

2015-03-15 Simplicity of Being

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SPEAKERS

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So good morning. I wish I could just lift a flower and be done with it.

Yeah. So I would like to the topic that's been on my mind is that of simplicity. And I think it's an important aspect of this practice that we do Buddhist practice mindfulness practice. And it's so important that there was a well known teacher of many of us named when Indra Indian teacher, Vipassana teacher who said, if it's not simple, it's not to be passing on. not simple. It's not not mindfulness. So keeping it simple and, and also to keep to learn to have a simplicity of being in our lives. And if simplicity is an ideal, as I'd like to emphasize that in Buddhism, often, the best approach to an ideal is to understand what gets in the way of the ideal. So to understand the nature of agitation, or when the mind gets complicated and filled with thoughts on that. And so that often rather than talking about simplicity, the way that the tradition often talks about these kinds of ideals is in the negative and they say there's an absence of agitation. Freedom from agitation if two people are in jail, prison, same prison, Same time maybe for years they've been in prison. And then they get released at the same time. And the gates of the prison open wide for them and they walk out. And the experience so the gates of the prison opening up and then going out is the same. You know, how did you get free? Somebody can ask both of them while the gates opened up and we walked out, it'd be very simple answer. But then in the subsequent weeks and months and years, what happens to these two people might be probably be very different from each other. They go, they, you know, at some point, they walk out the gate and they go different ways and live different lives and have different interests and different experiences. And their actual experience of freedom becomes very different from each other. So the same thing if we become free of agitation, the life that we live might look very different from each other. And we don't want to kind of beat when we're very careful not to lay, you know, requirement. You know, you're supposed to be calm, you're supposed to be tranquil, you're supposed to be loving, you're supposed to be peaceful. When you say it all that kind of way, it'd be very easy to become kind of a burden, like on nighttime to fit into this. But if you talk about becoming free of agitation, the doors of agitation open up and you no longer agitated. That may be a little bit, you know, safer as a goal. Because that's a reasonable thing not to be agitated, but what you do with your non agitation that's up to you or that's up to your life and what unfolds. So in this tradition, we ran and they often they often talk about the goal of the religious life, spiritual life in negative terms, which some people complain about. You know, I mean, I think we should be more uplifting but the idea you're to give us freedom to your life to be what it's going to be, without putting restrictions and names on it. In fact, the Buddha was very clear that someone who's become free cannot be characterized. So the idea of not being characterized because partly because you get characterized in currently his idea by what you identify with. So if you identify with your profession, you can be characterized by your profession, if you identify by your looks, you can be characterized by your look, if you identify by your smarts, or your whatever, you can be here, but if you don't identify with anything, then you then the idea is you're not

characterized by anything. Conventionally, of course, if you still have your profession, you, someone could say oh, you call you by your job. But I guess being that your mind your heart does not characterize it this weekend. I read a funny story. I hope it's funny.

In some ancient Buddhist texts, that kind of bizarre kind of, you know, but there was apparently in those people who scholar who wrote about it said it's probably made up story long after the event. But apparently there was a story goes there was a man who made a living by going around and knocking on the skulls of people who have died and then telling the survivors where that person was reborn. And so, you know, probably made a good living. You know, and, and then, so, the Buddha commanded to the Buddha so the Buddha offered him apparently several skulls, you know, to knock on and just and see you know who, you know, to To say where they got reborn, and one of them and so the first few of them may could easily do it. But the last skull was a skull of a liberated person, someone who'd become free. And so he knocked on this skull, and he couldn't figure it out. He couldn't figure out where what happened to him after he died. And he was never run into this. He was so perplexed. And so then he became a student of the Buddha. So it's the story points, this idea that in your mind, if you're free, you can't be characterized. You're not identified with anything. And so there's a simplicity of the mind there's a non agitation of the mind because a mind that identifies is agitated, they say.

So the idea of not being agitated, being simple simplicity of being I was walking down here this morning. And I walked by a house where their front door was open. And in outside the house, the car doors are open look like they're putting things in the car. And this little kid who's maybe two or three years old, came out of the car, got the doors open. And another kid was coming out of the house with a backpack. And they were carrying things and so this little two little kids, you know, they were two or three years old. And so they kind of the one come from the car helped the one come to the house, carry some things to the car. And I was walking kind of next to them. And I heard one of them say to the other, which would you like? The pink one or the yellow one? And second one said, Oh, it doesn't matter. And the first one said, Oh, well then you can have the yellow one. And I kind of left that hearing that conversation, kind of in all the here these kids, how did they learn, you know, they didn't even go to school yet. And they knew the words which, and the yellow and pink and they ask each other questions and get answers and this is pretty complicated stuff. And, you know, and how do they learn that? How do they stick that in and I mean, you kind of, you know, probably hurt people to speak and, you know, made associations to with sounds and this word which you know, which is a sound, which in English language means nothing. So, maybe I'm kind of a simpleton, but I thought that Wow, that's pretty amazing. It was an honor and then I kind of triggered this awe.

And so if the rest of the walk coming down here, I was kind of looking around the trees and streets and the cars and I was like just wow wow and I kind of felt I guess I'm out of prison or the prison of agitation preoccupation concerns important things to figure out sophisticated things to analyze planning my future these are all can be kind of a prison for us we're caught in these kinds of preoccupations and concerns. And this beautiful little these little kids saying their little thing and my kind of reflection Wow. I felt like wow, out of out of those concerns and thoughts and it's pretty cool to be present for this world and to be in all of it here. So to be, have a simplicity of being simplicity of the mind, to have non agitation in mind that can just be here in a simple way can be seen as one of the great goals of this practice does not like bells and whistles, of great spiritual communion with the ultimate. Here's a think, wonderful little summary of the Buddhist teachings the Buddha gave to his foster mother. So if your foster mother your mother comes, you know, and you've been studying, come up with one of the great world religions, right, then your mother comes and asks you, you know, for, you know, what's the essence of what you have to teach? I mean, you probably want to teach her something, you know, pretty significant, right? You want to get this is your chance to tell your mother right so. So this is what

the Buddha said in response to his foster mother asking but what he did essence of the teachings those qualities of which you may know These qualities lead to dispassion, not to passion, to being unfettered, and not to being fettered to self effacement, not to self aggrandizement, to modesty and not to ambition, to contentment and not to discontent to seclusion not to entanglement, to energy and not to idleness to being unburdened some and not being burden some, you may definitely know that these things are the teaching, this is a discipline, this is the teachers instruction. So, these are like simple things, right? I mean, these like, these are kind of things that, you know, how can this be religious?

To not be entangled or fettered, just now to avoid self aggrandizement. To have modesty and contentment I love this. I love this little passage because of the simplicity of, of states of mind are ways of being that are accessible to all of us. It doesn't require a reading book after book on Buddhist philosophy of emptiness and try to make sense of what they mean by the inner meanings of dharma. And, you know, it's a lot of study you can do in Buddhism to understand the philosophy and get bogged down. But these are just ordinary human qualities, that speak to something simple and direct that we can experience and to have these as our guide to becoming free to becoming non agitated, I think can be very effective. So how do we become an agitated, non agitated, be free of agitation? One way is to study your agitation and And I love the word agitation because it's so broad, it just means anytime Your mind is a bit overactive, it covers a lot of territory. So, so, you know, that really works well. If we're you to become the student, the devoted, respectful, humble student of your own agitation you know, just really get curious and how does this work? What happens when you get agitated? What are the different characteristics and qualities? What are the things that stimulate you to get agitated? What are the triggers for it? What are the beliefs that come into play? When you get agitated? I think the question of the beliefs behind agitation when you get caught up and worked up and when you finally find yourself calm, then you're no longer calm effects, important things has to be done. If you take an honest look, understand what do you believe? Why is it so important to kind of be so worked up and so involved in speed up the mind and the body and all this stuff. What's what is so important? What did what do you really believe? But don't settle on the first belief you come to? Why do you believe what you believe? What's behind it? What's behind it? What's going on, that you are willing to give up your calm or your ease, and get agitated. So to become a student of marriage agitation, this means that you have to study something about yourself, which maybe is not so exemplary about yourself. Maybe it's something about yourself that you don't want to let other people know, easily and quickly about yourself. You might even have some awkwardness to admit to yourself to some of the inner causes and reasons why you're agitated. But that's why I emphasize this idea of respectful, humble kind student of your own agitation, you approach it in a way to really want to learn and the reason for that is that if you bypass your agitation, it's going to the underlying conditions and triggers for it are going to stay there and be in the background ready to rise up again in the future. But if you really understand what goes on, two things can happen. Number of things can happen. But one is, is that you, you become wiser than your agitation, you become wiser than the delusion or the ambition or the different things that come into play. When you get when you get the cause you to be agitated, and if you're wiser, then you're not going to buy into it when those things arise. The other is the idea of being a respectful student of your agitation, turning your gaze and looking at it directly. A training and how to stay to how to be calm in your studies in your looking that you turn rather than letting the agitation keep you agitated. You find a place inside your mind where you can turn and look calmly at what's going on. And you're reinforcing that place of maturity of calm, of stillness of ease. In wisdom to operate in looking at the agitation, if you just allow the agitation to continue on unchecked, unobserved, then the you know, it would then we tend to identify with it. But if we can really be a student of it, it's actually a strong way to stop identifying and step back. You know, they say that a watch pot doesn't boil. And Buddhism we say, a watched mind doesn't boil. It doesn't boil over, you know, it doesn't get caught up in anger and things. So watching the mind or watch mine becomes happy.

The so that's one way to to deal with agitation. The other is to study the mind is the steady mind is a mind that is no longer agitated. And just one of the reasons why we focus on like the breath or on some concentration of object in meditation. It's a steadying of the mind. And to find some place in the mind where there's, that's kind of like a place of firmness or stability. So the mind is not kind of just jumping all over and wavering. And so this is something that a strength of the mind the ability to bring to steady it. And we all have the ability to strengthen the mind the mind is, is pliable is malleable, and so to begin regularly doing exercises to study the mind, and so regularly meditate and just focus on the breath that kind of I'm going to stay steady myself there. I like the word I don't know if it works for you, but I like the word steady as almost more than concentrate. And when I use think of the word concentrate, I lean forward but I think of the word steady, I kind of get more grounded and firm so to steady myself on the breath or something and to do things in your daily life that allows you to steady yourself in the activity you do. You know this thing about yes said many times now, but the amount of time people spend on screens. And I've noticed that I mean, it's you know, there's a way the mind begins to jump and the mind becomes a little addictive wanting to see what's next and going forward and looking for more screens. Dennett generally do not steadying the mind. And so some people are finding very wise to limit how much time they spend on their, on their on their computer screens, their phones, their devices, because of what it does to the mind, and to and to give yourself as long periods of time during the day that are screen free. And what's long periods maybe depends on you, and your job and all kinds of things. But, you know, for some people, maybe 10 minutes is a long time. And you know, just okay 10 minutes, I'm going to turn it off and just not going to give into any impulse to check check for email or anything and just hold it steady and what I'm doing right now, for someone else, it might be four hours. For someone else it might be all day on Sunday is my Sabbath from screens. On the seventh day, God turned off his device.

So to practice steadiness. And then the last thing I want to say that helps have an agitated mind is related to this thing about the, you know, not being on your device all the time is making, making behavioral choices that support calmness and steadiness. So don't just rely on the power of your mind, you know, just just meditate sometimes or just kind of, but go to places that are calming, go be around people that are calming, do do activities that are calming. Don't underestimate the value of choice of behavioral choices you can make that that you know that they so you're in for environments or in the activities, which help you kind of settle in settle out the tensions of the day or calm yourself down and then in that whole process begin to value what it's like to be an agitated and to appreciate the value of simplicity and simplicity of being you don't have you don't have to have a lot. You don't have to do a lot to be immensely happy and contented and peacefulness life and then rather than having a diminished life because you become simple, rather than diminish life because you're not doing a lot of things and getting a lot of stuff and getting a lot of stripes on your resume for all your friends to show them all the things you've done. You get to hear these two little two year olds talking. And be in Oh wow. And look at a tree and look at the asphalt and notice other people and see how beautiful people are. I wonder if They are and appreciate people, it means kind of a miracle that there are people people are you know, it's kind of awesome. Just to be a person, I mean, it's a pretty complex thing. Okay, how did that happen? So those are my thoughts for today. And so leave it at that in terms of the talk, but I wanted to spend a little bit of time to see if you had any questions. But this or anything because I'd like to hear from you, hear from you and find out what's on your minds.

Well, part of my thoughts right now are, but what about this? What about this, you know, all the all the reasons why it's hard to not be agitated sometimes perfect. One and mostly the things I have no control over, like the climate or the drought, you know, these are things that agitate me,

And it helps the climate to get agitated?

No, not at all. And I think, you know, while I'm doing something and being agitated about it, or I'm worried that's doing something, you know, that's how I that's Yeah, part of how my mind works. But I know I was the one who emailed you about, do a talk in the drought. So I can be mindful about the trout, but but that's something that, you know, there's things like that. I don't

Yeah, so I think this is a great great to bring that up. And I mean, that's the kind of thing to be respectfully, a student of and understand what's going on there. And in what's underneath agitation, what belief is underneath It what's the sense of self? And what are the lessons we've learned growing up, for example, about and, and, you know, I'm not saying this your case, but some people feel that you were only a good person, if we are somehow anxiously concerned about the welfare of others or something. And so to be oblivious to problems around us, that makes us kind of a bad person. So we have to show that we're concerned and involved even when we don't have can't do anything about it. And so worrying is one way, you know, I'm a good person, because I'm worrying and that's a proof that if I could do something I would but but, you know, when we're all in it, you know, we're all kinds of anyway, I don't want to keep talking this way. But I think it's great that you mentioned that and I'd encourage you to look deeper and deeper and question and then see if it's really helps you know, sometimes also where wiser. And we see more clearly what to do when we're not agitated. Little little still a little self conscious and my answer to you is adequate or you would ask more to respond.

I don't think so. I'll sit with that. Um. it's not quite the answer, I guess. But it's. Yeah. Thank you.

Great. Thank you. You pass it behind you there. So I so I had

my question, I guess is, I guess I was waiting for you to talk also about the body and how

you're raised. What?

about the agitation in the body? Because, for me, I can feel everything and I feel like when I have thoughts or feelings I like my body shows it really easily. And especially like when I'm stressed out or nervous. And people always tell me Don't be nervous. And then that makes me more nervous. Yeah. So I don't know if you have any tips, Buddhist tips on that one.

Ah, well, you're lucky to have I have a sensitive body from a Buddhist point of view because a lot of the wisdom that we want to develop in Buddhism comes through the body, a lot of the understanding of the world the body is kind of like an antenna or, or a place for a lot of understanding and the deeper way, so if you have a sensitive body, it picks things up or response to things this way. There's a way in which gives you access to much more self understanding and self awareness. But I think that to learn how to be within your body in a wise way, in a good way is part of what meditation practice can do is learn how to relax the body deeply meditation, learn how to open to it, learn how to let the energies move through without identifying with them or blocking them and also learning sometimes ways of moving like dancer Tai Chi or different things, yoga, that kind of frees up some, some of the bottlenecks, where the energy might be, can be free as well. So I don't know if that addresses your concern or

Yeah, it definitely does it. I think also, I, when I feel agitation in my body, I label it as bad. And I think working on labeling it or not even labeling it and like you said, just noticing the energy, and then it'll leave quicker. Yeah, unless, because if I hold on to and label it,

yeah, so this is what this is one of the hopeful advantages or nice things about meditation. When you meditate, it's not really necessary to label anything as bad. And so it's kind of like the bad free zone. You know, in terms of judging, so you can just whatever so if there's agitation and meditation just, it's not bad It just is. And then you'll learn how to be with it and explore it and find out how to be wise about it. I still remember very fondly a particular meditation session I had where I was really restless. And so then I turned my attention to my body and felt the restless with my body. And I characterize it to myself as ping pong ball just bouncing off the inside the walls of my body just like this energy is coming in from all over. And I just got more and more interested in fascinated and I just it was so much fun to sit there and feel the energies kind of coursing and moving and doing all this stuff. And my mind got actually quite calm. As I watched it, it was I didn't see it was bad. I didn't try to fix it. I just watched it.

Thank you.

Yes, please.

So one of the practices that I've been encouraged to do is writing out fears, resentments, all those types of things. And I've gotten to a point where like, I've identified a few very common ones that end up coming up like finances or health or

approval from other people. And

now, like to a certain point, when I see those things like I kind of stopped, like analyzing them and try to jump into like a gratitude list or something like that and just try to try because they're so I've started to realize like, they're just they're, they're just a part of like, they're not even really super personal. They're just thoughts that I end up having, and that I think a lot of other people have, but I'm wondering, after what you said, like I'm cheating myself by not digging into it a little bit more.

It's possible what, what I hear is that you've already done some of that work of studying it. By writing it down and getting familiar with it, you you become so familiar with it now. Sounds like maybe you kind of don't believe them as strongly or you don't feel like they're not really worth a lot of attention the way you used to think they were worth a lot of attention. And that represents certain kind of freedom with those. And I would I would take some time in prison. That freedom you found from, you know, not being so automatically pulled into them. And so I think you've sounds like you've done the work done at least at least in relationship to those. And I think it's a it's a, it's a, it can be an expected outcome of this kind of mindfulness and exploration is to have thoughts arise, concerns arise and just like they're like, clouds in the mind or like a little pesky fly that flies by and, you know, just leave it alone. Whereas, you know, as opposed to there's a pesky fly that flies into the room and, and now, the only concern you have is the fly. You know, you know, just this is all kinds of nice things going on in the room and why give so much attention to the fly.

So the devil is a little bit in the details, right, one of the things that I've noticed is in turning towards agitation or turning on turning towards some behavior that I think is, you know, not not good. So the question is open, let me just say that I think that when you do that you're kind of challenging the construct itself, right? You're saying this behavior that you've somehow constructed over time is not really useful. But it's a challenge to the construct itself, right. And one of the things that I noticed is that in turning towards that, right, that I don't necessarily have, like an easy interaction with the construct itself saying, Oh, this is why, you know, and so the question that I have is also what can you expect once you turn to a construct itself that's being challenged. Right? What can you expect? What should I naturally expect, right? Do I expect an answer do I expect? Just leave it just ask the question,

and then just leave it. Sometimes I do that and I get sort of something just kind of bubbles up. That explains something, right. But I want to know more about the actual process of turning towards something. What can you expect? How should you do it? How do you have a light touch doing that? Yeah,

let me know. And I answer, I answer that way, partly because everyone's going to have a different exploration and different discovery. And so for me, your question is really great. So the question is, you know, what, what will you discover if you go and look at it more closely, and what is useful for you? I mean, we'll see what to turn towards or agitation to learn from it. All kinds of things you might learn, including you might learn that you get more agitated when you look at it. Or it's not so useful to look at it sometimes. And so that so because you looked at it just enough to know this is not useful, I better go do something else. So that's part of the wisdom thing. Or, if not, this is your issue, but use the word expectation. It might be that you turn towards the way we identify with something you construct itself. And what's more important than looking at that at first is to look at the expectations some people have so driven by the expectations Oh, I listen, I read a lot of books on Buddhism and a lot of teachings and, you know, construct the self doesn't really exist it's not really true and I'm supposed to kind of you know, I'm expect that I'll be able to blow it up to smithereens quickly and be be free. So what is sometimes the expectations need to be questioned? And so what you'll see what what you uncover And how you do it as part of the process. But I think that one of the ways to stay away from getting too analytical because of meditation, you don't want to analyze. If you go for a walk, you might want to do some good reflective thinking and contemplation about it. But, but a very good way for a meditation is to always stay close to your body, to the physicality of the experience. And so even if you might be looking at thoughts and looking at emotions, keep a really close connection to the physicality of those things, the physicality of your emotions, how it feels in your body, the physicality of even thinking, because then it keeps it simpler, that you want to keep it really simple. Just a simple gaze is simple looking. And don't underestimate the value of not analyze, avoid, don't underestimate the value of keeping a calm, relaxed, steady gaze on something. You don't have to figure it out. You just have to kind of keep it in your awareness and stay present for And if there's something there to be learned, it'll pop up and show itself.

So you've just hit on a subject that, that I'm trying to try to understand the idea that while meditating, you're not necessarily thinking you're being present. But as the idea of the continuity is then after you've stopped not thinking and witnessing, you move into the conscious state of, then you pick it up to be a student of your agitation is that when the thinking begins,

Hmm, okay.

So, with Dharma talk with a theme of simplicity, I hope I can not be too complicated my answer the I think we have to differentiate between different kinds of thinking. There's discursive thinking, which is having a conversation and discussion in your mind or fantasizing very active kind of thinking, like active commentary and active kind of like discussion. And until and maybe analysis about thing, which is a whole discussion in your mind. Which we don't want, it doesn't really help the meditation process. But it doesn't mean that there's also simpler thinking that goes on, which might be the simple thought to say, say that you have, you find that you're agitated. And so there's a very simple thoughts as it says, in your mind that says, Let me feel that agitation in my body, where my body do I feel that that's a that's a much more simple and straightforward and ordinary thing then, then feeling the agitation and saying and thinking, you know, wow, I'm agitated and everybody else sitting here at IMC must be calm they're sitting so still and there must be something wrong with me and probably what's wrong with me was had to do it. You know, you go off you go, that's a discursive analysis, right? Which is based on what did that

feel like in the body? Where does it feel? Where do I feel in the body? Let me try to feel it really intimately? Can I get closer to it and really sense and, you know, what are the sensations there? So they're very, can be a very simple kind of questioning, kind of thinking that gets you more and more connected. And then, what's emotional, what's emotionally What's going on? Are there any beliefs that are kind of floating around with that agitation? Oh, the belief is that I'm, these people are gonna think I'm a bad person. And so oh, this concerned about how people think about me is a recurrent concern of mine. And then at some point too, because you become aware of patterns of what goes on for you, then when you come out of meditation, then you might want to go for a walks in and have a cup of tea and reflect and think about the patterns and see what you're seeing. And see if there's, if there's some bigger kind of, and then it might be a little more discursive. And I think a wise life is a life that includes contemplation and reflection, going for a walk and really can't and there's an art to, to, to, to stable, focused contemplation, reflection really kind of take up a topic and really stay with it, like go for a walk and say, there's like this walk, I'm gonna really think a lot about my, how agitated I am at work. And I'm just gonna, you know, really kind of come back in my mind, one might wonder my mind might might wander off, but I'm gonna come back and keep thinking about this and seeing what comes up. And then if it's a pattern that is causing difficulty or challenge or seems like it's useful, then it might be useful to go and spend time talking with a friend or talking to someone or journaling Doing something you really kind of go further, or have someone you can go talk to regularly about it, you know? So and one of the most common places in our society for that is in therapy. And if you have a wise therapist who can ask good questions, understand some of the bigger context of these concerns, they can really help you that exploration. So there might be that those choices made. Does that address your concern? Or did I miss you?

No, no, it does. It's to me there. There There are two activities involved meditation and then the continuity to the active life of, of living with what you've observed in the meditation. And so that bridge, that continuity is, it was what my question was directed towards, and you answered

that.

Okay, so I think the bridge is the best wisdom you have. So you started to understand where you know, your wisdom, what's needed outside of meditation. Okay. Oh, So one more than you'll stop, if you can pass the mic there.

I had a question about how to develop more skillfulness in being around the agitated others, and how come because you mentioned seeking out calming environments, but in cases when you can't, how to keep that influence of agitation from getting to you?

Yeah, that's a good one. The if you know you're going to be around agitating situations or people, you might want to prepare yourself, and so do things that are that calm you down or stabilize or develop a little bit of inner inner stability or strength before you go. So when you go, you're in a better frame of mind that you don't kind of Pick up some of the concerns or agitations, or you stay a little bit more independent little bit more free from it. Because chances are that part of the reason why you get caught in their agitation is because of little hooks in your mind. And so to understand yourself better, so this is also good if you have a regular person you see or agitate is agitated and you get agitated when you're with them. get curious. You know, just getting up, prepare yourself, get calm, and then go with the intention to understand what's going on for you. Hold your tongue little bit so you can watch your mind more. And what happens inside of you. What do you What's that? What do you start thinking What do you start believing? What what goes on for you in and the more you understand yourself in those situations, the more likely you'll be able to stay and not get pulled in or pick it all up. So that's what I'd

suggest. And then breathe deeply, relaxing your body. Pay attention to your posture. posture is a great teacher as well. So look at your posture and develop a stable good sense of a posture where you sit firm and still and not leaning forward not collapsing. Watch your head and just kind of stay and if you can stay in a good, nice aligned, upright posture, that's often is a protection from the agitation around us. Thank you. Okay. Well, thank you all.