

2009-12-24 Seeing The Roots

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

One of the important aspects of mindfulness practice is how mindfulness or meditation highlights aspects of ourselves that we don't normally see or understand. So, for example, I mean, the analogy I like to use is that of a still quiet creek that is barely flowing, it's very clear, but you don't actually see the water flowing because it's so you know, almost still so clear. You look down, you think the water's still, but if you take a little stick and you put it vertically into the water, you can see a little wake being formed at the edge of the stick, you see all in fact, Greek is actually moving. So in the same way, by sitting still physically and trying to hold the mind and something very simple like the breathing, it becomes a reference point like the stick in the stream for seeing the stream of Are of our own mind the stream of our inner life. And we tend to see more movement than we sometimes realize is there. Sometimes there's a lot, I think of it. You know, someone has a lot of energy, very energetic, maybe agitated. If they're very busy and active, they don't see how agitated they are. But if the rest sits still in a chair, then they see how agitated they are. And so by sitting still, and keeping the mind somewhat still or stabilized on the breath, or some object of meditation, it tends to highlight what is going on within in a way that sometimes is hard to see if you don't do that. And then a very important aspect of meditation practice then, is how you relate to what is highlighted. And you certainly don't want to relate to it as if it's wrong or bad or something it's supposed to kind of discard or try to stop from happening, I think is much more useful to relate to it. with interest, maybe curiosity, what is this? Don't give into it, but look at it and learn to hold it maybe with more equanimity, more balance, more wisdom and look for that look for equanimity balance and wisdom as a way of relating to what gets stirred up, which which revealed itself when you sit here and if you do that, then slowly over time, you might learn that you can, the mind becomes still there. And as the mind becomes stiller, then it highlights different kinds of movements within different ways in which that mind is kept active and activated. And is still there the mind gets the more subtle that activated aspects are seen until your mind becomes like a very, not just a very quiet still, you know, clear stream, but becomes maybe a quiet still pond where there's no movement at all. It's very quiet, very still very transparent and clear. So I hope you have a wonderful morning. One of the useful ideas that exist in our tradition is the idea of roots. And that what is obvious sometimes in the surface of our life surface of our mind, the activities that we do might not reveal to us the underlying roots. So the underlying motivation and the underlying structures, they're keeping things kind of going the way they are. And then one of the reasons to sit, sit, meditate or sit quiet and still, is it still enough so that the surface concerns the way we caught up into Surfing is caught up in the kind of the surface issues. Don't hide what's kind of under the surface of what's deeper so there's a lot of things that are reasonable things, important things people to address in their lives be concerned about to focus on and pay attention to. But sometimes in taking care of a lot of the surface things that we don't really get to some of the deepest things that go on and what and, and so the deeper structures or the deeper concerns or motivations or roots are still operating. And so they still create further surface issues over and over again. So for example, I might have a issue with my neighbor. That makes me angry. And so

I could kind of look at that anger. I understand what happened there. I could understand perhaps that I felt I was disrespected by the neighbor. And so from the disrespect, I felt hurt and that hurt I felt angry. And so I can try. I could do a lot of mindfulness practice with like, sit quiet, I can look at the anger, I can learn to hold the anger. Well, I can hold the anger well enough and economist enough that I don't get, I don't get reacted with the anger. I could understand some of the various conditions that went into the anger. I couldn't understand what happened in the conversations I had of the anger with a with a neighbor, I could understand maybe something about the history of my relationship with anger and other neighbors I've had and there's a lot of things I can understand. And perhaps by understanding all this, maybe the anger dissipates and no longer problem with that neighbor on my right. But then next week, its neighbor on the left, or the neighbor in the front and neighbor in the behind that I get angry with or get upset and I do the whole thing over with them or maybe maybe it's not an anger maybe it's some other strong emotions that arises or motivation in relation to them. And, and how we focus on these things has a lot to do with what we focus on with their challenges in their life, have something to do also with what we've been taught that are useful to pay attention to. So, in a psychological culture, people are influenced by that sometimes they look at the psychology, the inner psychology aspect of it or the history then, you know, the very abrasive ways. Someone who's maybe involved in issues of social justice maybe looks at the legal aspects or the you know, whenever something else but what might be hidden from you is that the underneath the kind of at the root of the anger I've had with my neighbor, might have been that I hold myself I see myself as a person who, who, as a particular kind of person, I have a view of As an image of myself or way of representing myself to myself or to others, that is very important for me. And so that the image I have of someone who is a certain way I carry with me in all these different situations, and I might take care of individual situations, I might take care of the issue with the anger with the neighbor. But I haven't really looked at the root for where that anger came from. And it came not just from being hurt, but it came perhaps from from that which could be hurt. And that which could be hurt, perhaps was a self image, no idea, I have to be this kind of person, I have to be related to this kind of way. And, and so if I don't turn around and look at the roots, the core of it, then that core, that root is still gonna be operating. So I go about the different situations like the common denominator, you have to look at the common denominator, otherwise, it's going to keep triggering things. So sometimes people will spend too much time looking at the surface. For us, that leaves the branches of a plant, and don't really get down to the roots. And the image of the roots in Buddhism is given because some plants you can, you can even cut down to the level of the ground and the roots keep sprouting up. And we'd have to in order to really do away with the plant, you have to pull the plant up from the roots. And so this tradition of ours talks about these roots. And the most common roots they give for suffering is greed, hate and delusion, which sometimes is useful to consider and sometimes it's just so such generalization that people don't even see themselves in those words, you know, greed. Yeah, I guess so. But and, but, but a whole other kind of area that's useful to look at to get down to the core is this issue of self self image self representation, attachment to self concerned with self And that can be very, very deeply rooted. And it's not necessarily related to what we were socially taught. But a lot of self understanding has to do with you know, it's conventional that's taught, reinforced by society and experiences and stuff. But sometimes it can be even deeper than that. And so and so to sit still enough to be mindful enough to see the roots is a big important part of what this practice is about. And one of the ways not to see the roots is to be too caught up with the surface issues. Now, it's important to take care of, you know, to use the word surface and routes, it's too easy to kind of be dismissive of one or the other. And we don't want to do that.

But, I think there's plenty of people who are so focused on the surface things they don't really see or don't take the time to see what's deeper and underlying it. And sometimes it's a personal psychological issues. Get a lot of emphasis by some people, as if that's where the problem is. And they have to kind

of deal with the psychology. And what's interesting, again, also about this tradition is that it points to the idea that anything that has to do with that's unique to you, your own particular biographical story is not really at the root. So if you're, if you're kind of focusing on what's unique to you what happened to me when I was younger, and what I learned and like, you know, perhaps you can't really get to do it, it has to be something which is a little more not, you know, more universal or more deeper than what are deeper aspects of our humanity than what the details of our particular life.

So as we do something like meditation, which in a very kind of light hearted way, maybe we're kind of loose We say is to learn to sit still. We sit still a little bit and then we see how we're agitated or how is this activity going on the mind and the heart, their body. And so then we have to learn how to meet that activity and hold it in a way that's useful. And, and see it clearly. And so part of that holding a useful way is not to be reactive to it, not before, not be against it, but rather to see it to learn how to hold it with some kind of equanimity, clarity. And then that helps support the mind getting quieter. And as the mind gets quieter, we begin having access to these deeper areas, the deeper roots, what's going on into deeper, deeper way. And sometimes when we get to the deeper roots, sometimes it can be very strong urges not to look, they're not to go there, but rather the turn, turn back and look at things that are more of the surface. And one of the reasons for that is that people can often get the message that really what's important Because the issues that are on the surface. And so they kind of focus on that as being that that's what it's supposed to be looking at supposed to be focusing on. I remember many years ago, I was teaching a retreat in Canada. And the woman who was raised in India came to the for an interview. And she said to me, I've been listening to people ask questions during the retreat. And I don't understand why people are so concerned with issues around their mother, and, you know, we're getting these kinds of things. Instead, what you said was, you know, aren't we doing this practice to get off the wheel of life and death? Isn't that you know, you know, growing up in India, that's kind of big idea. But I kind of heard this, she shared this idea that she saw that, you know, this idea of, you know, your relationship with your mother was important as it is now, don't dismiss it doesn't really, there's something much more important And that can be done. And for her language, it was coming off the wheel of life and death. Somebody else who might be something else that's what I like about Vipassana practice is that that's a practice that is not really meant to go digging, searching into the roots, but rather something we learned to look directly at what's happening without concerned whether it's a surface or roots, deep or shallow, and just to see it directly for what it is, but without and then learning how we how we relate to it. So we don't give it too much emphasis or too little emphasis, just to hold it and be with what's there. And then we start seeing through the cracks of it. We might see what's behind it, which deeper, but it's very important not to be blinded by the surface so we can't see the cracks. Let's see what else was going on there. And so Because then we don't necessarily go we don't go searching for something deeper, we don't go digging. But we also don't limit ourselves with just what's on the surface. And, and so one of the ways not to do that is simply to have the question. You know what else else is going on here? What else needs to put an else to what else is going on in this moment? Here I'm concerned about my neighbor and I'm angry with my neighbor boy else is really going on here. If I sit if I get quieter and still there, what else is going on here? And then we might feel a certain clinging to the deeper clinging maybe identify that as a clinging to itself. And what happens to the anger if you let go of the underlying clinging to self? So the Pali word for roots is moola. m us la so Now you know, that part of our tradition, maybe it helped you become happily ruthless, ruthlessly ruthless.

So thank you