

2007-06-11 Just to be Alive is Enough

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SPEAKERS

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About 30 years ago, probably 30 years ago now. There was a pivotal thing that my Zen teacher Mel Weitzman told me. He was driving me across the Bay Bridge in his Volkswagen of 1967 Volkswagen bug. And I didn't know, he was asking me about myself, and that was 1989. There was in 1979, so almost 30 years ago, 20 years ago. And he was he was asking me I was telling him about where I was working, where I was practicing Zen and things I was going and in any some point he turned to me and he said, just to be alive is enough. And that was kind of pivotal thing. A big impact on me, to having to just to be in live is enough. And when I was some years earlier, I suppose when I was five years earlier, I had been hitchhiking around Europe. And I was in Denmark. And this guy picked me up. And I don't know how that conversation got around to they asked me like what I was interested in, or I don't even maybe, maybe if he didn't ask me, I just started telling him. And, you know, I wanted to do that Zen practice. I wanted to study Sufi ism, I wanted to study rolfing, I wanted to, you know, I went through this long list of all these things I wanted to do. And I just did, it's kind of innocently this, you know, my, my, my, my list. And he, at some point, he turned to me in the car and said, You have a lot of desires don't you? Because the list was unmanageable in one lifetime. And so this is, you know, is contrasts you know, you have a lot of desires versus just to be alive is enough. And then I learned many years later from Mel Weitzman that Suzuki Roshi had told him that so you know that an impression of him. So he was just basically was passing on good news. And its transmission. So now you got it. And your job is to pass it on. Just to be alive is enough. Now you don't you don't have to believe this, of course. And some of you have probably already protesting but it might be interesting, not to take it as a belief but to take it as a was like a challenge. Or take it as a tentative hypothesis, and then explore around the edges of that all the different ideas and beliefs and feelings to tell you. No, that's not true. Just to be alive is not enough. And what are those things that are telling you that it's not enough? And why do you believe them? What's going on for you were the desires, maybe you have your long list of desires. Or you have your long list of aversions just I'm gonna get away from that. Honey that wasn't happening, then I could really get into my spiritual life.

I wonder. I'll give you an example of something might not work for many of you, but maybe you can translate it into something that might work for you. Your life maybe you're camping. And perhaps it's your last night camping, maybe up in the mountains or maybe in the beach someplace and you stay up into the night. Lots of stars, maybe moving maybe not dark, very still very quiet. And just laying there the air is temperature, temperatures comfortable. You're comfortable. You know pretty sleepy. It's peaceful. It's nice. And thoughts about work or what's going on happen to happen in a couple of days when you get back to the regular life come up. And you say No, thank you. No, I think I'll linger here. This is so precious the stillness. The sense of just be alive is enough right now. It's just enough. I'm not going to pick up my thoughts about work anymore. Right now. The for another time. When you remember something terrible that happened to you or something wonderful happened to you some

months ago, in the sense it's so palpable, that sense of being present that alive and content under the stars there that no, you don't need to go there, I don't pick that up and either go in that direction. It's that moment at least there can be moments where the sense of just to be alive is enough just to be here is enough. There's no need to think about the future and only think about the past or desire to really, it seems so full, so satisfying or something. Maybe it's a, you know, maybe in high school, it's the last day of summer vacation. You want the day to go on forever, to think about what's going to happen tomorrow. So I don't know if that resonates anything in your life, this idea of just kind of some moments in your life. Where there was a, perhaps a stillness or a peacefulness or calm or contentment and use weren't inclined to pursue desires of anything more than just being right there and then it was enough just to be there. Perhaps even the thoughts of other places other times future investor and past have no have no substance. They just kind of thoughts, their ideas, their words, disembodied words. They pass through the mind, compared to how palpable the sense of being under the stars and stillness, the dark, the quiet. You know, that how, how strong that feeling is just here.

You know, that only happen when we're camping, some beautiful place like that. Some years ago, I went to visit a mother whose child had died. And I sat in her garden with her talking with her. And of course, you know, there was a lot of compassion, a lot of care, trying to meet her. But I had the same sense there. Just to be alive is enough. Just there was a stillness, there was a presence. There's some palpable just there. I felt like they've been there forever. Even though it was kind of wasn't, wasn't a joyous have a certain weight to it. Just to be alive was enough.

So one night, there's a discourse by the Buddha short one And the literal translation of the title is something like in a suspicious night or a fortunate night, a wonderful night. However, in ancient India, they, they counted apparently days by nights. So also one night meant one twenty four hour period. So some people translated as auspicious day. The Buddha said to his monks, I will teach you about the one who has an auspicious night, a wonderful night, just the night they're under the stars. Listening pay close attention. We will and the Buddha said shouldn't chase after the past. We're playing expectations on the future. What is past is left behind the future is as yet unreached whatever quality is present, you clearly see, right they're not taking in unshaken. That's how you develop the heart ardently doing what should be done today. For who knows, tomorrow, you may be dead. There is no bargaining with mortality and his hope and his mighty Horde. Whoever lives thus ardently, relentlessly, both day and night, has truly had no suspicious day. So says the peaceful sage. Don't chase after the past or place expectations in the future. I was driving down here Today, little bit thinking about reading this to you. I just really strong feeling of gratitude. Being grateful for this day. Wow, I got to have another day. It's pretty good. And I got to practice for another day. So good day was enough. Now one of the ways to feel that's not enough is to be caught up in thoughts about the past in the future. Or as the Buddha said, this translation chasing after the past or placing expectations on the future, clinging on clinging to the past. So what do you have to let go of so that it might actually be the case. That just to be alone Divers enough is letting go. is letting go is just is your sense of just being alive is enough to leave you with a sense of deficiency. A sense of loss, a sense of emptiness or could it be that it can actually leave you with a sense of fullness of abundance?

What do you have to let go of? So you can experience enoughness What do you have to let go of experience abundant abundance? Now, usually we don't think that way the logic doesn't work very well right. What do you let go of to have enough? I thought getting enough was getting more What do you let go of to experience abundance? Wait a minute. That doesn't make any sense the law is if you want to have abundance, acquire, acquire, acquire, acquire, the more you can get more abundance you have, if you have a lot of stuff then maybe you can get around to being generous. What does it take? What do you have to let go of, to have a sense of abundance?

I apologize for the non sequitur little bit. But that's the risk of talking with no notes.

Just to be alive is enough, remember? So

today I've been thinking a lot about the difference between authority and leadership because of a chair of a particular meeting of people and And leadership is going to change tomorrow, my last day to be the chair. So it's a very powerful group of people and ways, who's been struggling with the issue of authority for years and years. And some thinking about this issue of authority, and an expert on this, but seeing how this group has worked. What I've learned is that I think I've learned is that there's a different the different one of the differences between authority and leadership is there's only a finite amount of authority. So, if you have authority, someone else doesn't, you know, an organization so you have the authority, and someone else doesn't and so you can compete for authority, but it's competitive thing. And some people don't have enough thing some people have too much. But there's not a finite amount of leadership. Leadership is it is infinite, there's still no possible scarcity of leadership. Because leadership is something that you take on. It's by through your initiative, your ideas, your example, that people have leadership, and I've seen in many situations where people who were not in positions of authority, we're the ones who ended up providing leadership in a variety of ways. So to shift the thought, from what we know from from an example we're situation, a view, a view, that it's built into it a sense of scarcity. Authority is built into a sense of scarcity. And leadership, I would like to suggest is built into it a sense of abundance. And if so, how do you carry yourself? Do you carry yourself as someone who holds authority? Or do you carry yourself as someone who Leadership so in a shift from scarcity to a limited commodity to abundant commodity so it's the same way with things like loving kindness. I think, you know, like romantic love. It's a, there's a limited, you know, commodity that's at stake usually. You know, and usually, somehow it doesn't go around very far. Because, you know, it's like, you know, your love for me is only enough for me. And so, that's the way it has to be. You know, and so But, so, so, then there's a struggles with that but in for loving kindness is not a limited commodity. It's not something that has to be monopolized or kept limited. It's comes from a sense of abundance. And the more Do it the more there isn't work, it's going to be spread and radiate in all directions, that the perfection of loving kindness is said, is said to be, when it becomes boundless. Without downs. the perfection of romantic love, I guess is when it's boundless towards one person. So, and then it's a scarce commodity, you know, and then argue about, is there enough or not enough and all that. So what is it just to be alive is enough? What comes out of you? What do you have to let go? And I've seen people I've known people who were struggling with something and they kind of let go. Maybe they're forced to let go, but they weren't happy. And then I would say if you get if you don't happy When you let go, you haven't let go enough. You don't have to believe me today anything but because but the suggestion here is that if you let go thoroughly, or notice and be thoroughly if you let go a lot, what will happen is you'll feel experience of abundance, or enoughness that enoughness doesn't have to come from getting things or having experiences or having things go the way you want them to go. or avoiding what is uncomfortable in this world of ours, lots of uncomfortable things.

So it'll let go enough. And I've let go in situations where I thought I was doing a pretty good job, but then only to discover that I was kind of this lingering feeling of grumpiness hadn't really let go. If we let go of things, that's not really the point, that's be letting go something deeply internal. And some people say it's letting go of a sense of self. And I've known people who have had serious physical limitations. suddenly someone was an athlete, for example, a person who was an athlete and suddenly something horrible accident or something. They simply couldn't do that anymore. And of course, it's pretty horrible. He struggled with grief and anger and all kinds of things, only to come out the other end at some point and say, you know, that was the best thing that happened to me. Pretty, you know, pretty amazing.

Because I didn't realize how limited I was living in this attach small idea of who I was, where I was caught up and being a certain way. And by having an accident, I was able to let go that can discover a whole different sense of how to be in the world. Maybe we're just Don't have to acquire experiences or require or get or make something happen. You can let go. I've known people it was one person I knew who. The whole time I knew he was anxious. And one of his anxieties was getting cancer. And then he got cancer. And then he knew he was going to die. And he knew he was going to die. He stopped being anxious. And then he was peaceful. It was really great to be around him. Just to be alive is enough. One a suspicious one wonderful night, this night.

So let go of desires sense of self Is it interesting to do that, so possible to do that? Is it possible to do that? When the world has 10,000 demands on us? You can say what's fine talk about just to be alive enough, but my life is not sitting there under the stars. My wife has five kids yelling and screaming demands the demands of work and not having enough money and food on the table. A screaming spouse, parents who are dying and I can't take care of them properly, and this list can be quite long. For some people. It's very difficult. This guy what he's talking about doesn't relate to my life at all, just to be alive enough.

I think it's possible to be very actively involved. engaged, leading the world. doing the best we can. But the world can only do the best you can. And at the same time feel better has to be enough. If we do the best I can it's not going to be enough. Or what do we have to let go of? So that in doing we don't give up doing our best taking care of our kids and all that. But in doing our best, what do we have to let go of? To be happy? And that's the challenge here. I'm suggesting a challenge to you. I'm not I don't know what you'll find if you pick up the challenge with the challenges is there some way Is there some deep way you can get inside of yourself and find something you can let go of. So that nothing is needed, in order to be happy. Happiness, just almost like happiness is innate quality, when all the desires and fears and diversions kind of fall away. So in this discourse, when the Buddha He says, You shouldn't chase after the past or place expectations in the future. And how does one chase after the past? When gets carried away with the delight? Interesting question what gets carried away with the delight of in the past I had such a form such a body. In the past I had such a feeling in the past I it's such a perception in the past is such a thought fabrication in the past is such a consciousness. This is called chasing after the past. And how does one not chase after the past, one does not get carried away with the delight of in the past is such a body in the past, that's such a feeling. So here are the Buddha's talking about getting carried away with self identity, identifying myself with who you were in the past one form or the other, getting carried away by that being attached to that. In bigger bodies, translation of the same sutra, he has an interesting footnotes in this passage. It's one of the few kind of Maybe the only commentary in his big fat book is contemporary nature. He says that the Buddha here is talking about the problems getting attached to the past. And that's where the suffering arises. Very different. Think of what he said from the teachings of Krishna Murthy. For whom just any memory was a currency, bigger body any memory is villainous. Any memory keeps you from being fully present here and now. There's a difference because Krishna Murthy you can't be can't remember anything. And it's okay to remember things. But here the issue is chasing after it. I love this story. To tell you another story. I said it. Many times that's why I feel a little bit shy about saying it again. But I was teaching a retreat. And there was a woman on the retreat who was a very troubled person. Very hard life troubled. A lot of inner turmoil, inner self, lack of self worth, self criticism, self loathing, what kinds of terrible things she was working with. And so today I was see her regularly and trying to be supportive and helpful. And one day there was just a guided meditation. I think it was in the meditation hall. And it seemed like everyone in the room got really stills like magic was like early in the morning, and it was like 10 o'clock in the morning and beautiful Setsuna sunlight and clarity in the realm of just like magic, really, still quite palpable stillness for everyone. And as it was after that, meditation, the first person I was going to talk to after

that right after that was an interview with her. So I sat in my little interview room, it was a was a monastery, we'd rented a little house things love monastics monk cell which I love. Have you said this wish struck wish that it was time for me to die, I could die in a month. So I was sitting my old monk seven very happy. My chair. She was coming in, she sat down chair facing me. And it was clear. So I was in this kind of very peaceful, happy, peaceful settle state from this meditation didn't really feel like talking at all. She came in. And it was before she could talk. She was thrilled here clear that she was kind of in the same state. As for actually for a while, we just sat there just enjoying yourselves. We're talking fiscal smiling. This is different. You know, for her, there's just this tormented person. And, and then at some point, we started speaking, if you said something about acknowledging, you know how wonderful it was, how peaceful it was. Nice it was.

And then she said but you know, Wasn't this way yesterday. Yesterday, I was suffering yesterday I was caught up in this concern about this conflict I was and then was like heck, when jive did hide whatever it's called.

She was being tricky transformed in front of me from someone who was completely peaceful, to something that completely someone who was peaceful to someone who was fermented. And you know, just stress in the face and everything changed. she chased after the past, she actually dredged up the past to tell me about it, because somehow being at peace was not enough for her. being at peace was not somehow something was lacking for her in that some sense maybe that identity, some sense of something. And so as I was so sad so that you pull this out of the past and then be transformed in the present this way, why let the past have such power over us? Why be hostage to the past in that kind of way? And how does one place expectations on the future when he gets carried away with the delight of in the future, I might have such a body in the future might have such a feeling in the future I might have such a perception in the future I might have such a thought fabrication and the future I might have such a consciousness. This is called placing expectations in the future. And how does one not place expectations in the future? We're not doing this and how is one not kicking in with regard to present qualities, I mean, here it says in the phone, with Buddhist teachings, whatever quality is present you clearly see right here and are not taken in by it. You know, taken in by What's happening the present moment. That's an interesting idea. So you're not kind of chasing the past you're not living expectations of future for what's happening here and now, you're not taking invites. I like that. You've been taken in by anything lately. caught by it, you know. And how is one not taking in. And how was one taken in with regard to present qualities, there was a case where an ordinary person who is not in practice, not versed in the teachings, not trained, sees the body itself, sees self as possessing a body sees the body, in this as in self, or the self in the body. He or she sees feeling itself or sees the self as possessing feeling, or feeling as if it's in the self or the self as as it as if it Feeling, he or she perceives, sees perception itself, herself as possessing perception, or perception as in self, or self as in perception. He or she sees thought fabrications itself as self, or self as possessing thought fabrications, or thought fabrications as in self, or self as in thoughts, applications. Last one, the last one last one is particularly interesting. I think it's kind of same formula but just stop you're laughing. So you can listen. He or she sees consciousness, as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, as if it's in the self or self as if it's in consciousness. This is called being taken in with regard to pressure qualities what's, what's left? And how is when not taking in with regard to the present? Here, here, a person doesn't do these things doesn't take the body itself and save the bodies in the self or part of the self with all these different possibilities. So, all these things are ways in which the mind moves, mind moves forward, pulls back three x plus and minus four and against wanting something to happen. So, when we sit to meditate, what do you have to let go of? So you can allow the mind not to move for or against. So you can let the mind release itself, soften itself, relax itself, what do you have to let go of so

that sitting in meditating, just to be alive is enough. What sense of self self identity with desires and expectations? What versions and fears? What are you holding on to from the past?

What expectations do you have for the future that are not really needed? But somehow cloud and contract and limit diminish who you are? And so the suggestion here this evening, he said you might hold as a little with a question mark before and after the phrase just to be alive is enough hold that is a question. Hold that as a kind of, it doesn't have to be a truth. It can just be like a, like a touchstone or some soap to use because I'm sure it's not a completely true statement. I'm sure it's perfectly true. And if you use this as a middle kind of soap that kind of goes washes washes your mind heart. You'll find lots of little extra stuff that you can let go of. And maybe you won't come to the place where just to be alive is enough. But maybe you'll come to just feel life live is almost enough. Suzuki Roshi once said, to Lou Richmond. New Richmond asked me, if I do Zen practice, will I get enlightened? And Suzuki Roshi said, if your practice is is sincere, it's almost as good.

Thank you for this wonderful, auspicious evening practicing together I hope that you go home and go to sleep tonight. Reflecting, thinking maybe you can let go and be happy or content as you go asleep.