

Dharmette: Insight (31) Mine Without Craving

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So hello and welcome to this Monday where we're continuing a longer series on insight, what the meaning of insight is in insight meditation. The core meaning has to do with having three profound observations, three profound ways of seeing deeply into our experience that are called insights. The one we're focusing on right now is the insight into not-self, which is so easy to get more complicated than it needs to be, because the self is a hugely important topic for most people who have one, have some sense that they exist as a unique individual, somewhat autonomous, making choices for yourself. So I want to kind of continue as we get closer and closer to the core idea, the insight into not-self, and take a little different tack in the next few days. That is to emphasize how much extra we add on top of self.

I don't want to posit there is a self or there is not a self right now. What I want to do is to emphasize that even if there is a self, even if there isn't a self, there are layers and layers of extra ideas, reactions that come with having these opinions, having this idea that there is a self, there is not a self. There might be innocent ways of understanding that, but most of us are not so innocent because we pile things on top. It's a little bit like if you're going to go for a backpacking trip or maybe a long day hike, and you would like to travel light, as light as you can. You try to take anything extra with you, and then you have the least—anything extra, any extra weight puts more stress, makes it more difficult.

So you try to reduce anything that's extra. There are some people who do through hikes, it's called, who go for long days, maybe months at a time, backpacking. They've managed to buy the lightest possible backpacking gear. They really try to reduce their weight radically to almost, you know, the ounces count as they sort through this. So imagine that instead of that, you feel like you need to bring everything along for all possible contingencies, maybe even for a two-hour hike in the mountains on a clear, nice day. So you bring a few suitcases with you,

with your raincoats and your rain boots and umbrellas and maybe you should have a sleeping bag and extra food and lots of water, because who knows what's going to happen.

So you're carrying four different suitcases, and after a while you realize that's too heavy, but what you do is you carry two for a while, you go back and get the other two, and you bring them along, and you're kind of going along with all this. But the suitcases are, you know, each suitcase is maybe 50, 60 pounds. You're trying to make your way in a nice little two-hour hike in a nice park where there's lots of people and the roads are nearby and you easily get out. All that stuff is not needed. In fact, to be able to go on a hike and put aside ideas of, I should have brought more, I should have had this and that, next time I'm going to bring more, I'm going to do this and that, it can be so preoccupying what we bring with us on the hike that we don't really enjoy the hike. Part of the joy of maybe hiking is to drop all our concerns, to just be in the natural world and just be present in a very simple way without a lot of extra thoughts, ideas, associations, relationships we have to take care of, duties we have to do at home or something. Just becomes simple and so nice.

This idea of self, independent of whether there is or not a self, it can come with a lot of baggage. It can come with a lot of luggage we carry along with it. One of them that the Buddha emphasizes is that he says, if we have opinions about the self, that's a burden. That's baggage, in my language. He called it suffering. As a philosophical concept, opinions about self just get you mired in quicksand. It just makes things so much more complicated, especially if you make a very strong opinion.

For the Buddha, a strong opinion that there is a self is suffering, it's extra. A strong opinion there is no self is extra, and it's an opinion, and it's suffering. The holding on tight to these ideas. So part of what we do in mindfulness practice is not a rush to understand not-self. The whole idea of insight into not-self is not a belief. It's not something you need to understand, just like reading a book about swimming. You don't need to only understand swimming. You have to swim, and you have to learn to float. It's what you need to know about swimming. You have to learn for yourself.

Maybe the analogy isn't perfect, but hopefully it's well enough that we're looking for a deep insight, not an understanding. So don't struggle with the understanding of the concept of not-self. But rather, for today, understand what's extra, what you add on to this idea of self. One of the earliest teachings of the Buddha, as far as we can tell what's early, he didn't emphasize his teaching on not-self. The comparable thing that he emphasized is not being selfish, because being selfish is suffering, suffering for ourselves, and it might be suffering for others as well.

Selfish is a clinging, is a preoccupation with something. There's a lot of extra baggage when

there's a kind of gathering together and holding on tightly to me, myself, and mine, and be excessively preoccupied and not be able to see the full picture we're in because we're so self-consumed, the conceit of self. So the Buddha emphasized that this is what we want to let go of, this extra selfishness. More often than teachings about not-self, the Buddha taught that we want to understand, be very careful not to add craving on top of any ideas of self, not to add conceit on top of any ideas of self, and not to add any kind of metaphysical opinion or view, doctrine, on top of the idea of self.

The way he said this, he refers to his little teaching that if you say, this is mine, and there's craving involved in that, this is mine, my possessiveness, that's suffering, stress. If you have the idea that this I am, and there's conceit around the I am-ness, that is suffering. He said, if there's this opinion, this view, doctrine, I know what the, this is the self, this is the true self, like the soul, this is the soul. If you hold on to that view, that's extra baggage, that's suffering. Right? So when the Buddha taught, he said it's more useful to see things through the lens, this is not mine. This is not who I am. This is not myself, my soul, my essence. And why is that useful? Because of all this craving, conceit and opinionatedness that we add on top of things.

To start seeing, so the first one, this is mine. What's really brilliant about this, when the Buddha was teaching this, he was always pointing to something specific. He was always pointing to something in detail, something. This thing is not mine, as opposed to saying, nothing is mine. The Buddha tended not to make these broad abstractions. He was always very particular, concrete. So, you know, this bell that's here next to me that I use, I could easily see this bell and not say it's mine. It belongs to IMC. I know who gave it to us, and it was a gift, and I appreciate it. It belongs, you know, it's not mine.

Because it's not mine, I'm not going to take it home with me. I'm not going to be concerned about how I'm going to pack it and all the wonderful things I'm going to do with it as I take it home. It's just a bell that sits here that I can use. I don't make it into my own. There's innocent ways in which we can see things as being mine. But the idea that we possess it, we own it, comes along with also the idea that we control it, that we can manipulate it, we can make it as we want it to be.

So, for example, this is my joy. This is my meditation. How could people be interrupting and disturbing my meditation? The neighbor has their leaf blower blowing one more time. Don't they know that they're disturbing my meditation? So I've claimed it for myself, the meditation. This is my thing to have control over, to run, to take care of, to protect. It starts to be these layers of complications. Right? That's extra, as opposed to just sitting here breathing

with a loud leaf blower going. Just kind of be very simple with it.

This is the present moment. To learn to let go the extra layers, the baggage we carry along with it. Part of that baggage is the idea of mine. So you might, as we go through the day today, do an exercise, do some study of this issue of mine. This whole idea of the Buddha's teachings of not-self, it's best if you slowly ease into it through a deep self-study. You really understand how your experience is right here as opposed to just listen to the words and the ideas and argue with them or just think about them.

The personal experience that lays the foundation for this deeper insight is to spend the next 24 hours looking and seeing if you could understand where the topic, where the concept of mine comes into play. My emotions, my feelings, my opinions, my car, my things, my time. You know, it's all the my, my, my, my that we do. It might be innocent the way you do it, but see what's extra, see what you add to it. See if there's any attachment, any craving, any stickiness that this idea of my and mine comes along for you. And then tomorrow we'll continue easing our way into the insight into not-self. Thank you.