

# 2019-07-07 Letting Go

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

freedom, letting, important, clinging, absence, recognize, person, people, release, buddhism, hand, point, experience, feel, fist, practice, shedding, relax, feeling, space

## SPEAKERS

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I'd like to try this morning to talk about a very important and central aspect of the freedom and letting go. That is at the heart of the Buddha's message. And so I think they are familiar enough to people that Buddhism puts a great emphasis on liberation or freedom. And that the, the exploration of Buddhism has a lot to do with exploring what it means to be free, what it means to be liberated. And in terms of the spiritual liberation that Buddhism emphasizes, especially in the context of the culture of United States, I think it's important to say that it's a freedom Buddhism emphasizes a freedom from and, you know, the dominant rhetoric of this culture of this country is free. to freedom to do things freedom to vote, freedom to assembly, freedom to religion, freedom to shop. And in the within Buddhism, it's freedom from because you can be free to do all kinds of things. But what drives to doing is a lot of clinging, a lot of craving a lot of conceit, a lot of greed, a lot of hatred, even that can drive it. And so we can't just simply look at the freedom to you don't have an unlimited credit card and then think you're completely free. The fact that that unlimited credit card might be invisible, how much greed or how much you know, is driving a person who clinging and attachment. And so in Buddhism, their focus is spiritual liberation is the freedom from those cravings, the attachments that The greed, the hatred, the conceit that might be operating. And, and soon and in some ways that's a lot harder to do to really be able to turn the attention inward to discover where those things are, and then to somehow become free of them. And so in discussion in in this movement towards freedom, there's a variety of words that kind of are in the family of letting go. So there's letting go, there's abandoning, there's shedding, there's casting off. All those are all kind of active verbs, but they're also kind of inactive or trends in transient verbs, like release or to be released or to be liberated or to be fading away or relinquishing, dropping a stopping. That happened not so much because we're actively doing something but Because as the practice deepens or strengthens the mindfulness and concentration, the insight, there's a natural shedding kind of a sloughing off of the skin of a snake as a skin as a snake gets bigger and grows. As we grow and mature. There's a sloughing off of what maybe in the past, we thought was important or maybe was important, but it's no longer needed. And this is releasing that can happen falling away that can happen that we don't have to be so actively involved with. And so, this idea of letting go releasing sloughing off casting off shedding is something that should be understood and explored and, and kind of treated with kind of as a precious commodity for Buddhist practitioners. And now there's not a few people who encounter Buddhism, who find the concept of letting go perplexing They don't understand why it's so important. They don't understand even how to do it. It's kind of a mystery about how it is. But as people, I think begin to engage in the practice, it becomes more and more clear that this is something that's valuable to do, and that we're better off for it. And part of the wisdom where the insight is to see that, that the alternative to letting go in the terms of holding on is not such a good deal after all. And so we begin seeing a holding on clinging, resisting and some strong inner way that contracts the heart, the mind, closes it down, is actually that's where there's a problem. And that's what we shouldn't be validating or celebrating, or trying to defend. And that's and that

not being that way is so much better than being that way. And so it isn't so much that letting go is being champion does. It just, it's better than the alternative. And to see that, then letting go becomes more interesting. Because we see, the Buddha once said that, you know, for all the emphasis he gave on things like letting go. He said, I don't teach you to let go of everything at any time. He said you only teach letting go, when it leads to your betterment leads to you having better states, where only teach letting go when it's nourishing or supportive for you. If it's not, don't let go. Without requires, again, self monitoring attention to ourselves, what the effect is of letting go, what the what it's like when we shed something or outgrow something, and to recognize what's there. There can be two people who have, perhaps in Buddhist practice, maybe even a profound lead Go for a profound release or experience of liberation. One person has it and will suddenly not have a lot of the inhibitions that the person had or a lot of the inner resistance, a lot of the carry a lot of the weight that they used to have their preoccupations. And with that new energy that's been released, will immediately pursue whatever they were wanting to pursue their mean, we have lots of messages and lots of ideas of all these wonderful things we can do. And so to be released of the attachments, and then suddenly, Oh, now I can do all this stuff. That's one way the other person becomes equally liberated something let's go in a deep way. But the second person stops and takes a good look at that. This person's investigates or feels or recognizes what it's like internally to Let go of something. So the first person kind of let go, maybe in a sense created space in the mind at heart, and immediately filled it with something else. The other person took didn't do that and took time to feel what that space was like to feel what that experience of letting go was like to feel the goodness of it, perhaps then what's nourishing of it, to really recognize what that experience is like. And I've known people like this, I've known people who have had practiced in Sara Lee and in deep way, and have had some important something important let go something shed and fell away. And I've even known some people who had this in their teachers in Asia, kind of confirmed that this was a really a genuine kind of Buddhist kind of realization experience. And then they went back to their normal, normal life. And they felt they ended up becoming kind of a little bit disappointed, something bitter, because they didn't see that it made a difference in their life. It nothing had really changed for them. And they were struggling just the way they did before and all kinds of things. And they've felt let down by their practice. And I've known other people who've had similar kind of experiences, for whom it was life changing, and it kind of changed their life, the direction of their life, it became their death experience became their teacher, their, their orientation, their kind of reference point, their North Star, and they never kind of became the same again. So what was the difference between these two people? I think that what I've seen so far and different people I've talked to, is that some people, for whatever reason, maybe because they haven't been taught to do so. Don't really appreciate The impact or the significance of the letting go that they've done, they don't stop and take a look at it and recognize it more carefully. They just kind of go on, you know, with life, you know, they have, you know, just all kinds of things to do. And in fact, I've known some people who didn't even stop to take a look at it and experience it, because they were so set on, like on meditation retreats, so much momentum to go back and keep being practicing concentration or insight that they kind of went on to the next kind of, you know, got to keep got to keep chugging away.

So there's a variety of reasons and also sometimes Buddhist teachers don't do enough to emphasize how important it is to stop and recognize when there's something has let go, when there's some deep you know, relaxation of something that we've been held to holding on to and, and there's good reason for that. Because sometimes people get a little bit too attached to that, or a little bit even conceited Look at me I'd like go Look, look at look at me, I'd let go of, you know conceit and so you know there's all kinds of you know problems that can come so some reason but but for the people who can actually who actually take in who realize oh this is actually important what happened this is actually a teacher for me this is significant something has changed now, that makes me understand myself my life priorities in a

very different way. Let me take a good look at this. Let me kind of remember this. Let this become a vision for me. So some people don't remember it or want to remember it because they've been told too much. In mindfulness practice, just stay in the present moment. Let go, let go of everything. And not a few teach people have had some kind of info working experience in meditation or in practice, go on to the Buddhist teachers, and the Buddhist teachers will say one more thing for that go off. There's some value to that instructions, for sure, but it can somehow sometimes cause a person to then like Forget about it. And it no longer becomes a reference point that lives in them. So to stop and recognize even the smallest kind of letting go that we have, you know, I think all of us here all of you have had small letting goes, that may be I just part of ordinary life. But, but just even in those situations, to notice it and feel it and get to know what what what let go, what changed. One of the words for letting go in this ancient language of the Buddha is no saga and wasaga also means to relax. And I love this I mean relaxation. So, to let go means something has relaxed. Can we experience that feeling of relaxation, that lack of tension that is there, the lack of preoccupation. One of the fascinating things to realize is the degree to which our preoccupations, or thicket of thoughts and ideas and stories and opinions, create a kind of a strong veil or filter through which we see our world to let go deep enough to no longer have that veil and filter and be able to see through the space that's been created, of the absence of clinging or the absence of preoccupation is not an easy thing to do. But once it happens, take time to feel that and experience and be with it. No matter how much are small it is, let it be your teacher, learn from it and learn well enough so that it becomes a understanding of your potential. And there's a lot of this and the most strongest language in Buddhism, for this, understanding our potential of freedom, inner freedom is used their languages using the ancient tradition is to have a vision, to have a vision, to have a deep enough experience of letting go to the person now has a vision of what is possible. A potential and here again, sometimes if people listen too much to mindfulness teachers like me, you know, that, you know, be in the present moment. You know, the idea of you supposed to think about the future, about the potential and where it's what's possible, is often sometimes, you know, so don't do that just stay in the present. And there's some value in that instruction But there's also very important sometimes to maintain memory. And to have some sense of the possibility of where we can grow into and develop. That comes from a clear, present moment attention to what it feels like what the experience is like, a freedom that's here. So this letting go. Freedom is associated a lot with a sense of space, and in the mind or the heart, and opening in the mind in the heart, and that is not cluttered and nothing's there to obstruct us anymore.

Little is there. And the powerful metaphor that's used for this in the Buddhist tradition, is that that of a path. Buddhism is a path more than a religion. It's a path a maga and a path through the woods through the stick jungle is a place that's a absence of trees and shrubs, of thickets so we can walk unobstructed. And what's important about a path is the absence of anything gets in our way. And so to be able to walk through a thick forest is to be able to recognize where that opening is. So in the same way, we are creating in this through this practice, space, we're creating our own path by recognizing where the opening is recognizing where the space is, recognizing where the lack of clinging is, and having a having a memory, a vision, and a visceral feeling for what that is like, Oh, this is what's like to be at ease. This is what it's like to have the mind not cluttered and tight and contracted. And if this if that experience of letting go or release is strong enough Then it kind of live in us. Maybe like a visceral memory, maybe as a, as a constant companion, that's always there waiting for you. I love the idea that it's, you know, sitting right behind your shoulder, you know, just all you have to do is turn towards us right there. Just, you know, that's available. You know, we go through our lives and we get busy and involved in all kinds of important things. And so then we lose touch with it, but it's right there in our shoulder sitting there waiting for us. You know, it's, I just have to kind of turn towards that or relax or let go a little bit, to get a little feeling a taste of what that space of freedom of liberation of letting go might be like. So the more that we can feel that and sense that you have a vision for it, then the amazing

thing that happens is that it begins with Working on us, often the language of Buddhist practices that you're supposed to practice, at some point, the idea that you're the one who's practicing transitions to, I'm the one being practiced. I'm the one being practiced by the freedom or the space that and so then what a lot of practice has is about more and more is not about doing but about allowing, allowing the space to be there, allowing the freedom to be there, allowing the non clinging to be there. And it's because we have, if you have if you've learned to recognize it, and allowed it to kind of really be felt and known, and if it's strong enough, it's it's not so far away. Then you can kind of like just relax, settle, settle in, just is it here right now. It can be it doesn't have to take so long. You know, you might and I suspect most of you can tap into some quality of it. I think all of you have had some enough enough experience of letting go or some kind of peace or some non preoccupation that you can come to a drive your car and come to a red light or stand in a long line at the supermarket. The back of it, I chose the wrong line. And use that as an occasion to contentedly just stand there and like go find the freedom right there. Find the difference between being preoccupied the light has to turn, revving the gas ready to go whatever. Or judging everyone or keep scanning for which line is better should I should I change or not change? You know, all these important decisions right? And just let go and just kind of find the freedom right there in that in that moment. Can you get some? It doesn't have to be dramatic. But it can be some some right there. Is it available? Do you have a feeling a sense of that possibility? Do you have a vision, you have a memory that kind of says, Oh, yeah, this is what it's like, I can let go.

So as this becomes more and more part of our life, and we allow for it, and this experience of letting go become stronger, it becomes a little bit like a force inside of us. That kind of wants to come. It's kind of a kind of a momentum that wants to work us it's kind of like massaging us or working us. There's a feeling almost like what what inside of us there is a movement of growing of shedding or breaking out of the shell. some point the chicks you know, start pecking to get out right Or at some point the snake grows and wants to shed its skin that's limiting it. At some point if you you know, if you're cold and you go to stand in the sun to get warm, you don't make yourself you don't make yourself warm standing in the sun, perhaps you just kind of stand there maybe expose yourself to the sun, so the sun rays can come in. At some point, the most natural thing in the world to do if you get too warm, is to take off the coat. Right? And then of course you do that. And so there's this momentum inside I'm getting uncomfortable with too much heat, let's take off the coat. So at some point that becomes a sort of momentum of freedom since a space of ease of peace, of freedom. It's kind of like a force of course we take off this kind of clinging to here and there. Most of us have a lot of things that we're clinging to. We have a lot of attachments, there's no shortage. And what it means is there's no shortage of things to let go of, or to outgrow or to shed. And so we can keep it to keep doing the mindfulness practice and keep looking and looking and being the one in charge. And that can be very powerful to do. But we then are not availing ourselves enough of this momentum of liberation exists within us, this potential that can operate if we just kind of make we make space for space. Isn't that great? And if you have space for space, then in that space, there's a feeling of ease of safety or freedom, of contentment of something that's there. And it's filled with potential. So if you hold your hand in a fist For a long time, and it begins hurting, but you think you're not allowed to let go of it, and it hurts even more. And after a while, you know, but after a while someone says, you know, by the way, the Buddha comes along and says, By the way, you don't have to hold a fist, you don't have to you it's okay to you know, to relax your fingers and open them up. So a number of things happen when you relax and open up the fingers. One is, you discover that, that you really now opened up and exposed the parts of the hand that have greater sensitivity, the palm of the hand fingers, you know, they're very sensitive, you know, have a lot of nerves there. And so now you can feel things in the sense the world in a much more nice way. You can also express a lot more wonderful things I think, generally when people want to kind of, you know, shake hands or you know, You know, a child is feels, you know, distressed and you just kind of put your hand on their shoulder or something, you do it with a palm of your hand. You know, I don't think the child's

needs to be assured if you keep the fist there and stroke them with your fist, it's very different feeling. And so this also when the hand is open, finally, the hand has a much more dexterity. You can do a lot more with a hand than when you have a fist. And also, when the hand is open, there's a feeling of greater ease in the hand. When we initially let go of the tight fist, that he is in pleasure of releasing it is maybe captivating for a few moments. That's good. What happens is that over time, we forget about it. We have things to do, and we preoccupied everything. What I'm trying to emphasize today is don't forget about it. It's still there, all you have to do is tighten up a little bit to realize it's still there. But it's become habitual, it's become normal to be it's become, you know, just, you know, we take it just just the natural state of things. So we don't think about it if the hand stays open, but we don't want to forget about it.

Because if we know, we really know what it feels like to have the hand open, and relaxed ease and sensitive, then we might become more sensitive to ways in which we start curling up and tightening up again. And then we feel I don't want to do that. I know something better. So the same thing with this inner freedom that can happen inside that. It certainly makes space for space in the mind, you know, we find this is that allows for a much greater sensitivity, and I would say intelligence as well. It allows for much greater dexterity and much more mind can be much more capable and do more things. It can also bring a lot of wonderful feelings. So you can bring a kind of pleasure, it can bring goodness, it allows a goodness, we have plenty of goodness inside all these wonderful, wholesome states of mind that that for some reason, they tend to do a better and surface better if we're not preoccupied. And have you noticed that if you haven't noticed, and so, you know, it's a wonderful things can happen in that space. It's not just like going into this, you know, dark space or boring space, you know, some of the most interesting parts of human life come through the opening that's happened from with freedom. And then, and then there's emphasis today is that I really want to stress is if we really get it, excuse me. If we really Get a sense of really feeling a visceral, maybe somatic maybe or heartfelt or mind felt sense of what this release is like. Ease is like pieces like of letting go or shedding or something like that it becomes a reference point it becomes a Northstar. So that we could start noticing certainly when we start tightening up and clinging again. But maybe even more important, we start being able to kind of sit word fair it out to kind of find out discover all the places where we're still clinging other places where that letting go or that freedom hasn't grown into. And so the more you recognize and feel and sense. Freedom, ease this deep relaxation of the mind, the more I can point you and help you recognize Oh, there's a heel over the air I have, I'm clinging to that still, I'm a little bit tight there, I'm a little bit tight, they're not as relaxed as I thought it was. And then you've cut it grows, and that freedom can grow and grow and move out and fill in and become more and more. So the importance of recognizing, becoming familiar with the goodness, the value that what feels nice, what's important about letting go. That's one of the important tasks of mindfulness. So if you're at the traffic light, now you have something to do. You can let go, and then notice what it's like just to be there. And that space of just letting go and peace. Maybe there's something for you to learn there. And maybe there are bigger kind of letting goes. Some of the letting goes you might not notice. You know, one of the wonderful things that can happen to human beings sometimes is distraction. We get distracted by something and then when We're over with big distraction, we realize that some of our big things we're upset about are concerned with are no longer there. And so, one option is to was not there, I better go back and pick them up. And quickly. I'm so resentful at that person and see if you notice after your watch, you know, you read a nice book or watch some nice movie or something you no longer think about person, you're free to this heady resentment. So you could use a brush as soon as you notice that, you know, you're Oh, I better rush. I better rush back and pick it up. The other option is, is to take your time and feel what it's like to not have the present. And that's an example of this appeal was like not to have these things, to be free of it for those few moments, and there's so much to learn in the absence. Absence is not nothing. In the world



of spiritual freedom, absence is what is gold. The absence of clinging of attachment or preoccupation, start noticing and valuing that absence. Okay? So this was an important topic for me at least.

I wonder if you'd be willing to do a little exercise. Face Painting you want to change your posture but just close your eyes.

What would you benefit from? Letting go like letting go, baby would be beneficial for you

and what goodness what benefit. way of being good way of being away to on the other side of letting go

And then, being aware that for some of you maybe this topic is touch something that might be kind of sensitive and that we want to care for each other. I'd also like to ask if you would be willing to quietly calmly form little groups with three or four and take a few minutes just each of you kind of Just a few words about something that came up in this talk or in that exercise. You don't have to do the most tender thing or the most private thing. But maybe it's something you want to share. But there was valuable for you and what was evocative for you? And we just did a few minutes, if you'd be willing to little groups of three or four.

Well, thank you very much for participating in that and being willing to be part of the discussion. It sounded like it was engaging and so I hope that was the case. And I hope there was enough sensitivity to each other because I think as I said before, this can touch tender areas of life. And the so it kind of ended the talk with this idea of the precious sense of absence and And then that this precious absence that comes along with freedom, just wonderful absence. It's always here. It's always available. So it might not be it might not see it or know it. But actually there's more absence around you and in you then you could possibly imagine.

And so it's always waiting for you. It's available. Absence that's freedom, since your companion may be your constant companion. Thank you all.