

Dharmette: Eight Worldly Winds (4 of 5) Pleasure and Pain

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August 08, 2024

Keywords: eight worldly winds, pleasure and pain, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, mindfulness, Vipassanā, Theravāda, attachment, self-definition

So now continuing with this fourth talk on the eight worldly winds and the teachings of the Buddha, the fourth one is pleasure and pain. I've noticed that in a lot of popular teachings on the four heavenly winds, pleasure and pain, comfort and discomfort, is listed first. So, whether it should be listed first or not, I don't know. But one way of interpreting that the Buddha puts it last is that maybe it's the most important, and maybe the most difficult. Because pleasure and pain is something very personal. It's something that we experience.

Things like the other six, gain and loss, that can be somewhat personal. We gain and lose our abilities and physical capacities. But often it has to do with gaining and losing things in the world. Especially things like fame and disrepute. As deep as that can travel into our psyche, into our hearts, it's still having to do with the world of ideas and the external world, what other people think. Praise and blame, same thing.

But pleasure and pain is something that we experience intimately, closely, physically with ourselves. And so maybe it's easier to—oh, so I'm hearing some people say the sound is going in and out. Hmm. Me too. So I don't know. Fine for me.

So some people say it's fine. Yes, comes and goes. No problem with sound here. Yes, so. It's possible that the problem is here at IMC, but that maybe those of you with different devices have a different effect. Okay, so some people, you're probably seeing the chats.

So if you're having a problem, yes, refreshing the screen helps. Fascinating that the number of people should have the same problem at the same time. Maybe it's a YouTube problem. Lots of people saying now that... Some people are still finding it in and out. So repeatedly people are saying that they close YouTube and then it gets better.

Okay, so we'll continue. So this idea that pleasure and pain is part of the worldly winds, it's something that in the world people just really respond to, react to. Some people are servants

of pleasure and pain, that everything they do has to do with being comfortable or avoiding discomfort, becoming comfortable. They define themselves by the pleasure and pain. There's some people who feel like if things are painful, unpleasant, uncomfortable, somehow that's a personal failure. Or it's an offense that the universe is providing.

And it shouldn't be this way at all. And then some people, because of that, when things are pleasant, are really attached to it. This is a sign of success. This is a sign that the universe is in my favor. And this means that this is exactly how it should be and then there's attachment to it. Sometimes pleasure and pain is experienced and we define ourselves by it.

That somehow I am wrong, I am right, I am great, I'm lousy, because there's pleasure or there's pain. And one of the phenomenal gifts that I've received from doing Buddhist practice is being able to experience pleasure and pain without being defined by it, without being caught in it, without picking it up and having it affect the quality of my inner life. And I remember when I was young in Buddhist practice that somehow, the context of doing ongoing meditation, ongoing Buddhist practice, at some point it just seemed second nature. That when I was going about my day, and I remember I had to lift something with someone else, something very, very heavy and carry it some distance. And I remember how painful it was in my hands to hold this thing digging into my hands. I wasn't hurting, harming myself, but it was really painful.

And it just seemed like the obvious thing to do, second nature almost to do, was to be present for it and not allow myself to be caught in it or reactive to it, be agitated by it, be aversive to it. And I had some semblance of a sense of attention that was at ease, a mind that was untroubled, that it felt like this is valuable to not sacrifice that untroubled mind. It's valuable to stay at ease with this intense pain in my hands. And so it became this kind of riding almost a razor's edge, very careful attention to watch that the mind didn't react, didn't pick it up. And so no one told me to do that. I didn't even tell myself to do it.

It just seemed like the obvious thing to do, to ride that edge, to explore that. I think that part of the idea was that I was better off, it was better for me not to get caught in the reactivity around the pain. So it wasn't automatic that pain meant that I had to react, contract, feel sorry for myself, feel upset, feel blaming something. It just was pain. And then I was quite surprised by being introduced to Vipassanā practice. And Theravādan practice includes clear recognition and encouragement at certain point in practice to allow yourself to feel great pleasure, joy, and happiness.

And I was surprised, but I didn't think that we were allowed to have those kinds of experiences. I thought just being present meant somehow some neutral state. So then the task

was how to allow for the pleasure of meditation, the happiness, the joy, without picking it up, without congratulating myself, without building up a self. Look at me, how great I am. I'm the one who's experiencing some pleasure in my meditation. And so there too was this, I'm better off not being defined by it.

I'm better off not being caught in it, reactive to it. I'm better off just allowing it to be without making it a story, making it an expectation, making it a requirement. Letting the pleasure and the pain come and go. And this is one of the, I feel, one of the great also gifts of a regular ongoing meditation practice. I found it invaluable to meditate every day, more or less at the same time, day in and day out. And then be present for whatever life gives me.

Because the consistency of it, over time, there are times with pain, times of pleasure, times of being sad, times of being happy. But the through line, the thread running all through it all, was mindfulness, was attention, was being really present for it. And in doing so, learning how to be non-reactive, non-attached to whatever is happening. To be present and balanced. Present and not going along with the swings of ups and downs, elated and depressed. And just being present.

And that is the art of working with the eight worldly winds. To be present without being elated or depressed. Without being... The certain agitation that comes with just being so happy and delighted and excited, that is a setup to crash and go the other direction to being so depressed and upset that things are not going our way. And that happens if we define ourselves by our experience. And so as we practice to start discovering a certain degree of freedom, of in-awareness, a certain degree of being present without being defined by anything, and feeling that this is good, this is a wonderful, deep, satisfying kind of way of being.

And you can feel and sense that as soon as we start defining ourselves by it, anything at all, making a self out of it, or this is happening to me, that we're actually diminishing ourselves. We're actually making something smaller, or tighter, or constricted. And the idea that we would not define ourselves, have an undefined awareness, can feel frightening, can feel, what's the point? The whole point is a whole lifetime I've been living with this idea that I am who I am and I have to define myself a certain way or defending or deflecting how the world is trying to define me or hiding how I really am because I don't want to define myself to the world that way. This whole social games that we play around this idea of self. And to find the deep satisfaction of being, putting that down, letting it rest, and to have the undefined awareness or undefined self.

And then to encounter pleasure and pain, and realize that these two can be the winds of the world that we don't pick up on. We don't let it push us around. We don't define ourselves

by it. There's something better that we can experience than only focusing on the pleasure and the pain. And that which is better is found in the awareness of the pleasure and pain. The awareness is not the pain. The attention, the mindfulness, the knowing of it is not the pain, not the pleasure. But there's a way of knowing, there's a way of being at ease with awareness, at ease with knowing, at peace with awareness, at peace with knowing, that is better than what it is knowing knows. And that's the art.

And when we have some sense of this higher quality knowing, or higher quality inner life, then it becomes hopefully second nature not to get pushed around by pleasure and pain. Not to be defining our life, or measuring our life, or needing our life to be one way or the other based on whether there's pleasure and pain. It doesn't mean a naive kind of just letting pain just persist because just that is. It's kind of a natural thing to take the thorn out of your foot. It's a natural thing to take that, you know, in healthy ways to avoid pain and healthy ways of allowing yourself to feel pleasure. But to do so with an inner life which is not defined by it, not dependent on it, not conditioned by it, not pushed around by it. This is the art of practicing with the eight worldly winds.

So I hope that you've understood well enough now that the theme I have around these eight worldly winds is that there's something better than them going on as we develop this practice. And so we know for ourselves that these worldly winds are just that, winds of the world that we don't have to pick up or get involved in. And if we do, then that's also practice. That's also what we bring our attention to. And don't let yourself be pushed around twice by the same worldly wind. One, by being caught in it. And the other, in being caught in the reactivity to it, reactivity to being caught. So thank you.

So we have one more day on these eight worldly winds and even though we've done all eight now and I look forward to offering you the concluding talk. Thank you.