

2014-02-09 The Simile of The Cloth

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsda

A couple of announcements. The thing about hunger in Silicon Valley. It's quite phenomenal how much there actually is you wouldn't think of it in place like this. And I know a little bit about it because my, my son was in eighth grade he wrote, he did a 10 minute documentary called the power of generosity, the fighting hunger in Silicon Valley that won an award. And he went around to Second Harvest and he went to soup kitchen, San Jose, and then he went along with a pastor. He went down to some warehouse district that Saturday morning, early early was dark, in downtown San Jose, and the back room of some ceramic shop, they had a room and they made all these sandwiches. And then he went along with the pastor with all these bag lunches to the homeless encampments in Guadalupe River. And he they passed out these lunches, and so he made a documentary of that whole thing. Then you could see it on YouTube. It's called the power of generosity. And you also get some interesting statistics there of how many people are hungry locally. So the second one is that we're quite fortunate to have Shinzen Young teach here this coming Saturday. He's one of the senior Dharma teachers in America, quite dynamic man. And very interesting and what he kind of his inventive mind, but my meditation. And he is when he was invited when he said he would come and do it day long, he said, he wants to advance day long and breath meditation. And so you're supposed to be a little bit advanced to come. So I don't know if there's some kind of some, you know, statement there. So it's not really meant for beginners. And not only that, but he wants people to read something at a time. So I think if you go on our website and the special events, maybe as a link to the things to read before he wants people prepared. And anyway, it should be quite a wonderful On Saturday.

So the topics for today's talk are love, faith, refuge, spiritual purification, and the ability to know for yourself what is true or know what spiritually true. It's quite a combination of topics. And they come together very beautifully in a very relatively short discourse of the Buddha from the middle length discourses called the civil discourse or the simile of the cloth. And so I'd like to it's one of my one of my favorite little discourses by the Buddha and I want to present this discourse both a little story that's It's housed in and then the teachings itself. And one of the things that there's a number of things I like about this discourse, but what about it is what it says about refuge. For those of you don't know, one of the primary expressions of faith, professions or face if they use kind of, maybe Western religious terminology is going for refuge. And the idea is refuge here means some place that you can go for support for inspiration involves tradition says it involves knowledge, understanding about what is spiritually efficacious. Its knowledge about its knowledge about something which we have gives us an emotional, heartfelt connection to the spiritual life that we have in Buddhism. And it also is motivational is what motivates people to engage in the kind of The Buddhist life and the word refuge, you know, implies support implies protection and inspiration. And they're said to be three refuges that we go for support to, or inspiration to. And that is the Buddha and the Dharma and the Sangha, Sangha being a community of people who have borne witness to what the Buddha was teaching. And it's one of the

most common rituals in much of Buddhism by all Buddhism is to, is to go a little bit short of the cripple and refuge where people go and recite the refuges and take the refuges. In fact, this ritual seems to go back to the Buddha, because it lots of stories of people hearing the Buddhist teachings and the end of those teachings being so inspired, that they declared in his presence, I go for refuge now and you in your Dharma, in the Dharma and in the Sangha. An interesting phenomena though is and this ancient texts is nowhere this the Buddha ever advise anyone or instruct anyone to go for refuge. He never says you knew this is a good idea you should do this. So it's something that's tradition and followers have adapted ever since. But he doesn't actually tell people to do it. As I've kind of scan through this early collection of his teachings, and I've only only found two central places where the Buddha gives instructions around refuge. The Pali word is sarana. And the first has to do with his teachings he mentioned so once teachings he gave near the end of his life. And he says, make yourself a refuge. Make yourself an island by practicing the four foundations of mindfulness. So don't go for refuge. Make yourself a refuge be a refuge for yourself in this guy. This could become your own support your own inspiration, something about yourself here that can have this kind of same level of protection, support, inspiration, motivation, understanding that you'd go for refuge in yourself very positive view of the human being in our capacity. The second has to do with this discourse that I'm going to read, referred to today. And here, the instruction here it gives is make yourself a refuge for all beings. There's a big difference between you know, I'm going to go for refuge in the Buddha versus I'm going to make myself a refuge for all beings. And so I think it's kind of meaningful that if you actually listen to the teachings of the Buddha, what he's telling you what he wants people to do is to become a refuge themselves. So what does it take to become a refuge oneself and what does it take to become a refuge support and protection inspiration For for others for all it does tell you some others says for all beings, quite a great thing right.

So, the story connected to this discourse is the Buddha is living or staying for a while next to a river called the Bahuka River in northern India, and it seems that this river was one of the sacred rivers of the time and sacred meant that people would go into the river to purify themselves. So, a kind of spiritual purification and if you had done bad deeds and needed to purify your karma, you can go into the river and get it all washed away. And so, a Brahmin probably a Brahmin priests to kind of belongs to a religious tradition that believes in this kind of purification by outside sources purification by the river sees the Buddha residing near the river and he says to The Buddha, you go bathing in that river? And the Buddha says Why should I go bathing in that river? What would the river do for me and the Brahmin says, The river is held by many to give liberation, it is held by many to give merit and many wash away their evil actions in the Bahuka River so, it's pretty, pretty promising we should go go there ourselves. If it really is up to you know what people say. And then the Buddha responds in this inverse and this following kind of poem or ballad and I'll be a little bit a fool may be there forever, yet will not purify dark D What could a sacred river bring to pass? It cannot purify an evildoer a person who has done cruel and brutal deeds. One pure and heart has ever more. The Festival of spring, the holy day. One, fair and act when beautiful inaction, when pure and heart brings virtue to perfection. It is here Brahmin that you should be, to make yourself a refuge for all beings. And if you speak no falsehood, nor work harm for living beings, or take what is offered not with faith and free from avarice with need for you, to bathe in the river. For then any well we'll be your sacred river. So here he's pointing to the heart, the quality of the purity of one's heart, purity of one's action, as being the sacred river is a place that we purify. And if you do that, if you purify your own heart, then you become a refuge for all beings. So rather than externalizing, spirituality, it internalizes it. This is one of the movements that the Buddha did, compared to some of the religious traditions of his time. And I suspect that we can also see that happening for us, that is not so difficult to consider the ways in which people look for something outside of themselves, as the answer is the place for their spiritual liberation spiritual well being, or just their psychological well being that they attributed something else is going to do it for me. And you know, many people come to

me and talk to me about the things they do. And it's quite remarkable the wide range of things that people are very sincerely trying to do, but their ways in which they're looking outside of them for Some solution and for a while here in Silicon Valley, I don't know if it's an attribute to Silicon Valley. There were, it was kind of a trend for a while I thought for people who thought that they were to get these meditation machines that you would wire stuff up in electrodes and, and, and have certain sounds that you would listen to and it would put you into this really good meditative state to get you into deep Samadhi. There's a neighbor here on Birch Street, who was an architect for building for John Lilly building in the first business in San Francisco for Samadhi Tanks in 1970s. You put yourself in this tank and this deep Samadhi Samadhi was kind of treated as an external thing you do this thing that you could put you in a good state. popular one external thing that river that people some people go to is drugs. Some people have a lot of faith in power of hallucinogenic drugs for, you know, for attaining spiritual states, or some people do it, oddly enough, oddly, but with the meditation itself or even meditation retreats, they treat meditation retreats as the thing that's going to purify them that's going to save them and cure them.

But there's a kind of way in which they're treated externally, outside of themselves. And I did that in the very beginning of my Buddhist practice. I was kind of enamored with Buddhism. And so Buddhism is great world religions, great authority figure, this great big thing, this great power or something. And, you know, little old me, you know, I had to somehow learn and enter into get in touch with that big, Buddhist thing. So much authority And at some point I realized that there is no Buddhism. And Buddhism has no authority, it's there is no Buddhism. There's only Buddhist teachings that can point us back to our heart. And so then I turned my attention away from Buddhism. You know, the thing out there that was going to do it for me to do it doing the inner work for myself here. So I think it's not so hard to see how people you know, we don't have necessarily rivers, sacred rivers here in America. But we have other things that we go to that externalizes the source of change how we're gonna change and become better and for Buddhist spirituality, the central aspect of it is taking responsibility for the quality of your own heart, your own actions and working to purify it. So, this is his response to this problem. And then, as part of this discourse, the Buddha gives a simile and this is simile of the cloth and it goes like this. Suppose, a cloth were dirty and stained and a Dyer dipped it in some dye were there blue or yellow or red or pink? It would look poorly dyed and impure in color. Why is that? Because of the impurity of the cloth. So to when the mind is defiled and unhappy unhappy results unhappy consequences are expected. Suppose a cloth were pure and bright, and a dye or dipped it in some dye or other, were there blue or yellow or red or pink and it would look well dyed and pure and color. It would look well dyed and pure in color. Why is that? Because of the purity of the cloth, so, to when the mind is undefiled I have consequence is expected. So it's a nice little simile. So you know the some of you know the famous end story of the poor professor, these professors sometimes in these kinds of stories don't get treated very nicely. And then the professor goes to visit the Zen master, and Buddhist professor and he comes with all these ideas about Buddhism, he's gonna ask questions. And but before they begin, the Zen master offers him tea. So they, the professor holds up his cup to receive the tea. And the Zen master starts pouring the tn but doesn't stop. So it pours over the side and, and, and the professor says, it's, it's full, it won't take anymore. And the Zen Master says yes, in the same way, you're full. And you can't take any more of my teachings because you have all your eye filled with your ideas and all that. So, you know, or for agitated We're filled with anxiety or filled with greed. You know, when the mind is preoccupied in very powerful ways, it can't take anything in, can't take teachings in it can't practice it can't really do the inner work that's, you know, purification that's possible.

So this is kind of simulate this is related to that. But then the next section I think, is what points to the how in Buddhism, the importance of knowing for yourself and we know that many people in the West talk about Buddhism is they like Buddhist religion because it's thanks focuses on you know, trusting your own experience knowing for yourself, but it's a little bit naive sometimes when people talk about

you know, how, you know, I'm gonna put it in terms to know my own truth know for myself, because it's naive because people will often justify anything that they remotely have an opinion about. as being I know or You know, but the Buddha this has emphasized knowing for yourself but it's emphasizing a particular way, a particular way, something's bigger thing that you can know for yourself, that's particularly useful. And this next section points to what it is we could know for ourselves. And so it has number of steps. So the first thing the Buddha says first he asks, What are the imperfections that the mind? So he's going to list what these are. covetous, covetousness, and greed are imperfections that defiled the mind. Ill will, is an imperfection at the mind anger, resentment, contempt, insolence, envy, avarice, deceit, fraud, obstinacy, rivalry conceit, arrogance, vanity. negligence are imperfections that defiled the mind. There's a monk named scholar named Venerable Anālayo. In commenting on this list, he talks about them all being social emotions. And it is kind of a little bit unusual to have this long list of social emotions, things that would happen when our society in relationship to other people. And remember, they talked to the text talked about being a refuge for others. And so what kind of emotions or motivations motivate us in relationship to our social world. And here is picking up a lot of them and saying, these particular motivations are not for the welfare of your own mind, and probably not to the welfare of the world around you. So first, he lists these things. And then he says, and this is the important part of practice of mindfulness of the unfolding of, of knowing for yourself. Knowing that these are imperfections of the mind, he lists each one individually. A person abandons it. So first you know it, you know it in yourself, you recognize it in yourself that you have these things, greed, eight, rivalry, arrogance, conceit, the right thing, and then you abandon it. So, of course, easier said than done. But it's a noble and wonderful thing to abandon it your these kinds of motivations, at least to the point that you don't act on them. Because you don't want to act in ways that cause harm to the people around you. So at least kind of be able to step aside and have enough mind presence that they're not dominating or motivating, motivating you for what you do. So the person abandons it. Then here's when person has known that these have been abandoned each way but at least each one individually have to abandon the whole lot all at once, but each one the person then acquires perfect. The translation here says the perfect confidence in the Buddha. So, what's interesting is that the reference point for having confidence in the Buddha, trust or faith in the Buddha is your own experience. Their own pure in language of the ancient world and you've purified your own mind, of particular, unwholesome and useful painful states. You've kind of figured out how to let go of it, and just see the difference between the mind which is churning, agitated by greed, hate and delusion, and one that doesn't have It is a very powerful observation. And this is one of the primary things that the Buddha was emphasizing that you could know for yourself. You could know whether your mind is greedy, you could know whether there's ill will or anger resentment, contempt, insolence, and avarice, deceit, fraud, obstinacy, rivalry conceit, arrogance, vanity and negligence. You can know this stuff about your notes there. And you can know there's no longer there.

This is spiritually efficacious and important in Buddhism. We're not talking about believing or knowing some metaphysical or transcendental experience or state. We're focusing on knowing something that is relatively simple and straightforward, something that hopefully is accessible to all of us. If we're tuned into it, if we're paying attention to this level of our experience.

Now the word that Bhikkhu Bodhi in his translation, translate says perfect confidence. I don't think it's the right translation. Partly later he translated elsewhere you translated that unwavering confidence in different addition to the same book. But even so it doesn't quite represent what the original Pāli is. It represents a little more than commentaries later tradition what it says this means. The, the word that's being translated perfect or unwavering, is a bit sharp. And a bit I know some of you don't know Pali, of course. But some of you know the word veda, that the vedas. Means kind of means kind of has a meaning of knowledge or knowing and vedanā what you can know directly. Of that she has the

meaning of knowledge and the word for confidence is a beautiful word called *pasāda*, which is related to the work related to the word serenity or lucidity. And sometimes it's translated as faith, a confidence of faith that has that has a serene or lucid quality to it. It's not fiery faith or fiery competence. And so the dictionary defines this as faith, trust confidence, based on knowledge. And so I think that's a bit gives a very different sense than perfect confidence. You know, how do you know it's perfect, but the idea that you know, you have confidence or faith or trust, based on something you know yourself. It's when you only when you know something for yourself, then you have strong unwavering confidence in the Buddha. So the Buddha is not so One that you have, you know, just blind faith in or just hold in esteem because it's the Buddha, but rather, to have real there to understand what the Buddha is about. To understand why he's revered and why people listen to him, requires us really to understand something about our own potential. And its own potential that's relatively simple, and so simple that some people will say this is just psychology as opposed to religion, because it doesn't have you know, to be free of greed and hate and avarice and rivalry and all these things. They don't have the kind of aura of spirituality of great religious truths and oneness with the cosmos or God or something. You know, it's like my therapist wants me to do that. But don't let that fool you, or to confuse you to think that this is not talking about something quite profound and very deep. We're talking about US state of ultimate state of liberation, which is these from Buddhist point of view, some of the deepest forms of spiritual experience anyone can experience. So then it goes on and says when also we'll have then trust based on knowledge in the Dharma. And when one will have trust based on knowledge in the Sangha, so here the safety of these are the refuge things, things you have your faith and trust in, but it comes out of our own knowing.

So, we're getting to love. So here we have faith. We have refuge we have knowing for yourself as part of the team's right to come together here. But now we're gonna get into labs here. Have you been waiting for this? I bet Whereas the love part when a person has managed to abandon what this text calls the imperfections of the mind, the defilements of the mind things like torment the mind that caused suffering in the mind. And in doing this has acquired confidence or faith in the Buddha Dharma Sangha, based on their own knowing like this. Then it says the person gains inspiration in the meaning gains inspiration in the Dhamma Dharma, gains gladness connected to the teachings. So, they it isn't just they have confidence in the Buddha Dharma Sangha based on your own knowing, but knowing his potential knowing this possibility of this transformation in ourselves, gives inspiration gives happiness or some kind of gladness or delight. That Yes, there is a possible I'm not stuck, there is a possibility is a path to walk, there's a way to unfold. There's a spiritual life to live, that can transform my suffering, transform me. So I become not only no longer suffer myself, but I can become a refuge for others. As it has this description, where it's assumption here is that once you start kind of getting into this having this confidence in this trust, and, and feel inspired and delighted by it, there's almost like the input. And the implication to these texts is that because of that, you almost kind of like in the river and you start just floating down the river if you're in the river, things that unfold inner unfoldment is interchange begins happening kind of on its own if a natural course, partly by why the tradition calls. The first stage of awakening is a stream, enter. Once you enter the stream, the stream will carry you and so here it says When one is glad, when one is delighted, Joy is born. When one has joy, the body becomes tranquil. One whose body is tranquil, feels happy. In one who feels happy, the mind becomes concentrated. And so, having a concentrated mind or concentrated heart is considered to be very important for the unfolding of this path of Buddhism. But rather than something we do huffing and puffing it, here it describes a process by which it the deeper concentration happens in the wake of first doing some kind of inner work for yourself, of abandoning, letting go of some of the some of this preoccupations of your mind which are troubling to have and forbidden taking the time to be lighted by that. What it means is that when you're able to let go of something, no longer be caught up in something, don't just quickly move on to the next thing on your agenda. You know, we have some people who almost have a lot of

things to do. And, but take the time to enjoy that. Take the time to be nourished by it, let it register. Because as that's your nurse and you let it register, then it's possible and allow yourself to feel glad and inspired by that. Take the time to feel that to appreciate that. And then perhaps some of this unfolding and being in the stream can start happening, and perhaps you'll be carried along and the deeper states of concentration arise out of being calm, relaxed and happy. And this is one source of relaxation and happiness. So then it describes that so firstly, it gets concentrated But what do you do when you're concentrated, nice to be concentrated? And what's that like to be concentrated in this way? If it happens naturally, without a lot of huffing and puffing more like an opening to something, what happens when we relax deeply? When the buyer talks about the body relaxing, becoming tranquil, and we feel happy and relaxed present way, we're allowing something to unfold within us, as opposed to be the agent who's going to make the change. What's that experience like? What happens? So here's a description.

One abides pervading one direction with a heart imbued with loving kindness. Likewise, a second direction likewise a third likewise a fourth. Likewise, above, below, around and everywhere. To all as to oneself, when abides pervading the all encompassing world, with a mind or heart imbued with loving kindness, abundant, Exalted and measurable without hostility and without tail will. So the answer to my question is, when has love here it's called metta or loving kindness. And this has been my experience in meditation practice, to my surprise, that at various phases of my deepening into the meditation path I found that my heart My inner life, started to sing or vibrate or resonate or, or radiate or something, first with compassion. And I was quite surprised that compassion was born. It wasn't trying to do it. I wasn't thinking about it. I No one told me that I supposed to be compassionate and wasn't interested in being compassionate, please No. And but as I sat, sat with my own suffering as I open to my suffering as I opened to my experience, the crust of my heart, the resistance, that tension, the distractions, all the stuff that was kind of kept me from being in touch with myself, fell away enough that then something felt what it felt like to me is something from inside could radiate flow. And in the early years of my practice, it was compassion. Then later, when I started doing Vipassana practice, then what was to my surprise bubbled up inside from inside was loving kindness. And I wouldn't describe it with these, you know, in this kind of very, you know, dramatic expression here, you know, abundant, Exalted and measurable. It's a little bit more modest than what I felt but I thought it was kind of float up. And when it talks about having gone all directions, not throughout the world, this was remarkable to me was to have feelings of compassion, feelings of love, that didn't have an object. It wasn't because, you know, I was thinking about someone. And you know, certainly I could have that. But here it was love and compassion that had no object. And that was one of the big surprises that just just a state of being imagined to the state of being of love, a state of being of compassion. And so that's why I think it feels like it just kind of radiates in all directions.

And then it goes a little bit further, it says that even this doesn't say it exactly this way. But even this, these beautiful states of love and compassion, they're so boundless, shouldn't be taken as being ultimate. But rather even this should be investigated. Even this should be practiced with To be mindful of, and to be seen, how itself these states are conditioned phenomena these states that there's something more to experience in it something beyond them something which is even less conditioned than, than this object less compassion and love. And this would be the deepest deeper layer layers of just fall that dropping away of abandoning the any kind of self reference that consciousness could have, and to have our awareness or consciousness be radiant be present in a full way. So in a sense, you know, you know, you're in it, you know, but that knowing has no self reference, meaning no self reference to a self to me myself in mind. Something drops away in that experience, that that, then a person knows the mind the heart is liberated is free.

And then the Buddha said, this is called one bathed in inner bathing. So if you want to go bathe you know so rather than So, kind of in response to this Brahman the, you know who talks about bathing in a river. The Buddha then presents a path, his own river, a path for the inner bathing. And it begins with doing your own work to begin recognizing and then letting go or dissolving. forces of our mind and heart that trouble us. Seeing that it's possible to let go of these things and have a heart and mind untroubled by these things. Be inspired by that have confidence and faith in that and in that inspiration of that, hopefully feel glad and happy. And let that happiness carry you to relax deeply. To relax in this world not being caught, don't be, don't be guarded or tense. Be happy, if you can. And then with that opening up into concentrated states, perhaps you'll experience love and compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. But don't end there. Don't take that as being ultimate. keep letting go until you have the experience of the heart being liberated and free. And that's your inner being the inner river that you can follow. And this is also the way that you can make yourself a refuge for all beings, which is a beautiful thing to do and expression of compassion. So in this text, in the sutta, the spiritual practice of Buddhism is clearly put in the context of, of our social lives. It's good in the context of being a refuge for others. It's within the context of practice. are experiencing love and compassion for others. And it's putting the context of overcoming the kind of inner mental forces and motivations where we're liable to cause suffering on others. So I think it's a beautiful thing. And so, that's the way one sutta covers love, faith, trust, refuge, knowing for yourself and liberation. Okay, so we have our key today, everyone's welcome to stay. And I think it'd be very nice if you would please just turn to someone near you. And even if you've been here, the first time ever, you've never been here before. Welcome the person next to you and say hello and then maybe go to and...