November 25 2026 Q&A

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So I feel sometimes, at this moment, I feel very lucky to be a teacher, like sitting here, because if I have something to say that inspired me, that was meaningful, important for me in the *Dharma*, I get to say it. And if I have nothing to say, I'm so lucky not to be burdened by anything, not to have anything on my mind or my heart, and that's pretty good too. So today, I'm lucky in the second way. I have nothing to say unless you ask me a question or ask me for something.

So I'm curious to see: is there anything here that anyone's on their mind, or anything you'd like to ask? Or are you equally lucky? Lucky if you have a question, and lucky if you have none. Yes. So, please use the mic because I'm—

Hi, Gil. I have a question. So, recently during meditation, I've noticed that in order to think about my relationship with other people, I have to have a concept of self.

Ah. Okay. But it's hard to understand your statement. I appreciate it. What—if you can—say what's appropriate for you in this: what concept of self do you have?

Yeah. So, for example, if I feel jealous of someone, I had to compare myself to this person.

Great.

And then I realized that could potentially be a robe I could just take off.

Little what?

So, it's hard. It's like I could just not compare to this person. I could choose to not compare to this person.

Or you can change what you compare.

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Okay, yeah. So, that only happened for a second. Then I just couldn't separate this anymore, or couldn't—so, yeah, my question is, yeah, your advice.

Yeah, I mean, if you're jealous, if you don't want to be jealous because it's painful or you feel like it's wrong, but you have a strong tendency to compare, can you compare in a better way? What would be a compassionate way to compare? Or how can you compare so you feel closer to people, not further away? Can you reframe the comparing so you say, "Oh, that was a nice thing to do"?

Right, because comparing is a way for me to actually understand the other person.

Yeah. Right. Yes. So, sometimes the words in English—there are a few words like "comparing" and "judging"—have strong negative associations. They don't have to, but they do.

Contrasting is a little bit more neutral. Maybe evaluating rather than judging, contrasting rather than comparing, might be a way of kind of finding another way of doing it.

Okay, thank you.

But I think that what I hear you say is that you have this sense of self that, at least with jealousy, gets in the way and is problematic, and that's true. Is there another sense of self that might be more beneficial? One that actually doesn't generate jealousy, but maybe generates compassion or care? That'll maybe be another place to see if you can shift.

So I don't have to get rid of—thank you.

Thank you.

I was wondering. I have a question. I was wondering if you have any thoughts or insight on the origin of intrusive thoughts and how to work with them.

The origin of intrusive thoughts? That's such a big category. It's so many places. The origin might be a little bit hard to say. But if I'm allowed to ask a question in return, because I imagine you have intrusive thoughts that you're asking about, most commonly or most recently, what's the emotion that comes along with your intrusive thoughts?

Mostly fear of them. Like fear of fear of them, or fear. It's a thing where, for example, a disturbing image will pop into my head, and then—you know, I have trouble hearing. Could you turn it up a little?

I could speak louder as well. Is this better?

Yeah. For example, I'll have the perception of a disturbing image that feels like it's coming externally, and then I feel afraid of the presence of that thought. Because there's several

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views. One of them is shame, like, “Why is it here?” Like, is it because of something that I've done? Another is, “What if I did act on this, even if I don't want to? What if I don't have control?” That's an extension of, like, “Why is it here?”

Yeah. So that's good. That's good. I'm glad you see yourself, that you know yourself well enough to see all this. And so, your answer, when you asked about the origin of the intrusive thoughts and I asked about the emotions that came along with it, I was glad you could say fear, and you described it very well.

But this is a secondary fear that's there because of the intrusive thoughts. Do you have any sense of the emotion that precedes that, when they are there with intrusive thoughts as they arise?

I suppose, like, a lack of control, or some belief that I don't—

So, lack of control. So the idea of lack of control, that things are happening to you that you have no choice over, is problematic for you.

Yeah.

And so, what's your association with lack of control? Is it that this is a time that you're going to do something that you regret? Does this mean that other people are going to harm you? Or why is lack of control difficult for you?

I think in association with not being able to—I mean, a lot of childhood associations with not being able to manufacture circumstances where I feel safe, but also where I feel compelled to behave reactively and hurt people.

Uh-huh. In what circumstance in your life do you—when do you, or how, or what place do you feel safest?

I think when I'm meditating.

Ah. And so, when intrusive thoughts come up in meditation, when you feel safest, what agency do you have to stay safe in relationship to those thoughts? What can you do? What role—what's your—so you're not helpless, but you actually can take care of yourself.

Well, I've been experimenting. This is part of why I am asking you, to see if you have any insights, because I've tried many different internal postures and approaches and ways of understanding this. I've found the most helpful is to invoke compassion for the thoughts.

Fantastic!

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That's so far been the most helpful. And I find, if I focus on my heart space and I really intentionally try to feel like, you know, if these intrusive thoughts manifest into reality, can I have compassion for that, even if it's scary or uncomfortable? And when I do that, it seems a lot less scary.

Well, thank you very much. So, I'm appreciating how well you know yourself. You're tracking yourself. It sounds like you're engaged very nicely in this practice.

It seems like to me that you're going to find your way. You're making the efforts to find your way. You're not passively sitting there and just being, you know, pushed around by your intrusive thoughts. So you're doing well, I would say.

And so, the idea of finding some way to feel more safe is really good. Use that as a reference point, and then do things where you help yourself, where you engage. Something inside of you begins to feel and recognize that, "I can take care of myself when these things come up. I know what to do." Not always, but start building up that confidence in yourself. And the work with compassion is really great.

Is that adequate of a response?

Yeah. Thank you.

Thank you very much. So maybe time for one more, if you can take—

So I was thinking about, as I walked, the image of the tree.

Can you hold it closer? I have to remember to bring my hearing aids, and I don't remember.

Okay, is this better? The image of the tree and the trunk, where you find your stability and your strength—

No, no, not well enough.

Yep.

What?

Yeah. Okay, is this better? Okay. The image of the tree and the trunk, where you find your stability and your strength, and then the leaves being insubstantial, like thought. And I thought, as I was walking, but the leaves provide photosynthesis.

Yes. Okay. Yes.

Is there a role for thinking in Buddhism? I mean, I feel like I'm constantly not trying to stop myself from thinking, but thoughts are intrusive. Thoughts are distracting.

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Yeah. Yes, absolutely. Thoughts are an important part of life. But ideally, we learn to think in good ways, in useful ways, beneficial ways, inspiring ways. Thoughts are very important.

But for many people, the way they use their thoughts, the way that they listen to their thoughts, the way that thoughts push them around, the way thoughts get them caught up in unnecessary actions and activity—thoughts can be debilitating. Absolutely. And so, part of what *Dharma* practice is about is learning how to understand thoughts well, thinking well, knowing its tricks, and understanding how to relate to it.

And understanding what kind of thoughts are really nourishing for us, beneficial, and help us to grow. And finding a healthy relationship to that, and a healthy relationship to the source of thinking, because there are different sources within us from where thoughts come from. If they come from the fear centers within us, then we can think in ways that are not beneficial for ourselves. But if they come from the wisdom centers within us or the loving centers within us, there's a whole different way that thoughts can manifest.

And most people don't know that there are these different sources from which thoughts can come. So it's a whole interesting world. But thoughts are important. We don't want to dismiss them. We don't want to offhandedly say all thoughts are bad or all thoughts are wrong.

And there's a time in deep meditation when all thoughts are too much, and it's just better not to think. But that's only a particular circumstance, situation. It does not imply that thinking is wrong. Just like, you know, there's occasional times in life when it feels better not to snack. You're not supposed to be snacking all the time.

So, the same thing with thoughts. There's occasional times where it's good not to be thinking, and when that time comes, let them go.

Thank you.

Great. So thank you all.

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