

2004-12-12 Renunciation and Ease

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SPEAKERS

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I'd like to talk this morning some more about a topic that I have been talking about the last week or so, topic which for some people has been unpopular, so I'll continue to be unpopular. The topic of renunciation and what I thought I'd do is approach it in a different way than I had before a little bit different. And that is to offer you the simplest medicine one of the simplest and most pleasant meditation instructions that I know. And start that up, he started the talk. So the instructions are set yourself at ease. So sit down to meditate. Set yourself at ease. mentally, physically, emotionally, you said yourself with some ease, and that can be doesn't have to be dramatic. Just can be at ease with your uneasiness, they can just be some a little bit more ease and what you have. Set yourself at ease. And then notice whatever happens that takes you away from that. That's it. And that great. So set yourself at ease and then notice whatever it is it takes you away from that. And the idea being if you notice really carefully what takes you away from that is that somehow you'll find your ease again, in variety of ways. One is maybe you realize that what takes you away from your years is not worth it. Not worth not worth giving up, or losing your ease for the kind of concerns preoccupation worries that the grabs the mind or the thoughts that grab the mind. And so maybe you're just willing to let go of it and come back to your use useful place. You might also notice that you might also notice as you pay attention to what takes you away from your ease, that if you're lucky, that the attention that notices that is easeful itself. Sometimes it happens, that the very act of noticing is itself a beautiful, peaceful, quality of the mind. And part of what we do in mindfulness practice is practice long enough, sometimes takes a while to learn. Learn this aspect of attention, awareness, that awareness in and of itself, does not judge or criticize, what it isn't what it is knowing. But awareness itself. It has a quality of peacefulness at ease. Awareness by itself has a lot of wonderful qualities you start paying attention to it. When other qualities that awareness by itself has no self reference, so all our self referencing tendencies, how it's good for me or how I'm being threatened here or myself, my sense of self Myself, identity has no role in awareness by itself. So, set yourself, set yourself at ease and notice what takes you away from it can open up to a great study a great discovery of different aspects of who we are. As we set ourselves at ease and do this practice, and then what we tend to discover is that there's deeper and deeper levels of ease. So at first, it might be as demotic committees a little bit, you know, you know, 1% more easeful than you are when you sat down. But as you do the practice, and you begin pushing the edge of that ease and learning how to be more easeful and more peaceful, more calm with what's going on, and as you as you discover and kind of push that edge, it becomes a a, again, a wonderful discovery process, about what is it takes us away from our ease, ease away from the east. Peace, conflict, peace, anxiety, peace, daydreaming, peace, ambition, desire, all kinds of stuff takes us away. And really understanding and getting familiar with this world of what takes us away from ease, from a sense of well being, is a really important part of the meditation meditation practice. So rather than thinking that you're supposed to push that away, you're supposed to get to know it. Notice what that is become familiar with it. Noticing isn't just something you notice in a flash. But you actually, you notice it, but then you want to

study it too and become familiar with it. Well, this is what it's like to lose my he says, what's going on? For me, this is the kind of thoughts I have the kind of feelings I have. And as you get to know something really well, then it becomes easier to find your ease again, on your balance in the midst of what's going on. So there's this whole process then, is a negotiation between where your ease is and where you're uneasy.

And there's a lot of things we discover in the process of that discover our deep cherished beliefs about what we think is really important where we really need as human being, I need to have, you know, whatever, you know, I need to have X, Y and Z. But you find out that actually maybe you don't need it are simple status. There's a simple state of the state of simplicity, a state of ease state of peace, that requires almost nothing, it doesn't require a sense of self to prop ourselves up. It doesn't require entertainment. It doesn't require a recreational opportunities. It doesn't require a bank account. It doesn't require a nice house. It doesn't require a lot of things. It doesn't require. This, the heart or the mind has a capacity of tremendous peace and ease without being propped up or supported. But many things that people chase in the world that we live in. We often have the idea that we need a lot of things in order to be happy. And so people are chasing a lot of different things. In, in our society here, there's a lot, a lot of consumer messages, a lot of social messages about what people think they need to have in order to be happy. And genuinely, they don't make people happy. It might bring some pleasure it might bring some status might bring some, all kinds of certain qualities of things that are sometimes desirable and useful. But it over it can, it can mask, it can hide the fact that the heart in and of itself, can be have a very deep sense of peace without being propped up and supported by anything at all around us. You don't have to be in a relationship. You don't have to be out of relationship. You don't have to have good health. You don't be you don't have to have poor health. You don't have to have, you know, a lot of things we don't need to have in order to find some kind of basic, deep ease or peace in the heart. And then as we kind of exploring that edge of ease, we'll notice all the different beliefs that tells us to be different. It has to be different. If only Had this then I could relax if only this if only that things that take us away. One of the things we discover is how much the things that take us away from our ease also takes us away from the present moment. When you sit down to meditate, you find that the easy place as you go deeper is the present moment is here. What's already something's already here, just being present in some some way, and that the forces of disease unease tend to take us away from that as we get lost in our thoughts thinking about the future planning the future planning and planning, or remembering the past or reviewing conversations repeating conversation, or fantasizing about desires or forces of ill will or angry about or just fantasizing? And the it takes us away from the present moment. And so that becomes a negotiation also of what why am I leaving the present moment. What's so interesting about what's not here? Why is it more interesting for the mind to be preoccupied thinking about something else, rather than to be fully, completely here for this experience right now? And so it's a process of discovery. What is that? And I think the intelligent approach to approach to meditation is to not just think it's not approach it as a pursuit of calm or peace in and of itself. But it's the pursuit of calm and peace, through self understanding, through understanding what makes us tick, in particular, what makes us want to leave the present moment. What is it that wants us? What are we willing to give up? Our sense of peace and well being?

So I think I'm becoming a little bit aware that there's a small movement. It's, there's good reason why no, people aren't learning about it very quickly. It's this one aspect of Is the slow food movement about slow food movement. And, and so there people are finding value in, in preparing their food carefully, I guess and eating it slowly and not just rushing, grabbing a bite to eat and kind of continue with your very important life. That's something very important is be found in slowing down and being fully present for the experience that we're having. And so then there's a slow, slow mo movement to slow movement,

that maybe it's better to live life a bit slower than always being in the fast track. You know about the rat race, right? And the thing about the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat.

So sort of slow down to live a life of slower support for a lot of the qualities that that benefit that comes from that the peace, the well being the sense of greater connected Other people, or family or community or neighbors, the possibilities of love and compassion that are there. Some of the best qualities, best experiences human beings can have as human beings come when we're fully present. And when we're not fully present some of the highest qualities of beingness is not available to us. So list of things like joy and love and friendship and peace come from being in the present moment. And we increase the possibility of them being part of our lives. When we are present. We're rushing around doing 10,000 things because it's not so likely to happen. And so there's also a you know, a movement afoot. Various forms has come, pops up periodically in different books and different ways of people want to simplify their lives. And people argue that there's a lot of benefit and simplifying lives. wonderful qualities of being arise. Someone told me yesterday that he discovered that how much happier he was when he had simplified his life quite radically. And he didn't have, you know, he didn't have high quality clothes, and you know, and all kind of hand me downs and, and but he lived his life quite happily now, it wasn't kind of chasing after all the things that he felt he had to do to meet need to have before started living a life of simplicity, not because it's a moral thing to do, that were Puritans, but rather because there's, there's tremendous richness to be discovered in living more simply, and life is too complicated, we lose something. And one of the things we lose for some people is what can be called the spiritual side of our life, that side of our life, the side of the heart, which is capable of peace, of love, of compassion, of joy, or spiritual joy. And I my sense is that that part of the heart is very shy. And there are other voices in the psyche that tend to can much easily, very easily dominate and be very loud. And so part of the art of learning a spiritual life is learning to tune into a voice, which initially is very, very shy. And it needs a lot of space and kindness and simplicity to begin to kind of showing itself and I think is one of the reasons why a lot of spiritual tradition has has something equivalent to a Sabbath where you're supposed to be supposed to do much, some people, some traditions, you're not even supposed to drive a car or turn on light switches, you know, or just kind of radical simplicity for the day. You're not supposed to work, the stores are supposed to be closed. In the Buddhist tradition, there's similar things it's kind of a observance day when people go to the monastery to live very simple lives for the day. Yesterday, we had one we had day long retreats here, which is kind of like a you know, Sabbath day people come here and they live very simply for the hours. They hear all the you know, the main things going on is people meditate, and they have lunch, and they meditate some more. You don't get much more simple than that. So something happens and that's simplicity, that if you give yourself a long enough time, that's quite pristine, quite beautiful. Do you go and do it on retreat, but you do it over a number of days. It's really exquisite. What can happen at times the sense of peace, a sense of well being sense of connectedness to the world around us. Someone could see a candy wrapper on the ground and see how beautiful it is. You know, just wow just sparkles. Because when the mind is really quiet and still and peaceful, what we see around us is much more beautiful than just kind of pick up on what the wonderfulness of life. So to set

the mind at ease, and then notice what takes us away from it. So what does this have to do with renunciation? Word renunciation is an English word, and might not be a good translation of the Buddhist word that's used as translated as renunciation, the Buddhist word. But before I tell you the Buddhist word, I'm going to tell you a different kind of English word, which kind of has almost the same meaning. A similar meaning at least, the word sacrifice. Also not a very popular word. Often it's kind of the associations with sacrifices, kind of you being diminished by it, you have to sacrifice something. And it's like, you know, does not always have good connotations. But the word sacrifice in Latin means to make sacred. That's what it means to make sacred. And so the word renunciation, then there's

something about the act of renunciation act of sacrificing, that can connect the person to what is sacred, or to what is precious or something that's really wonderful. So now I'll tell you the Pali word. It's nekkhamma And ne, the prefix means out. And the word khamma here comes from the verbal root to walk or to go. And so nekkhamma means to go out or to come out. And that doesn't exactly fit with renunciation. Renunciation means re-announce in latin root, what does that mean? But to come out, and the Pali's connotation is not, this focus is not on what's being left behind, but rather where you're going, you go coming out of a confined situation, a contract decision, some situation where the heart or the mind is contracted or confined, and you're coming out of that into situation where that's, that's like open space, expansive, peaceful, and that's that's the connotation of the word nekkhamma, coming out into an expansive open space, open air. So the focus a little bit more is on This association of the word nekkhamma has is no more What is gained in the act of in this act of renunciation. Whereas the English word for many people, I think association is a just kind of depressing word. Depending on the religious background you have, it's kind of self denigrating sense self diminishes, we have more diminishing ourselves or denying or self self denial associated with the organization, in a way that's kind of painful and difficult. But to focus on in the Buddhist idea of renunciation is on what is gained rather than what is lost. And so then we understand what it what is it possible to gain. And so this idea of set yourself at ease, points to a capacity and possibility of peace of deep well being that can exist in our heart, and what does it take to gain that possibility? Do we find that? And what are we willing to sacrifice or give up so that we can have this higher quality of aliveness a higher quality of being. So the focus is on what is gained and lost. But it still might require some letting go or surrendering or sacrificing something. Now, there's all kinds of things that people are willing to sacrifice. Like some of you probably be quite willing to sacrifice, quite a bit of your fear, or your anxiety that's easy to renounce to that. Thank you. Or you're willing to sacrifice you know, I don't know. There's all kinds of things you know, going to McDonald's. Someone told me today about the booty was it called it was called supersizing. I just hearing about the movie, I was ready to sacrifice renounce McDonald's forever. And so there's a lot of things people are kind of willing to renounce easily, perhaps And then there's things we kind of know of no, they're not healthy for us. And we're not going to fit difficult to renounce because we're lazy or because it's just kind of pleasure or do something. And we know it's not really good for us in the big picture. But in the maybe in the in the immediate moment, it kind of satisfies a certain kind of loneliness or certain kind of desire for comfort or do something. And so we kind of get into it. So Oh, I wish I hadn't would have been better if I didn't. And maybe I'm kind of an unusual person, but I find that I almost never watched television. But I noticed when I do watch television, I tend to feel I feel kind of kind of nice, little bit in the moment sometimes. But at the end of watching when I was watching, I kind of feel kind of drained. I don't feel good. It was I don't you know, I wish I hadn't

taught me to be unusual because I have a very poor diet of television. So we've haven't built up my resistance or my or my strength, have gotten you know, or have a certain kind of strength. A lot of people have the capacity to watch television. And then they're sacrificing. So in part of that, you know, announcing some of the things is giving up, you know, impulses within ourselves. And there's a lot of impulses, which are not we had we can have, which are not to our own benefit or our own well being. So, you know, what are they? What are some of the impulses that some of you have, that you willing to admit in public that you think is not so beneficial for yourself does not relate to your highest interest you believe? Anybody want to make some offer some impulses? Get a list here. Does that be your own? Actually, when you do you know, someone next to you, you know, some or somebody that you know about Voodoo that twice it's a bit safer. Yes. Buy something when you don't need it. So huge love of caffeine. Yes. Reading email several times a day feeling you have to kind of be on top of it. Yes. overeating impulse to be correct. The impulse to be correct.

So listening to the news, NPR what else working all the time. We see it really good to work all the time. Because you work all the time you want to look at yourself. And that's painful for some people. That's partly part of the reason why some people work all the time is not saying you know, what they like, you know You got to deal with what's really going on. Sorry. busy all the time. Yeah. Worry all the time worrying, worrying, worrying, worrying. noise, music or chatter, just noise music chattering, just keeping it always going going to be kind of addictive after a while it's kind of like hard to give it up.

impulse The Critic criticize other drivers impulse to accomplish all the time

from from harm. So that's something that would be useful to announce you think Sometimes it'll be nice when it's so sometimes protecting oneself is creating too much of a shell not really needed. The paradox is sometimes we protect ourselves too much, we cause more harm to ourselves, then we think the world is going to do to us.

Forget the impulse to forget as an act as an act, something you choose to do. It seems as if we're assimilating the material is it just your human human capacity? You don't have I don't I don't see how many choice but to do it, if you need to learn as you if you have that, you know, but but some people will choose to ignore some you know, Freud call it denial. Sometimes, you choose to not take something in and so they have to learn about and over again and that definitely has some choice, then it's an impulse that we can renounce. Yes, we can also resemble the experience of feeling inclusive, so disgust

needs to learn again. Yes, please. impulsive expectation That's dangerous. Seeking the company of others, so that's something you're ready. There's some aspect of that which you feel is good to announce.

So sometimes seeking company of others is another form of distraction from really being present for what's going on.

impulse to solve other people's problems

impulse buy judgments. Yes impulse to drive fast. You ready to give that up? Somebody else other people other people I'm sorry I forgot about.

Yes. Something I've been struggling with for a long time being in service for others acknowledgement so having the wrong impulses for doing service. It's maybe more selfish but more about yourself or about fear. All kinds of things can be reasons for, for what looks like a really wonderful thing to do, but the motivations are a little bit off

the impulse to fill the silence with words.

Yes. The impulse to find fault in particular with political situations, the info justified find fault. criticize at a moment's notice. Some people are good at that impulse to be the best

Regret, regret, renounced regret regret, impulse control, need to control can be renounced sometimes and other people will be very grateful.

Yes, resist change, the impulse to resist change.

The need to be perfect.

The impulse to look at what's missing what I don't have

the impulse the impulse to put off

Letting go of that you have to start work. If you don't let go of it then you can be lazy. Do nothing.

impulse to play play freecell on the computer computer

although in the other room Yeah.

compulsive or destructive thinking. Yes. So letting go certain kind of thinking. This is not useful kind of thinking. I think I pronounced this like that because it's destructive and harmful. So I think we just kind of began to scratch the surface of the, you know, one of the things weren't things classic things to renounces certain kind of attachment to self image to self identity. And the classic kind of reference point in Buddhism for renunciation are the monastics the monks and the nuns. And they're, it's very clear that they're renouncing the normal social identities that they didn't want most people have. And one of the forms that takes you know, the explicit way is that they'll shave their heads. And hair is one place where a lot of self image self identity plays itself out self concern. And so when they shave their head, they're symbolizing, that they're cutting off that kind of preoccupation and concern with themselves. And a certain kind of freedom or ease could come from that lack of concern. Not that everyone is caught up in self identity, but It's tends to be kind of epidemic and contagious enough that some people find it very helpful to kind of do something very radical to kind of ritually or symbolically or to shut kind of renounce that or let go of it.

So, that was those are all the impulses. Now, in letting go those impulses, what is gained will have to do as long but here are some of the ideas of what is gained by letting go some of the impulses freedom, spaciousness, discomfort, joys gained more time, more opportunity to be at ease your life back

Creativity, awareness, connection. Freedom from angsty. Peace a moment. What is that? It's so fleeting. And just like why would you use God before even notice it? Well, you know what's good? Is that

good enough? Good enough.

You can get lazy. I don't think so. I think that laziness is an activity of the mind. And if you let go, Well, you'd let go of that activity as well. You'd think you'd respond. Then you'd respond to what the what's happening around you. I think the natural, the natural state of the mind is a state, part of the net and aspects of the natural state of mind is it's responsive. So if someone's walking on the street next to you and slips and falls, if you're open and present, you probably stretch your hand down to help the person now. If your neighbor is sick, you probably go and bring them some soup. You know, so you start responding. And the world needs a lot of people to help respond. So there's no end to it.

I once heard a Zen saying about kind of defined Zen meditation or Zen practice, and very simply, that there's two aspects of Zen practice, sitting in Zen meditation. And then sweeping the temple courtyard, but temple courtyard here symbolic for the whole world. So Sitting in meditation, coming to that place of

peace that ease that freedom, and then responding to the leaves in the courtyard by sweeping them or whatever else is going on around you being able to respond, but be able to respond without losing our happiness or ease or freedom. That's why we make a big deal many people do, that the difference between reacting and responding. And a life of freedom is one that's capable of responding. instead of reacting and reacting is habitual reactions, you know, we will react before we even know if there's no choice in the matter.

So there's lots to be gained by renouncing by letting go. And in the Buddhist tradition, it's understood that renouncing the mental movement to renounce in order to be healthy, has to be always supposed to be a wholesome state of mind. In other words, it's meant to be a healthy state of mind. So it cannot have any aspect of aversion, or ill will or resistance or the kind of agreed as part of it. If you're pushing something away because you hate it, I hate them and push that away, then it's not really nekkhamma, renouncing, or if you're really greedy for freedom or for peace, then it's not really renouncing, there has to be some quality of health or the ease of, of in the act of renouncing itself. And so one of the things so if you pay attention to ease and what takes you away from it, you'll notice that if you're letting go of something, and you're not doing an unhealthy way, part of it is not very easy. You'll lose some of your ease in it. Resistance pushing something away. judging it. If it's a healthy form of renunciation of letting go, then the act itself is a joyful act. And this is one of the things that I learned in recent years about letting go is that, you know, my years of Buddhist practice, I've done a lot of letting go. And mostly it was, you know, some of it was not always easy, but you know, something I learned to do relatively well, until I had my first child. And then I thought, Oh, this is easy, because I just let go, my sleep, like, Oh, you know, all kinds of things. Like, you know, and I had all these things I wanted to do, I was used to doing I know, I was, I had children, I was somewhat, you know, getting on in my adulthood. So I was used to having all this freedom to do things and, and I found I couldn't do all these things I was used to doing and so okay, I let go of them. And what I found was that I ended up being resentful. Okay. grumpy. And, and that wasn't very healthy. And I realized that I hadn't really let go. If, if I was not happy, I didn't experience joy in letting go. I learned Watch out, Gail, you're in trouble. Because then come back and bite me by being resentful or grumpy or something. And I had to learn to look for what do I have to let go of, so that I can experience the joy of letting go. So that was a you know, the real, the key of it, where do I find it with so it might, I might have to let go of my sleep or let go of the particular activity I'm doing. But that's not really the issue. The issue with it was something deeper, some deeper kind of attachment that was going on. So for example, getting enough sleep, you know, renouncing my sleep, I could give up my sleep, you know, for the moment, but back in the back of my mind, you know, Saturday night, not being able to sleep back, my mind with some attachment to be able to Give a lucid Dharma talk Sunday morning. Because then all of you would like me. And that was still kind of operating back there, you know, like, Oh, you know, I have to give us, you know, how can I give a good talk if I'm tired? And, and so it was really constructed around that. And that was, I had to kind of maybe let go of that too. I just made that story up. I don't know. But, but you know, you know, there's something deeper that needs to be let go of. And so, where what do we have to let go of, so that we experienced the joy? The joy and delight, of letting go urbanization, what do we gain from it? And if you don't experience joy and delight, maybe you shouldn't let go too quickly. A part of the, again, part of the what we do in mindfulness meditation, is we try to understand what's going on. So if we don't if we don't discover the joy Have letting go, maybe don't let go. But rather study the situation more carefully, understand better what's going on. Hang out with it for a few days or a few weeks or however long, you really get to know something really well. And the theory in Buddhism is that if you know something really, really well, is it going to be easy to find your freedom. So don't be in a hurry to let go of things until you understood what you're letting go of, and then have joy be a guideline for you for that. And last thing I want to say about letting go is that

what we let go of what we can renounce depends a lot on what our priorities are, and what our visions are for what's possible. And if we have a real vision, that it's possible to have or attain reach, some very Some great goal, then, we're often willing to renounce a lot of things so we can attain that great goal. Olympic athletes will renounce a lot temporarily in the years of training, things that are often very healthy and good for this great goal they're pursuing. If a person has a very clear vision of what's possible to reach or accomplish or do with a spiritual life, then it begins making some sense to kind of rearrange the person's priorities, and perhaps even simplify or let go of things, which are actually really quite good and quite healthy. But human being cannot do all the healthy things that's possible. All the great things are possible. And to be able to choose and simplify one's life. To be able to pursue one or two great goals is quite beautiful thing to do in one's life. And the stronger person's sense of purpose or sense of vision of what's possible. The more things a person can often in a healthy way, renouncing let go of, so they can really follow through that and follow their heart's deepest wish.

The Zen master Suzuki Roshi said, pronunciation is, is allowing things to pass away. When they pass away, something like that I would look wrong in the quote, some recognition of how things pass things are always changing and passing away and then allowing it to go. And as we get older and older and older, there are a number of things that seems to pass away or not Be there in the same way they were, we were younger. And it's possible to hold on to that and feel bitter and angry and disappointed and embarrassed and all those things. But it's also possible to practice Buddhist renunciation, with all the things that are passing away all capacities and we're losing. And to realize that we just like go and find joy in letting go. There's so little we need to be happy. And there's something, there's a joy, it's possible to have joy in letting go of what we're losing anyway. Or as possible to be better. I wish I would encourage you to explore how to find the joy of what's inevitable and the joy of letting go anyway, thank you.