

# 2013-07-14 Ethics

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## SPEAKERS

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This morning, I wanted to talk about ethics. And ethics is something that's a topic which is very closely connected to meditation. And so a little bit from the perspective of meditation that I want to address this important issue and why it's connected the connection of ethics and ethical behavior with meditation is a meditation gives you access to the source of ethics inside of ourselves. So rather than looking at ethics from external points of view and consequential points of view and moralistic points of view, people who meditate will sooner or later come into touch with their heart, their mind selves in a deeper way. And in that deeper holistic connection with oneself when touches the place where ethical behavior has its origins. So whether it's unethical behavior, when gets discovers that origin in oneself, if it's ethical behavior, one discovers that origin in oneself, and then when we discover that origin in ourselves, what do we do? What happens to us? What? How does that change the equation? How does that change us to feel and sense those things inside? The one kind of way of describing the experience of meditation maybe especially for someone who's new, but it can happen to people who've long experiences as well, is that in daily life, it's relatively easy to be caught up in one's thoughts and concerns and issues around the world around the outside. And if you sit down to meditate and close your eyes, often enough, the experience is those good And continue. And so there might be that there's something really strong that we want. And so the mind still thinking about what what we want, or might be something that we have a version to, or hostility towards or be angry with. And that anger and the blame continues. And we keep churning out those thoughts and trying to figure out, you know, what we have to do. Or perhaps it takes the form of fantasy. fantasies can be very compelling, very engaging, very meaningful, even for people because of the feelings associations that sometimes our lives are much better, more interesting, more dangerous in our fantasies than anywhere else. So we've quite compelling to stay engaged. And so the mind turns away and it's fantasies or memories, reviewing memories can be you know, both very pleasant and captivating because of that, or can be very difficult and painful and captivating because of that. And so the mind kind of gets caught in these things. in daily life, walking around our life, the mind can't get caught up these things. But daily life has an amazing capacity to distract us to interrupt us. And so we do something for a little while and then the telephone rings or we have to do this or that or talk to someone or something happens and so we don't really sustain the activities remind for very long.

But when you sit down in meditation, you get the opportunity for uninterrupted delusion. Uninterrupted preoccupation for the purpose of this talk, uninterrupted preoccupation, uninterrupted desiring thoughts and interrupting hostility, uninterrupted fantasy, uninterrupted memories, and you can kind of really kind of get into it. Unless, you know, the teacher suddenly speaks up the middle meditation says come back to your breath. Oh, okay. You know, okay, well, where was I, you know, and, and so. So if you do this for a long time, whether it's daily meditation day after day or on retreat maybe whole day or longer,

sooner or later, the attraction of what we're thinking about begins to wane enough, that we get to see what the cost is for doing this kind of stuff. We get to see this feel that it doesn't you know that, that takes energy, it's tiring. To have this incessant kind of thoughts and activities going on, we can feel that we're actually in some ways disconnected with ourselves. The more we're caught up and preoccupied in the world of thinking and thoughts, the more we're kind of lost in the past or involved in the future or fantasy or involved in you know, desire or a version or whatever might be, the more we're involved in that and caught in the grips of those things. Less, were actually in touch with ourselves less, we're here connected. And so if you have a long enough time to be uninterruptedly doing these things, after all, you kind of catch on how this works, this doesn't feel good, this is not. After all, it gets kind of old to keep having same fantasies after a while it feels kind of like, tiring to keep doing the same thing after a while it feels you feel that doesn't doesn't if you don't feel quite connected or feel kind of off to do this. And so as as we can feeling the cost of how we behave or mental behavior and activity, then it becomes relatively natural to want to disconnect with that or not be so invested in that, to pull back from that, to step away from it. And a very simple way of stepping away is to step into the clear observation that this is what's going on to see and watch Oh, my mind is caught up. In thoughts My mind is caught up in desires or Memories are something and the more clearly we can recognize that that's happening. It's kind of like stepping back and getting a bird's eye view. Or this is what's going on for me. And, and that's kind of we're starting to disengage, or like the expression disinvest ourselves. Because one of the reasons we get caught up in preoccupied in thoughts and desires No, that is because we have invested a lot of authority, a lot of value in the importance of those things. So at some point, we begin disinvesting it from it, we don't invest so much importance in this. And so there's kind of stepping back, or knots are at a loss of interest in being so involved in those things. Some people then find if it's possible, they find it very useful to let go of those things that stop doing it. Not always so easy to do. But even if it's not easy to let go, it's possible to let go of believing in those things so adamantly or Letting go of going full board ahead with that. It's kind of pulling back. And so this mental noting them being mindful of it is one of the ways to not go full board into it and continue it as we as we are. So as we sit and meditate over time, with the what's going on with us becomes more interesting. So the example that I like to use is that if I'm holding the striker, and I apologize, those have heard me use before. You know, I'm a very important meditation teacher at one awake birch Street. And the proof of my wonderfulness is how well I can hit this bell. And so I need to have a really good striker because that's going to make a nice tone. And if I make a nice tone, then certainly you know, you'll think highly of me. And the strikers really necessary for that. And so I'm really caught this. This is such an important striker. And so I'm going to keep this I'm not going to any of you take it and I'm going to hold it really tight. And so I'm caught up in the striker and it's meaning I've invested a lot of meaning and value into this tremendous investment. And I'm focused on the striker looking around scanning the room making sure no one else is looking at the striker and once again you know just you know but in all that concerned with a striker I am not noticing how I'm holding the striker. I'm not noticing that my knuckles are getting white. Not so white?

And the or that they hurt them getting cramped and all that. So the but if I turn my attention to my hand and feel the cost of that grasping It becomes a different story, at some point that begin feeling the holding is not something I want to keep doing. And I begin changing the kind of equation changing my relationship. And perhaps at some point, the primary thing I think is important is not what I think the striker is going to do for me, but rather, the fact that I am really causing myself a lot of pain. And maybe it's not worth causing so much pain to myself in my hand, just so that you guys can think well of me because I can hit the bell, well, maybe the other solutions, maybe I can always have someone else hit the bell. But the so it's kind of idea that at some point, as we sit long enough to just be with ourselves, we start noticing the cost, we start noticing what the impact is on us. We notice how we're clutching our thoughts and ideas and identities and all this. And as we begin shifting the attention away from what we

want and what we're thinking about. To what it's like To be grasping those things where it's like to be engaged in those thoughts and desires, then we get a different we have a different piece of information. If we're angry with someone, what we might be mostly concerned about is them that no good sucker. And how are you going to tell them something? And maybe it's well justified to kind of give them their do whatever, you know, so, but if you sit and meditate long enough, after a while, even if they deserve their do, it's just not worth holding on to it. It hurts you to be sitting there and thinking that then concerned with it. And maybe sometimes you have to sit for a week before he finally you get the message that the cost benefit analysis has now expired or something, you know, the benefit of having those thoughts. And so maybe the best thing to do is, sooner or later to let go of that investment. You're over investing. So then so meditation is a place where you can see these things and learn these things, learn what it's like to hold on to the striker, and then to, and then find out the inner subjective experience, What's that like? And then to begin learning to let go, to relax, to shift the focus away from the concerns we have to what it's like to be having those concerns. And for some people, this is a radical revolutionary change of orientation, to change the orientation away from what we're concerned with in our lives, to what it's like to have those concerns. And meditation that as they go deeper is has more to do with what it's like to have those concerns what our subjective experiences like. And then there's certain kinds of things that just we don't want to keep doing it. We want to let go, we want to relax, we want to soften it's not worth having it anymore, even if it's justified to have these thoughts and judgments. In activities, it just, you know, there's something more, there's something more important to do. It's sooner or later. I hope you follow. So we come into ourselves in the subjective experience of ourselves. And as we become connected to a subjective experience of ourselves, we start noticing what motivates us what drives us the tensions, the wishes, the intentions that we have, and we start feeling what it's like the quality of those things. So, if you want to do something unethical, which in a Buddhist language could be defined as do something that's going to harm someone else. If you sit down to meditate, and that desire to harm someone is still operating. You're going to start feeling how off that feels in your system. You're going to feel how tiring it is to stay connected to those kinds of thoughts, those kinds of intentions. It just doesn't feel right. independent of any moralistic thoughts you have, maybe you're a completely immoral person, and happily, so. You have a good philosophy justifying it, but you sit down to meditate. And even though you're committed to your immorality, your immoral philosophy, I venture is that you sit down long enough, sitting quietly, really tuned into yourself, you'll feel sooner or later that What a drag it is to have those kinds of intentions and thoughts and motivations operating in you.

Because it takes work, it takes energy, it takes tension, it takes a certain kind of disconnect with ourselves. So it's not a moralistic thing to Touch into the source of our ethical behavior. It's just a kind of very practical, ordinary thing that happens as we sit quiet and tune in. And then it becomes pretty natural to want to let go of those intentions and those wishes, at least temporarily when we're meditating. Because you just, and so then we let go of it or we soften, we relax that part. And then we're in touch with some other part of ourselves. If there are thoughts of goodwill, or ethical thoughts of being kind of virtuous, that also we sit and meditate, you can feel the sources inside of ourselves for that. And there's a variety of sources inside for that. Some of them come out of the place of open heartedness relaxed, being present, feeling holistic and ourselves. And it can keep the heart beautiful to feel the beauty of ourselves. And then maybe we don't want to let go of it as quickly. Maybe we don't have to let go. Because that part of ourselves that feels holistic and open is not the work, nothing's being done. And this is one of the great contrast between ethical behavior of a mature spiritual person and the under any kind of unethical behavior. unethical intentions is unethical behavior always requires effort, mental, emotional, physical effort. ethical behavior may require that mental physical emotional effort and energy activity, but it doesn't have to ethical behavior can come from a place it's almost effortless inside. Isn't that interesting? The contrast is unethical always has to involve effort. And ethical

doesn't have to involve effort become almost effortless where it comes from just kind of almost like a natural place. If the ethical behavior and thoughts come from place of effort, then in meditation, the tendency is to let go of that as well. To really let go of the activities to become still there inquire. And some people might feel a little cautious about that, because Wait a minute, I was in touch with this ethical side of me. I'm supposed to let go of that too. It's okay. Because as you let go of even the efforts to be ethical, I think most people find they drop into a place that is naturally more ethical. The peaceful relaxed still place is a place where it just doesn't feel right to make the effort that it is I have the desire the wishes of activities, to cause anyone harm. And wonderfully enough, I don't know if it's paradoxical enough. That includes causing harm to oneself. And one of the things it's possible to see this process of self discovery is we see what the cost is. have our own behavior is when we are when we are angry with ourselves or criticize ourselves for being unethical. That criticism that you know, excessive blame, feels bad as well, is also work. And so it tends to be a there's a tendency of people who do meditation to start becoming much more forgiving and accepting of themselves. Not so they condone their unethical behavior, but rather to kind of maybe accept this as a part of their humanity, not to give into it, but not to kind of pile harm on top of harm not to pile up aversion and top of aversion. So meditation puts us close to the source of ethics. And some people find that as they come in there, that there's a very high standard of ethical behavior, that the heart that your heart is We'll call on for you. Sometimes, it's not uncommon for people who do a fair amount of meditation, to find out that things that they've done in the past that have caused harm to people that comes back and visits them. notations about being in the present moment, right? We bring the past with us into the presence, there are remnants of leftover unresolved issues in our life will show up in meditation. And the unethical behavior we've done sometimes needs to be addressed.

And I've known people who've, who have done meditation up to a certain point. And they could not continue with their meditation unless they went and found someone they had to make amends with. And until they made amends, the meditation couldn't go deeper, because it was kind of like that place of some kind of holding that needed to be addressed and dealt with.

I've known people who have been surprised by how beautiful or how precious or how wonderful or pure it feels to have this deeper, deeper relaxation meditation that touches a place that feels quite ethical and ethical purity. And non people who are including myself, who had no clue that there could be a place inside of feeling or sensation inside. That could be called ethical purity. And, and then city, you know, for me, I discovered it through meditation or meditation retreats, kind of like was Wow. That's quite something, to feel this kind of sense of purity. So meditation puts us into the source close to the source of this as we then Want to live our lives? Sooner or later? It becomes, I think, again, a natural thing, to want to act in the world, from the place of ethical purity from the experience and knowledge, the sense of connectedness to ourselves, that we're discovering and meditation. And so there's how what happens on the inside what goes on at the inside, then translates to how we behave. And in Buddhism, there's no sharp separation between how we are on the inside and how we behave. So that does not like you can't make a hermetically sealed separation between them. So as we kind of discover some deeper sense of ethical purity or integrity in meditation, then naturally want to behave better. If we behave better than naturally that will benefit us in meditation and this inner sight, inner connection to us and there's a very close relationship then. Between behavior and our interconnectedness. So what happens in Buddhism is that many people start becoming more ethical than more than meditate. It's a natural thing. The teachers, the teachers of Buddhism, will often like to say that you should be ethical first, and lay the foundation for meditation practice. But if you wait too long to get to ethical before you meditate, then, you know, it's, you know, it's kind of, then you're not getting the benefits that come from meditation that helps this process along as well.

So one of the teachings in early Buddhism is the idea that ethics ethical integrity goes hand in hand with wisdom. In fact, the analogy that's used is that it's like washing your hand for people who have two hands. You need both hands, to wash each other. And so one hand washes the other. So the same idea with ethics and wisdom, you need both sometimes ethics. Your ethical behavior is supported by wisdom. Sometimes wisdom is supported by ethics. Sometimes ethical integrity is considered to be a small, teeny little seed that you plant in a big field. And then it's nourished and supported by your wisdom to grow into a big tree. Sometimes your wisdom is just a teeny little seed, you don't have much. But then but it's supported, nourished by your ethical integrity and then it can grow into victory. So these two go hand in hand. And the reason for this is wisdom in the Buddhist tradition is defined by understanding how not to harm oneself and to others, how not how to benefit oneself and others. And so there's an experiential reference point for wisdom, you don't have to read get it, you know, PhD in philosophy to be a wise person, you have to be able to be able to be you have to be able to be have a direct connectedness, connection to understanding what causes harm and what doesn't. So if you're grasping that striker, the Wisdom is not found in understanding what the best striker is, and you know, to hit the bell, the Wisdom is found in understanding the harm caused by gripping too tightly. So this is why the Connect strong connection between ethics and wisdom, because if we understand what's causing harm, and what brings benefit, then it informs our ethical decision not on a moralistic basis, but in this experiential basis of harm and non harm. And vice versa. As we become more ethical, that also gives us more access to understand what causes harm and what causes harm, because that's the definition of ethics in Buddhism, unethical behaviors, that which causes harm. So meditation, as I keep saying puts us in the source of ethics inside of ourselves. This is why the future go back to the time of the Buddha. The ethical guidelines, the most common ethical guidelines that Buddha gave, for how to live a life are not what's called the five precepts which are very famous in our scene, but rather at something called a 10 karmic actions, the 10 steps of karmic behavior. And the word karma is a very interesting word, because it's often translated as action. But karma, it doesn't really mean action in this early Indian tradition. It has a richer, it's like a religious word almost so richer and more deeper meaning word. And it's more or maybe it's more like it's action that has its source in our inner life action that has our source in our intentions. And so the point that it's pointing back to what's inside, not the behavior itself, the five precepts, not killing, not stealing, not lying, not engaging sexual misconduct, and no intoxication have to do with behavior. But behavior is only skin deep, in a sense, so the 10 skillful actions are meant to take us back into the source inside of ourselves. So the 10 skillful actions are some of the same ones but not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct and not lying. And then it also involves avoiding malicious speech, avoiding harsh speech and avoiding divisive speech. So we're looking you know, those those are, you know, again, our speech what we do with our is such a big consequence. But the last three are the ones that point to the inner life the most.

The last the 10 skillful actions are not being greedy, not having ill will, not being hostile and not having wrong view. And I think that's one of the these last three is why this 10 skillful actions are the ethical guideline the Buddha most often connected, or taught for people on the path to liberation. Because the path to liberation requires this turning in understanding what's the depth of ourselves, and greed and ill will and wrong view are considered to be closer in because their inner phenomenon rather than just behavior. And then not only to avoid those things, but also to do the opposite of those to do the opposite. And so in terms of the last three, it would be, instead of greed to practice generosity, or goodwill, instead of ill will is to have goodwill or compassion or love, and instead of wrong view is to have right view and is right and wrong view thing is all about understanding harm and not harm. That's the essence of it. So I hope this so I want to read this cup. One couple of things more about this ethics thing. The early Buddhist tradition, the Buddha I understood the spiritual path as something that could have at some point or other be a natural unfolding. And the imagery he used like that of a tree growing, or a river flowing if you enter a small teeny river high up in the mountains and float down it goes into actually float down to the bigger streams, the bigger rivers, down to the bigger biggest rivers and finally



into the ocean, that's this direction it goes rather than than image spiritual work is by climbing the mountain to the top which you know, arduous and hard work, the image of the Buddha tends to give is more flowing down, down there down the mountain down to the ocean, or tree growing. And so here is an example of this kind of idea that beginning with ethics, here this translation is called virtue. For one who is virtuous, endowed with virtue, no deliberate intention, need to be exerted as follows. Let freedom from remorse arise in me. So if you're already being ethical, you're not to kind of ask to be free of your regrets. This is a natural law, that freedom from remorse arises in one who is virtuous endowed with virtue. For one who is free from remorse, no deliberate intention needs to be exerted. Let gladness arise in me. This is the natural law that gladness arises in one, free from remorse or regret. For one who is gladdened, no deliberate intention needs to be exerted, let rapture arise in me. This is the natural law, that rapture arises in one who is gladdened For one filled with rapture, no deliberate intention need to be exerted. Let my body become tranquil. This is the natural law, that for one filled with rapture, the body becomes tranquil. For one tranquil embody no deliberate vote, intention need to be exerted. May I experience happiness. This is the natural law, that one tranquil embody experiences happiness. For one who is happy, no deliberate intention need to be exerted, let my mind become concentrated. This is the natural law. That's for one who is blissful, the mind becomes concentrated. For one who has concentrated no deliberate intention need to be exerted. May I know and see things as they really are. This is the natural law, the one who has concentrated knows and sees things as they be. They are for one knowing and seeing things as they really are no deliberate intention need to be exerted. May I become disenchanted and dispassionate. This is the natural law. For one who has become disenchanted and dispassionate, no deliberate intention needs to be exerted. May I become liberated. This is the natural law, that one who is disenchanted and dispassionate that one who has disappeared this champion dispassionate realizes liberation.

Thus, one stage flows into the succeeding stage, one stage comes to fulfillment in the succeeding stage, for crossing over from hither shore to the beyond. So, this describes a process of natural flow and natural movement. Over time, it's not like just boom, boom, boom. But as we settle, you know if we use meditation as the reference point, that as we settle in and become virtuous, inner virtue, integrity, the inner purity, that that leads to freedom from remorse that leads to certain kind of gladness and happiness that allows us to relax more deeply and become tranquil. There's a way in which becoming more deeply and tranquil and meditation gives birth to happiness. As we become happy and tranquil, more concentration arises, more focus is stability. And then with that deeper stability, we start seeing more clearly, in deep ways deep into our own minds and hearts. The deeper the seeing, the more we tend to disinvest ourselves from our poor investment choices. And this is what disenchantment means in this tradition. And then as we disinvest ourselves, our poor investments We discovered a better investment and that is to be free to be liberated. And it said over and over again and Buddhism, this whole process begins with this, whatever even the smallest little seed you have of interest in being ethical plant and nurture that seed and meditate and all this will follow. So, that's what I have for today. Thank you