

2017-11-26 Gratitude Is Free

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SPEAKERS

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So good morning, everyone and welcome. Can everyone hear me okay? well enough, okay.

It turns out that one of the very best emotions going around that you can have is free, is not cool. And doesn't cost anything. And it's does tremendous amount of good for yourself in the world. And it's there for Chi. It's the wrong kind of language, of course, but it's there for the taking. But that's not really right. It's there that's available. And that's the emotion, the feeling the attitude of gratitude. It's one of the best things going, and it's free. And it doesn't take much to be grateful. Though, it's often in short supply. This is the season of gratitude, right with thanksgiving. And as I was, I didn't go deeply into the news this last two days. But I did kind of skim the headlines and some of the articles. And I didn't see any articles about gratitude, their Thanksgiving, but I did see a lot of headlines about this phenomenon that apparently is just taken off and is really important and expanding and growing. It's called Black Friday. That seems important. And then in the wake of this Black Friday, there was this big announcement about this man who owns Amazon, who apparently now is the most wealthy man in the world, wealthy person in the world over a quarter billion dollars. He's worth apparently, and they said thanks, thanks to or because of Black Friday, the stock went up. And so I imagine he's very grateful. And but I wonder if he is as grateful as the Buddha was when he was enlightened. The story, it's probably a myth is that after he was enlightened, he spent seven days sitting in the bliss, enjoying the happiness of being free. And then he stood up and went a few paces away from the tree under which he had sat and stood there and for seven days, looked back, look back at the tree. And in gratitude, for the support that he caught from the tree, that tree protected him and shade and maybe rain or different things. And I wonder, since it's a myth, what the symbolic meaning is of being standing there, gazing at a tree, being grateful for the support, the gifts that came from the tree, is a tree represents something that's non human could represent our natural world. The tremendous amount of support that our human life requires from you know, constantly to be alive, is a Is it something that is that a gift from the natural world? Do we take time to appreciate that our very breath that we take the steps that we take the feelings we have, what we hear what we see that act of seeing? These are all? Are they gifts? Are they something gets given to us in a way that's pretty special that we value and appreciate? Or do we take them for granted? I live about a mile and a half from IMC the center here. And sometimes I walk here, which I love to do, and sometimes I drive. And when I when I walk when I walk, I feel divided. And I feel a little bit I come down here and I feel kind of very appreciative of being able to do the walk appreciative of the trees. I take. There's so much more appreciation for me. And when I come to IMC in those days, I'm usually so delightfully surprised that we're here. Wow, this happened when I drive. I don't I don't know maybe I probably could if I thought about it, but it doesn't occur to me. Somehow. When I drive there's much more of a sense of I'm busy taking care of driving. And so I don't take time to be the Notice the sky and the clouds and what's going on around me.

And I also I think there's an expectation, it's easy to live with expectations, when I'm, when I'm driving, I expect things to work out, I expect the car to be functioning. And it's kind of a drag when it isn't. So I kind of like you know, more focused on how you're expecting it to work wanting it to work. And I've kind of come here and I kind of, I don't think I think this way, but I kind of expect this building to be standing. And to be here. There isn't, I kind of operate under kind of an implicit expectation of how things are. And I think that that's one of the dangers of the kind of modern life that many people in our communities here live, that we live, we have lives that are tremendously complex. And there's a tremendous amount of unseen forces that support us for the complicated lives that we have. And I have noticed that in myself and in communities I've lived in over my lifetime. That is the people who live in the simplest environments, people who live on farms, people live close to the natural world. People who don't have a lot of things tend to have much more gratitude, much more appreciation, much more joy, the people who live in complex worlds, I think there's much more expectation that things are working, that will be that things will take care of ourselves, things are expected to kind of be there for us when we need them. And I remember growing up a little bit in Italy, a long time ago, and ordering the telephone to come be delivered to our home. And you know, we were grateful that it came after a week. And you know, I think a lot of people here if you're moving to a new home and ordered a telephone service or something, or even if you ordered an internet service, and it took a week when they finally come, would you be grateful? Or would you be like irritated and ready to, you know, ready to kind of, you know, there's an expectation that a workout should be here right away? I need it this. So do we want to live a life of gratitude? Or do we want to live a life of expectation? We want to live a life that takes things or do we want to live a life where we get a much more sense that we're receiving a life of reception of receiving things, oh, how much I'm receiving, I think is a much more peaceful and happy life than a life that takes that once give me more. And it goes along with one of the core ideas of Vipassana meditation, mindfulness meditation. And that is the principle or the idea of a simple presence of being, as simplicity of being the idea of being present here and now. Without a lot you have to prove, prove yourself to the world without needing to apologize for yourself or defend yourself for who you are and being here in the world. without requiring to get and have and accomplish without requiring to explain or blame or, or you know, remember a lot. But it's simplicity of just being here. And this moment, at least being here and being content to breathe. Being content to walk down the street, being content kind of experienced what's here now. So one of the little kind of catch catchy phrases for the practice we do is the expression stop and see the more sophisticated words in Indian Buddhism was somata and Vipassana somata usually means become calm or do develop concentration. And Vipassana is the R word for insight. But when those Indian words went to China, the Chinese translated them very practically as stopped and see. So there's something about the mindfulness practice that involves both stopping, not freezing. And not that necessarily stopping for a whole week to look at the tree and be grateful. Though I think we'd be better off if we spent a little bit more Time that way,

but not stopping that long but stopping long enough to see what's here to recognize what's here. And if we stop and recognize what's here, will there be gratitude can there be, what does it take to look around and not want to take it to have, but to appreciate how much is given to us, how much we receive. And, you know, the, the, you know, moments moment, as I said earlier, we receive air to breathe. Without that coming quickly and fast, we wouldn't live very long. It's phenomenal. I find, every time I turn on the water in my home, I'm kind of pretty amazed regularly when I turn on this water. And it's water I can drink. I grew up also I grew up in Europe, not in Italy for another place in the 50s. In actually I tell you where it was so you can remember. So you can see the contrast in Geneva, TD by now so you know, international cosmopolitan city, our modern city. But when I was growing up in Geneva, in the 1950s, there was we had to boil the water because the water wasn't clean. Geneva did my lifetime. But now I turn on the faucet. And it's like this pristine, Hetch Hetchy water from the Sierras. It doesn't get much better in terms of water supply, what we get in this area here. And I'm kind of

amazed Wow, pretty cool. I need water in order to live food. I'm kind of like an OG the kind of food that's available here on the peninsula. I mean, wow, it's a little bit over the top, I think they produce in this supply in the range. I mean, most people in the world don't have this. And you know, and if you go to Safeway, or go to Whole Foods, and they happen not to have the right chocolate. No, you know, that's what a drag Give me the hundred million dollar 100 billion dollars Couldn't you couldn't at least have provided the right chocolate.

But there are people who you know, can't afford to buy food or people, you know that the one of the level of people hungry in Silicon Valley is quite high. I don't know what it is currently. But my son when he was in eighth grade, was studying hunger in Silicon Valley. And I think they figure something like 10% of the people in Silicon Valley, rely on Second Harvest Food 10% in this f1 place. And it's quite phenomenal thing. And we're upset about the chocolate. So gratitude. Sometimes people have wanted to differentiate in gratitude, and thanks. And we have this wonderful expression and thanksgiving to give tags, which is a nice thing. But I think one of the differences between giving and gratitude, or at least a useful distinction to be made is that thanks is what you offer to someone. It's a relational experience, where we're thankful for and express it to someone. Gratitude can just be an attitude that maybe can be for something specific. But it's possible to be grateful for no reason at all. Without anything specific in mind. One of the reasons I like to bow at the end of my meditation is that when I when the bell rings, I'll just almost always deeply appreciative of having a chance to meditate. And it just feels very appropriate in that appreciation, the recognition, the valuing of that experience of meditation, I want to express the gratitude somehow I want to express that appreciation. And so put my hands together to act in front of me and can do a little bow is a way of, of expressing gratitude. And it doesn't really make sense for me to say gratitude for what I mean. Yes, right. Meditation, gratitude, chance, gratitude for the subtleness or the peacefulness, just the Beingness of being there. It's a pretty simple thing. But I'd almost prefer not to it be a gratitude for anything in particular But just gratitude for its own sake, or just gratitude for being or just being alive or something. It's such, it's free, it's available, it feels so good to be grateful. And so gratitude is being kind of an attitude of a way of being alive. Whereas thanks is a relational exchange, where someone does something, and we express that gratitude, we express the appreciation, we express the valuing, we express their recognition that we recognize that this has been done for us is, you know, I think more to do with thanks with gratitude, you don't have to acknowledge it, it just, you know, here I am. And it's like, I feel so grateful gratitude is here. It said that gratitude generally is strongest, when something is given to us, that we receive something which is not expected or not required. If someone does something, an act of kindness doesn't act, it's kind of stretching themselves for us, then the appreciation of that act of kindness in the form of a gift, for example, or some other act is often kind of the catalyst for feeling gratitude. And so gratitude partly is kind of a field of feeling supported. And this idea that we're supported all the time, we're more supported than probably we acknowledge, supported by other people supported by, by the natural world, it's quite something for our life to be this way. So this image part, for me, it's a powerful image of the Buddha standing facing this tree for seven days. I'd get bored after a while, I don't know if I could sustain my gratitude for that long. But this idea of an extended period of giving time stopping and looking time to really take it in. As opposed to moving on to the next thing. And the next thing really quickly. And for me, this represents the difference between life that where we take time to receive what's here, versus a life always taking. And so there's simplicity of being that mindfulness is about just here, puts us in a place where we can be more receptive.

If we have a complexity of being where we're always about fixing and wanting and getting, defending, running away, there's not much room in there to feel receptive. And it's actually quite oppressive. How many people how much of our society how many people live a life of wanting and getting and taking. And I mean it politically, he's that it's oppressive, because the amount of acquisition and goods that is

used to kind of prop up our society and get people going, comes at a tremendous cost, socially, economically, environmentally, all kinds of things to take. But the most important, the most important, but one of the very important costs of a life of taking and wanting and having is often a lack of connection with oneself, a lack of really taking time to feel and be available here for this. So this, you know, session, a meditation we just did. It was a time for me, and hopefully, for you to feel here connected in a deep way to myself. But it's not a connection, this which is self centered. Because it turns out that being self centered, is a way of being disconnected from yourself. Surprisingly, there's something about the contraction or that tightness or their preoccupation of self centeredness, which gets in the way, of really settling deeply and being connected here. If we're deeply connected here, then without the selfishness, then I think there's a feeling of being porous or feeling of being receptive or open or continuous with the environment around us. And so surprisingly, maybe for some people, that logic of it'll be surprising that the more we focus here on ourselves and meditation and mindfulness, the more we're available to be present for the world around us. It's not a selfish act. It's a way of turning ourselves inside out, so that we are much more connected to the world around us. stop and look turned, turn your Inside Out, and then take time. And the some of the best emotions you can feel are free. They're available. But do we take time to avail ourselves on them, or there's so many things that we feel we have to do when they get and accomplish. Move on to the next thing. We're kind of restlessness that gets in the way of us taking time to experience, the simplicity of being the joy of being that's here, and now. Certainly a lot of forces that keeps us going. But then we have a practice of stop and look, pause. And I think the sacred pause the Sabbath, that we can do moment by moment, just to take it and be here for this experience. Can there be a contentment with this. So part of mindfulness practice, is so all that I've talked about so far, is idealistic. incense that involves ideals of gratitude, ideals of ways of being is a hugely important part of mindfulness practice, is to be present for what gets in the way of these ideals. So part of the homework is like in relationship to gratitude is not to go around now be gratitude, grateful and feel like you know, this is supposed to do and force yourself to be grateful. But rather, the homework is to take a good look, what gets in the way of gratitude. What stops it? What interferes with the ability to be grateful? If gratitude is a natural capacity, what gets in the way, I read briefly an academic article about gratitude in chimpanzees, chimps, chimpanzees, communities. It's not only a human thing, if it's in chimpanzees as well. Maybe it's more of a natural instinct that we're capable of. It's kind of innate in us the idea of feeling grateful. So what gets in the way?

I know sometimes for me, if I've done my homework, I've noticed sometimes it's fear, and fear in many different ways. Certainly, sometimes it's fear that if I express gratitude, people, it won't be appreciated. If I express gratitude, I'll be in debt indebted to someone I mean that to someone. They did a study about, about the gratitude in men, males. And they found out that they compared males in Germany with males, the United States, American males, were much less grateful than German males. And so then they tried to figure out why. And the idea is that because of the strong individualism in America, and the strong kind of sense of autonomy, apparently, there's a fear that if you spent you're very grateful or thankful, that involves certain kind of reciprocal requirement. It's a knowledge meant that we're not autonomous, it's economic. And it's an acknowledgement that we are interdependent and connected to each other. And that that doesn't quite quite go well, with I guess, if I were to study is accurate, with a certain kind of ethos, certain kind of attitude of certain American males. So I don't know if it's true. And I certainly don't want to assume that's true for the males that are here. But this is all part of this doing this research the homework and seeing what is it that gets in the way of being grateful. So the fear fear of indebtedness, fear of having to do something, fear of kind of expressing perhaps expressing being kind of dependent on others or connected to others, rather than being independent. There's also the idea of being miserly being stingy. I don't mean that you know, I don't gratitude maybe implies I have to give away I have to do something for others and I don't want to want to keep it for myself. Gratitude also gets in the way of being busy to getting more and acquiring more inquiring more.

I mean, imagine if he so stay ahead of you know, because he was in the news we could talk about him right 100 billion dollars he's net worth. Imagine if he took a week to stop everything he was doing spent a week being grateful for his good fortune or ignite 100 hundred billion dollars, maybe a year. I can't imagine him taking stopping, I can't imagine someone that kind of responsibility is kind of probably driven to a huge degree in going, going going. But it takes time to, you know, really settle back and appreciate what we have to be content. I think of gratitude and contentment going hand in hand. The Buddha said that there were two kinds of people that are rare in this world. The first are people who do favors for others, benefit others. And the other rare person is the person who's grateful for what's done. So I don't know that how true that is. But there's an interesting idea that back 2500 years ago, the Buddha should say that. So gratitude. So I want to read a couple of things.

Since probably for the last 20 years or so, in this whole movement of positive psychology, there started to be research on gratitude. And so there's all this, you know, you can get clinical studies now, I guess, on gratitude and psychologists. Before before the last 20 years, the people who wrote about gratitude were either religious people, writers, or philosophers for the most part, but in psychologists have been studying it for a while now. And so the early studies and here's a kind of a synopsis of results of some of these studies. That's, that has references for each of the claims. It's from Wikipedia. And so you can look at you can look up the studies, I guess. A large body of recent work, has suggested that people who are more grateful have higher levels of well being grateful people are happier, less depressed, less stressed, and more satisfied with their lives, and social relationships. Grateful people also have higher levels of control of their environments, personal growth, purpose in life, and self acceptance. Grateful people have more positive ways of coping with the difficulties they experience in life, being more likely to seek support from other people reinterpreted and grow from the experience, and spend more time planning how to deal with the problem. Grateful people also have less negative coping strategies, being less likely to try to try and avoid the problem that neither is a problem blame themselves, or cope through substance use. Grateful people sleep better at this seems to be because they think less negative and we're positive thoughts just before going to sleep. Wow. It's a little bit kind of over the top. Like, that's all we need. While Smith whilst many emotions and personality traits are important to well being, there's evidence that gratitude may be uniquely important. First, along to toodles that long longitudinal study showed that people who are more grateful coke better with a life transition, specifically people who are more grateful before the transition were less stressed, less depressed, and more satisfied with their relationships three months later. Second, two recent studies have suggested that gratitude may have a unique relationship with well being and it can it can explain aspects of well being that other personality traits cannot.

So I think that for me, I came upon the wonderfulness of gratitude. Not because someone told me to do so not because I read longitudinal studies. but rather because I sat, I sat and meditated day in and day out, sitting down, taking time to just be mindful and present to stop and see, to settle into a simplicity of being where there was a contentment just to be alive or just being alive is enough. And feeling this is a life is a gift. Being aware is a gift. Breathing is a gift, just be He felt like a gift, like his wonderful blessing thing that was occurring and happening. And I had plenty of opportunities over these years to see how I lost that coming out of meditation. See how I became in a hurry, I wanted things I was afraid of things. How I had, it was angry, or things had resentments, and all kinds of things I got pulled into. But then I would go and sit every day. And all much of this often would just kind of wash away. And I get to kind of start fresh with this simplicity of contentment, and presence, where the attitude is much more one of being receptive to this world, then taking from this world. And here, there's such a beautiful thing. And so many gifts come from being here in a simple way. So many gifts come from settling and letting go of or relaxing. All these thoughts and stories we tell ourselves and beliefs that we carry around about ourselves in the world and to be able to sit and drop the beliefs, the stories, the ideas, the internalized

messages that we've taken on the prejudice, we've have to sit and be really quiet and still and see in that stillness, to feel joy well being contentment, grateful, or appreciative. To feel that's a beautiful thing to do. And it's free. And then perhaps, you could maybe in principle, appreciate Yeah, a week in front of a tree, saying thank you, being grateful, makes sense. When we're free, like the Buddha. So to end, I would like to read a little kind of like a guided gratitude meditation that Jack Kornfield wrote, or maybe it's like, maybe it's like a Buddhist prayer. So Jack Kornfield writes, with gratitude. I remember that people, animals, plants, insects, creatures of the sky, and sea, air and water, fire and Earth. All whose joyful exertion blesses my life every day. With gratitude, I remember that care and labor of 1000 generations of elders and ancestors who came before me. I offer my gratitude for the safety and well being I have been given, I offer my gratitude for the blessings of this earth I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the measure of health I have been given I offer my gratitude for the family and friends I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the community I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the teachings and lessons I have been given. I offer my gratitude for the life I have been given.

So one of the best emotions going is free. And it's gratitude. And so thank you for being here today. And I'm grateful to have the chance to sit here with you and I'm grateful to be able to share something that's been important for me in my life.