

# 2019-09-01 The Open Hand of Inclusion

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

buddhist practice, hand, people, suffering, open, practice, clinging, tenderness, sidewalk, deeper, hold, world, phase, learn, ideas, begins, books, attached, space, happen

## SPEAKERS

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Good morning everyone. And what I'll attempt to talk about today is the idea that Buddhist practice can be considered a practice of all inclusive inclusion. And as a society, the issues of inclusion are very important for us. There's a lot of division in our society and all kinds of different ways seems like, you know, every day there's a new, painful way in which people are divided among each other. And, and, but I'd like to think of Buddhist practice as being learning how to be inclusive in a particular way. And then for Buddhists, at least, this particular way, is a foundation for perhaps, inclusion, inclusion work of all kinds. And to introduce this idea, I'd like to say it, there are sometimes considered to be two.

There are two very general phases of Buddhist practice. There's an initial phase that sometimes in some Buddhist tradition is called the preparatory phase. And then there's the phase where the practice actually begins. And for many of us, the preparatory phase is what people think of as Buddhist practice. And they know it's fine to do that. But there's a shift that happens at some point. So that preparatory phase is when people begin their practice, perhaps out of some inspiration, some trust, or some idea or feeling or logic, that this practice makes a lot of sense or it's been told that it's a good thing to do. And, and so I'll try it out, I'll check it out. And so I'm going to give myself over to it and experiment and give it a benefit of the doubt. And I'll do what they say for a while, they tell me to keep coming back to my breath over and over again. Well, they must have been doing this for a few millennia. So they must, you know, they must, you know, have good reasons for this. So I'll try it, sit down, close my eyes and come back to my breath over and over again. Or you know, all the different instructions that we have in practice we do. And some people can be quite inspired by this space, this contact with the practice, they're inspired by the teachings and what they point to the, how they explain this world that we're in how they explain ourselves, our suffering. And also it makes a lot of sense for some people and people when they first sit down a few people when they first sit down or as they get into it, they really something really resonates in some deep way and And so there's kind of this beginning phase preparing. At some point, there's a transformation. It doesn't have to be a sudden transformation. It can be a slow one, where a person and knows something about the practice about the Dharma about Buddhism, that's essentially your inherently personal, that there's some real experience of what happens as we practice, some experience of being different through the practice that is so clear, and so obvious in a sense to oneself, that it's like now now a person I know what the practice is. Now, I really understand that before I kind of was inspired, it was meaningful. I kind of thought I knew what it was. In fact, I told all my friends and relatives, so this is what it is. But it was you know, really kind of maybe intellectual it was book learned it was logical Lee put together. But Wow. Now I know it will be someone like who read books on swimming and didn't know how to swim. And it makes the books are really well written that's convincing. It's logical. It's possible to swim I'm inspired, it's possible to swim. I'll read another book about swimming. And wow, yes, this is fantastic. And, and they'll tell their friends you know, you can learn to swim, it's a great swim and, and, and then at some point they decide to try to

swim. And at some point they've learned to swim. Now I know. Now I you know, now I really know what those books are about because I can swim. And it's a whole different experience about it. Okay, now I can really try to develop my swimming and whatever I do. So it's a little bit like that these two phases and when this kind of language is used for Buddhism Buddhist practice It's sometimes said maybe it's provocative or maybe it's meant to be inspiring and not discouraging. They say that Buddhist practice begins in that second three face everything before just preparatory to get to there. And it begins because now there's a personal reference point for it. a personal note, that's what I'm trying to do. That's the home for it. That's the connection. That's what's gonna happen with inside of me.

And, and so, at that point, for some people at least becomes inherently or innately practical. It doesn't become some abstract ideas, some generalizations some ideas about some ultimate goal which is abstract or, you know, enlightenment is you know, not the, you know, can be all kinds of lofty ideas about what enlightenment is, and that can be inspiring or daunting. To people depending. But now there's something that's, you know that these people might say, well that enlightenment is good, maybe. But I know something now. This is what I think the path is. Now I know what this practice is all about. So what are those things about one of the ways to talk about experiencing it for oneself and knowing something is one knows that clinging, grasping, craving, being really attached to holding tight to things, is overrated. In fact, it's not really worth its promise. Whatever the advertisement is, whatever the public relations messages about the value of clinging or craving or holding on tight being attached. It's not really true. It's fake news. And the and when knows this, because what has been to the other side of clinging of craving, when hasn't some very clear, obvious way experienced what it's like to be breathing? What it's like to be aware what it's like to be relaxed in this body. What it's like to have a heart that feels open and uncontracted undefended. clearly enough that one has experience of this is a state where there's no clinging or the clinging the way I usually experience it is really absent here. And my usual way of clinging it's not really something I want to live with anymore. It has no value. It has no purpose. In fact, it undermines me It gets in the way of me And so for some people at this phase is beginning phases is now now that practice really becomes more to the point. I understand that when I claim, that's where the practices, that's what I'm trying to work with and not cling. And it can be, you know, a challenging times it's not easy, once one knows this, but when is at least has some confidence, some personal experience, this is what it's about. And what does that doesn't have to go into all the books and try to understand the complicated, you know, philosophical teachings of Buddhism, because it's not any more complicated than having spent a lifetime with your hand in a fist. And finally, understanding your thought you have to keep it in a fist all the time. It's okay to have the hand open. And I feel so good to have it open and when the tendency to make up This happens, wait a minute, I think I've you know, done enough of that this doesn't really feel good. It's, let me keep opening it, let me keep opening it. And in that struggle or that practice of keeping it open, there is maybe a lot of debates that goes on, some of those lawyers of the mind will come along and try to convince you that, yeah, we've got this in this circumstance, it's good to claim. This is a time you know, I this Buddhist stuff, you know, I don't have time for that right now. I just got to get through this and clawing my way through, you know, you know, be attached right through it or something, because this is so important, you know, and, and, and so then if the honest debate going on are really looking at it deeply questioning it, not just accepting. Yes, that's the case. But really questioning that and looking at that and practicing with that and going to the other side of that, and seeing Well, you know, maybe it's overrated. There is another way

And then as we do this and learning how not to cling not to grass not to be attached, then to discover it's not just a matter of being non attached, but in that non attached state, there is energy, there is movement there is power even, there's action that can arise out of it, kind of like from the inside out. It's not a passive state or say something a little differently maybe non clingy is has a certain passivity to it.

So it's maybe appropriate to be little bit questioning you know, is that being too passive but it's the passivity of a door that's been opened you know, a door that's open his past you know, the, the space that's been created in the open door is completely passive. It doesn't just they're just there it doesn't not doing anything. It's just nothing not troubling anyone the space and but now we can go through something can happen in that space. And, and so the same thing here within ourselves, non clinging creates the door. And it's remarkable what can arise, what can flow what could emerge out of that. So at some point Buddhist practice is to understand that the practice is metaphorically to keep the hand open, and not just to keep a hand open, but to allow to hold whatever happens in their life in that open hand. And if you, many of you maybe can't see this, but maybe after the talk, if you'd like to go up here and look in this statue of the Buddha that we have here, his left hand is laying on his lap in a very calm and peaceful way just resting there. And in the resting there in its hands, the his palm is open. To the sky. And, and I like to think that almost everything, all the different postures and things about that Buddha statue are highly symbolic. And this is symbolic of how we can be inclusive of all things. We want to hold everything in the field of our awareness. Without clinging, grasping, being greedy, being hateful, being spiteful, being resentful, or being diluted. So if, if we take the hand as a metaphor for our heart or awareness, then greed would be at you know the hand they would be reaching all the time and grabbing and holding on. The aversive tendency maybe would be pushing away or closing down or hitting or blaming or attacking or doing something and the diluted Just the hand just kind of spinning around kind of like you know, not knowing what to do what happens, just anxious and confused. But to have confidence and trust, that it's okay to have the metaphorical hand, open all the time to experience what is here, no matter what it is prior to reacting, almost like prior to acting and doing and because if we don't have the hand open, we don't have the heart to open the mind in this kind of open receptive way without clicking. then chances are that we're going to be acting, reacting, disconnected from ourselves. We're going to be acting from ideas. We're going to be acting from the reacting from the emotional impacts. We have and reaction from the emotional impact of being uncomfortable or having some kind of desire pop up. We're more like acting on the surface of our being where I think through the filter of ideas and thoughts and relationships that are kind of abstract or kind of distant, as opposed to really being grounded in that deep kind of intimacy or connectivity to what's happening. So that our response can well up from within, below the surface of our conditioning, below the surface of our bias and below the surface of our ordinary desires and attachments and ideas of things to what should and shouldn't happen. There's a time for some deeper response to happen.

And then in that deeper response, then maybe we welcome in some of our thoughts and ideas and memories and concepts and conventions that we have but isn't it the way we are Don't have them. But they are supports for this open hand to know how to respond. They aren't the closed hand or the reactive hand that has the precedence. So the second phase of Buddhist practice is a time where we really trust it's okay to have this tender, sensitive, open hand present in order to include and feel everything that goes on. There was a, we had here at IMC on Friday, a wonderful Buddhist teacher, an African American Buddhist teacher named Zen you, Earthling manual. And she wrote a beautiful book called The way of tenderness, where she talks about a lot about her own Buddhist practice, and her struggles to overcome or work through or come to the other side of her own deep struggle with being in this Country African American being a woman and being a lesbian. And, and its books called the way of tenderness. You know, as you know that the Tet their way of where to be the way they threw at the path of tenderness through these tremendous suffering and challenges and divisions that our society is seen. In that book, she has this wonderful sentence. She has a lot of wonderful sentences. But what struck my mind this week was, she says, the particular the particular suffering of any one individual is the general suffering for the rest of us. And I love this sentence I knew quite heavy exactly, you know, paraphrasing a little bit, but I love this sentence. We're not we're not separated from other people, what the suffering over their people, in some ways is our own as well. And to treat people Suffering is out

there and not taking the time to feel it in the tenderness of our hearts or this open hand to experience it and feel it in their body, feeling the heart feel it in their mind some deep way to really kind of let it kind of register is someone else's suffering or are suffering in relationship to them, not because of them, but you know, our discomfort. You know, I saw I was here some a couple of years ago I was right here, a block away in Redwood City. And that was sometimes a walk around that there's a high school there and I walked around the school property in kind of a park like setting the front of the school, but there's this big fence around it. So you know, you could walk in, you know, sidewalk in the city sidewalk in front or you can walk in the park like setting but you have to kind of go a long way around to sometimes to get to the sidewalk and There was some people two or three people walking down the sidewalk, I hardly noticed them I was maybe talking to someone on my walk and pickup truck drove by. And someone yelled, a derogatory or these very terrible derogatory terms we have in English for other people who have a certain type race. And then followed that by saying, Go back to where you came from. So here right here in Redwood City, and if I had been on the sidewalk, I would have somehow gone and accompanied her to show the person that they're not there. They weren't alone. Who was that was said to but I was kind of, you know, it was a big fence as far away and happened very quickly. So you know, I didn't really do anything but it was painful to experience that to see that happen and know that this is part of our society, this kind of things way too often. But to hold that, in the open hand, to be able to take time and to experience that and be with that, and to hold that.

If my friends and you this teacher had been the one on the sidewalk and that was told to her, when I know about her, she would have done that. She's a very she has she really knows what the Buddhist practice is. And she would have held that an open hand, her own suffering, the suffering of other people. She knows how to come back and rest in her tenderness in the softness in the presence. She might have done something I don't know what she would have done. I don't I don't know what I would have done if I was on the sidewalk rather than behind this fence. But to hold our suffering our purse suffering the particular suffering to ourselves and learn how to hold it in an open hand or the equivalent inside, rather than learning how to fix it, rather than learning how to get rid of it, how to solve that how to free ourselves from it. First and foremost, I think at the heart of what Buddhist practice is, when it really is Buddhist practice. It's not really about getting rid of our suffering, first and foremost, but it's rather holding it in our hands. This too I have to hold in my open hands. My fear that I have things xiety I have, I know that what has to be done, just hold it. As if awareness is two cupped hands. That comes up underneath my fear anxiety just holds it and is willing and confident that just a tenderly or carefully or open I feel I can sense it. Because we've learned that if we do that, all kinds of things begin to shift and change, things begin to open to the entire arrival they begin to solve, they begin to clarify and they allow us a chance or something deeper to arise within us that can meet that and wisdom I can understand it, deeper response deeper compassion care, something can happen, that can happen when we feel our suffering or personal suffering or any suffering and an automatic pilot, ah, something got to happen I have to fix this. Something you know, I better get out those books and you know, study, study, study and learn learn or I better analyze or I better, you know, maybe if I just get more concentrated in meditation, then I just blow it out of existence. You know, or I just need to you know, get away from it at all costs. When put so that might be useful to kind of find relief to to find some space where time and place where we're not suffering in order to be able to be able to get deeper and deeper into practice. But in this way I was talking about today when Buddhist practice really begins when we really starts with when there's no longer trying to get away from suffering. When one is trying to not meet suffering, with any clinging with any resistance, with any attachments without any versions, and one knows the nature of a confused mind where we get all confused and caught up in it. To know that even being confused about it is not where the path is found. And the path is found in something amazingly simple That is to hold it in the tenderness, hold it in the softness of an open hand, or two hands cupped underneath it just this. really be there feel it. And for many of us, but not everyone, for

many of us, I think the place to learn this is our own personal suffering. That's maybe a quote comes first. But then as we learn it, it's also the suffering of the world around us that we hold the same way. We're not supposed to do Buddhist practice so that we're free of our own suffering. And then we can just kind of you know, go forget everybody else and just go play. Because we can, I think when the heart is open when the hand is open, it's available to all the winds, whatever way the wind blows, where every direction the wind comes from, it blows across the soft end. So if we know something about the open, soft

presence to this world, the winds of our own suffering blow across that open, we hold it, and the winds of the world blow across it. And we, we've learned just to be with this. And this is one of the great gifts that we can give to our friends or family or society people we meet is our ability to be with them without reacting to what's happening without needing to fix or get away from. It just kind of be there when it sometimes people think we're being too passive. Because we're not worried enough, you know, anxious enough with them or something. And sometimes people will feel that maybe it's uncomfortable because they're just because we're somehow making space for the difficulty of the situation. Whereas most people cover it over with fast talk or doing something, but to make space for it, and just hold it in the minute and one of the things that one of the ways I see this kind of open hand, you know, it's really some deep inner sensitivity that we're capable of sensitivity that is born and lives through the body. So a lot of it is embodied presence. The whole body is like an open hand becomes like an open hand. The whole body is allowed to feel and sense what's happening with ourselves and were they not orderly, but it's almost like the man that now if you allow me I'll change the metaphor here. It's almost like we have deep inside of us who may be at the core of something We have a light bulb that's always been on. But mostly it's been covered over by lots and lots of grime, lots of dust. And as we do the practice, we're slowly kind of cleaning the, that grime and dust off it, so that the light can finally begin to shine through. And as it shines through, and finally, eventually the whole whole bulb is, you know, been cleaned. And so it's, it radiates in all directions, the light. And so whatever that light shines on, is what we've learned to hold tenderly to all the present for but because a light starts in the center of who we are inside of us, that light first goes through us, just happens to be the person that they're kind of a coincidence. Oh god, this is the person this here. And so you'll see, you know, one of the first places you'll see in that light, if you're really present is what's happening to you. The impact the world the impact you have on yourself, the world has on you, you will experience your own suffering and your own joys, your own capacity for compassion and wisdom and the opposite. And then as if the light is allowed to travel further, then it encounters what's going on around you, the people around you. But if the light skips over you and goes directly to the world around you, which it does for many people, because they don't know how to be present for themselves. Then all this unconscious subconscious reactivity, bias, thoughts, beliefs, will often come along and influence how we speak and what we say and what we do. But if the if really the light goes up through us first, then there's a much better chance that we'll respond and be with the world with much more wisdom and care and compassion and what's appropriate. And so there is a kind of priority that Buddhist practice gives to your personal experience. But not because it's selfish or self preoccupying. It's just the work in a certain kind of way because of where your life begins. Your awareness begins. In a certain powerful way you could you can say, for you, the world begins in you. And if you want to care for the world, you really have to care for yourself, because the whole world begins in you when you wake up in the morning. You You just gave you gave us woke up the world you give birth to the world.

so and so. So to really be careful with what's here, and the Buddhist practice, if you do it regularly, it becomes second nature to do that. Just like if you you know, who has a habit was to hold your hand clenched in a fist. That's second nature. That's what's kind of automatic. But if you keep practicing, keeping your hand open, keeping your hand open, eventually it's second nature to keep it open and



you walk through the world with it open, you can think about too much as what you do. So if Buddhist practice is done regularly enough, this keep coming back being present, opening up the light, holding whatever is here, with cupped hands, just being with it. Not trying to always focus on fixing suffering, but rather being with it. That at some point, that becomes safe in nature, and so when you go through the world, you don't have to do so much work to pay attention to your life kind of, you know, stop to really spend a lot of time with what's here with you. That's kind of obvious. And so there's much more space for your light to flow out more widely and take into account with the world around you and maybe not see it. Inner and outer being so separate. It's just wherever is here. So you might try it. So what I'm, what I'm saying is that there's two phases of Buddhist practice. The second phase, person really knows what Buddhist practice is about. And it's a phase where we really know what it's about, is not clinging, not being caught in greed, or hatred or delusion. And to not do that is to also save time. Kind of the other side of that is to have confidence in the open hand. To know that that's the way to be. Because to be greedy or hateful, or diluted or confused, is we're kind of doing the equivalent of closing up or losing the open hand. So to know it does, it's not, I don't want to live with greed, hate and delusion anymore. I don't want to be attached I want to have that open hand and to have confidence in that. That's what that's what happens when Buddhist practice when some person really begins Buddhist practice the second phase. So some of you have already started Buddhist practice in the second phase this way, and some of you haven't. For those of you haven't do it anyway. You don't have the proof that it works yet though, that this is what it's about. But try, try, try doing it as if you've already, you know, as if you really can do it. Try just having your soft palms of your hands that believe in your heart or in your mind or in your awareness. Just try holding it open. And then whatever occurs, whatever is happening. Imagine that it's just you, you allow it to just rest in your hands. That doesn't mean that you have to be for it doesn't mean you're against it. It's not about being for or against anything. It's just holding it and seeing what happens feeling and sensing and not giving in to greed, hatred and delusion, not giving into clinging or hatred. Just hold it And if that's not enough that the fact that the Buddha sits here all the time. You know, I, you know, he's been up there on our altar for very, you know, well, he's been here at IMC for a very long time. With he, I've never seen him tighten up that left hand it's always seems to stay open. But having you know, the idea that your hand is the Buddha's hand, that your awareness can be like the Buddhist wareness just holding things there. If that image is not strong enough, then you can notice that what's also there, or if you need stronger medicine, his hand is resting in his lap. So if you can't hold everything in your Buddha hand, maybe then put everything in your Buddha lap.

Maybe need more space for it and see what happens. See what that's like not to fix, get rid of, but just really offer that presence to your experience. And in doing that, if you're, if you're, you know, in that first phase of practice, if you keep doing that, I'm pretty confident that you'll learn soon enough for yourself that greed, hate and delusion, clinging and attachment is not really worthwhile. It's not really in your best interest. It's not really a healthy thing to do. And then you'll start Buddhist practice. Again, And again. And again. So May we all begin? May we all be beginners over and over again. Thank you very much.