

Dharmette: Insight (22) Suffering as Clinging to Release.

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Hello and welcome to this series on Insight. And right now we're discussing the insight into *dukkha*, insight into suffering or stress, unsatisfactoriness. My hope in giving these talks now about suffering is that most of you have been along for much of this progression of practice, of teachings from the beginning of the year, with *samādhī* cultivating a deep capacity to be calm and centered and quiet, still, peaceful, relaxed, and also these talks about insight. The deep capacity to be present for the changing nature of this world. In doing so, to be aware of how we resist that change, how we stop it, how we hold on to it, how we struggle with it. One of the ways we struggle that Buddhism emphasizes is one way or the other, we're clinging to something.

We cling to how things were, we cling to how we want them to be, we cling to how things are, we cling to how they should be, we cling to our beliefs, our thoughts, we cling to identity, we cling to our possessions, we cling to people. There's no shortage of things that we cling to, we get attached to, we hold on tight. All of those can be felt, if you're really deeply flowing in insight practice, as a resisting or interfering with a changing, moving, inconstant flow of experience. It's a way of standing in the river and putting up your hand and telling the river to stop. Maybe even putting the hand in the water to kind of stop it. You can put a lot of effort into stopping the water, but the water will flow right around your hand.

So there's something we can feel, we can feel at some point and the deeper the practice goes, how clinging and attachment doesn't serve us. It actually feels like it's a distraction, it's an interference, it's limiting ourselves in a very important way. The desire to let go of clinging is not an instruction, not a thing you're supposed to do, you should do. But with insight practice, *samādhī* and insight, at some point we know for ourselves, we can feel for ourselves, this is not good. Not only that, we can feel more deeply that the very nature of clinging, in the heart of it, it wants to let go. It wants to release.

It's work. It's suffocating. It's tight. It's painful to cling. In the middle of it, there's a desire to release, to free. In deeper insight practice, it's not a matter of following an admonition, you should let go. Rather, it's listening deeply to the letting go that wants to happen.

So in this, he talks about suffering, the second characteristic, the second really important insight, insight practice. The deep recognition of something about suffering. It may be helpful to appreciate that when the Buddha talked about the suffering that he really wants to address through this practice, that he defined it in a particular way. He defined it as clinging, sometimes as craving. Clinging is a kind of very, kind of holding on tight, much more than is needed. There's something about the nature of holding on tight that hurts, that is stressful, that is painful.

One of the strong definitions the Buddha gave of suffering, he called suffering, the human suffering that we have, the bundle of clinging. The bundle. It isn't just we cling to one thing, but a few of us cling to a lot of things. We have a big bundle. Some people keep accumulating bigger and bigger bundles. Every time we look at an advertisement or see something that we want, we hold on to that.

All through the day, we're accumulating more things to cling to, more things to hold on to, more things that we're grasping. The Buddha said that there were five, back in his understanding, five primary areas of this clinging. We can cling to appearances, our own appearance and others, which is a multi-billion dollar industry taking care of appearances in this country. We can cling to sensations, to whether things are pleasant or unpleasant, comfortable or uncomfortable. Many people are holding on to comfort. Comfort means so much more than just pleasantness. It means security or success or something. Clinging to comfort and discomfort. Clinging to ideas of things. We cling to stories.

We cling to imaginations. We cling to the stories of identities, me, myself and mine. And we cling to consciousness or cognitions that we have. So each of these things just kind of to, it doesn't have to be these five, but for the Buddha, he puts in these five buckets of bundles, these five bundles that we're gathering up all the time. It isn't the bundles, it isn't the things we cling to that are the issue. This is a very important part of this Dharma practice. The issue is not what we cling to. The primary issue is the grasping itself. To separate those two out is so important because otherwise we think we have to let go of everything, our possessions, our wealth, our friends, everything. But we don't have to let go of anything, but we have to let go of the clinging to those things.

In the lingo, the clinging, we might have greater wisdom. In some things we see they don't serve us, they harm us, and so we put them aside. But if they benefit from some things, we

don't have to put them aside. We can live with them freely, with an open hand, without clinging. This deep movement of letting go of the grasping, the clinging, the holding on, the tightening, is really the emphasis of Buddhism.

So yesterday I talked about the three kinds of suffering. We're here now where *dukkha* can be understood, if you stand it as literally as pain, there is *dukkha-dukkha*, the pain of pain, like physical pain, that's just pure and simple physical. There is the suffering, the pain of things changing. They're not being what they are. People die, get sick. Things will fade, things break. Societies change. Then there's the suffering of the mental formations, the mental constructs that we have. The third one is really the primary concern. We can have mental constructs, mental clinging, grasping towards physical pain.

We can have mental grasping and clinging to a relationship to how things are changing or not changing. We can have mental grasping and clinging to our clinging, to the constructs we've created. So it's the third one, which is a primary concern. They make the first two easier. If we're not grasping, clinging, resisting, physical pain can be a lot easier. I'm not saying it becomes easy, but it removes the second arrow. If we don't cling to change, then change becomes easier. It's not always nice, it's not always welcome, but it becomes easier to find our way. One of the remarkable things is how our hearts, our deep inner psychological life, generally knows how to work through how to find its way with grief, with loss, with change, with what's coming new, with adapting to the new way of living. If we give it a chance, give it time, but if we cling and resist, we don't give this deeper heart a chance to find its way.

We interfere with it. Then mental constructs are so much nicer and easier, there's no clinging. We learn to let go of those constructs which have, that harm us, for no other reason, because they involve this tightness and resistance. So the core suffering that the Buddhist practice is meant to address is the suffering that comes from our mental clinging attachments that we have. As I said at the beginning of this talk, the function of deep mindfulness practice, deep *samādhi* practice, is to help us become our own teacher that we can feel and recognize how we shortchange ourselves, how we harm ourselves through our clinging, our attachment. But even more important, we can feel that deep inside... deep in the heart of our clinging, our attachments, sometimes our fears, sometimes our strong desires, sometimes our very clinging to identity, to me, myself, and mine. There is a wish, there's a feeling, there is a movement towards freedom, to letting go of that clinging. So we become our own teacher when we recognize that, the wisdom of non-clinging and the deep request... that even clinging asks of us, that our inner life asks of us, let go, release, put down this burden, free yourself from all this work of clinging, the yoke of clinging, the bondage of clinging. Put it down, let

it go, become free of this suffering.

So, the insight into suffering is invaluable so we can see that in the heart of suffering is a desire for freedom, which is an invitation. Let go of clinging, of holding on. Thank you.