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Insight Into Suffering and the Painful

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SPEAKERS

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So the topic of dukkha. Dukkha, often translated into English as suffering. And it is, might not be the best translation. And I'll talk about a little bit the meaning or the meanings of this word. One of the reasons why I'm little bit hesitant today to use the word suffering is that some English speakers when they hear the word suffering, they think of the big suffering. Suffering is like a big deal. It's, you know, the major catastrophes, death, major illnesses, major challenges, that's what suffering is. And they don't for some people, they don't occur that often. And so, what's the relationship to daily life and all our activity. And so suffering might not be the best translation and sometimes sounds a little bit like the in Pali as the opposite is sukha. Du is usually prefix meaning bad or wrong or some off, and su is good or happy or something. And the cultivation of sukha, of well being, is the foundation for being able to really penetrate or see or have liberating insight into dukkha.

And so this morning we talked about, I tried to talk a little bit about this foundation of this is what we cultivate. We cultivate well being and cultivate happiness. And for some people, it's seems like a strange idea that you could actually cultivate and develop happiness. One of the things I emphasize is that you can also just simply begin by looking more widely into the present moment for what is good, for what is pleasant, enjoyable, maybe even inspiring. And then many times people have selective bias, that they orient around what's difficult. They orient around where the suffering is, that the stresses and difficulties are on what's wrong. And that often there's plenty of stuff that is right. And so some degree of happiness can come, just appreciating what's already here, being content with what one has.

But it's also possible to cultivate happiness in the way that the Buddhist tradition emphasizes, it begins with cultivating an ethical life. And there's something about living an ethical life, least for the Buddha. He thought that if you did that, you'd have a certain kind of happiness that in English is usually

translated as the bliss of blamelessness. At least in that part of your life, you can be happy that you didn't kill anybody today. You can be happy you didn't steal from anyone today. Happy you didn't hurt anyone with your sexuality today. Happy you didn't lie intentionally today. I'm happy that you didn't get intoxicated. And this idea that you you know that you'd be happy you didn't do these things. Most of us I think who is listening to this, probably it didn't occur to you today that you know, you don't go around killing people regularly or probably at all. And so to be happy that you don't do something that's not part of your life doesn't really seem like that should be a source of happiness. When you read the newspaper and read what goes on around the world, that you are in fact someone who's safe for others in this dramatic way of not killing, not stealing, not hurting people. This is a gift. And for the Buddha it's okay, it's appropriate to feel happy that these gross kind of ethical transgressions, you're not one of those people. That kind of Things that we're offering criticize ourselves for and berate ourselves, for, for many of us in this modern world is not for these gross ethical lapses, but often for smaller things, feelings of inadequate or feeling, unworthiness or something.

But it's possible to improve one's ethics and live a more ethical life, a life that causes less and less harm in the world. And that is expected to be a source of happiness and contentment. It's possible to learn how to be content with what one has. If what what has is the basic needs for how to live and live a life. And so not to feel like you have to always have the latest and the greatest of something and have as much as someone else. But to have a certain kind of profound contentment and ease with what one has and to use it and not feel like we need to do something else that can be cultivated.

There's a variety of kinds of happinesses that can be called debated, and one of them is the cultivation of compassion. That there's when compassion is at its most natural, when compassion occurs without a lot of extra baggage, extra difficulties, just the compassion by itself. Compassion in the presence of suffering has a certain feeling of satisfaction or ease. Dalai Lama talks about if you want to be happy, have compassion for others, care for others.

And so the cultivation of compassion, opening the heart in some way is a source of happiness caring for others, being as concerned with the welfare of others as you are in your own own welfare. It can be a source of happiness and so it's possible to cultivate this creative foundation And for the purposes of being on the path to liberation, one of the purposes of, of doing so is so that we can have insight into dukkha. Now the word dukkha in Pali, the literal meaning of it is pain, painful. It's really an adjective. And so it's means painful. And so what's often to said in English, the first noble truth, that birth is suffering. Old age is suffering, death is suffering, sickness is suffering, being separated from what you love is suffering. Being with what you don't like is suffering. The more literal translation of it is birth is painful. Old age is painful, death is painful. Sickness is painful. And you get a very different feeling if you use the adjective painful than if you use suffering in relationship to all these things, that that's to many people is more understandable. Yes, of course, birth is painful and death is painful often and sickness is painful, but that it's easier to understand there's not the whole picture. It's not a categorical kind of judgment about how bad these things are. It just means if it's painful, and it's also other things,

birth can be inspiring and source of great happiness and suffering. Sickness is not only painful, it can be other things as well. And some of them are kind of nice.

So the literal meaning of the word dukkha is painful, and it's little bit used in the Buddhist teaching as a metaphor. The idea of pain is then used to represent other forms of challenges that we have and we have that little bit in English. If you say that, you know that the you know today for Gil Fronsdal technology was painful. Technology or we say it was a pain today because there was all these buttons to push. And I'm not going to say it's suffering, but to say it was a pain, it just means that it was irritation or was just a challenge or something. And it doesn't elevate it to the heavy idea that you know that I'm suffering because of all this was just a perhaps a minor irritant. Not really. I just hope it was not for you all. And the so the idea that there's pain in this world, and different things are painful. And the task of practices had insight into it, but the kinds of insight and understanding We can have as we investigate what metaphorically is painful for us, what's difficult, distressing, challenging. Maybe that brings suffering to us.

There's a lot of different things to learn and discover. And in fact, the way that English translators translate the word dukkha into English has a lot to do with their philosophy of life, their philosophy of what they think Buddhism is about or the central purpose of what practice is. English translations are not philosophically neutral, dharmically neutral is different dharma teachings almost comes depending on the translation we had to use. So one of them is suffering, the very common and other one is that one translator uses is stress. And other translators are unsatisfactory or unreliable and in fact the three wonderful and significant translators of our Pali texts in English in our scene, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Bhikkhu Bodhi, and Analayo. They each have different translations they use or different ways of explaining understanding this word dukkha and I think each of them has a little different angle or understanding, a different philosophy or different approach that they take.

I say this so you don't take Buddhist teachings as being definitive and categorical, so much around this topic of dukkha because it's important not to do that, because it's painful to do that for sure. But also, the idea is to be have the freedom or the flexibility to begin looking at your own experience, and not to look at your own experience through the lens that has to fit into the lens of some presentation of what Buddhism is. And so mindfulness is very important part of this. Because mindfulness, it puts us in the middle of our own experience. It begins to shine a light of awareness, of knowing, of understanding, of what's actually happening here. And rather than trying to shoehorn ourselves into being, having the Buddhist experience, if anything, we're, we're trying to wake up and realize what is this experience. And how does the reference of Buddhist teachings help me understand it my own experience, so that Buddhism is more like a spotlight that helps us to see a reference point than it is something we're supposed to kind of, be in or align ourselves to, or it's supposed to explain everything who we are. So we practice mindfulness to see what's here. What we see is a little bit different, if we can see with a foundation of confidence, a foundation of certain kinds of contentment, certain kind of ease, well being happiness. And that tends to create a different lens than if what we're, if the lens

we're using is distress, irritation, anger, frustration, discouragement, you know, and seeing everything that's wrong about ourselves or the world around us. And chances are with some modicum of well being some settled sense of ease, that hopefully we're seeing more objectively, we're seeing with less filters and across the lens and we can just see, well, that's what's going on. That's what's going on. We're clearly and if what's going on is painful, to learn to see that and to come to terms with that, if what we're seeing is easeful or happy to learn to see that and to recognize that for what it is. And in the process of this, something very interesting begins to happen is that the ability to be stable, stay confident, metaphorically upright, and be able to see look at what's painful, what's difficult, which challenging, what suffering, to be able to look at what's pleasant, enjoyable, happy, joyful. The bit how we are able to look at it becomes more and more important. It's almost as if there was a certain freedom to be found in how we gaze these still and gaze upon everything kindly, be still engaged upon everything with freedom. with ease.

Now this is I think, for many people a very different approach than solving our problems, or accumulating more pleasure accumulating more happiness, holding on to things or trying to get push things away. As if the problem exists only the problem life is only measured, understood by our relation, how things relate to us. Our suffering is completely a product of the people that come into do things to us or events and how they affect us. And so we have to fix the events of the world, or happiness is only before because we've won the lottery or things in the world are just right. So we can become happy. And so when it's always up there, in a certain kind of way that we're trying to become happy or trying to avoid suffering. We are little bit then at the mercy of what happens and the world around us. And in the language of ancient Buddhism is that we're victims of the winds of the world, meaning when the weather changes, we just kind of got pushed around by the winds in new ways.

The way one of the things that we're doing a Dharma practice, to cultivating a, we're actually cultivating a stronger and stronger mind, we're just cultivating a strength, inner strength, even as kind of power to be able to be present in a confident way, in an engaged way, in a mindful way, in a focused way, and in a way that allows for there to be wisdom. Each of the five faculties becomes strong as we do this practice. And as we have developed some string, then we can kind of hold our In the face of the winds of the world, or hold our own, even in the face of the winds of our own mind.

Today I read in the sutta a little saying that goes something like this, that a practitioner has mastered, practitioners master their mind, or how I say it, I think we've worked a little bit better this way in English. A practitioner controls their own minds. They're not controlled by their mind. There is a way of becoming stable and strong and confident that no matter what the thoughts and feelings and move it motivations, we have some wisdom, some place of stability exists, where we can see it, we can respect it, but we don't have to give into it. We don't have to pick it up, we don't have to react to it.

So as practice gets stronger, our ability to see clearly what's happening becomes stronger and stronger. And at some point, there's a shift where our ability to observe or to see or to be aware or to

be present with experience becomes kind of like its own thing. That is, is felt to be independent from the circumstances we're in. And we're not yoked or tied or defined by their circumstances anymore because of the strength of this kind of mindfulness. And what's important about this, is it's possible to have dukkha, things be painful, things be a pain and not need to do anything about it. Because where what we, where we where we live, is we live in the freedom, of awareness, freedom of being, of being able to observe freedom of, of awareness that is not pushed around by or constricted by the circumstances we're in. And so it's not necessarily to we need to fix our suffering and get rid of our suffering, solve our suffering. Doing that is why sometimes to be involved in that, but it's not the only thing that we can do.

And as meditation, Vipassana practice, mindfulness practice, goes deeper and deeper. Becomes stronger and stronger is this ability to be mindful becomes stronger, it actually becomes less and less important in especially in the context of meditation, to solve our suffering to solve the things that are difficult and painful, it becomes more and more important to see it clearly see it more and more clearly. And that ability then to see as I keep saying, to see clearly, without having to solve or fix or dissolve our suffering is, is supported by having developed confidence in the practice, confidence in ourselves, confidence in mindfulness, that we have an ability to, it's worthwhile, it's appropriate to stay upright, present for what's difficult, without either giving into it, running away from it or fixing. This is a radically different way. I think that how most people relate to what's difficult and their challenges and all this. And it opens up a different kind of door and turns to the teachings I gave earlier this week, decide to cultivate and develop the capacity to be present for suffering, and be wish lists, to not be able to have a satisfying, empowered presence and have no wishes in relationship to that suffering, no desires, for or against, brings the mind to a very still and peaceful place.

That as I talked about earlier in the week, is the door to liberation, that really opened something up in the mind and the heart, that there can be a profound release and it's quite a rarity. Relation to discover that there can be a deep, deep, letting go and release of something deep inside where the problems of the world problems are problems, you know in the world don't have to be solved in the conventional ways that people are often trying to solve them. But we can become really free in a very, very deep way through this door of discovering how to be for certain moments of time, not forever, to be have the mind so peaceful and still, that there's a wish list. There's a desireless state of peace of stillness that lets things go.

So as Vipassana practice deepens, it's important to understand that we're speaking, we're beginning to leave behind the problem solving mind. The mind is trying to understand and to penetrate into the cause of suffering. That's not necessary anymore as we go deeper and deeper as we go deeper and begin having the strength of presence to be able to see and be mindful of experience that opens up the door for us to look at suffering, painfulness, distress, discouragement, all kinds of things in a clear way. And sometimes to go to keep doing this thing about just looking and looking and finding freedom that way, is not really the right thing to do the appropriate thing to do. Sometimes what's called on is to

really go in and understand the conditions, the causes of what the suffering is. And, and that's many things we can study. Sometimes it's important to become aware of the social conditions around us that are contributing to suffering we're experiencing other people are experiencing the distress that oppression, the difficulties, we live And our ability to hold ourselves in this upright, clear, powerful way, allows us to look and study what's going on in the world without succumbing to distress without succumbing to discouragement, succumbing to anger, succumbing to giving up, all kinds of things that are not really that useful. Some of the kind of more unnecessary and maybe undermining ways in which we react to the terrible things that are happening in our world. It's useful to see it as undermining. That it's me it's giving into, sometimes to a feeling of hopelessness, helplessness, it's giving into a feeling of, of hostility and blame, frustration. It's not, from a Buddhist practice point of view, you can actually feel how these stances, these approaches are not helpful. What's probably more helpful is to be able to hold your place, take your stance, and look directly and really see what's going on.

There's this expression that comes out of I think Christianity about turning the other cheek. If someone hits you, I guess you're supposed to offer them the other cheek. The there's no such idea in Buddhism. Rather, you know, I don't want to saying that's the bad teaching coming out of Christianity as a whole different context. In contrast though, I wanted to say that in Buddhism, rather than giving someone the other cheek, we turn towards them and look them right in the eye. And say you can't do that or stop you to really kind of confront what's there. And this ability to turn and look. That is what's important. Some of you might have seen in these stupas in Nepal and India, they had these big Buddha eyes, the ability to see the eye to look to be able to look deeply, is really kind of the hallmark of what Buddhism really wants to emphasize for us. And what allows us to look and look so if the sufferings out there, we're studying in the world, to look from a place that doesn't, doesn't undermine our ability to see clearly and bring forth what's best in us in relationship to it. But the same thing to look within ourselves. If there's a lot of challenges and suffering and what is it inside ourselves, that calls on us to look at it right inside us. wants our attention, what needs something from us? What is it inside of ourselves that needs to be loved and cared for and tended to, when we have distress and despair and when life is a life is painful for us. The ability, same thing, the ability to be still, and to really look and observe and be present is such a wonderful, compassionate, kind, supportive thing to do. To ask ourselves here I am struggling in my life, what is inside that needs, my care and my attention? What needs to be held in the embrace of mindfulness and attention? Is it my fear? Is it the way I feel hurt? Is it my anger? Is it my loneliness? What is it that really could use attention and here too, sometimes it's very powerful not to be in the fixed hit mode, not to look and try to solve and fix anything. Because the Dharma, this natural process of healing, resolution maturation, can often take care of many, many things. If we hold our experience we make breathing room for what's going on, to make breathing room for our fear or sadness or anger. And but a lot of breathing room, sometimes it needs a lot of time.

And this ability to be still and to observe or be present for, without being for or against, have the ability. That is a phenomenal gift. You know, as I've sometimes like to say, in my years as a Buddhist teacher,

one of the greatest sufferings greatest challenges I've seen and people are people who as a child did not were not seen, not really seen by their parents not being seen is that it is pretty much the same thing as not being loved. There's something about seeing, being seen and really seen for what who you are and how you are. That is, as a child grows up is such an important part of their development such a poor part, Porton part of feeling like they belong, and they're part of this world and they're worthy and they're cared for, that they're loved. There's something about mindfulness where we see ourselves see what's difficult inside of ourselves.

That it is a it is a kind of love. If we can learn how to see without trying to push away or always be fixing, always doing it away with just a whole can be present in a kind, supportive way. So in many ways, the path of mindfulness is not a path of fixing. It's not even often, necessarily the path of understanding the causes of our own suffering. It is a path of going in deeper to see what really needs attention here. Where do we need to hold our awareness? What do we have to hold openly and kindly? And just allow it to unfold and allow it to show itself? What inside Do we need to listen to deeply? Listen to so deeply listened so well, that we listened with a quiet mind. A mind that doesn't, you know, have all this chatter and ideas and it just listens and listens to what's in here. A sign of listening to the depths of who we are. We might along the way, discover something that Many Buddhists have discovered and that is that one of the primary places contributors to suffering has to do with how we cling grab, grasp, how we get attached to things, that also can be the same as how we push things away. And this is learning about learning, how the, the somatic experiences of clinging of grasping, learning what it does to the eyes, the eyes kind of gets squinted. Sometimes noticing what it does to the forehead or the It Gets bunched up or tight or and noticing what does in the brain. Sometimes clinging in attachment is can be felt in the kind of between the temples is a tightening of constricting or in the chest or the belly or shoulders, all these different places, some medically we're clinging exists, or how being attached and clinging and grasping is felt. In the field of awareness. There's sometimes a feeling the mind the attention, the scope of, of attention gets very narrow and gets kind of obscure and not really clear when there's a lot of clinging. Part of the value of this ability to really sense and feel and get to know experience to see and be still and just keep looking and seeing is that we get a really clear feeling for what clinging feels like in us. So we can recognize when it's there, we can recognize it when it's coming. And it can make a life a lot simpler. If we recognize the clinging and relax, then every time we cling to something, we think we have to analyze what we're clinging to, and have an argument with it and discuss whether it should or should not be clinging is it's important to hold on to what's really going on here. And why am I clinging and what happened yesterday that I'm clinging today. Those kinds of reflections are useful at times. But the simplicity of beginning to recognize whether the hand is held clenched, over the hand is open. It's that kind of simple. And that until learn to trust, non clinging, trust, not resisting trust, not grasping on and that in turn, supports the abuse. To have clear, empowered mindfulness, a clear sense of really paying powered presence and attention to what is so that it was them can operate. So we know how to take care of ourselves. We know what we need to do, and how to do it. Hopefully without the need to cling to anything. It's possible without any clinging whatsoever to look someone in the eye and say, no, we're not going to do that. I'm not going to do that.

Or it's possible to without any clinging whatsoever, to have an upwelling of love and compassion and generosity, and to act with tremendous energy in a way that looks maybe passionate to other people. To be really go out and really support Help this world. We don't need to cling, we don't need to grasp on fact, the Buddha said nothing whatsoever is worth clinging to. And to learn to have confidence, about an empowered life without clinging, is one of the great things to unfold and develop through this practice. And having some form of willingness to have well being discovering well being con, happiness. Confidence really has given us kind of part of this strength, to non clinging strength to this empowered mindfulness that's possible for us relaxed, easeful empowered mindfulness. So one of the themes of this talk that I gave today is a point which may be, I don't know how often you've heard this from a Buddhist teacher. And that is that it's not always necessary in a psychological way or in a personal way of Dharma practice, within ourselves, to always solve all the places of distress, all the painful things that go on. There are other ways and sometimes always being on the, on the road of trying to solve and fix and, and, and resolve and understand in some kind of psychological way. Sometimes that's really important to do that. And but if that's the only way we have a we're really missing a whole rich, valuable approach. To come into freedom. And that is not to solve anything, but to have the presence of mind and mindfulness that allows things to dissolve, that allows something powerful to evolve within us. And so sometimes it's a little bit like I said earlier, like a snake that gets big and strong, and sheds its skin. And I hope and I'm confident that each of you can, in fact, mature, evolve, develop, there are powerful forces, which I call Dharma forces that are within us that are capable of evolving and growing and maturing. We don't have to live a life of suffering. But allow yourself to become strong. Allow yourself to grow, make room for this strength that you're capable of to grow. evolve and develop, so that you'd have a taste and experience of awareness, which can be aware of anything at all. And at the same time be independent of what it's aware of independent meaning, not entangled, or caught with things.

So to have insight into what is painful in all the different ways that life presents itself that is painful, and to learn how to be free, in the midst of this painful world. So thank you. And I hope it wasn't too painful to listen to that. And I'll see you again here at 7:30. Thank you