

2004-12-26 Peaceful Mind

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SPEAKERS

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I was reflecting a little bit about. For many people, the focus of this time of year is that people say it's a season of peace. And my hope, of course, is that there's peace doesn't have a season. that peace is something that is relevant at all times. And from the Buddhist tradition, the idea of peace is very important. Buddhist practice is meant to bring peace both to oneself and to the world around one. But the focus on Buddhism, Buddhist practice, I think it almost always has been to focus first on finding peace within oneself. Finding the peace within oneself and then with that going out into the world. With that, and engaging the world bring peace to the world. But if a person doesn't have peace inside themselves, then there can be problems and going around and taking care of the world around around. And certainly I've been in situations where I wasn't very peaceful. And then something happened around. And I responded but my way of responding was so agitated and so alarmed in ways that afterwards I regretted that how could I've gotten so excited, you know, sort of caught by the event.

And this focus on finding peace with oneself first. The, in a sense, the, the heart of the spiritual if you want if we want to use the word spiritual for Buddhism, Western word doesn't Buddhists don't use the word Buddhist languages but if you want to use the word spiritual, the spiritual focus or spiritual reality that Buddhism most focuses on, is found in one's own mind and one's own heart. And that's certainly in contrast, in many religious traditions were what is considered spiritual is found outside might vary one's relationship to that outside thing might be part of spiritual life and, but that the sacred or whatever, somehow external and the it's somewhat common to contrast the opening of a very famous Buddhist texts called the Dhammapada. With the opening of the Bible, the Old Testament, the Torah and you know, where the opening of the Bible it's the emphasis is on God as the Creating force of the universe. And then God judges that this is good. But it's the god that's kind of creating everything. In opening a Dhammapada, the focus is on the power of the mind. And it's the mind that creates. It's not that the Buddhism claims that the mind creates universe, but Buddhism tends not to have a focus too much on the notion of cosmological metaphysics. But but this is the opening of Dhammapada. And you might want to remember that the word mind in Buddhism, I could pretty well be translated as heart. And if you do a test of your heart, you have a little bit different feeling, reaction perhaps to what's being said. All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind, speak or act with a corrupted mind. Suffering follows, as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind made by mind, speak or act with a peaceful mind. And happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves. So here the primacy of the primacy of the mind or the heart is emphasized. And then the rest of this text the Dhammapada is 426 verses in some ways of explaining or working this out how what we do with our minds and how we care for our minds, has a huge impact on our psychological or spiritual well being. And that the mind is kind of the mind doesn't create the universe, but the mind creates the way we experience helps shape that experience. And it is quite humbling to read Some of the studies from science and psychology and physiology, neuroscience, neuro psychology, to realize

the degree to which the mind and our neurology shapes the way in which we experience the world around us the way we experience ourselves. And that what seems so obvious in our, in the field of our perception. And so Matter of fact, is not so obvious. And Matter of fact, when you start studying how complex the mind is, and how the mind is capable of, in some sense, constructing perceptions of the world, a little simple, simple example is maybe some of you had this experience. I've had the experience of kind of walking along someplace. And then the having just a glimpse of some something for a moment, and then knowing what it is. And then I look more carefully find one No, it's not that at all. Once I had that bit of snake, very big snake, the snake was probably six feet long. And it was dusk. So that was kind of you know me part of the and I thought it was a branch across the path. So I stepped on it and then I jumped but you know I you know that the mind can construct a certain kind of view can see see things it said that the it's been said I don't know so much how this works but that there's a very small area of, of our visual field that we're actually focusing on in any given moment. And all around that little area of focus.

The mind is has a construction, a painting that it's made of what is the rest of the picture perfectly I've always there may be a few seconds ago because I mind The eyes are looking around but but Something happens, it changes off that narrow focus, sometimes we don't necessarily know that something has been changed, unless the eye kind of moves to see it. So generally, tests where they had text on a screen, and they can attract people's eyes. Then when when people's eyes are kind of focusing on one particular word effects, they switch to word someplace else. And, and the people observers don't see the switch and still see that the old word is still there. So there's probably you know, thousands of these kinds of experiments that show that you know, the way that we perceive the world and experience the world is not so you know, it's not as world's not, not always as it seems. Because of the tremendous power in the mind. I'm fond of saying that in today's the full moons that's probably what I'll say it is a beautiful full moon. We might not see it today tonight. But we say full moon and quarter moon and new moon. But the moon is always full. And but you know, we're our vantage point we say it's you know, half and quarter whatever, but the moon is always full, or the earth you know, we say that the sun is the sun goes down at sunset, the sun doesn't go down particularly, it's we're standing at the beach looking at the Sun and the Earth is spinning backwards at 10s of thousands of miles an hour. I don't know how fast it goes but you know spinning backwards hurling through space and, and then wonder dizzy you know. So we think we say the sun is setting. So the same thing happens with our perceptions about ourselves who we are as a self, the human being as a person. We have all kinds of naive ideas of what the self is. We have some sometimes idea of a unitary self, self as the agent. The self is who I am right and I am what I am or something or some kind of way Hold on to some idea of integrity around the self. But that also is a kind of construct of the mind. And some people's brains don't work quite right. And they don't have certain kind of basic things that we take for granted, and know how the mind functions and it doesn't it doesn't work for them. And so, you know, one thing is that there's a particular part of the brain, that dysfunction apparently is to identify my hand as my hand. And when that function of the brain is not there, person looks at the hand doesn't see it as their hand. It's an activity of the brain that that makes that thing. I don't know, that was a good example. But there's a lot of activity in the brain that shapes and organizes the world around us. And it's so important to our experience with the world that I think that it helps us understand this quote, by the Buddha, all experiences preceded by mind led by mind made by mind, spirit Correct with a corrupted mind and suffering follows, as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. So the focus here in this particular quote, is not making some grand conclusion about the role of the mind and constructing reality, or helping shape it in some ways. But rather, it's to focus on a particular area of suffering, and happiness. And if a person speaks with a corrupted mind, then suffering follows, as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. If you speak with a peaceful mind, then happiness follows like a shadow that never leaves. And these two images of an ox pulling a wagon is a very tiring image. You know, it's a very

heavy, it's a lot of burden. You're chugging along, it's muddy soil or whatever. And it's a lot of work, and it's tiring. The second image of a shadow that never leaves. It doesn't take any energy to bring your stick shadow Long as long as the sun's out, you know you you can do it without even thinking you know and doesn't require anything of you that somehow the connection between a corrupted mind and suffering is one of a burden being carried with you. The connection between a peaceful mind speak or act with a peaceful mind and happiness is one that's quite light and easy and kind of floats along with you. quite a difference kind of feeling wait.

One of the one of the values of developing a peaceful mind or a calm mind or still mind is we can see more clearly what's going on. And the agitated mind cannot see very clearly. And the analogy for this is that of that I like is that of a surface of a water which is all agitated. And then if you can have a boat going through that agitated, lots of waves and wind swept away in a boat goes through a small book goes through that water, you can't release, notice what happens to it's awake. So we kind of get disappears very quickly in all the turbulence, but certainly has awake but it kind of gets absorbed. And you know that you can't see what happens to it. But if the surface of the water is really common still, then the wake of a single boat will trail behind it for a long time you see what happens to it, you see the effect. So when the mind is really agitated, it's hard to see the effect that our actions have. The mind is really still we can see the effect and it can be have a big effect on ourselves and our happiness and well being and our suffering and, and so, speak or act with a corrupted mind and suffering follows in your wake, speak or act with a peaceful mind and then Happiness follows in the wake of that then we can kind of see it, feel it with a peaceful mind. The emphasis on the mind and Buddhism as being primary is not meant not meant to be seen that Buddhism is forced into kind of material kind of philosophy of materialism. That's all just material and stuff. The mind in Buddhism is considered more spiritual. So with spiritual reality realization is where we kind of where we make the world sacred is through the heart, how we hold our mind or how the mind operates and functions.

The mind or the heart is something it's meant to be quite intimate. And part of the value of focusing on the mind or mentioning this this was focusing something which is very intimate within us. Something you know, people nowadays say the mind is not just in the brain, but it's all over the body. But the sense of presence, the sense of heartfulness hence of the mind of awareness that resides throughout our pores, is something that's quite intimate, coming very close to us. And so to come to emphasize the importance of the mind, and finding how to bring the mind to peace is defined how to come very close to something which is intimate and warm and, and delightful, something that's, that's precious within us. Somebody once said that in a way that people often focus on their thoughts and thinking, first and foremost, we kind of many, many people are addicted to their thoughts, trying to negotiate the world through their through their thinking and thoughts. That it's kind of like a person sleeping in his or her house and person hears really loud noise in the basement and then wakes up to go investigate and goes in nearly to the attic. If we go immediately to our thoughts, and try to figure things out, we're kind of missing often where the real action is. And so part of what Buddhist meditation does or what is mindfulness practice is trying to do is train us to drop out of the realm of thinking or expand the awareness wide or in the realm of thinking out of the attic in the sense. So we can really investigate the fullness of what's here in our psychophysical being and, and there's something very intimate here to be found. That is not accessible. If we're trying to think our way into it. Thinking can be quite lovely, and bring a lot of pleasure. But thinking doesn't connect us to the vivid this visceral sense the immediate sense of this mind or this heart, this awareness, which, you know, is much more expensive abroad or more, more at the core of our being Then our thinking is, I think of thinking as being a kind of the outer, concentric circle of the human being. It's kind of like you have this, throw a rock into a pond, and it creates all these concentric circles that go out. And the outermost ones are thinking, and we tend to live there at the outermost concentric circle. But if we can train ourselves to recognize and see that what's

more central, the inner one, then we also begin to discover where peace is to be found. And peace is not to be found in our thinking, even though you can have peaceful thoughts. Thinking is not where the pieces to be found. And so to find that which is intimate, to come in, and drop into the heart, drop into awareness drop into, you know, the stillness of the mind, is one of the ways to begin finding this peace. In the Buddhist tradition, there's often been an emphasis, not an often but sometimes a way of talking about the peaceful mind. It's talked about as if as a mind, which is a, which is still an unmoving mind. And some people association with an unmoving mind or still mind is one of apprehension or fear. And you still might see one, maybe one that's frozen are one that's, you know, not creative and active and engaged in wonderful things. But if you have a look at the idea of the concentric circles, the idea is that at the very center of this concentric circles, there's a place of stillness. And there might be activity and creativity all around. That's center. But the centers still, sort of still centers can be cliché, and the unmoving mind. So that which is most intimate. That which is most precious, in a sense, is something which is unmoving at the center that allows us to observe and be present for everything else, and essentially participate with everything else that goes on. In the mind and the world around us, but we do it from that place of stillness, of awareness. To get a little taste of this maybe sense of it, or where to work towards this is, is to begin thinking of mindfulness as a movement of stillness, that when we bring awareness to something in our experience, no matter what it is, our breath, our body, our feelings, our thoughts, the world around us.

The what we're trying to what we're trying to discover do with that is to meet that experience with that part of the mind which is unmoving, or which is still to know something is to meet is to know something with the stillness of the mind. Now the mind most most of our minds might be agitated most of the time, but that little kind of hint of where's the unmoving awareness, this this particular instance. Because there's something about the knowing of anything in the knowing there can be stillness. So for me, this is a very important point of view, because there's a very strong tendency to want to react to the experience, to get agitated, or to be thinking about it, or to push it away or hold on to it or do something about the experience. To sometimes to judge the experience, judge myself, to be aware of something in oneself, and then it's just simply awareness of it and there's still still awareness. So this is what's happening. But the awareness gets entangled with all the movements of the mind, the movements forward against that we can have. So the idea of meeting our experience with an unmoving mind, is not the whole the mind frozen, but is to find that place of knowing which is not agitated but what the experience is. So even when something terrible happens, even when some, you have some personal insight that shows you that you're, you know how terrible you are, happens to some people occasionally. You know, that even that's not an excuse to allow you to get caught up in the agitation of the mind in relationship to that. We don't, we don't use, we don't like anything being an excuse to not search for that place of stillness, the unmoving place or the nonreactive place. And then I suggest is a very powerful challenge. The challenge of not picking up any reactivity, no matter what is happening in the world around us. Don't reactivity at all. That was a terrible breath, or I can't do this meditation or I think I better Go defrost the freezer rather meditate. Or I've, you know, all these thoughts and reactions and movements of the mind, the mind, part of the mind, the outer surface of the concentric mind, you know, is a lot of movement. And we're so easily seduced by that and pulled into that. And so all things that preceded the mind the mind shapes our experience with the mind is not what we think it is. Or we are not who we think we are. And it's so can you kind of question who you are question your experience for the purposes of finding how to get to the peaceful mind. If you're not at peace in your own heart. Why is that? What is the Why is it required for you not to be at peace Why have you bought into something? What have you bought into? What have you adapted or accepted or latched on to that causes you to lose that place of stillness within what has aroused you and caught you? Most of us can live most of the days aroused in the moving mind in the reactive mind. It's not always so easy to find the unreactive mind still mind. But I think that when we start bringing attention to our experience, and

interest in knows what is really going on now, what is going on now. See if you can bring with that interest. What is happening now. A experimenting with that now having a stillness in that knowingness, stillness and that awareness what is happening now and then makes space Maybe they will have a space, the temporal space. physical space kind of what's happening now? Is there a stillness here? When you lose the stillness, you lose the movement or not have it? Why? What are you galloping away with? What do you What's the pool? What's the, what is what is so interesting?

One of the most famous chats in Theravada Buddhism is one that goes: Aniccā vata saṅkhārā, Uppāda vaya dhamminō, Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, Tesam vūpa samō sukhō. And it translated something like this. All formations are impermanent. All formations formations here can mean a variety of things. But one of the key meanings is all the formations of the mind construction activity of the mind are impermanent. The mind is not hardware, the mind is only software in the Buddhist view, so you know, and if so that's why the mind, Buddhism focus in the mind can be changed, it's malleable. The mind is very malleable and change changeable. You don't have to take it as a fixed thing. So, all the formations of the mind are impermanent. They arise and they pass away. They come in and go. This stilling of these formations, bringing these formations to peace is the greatest happiness. So rather than thinking that this peace is stillness, the unmoving mind, at the heart, in our heart, the heart of our hearts is an unattractive place. Because it's one of the great or the greatest, probably the greatest source of happiness that's available to who we are. The ultimate happiness. One of the paradoxes of this whole process of finding the still mind, the unbelieving mind, is when the mind when when we get absorbed in the unmoving mind, the usual are most of the ways your sense of self disappear. And the sense of, inside and outside also tend to disappear. So when we come to the center where it's still, it's kind of like, we explode outward again. And the whole world is, you know, contained within that stillness, a whole world is contained within it within that awareness. Awareness contained within the whole world. So So, where Buddhism focuses, you know, has these verses were focuses on the primacy of the mind. The mind as it becomes developed doesn't become something that's separate from the world independent to the world. But kinda it's kind of like you go into into the center and then you come out and the whole world becomes yours. So last thing I'll say is that what makes the sacred in Buddhism, what is most sacred arises when nothing is excluded from awareness, when the mind is still or when the mind is at peace, and all things are included within it. Then the world becomes Sacred. But if anything's are kept outside, that's unacceptable and to pay attention to that. Or we keep so busy in focusing on one particular area of our life. Then we've lost touch with that which is sacred from the Buddhist point of view. A fixated mind is not sacred. But a mind which is open still an open includes everything within it is sacred. So what is that mind that can hold everything within it? That has space for everything? And what is that mind? And why is it so? revered in the Buddhist tradition? So that's for you to find out for yourself. So, may you all be peaceful for this coming year and May you if you if you're inclined, I'd like to encourage people to participate in that wonderful tradition of New Year's resolutions. And since intention, intentions are so important in Buddhism, you might spend his days reflecting a little bit on your deepest intentions. And if today's talk somehow about peace that's available in your own hearts can help you with that exercise of looking for deep intention. That'd be great. And then come New Year's Eve. State your intention.

So thank you and Happy New Year.