

2020-09-13 The Buddha Taught Action

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SPEAKERS

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I think many of you know that here in California, in Oregon, Washington. Other places in the West here, West Coast, going up into Canada. And up in the Arctic regions, the tundra. There are fires everywhere.

There was a nun in the time of the Buddha named Upacāla. Upacāla wrote two verses I'm going to read the first one now and then the second one later. She wrote, all the world is on fire. All the world is burning. All the world is ablaze. All the world is quaking.

So that was 2500 years ago and you In California, we have COVID-19, we have economic disruption for many people. We have now we have fires and those are not directly impacted by fires we have tremendous amount of smoke that keeps many people indoors. And it's really sad to see that people who can't stay indoors. There are people who do outdoor work, farm workers and construction workers who are just continuing to work when these kinds of terrible conditions unhealthy conditions. And, but you know, this world on fire has been going on for a long time and time with the Buddha. And pachala rights to all the world is quaking. Some people are beginning to wonder if next big earthquake in California will come now as well just to kind of, you know, just add to the complication of it all. And to think that way maybe it's also comes from fear. And from weariness from just some people are exhausted by the all these months of COVID-19. And now all these weeks of fires and it just seems to go on and on. Feels like a long winter. And meditation can renew us. Meditation is kind of it the best is allow us to start fresh every time we come out of meditation, that we all the traces all the dust and suit that's built up in our hearts and minds. How do we go through the day and are worried or stressed or tense or preoccupied, somehow has a chance to clear out to some degree and it's a wonderful thing to be able to start fresh. Started in a sense in a certain kind of way, start over, maybe not without, not to starting over with new responsibilities they carry with us. But the ability to really step out of meditation with fresh eyes and it's like you've gotten a good night's sleep and you're fresh and do and so that the continuity of the weariness that weighs us down, maybe doesn't build up so much because we have this way of refreshing ourselves and it was like some people do, if they exercise or so other things people do that really allows him to refresh to kind of really shed everything so it doesn't build and build in that last meditation and talking in the focusing on relaxation, some people might feel that or believe that that's a pretty elementary practice in meditation just to relax that meditation. Certainly Should it be

much more profound or have more higher, loftier aspirations or purposes or, or insights or experiences than just relaxing? And maybe that's true. But as with a lot of things in Buddhism, it's very important not to overlook the foundation and we want to have a foundation in place from which we can go to be developed further. And, and so relaxation is one of them, the Buddha taught relaxation. In the English translations of his teachings, they use a more, maybe a more sophisticated term for it. The English translations, talk about tranquility and tranquilizing the body and mind and but this comes to the same thing as relaxation, calming.

But then, you know, we were here we are in this heartbreaking time of so much distress and now with the fires, and it's clear that there's climate change is escalating much faster than that, than the climate scientists had expected. And that's kind of the big surprise. This was predicted in the predictive models that climate scientists had. And some of them are saying it just came sooner than they expected. So how do we manage with all this? How do we manage with this beyond just becoming relaxed? How do we understand it to make sense of it and some people are looking for understanding some people are praying that someone or something will make a difference in help. Some people are just kind of swept up in their fear and their anger and despair. And, and, you know, some people don't quite know what to do and they read the news and read the news and you getting more and more upset just reading the news. If we go back to the teachings of the Buddha for some guidance on this, I think it's very important to understand that the Buddha promotes action. He even though we many of us associate merit Buddhism with meditation, when you read the texts of the teachings of the Buddha, you get a strong sense that what he's promoting is action to be engaged. And, and the word for action is kamma, karma, which has different meanings. But over and over again, the text it simply means action and he's promoting action. And he, in fact, he calls himself a kammavadian, kammavadian, which means a teacher of action.

And he said some interesting things about action. As many of you know, because I quoted so often the Buddha defines a wise person as someone who benefits oneself benefits others benefit self and others in benefits the whole world. He also said that wisdom shines through action, or maybe a little bit more precise shot, wisdom shines through enactment Bhikkhu Bodhi translates it as wisdom shines through its manifestation, its enactment. So you know Buddhism is often associated with wisdom, but we don't want it wisdom is meant for us to act differently to act in a new way, in a beneficial way. And in the Dharma is not for people who are inactive. However, Sometimes in, in certain Buddhist circles and some meditators get the idea that the goal of Buddhism is to be inactive. And not to do and not to be engaged and somehow just be back in the 1960s there was a cartoon character called Mr. Natural you probably look them up someplace. It was a wonderful cartoon, Mr. Natural, just sitting in there meditating in the desert for decades, centuries, I guess he's sitting there while whole cities were built around him and then decayed and he just sitting there meditating, doing nothing except meditating.

And so this poem by Upacāla, is one of the kind of teachings that maybe could get the idea that maybe inaction is the is somehow the goal and here's the second half, first half, I read already. All the world is on fire, all the world is burning. All the world is ablaze, all the world is quaking. That which does not quake or blaze, that which to which worldlings do not resort, where there is no place for evil. That is where my mind delights. So where the mind doesn't quake or blaze, where the mind has no fires of greed, hate and delusion, it's doesn't quake in fear. Can be interpret a little bit as a place with in the

mind where you get quiet and still and safe and centered. And worldlings don't resort there but meditators do. They take up refuge there, they rest in there, they live there. That is where my mind delights says Upacāla.

So here the focus is the world's blazing out there. And I'm taking I'm resting inside, in a place where the mind is still and quiet. So that lends itself to the idea that that's what we're supposed to do just kind of be Mr. Natural Mrs. Natural to sit quietly and let the world do what it what it does. And there's a powerful story that the tradition tells are actually in the first person, the Buddha tell set of the Buddha's awakening. right afterwards, the Buddha was awakened. And the next thing he did was he reflected like this. He had this thought. It's hard to see the truth. It's hard to see the truth of that I discovered with my awakening. It's hard to to experience the stilling of Mind, the relinquishing of attachments, the destruction of craving, and Nibbana Nirvana. If I were to teach the Dhamma if I was to teach the teachings, others would not understand me. And that would be worrying and troublesome for me. And then he had it says here, there upon there came upon me spontaneously these verses had never heard before. Enough Enough with teaching the Dumbo the David hi found found hard to reach, where it will never be perceived by those who live in less than hate. Those died in lust, wrapped in crave in darkness will never discern this dumb which goes against the world. The stream such Deep and difficult to see. Considering this, my mind inclined to inaction rather than to teaching the Dharma. So the first according to this text, the one of the first things that occurred to the Buddha after he himself experienced awakening was to be to towards inactivity. It's too difficult to teach people they won't learn, might as well just be Mr. Natural and sit there and just practice. And, luckily for us, or at least for the story, the it's probably a little bit of a myth, the story because you'll see what happens next, then the great God Brahma, kind of the ruling god of the chief god of the heavens, now recognize what was happening in the Buddhist mind. And he thought to himself, the world will be lost the world perish, since the mind of the Buddha inclines to inaction rather than to teaching the Dhamma. So then he went down to India and, and talked to the Buddha and, and asked the Buddha, please teach. And in his request of the herring that request, the Buddha then surveyed the world and decided there were indeed people with little dust in their eyes, people who could be taught, and then he started teaching and those teachings that have come down to us now. So here we have this idea of inaction, being somehow easy to get confused or easily get pulled into as a result of the kind of the deep peace and subtleness of meditation is something that I think that is part of the territory part of the danger of this meditation tradition itself and we find people who can succumb to that. But what we see over and over again in the suit does, just like I'm saying that earlier that relaxation is a basis for everything. For the Buddha, his teachings over and over again, the basis of his teaching turns out to be action and a particular emphasis, to have to engage in, in deeds that are good in good deeds and ethical deeds, and avoid what's unethical. And that's foundational. And to do that, in actions, in speech, in in body, in speech and in mind. And he repeats this over and over again in different ways that we should do this.

And someone who is well practiced monk is someone who avoids doing wrong conduct, harmful conduct in body speech in mind, but rather, is engaged in beneficial conduct in body speech in mind. And it's, I can't underscore how often the Buddha one way or the other, will engage in conversation people. He lays this down as the foundation for everything else that follows. When he engages in inter religious debates that he did with that time. He doesn't fall back on philosophy or some ultimate nature of consciousness or ultimate nature of the cosmos or some great metaphysical principle or even

experience. He comes back always engaged in these debates. Not always, but many times. emphasizing that for him, that what's important is a person not killing, not stealing. not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, not having involved in divisive speech, not involved in harsh speech, not involved in pointless speech, that those are important things. And any, any he asks, you know is your does your religion have that or the your teachers live that way. And sometimes when he's talking to other practitioners and say, Well, my teacher is not quite that, and then that kind of enough for the Buddha to win the debate because that's the foundation being ethical. And then you build on that, then there is then there is, you know, then there's the development of practice. And this emphasis on action includes actions of the mind. And from the Buddhist point of view, meditation is a form of action. That meditation is the activity of the mind in a particular way. So in the last meditation, if you did it with us, then the emphasis was in relaxation. That's an activity of the mind to relax to relax. If you do loving kindness, that's an activity of the mind. You're bringing love to yourself. If you're just practicing, just being mindful and open awareness to what is that also is a kind of activity of the mind. And it might seem like a very simple activity of the mind, it might seem like the activities just to get out of the way and let awareness just operate. But even to get out of the way to let it operate is an activity of the mind. That that there's always action. That part of the reason people are reluctant to pick up even even read that the teachings of the Buddha and see how much you emphasize action is that action can be tiring. action can be a lot of people have associations with action that comes with tension and striving and pushing And trying to make things different than what they are. But the action that Buddha's going towards is in meditation is action allows us to be peaceful. And being peaceful, is not so that we can just have our own inner peace. The Buddha talked about how, when we are peaceful in our faculties, and peaceful in our mind, then our actions can be peaceful. If we have ease within, then there's ease in how we act and how we what we do. And in this kind of wonderful task of learning how to act and how to be free, how to act free how to act peacefully, how to act without stress, how to act without tension is kind of at the heart of what the Buddhist teaching. So this action, but also its actions heat pumps, voted actions that were ethical would in my an English word called ethical. And then we have it. Here's a quote that makes this clear. The Buddha, fully enlightened one, relying on the Dhamma, honoring respecting venerating the Dhamma, taking the Dhamma as a standard banner and authority. So the Buddha really depends on the Dhamma.

So the Dhamma can be the truth. But one way to understand that dumb is sometimes translated into English as the law. But I think is a good argument could be made that Dhamma can also mean justice, which just occasionally is translated as righteous. But I think in our modern climate, I think justice works quite well. Relying on justice, honoring and respecting And venerating justice, taking the justice as a standard banner and authority, providing just protection, shelter and guard in regard to verbal action, saying such verbal action should be cultivated, such verbal action should not be cultivated. So, hear this great kind of this great to hyperbolic kind of beginning of this little teaching is a little bit more hyperbolic, again getting a house grand this kind of paragraph is all building up to a simple statement that a parent could tell a child you should cultivate use develop certain kinds of speech and should avoid other kinds of speech. For the Buddha it was to cultivate speech which was beneficial, ethically beneficial, to avoid that, which is harmful, unethical speech, he said Same thing exactly same paragraph is said around verbal, physical contact, actions, what you do with your body, and also with the mind. So here we see that the Buddha decided to teach. And one of those strong things he's taught was action, that certain kinds of way of acting in the world. Here's another teaching that talking about

action and again also this one also kind of has a little bit of a grand beginning to get our attention perhaps possessing a well, a big coup, a monastic is that acting for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, for the good welfare and happiness of many people of devas and human beings by encouraging them to be concordant to be in harmony. encourages them in concordant or harmonious bodily action, the word is action concordant and verbal action concordant in mental actions, possessing these three things, a well known monastic is acting for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people for the good the welfare and happiness of many people of devas and human beings. So here again, we find explicit encouragement to to not only be act ethically, but also to encourage others to be ethical. And this I think, this ethical action, I think, in the climate of our society in the United States today, is like relaxation. It's like foundational. We should. It seems like in this country there are huge arguments and the divisiveness in the country, you would think that they could be they could somehow find their way if everyone can decide to be ethical to not cause harm. But there's a whole, there's an ethical challenge this country is facing and all kinds of directions and all sides. But this idea that Buddhists would act in the world is also provided with this teachings of the Buddha. And it could be for other ethical behavior, but I choose the one for speech, because that's such a big one in our society.

A practitioner reflects thinks this way, if someone were to damage my welfare, with false speech, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to me. Now if I were to damage the wealth, For another with false speech that would not be pleasing an agreeable to the other either. What is displeasing and disagreeable to me, is displeasing and disagreeable to the other two? How can I inflict upon another, what is displeasing and disagreeable to me, have been reflected Thus, the person abstains from false speech and exhorts others to abstain from false speech, and speaks in praise of abstinence from false speech. So here's a Buddhist encouraging not just being ethical oneself, but to speak up, to speak up to act speaking up for Right Speech and avoidance of false speech. And the rest of this teaching that speak up for the benefits the praising, not taking, not stealing or taking from What is not given? and avoiding doing so not killing and avoiding killing. So the action so the Buddhist teachings is phenomenally centered on action. It's surprising how much and so if you, you are despairing or afraid or angry, upset if you find yourself complaining a lot. If you find yourself just drawn to the news, and just despair and feel ground down by the, by the ongoing onslaught of challenges his world has. The Buddhist proposal for you is that you should do something you should act. modern psychology says that people will do even small acts are much less likely to be depressed to despair, be discouraged. Do something action At the heart of Buddhist practice, and act in ways that are beneficial. Do what you can even small acts. It can be small acts, you know, make a small financial donations to people who are struggling with a fire. Maybe for the Red Cross, maybe it's bringing a meal to someone who's sheltered in place or someone who cannot go out shopping with COVID-19 go shopping for them. It could be that you simply make sure your street is a bit cleaner and picking up the trash. It could be that you send a nice email to someone or a letter talking about how you appreciate them. People like people are uplifted by apprec being appreciated. And perhaps you've talked more often about what you enjoy and what's what's beautiful and what's pleasant and nice that's happening. There's something very powerful for the heart and the mind for ourselves and If we just talk about things which are really we really appreciate and enjoy. And, and if you feel like you're not doing that enough, maybe try it sometimes and just speak kindly speak with appreciation. And, and, and see what that does to you. Don't sugarcoat things don't pretend things are better than they really are. Don't avoid the difficulties of the

world, but don't get mired in those difficulties. find some way to empower in live and engage your heart. So that it is it is more uplifted or inspired. Because it's the uplifted inspired heart that will know how to live ethically. It's the uplifted inspired gladdened heart. That isn't a better place to act in the world beneficially, and to act in the world in ways Which are not stressful and not under the weight of obligation and duty and responsibility and all this stuff. So, we live in a very challenging times. And I believe what the Buddha would say, in the fact the foundation is do something. Don't, don't just sit, don't complain, don't despair, do something if you're sad about the elections, get involved in in getting out the vote if you're concerned about climate change.

Develop the network of friends who are lobbying Sacramento or Washington DC or maybe your do cleanup someplace, even in your neighborhood. Support, an organization that does supports, you know, the environment. There's all kinds of things you can do. And, and with this regard, I went out I was wanting to tell you a little bit about wonderful thing that happened last week for me. And that is, since I was probably a freshman in college, I've had a strong interest in, in in the environment and Environmental Action, ecology. And that was actually slated to go and become a soil scientist because I wanted to do soil conservation in places where there was a lot of erosion in the world. Before I got involved in Buddhism, and but all these years I wanted to do something related to the environment. And because I've been involved for many years with training Buddhist chaplains for hospitals and prisons and hospices a little over a year ago, I started with Susie Harrington and Kirsten Rudestam, a Buddhist eco chaplaincy program to train people to be equal chaplains environmental chaplains. And we graduated the first crop last last week and a year long 15 month long training. And I just you know, so it was a little bit my action to try to bring people into the world. And what was so inspiring was to watch these people went through the trainings from 22 people, mature, grow or kind of individually become more empowered to have projects that do activities to try to make a difference in this world, in relationship to the non human world and natural world. Environmental world. And, and, and why I say this is that the experience of being with them because they were actually doing something for the environment. These were people who didn't feel like they were crushed or despairing or angry so much about what was going on. They felt empowered, they're actually doing something and I've done I know other people have have other people Who are not don't know what to do and not finding themselves, who some of them are longtime Buddhist practitioners, who, because they don't have an avenue to act or feel they should act or can act around this. They're feeling dispiriting disappearing, what's happening now. Some of the inspired Buddhists that I know are these days, who are not discouraged to, you know, are disappearing or crushed by it at all, are the ones who are actively involved with getting out the vote. And just today, I talked to jack kornfield. And, and he is completely inspired these days and working hard to get get out to vote movements and encouraging other people to do it. It's quite something. So the point being, that there is action.

And it's at the point, the primary Dharma point I wanted to make today is is at the foundation of the Buddhist teachings is the important of action. And if you remember that, that I think will probably give you lots to think about and reflect on and wonder what's going on here and how does that work? And how does that work with meditation practice? And I still so thank you. I see a couple of the chats here. Yeah, the someone mentioned that didn't see the talk listed. Somehow the calendar listing for the Sunday morning disappeared last night. And I posted it just a little bit before our our time, so probably many people didn't see it. And then someone asks about this eco chaplaincy. We're starting a new,

whole new training for it. January, and you find information about it at the Sati center for Buddhist studies.

And so, thank you very much and may your actions be beneficial for yourself and for the world.