

Conditioned Consciousness (2 of 5)

Tension and Peace

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

awareness, peacefulness, fear, fearlessness, tightens, shrinks, released, calm, contrast, chronic, relax, wisdom

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The combined, aggregate totality of awareness – the shape, form, sense, image, and feeling we have for what consciousness might be for us – is related to the different attitudes and states of mind we have and the activities we engage in. The two that have a big impact are tension on the one hand and peacefulness on the other. These exist on a spectrum where it doesn't have to be all one or the other. Oftentimes, one is present with the other. The advantage of seeing and discovering this is that we can tap into the peacefulness in order to be present for the tension. If tension predominates, we can break out of the enchantment, allure, or strong attachment to tension by remembering peace is also here. Knowing the tension peacefully helps set us free from it.

If there is a lot of peace and the tension is not noticeable, it can be helpful – from that peaceful place – to see if you can find where tension remains. If this subtle, very slight tension that still remains is held under a peaceful gaze of attention, it has a chance to dissolve and be released. Then the peace can grow. Rather than focusing on the sense of peace, it is sometimes helpful to notice the cracks or the subtle places where there is still tension within the peace and to begin working on those edges. The peace can then spread and grow more and more.

Often tension is part and parcel of life. If it comes and goes, that is fine. The issue is when we hold on to the tension. For instance, we are driving and someone suddenly veers into our lane in front of us. We tense up to quickly break the car or back up or do something to be safe. This kind of tension is biologically important. But when we are driving and safe again, are we able to let it all go? It is when we don't let go, and we hold on to it, that the tension becomes a problem.

There are many causes for being tense. There are fewer reasons to hold on to tension and for tension to become chronic and tight. This has a lot to do with what goes on in our minds. There can be a strong desire or strong aversion to something.

Today, I would like to emphasize fear. Fear is one of the very powerful conditions for becoming tense. Some people have chronic tension that goes on for a lifetime because of some fear that was inflicted upon them. They remain afraid in some part of their psyche because of something they experienced. That tension is always there; we are bracing ourselves against life.

When there is tension, especially a tension of fear, if we have a sense of being conscious, it tends to feel shriveled and contracted. Tension pulls in and becomes tight. In yesterday's discussion about agitation, we said it tends to fragment consciousness, making it rough and jagged. But tension tends to shrink it. Sometimes the world shrinks due to a particular concern that we have. It may shrink from something that we fear, want, or are upset with. When we open up and look at the mind that is aware of our attention shrinking to that one concern, it just feels tight and narrow.

Awareness can become broad, spacious, and peaceful when the mind is not preoccupied, caught, or holding on to anything. A peaceful awareness is one that has been released. When attention that is localized in one place has been released, it can feel as if awareness or consciousness is beginning to spread out. It gets released and opens up.

There is a difference, for me, between peace and calm. Everyone is different, and some people think the two are synonyms. Calm, for me, is a settling and relaxing. It is almost like the weight of calm helps tension settle into the pull of gravity, and peace comes from release. With peace, things open up and become wide and spread. To use a slightly different idea, calm is a settling of mud in water, and peace is the clarity that is left in that water. It is like swimming underwater and having clarity where you can see so far. It is quite lovely. I have also swum in water, where you couldn't see more than a foot in front of you. It has a whole different feeling.

When I was a kid, I liked to swim in places where there were waves and the water was relatively clear. The waves were coming into a rocky shore. I loved to dive maybe five or six feet under the waves and hold my breath. I would turn over on my back and look up at the waves and the turmoil above. It felt peaceful down below. Everything was so quiet and peaceful there. The contrast was wonderful.

So what is fascinating, humbling, upsetting, and irritating about fear, but also maybe, beneficial, is that fear is its own danger. If fear is fear of danger, fear itself is a danger when it is chronic. It is a danger when it conditions us to see the world the way it is not – to see danger at every corner and every location. Fear is a danger when we become fixated on always looking out

for what the problems are and where the danger is. When we live only from that fixated view, everything becomes dangerous. It becomes this because fear is its own danger. It can be self-fulfilling if fear is chronic. Yes, we are in trouble, because of the tension, the contraction, and the lens of fear that we see through.

So if fear is related to tension, fearlessness is related to peace. Peace is not just some kind of bland state. It is a powerful, wonderful place through which we can be fearless, where we have nothing to fear.

Of course, when a car pulls in front of us on the freeway, having some fear is appropriate. It helps us to be safe. It isn't like we want to get rid of all fear. When we discover the value of peacefulness and fearlessness, it also protects us because now we become safe from ourselves.

Fear is a danger to ourselves and fearlessness is how we become safe from ourselves, because we are not going to cause harm to ourselves. We are not going to contract and hold attention – to be chronically tense – which can cause all kinds of chronic physical, mental, and emotional problems for people.

Meditation and exercise allow us to relax deeply, to become deeply calm, and to start experiencing states of peace, where tensions begin to dissolve. We are not

living in tension, and we have an experience of being safe for ourselves. The heart of fearlessness is to have that kind of safety. You become safe for yourself. The absence of fear changes the nature of consciousness, of how we feel we are aware.

It is easy for us to be aware with such a strong filter of fear and tension that it seems like it is the nature of consciousness and it is true. Even more powerful is when consciousness or attention is colored by fear – it then sees fear in the world. We don't necessarily become an objective, clear seer of what is actually out there because, in a sense, everything becomes dangerous. Everything is now seen through that framework of fear.

If everything is seen through the framework of fearlessness, then we are safe for ourselves. We are in a much better place to track the inner wisdom, the inner clarity, the perceptions, the hunches, and the reactions we have that help us be wise about what is out there.

Of course, there are dangers out there. Some are more subtle than others, but there are probably fewer dangers in the world than we can ever imagine. If we have the wisdom, the fearless wisdom to ascertain, and to know and connect deeply with all the different sources of intelligence that operate, then we can probably tune into the difference between a real danger

and a projected danger that is not really there. Projected dangers are often self-fulfilling. They sometimes create the very problems that we are trying to avoid.

So for the next 24 hours, you might study how this range from tension to peace is for you. When you are tense, where is the peace? When you are peaceful, where is the tension? May that clarity in the range of who you are and how you are help you to be less caught and stuck in the tension. May you be more fluid and in touch with the peace that is in our hearts.

Thank you.