

2014-11-09 Meditation off The Cushion Into Daily Life

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SPEAKERS

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To say, to begin by saying something maybe a little bit challenging, a little bit surprising to get your attention for the talk, the meditation, to sit and meditate, close your eyes and meditate. Meditation is mindfulness with training wheels. And why I say it that way is that meditation is meant to be somewhat optimal circumstances with which to practice mindfulness to cultivate mindfulness, to have the insights that come with mindfulness practice. But if we leave it only for an issue in meditation, it's really a truncated form of Buddhism or Buddhist practice, we really don't avail ourselves to the full potential of what the practice is about. And we take off the training wheels when we bring our practice into our daily life into our regular life. And perhaps that's where the practice really becomes meaningful. Does it really change and support your life? Does it help you live a better life? Does it help your society become a better place, other people benefit from you, being mindful and practicing. The, for me this I began to understand this distinction between practice on the cushion and practice in the rest of my life. When I was first, the first couple years where I was beginning to meditate on a daily basis, that meditation was valuable for me, I enjoy doing it, I appreciate it. What happened to me the calm, the sense of integrity, the sense of being connected to a whole that came with meditation for me. And at some point, I understood that the line between my mind in meditation in my mind outside of Meditation was an arbitrary line, there wasn't know what I actually didn't even need to have that line. It's the same mind in both places. And so then I began when I saw that, then when it got really interesting for me, was how to practice in daily life, how to have some of the benefits of a settled mind or open mind or mind of integrity was the language that I use back then. How could I have that my daily life as well? Why should I just leave it to be just something in meditation? And so then for many years, I think that one of the primary motivations for doing Buddhist practice and got me deeply involved in you know, monastic life in Buddhism and all that was not so much to do meditation, but rather to discover how I can take the mind or the heart of that I have meditation and have it in my daily life as well. That doesn't mean going around like a zombie. You know, like calm and you know, whatever. But But, and one of the things that was probably useful for me, in my early years of practice was practicing Zen. And it wasn't so much about being mindful, as a technique like, like a viola, they'll just be mindful all the time. But rather, what wasn't what I came to appreciate was what I was mindful of what I became aware of, as I paid attention to myself. And I got to see that many of the things that I contended with in meditation may things that I had to kind of work through or let go of, or understand or relax around. We're just we're operating just as well in my daily life as well. And so the very practice I was doing on the cushion, became the practice that I was doing off the cushion as well. It's kind of like the whole world became my meditation cushion. And so one of the first things that I saw early on was that When I sat and meditated, I was able to let go of a lot of my need to present myself to other people a certain way. certain kind of identity issues. And when I came out of meditations, those would come back. And so then I had to

explore that you know, what's going on with me? And do I want to live my life always, you know, always a performance, presenting myself to people in particular way. So they would see me a certain way. What does it take for me to kind of let go of that so I can have the mind of meditation in that sense in daily life as well. Why don't you let go of what I have to face. And one of the things I had to face was fear, because part of the reason why I wanted to present myself in a certain light to people was because I felt insecure socially.

And so I wanted to find a way to kind of feel safe and to make sure that I was, you know, orchestrated the world. That everyone would see me just the way they're supposed to. And which, if you're successful, if you're at all remotely successful at that it's probably exhausting. And then remember, one of the early stories of this exploration for me was, I was living at the green Gulch Zen farm. And it was a kind of farm and we're doing a lot of manual work there. And I used to, for some reason, I remember having to carry really heavy things around the farm with someone else to people carrying big heavy things. And he'd like a lot of that. And, and, and I wasn't particularly strong. I'm not particularly strong. And but I think some of the other people were a lot stronger than me so they could hold up there and just fine. The long thing we were carrying, but for me, I could, you know, so what became I became very interested in became an optional practice that I took on was to continue carrying these things, in spite of all the pain that I felt. And then what? How do I work with a pain? What is the pain? What happens to my mind when in pain to study the contraction that goes on or the self pity that goes on? What do I have to be present for what I have to work through what I have to worry about what's going on in this laboratory of physical pain, carrying this really heavy thing across the farm? It was optional. I could have said, Stop, let's rest. But I thought it became really interesting to study that a situation where I had some choice. And I learned a lot about myself away. Just as just as I learned a lot about myself in Zen meditation. I think most people when they do zen meditation, meditate with a lot of pain. It's not right, those of you who've been around Zen centers. Yeah. So yeah. So it's kind of part of the deal. And it's a great training. And it's dangerous because there are people present students who have damaged their knees and things like that, from sitting and not moving. But it's a great training because you get to look at your mind and how your mind operates under challenges. And you close down you get angry, do you get afraid? Do you, you know, disappear into fantasy? What do you do when there's physical pain, that kind of challenge? And what happens to your breathing? What happens to the muscles in your belly? What happens to you know, your mind and all kinds of things, what goes on? And what does it take to keep in mind? Keep your mind and heart at ease, keep your belly at ease, keep breathing and in an easy way, what does it take? What is it five? How do you find your place there? It can be done foolishly with something like a pain and I and you know people can get damaged but it's also can be done very wisely and it's a great laboratory for this practice. Because sooner or later, and for most people that sooner, you'll find yourself in a situation that's challenging. Maybe not physically challenging with pain, but some other kind of challenge. And if you have studied yourself and in meditation, for example, I really understand hung in there with a challenge and not give up in like the physical pain. Don't just get up and go out and go to Starbucks. You know, enough of this. I had a friend who said this machine, and we sat together and I thought we were just sitting happily decision together the seven seven days and retreat. And at the end of the retreat, he said, Oh, a couple afternoons I went out to the movies.

And then I was in that line. I was teaching just as those make sure we get equal opportunity for the different Buddhist traditions. I was teaching retreat at spirit rock many years ago. And this is man came into interview to meet with me halfway through the retreat. To purchase a custom, you meet with a teacher 15 minutes and talk about the practice. And he came in quite happy. First I thought I was happy for him, you know, maybe it's going well. And he sat down. He said, I just came back from down the street, but I played around a golf show there is mindfulness in golf. But there's a time in place, you

know, sometimes you want to stay in the training wheels, because that's where the challenges you don't let go of the challenge.

So you know, so this working with physical challenges of daily life working on the farm became part of my practice. One of the great things about the Zen training I got was, there was a lot of work to be done. And I did a lot of work in kitchens for example. And I'm not, you know, by by I don't know my wife, but in my early life that can be yours. Keeping things clean was not one of my particularly interests in life. I worked at greens restaurant for a couple of rounds. And I worked there for a year once. And then I left came back into work for a little while, left and then came back. And the second time I came back from Do My all my long years of the year, but a year and a half a very intensive meditation practice in in Burma and Thailand. And I came back the third time to work another three months at the restaurant in the kitchen. At the end of my stint there, one of the head cooks said, yeah, this time when you came back from your long practice, you were different. And I said, Oh, how am I different, but they'll be interesting to know. You didn't leave a mess around you.

How were transformed by practice. But, but anyway, I mean, in spite of the story earlier in my Zen training, it was really neat to be working in the kitchen and have people show me how to really clean a sink. I mean, I thought I could clean a sink, you know, you take one hand kind of rub it a little bit, and it's clean. But to really show you show me how to clean a sink, so that you you're really there with the sink, you know, hundred percent both hands, you really use you in the sink. And, you know, and it's not, you know, six out the afterthought get it over with and go on to something important. It's like just you me in the sink, and the sink has all these corners and ledges, and you know, and really clean the whole thing. And this idea of really giving yourself over to the sink and doing the whole thing was one of the ways of learning how to practice off the cushion. Because in the cushion, you want to have that thoroughness as well fully present, what you're doing and what I found when was a great training for me, not just because I could do it sometimes, but I got to see all the ways I didn't want to do it all the resistance, all the agendas, all the things that were more important, you know all kinds of things been patients. So, to really look at this to include it and really be honest and work with it and not give into it and to learn how to be present in a good way. So, this, this work of taking the practice off the cushion into our regular life can be very much supported by meditation, by having a reference point in meditation of what is possible. So to have a degree of calmness to say, degree of peace a degree of integrity a degree of presence, degree of clarity of mine degree of freedom from suffering and anxiety, whatever meditation does for you. If it provides you with some higher quality, way of being than you normally have in your in your life, then that higher quality of being becomes a reference point of what's possible. And so when that when you go back into your life, you can use that reference point for a number of ways. One way is you can pay careful attention as you leave your meditation to notice when you lose it. So just just imagine self calm and Dr. Little little meditation. And then make the next 10 minutes after you get up from your daily meditation, or the most important time of your practice. And watch at the first signs that you lose that calm or that steadiness or whatever it is you want to your reference references. And then as soon as you start losing It stop and take a look. We'll see what just happened. What did you believe was so important that it was worthwhile sacrificing your calm or your presence or your peace or whatever, study that get to know. So for me, for example, I wanted this one a little things I had to learn was once I had kids one of the things I told her in the when I had kids that I would meditate in the morning and things things that have to happen was I had to after my meditation, I have to get the kids ready for school, make their breakfast, get dressed, get out the house, you know. And I like to read my newspaper. So I you know, I happen to have my breakfast I'd like to say we've made this paper didn't want anybody talk to me I'm reading newspaper and I wouldn't have my time to lingers kind of like little downtime, you know, reading the newspaper when they had them. And so and so what I noticed I was a little slow to learn this was that I would and have less time to get the kids dressed to fed and out the

door into school. By time I dropped out of school, I was exhausted, I was ready to go back to bed. I don't know if you've ever been a parent, maybe you can't imagine. You know, in o'clock, nine o'clock in the morning, you're ready to go back to bed. You know, these kids.

And so what I what I learned was that what I was sacrificing my calm for was that whatever comfort I was getting from reading the newspaper, and is this really worth it? So I question After a while, so I know it's not worth it, why do I lose this, that I have this good thing. So I gave up the newspaper. And then the whole morning were the kids all went fine. And when not much better at least. So what I'm trying to say is that meditation can give you a reference point that they can you can study your life better with one way is by how you lose that reference point how you lose that state of being. And there's a lot of different ones. There can be states of love and compassion, there can be states of clarity, of a feeling of inner freedom that can come. And so you watch that and watch how you lose it. And other but also that reference point also, as you go through your life, if you do lose it, don't have it. It's still there as a visceral memory. And so it kind of highlights what you're doing. Also, meditation provides a reference point because meditations many times it's not so nice. You doesn't give you calm and peace and all these great things. It just gives you it just put your hindrances right up in your face. You know, you get to see that your mind is, you know, crazy your mind, your mind, I would say, you know, crazy my mind, I got to see, your minds are probably fine. My mind, you know, there's a Joseph Goldstein who said, the mind has no shame. And he was saying he was talking about his own mind. And I think because of all the things that the minds capable of doing and thinking, but you get to see the forces of desire, the forces of aversion and anger, the forces of distraction and patience, you get to see the forces of selfing and self identity that come into play and go on. And as you see that in meditation, you can feel the suffering of it, you can feel the unsatisfactoriness of having those things. And so it can be more motivating and meditation let go of them or to see them as being not so Interesting, in a way that we often don't see in daily life, daily life are often caught in them where they cannot drive the show. Like the stage directors are offstage, you don't see it. But it's really driving the show. And so in meditation, you see it. So that reference point of really getting to know how quirky you are, is really useful because as you leave meditation start your life. You've learned a lesson about how quirky you are, is that a better is a better term, and crazy. quirky is better. Those of you are not quirky, it's okay. But, but you know that how our mind works and mechanisms are from machinations of our mind, we start to see and understand as much better. And so when we go by our daily life, we understand that so we can do something about it, we can have a different relationship to it. So this idea of bringing the practice off the meditation cushion into the cushion of the world, is what really makes it valuable. Without that, I think it's really not that intense. Without that it may be just a hobby. But with bringing it into your life, then it becomes something that's important. So I wanted to read a few stories from my book of teaching stories I have called the monastery within a scholar, came to the Abbess, and explained, I have spent a lifetime studying Buddhism. And it has not helped me much. What am I missing? What is it I need to understand? What do I need to study? To prepare for this? To prepare the scholar for her answer? The Abbess sat silent for a while. Then she said, breathe in an easy and relaxed way. And then study what causes you to lose that is everything you really need to know about Buddhism. be found in that investigation. That's quite something. So when you sit and meditate, it's its place a time and place to hopefully begin discovering how to breathe with ease, how to breathe and relaxed with free way that the breathing just breathe itself. And that becomes a reference point of what's possible. So when you leave meditation, you can start understanding both what you do that loses that easeful breathing, and how to reclaim it, how to get back in touch with it. And in order to come back to that ease for breathing, that's you had sometimes work through a tremendous amount of, you know, what, you know, issues that, that how you what you think how you operate, your motivations, you know, the things that you do that gets you to tighten up and get tight. So, I found that

I feel like I try to meditate all day long, just like wherever I go. But the times when it's most interesting is when I find situations that are challenging, challenging conversations, challenging activities. And it's very easy to because the situation's so compelling to lose touch with myself not pay attention to what's going on here. But I feel it's so important to stay in touch. Because if you're if I stay in touch with what's going on here and met it, incense meditates it pay attention, what's going on with my breathing? Is my breathing tightening up or is it relaxed and loose and fluid. And if I could stay present and mindful, watching my mind watching my breathing, watch my body, then the challenging situation becomes just another form of meditating. And it makes me in a better position, to respond wisely, to listen more carefully to be present in a nice way. But if I get pulled into the difficult challenge in such a way that my breathing gets tight and shallow, my stomach gets tight. My mind is spinning and racing about what to do and I'm leaning forward into the situation or pulling back in some way. Then actually don't come from the best places within me. I don't deal with the challenges as well. So this idea of staying present and breathing, knowing what it's like in meditation practice, to stay in, just breathe and breathe into the challenges breathe into places of tightness, breathe into three, the width, the unpleasant sensation in the body, to learn how to stay balanced in meditation to stay in a balanced, resilient posture, and really get a feel of what it's like to be present in this kind of posture. That isn't collapse, doesn't pull back doesn't tighten up so that you have that as a reference point. So when you're in challenging situations life, you can meditate in those situations, meaning you can stay balanced, you can come back you can stay with your breathing. Keep breathing in a fluid way.

A young woman from another, another country, moved with her family to live for one year in a town near the monastery. When in the course of the year she discovered the monastery she would periodically visit to have discussions with the others. The habits introduced her to meditation, which became very meaningful for the young woman. When the families year long stay was drawing to an end, the young woman asked the Abyss in my country, there is no Buddhism. And no one has even heard about meditation. How can I continue to learn and deepen the practice you've started me on the Abyss said when you return home, asks far so far and wide. For who among the wise people is recognized as having the greatest ability to listen. ask that person to instruct you in the art of listening. When you learn what you learn about listening from such a person will teach you how to further your meditation practice. That's enough. That's what I read the story now because the alternate The opposite is true as well. If you learn to meditate, then you can listen better. You'll learn how to listen, you'll learn how to practice in the listening works both directions. So, how are you in conversations? Is that a time of practice as well? Or do you lose yourself in the conversation?

Many people arrived at the monastery hoping to be admitted to the monastic order. Some were sent away, since what they were searching for was not to be found in the monastery. Once there was a 30 year old man who arrived at the monastery, feeling exhausted. Oh no, I'm sorry. That's the wrong one. Wish let me leave that the teaser for I'm sorry. You'll forgive me and I'll start another one. Yeah, okay. Okay. This also young men, a young man once came to the monastery to ordain as a monk. He had been raised in relatively fortunate circumstances with easy access to education. capable, smart and friendly. He succeeded in most everything he set his mind to deeply reflective about life. He had studied the teachings of the major religions. In his early 20s. He decided not to follow the customary paths of marriage and career, leaving behind the life he had known here. And at the age of 22, and applied himself to the meditation and training the monastery provided disciplined, intent and intelligent. He made quick progress in his spiritual practice. monks and nuns had been there for years were in awe of how quickly he settled into deep meditation. Within three months of entering the monastery, he experienced his first taste of enlightenment. Immediately, the Abbess grabbed the young monk dragged him out the front gate, weather explanation kicked him out of the monastery. Later addressing the residents of the monastery, the Abbess explained, the new monks realization was genuine, and I'm

quite happy for him. However, in order for him to mature further along the path of liberation, he has to return to the world to experience more than more of the difficulties and sufferings of life. To under to understand all the corners of his own heart, he has to grapple with issues of livelihood, family and community life. Furthermore, I expect that someday he will be a great teacher. But for this to happen, he has to understand understand all the issues, so he can have greater compassion and insight into the lives of his students. For this particular monk, this isn't going to happen in the monastery. So he got kicked out. So one more name maybe so. So, you know, one of the themes of all this is that ideas is that some people who meditate and are in a Buddhist path are focusing more on going deep into the practice. I mean, deep meditation experience going in Practicing. And you see that on retreats as well, meditation retreats where people go and like their their focus on is a growing edge of their practice deep states of peace or something. But inevitably, what happens on retreats and meditation is that people who can go deep are somewhat deep a little bit, you know, more than shallow that that you kind of some point you come out and you're not so concentrated anymore. And that's a normal thing to have that go on. But what happens is it because people are so focused on going deep, when they start kind of surfacing again, they think, well, it's over doesn't count. I don't have to do anything focusing anymore until I go back on retreat again or go back and meditate again. The but actually, it's the time when you are surfacing coming out of meditation. That's probably one of the most important times for learning important times for understanding in resolving and working on all kinds of things. And so in some ways, the going deep, however far you go, is just the kind of the preliminary exercise to where it really counts. And that is as you come out, so if you sit and meditate at home in the morning, the real practice begins when you get up from the cushion. If you if you use, what happened to you on the cushion, as a reference point as a support is to help you understand yourself more. And then what did you learn there? What did you touch into there? That is useful to consider as a reference point as a support as a teaching for you as you start up your daily life. So I want to read one more story. And then if you have some questions or comments, you can mix them

Kind of since I'm talking about meditations so much as in the usefulness of bringing it to your ordinary life, here's a whole other alternative. As a teenager, she often visited the monastery. She was deeply attracted to the monastic life. The Buddhist path to liberation was what had the most meaning for her. When she became an adult, she planned on joining the monastic order. However, when she turned 21, or older sister and her sister's husband died in an accident, and she became the foster parent of their two young children. In addition, her own parents had become quite old and needed her help. As the only income earner in the family. She had to work long hours every day. She loved to meditate with all the work and caregiving. She had to Do she had no time for it? Since she was not able to fulfill her aspirations for following the monastic life, she went to the best of the monastery and asked how she could follow the path with a life she had to live. The Abbess said that if you couldn't meditate, then the best alternative is to be grateful for everything. So those of you who meditate regularly think about not limiting what you do to the meditation time, but to bring that practice you do on the cushion into your daily life. And that's really where you probably get a lot of benefit. And if you're not a meditator, that maybe you could use gratitude in the same way. That gratitude can be the reference point to understand what's going on to understand yourself and the world around you and And maybe gratitude can be as powerful.

So, we can take a few if you have any questions or comments and he would like to make

okay. Yeah, I heard a story from a Gen pass know that. When Arjun Shah Tata retreated. IMS, he, after a while, looked at all the meditators and said, I think you're like thieves with really good lawyers, thieves with really good lawyers, you live like thieves, and then you come here and feel peaceful as you meditate. And it's like being a thief with a really good lawyer. So, how to live in a way that's just being a

good person. And there's a kind of continuity that he was pointing to that. I just thought I'd share that story similar to what you're saying.

I was thinking about when you were telling the story about being on the farm and lifting the heavy objects and thinking that I was going to have a different answer. And that has to do with my own path, which is that I think that I've had enough pain in my life. And I was taught from a young age that I should really tough out the pain, and that I should take the pain. And my path now actually is to, if I was carrying a log is to learn how to say, you know what, I can't carry this log, I need to do something else on the farm. And it just is very interesting, different way of looking at it, because how you where you come from, but it's still a path to learn. And so that's, that's the path I'm learning right now is learn how to be more empathic to my own pain and to not feel like I have to take the pain. So I just thought, but I imagine that that's probably true for many of us in the room as well. Absolutely, I very much.

I very much, very much. Appreciate it. You're saying that, because it's true. And, you know, we have so many different backgrounds, different ways we're coming. So we have to take into account where we're at, and, and what helps us to become free what helps us to become more at peace. And so if you see the opportunity that how you can discover peace or self understanding in a useful way, by staying with pain, then it's a good path perhaps. But if you don't see it as an opportunity that it just wears you down, or whether it's a different opportunity, or where to find peace, then there might be other doors for people, but you're gonna see, each person has their own door, and you'll define what your door is, in different circumstances. And one of the things that I had to learn was, it was hard to do in the monastic setting was to learn how to say no, or learn how to take care of myself when the monastery wasn't going to do it. They had a certain discipline you have to follow. And so how do you work around that when it's not appropriate for To follow the discipline, and how do you say no? How do you find other other options? And so, yes, so I agree. So, I'm sure there's lots of people here and you'd eat out. What's most useful is not to stay with the pain and learn how to do something else. So one more straight back.

You talked about working in a restaurant and I work in a restaurant right now so you might know how crazy it can be. Like, I am better when I'm with like an object like working with the sink like you mentioned. Like if I'm just doing something without like people around or something, but if Whoo hoo, makes me angry. So much that, like, I just think that I lose it at the time and I, and I think that I shouldn't be like, like this, but then I think that, like, I deserved to be mad because this person has done injustice or whatever. And then I think that I cannot not be mad at the situation. I don't want to be a doormat or anything like that. So I just like, notice that I'm mad, but then I cannot control anything about that situation. So if you have

any advice for that

problem, probably not in any advice that you know, you find that useful because it's hard to understand the full circumstance you're in, to use this to suggest to give me advice. But one of the fundamental things which can seem like a small thing or maybe not really addressing the issue is To learn how to relax, and then fast paced work like in the restaurant work, it's very easy for tension to build, and the pressure of demand getting the food out and all these things to kind of build. And so the more tension that we build up, the less resilient we are less wise we can be about how to respond. And if you can learn the skills of relaxing over and over again, that's you know, in meditation, learn how to relax, let go, let go settle that. Relax the shoulders, relax the belly, and make and develop almost a habit. Then perhaps when you go to work, you can maintain a more relaxed state more of longer, and the more relaxed You are the probably more easy easier your own wisdom will come to the forefront and learn

how to handle difficult situations, you're probably less likely to get angry, if you go to do get angry, probably less likely to get swept up in the anger. So that's what I suggest. Okay, so When I ended my talk, I did talk with a story of gratitude. I'm grateful to all of you. It's a, it's a great thing to have a community of people you can come and meditate with. And I would say that without others to practice with and meditate with would not have. Practice as much as I did, I wouldn't have benefited as much as I did, from my own practice. And I think I really depended on the support of others. And to this day, and this morning as well actually feel very grateful the chance to come and meditate together with a group of people. And so thank you for coming. Thank you for being interested in doing this. And now there's going to be tea. And if you would like to stay be great, everyone's welcome. And then we'll have our community meeting. And because we have this tea and community thing, if you don't mind, I think what's the very nice thing to do in this day, is if you would turn to someone next to you and know welcome them to IMC even if this is your first time, that IMC belongs to everyone, so, saving is the first time you can welcome the person next to you as well. And please introduce yourself briefly. Thank you.