

## Finding the goal in the means

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Yeah, good morning everyone. Welcome to IMC and to our time together. I'd like to begin with an ancient analogy, that Buddhist analogy, and that is that of using, picking up a quail, a little bird, and bringing it to safety. The idea is that, the analogy is that you don't want to hold the quail too tightly and you don't want to hold the quail too loosely. So neither forcefully nor relaxly, neither with stress or strain and not with hesitation or kind of complacency or something. It has to be just right.

Just between those two. So in the same way, the Buddha says that when we make effort in doing Buddhist practice, it should be kind of like holding that quail. So neither too much effort or too little. Neither straining nor being lax or laxadaisical. Neither stressful or complacent. So just finding just the right way.

And so in this analogy, what you're doing isn't really highlighted. It's how we do it that's being highlighted. And this is one of the principles of Buddhist practice, that more important than what you do, it's how you do it. And the how you do it then guides actually what you do. It's so that you do the thing which is ethical or appropriate or helpful, healthy. And so the how we do it is so important that one of the principles in some Buddhist teachings is that the goal of the practice should be found in the means.

So the way your practice should contain qualities, characteristics of what the purpose of the practice is, the goal of the practice. So, for example, if the goal of the practice is to be peaceful, then you should find some sense of peace in how you do the practice. And you don't get to peace by straining or struggling or being in conflict with something. You find some way to be peaceful in the practice. If you want to become a generous person, practice generosity. There should be generosity in the very thing that you're doing.

If what you want is to not to cling, then you should practice in a non-clinging way. Or it should contain some quality. It's hard not to cling. But at least that should be an orientation. Don't cling as you do it. One of the ideas here is that the most healthy thing you can do for yourself in a spiritual life is to liberate the heart, to liberate the mind from all that causes suffering to yourself.

All the ways in which you cling, or resist, or shut down, or push away, that are actually ways of causing self-harm. Because partly the very nature of clinging, the nature of intense resistance to ourselves, some part of ourselves, is that in itself that is suffering in and of itself. And if we practice in an unhealthy way, if we live in an unhealthy way, then that's what we're setting up to be the goal or the consequence. So if we live with hate, chances are that it just kind of reinforces the hate. If we live with love, chances are that reinforces love. And so we want to be really careful so that we can say that's what, love or hate, but how we do anything.

And one of the very important principles in Buddhism is the idea of wholesomeness. The idea of doing things in a wholesome way. No matter what you do, do it wholesomely. And what wholesome means, it feels for our psychophysical system, it feels nourishing. It feels healthy to do it. And that reference point for health is something that is somatic.

You can feel it, you know it for yourself in a very clear way. And the analogy I use, I don't know if it works for all of you, but I've been maybe doing some heavy work in the backyard, gardening or something, gotten sweaty and hot and tired and dirty, and then I'll go take in a shower, and I feel so clean, like my skin kind of vibrates with a feeling of being clean and good and settled, and I feel all warm. Or when I was a little, when I was a small kid, I would take a bath in the evening before going to bed, and then I would just put on my pajamas and slip into bed, but my mother had just washed the sheets and so they were still warm from the dryer. And that was just so, it just felt so somatically comforting, meaningful, healthy to kind of be clean and hang into these warm sheets. So I don't know if that analogy works for any of you, but the idea that it's somatic, you can feel that what you're doing feels good for the heart, good for the mind, good for the body. And that's what makes it wholesome.

And that also then becomes a guide for what we do, because some things we do will never feel that way. If you lie, it's just not going to feel that way. If you are hating someone or hating something, if you really pay attention to the somatic experience of it, deep down inside it's not going to feel comforting or meaningful or healthy even. The only thing that might feel attractive is sometimes something like hate comes with a lot of energy and comes with a lot of righteousness, and that can feel good. But if you feel those, they don't feel good in any deep way either. Even though there might be energy, some kind of being energized or feel

powerful or something that might have a good feeling, but to have power from that, if you really pay attention, will not feel wholesome.

So this idea that we want to pay attention to how we're doing things, And the most healthy thing you could do is become liberated from clinging. This is a core definition of awakening or liberation, is that we no longer have the forces inside of ourselves that are going to add this kind of suffering, stress, unwholesome feeling for what's going on for us. And you can't find the wholesome results by doing unwholesome things. So the idea is to use ourselves as the book, use ourselves as the guide for how we find our way by noticing how we're doing things, how we're doing it, how we're doing it. So one of the consequences of doing Buddhist practice is that increasingly as we mature in the practice, we have an increasing focus on how we're doing things.

And one of the benefits of that is that it's easier to bring the practice into our daily life. Maybe at first you don't see what the connection is, but as you continue practicing, if meditation makes you feel at home, makes you feel calm, peaceful, gives you a healthy, good feeling, then at some point it might occur to you, why should I only have that kind of good feeling while I'm meditating? I mean, you know, the line between meditation and life is not that sharp. Why not have that kind of healthy feeling everywhere I go? And so then for some meditators that's a turning point in their whole practice because then they have a reference point for how to live their ordinary life. So they're not sacrificing or giving up or compromising that sense of well-being in their daily life as well.

And so then one of the tasks in daily life is how we want to do things. How do we do it that it's healthy? How do we do it that it's stress-free or diminishes the stress? How do we do it so that it creates a wonderful sense of health, a wonderful sense of vitality even, as we go about doing it? And oddly enough, maybe that when I had come to that point in my practice, that's one of the reasons I went to live at a Buddhist meditation center, because I wanted to find ways to take what I was happening in meditation and discover how to live that in my daily life. And I thought by if I'd lived at a Buddhist center where that was the whole point, or the community was all doing the same practice, that then somehow I'd find myself more able to bring the practice into daily life.

And, but then I was in a Buddhist center, so I meditated more. And so that wasn't exactly why I came there for. But there was, it was a nice kind of consequence, because then it became even more clear, the difference or how to do this, you know, meditation deepened, and then I had a different reference point for doing in daily life. And then, and then so then I wanted to do it even more. And then I went from living at a Buddhist center to, I moved to a Buddhist

monastery. And again, not to meditate more, but it turned out that if you go to a Buddhist monastery, you meditate a lot more.

And so then there was this wonderful kind of circular movement of meditation and finding out how to live this in my daily life and apply it. And so this idea then of finding, you know, the maturing of Buddhism has to do with the being interested in how to find this healthy way of being, wholesome way of being throughout our life. You know, why not? And the why not is not answered by some kind of moral dictum, rule or something, but rather it's because the reason, the whole, you know, is that to not do that hurts. To not do that is a drag. You feel how not to do that, you yourself are diminishing the quality of your inner being, your inner well-being.

That if you are doing unwholesome things, then you're kind of harming yourself in a certain way. And if you can feel that self-harm, then why would you continue? I mean, of course, some people will come up with good reasons. But generally, it's, you know, why would you continue doing that? And so, that's the motivation even for then, stop doing the unhealthy things, and what should you do instead? Well, if you're interested in a Buddhist practice, you would search for the healthy alternatives of how to do it.

And so, generosity instead of being miserly, being loving instead of being hateful, being generous instead of greedy, being wise instead of foolish, being equanimous or patient rather than impatient or reactive. So the list could go on and on to kind of what we're looking for. And then at some point, with this whole process, because Buddhism has this path of maturation, maturing to become healthier and healthier in this psychological, spiritual way. At some point, the reference point for how we practice is also affected by what we're discovering through the practice. And at some point, there are three things that become the basis or the foundation for how we want to do this practice itself. And these three things are ways that the goal is really found in the means.

And more and more as you practice, you know, you have the sense of this is possible to have this awakening experience or something. But then the qualities of that, what that is, you turn back into how you practice. So it becomes the reference point for how to practice. And that's immensely supportive, immensely helpful. And so I'd like to offer you three of these qualities. One is that you base your practice on not depending on anything.

Most of us are constantly, as we go through life, we're depending on something that we're kind of, the mind is preoccupied with, concerned with, wanting. There's usually some condition that we want to get or avoid, in which our very nature of consciousness, very nature of the way we attend to the world, attend to ourselves, is not not independent, not non-

dependent, but it's really dependent on wanting something, not wanting something, some condition. And the remarkable thing we can discover through this practice is a way that our awareness, our attention, the way that we attend, the way that we are present for ourselves here, that it's free from any kind of dependence on anything else. Of course, we live in dependence on the world and breathing and eating and people and society in all kinds of profound ways, important ways. I don't want to dismiss that. But it's also possible to sit in meditation, for example, or go to the local park and just sit on the bench and kind of just gaze upon the world there, or something.

And feel like there's a sense of presence or a way of attending or paying attention that is not dependent on anything. It's not relying on anything, not attached to anything, not requiring anything to be any particular way. And to have the opportunity and have the situation where to let go of all the things upon which our consciousness, our mind is operating, that at that moment is dependent on other things, and just be there is a really remarkable thing. I traveled from a different time zone yesterday. So my little inner clock was kind of a little bit off, I suppose. And so I woke up in the middle of the night.

And at first my mind was dependent on a lot of things. It was dependent on the idea that this is not good. It was, you know, if I don't get enough sleep then I have to give this Dharma talk tomorrow and I'll just fall asleep during my Dharma talk and this will be bad and my reputation's at stake. And so, you know, so all these things were kind of, you know, kind of operating maybe. And then my whole operating system was operating under this assumption that I need to sleep, I should sleep, I have to do what I need to sleep here. And I've done this enough times now to know that it's not a helpful position to be in.

It's self-defeating almost to have all those ideas. And so I've learned to just lay there and try to be content with the moment. I take it as a time for practicing and I'll lay there and I'll often first just relax my body. Usually if I really want to go to sleep or think it's not right to be awake, if I pay careful attention I find that there's tension in my body. And sometimes it's in my forearms. It's very subtle.

Sometimes around my chest, sometimes in my face. And so I'll lay there and just kind of relax those things, relax those things, soften and relax. And then I'll tune into my breathing, which has been a lifetime kind of practice of mine. Just be there. But as I do that, I'm just seeing, can my mind operate without dependence on anything? without needing to be any particular way, or have any values or purposes or fears, that it's kind of the foundation for the whole mental activity that I'm doing.

And eventually, it was easy, eventually. I could sit there, lay there and just be kind of content.

Nothing had to happen. Nothing had to be any different. I was just awake and I wasn't tired. So that wasn't a problem.

The only problem was the idea that I should be awake, I should be sleeping. But that was just an idea. So do I want to base my inner sense of well-being on an idea? And so anyway, so then eventually I fell asleep. And then I slept more than I usually do. So to find a way to practice where the practice is not depending on something, not requiring anything to be any particular way. is one of the characteristics of the practice becoming mature.

And that's the same in terms of that being a quality of the goal, the awakening experience is the same way. The mind that becomes free, liberated in Buddhism, is radically and fully now present, some people would say radiant, without depending on anything whatsoever. So, that's nice. So, those qualities, that's the orientation. So, I'm not practicing now. Am I depending on something?

Some people are depending on getting concentrated. Only if I get concentrated will it really work. I have to get concentrated. Well, that's a dependent state to be in. Another would be, wow, my mind is really distracted. I'm caught up in my thoughts.

So a dependent way of thinking would be, I have to stop doing this. I have to be undistracted. I have to be, you know, not so lost in my thoughts. Well, that's to be dependent. If you ask yourself, well, what is it to be non-dependent here, for a non-dependent attention? and you kind of feel your way into the answer, the consequence of that is you're kind of in the present moment. Rather than trying to be in the present, you find your way in the present. So we'll get back to this point.

So as I said, there's three characteristics of the goal that we then find in the means. Another one is freedom. And that is, these are all related, but for some people these different words work better for others. But now, we recognize that part of ourselves is free of greed, hate, and delusion. Part of who we are, part of what awareness is, part of our heart, part of our very being, has some characteristic of non-clinging, non-grasping, non-closing down, you know, non-grasping, non-attachment. And ultimate freedom in Buddhism is a radical, total, complete letting go of every attachment we possibly have.

Even at first it's just temporary, but it's really, you know, it's really kind of, maybe it's a pun, but it's mind-blowing that, you know, the degree of all attachments are blown away. And so now we're finding that. You know, we're finding some quality of non-attachment that's in the nature of how the mind operates. And we're building on that, growing on that, letting that non-clinging begin to spread into more and more areas of our life. It's one thing to have

some sense of what it's like to not cling. It's another thing to be able to apply that to all the circumstances and place that we live.

So part of the maturation of Buddhism is the expansion of that into more and more areas of our life. So then now practice is based on this notion of freedom, freedom from clinging. And the third is peace. That one of the primary kind of emotional, I guess, kind of characteristics of Buddhist liberation is a very deep state of peace. And so now there's a reference point to that peace. And so is it peaceful?

Is there peace as I do this? Do I sit down and am I immediately in a contentious mode of being with the world, with myself? Am I immediately focusing on what's wrong right here and I have to fix it? Instead, those things might exist, but the orientation is how do I do this peacefully? Where is the peace as I find a way to change what I have to change? How do I find peace with sitting, breathing here and being practicing?

How do I find peace in a situation that's maybe very conventionally very challenging all around me? Now recently I remember I was in a situation where the people around me were having some major conflict, but nothing was required of me. I didn't know them. They were strangers. It was a public place. And so it wasn't really my place to get involved to, you know, the anger and what was going on.

But it was kind of uncomfortable to sit there. And so I just sat and I didn't close my eyes. I thought that it might be kind of weird for the people. I was kind of sitting close to them. But I didn't want to make any problems for them, like look like I was closing the two in the mouth or something. So I just kind of lowered my gaze and then I looked inside and could I be peaceful?

As opposed to reactive or preoccupied or caught in by what they're doing and judging them or whatever it might be. Could I at least be peaceful in this situation? And I thought that was a nice solution. For me, that was a better alternative than the things that were already going on in my mind. Because I was kind of having my reaction to them, which was not healthy. So I thought, let's do the better alternative here.

So I could find my peace. I don't know what happened in the end. But as I said, I wasn't involved with the situation. And so those three things, non-dependence, freedom, and peace. These are the three, as we mature in practice, at some point, that becomes the reference point. That becomes, in the ancient Buddhist language, they say it's the basis of the practice we do.

The practices might be the same practice we did as a beginner. It might be something like,

beginners, some people do breath meditation, just tune into the breath. And so it might be the same practice as always, but now the practice is informed by these qualities or supported by these qualities. And that makes all the difference in the world because that's where we're trying to grow. We're not necessarily trying to become better and better people, better and better at mindfulness of breathing. We're trying to become more and more free as we do mindfulness of breathing.

And whatever practice we're doing then becomes a way that we're cultivating the how. Okay, how am I going to do mindfulness of breathing? How do I meet it? And not a few people who are beginners and maybe sometimes long-time practitioners find the breathing boring. Why would I do it? It's so boring.

And the mistake they're making is that they expect the breathing itself to be the solution. There's something in breathing that's the key in the magic. The magic doesn't come from the breathing per se. The magic comes from how we're with the breath. And the how is where something begins shifting and changing. And at some point the breath can be experienced as being a tremendous pleasure, a tremendous beautiful thing to experience.

And it can be very captivating and fascinating to be with the breath. So you might say, oh, the breath is fascinating. And then your friends, you know, your neighbors say, what? This is so boring. But it's not because the breath is inherently wonderful. It's the how we're with the breath.

And the how then changes how the breathing is experienced. So it's the how that shifts something and how we see the breathing or how we feel the breathing so that it starts feeling it very differently. It can be quite beautiful and peaceful and inspiring to be with the breath. But you have to understand that a lot of it has to do with the how. Another thing about these three qualities of the goal that's found in the mature practice, non-dependence, freedom, and peace, is that as you go about your life, If you focus on that, even if it's just one of those, maybe peace is the easiest one maybe, rather than focusing on mindfulness, it might actually be better.

We're like this mindfulness movement, part of it, right? So we think of mindfulness as all about what we do. We're supposed to be mindful, I have to be mindful, I should be mindful, and I'm going to be mindful, I wasn't mindful, I can't be mindful, mindful, mindful, mindful, are you being mindful? And people ask you, what's your practice? I practice mindfulness. What if people, instead of what, ask you, how are you practicing?

I think it would be more useful. Maybe it's too personal to do it in polite company. But rather



than asking, what are you practicing, how are you practicing? That would be kind of like, to be asked that question is kind of personal. Ask that question and you're accountable now for something personal about how you bring yourself to it. If you say, what do you practice? I practice mindfulness of breathing. Great. What are people going to say? That's nice. I do that too. Or I've heard that's a good thing. It's just kind of something abstract. But if they ask, how are you practicing? Now we're talking about something very personal. Oh, I'm practicing with a lot of aggression. Thank you. I'm going to get enlightened or bust. I know how to do this. And I'm going to push and assert myself. And I'm doing it to be the best enlightened person on my block. Wow, okay. Well, that was clear. But if you say, well, how? Well, I'm trying not to be contentious. I'm trying not to be in argument with reality. I'm trying to find my peace with how I am in this world. Then we're focusing on what is actually important, what is to be developed, what we're developing.

But how this folds back into the practice of mindfulness is that if you focus on how to be peaceful in the present moment, lo and behold, you have to be mindful. But mindfulness becomes a byproduct, not the thing you're trying to do. So, if you focus on how you should be, You can't help but to be mindful because the how always puts you in the present moment. How are you doing right now? What's happening for you right now as you do this? And so if you're looking for freedom from clinging, How do I go through this day so that I'm free of clinging? Well, this is, now that I have a flat, now that I have two flat tires on my car, I think this is a good time to experiment, explore this. Because now, I have so much reactions. I have a lot of things I cling to, being on time to the next thing I'm supposed to be going to, and clinging to how wrong the people at the tire company were to give me those old tires. clinging to, you know, just like it goes through, you know, there's a long list of things that now suddenly woke up that I'm now clinging to, or reacting to, or resisting. Okay, how do I want to be with this? Should I, yeah, I'll write an angry letter to that tire company. Or, how do I want to be with this? Well, how I want to be with this is that, of course I'm angry, of course I'm afraid, of course this is difficult. Can I hold this peacefully? Can I hold my clinging with non-clinging? How do I do that? Well, it turns out you have to be kind of mindful to do that. Mindfulness follows by the very motivation of what you want to do.

So, it might be a valuable reframing of mindfulness practice. Because sometimes the simple idea that I'm practicing mindfulness, I'm supposed to be mindful, is a little bit too abstract and have a little bit more sense of duty, a little bit more sense of a rule you're supposed to follow. And it can be hard because maybe it's not being guided by The how, guided by a somatic, heartfelt, body-felt, mind-felt sense of what is healthy and what is not healthy,

what is wholesome and not wholesome. But if you say, okay, I'm going to figure out how to be peaceful here. That's going to be my practice. And so how am I not peaceful? And what would peaceful look like? And how would I feel that? How do I feel the lack of peace? And how do I hold it peacefully?

And after doing that for a while, you find out, wow, the last five minutes, I've been really mindful. You had to be present and attentive in order to answer those questions. And then at some point, it might occur to you, how do I continue being mindful? Oh, now. There I am. I've been mindful for five whole minutes. I think if I just continue the mindfulness, continue the state of present moment awareness, that's going to maintain my peace. So, the goal, to have the goal expressed in the means. To be very careful not to get somewhere in your practice without considering how you include the destination in how you're practicing. And it's a very, very effective form of self-protection.

You do that and you're protected from straining, striving, wanting, being conceited, being somehow, there's all these ways in which practice gets hijacked by our attachments and our fears and our resistances and our dislikes and likes. But if you're constantly asking you this question about the how am I practicing, How is this supposed to, in and of itself, express part of the goal? Then it's kind of a protection because you'll notice when you're straining. You'll notice when you're clinging as part of your practice. And so it helps to support a healthy how your practice. And if a how your practice is healthy, then you'll become more healthy, at least spiritually or psychologically.

So the simple principle of today that I'm hoping that if you want to memorize one few words about that carry with you as a reminder is that to have the goal in the means. Have the means express what the goal is. Include the goal. So the two aren't so far apart. And if the goal seems so far away, the enlightenment, boy, that's like, seems like a good idea, but I'll never get enlightened in this life. It's just like too impossible.

Well, if you're caught up in that kind of idea, then the goal is not in the means. But instead if you go, wow, yeah, it's probably really far away. You know, the total, full, absolute, complete enlightenment of the Buddha. That's maybe a little bit far away. But look at that. I can be a little less clinging right now. Look at that. I can do that. I could not be so caught and trapped by this idea of ultimate enlightenment. And right there, you contain part of the goal.

And then you build that and expand that. How you are. So we have nine minutes left before the tea time. Everyone's welcome to stay for the tea and wholeheartedly welcome. Nice to have you here. And if you'd be willing to, you don't have to stay now. We can end. But it's very nice when we have tea to stay for a few minutes and to meet some people in the community

and say hello.

And I'd like to emphasize how valuable it is for each of you to welcome the other here. That even if it's your first time, you're already here. You're part of the community, so you can welcome the person you're with, even if they've been here many times, just say hello and welcome, say your name. And then if there's something that was important and meaningful for you or something that was evocative for you or provocative for you about this talk, maybe you can share some simple thing about that with your partner. And so also it'd be nice if you kind of look around. Maybe it'd be groups of two or three, but look around because sometimes people turn in opposite directions with the person in the middle left alone. So just look around and everyone gets to kind of be included. And if you prefer just sit in silence, then you close your eyes. It's kind of nice to listen to all the talking and then you can stay for the tea or whatever you'd like to do is fine. And I'll ring a bell in a few minutes when it's time to stop for the tea. So thank you.