

2015-04-26 Dwelling Independent Part 2

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SPEAKERS

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So good morning everyone. A few weeks ago, I gave a first part of a two part series of talks. And I'd like to give the second today there is a teaching in the early Buddhist tradition that someone had becomes mature and the practice becomes independent in the Dharma. And the word Dharma here can mean many things. It can mean independence in the teachings. And so you kind of know not no longer need to listen to Dharma talks. Or maybe give them and, but the Dharma also means the truth. So to become independent in the truth. It's a very powerful statement that we're becoming independent in the truth to live in the truth. I went to San Quentin on Friday. And at with a program there called the year long program called guiding rage into power. And there were 28 inmates in this program. And most think all of them, I think were lifers. And 21 of them. There were 20 of those 28 men, I don't know about, you know, exactly how it all added up. But 21 of the men are, there were 21 murders, committed by those 28 men was quite something to be in a room of so many people who had committed murder. And one of them said, I'm moving things but one of them said that facts are different than the truth. And he said I believe he was talking about himself because he was quite, he was quite open, in spite of this process he was going through but what he had done. And he said, the fact of having murdered someone is different than the truth. Because if you come and it The fact is, he was talking about the context of, it's different to the fact is one thing. The other thing is if you come and admit it, and if you admit it, then you're speaking the truth. And so he was for him, it was very important, this distinction. The truth is about to own up to it to live in the truth, to not you know, the fact can be you can be denying and all your one might still be a fact. So to be independent, in that with the truth in the truth, and so in. Another way, it's said, is someone who practices mindfulness practice to the point to mature mindfulness, they dwell independent in the world, not clinging to anything at all. becoming independent, the world not clinging to anything at all. And so a few weeks ago, when I gave the first part I talked about becoming independent and such a way that consciousness or awareness is not dependent on anything. And I talked about the advice that was given to a man who was dying. And it was a guided meditation offered, and they in the ancient ancient texts, and the way that it was offered was systematically going through all the different things that awareness could be aware of. And the guided meditation was don't cling to that. Don't cling to that. And in the context of someone who does someone dying, you know, it's maybe kind of, hopefully a little bit more obvious, that it's kind of not really much point to click any more than You know, if you're facing you're in a died as soon after this guided meditation was given this, this man died. The idea being that this is a really good time to learn to let go when you have to let go anyway. So it is a teaching like of everything don't cling to anything. The question is, is this an okay way of living in life in general? So the challenge some people have about this teaching about not clinging to anything whatsoever, not being dependent anything is that I get that, you know, how do I live my normal life?

Or isn't it okay to be dependent, we live in an interdependent life, and somehow to be independent of others, independent of the world somehow must mean that we're somehow cut off from the world or aloof from the world or, you know, dwelling independent the world means that you're, you know, just, you know, probably living in a cave someplace And there's not really realistic. And this is a this is a, I think a very appropriate concern to have about these kinds of teachings. Because in fact, our life is deeply interdependent to each other deeply they attend, they they relate being related, being interconnected, is very deep. And it's inconceivable having a human life without having the, you know, living in this kind of amazingly interdependent world where our very life being alive is dependent on so many other people and beings and things around us. And to realize that interdependent nature of our life is considered to be one of the great truths, one of the great realizations that it's very meaningful for many people to realize and experience. So how do these two things work together the idea of being independent in the truth independent in this world not clings anything, and being in the world in real life. to people. So in a sense last time I gave this talk first half was about doing this internally with one's own consciousness and awareness. And then how does that now the second part is how does this relate to the world in which we live in. And the Buddha taught mindfulness practice, one of the instructions he gave, is to be mindful, both internally and externally. And one of the ways of understanding this is internally means you know, your, your own body, your own impulses, your own thoughts and beliefs and desires and intentions to be aware of this whole inner landscape that's here. And externally means to be aware of other people, to be aware of the situation of other people and be tuned in and pay attention to other people. When I was studying in the Zen monasteries, one of the nice ways we were never told, as far as I remember, back in the late 70s, early 80s, the word mindfulness wasn't so popular yet. And now it's like it's always been there in pewter. Right, but I don't remember them teaching mindfulness per se in Zen in the 70s they might have but they had talked about it other ways other ways in which you picked it up. And there were some times these particular meals when we ate together and dining or meal table where it was kind of understood that you when you ate you would pay attention to the people around you. And if they needed more food or more water or something, and that was just part of the training that I got, you know that you you don't just eat your food and if you want more food, you grab it. You know, pass the butter. There's just me, me me, but rather part of the sphere of attention is also the people at the table with you and you noticing them noticing when they finished the water. Notice when they you know had finished their bread or something and the bread basket was next to you, you would offer them here. Would you like some more of paying attention to the world around you? And when I went practice in Japan, Japanese monasteries, I was also kind of built into the whole system is that you are actually paying attention very acutely to the people around you and you took them into your field of vision. So this idea of practicing mindfulness internally and externally, externally taking into the world around you.

So what happened? So, a few weeks ago, a person came to me with asking a very important question for her. My answer didn't satisfy her. But she wanted what she wanted actually was not so much a question kind of a question she wanted to guarantee. And she wanted to guarantee that if she practiced this path, all the way to freedom, like completely In this offered not clinging to anything in the world, that she would end up being compassionate. Her compassion would remain. So this is part of this, you know, fear is concerned, you know how you practice this non clinging, this not being independent that you're not going to care anymore. For her caring was so important that she wanted that guaranteed for me. And so I gave her the most honest answer I could give. And that's what I'm capable of giving. And I said that, generally, that's what happens maybe 99% of the time, but I can't give you the guarantee. Because I don't know what's appropriate for any individual. I don't know. There's so many different kinds of people, so many different kinds of minds and the way they function, so many different hearts, so many different ways of being in this world. That I don't want to pigeonhole people into this category. That You're supposed to be compassionate, then you have to end up with a compassion police. You

know, you end up the idea that you're, you have to fit yourself into this idea, you have to be this way. And we know that, you know, there's all kinds of people and I like to think of many of the people who have what sometimes are called disabilities or even illnesses in our society, psychological ones, or even physical ones. I think it's quite unfortunate that we even view it that way, sometimes, and that there are huge people, human beings and their way. And so people have, for example, dyslexia. Sometimes it's, it's looked upon as a, you know, as a disability or an illness or something. But I think that's a whole other way of looking at it, or attention deficit disorder, that they can be seen as gifts. It's just another way of being in the world, another way of functioning in the world. My son has dyslexia, we see at least he did have he might have outgrown it when he was a kid when he was young. And, but the way he was told that he had this dyslexia, he didn't know, he didn't know he was in a school where you didn't have to learn to read until you felt like it. And so he didn't know there was any problem with his reading. But his mother noticed there was some issues so strange, she had, she looked into it. And so by she educated herself and by time she learned that we told him that you know, he would had this he had this he was had a dyslexic mind and that he was going to do this special program. It was introduced to him as if he has a gift. And so he did this program where this man who was dyslexic and the man was kind of his hero for a little while is this cool guy and I had dyslexia he has dyslexia was pretty cool. And so they did it, you know, gift these things. And I was I was struck many years ago by an article in The Economist of all places about researchers study Attention Deficit Disorder. It's called disorder, right? It's very, very unfortunate. And they said that 10% of most populations are human beings societies, but 10% of people have this Attention Deficit thing. And so they studied went to, I guess Kenya somewhere and studied the bush people. And they, and sure enough, the bush people, among them, 10% of them had this particular kind of mind. We call in our society attention deficit disorder. And there they were quite happy and integrated and in nice in their life when they lived in the bush and when the same people moved to the cities. Their life started falling apart, it was much more difficult. And so the researchers speculated that, evolutionarily in the ancient world, society benefited when 10% of the population had what we call attention deficit disorder. Because they had their minds there were certain kind of gift, they operate in certain way.

That was very helpful in the bush hunting, gathering, searching, exploring new things, paying attention. And some certain, you know, 10% of the village had that kind of tribe had that kind of minds. It benefited everyone. It wasn't a problem. But you know, our society is changing. We're living in these cities with straight lines and straight straight texts and letters and all that. And so, those mines don't work so well. And I've known of people who have attention deficit and so called thing and they do really well as Rangers. There's Park park rangers become how they're out there and glide. So why do we call it a disorder just another way of being. So, compassion, you know, to say that everyone's supposed to end up being compassionate. I think it's disrespectful for all the different ways in which minds operate. Maybe there are certain minds which when they completely free free of suffering, they're happy, maybe compassion for some reason not there is a deficit, the Compassionate deficit people compassionate Deficit Disorder. And you know, and heaven forbid, then we'll send them to Stanford to take them compassion training, giving them a special plaque for their cars compassion disorder. And I think we I think we want to treat everyone. The first approach is to treat everyone as a gift is less is how their minds operate. And so this woman who asked me for guarantee, said, I can't quite give you the guarantee. I don't know. 99% of time I think most people, yes. Spiritual liberation brings a lot of compassion, but we can't guarantee it. So she was disappointed in me. wasn't what you wanted to hear. So for me in my practice, I didn't start practicing to be compassionate. I didn't start practicing I really had a caring for anybody except for myself. And what happened was that as the, the crust, the hard armor of my heart began to dissolve, then I started to become more sensitive, more attentive to the people around me. And then what feels like a very natural, caring for others grew stronger and stronger. And I feel it's one of the great gifts of this practice gave me is the gift of compassion. The fact

that now I care and compassion now is the fundamental operating principle that's behind how I've chosen to live my life. without, you know, without doing without this compassion thing, going You know, I'd be I'd probably have a sailboat I like sailing sailing off into the, into the sunset. And so this idea of, you know, so that. So for many people, I think that's often happens that as they kind of develop the sensitivity that mindfulness is that the capacity for caring for others becomes stronger. And it seems to have been the assumption of the Buddha the expectation he had of people who are doing his practice. He never really as far as I can tell, he never really was explicit about it didn't lay it out, you know, cause and effect and this is what's going to happen. He was more likely just just taken for granted that people become more compassionate after the story goes that after the first 60 followers of the Buddha became enlightened, he sent them off. He said, No to have you go on. The same road, spread yourself out to cross the lands and go out go forth for the good of the many for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many out of compassion for this world. So that it's a beautiful statement. So this was the Buddha's instructions for people who attained what he was pointing to. When I was practicing in Burma, many of us who practice there had been very much influenced by kinds of Buddhism where compassion was really important, loving kindness was emphasized. And we were there prior to doing a very intensive mindfulness practice or lectures, you know, all the waking hours of the day, you were supposed to very intensely meditating very intensely and getting engaged in being mindful being present for this experience. And one of the early teachings I got during a time in Burma, whereas the teacher said, Forget about compassion. You know, don't do that here and endure a sound kind of, you know, kind of. It's kind of like a pretty striking, pretty challenging idea. What?

But I don't think he meant don't have any compassion or, you know, we're not but rather, don't get sidetracked stay on track with what we're doing here. Because and I would say this I don't know if he thought this but I believe this stay on track with developing mindfulness to develop the sensitivity. He would develop the openness. You develop the clarity through which compassion can operate. But if you focus on compassion and that setting intensive retreat, if you focus on it too early, then for him, I think he felt that that was going to slow down the progress and growth of compassion. So that's one particular view. Some people find that the opposite is the most true for them. That Some people find that the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion is the foundation that allows mindfulness to grow. And so that's what they, their most useful thing to do is to cultivate and develop that. But this interplay between mindfulness and compassion, I think they're closely connected in mindfulness in love. One way I think of it is that, you know, I wear glasses. And occasionally in my life, someone has come to me and said, Gil, can I have your glasses for a moment? And as well? Yeah, sure. And I give it to them and they clean them. And then I put them on again and Oh, wow. Wow, yeah. You're so beautiful. I didn't know and it goes sometimes, you know, the dirt kind of builds up slowly, slowly and, and in the old days, I didn't have much have a habit of automatically cleaning my glasses every day. But I would do it would build if someone had to clean for me. So the same thing with our hearts that we're trying to do is to clear the heart of the dirt that's there, the dust that's covered. And then we can see clearly then love and compassion, if it's going to be there it can flow quite clearly. And so this idea of devout dwelling independent not clinging to anything, is the idea that clinging, having the mind dependent in the world, what it means that the mind needs something wants something is requiring something. So it's like, without requiring anything for the mind. you require food, you've acquired all kinds of things that we require to live on. But to have awareness not require anything is very different to have somehow it's like having an open hand. The hand doesn't require to hold anything anymore. And then the hand can go around and take care of things in your life much better. If I have this striker, and I like it, and I'm attached to it, but I never let it down, never let never let it out of my hand, then the hands not useful for much. If I'm clinging in my heart, in my mind, to my self identity, to my pleasure to my status to my relationships, that I have all kinds of things, then that very clinging interferes with clarity interferes with like having Dustin across the glasses, or it's like having your hands always closed. And

so it's not so useful. And it can be very challenging to consider that your relationships are improved if you don't cling to them. or so, you know, it's so important for us our relationships, that you know, to other people and all kinds of things. That is it isn't you know, you You don't want to let go, you need the loss of it the fear of losing it. So as people hold on even closer and tighter, one of the very strong places where that occurs is with people in your primary family. Like if you're a parent with children, there can be a very strong clinging and desire to do that. I know that for him, seeing myself as a parent, that there are times when my clinging, my attachment to my children has taken forms which are not that healthy, to the detriment of my kids. And it's been really clear that I'm better off sometimes not being attached to them, they're the outcome what's going on, that it gives them room to breathe, it gets less gives them room to find themselves and to be themselves. But that's a very hard lesson to learn to trust and maybe to trust that it's okay not to cling, that it's actually for the betterment of everyone for ourselves and others.

So in San Quentin on Friday, There was a man there. One of the one of these probably had been a murderer had been part of a notorious gang, inner city gang. And he had started to do programs think quitting is pretty wonderful. It's the only state prison that has lots and lots of programs for the prisoners to take the inmates to take educational programs, or self help programs, spiritual programs, all kinds of programs. And the reason why San Quentin has so many is because it's in an urban area. So there's all these people in the Bay Area are willing to volunteer their services and help. And most of those programs are done by volunteers. So it's free for the state. And, but the prisoners are up in Pelican Bay or way out there. So I don't know what's called there. To me the most of the most of the prisons are out in the boonies. And there's no people around there there are so few people there who can go around and offer their services so that people put it mates up there have no you know, way of two characters program. So think wins lucky so people just get this man had gone through a number of these programs including this and he was quite transformed, so transformed that he had gone through this guiding rage into power program that he'd been invited back invited back to become a facilitator to be trained to teach this program to other inmates. And so everyone in the program was quite surprised one day, when they discovered and I heard that he had been sent to the whole, he be sent to solitary confinement, because he had so changed. They thought that you know, what could he you know, what happened to him that he was committed to nothing violent anymore. What happened? So he was there for 60 days. I think and then he came out and they thought I would happen. And I think maybe it wasn't till he came out that he himself find out what happened. He didn't know why he was sent to this alternate environment. And he said the first But anyway, what happened the first I'll tell you what, maybe I should tell him why. There was a rumor that someone in the prison who had belonged to this Torrijos gang was going to do some violence to someone else in the prison. So but there was no name no one knows just as a rumor, this idea. And so, there's a certain logic then to taking everyone who had been in that gang who's in the prison and putting them all in solitary confinement. Because then, then it's safe, right. So he just so he being having been part of this gang, he without having done anything that deserved it, except he said except for my past I still have to live with my past and take the consequences of it. But you know, so he had to he was put in solitary confinement. And I guess he had never been there because he thought, oh, apparently he thought, Oh, good, quiet. Oh, he'd been to Salt Lake. Here's how you can find me and maybe in other prisons where had been quiet, but he said San Quentin Southern is not quiet. People are yelling and screaming 24 hours a day. And it's really, you know, it's a ruckus, it's, you know, and you're there and the cell by yourself. There's nothing there. And he said, for the first two weeks, I just stood there and myself thinking and thinking, why did this happen to me, it's not fair. I've done all this work and nothing happened. This is the consequences of it. And just kind of reviewing it over and over and over two weeks or two weeks. He said, You know, I don't think this is working, you know, in this context to do this. What you know, what if I tried meditating? So he tried and he could meditate for about two minutes before the noise around him got to him. But he kept

at it, and he would go back to his meditation. And slowly, slowly over the weeks, he was able to meditate longer and longer, until we got up to an hour and then longer, he would just do much of that during the day, and then he said with a smile on his face at some point, number of times, I fell into complete stillness and silence. Inside and everything, all the noise of the prison receded into the background. But then I got excited about the stillness and that came out it's a whole other thing to learn to be really still that way and not excited cuz he hadn't learned that yet.

And so with that he you know, without the ability to become independent of his environment, to not cling to anything and his the injustice or his past or all kinds of things. He discovered a very deep piece there during your 60 days in solitary confinement. And then he was laid out and back in the program, so I got to meet him on Friday. And part of the reason I want to tell you about this man was, was not only because of that story, but because he was now training to offer this to the other inmates in the prison. That the gift that he got and what he'd learned, he was turning around and he was with his compassion, his care was offering back to the others. And so this idea that it comes around the practice, and, and we can, you know, 99% of the time I think our hearts become such that we want to give back, we want to offer. Once we have sensitivity and care for the world, that then mindfulness externally to the world around us is a very important part of what keeps our heart open and what helps us to open and helps helps us to go forward. But it's very important not to assume that with freedom that your life has to look any particular way. You don't have to be a Buddhist. You don't have to be compassionate. Don't be cruel. But you don't have to, you know, doesn't have to look some way it doesn't have to be like you have to become, you know. Mother Teresa. You know, to become a Dharma teacher. You don't have to become anything. Many years ago, someone told me that when I was young, some Say, if you discover what you enjoy doing, and do it well and really enjoy it, that that helps other people. So someone who, for example, that they got what was given to me was this musician, someone who really does their music, a great joy, that's also a gift to the world to see that's possible. And so I say that because sometimes in spiritual circles, there is a kind of tyranny of compassion that goes on that, you know, you're supposed to kind of, you know, are working, go, you know, work in soup kitchens. It's great to work in soup kitchens, for some people. And the idea is that as we become more free, free of our own suffering, free of our own clinging, that maybe we can trust, what the free heart is about, we can trust what the free mind is about that then we'll find what our thing is, we'll do what seems appropriate for us and some people Take huge leaps, change in their life radically and end up doing some, you know, something very powerful that supports and trains other people, helps others. And some people play their musical instruments or take better mechanics take better care of the cars they fix and the customers that they serve. That somehow what we find we find what what is our thing? But I think that's because we're so interdependent that the people who learn how to be independent, allow the interdependent world to move most beautifully, most cleanly, most helpfully. We can't get away from the interdependent world, but we want to live in it without our clinging we want to live in it without causing further harm. We wonder we'd like to live in this world so that our lives benefits it. But how it benefits it depends on the gift of each person each person is can be different. And it doesn't have to look any particular way, but your way, what it looks like. So there's the inner freedom. There's the outer freedom, where we're no longer we're not clinging to anything whatsoever in the world. And then out of that, the door opens, and how you step through that door into the world. And to live this world is up to you. But I trust I trust a good heart of all of us. And if you're free, you'll find your way to live to benefit others.

So those are my thoughts for today. I hope that that those of you remember the talk a few weeks ago. I hope that this follows up. Well, well in it