

2017-07-10 The Tensions We Live With

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SPEAKERS

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So what I want to try to talk about this evening is living with tension. And in certain kinds of ways, meditation is used to relieve tension to let go over to relax. And you can do pretty deeply. It's possible in deep meditation where there's no sense of any tension left in the body whatsoever and no tension in the mind. And it's quite educational. To do that, we learn a lot about ourselves the process of getting that relaxed or peaceful. We learn a lot about our work, but what happens when we lose it afterwards. But one of the problems with getting relaxed, like this, and meditation is the assumption that you're always supposed to be relaxed. And that creates more tension. The idea that that's what you're supposed to do. Because there's many kinds of tension. And some tensions are inherent in how we live our lives, or how we think about our lives or how we relate to our lives. And certain concepts that we live under. If we live with those concepts, they're reasonable concepts to live under, maybe we have to live with them belong to polarities, or dualities, that can never be quite the way it is. But we think we want it to be that way. And so wanting it that way, then there's a tension or opposition against other ways. So one example of this is the inherent tension between tradition and innovation, tradition and progress. The conservative forces of our society, not breathers, politics, religion, all kinds of ways. And that those that want to have innovation and change and progress. And you know, they kind of live together, they can't really separate one from the other. And if you have the idea that one way is the right way, than the other ways made the wrong way. But if they're, if they live in a kind of creative tension together, then and we learn how to kind of accept the tension, then it's possible to kind of work with it and find new ways that aren't really so easy if we hold on to one side or the other. In other tension, that was the I think it's kind of inherent, and quite most people live their lives, I think, is the tension between being an individual a unique individual, and between and belonging, and being part of a group being part of society being part of a family to make something and for some people that is quite painful, some people the sense of not belonging is quite painful as them biggest drive they have in their lives of some people to belong and be connected and fit in other people, their big drive is to get out of that they feel oppressed by having been, in some circumstances, certain social situations, family or communities or something, where they couldn't be themselves and the way it was important for them. And so they kind of had to leave to go someplace else where they can be an individual or be themselves. Some people they become they the pendulum swings to becoming an individual, which is nice in many ways. But then it gets some point it gets lonely, you know, or sometimes they do belonging becomes more interesting. And I've seen in some people that pendulum swing back and forth. And sometimes people don't recognize that there's a kind of East live in a creative tension, you can't have one without the other. And so if we insist too much on one way, then we're setting up a kind of opposition or tension or that's going to arise because the other has to be there as well.

And so it varies from person to person, what degree This is the kind of little bit of a silly example of being an individual, unique, special, do it your own way and don't want to, you know, have to deal with

other people is the person who decides to make up their own language. Because, you know, why should they have to deal with, you know, anybody else's language is kind of oppressive, you know, one you never chose to be born into the culture that has a certain language and it seems a bit absurd that you should have to now accommodate all these other people and we speak that language so you make up your own language, but the problem making up Your own language is a language is used for communication. And so then you can't communicate with anyone and you're all alone in that, that language, the only person you can talk to is yourself. So the idea of kind of really insisting on being your own person kind of really doesn't work. Because what it is to be a human being is to be a social animals. But if you insist on being a social animals too much, that can be oppressive. And so then, you know, where do you fit? Where do you fit in the spectrum is like spectrums. And those spectrums kind of have a tension inherent in them. The other one that's interesting, I think, especially people doing something like meditation practice, or spiritual practice, but almost any discipline at all, is the tension between allowing, and discipline. When do you just simply allow your children to be their children, and when you discipline your children, when do you just allow yourself to be who you are, as you are, and when do you discipline yourself to do something, if you want to learn to play a new musical instrument, and you're just, you know, just allow whatever feels like I'm gonna do, you know, it just, you might be a musical genius, and doesn't matter, you'll pick it all up and be great. But most people lose learn a musical instrument will have to have some discipline, they have to do it regularly, they have to maybe do scales are to kind of practice regularly, and just simply allowing your fingers to do whatever they want. comes later, after a person has mastered a lot of music and music ability, then some point a lot of freedom comes. But you know, how much you allowing how much discipline you do. And I don't know if this is true, at all. But I thought I was told this by a yoga teacher. And I think it had to do with ballet, not yoga. But the idea was that the people who mastered that craft that are the most were the ones when they were growing up and being taught it, we're not told that this is exactly the form, there wasn't a strict discipline, like this is how it's done. But there was kind of like, this is how it's done. And then people did it the way they did it, and they weren't corrected. And somehow, then slowly over time, they grew into being coming great dancers, but the people who are always there with their teachers, organ systems a right way, strict way to do it, then they, you know, somehow that maybe toward it some kind of creativity. So when is it that creativity comes with allowing something to be expressed and from within? And when does creativity come with discipline and work and you know, effort over time, that creates a foundation for create some kind of creative activity. I think kind of sometimes it's kind of a tension between there's a spectrum that we live under. And part of this tension that we live under, if this is sacred enough, what I'm saying is partly because of the idea that things should be a certain way that it should be traditional, that's the right way. Or there should be innovation. There should be, you know, my my own voice and be my own person. It should be, you know, that we all should be together and harmonize and conform with each other. It should be that we should be disciplined and do things just this way. It should be that there should be allowing and creativity and discovery and new ways. As opposed to so as long as should, then we're not exactly in harmony with what is because a should is an idea or judgment.

And so we see now I think in in American politics, there's a lot of tension, political tension we live under, and how much of that political tension has its genesis in people's ideas of should. Things should be a certain way. I think that's reasonable to have those ideas. I'm not saying we shouldn't have shooting. But it is interesting to think of, to what degree is political tension involved with ideas of should little bit abstract thinking. And then if the thinking is a little bit should still be abstract from what's actually happening. Does that create a tension with what's happening? What is the nature of that tension? And who is an ellipse in that tension and for many of us, Many of us live in this tension. Some people live in the tension. And it's their business. That with tension that's I'll say it this way. One of the reasons I want to talk about this today is that I think there's a lot of tension that comes with being human being we can't avoid. But it's not necessarily wrong or bad to have certain kinds of tension, provided we know how to be wise about it, provided that we can learn not to be reactive to it. And some people, when they

get tense, they feel uncomfortable. And when we feel uncomfortable, sometimes it's there's a reactivity to it. And then there's the part of the show to show I shouldn't be this way. And I want to avoid it. It needs to be fixed, I need to blame I need to attack I need to run away, I can't deal with us. But sometimes it's really helpful to be able to learn how to relax with the tension, not relax the tension itself. But to be at ease, and allow there to be tension in the situation. Because there's a form of creative tension, that if we hang in there are able to be relaxed and present for that tension, then we might learn something new about it, we might, we might learn how to be present for it without being seduced by the shoulds. seduced by trying to fix it, seduced by choosing one side or the other too quickly. So we don't hear the other side, we don't understand the bigger picture and how this works together. And how the pendulum swings and how these tensions are spectrums morph and move back and forth. Between it. There was an interesting story that's told in our personal insight movement. story in the early every three years, there is a kind of an international insight meditation teachers meeting. And it meets either at spirit rock here in Bryn County, in California, or at IMS, in Massachusetts, or in Gaia House in England. So it rotates. People go teachers go to, and these started very early on. And I think in the 80s, early 1970s. But sometime early on, maybe in their 1980s, mid 80s they had a meeting and teacher body then was pretty small, maybe I don't know how many, half a dozen or 10 or so teachers. Now there's, you know, a lot more. And it turned out that the in this group of teachers, there were the progressive liberal teachers, and the conservative traditional teachers. And they were two of them that were kind of like, you know, on the opposite ends of the poles of those. And there was a tension in the room between, you know, this polarity. And there was this brilliant eventually became a teacher as well, but it's kind of a brilliant teacher, therapist, psychotherapist, who was there I was invited in to facilitate. And so he said, Okay, one, I don't know which one was first, but maybe let the progressive person that person is most progressive. Let the person leave the room. That person left the room. And then the therapist turned to everyone in the room and said now, oh, this person wasn't part of the teaching scene, one of the teachers, what would happen?

And they looked around, they thought and they said, Oh, well, I think we would all switched over to the left. We'd all switch to being a little more progressive. And then they had the person come back in and had the more liberal person leave the room? As the same question, oh, we would also, you know, move a little bit more to be more traditional. The idea being that they all kind of need each other or they all kind of through a system, they work together. And they could take the positions they had, partly because of the positions other people took and so they didn't have to take it, but they kind of naturally would swim kind of swing kind of towards the middle. Maybe if they weren't there kind of come in. But without seeing that they just lived in opposition and tension that was tense. They could still have tension. But when they saw that, I think everyone was much more relaxed about it, and found that they could work with it more Recently, and some of the, there were so good, there were some really heads being knocked against each other around this before that little exercise. So one of the things, one of the things to learn in mindfulness meditation and learn meditation is to learn how to be comfortable with discomfort. Because if we don't, if we are not able to hang out with being uncomfortable, we're not going to learn and see and be present, just look at what's happening in the bigger picture. And the smaller picture in ourselves. discomfort maybe shouldn't be seen as a problem, it's a discomfort means that something needs to be understood. Something that we need to learn something, but if we react to the discomfort are quick to get rid of it quick to take, you know, ignore it, then there's no learning, there's no going deeper into it to understand. So if we can be comfortable with discomfort to sit and breathe and relax, and just, this is not what are like is this uncomfortable, this is maybe, you know, whatever it is, but Breathe, breathe and allow for it and not get afraid, not get angry, not get spin out and thoughts of fixing it. Just breathe and be about this. This is discomfort. The wind book, wind blows on a spring day and the sun is hot, I know, summer day and the birds chirp early in the morning, and I'm just I'm uncomfortable. It's kind of a natural thing, as opposed to a crisis. So very powerful skill to

learn, to sit and be uncomfortable. And just to be comfortable with it to kind of, Okay, this is how it is. And that skill, then can translate to situations where there's inherent tension in the system, in the way we talk and the way that we formulate things. And then we can be comfortable with that tension. Again, it doesn't mean condoning it or accepting it or agreeing with any one side of it. But it means that because we're comfortable in attention, we can hang in there, look more deeply try to understand the situation more deeply, perhaps more willing to see the other person's point of view rather than being us versus them. And, and, you know, find our way in a nice way. One of the things about I've seen is I've been in a lot of 10 situations with tension. And it's remarkable how when there's one person who's able to sit in the middle of it, and be relaxed, name it, understand it, not not really take sides, even though they might have a position. It seems like everyone begins to listen to each other more carefully, everyone begins to settle down, as opposed to stay kind of intention and or in opposition with each other. So I imagine that this is not what many people think meditation is for, to be wisely tense. But maybe it's realistic. To have that as a goal for the kind of lives many of you live is maybe more realistic to think about. How can you be wise and relaxed or open or around the situations where you feel tense than it is to think about how can I get rid of this tension. There might be more learning and more growing up more develop in spiritual development from staying present and feeling it then then making it go away.

I wanted to read this, what I think is a lovely comb, by Norman Fischer, the Zen teacher here in the Bay Area. And I think this poem kind of kind of talks to this little bit to this idea of this tension that we can live under. And it kind of amusing way. The poem is called a model of the universe. What we want is a model of the universe. That includes everything, leaving nothing out. Yet is completely different, fresh, unique, holding nothing in common with any of its constituent elements. Yet, is not strange, exotic and does not make us feel uncomfortable. What we want is a model of the universe that we can read about in a magazine article with pictures. Yet it can't be just another magazine article, it can't be in a regular magazine. This magazine will glow as it shimmers before our eyes. What we want is a model of the universe that will answer all our questions to which we can refer for all sorts of advice to foretell the future cure bursitis get rich quick, aphrodisiac, etc. and will be absolutely foolproof 100% of the time. What we want is a model of the universe that we can talk to coyly we can group our eyelids that plump our lower lips, and begin to sniffle and it will Pat our shoulders and say they're there their grow sad and droopy itself. But without ever losing its composure or assurance. What we want is a model of the universe so complex, we can never understand it. So simple, we can grasp it in a glance and explain it to our friends via a few simple sentences. What we want is a model of the universe that once in our possession becomes identified so strikingly with us, that we become internationally famous. Our names, household words, the meaning of are doing and saying and internally living legacy around which all subsequent culture is organized. What we want is a model of the universe we can count on time after time. It is never tiring, never predictable, eternally knew what we want as a model the universe that is better than someone else's model of the universe. That makes their model of universe look really pale by comparison. Although only we realize this, we and our intimate friends. But our model, the universe is also better than the model of the universe, even our intimate friends. Although the fact of the matter is that no one but us really possess a model of the universe is our little secret. However, we write poems about it, that strike others as infinitely suggestive and profound. But since it makes sense, this makes us feel lonely. We want a model of the universe that everyone understands. We want to model the universe that explains everything. It doesn't take the mystery out of anything, in fact, adds mystery, even to the simplest of daily actions. A model of the universe that keeps us fit, and eating delicate and healthy foods, a model of the universe in which we appear never overweight, nor old. Yet, we don't want to actually appear in this model of the of the universe, we want to be beyond it, holding it in our hand, looking at it from a distance. Yet, we don't want to feel alien from it either. We

want love. We want a model of the universe in which we can always stay home, yet be able to travel whenever we want to remote places, or all foreign languages are actually English.

Though they never though they never lose their ethnic charm. What we want is a model of the universe contiguous with a total shape of time, so that it neither begins or ends is neither something nor nothing. What we want is a model of the universe in which this poem therefore never ends, and in which it never began. So maybe got a look. At some sense, this idea of having these should be one way but we don't want to just that way has to be the other way to in this tension. Sometimes we swing back and forth between them. These ideas. And sometimes people swing much too often, and react too strongly. That we wouldn't do if we learn to be at peace with the tension. Find this we just relax we can breathe or this is a tense situation. This is uncomfortable. And maybe it doesn't have to always be different than how it is. The movement of should it should be something movement. I wanted to be different. I want to be somehow takes us out of the moment takes us out of the possibility of just being relaxed In the present moment, being relaxed with what's happening, doesn't mean we condone it. What it means is that we're relaxed. And from that, being at ease with it, then hopefully we can not reactive to it, then we can have more understanding of when what we have to fix what we should change how we be in conversation with people. And how we may be talking about. These tensions are talking about the spectrums are talking about the range of views and positions we have, rather than it being a wall between one side or the other. If we see as many of these things exist in a spectrum, then maybe it's easier to be in conversation with other people. Because they're just kind of one end of the spectrum. And maybe in an odd way, maybe not so hard. Maybe we need the people that sometimes we live in tension with in certain situations, as opposed to being one way or the other. I've thought about this for a long time in American politics. It's a strange animal. But it seems to my little understanding of political history, that politics tends to swing from one side to the other. And somehow that swinging in politics, is how the country finds its way. And it's very unfortunate for some people in one end of the spectrum to swing to the other side. But maybe that's one of the ways is kind of like the rhythm in which there's kind of slowly over time, something evolves and grows and develops, because we certainly are different than we were in 1776. And you know, where he can even 10 years ago, or 20 years ago. So if that's the nature of it, to have these swings in these pendulums, that to this, how the tension plays itself out, then do we step back from it? participate in it, but not get so tightly involved? Like it should be one way. But rather, we participate? Maybe, maybe we help the swing swing in one direction, the other for sure. But, but you know, we see it as a system as a, as it's inherent in the whole thing to have the tension. Maybe it's not a mistake, maybe it's how we find our way forward in a certain kind of way. So that's a little bit of, you know, maybe political side of Gil here. So I apologize if it seems simplistic, but what I'm trying to point to the main thing I'm trying to point to today, is this idea that there are inherent tensions that exist in many situations in life. And that if we can accept the tension, be relaxed about it, then sometimes we can find a wise way forward. And one of the kind of prime examples I have in my own life for this is when I'm in, I'm in talking with someone, we're trying to figure something out. And we have two different ideas of what's supposed to happen. And so we're kind of, you know, you could say, and conventionally, we're in opposite positions, where it is tension between us. And sometimes we were having this conversation and going back and forth, and the other person will tell me, okay, I give up, you can have your way. And night, something like that. And I said, No, no, no, that's not how it should be. I don't want my way.

This way that easily, I want us to stay in attention. I want us to stay kind of staying connected. And keep talking about keep talking about it. Even though it feels a little bit tense. That's, let's let's hang in there. Because if we hang in there long enough, there's a creative tension that gets formed. And maybe we'll discover a new solution that works for both of us that we couldn't have figured out unless we stayed the end with a difficulty and attention. And I've seen so many times in my life, we this is how it works out. And so the third option that we hadn't thought about until we hung out hung up, you know, hung with

attention allowed it to be there didn't look for quick answers or, or give up because it was uncomfortable. So this also happens, you know, internally within ourselves, to sit and meditate with our discomfort, to be able to breathe and relax and be with it. We don't know what's being worked out. We don't know what's trying to find its way in our hearts and our psyche and our minds. But if we come to quick solutions or quick ideas or quick judgments of what's happening, we might be missing a very important opportunity. If you go and relax, get relief. If you check out or go away from the inner discomfort that you have, you might be doing yourself a tremendous disservice. There's certain kinds of inner discomforts, which are not meant to be problems, but meant to be kind of the stepping stone to the next point of growth. The third option, or the new option that you never heard of before. So this idea of sitting down, and not thinking of meditation as necessarily a place to be peaceful and relaxed. But a place where we can really be with what is and learn how to be with whatever is here, and relaxed, open handed, open hearted, open minded way. If it's very comfortable and peaceful, to be with that, or an open ended way, if it's uncomfortable to be with that, then open him away, just allow it to be there, feel be present, study it, get to know it, find out how we react to it, and how we push it away, or grasp or get angry or get afraid. See if there's secondary reactions, we can let them fall away. And just be with the simplicity of it. I've had plenty of opportunity, in my years of meditation practice to be uncomfortable. And I've done every possible strategy of trying to avoid it, you can probably you've probably have done as well, I've done this for 40 years, so long enough to have tried a few things out. And I'm generally found that trying to avoid, it doesn't work very well. But trying to be present. What I've learned is that what I've said earlier, whatever, what I've learned, is that often some deeper inner discomfort that I have, sometimes in the form of depression, sometimes in the form of anxiety, sometimes in the form of just agitation. Stress, sometimes it's something important is bubbling and working its way finding its way, something that I need to see, clearly. But if I, you know, go for a quick fix, go for a quick relaxation go for, you know, something, if I use now they have all these wonderful meditation apps. And, you know, you can get, you can get into these, you know, different zones, you know, wonderfully some people get quickly concentrated or peaceful in these apps. That's nice. But when are they going to be uncomfortable? It When are they going to be agitated? You know, you don't want to bypass it. It's not supposed to be a drug. In a meditation. It's mindfulness meditation is a way in a mature, upright, dignified, valued way to stay present in the middle of a life as it is. And in doing that, to wake up doing that, to find our way. And doing that. See what wants to come and grow within us that we won't make space for if we just have an app that gets us concentrated. So I guess it was a little you know, one little set saying, to summarize this talk by that you have to understand in context of the talk, don't just take it go home and say this is what Gil said, but so there's still summary. So let yourself be uncomfortable. That's it.

So are some of you now uncomfortable with the talk? And you'd like to talk about that? Or? Or do you have any questions or comments or testimonials that you'd like to offer?

Um, that was wonderful gal. Um, it just reminded me how I was taught growing up to love and appreciate the fringe fringes of society, because that is what keeps us going from keeps us from going over the edge and any one way that there is kind of purpose in that kind of extremes. And it's something you can learn from and being uncomfortable with them. Also, I was struck by you know, there's a discomfort and, like sometimes people say it's unfair this situations are unfair, and that's unfair. And they stop right there and are uncomfortable with the fairness of life. And I've found something really helpful is to keep in mind that it's actually a good thing that everything's not fair. Because if it was fair, every time you sped went over five miles an hour with the speed limit, he would get a speeding ticket. That would be sometimes it helps you hold the discomfort and fairness and unfairness going, it's kind of good.

Great, thank you. Thank you.

Yeah, you mentioned music early in the talk. And I found myself thinking about these polarities in the great musical bands and songwriters. So you know, the most glaring might be Lennon and McCartney, where, you know, McCartney had this kind of happy go lucky, kind of impish quality and Lenin was, you know, the heavy in the picture. And so, you know, the, some of the greatest work is when they have to meet in the middle, you know, they had to kind of join together. And then, but the tension of that those collaborations are often so tumultuous and painful for the participants. So they spend out and then you get, you know, McCartney doing silly love songs or something is just left to is completely impish, innocuous kind of personality and also good. It's all good. But yeah, it's abusive that way. But yeah, that attention. And, and, you know, if they learn to, you know, they gotten the lesson that I was trying to teach today about being relaxed about tension, allowing Ford working with it, maybe they would have stayed together longer than we would have more music. Imagine the music that should have been there. Was there waiting to be written? I finally knew how to be comfortable with tension.

We have the mic back over here.

Oh, yes.

The green light should be on on the side. Okay, so what do you do? Or what do you think you should do if you become too comfortable with detention? Because sometimes it feels like it just moves too fast. Oh. So it's like, you can't see it. And you know, you notice it. But then your mind just drips, then something else. So what comes to mind to me, when you say too comfortable with attention, is that sometimes there are uncomfortable tense situations that people are too complacent, too willing to be accepting of too willing to be kind of get out of the way and Okay, you know, just and that's, you know, if we give into, maybe giving into easily to it, kind of, kind of comfort with discomfort I'm talking about is one that we can use to look at it and address it more directly, if it needs to be addressed. It's not the kind of way of just complacently giving in or saying, you know, okay, it's all okay, and not just, you know, I'm just a good Buddhist and I just breathe with everything. You know, it's some things need to be addressed. And something should be addressed quite strongly. But we don't have to be tense, we don't have to be tense because of that kind of tension. We're not to be, you know, I what I'm hoping is that if we can be relaxed or learn to be comfortable with discomfort, it actually gives us more power and more ability to look things directly in the eye and address them when they need to be addressed. Is that kind of what you had in mind? Yeah. Thank you. Great. Thank you. So last one, yes.

Just going to say that I think it's probably very helpful if in when you're living with these differences of opinion, that you find a way that is respectful Where mutuality is involved, if you aren't going to voice your opinion so that both sides feel they're being heard both are multiple sides. I think that would be really helpful. I think the system breaks down when, when that doesn't happen, right?

I think so. So one of the nice theories to operate under is a theory that we, we all need each other. And so we need to also listen to each other and the different points of view and then slowly find a way to kind of find common ground. So thank you, and if this talk made you uncomfortable, that's okay. I guess and if or you want to talk to me about it. I'll be here for a while. Thank you.