

2018-03-17 Aspiration For Awakening

Thu, 9/3 5:50PM • 33:29

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

practice, awakening, people, aspiration, blossom, motivation, sincere, bodhichitta, suzuki roshi, sincerity, meditation, free, mind, sincerely, biological imperative, goal, mahayana buddhism, suffering, reason, word

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So I've appreciated being here today with all of you appreciating that people would come for a day along and apparently some of you didn't expect to have us silent day long. And so some of you came, sat here, sitting and walking all day. And it's a wonderful thing I think so I think is one of the most one of the most important things we do here at IMC is these silent dialogues where each person has a chance to meet themselves practice with themselves without you know, input from the outside which is useful teachings and input and instructions. But there's a limit to how far you can do with instructions and input and these teachers it's to kind of necessary at some point just to be left with oneself in the practice, and meet oneself and then not have the distractions of a lot of new information, new teachings do things and so I think it's very important. So I appreciate very much, and it's a little bit inspired by your motivation to be here and engage in this practice this way. I want to talk some about motivation and practice. And start by bringing up very important concept in Mahayana Buddhism, which is the idea of bodhicitta. And the word body means usually translated to English as awakening. Sometimes it's enlightenment. And citta. Here is usually translated it as thought the thought of awakening it also Mind, so the mind of awakening, and more more often than not Mahayana Buddhism, it's taken to mean the aspiration for awakening, the dedication, the motivation for it. And if you go back and try to look at the earlier teachings of Buddhism, there's not really a comparable concept there. It's kind of like just taken for granted that people will be motivated to practice. The closest you would get, I think, to really, you know, this, the emotional motivation and emotional kind of tone or the drive or the inspiration would be in the various uses of the word saddhā or faith. But because that this early tradition doesn't have that, as far as I know, a word for this kind of this aspiration, the movement for liberation kind of concept to hold that it's useful to maybe talk a little bit about this pretty citta In the Zen tradition where I studied in the Zen master Dogen, Zen teacher in Japan, the 12th century 13th century, he defined this very important mind determine bodhichitta as the mind that sees the world of impermanence. The insight into impermanence is bodhichitta. And this is a little bit of surprise, because but he does over and over again is used as the aspiration for awakening and, and what's the connection between seeing impermanence and the aspiration for awakening. And I think there can be a very profound connection, that the deeper the insight into this changing nature of our world and rising and passing a phenomena, the more I think it becomes almost instinctual, to want to move towards freedom. There's something about the free flow of excellence A reality, the flow of experience that we experience, we can see we perceive we have, as we deepen in this practice that lends itself to kind of a movement towards letting, removing the wind drag, removing the resistance to how things can flow and how things get can move. And so the more we have a sense of how things are constantly in flux and changing, the more sensitive we become, to the ways in which we block that are we hold on to things or we're stuck in some idea of permanence and this is how it is, are we resisting change or we're holding on.

And the more sensitive we become to that, the more we can feel the inadequacy and the unsatisfactoriness of clinging to things or resisting to this flow of reality, the changing nature of things arising and passing, coming and going. Things are here, things disappear, things are born, things die and we've become increasingly sensitive to our relationship to that world. And it stands out in the highlight is the holding or the tightening or the closing down that might go on all these all these kinds of ways the mind reacts in to the world of change and impermanence. And as we sense that the see that more deeply, the desire to become free becomes at some point becomes paramount. It just because I think there's almost a natural instinct to move to that, that I don't see it much different than if you put your hand on the hot stove, you remove your hand, or if you step, you know, you step on a thorn and it's embedded in your soles of your feet. You don't just keep walking, you know, glad to go deeper and deeper you pull it out. It's kind of that natural. It's like that instinct to remove that suffering is and so at some point in the insight into how things change gives rise to what I call called a biological imperative for awakening for freedom. And the reason I call it biological is because it doesn't really feel like it comes from the usual kind of sense of self or the egotistical desire desires we have or that drive many people and in their choices of what they do and their desires and aversions seems to come from someplace deeper than the ordinary kind of egotistical mind. And so I like to refer to that as biological. So maybe there's a better word, but that's what I'd put time being. That's what I've come up with. And then imperative, biological imperative. It's not like there's any should that we have to do this. There's no, I don't think the Buddha or Buddhism I don't see it as anybody has an obligation to become liberated and become free or do this practice. However they can arise out of this biological system of ours, a feeling of this is what's most important. This is what the system once you know, the biological imperative to pull a thorn out of the out of your foot. Is that an imperative? Or, you know, or is this No, it's completely fine. Just keep walking in it pushing in more and more than more thorns, the better probably right? I think there's a kind of, you know, kind of an imperative to pull the hand off the stove or so, again, that's maybe my choice of words and maybe you have another word that's works better.

And some people this bodhicitta thought of awakening desire for awakening is you know, it's not very, they can't really articulate why they practice. There are some people including for me at times, where it was like really clearly the most important thing that I was going to do was to do this Buddhist practice. But if you ask me why I was doing it, I couldn't quite put, you know, I couldn't quite, I didn't have a good you know, I didn't have good reason. And another person who likes to have reasons I'm kind of a, you know, a rational kind of person, right? Probably some of you noticed that already. And so so, you know, to, to have this, you know, to get up and sit every day and every day and first time I had this experience of not having a reason for my meditation practice was college. And I was sitting 45 minutes, 40 minutes twice a day. And that's a lot of time for college students. And, and when I, some of you from Davis, this was in Davis, this happened, that I had this thought that that was and I was like, Why Why am I doing this? And I couldn't, never reason. But I kept doing it. Now. There's a strange separate Reason for what you do. And I just kept doing it. And eventually I came up with a reason, kind of, and the reason that was most satisfying for me at the time. And that is that I wasn't doing it for any other reason, except to express myself. Something was arising within me that wanted to come out. And the meditation, the sitting was the way that this was going to surface and arise. And it wasn't it wasn't like, you know, some deep difficult things that were going to rise. It was just life on monster was like just being present and being here in a full way. That that's what wanted to come out. And so the way I likened it to an artist who you know, has no reason to art except to express or dancers they don't you know, might say why you're dancing. To express myself, you know, just the expressions coming out, maybe. So it kind of felt that way for me. And so I feel very lucky to have retrospect to have this. This biological urge dialogical instinct movement that didn't always have reasons it just it just felt it felt this goodness there was bubbling up and coming. Are there times I had very clear reasons. And I look back over with all that many reasons I had for practicing over my many years. I think the one that feels one of the ones that

feels most satisfying is let me tell you a little story before I tell you. So I had been practicing for quite a while and, and then I went to meditation center in Massachusetts called the insight meditation society, to do a three month retreat and And I ran into the teacher of their treat when I first day I was there in the hallway or something, Joseph Goldstein. And he asked me, you know, why are you here? What's your motivation? And, you know, I hadn't did it? I didn't I was taken by surprise. But why am I there? The reasonable question with you know, I was just there to practice. And so I said to him, I'm here, I'm here to overcome suffering, become free of my suffering. And I walked away and said, Boy, you know, Gil, you've been practicing for a long time. You're a Zen priest, you should have a more sophisticated answer. And, but no, I think that's like one of the best answers. That's a great answer. And it was sincere, but I was just like, you know, in the moment, I was taken by surprise, and that's what came out. There was a man at the time of the Buddha's life, who had been a monk sooner cut down, and he left the monastic life. And he went to town and the rumor their story came back from. Someone came back from it from town and said this guy Sunakkhatta, he's out there in the town, criticizing you, condemning you. And one of the things he says many things about you one of things he says about you is that your marriage, you merrily teach suffering and the end of suffering.

Merely because he was expecting it. What this guy wanted was a teacher who, you know, did all kinds of miracles and psychic feats, psychic powers, and you know, what, it wasn't doing enough of them for him his for what he wanted, because he merely teaches, you know, suffering under suffering. So the Buddha heard this and he said, that foolish man Sunakkhatta, he doesn't know that he's actually praising the Buddha when he says that this you know, to become free of suffering. But there are motivations that can get people to practice. And for some people it is to kind of get away from, you know, to use a kind of a metaphor to get away from the darkness, the difficulties of their life. For other people, they have an instinct, that they're moving towards the light to something beautiful and wonderful. And, and they're, you know, they're both walking the same path. One person is looking over their shoulder at the difficulties and that's what's propelling them. Someone else is looking forward and seeing what's seeing something, seeing something. But in both those cases being propelled by the difficulties, and by looking towards the potential that's in there, up ahead. It's very important not to get lost in the past or lost in the future. But again, to have this something, it's something at least in my experience, and the good wells up from within. We were were connected to something really connected to ourselves. It's not an abstraction, that desire that what we should do. But it's more like, for me this biological imperative, or this expression, or this movement towards with something as arising, especially with idea of some ideal in the future looking towards the light. If it's just an abstract ideal, it's not very helpful. But if some people for whatever reason, can have a real intuitive sense of moving towards the light of moving into some space of greater freedom or greater love or compassion or something. So, to have this bodhicitta now one of the things about this word boddhicitta that I find interesting is that it's a little bit ambivalent, what it actually hurts, you know, buried what it means but the word itself as I said, means the mind of awakening. And so it's often translated as the aspiration for awakening. But that's an interpretive translation of the, of the Sanskrit word. And it literally is the mind of awakening. And so, you know, a, what I like about that is that it might have awakened most literally, I would think means a mind that is awakened. That's what it means. And sometimes in Mahayana Buddhism, that's what it means. But it's more often described, defined as the aspiration for that awakening. So which is it? So what's the kind of very interesting I think, is that it's both and there's a wonderful harmony or alignment between these two in this way That the when the aspiration for awakening his sincere aspiration for freedom is seems sincere when the aspiration to to be free of suffering is sincere. It has within it qualities of an awakened mind that the that the awakened mind is not something way out there in the future. But the it's the if the goal and the means mirror each other, the means contains elements of the goal. What I mean is that if the goal is not to cling and the means to that is to start not clinging. If the goal for example is to speak a foreign language, the means is to

start speaking it, you know, wait until you're fluent and then start speaking. If you want to learn to play a musical instrument and be fluent are a skill that you start playing a musical instrument. So there's something if you want to become free of clinging you, you start by doing what you can to be free of clinging. If your goal is to be compassionate, you start by being compassionate to a degree that you can.

And so and so if the goal is to become free of our egotistical self preoccupation, the means is to start softening that and letting go of that. And so, in this way, the aspiration for awakening should ideally have qualities of the awakening itself. And there's one way of and one quality that I think kind of I would say it one quality, that I think that for this aspiration for practice, that maybe kind of is a really good one to maybe kind of is like the goal mirrors the goal or partakes in the goal shares and parts of the goal. And that is sincerity. To have a sincere practice. And I don't know what exactly, we wanted to how we went to find sincere. But to me, it's a wonderful word. A friend of mine recently looked up the word sincere in the dictionary or on the computer dictionary. And if you know you can sometimes you can see the usages of the word. You know, how are the frequencies used in books, I guess? The word sincerity has been dropping in popularity. I don't think this is good. So I want to re infuse it into our vocabulary. The AI seems to come from the Latin word for to be clean or pure. So to have a clean motivation I associated with being honest, being truthful, truthful, like sincerity is to is to have a motivation that represents who you are. So if not, if you're greedy, that's the motivation for fame and gain. That's not really sincere because that's not really who we are. To be sincere is to come from a place where we're not where we are kind of aligned with a goal. We're in harmony with what the purpose of the practice is the purpose of the practice. This is not to hate better, but to become free of hate. I think that's what the heart wants to do. Not to be greedy better, would be free of greed. I think that's what the heart most what most wants to do. And so this is sincerity. Practice sincerely and we don't practice sincerely if we, my mind at least, you can welcome to have another view. But in my mind that we don't practice sincerely, if we're too caught up in the goal. If we're too greedy, are you in a hurry to do to continue to attain something and get something? We don't practice sincerely. If we spend a lot of time berating ourselves and being critical of ourselves. We don't practice sincerely if it's a barter, and we're bartering. You know, it's an exchange. You know, I'm gonna if I do if I give the Dharma to all this time and effort Dharma better give me back, you know, awakening, I think there's a kind of kind of in my mind again, it sincerity has that quality of serving a healthy kind of humility, or humbleness or something that is involved in there. And the test is has where we're making the effort is what's important. giving ourselves to the practice. I like the idea of giving ourselves to the practice as an act of generosity. We give ourselves to the practice, kind of without any expectations or any demands, and it gave it to give ourselves to the practice and then the practice gives itself back to us in some way in what way that is. We'll find out as we do it, and it varies over time what we get back. Sometimes will we get back is really, really nice, feels really good, very satisfying the goodness of it.

And so Sometimes we get back is too much of ourselves you wanted to get free of all this and you knew, you know, all your all your shenanigans, all your foibles or all your all your other words where stuff, stuff, stuff, all your oddities or something, you know, come in, you know, face you directly like oh my god, I have to deal with this now and then we sit for that. And that's what the practice gives us. And so we practice with that. And to practice sincerely issues to keep going, just take the next step, take the next step, keep working, keep doing it. keep showing up working with us.

Now some people sometimes or protect themselves too much or don't give themselves enough they hold back in the practice, they're not really willing to open up or to allow the expression to come out. But I like I'd like to see Do you know what, what what wants to come out what wants to be expressed here? Because if we're too much that technique focused if we're too much like, you know, in charge and

wanting and expecting and kind of telling the mind this is what you have to do. It's kind of it's limiting it. Who knows what's supposed to happen? No one knows. But just to practice in such a way that you are willing in certain settings, and meditation is one of the best ones to them. To allow what's inside to surface, mix it in such a way that Room in you for what's inside can be expressed and come up. And as some of you know, especially then when people begin practicing what wants to come up sometimes there's lots of tears. Some people cry, and have, you know, backlog of tears. Some people, it's grief, some people, it's anger. I've known people who've sat and meditated and boiling anger comes up. And finally it's there. That's why, you know, it's nice not to move when you can. It's kind of within reason, it's good to be committed to not moving when you meditate so that you don't hit anyone. And you're not supposed to talk. So it's like, we're in a good place to be angry, you know, just sit there. You look serene, but you're inside, it's no good to express. And this idea of feeling this it's very generous. I think it's very, I think very significant to trust this process. Is of expression what wants to come what was to come? The alternative to trusting it, I guess is to mistrust it. The alternative to trusting it is to bottle it up or resist it or somehow attack it or do something else. And that doesn't work for the inner life. But this purification processes, letting things bubble up and be there and show themselves and not and don't be afraid that's going to you're going to be stuck. It's actually the movement of the opposite is what the unstuck set. And the backlog of unresolved issues will come and bubble up and they'll pass. Sometimes it takes a little while. Sometimes it's quick, but to be sincere and be willing to sit and work with what's there. There's a so there's a wonderful poem from it. ancient Japanese poem, I don't remember very well. But it's something like this.

If you take like in late winter or something before then everything has blossomed yet. If you take a axe to a cherry tree, you know and start chopping away. You'll never find the blossoms, the blossoms won't come out. But the gentle spring breeze brings forth the blossoms. And, you know, as many of these Buddhist poems in Japan, they refer to, you know, practice so, you can't force. You can't take an axe to your heart. You can't force something. But what's the gentle spring breeze that brings forth these beautiful cherry blossoms brings forth the blossoms in our hearts. Sincerity, kindness, dedication, humility, truthfulness, compassion, dedication, determination, courage, strength, honesty, perseverance, the different circumstances different when these these different qualities come along. And this idea that we bring this gentle breeze of our goodness or our love and our care and our practice, and then something will blossom. You don't find it's very hard to these were the eyes normalize regular To find in the cherry tree, that which is going to blossom into you know, the middle of the winter, but it's there. What's the middle of your winter? That's waiting for the spring breeze? And can you bring the spring breeze. Now, some people don't want to blossom, of course. And so it's nice to think that flower but is still not a flower that has to open to become a flower. Or I like this little saying a ship was not made to stay in the harbor is made to grow out the sea where it's dangerous. So, you know, if you're always just, you know your heart's not made to stay protected and closed and resistant and then spending too much time on the internet. You know, it's made for you know, let it blossom. So I have tremendous faith or inspiration or connection to this idea of inside of us. There is whether you know it or not, I kind of believe there is this motivation, there's something inside of you that wants to be free. And if you're still enough or mindful enough, you can feel that something inside of you knows that path knows that's where that's the movement forward. And, and to follow that and to be dedicated to it. And to really be able to stay in touch and really listen to that bodhichitta that aspiration for awaken your aspiration for freedom or the aspiration to be free of suffering. And it's so easy to lose touch with it's so easy to have other messages and other priorities and other values and other responsibilities and all kinds of other things come along to take precedence. And cover and cover it over. And one of the reasons to practice every day to meditate every day is independent of how good meditation is for you is just to create the conditions where you're quiet enough still enough that that inner expression has a chance to show itself because it's kind of shy or it's kind of weak in many ways for many people, and so

have some place in your life where this deeper thing can, can surface you're in touch with it informs you and guide you and support you as you go along.

So I'll end with a story from a friend of mine. A story I like to tell, um, you've heard it, I'm sure. In San Francisco, there's a now it's in Marin. There was a man who was ordained as a priest by Suzuki Roshi, founder of San Francisco Zen Center. And his name is Lou Richmond. He teaches up in San Rafael, I think, Mill Valley. And the 1960s as a young student of Suzuki Roshi, he asked Suzuki Roshi. If I practice zen, will I get enlightened? You know, because you won't have a guarantee right? And Suzuki Roshi said, if your practice is sincere, it's almost as good.

So maybe if you're sincere in your practice, you will partake with something That's almost as good as awakening, perhaps the quote some of the qualities or some of the characteristics of an awakened mind, a free mind will be found in how your practice and sincerity of your practice. It's a beautiful, I think it's a beautiful thing to practice. And I am very, very grateful for all of you to come today. It's a wonderful thing not only for yourself, but also for the world, that so many people would come and sit in the room that wasn't always quiet and still, you know, it's kind of a little bit like living in urban life is quite close on here. And it's a great, great location to practice and I think in the these conditions and challenges that it brings, and I thank you very much for coming and doing it and offering yourself and the practice. Each of you who came to practice here, whether you're new it or not, or supporting the other people To come, I'm pretty sure that a good percentage of you probably would not have or could not have practiced all day if you were alone. But somehow by being through the group that somehow you, you were, you know, that allowed you to continue and support. So each of you offer that support to others who needed it. So, thank you and