

# 2019-07-01 Exploring Intentionality

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

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I can add to that, that I didn't know too much about the Second Harvest until my son did a documentary about hunger in Silicon Valley. He wrote he did. He had to do an eighth grade project. And he liked doing videos. So he went around and interviewed and researched and did this very kind of, you know, nice documentary called the power of generosity, that he interviewed the person who ran Second Harvest and then he went to a soup kitchen in San Jose. And then he went down early one morning, like, still dark and, and they helped. Pastor Bob, I think was his name. He went some back room of a back room of some warehouse, and he had space to make sandwiches and they made all these sandwiches and bag lunches and then they went to Guadalupe Parkway, which we have a lot of homeless who live there. And he went down and have made sandwiches and helped pass it out and then he made his documentary about it then and there's a lot of people in Silicon Valley who are hungry the you know it's we're kind of known in this area for its opulence and there's a lot of people who are not a lot of people who use soup kitchens, a lot of people who use Second Harvest, a lot of people are hungry. So since that time I've kind of got fond of Second Harvest. So okay, so if you started already started, no. Okay. So,

what's on my mind these days is intention maybe we can say the power of intention. In Buddhist psychology, they say that intention competing with myself. The, in Buddhist psychology they say that intention is intentional sense of purpose is there in every mind moment. There are seven mental factors which are always present a lot of others which come and go, but intentionality is one of them. It's kind of an interesting idea that they have that a sense of purpose, a sense of motivation, a sense of an intentional direction for what we do is part and parcel of that. Every mind moment we have and are you tracking them all? are you tracking all the purposes intentions that you have? So one of the one of the reasons for mindfulness practice is to be able to cultivate a strong mind that's able to actually track much more carefully. The what goes on in the present moment, in particular what goes on in our own minds. And because it's our own minds, that we create karma, our own minds where we set in place that conditions that play out over time. So, intentionality and Buddhism and karma are closely connected topics, and I understand it this way. And that karma has to do with psychological causality what what goes on outside Psychology is kind of unknown, it's too difficult to figure out and. But that the psych our psychology, the workings of our mind is very much shaped by the intention, the quality of the mind with which we act on, which we speak with. And now so there's a little saying, that captures this kind of idea of karma and intentionality. And that is that if you act in ways that causes harm, you act in harmful ways. You create more harm. If you act in beneficial ways, you create more benefit. At theirs, you don't get off scot free. So if you do things which are harmful, somehow they're going to live in your mind and your psychology and in a variety of Different ways. One of the ways is going to live in your mind is you're setting in place conditions, traces, memories, kind of remnants that are left there, they're going to play out and nothing else. They're going to set the conditions for doing more. It's not exactly

psychology, you know, my my own psychology, but I saw it when my kids were quite young, how these things can play out in a very, very kind of alarming to see this and very educational for me. You know, so my older son, sometimes was what they call a miss spirited, high spirit or spirited kid. And so sometimes it was he would do things that you know, at least the parents thought he shouldn't be doing. And I discovered that if I use a strong loud voice He would stop doing what he was doing. And so very occasionally I'd use that strong voice to say, No, you have to stop. And then one day I heard him use exactly the same voice on his younger brother who was maybe a year and a half or two years old. And I thought, Oh, my, what have I done? And, you know, passing this on, and so that's the day I stopped using that strong voice. And, but so the same thing happens to our minds. We use a strong voice, we say something in an angry way. spiteful way, you know. And we set in motion, the way we kind of conditioned ourselves or influence ourselves, more likely than not to do it again. It makes it easier kind of it's kind of kind of work socially. channels and smooths them over. And so you want to be careful with what you do. Because over the conditions, you're setting up the influence you're having on your own mind.

And if you do the things which are beneficial, you create beneficial conditions for your own mind. So here's an interesting other little idea that I think it's kind of a modern idea, the idea of front loading and loading. That sometimes if you front load, meaning you put effort and energy into something at the beginning, it becomes easier at the end. But if you don't careful in the beginning, don't front load your efforts, then sometimes you have a lot more end loading to do things take care of at the end. So with karma is like this, if you're careful with your actions are attentive to the quality of the intentionality that's behind them. That It takes more work, you have to pause you have to look at yourself you have to be mindful and pressing for yourself. And you know, some people find doing work, be a drag and some people don't want to just be impulsive and have nothing get in the way and, and just do whatever they feel. But if you slow down and take a good look at what goes on in what's driving you, what's motivating you and why you're doing things and do it wisely, then there's a lot more effortless cleaning up to do afterwards. And there can be a lot of work to clean up afterwards if you're not careful. And some people have found out that it would have been a lot easier to have been careful for those three seconds when they said something than to spend years cleaning up from what they did or what they said. I mean people can make to say things pretty impulsively that are hurt that damaged relationships pretty quickly. And so the teaching of karma as a teaching about the importance of front loading, being careful how you're living your life as you're living it. So all this, what I'm saying it points to the idea that the present moment is for you is a creative moment. The present moment is not a neutral time. You're always involved in your mind, with forces in the mind, that are creating a future for yourself a future for the next second, the next minute, the next day in some way or other and, and it's a creative moment. If you're there to be creative in it. You're creating something. If nothing else, you're you're shaping your own mind at heart. And, and the seeds for that shaping. In Buddhism is often said to be the intention, the quality or the purpose or dis decisiveness behind what you're going to do. intentionality is a very important thing in the sense that I think of intention as what's between what we want and acting on it. Some people can have lots of desires, but they don't act on it. But there's something a little extra, it's needed a commitment to decisiveness, a kind of stronger push in the mind that we've maybe we can call it intentionality that that really behind pushes us to do what we want to do. And this is important to realize because someone can have an intention. Say that my intention is I'm hungry and my intention is to have food to eat. So that's my intention. I would say that's my desire, what gets me to act and the quality of that action they character, the quality of how I act is intentionality. So if I decide that the best way to get really good food is to rob a bank, you know, get some good money, and then go out to a nice restaurant that creates very different karmic consequences in our own our own psychology, then, and, you know, going to the bank and taking money out of your own bank account. or going to or going to, to a store where you and reflecting on what you're going to buy. So that what you buy, supports the

environment little bit or doesn't undermine it. You can add, you can add all kinds of things around the desire to go eat, that can shape so you can go be greedy for food, you could kind of go go down the shop, supermarket aisles and push everyone else's side so you can get to your food and grab it. could go into the market and be patient and open the doors for people and not be greedy and but go in with a sense of generosity and compassion for animals and

decide to eat vegetarian or something. There's all kinds of ways spins that we put on our desires as we act them out. So I don't know if I said, My best examples for this, but maybe you can fill it in for yourself. So to stop and look at our intention, what's the purpose we have what we're doing? what purpose do we infuse into the act that we do it? We do. That's the front loading part. When I was a young Zen student, I was very influenced by a Zen teacher who just said I'd come back from I've been practicing Zen center for a long time. And then I went and practiced in Southeast Asia and do you know different Buddhist traditions? Vipassana tradition, which we're teaching here, and I studied vipassana nine. And in in vipassana practice, we talk a lot about the details of a meditation practice, and what goes on in meditation with the experiences and the instructions for it and all this. In Zen when I was at Zen center, there was no discussion about meditation practice whatsoever. It was like, you know, there was almost like, that was taboo, even though we did a lot of meditation. And so, I asked in a public way, and in the presence of a lot of the priests xcenter. Why is that? And no one answered. So that was, so I kind of didn't think about it anymore. But, but then afterwards, one of the senior priests came up to me and said, Yeah, I'll tell you why. Zen practice is the purification of intention. That ends then we're not so focused on the details of meditation practice and how concentrated you get and how mindful you are. But rather, we're purifying or clarifying the sense of purpose, intentionality, and motivation for doing the practice. And as the intention gets clarified and purified, everything else gets lined up, everything else kind of fits into place. And I've found this over and over again, that if we can do a deep study of our intentions, the purposes we have for what we do, but really take time to look at it deeper and deeper, there is a kind of clarification a deepening and reworking a reassessment. That's quite significant. That might in some ways be more powerful than meditating every day. Because intentionality is what shapes how we live our lives and how happy where we are, how free we are. How much we grow has a lot to do with what motivates us for how we're going to live this life. So when I was at the Zen monastery, my first year or so there it was kind of a strange thing to do to go live in a Zen monastery and I was supposed to go to graduate, go to graduate school. And so, just a few weeks before I was gonna go to graduate school, I decided to go to the Zen monastery. And so I wrote I wrote to the department and it said, something has come up. And, and so I can't start this year Can I defer my start for a year. So I went to the monastery for a year or so. And, and but in the back of the mind was they had agreed to for it. So, you know, I had to graduate school hanging over me, should I go to graduate school? And or should I do something else with my life? What should I do with my life. And what I really wanted to do was to be of service to the world try to address the suffering of the world. And I wanted to do it through the means of Buddhist practice. For me, what I saw Buddhist practice was the clearest, strongest, most effective way that I knew to address the depth of human suffering, get really down to the core of it. And so I kind of wanted to do that. But I didn't trust my intention. I didn't trust that the purity of it or the clarity of it, I kind of thought about people who want to serve other people. They're probably doing it for selfish reasons. And I don't know I'm probably selfish.

So I spent a year reflecting and thinking about my intention. What is it what's going on with me and kind of teasing apart was going on looking at all the little motivations, the fears, the I should the sense of obligation that came along with that. The sense of of, of certainly sense of conceit that came with it, there was some conceit involved. There was all these different things that were involved with my idea of being of service, it was not such a pure clear idea of being a service to the world. So I spent a year kind of reflecting and thinking and looking at this. And turned out I think that was a year really well spent. It

wasn't so happy doing it. Because I was filled with doubt. And, you know, it wasn't a little bit of angst and stuff. But by the end of the year, I realized I decided, you know, for me a monumental decision was, in theory, it's possible to be of service purely. So, when I at least in theory, knew it could be done, then that would be that that was part of the decision then for me to go You know, devote my life to Buddhism, which I've done all these years. And then I've done this other times as well taking a year or so of my life, and just keep looking at my intentionality. And one of the question, interesting questions that I did for a year, was asking what is my deepest intention? So not just simply, you know, my intention for shopping for food or eating or my attention for what I'm going to say at a certain conversation with someone. But what is what is the intentionality is it's a sense of purpose, that I wanted to base my life on? What was most important for me, and, and one of the things I discovered in that year was how easy it was for me to lose touch with it. How easy it was to get busy with life and all kinds of things and, you know, things that were not so deep, intimate things, maybe they were just superficial aspects of my life that somehow paddled strama and pulled me in this way in that way. And how he was to lose in touch with this deeper sense of purpose or intentionality. And when I could tap into it, that it became kind of like a ballast, it became a sense of purpose, a sense of confidence, a sense of directionality, a sense of clarity about what I was about, that kept me from kind of being kind of tossed about in the, you know, in the currents of life. I knew what I was about, this is what I'm doing. I was also very interesting over that year, to see how this my sense of deepest purpose or gives attention shifted and changed over time. And, and I learned a few things which I'll pass on to you if you want to do this reflection on your own intentionality, your own intentions and sense of purpose and involved in this process of clarifying it and purifying it, that you can ask these kinds of questions. One is, is your intention And competence centaury Are you trying to compensate for some suffering some Distress, some sense of lack something some sense of emptiness you have in your compensating for it by filling it with something that something else? Or is there some deeper place of intentionality is not compensating because something is wrong in your life, but something that wells up from some deeper place, maybe when you're completely happy and contented and everything is good. What wells up then, in my case, I was doing a lot of meditation. And outside of meditation, I had my own angst and my, my anxieties and various issues, but in meditation, all that would drop away, and I'd get very peaceful on a very I don't want to, I don't want to say you know, too big, but become, you know, peaceful enough that my normal everyday anxiety fell away and got quiet and so then asking this question, what is my deepest intention was not trying to compensate for or fix some problem in my life that I had, but arose out of there's no problem in this moment. I'm just sitting here peacefully at ease content, this is all that has to happen to sit here. And then there was a feeling of some deeper kind of like a spring arising inside. And that that would answer that question. So is it compensatory or not? And I think ideally, it wouldn't be in compensation for something or wouldn't be in reaction to something so much, but we really go deep enough to find out what is it that your What is your What is your thing? What wants to come out of you.

The second thing is that if you say if your intention is negative in nature, like you have the intention to live without fear. That's a good intention to have. But it you can go deeper than that. You can ask any set you ask a second question. If I had no fear, what my what would be my intention then? So there's a negative intention, celebrate it, maybe, but then see if you can restate it positively. But then if you could have this negative thing happen, what then would you really want to do? And I remember one person I told me that her intention was to live without fear. And I asked her, Well, if you had no fear, what would be your intention then? And then she said, and she surprised herself what you said. He said, then then I want to love people. So what would you rather do that without fear or love people? And maybe, if maybe, you know, I mean, sometimes you have to deal with a fear first for sure. I don't want to diminish. diminish the importance of working with it. I had to work with my fear a lot. But but sometimes if you realize a deeper intention like to love people that to realize what that's what's underneath it can help address the fear much more easy, easier here let's make kind of changes the game changes the whole

perspective what we're doing. It gives him strength behind it or gives a different context for it than just trying to be without fear. The other thing to request it to inquire or reflect on in terms of intentionality, as you feel into the intention and see what it's like, is an intention that brings you a sense of well being or is intention that brings you a sense of uneasiness. Is it beneficial or is it harmful to you yourself or to others? What are the consequences for having it and some intentions you can feel some intentions or alienating some intentions protests from people, some intentions bring people together. Some intention separate ourselves from ourselves. Some intentions bring us together. There's not a few people who are kind of at war with themselves or war with parts of themselves. And so part of their intention to part of their subconscious intentionality is to be critical of themselves or to push the parts of themselves away or shut down parts of themselves or be at war with themselves. And you know, is that the best intentions to have and is that where you decide to really come from the deepest place? You know, to really see what's there and keep inquiring deeper and deeper. The other thing about intention is that to think about that there is actually layers of intentionality of purpose, and that I have a lot of faith that if we can use mindfulness to turn towards what's driving us the motivations, we have The impulses we have, that we turn towards it and clarify and see them and respect them, that we start going through these layers, we start going deeper and deeper. And things might seem maybe unfortunate intentions to have, like, maybe you're critical of yourself, you're very judgmental towards yourself, to respect that in this way to turn towards it. Allow yourself to be that way. Don't say that's wrong. Don't be Don't be at war with yourself for what you're doing. Hold it carefully and attentively and really get to know it well as if it has permission to be there. And then feel into it. And you might discover that underneath the intention to be judgmental or critical, self critical, is maybe something like a desire to be safe. And it's maybe a misdirected way of trying to become safe, but trying to be safe. That seems like a better thing place to be. And then what what is that what's underneath that? deeper down the desire to be safe, which is a little bit like a negative desire, you know, desire to not to not have to be afraid of something. Maybe there's a desire to,

to be open and present and receptive to this world. desire to love, desire to care. And I known for me and I think not a few people, that things can happen in life, that our desires are kind of impulses to love impulses Take care, impulses for one sense of wonder or sense of sense of the beauty and the value of life can be so easily squashed by things in life covered over and closed up, but they don't go away. Then they fester or we try and kind of unsuccessful ways to deal with That. But if we can just kind of very patiently turn the gaze back respectfully and see what's driving us. And it's a beautiful thing is a profound thing to do in meditation. Because in meditation, you're not going to move. You can, you could have any motivation at all allowed to be there, no matter how ugly it is, but you're not going to act on it. And so used to, it's a great place to sit very quietly, and turn your gaze towards it, and look at it respectfully caringly, maybe lovingly, that which is actually very difficult about yourself, and then see how it opens up. What wants to open what wants to show itself that's deeper, that's deeper, that's deeper. And it's my after all these years, I have this profound faith, that if you really look deeply into anything, it takes you down to the depths beautiful depths of who you are. And so to spend time With your intentions to look at your intentions, clarify them, purify them, exploring them, getting to know them. Take time to recognize them. Pause in your life long enough, so that you can ask yourself what is my deepest sense of purpose. Not a few people I've known have had deep, wonderful sense of purpose for their life. And then in the busyness of a career, lost touch with it. And, and felt kind of bereft because they had this wonderful thing going but they feel now they feel kind of trapped by their career and their family and all these different things. That what they really want it to be about couldn't really be there. It can be there if we pause long enough to look, if we listen and pay attention to it, and really go in, in and in and find what's there. I kind of believe that our the depth of our intention is some of the most Beautiful and important parts of who we are. And it's not something that we want to be kind of ignore. It's not something you want to be casual about. It's not something we want to, you know, not



give time to because there's all these important, you know, chores of everyday life to be done. Or websites to visit. The

So, intention, exploring our intention, getting to know it. There's a few things maybe warnings around this. When you ask a question, like what is your deepest purpose or deepest intention? There's a lot of societal or family messages we get about what's the appropriate purpose to have and one of them that exists kind of And this is society, local society, sometimes I think, is to associate a sense of purpose with finding the right career, finding the right what, what you're supposed to be doing in your life. And, and then there's all these examples of people who figured out a great what and to get written up on the newspaper. And if I just find the what, write the great American novel or something. And then I'll be great. In Buddhism, the what we do is actually much less important than how we do it. And for some people, their sense of purpose in life and intentionality, has a lot more to do with how they live their life than what they actually do. And it doesn't that for some people doesn't actually matter what kind of job they have or what they're doing. What matters is they do it with integrity. They do it with compassion, with love, they do it with generosity. Those are the qualities that really kind of are the creative act. That's shaped good karma. Whether you get a promotion or not, does not do much good for your karma. But if you do your job with generosity does a lot for the psychological cultivation influence the karma is all about. So how we do things might have a bigger impact impact on your long term happiness than what you do. And so, as you explore what's your deepest intention, be careful, you don't to easily fall into the idea of a what there might be something about the how. And in Buddhism, the liberation of the maturing and practice to liberation that comes, I think of it as a how, how to live this life without suffering, how to live this life without causing suffering, and how to live this life compassionately, to help alleviate suffering. That's a beautiful and profound way of In Buddhism, that's probably considered the most profound motivation in any human life can have. So I think you can tell that I think this is an important topic. And one that I spent a lot of my life with, and exploring and working with and all that. And what I'd like to ask you now that I've shared something important for me, maybe I have, maybe I can get your agreement, would you be willing to turn to maybe three or four people in there near you, and just talk about what this topic of intention has stirred up and you just don't want any one of you talk for very long. Just if you have a group of three or four, just make short statements, not everything you say on this topic. So you can hear from each other and just go around and around a little bit then. And so it's interesting to hear other people too. And so you do that. Maybe we can do that for about six, seven minutes, and then we'll come back here.

Well, that was a it was a real pleasure for me to sit here and not have to talk. It was a real pleasure to sit here and listen to you kind of talking so in such an animated way, and I hope that was about the topic. And that if it was, it was great to have all this energy. I really appreciate it. So thank you for going along with that. And maybe the beginning of your reflection on this topic, and I think you'll probably find that it's an inexhaustible a beneficial topic to explore intentionality and purpose and all that. And, and one of the great possibilities to be looking for finding your way with is that perhaps there is a sense of have purpose or intent intentionality that can go with us and almost anywhere we go, we discover how what we do is both beneficial for ourselves and beneficial for the people around us and for others, that it doesn't have to be one or the other. It's possible to do both simultaneously. And that's a wonderful, beautiful thing to aspire to. So I like the word intention, okay. But the words that I like more that I kind of associated with it, I like aspiration, dedication, and devotion. Those, those carry much more kind of heartfelt kind of, you know, sense of kind of commitment or engagement. wholeheartedness I guess like those words is wholehearted, this is what I'm doing. intention can be kind of weak. Sometimes it's my intention. It was my intention and you know, you know, but it's my is my dedication It's my devotion. So May this topic stay with you and I hope it serves you well. Thank you.