

2011-01-23 Being Doing And Knowing

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SPEAKERS

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So, at the heart of Buddhism is the issue of what do you do with your attention? And what do you do with your intention. And in fact, it is so close to the heart of Buddhism sees a human being, that it's almost as a you know, you know that, you know, if you really want to understand who you are and what makes you operate and what's really important for your life, it's really centrally important to understand the choices we have and what we actually do with our attention and intention where it goes, where it gets used for. And in talking about this could be useful to divide up the different options of how we use attention intention into three kind of broad categories that are interrelated or overlapping connected but we can tease them apart for the purposes of looking carefully. And that is in a three activities of practice which are being, doing and knowing. And we find often and now I've heard in spiritual circles, a distinction between being and doing. And when usually when that distinction is made, it's usually for people who do too much and, and they talked about how important it is just to be there always be doing and accomplishing and proving yourself and, and defending yourself but just relax and be and so, sometimes our attention goes in a direction of just letting ourselves be. And there's a long tradition in many cultures of having something like a Sabbath, something like a day of rest. Where the emphasis is just to be, and, and not to do much to keep it very simple. And in some religions, some places have a very radical break that day, you know, you don't do any kind of work at all, and you allow something else to happen vacations can be that also that way also somehow even though you might do something that kind of shedding of a lot of the momentum of doing and accomplishing and, and, and people find some deep rest where they just sometimes where they just tend to just being alive is enough just being is quite a beautiful feeling. And it's very rejuvenating, restful just to be. And so you find in Buddhism, sometimes teachers have an even traditions that put a tremendous emphasis on the value of being and sometimes there's whole good wood ologies old philosophies of Buddhism that support the importance of practice of just being and sometimes there's very strong admonitions not to do not to accomplish there's a great A famous Chinese end story of a monk who was diligently meditating in the meditation hall. He was maybe meditating up all night. And during the day, he was always meditating. And so the Zen master, the abbot came up to him. One day said, you know, what do you what are you doing? And he said, I am making Kabuto. I'm, you know, trying to get enlightened. And Zen master picked up a tile that was somehow around and started polishing the tile right there in meditation hall next to the guy, it's kind of strange place to polish a tile. So the monk said, Well, what are you doing? And Abbot said, I'm making a mirror. And the monk said, You can't make a mirror by polishing a tile. And the answer they said, Yes, and you can't make a Buddha by meditating. And so that's the kind of Zen thing so you have to understand While he said that, but it was part of the school where the idea of trying to do something, accomplishing something creates a dualism between who you are and some attempt to try to get someplace. I remember once Christopher titmus in a Dharma talk, because I forget exactly how it happened, but maybe he just kind of paused before he was gonna start his talk. And then he looked up, and he said, if you're waiting, you've missed the bus.

If your spirituality has to be by waiting for something to happen, then you've lost your lost touch with the possibility of an immediate sense of presence and a lightness connection to this moment here, that can't be here, if you're looking ahead into the future trying to accomplish something. And so there's kind of a wonderful dynamic tension, sometimes creative tension in Buddhism between our sense of presence and being right here and now and then a vision of what we can become. Then moving towards that. And so some people have a practice. Their practice is not to move towards something, but rather to find in rest in just this being here how we are right now. And so you find people who are very beautiful statements about how beautiful it is to just to be alive is enough just to settle in here and to be happy with life just this moment as it is, as opposed to trying to get something, retain something. And for people who do a lot, it's interesting to look at the belief systems that are in place that tell us what's not good enough just to be good enough just to rest and let be who you are. We have to accomplish something. One of the important you know, the idea of accomplishment is important and only if I accomplished something will I be worthy and successful people like me there's beliefs that That I have to kind of, you know who I am right now is not good enough and had to somehow prove myself or get away from who I am now or change myself because just right now I'm, you know, I'm a failure and so I can't rest in who I am in my beingness because that means resting and failure. Or there could be fear that that's not good enough to be rest in the sense of presence, because there's too many threats in this world. And I have to get something. There's some people who feel that that there will only be accomplished or be successful or, or be spiritually mature, if they understand something. So they're constantly trying to understand and trying to move towards something that they're going to get. And I can go through a list of probably many more things you see, see that are kind of belief systems that keep us going and going. Sometimes it's just the momentum of doing some people are just doing so much that it's hard to stop. It's almost like an addiction. There's a kind of that momentum going and it's hard to put it to stop. And so you know, there's more doing and doing we sit down to meditate and you come to, you want to practice it tells you what to do. Some people don't have any confidence in themselves. And they only have confidence that they're given very clear instruction from someone who seems like an authority and say, This is what you should do. And if you're doing something, then it feels like well, if I'm, if I'm doing something, I must be on the right path, doing nothing that just reminds me of, you know, how can that do anything. So part of being is to somehow relax all the momentum of doing doing doing and there's beautiful things that can happen when we relax. One is, there can be a deep sense of rest. And in that rest, sometimes there can be a beautiful feeling of presence, beautiful presence of heart, some of the beautiful qualities of being of who we are person tend to come through more clearly when we're addressed in ourselves, love, friendship, generosity, joy, really are qualities that arise in the present moment. If we're focusing too much in the future or the past, there's sometimes very little space for those things. And sometimes if we're focusing too much on doing an activity, there's very little space for the natural kind of sensitivity of the heart or the inner life to work are these things to kind of come forth. So some people find if they just relax deeply, that these beautiful things can come forth. Some people find if they just practice being and let go, the sense of being that sometimes what it allows us to do is to see in some more poignant, clear way to places which are things that are unresolved in us. And sometimes being doing and doing even spiritual doing and meditation practices can stand in the way of really meeting and confronting ourselves for what's unresolved and sometimes letting go of all the doing and just being. Brings, it highlights the unresolved things so they can be addressed and worked on.

So, I think from here in the West, I've noticed that a lot of Buddhist teachers will emphasize being the importance of being a practice of just being just be. And I think in the West, it makes a particular sense, as an antidote to all the doing that goes on. And, but it's not all that but that shouldn't be the last word. There's also a place for doing and then for the third category today, I placed for knowing before we

move into doing, being has a lot to do with who we are, as opposed to what we do and who we are is something to care take and take care of, and to value. So maybe more important than doing generous acts as being a generous person being so One who has qualities of generosity, rather than more important than doing, having to doing things of ethical things. I mean, we should do that. But maybe being a person whose ethical were that well, in other words were were ethical integrity flows from us because of who we are, as opposed to a should that we overlay on top rules, we overlay on top and then we act on those rules. So there are qualities of being that can represent who we are. And, and those quality, having this quality of being is a very important part of Buddha spirituality. Some of those arise naturally if we just allow ourselves to be, but some of them need to be cultivated. Some of them need to be focused on developed. And that's one of the reasons why the doing side of Buddhism is important that we don't just leave things to chance. But sometimes it's important to actually realize it be useful to have developed certain capacities, certain strengths, and those strengths support the practice of Being some people don't have enough inner psychological structures to hold a resting and being resting in who they are. And they need to have those stronger structures in place. Some people don't have enough understanding of the range of who they are the different impulses, intentions, motivations, thoughts, beliefs of who they are, that they need to develop that greater understanding themselves. So when they just rest into being, it's well informed. And they're not always unconscious things that are coming in from left field, because we don't understand ourselves well. And so part of practices, one of the doing things is to understand ourselves more. generosity is a beautiful quality. And so some people don't just rely on their native generosity, which might be kind of weak, maybe it's there, but it was actually developed to become a strength. So there's many things that Buddhist Buddhism emphasize that you can strengthen, develop. Classically there things like concentration acronym, there's capacity for become patient, the capacity to be to have loving kindness and compassion. Mindfulness itself is a skill and a strength that can be developed over time. So, there's a very important part of Buddhism, which is a doing practice. And, and it doesn't have to be in opposition to being when I was in living at Tassajara, which was a Zen monastery, where it kind of a certain kind of way I was being taught that being practice that you were told you know, that, that if you are focused on a goal, then you're polishing the tile. And what you should do is kind of just be at rest in your own Buddha nature. And if you want to try to try and change yourself in some kind of way that went against just being in that kind of Buddha nature way, but I thought it was kind of odd, that kind of approach and I thought Kind of kind of kind of crystallized for me How odd it was. It's beautiful. But somehow it was maybe a little bit quite not right? Or how I interpreted not quite not right, was I was the gardener Tassajara for a while, and I loved being in the garden. And I would walk around the garden in the morning and I sometimes I didn't want to do any of the work, I just wanted to go around and, and have this kind of wonderful, warm paternal love for my clients and to go look at them and appreciate them and then, you know, I'm just such a nice thing to do. And, but eventually I'll get to work but but one of the things I would do there were these weeds would grow up in the garden. And, and I appreciate the weeds but it seemed appropriate to pull the weeds. And it just seemed like that was part of what the what was needed. What was what gardening was about was moving enough weeds so the plants you want to grow there, the vegetables could grow. And I thought well here I'm at the monastery and pulling weeds in the garden and that's okay. Isn't it okay to then also pull weeds in my mind?

You know, if I got angry, you know, I should know, can I work on that anger and kind of pull up the roots of it and kind of work, you know, overcome it. Why? Why, you know, couldn't that be as as profound as just letting things be and I felt the others coming out, it's kind of an it's almost like a natural thing, if you're resting and being a certain kind of beingness. That in that beingness itself is a natural motivation to try to uproot certain things let go of certain things. And in fact, the doing of letting go is one of the thing that supports just being so letting go of all the tendencies to do all the impulses to try to get there to understand or to make something happen. All the grades and desires and fear that doing letting go is

a powerful muscle to develop and learn to develop. One of things we do is to develop that ability to let go and do the letting go so that we can just be. And that's, that's a wonderful thing to do. But sometimes you don't have to do all this letting go whenever to be, you can just it's a beautiful thing to just be with something like anger. But don't be the anger, but be with it. And this is where this issue of what we do with our attention and intention is really important. Too often with some unwholesome tendencies of the mind, like anger or something, we can get pulled into it involved in it so much that we essentially become it or it is in charge we live in it, or we're involved in mental preoccupations and thoughts. And we're kind of in the thoughts into preoccupations as if we're almost we're almost that's distinct from that world of difference from that is to be aware of the anger aware of the preoccupations and, and have our intention. Not to be guided by the anger, but our intention be be present for. And there's a big, big difference. And it might not look so different. But to say I'm going to be with my anger is different than saying I'm going to be angry. And so to be with my anger with presence and attention, then sometimes it's okay just to be because then you're not going to give into the anger, but you're also not resisting it and letting go of it. But you're in a certain kind of way free of the anger. So sometimes that kind of being is very powerful. And they get a sense of the kind of freedom that doesn't require anything to change. Even the unwholesome things is a powerful, powerful, I think, stepping stone towards liberation. And, and so sometimes, you know, sometimes we do let go. But sometimes it's good just to let things be. And so that's negotiating. That is part Practice but the doing I think is very important not to only feel it doing as bad which some people do doing is beautiful doing can be part of being and so they're doing part like spiritual life they can be a lot of doing spirituality I mean some of you did doing to come here and you decided was important enough to come here to get in your cars I guess or walk here and bike here and you know so doing and then you said you came in and find places to have new setup right that's a doing and then you close your eyes and that's a doing and then you try to I don't know what you're trying to do today. Hopefully you do. But you know there's you know, involved in the practice. But there is doing and even in the Zen monastery where there was kind of such an emphasis on being boy, they put a lot of energy into being these weren't lazy people getting up at four o'clock in the morning just to be I was being just smiled in bed. So it's interesting to look at what when we look at spiritual practice, you know, the activity, the work of spirit, the practice, what are the associations we have with it. And I just use the word work. Some people think of it as work. And work for some people has a lot of strong associations, which involved that are exhausting, a lot of shoulds but why does spiritual life have to be associated with work? Why not, there's another kind of doing that we'd almost we don't think of as being exhausting and oppressive and appeal kind of thing. And that is playing.

And you can go to local school ground and during the school days and see kids playing, and I'm guarantee you if any of you tried to play like they do, for those half an hour, they play, you'd be exhausted. And they put a lot of energy in, but it's kind of, I don't know if it's effortless. Exactly, effortless effort. But it's play, they're enjoying it. It's kind of not self conscious in the way that sometimes we work is maybe self conscious and appeal. What does it take for spiritual practice to be more like play rather than work. And we're the doing, doing, we do a source of delight. And I know for me that I just take it the light sometimes, and just being able to make effort, don't have to. And one of the ways to take to play or take the light in the effort of practice is to enjoy just doing for its own sake, and not be tied up with expectation of results. And I'll be measuring how far have I gotten? I got, you know, ever reached the first stage at the second stage, about you know, whatever. There's all these ways we measure ourselves. And I think the measuring, there's a time and place for, you know, tracking ourselves and how we're doing, but too many meditators tie themselves in knots by they sit down, close their eyes. Take three breaths. How am I doing? Am I there yet, as if there's there, but just the joy of engagement, just a joy for okay boy, I get to practice isn't this wonderful? And I don't care how far I get, I'll just get to do now maybe you know, this is a little bit my character to have that quality. Also, I just like doing things in for its own sake. Many times I do things and I have great fun doing them. And when they're

accomplished, I'm quite happy to let go of them and move on to the next thing because it's the doing which is nice to do. So, being and doing and sometimes we emphasize one, sometimes we emphasize the other. And sometimes if you're lucky, you can bring them together and realize that being undoing can happen simultaneously. They don't have to be a part. And the third part third aspect is knowing the practice of being the practice of doing and the practice of knowing. And Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on the value of knowing. In fact, they say that deeper realization Buddhism come from knowing, maybe knowing is a particular kind of doing. But it's a but knowing. And I know in my own practice that, that the practices of being and doing are something that I valued a lot took me to certain, certain length on the path of practice, but to go on the path the whole way, I really needed to have the knowing quality to have knowing. And the Buddha was called sometimes the knowing one, the one who knew. And you find in the different instructions that the Buddha gave on mindfulness, that one of the most common words you use is that mindfulness involves knowing. So knowing what how do we know. And so one of the things we're doing is, is cultivating, strengthening the capacity to know some of that has to do with knowing particular things. So it's useful to know how our mind operates. It's useful to know what's going on around us useful to know how to act wisely in the world. And that requires attention. And so in terms of paying attention to ourselves, like in meditation practice, it's useful to know if the way we're practicing is causing strain stress, or is it helping us to be relaxed and open and more attentive, more clear. And so there's a kind of a tracking and monitoring ourselves that involved that involves knowing that we know we know ourselves well enough. The four noble truths are a framework for knowing ourselves, knowing particular things about ourselves, is to know how I'm operating now is stressful. is causing suffering. Let me let go of that. Let me adjust. I'm out operating, so I'm not creating strain This is a very, very important principle for meditation practice, because it's easy to engage in practice, especially like on retreats in such a way that we actually, it's kind of productive. So for example, measuring your progress too often, you can see that that kind of gets in the way you know, that you see after a while that interferes, straining, judging yourself, comparing yourself to other meditators.

worrying about what you're going to tell the meditation teacher, you know, all these things, you can feel the stress that's there, the strain that's there, how we get contracted around it. And it's useful to pay attention to that know it, because if you know it, then you have a chance perhaps to do something about it. Maybe all you do about it, is be with it. As opposed to do anything with it just but that's stepping away from its orbit to be with as opposed to be yet or maybe you do do something about it, maybe you let go of it. Or maybe you try to do further inquiry into what's going on. So there's things we can know There's also a deeper knowing of the present moment to really clear clearly see what's happening as it's happening. So for example, you can just be with your breathing and meditation. And you can be with it in a simple way. And then here is quite relaxed, quite concentrated just being with it. But without really knowing what the experience of breath is like. If you with it, when you strengthen the knowing faculty, you see, clearly the difference between the sensations of breathing in the sensations of breathing out, you start seeing clearly that maybe in the breathing in, there is a series of movements in the in the chest or the diaphragm or in the belly. Maybe those movements you see they're smooth, maybe you see that they're choppy step like you see there's movements of expansion, that you've maybe there's a feeling of tightness at the end of the end breath. You know, clearly this in which your breathing you know, where what parts of your body are activated when you breathe, there's a very clear knowing, not analyzing and thinking and kind of like, you know, kind of thinking your way, you know, but it's kind of like the kind of clarity of knowing that if you had a dirty window, and you couldn't see out, and then someone came along and cleaned your window and just looked out and say, Wow, there's a tree there. I didn't know there there was tree outside my window. And it's just like, you know, you'd have to think about the tree. You don't have to analyze and look and say, what's that and it's just obvious. So the knowing is such an obvious quality by clearing the dirt from our window. So we see what's here,

we're looking more carefully. And if you're looking at your wall, you're not going to see the tree, you have to look out the window. So to look so the knowing. So it's different than being with a breath. It's kind of kind of allowing some loving it, what the experience of breath is like to be registered more formally within us. And that can be with anything, it can be looking at a flower Looking at, it could be looking at talking with a friend, it could be doing your work, where we allow the knowing quality, to register to be sensitive to be alert to see more clearly. And we know that the knowing quality is functioning more, more in a heightened way, when the knowing is, is is, is kind of getting close to the kind of knowing you have if you remember what's happening. So if you're walking down the street, and you see someone walking down the sidewalk who has a blue sweater, you can kind of just register in the peripheral your awareness, there's a person walking there, and then promptly Forget about it. Or you can kind of register really take in the fact of someone's there with a blue sweater that's kind of registered with a kind of clarity to it. So that a block later someone can ask you, do you see someone back there and then other street? Oh yeah, there was a person walking with a blue sweater. It's not like you're actually actively memorizing it. Or actively kind of trying to, you know, memorize it, but it's more like a column with more of a stronger registering stronger presence. Oh, yes. More like a yes, there it is. So the knowing has a quality kind of a Yes, yes, taking it in registering it. So like in minute mindfulness meditation practice, there's, there's there's at some point is a deepening or clarifying of this knowing capacity. It's like a yes to things, taking it in registering it, but not straining, not trying hard. It's more like you open the window in the mind. Let me let me let this come in more fully. This allows us to see more deeply what's there. And we begin seeing that our experience is different than what we thought it was. We have all these concepts and ideas that we overlay in our experience, we overlay on our friends, we will overlay on everything. And to begin let dropping some of these ideas and seeing more directly. What's there. is a very important part of the knowing practice of Buddhism. So we can actually have a realistic sense of what's happening. And the deeper the concentration, the mindfulness, the deeper the insight into reality that we can have.

But also, as we strengthen the knowing capacity, there's this beautiful, there's a kind of whittling away of all the things that we associate with knowing all the things baggage we bring along. So for example, if I'm trying to know something, I might be trying to know it, because I feel if I know it, then I can pass the test, suit a certain kind of stress. Or if I know that I can, then I can be safe in relationship to it. Some people are always scanning their environment and trying to they're always trying to know but they're really trying to know to kind of orient themselves so they can make sure they're safe. And there's always a kind of fear that's connected to the knowing. or there might be a sense of the agent who knows. I'm the one who knows. And so the knowing somehow is I'm looking out into the world to see What is it that either threatens or supports my sense of self. And so there's a bias to the knowing. As we as knowing we look more carefully, in the present moment, look what's going on, we slowly begin to Window away. What is extra what's not needed. So that knowing becomes simpler and simpler, more clear and cleaner, just knowing without any baggage without any association. And it's beautiful thing to have no extend out in the highlight as a strong, strong faculty or capacity of the mind. Oftentimes, when people know something, they know something, and they're focusing on what they know. And like if you go into I don't know what into a store and you want to buy things, and you're in a hurry. You probably spent a lot of time looking at the things you want to by making choices and everything without paying much attention to how it is that you know With knowing is like because you focusing on what you want. As the practice deepens the what knowing is focused on what knowing knows, becomes less important than knowing itself and the quality of knowing. So I like to like it, I liken it to when I used to live up in skyline, I would come down Woodside road, and he has great view of the, you know, the bay and the bay and sometimes, but oftentimes, you would have no view at all because of the smog. And, you know, you got used to it a bitchu ated just, you know, wouldn't be looking for it. You know, just fog, you know, smog. But every once in a while the smog would clear out. And I would be surprised at how clear the mountains over and Hayward and Fremont appeared. Wow, there's mountains over there. I had no

idea. I'd forgotten and they were so clear. And what stood out was the clarity of the seeing. Wow, there's clarity. So the same thing as knowing faculty gets stronger. That clarity of knowing stands out in the same way, wow. There's no smog. And that's a beautiful feeling to have that kind of clarity. But more important is that you start feeling that the knowing itself and that knowing itself, there's this kind of freedom. And, and that freedom of knowing is what leads to ultimate freedom in Buddhism. So to be able to rest in knowing, and then the practice of being takes a whole different dimension, when we can just be in the knowing when the knowing is very, very strong and clear. And then we rest in just a sense of being that allows the mind or the heart to let go in deeper and deeper ways that you can probably not even imagine how deep it is the capacity to let go. Let me just have that just to know That clarity. One of the interesting things about this winnowing away of what's extra from knowing is we window away or falls away slough off the sense of I am the one who knows the instance. So no longer would a person inclined to say, I'm a knower, I'm knowing, but rather there's, there's knowing, without the need of, of connecting it to someone who knows. Of course, it's you that knows, I mean, that's obvious. But it's just there just knowing, just knowing without someone who's doing the knowing. And it's quite something to see the functioning of the mind of consciousness. without it being intentional. They connected to a sense of self or self identity. And so in Tibetan Buddhism has beautiful expression called the cognitive functioning of emptiness.

So in liberated mind and empty mind that it's not really empty, but there's this natural functioning. And that natural functioning is knowing his cognition. And, and, and, and then there's a beautiful I think coming together of being and doing and knowing that there's just in the in the Beingness there's knowing that's doing to know and there's knowing and there there's freedom. So being doing and knowing they're all connected. They can't really separate it absolutely from each other. But it might be interesting for you to reflect and consider which These three you gravitate towards, if they set categories makes sense for you. You tend to be more of a being person and doing person or knowing person. Do you tend to be someone who practices or focus on more on the being? Or more on doing or more knowing? Which do you value the most? And which of the three Do you least value the least? Which are the means that no and that's not for me? No, I doubt about that's not really so good. It's a good idea. What's your relationship to these three. And it might be interesting to look at that and discuss it with your friends and explore it. And then you might learn something about yourself, that'd be useful. And maybe you get a chance to kind of question yourself in a good way and challenge yourself in a good way by looking at that. And which of the three might be useful for you to strengthen or develop more fully. People who do spend too much time being maybe they should do Doing people who spend a lot of time knowing maybe they should do some more doing to people do spend a lot of time doing, maybe they should practice being for a while. So that's the talk for today. I hope that made enough sense to you. And I hope that whatever you do, being doing, knowing that you enjoy it. Thank you