

In Korean, then

they have these cons which sometimes and then the students are given and my understanding and then you're given one question for your life. In Japanese, you're offering a series of different times when there was one question your question and so hopefully it's a good one. And so I hope that this morning has given you some ideas the value of questioning and that the maybe you go forth today with greater willingness to, to inquire, ask to explore to question what's going on and in doing that, I hope that it makes you happier. 10 times over. Thank you very much.