

2012-09-02 Meditation As A Mirror To Ourselves

Fri, 8/21 8:41AM • 29:02

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

meditation, learn, thinking, people, life, daily life, lessons, experience, notice, calm, caught, pain, feels, emotions, lose, realized, meditate, thoughts, question, happening

SPEAKERS

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So some of you know, I haven't given a talk like this Dharma talk for about a month over a month. So I was reflecting on coming down here and giving a talk. And reflecting that one of the functions of a talk like this A Dharma talk is to a point back to you. And not to hang on to what the teachings are what's being taught, but rather have those splitters being taught as being kind of a mirror that encourages you to be more with yourself, to observe yourself more, to understand yourself more to look at yourself more, what's happening. And it's in that spirit that I like to offer this that, you know, this really encouraged me to look at yourself. And one of the functions of meditation, which we do a lot of here at IMC is to help with that study. Have ourselves. And in a sense, the real book of Buddhism is found in yourself not on the bookshelves. The Buddha read the book that you need to read, if you're interested in Buddhist practice is found in yourself and your heart and your mind and how you function what goes on in you. And so as sooner or later, when you're encountering Buddhist teachings, the idea is to turn it around turn of incense, turn away from the teachings, in a sense, and use them to kind of reflect, look more deeply at yourself and to read yourself to understand yourself with respect and care. And to kind of discover what's going on here. Unless you discover something about yourself unless you to understand yourself deeply. Buddhism will have no value for you. It'll just be an inspired hopefully inspiring teaching that you carry around but not much more. So it requires so willingness and the effort some or to start studying yourself. And meditation is one of those places that we Do that. It's It's a wonderful laboratory for understanding ourselves and learning about ourselves. So this idea of understanding and learning as Paramount is different than how some people approach meditation. Some people approach approach meditation as a, as a, that it's about attaining or experiencing certain states, attaining certain spiritual experiences. And so there are people are pushing or trying or looking for the right thing or the spiritual thing to experience. If only I had that experience, then everything will live happily ever after. There's must be something I just have to kind of do the right thing and boom, and I'll just be taken care of. It's kind of magical thinking and it's a kind of way of not taking responsibility for oneself. It's kind of like kind of like hoping that someone else is going to do it for you. So Some people look to meditation for relief, which is a valuable use of it. Life is stressful, and so to find some relief, and so it's your place to get some rest and recovery perhaps. And that's certainly valid. But if the emphasis is too much on that, then there isn't studying of the cell for learning about oneself. The nice thing about having learning as being at the forefront of what meditation is about is that you can learn in any circumstances or any situation, any experience anything that's happening for you. in meditation. It's not uncommon for people who meditate some people to have some idea that certain experiences are acceptable or the right experience to have a meditation, and some are not. Some are proof that you've failed utterly and totally as a meditator You know, there's definitely That meditation was a total waste of time. And you know, something, the but if we're if they approach to the whole world of meditation is to

learn. Then sometimes we learn more from the difficult difficulties we have meditation than we do in the nice experiences of meditation. Some people actually may even learn the wrong things. When they have a certain amount of calm and bliss and meditation. They might learn this is the most important thing I have it now this I can look at that kind of, you know, certainly a dime. See, we give out these badges, right. Successful meditator you don't see anybody. Try harder.

And so, but sometimes, you know, you'll learn the most about ourselves. And learn most about practice and the path to freedom. When things are difficult, if that's what we intend to do, that's what we try to do. So no matter what happens, I think we really useful approach is what can I learn from this? What can I learn about myself? What can I learn from the process? Where can I learn about the process of freedom in this situation, and not be blinded by an experience. I've known people who spent months and months and months, trying to recreate the experience they had once upon a time in meditation, as if that was like, you know, it was very meaningful experience for them. But it's like focusing on the experience. Here's an interesting idea that if you have a good experience in meditation, what might be more important than having the experience is for you to learn how you lose it. And some people as they lose a good so called good experience. Just kind of Give up all that I was, you know, they get upset or they get regretful or they keep going back looking back at that experience is the measure of everything. And they're blinded to noticing what happens is they lose it. What do they get caught up? And what are the beliefs and values and feelings that go on? Some people as they lose a good experience or good state? Will, one of the things they can learn is how they criticize themselves. I'm doing something wrong. I did. But if they spirit is to learn, then it becomes interesting. Look at that. I had this nice experience of calm and peace. And then you know, I went to Costco or IKEA. And I started wanting a lot of things. And the way that I want things or the way that I'm overstimulated, that seems to be an interesting place where I tend to lose my calm What can I learn about this kind of look more deeply at this and learn more. And so this idea of learning and looking so one of the one of the reasons meditation is a good laboratory for this kind of learning is the repetitive nature of it. In that we do it over and over again, like if you sit and meditate every day. And you know, in our specialty, mostly close our eyes, and we simplify our lives, it's a very simple kind of laboratory, relative to going to IKEA. And, and so you have a chance of beginning to notice more carefully what your inner processes or like what the nature of your thinking is, your feelings, your reactions, your beliefs. And it's not that necessarily easy to see all these things, but the repetition of meditation, use it after a while start seeing you know, there's a certain repetitive thought pattern going on here. Or the more quieter voices that we have, that maybe are drowned out by all the concerns of daily life has finally have a chance To be seen, because meditation get quieter, and we see. And so we might see some of the operating thoughts or beliefs that we base our life on, we might see the quality of our thinking, we might see that we're Our thoughts are often about desire, or often about the ill will or hate, are often about anxiety or fear. And so you can kind of watch and see those thoughts. See that kind of thinking, and perhaps learn that it's not really in your favor to keep thinking of them. There's a cost to continually churn away obsessive with these kinds of thinking. And it's a very, very powerful lesson to learn that thinking certain thoughts repetitively and over and over again, is not really so useful. And for some people, it's a meditation that can teach you that sometimes much better than going around your life. I've obsessed about certain things about you know, going around day life and I haven't really understood Seeing that I was obsessing about it until I sat down to meditate. Somehow I'm busy, I'm engaged. I'm in between the little in between my obsessions, I'm taking care of, you know, cooking and shopping and doing all these things. And so, you know, it's I don't really kind of not really looking at it directly and seeing what's the common theme that's happening. When I sit down to meditate, it's easier to start noticing the repetitive common themes that go on. And as you start seeing the common theme and seeing how repetitive it can be, one of the lessons is, this isn't so useful.

Now, if you really take In this lesson, this is not useful. This is where learning is really important, then I think there starts to be kind of a natural beginning and natural movement, to relinquish the grip on that kind of thinking. And that's a very different approach than seeing, I shouldn't be thinking this is bad, you know, some kind of punitive or obligatory kind of approach, but you They focus again on learning learn a lesson really well. A lot of the wisdom of Buddhism comes from familiarity. That's bad news. And the reason that's bad news is that familiarity means that you have to see it again and again and again. Guess what? You know, you have to see some of your foibles over and over again to see your patterns what you do that's maybe not so useful. By seeing it over and over and over again. I say that so you can be patient with it. Just keep focus on learning. What can I learn from this, see it to understand understand, one of the things you might understand if you look more carefully, at yourself, is that you have net all kinds of unnecessary or painful judgments about what you see inside of yourself. I shouldn't be this way. This is not right. I should be a different way. So that's it. So again, maybe have to become really familiar with that pattern in your thinking until some wisdom begins to dawn and you begin loosening the grip of that there's not buying into it as much You might also see in meditation, the nature of your feelings, your emotions, it might be hard to notice, again, really, really kick in and a deep register register really in deep way. What's your emotional state isn't daily life, you might not even know but having to register and be felt in a full way is something and then in meditation, you have a chance also to see how you relate to your emotions. Do you judge them? Do you hold on to them? Do you try to push them away? Do you deny them? You try to fix them? What do you what is your attitude and approach to them? Some of them might be okay. But the business of trying to fix and do and react is kind of tiring. And one of the things is possible learning meditation if the focus is on learning, as opposed to doing is maybe you don't have to do so much about what you see. Maybe it's okay just to experience your emotions as they are. And one of the one of the I think one of the great lessons that I've had In my life of meditation is how trustworthy it is to relax and open up and allow for whatever emotions I'm having. That there seems to be a innate, I like think of it as biological, natural process of healing and resolving of unfolding around emotions that happens on its own if I pay attention, but get out of the way, if I stay present, allow it to be there, stay present and be still in a certain way meditation, and let it unfold. And this has been a really important lesson for me because I had a tendency to always to judge to push away, deny, fix all these things. So these so there's many things that can go on and on many things that you can learn from meditation, but yourself. That laboratory of learning about meditation then, shouldn't be kept should shouldn't be left only for the world of meditation. But those lessons where they really those lessons really begin having real value is when we take those lessons and apply them to our daily life. We learn enough about how we work inside, that we can then start seeing it in as we go about life. So that you're gonna have a more acute sensitivity to certain patterns of thinking, because you've gotten so sensitive to them. in meditation, you're much more likely to catch them outside of meditation, you're so much more aware of how you tend to react and respond in meditation, that you're much more likely to notice those reactions and responses outside of meditation. in meditation as a place to begin becoming more aware, to study to learn about what your body is like which feels like physically to be in your body. what it feels like to relax to open up your body to be tense in your body. That heightened sensitivity in the body, mindfulness of the body. is valuable. And meditation becomes even more valuable in daily life, when it becomes almost like a habit to come back and check in with your body and notice what's going on. So what are the lessons in meditation? How do you How can you take those lessons and meditation and use those lessons, apply those lessons, I decided meditation. That's, I think, where some of the real benefits of this kind of practice, begin coming.

Without that application of the lessons of meditation outside of meditation, I think meditation itself won't keep deepening or growing and maturing. There's kind of a feedback loop that goes on. So then we learn meditation about ourselves, we learn how to be with ourselves certain way. And then we learn

those. We learn to apply those in daily life. We learn more about ourselves in daily life, we our life tends to go smoother and easier, then it's easier to Come back and meditate. I want to mention one other thing that you could learn from meditation practice. And that is you learn certain skills, you learn certain abilities that get developed. And it might be that some of the, again, some of the skills you'll learn when things are difficult than meditation, maybe are more useful than when things are good at meditation. So for example, you might learn a lot of patience, and meditation. And the stronger that patient muscle muscle gets in meditation. The more you have it available outside of meditation in daily life, when I was a relatively new Zen student, I you know, my impression of maybe it's c EDS and kradic personal impression about Zen practice. But my impression of Zen practice is that a fair amount of the training involves practicing with pain, physical pain, at least it was for me Because you've had to sit in this, you know, uprights cross legged position and not move absolutely not moving. I sat with a lot of pain and, and I don't necessarily recommend it. But I that's was my experience. And I learned a lot about myself in my reaction to pain, my beliefs around pain, my self pity around pain, my all so much about how I because of meditation, I could see it all working. And I could see how when I got caught by it, pain got worse, I got worse. And I learned how to shift my relationship to pain quite dramatically. I learned to have the pain without being oppressed by it. And so that was nice, you know, for meditation, certainly. But most important was sooner or later outside of meditation, I encountered some kind of pain, physical pain and emotional pain. And what I learned meditation helped me so much to bring a useful, healthy kind of presence and relationship to that non meditative pain. And so you know, my life was enriched by that experience. So I learned patience, I learned to let go let go of my obsessiveness by being caught. I learned how to be more accepting and compassionate. I learned how not to interfere with my experience. I learned that it was useful to focus on my breathing as a refuge from getting caught up in my thoughts coming back to the breath, coming back to the breath. And so all those lessons all those skills were then skills that I've been able to use my daily life as well. There are times in daily life, it's been useful to be patient, to learn to let go to be more compassionate, to come back to my breathing, so I don't get caught up in the drama of the moment. stay balanced. So the idea of developing skills. So I said that when things are really difficult in meditation, it might be the best times for learning. It's also when things are good in meditation. So called good. As I've said earlier that one of the best opportunities of that good experience is how we lose that experience. How disappears, it'll certainly disappear sooner or later, there's no experience which is going to stay constant that didn't like, you know, a meditative you know, pill you can take. And then from then on, you're just gonna be, you know, floating on a cloud. That's the point, right? get enlightened and float on the cloud. There's no state or experience, no experience, which is going to stay constant. So, so, when when things are going when it was a nice state, what is it? How do you lose that? How do you lose your ease and your calm? And I think this is one of the I think great practices I really encourage people to do, is if you sit in meditation, and you experience some modicum of calm More than you usually have, doesn't have to be dramatic, just a little bit more than ordinary life, just enough to be a difference. Then as you come out of your meditation session, come out a little bit slowly and get up and start do your life a little bit slow more slowly than you normally would. So that you can pay attention to the first hints first movements of when you start losing that calm or ease or peacefulness. First movements have kind of speeding up and are getting agitated.

And then as soon as you start noticing that, take a couple of minutes to stop, maybe sit down in a chair and take stock notice what just happened. And then ask yourself a question. And the question is, was what I got caught up in what I got involved in? That got me more speeded up, causing me to lose my peace. Was it worth it? Was it worth losing the peace for this thing? asked that question. Was it worth it? So we're sacrificing your calm for this? And so, I mean, maybe it is. But don't be so quick to justify it. So for example, it means some small things that I learned this lesson in such simple things as getting up from meditation and going to get have breakfast, and lingering over the newspaper so that I became

late, who was going to be next? So I had to hurry and get everything ready and run out of the house. Was it worth lingering over in the newspaper? So that I can so I then I would lose my calm that I have for meditation. And if I didn't ask that question, then the next day I might have done the same thing. But if I asked that question, well, then I say, Well, what you know, maybe it's not worth it. So what do you what do you do? What do you get involved in? And I would suggest that many people never question the choices they make. That gets them riled up that gets them agitated or caught for spinning, partly because they don't have a vantage point of something to compare it to. and calm, the calmer you can get. The greater vantage point, the more learning you can do about that loss of the calm. And so the deepest piece of meditation and one of the values of that is it creates a dramatic contrast in order to study the subtle, deep ways in which we get caught involved, so we can question that and see it. So what can you learn from meditation What are the opportunities for you in meditation that you can learn about yourself? What would you like to learn about yourself through meditation? That's a very different question than how can I experience the right state? How can I get to calm and peaceful? What can you learn? What would you like to learn? So I thought it would be nice since we're a little bit fewer people being labor day we can maybe is if you would be willing to turn towards three other people's maybe groups of four here and share some thoughts you have, about what you might want to learn or what you could learn in meditation with them. This doesn't have to be your deepest, darkest secret secrets that you don't want to share with anyone. But rather, something you know it could be something relatively neutral or feels comfortable to say. And then when we've done that for a little while, then Let's be gathered here and you have a have a few moments to close and up around this topic. So okay.

anybody who'd like to share a little bit with that conversation was like or what you just anything. I wasn't privy to any of the conversations. Just the loudness. Yes. Could you pass the mic back there?

Well, I want to say first how much I enjoyed being in the group and discussing that question. And there were two things that stood out for me in the discussion and one was how useful it is to stop and look at the trigger that causes the negative feeling the resentment, whatever it is that's coming up. And then someone else in the group brought up that she sometimes think she's upset about a particular thing. But in the quiet she can realize that it isn't that at all. That it's something completely different. And it's makes it much easier to deal with it.

Great. So meditation gives you a different perspective to see what's really going on. Thank you.

It's very interesting for me to see. I didn't I didn't know what I exactly I was going to say had something on my mind. And as I was speaking, it became clear what it was Or clearer, more clear. And as I spoke, I realized that the thing I wanted to understand I had been understanding for a long time as I've been meditating and coming here and hearing Dhamma talks and, and reading it was something that was actually happening very deeply. Hmm. That's a good thing to learn. Rather than expecting you will learn it's already happening. Thanks, I didn't know that may approve that, you know, a lot more than you realize.

I was thinking that I was realizing that what I've been doing a lot is sort of preventive maintenance. So kind of along the lines of what you're saying with the newspaper since I started doing longer, longer retreats. I don't, I'm not able to like listen to the news in the morning or talk, show talk. Talk Radio and that kind of thing I used to have the radio on in the morning after breakfast or during, and I can't do that anymore. On one level, I feel a little out of it because you know, people go to, you know, chat with somebody, party, whatever. And, you know, I'm totally clueless about what's going on in the world to a large degree. And I guess that's not exactly a bad thing given but I do pick up I do pick up you know, the highlights, you know, of what one candidate or another whatever is going on, but, but also I realized

in meditation, my mind was sort of spun up this morning. And it related to something I had a phone call and that I've been thinking situation I've been thinking about and realized, oh, that maybe wasn't such a good idea. And so there's maybe ways to avoid having uncomfortable our wits would seem like unproductive settings. Great. Wonderful.

And I couldn't be assure you that the real height, the real upper level highlights have been the same for thousands of years.

And the next thousand whether I look at it or not,

it's right back in the can get the last one.

Something that I'm beginning to learn how to do is to become more comfortable with my uncomfortable emotional states when I'm out of meditation, that I can kind of return to the breath and just be mindful of how I'm feeling rather than rejecting it rather than saying, Oh, I'm doing this task at work and I feel anxious, that's bad. Instead, I just sort of step back right You've and say this is how it is right now. And that's okay. Great. Lovely.

Thank you. So I, one of the things that about learning and meditation, learning and Buddhist practice in general, which I've seen in myself, and I think it's probably true for most people, and maybe it's helpful for you to know this as well, if you don't haven't realized it yet, is that sometimes you have to reveal during the same thing. repeatedly. You know, you forget though you learn a new way or see a new way and a lot of it's just kind of learning it again. So from like today, today in my meditation sitting here with you, I really learned again, in a sense, reminded of that there's better things to do than to think.

So thank you all.