

2018-07-29 Don't Give Up Your Own Welfare For The Welfare of Others

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SPEAKERS

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So good morning everyone. So there's a remarkable verse in the Dhammapada at least was remarkable for me and that I spent a lot of time considering reflecting on it. And the verse goes this way Don't give up your own welfare for the sake of others welfare however great clearly know your own welfare and be intent on the highest good. So when I first saw this verse, I kind of stopped me and it really is this really right? Don't give up your own welfare for the sake of others welfare, no matter how great and I certainly had received a message through growing up in all kinds of ways of the importance of caring for other people. And the idea that not being selfish and not prioritizing oneself and certainly there must be hugely important things in the world to care for to meet to fix, that it's certainly worthy of sacrificing my own welfare for and, and that's maybe is appropriate. But this verse by the Buddha is says different thing. So, it would seem that this is kind of a selfish message. And in fact, it's in in a chapter with Mr. Potter that is titled oneself and it has some other nice verses in it. by oneself alone is evil is evil done, born of oneself produced by oneself, it grinds down those devoid of wisdom, as a diamond grinds down a gem. So in terms of you yourself responsible if you you know you Only you do evil to powerful word. You don't know other people's and other people who trick you into it or, you know, force you into it. And then the second verse is oneself indeed, is one's own protector. What other protector could there be with self control, when gains a protector hard to obtain? So, these are all messages about kind of oneself in importance of oneself and, and so it could seem like a very strong, individualistic message. It's a strong individualism here about you yourself, but the person and his Buddhism, his teachings of the Buddha, individualistic is itself a form of self preoccupation. And I don't know if it's self preoccupation, but is it just kind of as as having a very strong individualistic flavor or approach to it? And I think the answer is, Yes. No. Yes and no. Maybe it depends. And then there's another story, or story of wonderful story. I find kind of delightful that there are a group of three disciples of the Buddha, three monks who are in a small park woodland Woodland Park forest that's protected or cared for by a park keeper or someone. And they're, they're practicing living in this little woodland. And the Buddha is also wandering around, and he comes to this woodland and maybe thinks it's a place to spend the night or sit and meditate or something. And so he starts walking into it. And the park keeper says to him, you know, wait a minute, you can't go in here. There are these other disciples of the Buddha in there who are meditating and should be left alone. That part of the delight of this is that the story is that the park keeper doesn't recognize the Buddha as the Buddha.

There's a couple of stories where that happened, someone doesn't recognize the Buddha and I just delight in this because, you know, you know, there is a kind of hagiography or idealization of Buddha, where he just, you know, radiates light and kind of floats and, you know, is, you know, just, you know,

you know, you would, you know, you would recognize the Buddha mile a mile away, you know, you'd be blinded, and, and here this, you know, he doesn't even wreck it doesn't recognize him. And so it's kind of a nice story. But there's also I think, something metaphoric about this story, that there's something about not recognizing the Buddha, which does something very profound about how someone who's awake shows up. And, and there's something not to be recognized there to be seen. So, but then, he's three disciples of the Buddha monks to hear what's going on and they come out and say, oh, but barkeeper This is our teacher, please let him come in. So the Buddha comes in and the first thing he asks the his disciples is, are you getting enough food or you're comfortable here in your dwelling? And they say yes to asks about their physical situation. Yes, we're comfortable, we're getting enough food. And then he asks them How are you living together? I hope that you are all living in Concord with mutual appreciation without disputing, blending, like milk and water. Viewing each other with kindly eyes. It's a nice, beautiful kind of expression of living together in harmony and, and, and this expression limit together like milk and water. The opposite of that would be Living together like oil and water, or a little water separates milk and milk just dissolves into the water and becomes indistinguishable. And, and so and this idea that these three were living together kind of like milk and water is represented in the sutta is that the Buddha refers to all three of them by the name of one of them. So, it's a little unusual, but they kind of maybe also metaphorically, they're all in this together. And then he, they say yes, we are living. We are living in concord with mutual appreciation without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly, kindly eyes. And the Buddha says the name that Buddha uses Anuruddha but Anuruddha, how do you live this venerable sir so as to that, I think Thus, it is a gain. For me. It is a great game for me that I am living with such companions in the holy life. I maintain bodily acts of loving kindness towards those venerable ones, both openly and privately. I maintain verbal acts of loving kindness towards them both openly and privately. I maintain mental acts of loving kindness towards them both openly and privately. I consider, why should I not set aside what I wish to do, and do what these venerable ones wish to do. Then I set aside what I wish to do, and do what these venerable ones wish to do. We are different in body Fender pulsar, but one in mind. So here's an example of people living together and community in a very intimate, close way. So close that they feel like they're one in mind. And they're caring for each other and they're putting aside their own personal wishes for the welfare of the group. So is is Buddhism really a form of not individualism, but is it a form of collectivism or group ism is altruism and compassion and being being a caretaker of the wider community the important part of what Buddhism really emphasizes? And the answer is, yes. No, yes and no.

Maybe it depends. So and we find that different people enter the Dharma, enter Buddhism through different doors and perhaps two big gates that maybe its exist are some people enter it through the door of individualism, their own practice. And some people into it enter it through the door of community, being part of community and collective. And, and there are different forms of Buddhism also that specialize in these different doors. And probably it's fair to say that for the most part, this more kind of Buddhism that says developed here in the West, especially our kind of a person that Buddhism that's, you know, still remains fairly predominantly white and Protestant kind of culture acculturated kind of thing. It has a kind of individualistic flavor. I think. IMC is still here at IMC. I think even though other vipassana groups look at IMC and see oh boy there's there's a lot of community here, we have a lot of community values. And our retreat center is set up to be very community kind of orient oriented compared to other places. But still, it has that flavor. And it makes some sense because we're a meditation center. And meditation is usually done, even if it's done together in groups. You know, we, we close our eyes, and it's a lot of it's internally focused so that this center of focus and attention is here and this person. But there are other quite wonderful Buddhist groups that emphasize in community and being together community, practicing can community and very important part of my own practice has been in fact practicing in community. And a lot of the ways that I've grown in the Dharma, a lot of the

ways that I've become freer and wiser and more compassionate happened because I was practicing community and situations where it wasn't as dramatic as blending and milk and water, but were clearly putting aside my own wishes. and caring for the authors was an important part of the growth and development of myself and, and learning how not to be self self you know concerned so much and so there's different doors to go through. And but I think both doors regardless of which door we go through, it isn't like one is maybe better than the other. But But door that goes into the practice. And if we do that practice, then we find that this separation or this strong distinction between self and other the way that's I've set it up here begins to dissolve. And one of the one of the beginning beginning beginning places for that is in following the Eightfold Path. There's a somewhat famous in Buddhist circles, little story Ananda Buddha's main did main kind of attendant for many years comes to the Buddha and says, Venerable sir, I think the whole holy life the whole practice is having his half the holy life is having good spiritual friends. And the Buddha says, Don't say that it's the whole spiritual life is having good spiritual friends. And but then he goes on to put up goes on to explain that little bit. And he says, because if someone has a good spiritual friend, that person will encourage you to engage in the Eightfold Path. And this encouragement, to be on the path, the Eightfold Path is kind of the, one of the important roles of being in community or have have teachers is this is important. This is a way of living. This is what supports it all. And the Eightfold Path, as a delightful, I think are profound balance between paying attention to oneself and paying attention and caring for the community.

These two I see them as integrated in the Eightfold Path itself. Because it begins by having a right view. And that's up to you the perspective that you have. And only you can be responsible for your perspective that you live by. So it's something that's fairly individualistic that you take responsibility for it about how you show up, and how you see the world. But then the next four factors of the full path have a lot to do with We live in community, that we live in community with compassion and loving kindness, that we live in community without lying without using abusive speech, that we have kind speech, supportive speech, true speech, that we live in community without harming other people through any kind of physical harm or verbal harm or we don't take things from people we don't steal from people we don't get engage in sexual misconduct, the various ways that can harm people. And that's caring for the community around us. And it's, and it's caring for oneself. And then we also have what's called right livelihood, that we have a livelihood, a profession, we have a way of living livelihood means kind of the way in which we're supported in our life, whether you work or not, that that's your way of living. doesn't harm Other people, doesn't harm people around us or harm ourselves. And then the last three steps that a full path comes back to be very personal. It's really kind of monitoring your own mind your own heart, and caring for it. No one else can care for your quality of your mind, the quality of your heart, as well as yourself. In fact, if you depend on other people, to act just right, to behave just right to you, so that your inner life can be well and happy and free. You're really not free. You're actually kind of the dangerous if you do too much of that. And you to use dramatic Buddhist language, you become a slave or in bondage to the world around you. So taking responsibility for this mind, and this heart of ours is something that really is up to us. And, you know, maybe I should have asked for forgiveness for the example I'm going to use but it's, you know, it's like, no one else can pay for you some things you have to do for yourself. So, the idea that, you know, caring for your own mind is something only you can do for yourself. So, there is certain things which are done generally in an individualistic way, right, like being, collective being I guess, as possible.

And, and so it's appropriate to kind of have sometimes an orientation and so here is of life, to be just, you know, here for me this year, you know, that we do certain things alone, we and this caring for our own mind and hearts is something that we care for, and take care of so the last three structures stateful path, there's really about this, looking at it. And we do it in community. It's been very important, as I said, part of my life to be practicing and community. So here's a little story or a little idea about that for

over 40 years now I have regularly a lot gone to places to meditate with people. Just like all of us here today came here in order to meditate. I've been doing this you know, for 40 years. And I started off in college where I would go twice a week to a small city group Tuesdays and Thursday evenings and I would bike there on my bike and go sit for the evening and go home and I've done this, you know, but gotten Walk to places I've took my car to places I've got an airplane on an airplane to go to places to meditate, you know, in Asia, all kinds of done, you know, a lot of this going to meditate thing.

And when I was in college, one of the things I discovered was an interesting maybe irony or something that is, so I was going to meditate where the idea was to really be present for this experience, and perhaps be nonreactive to be settled, calm. And then I would jump in my bike. And I would sometimes be in a hurry, not settled, I got to get there got to get there on time. This is important, you know that that's where it's important to where I'm going, that's where I'll do this wonderful thing. You know, biking by and some point I realized, wait a minute, Gil. Why is the going there? Not the place where I begin. And so I learned very quickly, that the going to the meditation group shouldn't be the place where the exception to doing the practice shouldn't like, what's the point of not, you know, of getting stressed so you can de stress you know, it's kind of, you know, doesn't really make sense right, might as well not have gone in the first place. And, and so I learned that how I went to these places, was the practice I could take that as the practice. And so I arrived and I already felt, I used to be feel kind of amazed after a while or I came to this group and then college, and I would already feel so much concentrated and settled, because I gave myself to the biking as part of the practice. And, you know, periodically through the years This little tension between getting there quickly to the place I'm going to meditate or coming to IMC and I kind of hurry because I say, wait a minute, Gil, this is not about hurting. This is about practicing being present and no need to sacrifice my well being my welfare so that I can be here on time. Maybe that's the guy that goes against the purpose of what we're doing here. So then on yesterday I was on the supermarket shopping and I had my gathered my food I went to buy and I went to the checkout area. And there were a lot of people yesterday in the store. And so there were a lot of lines. So I did the reasonable thing is I'm hooked up and down and thought about Where's you know probably the best line, quickest line to stand and the one that has shortest line or something.

So I chose one very quickly understood that this was the slowest line but I've been standing there for a minute or two already. And, and so I could see that I had a choice. Standing there, I was very happy. I kind of kind of like in a little bit in awe at the colors and the place and the abundance of stuff and the world that was coming and going in the market and you know the turnout, the very high ceiling in this market and, and there's something for me about high ceilings and lots of space, which kind of is a I don't know what the right thing to say is but Like a mirror for the mind awareness which is open and spacious and lots of space for things and so by the time I realized it was I was in a slow line, I was quite content just just their present for the situation. So then I realized I was standing in the slow line and then I saw that I had a choice I could contract get impatient, start searching the other lines and calculating and evaluating those cashier those those checkout people and that line and how much is there a shopping bag and you know, just kind of like you know, you know, do the hunt for you know, snack quicker. Because I could think you know, well, I have important things to do. I have a list of errands, the things that I have to do at the get to play He says, and, you know, there's a lot of important things, you know. So I could add a choice of whether to give up being content and present. Or getting, you know, all preoccupied about how to do this as quickly as I can and really focus on this problem solving if you know how to get the best line. But this state of kind of being content and open and present and mind expansive that I had, to me at that point, that is felt like a great treasure. It felt like one of the best treasures that I have. It's not incidental. It's not unimportant. fact I've learned just one of the best things going what's important things going on. All kinds of levels in the present moment it was very pleasant very enjoyable, very nice. On a deep psychological level it felt it was so good not to be

involved in being preoccupied in my thoughts not be contracted, not be racing ahead. Honestly social level it felt really healthy to be there and being attentive to the community of people I was in the store with taking in the checkout clerk and the other persons in front of me in line and the other piece of what goes on around me. And it felt like a more no cos also in a more global way. I was taking you know their information I was taking in you know, they had always kind of Vegas impulse buy things you know, as you go out. But you know, I would look and see Wow, this comes some a lot of this is chocolate then. And where does chocolate come from and who grows the chocolate that This is Fairtrade chocolate. And you know, how is it that through the shopping I'm connected to this wider world? So these thoughts what goes through my mind, it felt healthy to have this sit in this open, contented present play. I was tuning into my environment and what was going on in a nice way. If I had been caught up in those thoughts, about fast other errands, what I had to do, my I would have lost that. So, I wasn't going to sacrifice my welfare sacrifice this goodness, this healthy, healthy place I was in for something else. The Buddha has a teaching, I think is one of those pithy teachings that are good to remember and, and somehow contend with and that is, nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to. To reword it. Nothing whatsoever. is worth becoming contracted by. nothing whatsoever is worth becoming agitated or worked up with. Those are powerful statements if we have a tendency to get contracted or to cling or get worked up or excited.

So, to focus on this not being contracted, not clinging, not giving up this nice state that we're in, is that selfish? Is that excessively individualistic? It can't be. Because selfishness is one of those contractions. Selfishness is one of those tightness and clinging It is one of those agitations of the mind. And you can't it's not sustainable. If we really settle back and relax and open and see what's going on. And if the direction we're going is towards Peace or to non clinging? And so the and then at state of non clinging the un-contracted place of the heart. Is it appropriate to give it up? for the welfare of others? Is it appropriate to give it up? You know, because other people needs are greater than our own. Before I answer that question directly, I'll give an analogy. And that is someone has great compassion for people who swim, especially children are learning to swim at the beach and all that. So the person decides, you know, I'm going to this summer I'm going to be a lifeguard. That seems really important to all these thousands of kids on the beach and you know, it's dangerous out there in the water and big waves and I am going to be a lifeguard. And I got to do it right away. You know, because it's important. But the person doesn't know how to swim. First, that person better learn to swim. Swimming, we learn to swim is kind of an individualistic thing. Yes, to master it for yourself. And once it's mastered as a personal skill, then the person can be a lifeguard. But don't, you know, be a lifeguard before you learn to swim, please. That's not going to be good for them or for you. So it's so this idea of so there is a kind of individualistic kind of skill or connection to something we're developing in the Dharma and it's something we want to develop first. You know, or it's or it's a differently. It's a wonderful foundation for how then we're going to live in the world and care for the world, how we're going to blend like milk and water, how we're going to look at each other and kindly eyes, how we're going to have mutual appreciation for each other. How how we know when it's appropriate to give up our own wishes for the wishes of others. And it becomes the reference point or the background or the foundation is this place of freedom and ease and non clinging. settle this this amazing treasure, the greatest wealth you can ever have in your life, the wealth that's portable, the wealth that no one can really take away from you. The wealth that only you can destroy and that is the wealth of a free heart free mind the wealth of A settled, contented, non clinging state of being. Some people hear this and they don't trust it. They feel like no, this kid, this can't be good enough. This is sort of, you know, selfish, it's about myself. And there's important things to do in the world. I have to care I have to be involved, I have to get contracted, I have to be angry, I have to be distressed. I have to you know, there's all these very strong sources, the messages in your own mind and from society. Very strong opinion, authoritative opinions that exist

in us, exist in our society, for the importance of not of of getting up on relaxed, open, settled, non clinging state.

Because it's so important to take care of what's in the world so important to respond and act and get or do whatever, that it's appropriate to get contracted, it's appropriate to cling, it's appropriate to get agitated, it's appropriate to be distressed. We should be we're supposed to be they want us to be we have to be we. And we do that and then we become like an, I think would become like a lifeguard who's forgotten how to swim. That's, you know, don't go to the beach when lifeguards forgotten how to swim. So this so you know, but what what what is possible is to really try Just this place of non clinging and the way they've learned to trust it is to learn to move into the world. Act in the world begin being in the world don't just, you know, avoid the world. And then we allow their response to the world to come from that place. And a tremendous amount of good can be done to the world tremendous action. A lot of effort and energy can go into bettering the world and responding to or taking care of our neighbors, our family and everything from this place is not like an either or. It's actually ideally it's both. And that's why the Buddha could say, don't give up your own welfare for the welfare of others, no matter how great because the greatest welfare Doesn't have to be sacrificed in caring for the welfare of others. The great you know, if you really know that if you clearly understand what what's the best for you stay close to it and that becomes the door the vehicle the means the medium by which we respond, to not respond to the needs of the world in some way or other is probably there be computer respond because there is some clinging there is some way we're closed down or shut off or not paying attention. But to come up with allow the response, our response to the world come from the heart rather than the mind to come from a non clinging place rather than a clinging Place makes it feel that there's no self here. It's not about me. Certainly, you know, it's our response. You know, it's hard to kind of take possession of it or identify with it and congratulate myself, look how great I am. Because the place I'm not claiming that there's not room for that you wouldn't recognize it's not a place where you recognize yourself in the egotistical way, or as you know, firms first place. And that's why I like to think when the Buddha came to this little woodland, and the park keeper didn't recognize the Buddha. There was nothing to recognize in the conventional way.

So don't give up your own welfare. For the welfare of others, no matter how great it's not meant to be a selfish teaching, I like to think of it, it really is the opposite. Because the greatest welfare for yourself is inseparable to the greatest welfare for all. Or to be able to connect to that or meet that in an important way. And you might not like this teaching, you might have all kinds of protests and, you know, you know, questioning it. And I think that's really good. I think this particularly teaching, don't give up your own welfare for the welfare of others, no matter how great is a wonderful little kind of portable saying, that's good to be in discussion with and to argue with them to do They twist then question and how does this work and bounce off and let it be a mirror and really kind of really look deeply in that it'd be a way of looking more more deeply into what makes you tick and operate and see yourself. So you don't have to agree but I encourage you to engage in it. So, my friends, thank you for coming.