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SPEAKERS

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So it's a remarkable journey, I think of it as your have a journey to meditate, know, to be on this Buddhist path and to sit down quietly and really spend what I think quality time with oneself and really start seeing what's going on here. But more and more importantly, but often for many people at the beginning of this journey, very important part of this is the mind getting quiet, our body getting quiet, and letting that become still and quiet. But it isn't for the purposes of just having a quiet mind that it's about some people think that's the point but then hold on to a quiet mind and try to go around life with a quiet mind or feel upset. Because it's not quiet, it's supposed to be different or something. But for the mind they get somewhat quiet allows a possibility or moves many people in the direction of their minds operating in very different ways than normal. Some people might describe it as a paradigm shift from one way one whole worldview way of looking at oneself and the world to a whole other one. And one way that that shift begins to happen for some people, is when the mind is quiet enough. The mind will realize that there's something more interesting to do than to think. And to lose interest and thinking is a phenomenal step. Sometimes it takes years and years for that to happen. But at some point, to realize that Thinking is kind of at least the way we've been relating to it. It's overrated. And that there's an alternative to always churning out the thoughts or being involved in thoughts. And that can come at time. It isn't like you have to believe this. But there's come a time when it's like so clear that you have a choice. either stay on track with your thinking, or put it down or stay on track with your thinking, or let the thinking recede into the background, because you're no longer interested in it. So it might not be possible to stop thinking, but what is possible to do is to lose interest in always thinking and that begin so if when that happens, then if we're no longer interested, we're not feeding the thinking. Because interest is food. thoughts. Interest means we're curious, we're obsessed. We're invested. We think it's important we have trying to solve something, fix something, understand something. fantasize something. Imagine something that seems you know, work that's important to do. So at some point, it seems like Well, actually, there's something better here to do than dead take this precious, precious life. I don't know what to call it, but precious life, awareness, we have a capacity to pay attention. And there's other things to pay attention to besides thinking. And that's, you know, I think for many people, I mean, a lot of people on the street don't even know they're thinking, you know, that there's thinking is like the water the fish swimming swims in. But to really start seeing more and more clearly, how the mind is thinking and operating and working is one thing. For some people, it's kind of dismaying to discover, you know, what's going on in there.

But when it gets really interesting is when we say, Well, you know, actually, my mind has a mind of its own, but I don't have to be so interested in that or so involved or be, you know, just let it be. So, for example, at some point, it becomes so palpable, are so clear that there's a sense of well being and calm and subtleness. That's here in the meditation. And that's much more interesting to focus on than it is to be thinking about, you know, what's for dinner, what happened at work or you know, all kinds of

things you can think about. Some thoughts can be very pleasant and very seductive and their pleasure. But at some point when the mind is, has it kind of its own pleasure, its own kind of sense of strong well being. The pleasure of thinking pales in comparison to the pleasure of just being present. In fact, you can feel that there's a loss in getting involved in the thinking. So one way to describe that loss is that as the mind gets more settled and peaceful, there's a sense that the awareness, the mind, ends up being is broader, more holistic. When we start, when we get involved on thinking, again, it tends to narrow the world. And sometimes it's very narrow, very tight. And you sometimes can see that if you're, you know, if you're able to get nice and calm in meditation, you know, doesn't that and then you know, that your mind has an amazing capacity to burp up new ideas, you know, you know, like burps and like, suddenly it's, you know, and it burps out some really good one. You know, and so suddenly you're like, interested in this burp that happened you know the thought the idea you know you're you know how your high school sweetheart jilted you I mean it happened 40 years ago or something right? And it burped high you know high school sweetheart like our you know it's suddenly you're like engaged and it's important then dislike it everything gets contracted, the whole world gets kind of narrowed and tight and that this particular concern is stuck and you can feel that it's a loss there was this feeling of being whole being present being contented and being here and now you're not and the consciousness awareness is tight and narrow and all that. So even so there's this paradigm shift that can happen as we meditate, where there we realize there's something better going on a better way of being more healthy, happy, contented, peaceful, that comes from not being so interested or involved in thoughts and it can be as simple as seeing a thought arise or being involved in some thought. And taking a look at that and saying, you know, no thank you now, or, you know, it's okay. You say your thinking mind it's okay that you're thinking they're they're there. You know, I, you know, I know these things are important there, there are something you don't tell us you feel acknowledged and you know, it doesn't feel and just let it kind of continue doing what it's doing in the background, quietly in the background, in the foreground of attention. At some point in meditation, the foreground can be the sense of well being and calm and subtleness and peace that comes from maybe from focusing on your breath or getting settled or having mindfulness Be strong. So you understand a little bit hopefully you understand that a little bit. It gets more interesting though, this paradigm shift that can can happen at some point as this kind of deepening of understanding of thoughts and she thing of interest around thinking happens. There can be the clear recognition that most maybe all but most of a lot of the thoughts are self referential. That are I'm the main character it's about me myself in mind what my preferences what's happening to me what happened to me yesterday, what happens to me tomorrow? What am I supposed to do? And you know that sometimes the thoughts aren't that way. But there's a high percentage. I think most people that somehow and it's probably evolutionarily a very it was a very useful to people who thought more about themselves survive better back then. But we're surviving, okay? Most most of us. So in meditation, then we start seeing how self centered or self involved a lot of thinking is. Now a lot of religions and people will say you shouldn't be selfish.

And Buddhism says as well, but it's not so much a moral issue and ethical issue is an issue that as we start seeing the operation of these thoughts and how self centered they are, it's possible to feel how it limits us it actually diminishes us. Rather than keeps us open. We're actually shortchanging ourselves in being self centered or self preoccupied or being selfish, oddly enough, and paradoxically enough, and so at some point, we start seeing that the activity or the thinking activity, the contractions in the mind, the emotions that are connected to this, you know, self oriented kind of approach to life. We start getting losing interest in that as well. That's a big one. Because you know, you're important that this is not to diminish your value, your importance, your preciousness, and all that It's not saying that you shouldn't get to have a kind regard towards yourself. It's saying that at some point as the meditation gets quieter and still there in this process of losing interest in thoughts happens because there's a better thing going on. We realize there's a better thing going on then being self centered, that being self

preoccupied self caught up. And that's a radical shift to make. I don't think that we get a lot of messages in our society that support that shift to a whole different paradigm. Mostly the support is you know, stay being self self involved and self you know, it's like when I went to once many years ago, an auto dealership to try out a new car and there's still time I think, I don't know if it's still the case, but when they didn't necessarily automatically have air conditioners and cars so they know automatic all cars have air conditioners.

Now, does anybody know that pretty much, pretty much anyway, so as to Driving around then, and the dealers driving with me and he said, you know, you deserve and your conditioner and I thought that was a pretty interesting statement. I really, I didn't say anything I just look, you know, it wasn't gonna respond to everything a dealer says, but I deserved. So there was a that's a little example of you know how this reinforcement of self you deserve this is you know that this is for you to do. And so this paradigm shift of in the mind of no longer being so self concerned, self preoccupied, thinking about oneself all the time, because we feel we see that this is actually not a pretty good deal. In the moment. Maybe other times it's useful, but in meditation, it's not it's not so useful. Do you know if there's a better way of being more peaceful and you know, You feel the tension or the stress involved with that kind of thinking and the limitation of it. And so there's a lot of loss of interest in selfing loss an interest in being self preoccupied. So if you're still quite interested in yourself, and you find it like some favorite, favorite topic, it's fine. This is not a criticism of that. But I'm trying to point out is that is this process of meditation goes along. What you'll learn at some point will be hope you'll learn at some point, that there is no other game in town. There's no other way of being that's radically different from the way of being that self centered with a self is at the center of the whole game. And as we started realizing the other possibility, the self game, then naturally starts losing its ular its authority. Its power. It's sensuality in our lives. And there's a whole other way of being that arises. Now, some people when they think about not no longer being selfish, and no longer being, you know, self preoccupied and shifting away from that self kind of paradigm. They think that the, the, the alternative is to be altruistic, because somehow times we have this idea that's either being selfish, or being altruistic. You know, if you're not being selfish, but the opposite is you supposed to care about people and do things for people. And oddly enough, and this kind of in that context of the mind getting quieter and losing interest in thoughts and knowing a different way of being, oddly enough, just as thoughts about self are limiting. So our thoughts about others There's there's there can be selfishness, there can be group selfishness there can be collectivist selfishness you know, and people can be just as preoccupied about others in the world and taking care of them and all that as they are with itself. And it's important to take care of the world, it's important to consider the considerations of the world. There's a time and place for everything. There's a time and place for thinking about yourself a time and place to think, at time and time and place to think about others. But there's also a time in place to not do that. There's a time and place to be able to let the mind rest time in place to allow ourselves to experience and live from a very different paradigm, very different orientation. And there's an orientation that we can make, that is not selfish, not self centered. It's also not other centered. Sounds like we sacrifice ourselves for others. And the alternative I think of, in the terms of situation centered, we become situation centered, as opposed to self centered, or other centered. And that is that situation center means that our awareness, our capacity to be attentive, is centered in the situation. And we're present for where we are and we take it in, whatever the situation is. And we are part of the situation. So our thoughts our feelings or emotions, our desires, our situation is part of the situation. So we're not going to deny that's part of it. We're just not going to kind of over emphasize it, or be blinded by that.

And part of the situation is the wider world and what goes on around us. And how far the concentric circles of situation is maybe varies from time to time but, but a great Hallmark or great kind of reference point for this radical different way of being, which is so much more relieving and stress free and happy

is the immediacy of the situation you're in now, here and now, what's happening now in this situation, to live here and be awake in the middle of it for this situation. And so I'll give you an example of some of the early times in my practice where I got this feeling that delicacy or the specialness of just this spring situation present, but just really here and it happens To be on meditation retreats, and, and it happened to be that it wasn't about me. But I was there. So paying attention. And there was a Japanese Buddhist monk, who spent the seven days next to me, meditating the seven day retreat, we sat in the same place next to each other. So, you know, we're breathing together and there was some familiarity, you know, from being together and he was sat, meditated very, very strong meditator and it was nice to sit next to him and feel it. And in the course of this particular retreat, every afternoon, we were serve tea. And so everyone kept their tea cup by their seat. And so when we when it was time to serve tea, we would bring it out and put in front of us in someone which serve tea and then he would end So, but the last day we have tea, when the tea is finished being being drunk, then there's people serve a tea come with empty trays to collect all the dirty tea cups. So that's, you know, just taking care of business. And so it was very nice, you know, they were going collecting them. But this monk next to me and maybe it sounds, maybe it's just I say it this way, maybe you won't. Maybe it sounds a little silly or petty or something but it had a big impact on me. He had to cut the hair, they take up empty teacup in front of him. And he didn't have to do this. There was nothing that required him to do this. But before the server came to take the teacup away, he in a very beautiful, very present very focused, attentive way to the cup. He bowed to the cup And my mind went, Wow. I mean, I've never seen him bow to a copy who ever thought bowing to a cup. But it was the presence and the sense of kind of care. And maybe the sense of maybe gratitude he had for that cup there was he had a relationship to that cup over those seven days on a meditation retreat, that somehow he acknowledged it's with a spell, that presence for it. And so it was situation centered, he was really there for that event. He wasn't like, you know, thinking about the server's coming down. And, you know, this server is probably going to judge me about how I put the cup on the tray and I better kind of calculate where to go into tray so that I, they think well of me, and I'm a Zen monk, after all from Japan and everything's, you know, what they think of me is important and, you know, I don't think he was cut up and all that. He was just there, him and the cup, just here sometime later, The era so two years later, it was my turn to be the person who served the tea at these seven day retreats so in the middle of the afternoon of the retreat that get up my meditation go get the tea and sir and it got to be a delicacy to serve the tea. You have this pot of tea and I certainly I could be could have been thinking about like, you know, I you know, I better I better not pour too fast too slow I better not drop it what are they gonna think of me? And you know, you know every time I'm seeing all these people offering empty and you know my status in the monastery is good this steak here and you know, I could I could have all these thoughts right to sell think thoughts. Or I could have had you know, that person you know, how could they? They took too much tea. Every day they're taking too much to eat. Thoughts are all kinds of thoughts, right. These thoughts, thoughts, thoughts?

But by this point in the retreat, I wasn't interested in those thoughts. I was very, I had better things to do than to be caught up in thoughts and judgments and ideas. Where it was better to do was to be situation center to be really in that situation. And really in that situation without being self focused, and without being other focused, but being situation focused, and it was a delicacy to just be there, in the with the person serving tea. There was a human connection between us that was a valuable there was care and kind of empathy or attention. But that empathy and that care and that focus, it felt so good and doing it too simple thing of pouring tea was not consciously about myself and wasn't consciously about the other person. It taught me That we can when we're situation center without this preoccupation itself without preoccupation with the others, that there is a responsivity. There's a way in which our system is set up to respond to that, and to and to respond appropriately and be with people appropriately and feel for people and be present. It isn't like a blank slate. In fact, our capacity for compassion and empathy gets heightened. The more we're situation centered, or the more or the less, it's heightened, the less

we're self preoccupied, and, paradoxically, less other preoccupied. When we're alone, longer kind of living through the filter of thinking but we have a wider lens more, there's much more of who we are, that has a chance to be present for the situation. Now people who are, you know, caught up in their thoughts and their concerns, and it's very easy to get impatient and very easy to kind of, you know, where's the point in life and what's going on and I've forgotten things to do. And I have projects to do and, you know, for some things to think and fantasize about and all kinds of things right. And so in that frustration or that, desiring and wanting, it could seem like it's the last thing you want to do is to stop fully and not let the thinking race ahead for the next thing and the next thing. But what I'm talking about here is a paradigm shift. That can happen when we get mind gets quiet enough and clear enough it sees what's going on. And at this point, it feels so much better to be the other way around radical thing and that became kind of the training for me. After doing this for a while and meditating for a lot, was, it was one thing to have this happen in meditation. It's another thing to have allow it to be there in daily life. It's another thing to lose interest in yourself preoccupying thoughts. in daily life when there's so much pressure to think and do and everything. It's another thing to trust, the operation of, of what comes when we're not seeing things through the filter of self, me and myself in mind, to really trust this and other place to come from. And, you know, some people have to spend some time a lot of time to be working through layers and layers of fear that they carry with them before they can feel like it's okay to be that way. Some people they have to work through layers and layers of ambition. Some people have to go through layers and layers of orientation towards pleasure and comfort, or avoidance of the opposite. There's all these things that get in the way that are, you know, so meditation is a chance to meet all this, seal this be with all this. So they get quieter and still there. And then once we see this paradigm shift, and it's clear enough, then it becomes something that you start recognizing in daily life as well. It's not far away. It's right here, here. It's always here. And it can be as simple as you know, being busy and doing things and recognizing your thinking and caught up in something. say, Oh, I know another way. I know that other place. I know I don't have to kind of be so interested in what I'm thinking about. Now. I can open the attention up more widely. To be situation centered here now.

So that's my thoughts for the day. So I don't know if that was clear enough for you, but if you have questions if you want clarification or if you want to protest, or if you want anything, please.

So you mentioned several times the sense of constriction and limited Miss thinking about self. And one of the things that very, I became very aware of, it's also very fatiguing. Yes. Yeah, too much stuff. Too much self preoccupation can be fatiguing. But it could also be the opposite of stop. It can be fatiguing. But I think keeping in mind some people's lives. I'd rather say this are so challenged, their psychology is so challenged, that sometimes thinking about self is enlivening. For example, delusions are grander fantasies about like all the wonderful things that's going to happen if I win the call of the California Lottery. Then, oh, I'll do this net, I'll save the world and, you know, I can be the great savior or you know, I'll build a big house and something and so and so it can be very enlivening and very pleasant. And, and so the, the, the, it isn't, you know, it can be better than the alternative. You know, he gets turned up not to have that as to maybe be hopeless or do something else. But even that kind of enlivening, thinking, ultimately is tiring, fatiguing as well. I've had that Great place. I know many people who meditate on retreats. I know everyone does this but I've had it certainly caught up in some kind of great fantasy. And it doesn't want to stop. And then it goes on and on and on. yukino is kind of alluring. It's pleasant until the fatigue sets in. Oh my god, I can't one more time we're gonna do this again. Give me a break. Thank you.

If you are not supposed to be other focus, instead, situational focused, how does the concept of compassion kind of fit into all that

it doesn't fit into it. It arises out of it.

Great, thank you

know this kind of compassion Yeah, you know in deciding what to talk about and these nights when I come down to teach, you know, there's usually a little journey I start with one idea and through the day different things come along and so the genesis of this talk, believe it or not, was that friendly friendliness so you probably can't you probably don't know how that route got from friendliness to this But to me, there was a connection. And now you asked about compassion.

So a lot of the work I do in the world is very situation focused. And I'm wondering what you have to say about having enough self reference there to use our emotions skillfully in those situations?

Well, I think if we don't, that is to have the attention. And that's what mindfulness is about is the mindfulness needs to should be ideally be 360 degrees. It should be all inclusive. And we're, you know, an essential part of the situation because we're, you know, we're always in we're always in the city. We're in we go along with a shifting city, you know, shifting situations. So but it isn't like we're so it's more like it's kind of like, if I use an analogy, there's a little light bulb in the middle of our being. And if you turn that light bulb on, the light radiates out and shines outward. But where it hits first is your heart, your muscles, your mind, your brain, and then it keeps going goes out into the world. So there's something about awareness which begins is born inside of us. If we really relax it open and allow it to be here. You will recognize what's going on here. There's a kind of a blinders on or preferential attention going on. If we're out there othering with the world, taking care of people doing things and Not including what's here as part of the picture. So, to be centered on once to be centered on oneself to be centered on situations means that we're happens to be that this psychophysical being is at the center of the situation always. You cannot be your like the you know, you're in the middle of the game. You know, wherever you go, you're in the middle of it. But to be to do that in a selfish way, or self centered way, is self limiting. But if your attention, your awareness, your wakefulness is full and clear, you will naturally include what's here. And you'll know what you're feeling and your reactions, your attention and your body and your thoughts and the speed and all that. And, but if you are not relaxed and open, if you've gotten hooked in and into the people you're talking with or dealing with in lose touch here Then Then it can get

difficult.

That makes some sense. Thank you. Yes, that's where like they would they language situation centered as opposed to self centered, because we're the center of the situation, but we're not. So we have to we is very important to keep it in focus, but not in a self centered way. Yes.

Like in this situation focus, orientation,

the situation centered

situation centered. So in daily life, what promotes or supports this orientation.

Being happy. There's a lot of things that support it. But I think, you know, in terms of what's realistic, you know, what would like one answer to your question? I think a lot of mindfulness, a lot of attention really, really, really taking the time to see what's happening. And not worry about this self says self centered other center too much. Now, what I taught today was mostly meant for some of you to be kind of like

just kind of a highlight of what will come naturally this by itself, you don't have to force yourself into being situation center, but paying a lot of attention and, and paying attention to how you're self limiting by being self centered. So it's not it's not like a shirt. It's not like bad to be self centered, or judging it being a bad person now, but if you can kind of really tune in to the physicality and what goes on the mind the fatigue and the tension Then it becomes clear and clear, oh, this is not a good deal. And we learn and work through it and resolve it and settle it. So I think my I have one answer for you would be mindfulness.

I think I've been there sometimes. And so that's, I think, why I'm attracted to this.

And, and once once we've been there, and once it comes familiar sometimes through meditation, sometimes other things that gives us that that state, then then at some point, it becomes easier to recognize it when it's happening. Because there's a lot of things that are wonderful, that are available to us. But we're so busy with our thoughts that we're not availing ourselves of it. You know, it's a nice day, it's sunny. And, you know, I'm thinking about my taxes actually due next April, in July, you know, and I can do taxes again, and, you know, how am I going to do it and do I have the right paperwork and you know, and you know, and so and so, and then I don't notice it's a beautiful day. So there's actually a lot more well being that's available than people realize, if we're not so caught up in our preoccupations. And if we know, a situation centered way of being we know kind of this freedom from self, if that's familiar to us, it might just simply mean that we kind of looked clean to kind of wake up and look at what's here. How nice. It's not so far away. Okay, thank you. We have time for one more bill.

And getting back to the idea that thinking about yourself incessantly during meditation can be exhausting. You know, sometimes I noticed that when I'm caught up in in a big juicy story that That my body has little tensions in it, you know knitting brows, clenched jaw or just my whole body may be a little, you know, contracted or tense or something. And it's that's not a relaxed. Sorry, that's not a relaxed, great way to be. And now I'm starting to wonder if maybe fit can work the other way around. If I catch all those little tensions in my face the rest of my body and consciously relax them. Maybe the thoughts will lose some other urgency,

it's a great thing to consider. Yes. And that's basically that's what the Buddha said. The Buddha has instructions the Buddha had around this whole thinking thing is to relax the, the physical tension that's connected to thinking. It's a little bit like toothpaste, you know, like a tube of toothpaste. If you keep squeezing it, it keeps coming out. You have to stop squeezing it for this come out, you don't look at it to stop, stop, it keeps reeling with squeeze, squeeze harder, you know, squeeze harder, you know. So it's kind of like this tension that we have, that a lot of the tension that comes with thinking is kind of like encouraging more thinking. It's like and so it's like, you know, it's more and more toothpaste coming, just toothpaste.

So you mentioned the Buddha said, this is this is this when he says, when he talks about relaxing the bodily formation? Yes, that's it. Yeah. Okay. So it's really hard for me to stop thinking by catching my thoughts. And saying, stop. Catch that thought again, stop really hard. That doesn't work yet. So maybe another strategy would be browse knitting, relaxer Brown. brows knitting? Yeah. Oh, absolutely.

Yeah, yes. I as being really some people, spending time being really diligent touching into the body over and over again staying connected to the body, some people will do body scans. And so and so it's kind of systematic and you keep on track and just go through the body and relax and relax, just relax everything relax, until the tube is no longer being squeezed.

Never thought of it in quite this way before it's great.

And toothpaste is good in small little dosages. And you know, the thoughts are good too. I have a very friendly relationship with my thoughts and I like my thoughts I friendly relation to their bedroom. You know, they so thoughts are good. I'm not this is not I'm not trying to, you know, say that shouldn't be thinking. But it's really nice to know that there's another option and it's and so enjoy. Thank you. Yeah