

2005-11-27 Right Effort Cultivating Wholesome States

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SPEAKERS

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shift gears a little bit for a talk. So if you are driving a car and you're going in reverse, turn backwards you decide that you actually want to go forwards and you have a manual thing. You have to pop it out of reverse first and I guess it goes through neutral before you put into first or somebody to drive off but you have to kind of stop going in reverse first the shift gears and then you need to put it into first or put it into a forward gear to go forward the For right efforts can be understood by this analogy, that if you're going in a direction you don't want to go, you have to first disengage from that direction. But if you just leave yourself a neutral, there's a lost opportunity. Because if you, you know, if you just pop it out in reverse, you're probably not gonna go forward. Unless you're pointing downhill. And you're pointing uphill, you're gonna keep going in reverse. So there has to be a shift is not enough just to let go of where you're at and going to neutral. There's also moving forward. And one of the things that I learned to do, I maybe I shouldn't say well, but one of the primary things I've learned to do in my years of monastic life was to let go to let go of the directions that weren't so helpful for me to be. So, let go of my attachments let go of trains of thought that were not helpful let go of moods and emotions, let go of motivations, impulses, let go of tension and learn to let go a lot and just in in letting go learning to be present. And I learned how powerful it is to be present and to be really fully present. And some people say we'll say present is kind of a forward gear. But being present, letting go and being present is very helpful. But one of the surprises for me of being a parent to young children is that letting go and being present is often not enough. And this has been a little bit of an insult to me or I don't know, insults the right word, but but it's been somewhat of a you know, it's like Not the way it should be. I spent years letting go and being present and that was enough. And that's not enough. You have to do all this problem solving has to go on. If I just sit down, be present with my kids running around screaming, you know, it's probably helps a little bit. Certainly presence is really important and being able to let go is really important, but it's not enough. You have to offer something you have to configure on what to do, you have to kind of muster up a certain kind of attitude or approach. Sometimes you have to be strong

and firm and sometimes you have to kind of know when to be loving and kind and, and but even the mood that the emotional kind of reaction that I bring to my children has to be considered this problem solving what's needed here. And it was supposed to be easy to practice. Let go the present right so what so in this particular situation with parenting, I've seen how important it is to cultivate helpful states of mind helpful attitudes helpful efforts. And it takes some effort to do that. So to let go and be present is kind of like making a blank slate. And with that blank slate, you could do something, you could paint the painting, paint, whatever you need to do or make something out of that. Or you could just not do anything. And sometimes not doing anything is blissful, that's great. But it's also at times a lost opportunity. And it's a lost opportunity to move our life in a helpful way in a certain direction. So if you want to drive a car, you have to do more than just get out of reverse. If you want to go to the Grand Canyon from San Francisco, you have to do more than you get into reverse pull out of your driveway. And they have to get out of reverse in order to it's kind of going but you can't just get into neutral You have to have it, you have to kind of get it in forward gear. But then you need to drive skillfully, to long way to the Grand Canyon. And you need to develop and cultivate skillful driving habits. If you want to arrive there in a peaceful, happy way, in a way that's supportive of certain intentions to live a peaceful life, a happier life, a liberated life. So if you drive at 85 miles an hour, weaving in and out of the traffic, and you're surprised if you arrive at the Grand Canyon, exhausted, then, you know, you shouldn't be surprised. You know, it has to do with your driving, you weren't driving in a way that was helpful to arrive in a subtle, peaceful way. There's a way of driving which is helpful for your purpose, in a way that's not helpful. The way it's helpful for others, and so you can take some responsibility for how you drive and that's a lot of things you can take responsibility for. You can take responsibility for The actual physical way to drive you know the speed and care that you take as you drive, you can take responsibility for your attention. how careful and full your attention is in the driving. You can have the cell phone and a DVD player on the same time. You know, it can just pay occasionally looking out the window. As you drive that's not you know, how much attention you give or you can have, you have a conversation or all kinds of ways not giving your full attention to driving. You can miss choices you need to make about maybe your mood, your mood affects your driving, and some moods if you're angry. Or if you're irritated or tweeting to get there in time, certain kinds of moves and kind of feelings that don't allow you to drive great clarity. You need to take responsibility for your motivation. You know, what's your motivation and how you drive. Getting there as fast as you can maybe not the best motivation to have. There's a whole series of sometimes all the different ways in which human beings can get engaged in activity. physically, emotionally motivationally you're thinking, give me what you think about maybe it's important. If you spend a lot of time lost in fantasy, maybe you're not driving very carefully. So you have to curtail hold back a certain kind of thinking. So that you can really stay present for what you're doing. So, so, when we drive, I think all those come into gear come into into play. But most of us, we don't think about it so much, maybe it's more innate, or, you know, we just, you know, it's kind of obvious way to do it, or certainly doesn't seem like a spiritual practice to do that. It just seems like oh, you know, I should drive in a way that's helpful or careful or not, and then take responsibility for what happens if you're not doing it that way. So, if you understand how this applies to driving, the same thing applies to other aspects of our lives, including our inner life, our inner sense of well being. If you have a direction you want to go, there's skillful and unskillful Ways to go there. So, if

what you want to do is to go to attain some very deep possibility of peace, or enter into a kind of develop a certain kind of spiritual capacity for peace, compassion, love, liberation, right if things generosity in Buddhism those are kind of considered a package. So if you want to move towards that package, then there are skillful ways of moving towards that and unskillful ways of moving towards that. If you spend your time lying, stealing, harming people, you're actually going in the opposite direction. It's like driving to Seattle, you're trying to go to the Grand Canyon. So, we have to learn to let go of those things which are unskillful which take us in a different direction. A lot of this has to do with the fact that in Buddhism, Buddhism puts a lot of emphasis that our actions, our activities, have consequences. Every activity human being engages in, unless the unless it's enlightened activity has consequences. So not just consequences in the world kind of the external world, it has consequences for our inner life for an inner sense of well being. So if we lie, we think, Oh, I got away. That's one quick lie and I got away that was nice. We got out of trouble. And maybe in the immediate moment, you got our trouble by lying. But there are consequences in your psyche, and your inner life, that line will have and sooner or later those consequences will bear fruit or flower and show themselves. It can be as subtle as creating a very subtle habit began easier for you to live the next time and easier the next time. It could be that the largest someplace inside of you, as some kind of tension are holding and at some point as you get more free that that whole gets revealed music Wow, I have to deal with the fact that I lied 20 years ago that's still lodged in there I can't get get further my spiritual life looking at that he thought he got away Scot scot free. But sooner or later, if you're going to be a meditator, sooner or later, things will catch up to you. And you have to look at it. So, things have consequences or activities, all activities have consequences. So, in Buddhism, there's this very strong emphasis to begin taking responsibility for activities for actions and their consequences. And what's amazing in the teachings of Buddhism, is how subtle activities what what subtle activities are included as activities, even your thoughts or activities. And you can just let some people just let your thoughts kind of wander freely whichever way they want. But there's a skillful and helpful way of taking some responsibility for the direction number thinking that or our motivations or impulses, to our reactions, our moods, our feelings, all these things we are activities, human activities, and would neither just let them kind of do whatever they're going to do, in certain sense, be a slave to them or since kind of be an automatic pilot, or we can start taking responsibility, taking our seat in the driver's seat, rather than being a passenger. I know in some spiritual circles, the emphasis is is more like you're in the passenger seat and to someone else in the driver's seat, and you can just kind of trust the driver. In Buddhism, there's no one else to drive your car. You as a driver, it's not the whole picture. There's the engine, the gasoline hasn't go in. There's other things going on to contribute. But you are responsible for your activity. It's like No one else is gonna pee for you. Right? You're waiting for some, you know, other drivers to do it for you. There's certain things you can only do for yourself. And so taking care of your, your, your activity, what did what you do with your life, the endeavors the efforts you make in your life is something that you can or cannot take responsibility for. And so Boudin says take full responsibility for it. So letting go is important, letting go of unskillful and helpful states. That's we've been talking about the last two weeks. And then what today is take responsibility for cultivating and developing wholesome or skillful states states of mind skillful activity skillful efforts. To have some sense of what skillful, you have to have some sense of where you're going, what your goal is, without some sense of

a goal, or some sense of purpose or some sense of direction, you can't really talk about maybe what's skillful and unskillful. So if your goal is to be peaceful, or if your goal is to be helpful, or friendly, or to be safe or to be whatever it might be that you have as a goal, then then you can then you can answer the question, what is it it's helpful to attain that to do that just make that possible. In Buddhism, the fundamental goal is or to the Buddha gave two paths that you could follow. One is a path towards happiness, and the other is the path towards liberation. And the two are separate, but not distinct. They have this tremendous overlap. The things you need to do in order to create conditions for happy life are very much the same conditions you need to do the creative life of awakening or freedom. And so the Buddha listed a whole bunch of things you can do and cultivate, to help make more easily possible to become, to cultivate both. The first thing he said you cultivate is generosity. to cultivate your generosity. Don't go Don't just cultivate giving, giving is just giving, giving an activity, the cultivating inner state of generosity when you give, see if you can do it in a generous way. generosity creates conditions for happiness in the present moment and also in the future, or give in such a way cultivate generosity in such a way that it produces happiness. If it produces bitterness, don't give. But do it figure out some way to be generous. So bring some joy to you. It also helps with having the ability to let go. generous to me means you give a little bit more than expected. So there's letting go that happens. A releasing of attachments, which is a skillful thing to do, and the more you can let go, the more you can release, the easier it is to be free or happy in the future. cultivating ethical life was very important for the Buddha. So live in an ethical way. Then cultivate Be careful with your thoughts with what you believe with your views. Look carefully at the your cognitive world. take some responsibility of it what goes on in your mind regularly? What is your comments, thoughts, beliefs, opinions that you carry? Are they useful? Are they not useful? How do you engage with your thoughts? Do you ride your thoughts really close? Are they tight? This is really important kind of caught by your thoughts? Or can you cultivate some ability to let go and be loose with your thoughts gonna light with your thoughts? Can you change your thoughts at will? You ever thought yeah, that's not useful to think about I think about something else. Or can you think deeply about your thinking, to see what is skillful here and what's unskillful to spend a lot of time with blame. blaming someone else for your problems. is like giving Have your driver's seat. And it's a waste of time to spend a lot of time blaming. discerning whether there's been some responsibility is as important. But you can never should never blame somebody else. For your inner state of mind, your inner state of life. You should take responsibility for your interstates yourself. If you spend time blaming, you've stopped taking responsibility. So to see that see how the mind works, not be tricked by and be fooled by it in turn and look inward, where the real work needs to be done around your mood, your mental state, what needs to be done here. What does it take to cultivate some helpful emotional states? We put a lot of emphasis in our in Buddhism, on cultivating loving kindness, goodwill, you could have a certain amount of goodwill in your life that just kind who you are you carry around with you and sometimes it shows up and sometimes it doesn't. You don't know quite why Certain people you have and some people you don't, and you don't know quite why or have some idea, and it's fine. What we say in Buddhism is, don't just be content with your innate capacity for goodwill, whatever it might be. Stretch it, expand it, cultivate it, develop it, so that you can have goodwill towards more people and more beings. So you should cultivate that capacity. You'll be a happier person. If you cultivate your capacity for goodwill for friendliness, for loving

kindness. And cultivating loving kindness is a condition that helps the mind become free. It's a lot easier for the mind to release itself to liberate itself when it exists in the field of kindness. Also, it said that loving kindness, compassion also can be developed, that both those qualities of mind tend to create clear seeing rather than making someone Pollyannaish, it tends to make you can see more clearly what is really going on. Then if you're, if you're seeing through the filter of anger or resentment or stinginess, or something like that. So to see more clearly takes up some responsibility for how we see the view we have of this life we live. One of the remarkable things is to how we look at other people. Do we look at other people as threats? Do we look at other people as as we judging them some negative way? Or can we we look at other people? Can we see their beauty? Do we see their ugliness for the city of beauty? As if we really are the judge of their ugliness? Who knows? But oh, you know, that person shouldn't be doing that or whatever. But it's a waste of time certain kind of way of judging other people is a waste of time. Is there a way that's not Pollyannaish? It's very realistic. We actually looking and cultivating the ability to see what is beautiful and people were was wonderful, and then relate to that speak to that. draw that out of them support them. I've been recipient of people who've done that to me. And I'm just blown away. You know, I'm doing doing my thing, you know, living my life, you know, maybe I'm grumpy or something. And then I see this person who's a friend of mine. And, and it's really clear this person is seeing something really nice in me. And pretty quickly, you know, I feel pretty good. That's nice. Wow. Or the person reminds me Remember, you know, you're no reminds me of something I've done in the past or somebody I'm with that person or one friend of mine tells me that's a record and he says, Oh, I just, I'm just happy when I think about you. And so he sees certain things. Sometimes I can't see myself so can we can do that to other people too, right? Oh, he can can be told someone Oh, when I think about you, you make me happy. Nice. I mean, don't wait for someone to do to you. It's a waste of time. You have better things to do more skillful things to do with your time than waiting, you know? No one said yes. If you have any interest like that, go find someone that you genuinely feel makes you happy and just say to them, you know, oh, you make me happy. Or when you did that last week, you know, last week I was happy and less than anytime he was happy. I think a cultivates the wholesome cultivates skillful cultivates a sense of goodwill cultivate sense of happiness creates conditions that are very different than if you go around gossiping or slandering people. Imagine you know every time you saw someone new When that person talks about you behind your back, that you're saying good things. Great. As opposed to worrying, and what does that person really saying? You know, or maybe you're that kind of person. Let me tell you, I got this great bit of news. Let me tell you what I found out about doesn't make people feel good. Like pppppp a certain kind of vitality comes with sharing gossip, but I think it's a waste of time. Also, you can rather say, oh, gossip, I think, you know, kind of derogatory things are kind of what can be said, Oh, you know, I saw my friend You know, so and so. And I was really happy. That person just makes me happy. Can you believe what the person did? The person was kind. And then you hear through the grapevine. About you out there, just talking about kind of your so to cultivate. So what is it that you could cultivate? So what is it you can develop. And the idea in Buddhism is that it's a practice that we cultivate and develop over time. Any skill that you want to have, generally takes time and ability to cultivate. And the other day, I was at a pizza place with my son, another family. And that is pizza met this menu for kids, you know, little things you can draw and puzzles they do. And they had a small little

Sudoku puzzle for the kids. And I've never done Sudoku before. And I was trying to make sense of it. And it's really easy for kids read faster and they couldn't, and the other parent took it in front of me just 123 and so now, last two days, I've been doing Sudoku at home. And the first day I failed, but yesterday I figured it out. In it, you get the hang of it. It's a skill you develop. So do you hang in there so I could have just felt bad for myself forever, right? Oh, you know, I get kids who don't go I couldn't do you know, I'm so dumb. That's an unskillful state to be in. But I kind of grappled it Okay, I'm gonna deal with this thing. You know, this Nemesis mine, deal with it, you know and try to cultivate, develop certain skill. So I was there with the numbers and figure it out. So we can develop ourselves and it's well worth when you get into neutral. Once you figure out how to let go of reverse you going, your life's going in the wrong direction. It's a huge, wonderful thing. To get into neutral. It's great. And in fact, what Buddhism says, to offer mindfulness to cultivate mindfulness and presence is a skillful thing to do. Mindfulness and presence is not neutral. So, I want to I might have been a little bit not emphasizing this importance enough earlier. But, but when you get kind of neutral don't just coast. If you coast in your cars going uphill you're in trouble. See what you can do to cultivate what is the best in you see what you can cultivate states of mind, states of heart wise understandings, wise views, wise approaches by his motivations. You see what you can do to cultivate and develop it. Look, look in different situations. I like to say like when I when I used to have a date book that I used to write my to do listing and for a while with my practice, to the beginning of the day to look at all things I had to do for the day that don't mean different appointments and stuff. And then imagine or think about, what was the intention that I wanted to infuse with each of those things? Get over it as quickly as I can, you know? No, not that at all. But, but it was okay. When I go to supermarket, I have to go to the markets on the list. Let me see if I can be in that market in a way that I can cultivate more friendliness to the people I encounter there is a clerk for example. That's my wish. Rather than just be neutral in supermarket or get out of this quickly as I can. And so to infuse our life with skillful intentions, skillful motivations, motivations that are helpful for us and helpful for others, is one way of cultivating what is wholesome. I don't think it's pollyannish. To do that, I think it's very realistic. When you it's very realistic to realize that the human heart, the human mind, is malleable. shapeable it's developable, it's cultivatable. It's phenomenal how much the heart and the mind can be developed and cultivated. It's a phenomenal instrument. It's a phenomenal tool. And so just leave it as it is, is not only a wasted resource, but it's also a lost opportunity. If you take that opportunity of cultivating yourself, figuring out how to deal with new eyes way down through time, you'll get a lot of benefits, lots and lots of benefits. So I ended with my two, two of my favorite analogies. Apologize that maybe heard it before many times. Maybe it's my favorite. So the first is I like to do yoga And I heard of the yoga teacher for whom students couldn't get into certain posture, because they couldn't stretch far enough, like, get their hands down on the floor in some way. They would pile up these telephone books. And they said, okay, you just bust your every day, every day, carry out one telephone page. One telephone page and telephone book is very, very thin, it's not gonna make much difference. However, if you do it every day, you know, there's only like 400 pages of elephant book, right? So after a year, year and a half, you're down to the floor. A year and year and a half seems really far from today. But a year and a half, it's now and you'd be so grateful that you did you prepared yourself to do the work to get to that for so that's one analogy is a small bit of difference done regularly makes a huge difference. Second one

makes the same point. If you take two parallel lines, and now just one of them ever so slightly apart, so they're not parallel anymore. It might take a long time before you they start diverging. But eventually they start separating, you see the separation. And after a year 100 miles or further, to actually quite distant from each other, just small choice. Today, small choice seems to make very little difference now. You can actually make a huge difference in a year, five years or 10 years. And I think having a perspective that your spiritual life is not only about here and now but also about the here and now you're helping to create in the future is a very important perspective to have. So I hope you all enjoy your hearing now. And here now, that's going to happen in a few minutes out there. Then there is going to be a potluck and you're all welcome to stay with your brought something or not. And one of the skillful things to do is to spend friendly time with your spiritual community. This is one of the ways to do that.