

2014-04-27 Reflections On Ignorance

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SPEAKERS

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I would like to reflect with you on that topic of ignorance. Ignorance is, is often seen as one of the core causes of our suffering our difficulties in life. And so to spend some time reflecting on ignorance, ignoring and the role it has and how it might function in your life and how overcoming ignorance might be a great help, I think it's a worthwhile thing to do. And there might be many flavors or forms of ignorance. So maybe the few words I'll say this morning, maybe will be just enough to prompt you to go home and reflect a little bit about how ignorance what role ignorance has had for you and your life. And how and what how you might address The topic of ignorance if it's still something which is active for you. So I would like to begin by reading this little story from my book, a monastery within. And it's the story is titled appropriate instruction. One of the monasteries, old monks had become a hermit, living deep in the mountains, a two and a half day hike over difficult mountain paths. Many visitors made the trek to receive advice and teachings from the old man. He was he was reputed to have an uncanny ability to know just what each visitor needed. Prior to giving instruction, the Herman the hermit asked that the visitor promise not to tell anyone What advice or instruction he or she received? After the promise was made, the hermit would simply say, What are you not willing to pay attention to? This was the only thing he would ever say to anyone seeking his help. Many visitors were first were first perplexed by this question. But by the time they had to walk the two and a half day trek out of the mountains, they invariably would praise the hermit for giving them just the instruction they needed to hear. What are you not willing to pay attention to? What are you ignoring? Whatever happened to you if you carried that question with you for a while, and just keep reflecting what am i ignoring? What am I not paying attention to? What am I not willing to pay attention to in my life. So there word for ignorance in the Buddhist languages of bija. Not knowing or ignorance. And there is two ways of looking at this topic. One is the active act of ignoring. And so sometimes the mind will actively ignore what's happening. And there's two ways of ignoring. One is movement away from reality. What's happening is difficult. And so we don't want to face it, we only deal with it. And so we, we ignore it, we withdraw, we pull away. The, the other is the movement, not away from reality, but towards fantasy. The two are closely related, of course, that one has to do with a version and one might have more to do with desire. So Time's motivation to move away from reality as more we're so interested in the fantasy and that we might have. So, we can either want to deny or avoid or turn away from what's happening. Or we could move into all kinds of wonderful fantasies we might have. There's a Charlie Brown Brown cartoon where Charlie Brown is talking to Linus. And he says to Linus. Oh, so you don't think my dad knows how to fix things? Well, just the other day. there was all this rattling sound coming from the engine of the car. And Linus says, Don't tell me he stopped and fix it. And Charlie says, No, he turned up the radio.

So it's kind of ignoring the problem by overriding it. By May. clowder by focusing on something else. And so, the idea of both aversion turning away and desire turning towards being central to the act of

ignoring the active act of ignoring. So what are some of the things that you think people, not you, of course, but what were those other people? What are some of the things that people actively ignore? Maybe have a list of them, some of you? What have you experienced, that people choose to ignore in a way that's not helpful to ignore? What death? What? addiction emotional pain, content conflict the big end Hold on your chest that feels like it needs to be filled. Aging. Anger. What? War? All the boredom, anxiety. What a great list. Let's go home and watch television, bank balance. Continuing the earlier kind of comment, how dirty our houses the dishes, the laundry taxes. I had a friend whose husband ignored his taxes for many years. And then he died and she she was left having to try to make sense of it was a heart hard for her.

So, I mean, there's good reason to ignore these wires what are some good reasons may not maybe I shouldn't use Word good, but what are some strong reasons motivating reasons to ignore these things? Because they're painful. They're all painful for some of them, we can't do anything about them. But just inconvenient. Yeah. What? habit? Fear sorry. Overwhelming just overwhelming to face it. Yeah. We have all these shoulds so how does shoulds help us ignore

Oh, I see so when there's a should hanging over it since obligation, it's so much more weight than it needs to. And just seems too difficult or too burdensome then. Yeah. Yes. laziness. That's a good one. Confusion not knowing what to do. Those things aren't mine. Oh, those problems are not my problems. The dishes are not my dishes to clean. This aging is not my aging. After all, this is this Buddhist teaching is great. It says that, you know, not to take anything personally so we can just ignore everything. Procrastination, perfectionism, it just becomes too difficult to try to do anything because feeling powerless. Yeah. other priorities resentment presentment do you resent that we have to do them we take care of them. Why do I have to do this?

Sorry, wanting to wanting to keep the peace? Yeah, avoiding conflict. big one.

Not knowing how to do it. So there's boy are there good reasons. So the mind, you know, in the background of the mind, that kind of thinking would be those reasons would be operating in Many times their unconscious or subconscious means that we're ignoring them. We're not noticing we're ignorant of the underlying motivation of why we would be ignoring what's going on. We're ignorant of the causes of ignorance of ignoring. What's the cost of ignoring like this? twin tension problem gets worse. This just pile up. More conflict fear guilt loneliness self bashing anger agitation, agitation mindfulness, lack Mindfulness. Yeah. Apathy various kinds of losses. Could you give one example your tax exempt Yeah. gains weight gain, weight gain. Yeah health problems if we ignore thanks. grief, grief consequences to others. Yeah. Regret lose access to part of our hearts kind of alienation from ourselves.

Settle down, shutting down This is a great, thank you. So what a heavy talk. The so what one of the teachings of Buddhism is that when we ignore when we're involved in ignoring, ignoring us, in part is a choice. You need to use the word ignoring, or choosing to ignore that ignoring has consequences. And then one of the consequences that has been mentioned is that Buddhism puts a lot of value on is that it shapes our disposition. It's kind of like maybe like a habit, it becomes a way it shapes how we then further see reality in the world. And that and how we see the world then affects the choices we make about how to be involved with the world, and the choices we make about how to be involved. Then, if those are based on erroneous assumptions, then They come back and bite us. Yes.

The difference between ignoring something and guarding the sense doors so there's a very important practice in Buddhism that sometimes translated into English as guarding the sense doors. And the sense doors are you know, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the touch, and the mind that are

six the six in Buddhism and the and guarding it can can that expression are they teaching and guarding the sense doors can seem like you're supposed to ignore what's going on? Like, just keep your eyes down sometimes and, and, you know, don't look at the don't look at something that's gonna make you fill you with lust for example, or fill you with anger. Just keep your eyes down and avoid that. And so that can seem like ignoring Something I like to call it, I like to call that practice of safeguarding ourselves at the census. So that has a little bit different connotation for me that you stay present for what comes in at your senses. They sense data that comes in what you see and hear and smell. And you pay attention there that you don't pick it up in ways that cause trouble. So if you see something that's very attractive, you see it, you recognize the attractiveness of it, and you leave it at that way, you don't let it go any further. Or you see something that's, you know, repulsive, you might notice that it's unpleasant to look at, but just leave it there. And you don't get involved to the whole story involved need to reject it or do something with it. So it has to do but it takes a lot of mindfulness to be right there at the moment. When we first perceive something before we kind of the inner inner mind starts making a story and activities about it. That's how I like to see that practice but Sometimes it is important and valuable to to knowingly not let our attention focus on certain things. Because we know that if we focus on those things, some unconscious habit in the mind is going to take over. So, if you you know certain subjects of the media if you know if you turn towards it doesn't do us much good. Looking at fashion magazines, they say for some people is very detrimental. Looking at pornography is detrimental looking, you know, certain certain certain things that people look at us know that I better not even get close to that because I get hooked. I'm addicted to these things. And so I better turn away or if, if you know, you have a habit of every time that You know, you go down a certain Hall at work by certain office, your resentment for a coworker, just because you reminded the person see their name on the door or something. And you just get filled with, you know, resentment entity. And you've done that, you know, now, you know, 52 times. And you're after a while you realize this is not useful for me or for anybody. I know that I'm troubled by this relationship. And when I get the resentment going, I don't see very, very clearly. So I think I need to guard myself since there's I need to not see that that door that name. So if I have a choice, I'm going to take a different hallway and not be reminded. So that's kind of being wise about what the impact the world has, and what what it what we want to bring in and what we don't want to bring in. And hopefully it's not a an ignoring of something, but it's actually a heightened awareness of the consequences and a wise choice. But what not to pay attention to. So conventionally we can call it ignoring maybe I'm gonna ignore that door. But, but I think that that there's a different connotation of what this ignoring means that Okay, good.

So there's this active activity of ignoring in the world of and then there's a kind of withdrawing ourselves turning away, and then there's turning towards fantasy. And it's useful to consider a little bit of what your comments common tendency in fantasy sizing is. A you fantasize more. constructive fantasies are more destructive fantasies. Are they more fantasies of romance and wonderfulness and how are you going to you know, delusions of grander and all kinds of wonderful things or they more delusions of destruction and mayhem and fear and with all the dire things are going to happen. It's kind of useful to start seeing the patterns and the themes that you have. Because sometimes if you see, if you step back like oh, keep a, you know, a mental record or physical record, and really start seeing Wait a minute, I'm always fantasizing this particular way that sometimes can help take away some of the authority of those fantasies, some of the lower some of the power of them, if we see Wow, I'm always doing it this way. But if we're just kind of don't see the pattern, just see this particular fantasy in this moment. in its own way, its authority, its value, it can be much stronger part of the part for some people. Part of the benefit of going on a silent meditation retreat is that they are not they don't get distracted from noticing our And distracted by their fantasies. You know, you've seen her over and over and over again, you know, same kind of fantasy, same kind of fantasy, you know, in your daily life, you know, it's come and go and life interrupts us. But meditation, retreats, nothing. Sometimes nothing interrupts us. And you see, wow, I'm spending a lot of time thinking about these particular things. And there's a lot of wisdom and come from

seeing how frequently it is. Because we can start, stop being seduced by them, stops, giving them value and get tired of them. And there's a very wise way of being sick and tired by some things. I'm sick and tired of having the same thoughts over and over again in the same fantasy. So fantasy is one of the ways that we ignore and, and we go into you just tune out to what's going on. So when we sit down to meditate, the idea is to stop ignoring One of the things we want to stop ignoring is the present moment. We want to really start noticing what is actually happening here. And it can be as simple for people who are fantasizing or thinking a lot. Sometimes it's very helpful to actually say something in your mind that helps you be present. And it can be as complicated as saying, right now. I'm aware of, and then you fill in the blank, and then you fill it, but then you kind of let you kind of be present for what it is. And then you do it again, quickly if you need to, before you wander off and you know, some kind of fantasy right now what I'm aware of his ex. Right now when I'm aware of his ex, and you keep but keep it up so that you keep recognizing what is actually happening for you in the present moment. Don't avoid the present moment, don't ignore it. When my mind is busy as one of the things I like to Do Is Just say the word here. I say it here. And it's kind of like it's not like a command to a dog. It's more like an opening to what seems more like sense of opening here. What's here? It's more like a question like what's here. And here, and then I think a moment just experience what's here. And it usually when I do this, because my mind is spinning and thinking a lot. So what's here is active mind. And so that's what I tried to get rid of it. I just opened and be aware of it. This is what it's like. But generally, I have to do it again quickly. Because otherwise get pulled in. So here, here, and after doing that for a while, when the thinking mind gets seen clearly and recognized for what it is, and when we don't participate in itself completely, as when we're lost in it. We keep coming back and recognizing what's happening, recognizing and do it in a regular way every second, every couple of seconds, it begins taking some of the food that keep that keeps the thinking going. And so generally starts to quiet down. At some point is quiet enough. We don't have to use this technique of using a thought to help us stay present. Because they're not now just the intention to stay present. Might be enough. Just stay present, come back be here.

So as we stay present, there's two ways to proceed. Well, they don't, they're not opposed to each other, they can work together. One is that we just start becoming aware of what is going on in our minds. Because if you're meditating, you're getting quiet. Sooner or later, you'll notice what you're doing your reactions, your your your judgments, here, involvements, you know, just What's going on in the mind, you'll know what the mind is choosing to pay attention to, you'll know what the mind is ignoring. You'll notice what how the mind turns away and what, what it turns towards, you start noticing the activity of the mind. And you start noticing that activity is driven by either aversion or desire, wanting or not wanting. And then, as you do this process, you can start questioning the value and the truth or the usefulness of these movements of desire and aversion. And one of the ways to do it is to turn towards what the actual experience of desire and experience of aversion actually feels like. Sometimes people are blinded by what they want, by the object they want or by the object of The reversion? Because, you know, it makes sense, you know, we should we need to human beings need to be concerned with what they want what they don't want. And so we should, you know, rearrange the world. So it all works for us and the rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. And so this constant kind of looking at the objects of desire and aversion. What we try to do in mindfulness practice is to open up the awareness wider to take in this the other half of the equation, not the object, but rather what what it's like to be desiring what the subjective experience is, like, of having a version. What's that like? And one of the things we'll find you'll find is that, that involves contraction or agitation or activity of the mind. Which if you tune into you see, is tiring to do is stressful to do. So that's so to see that and become aware of that meditation then then this starts to become willing to step back from it not be so invested in those kinds of activities, perhaps even let go of them. And let the mind become quieter, and let the mind become quieter. So sometimes it's just sitting there and noticing what's happening, noticing what's happening, knows what's happening, opens up to start noticing what's going on in the inner life. And then this inner life begins to

unravel or settle down. Very interesting thing happens that at some point, the movement inward into our minds into our hearts, becomes a movement outwards. You would think that these Buddhists are so selfish, right, just kind of going in and in and just focusing on themselves on themselves. But it's not that way at all. Rather, as we go in At some point, the activity, the agitation, the movements of mind, that keep us keep the separation of self and other that keep us kind of tight and small and our mind begins to dissolve. And the mind then begins to open up again. And the relaxed mind is an open mind where awareness takes in the world again, maybe not with your eyes closed, exactly. But when you come out of meditation, there's a sense of kind of being connected and available and open in a way that's quite lovely. Very, very, very profound. So there's a kind of movement in and then a movement out, it's kind of like you crouch before you jump, you know, you have to kind of first crouch and then you can leap. So first you go in and then you can come out in a different way.

So what I said there's two ways of approaching this present moment. One is just to be open to whatever here just kind of let it kind of reveal itself as it does. The other way is to choose to focus on particular things. So of all the different things that can be aware of in the present moment, you don't just let it be random, whatever appears, but you choose those things which are more useful to pay attention to. And the tradition says that one of the things that's very useful to pay attention to is what's called the Four Noble Truths. So in the present moment, it's useful to notice when there is tension, stress, a strain, contraction, suffering, whatever the word you want to call a sorrow, some dis ease uneasiness, don't ignore disease, uneasiness. It's actually very important. When I was, you know, back when I was a hippie, I went to live on one of the largest hippie communes in America at the time, there were 800 hippies living in the commune, in Tennessee place called the farm. And it was a great place. That was I was kind of my my entryway to kind of a spiritual life because it was kind of a spiritual kind of place. I was non spiritual until I got there. And that's where I was introduced to Zen mind, beginner's mind the book and that kind of brought me to Zen center. But one of the things that made a huge impression on me of living in this community was that if there was any tension between individuals in the community, the practice of the community was to stop and talk about the tension. And I'd never been around people who were so skilled and so willing, so dedicated to stopping and dealing with whatever tension there was between people. And what I saw was that as people got skilled at it, the conversations got shorter and shorter when they weren't skilled to be ours, like working it out. And as they as they kind of got more and more skilled and also because they knew each other better and better over time, they would sometimes just have a glance at each other. Or just say there it is. And they would kind of immediately everyone kind of language of the time was that all cop and people were quite willing to cop, you know, not be defensive. Okay. Yeah, okay, I did it. And there was a culture of dealing with and so being an easy and easier and so there was much more ease in that community than any community I've been to before. So this is a way of talking about the value of stopping and looking at how we're feel uneasy, which is the first step of the Eightfold Path of the Four Noble Truths. And then to look at what is it that makes us uneasy, or say differently? What is our contribution To our unease. And the Buddhist tradition kind of simplifies that with a kind of slogan. It says that the our contribution is our craving, the somehow that we create, we want something really strongly. And we want to to strongly something that that compulsion is behind the unease that we have. And it's a very rich area of exploration. It's fascinating. To enter into the world of unease and began exploring our relationship to it or philosophies around it or judgments around it our hesitations or doubts about it. Just it's a whole useful, useful universe. But as we enter into that universe, of our unease, and our craving and our compulsion is related to it and our philosophies know that after a while, your current your conversations with yourself become shorter and shorter. Until at some point you understand how to cop Quickly. Oh, yeah, there it is, this is what I'm doing. And we start taking responsibility for what's going on and then we let go. Or there's a letting go, that happens. So sometimes people practice with just open awareness to what is and things slowly show themselves. And some people find it useful to have a little more direction in their experience. And

since many people ignore their unease, like we talked about earlier, or if they don't ignore it, they relate to it with a lot of fantasy or a lot of judgments or a lot of commentary, a lot of strange ideas. It can be very important to learn how not to ignore our unease, but to be present for it in a relaxed way, in an open way, in a willing way. Oh, here it is. Here it is.

And some people it takes a long time to be willing to, or defined, long time to find out how to be present for something to spare. be uncomfortable and be comfortable with the discomfort. Isn't that great? So I hope that gave you enough food for thought food for exploration for the week that you can kind of maybe for the week if you'd like to carry with you this the theme of ignorance and ignoring and again looking at your life and see how does this operate in me? And what's my relationship to it and, and, and if you want to get extra credit as you explore this topic of ignorance ignoring how it functions in your life, what you learn about yourself and find someone you can talk to about what you're discovering a friend or a total stranger. Wherever you feel more comfortable with, see if someone's willing to sit down with you go for a walk with you and say, you know, I mean, looking at this ignoring ignorance and I listened to that talk and, you know, I didn't like it. And I would like to talk about why I don't like it, what the problems is and with it and why it's all wrong and whatever, whatever comes up for you, whatever you learn by processes. Okay. Thank you