

2009-10-25 Equanimity And Investigation

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SPEAKERS

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So, last week I gave a talk on equanimity where I introduced the talk with the idea that the theme could be a subject of contemplation, kind of like a bow on something we consider just explore perhaps even debate with argue with, disagree with, see how it relates to our life and so to live with it for a while rather than something that's just here's some teachings and say, Oh, that makes sense or doesn't make sense but actually to grapple or, or practice with the topic. And I'd like to continue with that theme today. That equanimity because it is such an important one, I think for living a wise life a peaceful life. balanced life. And also because it's very crucial state of mind for Buddhist practice and Buddhist practice as a part of spiritual life as it goes deeper and deeper taps into our capacity for equanimity. So that illiquidity becomes quite strong and helps us not only to face the difficulties of life with greater ease, but also allows us to have the stability to go deeper and deeper into the depth of the Buddhist spiritual life for the inner life or into the mind. equanimity there's different kinds of equanimity. There's many, many lists of different kinds of equanimity and I'm not going to go into all of them. But I like to differentiate between two kinds. There is the equanimity which comes from having an overview of the situation. And the Pali word is peca for that means kind of like overview to see to see well there and that overview comes from a number of different things. So, you can come from understanding something really well or I can come from having a very, not so much understanding exactly in the usual way of understanding, understanding, understanding, but rather to have a broad vision or us perspective for understanding something. So the side of understanding might be give you an example. About 20 minutes before I was going to leave home this morning to come here. My younger son made it very clear to me that he wanted me to leave home. Dad, you should go now go. You know, get shown the door that often is your own home. And however, I understood why he was saying that, and that is he doesn't, he doesn't get a chance to watch videos very often. But today is his birthday. And also he's sick. And so we got a video for him to watch. And the idea was, he wasn't going to watch it until I left home. So I didn't so with that understanding, I didn't take it so personally, there was much more equanimity about it. So, the other kind of equanimity. In the understanding type one peca type two overview type is when we kind of have a bird's eye view of a situation. So an example that I had many years ago was being on the balcony. The college apartment that I shared with five other people. And the glass door was closed. And I could watch my roommates having an animated conversation inside living room. But I couldn't hear anything they were saying. And it was quite something to kind of not know the content of the conversation, but see the animation, fly, the heat and the excitement and all that. And I was outside watching. And I could feel that from that distance, I wasn't caught up involved in the fray and all that. And, and I could feel much more kind of certain kind of equanimity or peace or nonreactive activity to what was happening. Perhaps some of you had the situation of leaving an argument of animated discussion some people had, and then come back and just kind of certainly outside of it, and not felt that you were so pulled into it or caught in it the way people there are. And it's

very obvious how much they're caught. But now you're not because You went to the bathroom and came back and

whatever whatever it took to have the Overview The distance. So there's a variety of ways that we can step back and get kind of a bird's eye perspective or a larger perspective in which to hold things. And that larger perspective is a very important one, which I'll talk about again more later. But that also can create more balance, more non reactivity of the mind that we call equanimity. The other kind of equanimity is, has a different word in Pali, it's called tetra matcha. Tata. And it's a three simple words Tatra means their margin means in the middle, and that means like, there again, like standing in the middle in the middle of it all. This kind of what we might consider having a balanced or centered mind. And to be balanced and centered, is a little bit different than having an overview to be balanced and centered can come from many different sources. But it can I think of as more of having some inner strength or stability that helps us so that we're not pushed around so easily not caught by things so easily. So for example, if you're quite calm, you have a kind of stability, where you're less likely to react to different things that happen, compared to situation where you're anxious or upset or stressed, where you're much more likely to lash out. So that calm creates more balance or being centered. There could be a strong, strong cultivation of concentration, concentrated mind like a calm mind also is more balanced, it's less likely to react, there can be physical strength, can give you a person some balance, some people who develop like after a strong bout of exercise and you have good really good sense of vitality. So times that vitality is so strong, that it, its presence, that sense of presence or vitality is stronger than a tendency to react to be pulled into what's going on around us. Whereas if we're sick and frail and quite fragile, emotionally, fragile, emotionally and physically, then something happens in our environment. And it has a much bigger impact on us. And we get pushed around or we react much more easily to it. So physical strength, psychological strength, emotional strength, are all things that can create this greater balance. There's a wonderful quality that does both provides the overview kind of equanimity. And the connectivity comes from having balanced having come in and kind of strength within us. And that's the quality of investigation to investigate our experience to find out What's going on? And because when we when we investigate something, we're stepping back just enough from it to not be entangled and experience entangled with a phenomena. And the more we can more we can step back to investigate, the less we are caught up in something. If we're completely caught up, there's no space to question what is this? Let me look at it more carefully. The more we investigate, the more we're hopefully in a healthy way removed from the entanglement. So we can really see clearly Oh, this is what's happening now. The

In fact, investigation is such a powerful force, I think that it often can change dramatically a situation we're in simply because we're investigating it. It's like adding a new species to an ecosystem. And it's all the system has to change accordingly. If you add investigation to your psychology, logical ecosystem or even your interpersonal ecosystem, social relationships, just that one quality can actually, even if you don't understand what's supposed to happen, you don't have solutions to difficulties. just bringing investigation can shift and change what's happening. So the investigation can be as simple as, what is this? What's going on here? What's really happening here, in the immediacy of here now and now, talking about investigation, what I want to now say one of the more useful things to one of the important things to investigate in terms of equanimity is to investigate the nature of our thinking, our thinking mind and to have, begin questioning our relationship to the world of thoughts, the way their mind process stuff. cognitively, whether it's in words, or in images, or whatever way it might be. Because if we have a more bad overview of the process of thinking, then we're less likely to be pulled into the world of thoughts in ways that are detrimental to us or pushed around by them. So an example of someone who was pushed around, I think, by his thinking, so my son's birthday was today. He's seven years old. And three days ago, he was he had a little bout of crying. He was very, very sad. And he was really sad

because his seventh year seventh birthday hadn't happened yet. was happening today, right Three days later, but he was sad, because he would have to wait a whole of the Year for his next birthday.

So you know, he was going to miss the seventh birthday because you were sad about how far away the eighth one was. So he was, you know, he was he had now enough intellectual capacity to understand time a little bit, and, you know, a year and future birthdays, and somehow he got pulled into this world of his thinking. And he talked himself, I guess into feeling quite sad about something that is far away something that at this point only exists in the imagination only exists in the cognitive world. So

some years ago, I was on retreat. And I was doing walking meditation, back and forth. And it seems that I was actually thinking a lot rather than doing meditation. But I was doing my best. And I was walking by and we do augmentation, we walk back and forth, but the Repeat, come to the end of your pass, you turn around and walk back. So I came to the end of my pass, I turned around and took a couple of steps. And then I stopped. And I looked around kind of nuts, kind of looked around, kind of in my head and thought, oh, when I was a second ago or two seconds ago, I was walking in the same location just in the opposite direction, as I was standing now. And so the locations the same times only a couple of seconds or seconds apart. Where are those thoughts that I was thinking a second or two seconds ago? Where were they Where are they? Where do they go? And the reason why I wondered where are they is that two seconds ago, they seemed so important. So substantial. And it's possible sometimes that our thinking is that we relate to it as if it's the most important, most substantial thing that exists in this world. And it's also the most insubstantial. Because poof, they can vanish, and then look for them, where are they, where they go? And somehow that kind of looking around, where'd it go? Oh, it I kind of had a strong sense of how ephemeral and almost empty these thoughts can be. But more important in terms of investigation, but it's not the kind of ephemeral insubstantial nature of thinking was like what interested me was, Why was I so interested in those thoughts? What pulled me so strongly into their world, that sometimes when I'm in it, I'm not aware of anything else. Why is it sometimes I'm thinking about Things I don't want to be thinking about. And I can't seem to drop it. It's such a strong force or power attraction or magnetism or something that keeps me kind of churning in these kinds of thoughts. So that became a very interesting area of explorer of exploration investigation, what is the glue that keeps me connected to thinking. And that investigation about the glue is one of the very important explorations to cultivate to help cultivate equanimity. Because if you understand the nature of that glue of the attraction between you and your thinking, and you can get a handle on that a little bit separation between that, then it's a lot easier to be economists. If that glue is really tight super glue, then you're not going to be very economist because you're going to be dependent on whatever is going you're thinking you're thinking is going to be churning away and you'll be pulled up pulled around. This way that by by your thoughts by the glue that was not not not necessary to have thoughts have any glue any attraction between thoughts and ourselves thoughts in the mind. And the same retreat. I was later I was doing walking meditation some days later. And, and I staked out my walking path. You know, it was my path. 2030 feet, you know, wasn't asking a lot 30 by two and I was walking back and forth for a while and I could see someone kind of walking kind of in the direction of my path. That's okay. And then I saw the person walk into the far end of my path. I was one and he was on the other end. Okay. And then I saw I'm starting to walk on my path. My path impacting on my precious meditation, my efforts to become liberated and free. It cultivates infinite compassion for all beings. He was walking on my path. And so I know I said, Oh, no, you know, it's I'm sure he realizes what he's doing. He's gonna, you know, certainly, you know,

walk away soon enough. So I started walking down my path and at some point it became clear that you know, I guess he thought it was his path. So there we were. So when I realized that this was now not just simply some accident or just you know, that that he was really doing walking meditation in my path.

At that moment, anger flared up for me and the amazing experience from Was that the angers had a kind of movement towards it where I felt the anger rise maybe from my belly or someplace in my torso and travel up towards my head, and then through my head and then straight out and disappear. And it was kind of like my mind was had Teflon. nothing sticks. And so the anger was triggered. But it there was no effort no nothing in my mind, to pick it up to get involved with it, to push it away to react to it. And because there was no entanglement with it at all. It just rose and passed away. And I was amazed. That was like this guy gave me the spec one of the best gifts ever. And to watch you know, the capacity the mind to be Aquinas to be nonreactive Active does not mean that there's no reaction. It means more that if there isn't there is a reaction. There can be no movement to do anything with it. There's no picking it up. No, pushing it away. No judging is being good. No judging as being bad. Just just it's just a phenomena that it's a single single phenomena that occurs and passes away, like a bird going through the sky. That leaves no trace. There's no path that the bird leaves or tracks it just there and it goes away. It's gone. And this is a very important, I think, teaching that the that many things persist are a mind because of our continual engagement with them. We fuel them and feed them by our innovation. So, if I had picked up that anger, and started thinking about it and being angry and sad, talk to teachers about this, or I have to give this person a piece of my mind or this person, really, you know, you know, all kinds of things I could have thought about, I would have those that's very thinking about it would have perpetuated, kept it going, and it becomes the food for it. And sometimes that food, we gorge on that food, meaning that things get stronger and stronger because of it. We talk to talk to ourselves and think about it and that feeds it. So thinking can be that way as well. That when we think something we're not, we're not in much control over what thought bubbles up. There's many thoughts that can bubble up. There's some of us, maybe not most of you, but some of us have a fair amount of nonsense that bubbles up. You don't just lose a hat. Today walking down here give me example of embarrassing nonsense. I don't know where it came from why it came up. But I was walking down here and there was a truck parked right near my house that kind of opened back. And there was this blue plastic tarp kind of goes over the canopy over and over the bed of the bed of the truck in the back. And, and I hardly hardly gave it a glance, just kind of notice this tarp. And my mind bubbled up this thought, Oh, I wonder if there's a corpse there.

There was no corpse there. It was just you know. So nonsense. Is that nonsense or is that supposed to speak to say something about the deep workings of my unconscious, unconscious mind? You know, something, you know, dark and sinister in my mind. The fact that there are all these homes on the street that have all these skeletons and corpses on their, on their, on their, on their lawns anyway, right now maybe that, you know influenced the fact that I was wondering about the tarp. So, you know, it was kind of I don't know why I thought that is bubbled up and I saw it and let it be and, and now I'm telling you so. So to be able to but some of our thoughts are not nonsense, some thoughts are very important. I have a lot of respect for the thinking process for thinking. And I think it's important to have a lot of respect for it. Sometimes in some spiritual circles and Buddhist circles. There's a fair amount of disrespect for thinking that can occur. I've had I went to one Buddhist teacher once and asked him, their respected Buddhist teacher and asked them However, I was supposed to think about a certain thing. And he looked at me and said, Gil, I try not to think. Now maybe he's an overthinker. And so he needs to balance by trying not to think. But I feel a little bit sad. Because I don't you don't think we should dismiss thinking it's an important part of life. But it certainly can get us into a lot of trouble. And the way that we relate to thinking is one of the factors that affects how economists we might be about our life. And so to investigate how we relate to thinking is very important. You can investigate the content of your thoughts. You can also investigate how we relate. And my suggestion is that for many of us, that has never occurred to us to question how we relate to our thinking. Often the contents Make might seem very important. For the purposes of, of the mindfulness investigation, sometimes it's much more important to look at how we relate to thinking than what we're actually thinking. Because what I said

earlier, that we can feed it, keep it going. So in that sense, I like to differentiate between thinking and thought. Thought thing is what the mind does. The mind creates thoughts, you know, makes a thought, corpse. And then and then thinking is when we create a chain of association with those thoughts, you start getting involved, we pick it up, we get involved, and one thing follows the other. And before we know it, we're calling 911. The thinking is much more optional. Thought thing is not that's what the mind does. Beautiful Mind we have it just you know, it's Oregon. That's secretes a certain substance. And it happens to secrete thoughts or images or something is part important part of what it does. So how do we relate to our thinking? What's our relationship to it? One of them is that very significant one for some people is to believe everything they think. And that's a recipe for an unhappy life, I think. So, as if every thought we have is consequential, meaningful, and so there's kind of the glue is so closely oriented towards them, that to his thoughts that we get involved with every single one that arises to not get involved is that it creates freedom. Just let it be as it is. In other way the glue to our thinking is What we believe our thoughts will do for us? This thought is going to solve all my problems. This, I have some problem my life, I have some difficulty. And if I just think it through enough, I'll get to the answer. Now thinking about our difficulties, and problem solving is an important thing to do. But if we over invest into the importance of thinking, we'll get in trouble. So in my life, for example, I don't know if it works this way for other people. But the biggest decision I've had to make in my life biggest turning points in my life where my life changed dramatically, you know, to a whole different direction. I had to face these big decisions.

Those decisions or the decision to doctor that happened through thinking about them, but they happen at the same time. They happen. I don't know how to say this in English or in any language, but I found that I had to think about them intensely these things I was challenged to decide, I think engage in a mental effort of thinking about it. But the answer did not come from the thinking. It's like the thinking provided the momentum, for something creative to happen, some other dimension of the mind, then through the thinking itself, and then at some point, the mind process that enough, and boom, I knew what I had to do. And afterwards, I figured out why I had that made that decision. But you know, a different way of processing. So sometimes we believe our thinking too much that that's where a solution is going to be. And sometimes it's not a solution at all. Many, many situations I find myself in as a teacher, where I'm thinking about what I'm having the conversation I'm having with students, practitioners. And sometimes my thinking tells me Oh, I know the perfect thing to tell this person. I'm so why Understanding and, and, you know, you know, I'll just have to tell this person this thing and their problems will go away. And, but I know better. And so I'll try to be quiet for a while and ask questions and hear them further. And I can't tell you how many times by not sharing what I think with someone, as I make space for them to explore and think more on their own, that greater wisdom comes out of them than anything that came out of my little mind. It's great. So, to make space for for, you know, not to believe our thoughts, it's being so important to not to believe our opinions, as being my opinion is the opinion to have not to believe that. So there's a lot of beliefs connected to thoughts. So the suggestion I have for you is for you to explore the range of beliefs you have in connection to thinking it's a hard thing to explore. Because it's so much semi conscious or even subconscious, because many people have never questioned, why do I relate to thinking in the way that I do? And another thing that's very interesting about thinking is how, what a large percentage of thoughts that many people have are self referential in nature. And why is that? What's what, what's the self referential quality? And how does that relate to why we're so interested in them? Or we believe they're so important, or we're trying to do with our thoughts. Another part of the glue around thinking is, are the emotions that are connected to it. So for example, if there's a lot of fear, or a lot of anger in relationship to the topic, the content or the thoughts, there must be much stronger glue much stronger involvement. It's the anger or the fuel that keeps it going keeps it keeps us, you know, locked into it. And so what might be important is to actually looking at the nature of anger or fear. If we want to have more equanimity around our thoughts, and

somehow break the cycles, just kind of thinking and thinking, thinking about something. You're looking at the emotions and at all. And then there's like just one more thing to look at when we're investigating our relationship to thoughts. And this perhaps is the most can be the most subtle, and perhaps the most meaningful to explore. And that is, what is the desire we have in thinking about something. So the thoughts themselves might involve a desire for something. But what is the what is deeper than that? What's the desire that's inherent in thinking about what Desire, what's the desire or wish connected to the thinking we have? And I suggest that, like, suggests that there's some kind of desire that's deeper and more subtle, more foundational than any emotional relationship we have to thinking. steeper than any fear and any anger, because oftentimes fear and anger itself is a manifestation of a certain desire, something we want. So what is it that we want?

And is it and if we have a different relationship to if we different understanding of what we want, when we're thinking about something, then what is the most useful way to get what we want? Or is this a want that we really want to pursue and want to have. So to be looking at our relationship to thinking is one of the ways to develop equanimity as the investigation becomes stronger As the mindfulness becomes stronger, then one of the one of the things that might happen is a sense of, of say it this way. I believe that some people orient themselves to life, primarily through the filter of their thinking. They understand what's going on, because they're thinking about what's going on. They understand other people because they're thinking about how other people, but they are so much as through the filter of thoughts and ideas. And sometimes those thoughts are quite removed from what's actually happening here now, lost in fantasy lost in the future in the past and can spend a long time there. And as investigation gets stronger, as the mindfulness gets stronger, there's a shift. That happens almost naturally as the mindfulness gets stronger. Where we realized there's much more to who we are as human being Then the faculty of thinking, there's all our senses, that takes in the world around us senses they take in our inner physical life, there is the inner world of awareness which opens up, which is much more silent than the world of thinking. Perhaps you've gone someplace and or been part of a conversation or part of something. And we're so caught up in your thoughts, you couldn't actually see the beautiful thing or experience the food that you're eating or experienced it really here with the persons even saying to you, because you're so much involved in your own thoughts. And as your thoughts come weaker, you can take in the sights, the smells, the tastes, and the other people in a deeper way. We have a lot of senses, a lot of sense capacities to take in a lot of different experiences in many different ways. And as the world of thinking, stops predominating it allows the other senses To become stronger, and take in more the full range of our experience. It's not uncommon for people who go on meditation retreats to walk out of the meditation hall and be in awe at the beauty of something that maybe even ordinarily would be considered ugly, juicy could its shine its radiance, it's kind of kind of beautiful stillness. To come out of the meditation hall and see a candy wrapper on the ground. Wow. Look at that candy record shines is silvery, it's glitters, it's wild. It's quite something. And but that capacity to see the specialness of the simplest things, diminishes to the degree to which we're caught up in our thoughts. At some point, the sense of aliveness vitality Presence becomes strong enough that it has so much more attractiveness, so much more value than the value of closing down and going into the world of thinking again. The world of awareness, the awareness, which is open, panoramic, transparent sense a presence of lightness, vitality that's here. It's so palpable, that it's greater than any fantasy and imagination and even any anticipation of things that might happen in the future. Because there are things that supposedly will happen we know like birthday parties. And for my son, that was his birthday party with you That the history that told fantasy run is a year away birthday party was greater for him than his sense of idle presence here and now with practice the sense of the immediacy, of presence of vitality, awareness of this non thinking kind of broad sense of who we are, provides a different kind of overview of what happens in our life, different overview of the thoughts, the values, the concerns, and the meaning of what happens.

That is one of the great ways of having greater equanimity, because then we're not less likely to be caught by what is happening, but rather what is happening. It's just one piece of a much larger picture. That's hopefully very satisfying and very meaningful and it puts things in different positions. What's most important?

So to step back to look at our thinking, step back and investigate the phenomena of thinking. So we're not caught in the world of thinking but step back and his overview and what is this experience like? And at some point, step back further and look at the very movement to investigate. What is this investigation itself and then relax into that larger presence that's behind the investigation. Or to realize that I'm the one who's investigating and to question look at who's the eye that's investigating. And then, then then relax into that larger awareness. They can that is not I, that is asking the question.

So I hope this talk today has given you more material to use as you investigate the topic by equanimity. I hope that during the first week that you worked with this, that you didn't exhaust the territory. And now for this hope for the next week, I would like to encourage you for this coming week, to keep the idea the topic of equanimity in the forefront of your concerns of your end and explore it, think about it, talk to friends about it, read about it, and see if the world liquidity can come more alive for you. So thank you very much. And again, if there's anybody Who's new here today please feel very welcome to stay for the potluck and join our community and also please don't be shy introduce yourself to people here and or to Hillary who's here or to me. Thank you