

## Dharmette: New Vision (4) Confirmation of the Practice

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to this fourth talk in the series titled New Vision. As the Buddhist practice matures, it provides us with a new vision, a new understanding of certainly what's possible, but also what might be available here and now. Sometimes people have very clear experiences of freedom, of letting go deeply, of very clear feelings that something has radically shifted inside, sometimes in a moment, with an experience of freedom, of awakening, of freedom. Sometimes there's an orientation that with these kinds of more clear markers of maturation in the practice, the point is to have those experiences. People are looking for that, wanting that. But one of the very significant ways of understanding any deepening experience or any significant useful experiences in meditation or in Buddhist practice is that the experience confirms the practice, confirms the process of coming together here with our attention, with our dedication, our faith, our confidence, mindfulness, concentration, the practice of ethics.

It confirms that this practice that we do, the full scope of it, this growing, this dedication we're doing, is good, is really good. It confirms its tremendous value. What's nice about this word confirmation is that when we confirm the practice, we're being pointed back to the practice. If we have some idea there's an end to the practice and we get some experience, then we can just kind of be in some kind of enlightened retirement. Then we kind of let the practice go. But in the kind of little simplistic saying: before enlightenment, practice. After enlightenment, practice. Just practice.

Let your faith, your confidence be there to always continue the practice. But the practice is not about a lot of doing. It has a lot to do with getting out of the way in a wholesome way, in a beneficial way, to know how to shine the light of awareness over and over again here in this

experience. And to know where to shine the light of awareness, to shine the light of awareness on the experience that helps us to grow what's wholesome, to shine the light of awareness on that which supports us to become more stable, more centered, more connected to the experiences we're having. Sometimes people have the light of awareness turned on, but they spend too much time focusing on the emptiness or the spaciousness that's there, which is certainly valuable to do, but to overdo it involves a disconnection with the fullness of our human life. To overemphasize a focus on freedom can, oddly enough, limit the fullness of our experience.

These marvelous experiences of emptiness, of feeling of liberation, feeling of non-clinging, as powerful and significant as they are, it's possible to overvalue them so that we're not continually returning to turning on the light to our full experience and to being practicing with all of our experience. So if the light is on, then we'll get the information: oh, now what's useful is a practice of loving kindness. Now that's loving kindness is what's called for here. Oh, in this situation I think I need to spend some time reflecting and thinking about the ethics. Right? Where is a non-harm in this situation? What choices do I make that reduce the harm that I might cause? And to actually do reflection and contemplation.

It might be that we feel the light of awareness is on, and we know very much that we're agitated. And it might be that given the circumstance and what's happening next, that what seems healthy, the most appropriate, is to do concentration practices, to settle and become more grounded. So in the activities we're going to do next, we're just more careful, we can be more careful and more appropriate. But one way or the other, what happens as people mature in practice is they have greater and greater appreciation that just the practice is the center. Keeping practice, whatever Buddhist practice is, the *Eightfold Path*, to keep that at the center of the life.

That can seem a little odd, because there are important things to do in the world. We've been taught maybe that what's most important is to always be helping people. What's most important is to have a close, intimate relationship and have love, have our love for a partner or for our children or for our parents or something. That's supposed to be at the center. That's the most important thing, the greatest thing. And so, you know, if a partner says, you know, what do you love most? What's most important for you? And with the expectation that you're going to say, you are. But if you say, oh, the practice is more important for me, your partner might be crushed. Unless the partner understands that because the practice of honesty, of clarity, of compassion, of being present—this Buddhist practice and whatever formulation it takes in any given time—that actually allows you to love more.

And so with a partner or a friend, you're not abandoning them or making them somehow lessening your care, your love, your friendship for them. By putting the practice at the center, you actually have more room, you actually have greater love for them. So you can come back to them and say, yes, the practice is most important. If you'd like me to shift that and make you the most important, and the practice secondary, what will happen is that I'll actually end up having less love for you or less time for you or less care or less something, less clarity about how to be in this relationship in a wonderful way. So the trade-off is not exactly in your favor. There's something about the practice that keeps us clean, that keeps us open, that allows the most wholesome parts of us to grow and develop.

And it feels like that's the source of life even for ourselves to practice. And so it's fine to have the practice be the center of our life. And ideally a friend or a partner who says, you know, who do you love most, me or your practice, and you say the practice, it's a perfect answer. Because I've seen that as you practice, you're actually more present for me. You're more available. You're less distracted, less caught up. So, and I've known people, family members who've said to someone, you know, relative or spouse, it's time for you to go and retreat again, because they see how beneficial it is for them to be in the retreat and they come back in such a much better place.

So at some point this confirmation of the practice is so strong that this is the most important. And one of the ways of understanding that is that some people have, is that now they want to integrate the practice in all of their life. They're asked a question, how do I bring my practice to my life now? But more appropriate or the more kind of heartfelt practice, version of that question, at some point in maturing in this practice, is not how you bring the practice into your life, but how you bring your life into the practice. Practice comes first, this cultivation, this growing, this *Dhamma* movement, this awakening movement, this freeing movement, that the practice enables and allows and supports. That is the center of life. That's the fullness of life. And now everything else can be folded into it. Come here, come here. Be in the freedom with me.

Let me not go out to find how to be free there. Let me stay free and bring everything else in to it. So maybe some of you have had experiences, small or great, or intermediate, that involve some kind of something that shows you clearly the goodness of the practice, the rightness of the practice, how the practice is beneficial. Yes, this practice is beneficial. Yes. But as practice matures, that clarity becomes stronger and stronger until it becomes clear that it isn't, practice is not something we do once in a while. How we live our life, the living of life, becomes inseparable from being on the path, being walking the path, inseparable from the

*Eightfold Path*. So, confirmation of practice. So thank you. And tomorrow we'll do one more talk on this new vision. And perhaps this will be the conclusion of all these talks since January on *samādhī*, insight, and the new vision. Thank you.