

2016-07-31 Mindfulness Cultivates Ethical Virtue

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SPEAKERS

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So, in Buddhism, as people practice Buddhism, the practice and how we live, our lives are inseparable. That is not only an exploration of right in our life, to have nice experiences in meditation or calm, but it's very much about how we live in the world with other people and with the world, the earth that we are in. And in fact, the maturation of Buddhist practice is manifested in how we live our lives. It's not separated, it's connected. So I'll tell you a story. There was a miner, who had a mine live next to the mine, and also raised three children there. And it was, um, you know, modest mine that was, if you dug around a little bit, there were jewels and gold and silver to be had. And the farmer, the miner would go down to the mind and occasionally come out with some jewels or gold, and sell them and was able to live a modest life with a family. Not rich, not for comfortable life. But at some point, when the children had grown up, the miner died. And the miner left these three siblings, the mine, that was their inheritance. The first sibling, went down into the mine, and was mesmerized and charmed by all the jewels in the gold, and the silver that was down there. And was very happy to acquire a lot of them and gathered them together. And didn't want to share them with anyone didn't want just like having them. And so stayed in the mine never came out. And got pail ran out of food, that eventually starved and starve to death. The second sibling gathered together what jewels and gold and silver that were in the house when the parents had died, and went out into the world with that. And it was great to have all these swells, and was amazed at what could be done and by and experience to be had and, and it was mesmerized by what the promises of the world and went along merrily for a while until the wealth was dissipated was ended. And we still was mesmerized by the world. And by that time after sometimes forgotten about the mind. And so it's just a kind of searching, wanting in the world being in the world getting poor and poor, and eventually had nothing left and lived a life of poverty and got pale and eventually, eventually died of starvation as well. The third sibling, lived in the house, on the earth next to the mind. And from time to time would go into the mind and do some excavating and searching and would come out with some jewels or gold or silver. And then when the days were right, would go into town and sell them and buy some goods and live in the world little bit. And then come back and go into the mind and kind of live their best spent their life kind of on the edge of the mind and the world. And going back and forth. But, you know, was a home base was there in that house next to the mind. So she lived happily ever after. Neither rich nor poor, a modest life, but very inwardly happy and inwardly rich with peace and well being.

So this parable speaks to a practice where we can go in, there's all this treasure inside of us. There's jewels and gold and silver and wonderful states of mind to experience and it's possible to get mesmerized by that and think that's the point of practice and to focus on that as being the thing Kind of, and some people do, they go into that inner world. And there are some people who get kind of addicted

to meditation addicted to being on retreat. And they kind of, you know, it's kind of nice and pleasant for sure. And, and, but they don't believe in the world, and there's something something goes dead that way. And there are other people who are mesmerized by the world and live out in the world, and get mad, you know, caught up in that and, and if that's all there is, that's also a kind of way of starting a different kind of starvation. And then there's the possibility of living kind of, at the junction between these two worlds, connected to both. So between the inner world, and the outer world. And that junction, that place I'd like to propose is mindfulness of the body, mindfulness, which is centered on the body. And in fact that you'll find in the ancient teachings of the Buddha, a tremendous emphasis on the importance of mindfulness awareness centered on the body. And if the awareness is in the body, then we can partake we can enjoy the treasures that are within. But they also those inner treasures then become the gifts or the means the vehicle for how we live the world outside. In the world itself and world, the relationships. The body is the mediator between the inner and the outer world is how we connect to the inner world in a way that keeps us in the world. And it's how we're in the world in a way that keeps us connected to ourselves in a deep way. And not just connected. But in the teachings of the Buddha. This mindfulness centered of the in the body is what supports us to live an ethical life. Ethical virtues thrive in the field of mindfulness of the body. So another story from the ancient suttas. Sariputta was the Buddha's right hand disciple who Sr. ox they say, it's one of the most important disciples of the Buddha. And we have second only to the Buddha, what survives from the ancient time or the teaching, so Sariputta. And so the Buddha, sorry, good, I was living with the Buddha and his dwelling in the same area for a while. And at some point, he decided that he would go wandering around the countryside, go traveling. And so he asked the Buddha for permission to leave. And so the Buddha said, Sure. So he packed up and headed out, as after he had headed out for his wandering eye, another monk came to the Buddha and said, Sariputta, just left, just before he left, he hit me. And he didn't apologize. So that's kind of dramatic, that word that gets translated as hit sometimes could also mean insult. So that makes a little more sense that he insulted him but, but it makes a better story if he hit him.

And so the In response, the Buddha says, says, so someone, Go, Go bring sorry, put the back. So someone went off, found him before he'd gone too far and brought him back. And then bring that monk here to shoot, cues sorry, of having hit him. So the Buddha asked, start with that, did you hit this monk, and then go off in your wandering trip. And so this was sorry, put this response. He said that, if someone lives with mindfulness centered in the body, their mind will be vast, expansive, and measureless. And they'll be incapable of hitting anyone Have insulting anyone. If their mind is more centered on the body, then if their body is centered on the on the body, the mind will be like the ocean. And vast and expansive and measureless. And if you throw terrible things, bad things into the ocean, and the ancient language is certainly spitting and peeing and pooping, you know, things that are usually kind of a little bit not so comfortable to be, you know, directly around in. Or sometimes they even talk about, we put a corpse in the ocean, the ocean doesn't care, the ocean stays expansive and open and doesn't react. So in the same way, when mindfulness centered in the body, when the when the when mindfulness center in the body, then the mind will be open and spacious, not troubled by things around them. And you use this analogy repeatedly said, If mindfulness is centered in the body, it's like a fire, that it's not troubled by the spit than dirt that's thrown into it. It just does not travel that so in same way, mine is not troubled. If the mind is centered on the body, it's like the air and the air doesn't mind and you can throw all kinds of terrible things into the air, and the air is not troubled by it doesn't change. Or like the earth, you throw things onto the earth back in the ancient days to Earth wasn't troubled. Now, nowadays, I think the earth gets troubled, you know, fracking, and they're having earthquakes. But the, this idea of the mind staying open and relaxed and spacious, that's kind of the treasure, that's kind of the jewels, this ability for a mind which is clear and clean and open and expansive. But then the sharp widow said, if this if you buy this way, a person is incapable of hitting someone else, incapable of insulting someone else. So that's quite a claim. So this monk who accused sorry Buddha for hitting him

is sitting there listening to all this. Sariputta has not denied the claim. He just says, you know, but he does say, I abide with awareness centered on my body. So after the fact, with it goes through this for a while. And one of the reasons for the repetition going on and on is that the rhetorical device of this monk sitting there kind of getting smaller and smaller, you know, recognizing what he's done kind of kind of, like, kind of, kind of, for him, probably his ocean is really small. So that he's hearing all this and there's not much space to hold it. So he gets kind of like, oh, what have I done? I've lied, because I quit. I didn't actually hit him.

So finally, the monk says, Okay, I confess, I made a deliberate lie. And I, Sariputta, I didn't hit me. And I have transgressed, I've erred in my ways. And I and I recognize my transgression as a transgression. I will not do this again. And will you Pardon me? And the Buddha says, Yes, it's when it when someone recognizes the transgression as a transgression, and disavows it and is not going to do that again. Then they've corrected themselves in the Dharma, and then we pardoned them and support them to go on with their practice. And then the Buddha and the story, the Buddha then goes to start with that now, will you pardon him as well? And start with that as interesting answer. He says, Well, he hasn't asked me yet. And this ends without. So we don't hear the rest of it. So I think the, you know, some people, the people, the people who are recording, it didn't occur to them to continue this. So I think the, I think but the lesson of the sutta is that you know, it maybe it only makes sense to pardon someone or whatever. If you offer forgiveness, if they somehow directly turn towards you and ask for it and say, you know, I transgressed against you, as opposed to going to the Buddha kind of avoiding facing it directly. But the remarkable thing is, is that the Buddha, sorry, put those calling upon mindfulness centered on the body As the justify not justification, but the explanation for why he would not be unethical. Something about being in the body, which helps people be ethical. There is a discourse that Buddha gave called the discourse on mindfulness centered on the body. And in there he says this, when mindfulness of the body has been repeatedly practiced, developed, cultivated, used as a vehicle, used as a basis, established, consolidated and well undertaken. It's a long list, it's maybe a little bit difficult to follow along. But I think that if you are able to follow it along, it's kind of like, it's like driving something home into the heart into the mind. This is really important, this can be done. This has a big effect. When you really practice this well, it's practice, develop, cultivated, used as a vehicle. Something you ride right along with carries you along mindfulness of the body. used as a basis uses a foundation. Imagine the mind from your body being the foundation for how we live our lives, the mindfulness of the body, and then consolidate it is a great word. So you somewhat consolidate yourself, you're gathered together, you stabilize, you integrate the mindfulness of the body. If you've done this, the following benefits will follow. One conquers aversion and attraction. One is not conquered, by aversion and attraction. One conquers fear and dread, when is not conquered by fear and dread. One is patient with ill spoken, unwelcome words. And one is patient with bodily feelings that are painful, uncomfortable and distressing. So this has a direct ethical implication. Because if you're able to be centered in this wonderful mindfulness of the body of awareness is really grounded in the body and the mind then as a result, it feels expansive or settled or open or peaceful. One of the causes for unethical activities actions is people have aversion, hostility. And one of the one of the causes for unethical actions is could be said to be attraction. You want something so badly, you'll do anything to get it. And some people are caught in the grip of their version and their attraction. And they lose their mindfulness, they lose their presence, they're no longer self possessed, or self control, they're self, you know, in charge of themselves, the aversion or the attraction takes over. And we know that that could be quite strong, and people have very strong attraction sometimes, or we call them I say they have an addiction.

When conquers fear and dread. So I think one source of unethical activity is fear. And that's some one of the reasons why some people hate they're afraid. And so, when we've caught in the grip of fear, people will do all kinds of things that they wouldn't do if they're not afraid, in order to defend

themselves. And sometimes they'll just in their fear will justify the rightness of unethical activity harming other people. And sometimes the fear is not so well founded. Fear of strangers, fear of the unknown people, fear of people, you know, all kinds of things that people then put up walls to keep everyone out. One is patient with ill spoken, unwelcome words. So the idea that when someone says something which is unwelcome, unpleasant, maybe they insult you that with mindful Center, the body, that person you're much less likely to get caught by that. You're impatient around it kind of reactive to it. There's space, there's openness, there's patience around those words. And then the interesting one is bodily feelings. If they're painful, uncomfortable and distressing. Then with mindfulness entering the body, we can hold them much better and much more relaxed and open around them rather than caught in their grip. And with both these with unwelcome words, that's leads to unethical activity, where we will insult other people, or we get into a fight because we feel so uncomfortable with it, but also with physical pain. Some people's capacity to space just a kind of like equanimous it with all kinds of things in the world decreases under the stress of a lot of physical pain. And it's it's a very debilitating pain. So sometimes people will do things they later regret. And they'll snap at people they get angry, they'll push people away all kinds of things which could be considered unethical in the sense that it's not living a friendly and supportive life, mutual life. And so even if there are strong physical pain, the there's something about mindfulness centered in the body that holds that pain, so that we're less likely to act impulsively in ways that are unethical or that way or ways that cause harm or related regret. And I'd say for myself that with pain, that I think one of the one of the great gifts of this mindfulness practice, is having learned the ability to enter into the body with my attention when I'm in a lot of pain. And when I do that, I can manage the pain more often than not, it's when that not really grounded in the body, that the physical pain, it's in that you think I'm in the body with strong physical pain, it's yelling, but there's something about the strong physical pain, if I'm removed from the body, in my head in my thoughts and ideas, that I can much more poorly relate to it a much more reactive and constricted and tight around it. But if I can stay in the body, this, there's space, there's openness, there's possibility elsewhere that to kind of drive home this importance the Buddha gave for mindfulness of the body. And in this discourse called discourse on mindfulness centered on the body, he gives these analogies. If you take wet clay, a lump of wet clay, and you're throwing a heavy stone in it, it's gonna it's gonna flatten the clay, it's gonna like make a big dent on it. But if you take a ball of string, and throw it against a solid door, nothing's gonna happen to the door. In the same way, if Mara comes along, and Mara is the Buddhist personification, of temptation, being caught in aversion and desire, the personification of evil, wanting to do unethical things, this is Martin Buddhist had this, this being is supposed to be kind of represents all these inner forces within us. And these things come along. And let's see here, Mark, could you turn the air conditioner down? One thing? I don't think we need it today. Great.

Thank you. That's enough. We need a little bit maybe. And so if so, the Buddha said, If Mara finds will find opportunities in you, if you're not centered, you're mindful, not centered in your body. And if you're not centered in your body, then it's like the wet clay that gets squashed by the stone. But if you are centered in your body, then Mara will not get an opportunity to work with you. And it'll be like the string bouncing off the solid door. So it's your choice, whether you're like a lump of wet clay. Or if you're a solid like a solid door. And at any implication, I don't know which one you prefer, but the image for you. But I think here the idea is you're better off being solid, upright, strong, stable. And so all these things can come along all these temptations, all these forces within you can arise, you can still get angry, you can still get the things arise. But if you're really centered in your body, you're not going to react, you're gonna pick up, pick it up, you're not gonna be pushed around by it. And as a consequence, you're not going to do unethical things. And this emphasis that ethics arises out of strong mindfulness of the body, or the avoidance of unethical things, is one of the strong you know, teachings of this early tradition. But mindfulness of the body is not just to develop the kind of mental spaciousness and freedom not to give in to unethical impulses. But it's also a way of allowing the jewels within us, the beautiful states, the

skillful states of mind, qualities to bubble up and arise. And so the Buddha said this about using an analogy, if you can imagine, visualize the entire ocean, like the Pacific Ocean, if you can get their bird's eye view of the whole thing, right up to the shores, then your mind would naturally include in that image, the rivers that feed into the ocean, you know, the mouth of the rivers that come into the ocean. And so same way, if you're fully mindful of your body, you'll include within that awareness of the of the ethical states of the skillful qualities, skillful states of mind, the beautiful states of mind, there'll be included in that. So here, the idea is that if you're really centered in your body, you'll live in it, you'll be connected to a different set of mental states, than if you're not centered in your body. And the suggestion is that here centered in your body, you will have access to what is beautiful, what's nice inside what's skillful and helpful. And probably some of you can see this, if you look at yourself. And you'll see that at times, when you're most distracted, caught up in your head and your thoughts and maybe stressed out and harried. That's your you'll probably find yourself not so connected to your body, not centered and relaxed in your body. that those are the situations where you're much more likely to lash out, much more likely to say something, you're later redirect much more likely to do something which is harmful in the world, careless in the world. But if you are centered in your body, then you're probably much less likely to act impulsively. And you probably have a certain amount of spaciousness or calm where you can start noticing the other kinds of feelings, the empathy, for example, you can notice, or you can feel generosity or love or wisdom are more available that way. And so this idea that the mindfulness of the body is a source of the good ethical qualities that then would translate into how we live an ethical life in the world. Because mindfulness of the body leads to ethical virtue. So how does this work? How does how does this really happen? And I think that those of you who meditate regularly maybe can start recognizing how this works for yourself.

So one of the things that happens when we meditate is that especially if you focus on your body to some degree, is that the body begins to relax and soften. And as the body softens and relaxes, it has a direct impact on our mental preoccupations that are meant we can be left with a mental preoccupation to be caught up in thoughts, concerns, caught up in emotions, involves certain kind of tightness or constriction that is carried in the body as well. As the body relaxes, the mind relaxes. If the body doesn't relax, it's really hard to relax the mind. What was meant some meditators will discover, as you might have a lot of problems. Maybe you have some real preoccupation, you're troubled by something really big. It isn't so much that you want to solve the problem. But you just want to not be so troubled by something. So you might be feeling really sad, maybe depressed, and just like how do I deal with depression? I feel so bad and not to do something and, and, and sometimes we're spending our time thinking, What do I do I have to do something, I have to figure it out. This is not good. What do I do extra? Why I can't figure it out. It's so bad. I have to do something. But it's kind of like being in a labyrinth. We were trying to think our way out of the labyrinth, maybe there's no exit and we stay in the labyrinth, we stay caught up in the very kind of forces that keep the depression there. But certainly we know now that certain some kinds of depression arises out of because of how we're thinking. So it's not so much a matter of thinking differently. But it's possible to stop thinking so much. Stop having so much effort Your energy or preoccupation with the thoughts themselves. So as the body relaxes, so does the strength of our preoccupation with those thoughts. And as the strong sense of being aware in the body grows, there becomes a different reference point for how to live, then living in our thoughts, some people really live in their thoughts that's really grounded, everything's oriented around the world of thinking. But it's possible to have the body be the basis body be the vehicle, body be the foundation. And as the body relaxes, and as awareness starts emerging out of the body, that becomes a very powerful alternative place to live than to live in the thoughts. And then as the thoughts become quieter, maybe as preoccupation becomes weaker, then we're not troubled by the thoughts so much, they don't have so much power over us, they don't catch us so much, they don't influence us so much. And even if certain thoughts and ideas continue, they don't really have much impact anymore. Because they're not

very, it's like a quiet voice in the background. Or as the analogy I like to use, I apologize if I said it too much, is a fly. Fly lands on an ant, big deal for the ant. If the fly lands on an elephant, it's not a big deal for the elephant. So part of what we're doing through this mindfulness of the body is becoming elephants. If you live your life in your thoughts, you're more like an ant. Meaning that in your world of thoughts, is much easier to get impacted and weighed down by the experience of the world. But as the thoughts get a little bit, kind of put in the right context, put in the right place. And we really centered in the body, then we can live more like elephants or like a solid door or, you know, whatever your bedroom, whatever you like. Or like the ocean, you know, we have space, we're not reactive, we're not caught by what's here. So as we relax in the body, there are thoughts keep us less, we're less gripped by the thoughts are less gripped by the thoughts, the mind becomes more expensive. As it becomes more expensive, then there's space for other things to be there. And we have all these treasures within us, all these jewels within that are often hidden, covered over because,

you know, they're covered over by our preoccupations, or fears, or angers or dreads or aversions or you know what all these kinds of things that we have. But as we kind of relax all the preoccupations and things are caught up in the world, and just be centered here in the present moment in this body. Here, then we have access to treasures, sense of well being sense of peace that supports us to live a life that's balanced and ethical. That maybe you're not going to get rich in the conventional ways, and rich and starving spiritually, or you're not going to be poor. But spiritually, you're going to be just right. And in this place where we live, not in the mind, and not lost in the world, but right there on the ground on the earth, in our little mindfulness of the body house that helps us to live a good ethical life. So one of the beautiful things about this is that it's very clear in the teachings of the Buddha, that ethics, being ethical, virtuous, emerges out of the practice or emerges out of the body. As opposed to being rules and regulations and ideas that you import from the outside or ideas you have in your mind what you should be doing. I should be doing all these things. But instead, it's something that can kind of arise out of the wellsprings of our goodness that's within. But the put the means to that is mindfulness centered in the body. And that means cultivating it and developing it takes, it could take a long time, before you really start repeating over and over again, come back, come back home here in this body, come back home here, and what the body is feeling, what are the sensations? What are the feelings, what is going on in your body, the body never lies. The body is a wonderful window into our lives. And it's well worth developing mindfulness of the body. And with that, going into the world and living our lives, and you do that your life will leave much more harmonious with everyone else. So mindfulness centered on the body. It's your home. Okay, so thank you.