

2015-06-13 Shedding The Shell of Views About The Self

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SPEAKERS

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Sometimes we talk about the spiritual journey, like I have today. And sometimes we say there is no journey that there's nowhere to go. And in some ways, they're both true. There's nowhere to go, except to go fully here, to be really here some new way, not to go anywhere not to have a particularly new experience, but to be present here and a new way to wake up. To not be in conflict with ourselves in the world, to be compassionate to what is. Some ways to kind of, you know, we don't go anywhere, but we wake up to this here. And sometimes it's said that the way these two come together a journey and there's no journey is that the fastest way to go from A to B, in the Buddhist practice in this kind of practice is to be fully at A. So to be fully here with yourself as you are to be fully here with this experience. And so part of the study is to study how you're not fully here. Now there's not acceptance or resistance or judgments or pulling back or going forward, supposed to just really here with this experience upright still here. And then if we learn to be here, more and more fully, that puts us in a journey, you know, through our attachments through our fears through our holdings through greater levels of maybe peace and love a variety of things that come along in that journey. But it's really the journey. So is there a journey? It's a no journey. It depends on this metaphor.

But one of the ways of talking about this, is that maybe a different metaphor is that we're trying to shed our shell there's we kind of sometimes encased in a shell. There's limits us that keeps us bound. And that we're trying to do is somehow soften and break open the shell that we're kept in. You know, sometimes obviously a shell of fear, or a shell of conceit or a shell of opinions in the Use the stories we tell ourselves or a shell of our pain or past pain or historical pain, we still have and still feels thanks kind of shell that limits us. The shell that's created when we have a very strong sense of me versus you, us versus them creates a barrier creates, you know, barrier between people. And so to somehow break open that shell or to change the metaphor slightly more to break free from the cocoon and that keeps our butterfly from flying. You know, we were all kind of bound in in some ways. And one of the shells that limits us. shells that is often a source of a lot of suffering is the shell. The shell of self And so I ideas we have a who we are, the way we identify with things. The way we want to be represented by others the way that we don't want people to see us and try to orcas, we don't really care so much to build up a sense of self, but we don't want them to see us in a particular way. So we want to protect ourselves, so they don't see us in a negative way. Or we do we want people to see a certain way. And so we try to create a persona that has a certain results. Or we're limited by past experience, or limited by what people have told us in the past, about who we are. And especially when we're children, we're very, very, very susceptible to what other people tell us. And if people tell you, you're this kind of way, or if they don't tell you if they behave they act towards you as if you're a certain kind of person or kind of

way and sometimes It kind of becomes you grew up and that's kind of like what you assume this is true. Something relatively innocuous for me was in seventh grade, I, my art teacher looked over my shoulder at my drawing and said, You have no artistic ability. And so that's kind of interesting, you know, and I didn't, I had no idea. I had no identity about being an artist. I couldn't care less. It was like, nothing did absolutely nothing to me in terms of my Well, my happiness, or, you know, I wasn't depressed or nothing. You're just like, Oh, it was just the truth. You know, it's just like, Oh, you know, you learn that H two O is the you know, means water. You know, I don't get I never got depressed around that. No, h2o, you know, means more. Oh, no. You know, you have no artistic abilities like so same kind of same kind of valence for me, right. But it became a big cabinet and understanding this You know, this is how it is. And I grew up with that idea of, you know, just matter of fact, didn't bother me, but just, that's how reality was constructed. And then to find out in college that because I was tricked into it in fact, I had a little artistic ability enough that I really enjoyed drawing and painting and I and sculpture and things like that enough so that I took art classes and enough so that actually became an art major for a short while, but it was really a ruse because I didn't want to be an art major, but it was the only way to get some art classes. And so you know, so the you know, so I, you know, I've been limited by this view that society had put on me and there's much You know, there's extremely painful views that society put some people on they internalize these views and who they are. Or we have experiences and growing up our even our friends, I had friends you know, in high school, they treat Give me a certain way. And I assume that I was that kind of person. And mostly remember what they, they seem to be never interested in what I had to say. So I would start saying something and they would like, you know, like, interrupt me or stop and I got this idea I have nothing interesting to say or not, were saying anything.

And so I had to become a Dharma teacher to make up for a captive audience. I just had different friends in high school I probably never have chosen. And so you know, that I carry that with me for a good number of years, this kind of this kind of angst or this kind of identity and the sense of, Oh, you know, that, you know, no one's no one wants to hear what I have to say was kind of a feeling I had for a number of years. And, you know, all kinds of experiences that we grew up, you know, this is who I am and it's hard to see in ourselves. See sometimes easier to see in other people. You see other people limiting themselves by some identity and say oh, you know you want to show them shake them you know No, no you don't have to. You're more than that there. That's an old view. Or someone treats you with an old view. You know once upon a time you did something a little unusual. And now every time they see you, they think of you that way. Or maybe it wasn't once upon a time you did something unusual. for 10 years you did something unusual 40 years you did something unusual. And sure enough, when they see you after 50 years or something they like treat you as if you still did it, they haven't realized that last month you changed and so they're holding you to you know, you feel like a Finally I transformed them change and they're still like going through that. When I was a new practitioner starting to meditate regularly. I was living with Friends a couple and they weren't meditators and but I would get up every morning and meditate. And then from meditation I'd go to breakfast and the and I kind of like my usual way of building up Gil or behaving as Gil wasn't really operating it was kind of like it wasn't playing any social games or something and so then I just come to breakfast and just be kind of an in for me a nice way kind of empty not to do anything as to prove myself I didn't have this was just there. And I could feel over the days that tension started arising and in there, my friends because they expected the old girl to be there. That's how they related to me and I you know, there might have been if I'd wife has been wiser they might have been some way to found my way with it. But I wasn't so wise I was 20 or 21. And so I i thought well, it's either my AI is either I just choose between my friends or meditation. And since I was living with them and working with them, I decided that I would give up meditation for and so I gave it up for about five, six months while I was living with them. So this idea you know that identity and I had to be someone for someone, other people, be somebody for ourselves prove ourselves. It's such a drag that one of my definitions of self, you know, someone asked

me what does the self worth self it's when dragging it just slows us down. You know, just kind of like it interferes with life and things. And so it can be a show, some people get really boxed in held tight, and the tighter that shell is, oddly enough, the more easily to threaten, the more fragile it is, because it's kind of a constructed thing that has to be held in place. And then it's weaker, it is a softer it is the more fluid is more or less it gets threat. To buy things. And then if there is no shell, then the shell is not threatened, the bullet can't break at all. The an image that I kind of like about, you know if you know, things happen. So things go on in the world and things happen and the things that happen in the world. Like if there's a ball and you throw the ball through space, it just kind of goes until the momentum goes in, it completely falls on the ground. But if you throw the ball against the wall, it gets stopped by the wall and falls down. So someone says to you that you know that people with glasses are odd, you know, so I could travel through space until the momentum fades away. And that's it. No hear about that again.

Or it could hit the wall. And you know, the wall is added some identity, some idea of self that you have inside. So, you know, if one of you said, you know, people with glasses are odd, since I wear glasses right now, you know, I'm so concerned where people think of me, and now they'll think I'm a lousy person or whatever. And now I better make up for it. And maybe I'll explain to them why it's not the case. I'll prove to them that I'm not allows you person a grumpy person because even eyeglasses or I'll go out and get contacts you know, all kinds of things because I hit something inside of me, you know, my mind my identity, my fears, my concerns about needing to be someone for other people. It hits something. But someone can say that people with glasses are crummy and it doesn't it doesn't hit any anything inside, it doesn't land anywhere. There's no idea that it encounters, it just goes right through doesn't have to go anywhere. And so part of the idea of conceit and self identity in Buddhism is that we put up these walls for the balls of life. And we've erected the walls. And if we have a lot of walls, you know, then all kinds of things bounce off it and become a problem. But if if there is no walls, all kinds of things can happen in life. That just kind of goes right through space. Like we're a space, which is kind of there. And I'm pretty confident if one of you said people with glasses are crummy. I probably there might be a teeny ripple in my mind. And the ripple would be that's curious. How would How would anybody come up with that idea? That's Yeah, that seems kind of neat. No. So there would be no it wouldn't be like it would do something. But it would just be a little ripple, it wouldn't be a wall wouldn't boom. And so in Buddhism, often they have the idea that something goes up around the notion of self, that doesn't have to be there. So as a reference point that I like to use, so used to go backpacking in the sea arrows and all kinds of concerns that I have in the urban area fades away after a few days. And I could be eating my food in that campground and spill ketchup on my shirt. And I'm not concerned what people think about me. But if I was sitting here, you know, as a Dharma teacher, the founding teacher of IMC and I had lunch with you here at the you know, over there that you know, during lunch, everybody's at some point these silent and this is, you know, squish goes to catch up and What are people gonna think of me? You know, now I'm, you know, you know, I have not, you know, presentable as a Dharma teacher, you know, oh, no, they're not to do a lot of explaining and how this doesn't really, you know, this was an accident doesn't really reflect on who I am and what I'm capable of. And, you know, if I had another shirt, I put it on, but you know, you know, it's not really, you know, you know, you know, I give a whole Dharma talk to protect my identity and my view and what people think about me, right. So in the urban area of social area, we can we put up these walls or put up these concerns that in other settings, they disappear, and we start seeing that they're kind of constructs, they come and go, they will be arbitrary, as opposed to either fixed, this is it, you know, so you know, and that's what happens this many times. We think our identity is it just like me and not being an artist. This is it. mean, I mean, this means like, just it's part of the fabric of the universe that, you know, you're this kind of person, you're this kind of identity, you're this, whatever means to be who you are, it's like this is it. And so then because you have a wall, we have this thing that's in there, things can hit that things can encounter that things can reflect on that. And one of the great things about meditation practice, you know, kind of like

backpacking and free to go out backpacking long enough is that the activity that constructs the walls can get relaxed. Because self identity is something that we think about self identity is something that we operate under self identity is something that we believe self identity is something that you know, as a wall there Balkan hit, that kind of self identity is a construct, something the mind has to create and make. It's not inherent. So you might say, Gil, You must be kidding, because there are some in here And identities like view, for example, you seem to be a man. And that's your sucker that way. You're, you know, and you're telling me that just a construct to some degree you don't know enough about me to know exactly, you know, you know, am I really just, you know, man, I mean, who knows?

It's possible, but I haven't told you everything. So I could be something interesting like this I mean original, something different, right? You know, I kind of look it's easier to get along that way. Right? If I look one way, that couldn't be right. Or it could be that that But the main point is yes, maybe I am. I am kind of biologically considered a man maybe. But I don't operate under that. I don't I don't, I don't I don't mean A construct out of it, I'm not thinking about that. So if I'm up in this year is all alone in the mountains, the idea that a man probably doesn't, you know, mean much, but then it has some kind of setting. It means a lot. I went home during supper, and I've never seen this neighbor across the street but the my wife said, Wow, that testosterone is up across the street, there were like four Harley Davidson motorcycles and two low riding cars. And these guys jeans and T shirts and like strutting around and then it was interesting. So you know, I, you know, that was my people. I should join them, you know? And it becomes an idea. And so it's the operating of idea and opposite of the construct is how we suffer and so meditation practice, one of the functions of it is to begin relaxing and softening in these identities to see how they operate, and beginning to discover how to be present without them getting in the way without them interfering or being a show. And certainly being a man in my case, is a okay construct. It's not necessarily a bad one. And sometimes it's expected. You know, if it's a little bit of society worker, it's a little bit easier if I go into the men's bathroom, rather than the women's is kind of like a construct that I you know, less chaos. But, but, you know, I don't have you know, so then I put it on, I live that way sometimes. But, you know, if you tell me, you know, a real man doesn't wear glasses. You know, that's not gonna do anything for me. You know, just like that's I don't touch my day. entity is not tied around being a real man and what all society thinks that means. And you know, all these Harley's across the street, motorcycles, you know, just just leave, let it be. And then sometimes having an identity is useful. There's also an interesting and interesting walk, I took my walk with my wife, when I dinner at home. And around the block there was some people were talking very loudly, so we kept walking. And then it sounded really bad, like, fight or something, but you couldn't see. And then someone drove by a woman who said these people back there are fighting. So I went back, and there were four people and there was a yelling and I didn't see any fighting that moment, but there was a woman who was like covering her hand or face like with her hands, and she didn't know who she was just simply distraught or whether she'd, you know, was hurt and holding her wounded face. And this guy with bloody hand so I didn't know what was going on. So I saw I went over and I said, Can I help here? Anything I can do? They said, No, this is just a family argument. You know, so it's okay. And I said, Oh, okay, Christina is anything I can do? And no, no. And then I said, and this is where I assumed in an identity was useful. I said, I'm a minister. Is there anything I can do? And then things changed. Even as soon as I said, I was a minister, and then they didn't want to dismiss me so quickly. And And so then, you know, we talked and you want to shake my hands and I didn't really want to shake that buddy hand. So I kind of did it limply on the edge of the fingers, but but he really wanted to shake my hand like cuz it was like, important for him. This guy, he was distraught. So I shook his hand for my handshake. And so anyway, so there was a so sometimes we play these constructs. And so I put like, I took On the persona of being a minister, it wasn't so far fetched. Right? And given my role, Buddhist minister, I didn't tell him I was a Buddhist minister. And then my wife waited on the sides for me to finish my little

conversation. And so when I joined her again, I can tell you I was no longer a minister. She would not have put up with that.

In so they see these things are fluid rights, but But what is not fluid? What do you get caught in? What do you get stuck in? What is it when you sit down to meditate, you keep repeating over and over again the concerns you have, and how do those concerns relate to your identity to how what you believe about yourself and how you have to be seen how you want to be seen and how you have to prove yourself and all these ideas. And it's such a it's such a relief, to have an experience where we radically put down these ideas radically least temporary We don't need them anymore. Have an experience of ourselves free of any idea of identity any idea of who we think we should be or have to be or any idea of needing to defend our or ourselves or other people just and it just had experience and just being just to be, is such a relief.

So in there was a famous person who was considered the founder of Zen and China, John in China, then Bodhidharma. And they say he came from India to China. And when he got there, he had an audience with the one of the greatest Emperor of China, Master Emperor. And Emperor Wu had built a lot of Buddhist temples and was very devout Buddhist. And, and, you know, the Emperor in China was like, he's a top of the hierarchies like, considered almost like the Son of God or something that scented heaven in very important person. And so very About and a lot of support a lot of monastics and translating texts and building temples and all this stuff. And so this Zen monk walks into the court and he's a foreigner, you know, sometimes in the Chinese texts, they call them barbarian, from the west Western barbarian. And so you must have stood out being a foreigner in China in the court. And so the Emperor said, Who are you? And now you don't mess with the Emperor. You know, so we, unless you have a lot of confidence. And I think Bodhidharma had a lot of confidence. Because when he said, when the Emperor said, Who are you? Bodhidharma said, I don't know. I don't know, isn't it and so then, Emperor, US How much merit have I gotten from building all these temples? And Bodhidharma said no merit. And then the Emperor said, What's the highest meaning of the holy truths of Buddhism? And boy, dharmas had no meaning. Actually, then Then he asked, well, who are you? And Bodhidharma said, I don't know. And then he every dime returned around the left. And this emperor was kind of stunned. And when you kind of like stop being stunned, his ministers explained to him he was a great Buddhist teacher from India. And then he tried to get his people to go find him and bring him back, but it was too late. So this is a story. They tell him a teaching story they tell in Zen. So but this idea of, I don't know who are you? I don't know. Can you say that? And in what way can you say that with With a confidence that you could say that in the court in front of the Emperor, you know, like, it's not like you don't know, because you're like, I don't know, I'm confused. I haven't figured it out yet. But rather, I don't know. And I don't need to know. Don't know, and I don't need to know. So what happens if you don't know? And they are everything they say. And then they say, not knowing, is most intimate. Sometimes in Zen that enlightenment is almost described in terms of intimacy. kind of nice, especially in America, we were like being relationship. You know, so what is that? You know? So I know we want to be intimate. So how do you how do you how do you be intimate with someone? And the Zen answer is, you don't know. You don't come with preconceived ideas. You don't Come with agendas, you don't come with yourself as being a certain person you don't let insist the other person be, but you meet and some kind of space where there's possibility for something new. And in fact, you're I think we're constantly becoming new, are constantly getting renewed. So much so that this is also the kind of the Zen view of this whole self thing.

And sometimes in zen, you could be asked, Who are you? And sometimes they give a very concrete, very specific answers not this ambiguous, I don't know. So if one of you asked me, who am I? One answer would be, I would pick up the glass and drink and that's the answer. That's a Zen thing. Right?

And the point of it is that while I'm drinking, I'm the drinker. But you know even to say I'm a drinker is saying too much so you demonstrate it That's who I am. But I put it down. I stopped being that. And then what am I? No, no, I'm a talker, Dharma talker.

And when I go home to my wife, You know, so we discovered so the point being we discover who we are in the activity that we're doing a time we're doing it rather than that we have a certain identity. So you know, rather than me being a man, I will be I guess, Manning you know if I'm Manning of a man, right, but, but that makes it makes it much more fluid and I think much more respectful because maybe there are times when I'm womaning. No, is that allowed or man, you know, just you are, what you are the activity that you do. And that's how you discover and you don't need to bring anything with you from the past. You're okay to drop the past to some degree, you know and not know. And this stepping into it earlier I talked about stepping off the cliff into the unknown. And part of that is being willing to go step forward and not carry with us. And then anyway carrying those ideas of who we have to be willing to just be without a wall without something that the balls of life have to strike and so not to know not to not to know who you are not as a lack of confidence not as ambiguity not as confusion, but maybe as tremendous confidence that you can discover in the in the activity that you meet that you encounter, whatever you're doing whatever is needed. And then that he so if you're not doing anything, oh, and someone says Who are you you say I don't know. But if you're sweeping The hall out there after the meal, then your sweeper. And that's, that's all it is. As opposed to, you're sweeping the hall out there. And you need to prove to all these good people that you're a really dedicated, devoted student member of IMC and, you know, important person here and, you know, has a really important role and everybody's noticing, you know, I chose a job, you know, right in the middle where everyone's walking so that everyone can see that I am volunteering and you know, I'm not, I'm not a slacker. And you know, it's all this self going on. So, what we are then we discover is with we're a self maker, you know, making ourselves and venting selves and all that stuff. That's what's happening moment, as opposed to, they asked me to sweep I'm a sweeper now. So the journey out of the shell of Self, the journey out of the constriction of self, the way we limit ourselves by our ideas. And when we, when we learn to drop some of these ideas and not live by them, then there can be much more freedom in picking them up to when they're useful. It's useful to be a sweeper, it's useful to be a minister, when neighbors are fighting. And by the way, you know, and the but then you know, because then it's much more fluid with and we pick them up when they're useful. We live them when they're useful. play the games, the rules, when this useful that comes with some identities, and then we can put them down and then if your confidence feel safe, feel at ease enough that we don't have to play the self game. We don't have to do anything. It's okay just to be okay just to be and breathe. were safe, deep safety. We're actually less safe when we're playing the self game. So do less just be just be so a journey and journey to confident not knowing who you are. So you can discover a new everyday Okay, that seems like enough. And thank you for coming today.

Kind of a wonderful thing these this long day you know this spirit of generosity where someone comes and offers breakfast and someone comes along and Martha came really early and help thank you and Hillary was doing, you know, getting supplies yesterday and other people helped Bruni helped and Dawn and Bill and a lot of people help all of you probably had a role Some kind and nothing else you came to practice here and, and your practice affected your practicing here whether you intended or not probably didn't intend it is a support for everyone else. At that effect, we know it. So that's why we come together sometimes just so we have the support of others. It's difficult to do the whole day like this or hours like this, if you're just doing it on your own. So you offered something by being here. And hopefully you received something too and felt the support of others. So I want to thank you for coming. And I hope that the journey of the day has been meaningful for you in some ways, helpful in some ways. And I hope that the rest of your weekend is a wonderful discovery of how little you need to know

how little you need to know about yourself. Except, you can discover it as you go along. Then you let it go. Okay, so thank you very much