

2010-01-17 Inner And Outer Conflict

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SPEAKERS

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Good morning. Last week when I gave a talk, I gave a talk on the Four Noble Truths. And those of you who've never heard of the Four Noble Truths, I'll just mention what they are very briefly. And then hopefully you'll follow along. Four Noble Truths are at the heart of what the Buddha had to teach and what Buddhism is about. And a lot of the other philosophies, teachings, realizations that Buddhism points to arise out of these core insights or approaches or to life. And the first truth is the truth that there is conflict, let's call it conflict, there is suffering in life. It doesn't say life is suffering, say there in life there is suffering. The second is that that suffering has a origin has a causal beginning. In Buddhism, he points to the origin to be clinging or grasping. And then it's possible to see the grasping and thereby sees the suffering that comes from that grasping. And then there's a path that's connected to that process. There's a path of practice that helps us to do that that expresses that manifest that freedom that brings that freedom from suffering from clinging. So these are four pragmatic truths. They're not meant to be kind of absolute Creed's that we believe in, they're supposed to be one way of seeing them is that they are pragmatic they are approaches orientations we could use for living our life more a lot more wisely. If what you want to do is to find a gas station, then you don't go look in your bedroom closet, you know, you look in particular place for gas stations. So if you have a particular approach, orientation or desire, wish for your life it helps to know what orientation you need to. So if you're lost if you're in the wilderness, and you want to find your way out, perhaps you'd look for, you've been trained perhaps, and you've trained to look in certain signs or in the wilderness to help you find the way out. You don't start studying how the ads make their anthills. When you're lost, that's not going to be a useful thing to do. But rather maybe you look for see where the sun is and what direction it is and variety of kind of other things. And so if you've been trained, you know what to look for. So the Four Noble Truths are the orientation or the evidence which helps us find our way. Now, what I think for me personally, I think one of the things that's significant about the way the Four Noble Truths are formulated, there is no personal pronoun in them, it doesn't say no, you suffer And there's a there's a, there's a cause in you for your suffering. And that causes you're clinging. And if you follow a path, you somehow be connected through freedom. There's no pronoun at all. So, to me, I take that as certain Liberty involved, that you can assign pronouns as you wish. And, and I think that at the heart or the one of the primary ways is interpreted his opponent is for yourself. There is suffering in your life. And if you cling, you'll suffer and if you let go of that clinging, you will become free of that suffering. there is conflict in your life. If you understand the origin of that conflict, your contribution to it and your clinging, then the suffering connected that conflict go away. Perhaps interpersonal conflict necessarily won't go away. But whatever distress you feel about it And so a lot of what Buddhism is about is really doing the somewhat sometimes very, very deep work very, sometimes sometimes complex work, or really understanding all the part all the things that are involved, or contribute to our suffering or clinging and all that. So one way of understanding is for me, another way is to understand it, them or us. We suffer as a society, we suffer as a family, as a community, as a nation, as a country as a world that they're suffering. And it's

not you don't have to go very far to run into suffering. It's not your own personal suffering, but is a suffering of many other people, collective suffering or sick suffering of a large collection of people who share the same thing. So like right now, there's hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people in Haiti are suffering and we can't deny it.

So is Are the Four Noble Truths relevant for understanding our collective life? Can we say Oh, those people that are suffering, and well they just clinging to something those people in Haiti, and they should just let go of their clinging and and, you know, to say that I think would be not only a disservice, but kind of as worse than salt in a wound. But, but the distinction that Buddhism makes is it between pain and suffering. And there's a lot of pain that doesn't necessarily involve suffering and the suffering and suffering for Buddhists involves that kind of pain that arises from clinging. So it's kind of Buddhist you have to when you talk to a Buddhist, you have to always interpret it that way. That this is when Buddhists talk about suffering as the suffering arises from clinging and there's a lot of other kinds of pain. So certainly, I can manage There's suffering in Haiti that comes from clinging and I saw in the paper today reports about all this looting and, and violence that's going on. They're rioting and stuff that's going on in the after week after aftermath of the earthquake. So that you know, represents a fair amount of clinging involved. And you don't have to do a big analysis of the news or the world around us to find someone's clinging or craving or grasping someone's compulsivity as the origin for many of the big things we read about in the newspaper. Someone's greed, someone's ambition, someone's hate something and or a collective group of people's ambition or greed or hate fear, or all variations of clinging that then have collective impact on many, many people around. And I think one of the contributions Buddhism makes is to is to help us have the tools and the skills To look back into the heart into the mind, to understand something about the nature of that clinging, because if if we never look at that if you only fixed policy, then we never never really address the core issues that that the core issues of a human being, you can feed someone forever, you can bring them all kinds of consumer goods, you can set them up in a big house, do all kinds of wonderful things. And they might be much more comfortable, but they might also they're suffering, they're at the core of their being might still be there. And as we know, we've hear lots of stories. I've heard lots of stories, comparative stories, people compare the degree of happiness in the United States, which is considered to be overall on the average or something like that, with all kinds of exceptions in affluent country. And they compare it to countries in the world that are far from affluent, some that are poor, and some people are quite surprised that the contagious sense of happiness in the streets and among people is so much stronger than what goes on in this country. And when I was a young man traveling in countries like, I remember I was in Barbados, Barbados, which was a relatively poor, Caribbean country. As far as I've been to many, many countries by time I went there and grew up living in different countries all over. And I had to say it was a happiest group of people that have ever encountered in my life, that people in Barbados. And so having having, you know, well, lots of things, it's not necessarily their source of happiness. So what is it so Buddhism is as a contribution to understand the technology, the psychology of it all. So here's two stories from the Zen tradition and The two stories are these two sides that I'm trying to talk about the data side of the personal practice oneself looking at oneself, and the other has to do with our relationship to the world outside of us. How do we relate to the world out there to Haiti to suffering to people out there? You know, it's their suffering, do we just kind of shut down and you know, when we whenever we get enough people into IMC, then we lock the doors? You know, so we can just meditate, get our act together and keep those people out? Or do we keep our doors open and our hearts open? And somehow our our practice has a direct bearing on how we relate to the wider world. What is that?

So the first story is a famous story. That's well worth repeating. The two Chinese monks were traveling on foot around China in the old days, and they came to river they encountered a woman who somehow because of her condition as whatever, I wasn't able to cross the river. And so she was distressed he

was needed to get across. One of the monks saw this and simply picked her up and forded the river carrying her across, and then put her down the other side and then the two monks continued. That evening when they finally came to a monastery, the first the second monk couldn't contain himself anymore, and he burst out and said, How could you have done that? You're a monk and monks are not supposed to touch women. And here you pick the only touch there. You picked her up, you're holding your arms and your carrier across the river. How could you have done that? And the first monk said, I put the woman down by the river. Why are you still carrying her?

Why are you still holding on to her? So that I think is a very, very simple, powerful story. When you ask yourself, What are you still carrying? What are you still holding on to? Are you still carrying resentments? Are you still carrying? hurts? Are you still carrying? attachments? desires? Are you still carrying viewpoints opinions about people that are ancient? Or are you able to put things down and see situation fresh and new? Here? This is what this is what's happening here now. And so the question to ask the question, What am I still holding to what am i clinging to? is a very significant question. And, and to ask that, you know, what am I still holding on to here if you're troubled by something? What are you carrying with you for days, weeks and weeks, years and years. Another second story also from China, Chinese monk story of two monks who were also traveling. And, and there was this custom in ancient China, old China, for monks to spend a good part of their life for years, wandering around visiting different monasteries, visiting different teachers and questioning them again teachings. So it was a lot of wandering, wandering stories. So these monks do, monks were wandering looking, they're looking for a teacher, one of them, they were looking for a teacher to practice with and checking out different monasteries. And as they approached one famous monastery there was a river that ran down from the monastery past the past the path where they were walking up. And they noticed that coming down the river from the monastery was a single leaf of lettuce. That somehow maybe they've been washing it up flip river, somehow God Not at the kitchen or down the drain or something gotten away, single leaf of lettuce. And so one of the monks saw that since he said, Hmm. A monastery that can be that wasteful is not a good place to practice. Let's go find another place. And they started to turn around. And just then they heard this running footsteps coming down the path from the monastery. And it was a cook running after that lettuce. And he picked it up and took it back. And then they said, Oh, this is a good place to practice. So a single leaf of lettuce that's significant enough to choose where you practice and what is someone else's relationship to a piece of lettuce have to do with your Place a what? How you want to practice where you should practice? And why would that cook, be so concerned about a single leaf of lettuce to be running out of the monastery down the path to find that? Why is that such a significant? What are the lettuces that you let go of? One of the lettuces that you discard disrespectfully? Oh, that doesn't count. It's not important. What do you not notice that you need to do you're responsible for that maybe you should care for more carefully.

I'm very touched by the fact that the health of people in Central Valley people a place like for Fresno was a people. Children who get asthma in the trees and lower realms of Sierra there are very much impacted. By the smog that's produced by the people in the Bay Area, which means me. You know, I can, you know, I get the ocean influence, you know, I get relatively clean air compared to them. But you know, there's a way in which the air kind of blows it right into the Central Valley and settles there against the foothills. That's our leaf. That's our lettuce leaf. We can't go get it. That's not the point. But I'm very conscious of it and aware of it, then how do I take that in? How do I live with that awareness? Do I just forget it? Well, that was interesting. Everybody wants to know the newspaper and then drive with abandon? Or do I somehow live with that as a living memory, something that's important to keep in mind? And I feel it's important to keep in mind as I choose how often I drive and how much I drive. I remember Oh, the kids in Fresno. And you know, and then there's a lot of things like that. What impact do we have and those those caring for our life and our relations to other people, is that an important

part of Buddhist spirituality. And I would say it's extremely, it's a very important part of it, that we don't just care for ourselves and our suffering. But we also care for that of others, we respond to it. And but here's a very important point. And, and that is that Buddhism does not obligate us to any of any of this. Buddhism just does not say, thou shalt be free of suffering, Thou shalt not cling. It says, rather, there is suffering. And if you're interested in suffering in this way, then there's a possibility for you to let go of your clinging. And there's a practice to help you do that practice of mindfulness of careful attention in other things, Buddhism itself is not a kind of it's not a religion that has a god. And this is a very important point because when there's no religion on a god, there's no No, no one ordering you around. No one kind of setting the rules for you. There is no kind of like deity, arbitrating, what's going to happen to you. And so Buddhism is not it isn't a kind of religion that it has. There's no place in Buddhism to obligate anybody to do anything. But who's gonna do it? We can't, we can't resort to our gods say, Hey, you know, our God says this, therefore, I'm gonna make sure you do it. And we don't have a god. And so if you don't have a god, I mean, then who is going to who's going to be in charge? You know, I mean, they're, you know, you're having an election decide who's this person Buddhist gonna make the rules for us. There is no one. So Buddhism doesn't obligate us to respond to the world around us be socially concerned. This is very challenging to some people, especially here in the West, there's a very strong social gospel in the West, coming out of the late 1900s. Whereas a really big expectation that people involved in religion are involved in social health and aid and all that. It's almost like a requirement to do it. And Buddhism doesn't have a requirement like that. So different Buddha's must be kind of like, just a selfish religion, something it's not a religion at all. But, but, so there's no obligation. However, I think it works like this. That if you put your hand on a hot frying pan You pull your hand back, your hand gets pulled back, you don't even think about it. That's what you do. If someone collapses with a heart attack in front of you, on the street, you don't walk on. You don't even think about your drop down to support the person to do something are called one on one or something. There's a response. There is a kind of responsivity that people do. That doesn't belong to the world, a lot of analysis consideration. It doesn't even belong to that to it's, it's, you know, what's good for me.

And so maybe, maybe to give another example for people who are parents, maybe this this is something you're familiar with, that parents care for their children, especially when the kids are really small, has a quote can have a quality of selflessness in it Where a child's welfare is so automatic take care of that. It's not you know, it's that doesn't even compute the idea of Well, I'm missing my night's sleep. It's three o'clock in the morning. I mean, if you're if you're, if your spouse says, You know, I can't sleep three o'clock in the morning, you know, entertain me. You know, there's probably not much sympathy. But if your two month old baby is crying, two o'clock in the morning you know, there can be that isn't always the case, but it can be kind of almost almost like instinct sounds like you know, you don't think about it. It's not like oh, you know, for me, and why should I do this? It's just kind of like automatic. They're all just like the baby's almost an extension of you. There's a another Chinese koan Chinese teaching Zen. Remember that well, but it's something like what is it like? For other look at what it's like for the great buddy sought by the great kind of personification of compassion, to be compassionate. So we looked at testing for a quaternion, which is considered this almost like a goddess, or God that had all this work. All this compassion in the world is very dramatic kind of compassion work in the myths, so what's it like to have compassion like this great goddess, and response, the teacher said, Oh, it's like bunching up the pillow at night. So you know, you're a little bit you know, you're half asleep, and you're kind of uncomfortable a little bit, and it's unselfconscious that you you just kind of move the pillow a little bit to make yourself feel more comfortable. You're not doing it for any purpose. Anybody can see what they Wait till a bunch you're up or you're, you know, trying to prove a point to yourself, it's not competitive. You know? It's just, you know, it's not it's almost not self conscious, you know, self consciousness, self conscious kind of way just, it's kind of like you know, it's, it's almost like the pillows an extension of you. That's how it is for the great compassion to operate in

the world. So, what happens when we look at ourselves in a very, very honest way, not just with the ordinary thinking mind, which is limited and how well a dp can see. But when the mind becomes still quiet calm with that heightened capacity of perception, heightened ability to see the details of what goes on within our psychology and what happens if we let go of it. Hold on too. we cling to what happens if we let go of the clinging involves resistance being closed. And one of the things that happens, I believe most people is that we become more sensitive, become more tender, become more aware that if you were preoccupied and caught up with things, you hardly even notice your neighbor or the person standing near you. But if you're not caught up in your concerns and preoccupations, you'll notice much more likely the person sitting next to you, the persons around you. If you are, if you're, you might know if you're caught up in the sense of self self identity and how competitive everything else and how you want to compete this the best person. You might notice the people around you, but what do you notice about them, you notice how they threaten your quest for superiority or your quest for something or identity, or how you notice how they threaten your fear if you're trying to be safe and secure, and you feel very insecure. And so you notice particular things about them.

But if desires, ambition, status, fear, sense of insecurity, all of those are kind of holdings, the things we hold on to, if those things drop away, then maybe then that awareness becomes much more available to notice something more acutely or more direct or deeper about that person around you. You don't notice how they, how they're competing for your status, you don't notice how they threaten your whatever. But you notice maybe what we can call their humanity. You get a sense of perhaps something deeper about them how they are and make sense. Notice, oh, that person is happy or that person suffering and if we so this area of empathy becomes stronger, and Pathak connectivity, his sense of is one of the consequences for many people, when they do meditation practice when they do mindfulness practice. And then what arises as a result of empathy. What are the consequences of having empathy? and empathy is a beautiful, beautiful capacity. It's different than contagious emotions. contagious emotions mean you kind of like you're your victim, almost other people's emotions. But empathy is you feel someone else's emotions. So use empathy. And you're concerned about it, you feel kind of heartfelt nice with it. It's connected to compassion when they're suffering. And so when there is less self thing, less self preoccupation, less operations of greed and fear and hate and all these things operating, then I think that there's no obligation to help your neighbor. But I think often enough, it can be The response that comes out of that sensitive open heart. another's obligations comes from anywhere. It doesn't come from externally from Buddhism, certainly not. If it comes from anywhere the obligation comes from your heart. But the but did we use the word obligation is too heavy? Because obligation, to me, at least in my vocabulary sounds like a lot of clinging. Or a lot of I feel kind of oppressed by the word. I still have to do something. But it comes, I think, no obligation, but it comes but but you can't but also it's not appropriate to I think, I think sometimes we do ourselves a huge disservice by shutting down and closing down the response that wants to come out, or let me help here. Let me do something.

So with that, as as our preoccupations and attachments settle down, and there's a greater sense of tivity awareness to the world around us great empathy. there then also arises what in many spiritual traditions is called is, is, is, I guess referred to as a greater understanding of the interconnected nature of this world we live in. And one of the highest kind of worldly or highest, almost mystical experiences relating to our inter interdependent related related worlds is to a clear sense of how amazingly interrelated interconnected we are. And it's considered among some mystics, mystical traditions to the highest mystical experience is a tremendous oneness or tremendous sense of interconnectedness or mutuality. That's always here. Buddhism doesn't hold that this death kind of experiences the highest point to the spiritual path but In at least in the world of how we relate to everything else, it's the highest. And it rises out of it. It's in Buddhism, it's often expressed or, or comes together with loving kindness,

compassion, sympathetic joy and things like that. It's not ultimate, but it gets pretty close. What Buddhist sense so, as the as the as the hearts, the mind settles and get quieter, peaceful, and perhaps certain brain centers don't operate so much. It seems like one of the powerful experience people can have is a sense of interconnectedness, and how everything's relates to everything else. In Mahayana, Buddhism, again, coming out of China, there was a beautiful image for this called indras. net. And indras. net in India was kind of like God in the Indian Pantheon. And so it was just going to cosmic net and in each corner, each kind of joint in the net, there's a mirror, maybe many mirrors pointing in all directions. And each mirror reflects each of the other junctions of the net. And so have you ever been to changing room where you kind of all these a couple of different mirrors, you kind of like becomes like an infinite number of you go back and forth, and then you regress. So enough with one but and the, so this indras net is like that, where it's not just one person being reflected many times but everything is being reflected infinite number of times in every possible mirror, you know, going back and back. So that's supposed to be an image of how amazingly interconnected we are. Buddhism, as I understand it, does not make any ultimate absolute absolutisms out of the sense or experience we can have of interconnectedness It doesn't make some kind of absolute philosophy, we're saying we're all interconnected. You know, what is the butterfly flapping its wing in the dock have to do with, you know, the rain running down the gutter at my street. You know, maybe you can make an argument for how it's connected. But it's kind of ridiculous means functionally there's no connection, right. But to say everything connected to everything else is kind of, I think, a little bit a silly thing to say. It's silly in the sense that it's, it has no functional pragmatic value. If it's symbolic, or if it's kind of speaks to some kind of experience that we have a sense of feeling. That's okay. Buddhism is very reluctant. We always, always been very reluctant to make these kinds of absolute statements. What it's what it does, though, however, is when there's a strong sense of interconnectedness, that can exists. It's always emphasized that interconnectedness shouldn't be abstracted as a concept. But it's something that, that we, we, we understand in the particulars of our life, the things that we encounter, and see and feel that there's where we can feel I can see it. And it can be immediate things lettuce leaves, we discard. It can be those things we read about the newspaper. You know, where there is a there's a connection between us and Haiti, not just the heartfelt one, but there's other all kinds of ways in which Western society Western culture, kind of, you know, all these questions, society is kind of CO created over the last 200 years.

But in the particulars, and so Buddhism keeps coming back to the particular. So here, this situation, this particular situation, what is the connection we have, what's your connection we could have let's not get into the abstract. Let's not get into the metaphysical absolutisms. Let's be content of settling and open our hearts the best we can. And from that open heartedness. Let's, let's see what we, what we meet in that open heartedness. And let's see what arises from that arises from it. in different situations, different things arise. And for me, the last few days reading but a Haiti, I just first I thought, well, I'm going to send a donation. And then I thought, I think that what I'll do instead is I won't take any dāna, any donations today when I teach. And unless you'd like to take all that, let all that go, whatever it might be, to Haiti, because that's kind of just as that just came out to me I was what I wanted to do, something I could do. And maybe I'll think about more things. As time goes along, maybe IMC we'll think about things as a community. What what comes out of our hearts when the heart is open? What comes out of a sense of connection and connectivity of being connected? So connected that it's almost like it's not you over there and me here. It's also so connected, that it's almost like you are me. Not quite, but almost. It's as if, as if your situation is my situation, if you're suffering is my suffering. And this is this that come from me coming out of my Buddhist practice. This was this has been a very significant

It's become a very significant part of my life in a way that I couldn't imagine before I practice the way in which I can take in experience. People situations beyond me, outside of me and feel like it's almost me,

I'm not separate from it. I can't ignore it because I just ignore my own hand. It is who I am. And so we care for it. And this is why I often like to say that no one can do Buddhist practice without sooner or later doing it for others as well. Because as soon or later as you do Buddhist practice, this deeper sensitivity and openness of the heart comes forth. And then that the sense of separation of here and there it doesn't make sense anymore. Doesn't make sense. It makes some sense. It's logical. It still has a place, but it's almost as if, or as a big part of that barrier separation falls away. Almost as if you are me and I am you. And so our response comes from the heart. It doesn't come from obligation. I hope that's really good news. I hope that makes you happy. And, and it also means it's an obligation, there's no hurry. You know, when you're ready, when your hearts ready, you will respond in your way. And I could well imagine that there are people because in other situations, I've been this way, where there's been a major tragedy in my, my neighborhood, my neighbors, or with the world out there. And I've said, you know, this is affected me, I feel the suffering. But you know, I'm not going to do anything to this one directly. But I will be influenced by it, it will be affected by it. And as I'm affected by it, I'm going to try to figure out how to do better elsewhere. How to respond better in some other way to this life of ours, try to make a difference in this world of ours. And in some situations, I move to respond in some more direct way. If that makes sense, but sometimes it's direct, and sometimes it's quite indirect. If we experience the suffering of the world around us, and we're distressed by it, we feel guilty because of it. Then you are like the first the second monk who didn't put the woman down. What are you holding on to? What are you carrying? If you feel this stress. What happens if you don't drop the distress and trust your heart? Because a lot of distress and guilt has to come with judgments, ideas of what should and shouldn't be, concepts we add on top of the situations. But what happens if we just trust our heart? See what arises or trust some deeper part of ourselves what comes through us as a result of that?

Okay, I guess that's enough. It's time anyway. So, um, thank you. And I hope that whatever mindfulness practice you do that did the Windows to your say the windows to your mind the windows to your observation to your seeing is open in all directions, inwardly and outwardly. Thank you