

## Dharmette: Eight Worldly Winds (3 of 5) Praise and Blame

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Hello and welcome to this third talk on the Eight Worldly Winds. The context I'm trying to offer these teachings is that there is an alternative to the eight worldly winds that we can discover through doing Buddhist practice, or through doing maybe many things. It doesn't have to be Buddhism. We can discover an ability to feel a deep sense of happiness, contentment, peace, clarity, and sense of wholeness. We can discover a kind of simplicity of being that comes from not being caught in preoccupations, caught in distractions, not being caught up in navigating the world through what's good and what's bad for me, myself, and mine.

There's a wonderful softening, letting go, absence of conceit, which is possible when we're very deeply settled here. When the mind gets involved in all kinds of things of conceit, preoccupations with me, myself, and mine, caught up, reactive to what we're receiving from the world, the experiences we have from the world, it becomes agitated. When the mind is caught up with sense of me, the doer, and the one who has to do things and get things and have things happen, all those things can become quiet for a while. We can take a wonderful mental vacation from the usual preoccupations of the mind. That becomes a reference point for where well-being is found, where we get our joy and our happiness and our sense of feeling satisfaction with being alive.

To have some kind of reference point like this means that when the worldly winds blow our way, we don't get pushed around by them. We don't get caught by them. We don't get reactive to them. If the worldly winds are how we define our happiness and well-being, or unhappiness and lack of well-being, then every wind that blows is going to blow us around. We're going to be reacting, fixing, putting up windwalls to stop them, putting on heavier and heavier windbreaks, just whatever it takes to try to somehow protect or hold on or to keep them going. But if we have something better than them, then they come along and we're not tricked by them. They don't have a big influence on us.

This is particularly true for the pair for today, the worldly winds of praise and blame. Many people really cherish praise. Some people depend on it. They want it. They're looking for it. Some people are organizing their life and their conversations so that people are ready to praise them. People boast. People explain what they did and how great they did and how wonderful things were. People will present opinions, political opinions, with the idea that people will praise you if you have the right opinion. Some people get that's where their vitality comes from, this joy of being someone, being recognized as someone, as being praised, being honored, being somehow in the relationship to others, stands out as being special. People look up to us.

Some of that's normal and okay, enough. But there's a lot of conceit, a lot of challenges that come from living a life dependent on praise. The more the praise there is, the more the pendulum can swing to be blamed. The more people praise us, the more they expect us to hold a certain standard, to be a certain way. It's a setup for the pendulum to swing. It's a setup that we can't always be praised. There are people who are going to criticize us, be angry with us, be upset with us, not share our same opinions, be critical. If our sense of vitality has come from praise, then it can be deflating to be blamed or be criticized.

Or it may be not deflating. Sometimes it's actually energizing to be blamed or criticized, because then we're ready to fight. We're ready to work on defending ourselves. Then we're aroused and we have to be more careful and more attentive. There's this arousal that comes with praise and blame. The very sad thing socially is that when situations and people neither praise us nor blame us, then that can be boring. That could be not interesting for us. There's no orientation in that. We're not getting anything from them. They're not activating us.

There are times socially where the people who neither praise nor blame are overlooked or ignored because that's the orientation some people can have. Praise is not wrong to be praised. Blame isn't necessarily wrong. Sometimes it's accurate that people are finding faults, finding some mistakes we've made. To have the ability to be open to both in a relaxed, open way, where the quality of our inner life is not dependent on the praise and the blame, is important. We are centered on ourself in a nice, peaceful, nice way. We know something better than the joy of praise and the unhappiness of blame. We're not depending on it for our sense of self, for our sense of vitality, sense of happiness and well-being, for peace.

We can watch praise and blame. We can be present for it in a clear way. We can listen for what's true, what might be accurate, and appreciate what's accurate. Appreciate praise which seems accurate enough, and appreciate that people recognize it. Appreciate when people point out our faults. The Buddha talked about anyone who points out our faults

should be treated as a treasure. We're lucky to have people help us to see ourselves better. I find it a delight when someone points out a fault that I've done, a mistake I've made, or something I've said that was wrong, or maybe was even hurtful for someone.

I can feel my challenge, and sometimes I get defensive, or sometimes I can feel hurt, or just dismayed. But I also feel as the light, oh, my chance to open to this. It's my chance to feel this, to be present for it, to find a way through it to some other way. Rather than avoiding people who want to point out our faults, within reason there's a way of opening to it and feeling the joy of it. Sometimes that's the very thing that disarms people who want to criticize us, and it surprises them. There are people whose way of living is to be critical all the time, and maybe there's little hope then. But there are people for whom they're used to people pushing back and fighting and arguing, and that's kind of where they get their juice. To turn towards them and open and say, oh, you might be right about that. Oh, there might be something there to what you're saying. Can you tell me more? Can you explain exactly how that works or something?

Some people are surprised when someone responds so undefensively, and it can sometimes disarm. Sometimes it's even the very thing that the person at least wants to have happen, because it also means that maybe they're not getting under your skin. This idea of knowing an alternative way of being happy, being content, being centered on oneself in a nice way, an alternative to praise and blame, is important. Praise and blame can happen, but we're not caught by it. We're not pushed around by it. We're not influenced by it. Then there's opportunity to be wise about it. If the praise seems neutral, okay, thank you for the praise, and just let it go right by. Sometimes there's criticism, which we just let go right by. We don't have to pick it up or get involved.

We don't have to have a belief system that every praise and blame is something that we have to react to because every praise and blame somehow defines us. We're being defined by someone else, and we've given them the power to create that definition for who we are. We've somehow forfeited our own strength, our own independence, our own capacity just to be, because somehow we're allowing ourselves to be defined by the other person. Either we want to get attached to that or go along with it, want more of it, and we try to organize our life that way. Or we try to defend ourselves, or criticize, or counter it in some way. But in both ways, we've given some of our power, some of our independence over to other people. How about receiving praise and blame and not giving the other person so much power over you, over us?

As you go through the day, the next 24 hours, you might see, are there subtle ways, strong

ways, big ways, that you do receive praise and blame from people you know, from strangers, from different situations? What's your common way of reacting to that? What's your default? When you're not feeling rested, when you're hungry, when you're a little bit off in your day, what is your gut reaction to praise and blame? When you're centered, and rested, and well fed, and feeling content, what wisdom do you have about how to respond to praise and blame? What is your relationship to this very important pair of social interactions which are common enough in the human social world? How do you relate to praise and blame?

The assignment, if you're interested, is just discover how it is for you. The more you understand how you react, how you respond to praise and blame, the wiser you might become around them. What wisdom grows for you as you see it clearly. So thank you very much. And so we'll continue with these eight worldly winds tomorrow.