

Dharmette: Eight Worldly Winds (1 of 5) Gain and Loss

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So hello everyone and welcome to Monday and the first talk in this week's series. And the topic for this week will be what's commonly referred to as the eight worldly winds. The eight conditions by which people get caught by circumstances in the world. The winds that they can change. They blow this way and that way and we're battered around by them. Sometimes the victims of these in the way that because of how much we allow them to take over or impact who we are.

And to introduce these first, I want to say that it's common enough in Buddhism and meditation circles to have some idea of an ideal state to attain, ideal meditation to experience. Where we're just kind of floating in equanimity. We're just kind of feeling so peaceful and at ease and everything seems so nice. And that that's the goal. And if we're not there, then we're not really meditating properly.

And so we have some fault, but we have to kind of figure out the secret of how to get into this kind of blissful state. Something like that. In contrast to that, I think what mature meditation is like, mature mindfulness, is not that we're living in some kind of blissful state all the time. When the practice really matures, then there's a keen willingness, a keen interest, a keen welcoming of taking a deep look at what gets in the way of mindfulness, what makes mindfulness difficult, what trips us up, where we get attached. One of the earliest teachings of the Buddha is that what characterizes a wise person is they know how they get caught. They know, understand, and are mindful of their clinging and their challenges.

So it isn't that a wise person knows how to be peaceful all the time, but the wise person really understands all their difficulties. And that is the stepping stone to peace. And we don't want to bypass that or override it in order to find some degree of peace. But it's by knowing ourselves thoroughly that we can come to a place of peace. And knowing how we cling, how we get caught. And so this is a phenomenally important part of Buddhist practice.

And there are some people who prioritize the lofty ideas, the wonderful ideas of *nibbāna*, freedom and liberation, lofty ideas of compassion and loving kindness, and all kinds of things that are very, you know, ideals that are very positive. And in doing so, they overlook the basic foundational work of Buddhism, which everyone needs to do, including the most mature practitioners. And that is to really understand themselves. Really understand how we get caught, how we're not peaceful, how we're not equanimous, how we're not loving and generous. Not to understand it with criticism, not to understand it with that makes us a wrong person, but rather this is the means, the ways of opening up more. It's a stepping stone to freedom, a stepping stone to not being caught.

And the way not to be caught is to understand how we get caught first. So there's this deep work that has to happen. And anatta bypass, it's not jumping over, it's not finding some wonderful solution. So we never have to address any of our issues. So these eight worldly winds are examples of how human beings often get caught. And so there are four pairs.

Gain and loss. Fame and disgrace, or fame and disrepute. And blame and praise. And pleasure and pain. So, gain and loss, fame and disgrace, then blame and praise. They're different. And pain and pleasure. Pleasure and pain.

So, the first one is gain and loss. The weather changes all the time. When I lived in Tennessee, their saying was, if you don't like the weather, then wait five minutes. The weather changes and moves, and it's this way and that way. And for a little while we gain the sun, and then the sun goes. The party is washed out in the rain, but then something else happens.

And so there's a gain and loss all the time. We gain something new, we buy a new thing, new socks. Soon enough the socks are old and they have holes in them. Soon enough we lose one of the socks in the washing machine and now we only have one of the pair. These silly little examples, though, get magnified in all kinds of ways that we gain and lose, gain and lose abilities. We gain in abilities as we grow and we're young, and then as we get older there's maybe more recognition of losing certain things and abilities.

There is gaining wealth and losing wealth. I've known plenty of people who have overnight in a day somehow or other lost much of their savings. And I've known people who were surprised by suddenly receiving something that they hadn't expected. I knew one person who wanted to go to college, didn't have the money, and then was suddenly surprised one day that there was an anonymous donation that made the college possible. And so, gain and loss, that's built into human life. And so, how do we relate to those when they come?

And certainly there can be *muditā*, some joy, some delight, that healthy gain, and there could

be some disappointment with loss. But as a worldly wind, it means our inner stability, our inner freedom, our inner certain kind of peace is sacrificed in our relationship to them. And the way the Buddha talked about it is that when there's gain, we get caught in welcoming it and approving it and validating it. And when there's loss, there's hostility to the loss. There's opposition to it. One translator calls it a rebelliousness to it.

So there's an attitude, there's a way in which we then interact that's more than just a very simple appreciation or a very simple maybe feeling of, I was unfortunate, but we're actively involved in approving, welcoming, this is great, I really like this, holding on to it. Maybe building up a sense of self, maybe sometimes it's almost like a drug. We gain something and we're pumped up in some kind of way. We win a lottery ticket with lots of money. And now we're all excited and elated and we can't wait to start buying everything we want to buy. And then the next day we find out there was a mistake and our number didn't win the lottery.

And now suddenly we crash. And not only that, but during the 24 hours there, we've spent our savings because we thought we were getting more. And now we've lost our savings because of it. And now we crash and are disappointed and furious and angry with ourselves. And so we swing from one to the other. And it's a swinging back and forth, almost sometimes as a counter-reaction to each other, backlash.

Swinging one, having our hopes up. Swing the other direction and having our hopes crash. Around loss, gain and loss. And so part of a wise life, a wise Buddhist life, is to be cognizant, to recognize. Clearly, as it happens through the day, now there's a gain, now there's a loss. And then, what is our relationship? How does that affect us?

Is the wind of gain, the wind of loss, pushing us and grabbing us, and we're kind of riding the wind, or being pushed by the wind? Are we being reactive in some way? Are we overreactive? Is there an enthusiasm and an approval and a welcoming that is a form of attachment and expectation and thinking it's always going to be this way or not? And when there's a loss, are we disappointed in some deep way? Do we sink? Are we deflated? Do we think now it's going to be this way? And are we angry? Do we have a sense of hostility? This is not fair. This is not this way. And so the pendulum swings.

And some people the pendulum swings with every gain and loss. In fact, it's almost because the pendulum is in one direction that it swings as far as it does in the other direction. If we're really feeling delighted and fantastic about the gain, maybe how elated we are on the lottery, then we have further to swing when we realize we didn't lose the lottery. The sense of disappointment is so much more. And is there a different way? Is there a way of recognizing in a wise way, in a careful way, in a caring way, this is loss. This is gain. This is nice. This is not so

nice. But let's not invest so much into it.

Let's not tie ourselves to gain and loss. And so in his teachings about these eight worldly winds, the Buddha said that someone who is well-practiced that they are ready to see when there's gain, that that is also changeable. That also is impermanent, inconstant changing. When there's loss, that's also, in some way or other, it changes, it'll change, it's inconstant, my experience of it is inconstant, I'm inconstant, things will change. It's not going to be only loss forever. Something different happens.

And this idea of the changeability of our experience in our life for the Buddha helps with a certain degree of stability, a certain degree of not getting invested in the pendulum swinging to one extreme or the other. And in doing so, rather than dampening us down, it makes room for a deeper sense of well-being. A deeper sense of stability and feeling at home, feeling at peace, that has more to do with our wholeness, our fullness, our deep inner connection to ourselves that we don't have when our sense of happiness and sadness is tied to gain and loss in the world. To things that we gain and lose, as opposed to some deep inner place that is not about gain and loss, but about a sense of at-homeness, peace, stability here with ourselves. That is something that over time that meditation can connect us to. And the stability, the calm, the peace of meditation can feel so much more satisfying than winning the lottery.

In fact, so much so that we win the lottery, the attitude might be, well, let's see what happens. This is maybe nice, maybe not. We don't know. Let's see what happens now. Or if we lose our sock, who knows what'll happen. Or something more serious. Maybe, we'll see what happens. Maybe this is not so good. Maybe it's not. But let's just see. Let's see what happens next. We don't know what this is going to go to.

So the first of the eight worldly winds is gain and loss. And if this seems at all interesting for you, you might go through the day today, the next 24 hours, looking to see where there might be gain and loss through the day that will teach you about how your pendulum swings more than necessary. How you react. How you get caught in it, get attached. How you're overly welcoming, overing approval of a certain gain. And overly critical, oppositional, even hostile to certain loss.

So, please do this with care and respect for yourself. And human life is difficult. And we want to find our way through this with grace. So, thank you very much.