

## Introduction to Buddhism Part 5: The Equivalence of Ethics and Enlightenment

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So good evening, everyone. And welcome to IMC. In coming down, thinking about coming down here to teach, I had this image of this talk being a little bit more like a fireside chat. I think because I am feeling for. That's because what I want to talk about, for me personally, feels very personal or kind of intimate, and something is close to my heart in some kind of nice way. And so it's kind of like sharing this with you. So it just kind of feels little, you know, so far as it chats, like I am more intimate or something.

And though it might not be obvious to you, that's how it is for me. I'm continuing on the series of talks that I'm giving since the beginning of the year, I called Introduction to Buddhism. I'm doing a variety of kind of topics of what Buddhism is or could be, or how I understand it. And today, I want to talk about Buddhist ethics. When I was new to Buddhism in early years, a long time ago, there was very little discussion about ethics and it was kind of like almost like an afterthought. It wasn't considered that important, you know, or wasn't given any important place.

It was kind of like there. And sometimes passing reference would be made to it. But it was kind of like a classic idea that Buddhism there's a path of practice, a series of practices that people do, or series of stages to attain, kind of or moved through, that are, as I've already said, you know, organized in three major categories: ethics, meditation, and wisdom. And ethics is first. So, you know, you really want to get to the wisdom part. That's what's really important.

And since we're all sophisticated people, grown ups, and you know, smart, and you know, we want the wet ethic parts, and then we want the wisdom part, and the ethics was kind of like kindergarten Buddhism, you know. It's like, you know, it's a kind of, you know, kind of

a good idea. Let me tell you about the wisdom kind of feeling. And so the ethical parts of Buddhism didn't seem to have much importance. And then there was a kind of discussion when I got involved in this tradition, which is the Theravāda tradition, and based on the earliest teachings of Buddhism back, the Buddha there was a funny kind of attitude the people had about from outside, looking in to the tradition that were in here.

On the one hand, people would say that they were the selfish ones. We had a college student come here once who had taken a class on Buddhism, and he'd been told in class that the Theravāda Buddhists we are are the selfish ones. And in Mahāyāna, the people are altruistic, the other kind of Buddhism. And so he came. She kind of he thought that was kind of, you know, strange, or a strange group of people who are all selfish. So he specifically came to find out what they looked like.

So this is what he saw. And because there's some, there's a critique of Theravāda Buddhism from later Buddhism, that these early Buddhist people, they're just interested in their own enlightened, and they're selfish. Then on the pendulum swings the other side. And there's the other critique of our tradition is that sometimes people say it's all about ethics, and just meaning that when people say it's all about ethics, it's like, This is like, you know, they're missing the important parts of Buddhism. Or maybe they're a little bit puritanical, a little bit overly strict, and a little bit kind of caught up in rules and regulations. And that's not really where the heart, the spirit of Buddhism is.

It's about freedom. And you won't express your freedom, and be free, and be wise, and you don't want to be restricted. So there was always attitudes. And so, on one hand, it wasn't taught much, and you got a sense it was kind of like kindergarten Buddhism. On the other hand, you got the sense that it was, you know, somehow because we weren't interested in ethics, we were selfish. But on the other hand, we were too interested in ethics, and we were uptight, and so it was kind like, you know? So those are kind of messages I got early on.

And then I started studying for myself the early Buddhist teachings, and surprisingly, I think the ethical teaching started jump out more and more, and there were such teachings like this that brought ethics and wisdom together. There was a statement that I am an ethics our ago. There's an analogy. Did ethics and wisdom go together like two hands, like the right hand and left hand washing themselves, washing each other? To take two hands and you want them to wash each other, they need each other. And that the intimacy or the compatibility of ethics and wisdom was that they were really working together to do the same task.

They weren't so separate. It wasn't like one was a low status and one was a high status, but they have a certain quality, like two hands washing and washing themselves. And then there

is a statement that about a wise person. The Buddha once talked about who is a wise person. He actually talks about who is a wise person of great wisdom. So now we're back into wisdom, and the Buddha said, A wise person of great wisdom is someone who is concerned with the welfare of themselves.

Aha, this is the selfish school, the welfare of others, the welfare of both self and others, and the welfare of the whole world. That's a wise person of great wisdom. And this concern with a welfare. Maybe not. Doesn't some people associate directly with ethics, depending how we define ethics? But it does show that if ethics has to do with how we relate to the world and how we care for the world, that this is what wisdom is defined. Someone who has his kind caring attitude and concern for the world and a person of great wisdom is someone, you know, is someone who is enlightened.

And the idea that so someone asks, you know, I'm involved so much as tell somebody you out, Buddhism. That's all Buddhism. That's the one that's a school, that religion has enlightenment. What is it like to be an enlightened person? Now, you know what to say, and someone who is enlightened is concerned for the welfare of the whole world, self, others, both self and others in the whole world. And so these are interesting statements that are made.

And then it gets more and more interesting the more I studied it, and at some point it became inseparable the Buddhist teachings about ethics and the Buddhist teachings by wisdom, inseparable the path to liberation, a path to awakening, enlightenment, and a path to ethical maturation. That the path to the path to enlightenment, which is clear what Buddhism is about, is the same as the path to the maturation of our ethical of being an ethical person. That the culmination of becoming an enlightened person is to become completely through and through an ethical person. These two, they're not separate, isn't like one is younger in Buddhism, but they really go together. And the kind of the way you know whether someone's maturing in enlightenment is if they live in a more ethical way. Now, it's possible to be ethical in some ways. It's possible to be ethical following the strict rules and regulations.

But then if you're doing Buddhist practice, then the Buddhist practice, all the different elements of the Buddhist practice, have an ethical quality to them, have a quality of developing a person's ethical life. And else, I'll describe that a little bit. First, I want to say about the goal, the enlightenment goal. Why I say that the enlightened person is also an ethical person is that this is early Buddhist tradition will say that makes a claim that all unethical behaviour, whether it's by physical action, by speech, or just how you think, how you think, all unethical behaviour is comes out of three fundamental tendencies. They call them the roots, and those roots are considered to be unethical. And the language that they use is more strictly,

our tradition is not ethics. But they use the word unwholesome or unskillful.

And so there's three unskillful roots, a basis, foundations for all unethical behavior. Those are greed, hatred, and delusion. The definition, the most common definition in this early tradition for what enlightenment is, for what *nibbāna* is, it's the destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion. The very basis for being unethical is destroyed with enlightenment. And if those are the roots for our unethical behaviour is destroyed, then the person is become ethical. There's not going to do anything intentional, consciously intentional to harm other people, to do something that's hurtful for others. If these greed, hate and delusion have been uprooted, so this is how I really come together with enlightenment. Inseparable, inseparable.

And the Buddha was most commonly kept referring to people who are enlightened, or to enlightenment, or to *nibbāna*, in what could be called ethical terms: the destruction of greed, hate, and delusion. He didn't talk about it now: a cosmic consciousness, or some great blissful state of mind. He had lofty terms for it, like enlightenment and awakening, and liberation and *nibbāna*. But over and over again, we actually explained what he meant, explained it by the destruction of greed, hate, and delusion. And there are other words, a little bit like that: the destruction of something, the ending of something, the letting go of something that all these things attachments that are the source for being unethical.

So then it's what about the practices? So last week I talked about the Eightfold Path, and these are eight sets of practices, which are a way of organizing all the important practices in Buddhism that lead towards liberation. And if we analyze these eight, for these eight sets of practices, it's pretty easy, I think, to see how each one of them has an ethical quality. They're ethical in nature. The first one is called right view. And one of the ways the right view is understood it's a having an insight, having a really clear understanding of the nature of suffering: its arising, its ceasing, its ending, and the way to its ending.

Suffering is another way of talking about harm. If you understand about suffering really well, if you are intimately connected and know it well. That's one of the jobs of Buddhists. It shouldn't be a public advertisement. No one would come if I come to Buddhism and become really intimate with suffering. Now, that doesn't sound like very much fun, but this is kind of to really have a really clear understanding of the illness is a way to the cure. And so to really understand not only suffering, but the origin, the beginning of, and how it arises, how it comes to be.

But more importantly, that we're not stuck with it, that there's an end to it. It could stop if we could cease. And to have some sense of how it works makes a person acutely aware of suf-

fering and the possibility of ending of it. That lends itself to that person now becoming very sensitive to suffering in others as well. And with that kind of sense of sensitivity, people don't want to cause harm. They don't want to be involved in art causing harm. So this right view built into it, this idea that a view that kind of wants to kind of decrease harm of production in this world.

The other thing that the right view is its understanding that our conduct and how we act has consequences, and that good behavior ethical behaviour has good consequences, and unethical behaviour has bad consequences. And to be acutely sensitive to that is one of the ways of becoming. I want to be more ethical. Not because we follow rules that we should be ethical is that we don't want to have those kinds of consequences for ourself and others. The second of the Eightfold Path is right attitude, right intention. And these are three sets of attitudes with which everything we do. We do it with these attitudes, and two of them would seem explicitly ethical, because to one or two of them have or having an attitude of kindness, an attitude of compassion, attitude of non ill will and non cruelty.

And you have those qualities in yourself and your attitude. But go about your life. Then you are going looking the world ethically. The next three are all ethical explicitly. So right speech, right action and right way of life. So we don't right speech. You don't lie. Right action. You don't kill, steal, or harm through your sexuality. Right livelihood. You don't have a way of living in the world or livelihood that is causing harm.

The presence, the cause, and the cause, and the ending of harm, is the core definition of ethics is in Buddhism. It's all about harm and ending of harm. It's not about some kind of abstract, ultimate rules coming down from the heavens that you have to act a certain way. It's this very practical concern about not causing harm and causing benefit. The sixth of the Eightfold Path is called right effort, and that is the effort that if you notice you're doing something that is unwholesome, unhelpful, unethical, you note, you notice that, you notice for yourself that this is harmful, then you would stop doing it. If it's skilful, wholesome, helpful, beneficial, then keep doing it. And this is a little principle that applies in many areas of life.

It's often considered to be really the essence of meditation practice. If we're going to become our own teachers in meditation, this is the guideline by which we look at our inner life as we meditate. And what I am thinking about right now is the attitude I have in my meditation. Is the way in which I'm practicing right now skillful? Helpful, wholesome, beneficial or not. So you know, if you are thinking about, you know, mostly thinking about your sitting down to meditate, and your whole time you're trying to calculate the best lottery numbers, you know. But then you make all right. Effort means I look at what I'm doing and see it is helpful, or, you

know, it is skilful to do this, then you might discover, you know, it's not that helpful to spend meditation time thinking about lottery numbers, and then you might stop doing it.

Or you might look at your rally trying hard to get concentrated so you can get, you know, some kind of wonderful bliss states, and you look at yourself as you're doing this. Say, Wait a minute, this kind of striving? Can it be a little bit a conceited effort to have really good bliss states? This is actually unwholesome. It's unskillful to do that, and to really and you feel that inside. You feel the tension of it, the strain of it. This doesn't feel good. And because you feel the tension, we let go. What this disclaimer holds to valuation, whether it's skillful or unskillful lends itself to being ethical.

And then we come to right mindfulness, a seventh of the impactful factor. And this is where it gets even more interesting. There's plenty of people here in the West teachers and who've taught mindfulness with very little reference to ethics. For the Buddha, he repeatedly talked about how the practice of mindfulness is an ethical practice, that practising mindfulness makes a person ethical, that the practice of mindfulness really paying careful attention in of itself diminishes these three roots of greed, hate and delusion, that the more mindful we get, the more difficult it is to act unethically, the more difficult it is to violate the five precepts of not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not getting intoxicated. And so there's something about the careful sensitivity that comes of mindfulness. And now we're really talking about we are becoming our own teacher. There's nothing about rules any more, nothing about you're obligated to be ethical. It's all from the inside out.

Through being more and more aware of the impact of what things happen to you in the inside. You realize, Wait a minute, to kill someone feels really lowkey. Even the motivation to do it is a kind of violence to me. To steal, to engage consciously and intentionally in sexuality in ways that harms people, it just feels really bad. You can feel how we're knotted up or tight. We're alienated from our ourselves. We're cut up in states of mind which are not productive and helpful for yourself or for someone else, and we are feeling the stickiness of it, the in an undissatisfactory quality of all these different states. And it's kind of like you take your hand off a hot stove, like you don't want to touch it. And so ethics, at this point, through mindfulness has that kind of almost physiological, biological kind of instinct is part of it. You get close to wanting to harm someone through your ethics, and you pull your hand back, No, I don't want to do that. Because we're so sensitive.

Generally, it's thought that more often than not, most the time, that those people who are doing unethical things in the world. They're actually out of touch with themselves. They've somehow been disassociated from their feelings, their emotions, and the impact, and really

paying attention to what's really going on here. They're living up in their head, they're living and their desires, their of being projected forward into the goal and what they want, and the, you know, the lust for power. Sometimes the Buddha time. And the Buddha connected unethical behavior with the desire for power. And so, over and over again, Buddha talks out mindfulness cultivates ethical and ethical people, ethical people.

And then is the final step, the Eightfold Path, is right concentration. And right concentration is a beautiful practice of settling the mind so that it's unagitated. The mind is tranquil. The mind is clear, undistractable. So the mind then could not so much focus on something. The mind can attention can settle on something like other breathing and just be there, just easily and almost naturally, because there's no distraction. There's no agitation. A mind that has no agitation is tranquil and clear. Is a mind that has very little or no greed, hate and delusion. It has very little preoccupation with wanting to kill or steal or lie or sexual misconduct, or, you know, thinking about where the local liquor store is. Those are all agitated states to be involved in and to.

And one of the wonderful functions of concentration practice is to give an individual a really clear experience inner experience of a kind of ethical purity, a kind of clarity or feeling of clean cleanliness inside of the mind or the heart or the inner body that just feels so great. It's kind of like, great, like waking up from the most refreshing nap you've ever had. Ah, why it's so good. I feel so clear and bright and rested and all that. So that to discover this kind of ethical clarity inside is one of the wonderful consequences of getting concentrated. If you experience that, then you're probably not going to be unethical, because it's kind of a violence of violation of this wonderful, very healthy, wholesome, beneficial kind of experienced way of being in the world. And we learn that to be unethical, we are becoming more agitated. You have to be agitated in some degree, to be unethical. And the more agitated we become, the more alienated we come from the core of who we are in our life.

So that's kind of going through the Eightfold Path and saying how each of those steps has an ethical quality to them. An ethical quality means it has to do with how we live in relationship to other people and the world around us, and that as we follow the right path, it becomes a natural thing to want to live in the world and the world of other people and not cause harm. And even better to be concerned with the welfare of others, to care about people, and one in one to take care of them. And I find that one of the So as you know, I practised and as I studied, I just really start seeing more and more the convergence of wisdom and ethics, the convergence of doing the mindfulness practice, and not only becoming ethical, but becoming more interested in ethics. I believe that the deeper one practices, The more thoroughly and

mature someone comes becomes in mindfulness practice or in Buddhist practice, the more natural is for them to be an ethical person, to think ethically, to be concerned ethically.

And again, what I mean by that is to be concerned with harm and benefit, the welfare of the world around them, to care for people and not on and do not want to cause harm, and that becomes an original orienting principle of a Buddhist's life is this idea of not causing harm but doing the opposite, perhaps, of promoting the welfare and well being of oneself and others. And so this practice. So the Buddha back in the ancient times, I think he was brilliant in seeing this connection between inner liberation and becoming ethical. And then he kind of did this wonderful aquito, this wonderful, you know, a slight of hand almost where he kept. He had all these lofty ways of talking about enlightenment and practice, because that's what was expected back in his time about what we know spiritual practices do. They offer lofty goals and a and then he was constantly one of slipping in that it is an ethical goal. It's a practice of becoming more ethical. And he seemed to have been one of the maybe not the only person of his time, but to have emulated the religious life of an ancient in ancient India. Ethics From the ancient literature that we have, ethics was not a big part of religion before him, but with him it became centre stage.

But you don't see that very often. I think if you go read books Introduction to Buddhism books, they'll make a passing refuge reference to ethics. They might even have a whole chapter saying ethics is really important, but it's only one chapter, and then they move on to talk about all the other lofty things, emptiness, no matter whatever, dependent arising, and all these wonderful philosophical things. But the impression I have is that the teachings of the Buddha were through and through ethical in nature. Now, to say that to some people, I'm saying it here, could feel oppressive, because some people have had oppressive experiences with people's promotion of ethics in telling us how we supposed to live, and you should be this way. And some ethical teachings have been really detrimental to whole wide populations of people, that the young people are told basically, You're bad. You're evil because of your sexual orientation, your gender, all kinds of things. And then there's often comes with very strong, sometimes sense of obligation that you're obligated to be ethical, you are obligated to be generous, your object to be this way.

So I've been studying the teachings of Buddhism for a long time, and I don't see anywhere in the teachings of the Buddha where he obligates anybody to be ethical. So there's no way I say he's teaching people how to be ethical with no obligation as part of it isn't at a relief. I think it's great. You're not obligated, but watch out because you'll become ethical. There's no obligation, but you should know it's coming in through the back door. You'll end up being



a good person. Just watch out. But you don't have to. But if you're serious, it'll happen anyway.

So I think It's I think I think it's very important to emphasize the non obligatory nature of all this. I, because of some people, really, I have struggled under the sense of obligation and internalizing the sense that I have to be a certain way to be a good person. And now, so there's a whole different attitude in its early Buddhism with and is ethics. I like to think of it that through the if you start doing the practice of the Eightfold Path, then ethics gets awakened in a certain way from the inside, and it grows and blossoms, and it's not an external rules that you follow. So it's an important part of Buddhism. It's an inter integral part of the whole path to Buddhism. It's not kindergarten. Buddhism is not just something you do little, but at the beginning of Buddhism, you know, the first year you practise and you put it aside and get on to real things. It is the real thing all the way to enlightenment. The path to ethical maturation in Buddhism is the same as the path to spiritual liberation. The path to spiritual liberation is the same as after ethical maturation. They're one and the same.

And if you don't believe me, that's fine. Is no obligation. Find out. And finally, do the practice and find out for yourself. And I'm pretty sure that if you practise sincerely in that, you'll discover this case for yourself as well. So we have about ten minutes before the end. And do you have any questions about this, any comments, any testimonials, or any protests? Thank you.

I'm curious how much you think the emphasis on ethical practice and Buddhism I can get in the way of, like, more shadow integration work. So an emphasis on a certain way of being, I'm causing a subconscious suppressing of different parts of you, and not being able to welcome and integrate them. I think it depends how we, how we incorporate ethics into our life. If we take it on as rules or as social norms that were put to take on, then it can become shadows. Then it can obscure the parts of us that are not that, and all groups have shadows. So our group here, you know, we then Buddhism circles we've been in kind of the normative ethics is to be a kind person, and but if that's what is on kind of what's approved of, then it's a little bit hard to come in here and be mean, you know, or be angry, or be grumpy, you know.

I sometimes grumpy, and they come down here, and I feel, I know I'm the teacher here. I shouldn't be grumpy, you know? And so maybe I don't show my grumpiness that ladysalisa. So then it goes in the shadow. And so that's anger. And also people, and at least in Western Buddhist circles, tend to be a conflict avoidance. And so, you know, it's that's not so helpful. And body kind of comes to this normative idea of what it means to be a good person, or fit into the group, or all kinds of things like that. So all groups have this. All cultures have shadows.

But that's why we have a practice. And the function of practice is like mindfulness practices, or body mindfulness practices is that their job is to put light in the shadow. So we can't help having, you know, these cultural things because we have to find some way to get along. But then it's really important to go to this practice, and I think that then it all that stuff gets looked at. It also means you don't be too afraid of the shadows. It'll all come. It'll all come out if you're practicing mindfulness sooner or later. So I find you following the back.

One of the writings you mention today said that an ethical person is concerned with the welfare of self, the welfare of others, the welfare of self and others, and the welfare of the whole world. I'm interested in what you think the distinction he was making was between all those categories. It seems like the first two cover everything, agreed. But out what about what distinction was he making with self and others and the world? Great. There's a great question. And to the one that I find the most interesting is the third one. And the wise person is concerned for the welfare of both self and others. And how does that different from, as you said, the first two? Because that seems to cover it. And so these might be modern interpretations. I don't know what the ancient were thinking, but one idea is that the both self and other is that we. It's the relationship between us. It's we. as a community. So like a family or a couple or a group like this, it has a different dynamic and different kind of patterns of networking, of relationships, of agreements, all kinds of things. That's there because we're working together, and so is no longer just the individual, but it's the community. It's the connections that are going, and so we're paying attention to that relationship, those connections. When we have both self and other, it's the we, you, I, and we that they say, right? That's but one idea. And the whole world, the this is again, I don't know what they were thinking back then, but I like it because this thing about a welfare of self, welfare for others while for yourself and others. I think in my mind, I think it's probably the meaning in the ancient world. It's primarily human centric. But as soon as you say the whole world, you expand beyond being concerned for the humans, but the welfare of all the animals and creatures and the planet, and you know, the whole thing. Thank you.

The other push to push the button, so there's a light on it, I think, becomes green. I really appreciated the talk, and very timely for me. I was wondering if you could comment on the sorrow that you might experience when you witnessed someone who is suffering from greed, hate, or delusion, and might be behaving in a way that's unethical, the sorrow. So the, as I said, the sixth step of the ethical path is to learn how to make certain distinctions. Distinctions mean what is helpful and not helpful. And so you think, Then there's a distinction between sorrow that's helpful and sorrow that's not. What would that be? What would it look

like? What would that be in my mind? It might. An unhelpful sorrow might be something akin to despair, and a helpful sort of sorrow would be a kind of mourning. Great. And well, and what do you think despair with? Wasn't your word you use despair? Yes. What are the conditions that have to be there that are in the in a person so that they would experience something and feel despair, definitely agitation. So the agitated and self concern, self concern, self preoccupation, rather than be concerned with that person being having a hard time. I am concerned with my discomfort around it, or my responsibility for it, and so that. And then a healthy kind of sorrow would be a feeling of pain, a feeling of, you know, just genuine concern for the other person without referring it back to oneself. Thank you.

Yes, I would. I think that if we could learn to distinguish between good grief that's what Charlie Brown had, good grief, and if we use that language bad, you know, Charlie Brown language, bad grief, you know, to make a whole different world. We do. We don't want to throw out the baby with bath water. We not kind of reject all these things sadness, sorrow, grief, but we want to be able to distinguish between a healthy and unhealthy version of it. And that's part of the functions of mindfulness. They help us with that. So anything else, all your ethical issues have been settled once and for all. Yes, he the mike, please. Now here I have to make sure that light is on. Okay, I don't know how well thought out this question is, but I have been noticing about myself, having grown up in Brooklyn, that my personality is holding on to an edge, you know? And I think the edge sometimes is a protection of the fear that if I let go of that part of my personality, that I will be more responsible for every thing. I don't know how that connection is than that. You know that there is obviously suffering involved, but that the suffering protects me from stepping off the cliff, you know? So I just wanted to thank you for your talk. First of all because it brought a lot of clarity to my understanding of how the two hands go together and bits. So much sense for me. Thank you.

Thank you. I really, I very much appreciate yourself understanding about this, to be able to be so articulated about this tendency. For you know, you've probably taken your long time to come to that kind of clarity. And I appreciate that you understand yourself that way. And since you're here at a place where you do mindfulness meditation, that I could say that mindfulness, if you really give yourself to the meditation, that you might discover that if, at least in the meditation, you can begin letting go of the edge and beginning to explore more deeply, more of these issues, what's really going on down there, underneath there, and go through the layers. And it's really worth a while to go through the layers. It's possible eventually to put it all down, and you'll be safe. So great. Thank you, everyone. I hope that my little attempt at fireside chat was nice for you all. And a Thank you.