

# 2013-11-10 Stepping Out of The Mud of Identification

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

pull, mindfulness, situation, mud, people, feeling, respond, thinking, equanimity, wisdom, happening, home depot, bit, conflict, find, effort, investigate, exercise, investigation, present moment

## SPEAKERS

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So, first I thought I would somehow dedicate this talk to the people who have been suffering or killed by the typhoon and Philippines. When I reflect a little bit, you know, the numbers, the headline numbers is 10,000 people killed. But then many, many poor, more people probably are injured. And many, many, many, many more people are probably affected by that the family members, friends, community neighbors. And so the ripple of, of pain of suffering kind of goes out to probably hundreds of thousands of people. People have lost their homes and schools and many things. And it's certainly my hope that the practice we do here, the teachings we do here helps create to helps shape people who are able to better serve the world better care for the world around us. And if I didn't think that Buddhism made a difference like that, that probably wouldn't be teaching it. So with those people in our minds and our hearts on give a talk, and I'll begin by asking if you would go along with doing a short exercise. And so it's, you know, maybe a meditative reflective reflection. So, for this purpose, I think it's better if you would, if you could close your eyes, maybe get into your meditation posture. And part of the purpose of this is that in this posture, and with the eyes closed, many people find that they were able to reflect more deeply, or some deeper parts inside of themselves can kind of come forth in the reflection. So to take maybe a couple of minutes just to settle in. Take a few deeper Let's relax, let go.

Letting your breath returned to normal and you're reconnecting to yourself. centering yourself here in your body.

And this reflectional offer has two parts and for the first part

If you could try to recall or reconstruct how you are, how you respond to conflict when you are least wise when you are most stressed out, tired, frazzled, in a hurry. upset when you have the least access to your wisdom, what is your gut response your your instinctual response to being in conflict.

You tend to get angry or do you tend to get afraid

Do you tend to attack and blame? Do you tend to pull away Run away?

Do you have the ostrich approach to conflict? Putting your head in the sand? pretending it's not there many ways but how do you respond or react when you have the least access to your wisdom

and then take a few Deep breaths again. And as you exhale, perhaps, let go of that reflection those thoughts as you exhale, perhaps settling back into your body.

And now consider how you tend to respond to conflict. When you have your wisdom available. When you're relaxed and settled, grounded in yourself calm connected to you know what you know is wise. Maybe you have time to reflect and consider what Do what how do you attend to respond to conflict then?

What are some of the wise ways in which you could respond to conflict?

And then to end the short reflection you can take a few long slow deep breaths in your body again and when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

So, at least for now, I'm not going to ask for reports what came up for you but did some of you Except I noticed that there was a difference between how you respond to conflict one way without. Yes, enough of you, enough of you. Those of you didn't you talk to the ones who did. And the so on Friday I heard a saying that maybe it's fairly common in society and sounds like it should be probably is maybe I'm just very late to learn it. But the saying is when your house is on fire, it's too late to dig a well for water to douse the fire. Right. So it when your life's in crisis, it's maybe too late to start meditating. If you Meditation is going to help. You know, so you need to kind of dig a well when you can. And so in terms of spirituality or meditation, if that interests you as approach to life, it helps to, you know, start the work of meditation before the you really need it. So when time comes when things are challenging, you have the ability to stay calm, to be mindful the economists to bring the best tools and merit of the kind of meditative meditation or mindfulness into our life when we engage. So sometimes we find ourselves in crisis and conflict and difficulties and sometimes we don't. Sometimes, we say this way, the exercise I offered you was partly to point out that how we are can affect how we respond to conflict and to crisis that We might be relaxed and calm and centered and able to reflect and find our wisdom. Or we might be harried and stressed and not able to reflect deeply. So that we respond to different way they could be the same conflict to same crisis. But how we are depends affects how we respond to it. So how we are is variable. And the idea in path of mindfulness and Buddhism is that we can cultivate and develop ourselves so that the variable in life, us how we are that variable is something we can begin to have some mastery over some ability to choose some ability to come from a place that's why sustain us and this is important because it's very easy to be involved in certain situations, difficulties, challenging situations and be be pulled into the orbit of the crisis, the concerns, whatever, in such a way, that how our mood, our feelings or attitudes, even our thinking, is strongly conditioned by the event that we're in. As opposed to our ability to stay unconditioned by to stay unaffected by it in a wise way, but be able then to offer to change situation for the better if it's appropriate to change it. Rather than being conditioned by the event, we can condition the event rather than being affected by the event, we can have some possibility of, if we can't effect effect, effectively the event, we can at least have some ability to improve our own personal situation in the middle of it. The there's a kind of a graphic image given in the suttas in the discourses of the Buddha, which I'd like to apply to what I'm trying to say here. It's this is the way the image is given. Is that imagine a person who is has gotten that him or herself stuck in mud, the word is translated as mud, maybe it's better to think of quicksand. And, and so you're kind of, you know, you kind of walked out into the marsh and stepped into the mud and you're sunk down to your knees or into it, and you want to get yourself out, you're with your friend and both of you have walked into the mud and both of you sunk down to your knees. So then the image goes on, would be imagine that one of those people tries to pull out the other one. If you know both of you equally in the mud and the quicksand and you try to pull out the other one, chances are that yoke sink further down. Both your friend then sees you're going

down, decides to try to pull you out. Then, you know, your friend sinks and so it goes until you're both you know, a little bit too far under so in the same way, so with the in this analogy in the Buddhist discourses, it says in the same way, someone who is mired in delusion and greed and hate, cannot pull someone else out, who is also mired in delusion, greed and hate that one person has to be up in the dry land to be able to pull the other person out effectively. And so if you want to get help, don't get help from someone who's more diluted than you are. Or equally diluted, because chances are us pull yourself down. So, but I want to apply this to ourselves. That sometimes we are so affected by the situation we're in, we're conditioned by it, and our mood can get kind of so pulled into and caught up in it, that if we try to find a way out, we tried it, then we might try to find a way out in the term terms of how we're conditioned in the mood that we have. So for example, if we respond to a situation around us by being really angry, and then we try to use anger to get rid of anger, you know, are we thinking in angry terms, aversive terms? And that's what we're thinking? Are we trying to find a solution in with thoughts that are spinning around with aversion? It's, you know, very hard, you know, we might actually kind of pull ourselves further and further into the mud. So we have to find an other way to pull ourselves out. Besides the terms of the unwise ways in which we are operating, makes some sense. So I went to my 11 year old son yesterday, is wanted to work on his invention. He has to make an invention for his invention club at school. And it said, I don't quite understand what it is but has to do with some kind of pencil new brand new radical pencil holder. dispenser. And for this he for this purpose, he needed some kind of narrow tube. So we looked around the house no tubes, so I thought well maybe we'll go to Home Depot but the thing was that I think maybe I ate something that didn't work for me yesterday or something happened to me and I felt kind of didn't feel well for a while and really tired and but I kind of thought well, you know, this is a chance he wants to he's really enthusiastic about his invention getting this thing and it's a chance to do something with him. And so even though I don't feel so well I think I'll go with him to Home Depot is huge, you know, huge building supply company. So, Zoey went there. And you know, I couldn't quite pull myself out of my, this funk that I was in this kind of tired, not feeling good kind of situation. And so the hallway there, I didn't talk to him because I just like just trying to get there was enough. And, and so, by the time I got into Home Depot, I thought something else is needed now, because this is not how I am is not so. Good, pleasant. So, what I what I resort to

is mindfulness should be no surprise but, but mindfulness in that situation sprinkled are informed by investigation, curiosity. So I started getting curious and interested in what's going on what's going on with me what's going on in the situation around me. And for a while when he was dealing with his enterprise. I just stood there upright and just kind of looked around and took in was going on and curious about it all and curious but how he was and the more I try to be mindful and investigate to see understand what's going on the situation, the more what I could feel like almost like I was being pulled out of my mood that I was caught in. And no longer in it, it was there kind of not so far away. Like if I just stopped kind of paying attention carefully, I could have easily gone back into the ideations, the thoughts, the ideas, the feelings, that involved how I was feeling. But it didn't take much in that situation to use my mindfulness to pull myself out. And the feeling was being pulled out, like maybe not like pulled out a mud but like that analogy, and pulled out and then I felt free and independent from my mood or the situation how I was, and I felt much clearer and more present and, and it was quite, quite nice. So then I decided this is good enough. I think I'll keep doing this. I'll stay You know, it takes a little bit after a little bit of work to keep this and then as I did that, probably because of doing it The my my funk or wave was feeling tiredness, I had started to shift and fall away. And then I started feeling much better. My story Oh, thank you.

So the idea of so there's kind of summarize a little bit is that how we are effects how we respond to situations. If in the end, we might go into two situations that are very similar, but because we are

different, we respond differently and we don't have to be a victim of circumstances. Circumstances certainly can affect us we react we respond ways. But if we respond in ways that pull out what's not wise in us, if we get stressed or angry or upset or depressed or sad are kind of caught in it. It's sometimes very hard to deal with the situation on its own terms, meaning if you're angry or sad, sometimes very hard to kind of find your way through that in on the terms of the angry thoughts, the sad thoughts themselves. And it can be kind of like a maze and toss to go around and around in this maze, trying to figure out the, maybe the unfortunate example that I like to use is the clown in the circus, who there's, you know, as the ball and the circus floor, and the clown goes down to pick up the ball, but just before picking it up, bends over, the foot, kicks the ball a little bit, and so he can't reach it. So he has to walk further to bend down into his foot accidentally kicks it again, so he never can get it. So sometimes, certain ways of thinking and trying to figure out and solve problems. We just kind of pushing the ball further down. We kind of keep the momentum of the kind of thinking going, and rather than solving our problems through our thoughts, because sometimes it's the thinking itself, which is kind of the nature of the thinking itself, which is kind of what keeps the ball rolling. It's useful to find a way to be pulled out of our thinking out of the normal way of thinking are things you kind of ways. So that we can kind of see the situation in fresh ways. And then think in fresh ways. pull ourselves out of the situation. So we're not so influenced by the mood of the moment, the funk, the anger, the sadness, the fear, whatever it might be going on. And so this is one of the functions of mindfulness. And so very important to realize this because otherwise, it's easy to give too much authority to how we're feeling. Some people really identify very strongly with their thoughts. They identify very strongly with their feelings and emotions. They have so you know, so this is this is identify so strongly they think that's where the solution is, that's where the problem has to be addressed and dealt with. And sometimes, maybe they does. But we have to sometimes useful to be able to pull out of the mud First, get on dry land, and then be able to turn back and pull your partner out of the mud, pull up whatever needs to be done for your life. So how do we do this? I think that mindfulness and meditation helps can help a lot dramatically. So if we understand that mindfulness is not business as usual for the mind, it's stepping, in a sense, metaphorically stepping back and observing what's going on, rather than identifying what's going on. It's why some people like us are watching what's going on, as opposed to being in the drama, being in the soap opera, or what's going on. So mindfulness is very, very useful for this because mindfulness means Kind of stepping back and clearly recognizing what's happening, clearly clearly being present for what's happening without without being lost in the past and the future and things like that. I'm going to do an example for you of something that I use for kids. So if I had this bell in my left hand and the striker in my right, and if I can strike the bell like this, then makes a nice sound. So and that and that can only happen in the present moment, of course, right? advice if the bell you know, if I pick up a striker and hit the bell that was there yesterday, you know, it doesn't really hit. It's kind of like, if I'm thinking about the past, I don't really hit or meet the present moment very well. And so then it becomes if I'm thinking about the past, then it's a little bit like trying to strike the bell and go like This I miss it right I hit the left side of the bell

or if I'm thinking too much about the future and to try to strike the bell, strike the moment see in the moment, I miss it also right I hit the right side of the bell but if I'm really caught up and upset about the present moment and so I'm really holding on to a tight identified with a closely you know I'm holding a tightly the ballot next that kind of sound, I have to both hold the present moment likely. And I have to be able to strike hit the present on the present for the present moment to make the sound so, this idea of mindfulness to you know, to not be caught in the past. That's one of the ways we kind of are circling around in a sometimes in a maze that there's no way of getting out if we're easy to get caught in past thoughts. It's easy to get caught and future thoughts, those of you who have, who have planned the future and then planned again, and then planned again, and planned again. And then a few more times you plan and for safe measure, you plan some more. You know, I, you know, maybe it was useful, but I

know I've planned the future enough times to, you know, to realize it was a waste of time. What was I doing all those hours of planning, when the events never happened? I started giving up planning, being so caught up concerned with planning when I started to understand that my track record of predicting the future was very poor. So, you know, if I can, you know, it took me, you know, maybe 10,000 times to realize I was wrong 909,998 of those times what was coming with that Really, you know, that's not a very good investment in my time. So to be able to kind of pull back and see, and maybe you don't like the language of pulling back but pulling back, stepping back and seeing what's happening now, just like when I was at Home Depot, what's really going on right now and looking around being present. So that's one thing. The second thing that I think is very effective for helping us get a better perspective pulled out of the maze pull out of the mud so we can kind of address the issues in a better way is investigation to be able to be curious, interested in try to look more carefully understand better what is actually going on here. And remember, it's very delicate to do an investigation because it's easy because it's a little bit thoughtful, involves thinking it's easy to get pulled back into the into vacation because you're using thinking. So of course you know as hard as we use Thinking so that we don't get to. So we're like not meshed in the situation. But little bit kind of step back and looking at it. And one of the ways that I find most useful in which is mindfulness tuition teachers, is to investigate the situation as an event that's happening in the present moment. Only try to investigate how it's happening here in the presence. Now here now. The so yeah, and on Friday, we had our chaplaincy training here. And Paul Heller, one of the teachers of it did a wonderful exercise for people. He had them reflect about a situation in the last few days, that was quite difficult for them, and trying challenging for them to be and then, you know, kind of like their exercise I gave you kind of, you know, their wisdom wasn't there and they were challenged. And then they were supposed to go into dyads with a partner with someone else and tell the other person Only how they were feeling and reacting in that situation. And they didn't have to say anything whatsoever about the story. People like blue bit disoriented What? I can't tell the story. The story is like everything. No, no story, just how you were, how you responded how you reacted to it all. And, and so that kind of helped them look at how they were. Because it's easy when we tell a story, to get involved in blame and issues and, you know, and you know, it wasn't really my fault, justifying ourselves or whatever, but none of that just just how you were.

And then, after doing that for a while, then the exercise shifted to think of a situation in the last few days where the best part of you responded to a difficulty and challenge and something quite went well for you. Now, how did that feel for you don't tell the story, not the interview, just just how it was. So that was an exercise to help people stay with their own subjective experience of it all without getting involved in the story making mind. So investigation can be something like that is don't get involved in the complicated story aspect of it. But try to really see what's actually unfolding and happening in the moment right now. What is seen, heard, smell, taste touched, felt, what's going on, investigate, look more carefully what's going on more carefully. So for my situation at Home Depot. Not only did I kind of look around and what was going on at Home Depot, it's fascinating to look and see how people are there. And the smells wonderful. smells different aisles have different smells, but also, what's going on inside of me, how did I feel my tiredness? Well, there was a kind of little bit of feeling of kind of You know, mud mind going on my mind wasn't quite operating the normal way and I could feel kind of heaviness and weight that was operating. And so I was investigating looking and feeling in the present moment, this is what's going on. So it's kind of like putting a magnifying glass in the present moment and understanding as an as, as a present moment in phenomena more deeply, not thinking, the complexity of situations and, you know, what did I eat yesterday and why did I eat what I ate, I shouldn't have eaten that and, and I didn't really need to eat and you know, it might be useful to investigate for other purposes. But that pulled me out of the moment, back to home rather than investigating here. So in terms of being pulled out of the mud, investigation, and what's happening, that present moment, is often can be very, very helpful. The other thing that's helpful is putting effort into doing And I know I've



so come sometimes to the kind of the idea that, you know, I shouldn't have to make effort to be better off, it should just be given it could, you know, effort means that somehow somehow I don't deserve it effort means that, you know, that there's a big should effort means that you know, I'm burdened with requirements, you know, I, I made the, it's much better to get enlightened without any effort, you know, just, you know, if there's effort and without effort, then effortless way is so much more pleasant. That's what I want and you know, just have to read more books to find that way. But, so some effort is needed some engagement, some some waking effort, and sometimes when we're in a funk, it's hard to bring that effort up to arouse it. And so we need some courage, we some inspiration, some something to kind of, kind of bring a spark to kind of Do this work of mindfulness and effort. And then to use some of the teachings of the tradition, something that was also helpful is a sense of joy, or delight. And in fact, when I was at Home Depot and I could feel myself being pulled out of how I was feeling, there was a sense of mild delight, kind of, look, this is nice. This is good. And so to learn to appreciate that, in the present moment that you're that light that's happening, it can be hard to do because because there could be these very strong currents of thinking that pulls us back into the mud. I could feel the light I could feel present. And then it's so easy to have a thought, or Yes, Gil, but you ate that food and you should have known better and how could you have been such a mindless person spent your life devoted to mindfulness and you had that food, you know, this year a disaster. And so then they'll get pulled in right as opposed to appreciating the joy They're the delight in me fed by nourished by that. And then there's

the tradition also puts emphasis on things like tranquility and calmness, appreciating calmness, being calm, relying on calmness to help us find our way in these situations. It also puts emphasis on concentration on stability and being focused. So stay focused on the task at hand, find yourself stabilized in here, and then it puts emphasis on equanimity. One of the most beautiful emotions you can ever experience when it's done in the context of deep concentrated states is equanimity. And so in fact that yesterday at Home Depot afterwards as I got myself established in this kind of more open, relaxed present state of mind. I delighted in the equanimity that arose, because there were things happening, you know, desires and wants and questions and concerns of an 11 year old wanting a part that took a lot of, you know, conventionally would take a lot of patience, you know, and going here and going there and, and, but I didn't need any patience because with that exercise I was doing, I had equanimity, equanimity being I wasn't being pushed around by it, I wasn't being caught by it. I wasn't concerned with it. Okay, so just this is what's happening and my mind is relaxed now. And if this is what the kid wants, I'm happy to go and let him it's his it's his invention. It's his exploration of the world. It's his way of finding something. And my job is to accompany him. And, and in fact, turned out that he faked Aqua was needed better than I did. So it was a good thing that I backed off because he was wiser than I in the end. So mud, the mud of identification. We get it we identify so strongly with things, the mode of our preoccupation. And it's a great thing to step out of the mud. It's great to step out of the maze, rather than kind of constantly being pulled further and further into the mud or just spinning our around and around and all that byways and highways of the mazes of our minds. So, learning how to do this is a way of learning how to enter into any situation. To have some control or some way of monitoring self some ability to choose how to enter into In a situation, and to find your wisdom in a situation, how to shift and change yourself enough, so you can be wise and situation rather than unwise. And that's the hope that this practice that we're doing here is shifting you. So that more and more you're, you're kind of you live in the kind of way how you are is a way that helps bring forth your wisdom more and more in life rather than your own wisdom. So my hope is that you certainly are wiser people and in that, in that wisdom, you also become more compassionate for this world, the people of the world who suffer so thank you