

2019-06-30 Karma And Intention

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SPEAKERS

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So good morning everyone. And what I'd like to talk about this morning is karma and intention. And these are very important topics. The dilemma is courage have said that it's more important to understand the Buddhist teachings on causality, which is what karma is, than this to understand such teachings as not self and emptiness, which says a lot for us, especially Tibetan Buddhism, emptiness is very important teaching. And in the Zen teaching, they have this co on this little story teaching story, called the yaku, Joe and the fox. And now the story goes this way, that Jacobo was a Zen master the abbot of the monastery. And he would regularly give Dharma talks. And I guess that was open from people from the outside they come in. And whenever you give a Dharma talk, there was a old man who would come and talk and sit in the back. And, and then he would leave at the end. And after a long time of doing this one point, the old man stayed behind, and went up to the habit. And he said, once upon a time, I was the abbot of this monastery. Someone asked me the question, is an enlightened person, subject to cause and effect to karma? And I said, No. And because of that answer, I have now been reborn. I said, I'm not really human, but now I've been reborn 500 times as often Is his karmic consequences of saying no? And, and now I come to ask you the question, is it enlightened? is an enlightened person subject to cause and effect? And the abbot answered, a good Joe answered, enlightened person does not ignore cause and effect. And with that the old man somehow woke up or something happened and he said, Then he said to the habit, thank you. And tomorrow morning, behind a certain boulder back in the forest up in the hills, you'll find a body of a fox died, and that'll be me. And please give this Fox the burial that's due for monastic. So in the morning, yeah, Cujo gave instructions to his monks and they went out and found the fox and then back and they buried him meaning that his many lifetimes as a fox came to an end when he got the answer, you don't ignore cause and effect till the Dalai Lama says it's very important to understand it. And, and if you don't watch out you might be a fox for a long time. So is so the teachings on karma are very particulars in the early teachings of Buddhism. And it's a teaching that puts a lot of emphasis on the importance of the present moment, which is one of the hallmarks of mindfulness practice is to be present for our present moment experience. And not so much to enjoy it, but rather to be able to really use the present moment to its fullest potential for us. And, and one of the potential For the present moment when we're really here is we see that we have choice. And then to be able to exercise that choice wisely, that if we don't slow down enough don't pause long enough for no pay careful attention to what's going on. Many of us will operate on automatic pilot, you know, we'll just say things will do things but just kind of barrel ahead. And, and there things are done without much reflection. And,

or without any deeper kind of understanding of why we're doing it, what purpose we're doing it, what the consequences are. And now it could seem like a drag to stop, pay more attention, slow down, restrain yourself from being impulsive. But there's a difference between front loading and unloading are life. If you front load your Your life with more attention given to why you do things, the purpose, the intention

for what you do for the consequences that you're putting into place by what you do, then you can be more careful. And you don't have to take care of a lot of things afterwards. If you don't do that, and are impulsive and say things without thinking about it or act on things that later you regret that you acted on, then the chances are that you'll do things that afterwards you have to end the end loading. Afterwards, you have to spend a lot of time apologizing, defending, explaining, justifying, remedying, whatever you did. And so it might seem like a drag to Front Load your life to spend more time more care about what you do in the present moment. But actually, you end up more likely not only saving yourself a lot of work later. Later, sometimes save your And the kind of regrets that people will have for a lifetime. But also you put into place, much better conditions for the movement of our life, we can start creating, doing those things which have beneficial consequences to our life. And that's the heart of the teachings of karma, that our actions have consequences. And we should be careful with the consequences. Now that they are the word karma is a big word. And, and so it is not some kind of theory about life having to do with multiple lifetimes, often multiple lifetimes come into play in traditional Buddhist teachings around karma, because the cause and effect continues through lifetimes they say. But that's not the heart of the what the teachings are about the heart or the teachings about about really being careful what you choose to do in this present moment. vacationer karma is also not a teaching that provides cosmic justice. We have for good reasons. And I think, a wonderful reasons, some of us a strong desire for justice, whatever that might understand. And it's sometimes hard to see that there's justice in this world. And, and so one of the ways to get justice is to have this teaching of karma. Justice will happen in the person's next lifetime. Okay, everything's back in order. Okay, I can rest assured that no good lousy person is going to get it, you know, and not just get off, you know, scot free for what this terrible thing that person did. And it'd be nice, maybe that's true. But I think we have a strong desire for justice, which might actually do us a disservice because it might be might take us away from really dealing with the present moment, champion justice here in this lifetime for our society, but also to deal directly with our discomfort around what goes on and work with that. Because if we have an excuse to kind of, you know, kind of put a salvo over so later it'll be taken care of in next lifetime, then I don't have to take care of this now I'm kind of relieved a bit and, and reassured or something. And I think it's more maturing to really kind of not look at some theory of justice over multiple lives, but really kind of work with what's here and look at it. The and also that theory of karma has very little to do with explaining what's happening today, based on what happened in the past. The, the, it's not a theory that everything you did in the past, is the cause of what happened today. doesn't put ultimate responsibility on you, who you everything that happens to you on what what you did before. It's really a focus on our capacity for responsiveness, our capacity to be present, and respond wisely and with choice. And, and mindfulness puts us in that seat, it puts us kind of in the driver's seat of caring and being

patient and being attentive to what we do. And, and as I said, it might seem like work that's front loading, but actually it has a much, it's much less work in the long term, if you do it. So the karma, our actions and the consequences of actions can have. The word karma literally means action. It's kind of come down to been sometimes the consequences of our action. People say that's the person's karma. And what they mean is that SS the fruit of their own action. But technically the word just means action. And so we want to pay attention to the action. And then actions have consequences. And where can we see the consequences of our actions, we can see the consequences right away. That there's a quality of work, what we say what we do, even when we think that it has a Valence. If we think with thoughts of hate, if we speak with words of hate, if we act with hate, if you really pay attention, it actually feels grading for the whole system. It's actually painful. It's a contraction. And so the consequences right there. The problem with some like hate is that it's often focused on purpose and an object something or the object of hate and to get rid of something. And so the attention is outwardly directed, and with the head hating person doesn't, doesn't really pay attention to what the effect isn't here. For them, the effect is still here. It's uncomfortable for them. And that's often the unconscious or subconscious fuel for

further hate. They're trying to get rid of something that because they feel so bad. But part of the function of mindfulness is to turn the attention around and really see what is happening for us. When we speak and act and even think, in ways that are unskillful. We think for the ill will we think with greed, lust, when we think with our act with jealousy, or spite or resentment, or, you know, all kinds of things criticism, self criticism, and you know, even something like guilt, which is common enough emotion for people. These Buddhists say there's no really valuable purpose for guilt. There might be a valuable purpose for regret, but guilt is a kind of a Self criticism that is painful, it's more of this contraction. So to start paying attention to the immediate effect, the simultaneous effect of what we're doing, the quality, the quality of that and the impact on us. There's also effects of our actions down through time. And we don't have to look at it to mysteriously, karma is not some kind of metaphysical accounting system that exists someplace up in the sky or I don't know where it would exist, that is kind of keeping tabs in everything. It's but there are consequences, you know, that we can experience you know, over time, and one of them is in the effect it has on our level of tension or relaxation, the muscles that get tight in the muscles that get softened and relaxed. That conditioning on our body. By what we think and act and do, might be miniscule in one act of speech or thought or action. But if we had the same chronic activity over and over again, the, the effect is, can be huge over time. I wished I'd been told that Abraham Lincoln once said that by the time a man is 40, a person is 40. That person is responsible for their face.

Because of all the holding patterns and attitudes that get carried along like that. And so, you know, there are these traces that are left behind. There are traces in our memory, and memory can go underground for a long time and then pop up. And one of the remarkable things of ongoing meditation practice is that sometimes long lost, long forgotten memories will return and sometimes there's a good memories known People who've, you know, had forgotten about really important, pleasant, enjoyable memories of feeling safe or contented as children. And somehow those reappeared through meditation, and became a source of strength for them. But it also the opposite can happen, that people in meditation sometimes will remember things that were very unfortunate the regrets they had or how they hurt people. And sometimes it comes with a big bang, like, Oh, you know, Oh, where did that where did I say 20 years ago, and I've known people who felt 20 years. Yeah. You know, forgotten something they did, and then felt they had to go make amends or apologize to someone. And so these things live inside our psyche is kind of memories. Sometimes, you know, memories we don't remember, at some point, they can come up and it's much better for them to come up and be resolved and work through it. You know, while you're still, you know, relatively good hell You know, it's like a meditation or something. Because sometimes when people are dying a little bit slowly, the inhibitions and the various conditions are such that those memories will come back then. And, and then when maybe not so able to deal with them or work through them. And it's rather unfortunate to die, you know, with regrets in our minds. So it's good to kind of clean the Clean up, clean up the act ahead of time. The other thing that our actions do, like a consequence down through time, is they set conditions in place, and that conditioning affects further things. So for example, the example of the hateful person who creates this contraction in their body, that's uncomfortable. That's a condition that people then will have through that discomfort will then react or push away or drink alcohol or do something to kind of unhealthy about this discomfort. They're feeling And the opposite can happen as well. We can do things that create good conditions for ourselves, that help us feel content, happy, peaceful, more relaxed, more generous, more, you know, all kinds of wonderful ways of being in the world that feel good, the quality of your inner being is better. And those tend to generate a nicer ways of being are more supportive ways of being a good way of being. And we are the custodian of the conditions of whether we're really the custodian of the quality of our inner life. And so you want to set up conditions that support a good quality of life. And so you want to make choices that put in place, things that are conditioning or influences on you that are supportive and helpful and bring out the best in you. As opposed to taking out those conditions doing those conditions as bring out the worst in you. And this can be simpler. Stick. As you know, very simple little

choice. Least, you know, I've made this choice sometimes, if I'm going up to San Francisco, choosing to go on highway 280, rather than one on one. And I because I've noticed that I actually feel better going up to 80, than to auto one. And I arrive in San Francisco and a little better, a little bit, you know, it's not a big deal, but it's a little bit better positioned place and all that and just nicer. And so I'm caring for the, you know, these conditions and what influences they have on me. And so our actions are consequential. And the focus on karma not ignoring karma is to be careful with the choices we make, in what actions we do. So in actions in Buddhism, also include what we think and among What we think kind of in that kind of world, on the mental world is our intentions. So, and Buddhism puts off and puts a tremendous emphasis on intention, and sometimes seems to imply that, that the seed of intention is like a seed for our karmic consequences that come into play.

Almost everything we do has some intention, some purpose, some motivation behind it. It's kind of like the beginning in for all our actions. And so to be able to quiet enough, or have a strong enough mindfulness, to see what is our intention, moment by moment, to see what our motivations are, is huge. So to begin looking and the quality of the intention has a big impact on all these things. And so to know The quality of an intention is the quality of attention, something that you feel good about that supportive and nourishing, or is the quality of the intention something which is not nourishing, which is painful to have, or, or undermines us or drains us or something. And so, to ask yourself the question, why am I Why am I going to say what I'm about to say? Why am I going to do what I'm about to do? Or I need to do something here? Not what should I do? But what should be? What is the intention in which I want to do it? And to spend time in your life taking the time to ask yourself that question, I'm about to do something. what purpose do I want to do it for? What am I trying to accomplish here? Can can really awaken a richer, deeper, more valuable way of living in the world. And here I'll give you another example. Which is Again, pretty simplistic, perhaps, ordinary. And that is, because I've done this. I got to go shopping for my family for food. So what's the intention? Someone asked me, Why are you going shopping? Because my family needs food. Okay, that's nice. Okay, you'll learn some information doesn't really say anything particularly deep. But before I go shopping for food, I can ask myself that. What's the intention that you're doing his for it, oh, I want to care for my family. I want them to feel when they come home, that they're being met with support with care with love, that there's food there for them. But you know, there's actually I could have other intentions. I could go to the market to buy food. And my intention is to every person who somehow I encounter who's willing to look at me That I want to kind of meet them in a way that's gonna make their life a little bit better. You know, I don't know, you know. So that's my intention is to go out there and make a difference for people. I've been grumpy and gone to the market with my shopping cart and like all these people in the way and, you know, I'm not going to look at anyone and you know, like, you know, and you know, I'd probably didn't create a very good week behind me. And I've gone to the market and I'm surprised by you know, sometimes I'm looking around and being present and being as interested to connect to the people around me as I am with the food. And it's not so dangerous because most people don't want to connect.

But it was kind of nice. It's nice for me. And you know, and so then and now that my wife is mostly gone these days, I've been going to the market early in Safeway because Safeway is open 24 hours. So I go super early in the morning, and it's kind of fun. There's all these people stocking the shelves. And, and not so many people online. And so I've gotten to know some of their clerks because they're the same clerks are only a few clerks, their checkout clerks and so I'm getting to know some of them by name and, and you know, having more conversations and it's a very different feeling of you know, and because they're stocking the shelves, the stalkers are in our apologizing because they've stuffed boxes in the aisles and, and so it gives me a great chance to say no, it's not a problem, and it's a great you know, have a little exchange and I kind of like it. And so I could have the intention to go and connect with people or be make a difference in that world little bit. So by giving some thought to it, I enliven, I

enrich what I'm doing with nice purposes. Whether I'm successful or not successful, you know, that's another topic, but the fact that I can go into the market with that kind of liveliness to me is actually feels quite good and If all I'm doing is buying food for my family, if that's, you know, there's no other reason they sent me. I said, No, I don't want to go but I'm gonna go because they told me to. You know, that's pretty limited world I live in. And so can you expand your world through care and attention to your intention? The world of intention is also a very significant world to consider. What are the priorities that you have what what intentions? Do you give priority to? Where what intentions are central to how you want to live your life as a whole? Is there a larger purpose for your life that you have a sense of meaning sense of values, sense of direction that you have? And I think that it's a wonderful thing to spend time regularly reflecting and what is my deepest intention? What is the deepest purpose purpose that I have for this human life that I have. It's an amazing thing. One of the consequences for me of doing those, all those years of Buddhist practice, is I don't take being alive for granted. I don't take being conscious for granted. I think it's just amazing that this, this whole show exists that even the fact that I'm conscious, I just find amazing. And so to care for this and, and ask a question, what is my deepest intention? So I did that for at least a year every day. I would ask myself that question, sometimes multiple times through the day. And it was fascinating to watch how over the year that it morphed and changed. Sometimes it was exactly the same. Sometimes it changed and over time, and one of the ways it changed over time, is it kind of felt like I went deeper and deeper was kind of like, I would come with intention. And I would say You know, yes. And what's the intention for that intention? Or where does that come from? And, and then if I had a negative intention, I wanted to live without fear. I always thought I found it really important to say, what what is the positive version of that? Or if I had no fear, then what would be my intention? And to go deeper and deeper? And, and there's many things that could be an answer to that. And yet some care needs to go around to answering a question, what is my deepest intention? We don't kind of bring with us societal ideas that we've inherited somehow, of what a human beings life is supposed to be like. One of their great intentions is not what we do with our life, like, some great career or something, but rather, the intention of how we're going to live this life. And then how we live. We're going to live with compassion or care, generosity or Focus on practice, kindness, and how we are might be the organizing principle for our life more than, you know, saving the world or some some way.

But to keep looking down into your heart into your heart, a variation that I did for myself with this, what is my deepest intention, which was very interesting for another year was I asked myself, if I'm going to die tonight, how would I live this day? What was it what would be important for me? What was the most important thing to do if this was my last day, and that kind of put put a mirror on my life that was very powerful. And again, over because I did it for a year I kind of kept morphing and changing and looking and as I looked at it, and I thought it was really valuable for me. So to be careful, with intention to develop a skill and the ability to look at why we do things that purpose for a while. Do it the motivation, what we're intending as we do it is very useful. I many years ago I met a family who told me that the one of the most common questions they had in the family for each other was what, when, when they were talking about something was What are you? What are you intending? What are you intending and doing this or saying this and so kind of like plumbing deeper, you know, dropping deeper what is going on here. And so combine these ideas of intentionality and our deepest intention and the idea of karma, that intent intention is an action. And it's an action which has consequences. And because there's a psychological state or psychological condition or intentions, the causality the cause and effect, as plays out in a variety of ways, but in and of itself, plays out psychologically. If we act on an intention And then the physical action in the world plays out in all kinds of other ways. But just simply having an intention that we dwell in and stay with. It's not an you know, you're not off scot free. It has consequences for your conditions you It sets memories in you all kinds of things go on. I've had when I was young, I've had strong greed for things that stayed in there over and over again. And I kind of look back at some of

those things with regret. Where was I doing all that time spending that time and i don't think it was a good condition condition me in a good way didn't set up my mind or set up my heart in a healthy kind of way. I never acted on them, but still it had an effect on me. So intentionality to intentions we want, even if we don't act on them, and they're more like wishes or hopes. Or something that we might have are consequential and psycho in the psychological unfolding and develop and growth that we have. And so how do we care for it? So one of the ways is through meditation. Meditation for some people, is a really wonderful way of getting the mind. Just quiet enough doesn't have to be dramatically quiet, but more quiet than usual, in such a way that we can start to caring for the quality of our mind the intentions of the mind, desires of the mind that are operating. Maybe in meditation, we learned a lot about letting go of what arises, and we can drop deeper. But also in meditation, as we are calmer. We have access to deeper wellsprings of intentionality, deeper wellsprings of emotions and values and, and ways of being that can be the source of very skillful and helpful intentions that we have. That are much harder to tap into, if the mind is agitated and running around and being busy. And so to sit quietly enough to be deeper in touch with ourselves, to become still enough to see the points of choice that we have. And one of the choices we have a meditation in particular is a choice to let go or not this, I don't need to continue this train of thought, this is not helpful, this is not a useful thought to have. And that ability to let go is not just to let go of something, but might also be to allow ourselves to let go into a deeper place inside to let go into a deeper listening, what's really here and then over time, to be able to ask yourself the question, what is my deepest intention? When I did Zen practice many years ago, when a Zen teacher told him defined as in practice as the practice of purifying our intention, then it was kind of a very thought provoking idea that was that's what the practice was purifying or clarifying our intention.

And and I kind of like to think that our intention, the intentions we live our life on life in are so preciously important that we want to really attend to it and care for it well and that it be a well, Inner Wealth that we have at the intentionality and don't have your intentions and what you want your life based on. be confused with how successful you are in living on them. Sometimes it's just powerful. We're living on these good intentions. And so you know, whether it plays out well in life or not, that can sometimes be secondary to the benefits we get from knowing that we're resting and dwelling and these wonderful, good qualities that We were capable of having. And finally, I'll say that I've advised people that you know, I'm a meditation teacher, it's like, like, I guess I've been doing this for years. So you think that that's important, right? meditation, and is. And with that as a contrast, I've sometimes said people, it's actually more important, more important than meditating is to ask yourself regularly, what is your deepest intention? Is that important? So don't ignore cause and effect or you'll be a fox. Thank you.