

## Dharmette: Insight (19) Aware of Suffering without Suffering

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So hello everyone and welcome to this series on Insight. And we're now into the second half of the year. And what I'm introducing this week is, is built on all that we've done in the first half of the year. So this is not out of the blue, it's not meant to be self-standing. It's meant to have a phenomenal support that we're ready to bring mindfulness to, to, excuse me, we're ready to bring mindfulness to that part of our life that's quite difficult. Right? To the world Buddhist, English Buddhists, call suffering.

An essential part of Buddhist practice is a mature, clear, honest encounter with suffering, with stress, with tension, with the emotional difficulties of our life, the ways that life can be so challenging for all of us, and how to be able to meet that in an effective and useful way. To be able to be present and not collapse in the face of challenges, to meet it and stay in some way strong and open, to meet it and not be defined by the suffering, not be overwhelmed by it, not be confused by it, but to be able to really be present for it in a clear, effective, and honest way. So that we find our way to freedom. So we find a radically different way to be with suffering than how ordinarily we might be. And so to hear this emphasis and be ready, hopefully many of you have been doing this now for six months, this feel like you have, this is in the background, to be able to meet this in a new way.

So the word that we translate by suffering is *dukkha* in the ancient language of the Buddha, Pāli, we call it the way it comes to us. And *dukkha*, D-U-K-K-H-A, is in the ancient language, is actually an adjective, whereas the English word suffering is usually considered a noun. Kind of maybe a verbal noun, but a noun. But in Pāli, it's an adjective. So that's very different. It means that it's always referring to something.

It's a characteristic of something. It's not its own thing. It's not its own event that's there. And so it little bit maybe demotes the word suffering from how it can be seen as being this grand, catastrophic kind of thing that is so big. So the literal Pāli meaning of the word suffering is painful. And it doesn't distinguish between emotional pain and physical pain.

It's whatever is painful, and human life has pain in it. The Buddhist orientation is to give extra attention to the emotional pain that we might experience, because the emotional pain is... or the psychological pain, that part of the pain that we feel that in one way or the other, we are contributing to. We're not necessarily responsible for our suffering, but there is a way in which we contribute to it and that adds to it that makes it much more difficult. There are certain forms of emotional pain which comes with being a human being. To grieve is painful.

But it's not wrong to feel that pain. There's something sacred about grief and about that pain of grief that's very tender and very human to experience and make room for and allow for. And it's fairly easy to be able to add a degree of stress, tension, that's not necessary to it. And we can suffer more by what we contribute to it, the fear, the resistance, the collapsing into it, the excessive reactivity to it, the heavy beliefs that we live under around what we're experiencing. So we have a contribution that we make. And so the *dukkha*, as an adjective, is the stressfulness, the painfulness, the tenseness that we contribute to whatever the experience it might be.

And it's maybe challenging to talk about our contribution because then we feel like maybe that we're wrong or that we did something, a mistake, or that somehow now I'm being blamed for the suffering that I have. And that is not what we're trying to do here at all. We're actually trying to free us from this more complicated way of interpreting and concluding who we are, what we are, what's going on here, and learn how to be very simple, very quiet and simple, so that we can feel the ways in which we add stress, the way where there's tension, the way in which there's suffering that can be met with that which doesn't suffer, that can be met with something that holds it caringly, compassionately, openly, some way holding it so there's a peacefulness. We don't add second arrows. We don't add ways that we make it worse. If anything, what we're adding is how to make it better for ourselves in relationship to suffering.

So some people translate the word *dukkha* as stress. And the advantage of that is that it's not such a big word. And it's not necessarily so automatically tied to our psychology, to our identity, right? That it sometimes does if it's a word suffering. And stress is a kind of an inherent part of human life as well. And maybe it's easier to appreciate that stress is extra

and that we can kind of work with our stress in a responsible way to de-stress.

And the advantage of stress as a translation of *dukkha* is that as the *samādhi* gets really strong, as meditation goes really deep and full, we wouldn't call it suffering anymore, what's there. But we can feel very subtle tension, very subtle stress that's maybe even right in the midst of feeling a lot of joy, right in the midst of feeling a lot of happiness, right in the midst of, in a very subtle way, in the midst of feeling a lot of peace. And so to feel that stress, to feel the subtlest little pieces of tension is part of the onward leading nature of freedom. And even there to find tension and stress in the subtlest and the deepest kind of peaceful states of meditation expands the fullness of that which doesn't suffer, the experience of freedom, of openness, the absence of suffering, into which we can fall, into which we can open.

So the idea that *dukkha* is not its own thing, it's an adjective, that means that it's part of something, which means that suffering is never the whole thing, that it's always a piece of our humanity. It's a section. It's an aspect of it. And I know that sometimes the whole atmosphere, the whole world can just feel distressing and fearful and dismaying and difficult and the weight of the world can be on our shoulders. The idea in mindfulness practice is to practice with the world that we have, the experience we have, not to make it worse, not to suffer more because of it, but to be able to find some degree of stability, steadiness, stillness, some ability of clarity, clear awareness.

So we begin to recognize there's always more going on here than whatever it is we're calling suffering. Whatever it is that's painful for us, emotionally painful, physically painful. And to and to begin to feel that which is more, feel that which is not suffering, so we can be with suffering in a mature, responsible, caring way and a wise way. And when there's enough stability, enough ability to meet suffering without adding second arrows, without making it worse, then the hope is that we can think more wisely, more clearly about it and know how to address it appropriately. And sometimes something needs to be fixed, something needs to be addressed. Sometimes we need to speak to someone or take care of something or do something.

Sometimes we need to take a break or we need to kind of find relief. We need to find a vacation. We need to find some way to, even occasionally, to distract ourselves so that something can relax and be easeful. But it's never meant to be an escape. Buddhism is not, Buddhist practice is not an escape from suffering. It's to learn how to work with suffering in a wise way.

And there comes a time when the meditation, when the mindfulness, the practice is strong, when the best strategy is to learn to suffer better. And that's a provocative statement to suffer

better. What I mean by that is not to just suffer for the sake of suffering. Suffering better is to suffer in a way that's wise. Suffer so there's less suffering. Suffering so that suffering is met with that which doesn't suffer.

Suffering is felt as only part of the picture. Something we can breathe with, something we can find our ease with, something we can practice with. Where the idea of practice is, we identify more with us as a practitioner of peace, of mindfulness, of clarity, of stability, of calm, than we identify with whatever suffering we have. We can meet our suffering with that which doesn't suffer. And if we can't, to be mindful and clear about that, it's okay. If we can't be together with our suffering in a clear and useful way because we're spiraling out, then the appropriate thing to do is to find another way.

Then mindfulness is not the way at that moment. Then it's to do something, shift something. Go for a walk, talk to our friend, you know, maybe do some exercise or... Occasionally, as I said, we distract ourselves so that we retreat only so we can come back later and begin addressing the edges of what is difficult. And not to address it, to try to fix it, but rather to... This is the amazing thing about this practice, is we're not trying to fix something, but we're trying to find our freedom with it. Find our freedom with suffering.

And so that suffering and that which doesn't suffer can meet each other. And there in that and between them, that's where we find our freedom.

So thank you very much, and we'll continue this topic of insight into suffering. Thank you.