

Second Arrows and Open Windows

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So it's certainly, I feel, always an honour to be able to be with people in this form and other ways, to talk about the Dharma, to share the Dharma, not just the words of the Dharma, but a little bit of the experience of the Dharma. So here we are, and I wasn't sure, you know, what topic to talk about today, partly because of what's happening nationally in the United States. And it feels like it's pretty, for me, pretty close in to where I practise the Dharma, with what the Dharma's about, and seems very alive, all the various challenges this country has. And it's an impressive statistic that for the last month or so there's been forty-five mass shootings in this country. So it seems like it qualifies to be an epidemic. We have the repeated and repeated violence against African Americans.

Some of their videos are quite graphic, that, you know, it's painful to watch and see, and the Asian Americans who are also the recipient now of heightened violence. And now we have this, there at the Dercchevanza trial, which is coming to a head maybe this week, and who knows what direction the jury will go, and maybe in either direction the jury goes. It seems like it's pretty consequential. And what will happen to this country? So those things are certainly on my heart and in my mind. And besides just bringing them up and other things, I just wanted to name them, that they're certainly present for me, and that they, as I talk here about the Dharma, maybe I am addressing these issues, though it will not be direct, and not exactly intentionally, but those are definitely close by for me.

And what I want to begin by doing is talking about this very famous analogy or parable that many of you have heard before of the two arrows. And I think this is such a profound teaching. It's so evocative. And as such, it is a kind of a koan, a kind of a wonderful Dharma question. And the question is, what is the second arrow? Where is the second arrow?

So the two arrows are, the idea is that things happen to us in our lives which are painful, and there is plenty of that in this human life. And Buddhism is not to deny that there is pain that

happens, and some of that pain is physical, and some of it is emotional, psychological. And then that's called the first arrow, and the second arrow, which makes the pain worse because being shot by two arrows is worse than being shot by one arrow. The second arrow is what we contribute, is the arrow that we shoot at ourselves, implying that there's a way in which we react and respond to the occurrences of our life, our daily life, where we increase the amount of pain that we experience. And in one went. Or on a side, the second arrow, that pain. That's the pain we call suffering.

The fact that there is pain in the world that is allowed to be pain, and we do the best we can with it, and row as wisely as we can. But this very powerfully significant word for Buddhist, the word suffering *dukkha*, that's what happens with the second arrow. And that is something that we do to ourselves. And so the question is, what is that second arrow that we shoot at ourselves? And so there's many things that we do. One of them is, for example, if we feel pain, and then because of that we get angry and are hostile, and that hostility can be directed towards others who we think are responsible for our pain, or the hostility can be directed towards ourselves.

But regardless of where the hostility is directed, the hostility itself is the arrow, is the second arrow. So certainly you can feel that if the hostility is directed towards oneself, maybe that's like two arrows extra. There is the arrow of the hostility itself, and then that's what the arrow hits inside of us. And then of the hostility directed outward to someone else, it still hurts the person being hostile. It is a way of shooting arrows at oneself, and maybe shooting arrows at someone else, causing them pain. There can be a second arrow, can be not seen as an arrow. It can be a very strong desire that we latch on, attach on to things that we want.

And there's something about the squeeze and the holding on of intense desire, really wanting something, which actually feels painful. If we really feel sensitive to what it is going on here, and we're shooting a second arrow at ourselves, there's a jealousy and there's envy, and there's greed, and there's you. Now, just a list of things that we do that are called a second arrow. Conceit is considered to be a second arrow, the conceit of, you know, that where we latch on to, we hold on to tightly some idea of me, myself, and mine: I'm special, I'm wonderful, I'm different than others. We compare ourselves to others and put ourselves in a that we're better than or they're worse than. To be very critical of oneself and have a negative view of oneself is a second arrow.

And certainly life is difficult. So this teaching about the two arrows doesn't deny the difficulty of life. It just makes this distinction between where the pain is and where the suffering is, of where the first arrow is. In the second arrow, and all forms, all these forms of conceit, the

Buddha said that he could not. He did not know of any concept of self, idea of self, philosophy around who the self is that didn't bring on the second arrow. That's a powerful statement. It's not the same thing as denying there is a self. It's just that to be wrapped up around the conceit of a self is a second arrow.

And now there are second arrows around getting wrapped up around opinions and views and philosophies and politics, that being right and insisting on it, on that insistence on being right and in asserting one's views. Even if the views are true and accurate, the assertion of them, the attachment to them, is a second arrow. What happens when people practise something like meditation, mindful meditation? We become more and more sensitive to us, so we recognize better and better these second arrows. People who don't have that sensitivity don't see that hostility is hurting themselves. Don't see that the attachment to pleasure or to views, philosophies, politics, attachment to conceit is a second arrow, because they are not attuned to where the pain is, where the contraction, the hardness is, and where that they are, where we get hurt so easily.

So one of the challenges, one of the things about these second arrows is they often don't just live by themselves. A second arrow is a kind of agitation. A second arrow kind of lives within us. And then, you know, if someone has an arrow stuck in them, and someone comes along and wiggles that arrow, it's probably going to hurt a lot more in the skin or wherever it's pushing in. And so we have these second arrows, and they can be embedded in such a way that all kinds of people can come along and do things and say things that are shaking, twisting that second arrow to make it more and more difficult. And the second arrows are often sticking out the most, so that they're the ones that the world around us will often hit first, that the difficulty of the world, what people say to us and do to us, will often hit the second arrow. Not something deeper inside of us, but second arrows, what's sticking out.

So what I mean by this is that if we have a kind of conceit, for example, that I'm better than everyone else, then the slightest little—that's a second arrow. The slightest thing someone says that undermines that or criticizes that will threaten, hurt, agitate that second arrow of conceit. If we are angry or hostile towards someone or towards ourselves, then any threat to that hostility, any trying to dampen it down or quiet it down, or anything that's difficult that happens around us kind of vibrates or affects that hostility to kind of irritate it more. And so we get more hostile, strong attachment or wanting something. All kinds of things can happen to threaten that desire or that attachment, and so because it's threatened, it hurts even more. And now, so each of these times when the second arrow is sticking out so far. That's what the world hits when it hits us.

It's—it is. We start adding more than second arrows, third arrows, fourth arrows. And the more arrows we've added to ourselves, the more we become fragile. The more we're ready to be irritated, or be agitated, or be, you know, for all those arrows to be twisted in us, even more so to be. So it's very important to learn to recognize these second arrows. And one of the ways to recognize them is through agitation. Second arrows always come with a degree of agitation.

In fact, it might even be fair to say, if you're agitated, there's a second arrow operating. And the task of mindfulness would be to discover, What is that second arrow? Or the task is to settle that agitation. And one of the functions of meditation is to quiet the agitation enough so we can be more observant and see more clearly when agitation begins, and not to give authority to the agitation, not to get swept away by it, or treat it as, Of course I'm agitated, or take it for granted. Just agitation is just happening, and I have to go along with it. I have to do something, and run around, and fix something, or be angry, or do something. But really, when we're agitated, to stop and look.

And now, because agitation as a second arrow is something that when the world does something which is unfortunate around us, that if it hits our agitation, hits our second arrows, our response is very different than if events of the world. It doesn't hit our agitation. If the events of the world are received in our peaceful heart, our settled heart, if the agitation, the difficulties of the world and what people do to us and say to us is received in our calmness and our openness, without any second arrows, without any agitation, then it's an amazing thing begins happening. An amazing thing is that there's a way in which we can feel as if those things don't touch us, as if they go right through, as if there is a vast emptiness space, if there is a transparency, or there's a through which things occur, they're still known and felt. And even painful things can be felt as pain, but it feels like they're not lingering, or being held on to, or being stuck anywhere. It isn't like they're embedded. The arrowhead hasn't been embedded anywhere.

And there's this wonderfulness when there's freedom, like a vast open window that sees clearly everything. The breeze goes through clearly. Wonderful spring breeze, perhaps. But when the neighbour kid throws a baseball against the window, it doesn't break the glass. It just goes right through. Hopefully. There's nothing in the living room, but as I might in my kids at my home, it wasn't so much the neighbour kids throwing a baseball from outside at our windows, my kids throwing the baseball inside.

And if the window's open, they're not going to, you know, go on to hit anything outside that would break. So the idea, you know, too, when there's no second arrows, it's like the win-

dows are all open, and then there's room in the heart and the mind to experience the challenges of this world, and we know that we don't have that room for it when we get agitated. Certainly we could have a lot of respect and care and compassion for our agitation. But to recognize, Oh, this is agitation. Oh, I'm agitated. I've heard about that in Buddhism. Agitation is the very thing that's extra, is the second arrow.

I don't know how this is a second arrow. It seems like it's pretty natural, pretty obvious, and that of course you should be agitated in this circumstance, aren't you? Suppose everyone I've ever known in my life, they always got agitated when these things appeared. So isn't that's what human beings do? They get agitated. And yes, many people do get agitated in all kinds of ways. Many people do, as a matter of natural course of how they live their lives, shoot a lot of second arrows, but it's not necessary.

And so to know this, not to shoot another arrow at yourselves: I'm a bad person because I'm agitated. But to know this and get curious, and to take the agitation as a strong encouragement. Pay attention. Look, see what's going on here. Where is a second arrow? And the agitation, I think even though it might be a second arrow, I think it's actually very helpful to respect it and see it as representing what's important for us.

And if it represents what's important for us, then it's time. The more agitated we are, the more it gives us a purpose, a direction. Or now I know what to do, and that is either to look inside. So what does this agitation—get curious. Sit and meditate, get quiet, and study, and feel, and really get to the bottom of this agitation. What is it? And settle the agitation, and see what happens then.

Or, like, for example, we're agitated about something in the world. Maybe to get caught in that agitation is to miss a golden opportunity. It's to somehow get too involved in the second arrow we're doing to ourselves and not appreciate that. Maybe what we're agitated about doesn't need our agitation, but it does need our attention. So this way of respecting agitation, it's either it's a prompt to look inside more deeply, or it's a prompt. It gives direction and meaning and purpose to look outwards and study, be intent, and look and learn better. What's going on with your friend?

If you're agitated by a friend, you know that maybe talk about them, talk to them and find what's going on for them, and you really be present if it's appropriate. If you're agitated about what's happening in the world, if you're really agitated enough, then you have a sense of purpose. You can, Okay, I'm going to turn my focus of my attention to learn more about it. Don't rely on social media. Don't rely even on the mainstream news articles. If you're agitated, it's important enough that you should get to the bottom of it and understand and do

some research and really learn, as opposed to just continue to kind of swim in the agitation and continue to read the kind of news that only agitates you more. Then you're not really studying and getting through to it and doing research.

So this and this always, both these ways are ways of no longer living with the second arrow, and both of them are ways to offer something different to ourselves. Then just twisting the second arrow more and more. It's giving us something to do. And those two can be done together. We can both look deeply inside and settle the agitation, find out where we're attached. Or we can, and we can also look and see and study and read about or learn about what's going on in the world. Or even better, we can actually bring our focus to do something about it.

And even if it's a very, very small thing to do, act and do, because then we're going where that is sometimes the way of pulling out the arrow, or that's the way of not allowing the arrow to keep getting twisted more and more. So there's a marvellous thing that happens when we have started to pull out the second arrows, and that is that there's less and less that the world strikes. There's less and less windows for the world to break in our hearts. The heart becomes more and more open. So we have to be very careful with these second arrows, because there they are oftentimes the primary source of more and more pain and suffering. So it's not just simply in—it's one simple little arrow, second arrow that's gone in, that's causing us suffering. But the continued twisting of them and striking of them and rubbing up against them that the world does and that we do makes them coming more and more. More suffering arises and happens.

So to take out the second arrow, to understand this idea of second arrows, and understand that there's a whole other way of living. It's possible to live as a large, open window. It's possible that the things of the world that we can care, we can be involved in, we can respond to. But when we are aware of it, when we know it, when it comes to us, when someone is angry with us, it's possible for that to just go right through. And the open window of a heart, and in doing so we can remain steadfast, present. Looking maybe kindly, but really looking at the challenge, looking at what's happening, looking at, for example, the angry person. Sometimes it makes angry people more angry if they have no effect on us. So some people will find that very satisfying. But I think more importantly is that if we have no reaction to people who are angry with us, maybe, or to the difficulties and challenges of this world and politics and what's happening around us. I hope that we get motivated to be wise about it, to see it more clearly, to be curious and look, to turn really and stay present with eyes open and looking in that direction, seeing, What is this?

Having an open heart where nothing in the world can touch, because everything just goes right through, does not mean that we become indifferent. It just gives a lot more room for our wisdom, our care, our interest, and our love, our compassion to operate. And those things—love, compassion, wisdom, interest—those are not second arrows, and those do not stick out in a way that people can twist and hurt us even more. So in summary, what I am hoping in offering you this talk is that then you'll get interested, curious about your second arrows. What are they? And if you're a little bit like me, then perhaps sometimes you'll see clearly what it is, and sometimes you won't, and you'll see, What is this second arrow? I think there's a second arrow here. What's going on? And get curious, and to keep this kanava front maybe forever. But maybe for this week, maybe talk to friends and journal about it, reflect on it, meditate with it. What is my second arrows? What are my second arrows? And in what way do my second arrows. Which way are those second arrows? The very things that the world keeps twisting and twisting and turning in deeper and deeper.

So thank you, everyone, and thank you for being here and now. I hope that you have a wonderful week and now. When you've pulled out your arrows, put them down. Don't put them in your quiver. Put them down, retire them. So thank you.