

2007-01-22 Breathing Easily

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SPEAKERS

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So today's talk will go kind of from the abstract to the practical. From the perhaps sublime and religiously challenging to the most everyday concrete, essential thing that we can do in Buddhism seems to kind of hang in there we go from the abstract to the practical.

And probably one of the most abstract places you could start in any religious tradition is to ask the question,

on what authority what's the authority

upon which you have your religious beliefs?

You know, you have these

you know, great religious, you have great,

great world religion, you're called a religion and we teach these things that are supposed to be supposed to be true.

And how do you know they're true?

And then you go down the street,

to another meditation center or a church or synagogue or temple or something

and they say You know, this is this is the way.

And then you say, well,

we have it under authority that it's this way and they have authority. It's that way. So who has it? Who has the right authority? Or what authority do religious beliefs come from? And, and some people claim that their religious beliefs come from Great Divine sources. So they have tremendous power and authority because of that claim. Then you can ask the question of what one authority Do you know that it came from that wonderful divine

source?

Well,

you know, my minister told me

how does she know

what authority she handed

over? She went to seminary.

People seminary, you know,

authority they have, oh, you know, they say well came from this book.

Well,

about that book. So you

can kind of ask these questions in our once heard of a Christian, first year Christian religion who was a Christian. And he went over to a Buddhist scholar, a young, budding Buddhist who was becoming a Buddhist scholar, and he said, don't go down that route, the scholarly route. If you go on a scholarly route, we start investigating and questioning the questioning is the source of the authority of your beliefs.

It's really hard.

You know, you it's really hard to kind of your religious beliefs sometimes kind of end up feeling like you're on quicksand. So I'm not I'm sure it's not true for everyone, all religions, but certainly the issue of religion authority, what for what authority we have something is certainly an interesting question to

ask. And

I suspect that a lot of people don't ask that

question very often. In fact,

number of people have told me, they when

they went to Sunday school, they start asking questions like that. They were asked to please don't come back.

So,

the Buddha was wandering around India

24 2500 years ago.

And they were at his time there were a lot of other religious teachers with very different religious teachings

wandering around as well.

And he came to a town

of belong to the people called Columbus.

He showed up. And the Columbus went to the Buddha. And they were kind of very, very cleverly very reasonably. They said, well,

you're just another

spiritual teacher

coming to town. We have a lot of teachers coming to town. Now tell us tell me, I think Kelly telling us about what

you have to say.

Why don't you tell us how can we decide amongst them all?

Who has the truth?

That's a pretty good question. Right? acquainting, I find your way through all this. So then

the Buddha makes it clear In a statement,

which

should always be a little bit suspicious of when people religious people make declarative statements, that's when religious people are good at that. And that's supposed to carry certain authority. But somebody makes a declarative statement.

So now you've been warned that this is coming.

So you can do with it, if you wish. And this is the statement that I'm about to read is very famous, and it's often quoted and often misquoted a lot and,

and it is

loved, loved by many people. And there's a Zen teacher, which has taught here love the teacher named Yvonne Rand, who said once that every bush should have this statement tattooed on the inside of their eyelids

It's so important. So

these Columbus that come to the booth and they say they're perplexed by all these different teachers that come through and how should they,

you know, figure it out, decide amongst them.

The Buddha says to them, of course, you're uncertain. Of course, you're in doubt.

When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born.

So in this case, Colombo's Don't go, don't decide. Don't go by the authority of reports, by legends, by tradition, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies,

by agreements,

through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought,

this contemplative is our teacher.

What's left

don't go there. authority of

just report just because you hear hear about it, someone says it. By legends, by myths. By tradition, it's by tradition. It's always been my parents and parents before

that back.

Don't Don't go by tradition.

Don't go by scripture.

That's a big one, right? I'm holding a Buddhist scripture right? There self destructs. Don't go by scripture. By logical conjecture.

This is hard for some people they think they can relate we should be feels

a lot rely on our own logic and reasoning to come to the truth,

religious truth. And here the Buddha says don't go by your reasoning. That's kind of challenging by probability, interesting one, Pascal's Wager. And,

or the thought that

this person is my teacher, therefore it must be true.

So that's then then it goes on. But as it goes on, it's often there. misquoted in popular Western writing and the misquote it says something like

go by your own experience

or go by what they know yourself. So, the point is to kind of focus on yourself and what you know for yourself. And properly in California people say like, you know, go by your own truth is that somehow what you think you believe is true?

And this is what the Buddha said.

When you know for yourselves that these qualities are helpful, these qualities are Sorry, no, you know these qualities are unhelpful

and these qualities are criticized by the wise and when you

know for yourself and these qualities when adopted and carried out,

leave to harm and suffering,

then you should abandon them. So interesting

statement because what he's done is turn the question that he's reframe the question. Rather than kind of going answering the question, how do you know what is true? He said, He's actually suggesting instead of that question, focus on how you know, what is harmful, and what is beneficial.

Know what is helpful, and what is not helpful

to be framing. So, for example, if you

have appendicitis,

you want to know whether the doctor can be helped you or not.

You don't want to know whether, you know, you might want to know, you

know what medical school The doctor came from, or just, you know, but there's a lot of things which are quite incidental. So the Buddha wants to this

analogy where you're supposed

to go by analogy that says, but

there's really no once the statement is kind All these leaves you with nothing.

But the

there's a man who was struck by an arrow.

And it was poisoned the arrow and all that.

And it was really important to get the arrow out quickly.

And

so people came in search of the people came

and said, No, no, no, don't take it out. Before you take it out, I need to know who shot the arrow. What kind of way was shot from day to know that the cast background or the person who shot it,

you know, goes through all this list of things that he needs to know.

But at the time it takes to investigate all those things, the poison will have done its work and then they'll die. So the same thing with spiritual things. We have this arrow of suffering, somehow we hurt. We're in pain. We're afraid we're angry. There's two different kinds of suffering we have

and if you spend a lot of time trying to

delve into the

final

resolution

on the core issues of the religious authority.

What's really true?

How do you really know?

Maybe it's like the man who's struck by the arrow doesn't take the arrow out until he has all the answers following

so here the Buddha is reframing the issue,

away from the issue of how do you know what's true

to suggesting instead

focus on knowing what is beneficial enough, not beneficial, what is harmful and was not not harmful?

And what brings suffering

and what brings happiness. And that's something experiential. That's something

you can firstly know for yourself.

You can know whether something brings you a greater sense of ease and well being or you can know whether it brings you a greater sense of depression or heaviness or suffering or despair or discouragement or something.

So the things you can feel and know for yourself.

You don't need a scripture a book or a teacher. To tell you, you're feeling better, I hope you don't.

So here are the what is pointing these people to karma

back to something that they can find in themselves.

Some people, some teachers will say that the ultimate scripture you find in your own heart. But the way you find that the Buddhist said, is not through your reasoning, not because something's agree with what you think that because it sounds good is good for your identity for other very simple, experiential way that is harmful for me, or is it beneficial for me.

And a big part of the mindfulness practice

is becoming involved becoming more and more sensitive. So we can be become our own future and find your way in this regard.

Because if you're more and more sensitive, you'll

also find that certain things which seem like they're beneficial for you on the surface, are not really beneficial when you really get down deep inside

You might think it's beneficial for you

to unwind watching television. I

watch television sometimes and felt lousy. I generally feel lousy after I watch it before, even though I think I'm relaxing, so there's something very seductive about it.

So let's give you one example. The not true for everybody.

The pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of all kinds of pursuits, that on the surface, you know, like gossiping, gossiping can feel good. You can bond with someone, energy and excitement and thrill. But if you're really sensitive, you find that actually there's a kind of clutching or kind of hostility that's causing you pain and yourself. But usually we override it, we don't see it, because they're so focusing on the

gossip and kind of the surface

and a good feeling in my Comm. So thought

of mindfulness. To get really sensitive, so you can really know what's truly helpful for us what's truly beneficial,

what's truly bringing us a sense of well being.

So, so that's what has authority in Buddhism. That's what the suggestion in Buddhism is. Ultimately, the Buddha does not have the authority.

The Scriptures don't have authority.

They're they're meant to be helpful,

meant to be the teacher in teaching, they're meant to be guides for us. But that is not where the authority resides. The authority resides in testing things out finding out for oneself finding out for yourself, or trial and error finding, what is it that leads you to a greater sense of peace and well being in this life. You have to rely on yourself to find this way. There's it has to be way of taking responsibility for this. And then checking, checking and counter checking and testing the waters and finding out and you can find your way to find your way

So, one of the things this quote says

is those qualities which are unhelpful or helpful in which are criticized or which are

which are

recommended by the wise.

So it doesn't say, you know, in some kind of radical way only rely on yourself. There is some encouragement to take get advice from people who you think are wise. The wise people, what do they say is beneficial? What do they say is harmful?

And then you have to find out for yourself whether that's true or not.

But you have at least at least you're kind of getting getting yourself into the territory, you're getting some good advice to find people who are wise.

So that's the abstract part.

Okay. So then,

in this in this famous discourse, The Buddha is going to give the Calamos an example of how to do this. And, and in this example, example he uses, is cultivating, loving kindness seems that love it the practice of loving kindness was known in India at the time of the Buddha,

not a lot that is essentially a Buddhist practice

seems to be doing during that time. And, and it's generally taken this way. They can be a meditation practice, where you sit down to meditate, and you cultivate on a certain culture that you cultivate it by focusing on a sense of boundless love

for all beings,

it's a great thing to do. Just a nice thing to do. So you do this practice of boundless love you sit down and kind of open your heart

and reflect on your good wishes, your kindness, your

care, your concern, your friendliness for all beings, and you kind of opened up in They're kind of radiate from you as a kind of warmth almost

in all directions.

Then the Buddha says,

If you do that,

then you can you'll find out for yourself whether this is beneficial or not for you, and you'll receive some summarize it briefly. You'll receive two things. You'll notice two things if you do this.

And now in most English translations

of this passage,

they'll translate this as the assurances you'll receive certain assurances.

If you do this

one translation English translated this word solace, solace.

However,

the original Pali

maybe has a technical meaning of assurance, but the

literal meaning the little words means to breathe easy. Breathe easily. So if you do this, practice loving kindness, you will receive these the benefit of being able to breathe easily in this way. It's very different. It's talked about receiving assurance, versus like guarantees versus attaining something is very physical and immediate. You get to breathe easier. That's nice in it. The first reason for breathing easily is that is if you don't know loving kindness practice, the first reason for breathing easily is if

there is a world after death.

And if good deeds bear fruit in the afterlife, then with this as the basis with a loving kindness as a basis, I will be I'll be reborn

in a good destination in a heavenly world.

So here's a kind of reassurance then these kinds of assurance Oh yeah, no You know, when I die, something good's gonna happen

I'm not gonna go to hell.

So, but today the Word says you can breathe easily, which is nice, right? And the second assurance, the second reason for breathing easily is

if there is no world after death, okay?

He's not saying is there isn't one of these, but those are the basically two options right?

So you're kind of covering your basis

if there is no world after death,

if good and bad deeds do not bear fruit

in the afterlife.

Then in this life,

you will live happily free from hostility ill will and upset. So if there is a rebirth, you can breathe easily because good things will occur to you. If there is not afterlife This is the only life we have, then you could breathe easily because you will live happily if you're filled with loving kindness you'll live happily happily free facility ill will and upset.

Is that pretty good?

Now what I want to focus on here is this idea of breathing easily.

It goes through this

great statement about religion authority changes the direction of the of the inquiry, to focus on what is beneficial and what what is harmful. What brings suffering with things brings happiness. And then he gives an example for this. The focus is on something very concrete that you can experience and know for yourself.

And then you can know whether you're breathing or not.

Why would you want to breathe easily?

I think more important things to do.

You know, there's things to accomplish. Breathing easily.

When you when the breath is being breathed easily, we're at peace. We're at we're at ease.

We're happy with ease.

When the breath is not easy when it's contracted or held in some kind of way, that generally represents some way in which our mind and heart

is contracted and held.

If we're afraid, the diaphragm sometimes gets pulled up, it's held tight, or the stomach is pulled in and held. Or if you're angry,

that might be a lot of tension in the chest

someplace or maybe also the diaphragm or the belly.

Or if you're depressed, there could be feeling of heaviness weighing down on the chest. And every time you breathe in, just can't breathe in all the way feel so oppressed, perhaps.

Can't breathe in fully

how we feel

is very closely tied to how we breathe.

There's a very intimate relationship with how we feel and how we breathe.

And if we, if we take care of how we breathe,

and became the become the caretakers of our breathing, we then directly become the caretakers of how we feel.

If you go about your day paying attention to your breathing,

and you notice those times when your breathing is held,

or tight, or constricted,

and then if you relax it, you probably noticed that your mood shifts with relaxation.

If you if you're able to cultivate a very relaxed breath,

and for some people it takes a while, but through meditation other things to develop a very deeply relaxed breath and the muscles or the torso and diaphragm the stomach are relaxed. there then the birth becomes a more and more sensitive instrument. to notice the shifts in your mood and shift in what's going on in you. And sometimes it's easier to adjust or fix or find peace. It's easier to find peace by relaxing your breathing

than it is to practicing psychoanalysis

on yourself. What's this all about?

Why did my mother do to me why, you know why why am I this way? Why am I so angry right now? Why am I so afraid this is someone explained to me I'll pay someone a lot of money for this. And, and all you need to kill me perhaps can be a little bit ridiculous here but all you need to do is just take a deep breath and relax. It's not always that easy. But as of yesterday, is that is that maybe sometimes it is that easy. Maybe sometimes,

you can bypass a lot of the kind of

complicate complicated

ways in which we've kind of caught up in our life by taking a deep breath and relaxing

Using your breath.

And the more easeful your breath is, the more sensitive you'll be to the subtleties of what's going on in your heart in your mind. I find that mindfulness of breathing is I call it the grace of lubricator.

Because

if you pay, keep paying attention to your breath, it's hard to stay kind of locked up or frozen. Saturday I called mindful breath, Wd 40 for the mind. You know, just kind of oil, oils, the hinges and just come back to your breathing and discovery what's going on with your breath. Take your breath very seriously. And have a habit have a very powerful almost like a habit

that whenever you can throughout the day,

come back and check in what's going on with your breath.

Just like I'm doing even though I'm talking to you, constantly checking in with my breath is my breath relax my pulling my diaphragm. Am I worried? About how well I'm getting some ideas across. And all the kind of the work might be worried I might have or any idea I have to kind of really make a

good point here really say this Well, I can feel

a change with the muscles of my ribcage and my diaphragm, my stomach and sometimes my field, my shoulders, even McDuck rib cage sometimes. And sometimes that's the first indication I have that something is a little bit of this. And then I can kind of adjust it and kind of relax, let go.

Maybe fall down.

To have a soft belly is another way of talking about this. Keep your belly soft.

Some people are conditioned.

We're conditioned as babies, young young children, even though it was important to keep their belly pulled in. It's there was a certain period in America where women got that message stuck in your

stomach stuff stomach. It's very unbecoming to have a stomach that hangs out. And some men also have maybe different kinds of reasons of all have been trained to hold her stomach in,

stomach in and chest out.

And which kind of interferes with the breathing. Nobody's interfere with the breathing. Because the breath the breathing apparatus is held tense. It's hard for the

inner emotional life

to relax as fully as it can.

Because it's such a

close relationship between how we hold our breath and how we hold our emotions. And I've known people who when they finally released their stomach,

it was being held for years and years. The first

thing that happened was they cried because it was just held in there for so long was locked in, and when they relax their belly, finally those tears would come out. Occasionally people will say, Oh, no, this is terrible. This is worse than before. I'm crying. But that usually passes after a while. And after a while they realized I really needed to happen. I really needed to purge that to finally get it out. Sometimes it can be anger that finally gets released. Finally, relax, certain things are holding.

We realize we have all this built up anger.

And one of the great places in life to be angry, you know, it's really good to be angry. It's really good to be angry while you meditate. If you're going to be angry, do it in meditation, let it rip.

Because it's safe for your anger hurt anybody.

And you can keep your eyes closed, you're committed, not moving.

Then just let it let it go. Don't Don't indulge it.

Don't get involved in it. But if it's just released, that's happening. Finally relaxing. letson Baba thetic prove to you just like you like tears move through you really come. So sometimes there's a lot of stuff that gets released as we release the breathing.

And so you have to kind of work through that period of time. You know

the word things xiety comes from the Greek word for choking so the new against close connection between emotions and our breathing

so

really easily it's really a simple thing doesn't sound like a great fantastic

religious ideal

You know, there's other religious ideas that seem much more grand and wonderful than religious
Neighbors say What? What's your religion based on? Oh, breathing easily.

Oh, gee, I'm sorry for you.

I'm communing, um, communion communion communion with the creator of the universe and your
breathing easily. But the suggestion is that great The easily is a very, very powerful vehicle. so powerful
that some Buddhists will call it a vehicle to the divine, not because it's the same reasons as maybe
theistic religions, but they hold it up as being a very powerful vehicle to a kind of peace and well being
and ease that social blind. That is one of the greatest things that can happen to you. It's the when the
breath is at ease. The diaphragm is relaxed in the belly of saw, the heart is soft, chest, the soft
shoulders are relaxed. Then some of the very best qualities of who we are, can flow through easily
through us the best qualities of love with kindness and integrity. authenticity of honesty tends to flow
through us easier, easiest and to breathe easily. We'll open doors a piece, which will serve you with
tremendous happiness for a long time.

And so you become the authority

for whether you're breathing easily or not.

You do not need a scripture.

You do not need a teacher.

You do not need legends and myths. do not need your reasoning and logic

to decide whether you're breathing easily or not.

That's something you can find out for yourself.

And then begin following the trail. Follow that follow the trail the track that leads you to breathing freely
more and more easily

throughout your day,

all circumstances

and I will tell you that

I will Leave that

using breathing easily as your guide, your breath will become your best teacher. So

may you all breathe easily. Thank you