

00:10

Why is it so hard to change the direction of our civilization?

00:19

I'd like to suggest that what's missing at this point is not more facts and information or even technology. We have more than enough. What's missing is insight.

00:36

My teacher, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, has said that if we haven't yet changed our way of living, it's because the awakening isn't strong enough. We can't hope to change the world if we can't change our own way of seeing things, our consciousness. But how can we do this?

01:01

In the Zen tradition, we know that awakening doesn't happen only with the intellect. We need to engage our whole being right in the heart of the present moment. And a very simple way to do this is with the practice of mindful walking, a powerful meditation that doesn't require hard labor or even extra time.

01:32

Do you remember the first steps you took outside this morning? The feel of the ground underfoot, the fall of the light, the quality of the air. Do you remember the first tree on your way? Life is there for us, but the question is, are we there for life? Perhaps this morning we had something more important to do. Perhaps we were in a hurry. Many of us have a feeling that we are running out of time. But when we rush to do something, are we saving time or are we losing it?

02:31

There is a lot that is urgent, but in order to take the kind of radical, decisive action that our planet is calling for, we need to be fully present, grounded and alert, fearless and free. It is our way of being that has got us into our current crises, and it is our way of being that can get us out.

03:02

Mindful walking can help. We really feel the contact between our feet and the ground. And we enjoy the harmony between our breathing and our steps. With each step, we arrive into our body, into the present moment. And we become fascinated by the whole experience of walking. And for those of us who are physically unable to walk, perhaps we are in a wheelchair, we enjoy the experience of moving through space. And we open up our senses to the sky, to the trees, to the people around us, or simply to the hum of life in the city. And we have a chance to wake up to what is going on, in us and around us.

04:13

And in the Zen tradition, we also use questions to help us wake up. To help spark awakening. And today I would like to offer you three.

04:28

The first question is: Who are you? Who are you? Say you're walking to do something. Perhaps something very important. Something that may be the right thing to do but very hard. Ask yourself. Who is walking to do this? Can you see that you are, in fact, an entire lineage of parents, grandparents and ancestors? We carry all of them within us. Their qualities and their weaknesses. Their hopes, their regrets, their fears. Each one of us is in some way an ambassador of our species. And as we walk, we have a chance to activate the best of ourselves. The qualities of awakening. Endurance. Compassion. Generosity. Fearlessness and hope.

06:04

And going further, as we walk, we realize that we embody millions of years of evolution. Each one of us is nothing less than a representative of the planet. A child of the Earth. In this very moment, we are all made of Earth, sun and stars. Mountains and rivers, savannahs and rainforests. It is impossible for us to be without all these elements. And realizing this is to see with the insight of interbeing. This isn't just intellectual knowledge. But the living insight that you and I, we are much more than we think. And this is an immense source of love and strength as we take action in the here and now.

07:23

Which brings us to question number two. Where are you? Are you here? Are you now? Do you feel at home in yourself, relaxed and at ease? Or is there still some restlessness, perhaps a little agitation? We may feel distracted, preoccupied. There are those who say we are too much in the present, not planning enough for the future. But there's a difference between being alert and

awake to what is going on and being lost in our work or projects, or drowning ourselves in consuming to cover up, escape from or numb ourselves to what is actually happening. Training our body and mind to be fully present in the here and now is essential to our survival and to the future we are creating. It is in the present and only in the present that we can truly nourish our happiness and handle and take care of our pain and our suffering.

08:54

For example, in this moment, if each of us takes time to really breathe in and come back to our body, we may find tension. And right now, on an out breath, we have a chance to release that tension. This is possible right away. If we come back to ourselves in this moment and we find sadness, we have a chance to embrace it. If we find fear, anger, despair, we have a chance to accompany it, to be with it and to look deeply into what it is telling us. Our suffering contains within it the suffering of our world. The violence, the destruction, the discrimination and exploitation that is going on right now across our planet. We are doing real harm to one another and to all species. And the more we realize this, the more we awaken to this, we want to do something to help, to transform the situation. But this requires a tremendous source of energy. And where can we ever find enough energy? In the Buddhist tradition, we know that our intention, our deepest aspiration, is an immense source of energy.

10:49

Which brings us to question number three. What do you want? What do you really want? What is most important to you? This is not only about doing, this is also about being. It is possible to be firmly rooted in the present moment, and yet motivated, energized by a deep desire, a deep love to contribute something positive. And wherever we choose to make our contribution, our task is to do our best in that spot and we will have peace. Even the simplest act born from love resonates without limit.

11:55

So we're walking. And we can arrive into our life at every step. And we get to ask ourselves, Is this how I want to live my life?

12:21

Life is short, and each one of us needs to identify and nurture our deepest aspiration, rekindle it if necessary and find a community of friends and allies who share the same dream. And with the insight of interbeing, we see that we're not a small me realizing our dream, but a vast us. And we arrive at our destination in every step.

13:02

So who am I? Where am I? And what do I want? The act of asking these three questions in the heart of our daily life, as we walk, will help us to wake up. Because the fact is, if we keep going in the direction we are going, there is no doubt our civilization will end soon. Many civilizations have ended, and ours is no different. And if our awakening to this truth is not strong enough, our actions will not be strong enough to heal ourselves and to protect our Earth. We need to see the suffering, the truth, in order to get the awakening. There's a deep connection between the two. We can't help if we're numb or if we're overwhelmed. Only when we dare to feel in our body what all these facts, all this information means, will we truly awaken to the preciousness of life. And to the danger we are in. And we have the spiritual strength; we need to do this. Mindful breathing and walking can give us stability and non-fear. Being in contact with nature lifts our spirits and heals our soul. The Earth, our ancestors and our descendants, they are all here with us in this moment. Giving us clarity to see the truth and courage to take radical loving action. And with this awakening and this spiritual strength, it is possible for us to act with the urgency of today and also with the freedom of eternity.

16:00

Thank you.

16:01

(Applause)