

2008-04-27 Appreciating What Is There

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SPEAKERS

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In about 1980 or so, I went down to Tassajara Zen monastery to be a practitioner down there. And on the way down, the my ride stopped in Carmel, I think, Carmel Valley, the bookstore. And I wandered through the bookstore and just pulled down a book from the spiritual shelves when I pulled it down kind of at random and opened the book at random and read a sentence and close the book and put it back on the shelf. And, and that's one sentence then reverberated stayed with me for quite some time when I came to the monastery. And the sentence that I read was something like some very I don't remember exactly now anymore, but it was something like the problem, primary problem people have comes from holding back from not holding, holding back, resistance holding back something like that. This job, I don't know what the context of that was, I just read that one sentence. And so, the fact that it was stated negatively, I thought, well, I'll somehow it didn't occur to me that I would restate it positively. And to the question of, you know, the solution of life is to participate more fully. And so this idea of participating became one of my practice phrases for my part of my time at the monastery. And so, partly for me, then the practice was, how can I participate more fully with what I'm doing was it was the kind of how can I participate what I'm doing. And soon after I had that kind of idea, that kind of practice kind of direction. I was assigned to the kitchen Tassajara to work in the cook, work in the kitchen. If and, and this was rather a disappointment for me because I'd gone to the monastery to meditate. And, and we better take the fair amount. But if you weren't in the kitchen you didn't meditate so much. I think you got to meditate two times a day or something wasn't so much and so a little bit disappointed. But so there wasn't a kitchen with his practice, however, participate more fully with what's going on. And it was the and the carrots you know, how do I participate in chopping carrots or these onions or whatever. And because we were cooking for I don't know what it was 4050 people. There were a lot of carrots and onions and different things to the job. In the first few months I was a kitchen I was when primary things I did was chocolate. And what surprised me is I was thinking about this participation kind of approach was how much I was not participating in chopping the vegetables. I was not interested in chopping vegetables, chopping vegetables was not spiritual practice. You know, it wasn't really Where was that? And who was it really, I was up there in the zendo meditation home. And so in my first period of chopping vegetables, I was paying attention to what I was doing, I found out that I was turning my body, you know, kind of away from the vegetables and chopping board towards the door. And, and, really, I was only working with my right hand, really my left body part of my body just was not there for this activity. And so, I would turn my body around and just face the carrot, okay, it's you and me. And then after a while, you know, my body would turn away you know, the character was participating. So and so what so I had this practice of practice, you know what was like to really be there for this activity of jumping Vegetable and not you know, the same thing happen there as happens in meditation, my mind would wander away into other places and other times and thoughts and worries and all kinds of things. And I could see both physically, that there ways in which I wasn't really fully there for the experience. And mentally I wasn't there fully for the experience. And so I turned myself over. Okay, let's try again.

Let's try again, let's be there for this thing. And, and it got to be after a while, that was actually boosted kind of there and I got to really enjoy it. And then look forward to when there were five pounds of onions. You know, just kind of wail away just, you know, got really into it. And, and so it was really nice, kind of to really be there for it. And, and it kind of kind of was my whole kind of way of being in the kitchen was an open house. I really fully be here even though I didn't want party I wanted to be somewhere else.

And one of the surprises at that time was that You know, I've had to meditate a lot less. But there was some way in which that kind of, you know, more full attempt to participate be there in the kitchen chopping vegetables and all that translated to how my meditation went when I didn't meditate. And many times I found that sometimes I remember there were times when I would work in the kitchen to the last possible moment that I could because frankly, I had to and then and then I would, you know, do whatever they do get out of there and put on my robes. And, and everything is in monster, a lot of things are choreographed down to the second. So you had to have it all worked out so that I could work as long as I could, and then put on my robe and walk in through the meditation hall door, just when they were gonna close it because you couldn't go in after certain time. So head down pretty well. And I would sit down Rather than being frazzled, from all the activity in the kitchen, I would sit down now just be there, just there was, and everything else would drop away in the kitchen things. And I was surprised how often happen, then it seemed like, the more I kind of participated fully in the activity kitchen, the more it supported me to be fully present for meditation. Then, in fact, that was also kind of the phrase for meditation often was, how can I be here more fully in this activity of meditation. And the same thing happened there where it was both both a physical thing and a mental thing to participate. And I felt fortunate to be doing Zen practice because then put emphasis on the body and posture, I struggled with the posture but but it's still you know, the spirit struggle meant that was connected involved and trying to participate. And so we'd really beat you know, try to be there with my posture be in the activity of sitting as much as I could. And then the same thing happened. My mind And wandered off sometimes just there like that. And so the practice there was also but so many times, I could see how I was in the kitchen translated the high was in the meditation hall. And there were other times where it wasn't such a wonderful story. There were other times I was frazzled, upset, anxious, worried, whatever goes on what's going on the kitchen. And then I would come and sit and that would be the kind of what I had to work with and deal with. But the more I could fully be in the kitchen, just do the simple activity, whatever I was doing and kind of burned myself up in negativity, in a sense. More often that translated to having that full kind of connection, concentration in meditation as well. So is it is it true for you that holding back resistance is a source of suffering? Are there ways in which you hold back in other ways that you can participate more fully with what you're doing? that supports you that helpful And how and how would that look like, in the two themes kind of offers one has its physical with your body, what you do with your body, how you are with your body when you do things. When I was in Japan at the monastery there, I would sometimes carry the rice from the kitchen into the dining room enough to carry the pot with one hand. And the other monks would get upset with me. Do you have to carry rice with two hands. And there was a variety of reasons for that. But part of it was, you know, when you're going to do something, you want to do it fully and really be there for that activity. And if you carry with one hand, you know, ground, you know, half of us involved. If you bring it with two hands, when when you offer something to someone you offer with two hands, you actually bring yourself much more into participating much more. But if you kind of just go like that in here, or toss it to them, you know, it's nice, maybe but it's not as it doesn't have the same fullness of connection participation if you use two hands and that was something Also I learned from Zen practice was this value of kind of using both sides of my body using both hands, when it was appropriate when I did things. And in, you know much of Buddhism, we have this custom of bowing, putting our hands together. And that also, you know, putting two sides together. So we're all there for what we completely there for the activity of offering a respect

or appreciation of someone. So we're there, you know, all of us is there. So, you know, so that's a bit then we don't we'd resist, we hold back sometimes some of us do. And what are the what are the reasons for that? What are their motivations for that? I think understanding that is very helpful. The degree to which fear might be a reason, doubt might be a reason. It might be a way of protecting ourselves. So we don't we don't want to be involved fully.

Or maybe we've been fully involved participated in something in the past, and we got burnt. I'm not gonna do that again. I'm not gonna lie. Again, whatever it might be, and or maybe we've been inappropriately involved, we kind of kind of kind of got involved too closely too and intensely with something that was not appropriate for the activity we're involved in. And so we kind of felt, oh, well, I don't know how to do this. And so sometimes it's a matter of learning what's appropriate in different situations. And so one of the very famous Zen phrases that kind of was a Zen monk who was asked, you know, after a lifetime of Zen practice, do you have a teaching for me? And he said, his answer was an appropriate response. So finding out the appropriate response, and I love this the teaching of the appropriate response, because it's not giving a a set answer or set teaching, this is the way it should be. It isn't the truth, but rather the truth with the response that kind of went to what's true in the moment has to do with response, but what's happened In here, the conditions the situation the people with, and every situation we're in requires a different response. And so to participate more fully, also, in my understanding of Zen practice meant also to have a question in your mind. What is it that this situation requires? What is this situation asking? Me? So what's the appropriate response? How do we participate in the way that just right? And sometimes it's appropriate to sit back? So I had a Zen teacher who said that when he met with people, he would kind of like to kind of would pay attention to their body language, to know how he would respond to them, be with him. And if they were kind of like slumped and slumping all over, you know, he would slump. So they feel kind of comfortable. Or if they were sitting up straight, he would sit up straight. He had a prohibited handle issue or being intimidating. So it was kind of important for him to kind of do that way I guess. So appropriate response for him. I think had some friends. to do with who really was. So this kind of feedback system, we've all kind of together. But whatever it is, if participating, how do we enter into this particular situation here and find out in this situation, how we can be, you know, what's appropriate, what's needed, what's going on now, as opposed to thinking, or the grass is greener somewhere else. And I know in the past, hopefully the past you know, I've been to parties or something and talking to someone and my thought was, oh, I wonder if we might be more interesting to talk to the person over there. That's not very nice. Embarrassing mentalia, right. And the grass is greener somewhere else. And then I go over there and then my mind goes, Oh, I wonder over there. Over there. It's kind of kind of a kind of a disease of the mind. The over there disease over there, it's better than here. It must be better over there. And so it's kind of like leave kind of a restless quality. And just do it. Okay, here. Here's here. So What would it What would a participant here? How do I live with here? I do I accept here, how do I engage in here? And what happens in me, when I don't do that, what happens takes me away from that, to understand that that's the mindfulness practice to see clearly what's going on. And then another, another aspect of this participation. Again, come back to my Zen training, present practice was that of appreciation. So not only to participate, what's going on here, but to do with some appreciation in what's here. And the most representative, teaching moment zen, for me of that was after we did a session at Green Gulch, and right across the aisle from me where I was sitting across the walkway in the hall. space next to the cross for me was this Japanese visiting monk. And the custom there was at the beginning, first day we're given a cup of tea like a tea cup to keep our seats for seven days. And then once a day in the They come service to cookie. And then at the last day of the seventh day, they come and they retrieve that teacup, take it back to the kitchen, wash it, it's stored away. So was the seventh day. And I was sitting facing this monk who was, you know, four or five feet away. So I can kind of see what he was doing. And when the time came to, to return the teacup, he did something which was not in the

choreographed routine. You know, and because you kind of knew what you're supposed to do, you're not supposed to do all that extra stuff. Was he? He bound to stick up?

clearly about to stick up before he had to he didn't have to, because I didn't seem to me. I don't really know what's going on for him. But what the effect it had on me was I thought, wow, this guy's appreciating and thank you this teacup and inanimate object. That's something you know you understand. Appreciate and thanking people, but an inanimate object. And that was kinda representative moment kind of this Zen aspect of appreciating what's there as well. appreciating what it's done for us to support it gives us appreciating just its own kind of existence, appreciating perhaps the cause and conditions that brought up there. The Potter who made it, the people who washed it, took care of it and brought it there and people served it to the whole world that the teacup kind of represents. So both these things are pre participation and appreciation involve a deeper connection to what is here. And it's one of the things I hope that we're looking for mindfulness practice is how to meet or be present in our life in a deeper way. And part of the what I like about the teaching of depth, is that it doesn't require the situation to be different from what it is we have to get away from change and makes them go away. But rather can we discover discovered from a new perspective, that of depth. And then the analogy that hopefully works for this is that of comparing a two dimensional world to a three dimensional world. And a three dimensional world might be fascinating. Like television is two dimensional, right? If you think about it, is a two dimensional world. But you know, I think that three dimensional world and it's a nice sunny spring days, you know, hopefully much more rich than deeper than the two dimensional world of television. Or if you spent a lot of times of swimming on the surface of the ocean, contending with the waves and all the things that go on there. And then at some point, you realize you can dive under the water and you realize there's a whole depth there, the world, the fascinating world, under the water, so people are just in awe of what goes on under the surface. You can see from cooking land, realizes depth there. So the same thing with our Our life here in many ways, we can think of our daily busy, active thoughts filled mind world as being two dimensional. And certainly, if we're living in our life, through the filter through the medium or thinking, and that's the only way we really connect with a primary way we connect what we think we believe. It's as as beautiful as the thoughts and beliefs can be. It's two dimensional compared to a kind of a fullness of experience. That fullness of experience or depth of experience, has a lot to do again, I think with the body, to be there with your body present in your body, and sensing and feeling your experience through your body as much as through what you think about what's going on with you think about yourself. So, to be to be here fully, and then be interested, okay, how do I sense I feel my way into the depth of what's going on here. Now, as always, in any situation, there's a depth of view and your view and your history, your life, your thoughts, your feelings, your, your there's the depth of the people you're involved in their history, their feelings, their motivations, their, you know, all the different aspects of who they are. And there's, you know, there's depth in the interconnected quality of what's happening in any given situation. There's a two dimensional world of a teacup, deca, Pacifica and then there's a three dimensional world of a teacup. Realize a teacup is connected to a lot more things to the Potter and the people who brought it to you and the people who cleaned it and people who filled it the people who you know and it's connected to the soil that clay teacup came out of in the person who dug it out, you know, in that clay connected to other things, a whole whole world of connection that some people find very meaningful to feel connected to. If it sounds a little bit too romantic, then I think that I almost feel like, as our life has become more complicated, that it's important for us to take some responsibility for the three dimensional world that we often don't see. So how many of you know what happens to your poop when it goes out on your toilet, out of sight, out of mind, right? two dimensional world

but, you know, take some responsibility for your trash for your stuff, rather than someone else's gonna take care of it. Now, this whole thing about all that medication gets flushed down the toilet, the effect it

has on the environment. So, you know, to take into account that three dimensional interconnected world is part of being full Present appreciating here, as well. And the last thing I'd like to say is that there's something really fascinating happens when you enter into the moment enter into what's happening here as fully as you can. It seemed like a narrowing down. In a sense it is maybe, because maybe you're not thinking about what's far away anymore, you're going down. But as you more fully you're here and kind of still in mind, it's still there or concentrated or present or mindful here. There's a way in which it seems to opens up as well. Open up the three dimensional quality. So for example, if you're really fully here, for one thing, the mind is still the mind gets more concentrated, my stuff's been fragmented and going off in different directions. And as the mind gets Still, the mind becomes more expansive, and the mind starts feeling like a beautiful thing. Awareness starts in the computable thing and awareness Our awareness which often is not, you know, it's kind of invisible. You don't fish doesn't see the fish, the water swims in. Often we don't see the awareness we swim in. But as we get Still, the awareness that we have always here becomes a larger reality and more present more aware. That sense of awareness sense gives a sense of expansiveness kind of opens up. So it's kind of a narrowing of attention, and we can enter into the knee and the carrot. And then as the mind gets still, awareness opens up becomes expansive again, and we become more aware of the wider world. Isn't it beautiful? I think I think it is. Because you're worrying about what you're going to lose by participating. So those are my thoughts this morning. So now it's your turn if you have comments or thoughts or questions. Anybody want to participate in today's talk?

This isn't very well thought out. But um

I think sometimes I have a hard time knowing

when it's skillful, just to totally be with what's happening.

And when it's more skillful.

Not too. And I

know that's very vague, but it's a good It's very good. It's a great question. And each situation is require a different answer. But since you know the first thing I thought about when you pick up the mic, I thought kids because we share the parents, right? And so this morning I was alone at home with my two kids, my wife's off. And so I didn't really want to play with him.

Rely, you know, one of the one of life's problems is we hold back we read History. And so with some point, my son went down to the basement and came up with this long form tube they kind of has that he likes to make the closed loop de loops that he puts marbles in and drops them they go around and around requires a lot of work and tape and holding and dailies long, too. And so I entered his world and helped him and set it up and just, you know, you know, I didn't really want to do it too fast. Although this is what's needed here. This was appropriate. His five year old needs contact from his dad little bit, he will need some help. He needs to kind of get involved and connected to something. And for me, just to kind of resist it right now. I think he's going to feel the resistance somehow and feel a little bit more like he's lacking. So I entered into that world for about five minutes. That's not very long, right? Five minutes. And when he was all engaged, I take a shower now. So we don't take care of other things. I came out of the shower at some point, it was clear that some worse context for me was needed. So I read Calvin and Hobbes for a while, I have no idea if he understood any of it, but he happened to be there. And then I thought, okay, now I gotta do something else. So I was just given take, it was like, understanding no situation that something was needed here. But if I just kind of gave into all those

requests, you know, it wouldn't be healthy for him. And so there has to be appropriate, you know, not playing anymore, you know, and that's part of the healthy participation. So there has to be this discernment that goes on figuring out what's needed. And so when sometimes when people people are unreasonable, or they ask for too much from us, or if they know how to work with that, and sometimes we participate fully by being fully present. Facing someone not being there half heartedly fully present, looking at them with care and friendship and saying not now. So that's my best answer or a good question but vague enough unless you will, unless you want to ask further.

That's great that description of your kid cuz my mind went to where I work and how easy it is to have a version for different workmates different situations and how it has to be different in each moment because sometimes I have something that I can can do that I feel as positive about a situation and sometimes you were talking about holding back and there's also the other one of getting too involved in drowning and kind of the interplay between those two. If you could talk to that Pema children is talks about That not drowning total unit, but also not pulling back kind of that midpoint is where the bodhichitta starts to develop, the heart opens. Can you talk to that? Please?

I'm not sure I can talk to what the maturity talked about. But But I think that if we use as a reference point, or is it is a locus for our practice our body, then are we connected? Are we really fully here in our body. And if the body is tight, resisting, holding back, the body will teach you to show you that's going on. If we're over involved, then chances are relatively good that we've lost touch with the body as well. But if we stay in touch with our body know what's going on here, then there's much more likely to know when you're getting involved in a healthy way or an unhealthy way. If you lost touch with your body, chances are you chances are that you're in danger of an unhealthy involvement. And so then, as your involving your body connected participate in your body here with your body's like I was with a carrot. So I was really there with the carrots. I wasn't lost in the carrots I was just standing on like both feet solidly on the kitchen floor and engaged. So are you solidly in your body? Are you balanced? are you connected? Are you here in your body? How are you in your body, the body, your body is a great teacher. And then once you have that kind of stability of your body, you're stable and present their sense of presence with your body not present just with your mind thinking you're aware. But you actually present with your whole body for something, then what's appropriate, what's the right way of being in a situation and then about 40 Cheetah, you know, the idea of compassion and whatever. As you began to talk for whatever reason, my mind reminded itself that

when

when there's conflict, sometimes I feel with someone if I can, I'll try to meet with a person or talk to the person directly over the phone. Because I found often enough that my own nasty machinations in my mind about all the what the problem is and that person not person is sometimes unrealistic. But as soon as I meet the person, oh, that person's a person versus not just an idea, and then the whole set my my whole relationship to the conflict or the difficulty or whatever changes when I'm actually in the presence of the person we met in the presence of person, then it's like emails really good example like that. Sometimes they get these communications over email that What? You know, that was that's angry or disrespectful or that's odd or off or something. And, and then remember, I was just email Let's call the person up. And then I find out that, you know, we can have a good connection. But if I react to what I what I interpreted was in the email, then it could just make it worse. I saw a hand over there. You pass it all the way out.

On the theme of conflict, I've participated in some political rallies in San Francisco lately, which is pretty unusual for me. But could you say a word maybe about intention to go to these rallies and be fully

there, it's really chaotic. And I kept having to think my intent. I think I'm here because such and such and not because of such and such, it's very difficult to stay oriented, and trying to be peaceful.

So, one of the themes is how to be true to yourself and how to participate and be true to yourself. How to stay connected to your, your intentions, your attentions, you have an often in the crowd of people, it's common, you know, and like people are very influenced. So you can be carried away by other people's anger or sadness. And so how do you stay grounded and centered in yourself while you're participating? participating doesn't mean that we give ourselves over something. It means that we're, we're, we're dancing, we're engaged, we're engaged in a wise way, we're there for the experience with fully participating sometimes means saying no. It could be that fully participating in their mind doesn't mean accepting and going along with it, it might be appropriate to say, you know, I'm, you know, I'm really here and part of this group, I'm involved in everything. Because I'm a part of this group, I need to speak up and say, this doesn't feel right. You know, and you stand there, ready to take the group's response? Okay, I'm here. And this will be they feel that they feel that they feel that there's a way of kind of going back and forth. So this is a woman, Leslie Grant, who is speaking here today. She told a beautiful story of when the Olympic torch was going through San Francisco, she was went to one of the demonstrators and, you know, against the occupation of Tibet, but she said I didn't know this, but she claimed she said that when she got there, that the Chinese have actually flew. When all these counter demonstrators from China, you notice, yeah, I just I didn't know it from what you told me. They flew them in. And also they're being you know, properly trained counter demonstrators. And Amazing, amazing thing. And, and so it was, you know, she was one group and they were there another group, and for a while there, they were yelling at her and, and then she was very she was very staid, very calm and, and engaged them. And after a little while there was a they had a calm conversation. And she said, You know, I know the Dalai Lama. You know, I spent time around him. And you know, I was in Tibet, none. And let me tell you some of the things that you you know, some things you're saying here. I know, the other side, let me tell you a little bit. And she told told us to talking about molars and the rituals and all kinds of things. And they were kind of very cheap, but she says kind of fascinated. And I don't know what the consequence was of a conversation. But I think it's quite something. They had a peaceful conversation, after all this yelling, started initially. So there's an example of someone Was there and found a way to participate in a way that expressed some deeper intention besides animosity or something, but he was able to connect. So how to participate to be true to ourselves is the big, big challenge. And some people try to be true to themselves by staying alone. So it's not an adequate answer to your question, but you don't have to do.

So maybe that's enough of one more here and then we'll go

when you talk about being

so present in the moment, does

out of that necessarily

flow a sense of bliss and, and, and great peace and

enjoy?

Not necessarily. It depends on the situation you're involved in. If you're involved in some kind of terrible crisis, someone's hurt and need to be helped and, you know, you're fully there for it. And you know, I'm going to feel blissful and joyful of being appropriately sorry, whistling Dixie, you know, my friend's leg

just broke, you know, might be fully there and help. And it's very helpful to have to have practiced mindfulness know oneself, well. Then in situations where you're really needed, you know yourself well enough, you know, what your possible limitations are, that you can work with them and overcome them. So you can really be there to help the situation. And, and so but so the joy and bliss is maybe partly depending on the situation, you're in that piece. Kind of might be there. But as Reckford I prefer to use the word non conflict. mean, even in situations of social conflict, there's a way of being fully present for that in a healthy way. So you don't feel any inner conflict. So there might have been an inner inner conflict and that inner conflict with what's going on with yourself in this situation. Some situations would translate to peace, translate to joy. In other situations, I think you would think it's peaceful. Because it's, you know, whatever is going on, but maybe after it's over. You were there so fully for the situation you're in that nothing that much lingers. And I've been situations where, you know, after I did something, I spent a lot of time thinking and I wish I was different. I said something different, how can I been that way? And, you know, caught up in at all for quite a while quite a long time. And other times I've been fully present in a way that you know, I kind of burned up in the situation I finished the situation was finished itself, maybe it's a better way of saying the situation was completed more or less complete. So when it was over, I didn't have this lingering processing that had to be had to happen. So in that sense, was complete that could be effective. To be peaceful, that adequate answer

adequate for now. Thank you.

So, so we have our potluck today. And even if you didn't bring anything, please stay if you'd like to stay and please, if you would introduce yourself to people and, in fact, this might be a good time if you see someone sitting if you're kind of been in an IMC for a while and see someone near you. You don't recognize, say hello if you'd like, even if even if some of you don't stay for the potluck. It's nice to participate and feel a part of the community or feel like we're welcoming everyone who might come. So enjoy the potluck. Thank you