

Canki Sutta: Discovering the Truth

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So this Sunday talk could be seen as a continuation of the last three weeks of early morning talks on greed, hatred, and delusion. This is a theme that comes up repeatedly for the Buddha, and in some ways it's important because the goal of practice is to wake up, be experienced at peace, wake up to the absence of greed, hate, delusion, to wake up to the presence of the peace that's possible without it. So what I want to do today is maybe a little different than usually on Sundays. I want to tell you a little bit about a discourse, an ancient text, to talk about the teachings and conversations the Buddha had. It's a talk that is a sutta, which is maybe one of my favorites. Maybe the top ten, if I had a list like that, of ones that I value.

It's called the *Caṅkī Sutta*, and it's in the Middle Length Discourses number ninety-five. Why I like it is one of many reasons. But one of the reasons is how it talks about truth. It talks about protecting truth, and who doesn't want to protect truth, and then discovering truth or awakening to truth. Finally, it talks about the final arrival to truth. What is a final arrival, a complete coming into truth?

I can't tell you the full story of the text, but the basic idea is that a young, very well-educated brāhmaṇa comes to the Buddha and asks a simple question. He says that the brāhmaṇas in his tradition claim that their scriptures contain the only truth and no one else has the truth. What does the Buddha think about this? Instead of answering it directly, the Buddha says, Well, do any of the brāhmaṇas in the present generation themselves say, I know and I see this truth, or is it the truth that they have just taken from the texts, and they believe it because they have faith in it, because it's in the text? The young man says, No one says that they have seen it for themselves or known it for themselves. The Buddha says, What about their teachers and the teachers before them and back seven generations? Has anyone said that they themselves have seen the truth, or they themselves have known the truth directly? He says,

No, and the Buddha says, Well, basically, then, there's not much value in a statement, This is only the only truth, if for many generations no one's actually known it for themselves.

So it's a little bit challenging, I suppose, to the brāhmaṇa, because back then their religion is based on the ancient texts and they are taken on faith. The Buddha says, Well, if you want to—so the man asks the Buddha, Well, how do we protect the truth? Probably he asks the question because they thought they were protecting the truth by protecting those texts. Protecting it meant memory. There was no writing back then, so memorizing them and passing them down from generation to generation.

The Buddha says, You protect the truth if you, when you talk about what you think is true, like religiously true, you indicate the reason for why you take it to be true, the basis for that statement. So if you take it on faith, preface your conversation with, I have it on faith that this is true. If you believe it's true because the tradition tells you so, then say, Based on the tradition, I take this to be true. If it's a matter of because it's in your sacred texts, say, Because of my sacred text, I take it to be true. If it's because of your reasoning and your logic, say that. If it's just because you have some intuitive sense that this is true, say that, I have some intuitive sense this is true.

So it's kind of a very helpful thing for other people to know that if you make a truth claim, on what basis do you make it? Oh, it's on faith. It's on whatever. So the young man says, OK, but can't you discover truth for yourself? The Buddha says, Yes, you can. So the man says, How do I do that? How does one do that?

This is another wonderful part of the text. The Buddha then describes a process by which someone can discover the truth. The young man is not just replying to the man's question: How does one discover the truth? The Buddha provides a means of process, and the Buddha doesn't directly propose—he doesn't really directly say what's important for him, what the Buddha's truth is, what he has realized. He just informs the man of a process. But indirectly, the Buddha's goal of the spiritual life is emphasized.

It's kind of a sleight of hand, perhaps, or maybe you have to be really attentive to see what he's doing here. I'll try to explain this. I see trying to spell the text, *Caṅkī* is usually A C A N K I, that's a Pāli spelling, C A N K A, but it's pronounced chunky, like with C H. So the Buddha doesn't describe the process of discovering the truth. This is important from the Buddhist teachings, because the Buddha really wants everyone to discover for themselves. Don't rely on texts to know what's true, but to really know for yourself in some direct way. But it's a process for doing that.

You have to realize that in the ancient world there were no books, so you couldn't say, We'll go to the library and read up on it. If you wanted to hear and learn spiritual teachings, learn about a process to become, discover the truth, you had to go find someone who would teach it to you. The first criteria for this process has to do with a relationship we have to a teacher. The teacher teaches. The next part of the process is the relationship we have to teachings. The final step of the steps of this process has to do with the practice as we do, what we engage in so that we can discover the truth. These three areas are important: a teacher, the teachings, and then the practice.

The Buddha says that first you want to find yourself a teacher. To do so, go find the teachers in your area—I'm paraphrasing here—and investigate them all. Investigate the teacher. Then it goes on in great detail how you're supposed to check them out. They all have to do with checking out whether in the teacher there's a presence of any greed, any hatred, and any delusion, because of which they will use or twist the teachings. They will not quite give real teachings, or somehow influence the flavour, the texture of the teachings they give, because they are infused with the teacher's greed, hatred, and delusion.

You want to have a teacher who is not going to have any greed and hatred and delusion which influences what they say. So there's this wonderful instruction: check out the teacher. To really check out a teacher, it takes time. Don't rush headlong into a teacher. Really tune in and pay attention, and see how they live their lives maybe, and see, are they free of any greed, hate, and delusion? That's good. That's going to show the way that they teach, the simplicity or the clarity of what they have to teach.

If you decide that they don't have that kind of greed, hate, and delusion, then have some confidence in that teacher, have some faith, some trust in that teacher. Then the teacher's worthy of some degree of trust. The next step is go visit the teacher. In the ancient world, again, you couldn't read a teacher's books, watch them on YouTube. You had to go and find a teacher. So go visit the teacher. It's important to be in the presence, especially back then in the oral tradition, and offer respect to the teacher.

There's a long, ancient tradition that some modicum of respect prepares a listener to listen well, kind of clears a certain degree of clouds or agitation. That kind of genuine respect or care is a kind of willingness to be open and give a kind of willingness to listen well to what a teacher has to say. But remember, this is after having really checked out the teacher and decided, Okay, this person's worthy of some respect. Then listen to the teacher. Listen to what they have to say. In the modern world, we might say, Read the teachings carefully. Listen, read well, take your time. Back then there was only listening. There were no libraries, no

books.

The process with the teacher is to investigate, to have faith, trust some degree, to visit, to offer respect, and then to really listen to the teacher. Listen to the teachings from the teacher. Then as you listen and hear the teachings, fully take them in. As you hear them, memorize the teachings. That makes, again, a lot of sense back in the ancient world, because you didn't have a book to refer back to, and people didn't know how to write, so they didn't take notes when the teacher was teaching. You couldn't go to the library or something to check out a book to find out if you wanted to review and read again and think about what was being taught. You had to memorize what was being taught, and people back then almost certainly had a much higher ability to memorize than we have today, because that was the medium for knowledge in a way that is not the case today.

Then, having memorized them or have them in writing or some way, examine them, reflect on them, think about them. Here again, just like with a teacher, you don't accept teachings. You don't accept a teacher blindly or quickly, but you really check it out. There's a process of checking it out, thinking about it, looking at it, not automatically believing the teacher or believing the teachings, but really reflect on them, examining them. When one has examined and thought about them deeply, and if they really, from your best understanding, seem to be good teachings, then accept those teachings enough to be willing to begin the process of practice. So here the teachings: memorize the teachings and reflect deeply on the teachings, and then some modicum of accepting them as something that is accepted well enough. Now you can practise with them.

It's kind of like you've gotten the ingredients for the experiment, and now you have to run the experiment if you want to discover something. So then comes the practice, and the practice is first. By understanding the teachings, by having faith in the teacher, this whole process is to have there spring up, arise out of yourself, the desire to practice. Without some inspiration, some enthusiasm, some feeling of, Yes, I'm going to practise, you know, then the experiment is not really going to work. So we want to listen to teachings, take them in until we really feel like, Yes. It might be part of that Yes to practise comes from having checked out the teacher who says, If it's possible to live without greed, hatred, and delusion, this is a worthwhile path, this is good, this is inspiring. That inspires us to want to do it for ourselves, to discover how to do it.

Then there is preparing oneself. The text says being fit to practise, so preparing ourselves to practice, whatever that means, getting ready for practising or getting established in practice. Once again, the word examine: when we have a practising meditation example, and get

up and settled, and really able to be in the present moment, there is a non-discursive, non-analytical way of looking, examining more and more deeply what is our experience, what's really going on in our direct experience. Here we have, again, this examining: a teacher, you reflect on the teachings, and now we're examining and looking deeply at our own experience, because that's where the discovery of truth is going to be. Then a person continues practising and endeavours and makes more effort, and as practice moves along, there comes a time when this becomes a conalict. We give ourselves over to it, give ourselves over to really see the experiment all the way through. At some point one realizes, one has a realization of ultimate truth with the body, one realizes with the body ultimate truth.

I believe the experience with the body is being said to emphasize the direct, personal way in which we see and perceive and experience the truth. This is not from a book. It's not ideas. It doesn't exactly belong to the mind of analysis and cognitive beliefs, or even maybe a certain kind of not even cognitive understanding in a certain way. But first and foremost, it's coming so obvious that all this is. So, you know, if you are really hot on a hot day, and you go stand in the shade of a tree, what's cool, you know, you experience the coolness, the truth of that coolness with your body—it's a really felt sense experience. This kind of realization of the truth with the body directly is called discovering the truth.

This young brāhmaṇa asks the Buddha, Then is this the final arrival at truth? Is this the final complete experience of truth? The Buddha says, No. In order to really arrive at it, fully be centered in the truth, then you want to do that process that he described before, over and over and over again. I imagine you don't have to keep doing the checking out the teacher at some point, or the checking out the teaching so much, but to do the practice part of it over and over and over again. It's the repetition of basic practice and repetition of coming back into the discovery of the truth, discovering the truth over and over and over again, that begins to expand and fill out and develop this capacity. We become the truth. We arrive in truth in a full way.

In this teaching, the Buddha does not say what the truth is, so the young brāhmaṇa does not ask the Buddha, What do you teach? And what do you teach about the truth? He's really asked, first and foremost, about his own religion, and then he asks maybe to understand it better. His own religion says, How do I protect the truth? How do I discover the truth? How do I finally have a final arrival at truth? The Buddha just then answers in a kind of generic way, perhaps, or a vague way, without specifying any particular teaching of his own, almost. This is where there's a sleight of hand, maybe, or a quick move, because what the Buddha says at the beginning, the very first step is, check out the teacher to make sure the teacher

doesn't have greed, hatred, and delusion.

This is the goal of the Buddha. The goal of the Buddha is for people to come to a place where they're free of greed, hate, and delusion. By having this young man first and foremost check out—you may be told, This is what you have to check out first—it does a number of things. It means that he is only going to study with people who have realized the absence of greed, hatred, and delusion. Because they've realized that, they know the value of that. Maybe they have all kinds of non-Buddhist ideas, maybe believe in all kinds of things, but for the Buddha, that's maybe secondary. What's really important, what's primary, is this freedom from clinging, freedom from grasping, that the freedom from greed, hate, and delusion represents.

Also, by telling a young man to pay attention, to check out the teacher in these states of greed, hate, and delusion, it's actually a beginning of attuning him to this possibility of being free of greed, hate, and delusion. To really study someone else, and investigate someone else, and really see the way that they are free of greed, hate, and delusion, that they have this amazing freedom from these kind of powerful forces that are so big in our society—I imagine it's really inspiring, inspires a possibility. Also, I can't imagine that the young man, if he did this, would begin becoming, having spent time studying greed, hate, and delusion, or the absence of it in another person, would start becoming more self-aware of one's own greed, hatred, and delusion, and seeing it more likely. Seeing maybe the unfortunate nature of it being there, and the teacher is without it, but I have it. There might be a kind of inspiration that maybe that's important not to have it, to work through it. So I believe that the Buddha is kind of like—one of his primary messages, he kind of, a kind of side door, gets through to this young brāhmaṇa who is talking with him, so that by the time you get to the full discovery of truth, the full attainment of truth, the idea that it involves the absence of greed, hate, and delusion is not very far away. If you want to become what the teacher has attained, and that also has to be an absence of greed, hate, and delusion, and that is what the Buddha was teaching.

The idea of religious truths, doctrines, beliefs that are maybe not that important for the Buddha unless they interfere with the possibility of this radical freedom. But this radical freedom perhaps can exist without too much concern about what people believe, if it's not harmful, if they believe all kinds of religious beliefs and ideas that come from their tradition, from faith, from their logic, whatever. May it be so, or let it be that way, provided that we discover how to live together on this planet free of greed, hatred, and delusion. So protecting the truth, I think it's a generous thing to do. If we tell other people the basis upon what we know, what we believe to be religiously true—by faith, by tradition, from the texts, from my teacher, whatever—and then engage in a process of discovering the truth for ourselves, this is a great

thing to do.

Not only maybe we can't discover what that is while we are ourselves still involved in greed, hate, and delusion, because just like a teacher may skew their understanding by the influence of greed, hatred, and delusion, so we would skew our discovery of the truth by those forces as well. To cleanse ourselves, to learn to do, empty ourselves of these forces, is possible. It's worth a while, and it's one of the great instructions from the Buddha to do so. So the *Caṅkī Sutta*. Thank you very much, and I look forward to being here again with you next Sunday. No, I won't be here next Sunday. I'll be here in two weeks this coming Sunday. Andrea Farrell is coming to speak. She's my co-teacher here. I see a wonderful teacher, and I feel like you're very happy that she is coming to continue these teachings while I'm away, and you'll be in good hands. I look forward to seeing you in a couple of weeks. Thank you.