

Wednesday Dharma talk, week 4

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A small piece of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* that has not been covered this month is the beginning of the refrain. The refrain is an instruction and practice that appears at the end of each of the 13 other exercises. And for a beginning of that, as one abides observing, *dharmā* experiences internally and externally. Let's compare, kind of a paraphrase. And what I'm hoping that you appreciate over this month, that the capacity to observe deeply, know deeply, sense deeply, almost like we're knowing from the *yonī*. We're knowing from someplace that's much deeper in us than the ordinary surface sense-contact we have with the world.

To observe and know and sense this world, to be aware, in a way that involves harmony with this world, a way that is beautiful, that there's beauty in the knowing, beauty in the abiding, that it would be possible this wonderful capacity we have to know, to be aware, can arise from different sources within. And if the source is the factory and the story-making mind, the results are usually very different than if it's from the organic garden growing deep within. If we know from the whole way of thinking and orienting and intending that's rooted in clinging, greed, hatred, and delusion, that's a very different way of knowing, observing ourselves internally and externally. And if we know from that deep place inside where there is no clinging, where there is no greed, no hatred, maybe no fear. So the source of how we know gives us a very different way, brings about a very different response.

So if we abide observing the world internally in ourselves, we'll meet it very differently. Maybe we'll meet it with more care, more respect, more kindness, more generosity. We can hold ourselves maybe as our own best friend. But then there's the external world, to abide observing the world, the world of all its people and beings, from this deeper source. Sometimes that can be harder than sitting quietly with your eyes closed, where you're mostly behaving and looking at yourself deep inside. Sometimes harder looking out upon the world, especially through the lens of the news, or the news.

But it makes a difference, the source inside, the operating system inside, from which we look and gaze. And I'm hoping that in the course of this retreat, you've touched into your own capacity to see yourself, see the world from an operating system, from a source, from a sensitivity that gives birth to the wonderful array of caregiving emotions and attitudes that humans are capable of. Caregiving approaches, attitudes, motivations that really need to be able to, in order to really be what they are in their essence, is to be born, to grow and to flow out of these deeper sources within. I don't think you can have compassion and hatred at the same time. Can you? Can you have love and greed at the same time?

But in their essence, in their purity, in their simplicity, to let these things arise, the good caregiving emotions from the... Have them arise out of the *yoni* or out of the heart... out of this deeper place. That's the possibility of this practice we're doing. It isn't just a practice for your own liberation. It's a practice for awakening, for sure. But one of the things we're awakening is our capacity to care, to love, to meet and engage with the external world, with some of these different caregiving practices, approaches that humans are kind of organically designed to offer to the world.

So I want to offer you five different caregiving emotions, attitudes, motivations, instincts that can grow out of this practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna*. If we allow it to. If we're cultivating this garden, cultivating this plant, cultivating something that, remember, it can grow. If you remember at the beginning of the retreat, I talked about the difference between asking someone, what are your practice, versus asking them, what are you growing? What are we growing here? And these are some of the things that can grow. So there's five in the palette or the caregiving emotions, the family of them. I'll offer you five.

And so the first is that I want to just keep using the word instinct somehow to have a sense that it's something deep inside or maybe even genetically... genetic disposition. To, in the Buddhist language, to be ethical is rooted in the instincts, the motivation to not cause harm. And this can be a very powerful motivation that arises because of this deep sensitivity that can recognize, can feel, can have a deep sense of how terrible it is to cause harm, how painful it is, how it's painful for people we hurt, and how painful it is to be the one who does the hurting. When I, one of the results of my very first Vipassanā retreat in Thailand, it was a 10-week retreat, and it had to do with kind of ethical integrity. One was the first time in my life I understood why people, why people can feel joy in being ethical. I thought it was a kind of Pollyanna-ish silly thing that was being emphasized.

I didn't trust it, that kind of idea. But then when I was sitting in that long retreat, and I started feeling inside of myself, it was another word I used, which was a word I also didn't like. I

didn't trust, but I couldn't come up with a better word. It's just like, I couldn't believe I was using this word. I was feeling this inner purity. Wow. And I could feel, I could recognize that I could harm that. I could tear it. I could rupture it. And why would I do that?

So part of this instinct to be ethical comes from a deeper sensitivity of what the impact on self and others it will be. And to care about that impact, to not want to cause harm to others, to do what we can to mitigate or reduce the amount of harm that we cause and how we live our lives. And I think this is one of the byproducts of this practice, a way of caring for this world. We thought it doesn't take much to reflect on how, what a radically different world we would have if people lived by the five precepts. The people who would probably suffer the most are the newspapers, news agents.

So there I'll tell you a story that I don't know if it's true, but I did read it in a book that presented it as true. It was written by someone who was a therapist and said that in their place of work, some kind of hospital, some kind of big institution. And they were working in a kind of a high rise of sorts. But in order for everyone to get there, they had to somehow go through on the highway nearby a toll plaza. But the way it was set up, it was kind of an honor system, that you threw the coins back then into the basket or something. But from the vantage point of this building where people worked, you could actually look down and see the cars coming and see whether the drivers put their coins in or not. That's been a long time ago. And they had coins if you remember what those are. And so someone there did a survey. They kind of watched and tallied and saw who was it, who was a therapist, who was a therapist coming to work, who put their money in and who didn't.

And then they compared it to whatever data they had of their success with their clients. And the ones who didn't put the money in, they had less success for their clients. Whatever. I don't know how they measured nice things, but... So that was quite something I thought. And it makes some sense to me. I imagine that someone who doesn't want to pay the toll, maybe at minimum, they're impatient. They don't want to go through the trouble to slow down or something. And if that's the orientation, I'm sure being impatient with a client is not the best for the client. Or maybe they're selfish. And someone who has an orientation towards selfishness, and if that spills out even a tiny bit into therapy, I bet that affects therapy.

So logically, it makes sense to me. And someone who knows not ethical doesn't care about enough being, you know, and also probably is not oriented in the same level of respect and care for the humanity of a client as someone who is highly ethical, who's attuned to something very different. So to live a life of non-harming as a way of caring for the world, and to have that be a response from the *Satipaṭṭhāna* sensitivity to observe and take in the people

around us. The second, and this is a really fundamental one in the *Dhamma*, is generosity. The instinct to want to support people, to do good for people, to give gifts of things, money, time, smiles, attention, listening, all kinds of ways in which we can be generous to people.

And what's really marvelous about these two, ethics and generosity being kind of considered almost entry points for the *Dhamma*, is that it puts the *Dhamma* practice immediately in relationship to other people. It isn't like the people who start Buddhism through meditation. It can take some years before they realize that there are other people. And that's part of the practice, is to be in healthy relationships with people. But traditionally, it starts with developing these healthy relationships. And practicing generosity is one of those ways.

It really rectifies and clarifies and develops and enhances relationships and our own self in those. It gives us a deeper understanding of others and a deeper understanding of ourselves. And to have this desire to benefit others. It's also an instinct. It has to be an instinct because, you know, there has to be something in there inside parents to want to care for these little babies. They look cute until you're the parent and three o'clock in the morning and this and that. But, you know, we care. We're generous. We want to do well. We're mammals, it's built into mammals, maybe other animals too, to care for each other, to bring food and feed and do nice things.

I'm fond of an ancient kind of story from the Middle East, maybe a Sufi story of when these two parents had a baby girl. Some wise person, some psychic, something in the village said, your daughter will die on her wedding night. Well, that kind of put a damper on things. But, you know, life proceeded the way it does. So she was going to be married and parents didn't say anything to anyone. They just like held their breath and... But it was a great wedding. It looked like a well-matched couple. And there was a big dinner after the wedding. And there was a knock at the door. And there was a very poor, disheveled, dirty, limping along, old, poor, distressed lady there of some lower caste. "I'm hungry. I'm hungry. Could I have some food?" And no one wanted to give this woman any attention, or even food, except for the bride. And she went out and gave a big plate of food to the starving, sick lady. Well, the next morning, the bride hadn't died. So the parents went back to the psychic and said, what happened? You said she was going to die. "Yes, she was. Yes. Unless she did one pure act of generosity." And that's what she did. So the power of generosity, who knows what good it will do for you and others?

One of the reasons that such a, I think, very significant and important caregiving instinct and a real guide for how to live a life is to consider the difference between doing something out of generosity and doing it out of obligation. If someone does something to you and says,

you know, I had to do this, so it's my duty, it's obligated, and I might as well get it over with here. You know, maybe you're nice. Maybe they give you, you know, supper. So you're glad to have the supper, but, you know. If instead the person said, I'm so happy to see you, I just really wanted to make a nice meal for you, and I really want to offer you what you need, and it's my joy here, please. What a difference that makes. The same act, giving someone food. But the attitude behind it is so radically different.

I would like to suggest obligation is overrated. It can actually be harmful. Be very careful about doing things because you feel obligated. But generosity, that's a whole other species. That's a whole other thing. Then sometimes the thing we do is secondary, right, to the tremendous food, nourishment of the freely given generosity. It's kind of pouring out. Generosity builds community. Generosity builds friendship and connections and heartfulness. Doing things reluctantly out of obligation does not.

There are people who will tell us you're obligated, you have to do this. Maybe that's true. Maybe. But why don't you just not tell me that? I want to just let me, give me a chance to be generous. Why don't you trust my generosity and see what comes out of that? Maybe it'll be better than doing it out of obligation. So I think if you're interested in saving the world, which you know is a pretty lofty standard, high goal, but if that's your thing, I would recommend that you do it out of generosity, not out of obligation.

The third caregiving instinct is *mettā*, loving-kindness, which is a specialty of the Theravāda Buddhism. And I read many years ago a kind of academic article, journal article, about what motivated nurses in Thailand to be good nurses or to be nurses. And they said it was *mettā*, loving-kindness, goodwill. That's what... And the way they described it, *mettā*, overlapped pretty, both in what they described and also in the consequence of what they did, was similar to how many people in the West might use to talk about compassion or *karuṇā*. That *mettā* and *karuṇā* should be two very radically different things is not so clear. I'll say more about the *karuṇā* in a moment.

But *mettā*, very simple friendliness, friendship, kindness, goodwill, well-wishing of others, that arises out of an open, caring heart. I don't know if we have to have a reason to be kind, to be friendly. But there's lots of reasons not to do it. One good reason to not do it is you're just too busy and distracted doing other important things. There's wonderful things to do in the world. I mean, the consequences of your being on this month long without being on your device, you really missed the... How all these wonderful corporations have announced the release of new products that are really primo. I mean, like this is like... I mean, they seem to say the same language every year, but this is the year. Boy, oh boy.

So why would you bother being kind when you have so many important products to catch up on and get up to date with and make sure that you're the latest and the greatest? So greed and hatred and distractions and impatience and preoccupation, I think cause a tremendous harm, tremendous cost, because we lose touch with this deep source inside. And this deep source wants to be kind, wants to have goodwill. And we do the world, the world of good, if we can stay in touch with that, the natural source of kindness, the natural source of goodwill, the source of goodwill that just feels so good to live by. I was, in some ways, many of you know the story that partly coming out of Zen when I came to Vipassanā, I couldn't believe this teaching on *mettā*, but I didn't trust it at all. It just was saccharine, it was artificial, constructed. It was kind of like a, you know, it was certainly not the real thing, direct penetration of emptiness or something like that.

And so when I was at IMS and they started, those teachers started offering this, she couldn't believe it during the meditation time. It's supposed to be pristinely silent in Zen. Right? They would offer these guided meditation and loving-kindness. So I did the abrasible thing. I just tuned them out. Until somewhere halfway through that three-month retreat, I was just sitting there practicing minding my own business. And I started feeling strange things inside. Like, what's this? What's going on here? It feels good. Now, what is this? And I thought, oh, it's what they're talking about. It's just *mettā* thing. And then when they came to do the guided *mettā*, then I thought, oh, this is cool. This is pretty good. So I'm a slow learner. You know, I had to, you know, I was challenged by a lot of this stuff. And that was one way. But it felt really good. Yeah. That came from a place of well-being.

So to cultivate and care for our own well-being is not just for our own sake. It's from by caring for our own well-being that we have more well-wishing to offer others. It's the source of this deep, caregiving instincts that we have, is to feel really good, to feel like happy in here, feel contented, peaceful inside of ourselves. That's what allows the *yonī*, that's what allows these deep sensitivity to operate well. So a *mettā*, kindness, friendliness.

The fourth is compassion, *karuṇā*. And it turns out historically, *karuṇā* is not really as emphasized in the Theravāda tradition as it is in the Mahāyāna. And maybe we didn't have to because we had this *mettā* thing going that covered much of the same territory, kind of did the same job. So maybe, you know, this is okay. And so there is this idea that the Theravāda are the selfish people because we don't have the *karuṇā* going the same way as the Mahāyānas have. I think it's a very sad misunderstanding.

But it is true that if you go back to the time of the early teachings of the Buddha, that the word *karuṇā* doesn't appear that much except in two formulaic passages that are repeated over

and over again. And that is the passage on the *karuṇā*, compassion, *Brahmavihāra*, divine emotive compassion. And the other is another formulaic passage also connected to, both connected to meditation practice, and that is the liberation of heart based on compassion. Otherwise, the word *karuṇā* is hardly used, and it's very little association with the Buddha. He was supposed to be the compassionate one. So that's kind of shocking. So I'll go on to come back to this in a moment.

But even so, compassion is one of the profound, the way we understand it in the West, at least, one of the profound, marvelous caregiving instincts we have to somehow be attuned to the suffering that other people are experiencing and to care for it. To have care, have empathy, sympathy for it, and enough that you want to see them do better. You want to see them be free of suffering. And if you can, to do what you can to help that happen, it's a little different flavor than *mettā*. And that, for some people, the *karuṇā*, compassion like this, can become the organizing principle of our life. There's something about encountering the suffering of the world that can really have a deep impact on how we want to live our lives. And it was for me. I mean, so that was one of the very important transformative aspects of doing Zen practice was how I was compassionate in the process of doing Zen. How there was a gradual growth. It wasn't like I was trying to become compassionate. I don't think compassion was part of my working vocabulary when I started it, being a Zen student.

So I didn't, like, didn't have any desire to become compassionate. You know, but slowly, and only realized that in retrospect, but slowly, slowly, I was compassionate by that practice. And there were signs that it was happening, but I didn't know how to read the signs. One of them is I started gathering photographs of Avalokiteśvara and putting them up my wall. I started drawing, copying pictures of Avalokiteśvara and putting them up my wall. I just thought they were nice. And now I didn't realize that I was, and then there are other things like this too that I did. In retrospect, I realized I needed a lot of compassion because I suffered a lot. And so somehow that resonance with those pictures and what they stood for, you know, I needed it, and something was awakening in me, something in me was recognizing it in those pictures in Avalokiteśvara and other people who were compassionate around me. And so I took it in, and slowly it grew in me. And it grew in me so strongly that the choice I made to become a Zen priest, Zen monk, to be ordained, was the only way I knew how to dedicate myself to a life that was going to respond to the suffering of the world.

Because I wanted to be able to respond to suffering in the deepest place suffering exists in people. And the only way I knew how to do that was through Buddhism. So my whole adult life then became organized around compassion. It was kind of the organizing principle still in

some ways for my life. But it didn't seem to be the organizing principle for the Buddha. What was it for him? For him it was *anukampā*. So the fifth of these caregiving instincts. And you won't realize that Pāli says *anukampā* in most English translations, because translators will use the word compassion to translate it. So I just always assumed it was *karuṇā* when I read the English, because I didn't know there were another word. But *anukampā* has a different meaning than compassion has, in ordinary English at least, *anukampā*, the way it's explicitly described in the suttas, is caring for the welfare and happiness of others, which can include, for sure, caring for them when they're suffering.

But it's more than just alleviating suffering. If someone's not suffering, you're supposed to just ignore them? Well, you're not one of those I'm caring about. Because, you know, but no, you care for everyone. There's a care for their welfare and happiness. People are happy and you want that to continue. It's kind of like *muditā*. Caring for people's welfare and happiness is, and what I, but that is mentioned repeatedly in the suttas, in the places that we would expect self and *karuṇā* to be. But I like it that it's *anukampā* because it's a broader, two reasons. It's a much broader caregiving attitude, because it cares about welfare and happiness too. It's kind of like, it's kind of like it covers the range of all the different ways that we can be in the world. Ethically, generosity, with *mettā*, with compassion. It's all kind of, all those are kind of under the umbrella of *anukampā*.

But I also like it because it seems like one of the characteristics of *anukampā* is that it's kind of humble, it's kind of ordinary. And so that's why I like to translate it as care, because care is kind of ordinary. We use it for ordinary things. Some of you maybe care carefully for the pots you clean. You care for them well by doing a really good job. Or you care how you handle it, something, or clean something. We could be caring for the building. *Saṅgha* service rooms, we care for the building and different things. But we talk about spiritual care and elder care and child care. Intensive care units. This word of care, nowadays they, in some hospitals, they used to have chaplaincy departments, but in some places they have departments of spiritual care. It's kind of nice. I think people have a very different feeling if it said, I'm here from the Department of Spiritual Compassion. Maybe it's okay, but I think spiritual care, it's simpler, it's more, less baggage, less heaviness, just kind of like ordinary kind of a mirror to care.

And I think why I think that *anukampā* is such a very significant caregiving instinct. It's the one that's most associated with not clinging, the most associated with having really freed up the heart, a heart that's uncomplicated. And this is the most uncomplicated way of just being available to support, to care, love, be kind. It has very little extra in it. Simply they care. I've

been, I mean, when my mom was in her memory care home and dying there, I was inspired by the level of care that she got there. People really cared. But it wasn't obvious to me that they had love for her. It wasn't obvious that it was really, was it really compassion they had? I couldn't read or see that this was, they were just doing their job really well. They cared. They wanted to do really well and treat her well. But they seemed like it was something very simple. If they had to sign up and say, you know, show up for job, show up for work with compassion, we're not going to let you work here until you have compassion for the people who live here. I mean, how often is that accessible? And then love is even higher. But care and care well, care kindly, care simply, to give yourself completely to the task to care. Yeah. Without that kind of higher bar of having something like love. Maybe. But certainly, *anukampā*, I think, has the simplicity of non-clinging, radical non-clinging, that sometimes it's much harder for many of us to have when it's friendship, friendliness, or *mettā*, or compassion. Those can get so... It's kind of hard sometimes. Certainly there can be non-clinging compassion, which is sweet and clean and nice. But I think this *anukampā* is a very basic caregiving instinct to care.

So we have these abilities. We have many caregiving emotions. And there's probably others we can list as well. And I think that what is important in *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice is the sensitivity and the openness of the operating system that we respond to from. And to respond from this deeper operating system, to operate from this capacity for the deep sensitivity, profound sensitivity, to operate with this ability to abide observing, where the observing is not interfering, not judging, not for or against what we see, a kind of clarity, a real clarity to see, so clinging free. And then to allow what wants to grow, what wants to surface, what wants to flower in this deeper sensitivity. Who knows what will come out of you in different situations?

Maybe sometimes it's the instinct to be ethical and therefore not cause harm. And that's the way you care for others, not interfere with their lives. Maybe it's the instinct to be generous. And that's in the context situation you're in. Generosity is the name of the game. It might be friendliness, loving kindness, kindness, goodwill. I like the word goodwill as a translation of *mettā* because it's also kind of a simple, more humble word than... Loving kindness is a little bit of, in my mind, it's a little bit of a high bar. I love the idea of loving kindness as a high bar, but still a high bar. But goodwill is more accessible. You can, you know, have goodwill for your enemies, but it might be hard to have loving kindness. And then maybe it's compassion. Maybe it's *anukampā*, care. Maybe it's something else. But what a great world it would be if we could learn to abide observing the world around us so that this deeper source within guides us, inspires us for how to live our lives.

I think *Satipaṭṭhāna* practice has a huge potential for our own well-being and for our obligation-free capacity to live for the welfare and happiness of others. And because I believe that that's possible, that that is one of the results of doing this practice, that we will almost naturally care for others, each person in their own way, and the individual variation of how these caregiving instincts operate are huge, huge. So... I think it's very important not to judge people by what their way is. But I do believe, and that's one of the reasons why I teach, and why I teach this practice of mindfulness, is I believe that it does make us all change agents for making a better world. And these caregiving instincts are a huge part of us. And over my life, there have been eras or phases in my life where each of these was like the more the theme of the era. You know, the era of non-harming, the era of generosity, the era of *mettā* reluctantly. The era of compassion, the era of *anukampā*. They're all there, but they kind of came to, so some of them came to the forefront at different times, maybe because that's what I needed at that time. So maybe that's who can be for you too. I don't know how it's going to be for you. It has to be a different, uniquely your way, not my way, not other people's way. But what I trust, is that if you can settle into this deep place of sensitivity, this deep source within, good will come from that. We just don't know how. So maybe we'll sit quietly for a few minutes and you can consider your relationship to these five caregiving instincts. Are any of them more alive for you in this era of your life than the others? Or...