

## Resistance

Alan Zundel at the HeartAwake Center, June 13th 2007

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Okay. So we come here together, and we sit here silently for twenty minutes or so; been doing this regularly for a long time. Have you ever stopped and thought about how unusual this is? *[laughs]*

When you run in circles of people who are spiritually-minded and meditation or looking inward is common practice it may not seem that usual, but very few people actually do this kind of thing. And even in our culture, where people are aware of meditation or have heard about it, very few people actually do it; let alone all the people in the world who have never heard of it. And I think we can learn something from why people who may have heard of it don't do it, learn something that is useful for ourselves as well. It teaches us something about ourselves, because we're all at some level very much the same, or at least similar.

First you have a large group of people who have heard of meditation but don't express any interest in it. They just—it's just not part of their set of interests in life; they have other things they want to do. They have other interests they're pursuing, and meditation doesn't play a part in their idea about what they want to do with their life and how they want to spend their time. Usually people who are more busy in life, right? They're pursuing careers, raising families—and it's not just that they're busy, it's that what their goals and priorities are are very different than the goals and priorities of people that may take up meditation. They're not so much interested in looking inward as they are in outward achievement, perhaps. Accomplishing things. Getting things done.

But if you press them a little bit and say, 'Well, why don't you try it out, why don't you try meditation? Just see what you think about it, how it feels for you—just give it a try?' Ordinarily, I think you get one of two kinds of responses from them. One response is, 'Well, that's just weird. *[laughs]* I don't want to do that, because it sounds strange. It's not the kind of thing that people I know or people I associate with do. And not only that; if I do that people might think *I'm* weird, think *I'm* strange. I'll lose a little bit of social status if people think I'm going off the deep end or becoming one of those people.' And they don't want that; that just doesn't fit in their view of life—it's *other*, it's *different*. It's something *different* kinds of people do but not them or normal people, their idea of normal people. So it's weird, it's strange, and they don't want to have anything to do with it because of that.

The other kind of response you get if you press them on it, is that it just sounds boring. It sounds like sitting there for twenty minutes—even *ten* minutes, let alone twenty—it sounds boring, it's a waste of time. What you do? You sit there and you don't accomplish anything; you just—your mind goes around, and you try to focus on your breath or something, and what do you get out of it? It just sounds like a way to waste time; you could be *doing* something. And

you would get very bored, doing that. These are the people that don't exhibit any interest in meditation, at least at that stage in their life. Things can change.

Another set of people is those who *do* express an interest in meditation and say they'd like to do that, but they never seem to get around to it, or they don't make time for it or they hardly ever make time for it. They're too busy; that's their reason for not doing it more often or not getting around to it. They'd *like* to meditate but they just can't find time for it; there's too much going on in their life and they can't find the right time or place where it's quiet enough to do what they need to do. Now there's obviously some legitimacy to that, that people can have a lot of responsibilities with their work, or their family, or other things in life that don't leave them much time for doing meditation. That's very true, and some people are very busy that way.

But to some extent—I think for the majority of people in this position of saying they don't have the time for it—I think if you scratch the surface and look at how people spend their time, there are blocks of time where they're not not doing anything important, where they could be meditating. The big one is watching television, obviously. [*laughs*] People—when you read the statistics on how much time the average person, it's like, 'Where do they find the time to watch TV that much?' And that's not even kids, who spend a lot more time on TV than adults.

So time spent watching television could have been spent meditating, and you have to question how sincere they are when they say they want to meditate but don't have the time. It seems like maybe something else is going on there, something similar to the earlier group that I mentioned saying that it sound boring. There's a feeling like, well, television is relaxing, entertaining, but meditation is going to be a little bit of an effort or I'll feel a little bored or something. Whatever it is, there's a *resistance*.

And that's really the subject that I'm getting to, resistance. In both sets of people there's resistance to meditation, and all the reasoning for why people don't meditate when you offer them the opportunity, there's a resistance. There's a resistance that's called 'I don't want to be weird,' there's a resistance called 'I don't want to be bored,' and there's a resistance called 'I don't want to make the time for it.' And I think behind all of these there is something that even those of us who spend time meditating can identify as having in common with them.

And that is, when you *do* meditate regularly, you will find your mind resisting becoming quiet and still. Right? It wants to go running off in different directions, and it does take a little time and sometimes a little effort—sometimes a lot of time and effort—to get the mind to start to settle. So inside of us there is also resistance to silence, resistance to stillness—resistance to whatever it is that meditation is meant to bring into your life, even when you express a desire for those things: stillness, silence, insight, change—there's resistance to it. And I think the big difference between the three groups is not so much that they're all that different in their reasons or in their ways of life, as it is in the degree to which they're aware of that resistance or giving the right name to it. I think underlying all of it is resistance.

In the case of people who have no interest at all or say they have no interest, there's a *lot* of resistance: resistance to change, resistance to being different, resistance to being bored—all

comes down to something more basic. And not finding time for it is also resistance, resisting *making* the time for it, just like when we resist becoming still. So what is this resistance all about? What is it in our mind that wants to run away from being still, being silent, spending time in stillness? Whether that desire to run away is very strong, and won't even allow us to consider the prospect of sitting still for twenty minutes or so, or whether it's a little more weak but still acknowledged that, okay we're sitting here *doing* it, but still there's something in us resisting it. What is it?

I think we get some clues from these ideas about it being weird, or it being boring, or it being an effort. 'Being weird' represents change—being something other than what you are now, maybe dramatically different than what you are now, and what you're used to. A lot of the resistance is a resistance to change—maybe *all* the resistance fundamentally is a resistance to change. Because even though I'm going to talk about this resistance and identify different aspects of it, I think these aspects are all tied together, and it really comes down to an intertangled ball of things that are really one big knot of resistance somewhere inside of ourselves.

So this resistance to change, to being different—there's the recognition that opening yourself up to the stillness inside of you represents potential for change; you can become a different person by exposing yourself to this. And part of you is fearful of change, right? Even when we acknowledge there's things in our life we'd like to change, what we *really* want is to be able to control that change and make it into the change we desire. What opening yourself up to the stillness represents is a letting go to something deeper that may change us in directions that we can't control, or that we can't plan. Opening yourself up to something deeper means that might *take over*. There's resistance to that something 'other' in ourselves.

Even when people think that what they're opening themselves up to—which is what I would say—is the divine, is God manifesting in our souls, there can be resistance to that. Not wanting to give control over to God, wanting to maintain control for ourselves—even when you believe in a loving God and you want to place your trust in God, it's hard to give that control over.

Now that doesn't even broach the topic of maybe it's not God that you're opening yourself up to. Unconscious forces, just in a secular psychological sense—you could be opening yourself up to all kinds of things inside yourself that haven't been dealt with or resolved. And exposing yourself to that can mean a lot of change. People sometimes say, when they start meditating, 'I feel like I might go crazy. Something in me is starting to bubble to the surface and what I'm afraid of is that it's going to change me so radically I'll go crazy.' It's another way of saying, 'I'll be weird; I'll be strange.' It comes back down to that. There's the sense that in our own psychology there's something that might come up that we've been avoiding, that may take over and make us into a different person. We're not sure we want to let go into that.

More extreme than that would be identifying this inner self, or this inner potentially, as being demonic or evil in some way. You hear this sometimes from fundamentalists, 'Well, if

you meditate you're opening yourself up demonic forces, devils could be talking to you or something and hallucinations; they can deceive you.'

So there's this *fear*, there's this fear of what it is inside of us, and I think that resistance is based on this sense that change is threatening, change—even when we desire change—can be threatening if it's a change that we can't fully control. We feel like the smaller part of ourselves has a grasp on who we are, but there's some bigger part of ourselves that we're in touch with that can take over, and just maybe even obliterate that smaller self. And we won't be able to control what happens next and where we go from there. So there's resistance to that, just the fear of change and what we might be opening ourselves up to.

Of course there's a lot of inertia in that as well, the mind's resistance to the inner silence and the deeper parts of ourselves. We're so used to operating at this more superficial level of the mind, of thought, of emotion, of plans and projects and our familiar identity, that's it's hard to get outside of that once you decide you want to do that. So even if you decide, 'This is a good thing, this is opening myself to a positive thing'—yet I find my mind still wants to keep going on in the same direction. So it does take an effort, and we resist making efforts. So that's part of the thing in not making time for it is this feeling that there's going to be a little bit of effort involved. I think that's where boredom comes in too; there's that feeling that 'I have to make an effort, and I have to expose myself to this feeling that there's this shallow part of me that if I don't keep it distracted, will be somewhat painful.' If not that strong a term, maybe—what? Annoying.

[Voice:] Uneasy?

Uneasy. Being left alone with your mind and no distractions is not just boring in the sense that you can't find anything useful to do, it's boring in the sense that I don't like to have to deal with my own mind. The idea of being shut into a cell by yourself with no distractions, a lot of people would feel like that would be *torture* because all you'd have is you own mind, and your own mind is—to some extent everybody senses—your own mind is not always your friend. [laughs] There's something about the way your mind functions that can just become very tiresome and annoying and irritating, and even *painful*.

It's painful to let your mind go with nothing to keep it moving in other directions; that's why we go to TV, entertainment, all that. I mean, there's positive things about art and culture, but often we go to it just because we don't want to experience that pain of listening to our own mind and letting it run on. We want something else to take it over and take it in a different direction so we don't have to be let alone with our mind. There's inertia—you know, we're stuck with our minds and how they operate, and if it takes a little effort to get past that, well, it's a lot easier to just distract ourselves. So fear of change, and that sense of inertia, will both keep you in a state of resistance.

Beyond that, what people will experience—or at least what I've experienced—when you can break through some of that resistance, when you've made sufficient effort and your attention is strong enough and you can remain silent, sitting silently for a good period of time, so that this

deeper self starts to emerge and you feel the silence and calmness—you start to sense that there's something beyond that. That between this initial sense of silence and a much deeper sense of silence and spaciousness, there's something else threatening, something that you have to fear, that you'll have to pass through in order to get there. And this is where your mind will kick up dust again, because it does not want to go through that. It wants to remain in this shallow state of calmness and feeling of silence and stillness without going deeper.

What is that? That's the pain of recognizing unresolved emotions and issues in our lives. Now this is a very psychological thing, but when you begin to open yourself up, things from your past that you may even have felt you dealt with, have—what? Sometimes we have to relive them on a deeper and deeper level to fully integrate them into our consciousness and get beyond them. So you can find things coming up from your childhood—humiliations, fears, traumas—and you sense that something like that is coming up and you're going to have to relive the feelings of that. You may not be consciously aware of that but I think you sense that that's what's going on, and your mind will want to start kicking up some dust so you don't get into it that deeply, waiting until maybe you're ready to be able to assimilate that.

So when you're meditating and you get into this sense of silence, and then you find, 'Oh, sometimes I meditate and I can get back to that; sometimes I meditate and my mind just seems to be running like a gerbil in a cage again.' I think that's what's going on, is that that old emotional stuff, that old baggage, is starting to lift its head and your mind goes, '*Not yet!* Not yet; let's just wait a little bit longer, until I'm really ready to confront all these issues.'

There's a lot of wisdom in the Christian tradition and the basic storyline of Jesus, in the juxtaposition of the crucifixion and the resurrection, because it maps this process very closely as well. You have to go through the pain of crucifixion, which is really the reliving of uncomfortable emotions, in order to get to the resurrection of a deeper awareness, and a deeper sense of self.

So resistance has many levels, and many manifestations and rationalizations, but at the bottom, it's a sense of *fear*—a fear of change, and a fear of letting go, and a fear of going through pain, all of which, really, are related. In the letting go, it allows the pain to arise, and allows the process to happen that's going to change you into the person that you've yearned to become. But people take it at different paces; so resistance is going to be there, it takes time. Maybe understanding how the process works can cut short the time.

Maybe not. I don't know. But I talk about it anyway. Maybe I've talked to long.  
[laughs] Okay.

**The HeartAwake Center**

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