

Be, See, Free, We (3 of 10) The Desireless Door of Liberation

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The topic for today is the second door of liberation, the wishless, or desirelessness. Sometimes it's called "aimless," but I like the word "wishless." This is a very profound, important part of human life. Human beings could probably be called "human desirelings" because desire is such a huge part of human life. Desire is built in and maybe it's fair to say it's inherent to human life. Without desire, nothing would happen. We would just sit and do nothing. We'd be a rock or something.

Sometimes having no desires is a definition of someone who is depressed. To want to eat when you're hungry is a desire. To want to pee when your bladder is full is a

desire. There are all kinds of desires operating all the time. Some desires get us in big trouble. Some desires are unhealthy or harmful to others. Some desires are harmful to us. Some desires come with such pressure, constriction, demand, and addiction that just having the desire is really painful.

I discovered this many years ago when I was young. I noticed that I used to love going into bookstores when they were easily available. I noticed that I would be exhausted after I left bookstores. Looking into it a little bit more, I discovered this was because I hardly ever bought anything. I didn't have any money. But I'd go down the bookstore shelves thinking, I want that, I want that, I want that. I just wanted everything. It was the incessant desire that was exhausting. The desire was like a movement of reaching forward, holding on to, and looking for the next thing. It was a kind of stress.

When we sit in meditation, we begin discovering the stress of desires. Not all desires are stressful, but we can start noticing that some of the tension, stress, pressure, and exhaustion we have is partly born from the ways in which we relate to desire. This includes the ways in which we participate in them, or pick them up, or lean into them, or hold on to them.

The movement toward becoming calm or settled in meditation is partly a movement of releasing the pressure around desires – holding them, needing them, the authority and the command that they sometimes carry. Meditation is not anti-desire, but it is about freedom from all that extra weight, all that extra participation in desires.

There are two general categories of desires. There are desires that can arise with no charge and no pressure at all. And there are desires that arise with charge and pressure. Even healthy desires can arise with a lot of pressure and tension, with a burden, a lot of self-centeredness, a lot of measuring ourselves and expecting things of ourselves. They can arise with extra beliefs that we carry and hold on to, with opinions about desires, about what we want to have, or with negative desires – the desires not to have, not wanting. Even healthy desires can carry all this, so simply justifying a desire because it's appropriate and healthy sometimes causes people to overlook the unnecessary cost of the way they participate in that desire.

Meditation is not necessarily anti-desire. It is freedom from all that extra cost – all the ways we go into debt because of our desire, the ways in which we are burdened by it, the ways in which we lose our freedom. So in meditation, we begin tuning into that stress,

tension, and charge – the leaning forward we can feel with desire.

I saw this first many years ago on one of my first retreats in Thailand. We had to walk from the meditation hall on a dirt road down a hill in the jungle to where we were going to have lunch. Lunch was the main meal of the day. There was no food in the evening and only a very light breakfast. I was young and quite hungry. And I started noticing that coming out of meditation I was pretty grounded and centered in myself. But as I walked down that road to where the food was, I could feel that somehow my center of gravity, the center of my attention was ahead of me. I was leaning forward wanting lunch, planning it, and thinking about it. I was almost outside of my body. Then I would pull myself back and get myself grounded again. Then the desires and thoughts around those desires would come up again, and I'd be leaning forward. There was a seesaw going on. It was quite fascinating to see.

As we learn not to have a charge with desire, desires can start abating because we're starting to feel a place of contentment and peace. Peace is something that we can have a desire for without a charge. We just feel this is good. This is coming home. This is a place of harmony, of non-resistance. This is a place of non-fixation. This is a place where what's healthy within us can flow and move through us.

The movement towards releasing desires, releasing the charge of desire, the attachment to it, is a movement towards health. This can make it a lot easier to let go of that charge and the attachment to desires. As we have deeper ease and contentment, we also have more wisdom about whether we should act on a desire or not. But we act on the desire – sometimes with lots of energy – without that charge, contraction, or tension that we had before. In some ways, with appropriate desires like compassion and care, it can actually be easier to act on a desire when there's freedom in relation to it. When you have real, healthy freedom within, it is more likely that you'll see and feel when your relationship with a desire is unhealthy – when greed, hatred, delusion, or attachment are a part of it.

The movement is towards learning to have to be free of our desires. There might still be desires, but freedom from needing them or acting on them creates a very still, quiet mind that allows something to release more and more deeply. The analogy I use for this is that of a big bowl with marbles spinning in it. When I took my young kids to science museums, sometimes they had six-foot bowls. You'd stand up on a little bench to look into them. The kids would drop marbles into the bowl. There was a hole at the bottom of the bowl, and the marbles would go spinning around, knocking against each other a little

bit, and moving in all kinds of fun ways. It was fun to watch them.

Every once in a while, the marbles would get down to the bottom, but they had so much momentum they'd cross over the hole and not fall into it – until the momentum lessened enough. Gradually they started staying more and more near the bottom of the bowl, and then, at some point, they'd be going slowly enough that when they came to the hole, they would drop through into a little cup, like a golf ball.

Like this, when the momentum of desire and wanting is not operating so much, and it gets quieter and quieter, with less and less momentum, we come to a place where we're able to breathe and be present. Everything is functioning in a healthy way, but it's clear in that peace and coolness of the mind and heart, where there's no inclination, no movement of desire whatsoever, and no charge whatsoever, that the momentum of desire has come to a still place. Then we fall into that little cup where we can rest in a deep, deep way.

But it's not really a cup like in golf. It is hard to talk about it, but if you fall into the cup, the cup has no bottom, no sides, and no top. There's no definition there. There's no limitation there. There's nothing that holds it. This beautiful state where desires are let go of

and nothing is holding anything is a profound experience of liberation and freedom.

The door of the wishless is one of the doors to this experience of deep release. Everyone will go through the door of desirelessness. This is one of the movements as meditation gets stronger and deeper, and we feel the beautiful health of being so settled and peaceful. It is one of the doors that can open when we let go deeply.

But even way short of being a door to liberation for people, learning how to change our desires, letting go of unhealthy desires, and learning how to be with challenges without desire, without needing it to be different, is a stepping stone to greater freedom. Not that we have to have a policy of accepting difficulties and discomforts. But learning the ability, maybe in meditation, to be with discomfort and have no desires in relation to it can be a very profound movement towards spiritual health.

Study desire and understand the different qualities of desire. Over the next 24 hours, you might look at the desires you have and talk to friends about them. See if you can tease apart the simplicity of a desire versus the charge that's added to it. Maybe you can separate those and let go of the charge. Then you can decide whether

the desire is appropriate or not to have. Tomorrow we'll do the third door of liberation. Thank you.