

2012-07-09 The Inquiring Mind

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SPEAKERS

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Almost 30 years ago now a few people with encouragement of Joseph Goldstein started the first journal and newspaper magazine for the insight meditation community in America in the world, and they chose the name Inquiring Mind. And because they felt that this was a very important part of this practice of ours, a Buddhist practice is to have an inquiring mind to inquire. And to inquire, is to have questions is to question what's going on look more carefully what's going on. And it's not so much about being you know, reading a book about Buddhism, and learning the facts, but rather learning how to go into your life. Wherever you go wherever you are. With inability to investigate and ability to ask yourself what is going on here? What's happening here? Even when things are pretty much exactly like they've always been. Nothing seems to be changed. Everything's pretty ordinary. Was the inquiry mind stir up? What does it look at? Where does it discover? Are things really the same day after day? What's different? What's happening to you? What what's useful to look at? If the inquiry mind One of the interesting things, the inquiry mind, is the inquiring mind inquires into itself, and what's the quality of this mind? What's the mood? What's the attitudes, what's the beliefs that are operating, when you go about anything you do? And so the ability to ask questions, basically, asking that question is the question What is this and this is a wonderful way of practicing where you kind of ask What is this? But you don't settle for any verbal answer. It's more like what is this is like, look more closely now. And then ask the question again What is this and look more closely? What is this and see what reveals itself which shows itself almost worth word lessly without your explanation of what's there. Explanations tend to get in the way of the inquiring mind. You know, digs further looks further understanding more deeply what's going on. And it's so there's many questions you can bring. One of the interesting questions that I think for the foster students is the question What am I not paying attention to now? What am I not paying attention to? Because chances are, you're not paying attention to everything you could probably you what you pay attention. is a very narrow sliver of reality a very narrow sliver of your mind. And so he has to quit What am I not paying attention to now? Does that open you up? Does that kind of expand your horizons? So you may be noticed more. Some people are self obsessed. What am I not paying attention to right now? I'm not paying attention to other people. Some people are other people obsessed. And so maybe pay attention to yourself, some people, you know, a lot a lot of different biases and select the selectivity process we have. So the question is, what am I not paying attention to? Now? That's an interesting one. And the other one that it's nice question is to ask yourself what am I not accepting right now? Or to change the set the question around what needs acceptance right now what could I accept right now? And put yourself into a fight yourself in a really challenging situation that's demanding and stressful for you and ask that question. Chances are, you're not asking that question. And so what needs acceptance right now? Maybe what needs acceptance is the fact that you're stressed out and it's difficult and chaotic, and you don't know what to do. Is there some way of accepting it or being relaxed about it or opening to it, where you're not bothered by it or oppressed by it or being pushed around by it? It's a very powerful thing to have some kind of an acceptance in the mind

doesn't mean you can do something or agree that has to continue the way it is. But to have the mind relaxed and open. This is how it is then receive it and let it be. Another interesting question, the whole series of questions are interesting to ask is about yourself. Who do you think you are? How are you presenting yourself to others? Interesting question.

Most people most of the time, that some of you I know, certainly, but most people, most of the time when they're involved in social interactions with people have some concern about how they're presenting themselves to others, how they're seen by others. And to inquire into that, why do I want to be seen? What am I trying to do? What kind of impression Am I trying to create right now? Am I trying to hide so people don't see part of who I am? Am I trying to create a certain kind of persona? So people think good about me? Am I being driven by the desire to be liked by people and I'm trying to do the variety of social gymnastics that I'm capable of doing to ensure that people will like me or certainly not reject me. So this whole kind of self concern, self image, self identity, how we want to represent ourselves is a very powerful place to inquire. Who am I in the situation, who do I want to be? What am I trying to be? And then there's all kinds of, you know, to question what happens as we practice and we practice mindfulness to pay attention to the present moment as we practice concentration and calm down. We can start asking ourselves about, you know, what our experiences and how do we work with it? How do we find our peace with it? Where's the happiness in the situation? Where is the stress? What is helpful in this situation? What helps bring delightful stillness, to my mind to my heart? What opens me in the situation? what connects me to others? In this situation? How can I be more connected? How can I feel more present for people? What I'm trying to get across here is the inquiring mind of this practice is one that asks a lot of questions. And that's one of the tasks of someone who's doing Buddhist practice, I believe, is to begin asking more questions than you normally do. And try As you ask questions of your situation, have yourself to then become skilled at knowing what kind of questions to ask. I remember when my sons were quite young, some of them, one of them was we asked questions all the time. And I did not find them helpful.

And, but what questions are useful to ask whether or not useful to ask, and different situations? So that's kind of a long introduction to kind of pass the buck to you. You're supposed to be asking questions, whatever questions you have, what kind of questions do you have with you? Not necessarily you want them answered here by me or by anybody? But what questions do you have in your life? What questions do you carry with you? What are the questions that drive you and move you through your life and motivate you tell you one that was important for me in my early years of practice. I spent when I was 20, or 21, I spent a week alone on a small farm small dairy farm that had five cows that I was responsible for milking. I would get them in from the fields, milk them and take them out and now live in this very small rural place where the only person I saw for the week in the distance was the mail carrier. Otherwise, I didn't see anybody or talk to anybody. And it wasn't intending to be a hermit for a week. But that's just how it ended up. I was left the only person left with a house. And, and so it was the first time in my life where I had that kind of solitude, where it wasn't around people and family and people it was a new experience for me. And what happened in the course of the week is my mind got quieter, and my perception became more acute and then Looking at trees and nature and objects in the house I lived in and they sparkled he kind of stood out in the highlight was just like so beautiful to look at everything because the my perception was you know, there was less distracted, I was less agitated in my mind so I could see in more clear, acute way. And I also became much more acutely aware of my inner functioning my thoughts that had never been so intimate with my thinking process in my life before. It was kind of like s like they sparkle, just like the tree sparkle, that stillness in my mind. And these thoughts was quite something. And I love the intimacy, I love the stillness, I love who's felt very precious Bandha that seven days that I had alone, I felt so connected to myself to the world I felt so it was such a nice, beautiful experience. And then my friends on the farm came back. I was caretaking for

them and they went for a vacation and then we were social again you know social again and then that intimacy in the precious in the stillness that I had, when I was alone, pretty quickly dissipated. And then the question I had after that for myself was, how can I be alone with others? Not aloof and alone. But how could I have this kind of friend precious, intimate, cute sense of awareness to myself and the world around me, even when I'm with people, and I could see that when I would get involved with people, my mind would get much more busy with what I wanted, what they wanted my pet how I presented myself or they thought of me. You noticed all these games or concerns that I had when I got social? So the question was, how can I be alone with others? And it was good because another option I could have had was to become a hermit. All right, well, this is great. I'm just gonna forget these people go live alone. But somehow or other I didn't. That's not my that wasn't my question. My question was, how can I do this? Together with others and social and so that became my task for a good number of years was how to discover how to not get caught up in the social machinations, how to stay present and calm and, and have that kind of intimacy. And I found that the practice of meditation helped a lot. Because they got me in touch with a still in the inner stillness and calm and mindfulness that then I could use to explore and question you how I lost that. What happened when I lost it, then? Why I lost it then and how to kind of come back to it. So that question served me really well. Another question that I carried with me when I went to the monastery was the question I'd read just before I went to the monastery I read, I opened a book randomly on the bookshelf in a bookstore and spiritual section. And the book said that the page said something like, the basic human problem is something like I forget now, if Forget all these years later, because I reworded for myself but the basic problem is,

you know, not being connected feelings being separate. And so I kind of didn't like it's being stated negatively, so I rephrased it for myself as a question. And the question for myself was, how can I participate more fully with what I'm doing? And for me, this became a great question as I entered the monastery was how can I participate more fully in whatever I was doing in the monastery, for me, it kind of was a kind of an unusual environment, where I could really kind of experiment in private practice, being fully present whatever I was doing, with my full body, my mind my heart, and explore what that meant. So that became a very important question for me, how do I participate more fully? So how about for you? What are some questions that you've had? What are some questions that motivate you and your life and your spiritual life? What are some of the questions? you've held, what are some of the questions that are really important for you are so important that we would do you a tremendous disservice if we answered them.

So he would like to offer some

please use the mic. So we have two of them so we can pass them around the same time. So

can I risk asking you what what the answer to

the first question was? The question of

how can I keep this

stillness in and interact with others?

Well, it didn't. It doesn't come with a simple answer. It came from years of practice. It came from having that question and carrying that question, using that question to keep looking at myself and looking and seeing particularly How I lost it. And that's why meditation was helpful, because then I had some reference point of being a little bit calmer than usual. And then as I left meditation started my social life,

I could watch much more carefully. It's like a highlight, I could see how I was afraid. I mean, fear was a big thing. So I get afraid in the social interactions. And I'd be very concerned, I really wanted people, I was kind of addicted to wanting people, everyone to like me. And one way to be miserable is to try to make everyone like you. It's really, you know, it's not possible, right? So, you know, if that's what your deal like you need to have, you're in trouble. So I got to see all these things. I got to so seeing how my mind operate and seeing how I related to people and myself. Slowly over the years, I got wiser and wiser understood those things better. That's where the answer came. So that's where you know, maybe the example where it's Did this is how you do it? And this is the answer. It wouldn't have helped me. I had to really see it to myself. So I'm back in the outer Hall, if you can maybe press. And while it's being passed, if someone else wants to say something and raise their hand, we can pass the other one around.

So I, I asked myself frequently, what do I need to know? And another favorite one is, What am I thinking now? Is it useful? Is it helpful? How do those thoughts make me feel? Is that how I choose to feel as I live my life? Is it helpful and when it's not, or when I believe it's not, it's how can I let go of this. And then I repeat the wonderful phrase, let go a little be a little happy.

Have a lot of happiness.

And then I usually stop and smile.

Great questions. Thank you. Yeah.

For many years I struggled with the question of how can I try to be a good Buddhist and not be clinging, but also

not give up my passions.

So how to be a good Buddhist how to how not to cling without giving up your passion, your interest, your enthusiasm? That's a great question. Don't give us the answer. But have you found some answers?

Well, for a while I stayed away

that help your question To explore something different.

I didn't I'm still working on it. I'm not clinging to being a good Buddhist, that's

already been trying to. But

I see a lot of

benefit coming through meditation I feel that needs to come. But

I'm just being

some some questions after fee or some questions just fade away. They never answered they just fade away.

I just feel that I cannot give up my passion. So it's maybe

the question is not relevant.

Yeah. So I just

hang in there.

Great. Thank you.

Hi. Oh,

I'm a scientist, I my job is to ask questions all the time. And I feel you bringing up this whole asking good question immediately I'm thinking, Oh my gosh, am I asking a good question? Or not? And I feel like overcoming this self judgmentalness of asking a question becomes my own question.

That's great. That's really important, I think, a second order kind of questioning that looks at the impact of how we're approaching our life, the impact. So, you know, if Yeah, it's as possible to ask here, you know, Gil says, You should ask questions, and then you get all worked up in your questions, and we're anxious and we're busy and trying to get the good best question and, and, you know, and just, you know, end up with a headache. But the but the higher order kind of overview is, how do I ask questions or what are the right questions, or how do I approach whatever's happening? Or how do I enquire in such a way that I become more still and more peaceful? I'm more calm, or more free. And so it's very important to use mindfulness to see that the way you ask questions is not being helpful. So one approach then would be if this approach of asking questions is too busy or too agitated, is there another way? Is there a way that's more peaceful?

So lots of questions in my mind. But what is this? The one that these days is just sticking to my mind is about physical pain. The main theme you have been discussing the past six months I've been coming here, like 90% has been about clinging attachment, you know, wanting something and to develop skills to resist that. But this question is about what if a pain is being inflicted on you from outside I'm thinking about people who get tortured in political prisons. Yeah. Man of convictions, men who are very strong and they go under on the torture table. And or people in Auschwitz, who did not have any future. They knew that next minute they might die. I'm thinking my question is how it Buddhist discipline. One can deal with these situations. So I'm pondering on that constantly.

But anyway, yeah, good. Okay. We're less Tempted to Try to say something. But that's not the test tonight is to answer questions. Maybe you know, that, you know, but that's great to hear that that's your concern. So that how so it's one thing to understand Buddhist principles and Buddhist practice and ideas in the ordinary activities of our life. It's useful sometimes to let go it's useful to be peaceful or something, but what do you do next? situations where there's violence and someone's really causing tremendous suffering on you or in other people. And are you supposed to just sit there and accept it and know this is fine. I'll focus on my breath you know, what happens then and, and do this and there's a, there's a Buddhist principles and Buddhist practices have any bearing in these extreme situations. So I guess is the question, right?

If you could use the mic and everyone can hear.

Okay, is it? Yeah, okay. So I'm

in my work, but now I with his question, no, I, my question doesn't. And it's interesting how we how we influence each other and in asking questions in my work, I am very cognizant and aware Have the guiding principles in which I form questions. And those guiding principles can can form those questions so that because I know my question will influence and that answer that comes back will influence me. And in my practice of interviewing, I believe those guiding principles of kindness, curiosity, acceptance, and a desire to understand and accept lays a foundation that then in the dialogue, we can construct a more

fruitful

conversation.

Thus, my work is to do that, and when you ask that question, I thought, Oh, my God, I don't do that. to myself, in that same manner, meaning, being very cognizant of how I frame the question with appreciation and acceptance already in the structure of the question itself, right.

So you don't approach yourself with that kind of acceptance and kindness,

prototyping of the question that demonstrates implicitly the values and beliefs

consciously

instead, what the heck? No, I don't see why you do.

Yeah. No, they mean, so that

was very curious to me.

I asked myself the question, why don't I take the same care in framing questions for

yourself? Great. Lovely. Thank you.

For most of my life, my working life, I've been involved in science as well as over here. And at one level, the focus of my work was to find the answer to that question. It's a burning question and we want to pursue further knowledge or, or discover something that's of great worth to humankind or some such thing.

But I've come to realize that

questions are, are not perhaps not best looked at as as a way to point into an answer and to keep focusing on the answer The answer The answer The answer, but I think that's wrong. I think it's only a one way to use a question. I think questions are great leaders. If you have a question framed in one way, then maybe the more clever way to deal with the question is to find another question that's related, or frame the question differently but use the question as a leader into guiding how we're to live. Well, for one thing, of course, we want to pursue whatever we're working on. According to basic Buddhist

principles, you know of kindness and compassion and concern for something besides increasing my net worth, etc, etc. There's many other ways to go to use a question besides just to seek the answer. I mean, the answer is rather simplistic and sometimes it's it is nothing but a dead end.

Great. Yeah, I love hearing this spiritual things very significant what you're saying.

I find that very, very useful. But it's not necessarily easy. Okay, you've got one question on a table in front of you. And so we're going to say, Well, I'm not going to click a school answer after the answer to that question. So then where do I go? What do I focus on? How do I choose the next direction to go? Or how do I not? How do I know not to go that way? Because that's not productive. Well, it takes a lot of wisdom and maybe some luck, or maybe some inspiration from some other source as well or something.

you're pointing to two things conflict sometimes there's sometimes it's in beginning was there's something very significant but asking a question, but not looking for an answer, but laying the question you cause a, b, to lead you or I let my vocabulary say, to open you to kind of kind of Expand your horizon to see more deeply and more clearly or more. What is this? So this kind of thing, and questions or openers, but then you're the second thing you're asking is that sometimes you do have to answer the questions answered. Because there are choices to be made in life and so which direction to go? And so what, what questions and what where do you find answers to things that do not have answers?

To realize that sometimes to what appears to be a direct straight answer to the to the question is not the easiest or best way to go. Go around. come at it from the other direction.

Great, thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

This relates to the last point, I came to meditation with the question, How can I be more cool, calm and collected? And instead I keep getting the answer to how can I cultivate generosity. Somebody is not listening very well.

Thank you. Let's go in the back and backroom.

Not so much a question as just a reminder for those of us who are wearing this, if you could hold these mics really close to your miles, it's been difficult to hear some of the remarks Thank you.

I have these two questions which are always like connected to each other. Am I being authentic in this moment? And is there an opportunity to love

is there not?

Is there an opportunity to love

Great question.

So, but somehow they're always connected with each other.

And if you carry those two questions with you for a long time, are they relatively new for you? or?

Yeah, they've been around for a few years. They don't seem to go.

And it has been useful you useful for you to carry these questions with you through your life. Yeah, yeah. Great. Thank you.

Hi.

I'm trying to ask myself how I'm going to be able to change myself. I've been working on that specially after I, I read, everything is changing. So I'm, every day I asked myself how I'm gonna change myself. Because there is a lot of things, even the like what you said when when people like you. Sometimes it's it's not good. So I'm trying to see how I'm gonna be like different words I should change to, to ease like because sometimes from this love you get pain. So I'm always working on this.

So how to change how to change yourself how to change myself so you can have more

like to ease more ease.

Exactly find the ease. Yeah, so everything's changing and how do you participate in the change? How do you change yourself so that you're at ease with it or have more ease with it all? Exactly. Great question. Is that been a useful question for you to carry? And you had some of you had some answers.

Yeah, I've been trying to change a lot of things in a good way like I used to, to control everything, like at home, you know. And that will give me a lot of work because I have to be responsible for everything. So now I'm trying to just take it easy and that's working.

It's probably more useful for the other people at home.

Yeah, so that's just one, one example.

Great, thank you.

It's interesting, because my question is actually the opposite. How to stop wanting to change myself.

How to Learn to be satisfied with what I am

great. It's also both both are great questions at different times. So maybe now I'm back in the outer Hall.

I think this lady over here triggered something for me. That's similar and that is something that's very helpful for me and that I forget a lot is how can I help? How can I help in this situation? And it tends to simplify things a little bit. I don't want to suggest that life is simple. But when I have the greatest difficulty, I try and find my way through something. I think I'm often forgetting how can I help? Great.

I was in a at a concert last night, a live concert where I was right up in front Whoa. And I felt so much in the moment because I could, I could see the performers. The music was really loud in you know, or it's, it was pervasive, I guess, all around me and you could feel in your body and it was so good because of

being there in the moment. But then how do you stimulate your senses or be aware of your senses like that throughout the rest of life? Because I would like to have that feeling more often where you're just right there with your sense

without having to turn up the radio. Yeah.

Right. Yeah, it's a place that I just keep thinking, Oh, I want to go back to that, but I don't know how to do that. And my guess is that I have to be more in tune with my body. But it just seems like you know, they're just certain Situations maybe out in nature where you're feeling stimulated all around, but a lot of times the head, you know, takes over and you don't just feel right. All the senses coming in.

Great, thank you. So, okay, so and I like to end with a question for you to offer you for the evening for the week or whenever and to introduce the question to you make a little bit more understandable or something. I think that a fair number of people here in our society around us, probably a lot of you have cell phones. And nowadays, and, and some of you carried with you, you don't just leave it at home and you know, that's not you know, you carried with you So, you know, some people carried in their pockets, but then you take it out You put it down and, you know, and I've noticed in myself, and then one of the habits, or one of the instincts that I've cultivated now in our cell phone culture, is I kind of always know where my cell phone is. I now have an expensive cell phone smartphone. Right. So, you know, you know, I wouldn't want to you know, and so, you know, I kind of always know where it is. I know, it's my pocket. I know, it's on the table. I know, it's on the floor. There's a there's activity, kind of almost subconscious activity that goes on that, you know, where is it, you know, kind of know where it is. In the old days, it might have been, you know, maybe still, I hope it's still it's been like a parent of a young child, you know, you might be working in the kitchen, but you know, where the kid is always, you know, you always kind of know, but you're doing your work, whatever. So that's the kind of stuff so the question is Do you know where your mind is? Do you know where your mind is? And can you? Can you cultivate the same intuitive or habit of knowing where your mind is, as you do for your cell phone? So you're What?

Sorry.

Oh, so what you said here? Oh, she's gonna say more loudly if I could.

What if you're not at that stage yet

with your cell phone.

But hopefully,

hopefully, you don't have to go out and get a cell phone to discover how to do it. Before cellphones people were mindful If people knew what was you know, they tracked what's going on. So they need to track but it make it a habit. And this is what I've learned that you can do with regular practice takes time. But you can develop a regular kind of habit or instinct to always kind of be tracking what's going on in your mind, your thoughts, your feelings, reactions. So it's second nature, so you don't lose yourself, you don't get lost and don't know what's going on inside. Because you're so caught up in the world or your fantasy or whatever it might be. And so you're always gonna ask you, where's your mind, you're going to tell them, this is where I'm here. So if you have a cell phone, if you understand the analogy, and perhaps that could give you a little encouragement, because it doesn't take a lot to have attention, effort energy, to make this second nature to be aware of yourself, just like it doesn't take after you know, after

a while having cell phones. It doesn't take a lot of effort and energy to kind of know where it is. It just kind of becomes second nature almost for some of us. So it may be second nature for you to know where your mind is. Where's your mind now? So thank you for all the questions you have. And it's my belief that everyone comes to practice with questions. It might not be worded and with a question mark at the end, but the inquiring inquiry mind is what brings you to practice. And so you might look at yourself and see what do what is the role of practice for you? What are the practice that brought you to come here to IMC to meditate? What are useful questions that you can add to your life? And you might ask some of your good friends that you respect a lot, what questions they carry about their life. You could learn a lot from someone, if you ask them these kinds of, you know, ask them what questions they've had. So thank you all.