

# 2018-12-09 Right Effort with Wholesome Desire

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

desire, deeper, unhealthy, arise, life, buddhist practice, wanting, people, talk, buddhism, worse, awakens, freedom, heart, aspiration, evoked, wishes, egotistical, feel, craving

## SPEAKERS

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I'd like to do a little bit of a follow up talk from last week. One of the things I mentioned last week is the Buddhist value of having few wishes, being content and fewness of wishes. And I also talked about a place in Buddhist practice of finding a place a very profound place of absence of desire. And those two teachings by themselves, it's easy to hear them and generalize from them. And when people generalize from Buddhist teachings, they, what they means is they take teachings that are particular to particular circumstance, context, and then assume they're meant for all of our life. So to say that there's a place of freedom with the absence of desire, freedom from desire has no desire at all. It's kind of a goal of Buddhist practice in a sense, but that does not mean that we're not we're supposed to live without any desire at all. The point of Buddhism is to you know that somehow Buddhism is critical of desire, and of course, to come to a place of no desire at all. So I wanted to talk more about desire, partly because of I talked about last week as a corrective in case it was misunderstood. And partly because I think it's a very profound topic. It's profound because desire, in all its different forms, is a family of different, you know, ecosystem filled with different species of desires are really at the heart or central to being human human activity, living human life, that without desire. You know, much of what was meaningful in life and valuable and drives life wouldn't happen at all. And so we have to kind of look at the different kinds of desire though. The unwise kinds of desire, desire desires, that brings suffering, the desires which are wise the desires which benefit us and but certainly we can appreciate that you know that desires have a huge role in our life. And it may be it's a little bit petty to bring it up. But most forms of literary and video entertainment movies and literature we were addictions we write really centered around someone's desire. otherwise it wouldn't be very interesting. Someone romance desires, that's romance movies, and, you know, and, and novels in particular, that's real obvious there. But, you know, all kinds of adventures and, you know, criminal movies and you know, mysteries if someone has a desire, that's at the heart of it. And it wouldn't be, we wouldn't be as entertained in this life. There's no desires. We wouldn't be as heartbroken if there weren't people acting on desires or If we don't have our desires and our desires, our are disappointed or desires are crushed, our desires are unfulfilled. Or we would we would not have done without desires, we wouldn't have some of the highest reaches of human capacity and human accomplishments, we would not have some of the great movements of compassion and care and expressions of wisdom that go on. desires are kind of, you know, built into the very fabric of our lives and our hearts and our, our societies. And to anyway convey that we're supposed to have no desires, right kind of suspect that it just means that we'll just have a population of depressed people. And so I evoke this with the idea that one of the really important things to do is to become a student of desire as a student of your desires, and whether it's directly or indirectly I would like to believe that's partly what Buddhism is. That as we deepen our mindfulness, deepen our concentration deepened our

self reflection, and understanding of what brings suffering and what doesn't, that there's a clarification around our relationship to desires and recognition of all the different forms of desires that are there.

And to be able to distinguish between craving or lust or clinging desire, versus the kind of desires that are behind things like sincerity and commitment, dedication, devotion, beautiful qualities of the heart that people can live their life by and do wonderful things. And, and to see the difference between those which are life giving and which are life denying or life destroying. with water, we're going so as I Going to this talk I wanted to evoke a very simple idea. So if nothing else, this simple idea stays with you. And then you know, the rest of the talk is risk free for me. The so the simple idea is that very, is that all of Buddhism can be summarized in this simple statement. Whenever any circumstance you're in, don't make it worse. improve on it. wherever you're at, don't make it worse. Make it better. That's it. Now Good luck go to work. And this time of don't make it worse. I think that's a real wonderful kind of mirror for ourselves or kind of call to look at ourselves and say, Well, if I'm talking to someone, I'm some kind of circumstance, am I going to make it worse now with what I say with what I do with what I think what I feel, and I'm making this worse for myself, by the judgments and criticism and self criticism that I'm living under, am I making it worse because I've filled with blame and hostility to others. I spent yesterday one of my yearly visits to the California state prisons to visit that the grip program and these are men who are lifers, many of them who have committed murder. And they're looking very deeply at how they've made things worse. And the lesson yesterday with a lot to do what came out was They read letters they'd written of the unfinished busyness of their lives. And they were letters mostly to all of them, I heard were to relatives that were impactful for them when they were children. And mostly they were horrific, horrific things that have been that their parents or mothers or fathers had brothers had done. And, and that the deep, hurt, abandonment, shame, trauma of what happened to them as kids was the momentum or the behind how they live the life of making things worse. And so they had to understand the roots of what they were avoiding what they're trying to shove down what they're trying to compensate for, in order to really kind of come to some deeper place. And then it was clear that they were interested in making things better and that's why they were there. And And, and there was discussions about how, among some of the facilitators that in some of the prisons where they have been doing this program, that in the years when they have the program, there's 30 6090 men who go through these programs, that the yard prison yard gets calmer. And when there's some reason they haven't been able to go into the prison to do the programs, the next years, the tension in the yards go up. So making things better. So this simple idea for your life, any situation you're in, are you going to make it better now where you can make it worse. So the Buddha's way of saying this is much more complicated.

And I'll read it to you, but I'm reading it to you not because of how he says it, but how he what he says about how to do it, and it has to do with having desire And, and how to participate in certain desires. And it's kind of very, I think, very strong language that usually is not associated with some of the Buddhist teachings that are taught sometimes in the West but often their teachings are a lot too often about acceptance about not having so caught up in goals not wanting so much letting go. And so I can suggest the kind of passive approach to Buddhism just kind of sit and be open to the experience and, and just be present. So it's how we do this. I want to emphasize to them, otherwise it might get you get bogged down in there. But there's four, four statements. The first statement says, if you haven't yet make it better or worse, don't make it worse. If you're making good worse, stop doing it at you haven't made it better yet. Start doing it. And if you making it better keep doing it. So that's the kind of, you know, simple way so you have to kind of maybe now you'll hear what I said. But remember, so how is like this awaken this awakened desire, wakening desire, one makes effort, arouses energy strives and endeavors and that's strong language. So this is the how okay and what friends is right effort. Here a person awakens desire for the non arising of unreason, evil unwholesome states and one makes effort arouses energy, strives and endeavors. When awakens desire for the abandoning of a reason, evil

unwholesome states, and one makes effort, arouses energy, strives and endeavors. One awakes  
awakens desire for the arising of unreason, wholesome states and one mix effort arouses energy,  
strives and endeavors. One awakes desire for the continuance, non disappearance, strengthening,  
increase and fulfillment by development have arisen wholesome states and one makes effort arouse  
energy strives and endeavors. This is called great effort It's exhausting just to read it. So I usually don't  
teach this very much because it's kind of complicated and it just sounds like wow, we have to really, you  
know, get to work here and, and, you know, make a lot of effort and the association people make with  
effort are often you know, one of exhaustion and you know they cannot do work. But I think if you  
understand the nature of this work really well. It doesn't have to feel like a lot of effort though  
sometimes it is. But what why I wanted to read this was because of the This requires desire. It says  
here when awakes desire and the desire simplistically is to make don't make it worse. If you're doing a  
situation don't make it worse and a desire to make it better. The highlight is and then that desire is done  
with energy with dedication with own. This is not for the lazy. And in fact, the Buddha was very explicit.  
He said, what I'm teaching is not for the lazy and it's to really engage. And it engaging in a desire. It's a  
desire, which is meant to counter unhealthy desires. There are wise desires that can move us towards  
freedom that can move us towards love. There. There's very profound within us desires. If we kind of  
quiet down and get really centered and really deep inside, the heart will have desires. It can't not have  
it. It's the nature of the heart to desire.

But that desire when it gets deep inside might not feel like it's selfishness. Tires are egotistical desires  
or desires that well up from the control tower of self. You might not even feel like you're identify with this  
as me that desire that I'm having. But there is desire happening. There's a wanting something to  
happen there's motivation. So compassion and loving kindness goodwill are motivational, they involve  
some kind of desire can a mother's care for a child can that can cannot arise from something deeper  
than the egotistical control tower, where we identify this is me myself in mind. Is it something deeper in  
our biology, that biology of the heart Even physiology to, to care and to nurture and support and the  
idea to nurture and care for something is a desire of sorts, you know, you might not call it desire In the  
moment of taking care of a baby, it just seems like a natural thing to do. But it points to how these some  
of these desires don't have to require a lot of self conscious work. Like now I have to gear up and we  
do here and do all this stuff. They can come from some deeper place. At the same time, there are  
powerful desires which are unhealthy to act on. And to have a deep respect to the volcanic power of  
addictions and lust and craving and really wanting things that can exist in people. Maybe some of you,  
maybe some of you if you just remember when you were a teenagers, the strength of some of those  
desires were, you know, pretty intense and your parents that had to deal with it, and the but some of  
these drives that we have, that sometimes are unhealthy for us, the force and the place where they  
arise. In NSS, like, you know, biological, it's like, wow, it's just like, it's very hard to control them. And so  
how do you, you know, to just say kind of open and accept what's there. You know, watch out better not  
be close to me then. And sometimes to be able to not give in to some of these unhealthy desires takes  
a tremendous amount of work. It takes a very strong desire to counter it. Some people have to break  
into a sweat, literally, in order not to give in to unhealthy desires they've given into so many times, and  
there are people who will say, it's now it's come to be a pattern of life and death. The strong addiction,  
strong push of my desires, unhealthy desires, is killing me, literally. And if I'm going to live I have to  
stop. And so there has to be a counter desire that takes A lot of effort and what the Buddha says here is  
lightweight compared to what some people have to do in order to really gear themselves up. So their  
desires, which are unhealthy, they take a lot of work to counter, and you have to take them quite  
seriously. Some people have to get support and help from others. And it's not easy. And then we have  
desires, which in the far other end, are healthy and just seem to arise naturally and easily. And he's  
mostly comes from a lot of relaxation and ease and sitting and just like, of course, this is what happens  
that goes on. And then there's a whole range of things in between that go on and to appreciate the

complexity of our human desires, all the different aspects and maybe start collecting if you will, all the different desire words we have in English or you have a different language in your language. So to go through some of them, I'll try to go from the most unhealthy to the healthiest to see if I can do what what can I come up with? So there is addiction, craving, lost, clinging, grasping. And then there's maybe just wanting just, you know, hoping, hoping or wanting longing. There is aspiration, dedication devotion. There is inspiration. There is. I don't know. That's what I come up with right the moment. Do you have any other one contribute some words to the list?

Persistence. Yeah, I love persistence. I'm not sure persistence is a desire. But it's needed for desire maybe or the desire to persist the desire to keep going sustain it. So it's I think persistence is my strongest, kind of my strong quality that's really supported me and my practice. So I love it. Yes. commitment. Yes, you're yearning send that pic in that range. So ambition, inspiration, motor passion that can fit on both sides of the inner dream. Dream a dream having a dream, the dream, aspiration dream aspiration. So all these have different flavors. in different ways and they live in us and different impacts. Now to make make this little more complicated, complicated, a person can have appropriate healthy desires, beautiful desires, but the way that they engage in them is unhealthy. So, for example, there can be a lot of self referential, self referential egotistical relationship to them, you know, I, I want to help my neighbor who's sick, but I want all the other neighbors to know it. You know, I want you know, I want to broadcast to the local newspaper, you know, I want to get all the credit. You know, I'm gonna make sure that all the neighbors know I'm gonna knock on the door and tell them you know, so then, you know, certainly began maybe with a wonderful aspiration to help a neighbor but some of these extra things added on could actually be not only harmful for itself But a burden for everyone else has to live with it. The there can be a lot of expectation that they're going to we're going to succeed. And we have the complicated idea of success and what it means. So if I don't succeed in this desire, that means something terrible about the world about me or something. And so we add this burden of association when it means, you know, desire, the, we have, you know, there's a whole whole slew of things that come along with it healthy desire, that actually makes the whole complex, unhealthy. And, and so part of this investigation and discovery of how we, how the ecology of desire is, is not only to understand the nature of our desire, where it comes from inside of us, but also discover what, how we how we live with our desires, how we act on them, and somebody have really profound desires, things that are really important for them that arise up, but they're afraid. And they never follow through on them. Or they feel like they're not worthy of it, who am I to do that? Who am I to want that and so they hold it in check and never comes out. And so, to really understand all the ways we relate to desire, so, then we come to the goal of Buddhist practice and how this can help with a healthy relationship who desire. Buddhist practice is ultimately in a certain kind of way of understanding, ultimate. Come to an experience with a radical absence of desire. All desire, both healthy desires and unhealthy desires. And that's refreshing. Just as maybe isn't enough is a fair example is that your person might have all kinds of important desire to help the world. And they're going to go train for a long time and get professional training in this career. They're going to engage in that career and following through on this desire so like with their hearts greatest wish. From time to time, it better take a vacation and really put that aside and not have that desire churning and going and really rest the mind in a deep way to get refreshed and, and clear out and then come back and pick the desire up again, when it's time to go back to work, for example. So in Buddhist practice, we practice minute Buddhism. They eventually goal eventually if you're following the path all the way is to come to a quieting of the mind.

Where we feel complete, contented and free with a mind that has no desire, where we feel, we feel at ease in this world. So the neurosis of feeling I'm inadequate or feeling, I have to prove myself, or I have to defend myself, I have to get what I want, or I have to do this and that all the different kind of neurotic ways in which that can play itself out, has been put to rest. And we experienced the phenomenal

goodness, the phenomenal freedom of sitting, being present in this world, with radical uprooting of all desire, not only the desires that we're consciously, normally consciously aware of, but the deeper structures of the heart, deeper structures of it all that have to do with the desire to live. their desire to be alive, the desire to you know, the deepest desires that are Human Being have that kind of underlie all the others. And to even discover what those are, it takes quite a while and doing Buddhist practice, but then to really put them to rest. And we're not to expect it then to put them to rest forever. But if we know, a freedom, if we know a sense of wellness, that it's possible to be alive, free, happy, without desire. Then when the time for desires again, we relate to the desires in a very different way, they become simpler, because the neurotic way of being involved with egotistical ways of being involved are less likely to be there. When their desires start coming back again, we have much more ability to see what's going on and to choose between the healthy ones and the unhealthy ones and we're much less likely to die. be pushed, the pressure of our desires is actually gonna push us. We still have desires might have some still healthy and unhealthy desires. But we're not free. I guess I'm not sure how to distinguish. We're not free from desires. We're free of desires not right. Or maybe vice versa, you're not free of is that the freedom is the absence of desires, but it's the freedom that when desires arise, we're not caught in them. We can see them arise, we have the ability to choose, Okay, this one I'm not going to act on this one I'm going to act on and so to have that ability in that certain kind of power of choice like that. It really helps to have put to rest it stopped. All desire and it's a high bar I appreciate that, that Buddhism has, but even going part way provides a lot of freedom, even any, any degree to which we learn to put to rest our desires for and feel as goodness of that will give us some perspective and distance and freedom to be able to just choose how we relate to desire some desires when they come up again. And the deeper we can do this, the deeper we can come into a place of no desire, then, you know, I think the more power will have may come out of it in terms of choice and ability and know how to go forward. It's also a way of clearing out it's like a, like a spiritual vacation or something like vacation of the heart to really clear out really, really deeply. In the end, there has to be this clarity that comes from this ending of desire allows the desires or do arise arise in a simpler way. And to arise is not only simpler and more clarity and all there's not also complicated associated things we do with them, but also to arise without eating to feel that it's me having the desire that there's a, there's a, it seems to arise from someplace I like to say someplace deeper than who I am. What do you think of that? That which is deeper inside of you than who you are? Isn't that great? I like at least but, but if you don't like that, then you could say well, the desire came from something bigger, you know, beyond me. Who knows inside deep outside, it's all good. And but you know, not from this little you know, me the control tower, so neurotic. And so this clearing out have no desires and seeing this deeper thing arise. And then to have have the ability to be wiser about how we engage in them to have passionate desire

but no expectation of success, to have a passionate desire and no need to prove oneself in following through on those desires to have, you know, to even to organize your whole life around a particular desire, it's so important for you like that's the organizing principle of your life and feel like it's a completely natural movement that you're dedicated to committed to. But whether you succeed or not, or whether how good you are or not, that's incidental to the other side, and yes, this is what I want my life to be about.

So having fewness of wishes to be content is part of the city For support for coming to a place of looking at desires in deep, deep way, and doing an inventory and cleaning out and rectifying of them. coming to a place where there's no desire, however temporary it is, is a phenomenal shift of perspective. So we can see our desires in a new way and should be able to see our desires in a new way, I hope allows us to see deep inside of us and appreciate the tremendous depth or tremendous kind of integral kind of working of the heart. Where there are strong, dark desires that are things that are very important for us or important for the heart are important for this universe to come together. And

what is it in there. That's really important. If we settled and open discover what the hearts wishes are Discover what you know really what's moving us underneath our fears underneath our preoccupations underneath our distractions underneath our our is going to be superficial desires that we keep ourselves entertained with and soothed by and comforted by, really kind of sit still in deep and listen and understand some of the depth of what's going on what's there and to make it more interesting, I think the unhealthy desires, we have the unwise ones, the ones that maybe cause a lot of suffering.

It's an interesting, thanks very useful to maybe assume that they are unhealthy ways to try to attain or accomplish a healthy desire. That deep inside we have a healthy desire that somehow doesn't play itself out or it's been squashed or perverted or hurt in some way. And so it comes out in these unhealthy ways that I saw that yesterday in the prison. The heartbreaking stories of wanting a mother's love for loving one's siblings, and wanting to take care of them and then having horrible circumstances make it impossible and squashed. And that pain of that loss, then tick playing itself out for decades, and unhealthy bizarre desires wanting to do this in that and then finally be able to come back and touch the core source where it all began. desire for love, to be loved, and to love To care. And so the point being that if you happen to have occasionally, some unwise desires, rather than dismissing them, or feeling bad about them being there or be critical, I shouldn't be this way. One of the powers of mindfulness is to sit with it, listen to it, get to know it, well, give it time, but in a safe kind of environment of sitting still, so you're not likely liable to likely to act on it. And then see if you can find it through the cracks of it. Maybe there's something deeper still a deeper desire, a forgotten desire, a, you know, repressed, oppressed desire, something actually that it's tender and beautiful and maybe more yourself are coming from a deeper place of who you are. That's been long since over No overgrown with the weeds of craving and less than blame and hate. So quite much down there deep. So the art of mindfulness is to turn towards all these desires that might be there. So to step towards them, step into them. But don't believe them automatically, and don't act on them. But study them, look at them, be with them, learn about them. write letters about all the you know, unfinished business around these things. discover what's there. And you probably become more filled with what's most essential about who you are. You'll tap into kind of the roots, the depth of who you are as a human being and your gifts, your hopes, your wishes, your desires, that really are those that are worth basically, you know, being the foundation of a life. And from a Buddhist perspective, one of the core central desires is the desire to be free from the grip of desire, the desire to come to the end of desire. And if you let go of that desire to be free of desire to come to the end of desire, too soon, you'll shortchange yourself. Keep the desires as long as you have a sense that they're useful. And then when they're not useful, put them down. And so when you come to meditate, for example, maybe is a strong desire that gets you to the meditation cushion. But once you're sitting on your meditation seat, you can give up the desire to get to your seat. Don't keep thinking I need to get to my seat. And once you you know, so as you keep as you meditate and go deeper, there can be desires there to go, you know, become freer and freer. But then watch and recognize when it's time to let go that too because no longer needed, no longer needed, and then coming to a place of freedom. So the desire for freedom, I think, is one of the deep biological urges that is deep in our hearts. And if you sit quietly enough, you'll feel that desire. So those are my words. So hopefully that was a nice corrective from last week. I don't know if I have to do a corrective now for this one.

But we're gonna have tea today, and I think this is a great day for Chuck. We have five minutes before the usual into the talk. If you'd be willing to turn to one or two people next to you say hello and if you want to offer to your new friends one little idea that was evoked to you or about desire was meaningful for you in the talk or evoked in you or some wisdom you have on desire, but has to be very brief don't give I was the only one I was the only one who was allowed to talk this long today. So make it brief, but just to just to kind of connect and share and let this talk kind of leaving you a little bit longer. And then in

those five minutes while you're saying hello to each other, some people will set up the tea and then we'll everyone's welcome, stay afterwards and chat and talk. Thank you.