

Not Self: Wrap-up (5 of 5)

Gil Fronsdal

2006-02-13

Keywords:

anattā, atta, atman, puggala, karma, liberation, Four Noble Truths, selfing, arhat, noble person

I've heard it said that if you talk about the same thing too much, then people will lose interest. And so I'm going to give one more talk on this idea of self—very much, most as tarot. Has it been five weeks now, this fifth week? Some of you keeping count of one talk after another, trying to get from different angles or different perspectives on this Buddhist idea of self. I think it's an interesting one. It's, as I keep saying, quite perplexing to many people, because it seems that on the surface that Buddhism says that there is no self, and then, well, where does that leave you?

And then people, even teachers, will very seriously almost pin on that and say, "What leaves you nowhere? That's the point: to be left nowhere, left hanging, or left nowhere to stand, nowhere to abide." And what I saw, one of the things I said last week, is that according to the Buddha, once you enter into the discussion about self and no self, you end up in a quagmire of metaphysical beliefs, and it's just a swamp, and gets more complicated the more you look at it. He actually tried to offer something that was a lot simpler than the notions of self. I don't know how well I succeeded in simplifying it for you, or making it clear. Of this whole teaching of the last few weeks, some of you were here to get it.

So a little bit, what I'd like to do is to take out a different angle, but also a little bit of a summary of the last weeks of what I've said, get an overview. Maybe putting it all together in one evening might make some more, different kind of sense out of it. So in Buddhist teachings, especially here in the West, there's a lot of teachings about this idea of self, and it's usually translating a Pāli word, *atta*. In Sanskrit, the same word is *ātman*, and in Pāli, *anattā* is then the negative. It's usually in English translated as "no self." But as I said last week, last few weeks, it's better translated as "not self."

But still, is this a word *atta* in Pāli? And it's the word usually "self" in English. There's a very different word that is seldom talked about, especially in the West, that's related to the word *atta*. It's almost a synonym for self, but not quite the same. That's the English word for "person." And there's a Pāli and Sanskrit word *puggala*, and there, in fact, in ancient India, there was some evidence that the most popular form of Buddhism for many hundreds of years in India was not the kind of Buddhism that survived down to the present times, but was a form of Buddhism that was called the *puggalavādins*, the teachings of the persons—people who believed in this category called the *puggalas*, persons.

And so the side of person then became an important category for these people. But it's also there in this tradition. So we have this English word "person." And what is the Buddhist teaching about personhood, and how is that? Why bring this up as opposed to the teachings about self? I think there's a series of words which can be seen almost as synonyms in English, and also you find almost equivalents in some Buddhist languages.

One is "self," maybe the translation of *atta*; "person," translation of *puggala*. There is also the idea of a human being, the human. Another word is "individual." You know, your self. You're a person. You're an individual. You're a human. And there's probably some other words like that. What I'd like to suggest here this evening is that there are nuances, a difference between these words.

"Human being" is a large, general category that all human beings fit into. Human beings are human beings in this big category. The word "individual" might not refer to human beings, but as a human, "individual" seems like it would be the same thing. However, the word "individual" is a word that is in relationship to something else, which may be a society or social being, social relationships. In fact, "individual" and "individuation" and "individualism" are relatively modern words. Some of them are only a few decades old, some are a few centuries old.

And in some countries, in some societies, cultures in the world, the word "individual" doesn't have the same meaning or value as it does, or doesn't exist in the same way as it exists for us here in America, where the word "individual" is very important. We're individual. In contrast to being somehow merged with society, we stand out. We're unique. "Individual" points to our uniqueness in America. And so to individuate means we differentiate ourselves from others.

So the word "individual" implies differentiation. The word "human" doesn't imply differentiation. It just means that you are part of this class of species or this class of beings that are

called human beings. The word “self,” not sure exactly how it falls. Maybe these are all words in semantics, so you might have different uses of the word. But the word “self” is a cherished idea. I can say that safely, can’t I?

It’s so much so cherished that if we say there is no self, then there’s always someone who protests and complains. And especially if you’re a therapist or are a therapist, it’s pretty inevitable that someone will raise their hand and say, “Wait a minute, this is a cherished idea in my therapy. I’m trying to develop a strong sense of self, and here you’re telling me there’s no self, and that just doesn’t...” You know, something has to give. Doesn’t make sense, you know. Maybe so then.

But I would like to suggest that the word “self” implies something either very individual, very unique, something unique within us. The inner self, for example, “find yourself,” almost means the same thing as “go in.” So “discover who you are”—where if you say, “Find out who you are, what you are as a human being,” we don’t necessarily do the same thing to go in or to our inner psychological life. And sometimes the word “self” then kind of morphs into something very universal, like the cosmic self, the big self, a little bit like the Hindu idea of *ātman* and the ultimate in the world being the same. But as the self has all kinds of connotations, I think the inner psychological self or the soul or something.

The word “person,” I’d like to suggest, has a different connotation. The word “person” is a kind of a hybrid concept that covers both the universal aspect of being a human being, but also something that’s very particular to each person, each being. It’s a kind of both universal and personal, both unique and kind of general. So every culture and every religion has some understanding of what it means to be a person that I would suggest is different than the understanding of what it means to be a self or not self, or no self.

It is kind of the way they understand what does it mean to be a human being. When you look at a human being, the purpose of being a human being, the goal of being a human being, the condition of being a human being—every culture or religion has some notion of a person. So in Buddhism also, there is this notion of what it means to be a person. You can ask of Buddhists, “What’s the Buddhist concept of personhood?” And that’s a very different kind of way of looking at us, at ourselves, than asking the question, “What is my self? What is the self?”

The self is kind of in that kind of context. I suggest that looking for the self can be seen as a narrowing of the question to something essential. We are saying, “What is it to be a human? What is it to be a person?” brings in a whole ecology of a human being that is much broader.

So each religion, I would venture to say here, has a concept of personhood. So what is the concept of the Buddha, the Buddhist concept of personhood? How do you understand what it means to be a human being?

And once you start making statements—something seemingly very simple, simple statements of what it means to be a person—or you see, you read between the lines, say, “What does this mean? This is what they mean. This is how they see what human beings are all about.” Then a simple statement actually can build a huge, complex philosophy, metaphysics, culture, and builds out of that. So you have, for example, religious and cultural ideas of innate human evil, sin, and you have ideas of innate human goodness, nice kind of view: “This is what a person is.” Somehow, to human beings as a person, we have this innate quality.

And then from that very simple statement, then that implies and implies and implies—you have something that develops from that. So I am going to offer six different points of how early Buddhism, the Buddhism that we kind of follow here at IMC, how I understand the human person as distinct from what the self is. This much you following me? Enough. Is this interesting enough? You’re still here. You’ve been patient all these weeks.

So one of the concepts of a human person that’s central for this tradition is that a human being, human person, is subject to suffering and to happiness. It’s something. It’s a being. It’s an entity which is subject to suffering and to happiness, to disintegration and integration, to bondage and to freedom. That is inherent in the understanding of the human person. So when the Buddha looks at a human being, the Buddha sees a being, an entity that has this potential or this capacity, subject to these things.

The second point is that the human being that’s a person—who we are—is a moral agent, not necessarily moral in terms of moralistic, but is an agent of change. We can make choices to change ourselves and change the world too. We are agents of change. We’re not only subjects who are subject to the whims of reality in the world, but human beings also can act in the world, on the world, and on ourselves. We are agents of action. And there are religious teachings in the world that claim that human beings are not actors.

We can’t act. We can’t make a change. It’s all an illusion. It’s one idea and you shouldn’t even bother. The important things in life are not up to you. It’s fate, it’s destined, it’s up to the gods. It’s predetermined. There is no free will. So in this second point, it’s related to that: there is a kind of free will in Buddhism. There is choice that we make, and human beings can be the agents for change, for action, for effect—we can make, we can affect the world, and what we

do makes a difference.

The things we do, the ways we act, the choices we make, do make a difference in the world. They have an effect. And then, following that, to point three, is that human beings can change and develop and grow over time, just like a child can grow as they get older. And that growth and development in a human being is not necessarily all for the better. There are people who grow and develop and make choices and are influenced by the conditions around them in such a way that they become forces of harm in the world. They harm other beings, they harm others, and they get really good at it.

They develop a tremendous capacity to be murderers, killers, all kinds of things. Even sometimes when we don't even want it, the choices we make, the way we live our life, lends itself to, you know, accidents that wouldn't happen if we left the quail alone. So we can develop and grow, but that development isn't necessarily always beneficial, but it can be beneficial. And so there are beneficial ways we can grow and develop, and the ability to grow and develop in beneficial ways is related to two things. One is that we know what's beneficial, so you know what to work towards, and that we act in the world or we behave in such a way that we allow that growth and development to happen.

So we human beings are that. The Buddhist understanding of a person is a person, a person is someone who can grow and develop. Then, related to all these points, another point, which is that we are all subject to cause and effect, sometimes called *kamma*. That is related to what I said earlier, but rather focusing on human beings as being the agent, we're also the subject of our actions. So we can act in the world, but depending on how we act in the world, it comes back to us in some way or other.

And if we are the recipients of the effects of our actions—not in all effects, not in some mechanical, mechanical way, for it's obvious—but there is some way or other in which our things come back to us. And so it's the notion of *kamma*, the habits we develop, the conditions we set in motion in our minds that will come back and bite us if there are bad conditions, or help us if they're good ones. But the things we know—our *kamma* comes back and affects us, and therefore, so then to relate to all this. Now, is the fifth point? Is that liberation—that there are worthwhile goals for a human person, for human beings.

There are worthwhile things to strive for or to work towards. And sometimes you have religious teachings that say that you're perfect just the way you are. The thing to do is just relax, have it easy, accept yourself as being just innately beautiful and great, and there's nothing to do, and nowhere to go, nothing to be. All these kinds of teachings. Maybe even I've said

things like that here, and maybe other teachers, Buddhist teachers, have said that. Even is a book titled, “You don’t know where to go, nowhere to go, nothing to be.”

But you know, it’s one thing. So always be suspicious of spiritual teachers. Always don’t let any of them off the hook. And I also like to bring up, suggest that spiritual teachings also exist not in a vacuum, but they exist as part of a larger package of culture, of society, of conditions, that, in effect, how we see the human person. So I’ll offer you one challenging premise: that the teachings that we’re all perfect, just fine the way we are, just matter of relaxing and opening, and nowhere to go, nothing to do, tends to be most popular in the history of Buddhism in relatively affluent cultures, societies, groups. Now is that nothing to do, nowhere to go, nothing to become, nothing to attain, just enjoy.

So that’s interesting. It might be very profound, that might be very true teachings, but why are those teachings most popular in particular societies and not in others? So there is this idea in when the Buddha looks at a human being that there’s a—this is probably the place where, in these premises that seem to me like the biggest leap, where do you—where’s the manual? It says, “This is what a human being should be like.” Why should this be so? To the Buddha, in the views of the Buddha, there is a goal which is worthwhile to pursue.

Actually, a few goals, a couple of goals. It’s worthwhile to pursue the goal of happiness, and it’s worthwhile to pursue the goal of liberation for human beings. So for the individual and for other individuals, the Buddha dedicated most of his life to try to bring that message out of his compassion and care for others, to bring that message of possibility and encourage people and show people a path that people could follow and walk so they could develop themselves, create the conditions, be the agent of change so that they could make a difference in this human capacity for—to suffer or to be happy, to be in bondage or to be liberated. So there is a worthwhile purpose or goal for human beings, and the primary one, the ultimate one, is liberation. Liberation is a worthwhile goal.

Also, when the Buddha sees a human being, he sees that liberation is a potential that all human beings have, whether they have a self or do not have a self. Liberation is a possibility for all beings. A human person—understanding a human person has that. Some people would like to see that as being an innate quality, the Buddha nature in each person, the innate goodness in a person. Not enough, or potential is the same thing as something inherent. Potential is kind of a strange category, and this whole idea: Are human beings inherently good? Are human beings inherently bad?

The Buddha avoids that kind of question. It’s not really addressed. Not really, maybe, inter-

esting kind of question, if anything. How the Buddha sees it is that inherent in human beings, inherent in unliberated human beings, is they have the capacity for both evil and for good. So in terms of the capacity, potential that we have inherent in all of us is both good and evil. It depends on what we feed, what we act on, how we live our lives, which gets stronger.

So I think the Buddha is reluctant to say, “You know, people are inherently good or inherently bad.” Yet that question is not answered by the Buddha. I think the answer is we’re both, depending on what direction we choose to go. But anyway, liberation is a potential we all have. And then related to this is that the Buddha doesn’t say this, you know, explicitly, but I think implicit in his teaching, close to being explicit, is a notion that we should respect this potential in other people, that other people besides ourselves have all these potentials for happiness and for suffering, for bondage and liberation, and that we should respect that in other people and not interfere with their happiness and liberation.

In fact, we should not only shouldn’t interfere, but it’s actually good to help it, be supportive of it, so that then feeds into Buddhist ideas about things like euthanasia and maybe even abortion. In order to look at these questions of what to do over these life and death questions, existential questions, you have to answer some questions. But how do you understand what a human being is like, what a person is? And so if you understand the human being has its potential for liberation, and that this is a valuable potential to respect and to honor, then some Buddhists will make certain decisions around questions of life and death based on the respect and valuing of that potential. In letting that potential unfold, are the best, the best possible?

Then the last point that is also, I think, a thing is interesting in this early Buddhist tradition, the teachings of the Buddha. When the Buddha looks at human beings, and understanding personhood or person, the Buddha differentiates between different kinds of people, different types of persons. So rather than seeing that everybody’s equal, there is the same, and there’s no difference between all of us, the Buddha actually differentiates between people. Now, it’s not so strange to say that, because we do that, you know. If you want to, if you have something that requires surgery, you know, you don’t go out and ask your mechanic to do it.

You differentiate between your car mechanic and your surgeon. That’s an important distinction to make. And usually, and so in the spiritual life, the Buddha makes distinctions, differentiates, and I find myself feeling inside, I feel shy about making distinctions. We people, on a spiritual basis, somehow it feels kind of wrong to do that, and sometimes I kind of

lean against, kind of want to punish the void, that kind of Buddhism. And when I translated *Dhammapada*, there was always a place where the Buddha was differentiating between people in ways that made me look more uncomfortable.

Like, for example, some people are fools, you know. When's the last time you heard me sitting up here? Somebody's been coming here for years and years, and, you know, I said to ever referred to somebody as being foolish. So in such a kind of person is foolish, you know. Maybe I should be sorry with myself. But the Buddha put a difference between fools and wise people. Some people are wise and some people are foolish.

And it's not inherent in who we are, but rather it's something that has to do with our choices we make and how we develop ourselves. So some people make foolish choices and some people make wise choices, and that's a useful distinction, apparently, because the Buddha made it a lot. The other is a differentiation or different kinds of people. It is people as big ones, as people who have been liberated and people who have not. And there's a lot of language acknowledging certain people as being liberated in contrast, people who are not.

The most common one is the word *arahant*, which literally translates as "the worthy one," someone who is worthy of respect, worthy of—since most of them were monks, it also meant they are worthy of our generosity, of our gifts, our giving them food. The other word is *ariya*, which is usually translated into English as "noble." These are people who are noble. They have attained a certain degree of nobility. Sometimes the Buddha referred to people who had attained liberation as Brahmins, attained a certain level of inner purity as Brahmins, and very clearly undermining the idea in his times that Brahmin, the caste Brahmins, was something you were born into.

So the idea that you were born into a caste, that your status as a human being was dependent on how you were born, was something the Buddha had just wiped away. So your status was based on your birth—you know, you are born to your ethnicity, your race, your financial situation, you know, all kinds of other kind of world, kind of ways of measuring a person—the Buddha just wiped away. And the differentiation that was left for him was a differentiation between, "Have you done the inner work of purification? So have you somehow or other become pure?" And purity—becoming pure—is the same thing as being liberated, because the forces of impurity that are being cleansed are the forces of greed, hate, and delusion, the forces of clinging and grasping.

So a human being is someone who can do that. So there are differences between people, and even though it makes us uncomfortable, and then there's all this competition and status

making, and a lot of ugly things happen when we make those distinctions, make distinctions. But anyway, he made it, and maybe it's only to be looked at rather than ignoring it because it's ugly. It's not ugly inherent because people hold it in ugly ways. This is a distinction the Buddha put a lot of value on because he made it a lot.

And to go back to the mechanic-surgeon kind of distinction, it does make some sense that if you can learn a spiritual path from someone, you want to have some confidence that they have been on that path, or they're further along on that path than you, or they have reached some level of attainment or liberation, or some degree of purification or change—something. Whether it's having confidence in the Buddha and his teachings, or whether it's having some kind of confidence in a teacher that you listen to, like some of you come here to me, listen to me, and there's probably some differentiation going on in your own minds that you come here not to do other things with your Monday evenings. So in looking at suffering, since that's kind of the core issue in Buddhism—suffering and freedom from suffering—so in looking at suffering, there are three forms of suffering.

There is one form of suffering, one cause of suffering that's really big for human beings, for a lot of human beings, and that is suffering around self-image, self-evaluation, self-possession or personal possessions. Those are really big. So one evening I talked about those three: the clinging to possessions—"This is my possession," the clinging to self-evaluation, conceit, and the clinging to some view or idea—"This is who I am," some image, "This is who I really am." Essentially, that there's an activity called selfing, the activity of making a self, creating a self, depositing a self, and then orienting oneself to that self, which tends to cause a lot of suffering for human beings.

So we haven't said anything about "there is" or "is there not a self?" But there is a lot of activity in human beings around selfing, around making a self, holding on to self-image, protecting it, defending it. A lot of emphasis on evaluating oneself: "Am I good enough? I'm not good enough. My self-esteem, my self-worth, am I compared to others?" Now, all these things, and then my possession, things that are mine—these are real, this is really who I am. Having these possessions defines who I am.

So I think that's pretty given, right? That's a lot of suffering. There's a lot of suffering around selfing. There's probably selfing that maybe doesn't count. Maybe the soft selfing doesn't cause suffering. But there is a lot of suffering that comes out of selfing. So if we're going to address the issue of suffering and find liberation from suffering, find happiness, somehow it has to address the activity of selfing.

And the primary thing it has to do is to somehow free us from being neurotically preoccupied with selfing, with self-evaluation, with concern with my possessions and my things, and concern with even coming concern with a kind of essentialist idea of, “This is who I really am. This is my true self,” which can also be something we hold on to, and sometimes we don’t even see it until it’s taken away. And sometimes there are hell things that happen, or accidents that happen, or disasters that happen where the way that we’ve understood who we really are, maybe in its unconscious way, is not available anymore, taken away from us.

Someone is young and very athletic, and their whole life has to do with being active and involved athletically in the world, and they have some serious injury, and they can no longer do that, and they don’t even know who they are, they have no idea who they are. They have no idea of how to be in the world, because their whole life was oriented around that particular persona, that particular image of who they were. And that’s taken away. They have to, kind of very painfully, know how much they are attached to it. What’s a little bit harder to understand, maybe, is the way that some metaphysical idea of self can also cause suffering.

And the metaphysical idea of self—sometimes it may be better translated into English as “soul” rather than “self,” some idea, “This is my soul.” The Buddha suggested that even that can cause suffering, that can lead to all kinds of problems. So don’t even bother with the whole pursuit of the soul, thinking about the soul, or thinking about the true self, the essential self. Just let that all fall away. It’s not needed to address it.

What is needed is that the Buddha would offer a very simple path, simple in principle. And that is, rather than kind of looking at your life through the filter or the lens of self, of soul, of self-image or self-evaluation, look at your life through the filter of suffering and freedom from suffering, from stress and the ending of stress, from tension and the release of tension. Now, it turns out that a lot of the selfing we do has tension, stress, and suffering as part of it, not only as a result of it, but in the very creation of it. Maybe we don’t necessarily evaluate ourselves to hold on to the strong self, unless there’s already suffering there to begin with. We feel uncomfortable somehow, and then we latch on to some self-identity, some self-image, to create a protective image for us that kind of makes us feel better.

And so even the idea of creating the idea of the essential self, the soul, having those ideas—if you pay very careful attention, you might see the strain or the stress or the tension that’s even going on in the mind, in the psyche, with that kind of preoccupation and concern. So if you use suffering or stress or tension as the reference point, can sniff it out, get really sensitive to it. Then all these other issues will become clear. They’ll come to you. But rather than

resolving them metaphysically or philosophically, you resolve the tension. You relax it.

Before getting a PhD in philosophy, you just relax. So some people want to know, “What’s the meaning of life?” A great one, right? What’s the meaning? What’s the true meaning of life? It’s an interesting question. An interesting answer is, before we answer that question, let’s find out why you’re asking it.

And is there suffering prompting you to ask that question? And if there is suffering prompting you to ask that question, what would happen if you turned your attention towards that suffering? And resolve that suffering? Could you do that before answering the question, “What’s the meaning of life?” And is it possible to turn around and study that suffering and settle it? And once it’s settled, what happens to the question? If the suffering that prompts you to ask the question is settled, then what happens to the question?

So the analogy that is sometimes talked about that’s related to this is if you go to the plains of Africa to be a nature photographer. You could run around the plains and try to find all the animals, take pictures of them, and you exhaust yourself. An easier way is to sit by a watering hole and wait, and sooner or later all animals in the plains of Africa apparently need to come to the watering hole to drink. So you sit there and wait and take pictures when they come. So the corollary here is that our suffering is that watering hole, and all the issues we need to deal with in our life for the purposes of liberation, for the purposes of this very deep happiness and peace—that is liberation—all the issues we have to address will come to us if we sit at the watering hole of suffering, if we pay attention to that, look at it—suffering and happiness, stress, and end from stress, tension, and its release.

And it might seem kind of mechanical or mechanistic. It might seem kind of reductionistic to look at just suffering, distress, and freedom from it. It might seem kind of pessimistic and kind of party-pooing to look at that, but I think it’s very realistic, and it really shows us what are the real issues we have to look at rather than wasting our time with a lot of other things that may be just abstract, and rather than being pessimistic, rather to be kind of a downer, kind of bad news to look at suffering. The whole point is to be happier. The whole point is to find the path and how to live in a lighter, happier, fuller way.

So hopefully, even though initially it might seem kind of depressing to look at your suffering, hopefully very quickly it seems like a really great thing, like, “This is a good path.” He says, “I’m getting lighter. You know, things are getting happier.” And I have heard stories of Buddhist teachers—there was a three fifteen-year-old who went to see Suzuki Roshi in 1965 or so, and they heard that he had a natural way of getting high. Because back in San Francisco

at that time there were unnatural ways of getting high, and so they had disguised his den: “Master, can you teach us how to get high without taking drugs?”

And so they asked him the question, and so, “Great, come here.” And he sat them down, and he proceeded to give a talk on the *Four Noble Truths*: there is suffering, there’s a cause of suffering, there’s the ending of suffering, there’s a path. And, you know, they came to hear about getting high, not suffering. But the one woman I knew who was part of this little group, the three girls, said he was just so happy talking about suffering that it got my attention. You know, she was an ensuance student ever since. Now it’s been over forty years.

So the idea of self is a dead-end concept. The teachings of the Buddha, the idea of a person, is not to have some concept. Which means to be a person, a human being, is not a dead-end concept. It’s actually needed to have one. And the Buddha has one. You might not agree with it. But he has one.

There might be an overlap between trying to understand, you know, when we start to understand who we are, we understand ourselves as a person, as opposed to a self. Does that make sense? No, it doesn’t make sense—well, too. So, and one of the—in the teachings of the Buddha, then, that we’re talking about today—one of the preeminent ways of attaining liberation, attaining happiness, attaining peace is through meditation. And part of the reason for this is that the activity of selfing, the activity of clinging in the mind, and that stress and tension that comes from it, is very subtle—means gross, obvious sometimes, but it also can be very, very subtle, very deeply entrenched in the mind and difficult to see.

And you need to get a mind which is very still, very peaceful, very peace. Differently, you need to have a mind which is very peaceful in order to see the very roots of where the mind is not peaceful. So part of the reason why the push for peace becomes more and more peaceful, and is that a peace gives us a vantage point to see more deeply. It’s like having a pond—right? A pond that has waves that are choppy on it. You can’t see down, but the clearer and more still the pond becomes, the more easily you can see to the depth of the pond.

So meditation is one of the preeminent ways of creating this. The peace that can go really deep or really pervasively big, so we can see down to the depths and the roots of who we are. And then the last kind of view of the human person that I’ll mention today this tradition has is that the tendencies inside of us that cause suffering and bondage and unhappiness, disintegration, have at their root—have certain roots that are deep down in the human mind. They are like seeds. Or the Christian, you call it roots—*mūla*, roots really deep down from which sprout, proliferate the vast array of human tendencies that cause suffering.

And the Buddha says there are certain plants in one—now, which ones? I think like the plantain plant, maybe, or some certain plants in ancient India that if you simply chop it off, cut it off at the trunk, it will re-sprout from the roots. But if you really want to get rid of this weed or this plant, you have to uproot it. So if you can do a lot, a human being can do a lot of house cleaning. We can resolve a lot of issues. But if we are only doing it at some surface level, then, like I like to say, it's like rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic, or, you know, it's just like taking care of certain things.

But then these latent roots are still going to operate, and they're going to pop up another way. Sooner or later, they're latent roots that are there. So part of the view of the human person in this early tradition is that there are these latent tendencies, these roots, through these kind of deep seeds. Sometimes they can lay dormant for long periods of time, and that if you want to be fully liberated, attain the full capacity—fulfill our full potential and capacity for peace, we have to be able to drop down into the place in the psyche or the mind where these roots reside, so they can be seen once and for all, and somehow be plucked or transformed or changed or something.

So there is that. So this is my understanding, my attempt for you to give you some sense of what it means, what the Buddhist view is of what it means to be a human person. I hope that these last weeks have been more clarifying than confusing, and I hope that gives you some better contact, understanding of which, when Buddhist teachers talk about *anattā*, or not self, or no self, kind of what it's about and how it fits into a bigger picture of what it means to be a human being from a Buddhist point of view.

And I hope that you at least in principle have an increased appreciation for the value of the *Four Noble Truths*, as you know, as value of why the *Four Noble Truths* is so central teaching in Buddhism, and the increased value of why it might be useful to look at our life from the filter, the viewpoint of the *Four Noble Truths*, as opposed to other filters. And one of the advantages if you do that is that it makes the path of Buddhism lighter and lighter, easier and easier, because if you focus on suffering and the freedom from suffering, then each step along the way hopefully is a releasing of tension, of stress, of the forces of suffering. So each step along the way is a step of making peace. And as you walk that path, hopefully each of us will become more and more peaceful in our own hearts.

And I think one of the most beautiful things that I know in this human life is a heart which is at peace. It's incomparable in beauty and profundity and all kinds of things, purity. And it's one of the greatest gifts that anybody can give the world is to give, or give the gift, give

those gifts that help other people become free of suffering, and also have some taste of our potential for peace, for this profound happiness. So thank you for listening to all this. I'll see you in two weeks. I'll see you in two weeks.