

2018-08-27 Three Kinds of Independence

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SPEAKERS

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So this evening I want to talk about a concept that is important in our meditation tradition. And the word has to do with a Pali word, the ancient Buddhist word that is still current in Sanskrit and still very current in India to this day. And it's the word viveka. And generally in English we translate a particular way which I think maybe a lot of people in India wouldn't recognize. And, and I mean a little bit over the many years I translate and things like that and kind of sometimes try to find what the good translation of these ancient word Buddhist words are. And I think that most English translations have chosen the word which is probably not ideal for this, this word, and the translation is up nowadays in English texts for translating Buddhism. Translated seclusion, but seclusion is has kind of connotations of you know, being locked up or, you know, hidden away or kind of, you know, some people might have positive associations with seclusion, but it's not automatically for many English speakers a positive word and good word. It has some sense some speech and to translate it that way but in America, historically the word viveka has a very important place in history of American religions. Because there was a Swami an Indian teacher, who came to America in 1893, to the world, world parliament of religions that was held in Chicago. So first gathering kind of ecumenical gathering of religious leaders from all the different religions that were kind of known by Then I guess, and it was actually a major historical event. And, and coming from India, there was a teacher whose name was Viveka Nanda. So his name was the joy of the viveka. And he was a disciple of Ramakrishna, and he had a big impact at this parliament. And he gave a talk a talk and they say that he was one introduced yoga and advice and kind of some of the Indian philosophies and teachings and meditations here in the West have a huge impact. Also, he spoke so wonderfully about ecumenical kind of way that he really was very important in opening up a much broader kind of inter interfaith dialogue and tolerance and respect. So this Viveka Ananda was very important And so the I'll tell you a story kind of an analogy a little story. tale if you're living in the hustle and bustle of a busy urban city and rushing around a lot of things to do, and you know it makes sense to have at least two phones because you can you know, because you can talk on one and check email someone probably three is better as you can you're texting another one. I watched teenagers now my teenage sons and they seem to completely adept at being on the computer and the phone at the same time. You know, I don't quite understand it, but that seems to be the way and but you know, that's only two and then there's traffic and people and things to do and rushing around and it's just a rush and hustle and bustle of life and all that and important things to accomplish and to prove and There's always a 15 minutes of fame that we're trying to get and, and, you know, all these things so, rushing about but then the middle of this city where all this hustle and bustle is going on, you're part of it, there's a very large park and it happens to be that the fastest way to walk across is to go over the park rather than around because of all the traffic. So you decide you're going to walk you know, over the through the park which means up over is very, very large kind of Mount Hill.

And, you know, it's a little mountain and so you start walking up walking up and you know, big bottom of the park there's all these people doing stuff so bustle things, but as you get up not many people go up the steep hill and you go high enough that you're while you're kind of above the crowds of people and you're you're in a hurry to get someplace but maybe there's no cell phone reception up there. And so you stop and you take your breath and you look around and you see the all the people are brushing Doing and all this stuff and you're not part of it, then you're above it all and you look down you say, wow, that's like looking at a colony of ants, you know, rushing around and it looks like you kind of looks like that, you know? And it's amazing you know what it looks like all these people and where are they? What are they such a hurry for and, and just a little while ago you were that but now you're above it and you're apart from it and you get a whole different perspective of anything. Wow, you can breathe. I had a little taste of that when I was in college. I had lived in a parliament with five other guys see. And one day I was on little balcony we had in the sliding glass door was closed. And so and I saw two of my friends in living room, having an animated conversation, but I couldn't hear the words. And that was like really special to be able to watch and have no idea what they said was talking about and watch how animated they weren't engaged. They were like the most important thing in the world. But I you know, just just it was just gestures and somehow being apart from that. Somehow it showed me there was a whole other way of being or they didn't have to be caught up in all this things that I've been caught up in and it showed me another way. So to be up higher, and look down and you have an overview, and the word overview is what is the actual The, the, the word in ancient language that became equanimity. The Pali word upekkhā, or equanimity, as has the connotations or the etymology of the word is, means to look down from an overview of situation. So sometimes when we can get into an a broad overview perspective, we get more economists about it, we have the big picture. It's easier. And so we're going up this hill in the park and we're above all the hustle and bustle and we're apart from it. And we say, Wow, I'm so glad. Maybe I don't actually I don't have to rush that. And, you know, maybe it's good to take my time and just breathe fresh air and be apart from it all. Well, this feels good. I feel like there's more space for me and it's kind of refreshing to be kind of a little bit more alone and have space and time and, and time to think time to be with myself. And so then, as you keep going up, then after a while, the hustle and bustle falls away. And then you realize, that's to your surprise, you brought the hustle and bustle with you. It's in your mind, the way your mind works. And, and all this thoughts and concerns about things and desires for this and aversions for that and doubts about what you're doing and all these kind of swirling thoughts and ideas and concerns. And even though it feels like you're breathing room because you're higher up in this nice, Park mountain, and fresh air and it feels good to be there. You're surprised by your busyness of your mind and how you're doing Not at all with you. And this was an experience I had when I went to Burma. I went to Burma many years ago to be at a meditation monastery. And I was there for a long retreat. It was an eight month long retreat. So for eight months, I really didn't talk to anyone else in silence, just mostly meditating all day long. That's one of the one of the high points of my life. But after about three months there, and I was I had gotten more still and more concentrated ever been in my life. It felt like I was down touching, really deep, deep down into my mind. And before that, I'd been living at the San Francisco Zen Center for a number of years practicing Zen and Zen Center is a community of maybe 150 people in different centers they have in the Bay Area. And, and there's all these jobs you have in positions you have and hierarchy, you have Status you have and, you know, all these different things. And, and so and relationships with people and teachers and this and that kind of, you know, it's it's a socially complex place

And so here I was far away from Zen Center at them on at this monastery in Burma, hadn't really talked to anybody for three months, except the meditation teacher for a few minutes every day. And my mind was really still I felt like I'd really reached the really deep beautiful place in my mind. And to my surprise, I had Zen center thoughts, you know, like this person and talking to this person and concerned for this person or relationship and what positions would I get if I go back and all this kind of stuff? And, and I

said to myself, Gil, what in the world is zen center doing deep in your mind? How did I get in there? That doesn't make sense you know and I made a vow to myself kind of promised myself that I would not go back to Zen center until the heads and center out of my mind and so this still you know for you you're walking up this mountain in the park and you're far above everything and just like my my my look at this I brought the whole world with me and I'm still caught up been preoccupied and all that. And so then you realize that and see that but then you standpoint you get an overview of that. And you find yourself you're not so involved in it, you know, so cotton that you see it, you're kind of amazed. Wow, look at this mind, because you're amazed and have this overview and not so caught inator you know, caught up in it either for or against it. The desires, the aversions, the preoccupations begin to fall away and And then there's a deeper peace in the mind, quiet and stillness in the mind. And it's really nice to have all these you know, you've drop all these concerns that you've been carrying with you for so long and the mind has a cleanliness to it or openness to it or a set on this that peacefulness to it. And some people are content with that. And some people come to meditation force, experience like that. But in Buddhism, that's this is really not the point of Buddhism is to have some experience some feeling of peace and well being, but rather to be able to use that as a vantage point to look even deeper into your mind to discover some of the deepest roots or the deepest places of holding of attachments of clinging we have and there's a series of attachments which are very, very deep attachments to self. There's a whole world of selfing and identity where there's a fair amount of clinging and holding on attachment to opinions attaching the two values attachment to religion, attachment to status, attachment to power, attachment to wealth to security and all kinds of things. Some of these things are worthwhile pursuing in and of themselves. But it's a pity to have this beautiful debt that for the mind caught up in that preoccupied with it. And you don't want to have to you want to have your depth of your mind not be to use dramatic language they sometimes using Buddhism be polluted by attachments and clinging. And so then, the marvelous thing that can happen is you can sometimes actually pull out or have fall away shed some of these deeper attachments. And then you can go back down to the hustle and bustle and you come back to the hustle and bustle. If you come back to the hustle bustle before you uproot the attachments, you have a piece you've put you put aside some of the desires and aversions and preoccupations, but the tendency to get preoccupied is still there. And so you come back down and that piece is not going to last and pretty soon Europe back in the hustle and bustle. But if you're able to really get down to the root of the mind to the place of these places have deep attachment and uproot some of them, then those stay away or you're not going to be tricked by them anymore. And then you come down into the come back to the hustle and bustle and you don't have to be caught in the middle of it. And you can go around and do it but you feel a certain freedom in the mind. So this analogy I'm giving is an is the analogy for this word de Baca. And probably the better translation for it rather than seclusion is separation. It's separation is shaking out making a distinction.

You see, in some, some dictionaries they use the word discrimination in the sense of separating out some things. So it's separated, becoming separate. And the tradition talks about three kinds of viveka three kinds of separation. The first is kaya-viveka, which means physical or bodily separation, where you take your body and you pay and your body is separated from the hustle and bustle. You go someplace where it's more peaceful and more settled. This is where the idea of a solitude becomes quite nice. There's probably it's hard, I think, to have a very deep spiritual life without some healthy solitude. solitude though, is often covered over and crusted by things like alienation and loneliness and fear and you know that a lot of kind of difficulties difficult connections people have with solitude. But the idea is that there's, if a person doesn't feel alienated or feels like they're pushed out or feels like they did, if they don't feel they don't belong, or they don't feel alienated, that are lonely. Being alone in solitude is really a precious thing. Because of the way in which it allows us to get an overview of things that's hard to see if we're always in the hustle and bustle, always busy running around doing getting wanting and all these things. And so there's a long tradition of people who do meditation and Buddhism,

spending some time away from the ordinary life. And, and sometimes they go spend time alone. Sometimes they go we have silent retreats where it's kind of solitary, except you're doing with 40 people. But you know, they don't talk to you Not not much talking mostly done in silence and, and it really allows and you know going into solitude in this way we caught with language we use is retreat and so kind of retreating from the busyness of life. So, we can see ourselves see the world from a different perspective to get the overview, so, this is kind of the physical separation is a kind of a considered important step in the second separation, this is be set to is to separate oneself from the ordinary preoccupations of the mind, the desires of everything we think we want and wanting and planning, expecting, and also to separate ourselves from all the aversions and angers and resentments we have and generally they talk about the five hindrances. You know what those are, and this is usually seen as a temporary separation when the mind gets quiet in concentrated enough, the mindfulness gets strong enough, it's kind of like getting higher up on that mountain. So and so these begin to fall away. And then we have a clarity and a stability of the mind, which is really useful to start looking deeper into the heart to really seeing what's going on here. And, and so this is called mental separation, citti-viveka, where the mind becomes separated from its preoccupations. And then, at some point, it becomes separated from its attachments who party have the backup and this is usually requires a very still and focused and very, very, very attentive, very attentive mind. Not a lazy mind, not a mind that is peaceful and kind of just kind of spacing out. But a peaceful mind is very attentive, very sharp, very kind of, kind of refined or kind of like a, you've made your mind into a very fine instrument. When the mind is very peaceful, very calm, very focused, very concentrated with mindfulness is very clear. And there's a tremendous clarity and precision and how we're present for things is it's not vague. It's not spacey and, and, and in that state, sometimes that's where we start touching or massaging or, or started the mind itself starts releasing some of the deepest clings we have and when those clinging, clinging, fall away, and we're separated from the cleanings, that's called upadhi-viveka, which is the separation from the attachments And if you do this well that becomes kind of a permanent thing, and or new, a whole new lens through which you see your life. And then of course, we're going to come back into the world. And then they have the language of coming back from that kind of journey with gift bestowing hands. So we come back in a different way with a different kind of heart, a different kind of eyes to see what's important and what different things we start valuing different things than we did before. And we probably were not going to value some of the consumerism that we have or some of the status things or pursuit of power, or only the pursuit of pleasure, all kinds of things that kind of fall away. And, and there can be because of this party viveca this separation from attachments. There can be this heaps wells, well spring inside of peace, of calm and well being because of this place inside that And that becomes separated not from the world, not from oneself. But it's become separated from the attachments, they're no longer there. And so classically, the, in this our, our tradition, these three different separations are one description of the journey that people take. And in the first one I said is more physical. So in some ways, in some ways that's easier to attain. And that can be as simple as, you know, you want nice solitude, maybe just, you know, maybe once in a while, get up an hour earlier in the morning before everybody else is up, get up at five. You know, and, and, and just maybe like, no one's up in the neighborhood yet. And so you don't have to go off into some Himalayan mountain to be solitude solitary. It's just like certainly so exquisite, sometimes to be alone and quiet before the urban life begins to start up. Maybe go into a park. And as it can be lovely to meditate in a quiet park by yourself for me this idea of having solitude. And then, and then the second kind of viveka, separation from our preoccupations, takes time it takes wisdom. It takes really understanding the nature of the mind, what's on what's going on in the mind, and what's important to pay attention to what's important to do with the mind. And if you can't just automatically sit down and just try to quiet and calm the mind from this preoccupation too easily to sit down and do it takes practice it takes to take more than just practice. It really helps to start becoming wise about this desires, rather wise about preoccupations. So I have the overview of them, so that you're not pulled into their tricks. They're like trickster. These things and we get pulled into them and we think they're the most important thing. And so that takes studying

them and be mindful of them understanding them and, and as we understand them better understand how the trick works. So they get caught up in their orbit, then it's easier not to get caught and becomes, we have this separation from our preoccupations. And then we go on to that to the last one. So the vecow and, and I, my impression is that in India to this day, in some traditions, it's a very important word. Sometimes I have had the impression that it's sometimes used almost like liberation itself, you know, or awakening itself. That size is very strong, wonderful connotation. And I don't know if we can get separation, the word separation to have that wonderful feeling. So sometimes I've experimented or to use the word independence. For the deca so physical independence, so the body is no longer dependent on the hustle and bustle in the world. And then mental independence, where we're kind of no longer caught up in our own preoccupations, and then independence from our attachments. And perhaps if it's independence, at least then, you know, that part of American culture that seems to like independence, you know, maybe this idea will have a little bit more pizzazz and seem a little more relevant. So, seclusion, solitude is separation, independence.

You know, this is, I think, an interesting word. And the last thing there's, in fact, that will monastery that there were in our scene, that kind of, you know, in England that's kind of part of sister her sibling part. And right now our Buddhist family is called citta-viveka. And so, independence of mind. So there's my thoughts today. We have about 10 minutes. So if you have any questions about that or about anything you'd like to ask, you're welcome to bring up any topic.

I want to say you were talking about

you were meditating in Burma. And you had the sign realization of

did Like what? Like what steps do you think are most instrumental?

Yeah, I felt that it did work in terms of getting Zen center out of my mind. When I did come back, I had no need or particularly interest in returning to that world. It turned out that I did. And I was happy to do that just but wasn't exactly that was partly to do with circumstances that I ended up back at Zen center and, and I was together I had a girlfriend who really wanted to be back there. So I went along and And I was came back and then I was back in that orbit. So that way, I think it worked pretty well. And that for me that then I think my participation was incentive and was a lot more free than it had been before. There was a certain one of the purpose, one of the reasons I went to Burma to do this long practice was I'd recognize in earlier retreats, a certain attachment to self that existed deep in the mind. It was a kind of attachment to self that, you know, it wasn't like an ordinary attachment that we can identify I can attach to being axed or into that way, but it felt more like a little seed of pressure or a little seed of tension that I somehow identified with this is who I really am or something like that. And I felt like this is something I became essential for me to come back and touch her to see or understand again, it was became like the most important thing in my life for me because I can't tell you it wasn't like logical, exactly, but there was almost this deep heartfelt drive or inspiration or aspiration, to touch that and somehow settle some issues that are represented. And when I left after that, after eight months that was that had disappeared. And I wasn't I didn't see it disappear. But I had very deep experiences. They're very deep experiences of release. And I think in that process, or whatever that was was uprooted or released.

Thank you, Gil. I'm curious if you could talk a little more about release.

If you give her a different mic, I think the battery Must be going low. Yeah.

Testing.

Thank you. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit more about released from daily preoccupations of the mind and the mechanics of making that happen.

Yeah, that's reasonable. So there's a variety of ways to depends on the person and the issues, what's going on. Certainly regular practice of meditation, if we want to use meditation as the suspect or meditation center here, and there's other other ways to do it besides meditating, which usually this now is the as the reference point. So there's two general ways. One way is through understanding In the other way is through concentration. So, associated stakes. So with concentration means that you develop the mind to be strong enough to override the preoccupations and, and there's a nice thing that as the mind gets a little bit more so you keep focusing, for example, back on the breath. And every time you focus on the breath, there's a little bit the energy that would have been available that you would have been using for your preoccupation goes into your breathing. And so it's kind of like you know, if you want to turn off gushing hose or water, you have to turn the faucet and but maybe you know you've turned a little bit a little bit little bit slowly, slowly the flow starts, you know, to decrease. So every time you bring your attention away from your thoughts back to your breathing and let the thoughts get quiet You turn the faucet a little bit down, but they'll come back right and they come back and they come back but slowly keep doing it over and over again the strength of the of the faucet becomes less and less open or the strength of thoughts decreases. And then it's replaced with greater strength with the concentration. And that then the to eventually all the preoccupations just kind of fade away. And things get quiet that way. That's one way. The other way which is more than mindful way is to not always turn towards the breathing object of concentration, but actually turn towards the preoccupations and look at look them right in the eye kind of study of being up the mountain and looking down and having an overview is and you know, so you're getting you're getting kind of a bird's eye view of it or taking a really kind of looking at it well and learning to how it works for you. And sometimes it is taking a really good look at thinking How thinking works, the energy of it, the emotions connected to it, that begins to kind of dislodge the way that we're so wedded to it. And we begin to kind of the glue that ties us to it begins to soften and dissolve, because we understand it because we see how it all works. The attempt at it, and slowly we find ourselves more and more with the overview. And as we have the overview or the clear observation of it, the strength of it, that's another way that decreases the strength or the preoccupations and they slowly fade away. And sometimes they fade away quickly, if we we really, we see, wait a minute. This is not interesting. But as long as we think it's interesting, fascinating, then it's a little bit harder, but so you have to kind of break the fascination with our thoughts. We have better things to do than to think sometimes Good, thank you. So you can bring the mic over.

Thanks. So, the word that comes to mind is distinctions like think distinctions is I, I see the skills of making distinction of that path which is consistent with this overview. I keep noticing this the past year or two is this distinction. activity is really where I have a lot of leverage of. I see I see like a different perspective that there is no one way to read one thing and be attached to what one one picture of flow of it. So one

of the purposes of mindfulness, quiet, still focused mindfulness is to make better distinctions to see more clearly, the different things going on in the mind. And when to the mind is just a big buzzing You know, you know, overcrowded Metropolitan traffic, you know, it's also all kind of confusing. It's hard not to get to get one's bearings and find a way and, but if once you get quiet enough starts seeing oh there's that there's that there's this, there's that, then there's tends to eventually start seeing even gaps between them that there's more peace or we can make a distinction between that, you know, we start seeing, for example, every time preoccupied, I'm clenching my jaw. But you don't have to clench my jaw

and the distinction between a clenched jaw and unclench jaw starts standing out, and then you can choose the unclenched draw, and then you find that your thoughts are not so it's not quite as strong as they were. Just is there a this distinction is a really good one.

Yeah, I thought I found my own hack, but that's good.

Yes, they did last one

more of a statement. So my first language is singular. And in that we have the word viveka. And the interpretation is arrest. What dress dress? Yeah. Nice. So I thought that's pretty relevant.

That's fantastic. I didn't know that. Thank you. So let's go and get some rest. Sleep is sleep as a kind of a viveka. It's kind of a physical solitude, you know, to suddenly Close your eyes and maybe you hope that in sleep you get the mental solitude or separation from your preoccupations. And it'd be really nice if you could wake up without your attachments. So enjoy your sleep. Thank you.