

2007-11-25 Tending the Inner Flame

Fri, 7/31 6:58PM • 27:31

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

flame, meditation, people, discover, world, reacting, settle, beautiful, blame, reactivity, influenced, qualities, wind, warm, criticism, gratitude, mind, momentum, warmth, light

SPEAKERS

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So good morning. And the words I'd like to share with you today have as their catalyst, the topic of generosity. But I say that the outset because maybe I won't get to it generosity itself, but that's in the back of what I want to say. So in spiritual discourse, religious discourse, there's often recourse to poetry, deploy that kind of language. That's not meant to be taken too literally, but more metaphoric. And in that kind of language, there's a teaching that's meaningful for me. And that is that each of us has a flame inside of ourselves. And how we tend that flame is a very important issue in human life. And one of the things is discover what that flame is, and then discover how to tend it to nourish it, develop it, and then eventually, to set it free. If you take the idea of candle flame, a candle flame does not do well in the wind, the wind can blow it out over the wind can cause it to flicker when there's no wind and the candle flame can be quite beautiful. The service has beauty and it can be the candle flame of being very still and very dynamic at the same time. And still kind of beautiful yellow flame coming up. That's inside it's full of full of dynamism. The same time it's good to be still and so the light doesn't flicker gives off certain amount of so we have this inner flame and that inner flame can flicker in the wind it can be blown out. When I was about 14, I went to a boarding school that I didn't know at the time when I went there wasn't sent there because of this but once I got there discovered it was the it was a boarding school in Switzerland where all the kids who couldn't get along and other boarding schools were sent. And I was only there for a few months. And it was a beautiful place high up in the Alps. I chose a crevasse chosen for me because it was such a beautiful place hi in the Alps. And one day I was walking with an older friend to school on this beautiful mountain road. Overlooking this beautiful valley below in the happy hour above and blue sky is walking in this amazing scenery. He said to me, I said, you know, our 14 year old are, you know, what's, you know, what's the meaning of life? You know, what, how do we fit into all this? And he was 17. And he looked down at me and he said, Don't be so silly. And that just knocked it out. That that kind of inquiry, that kind of sentiment, that kind of feeling, with our snuffed out, they've kind of like are snuffed out but at least squashed or receded. And it wasn't until many years later that some of that sentiment some of that inspiration or some of that questioning, came fourth again. So sometimes it can be quite fragile to what other people say or society around us. And the flame that's within us beautiful flame is also susceptible to what is called in Buddhism sometimes the four winds and the four worldly conditions are for the eight Eight wins the eight worldly conditions. They're made up of four peers. And these are things that kind of the winds of the world that blow through and cause our light to somehow flicker or sometimes doesn't flicker, sometimes they actually cause the flame to turn into fire. And fire sometimes can burn really badly. So, some of the wins that can cause these problems are gain and loss. We gain something we get something we succeed in something or we lose something, we fail in something. And that has such a big impact on this inner flame that sometimes it can snuff it out or positive flicker, or sometimes it can actually turn it into a raging wildfire, wildfire and cause tremendous devastation. And then there's the winds of, of fame and disrepute.

So to get famous, or to have fame, however, Repetition be considered certain way you know, and or be to have disrepute can also cause a tremendous amount of flickering or problems with the inner flame. And then there's the flame of a little bit different from that the flame the wind of, of praise and blame. And getting praised it's kind of sounds good to be praised and get kind of pumped up. But actually, getting influenced by by praise too much, can cause all kinds of strange things this inner flame and blame as well blame could feel the pain of that it's more easily to feel for most people. One of my favorite verses from Dhammapada goes something like they'll blame you. If you talk too much. They'll blame you if you talk too little. And they'll blame you. If you talk just Right, they're just in the middle. No one in this world is free of blame. No one world is free of criticism. So you might try it, because in all kinds of maneuverings trying to get yourself set up so that no one can possibly ever criticize you for anything. Find out the place. And, and maybe the only place would be just to stay home all the time. But if people find out, you're staying home all the time, they'll criticize you for that. And if you're never home, they'll criticize you for that. So they didn't know and is free of criticism and why I like that this version of a pata is that maybe it's true. And so maybe we don't have to take too seriously. The blame the criticism we get, if we are slaves to criticism if we're unduly influenced by the blame and criticism that can be put on us the judgments other people might have on us, then you know, we're going to suffer the flames going to disappear flame is going to suffer. It's going to flicker or go out or turn into a raging fire. The it's certainly a very painful thing and a society that people judge each other. But to be angry that people judge each other is maybe another kind of flickering of the flame. I think it's more valuable not to be caught up in judging the judges, but to figure out a way to have the flare flame burn without being reacting to the what's going on to blame. So the world of raise, praise and blame, do not buy into that. Not let that unduly influence influence us. And then the last of the worldly wins is pain and pleasure. So, pleasure is a good thing. There's nothing wrong with pleasure in and of itself. But to easily the pursuit of pleasure, the attachment to pleasure, the resistance to discomfort, the reactions discomfort, the judgments around discomfort, the signing of meaning, and world philosophy around pleasure and pain can cause this inner flame to flicker. And to cause the inner flame to go out or sometimes turn into raging fires. I keep saying, the raging fire, sometimes of anger, sometimes with lust and desire. So what is this inner flame? That is so beautiful, it's so precious and each of us that somehow can be unduly influenced by the conditions of the world. Maybe each person has their own sense of what that flame is. And for me to say this is what the flame is, is maybe a disservice to each of you. But what is it flame? What's that is Warm, the inner well being inner light that's discovered, when the heart or the mind, the inner life is not influenced or not in a reactive relationship to the winds of the world when it's not near reactive relationships to his desires, craving or to ill will or versions. And one of the functions of meditation practice is to somehow settle the flickering still the flickering are subtle the fire, so the inner flame can be there in its own beauty.

And one of the ways to discover that is to discover is to is a practice of non reactivity. So not to react to things not allow things to we allow ourselves to react to things that go on. So certainly, if somebody's sitting meditating, and someone comes along and says, Oh, that's you look like I'm The world's best meditator, that's a great meditator you are, you might feel kind of good. But you've reacted. You've caught these are what's wrong feeling good? Well, you've been you've been influenced by something outside of yourself in an influence, you've lost touch with something that's inner, you've kind of gone from the inner to the outter. If someone comes along and says, You're the worst meditator, then again, if you get react to that, Oh, no, I should never come to IMC again. I don't belong here. But then you've caught up, you're reacting to something. And often human life is made up of a whole series of reactions, reaction to this and that and this or wanting this not wanting that do all this. And there's so much momentum in the reactivity. That part of what meditation practice is doing is is settling away the momentum of the reactivity. And some of the momentum takes a while to settle away. Just like if you do

yoga, yoga posture, it takes a while for the muscle to stretch. You can do some stretching Muscle, we really say in yoga that if you force your muscle to stress or you're tending to stretch, you damage it. So you have to kind of be very patient. And so you have to just allow it to kind of stretch its own time. So in the same way, there's a lot of momentum in our mind or hearts from the momentum of the desire and wanting and clinging and holding. You can't just take enough of that. But you have to somehow create the conditions that allow it to settle away to relax, to soften. And so meditation hopefully is one of those conditions. And what supports that the most, is not reacting to our reactivity, not reacting to the discomfort and then reacting to the momentum of the mind, the busyness, the mind, the agitation of the mind, agitation of the body, just letting it be there. Letting just kind of be there in the stillness of your posture, stillness of your mind, not judging yourself, for against it, not praising yourself or blaming yourself, not reacting to the pleasure or the discomfort that might be there as you meditate. Not being concerned about praise or blame, or your meditation, you know, expecting to be the best meditator or the worst or how you look for other people. And so just let things be as they are. And then with time so there's, there's, so there's twofold to full time thing going on here. One is, we stopped reacting to what is and then no longer reacting. We allow the momentum of past reactivity, to settle away to relax. And some some things relax very quickly. And sometimes some things might take months or years and meditation to really soften and relax. Some momentum of reactivity or clinging is pretty mild. And simply you can tell yourself, relax the shoulders and they sometimes they will. And some things are deeply, deeply rooted, and so locked in that the so for example, the attachment to being right Over the attachment to certain kind of pain, certain kind of suffering or injustice being done to us might be so deeply rooted inside of us. That even to get close to it is, is a big task is hard to do with time, we settle away. So what is it that's left? When the reactivity to things falls away? What is it that's left? When the inner life is no longer living in reaction to the conditions of the world around us? What is it what is left when the inner life is no longer looking outside of itself? For its fulfillment? What is it that the inner life is I'm looking outside of itself for protection? So externalizing our concerns what's left? And so I think one of the beautiful things about mindfulness meditation or meditation is this process of letting go of shedding like the snake sheds its skin, perhaps shedding all the stuff that's extra, and then discovering something beautiful. gets inside of us. It's sometimes it takes a long time. Remember when my father when I first started getting involved in meditation a lot, I think I was going to go to Thailand. My father was taking me to the airport. And he was kind of curious about this. The allocation thing I was doing my 20s the most important thing was meditation, living in monasteries. So he asked me about it, you know, to explain, you know, what, what it was a criticism about. And in order to try to explain to him in a way that maybe he would understand the attraction to me, for me. I said that it was like falling in love.

But somehow the experience of meditation experience of being settled, letting all this stuff fall away. The beauty that was there was kind of as compelling as falling in love. Because it was so lovely. So lovely, lovely, lovely. lovingly lovable, and it had this kind of sense of inner radiance, warmth and delight, that maybe could be there sometimes and falling in love for someone. And there's certain advantages that exist, maybe disadvantages, but certainly certain advantages that exist. A falling love doesn't require another person. So that inner radiance inner beauty that can be there. Now, some people don't know anything about their inner warm their inner light or flame. And so they look for warmth from other people. They look for light from others, and they were to fulfill them or to kind of do feel that part of themselves. And sometimes it is a bit of a problem because he never sometimes it's always oriented externally. That person is going to do it for me, that person is going to remind me of me with a warm, then there's a kind of alienation or separation from ourselves. Sometimes two people can each other, both of them looking externally for someone to provide the warm and they don't exactly provide the warmth to each other. But they just love being together because the companions looking companions and having a need. And so it's just a good to be someone else with someone who has same need. So what is it that when you start looking externally, what can what can be discovered inside

is really the big question today what can be discovered inside? That's fulfilling, what can be discovered inside that can feel complete, that requires nothing else. sense of happiness or well being, a sense of peace, a sense of light. So the Buddha said once, near the end of his life, he said be a light onto yourself. deeper, deeper, deeper means Oscar's To me it means a like a flame be a flame onto yourself. So how do you discover that flame? And how do you discover it, love it. claim to be unmoving. One of the words for meditation in Buddhism is jhana. Sometimes the word jhana is used for absorbed deep, deep, concentrated meditation, absorption meditation. And the word jhana comes from the word jayati, which means to burn. So Sunday, what is that that can allow us to burn inside? So rather than snuffing and going, still going cold in meditation, meditation is a kind of a kind of a inner warmth or light or radiance, that gets stronger. And how do we discover that? When the habits of mind are so strong, to be external, to want things, to desire to fantasize to imagine to resist to hate you know, when the when the mind is focused on things and thoughts and ideas and feelings, you know, always outside of itself. So how is it the mind can ascend The heart can turn in on itself settle and feel settled on itself. And I think for some people, it's a very threatening idea. For some people. It's a very cold idea. For some people, it's, I think, a very, an interesting idea. Because we're taught and people believe that it's the world that provides us with meaning and excitement and purpose, all this stuff. So in Buddhism, then we have this idea of meditation, this inner burning is and the inner flame can be unmoving, and dynamic. Or if it's maladaptive or mal reactive, then an inner flame can turn into a fire. And so in Buddhism, they talk about the fire of greed, the fire of hate, the fire of delusion. And there's a beautiful sermon talk by the Buddha, where he says and you kind of imagined in the kind of his great rhetorical style The world is on fire. It's on fire. with greed, it's on fire, with hate on fire with delusion. So this inner flame now there's something very beautiful about the inner flame. And that is it gives warm and I think it's very important to allow that warmth to radiate from us. And I think that those that warmth has different qualities, or different is expressed in different ways. And one of the ways is through gratitude or appreciation, the simple feeling of being grateful and appreciative. It's hard to feel grateful or appreciative when the mind is in its reactive mode.

When the mind is not settled, and the mind is not relaxed, the mind is agitated, tense, wanting something, desiring something trying to fix something always kind of preoccupied. It's really hard to feel great. And then gratitude requires real gratitude with deep, deep, satisfying, warm, glowing gratitude, I think requires us to be pretty relaxed, pretty settled. For you these, that sense of ease. I think it's I think, maybe or maybe you disagree with me, but it's hard to feel a deep sense of gratitude. And one of the reasons I like to bow at the end of meditation is that I feel often I feel a lot of gratitude. But then I finish my meditation practice. And sometimes people that people ask me, What are you grateful for? And I can't quite tell, you know, I don't know for anything is the point. I just feel I just feel grateful because they're okay feel grateful for no reason. And, and so just nice to express that gratitude. And I could probably fill in reasons, but that seems a little bit trite to try give reasons for this feeling the census there and so closely connected to gratitude as appreciation, to feel appreciation. And I think again, it's hard to feel appreciation if we feel we're incomplete. We feel like there's a lack. We feel that there's a The world needs we need the world needs to provide us with something, something has to change and be fixed, that we're not enough. It's a lot easier to feel relaxed, when we feel like we're enough. And this wonderful thing about meditation is that you can feel enough without getting anything. You can feel enough without things in the world changing. Someone can still be really angry with you. Someone could still be telling you that you are an awful person. Someone could, you could even have done something really terrible, that you feel bad about. It's possible to settle enough quiet enough. interfere in a sense and deep sense of enoughness deep sense of fullness of completion. And then from that I'm saying comes this warm in that warm, that glow of that Warm is expressed in feelings of can be expressed in such feelings of gratitude as appreciation as love, as kindness, as generosity as since we're talking about a flame and one of the things I find very, very meaningful is the way in which these

qualities can come almost unprompted. It isn't that we have to kind of tell ourselves are supposed to be generous now supposed to be kind now, as if it's a such a thing we have to do. It's more like something effortless. Something that seems to just flow flow in a glow. One of the beautiful qualities of the inner flame is awareness itself to be aware And I hope that people who practice meditation eventually discover that awareness. Being aware, doesn't require effort. That being aware is a delight. something wonderful, that being aware is part of that inner flame that inner glow. Simply be aware. I know that when the mind is in a reactive mode, it can take a lot of effort and work in order to pay attention to be mindful. But when we've shared the reactivity, we've settled and quieted the reactivity. Then, awareness is not a lot of work just is, there it is, we're aware. And so, these qualities have come from the isness of the still flame, the quiet flame. So still flame the quiet flame can seem uninteresting to people who want things in the conventional ways of success in the world. But the pair oxido irony is that once we get a sense of the inner flame, it comes coming out of it comes some of the most beautiful qualities that humans can experience and express. And I would venture to say that many of the attempts to get things in the world to be just right, the right job, the right house, the right relationship, the right whatever, I would venture to say that it is art I get that sometimes is a is a indirect way of attempting to touch into these beautiful qualities. They're available in a much more direct and immediate way.

And that still flame the quiet, silent place inside is also dynamic. Under a candle flame is both still and dynamic. So it's not dynamic, because it's reactive. It's dynamic versus responsive because it flows out of it. So rather than reacting to the world, We're being motivated, the motivation is coming from within. So the question for you is, what is your flame? And what do you know about an inner flame? Have you touched in their flame? Have you felt it? Did you see in the inner light inner light, something you'd call that using that kind of poetic language? What is what is your inner flame and inner light is anything that I've said today resonate with what you've tasted, touched and felt inside of you. And what does it take for you to nourish that inner flame that inner light? Or if you haven't tasted it touched it? What would it take to discover it to be motivated that possibility of finding it? And I think that certainly nourishing it to letting it grow are becoming bigger part of our life requires us to appreciate what it is to appreciate its value. And since it has no monetary value, no recreational value, or whatever, then it's very easy to kind of dismiss it or overlook it. But in order to nourish this inner light this inner flame, it needs to be appreciated. So do you appreciate it? How do you appreciate it? How do you give time for it? And you give time for it. You give real time for it, or is it mostly something that you'll you'll get to eventually eventually, I'll give time to it eventually, you know, when I retire. Eventually when I get old, eventually I'll get time to nourish and develop this inner flame. So becomes a strong thing. Bright light for us. So I hope that each of you can become a really beautiful bright flame. Light they can glow Give a warm and light to a world that sometimes seems to have not enough warm and unmet right. So I hope that as you discover your inner stillness, that your inner stillness brings forth all these beautiful qualities that you that you will share with others. And that way, we can all be thankful for each other. So, thank you