

2015-06-15 Simile of Mara

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SPEAKERS

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I'll tell you of a ancient simile, parable that comes from the Buddha. That I think it's kind of evocative or if you if you care to can you can kind of apply it maybe to your life and see if there's some application. And to begin it before, just tell him what kind of open modern story which is not not a kind of something I know much about. So maybe I don't get the facts accurate. But a person goes into a bar, and this is this is not a joke. A person goes into a bar. And just to get out of the heat or something and not to drink knows better than to drink alcohol. But the bars the people who run it, they're so thoughtful and generous. They have all these salted crackers and stuff on the counter for free Just please help yourself. So the person starts eating those and gets really thirsty. And so wants to drink. And so he's in a bar gets really thirsty and just a little beer would be nice. So that goes the first one. And that's what's nice. Get the second one and feel that's really nice. And then notices other people drinking whiskey. Oh, might as well. And so the story goes, but the bait the hook was those you know, was maybe those those salt crackers.

So, this kind of idea of there being bait that catches us and then we start pursuing the particular thing, and we get intoxicated. Whether it's literally intoxication with alcohol or something or intoxicated with other things that we can get caught up in. This was in that this was going on 2500 years ago. Probably more But certainly at the time with the Buddha. And so this similar story kind of is built on this idea that there's bait, and there's traps, you get intoxicated. And then there's traps and get caught. And it's starts with a story of a herd of deer, and a hunter who wants to catch the deer. And so the deer are in the terrain of this Hunter, and they're just happily going about their business. And the hunter puts out bait and the various food items that if they are either apparently back then they had ideas of intoxicating the deer to kind of weaken them or make lower the guard or something. So they eat this intoxicating piece of food or something. And then it would be easy for the hunter to come and catch these intoxicated deer and so wonder herd got completely caught carted off wherever deer go when they get carted off so but there was a second year nearby who watched this happen and they saw that the hunter we put out this bait so they decided they weren't going to stay in that territory. They decided they would go far away into kind of the wilderness and just really kind of just not live in the luscious area with lots of food but live far away from the danger of the bait the hunter and just kind of eat kind of a little bit the weeds that were there the you know the dry, old kind of shrivel plants that were there and just kind of manage you know, and it's kind of renunciant way far away. But sometimes it got the dry season got really poor the pickings in this area and so they Come back to where the pickings were good. And then they would really be happy to be back and they would kind of eat a lot and eat a lot and they would kind of not notice the bait. And sure enough, they ate the date and they started getting toxicated and then the hunter would somehow catch them. But there was a third herd of deer. And they saw this and they said, well, we're not going to just, you know, just casually walk around and eat the bait and get caught. We're not going to go run away and, and then rebound back at some point and gorge and not pay attention.

We're gonna live right here in the midst of the hunters land, but we're gonna find ourselves a hiding place. So and then we're gonna come out of our hiding place when it seems safe, and we're gonna be really mindful and careful about what we eat. And we're gonna kind of check out and avoid the bait and eat other things.

And so the hunter sees this that none of the deer getting caught, they're not eating his bait. So the hunter has a plan. He puts out lots of traps. Apparently the great tech stocks buy really big, big traps with a bait inside but lots of them. And it wasn't clear from the story whether he catches them in the traps, but somehow or other because he has so many traps, maybe sees where they can kind of maybe nibble the bait and get away before the trap gets to them or something. The traps somehow give evidence of where they're hiding. So then he kind of just marshals his forces the hunter and just goes to the hiding place and catches them. So the idea of staying in Mars in the hunters territory and hiding somehow that didn't work either. So the there's a fourth hurdle and the fourth herd of deer see all this have proceeded and then decided well the only way that what we'll get it we'll we'll do is we're going to go to a place where the hunter can never go and apparently the place is somehow like a hiding place something but some place where mark and ever go and then the hunter comes along and sees that the deer aren't eating his things and are getting caught and he understands he can't find them because they go someplace where he can't go. It but it occurs to him that he could scare them. But he says if I scare them, then they're going to say that they're going to get all excited and yell alarm at all the deer in the forest, they're going to run away and there won't be any for me anymore. So I'm gonna leave them alone. So he leaves that fourth year alone and they're safe. So the Buddha tells a story, simile, and then he's gonna explain the simile and First he says that the hunter is Mara, m a r a, and Mara is kind of a little bit looks like the Buddhist devil. But it's in many of these texts. It's just a simile. It's just the kind of analogy analog annelle analogy for, or metaphor for something. And it's a metaphor for being caught in the world of sense desires, whatever sense desires there are, and being intoxicated by by it all. And so that's what Mara wants to catch people. That's what Mara's job description is to get everyone intoxicated so that they can all get under the sway and power of Mara. So the first herd of deer are those. He actually talks about people are spiritual seekers, who just live in the sense realm where there's, you know, every possible sense like there is right here in this local area right you can't there's bars down the street there's you know, there's iPhones to buy there's there's websites they go to, you know just the food to get there's all kinds of things to be intoxicated with are caught by and so the first group of seekers just lives in that realm, and they don't pay attention and, and they just like look at the billboards and we've got to go Best Buy. And pretty soon they're all excited and lost in their kind of world and, you know, and pretty soon they're lost to Mara lost to that intoxicating world of desires and wants and things and all that. So much for them. So there's another group of seekers, spiritual seekers, who notice that those people notice that didn't work to stay and that's where so they decided to just get out of the central world to renounce total renunciation via sedex go live in the wilderness completely, you know, shun anything to do with, you know, this sense pleasures whatsoever and they're so successful for a while. But sooner or later, there's a rebound there's a pendulum swings, and they can keep it can they, you know, they use their, their strength of will to keep away for a while, but at some point, they come back they have to come back. And then they because they're, and then kind of like, and suddenly they see all this stuff. Wow, candy Starbucks, or hot dog, you know?

And so they like go in there and you know, I had a friend who was a meditation teacher, a very good friend and we were teaching retreat together. And usually with teachers live at the retreat center during the retreat. But for that retreat, he was living off campus. And so he was he would come a bit later in the morning and the rest of us. And one morning, he stopped at the Starbucks and had a double espresso or something, you know. And then it was his job to come back to the retreat center retreat and lead a guided meditation. And I was sitting next to him, and I don't know third halfway through it, I kind of

leaned over and tapped him on the knee and said, Yeah, thank you better slow down. Because he was like, bracing through the, the guided meditation. So, you know, he had fallen into Mara's grips, caught caught by Starbucks, right? So anyway, so they go off you for a long time. And one of the nice things about not not so nice things about people who practice avoidance just radical, avoid so you know, just not gonna close that way and kind of shun it and pull back of aversion and fear and not a fear, the text talks about having fear, peer pulling back is it can rebound or will can weaken. And then suddenly we find ourselves kind of like not even noticing we're back in it, we just can like oh, and then work. And then sometimes it's even stronger than it was before the desires. So there's some some seekers who do that. And there's a third group of seekers and notice the first two that didn't work. So they decide that they're going to hide somehow and they're going to bury might be very mindful in the world of sense desires, and live in that world and just partake, but just what they need just enough food, just enough coffee, whatever they need, just need to be very mindful and careful. Then they're going to hide and not be caught by all the billboards not be caught by whatever people get caught by being very careful how they live and But that doesn't really work either. And for them the way the Buddha describes it, they, they're bait that they get hooked into, and then get intoxicated by and then get caught by Mara his religious philosophy, his grand ideas of, of the religious life grand ideas of life and death in the cosmos and the universe and the nature of all things. So it was very interesting they were chose that to be, you know, the hook. So they, they were successful in avoiding kind of the usual sense desires. But there was a different kind of desire a different kind of intoxication, intoxication and religious ideas. And that's certainly possible. And after I practiced my long retreats in Asia, I came back to America and I was talking to one of my Buddhist teachers that I had before I went to Asia. And I was kinda a little bit in an altered state. You know, I've been Sitting mostly on monasteries for long periods of time. So all I do is just meditate, meditate, meditate. And it was great. And my world was reduced to meditation and meditation experiences and I was I became a little bit of an intoxicated by Dalek, this is so great and everyone should do this. And a number of kind of being all excited about my meditation experience in talking to my teacher about the meditation experience. At some point, he stopped me and looked at me and said, you know, talking to you, it's like talking to an addict.

So careful with religious ideas and philosophies and getting caught by that and hammered by the way, another way of getting caught. And so then, we come to the fourth seekers, fourth group, the fourth, like the fourth herd, and they see all that goes on before them. It's kind of nice if you learn from others. You pay attention, you know, see, oh, that didn't work for those people. So Maybe I won't try that. I want to have the saltines in, in the bar and so they sit figure we have to go to some place where Mara can never find us where we were safe and can't be seen by Mara can't be seen by temptation. And then and so where is it that Mara cannot see us? Where is it that the forces of temptation cannot find us? There's no no footholds, no hooks, maybe there's hooks, but there's no fish to be caught. And so the Buddha then says that, for those what they found, was they found and deep meditation practice, a certain kind of a describes the joy and happiness, peace, well being of meditation practice, a kind of well being where we're feeling Whole, contented, safe, kinda like fulfilled at the deep meditation has a feeling of being fulfilled, they often feels very meaningful, very nice and safe there that place Mara can find you. Or I can't put out a trap, you can't do all kinds of tricky things to find where you are. There's something about the mind the heart, in deeper meditation that's very, very fulfilling. And interestingly, in other places, the Buddha said that one of the ways One of the really, what he felt like when he pointed to one of the important means, for overcoming really strong desire, like sensual desire of all kinds, which are very powerful for some people. So one of the strongest addictions that many people have, one of the strong ways to do that. Is not through an active will not through avoiding at all this not you know, the They'll certainly conserve and help but is in fact to develop the develop through meditation, a sense of feeling fulfilled, a sense of feeling, kind of satisfied and a whole contented, peaceful, a sense of well being. And that that can help loosen the grip of desire. Because part of the reason why we're

caught by Mara caught by the bait of the world is often because we feel inadequate, we feel that hole we feel something's lacking. We feel dissatisfied. We feel lonely, we go for the refrigerator and eat that there's we feel something is kind of off. And meditation practice is one of the ways to kind of iron out the creases or some of the way or fill in the holes of who we are, or to somehow pull out the thorns that are keeping us kind of irritated and anxious and noise or something where we want something to satisfy as well, something to relieve our difficulty. And so we look for essential desires or the sense worlds or philosophies or things in the world to get addicted to caught by and excited by and hold on to. And so one of the functions of deep meditation practice is to provide a very an alternative way of being. That's different. And what's interesting about this approach is it's not an approach of mindfulness. The mindful deer were the second ones. Or the third ones, the third ones, they started to stay in this world. They tried to be really mindful and mindfulness could take care of it all. But it didn't because Mara could find you in your hiding place. So to go to a place where Mara can't isn't like Mara can find you they tech says, The place where Mara cannot see you you're coming visible tomorrow. Why You're in the middle of the world does not leaving the world behind, but in some somehow becoming invisible to the temptations. The The, the gravitational pull of saltine crackers in the bar can't find you. So you can see you can get pulled towards it.

So this experience of meditation practice, but it's not just mindfulness practice, which is very sweet teacher, it's very effective. But there's one step further and that is to develop the meditation more than just be mindful, but to develop a some concentration, the concentration is what can physically almost physically make us feel whole and settled. And to be concentrated requires to learn about the mind well enough to know how to leave alone, or let go of the distractions that would come in our mind that thinking we have. And so it takes some work sometimes, but that's kind of a little bit the dedication that the that meditation can About that, yes, I'm not going to get distracted. I'm not going by mind jumping around, and to go over after everything. Because a mind distracted mind that jumps after all the distractions is the very mind that can not pay attention to notice when the bait comes along. And we jump to that next debate and we don't even know that we've kind of been hooked in before. You know, some days go by or some time goes by or until, you know, things are so uncomfortable. We've over eaten, you know, eat and eat and eat and then why did I eat so much? After you're full and gorged and then there's wisdom. The so the sense of well being being settled. So the ways in which is one of the ways the Buddha talked about becoming free of Mara.

There's a different story around Mara as well that has tell you Because I think he makes an interesting point. And that is the, the Buddha used the analogy of crossing the Ganges back then in ancient India, there are no bridges. So to cross a big river like the Ganges, a farmer, with cows with a herd of cows, I had to find some place where the river was shallow enough that the cattle could cross. And if the, if the farmer didn't find that, and put the herd in a place where the river was deep, all the cattle will be washed away and die. We find the shallow place, then they can manage to get across the river to their side. Same way. In this Emily, the Buddha said, Mara is around the world of Mara is the river and you need to find a way across and if you go across where it's too deep for you You you'll get swept away. But if you go where it's shallow, then you can find your way. And what I like about this simile is that the idea is you, the person that you still plunge into the realm of marmaras around Mara stream is a stream of desire and sensual pleasures, which is, you know, pretty much everything that the world is about in this in the Buddhist, Buddhist understand it, that describe it. And in this analogy, the people still plunge into the river of sensual world, this world that we live in, they're not avoiding it. There's a plunging in, but you have to plunge in where it's safe. So you create some level of safety so you can get through it to the other side. So one of the ways to create a safe fording of the river and live in this world, so that you don't kind of get swept away is to live by the precepts live by ethical guidelines. They're kind of meant to be a protection. So if you don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, don't engage in sexual misconduct

and don't intoxicate yourself you're much less likely to get swept up and caught by behavior that somehow and toxic age or click or, or infatuate the mind or where you're not in control. And so there's this guidelines, here's how you stay in control, and you stay where it's safe to go across. And there's other things to do and practices to do their approaches to do that help make the path the shot, you know, the forwarding safe. The other one is the Eightfold Path. If you kind of use the Eightfold Path as an orientation, that Buddhism offers, that also provides kind of a way to get across. And the other way is to practice mindfulness, which means yes, we're going to live in this world. But we have to pay a lot of attention. We have to really notice the tricks of the mind. what goes on inside of what how it desires work for us, how fear works for us, how? What's the word? Not avoidance, but not starvation.

But what's it called when you know, version or version two, but when denial, deprivation, the forces that you know, you practice deprivation, you have to be wise about what that does to you. But what is it to live in this world across this world, not to avoid it, but also not be swept away by all this. And so here so the Buddha offers us a variety of things that support us and help us to live in this world in this realm not to avoid it, but live it so that Mara can't find us. Live it so we can cross the stream of desire to get the other side where to where it is safe. This is this was apparently useful teachings for people 2500 years ago. Do you think it's useful for nowadays? Or is there an app you can use? So you don't have to bother with meditation or ethics or they thought that they were mindfulness because you know, just, you know what, you know, a map app, that'll show you how to find your way safely. I think it's still relevant. So what do you think? You think that these similes, analogies and what they're pointing to has any relevance for your lives? They speak to something that you could relate to. I'd love to hear from some of you. That seems relevant.

Please, yes. And if you could say your name first. That would be nice. With the mic so everyone can hear

Hello, my name is Rockman. This is my first time here with this group. So the story reminds me of a phrase to be in the world but not of it.

just reminded me of that. Yeah, it does

not. It's a great face race. And how do you understand that?

That's a good? That's a great question.

I think it comes through mindfulness of how we are expected to live in a in a sense through our limitations. And a lot and being mindful of a lot of the assumptions that we make, about what we're capable of doing on a day to day basis.

Being able to see outside of that box nice.

So being aware of our limitations means kind of accepting them, but not be pushed around by them or have self pity for them or something, but be wise about them. And our assumptions means to live in the world. But, again, not be caught by the assumptions, but to see what they are and be wise about those as well. That's what was a great, great answers. Thank you. So,

my name is slicin. It's my first time here too. But I was thinking about the deer the second deer were kind of externally focused, right, they were they were really focused on the hunter and being careful. And that the fourth deer were much more internally motivated, you know, that less, I mean, less

reactive in that sense, right? Because they were focusing on sort of, not so much avoiding the hunter but changing how They were in the field. And I thought that was kind of interesting. Nice.

So change themselves, so they became invisible to do the hunter.

Yeah, I mean, it's tricky because mindfulness is sort of both right, it's internal and external, right. But in the story, you know, the second deer seemed I could relate to them, right? Because they were pretty much focused on staying safe, and not so much. It's just more externally focused.

I think it's a great depth perception about the observation about the story. So without any if you don't change ourselves, and you're always protecting ourselves against the world. We're gonna be busy for a long time.

People are thinking Daniel, could you push that button down? A couple of more degrees a little bit too cold for me, April Push up the up button. Thank you,

Elijah. Was that your name?

laser of? Okay. You kind of touched on something a little bit, talking about 14 through the shallow part of the river where it's safe. And I guess I'm wondering, when can you make an argument that you should jump into where it's not so safe? I mean, there's the expression. I'm in over my head.

Usually it's not a good idea.

Well, I guess I'm wondering

where

taking a chance on something Where you might be in over your head, but doing it anyway because I'm struggling with the idea of playing it safe in life. And whether that indeed can be a limitation. And then there might be times when you do need to

take a risk,

take a risk, yeah,

but maybe taking a risk and being, you know, being a deep water when you can't swim is are two different things. There's a lovely quote that I like that it says something like a boat is safe in the harbor. But that's not what boats were built for. So if you're, you know, we're not really, you know, if we only make ourselves safe, isn't you know, is a pretty truncated limited life. I think important is to they have the willingness, the ability to take some risks, but then to be wise about it. So can you think of a situation where in your language thing over your head? Having What What did I say? How do you say it being? Obviously asked what's the expression? You know where your head in over your head? Yeah. Where have you had experience in your life where that you felt that you were in over your head, but it turned out well, you're glad you did it. Yes. What some examples that you want to share?

Well,

I can think of something right now. There is a work project, a great opportunity for me. And I have never done anything like that before. It's way bigger than anything I've ever done. And I feel like I need to do But that I have to take that risk I have to get into deep waters and just swim as much as I can and hope I come out on the other side of it but for me I I can't not do it.

So if you if you succeed, then you weren't over your head in water but if but it's six if you do if you don't succeed, we know that there was too much for you. Right? And hopefully the consequences of failing are not too dire.

I don't drown hope I don't drown. Hope you don't drown.

Yeah, no, no, no. Have you ever been over your head and water? And it was really not a good idea? Oh, yeah, that's also happened. Yes. So hopefully you have enough wisdom that they have some sense of intuition of when it feels like you're over your head of the water and it's okay and you It's worth the risk in some point it's not. And for some people, the consequences of going in over their head is really not good.

Yeah, yeah.

Thank you.

Over here.

Hi, I'm Keith.

I think a difference that I picked up in the, the whole conversation just now about being an over your head is it? I think there's a difference between, like, risk that's based off of comfort and risk is based off of, like actual safety. Right. Like there's there's some things that you might do that are just like, just straight up dangerous. Yeah. And then there's other things where it just might not be comfortable, and were kind of pushing yourself would be worthwhile. Yeah. So I think there's a distinction there because that, you know, taking on that new work project is great. You know, I think that pushing ourselves in that kind of a way outside of our normal comfort zone trying something that maybe we haven't tried before. I think those things can be good. But, you know, if you're going into the raging Riptide or something, maybe, maybe that's not such a good idea. So I think I think there's a distinction that can be drawn there.

Great. Thank you. Yeah. So Trudy said the back you still want to say something, Trudy.

I was thinking the similes for me are like phases of my life. Where I've used different distractions, different hiding different ways to hide. Different intoxications. No being intoxicated with dressing well being an intoxicated with Being more and more educated, you know, another degree here and another degree there, and my life will be exactly the way I want it and ignoring the simple solution of experiencing what I'm experiencing instead of running away from it.

Nice. Thank you.

Up here. Yes,

please. Hi, my name is Jacob.

So, when you were telling the story about the deer that were being mindful and they were being choosy about what to eat, I was kind of rooting for those deer. And I was hoping they were gonna survive and I was disappointed that they all died. So, but I like what you said about the distinction between the deer that were just mindful The world versus those that are mindful plus meditation, essentially. And I'm intrigued by the idea of being invisible Tamara. It's kind of a curious and fun concept, being invisible to temptation. So I'm trying to understand why. Because I like the idea that mindfulness is not sufficient. I like the idea that meted daily meditation practice, add something. But I'd love to hear maybe a little bit more about why, how we might conceptualize that the meditation practice might make us invisible to temptation, for example, is it that if we sit and we're just by ourselves, meditating, and then we're still happy? 20 minutes later, we haven't gotten a new iPhone or a new big screen TV. Is it that then we have an insight or it feels more true that We can without gaining anything new, then we're, we're sufficient and we're whole, or is it that if we

let our mind wander and then we come back.

We realize we don't have to be attached to chasing after things and we can just let things happen. I'd love to hear more about your consideration of how does, how does meditation practice give us this invisibility tomorrow?

That is right to the point that if you have a sense of happiness and well being coming out of meditation, or calm, feeling fulfilled or feeling contented, that contentment You know, you're not discontented and often we want something for dessert discontented. So it's a little bit like me, I don't know if this is the best analogy but having a really good big meal and, and feeling full and contented. And then and then they say, well, actually there's that was a good meal. Yes, but we have The absolute best entree that was ever made by the best chef on the planet. And as you know, and they, you know, are you going to be, you know, your fuel already full, you know, and the temptation is great. I mean, this is gonna be the best food ever. But you feel content, you know, so you're less not so interest. It's okay. You know, I don't have to do it. I don't know if that was the best way of describing it. But, but the idea that sometimes we can be conventionally contented. Hello, we've had our fill, and we've had our fill, so we don't want any more of something. So meditations are a wonderful way to have your fill without needing to consume anything, buy anything, get anything, and some people might feel like it's not worth it. That means that seems kind of strange, you know, to just sit and get peaceful and contented you're supposed to be contented by getting something or accomplishing something so it can't really count you know, and, and some people who want to have things want to have relationships, one have money want to have all kinds of stuff are actually frightened and repulsed by the idea of sitting and becoming contented and fulfilled with nothing but your own breath. And, you know, I don't know, that doesn't count. That's not real, that's frightening or something. And so maybe it is, but it's a wonderful thing to discover how to be happy, for no reason at all.

Thank you. That was beautiful.

So in the frontier.

Thanks, Gus. I saw as I was thinking about this, it seemed to me that it's basically maybe your thoughts on this. It's a question sort of discontent and content, and that maybe mindfulness helps you be aware of discontent. Mm hmm. So that you can do something different, and that meditation helps you build can be contained. Beautiful, very nice, very nice, yes. And mindfulness and once you're content,

mindfulness can help you stay contented. So, I've been told that, again, there's lots of the world thought about the world. I don't know. You know, maybe I've been one of those guys who goes off into the wilderness and doesn't really haven't haven't entered the stream so deeply. So like one of the streams I haven't entered into is TV. So I maybe I've missed something a very important part of my formative growth as a spiritual person by avoiding TV for 40 years. So but I have heard

that that just as there was more on the time of the Buddha amara still exists and the place to find Mara parents Currently is in the TV show a Doctor Who and that some of the some of the episodes doctor who are using the image the idea of Mara and Mara's armies Mara servants are very very mean there are the writers of the script very explicitly are using this but I guess you wouldn't know that if you didn't know the stories so some Mara still here. I can't tell you which episodes but Mara is not far away. You know, but Mara, and Doctor Who, oh, no, I thought Do you want to say something? Anybody know that this this connection? No. Okay. I don't I'm not recommending you go check out Dr. Hulu. But by just letting you know that and if you don't find it, if you do watch Dr. Who you don't find Mara, you're guaranteed to find it and find Mara in the commercials

So watch out for those commercials. Anyway, thank you very much for this evening and for meditating