

Natural Emergence

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Oh, can you hear me okay? Is it loud enough for everybody? So, there's a wonderful English term that made its way into our Dharma circles. I don't know how long ago. Maybe it's been there a long time, but I get the feeling it really kind of began to blossom, this word, maybe in the last 10 years. It's the word, the concept, emergent. What is it that wants to emerge?

The Buddha used the word *jāti*, or *jānāti*, to be born. He talked about what gets born in us as we practice. It's a very different idea than various ideas that we have to fix ourselves, that we have to do something, we have to act a certain way, do a certain thing. It's more that we have to allow, we're allowing or supporting or nourishing, fostering some kind of inner capacity for growth, for development. Something is flowing out of us. And so the idea is to create the conditions for that growth, for that something to emerge.

And not a few people will say that what is the emergent, what grows in us, is not exactly us. It's not yourself. It's because you can't quite appropriate it. You can't quite fit it very neatly into some idea of this is me. Of course, it's not someone else. But somehow it doesn't fit that box of me, myself, and I or something like that.

So, but there are conditions that allow for this to happen, the inner growth, the inner birth, the inner emerging. And one of them is to be at ease, to not be tense, to not be caught up in reactivity, not to be tied in knots, not to be in a hurry, not to be overriding it by trying too much, doing too much, not spending a lot of time in the story mind, in the head, making up stories, making up judgments, making things up. So to settle and to relax and to find a kind of settledness in oneself, and the language that I like to describe, maybe it's not, this won't work for you, but is the idea of feeling at home in oneself, to feel at home in oneself. And, or for your heart to feel at home in itself, for your heart to feel at home in your chest. Those are the conditions that begin allowing something to begin to grow, to emerge, to flow, something different.

Right? Different than you can orchestrate for yourself, different than you can engineer for yourself. And one of those things that can flow is positive social emotions. And the positive social emotions like *mettā*, loving kindness, compassion, generosity, they're part of this emergent quality. So you can't, it isn't something you're up in the head kind of directing yourself. I'm supposed to be more kind. And I'm a Buddhist after all, so I better get going and crank up this kindness thing.

And, you know, at least I should have a smile or something. You know, it's like that's more of the old problem to act that way. But to create the conditions for something to emerge that is natural, something that doesn't require a lot of effort, because we've kind of cleared the room, cleared the space, and developed the kind of inner sensitivity that allows something deeper to emerge, to flow, to come out of us. And one of the remarkable things to discover through meditation practice, which is not necessarily easy to discover for oneself, but certainly it's possible, is that meditation brings us into kind of a natural state, a healthy state. There's a long history, and especially when I was younger, for people to be focusing on altered states of consciousness and higher states of consciousness, special states of consciousness.

It turns out that for most people, the ordinary states of consciousness are the altered ones. Yeah. To spend our time living in fear, to spend our time living in judgments and criticism, to spend our time living in aversion, living in desire and wanting, living in... That's what's altered. And it alters us in a way that's painful, that's suffering.

And if we think that's the normal, then to be calm and peaceful, that's altered. And some people even feel like there's a problem there. There was, I think it's a true story that some of my colleagues will teach, say about the woman who came to a retreat and middle of the retreat she said, something unusual is happening to me. What is it? Well, I can't really tell you what it is. Well, keep looking then, the teacher said.

She came back two days later to the teacher and I discovered what it is. What? I'm calm. Or I was reminded of it today, of a man who used to come here many years ago. He was in his 70s then. And he said, he was kind of amused, he said, my kids think that I need to go see a psychiatrist.

They're really worried about me. They think maybe I'm getting Alzheimer's now, something. And the reason is I spent my whole life being anxious. And now that I'm doing this meditation practice, I'm no longer anxious. And they think something's wrong. So, but nothing was wrong.

He was coming into himself. He was allowing himself just to be, the anxiety kept him from himself. So the settling and quieting and relaxing and just showing up and feeling at home in ourselves is what allows the immersion to come. The emergent things that are healthy, the positive states of mind, positive social emotions. The negative social emotions, like hostility, involves tension and tightening and narrowing, and it limits that wholeness, it limits that wider possibility for something that's emergent to arise.

And the proposal I have is that most of the positive social emotions, for them to be really genuine and really valuable, they belong to the emergent. They belong to the things that we allow to grow in us, not something that we make happen. And so if you feel like you're supposed to be kinder, don't make yourself kinder. Maybe you should be kinder, but relax instead. Create the conditions that kindness is what wants to come. Don't do the kindness.

Settle, open up. Relax. Let go. Take a little bit of time, go for a walk, sit and meditate for 10 minutes. Do something that then makes it easier for the channels of kindness, the channels of goodness to be there when you encounter people. That's how it can happen.

And sometimes 10 minutes is enough. Sometimes you need 10 years to do that work. And probably all of us, sometimes it's 10 minutes, and all of us sometimes it's 10 years for certain parts of who we are. But it's really good work to do, so that this emergent can be born and to grow. And finally, I'll say that one of the questions I ask, I offer people, I usually don't ask them directly, but it's a question for them to reflect on, especially if in certain choice moments, whatever those might be, is to ask oneself, what wants to be born here? What wants to be born?

And sometimes it's when there's difficulties, I've offered that question to people who are depressed, because depression shouldn't be seen as a problem sometimes. So what wants to be born out of this depression? And that kind of changes the whole game. Oh, that's different. Maybe something here wants to... Maybe the depression is preparing me for something.

It's the fallow time. And sometimes when you're really peaceful and calm and settled, then you think, oh, life is good. Sit quietly, have a cup of tea, and feel your way into this question. What wants to be born here, given how I'm feeling right now, the goodness? So there is a natural you that's waiting for you, and it's not an altered state. It's the healthy way of being, the healthy mind, the healthy heart.

May you discover it, be it, and share it with others. May it be your gift to the world, your good heart. Thank you.