

2012-03-11 Views of The Dharma

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SPEAKERS

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Good morning. Those of you who've been listening to the last few weeks of talks, know that I gave a couple of talks on how the Buddha taught. And then last week I talked I gave a talk about how to be a student. In the point of view of the Buddha, the Buddha said about being a student. And what students and teachers have in common is the teaching that goes between them. So I thought, Today I will talk about the teaching that and Buddhism teaches the teachings of the Buddha, the teachings that are studied by Buddhist students. It's often referred to as the Dharma. In, in Pali, the language of our tradition, it's Dhamma without the our double M. So the and so the Dharma is sometimes seen as being a mysterious entity. Sometimes language like profound is used, unsurpassed, penetrating and perfect in the Zen tradition they chant unsurpassed before every Dharma talk. They chant unsurpassed, penetrating perfect Dharma is rarely bet with even 100,000 million kalpas having it to see and listen to, to remember and except I to fully where's it go fully? I now bout to fully embrace so you know, in the solemnly chanted and, and it kind of suggests that this is like, you know, this is suck seriously are profoundly religious and in fact when I studied Buddhism and then and when I studied Mahayana, and great philosophers like Nagarjuna I got the impression that the Dharma was this amazingly profound, complex set of paradoxes or incomprehensible aspects. So the talks these last weeks, not about Mahayana, or zen, but about their earliest tradition of Buddhism, coming back from the time of historical Buddha. And in what does he mean by the Dharma. So there's a passage that's often chanted in this tradition about the Dharma. And it's, it goes something like, I'm not going to chanted the Dharma is visible, here and now. It is immediately effective, inviting inspection, onward leading, and to be experienced by the wise So, the Dharma is immediately effective and visible here and now. So back in the time of the Buddha, this claim was made and people come to the Buddha and say, What do you mean the Dharma is visible here now. And now, if you have some mysterious mystical idea of the Dharma, some radically altered state of consciousness or some radical new perception and non dualistic perception of things or some mysterious penetration of the true emptiness of all phenomena, then you know, it takes some doing to get to the seeing how it's visible here now, but the if you go back to these teachings of the Buddha is very seldom that he said things that were kind of mysterious or sounding mystical. In fact, if someone asked him Questions like this? One of the common beginning points for him to explore this question was to refer them to something they already knew. And I think that this is a very useful way of whenever you hear Buddhist teachings is to don't consider how it's unusual or profound or foreign, but rather assume you already know it. And in what way do you know it? Where in your life? Do you know it? How do you know it? And how is it useful and how you already know it? And then from your own experience, then how can you expand its usefulness into more areas of your life? So I suspect to try to choose an example that you're all familiar with. I hope maybe, maybe hope not. But I suspect most of you had the experience of having a pebble in your shoe and

And when you have a pebble in your shoe, you know and it's pebbles digging into your soles of your feet to your walk. You could just keep going along content to get the massage and the blister and whatever it does, but most people feel the pain of the pebble and they would at first opportunity would probably stop and take you know take off the shoe and pull the pebble out and then keep walking and in walking feeling the relief or feeling of the you know, definitely good now it's not irritating the foot anymore. So in that situation, something was is the word visible here and now experienced here now, you experienced the pebble and the pain and it invited something invited that you look closely and take off the shoe. It was onward onward leading in the fact that you Once you kind of were a bit and aware that you can do something, most people will take that pebble, especially if it's sharp. And, and to be experienced by the wise themselves, immediately effective experienced by the wise, it's pretty immediately effective, take the pebble out. And it's experienced by the wise. And here the assumption is you're wise enough to take the cue off from the pebble out. And that's the experience something's supposed to do for yourself. It isn't like you have a pebble in your foot. And you go around telling everyone else take off your shoes and look for pebbles. You know, it's something you know, that doesn't make any sense, right? Someone has a pebble in their shoe and I'm lazy. So you guys kind of go look at your shoes. No, you're not you know, the only place it's going to be helpful for you is to take off your own shoe and do something about it, right. So there's an example. Maybe so in other example perhaps that and maybe this one you don't have to, if it doesn't work for you, you can re translate it into your own life somehow. But maybe you're on the computer. And you're, there's something really intense that you're doing on the computer. And at some point, you start feeling like you're getting a strain headache from it. And you feel that tension you feel the way you're straining and looking, leaning over. And you start to at some points are feeling the dis-ease, the uneasiness, of the tension and how the headache is coming on. And enough so that it gets your attention away from your absorption in what's on the screen. And then you notice, wait a minute, I'm really engaged here in a tense way. And if I continue this way, the headaches won't get worse. I think I need to do something to change. I have to keep doing I have to keep doing computer work for whatever reason. But perhaps I can relax my shoulders, I can sit back I can not be straining so hard my eyes, I could just kind of relax my body a little bit, or relax in my mind a little bit. And so and so person does that. And perhaps you've done something like this. And then you feel the benefit of that to feel more relaxed. It could be a same thing with driving. You can get the tense driving, and then you can relax and you can feel the problems of being tense and then you can relax. This morning when I was making breakfast with my kids. I got involved a little bit I could feel it wasn't very dramatic, but I could feel a little difference. Between It was very subtle in my in my forearms. That as I was making the waffles in getting the better and doing all this stuff, I could feel there was a little bit of tension in my forearms as I was doing it. And as I was reaching for things, it was this tension kind of like, I was in a hurry to get it. And when I noticed that I thought, you know, this wasn't particularly painful, it wasn't painful at all. But I kind of felt that this was more like wasn't so much like a problem was just like, I think there's another way and so I relax this little tension in my arm. And one of the things I noticed was my arms became much more fluid as they reached for the eggs, flour, whatever. It felt nice to kind of just kind of as if there wasn't you know, getting getting the little sugar in my hand wasn't the point getting done with making the waffles not the point was just out there doing each thing for itself. It felt very nice.

So here I'm offering you a variety of very practical examples from your own life that some questions Be from your own life. That is a reference point for how we're going to have the Buddha then we'll talk about how the Dharma is visible here now. So when he talked about how the Dharma is visible here now the first example he would use, once he had people's attention maybe this way, he would say sometimes you do as a question for math, he would say something like, when you're caught in greed, greed, lust caught in desire in a strong way. Is that painful or not painful? Is that stressful or not stressful? And the person would say yeah, it's to be caught in it to be in device of greed is pretty painful. And then if you let go of it, let go device if we go over clinging is that this is Painful or not painful, that's

not painful. There's relief, there's freedom then from that particular clinging. And with that as the example, the Buddha would say, this is how you how the Dharma is visible here. And now. This is how you know it for yourself. So you know, for yourself the cost of greed that caused the tension, we could say the suffering, invites inspection to me Come and look at it more carefully. Just like you would look at the pebble in your shoe, look at the experiences more fully what is this and then the part of the Dharma is not just seeing it, but then letting go. And just as taking a pebble out is immediately effective, just as letting go of attention my arms, it's immediately effective in some way. Just like changing your posture and letting go of a little bit of tension in your postures immediately effective. So if you can loosen up, lighten up free yourself from the greed that's immediately effective. You can feel the immediacy, immediacy of that. And then it's onwards leading leading it's very interesting term. It's onward leading. It leads somewhere. I like to think of it as water flows downhill. If you if you're a ball rolls downhill if you let go of the ball. There's something that happens inside of us. That if we hold ourselves tight and clinging, if we grasp if we get tense, it limits or holds back a certain unfolding a certain onward movement in ourselves. And the other movement as I understand it, that is held in check is the deeper deeper, letting go relaxation That can happen. Because there are layers and layers of ways in which people cling, many of them which many of them we don't even know we have, because we're not so attentive to ourselves, we're not so deeply aware. So you might be aware of attention, you might be aware of headache. But there's, you know, you know, kind of Muslim is more physical. But then as you get still and quiet enough, or as you begin on relaxing and letting go, you start becoming where there's actually more subtle and more subtle things going on. And so, the movement of letting go is commonly onward leading because it helps us to see deeper, what further can let go and what further can let go. And that movement of looking, experiencing it. Letting Go, experiencing the benefit of that is something here it says the Buddha said used to be experienced by the rise. So then the Buddha went on and said this Same thing for hate. Can you know when you experience hate as a suffering when released when you let go of hate, freedom from suffering, and then it is same thing for delusion and talking to people. Now, what's interesting about this definition, when you see thee This is how you see the Dharma. So some people might protest and say, well, dogma is more profound than that. I mean, this is supposed to be one of the great world religions. It must be some profound philosophy. You know, the Dharma here, that this is not being touched here. You know, Buddhism isn't about that not self. You know, I mean, that's, that's mysterious and paradox. And that's something which, you know, can read great philosophy books to try to understand what is itself and what's, that's where the Dharma is. Better go to the library. But for the Buddha, he said, if you want to see the Dharma

You can see it in this movement in the in something that's experiential here and now that you can look into inquire inspect for yourself without a book. And what you can understand for yourself is if you're in the caught in greed, hate and delusion or not, and greed, hate and delusion are considered to be the kind of the convenient terms of categories for their or their, for the foundational clings in the mind that lead to all the others that we have. So, somehow every every all kinds of claim we have somehow have the roots, they say, in greed or in hate or in delusion. So, here in saying that this is the Dharma, the Buddha is not offering something metaphysical is not offering something supernatural is not offering some great tenant They have to believe in that you have to believe in a little bit. You have to believe that you suffer. And that you can and you can, you can become free of the suffering. But it's not like some you know, it's not not like a religious tenant in the way we often hear in the West think of a religious tenant. So in this way, one discovers the Dharma. So it's become something very personal and only to be discovered in oneself. And I'm sorry to say this, for those of you who have written Dharma books, Dharma books don't contain any dharma. All they do is they point to where the Dharma is. And the only place they can point to to find it is in you. Because from your point of view, the Dharma exists nowhere else but in you, but only if you do this. Turning Words, to understand and to feel the

pebble. And if you know you don't have to do that. But if you have, you know, the pebble in your cells in your shoe, you know, it's an ordinary thing to take the shoe off. If you feel the pebble in your mind, it's a relatively ordinary thing to stop and take that pebble out. You're encouraged to do that. So again, this then they might be these protests Is this enough to be the Dharma Dharma certainly must be more. So I want to read to you a few passages from the ancient tradition, from the teachings of the Buddha, where he defines the Dharma in different ways, don't take it as being the final definition. But see if he's listened to these different definitions or descriptions, see if you can follow us here. Some of the common kind of overarching theme in this sort of the scope of it.

So this is what the Buddha taught to his foster mother, she asked him for the teachings. As for those qualities of which you may know yourself, these qualities lead to dispassion, not to passion, to being unfettered, not to being fettered, to shedding, not to accumulating to modesty, not to selfing, gridiron aggrandizement, to contentment, not to discontent, to seclusion, not to entanglement, to arouse persistence, not to laziness, to being unburdened, not to being burdensome, you may definitely hold this is the Dhamma This is the teachings of the Buddha. So, again, here you see that the Dharma The teachings of the Buddha are not defined metaphysically supernaturally, philosophically, but rather, they're defined or described to personal qualities that you can know for yourself. You can know whether you're content or discontented. You can know whether you're living under self aggrandizement. Or whether your opposite or modest says here. You can know whether you're caught up entangled, or whether you're independent from things. You can know whether you're caught in passion. caught by it kind of, or whether you dispassionate, a good way.

Here's another definition of the Dharma. The Buddha expounded to him the Dharma special to the Buddhists. So here's the special to the boots. Oh god, this is special. So what is the teachings that's special to the Buddha? Now we're gonna get to the philosophy. suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

So and then in this kind of vein, here's another definition to the Dharma. Doing no evil, engaging in what skillful and purifying one's mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha's. So again, it's something very personal, and in a sense, individual or private. This is something you have to do for yourself. In this regard, the Buddha talked about the Dharma as being like a raft. You know it analogy was, if you if you're, you know, walking through the woods and you come to her rivers that you have to cross. And so you might maybe can't swim. And so you build a raft out of branches and trees you find, and then you take the raft across. And then the Buddha said, if the man gets it person gets across the river. And there's going to continue walking in the woods for a long distance. Would it be wise to then pick up the raft and put it on your shoulders and started walking through the woods with the raft? And the answer is supposed to be no, it's not wise. It's kind of a burden to have to carry the raft. So in the Buddhist in the same way, I teach the Dharma to be like a raft, that you use it to ferry you across, but then you don't carry it with you anymore. So you use it to do this inspection. You do this to this mindfulness to explore. To do this work is personal work. And then you can leave it behind. Now again, those of you who find this very, very unsatisfying to have this almost ethical kind of teachings at the heart of Buddhism, that has to do with how we behave, how we are qualities of mind at heart, we clean ourselves up internally, you want something more profound, something more challenging. So here's one for you.

The Buddha teaches the Dharma for the elimination of all standpoints, decisions, obsessions, adherence is an underlying tendencies for the stilling of all formations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving, for dispassion for Association for Nibbana. That sounds a little bit more you know, lofty and wonderful and like this, you know? This sounds good, you know, right? Those of you who want the lofty religion, the religion supposed to be kind of, you know, freed

from greed, hate and delusion. I mean, that's like, you know, my mother told me that I don't need Buddhism for that. But what Buddhism is in its definition of Dhamma Dharma as being onward lead leading, suggests something, I think profound. And that is that, to do this thoroughly, to do this inner work thoroughly of letting go of clinging, greed, hate, delusion, fear, to do it thoroughly, brings on something you know, involves a radical or dramatic transformation in the person. So I want to try to convey this to you a little bit here, by taking the topic of mindfulness itself. So there's nothing in these definitions of that puts mindfulness as the purpose of Buddhism. purpose is to become mindful. purpose is to be in the present moment. Sometimes in the western Dharma, mindfulness in the present moment is almost treated like the Buddhist God like the end all and be all gone, everything gets good. But here that wants to emphasize is not the present moment, not mindfulness in and of itself, but rather the way in which mindfulness helps do this inner work of freedom of freeing us from the way the mind is caught, clinging. So then, so and we're mindfulness tradition. Here, we practice mindfulness, which is thing. You know, what is mindfulness? And, you know, I've been teaching mindfulness and practicing and now for 30 years and I don't actually know what it is. So that's, you know, I teach intro classes in mindfulness. But now if you find now, you guys like admit it. I'm not sure what it is, but I can get close enough to it. That's close enough is good enough. You don't have to have exact definition. It's a functional definition. So mindfulness is the capacity to pay attention, to bring awareness to something, to recognize what's happening, to know what's happening in the present moment. This Satiputthana Sati means mindfulness, putthana means to stand. Sometimes it said to stand close to, to attend to, to bring our attention or witnessing attend to something is mindfulness. So when we bring when we so we start so big part of this is to be mindful because without the mindfulness without attention without attending To our foot to free, we don't notice the pebble if we don't attend to our posture, or we don't feel the tension we're holding. If we don't attend to our mind and heart, we won't see how we're consumed or burning up with hate, or frozen in fear. And it's easy to be so focused on our concerns or things that we don't notice. That's why, you know, being on the computer absorbed in something, it's not until the tension gets big enough that we noticed something screams so we notice that you're caught. But if you're mindful more often, if you're not caught in what you're thinking about, then you're you'll notice more often how you are in earlier on you can relax and not and free yourself from being caught. So mindfulness says it's very, very important, very important to cultivate and develop so we can notice the pebbles sooner than free ourselves sooner. There's other reasons other benefits of mindfulness but for this purpose so mentioned those as a practice develops of mindfulness, one of the important areas of mindfulness is to be mindful of mindfulness itself. Now, to be mindful of mindfulness itself to be so is to know that you know.

So it sounds a little bit abstract perhaps knowing that you know, but there are situations in life where not only you clearly know something, you know, you know. So an example might be if you wake up from a really great nap, middle of the day nap, you really wake up refreshed. It's beautiful light coming in through your windows, and you know your content and happy and satisfied nothing has to do and you wake up and you just look around you see this beautiful light streaming into your room, and everything sometimes still and still are beautiful colors. And you're just there enjoying it and you know that you're enjoying it you know that you know, there's something about knowing that's there. Or the example I gave the other day was you have sometimes in dramatic near accident in the car you know you're driving along have discussing whatever thinking thinking in your mind your whatever fantasies or ideas you normally would do, you know, maybe not so profound. Some of you aren't always profound in your thinking as you go through your day and, and so you're going along and then and then there's this near accident on the freeway, and those superficial thoughts that you're having just vanish completely, and you're completely present. Like, like, you know, the reset button on your computer. Maybe because adrenaline is running rushing through you so you, you suddenly you're awake and aware and grateful to be alive. And the sense of immediacy of attention and awareness is so strong, that it isn't so much what you know, with awareness that stands out. But the fact that you are aware, just the fact that you're

aware Wow. That it's it's kind of a miracle that you would know anything that awareness exists. So sometimes you can know that you know, you can be mindful of yourself being mindful. For mindfulness practitioners, this is very important because ordinarily, when people bring attention to something, including mindfulness, that attention is not independent of how the attitudes we usually have about our life, the attitudes which really go along. So if I'm anxious, then I will look at look outside My eyes into the world in an anxious way. If I'm greedy or lustful, I will look through my eyes looks, look and experience the world through the filter of that greed or that lust. If I'm hateful or versiv, then what how I know is is colored by that aversion. And that also happens when people are mindful. Might is very rare that people are completely economist Li, neutral or clear. When they're mindful. Often their mindfulness comes together with some of the deeper underlying attitudes that we carry with us in our life, sometimes shifting attitudes, sometimes deeper than the shifting attitudes, but some core beliefs and core attitude that is there all the time for us to come in the background. So that so that the mindfulness is not really, you know, simple so Some point is important to become mindful of mindfulness, mindful of how you're paying attention to see, is there any ways in which any any influences that are coming to bear on how you're mindful, that are a pebble for your mindfulness? And so you can you find a way to take take out those pebbles. And so we have in mind frustration, often language like mindfulness is about acceptance, or being non judgmental, or nonreactive. These are all pointing to the possibility of mindfulness being there without any pebbles without any influences from some of these underlying attitudes we might be carrying with us. When we see that mindfulness, like some people, you know, practice mindfulness, the very serious Buddhist practitioners, they've understood that the Buddha Buddhism is mysteriously profound and very hard to get to and so they're good they're they're going to be the best, deepest, most profound Buddhist on their block. They're the ones who's going to, you know, get it. And so they kind of huff and a puff really sits strong and serious and, you know, under straining, straining to get something. And so the mindfulness itself has a strain this pushing this leaning into the future concerned about the future is part of it.

So if you're mindful of mindfulness, you'll notice that the strain of the striving there and then you can take that pebble out, you can relax, not to relax so you don't be mindful. But so you can be mindful in a way that's more relaxing, more satisfying, more meaningful, lighter, or open. So as we begin doing this work, at some point, become mindful of mindfulness, and it becomes a very powerful door to begin looking into our deeper attitudes. Helping the mindfulness becomes the knowing and mindfulness, the awareness. And one of the ways you know that mindfulness is becoming simpler or cleaner, has less pebbles is that a moment of mindfulness is satisfying. A moment of mindfulness is settling, is feels good. It's kind of like calming. If a moment of mindfulness makes you tense or anxious or has no beneficial effect, and you don't feel kind of little bit lighter, a little more open or a little bit more settling, chances are, your mindfulness is has a lot of influences to bear on it. And you're entangled and caught in what you're mindful of. So you can look and see what's the quality of this mindfulness awareness I have, is it settling or not? So then as this investigation Onward leading, inviting inspection, visible here now continues. At some point, one of the things you might see that is bearing an influence on your awareness, your mindfulness, how you attend to things, your present is your sense of self. There is a self image, a self representation, an idea of yourself. I'm the great Buddhist I'm the person is going to get to, you know, be this best meditator on my block will give out badges at IMC for best meditator so that I could go Be proud, you know, so. So the mindful practice is connected with pride perhaps, or perhaps the opposite. We might have such poor self image, self idea. They say, you know, this, I can't do anything. This is hopeless. And so built into the mindfulness is this sense of I'm hopeless, I can't do it. Buddhism is profound and lofty, and who am I? I can't. And so that sometimes the sense of self is conceited. And sometimes it's deflating, inflating and deflating. Neither unnecessary. And so as we become mindful of how we're practicing some time, at some point, we become aware that there's a sense of self operating. And that sense of self gets more and more subtle, because it might have nothing to do with inflation and deflation. Just the very idea, the sense that I am the one who's

practicing mindfulness is extra as a pebble. At some point, someone who is new to meditation, you don't tell them that because this confuses them. And Who is that? Who knows last questions like, who was supposed to meditate? If I'm not meditating Of course I'm meditating. But as the as the as we get calmer and Still and more focused more concentrated, as we remove the pebbles, more and more, at some point, you'll see that even the sense that I am meditating is extra is not needed. It's kind of like wind drag to drop like a little pebble. And so then it might be interesting to try to put that aside. And to be aware, without any notion, any construction, any activity of the mind that says, I am aware. And so here we're doing something which was some people's very radical, and maybe something that very seldom done their life and that is had an experience of themselves without being self self referential. And most people are constantly self affirming And to end to go into deeper, deeper states of peace. without it being at all self referential is one of the most beautiful things that we can experience. And as this happens, you get a deeper and fuller sense of what it's like to let go of pebbles.

How radical is the fact that the Dharma is visible here and now in our in removal of greed, hate and delusion, might seem kind of simplistically ethical or not so profound. But when you start appreciating that as you go down to layers, and shedding and freeing yourself with the subtle, even something as subtle as I am meditating, is a little bit of clinging involved in that little bit of extra holding. You let go of that too. And then at some point, the transformation the openness, the freedom, the lightness, the independence that a person experiences Feels sacred feels special It feels like one of the most meaningful things a person could have happened in person's life. And it's really good to know there's a path that leads to that. But the path that leads to it is not found by striving for it straining for it straining for it striving maybe it's okay the right way, but straining for it. But as found by this little all the little steps of removing pebbles and look on it, as you go along, you remove the pebbles that you can you really release the holding that you can let go and then trust the path to where it goes.

So a person who gets a sense of this understands how this works. At some point, they attain something which includes In early Buddhism was considered very important. And that attainment was described as becoming independent in the Dharma, becoming independent in the Dharma. And that's the direction we're supposed to be going. independent of Dharma means now you know for yourself so well, that you know what it's about. And you don't need anybody else to tell you anymore. You don't need anybody else to support you anymore. Because you understand for yourself, what's your pet, what the path are involved, where the Dharma is discovered? And who is it it has to do it? And you know, it's so well and so thoroughly, that you become someone who becomes a gift to the world, rather than a burden to the world. So that's the Dharma. Hopefully that was understandable and okay. And each of you become independent in the Dharma. Thank you