

2004-08-02 The Three Grips of Self

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SPEAKERS

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Two Monday's ago I gave a talk here on contentment and the important role that contentment has in Buddhist practice. And then last week I gave a talk on, on joy and the important place of joy in practice. And in a sense, the teachings of the Buddha the path that the Buddha taught, is built on a foundation of contentment and joy, kind of happiness or sense of well being. And so a little bit of a paradox because people often come to practice because lack of well being, and then they're told we first you have to have well being to be here. What it is, is that we practice the best we can, our practice, but we it's important to appreciate the value of a sense of well being contentment, of joy of happiness, and to live a life that supports the presence of these good qualities. And for some people, that means changing their life a little bit so that their lives are locked because some people, so the way they live their lives is conducive for the presence of joy and happiness. If a person of persons living a very, very hectic, furious life, it's filled with greed and hate and confusion. And because they're doing too much, or do too many greedy activities, and they want to try practicing Dharma practice, they're not going to have much success. You know, because you're kind of in this fog of greed or fog of tremendous busyness. And the kind of possibilities of well being possibilities of contentment or some sense of spiritual dimension of life doesn't have a chance to kind of get in or do arise. So the biggest appreciating these qualities and to look for how to develop them in our lives is very important. And partly it's important because the deeper work of Dharma practice is supported by these qualities. The deeper work with our practice is often quite challenging. Sometimes it's very frightening. And, and from a conventional point of view can seem very, very threatening or very uncomfortable. And the threat threatening aspects of Dharma practice or the discomfort, uncomfortable aspects of them are a lot easier to handle their work with if there's a fair amount of joy and happiness, to carry you through them at the same time. And they often go hand in hand some of the more deeper threatening or deeper challenging aspects of practice. Don't Don't arise unless you have that sense of well being first. And so Kind of you don't have to worry about not having it because usually it comes first anyway. And the most challenging aspect of practice is when we start encountering the Dharma, we start seeing the Dharma. When we, you know, this the joy and contentment, which allows us to have an

experience of the Dharma, in its depths. It said sometimes in the tradition, that there are three ways that we can relate to we relate to the Dharma, in the course of practice. The first is that we, we learn about the Dharma, or we know about it. So you could read a book or something. Here's some talks and you have somewhat of intellectual understanding of what the Dharma is. The second and the Dharma has a lot of different meanings in Buddhism, but that could very simply mean the truth. The way things are, the depth of the truth. The deep insights that are synonymous with Civilization. So first we kind of know about it. And then the next is to see it to see the Dharma. And knowing and seeing are quite different as reading a menu is quite different from eating the food. So reading a book about Buddhism is quite different than actually tasting or seeing what is actually being being talked about that we see for yourself. Aha. Now I know, I know for myself, I've seen this actually makes sense, because I can see actually see how it works. I see this insight. I see this I see the truth. And the third phase of practice is being the Dharma. So not just simply seeing it, but becoming it. And that's sometimes it's both seeing it and letting and becoming it can sometimes be a big challenge. And it can seem like a huge endeavor to see it as one thing and to become into something else. And part of the reason why it's a big endeavor, why can be challenging Where at times terrifying for some people,

it often works as a direct challenge to our sense of self, to who we think we are. And many of us hold on to our sense of self. Our, our, or our conventional happiness or well being or security in life is often tied up in the sense of who we think we are, and who we're trying to who we're trying to be, and who we're trying to present ourselves as to the world. Or represent ourselves to us. We are who we are, in a sense, and then we're always representing ourselves to something else. And then we hold the hold on to their presentation. And we don't show ourselves fully. We hold back aspects of who we are because we're afraid if they knew that about me, I would, they wouldn't like me, or we present something totally different. We try to put on a good face or be smart or kind way that's not really who we are and so there's a whole dynamic around what can be called selfing. In Buddhism, creating a self being attached to a sense of self, that is, needs to be addressed in practice, because the whole enterprise of selfing is stress producing is stress reinforcing is a condition for deeper and deeper suffering. And so, if we want to kind of relax deeply in meditation or in our lives, as deeply as possible, that aspect of life which is stress producing which is tight or tense, or causes suffering has to be let go. And it turns out that the cell thing that we often live by is stressful and tense producing. And it might not be producing suffering immediately. In fact, you know, you immediate you might actually feel some happiness someone praises you. Well, you did a great job. Suddenly, you're puffed up. And it's great, right? You feel certain kind of happiness, but there's a certain kind of happiness that can come from, for example, being praised or being too filled with oneself, that is very fragile and is a setup for suffering in the future. Once we have that praise, then it might be very difficult to do without it in the future. Then tomorrow they blame you. You know, and then what what happened, you know, disoriented. How should they have switched so fast? And there's a quote by the Buddha where he says something like, it's an ancient truth. It's been true ever since ancient times. There is no person who isn't. There's no one who's ever freed of being blamed. They blame you if you talk too much. They'll blame you if you talk too little. They blame you if you talk just the right amount. No one is free to blame. So I wrote when I read that I was I had a little little teeny, you know, liberation. You know,

and the attempts to try to set myself up so I would never be blamed. I realized it was hopeless. One of the ways that I tried to present myself that I became painfully aware of was my neurosis about wanting to be liked. And I remember I working in a kitchen, where I was kind of the kitchen foreman, and kitchen manager, and it was not a place, you know, where wanting to be liked was very relevant. I mean, had the food had to be out. You know, he had this thing had to happen. And if I spend a lot, I get a lot of gymnastics social gymnastics. To ensure that everybody in the kitchen likes me it was very complicated difficult and, and the food didn't come on time. So it was very clear, you know, so I got to see over and over again this you know this tremendous gymnastics I was doing a trying to kind of say things certain ways and get people to like me. And it's good for people to like you to like us, right? not physically, but to do this mental gymnastics and try to be who you're not and try to be overly protective of them. Try to avoid the truth by saying things really nicely, you know, it's, you know, no one's no one has to live, no one should be able to live that way. So,

so sooner or later Dharma practice challenges us in this whole area of selfing how we relate to the self when we think the self is and the teachings of the Buddha are over and over again point to this in ways that can be seen as very challenging. It's one of the common refrains in the Buddhist teachings is a little kind of triplet tweets, three fake statements that come to go together. He's referring to different things at different times, and different things in our experience. Sometimes he talks about our body. Sometimes he talks about the mind sometimes consciousness, sometimes different sense organs, eyes and ears, sometimes our feelings sometimes our thoughts and dispositions, our intentions or feelings, he talks about these different things and he says these are not Don't, don't, don't, don't take these as being mine. as being me and as being myself these are not mine they're not me and they're not myself. So it kind of is still Triplett restatements me myself in line. But he did it me. Mine, me myself. He's English wasn't that good?

And so and what is his What? His points to his three movements, what was called the tradition grips that the way we're gripped the mind is gripped or gripping two things. The first one has to do with the grip of greed or possessiveness. This is mine. So you know, my car is mine. My money is mine. My house is mine. My clothes are mine. We had on my mind incident this weekend at spirit rock where I'm with my son to the Family Retreat. And it's like, you know, it's a great thing. It's like, it's just beautiful, beautiful state of the art meditation center that's gone to for many years, you sit in great silence, no one talks, and just perceivers walking very mindfully and quietly and certainly all the time, just great, except for the Family Retreat. And it was a wild. But in any case, we were my son was very happy to be there. And we got there a little bit early, early enough for him to get a front row seat in the meditation hall. And for three days, or four to three to two and a half days. We had our seats and we had all handwritten sign said reserves on it. And then we came in one morning and there was another six year old sitting on the seat And his parents oops. Those are our seats. They, we own them, we possess them, we claim them, they're ours. They are, you know, we had made the mind and movement of self things that occurred. There was no inherent possessive to that place. So those portions Didn't you know, have in our names, because I have the reserve sign but I mean, we made themselves we made them or, or we claim them was a mental activity. These are mine. And we were

living in that mind. And in living in that mind, these are mine, these are ours. Then, we had to deal with other people's ideas about who's those were. And that six year old had a very different idea. He didn't understand about mine and he You saw that they're empty, he couldn't read. And so what to do. Now as a grown up Buddhist, I had the capacity, I hope of saying, It's okay, you can have those seats in speedbit in the front long enough, we'll stick a seat through their back. But I was with a six year old, my son and I had to figure out, you know, what was best given everybody's situation. And for my son, he had big time selfing around his seats. And I did not feel that this was a time to teach him a lesson in letting go of mine. It just didn't seem appropriate. It seemed like it actually caused more damage than good. And it seemed like was easier just explain to these people that we've, you know, very carefully been sitting there. And, you know, we had our reserved sign there and then Afterwards later they left kind of gracefully left afterwards I went up to the woman and said, you know, thank you I explained the situation she explained her situation was complicated. And then it's open by the way there were other seats nearby and she was I gave her some, you know, front row seats nearby that were empty. There was ended up well. But you know, something happened right there is a six year old you know, and growing up and people are all selfing it's an optional thing. But you know, there was a lot of complexity around it because of the delicate nature of self.

So you know, we make things into mine. As I like to say sometimes here. If we went home tonight, with different shoes and we came with our shoes wouldn't care. You know, it's all about self thing. You know, you've made these are my shoes. You know, you would actually used to wear Birkenstocks a lot. Sometimes I would go home with different Birkenstocks and once usually been the last one to leave, right so it was never my problem sometimes I go home with different burgers outside wonder, will I ever get my original ones back and once I didn't I wear the other ones, you know? Do nothing is gonna be wore out. I love the quote by Suzuki Roshi. And there's a photograph of him actually seeing this kind of coincidentally took picture the same time he held up his glasses and he went like this. These are not my glasses. But you know about my tired old eyes. See, you allow me to use them. That's a different attitude about you know, something that he was he is in a sense, to kind of much holding in much more likely is the idea of possessive possession. So I suspect that All of us, probably too small, a great degree, are very much actively involved in the business of selfing around claiming things as mine, these are mine. And then the question is, is that a setup for you to suffer? Or do you have the freedom and the grace to just with circumstances change, say, Well, okay, you know, that's too bad or I'll have to do something about this or maybe have to say something to someone or try to protect it or do something. Take good care of it. But we're not our ego is not tied to it. The way we don't suffer because of, you know, the fragile nature of possessiveness, possessions. It's very fragile. The idea of possession. As my friend said, we didn't say this, but to experience when she came home after going Stinson beach to the beach. And all she had whether it was her car keys and driver's license, and she came back in her house. Which was also her office in the Oakland Hills was no longer there. Because he would burn in Oakland fire. So, my house, my ashes, you know, things can change very quickly. So then what is our relationship with things we say our mind? And we hold on to these things in a way that's going to cause us suffering, or do we hold them in a way that, you know, doesn't cause the same level of suffering is our life depended on is our deep sense of well being our deep inner

sense of happiness dependent on the presence of these things we call mine. So the Buddha was much more challenging just saying that our possessions are not ours. Oh, at this Family Retreat. You know, Betsey rose. She's a singers Buddhist singer. And she's great. She's gonna come down here one day and do a musical Dharma talk for us. But she did this beautiful kind of solo song She's saying that the chapter the poem, on children by in the Prophet, and it starts off, your children are not are not your children. There was some moving you know, family retreats, singing daughter parents, your children are not your mother But who are they then they're not your children. They come through you but they don't belong to you. You cannot give them your thoughts. You cannot give them your thoughts. You can only give them your love. You cannot make them become like you. You can only try to shape yourself to become like them. Something like that disappears, but it's done both critically right. So the Buddha was much more challenging just possessions but he also said our thoughts are not something that we can take as mine. Our feelings are not mine our bodies not mine our eye our nose or yours are here one of the reasons why Buddhist monastics shave their hair is because so much selfing goes into our here. Oh, my hair, you know, doesn't even my six year old is concerned about his hair. Do you think he's really concerned about his milk mustaches? He does not want his other friends to see that he has a milk mustache. I don't know where What's gotten into him. You know it's happened. And David says it's mortifying to have enough

mustache in front of other six year olds. So. So this idea of you know and consciousness is not self is that is not something take as mine my consciousness. And so basically what he said the whole psychophysical being is not to be taken as a possession. as mine This is mine to own a business. Esther and that's very challenging. And then the question is, is this reasonable even to have this attitude? Of course, this is my body, you know, until you know, you have hip replacement. Or you know, my my sister has a as to other people's kidneys in her body. She has four kidneys. Whose kidneys are they now? Yeah, these extra kidneys, but they hers she borrowing them. And things change, you know, so you know, how do we relate to this body. Some people give up their kidneys quite freely. One person gave it a freely one was a cadaveric kidney and, and, you know, giving these things up, but when you give up, we hold on to certain things, you know, until maybe a loved one is in trouble and then we're willing to give up certain parts of our body so we think it's mine. And then consciousness is Not something we possess. My wife some many years ago, had to go through for three months, medically induced menopause. And we'll see it's gonna be like menopause is for her, you know what you really go through it. But she went through his medically induced menopause. And when she had hot flashes, and all these symptoms, sometimes I guess happened minute pause. And she said to me going through, she said, You know, this is bizarre. There's all I'm having all these thoughts. But these are not my thoughts. And she had the wisdom not identify with their thoughts, maybe because they were so different than what you usually are, and she would, but these are not my thoughts. Or when I was 14, my father took me aside and he said to me, I wish I've said many times, I apologize for repeating. And he said, as you're going up, you're going to have a lot of bizarre thoughts. And he said, Everyone has those Don't worry about it. And that saved me a lot of grief. Because guess what I had been, you know, periodically bizarre thoughts. I thought, oh, I've been warned, oh, this happens to human beings. So I didn't take it too personally, I know this is mine. So it kind of freed me

up. The next. So that's, you know, the issue of taking things as mine. The next one is, which is has to do with greed, the movement to greed you're holding on or possessiveness, that movement of the mind. And the second is that of seeing things as me. And this is understood in tradition as being the kind of grip of conceit and conceit is a very powerful force in human human psyche. And this has a lot to do with taking some things to us as defining this is who I am, often in comparison to others, other people, I'm better I'm worse. I'm equal to I'm good and bad in relation to others. It often has to do with a sense of self worth, or value. I'm valuable and worthy. Because I am x, because I am you fill in the blank, you know, for each each of us probably has some kind of Boogeyman that we fill in, they're not blank because I am therefore I am great or therefore I'm lousy. Because, you know and, and our sense of self worth is often tied then to this we fill in I am this is who this this this defines who I am. My work defines who I am. So I'm I'm Whatever. I'm a carpenter. I'm a carpenter and carpenters are really cool. And you better know that I'm cool. Because carpenters are cool, or whatever, you know, or, we our sense of who we are, comes through who we related to. So, you know, our spouse, our spouse is someone there for where someone or You know, our parents, I see it my son, he's kind of proud of me thinks it's good to be a Dharma teacher. And so he's kind of proud to listen to me, you know. So for the time being, I'm, I'm cool in his eyes. And I think he gets a little bit of, you know, sense of self because he's borrowed for you know, from what he thinks I am. And the in accomplish our accomplishments will be done in the past, and hold people hold on, hold on to it for a long time,

who they is very important to people see who we are. And so we could spend a lot of time on people who spend a lot of time talking, explaining, demonstrating themselves to can show everybody else who we are. It's very important other people see us as who we want to be. And this has to do with this idea of conceit and the grip of conceit and for some people, it's very, very powerful. And it causes tremendous grief. Partly because it's not a very reliable thing to hold on to any kind of conceit any kind of a grip of conceit holding on something, this is who I am, is probably going to change at some point. And it takes a lot of work then to maintain an old identity old idea of who we are, the further it goes away from you know, if we hold on to some accomplishment, and this is really important, this accomplishment to define who I am. And the further back in time that goes into the past, the more effort has been made to remind yourself of that, or to remind other people of that, let me tell you that story of when I because otherwise, how would people know it unless you told them or reminded them? So the grip of conceit is very, very fragile causes tremendous suffering. The third grip the third thing, you know, as the third thing is, this is not myself. And this is not myself in Buddhism. To be the grip of abuse, it is very important for many people to understand. Since the idea of not self is very central to Buddhism, it's very important to see that this actually the teaching of not self, belongs to views. It's the views or the philosophy or the story we tell ourselves about what the self is, it's a little bit different than conceit, because it's more of a view. We're philosophy. So we have a view or a philosophy or that the self is eternal, or the self is one with nature or the self is independent from everything else. Or the self is the same as the body or the self is different than the body, or the self is the same as thoughts or the or the self is the same as our feelings or the self is the same as our intuition, or the self is the same as, as our inner Select with a self as the same as our intentions, or the self isn't the same as our, you know, just kind of you of understanding who we think we are. And we're not necessarily hold using it to

hold up our sense of worth, like as we would when conceit, we're using it to compare to someone else. But it's a deep view that this is who I really am. My true nature, my true self, I found it, for this must be what it is, we have a view of it. Now, now that I think I know what it is I have to find it or I have to hold on to it or I have to get everything else out of the way to experience this as the true self. And what the Buddha said over and over again, is that nothing whatsoever that we can experience. It's an experiential world qualifies as a reliable self, something we can hold our philosophical halftone This is who I really am so not our body, not our Consciousness never thoughts, you have nothing. Then the question is well, how about something that's outside of experience? And the Buddha didn't answer that question. No one ever asked him that question, I think. But I think what he would have said was, when it's not relevant, it doesn't really pertain then. It's completely outside of experience. Nothing you can you can't have any relationship to it because you can't experience it or see it or know it or act on it to have it act on you. So three grips of self, the grip of possessiveness, the grip of conceit, in the grip, of views, and both of them are very, very powerful in the human psyche. All three of them, but all three of them are powerful human psyche, and all three of them. Take effort, take work to maintain and mental work mental effort. You don't say possessiveness doesn't exist. Without our mind creating idea this is these are my shoes, or something, the idea of conceit doesn't happen unless the mind makes the effort to compare ourselves with others or devalue be caught up in the world of valuing. And the mind doesn't have a philosophical view, without having philosophical view without making the work to have that view and hold it somewhere, maybe it's in the back corners of the mind kind of on a shelf quietly for the most part, but it's still active. So if we can have, they are things energy to, to be there and to operate. And the kind of effort and energy it takes

is considered in Buddhism, to be stressful, to be agitating. To be painful, though most most of the time, the degree to which it suffers, it's painful or agitating, stressful, is so subtle, that we wouldn't necessarily see it. But it's going on this underlying foundation of suffering going on that's supporting a whole Cathedral whole edifice of selfing that's built on these three foundations and foundations themselves are suffering unstable, unsatisfactory. As the mind gets more settled on itself as the mind as we get more peaceful, more trusting and beginning letting go and more more deeper away, letting go of the suffering, then going the extra activity of the mind, which is burdensome, the stressful activities and the mind is still learned still there are more more relaxed, more open or more peaceful or more spacious and more empty or whatever the kind of language you'd like to use, sooner or later. It has to, for many people encounters this interface with the process of selfing. And partly why it's so difficult for some people is that the attachment to self thing is so strong. And our sense of security and well being is so tied up with this thing of selfing. The fact that it's important for us to Have you know, a particular job or particular house or particular bank account that has certain amount of money in it or particular relationships? Or it all have to do with a sense of self thing? Me Myself in mind? I'm so sorry. I'm confused. A lot of things we're attached to, I think are very important. Or, you know, are built on this deeper foundation of self thing. I guess I'm kind of muddled, muddled, muddled right. Now, in my head, I'm trying. Can we just erase that or can we start over again? Or what do you do when you get confused? So the challenge is to you know, as the mind gets more peaceful, unsettled, is we're challenged to look at this idea of selfing it becomes very, very important. And then what does it take to

step to take a leap and move beyond that? into the letting go, letting go that selfing How to rest in our hearts or rest their minds rest just rest in being beingness in a sense, without having to any kind of selfing at all without needing to have a view of who we are. Without seeing anything through the filter of this is who I am. Even the view that this is happening to me. The idea this is happening to me, is in a funny way of you. It's happening to you. Many things are happening to you. So it's not like not erroneous to say it's happening to me. But to form the idea in your mind this is happening to me is one step extra from just having it happen. You see a sunset. It's beautiful sunset. This sunset is happening to me. The sunset, I'm the one who's experiencing the sunset. Isn't this great? It's it's really happening to me. It's happening in my eyes. It's happening my mind. It's really wonderful is happening to me. How much you enjoying the sunset? And all that activity goes on? I think it disconnects you from the sunset a little bit, doesn't it? So, you know, we usually we don't relate that actively with selfing, around sunsets, but it's happening in a subtle level. So can we let go that you start the sunset be there and in a sense, without it happening to anybody, doesn't mean you don't have the experience of a sunset. But you don't formulate the idea. This is happening to me. They just have just experienced happening through us. So the third step of Dharma practice city of becoming the Dharma has a lot to do with letting go. Relaxing, having a phenomenal deep trust, where it's okay not to have any kind of selfing going on at all, to put all that serviced. It's one thing to go into, into, for example, some deep experience spiritual experience. They really see really let go of self for a moment or for Short timer for a period of time. And to see Oh, this is really right. Wow, I see it, it's possible. And there's another thing then to live that way to become the Dharma. And so you know, part of the value of deep practice is to show us what the work is of learning to let go and rest in this deeper sense of trust or beingness or Dharma, where it doesn't have to be any kind of self referential

constructions going on around at all.

So a lot of Dharma teachers will then emphasize that we're the key to Dharma practice, is not attaining anything in practice, but rather, it's letting go You know, to attaining some great states or great experience, you know, once once I attained this great enlightenment, the great masters talked about this great big bang experience of enlightenment but I get the Big Bang, then I'll be okay, then I'll be a worthy person, then I really have something great. You know, MINE MINE like me, thank you. And I'll be the greatest guy in my block. It'd be really great to go out in the block and show my neighbors you know, how good I am, I'm enlightened. And, and it's really going to be me. I don't even know who I am. When I really have that enlightenment. I really it's me. So rather than saying, so rather than talking about Buddhist spirituality in terms of attainments, it's much more common talk about it as a process of letting go. It's not about acquiring or getting anything, right, rather, just letting go, letting go and the Dharma that we can know that we can see and we can Become is present right here, right now. It's ever present. It's everywhere this, it's nowhere else. It can be nowhere else but right here in us, with us all around us. Can we let go? Can we relax? Can we trust enough to allow the Dharma, the truth, the way things are to just be us or just be there's no us anymore. So that's the challenge. And it's best to accept that challenge. Once you've done the work to in figuring out how to establish a modicum or a fair amount of contentment and joy in your life. And once you have that, then we can talk about the big

challenge. So I hope that was clear enough. Apologize for the middle Miss. And, and may you all be the Dharma