

THE HIGHER GOOD BEYOND GOOD AND BAD

Week #3 of a 5-Week Series, "The Power of NOW"

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So how many people believe that the mind -- and the power of our thoughts -- have a direct impact on the quality of our lives? How many people would agree with that? And how many people believe also that the mind is the greatest obstacle to inner peace fulfillment and enlightenment? And one more: How many people believe that all of our unhappiness and all of our in our suffering is self-inflicted, created in our own minds?

You know, our minds are absolutely amazing, but they also do some things that are not healthy; that are not productive; and can even be harmful. And one of the things is that we create **drama**. I know nobody else in here does, but how many people know someone else who has created, who creates some drama? [Congregants laugh]

And I always like to say that we are masters of "MSU": Making Stuff Up! [Congregants laugh] I think we have all made stuff up! Some little incident happens and we start creating some big story around it. I remember one of the first times I gave a talk. I was in this small, little church. And someone in the front row was sitting there with their arms crossed, serious look on their face, just staring at me. Face did not change a bit. And then a couple minutes later, I noticed a woman get up and leave. And I thought, "*Oh my God, this is not going well.*" You're creating all kinds of things. Two minutes later, the lady comes back ... from the restroom, and at the end of the talk, the guy comes to me and he says, "*That was the best talk I ever heard.*" [Congregants laugh] And I wanted to say, "*Why didn't you tell your face?*" [Congregants laugh] But

Isn't it amazing how we can make stuff up that is not real, but we create it in our minds?

You know, Mark Twain said it this way. He said, "*I'm an old man who has known many great problems, but most of them never happened.*" [Congregants murmur] And I bet most of us would agree with that: that the things that we worry and stress and are anxious about, that they never even happen.

So, besides drama, here are some of the things we do that are an unproductive use of our mind; that do not help our inner peace or our fulfillment or path to enlightenment. And one of them is **resistance**. That we tend to resist. Anything that doesn't go our way, we resist it in some way shape or form ... by getting angry or complaining or hating it or pretending or denying or blaming. but we have a lot of resistance, because we don't like a things don't go our way.

And another thing we do is we tend to **crave**. We believe that what we have right now in our life is not good enough to be happy, so we want to crave having something that isn't happening in our lives. And we believe at some level that our happiness necessarily depends on having that thing that we don't have, because now is not enough.

And then the last one is that we **avoid now**. We are so addicted to time -- and identifying ourselves with our past or hopes for the future -- that our mind is more in the past or future than it is in the here and now.

You know Eckhart Tolle describes drama as anything that pulls our minds out of the present moment. Anything that obscures the now. And whether that is conflict or fear, or feeling sorry for ourselves, or shame, or power struggles ... or whatever way it looks like. It is anything in our lives that pull ourselves away from the here and now and make us feel a disconnection to the Source of the eternal presence that is within us.

Today, we are in Week #4 of our five-week series on *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. And one of the things that's clear is that most of us are not always conscious or present to our lives; to our relationships; and particularly to ourselves and our divine connection.

Week #1; it was called "Freedom from our Minds." Week #2 was about "Realizing Pure Consciousness." Last week we looked at "Enlightened Relationships." And today we're going to look at "The Higher Good Beyond Good and Bad."

And so what is that higher good beyond good and bad? It is **ACCEPTANCE**.

Page 417 in *The Big Book* says, "Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today." Acceptance is more transforming and more healing than we realize; it is a powerful and amazing spiritual practice.

Eckhart Tolle says, "When you live in complete acceptance, it is the end of all the drama in your life." That acceptance gives us some amazing, amazing gifts. The first thing it does is it gives us a sense of peace. Because when we accept, we relax. We are more calm; we are more open. You know, acceptance helps us heal the past, which we are so attached to sometimes. Acceptance creates a level of new energy that we were using to fight against things. It frees that up for us to actually use it in a more conscious way and be more fully present and live our lives in a more engaged manner.

This morning, I want to look at three things that benefit us in terms of the practice of acceptance, which is the higher good beyond good and bad.

And the first one is called to **ALLOW THE 'IS-NESS.'** And I'll kind of explain that one a little bit. You know, I think everybody always wants good and we always want only good in our lives. We always want the positive and we only want positive.

So I ask you: Is it possible to only get good and only get positive in our lives? You know, we all think we know what good and bad is and what positive and negative is. But do we?

How many people have ever had something in your life go wrong? Really wrong? And it could be you lost a job; it could be an injury; could have been a divorce; bankruptcy; or you got relocated to a place where you knew nobody. And somehow, that wrong thing -- or "not good" thing -- turned out great and gave you blessings. And anybody ever have anything go right in their lives that seemed to go wrong? Because sometimes those things can trigger us having an awakening: some insight; can give us clarity; help us develop greater boundaries; or have a greater level of strength and focus.

And my question is: Was that event bad? Or was it good? Was it positive? Or was it negative?

There once was an old Zen farmer who every day used his horse to help work the fields. And then one day the horse ran away. And then neighbor said, "Man, that's terrible! That is terrible! It is such bad luck!"

And the farmer said, "Eh. Perhaps."

And then a couple of weeks later, the horse came back and brought 10 other horses with it. [Congregants laugh] His neighbor says, "Wow, that's wonderful! That is such good luck!"

And the farmer says, "Hmm. Perhaps."

And then the farmer's son came home, and he was trying to tame one of the horses. Fell off and broke his leg. And the neighbor said, "That's terrible! That's such bad luck!"

And the farmer says, "Perhaps."

A month later, his leg is still broken; still can't help. And the army people come to try and recruit some young bodies. But his leg is broken, so he didn't have to go serve. And the neighbor said, "That is such good luck! That is wonderful!"

And the farmer says, "Perhaps."

And the point I'm trying to make is: we in our lives tend to be very quick to want to label things as "good" and "bad." Very to label things as positive and negative.

You know, we often say things: "*How was your day?*"

"Oh, I had a bad day."

"What happened?"

"Well, I didn't get a lot of sleep last night," or, "I had a leak with my wall, and now I've got to go get it fixed," or, "I had a disagreement with the office." And we name that "bad." We name things bad and good so quickly and so easily!

Shakespeare once said, "*Nothing is, but thinking makes it so.*" And the truth is: that nothing is negative and nothing is positive. It just is. We are the ones that make it so by what we think about it. You know, there's so many ways that we sometimes just create stories around things that happen to us, but nothing is but thinking makes it so.

And what it is: it's not about pretending; it is about just allowing whatever it is to just be. You know, because that helps us move beyond our mind. It helps us move beyond resistance. It helps us move beyond the positive and negative mindset. And it helps us just get centered and be present to whatever it is that's actually going on in our lives. No extracurricular commentary or ideas around it, but just being present to exactly what is going on.

In *A Course in Miracles*, it says, "*No one who is with himself can even conceive of conflict.*" And what it is saying is that, when we have self-acceptance -- when we have made absolute peace and accept who we are -- we cannot have conflict. And there will not be drama in our lives.

Acceptance is an incredible gift we give ourselves, because it makes life easier and it makes it drama-free. It releases all that energy we spend wasting our time trying to hate or complain or dislike what is going on in our lives. And we get to actually be present and enjoy our lives more consciously.

Okay, and so now, the second thing that's powerful and very helpful with acceptance is that we get to **ENJOY THE IMPERMANENCE OF LIFE**. You know, one of the great struggles with human beings is: we have a hard time accepting change. But the truth is: while we don't like change and hate change and resist change, change is a part of life! Life is always changing, and life will always change. In fact, when you think about it, change is the renewing principle of life. Could you imagine if nothing ever changed? I mean, change renews life. It helps us renew our perspectives; helps us awaken; it helps us grow and transform in different ways.

You know, the Book of Ecclesiastes says, "*For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to harvest; a time to build up, a time to tear down; a time to weep, and a time to mourn; a time to laugh, and a time to dance.*"

Now, acceptance includes accepting the nature of life, which is impermanent. Life is always changing; nothing lasts! And so, we need to accept that whatever is before us will change. It will end. It will be different at some point. Because what we like to do is: we get so comfortable in our comfort zone that, when something starts to change, we try to cling on to it and make it stay exactly the way it was. And

we're actually hurting ourselves and robbing ourselves of new possibilities, new opportunities and new areas of growth.

When you think about it, every area of life has certain different cycles. There are different seasons that have cycles. Our sleep has cycles. We have high energy and low energy times; high creativity and low creativity times. And we have cycles of success; cycles of failure; cycles of when to hold on; and cycles of when to let go.

And again, it's important that we don't cling on and hold on to those things, because we're holding ourselves back from exploring and expanding our lives. That everything in nature has a certain cycle, and we need to be able to be willing to accept all the cycles in our lives. Because we only tend to like the growth cycles -- you know, the improvement cycles. But the truth is: it can't grow all the time! That would be harmful and uncomfortable. There has to be a part of letting go and a part of releasing to have rebirth; to have new growth and new possibilities. And so acceptance in this area is about accepting the impermanence of life: that things will always change.

I saw this interview with all these actors: Robert De Niro and Tom Hanks, who was the one who was speaking in this little clip. And they were all sharing things they wish they learned earlier. And Tom Hanks said that his was the lesson of *"This, too, shall pass."*

And he says, *"You're feeling bad; you're feeling sad; you're feeling angry, like nobody likes you? This, too, shall pass."* He said, *"You're feeling great; you're feeling on top of the world; you're feeling like you got all the answers, and everybody loves you?"* And he said, *"This, too, shall pass."* [Congregants laugh]

And the fact is: all the things in our lives shall pass, so holding on and attaching is not the greatest strategy for us having a happy and peaceful and successful life. The greatest thing to do is to accept the impermanence of life. Accept the fact that it will change.

And I think one of the things it does: it helps make this moment more precious. It helps us realize this stuff isn't going to last. We don't get to be in these bodies or in these situations or experiences. So let us enjoy and appreciate the opportunity and the experience and be fully present and engaged in them.

Life is always going to be changing, and one of the things Eckhart Tolle says is that, with that, we need to be like a big river; a deep river ... where in the bottom it is calm; it is peaceful; it is still. And on the top, there can be change. And realize that change is just a part of the experience of life. It's not the whole experience of life. And that we could say grounded and centered and present, even though life is changing.

And the more we seek a sense of stillness -- the more we quiet our mind; the more we connect with that timeless, formless, unchanging Spirit within ourselves -- the more we can stay more grounded. The more we can accept the cycles and changes of life and be fully present for them, while accepting the fact that they're not going to last forever. Not being upset or sad; that's just life! It is to actually work with life and be more centered and engage and enjoy the impermanence.

And then the last one is about **ACCEPTING AND GIVING THANKS FOR OUR DESTINY**. I saw somebody give a fabulous talk the other day and it was a very simple thing that they said. She said, "If you want to live your best life, all you got to do is two things -- only two things, and you live your best life. And they were acceptance and gratitude.

Here's a quote by Marcus Aurelius over 2,000 years ago. He said, *"Accept whatever comes to you woven in the pattern of your destiny, for what could be more aptly fit for your needs?"* And what he is saying is that whatever comes into your life is a part of your destiny. And whatever that thing is that's in your life right now, there is nothing that could be more fit to support you and help you on your destiny than that

very thing. To not just accept it and allow it, but to appreciate that it is there. And all the things in your life are there because they are there to help us. They are here to support us in our spiritual growth.

We like to think that life is against us and people are against us, conspiring against us. But it's actually the opposite. Life is conspiring for us, trying to support us and teach us and guide us; to help us grow into the fullest amazing beings that we are meant to be.

And so, it's important to not wish we were someone else or wish this was different or wish that was gone. It's actually to face and embrace it and realize, *"That is the best thing for my growth now. That is the step. That's the stepping stone to help me move towards my destiny."*

Every 10 years in this monastery, in which they all take a vow of silence, they're allowed once every 10 years to say two words. After 10 years, this guy gets his first chance and his two words are "food bad." [Congregants laugh]

Ten years later, he gets two more words, and he says, "Bed hard." [Congregants laugh]

Another decade goes by, and he looks at the head monk, and he says, "I quit." [Congregants laugh]

And the head monk says, "I'm not surprised. All you've done is complain ever since you got here." [Congregants laugh]

An elderly Buddhist monk said this: *"I have learned to offer no resistance to what is. I have learned to allow the present moment to be, and to accept the impermanent nature of all things and conditions. Therefore, I have found true peace."*

Can you imagine you offering no resistance to what's going on in your life right now? Can you imagine offering no resistance to anything that might happen to you tomorrow, or this week, or next week? Can you imagine willingly embracing whatever it is that comes before you, and knowing that it is God's gift for you: that it was chosen for you for your path. Even if it's uncomfortable; even if it's challenging, are you willing to accept it?

So, the three practices of acceptance are to allow the "is-ness" by not labeling things as good or bad or as positive or negative. Nothing is positive or negative; it just is. And then to enjoy the impermanence. To realize life is changing. It's always changing. This too shall pass. Accept the things that will pass and just be present to them while you have that opportunity. Every moment is precious, because it will not last forever. And finally, be grateful for your destiny, and know that whatever's in your life is there for your best.

What is the highest good beyond good and bad? It is the power and practice of full acceptance.

God bless you all! [Congregants applaud]