So again my warm greetings to all of you. I'm happy to be back here this Monday, this 7am sitting with you all and to share the Dharma and the practice with you.

The topic for this week is going to be Nibbāna. The word Nibbāna is the Pāli language way of saying Nirvāna, which is the Sanskrit wording of it. And this is a topic which is pretty central to the teachings of the Buddha. It's one of the definitions or one of the stated kind of goals of the practice is to attain Nibbāna. But we have to kind of look at this carefully, what this means, and this experience is like. First of all, the idea of the word Nibbāna is a metaphor. It later, after the time of the Buddha perhaps, becomes more of a technical word. But the Buddha started using the word as a metaphor, and with a variety of different meanings. So we'll look at the meanings of this word. And this five days we'll do it together, I think of a little bit like an unfolding, a path that unfolds day by day, is hopefully we go kind of build on the teachings each day to go further on this topic.

It's a topic that I think I avoided for many years to teach as a teacher, I had a somewhat ambivalent relationship to using the word Nibbāna or Nirvāna. Partly because it's a can be a confusing topic, it lends itself to some kind of idea of a transcendent goal that's kind of apart from daily life. And often there can be a lot of conceit about who has or doesn't have Nirvāna, Nibbāna, the experience of it. And a lot of confusion, a lot of comparative thinking, a lot of striving, that goes into it. And so it just seemed always better not to talk about it. But in recent years, it seems to kind of changed my mind a little bit and see it as we don't shouldn't shy away from it. That it's important part of tradition, it's important part of our potential, and maybe we can talk about in a way that that prevents some of the downsides of talking about it.

And so one of the kind of tensions in this history I had with this word Nibbanna was there were two kind of general ways of emphasizing the practice. Some people, some of my teachers would emphasize
the practice was just in some way or other was just about being fully present for this experience, without any concern for a goal. And if we start talking about enlightenment, or Nibbāna, Nirvana, then we start talking about something which is not here, but rather somewhere else in the future, some potential and if we're leaning into the future, we really miss the experience here. And the point was to really just be present for this experience in a full, full way, in a very deeply unconditional accepting way, just this experience. And then I had other teachers who emphasize that there is this something very different than just being here, that is Nibbāna, is this liberation, this deep release this freedom that's possible. And sometimes it was kind of presented as kind of an experience you can have.

And so how do these two different kind of emphasis is work together? And one way is that with a little saying, that the fastest way, or the maybe the most effective way of getting from A to B, is to be fully in A. So yes, there is a goal. But the way to attain that goal of Nibbanna is not to be leaning into the future, not to be striving, but really to settle in and unconditional acceptance of this moment, just as it is comfortable, uncomfortable, pleasant, unpleasant, wonderful gardens or barren wildernesses. It doesn't really matter. The matter is the practice, which allows you to settle into how it is now. This is what it is, let's be mindful and present here.

Sometimes however, this mindfulness, just being mindful to the present and the no goal leaves some people with not enough kind of incentive or imagination or direction for how fully it's possible to be unconditionally, here in a full way. And so it's talking about Nibbāna is that the fullest potential of what it's like to be fully here and present. And I'd like to give you kind of another example metaphor kind of, from my own experience. Maybe about eight years ago, when my son was maybe 14 or so 13 or 14, we were on vacation and I did something which I've really never done before in my life. Because he was kind of interested in this, we went to a golf course to go golfing. And we, you know, rented the whole golf club thing and golf balls and walked out on the greens and we did some kind of practice putting, shooting before we got on to the proper golf course. And then I was going to go first at the first tee, I think it's called. The first place where you begin towards the first hole, see how very little about golf. And I put that tee into the ground and put the little white golf ball on top of it and chose this, you know, the club that you use for hitting the first good whack, that's supposed to send the ball far. And I got myself all kind of settled up and ready to swing and I can really, you know, this was a time to be really present and mindful and I was, you know, I was really there right there, present and it felt nice. It felt good to be engaged, good to be in that posture the best I could, and be out under the blue sky on this green grass near a forest nearby. And to really just be there for that experience, it was quite lovely. And to be involved in the task of really focusing on the activity of swinging, swinging and hitting the ball. And so I was really kind of present and concentrated in right there for the experience was great. And I swung that club and whoosh, I missed the ball completely. It was still sitting peacefully on the tee. Okay, so I got myself all settled up again and ready to do it again. And again, I just missed it completely. I don't know how many times I missed it. But eventually I hit it. And the first time I hit it, I could feel the good sound of a whack. And then the ball went about three feet rolling on the ground. And so that was you know, a wonderful, glorious beginning of golf career. So then of course I put the
ball back on the tee and try it again. And eventually I hit the ball. And it was a very nice sounding whack. And the ball lifted up in the air and sailed down the golf course. And what happened to me was everything stopped. And I kind of felt my mind floating, flying with the golf ball up into the air. And there was a sense of release and freedom and ease and openness with watching the golf ball fly up in the air going. And so the idea of purpose and being intentional with the swing and with the golf ball and hitting and being really present in a conscious way, vanished completely. There was no intentionality, there was no me there, was no trying to be mindful of anything. It was just natural awareness, natural awareness of and this complete release of intentionality or purpose of me in that movement. And while I was trying to make the swings, there was a hit the ball, there was a kind of very nice mindfulness, very nice presence that was satisfying. But there was a whole order of magnitude different of the satisfaction and the ease and the freedom, the well being that came when actually the mindfulness, the intentional conscious mindfulness of being present, dropped away. And I was just there with this great feeling of timeless openness with the ball flying through the air. And after that ball was through the air, I kind of said oh this is why people go golfing, maybe for that experience.

So these are two different ways of being in the present moment. One is a little more intentional, one is more focus, more involved. And one involves complete release. Nibbāna is a kind of being present. It is being fully at A, just like many people might experience mindfulness is ahh I'm fully here. But it's fully here with this release this freedom, this ease that's there. And the tradition describes it in many different ways. There's one list of 33 synonyms for this experience. And I'll read you some of the words that get a sense of the richness or the value that the Buddha put on this experience. He called it peaceful, sublime, happy, calm, wonderful, amazing, health, non troubled, purity, freedom, the island, the shelter, the refuge, truth, and what's subtle, and destination.

So these are very kind of positive words that suggest that this is held up in high value. And it's not as some people think, that the word Nirvāṇa or Nibbāna mean a kind of quenching, kind of extinguishing of everything into some kind of bareness or something. There's something about the release, this freedom of the ball going through the air, of the bird flying through through the air or something that is quite wonderful. And there's very positive associations with his word Nibbāna. And in fact, the colloquial meaning of it, one of the colloquial meanings of it is health. And other one is to become peaceful and tamed. A well tamed peaceful horse, is described as being a horse that has Nibbāna. It also has the meaning of a fire going out, not because it's been blown out, but because the fuel that which keeps it burning, has finished. There's nothing more to burn. And so the idea of health sometimes comes to the idea that the fever of any illness has broken, and there's no more fever that's burning us.

And this experience of Nibbāna has a number of metaphors that go with it. One of them in this list, it's called an island. And the idea is that, it's also called sometimes the other shore. And this shore is where there's a lot of danger. And a lot of danger for suffering. The other shore, or the island we go to is a place that's free of danger, free of the floods of life, free of the winds of distress that can happen.

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And so it is sometimes presented as a location, a place. But that's kind of a metaphor. Sometimes there's the idea in Theravada Buddhism, and another metaphor is that it's a wonderful palace or wonderful capital city that we come to at the end of the path.

But regardless of what it is and we'll talk about it as we go through this week, it certainly qualitatively significant way of really unconditionally being present for experience right here. And one which brings a tremendous feeling of well being and kind of sets us on a new course of practice. We understand that the level of possibilities of well being and peace in a very radically different way, where it kind of comes from the inside out in a powerful way, rather than from the world towards us. And so one of the synonyms for this experience is the word happy, sukha. And sometimes the word delight is used.

There's a nun, Uttamā, who in time with the Buddha had a poem. She said the seven factors of awakening, the path for attaining release. I've cultivated them all as instructed by the Buddha. I attained what I wished. I am the true daughter of the Buddha, always delighting in Nibbāna So the Buddha said Nibbāna is the greatest happiness. And Nibbāna is also described as the release from all suffering. So this release more suffering, happiness, something we delight in. Something that teaches us the full potential of mindfulness, full potential of being fully present here for this experience.

So that'll be what we'll talk about. I'll talk about these next days. And hopefully, I'll do so in a way that is relevant for you and that you can understand this important topic. So, thank you very much and I look forward to being here with you tomorrow.