

# 2019-06-01 Different Forms of Attention Part 1

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

attention, learning, happening, blur, recognize, details, meditation, observe, knowing, comprehend, plants, hiking, people, breathing, mindfulness, life, bit, meditate, settle, active

## SPEAKERS

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So what I want to teach you about today kind of a theme for these three talks that I'll give I'm going to introduce with an analogy so for you know I've been living here on the peninsula for for 25 years, and we'll have often gone hiking in the hills here. And I've often gone hiking with my wife, who's a botanist and worked professionally as a botanist in these hills here studying the plants. And I've learned a little bit about the plants from her over the years. But I never really took an interest

you know, real real interest, you know, until about a month ago and, and I started to ask her if she would, you know, help me learn the different plants started with the trees. And they learned about all the different oak trees that are here in the area and that was fast. And are there trees and then I started doing the understory the plants and shrubs and different things. And it's been a delight. And it's kind of a kind of an embodiment of how I always enjoyed hiking and being in nature and, but it was kind of just a, you know, a blur of green. And now, I see all these details in it. And when I have those plants, I remember their names and it starts I start seeing that, you know, just it's very useful and oh, there's that there's that. And like the it's kind of like going for a hike. Now the nature has become three dimensional, almost like, you know, someone's like, the whole new dimension, and it feels richer, I feel more engaged, I feel more connected, more present, it's easy. And I found myself you know, just looking and watching and studying and seeing and I've even learned how to identify some trees by their bark. You know, you know, just walking along I see the bark, okay, that's that and this and that and, and, and then, you know, start becoming aware of the progression of what flowers or plants are flowering different types of plants are flowering and it's like well look at that, you know, it's kind of like that's coming and now it's fading and the other ones coming and so it feels much more rich and I feel engaged in a different way of being pulled in and present. That is very nice. And I feel kind of very I find myself my interest increases to kind of get into Warren's so as you know, our hikes have gotten a lot slower. Stop its pets. And, and then it's not just a matter of you know, knowing the name but then you know, she'll have me well peel the stem. And different plants have different kinds of stems. Smell that one, you know, smell delicious. And they have different smells and, and he'll take off the flowers and show me the inside of the flowers and how the stamen and pistil are different in different flowers and not you know, it's like, oh, wow, I didn't know there was all this was here. So it's been fascinating and you know, engaging. So the same thing can be true in meditation, it's possible to meditate and it's all just a blur. And you can possible that idea I'm supposed to I'm supposed to meditate. I'm supposed to sit and just get calm. That's the end of the story. And everything that goes on in the mind is just a blur and what goes on in the experience is kind of a blur of stuff. And yeah, just relax, relax, or hope you'd be open to whatever's here would open you know, just be open and and, and that works well for some people and they can do it for 25 years and you know, it feels kind of relaxed and open and it can be beneficial. But it's also possible to start learning the landscape learning the plants learning the different components of the inner life. And, and that becomes richer and more valuable and, and, and there's many different

species you have your whole ecosystem in there right and different things flower at different times and you know, and so, different things feel differently like the stems different plants feel differently and so you can really kind of get into the detail and it starts becoming alive in a very different way. And sometimes our relationship to the inner landscape can shift and change as we get to know it better. Sometimes identification with it or the or the cleanings we have or the versions we have to it are easier to do when we don't really know something carefully and well kind of in detail. Some people are resistant to the idea of learning the details of inner life because you seems like work and they don't want to work they think they're trying to meditate to not work. And, you know, because they work all the time or something, and they want to break so up and how to navigate in this inner landscape, and to have learn, learn what's going on in there that really understand what's happening there in a way that supports the relaxation or the freedom or this is part of the art of all this.

So what I'd like to do is to, to some of this, by describing to you that awareness, your ability to pay attention is not a unit you a singular thing. You know, a teacher says you know, Okay, sit down and meditate and pay attention. Every single you know if there's room for like all these people here, I bet every single one of you will do a slightly different or very different method. Until thing you're told to pay attention. Because there's actually turns out many ways of using attention and to simply say pay attention. You know, I know, you might think I know exactly what the teacher means. But the reference point is what you think it means. But they're probably, you know, there could be dozens and dozens here in this room ideas of what that is. And, and there are actually many different ways of using attention. And as we begin learning the different ways that different forms different species of attention, then we have the ability to recognize what we're using at any given time, and also have the ability to know what might be useful and shift the kind of attention we have, depending on what's useful. It might be a different phases of meditation, different forms of attention are useful. And so if you haven't, if you can know what these different forms of attention, are you You can shift accordingly. And you can actually be consciously part of that it's okay now switch, or your it might be phases of life, it might be that there are different things that are going on. And, and so different forms of attention are needed maybe when you're agitated, it's a different form of attention that's useful in the mind is really settled. And so so, you know, and so if you know the different forms of attention, you can apply the appropriate one. Some people will have only one idea of what they're supposed to do. And it's a mismatch sometimes for what's actually happening for them internally. And so there can be dissonance between what's happening in the kind of tension they're using. And they're kind of like maybe butting their head against the wall, trying to meditate when, you know, it's not really the right match between their experience and what's going on inside. So, if you go back and look at the teachings of the Buddha you find that he has a lot of different forms of attention that he instructs. There's not a singular thing. And, and even if you look at the famous discourse of his on mindfulness, the four foundations of mindfulness in there you see he uses a different verbs for what we're doing for different experiences of what's going on. And, and one of the very interesting things for me when I started looking at this text carefully, is it's the mindfulness text, right? So what I did was I went to when he went back and looked at it, and say, well, it's the mindfulness tech. So what does it say to how to you know what to do? About being mindful? Turns out, there's no doing in that text related to the word mindfulness, some mindfulness text, but it's mindful is not presented as it I think you do. So why wait, wait a minute that you know, but there's a lot of other Things that we do in the text, are there ways of using attention. And, and, and so, as the day goes along, I'll talk I'll come back to mindfulness. But for now, I want to talk about some of these other ways. So there are active ways of using attention. And there are what may be called passive or receptive modes of attention. And sometimes it's useful to be actively bringing attention. And sometimes it's useful to be in the receptive, more passive mode. But it has to be a match for where we're at. I think that if the mind is really caught up in major preoccupations, and to just kind of settle back into a passive receptive mode, sometimes that just gives the mind free rein to kind of keep

wandering off. Other times, it's exactly what's needed to somehow pull back and just kind of, and just be receptive might pull the plug from the all the ways in which we're participating and that lets something settle. But, you know, that isn't one shoe doesn't fit all. So, which one of these to the passive or active and then there are different kinds of active and different kinds of passive attention that we can have. And so, which one you know what what are the different species what are the different ways. So, the,

in this text, there is a lot of emphasis on knowing, and the word is coming from the really comes from the word to know, something as opposed to more passive in the kind of note, some people will use the word to know kind of in a generic way to me just being aware, but to know is to recognize and what's going on and that can be Be a little bit more active. So what's actually not what's actually what do you what can you actually know? So when I'm walking in the woods now with my wife are walking in the hills. In the past, I knew I was in the woods. I knew I was out in nature. I knew those were trees. You know, I'm not so lost. Right now I know. That's a coast live oak. That's a valley oak. That's the blue oak that's a Black Oak. I kind of can recognize these things, and I really know it. And so there's the act of recognition. And there's a clear knowing of what things are. So if I'm following my breath, there's a clear knowing that this is an exhale, clear knowing that this exhale as I'm experiencing in my chest involves a release Have the muscles around my stuff. Some of them are muscles around the kind of whole area. But as I exhale, there's also a subtle pushing. And there's both a combination of releasing and feels very nice. And a subtle kind of pushing of the diaphragm as we do it is for me. And so this combination of kind of detail, look at that there's, there's a little release, appealing little pushing, feeling, and just sensing and feeling there's movement. There's a subtle movement, a separation of the vertebrae, that vertebrae, that rib cage ribs, because I inhale, and I can feel the collapsing or the coming together that little bit of space. As I exhale. I'm not working at it. But I've learned over the years I've practiced, all these little details around experience are breathing and if I engage myself and recognize Knowing these details, then I feel myself being pulled into that world. If I, if I just think, you know, if I just hear the instructions, follow your breathing. It's so vague that instructions that some people who don't have never meditated before, don't really know where to start. It's just a very vague idea. And they're just kind of vaguely with the experience of breathing. But it's possible to kind of be very familiar with the experience, and it becomes alive with a richness, variety and different things going on. For the uninitiated, it might seem very boring to know all these details about your breathing. But I think maybe For the uninitiated might be feel very boring to hear the idea that go up to the local parks and learn all these different details of different plants. But for me, to learn to be familiar with it allows for greater interest and natural interest in that natural kind of a lot. Kind of presence and engagement with the richness of the moment and what's happening in the kaleidoscope of life that's coming and going. And just like, it's fascinating for me to be out in nature, our inner life is just as much nature as the outer life. And to kind of connect to that this amazing manifestation of evolution, basic manifestation of

the natural processes of life, internally is nothing different than watching. You know, whatever phenomena in natural world you're watching, it's just a Wow, look at that. how it evolves. And so the idea of recognizing is an active part of mindfulness. It has a there's a, so that's the word by John Gotti. There's also the word that's related to it some pajama that the Buddha Use, which is usually translated into English as though like, translation is clear comprehension. And that's also they clearly comprehend what's happening. That's a little bit different than recognition makes in my mind, I think of recognition or as knowing it's just recognizing or knowing, you know, specifically what's happening now. Clear comprehension is understanding, seeing what's going on now, and seeing how it works, seeing causality seeing conditionality, seeing a little bit more than patterns of what's happening. And so, I might notice, for example, that my breathing is relaxed and soft and gentle. And then I start thinking about you know, my high school girlfriend one more time and I feel that my my mice my style, Prime contracts, my

stomach contracts. Now my breathing is not so soft anymore. And so I clearly comprehend the relationship between what I'm thinking about and how my breathing has shifted. So maybe that's, you know, it's a form of knowing. But it's a little bit more of a higher order or kind of overview, knowing of what's actually happening. To be clearly comprehend that how that works, gives me a lot more wisdom, understanding of what's happening, if it's just all a blur. I say, I'm aware now that I'm tense, and feel kind of uncomfortable. But what happened? How did I get here? What's going on here? And what am I? What am I supposed to do now? It's very different than if I clearly comprehend the causality that conditionality from starting to think about this high school friend and seeing the emotions that arise, recognizing them, seeing the relationship between that and how that affects my breathing. It becomes a richer world to live in and pay attention to. So sometimes what's useful to do in meditation is to engage actively to do recognition and knowing. And one of the ways that's done in our tradition that vipassana tradition that sometimes some people find helpful is to use mental noting, in the mental noting is a clear act of recognition. And that's how it's traditionally and understood in traditional Vipassana instructions that the mental noting is a kind of like a outloud in the mind and silently in the mind out loud. Saying, what awareness is recognizing. So if you feel if what you're recognizing you've gotten too warm, or if you've gotten cold, you would say to yourself, warm, or cold. It's a more active or engaged or energized way. Recognizing what's actually happening. And sometimes that's useful. Sometimes the naming of it being a bit more emphatic about it with using the note keeps people connected makes people more fully connected to the experience. There's the act of recognition is stronger, your helps us to really see it. It can, unless the mental noting becomes automatic pilot or it gets emphasized. That's the whole point. And then people will kind of actually get disconnected from their experience by how they use the mental noting. But whether you use mental noting or not, the focus can be an active kind of active practice, is to recognize that this is what's going on. Oh, that's what it is. And, and so sometimes what we do is something's going on in our experience, say the knee hurts as we're meditating. And so we decided, Okay, I need to recognize and know what's happening in the knee. They may look at it carefully. There are times when I've had injuries, for example, leg injuries, and I've done walking meditation. And I figured in order to do this walking meditation and do it, so I don't aggravate the injury, I need to really know carefully what kind of how to put my foot down the angle of my foot,

the pressure of my foot, how much a swing my foot so that to kind of know all the details of how the details of walking affects the injury. And so that's an active engagement, of recognition of knowing have a clear comprehension going on. And, and in doing that, I get the information that's needed in order to walk well and carefully and not to aggravate the injury and maybe even walking away that helps the healing. And so when that injury, what's called for a neck the attention is kind of much more active attention. in daily life that's often needed mean active, sometimes engagement, what's going on in the present moment to see the details. The advantage of learning all these details in our meditation practice is that after a while it becomes second nature. And then it becomes a richer world to go into. And it's much more captivating, it's much easier to stay in the present moment because you know that you know, the landscape, you know what's going on. If it's just all just a blur in there. Probably, whatever preoccupations you're thinking about is going to be more interesting. There's more detail there. And there's more drama there. There's all kinds of more much more right, rather than this blur of the inner life. So to spend time getting to recognize and comprehending this inner life might seem like work initially. But this is part of the territory of what one of the ways we could practice is to use as clear comprehension to balance that there's all Also ways of practicing, which are more receptive or passive enough, passive is enough, passive is the best word to use, because some people just go to sleep when they hear that, and but the, you know, more, more receptive, and allowing, then active. And so we're allowing some to be there. And so one of the ways of using awareness is to be an observer to observe, and rather than knowing. And so now the emphasis is not to clearly understand what's there. But the emphasis is settling back, and just observing things as they come and go observing what's



there. And, and, and, so to kind of So, some people find that by observing, they are not involved in what's there. They're just kind of stepping back to have a bird's eye view, perhaps of what's happening. There's a lot of fear and then They find it they just kind of take enough steps back from a distance from a distance, it's a lot easier to be aware of the fear and just observe it shifts and changes over time. Some people find that it can be very helpful just be an observer of the stream of thinking and just watch it go by, and rather than, you know, being involved and, and so, to discover how to kind of be in the, in the passenger seat of the car rather than driver's seat and just not try to do so much not try to accomplish anything in meditation, but step back and just okay just just watch and have the mind open and aware and, and watch is a bit you know, some some Buddhist some, some meditation traditions use the language of being the observer, which can be very liberating compared to being the Dewar and Buddhism, we tend not to use the language of being an observer, but just kind of being the observation You can just observe that things gonna take this idea of self out of it and just observe. And sometimes what's helpful in meditation is to do that. Sometimes it's not helpful because that passivity of just observing. Again, it just makes too easy to slip into the strong streams of thinking that are going on. And then it might be more useful to use recognition of the thinking and what's going on with thinking and have, you know, and that's what gives you a handle on it. But sometimes, it's useful just to back off and just observe. Sometimes it's useful as the mind settles and gets concentrated and less distracted more in the present moment to shift to an observing mode. Because then the mind is ready for that. It's not ready for maybe when you first sit down, and so you have these two modes that we can go back and forth with, with observing. It's possible to shift and change how close you Observe the distance you have. Sometimes it's useful to kind of get really close and observe something intimately. So like you feeling pain, sometimes it might be useful to feel the pain really closely be an observer of it, but feel it up close.

And that's kind of what's most helpful. Sometimes the very, very same pain in different time, it might actually be more helpful to not be up close. But to observe it from a distance, kind of like really kind of back off back off and just kind of work its way down there. And that distance creates less reactivity around it. So we have these different choices about how to use awareness. And what I, what I'm trying to and that whole analogy about the learning of plants was used to I wanted to point to this, to make this point, that part of what the species the ecosystem, we're learning is in fact the different varieties of attention, qualities of attention we can have and recognize what's being used. recognize what might be useful. And then I think it becomes much more interesting and engaging to do the practice. And to make I figure out how to do the adjustments that are supportive and helpful for the deepening and, and freeing process that goes on in the practice. So I could say a lot more, there's much more to be said. I'll say more as we go along. Now, I'll give a short talk at 545. And then another talk in the evening, where I'll pick up and continue in this theme. But I think hopefully I've kind of made the introductory point that is useful for the kind of introduction to this, this theme. And, and so you might, you know, in the afternoon, that are even during this lunch, I'm at lunch break, you might kind of relax, maybe more in the sense of observing what forms of attention are operating for you at different times? If you are making a grab getting some hot water, the hot water machine we have there, especially if you've never used it before. What forms of attention Are you using to figure out how to make it work? You know, how are you studying it? How you're looking at it? What are you learning? You know, are you know? And are there times are times when you know you're finished eating your food, and you're sitting there, you switch to more observer mode. Quit you know hot it what how does attention shift and change? different settings and maybe there's a loud commotion here in the building. And after a minute or two a bit, you realize you just were settled back In the observer mode, you just watched if you were completely the observer, you know, or maybe you got into analyzing the situation and you were kind of tried to comprehend and you were engaged, more actively involved. So none of this is right and wrong. It just does your mind work. What are the choices? What are the different ways you pay attention, and

over time, you'll learn a bigger, bigger repertoire. And that'll help you with the meditation help you with your life, help you discover how to be free in different settings. Because the kind of attention we use has some bearing on how free we are about with what we're paying attention to. So I'll continue on this