

Calmness (3 of 5) Safety in Calmness

December 8, 2021

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

agitated, calm, peace, safety, safe, preoccupation, agitation, mind, *khema*, stress

Gil Fronsdal

It is funny that we are talking about the electronic buzz with the recording. Sometimes buzz can also mean being hyperactive, and this week we are considering calmness – being peaceful.

Imagine a person sitting in meditation. They are worried about the rain. What are they going to wear in the rain? Will they be safe? They have to go out in the rain. Isn't it dangerous to go out in this rainstorm? There is all this agitation, preoccupation, fear, and tightness around thinking about the rain.

This may be easy enough to imagine, but it turns out that it is not raining. There is no rain predicted in the forecast. The skies are clear. All that concern about the rain – being safe and managing the rain – had no real-world reference point. The agitation created by imagining the rain while sitting in meditation was all self-caused in this little universe inside our skulls.

We were creating this little rainstorm inside our minds. In doing this, we were contributing to a lack of safety for ourselves. We were in a subtle way harming or agitating ourselves. In this thought experiment, it is easy to understand how our own inner life can add to the unnecessary feelings of not being safe or feeling stressed. This is not necessary, but we add to the situation.

When we know that we have used our imagination and added to the stress in our minds, it might be easy to let it go. When we know it is not a real thing, it may be easy to turn back to a calm place within. It may be possible to look for this calm, peaceful place within. We may return to our breathing and as we breathe, let go and settle back into this calm place.

That thought experiment may be easy to understand, but what if it is raining outside? What if there is a big storm outdoors and we have to go out in it? Those same thoughts might be there. How do I feel safe when it rains? What should I do? How do I find my way? Now it can be justified to think these thoughts because they are addressing a real-world situation.

We now can ask if we are contributing to the agitation we are feeling. Are we creating the agitation? Do we attribute our agitation to the rain? Do we justify these feelings because there is an issue we need to address, and so, of course, we should be agitated? Or, are we able to see that even in a real-life situation, we are contributing to the agitation?

We are caught up in the ideas, thoughts, and stress of that type of thinking. In a subtle way, this thinking creates a feeling of a lack of safety within. We are harming ourselves with stress. We are preoccupied and don't pay attention to the bigger picture of ourselves sitting in meditation. We are not safe for our place of calm and peace within.

One issue is whether we will be safe going out in the rain. Another issue is whether our peace inside is safe. That is a different issue. What if our inner peace is really important? Maybe it is more important than getting wet in the rain. Is it more important than getting agitated while meditating, and worrying about something that is not happening right here and now?

This thought exercise that I am offering is meant to point out that even when we are concerned with a real-world issue while we are meditating, we are becoming less safe for ourselves. When we are preoccupied with an issue like this we are harming ourselves. There is a trade-off between whatever benefits we get from thinking about the issue – What should I wear in the rain? What kind of umbrella should I get? How should I go? – and what is lost in terms of being connected to a deeper wellspring of calm, peace, and settledness.

If we evaluate the situation in this way, we may realize that there is no purpose or value in sacrificing our calm and peace for those thoughts. It is not to our greater benefit to lose touch with our calm and peace. The calm

and peaceful place may be a place of integrity. It may be a place of feeling more connected to oneself, a place of wholeness, intelligence, creativity, and compassion. It is a place where there is a wellspring of a sense of freedom in life.

The agitated mind eclipses something precious within. The agitated mind limits us. If we are able to settle back into a place of peace and calmness, there is a feeling of unlimitedness and unboundedness to this. There can be a sense of connecting to ourselves in a deeper way. Not only is this place of calmness and peace safe, but it turns out that the way we think affects how we respond to and understand the world.

Responding to the world from a place of calm and peacefulness creates more worldly safety than responding to the world from a place of agitation. If the mind is jumping around and agitated, then we will act that way in the world. We won't see situations or ourselves very well. We don't tap into the deeper understandings and values we have. We lose touch with our core values.

In Buddhism, there is the word *khema*, which can be translated as "safety" or "security." It is also translated as "peace" or "calm." The fact that one word encompasses both meanings points out that these two translations are not so separate from each other. Safety is connected to the place within where calm or peace is found. How do we contribute to the safety of our calmness, inner well-being, or peacefulness? How do we not add layers of limitation, agitation, or preoccupation so we lose touch with the calm? How do we tap into the calmness and peacefulness that helps us feel safe in the world?

I am certainly capable of being concerned about staying dry outside when it is raining. If I am in a hurry or agitated, I might grab the first coat I can get so I can stay dry. I might not notice the umbrella that is by the door as I leave. If I had been calm, settled, and relaxed as I was leaving, I would have seen the umbrella. The umbrella might have kept me drier than the coat I chose.

These are simple ideas and analogies for what I am trying to say. I encourage you to think and reflect on this. You can probably come up with better examples in your life of how this works. Reflect on how the sacrifice, the downside of being agitated and preoccupied, might motivate you to feel your way back to the place where things are calm and peaceful.

I'd like to suggest that the calm place within is not so hard to find. Take the time to look for it in a physical sense. Where in your body is physical calm and peace? Is it in your chest, belly, feet, or hands? It is relative to how agitated you might be feeling. Where in your body is the place of greatest calm? That might be the toe-hold into an inner world of safety and calm.

Once you have a toe-hold to the calm, then you can breathe with it. You can settle, relax, and value it. You can protect it. This still, quiet, peaceful place within is well worth protecting. The primary person to protect it from is you. Protect it from the surface mind that is agitated, anxious, and caught up in preoccupations.

Your concerns might be very valuable. They may be so valuable it is better to stay calm. Then you can better address them. If they are not real, if there is no rainstorm, then it is all the better to not have sacrificed your calm for an agitated mind. Consider how calmness helps you to feel safe.

Thank you for this time and I look forward to tomorrow.