

Binding and Unbinding (5 of 5) Unwholesome and Wholesome Views

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Good morning. This is the last day of this five-part series on wholesome and unwholesome aspects of our mental activity. Because these aspects look similar, it is possible to be confused about which are wholesome or useful and which are not.

Today's topic is *ditthi*, usually translated into English as “views.” Views – our stories, opinions, and philosophies – can be a source of bondage. We can get caught by them. Views can also be a source of freedom, wisdom, and helpful guidance in our lives.

In western Buddhism, there is a tendency to use the English word “views” to refer to unhelpful opinions, stories, philosophies, or metaphysical ideas about what is happening in our world. Because of this strong tendency to see views as unhealthy, sometimes people get the idea they are not supposed to have any appropriate stories, interpretations, wisdom, or understanding to guide and support them in their life.

In the Pali suttas, the word *ditthi* is overwhelmingly used to mean something like speculative views or fixed views. “Speculative” means opinions and views about things that we cannot know directly. They are interpretations or stories.

“Fixed view” refers to when we get caught and attached to the view. We become opinionated about our view – we’re holding on to it as a truth: “This is how it is.” Fixed views can be healthy and appropriate by themselves, but there is suffering involved in how we hold them. There is attachment and clinging to the views: “I’m right and everyone else is wrong.”

This attachment to our philosophies and opinions can be operating whether or not our opinions are accurate. For those of you who have accurate opinions and ideas about what is happening, it is important to consider that the way you hold them can be a source of suffering for yourself and others when there is an insistence and dogmatic attachment to them.

Much of Buddhist practice is about overcoming dogmatic views that speculate about the nature of reality, human beings, our life, and the nature of liberation. Instead, we discover the views and understandings that come from our direct experience – seeing something directly ourselves.

When we are first introduced to Buddhism, we might take the teachings and ideas on faith. We might have enough faith that we are willing to do the practice while understanding it is provisional faith, a provisional view. We might reason, “It seems like this is pretty good, but let’s find out.” The point is that we are moving in the direction of insight, where our understanding comes from our own direct experience.

What we do not yet know from personal experience, we take on provisionally as something we can discover for ourselves. We can use reflection to think about philosophies, views, and religious and metaphysical ideas that might be attractive and seem right to us. But we realize we can never prove them for ourselves. They might be outside the reach of direct sensory experience. If we want to hold on to them, knowing that we cannot discover for ourselves whether they are true, then they become articles of faith.

In Buddhism, we are looking for those understandings and views that we believe we can discover and verify for ourselves. For example, there is the simple idea that if you cling, you will suffer, and if that clinging is released, the suffering is released as well. This belongs to the area of direct experience. It might not be easy to

experience. Over time, we can start seeing how this works. “Yeah, in fact, I was clinging, and then I suffered. Before I clung, there was no suffering.”

An important theme in Buddhism is that all our experiences are inconstant. This is meant to be an insight that we can verify for ourselves. The view of life that we arrive at through practice is built on a deepening appreciation that things are impermanent, inconstant, and changing all the time. Over time, we see that this insight has a liberating quality. Freedom from ideas of constancy, permanence, and fixity make us more malleable, fluid, and adaptable to all the continuous changes in life.

Sometimes Buddhists advocate the view that there is no self, but this is not actually what the Buddha taught. With some reflection, maybe you can appreciate that you cannot really discover that there is no self. How would you know that? The Buddha focused on what you can know for yourself. What you *can* know is that no specific thing in your experience can qualify as a definition of who you are: “This is myself.”

The direction of practice is to see that what I experienced and took as myself is not really who I fundamentally am. To hold on to that self-image is a kind of suffering, a kind of wind drag that slows me down. Not identifying with that results in more freedom and ease in my life.

As practice deepens, all the particular things in our experience are seen as not-self. But “not-self” is not an idea that there is no self. It is also not the idea that there is a self. The philosophical question of what is and is not a self is considered a speculative view that we do not get involved in. We get involved in what we can see directly and know for ourselves.

In practice, we rely on the understandings and views that come from insight through direct experience. These can give a sense of purpose and direction to our lives. When we see clearly that it is possible to suffer less, to let go of clinging, to see below our fixed views and interpretations and see things more directly for ourselves, these insights can guide our lives.

These insights can be a powerful inspiration and motivation to continue on this path of freedom through direct experience, rather than through speculative philosophies that we can never ascertain directly for ourselves. If there are philosophies that we can directly ascertain for ourselves, then, if we are motivated, we can practice to discover them.

When describing his teaching, the Buddha said: “I just point out the way. It’s up to you to walk the path.” Appreciation of what we discover through our direct experience shows us the path to walk.

We can get wrapped up and caught in opinions, stories, views, and philosophies about how things are. Or we can have understandings that point to freedom beyond stories and show us how to be free in direct experience, by opening up to what is here in a deeper way. We can discover the stories that are possible in direct experience – seeing clearly what is here. One of those stories is the story of freedom: the story of moving from suffering to freedom from suffering, the story of happiness, living a life of clarity and release. This is a story worth living. Maybe we can share with each other our stories of what we discover about freedom.

Over the weekend, you might look at the role that views, stories, and opinions have for you personally. See if you can discern the difference between views, stories, and interpretations that you are caught in and those that you are not caught in. See if you can differentiate between those stories that are helpful for seeing more deeply into your direct experience, and those that obscure real insight into what is happening here and now. Thank you.