

Sunday Dharma talk, week 3

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So to offer some teachings from the Buddha that work to follow up or highlight these last instructions in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: suffering, the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. But to introduce or contextualize these teachings, they occur in a story about a monk named Channa. It's believed that Channa is the same Channa that was the charioteer who drove the Buddha, before he was the Buddha, out of his palace, crossed the river, and to the edge of the woods where the Buddha then renounced the world, renounced his life as royalty, and set out to be a renunciant to find this end of suffering. It is said in the legends that Channa did not want to leave the Buddha; he felt very close to the Buddha and begged to come along. The Buddha said, no, you have to go back, take the horse back. So Channa was heartbroken.

Seven years later, after his enlightenment, the Buddha did come back, and then Channa became a monk. However, he had a challenge. It seemed like he had a lot of conceit. Having been very close to the Buddha, it was like, this is our Buddha, this is my Buddha. This is our teachings, my teachings. He felt strongly identified with it without really learning it.

He was very stubborn and held his views strongly. He ran into a variety of conflicts that a monk normally wouldn't have. The Buddha had to censor him a few times because his behavior was so difficult for the community. I think at one point he had to go away and live on his own. But his obstinacy and stubbornness and way of being in conflict persisted, and decades after he became a monk, when the Buddha was close to his death, the Buddha decreed the strongest censoring that he could do to any monk short of disrobing them. That was, he forbade Channa to live with other monastics, and he forbade the monastics to talk to him.

So he didn't have to stop being a monk, but he was isolated from the community. Seems pretty intense, but maybe he was an intense person, and nothing else had worked. So the

Buddha died, and Channa was isolated. At some point he left his isolation and went to the vihāra, the monasteries. He went from *kuti* to *kuti*, from hut to hut, where these different monks were living. He said to these monks, May the elder monks instruct me. May the elder monks teach me. May the elder monks provide me with a Dhamma talk so that I can see the Dhamma.

So, it seems like he had a change of heart and he was coming back and just really wanted to receive teachings. He hadn't really penetrated the Dhamma in all those decades. So to say you see it, does him see it for himself. But the elder monks were not supposed to talk to him. So they simply said some formulaic teachings, basically to kind of, you know, here, take this and go away, maybe. But they did address him as friend. The friend Channa.

Appearance is inconstant. Sensation is inconstant. Recognition is inconstant. Mental constructs are inconstant. Cognition is inconstant. And these are the five bundles. Then they went on and said, Appearance is not self. Feeling is not self. Or sensation is not self. Recognition is not self. Mental constructs are not self. Cognition is not self.

All mental constructs, fabrications, concoctions, are inconstant. All mental activities are not self. So these are, you know, they're offering him right to the heart of central teachings. These bundles in the time of the Buddha were really considered some of the major obstacles people had to liberation. To see that these were not fixed things, that there were processes that came and went, was considered to be one of the primary means for liberation. So they are offering him this. But I got the sense that they're just kind of giving them a formula.

Then it occurred to Venerable Channa: I know already that appearance is inconstant, feeling is inconstant, recognition is inconstant, mental constructs are inconstant, cognition is inconstant. I know that appearance is not self, feeling is not self, or sensations, recognition is not self, mental constructs are not self, cognition is not self. All mental constructs are inconstant. All mental activities are not self. I know this already. But my mind is not inspired, confident, settled or resolved, the quieting of all mental constructs, the giving up of all attachments, the ending of craving, fading away, cessation, *nibbāna*.

So this is a very honest thing to say. He knows the teachings. He's been around in it for decades. He's around the Buddha after all. And still, the goal of the practice doesn't inspire him. He's not confident about it. He isn't resolved and settled in the value of stilling, the quieting, calming of all mental constructs. He's not settled on the value of giving up all of clinging. Why would you do that? To bring craving to an end. And, you know, what's the value of cessation? I mean, ending shouldn't, just ending doesn't mean much. You can't sell it.

Then he goes on and says, Instead, anxiety and clinging arises. My mind is spinning. For someone who sees the Dhamma, it does not occur to ask, Who is myself? It does not occur to them to ask. In order to see the Dhamma, who can point out the Dhamma? So he understands the words of the Dhamma, but he hasn't seen it. So he wants to know who can point it out to him. The elder monks there in that monastery are not going to do it. So he's challenged. You can imagine that there's a very difficult time for him, kind of shut out of the monastic community by the Buddha of all people. All these years of being connected and somehow something didn't penetrate. Now he's maybe has remorse. Maybe something has changed inside of him now. He kind of, okay, now I have to know. Now I want to see. I'm ready. What does it take to be ready?

Then it occurred to Venerable Channa: Staying in Kosambi at the Gosita Park Monastery is Venerable Ānanda. Praised by our teacher, esteemed by his wise companions in the holy life, Venerable Ānanda can point out the Dhamma so I can see the Dhamma. I have a lot of love for Venerable Ānanda. Why don't I visit him? So you see, he has love for this monk. It says everywhere else that Venerable Ānanda treated him kindly when others weren't.

Then Venerable Channa, having set his sleeping place in order and taken his bowl and robe, set out for Kosambi. Arriving, he exchanged friendly greetings with Venerable Ānanda. Taking a seat to one side, Venerable Channa said, and then he repeated the whole story, everything that's been said so far, and what he said to the monks and what they said to him. Then he ends by saying, May Venerable Ānanda instruct me. May Venerable Ānanda teach me. May Venerable Ānanda provide me with a Dhamma talk so I can see the Dhamma.

And this is what Ānanda says in reply. Okay. On this matter, I am certainly delighted with Venerable Channa that you have opened up and cut through your obstinacy. Listen, Venerable. Give ear, Channa. You can understand the Dhamma. You can do it. Then Venerable Channa thought, It seems I am capable of understanding the Dhamma. Imagine that. Someone believes in me that I can do it. And a great rapture and delight sprung up for Venerable Channa.

Sometimes it really helps if someone believes in you. Here's an example of this man who's struggling and challenged in his community and in himself. There's this warm-hearted rapport with Ānanda. Ānanda greets him kindly and says, you can do it. Basically, I believe. You can understand. It's possible for you. Maybe that was why he was so challenged. Maybe he had big doubts in his ability to practice, the ability to really do this. Ānanda said, I believe you. You can do it.

So then, Ānanda is going to provide him with the teaching that comes from the Buddha. This

is a very famous teaching that Ānanda had heard at the time it was given. This is the Buddha's teaching to a monk named Kaccāna, Kaccāna Gotra. So he's quoting it, this whole teaching from the Buddha to Kaccāna, verbatim. He starts off by the Buddha saying, Kaccāna. Kaccāna, mostly this world relies on the dyad, the dualism of existence and non-existence. Things either exist or they don't exist. And what exists and doesn't exist? Suffering really exists. No, there's no suffering. I've heard Buddhists tell me there's no suffering. Everything's empty so there's no suffering. Either you exist or you don't exist. There's no other option. So of course you exist. But no, you don't exist, say some Buddhists.

Mostly this world relies on the dyad of existence and non-existence. But when one sees with right wisdom the arising of the world as it comes to be, the thought "non-existence of the world" won't occur. The world here means the world of your experience that you're living in. If you see that your experience arises, you can't say it doesn't exist, because you have it right there in front of you. But when you see with right wisdom the cessation of the world as that occurs, a thought "existence of the world" won't occur. So both of them don't work if things are coming and going. They don't quite have an enduring existence, and they don't have an enduring non-existence. They come into being and they pass away.

Kaccāna, mostly this world is attached, clinging, fixated and in bondage, Kaccāna. But toward these mental attachments, clinging, resolves, fixations, and lingering dispositions, one does not attach, cling, or resolve, "This is myself." So this is a little complicated teaching, but it's partly because it uses all these synonyms. Here he says mostly this world is attached. It does occur occasionally that people are attached. Might even happen to you. But when these occur, one does not then send second arrows at them. The way it's worded here, when these occur, one does not attach to them with the idea "this is myself."

So of course, clinging occurs. But leave it alone. Don't make a self out of it. Don't get attached to the clinging by being attached to the self that clings. This can be a negative clinging, where the clinging takes the form of resistance or hatred or aversion, like "this is bad, this shouldn't be there." And "I'm the one who is bad. I'm the one who's clinging. I'm the one who shouldn't be doing this." Here it's saying very simply, it's kind of letting your attachment alone. It's kind of remarkable teaching, I think. Just leave it alone. Don't make a self out of it. Don't use it to build a self, have a self.

If you don't kind of get wrapped up around it with this whole self thing, with all the layers of ways in which we create self-identity, self-worth, and personal value, personal feelings of right and wrong, "I'm this way. No, I'm not the way I'm supposed to be." These are all ways of being attached to seeing the world, either through existence or non-existence. Does the

self exist? If you see the arising of the thought, "I am," it wouldn't occur to say there's no self, maybe. But then if you see the disappearance of the self, of that thought, "this is who I am," maybe it wouldn't occur to you that you exist, neither exist nor not exist. There is an alternative, and that is to live in the world of things arising and passing.

Live in a world where we see that things arise and pass because of causes and conditions and dependence on one thing, something else arises, and that things can unfold naturally, without the need for clinging. So if one then does this, does not cling to this as myself around clinging itself, one will have no doubt or indecisiveness, uncertainty, that this very suffering, the suffering of clinging, when arising is clearly arising. And that suffering, when ceasing, is clearly ceasing. So now, he says humans sometimes are attached, and then sometimes they add a second layer on top of that, of suffering that is getting attached to the clinging in some way by creating and holding on to some sense of self. But if we don't add the second layer, just let the clinging, let the attachment be there very simply, then you might see, with a quiet, calm, focused mind, that attachments don't have an existential existence. They don't exist. They're processes that come and go. They're fluid. They're dynamic. And they have the nature of arising and passing.

The reason we don't see that often is that we're just repeating our attachments at a very rapid rate. So it looks like it's constant. It's like if you look at the old 8mm movie on the screen, it looks like someone's walking across the screen, but it's just a lot of still shots on the screen. So the mind reconstructs it then as movement. There's really a person there. There was apparently a really big moment in cinema when there was a movie of a train barreling down the tracks right at the audience. People apparently went running out of the theater screaming. So to be able to see the inconstant, insubstantial nature of our *dukkha*, of how we suffer, how we crave, to see it come and see it go, this is not a small thing. This is what the consequence of this kind of insight can be.

With this, one's knowledge of the Dhamma is independent of others, becoming independent of others, because now you see the Dhamma for yourself. This does not require a PhD in Buddhist studies to understand the Dhamma. It doesn't require reading a lot of books. What is essential to see in the Dhamma is right here in your own immediate experience. As Ānanda said to Channa, you can do this. You can see the Dhamma. You can understand it. Ānanda, because it was preserved this way in the suttas for now centuries, the whole tradition is saying this to you. You can do it. It's possible. The whole tradition believes that the people in the future who are going to see this will understand. It's possible. With this, one's knowledge is independent of others. One is free.

This, Kaccāna, is how there is right view. Kaccāna, "Everything exists" as one extreme. "Everything does not exist" as a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the *Tathāgata* teaches the Dhamma through the middle. One of the great metaphors of the Dhamma is the middle way. One of the ways I really like to imagine this middle way, it's not the middle way midpoint, the fulcrum, like between two extremes. It's the middle way, the path through a dense forest. What makes a path in a forest? It's an opening, it's a clearing, where there's no obstructions. It's empty of obstacles.

The belief that things really exist and this is how it is, and it's always going to be this, is to get lost in the jungle. To believe nothing exists, there's no purpose, no point, nothing is possible, this is to get lost at a different side of the jungle. But to see that things arise and cease, there there's a path, clearing and opening, where we can walk freely. There's where we can find how not to cling. There's a way of practicing this living in this world. But here, while we're still in this retreat, to find the path as you walk. The next step, the next moment where to be mindful, is to step into that place where there's freedom, to step where there's no obstacles, no clinging, no holding on claiming this is the way it is, or this, or it's not that way. Nothing has to exist in a fixed way, nothing has to not exist in a fixed way. It's in the arising and passing that we can find our freedom.

There's a vast open path in front of us, a path that opens when we don't cling to anything. There are more things in this world that you don't cling to than the things you do cling to. You should be able to find the path of non-clinging. It's right here. There's lots of it. Don't get blinded, don't get caught in this little sliver of the world that you're holding on to. This is so important, this really exists, this is the thing. The middle way is broad, wide, expansive, big enough for everyone. Right here, the next step. Find how to step forward without any clinging.

Find how to know the next moment where the knowing is not attached. Know how to step forward into the next moment without carrying the luggage or carrying all these bundles. The vast open path doesn't need you to carry bundles of self. So to kind of finish here with the core teaching of this text, I'm going to read again. Okay. When one knows with certainty that this very *dukkha*, the *dukkha* of attachment, of clinging, resistance, holding on, shutting down, when one knows with certainty that this very *dukkha*, this very suffering, when arising, is clearly arising. It's clearly just something appearing for now. It's here for a short time. And that suffering, when ceasing, is clearly ceasing. It's gone. You will cease. But for this day, you're alive to step into the path of freedom, wide open, non-clinging, that you can see clearly when you see the inconstant nature of your challenges, of your suffering. You see

that it comes and goes. You don't kind of hang on to it as permanent. You don't make it fixed through your constructs and your ideas. You settle back in the open space. You see the inconstant nature. You see all the openings available when things cease. In that opening you can take your next step.

So you can know peacefully, clearly, know calmly. See what's here without clinging. And if what you're seeing is your clinging, then you're right on target for this teaching. This teaching was meant for you. Don't make a self out of your clinging. See it. See its transitory nature.