

Friday Night Dharma talk .

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There were some more questions about *dāna*. So we've had these wonderful four people on staff at Big Springs, Russ and Paula, Michelle and Bear. And so they're on pay with Big Springs. That's the pay there. And so when you make *dāna* for IRC, IRC Recruit *dāna*, all that will go for our gift that we'll be giving to Big Springs. And we take into account that that also includes for their staff here.

And that our wonderful managers, Marianne and Enlish, they are in the IRC volunteer model. They're retreating like you are. There's a way of practicing the retreating of managers. So hopefully that all is clear. And it's kind of phenomenal to me. It's been a surprise, and just a wonderful inspiration.

The good work, open-heartedness, generosity of the Big Bear staff here. It was something we were always here, ready to help, track, be with us in a way that I hadn't anticipated. I thought we would be a little bit more alone here, had taken care of things. So it may be that this talk about generosity at the end of the retreat is quite fitting. Some people say it's fitting because it's a wonderful instructions for going home to practice generosity. But also it's a way of kind of maybe bringing together the teachings for this week on wholesomeness and learning how to feel, identify, recognize what is wholesome inside of you.

So it is not an idea of what is good. It's not, you know, you read the Buddhist book on right behavior, and you know that in some situations you do it this way, and you exactly know the protocol by reading the book. The only book we're reading in our school is the book of our hearts. Learning to read and recognize everything you need to know in Buddhism that's good for your being on the path of Buddhism is found in you, found in your own heart, your inner life. And one of the things we find is beauty. And generosity belongs and overlaps with this whole experience of wholesomeness, whole experience of beauty that's central to what to practice the path is about.

And thinking about this just now, I wanted to tell the story that maybe many of you know well, that at some point when the Buddha was maybe 36 years old, he'd been on the path of practice for about seven years, kind of trying to find a way with his suffering. And the various things he tried didn't work. So, you know, he was apparently a pretty diligent practitioner or whatever he did. But it just didn't work. He didn't find the solution and the answer that he was looking for, to the ending of suffering. And so, yeah, maybe the way the story is told, it seems like he didn't know what to do.

But then he remembered a story when he was a child. And most people say he was about six years old. And his father was the local chieftain or king. And in the spring, they had a spring plowing festival, which was maybe a big festival. A lot of people would go out there with oxen and the plowing flowers and chant and do things. I don't know what they all did.

And on the occasion, as a young child, the Buddha was kind of left alone on the edge of the field under the shade of a rose apple tree. I take it as being very significant that the name of the tree is remembered and preserved. All the trees in the Buddha's life, the major trees under which he sat or things happened, we know what tree it was. Maybe one day someone will remember you sitting under a tree here. I mean, you'll remember looking back, oh, I sat by this tree. And so remember at the time of he was at the edge of the field, left alone.

No one was bothering him, but it was a comfortable day. It was a nice day. And maybe it was kind of interesting to see the festival going on up in the field. But in any case, he kind of became kind of inward and settled and experienced inner joy, a joy that was free of any unwholesome thoughts, any unhealthy way of thinking or being. And in that joy, he became settled and unified. And it felt that joy, that well-being to him, felt very clean, felt very, in my language, kind of pure, which was probably a surprise to him because going through his years of difficult spiritual practice, some of that was asceticism, with the idea that you weren't supposed to experience joy.

Joy was not okay. Or some of it was growing up in kind of a, in some of the religious traditions of his time, people who were Brigham Scions believed that sensuality, sexuality was a detour, was a distraction, or wrong for being on the spiritual path. And so the idea that joy could be a good thing was kind of seemingly absent. But he experienced this joy that felt wholehearted, felt whole, felt good. And he said, this joy is not to be feared. This joy is not to be feared.

So I just wonder, you know, why he feared it before that. And then he said, this is the path to awakening. There was something about the purity, the simplicity, the cleanliness of the absence of unwholesome thoughts, being collected, being unified as experience of being whole. They said, oh, this is outward leading, this leads somewhere. And then what I want to high-

light is that he felt something really wholesome. He felt it, he took it in, and something in him recognized something about it.

Recognized this was good. And maybe some of you have had experiences with small children that were similar to this, feeling of safe, cozy, settled, peaceful, gathered together. When I was doing Zen practice, my early years of Zen practice, I started recovering, just to be a little bit dramatic, recovering forgotten memories. I'd be sitting in the Zen Dome meditating. Mostly Zen meditation, not the meditation wasn't difficult, I was difficult. It was a lot of suffering I was dealing with.

But sometimes I'd get settled and a little bit concentrated and kind of felt kind of cozy and good. And then he said, wait a minute, I've had this before. I recognize this. And I remember back to a time when I was maybe seven or eight. And there were many nights as I was falling asleep. Somehow I was laying at my back, looking up into the dark room, imagining that I was seeing stars, and feeling very at home.

Like, oh, this is, I'm where I belong. I'm here in this universe. You know, somehow there was something about being like belonging, being part of it, being part of the whole. I remember at that age, I wasn't afraid of dying, because I thought dying just meant I went back home, back to the stars, back to being star dust or something. And that's who I was anyway. So I had these thoughts.

I'd lay there and imagine the stars up there. And then I'd turn over on my side, kind of on the edge of the pillow. And I had an experience that I labeled for myself, edge of the pillow experience. And I would feel so, so warm and fuzzy and contented and kind of peaceful and kind of filled with kind of a goodness that everything was good. I didn't think about it, I didn't try to have it. I just, I took, I don't know, I wouldn't say I took it for granted, but also I had no intelligence or imagination to make anything of it.

And that happened a few other times growing up where these experiences would happen. I'd get, have this wonderful feeling. And then I had all kinds of other horrible experiences. What occurs to me at the moment is those times I remember that things happened. And literally, the feeling in my chest was the heavy iron doors in front of the heart closed. I wasn't going to open that. I wasn't going to open anyone to anyone. That part of me was now offline. It was like a clang in my heart. And so when I started doing Zen practice, you know, I would have had to deal with all this.

It's a lot of difficult emotions, a lot of suffering. But I had these touchstones growing up that maybe predisposed me a little bit to this life. And one example of that was I grew up a lot

in Europe. And I don't remember now what kind of conflict I had with Catholic monasteries, but I must have had enough contact maybe walking around as tourists or something. And I had this feeling, this idea, Oh, if I could live here, then I would have that edge of the pillow experience all the time. This is where it is.

This isn't a place for it. And so I wondered when I was 17 or something, will they allow me to join the monastery as an atheist? I didn't care about the Catholic beliefs and God. That didn't matter. It was just somehow the lifestyle, that way of living and walking through the halls, getting up early. Right? And then some years later, I was 19, I think I was 19, I was traveling around Europe by myself, and I came to a Catholic monastery called Mont-Sand-Michel, which is north in Brittany, Normandy, it's on the coast.

And it's kind of an amazing place, because you drive across kind of like you drive across the plains, and then it rises out of the plains like a Disneyland kind of... palace or, you know, castle or something. And it's on this big island. And the tide is out, and there's, you can walk all the way out, kind of the waters past the island. The tide is in, you have to follow its bridge, long, long bridge to kind of get to the, or raise road or something. It gets to the, and it was really nice that I got there and I didn't know where to stay, but there was like one street going around, curving around the island, going up to the monastery.

And there was a Pax Christi hostel, some kind of a Catholic kind of hostel for travelers. And so I got her bed there and it was such a lovely place. They served bread and soup, I guess, are just like so cozy. And the priest became friendly with me. And then the next day I went into the monastery for tourists, a tourist kind of, and with big kind of cathedral-like monastery. But they were going around giving us a tour.

And then you got to where the top of the hill, it was built on a big hill, the island was Konkaki Hill. It was kind of on the top of the hill, and there was a thousand-year-old original chapel that was the first thing that was built there. And they never tore it down. They just built the monastery around it. So they took us through the chapel. And immediately when I stepped into the chapel, I just felt such peace. I said, wow. And I tried to linger there as long as I could with the group.

So then I started doing Zen practice. And then slowly, some of these kinds of experiences started coming back, sitting in *zazen*, sitting on Zen retreats. And some of this goodness that was coming back or appeared was temporary, very temporary. And at first I didn't do anything, think anything about it, just like, oh, that's nice. Edge of the pillow experience. I remember what that's like.

But slowly what happened was that I started to recognize that there is something beautiful inside. There can be inner beauty, wholesomeness. And then when I was very meaningful for me to then start reading the ancient teachings of the Buddha to see how much he emphasizes beauty in his original Pāli language. When he was speaking English, he unfortunately didn't emphasize so much for us. Because in English, the word for beauty gets translated as good. And good is good. I can't say good is bad.

But so some of you know this word because it's *kalyāṇa-mitta*. And so we say good spiritual friend. *Mitta* means friend. So there we use the word good. And the word is used in different contexts in the ancient teachings. But in all the dictionaries that I could look up, Nepali, Sanskrit dictionaries, the first meaning of the word is not good. Like, I don't think any of them have good as a meaning. They had first meaning is beautiful. And sometimes they also, the dictionaries add, not good. They add excellent. Good is kind of flat. Excellent, like, oh, that's excellent. And sometimes they use the word ethical. And so beautiful. Beautiful friend. And the understanding is when it's used in Buddhism, it refers to kind of an inner beauty, spiritual beauty, inner beauty.

And so a *kalyāṇa-mitta*, originally, it's not a peer. We have these *kalyāṇa-mitta* groups, we're all peers, good friends for each other. But in the suttas, *kalyāṇa-mitta* was kind of meant it was your teacher, was the people who had practiced were more experienced in practice than you were, more mature in the practice. Those who can guide you, they had become beautiful. They're beautiful in our life. So they're beautiful friends, excellent friends, ethical friends. And then another place where good is used, the Buddha speaking English, is they didn't want to excite the Victorian English too much. So good. And, but the, he, there's the, and they say, find these English translations, the expression good and bad karma. You've probably heard that good kind of, kind of comes off the tongue pretty easily. Some of the times what they're translating is the word *kalyāṇa*. And you get a whole different feeling for karma if you translate it as beautiful and wicked karma. Or malicious karma, but beautiful karma.

So rather than just becoming a good person, like following the rules and doing good things, what's wonderful about the word beauty, beautiful action, karma means action, beautiful karma, beautiful actions, that is not first and foremost seen as being ethical, though it's wholesome, it's also ethical. The word is also used for kind of equivalent of ethical. Beauty, this inner beauty in being ethical, are synonymous. But when the emphasis is beauty, it takes it out of kind of a moralistic world. It takes it out of a world where we use morality, ethical rules, as shoulds and shouldn'ts, with which we do an ugly thing, which is we criticize peo-

ple, shame people, we... condemn people. We treat them as unworthy, have no value. We're mean to people who we think are kind of breaking the rules or not doing things the way we want them to be. And there's a lot of harm that's happened in our society because of this tremendous amount. But if we see the word as being beautiful, why would you do something ugly to celebrate the beauty, to emphasize what's beautiful? The idea is that we're supposed to become beautiful from the inside out. So that, and then to do what's beautiful. Like some of the Native American people talk about walk in beauty. The Buddha talked about meditating in beauty. Isn't that nice? The point of meditation is to meditate in beauty. Meditate with beauty. Does that give you a very different feeling for what you're going to do when you sit down to meditate? Right? Then I said, okay, gang, today we're going to concentrate. We're going to zero in and hold on to that breath and not leave it away for one moment. And we're going to really do that. I'm going to yell at you during the sittings. Concentrate, concentrate. I shouldn't even joke. It sounds so jarring. But in Japan, the Zen monasteries, they would sometimes say, concentrate. And... No, we're not going to do that. Today, I had the wrong day. Today is the day that we're going to do the beautiful. We're going to connect to what's beautiful. And maybe you can't find it inside, but beautiful karma, beautiful action means you find it in how you act.

So meditation, mindfulness, is kind of an activity of the mind. What would happen to you? If whenever you make a deliberate moment of mindfulness, that you adjust it so that it's beautiful, or if that word is not, doesn't speak to you, so you do it that it's calm. You do it so it's kind. You do it so that it's gentle, tender. So all these different kinds of words or concepts are relevant. And beauty is not the word that speaks to you. Okay. What we're trying to do in Buddhism is to the degree to which we have deliberate choice. Can we do what we do wholesomely? Can we do it in a way that pleases us, pleases something on the inside? Can we do it somehow so that we don't regret having done it? Duh, that, it didn't work out. I didn't get what I want. But boy, the way I went about it felt so good. It didn't really matter. I didn't get what I wanted. I drove to the store and started driving. It was so peaceful and calm. I wasn't in a hurry. I gave people, had people right away. I didn't go fast. I just drove in a nice, calm way that didn't irritate anybody else. And it was great to park in the parking lot. I felt like I took my time to do it nicely. And I did it nicely to make it easier for people next to me to get out of their car or get into their car. It was so nice to do a walking meditation. I wasn't judging what people bought. I was just walking calmly and peacefully and walking into the store and appreciated that there was so much abundance for me to choose from and appreciated the people who worked there. And along the whole, they didn't have cornflakes. Well, that's too bad. But boy, I had a nice time coming here. No regrets. I don't know if that's

silly. That's maybe a kind of silly example, but I'm sure you can make a better example. And that's the whole point. You're supposed to make a better example. Figure out how to make this your own. And we can also, when we send out the meditate, we could do that same thing. What would it look like if your mindfulness was beautiful, was calm, was wholesome?

And then I know some people will protest, impossible. I can't do that. I would propose that if it's a deliberate act, something you choose to do, there's always room to do it in a way that you would like to do it, or try to do it that way. If you're choosing to do it, you're not an automatic pilot. If you're choosing to do it, then there's probably enough room to try to do something that's a little bit nicer way of doing it, enjoyable way of doing it, collected way of doing it, a present way of doing it, not distracted way of doing it. There's a lot of little choices you can make. And maybe the language of beauty, you can do it beautifully. How would you stand in line at the supermarket if you were to try to stand there beautifully? Gracefully, if your way of standing there was peaceful and settled, that was a gift to the other people there, There's a lot of agitation, a lot of desires, a lot of being in a hurry in supermarkets, trying to choose the right line that's going to go fastest, and then you're in the wrong line, and should you change. But there's this one person who's just standing there, content to be in the line that's the longest. So to do what's beautiful, to meditate in beauty, meditate to do what's beautiful, and to begin recognizing the inner beauty.

There's these books called the *Abhidhamma*, books. Sometimes they're called seven books of Buddhist psychology. And I think mostly they have very little value. But in my estimation, the most valuable thing in all these seven books are very detailed analytical categorizing things. They categorize all kinds of mental states, long lists. And they categorize like 52 wholesome mental states, generosity, equanimity, *mettā*, compassion, joy, happiness, patience, goes on and on. And for me, the most important thing is not the list, but they call the list the beautiful. That the opposite of that, the unwholesome, they simply call the unwholesome. But that the wholesome is called beautiful. *Sobha*, it's a different word. It's the same beauty. There's our recognition that we have the capacity for inner beauty. And the idea is it isn't something that is there only because we do it. But as we do it, it casts this influence on us. It conditions us. It develops the side of us. And slowly these things become stronger and stronger. And then when we recognize what's wholesome and beautiful within us, that becomes a very powerful reference point to know what's worthwhile and what's not worthwhile to do. It's not worthwhile to lose that. We are in fact diminished. We become less, we become limited, we become partial. We lose our wholeness when we go in the direction of the unwholesome. But now we have a reference point that you can see the difference. You

can see the loss. It's kind of like if you have, you know, really, really dirty clothes. You're a car mechanic. You haven't cleaned your clothes for two years, ten years. It's splattered with oil and grease and ketchup and all kinds of things. And, you know, one more drop of oil. Who cares? You don't even notice it. But somehow that suit of clothes is clean, bleached. It's completely, so it's almost like new again, completely white, completely clean. One drop of grease that jumps out. It's obvious. So when we're swirling in unhealthsome states, swirling in confusion, swirling with fear and dread, anger and hatred, greed and delusion and conceit. You might not notice one more piece of meanness. Actually, meanness might be a little bit of meanness is better than some of the other things you're doing. It's just like, but if you have cleansed your mind, your heart settled, emptied out, become peaceful, become whole, discover the inner beauty, the inner wholesomeness, then a little mean thought feels like, ouch, oh, that's too much. Well, why would I do that? And so having this wholesome reference becomes onward leading because it's self-reinforcing. It shows us the alternative is not such a good deal.

And so, learning to let go, which is kind of one of the hallmarks of Buddhism for many people, but what we're learning to let go of is the unwholesome. It turns out in his teachings, the Buddha never tells people to let go of anything in the world. He's always talking about letting go of what's unwholesome. So you get a very different sense of the Buddha's teachings on letting go when you hear that. Because you thought you had to let go of your money and your spouse and your dog and your house and, you know, but everything, because that's what good Buddhists do, right? They just let go. They're not supposed to be attached to anything. The Buddha did not say that. His whole focus on letting go is to let go of the unwholesome within us. Sometimes, and that's what monasticism is, sometimes people choose certain practices, certain way of living, to help them with dealing with the unwholesome and finding the wholesome. And so they become monastics. But that's kind of a practice choice. It's not an ethical choice. It's not a choice to live the better, you know, the more proper life that this good person would be a monk. It's just like a pragmatic choice. And the monastics are not the model for how lay people are supposed to live, except for how well they've learned to let go of the unwholesome. If they've done that, they can be inspiring for us. That's our task too. To let go of the unwholesome, to have it shed maybe slowly, and to grow the wholesome, to develop the wholesome.

And one of the most remarkable growths of wholesomeness for myself began with the slow growth of compassion when I was doing Zen practice. And maybe it had something to do with the nature of Zen practice, that compassion grew. But it also had something that maybe

had a lot to do with the fact that I was suffering so much. Compassion is the kind of the response to suffering. They didn't know that I was becoming compassionate. But it grew slowly, and then I looked back and understood, oh, wow, I've been changed by this. And it became so important for me, this experience, sense of compassion for the suffering of the world. Then I decided to become a Zen priest, to dedicate my life to Buddhism. And then at some point I went to do *vipassanā* practice. They didn't talk about compassion. They talked about something that was a little bit, for me at least, it wasn't exactly ugly, but it was kind of like contrived and kind of like artificial and kind of like, you know, ooh... at least for a Zen priest like me. And that was *mettā*, this loving-kindness thing. So in my early years sitting at a three-month retreat at IMS, where these test teachers started doing *mettā* meditation in the meditation hall, talking while we're meditating. I mean, for a Zen priest, I mean, that's like taboo. When I was growing up as a priest, a Zen sinner, one of my teachers says, yeah, we never talk to people when they're meditating, because when you're meditating, you're a Buddha. And what do you have to say to a Buddha? I was kind of inspired by that, but you don't talk, you know, at least back then. And here they were talking to us, *mettā*. So I did the reasonable thing. I tuned them out. And then I did this mindfulness practice, but by this time I wasn't dealing with all my suffering anymore. By this time, I had a lot of happiness when I sat. And so I don't know if it's the nature of the *vipassanā* practice or simply the phase of practice I was in. But one day I was sitting there minding my own business, feeling kind of happy. And that occurred to me, wait a minute. I think this is what they're talking about when they're talking about *mettā*, because I had this warmth, this kindness, this feeling of kind of love or something. It wasn't compassion. And so then when they came next time to do the loving-kindness practice, I thought it was the best thing going. I thought, this is great. Because it kind of, it came out of the practice, came out of this wholesomeness that can grow within us. So that was nice to have both of these now. And then I did a whole round of a lot of practice. And then I started teaching and still practiced, still being cooked by the Dharma.

And at some point I noticed that I still had compassion, I thought. So whatever I was feeling, I felt this is compassion, it's still a concern for the welfare of others. But I had a very different feeling. It was calmer. It was more peaceful. It was more at ease. It was more... It felt deeper somehow, but I just thought it was compassion. Yeah. And then about 10 years ago or so, I was reading, studying the Buddha's teachings. And here again, there was a translation problem where, you know, same kind of problem with *kalyāṇa* is translated as good, and we missed some of the richness of it. There was a Pāli word that was translated as compassion. So I always thought, reading the English, they were translating *karuṇā*. But then I started looking to Pāli, and it was not *karuṇā*. It was *anukampā*. And then I started studying how this

word was used in the suttas. I said, it's not compassion. It's a byproduct of non-clinging. And it's a kind of universal, sinful, ordinary care for the welfare and happiness of others. *Karuṇā*, compassion is about the suffering of others. What happens if they don't suffer? Then your compassion is not needed. But the *anukampā* is always needed. It's always good. And I said, oh, what's happened is that I'm clinging less. And somehow, now I've also, now this phase of my life, now there's this third thing that has bubbled up for me that was simpler, calmer, or peaceful than compassion. That was more oriented towards a simple, clinging free care for the wealth and happiness of others. And that felt so good. I was so happy to have a name for it. I was so happy to see it was different than *karuṇā*, compassion. And so this, you know, it took me decades. I'm talking about decades here, right? The things evolved for me this way. But it evolved. It grows. It's possible. And a lot of what happened to me, I didn't know about. I didn't study about it. I didn't learn about it. I didn't learn about it from anybody else. And now we have so much more understanding about these things so we can point to it more, help people with real life and understand it more.

And so as we come into end of this talk, the last full talk of the retreat, I want to end, according to Buddha. He said, a little bit of a paraphrase, but he said, if you... If you are not capable of growing the wholesome in you, I would not tell you to do it. But you are capable of growing the wholesome inside of you. Therefore, I say, do it. So he didn't know, he never met you specifically. But I bet that teaching of the Buddha still applies to all of us. We are capable of growing, finding, radiating, living in the wholesome, growing in wholesomeness, growing in beauty, living in beauty, and sharing our beauty with others through our care, our love, and our compassion. May it be that we sit and do this practice for the welfare and happiness of all the people and animals, the worlds that we encounter. May we do our part to make this a better world. Thank you.