

Dharmette: Insight (18) Insight into Suffering

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Hello and welcome to this next talk on the Insight series.

I've decided that it's time to move on to the second insight. The first insight is insight into the inconstant nature of our experience, the impermanent, changing nature of experience as we experience it. There's a lot of wisdom that comes from becoming attuned, seeing clearly the impermanent, inconstant nature of it all. Part of it is the ability to hold our ground, to be present in a non-reactive way, to find our stability in the face of change. This becomes invaluable when we come to the second insight.

In English, the word that is usually used for *dukkha* is translated as suffering. It's a big word, and maybe it's not quite the best way of characterizing the word *dukkha*, the Pāli word, ancient word. But for now, what's wonderful about this word suffering is people do suffer. The second insight implies that we're learning how to be present for suffering, not to turn away, not to close our eyes, not to avoid, but a very honest and clear recognition that there is suffering. This ability for Buddhists, this orientation for Buddhists, very clear-headed, clear-minded, and a willingness to, yes, there is suffering, is a radical thing to do when many people are avoiding their suffering at all costs. Some people are unwilling to be present for their discomfort, present for their distress.

They distract themselves, they medicate themselves, they run away, escape, distract themselves. Sometimes there are strategies of blaming and attacking and looking outside. Sometimes we do things of feeling suffering, but we don't just face it directly and see it. We believe in it. We get overcome by it. We collapse into it.

What Buddhism is saying is, yes, there is suffering in this world. Be present for it. See it clearly. See it from a place of stability, not in a certain kind of way, an attitude that's not for or against it. Even if there's suffering we're going to fix and try to change, there's an ability

to hold a place of just being willing to be present, to see it clearly, and to be honest about it, an honest recognition that we have suffering in ourselves, in the world around us. Then to appreciate that it's invaluable to see it, to know it, if what we want to do is to become free of it.

If what we want to do is to address the suffering in a beneficial way, all the ways of avoiding it, all the ways of collapsing under the weight of it tend to make the situation worse. The idea in Buddhism is don't make it worse if you have a choice. When there's suffering in the world, and there are huge challenges in our world that's always been there, it's very unfortunate that the attitude, the beliefs, the emotions, the reactions we have to what goes on in the world around us, we're actually making it worse. It's bad enough, some of the things that go on, but then we despair or get angry or blame or all kinds of ways in which we respond to it, that we're adding second arrows. We're adding to the weight of the suffering.

So, for example, if someone invites you to their house for a meal, and you come, and just as you come, they burn the meal. They're angry with themselves, they're angry with the food, they're angry with their stove, and they're even irritated that you're there. It's very uncomfortable. It's an uncomfortable situation. How can we make the situation worse? We might make it worse by being angry with them.

We might make it worse by blaming ourselves for coming too late. We might make it worse by running away. We might make it worse by trying to fix the charred food. There are all kinds of ways in which we make the situation worse than it has to be. Our contribution is to show up and react in such a way that we're contributing more suffering to the situation, making it worse. It's bad enough to begin with. Don't add anything to it.

So when things are happening on a national level, a global level, and people are doing things which we feel quite distressing and upsetting, that they're causing a lot of suffering, don't add even more suffering to the world by your reaction. But do have a clear, level-headed looking at seeing this as suffering, but I'm not going to suffer because of it. That is a radical thing to do. That is a phenomenal thing to do, to be able to see and be present for suffering, and show up in such a way that we're not going to suffer because of that suffering. Even if someone is harming us, which we should stop, but we can make it worse for ourselves, for the attitudes, the attachments, the reactions that we have.

As we learn to meditate in mindfulness, as we learn to be present for experience, not trying to have a good experience, not trying to avoid being uncomfortable, one of the most powerful things about mindfulness practice is learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, a willingness to have a stable, clear, honest mindfulness, and really be present for what's there.

If we only know how to be present when things are deeply going well and calm and relaxed and peaceful and we're riding on a cloud of *samādhī*, we're not really getting the benefits of this practice. The benefits of the practice come when we're able to be calm and still enough to be able to look suffering right in the eyes, say, I see you, and not add more suffering on top of it. So even if we're suffering personally inside, to learn to be able to see that clearly, kindly, openly, and don't add second, third, and fourth arrows to it. This is invaluable and very important. That's why we're learning to track ourselves, to see, oh, I'm making it worse now.

As we meditate and get calmer or more settled, one of the benefits of that is not to stay calm, not to identify with a calm. It's like, oh, I'm such a calm person now, this is great. But to appreciate the calm gives us a vantage point to see more clearly when we start losing that calm. When we have a sense of ease, we learn how we lose that ease. In that losing of it, that might be where we are making the situation worse. That is where we have left behind our ability to just be present and to see clearly, oh, this is difficult, and I'm going to be here. I'm going to be present and see it and be mindful. Even if I don't know what to do, at least I know not to make it worse.

This very simple exercise that maybe is difficult to do, it's simple to explain, it goes this way. Set yourself at ease, whatever ease that you can, and notice what takes you away from it. Notice what caused you to lose your ease. See, are you contributing something to make it worse that you actually don't have to do? It's extra to the situation. Maybe you don't have to make it worse. Set yourself at ease and see what takes you away from it. So that's my recommendation for what you could do for the next 23 hours until we meet again.

This is an entry point now for this deeper dive into the second insight, the insight into suffering, *dukkha*. In order to do this well, we need to be able to learn not to add suffering to suffering. We need to learn well how to stay with our ease, stay with our stability and calm, even when we're feeling lousy. That is a phenomenal thing to learn. That's where you can start finding your freedom. You might even find a smile at a time when you're suffering in some way that in the past it despaired you, saddened you, upset you, but with mindfulness of it, your suffering won't bring you a smile, but your mindfulness might bring you a smile as you find this wonderful capacity to be present without adding, without making it worse.

I hope that you enjoy, or at least value, this turn that we're taking now. Remember, we're building this on the foundation of all that we've done now over this year so far: *samādhī* and insight. Now there's a dive for the next week or so into this world of the second characteristic, the second perception, the second insight into *dukkha*, suffering.

Thank you.