

Dharmette: insight (21) Three Kinds of Suffering

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So welcome to beginning of the week as we continue this series on Insight, and the three insights that are core to the Insight Meditation practice is having this deep observation, this deep insight, clarity, deep recognition, change of stress, and of non-identification. And I choose those words carefully as an alternative to some of the usual ways of saying, talking about these three characteristics, three insights, recognitions that we have. And the focus currently is the second one, *dukkha*, the deep recognition, the capacity to recognize, to perceive, to know suffering, stress, de-stress, in such a way that we find our freedom in it. We find ways in which we can grow spiritually and develop ourselves, rather than being overwhelmed by suffering, finding a natural way in which the heart, the mind, the inner life can grow and develop into greater clarity, greater calm, greater care, love, a greater kind of sense of wholeness by how we recognize, how we're present for the suffering of our life. And this, of course, is not easy. And this is why now we're on this, you know, we've done six months already now on *samādhī* and insight to prepare the ground for a deep, useful way of engaging with suffering.

And this long preparation is a way of having a deep respect of suffering, the challenges of it, the difficulty of being with it, but also the opportunities, the richness that's possible by bringing this practice into the middle of it. There is a teaching that goes back to the earliest time of Buddhism, that says there are three types of *dukkha*. The word, the Pāli, the ancient language, the word is *dukkha*, D-U-K-K-H-A. And it's usually translated as suffering. But in its core, it means pain, just a strong discomfort or pain that can be physical. But it could also be emotional.

Yeah. And it could also be quite deeply embodied or rooted in us to become kind of the core operating principle from which, not operating principle, but the core fuel for how we operate. We're reacting and adjusting to our deep suffering in how we see the world, how we see

ourselves, how we engage in the world. Right? So the tradition talks about three types of *dukkha*. And sometimes it's helpful to distinguish these three different types.

And in a sense, there's many, many characteristics of our suffering. There's many kinds of suffering, many ways of understanding it and recognizing it. And different teachers will emphasize different parts. Buddhists have been addressing this issue of *dukkha*, of suffering for 2,500 years. So you can imagine that over time things have shifted and there's been different interpretations, different recognitions, different ways of working with it, different emphasis that goes on. And so if you go through to the history of Buddhist teachings and even in modern world, listen to different teachers, teachers in different Theravāda traditions, teachers in Burma, teachers in Thailand, teachers in America, you'll find different teachers emphasizing different aspects of *dukkha*.

And so it isn't that they're contradicting themselves, each other, but it's that there are just so many different ways of looking at it. And the task is to find out how it's useful for you to see it so that you find yourself not caught in it, not entangled with it, not being undermined or deflated or overwhelmed by it. So there are these three kinds of *dukkha*. And there are three kinds of pain. There is pain, pain, *dukkha-dukkha*. It's literally called. There is the *dukkha* of change. And there is the *dukkha* of mental constructs.

So the first one is just straightforward, uncomplicated physical pain that can be mild and it can be overwhelming. But it's not there because of our psychology. It's not there because psychological reactions, clinging. It's not there because we're caught in attachments. It's there because it's just straightforward physical pain. And for that, we need to have wisdom.

We have to have wisdom to know how to manage it. And we have a lot more ways of managing physical pain in the modern world than they had in the ancient world, where the Buddha, he used the power of his mind in order to deal with his intense pain as an old man. And he would go into deep states of concentration. He said sometimes that's the only time he got relief from his old age pain that he had in the last years of his life. But, you know, to be wise about it. And one way to be wise is not to feel that we have to always endure it, or that we should always use our practice to find our freedom from it or a relief from it. Sometimes we need medication, sometimes we need medical care, all kinds of things that are useful. But not to see it as a personal fault, not to see *dukkha-dukkha* as something that we need to somehow criticize ourselves for having, but it's something that we need to be wise about how to live with and handle and find our way with.

The second is this suffering of change. And here the assumption is that change isn't always

welcome. Right? Or that we want change in a way that's not happening. Change is happening different than how we want it. And so, even if change happens in the direction we want, either way there can be attachment, there's clinging, and there's the suffering of clinging to something and then having a change and go away.

And then that clinging then feels frustrated, feels distraught. And so there's a kind of suffering. So the suffering of change also requires wisdom, but to some degree it requires the wisdom of acceptance, that to some degree human life, in order to find some way to live at peace, at calm and steady, to be wise, we have to accept the fact that things change. We get old, we get sick, we'll die. Other people get old, they get sick, they die. The things of our life shift and change in ways that we don't want, but still they change.

There can be natural disasters that happen in your town, in your neighborhood, and that's a change. And so to be able to somehow navigate the change with ease, with calm, without the attachments being a wind drag, without being protesting against the very nature of change, which is inherent in this natural world that we're part of, things are always changing. And of course we can have some role in changing things in the right direction. Of course we can have some role in keeping certain things the way they are for a while. We can let our cars last longer by changing the oil, or being careful how we drive or something. But we want to be caring and careful but not be attached. And so the suffering of change is when we somehow don't have an accepted change as a given and find a wise way to navigate with it. So a deep acceptance, no protests against the natural movements of change.

And the third, the one that's really core to Buddhism is the suffering of the mental formations. This is the suffering of craving itself, the suffering of attachment, the suffering of the way that the mind engages in things where there is suffering, tightness, stress, clinging, resistance, pressure, irritation, annoyance, built into the very ways in which we engage, relate to what's happening in this world. And here is what the practice has the most power to work with. Here we're learning not to accept things, but we're learning to or finding a way to have a deep letting go, a deep relaxing of this added addition on top of our life that we contribute, which is we contribute clinging. We contribute grasping, craving, resistance, animosity, hatred, greed, jealousy, envy, covetousness, all kinds of things that we add, that all of them that are characterized by tension, stress, a tightening, a pressure that feels very uncomfortable.

And so the suffering of mental formations is a suffering which is inherent in the movement of attachment, in all its different flavors and forms. And it turns out that this is the attachment that is most deep inside of us. That maybe is, for some people, is right there the core operating principle from which they live and understand themselves and define themselves.

And now this is the one that we want to be able to see with tremendous clarity, with a mind that's very calm, still, quiet, rooted, that's part of the whole. This is the function of insight supported by *samādhī*, is to be able to get such a feeling of centered, calm, a sense of well-being, that we can see some of the deepest places of suffering we're holding on tight. And that is one of the great, wonderful, maybe you can call it paradoxes, of this practice. That the deepest suffering we have, we want to prepare ourselves to meet that by cultivating a good amount of settled, calm, well-being, that our sense of well-being, sense of joy or happiness, that can come with *samādhī* and insight, that becomes the field within which we're ready to encounter some of the deepest holding, clinging patterns in our life.

And so this is a path to preparation, being wise not to address things directly and force our way into a peaceful state. But we prepare ourselves, create the conditions, so that we can be present for the deepest clinging we have in a way that allows for the deepest letting go of that kind of mental constructs that involve clinging attachment. So three kinds of *dukkha*. *Dukkha-dukkha*, the *dukkha* of change, and the *dukkha* of mental formations. And each of them requires a different kind of wisdom, a different approach. And so it's not just one way to be with suffering. We have to have some wisdom and understanding of which ones we're working with.

So thank you. And in this process, may you suffer in a way that supports you to reach the end of suffering. Thank you.