

# 2014-01-11 Freedom From Identification

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## SPEAKERS

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So as I believe, number of you know, that one of the foundations for this practice, supports for this practice in its Buddhist context is that of going for refuge or having faith. And I'm not going to talk about refuge or faith. But I want to say that one of the functions of refuge or faith, one of the functions of this practice is to provide a really deep reassurance to be able to reassure us in some deep way. So that that which inside of us which is anxious that which inside of us which is distressed, tense, contracted, has a chance to thaw as a chance to relax and to settle. And there's a variety of ways that we get this reassurance. One is were inspired by teachings or the Buddha, or teachers or something. And there's something about the other practitioners we meet that really speaks to us and shows us a possibility of waiting and being in the world. And it's reassuring to know that this is a possibility. Because maybe growing up, we never saw another option everyone around us, we're all running around being anxious, that that's what you had to do, maybe I know some families of origin. The kind of the currency of social exchanges, is worry. And that's how you show love is by worrying and if you don't worry, then it means that you don't love you know, you don't care. And so to meet someone who seems to care and maybe to love, but who doesn't is not anxious or worrying, can be reassuring. Oh, there is another way. It can be reassuring to have a practice like mindfulness, to have a practice that of settling in Relaxing practice that helps us work through some of the challenging issues of our lives. It can be simply relaxation practice, that we sit and meditate mindful. And some of the tension that we built up and accumulated seems to dissipate sometimes without us having solved any of our problems. And that can be very reassuring because the mind will often think that it's solving our problems, that's that we're going to get the solution. And so the mind then will think and wonder and figure out and sometimes the constant problem solving of the mind is the very thing that keeps us from seeing the solutions very thing that keeps us agitated and going. And so to do a simple concentration, practice, breath meditation practice, and just sit, be quiet and something begins to relax. Just physically relax, and then we feel that the mind relaxes, and somehow with anxiety is not there. It can be very reassuring. Be assuring as there's another way besides the usual fixit approach, it can be very reassuring to have like a mindfulness practice where maybe you look more deeply into yourself. And you begin seeing what's actually operating in there. It all seemed like just a huge chaotic mess or just, or a big black box, the mind is a black box. And you wonder why you feel and think and say things just like just, they just come out of the black box. But part of the function of mindfulness is begin seeing the black box inside of it, and seeing some of the motivations, some of the reactions, some of the beliefs that are operating under the surface that propel us to do what we do. And some of the feelings, some of the wounds we have some of the some of the tensions we carry that propel us to act in certain ways some of the inner pressures and so to see it and then begin to have those be released or relaxed or not have this power over us. is very meaningful.

It can be very helpful in the course of a variety of things, but meditation practice in other ways, to not just relax some of the tension and anxiety we have. But it can be very reassuring to experience states of joy states of love states of peace, that can come through practice can come in other ways as well. And so to be really all there is these things. So that's reassuring, but it's also reassuring to experience them because in the experiencing them kind of like we've been nourished and nurtured. This is kind of like up get fed and nourished by these kinds of experience. And again, something inside of us can begin to sometimes heal. Relax, let go. When we're suffused with feelings of well being with happiness with peace with love, compassion, that can sometimes occur in the course of practice or doing practice. As I focus on that are different things. Sometimes people experienced this on retreat, where we stay long enough on retreat, to disconnect from the usual concerns you have that sometimes states of peace or well being well up, and they're very reassuring to have this reassuring for the heart to know that. So I gave this long introduction to say that there's a there's a very interesting other approach to practice that's more pointing towards the liberation aspect of the practice. And that is that we're not looking for a particular experience to be the experience. You know, the point is to be calm, the point is to be peaceful, the point is to be relaxed. And only if I get to that place where I can be concentrated, super mindful, deeply relaxed, then I'll be a good Buddhist I'll have arrived and everything will be fine and If I'm not there, then bad Buddhist or I'm not up to it, or I'm just struggling or you know, it's whatever. There's all these ideas that arise. And so that we want to be very careful not to set up experiences as being the ultimate point of what we're doing here. The experiences of various kinds have their role and their place, they can be very reassuring. But the point is not to have the experience ultimately. And in fact, it's one of the things that the number of Western teachers have pointed out, that maybe more so than in Asia, Americans tend to be very focused on having experiences. And it you know, and so they go to retreat and have some great experience and then go back and tell your friends I had this great experience. And then the next retreat you go to you don't have a great experience. And so like, Oh, no, no, I have nothing to tell you. I spent all this time and middle surfer there's no good experience. We're having good experiences good writing. Tell your colleagues in the world you know, wow, I think is great peace, great joy, and it was like, it was ecstasy. You know, it's just and then next week I'm going to go to Costa Rica and go zip lining and that'll be a great experience. And some teachers, Buddhist teachers have said there's this seems to be kind of experienced junkies really focused on experience as being the point I would like to offer another whole other way of understanding practice. And that is that the practice is about not identifying with anything. So not to interpret our experience through the filter the concepts of me, myself and mine. And so, the me thing in Buddhist language is to take something to be who you really truly essentially are. This is who I really am. Myself thing is to take some aspect of what you're about you don't see it as essentially you, but it's mine. And so you know, people identify where their hair or their clothes some people spend more time caring for what they are focusing on what they're going to wear, then what they say because they identify so strongly with their clothes and how they present themselves. And so, this is my you know, the clothes that some people maybe it is me, but it certainly myself you know, some part of me or my hair or my you know, different aspects of my house or my car or some of them attribute we kind of you know, associate ourselves with it, we identify ourselves with it.

And then the mind means that we take responsibility ownership over this. This is really up to me, it's mine to possess, it's mine to have control over and feel very tight around this. And these are all projections, interpretations. On top of experience, they can be have some semblance of accuracy accuracy to it. There are things which conventionally we all agree, their social agreement are yours your things you can say it's mine. So we know when you leave here, this hall and you know you you know I think we we allow the fact that you could say those are my shoes. Excuse me, I think you put on my shoes. You know, the shoes don't care who takes them home. I see the shoes sitting out there couldn't care less if it went home with something different they came with here. But you know, it's a little

bit awkward and you might end up with shoes which are too small for you and they hurt to walk home and you know, or this choose that to kind of don't really represent who you really are very well. So you know you don't want to wear those shoes. And I remember back in the Palo Alto days I ended up with someone else's Birkenstock shoes and I was kind of you know I tried to find the owner but never found them but I was kind of content with exchange because the new ones were much better. They were newer and my role more now. Maybe someone felt sorry for me but the so conventionally you know, we something is mine is okay. But we can get caught up in mine. So for example, all of you, most of you, I think, you know, maybe had one place in the hall that you took as your place and you didn't actively think this is my place. You weren't thinking you wouldn't even notice that you kind of claimed it. Until you went to the bathroom and came back and someone was sitting in it. You know, you took us zafu off the shelf. You put it there carefully on the floor. And you came back and you'll look, they're sitting on my zafu. But when you put it back on the shelf, then the day, you can come back next week and you won't remember which software is yours, you know, but somehow you've made it yours. And so this creation is an idea that we make, this is mine. And it's not necessary to have that idea. It's possible come back from the bathroom and just look around say, Well, where do I sit now, as opposed to that I have to get my place again. So, to identify to take things is defining this is who I am, or this is the or define it as this is mine or my possession, our attributes, our feelings, our emotions, our states, is one of the sources of suffering when we cling to that hold on to it. And so one of the ways that plays out for meditators is identifying With the states of mind they have. So the mind is agitated, the mind is calm, we're happy, we're unhappy. And so there's all kinds of mood swings we can have. And because sometimes a meditation goes well, we feel have good states of mind. We strongly identified this is successful. I'm a good meditator. Now. I know I am on a good track. Now I have something to write home about. That's nice, whatever, all kinds of ways we identify. And so I mean, I'd like you to have good experiences, but it's much much more interesting not to identify with it. So the analogy I think is nice. Is that the weather, the weather comes and goes. There's all kinds of ways the weather can be except in California in wintertime, that there is now pretty constant. But you know, you have big storms. You could have, you know, sunny weather, you can have foggy weather. All kinds of things. And most people, you might have preferences around the weather. But we don't identify with the weather. We don't spend a lot of time thinking the weather is my weather.

I'm responsible for the weather, and I better fix it. Generally, you know, that's a waste of time to be thinking about the way and generally use the weather's. What it is, and maybe I don't like it right now, but I will wait until it passes. Or maybe I like it now, but I know it's gonna change. So I'll enjoy it while it's here. So we don't identify so strongly with the weather. So in the same way, our moods and mind states, we don't have to identify with that we can treat it like the weather. Sometimes we're agitated and unconcentrated sometimes we're in a funk. Sometimes we're feeling happy. Sometimes we're still in quiet. And all those things can happen. And in addition, there can be this little hook We hook ourselves on to it we identify with us we use that to define ourselves, or we use it as a, as a way of showing that we're successful or not successful, or we use it to this is mine. So one of the classic things in meditation practice is to be sitting here quietly minding your own business, maybe getting calm and quiet, feels very good. And someone comes in really noisy. Someone has a lumberjack approach to entering meditation hall, they don't take off their big lumberjack boots, they pound into the hall. They sit down and they probably ran a marathon because it takes them 10 minutes to stop. You know, and, and so then the mind thinks that person is disturbing, my calm. That person just took my calm away. So there is an example of identifying my calm. It's my practice. Mind mind mind, calm comes, come goes, the person comes in, the mind gets agitated. agitated mind is supposed to my agitated mind. So these things come and go. And what some people have found that it's very helpful sometimes sometimes to switch the way we talk to ourselves and sometimes drop the pronouns we use. So for ourselves, so, first pronoun, so for example, if you're feeling sad, it can really you can sometimes you can really, if

you're really sensitive, you can feel the various big difference between saying to yourself I'm sad, my sadness, versus saying, sadness, their sadness, or same thing with pain. people identify a lot with pain, but it's possible to just feel the difference between saying to yourself, or kind of almost like saying to yourself, my pain versus the pain. And some people will find that it's freeze things up a little bit loosens things up. It can be overdone which some practitioners have done, where they never use the first person pronoun. And at some point, they're so disattached or disassociated from themselves that you can like who's anybody there you know, there's a lot of heat, a lot of heat and fire and a lot of energy in my head and, you know, just it's just energy and heat. But you seem really angry. He, you know, kind of pulled back so far, you know, and not really, or, you know, there are others anger and there's punching you out. You know, so there's sometimes so disassociated. Don't take responsibility for it. In metta meditation, it's a good place though the meditations are great laboratory. Meditation is a great, a very unusual place when you sit down to meditate. Some people call it a temple, your body is a temple, you meditate the sacred spot. And one of the things that makes it very special is that in the course of the meditation within reason, you're committed not to move. And when you're not moving in meditation, and you're not going to speak in meditation, you are probably not going to cause a lot of harm in the world. You're safe. So in meditation is a time where you have permission not to take responsibility for anything. You don't do it. You take some responsibility for your relatives, you know, because it provides possibility for your job as well. It was happening at work, you don't take responsibility for your, you know, mental state, you can just forfeit responsibility.

Not forever. But to experiment and discover what's it like to dis identify what's it like not to carry with the burden of responsibility. For me when I had to learn this a lot, because my Achilles heel is my sense of responsibility. I'll take responsibility in all kinds of ways. And just it'll really drew me in if I don't pay attention. And so be sitting in meditation, not to identify means also to let go of, I'm responsible, it's up to me. I have to save the world. No one else is going to do it. I have to save the person I have to fix something I have to but to let go. To use that kind of sacred space have not had a meditation to be experiment with putting aside responsibility. If, if you try to put it aside in normal life, sometimes the voices are so strong, like you have to do it, it's important to do it to be responsible. But at least in meditation where you can't do anything anyway, you know, because you're committed to not moving. Since you can't do it, can you drop it and then later you can pick it up again, it's a very important thing to learn this, this process of this identification, non identification, so much so that non identification is very closely related to non clinging or non attachment, because generally, the kinds of identifications that cause us trouble involve clinging to some idea that we have that how I should be what you know, something. So to begin to sit down and meditate and have your experience coming, go, change like the weather and learn not to identify it is very helpful. And this is where having uncomfortable, unpleasant experiences and meditation is really good, really useful. Because they're you're much more likely to be clearer to see the cost of identification. It's clear to see the pain of it. And it's easier to kind of begin maybe sometimes letting go of it. Whereas the things go really well and pleasant. There's no problems. I'm not identified. No way. I'm just so peaceful and relaxed, and I'm just doing so well. And I'm not identified. I'm not a kind of person who identifies and I don't think about myself very much and that everything's going really well for me. No problems for me until the noisy person comes in, or until no, I don't know what you know, the teacher says, It's nice. We had this quiet day so far. But now we're all going to turn to each other neighbor. And we're going to describe to the other person in the hall, some deep personal secret you'd never wanted to share to anyone ever before. You know, boy, he then I wasn't even good place. I was in such a good place. I was so calm and a teacher, he just blew me out of the water. And now I'm all upset and I need to write to the, to the Vipassana teachers union. You know, how could he have done that? It's, he ruined my good, my good meditation. And so in fact, you were identifying it, you said, then when it's really pleasant, it's so much more difficult to see it. It's a sign of invisible and so it's a radical thing to practice non identification. And to see that in the non

identification, there's a gap Or space, in the mind or in the heart, where we don't get we're not caught by things we're not entangled, what's going on, and in that space, there's freedom. There's freedom and then to vacation. If you don't find freedom and non identification, if you don't feel sense experience, freedom in non attachment, you're probably still attached to something. probably still identifying to something. The idea is to be able to the Buddha talked about having knowledge and vision of liberation. So, vision is something we see directly with your mind's eye. Knowledge is a real understanding in the moment. So you really have to really know it. But there's a freedom which is kind of quite an experience. We might say I haven't experienced freedom, but it doesn't have any flavor, color, shape. It doesn't have any texture doesn't have any substance. Just kind of it's more like it's more akin to space, then all the things we can see.

So, non identification. So you might think but this little bit, my hope is that this talk is a little bit provocative for you, for you to reflect a little bit about how you relate to your experiences, do you identify, do you have preferences and do you categorize different things as better and worse, more desirable and less desirable? And if you do it, do you then identify with one do you and if you do identify or attached to one side or other that Is that really necessary? Freedom is not found and experience freedom is found in the non clinging to experience makes some sense. So we Have a few minutes if any of you would like to ask a question about that or question about practice today, and you're welcome to ask

for the mic, anyway. Yeah.

You're talking about

experiences, but not

try not to identify things as mine or my identity.

If I'm somebody who wants to change that way,

how can I become a better detective on myself?

Seems like the first step is to start noticing when you get that

Yes. That's it.

The one one interesting way is to look at the words you choose to use either in both in speech, loud speech, but also if you talk to yourself in your mind, notice how often the first person pronoun is used. And it's again it's quite it's quite some people it's very clear how often they use the word I and you live in Japan so it was a shock to me when I was not shocked but it was a surprise to me when I was in Japan. I was learning Japanese and so I would try to speak Japanese like you speak English. And in English you use the first person pronoun a lot I and Japan you don't use the first person pronoun very rarely. And so I would start every sentence with any have any say in Japanese, it's it's kind of cumbersome to say I and in Japanese you have to four syllables, so Watashi wa. And so I will go, you know, it's like saying, you know, it's kind of like saying, as for me, you know, if you start everything as for me, I'm going to the store. It's kind of like this As for me thing. And so it's I kind of began feeling like I was a sore thumb in Japan because Wow, in English, we use the first person pronoun and a lot. And so then, and so that made me interesting to explore more that use. And sometimes it's over done. It's, you know, you can feel it and see the identification through how we speak. And also sometimes in the mind,



you can see how much is self referential? And sometimes it takes a little analysis of how we think, to see yes, you know, how I'm thinking is a kind of identification I'm measuring myself and my well being and my status and my, you know, by what's going on and so all about kind making myself safe or building myself up or protecting myself or defending myself and it's all about. So that's one way is to pay attention learn that. Another way is to notice if you're hurt. Because when when we identify with something, if there's clinging and then and then in the identification, then there's pain, there's there's suffering, there's stress, there's tension, there's pressure, there's something that some discomfort, and part of the advantage of mindfulness training is that it heightens our sensitivity. So we tune in more and more things we tune into more is the times when there's stress in the system. And so then we can start so if you feel the wind drag of identification, then then we turn around and look at it. If there's no discomfort going on, maybe there's no problem. So sometimes we just wait until suffering comes in. Then we study it. But you don't have to go and drum up suffering. Okay? Yeah.

Without now, this was amazing to me. You can just make sentences our verbs and objects. And that's very

Yeah, great.

Yes, I think that depends what you mean by identification. Identifying something just sometimes English means just recognizing what's there. And to know that I'm the one who's recognized and can be quite innocent. But it depends a little bit on the on the weight that's put on the I, I am recognizing, you know, I'm such a good person, I'm a great meditator, I'm really seeing what's going on here. As opposed to you know, it's kind of like just a whisper, you know, there is just a whisper, I am recognizing what's going on. It's like not that important that. So some people are really have a very strong sense of identity. So So, you know, so what, oddly enough seems oddly enough, I was surprised when I learned this. That the more shy a person is, the stronger sense of self they have. The more arrogant the person is, the more stronger sense of self they have to write. But just kind of like you know, both of them involve strong sense of self just they play out different ways. And I always thought that someone who was shy, didn't have much sense of self. But it happened when it's really strong. It usually comes with so it depends how it's done. Simple identification like there's some identities we'd like you to kind of likely hold on to it if you're a man or if you're a woman and public facilities has a men's woman women's room, we would like you to kind of know that identity can keep keep keep that in the clothes don't say Well, I'm not I don't identify with any of it. You know, and doesn't matter to me and you go into a bathroom where it causes a riot. So that answer your question, okay, or maybe one more. If you have any

I hope I didn't frighten you from asking questions. You don't know how to ask a question. You don't know how to ask a question without an eye.

When I'm tired, I

go into volunteering, or I didn't get on a whole lot of like email lists or I just, you know, I have to say I don't do very much at all. And I, you know, go through the day, and I very seldom hear my name spoken. I very seldom have it, you know, I'm not asked a question and I'm not told very much and I don't have to force opinions about anything or come up with some kind of, you know, this is how I know well answers that question. It's a very monastic life that I didn't really know I wanted. But as I sink more deeply into this sort of silent, non productive life a real absence of product, like I'm not quilting or anything. I I am enjoying a non I

great I'm

just I am enjoying disappearing into work housework and into just what it is. And I love not being me. I love love Having to be me for anybody.

Wonderful. It's delightful sounds like your daily life is like you call them monastic for the lake community. It's like being like being on retreat. Good for you. So, thank you. So thank you all. So I said this most of the day Long's like this, this these long silent day Long's are one of my favorite things at IMC because I think it's a very, very, very important and significant way of practicing, where you're really left with yourself without a lot of input from a teacher instructions and just to kind of engage in it, engage the practice, do the practice hour after hour, and see what the changes are to kind of be with the unfolding and, and begin kind of understanding better how your practice and what you're doing and it's a great thing to do. It's something I feel very strongly, we don't just do for ourselves. We do it for everyone. We do For the people we practice with here, and we do it for the world at large. It's a great offering, I think, to do this kind of inner exploration, inner discovery, and beginning to find a place to be come from greater freedom and compassion for the world. So, thank you very much for coming and being here for the day.