

2018-12-03 Balance Between Doing and Allowing

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SPEAKERS

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So I've been meditating for 40 years. And I still marvel at meditation, Marvel that what happens? So wonderful, but a wonderful journey that I'm probably wouldn't trade for almost anything. And one of the marvels is not what I do, but what happens when I meditate with this is done to me in a sense. And what I have in mind this evening, to try to talk about is probably best, maybe represented by an analogy. So, a few times in this lifetime, I've taken up some kind of exercise like running, or swimming, sometimes hiking and, and there's a common phenomenon, at least for me doing these things when I, when I pick them up I have this idea. It's a good idea. And then I start doing and I don't like it. And it seems like it's a little bit rough and my lungs don't quite work and, and, you know, it seems like a lot of work a lot of effort has to go in and, you know, I could feel for me, you know, I'm not in shape and I kind of don't want to do it and, and I have to kind of use my will to override the desire to stop something like that. And then times like I've done it every day or very regularly. Then over time, you know, here's the relatively quickly the first week or so, somehow the lungs get into shape. Then it becomes easier. And, and it's not, it's not so much resistance to running, it seems like I just, you know, just kind of, Okay, I'm doing this and it still work but it just, you know, it seems like things aren't clicking together and I don't have to work so hard at breathing like I did it beginning or something. And then if I keep doing it, and doing it, after a while, as part of it becomes easier and easier. And for me the writing sometimes I thought the first 50 for these, like always the first yards 50 yards, something was a little bit, you know, took some willpower or something. But, but then it kind of, you know, I kind of settled in and, and there was this for a while there was this feeling of sometimes it felt like it was effortless to run for part of it. And, and, but there was a feeling of that almost like I was being run, almost like that i something suddenly clicked in the energy clicked in the breathing clicks. In, somehow the muscles click in, and then it's not so much work at all do anymore. And I kind of like it, it's nice. And, and there's often a very nice feeling of, you know, for a while then after a while I get tired, and then it gets hard. But, you know, for a while just kind of everything's kind of flowing in the flow of it or something. And then, and then the more I do it, at some point, that when I get into this flow, it just feels very easy and good and obvious to be in the present moment. I might be thinking, but the thinking is like so peripheral to what's going on there. The real thing is I'm really present, every step, every breath, every kind of thing going on the movements of the body, everything some kind of alive and I'm just right there with those things. And there's this feeling of lightness of energy going through me attention a certain kind of joy or delight. Is something for a while. And, but you know, I'm not Superman. So eventually, you know, I, you know, I got tired and then different things would kick in, but you know, it's quite wonderful feeling. So that's an analogy for what can happen in meditation. That if you're new to meditation, for some people who start new, there's resistance and a lot of ideas that you know, this is crazy, or I can't do it or all kinds of things will kick in, and the body will be uncomfortable. And, you know, the body aches and screams. And I

remember sometimes having this when I was new to meditation, and a sensation in my legs that I'd never knew before. But it was a distinct sensation of wanting to both You know, when run away or something.

And so, you know, there's that, but then I do it every day. I didn't even notice when I started I did it every day and as I did it, all kinds of things began to shift and kind of imperceptible at first. But, you know, after a few weeks or months and beer, you know, did all these changes started going, the body started to get conditioned, just like with running the, you know, there's some of the tightness of the body loosened, and some of the places those a week got stronger. And it's kind of a little bit Caroline got settled. And sitting in this posture became, with time, one of my favorite postures to sit in. If someone had told me when I was 20, when I started, that this would be a favorite posture. I would have told them that they were crazy. You know, so much pain, fire and aches and all that. And, and, and so I kept doing and not only was the body current condition but the mind got into condition. And I was able to kind of settle in and although all the ways in which I reside, resistance and doubts and all the criticism I had for myself and all these feelings of, you know, my usual habits, a way of being that really were interfering with meditation, I got to see them and recognize them and they quieted down and quieted down, slow down. And after a while, it became like with running kind of you get into the flow, and just feels like your sinks are flowing sometimes it's really there and, and sometimes, just like with with running or swimming, you know, it's very much in the present moment. It's really hear every breath, every sensation, sound, you know, everything going on, and it was exquisite to have that. And it didn't feel like a lot of work. It wasn't like I had to work at it anymore. You and it wasn't it wasn't so much it was an act of will anymore. Even like with running you get into the flow. I guess if you measure the energy expended, it'd be a lot of energy. But the psychic energy involved seemed like was very little it wasn't any whale involved or forcefulness involved, it was just like the most natural thing to do for a period of time and running. So meditation also can settle down and come like that then and it becomes kind of a easy to do, it becomes you get into the flow, maybe not the first five minutes. But you know, you get concentrated and get settled. And, and slowly over time, a lot of the kinks in the mind work themselves out. And the wonderful, it's a wonderful analogy, another analogy that I like from a yoga practice. There's a post called a triangle, where you kind of stand with your legs kind of, you know why it's like a V or something like upside down V. And then you kind of lean over from one side on your hips and, and you without bending your knees. You put your hand down on the floor and use the other hands up towards the ceiling, but your your one hand goes down and touches the floor. And so many people can't do it. And so they often have a yoga teacher who put blocks there. And so you can have your hands on the blocks, and you get to support. So there's I heard one. So this technique is back when there was telephone books, you would get a stack of telephone books. And he had put them inside of a block, he kept all these telephone books, and put them on the floor. And then you would, you know, until you until your hand can go down and touch them if you bent over. So that's good. And then every day you tear out one telephone page, one page. And those telephone books in the old days were very thin pages. So you know, you don't really notice from one day to the next that you're doing any difference makes any difference whatsoever. It seems like you know, it's you know, in the middle, but every day you pull the page off, and every day, you know, you're actually going teeny bit They're down. And over, I don't know how many pages you have to do 300 pages or 1000 pages with, you know, eventually you get through all those pages and all the telephone books you have, and your hand goes to the floor. And so meditation is that way too. It's like, a lot of the changes that happen are incremental. Where we learn to let go, we learn not to be so preoccupied, we learn not to get caught up in our concerns, we like to learn the body itself settles in the breathing actually settles in, also in opens up in meditation, the posture kind of changes. There's all these psychological, emotional, maybe spiritual, physical changes that happen to develop kind of a yogic body. And that kind of yogic mind that happens can happen, you know, often very, very gradual, so gradual that if you're looking for progress, day by day, it will be

hopeless. Just like those, you know, 10 pages, you know, you No, that's not that's gonna not go anywhere.

But if you do it every day things settle in and settling and settling. So for some people, it's a slow process. I think everyone, for some, it is a slow process it comes steadily working out, you know, I never you know these swimmers who practice, practice and practice, I kind of marvelous swimmers. Some of them do the same movements, over and over and over again for years. A friend of my son's and he grew up with is now a college level swimmer and, you know, swims and swims and swims. But I think what happens perfectly as you get stronger, but there's these incremental little shifts and changes in the stroke, the stroke becomes more and more efficient. But it's almost like maybe you have a coach who tells, you know, turn your hand it'll be this way or do that and this and that. But I suspect some of it is just intuitive. The body knows we'll figure it out. If you do it often enough. If your body if your body figures out the physics of the hand in the water, but you have to do it a lot for all these shifts and changes to happen. So, sometimes meditation is that way, did all those changes. Sometimes the change can be dramatic. Sometimes people sit down to meditate, sometimes the first time they sit down to meditate, and they've never done it anything like this before. And their habitual mind is a mind that's been spinning and thoughts and concerns and fears and imaginations for so long. And they have never thought there was anything else. And they're revved up. The mind is kind of like going like an engine. And someone tells him sit down and focus on your breathing and settle down. And lo and behold, something gets quiet. that's never been quiet before. And it's a revelation. Wow, I had no idea I'm just now I'm living in a new world. Wow. And there's some people have that kind of Beginner's Luck first. Time to meditate or I had it the first two weeks that I meditated, like, wow. And but it's kind of like you know it's sometimes the novelty of it it for beginners is so interesting you know it's like you know you you're involved in one of the great world religions the great you know it's it's very exciting and it's full of promise and you know if you're into that thing kind of thing and so you get pulled into it and then after it was great but then after a while that initial kind of honeymoon phase and then after well I was just left with myself I suppose supposed to be left with all the promise and grander if at all. And then the work is then the work starts day in and day out. The at some point, and different in different people who different points. It's a marvelous what I marvel at what can happen is that it feels like we're being meditated And we get out, we learned how to get out of the way. And it can you can't get out of the way, when you're resisting it and you're fighting it and all that. But as you get into it more and more, that you start recognizing that acts of will no longer make any sense, the idea of, of insisting and discipline and just showing up, it doesn't make any sense to do any more because it's actually goes in the wrong direction and makes the mind agitated. And, and the idea that I'm the doer, it's up to me, I have to do this. And I better do a good job and I have high expectations of myself what's supposed to happen. All that is seen as being besides the point and not really needed. And so all this all kinds of ways where the doer of meditation falls away. But if you tell someone don't, you know, never meditated before. Come and sit down. Do anything, it's like telling someone you know, you know, to go out there on the tracks to go running and just sit down you know, you have to you have to initially make some effort to get the energy going to get everything aligned to get conditioned to learn how to let go to recognize what has to be let go of how to get out of the way. After a while, we learn to get out of the way, while the same time the system is engaged and present. And, and then at some point, there's these marvelous things that can begin happening there's and there's a beautiful another like assembly that's used by the Buddha to describe an aspect of this.

That would be something akin to having, like a geyser, fount of water coming out of the ground, has its plug in it if you pull the plug the geyser comes in all this water flows out the way the Buddha said it was not like a geyser, but rather an underwater spring. And at the bottom of the lake, there is their water, there's the water spring water is flowing into the lake. And as it flows from the middle of the bottom, it flows upwards and spreads out into the lake, in a kind of a gentle current that comes up just flows like a

fountain of water coming through the water. And, and at some point, that's what it feels like in meditation, it feels like the fountain is operating or the flow is happening and it is arising and flowing moving through us with a beautiful analogy and the Buddha back at his time recognized all this and he talked about he talked about how certain things begin arising on their own and natural process that when certain condition are in place, then something begins to take over. That's quite beautiful. It's quite wonderful, quite helpful in order for these wonderful things to kind of kick into place there, he says they're based on something. Just like he said, human are all all legged creatures. They walk, they stand, they sit, they lie down, all base, all dependent on the earth that they're standing on. In the same way, these marvelous things that can flow out in meditation that can grow and can develop. They're all built on the foundation, they all based on dependent on virtue. So the idea of being having certain kind of inner some people like the word integrity, ethical integrity, no longer doing things with the mind with a body with The mouth that are involved agitating the mind, constricting the mind conflicting the mind, the heart, the kind of things of causing harm, intentional harm to the world around us. This idea of kind of cleaning up the ethics or virtue is a foundation necessary for this marvelous things to happen. So it's not just a matter of sitting down to meditate, and then going out and going around robbing banks all day when you're not meditating. There has to be, you know, some kind of purification or cleaning of what's ethical life to make this work. And then so there's so there's this thing is these things start to arise. And, and so the oddly enough for people who do mindfulness practice, the way it's talked about here in the West, in mindfulness itself, is not described as something's done. But mindfulness is something that arises based On our ability to keep observing what's going on. So there's two different things in the ancient language, there's observation. And there's what's Sati is mindfulness. And if we really keep showing up what's here and seeing what's here, seeing really being present, seeing what's in our body, seeing our feelings, seeing the states of the mind, seeing the mental processes that are operating, and the and the, and the important things being said, just see it. For the body, it said, seeing the body in the body in the body, see the body just as a body, see what's there very, very simply, without judgments, without associated thinking without commentary, just kind of see things in themselves, without being for or against anything, to cultivate ability just to see what's there. As we do that, what something gets born and what can Exploring is a kind of a higher quality or higher kind of awareness. That one teacher I know causal lucid awareness that he uses Bhikkhu Bodhi, who famous translator, who described Sati, the word that we now translate as mindfulness, as a lucid awareness that something gets arise and gets born. The Buddha describes this arising of something like this, it happens that we don't do or we create the conditions for it to happen over time. He calls it he uses the word Sati for it mindfulness, but he calls it mindfulness as a factor of awakening of mindfulness, the mindfulness factor of awakening. And he has seven of these different qualities called the factors of awakening. And, and these are these seven fountains, the seven things that kind of flow if we get out of the way.

But if you don't have to do the practice, you have to do our work to get there. So, these seven are the fact of the mindfulness factor of awakening. The usually in English we say the investigation factor of awakening, the energy factor of awakening, the rapture, factor of awakening, the tranquility, factor of awakening, the concentration factor of awakening, and equanimity, factor of awakening. So mindfulness investigation, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. These are beautiful, beautiful states, the beautiful fountains that can arise are states that kind of spread and be there. But the thing that's so marvelous, so remarkable is how these things can arise. Kind of as gifts. We don't construct them. We don't make them We can recreate the conditions for them to be there. We kind of do housecleaning of our hearts and our minds. We cultivate the ability slowly over time by taking one telephone page off at a time of cleansing or freeing the mind and the heart. And as the mind and the heart get freer and freer, then the states begin to become stronger and stronger. Now, the point of all that in the teachings of the Buddha is not to have these nice states. And there's no state that is the point for the Buddha, but rather is what he is with why they're quiet, why they're called the factors of

awakening is that they lead to awakening. They create the conditions they themselves they arise because of the presence of certain conditions. But they themselves are the conditions that support the mind. have the heart to relax enough to feel safe enough to trust enough to feel confident enough to be able to release and let go. The deepest fears that we hold the deepest attachments we have the deepest preoccupations the deepest attachments to even existence and living the attachments to identity and being someone and, or not being someone and all these things, that all these kind of fundamental attachments that are kind of the basis of many people's how they live their lives, to be able to put those to rest is not an easy thing to do. And so there's a lot of support that's needed for that. And for the bootup important part of the support is to allow these deeper states to come up to kind of condition or inspire or settle the hearts I can finally feel safe just to let go just to be. And it's a marvelous thing to kind of feel that this process happens you know, this whole idea of self that speaks versus such a complicated complex world self me myself in mind, who I think I am how I think people see me how I want to be seen. The identities I hold on to all these things, the complicated world that our society around us supports us to have to be into, defend into, project into hold on to, to have all these preoccupations with self quiet down, or be seen through or no longer be the reference point for how we go through our lives is a fantastic thing to do also. And part of the idea of meditation and this idea of this conditioning is opening up to the flow or some other process unfolding, we get out of out of the way of his support this idea of putting, pausing, stopping, popping the bubble of me myself in mind, the city of self, that's the post, you know, we think it's we're at the center of who we are. And to, to be able to be present for this world without this little or big. And I want to, I want to say splinter. We carry with us the splinter of self identity and attachment. It's just a marvelous thing. And to get out of your own way, that way and to feel the freedom of it.

So, one of the reasons I'm giving this talk is that as people Meditate. There are there's a play between two different related phenomena. One is, what we do and what we allow to happen. So there's certainly we have to do something. And if you're brand new, for example, maybe you have to do a lot, a feud. Or if you're really agitated, or something difficult happen in your life, it might take a lot of work to corral the mind, the thoughts that we occupy the occupation and really show up and be here, be with what's going on. There might be a lot of strong emotions and difficulties, emotional difficulties that are present and you know, because of what's going on in life, and it might take a lot of compassion and care and effort to be present for oneself and it takes work. So there are times when when meditation is work and there's what we do. And also but there's also necessary to have an attitude that is not just all about doing. It's not about me doing something or me getting something, there also has to be getting out of the way and allowing something to happen. Without making space for something to happen, this maybe nothing can happen. So, you know, if the mind is filled with thoughts, there's no room for anything different to happen. And one of the reasons why we let the thinking quiet down meditation or like over thoughts is so that there's room for something different to arise and to happen. And getting concentrated, being settled, feeling joy, feeling a lightness, feeling calm, all those things. It's kind of like those things can arise for us if there's a room in the mind. For that to happen. So it's not just a matter of letting go of thoughts, but it's also letting go of our thoughts or quieting them down and letting go into, into kind of space into quiet or silence, where the mind is not incessantly thinking and doing and wanting. They're spinning around in its little world winds of preoccupations. And so there has to be so how can we offer ourselves or how can we also mix, do this allowing peace, there is what we do. And then there's the allowing for something to happen. There's the making space, so that something and then getting out of the way so something come into that space, something can surface and come through. And this combination of those two is the, you know, kind of describes the process of meditation. And sometimes the balance is more towards doing and sometimes the balance is more towards not doing but rather out. Allowing, and we go back and forth. And in not just in deep meditation where these, you know, marvelous seven factors of awakening arising that we allow, sometimes the

very profound work of psychological healing, emotional healing that we have to do is works very much the same way where we have to do something we have to do sometimes there's a lot of doing, when there's a lot of inner turmoil and pain. But it's also we have to also allow for something to operate in, within us allow it to flow, something to flow, sometimes the pain to flow, the strong emotions to flow, grief to flow, we have to make that make room for that to come up. And so figuring out what the right balance is between doing and allowing, sometimes it's too much to allow, and maybe what's needed is grounding meditation or compassion meditation, but other times, the most healing thing we can do is Get completely out of the way, and let the difficult emotions just flow through us. So this balance between the doing and the allowing, and as we do this meditation practice if you do it regularly, maybe every day, and so that you can have the experience of pulling away one telephone book page at a time, that what you generally people will learn to do, although what people learn is a deeper and deeper trust or confidence in this process of allowing things to move through.

And whether it's really difficult and painful things through having them come through, or whether there's these marvelous things that come through. It doesn't matter to the meditative mind. What matters is more is that the confidence we have in the allowing of getting out of the way that we are okay, actually it's very healthy, to let the forces within us that The unfolding within us to make room for it. Because it seems that our inner life is smarter than we are. What do you think of that? The little piece of you that you think that you, you know, identify as you know, the control tower, who's in charge and knows what's supposed to happen. It's just a small small part of your intelligence sorry, but you know, the mental processing goes on, there seems to be a profound possibility or potential within, towards healing, towards growth towards freedom. That can unfold more cleverly, more wisely, more healthfully. If you get out of the way of the inner forces that are moving through us. Then if you are trying to be in charge and being responsible and in control of the whole situation. So sometimes, so to see this doing and allowing. It's also a balance of Controlling, and letting go of control. It's not one or the other. And so meditation is kind of, you know, as you get used to it and get familiar with a territory of it, it's learning how to recognize at different days different times where that balance is, and that balance will shift all the time back and forth. And sometimes you realize, okay, now I have to do more and apply more and just manual labor. And other times you realize the best thing to do is just get out of the way, the best thing to do is to do nothing, nothing but allowed, I think it'd be present for what's there. And that's something that's not self, you know, some something, something that's deeper within us than self operate. And so, whether it meditation is difficult, or inner, inner life is challenging or whether it's quite wonderful. The process is very much the same. And so the learning of how to meditate learning of what are the skills we're learning in both directions, both in both both scenarios, so don't worry too much. If your inner life is in turmoil and using meditation to meet that, you're, it's very profound what you're learning in this process as well. And it's preparing you for later for the other what happens. And the other way works as well. That if you're lucky enough to have be able to touch in from time to time to these deeper states, of like the factors of awakening status, arising of stuff, and learning how to get out of the way and let those things flow through us. That's a very powerful lesson for when life becomes difficult. You know, someone dies something and you have all the grief. And now you know, oh, this is not as pleasant as joy meditation. But it's a similar process of getting out of the way. And it's allowing this trusting this deeper thing that's going on and happening. And so over a lifetime, we go through all these ups and downs because there are all these different ways and all these different ways of being sounds like a linear path that you know You, you know, you just do this practice and you get enlightened and it's lived happily ever after. If you're a human being, there'll be all kinds of wonderful varieties of feelings, emotions, experiences, states that you come through. And to be free is to be free is to be, be able to let them come through freely more than needing it to be just, you know, riding on a casino coasting along cloud nine or something. But it's taking it letting our humanity our humaneness come through, in a very, very free way without identifying with it without being caught by it without being

resistant to it without being being attached to anything, but allowing allowing us to come through allowing allowing beautiful thing. So I hope this makes sense. That's what I said today. If it doesn't make sense, you probably just forget it. Forget what I said, you know, but you know, still meditate. But you know, you don't have to, you know, this was and but you know, in 10 years, you might come back and try to listen to this talk. And it's because maybe that time you've pulled out enough telephone pages, telephone book pages and now it'll make sense. And, and then I can't help myself but one more thing to say.

You know, if it takes you a year in the triangle posts, you know, taking those pages off the telephone books to get your hand down. From the point of view of today, a year is far away from the point of view, in a year from now, if you look back over the year, it's a blink of an eye. 10 years can seem like that's forever. That's crazy. Who would ever do you know, commit themselves with 10 years? In 10 years, it'll seem like a blink of an eye. You know that it goes the other, the past, go faster in the future. Something like that. And I'm trying to do to say this as an encouragement. Do it. Give yourself over to the practice, have some discipline, just do it regularly. Don't worry about how long it's going to take. Because if it feels like it's going to take a really long time. That's only one perspective. When you go through that time, you'll look back and realize I'm so glad I did it. That was actually went pretty quick.

So I hope you can enjoy your meditation practice. Thank you.