

2018-09-10 Toward Freedom From Samsara

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SPEAKERS

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So, kind of the background right foundation for the teachings here at IMC are the teachings of the Buddha. And they're preserved in a large body of literature that's filled with the use of metaphor, allegory, simile, puns, word plays, poetry, evocative imagery, you know, a lots of different kinds of what we call literary effects to kind of bring something alive for people. And so, it's a little bit hard sometimes to read them for if you've kind of introduced to Buddhism through later interpretations, because sometimes things that were metaphors, later on were taken to be realities. And so, you know, it's called You know, so one of them is interesting one word is the word samsara. And I think many people are familiar with the word like it's not it's not as well known as Nirvana, but the two are often considered to be appear. samsara and Nirvana, Nirvana. And, and in more recent decades or centuries, the word samsara has come to mean I'm Buddhism, a place that places this crazy world that we live in. And, and so the solution because the world is crazy place is to get get out of this world. And so the idea is to have Nirvana and that kind of, you know, logic. Nirvana is a transcendent place. It's really a place removed other than this world here. And, and so often this kind of geographic It's seen as a geographic term samsara is here and Nirvana is there in the earliest usage of the term, samsara meant to wonder, like to travel about to wonder, and that it wasn't a place but it was an activity there was an action of wandering just on and on and on. Endless wandering. And was that wandering supposed to be meant as a metaphor or a simile an allegory was it well, how are we supposed to understand it? Regardless of what it was used originally, that's a whole list literature was meant to be evocative and suggestive and, and so I think we're allowed some liberties to see you know, how it is what it evokes in us here and in our life. And, and I think that it's fairly easy to see that many human beings are wandering through their life. The You know, there's a stream of one thing after the other chasing a dream, chasing after this hope this expectation, this is the thing that's going to do it. You know if there's a story of Mullah Nasreddin, who's has a basket of peppers, hot peppers, green peppers, or red peppers, and red peppers, right? So he's eating them, he's sitting there eating them, and each one is super hot, and he's tears running down his eyes and his face and he's like, goes for another one. It's just like, he's clearly suffering a lot. And, and someone says to him, you know why you're doing that, you know, it's hurting you and you're in pain. Oh, but I've been told that some of them in the basket are sweet. So the next one, the next one will be sweet. The next one, you know, the next one will do it for me. And so you know, I don't know that what the next one is the next you know, the Next slide. So when I'm going to win the next, you know, job I get will be the job. The next partner I have will be the partner the next you know, go. It's always something, you know, wandering looking the next TV show, although I've watched 100 TV shows they're awful, awful, but the next one will do it. They don't do them. Sure. You know, it's always you know, that they know so. So people are wondering, looking for something, wanting something, trying to run away from something. And there's this constant incessant wandering going on. And you see that in their mind most particularly the wondering of our thoughts, the thoughts that are wanting, going to the next thing and that thing and, and, and running away from this and going after that

and going to the next thing and trying to figure it out and have expectations and hopes and you know, just endless endless.

And this ancient kind of metaphor for this simile is that of monkeys. swing through the through the forest and the branches of the trees. And I haven't studied monkeys to know if this is how they do it, but they're swinging kind of fast. And so they by the time they grab onto one branch, they're already swinging over to grab the next and the next. And so this incessant going after something going after something. And a fascinating place to see the wandering of the mind incessant searching for the mind or pursuing thoughts of the mind being having this endless stream of thoughts and kind of swimming in it and going after it and going along with it, and is on meditation retreats. And because in ordinary life, your thinking gets interrupted a lot. And so you're having some, you know, gradual thought and you're involved or a terrible thought and you're involved in doing it, and then the car in front of you suddenly veers and you know, veers out and puts a brake on and suddenly you have to stop and there goes your thoughts for that moment and And so reality is constantly interrupting. But on rich meditation retreats. There is very little interruptions. You're sitting for 45 minutes at a time like we were Did you know just now and then you get up quietly no one's talking and after a while the routine is really routine. It's like, you could be walking meditation, you're sitting meditation, maybe the big entertainment is a meal. That's the interruption. And then you know, and so you're left to yourself much more than people usually are. And one of the advantages of that is to see how the mind is functioning. Just watch and see how incessant it's flowing and wondering and going on and on and on and on. And I want spent three days on retreat in a fantasy and I couldn't stop it. I didn't want it I didn't get it exactly one it but it was very pleasant and wonderful was all kinds of plans and involve business plans and you know, as well as creating This, whatever and, and it took me three days to get sick of it. That's, you know, I'm slow learner or something. And, you know, give me a break but had all this promise and hope and it was very pleasant what was going to do for me and so I was pulled into its world. And so that is samsara that's wandering on and on and on. And so the simile that goes along with this idea of samsara is the head of a river. You're in the river and you're flowing on and on and it just goes on forever. And there's and then you know, might be in the river flowing in the river and then these wonderful boats come by, or terrible boats come by and you find yourself on a boat and for a long time you're on one boat and it's spectacular at first but after a while, you know, you've seen all the shows, the Show Boat has and you're doing a rerun after a run or something to get me get me off this boat or you get on The great warships and you're fighting the great battle until the battle never ends just goes on and on and on. Or you're in this poor decrepit little raft that barely survives and that's when you stay on really long because you're so feel so sorry for yourself and so much self pity Poor me. And so it's very you know so we get on these different reps but what the thing is we keep floating just goes on and on and on it's and some things are very promising this boat down there that'll do it for me and so we get on boats but what we don't see is it's just more of the same goes on and on and on samsara just flows on and we wonder on and on and on. And so, you know, is that a depressing news that Buddhism has, you know is it is? I don't think so because especially when people do a lot of minutes Just after a while it starts to be kind of tiring. The incessant wandering going and going and flowing of these thoughts and ideas and concerns and fears and desires and ambitions and, and enough already.

So then there's an alternative that Buddhism offers. And the kind of metaphor that's used for finding that alternative is to reach go to the other shore. So to go through, go across the river, to the other shore, don't go with the river and keep flowing, and come to safety on the other side, cross the river, and come to the other side. And that also has lend itself to kind of a bifurcation of the world. Because again, anytime you have these geographical metaphors, it's like a place and so of places, it's that place there, it's over there. And this where we where I am now that's not good to get there. And there can be sometimes in Buddhism a kind of rejection of ordinary life. Because there's this other place we push to

go the other shore. But you know the other shores know where else but here it's not you're not going anywhere, it's here but it's here we already are without incessantly flowing on working on word, whether it is incessantly seeking and wanting or protecting and building and after a while, you know it's not incessantly building up itself, not incessantly defending yourself that incessantly proving yourself and justifying yourself and blaming yourself and feeling sorry for yourself this whole kind of kind of construct of self is part of the in Buddhism because you're part of the samsara part of the wandering we wander into these identities, these ideas of who we are, it goes on and there's no end to it. Part of the challenge with being caught up and wondering with all kinds of ideas of self is that some of them are good ideas, they're good boats, you know, they float, well, they do good things. But it's just more of this flowing and just more of this kind of being caught in something, this idea of self. And so, to Cracow across to the other shore, but really the shore is here. And in the beginning, what we do is we get a foothold on the other shore. And if you could get a foothold and stand stand someplace and stand on the other, close to the shore, this water shallow enough, then you can, you know, begin you're safe from the currents, and you can maybe stand stand your ground and the currents won't keep, keep pushing, you're down downstream. And so from there, you can make your way back up to where it's really safe above the water. And I have this fantasy engineering my bit my my kind of construct of this whole image is it turns out women floating for millennia, long time. And but it turns out to be no, it turns out, the water is only three feet deep. It's very strong, it's only three feet deep. And all we had to do was stand up right. And then our feet reaches the ground. And then we have a foot tall and we can stand there. But in any case, and the other shore near the other shore, we can get a foothold, we can stand it and then when we stand firmly there, then the current still flows. But it flows past us and by us, we're not carried along by it. So there's a way of standing being upright, metaphorically that the mind the emotions, all these thoughts, the selfing that goes on continues. But we're, we're kind of standing still in the middle of it. And it doesn't push us around and we're not caught by it. Because watch it, go watch it go by it goes and goes and goes. And there's a kind of freedom from it. It's clear that we're watching it go, but we're not flowing in it. We're not participating anymore. We're not jumping in on that boat and that boat we see the boats go by what that was a nice thought, but by, you know, that's a terrible thought, okay, you know, just kind of, Oh, there goes here comes emotions and feelings, just let them go by. It's a radically different way of living, of being than allowing yourself to keep floating on and on and on. And, and so all you need is a foothold to begin that process of being free. So what's the foothold and I think you have to have ideally have to so you want Fried each foot you put down. So I think that there's two I think of two foot holes which are really invaluable.

The simplest one, at least in principle is the simple act of mindfulness. There's something about awareness. When it's clear, when it's specific, that really recognizes Oh, this is what's happening now. This is what's going on now. When it has enough clarity around it, then the awareness is not flowing with what it's aware of. When it's really clear awareness isn't part of the reaching out to grab it or push it away or contract around it. It could mean mindfulness is really clear that mindfulness is independent of what it's mindful of the knowing is free. I have what is known. Awareness is more spacious and open and some people say receptive to what's happening as opposed to somehow entangled with it. And in that moment of clear, seeing clear knowing there is a foothold in awareness. We're not in the stream anymore. We're not swimming in the spirit pushing around by the But to do that, and this is part of the art of mindfulness. It helps to be to have a specific recognition of what's happening. It's very easy, I think, to kind of be it to have life be just one big soup of a river just flowing all this stuff. And it's hard to see that all these different things are happening, and kind of all kind of mixed up together. So I might have a A judgement about something happening. Maybe I'm judging the river. The river is muddy today, I'm getting dirty. And we're still in the river flowing along. But, but they did my my reaction to the muddy river and not liking it. It's just kind of all kind of in the soup together. And it's not any different than the river and me and so I'm, you know, it's, it's you know who I am, what the judgment is with the river is it's all kind of in a soup. It's kind of like not really seen as being distinct. But to have this mindfulness is

distinct. So there's the river. There's recognizing it's dirty. There's my discomfort with it. There's a judgment that that's not nice. That shouldn't be that I don't like that. And here's me saying, I don't like it. I just invented AI for the moment as opposed to Just dislike there's I dislike it and to be able to kind of when you see it to that kind of specificity, then the awareness has a better chance of not being entangled in the soup caught up in it. And that's where we can get a foothold step by step back, and then we can start watching the current go by. The second foothold is ethical integrity. To stand on our ethical, ethical goodness, our intention to not cause harm to nothing intentionally cause harm. Do not deliberately cause harm. And so, without some modicum of feeling good about yourself, some modicum of feelings, certain kind of self worth certain self self dignity, self valuing self appreciation For the idea that we're doing the best we can here to some degree to live a good ethical life then you only get one foot hole and you won't be so you need to to really kind of stay stay sit balanced and not be pushed around by the river. And so maybe I suspect that a high percentage of you here, if not the whole, certainly the whole group as a whole are probably more ethical than you give yourself credit for. You probably haven't killed anyone today. You probably didn't Rob any banks today. You probably didn't. I hope you didn't get more in sexual misconduct today. That's a little bit you know, that's a little more popular. And I hope you didn't lie today that's even more popular and you know, and I hope that you didn't involve yourself in toxic hands.

It's kind of interesting how they seem late, sometimes getting more more popular. This you go through them through the list. But even so you've might have been your intention is to live a good life, not harm anyone and you're trying your best. trying your best counts for a lot for getting a foothold. And to feel somehow feel the goodness of that feel how to me hopefully comes from a place of, of self worth and dignity of goodness of value of some kind of inner beauty something really nice and many people don't have the habit don't have the training don't have the ever been given the instructions to take and cherish and value your ethical goodness. cultivate it, use it as a refuge stand on it, take a foothold on it. And let that be here. And it's a lot easier to stand still in the middle of the flow of life and the flow of all this incessant going on. If you have kind of you don't you're not kind of wobbly around your ethics or feel like you have to defend it or protected or hide it or do all these different things. Just look just so those two things, we stand on those stand on those on that firm ground. And then let all the all the flow, the wandering go on. Without us feeding it, they're fueling it. Because we're talking mostly about the mind. As the mind begins to does this and it's no longer caught and feeding it. The it begins to quiet down. It begins to, to get quieter in the flow becomes weaker and, and we don't and as it gets weaker. We see it more clearly. We feel the independence from it, the freedom of it. And we stand, we still hope we stand our ground. We don't get pushed around, and we let it flow and flow and quiet and quiet. And so holding ourselves in certain kind of upright way, still in the middle of whatever is going on. That's everything else quiet down. And then a remarkable reversal goes on. And that is that first, we're holding ourselves kind of still, with our awareness, no attention, just being there and watching everything. And as everything else gets quieter and quieter around you, the river quiets down can still learn still there. What starts becoming more alive, more luminous, in a sense, is that awareness. that stillness no longer feels still Exactly. But feels free. feels a little To feels liberated in some way, until at some point, you know, we've managed to get up to the other shore, where the mind or the heart is not pushed around by anything. The mind is not the heart is not caught in the swirls the eddies of desire and aversion and fears and doubts, ambition and all these different things. So the main point I wanted to say was this idea that we want to get a foothold. And in our tradition, there are these two foot holes that are very valuable. The mindfulness foot hole and the ethical foothold and the mindfulness foothold is not over there. The other Sure there, but it's here, where you are, when you can clearly know this is what's happening. Oh, now I see. Let me tune into this and see it really clearly. And in that clarity of knowing that this is what's happening. So very ordinary is very simple activity. The mind is not like a complicated rocket science kind of thing. It's very ordinary, but it's ordinary done with clarity and specificity and, oh,

this is what's happening. This is a this is an inbred, this is an out breath. This is a thought. This is mine out of control. Oh, this is the mind out of control. Your fears of leaning into the controlling mind being about to be swept away again, and then you view it more emphatically bringing more clarity, this is a mine how to control until you finally And you'd watch it, but you're not it. And there's a kind of freedom in that.

So, samsara samsara is the end of the endless wondering. And Nirvana is when the wandering stops and that's pretty cool. It said that it that when the wandering stops when when the other shore, that's the greatest safety. Sometimes the said metaphor, the of the river that can be kind of romantic and nice river flowing down. They often use the metaphor of it's a flood, and floods are much more dangerous. So the idea is we want to get out of the flood to assure to safety. And so Nirvana is safety. So those are my little thoughts for today. So do you have any questions about anything? Like what I said or about anything else you're welcome to ask.

Thank you for your talk.

I don't know how to ask this but it has to do with what ambition is and the description you have the river and having that be a mind activity. It

I feel really confused about the about using my practice to move forward with choices in my life and the choices to act often feel like they revolve around ambition or having a desire or a desire to see something happen. And when I hear you speak about the footholds and the going to the other shore, I start judging my choices, thinking While I'm just wasting my life, because what I really should be doing is just sitting and going for Nirvana. So I get really tangled up in confusion around what is right life and being comfortable with my ambition.

Great, as well said thank you. And so it's a little bit delicate thing to answer a question without two people deciding what their shared understanding of words are like ambition, generally, when I think of ambition, and I think Buddhists may be that involves some kind of attachment, some kind of greed for something to happen. The alternative to having ambition is to have a vision about what's possible or an aspiration and aspiration, I think of is something which doesn't Have any greed or attachment to it, it could be a great vision of something worthwhile to pursue. And peers might put a lot of energy and passion into it. But they're not attached to the outcome they're attached to having happen. It's like, you know, if it happens, great, I'll put my effort into it. ambition is often associated I think, with it being personal ambition, it's for me, sometimes we talk about ambition for my family or ambition for someone else, but it's often very much closely tied to being once self identity issues and egotism and selfishness that I think that's why some people have trouble with the word the idea, thinking ambition is a good thing because of that association. Regardless of how we understand the word ambition, where our motivation comes from it from inside, is it one of the important topics if I like to think that there's a surface mind, the surface mind is a place of anxiety and worry Have the social pressures and, and, and you know, egotistical kind of self identity thing that goes on and try to get praise and you know, the whole world of things that were that goes on in the surface. And I think of it a surface because often it comes with a lot of thinking. And that's where the incessant incessant flow of thinking is often operating. And while meditation can help with all this, it's not that you live in blissful retirement on the edge of the river. But rather if the if you could drop the quiet the surface, find all that chatter, and you know, and be able to discover a place of peace that's deeper, where ambition has been put aside for the time being. Fear has been put aside, all kinds of things have been put aside temporarily like a vacation a break, and really settle into a deeper place within. Then there's a deeper reference point. knowing what's important, and they're there, there might still be motivations coming from that place. But that's coming

from a deeper place that seems it feels like it has more integrity or feels like it has more real or closer to the core values we want to live by. I've known people who have been ambitious to do things and but and they succeeded and only then did they realize this was wasted time. You know, I just went I was doing this really to get my parents approval. Turns out they didn't care. And so the so this idea of going to the shore or letting the incessant flow quiet is not meant to be end up being quite testing or peaceful or doing nothing. Hopefully it gives us access to much deeper wellsprings of motivation of aspiration, a vision of knowing what's possible and knowing what's most important for us. It makes sense.

Song.

This is two halves of a one question where someone said that the intention to have compassion is enough. I may not actually feel it. But the intention is strong. It's a long way toward it. But a deeper aspect of that that I was introduced to just recently is the

bodhisatta Val

and I always thought of it as the thing that is

All my bodhisatta is take bodhisatta house, but I

can I say what I think that is

I vow to live for the benefit of all living beings. It's very simple. But I I've taken that to heart to mean that the intention of that bow is the same thing that you have that intention to live that good. Could you speak to that double sided

question?

Well, certainly intention is valuable. And that's many times is where it begins. And so to only have intention and not act on it ever. Oh, it's kind of nice for that intentional part of us. But, you know, it's I don't know how far it'll take us, but that's where it begins and it counts for a lot and so have the intention to be compassionate, you know, not because you're going to become wealthy, but because there's some kind of movement in the heart some some kind of feeling or sense inside that, that really feels right that I that, you know, this, this is my hope I can't do it now, but it's my hope to do that someday. I like to kind of celebrate that comes from a good place inside and, and we want to appreciate that and value that and care for that. And then perhaps over time, that intention can grow. If that takes that intention to be compassionate, has a little bit bigger, you know, vision to it, that it's really you want to live a life that supports all people. Generally the Buddha talked about comes, people make this kind of commitment, this vow when they have a clear sense that, that it nothing else makes sense except somehow being open For the welfare of all beings, and, and they might not be able to do it, but it's the only thing that makes sense. And so the intense This is what I this is what I aspire to do. And then, you know, ideally we try to save all beings. But you know, you're not going to get around that many of them. But it's pretty beautiful, pretty wonderful. That's what people are living for and letting that kind of good heartedness come out. Is that an adequate answer to you? Great, thank you. Yeah.

So this is all been very relevant to what I've been thinking about recently. What I've been going through but

Basically, I feel as though society does not encourage you to follow your passions necessarily. It's not something in a lot of cases where you can actually build a good foundation. That's why they're starving

artists. Of course, for example,

yeah.

And there's probably fewer of them here than there were before.

Yeah, I can't afford to live here. Right. So they go somewhere else and stars starve.

Yeah, exactly.

Yeah. So

as a young person, it just, I can't help but feel a lot of trepidation about the future. Because it's like, it can be very discouraging. So if you take the metaphor, of a person standing in a river this levels rising, you know, no pun intended. But yeah, the sea level is rising. Oh, that way. Yeah, with. I actually did intend that pun but so, yeah, it's just it feels like, I mean, I'm sure humans have always had a lot of resistance or they've been faced with a lot, but I feel as though this is a very unique situation. I'm sure everything is unique, but this just seems like it's really forceful in the direction that is not conducive to being a happy human.

Well, then, if that's how you see it, the only way you're gonna have some degree of happiness well being is to do something about it.

Yeah, that's, yeah.

And you know, and if that's not popular passion, don't think Listen to the popular voice. Unless they're unless they're giving you good advice about how to do it. Because you know, there's a lot of there can be a lot of wasted effort in that regard. But the more strongly you feel about, about what's happening in the world and the suffering in the world, you know, the more important words like hey doing anything else, but respond to it, this is not a good alternative. And it see if you really are dedicated to doing something about it, then you might discover what a waste of time is to be afraid. What a waste of time it is to be dismayed. Does we have much better things to do than be afraid? Thank you.

The first foothold You said

you should observe the annoying was without the knowledge. No, no, we should clearly know without being caught in what we know without being entangled with it. Would you clarify this? How would you practice this? Oh, I'm looking at you and you seem to have a very nice blue shirt and I wish I had a shirt like that. I wonder if I could maybe trade or I wonder, you know, I'd see how much money yeah, yeah. And so I know you have a blue shirt but you know me and not sure if we're meant to be together. So that's, you know, I'm entangled with it, right? I'm caught with that. But if I kind of sit here and take a few minutes Come down and breathe and oh kill What's going on? shirt. Desire. Oh, there's desire. Let's just know that desire. I want that shirt. I don't really want it so

don't don't don't

don't give it to me. The you know, and then I sit and they get quieter and quieter Oh desire, there's desire. I have a desire, but I don't have to. I don't have to do anything with desire. In the past, I always had to act on my desire, there was this authority around desire. This is new. I have a desire for the shirt. I just I see it so I see the desire. And I can see it without acting on beam it is Wow, look at this desire. And then I get quieter and I see. Oh, look at that. quietly. I have this belief that if I can have that shirt. More people will like me. And it's really about getting feeling like, I want people to like me and all this stuff. And I didn't know that until I got quiet and saw. And then I see I want people to like me because of my clothes. And then I'm not entangle with that, you know the knightstone look that's that thing. It's like looking at something out there as opposed to I want people to like me and let that shirt doesn't work let's find another one. Does that make sense is that I don't know, I'm just making this up so that I you know, I did sometimes I don't know if these school scenarios you know, explain it better than a rational argument. Excellent. Thank you. Great, thank you. I like your shirt, but I don't want it.

Okay, so,

so get a foothold and trust it and let everything else go deep like yourself. So way of really allowing you to metaphors change, right? I love the metaphor deep. The river just keeps you on the surface of your life. The foothold allows you to drop in deep and discover what's really going on. And then you might discover powerful motivations and intentions and, and there, and I think if there's really deeply in you the motivation, the intention, do something really feels integral and deep inside of you and it's not going to cause any harm but maybe the opposite. Take Take your chance. Become a starving activist. Thank you