

# 2019-05-26 Intimacy

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

intimacy, intimate, meditation, people, feel, deeper, present, attachment, dharma teachers, carrots, barriers, sitting, zen, discover, knowing, preferences, practice, relationship, discovering, nice

## SPEAKERS

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So the topic for today is intimacy. And it's a probably a topic which Western Dharma teachers have picked up on quite a bit among Western Dharma teachers, especially zen, they love this. Some of them love this saying that to be where they equate to be awakened, is to be intimate with all things. And the other thing they like to say and sadness, not knowing is most intimate. As you know, if we know too much and become with our preconceived ideas, we can't really know what's directly here. And so I think this idea of not not, you know, not knowing is most intimate. And, and it's an interesting perspective to look at dumber practice the idea of intimacy, and now we'll talk a little bit first about some of my own experience with this topic. And then I'll say the heart of the talk some things which are maybe not particularly, or specifically Buddhist. And then I'll bring it back to a Buddhist perspective on this topic or the value of it. The End the, I think of intimacy as having two major elements. And maybe there's other definitions, and it might be interesting for each of you to consider how you use the term if it has any value for you, or even if it has no value at all. It probably has some meaning that that you give it that gives it no value or gives it value or something. And so for me, the intimacy involves two things. It involves knowing something closely knowing something well, and it involves in that knowing, not having any barriers in the knowing. Some people might say that intimacy involves feeling close connected, somehow a deep connection with something. And, and I think that's nice. But I kind of prefer to say with no barriers to the knowing. Because when you talk about being deeply connected, it's too easy, I think to slide over in, we should be connected. We're supposed to be a certain way. Whereas if the if the expressing the idea of no barriers to connection, then whatever supposed to happen when there's no barriers, no static, nothing gets in the way, then it can happen freely on its own and who knows what it's supposed to look like. Maybe doesn't have to look like being deeply connected. So maybe this will make more sense as we go through this. And so for me, the discovering some of the value of what I call intimacy probably began most clearly with sitting meditation. That was in meditation in Zen Meditation specifically, where I started to know myself in deeper and deeper ways. And feel that kind of intimacy to myself to my feelings, my thoughts, my emotions, my kind of inner life in a way that I'd never known when I was younger. And it felt very rich, it felt very satisfying to be connected to know. And even if what was being known was not very pleasant. It was still felt very precious to be in touch with it, or to really experience it to let it be there without any hindrance or any barrier. And it's represented by an experience I had at the Zen monastery Tassajara. When you first get there go there to be part of a three month intensive practice period of meditation. As as the custom in Japan there's a ritual, a ceremony Were a rite of passage that you have to pass in order to be able to enter the monastery. And this rite of passage involves sitting in the meditation hall for when I was there, I think that the, the rule was five to 10 days without moving kind of

three times a day you got you were given a meal. And so you could turn around in your seat because all the all the meals are eaten in the meditation hall. So that was kind of like Yoo hoo hoo, busy eating.

And then after the meal you had, I think half an hour break. And then you have to go back and sit and but there were no bells. There were no you just had to sit until the next meal. And, and, and you know, if you're really needed to move, you could move but and if you really needed to go to the bathroom, you could, but you know, the sitting was fun. To 10 days how long you sat and it was the custodian of the meditation hall decided how long were the abbot or someone who decided how long you sat. And if they saw you going to the bathroom often or if they saw you kind of fidgeting and moving a lot, it was going to be longer rather than shorter. And I did this twice I did it. I had to do it in Japan as well. Where in Japan it was there was seven to 14 days. And yet, it was kind of like you have to prove your sincerity in Japan to be entered. So it's your pen. First you have to kind of show up at the monastery gates. And, and then you have to stand out there at the front of the gate. However long it took to prove your sincerity. And you just have to stand there, stand there and stand there and stand there. And at some point they felt okay this this person is serious. So we'll let him come in and lay now he can go to the first little empty room right next to the main entry play, where he gets to sit for seven to 14 days. And the same system, you know, after meals, you got to break, you got to sleep. So this is a long way of saying that it was pretty painful. And, you know, not moving for long periods of time. And when I was at TSR, there were three of us doing it together. So we sat together like this in a row. And, and so in order to cope, I had to really come to terms be present for that mostly, for me a lot of like pain that I had. And, and so I had to be very, very attentive to what was going on, to be able to manage with the pain so that fear, aversion despair, self pity. All these things didn't got the upper hand. And I learned quickly that if I had something like these things like self pity that the muscles around my knee would ever so slightly contract and it would hurt more. And if I had no self pity, it wouldn't hurt as bad. So I preferred not hurting so bad. So I had to watch what's going on my mind very carefully and I saw that what I thought about affected my relationship to the pain affected the pain affected how much ease I could be with that or, or disease I had with it. So it was so long, you know, five to 10 days, that, that tracking it, being with it, and having to be meticulous with watching my mind in order to for me, I felt like to survive. That I never had been so closely in touch with myself it was so I didn't know how long it was going to be open ended and Up to, I guess, 10 days. And at some point I was sitting there in the meditation hall. And I felt these fingers tapping me on the back of my shoulder. And I knew it was over. And I started crying. Because I what I thought was, I'll never be this intimate with myself ever again. Because who would put themselves through that on purpose. And so I am this idea of, you know, being really intimate. So what I discovered, though, is that you don't have to sit in pain to have that intimacy. It was just that was my, you know, first encounter with it. And as my meditation practice deepened and continued, and I learned to be more meticulous and being present in the meticulousness of it. All, you know, it's kind of like the door is open or the windows open to see and see I could see all the little movements of my mind, I could see the movements of my emotions and feelings. And as I got quieter, and still there was more and more intimate, more detail more closer or deeper into what's going on.

And it felt so good to be deeply in touch with myself. And whereas if I did that, what I felt was that what I saw was the forces that would come up in me, where I would lose that where I would start thinking about things or reacting to things or kind of getting involved my preferences or my dislikes of things, and then I could actually feel how I left that intimacy or that close connected tivity and that was a powerful teacher for me to watch what goes on in the mind to do that. And the more I knew how to be at ease, and was deep knowing and the peace with myself, the more that became a teacher for me to see a notice how I reacted to that and pulled away from it or, or whoever won On. So then, the other thing that happened in those Zen days was, we would sometimes sit for seven days sushi in seven day retreats. And we would sit in the meditation hall for seven days. And we would in zen, you sit very, you know, and kind of, it's very organized. And I would sit next to some people who were just, you know, just a couple engineers were nice, we're just maybe two or three inches apart. So we were pretty sitting pretty close to each other. We were all sitting in a row facing the wall, and then we met they meditate

with the eyes open. So you know, your visual field, you're not really focused looking at anything but still the visual field is kind of present. And, and what I started to discover, was sitting next to someone for seven days. I would be aware without thinking about it or trying to have their breathing. I'd be aware of their chest moving upside in my eyes. I could see their chest Moving are their belly moving and I could see how they sat, I could see when they started feeling I could feel their see in their body and the body shifts and stuff. Or now they're struggling during a hard time right now they're crying or now they're really clear and present and why they're really still now. And, but especially with the breathing, I felt such intimacy with those people. I felt like I really got to know people in a way that, you know, seven days to next to them in silence. I felt I knew them better than if I'd spent seven days talking to them. Because talking you learn something about people, but there's something deeper about meditating with someone there's like somehow they're touching into deeper parts of themselves or fuller parts of themselves. And somehow it's kind of manifesting, somehow, you know, there was that less barriers for me to take it in. And so I felt very precious about this kind of, you know, people I sat next to him today Taking them in and it wasn't done intentionally. Maybe if it did intentionally, I wouldn't have been felt so intimately intimate I was trying to do it. But it came from kind of the openness, the clarity, the subtleness, the presence of sitting there. And so this was very nice. And then I and one of the great insights I had periodically through my time of being a meditator is that the mind My mind is essentially the same mind in meditation and outside of meditation. The inner life that I have is this you know, same inner life I carry with me everywhere in a sense. And so to have a higher quality, mind or heart or inner life in meditation, and not have it outside of meditation is to live in arbitrary line. It's a live kind of A divided line. And it became very clear to me Why should I have these this freedom? Why should I have this intimacy? Why should have this, this poignancy and a lightness and integrity that I felt in meditation? Why should it remain there, the mind has the same potential to do it outside of meditation.

And so that realization was really important for me, because that was the time when I shifted my focus, from only doing meditation or thinking meditation wherever I was at, to trying to discover how to continue or how to have that depth of contact with myself and the world around me how to have that sense of freedom, or intimacy or integrity in the rest of my life as well. And it became a year years long process to discover how to do this and in fact, that was what motivated me to go live at the Zen center. And because not so do more meditation, but to be in an environment where I felt that I could learn how to extend or discover what I was discovering in meditation in the rest of my life and work and conversation with people in all kinds of different settings. And so that was what motivated me. And then, but because that's where I went, there was a lot of meditation. And as I kept wanting to explore this more and more, it became more important to do this, I'd go deeper into the Buddhist world. And as I did that, they don't pay they told me but as the consequence was more meditation. So there was this wonderful reciprocal relationship between meditation and then doing more and then being interested in how I did this in life. An important place for me with this intimacy was working in the monastery kitchen, and I learned a lot about how much I was not really present. For much of my daily activities in life, I had a lot of preferences, I did things I wanted to do and didn't want to do. I had, you know, important things to think. And, and so I wasn't really there with chopping the carrots. And the carrots became part of my important monastic teachers. Because I would, you know, spend months chopping vegetables in the kitchen, and I could literally you know, I was so much didn't want to be there sometimes that I had my body turned around facing the door, and kind of like it's kind of chopping kind of the vegetable is kind of sideways because, you know, and I would notice how I was and I would turn my body back so it's just me and the carrot. And, and I'd notice how my mind you know, would have all these other thoughts Take me away and reactions and just like sitting with a pain in that rite of passage. I just Right, the I wasn't in pain but I had to kind of real to really be there with a carrot I had to know myself well and, and not give in to all these kind of ways, byways and highways of the mind thoughts reactions and just be there with a carrot. And so I became more intimate with myself as a chopping vegetables. But I became

I felt that very intimate with a carrot. And that was nice. I mean, maybe that's, you know, what did you accomplish the New Years of Buddhist practice skill, intimacy with carrots. I don't think that goes you know, will go very, very popular or something. But, but the idea is that those are the carrots represent a lot of different things that can really be present for. And so Zen trading was a lot about bringing this presence, attention and fullness to each thing that you do. And one way of describing that is to be intimate with each thing you do. And so I felt this intimacy and care and attention With a carrots with washing pots with sweeping the grounds with, you know, all the things we did, and, and that was a very rich for me to discover. And it was one of the ways to extend what was happening in meditation out into daily life. And then it was also the challenge of people you know, it's sometimes meditation is a lot easier than being with people, for me, and, and so what is it to be intimate with people or what is it that what are the barriers that I had to being present in a full way and carrying away without any barriers and just really be there? And so I got a start to start to experiment with how I talked with people. And what happens is I talk and, and am I there really, is my conversation present for them. Am I present for them? Am I more involved in my reactions, my preferences, my negotiating trying to fix things trying to have an impact on them rather than just be present. And I learned a lot about myself that was rather humbling and disregard my relationship to people and everything. And, and slowly I began to let go of this stuff that was kind of not so useful for me to do. One of the first ones that I learned in that kitchen at the monastery

was how much I wanted to be liked. And, and it wasn't that wasn't the end of it. I noticed how much I was constantly doing social gymnastics, so that I try to get everyone to like me. And I got to see this at a time when I was the kitchen manager. And there's something about being a head of a kitchen with you know, there were some times you know, dozen people working in the kitchen, which is usually not the ideal place to get people to like you. You know, they have to get the job done and you know, all kinds of things and they talk about monastery kitchens being kind of a pressure cooker place. And so to me to constantly doing this social Tim, Tim nastic, as the kitchen manager was very stressful. And so I had to take a deep look at this. And I had to see what how attached I was to this. And I learned that that desire to be liked, interfered with being really present for the person that was with and in a sense, interfered with intimacy. And I probably thought that if people liked me, then we could be intimate. You know, but that was mostly going by preferences and was veil of desires that I had. And I had to actually let go of the desire to be liked in order to have something like real intimacy, which maybe it's kind of a counterintuitive. So now I want to say talk a little bit about what I, you know, what I think are three elements of intimacy that maybe have not to do with Buddhism and hopefully have some universal value to point these things out. And so, are three approaches to intimacy are three channels in which intimacy occurs. And so one of them is having be feeling really intimate with someone else because you know them well. And there are people who will share themselves who will tell you stories about themselves people, you know, their life story, their situation like that, whatever is going on, or they're going through some kind of difficulty or something wonderful. And you feel really connected to them, you know them well, and you feel like wow, I there's real intimacy here because I know them. And I know you know, they're telling me all kinds of details or life info I'm being pulled in. I really feel closed. Because I know so much about them. And some people feel, you know, quite nice, it really can be rewarding and satisfying to feel that depth of connection to other people. Some places where that can be a little bit dysfunctional, as I think some people know, is that sometimes people are in helping professions like therapists and Dharma teachers will, people will come and tell them deep, intimate, deep personal aspects of their life. And the therapist and Dharma teacher can feel very intimate and feel very connected to other people. But if that's the only place they have intimacy, and they're using that kind of role being therapists or dharmapuri for that kind of close closeness, that's dysfunctional that is not so healthy actually. But, you know, it's the intimacy is one way you know, you know, someone else will. That's one way The other way is they know you well. So the first one is your you know them



well. The second is someone else knows you well, but it's not just they know you well, to be intimate. I think there has to be a feeling that you are understood that you're you, someone knows you well, the feeling of being known and being understood. So the first one is you understand them and know them. The other feeling of intimacy that you could have is when you feel someone now knows you. Wow, I'm known. And to really feel like you've been seen and understood, can be a very satisfying feeling, and a feeling that and some people crave that they want that. And some people that's the only kind of intimacy they know. And so they, they're not really interested in other people. They just want to share with themselves so that they can feel had the experience of someone Who knows them and sees them and experiences them.

And so that's that you know, it can be really known by someone is can be very satisfying and to be known not just because you know the surface stuff of what you do, but you know, you start sharing very personal things of you in your life and what goes on, someone knows it and they know it with the care with respect, they know it with a sense of the safe for you for them to know it. They respect what they hear and you feel that that knowing. And then the third approach to intimacy is related to this thing about being intimate with oneself. The channel is to oneself when really knows oneself well. And so you know, when is quiet enough when doesn't have so much static in their mind that interferes with deeper and deeper knowing and recognizing what's going on. That's why meditation is stillness submitted. is not for the purpose of being still. But so there's no static to see the deeper impulses, feelings, desires, wishes, fears, beliefs that we have. And to really start knowing and feeling deeply is, you know, can feel certainly very intimate with oneself. One way that that intimacy, these different kinds of intimacy, these different approaches or channels for it, they could work together. So sometimes if someone else is, you know, if you're really trying to understand someone else, really try and be present for someone else. And maybe you have to respond or know what to say or how to support them. What they're going through might be quite difficult. what they're going through is maybe challenging for all kinds of ways. And in order to really be present for them in order to really connect and understand them. It takes a lot of intimacy with oneself, when asked to be able to tune in to one's own feelings with own body sensations, one's own beliefs. Once own history and relate all kinds of things and really stay in touch with deeper places inside where we resonate with someone or feel connected somewhere where we take in someone process someone than simply our rational mind, you know, we hear the story and then we just kind of do the calculation. Well, they said they had a flat tire and I had a flat tire once and they probably feel you know, a little bit discouraged. You know, I know them. But you know, it takes much more to kind of tune in and to feel and the great the greater capacity we have for sensing and feeling in ourselves, that is, the deeper we can feel and sense the fullness of someone else. And so some people, what they value in connection to other people, talking with other people, connecting with other people is not necessarily being intimate with them, but the process by which they feel intimate with themselves in that approach. And that can be a little bit dysfunctional, that if that's the only way someone knows how to be intimate with themselves is in the prop with a prompt, or the intensity that can happen with when we're with someone else. And only then do we really know ourselves. So these are not three different approaches to or channels for feeling intimacy. Some people only only know intimacy through one or two of these channels. I think it's ideal to know them through all three because then that the doors of knowing of awareness is equally open in all directions. So three, three approaches are to be intimate by knowing someone else well, do you feel intimacy by feeling you have been known by someone else while you are being known? And then the intimacy that comes from knowing yourself? Well, two, three ways. So what's a Buddhist kind of approach or Buddhist practice kind of thing to do with these three different things. I think what makes it really rich is, in Buddhist practice we're looking at the heart of Buddhism is how to be free, how to be free of attachments, clinging resistance, how to be free of the static, or the barriers, we have, to, to, well, you could say to

being intimate, but the barriers we have to being free and, and so if we use the deeper intimacy that we experience, as a as the material for the practice, then we're going to learn

places and our deep with the more we know, ourselves, we're going to recognize Oh, here, I'm stuck. Here. I'm reading read active. Here, I'm resisting. Here, my preferences are operating. Here, here I have a lot of desires. Here I have a desire for intimacy. And lo and behold, the desire for intimacy is now interfering with being intimate. Here I have a desire to run away, or to not be known, or to protect myself. Is that right? Do I really need to do that? What is that what's going on here in me, and to really feel and understand what's going on in this deeper, deeper way. And so the process of being intimate is not for intimacy sake, but for the sake of freedom. And then, and then to discover great and greater ease. And to do that in relationship to other people, is a fascinating process and not always welcomed by other people. Because as people get to know each other deeply, kind of what we call maybe deep or very close relationships are often

driven by a lot of attachment. I think that it's probably hard to find a relationship where we don't have attachment to certain preferences or desires, what we want what we don't want. And sometimes the more intimate people are, in terms of being closely connected partners in some way, probably the more subtle and deeper the expectations the attachments that we have, are operating. And so intimacy by itself doesn't always come attachment free. In fact, sometimes what people are intimate about is their intimate because they share the same attachment That can feel very safe, it can feel very connected, it can feel like they know each other well. And let's just keep doing it. Whereas to begin discovering how to be free, and not try to get everyone to like one yourself or not try to get something from a relationship are not trying to beat get approval or even get love, or status or safety or recognition or pleasure or whatever it might be, but to stay open and to meet someone else in the openness, and they'd be able to be met by someone else and that freedom and that openness is one of the great I think delights of Buddhist practice. In the Zen tradition where I practice first, that the ability to meet another practitioner, mind to mind or heart to heart, body to body in a sense in that field Freedom is considered to be ideal. And in fact, what they're doing sometimes in Zen practice, is they're using that as the orientation or a reference point for discovering how free you can be. Because it's possible to be free, or feel free in a limited way and but in meditation, or alone, and think that you're really free. But it's not, you know, then you run into people and you discover you're not so free. It's not a few people who spend long periods of time on meditation retreats are off being monastic or something and, and protected from many of the everyday concerns. And they thought I'm pretty free. And they go then they come back to the city and work and you know, start a family And getting the screens to school and the mortgage and then and then plumbing under the sink starts leaking. And it goes on and on. You know jack kornfield tells a wonderful story of meeting one of the famous Sufi masters who living here in the West eatery, Shah or someone like that. And, and, and he said something like you take almost any of the great spiritual masters from Asia. And you seem so wonderfully enlightened and you put them in an American suburb with kids and a dog and work in a mortgage and they're going to be challenged. So the work of bringing the practice to our relationships and discovering how to have this Freedom and clarity and no barriers. And a certain kind of intimacy is also part of the work that they explicitly do in in some some schools of Zen. And they have this wonderful saying and like a phrase they say cliché, only between a Buddha and a Buddha. That's something something about the nature of practice can only happen in relationship to other people. And so when you go to a Zen teacher for formal interview, a meeting one on one, it sometimes at some point, it stops becoming a place you go for advice. But it's comes it's a place you go to meet, to discover what it is to meet from the place of the depth of your practice. And you show up and you kind of be your practice and the teacher hopefully B's her practice and then you know, what happens and what kind of meeting happens there? Is it static, free Is it attachment free or what happens there?

So this idea of discovering intimacy, and exploring intimacy can be very satisfying. But I think it's a great help for Buddhist practice, and, and to do Buddhist practice and explore how to become freer and freer in our relationships and in this intimacy is also a way of purifying our intimacy, clarifying it, and also making it safer and safer. I think it's fair to say that there's a lot of attachment as I said, in relationships, even ones that feel very intimate. And those can blow up at some point. People can go together for a long time and then these attachments get the upper hand or they manifest in some ways that are difficult for a relationship. But if the intimacy we feel is used as a field, of practice of looking at the static, looking at the attachments, looking at the what's really going on, deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper, smelling our way feeling our way to the greater freedom. Then, you know, the intimacy, the process of intimacy is protected and made safer as well. So it's wonderful reciprocal relationships, that intimacy supports the practice and the practice supports the intimacy. So if this is interesting for you what I said, what I'm hoping from this talk is not to have taught you something, but rather to have provoked something in you. And what I've provided provoke is or evoke maybe a nicer word is that you reflect on your own relationship, intimacy, how do you understand it? What's your relationship to it? Does it have any role in your life? How does it work for you? Are these three different principles of three different kinds of intimacy I talked about? Are they interesting for you, too? You fall in one, the one of these three more than the other. You your intimacy you tend to feel with people tend to be more about knowing them or they know you are mostly knowing yourself. How does this work for you? So, intimacy, I hope this is interesting. So not to frighten you. Because Because intimacy it can be quite frightening. So you don't have to be intimate whatsoever. But before the potluck man about five minutes, it'd be great if you would turn to one or two people next to you. And to say hello and say your name. Yes, that as far as you want to go great. But but you might want to say something safe. About this theme today. To the people you're saying hello to anything that was evocative for you interesting for you, or challenging you'd like to just say, and then please stay for the potluck and which will probably start in about 10 minutes and thank you for being here.