

Planting Wholesome Seeds

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So good day, everyone. And welcome to our time together Sunday and the Star Ma talk. Before I give the talk, a couple of announcements. One is that next Sunday after the talk, I'll offer a community meeting here on Zoom right afterwards. It's more of a community meeting for the local people who might normally come in person to MC, but everyone's welcome to come to the meeting. The topic of it will be on the opening of MC, the time to open our doors and have programmes again is on the horizon, is in sight, and maybe in August.

I want to just talk a little bit about the opening, the plans, and hear concerns, questions, and desires that people have in the more local community. If you're not local, you are certainly very welcome to come in; you're part of this community regardless. It might be interesting for you to know some of the plans here, and we will certainly be giving a lot of thought to how to support the widespread community of people who have been participating this last year on Zoom and in talks, and so on our minds. The other thing is that in a few weeks, I think around the tenth of May, maybe tenth and eleventh of July, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, there's a Dharma teacher, a wonderful vipassanā teacher, Gregory Kramer, who is one of the more innovative and brilliant teachers, innovating a lot of application of the Dharma, of application to mindfulness, into the rest of our life outside of meditation. He developed a whole practice called Insight Dialogue to bring mindfulness into talking, in our conversations with people. He's written a book now called, I think, The Whole Path, A Whole Life, The Whole Life, Whole Life Practice, or The Whole Life Dharma. I forget exactly the title, but what he has termed the whole life.

He explores the Eightfold Path in this book, addressing very well many of the issues of how to live the Dharma in our whole life. He's offered to come down, he's offered one day for our community to offer a kind of creative teaching and a kind of retreat over this weekend, at

least that weekend in July, where he'll offer teachings and practices on his whole life Dharma approach, with lots of time during the day to go about your life, your daily life, and to practise with it. He'll offer support through the day. I think the main meetings are in the morning and the late afternoon, and then practising in your life with it. I feel very fortunate to have him coming, and I encourage many of you to come if you're interested. There's more information about it on the MC website. I believe the easiest place to find it is on What's New, a section on the bottom right of the home page. But also if you look under programmes, it's listed there as well, and you have to register for it. So Gregory Kramer, The Whole Life Path or The Whole Life Dharma, something like that is his book.

I see in the chat there were several Happy Father's Day wishes to go out, and certainly to all the fathers. A few weeks ago we had Mother's Day, and to all the parents who are listening to us, may you be honored and respected and appreciated for all that you do and have done. Also this weekend, many of us in the United States are celebrating this new holiday. We now have a Juneteenth Day, the nineteenth of June, and I think it's already become my favorite holiday in the United States. I kind of liked, in principle, the idea of Fourth of July for being an independence day. It seems closely related to the Buddhist idea of freedom, of liberation. But July Fourth is much more closely related in my mind to this, and maybe this can be a holiday that we Buddhists in the United States might particularly cherish.

It's interesting, as it's not really the celebration of the particular day that the Emancipation Proclamation, when slaves were, in a sense, liberated in the United States, but rather represents the day that in Texas, in a particular town in Texas, I think Galveston, where many months after the proclamation was declared, the slaves there learned that they were free. In other words, the locals didn't want to tell them that they were free, and it took that long to discover. So it's the last of the slaves who discovered that they were actually liberated. To celebrate this very important milestone in this country seems like a celebration to appreciate, to honor, to remember. It seems like a very important thing to do. The fact that the liberation from slavery is a much bigger liberation than from a political control of England, the United States, where lots of the people who were so-called received their independence from England had a lot of freedom compared to what slaves had. But to have this liberation from slavery, it's a much bigger one.

To appreciate how important it is, and to feel the poignancy, or the pain, in the fact of the delayed notification of some slaves, and how difficult that freedom from slavery actually was, and how even being freed from slavery, there are still remnants of that oppression that continue to this day in the United States, the consequences of all that. So that leads to the topic

for today, which has a little bit to do with the Buddhist teachings on *kamma*. But I think rather than particularly focusing on Buddhism so much, it's actually, I think, a wide-ranging teaching in many religions that is sometimes summarized with a little phrase: You reap what you sow. Or, say it differently, what we do plants seeds that will come to fruition. Those seeds, the quality or the characteristics of those seeds, affect the plant that grows and the fruit that comes. So our seeds, our activities, or the actions that we do that are unwholesome, will produce unwholesome fruit. Those which are wholesome produce wholesome fruit.

In plenty of places, including in Buddhism, it seems to be a kind of fundamental law that this is how things work in this world. Whether it's that fundamental and works all the way, all the time, this way, it works a lot of times this way, and we see results, we see this over and over again. In some ways, the tremendous unwholesomeness of slavery, which, you know, to use the word unwholesome here just seems almost, I don't know, it just seems like it's belittling it almost. But the almost the evil of slavery is the actions of the people, you know, two hundred years ago, a hundred and fifty years ago, however long it was, all these centuries of slavery on this continent, that tremendous unwholesomeness set in motion a whole series of fruits, a whole series of conditions, a whole series of things that are rippling through our societies to this day, that we are the recipients of this bitter fruit. There have been plenty of seeds that were planted in this soil for centuries with slavery, and we're still contending with it and dealing with it in so many different ways. So we have a very clear example of this, and it does not necessarily mean that all the fruits that are produced by the seeds that we plant are limited to affecting ourselves.

Sometimes in the Buddhist *kamma* teaching, the idea is that you will reap the fruit of the seeds that you plant. But I think that I find it very helpful to separate out, you know, it from being so personal, because the effect of what we do spreads out beyond us, and sometimes the impact around us is bigger than maybe the impact we experience in ourselves. But to be the caretakers of the seeds that we plant, to be very careful with what we do, so that what we do is not planting unwholesome seeds, but rather planting wholesome seeds. It's presented in almost like a law that if you do something unwholesome, it will produce unwholesome fruit. If you do something wholesome, it will produce wholesome fruit psychologically. We can see that in ourselves, that sometimes we can see that very clearly. If we do unwholesome things, that certainly sets up conditions that support more unwholesomeness.

Sometimes if we spend a lot of time being mean, angry, critical, hostile to others, they start to act and behave around us in a way that starts being uncomfortable for us. That discomfort, that social discomfort, that maybe being ignored or not addressed or something, is painful.

Some of this unwholesomeness that people live with in the world is a result of the pain they feel they are. So much so that sometimes I've heard this kind of *kamma* principle be that if you act out of pain, it produces more pain. If you act out of non-pain or out of happiness, you produce more happiness. So one of the cycles, there's a cycle of unwholesomeness where unwholesomeness produces more unwholesome conditions, and those unwholesome conditions make it easier to act unwholesomely, and that produces more conditions. There's the cycle of self-perpetuating unwholesomeness that can go on not only for an individual for a lifetime, but also gets passed on to generation and generation of people.

That's where there's sometimes tremendous hostility, anger, even violence in families, and kids growing up learn that that's what you do, and that's the kind of learned behavior, and they grow up to be adults, to continue it, and they pass it on to children. We see that both in oneself, that causing suffering in the world is a cause, a condition for further distress, further pain, further discomfort, and pain is a primary condition why people do things in an unwholesome way, unskillful way. Buddhist practice is a practice to interrupt the cycles of unwholesomeness, to not perpetuate that. It's remarkable how meditation functions in that. To sit down and meditate, and be still, and be quiet, and just focus on your breath, is not such a simple passive practice. When the mind stream has all this momentum of thinking certain ways, attitudes certain ways, of anger, hostility, greed, delusion, and you just kind of feel the power of those cycles of that kind of thinking, sometimes in those attitudes, those desires, when we sit down to meditate, and then simply to come back to the breathing, is an interruption in that mind stream.

Maybe its interruption lasts only a millisecond before we have to do it again and again. We get pulled away, but we're beginning to interrupt the cycles, to stop the cycles. Getting off the wheel of these unwholesome actions produces the conditions for further unwholesome conditions, and so we interrupt it. But we can do better than just interrupting and stopping it. It's also possible to plant the seeds of the wholesome, to plant seeds for happiness, for well-being, for health. Things that are done in a healthy way produce more health. Usually, if we plant seeds for happiness, it produces more happiness than the actions that we do, whether it's actions of thought, actions of speech, or actions of body, that there's a way in which they can produce more of the same.

So unwholesomeness produces more unwholesomeness. Wholesomeness produces more wholesomeness. The challenge here, or what's fascinating, I think, is sometimes we find ourselves it is easier to do the unwholesome than it is to do the wholesome. It's easier sometimes to be angry than to figure out how to address a situation in a way that's peaceful or

kind, that's still effective. It's easier to be short-sighted about the impact we have right now. Anger sometimes is to stop something that we see, we want to push something away, or have an impact right now on something. Oftentimes the unwholesome behavior is short-sighted, more often than not, I would suggest, whereas doing the wholesome can feel like a lot more effort and work is needed.

It takes more reflection and thinking and ending the mind streams of unwholesomeness. If we're lazy, it's just sometimes easier just to go ahead and do the unwholesome. If we want to get immediate results, unwholesomeness maybe can do that, but to do the wholesome routes takes a little bit more effort. Initially, it might take more effort to look for a kind of delayed gratification, an understanding how to be wise in a wholesome way, in a kind of supportive way, and non-greed, non-hatred. But as we practise, and we start being in touch with non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion inside of us as a kind of almost like a place, or a clarity, or purity, or an openness, or a peacefulness, then it becomes easier and easier to be that way. We start seeing that to act with unwholesomeness is a kind of instant *kamma* where the unwholesome itself hurts—ouch—whereas to act on the wholesome feels good.

So here is the principle in very simple language: if we do something that has an ouch in it, it's going to produce more ouch. If we do something that has an awe in it, chances are it'll produce more awe. Even though it might take more work initially to do the wholesome, the healthy, that which comes from the best part of who we are, it's a training we're doing. We're beginning to open the door that might be rusted shut. The hinges are rusted and tight, and we're beginning to open it. Discovering and opening this door in the heart so that the wholesomeness becomes second nature, becomes the place that we act on, live from in the world, and we start feeling that this is what's easy to do. The unwholesome is actually more stressful, more difficult in its own way, and so we choose the easy route to live wholesome ways.

Initially it seems like the unwholesome can be easier, but over time, the wholesome becomes easier. The advantage of the wholesome is it doesn't produce the same levels of difficulty in life. The after effect of wholesomeness: there's no clean up that has to be done. There's no retribution. There's no people being angry back at us, perpetuating the cycles. Whereas if we do unwholesome, we have to explain ourselves, we apologize, we have to defend ourselves, we have to escape, we have to shut down, we have to ignore—all this kind of secondary, tertiary behavior that comes out of the unwholesome, that doesn't come out of the wholesome. To live a simpler life, a cleaner life, by tuning into what is wholesome.

This distinction between wholesome and unwholesome is really key to the whole Buddhist practice, and to begin understanding what this means, and more importantly, how to recog-

nize it in ourselves, how to recognize the healthy feeling of the wholesome and the unhealthy feeling of the unwholesome, how to recognize that we're planting seeds, and we want to be careful with the seeds that we plant, and we plant the seeds through our actions, and the quality of our actions is the particular plant that we're planting. So we want to be careful with our actions. Careful means using your capacity for choice to choose what you should do. Don't live a life that doesn't use the tremendous gift we're given that we can choose between. We can choose what we do, what we say. Don't live a life that doesn't have the simplest self-reflection of being wise and aware of what we're going to say and do before we do them.

This is one of the reasons to practise mindfulness, that the more mindfulness we have, the more there is space in the mind, the more there's almost like a pause in which we can see where the moment of choice is. If we can see that moment of choice to choose the wholesome, and if we don't know what the wholesome thing is to do, then it's generally quite wholesome to avoid the unwholesome. That's enough. Sometimes you do want to make it more complicated than that. Or it's wholesome to say a pause and say, I need to think about that. Or can we just let it sit for a while as I reflect on this? Can we take time out so I can just be with myself a little bit before I respond to this difficult conversation we're having? There are unwholesome responses. There are wholesome responses. That doesn't mean we understand how to be kind or generous or loving, but we know something else.

Maybe the choice is to be more mindful, to be more present, and really listen more deeply to ourselves and to what's going on around us. But mindfulness, as mindfulness begins to take hold of our life, we begin to have that space where we can see there's more and more choice. If you see your choice, then you begin exercising your freedom, the freedom to live wholesomely. Certainly you have a certain freedom to live an unwholesome life. However, if you live unwholesomely, you are actually in bondage. You're actually caught in the grip of things like greed and hatred and delusion. Unwholesome is not the place of freedom. It's the opposite. So to see the place of choice, and see where the freedom is, to do the wholesome, this is the path to the Dharma.

You might want to carry with you this little nugget of wisdom, little phrase, that what you do, everything you do, is planting a seed for a plant that will come to fruition. So if you act in ways, if in acting there's an "I," chances are you'll produce more "I." If the way you act has an "I" in it that feels healthy and good, you probably have a plant, and the fruit of it will be somewhere in the world, maybe for you, or maybe for others. May this practice that we do in this weekend of the first Juneteenth national holiday, may this practice that we do help

our whole society to interrupt the century-long cycles of violence and futility and racism that keep going on. May it stop with our generation. In doing so, may the wholesome flower. May we plant gardens and gardens and gardens filled with wholesome seeds that support all of us, our whole society. Thank you all very much.