

Dharmette: Second Arrow and Fresh Start

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So, earlier today I talked about how there's always two things: what's happening and your relationship to it, how you relate to it, and that that's a big statement, that half of what's going on for you is your relationship to it. And sometimes what's happening that we're focusing on is the relationship. And then the question is, how are you relating to your relationship? Some people really are troubled by how they respond to the world, react to the world; they criticize themselves for it. Some people are proud of themselves by how they relate to the world. And so that relationship to the relationship can just keep going back and back and back.

And then if it goes too far, we lose touch with reality. There's reality, there's our relationship to it, then there's our judgments and attitudes towards how we're relating. And then there's what that triggers in us. And then that triggers in us. We relate to that, and we're concerned about that, and continues that cycle.

And so people are... What's happening in the world is kind of disappeared. People are just spinning out in their thoughts and with all that. And one of the functions of mindfulness is to wake up and come back to here, to here, right here and now, and to kind of somehow, in a loving way, appropriate way, to cut through the tremendous fog, the tremendous thick soup of preoccupation, entanglement, all the things we're worried about and concerned about, and be here. Partly so I can start over again, but start over from the beginning so we have a better chance to kind of start fresh. And this is one of the very ways, one of the ways to be very generous to ourselves, and that is to kind of assume from time to time that you're allowed to start over.

You don't have to carry the full bag of all your conditioning, all your energy, all your challenges, all the ruminations, all the thoughts, everything with you all the time; you're allowed to start fresh. And then see how you find your way. Taking a deep breath, taking three breaths,

to wake up from the fog, the soup of concerns, preoccupations, fantasies, futures, pasts, guesses about things. Yes, fears about things that are not happening here and now, and show up here and get grounded to have a fresh start. Oh, I'm just sitting at IMC. I thought I spent the last hour in, you know, trying to deal with the unemployment office and fear about my future.

And, you know, I'm not even, I'm not in the unemployment office. I'm at IMC sitting here. You're allowed to come back here. Be here. Be here, be here. And then start fresh.

And then as you start fresh, there's two wonderful stories that we like to highlight, ancient Buddha stories we like to kind of remind ourselves of in our tradition. One is the story of the Buddha teaching a group of people, like maybe this number of people here. And the Buddha says, if a person comes along, and there's an archer, and the archer strikes that person with an arrow, shoots an arrow at the person. Well, that hurt the person. And everyone nods their head, oh yes, that would hurt. And then the Buddha said, well, what would happen if the archer then sent a second arrow at the person?

And it struck the person. Would that hurt even more? Oh yes, that would hurt even more. And so then the Buddha said, basically, he said something like, the first arrow is what life gives you. The second arrow is the arrow you shoot at yourself. So all kinds of things can happen.

You can get sick. That's bad enough to be sick, maybe. And then you can shoot second, third, fourth arrows at it. How could I have gotten sick? I must have done the wrong thing. I eaten the wrong food.

You know, I'm somehow... I'm supposed to be a person who never gets sick, and I have friends who don't get sick as often as me, so I must be a loser. There's all these second arrows we add to it. Or if I'm sick, I can't do my job, I can't do what I promised, and that'll be terrible. People will hate me. Arrow after arrow goes in.

It could be that something simple happens, and maybe you burn the rice, you're cooking. Okay. That's bad enough. Maybe your kitchen stinks a little bit, you know, smells of the burnt rice. That's bad enough. And then you add second and third arrows.

I'm the world's worst rice cooker. No one is as bad as me. And so it builds. And then that's bad enough. And then you feel lousy. And because you feel lousy, that's just proof that you're a lousy person.

Then you feel more lousy because you tell yourself how bad you are. So second arrow, second arrow, third, fourth, keep building. We're allowed to start over. We're allowed to just, okay,

let's stand here, let's feel my feet on the ground. Let me breathe. Let me just feel what's happening here.

Let me put aside all the arrows for the time being, all the judgments, all the reactivity, just the best that I can, I'm allowed just to be. Let's start over. What is happening? Well, it's still. It's a little bit smells of smoke and burnt rice here. So what?

So what? I think I need to turn off the heat at least. I think I need to maybe take the pot outside so the smoke doesn't keep filling the kitchen. Maybe I need to deal with it. Maybe that's okay to do. The second arrows, maybe I can wait. Maybe they can wait.

And so second arrows, be careful with them. Remember you can start over. You're allowed. And sometimes I've started over with the idea that, let me give myself a second chance here. Maybe I can start over and do it in a better way than the way I was doing it. And that's a very generous thing to do.

Oh, I can start over. I get a second chance here. So that's one story, the story of the two arrows. The second story is a story that's somewhat related to this idea, and that is in the traditional Buddhist cosmology, there is a pantheon of different gods. And some of these gods resemble the Greek gods or the Norse gods more than they represent any Christian, Jewish, Muslim idea of God or something. And so they're rascals.

They have their challenges. They have their fights. And they have all kinds of things. And there's different levels of heavens. And so the one level, the heaven that's closest to us in Buddhist cosmology, there is a the chief god there. His name is *Sakka*.

And *Sakka* is also known as *Indra*, sometimes, as those of you who know by the Indian religions. And *Sakka* had a great palace in the sky, had a great throne room, a great magnificent throne, the only *Sakka* was supposed to sit on. And it was, you know, a marvelous place. One day *Sakka* had to go someplace to take care of things elsewhere in the heavens. And while he was gone, this little kind of ugly little runt of a nature spirit, kind of like a little troll, ugly little runt of a troll, scampered up into the throne room, into the throne, jumped up in the throne, and sat there like he wasn't going to move.

And the other gods in the royal court said, this is terrible, and you have to get off. That's the only *Sakka*'s allowed to sit there, and they got angry, and you have to come off, get off, you know, and they were just sending all their arrows at the *Sakka*, not knowing that all the arrows they sent at *Sakka*, they were sending into their own heart. You are terrible, you shouldn't be doing that. We're going to show you what you... Whatever. And finally, they used their biggest card. They said, we're going to go tell *Sakka*. He'll come and take care of

you.

But the problem was that as they kept saying this, being angry with him and yelling at him, step by step, the little ugly little runt of a troll got bigger and bigger and more beautiful and more radiant. And this confused the gods to no end. Like, what's happening here? And so they finally went to get *Sakka*, went up, found him wherever he was, and explained what was happening. And *Sakka* said, oh, okay, I know. I know what this is about.

So he came back to his palace, and he went in front of his throne, in front of where this now beautiful, radiant troll was sitting. And he said to the troll, Nice to see you. I hope you're well. I hope you're comfortable on the throne. It's nice to have you visiting and just know that you're welcomed here. And soon we'll have dinner and you're welcome to come to have dinner with us.

And as he offered his hospitality, his kindness, his generosity to this troll, the troll got smaller and smaller and smaller and then eventually, poof, disappeared. And then *Sakka* went and sat on the throne, and he explained to the other gods, that was an anger-eating troll. The more you are angry, the more you're nourishing and feeding it, and the more it grows and grows and grows. And it's not going to stop growing if you continue with the anger. The only way to handle this is to offer the opposite. Right? And then something relaxes, something dissipates, something disappears.

So how do we relate? Instead of sending arrows, both to ourselves and to the world around us, what if we offer flowers? What if we offer our care, our kindness, our hospitality, our generosity to ourselves and to others? Be very careful in how you relate to anything. The ways you relate is kind of the treasure that we can offer ourselves in the world. In Buddhism, we don't emphasize that there's some inherently wonderful good thing waiting for you in your essence, like some abstract thing.

But rather, we emphasize there's a wonderful, beautiful, wonderful capacity we have for beauty, for preciousness, and it all has to do with what we offer. We offer our kindness. We put our arrows away, and we see if we can relate to whatever is happening in a good way. And always, no matter what is happening, whether it's wonderful and difficult, whether it's arrows or flowers and hospitality, it's always good to remember you can start fresh. Come back to this in the simplest possible way. Your feet on the ground, your butt on your chair, your inhale appearing, the things you see here around you, what you hear here around you.

Come back to this, the simplicity of this. And in doing so, you start coming into a kind of equilibrium, a balance, where you're not caught up in, whether it's arrows, weapons, or whether

it's flowers and wonderful meals that you offer the world. But you find the equilibrium and a balance in the middle of it all that allows you to stay close to that place where we can relate to what's happening here and not spin out into fantasies and abstractions that takes us further and further away. So thank you very much for being here. And we're going to do some cleaning now.