

2010-07-18 Cultivating Tranquility

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SPEAKERS

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The theme I thought I could explore with you today is tranquility. tranquility is often associated with meditation becoming calm. And it belongs to a class of qualities that are easy to under appreciate. And in our society, sometimes tranquility is supported. But in many situations, there's not much support for being tranquil. In fact, sometimes people get worried that discouragement even kind of against it. Some years ago, there was a elderly man who started coming here to IMC. And after being here for a few years, he said his kids, his extended family started to get worried about him. You know, what's wrong with all Dad? Is he getting senile or something? And, and the reason I have trouble hearing out there. There's no volume out there. It's cranked up all the way it says there's more space in here. We can wait for some of you can come in. There's lots of chairs. At least six or six or seven. The rest of us can be tranquilo. We wait. One of the things that supports tranquility is that nothing needs to happen. Oh, I should talk so you could find out. They're working out there. It's low. So you still come in there's chairs in here. Wait. Oh, it works over you. Oh, yeah, that works everywhere. Okay, so

So this fellow, you know, his, his, his kids were worried about him, but what's happening to all dad and anything What happened was that I'd become tranquil and he'd spent a lifetime being anxious. And so the personality change was so big, from you know, the person they always knew who was always anxious about things to the person who settled down and become calm, that they were worried about him. And but he thought there was nothing wrong with the and I was remembering that you know, there's sometimes we go into situations places with our calm to conduct calming and tranquil environments. And one of the I've been in many meditation halls, that the halls themselves are very tranquil. You go in there and since feeling of stillness of peace, it's there. And like, one of them is the green color. meditation hall, green gold Zen center and Moran, I spent many years living there. And, and I remember going and meditating, doing the zen meditation, there are a number of times where they a lot of times when I was there, the teacher would go around and adjust people's posture, straight to the exam, you have to be really straight. So they're just your posture. And was very interesting phenomena, that if I was trackball, if I wasn't calm and present, then it would sneak up behind me because you're sitting meditating, you know, wouldn't notice anybody else around be very quiet, and they'd put their hand gently on your shoulder, but they're gonna adjust your posture. If I was tranquil, I would be like water just very fluid. It's like oh, you know, just kind of just go with it. Even though a surprise I came out of nowhere. But if I was involved in some kind of preoccupation sitting there thinking I was meditating, but thinking about something involved in something lost in something. And then they came and touched my shoulder, I'd be startled. And so this relationship between, you know, how we're affected by the world around us, and where our mind is what goes on within that if we're agitated, caught up in things, it can be much more jarring to have, you know, things happen to you and interrupt the flow of what you're doing, what you're involved in. And then I was thinking I was traveling recently, airports and stuff, and cities and different things. And it struck me how many environments in

our society are not tranquil. And, you know, you know, the scene in the airports where they have his television on everywhere you go. So many places have television, and I don't find television so tranquil to have a sound television sound around. And then if you get, you know, interested in what's on television, then the loudspeaker goes on. So you can't hear what's on the TV. And anyway, and, and so in those environments, it's really helpful to be able to bring your own tranquility with you. And if your tranquility depends on the environment, then you are going to be kind of victim and slave to the environment wherever is going on. So how do we cultivate a deeper sense of tranquility. To it becomes supportable. We take it with us. And how do we be tranquil so that we feel vitalized by it, we feel enlivened by it, as opposed to kind of tranquility which is a dampening down of some vitality, life. I think one of the first things is to appreciate it and to have some real experience of it in some way. Some people can have it by being in nature, being quiet, some people just being alone, variety, different settings where it can happen. For me when I started meditating, what was important was memories I had as a child of being tranquil, or being a younger person being tranquil. And those they were kind of like, you know, forgotten memories, repressed memories. And, and so when I started meditating, maybe touching close to that those levels of tranquility that I had in special situations, those memories came flooding back. And one of the memories was riding a bus, home from school every day, like I took a city bus, and they This was in Italy. And I learned somehow that if I sat at a particular seat in the bus,

the conductor, the There's two people driving the conductor and the conductor would, you know, at the end of the route with tabulate up all the tickets, he sold them round trip the one way the child, the adult, or, you know, elderly whatever it was. And if I sat in the right place, he would sit right in front of me. And he would start tabulating up on this graph paper, all the things he sold. And if I sat there and just watched him do his work, I got really tranquil. Now, I can't explain that exactly, cuz maybe like a concentrated kind of absorbed in his absorptions focused and everything else dropped away. But what was significant was how peaceful I got. And, and maybe children have that ability to kind of, you know, in certain unusual environments to kind of get really calm, maybe you've had that. Or then when I was 18, I wasn't the kid anymore, but I was traveling around hitchhiking traveling around France. And I came to a place called Moonstone, Michelle said, it looks like you Looks like made by Disney in the distance. It's this huge monastery Cathedral that towers out of these flat plains of Northern France, a little bit out at Sea Island. And so I went there, spent the night there. And I got a tour of the monastery. And when we walked through the very top of the hill, which is built on, and that monitor is built on the hill, on the very top of the hill, around the hill on top of it is a little chapel that's at the heart of this huge monastery complex little stone chapel that was built, I don't know, eight hundreds or something. And then the monastery was built around a little chapel, stone chapel, and I entered into the stone chapel. And it was kind of cool just you know, cool rocks and very simple rustic you know, nothing, nothing of the grander of the cathedral that was there around it. And I got really tranquil really peaceful. Everything, everything, everything that stopped everything that's still and quiet. And, and I was in a group, but I let the group go so I could stay and linger as long as possible, because I was so it was so meaningful to have that peace and that stillness, that tranquility. So it's certainly nice to have those experiences. And to have certain degrees of tranquility like that can be very healing. The ways in which we might be at war with ourselves or fractured or upset or agitated was very helpful, but more helpful than how it might settle something heals something, is when we might learn from it. And, and so to take the experience of tranquility you've had whether it's a minor tranquility, or as a major experience, maybe we've had once or twice in your lifetime. And to learn from that and learn in particular, what is it that's not present when you're tranquil? And what is it that arises? causes you to lose it. Because then if you start understanding those conditions, then you might be able to address those conditions in your daily life. So for example, I've noticed that I'm more tranquil, if I don't take things personally. And I'm capable of getting quite agitated. If I get take things really personally, you know, this says, Whatever is happening, it says something about me. And relating everything to me and my history and how people

see me and all that very quickly, the mind can get all worked up. But if I can just let things be as they are, without needing to relate it to some representation of myself, then I can stay more calm. And in this strong experiences of tranquility I've had it's almost as if, you know, I don't, I don't matter, or let's say differently, I suppose I matter but that there's no self conscious concern, preoccupation, worry about myself, and what people think of me and you know, just, I'm just there. There is. So in tranquil states, there is perhaps no attachment Buddhism puts a tremendous amount of emphasis on this relationship between tranquility is that tranquility It comes with an absence of clinging. So if we're clinging to something, then it's basically not going to be any tranquility there. The more we more regressed, the less tranquility it is. It's like a constriction a tightening of the mind and narrowing down spinning around that goes on.

So then what can we study? Can we get interested in in in clinging, study at Find out and then there's a very powerful question you can ask yourself. I think it's very significant. If you notice if you're attached to something attached means there's compulsive thinking compulsive desire means that You can't put it down as you can't say, Oh, you know, it's nice if it happens, but you know, if it doesn't happen then at ease with that, you know that you know the Serenity Prayer, right? Let me be serene about the things that can I have to accept and the courage to change what I have to change and the wisdom to know the difference. So, you know, if you could have that serenity then you're not attached. But if you if there's attachment, so very powerful question is, is why is it more important for you to cling, then not? What do you believe about clinging that keeps the clinging going? Why are you willing to sacrifice your clinging for your peace? For your tranquility? So three questions. He doesn't like that we start questioning because if you have those kinds of questions, You can maybe start teasing out of your mind, the underlying beliefs that support your clinging. While you think it's really important to claim or to worry about things worrying as a kind of clinging, there are some people who feel like it's really important to worry, because only by worrying, can they show other people that they care. And so the idea of not clinging also can imply some people don't, don't cling and hold on to the wanting it to be a certain way, then people won't understand that I care. But you can care a lot without clinging. You can care a lot without worrying. There can be fear operating, you know, if I don't hold on to this, I'll lose it. And paradoxically, sometimes if we hold on very tightly, that's when we lose it. Then we destroy it. So you know, to question ourselves to look honestly at what is it we're attached to and Do you know why? Why are we doing that? What do we believe? And why are we willing to sacrifice something better? For the clinging? And then see what kind of answers come your way? You might have some great answers. Maybe some really wise answers, but you know, they're wise enough? And are you wise enough to really question and engage in a dynamic process of, of reflection around your answers and your thoughts, your concerns around this.

One of the things that supports agitation is doing too many things. And, and I've seen that in myself that as soon as I set myself up to do a lot of different things, my mind begins to spin. And not only is its spin in the moment, but I find sometimes they keep spinning after I stopped doing all those things, so so one of the really great supportive techniques or practices for supporting tranquility is to do one thing at a time. You know, do you know, and hopefully some people find they do better to do things better to do one thing at a time, they do many things at once.

Maybe, you know, I'm embarrassing to admit it, but you know, once the cell phone kind of thing got going, you know, so many of us have cell phones now. Guess what, I experimented with once a few times two or three times till I realized this hasn't worked, was talking on the phone and looking at the computer at the same time. You know, I can do that, you know, person's not talking about anything important. So, you know, I might as well you know, look and read my email or something. And then after a minute or so, or one of the person say, you know, that didn't work and also Kept kept in mind we're

busy I you know, it's actually more settling for me to stay present, do one thing, just just listen to the phone, just talk the phone, I talk not do a lot of other things. So

so one of the contributions of meditation to all this is meditation can show us a tranquility, which is deep, as opposed to surface. It's the nature of, you know, I think I think of like the ocean, that the surface of the ocean might be agitated or might be still. But if you go to the depths, just a few feet, 10 feet, eight feet, six feet underneath, sometimes the waves it gets very peaceful very quickly to hold different relationships. It's quite something to go snorkeling or scuba diving and, and be up on the surface where there's quite could be quite tempestuous, sometimes the water and then died down below. and have it be quite quiet quiet, you can look up and see the waves and stuff above. And so it's possible to have surface calm in one's life. But meditation helps us to have this deeper calm to discover a reservoir of calm or tranquility within a capacity to be still deep inside. Even if some of the surface chatter of the mind is busy, there could be a sense of feeling or refuge of stillness within. And that's what's that's what's can be much more portable and much more fluid and much more supportive of daily life. Because a surface calm, just be able to keep your mind kind of quiet on the surface, not so many thoughts are something that can get agitated very quickly. But if the deeper kind of places where you know, the deeper reservoirs of what's important for us, deeper reservoirs of emotional support, whatever stays calm, then it's very interesting because Then it's possible to bring that calm or have that stillness, in contact with situations where we're feeling uncomfortable situations where we are somewhat agitated. And to be able to have both is very interesting to feel you feel to somehow get stirred up about something, it could be something good and, but it feels uncomfortable, and then have the ability to be present for that discomfort or that agitation without being pushed around by it. And one of the things that supports us a lot is the willingness and the wisdom, to know how to be present for something that's uncomfortable. And for some people, what makes them agitated and restless, is they get restless when things are uncomfortable. When they're physically uncomfortable and mentally uncomfortable, emotion uncomfortable, socially uncomfortable, that then we get kind of worked up and get worried or afraid or feeling great to fix it or change it or, you know, run away or close down are all these wonderful strategies we have all strategies, which gets us kind of worked up. But if we can feel that something's uncomfortable and know how to be still know how to be comfortable with discomfort, know how to be, be accepting of the discomfort not to run away or be caught up in it. Then there's this meeting place between our stillness and the discomfort, a meeting place between your mindfulness and discomfort. And, and one of the values of that is that then you can actually see the uncomfortable situation with greater clarity. If we're reactive to it, we don't see it very well. And perhaps the wisdom that's there the deeper understanding and wellsprings of understanding of ourselves and situation, don't have a chance to show themselves, but if you've learned to be comfortable with the discomfort, then there's much more wisdom that could become available, and there's much more poignancy and sometimes we can, we can Sometimes it's even even I don't know if enjoyable is the right word but there's a poignancy or tenderness that can be born in that contact with between discomfort and stillness or discomfort or quility, discomfort and mindfulness.

So how do we get comfortable with discomfort? As always a support for tranquility. You got to be uncomfortable. You know, you're not going to read a manual, this is how you do it. You got to be inspiring yourself in some situation where you're uncomfortable, and chances are it's happening. It'll happen sooner rather than later. And so you got to look for opportunities and, and hopefully you're wise choose the right opportunities and then experiment. How can you be still, how can you be quiet? How can you be nonreactive in this situation? Only by experimentation, will you learn how to do that, for people who do meditation practice, that's a great laboratory, or great gym, whatever your analogy like, for, for doing this exploration, because sooner or later you'll get uncomfortable in meditation. It's guaranteed. And but you have this kind of you had the conditions where you're still not much is going

on, nothing has to happen, you know, to figure out anything, you have to do your taxes or something, something you just use there, right. And so, and so there's a kind of better conditions, to have a heightened attentiveness to what's going on inside of you, what you're attached to what you believe what your reactivity is, and all these different things, and a heightened maybe a capacity to be courageous or to have some inner strength to hold still. It doesn't mean you have to hold steel forever, but perhaps live longer than you normally would. So the capacity To hold one second, hold oneself still nonreactive is a really great support, record tranquility. And chances are that most situations you're in don't require you to act immediately. Especially social situations which are often agitating. But there's often space for a little bit of to be still to hold yourself internally still, weight and weight, not only to this kind of support, tranquility, not only a weight to allow kind of your clinging and grasping or activity not to operate automatically. With a weight to the situation you're in can become more you can register you aware of it more fully. You can become you take it in more completely what the situation is. So many situations where I've been in where I thought I knew what need was needed. I thought I understood situation, but when I've waited, and still let it kind of speak more fully the situation I've learned, it's not what I thought it was. And, and I've been so I've, I've saved myself so many problems in my life by waiting, not a lot, not like waiting years something, but you know, waiting three seconds. You know, for example, it could be as simple as someone speaking. And you know, there's this little gap in their sentence, you know, a little gap, and I'm ready to kind of jump in as if you know, I have the right thing to say at that time. But if I wait three seconds or two seconds or one second, they weren't finished. They were just getting their breath to continue. And then I can hear them out more fully. So that the ability to be still to hold oneself still And then what are your associations with being still like that. And I can imagine some of you who feels reservations being still means being rigid. Being still means it kind of a dead end angle, my excitement and my joy of life and my ability to act more fully and spontaneously. What I've made, it's the opposite is the opposite. That the capacity to be still to be tranquil, makes much more room for spontaneity, for creativity for a greater connectedness, greater intimacy, with myself in the world, then it does if I'm agitated, and it's a sense of intimacy is one of the things that I feel very meaningful, to feel intimate with my breath to be infinite with the environment. Be intimate with situation, to really feel a close connectedness and contact allows for some deeper relationship to unfold that Canton. For from agitated, wanting things to be a certain way, or not wanting things to be a certain way or bringing being driven by the wanting and not wanting.

So meditation is a wonderful place to learn to be tranquil. It's a wonderful place to learn the capacity to be still, although still hold oneself still, it's a wonderful place to learn the nature of our restlessness or agitation, understand that investigating the qualities of our clinging at different days, different situations of meditation, your meditation is going to be different. And some, some days you meditate and you're lucky. And meditations going to teach you about tranquility, you get to become other days you meditate. And the meditations going to teach you about clinging. It's not what you hope for, you want to get calm. And you don't get to choose necessarily what your meditation is gonna be about. You get your inner life often kind of shows you what you need to work on. If you get quiet enough, and sometimes you have to work on yourself. wiseness sometimes you have to work on your stillness, you know. So, to learn to meditation is a great place to learn this. And hopefully through meditation practice, you will learn a depth of tranquility or depth of peace. That is that peace that is freed from or independent from your self concept, independent from the things you want and don't want in your life independent from what people think of you independent of your comfort and discomfort. and discover that a deep reservoir within of peace of tranquility and then have access to it as you go through your day and through your life gives a kind of strength to a life a certain kind of ease to a life that I don't think is possible without having somehow be in touch with that reservoir to know something about it. And then it's possible to get that portability of tranquility, to go into situations that are very agile. stated in difficult and be able to stay calm or to be able to continue to have breathing room. That's the last thing I'll say is that you breathing.

Coming back to your breathing is one of the ways to help you be still or not reactive. Take three or four breaths, five or six breaths, breathe mindfully. And then we have this great expression that you can get breathing room. And, and mindfulness gives breathing room to your mind in your heart. So there's more room there. So I hope that all of you get lots of breathing room for your inner life. And with that, all that room that you can be more tranquil. I hope that you use this talk as a way to reflect and contemplate maybe discuss with others. What Your relationship and thoughts are to this topic, this theme of tranquility and the role that tranquility has in your life. Because it's one thing for me to talk about it, it's something else for you to explore its meaning for yourself. So, thank you