

2007-04-01 Being Present

Thu, 7/30 8:12PM • 30:12

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

present, boat, retreat, river, people, retreat center, world, peace, thought, simple, mind, presence, shore, peaceful, riverbank, work, caught, supposed, inner peace, day

SPEAKERS

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It's nice to be back. Nice to sit with all of you see many of you again. And I was sitting this last month on retreats, and we'd have a little cabin Retreat Center. Where would they brought food noontime every day, and it'll bag and so dilithium leave it outside. And so I didn't talk to anyone or see people much. was basically not a month long retreat. It was for five day retreats in a row. Because I've small kids at home, I couldn't be gone the whole month. So I came home on the weekend. And what it meant was, I thought of it mostly as for retreats because I thought of as a month long retreat, then you might easily go thinking about interruptions. For independent retreats, it's pretty good in a month.

And I did think of a few things to say. But it's a little bit hard to talk. You know, I haven't been talking for a month much. haven't had much of my mind. And I think I've forgotten everything I know.

We'll find out soon enough.

For me one of the very valuable and precious opportunities or possibilities in human life is to bring the mind to peace, the heart to peace, to experience some degree or of peace, inner peace. And as I come back, I came back Friday afternoon and, and back at some of the normal things of life. And one of the things I become aware of quite acutely is how much suffering there is in this world. And it's almost as if the more peaceful you become the more sensitive you become to the suffering around. And I feel that the person that the potential for peace is something that is so valuable to tap into the touch to know about because if you know the possibility for deep inner peace that's not dependent on the conditions of the world being any particular way, then the conditions in the world won't influence you so much more influenced your your unhappiness or happiness. In a way that worldly kind of conditions will often do. So this idea of peace seems very important for me, especially coming out of the retreat was, in some ways very peaceful. When I first got to the retreat center, it was moving my bags and I thought I was just so delighted by the place places seem so peaceful and just so happy to be in this peaceful place. And I was packing my bags to leave on Friday. I kind of remembered that and looked around and the place in seemed peaceful anymore. You know, it's just, you know, just the place beautiful place redwoods in Boulder Creek. And but what I thought happened was that the sense of outer peace was wasn't diminished, but it was replaced with very strong sense of inner peace. And that inner peace was what was the palpable thing very strong thing. And the outer world was just what it was. So one of the vehicles that I know for experiencing peace is to be present. And so it can be a lot of work to become present. And that the retreat center was at these little cabins were six cabinets up in the hilltop, that was for retreatants. And hardly ever saw the other retreats. But at the edges of the trail going to those cabins, there was a sign that said, meditators at work. And I found that actually quite heartening Because sometimes it felt like you know, certainly a lot of work. And it was a work to keep showing up

and being present. Especially going away four times in a row and coming back and having four retreats in a row, each time I came back, it had to be established the presence, you establish the ability to be present, like could be kind of, you know, conventionally present pretty well, but be conventionally present and to be really present is a world of difference between the two. So, I got to look at what it takes to become present. And it says having for retreats, there were different issues that came up with different different Monday's when I started that recording I had to kind of work through in order to arrive at some real presence. And you know, the first week I was on retreat, I had this expression kept that I was working through all these goals. This may be kind of unfortunate term, but that was what came to my mind. And all these thoughts, conversations, people, events, memories, that kept coming coming. And they would go they were kind of ephemeral. They're kind of not really here. They were, you know, distinct places and different distant times. They weren't there in that place. And, and so they didn't have any they were kind of transparent like ghosts, right? They're kind of you put your hands right through them like he put her hands through a ghost, I guess. And so just all these ghosts, you know, kind of not really real. With my mind took them as real mind took them as being important. My mind kept slipping off into these tracks,

Ghost tracks, and now it's a ghost and the ghost would vanish. And then another one would come. We stay where we come back. Another way of talking about this is analogy I like is that you've had a nice hike. beautiful sunny day, you come to the edge of a river. And you have a nice picnic table now, everything's great in the world, you're peaceful, you're very contented, happy. You're laying there at the bank of the river. Just watching the river go by. It's very nice to watch the river go by. And then a show boat goes by. And the next thing you know, you're on the show boat. And it's not no longer content and happy. Maybe it's exciting to the show. But first, it's exciting because they have casino on it. There's a chance to win. And that's quite exciting, enlivening and energizing possibility of winning. And but you know, kind of You don't even have noticed you've left your peaceful riverbank. And maybe it takes you know, a few months to realize you're on this riverboat and then something Oh, wait a minute, get off, broke. And then there's, you know, but then you're on the riverbank again. And then there's other river boats that come by, and some are, you know, quite captivating, kind of pull you off the river back into the, into the boat. And so everybody has their river boats that pose the mind the reverse of thoughts, ideas of concerns. Some people have river boats of worry. And these big red flashing lights danger danger on the boat and jump on that boat pretty quickly. And some people have both the river boats or our prison boats. And for some reason they willingly jump on the prison boats. And then they're sitting there kind of imprisoned in their attachments, desires and fears and limited limiting limiting ideas and then there's riverboats Have you know, like showboats of desire riverboats of hate? Do you ever both of lethargy, laziness, that's a good one lay there and kind of meander down the river kind of not doing much than a year. And then there's some really interesting riverboats this spiritual river boats that come along here on the riverbank quite peaceful, quite happy, contented and this glorious religion comes along. It might even be Buddhism and, and has all this promise, you know, the big billboard that says spiritual experience on it. So you get onto that riverboat, a spiritual experience, and you know, it takes you I just must take even a few years to get off that one. And then there's the spiritual identity boat. There's a lot of Identity boats, me boats, big billboards, pictures of you know it's pretty catchy pretty captivating. My studio knows. And you get older and older and some point you've had a look on the Billboard over the side of the boat and you realize it's not you anymore. You were like 20 years ago. And that billboard is spiritual books are interesting. You know getting on the spiritual books there's another boat they get on the mind goes off and inside the world of thoughts and ideas and negotiating ideas and concepts in feelings. There's the ascetic boats, the Zen aesthetic boats. You know, you can harmony with rivers, sleek, beautiful, simple boats, they just seem so made for the river kind of harmonize With the flow the river, and just like one with a river just like this is if you're one with the river, still you've ever feel about not being there and, you know, in the river bank. And so it's very important to

be able to see the difference between being at peace. Having the mind be still and not caught by things not caught up in things not preoccupied by things, versus the mind which is preoccupied or caught up in things. And we get caught up so quickly, so easily. And so it takes times of work to keep coming back, thanks for petition, coming back, being present, being present of seeing what's here, what's happening, what's happening. Oh, it's a boat. It's a thought. It's a feeling. It's a sensation. You're seeing it over and over again, coming back. And one of the ways of knowing if you're really present really present is To kind of conventionally present is that you see a boat goes by goodbye. And you don't get on? Do you see a thought arise? And you say, Oh, that's just a thought I don't have to get involved in that thought. That thought is a present moment experience just arises there in the present moment. And it does, which does and passes away. But you're not caught in it. You know, we've all been if you realize I'm here, it says, like, I'm here and the thought is there. That sense, you know, I'm just stability or presence of mind that doesn't get on that boat to see as it goes by. And so to be present, you know, in some ways, is a very simple thing. And I'm struck many times will how simple it is. And sometimes it's deceptively simple, so simple that we don't appreciate its value. And sometimes it's infuriating. Some infuriatingly simple, because it's such a simple thing, but it's so hard to do slip off so easily so quickly. And the meditation is work meditators at work. And it's interesting to reflect on what does it take to become presidents? So what does it take for each of you to become presidents? And that's a question you can carry with you every day. Because in different settings in situations, different things, different retreats, different things are required to work through in order to really arrive really be present. And so I can list a few of the things that that might take some time, I think a quite interesting one it one is that it takes some kind of understanding. The valuable thing to do, to be present as opposed to caught up to have that little bit of independence of Freedom from the conditions of the world, all the boats, all the activities of the life. It's valuable not to be caught in that, but be present in here. To see it in a way that's you're free of it. To have some understanding the value of being present. Another thing that helps us to have some kind of confidence and even faith, that it's really valuable. One thing to understand it's valuable. It's another to have real confidence and sense of tremendous faith. Yes, this is something that I can put my heart into, kind of a kind of a wholehearted feeling Yes, to this is what I would like to do is be present. So sometimes it takes a long time to develop that strong sense of faith or confidence or hardness, that this is something that I really direction in my heart wants to take. There has to be a willingness to be present. It's one thing to understand, rather than to be willing, in some of those showboats or so. Interesting. And so, you know, there's there's a, you know, yes, I'll have the riverbank But later, right, not yet. This is so good.

And sometimes in meditation, like in retreats, certain fantasies can have that kind of little hook on it. Yes but other documentation later because this fantasies so good, so juicy and after all, it's been hard. I mean, he's working so hard to create, I deserve a break. So you get on that boat. The it can take a lot of courage to be present. It's not easy. And what we are called on the present for sometimes is very difficult material. And it was often a good reason why sometimes People find it hard to be present. Because what they have to look at in themselves is often quite difficult. Sometimes you have to look at our deepest, darkest kind of secrets of our minds, the fears, the anxieties, the terrible memories, all kinds of things that go on mind. You strong habits, greed, hate. And so it can sometimes it takes tremendous courage to stay present. I know people who've had a lot of fear come up on retreat. And it's a little bit you know, kind of, on one hand a little bit surprising because retreats are some of the safest places in the world. These three tweets, you know, around here, go to spirit rock, for example. People don't even lock their doors at night. You know, not that many places you can go in the world where you sleep with unlock doors. It's a very safe, and I've seen people be more afraid of spirit rock than almost anywhere else in the world. You know, completely petrified You'd look around, nothing's going on. But you know, it's really frightening sometimes to kind of meet yourself to confront yourself, see what's going on in there. And so sometimes it takes a lot of courage. And, and in order to be present, there has

to be the arousing of courage, the strength, you're developing with courage. And some people are my heroes because of the courage they've had in doing a simple thing of showing up and being present. Sometimes it takes something, sometimes something has to be resolved. Before you can be present, really presence. Sometimes there are issues that need to be dealt with. And there's a whole range of issues that could come up. Sometimes it has to do with our past behavior. Sometimes it goes past behaviors sometimes. There's kind of moral reckoning that comes on retreat, and you thought your morals was just fine or something and then suddenly you realize, Oh, my God, what did I do? Realize I hurt that person or when I do so, sometimes there has to be some kind of a resolution of our ethics or a past behavior. Now it can be as simple as needing to go tell someone you're sorry to apologize to someone, or it could make necessary to go and do some kind of confession or some kind of behavioral change or something. And I've known people who've had to leave retreat, it didn't make sense to continue in retreat, they have to actually leave the retreat, go meet, go see someone, work, do something, do some work, personal work with them or whatever. And then they can come back. One friend of mine was in India in the 60s on retreat. And he came to a block and his practice and Ram Dass was there and they were kind of friends and Ram Dass told him you have to go back to America and see your father. And so he went in, cut is here and has Taylor India make a suit for him and put on a suit with my doctor America to see his father before he went to America proms I said to him, but don't stay long it's like you get him some riverboats and some river boats are going to sink before the reach shore. So you got to shore up the but you're fixing up the boat right? You have to kind of repair the boat before you know so you don't sink before you get to the shore. All that you can talk about the shore forever how wonderful the shore is. And if you don't fix the boat, you're not going to get to shore. Oh, there's another great boat. That's a really captivates some people. It's the rescue boat. And that's the boat where you're gonna rescue everybody. And, and because people need rescuing right? And so you get out there with you know the rescue boat and these two boats out. They're going to collide. You go out there and you rescue them so they can go smooth goes down the river smoothly, safely on you know together. Or then there's the ones that you know are certainly going to drown it's good to go out there and rescue them so they don't drown.

And then it's interesting rescue attempt, where you see a boat that's about to kind of veer too close to shore connectivity bumped against the shore, heaven forbid boats are supposed to bump up against the shore have to go documents appear. And so you go then you pull the boat away from the shore, that shore where we've been so nice to rest the peaceful place. And sometimes actually, there's spiritual rescuers who actually get in the way of their process of crashing to safety, crashing to to peace and freedom. So be careful for the rescue boats. Sometimes they're not so useful. Sometimes they're good. And some of us are rescue people. We just you know, it's one of my one of my traps. Sometimes it's too To you know, be the helper. And, and sometimes that's, you know, I get from helping vote too easily. So, sometimes you have to leave the retreat or leave, you know, do something. Some atonement might have been necessary. Sometimes psychological work needs to be done in order to go through work through something, so we can get to this things are so simple, just be present, but the things that we've worked through there has to be a lot of letting go. That goes on. And, and, you know, letting go of almost everything, everything. If you're holding on to something, then you're not really present. You can be present or you're holding on, but you're not you haven't taken the presence, your presence to the point of being at peace. And so you're still holding on Do something, then. So there's all kinds of stuff you have to let go of, we have to let go of, and we have to let go of one of the great ones is self identity, you're allowed to have an identity. That's fine. Because it's kind of hard not to have one. But you have to let go of holding to it. And that's much harder. That's really hard to do sometimes. And there's all kinds of identities people have. And some of them you know, are, you know, gender, ethnic or things like that. Some of them have to do with their work some have to do with the behaviors you have to do with their mind. Because smart I am or how beautiful I am. kind I am. Some of them are

unfortunate identities. Oh, I'm a terrible person. I'm just, you know, unworthy. I can't do it. What was the thoughts that the some of the worst things that we let go of our thoughts, beliefs, to live beliefs and opinions that get in the being present, one of the ones for meditators can be, or I can't do it. You know, and you see that on retreat happened to me sometimes on retreat, Oh, I can't do this. You know, you try and be present for the present. And then sometimes on retreat, you lose perspective. You're so much more present than you are normally. And then the mind says, I can't do this. The last day of the retreat Friday morning. At one point, I was sitting, practicing and I thought, Oh, I'm pretty ordinary. This is, after a month of sitting, I'm just kind of ordinary again. Nothing happened. There's a little bit embarrassing. All this work and effort and nothing happened. And, and then I went down to, to check out the office at the retreat center. And I could barely speak wasn't the order During a lost perspective, you know, it had become ordinary, the extra ordinary had become ordinary. So it seems like you know, so it was really easy in that situation. Oh, you know, oh, no, I didn't know for a few minutes didn't last long. Oh, no, nothing happens is you have nothing to show for it. And so all kinds of beliefs. There's also the beliefs of what's supposed to happen. I'm supposed to get concentrated. I'm supposed to be mindful, I'm supposed to be present. And those are okay thoughts to have kind of 30 likely, but you can get caught up in thoughts. I'm supposed to be a certain way. And that's another boat to be on. That prevents us from being present. Now, one of the marvelous things about being present is that being present has no conditions. About what what is supposed to be present for. presence doesn't have a condition about what it's supposed to be present for. So nothing has to be any different in order to find your presence, except you have to know what is going on in the present moment. So if you have a thought that says, Oh, I can't be present. And you see that thought, that goes to that boat, oh, there's a thought, I can't be present. And you're present for that thought. You're present. So you don't get rid of that thought, if to see it for what it is. So I find it I find, I find it and I found it to be very, very meaningful for me to realize that nothing has to be any different. Moment by moment. I've had to kind of wake up to this. Wake up to this, wake up to this. And if I thought that I was the one who was waking up to it. There was also another boat that I'd get on. Look at me, I wake up, I'm here. I've done it. You know, as soon as I said yes, I did it, I veered back into the river, I kind of left the presence. So this is a wonderful thing that the more more present you become, there's this way in which self preoccupation or self be caught up in oneself, begins to dissolve away or fall away. And it can be very disconcerting if the whole way in which we based our life how we live our life is based on some self identity, or some being a certain way or self and to suddenly find that, you know, you're not oriented around self anymore. Then is it safe? Is it okay? How do you prove that anybody Europe, you know, that your great sort of has to fall away the sense of self is Used to be really great. And in order to have some deeper level of peace, the presence has to go into that level where with that boat, the boat itself kind of falls away. So what does it take to be present? I think is a great question. And out there ask the question the abstract but to ask it in the particulars for you, does it take for you and asking and asking yourself that question to appreciate that how complex or complicated or deep the heart in the mind is, and that even though being present is a simple thing, the work of getting there involves all of us in the full richness and depth of our psyche in order to work through that to see it and It's sort of I think it's one of the great works of human life is to work through all the different things, all the issues, all the different things that keep you prevent you from being pristinely present. So what is it that keeps your presence today and tomorrow, the next day? And what does it take? Once you realize what's keeping you from being present? What does it take to work through that? You will be a little bit careful that you don't take mindfulness instruction to simply simplistically that just because mindfulness is such a simple instruction, be present for what is it can lend itself to the idea that you're supposed to then be simple minded. You're supposed to be conscious simpleton kind of you know, you're supposed to kind of be a rich human being.

I think that being present for what is the instructions is simple, but our minds are complex. And to appreciate that, so that we really take an honest look at it, and they're willing to do the inner work. They

kind of work through and sales, the mind. And so the mind can come to peace. It's possible to summarize the Buddhist teaching. Everything about the Buddha's teaching was pointing towards bringing the mind to peace. Bringing the mind to peace. It's great. So

I think I've talked long enough, someone hasn't talked. I hope these words are helpful for you and in that somehow, you might be inspired To look at yourself and explore this question, what is it that keeps you from being present?

Thank you very much.