

# 2019-09-08 Deepening Relationship With The Dharma

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## SPEAKERS

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So one of the pleasures of my life, my adult life has been my engagement in Buddhism, the practice of Buddhism, the study of Buddhism, and the fortune of being a being teaching Buddhism. And if I look back over these decades that I've been involved, it goes through faith, it's gone through phases, or it's going through kind of variety of different steps of my relationship to all this. And in a sense, it's become more and more multi dimensional. And I think that's for people who stay involved in Buddhism for some time.

People who stay involved in Buddhism for some time that probably there are changes in how we understand or relate or participate in the practice and the teachings and we're maybe it also get the feeling this metaphor of dimensions makes sense where kinda gets more multi dimensional. So for example, if we have a one dimensional relationship to Buddhism, it's might be that we've heard one particular teaching and it's like a sentence or something. And like maybe the sentence that that you know, everything is impermanent. And that's a kind of interesting statement and it's may be interesting or, or simple, simple statement might be that some people have heard is that desire is the condition or the cause for suffering. And some people find that this you know, one line like that sometimes it's confusing sometimes it's very impactful I live with that. But it's kind of just a one one little sentence. And then they might learn the context for those sentences, those little teachings, they fit into a wider kind of set of teachings. And that might be more two dimensional, you start feeling the richness of it and why it's being said, and the purpose it's being said, this particular teachings, and they don't meant to be stand to be stand alone. They're meant to be part of a larger kind of ecology of teachings. So then it might become more two dimensional. And then a person might, all along or some point they start practicing with those. And then they realized that those practices, those teachings, have a context in their own practice in their own life. And then then all kinds of interesting things happen. We start looking at how we can practice them or how they apply them to our lives. We might feel that well, this didn't make sense for me in my life and my background and then we debate them or argue with them or try to kind of go deeper in them and kind of, you know, and explore them and expand them or stretch them or adapt them. So they work for us or something and it becomes kind of a living relationship with them. So becomes more three dimensional now. And you know, it's like, you know, not just the particular idea, not touch it to the wider context of what the Buddha might have taught. But now it has to do with, you know, our own lives and stuff. And then perhaps, if we keep the metaphor of dimensionality, that maybe there's four dimensions, if, if at some point we not just look at, you know, what it's like for us personally, but we also start kind of the interface with our culture and our society. And so how does this work more

widely in my engagement in society and the world around me or my understanding of what goes on in the environment or the society and so it gets richer and richer all this and then you know, all these dimensions, keep Working, and deepening and moving and, and things change over time. I suspect that if I had. So that certainly happened for me over my decades now of practice. And I suspect that if I had stopped my practice involving Buddhism, in any of those phases or points along the way, those dimensionalities if I would have stayed my understanding of the Dharma Buddhism, then would have kind of gotten frozen at the time I stepped out of Buddhism. I was like, that's what it is. And, you know, for me, because I kept going, I said, No, it wasn't quite just that that it was actually changed and became something different or you know, kept growing. And so you know, each of you in some way or other whether you're here the first time or you've been doing this for a long time, you know, you're you'll be hearing the teachings or engaging the teachings from your particular situation now, and which is hopefully wonderful. And then but it'll also change and develop. And, and just, you know, if you really get into this Buddhism stuff, you know, it may be it's like you know a marriage where you know that you're committed but it can be a little bit strange sometimes. So sometimes you know, relationship to Buddhism can be a little bit of a strain but, and which part which party is most responsible Do you have to decide?

And so, I wanted to give you an example of this for myself, from my life have been very significant part of my journey along this practice, and that is around the topic of intention. And, and maybe it's represented as being different by a very common idea that the second step of the Eightfold Path is right intention. So when I first came into Buddhism, I was practicing Zen. And classic Buddhist teachings were not that important in Zen. When I was practicing there, it was there kind of on the edges, sometimes it'd be talked about, but it didn't really have a central focus for what we were doing. And in Zen practice, there's not a lot of instructions. So there's not a lot of instructions about how to work with the mind and the technique of meditation practice. And there's good reasons not the clients and they don't give instructions because there's a whole different orientation around what practice is. But compared to what we do and be passing out this insight meditation is quite dramatic the difference between the detailed instructions we give and almost absence instructions there, their strengths and weaknesses in both sides. But at some point, I learned little bit about this inside practice. And, and I asked some of the teachers there, why don't we talk about meditation practice in zen, you know, the details of what goes on? And the answer I got back was no. What we do is we talk about our intention is and it involves the purification of our and our intention. And everything follows from that. Now, I thought that was a pretty wise answer in some ways. That and I've noticed this, that if we just keep paying attention to the purpose, the values, the, the attitudes that we bring to our practice, that that's probably like 90% of what helps us develop the meditation practice. And, and if we get, you know, get a good attitude going, that kind of just thinks yourself All kind of almost naturally from itself meditations not to actually do that much then. And, and so I think a lot of the insight instructions, we slowly begin seeing what we're actually doing. And then starting to, you know, correct for it or change it. And so it becomes what we do is in harmony with being present in a peaceful and nice way. But in Zen there was idea was we focus, they focus on that directly. And in fact, that's what I found very helpful in my Zen practice. And I got it I, early in my Zen practice, I got the idea to spend a lot of time looking at what was my deepest intention? What was the kind of Central purpose for which I wanted to live my life for the intention for I wanted to organize my life around and so I spent a lot of time doing that. Sometimes in our daily made it practice on a daily basis, as what is my deepest intention? And I would watch from day to day, sometimes it didn't change. And sometimes it changed. But because I kept asking that question and looking at it, I had a chance to shift and change it to look at what my answer was, and then not just live without the answer as a fixed thing, but rather keep looking at it to angle see if I can refine it, see if there's something else. Interesting, I think I discovered was that if I stated my deepest intention, with a negative statement, that I found it useful to try to reframe it positively. So what I mean by this if I, if my

my deepest intention was to live without fear, that's valuable. But then I'd asked myself for what purpose? Or what would be the positive side of that. And then I'd find that it would come in if I liked the positive side of living without fear. What I wanted to do was to live with love with compassion. And oh, that's interesting. And then it became kind of a different thing. how, you know, it became, oh, maybe I don't have to focus so much on living without fear. I thought that was important. But I can actually access the love or the compassion more directly. And that seems good too. And so, but so I kept kind of looking at this and looking at that then one variation of that was that I did for a year was, I would ask, I asked myself in the morning, what I would do, if I knew I was going to die in the evening. And, you know,

you know, that's an interesting question because if you know if you if you if I tell you, you know, if you told you're going to die in 10 years, that's okay. Five years, I did with this exercise with someone wants to kind of in a workshop I was teaching, the kind of guided meditation. What are you going to do if you're going to what would you do if you're going to die in a year? What would you do if you're gonna die in three months in a month in A week, in three days, in a day, in three hours in an hour, in three minutes in a second. And so in a guided meditation people are kind of following along and was very impactful for people to go through this. But remember, one woman came up to me and said, when he got back to three hours, then it got interesting because I live four hours away. And I could no longer go back home to to clean my apartment or get everything my sky fares in order or something. And then I had to really face myself and really kind of look at what what was important for me, because I had all these things that kind of distracted me that I felt were important. Another person I went through with and then luckily she told me a year later, and there was a happy ending I guess. But you said after that exercise I quit my job because of you know what, you know what's important? So I would do that for a year ask myself that question and what to do for the you know, I was dying this evening and that was very powerful to look at what was most important for me what was the most important thing I wanted to do in that kind of context and how I want to engage my life look at my life, I do during that time, but what did I really want to be in touch with during that time? So this continual kind of reflecting and refining What is my deepest purpose, and, or my deepest intention, I found so helpful. And so then, at some point, I learned about the Buddhist teachings about the Eightfold Path. And again, in zen, we would learn it sometimes more as just a lesson I learned more is just to kind of abstract teaching at first that didn't really Understand or think about how I practice with. And I learned this idea of right intention. And, and I just kind of thought, Oh, that's a nice idea. I didn't really engage with much more. And then I also learned that right intention involves renunciation, intention to renounce, whatever that means, the intention to live without ill will. The corollary being to live with friendliness and kindness, metta to live without any sense of harmfulness, or cruelty or wanting to harm and the corollary of that is to live with compassion. So those seem like a good ideas. And I just filed them away as ideas for quite a while. And, you know, they were part of the overall teachings of the Buddha. So part of the two dimensional kind of thing about Buddhism but At some point, especially when I got involved in this insight tradition, then I started thinking more about what do these mean these right intention and how do I live with them? And a very valuable way that I came to understand it is that as forms of reflection, before I do something, when I had to make a decision, or, or was reflecting what should I say in the to a situation, what should I do? What kind of decisions do I make about what to do? I found it helpful to ask myself, what is my what is the intention behind it? For sure, what's the purpose behind it? And that just was so useful in and of itself. I was shocked to discover. I've asked myself, what's the purpose of saying what you're going to say? Go? Why are you saying what you're going to say? It turned out that I had lots of purposes. You know, someone asked me, you know, where's the train station in Redwood City. And so the purpose is give them information, right? That's it turned out that I wasn't that innocent.

I might want to impress them that I got a good, a good direction giver that I really know my things, you know, my directions well, and I'm an important person who knows the Redwood City and, you know, and you know, or I wanted to get it at night, I wanted to kind of boost up my self esteem as being a helping person. You know, all these complicated things were going layers and layers or purposes. And so by keep asking that question, you know, why, why, what purpose do you have in saying that you're going to do if I engage that honestly, and kept looking, and not just settling or just I'm just giving them the information they asked for? I found Actually, I was really important for me to look at myself and see who I am and how I operate and begin to kind of be transformed by that information. But I found that with these Four thing these three things are renunciation. kindness and compassion, I would ask myself is what I'm doing now what I'm saying and do intuition and be is motivated by one of these things, some kind of letting go. Some kind of goodwill, some kind of compassion for the situation, or maybe the opposite. Turns out sometimes my motivation was the opposite. It was kind of subtle sometimes. And sometimes, you know, just multidimensional purposes which we had we cooperate on. I could have I could have multiple intentions that motivate me. And so yes, some of it was to be helpful, but some of it was, was because maybe, I don't know what maybe you know, I'm late to get home. And I really want to get home so part of my way and motivation to tell people directions this train station is to Just get them away from me quickly. They might like them, but you know, there's this concern, is that compassionate is that friendly to you just to give them directions use, like get them away so I can get home. You know, so it asked myself what motivates you here and what's you know, is it kind is it compassionate? Is it Am I letting go? The only reason I wanted to get home was maybe, who knows maybe so that I could

do Sudoku and you know, so I can let go of that. So the so I found it useful as a as a litmus test or as a way of looking at myself and questioning myself. And sometimes I found it helpful to have that kind of reference point. I didn't have so much the idea that I should be that way. I just found it useful to have that as a litmus test for myself. And I found that useful, explore it and go into it more. And then I started discovering as a practice deepens that it didn't have to be a litmus test or reflection, that the letting go renunciation, which is kind of a big frightening word for some people turned out he was simply an expression or a manifestation of a mind, which has come to really love and feel at home and not clinging to things. Not being attached to things and needing everything to be just right or being in control of things. And actually my heart My mind is healthier and happier when I'm not holding tight to things, and so renunciation is less about giving something up. As it is staying true to the heart, the mind which just feels healthy. The wise good. And so in this idea of or same thing with being kind or being friendly or having goodwill, turns out that sense of goodwill also seem to come out of how the heart naturally is. If I'm relaxed, if I'm settled, if I'm, you know, my mindfulness and clarity of mind is strong. It just that seems to be what dwells in there. And so it wasn't so much that I had to become kind. It was more like, Gil. You know, you'd have to look at your, you know what you're going to say and do and evaluate it that way. It's more like, you've lost touch with it. You're not you're less stressed out, you'll be too busy. You're a little bit caught up in something. How about coming home to a healthy place of being about coming home in a sense to kind of more closer to what it feels like to really be true to myself for true or something? And so it was more like a rite of passage. is to come home. Same thing with compassion is coming home to compassion as opposed to, you know, obligated to be compassionate. And so right intention I felt was was, you know, kind of a practice of coming home. So it was all these things it was and then and then the whole other way that I've started to think of it more recently, and that is that maybe it has nothing, maybe a right intention has nothing to do with intention or it's so different. They mean nothing to maybe a right this word was called the right intention. Maybe it's too limited for what the second factor the Eightfold Path is. And so then I looked into the Pali the original texts and languages and try to understand this word to word as some sun cuppa. And the more I looked at it, the less it looked like intention Some translators translated as resolve, so right resolve, and some translators have translated, right aspiration. And I thought looked at that I looked at that. And, you know,

that was pretty wonderful for me to use those terms and practice those away. So it's beneficial to have those translations. But you know, I don't know if this is what the Buddha had in mind. And, and so it was it was maybe wonder, well, maybe there's other meanings that I'm missing out on. Maybe there's I can expand now beyond intention into some other domain of what it might mean. And, and so I looked at the ancient commentaries and looked at texts and, and it's very hard because to understand because the Buddha didn't define his words. And it was very difficult and I came to understand that peep the English translators have chosen intention, resolve or aspiration. That's just their guests. It's really hard to do much more than guess. And I think that would happen little bit is that in the history of Western philosophy and religions, the idea of will is really important. The idea of intention is really important. And so I think that Western

translators of these ancient texts brought with them this very strong interest in finding intention in the suit doesn't the Buddhist teachings and then found words that fit this very important Western term and then translated in that way. And so my being a Westerner, maybe partly so it worked for me, was beneficial. I benefited from that. I felt that grew because of that, but Maybe if I go back and understand what the Buddha meant, maybe there's a whole other dimension that would be useful for me. And so I did explore it and try to figure it out. And this is my, my current best understanding of what, how it's how we best translated into English or understand it. And it means something more like, right involvement or right application, right engagement. And, and so of the mind. So say that just as just, you know, let's just do it as a thought experiment, potentially, that what I'm talking about is really interesting. I mean, it's like this like most fascinating Dharma topic you've ever heard in your life. And this like you're like right on the edge of your seats and, and your, your mind is kind of gathered around And really kind of engaged and focused. You're you're involved, your mind is involved in the topic that's being discussed. You're not thinking about the time you're not thinking about your knees aching, you're not thinking about what's what's for lunch, you're like really involved engaged. So the involvement and so the mind can have various degrees of involvement. It can be very lackadaisical, it could be almost barely involved at all. It could be just scattered Li involved a little bit involved as well other things at the same time, or it could be fully engaged in a certain way. And the quality of how we engage is actually variable as well. Because we bring along when we felt when we getting engaged, our mental forces to be present for something to be involved with something, we can bring along a lot of different things. We could bring along our Just watch some, you know, young kid or a teenager, you ask them to be do something they don't want to do. I when I was a kid, I was my job every week was to mow the lawn. Mostly I was involved with resentment and boredom. And, you know, that was my you know, what I was involved in. It was you know, I was doing demoing but if you asked me what you know, if you really if I really honest, look back now. So go over your really, what was your What was your mind involved and engaged in? What was I applying the various capacities of mind to do? I was applying myself to being really good at resentment and boredom. And, you know, and effective that was I was drained. I was tired. I was you know, it's exhausting to mow mow the lawn. And, you know, why would you ask a teenager to do this so the way in which we evolved, and so now it's not about, necessarily about using the right intentions, renunciation, goodwill and compassion as a litmus test to study ourselves. It's not so much about coming back and being some kind of way. But rather it's, it has to do with how do I want? How does the mind what's the flavor, a quality of the mind, that kind of is infused as I do something. And when I thought about this, then I thought about meditation practice. That is not so much the goal of meditation practice is to be that compassionate or to let go or to be declined, but rather, in a way in which I meditate. The way in which I involved in meditation can I didn't have those qualities. And then I summarized them for myself in a very, you know those three things into one word. And those were that's the word non conflict. Can I be present in my meditation? Can I engage with what's happening to be present with what's going on, in a way where the mind is involved with it all, without a conflict with what is happening?



I might have ideas that something is right and wrong and certain things need to be fixed. My Kitchen Sink needs to be repaired. You know, I'm, you know, I'm not in conflict with that. But, you know, we'll get around to it. The, but to have an attention away of a of the application of the mind and meditation is the application of mind which is not in conflict with anything whatsoever. And that being not exactly the intention, though intention can be part of that. It's not aspiration is not executory resolve, it's more like, and it's not for some conceptual purpose of my idea of what I have. This is why I'm doing this. But it has to do with something that's more like the quality or the very way in which I do something. Which somehow the words intention, which is kind of in play implies having an aim or a plan doesn't really apply or resolve doesn't quite apply because that kind of means in English having a firm decision about something and aspiration implies more like you have a goal for something but application or involvement or how we engage. That's really how are your I am right now here in the present. And that's might be prior way the mind is involved with living, that's prior that having a desire or an intention, or a resolve. It's more like has to do with how we are rather than what we do. And so how we are. And so how do you want to be? And I think part of the treasure we have in our lives, more than what we do is how we do how we are. And so for me now, this second step of the Eightfold Path, which are now for this phase of my life, maybe next week, it'll be different. It all changes, right? I'm very happy thinking of it as right engagement or right involvement, because it has to do with how I feel, how I am and how I want to be right now. And can I be here without any conflict so this An example how you know if this idea of intention and right attention keeps changing for me and now I find it some now and now I found it has it, I'm taking a different understanding of it. I'm not saying it's the right understanding, but it's it's expanded its meaning and its richness for me. And I suspect that as I continue this practice, that what intention means or how I practice and look at it, this right you know, involvement, what that means. But the second factor is eightfold path means will continue to change and morph is I find new applications or new understandings of myself or this life of ours, and it just feels like it's so good. And then I'll end that, what are the lessons for this, for me, at least, is independent of what Buddhism teaches, or really is whatever that is. It's really great. Just engaging in it, the engagement with it, there's something very special about the engagement in anything we do. It's in the engagement, that freedom is found in the engagement, that wisdom and develop and growth, reflection and discovery can happen. And if the engagement itself can have qualities of not holding on tight, letting go of not being hostile towards anything but having goodwill rather than hell. Well, if our engagement qualities of compassion and care, rather than hostility, then I think the engagement just keeps deepening and enriching and becoming better and better. So right engagement, the right involvement, how we are. So that's what I had in mind today. And we have a few minutes before the end. If any of you would like to make some comments, comments about that or would like to make some quiet have some questions. You're more than welcome to bring up anything. But vinita if you could take the mic I would help.

This is on.

You mentioned a method of engagement of non conflict. I get stuck on the negatively phrased instruction can you offer me a positively phrased instruction there?

I think the obvious one that comes to my mind at least is acceptance. But or I prefer rather than acceptance I prefer allowance. Not so much allowing things to be as they are, some things need to be changed, but allowing them to appear in the mind or be into awareness, the awareness doesn't contract, some quality of the mind that stays open fluid without tightening, restricting, being adverse. And then wisdom can operate to decide what we need to really accept or not accept or allow or not allow, but there's a kind of initially space in the mind for things to be there that way, so I kind of like that. But But the problem with sometimes the problem with the positive is that it can seem too much like

something we have to do and not Conflict is more about what we don't do. And that sometimes allows for more inner and outer possibilities to emerge, that if I think I have to do something, even something as, as accepting as acceptance, it can be very subtle, a little bit too much being controlled a little bit too much kind of having an agenda of what's supposed to happen. So having non conflict or non resistance sufficient in my mind works, sometimes makes more room for the things to be in their pristine perfection. That makes sense.

Yeah, the concept of allowing or accepting, at least in the moment really helps me a lot more.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So we all have different ways, reference points. And there again, there's a there's a kind of that's one of the themes today is our practice and the words we use, the concept we use will change over time. There are times when acceptance and allowance was kind of really the operating, that really worked for me and was meaningful. And other times with this, like right now, like this idea of non conflict and non resistance seems to be more than, you know what speaks to me and points to my mind. So there's what this means that, you know, for these, listening to these kinds of, you know, Dharma teachers like myself, you know, we're always going to be limited in what we teach, can feel a little bit sorry for us. You know, we because we have to use words we can't, you know, we can't have too many footnotes in these talks, we, we have too many footnotes in the talk, we can't like say, well, it can be this way and that way, and this way and that way. And so you have to sort of listen to us and say, Well, that didn't work today. And maybe it'll work someday or that worked for me last week. And if I hear what the teacher say, and then if I, if I just change one of the words then it all works for me. So this is Part of the year engagement, your involvement with the teachings with the teachers is to be it's kind of like active learning that we're involved in active learning means it's not passive where you're just trying to, you know, just be told the truth, but rather it's, you know, thinking about it, engaging it and finding out because and that way it's easier for me to be a teacher because I don't have to worry too much by getting 100% right for each person. Yes, in the back.

What what I'm finding myself reminded of with your, especially the end of the talk, Gil, where you talk about no conflict, is the first verse of the Dhammapada which I love Only one I know who knows well, but it's it's something like beacons something like all experience is led by mind created by mind made by mind, speak or act with a peaceful mind. And happiness will follow like another departing shadow. Yeah.

Yes, thank you there was. I think that though that the opening of the Dhammapada speaks to this very nicely.

So, Gil, I

appreciate what you're saying about non conflict within myself. And yet I feel especially in these times when there are groups of people that are being demonized that if I see something like that happening, I feel Very moved to stand up for them.

Yes. I'm happy to hear that. So this is where this is where it's a little bit hard to, you have to have to listen to the, you know, to what I said very carefully. Because what we're moved to do is different than how we receive things in our mind's eye we receive things in our awareness. So the idea of not being in conflict with anything means that we're not in conflict in how how we perceive it in the perception of it in the registering, oh, this is what's happening, the mind doesn't contract the mind doesn't resist, the mind doesn't close down. The mind doesn't get agitated. The mind stays balanced and peaceful and calm. And that allows wisdom to operate the law allows our best discernment or best understanding of what

happens and allows us to tap into some of the best empathic response is that we have about a situation. So if something's happening, if you see something on the sidewalk, someone is doing something, you know, racist or someone's doing something that's really demonizing someone else. Then you because you might have might, because you have this ability to stay calm and open rather than immediately get all tight and to walk up and stand between the two people look at the person who's angry, and look at them in a very relaxed kind way and say, you know, what's, what's happening here? And you're clearly not going to try to stop it from continuing to happen. But you're putting yourself in the middle of it, but you're trying to engage in a way where they don't feel attacked, but maybe it stops the behavior of what's

going on here.

Or, you know, wow, someone what if some, this is what I witnessed this once, once, many many years ago. I think I've told this story that there were people in, in terrible kind of conflict on the street. And one person was kind of trying to get away and he's really big, strong people are trying to get her and but he wasn't really running away and but it was really ugly. So I tried got in the middle of it, but I didn't, I didn't know quite what to do, and these big guys would step towards me. And, and so my best best response I had to that was, I would step backwards. And there's the closer you know, because I was in the way between them and this person. And then this other person walked up and said, and I'll do the same thing set up and said it looked at the people said, you know, if this was happy, if I was that person if this was happening to me, I hope that you will step in and intervene for my sick. And he said it in a very calm, very relaxed way. And that diffused the whole thing. And so, you know, there are examples of when people can stay relaxed in a sense in their mind, which which what it means to be that awareness is allowing things to just arise that sometimes really wise and dedicated and energetic responses can happen to what goes on. And that's what I hope, I mean, I want us to respond, I want you to respond to do something, I don't want to be passive and ignore it. But that's not what I mean by allowing. I hope that things that need to be stopped, things that shouldn't be accepted. In our behavior, we don't accept them. But with we'd hopefully do it in the wisest way possible. And we can do that because we've learned to kind of stay calm or stay open or have an allowing mind We're allowing heart. And that's why, you know, this is why they weren't allowing non conflict. You know, they don't have to really understand though exactly where the location of that is. That makes some sense. What do you think? So thank you for today and thank you for your engagement, your involvement. And may you get great benefit from taking a good look at how you engage how you apply yourself to whatever you're going to do. Thank you.