

2020-07-05: Training in Freedom

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SPEAKERS

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Good day everyone. It's nice to be here in this way, sharing the Dharma sharing the practice and sharing maybe our care for each other. So today I want to begin by making a distinction in Buddhism, between what can be called practice and what can be called training. The word for practice bhavana can also mean cultivation, development of something. And we practice mindfulness to develop mindfulness. We practice concentration to develop concentration. We practice love to develop love. There's a lot of emphasis in traditional Buddhism to practice as a way of developing ourselves, developing capacities that are wonderful. But at some point, there's also training. And the distinction that I'm making here is that the word training I'm using to mean that we have an activity that we're doing and we're training in that activity. Or to say it maybe, we have a sense, we know something about what this life is about and then we train in that life. But we have to know what that life is about. We have to know what the activity is that's really valuable that we're focusing on here in practice. And so the practice many people have logical idea or have some sense or intuition that the Dharma practice is a good thing. And they'll engage in it and practice it and do it. And then at some point, there's a something happens, where there's a clear enough experience of a different way of being. A way of being that's maybe characterized Buddhism likes to characterize it by the language of freedom, characterized by sense of liberation or freedom. Sometimes it characterized by a feeling of profound peace. Sometimes by a profound feeling of happiness and well being. And sometimes as a clear experience of selflessness or lack of selfishness. And this then becomes a reference point for how practice and how training then goes. And they say traditionally in Buddhism and you don't take it too seriously for yourself, but that it's when a person has an experience or a feeling, personal feeling or experience of freedom, that that now they know for themselves what the training is about. And until then practices partly an act of faith, partly a good idea, or perhaps it's just a nice way of calming down or stress reduction. Nothing wrong with that. But at some point, it becomes something much more significant. And the difference between these two are quite, quite a big difference. In fact, when people come to practice it's rare that someone asked, sometimes people have an experience or freedom, experience a very profound peace that they've had in life, someplace maybe accidentally, that they do

have that reference point before they come in practice. But generally, if we don't have that, then it's hard to know what it is this experience of freedom is like, and why it's hard to have it tuned to know what it's like, is that we tend to focus on our lives in a somewhat self centered way. What's in it for me, myself and myself, me, mine and myself. We're trying to, we have an orientation, it's about my experience, my being saved, my being better, my being accessible, my being healed, my being free. And the freedom that Buddhism is pointing towards, doesn't really fit into any model of being self centered, of self centeredness. It's little bit like a caterpillar probably doesn't know it's going to become a butterfly when it forms a cocoon to be in. It can't imagine what it's going to be like maybe. But then when it comes free of the cocoon, it has wings and flies, it has this freedom it could never have imagined when it was still a caterpillar. And so in the same way, it's hard to imagine when we're still at Caterpillar, we're still kind of living in what we're taught and oriented to growing up for many of us a certain kind of self centeredness, and extreme forms of selfish life. But even people who are not selfish, but to seem kind of actually very generous and kind and supportive of others, they can still be, in some ways, maybe a healthy self centeredness and orientation from the point of view of how we define ourselves, how we see ourselves as a self, the way that we engage and assert ourselves in the world. In extreme forms, this self assertion is a self aggression, and wanting something getting something. And this is maybe an interesting distinction between the kind of freedom that Buddhism focuses on, and the kind of freedom that's often popular in in the United States. I think the day after independence day, and a day, where, you know, at a time where many people in America are insisting that they should be free to do whatever they want and not wear a mask and not have anyone tell them what to do. There's a kind of emphasis a certain kind of freedom, which at times has been important for this country and at times is a problem. And it's the freedom to do things, the freedom of unfettered activity, without the limitations in what we do, to freedom to vote, freedom to assembly, freedom to bear arms, freedom to shop, shopping, you know, we've been kind of the kind of the representative of unfettered freedom to be a consumer is to have an unlimited credit card, just be able to just, you know, have that freedom just to have all our desires met. The freedom that Buddhism talks about, is a freedom from. The freedom from attachment and clinging. The freedom from hate, the freedom from craving, from delusion, freedom from fear. That it's a freedom from all the ways that we're limited. The way we are, restrict ourselves in some way. So if you have an open hand, it feels you know, the hands been finally opened and relaxed, and the hand is open and feels good to have the hand open, but feels so good that we want to grasp it. As soon as you grasp the open hand, the open hand is lost. And so, if selfishness is like that, that there can be an ease in life, as soon as we want it or appropriate it for ourselves, that there is a contraction that goes on, we actually lose a certain kind of freedom in the assertion of self or the aggressive assertion of me and what I want or tightening up. And it's kind of like, if, if a person is fairly relaxed, they might like I said earlier, the diaphragm might be moving freely and nicely, and that's very good. But then if we get, you know, we know that the easefull breath, the breathing is very adaptable, very changeable, affected by our mood and activity. That if we get afraid, the breathing change, you can feel that contraction and tightness in the up lifting of the breathing and tends to be a lot of chest breathing, perhaps sometimes we were afraid. Anger affects our breathing. Selfishness and wanting an aggressive selfishness affects our breathing. And so the breathing no longer feels relaxed and useful. There's a contraction, a tightness a different breathing pattern with

excessive selfishness. If someone is very attentive to the effect, they'll feel how their selfishness has contracted something. It might be the chest, the breathing and might be the shoulders. It might be the jaws or it might be the eyes that are looking in a way and zeroing in or tight or very focused. Or it might be in the brain, contraction around me, myself, and mind, I have to have my way or my way or the highway or kind of like kind of a tight thing down or insistence. That all feels it's a contraction, it's a limitation. Someone who's very selfish, might have be able to assert themselves in the world and have a lot of freedom and action. But they do so at the expense of losing the freedom of their hearts and mind. But if we're not attentive to that inner life, we won't feel the impact that has. We won't feel how limiting it is, and how what a dramatic loss of freedom it is. We won't feel that we like the open hand. We won't notice that the hand has become clenched, and therefore there is no more open hand. And so as we practice, and we begin discovering more and more freedom, one of the things magical kind of magical, very special things that begins happening is there starts to be an orientation or understanding about life, which is not self centered. I like to think of it as being situation centered, where we're open and very present very attentive to everything that's here is no denial of what's here within us, around us, but it's no contraction, no tightening around it. So as mindfulness works, it's worked. It's works on us and affects us. And we started feeling or getting the feedback system of noticing the impact on how we behave, what we do, what we feel what we want, we don't want the impact of our inner dialogue and how it undermines us or limits us, the ways in which desires work or hostilities work within us. And we start feeling more and more the cost, the personal cost for that. Then, at some point, maybe we start relaxing, more deeply settling more deeply. And, and we start kind of getting going into the cocoon, having been a caterpillar cell for so long. And we don't know we can't really know how we're going to come out. And in fact, to know what the practice is about that I'm supposed to get something even idea that I'm supposed to be peaceful. It can be too much kind of idea that it's kind of goes along with the old idea of self and it's up to me and measuring yourself and how far have I gotten Am I Got them as far as the person next to me and other Buddhists that I know and all this self game goes on. At some point, there's a deeper letting go. At some point, there's some kind of falling away, a shedding that kind of more or less traditional idea of this, where there is a profound experience of letting go. While profound, I don't want to make these strong language today. There's a deep or there's enough experience of letting go. That there's a different reference point. Rather than a reference point of self and self assertion, or self denial or self protection. There is a reference point of freedom that's available. There's a recipe reference point or some kind of piece. That is maybe not so personal. Some time ago, there you To be a lot of discussion about transpersonal psychology. So this transpersonal piece or non personal piece is certainly here. But it's not so easy to associate it with this self. So the open hand, it's hard to find it if the hand has contracted. And to kind of figure out what the what the open hand is like when the hand is always contracted, you know, if we don't have any sense of what it is, when the hand is finally open, on Now I know what it's about. Now, I know I can keep my hand relaxed, and might still the habit of contracting might be there. But now that person knows, potential a possibility, maybe they didn't know before they spent their whole life contracted. And then the training, the training becomes a training to stay with an open hand or this training is too real. that, yes, you're using, again, the analogy, the diaphragm is relaxed as I breathe. And I know it's possible to be relaxed in my breathing the way I never knew

before. And now let me see if I can let that ease and relaxation spread up into the chest where it's still tight. The training is to expand that relaxation. And it's possible to do that in self centered ways. But maybe the most relaxed breathing person in the block, or it's possible just feel that there's a momentum inside at direction, the direction inside that wants to go towards greater freedom. And it's not necessarily a personal thing. It's more like this wants to work on us. This is where the direction that life wants to take. Life doesn't want to be contracted. It doesn't want to be limited. doesn't want to be Life wants to be free. But the freedom of life is not necessarily the freedom to do. from the vantage point of self, me and myself and mine. It's the freedom to live from inner freedom to live from a place of no craving, no attachments, and even a place where there's kind of no self there. No self centeredness at least. And to know what that is like, without having experienced it is kind of like the caterpillar trying to figure out what it's like to be a butterfly. Maybe it can't figure it out at all. So at some point in this practice of that we do, at some point, there's enough of an experience of this absence of self centeredness, this peacefulness this mind being at ease that we know this is possible, I had no idea that this kind of inner freedom was possible. And now that I know, this is what the practice is about, now I can train. Now I know what the training is. The training is to live with this piece of this, this freedom, the training that's the activity of of freedom, the activity of training is the activity of living from a free place without these all these inner limitations slimmer inner constrictions that we have and then how do we start expanding this place? How do we expand the peacefulness the ease the freedom to all the different parts of who we are? It's one thing to have a glimmer or have that door opened up a little bit but then What the practice then becomes a training becomes is to find out how to expand it more wider and wider and wider. It's kind of like we have a toehold in freedom and with that first toehold, then we begin to expand it outwards into all the areas of our life. So it's not a dramatic, it doesn't have to be a dramatic experience of enlightenment or something that is toehold. There are ordinary experiences in life that can give us a feeling of freedom, the feeling of peace, that is what we're training for. So a couple of days ago, my wife and I went for a hike in the mountains. And we spent a few hours next to a beautiful clear little mountain creek with boulders around it and little fish in it and, and I could just spend, you know, I could have felt like I could have spent the whole Day, just looking at the pattern of the water flowing over on the surface flowing down this creek and there was something very captivating relaxing easeful and the clear water the clear sky The clear kind of beautiful mountain stream that we were in peaceful place. That just looking at the stream my eyes were not tight or zeroed in. My mind was not tight and concerned any anything. My mind was kind of like floating like the river kind of floating on the river. very peaceful verities nothing particular no particular subject of thought that preoccupied me no preoccupation, certainly there were thoughts, but everything was very still and quiet and peaceful. Maybe some people have looking at the ocean if they're living near the ocean or laying on your back and looking at the clouds above or And it can give a feeling for a kind of a peaceful ease for place that is very meaningful, that can provide a deep satisfying feeling of contentment and ease. That is a reference point for noticing how we lose it, to noticing how we get caught up by things are preoccupied or the mind starts spinning and doing all this stuff. And then remembering that, Oh, that's a possibility. That's what that that is the place to live from. So in Buddhism, when people start doing the training, they have this reference point, this is worthwhile, this is a valuable place to come. And in fact, sometimes this reference point is so strong,

that a person realizes that to live any other way is not worthwhile. any degree of stress any degree
Have pushing or aggressive self selfing any aggression, any hostility, any craving, any lusting for
anything. It's just not worth it. There's such a huge loss. Any selfishness is not worth it. There's there's
a, what's most precious and most valuable is lost in that. That freedom, this profound sense of peace
or happiness that can come. It can't be selfish, because as soon as we're selfish, we've we've kind of
closed up the clothes, the clothes, the hand into a fist. And to feel that interface between the peace
and the tendencies to be selfish, again, is one of the great kind of challenges of practice one of the
great dances of practice because we can't just give up Self centeredness that easily, but to feel it
happening on all the emotions that come all the lawyers of the mind come and say, Well, I'm supposed
to be angry or hostile, I'm supposed to want something and what's wrong with that? What's wrong with
having you know, more things or this and that I deserve it, then all this stuff that goes on in that
meeting place, between freedom and we're not so free, where we're not so free, insists on having a
freedom to do. Not realizing that it's doing that we lose the freedom, the from craving from selfishness.
And so there starts to be this dance this meeting place. When we start training in Buddhism. We can
expect we're not going to be perfect. We're going to have all kinds of material to look at and be honest
about and to work our way through all kinds of attacks. And cleanings and self selfishness that we had
that operates. And we have this reference point now. And there starts to be a dialogue and meeting
place and influence from one to the other. And what the training is to have the influence go from
freedom into that place where we're not yet completely free to let the freedom the peace, the
happiness, the love, just begin to move into those parts of our lives where they're still not there to help
have this kind of selflessness, not self centeredness. I like not self centeredness, spread into the rest
of our life. And in the process of doing so, to learn that this non self centered place, that that's the
Genesis that can be the origin of of how we live in the world, what motivates us, what helps us take
care of the world what's hips us take care of this being that's here ourselves. There's a whole different
foundation for choosing how to live our life. That's different from the foundation of selfishness, this
foundation, it's about me myself in mind. It's all about me. It can still be about this being here, you
You're still be about this body, this heart, this mind, but we're no longer self centered. Now we can be
situation centered. We're sick. We're at the center of our personal situation. And we're aware of
everything here, including what's here in ourselves, and we know how to take care of what's in here.
What's in here is as important as any other business Hang out there any person out there. But we
start discovering that to really take care of this being well, we train it we engage in the training of
freedom, the training of non attachment, the training of non craving, non hostility, non lust, non
craving. So, we have a practice that we do, and we have a training. The practice is to cultivate these
qualities of mind that support us to cultivate concentration, cultivate mindfulness, cultivate patience,
cultivate honesty, cultivate generosity, cultivate, kindness and compassion. There's all these qualities
that we can cultivate. But then the training is to train in freedom to train and liberation. To have a
feeling for liberation. And with that feeling of liberation, begin to expand that feeling or that sense or
that experience until our life just feels free. And then we'll find that there's plenty of motivation within,
chances are, then your life will respond appropriately to what's needed within yourself and the world
around you. And the idea of living not selfishly, with living appropriately, for the welfare of all beings
everywhere. For the welfare of oneself, the welfare of others well for ourself and others, and their

welfare for the whole world, is what the Buddha was talking about. So may your practice bring you to the point where you have, you know, what the training is about what the practice is about. And that's and then as you when you really know that for yourself, then they say the Buddha said, then you become independent in the Dharma. When you have a clear enough reference point for the training clear enough for reference point for freedom, then you become independent, the Dharma because you know now for yourself what it's about. So those are my thoughts for today and on this independence weekend that we that some of us are celebrating and some of us are not the and Let's always celebrate the possibility of inner freedom. So thank you for being here. And what we've started on these Sundays now is that those of you who would like we can transition over to a different meeting a little bit is meant to be kind of a community meeting, those of you who come to Sunday morning who'd like to meet other people and who are doing this and be a little bit more in community and be part of maybe a little bit discussions maybe about the Dharma talk and what came up and maybe you want to discuss a little bit what what feeling or experience Have you had a freedom that can be a reference point for you in your life. So the idea is to transition over to a Zoom Room, and Ying Chen will be your moderator and facilitator. She was one of the teachers here at IMC and she could answer some of your questions but she can also at some point put you into breakout groups of about five people. So you can kind of meet each other and have a little discussion for about 15 minutes. The whole thing's about 30 minutes, but it kind of starts it takes a few minutes to start. So it starts in about five or 10 minutes. And I think the Zoom Room is now open and you can just go there and start chatting with Yang and then enough people have come she'll kind of start more officially. And so the link for the zoom is at the very top of this chat if you can scroll up to near the top, not the very top but maybe four or five down. It's also in the IMC calendar. So if you go on IMC website, and the bottom, there's a little calendar in the bottom left, and you click on the community meeting community discussion group that's there, you'll see the link there. There's a zoom link and you need a password. And the password is metta, m e t t a. And that'll bring you into the room and And also when I finished could get down from here and go over to the other computer. I'll post the link again at near the bottom of the, you know, on the chat so you don't have to scroll all the way at the top and if you if you go to it right away you can before it disappears up, you can click on it and then go right right there. So thank you very much