

## Friday Dharma talk

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There are sometimes in this world of ours, places you'll go where to go there you want to prepare yourself. If you go to a wedding, you probably get out of your pajamas. If you go to a funeral, you probably get out of your dirty work clothes. As you approach the funeral, you probably get a little quiet, attentive to who's there and how people are. Sometimes if you go to a sacred site, some people prepare themselves to go there. Sometimes if you're going to go see a really reverent person, I think for most Western Buddhists, at least in our circles, the Dalai Lama can represent that.

Do you have the occasion to meet with the Dalai Lama one-on-one? He's going to have to have you over for tea here. So maybe you decide that after a week of not showering, that before seeing the Dalai Lama, maybe you should clean up. Maybe you clean yourself up a little more than usual. Cut your fingernails and make sure your hair is nice. Oh, he's going to come to your house for tea.

You know, socks and dirty underwear all over the living room couch. Non-attachment. He's... Dalai Lama represents the pinnacle of non-attachment. You need to show him how non-attached you are. So you just leave everything there. And he has to kind of pick around them to find a place to sit.

Non-attachment. Chances are high. Chances are high. That is not how you'll do it. Chan says, ah, you probably clean your house. Clean the cups and the tea and get everything nice. Get yourself nice.

We're going in this journey to a sacred place. We're going in this journey to meet a sacred person. The sacred place is in you. But you'll see it doesn't stop with you, but radiates out in all directions. I think for me what's most sacred in the Dharma is the awareness that knows how to include everything. Everything is held in awareness.

That's sacred. As soon as there's something that says, no, not that, then it's no longer sacred. So the sacred is in you and then... radiates out from there in all directions to include everything. And the very special, holy, sacred person you're going to encounter is you. Though in Buddhism they don't use the word sacred or holy so often, but they use the word noble.

You're going to meet a noble person, you. So this first foundation of mindfulness is preparing. We're preparing ourselves. So, meaning that you would be careful that you don't take these practices as being the whole thing in the beginning. You're willing to give it the benefit of the doubt, you're willing to do the preparation. And the first foundation, as I understand it or interpret it, is really preparing the ground, preparing ourselves in order to go deep, in order to encounter something deep within us, something important within us.

But we can't just go right there, the snap of the fingers. We prepare ourselves. And we prepare ourselves with all of who we are. So we prepare ourselves with all our attentional faculties, the metaphor of waking up. This is wonderful for me, quality that you wake up, you turn on the light, you open the windows, so that all our ways of knowing, sensing, experiencing can operate. Even the ones that we... don't even know we have, to make ourselves available, to make ourselves, to get out of the way of ourselves so that our capacity to sense, feel, know, and in doing so become attuned, deeply attuned, to this direct present moment experience.

Because it's in the direct present moment experience that that's the door into the temple. That's the door into this depth into what's sacred. So we want to learn and appreciate the direct present moment experience of now, not for its own sake, but as a doorway and doorway. And this first foundation then uses, you know, all of how we can sense and know, all the different ways are allowed to be brought together. But some of the ways we know are more cognitive, more elaborate. We can review, we can consider, we can imagine, we can use images.

All the things, if they're gathered together for the purpose... of being here in our direct experience, unmediated by the images, the concepts, the metaphors, the imagination, the thinking mind. But we're allowed to use all of our intelligence for the purpose of really helping our whole psychophysical system to arrive in the present moment for our direct experience. I think Buddhist teachers are sometimes afraid that people, if they use anything but the simplest forms of awareness, they'll spit out in stories and get lost in thought. They're probably right. But still, I think it's also very important to know that we're allowed to include all of ourselves here in the practice, all our capacities, if we know that what are you being used for?

And so we marshal them for, oh, this, let's do the degree to which it helps me to really arrive in the present with a quiet enough mind, with a clear enough sight, and, with the simplest possible cognition of knowing, that it qualifies good enough to be our direct experience of now, without the overlay of a lot of projections, without the overlay of a lot of desires and aversions and judgments, without the overlay of stories. And so, in doing that, we also begin discovering ourselves. We get to know ourselves better and better. We certainly get to know all the ways that we don't stay present. The important part of this practice is to actually be very respectful of how we get distracted, how we get caught, and to see it clearly, to know it, to learn from it. To learn what needs to be learned, to adjust what needs to be adjusted, to heal what needs to be healed.

All thinking about, yes, on our way, this preparation to be here and now, all of ourselves included. And then we come to sensations. Sensations are the primary means for having direct experience. Right? Direct sensing of the moment. Sensations by themselves, in and of themselves, are not a story.

Sensations by themselves, in and of themselves, do not contain in them the judging. They're not self-judging. Sensations in and of themselves are just sensations, simple sensations. And how simple can we be aware of them? How simply can we be with them? Without boredom, without agendas, without looking beyond them, or using them in order to have some kind of special experience.

And there's a way of understanding that everything we know, everything we, yeah, know, one way or the other, arrived, came to be known through the doorway of the senses. There was something felt, something sensed. So yesterday I talked about the four elements, the four properties, the four characteristics of sensations, of how we sense. And this is really now the real, becomes a doorway to go deeper. We're kind of preparing ourselves to be there close to the senses, because this is where a real pivot, a real turning point, or a deep opening is going to happen in *satipaṭṭhāna*.

Perhaps we can go back to the metaphor of the hourglass. We've been gathering and settling and coming to the neck of the hourglass and unclogging it, the neck so things can flow. And what flows is sensations. Now, it's this world of sensations is that narrow neck of the hourglass. And it is narrow. I mean, it's pretty simplistic and narrow, and you could easily make a strong argument for much of our life is left out with you only paying attention to sensations.

And it's true. Still, much of your life is left out when you go into the shower. You don't complain about that. Of course, a lot of our life gets left out of a lot of things we do. You go to a

library to leave a lot of your life behind. But it's for the purpose of opening up to that bottom half of the hourglass where everything comes back.

So this kind of relaxing, settling, quieting... opening, clarifying, sensing, knowing, become simpler and simpler. And on retreat, many people find that you want to be careful on retreat to live in a way that supports that simplification. You don't want to do something that stirs you up too much. You know, we've had people on the retreat who thought it was so easy, simple, innocent to check for a text or check for an email. And one way or the other, it took them.

They saw something, read something that they weren't expecting. And it took two or three days to get back to where they were before they opened their device. It was so activating. It was so activating. So you want to be very careful. There are people on retreat who think they have to exercise all the time.

And some of us, especially now that we're getting, some of us are getting older, that's important. But it's also easy to overdo it because in the beginning of a retreat, it seems fine to run. In fact, some people, like for example, running or exercising, they're so alive, all the blood is coursing through them. Now they're really mindful. Boy, this is... Of course it's good to exercise. I'm so mindful of exercising.

I finish exercising, I'm so present. And then they go and sit down and their mind is spinning. You know, racing and... It takes them a few sits to quiet down enough. So that principle, that idea goes more as the retreat goes along. So it's important to be, you know, care for yourself and know the consequences and support everything that keeps you, prepares you to really relax, settle into this neck of the hourglass, this simple, simple way of being.

Just sensations. And I'm saying the word sensation so often, but just pressure, weight. Heat, cold, tightness and looseness, movement, lifting, falling, fluidity, cohesion and stickiness, stretching, tightening, all kinds of particular, it's the particulars we're staying close to. It's not just generalized, but really feeling and sensing the particulars here. So yesterday was the introduction to the mindfulness of the four elements. And then there's one more preparation that for me is there to now really appreciate, really value more than maybe we have the preciousness or the uniqueness, the specialness of sensations.

Because after this next instruction, the instruction goes back to sensations. So it's a sensation in here, that's my translations of *vedanā*. So on both sides, between this middle exercise between them, we're doing sensations. But after this exercise I'm about to explain, this is now when the sensations begin to open to this new world. This is what we're preparing ourselves

for. And the hourglass begins to open.

And this is the way that this is also presented. It's not a direct experience, but it's kind of like a visualization and imagining something. So again, here the imagination is being called upon to help us to really give us a lesson that really wakes something up for us. Something like this, it goes. I'll change the pronouns. As if. As if. As if.

Just imagine as if you were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing. Compare yourself to this same body with the following reflection. My body too is of the same nature. It will come like that. This body of mine is not exempt from this destiny. It means a little bit. Here I just said, don't do anything exciting that would stir up the mind. And here I brought in, like, what is Gail doing? I was happy and calm, and now there's this death, the corpses. This is not easy. Okay.

As though you were to see a corpse thrown aside in the charnel ground, a skeleton of disconnected bones scattered in all directions. Here a handbone, there a footbone. Here a shinbone, there a thighbone. Here a hip bone, there a backbone. There a ribbone, there a breastbone. Here an arm bone, there a shoulder bone. There a neck bone, there a jaw bone. Here a tooth, there a skull. So you compare your body to that corpse. This body of mine too is of the same nature. It will be like that. It is not exempt from that destiny.

One of the primary differences between a corpse and you is you're alive. And the primary way that you know you're alive is through the operations of your nerves, nervous system. One of the primary ways is through your capacity to sense, to sense and to know. As long as you are sensing something, you're alive. The corpse senses nothing. Sensing, feeling here and now is this amazingly precious, invaluable activity of life.

We were designed by evolution to sense deeply and fully. Our senses are the doorways for gathering very important information, for knowing deeply this life. And I don't know why, but it's also the doorway to go really deep, deep inside, to the depths of our wisdom, our depths of our emotional and spiritual health. Sensing and sensations are not incidental. They're not unsophisticated for people who have PhDs in philosophy or something. Sensations are really the more than just evidence of being alive.

They're the deep working of life. They're the amazing intelligence around it. And many times I've told the story, but for me it's still poignant of how there was a time I loved to see old photographs that, you know, at least a hundred years old. Right. I think mostly from the 1800s. And so I knew that people in the photograph were no longer alive, and they would be drawn to their eyes.

And there were some photographs that were from the old times, they had a very high resolution, a lot of clarity. And I could look at their expressions in their face, the people there, look at their eyes. And there was like a little sparkle of life there, sparkle of attention. And I would look in that, and I would say to myself, that was their moment to be conscious. This is my moment. Now is my moment to have it. I'm not going to have it. In 100 years, I won't have it, just like they don't have it now anymore. This is when we're alive. And so it now, and sensations.

And so to appreciate that our capacity to sense and to feel and know is here just for a short while, to yield to sensations, trust your sensing body. Feel the sensing body sense as if you can trust it more than you trust the mind's effort to understand and to figure things out and to make things happen and the mind's trusted more than the mind's capacity to judge and come to conclusions and decide exactly what how worthy and unworthy you are, how right and wrong you are. To meet, to go to this sacred place, to meet this sacred person, you'll miss it if you spend a lot of time thinking about how right and wrong you are. You'll miss it if you spend a lot of time reviewing the past, planning the future. You'll miss it if you spend a lot of time in fantasy and desires. You will die, but now you're alive.

There was this inspiring Zen priest at San Francisco Zen Center when I was there. His name was Isan Dorsey. I knew him, and he died of AIDS, and... I was told that when he was, you know, somewhat sick with AIDS and maybe even close to dying, he did something like set up straight with that spark in his eyes, which he had a lot of sparkle, a lot of life. And he said, to have AIDS is to be alive. He was focusing on being alive. Yeah. Even if you were going to die in five minutes, maybe you have better things to do in the last five minutes. Maybe there's nothing better to do in the last five minutes than to be alive. The alternative, what you could do is just miss the whole fact that you're alive and worry about what's coming. And your last chance to really wake up and be here in a full way is lost. Right?

There's a long tradition in Theravādan Buddhism to see *satipaṭṭhāna* practice as a preparation for dying. And sometimes in Theravādan Buddhism, it's a *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* that's chanted after someone has died. What if you call on this practice now, here, this is when you're alive, this is when you can, this is where you're going to meet yourself as sacred, yourself as the sacred temple. And in calling upon all your faculties to support you to be here, here in the direct experience, you can also call on your capacity for love, your capacity for care and kindness, your capacity for compassion. It's possible to understand that tremendous value of practicing here, being present for a direct experience, sensing and feeling more fully. To do that and allow that to happen and be here is one of the most loving things you can do be-

cause it's so valuable, so caring, it so brings us to some of the healthiest, freest, suffering-free possibilities. It's so good. So, if it works for you, love yourself into the present.

When I was with a Pandita, who was very strict, stern, nothing fancy, nothing, you're supposed to do anything, but this very dry Vipassanā, what I didn't tell them then, so the easiest thing to do then was just not tell them everything. What I didn't tell them at some point, knowing, being aware, sensing every moment of mindfulness, I just loved each thing. Just loved it. That's what it was, meeting it with love. Loved it. Love there, love there. And then there was a period of time where doing that it was kind of like I had an eraser. And I would just love something and it would just vanish. And then I go to something else, it would vanish. I just loved everything away until there was no body. It was kind of a fun experience. Yeah.

So you might have your way. Be very careful, caring, kind, gentle. Don't be ahead of yourself. Don't be behind yourself. Show up for yourselves. Show up and then drop deep down into that capacity you have to sense and feel and know your direct experience. Regardless whether it's comfortable or uncomfortable. It's all direct experience. Trust it.

And so for tomorrow, tomorrow will be a day for you to do this, to really love yourself, care for yourself, really kind of take the day to really see how close, see how deeply you can relax into all this. Settle into it. Stay close to your direct experience, do your work meditation in a way that harmonizes between what it takes to do the job appropriately, but also keeps you slow and connected. Be careful when you go into your room that that's not the place where you kind of turn off the practice. Be careful how you go to sleep so that your loving practice is there too. So the whole day, so tomorrow there will not be a dharma talk, and there won't be an instructional sitting.

Inez will be here to sit with you at 8.15 sitting, and I'm hoping the bell ringer for the dharma talk. I guess Casey can ring the bell for the 3.15 in the afternoon. No, 4.15 afternoon sitting. So we'll sit... you'll gather here again at 4.15 instead of 4 o'clock. And then there'll be a sitting from 4.15 to 5 o'clock. And this will be on the schedule, so you'll be able to see it. I'll be away for the day, and I'll be back early the next morning. And then tomorrow there'll be no practice discussions with me, and as we'll have a few more than she'll offer a few more than she has been offering. And then I'll be here again early Sunday morning and then we'll be here in the hall for the instructional sitting at 8.15.

And finally, it's really a precious opportunity to have a full day of silence in doing this kind of practice. I hope you enjoy it. Thank you.