

2016-05-08 Protecting Others By Protecting Oneself

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SPEAKERS

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So in seeing so the Buddha was a storyteller, often using metaphors and similes and stories to do his teachings. And one time he was I want to tell you one of the stories he told and he he says it in English once in the past I wonder how much that's like once upon a time but once in the past there was an acrobat and an acrobat asst and they did their art, their performance, or some somehow on the bamboo pole. And the commentary say that the Acrobat video, hold the bamboo pole, stick it on, on his forehead, and balance it. And the assistant would climb up the pole, and do various, you know, acrobatic tricks on the pole, while he kept the balance. So and the apprentice apprentice who was the one who claimed the pole, I had the peculiar name or the nickname, frying pan. And I don't know why, but I like the English, you know, a little saying, you know, you know, as you go into the frying frying pan means it's, you know, getting kind of difficult to challenging, right. So, I imagined this poor acrobatic system to climbing up this pose, you know, the challenging thing. So it was a, you know, challenging art to have, and so that once the Acrobat said, Assistant, you climb up my shoulders to go up on the pole. And if you watch over me while we're doing our trick, and I watch over you, that way, we'll be safe. And we can do our show. And people will reward us with lots of money, lots of donations, street performer. And so the acrobats assistant said, No, that's not how it should be done. And she said, it should be done. I'll watch over myself. And you watch over yourself. And each of us watching over our own selves. That way, we'll be safe in our performance. And the Buddha said, I telling that story, he said, it's the same thing with us in the end the practice. He said, that's the method he hear. And then he goes on to say that the way so let's he kind of approves what the apprentice, his assistant said, it's kind of a nice idea, you know, to take care of yourself first. And I was reminded of the story on Friday, when someone told the story of when she was trained to be a first wilderness first responder. And she was taught to, you know, to go into the wilderness to find someone who's been injured. And she was taught that you don't rush up to the person who's injured, fallen off the cliff, or something. And you take your time, and you look around and study the situation first. So that you can make sure that it was safe for everybody safe for the responder. You know, if persons fallen on a cliff, you make sure there's not going to be a landslide on top of you. If you happen to help anyone then. So to first you take you kind of take care of yourself as the responder, make sure it's all safe. And then you step in and take care of the person. I saw that some years ago, when I stopped for a fire up on skyline. There was a little in someone's yard up there, there was a fire. And what had happened was a big pile of of branches and leaves and stuff. And the person had thrown the ashes from the coal from the fire into that big pile. not noticing that there was still some hot coals in it. So this was a huge pile of leaves and there was a huge fire going up. And so were the first people there and then the fire people came right afterwards. But the owner was there with a pitchfork trying to figure out what to do trying to break it up or something. And so the fire is fire chief came. And I was very impressed. The fire chief just kind of calmly mosey down and Look at it. And

the person the owner that was yelling at and actually pointing the pitchfork, like at the chest of the fire, you got to do something now.

That's fire chief kind of, look, yeah, we'll do something. And then they did something and then they put it out. But this idea that, you know, you take your time you stay present and mindful, you kind of see what the situation is, and the bigger picture and maybe you're a lot safer that way than rushing in and seeing is also an emergency. I was called the fire department many years ago when I lived in Marin County, because I forget so much the details of it. But someone said, oh, there's a little fire up there. And I kind of didn't take the time to look. And so I called and they came and there wasn't a little fire up there, there was someone smoking a cigarette. So you know, to this idea of, you know, rushing in or getting all excited, and there's an emergency got to take care of it right away. So the idea so the Buddha said, See in the same way as the acrobats, assistance advice, let's take care of ourselves first watch ourselves. How do we do that here, and here, the Buddha does something a little bit sleight of hand, because it so he listened to this.

So here with us and the practice, it's just the same way I will protect myself. This should the four foundations of mindfulness be practiced. So if you want to protect yourself, practice mindfulness, check in with your body, check in your feelings, your mind states, what's going on with you. That's the way you can be safe in the Dharma. And then, protecting myself, then I'll protect you was the apprentice said. So then Buddha said, I will protect others. How? By establishing the four foundations of mindfulness, protecting oneself or protecting others, protecting others, one protects oneself. And this is a great little saying, protecting oneself from protects others protecting others, one protects oneself, that there's a mutuality going on here. And this is deeply embedded in the thinking, the Dharma teaching this idea that we're all in it together, that we're actually have a tremendous relationship with each other, that if you really take care of yourself, well, that will take care of other people. If you take care of others, well, that'll take care of you. And so where that balance is what you focus on any given time, is maybe part of the art of it. But it's not one or the other. And so I've seen many times, where if someone was able to stay calm and present and attentive, and kind of not lose their wisdom, not lose their cool not to lose their, you know, their ability to be wise. They took care of the situation for their people much better. Whereas when someone lost their cool got excited, not only was it not good for them, but they more often made it more dangerous for the other people as well. And so, and here, he says, By the practice of mindfulness, we make it safe for oneself and others, others in ourselves. And then he goes on to say and how that by protecting oneself, one protects others. It's going to repeat himself here by the pursuit, development and cultivation of the four foundations of mindfulness in such a way, it is in such a way that by protecting oneself one protects others, and how is it that we're protecting others, one protects oneself, by patience, harmlessness loving kindness and sympathy. It is in such a way that by protecting others, one protects oneself. So here, patience, harmlessness. loving kindness and sympathy are the ways to protect others. So it's not doing something for others. It's not like, you know, protecting them from danger, except the biggest danger you're protecting them from is yourself. If you can be patient, if you can practice harmless this ahimsa. So word, if you can practice loving kindness or sympathy, compassion, then certainly If people are protected from you, and also the motivations that you act on, are probably going to be the ones that are going to protect them in real ways in the world, you'll do things for people, you'll step forward and take care of them. I think that the idea of, of supporting people around us stepping in, and being their support is something that all of us need. We live in a society now we see more, and I don't know if it's more, but certainly a lot of it, where tremendous amount of prejudice goes on tremendous amount hostility, and, and people don't treat each other well. And sometimes, because of racism, for homophobia, all kinds of things, and to be able to step forward, out of harmlessness, and patience and compassion, to offer protection support for others, to be able to be kind of an ally for other people not to let things go kind of unspoken, and, and ignored, because it

doesn't affect us. But to figure out some way to step forward with those qualities, to be offered support and help, I think is something that it's gonna become increasingly important as some of the tensions in our society gets stronger and stronger.

But to do that, but only by first, taking care of oneself, by being grounded and connected to your own motivations, what's going on what your beliefs are, what's happening to you, to be grounded and centered in the four foundations of mindfulness and mindfulness practice. If you're Take care of yourself that way, then you will not give free rein to the kind of impulses where you harm yourself. You won't act on greed, you won't act on hate, you will act on delusion. If you don't act on greed, hate and delusion, then you are a person who doesn't harm other people are more likely to act on the opposite. The opposite of greed is said to be generosity. The opposite of hate is said to be love. And the opposite of delusion is wisdom. So greed, hate and delusion. So protecting oneself, one protects others, protecting others, one protects oneself. This has been part of the rationale for not just in Buddhism, but in what I've read, in much of Indian religions, of why it seems so beneficial for people to go spend a serious amount of time, often kind of a whitewater society, on retreat and practicing. Because the more deeply we can take care of ourselves, the better we can come back and be support to people or society or being inspiration. Right after 911. You know, that was probably a few days after a couple of people here from IMC went off to set a three month retreat at Barre Massachusetts IMS. And, you know, the country was kind of traumatized after 911. And the idea of, you know, it seems like this is the time that society needed lots of people support lots of, you know, some someone helping being involved. And I was concerned that they were, they would feel that was somehow inappropriate for them to go off into this three month retreat, Silent Retreat, right after that kind of event. So I went and found them out, and said, you know, you might think this way. But in fact, this is one of the best responses that you could do, to go do that, because someone, it's only there's only hope, if someone can show how to get to the bottom of our hearts to where and uproot the forces of greed, hate and delusion that we have there. And if you know other people, if we can really see that people do this work, it's an inspiration for other people. They say, Oh, it's possible. I don't have to act on hate, I don't have to act on greed, I can find some way to cleanse myself over those things. So the idea that it might look like it's selfish to go off to do that kind of thing. It could be, it could be actually a very selfless thing to do. Because you're doing the kind of deep, powerful work for all of us to come back and support the world around us. And I know that I've been very inspired when I was in New York practitioner, by some of the people that I met, who had done such things and had been transformed by it. And now they were available to the world in beautiful ways. That kind of very pure ways or generous ways, compassionate ways. So protecting so this slogan is protecting oneself, one protects others, protecting others when protecting oneself. So what do you think of this? What are your thoughts about this? Do you have any comments or questions you'd like to ask or testimonials?

I apologize because this is out of a book. It's from what I did.

I'm clear, then a student of Suzuki Roshi, he's came to him repeatedly saying, you know, you know, trying to make cookies for my friend, and I'm trying to take care of this person, that person. And he looked at her very fiercely and said, first take care of yourself.

In that, that'd be the impression on me.

Nice impression.

I was hiking in Black Mountain

Wednesday, and guy was running down the mountain as a jogger and said, I just saw a mountain lion, he just left the trail. And I remembered Taan Geoff story about offering metta to the snakes along the walking path. So I offered metta to the mountain lion, and had a lovely hike. Alone,

yes, great.

I recently had a baby and I want so much to give to her. And but I realized that a lot of giving to her well is making sure that I take care of myself that I sleep well and eat somewhat regularly, as much as I can. So that really resound with my experience right now.

Yeah, that's very important for parents to learn that it has to be a mutual taking care of each other, because it was only taking care of the child. Everything's about the child that ends up being kind of lopsided, and the child grows up, you know, with the funny, funny attitudes.

That's an important thing if you're a caregiver, because some people use it when my wife passed away on five years ago, but she had a lot of health issues through her life. And a lot of people get into this real sainthood things taking care of people, and they forget about themselves. And if you do that, you're gonna be useless, you're gonna burn out. So it's really important if you're a caregiver to, to pace yourself and also to, to figure out time for you to be with yourself or to just get away from it all.

What I appreciate about this story is that it enhances compassion, because it puts the whoever is taking care of him and it's mutual. Put you on the same plane so that you You're no different than the person you're taking care of. And maybe that enhances the ability to, you know, feel in your heart,

what might be felt in their heart and vice versa. Nice. Yeah.

I am Betsy. I was going to add that I attend weekly meeting for Al anon for parents. And I remember the first time I walked through the door to that meeting, hearing people say that they were there for them. Now, I had heard your story, the Buddhist story before. And it appealed to me at one level. But when I heard my community of people say that they were there for themselves, I thought, well, that's just wonderful for you. But I am not here for any reason other than I have someone in my family that's in extremists, and that's why I'm here to get help for that person. Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending upon my state of mind, I needed to be in that meeting for years. And really, with all the passing time, these lessons go deeper and deeper and deeper. And in a way, it's that I found at least it was that searing pain that this that that drew me into that room in a choiceless kind of way. Like, you've just got to go there. That allowed for that allowed for the deeper and deeper and deeper

appreciation for these teachings.

So keep telling that story. Nice.

Nice. So you came to appreciate the people who said they're there for themselves? With time said, right? Yeah.

Oh, over some years, as I've looked at my efforts to help people, I've noticed a dangerous spiral of thinking that can happen that it can start with, if I'm able to help them, that means that at some level, I'm more competent or skillful than they are. And so then their kind of rise a sense of pride in my being able to help. And then where it gets really crazy, is that if I can make the situation seem more

dangerous than it really is, then it means that I have more merit in helping them. And this can just spiral into a rat hole.

And that those times that I've been mindful enough to step back a little bit, and first see what really needs to be done here. And I usually find that that much less is required of me, then I might like to think, nice. I know there's some people who kind of avoid using the word help, or the idea that they're helping, sometimes they you know, what are some other alternative words to help? Because help sometimes implies a kind of some people say this separation near to talking about her. You have another alternative word. presence of her presence. Support maybe bear witness. Company.

Sorry. bench sitting, bench think porch sitting. Yeah. Being with compassion, sorry, companionship. A lot of those answers work, I guess work really well, for people who don't need something to have happen. They just want you know, it's really helpful to have companion or presence and all that. But, you know, sometimes people actually need something a neighbor needs someone to go shopping because they can't get home. So you're helping your neighbor? Or is it or, or are you helping yourself? Or, you know, maybe maybe the word help does not need it? Rather than saying, Can I help you? You say, Can I do something for you? Maybe just that simple. Change of language establishes a different kind of relationship. Someone else was up? Yes,

I just started reading a book called trauma stewardship. And it's this title was kind of scary, but talked at mentions that people who are involved are environmental activists trying to care for the earth or people who are caregivers trying to care for someone in a child's or sick person or an elderly person, and the whole range of people who are trying to care and make this a better place that there are many of the situations where you feel you can respond by, Oh, I can't do enough. I just can't do enough or you feel numb, and you just disengage or all these different strategies that we have, because we're not aware that when we're around people who are suffering or the planet that's suffering And we're trying to make a difference that we can easily take that on. And I remember a conversation I had with you once years ago and about empathy. And I said, Well, that's feeling the same thing the other person feels and you said, that's not, that's not how we see it. And we, because if you're around a very depressed person, and you start feeling very depressed, that's not going to help either one of you. So I remember that very clearly.

I've been very moved by the security guards where I work. A couple of times, there have been situations where someone has come into the building and clearly is, you know, I don't know, one of them may be dangerous, the other one, I'm not sure what they're gonna do. But I've happened to be walking in the hallway where the security guard is walking up to the person. And he's completely, he has a goal in mind, he's walking towards the person, but he's completely at ease, I'm very impressed by it, you don't have the feeling he has any, the rest of us are kind of around. But, um, he's just completely at ease and walks up very, very relaxed. It really, it's great to see something like that,

I suppose chances are that it puts the, the threatening person more at ease to what they're not. So they're probably less likely to act out. straight back feels a little bit more complicated when the scale gets larger. This is something I've dealt with a lot in the political world, where there are some folks who've made enormous positive political changes. But in their personal lives, their behavior was heinous, for lack of a better phrase. And if we had waited for Ted Kennedy to find close, personal goodness, he would not have done as much for 100 million women in the United States. So it's good to save, excuse me, you should work on yourself. But some folks have done enormous good without ever having worked on themselves. Hmm.

Hopefully, the two aren't exclusive of each other. And often they are. And I think that's one of the one of the very interesting, I don't know what to call it philosophical, you know, kind of a ways of thinking about Buddhism in the West, is that Buddhism does not have historically a very strong social gospel, very strong philosophy for helping in society getting involved in those kinds of big, big things. And so in recent decades, here, in the West, a lot of Buddhists have felt the need or desire to be involved politically and politically or in variety of ways it is socially engaged, called socially engaged Buddhism. And part of that, in a people who are on the forefront of that field of social engaged Buddhism, are doing a lot of thinking and exploration, about how to have personal practice, the personal practice towards personal liberation occur in the very work of social engagement. So it isn't that you have to go off on retreat, to develop the four foundations of mindfulness to learn how to be free or learn to develop compassion. But how do you find out how to practice that in the middle of your social engagement? And this is very exciting media, we bring those two together and not have them apart. So next next time, there's a ted kennedy I hope that do both.

Last night, I turned on the TV expecting that I the news would be on. And instead there was a program called what would you do? And similar to Candid Camera from years ago, they set up scenarios where they watch what people how people behave. And last night, they had set up a conversation between three women, two of them very thin, and the third one was chubby. They were trying to convince her to take diet pills in a very kind of forceful way, in a public environment where they spoke loudly enough for others to overhear and the point of it is to watch how people in the restaurant would react. Would they interrupt with a and then the girls the thin women left in the chubby woman was left there and did they approach her then? long and short of it? Some of the responses are really heartwarming. And how people when they see something that is dangerous, for you know, for this woman to be taking diet pills that could be amphetamines or the They intervene in in a kind and gentle way, or sometimes not so kinder, gentler, but feel the urgency to support this person.

and beautiful. Hope you hopefully it was mostly positive responses people got

Well, yeah, they they all the ones that are shown or are positive in some manner, I don't know what percentage are the other way?

I think that, yeah, there's that it's a you know, a little bit complicated sometimes with, with some of these personal issues of what the when they should be intervention when we leave people alone. But I think as a, my my impression is as a society, we don't do near enough to celebrate people's for who they are. And there's so many different ways that people can be. And so some people are large, and it should be celebrated. Some people are small, it should be celebrated. Some people are men, they should be celebrated some people, some people are women, they should be celebrated. And some people are gender diverse, a whole different, you know, and that's beautiful and wonderful in itself. Right? And so let's celebrate this, you know, all the differences. And so I hope someone came up to her than that restaurant said, you know, you're beautiful.

On many of them did. I mean it was they definitely supported her. And questioned whether these other women were really truly her friends. Hmm. And because the scenarios are a bit over the top,

which they're all

actors, right?

Yes. And the crew comes out to tell the people that similar to Candid Camera where you're on Candid Camera,

I don't think that camera camera would come out of a Buddhist community

are you guess

I've spent more than half of the past year in Silent Retreat. And I've noticed that coming out of these long retreats over and over again, that there's so much reflection of the goodness that's here, from doing from really being close to the practice for long periods of time. And I find that sometimes I can take that in and really appreciate it as not even something that, you know, is something that I own, or that's mine that I did, but just a result of the teachings and then being practiced. And I noticed that the hardest thing for me has been to consistently be able to take that in and use that as like a continuing inspiration for practice. And I think that, that work of really knowing our own goodness, and taking that in from others. reflections is really important work.

Nice.

So I work in the renewable energy company, and things can get like pretty intense sometimes. And like I wasn't sure if I was going to come full sitting today at 9am because I had to do I forget a lot of things done for tomorrow. And it's rare often times reckon I have to decide for myself, I'm going to take a break and otherwise it's a slick, I can sense that I'm gonna burn out and I have to please give somehow that'll make others have an opportunity to to take a break. So it is I think it was like, the topic was very timely, and but it's something that have to be consciously done over and over again, other ways. It's not like a one time thing. Yeah,

I think so. And I suppose that there's plenty of places nowadays and businesses and startups where they kind of push to work all the time. And that turns out that people become less and less efficient. There are some places in Europe I've heard where they actually have shorter work days run longer, and they find that people actually are more efficient, get more done and you know, this Push, Push Push expectation is always supposed to work. I saw some hands back there and then was maybe one more and then we'll stop.

I appreciate the talk today because it really hits some things that I wanted to hear and needed. Here I've been in helping professions, all of my life. And I derived a great deal of joy and gratification from that. In fact, when I retired, I immediately looked for volunteer opportunities so that I could give. But I also realized only then that there was a tipping, that I needed to find the joy of taking care of myself. And I've made a beginning

by coming here,

nice. So thank you. So I'd like to say, like that last word, if I may. So the, the Buddha says, you know, the one way to take care of others is to practice the four foundations of mindfulness practice mindfulness a deep way. And one of the one of the benefits that can come from deep inner practice contemplative practice, is to discover your own beauty, discover some real value, to be really settled and at home in yourself in a wonderful way, in a precious way. And from that doing that, you have different eyes, in which to see other people. And it's easier to appreciate others than as well. So if you can really appreciate something in your own heart, as being some of those valuable thing that you have the treasure that you have inside, you can find that treasure, then you're able to see the treasure of

others how wonderful and special others are, and no matter who they are, you know that everyone should be celebrated. Great. So enjoy. Thank you.