

# 2007-05-20 Mindfulness Continued

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

trail, backpacking, shoes, present moment, mindfulness, people, life, comparisons, ownership, thinking, meditate, day, activity, higher elevations, buddhism, bit, compare, mindfulness practice, monastery, battles

## SPEAKERS

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Last week I talked a little bit about mindfulness. Right mindfulness. And today I thought I could talk about some other aspects of mindfulness a little different angle, a different way of talking about it. Once they were two young men who came to the monastery and the first one came, the abbot asked, you know, What are you here for? Why do you want to come to the monastery? And the young man said, I'm here. I'd like to come practice in order to experience the full power and luminosity of the Dharma. habited Okay, well, welcome to the monastery, but be careful what you wish. And as soon as he was settled into his room and everything, the first man rush To the meditation, the meditation hall and toss the shoes off and toss them onto the shoe rack and waiting to meditate. And as you're sitting there is a very capable men used to success in life sat down to attain the full power and luminosity of dharma. And as he sat there, this heat rose up inside of him and light started to appear. And I can do this and set with even greater zeal there and the heat and the light got stronger and pretty soon, poof, he burst into flames and all that was left was to ashes on discussion. Full power and luminosity of the Dharma. So the second men came to the monastery and they said, What are you here for? And he said, Oh, I'm here to experience the Dharma. The truth. In the food I eat the activities that I Do and in the face of the other people I encounter. And then it said welcome. And then that man also got settled in that evening when it was time to get all the monks to meditate. He went to the others to the meditation hall and as he took off his shoes and placed them in the shoe rack, you notice that he didn't actually line up the shoes so well when was a little bit askew. And, and so when he saw that, he kind of looked at himself and he saw in his mind that he was a little bit distracted, a little excited about being the first day of the monastery and, and he was somewhat distracted, he wasn't really present. And he noticed that it was actually a phenomena that was quite common in his life, not to be fully present for something because of the mind being distracted by thoughts about anticipating what was going to happen. And then so then he looked more carefully at issues and he saw that his shoes were worn, worn out. he'd known them when they were new. He'd had some years. And he says, Well, you know, they're old now they're old and worn out, I hadn't really noticed that. And, and you know, it's nature of all things will wear out and decay and pass away. And he looked at those that worn out shoes and he thought I'm a young monk, now it's my first day. But really soon, I'm going to be an old monk here, not gonna take long. And that kind of inspired him or kind of kind of deepened him, to kind of have a sense of impermanence and the quickness of change. And then he saw his shoes, you know, looked at more carefully the shoes, they're in shoe rack, he was going to straighten them out. And he saw that, if he moved his shoes a little bit to the left, he can make more and more space in the shoe rack for some other person to put their shoes next to his. And in seeing that he also saw in his mind's eye, the other monks who are following into meditation and so that they years of sincerity and practice Because of some of them, so that they were going to come and meditate and offer their best practice offer their best efforts to practice. And he wanted to somehow make it a little bit more inspiring or interesting or useful for them to kind of meditate

so that if I move my shoes over to the left and make space there not only will be nice and mindful, but also makes placement easier for them to find a place for their shoes and a little bit a little bit easier for them to come in, smoothly smooth enter instrumentation. And so he moved his shoes over and then he turned to go into the meditation hall, and he was happy. The story so which monk Would you like to be?

So something as simple as putting your shoes in a shoe rack can't be much spirituality there, right? Can't be much depth there, there's most likely much more important things to do than how you put your shoes in the shoe rack. You can come into the meditation quickly to obtain the full glory of the Dharma. And you want to do that as quickly as you can, you know, the shoes just get in the way of doing that quickly. I heard once that Thomas Merton was asked what he had attained in his years of Catholic monastic practice. And he said, I learned to open and close doors. Now that seems pretty, like a waste of time, right? years of practice, you know, he is very intelligent man. He learned to open and close doors. He said he studied the scriptures and then all about the scriptures. He learned about deep aspects of contemplative prayer, understands better the nature of God and all kinds of wonderful things. He could have said Right. Opening closers, go. Do you know how to open door? Do you know how you don't have to go to the monasteries and learn that? I don't think so you all know how to do it. But do you really know how to do it? Can you do it with real presence? Is the question. And in that kind of presence that just like the monk saw his shoes, and the mindfulness that he was present for it, he could see so much the mindfulness to hold the present moment, and awareness, and then allow the present moment to reveal so much of what's there, if you look if you pay attention.

And one of the remarkable things about the mindfulness practice, it doesn't have to be remarkable things that you pay attention to. It can be the ordinary, the ordinary aspects of life. And when we focus on the things of life as being the solution, and we all often want good things, but if you focus on How you hold the things of the world, the activities of life in your awareness. And it's your inner life that changes in relationship to that, then it doesn't matter what you're paying attention to, it could be opening, closing a door, putting your shoes in the shoe rack, it can be many things. And there's depth there to be discovered. So in following the path of mindfulness in Buddhism, we call it a path. And I talked a little bit about the path last week. And I'm gonna continue this analogy of a path. Sometimes the video of a path in Buddhism is likened to the of a path in the woods or the jungle. And if you imagine yourself going up into the mountains in the Sierras to go backpacking, and so you're going to do this planned backpacking trip. And so you are going to pack and get ready to go. So you're going to go for 10 days or something. And so of course, we need lots of clothes. You put that in one suitcase and then you have the lots of food. Would you put up another suitcase and then of course 10 days is a long time. So you need a fair collection of, of books and literature and magazines and videos that goes in your backpack. And then you you go, you know, standing there at the trailhead with your suitcases in the backpack, you know, I'm ready. And someone who's being mindful, wouldn't won't take a lot of steps up the trail. To understand that this doesn't work. And what has to happen if you're going to walk the path is you have to kind of go back to your car and you know, kind of shed all the things which are extra complicated, you know, if one set of clothes for every day realizing backpacking, you don't need that. So you simplify, simplify. And so that's part of the Dharma practice is some certain aspects of simplifying one's life. Not because things are bad either because if you really want to follow something Well, you can't do everything. And so somehow you really be focused here on the path. So part of Dharma practice is the kind of reflection about what is extra, what can you maybe shed or simplify so that you can really engage in for example, so you have time every day to meditate for whatever, half an hour, an hour, whatever you do. And, and I know for some people, it can be quite a challenge to find the time and the motivation to meditate every day. So what does it take, what kind of reflection what kind of inner what kind of inner prioritizations of your life you have to go through sort through to make that a priority? If that's what you want, we want to be on the path. So when you're on the path to finally you

get your backpack, you know, lightened up and you're going along, and you're heading off on the trail. And pretty soon, you find out that there are side trails and the first side trail you come to is a casino with cabaret and night shows. And you know, it's you know, it's pretty fascinating. So you go and spend a few days, weeks decades on that side trail until finally remember oh you know what's not on trail and then you go along further back on the main trail and you go a little bit further, excuse a few feet probably a few inches further along. There's there's another trail to the side that there's a huge battlefield. It's a big battle going on shooting and fighting and all this wonderful things that people can do and say, Wow, I guess that's my battle. I'm supposed to be there. And so there's a side trail of fighting the battles and you know you look if you look too Please saw that they're all wearing, you know, ancient or close and ancient weapons. You know, you have to realize actually, you know, it's a long finished battle. It's not no longer actually going on. But anyway you go, you know, we fight battles are long over anyway. So you go, you know, so they could take a few days or weeks or decades, you know, reliving old battles. They do that right, get is very good wherever they do it, you know, we live all battles. So that's a side trails to be living battle side trail. And then finally you get back on the main trail.

And then there's a you see another side trail and that trail has a big sign across it says, the future. And that's fascinating, the future, you know. So, the future is kind of scary, you know, to worry about what's going to happen and all that or futures really has great promise. And so I'm wondering what's down that trail. So you go into that That future trail and actually very quickly, it branches out to sub trails and sub trails, and all these trails of sub trails. And, and so you go along one and you go next one sub trail and sub trail. And sometimes occasionally, if you're lucky, the sub tree has actually come back to the main trail. And you know, this is good, I'm back. But there's all these little all the trails so we can take, and it's actually kind of rare to be on the main trail. The so we have to kind of know what is the main trail if you know what the sub trails are the site, the detours. Now, one of the remarkable things about mindfulness practice of mindfulness is the fact is that you know, if you're hiking, you take a detour, take a stick the wrong trail, you walk for a couple hours, generally, you know, it might take a couple hours to walk back to where you left off and start again. might take a while. Maybe you're lost for a while. Particularly subtitles and it takes a while to kind of get help. But with mindfulness, it's much better because as soon as you notice, clearly, oh, I'm thinking about the future. You're back on the main trail. It's really remarkable. It's not like magic matril it's actually not that far away. You start to wake up, oh, this is what's happening in the present moment. And then waking up this is what's happening the present moment, have a little bit of spaciousness or freedom or independence from what's going on. Oh, this is what's happening here in the Maitreya ligand matril is always what's happening in the present moment. And part of the enchantment or the camouflage of these others detours, is they have a way of kind of camouflaging or, or as I say, this way, their way of kind of hiding from you the present moment Old battles are just you know we're lost in the past or fantasies we've lost in the fantasies and we don't really see the present moment or if we really see it or we're thinking about the future so just like that it's possible to wake up and so here we are. So then and then some of them so but some of the sub trails are not so far away from the main trail they're just like a few feet away and some people find themselves not on the main trail but on the side trail and the side trail maybe is like always judging the trail that trail over there's too you know, it's too rough over there. They didn't do enough didn't clear enough over there. Look at that person walking that trail. You know, it's what first is not walking very well. You know, that person is walking. Wow, that's really good walking, you know, there's all these comments and judgments like reporter or whatever, and, you know, looking at, you know, going along and you're not really on the trail. So sola we get on the trail we really present on the trail really here. And then really remarkable thing begins to happen when you really kind of can start showing up and being here. And that remarkable thing is we start noticing the things that we're carrying with us that are extra that they didn't initially seem to be extra you know, initially seemed to be fine like going backpacking. I don't know if this is a good example but you're going backpacking and perhaps, you

know, you normally in life, you drag your feet and that's works fine daily life, little dragging, you know. And you notice that, you know, after after a few miles of hiking in this year, as you notice that, you notice, why am I keep Why do I keep drifting all the time? Or why did this feel so heavy on my legs all the time, and you see, oh, because I'm dragging my feet. I think I have to lift my feet for that higher, to walk a little bit better. So as we as we start to present more fully for the path here, we can start to understanding what is it we're doing here, that maybe it's not serving us, there's gonna be not beneficial. And so it might be, you know, so. So with mindfulness practice, it might be that, that there's a lot of judgments that are on that right there. And then on the heel of every moment of mindfulness, or there might be a very subtle feeling of, of not just mindful of what's going on here. But there's a feeling of alarm or fear. Oh, if I'm not mindful and careful, something terrible is gonna happen to me.

This little bit fear that's going on there as part of each moment of mindfulness, or my futile states of bracing ourselves from life, or an attitude some people I've seen. Recently I saw someone who had an attitude that his attitude about life is that everything that he does, is an uphill battle. uphill climb. Everything's climb even When it's obvious the hill is going down. It's an uphill climb. And so this idea that everything's an uphill climb is extra, and it weighs us down. It's an extra burden. It's extra suitcases to carry. So part of the path of mindfulness is to be present well enough to begin seeing, what is it we're carrying with us? What goes on with our attitude? What's our approach? What's our relationship, what's going on, just like the monkey put his shoes in the shoe rack, and seeing his shoes with a little bit crooked, could see his own mind being distracted. You could see that. So they being in the present moment, it helps us to begin understanding what's extra. And then slowly, we can begin shedding it. Now some of the things that are extra, were not extra much of a problem at lower elevations. But as we get higher up in the car as a higher higher elevations, some things you know, that are just fine, lower elevations Realizing that this is really too much kind of cutting down on me to put this down, you know, you leave it behind or something I know I've gone back back into zeros and it's been four or five days, you know, getting up close to Mount Whitney. And I'm so glad you know almost like every day I can't wait to eat not because not because I'm hungry because it lightens my load less to carry.

So so as we can kind of, you know, as the mind gets more still more concentrated and more present in a kind of more deep, deeper way. We start seeing things which maybe were not a problem before, but are a problem now. Or to say it a different way. You know, like if you know the shoes that you wear every day are fine for city streets and for how you you know, ordinary walking But if you start, you know, backpacking in the Sierras, then you realize after a few days, you're constantly using them. Actually, they're a little bit off for you. They're slightly off the way that somehow the seasons, the scene, you know, is sewn together next year. I know, your ankle, or your heel is a little bit kind of rubbing. And you got to realize, Oh, this is actually a problem. It's irritating. And so some things are not an irritant in normal life because we don't do them enough, even though there's a problem. So what I want to mention here is I want to mention three things, which higher elevations. We start seeing it as being a heavier load and higher elevations. We see our irritants. And it's not to our in our favor, to carry this baggage. So the three all have to do with what sometimes Buddhism called selfing. The activity of appropriate if something is myself holding something myself in mind, it can seem innocent enough in the city to have this as mine. But as you go up higher elevations it doesn't feel to the earth it becomes extra. So the first one has to do with ownership. Ownership seems like an innocent thing. Enough. Seems like you know, ownership is not inherent in reality that people own things. It's a convention that we all hopefully share with, but not all, we don't always share it right. You know, so, the government has eminent domain, I find I own this, you know, suddenly go disappears or, or they're, you know, suddenly there's an earthquake. And you know, this car that I own is so important, but now they squashed. You know, I don't really own that. Someone else could clean it up. Take care of it. So autoship is a convention that we carry with us. And it's interesting to watch how the convention of ownership has an



activity of the mind that comes into creation and is created and it just disappears. And if you're paying remindful for the present moment, you can see the creation of ownership. And you can see it's dissipation. So it can be as simple as you come to IMC Sunday morning to sit and you sit down in a chair, for example, in a cushion, and you're listening to the wonderful Dharma talk within or you sit and meditate, and then you get up to go to the bathroom. You know, when you come back. Someone is sitting in your chair. It wasn't your chair before you came to IMC today. It was just the chair. They have all these chairs here. But somehow this thing has been created while you're here. It's my chair. Of course when you leave here, I don't think any of you taking the chairs with you. Don't think you'll use it as my chair, that convention is going to not not not going to be that much anymore. We were happy to let go of it. But during this hour and a half, this is my chair, and the strength of that can be seen, but how you feel when you come back from the bathroom?

And, and so of course, it's that person's problem, right? who sat in my chair? Well, there's issues that he had to feel it but, but, but still, the interesting thing to see is how it's an activity of your own mind. And sooner or later, when you're in the present moment do mindfulness practice. You start seeing these these, these ideas of ownership or a burden for the mind. And you have to collect a famous story of Suzuki Roshi, there's a picture of him taking saying this, he was holding up their glasses like this. And they took a picture just as he was saying this, so preserve this way and he's saying These glasses are not my glasses. But you know about my old tired eyes. And so you let me wear them. So he wasn't taking ownership of them. But he was actually, you know, saying actually, you know, I don't own them, but you're allowing me to use them. So that's a little different attitude. So, the, so there's ownership of things, but there's also ownership of aspects of ourselves. So, you know, it can be that you, you know, it's your signature, it's mine. It's my anger. That's a little appropriation of ownership. It's my anger. And of course, you don't want to kind of not be responsible for your own emotions and say it belongs to someone else. But there's a way there's a big difference between saying my anger and saying, There's anger here that I'm trying to feel feel with When is mine to magnet for all these ideas of, of self identity of value and worth? And also it can seem like it's, it's my anger, well then I'm stuck with it. It's kind of feels tighter working more and more kind of attached to who I am, we could say via anger. And people meditate a lot, you know, like on retreats, for example, maybe elsewhere will often say that there's a shift inside of them. When they shift from saying something as mine to saying it's just like pain, my pain versus the pain. It's a there's a kind of energetic shift inside my pain, it can feel really claustrophobic and tight and difficult. But there can be a shift sometimes associate sometimes addiction, that pain that exists. There's also you know, we take ownership of ideas, my opinions, it's my opinion. It's important people understand what my opinions and I've been in situations where my opinion was so important, only to find out the next day I had different opinions. And so the idea of, you know, taking something as mine, it's can be innocent enough in some situations. But as a spiritual life develops, it can feel sometimes how it's a burden and is necessary to shed it. And if you're in higher elevations, it's easy to shed, if you're in the median elevations that can be able to struggle as you begin debating, should I shouldn't I, and this is, you know, makes some sense, but not really just, you know, of course, it's mine. I bought it. And so then, it's interesting that in psychology, neuro neuro neuroscience, neuroscience, they say there's a place in the brain that That construct that when you look at your hand, you see it that is operating, you can see it as my hand. And if that part of the brain isn't operating, you don't see it as my hand. Just you know, it's like a hand. It's like somehow foreign. Interesting. That's the idea of mine is an activity of the mind. Maybe some of its built into the neurology of the brain, but still as an activity. And as the mind gets quiet and Still, you can see this activity. And that's really one of the things we're trying to do in mindfulness practice, is see the convention see the creation of things. So that nothing we start creating necessarily, we're not fooled by it and caught by it. We see the creation of my you know, my beauty. I'm so beautiful. My beauty, you see, that's a creation and when you see it as a creation rather than something inherent in inherent, well not that of course that's inherent right? But Would you

see it as something is, you know mine, you know, the beauty parts in here but the mine isn't right. So you see it's an activity and then you can have a different relationship to it you can hold it lighter, you might be willing to put it down with doesn't serve you when serve you you hold it doesn't serve you dropped it, it's my chair might be useful. See, when you come back from the bathroom and someone else is sitting and if there's another one next door next to it doesn't serve you to hold on to my chair. So that's one of the one of their cell things. The second cell thing is a cell thing of its course in Buddhism, they call it conceit, but we can call it comparing oneself to others or to other standards, the act of comparisons, so whole activity of comparing, that is a huge source of human suffering and it's an activity of the month. To compare, and to put value on the self, so we compare ourselves to others. So I see that some people having black socks, and I have a grey socks, and it's very much better in a warm day to have grey socks. And certainly, you know, I'm a smarter person, right? Much more than these other people, always black socks. I can't believe it. But you know, but you guys are so much for me. I'm really, you know, I'm really, you know, I'm really smart. You know, I'm not gonna, of course tell anybody that because that's kind of shocking. I'm not conceited. But so I'll just be quiet about it, but I'm really doing a good job today. Oh, I see white socks. Oh, I mean, it's really hot in white socks is much better reflects the sunlight. No, Matt was like thinking I'm such a fool. I could have done a white I have no hope no one notices. And so you know, as compared to thinking and that's so silly about socks, right? But, you know, we do it with all kinds of things that really cause a lot of suffering, some people do it around the body, aspects of their body. So it's comparisons of different body types the body this, this and that, you know, you know, when people compare and judge, we do it towards ourselves, we do it towards others, others do it towards us, for painful. We do it towards, you know, we are behavior where we feel we think, Oh, you know, I'm not so kind. These other people are so much kinder than I am. I think I better not come out, you know, to the boot run a Buddhist group because they're supposed to be kind there. I think, you know, I don't want you to just go out, maybe hang out with different kinds of people. The bar is a good place. Now, so if we compare ourselves and then we make decisions based on those comparisons. In Buddhism, there's a concept called destiny. And dustiness is reality that's independent of comparative thinking. So for ourselves, who are you, prior to any comparisons? And some people, it's really hard to get to there because somehow almost locked, almost kind of entangled. entwined with our sense of self is because of a very early age is the idea of comparison compared to thinking. But it's possible through meditation to begin shedding, shedding, softening all the comparisons, all the judgments, all the evaluations, all the conclusions we have about ourselves, and get back to what can be called the vastness of who we are. We don't have to be apologetic, to be defensive, we can just be be. So as a second stuffing, is this self thing has to do with compared to thinking. The third kind of selfing has nothing to do with comparisons, but has to do with claiming something is myself This is who I really am. So you know who you are. Comparisons can see who you are some kind of metaphysical absolute sense is, you know, not necessarily comparative thinking. So, you might be a depressed person, but you're not comparison to anybody else, like, everyone else is happy doesn't make any difference to you, or anybody else depressed doesn't make any difference to you. You're just depressed. But you can can. I am a depressed person. That's who is permanent. This is who I said, My essential nature is to be depressed. And I've seen that in myself. I've been depressed. And, and I've, I've succumb to the fallacy of permanence. This is it this way forever. And, and then there was one once many years ago where I was the opposite. I remember telling a friend of mine I found a summer I was really happy, I was ecstatic. into the summer I told a friend, that's it, I'm never going to be depressed again. And that fall, I was more depressed I'd ever been. So that you know, so this idea, this is who I am. And we hold on to this. So much, you know, is changing and permanent moving through us.

And society, our society also attributes, fixed identities to people, this is who you are, it's very painful. Some people take it upon themselves. Some people I know, really dislike being treated as a spouse.

That you'd be seen as a spouse, that's who I am. or children sometimes have a very hard time. Some children not attributing preparedness to their parents. The essential nature the parent has to be a parent, and they can't be anything else. But you know, they were they were someone before. They were parents. And some parents are quite happy when they're no longer parents. You know, when the kids grew up, and so they can go off and kind of do, you know, the things that they've been putting off for 20 years. But the kids a little bit hard for the kids. So, you know, you're supposed to be by parents, you're supposed to kind of behave a certain way that parents are supposed to behave. And sometimes it's dysfunctional, the whole thing, but, but sometimes it's just the children that kind of, are sometimes the opposite. You know, the parents, you know, you're my child, you have to always be my child in a particular way. It's your central nature be my child. And that's, you know, so. So, and then the final aspect of this, you know, saying this is myself in Buddhism, is that the word self is aka in Pali, and not maybe it's sometimes better understood in English for the word soul rather than self self as a psychological meaning, the ancient ancient idea of Africa it's much closer to the idea of soul perhaps kind of like a little seed inside of us of the soul. And so, to say this is this is my soul is also considered to be extra baggage you know just gets in the way to get that might be useful in some some ways but as you get to higher elevations you have to learn to share that as well to save my consciousness of consciousness if my soul or myself or my body is the true self for my feelings, my emotions, my intentions, my inspirations anything that you can say this is my true self. My true soul is considered to be extra baggage about you when you get to work treeline for example. You know, and you have to have to share it, you have to let go of it. And, or, you know, you think of some, you know, they're really wonderful athlete, you know, championship game. You know, Wimbledon, you finally make it the ribbon button right? The finals and but you know, tennis, you know, fight on that just announced at the last volley and you're about to win and suddenly occurs to you who's the true self that's gonna hit this ball you know it doesn't serve you, you know, that's not the time to think about that. So when you're moving towards freedom and becoming freer, which is what Buddhism moves you towards, there's certain kinds of things which are extra baggage. And it turns out this whole idea of soul of the essential soul holding on to my true self is just extra baggage, extra baggage, extra baggage. And what's remarkable is many things are remarkable today here is that

if you climb the mountain Cirrus takes A lot of work to get to the top, some peak. If you follow the path of mindfulness, the path will help you reveal all this stuff that's extra. And it can be hard work at times. Sometimes it's easy work. But one of the things you discover is that it's possible to be happy as possible to be at peace as possible feel at home with very, very, very, very, very, very little of the baggage that we've carried with us that we thought has been essential. I guarantee that you can be happy without taking ownership of the chair at IMC for an hour and a half every week that I think you agree with right But you can be happy, you know, that extract like that, and you actually be happy with so little. So I hope that you learn to open doors. I hope you'll learn to put shoes and shoe racks not because of the doors close to the doors sake. Not because they could have shoes because there's a way of being present for your life as you live it in the ordinary activities of life. That if you're present, so much can be revealed and you'll find the main trail for your life. Okay, thank you very much.