

Understanding Spiritual Bypassing - Class 2 of 2

Teacher: David Chernicoff

March 29, 2025

Introduction

I'd like to pick up on my comments from last week at this point in regard to this topic of spiritual bypassing. Just briefly, I'd like to review what I talked about last week to highlight some of what I see to be the key points in that discussion. For some of you who might not have attended that first meeting or watched the recording yet, the definition that I gave of spiritual bypassing is the place I'd like to start. This was a comment made in Robert Master's book on spiritual bypassing, and he was reflecting on his understanding of John Wellwood's work in the field. The definition being spiritual bypassing is the use of spiritual practices and beliefs to avoid dealing with our painful feelings, our unresolved wounds, and our unmet developmental needs.

Key Points from Last Week

One of the key points I made last week that I'd like to emphasize again today is that this is a normal part of the process of spiritual development. So this is not understood to be something that should not be happening, and it's not some kind of evidence that we're not practicing appropriately or that we're not good human beings when we notice ourselves occasionally getting caught up in these processes referred to as forms of spiritual bypassing.

Rather, the wiser way to look at this is to see the bypassing that we notice in our own lives and in our own spiritual paths as part of the curriculum for awakening. So these are tendencies and inclinations of the ego to preserve itself as primary in regard to our consciousness and our understanding of who and what we are. They're related very clearly to what in Western psychology we would call defense mechanisms among other things.

Forms of Spiritual Bypassing

Unity Consciousness

Last week I talked about five different kinds of spiritual bypassing. Very briefly, I talked about what I called unity consciousness, which has an awakened dimension of understanding and represents one

of the most profound kinds of experiences we can have as human beings because it's related to our innate capacity for self-transcendence. At the same time, when it becomes spiritual bypassing, there's a naive and distorted understanding of what unity consciousness means. And it's not understood in relation to the fact that true spiritual maturity requires us to develop on two levels simultaneously. One being what's called the relative level in Buddhist and other contemplative teachings, and the other being the absolute level.

Rather than actually developing on both levels, when unity consciousness becomes a form of spiritual bypassing, it's an attempt to leapfrog over the human dimension of who we are, the wounds and the unhealed parts of ourselves and the personality work that we need to do in order to authentically experience ourselves as something more than a human personality in a body, even though that in and of itself is quite sacred and beautiful.

Exaggerated Detachment

Secondly, last week I talked about what I called exaggerated detachment, right? A kind of enforced calm in which what we're actually doing is suppressing our feelings and desensitizing ourselves in the name of appearing to be equanimous, like our teacher in some cases. And this is a misunderstanding of what true equanimity is because in the case of true equanimity, there's an allowing for the full range of human experience and an ability to sit in the center, like being in the center of a hurricane and being in a place of calm and presence because one isn't identified with all of the emotional ups and downs that are occurring.

Overemphasis on the Positive

Related to this, and thirdly, I talked about a form of spiritual bypassing that involves an overemphasis on the positive and an aversion to the negative. This is a kind of black-white thinking in which we see certain emotions and states of mind and heart as positive, such as compassion and generosity and loving kindness. And we see other states like anger or resentment or bitterness or sadness as "negative emotions," yeah?

Rather than recognizing that all of these experiences, the full spectrum of experience is inherent in being alive as a human being. And then we come to understand our task as human beings who wanna wake up as being to develop a wise relationship to whatever arises, however painful or joyful it might be. That lends itself to a more authentic equanimity in regard to the previous form of spiritual bypassing.

Diluted Notion of Compassion

I also spoke about what I called a diluted notion of compassion, in which we're not actually present and intuitive enough to see what's actually needed in a situation, at which point we have a tendency to project our own needs to be a helper into the situation, rather than seeing clearly what's needed. And sometimes we help too much, or sometimes we have naive ideas that are not accurate and wise in relation to what real compassion looks like.

Last week, I talked about there being a full spectrum of behavioral options associated with the realm of wise compassion, from simple presence and really being fully present with another person, so as to communicate a kind of acceptance of every aspect of that person. And on the other end, a kind of directive compassion, telling someone what to do.

Poor Boundaries

And the last form of bypassing I talked about last week, I called poor boundaries. This has to do with the tendency, as I said last week, for those of us who grew up really needing and desiring approval, particularly in our families of origin, we tend to want to please everyone and everything. We tend to say yes in some situations when we're asked to do something, when on some deeper level, we really don't want to do it. We tend to override our own needs and what's healthy for us in some cases. And we're unable to express what I would call honest yeses and noes when it comes to interpersonal relationships or working in an organization. So those were the five forms that we talked about last week. To refresh our memory and also to give us once again a felt sense of what this spiritual bypassing is all about, beyond the level of concept.

Case Example

Let me read you a very brief case example from John Wellwood's book, "Toward a Psychology of Awakening." He writes:

"A client of mine who was desperate about her marriage had gone to a spiritual teacher for advice. He advised her not to be so angry with her husband, but to be a compassionate friend instead. This was certainly sound spiritual advice. Compassion is a higher truth than anger. When we rest in the absolute nature of mind, pure open awareness, we discover compassion as the very core of our nature. From that perspective, feeling angry about being hurt only separates us from our true nature. Yet, the teacher who gave this woman this advice did not consider her relative situation, that she was someone who had swallowed her anger all of her life. Her father had been abusive and would slap her and send her to her room whenever she showed any anger about the way he

treated her. So she learned to suppress her anger and always tried to please others and 'be a good girl instead.' When the teacher advised her to feel compassion rather than anger, she felt relieved because this fit right in with her defenses. Since anger was terrifying and threatening to her, she used the teaching on compassion for spiritual bypassing, for refusing to deal with her anger or the message it contained. Yet this only increased her sense of frustration and powerlessness in her marriage. As her therapist, taking account of her relative psychology, my aim was to help her acknowledge her anger and relate to it more fully. As a spiritual practitioner, I was also mindful that anger is ultimately empty, a wave arising in the ocean of consciousness without any solidity or inherent meaning. Yet, while that understanding may be true in the absolute sense and be valuable for helping dissolve attachment to anger, it was not useful for this woman at this time. Instead, she needed to learn to pay more attention to her anger in order to move beyond a habitual pattern of self-suppression, to discover her inner strength and power, and to relate to her husband in a more active and assertive way."

So that's one practical example of what we're talking about here. And because I worked for many years as a psychotherapist and a meditation teacher, this is a longstanding interest of mine here in the West, because in so many cases, certain kinds of folks come to spiritual practice with the kinds of confusions associated with these issues of spiritual bypassing.

Further Exploration

What I'd like to do today, just to give you a kind of preview, is talk about a few more forms of spiritual bypassing that we commonly see. That will not make our list exhaustive because there are many forms of this kind of issue that show up, right? Still, I'd like to look at a few more so that we have a good overview of some of the most common forms of spiritual bypassing. And then I'd like to flip the coin over and look at what happens when we move beyond spiritual bypassing to the higher levels of integration and wholeness that are possible for us as human beings.

Uneven Development

Another one that comes into play could be described as uneven development. If you think of us as human beings who live on multiple levels of experience, the intellectual, the physical, the psycho-emotional, and the spiritual. What sometimes happens in some situations is that a person can become very highly developed on one level while not well-developed on another level. And this is particularly problematic when the level upon which the person is very highly developed is the spiritual level. And when what's lacking would be what Dan Goldman called emotional intelligence or some other form of psycho-emotional integration.

I think a lot of us are painfully aware of how many scandals we've seen in the Western spiritual communities over many years. Frequently what comes into play in these kinds of situations, although not always, is that a teacher in the early days who grew up in a monastic setting, in the case of Tibet, for example, sometimes when someone was recognized as a tulku, a lama who had been a previous teacher in an earlier birth, according to that system, a child would be taken from their parents at say the age of two, taken off to a monastery and raised by monastic men in a monastery from an early age, taught very profound and esoteric Tibetan teachings that are extremely powerful. In many cases, that child would go on one or oftentimes two, three-year retreats as part of their training as a tulku, as an incarnate Lama, yeah? That's really wonderful in a spiritual culture like Tibet. What happens though, when the Chinese force many, many Tibetans out of Tibet, they escape to places like India and Nepal, and eventually begin to teach Western students, coming to the West here in the US and other parts of Western Europe.

Well, the cultural contexts are radically different. If I take a person like that and I put them in a role in which many students are coming to them with unresolved wounds from their childhood search of the unconditional love that they didn't sufficiently experience in their early lives, there's going to be a tremendous tendency for people to project a kind of perfectionism onto that person, which is very hard to field. Fielding transference is a necessary skill for a teacher. What happens when that person who's had little or no experience in the realm of intimacy or sexuality is approached by someone who's attractive to them? Unfortunately, we've seen many of these scandals in the years that I've been involved with practice, either in relation to sexuality or in relation to finances or power. And this is not a judgment or a condemnation. It's a heartbreak, yeah, because it's rooted in a kind of confusion, uneven development of the kind that I'm talking about here, right?

What is particularly sad is because the news cycle in our country works the way it does when there have been scandals in spiritual and religious communities. It's all over the news, yeah, because that's how yellow journalism works. On the other hand, what's rarely, if ever, talked about is all the beautiful things that go on in healthy relationships between spiritual teachers and their students. Those are not newsworthy items, unfortunately.

So the world at large gets an impression that's really quite skewed and inaccurate in terms of the fact that people come away thinking almost every spiritual community is riddled with scandals of the kind that we hear about from time to time. So when we talk about uneven development, we're talking about recognizing that emotional intelligence, communication skills, all the different kinds of things that enable us to be effective with peer interpersonal relationships are a necessary part of a leadership role for a spiritual teacher.

So this is another way in which this kind of spiritual bypassing has shown up over the years that's been particularly painful for those of us who have been in the scene for a number of decades.

Spiritual Pride

Related to this, there's another form of spiritual bypassing that I would call spiritual pride. That is, there's a kind of dualistic thinking that people new to the spiritual life incline toward, in which the worldly life "quote-unquote" and the spiritual life are seen in a very black and white manner. The understanding is somehow from this perspective that it's better "quote-unquote" to live in an ashram or live in retreat or "quote" renounce the world right in service to becoming enlightened, rather than seeing the world as the vehicle for that process. This is what gave rise a number of years back to what I would call the engaged spirituality movement. A lot of us here in the West recognized that we wanted our spirituality to be something we could integrate with our family lives, with our jobs in the world, with our political views and activities, and other aspects of our lives.

I know when I first got involved with the teachings in the early '70s, and I became brahmacharya as a celibate, training as a yoga teacher, there was no small amount of spiritual pride lurking in my consciousness and that of other people. Somehow there was this belief that it was a higher way to live, to renounce the world and escape from it, which of course is a problematic view on a lot of levels. What's needed of course is a kind of integration. I have nothing against folks who wanna become a monk or a nun or make some other kind of commitment to a spiritual life that feels appropriate for them. That's beautiful, that's integrity and authenticity. But so often in this kind of spiritual bypassing, what's actually happening is a kind of posturing. Someone develops a self-image and a belief that it's a higher way to live. And what's actually happening is it's the ego, because of its low self-esteem, is compensating in a particular way and misusing the spiritual beliefs and teachings. It's as if the ego is trying to heal its wounds by raising itself up above other people. And yet almost inevitably, that part of the process is unconscious. This is another form of bypassing.

Realistically, when we turn toward the deeper truth of who we are and what we're all about, we become much kinder in relation to ourselves. We become less perfectionistic, which is what happens with spiritual pride, as if somehow we're gonna be completely perfect when we get to the end of the road. And we become able to embrace a kind of lightness of being so that we're not so heavy-handed and so serious and so somber about our lives in general and our spiritual practices as well.

Here's a couple of examples of people who have worked with this integration process in this regard. Some of you have heard me share this one before from the writer Annie Lamont, a wonderful teacher and writer familiar to some of you, who's been very committed to her Christian practice for many years, and really has an ability to share her personal experiences in a way that touched the universal. She writes:

"Sometimes faith looks like myopia. I don't see everyone's faults so clearly as I used to, let alone my own. The God of my later years is not interested in my pores or cellulite, and hopes that I will stop noticing yours. My vision has blessedly blurred. This is a great advantage when you're trying

to live more spiritually, more expansively, more like Zorba the Greek and less like the church lady. For instance, when I sit here on my bed, now writing on my iPad, the top roll of my tummy sometimes creeps over onto the screen and starts typing away. In the old days, upon noticing this unsought collaboration, I would have decided to start a new diet or possibly to end my life. Now I think to myself, who knows? Maybe it's got something interesting to add."

Imagine being that kind in relation to yourself. That playful. About 20 years ago, Sharon Salzberg, a friend familiar to many of you, came here to Boulder, what we then called Rocky Mountain Shambhala Center outside of Fort Collins up in the mountains. And she had a very large turnout for her retreat. So she invited me and a couple other people to assist at the retreat. And at one point, because we were sharing an apartment on the land up there, she shared with me a reading that someone had texted to her about his meditation practice. And here again, you can see this lightness of being and this lack of self-importance that really brings a kind of fresh air to the whole process.

This fellow sent us an email to share, and then she read it to me, and I said, I have to have a copy of that. It's called "Ways I Have Been a Bad Meditator."

- I have thought about eating a piece of dark chocolate.
- I've wondered whether I left the oven on.
- I've looked at my watch before the meditation bell rang.
- I've thought about kissing the woman sitting on the cushion to my left.
- I've thought about shushing the heavy breathing man on the cushion on my right.
- I have wanted the teacher to notice how well I'm meditating.
- I've missed my old girlfriend.
- I've remembered why I broke up with my old girlfriend.
- I've wondered if living in the moment means I don't have to put money into a retirement account.
- I've imagined going to Stockholm to accept the Nobel Prize in meditation.

Okay. So that's the way to offset spiritual pride, right? It's wonderful to feel good about being engaged with authentic spiritual teachings because we recognize it's a blessing them in our lives. But we don't want that to disguise any kind of subtle perfectionism rooted in a superego that has totally unrealistic expectations that torture us. And it's easy to develop a spiritual superego of just that kind. So that's spiritual pride.

Challenges with Anger

The other thing I want to talk about this morning is one particular emotion that Westerners often struggle mightily with in regard to the path of spiritual awakening. And that's the experience of anger. Right. In order to understand why anger is such a challenge for us who practice spiritual teachings,

Buddhist and otherwise, here in the West, one thing that's really helpful to understand is the vocabulary problem that comes into play. There's a wonderful book that I recommend to those of you who wanna look more deeply at the issue I'm about to talk about. That's called "Buddhist Practice on Western Ground" by a teacher named Harvey Aronson, A-R-O-N-S-O-N. And Aronson's a really interesting teacher for a number of reasons. First of all, he's a licensed psychotherapist. Second of all, he's highly trained in insight meditation and the Theravada tradition. Thirdly, he's highly trained in Tibetan practice. And fourthly, he's a translator. So he really understands these words and their roots and what they're intended to mean.

Among other things in this book, "Buddhist Practice on Western Ground," he talks about some words that commonly create problems for Westerners because they're not wisely understood. One example is the word ego. There's a great chapter in the book called "Ego, Ego on the Wall, What is Ego After All?" And if you think about it, the word ego is used in a wide variety of ways in our culture. If I'm a Freudian analyst, the word ego is used in a very specific context related to the word id, right? And related to the word superego. It's part of a model in Freudian psychoanalysis. On the other hand, the word ego is often used by Asian and Western teachers to talk about the small self, the relative self that each of us is, our body and our personality. Yeah, and it's distinguished from our Buddha nature or our true self, right?

On another level, the word ego is used on the street to mean egotistical. If I say Frank has a really big ego, that's not a compliment, yeah? That's using the word ego to mean egotistical, yeah? And you can see how the word ego, oftentimes when Asian teachers come over, their senior students teach them words like ego and self with a small S as being interchangeable. Likewise, a word like attachment, which is oftentimes in translation, the second noble truth. The cause of suffering is, yeah? Literally, the word translates as thirst.

However, if you look at English translations, one of the translations is attachment. Another is clinging of mind. Another is craving. However, if you look at the field of developmental psychology, attachment rather than being a negative and a cause for suffering, is considered absolutely central in terms of the bonding that we have as children with our caregivers. A child who cannot attach to a caregiver is said to have an attachment disorder, an illness. So here's a word that's being used in very different ways. One of which is quite positive because healthy attachment is required for healthy development. And another setting in which it's the cause of suffering.

So how does this apply to anger? And how does it generate confusion? This was so helpful to me as someone who mightily tried to manage my anger much of my early life in practice. What Aronson pointed out is that in Asia, when teachers talk about anger, what they're talking about is aggression. Not just feeling angry feelings, but acting them out and causing, wishing harm on another, if you will. So anger includes in it acting aggressively. And for that reason, I noticed with my Tibetan teachers, when I lived in Nepal, and when I studied in India as well at times, when they talked about not getting

angry, they talked about it on the level of fire and brimstone. They would say things like, “How terrible your rebirths would be if you ever expressed anger.” Well, think about that in relation to the example of the woman in therapy with John Welwood at the beginning of this talk that I talked about. She needed to learn how to deal with her anger in a wise and skillful way. Now here in the West, we talk about anger as an emotional state. It’s a feeling we get when we don’t get what we want, or we get what we don’t want, or we’re frustrated in some way, and so forth. or in some cases, because we feel moral outrage. Right now in our politically divided country, there are some people who are quite celebratory about what’s going on, and other folks who feel a significant amount of moral outrage about what’s going on. But we can distinguish anger as an emotion from anger as aggressive action. Does that make sense? Are you following this one? Yeah? Because in order to have healthy interpersonal relationships and relationships with the world, we need to set boundaries. If someone speaks to me abusively, for example, and in a harmful way, I may very well need to say to them, “I’m not willing to engage with you unless you speak to me in a different manner.” Now, I might understand as a practitioner that that person’s abusive behavior is rooted in their own suffering, pain, and confusion. So I can set that healthy boundary and still have some compassion in my heart and still say, I’m not willing to relate to you. That’s a healthy expression of my anger. People like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King in Mahatma Gandhi were very angry about what was going on in the world. And what they did with that anger was they channeled it into amazing activity that helped improve the state of the world.

So how does this apply to us as people moving through our lives, treading the spiritual path? In one of the books I mentioned last week called “Spiritual Bypassing” by Robert Masters, he talks about four different ways to work with anger as a practitioner. Some are unskillful and some are more skillful. The first one he called anger end. In Gestalt therapy, this is called retroflexion, where what we do is we turn our anger on ourselves. I had a tendency to do this when I was young because I grew up in a household where there was no permission whatsoever to express anger. And in fact, there wasn’t much permission to express emotion. The allowable band of expression of emotion was between an inch and an inch and a quarter. And otherwise I would hear something like, Don’t upset your father, right? Don’t raise your voice. Don’t speak to me that way. Now, anger in, as a lot of us perhaps know, especially those of us who incline in that direction, leads to depression for many people. It leads to the kind of negative self-talk where we turn our anger back on ourselves. So clearly that’s not a skillful way to work with it.

The second form of anger that Masters talks about, he called anger out, which as you can imagine is the flip side of anger in and it’s acting it out impulsively. You know, the first people work I ever did as an undergraduate student volunteer was volunteering at a prison in New Orleans called Orleans Parish Prison. That prison was filled with people who had this problem of anger out. They acted out their feelings first and then experienced the consequences of how inappropriate that action was later. So both of those are considered to be unskillful and will lead to suffering for us.

Now we start to look at two more skillful forms, one of which Robert Masters calls mindful anger.

Yeah. When I first studied Western psychology back in the late '60s, the way in which emotions were presented to me was either or. Either you suppressed an emotion or you expressed an emotion. Those were the only two choices I understood there to be. When I came to understand mindfulness, which is what Masters is talking about here, I could see there was a third option, which is I can be mindful that I'm angry. I can notice the tension in my throat or my hands or my chest. I can notice the self-talk of what I'd like to say to my boss, say, at work when the boss has criticized the piece of work that I've done, perhaps unfairly. So I start by being mindful. And I don't have to do anything at that point. I'm not directing and blaming myself, so I'm not directing it in. And I'm not acting it out by yelling at the person I'm angry at. I'm just aware that I'm angry. This involves what in Buddhist teachings is called *sampajañña*, which is usually translated as clear comprehension. So in that moment of mindfulness, I can see what's going on inside of me. I can see the situation that I'm in, and I can make an intuitive evaluation of the appropriate way to deal with that anger in that circumstance. Is this making some sense?

Let's just take my hypothetical example. If my boss criticized a piece of my work and I think it was an unfair criticism and I notice I feel outraged, and I feel like saying, I quit, take your job, I don't need it, except what if I need it? What if I really need the job? And what if I know that part of why I'm so outraged is because I had a highly critical father who also criticized me a lot unfairly. And I might notice I'm piggybacking that unresolved anger at my father on top of my anger toward the supervisor, right? Then I might just say nothing to the boss and maybe go out after work with my best friend at work and complain about my boss over a cup of coffee or a beer or something, right? I'm not pretending I'm not angry, but I can see clearly what an appropriate expression is.

The fourth kind of anger that Masters talks about, he calls heart anger. Tibetans call this Vajra anger, as I mentioned perhaps previously last week, right? And this is a fully embodied anger in which sometimes it's appropriate to be angry. And sometimes the situation requires that. If someone came up to me and my wife and daughter, we were walking down the street and threatened us, I would feel probably frightened and angry. And if that anger was necessary to defend myself and my family, I would act on it. It would be an appropriate thing to do in that particular circumstance.

So you can see how there's a movement toward greater integration here, right? The first two aspects of anger in and anger out are primarily or completely unconscious. These are what we call in Buddhist training habitual patterns. Then we come into the realm of mindfulness and we have this notion of mindful anger. Master said something interesting in the book though. He noticed that the kind of folks who come to a lot of meditation communities tend to be conflict avoidant and uncomfortable with anger in many, many cases.

That's a very common pattern in meditative communities. So he pointed out in a way that was helpful to me because I'm one of these kinds of people who doesn't like conflict, although it's been a part of my professional life for years. He pointed out that there's a tendency for people who think they're practicing

mindful anger to actually be suppressing it in many cases. So those of us who are uncomfortable with conflict and tend toward being conflict avoidant need to be really honest in examining what's happening when we're being mindful of our anger. This seems to me to be an important part of practice in a lot of different ways, partly because there's so much energy and power associated with feelings of anger. And when those energies get channeled, they can do amazing things, as we've seen in the civil rights movement and various other social and political movements at various times. And those same principles apply in our individual lives as well.

Moving Beyond Spiritual Bypassing

So what happens then? Let me flip this coin that I talked about at the beginning. What happens when we start to work with spiritual bypassing? We start to identify it in our practice and our life. We normalize it, not judge ourselves for its presence, but recognize that it's part of the curriculum of spiritual awakening, not a mistake, and not evidence that we're not practicing correctly. And then we start to move beyond it. We start to move toward a greater degree of wholeness or integration in who we are in how we move through the world, right? John Wellwood talked about this beautifully. See if I can find him. This is what Wellwood said about this notion of integration, which is the way in which we move through and beyond spiritual bypassing.

“For the most part, psychological and spiritual work address different levels of human experience. Psychological inquiry addresses relative truth, personal meaning, that is the human realm, which is characterized by interpersonal relations and the issues arising out of them. At its best, it also reveals and helps deconstruct the conditioned structures, forms, and identifications in which consciousness becomes trapped. Spiritual practices, especially of the mystical bent, look beyond our conditioned structures, identifications, and ordinary human concerns towards the trans-human, the direct realization of the ultimate. It sees what is timeless, unconditioned, and absolutely true beyond all forms. This is what the Buddha called the deathless, right? Revealing the vast open-endedness or emptiness at the root and core of human existence. Yet, must these two approaches to human suffering work in different directions? Or could they be compatible, even powerful allies?”

And as you might surmise, he believed they could be powerful allies. I've seen that in my own personal life and in my own work with other people. What happens when they're in good alignment? Well, there's a way in which we tap into our innate human capacity for transcending the small self, right? Let's look at some examples. Here's one from Pema Chodron's book called “The Places That Scare You.” Pema writes:

“A young woman wrote to me about finding herself in a small town in the Middle East, surrounded by people jeering, yelling, and threatening to throw stones at her and her friends because they were Americans. Of course, she was terrified, and what happened to her is interesting. Suddenly, she identified with every person throughout history who had ever been scorned and hated. See the movement from the personal to the transpersonal. She understood what it was like to be despised for any reason. Ethnic group, racial background, sexual preference, or gender. Something cracked wide open, and she stood in the shoes of millions of oppressed people and saw with a new perspective. She even understood, this part really got me, her shared humanity with those who hated her. This sense of connection, of belonging to the same family, is bodhicitta, a Buddhist term sometimes translated as altruistic intention. The Dalai Lama usually calls it the good heart.”

So here she was, a very human person, feeling isolated as we often do in our ego bubble and our body. And a set of circumstances allowed her to move beyond her sense of small self without rejecting it, but including it, to a sense of being one with reality itself, not separate from the people who were threatening her life, literally.

The other example that I think is so beautiful is from a book by Roshi Joan Halifax called “Being with Dying,” in which she captures this same kind of movement. And really, this is like a, boy, if I needed a perfect example for moving from spiritual bypassing to what’s beyond, I would have written this, basically. This is what she said:

“When my mother died, I received one of the hardest and most precious teachings of my entire life. I realized that I only had this one chance to grieve her death. I felt like I had a choice. On the one hand, I could be a so-called, ‘good Buddhist,’ unquote, accept impermanence, and let go of my mother with great dignity. There’s the tendency to bypass. The other alternative was to scour my heart out with honest sorrow. I chose to scour. After her death, I went to the desert with photographs of her and letters she had written my father after I was born. Settling under a rocky ledge, I sank back into shadows of sorrow. When your mother dies, so does the womb that gave birth to you. I felt that my back was uncovered and exposed, even as I pressed it into cold, hard rock. Later, I walked the Himalayas with a friend who had recently lost his mother, too. The autumn rains washed down the mountains and streaked our wet faces. When my friend and I arrived in Kathmandu, the lamas there offered to perform a Tibetan ceremony for my mother. They instructed me not to cry, but to be at peace. By this time, I felt ready to hear their words, and I did not have to force myself to stop mourning. When I let myself drop all the way through to the bottom, I found that my mother had become an ancestor. As I finally released her, she became part of me. And my sadness became part of the river of grief that pulses deep inside us, hidden from view, but informing our lives at every turn.”

So you can see she felt the temptation to leapfrog over this deep grief. At the same time, she had the

wisdom to practice what we talked about last week, which was turning toward what was happening rather than being aversive to it. And in that process of fully embracing her humanity and her grief and her loss, she tapped into that innate transcendent capacity for knowing ourselves on the level of ultimate reality and realizing that on that level, she was not separate from anyone or anything, including her mother. Yeah.

Conclusion

So the key word here from my perspective when we talk about working with spiritual bypassing is this notion of integration. We want to own and acknowledge all of the vulnerability and frailty and uncertainty of our humanity and our quirks and personality patterns resulting from our unique karmic history and recognize the inherent sacredness of that. At the same time, we wanna recognize that that's a subset of something much, much vaster, whether we call that the ultimate mystery or our Buddha nature or our true nature or our Christ consciousness. That also is what we embrace in the process of waking up in such a way that that vaster dimension of ourself begins to infuse our human personality and body and express itself through us as we move through the world, right?

I'll close this talk with the words of Pema Chodron who I mentioned earlier really is such a beautiful example of the kind of embodiment that I talked about in terms of having her feet fully grounded on the earth. I love how earthy her teaching style is. At the same time that she recognizes this expansive ineffable dimension of who and what we are that my friend and mentor Father Thomas Keating called "The Ultimate Mystery." This is Pema's vision of awakening in a healthy way as we move through and beyond spiritual bypassing.

"Spiritual awakening is frequently described as a journey to the top of a mountain. We leave our attachments and our worldliness behind and slowly make our way to the top. At the peak, we have transcended all pain. The only problem with this metaphor is that we leave all the others behind. Our drunken brother, our schizophrenic sister, our tormented animals and friends. Their suffering continues, unrelieved by our personal escape. In the process of discovering our true nature, the journey goes down, not up. It's as if the mountain pointed toward the center of the earth instead of reaching into the sky. Instead of transcending the suffering of all creatures, we lean toward the turbulence and the doubt. We jump into it. We slide into it. We tiptoe into it. We move toward it however we can. We explore the reality and unpredictability of insecurity and pain, and we try not to push it all away. If it takes years, if it takes lifetimes, we will let it be as it is. At our own pace, without speed or aggression, we move down and down and down. With us move millions of others, our companions in awakening from fear. At the bottom, we discover water, the healing water of compassion. down there in the thick of things we discover the love that will not die."

I'd like to stop here for the moment so that we can take a bit of a break. It's 53 after the hour. How about if we come back at 10 after the next hour, depending on the time zone that you're in? Do something kind for your body, move around a little bit. And then we'll come back and pick it up from there. Thank you for your attention.

Discussion

Welcome back. What I'd like to do at this point is create some time for discussion. I'm aware that this material is a lot to take in, and there's a lot of it. And it has a certain dense quality to it in terms of assimilation and digestion. So I'd invite you to take a few moments and check in with yourself and see if there are any aspects of what we've been talking about that you'd like to comment on or raise a question about or clarify or anything of that sort. So just take a moment and take a look inside and see what's going on and how it is you're taking in these concepts and illustrations of spiritual bypassing.

Now, if you'd like to speak, it looks like I've got you all on, no, two screens, but you can either raise your hand in your little window, or you can click on the React button at the bottom of the screen where it says "raise hand," at which point Rob will see that you would like to make a comment or question. You can also put something in the chat and we'll try to monitor that as well. But let's just see where you are with what I've been talking about so far. Let me open it up. Anybody? Go ahead, Shelby. Would you unmute, please? You're muted.

Questioner

I'm having some questions. Can you hear me? Yes, we can. I'm having some questions about the inner connection between psychology and spiritual life. And is it possible to have a spiritual life without a metaphysical or conceptual idea of the spirit? I mean, when Buddha says, I teach suffering in the end of suffering and that's it. It doesn't talk about spirituality. So it's a question, it's a big question for me, how to knit these things together.

David Chernikoff

I think it's an important question also because it revolves around the understanding we have of the word spiritual. I mean, because the word is used in a wide variety of ways. It actually, it brings to mind, I had an interesting experience when Naropa first opened in Boulder in 1974, it was a summer institute. And then they repeated it again in the summer of '75 before it started to become a university.

And in the summer of '75, I took a course from a Buddhist scholar who basically surveyed all the different schools of Buddhist philosophy. Yeah. Wonderful teacher. John Baker was his name. He was a senior student of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. It was 1975 and it was Boulder, the class was a fascinating combination of sort of East Coast intellectuals who were on sabbatical from their universities and hippies who came down from the mountains with their staff walking into the classroom and people people hit with hair done to their waist and beyond, you know.

So, and John did a beautiful job of surveying all these different schools, the One Mind School, then the Yogacara School, and all these different philosophical perspectives in Buddhist teachings. And in the last class, he basically opened it up the way I am now and said, you know, I'm not going to introduce new material, but let's see if there's any loose ends from this class, right? And there was a guy sitting next to me who was on sabbatical from a university back east. And he said to John, he put up his hand, he said, "John, I have a question and it might sound facetious, but it's not."

He said, "I've been sitting here now for five weeks, several days a week, studying these different Buddhist teachings with you. And as we come to the end, the question that I'm holding is, what about Buddhism is spiritual? Just like you're asking, yeah? And John took the question to heart. And he thought about it a moment, he said, well, in a technical sense, nothing. He said, the word spiritual comes from the Latin, spiritus, which is usually translated as breath. And he said, "It's most often associated "with the Abrahamic traditions" of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam." Yeah. He said, "If I had to summarize," and this made the whole course really super worth it for me. He said, "If I had to summarize what Buddhism is all about," I'd say that it's about learning "to appreciate the world as it is."

And that was his summary, yeah. So what does that mean about what the word spiritual means? Back in the 70s I also studied with a Jungian teacher named Dr. Ira Progoff. Progoff wrote a number of books in relation to the bridging spirituality and psychology. And so in one of the workshops someone said to him, "Dr. Progoff, you're we're always talking about spirit and spirituality. What does spirituality mean for you? And he said something interesting. He said, "For me, spirituality involves "the deepest level of meaning in a person's life." And that's where I connect with it. It's not particular to a belief system or a particular conceptual map or model of reality, it's related to the fact that we as humans are meaning makers. And it's that search for meaning that was talked about in the book, "Man's Search for Meaning," actually, right? That I associate with it. So I think you're free to decide to discard it if it's not useful to you as a concept, or to define it in a way that works for you and supports your particular unfolding and deepening of wisdom and love. Does that speak to it a little bit?

Questioner

Yeah, it's helpful. It's really helpful and I appreciate you taking it up. Thank you.

David Chernikoff

Uh-huh, you're welcome. Go ahead, Judy, if you'd unmute, please.

Questioner

I have to tell you about my grocery store experience. ago, I was grieving, my younger sister had died, and I was very heavily into grieving. And I had to go to the grocery store. And I was walking around the grocery store. And suddenly, I looked at all the other people in the grocery store.

And I realized, all of them to had lost someone. And it was a very interesting because I felt very connected to them in a very in a very compassionate way. And then I thought about all the people

in the world who have lost someone and expanded the compassion. And it was a very interesting experience and I think that's what you were talking about when you were talking about a transcendent experience.

David Chernikoff

Now that's very similar to what that young woman in the Middle East experienced in the reading that I shared where they were being threatened. It's also related to a classical Tibetan practice called Tonglin, where you intentionally extend beyond your own personal grief, and you choose to open your heart to others who are grieving, and you kind of move out in concentric circles. Maybe you start with others in your extended family who are grieving, or others in your community who are grieving, or others in your country, the United States, if you're living in the U.S., who are grieving, and you intentionally learn to stand on all those different levels without denying your personal loss. It's a both/and, if you will, right?

And this is really related in a sense to what Shelby was asking about, because last week I made a comment that I'd heard Ram Dass say many years ago, when he said that from a spiritual standpoint, suffering is functional. And how I've come to understand that is, one of its functions is that it becomes a gateway to compassion for other people. It's not an accident, for example, that the people who are most effective at helping, say, someone newly diagnosed with breast cancer, are breast cancer survivors who have sat with a physician and been told that they had cancer in their body.

It wasn't an accident for me that 20 years after my father died suddenly and unexpectedly from a massive coronary when I was 13. At 33, I was directing hospice programs teaching people about grief and trauma. Those were those that experience at 13 shaped the unfolding of my entire life. And all of us suffer in particular ways that give us an affinity for that kind of suffering when we experience it in other people. Yeah, and that's very much what you're describing.

Thank you. Any other reflections or comments, either on last week or any of the material that we've talked about? Carl, you've got, it's a little dark there. You got, it looks like you got your hand up.

Questioner

I just wanted to thank you so much. What struck me this week was the richness of what you had to say. And I'm very grateful to have heard you. The richness is quite profound to me, but also reminded me of the process of development. I came of age in the '60s and did lots of drugs and alcohol and did gestalt therapy in the '70s and the '80s.

Originally we called it primal therapy and discovered a lot about, I wasn't even aware that I was angry and I discovered that I was really, really angry. I had a much more difficult time dealing with sadness. That scared me at the time. I think maybe I'm a little better at that now. But anyway, I just could relate to that. I don't know what else I have to say. I'm just very grateful to have heard you. Lately, I've been thinking about, it's been like probably 20 years since I've been in therapy, but lately I've been thinking about doing it again, you know, at my age.

And I think some of this talk about being in a relationship certainly brought up a lot of things for me. and my wife passed away like 15 years ago. But anyway, so I've been thinking about that and dealing, certainly I appreciated what you had to say about anger. I'm also involved in a 12-step program for decades and they generally don't, I think anger is not a good thing. It's dangerous, you know? So I get that. And I mean, it's all suggestions. So it's not something that I necessarily have bought, but anyway, I can appreciate the, anyway, I'm rambling a bit, but I really just wanted to say how grateful I was to have heard you and the richness of becoming a whole person. - Yes, yes. - Thank you very much.

David Chernikoff

Thank you, Carl. Geeta, please go ahead and unmute.

Questioner

Thank you so much. I really, really, I think, benefited from your talk both last week and this week. and of course the talks you're given bold and otherwise.

I was just talking, thinking about this idea about psychology and spirituality. I mean, I'm originally from India and grew up in a Hindu household. And the concept of religion was not even there. It was just a way of being. So there was no idea about going to temple on a day or whatever, you did whatever you did, you know? and there was no compulsion to do anything. And it came out of that tradition.

And having lived in the West for decades now, the idea of psychology was also very new to me. Even now, if I talk to friends and family in India, many would say you only do therapy if you are crazy or mad or something like that, you know?

But personally, I feel like I wanted to share resource, especially Karl's idea about going back to therapy. I think this has come and I'm sure you're familiar with it. Internal family systems, therapy style. It has been I've heard from other people in my own experience, and I've not done it formally, but I've just kind of dabbled. And it has been kind of life changing in terms of working with the the small self or the psychological self.

And creating more space for whether we want to call it spirituality or personal growth, whatever we want to call it, being able to kind of intersect the two so that they work hand in hand and that integration that you talked about so that I personally feel that I'm having grown up in India, expressing your emotions was a thing, even is a thing. And it's it's just the way that culture is. you probably know that.

So that's been not an issue, but I think any expression of any emotion was happening on the first two levels. You talked about anger specifically, but I have experienced that in the first two levels were happening and not very consciously. It was just very, and not being. My phone is talking to me now.

And I feel like with this IFS based therapy, I've been able to move into the third and fourth space more mindfully and sitting with that and being able to embrace both simultaneously and not trying to bypass the emotions or bypass the way the world is happening in my personal life or broader kind of aspect.

So I just wanted to kind of just share that with everybody and you.

David Chernikoff

That's wonderful, Geeta. You know, IFS, Internal Family Systems, was created by a fellow named Dick Schwartz, and it's one of a number of systems that integrate spiritual contemplative practices with the best of Western psychotherapy. So rather than being an either or, and the way Wellwood talked about it, which was many years ago when he wrote that piece, 25, 30 years ago actually now, we've seen more and more of these methods in which spiritual principles and psychological therapeutic principles are blended in systems to help us become the kind of whole person that Carl was referring to a moment ago, right?

So I appreciate you bringing that up because it's an excellent resource for all of us to think about and to know about. Yeah. Yeah.

Interesting. Looks like we've got some comments in the chat. Let me just see if, we've got Gita talking about IFS. Let's see here. Tamara, you asked about the last reading from Pema Chodron, where that came from. It's from a book of hers called *The Places That Scare Us*, of which there are many, let's be honest.

There's another question here. Someone else wanted to know that same thing. Here's a question from Susan. To help us wake up more often in our daily lives and becoming more aware of when spiritual bypassing might be arising, do you have a gāthā or mental noting cue that could help us?

Yeah, I don't know if all familiar with what a gāthā is, but a gāthā is a mindfulness recitation taught by Thich Nhat Hanh that is usually something that you recite very briefly before an activity and its purpose is to help you become attentive and aware of what you're doing rather than be on autopilot, essentially, yeah?

So for example, when Gitep mentioned internal family systems, and when I talk about these systems beginning to integrate the spiritual and the psychological, the common principle is related to this question of how do we stay awake in daily life, right? Which is to say that the principle that is shared by the best psychotherapeutic systems and the best spiritual systems is that awareness precedes choice.

If I'm not aware, I'm on autopilot and I'm likely to respond in a stimulus-response fashion automatically and then see what the consequences are. This is the difference between the first two kinds of anger or any emotional expression, as Gita mentioned, and the last two, mindful emotion and heartfelt emotion, right? There's awareness and then one makes a choice about what the appropriate expression or lack thereof in that circumstance.

So, Agatha for example, the way I typically start my day before I get out of bed when I realize I'm awake is I recite a gāthā that I learned from Thich Nhat Hanh that says very simply, "Waking up this morning I smile. 24 brand-new hours are before me. I vow to be fully awake in each moment and to look at all

beings with eyes eyes of compassion.” And then I open my eyes and I’m ready to get out of bed. But setting that intention from the very beginning, yeah.

Another example of a gāthā, washing the dishes. These are really helpful with things that you do frequently that you check out for because they become automatic, right? Try walking up to the sink when you’re gonna wash the dishes if you’re gonna do them by hand and not just toss them in the dishwasher and say, “Washing the dishes is like washing a baby Buddha. The profane is the sacred. Everyday mind is Buddha’s mind.” And then wash the dishes, right? It just became a meditation practice, yeah?

And this book has, There’s gāthās for how to light a candle and how to put it out. The book is called Present Moment, Wonderful Moment. Yeah, I really recommend it. It’s a beautiful practice. Yeah, let’s speak to it, Susan. Yeah, okay.

Let’s see, “Shiboda, integration. Could you please describe some of the principle steps of the process. Can you unmute for a moment and just clarify for me what parts? Let me see if I can speak to it directly. Yeah? Take your time.

Questioner

Oh, hi. Yeah, well, I was just looking through some of my notes and I wrote down, learn about it, identify, normalize, see it as part of the process, and then integrate. So then I went to CoPilot’s AI chatbot and asked the question And I found a lot of really good answers, just doing some basic searching there. But I was curious to ask, I know you’ve done a lot of work in spiritual-related counseling, and I was just wondering if you could comment a little bit on what you’ve observed as some of the principle steps that people go through in integrating and transcending some of these personal challenges and then becoming more productive and happy. in life.

David Chernikoff

Great, great.

So, I think there’s a few principles that come to mind, right? The first one that I talked about last week and a little bit less this week, but was implied this week, is that I need to turn toward versus away, right? I talked about this notion that the issue of how we use our psychological defenses and how we turn toward what’s positive and away from what we see as quote unquote negative, right?

We need to reverse that in the sense of we need to become curious and interested in the hard parts of our lives. Not in the sense of masochism, but in the sense of becoming curious. What I call loving curiosity, right?

So let’s say I have a habit. Let’s say I have a habit like sugar is one of the more addictive chemicals in this culture. I’ve worked with people over the years who felt like they had a serious sugar addiction, okay? First of all, the first step was to acknowledge what was so—that they felt compulsive or addictive in relation to sugar, right?

The second step was to study their relationship with sugar, to become interested in it rather than put off by it because it generated self-judgment and self-criticism that was painful. So sometimes I would have them keep a little journal about when they noticed themselves going to sugar and when it was for, because they were hungry for food, and when it was a form of what could be called self-soothing. Yeah, okay.

And that journal writing, which they would discuss with me when I was still doing clinical work and such, we'd talk about what they noticed, and we would explore it together, right? And they might notice, for example, that when they were lonely or when they were sad, they'd be inclined to self-soothe in that way, right?

So now instead of it being something that's too painful to think about or look at, it's become something of interest, right? You call it befriending, befriending the pattern rather than having it be a source of self-judgment.

Then as they start to notice, what happens organically that's so interesting is, initially, they wouldn't notice until after they acted it out. So say, you know, they overate with something sweet, and then afterwards realized, I did it again, right? And maybe a little self-judgment.

Over time, though, as they became more aware, there would be a moment at which as they were about to overeat because they were lonely, they would realize they had another option. They might call a friend, because we would talk about what else could you do to self-soothe that would help your heart feel more loved and connected.

They could call a friend. They could take a hot bath. They could walk in nature. They could do some yoga. They could sit in a sauna, so on and so forth, right? And as they would become more aware from studying the pattern, the awareness would move in front of acting it out, instead of show up afterwards, right?

And I would reinforce their efforts. Even at the beginning, when they still acted it out, but they noticed afterwards, I would remind them that it takes a lot of courage and a lot of bravery to face these kinds of patterns that we create our own suffering with sometimes, right?

So at a certain point, what happens is the awareness of the loneliness itself becomes a new habit in which they have a variety of options instead of only one, right? And at that point, the integration happens organically as a result of the previous causes and conditions, right?

And this same pattern of, say, any compulsive or addictive behavior is subject to the same pattern I just described. Sugar is just one example, yeah? It could be alcohol, it could be acting out, it could be shopping or gambling or any number of activities, right?

But the integration, it's as if the paying attention and the generating self-compassion represents the causes and conditions that set in motion a process of integrating. So the integration happens as a function of those other preconditions. Does that make sense? Yeah, okay, great, great, thank you.

Anything else that's on our mind, so to speak? Speaking of unity consciousness.

I do want to, for those of you, a few of you have emailed me about going further with this kind of material. Let me just mention some of the resources I mentioned last week and add one more for those of you who might want to go further.

There's lots of talks on this kind of topic, so you can certainly find talks online if you want to listen to something or watch something like a video presentation. The books that I found most useful, since I love to read, although I don't have time much to do that these days.

The ones I mentioned were John Wellwood's book, *Toward a Psychology of Awakening*. In some ways that laid a lot of the groundwork for this material. *Toward a Psychology of Awakening*, John Wellwood, W-E-L-W-O-O-D.

The second one, *Spiritual Bypassing*, is simply the title, written by Robert Augustus, like the month August with US at the end, Augustus Masters. Subtitle you don't need probably, *When Spirituality Disconnects Us from What Really Matters*.

The third one I haven't referred to, but when I talked a little earlier about the abuse problems in spiritual communities and problems with sexual acting out and power struggles and financial problems and so forth, a friend and colleague of mine wrote a book called *Meeting the Shadow on the Spiritual Path*. *Meeting the Shadow on the Spiritual Path*. Her name is Connie, C-O-N-N-I-E, last name Zweig, Z-W-E-I-G. Connie Zweig, *Meeting the Shadow on the Spiritual Path*.

And lastly, if you want to go back to the roots, like the initial movement of these concepts into our western Buddhist world, it would be Trungpa Rinpoche's book, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Chögyam Trungpa. And then as some of you know, R-I-N-P-O-C-H-E, which is an honorific title, yeah.

Any one of those would be a nice way to take a deeper dive into this material, yeah. Yeah, before we move into a closing exercise, let me just check and see if there's any other comments or questions that folks wanna bring up for the moment. Oh, please go ahead, Tamara.

Questioner

Thank you so much. Something that I've struggled with is encountering spiritual bypassing in spiritual communities. And it's so discouraging to me because of my history, my suffering was invalidated and discounted and the message was to ignore, you know? And so when I encounter that, especially in spiritual settings, it's really activating and painful. You have any guidance or advice for that kind of situation? Thank you.

David Chernikoff

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Yeah, it's a challenging situation for you to be in. The way I would approach it would be to recognize that human beings are highly imperfect on one level. always have been, always

will be, right? So rather than wholesale discounting of the situation, right? I would take a good honest look and use your discernment to see is there something of value here that I can take away? And are there aspects of this situation I'm gonna disregard as unhelpful to me? All right, that would be one place to start. The glib way to say it, a friend of mine used to say to me about this, just this kind of issue, 'cause Boulder was filled with communities that were a mixed bag, so to speak. And he'd say to me, "Just take the best and leave the rest."

Right, all right. But that doesn't address your personal pain and your history and your connection to that, right? The fact that you're getting triggered, that personal pain is still getting triggered in such a deep way, tells you that there's a certain amount of attention you wanna give to that part of your personal history to help heal those wounds. That community is not the place to do that work. But maybe a good healer, psychotherapist, who's trained in spiritual teachings as well, could be helpful, because if it's still being triggered in that way, it's asking for attention. Does that make sense? Yeah. And that's how I'd go about it. And I would see it as an opportunity on a certain level, not that the pain is not difficult, But it's beautiful that you're alive enough that there's still some communication inside of you saying, this part of me needs some help and attention. Great, thank you. Julia, I see you've got a hand up. Would you go ahead, please?

Questioner

Yes, in the previous class, you gave us a quote from I.R. Nose. And I thought, oh, that's a great quote. But about a couple months ago, I bought a pillow at the thrift store that had this same quote on it. And I got it home and, well, I mean, when I saw it in the store, it was what, a dollar or something. Nobody wanted it, pure white. And I don't find, but the back is blank. So, and I don't find it restful to have like these words in a more or less, in a semi-permanent place in the living room, it's not restful. Nothing against your vocal teachings or anything, but the thing, what was funny, and this may be helpful with all the political biases flying around these days, is that I thought the quote was stupid and dumb, But to hear you say it.

David Chernikoff

Is it the same quote that I read?

Questioner

It's the same quote, but when you said it, it's like, oh, that's really good. I like that. It's really true and blah, blah, blah. And then a week later, I remembered, wait a minute, I know that name, you know, on the playback of the class, I know that name, L.R. Noste. And looked over at the pillow that I'd been sitting on with my butt. It's like I had to laugh and share that in the class. Thank you all. Life is amazing. Life is amazing and then it's awful. Life is wonderful and then it's stupid.

David Chernikoff

You know, I mean, it says in the discourses it's helpful to have a wise butt. So you've been sitting on that for a while and you know, that's good news.

Questioner

But it's a pillow and my butt is not calloused like Milarepa yet.

David Chernikoff

Right.

Questioner

That's spiritual materialism.

David Chernikoff

Exactly.

Questioner

Thank you for a wonderful class.

David Chernikoff

Good to see you again. Well, I'm aware of the time. I know Rob has some announcement to make And then perhaps we'll do a very brief closing and dedication of merit so that we can remember, as is often helpful at the end of any practice period, that when we study and meditate and work with teachings, we're always doing so simultaneously in service to our own happiness and wellbeing, and so that we can each become greater instruments of happiness and wellbeing as we move through the world.

Well, let's just take a moment. It does feel like a really rich topic to me, and I so appreciate your engagement with it and interest in it.

Let's go inside for a couple of two minutes or so and let go of all the concepts and words—there's not going to be an exam on this one, right? And trust that what you need from this course will be available to you when you need it.

So let's drop down from the mind to the heart. You can do this with your eyes open or closed as you're so inclined. Let's come back to what the Tibetans call profound simplicity for a moment. Realizing the miracle of our aliveness, which is so simple and direct and straightforward on one level and so profound and mysterious and unknowable on another level.

Take a nice deep breath into your heart center, at the center of your chest, as if you could breathe in and out through that area. And recognize that across many great wisdom traditions, this place in our hearts is said to be the place in which we can be separated from our sense of separateness.

This is the place of unity consciousness, where we honor the source that connects us all, the life force that we all share, and the incredible multiplicity of forms in which the source expresses itself.

And rest here briefly, without any agenda, without being anyone who needs to fix anything in your life or in the world, and rest in what a colleague calls simple presence.

I'll close with an ancient Buddhist blessing called the *Pattānumodanā*.

Just as water flowing in the streams and rivers fills the ocean, thus may all your moments of goodness touch and benefit all beings—those here now and those gone before.

May all of your wishes be soon fulfilled as completely as the moon on a full moon night, as successfully as from the wish-fulfilling gem.

May all dangers be averted. May all disease leave you. May no obstacles come across your way. And may you enjoy happiness and long life.

May those who are always respectful, honoring the way of the elders, prosper in the four blessings of old age, beauty, happiness, and strength.

May it be so.

David Chernikoff

[Bell rings] Thanks to all of you for your participation.