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SPEAKERS

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So I'd like to continue a little bit on the theme that I did last week. And that is inspired by the divisiveness of public speech in our society these days, and some of the ways in which speech is referred to and discussed. And, you know, I think for many people who are following the news, some of the statements about truth that are coming out, stand out quite dramatically that the President's lawyer should say that truth is not truth. At least on the surface of those four words, it's a little bit noteworthy, and I think, begs for further investigation and consideration and what in the world the person was saying in saying that statements about the tremendous you know, onslaught of claims about fake news certainly requires more reflection consideration what's being said and why and the impact of it and statements, like from the President that said that what you read and what you see are not what's happening. And that's kind of also require some consideration what to what's actually meant there. So the idea that some of these public statements now require further consideration both for what was being said, at the intention and the impact, but also the whole nature of truth and what is true and how do we know is, you know, I think is a topic that's up for us to consider as a society. And partly some of the moral relativism that exists in our society. And that's often come, I think, or comes I think overall, is associated more with a liberal left than, than the right is spilling over now and in some ways, coming back and biting the liberal left with moral relativism. That's you Coming out of other parts of our society now. So it's a complicated issue what's going on and we're looking at it people interested understand it. So I thought I would try to look a little bit at the topic of truth today in this talk. And I can confidently say that I don't feel like I'm an expert at this topic in the degree to which it's required and not consideration. So these are both my exploration of it, but also because I don't feel like I really understand these issues as much as well as they should be. What I can do is go back to the suttas the teachings of the Buddha and see what's, how that's handled there, and see if that might have some relevance or for our modern consideration, reflection of these topics. And the so there's a number of things. So I want to read or relate to you one of my favorite discourses favorite texts from the ancient tradition that purport to be the teachings of the Buddha. And it has to do with a conversation the Buddha had with the young Brahman. And in the Buddhist texts, the version of the story, he's little bit too presumptuous or a little bit too proud or something and kind of a little bit rude to the Buddha. And, and so the Buddha at some point thinks, well, let's give him a chance to ask a question or give him a chance to speak to me. And so, and so, he does. And this Brahmin brahmanism belongs to the priest class of the brahminical religions of ancient India. And they believe the set of scriptures they that goes back something some a thousands of years before that even the vet does and The Upanishads and different texts that they have. And so this Brahmin says to the Buddha, these scriptures that we have in some Brahmins claim are true. Is it true? He says, as he says, some Brahmins come to the conclusion. Only this is true, only our scriptures are true, and others are empty or worthless depending how you translate the word Moga.

And, and I find it quite very interesting that it's the distinction being made here is not between truth and falsehood, but between truth and what's empty or useless or worthless. So are these are the scriptures so I didn't say so some people say this and what is the Buddha think about this? Is it true or worthless? These two teachings, yes. So, so, this, this Brahmin asked the Buddha, you know, just what do you think of the statement that they come to these Brahmins have come to the conclusion only this is true and everything else, you know is worthless. And, and the Buddha then asks a question return, he says, any of the Brahmins who exists today who are currently live? Have they known and seen these truths for themselves? And he says, No, they have actually seen and known them for themselves. And then the Buddha as well as any other people, as their teachers. Maybe no longer life had they known and seen this for themselves. No. And then if you go back seven generations of teachers into the past, have any of those teachers seen and known these things for themselves as being true and the Brahmins says no. So, in other words, the claim truth claims that claim these these scriptures are true is based on the scriptures themselves, not because anyone that they know is actually seen and known this and, and I don't know what to think of the what the Buddha says next and but but he I kind of would like to believe he said this with great kindness and compassion and gentleness but but you know you can read read it as you wish but he said, well that's a little bit like a blob like a line of blind people, you know, holding hands leading each other along. They can't see they don't know where they're going. But you know, so I think about this with the Texas and, and so and then the Buddha said well and so what they're just realizing they're just these are all things that they're Holding, believing on faith. So these are faith claims that the scriptures are true. The survey and faith is a powerful influence on people's lives and what they believe what they hold to, but that is based on faith. And so then this Brahman says to the Buddha, it's not only out of faith that they believe this, but also because they honor or revere the their scriptures. So then the Buddha says, kind of changes the direction of that conversation little bit and he says this, he says, first, you took a stand on faith. Now you speak about scripture. There are five things that may turn out in two different ways, here and now. With five faith taking things on faith on your personal liking and disliking on based on scripture based on reasoning and based on consideration and pondering of views so there's these five ways in which people can relate to here we're talking about religious teachings. But you can take it on faith. You can take it you can accept it or believe in it because you like it. You can take believe it because it's the tradition, the scriptures or the tradition and just makes it true. You can take it on because you've really reasoned it out this for yourself. Or you not quite like reasoning, but you've really given consideration and then accepting it out of consideration. So, you know, the ship the last two. So, you know, many people have a lot of value and who are very rational like to rationally think things out. So anybody that is five, five ways. And then he says that these five ways may turn out in two different ways. Something may be fully accepted out of faith, yet it may be empty, hollow and false.

Yet it might also be someone might also be accepting of faith, and it might be factual, true and unmistakable. And then he goes through all five of these. And he says, the fact that it's taken on faith they're taken on because of Scripture or these other reasons, doesn't determine whether it's false. true that in itself because it can turn out either way, by them, so that's not quite good enough for the Buddha. And so, then this Brahmin says, or then the Buddha continues, he says, under these conditions, the fact that these five different criteria for truth or not, you know, can turn out either either way, someone who's interested in preserving the truth will would not come to the definitive conclusion, only this is true and anything else is empty or worthless. So, it Buddha introduces this idea of someone who is interested in preserving the truth. So, that that gets the Brahmins attention and he says well How do you preserve the truth? And that's a little bit different than yet in saying what is the truth, but how do you preserve the truth? And this next answer is one that I cherish a lot. He said, Buddha says, Well, you preserve the truth. If you take something on faith. You say so it's my faith, that, that this is my faith that this is true. As opposed to saying this is true. It's my faith. It's my it's my faith, to rely on the

scriptures. It's my faith to rely on my likes what I like or dislike, it's, it's all said differently. It's my, it's my, the basis upon which I take what something could be true. The basis is on faith. The basis is on scripture. The basis is on what are like my preferences. The basis is on my reasoning, my pondering, so people know exactly why and how you're taking this to be true. You're not claiming it is true. You're confessing why you take it as to where the basis of authority for what you take it to be true. And if you make that statement, then you're preserving the truth. You're making an honest statement. To say that some religious teaching is absolutely true and everything else is false. That may or may not be true. But to say, you know that, that I'm taking this on faith, I'm taking this because my Scriptures teach me so that is preserving the truth, then you're being honest about it. And one of the nice things about it, then it's easier, it will know where you're coming from. It's easier to be in dialogue with people. It's easy. to kind of explore the value or the appropriateness of those sources of authority that people have. And what you find in this ancient Buddhist tradition, is a fact a questioning of the authority upon which people take or hold religious views. And which we find in the Buddhist texts, there's often then there's a result of that a kind of pulling the rug from underneath many people's beliefs, not because they're criticizing the beliefs, because they're questioning the underlying source of authority for why people hold to those beliefs that make sense. Anyway, so this is how you preserve the truth. So this Brahmin comes back with another question and he says, then in He says.

So he agrees Yes, in this way, there's the preservation of truth. But in what way? Is there the discovery of truth? So it's one thing to preserve the truth by making a statement about why you believe something. So, but now, we now I guess, get to that down to the truth itself. How do you discover what's true, supposed to just the sources? So just think the idea is discovered for yourself? How do you really know the truth? And so, back then, in ancient India, there were no books, written books. There was no TV, no new stick, you know, editorials, all kinds of things. There was an oral tradition. And it was all done orally. And so. So you really required a person to person contact to learn anything or consider anything. And so it was very important than to go to something if you wanted to find the truth and if you weren't going to completely rely on yourself, and kind of you kind of go around and ask people, what do you think and what are your teachings? You had to, you know, you'd go to someone. So the Buddha had the, when you go to someone to begin investigating what might be true, the first thing you should do is discover if that person is free of greed, hate and delusion. Because if they're not, you can't quite rely that they depend on what they're going to say is really going to be true there can be skewed in some way or influenced some ways or what they say. The way the Buddha says this. He says you should go to person and investigate the person to check the person out another text he says, if you go to a religious teacher, take your time, check them out really well. So investigate the person in regard to three kinds of states in regard to states based on greed, hatred and delusion and ask yourself are there in this person, any one of these states such that that person's mind will be obsessed. And while not knowing better, might say something that is false. And so not well, not knowing the person might say, I know and well not seeing the person might say I see. So two person makes truth claims, but have influenced by greed, hate and delusion, they might not say, what actually is true what the terms of what they know and see. Or next one's very interesting. Or that person might urge others to act in a way that would lead to their harm and suffering for a long time. So the statements that we make, the truth claims we make can have huge consequences. And we want to be careful with those consequences if they don't perpetuate harm in our society. You know, for here, it says for a long time. And so when you want to check out someone for what they say, here, it's not so much do they say the truth, but what what's the quality what's the character of the of the speaker? Is this a truthful speaker Is this a trustworthy speaker that you're hearing? So that was kind of interesting. Kind of. So here, we're not looking at what is true and false in terms of doctrine or teachings or something like that. But first and foremost, we're looking at the ethical qualities of the speaker.

And, and that's a, you know, an interesting criteria that and you find that over and over again in the teachings of the Buddha, the ethical qualities of the Speaker of the person needs to be evaluated, not just the abstract claims of truth and false about something. Now, one of the reasons for this, and the Buddhist tradition is that has to do with the ways in which the Buddha then spoke, that how a person can discover the truth for themselves. That's what he's going to go through here. So first, you go check out the teacher. And then you listen to the teacher. And then you ponder and reflect on what the teacher says. And then after you've reflected on thought thought about for a while, then you put it into practice. And so for the Buddha, the truth the Buddha was interested in. We're not was not propositional truths. We're not claims that you had to take on faith, but rather something you can discover for yourself. And so I don't know if pragmatic truth is the right word for it, but experiential truth in some way, and what is it that you can reliably know for yourself? Because it's very easy for people to say, this is my experience, and think it's a real personal experience, direct experience. But there's such a strong overlay of interpretations that go on top of how we perceive and see and understand what's going on. That it's not really a direct experience. It's it's a, it's being seen through the filter of interpretations and bias already. So So, the Buddha then he goes on and talks about practicing. And, and by practicing. For the Buddha he gives, in many places a path of practice that includes meditation, to discover the truth. And one of the interesting thing to realize here is that if you want to discover the truth that the Buddha was pointing to the path to do so, goes through a phase, where you have to become a person who is not in being influenced by greed, hatred and delusion, and in any kind of way, and so this is an ethical transformation that the individual influenced by greed, hatred and delusion. So they the person who, if you want to discover the kind of truth, experiential truth, the Buddha was You know, encouraging people to do, we have to go through a phase of practice, where our own greed, hatred and delusion, maybe it hasn't been eradicated completely. But meditation, we're able to put it at rest or put it aside or settle it down enough that our eyesight our ability to know and see, are not going to be unduly influenced by greed, hate and delusion. And more importantly, we're going to able to see, without that agitation that greed, hate and delusion would bring them bring on. So here before we even get to, what is the truth in the Buddhist language, we're talking about the ethical, and the ethical state of the person who speaks the truth, and also the person who's going to discover it for themselves. That there is no discovery the truth, unless somehow or other, we're able to work on this inner obscurations And confusions and, and, and drives and biases that come from greed, hatred and delusion. And then with that it's possible to see the truth that the Buddha was pointing to. And that truth. Again, it could be said to be very ethical in nature. because it involves the eradication, eradication, the uprooting of these three ethical status motivating states, greed, hatred, and delusion. And, and those get uprooted. And it's possible to see or experience the mind or the heart. Absent of these states, it's possible to experience them temporarily absent. And for some people, that's a radical experience to really feel this purity or this cleanliness inside. And even people who conventionally don't have much greed, hatred and delusion. You know, it's not really that the, for Buddhists to keep talking about greed, hatred and delusion, they fall asleep because it's not quite so interesting, you know, what's this about. But once you start going and following a path of meditation, where the mind gets cleaner and cleaner, because the activity, the Act, the agitations of the mind are quieting down. That experience of the mind being clean, can be radically transformative for people to know that that's possible. And then after that, the tendencies of the mind to get back into all those activities that fit the category of greed, all the activities with category of hatred, of delusion, it just doesn't feel right anymore. Because you know, you know, a different way. So that is that's a discovery of truth. Again, that's not a propositional truth. It's more of a psychological experience state that a person knows for themselves. And it's they know this hurts to have these ethical states. And these don't hurt to have the opposites. And this language of ethics that I'm using, some people don't appreciate it, and which is reasonable for many reasons. But in ancient India, there was no actually no obvious word for our word, ethics. And so the Buddha doesn't say that it's important to be ethical. He just says, greed, hate and delusion, need to be addressed and looked at then, and be cleansed from and, but for many people here in many Western perspectives, this this could be seen as an ethical path

and ethical change that That happens with people. And, and exactly what the truth is, aside from this kind of experiential truth and this kind of taste of freedom that can come from the absence of these states of clinging I don't, you know, that's it gets more and more complicated in our society and what goes on around us.

But do we listen to people who are, you know, being, you know, really being driven by what seems like greed and hatred and, and clearly attempts to be deceitful and what and what influences the Buddha was concerned about the long term harm that things cause? And so this public discourse that happens in our country right now, it might be interesting to consider that in 19, in 2017, there were 81 journalists Who were murdered around the world, and some 280 of them who were put in jail. And you know, a lot of them were investigating corruption in different kinds of ways. And this prosecutor who was just prosecuting the case of Paul Manafort, some, I don't know, 10, 12 years ago, maybe some of you remember exactly how long ago he was. There the apparently the New York mafia had a whole plan to assassinate him in the restaurant in New York City. So, so, how people speak about journalists and news is not inconsequential. And so what is the motivation behind people why people speak and what is the impact we have is we have a very important Buddhist reflection on all this. And people certainly have very important things to try and to accomplish and that may be purposes they feel very motivated to do. But in Buddhism, it's never just nothing justifies acting from places of greed, hatred or delusion. So in Buddhism, the task would be something if you really feel passionate about something, you don't succumb to those forces that you'd find other important and creative ways, significant ways to speak up into into work and, and Institute change. So then I'd like to end with this two quotes from the sutras. And that one's not from a suttas from a later terabyte and commentary. truthfulness has the characteristic of non deceptiveness. I love this definition. It's little bit hard to know what's true. I'd like to propose it's easier to know what's deceptive And so we might be the hard time some smite, you know? So we never want to be saying what's false. Maybe that can be easily ascertained in many situations, things people claim. And so it's one thing to make a claim that something you know, it's one thing is to lie. It's another thing to you know to say this is true and lying is that you know is so non lying is the definition of truth. That's really interesting. The second quote when one is not ashamed of telling a deliberate lie, there is no evil than one would not do. And that quote is with the Buddha. So you know, what is Truth, what is falsehood? How do we discover for ourselves? How do we preserve it? By being careful about how we hold what we say how we make claims? And, and do we make claims that we tell people on this basis that I make this claim? I read it in the news. You know, I read it in, you know, you say where you read it, you know, and, and where you heard it, and then people can then participate in a deeper reflection of what's going on. And they can if you just make claims. So that was my offering to, you know, a topic which I don't think, as I said earlier, I don't feel like I have a good sense of how to find my way in the world of these truth claims that exists out in the world in many different fronts. But I think that we that I say that you know, that I'm still trying to find my way with it, because I think so. to society, it really is good for all of us to spend some time reflecting and thinking, you know, how does this work? And, and, and it's very easy to be opinionated. So that's not true and how could they and but not really take a good look, what do we believe? What do we understand and how do we really looked and considered

these the nature of Truth and Falsehood in truth claims and you know, and you know right now I think the larger the public discussion around this that I've been seeing around around the words, facts and truth and if that's the only words or concepts that are used in discussion is actually I think, kind of poor and limited. And it might be important to introduce other words into the conversation. And that is, concepts of the values that people have and also the principles that people have, you know, base their lives on because values and principles, I don't really fit neatly into truth and falsehood claims. And they don't fit into facts, you know, nonfat kind of claims. And so but they're very important in human society, the principles that our society is based on or community or people, and the values are based on. So to

be really happy reflection and think about the difference between truth, facts, values and principles is important part of this whole exploration forth and part of our society these days. So that's the talk. And it is true, and it's a fact and it's a value and a principle that we should try not to park on Birch Street and the parking lot across the street. Going on it also in the dentist parking lot there. That's the other place. So you know something's lucky you know it's fifth bill, all four of those. Yes. Yes.

You talked about greed, hatred and delusion, the three hindrances. So greed and hatred is a little bit easier to understand. Delusion has lots of grades, and you know the subtleties of biases that can come in and can lead to delusion.

And the problem with illusion is that it can be it's hard to see it that it's you No, we think it's fact or true right in the spirit. That's that's the challenge with delusion is not to see it. But then you know, but it's something that there's plenty of delusions are easier to see than others. And sometimes, you know, it's only the next day we realize but yeah, that's pretty good. Well what was I thinking? You know, but a lot of it. One way to think of it that may be helpful is to consider it to be projections. We project ideas, values, concepts, interpretations on the world around us and other people. And it's actually possible to watch the birth of those projections. If the mind is mindful enough, strong enough, and the ability to watch a thought arise in the mind, perception, perceptions are not innocent in Buddhism, they're kind of a thought to see kind of the stance the assumptions that arise when we see someone or see a situation and watch it happen. allows us to evaluate Wait and see, well, that's not really true, or that's not really I'm not so sure about it. What happens when people when thoughts and interpretations and ideas arise, and we're not mindful of it, then it gets completely intertwined with our perceptions of reality itself. And so it seems like, what we're seeing is, we don't see that our perception and our interpretations are entangled, or that they're two separate things. And so the ability to be calm, centered and mindful, is one of the best antidotes to a lot of delusions, whether it works for all you know, sometimes it takes a lot of deep inner work. And so that's why the reference point for the Buddha to really do this deep work of putting aside greed, hate and delusion. His path is to do meditation and then meditate. Mind is one of the best platforms to do this to see this, if you're trying to do it without meditating, it might be very limited how far you can go. So it's time to stop and appreciate this question. This is a very important topic and probably we should have more discussion, but I don't want to keep people here. But I want to say that please stay for the potluck. And please say hello to each other and welcome each other here. And, and you know if this was an evocative talk, you might share with some person next to you or something little bit about what your thoughts are in listening to this. Thank you.