

## Dharmette: Insight (36) Not-Self as the Better Option

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So hello and welcome to this Monday morning talk where we continue with a theme of insight, starting in a little bit fresh with a new week's orientation towards insight. And the topic still is not self, a topic that's very difficult for many people to appreciate and understand. What I'd like to do today is to emphasize that the teachings on not-self can point to staying close to a sense of well-being, that this is not meant to be—to diminish us, but rather to leave us in a good place. So remember that these teachings about not-self now are following a long series of teachings and practice of *samādhī*, and now a series of teachings on insight. So this is not meant to be understood just walking off the street and going into a Buddhist center and never having practiced before, and hearing a very rational, maybe, maybe not so rational talk on not-self and trying to understand it from one's own, you know, ordinary state of mind. The orientation here for this talk is that it's for people who have some experience of meditation, of a deeper inner life, where they have some qualitative experience of inner well-being, where there's a qualitatively good experience of peace, happiness, freedom, joy, calm, tranquility, something that feels really good, maybe not easily found.

And in the context of that, then the not-self teachings point to, be careful. Watch how this whole world of me, myself, and mine, this whole contraction around defining ourselves, even identity sometimes, sense of ownership, sense of judgments and concerns about how we look and do people like us and are we adequate, all this whole constellation of things, clearly feels like a diminishment, clearly feels as a loss as we get involved in that world. So to give example, the—I've used this before, maybe here. But say that you've come to IMC and meditation hall here, and you're sitting with a group of people, and the meditation is going really well for you. You can't believe how peaceful you've become, how subtle and calm, and there's a feeling of great well-being, happiness. And you're just staying cruising along like this.

And then you notice that you have to go to the bathroom. You have to go. So you just, matter of fact, get up and you take your peace with you. It doesn't go anywhere. You stay calmly and present. You're staying close to it. Go to the bathroom. You come back. And you see that someone is now sitting in your seat, maybe on your cushion. Okay. And you can see that you become indignant. You can see that you become alarmed, that you're about to get angry. But the anger, the alarm, the indignation is seen right away because of the sense of peace and the well-being you have. You notice that the surface of the water is getting choppy in the mind and the heart. And you sit there and you look at it and say, wait a minute. My assuming that's my seat and someone is sitting in my seat taking it away from me. If I go down that route, I lose this wonderful state of peace I have. I don't have to take that as mine. That seat is not mine. I can feel that as I do that, that peace begins to go away. The happiness diminishes. Why get wrapped up in this thoughts of that that's my seat? Right. It's not my seat. I'll leave it alone. I'll find another seat.

So here the example is the one that shows that we know something is good, and we know that as soon as we take it as mine, we get diminished. So it could also be that you're, somehow you had a nice day, you've been nice hike in the park, you got to rest, you ate just a right amount of food, you just feel very fresh, refreshed and nice. And it feels really good. You feel like there's a spring in your walk, and you're feeling really nice. And someone, a stranger, walks by and says to you, your shoes are ugly. And now, you know, you can feel that you're tottering between, who cares? Or, wait a minute, why do I want to go down and be angry? Why do I want to now criticize myself? Why do I want to now look at my shoes and feel like I've really, you know, failed as a human being to wear shoes like this because some stranger said that they're lousy shoes. Right? And because of the feeling good, where's the priority? Do I want to sacrifice my feeling of goodness and freshness and happiness to pick up this whole question of, am I an inadequate human being because someone has an opinion about my shoes? Should I run after the person and tell them that was mean, that was unnecessary? Or do I stay close to my peace? Do I need to sacrifice it around a self-idea that somehow I'm a very bad shoe chooser. I don't need to do that. I don't need to do that.

So with the deeper the meditation goes, the more reference point, more understanding we have at the downside of this is mine, this is who I am, this is me that goes on. So, for example, there's lots of things in meditation. It's relatively easy not to assume this is me, this is mine, this is myself. So there might be a sound outside, hearing. We don't own the sound. It's not mine. We don't define ourselves by the sound. That's my true self. That's who I am. It's just a sound. And we leave it so simple. The extra layer of me, myself, and mine, we feel there's

a little bit of tension, a little bit of preoccupation. Something really good was lost in that. So there, the sound occurs, and we realize, that's not myself. That's not self. Leaving it that way, seeing it that way, the sound, I stay closer to my peace. I'm better off this way.

There is an itch. That's not myself. That's not mine. That's not me. I'm not the itch. It's just itch. Just this, the itch itself. Just this. What about a thought? Just a thought. Maybe I don't have to overlay me, myself, and mine. I don't want to define myself by the thought. Many people are very closely identified with their thinking. It's like the thinking is who they are. But it's not necessary. And when the mind is really peaceful and quiet, it's possible to see the thought arise. It's possible to see we follow it to get involved, to judge it, to define ourselves by it. But that was really one of the best thoughts the world's ever had. I better show it to people so they see how great I am. See we get involved and we don't. We have something better to do. We don't want to sacrifice our well-being, our *samādhi*, our concentrated state.

So from the vantage point of deep practice, we begin seeing more and more that the particularities of experience in the moment now, what's happening in this moment, when really in the lived experience, this is not self. And this is always particular. This sound, this itch, this thought... This emotion, this is not self. Because we see that to assume that, to get involved with that, is not necessary. It's a diminishment, it's a narrowing. There's something lost in the process. It's almost like if I take that thought as me, and if, in a way, I become less of myself, I lose part of the wholeness of being here, because I've now selected a piece of the whole to get caught in and preoccupied with. And so the suchness, the fullness, the wholeness here is lost. And so in deeper meditation we begin seeing that any attribution, any attributing self to any particular thing, is a little bit, is unnecessary, adds a level of stress, adds a level of diminishment. Why bother?

Then you might come up with, well, but there really must be a true self. There is a real self. After all, you know, after all, all these protests around teachings of not-self. In that deep state of peace and calm, you don't need to have philosophy. You don't need to get into that. It's not completely unnecessary. Right? To get involved asserting, yes, but there is something. Why diminish yourself again? Why lose yourself, in a sense, in these kinds of kind of narrow preoccupation about to prove that you are yourself? Just stay with the peace. Stay with the peace. And that the concerns about the philosophy of self, the concerns about, that can be later. It takes a long time to get into quiet, deep meditation. And so then you can stay there.

So what I'm offering today is still not a clear definition of the Buddhist teachings of not-self, but we're slowly getting there through the edges of it by working our way in. And what I'm

offering today is that there's a whole way of understanding how little self we need to assert into our psychophysical system in states of deep peace and happiness and well-being. And so not self is not needed. Self is not needed. Selfing is not needing. Making things into mine, who you are and who we truly are, the self. That's just extra on top of, it's not even cream on top of the cake. It's putting, I don't know what, dirt on top of the cream. So not self. Not self is so valuable at times when it's clear that self is not needed.

So I hope that made sense. And if it did, I'd encourage you to go through the day, next 24 hours, maybe put an alarm on your smartphone or your watch or whatever you can. And maybe once an hour, maybe not on the hour, maybe sometimes off the hour, so it's a little bit of a surprise. And when the alarm goes off, just check in. Are you involved in selfing? Are your thoughts about yourself or the involved? And might there be a better option? Is nearby? Is there a little bit more peace, a little more happiness, well-being, if you're less involved, less caught in this whole selfing thing. So, thank you, and we'll continue this tomorrow.