

2006-01-30 Not Self: Finding Oneself - (3 of 5)

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SPEAKERS

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So I would like to continue this evening on the topic that I've been doing the last two weeks, which is the Buddhist idea of self and not self. And kind of explore it from different angles. And hopefully, I think also make some sense out of it. Since many people can't make any sense out of the Buddhist teachings on itself, when sometimes taught in a more philosophical way. So there's a story from the time of the Buddha's life, where the Buddha was sitting in a pleasure park in a park someplace in the grove of trees, meditating. And nearby, there came a group of aristocrats to enjoy the pleasure Park, have a picnic and repairs These young princesses and their wives came and had to stay this party and picnic and one of the princes came with a cortisone because I guess he didn't have a wife or something. And after their picnic and they're partying, whatever they did, they all took a nap. And while they were napping, the court isn't. plucked all the jewelry off their circuits and when running away with all the jewelry, and so when they, these young men and women woke up from their naps and realized that they'd been robbed, they went wandering through the pleasure Park, looking for this woman thinking she might still be there. And they came across the Buddha meditating. Do you hear Okay, trouble hearing? It's okay working. So, they came across the Buddha meditating and they asked Buddha, have you seen a woman walking by wandering body? And the Buddha said, what would you rather find? A woman or yourself? And that got their attention. And so they all sat down. And the Buddha gave teachings to these young men and women. And many of them became the Buddha's disciples, students. Happy stories, right? So what would you rather find? The perfect relationship or yourself? What would you rather find the greatest job for yourself a lot of money, the lottery or yourself, would you rather find what's important thing to do in life. So here are the Buddha's pointing to what's more important. And there's something very important about finding oneself. And so what does that take to find oneself? And I think there's many answers to that question each of you have already has your own answer. I would like to propose that one of the things that could mean is slowing down long enough to be able to find out what you feel what you think, what motivates you, what you believe, to find out what's really here, in this psychophysical being here, because I know it's very easy to be busy with life, busy with preoccupations, and not to really miss what is here not even pay attention. I don't

even know what we believe or what's happening. So to slow down enough, or sit still enough to listen very deeply. There's a bit of a story that's often told in our circles that I've talked to From the Ramayana, of Rama, Rama going through the jungle with some companions. And he hears this very faint voice calling out his name, rum, rum. And he asks his companions if they hear that voice, and no one hears it except for him. And so he goes through the jungle, listening, you know, towards towards the sound walking towards the sound. And finally it comes to this big boulder. And he hears that sound, his name rum is coming out of this Boulder. And so he takes his hands and gently places it places it on the Boulder. And at that point, the boulder breaks open or dissolves or something, and this beautiful goddess or Devo or something comes forth from that folder and she has Been somehow enchanted are casting a spell and kept frozen captive in this folder for maybe a long time. And what's very interesting for the story is her name. Her name is Elia and Elia means home. So Himalaya means the snow Home Home of the snow. So Elia home. So that's her name home. So only he could hear this very faint whisper that was calling him home. Nice. So what's your faint whisper that's calling you home. And then he had to put his hands so it kind of really be there. It Be there so you and touch it. touch something very deeply. A few days ago, I heard Jon Kabat Zinn talk about the dictionary entry in the Oxford dictionary for the word touch and I didn't look it up to find out to confirm it. But he says that its longest entry in the Oxford dictionary is longer than the entry for love. And so touch is very basic. So to touch, what does it mean to be in touch in touch with yourself? However, when we go to find out who we are, which is, I think the task of many spiritual traditions, some of the obvious answers to who we are, start dissolving, starts breaking open, as we investigate and look at some of the things that we might think oh, this is who I really am. Don't doesn't stand up under scrutiny. And so it's a very interesting process of really looking deeply and finding out Wait a minute, not this. This is not who I really am and then we look more deeply and No, that's not it either. We keep going towards something. Maybe we hear this or nay Being called. And often it's a process of shedding a lot of some people called, sometimes we'll call it false beliefs of who we are arbitrary beliefs of who we are limiting ways in which we think we are. And for some people, it becomes a bit of a mystery. Who am I? Who am I here is supposed to find out who I am, but the more I look, the more mysterious it becomes. So, that process of kind of the mystery of it all is very interesting. And I was first introduced to it not through Buddhism, but through the study of science. When I was a college student, I took various science classes like biology and botany. And I was actually blown away by my experience of studying science. And I could say having done undergraduate degree in science and a graduate degree in religious studies at Stanford of all places, I can say that my science classes were more religious than my religious studies classes. My sense of our you know, sense of the mystery and you know, something, we just really something and remember once in botany class introduction to botany, and there was we were studying the carbon, oxygen, carbon dioxide, oxygen kind of cycles. It was this big beautiful diagram on the chalkboard of how you know, the plants produce oxygen and human beings and animals and other places produce carbon dioxide and because of this big cycle goes around and around. And, and was pretty basic idea. But as I left the classroom, on the campus, there were all these beautiful trees around me and I said, They're in all these trees. And kinda almost like a religious sense of our, where the sense of who I was the boundaries of it dissolved. Because I sat there kind of contemplating that I needed the trees to produce oxygen, more than I needed my eyes more than I

needed, you know, certainly one kidney, there's a lot of things that are very intimate, important part of who I think I am. But I could easily do without them that I could do without, in these plants, they're producing oxygen. And so I was wondering, where do I begin and where do I go? And that was a sense of mystery, or that I had, where do I begin? Where do I end, if that, you know, if I'm so dependent on this external world. And then I remember also in 100 was Boston, a biology class studying mitochondria. And it's been 30 years since I studied this stuff. So and I think that the biological knowledge is in the last 30 years is probably multiplied in times in all the time before 1976. But in any case, I'm kind of my knowledge like the kind of dated. But back then theory that was most active about mitochondria was that mitochondria. Originally, were singing yourself single celled animals or beings that were distinct and independent, independent, that somehow were absorbed into a bigger cell. And that as cellular life evolved and develop, eventually become complex animals, those mitochondria multiplied together with the cells and just came along for the ride. And mitochondria are very important because they're the energy powerhouse for cells, which kind of like a battery. And here the theory was that this essential battery for every single cell of a living being is a foreign object is a foreign being, you know, you look around and you have a lot of cells in your body and, you know, every cell that you have, there's another being in there. You know, you've been possessed. You know, as somebody says, you know, that somehow has been absorbed and just kind of travels along with you. That's how it's set up. I thought that was pretty amazing. Where do I begin? Where do I end? Who am I? My name is to creatures, even human beings and mitochondria. I thought that was kind of amazing. I don't know what it does for you. But I was kind of amazed by that. Where do I begin? Where do I end? Who am I? And then if you look at you know, again, little bit this physiology of the human being and you realize that if you look inside of yourself, you mostly made up of space. And I don't know what they you know, if you compress yourself, take all the space away. You probably don't know what size would you become You know, I don't know if you've probably smaller than the period end of a sentence. probably less than that right? All the space goes away well mostly made up of space. It's just astounding how much space were made up. So, you know, here I am, right. So what's that about? space and then and then there's we made up a water, someone know what percentage we made up a water 172 she's 72 He's 80% 90 something light you know, and so made up of water, you know, big chunk of who we are as water. And this water has been a lot of I guess some of it gets created here and there as we go along. But some that I imagine it's been kind of cycling through this world for hundreds and thousands of millions of years and You know, and the water we drink today probably has gone through and been passed through the bodies in some way or other of countless beings before us. And so even the water we make up you know, so just recycled material. And then our, you know, and then besides our water then we made up of other stuff, you know, carbon, or carbon based creatures and the carbon were made up of is, you know, really recycled. You know, human beings are into recycled material that's we do we use, you know, we go out and look for material that's recycled and recycle it again. That's all it is. You know, we're the original, original, but we've made up all this recycled material stuff. Now, all this stuff, material of our life, material goods of our life that come together, because we eat and kind of happen into our life. Is that who we are, we this material body, are we just that passes through and We take it to be this is who I really am, do I find who I really am in the water 7080 90% for water we find it in the carbon we find it in the magnesium,

we find it in the potassium, we find it we find it in the carbon in the in the organic compounds that make us up, you know, where's this? Who are we that a lot of that's interchangeable. A lot of it we can do without and some of the weekend. So we don't find it necessarily there so easily. You know, find it in your you know, so obviously you've caught up, you've cut your hair off, are you more or less you're who you really are. And then there's a and then if you look more deeply besides the material being who we are. I'm astounded by some of the research being done about the brain and the nervous system and the chemicals that make We'll all go. Just this week I read a story about how the, the kind of intelligences of men and women as a generalization tend to be different depending on the presence and absence of certain hormones, especially in gestation. embryo gets kind of, you know, men get all this testosterone at an early age when you still embryo it kind of creates a certain kind of intelligence. Apparently spatial intelligence gets really strong under the influence of testosterone. And as an as a human being an adult. Apparently you can you can play with hormone levels and can change intelligence, how the mind works and the brain works. And as my wife found out, she went through for three months medically induced temporary menopause. And then two years ago, and after a few months of that, she said, these thoughts are not my thoughts. Nothing, I was pretty wise of her to see it that way. She did identify them with them. She these thoughts are not my thoughts. And so, you know, hormones, you know, fluctuate and change, the chemical levels fluctuate and change. And they have a huge impact on what we think and when we believe certain kinds of psychological, a usual original states of mind happen because not only do we have the illusion to lose the thinking, What's going on, but there seems to be chemicals involved in convincing us that they're true. You know, it's not just simply that we think they're true. There's actually these kind of chemicals that get that kind of want us to believe certain things. One of the things that I guess other who psychologists neurobiologist, have pointed out that one of the seemingly from many people, one of the common delusions of human beings, is that we think better of ourselves, and we really are now I don't know how they got that conclusions as most people I know think they're worse than they really are. But maybe the combination of that, but, but somehow there's this kind of delude ourselves, we lie to ourselves and all kinds of things about ourselves. And what's that based upon? And we start kind of digging into the physiology and the neurology of the brain, we find that there's all this kind of, you know, all these influences of biology, on how we think, and maybe even what we believe how our mind works, the intelligences are the that we have the processes, mental processes we do. So do we find ourselves in that? If you take a new hormone, and you start thinking having new kinds of thoughts? Is your thinking you just you know, well? Yes, if you take chemicals and if it takes some kind of hormones, of course, then new thoughts are not you. The new thoughts are Someone else's or something else, right? But the old thoughts, that's really who you are right? Because the old hormones, they're accurate. The ones you kind of somehow came in, you know, just have to have natural called naturally, that's who you are. So, you don't you don't have to go very far in literature, of neurobiology of psychology of sociology, many different places to begin realizing that in the modern, modern scientific world, the self as a some kind of essential self begins disappearing. And I think that modern science has much better arguments or evidence for saying there is no self, then Buddhism has they, you know, they found certain brain centers and in the mind, the brain that seems to be to be the brain centers that Even manufacturer the sense of self, this is me, this is myself, this is mine. And

if those aren't operating, then the sense of this is mine doesn't exist. One of the things that I've read in defining this kind of study of neurobiology is some some scientists will say that human beings are or are, exist in a very strong, interdependent world. We're dependent on our mothers, we're dependent on our parents, our families, our community, our society, there's a very strong level of dependence. And one of the functions of some of these hormones and brain power centers and whatever is to create a sense of individual that's very distinct and separate. And so there's this kind of play between being dependent and being independent, that seems to be built into some of the structures of the brain. Does that mean that the structures of the brain are real you The fact that the mind can create these things is constructed and created. Is it arbitrary? What is it? So I find that this in the study of science, it's it becomes kind of weirder and weirder who we are. Or it becomes more and more mystery mystery. Who are we? And what makes us tick? What makes us believe what we believe? What makes us have the feelings we have the desires we have, the impulses we have? What's going on here? Who's in charge? Are your hormones in charge? And then probably a good percentage of you have probably had times when your hormones were clearly in charge. And, and later you realize, wow, what was that about? I did things that didn't even want to do. And so are those hormones really you or who are you and all that I had the good fortune to have known. I guess now I know five generations of friends dolls. As you know, my father and my grandfather knew my great grandfather, and I know my sons also. But I know in the generations of myself going back to my great grandfather. I see there's certain personality traits that seem to be consistent. And I don't know if they're going traveling into my sons yet. But if those personality traits existed before me in this lineage, are they really who I am? Are they really who I am? Or are they, you know, what are they? Who am I? What are those things? Can I claim as being who I am? I don't know. I just find it. I find it seems kind of mysterious. Who am I I think reflection on oneself, like analysis, now analyzing myself sometimes really interesting. A few weeks ago, I participated in a meeting where I had a little bit of strong words with someone. And there was a lot of inner processing going on in the need in my decision to have these strong words for someone else. And, and because it was the unusual in that context had these strong words. I spent a lot of time afterwards reflecting what was going on there for me, and was very interesting for me to reflect because the more I reflected what was going on, the more I started unpacking, more and more what was going on in that situation. More of my understanding my views, my beliefs, my motivations, my intentions, my feelings, my the background of what's going on. Whatever the last days, the sense of the group, sense of history of the group, my my relationship, the history of the group, it just got so amazingly full, which was all going on, in my choice to have these strong words for someone. And at the time, I had no idea it was so complex. But I took the time to think about it some days, and wow, there's a lot going on here. So where am I? Who am I? Who am I? And as I think many of you know, in some spiritual traditions, a central question for the spiritual life practice question is the question Who am I? Who am I? And just ask that over and over again, it's for some people, it's very profound to ask that And the way that it's most profound for me is not in getting an answer. Although I figured it out, I spent a long, long enough for that answer that question I figured out what I found is most satisfying to me with that with the answers that come to me, or the answers when I realize I'm not this, I'm not this No, not that. I'm not that. I'm not that. I'm not that. I'm not that. So what are you? What are you not? That's an interesting question. So who are you or you can ask

who or you're not. And you are you're really not. So I saved I saved here. In front of you. And you could ask me, who are you? And I could say, Oh, I'm a Dharma teacher. Is that who I really am? It's some. It's a role that I'm playing now for all of you. And I go home. And let me tell you, if I take this role at home, my wife will say, kill, you're using that tone of voice again. So it's so Dharma Dharma, Dharma teaching deals that who I really am. So I don't see that as who I really am. And my father, my husband, and my son, said who I really am. Are they more like clothes that I wear? Sometimes are useful concepts and sometimes get in the way and they're not useful. In my in my What are Who am I really? Am I really a kind person that I really I don't know if I was kind of I had a strong words, that person I know it's I've been burdened sometimes by taking it to be a kind person when I organize so who am I? I'd rather not see myself as a kind person. Even less, even less do I want to see myself as an unkind person but I don't know I don't need to see myself that way. Choose those concepts in my mind, and my age, I'm 51 years old. That's who I am. I think more The older I get SH has any meaning to me seems kind of an empty concept in some ways Am I my gender? is gender defined who I really am. I know for some other people it is but I don't identify that strongly with gender seems to disappear plenty of times but by the situation's it seemed like something that's gonna represent some essential aspect of who I am. My my this city, ethical background. doesn't doesn't, doesn't hold me very tightly. I'm Norwegian. I was born in Norway. I don't quite identify as an American I don't quite identifies Norwegian I don't really care so much. I wish they had United Nations passports of everybody who wants to one. I'll take that quickly. Am I my accomplishments in the past? I could wear my accomplishments like a badge. My latest one, you know, that book I try to say we got published last year in a pod. I could like you can put a poster up here behind me. So you really know that I'm somehow intimately tightly connected to that, that piece of that accomplishment. So that every time you see me you get down to your floor and your bow and you just think you have a really great you know, it's really you know, I don't think I'm I don't I don't identify very much with my accomplishments. Little bit Wish me some joy but more than that who I really am I accomplishments things I've done in the past in my past experiences when I traveled to France many years ago the some of the French people I encountered said the Americans are really strange. They seem to only want to talk about what they've done I don't know if it's true or not, but that was a few people like anecdotal evidence that people like Dr. Americans like to talk about what they've done their story and I don't know when they talked about in France otherwise what else is there but you know, in my my story and my my past all the all of my past experiences, a quick you know, quickly Some of us are I can get sometimes to want to tell people of my own county but what, who I was in the past what I did in the past that Who am I really what I'm going to be in the future. I think that a lot of things that people take as who they are If you really investigate carefully and really question is this who I really am, it begins to fall away. And Buddhist spirituality and then other spiritualities, as well is very much very much involves this kind of shedding of identities of who we think we really are, which really gets in the way, or limiting us, self limiting. And I think it's pretty easy to see other people who limit themselves by how by their identity, somebody thinks, you know, oh, I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy. I couldn't do that. And, you see, you see how ridiculous it is? And how could they limit themselves so much that way? You know, you're good enough. You could do it. Don't don't don't burden yourself with that kind of limitation. It's a view of who they are. Or sometimes people put you in a category. I know sometimes spouses can be seen

sometimes through the, through the, through the perspective of the other, the other spouse, you know, you don't seem to exist at all, but it's because of who you know your spouse that they see Oh, you're so and so's husband or so and so's wife. And it feel kind of yucky to be seen only that way. You know, you know, hey, I'm here. You know, I'm not just a wife or husband, you know, I'm, you know, I'm who I am. Don't limit me, don't keep me bound by that. Or once upon a time. You had angry words with someone, it doesn't happen that often to once. And from then on, the person thinks of you as an angry person. Please, please don't you know, limit me that way. Don't Don't hold me in that box. I'm more than that. What's hardest to see. So it's easy to see when other people do it. It's easy to see when people do towards us what's most difficult to see is when we do it towards ourselves, we limit ourselves. But one of the clues that we do this is that we suffer. If we feel unhappy or feel dissatisfaction or feel pressure or feel oppressed, or feel held back or way down, all those are kind of symptoms can be symptoms of the limitation of self concept and self ideas. And the shedding of identity shedding all these things, this is who I really am kind of idea shedding. Some people will say see it as being a diminishing of the self, then less and less, I'm not really here. Other people will see it as being an expansion of a cell, because there's nothing that stands in the way there's no boundaries to who we are. It's like being in you know, in a whole series of concentric boxes and somehow you begin shedding boxes from the inside out and you get more And more and more space as you kind of shed those limiting constructs that hold us in eventually the last box gets taken gets opened and you realize there's infinite space all around you It's great. So I believe that there are times many some people are have intimations of a shift of identity or sharing of identity. For some people can be spending a lot of time in nature can do it. Some people back in the old days, used to be taking drugs, I don't know but nowadays, people don't tell me anymore, but they do. But back when I was young people took a lot of drugs. was a big shift of identity that happened with and sometimes child birth, it can be a huge shift of identity. It's very powerful shedding a lot of stuff. I've known a lot of parents now since now I'm a parent. And it's really amazing how parenting causes one to shed a lot of identity. All the damage is you don't have time for it. So there are certain certain things in life that can kind of cause that shifts, sometimes temporary shifts. When we get an intimation or intuition of something is different than the usual constricted ways in which we hold ourselves and see ourselves. And then the question is, how do I live into some more Well as Be careful what you say. So I could say it's a more expanded sense of self or unlimited sense of self worth, freed sense of self. The technically correct Buddhist thing to say, is to say something like, how do I live into freedom from the limitations of self? Freedom from the limitations of self concept? And the reason why that's technically correct, is the first ways say, How do I live into an expanded sense of self leaves you with an idea of who you are an extended, expanded sense of self. That's who I am. But the Buddhist way of looking at this as mostly negative is worrying it negatively, focusing on what's absence, freeing ourselves to just talk about the freedom from the limiting concepts and attachments to sell and what we are and what happens once we're free from these limitations. The Buddha preferred not to say is that very satisfying. So here yeah he said to these aristocrats Would you rather find the woman or yourself and then the Buddha offers a path of practice that involves the shedding of a lot of identity seeing through penetrating through the constructs. And, and, and then in the end you don't find anything to hold on to. So it's kind of like you know, false advertisement at the beginning. So, how to do how to be free from all this stuff. So people

have some information sometimes the possibility of a shift of identity or change of identity or shedding of identity and one of the ways Then to live into that is through meditation practice. And meditation practice the calming of the meditation, calming that activity of the mind that's making up self. The, the insight of meditation we actually can see through understand what's going on. Understand, see how it's constructed, how it's created, to penetrate through. To the veils of it is very, very powerful process, in what you're trying to do and meditate and deeper, deep Buddhist meditation practice, is to kind of, kind of shed the veils of selfing. enough that you get down and start seeing the very beginnings of it. What prompts it in the first place? What is the inner motivation? Where's the inner prompt for crying to create a sense of self, to hold on to a sense of self, with with attachment? what's the what's the prompt that wants to cling to self self concept and ideas? And then the idea is to see that initial early prompt and then find some way to relax that and when you relax that what happens? So, last week, if Remember last week, those of you who came, talked about the three kinds of clings that have to do with meaning, mining and myself, number that me myself in mind, that activity and the Buddha said something very interesting to a monk once. He said, there is this activity with the mind constructs. Sense of possessiveness possession, there is activity with the mind creates concepts about who I am. There is activity with a mind creates some views about who I essentially am in my essence These activities in mind go on, they're all activities of the mind. But if you look through the activity to the ground, from which that activity arises from the objects from the brain or the mind or the inner place, the mind that creates that activity, if you can see that the ground at which it arises is not self is not mine and not the self then you're freed from the activity that makes sense. So, if you understand that the the, say it may be very crudely, to say that the the, the deep in a process of the inner machine, the inner that bubbles from outer which bubbles up the idea or this is who I really am. If that inner process of bubbles up, this is who I really am. Is that interview process is seen as being not self. Then whatever thoughts that process creates, are seeing through and penetrating. So, to drop below the level of our thoughts, and what is there in our brain, our mind, in our hearts. Last thing I'll say is in Buddhism, all this, all this discussion like this is not kind of idle philosophy or, you know, cute philosophy or something. But it's really a part of the, of the pointing to the possibility of setting the heart at peace, to discover the deepest levels of peace, well being and happiness, it's possible for human being that can happen when we've shed all of the ins A series of false attachments to sell. That's kind of agitate the heart and disturb the deep inner peace that's there. How many times can I say this is the last thing I'm going to say? what I've tried to do this evening, carefully, carefully, but maybe you might not have heard what I didn't say. But what I didn't say. I guess I said nothing about that. I said, they no claim that the Buddha taught that there is no self. I didn't say that. What I said is that this is not so this is not so. This is not so. This is not all these things you can find. All these things is a question is this self? No, that's not self. This is not self. Listen. I didn't say that there is no self made interesting. So now I will stop and let that hang for the week. If you're interested in this topic some more then I'll continue with this next week. Thank you