

2008-01-21 Core Beliefs Right Attitude

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SPEAKERS

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Those of you who've been coming the last couple of Monday's know that for January I'm doing a series of talks in my attempt to introduce some of the core teachings of Buddhism kind of like an introduction to Buddhism series. And the evenings were titled core teachings, core practices, core attitudes and core realizations. Can people hear okay? Terrible. It is. So tight on that side. So, let me see what maybe kind of move this that help. So today Today, the topic is core attitudes. So, now they're going to talk about attitudes Is this better? Better? good attitude. I thought I thought of titling today Buddhism with an attitude. And it is perhaps a little bit of an odd concept or idea attitude. I haven't given it a lot of thought before. But I felt somehow some vague way somehow that the, the word, the concept of attitude captured something very important about an approach or a way of approaching Buddhism, Buddhist practice. That's so much different than the teachings or the practices. It's saying how do you approach it, or the attitude or the, with which you enter into it? And attitude. I think I'm sure that 20 years ago I would have felt uncomfortable, much more uncomfortable by this idea. There's an attitude to be had when you practice Buddhism or you engage in Buddhism. Because attitude seems something so private and so personal, that to be told that should be adjusted or have a different attitude than what we have seems a little bit, you know, maybe perhaps lacks integrity or perhaps seems too much like being told what to do or how to be as if there's some authority outside of you, it says, you know, tells you how to attitude you should have. But I think that there is very core attitudes that are encouraged when you enter into Buddhist practice. And if you understand what some of these attitudes are, then I think the whole practice and the teachings themselves and the practice of walking the path is a lot easier for lighter, less likely to suffer because of walking the path. I like to think of the Four Noble Truths which are really the heart of the Buddhist teachings. As if they really understood well, they're protection from suffering even more because you're practicing the Four Noble Truths is the truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, and the release from suffering. And if you're sensitive to those issues, suffering the cause, and the release of at the end of it. And if you look at that, from that point of view, look at how you practice how you engage in Buddhism. You'll then hopefully notice when you're suffering because of how you engage, some people strive too much. Some people are too, too high ideals and they disappoint themselves, because they don't attain quickly enough. Some people are comparing themselves to others, I'm not going fast enough. There's all kinds of ways unfortunate ways in which people suffer because of their contact with Buddhism. And in Buddhism is meant to be to help you become free of suffering. have caused you more suffering. You want to be sure to turn the Four Noble Truths to look at you, yourself, and how you're how you're handling it. And so you feel your suffering connected to it, you're striving, perhaps, and then you're clinging in relationship to it to maybe your version, your resistance to might be coming up. And then you look at the cause of that you see the resistance of the clinging or the craving, whatever it might be. And then you learn to release it, let it go so that you can hold it all lighter. And lighter doesn't mean that there's not a lot of effort and a lot of serious seriousness in doing practice just means that there's the seriousness or the fullness of the

engagement, the hardened wholeheartedness of the engagement is somehow a light feeling or it's kind of easy feeling like feeling. So in thinking about attitude, I believe that one of the fundamental attitudes That Buddhism encourages is an attitude that

of or kind of acrobatics attitude, but consideration to consider what you're doing from the point of view of whether it's harmful to yourself and others or whether it's beneficial for yourself and others. And the attitude the top two, you do Buddhist practice an attitude of being concerned or interested in the welfare of oneself and the welfare of others. And the according to the teachings of the Buddha, he offered both emphasize both self and others. And for me, that's a he said right at places he said that a wise person is someone who considers the welfare of oneself others and both. He was teaching his own son. When you sign was 70 years old. He taught him to say Things you could you could look at your actions, look what you're doing, and consider whether it's harmful or beneficial for yourself or for others. So this idea of self and other than mutuality, is very important. I call it the mutual benefits approach to, to life. There's a strand of current of teaching in the West, perhaps in some of the Western religious traditions, where there's a very sharp dichotomy, duality between self and other, that plays itself out in another duality, which is duality of altruism, and selfishness. And the idea is you're not supposed to be selfish. That's the worst thing you can do. And the best thing to do is be altruistic. You should be altruistic. There's a moral commandment to be altruistic. And so in that kind of divide, then, you know, certain behaviors are approved and certain they're not. And I've known people who've suffered under this kind of duality, who felt partly because of their religious heritage, we felt that personal benefits of any kind, including feeling joy, delight, was somehow not unspiritual he's not supposed to not have any benefit for yourself. And I've had the privilege once of telling someone who came from particular Western religious background venerable old one that it was okay to experience joy in meditation. No, you know, it was felt like kind of a privilege and also kind of a shock that I needed to say that to someone. But somehow she had gotten this message from her religion that that was not okay. And then also plays itself out for people. What's important is to kind of give yourself up selflessly. You know, to others, and somehow that selfless, giving yourself over to others. There's some kind of Maybe reward in the afterlife or something in India, not just in Buddhism, but in the Indian. There's a current very strong current in Indian religious culture, where the self and others are considered to be very interrelated, interconnected. So that if you benefit yourself, there have been benefits that that provides benefits to society to others. And if you benefit others, that brings benefit to yourself, you're looking for how the power to work together mutually. So if you become happier, then it's good for other people because that happiness spreads from you. If you're miserable and people contact you, people are going to feel depressed. So to work on yourself and become happier is beneficial for us. But if you help other people become happier, then you'll get high on that, you'll get that you'll get benefits from that. And so it isn't a concern. So there's duality structurally doesn't exist so strongly in India.

And rather, the attitude is one, that we're all in it all in it together, much more, I think, than this duality of self and others, sometimes looks at this. So now attitude and mutuality. So to live as have a spiritual life and practice life, where what we're doing is we're trying to somehow benefit both. If we're trying to work on ourselves, as we do in meditation to sense then to understand how that benefits others. And one of the things to do in Buddhism is to actually intentionally think about reflect about the benefits that you've received from practice. It's okay to do that so it can have benefits and reflect what it is and then act actively consider how that can be beneficial for others, how it might spread out to others how it might. So if you became a little bit calmer to meditation, then consider how that calmness might be supportive and helpful for others. If you're happier, then consider how that happiness can be helpful for others. So that what your own benefits don't stay with yourself, to deal with how you're benefited, and spreads out from yourself and to others. And no, and then it's also reciprocal, that the benefits the way you support other people comes back and then benefits yourself. And I like to think of that the way that

you support people support their own practice community to come and sit with a community and then you return support that community, you're also benefiting from the support that they do benefit from the from the welfare of the community. I felt that very strongly. Often, I feel I hear I feel many places I practice that, as I've made it possible for people to practice for people in practice in many many different ways. That that Then I benefit from that because I kind of place the practice. And I got good people to practice with. And I feel so lucky. So one of the fundamental attitudes in Buddhism is this idea of mutual benefit, to consider how that works. Now it's possible for people to become to practice very selfishly, and some attitude of just just for me, these other people are just a nuisance. And, and not only that, but you know, they're not very spiritually advanced. And I you know, and I, you know, so you know, I'm gonna, you know, go someplace serious here, get out of my way. And or some opposite ideas that people have sometimes that I'm the only klutz around here, the spiritual klutz. And everyone else, you know, Dave seem to be on the brink of Buddhahood. And, and so that also kind of, you know, creates this kind of divine, self and other which is not very helpful. So we're all in it together kind of mutuality, mutual benefit and mutual support system. And they certainly there are times phases in people's life where the primary thing we're doing is maybe much more self inward, much more inward, and just not so connected to others as much. They might be phases and understood this phase is useful for me. Someone who has been a gregarious extrovert to their whole life, might be really good to go off and spend a month in silence on a retreat and not talk to anyone. Someone who's been introverts all their life, and mostly holed up in their house going on another retreats in silence. Maybe it's not what's called for, maybe what they should do is you know, you know, join, join the IMC board. Or you know, or I see that I see I just got a message in the mail. Today that there is this week that the Redwood City School District needs a new board member. And they're looking for new volunteers. And I considered for a while, should I sign up for this? You know, because my son's in the Redwood City Schools and should I kind of contribute and help and, and, and I kind of thought about it for half a second. And I thought, I bet that's a lot of time. And a lot of people contacted a lot, a lot of phone calls. And I think I get enough and not you know, there wouldn't been balance in my life. So maybe one of you would like to be on the board. So, but there are different phases in people's lives. I've certainly gone through phases of my life where I've been a much more inward or much more kind of reclusive, hopefully in a healthy way reclusive and times where I've been very actively involved in very social in my work and activities that seemed to be a face to be in. So, this issue this attitude and of how is it that I can approach this

my practice my life. So, mutually beneficial is in the background of background attitude for Buddhism. Then it plays itself out in particular details. One is in the Eightfold Path, the second step is sometimes called right intention. It might not be the best translation, people tried other translations. And I think with a little bit of a stretch, we might see it as the right attitude. And that's in that description right intention right attitude. There are three attitudes which are encouraged if you want to if you want to do this practice When you say it this way, if what you want to do is this approach to the belief of suffering, both for yourself and for others. Then there are these three attitudes which are really helpful. If you are interested in freedom from suffering and liberation, you can don't have to pay any attention to these attitudes. But if you want this, these three three attitudes are really helpful. These two three approaches of how you go about your day. And the first is, the word is in English is translated English is renunciation. And renunciation is a rumor is that pronunciation is a very unpopular topic. And the rumor also is that Western Dharma teachers are reluctant to talk about pronunciation because then people will come back renunciation is meant to be quite beautiful. Concept attitude approach to our life. And perhaps the word renunciation is the wrong word. The Buddhist word, the Pali word that the Buddha used for enunciation and Nick comma as as kind of the connotation of going forth going out and going out into the wide open space. So it's kind of like you've had cabin fever. You've been cooped up all winter snows, I can't get out of the cabin with 13 of your relatives and you don't get to choose which ones. And then finally, the snow thaws, storms over and you get to go forth out into the wide open and

avoid feel good. So it's almost like almost you know, it's similar kind of the way that the Buddha talked about, we talked about leaving the dusty household life, to go forth into the wide open space. So you have to be, you don't have to jump right on that as being Oh, this is kind of the meaning of the household life. Just kind of take it to be kind of the equivalent of cabin fever, the dusty household life since most of you don't have dusty household lives, you know, doesn't relate to you. But when it's dusty, then it's a drag. So there's something about, you know, being and household in Buddhism means more than just living in a house. It means somehow being emotionally constrained, attached, stuck, caught up, under stress, in the kind of lifestyles and attitudes that lay people often have to not be caught anymore, to be free to step forward. And so the, the kind of connotation of renunciation in the Buddhist English, not the English English but British English is the word meditation emphasizes what is gained rather than what is lost. And whereas in English English pronunciation emphasizes letting go of, in Buddhist English, emphasizing what we're gaining regaining something beautiful and you're not asked in Buddhism, to renounce or let go of anything to simplify your life in any kind of way, unless you see it as an opportunity for greater well being, for greater welfare, greater happiness, greater spiritual depth, greater spiritual freedom. So, the Buddha said in one place, a wise person is there just paraphrase a wise person will give up a lesser happiness for a greater happiness. So this is it. So you if you have if you have happiness, it's fine. But if giving up Less happiness brings you a greater happiness a wise person would choose that so if you're in the greater happiness has to take into account yourself and others so you don't just you know if you're stuck

in some kind of social situation like a marriage then you can easily imagine a greater happiness beyond you know for yourself but when you think about the neutrality You know how it is for the whole system for everyone then you have a different a different analysis situation is just for yourself. What is this greater good the greater happiness here. So the so this so, when uncle ation is a very important attitude So, how can I go about my life I kind of go through this practice, and simplify like go hold things lighter, not be so attached, not cling to so many things. Be willing to soften to soften up the grip that we have on things, on people on status on recreational opportunities and finances, on praise from others, you know, to the My gift from others on success on pleasure. There's a whole a whole series of things that for some people are that motivate what motivates the most which kind of gives emphasis in their life, meaning in their life, that you can even clean around a lot of meaning. And in Buddhism, those things are not to be clung to the lightning up from them is part of the happiness. So maybe I probably just have if I did this for you recently when I talked about the Four Noble Truths, but I did it last Sunday or two Sundays ago for the children's program. I hold up a bell for them. And I ring it makes a beautiful sound. And then I hold it this way. So if you cling to the bell, it doesn't make a beautiful sound. But if you hold it lightly, you're gonna beautiful sound. So the renunciation, renunciation is in part holding things lightly. But things that are harmful things that are harming you, you want to let go entirely put them down. And so one of the things that happens as people practice mindfulness, mindfulness gets stronger and deeper to becomes a more thorough understanding of what is harmful for us what causes stress. And I think it's quite easy to live a life it's not very self reflective, and not to see the impact that our anger has impact that are busyness as impact that are, you know, all kinds of certain kinds of behavior have. And so we don't know that we're suffering, we're harming ourselves in the process. But if you stop a little bit stuff enough, and look and pay attention, start seeing the impact. And I've known plenty of people who have decided to give up their anger when they saw the impact they had on themselves. And they said, Wait a minute, I'm harming myself more than the person I'm angry with. So that's quite an analysis, right? Some people want this hostility towards the length that you're the object of your anger. And they realized that their enemy is hurting them more, that they're hurting themselves more than their enemy can ever hurt themselves or hurt them. Because enemy can ever get inside in that kind of way. So, what part of this attitude of mutual benefit is an attitude of how can we Let go How can we lighten up on those things which are causing us harm. So to consider that go to approach to life that

considers that the second attitude is an attitude of compassion. And sometimes the attitude compassion is also the word that's sometimes kind of seen as just talking about compassion also can be seen as talking about non violence, to be non harming, to be non harming and compassionate. And what a great day to talk about that. Martin Luther King Day So, the, to live a life that doesn't cause harm, to live a life that is motivated by compassion. So not only is interested in non benefiting, mutual benefit, but actually sensitive to suffering, such a way that our heart in Buddhist language the heart trembles Contact was suffering removed by our contact with the world of suffering around us. And, and in a desire and compassion is the desire that suffering to be alleviated.

Compassion is more than empathy. Because empathy is just kind of sensing the experience sharing it and sense and compassion takes one more step where there's a desire or wish for that suffering to be alleviated. So to have that that approach of being sensitive to suffering so that compassion can arise is an important aspect of this approach, a Buddhist approach. I think it's very hard to be told. You should be compassionate. I don't know if it's possible to just kind of just Okay, I'll just gear up then. But it's possible to be to slow down enough to pay attention to the suffering in this world. There's a way of reading a newspaper You won't get the past the first page, but read newspaper and allow yourself to really take in and reflect on the degree of suffering that's being described. You know, you read you know, someone or many people have died in Iraq you don't just take numbers that's interesting. And but you seem to think oh that person and that person's relatives and friends and neighbors, maybe children and you get this kind of ripple effect you know, there's there's this this concentric circles of suffering people out and in how many and how long suffering pain gonna last. The my brother in law is a was is a Dutch Jew who went through the German concentration camps. So that's was 62 years ago, since he was freed from the camps, right? 62 years. And that pain is still he's still living with it 60 to 62 years later, and I know people from generations, Civil War was General, you know, 400 years in America, in fact. So you look, I look at these read the paper, sometimes I see what's going on in Iraq and it doesn't take much to break my heart. And, and, you know, in some ways, it's terrible, to have the heartbroken. It was terrible to have these things happen. But there's something really right. If it's gonna, if it's happening, there's something really right about letting that impact your heart, take it in. I feel somebody has to be a witness of it. Somebody has to take it in fully. If people aren't taking it in, then how are we going to be responsive response football and a good way to all that? How do we let that inform our life, learn from that and move on from there. So to enter into our life with compassion, to have that approach, or at least be sensitive to its importance, to slow down and for it, to be concerned about it, to have that as a value is a part of the Buddhist attitude in this life. From that compassion then comes, it comes further comes, hopefully a greater inspiration, a greater motivation to practice stronger and to practice for others. I think that it's impossible at certain point, when people do Buddhist practice for different people to different points along the so called path of progress. at certain point, it's impossible to practice anymore, unless you're also doing it for others. And so, I think that the sense of compassion and sense of the suffering of the world it's possible to encounter it and have it snow you under But it's also possible to encounter it and feel really energized by it and say, Yes, I'm going to try to do better. I'm gonna try to do my own practice better meet my neighbors better. I'm going to try to live this life more fully in response to that. And then it gets the Buddhist attitude, to meet all that, and not feel discouraged by it. But rather than a kind of way, feel encouraged is the right word, right word but, but energized, motivated by that to make a difference. And so, renunciation and compassion, and the third is to have loving kindness metta to have goodwill. And it's different than compassion because compassion is mostly has to do with suffering, relief from suffering. goodwill is the kind of feelings we have towards people who aren't suffering even imagine that and so it kind of an approach of kindness. Can we be kind here? what's the what's the kind thing to do? or How can

I be kind associate situation? or How can I be going to be expression of goodwill here? I don't know what word works for any of you. Some of these words are might seem impressive. Some of these words might feel meaningful. But you know, goodwill, friendliness, kindness, loving kindness, love. What other synonyms like that are, they're exhausting. Kindness, anyway. I'd rather not have niceness be a synonym for kindness. That wouldn't be good. I think it sounds sounds dangerous to me. Maybe you shouldn't be nice, but you should be kind and so So, some Buddhists and Buddhist attitude that's developed, encouraged cultivated, is one of loving kindness. So it's an attitude to how you go about your day how you go through life. And it's found that cultivating loving kindness is very helpful for going along the path. It's very helpful because it creates good conditions around you. If you're kind the world tends to be tends to respond by saying return, but also it's the one of the best attitudes towards oneself. If you can be kind towards yourself friendly towards yourself, then you can. You can. It's a lot easier to develop concentration, it's a lot easier to develop your meditation, it's a lot easier to negotiate all the difficult aspects of your psyche and your psychology. might come up as you're engaged in Buddhist practice. It's been said, kind of cliché, that self knowledge is seldom good news. And if that's the case, then you need a lot of compassion and kindness to encounter the parts of yourself maybe you'd rather not encounter and that's part of the path. The idea that you're supposed to kind of move to that was great cause greater happiness doesn't mean that we get to avoid what's difficult. And part of mature spiritual life is one that knows why his ways of how to practice engage in the most difficult was actually sometimes it's actually very unpleasant to encounter. And, and I'm inspired by the examples of the civil rights movement in the 1960s and 50s. And, and how people you know, they did what was right in a way that didn't hang in there with tremendous courage. perseverance. It was very unpleasant to them. Some of them. One person, one woman I met, stood at a street corner protesting the racial discrimination in the South 1962 or 63. These white guys in a pickup truck came to pick up truck came along, jumped out of the pickup truck and beat her up. Her and the other people, their group of people protesting the next day. She went back the same same street corner stood there in protest. Same guys came jumped out of the truck era. The third day she was in the same street corner. Same guys came by. Same guy jumped out of the truck to beat her up, had his fist over her head very pouncer the look into her eyes and he said, What are you doing? And then they had a conversation and there was no more violence now That was pretty unpleasant. But there's something very powerful that allows a person to engage. That kind of strength, that kind of sense of motivation, vision, that sense of that allows person to stay present for something like that. So sometimes it works the same way, not only in our social life if we need that kind of courage and dedication, but also with our inner life. And sometimes we have a sense that for the greater good for the possibility of opening up to the greater happiness, that we need to have that kind of kind of firmness and commitment, not to give in to our own anger, own violence. So kind of things that go inside of ourselves as well, and sit there and be able to kind of deal with it, when it's quite difficult for ourselves. So, sometimes Buddhist attitude, a core Buddhist attitude, is courage, courage, courage, persistence, resolve, strong sense of resolve are going to do so I could go on and on and get A long list of further attitudes. But that's probably plenty. These are kind of core.

But I want it before we end tonight, I want to point out that

I think it's useful to consider that all these attitudes and their shadow and that Buddhist community who are trying to live by some of these values and some of these attitudes will have its shadow as well. And a shadow here What I mean is at behavior, feelings, motivations, thoughts, which tend to get unacknowledged, not looked at unexamined, because somehow they're not accepted as part of the norm, and unacceptable in the culture. And so, you know, it's, you know, in many Buddhist communities I've been in, perhaps here at IMC where attitudes of letting go of kindness, compassion, niceness, or, you know, held up as being valuable. And then, you know if people are somewhat shy to come around and show that they're grumpy, or angry, or hostile. And so that part of themselves kind of gets gets get

through, they get really quiet about it. So as a community, even if we don't know it ourselves, the community as a whole doesn't know this is present. So becomes a shadow of the community, hidden part of the community, of a culture or sometimes it becomes hidden from ourselves. And people have blinders about themselves as well. Because what they think has to be normative. And this is not, you know, wrong, in the sense that

that wrong in the sense that that there is in fact, an ideal community out there that has no shadow We should become like that. I believe that every community of people where there's a family, or neighborhood or you know, culture or society or community like ours has shadows, that just comes with territory. And so to know that and be sensitive to them, but the function of a practice, inner practice mindfulness, meditation practice, spiritual practice, I hope its function, one of its functions is to reveal the shadows. And if you have a culture without a practice, then watch out. You might come back and bite you in some way. But if you have a culture with a practice, hopefully then they kind of get the best of both they balance each other out. They they clean themselves up. So these attitudes of mutual benefit of compassion and remediation, letting go, kindness can all have the shadow renunciation You can have the shadow of letting go of things in appropriately, letting go before you're ready. Because you know, it's just good to let go. You don't want to show your friends that here that you know you are holding on clinging to things. You let people let go and appropriately, compassion and loving kindness. The shadow of that is that we might not be aware or sensitive to feelings of hostility or anger, or grumpiness or unkindness, that might be you know, judgy, judgmental ism variety of things that might be going on. Maybe there are unfortunate things, but we don't notice that we don't pay attention and they've kind of worked themselves out in other channels, kind of unfortunate ways. The shadow of this emphasis on mutual benefits might be that there's a phase of a person's life where really they need to be very private or integrated or secluded. And then somehow, that seems on Buddhist because they're supposed to be concerned with both self and others. So that's not good. And so there's always the easiest way to judge these evaluations to end up causing some difficulty. And part of the way that the practice is a protection is that one of the things we do in mindfulness practice is to pay attention to where the stress is, what is uncomfortable is, and if there's a shadow being created, if you're sensitive, you'll feel the discomfort, some things feel a little bit off. And so because you're, you're quiet enough to notice where you're off, and you look at that investigated, then you hopefully catch it. And if you catch it, you want to be really honest about it. And at least to yourself, and I hope that we can be honest together as a community as well. As we can be grumpy and be accepted for that. And if you feel unkind, I hope you don't be unkind, but if you feel unkind Help guys communities okay place to say, I'm feeling really unkind. I'm feeling really hostile. And Okay. Well, that's nice, we can practice together. And, but don't don't be hostile if you can help it, but you're allowed to feel that way. So we can practice with it and work with it. You're allowed to come here as you are, you know, you have to kind of make yourself into some kind of special Buddhist person to come time see. But just Come as you are kind of party. So, I hope that was understandable. And I've never given a talk like this and right attitude or core attitude. So hopefully, that represented the tradition well enough. And so next week, we'll do the last in the series, and we'll do the core realizations. Thank you