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SPEAKERS

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So this morning, I would like to talk about something which I've never talked about before, and which for most of my time as a Buddhist practitioner, I had no interest in or no it tastes for and basically ignored it. And then never talked about it. And I've never heard any Western Dharma teacher talk about this topic. And

in fact, if,

if I was going to guess, on the attitude that Western, many Western practitioners kind of Western kind of convert practitioners, people who haven't grown up in Buddhist culture have towards this concept. They think, well, it's, you know, it's not really relevant. It's not really the Buddhism or the important or or, you know, they they Furthermore, super superstitious or folklore, part of Buddhism, we want the real thing. But it turns out that this thing that we're talking about is really central to much of the Buddhist tradition as it's been taught and practiced down through centuries, and so central and can be considered to kind of be almost the essential heart of it for maybe for what most people are interested in preoccupied or concerned with when they are involved in Buddhism. So there's a big kind of, you know, disjunction between, you know, something we leave out here in the West often, but which is really kind of core to what Buddhism has been down to the centuries. And one of the reasons I don't want to tell you what it is. If I give you the most common English term, you'll probably immediately have reactions or with ideas and judgments, you know, and, and it's far from clear to me that the most common English translation is a good one, it's probably inadequate. As is often the case, there's not a one to one correspondence between some of the Indic words that the Buddha used in English. And so it's hard to know how to translate it. So we do the best we can. And we never use using words which, you know, you know. So I'm right now discussing. I translated the work of the Buddhist. And it's gonna be published and I'm talking with the publisher a little bit about some of the translation words. He did not like that I translated a certain word by the English word evil. Because Evil has a very strong, very strong connotations in the western mind, and all kinds of associations come up around the word evil And he said isn't really accurate as representing the Buddhist word. And the well probably not the accurate, but it's the best word I could think of all the other words just don't kind of work. They don't kind of, it's a really strong word. And indeed, you know the word, period, paradoxically, that's the word papa. And, I mean, that's the first house pronounced in Pali just happens to be that's why it doesn't mean father, but it means this really strong thing. And so evil is probably the best. So there's this problem, you know, with words. And sometimes Westerners will or people translating will choose not to translate a word, but rather continue to use the Pali and make it kind of English, like the word

Dharma now has kind of become almost English. We don't try to translate it that often. So I'm talking about still kind of beating around the bush so what I want to do is, is I'll tell you the Pali word. First. Some of you might know already, the Pali word is putting and putting your sometimes pronounce putting Yeah. And I'll read you a passage from the Buddha, when he talks about this term. It's one of the maybe one of the few in the only places where he kind of kind of more or less defines the term, a term that became very central then for Buddhism for the next century, next next millennia. Monks Do not fear. Putting your is an expression denoting happiness. What is desirable, wished for dear and agreeable I know full well For a long time I experienced desirable wished for dear and agreeable results from often

performing.

So maybe by the end of the day into the talk, you'll help me come up with an English word for prettier. Is this worth putting me? So he says, Penny is another word for happiness. So that's, you know, we don't want to call it happiness because it doesn't miss us too much. But that's, you know, it gets us interested, you know, it's something has to do with happiness. So I'll tell you a few stories. One is the story that James burrows will often tell. And maybe some of you sat with James and heard his cheesecake story. He was he was sitting at three months of pretty much meditation retreat back in Massachusetts. And, and he was diligently practicing his practice Silent Retreat. And some one day he was given somehow or other. He was given a gift of large I think was a large piece of cheesecake. And we just for him, maybe it was a birthday or something and you know, and it made him really happy. And he kind of delighted the cheesecakes, Juan's favorite flavors and favorite things to eat and so great, you get to have this wonderful thing.

And then we looked at it, he said, oh,

maybe some of my fellow recruits would like some of the salsa. So he started cutting up in half and then quarters in the middle, little slices, and then put each slice on a little plate and left them there for other recruiters to come and take a slice of cheesecake. And then he sat down nearby and watched as they came in. And he saw this great expression of delight on their faces when they saw they had a chance to eat a few bites of cheesecake. Now, what James says is that if he had eaten the whole cheesecake himself,

his

gustatory pleasure, his sensory pleasure would have been much more, he would have had a much more satisfaction, his mouth and all this wonderful sweet flavors. But it wouldn't, wouldn't have lasted so long. However, his memory of the delight, and the happiness that was in the people's faces and they saw they had a chance to eat cheesecake, that's something that lasted for years. That kind of little happiness that they carry with them. That lasted for a long, long time. So he did something that he chose, in a sense to sacrifice his own pleasure without thinking about he was doing it for happiness, but the result was that it brought in happiness for a long time afterwards. Are there certain activities that we do that tend to bring us happiness when we remember them or, or kind of somehow clarify the mind or purify the mind in certain ways. On on Friday, we talked about generosity here. And imagine that you

each gave me

I told you that I was going to I was going to if you gave me \$20, I would go and find some body to give it to. In the next week, when you came back, I'd tell you who I gave it to. So you have a lot of confidence and trust in me and are Gil's not going to give it to any old you know, bomb and he's probably going to use it for good purposes. And so, because of this great conference may be misplaced. If you have any. You give me your \$20 And, and you'll leave feeling kind of happy and you feel like oh, probably Gil's going to give it some worthy cause. And so it's an act of generosity in your part. So because it's an act of generosity in your part, there's a certain kind of conditioning of the mind. To strengthen that movement of generosity within you perhaps. There's some karmic movement that can happen because thought of it as a generous act. And generosity is a karmic, the karmic event. And so how does karma work? It's unsure how karma works for karma is a law of cause and effect. That if you do something, certain things based on certain intentions, those intentional acts will bear fruit, either in the moment, or tomorrow, or in a few years, or in Buddhist say, in a future lifetime. And so it's the intention that effects That cause and effect relationship. So if you just, I don't know, you put \$20 down, you know, on the sidewalk and just walk away without thinking about why you did it. Did, you know there's very little karma there. But if you find someone who's really worthy for \$20, you give them \$20. And your intention is to offer the help and support, then you're conditioning that you're causing a different kind of causal relationship in your psyche than just putting on the sidewalk, you're kind of, you're watering the seeds of generosity for example, the seeds of happiness and things like that. So karma is can be happiness producing if you do, if you plant the seeds that produce happiness. If you plant seeds that produce unhappiness, suffering, then attempts to create a causal connection that creates greater suffering in the future. those activities which are on healthy ways, create greater health. those activities which create disease create more disease. And so if you act out of hate, that hate tends to create further disease, in the mind, in the psyche, both in the short term perhaps in the long term, the most kind of maybe the most rational basic way of understanding it is that it creates a habit. And that habit then will come back in the future, or it creates a memory. And I certainly I've sat in meditation, for example, remember things from 1020 years ago? Oh, how could I said that? How could I have done that and so somehow that memory was stored there and it came back and remember good memories came back and suddenly it was filled with happiness. So karma has who knows all the routes of karma. But this word punya is not karma. So, or, or it's a subcategory of karma to the aspect of karma. So you all give me your \$20 is destroyed. Do it. And so you come back next week and I'm going to tell you what I've done with it. I say well \$10 of it, I gave to this. No good lousy neighbor of mine, who you just sits around watching television. Kind of grouchy is mean to the kids and neighborhood. And he just went out and bought some beer so you can watch more football. That's what you do with adult with the money. And then about the other \$10 I gave to this kid in the neighborhood who's getting ready to go to college. And, and he's really poor. But because of the 10, he did \$10 in order to send overnight express his application to some university that he's going to go to They needed that money didn't have any money to send the application to get there tomorrow. And so I gave that money to him. And he's able to get now he's able to get the application in a time, but they accepted. Wow, that's great. The tempo was went really, you know, went to a good cause. And so that's really great. Feel command me feel happy by that. And maybe \$10 for helping buy beer, maybe if you remember it at all. It doesn't, you know, you kind of regret having given me the \$20 to pass on. But the \$10 that got this kind of college, you know, really was kind of one of the pivotal things have gone to college because he didn't get that letter. And in time, he wouldn't have gotten in and, you know, he would have taken a different roles in his life. So for years, you've said, Well, that was a great thing. Well, I didn't know that one little act like that, almost anonymously, anonymous, could have

brought such happiness to someone or made such a big, big difference in one's life. And four years later, it brings a sense of happiness to you. So punya is that which brings his acts that bring happiness acts of generosity are not all equal in terms of creating happiness in the equation of punya. If you give generously, to someone who's going to go out and buy more, no alcoholic is not a rock and quit buying more alcohol. There might be benefits during that. But chances are that you're going to feel a lot less happy than if you give a certain amount of money to someone who doesn't really wonderful. Imagine if James and left half cheese cuts cheesecake slices there. And two years later, someone came to him and said, You know, my practice was going really well. I was really concentrated really cruising my practice. And then I came to the speed bump. My practice that afternoon. I thought kind of discouraged. And I was gonna you know, go to sleep early that day. They just give up and go back to sleep and start the next day. Because the cheese cake was there. I was so glad that someone you know something so happy this act of generosity and it's just wonderful things someone offered someone cared about me or stuff and it was so sweet and give me a boost. And I went right back to my cushion. And I guess and I was enlightened. And I was going to go to bed but you said this one imagism came back and Jameson said that, boy, Dad, you Wow, that is amazing. I'm so glad I did that cheesecake. And it you know, it probably brings a lot of delight to him. And then the next time James goes down to meditate on retreat, he his sense of delight and happiness is there with them. Does this kind of joy or delight or happiness can come from knowing the benefits of our good actions? Is it spiritually useful? Is it humanly useful? Is it something that's desirable? As it says in the quote, Prunier is something desirable, wished for dear and agreeable. Is this at some, is this something which is agreeable, desirable? That for you is something you'd like to do. Do you evaluate the things that you do based on whether this is creating a field of happiness for yourself or for others or not? And how do you evaluate what brings happiness? I think one of the reasons I kind of didn't like this kind of concept in early days of practice, was it a little bit artificial or pollyannish or sacrum the idea of doing something in order to feel happy for it seemed, you know, kind of a little bit contrived and lacks sincerity me perhaps, and certainly can have that aspect. But are there ways in which We'd already do acts of happiness producing x. Things that would create happiness of making us happiness. But we don't avail ourselves of that happiness. We don't reflect and think about it, we don't remember it. We don't allow ourselves to be open to Oh, this is a really great thing. That idea you know, what the people benefited they were happy. Oh, one of the practices in Buddhism, that again is not practiced so much in the West, is, goes by the Pali name, anumodana. Anumodana is is pervasive in much of Buddhism in Asia, certainly in Indian Buddhism. And anumodana is usually translated by the word rejoice, to rejoice in those happy ness producing activities and feelings and emotions that human beings have. So You know, now we could all kind of rejoice in James's generosity with a cheesecake. That's great, that's great for James maybe it's a kind of a kind of a minor thing to rejoice in, but there's a lot of things we can really kind of rejoice in or celebrate what a great thing that someone has done this, you know, something activity and, and to feel the happiness of that is considered to be a useful spiritual practice to do. And so in traditional Buddhist settings in India, they were actually ceremonies of rejoicing that people would do where they would. My guess is even from the from the archaeological evidence that these were very lively celebrations. They didn't have kind of quiet Protestant flavor, but rather were kind of you know exuberant with music and celebration singing and dancing and whistling and yeah, you know, kind of like a gospel revival hallelujah. Not our kind of Buddhism is it area, but I think that this is part of this rejoicing in in, you know as part of the field of what some Buddhist Buddhists was worried about. So in the evaluation for so there are three things that traditionally have said to produce this, this kind of this kind of happiness and there's probably many things but there's lists actually, further in this quote, that gives it the Buddha says,

have what kind of what kind of deed of mind

carries this kind of fruit to create happiness? Of what deeds ripening is it that I am now have such great is that what these ripening is it that I know am now of such great accomplishment, and power. And then it occurred to me, it is the fruit of three kinds of deeds, the ripening of three kinds of the deeds that I have no such great accomplishment. So here's the Buddha talking about how he accomplished his Buddhahood. And here's awakening. And here's because of these three things, deeds of giving. deeds of here called itself mastery and deeds of refraining. Then he goes on to say in a poem, he says, once you train in deeds of punya that yield long lasting happiness, generosity, a balanced life, and developing a loving mind. So the three areas of development Panyo. Panyo has developed a generosity for living here. It's called a balanced life. Developing loving kindness, other places it says that it has been said that the three primary activities of punya is generosity, generosity, ethics and meditation. So, these can be seen as spiritual practices in Buddhism for the cultivation of wisdom of liberation, but here they're also talked about as creating and the happiness that comes from that is a condition for greater for for spiritual development. And in our in a statement the Buddhist attributes is accomplishment as a Buddha to having done acts of punya early you know earlier so in getting traditional Buddhist settings, Buddhists will evaluate, where they perform, for example, acts of generosity to give generously to those areas, they will tend to create the greatest happiness for themselves. And perhaps some of you do that yourself, you know, with fundraising letters, you get a whole stack of them into the year. And then you look inside, you know, what is it that will bring you the most seems right to you the most happiness, the most joy or the most delight or whatever. And so, you maybe choose some or over others and what to give to. But the same kind of evaluation goes into for Buddhists. And so, they will say, so, one of the, one of the traditional evaluations is, give to someone who is practicing is produces more happiness and giving to someone who doesn't practice the spiritual life. Or someone who is well advanced in the spiritual life creates greater happiness given to that and given to someone Who has no spiritual life? give to someone who's meditating. And this is this system of evaluation isn't is of course terribly abused in Asia, where they'll give lots and lots of money and things to monks and nuns who are very highly attained or seemingly so in some ways or other and monastery build all this marble and gold glitter and all this stuff from the temple because people are giving so much to this. And then people down the street are starving. something a bit odd about that kind of a kind of situation then, but still the it's it can be abused. So it's still the idea of evaluating little bit, what we do. based on where is it, what is it what is it that creates the greatest happiness is part of the traditional valuation. So meditation is also said to produce punya I think this is important point because meditation has a lot of benefits. But many, many people here in the West don't think of it as a punya creating activity, something that creates this happiness producing event. In Asia, a lot of people are so happy that they can engage in meditation practice. They feel like it's a wonderful karmically fruitful and beneficial thing to be involved in, and just brings them to life to sit down and meditate. Here in the West, I know a lot of people sit down to meditate. And the first thing they deal with is self criticism and self hate or their sense of striving, and you know, you know, all these all this complex kind of emotional stuff that comes up as we meditate here in the West. And, and often in Asia, stuff comes up also, but to also feel the happiness when they feel like that people sit down to meditate, feel like they've come home and feel like Oh, great. This is a this is a punya day Reading activity that they're involved in Isn't this great? But we don't have Prunier as part of our equations. We don't think of it, we're doing this punya thing. And so we don't, you know, we don't give ourselves credit don't feel the happiness of doing that. So I know people in Asia who just feel happy, the fact they sat down to meditate, they feel happy because they just did it. Regardless, if the meditation was awful. That was a terrible meditations, too bad. But I just did it. It was so great, you know, it's producing good karma, just

by doing it, or ethics, living an ethical life, a balanced life. They just feel happy and doing they feel like they're creating all this good for themselves in doing this. So I began to wonder whether I'm losing you all. Because, you know, it's it's, you know, very unpopular topic. Strange topic. So now, what do you think those of you who don't know already what are you Do you think is a good translation? Or Well, you know, what do you think is the best English translations for Kenya?

Now you've heard about it. Yes.

uplifting satisfaction. So deeds of uplifting satisfaction. Okay. Yes. self sacrifice. Never let's think a little bit far fetched for the word pudding. Yeah, but I can understand why you come to that. Yes. Or no, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. Yeah, I, you know, my mind is a little bit fuzzy today. But what happened was that I started saying that the word it's very hard to translate English words into a Pali words into into English. And then a degress instead, for example, I'm working right now with the issue of this word Papa, which means evil, which usually translated evil or translated is evil. But that's a whole different topic. So I sorry, I got confused you, the word is punya. And, and the Buddha here says, it's another word for happiness. So what what do you think? Yes, joy. But even as sitting in meditation, or being ethical is, is putting Yes, contentment Peter sorry, celebration, celebration celebratory activities, celebratory celebration worthy activities. There's also the term up

which is

these are activities which have the opposite effect. So create unhappiness Aspire. So one of the interesting things about putting your here I didn't make this clear enough either apologize for this lack of clarity to me is that the punya the strength of the printer that the size of the printer the amount of printer

doesn't only do depend on

your intention.

It also depends on what happens as a result of that intention. So, you might have you might have equally you might be a very generous person. And your movements of generosity are equal to various people you give to say you're going to give food to various people. And, and so you give food to lots of people It feels great. But one person use that food as per the energy of the food and went out and, and worked for Habitat, humanity, humanity since beginning strength feels really great, maybe happy to see that Welcome to support Habitat for Humanity is an indirect way so someone else's went to use the food to be fortified to watch a football game. It kind of creates a different level of happiness in you the field into which you gave to so your nutritional work is a field you give to different fields. So you give to a field of different people have put in your field. Some people have big punya fields. And some people have small prettier fields, because the traditional language, so someone who likes to work for Habitat for Humanity has a bigger field than someone who spends most of the time watching football. And so, and so traditional Buddhist life to give two big Prunier fields. One of the biggest the biggest possible putting your field around is the Buddha. So Buddhists like to give to the Buddha, because that's it. What happens is, even if you give like a really teeny little thing, like you give a flower to a Buddha, you go out and pick a little wild flower and give it to the Buddha. Because the Buddha has

such a huge push in your field. The results of happiness for you and is beneficial, desirable results are said to be really huge things a little mythic, but yes

Shared merit Okay. Yes.

The word reward and punishment Yes.

A lot of people motivated for

president asking

how much motivation

how much American

so the traditional translation of this word putting English it's so people have merit fields and there's bigger or smaller merit fields and doing for me acts of marriage shared merit, it usually helps translate into English. And I'm not sure it's really the best translation, partly because it has this connotation of deserving something or you merit something deserving. And it seems more complex the understanding. So there is a question. Do people do too many Buddhists intentionally do things in order to acquire so if what you're asking but we can just use always Asians, I mean, there are people here in the West, who are very focused on there too. It's uh, I mean, you do find that you do find some some settings people have merit passports. They go around to different temples and make donations and then you get the standard habit will stamp the passport. And then when they when they die, they, they want that passport burned with them. So that Yama or whatever, you know, whoever kind of, you know, checks you out after you die. Just you know what's happening next for you know, the marriage to make sure that miracles with them in some way. And so there's there's a lot of behavior that seems very odd. For in our, in our eyes, I think people are obsessed by merit and that's all they do is go and try to get an error right then. And there doesn't seem to be much spiritual practice involved. It just seems to be about just getting getting getting this kind of economy American, the one you know, they say you you can't take your wealth with you. Buddhists say well, you can't take your wealth with you, but what you take with you is your merit, your good karma. And so you try to acquire a lot of good karma and that creates good rebirth. So it can have a cancer Very unspiritual kind of very selfish and self absorbed and all that. But it's it's central to some schools of Buddhism. In Tibetan Buddhism, it's very, very important, the idea of building up marriage, because the understanding is that you cannot really make long term progress over many lifetimes, in spiritual life unless you build up a lot of merit first. And so Tibetan Buddhists will spend a lot of time doing put Joe's doing worship, they can offerings, 10,000 thousand, hundred thousand thousand hundred thousand offerings. You know, all kinds of things washing the guru, because they're building up the merit field they need. So in the future lifetime, they can be a Buddha Theravada Buddhism doesn't really have that strong notion. So you don't find in our tradition, emphasis on merit so much. And for many of us Westerners who went to Asia to practice, our teachers never talked about it. They they didn't. They may They just figured we hadn't, we had plenty enough merit because we'd find our way to the meditation monastery. And so we were to start meditation practice. And that's when many of us came back from Asia. We then practice meditation in a much more direct way in front it's very beneficial. And many people have found

meditation practice to be beautiful practice independently before even Buddhism, certainly independent of this merit economy merit concerns

and

the reason I was kinda inspired to talk about it today was and the way I talked about kind of trying to avoid the word mirror initially is in not talking about it for all these years we've been in America that Theravada tradition in America kind of ignoring is no that have we're ignoring something we don't like? So you know, some of you may be uncomfortable with this discussion today. It's very different with usually get here. But are we ever left something out? Is something something bad Something something to be found in this concept of punya. That's actually valuable for us. It's useful for us, aside from the ways which are maybe not useful ways we kind of think are not really spiritual in some way. Is there something useful for us to learn from this? can we can we select the concept in a way, in a way that is helpful for us. That's that's the reason I was wanting to give this talk. So Cheryl says it has to do with movement of the heart, not with expected outcome. And it said that in a tradition that giving for example, giving is a very punya meritorious thing to do, that you get you create more merit, if you if you're not concerned about the outcome. So if you're not concerned about getting one merit, you make more merit than you are concerned about making marriage. So, you know, but still you make marriage forgiving if you want marriage.

Yes, I use to my

benefit.

What is of greatest benefit? But there's so many different ways of understanding benefits seems like you lose, you lose something you don't you lose if you just use the word benefits.

Any benefits, your benefit and it's definitely

the reaction of marriage.

counseling.

So one of the very common practices in Buddhism is to dedicate or offer up your merit. So you get all this America doing this and stuff, but then you don't keep it clean. yourself, but you offer it for the benefit of others. It's very common at the end of practice events, sittings or day long retreats or retreats, people do the occasion of merit. And often when I say it loudly, I say, may the benefits and merits from our practice together. So I use both words. And, and it's a beauty I think is a beautiful movement is whatever benefits of document or happiness or calm and joy. Let it be for the benefit of others. So we're not trying to keep it to ourselves. It's not about a self centered approach of just me myself in mind.

I know

I've heard people say that So, are there

Can we allow? Can we?

Is it useful to think about creating conditions for our own happiness through activities that meritorious activities is happy. It's just something that comes from having the most toys or having the most, you know, is it something as internal that we have to kind of struggle with our own psychology to figure out how to be happy? Or is there some happiness that can be produced from how we act in the world and we go into the world in ways that are that then generate happy producing condition conditions. So you sit in your own room waiting for yourself to be happy, you're depressed, I wish I'd be happy and have to deal with this and or, you know, maybe there's another way when that is sometimes just to go out into the world and find some activities you do. The act of generosity or some activity, which is a happiness producing activity. And not only something that produces happiness, for the moment maybe also produces happiness for the long term. When you think about Remember,

the word merit

is this is an odd word. The benefit is that I like to read benefit acceptance to rational and the word merit has a very interesting in my mind connotation that I think karma and I think this merit stuff is putting your stuff functions in C In obvious ways, but also functions and unseen ways. And ways of the psyche doesn't necessarily understand. And so they deal with putting you also implies that there's larger, an unseen world that we're participating in. And so acts of generosity or acts of putting you on whatever, that they have benefits, the ways that we can even see for ourselves in the world around us. Yes, listen to you talk about this.

You know, when a child is young, you often teach them to behave in a certain way because they get something back. They get some kind of fair in a way, and then by teaching them that relationship, that eventually becomes part of who they are. And the idea of doing it for something or for something for themselves tends to drop away and become more. You know, less less, less attention on the merit and generosity, the ethics driver so I think it's just kind of, I mean, I look at it the way you described it as kind of a skillful means of getting to the point where you can do something really from your heart and not not

Yeah, so that's just beautiful. So part part part of the benefits of doing this these kinds of activities is that it's kind of conditions the mind to to goodness and even though you might be able to selfish initially kind of, it's, you know, the goodness grows and grows and grows. I

couldn't opinion because Clayton's goodness Sure. boiling

points to me.

Yes, please. Well, I like I like to pretend that way myself. That it's a it's the it's this the qualities of mine are states of mind that come From our good goodness good activity with a tradition itself will not limited to just the kind of the kind of psychological understanding because there's unseen ways in which this stuff happens. Sometimes printer is very closely connected to the word power. It comes with a person who has a lot of punya has a lot of power also. You can build up a strength of certain kind of strength of power and all this did with it for a while. So it's time to stop and I hope that this was interesting for you to to look at it a very different topic than we ever look at them and hopefully you for

your benefit, and we've all created more merit in the process of exploring this. And may it be for the growth of your goodness in your, in your hearts and

and may you

allow yourself the happiness that comes from recognizing your own goodness Thank you