

Tuesday Dharma talk, week 3

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So the plan was to talk about the seven factors of awakening. And probably by now you realize that having plans on a retreat is not such a good idea. So the plan has changed. Hopefully we can make a course correction. And after the meetings today, practice discussions and other reasons, it felt better to continue with practice. The sequence that's offered there in the *Satipaṭṭhāna*, so that the next instructions has to do with the five bundles, usually called the five aggregates.

So to introduce these bundles, we start with, I want to start with some of the metaphors that the Buddha uses. Because you see in the metaphors he offers for his teachings and what he's pointing to, that he has two distinct kind of metaphors used for very two distinct aspects of our humanity. He uses things that are handmade, back then handmade, by humans, to make something that's, in a sense, an artifact, something that is made that does not exist in the natural world. You wouldn't expect the natural world to just, you know, conveniently make one of these objects. It requires human ingenuity, imagination, craftsmanship to make something that's, in a sense, is an artifact, in a sense it's artificial and that it's not natural or it's something synthetic.

Like certain synthetic... Pretty obviously we'll talk about forever chemicals as being synthetic or plastic clothes, synthetic clothes. And so what the Buddha had available back then was just examples of these were things like... One of the most famous ones that you've heard is the idea of... the two arrows. The first, they say, is what the world brings you, but the second one is what you add yourself into your heart. And the Buddha, when he was... one story of his enlightenment was that he discovered this arrow in his heart and he pulled it out. And an arrow is an artifact of human invention and creation.

It's crafted and made. It'd be very hard to find an effective arrow just laying on the ground someplace that nature just kind of, somewhat coincidentally crafted. So here, human suffering is depicted as something that human, the metaphor is something humans have made. Sometimes he uses the metaphor of a trap, like a trap for deer, trap for monkeys. And the deer trap is also something that's been constructed with bamboo or twigs or something. Or sometimes it's built by, with ropes.

And so here we have something crafted. That's also what we get trapped in. Sometimes he's talked about use that you have a fisherman's web, like the Brahma's web net, it's called, that all these views and ideas that we get caught in. And he has... And these views and ideas that back then, the people, philosophical, religious views, the people got caught in the net of that, was human-made stories, views, inventions of philosophy and doctrines that were also not part of the natural world, but were constructed and kind of imagined to be so. And... One of the depictions of his awakening, he supposedly exclaimed this poetic statement that goes something like, How a spider you are seen, your rafters and beams have been shattered, never, and shattered and destructed, never to be built again.

So some of us like houses, and we admire people who build them in wooden houses, and think we admire them, and given what has happened in our society, we admire the naturalness of someone with a woodshed, with handcrafted, beautiful handcrafted wooden home. And we almost say that's pretty natural. So in some ways, some of these metaphors don't quite work for our modern imagination. Right? We probably have to make something new. Something like, Webmaster. Your code has been seen. Jumbled and jumbled all to up and never to work again.

So you have to kind of give the Buddha, you know, that's all the Buddha had back then. Descartes only had thinking, so I think therefore I am. I think it's the way that some of us live. I have a phone, therefore I am. I remember losing my phone once with all the addresses and phone numbers and calendar stuff, and it was great. I felt liberated.

So these metaphors like this, the metaphor of a clay pot is... is used for to represent these imagine, not imagine these artifacts of human creation that gets built. And that in that famous simile of the mountain lake that represents an awakened mind, completely clear water, usually they say there's gravel at the bottom in the English translations. But the word literally is also the word for pottery shards. Right? The pot has been shattered. And it's laying at a rest at the bottom, the mind or somewhere.

And awakening in some places is like into a rope on a ship that's been in the weather a long time and left alone. Boats have been pulled up on land and the sun and the weather. Slowly

that rope gets thinner and thinner. Slowly kind of dissolves and decays and gets worn away. Until finally it's just a simple little thread. And then if you watch that thread, just get close to it, amazed by the thinness of what was really thick once before and heavy and strong and could pull boats through water.

And you watch that thin, thin, thin thread closely and just wondering what's going to happen. And then suddenly snap it. It... Eventually it breaks, it snaps into two pieces. So that is used as a metaphor for the mind wearing away its attachments. Attachments are the rope that ties us, ties us in knots. And we'll see later that one of the words for attachments in the Pali Canon is in fact a knot. Notted up. Which they take a rope. The knots also are not, kind of not natural in the world. Suppose you, there you might find seaweed wrapped up its ways that maybe is knotted. But so the knots get untangled, get broken, the rope dissolves, disappears.

In contrast to that, a metaphor is having to do with the natural world. Both the animate or the living, the natural world and the non-animate natural world. And the spiritual growth is called growth. That's a biological term. And sometimes the metaphor of seeds are used. The seeds that germinate, that you have growing a plant. Awakening, liberation is sometimes called the fruit, the fruit of the tree. It's a natural kind of something that grows and develops and then ripens. And when the Buddha was observed that his own son, probably as a young man, was ready to hear liberating teachings, he referred to his son's mind as being ripe, like a fruit that was ripe.

So over and over again, this natural metaphor is like sitting on the eggs and incubating the eggs that the Buddha uses. So this day of growth, a natural growth, and unfolding. And then from the inanimate world, he uses very common metaphors out of a river, of a stream, in particular the current of the stream. And the famous kind of... transitional experience in this tradition called stream entry literally means entering the current of the river, which gives more sense than how you're floating in something. It's taking you someplace, carrying you someplace to full awakening.

And... Sometimes the metaphors of practice and how it unfolds is in fact like rain falling on a mountainside, and the little drops kind of saturate the soil, then eventually begin flowing together, and then the drops get into little streams, streamlets, to streams, to creeks, to rivers, to mighty rivers, and eventually makes it into the ocean. So the flow of practice, they are the flow of practice, the unfolding of practice in this natural kind of way. So these are two very different sets of metaphors. Things which are artificial and things which are natural. Things which are, I don't know if we want to use the word unnatural, because that's the sounds unnatural. But in human-made artifacts. Right?

And so how we get in trouble is by ourselves. This is the big challenge of Buddhist teachings, that in one way or the other, the practice itself, in and of itself, and its kind of core aspect, involves taking responsibility for ourselves. Taking responsibility, in a sense, or taking accountability or taking with... our particular contributions to our suffering. It's easy to say or understand that some of the suffering we have was in fact caused by others. And we don't want to get them off the hook necessarily. We don't ignore that. That's the case. It's very important to understand that sometimes. Still, the core aspect of the Buddhist practice is to understand our contribution, our personal contribution to that. What am I doing? That contributes to the suffering.

It turns out our contribution is pretty core because that contribution exists deep in ourselves, deep in kind of the operating systems. Someone else might add a little program to your operating system because of what they do, but that might not be so robust, that code. Maybe it doesn't last so long, but the core operating code is really coming from you. So it actually makes a huge difference, our ability to really get quiet enough, still enough, to begin seeing what's going on here from the inside out. And from these two metaphors, we get sets of metaphors. We get the idea that there are things that we're doing that are artifacts of human creation, of our own creation, that are made up from imaginations and crafted and made and held and engineered into place. And that those things belong to the world of suffering. And then, on the other hand, there's that which is natural, that which comes out of our biology or the deeper wellsprings of our life. That is not something we invent. It's not something we... It's not a fantasy. It's not a fantasy. But it's something living, biological, natural. And it's kind of amazing to begin appreciating the rich, organic, biological, natural human capacities within us.

99. Somewhere between 99.999999 and a few more nines of what goes on for us, how we live and how we get around and how we everything. It's just our natural system working. We tend to obsess by that point, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1% that we have choice, we can make up things, we can, we get blinded by it, we're excited by it, we get mesmerized, and we don't understand how much of our natural system is here to care for ourselves. An intelligent system of wisdom, of understanding, of healing, of love, of care, of peace, of friendship. There's so much here that is available in this natural system if it's not overridden by the artificial system. And that's what we're learning to do, is to see that.

And so in terms of yesterday, the... five hindrances, they're like, to the degree to which they are part, are integrally connected to the story-making mind. The hindrances in some ways are pretty artificial, pretty manufactured. And we're making up these stories. And probably all

of us, all of you like me, for sure, I've caused a lot of trouble for myself and others by making up a story about what was happening as if that's really what was going on, and not taking the time to look and see and hurt my friends, hurt myself, because I assume this is what's happening. And it was just a made-up world that my mind invented.

In the United States we have this kind of simile or metaphor of, we say that the fish gets bigger with every telling. When the fresher person gets to sow stories, even stories that are based on something that really happened. There's plenty of studies about how human memory is not actually that accurate. Human perception is not actually that accurate. We think that everything you perceive is the way things are, but it's not always the case. We miss things. We misinterpret things.

Every year, probably three or four times when I'm walking in the hills, that I see a snake. That turns out to have been a small snake-wide kind of root snaking its way across the top of the trail. And for a flash, I see a snake. There's a famous video, Basketball Players, bouncing a basketball back and forth in front of an elevator. And you're asked to kind of count how many, something like counting how many times the basketball changes between the people. And when it's all over, the facilitator says, did you see the gorilla? Most people know what's gorilla. And then they play it again. And the elevator door is open, and this person in a gorilla costume comes out and jumps around and tries to get your attention and then goes off screen. The majority of the audience who watches this video don't see the gorilla. It's center stage. But the gorilla was just made up. It was an artificial gorilla. So sometimes we live in a strange world. And this artificial world has become more and more artificial. More and more artificial.

So the hindrances are kind of stu... have a lot to do with these artificial stories we live in and make up our identities, who we think we are, the movements of the mind to claim things as me, myself, and mine. They can easily get subjugated, get caught in this world of artificiality, this world of artificially created ideas, and the whole universes can be built together around ideas and concepts and stories about me, myself and I. And that is one of the central rules of the teaching on the Five Bundles, to understand the suffering that arises, and how the suffering that arises, from how we get attached to certain things, saying, this is who I am. And the metaphor of bundles means that also as a human creation, we grab something and then we put it all together like sticks, like a firewood, and then we tie it up so it becomes a bundle. All those sticks don't exist together that way in nature, but only because we've created these bundles by tying it together, gathering it. So we gather ideas about who we are. Some of them are accurate enough, but then we get attached to them and we add it to this growing

bundles of things that we then carry around with us. So they're called in this text, the five bundles of clinging. So not just the one backpack full that you have to carry around. Five big suitcases that you've gathered all this stuff in it.

And the way this teaching is presented, I believe, how I understand it from my studies, is that all the things that are going to be grabbed onto as me are deeply connected to how the mind manufactures them. So they're kind of byproducts of the manufacturing mind, the factory mind, not the soil bed, the garden bed where something grows, but the factory that's... not only working overtime, but polluting the world too with all its smoke. And so the five bundles begin with something that's usually in English called form, but it's a little more nuanced than form. So I like to translate it as appearances. And the reason I like appearance is that how things appear is not exactly how they are. The appearances have to do with how we select in the world, but what's important for us. So if you see someone walking down the street and you say, oh, that person appears to be friendly, you're probably selecting out a variety of things that they're doing, and on their images on their face, and different things, and coming to the conclusion that they're friendly. They might well be, but there's no guarantee. And now we have an appearance of friendly, but it's not necessarily what's happening. And so there's all these appearances, and we're concerned about...

And so we select out, the part of the construction, sometimes selecting out of the hole something. Sometimes we take appearance and we create something. We change what kind of haircut we have. We change our appearances. We change our clothes to appear differently. And so one of the bundles has to do with our appearances. Right? And some people are very attached to appearances. They say that with TikTok and Instagram and all these things, there's a heightened concern that people have with how they appear. I've been around people in their late teens and young 20s, and it's phenomenal how many times they're posing in suggestive and... with all these attitudes for these pictures they take, and they post it on their scene, on their Instagram, or with different places. And their appearance is so important. There's a very famous picture of one of the, maybe, the great-grandfather in Thailand of the monastic, forever monastic lineage, the kind of founder of the Thai forest tradition that we're connected to. His name is Ajahn Munn. If you saw the most common photograph of him that you would, that's around, you wouldn't want to get within a mile of him. And this does not speak well for Buddhism. The look he has. But you have to realize that the picture was taken in something like 1940 or something, and he had never seen a camera before. He has to sit there and look into this strange contraption. He had no idea what we're going to be doing. So he just sits there completely, you know, uninterested and looks, stares at it and, you know,

upside down, upside down smile, you know, because, you know, he's not thinking about Instagram and his... And getting likes. How many friends do you have? No one was asking him. How many friends do you have? He was like, what is this? And, you know, he could have spent most of his day smiling. People loved being around him, were inspired by him, and he was a very meaningful teacher. For all we know, he was smiling all the time. I saw some of this sternness around photographs when I was with DuPontita. Yeah. And now so many pictures, people wanted pictures of him and he just like look seriously. He could look very serious. So one day I said to him, Uplandita, is it true you never smile for photographs? And he broke into this big smile. And my camera was too slow. So all this posing, appearances become, you know, is so important and people commit suicide. Right? Over what people say about their appearances. It's so much the sense of self around appearance. And I imagine that you've had attachments about your appearances. Some of them could be positive attachments and good things. Some things could be that you're not unhappy about something, about how you appear. People spend a lot of money to change their appearance. So how we appear is not just an innocent thing. It's been the natural way of how we are. There's a selectivity process in operating there, in the making, in constructing and imagination. So that's one of the areas where we get attached.

The other, next one, has to do with sensations, *vedanā*. And that seems like, isn't that natural? It hurts, or it doesn't hurt. It's pleasant. It turns out that pain and pleasure to some degree interacts with the mind. To some degree the mind is kind of involved sometimes in how we experience this pain and pleasure, what is pleasant, what is painful. And I mean, I remember the first time I had coffee as a young teenager, I called it dishwashing water. Now I drink coffee every day, and I don't think it's dishwashing water. I kind of like it. There are acquired tastes we have, and something that wasn't pleasant becomes pleasant. Or something that was pleasant becomes unpleasant. There was a particular food that I had that when I was 19, I threw up. I was drinking too much alcohol. One of the rare times I got drunk. I've never got... I've never drunk very much in my life, but... So I threw this thing up, and then for years I didn't want to get close to that dish. It was like it was just too unpleasant because the associations were with flavors were just too much. So this idea of pleasant and unpleasant is a rich world that's not a pure experience thing. The mind is a little bit involved, the liking and not liking, the fears that come up around pain. There's a kind of a famous rumor that I've seen happen to people that they have a lot of pain, and then when they call the doctor, it goes away. Or the doctor says you'll be okay, and then it goes away. There's such a big psychological factor involved in some of this, the intensity by which we see things. So we're not innocent experiencers of pleasure and pain. But some people are very attached to pleasure and pain,

to comfort and discomfort. People spend an or some people an ordinant amount of time and money to have pleasant experiences, to avoid unpleasant ones. I suspect that some group wonderfully will profoundly carefully construct political philosophies were really just a way of rationalizing. That's unpleasant. I want that to go away. So then people get caught in the world of senses and sensations and pleasant and unpleasant, comfort and discomfort.

And then we have ideas, simple ideas of how things should be and not be. Simple ideas of value, of the value that certain things have, or lack of value. We have ideas of what it means to be this and that. We have ideas about other people. We see them, and we have ideas, well, if someone who wears glasses must be geeky, and then we have this idea, and that idea is overlaid, and all people have glasses. They're geeks. I mean, just trying to do simple example, but there's just thousands, millions of examples of what we do to each other as human beings, overlaying simple ideas on top of them. And we have ideas. And so some people are attached to their ideas, their concepts through which they perceive the world. Some of these ideas are learned from society, from family, from religions, from our life experiences. Some of them are just made up by ourselves. And then that's a third bundle. I call it recognitions. That's the way we recognize something we see something, and we connected some previous idea we have, and then cognize it through that.

The fourth bundle is the butler did it. The fourth one is the one who... is the bundle that makes all these things. So the fourth bundle in some ways makes the other bundles, makes the other categories. So that's one called *saṅkhāra*. So it's, as I said, it... It might better, better, what they call it, fabrications or concoctions, to get the flavor that what we're talking about here is making unnatural things, artificial things, things that are human inventions, human imagination, that don't really exist in the natural world. So in the natural world, you know, there is, you know, no one who is unworthy because they wear glasses. Right. That's a construct of the mind, fabrication, concoction of the human mind, to see people who wear glasses as being somehow unworthy. Some of the things we see as pleasant and unpleasant are part of this concocted world of these *saṅkhāras*. Appearances belong to that world. And sometimes this concocted world makes stories. The hindrance, there are stories that make the hindrances or other stories. And so not just being attached to ideas, we're attached to stories. Stories about our past, what happened to us. Stories about what should happen. Stories become, are invented and created and imagined, and then we lock into them. And those stories then contribute to making attachments to appearances, to sensations, to these concepts, ideas of recognition.

The fourth bundle, it's a little bit harder to understand. It's usually translated as conscious-

ness. And if we retain that meaning, translation of *viññāṇa* as consciousness, it's possible that what's being referred to here is also constructed by *saṅkhāras*. Consciousness? How could that be? I think in the suttas, this English word consciousness is... Well, in English-speaking countries, the English word consciousness is rather problematic and often unexamined what it means. There's a lot of books written, big debates about what consciousness is. The word *viññāṇa*... More appropriately, to understand the Buddha, be translated as cognition. A simple cognition, a little bit different than recognition, but a simple act of just cognizing of one particular data that comes in. Maybe before we have a name for it. But then, something in our mind constructs individual data into bigger patterns and sees it in the bigger kind of way. It's kind of like the 8mm film that's just putting all these still shots on the screen, but the mind constructs it into motion. We have all these attentional faculties that are all operating in their own individual way, but the mind takes all of them together and puts them into a kind of a unitary feeling of a field of awareness or something. And then there's a lot of attachment to that. Doesn't have to be attached to consciousness. But this is in the Atman, the Buddha, it was primarily religious people who were attached to consciousness. They had ideas that consciousness was eternal, was unborn, undying, that the whole point of practice was to understand the true nature of the self that in a certain way was the same as consciousness, was the same as the divine Brahma, great God or something. So, to understand all these as constructs, concoctions made up by the mind, and the attachment to it is certainly made up by the mind, now we're ready to see the instructions the Buddha gives for these.

So, before I say it, one of the movements of *Satipaṭṭhāna* is to go from more complicated to simpler and simpler. To go from the hindrances, which are complicated stories, the story-making mind gets quiet. And now there's something much simpler that we can see. And that's the simple movement of these little attachments, these little constructs that we make. Constructs around appearance, around sensations, around concepts, around stories, around being the maker or the house builder, around cognitions. And for each of these, they'll read the instructions or how it's presented.

How does a practitioner abide observing mental activities in terms of mental activities in reference to the five bundles of clinging? Here, one knows this is appearance. This is the arising of an appearance. This is a disappearance of an appearance. This is a sensation. This is the arising of a sensation. This is a disappearance of a cessation. This is recognition. This is the arising of recognition. This is the disappearance of recognition. This is a mental construct. This is the arising of a mental construct. This is the disappearance of a mental construct. This

is cognition. This is the arising of cognition. This is the disappearance of cognition.

So what this is pointing to is that all these things do not have any inherent existence. They are not real things that last and perpetuate and continue, grow and flow and move. They are fleeting little thoughts, fleeting little ideas, fleeting little movements of the mind that come and go. If we really get quiet and see that appearance appears, appearance disappears. I'm looking here, there's a Zafu in front of me. What appears to me is a Zafu. Ten thousand years ago, a human being who saw that object would not have thought Zafu and all the things associated with Zafu and how their butts fit on them. They would have been kind of mystified. Wonder if they could eat it. Maybe it makes good fuel for fire. So it happens so quickly and so-called naturally that, well, it's a Zafu. What's the big deal? That's really a Zafu. It's not really a Zafu. We're calling it a Zafu. We're treating it like a Zafu. It's a convenient... Zafu is a functional name for an object that looks like that. I've sometimes slept with one of those objects, and I call it a pillow then, under my head. So, fleetingly, it's possible with a very quiet mind to see that there's the object there, brown and round, and then what flits through the mind is safu. And that particular concept flits through the mind and disappears, only to reappear. And it's fascinating to watch how we paint our experience. We overlay the world often with accurate paintings of what it is, but it's still a kind of, and sometimes it's not accurate. When I see the snake, I've projected snake. When I look at the zafu, I'm projecting zafu. But it's really a zafu. You're not projecting. It's not really a zafu. It's partly a construct. So how it appears... Sensations can be the same way. I have struggled on retreats with physical pain, and seen it vanish in a moment when I understood it in a new way. Like, what? What just happened? That can't be that easy. I've seen the arising of physical pain that was clearly tied to a thought, an idea, and something going on, and I saw it disappear, coming and going. Comfort, discomfort, this may be a little bit easier to understand, because comfort, we're leading into it. We're taking it and perceiving it as, oh, this is good, pleasant and unpleasant. Right? And then these recognitions. So that's kind of like, you know, the appearance, it appears like a Zafu, and now I'm recognizing it as a Zafu. It's a fleeting kind of recognition. I love the fact that sometimes I can watch thoughts, recognitions arise in my mind. It's such a powerful and effective thing, because I can then put a question mark after it. Is this really true? No. I go around with this idea that everyone with glasses is geeky. So I see someone and I say, oh, geek. But mine, maybe that does that. But then seeing it arise, my mind makes a habit now to put a question mark after it. Really gill? Isn't that really the case? And then I look, take a second look, and I realize mostly gill, get off it. This is ridiculous to go around and projecting that idea onto people we don't know. But seeing it arise gives me a phenomenal opportunity to question it before it kind of gets into the story-making factory, and pretty soon it's a big

story. And seeing it disappear, it's phenomenally liberating to see these projections we have about reality. They appear... and they disappear. And they have no absolute reality. Maybe they're not so accurate. Maybe they're just a product of our own mind more than what's out there. And so to be quiet enough to see the projection, see the idea arise, maybe see how we start to see the world through the lens of those ideas. And no, we don't have to do this. Let it go. And then these stories we make up, these things we invent, the other bundles, but stories, the fourth aggregate, the *saṅkhāras*, to watch them come and go, appear and disappear. And to realize too that there's something else going on here than this story. And there's a lot of people who don't know that. A lot of people think that what's really happening in the world is the story they're living in. But to know there's some whole other thing about how to be alive, besides the story, besides the clinging to any of this, and besides making any of this into me, myself, and mine.

So the idea here is that a lot of who, when we take this as me and get attached to it, for the Buddha, he's suggesting that it's usually one of these five bundles that we hold on to as myself. Or maybe it's all of them together or some combination. And so this movement towards holding on or getting attached to myself, to self, sometimes has actually something that is, some idea that is operating under, something invented, something constructed. And there is another way. And then for the time that's left, what I want to say is that one of the tools... that the factory has for constructing things is the ability to divide the whole into parts. Different people might have different purposes for a tree, and so they see the tree through different lenses. And that's all they see is what they're interested in the tree. A tree by itself does not divide itself. It's continuous with all its parts. It operates as a whole. We divide ourselves up into parts, select and chop up and prioritize and ignore. As we begin seeing the arising and passing of these things, see that's what they really are. That's what process of coming and going. That begins to heal or diminish the strong sense of separation about how we prioritize certain parts of ourselves over other parts. And what's wonderful is when the whole can operate. And the alternative to this attachment to self is not non-existence. The alternative to attachment to self is to allow the whole... and the brilliance of the whole, the intelligence of the whole, to be there and to grow and develop and flow. And that's the topic maybe for tomorrow, with the seven factors of awakening. Those, the metaphor for those are not clay pots that shatter, but those are more the natural world that flows and grows and unfolds in a natural way.

So... To sit quietly, to let the mind become still, but alive with awareness, clear, no longer searching, no longer building, no longer seeking, no longer avoiding, no longer caught in

desires for sensual pleasure, aversions for getting things away, rid of things. Yeah. And the mind becomes clear enough, calm enough, quiet enough. An invaluable way to gaze upon the world is to settle back and watch what comes and goes, appears and disappears. Not because you're searching for that, not because you're trying to manufacture that perception, but rather you're not obscuring the mind's eyes' ability to be at rest, to be still, enough to see the constant change of things coming and going and changing. The paradoxes, or the irony is that the stiller the mind is, the more we see that all things are constantly shifting and changing. The more busy the mind is, the more active the mind is, the more crazy the mind is. The more that factory mind that makes things up, makes up ideas of permanence. Things appear to be solid, continuous. Trust the still mind. Trust the quiet mind. Trust the spacious mind. Trust the whole. And when the mind is still enough, clear enough, concentrated enough, allow yourself to allow the arising and passing of phenomena to be revealed to you. Welcome it. And in doing so, to start setting yourself free from building a self on appearances, sensations, ideas, stories, even consciousness, to see things appear and disappear and reappear. Can remind the mind that it does not need to hold on to anything. And then one day, the mind can let go of itself. Thank you.