

2007-10-01 True To Oneself

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SPEAKERS

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In the last few minutes of this sitting in this meditation I'd like to offer you some contemplative questions that we can include as part of the meditation. If you feel a need to make yourself more comfortable, you're welcome to do that.

And there is an opportunity in whatever calm or stillness you have of meditation, to sometimes have a question or contemplate something But to do it not from the usual thinking place to the mind the discursive thoughts. But to see what wells up from deeper inside from the silence. make space for something unknown to respond. You know, ask a series of questions. And after asked each question, let it sink into the depth of your being. And notice what it resonates with. Notice what it stimulates. It might stimulate the response and answer for it might stimulate something else. That's a it's interesting.

You could repeat the question to yourself silently a few times. Hang out with it. And then after a minute or so I'll ask another question.

So, the first question all of you who have come here this evening to meditate. So, perhaps we can assume that all of you have some interest in meditation, Buddhist practice, in a spiritual life

What is your primary intention or sense of purpose or direction engaging in meditation or Buddhist practice spiritual life

what's your primary aspiration in a spiritual life?

What is your primary obstacle to that intention to that sense of purpose

in relationship to your intention or spirit Your life, your meditative life. What's the primary or greatest opportunity that awaits you?

What's the primary opportunity you have to follow through on that intention?

Then the final question

considering what your intention or aspiration or sense of purpose is meditation, Buddhist practice or spiritual life

can you come up with one primary question that you wish could be in Certain they would support you help you in your intention. What? What in what question comes out of your intention for you

So before asking you those four questions I had considered telling you this story about myself. But the purpose of the story would have been ruined by telling the story. So that's why I didn't. But now I can tell it to you. And I'll tell you why it would have ruined it. When I was a relatively new Zen student, and we're starting my Zen practice, in earnest, probably with a lot of enthusiasm. I went to a small sitting group in Davis, California. There were like three or four of us who would sit in someone's very small bedroom twice a week. And the custom in Zen was to sit with the eyes open facing the wall. And since it was a very small bedroom, my knees were basically against the bedroom wall, and I'd be sitting there, upright to my eyes open looking at this wall and In one of my early times, I was sitting there, I sat down to meditate. And this large Roman column rose up in front of me. And I don't usually hallucinate, but but the big column, you know, it was majestic. The kind of a column you see in front of banks that tell you the bank is as great authority or something. And written down on this big column, engraved and painted black with letters, z, e, and i don't know when the visualization or whose nation stopped and when reality kicked in. But as I experienced it, I then went to embrace that column. And as I embraced it, it vanished and I hit my head against the wall in the bedroom.

That was enough to get my attention. And I realized that I hadn't. I was trying to pursuit pursuit of Zen, this thing that was out there Zen Buddhism is great religion of the world, as if it was something out there that I was going to study and hold on to and hold on for security or something. And there was nothing there just vanished when I tried to grab it. And so then my attention got turned 180 degrees around. And rather than studying then, by studying the books in Zen out there, I understood that the practice of Zen was to discover yourself wasn't turned in and be here with yourself. And I want to tell you that story before I asked you the four questions because I want you to kind of sink into yourself and see what is it here with you. However, I thought maybe the story would have ruined it because then you would have had a should and they were taking you out of yourself, rather that helped you be in yourself. So here's why I asked the four questions. And, as I said, there is a opportunity that sometimes exists in contemplative states of mind, to explore to, to consider questions that normally don't have access to kind of responses to questions that are deeper than normal discursive mind, we think about things. And maybe a little more creatively or more in touch with something of greater value inside of us or something valuable. And I would like to respect each of you for whatever your response was, it's who you are. And that's the beginning place. I like to feel that I feel very strongly that the beginning place for Buddhist practice is always you where you're at, and not where you're supposed to be, where you're trying to be, you know, but rather, where you actually are. And there's a way of opening up and being very inclusive have actually who you are here now. And sometimes it can be very hard to get to yourself to find yourself because there's so many blinders or so many wishful thinking or so many strong intentions to get some place that we willing to discount to push aside. What is here for us. I think it's really begins here. And one of the primary places that begins is inner intention. What's the intention or purpose or motivation or aspiration a person has. And sometimes very clear responses come up for people very clear intention or aspiration. And sometimes people don't have clarity around it. For several years, my early years of, of my Buddhist practice, I was really motivated. But if you'd asked me why I didn't have an answer. It was kind of like something my body knew to do. I just like, I just kind of knew this is what I should do and what I should do. And I thought it was kind of strange. That I couldn't come up with a reason why I was doing it except I was doing it. And so I went through a whole exploration on that for a while. So I think it's possible to have, you know, strong, strong sense of purpose without actually having words that connect to it. So then the question is, given who you are and your intention, one of the interesting questions is, you know, how do you best fulfill that? And if you're interested in something like Buddhism, how does Buddhism support that or help that or inform it or challenge it or be

a mirror to rate or something? So rather than taking up what Buddhism says your intention should be, you can use Buddhism as a challenge as a mirror as a support. What is it the Buddhist however, is what Buddhist practice supports you and what you want to do. Very important question of is what's your obstacle? Sometimes it's more interesting to look at the obstacles to your intention and the intentions themselves. Because if they are obstacle settles away. You might be surprised who you find yourself to be or what you find bubbles up instead, it might be very different than what you were hoping for. It might be more beautiful. But so the question is, what is your obstacle? Then the question of what is your primary opportunity to follow through on that? You know what, you know, if you're going to follow through, there has to be an opportunity. There's no opportunity, then it's hopeless. So what's your primary opportunity? You see, it could be a whole range of things that maybe you came up with. And then finally, if you had one question that came out of this intention, what would that question be? You could ask the Buddha or someone or whatever the question be. And so those are the four questions. Some of you came in late, so maybe didn't hear it. What I would like to see happen now is that

you form groups of four You have a chance to tell each other what your question was. Three years. You don't have, you don't have to have you don't have to have one. It's not a test. So don't worry about it. But if you have one, share it with the others, if you feel comfortable sharing it with it, if you don't feel comfortable, edit it.

You know, as long as it's honest, you know, but you can, you know, edit it. You know, maybe your intention is to be the next Buddha. You don't want to say that to people who don't know, so Oh, you know, I just want to deepen my practice. And share your question and then try to offer some of the background behind that question. That could be the background was those first three questions? I know, if I state your question you had and then offer some background and what that behind that question. It could be something hasn't happened to the first three questions. Or it could be something very different, but share some of your best Background That's for you. It's important for you who you are. That's behind that question. And the important thing here is for me is, I'd rather do yours be honest about who you are and what you are. That's really the hope. And if you don't feel comfortable doing that, then honestly just say, I'm not comfortable to go any further. That's as far as I'll say. And that's cool, completely fine. Okay, so it will take us a little while for that before we do the next piece. Some of you might have come here today for quiet and peace and silence. And you don't want to do this. What you have one option you can always leave. In other option you can do as you sit quietly, in the chair, just meditate well that people talk and then go together. Or you can try it out, trust it. It's pretty common when we do these kinds of kind of breaking into groups. It's pretty common for a lot of people to feel comfortable and safe. Oh no. And it's also very common for people at the end say that was great. So I hope that's the case. So if you could form groups of four to hopefully we have enough to works out if it doesn't, we can have a group of five or three, and then each person gets about two minutes. So

So come back, come back.

It could well be that for some people and some of you to go from the 45 minutes of silence to a cocktail party was a bit jarring. All this talking. So I think before we proceed, just let's sit quietly for about two minutes can regroup and settle and be with yourself and see what's linkers for you from those those conversations

One of the Buddhist stories that I'm fond of is the story of a monk in time of the Buddha who was supposed to have been fully enlightened, fully awakened person. And he was out wandering around the countryside with another group of monks. And they came to a river they had to forward. And in order to cross the river is shallow enough, you could cross it by foot. But he pulled up his robes and prance

across the river in the most undignified way. Now, monks are supposed to carry themselves a certain dignity so they're inspiring for others and whatever. And he pulled up his robes and probably had no underwear on so maybe even more interesting. And so the other monks for a guest and so they went to the Buddha. And they said to the Buddha, you know, this guy is supposed to be enlightened, but, you know, his behavior, you know, is kind of very, you know, very funny. enlightened behavior. How could this be? And the Buddha said, it's okay. He is really a liberated person. However, for 500 lifetimes before this one, he was a monkey.

And his monkey nature still comes through. So I like this story because it kind of allows each person to be unique. Each of you can be a monkey or can be just unique. And whatever you are, and, and, you know, we're not supposed to all conform to, you know, look in a particular way. In fact, Jack Kornfield in his kind of survey of many people, he's a spiritually mature person. And people that he's known. He says that the more spiritually mature person becomes, the more eccentric they become. You know, kind of odd. I certainly feel odd. I don't know I'm very mature but I'm very hard. And so, as I've seen that also among some of my people I've known who I consider quite spiritual mature is peculiar ways in which they are oddities they personality quirks or whatever. They're so relaxed about it. Are you ready? So that's how it is. They don't take it just like they don't even take it personally. So when I studied zen, there was a saying they said, Suzuki Roshi said, when you are you, Zen Zen. So it is again, this idea you're supposed to impose something on you But you're supposed to really become yourself. But if you're not already yourself then so if Buddhism isn't, you know, if you're supposed to just be yourself, then there's no spiritual practice either, right? Because then just life as usual. And life as usual usually is somebody was suffering, you're getting comfortable in something. So usually there's something we want to address and change. But how do we address it? How do we change ourselves? How do we engage in something where we have some stay with some level of integrity, allowing ourselves to be ourselves in some deep way? not throw out the baby with the bathwater. How do we stay true to ourselves in this process, I think is a very important question. For anybody engaged in spiritual endeavor. How do you stay true to yourself and doing this? I've known plenty of people engaged in spiritual practice who have not stayed true to themselves and have suffered the consequences and been tremendously disappointed. burned by There's their spiritual life, variety of things. How do you stay true to yourself? That's a great question. And hopefully there are many answers, as many answers as there are people in this room. But I would like to offer a few maybe not answers, but maybe supports for how to be true to yourself as you engage in this process. And one of the great supports for this process is your own breathing is to stay in touch with your breathing. And notice when your breathing gets constricted, held, somehow tight. And as soon as your breathing gets constricted, that's a really important teacher for you that something is amiss. Something needs your attention. The second support besides your breathing is the rest of your body. To stay in touch with your body. Your body will give you lots of indications when you're off when you're not true to yourself. The Body, I consider that you know, there's this famous saying in psychology. Dreams are the royal road to the unconscious. I think maybe dreams are a good road. But the core, the gill, the royal road to the unconscious is your own body. If you stay in touch with your body, you'll learn so much of what goes on within you your motivations, your attitudes, your reactions, many of them that you don't even know unless you pay attention to your body. The way you hold your body, your posture, your contractions attentions in your body, are all your teachers and will help you because when you start you stop being true to yourself. Chances are that's being expressed somehow in tension in your body. And then there's being aware of your emotions. Be very, very diligent to notice what your emotional life is like what your mood is, what's happening here. Don't try to override or ignore your emotional life in order to get someplace or do something but pay attention. What is what going on here. emotions can be like kaleidoscopes, it can change very rapidly sometimes. And it's very interesting. Stay in touch with it, know what's going on. If you are in touch with your emotional life, you're much more likely to stay true to who you are. And then

also then finally, stay in touch with what you're thinking. If you spend, spend some time in your life, tracking, being aware of the kind of things you think

some people you know, the unexamined life for most people's life where they don't look at their beliefs, their thoughts, their values, the what kind of concerns they have in their cognitive life. But look at that kind of look behind. Spend some quiet time and regular basis we have a chance to see what is it your primary concerns and drives your thinking mind. I think of these as being kind of concentric circles with the breath in the middle. If you can be centered in your breathing, middle of it all. The breathing is really the big part of who you are. Then Then there's the body, then the emotions. And then very outer circle is your cognitive like your thinking like, if you can track those things, then it's a lot easier to be true to yourself to discover what that is. And those four areas are the primary areas which we practice mindfulness, Mike was nice to ourselves. And it's part of the reason we practice mindfulness is not to impose Buddhism on us, but rather to discover who we are. And in doing that, beginning to separate, out, tease apart now, which is extra, that's part of ourselves which causes suffering causes other suffering. And to help us show us how we can let go of things which cause harm or difficult and unnecessary and then how also how we can respect and take the light, maybe, or at least put up with our monkey nature. come through here and there. So, I would like to hope that whatever question you came up with today, as your question coming out of your head, whatever your intention is, for spiritual life or meditative life or whatever that domain can be called for your vocabulary, whatever your intention is, that you have really a lot of respect for it. And, and let that be kind of the source of asking lots of questions. And lots of explanations, lots of discovery, this process. When I did, again, Zen practice, one of the teachings I was got there is that sort of one two, where the teachers defined in a kind of nutshell, Zen training, as being a training involved the purification of your intention. So you discover what your intention is and then you act on it, you live with it, you explore it. And that gives you information that can refine your, your intention, clarify it corrected, and you get more and more, clarified more, more purified more and more, kind of down to a core intention. We start over at, and then through the mindfulness exploration, we can find our way. And it's one of the really beautiful things in life is to come down and discover the pure core within each of us from which we could live. So thank you very much.